



# The King's Pawn

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Noah

I hate him. Always have. The way he looks through me, then pretends I dont exist

Theres something wrong with him. More wrong than the rest of my fathers men Its a good thing Killian Donovan doesnt think about me at all.

But when Im on my knees, staring down the barrel of his gun, accused of a crime I did not commit, Killian is all thats left between me and a shallow grave.

He must have a weakness and Ive got five seconds to find it.

Killian

Kill Noah King.

Those are my orders.

Its about time the bosss brat was put in his place. Too loud, too stupid, too tempting, and when he betrays the family, I get to shut that sassy mouth forever.

A damn shame, because when hes on his knees with my gun between his lips, his pleading silence isnt the only thing that stops me pulling the trigger.

Ive got five seconds to choose

Five seconds that change both our lives forever.

**Total Pages (Source):** 15

## CHAPTER

## ONE

### Killian

The doorman lifted the velvet rope and nodded me through, out of Boston's bitter night air and into the nightclub's throbbing beat. Music thumped my chest; people cast me sideways glances before moving away, some instinctual part of them knowing I didn't belong. I wasn't here for them.

My target lounged in a booth, knees spread, arms draped over the back, his black sateen shirt with floral accents unbuttoned and untucked from his slim waist, pants hanging off his hips, sandy blond hair messy, as though he'd fallen out of bed into another wild party.

Too stupid, too full of himself, too confident—Noah King had no idea tonight would be his last night alive.

He spotted my approach and cracked a cocky smile. "What are you doing here?" Blue eyes raked over me while his smart mouth parted in a smirk.

"Let's go."

"I'm not done." He snorted. "Why don't you grab a drink? I'll let you know when I'm ready." A few titters bubbled from his groupies.

I didn't work for him, didn't follow his orders, and didn't give a shit about his schedule. I had a job to do, and that job was putting Noah King in the ground. I lunged, grabbed his shirt in my fist, and hauled him out of the booth. He flailed and his friends screamed, probably more concerned for their spilled drinks than Noah's well-being. The crowd parted again, since I now had a stumbling, swearing Noah King in my grasp.

The doorman nodded me through again, familiar with this song and dance.

Noah didn't struggle, not really. We'd been here before, me dragging his ass out of trouble, away from the cops, scooping him up after the latest bar fight or binge. There was always something with him, some kind of drama. Fucking Gen Z.

"Jesus, what crawled up your ass and died?" Noah spluttered, righting his shirt as I dumped him on the sidewalk. "This is a fucking Blake Mill shirt, you neanderthal."

I headed back down the street, toward the nearby parking garage. Noah tagged along, muttering about his fancy shirt, unaware the outcome tonight would be very different from the others. After descending the ramp, I unlocked the Lexus, the alarm chirping as it disengaged, and we both climbed into the car and settled into its leather seats.

Noah clicked his belt on. "What did I do this time, huh?" He sniffed.

Ignoring him, I peeled the car from the garage, threading into Boston's quiet nighttime traffic. A few hours' drive should be far enough away. I had the perfect spot in mind. Somewhere his remains would never be found.

"Fuck this," he muttered, then dug a bag of white powder from his pocket.

"Don't do that shit in here."

“Right, I forgot, you’re my conscience. Maybe you should try some, huh? Might help you loosen up. You’re always so uptight, so rigid, you know? That brooding face ever smiled?” He circled a hand and chuckled to himself, returning to unwrapping his bag of coke. “Getting high makes sex amazing. Not that you’d know.”

I hit the button for his window, cracking it open. A blast of cold air almost whisked the coke from his knee. He swore and tried to punch his window button to override mine. I grabbed the bag of coke and flung it out of the car, then hit the button to close the window.

He glared, eyes big and blue, like a kid who’d lost his balloon.

Jesus, he was twenty-four; would he ever grow up? Not now, since it was over for him. “If you think coke makes sex amazing, you’re doing it wrong.”

“Fuck you, Killian. All right? Fuck you.” He huffed and slumped in the seat.

Hopefully, he’d shut his mouth for the rest of the ride, as we had a ways to go. His silence was a welcome relief. Until he fiddled with the radio buttons, trying to find a station. He settled on something moody and emotional. I jabbed it off.

“Why are you on my ass, huh?”

I took the I95 north. Boston’s glittering sheen faded in the rearview mirror, so there was just us in the car’s quiet interior and the occasional oncoming headlights carving through the dark, illuminating his sullen face.

“Where are we going?” He waited a beat. “You can talk, you know. My father isn’t here. Pretend to be a human being? I won’t tell him. It’s not like he and I talk anyway. He barely knows I exist.”

Val, Noah's father, knew Noah existed all right, and this time he was done with Noah's excuses. There were fuckups, and then there was sleeping with the enemy. Noah had been warming the wrong bed and spilling business secrets during pillow talk. Still, killing his own son was something I didn't think I'd ever see the boss order. But here we were. Even the boss of the notorious Back Bay Mafia had limits when it came to family.

Noah glanced over, and in the glow of the car's instrument lights, his face had never been so pale. I kept my eyes on the road. Five years, I'd been cleaning up after Noah King. After tonight, he wouldn't be my problem ever again.

"You know, I never asked—figured you wouldn't tell me anyway—but you got family?" He huffed a laugh. "No, of course you don't. Do you even have a life outside my father?" He continued with his rambling, tossing around theories about my background. His voice droned, like the rumble of car tires. I only half listened.

Ninety percent of the words that came out of Noah were filler. I'd gotten used to filtering out the important parts. I was tempted to ask him why he'd done it, why he'd talked, why he had to be so damn stupid, when he must have known his bullshit wouldn't be tolerated forever. But if I asked him that, he'd know I knew, and then I'd have a hostage situation on my hands. Like this, with him thinking we were heading up north to the summer house, despite it being winter, kept him compliant.

Snowflakes left trails in the headlights. The car's automatic wipers came on, sweeping fat flakes aside. Hopefully, I'd get this done and be back in Boston before any real snow began to fall.

"Is this about the drugs?" Noah asked, his voice softening. The high from whatever he'd snorted in the club had probably begun to wear off. Somewhere in that stupid head of his, he might even be sensing danger. But he wouldn't listen. If he'd had any survival instincts, he wouldn't have gotten into this mess.

“My usual guy stopped selling to me. That’s my father again, you know? What am I supposed to do? He cut me off. It was only a few deals. My options are limited, right? I can’t buy from the usuals, so I have to go out of town. And it’s not a lot, it’s just...” He shrugged. “I don’t know, man, it’s not a problem. I don’t have a problem. It’s just sometimes...” He laughed dryly. “Like you’d even understand. You don’t even have a life. Well, I try to. You know how fucking hard it is to make friends when everyone knows your father’s a fuckin’ psychopath? I’m talking about real connections here, not just people who want to fuck me over for money or power. You know, try and get me to talk shit... I can’t fucking trust anyone. Everyone wants a piece of me. So yeah, I get high, it’s that or... or...” He trailed off, staring out of the window. “Whatever.”

I flicked the radio back on. Even I had my limits to how much bullshit I could listen to.

“You can’t tell me you like doing this? Cleaning up after him?” He flicked his pretty eyes over me. “Do you look in the mirror and like who looks back at you? My father’s attack dog. He clicks his fingers and you bark.”

“Watch it.”

“It’s true. If you were something, someone important, you wouldn’t be babysitting me.”

That might have been true, but I knew my place. And I was buried so damn deep in its hole, I’d made my bed there long ago.

I took the next turn off the interstate, onto winding back roads. A light dusting of snow had settled on the asphalt and clung to the pine trees. No tire tracks. This part of New Hampshire got rural real quick. We were close to our destination.

“Where are we?” He sat upright and studied the scenery, only now beginning to realize something was very wrong with this road trip.

I tightened my grip on the wheel.

“Killian.” He faced me, eyes widening. “What is this?”

Just a few more miles.

“Where are you taking me?”

His usual easygoing tone had vanished from his voice, leaving it thin. We weren’t friends, him and me. Never had been. Despite the times he’d begged me not to tell his father the multiple messes he’d gotten mixed up in, the countless fuckups even his father didn’t know about. It was always going to end this way. He’d had chance after chance to clean up, to toe the King family line, and he’d flung it back at his father time after time. Noah was never going to win that fight.

I pulled the car onto a snow-dusted dirt road, rolled into a sparse clearing in the woods, and cut the engine.

Noah gulped. “Wait?—”

As I opened the door and climbed out, I discreetly collected the gun from the pocket of the door. Freezing air sucked all the warmth from my body, but that was fine, I needed the cold for this. It would be over soon. But the next few minutes might get loud.

“Killian?” He peered up at me as I opened his door and he knew—either saw it on my face or finally understood this was the end of the road. He paled even more. “Ki-Killian, w-wait.”

“Out.”

Noah pushed himself into the seat and breathed hard through his nose. He looked at his hands, perhaps thinking he could take a swing. He might land a lucky punch, but we both knew I’d put him on his ass right after.

I could shoot him in the seat, but that would make a forensic mess I didn’t much feel like cleaning up.

His gaze skipped sideways, to the gun in my hand. He swallowed and slowly climbed out.

“Phone.”

“What?”

“Phone.”

He dug into his pocket and handed over his phone. I dropped it and smashed it under my heel.

Noah had fallen quiet.

Each man died differently. No two were the same. Some begged, some got furious, some fell apart, some tried to sell their souls—or the souls of their kids—for one more chance. Noah was quiet now, but his mind was probably working overtime trying to figure out a way to get free. But we both knew his father had sent me because I never missed.

He looked up with those long-lashed eyes, and damn if some part of my heart didn’t hiccup. I shoved him forward, needing him to stare ahead, not at me. “Walk.”



He stumbled between the trees, heading into the woods. If he ran, he knew I'd shoot him in the back. The begging would start soon. Maybe I should have gagged him?

"Whatever this is about, let's talk. Call my father, let me talk to him. This is a mistake."

"No mistake, Noah."

"He... Look, whatever I did, I'm sorry, okay? This is... I get it." He tripped over a root and righted himself again. "I get the message. I need to be better, a better son, I get it. I'll be that. I will. I'll be whatever he wants me to be."

I flicked the safety off. Noah's shoulders jerked at the sound, so loud through the snowfall. Snow had landed in his sandy blond hair, lit by moonlight. A few flakes had melted on his expensive shirt. He wasn't so worried about it now.

"Killian—" He tried to turn and stumbled. I grabbed his arm, righted him, and pushed him on. Just a few more steps. Away from the clearing. Couldn't have any hikers stumbling on his shallow grave.

"What the fuck is this?! Huh?" he snapped. "What did I do that was so bad? I just bought some fucking coke from the Southies, that was all!" And here came the anger. Good. It showed he had some fight in him. For a while there, I'd thought he might die like prey, which would have been fucking sad for both of us.

"Turn around."

He stopped, boots crunching in the snow, and turned. "Asshole."

I pointed the gun between his eyes. "On your knees."

His bottom lip wobbled. “Let me run? I’ll go, you’ll never see me again. Tell him you killed me. I’ll vanish. It’ll be like I’m dead.”

“Knees.” I gestured with the gun.

“Fuck.” He swallowed. “Killian, please?”

A step, and I pressed the gun to his forehead. “ Knees .”

He glared, those blue eyes a brilliant sapphire, and knelt. Lifting his head, peering up, those eyes burned with icy fire. “What did I do? Tell me that.”

That defiance, I’d never seen it on his face before, like he had a backbone. As though, somewhere under all the expensive shirts, leather bracelets, cocky remarks, and sassy smiles, there was someone with a heart and soul, someone not as dumb as he made out, someone worthy.

I lowered my aim, hovering the gun over his lips. It was going to be a damn shame to mess up his pretty face. “You betrayed the family.”

His eyes narrowed, brows digging in. “Betraying the family is the one thing I have never done.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:41 am*

### CHAPTER

### TWO

Noah

I'd known, hadn't I? It was always going to be him. Killian .

Nobody survived him.

He stared down the barrel of his gun now, at me on my knees in the cold snow, as though I were nothing. Just another mess to clean for my father.

My heart thumped up my throat, trying to choke me. But I wasn't scared, not like I'd thought I'd be when it ended.

The reason didn't matter. I'd never been what my father wanted. And so here we were, Killian and me. He'd pull that trigger and nobody would give a shit that Noah King was gone. Nobody understood how I'd had to live every fucking day like it was my last, because I'd known that day had been coming. And here it was, staring me in the eyes.

I'd never noticed how dark his eyes were before. How many people had been in the same position, on their knees, gazing up at Killian, only really seeing him in their final moments?

"Tell me what I did." My voice quivered some, but that was okay. It would be over

soon. For both of us. “What was the final blow? What’s so bad that he has to kill me for it? You can tell me. You owe me that.”

“You fucked the Southies girl, told her about the shipment of guns. Got two men killed when the cops raided the dock warehouse.”

There was a lot of wrong in his grumbling sentence, but one part of it had laughter bubbling inside. I shouldn’t laugh, but it seemed as good a reaction as any.

I dropped my ass on my heels and chuckled. Of all the shit I had done, Killian was going to kill me for something I hadn’t . Story of my life. I should have gotten higher, partied harder, I should have fucked the Southies girl, even if that would have been impossible. But he didn’t know that. None of them did. If I’d told my father I was gay, this whole scene would have played out years ago.

“You think this is funny?” Killian asked, his cruel mouth half sneering. Maybe he didn’t have nice eyes after all. Maybe that was the coke I’d taken earlier screwing with how I saw him. “You understand what’s happening here, right?”

I snorted. “Oh sure, I understand.”

His face scrunched up. “I’ve never had someone laugh at a gun in their face before.”

I might have laughed harder, but panic began to ruin the hilarity. I really was going to die here. “How long have you wanted to do this? You’ve always hated me. I saw it in your eyes every time you looked through me.”

“Stop talking.”

“Is it me you hate or the fact my father always sent you to clean up my shit?”

He pushed in, and the end of the gun nudged between my lips.

“Stop. Talking.”

I swallowed, tasting metal. It would be quick, if he tilted the gun’s angle. Not so quick if he shot me through the throat. I didn’t have words now anyway. What else was there to say? Breathing hard through my nose, I tried to keep the pieces of myself together, but the longer I stared at his face, the more I trembled, and the more I wanted to beg. I didn’t even blame him. How fucked up was that? Killian didn’t want me dead; this wasn’t personal. It never was with him.

I wished we’d known each other, wished he’d seen more of me than the drunken, high, boss’s son he kept pulling from the fire every Friday night.

He pulled the gun free. “Fuck.”

I gasped and swallowed again. He’d lowered the gun at his side. Wait... was he...

He jerked the gun up again, pointed at my face.

“Wait!” I raised my hands and ducked my head, expecting the shot, expecting these to be my last seconds. But it didn’t come. I peeked through my fingers and found Killian’s glare on me, as cold as ever, but when my gaze caught his, a flicker of something softened his hard eyes.

Wait, what was this?

He lowered the gun, and with a snarl, he swooped in, grabbed my arm, hauled me to my feet, and shoved me back along the tracks we’d made in the snow. “Move.”

I kept my hands up and stumbled on. What was happening? Was he going to shoot

me in the back? No, or he'd have done it already. Was he taking me somewhere else?  
“What’s happening?”

“Do not say another fucking word.”

“Yeah, but?—”

“Get in the car!”

I fumbled with the door handle and dropped inside, shivering—only now noticing how cold it was. Killian threw his muscular bulk behind the wheel, gunned the engine, and twisting to glare through the rear window, he launched the car backwards down the road. Okay, so he was furious . But in an unexpected turn of events, I was alive. So there was that. Maybe all this had been a warning? Make it seem as though he was going to kill me so I quit causing trouble for the family?

He fishtailed the car onto the paved road, rammed it into gear, and roared the car onward. We weren't going back the way we'd come. So we weren't going home, to Boston. That wasn't so good. If it had been a warning, he'd be taking me home. Maybe something spooked him about that spot in the woods. Maybe I was still about to die, but somewhere else?

Thirty minutes later, he pulled the car off the main road, down a snow-dusted dirt road, hit the SNOW button on the Lexus, and bumped us another ten minutes into the woods until the headlights swept over a grim-looking cabin.

I peered through the windshield. “What the fuck is this?”

He threw me a warning glare. “Get out.” He left the car and marched through the headlight beams, coming around to my side.

I wasn't getting out. No way. If he wanted to kill me, he'd have to do it in the car. No way was I going into that murder cabin.

He yanked open the door. "Out."

"No."

He reached in. I ducked away and kicked out, catching his thigh. He grabbed my leg and yanked me off the seat and out of the door. The back of my head hit the doorframe, then he dumped my ass in the snow. I writhed, but his big hands grabbed both my wrists, pinching them together in front of me. "Hey!"

More times than I cared to count, he'd slung me over his shoulder, dragging me out of a fight, or that one time when I'd gotten so drunk, he'd had to carry me home. Not my best moments. He'd seen them all.

He dropped me on my feet and hauled me along behind him, still holding my wrists trapped in his large, rough hand.

"Is this your cabin?" I asked, stumbling up the icy steps behind him and onto a porch.

He elbowed the window glass, shattering it, reached inside, and unlatched the door.

"Not yours, then," I muttered.

Inside, the air was colder, if that was even possible. With a flick of a switch, the lights came on, so the murder cabin had electricity, but its small interior was basic, with décor left over from the nineties, complete with a tired leather couch and fluffy stained rug. Killian left me standing in the middle of the living room while he rattled through drawers in the kitchen to my right.

He returned with a length of thick rope.

“Wait, that’s—” He grabbed my right wrist, then my left, and slung the rope around them.

“Asshole.” I yanked and managed to slip free from the rope.

He grabbed my arm, fingers digging in. I didn’t think, just swung my left hand, open, and slapped his face so damn hard a fire blazed up my arm.

Killian paused, shocked for a heartbeat, then smacked my cheek. I reeled, gasping, more alarmed that he’d hit me than from pain.

“You hit first,” he said, like it mattered.

By the time I’d found my balance, the rope was firmly around my wrists. “You can’t do this.”

“Fine, then I’ll kill you.”

I bared my teeth at him. Almost dared him to but swallowed that remark before it could bite me in the ass. He waited for it too. Waited for the excuse to finish what he’d brought me out here to do. “What are you going to do? You can’t leave me here. Just take me back. Let me talk to my father, let me explain. He’ll have to listen.”

“Stop talking or I’ll tape your mouth.” He stepped back and studied me as though I was some kind of puzzle he needed to figure out.

“Wow. So what are you going to do, huh? Leave me here, like this?” Wait, that was exactly what he was going to do. He was trying to cover all his bases. Which meant tying me up so I didn’t get picked up on the road, trying to escape. “This is a terrible



idea. You realize that? Whose cabin even is this? You can't leave me here. I have needs."

"Stop talking." He stepped back and rubbed his face. "Let me think."

"Oh, you do that? Think for yourself? I thought my father did all the thinking for you."

"I will tape your fucking mouth, kid."

"I'm not a kid, old man. What are you, fifty?" I snorted.

"I'm thirty-five."

Just over ten years older than me. "Ah, sorry, man. Those years have not been kind." I stumbled back as he huffed and grunted through his decision to keep me here.

In fact, those years had honed Killian Donovan into a man in his prime. He had one of those naturally big bodies that made having muscles seem easy. He worked out when he wasn't babysitting me. I knew because I'd interrupted one of those gym sessions once when I'd needed a ride home, and I'd watched him lift weights from the sidelines. With muscles like his, it wasn't any wonder he could bench-press me. That gym session had given me enough late-night fuel to jerk off for a few months, until he'd told my father how he'd caught me scoring some coke.

Asshole.

It was a shame he was up my father's ass, when I'd fantasized about having him up mine. But I wasn't thinking about that, since he'd almost executed me. And had now decided on kidnapping instead.

“This is only going to get worse for us,” I said, glancing idly around the shitty cabin.

“Do you want me to kill you? Because that’s option one. This is option two.”

“Why didn’t you?” I asked, fixing him in my sights. “Kill me?”

He huffed, vanished into the kitchen, then returned with a roll of tape.

“Oh, fuck no. Wait.” I backed away, but he was coming like a goddammed freight train. I tried to turn, stumbled against the couch, and then he was on me, pinning me down. “Fuck, don’t... I won’t say anything.” He hovered a strip of tape over my mouth. “I won’t, please.”

With a sigh, he eased off and let me up.

I stayed on the couch, feeling vulnerable and confused, hot and cold at once, coming down from my earlier binge and the rapidly receding rush of adrenaline he’d spiked almost killing me in the woods. “You don’t need to tie me up?—”

His glare cut me off. Right. Silence. I could do silence.

He went to work shoving the mismatched furniture to the sides of the room, then tied a new length of rope to the loops around my wrist. He tied that off around a big floor-to-ceiling post. I had enough rope around the post to maneuver but couldn’t leave the room or reach a window. What about my needs ? The moment I thought it, he brought over a bucket.

I arched an eyebrow. “Really?”

He pointed at me. “If you escape, I’m fucked.” He pointed at the bucket. “So you will piss in that until I figure out what to do with you.”

“Just let me go. I’ll go north, to Canada. Tell him I’m dead. Nobody will ever know.”

Seemed like an easier solution than whatever this was. But Killian’s dry glare made it clear that wasn’t an option.

He couldn’t keep me in a cabin in the woods forever, and if he didn’t let me go, then he was going to have to confront my father. But whatever, while he figured that out, I’d sit tight, seeing as I didn’t have a choice. And I was still alive.

He’d left the couch in my circle, so I sat and wondered how the fuck this had happened. He’d said I’d slept with a Southies girl and told them about the warehouse deal. Whoever had told my father those lies must have been trusted for him to believe it. Or maybe my father really had just wanted me gone.

“I didn’t do it, you know,” I called.

Killian was slamming cupboards in the kitchen, out of my line of sight.

“Doesn’t matter. He believes you did.” He sauntered back with a jug of water and a box of cereal and stood by the couch, not knowing where to put either. He puffed again and looked at me as though I were a different problem now. Not one to snuff out and be done with, but a problem that needed to be put right.

He put the jug and cereal on the floor.

“Thanks,” I said, sensing he might be having a thoughtful moment in that hard head of his.

“Cereal is all that’s here. I’ll bring more supplies...”

Look at him, getting all domestic. Who knew. “I meant for not killing me, but the

cereal is good too.”

His eyes narrowed. “I still might kill you.”

No, he wouldn’t. Or he would have already. I smiled, and he glowered. But whatever he needed to tell himself to make peace with the fact he hadn’t killed me was fine by me. The cabin wasn’t so bad. I’d passed out in worse places. A few days here, then he’d let me go. He’d have to.

“Now what?” I asked.

“Now I tell your father you’re dead.”

### CHAPTER

### THREE

Killian

The snowfall had eased by the time I drove back into Boston around 5 a.m. I'd sent a text to Noah's father with the simple words: it's done . But that wouldn't suffice. Not when it came to killing his only child.

I pulled up outside the huge brownstone and rung the bell. The housekeeper let me in. The house was classy-old, made of deep colors, high ceilings, and too many stairs. I found Val King in the breakfast room, sitting in his dressing gown by the window, reading a newspaper with a steaming black coffee in front of him, like his father had done in this house every morning, and his father before him. The Kings went as deep in Back Bay as the reclaimed land all these grand houses were built on.

Valentine King was in his late sixties. He'd had Noah in his later years, probably realizing he needed an heir. What he'd gotten instead was in impetuous wildcard who everyone had told him would settle down eventually, but never did.

And was now—if I were to be believed—dead.

Val folded his paper, tossed it onto the table, and lifted his gaze. "Well?"

Noah had his father's penetrating blue eyes, but the rest of Noah's slim grace likely came from his mother's side. Noah was quick and agile, whereas his father was

stocky and solid. Val didn't need to be agile. Predators didn't run. They beat any threat into the ground.

"He did well," I found myself saying, remembering how fierce Noah had been in those not-so-final moments. "He faced death with honor."

"At least he died right." His father sniffed, but that was all. No regret, no moment of reflection.

An unexpected twinge of irritation tightened my chest. As far as he knew, his son was dead in the dirt, and he couldn't say anything more than he died right.

He picked up his coffee. "Terrible business. My own son, a betrayer. The rot must always be cut out, Killian, no matter the cost."

Noah had said he hadn't betrayed the family, but he would have said anything to escape. I knew Noah, and this kind of mess was right out of his playbook. Fucking a Southie girl, spilling secrets. But the way he'd said he hadn't betrayed his father... "Betraying the family is the one thing I have never done." I'd never heard him speak of anything with conviction before. Noah had cared, when facing death. That, I knew to be true.

While his father didn't care about him at all.

"You can go, Killian."

I turned to leave.

"And... make sure it's cleaned up. No trace. Understand?"

"All part of the job." I left the house, jogged down the steps, and climbed into the car,

thoughts turning to Noah tied up and waiting in the cabin.

I'd lit the cabin's fire before leaving, but it would be fading down now, and with the weather as it was, Noah wouldn't last long in the cold.

A few hours' drive, and then he and I were going to have a sincere chat about the future. If he had one.

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*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:41 am*

### CHAPTER

### FOUR

Noah

I jolted awake to the crunching of tires on snow. Light streamed through dusty drapes, so it was day out. How long had I been asleep? A few hours? The fire had burned down to just smoldering ash and a chill had crept in.

A car door slammed. Killian was back with supplies. I'd convince him to untie me so I could use a proper bathroom, and then, once I'd locked the door, I'd climb out of the bathroom window. There had to be other cabins around. People. Cars. I'd steal a car, drive, and keep on driving. Never, ever return to Boston. Problem solved for everyone.

Boots stomped closer to the cabin, clomped on the porch, and stopped.

What had he stopped for?

The door handle rattled, the door opened, and the man who entered was definitely not Killian. Most of him was thick coat, then my gaze dropped to the rifle in his hand and back up to a grizzled, gnarly face that had seen a few too many harsh winters.

“What the hell do we have here?” the old man said.

“Uh... Hey. Long story, but as you can see, I'm tied up, so if you'd like to let me go,



that would be great.”

He kicked snow from his boots, closed the door, and shrugged off his coat and draped it over one of the chairs Killian had shoved against the wall. He didn't seem in a hurry. Or all that concerned to find someone tied up in what I assumed to be his cabin. He grabbed a few logs from the stack, stoked the fire, and tossed the logs on, taking his sweet time.

I eyed the gun he'd left by the door. Hunting rifle. Was that what he was doing out here, hunting? The cabin hadn't seemed lived in. It had been cold when we'd arrived. The kind of cold suggesting it had been empty for days, not hours. Why was he here now? Had Killian sent him?

When he straightened and eyed me again, I showed him my bound wrists. “So, yeah, the ropes?”

He barely looked at the ropes, instead staring at my face. “Who did this to you, huh?”

“Probably best not to say.”

He stood with his back to the fire, warming himself and not untying me. In fact, his eyes roamed in a way that had me wishing I'd bothered to button my shirt up to my neck. With every passing second of the skin-crawling gaze on me, it was becoming clear he was not going to let me go.

There are dangerous men, like Killian. Men who will pull a trigger without blinking.

Then there are men like this guy, whose vibe was way off and into crazy town. Who the fuck had Killian brought me to?

“Just let me go, and nobody has to mention this to anyone.”

“I could do that.”

But he wasn't going to. Not with the way he was drooling over at me as though I was his next meal. His bottom lip wobbled, like his hands did. Trembling from age, or something else. I preferred staring down Killian's gun to whatever this was.

He started over, and if he so much as touched me, he'd soon realize I was not gift wrapped for him . Fuck.

He knelt, knees popping, and leered. “You look familiar.”

“That's nice.” He looked as though he'd climbed out of the window of a high-security mental hospital.

“I know you.”

“No.” I smiled, trying to be polite. “I don't think so.”

“Your Val King's son. Neil... Nolan?”

“No.” This guy was going to be a problem.

He reached out and touched my leg. I kicked him off. “The fuck?—”

“Feisty, aren't you,” he said with a laugh.

“Touch me again, old man, and find out how feisty I can be.”

He lunged, and this was one of those times where growing up as a mob boss's son and being exposed to casual murder paid off. I looped the rope around his neck and cinched it tight, choking off his air. He wasn't big, not like Killian. He struggled,

mouth gaping, his bent, sticklike fingers trying to grab at the rope. I held on, even tightened it. Fuck this guy. Nobody touched me like I was meat. As his bucking slowed, I eased off, untangled the rope, and shoved his limp, unconscious body away. He sprawled on the floor—not moving.

I shuddered. “Fuck.” And gave him a kick for good measure. He wasn’t awake, but I couldn’t tell if he was dead and didn’t much feel like touching him to find out. With a ragged sigh, I slumped against the couch.

I hadn’t meant to kill him, just choke him out. Maybe he’d had a heart attack? If he was dead, hopefully he wasn’t someone important to Killian.

Not the best start to the day, but at least he’d put some logs on the fire.

More hours went by, and the logs had burned down again, until finally, the sound of another car engine hummed outside. If it was another fucking rapist so help me God, I’d scream the whole fucking cabin down.

Footsteps stomped up the steps and Killian flew through the door, gun out.

His eyes widened at the dead/unconscious guy on the floor beside me. “What the fuck happened?”

“You brought me to a pervert’s murder cabin is what happened.”

Rage swallowed the shock on Killian’s face. I’d only seen that look on him once before, when he’d dragged me out of a brawl—a murderous look that left no room for doubt. That ruthless glare fluttered my heart, stealing my breath. “Did he touch you?” Killian growled.

“He didn’t get that far.”

Killian strode over, aimed the gun at the man's chest, and fired. Blood splatters dashed my chest. I flinched. And he fired again, this time in the man's head. The first shot had probably been enough, but the second one left no room for argument. He was for sure dead now.

"Jesus, there's blood on my shirt." A few splatters dribbled down my chest.

"Nobody touches you," Killian growled, then turned on his heel and left the cabin. I stared after him, blinking. What the fuck was that?

He reappeared with a bag of groceries tucked under one arm. All right, color me confused, but what was happening here? He brings me out to the woods to kill me, then gets all macho-protective when someone else tries to have a go?

And now he was unpacking groceries in the kitchen as if he hadn't just shot a man I'd strangled?

Killian sauntered back into the living room, coming straight for me. He loomed and handed me a beer. I took it with both my bound hands, thoughts falling over how—this close, with him peering down at me—his pants hugged thick, sculpted thighs, and how the black T-shirt he wore strained to contain his chest. He'd always looked good, but maybe a little murder on my behalf had me reassessing Killian Donovan. Because fuck, he was hot when he got his murder on.

"Who is he?" I asked, taking a swig.

"Garren Reed. Piece of shit your father knows. I didn't think he'd be up here."

"Guess he didn't think you'd be here either."

We both stared at the dead man, drinking our beers in a weird moment of mutual

disgust and something else. Some kind of shared chill.

“You going to untie me now?” I asked, breaking the comfortable silence we’d fostered over a dead body.

He downed the last of his beer and set the bottle down on a table he’d pushed to the side of the room. “Are you going to run?”

“I might,” I admitted. “I haven’t decided. Are you going to kill me?”

“I haven’t decided.” His mouth, always fixed in a stern line, ticked. It ticked . Which for him was a full-blown grin. And that tiny little twitch changed his mean face into something a lot more interesting. Made him seem younger too, not the miserable, grumpy dickhead asshole who my father sent after me. But an actual living breathing human being. He maybe even had a heart under all that macho bullshit, since he’d gotten all ragey after learning the wannabe rapist had almost touched me up.

“Wow, you can smile.”

“I’m not smiling.” He stopped smiling.

“I saw it. It’s okay. I won’t tell anyone. If you untie me.” I used both hands to drink from the beer bottle again, hoping he took pity on my sorry state. “Also, I really need to... go.” I glanced at the unused bucket. “And neither of us needs the trauma of that. Come on, man, be a human, not the gorilla you pretend to be.” I raised my hands and fluttered my lashes.

There was that tiny twitch again. Look at that. A little miracle of a smile. Two in three minutes, in fact.

“Fine, you can help me clean this up. But if you fuck me, Noah, I’ll be digging two

graves.”

He came over and untied the ropes. I watched his big fingers work, unpicking each knot. There was something about a man with capable hands. He didn’t waste gestures; when he used his hands—like when pulling a gun—he meant it.

Finally free of the chafing restraints, I hurried to the bathroom.

“Keep the door open,” he grouched.

“Jesus.” A glance over my shoulder revealed him leaning against the back of the couch, arms crossed over his barrel chest, dark eyes on me. “You going to watch me? I might start thinking you and your dead friend there want the same thing.”

“Reed was no friend of mine.” His eyes skipped away. “Shut the door, then.”

I swung the door shut and eyed the narrow window. It wasn’t locked. I might have been able to squeeze through. But I really needed to piss.

“You won’t make it more than a few miles,” Killian grumbled behind the door, sounding closer now. Did he have fucking X-ray vision?

I unzipped my pants and did the necessary, sighing out my relief.

“It’s below freezing,” he went on. “You’ll start out fine, then within the hour become confused, start wandering in circles. Delirious. Hypothermia. You’ll wish I’d shot you.”

I rolled my eyes. He knew all the best ways to die. “How do you know that shit?”

“So, don’t climb out the window.”

I frowned at the window, finished up, and tucked my dick away. Farewell to that escape plan. “I wasn’t going to.” What was I going to do? I stared at the filthy mirror, washed my hands, and wiped my face clean of blood. If I stayed, there was a fifty-fifty chance he’d come to his senses and put a bullet in the back of my head, probably when digging the grave for his not-friend.

Unless Killian planned to stand against my father, I wasn’t getting out of this. Killian wasn’t as dumb as he looked. He’d have figured out I wasn’t going to get a happy ending, same as I had. He’d fucked up my assassination once, but he’d have to pull the trigger eventually.

If my father found out I was still alive, Killian would be killed right alongside me.

Or, we figured out who the asshole was who had lied and put me in crosshairs. Maybe if we found the liar, we might have some negotiating room with my father.

It could have been any number of my father’s men. I wasn’t short of enemies. Most of the Back Bay family wanted me gone. Killian included. At least, I’d thought he did. Now? Now, I wasn’t sure what he wanted.

“Open the door or I’m breaking it in.”

I opened the door, found him with his arms braced on the doorframe, his handsome, snarly face right there, and cocked a hip. Now I’d noticed how pretty his eyes were, it was impossible not to notice them. Long, soft black lashes, like my expensive paintbrushes. Bad men like him shouldn’t be allowed to have such gorgeous eyes. “You going to let me through or do I have solve a riddle?”

He blinked, realized he was holding me up, and stepped aside. “Your smart mouth is going to get you killed,” he grumbled as I sauntered by.

Ah, that was what he'd been looking at: my smart mouth.

A trickle of lust tingled down my spine. Strange, how I liked how he'd been staring at my lips. Killian Donovan was not my type. Besides that weird month-long crush, after seeing him work out. Too muscular, too monosyllabic, too old. And then there was the fact he was straight. And uninterested. I'd have known if he was into guys. Or anything with a heartbeat. All the times he'd scooped me off the floor of some bar restroom with questionable clients who sold their company by the blow job, not once had he made a suggestive remark.

Maybe he wasn't into sex.

Shame though. Underneath those basic black clothes was a body that wouldn't quit. He'd fuck like an animal. And I wasn't thinking about that. I'd gotten over my Killian Donovan phase. I did not need a deep dive back into that fantasy, especially while he was holding me captive.

"As much as I like beer for breakfast, did you bring any real food?" I asked, heading for the kitchen.

"We should move Reed," Killian said, moving to the corpse. "It'll be easier while he's warm."

Oh fucking joy.

Killian looked over. "You hold his legs."

This was not how I'd planned to spend the first Saturday of the rest of my life.

"Grab his coat."



I scooped up the dead guy's big coat and handed it out as Killian lifted the body under the arms.

"It's for you," he said, sounding irritated. "It's cold out."

I shrugged it on, grabbed the dead guy's limp legs, and helped carry the body to the door. "Won't the ground be frozen?"

"There's a spot out back, under a bunch of crates. Dirt will be softer there."

He took all this in stride, as if it were just another day at the office. My father had learned early on that I'd rather throw paint at a canvas than kill people, and that was about the time he'd given up on being a father too. He'd have probably preferred he had a son like Killian. Someone strong, someone who knew how to dispose of a corpse, who could take over the family business. Not me, an art major who was good at spending money but not making it.

Outside, a dusting of snow fell. Killian handed me a shovel, and we got to digging while sharing a strange, contented silence. The sounds of the shovel cutting into dirt filled the quiet, and all right, maybe it was kinda okay, being next to him?

Was this fucking Stockholm syndrome? How quick did that shit kick in? It hadn't even been a whole day since he'd had me on my knees and his gun in my mouth, and now I was out in the snow, digging a grave, as though we were friends.

Jesus, I needed to get my head on straight.

Killian worked for my father. Always had. Always would. His loyalty was with the family, and I already knew he believed me a risk to all that.

If he'd believed that though, he would have killed me. And he hadn't. Not yet,

anyway.

“Did you tell my father I’m gone?” I blew into my hands. I hadn’t been digging for a while, too fucking cold. Each of Killian’s shovels shifted twice as much dirt as mine anyway.

He peered up from the bottom of the hole. He wasn’t wearing a coat. Steam rose off his broad shoulders, and okay, maybe I’d been watching how all those muscles moved because the free porn was keeping me warm. “I told him,” he said flatly.

“How’d he take it?” I doubted my father would have shed a tear, but the little boy in me hoped he had, for reasons I didn’t fucking understand. I knew he didn’t care, but I’d always hoped one day he would wake up and love me.

Killian shoved the shovel in the dirt and then paused. “He…”

“He didn’t bat an eye, did he?”

“No.” He winced.

“Well, fuck.” I laughed. It was that or scream. “Is that hole deep enough, because I’m freezing my balls off.”

“Go inside, I’ll finish up.”

Alone? Like I could be trusted not to run? “You sure?”

He grunted something as he climbed out of the hole and grabbed the dead guy’s ankles. I glanced at the cabin, pining after the warmth of the fireplace, but also, I’d helped some, and the deal was he’d untie me if I helped bury the body. Whatever he thought of me, I kept my word.

We dumped Garren Reed in the hole, and together, shovel by shovel, we filled in the grave, covering the newly disturbed earth with crates. Nobody would find him, if anyone bothered to search.

“Nice work,” Killian said, brushing clumps of dirt from his hands.

Was it weird, how we both stood over a grave, muddy, half smiling as the snow fell around us, and I liked it? Liked it a lot. Like... fuck, what was going on here? And how come Killian wasn't growling and shoving me around? How come he hadn't pulled a gun and shot me?

Why wasn't I in that grave?

Was it stupid to think Killian didn't want me dead because he cared? Like nobody had ever cared for me before?

### CHAPTER

### FIVE

#### Killian

Noah wasn't as useless as he made himself out to be. He'd strangled a man while tied up, and he'd been more than capable of digging a grave without breaking down or complaining about his shirt—now covered in blood and mud.

“You uh, you should get cleaned up,” I suggested, shutting the cabin door and sealing us back inside the warmth.

He looked down at himself, winced at the mud and snow clinging to his legs, and shrugged off the big coat. “Right.” He kicked off his boots and headed for the bathroom.

The cabin had a small shower. If it worked, the water was probably cold. A few minutes later, I heard the hiss of water, and Noah's yelp. The cold must have cleared though, since Noah started humming a few minutes later. Always talking, humming, moving, making noise—he didn't know when to sit still and listen .

I cleaned the blood off the living room floor, rearranged the furniture over the stains, and stacked the fire with fresh logs. As I was adding the last log, Noah started to sing. I didn't know the tune, but his voice carried the sentiment well, adding his own flare. Emotion warmed the notes. He was... good. Really good.

I hadn't known he could sing.

What the fuck was I doing, listening to the boss's son singing in the shower like this was some kind of vacation in the woods?

I needed to get my shit together. If I wasn't killing him, what was I doing with him?

My phone rang. I picked it up from the kitchen counter and winced at the caller's name.

"Where are you?" Noah's father asked, voice grating.

"Cleanup." I parted the drapes behind the kitchen sink. Big snowflakes buffeted the window. "Snow's coming down hard. I'll wait it out. Be back in a few days."

Val's heavy sigh made his irritation clear. "There's a situation. We need you here."

I'd have replied, but Noah appeared, a tiny towel wrapped around his slim waist. He used another to ruffle his hair. Water droplets glittered across his skin. He grinned, and as his whole face lit up, a sudden bolt of lust almost dropped me to my knees.

"Killian?" Val growled.

"Yes, I will." I turned away from Noah and ended the call fast. If Val learned he was alive, we were both dead. Fuck, this wouldn't do. I tossed the phone on the counter, beside the bag of groceries, and braced against the counter's edge.

Shit. I hadn't expected him to appear nearly naked, hadn't guarded against it.

The grocery bag rustled. "What the hell kind of supplies are these? Beans and beer?" He snorted. "At least you're on brand. Did you get any actual food?"

“Put some fuckin’ clothes on.”

“Can’t.” He tossed a can of soup in the air. “Washed them. They’re hanging up in the bathroom.”

This was insanity. I was insane. I had to be. Keeping a mark alive? This never happened. Why was he still breathing? He should have been the one in the hole in the backyard, not standing in the kitchen with nothing on, his lustrous body licked by the cabin’s soft, warm lighting. I’d seen him in various stages of nakedness, but never like this, and why the fuck was my heart pounding?

Noah King was everything I shouldn’t want, and everything I craved.

I’d known it since my first job for the Back Bay Mafia, beating the shit out of some guy who’d thought Noah had been an easy target and had tried to sell compromising photos of the boss’s son. I’d seen those photos. His father had given them to me. I’d stuffed one down the stupid bastard’s throat as a message. But I’d kept one too, knowing I shouldn’t have. There was a part of me—a part I’d silenced—that desired Noah, in ways that could never happen. It had been easy to ignore, until now.

I marched into the living room, grabbed the ropes, and while he was distracted with emptying out the groceries, I grabbed his arms from behind.

“Easy, big guy—wait? What?—”

I shoved him against the counter and looped the ropes around his wrists. “This isn’t camp.”

“What the fuck?!” He bucked. “We had a deal!”

“And I kept it.” Fuck, his skin was hot where my knuckles brushed his bare arms. His

back muscles rippled, shoulders rolling, and it was like a goddamned symphony of masculinity that kicked my thoughts over and made my dick twitch.

“I meant untie me forever, not just for helping you get rid of a body!”

I had him pressed to the counter, his back to me. The towel clung to his hips and hugged his ass, an ass I was pressed against, an ass as hard as a nutcracker. A vivid, blinding image of me taking his hips in my hands and spreading his ass shot need into my veins, bringing my whole body alive in savage fire.

“Get off!” He bucked, writhing, making his firm ass grind against my hard dick.

I needed to move, now, or this was going to get real awkward, real fast. I hauled him off the counter, bullied him into the living room, dropped him on the couch, and returned to the kitchen. I took my frustration out on the supplies I’d brought, flinging them inside the cupboards and then slamming the doors.

“Asshole!” he yelled from the living room.

“I can still kill you!”

“You won’t,” he called back. “I got under that thick skin of yours, didn’t I?”

The little shit. He needed to learn to keep his damn mouth shut. Permanently. This feeling, this... rage, it wasn’t for him, it was my own fucked-up head, but I could use it. Get it done. Do what I was supposed to do, instead of dragging out the inevitable and torturing us both. I removed the gun from under my shirt and marched back into the living room.

Noah lay half sprawled on the couch, where I’d left him, his hair mussed, his face furious, and his towel tented over a hard dick.

“Fuck,” he snarled and dropped his head back on the couch, flinching his gaze at the ceiling. “Shoot me, then. Get it over with.”

I had been about to do that, I had the gun at my side, but... This was fucking confusing. Why was he hard? I swallowed a lump that had been working its way up my throat.

“Don’t make it weird,” he said, voice low, deep, like he didn’t want to speak, or maybe thick with desire. “Just shoot, or suck my dick I guess, whatever.”

Suck his...

Touch him, like that, sprawled on the couch, tied up...

The semi I’d been trying to fight off came roaring back, pooling heat, hardening. Noah hadn’t seen, not yet; he was still blinking at the ceiling. Was he hard for this fucked-up situation or hard for me? I’d known he was into men. It was obvious from the first time I’d dragged his high-as-fuck ass out from under the sheets of a threesome before any more photos turned up on the internet. Not that it mattered. What mattered was now, and what all this meant.

Maybe it didn’t have to mean anything?

He blinked, and his gaze slid sideways to look at me. Then it moved down my chest and settled on what had to be the obvious bulge in my pants. His eyes narrowed, then widened. He opened his sweet lips, about to say something that would ruin us, something smart or sassy, something that would drive me crazy. I lunged, slammed a hand over his mouth, pinning him down. Now I had him under me, I drank him in—his heaving chest, pert nipples, the scrunched abs, since he was bent some, and the V of his hips, guiding my eye to where the towel stretched over a very eager dick.



With his hands tied and wedged under him, he couldn't fight me off if he wanted to. But I needed to hear him say it. Say yes.

I dragged my hand down his chin and gripped his neck. He smiled, eyes dancing. And he was going to say something sharp, something biting. I might hate him for it, but I wanted to hear it too: hear him sneer, hear that vicious passion, that restrained rage he had at the world, hidden so far down he might not even be aware of it. If he told me to stop, I would. If he said no, I'd listen. It would be for the best, for both of us.

"Wanna fuck ?" he asked, drawing out the fuck so I felt the word travel through my hand at his neck.

"I'm not fucking you," I growled, but I pushed in so close his beautiful blue eyes were all I could see.

"You sure?" he purred, then shifted his ass on the couch, bringing his thigh up, pushing it against my knee that was propped next to him. "Because this feels a lot like foreplay, Killer."

Foreplay. Was that what this was? Him tied up, me over him, on him, gun in my hand, my dick raging hard and his twitching under the towel. I'd resisted for so long, trapped the needs behind a thousand mental doors, buried it so deep there was no chance of these desires coming back to life. Because it had ruined me once. Destroyed me. But here they were, in the room with me, burning me up, taking the reins, shredding my control, and all because Noah King didn't know when to shut his pretty mouth.

I pressed the 9mm gun to his lips and Noah opened as though it was the most natural thing in the world. Goddamn. Need rode me so hard I almost moaned from the agony.

"You like it, being tied up?" I asked him.

He couldn't answer, since the gun barrel was in his mouth. But his eyes answered for him. And so did his dick. I removed the weapon, kept my other hand on his neck, and stroked the 9mm down his chest. He'd seen me kill a man, he knew how this ended, eventually. Was he hot for this because of what was coming, or hot for me? When the gun skimmed the towel, his breathing quickened, but his eyes stayed on my face. I drew the weapon down the hard bulge under the towel.

"Fuck." He gulped, and I felt that too, under my palm. "This is some fucked-up shit and I am?—"

I tossed the gun onto the couch beside us, drew my other knee up, pinning his legs between my knees, and pressed my hand over his mouth again. His eyes blew wide.

Trapped. At my mercy. If anyone else had Noah pinned like this, I'd kill them. He was mine.

And since he wasn't getting out of this alive, I'd make his last night one of the best nights of his life. And maybe mine too.

### CHAPTER

### SIX

Noah

I had to be dreaming because Killian Donovan was not straddling my legs, trapping me under him, his dick right there, shrink-wrapped in his pants. I'd never wanted to go down on a cock more, and I couldn't get to it. The ropes burned, my hands pinned behind me, but even that felt good. As if a little pain made my rabid need to have him burn brighter, hotter.

He was everywhere, all at once—on me, in my head, his taste on the tip of my tongue—and we hadn't even done anything, just eye-fucked each other while he'd pinned me down and shut me up.

He snarled, like he hated me, hated this. Fuck, he was even hotter when in a rage.

How had we gotten here?

As soon as he'd tied me up and shoved me against the kitchen counter, I'd known I was in trouble, but not the about-to-die kinda trouble, more the I'm-hard-for-this kinda trouble. I'd fucked around with ropes a few times. But nothing like this, like having a brutal monster fix me in his sights as though I were his prey and he was about to savage me so hard neither of us would come out the other side the same.

He'd thrown me around in the past too—had seemed to like dragging me out of

trouble by brute force—but something had changed between us, something that made all the bullying shit feel like foreplay.

I wasn't scared—all right, I was. Killian was more than capable of fucking me and then pulling the trigger when he was done. And why did that make all this more desperate, more fucked up, and a thousand times hotter? I was messed up, wasn't I? To want this, want him, my father's neanderthal pet.

He seemed to be struggling too, since he hadn't moved and still covered my mouth. If he was going to kill me, then we might as well let this play out before it was all over. He needed to get out of his own head and go down on me, or maybe he'd go straight to fucking me. My heartbeat skipped, balls tightening. To get railed by Killian, his body bent over mine, his dick pumping, stretching me wide, hands gripping me... God.

"Fuck me already," I snarled, or tried to, but it came out as a garbled moan under his hand. All this thinking would screw us both. What he needed to do was take my hips, flip me the fuck over, and sink his dick in like we both wanted. He didn't usually hesitate. Killian attacked everything as though he meant to kill it. His dick had the right idea. And I needed it in me. Anything else was pointless.

I narrowed my eyes and glared.

His lashes fluttered, some decision having been made, and Killian's hand eased, freeing my mouth.

"It's about fucking time?—"

"We're not doing this." He turned his face away and began to climb off.

No, wait, he was leaving? I needed this. "The fuck we aren't." I shuffled upright. "I

see you're hard. Fuck me, Killer . C'mon. What's got you scared, huh?" He was on his feet now, turning away. "Is it my father? Coward. I was right, you're just his fucking pet, can't think for yourself, can't take what you want. And you want me. You look at me like I'm your slut, so fuckin' take me, fuck me like I know you want, like you've always wanted. Hold me down and fill me up, Daddy?—"

His eyes flashed. "Don't fucking call me that." He dropped his hand, adjusting his pants around a dick that had to be hurting.

I leaned forward. "You want to shut my mouth, make me."

Something inside him snapped. He spun on his heel and came back at me like a tidal wave of pure fury. Fuck, I was getting it now. Lust scorched my soul, made my dick and ass ache for whatever pounding I was about to get.

The hand he'd dropped to adjust his pants now went to his zipper, and with a quick flick of his wrist, he gripped his erection. And there it was. His cock in his hand. His eyes fierce. I wet my lips, hot with want. His left hand thrust into my hair, tilted my head back, and I now knew where that cock was headed. I opened my mouth, so eager, and swallowed the thick length as Killian glared, hating every inch he pushed in. Fuck, it was a lot, but I wanted it, wanted more, wanted him to touch my soul and bring me to life.

I tried to tell him with my eyes to give it to me, tried to make him see how I needed it, but his sneer told me Killian wasn't home, not the human part of him anyway. What little softness he'd had was long gone. A cold-hearted killer stared through me, his dick riding my tongue and plunging down my throat. I gagged, and maybe he heard because he eased off some, but not for long.

It wasn't pretty—it was animallike, and I was out of my mind for it. For him. My Killer .

I rocked as he fucked my mouth. My own dick was pinched in my towel, its constraints wringing out tiny shivers of friction.

He dropped his head back and his grip in my hair eased, his rhythm slowing. Surrendering himself. Looking up the length of him, stretching my lips around his dick, had to be one of the best views I'd ever seen. It was a damn shame he wasn't naked. Would he let me crawl over him, let me ride his cock as mine slapped his abs, like I'd fantasized a thousand times?

His fist in my hair had eased off enough that I controlled the pace, controlled how much of his cock I swallowed. I pulled off, making him glower, furious, but I had him now and licked from balls to head, flicking my tongue over the sweetest spot, until taking him deep all over again.

He moaned and his fingers knotted in my hair, but not like before. He'd given himself to me, and he was all mine to do with as I wanted, and I was going to give Killian the best blowjob of his life because it might save mine.

### CHAPTER

### SEVEN

#### Killian

This was wrong, but so right. Noah's mouth was taking me down some forgotten path, one I'd long ago denied existed. Pleasure . Selfish, bone-melting, ball-aching indulgence. I should have known his smart mouth would be my undoing, and now he had me captured, at his mercy.

If his father knew my dick was between his son's lips, he'd kill me in an instant, and that thought—among a tiny riot of others—had me racing toward the edge of ecstasy, losing control, nudging the fringes of madness.

Noah sensed I was close, pulled off, and grinned. I already had my hand in his hair and gave it a twist. He gasped, that pretty mouth opening, his pink, wet lips inviting. I nudged my cock between them, and he took it in, his ice-blue eyes making it clear he wasn't letting up this time. And true to his silent promise, he took control.

The sight of his lips wrapped around my dick tugged at pieces of my broken thoughts, rearranging things I thought I knew, making them unknown again. Like, what the fuck was I doing fucking Noah's King's mouth? It was too late for regrets. Not least because he smiled while getting me off. His lips tightened, and I rushed toward coming so fast there was no stopping it.

I clutched the back of his head and came undone down his throat. Somewhere far

away I heard him splutter, but I was lost, spilling between his lovely lips, watching his not-so-innocent eyes shine. And there, right on the precipice, some tiny, sharp piece of my cold, icy heart broke.

Noah sucked, then pulled off and flopped back on the couch. He coughed, licked his lips, and peered up through his lashes, his post-fuck gaze telling me things had changed. Or maybe he'd always had the power, and we were both now realizing it.

A dark, damp patch stained his towel. Had he come? Should I finish him off? It would mean going to my knees, and I didn't kneel for anyone.

"Don't worry," he croaked. "You don't have to reciprocate. Although you could untie me so I can fix it myself, you know? Because, Killer, you're fucking hot, and I'm dying here. Or maybe you like hurting me, huh? Maybe that's your thing? When did you get hard? Back in the kitchen there, tying me up, bending me over the counter? Yeah, there it is. Is this new for you, or have you always wanted to fuck me? Can't say I expected it. Not you. Must be messing with your head, huh? You always liked dick, or is it just my mouth you want to fuck?"

"Noah," I growled, "you talk too much." After tucking my dick away, I ran a hand through my hair. Shit, my hands were filthy with blood and mud. And Noah still looked at me as though we'd just begun whatever the fuck this was.

"Say my name again." He smirked, like the cat who'd gotten the cream. "Say it like you hate it."

He was going to make this worse, smirking like he was, like he had me by the balls. I was screwed. I'd made it worse. If there was any chance of him living, he'd never be able to keep his mouth shut, and it would get back to his father that I'd fucked his son. "Fuck. Stay there. Don't fucking move."



I locked myself in the bathroom and slumped against the wall. I'd mouth-fucked Noah King. No, this was... This couldn't happen. Five years I'd kept myself under control. Five years, groveling to a man I despised—his father. Five fucking years, waiting for revenge.

“Where am I going to go in just a towel?” he called. “This will be good for you,” he went on. “All that bottled up aggression. You just needed a good fuck. You feel good? Because I feel fucking fantastic.”

I stripped off, stepped into the shower with its cracked tiles and stained grout, then flicked on the water and stood under its ice-cold jets, waiting for it to warm up. Noah was probably still talking. Apparently, he didn't care about what had happened, like fucking a man was just another Tuesday for him. He took everything in stride, made every day seem effortless, despite living in a world that wanted to kill him around every corner.

How did he do it? How did he smile so easily?

I washed my shirt and pants, slung them over every surface in the bathroom, alongside Noah's fashionable clothes, flung a towel around my middle, and stared at the door. Nothing had changed. I'd had my dick in Noah's mouth. He'd been willing. Wanted it. Didn't mean anything. Didn't change how I needed to figure out a way of living through this.

But shit, I'd fucked the boss's son.

How had that even happened? How did he get inside my head and unravel all the carefully constructed restraints I'd kept myself in for years? What was it about Noah fucking King that unraveled me ?

“Bad fucking move,” I told my reflection. This whole shitshow had been one bad

decision after another. No more mistakes. Just business.

I opened the door. He was still on the couch, where I'd told him to stay. His gaze drank in my bare chest. The way those eyes roamed, I felt their heat, like I wanted to feel his hands on me, his mouth, his tongue. Fuck .

He laughed. "Now you're just being cruel."

It was going to be a long night.

"We're just going to sit here and pretend we don't want to fuck each other's brains out?"

"Take the beer."

He took the beer. I'd untied him earlier, as it seemed fair since he'd been so... accommodating. "What happened... earlier..." I began, standing over him, still wearing just a towel.

"You mean the best blowjob of your monosyllabic life?" He brought the bottle to his lips, reminding me where my dick had been less than an hour ago.

Naturally, he was going to make this difficult. He didn't know any other way than to be irritating. "It didn't mean anything."

"Sure." He shrugged. "It's not like we're in love, right? You and me. Just a one-off, we bonded over killing a man. I've got Stockholm syndrome. Or a rope kink. Both? Whatever."

There was a whole lot of shit he'd said that I wasn't going to touch. "Right." I sat on the edge of the old wingback chair, beer bottle between my hands, and tried to find

the thoughts I needed to focus on—not the ones filled with Noah, and how even now, I knew that frantic mouth-fuck might have lit the fuse between us. “I can fix this,” I said.

Noah raised his eyebrows. “In a way that doesn’t mean you have to dig the next grave without me?”

Was he joking or being serious? I couldn’t tell with him. But then one of those eyebrows twitched, and his smile ticked with it. “If I find who claimed you were—” I cleared my throat. “—sleeping with the enemy, I’ll tell your father it was a setup, show him proof.”

“You believe me now?”

“It doesn’t matter what I believe.”

“Yeah, but you see why it’s a lie, right? Whoever this Southie girl is, I didn’t touch her. You see why?” He spread his hands, beer in one.

“I see.” I’d had a first-hand demonstration of why it was all lies. Or was that why he’d done it? No. He wasn’t faking how much he’d enjoyed earlier. Noah was many things, but he’d never lied to me, not once. “If I find whoever set you up, go to Val with proof, tell him I kept you alive since he wouldn’t want you killed by mistake, then we’re good?”

“Until he finds the next excuse to kill me.” Noah picked at the beer label.

“Your father is...”

“What?” He looked up. “My father is what? Because if you were going to say under all that sociopathic repressed male bullshit he actually loves me? We both know

that's not true."

"I was going to say he's old, maybe you'll get lucky and his heart gives out."

He mustered a short laugh. "My father will live until he's a hundred and five just to piss me off." He tried to smile, but the weight of too much history held it down. "Can't choose your family, right?"

"Right."

"What about you? Where's your family? Assuming you were born and not carved from stone. You appeared five years ago and slotted right in, like you'd always been in the business."

I should have known that was coming. "You hungry?" I stood, set the beer down, and headed into the kitchen.

"For something other than cock?" he asked, following.

"The more you talk, the more appealing that second grave becomes."

"I can't tell if you're joking or serious."

"Always serious."

He propped his hip against the counter, folded his arms, and tried to read beneath my stoic expression. "Are you though?"

I was, but since he'd started looking at me like he was now, as though trying to figure me out, and how I liked his eyes on me... Maybe I could fuck with him some more.

I showed him a can of soup in one hand and beans in the other.

“Soup,” he said, then searched the cupboard for some pans. A few minutes later, I had the soup on the heat and sliced the bread.

“So you are domesticated,” Noah said after watching me for a while. “I wasn’t sure, since my father keeps you chained.”

“Is that what you see?” I asked.

“It’s what you show everyone.” He shifted closer. “You make them think you’re a yes man, a murder machine, but you’re not like that, are you? You’re smarter than that. I’m starting to think you’re smarter than you look, Killer. How did you get my father to trust you like he does?”

I stirred the soup. “By putting his enemies in the ground.”

“But not me?”

I planted a bowl of hot soup into his hands. “No, not you.” Our gazes met through the steam. “You’ve never been his enemy, just a pain in my ass.” His eyes widened. I knew what was coming and nipped it in the bud. “Say anything about asses and I’ll tie you up again.”

“Is that a threat or a promise?”

I picked up my soup, the plate of bread, and sat at the small fold-out table. Noah sat opposite, smirking. Our knees bumped, so I shifted sideways. He grinned as he ate, dipping his bread and tucking in.

He was a relentless flirt. I knew that. I’d just never had the full force of his sassy

charm directed at me and was struggling with how to shut him down, or whether to encourage it, since it brought parts of me alive I hadn't indulged in for years. Parts I thought I'd never feel again.

"You didn't tell me where you came from," he said, eyes flicking up from his soup.

"No, I didn't. Eat."

"Mysterious man. Huh."

"We need to figure out who lied about you. Any ideas?"

Noah gave a dry, empty laugh. "All of them?"

"You pissed off anyone lately—more than usual?"

"Just my father, by breathing."

There was more to it. His father didn't need an excuse to kill Noah. Someone had forced his hand, someone had given him evidence he had no choice but to act on and send me. Few had that much sway over Val.

"Ask him," Noah said, shrugging. "He'll tell you."

"I never ask him. It doesn't work like that."

Noah swept a piece of bread around his empty bowl, soaking up the last of the soup, popped it into his mouth, finished up, and leaned back in the chair. "Is this all you want, to be my father's pet? His killer until he kills you? Because he will, you know. One day, he'll decide you're a threat, and you'll be gone by sunset. That's how he's lived this long. Anyone smart, strong, he uses, and then he turns on them before they

turn on him. Kill or be killed.”

I knew exactly how his father ran the Back Bay Mafia, and I knew that day would come, but not yet. Not over his son, Val King’s pawn. I wasn’t dying for a lie, and neither was Noah. I was fixing this.

“He kills the clever ones first,” Noah added.

“That’s why I don’t ask questions.”

He lifted his gaze, sensing or hearing something in my tone I shouldn’t have let slip, and he knew there was more happening here because he was another one in his father’s orbit who wasn’t as stupid as they seemed. Perhaps I’d been wrong, perhaps he did listen. He was listening now and hearing more than I’d said with words alone.

“What did he do to you?” Noah asked, his smiles gone. He looked older without that smile, colder too.

I stood, gathered up the dishes, and dumped them in the kitchen sink, then stared at the snow swirling in the dark outside the window. “There was someone,” I said, grounding out the words. “Someone in my life. He died. Wrong place, wrong time. Just... walking down the street. He wasn’t supposed to be there.”

I heard Noah move but didn’t dare glance back. If I stared at the snow, the words came easier, as though it had happened to someone else, another man, in a different life. Which was true. Things had been different back then. I’d been different.

Noah’s soft hand settled on my back and stroked higher. I almost shrugged him off, but the part that had broken off in my heart revealed the truth of how I needed his warmth, needed to feel again beneath the ice I’d frozen myself in.

“I’m sorry,” Noah said, leaning in close.

I smiled without any humor. He didn’t need to say sorry, but one day his father would, at the end of my gun.

He moved closer, hooking his bare leg around the back of mine and pressing all of himself up against my side. I stared at the snow falling as Noah’s heat thawed the past from my bones and warmed me through.

“I can make you forget.”

Nothing would make me forget. But as I turned my head and found his soft eyes looking up at me, his face so beautiful, it seemed as though it wouldn’t kill me to feel again. Noah’s fingers stroked along my jaw, training my gaze on him. He was too fucking pretty to be real, but he wasn’t fragile, not like most believed him to be. The more I knew him, the more I understood what it took to be the coyote in a den of wolves.

I stroked his cheek, touching the forbidden, and when he leaned into me, seeking more—like I needed to feel him—I figured we might be falling together. And would that be so bad?

He tilted his head back, brushed his lips close to mine, and purred, “Stop thinking, Killer. We’re just two fucked-up guys, wearing only towels, in a cabin in the woods, and there’s nobody here to tell us no.” The last words passed his lips in a breathless whisper.

I slipped my fingers into his hair, almost kissed his tempting lips, but skimmed my mouth against the corner of his. As he turned his head, I mouthed his jaw, tasting Noah for the first time.



One taste would never be enough.

Somehow, sometime, he'd gotten under my skin like he'd said, and it wasn't because of the cabin. It had happened years ago, when his brilliant blue eyes had fixed me in his sights and his smile had punctured my heart like a bullet to the chest. That was why, every time the call had come in about some new trouble he'd gotten caught up in, I'd volunteered to save him. Every damn time. I'd chosen to save him for five years, and he believed his father had ordered me to.

It was better he think that, or he'd know how deep that first smile had cut me.

His soft exhale fluttered over my ear, his cheek brushed mine, and his hands stroked my biceps, seeking to hold on.

"So soft, Killer," he said against my cheek. "Careful, or I might start thinking you care."

I grabbed his arms, slammed him against the counter, and ravaged his neck, his collarbone, swirled my tongue around a tight, pert nipple, going lower, falling deeper. His fingers tugged at my hair. Breathless, needful moans fell from his lips. I licked up his abs, wild with desperate need, then dropped to my knees, tore his towel free, and swallowed his dick, balls to chin.

"Ah, fuck!" He bucked, hands twisting in my hair, hips thrusting, thrusting his dick deeper down my throat. It wasn't romance, it was fucking desperation. I'd fucked his mouth and needed to fuck the rest of him, but before that happened, it had been too long since I'd had another man come undone under my tongue, and I needed it to happen now—like he'd said, in a cabin in the middle of nowhere, nobody else mattered. Just Noah and me.

"Yes, take it, take it, God, Killian, your mouth was made for me."

I lifted my gaze, slid off some, and jerked him off with my hand.

Our gazes locked. He knew I was going to make him come in the next few minutes, and there wasn't a damn thing he could do to stop me.

"Fuck, look at you, on your knees for me?—"

He was right. I was on my knees, where I'd vowed never to be. Noah was ruining me in all ways. I hated him for that, hated how he'd emptied out my heart and sauntered into the space left behind. I pulled off, stood, and crushed him under me, gripping his hair and holding his head back, exposing his throat and wide eyes as I pumped ruthlessly.

"I'm going to fuck you," I growled over his lips. "I'm going to fuck you so goddamned hard it'll ruin you for any other man. You understand me? Because after this, there is nobody else."

"Fuck," he sneered, breathing hard, breathing fast, his cock trapped in my fist.

"You want to fuck with me, Noah, then know who you're fucking with. If you're mine, then you're mine to the end. I will brand myself on your soul, you hear me?"

His eyes widened, pupils going dark. "I'm gonna come?—"

I stopped jerking him off and gripped his chin. "Say it, say you want me, and know if I make you mine, no one else will fucking touch you, nobody will hurt you."

He whimpered, but the lust in his eyes made the noise one of need, not fear. "My father?—"

I brushed my lips over his open, gasping mouth. "Is on borrowed time."

He gazed at me, through me, seeing me, perhaps for the first time. I didn't fuck people and throw them away when I was done. When I fell, I fell hard. If he didn't want that, didn't want me, if he wanted someone to cum-dump in, then I wasn't his man. But if he wanted me in his life, if he wanted me, my heart, my soul, then I was his. All-in. Under all the sass, the swagger, all the times I'd saved him, he damn well knew it would come to this. He had to. We'd been circling each other's orbits, threatening to collide, growing ever closer, until here we were. Collision imminent.

"Yes," he whispered.

That one fucking word. Yes. Just a word. But its meaning sealed our fates. Forever.

I dropped my hand to finish him off, but Noah grabbed my wrist and locked on, his fingers tight, like a vise. "Now fuck me like you meant all that," he snarled.

I spun him, and his tight round ass demanded I dig my fingers in. I held him and rubbed against his cheeks, just my towel between my hard cock and his tight ass.

I tore open the nearby cupboard, found some oil—didn't care what kind—dropped my towel, slickened my fingers, and parted his cheeks, sliding down the valley to skim over his hole. He stuttered a gasp and shifted his hips, arching his back and lifting his rear.

"Condom?" he asked.

"I haven't fucked anyone in five years."

"You... What?—"

He tried to turn his head, but I gripped his neck, spread his ass with my free hand, and pushed my dick in, stretching his tight hole. Noah King finally stopped talking. But it

didn't last, and I didn't want it to, not when the sweet, short gasps were all I needed to hear to push deeper inside.

“Goddamn, I never thought I'd get your dick.”

Bending over him, I kissed the back of his neck. “You wanted it since that day at the gym.”

“You knew?”

I straightened, grabbed his ass, and plunged deeper—so deep, Noah choked. I'd wondered about his long, lingering glances since that that day, wondered how he'd feel clenching my dick, until I made myself stop dreaming.

“I see your smile in the window, Killer,” he growled.

I looked up, and there we were, reflected in the window, him and me, bent over the kitchen sink, stripped of our lives, down to the bone, naked and fucking glorious. I rammed my dick home. Noah gasped, arched, and thrust back, hungry for more. Our eyes met in the glass and stayed fixed on each other as I fell into an easy, sweet rhythm. Noah's gaze grew heavy, his mouth open, body alive under me. His soft, pining moans sharpened into lusty gasps.

Shifting him back against me, I reached around his hip and grasped his dick, picking up right where I'd left off, jerking him fast. He panted and rocked, his ass riding my cock as he fucked my fist, quickening until he lost himself in the race to finish.

His moans peaked, body stuttering. “Oh God!” He threw his head back and came over my fingers. I might have lost my mind in the next few thrusts, but I needed to get deeper, needed to be inside him, like I'd said, to brand myself on his soul. I grasped his hips, tilted his ass up, and fucked him down, making him gasp and pant

all over again. I was coming undone, falling into the electric dark, falling for him, and as the blinding pleasure snapped, I spilled with a guttural shout, forgetting who and what I was, just knowing the man under me was everything .

I came back to myself, with Noah watching me in our reflection, his eyebrow raised. “We’re both fucked,” he said, adding his cocky smile.

We were both something, but what, I hadn’t yet figured out.

### CHAPTER

### EIGHT

Noah

I lay in the bed and watched Killian pull his pants on, then sit on the edge of the bed and shrug on his shirt, covering a body I'd tried to devour in all ways. I didn't pretend to know what this was, if it was anything, but he'd said a lot of things last night, said things that had made my heart swell, made me think I wasn't alone, made me hope there might be something more than living for today because tomorrow might never come.

"I'll be back tonight." His voice was thick from lack of sleep and from taking my cock between his lips. His hair, usually styled smooth, was a ragged mess, and his face had gained this weird thing called a smile. I hadn't known he was capable of that, but there it was.

"Hey?"

He looked over his shoulder, and I reached for him but let my hand drop, not sure if we were there yet. Not sure what we were.

"Be careful," I said. I'd never worried about him before. Never cared where he was or what he was doing. He was just there, always saving me.

He touched my hand. I raised my fingers, and his brushed mine. Not really hand-

holding, but a soft, tentative promise of what could be.

“It’s just a question,” he grumbled, standing.

But he didn’t ask my father questions. That wasn’t how it worked.

I stretched under the covers and watched his gaze spill down my exposed parts, then pour over my bare leg, my hip, my chest, in all the places where his tongue had explored thoroughly a few hours ago.

It was a damn shame Killian hadn’t had anyone in five years, because he was fucking dynamite once his fuse was lit. The love he’d lost had torn out his heart. I saw that now—saw him. And I was fucking scared as he headed for the bedroom door; scared he might not return, scared we’d never get to explore this crazy thing we’d discovered between us.

But the snow had stopped, and that life was pulling him back.

This cabin, this bed, all the things we’d done—it was already melting away.

“Stay here,” he said, opening the door. He hesitated, and I told myself if he looked back, then it was real. He’d said it was real, said I was his.

But he didn’t look back, and a little while later, the car engine burbled outside and the crunch of tires on snow signaled his leaving.

It didn’t matter.

Even if we discovered who the liar had been, there was only one way out of this for both of us. One way my father wouldn’t come for him eventually. For him to live, I had to die.

But that was okay. While he'd dozed like a sleeping dog next to me, I'd figured out what to do. When he came back later, we'd fuck, trying to make up for all the years we'd ignored each other, and when he slept, I'd take his keys, drive north, and keep on driving until the car ran out of gas. Then I'd get on a coach and keep running. It was the only way to save him. Because if my father suspected Killian and I were close, closer than fixer and troublemaker, closer than a mob boss's son and sometimes bodyguard should be, and that Killian had lied to keep me alive, Valentine King would kill him.

So I would run. Vanish. As good as dead. And the problem that was me would be solved for everyone.

I left the bed, washed up, threw on my creased but mercifully clean clothes, stoked the fire, and made breakfast. And waited.



### CHAPTER

### NINE

Killian

Kicking my heels outside a glitzy restaurant was not how I wanted to be wasting the evening, an evening during which I could have been back in the cabin, between Noah's legs, listening to his sawing gasps, my cock buried deep and him begging for more. Goddamn, I was getting hard again just thinking about it. I adjusted my pants while leaning against the boss's car parked in the adjacent lot. Now was not the time to be thinking of Noah's naked ass—except, I couldn't get him out of my head.

Luckily, Val's driver, a man I knew well, had gone back to checking his phone long ago, when our conversation had dried up.

I checked my watch for the hundredth time.

The boss's late lunch had turned into an early dinner. I couldn't disturb him for a quick question. If I did, he'd get suspicious, so I had to sit on my hands and wait, with a head full of Noah and his taste still on my lips, his whispers of how he'd take every inch I gave him in my head.

"Why don't you hit the road, and I'll drive the boss back?" I told the driver. "There's no point in both of us waiting around. Take my car."

"You sure?"

“Yeah, I’m good.” I tossed him my car keys as he got out from behind the wheel. We often switched rides; it kept anyone watching from pinning a face to a plate and made for fewer ambushes, since few knew what car they would be traveling in on any given day.

The driver sauntered off, and I dropped behind the wheel of the sleek black Mercedes. Nice wheels. Comfortable. Luxurious. But more importantly, the blacked-out windows made it private.

An hour later, Val emerged from the restaurant. I greeted him with a terse nod. Dressed like a blade, in a grey tailored suit, he resembled a successful businessman. “Killian, it’s about time you returned. The business doesn’t stop because you do.”

I opened the rear door, nodded at his bodyguard to back off—since Val was in my safe hands—and dropped back behind the wheel. Minutes later, we cruised into traffic.

“Everything was dealt with?” Val asked with as much emotion as someone asking if they’d fed their pet fish that morning.

“No trace.”

“Good.” He stared out of the window and the light from the streetlights slid over his wrinkled face, making each wrinkle look like a cut.

“We have problems with the Southies muscling into the docks operation,” he said. “I want you on it. I sent Simon, but he’s wasting time. It needs action, not delay. Delay looks weak.”

“Of course.” He’d brought up the Southies, which gave me an in, if I worded it right. But subtlety wasn’t my forte. Noah could do this dance, with his smart mouth and

quick one-liners. I was more of an action man. “Who told you Noah slept with the Southies girl?” I asked. Did it sound natural? Probably not, since Val’s daggerlike glare shot straight to my reflection in the mirror.

“What?” he snapped.

“Someone informed you of Noah’s indiscretion. Who was it?”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“I... I need to know how far this cleanup has to go. Is there anyone else I need to silence?”

He grunted a derogatory sound, hating mention of the gears that kept his bloody machine working. He’d rather be above it all, not getting his hands dirty. “Ask Simon.”

“Simon told you?”

“Forget Noah. It’s done. I need you on the docks, and I need it to happen now.”

I dropped the boss off at his brownstone and crossed town to Simon’s apartment building. I parked on the curb outside, hurried up to his floor, and knocked. “Hey, man, it’s Killian, open up.” Simon and I often crossed paths. He’d been around a lot longer than me but kept his head down, did as he was told, and didn’t make waves.

No sound came from behind the door. I knocked again before calling his phone. “Probably should have called first.” With my head full of Noah, my game was off.

The phone rang, but Simon didn’t answer.

There were a hundred places he could be. But as I was supposed to take on the Southie docks fuckup, I had to find him sooner rather than later anyway. Whether he'd tell me anything about Noah sleeping around with Southies was another unknown. But I was here, so...

I tried the door handle and gave the door a shove. The frame creaked. The locks were new, however the doorframe had probably been in since the apartment was built back in the nineties. I rolled my shoulders, gripped the handle again, and putting all my weight behind the next shove, popped the door off the frame enough for the lock to slip out of its niche.

"Si?" I called, entering the apartment. After checking each room, it was clear Simon wasn't home. But his laptop was, humming to itself on the coffee table.

He'd have it passcode protected. I flipped the screen up, and the desktop blinked to life, showing a dozen folders open. No passcode. Idiot.

I scanned the documents: docks info, shipping manifests. He'd been working on it before he'd left.

It was all info I'd need but nothing that was going to help me save Noah, until I minimized a window and a Google map popped up, its pin in the middle of nameless greenery. Nowhere near any docks or water.

I leaned in closer and zoomed out on the map, trying to figure out the area. The zoom jerked, whizzing out too far, showing Boston, and the pin was far up the I95 in New Hampshire.

Over the cabin.

"Fuck!"

I knew where Simon was.

### CHAPTER

### TEN

Noah

There was no TV in the cabin, and Killian had smashed my phone. I'd have gone crazy if I'd had to stare at the walls any longer, so I'd dug up some pens and a sheet of old paper from the kitchen drawers. I preferred to work with paints, but I could make pens work in an emergency, which this was. I needed to draw Killian, like I needed to breathe him in, to taste him, to wrap myself around him and absorb him into my veins.

The grumpy asshole had gotten into my head, and my heart. But as tonight would be our last night together, I needed something of him to take with me.

The sketches started out rough. I tried to capture his ridiculously pretty eyes, then that snarling mouth and his lopsided smile, as though his face would crack if he managed a full, genuine smile.

With my head down, pen scribbling, the hours evaporated until it was dark again outside. The whole fold-out kitchen table was covered in pieces of Killian. Now, all I had to do was put all I'd learned together in his final portrait.

I leaned back and frowned at the black window. How long did it take to ask my father a question?

He could have called him, but Killian did everything face-to-face, said it was the only way to get the truth. What if my father hadn't liked how he'd asked, what if Killian was face down in the dirt somewhere? No, my father trusted him. He wouldn't turn on him so fast. Even if Killian had his own motives for everything .

I fixed a pot of coffee, gearing up to start the final drawing, and leaned against the kitchen counter.

He hadn't said what had happened to his lover, but it seemed pretty clear his man had gotten caught up in my father's crossfire—wrong place, wrong time. The Back Bay Mafia didn't give a shit for collateral damage. But they'd killed the wrong bystander in Killian's man. Because I knew that look in Killian's eyes now. He'd kill them all. It was a shame I wouldn't be around to see him drop my father to his knees and make him eat his gun.

The yard outside shimmered silver in the moonlight. No snowfall. Just clear skies.

Something glinted out there in the gloom between the trees, where the light didn't reach. I leaned over the sink—the same position Killian had me in last night. Goddamn, he'd fucked me like a jackhammer. I could still feel his hands on me, the twinge of soreness behind my balls. Damn, I wanted more, wanted forever?—

A short, sharp sound split the air. I spun sideways by someone or something grabbing my shoulder. Only there wasn't anyone in the kitchen. The coffee mug slipped from my hands and shattered. Heat, like boiling water, scorched down my left arm. I stumbled against the table, gasping. What—why was my shirt wet? I touched its dark gleam. My fingers came away glistening red. Blood . My blood.

The window—I saw it then, the hole. A shot.

I'd been shot.

Fuck!

The rifle... Where was the pedo's hunting rifle?!

I bolted toward the living room, heard the door blow open and slam against the wall, heard the thwump of a muffled gunshot. The cabin's wood walls splintered to my left, too close to my head. I veered right, flew into the bathroom, then slammed the door and locked it. "Fuck, fuck, fuck..." I hadn't even gotten a look at the guy.

"You're supposed to be dead, kid."

Simon? Fucking Simon?! I spun on the spot, searching for something to use as a weapon, something heavy I could swing, anything. Towels, soap, toilet paper—fuck, my arm throbbed.

"That flimsy door isn't going to stop me, so save us both some time and get out here."

The window! I flicked the latches, heaved it open, and shivered in a blast of cold. What was it Killian had said, I'd freeze to death in under an hour? My odds outside were better than in.

"Why are you doing this?" I called, sounding weak as the words stuttered between chattering teeth.

I grasped the window frame and heaved my upper body through. Fuck, it was cold, and the window gap was real small...

"It's not personal, I needed your father distracted and you were an easy target. But see, the whole Southie lie started to unravel. They got wind of it, told your father it was bullshit. Imagine that, Southies and Back Bays fucking talking, like we aren't



enemies now?" He laughed. "I was supposed to make a shit-ton of cash, but this bullshit with you made them twitchy, made them think I was setting 'em up. Then I got to wondering if Val was onto me. So, where the fuck was Killian, right? He's the attack dog, was he about to tear into me? And you know what I find out? Nobody had seen Killian for days, not since he was given the kill order for Noah King. Then I'm thinking, what if Killian was always onto me from the get-go, and he didn't kill you? What if he was setting me up? And here we are. Killian's got you hidden away up here while he comes after me. He figured it out and told you all of it, didn't he? You and him think you're so fucking smart. Except, I got you now, and when he comes back, I'll finish him too."

It hadn't been like that. Killian would have killed me, if he hadn't wanted to fuck me instead. We hadn't known anything until we'd started talking. But now the whole kill Noah King shit made sense.

The bathroom door rattled. Stuck half out of the window, I wiggled my hips through, inch by inch. At least Simon liked the sound of his own voice. He could tell me his whole fucking life story, just so long as he stayed behind that door to tell it.

"Fucking open up!"

Just a bit more... I dangled upside down, reaching toward the ground. Blood dripped from my fingers. That was bad, wasn't it? It was a lot of blood. And I couldn't feel my left arm so much now.

The door banged again. Fuck, fuck, fuck. The window let go of my hips. I fell and crumpled in the snow, then scrambled to my feet and dashed for the tree line. It didn't seem all that cold. It would be fine. I'd run for the road, and someone would pick me up.

Several inches of crushed snow cover hid divots and tree roots, trying to trip my

every step. I stumbled on, wincing as pain twinged my arm. It was fine, just had to get to the road... Just find the road...

“You dumb fuck!” Simon hollered.

A shot pinged off a tree somewhere close by. I ran into the gloom, veering left and right around stark tree trunks. Snow clung to my shoes, my legs, weighing me down. Where was the fucking road?! It had to be here somewhere. Trees stood upright, like prison bars. Trees in every direction. No road.

It was here. It had to be.

“You’re dying out here, Noah! Like the piece of worthless shit you are. Give up now. Save us both this bullshit.”

His voice bounced through the trees, coming from all around. I didn’t know which way the cabin was, just knew to keep moving away from my own tracks in the snow. Tracks he’d follow. Fucking snow. My trail couldn’t have been more obvious if I were wearing a fucking neon sign.

Hurrying on, I stumbled around trees, fell over hidden divots, and dropped down a bank that had rushed up out of nowhere, coming to rest under a fallen tree by a half-frozen brook.

Fuck, everything felt heavy. I shivered so damn hard all my bones ached. But I needed to move, to walk down the brook, to hide my tracks.

I pushed off my ass, to my feet, and lurched into water so cold my ankles burned. It was fine, it was all fucking fine... I had to keep moving, just keep moving, and find the road.

Just find the road.

Just run.

### CHAPTER

### ELEVEN

Killian

The car abandoned at the side of the road not far from the dirt track that led to the cabin had to be Simon's. He might have arrived ten minutes ago, or two hours.

Noah could already be dead.

If Simon had killed him, I'd burn the entire fucking Back Bay operation to the ground. They didn't get to take another piece of my heart. Ever.

I roared the Mercedes off the main road and down the snow-dusted path, slid to a sideways stop outside the cabin, and hesitated at the sight of the open door. I'd hoped Simon wouldn't have made it this far—had hoped that Noah would be inside, barely dressed because he didn't seem to know how to wear clothes. He'd be on the couch, all smiles and hungry eyes.

If I found him dead inside, I'd lose my fucking mind.

I snatched up my gun and left the car.

Footprints in the snow led from the trees, up the porch steps, through the front door. Melted puddles inside showed where Simon had been. I palmed the gun and scanned the interior. Whatever had happened here, it had taken place long enough ago for all

the heat to have left the cabin and for the fire to die down. Papers fluttered on the kitchen table, drawing me closer. Sketches. Of me.

A horrible, gut-wrenching sob tried to boil up my throat. I buried it under a snarl. Focus. Don't think. Don't feel . Hunt and kill Simon.

There didn't appear to be any signs of a struggle...

Blood.

Splatters made for a haphazard trail toward the bathroom, where the door hung off its hinges.

Fuck.

Blood inside the bathroom too. Bloody handprints on the basin, the window. Noah was hurt. And he'd run. That was good, it meant he'd been alive... Could still be alive. I dashed back out of the cabin, darted around the side, and found two sets of messy tracks in the snow, blood sprinkled among them.

I cocked the gun's hammer. "Hold on, Noah."

### CHAPTER

### TWELVE

Noah

It wasn't so bad. I couldn't feel my feet anymore, but it wasn't all that cold anyway. All I had to do was sit in this divot I'd found and wait Simon out. I'd be fine.

I hugged my knees to my chest, tucked my chin in, and trembled.

The forest was quiet. Frozen in moonlight.

I'd get out of this. I had to.

There were things I hadn't done, places I'd never been, sunsets yet to paint.

I couldn't fucking die here. I hadn't even lived.

I wanted to make Killian laugh. I knew he could, he was just too stubborn. But he laughed, and when he did, it would be glorious. That big ol' dumb face of his would light up. Was he ticklish? I'd find out, when this was over.

I wiped cold tears from my numb face.

An owl hooted.

Maybe it was safe to come out?

If— when this was over, I'd go someplace hot with Killian, make him run on a beach in short-shorts. God, yes. That needed to happen. Fuck Boston. Fuck my father and his bullshit business. We'd be free.

Lifting my chin, I looked up through the towering pines and blinked at the stars.

It wasn't right.

What was the whole fucking point if this was the end?

A gun hammer ratcheted in the quiet. "Come out," Simon growled from the bank behind me.

"I'm good," I croaked. I wasn't even sure I could unfold my legs, like maybe they'd frozen stiff.

I'd always hated him, with his too small eyes and ginger hair, that he slicked back, so it always looked greasy.

He skidded down the side of the hollow, dislodging snow and stones, then reached into my hiding place, grabbed my arm, and hauled me out.

His touch sparked whatever instincts I had left. I swung a fist, more out of blind panic than real skill, but my knuckles met his jaw hard, whipping his head back, surprising us both.

He reeled. I lunged. Grabbed his gun arm, jerking it upright. He fired, I heard the muffled shot go high, but if he brought that gun down again, the next bullet would go in my head. I slammed my knee up and crunched something near his balls that made

him grunt and slump over. Except, I couldn't hold him, and both of us went down, tumbling in the dirt, grit, and snow.

I still had his gun arm shoved away and scrabbled at his chest, trying to shove him off.

His fingers locked around my neck.

He tried to aim the gun down, while I levered his arm up, shaking, weakening.

His snarling, vicious face loomed. "Now fucking die."

I bucked, tried to twist my hips under him, but he had me pinned, and the more I fought, the quicker the throbbing, pounding darkness washed in.

My chest burned, lungs screaming. My vision swirled through tears.

I tried to grab at him with my useless left arm, tried to push him off, but my bloody fingers slipped off his chin, his face.

This was it; I was dying. The whistling in my ears faded, muffled behind the rush of blood, and it seemed so fucking unfair. I'd never even been in love, could have been... wanted to be, so I could mean something to someone, so all of it had been for nothing.

Would Killian have loved me?



### CHAPTER

### THIRTEEN

Killian

The mound up ahead resembled a tree stump, but after a few more steps, the truth of it ripped my heart out. Noah under Simon , not moving.

Simon brought his gun down to finish him off.

“Hey!” I aimed up.

Simon swung his gun toward me.

I fired, the gun boomed and bucked in my hand, and the round punched through his gut. He gasped, teetering, taking too damn long to fall. I crossed the last few strides in a blur and kicked him off Noah. He sprawled on his back, moaning and swearing, bleeding from his stomach.

I tore the gun from his loose fingers—he wasn’t going anywhere—and dropped beside Noah. He gasped, wheezed, trying to breathe too fast. Fuck, he was pale, his lips blue, his eyes bloodshot and red-rimmed.

“Noah?” His cheek burned cold under the palm of my hand. His mouth worked but made no sound. “It’s all right, I’ve got you.” I hauled him off the icy ground, into my arms, trying to wrap him in warmth. He was hurt, hypothermic, bleeding. Dying. I

clutched him close, needing him to be okay. “Hold on, I’m here, hold on.” All the times I’d saved him, nothing had hurt like this one.

His small hand scrunched my shirt at my back. “I don’t... want to... die.”

“You won’t. I’ve got you. I’ll always have you. You hear?”

Simon had managed to lift himself onto his knees and was crawling away, oblivious to the smears of dark blood he’d left behind. Then he dropped again and slumped against a tree, clutching at his gut. He saw me with Noah, and his face scrunched in disgusted confusion.

Maybe he’d die from the bullet in his guts. But I didn’t have time for that.

I raised my gun a second time, aimed between his eyes. “Nobody hurts Noah King.”

This time, the round punctured his forehead, smacked his head back against the tree, and left him slumped over, twitching.

“I’ve got you, Noah, hold on, all right? Don’t fall sleep. Stay awake.”

He mumbled something, but his eyes drooped. His soft breaths fluttered against my neck. Fuck, I needed to get him warm, fast.

“Better... dig... ’nother... hole,” he whispered, maybe meaning for him?

Fuck that, Noah wasn’t dying here. But Simon had. “Nah, let him rot.”

He trembled in my arms, so small, when he’d always been larger than life before. I retraced the tracks in the snow, carried him into the cabin, kicked the door closed, and laid him by the fire. I had to warm him slowly. Too fast, and his body would go into

shock.

He bled from a gunshot wound in the shoulder, but the round had gone clean through. If I got him warm, cleaned his wound, he'd be all right. I needed supplies, blankets, might need to stitch him... I shifted to stand and his hand shot out and grabbed my wrist. He yanked me back down, eyes wide, pupils blown.

“Is my shirt... ruined?”

His shirt ?! I snorted. “Sorry, baby, your shirt ain’t gonna make it.”

“Fuck.” He let his hand drop but managed a little tic of a smile. That smile told me all I needed to know.

Noah King was going to be all right.

### CHAPTER

### FOURTEEN

Killian

“I still think I should run,” Noah said, climbing from the car outside his father’s brownstone, blinking into Boston’s pale blue sky.

Running was not an option. There was a better way to end this and begin something new, for both of us.

Noah joined me on the steps. He was still pale, especially under harsh sunlight. It had been a couple of days since he’d been near death. The fact he was standing next to me at all was some kind of miracle. Although, I didn’t believe in God, or some divine being, shifting us around like chess pieces. But I had begun to believe in second chances in life, and love. I believed it because every time I laid eyes on Noah King, my heart tripped, my breath fluttered, and my thoughts got all tangled in the way the sun highlighted Noah’s messy hair, how his smile forever played on his soft lips.

“You keep looking at me like that, Killer, and we’d better scratch this meeting and go back to your place.”

I cleared my throat and pressed the bell. “We’ll get to that.”

“Yes, we will.” Noah licked his lips and gave me a savage once-over, reigniting a fire inside only his touch could quench.

The housekeeper let us in and left us in the living room.

Sunlight streamed through large sash windows, illuminating the old wingback chair. The room, like the house, was a slice of old Boston. It had stood for over a hundred and fifty years, as old as the Back Bay families. But the old ways were dying. Business was changing. I was about to make sure of it.

“My... son?”

Noah’s father stood in the doorway, wearing his suit, about to go about his day as the mob boss of one of the US’s most notorious criminal organizations. What he hadn’t expected to see was his son standing in his front room, back from the dead.

“Father.”

Val’s shock vanished too soon, and those shrewd eyes turned accusingly to me.

“Simon lied to you,” I said. “He was selling our goods to the Southies, using the docks to do it. He needed you distracted and me elsewhere while he betrayed you. Everything he told you about Noah sleeping around was a story, fabricated to undermine your grip on the business.”

The old man lifted his chin and straightened his cuffs. “I know.”

He’d... known? Before or after he’d ordered me to kill his son?

“You overstep, Killian,” Val said. “Noah’s fate is not yours to decide.”

I swallowed. “If you knew, then Noah didn’t have to die.”

Val’s eyebrows lifted. “And you decided that?”

“I’m right here, you know, Father,” Noah said. “Whatever that fucking word means.”

“Silence!”

Noah didn’t flinch, but he did press his lips together and narrow his eyes on his father. He knew—we all knew—Val didn’t care how his son had almost died over a pathetic deal gone wrong. I wasn’t sure I’d believed Val could be so heartless, wasn’t sure if he’d understood how he’d been played and Noah had almost paid with his life. But he’d known, and he didn’t give a shit.

There were bad men, stupid men, and then there were men like Val King. Vicious men.

“I’m disappointed in you,” Val said to me.

I arched an eyebrow. “Because I didn’t kill your son?”

“Because you went against my orders. Now, you may both leave. I have a busy day, and I cannot be distracted by whatever nonsense this is.”

Noah dropped his chin at being dismissed as though he were nothing but a spec of dirt on his father’s shoe, when instead he was the brightest, most valuable fucking thing in this room, in my life, and in his father’s life too.

Noah was almost at the door when I said, “No.”

They both turned toward me. Father and son. So different, but two sides of the same coin. Strong. Capable. In their own ways. But Noah had heart, he had soul. Val was as cold as corpse.

“Here’s how it’s going to be.” I moved to the table beside the window, picked up one

of Val's crystal whiskey glasses, and poured myself a drink from the decanter. When I raised the drink to my lips, Val's fury was so potent, I felt its burn the same as the heat of his whiskey as it went down.

I dangled the glass in my fingers and then gently set it aside. "Noah is protected. Nobody touches him, nobody threatens him, nobody so much as looks at him sideways, or they will have me to answer to. That includes you, Mister King. Am I making myself clear?"

Noah's eyes widened, while Val's narrowed. "Get out," Val snarled.

I would when I was done here. "I know where the corpses are buried, I know what secrets keep you awake at night, and I know few, if any, of your men are capable of stopping me before I bring this entire operation down."

Val's nostrils flared. "I made you. You were nothing. Who do you think you are?!"

I sighed and headed for Noah by the door. "I'm the man who controls the Back Bay Mafia, but we'll keep it between us. For the sake of your reputation. You should think about retiring soon. I hear the Hamptons are nice." I smiled at his fuming face, then strode with Noah out of the door.

Noah glanced over as we climbed into the car and pulled away from the house, heading into downtown Boston.

"Well..." I sighed. The sun shone, the company beside me was perfect, and I'd not been this happy in over five years. "That was fucking freeing."

"What did you just do?" Noah asked, a touch of awe in his voice.

"Showed my hand." And it felt good. Five years I'd been collecting his father's

secrets, five years being the yes man, five years on the end of his leash. I'd finally shown Valentine King who I was, and now I'd get revenge for the love I'd lost, and the love I'd gained.

The Back Bay Mafia was mine.

“ Fuck .” Noah laughed. “He'll come for you, he'll find a way. He thinks you want the throne.”

I tossed Noah a sly grin, downshifted the car, and raced through the shadows of Boston's high-rises. “I do.”

And if we played the game right, Noah King would be on the throne beside mine, ready to burn his father's kingdom down or reign over it. Whatever Noah wanted.

We'd be the fucking kings.



*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:41 am*

Noah

Capturing Killian on canvas was like trying to pin down a wild animal. I'd tried to sketch him from the fragments in my mind: his serious mouth, his killer's eyes, and those pissed-off wrinkles that sometimes gathered at the corners of his lips. But putting all that together to paint the man had proven impossible.

I swept the brush across a new painting again now, and narrowed my eyes at the silhouette on a whitewashed background. No. Still not fucking right.

I'd trashed three attempts in three days, while Killian had been busy with the business— his business. He had balls to try and steal the family legacy, but it was going to take more than bullying my father to rule the Back Bay Mafia as a king. If anyone could do it, Killian could.

I had my ear to the ground, I heard the chatter. Most everyone talked in the clubs, ignoring me. Thinking I didn't matter. Just the boss's waste-of-space son. But I heard it all, heard how Killian was making moves, and people were taking notice. Some good, some bad.

I dashed the canvas with a few more brush strokes. No, still not right. Fuck.

It was no use. I needed the man himself in front of me to paint him right. But there was no way the big gorilla would volunteer to model.

Scooping up my new phone with paint-stained fingers, I tapped out a text message.

Need u

What's wrong?

Noah?

I'm coming over.

Twenty minutes later, his heavy-handed knock sounded at my door. "Open up."

God, I loved that growl. If I waited, he'd kick the door in. But as I didn't want the hassle of replacing it, I opened up and found him with one arm braced against the frame, sunglasses shielding his eyes, and that mouth tightly pinched with a frown.

His gaze roamed, checking for whatever that fixer-mind of his looked for. Weapons probably. Then it landed on the paintbrush in my hand. "You didn't reply."

I shrugged and sauntered back into my loft apartment, stepping into the sunlight pouring through the tall wall of windows. "Needed to get you here, didn't I?"

"What's so urgent?"

"I'm lonely. Bored. My arm hurts. I wanna see you. Pick one."

He closed the door behind him and crossed the living area. Then he shrugged off his jacket and searched for a spot to toss it that wasn't covered with half-finished art, pots of old, rigid brushes, or my discarded clothes. "Jesus, you ever clean up?"

"This is clean." Back behind the easel, I dipped my brush and watched him from the corner of my eye.

He dumped his jacket between two unfinished portraits and flicked off his sunglasses.

When his gaze skipped to me, it landed like an electrical spark. I'd always mistaken that heat for hate, but it had been hunger all along. I smiled back, and welcomed his gaze roaming over my chest, under the untucked shirt and down my hips, hidden by low-slung sweatpants.

"What are you working on?" he asked.

"You."

His right eyebrow arched. He started making his way over. "Can I see?"

Nerves fluttered, making me swallow. As I mostly socialized with assholes and murderers, nobody much cared to see my work. A few one-night stands had gushed over some older paintings, but the praise from meaningless hook-ups had been just as empty.

Killian stopped beside me, folded his arms, and fell quiet. More quiet than his usual stubborn brooding.

I eyed the art and tried to see it as he would. The rough, sweeping brush lines and dramatic strokes had captured his grumpy seriousness but I'd tried and failed to catch his secret softness too. Mostly because it was as elusive as his smile.

"You're good, you know," he finally said.

"You mean I have enough shitty father issues and childhood trauma to make a go of being an artist?"

"We'll work on that," he said, mouth ticking.

I snorted, then eyed his likeness in the painting. I never much cared for what anyone thought of my art. They'd mostly used the veiled compliments to get in with the King

family. Until now. It mattered now; it mattered what Killian thought. It always had. “You really like it? You’re not just saying that?”

“Why the fuck would I stroke your ego, when we both know you do that all by yourself.”

I laughed—asshole—and in retaliation, swept the brush across his cheek, painting a black swoosh on his jaw. He gasped, snarled, and scooped me into his arms, then dumped my ass on the cluttered countertop in one smooth movement. Paint pots toppled, spilling paint. Killian wedged himself between my knees, stabbed his thick fingers into a pool of green paint and drew something on my chest.

I looked down. “What the—” He fingerpainted a line down my nose, then used the same paint-slick fingertip to lift my chin, and smirked.

“Neanderthal.” I batted his hand away and tried to squirm out of his grip. His heavy arms closed around me, and the growl that rumbled in my ear ended any attempt to fight him off. Yes, this was what I needed, what it was all for. When I’d found myself lost and scared in those woods, I’d wondered what the fuck the point of anything was. I knew the answer now. This was what I lived for. Killian’s arms around me, his breath in my ear, his bare skin on mine. The feeling of coming alive. A feeling only he ignited.

Warm, soft lips skimmed my jaw, then shifted lower, mouthing my neck. I sighed, shivered, and tightened my grip on his arms, holding him close instead of trying to push him off.

“Are any of these paints and shit precious because I’m about to fuck it all up.”

“Yes, don’t—fuck.” I flung an arm around his shoulders.

He grumbled some more disgruntled noises, then captured my ass and hauled me off

the countertop. I locked my legs around his waist, my arms around his neck, clinging on as he stumbled about my chaotic mess of an apartment to find the bed. Which he eventually did and dumped me unceremoniously on it.

Bracing my arms behind me, I ignored the twinge of pain from the mostly-healed gunshot wound, spread my knees, and eyed Killian through my lashes. “So fuckin’ romantic. You sure know how to make a guy feel special.”

He snarled, crossed his arms over his chest, and tore his t-shirt off, over his head. “If you wanted romantic, you should have found a poet to fuck.” He prowled up the bed, like that wild animal I’d tried to tame on canvass, and captured my mouth in a kiss. He was rough, and brutal, and sometimes fuckin’ cold-blooded. But in this kiss? I’d found the softness I’d searched for in his portrait.

Prying his lips apart, I danced my tongue with his, and felt the killer melt away. That side to him never went far though, and came roaring back when he grabbed my wrists and pinned them above my head, pinching them together under one hand. His other hand went to my dick and groped through my sweatpants. I arched, gasped, burning up in the best way.

He abandoned my wrists, but only so he could bite at my ribs. I grabbed his shoulder and shoved him down. He went willingly, yanked on my waistband, jerking my pants away, and swallowed my dick.

“Fuck,” I choked. How was his snarling mouth so damn soft and hard at the same time? He spat, sucked, and mixed it up with his hand getting in on the action too. I was at his mercy, always had been. My killer.

“Noah.” He gasped, then reared up and worked at his pants, tugging them undone. “I need to fuck you into this mattress.” He reached across the bed, tore open the drawer, and dug out the lube. I chewed on my lip, and writhed, primed and so fuckin’ eager. Killian, on his knees, squirted some lube into his palm, and made a show of oiling his

fingers, knowing damn well what the wait was doing to me. “Nothing to say?”

“Just to hurry the fuck up. You’re not getting any younger.”

His sideways smile cut my heart in two. But there wasn’t time to enjoy it. He scooped an arm under my back, flipped me onto my front, jerked my ass in the air, and spread my cheeks. His finger was in. Pleasure trilled up my spine. I gasped and grabbed at the headboard. But Killian wasn’t messing around. When he wanted something—right now, my ass—nothing would stop him.

Barely prepped, and all the better for it, his dick replaced his finger, and thrust in, lighting me up. I blew out a hard breath, but at a shift in angle, the discomfort faded, turning to brilliant, electric friction. My dick jumped with every one of his grunting thrusts. I clung onto the headboard, needing it as Killian grabbed to my hips and fucked hard. He was wild and brutal and every-fucking-thing I needed, because under all that vicious, ruthless, stone-cold-killer, was a man whose heart had been broken, but who still had the courage to share its pieces with me. Did he know I’d forever keep them safe?

He shoved my shoulders down, my ass up, shifting his angle again, and fucked like this was his whole reason for living. I was close to coming, so damn close that a few more slaps from behind and I’d be done for.

The ruthless pounding stopped, its absence just as startling. His hands skimmed from my hips, up my ribs, and drew me upright, my shoulders against his chest and my straining dick jutting like a pole. Fluttered kisses skimmed my shoulders. He’d gone from violent fucking to heartfelt tenderness so fast it left me lightheaded.

“Noah...” His firm fingers gripped my dick and began slow-pumping.

“Hm?”

“Whatever happens, it’s you and me, right? Just you and me.”

I swallowed and had no words left to speak. So I nodded instead, and croaked out an unpoetic, “yeah.”

He gave a snort, snarled in my ear, and pumped my dick with the same ruthlessness as he attacked everything else.

I didn’t stand a chance. “Gah, fuck!” Trapped in his arms, I bucked as he fucking tortured the few final shudders out of me. I’d barely come down when he dropped me forward and in three slamming thrusts, he came too, seated so goddamn deep I forgot how to breathe.

“Jesus,” I panted. I was going to be feeling the marks he’d left for a while. “You should come with a warning sign, Killer.”

He wrapped me in his arms again, and we collapsed among the tangle of sheets together, thoroughly fucked and wrecked, but in the best way.

We weren’t out of the woods yet. Him and me. Not until my father was dead. But knowing Killian like I did, it wouldn’t be long before Val King was on his knees, looking up at the man who’d come for vengeance.

That day couldn’t come soon enough.

When Killian’s breathing slowed, I crawled out from under his heavy limbs and headed to the bathroom. There, the sight in the mirror stole my breath.

It wasn’t the green line of paint down my nose that stunned me. Although, it did tug a smile to my lips. On my chest, Killian had painted a messy green heart. I traced a fingertip over the crusted paint. Beneath all that surly machoism, he was a romantic. And my heart was his.

I knew what I had to do.

Sneaking from the bathroom, I grabbed my brushes, a new canvass and frame, propped it on the easel and with Killian lightly snoring, tangled in bedsheets, his hair a mess and half his gorgeous body exposed, I began to paint.

The End