



# The Priest (Steamy Shorts #14)

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**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** Valerie

Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.

I was born and raised a God-fearing woman, but Father Reed Murphy stoked the fires of hell inside me. I can tell he's different. Not the same run-of-the-mill priest they keep sending to our town.

And I know what I'm doing is wrong. But why does it feel so right to sin at his side?

Reed

I'm out of my depth and out of my mind.

I play a priest in the parish while dangerous men hunt for my head. It's not the way I saw my great escape going. But the second my gaze fell on Valerie Garrett, she was mine ... we just didn't know it yet.

I'm on the run and locked in place. Stuck in a tiny town with a literal boatload of cash waiting to sail off into the sunset. But I can't leave without her. She stole my heart with her perfect smile, and I'll do whatever it takes to keep her safe.

Good God, up above, I know I don't do this often.

But tonight, I pray you'll give me the strength to do what I must.

close your eyes f a n t a s i z e

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# Page 1

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1

REED

“ W hat can I get ya, hon?” the elderly waitress asks while she fiddles with the yellow-paged notebook. A crooked nameplate hangs from her lilac shirt reading, Debby —an old-timey name for an old-timey woman.

“Burger and fries will do. Toss in a tall glass of soda with lots of ice. Unless you’ve got something stronger.” Cola ain’t gonna cut it. Not after what I just went through. I’m a damned king among paupers in this diner, but my sins are lying in wait at the bottom of a bottle.

“Stronger?” She brings a wrinkled finger under her chin and looks at the ceiling while she thinks. “There might be some cooking wine in the back if that’s your sorta thing. Other than that, we’re a dry bar.”

“No sneaky gin under the table? Or a little whiskey to give the coffee an extra kick?” I wave the idea of wine off reluctantly. It isn’t my beverage of choice, and with the awkward glare and shaking of her head, I know my wishes won’t be answered tonight. “Soda will do.”

“Coming right up,” she says, scribbling my order down on her pad and slipping behind the counter. She attaches the sheet with my order onto a line for the cook to collect before heading to the other end of the bar and talking to a rotund man.

The sack of lard sits at the end of the table, with a goofy grin splashed across his

patchy bearded face. When he isn't fixated on shoveling forkfuls of bacon into his mouth, his beady little eyes are set firmly in my direction.

The first instance of doubt creeps in. Does he know? Does he recognize my face? No, of course not. He can't. I just got here, and the news wouldn't have traveled this fast.

But I understand where the nerves come from. A deep, forgotten place that I've long ago abandoned in the darkest recesses of my mind. After the hell I unleashed in Philadelphia, there's no surprise that any prying eye will make me jittery. But what if he does know? What if he's waiting for me to slip, lower my guard?

My hand slides under the table, instinctively reaching for the gun strapped to an ankle holster. Still there, cold to the touch, ready to be fired again.

Calm down, Reed. You're getting worked up over nothing. It's a short stay in Aurora. A few days at max before you take that big, beautiful boat onto the waters and disappear to some beautiful Caribbean Island.

You can do this. Just breathe.

A quick scan of the diner sets my mind at ease. It's not just the lard sack at the end of the bar; all the patrons have a strange gaze directed toward me. It's counter-intuitive to think more eyes means less danger, but in my case, it shouldn't take a genius to figure out why they're all gawking.

I'm a new face in a town with fewer than a thousand people. But I can't let it lull me into a false sense of security. Anyone in here can recognize me, call the cops, and get my ass hauled off to prison.

The fat man raises a hand in a feeble wave. My neck crooks, and I shoot him an awkward glare. Still, I return the wave with the hand that moments ago fingered the

weapon I'd have happily taken his life with.

"Excuse me, miss. Why's that man staring at me?" I ask Debby as she returns to my side of the bar.

"Because we've been waiting for you." She raises a brow of her own and crosses her arms over her breasts. "You are him, aren't you?"

"I'm somebody, sure, but I can't say I'm him. Not until I know who—" The sound of a ringing bell cuts me off. Another set of patrons enter.

An older man my age, with a mean look on his weathered face, and a woman—no, a goddess—walking beside him. She walks with a youthful bounce in her step and an eager lust for life twinkling in two blue pools she calls eyes. A blonde river of perfectly sculpted hair runs down her delicate shoulders, pooling near the small of her back. Every hopping step makes her thick thighs and voluptuous ass bounce.

She's all smiles from the moment she enters, and even as she takes her seat opposite the angry-looking man, there's no hint of her happiness dwindling.

One glance and my cock's throbbing. Another, and it's knocking on the underside of the counter. From the very first sighting, I was hooked. A moth to a flame. A lamb to the slaughter.

"We've been waiting these past two weeks for your arrival," Debby says to fill my silence. "We've missed three Sunday sermons because you haven't showed. You should be happy old Walt is giving you a wave and not tearing you a new asshole for being a no-show."

Sunday sermons? What the fuck is she going on about? I can hardly think, let alone play into the old-timer's bullshit.

My goddess leans forward, elbows digging into the table to speak with the old man in front of her. The action squeezes her tits together, and they're practically spilling out of her low-cut powder blue top.

Yeah, this isn't good.

One look at her is all it takes for me to know I'm about to make a terrible mistake. But if any of Debby's spiritual hoo-ha is real, maybe this is the good Lord above sending me a message. Something along the lines of time to settle down, kid . You've done enough living for one lifetime. Take her and run.

"Yes, of course. I'm the new priest. I was hoping no one would recognize me for a while still." My eyes widen at my own response. "You know, while I get acquainted with this lovely little town of yours."

What are you doing? Don't play into this bullshit. You need to get out of here.

I'm not seriously thinking of going through with this, am I? Pretending to be the town savior when I'm in town to hang low because of what I did to those mob goons back in Philly.

"Well, you best be ready for Sunday, or you're gonna cause riots around town." Debby waves a gnarled, wrinkled finger in my direction.

Looking over to see her running circles through her hair, with that white-toothed brimming smile, my answer is set in stone. How can I run when the woman of my dreams is sitting two tables over?

The older man stands and makes his way to the end of the counter. She eases back in her chair, and her eyes turn to me. Two giant blue marbles twinkle with warm delight. Her joyful smile twists into a naughty grin, and she raises two fingers to wave.

“Oh, I’ll be ready. Don’t you worry about that,” I say with the tactical precision of a trained liar.

What’s with these people waving at me?

Still, I return a dumbfounded, half-assed wave while I drink in her body. Undressing her layers, piece by piece, in my mind until I’ve sculpted a near-perfect image of her pale, naked body in front of me.

The things I will do to you, pretty girl, would make God blush.

And I can’t wait.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:23 am*

2

VALERIE

I knew he was different from the moment I saw him. His long, dusty coat and the worn leather fedora atop his head made him stand out like a sore thumb in our little town of Aurora. And from the second I saw Father Reed Murphy, my mind hasn't let go of him.

Throughout his first service, all I could do was think about the strong hands he waved around while he spoke, latching onto me, digging into my hips, and pulling me into his exquisite frame. Calloused fingertips tickle my smooth, soft skin while the thick piece of meat dangling between his legs grows rock hard and ready to sin.

"It was a good service, but Father Murphy seems to have a different way of doing things. I'm not sure I fully understand it myself," Bob Hoskins says while he shakes my dad's hand.

They're catching up and exchanging notes, gossiping about our new priest like two schoolgirls. It's cute, if not a tad monotonous. I've dealt with it all before. Every newcomer in town catches Mayor Bob's attention, and he puts my father on the case to do some digging. It makes sense with my dad being Chief of Police, but a prying eye on every new face might send the wrong message to folks wanting a place to settle down.

"Have you seen the state of him? He's new age. Might be a convert," Dad replies. "No man with that many scars has been a child of the cloth all his life. But maybe it's

a good thing. We get to see a different side of our faith. See the good Lord's plan in action."

Dad's hardly one to talk. He's big, mean, and littered with scars and bullet wounds from his years in the military. Still, he holds himself and his faith in high regard, regardless of outward appearance. I'm not surprised he's giving the new priest a chance, even though Father Murphy looks more like someone who belongs behind Dad's bars.

"We're a small, isolated town. We don't need a different side to faith. We need stability," Bob says callously, sliding into the driver's seat of his muscle car. "But maybe you're right. I shouldn't cast the first stone or however it goes."

Father Murphy isn't anything like our previous priest. He's tall, handsome, and chiseled from marble. Maybe that's what this town needs. Someone who's seen the darker side of life in order to guide us—them — to the light.

As much as I want to count myself among the flock of blind followers, I can't. It took one look at Reed Murphy to know my faith lies elsewhere. Still in God, but in a different pocket of His holy love.

"I'll see you tonight for the game?" Dad changes the subject, and Bob nods his head. "I'll invite Murphy over, too. Give us a chance to get to know the guy better without having to dip into his history."

"Sounds swell. I'll bring chips and dip." Bob turns his head to the deep blue sky while he ponders what to say next. "A couple of steaks for the barbecue."

"Now we're talking. I'll see you then, Bobby boy. Drive safe, y'hear?" Dad pats the roof of Bob's car and turns toward me. "Ready to get out of here?"



“No, not yet. I want to go in and speak with Father Murphy,” I say.

Dad raises a brow. “About what?”

Bob’s engine roars to life, nearly drowning out Dad’s words. He revs a few more times before he takes off down the road.

“It’s private.” My response is enough for him to yield. I’ve done it a few times before, breaking away after church to speak with our previous priest in the confessional.

“Ah, of course.” He smiles and wraps a hand around my shoulders, walking me back up the stairs towards the church door. He’d never pry when it came to a conversation between me and God. He understands it’s none of his business as long as I’m not getting myself into actual trouble. “I’ll wait out here.”

“Of course,” I say, slipping through the door into the quiet church.

Father Murphy sits on a pew, his head fixed toward the ceiling. He’s sprawled out lazily on the firm wooden seat, hands folded over one another on his belly, and his massive physique testing the limits of his all-black vestments. If I had the time and Dad wasn’t waiting, I’d love to stand here and observe him.

Watch, like a fly on the wall, as he goes about his business. Drink in those shimmering hazel eyes and stand in awe at the sheer monumental size of him. He shifts in his seat and grabs something at his side. It’s the church’s golden holy communion chalice, and he brings it to his lips for a long glug before wiping away the remnants of red wine that spill down his cheek.

Naughty boy. Getting your kicks on the blood of Christ.

Before I say anything, I unbutton the top three buttons of my blouse until my cleavage and part of my bra are visible. In preparation—and Lord knows I prepared long and hard for this moment—I opted for the best bra I could find in my drawer. It’s dark blue, with a black lace lining in a floral pattern running along the sides. To finish off my outfit, I roll the waist of my skirt up until it hits mid-thigh.

“Father Murphy?” My voice is meek, almost scared, as I approach him.

“Ah, fuck.” Father Murphy gets a fright hearing my words and spills the wine over himself. He drops the chalice to the ground, using his feet to kick it under the pew. “Shit, you didn’t hear that,” he says before correcting himself again. “Or that.”

I chuckle at the silliness of his swears and his attempts to rectify the situation.

“I didn’t hear you cuss. Twice. Got it,” I giggle. “But what should I make of you drinking the communion wine while you’re all alone?”

He turns to face me fully, a worried look sprawling across his face. He doesn’t fumble to find words or answers to my question, instead remaining silent and stoic as he watches me walk.

“Nothing, I suppose,” I finally answer for him, “considering what I’m about to do...”

To him.

“And what exactly is it you’re looking to do?” He crooks a brow.

“I’d like to have a word with you?—”

“Of course, what’s up?” Father Murphy’s eagerness cuts me off. He gets up from his seat, wiping away some of the wine splashed over him.

“I’d like to have a word with you and God,” I say, walking slowly, swaying my hips, doing everything I’ve seen in the movies to make myself appear sexier. “Are you free for a confession?”

I can feel his eyes burning into me. He does his best to keep them on mine, but I can see them wandering downward to the unbuttoned top of my blouse. The fabric in his crotch shifts and a hard gulp makes his Adam’s apple bob nervously.

Hook, line, and sinker.

I’ve got him.

“It’s been a long time since my last, and I have a lot weighing on my mind,” I add, but the gawking doesn’t break. His hands slide under his vestments, and I watch them dance under the material until the bobbing in his crotch comes to a halt.

“Of course,” Father Murphy’s voice cracks. He clears it before continuing, “Right this way.”

We walk together, a few feet apart. With every step, I feel my cheeks turning a deeper shade of red. I shouldn’t do what I’m about to, but what choice do I have now? I’ve put myself and Father Murphy in this situation. I’m not going to back down.

Not while he’s biting into the forbidden apple from the palm of my hand.

REED

For such a smart man, I sure am pretty stupid a lot of the time. I'm playing dangerous games with forces far stronger than I care to imagine. Not God, mind you, but mafiosos and cops, all gunning for my head. Somehow, even with those real, tangible threats hanging over me, I'm acting as a vessel and messenger for a higher power who hasn't done much in the way of helping me over the years.

Still, it's gotten me closer to her. We're so close together, separated by only a bronze letterbox opening and a thin sheet of grated plywood. She's sitting on a flimsy wooden stool, her head pointed straight ahead and her eyes shut tight. Her breathing's shaky, nervousness making her lower lip quiver, and I can tell whatever she's about to say is meant for someone who'll know how to help her.

A real priest with actual intent to rectify her sins. Not me, the lousy piece of shit preying on this town to get a shot at the sexy blonde.

"Before we begin, you know I'm new here, and I'd like to ingrain myself within the community as best I can. May I ask your name?" Yeah, that sounds good. A smooth way of asking for something so simple without sounding like a damned creep.

Even though that ship had sailed, I saw the way she looked at me while I fumbled to hide the erection bouncing against the thin material of my black cloak.

"Valerie," she says.

“It’s nice to meet you, Valerie. Please continue.” I keep my voice calm against my mind and body’s racing.

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.”

Christ. Sorry, big man, I shouldn't be using your name in vain when I’m sitting in your house, but I’m sure you understand why those words make me go a little wild with the woman sitting next to me.

“Tell me, what have you done?” Those words feel pathetic, leaving my lips.

“I’ve engaged in the act of...” Her pause makes my heart quicken. What vile thing have you done to have to sit opposite me and ask God for forgiveness? She resonates purity, and I can’t imagine what she’s about to say holds a candle against the thunderstorm of bullshit I’ve done. “Lust.”

A choked cough fights its way out of my throat. Lust?

“Have you acted on them?” Now we’re getting somewhere.

“No, Father Murphy. They are acts of the mind.” Valerie speaks with confidence, as if what she’s confessing isn’t a point of shame but of pride instead.

I peer through the grated divider between us and see her there. Her hands meander across her body, fingers dancing over the silky fabric of her Sunday best.

“Dark, dirty thoughts. Being ravaged, taken, broken, and used,” she continues.

What the fuck am I supposed to say to that? I can’t keep my thoughts straight when I look at her. How will I hold a conversation when she’s telling me the deepest, darkest desires burning in her mind?

“And who have these thoughts been about?” I ask. It seems like the correct response, only because I’m desperate to hear her answer. To see her plump lips mouth my name.

Valerie turns her body in my direction, scooching downward on her stool until she’s almost lying down. One of her hands stops on her breast, cupping the full mound and giving it a squeeze. The other glides down her belly, slipping between her thighs. The back of her wrist parts the fabric, hiding a thin pair of dark blue, sheer panties. The see-through fabric doesn’t do a thing to hide her bald cunt.

“You,” she whispers. “Filthy, vile thoughts of you. From the moment I saw you, I haven’t been able to strike them from my mind.”

Fierce heartbeats to pump blood straight to my cock in a tooth-aching erection. The intensity makes me lightheaded and leaves my throbbing member tearing at the zip of my trousers, begging to be set free.

“What thoughts?” Weak words leave my feeble lips. I’ve given up on the confessional parlor act. I don’t care if she figures out I’m not a priest because of it, either. I just need to hear what’s running through her mind while she touches herself without care.

“It might be easier if I just show you,” she says.

I can’t stop myself, allowing my hands to wander beneath my priestly vestments. I take a firm grasp of my cock over my pants and work the head with my palm while watching her work.

Valerie’s hand that traveled between her thighs tugs at the soaked fabric of her panties. They part from her skin, exposing her freshly shaven pussy. She glides her fingers along the length of her slit, and it gives no resistance with how wet she is.

She coos a soft moan. I drop off the thin piece of wood acting as a confessional chair, pressing my face against the grate to get a better look. All the while, Valerie doesn't open her eyes. She's lost in her own fantasies, touching and pleasing herself with reckless abandon.

"Do you want to touch me?" she whispers behind the choked noises of pleasure. "I want you to touch me."

It's do-or-die time, right? Go on with the bullshit of being the town priest or give in to her desires. Yeah, there's no question about it. I'm throwing myself at her feet and worshiping halle-fucking-lujah.

I drop the bronze divider and shove my hand through it. The hand playing with her breasts reaches out to take it, and even with closed eyes, she latches onto me on the first try. Valerie doesn't drive it down to her crotch, instead bringing it up to her lips. She kisses my knuckles, slow and tender, while moaning at the pleasure she delivers to herself. From the knuckles, she moves along my digits, ending at my fingertips. The tip of her tongue is first to come out, running along my skin before she sucks both my index and middle finger into her mouth.

She treats them to a show, licking and sucking on them, no doubt in the same way she would please my cock if it were in front of her instead.

The timid rubbing I enacted on my cock has moved to full-fledged stroking. Still through the pants for whatever it's worth, but I'm too far gone to care about the ramifications of what's happening.

Her tongue dances against my fingers, gliding between them until they're soaked in her spit. Her free hand remains between her thighs, rubbing slow circles over her clit while she drags my hand down her body.

“I want to feel these strong hands inside of me,” she whispers, resting my hand on her thigh. “I want them to break my innocence and purify me from within.”

A pleased groan rolls through my chest.

“Will you do it for me, Father?”

“I’ll do anything you want me to.”

A satisfied smile tugs at the corner of her lips.

“Then do it.” Her words come out as an order.

Valerie thrusts her hips into the air, and with one swift motion, she drops her panties to her ankles. She holds that position while my soaked fingers dance across her silky-smooth skin.

I can’t stop myself from going all in. I press the two fingers she had in her mouth against her clit, taking over where she left off. I press down firmly and rotate against her nub, and her body instantly jerks in delight.

Her hands wander up my arm, and she moans in satisfaction, giving me free rein to do whatever I want to her. I glide my fingers between her folds, still stroking myself while I watch her exquisite breasts bounce with every spasm my touch brings.

“Are you ready?” I ask.

She nods, slow and determined, drawing in a deep breath. Still, those two blue orbs stay closed.

I start with one finger, the middle, prodding at her entrance. It’s a difficult task, trying



to take it slow while she bucks her hips, and her slickness beckons it forward. But soon, she accepts the first finger. Her body shoots upright at the sensation, and a deep, longing moan escapes her lips. She slams her mouth shut with both palms while I move back and forth, deeper and deeper.

“Valerie?” a voice cries out in the church, and Valerie instantly recoils from my touch.

Whoever interrupted us better have a damn good reason for doing so.

“Is everything alright?” the same voice asks.

It’s the first time she opens her eyes, and her big blue orbs twinkle with a somewhat panicked gleefulness. She jumps to her feet and inspects me through the grated wood. Her teeth sink into her lower lip as her eyes scan me, resting for a long while on my exposed cock.

“Next time, I’m going to taste it,” I snarl and lick my lips at her pussy, so close behind the barricade.

“Next time you will,” she teases, shoving my hand back through the opening. “And you can punish me for being such a naughty girl.”

The words hit my heart like a dagger, and I fall back in wild astonishment. She’s the perfect firecracker for my time in Aurora. Hell, who am I kidding? She’s the woman I want to have at my side for the rest of this crazy journey we call life.

Her last act to ensure I’m hooked to her for good is bending over with her ass pointed at my face and the perfect view of her pink slit at eye level. She moves slowly, sinking to grab the panties pooled at her feet and lifting them slowly. Without another word, she steps out of the confessional booth.

“Yes, everything’s fine, Dad. We just finished,” Valerie’s voice echoes around the church.

Her father. Of course. I shouldn’t be surprised to realize the old man treating her to a dinner meal was a parent, yet somehow, I forgot parents were a concept. I guess my head isn’t in the right place now, anyway.

“Is Father Murphy coming?” Her dad asks.

“He’ll be right out.”

Right out? What? I can’t leave like this. Valerie seeing me play with my cock is bad enough, but walking up to her father red-faced and flustered will surely break the illusion I’m trying to conjure.

A smile cracks my nervous fidgeting to appear somewhat presentable. She’s going to be trouble, and I’m going to love every fucking second of it.

I take a moment to still myself, but it’s an almost impossible task with how close I came to blasting my seed over Valerie. Deep breaths are followed by my own haphazard attempt to fix my attire and hide my throbbing erection beneath my clothing.

When I think I’m ready to step out, I give myself an extra minute. Best way to avoid any awkwardness from an erection while we were meant to be speaking to God is to wait until it’s at a manageable size. More than anything, I’m hoping the few extra minutes I’m taking to get out is enough for them to get bored and leave.

To my immense displeasure, they’re still here. Valerie stands while her father sits in the pew beside her—a few rows back but not far enough from where I was sitting earlier.

“Father Murphy, I hope I didn’t intrude on Valerie’s confession. It’s just we need to get going,” he says as I reach them. Stern blue eyes stare me up and down, and he smirks on noticing the wet stains from where I spilled the wine.

Luckily, he has the good sense not to bring it up.

“No bother. None at all. But if you’re busy, I shouldn’t keep you. I hope to see you both here again next week,” I say, doing my best impression of what a priest should sound like. Sucks that my only references are from TV.

“About that...” Here it comes. An invitation to something I want no part of. Why else would he corner me this long after everyone’s gone home? “I’m hosting a little get-together for the football game tonight. I was wondering if you wanted to stop by, meet some of the townsfolk—well, the important ones at least—and get a sense for the community we’ve cultivated here.”

“The important ones?” I raise a quizzical brow. Nope. Bad idea. I’ve already stretched my luck far enough. You’re on the run for robbery, murder, and a whole heap of other shit...but then again, Valerie’s going to be there. Even now, while she hovers behind her father, those blue eyes gawk at me. They sink to my midsection, teeth digging into her plump lower lip, eager and excited for my cock. Fuck, here we go. “And what makes them important?”

“Oh, Father, I didn’t mean to offend you. We’re still merely people,” her dad turns his head to the wooden carving of Christ on the cross behind me. “It’s just going to be me, the mayor, and a couple of my buddies from the station.”

Station.

Police station, no doubt. There we go, there’s my answer. Turn around and run. I might want Valerie’s pussy smothering my face, but this is getting too hot, even for

me.

“What time?” I ask. My logical mind is right, but it lost control as soon as I saw Valerie’s perfect body pinned up and soaking wet. “Oh, and what’s your name? Seems odd to come to your home when I don’t know what to call you.”

“Game starts at six, so we’ll be meeting at five. And the name’s Brett. Brett Garrett,” he says. We shake hands while he gives me his address, and the pair start walking out of the church.

All the while, I’m glued in place, watching Valerie’s swaying step carry her perfect ass out the door.

Fucked is an understatement. But if I’m lucky, I won’t be the only one getting fucked tonight.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 3:23 am*

4

VALERIE

How can I do this without a care in the world and a grin on my face?

Maybe Dad's right. Father Murphy could be a convert. A criminal turned priest to save his soul, and here I am, testing his faith harder than anything that's come before. He hasn't taken those golden eyes off me since he entered our home. They're deep, dark pools, burning holes into my skin with the way they scan my body. I can't help that it's another hot night, and I get to wear my short shorts and a crop top.

It's all on display for you, Father, even if it does crumble that iron will of yours.

"It's a shame Abigail couldn't make it tonight," Dad says, running a hand through his peppered brown hair. "It would've given Val something to do."

"Oh, no, don't mind me." I smile. Given the options of hanging out with Mayor Bob's holier-than-thou daughter or leering at Father Reed Murphy, I got the best of my options.

Dad's words fall on deaf ears to both Bob Hoskins and Father Murphy. Bob's entire focus is on the screen, where young men throw and kick the ball over the field, and Reed Murphy's mind is probably exactly where I want his face to be...

Between my thighs.

“And anyway, I’ve got duties to handle. The salad and sides aren’t going to make themselves.” I jump out of my chair and shuffle past my dad, Bob, and two of his buddies from the force.

“Can I give you a hand in the kitchen?” Reed gets up and follows me toward the kitchen without waiting for an answer.

“You’re choosing kitchen duty over the game?” Dad asks, almost dumbfounded that someone wouldn’t enjoy America’s national pastime.

“Baseball and ice hockey are where it’s at for me,” Reed says. “I grew up on the Canadian border, you see.”

“Then, by all means...” Dad shakes his can in the air, and the last few drops splash against the sides. “Mind fetching another while you’re up?”

“Not at all. I’ll bring a round for the table.”

“There he is,” Phil Montague, the youngest of Dad’s friends, says. He shoots Father Murphy with finger guns, and the two of us slip into the kitchen.

Reed stops at the kitchen island and rests his palms flat on it. His golden eyes drink me in the same way he downed a chalice full of communion wine. Longing, desperate, hungry.

Damn, he’s handsome. Blue jeans and a black shirt fit him better than pastoral robes and white collars.

“I hope you haven’t forgotten what I told you.” He breaks away from the counter and opens the fridge, grabbing a ring pack of beers. He pulls one out for himself and sets it on the counter.

“I haven’t been able to stop thinking about that tongue of yours since the booth.” We’re talking casually, as if it’s another normal chat about the weather. I’m preparing knives and the chopping board while he fetches booze. It almost feels...normal.

I don’t even blush at the thought anymore. His reciprocation in God’s temple was enough for me to know we’re two different bodies that share a single mind.

“Then take off your pants and panties, kick them aside, and spread your legs. I’m eating something tonight, and it sure as shit isn’t going to be poorly barbecued meat.” Reed’s tone is firm. Commanding.

Yup, I was wrong. I don’t blush at my own silly thoughts, but hearing someone demand something so vulgar sends me over the edge.

“Hurry back,” I say. If it were different circumstances, I’d put on some cutesy voice. I’d whine, act out, and play my own sexual games. But I can’t. Neither of us can. Our words need to sound like mumbles in the kitchen so no one catches on to what we’re up to.

No matter how badly I want to break him, the way I know he’s going to break me.

Reed slips out of the kitchen, and the boys cheer him on, calling him a Saint and joking about how Reed’s their real savior. Pretty fucked up if you ask me. They’re not teasing him, necessarily, but they sure aren’t giving him his due respect as the leader of our faith. Then again, I’ve believed for years that my daddy is the only one who goes to church with a pure heart. The rest of them, the mayor especially, are there for social credit.

While Reed’s away, I move the chopping board to the island for a better view of the door. I grab cucumbers, baby tomatoes, and various other ingredients from the fridge, setting them in a neat row with our sharpest knife beside them. Finally, I undo the top

button of my pants and hook my thumbs into the waistbands of both the shorts and my panties before sinking them to the ground.

Even the motion of the fabric pulling away from my wetness sends electric pulses tingling through my body. Overeager and deeply excited for what's about to come.

Reed returns with a dastardly grin. "Were you a good girl while I was away?"

I take a step back to show him I'm naked, and his jaw nearly drops through the floor. "My God, you're a hellcat, aren't you?"

A hellcat. I like that.

I sink my teeth into my lower lip and nod. I get back to my station, pick up the knife, and start cutting the hard stems of the lettuce away.

Reed grabs his beer, walks over to me, and hovers dangerously close while he further inspects what he demanded. He cracks the can open with one hand while the other finds a comfortable place on my ass. A rumbling groan bellows inside his massive chest as he squeezes my flesh.

"You understand that I'm going to destroy you, right?" Reed asks, but the rhetorics aren't lost on me. I don't have a choice, even if I wanted to stop him. I've awoken the beast, the demon, buried deep inside, and I have to face the consequences.

My heart flutters at the thought. Aren't I just the luckiest?

"So, Father Murphy, you don't strike me as the salad-eating type. Looks to me like you're on a full diet of protein and malt whiskey." I stop cutting and press a finger into the grooves of his washboard abs.



“Please call me Reed,” he says, setting his beer can down and placing the second hand on my other ass cheek before taking a step behind me. “Shouldn’t remind me of what I should be doing instead of this.”

In a swift move, he spreads my cheeks, exposing my holes, and the rumble I heard earlier turns into a growl trapped in the back of his throat.

“Oh, of course,” I moan. His touch hasn’t even breached my intimate areas, but the sensations drive me wild. “Reed it is.”

He steps closer, pressing his cock against me. It’s thick, hard, and nestles between my cheeks. Reed can’t help himself this time, as hard as he tries, the rolling groan hits my ear and sends a shiver down my spine.

I’ve got you right where I want you. And there’s nothing you can do about it.

“But don’t be down-hearted with what you’re doing here, Fath—Reed. You’re doing your duties and delivering punishment.” I wriggle my ass against his girthy member, and his knees buckle. He stops himself from falling with the counter behind him. I coo my next sentence in a sultry whisper. “And I’ve been a bad, bad girl.”

Reed’s breathing deepens, and his enormous frame returns behind me. I don’t have to see it to feel his overwhelming stature engulf me. His hands wrap around my midsection, pushing me forward until I’m half bent over the kitchen island, with tomatoes, cucumber, and other salad ingredients rolling across the counter.

“Then get over here,” he whispers in a dark, husky tone. He drops to the ground, shaking the very earth on which we stand before his hands return to my cheeks.

Once more, they break apart my skin, exposing my holes. A lustful, hungry moan escapes Reed before he buries his face into my legs. He starts with kisses, almost soft,

almost caressing, but even with his attempts at gentleness, I can feel the burning desire. He's fighting against the beast within, and the monster is winning.

His lightly stubbled face tickles the backside of my thighs while his mouth moves freely across the bare flesh. Between kisses, he sinks his teeth into me, gnawing at my flesh as his head ascends ever higher to my soaking core.

"I'm not going to waste a drop," Reed mutters to himself as he laps at the first drops of my wetness with the pad of his tongue.

Every action he takes, the forceful nature of his wants, sends me into a wild overdrive. I press my ass back and into his face, smothering him with what he oh so desperately desires. But I'm not the only one falling off the edge. The closer Reed gets, the more reckless he becomes. Gentle licks and nibbles turn into long strokes of his tongue, drinking every drop of me, with harder bites that will definitely leave a bruise. Even his grip on my ass tightens until my skin won't stretch any further, and my nakedness is fully bare for him.

Then he does it. Without warning, his tongue meets my folds and glides straight through them, penetrating me. One hand releases my ass and slides to the front of my body, where it haphazardly finds my clit to rotate the circles with ever-increasing intensity. My legs turn to jelly. I'm on the verge of crumbling to the ground, but Reed doesn't let me. His massive arms are my anchor, holding me in place while he does whatever the hell he wants to me.

I bite down on my inner cheek to ensure not even a squeak dares leave my mouth. I fear I won't be able to stop myself if I start.

"You taste so fucking sweet," Reed mutters against my skin.

Mounting pressure forms a fiery pit in my core, and the words send it over the top.

The second I felt him touch me, I was in for a treat, but how could I have known it would be this hot? This intense?

He slides the hand away from my clit, but it's not left alone long before his mouth slithers over me. There's no delicacy in Reed's actions. A single lick is all he gives it before sucking my nub into his lips. The pressure is followed by quick, sharp flicks of the tongue, and an overwhelming blast of pleasure resonates throughout my entire body.

"That feels so good, don't stop," I whimper. I want to say more, but every word has the possibility of being followed up by a loud moan, and I have to still myself.

Reed listens, continuing whatever magic he's enacting down below. While his mouth works wonders on my clit, the hand that moments ago rubbed it finds its way to my entrance. He glides it between my folds, getting it soaked, and I can't stop the giddy chuckle tearing from my lips. With another deep suck, he slides his finger inside of me and doesn't stop until his knuckle hits my outer walls.

His hand starts to move again, this time pulling in and out in long, slow motions. The fiery pit in my belly turns to an intense pressure, gripping at my core and yearning to be released. Each thrust of Reed's hand brings me closer to the edge.

"Are you close?" Reed asks.

"Uh-huh." It's all I can manage to get out between my short breaths.

"Then cum for me. Cum on my face." Intensity drips off his words.

And that's all it takes for the pressure to release. Pleasure bursts from my core and stretches through every fiber of my being. Everywhere the radiant warmth touches leaves goosebumps in its wake, and my body finally collapses underneath me from

the overwhelming orgasm that ripped through me.

Reed catches me before I hit the floor, muttering that he isn't finished yet. Before he releases me in full, he uses the pad of his tongue to lap up whatever juices managed to escape.

"I said I want every last drop, and I'm going to have it," he snarls. It should sound silly, but hearing him say those words is so fucking hot.

When he finishes, Reed lifts my panties, then my shorts, and does the button for me. He uses the back of his wrist to dry his face before standing upright again.

I turn to face him, only to find he hasn't moved and I'm staring into his chest. I look up at him through a hooded gaze, and a satisfied smile has taken over his face.

"Did you enjoy it?" he asks.

I open my mouth to speak, but he doesn't allow me to. He wraps a hand behind my neck and pulls me into a kiss. Our first kiss. I can still taste myself on him, and if my legs were struggling to support me before, they're even weaker now. He has to hold me up while our tongues dance their own passionate dance.

It might be wrong— even worse now, having tested Reed's faith and broken it—but I know this is the right decision.

"Are you ready to go back to the football game?" he asks when he breaks our kiss. He takes a step back, distancing himself from me on the off-chance someone walks in.

No wonder he was so happy to take the drinks out. No one would need another while he was busy.

“Fuck the football game,” I blush at my own cursing. “I want to feel you inside me.”

Reed’s dashing smile is replaced by a wicked one. “Oh, you will. And you’ll never be the same again afterward.” He leans in close for the next part. “Because I’m going to destroy you, pretty little thing. And you’re going to love being broken.”

Without another word, Reed grabs the knife and starts dicing the cucumber into thick chunks.

And I’m left floating in wonderland, with more delighted thoughts of what’s to come.

5

REED

Three Days Later

My phone hasn't stopped ringing since I woke up this morning. No matter how many times I kill the calls or how long I leave it lying somewhere where the constant buzzing won't bother me, it goes off. There hasn't been a minute of peace from it since I sat down in the coffee shop, and my guess is it won't stop until I answer.

It would be easier to answer if the caller ID didn't read Unknown Number. Hell, it would be easier to answer if this wasn't a burner I picked up for emergencies. No good can come from answering this call, yet I can't stop myself.

"Who is this?" I ask with the sort of confidence a man in my position shouldn't have.

But maybe that's what this is all about. I live for the thrill. Life and death is a meaningless endeavor, and it's best to take one punch after the next. Eventually, they have to come to an end, won't they?

"Reed?" The speaker's voice is husky.

"I asked who you are. I know who I am."

Through the sea of people making their way through the mall for their early evening shop, I see Valerie at her station. She's a cashier inside a shoebox-sized clothing

outlet that hasn't seen all too much business in the three days I've been watching.

It's official. I'm losing it. Another battle against myself for someone who can and will ruin the rest of my life. I've gone so far as to start following her around. Never letting her leave my sight for longer than I must while I tend to church duties. I've watched her work. Seen her choose delightfully sexy outfits for our future meet-ups. And of course, peeked through her bedroom curtains while she believed herself alone.

She lights a fire deep in my soul, and I feel the inferno burn hotter every second.

"Arrogant until the end," he says. "You know, that's what I liked about you. A confident man who wasn't afraid to swing his dick around in the face of real danger. It's why I knew you were the man for the job."

"I was wondering how long it would take you to find me."

I haven't been able to get Valerie out of my head. Her beauty, the sweet smell of vanilla lingering on her skin, the taste of her cunt.

"Cipriani?" I bring a cup of coffee to my lips and take a sip.

She's bored. I can tell by the way she flips through her magazine, eyes desperately raising to the door anytime someone passes a few steps too close. Her smile brightens at the potential customer, only to be replaced by a childish pout when it's another false alarm.

Both melt my heart.

"Where's the money, Reed?" He doesn't answer my question, but he doesn't have to. I figured it would be Alfonso Cipriani from the very first call. The man is insistent, and he's not going to give up his hunt because I don't answer the phone.

“Now, why would you think I’d answer that?”

“Because you’ve killed two of mine and stole from me. You know what happens to the men who fuck with me, don’t you?” Annoyance laces his words, though he tries his best to keep a calm demeanor. “Give me the money you stole, and I’ll consider sparing your life.”

“Don’t bullshit me. We both know I’ll be dead before the money bags hit the floor.” I scoff. I shouldn’t be so nonchalant to these threats, but I can’t help myself. Alfonso Cipriani isn’t the first thug with whom I’ve stepped into the ring, but he is the biggest. “But you’re right. I feel like I owe you something, and I always make good on my debts.”

From the distance, I watch Valerie lift her head again. This time, it isn’t for a passerby who might turn into a customer. Instead, she’s squinting directly at me. She’s even leaning forward in her chair; those magnificent tits pressed together in the deep V of her top to get a better view.

Shit, she’s noticed me. I haven’t fully come to terms with following her around, let alone trying to explain it to her. We shared a few hot moments of pleasure together, and this behavior borders on psychopathic. Time to get the fuck out of here.

I wait for a small crowd of people to block her view before getting out of my seat. I drop a twenty-dollar note on the table and vanish into the crowd.

“I’m listening,” Alfonso says.

“Use this as a teachable moment. You hired a thug to do the work of your goons, and you lost out. You were prepared to lose the two men who accompanied me in the bank, and you shouldn’t be surprised that my loyalties lie only with myself. You chose the wrong dog for the fight, son, and that’s a lesson you can carry with you for



the rest of your life,” I say.

“I thought as much,” Alfonso sighs. “You’ve made a powerful enemy today, Reed Murphy. You’ve chosen to stand against giants, and I will make you suffer.”

“Then you might as well call me David with how I’ll fuck you up if you pursue this venture of yours.” I guess pretending to be a preacher has its benefits. I wouldn’t have thought of the David versus Goliath fable had I not stepped into the role.

Alfonso starts screaming obscenities on the other end. I kill the call and pocket my phone.

I’m not oblivious to how fucked I’ll be if he catches up to me. This chat was a wake-up call. A reminder of why I’m in Aurora at all. My stay here is supposed to be a jumping-off point before I ride into the sunset with my ill-gotten gains. But there’s so much more at stake now.

Valerie.

I don’t want to leave her behind. She’s rocked my world and left me begging for more. I can’t run, not without her. But I can never come clean about who I am. I can never tell her that the man she’s chosen to give herself to is a monster.

The delusions of a hot priest probably chip away at her soul and psyche. What would she think if she found out I’d broken at least seven of the Ten Commandments in the last few hours, let alone weeks?

But if there was ever a time to break down and pray, hoping that the big man upstairs would turn a blind eye to my discretions and lead me to salvation, it’s now. So, God, if you’re listening...

Do your thing.

## Page 6

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6

VALERIE

A chilly wind bites at my exposed arms and legs, leaving goosebumps along every inch of skin it touches. The pitch black of this moonless night consumes my surroundings, and even the small light above the porch burns a dim shade of yellow. Two cars are parked out front. Reed's old jalopy and an equally decrepit, muddy brown sedan.

I shouldn't be here.

He's busy, and I'm acting on a whim. The man I saw sitting at the coffee shop could have been anyone. Not many men in Aurora look like Reed, but I've fantasized about him so much and so often, I wouldn't be surprised if my mind was playing tricks on me. Now I'm outside his manse, shivering in the cold, hoping he'll invite me in and...

I don't even know what.

The curtains are drawn on the only window looking into his cottage. A human-shaped shadow walks back and forth, while the other is an unmoving blob sitting off to one side. But their voices are clear, even through the howling winds.

"Listen, old timer, I don't want to threaten a fellow brother . . ."

Threaten ? Why would Reed have to make any threats at all?

“But if you don’t pack up your shit and skip town, there’s going to be trouble.” Reed stops pacing. His imposing form blocks out the light and leaves an enormous black spot on the curtain.

My monstrous angel.

“Leave? I can’t. I’m late as is, and this would further solidify me as the laughing stock of our faith,” the blob speaks. His voice is soft. Feeble. He’s afraid of Reed.

“How does the old saying go? Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can never harm you,” Reed says. “I won’t be here long. I’m just a ghost in the wind. Give me my time, and I’ll give you your parish.”

My heart sinks into my guts.

Reed’s leaving? No. He can’t. He just got here. Perhaps I was foolish to place my trust and happiness in a man I hardly knew. I gave so much of myself to him in one big go, and I never considered him disappearing a possibility. I was blinded by lust, so desperate to have him at my side that I couldn’t see tomorrow, let alone where the future would carry us.

The feeble-sounding blob shuffles in his chair. “You’re not going to be here long, brother? And why’s that?”

“If I told you, old boy, I’d have to kill you.” I expect to hear either of the men laugh, but it never comes. “So, are you going to give me the time I need or?—”

Reed takes a step towards him, and the blob raises his hands in surrender. “I’ll go. I’m not here to stand in the way of whatever demons you’re facing. But remember, when you stand before the pearly gates, your secrets will come to light.”

“When that day comes, Father, I’ll accept my place among the wretched and burning.”

Oh no. What have I done? I’ve thrown Reed off his course. Dad’s right, isn’t he? Reed isn’t anything like the priests we’ve had before. He’s a different kind of beast, using his time here to atone for the sins he’s committed in the past.

And without a thought or care in the world, I’ve placed myself between him and his salvation—for no good reason other than he drives me wild and leaves a puddle in my panties. Fuck.

The two of them stand and make their way towards the front door.

Shit, I’ve got to get out of here. I can’t let him see me, not with what I’m wearing and my dastardly intentions for standing outside his door. I launch off the porch and fall into the small flowerbed in front of it.

“What was that?” Reed swings the door open and exposes his massive, shirtless frame to the elements. “Get behind me and don’t move.”

The bespectacled man peering around Reed’s muscular physique has more of the stereotypical priest characteristics. He’s short, balding, and dressed in black with a golden cross pinned to his jacket.

“Expecting trouble?” the priest asks.

“Nothing I can’t handle,” Reed says, stepping onto the flimsy porch. The wood creaks and screeches beneath the sheer weight of him. His golden eyes scan the pitch-black horizon while his body flexes muscles I didn’t even know existed.

Okay. Lying in the dirt and hoping I get away unnoticed is an option. A stupid one. I

can tell him I'm here seeking answers, but it won't go down well with the outfit I'm wearing. A short skirt that barely covers my ass, thigh-high stockings, and a top more akin to a bra than any shirt.

I should be scared, but I'm more embarrassed than anything else. The man behind him is going to lead this congregation when Reed goes wherever he's headed, and this is a damn terrible way to introduce myself.

"It's me." Nervousness makes my voice crack when I speak.

"Valerie?" Reed gets off the porch to see me hugging the dirt. He offers a hand, and I take it.

"Let me not keep you, Reed. But know, my son, I'll pray for you," the priest says.

"And I for you," Reed responds.

Reed wraps his arms around my shoulders and pulls me into him. I crumble into his muscular frame, draining whatever heat I can steal. We watch the priest descend the staircase and take a brisk walk to his car. Once he starts driving off, Reed leads me back into the warmth of his home.

"Come inside, pretty little thing. You'll catch your death of cold out there." That's when it hits him. My outfit. Lustful eyes drink me in, and if I needed warmth before, I don't anymore because they're burning right through me.

Yes. This is a bad idea, and I shouldn't be here. But I'd be lying if I said the way Reed Murphy stares at me isn't exactly what I wanted when I arrived.

### REED

I can't take my eyes off her exposed body. Valerie's outfit barely covers anything at all and leaves nothing to the imagination. It doesn't help that I've seen what's beneath it.

Still, by outfit alone, her intentions are obvious. Her dark purple bustier corset is rimmed with light, see-through fabric. The straps are made of an equally thin fabric, with two bows above the shoulders to tie it together. Her short skirt, the same deep shade of purple, rides up her legs so high that a gentle wind could show off what she's hiding beneath.

"What are you doing here?" I ask when my prolonged gawking forces a cheeky grin onto Valerie's face.

"I came to see you." Her eyes, like mine, wander. She inspects my muscles, the silver scars coating them, and of course, the enormous tent stretching the material of my gray track pants.

"At this time of night? It isn't wise." I wrap a hand around her waist, resting it loosely on the small of her back.

Valerie raises a hand to my cheek, brushing it with the back of her fingers before it slithers behind my neck.

“I had the same thought myself. It’s why I was hiding in your bushes.” She winks and gives me a smirk. “I hope I didn’t interrupt anything.”

The priest. His arrival is horribly timed. If I had a little more time, I’m sure I’d be able to leave this place with the money and Valerie. But my clock started ticking when I answered Alfonso Cipriani’s call this afternoon. He’s going to send his bloodhounds on their hunt. The priest coming to claim his role is just another reminder that it’s time to get the hell out of Aurora.

“Not at all.” I won’t lie to her unless explicitly necessary. It’s easier to cut the conversation short.

My response changes something on her face. The sweet smirk she wore as she entered vanishes into a pout. Her eyes soften, and tears rim the lids. The hand she snaked around my shoulder tightens around my neck as she draws me close.

“Are you okay?” I tighten my grip around her waist and pull her into my chest.

She doesn’t cry—not immediately—but her words carry so much sorrow. “You’re going to leave me, aren’t you?”

Fuck.

I’m not ready to have this conversation. I blew into town a few nights ago and lost myself to fantasies of the perfect future with Valerie at my side. The consequences of my actions were, and still are, the furthest thing on my mind.

But running off and spending the rest of our days together, as beautiful as it sounds, is a delusion that had to catch up to me eventually. Why the fuck did it have to be tonight? Why would she part ways with her life for a drifter? Hell, I’m not even a drifter. I’m a conniving, lying bastard who saw an opportunity to abuse my power to



get closer to her.

And good God, has it been fucking amazing, but it's time for reality to set in. For the hard truths of this life to shatter the perfect image of our future together. No matter how badly it stings.

“Valerie, I—” I don't know what to say. “You can come with me. I've got a boat. I've got cash. I can give you the life you deserve.”

“I can?” She peers those puppy-dog eyes up at me.

I'm not the sort of man that likes to mince words. I like to say it like it is.

“I want you to.” Those words don't convey my truth. I don't want anything.

My mornings should start gazing at her picturesque beauty while my nights are spent buried deep inside her warm cunt. Valerie sunk her hooks in me and claimed my soul the moment we set eyes on each other. I lost sight of myself to a future full of her, and I will not yield.

There's no point lying now. She has seen behind my thin veil of lies.

“I need you to,” I correct myself.

“You barely know me.” She brings her hand back around and digs her finger into my chest while she sinks it down my frame. “What happens if you get bored of me? Find someone else?”

“You lit a fire in me that hasn't stopped burning. I can't see it fizzling out when every time I look at you, new flames roar higher,” I say.

Pearly white teeth sink into her lower lip. Her deep blue eyes are glued to mine. They don't hover or move, but I can tell her mind's racing. Thoughts of running away and escaping this town are playing in her head. Her fantasies, like mine, are becoming a reality. Escaping this town together, disappearing into the night, taking on the future together.

"Kiss me."

Not the words I was expecting, but I'd be a fool not to take up the offer.

With the hand wrapped around her waist, I hoist Valerie into the air, and our lips meet. My free hand shimmies down her body, stroking at every patch of free skin it can graze before nestling on her ass underneath the skirt. With an effortless hoist, I pull her into the air, and Valerie locks her legs around my waist.

Our tongues connect, dancing freely between one another's mouths. They battle for supremacy, smashing together as squeals of delight bubble their way up from Valerie's core.

"I've dreamed about this moment every night since the diner," Valerie whispers between kisses. "Your rough fingers moving over my skin. Our bodies melting together and becoming one." She pauses, and I feel her naughty grin against my lips. "Your massive cock splitting me in half."

"You know exactly what to say, don't you?" I groan in desperation.

Valerie clings to me with one arm as the other descends between our bodies. It hits the waistband of my pants, and two fingers trail the length until they find the string tightening the pants to my waist. She tugs on it delicately, slowly unraveling the knot, while her head snaps to my ear.

“No. I know exactly what I want,” she purrs against my earlobe, “and you’re going to give it to me.”

### VALERIE

Reed wants me to run away with him. Is it crazy for me to say yes?

Maybe it's the intoxicating lust filling the air that sways my judgment. Or maybe it's just the man clutching onto me with such fierce intensity, so eager and desperate for a chance at having me, that muddles my mind and makes me want to succumb to his whim.

A choked noise burbles from the back of Reed's throat. He snaps to my neck, nibbling and gnawing at the tender flesh with light bites as he ascends to my ear. I snap my head back to expose more of my skin, and Reed wastes no opportunity to let his mouth and tongue do whatever they please.

Reed wastes no time. His tongue finds the groove of my neck as he walks forward and presses me against the wall for support. Strong hands grope my ass and spread my cheeks while the massive slab of meat dangling between his legs finds its place between my thighs. The cotton barrier of his pants doesn't stop his head from grazing and prodding my hole.

A gasping squeal fights its way out of my mouth, and Reed responds with a satisfied groan. His hot breath tickles my skin, raw and tender from how he ravaged it so freely with his mouth.

"If you're making those noises and I've barely touched you..." Reed thrusts his

erection against my desperate pussy again. This time, I moan freely, releasing the pent-up sounds I fought to hide. “Imagine what you’re going to sound like when I destroy your perfect cunt.”

The vulgarity of Reed’s words sends me over the edge. This isn’t the man who preached to me on Sunday but the demon he fought so hard to tame. A lust-fueled monster starving for sin. And as much as I hate to admit it, I want this beast to destroy me.

Reed presses his hips into me, using them to pin me against the wall. While I’m stuck, I feel his burning hot fingertips lower on my ass until it wraps around my soaking wet panties. Feeling my juices coating the fabric, Reed mutters fuck but doesn’t stop his movement.

His hand slides between my panties and peels the thin material away from my skin. The movement tickles my sex and forces my hips to jerk forward. His throbbing cock glides against my skin, striking my clit, and sheer pleasure washes over my entire body.

“That’s it, baby. Lose yourself,” Reed whispers, thrusting his hips even harder. Again, his cock presses against my clit, and I can’t hold back the eruption of moans that break from my lips.

I tighten my grip around his shoulders, my hands grabbing at handfuls of his hair while Reed continues his thrusting. Each pump inspires another wave of bliss to erupt from my core and pulse through every fiber of my being. The fingers that found their way under my panties glide between my folds, threatening to enter with every motion of Reed’s body.

And then it happens. With one final thrust, Reed’s thick cock squeezes against my clit, while his index finger slides into me. The single digit is enough to fill me up, and

the wild sensations are only enhanced as the second forces its way inside.

The vast wave of pleasure from his fingers alone drives me crazy. My mind goes blank, my body becomes desperate, and I can't control myself. I start bouncing up and down, the slickness of my pussy enough lubrication to make Reed's fingers thrust in and out of me. He lets me ride his two thick digits until I'm clawing at the edge of orgasmic relief.

That's when he stops me. Using his hand on my ass to hold me tight, Reed starts gyrating his fingers inside me. He moves slowly to start while loud rumbles burble inside of his chest. It doesn't take long for him to lose control. The slow rotations become faster, his steady wrist begins to move up and down, and soon enough, he's pumping his fingers in and out of me with an intensity that builds a warm fire inside my belly.

"Fuck, Reed, that feels so good," I fight the words out between my gasping moans. A wicked grin stretches over Reed's face.

"I'm going to make you cum on my fingers before you have a chance at my cock," Reed says. And though I don't believe it's the reason he said it, those words send me over the edge.

I lose control of my body. My grip loosens around Reed's shoulders, and if he's not pressing me against the wall, I'll fall to the floor. His hand continues bobbing up and down, shaking every part of my body with fierce intentions.

Reed's eyes lock onto my breasts, and his hungry tongue runs along the length of his lips. He can't stop himself from burying his face into my cleavage, lapping at the tender skin while he finger-fucks me.

A cacophony of wailing moans escapes me while the fire in my belly swells outward.

Heat rises to my cheeks while cool liquid trickles down my thighs. My breathing hastens. The knot in my tummy tightens. And in a sudden explosion of absolute euphoria, every nerve in my body awakens in pure delight. The world around me melts away until there's nothing left. Only him and me.

Reed's rhythmic pumping comes to a slow decline until he slides his glistening fingers out of me. He holds them up, golden eyes locking onto the digits. And with a devilish smile cracking his lips, he presses them into my mouth. Lost in ecstasy and lust, I lick myself off him, the sweet taste filling my tastebuds and Reed's pained groan tickling my ears.

"Let me have a taste," Reed murmurs, pulling his fingers from my mouth. He uses the hand to pin my head against the wall, forcing his tongue into my mouth.

I let my hands run down his body, grabbing his well-toned ass while our mouths have their exchange. He sets me down on the ground again, and even as he steps back to part from our kiss, his hands never break away from my hips.

"You're incredible." Those are the only words that find their way out of me.

"I barely had to do anything at all." Reed winks, and my heart melts into my tummy.

"Then how about you show me what happens when you do touch me?" I say. I lift my hands up his ass and get a firm hold of his waistband.

With one tug, I sink them to the floor, and his enormous cock bounces free from its confines. It's thick, throbbing, and veiny. My heart flutters at the thought of his thick girth penetrating me, destroying me.

"Do you like what you see?" Reed asks after a short pause. "You haven't blinked since you took it out."

I look up at him, nodding my head. "I love it."

"Good. That's how it should be," Reed says. "It's the only cock you're going to have from now on, so I'm glad it's to your liking."

While he speaks, Reed's hands move up my body and stop on the straps of my bustier. He unties them gently, but that's as far as the delicate nature goes. He grabs the bottom of the corset, and with a hard tug, he pulls it down and exposes my breasts.

"Fuck," he groans, unable to control his animalistic urges.

He buries his face in my breasts again, but this time, he's not licking at the mound of flesh. Instead, the tip of his tongue finds my nipples. While his tongue plays with my tits, his hands get to work shedding my lower layers.

I giggle at the ticklish sensations against my chest but gasp deep breaths at the feeling of his hands working.

That's when it hits me. It's going to happen. This is a preamble for the main show. He's gotten me worked up, hot and bothered, and now he will take me. The tickles against my chest turn to fierce desire, the heat of his mouth lighting another fire in my core.

Reed Murphy is going to fuck me.

With shaky, nervous breaths, I crumble into him and lock my mouth to his. My fingers run through his thick, black mane. I tighten my grip and pull his head back. Reed doesn't fight it. My free hand drops between our bodies, and I get a firm grip on the base of his cock. His head is wet from prodding against my hole, and I start stroking back and forth over his member.



“Ah, fuck,” Reed moans, and his legs buckle under my touch. I take the moment to regain composure and the sense of control I had when I arrived. I watch him crumble to my touch, his body shaking and rattling with every stroke.

“Does that feel good?” I coo, taking a step back to create distance between us. I want to see it. Watch as his body rattles and his cock throb in my palm. If it wasn’t going to happen inside me, I’d want to see his hot seed shoot from the tip of his cock and cover me in its warmth.

Reed hums his yes, pressing a hand into the wall to steady himself.

“Then imagine how amazing it’s going to feel inside my pussy,” I say in a sultry whisper.

I can see the shift in his eyes—from calm and subdued to my touch to animalistic and intense. Reed throws a hand behind my neck and clutches onto it. He pulls me into him. His erection stabs against my belly, and our mouths meet in a fiery explosion. His free hand finds its way down to my ass, and he squeezes against it while he leads me backward through a door until the back of my knees buckle against his bed.

“That filthy tongue of yours is going to get you in trouble,” Reed says, dropping to his knees on the bed.

He takes a firm hold of my ankles and spreads my legs apart. He sinks lower until his throbbing head is knocking at my entrance through the soaked silk.

“Then you’re going to hate what I say next,” I whisper between my moans. Reed kisses my ankles and thighs while his golden orbs stare at me side-eyed.

I shove my hands down my body. One hand finds the base of Reed’s throbbing erection, while the other parts my panties again.

“I can’t wait for your massive cock to split me in half.”

I tug his cock, gliding the tip between my folds and getting him soaked.

“Your girth stretching me out . . .”

I don’t give him a moment to process my words. As soon as he’s sufficiently lubed with my juices, I ram his tip inside of me, and we both let out an exasperated moan in unison. Reed releases my legs. He pounds his fists into the bed next to my head to steady himself.

“I want your hot seed splashed inside my womb,” I finish when I’ve caught my breath.

Reed tries to steady himself with a deep, long breath, but I don’t allow him the opportunity. I buck my hips, and his cock penetrates deeper inside of me. His arms twitch and flex while a raspy moan leaves his lips.

He presses his hips down, sinking his cock lower and lower until my hungry cunt has devoured the entire length. I scream at the overwhelming sensations tickling every sensitive nerve ending.

I tilt my head downward, inspecting his body until I reach the center, where his manhood is fully engulfed by me. He can’t speak. Hell, I can’t even tell if Reed’s breathing anymore. He’s fighting his own sensations, breathing unsteadily as his hips begin to move.

His veiny erection throbs inside me. Every thrust comes with a bounce that tickles my walls.

“You feel amazing,” Reed’s raspy voice barely manages to get the words out.

I can't speak even though I want to. Every movement of Reed's hips brings forward an intense wave of pleasure. The sensation of him inside my walls builds a tight pressure in my core. Such a familiar feeling, yet so different with him inside of me. The first stirrings of a climax, but one I've never experienced before.

Reed regains some control of himself, standing upright on his knees. One hand sinks to my hips, digging into my skin to get a firm grip, while the other squeezes my breast and pinches my nipple.

I expect him to thrust harder and faster, lose control, and break me the way I so eagerly want to be broken. He doesn't. Holding me firmly, he thrusts in long, hard bursts. Slow and steady, while those golden eyes lock with mine.

"You're mine now, Valerie," his words are stern. "Do you understand?"

He slides his girth out of me until only the tip is left inside.

"I'm not the kind of man who likes to share." Reed teases me, flexing his cock and letting the head tickle my hole. "And no one but me will ever touch this pussy again."

With those words, he thrusts himself deep inside of me.

A feverish moan fights its way from deep within my chest and bursts out of my mouth. His words, his actions—everything about him is so fucking hot.

"I'm yours," I scream between gleeful delight. "Yours and yours alone."

My admission sends Reed into a wild frenzy. He clutches onto my waist with both hands and hoists my ass off the bed.

"You better fucking believe it," Reed groans.

Using the leverage he created, Reed pulls my body into his with every thrust. His cock slides out before smashing into me with long, sharp motions. He never breaks his eyes away from mine. Not even as his calm breathing becomes frantic and intense. Not while his muscles flex and his body tightens. Not even as he tears an orgasm from my core and my walls tighten around his thick member.

I twist and shuffle on the bed. Noises leave my lips, and my head snaps from side to side while Reed fucks me.

“You love my cock destroying your tight cunt, don’t you?” Reed roars. “Filling you up and breaking you down.”

“I do.” Short breaths make my words come out weaker than I intend. “I love your cock splitting me in half. I love how you use me like a fuck doll. Don’t stop, I’m about to cum.”

“Christ,” Reed shouts. He must’ve noticed the first one, but hearing me admit that he’s the reason I’m reaching orgasm breaks him. His hips move faster, bucking with fierce intensity. His grip tightens again, and he holds my ass in the air like it’s nothing.

“That’s it, baby. Cum on my cock,” he groans. “I want to feel it while I fill your belly.”

Reed’s thick muscle rattles against my walls in erratic spasms. His breathing is loose and wild, and his hands and arms shake while they hold me up. I buck my hips against him while he pounds into me. The tension in my core grows tighter and tighter, like a coiling spring, until finally, it breaks.

An intense ripple runs a hot current through my body, and an explosion of my liquid drips from my pussy and over Reed’s cock. It sends him into a cum-hungry frenzy. A

thunderous roar explodes from somewhere deep inside him as he pulls me tightly into his cock. His golden eyes shimmer as his face twists and contorts in absolute pleasure.

There's no pause between my release and the sensation of Reed's hot load spilling inside of me. The roar continues even as he crumbles on top of me, burying his face in my tits and trying to regain any sense of composure.

Our bodies remain interlocked. A tangled mass of messy, wet limbs sprawled out over his bed.

I am his.

And I wouldn't want it any other way.

### VALERIE

The constant buzzing of my phone wakes me from slumber. I'm still cradled in Reed's strong arms, and even as I shimmy out from underneath him, he doesn't stir. I grab my phone and tip-toe out of his bedroom, answering when I'm in the living room.

"Hello." It comes as no surprise that Dad's calling. I left home earlier under the guise of seeing our priest and haven't given him any indication of what's going on. But I didn't expect my appearance on Reed's doorstep to yield so much and never thought I'd be here this late.

"Where are you?" I expect anger but get panic instead.

I check the time. It's quarter past ten. Too late to still be at the church but early enough that it shouldn't cause suspicion. "I'm on my way home. Father Murphy and I—"

Dad cuts me off before I have to come up with a life. "Hurry home, Val. It isn't safe. Reed Murphy isn't who he says he is."

"What do you mean?" Maybe it's the haze and fog of an abrupt awakening that knocks sense from my mind, but Dad's words don't resonate. Reed Murphy is strange, but I can tell he's pure at heart. He might not be an upstanding preacher who came to our town to save the souls of the masses, but he sure has done for mine.

Even if saving isn't one of the things on the list.

"He isn't a priest." Dad's panicked tone grows more frantic with every word.

"I know." Of course, Reed isn't our priest. The guy who stopped by earlier is.

Although come to think of it, that was never explicitly said. It was my assumption based on the interaction we shared —the one that led to the intense passion we displayed all over Reed's cottage.

"I met our new priest earlier. He was talking to Father Murphy." I wipe the sleep sand from my eyes and shake my head, trying to clear it. "Dad, what's this about?"

A deep sigh followed by a long pause follows my question.

"Reed Murphy is a killer," Dad says grimly. "He's wanted across New York for a job that went wrong with some mobster in Philadelphia."

It couldn't have been easy for him to say that. Dad hates bringing work home, and it pains him even more to tell me any of the darker details of his job. Luckily, there have been so few in Aurora that it's never bothered him. But I can hear how deeply it's hurting him to tell me this.

I'm his little girl, and he wants me to believe the world is full of sunshine and rainbows—even while he's out there fighting against the darkness.

"What? How do you know—" I stop speaking. My voice sounds foreign and far away.

"The priest you met earlier? He stopped by and mentioned it," Dad answers before I get the question out.

Reed's standing in the bedroom door now, arms crossed over his firm chest, with a quizzical look splashed across his face.

"Get out of there and get home. I'm on my way to his place," he says. "I'll send someone to the house to watch you."

"Okay. I love you, Dad. Be safe, okay?"

"Don't have to worry about me, pumpkin. I'm always safe." Dad clears his throat before uttering, "I love you too, and I'll see you for breakfast."

He cuts the call.

"Is everything okay?" Reed tilts his head to the side. His stern features break with a look of concern, probably noticing the panic in my eyes.

"It was my dad." I don't know if I should feel sad, scared, or angry, but the concoction of all three fills me with confidence. "He told me you're not who you say you are. You're not a preacher but a..."

And as fast as it came, the confidence disappears.

"A criminal?" Reed's eyes betray the strength he's trying to portray.

"A killer."

He doesn't approach me, though I can see how his body fights against itself to stay put. Those golden orbs that earlier tonight couldn't break away from me don't dare lift to meet mine. He takes a moment to steady himself with a long breath.

"I can explain." Reed's voice carries the same conviction as it always does. Even



humbled, he doesn't show a sign of weakness. "If you'll hear me out."

"So, it's true," I scoff. Somewhere deep inside, I didn't believe it. I wanted to keep viewing Reed as my dirty little secret. The man of God I tempted and seduced. Sure, that probably makes me fucked up in a different way, but his admission of guilt makes me feel like a fool. I never had any power over what was happening. I was using him, just as much as he was using me.

"It is, but you'll have to trust that it was me or them. I'm not a good man, Valerie, and I won't pretend I've ever been one. But being bad teaches you things that an honest life can't. It was them or me, and I chose me," Reed says. He's not dancing around the point or trying to fight the accusations, but his words make me think he's still trying to curry favor with me. "Everything I said tonight, I meant. I have to leave, but I still want you at my side. It doesn't have to end like this."

It doesn't, but it should.

I don't think anymore, allowing my body's natural instincts to take control. Before I know it, I'm running from my place in the living room, out the door, and into the cold night air. I don't stop sprinting until I've reached the church's gate. I turn around to see if he's chasing me, but he isn't. Reed stands on his porch with hands on the railing.

I break through the gate and see headlights coming towards me. It's probably Dad, and I breathe a sigh of relief. As shameful as it is to stand here in one of Reed's shirts, I'd rather explain this to him than be trapped in this strange melting pot of emotions alone.

As the car nears, I notice they aren't the familiar headlights of Dad's BMW. The car slows on approach until it's moving at a crawl. The driver's window is rolled down, and the man inside is holding a gun against his chest, with the barrel fixed on me.

“Get in the car if you know what’s good for you,” he says, and the backdoor swings open.

In the distance, I hear Reed shouting my name. He’s begging and pleading for me not to get in the car, but what choice do I have? I step to the backseat, but before I enter, a hand grabs my wrist and pulls me inside. Terror clings to the back of my throat and chokes my breathing as the tires skid and we start speeding off.

And just like that, I feel the gaping void of leaving Reed’s side. Bad as he may be, there isn’t a person alive I’d rather be with now.

Not even my dad.

10

REED

With nothing but my track pants and a gun, I pursue the men who kidnapped my woman. They don't make it hard for me, driving slow enough so I'd catch up but fast enough to reach their destination before I could do anything about it.

This was always a possibility, I reasoned while I drove. Blinded by the desire to have Valerie at my side, I never considered Alfonso's call a threat.

Those delusions died the moment I saw Valerie get abducted. It's a cold reminder of the harsh realities of life. That no matter how far you run, the past will always come back to haunt you. Unfortunately for me, the past was only a week ago, and Alfonso Cipriani is still mighty angry about what I did to him.

I'm standing outside a warehouse on the docks. I'm not two miles from the boat I have all my riches stashed on. If Valerie had not entered my life like a hurricane and shaken the foundations of my belief, I'd have run to it now. Taken to the waters and disappeared from this cursed land. There's no running now, not until I know she's safe.

Even if it means I won't be walking out of here myself.

"Hands where I can see them," a voice comes from behind.

I do as it instructs, raising my hands but keeping my gun firm in my grip. Turning my

head over my shoulder, I don't see one of Cipriani's suited men but Valerie's father. He has a gun to my back and a mean look in his eye. As much as I hate to admit it, I deserve that hateful glare. "Reed Murphy, you are under arrest for th?—"

"Shoot me if you must, officer, but I'm not going with you," I say. "Not now, at least. Your daughter is inside this warehouse, and I'm going to get her out."

"What did you just say?" he snarls like an enraged mutt.

"When she was leaving the church, I saw them take her. I'm going to get her out. Let me do this, and I'll let you take me in," I say.

I want my words to be a lie, but they aren't. Valerie's safety is the only thing I care about now. The moment I saw her, when I claimed her as mine, I stopped living for myself. She became my sole focus, my reason to live. If that means going to jail, so be it. Even now, as I face the law and my poor decisions, I don't want to run. Without her by my side, there's no reason to go on.

"Let me—the police—handle this." Fear bites at his words. The anger and frustration are washed away by pure concern for Valerie's safety.

"With all due respect, officer, these animals will eat you alive. You're a small-town cop with little understanding of how real criminals work. Stand back and let a professional take care of this," I say. I'm oddly calm for a man facing death on all fronts. "I'll get her out, and then you can do whatever you're going to do."

"Okay, fine. But please, bring her back to me," he says.

With a nod, I drop my arms and step inside the warehouse.

### VALERIE

A cacophony of gunshots echoes and reverberates throughout the warehouse. All the while, the man who took me captive sits behind the warehouse manager's desk with a shit-eating grin on his skinny face.

"All this bloodshed has to make a man wonder what's so special about you," he says, like I have any idea what this is about.

"What do you want with me?" It's the only question that comes to mind. I don't expect an answer, but I'll accept anything he gives.

"You?" He raises a brow and steeples his fingers. "Nothing. You're inconsequential. I want Reed, and you were the easiest way to get him here."

"Why me? I barely know him." I've felt a host of emotions since I was brought into this office. Panic, anger, fear. Each, in turn, has bubbled and boiled down to nothing but the cold numbness of acceptance. I have no control over what's going to happen, and the only thing I can do is pray that Reed gets me out of here safely.

"And yet he follows you around like a lost little puppy." The man scoffs.

So, it was him in the mall? Why knowing that makes my heart swell when I'm in actual danger, I don't know, but I can't help but let the warmth wash through me.

“And even knowing that certain death awaits, Reed Murphy powers through and fights through scores of my men to get you out safely,” the man adds.

Reed killing someone is the reason I’m in this mess. It’s what made me run away from him, and now I find myself begging him to slaughter as many as it takes to get me away from here. It’s a funny thing coming to grips with the hypocritical nature of my situation. Like Reed said, it was them or him. Now it’s us and them, and I choose us.

The final shots ring out, and I hear heavy footsteps on the metal staircase leading up to the office. My captor draws a pistol from somewhere underneath the desk and fixes it on me.

“I’d love to continue our chat, but it’s showtime. Just know, it’s nothing personal. This is just the way things have to be.”

As the words leave his lips, the office door swings open. Reed stands in it with his pistol cupped in both hands and the nozzle fixed on my captor.

“I’m disappointed, Alfonso. I expected a welcoming parade to bring me straight to you,” Reed says. His tone doesn’t resonate with the intensity that burns in his golden eyes.

Streaks of red run down his body, with splotches dotting his gray pants.

“I knew you’d find your way,” Alfonso smiles. “Where’s my money, Reed?”

“Put the gun down, and I’ll tell you,” Reed says.

“Do you honestly think you call the shots here? Tell me where my money is, or I’ll kill her.”

“Fine, I’ll tell you. But how do I know you won’t pull the trigger once I have?” Reed asks. With his question comes the first time he looks away from Alfonso and to me. His eyes carry the apologies, but his mouth can’t speak.

A feeble smile crosses my lips. He’s here, risking his life to save me. Whatever his past holds is for him and God to discuss someday, far in the future, when he crosses over. Right now, he’s the only person I want in this room with me. My hero, my monster, my damned savior.

“You don’t. But it’s the best chance you’ve got.” Alfonso leans back in his chair, and it squeals the whole way down. He kicks his legs onto the desk and gets comfortable as though waiting for story time before a nap.

“The money’s in a boat two miles up the shore.”

“Too easy. I don’t believe you,” Alfonso sighs. “You know, Reed, if there’s one thing I can’t stand, it’s a liar. Sadly, because of that, I have to put a bullet in her pretty fucking head?”

Before Alfonso can finish his sentence, Reed squeezes the trigger. The bullet strikes Alfonso in the chest, and the sheer impact of it sends him hurtling off his chair. As his body hits the floor with a satisfying thud, I drop to the ground and start crawling over to Reed.

Reed fires another shot toward the desk. And then a third, but no noise comes from behind the desk.

He helps me to my feet and pulls me into a tight hug, turning his back toward the desk and using himself as a shield if Alfonso manages to lift himself.

Down the stairs, my father is waiting. He looks at Reed, cradling me against his body,

and up at the office where I was kept.

“The man upstairs is Alfonso Cipriani, head of the Italian mob out of Philadelphia. His crimes range from murder to drug trafficking and weapon smuggling. I don’t expect you to take him in exchange for me, but it’s a peace offering for the trouble I’ve caused you and your family,” Reed says, never releasing his grip on me.

And I never want him to. When I ran from his home, it was because I felt scared. But it was when I was a captive under Alfonso that I realized Reed never had any ill intent for me. Though I discovered the truth, he was still the same man I broke in the confessional. Who sent me to a new plane of pleasure in my father’s kitchen. Who claimed me in the churchyard cottage.

I didn’t then, but I know it now. I still want him. Need him. Even if he isn’t a man of faith.

Dad inhales deeply, exhaling in a sigh.

“People are going to think I’m crazy, standing in a warehouse full of dead bodies and talking to myself.” He turns away from Reed as his lower lip quivers before the next sentence gets out. “I sure hope the man who took my daughter takes care of her because if I meet him again, I’ll bring down the nine circles of hell on his ass. I’ll make him wish he got a cozy prison cell instead of my fury.”

Reed smiles. Dad won’t say it directly, but he isn’t going to stop us from running. As much as it burdens him, Dad won’t arrest the man who saved his little girl.

“I’m sure both the man who took her and your daughter are thankful for the opportunity. Hell, who knows? Maybe they’ll see you again someday on some sunny island in the middle of nowhere. It’s in God’s hands now,” Reed finishes.



He takes my hand in his, and together, we run—back through the warehouse and out into the night. We giggle and laugh and pretend that everything is okay as we ride off onto our next adventure.

### EPILOGUE

REED

Six Months Later

“Are you ready for this?” I ask, brushing a loose strand of black hair out of my face.

“Ready as I’ll ever be,” Valerie says, staring out the airplane’s tiny window at a city growing ever smaller as we soar into the clouds.

I sense no fear in her. No regrets or worries about the decisions we’ve made. She’s overflowing with beauty and radiance, ready for our next step. Together.

“Are you ready for this?” she asks with a sly smile.

“God, no,” I admit. “My heart’s thumping in my throat, and I might puke.”

She giggles and wrinkles her nose at my comment.

“Well, you’re a big boy. You’ll get through it.” Valerie takes my hand and runs her thumb over the golden band signifying our marriage. “You’ve trusted me this far. A little more faith won’t hurt you.”

“Faith isn’t the problem.” I lift her hand and brush her knuckles against my lips. “It’s hitting the ground that scares me.”

“We’re bound to hit the ground eventually. Just make sure you don’t do it too hard.” She smiles that smile that knocks the breath out of me.

“When did the roles reverse?” I raise a quizzical brow. “Isn’t it supposed to be me who’s strong, confident, and impossibly handsome?”

A cheeky smirk darts across Valerie’s face. “Well, you are impossibly handsome. The rest, I’m not so sure about.”

“You two, you’re next,” Bill Matherson interrupts us. The sheepish grin on his face says all I need to hear. The prick’s relishing in my fear.

Valerie slaps my thigh and gets up. “I’m so excited,” she squeals gleefully.

And it’s her sheer delight that has me on this plane, letting Bill strap me into a harness and a parachute. But Valerie’s beaming smile and the twinkle of nervous excitement in her eye make it all worth it. Her happiness, no matter how deeply it pains me to attain it, is the only thing that matters.

And Lord knows she likes to make it hurt.

When we’re dressed to jump, Valerie takes my hand in hers. She pulls me into her and presses our lips together in a tender kiss.

“I love you, Reed Murphy,” she whispers.

“And I love you. More than the moon and stars I’ll never see again,” I tease. She chuckles and breaks away from me.

Bill Matherson straps himself to my jumpsuit, and a lady I don’t know the name of does the same to Valerie. We stand beside the plane’s door. With one hard tug, it

opens, and torrential air bursts into the cabin.

I take Valerie's hand again, gripping it tight, as the four of us launch out of the airplane and hurtle toward the Earth.

And as we descend, I can't hear the gleeful squeals she's making. But her face shows the pure joy of a kid in a candy store. Her happiness, even in my terror, is all that matters.

Good Lord, I don't pray nearly as much as I should. But right now, I ought to thank you for all the blessings you bestowed on me.

VALERIE

Five Years Later

Reed's arm snakes around my shoulder, and he pulls me with a kiss on the top of my head. He holds me tightly against his magnificent frame, staring at the calm blue ocean ahead of us.

If someone told me this is where life would lead, I'd think they were crazy. The daughter of a small-town cop, living a life of carefree luxury beneath the warm, tropical sun. I still wake up some mornings expecting it to be a dream. To see my old room in Aurora, hearing my dad cooking bacon and eggs, and preparing for another long day of selling clothes in the mall.

But every morning, I wake up in Reed's strong arms. He holds me close to his chest, and the gentle rhythm of his breathing is a soothing reminder of our perfect life together.

"Can I get you two anything to drink?" Dad asks, shimmying and shuffling from his lawn chair buried in the sand.

Reed's nervous eyes snap to him like a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar. "Uhm, sure. I'll have a beer."

My biggest fear of following Reed into the unknown was that I'd never see my dad again. He let us run, even though he knew the consequences of being caught would be dire. Beyond even that, I feared that my dad would hate Reed for taking me away.

But it was barely a month before Dad reached out. He didn't care about what Reed had done. In the end, it was Reed who saved me from the men who wanted to harm me, and Dad took that as a good enough reason to forgive and forget.

"And what about you, hon?" Dad asks, brushing the top of my head as he passes by.

"A bottle of water," I say.

"Water?" Dad crooks a brow. "When we're in paradise, overlooking a beautiful ocean, in the middle of the afternoon? Come on, at least have a cocktail with your old man."

"I can't," I say. "Dad, we didn't bring you here just to have a nice holiday."

Dad's eyes narrow, and his expression turns serious. "What do you need, baby? I'll make it happen."

I burst out laughing at his grim response. "No, it's nothing like that. I'm surprised you haven't noticed it yet."

I turn to Reed and cup his cheek in my hand. A warm smile graces his lips, and his eyes twinkle with absolute pride. With a nod of his head, I continue.

"Reed and I are having a child. A baby boy. He's due in September," I say.

"Oh, I see," Dad says. It takes a moment for my words to set in, but when they finally do, he lets out a delighted squeal. "I'm gonna be a granddaddy."

Dad rushes off to fetch our drinks, humming a tune as he walks.

"That went better than I expected," Reed says, releasing an exasperated sigh. For a man who once held so many secrets, he sure hates keeping them now.

The hand around my shoulder starts twirling strands of my golden hair.

“I knew it would,” I say.

“We’re going to be a family,” Reed whispers into my ear, his voice crackling with emotions I don’t think I’ve ever seen in him.

Pure happiness swells in my heart as the warm summer breeze washes over us from across the sea.

“You, me, and our little baby.” I nuzzle myself into Reed’s side, wrapping an arm around his waist. “The perfect family.”

The End

Thanks for reading!