



You're To Blame 2 (Haven Saints High #2)

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Category: YA&Teen

Description: I've been tricked.

Chelsea

What happened to Tate?

We were planning our future together.

The new monster in my life wants to play games and make me his trophy wife.

Tate

One visit to London changed my life forever.

I was separated from Chelsea the only girl I've ever loved.

My pro football career came to an abrupt halt.

Life altering dark secrets hang over my family's head.

I will put an end to the bastard who has my woman.

This dark high school bully romance novel is recommended for mature readers due to the sexual content and cursing. If you have triggers or hard lines, avoid this series.

Total Pages (Source): 21

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 8:12 am

“Let go of me, Mason. There isn’t a chance in hell I will be your wife.”

“No, I’ve waited so long to be in your presence.” Clutching my waist, he inhaled my neck.

I slammed my fists into his muscled shoulders.

“Fine.” His arm was still wrapped around my body as he retrieved his cell phone from his back pocket. “I’ll order to have his fingers on his playing hand cut off.”

I dropped my head against his shoulder. “Ok. I will do what you want.”

He released me. I slipped out of his lap and curled up on the bed. My night had been ruined in less than twenty minutes. My boyfriend’s twin brother returned from the dead, only to make my life a living hell. For what? What did I do? I did absolutely nothing. I didn’t make them like me. Or, fall in love with me. I fell in love with the other twin and now I’m in the crosshairs of the other who couldn’t live with my decision. He wanted me to be his despite what I wanted. What about what I wanted? Did it matter I’d always been in love with Tate? That I was eager to see Tate every summer. Felt a hole inside my heart when I reminisced on the times we spent together in the tent when we were kids. Felt like a boulder crushed my lungs when he blamed me for his brother’s accident. His words ‘You’re to blame’ plagued my thoughts for years.

What do I do now? How do I find my man? Who could I trust to help me? Clearly, Marisa knew he was alive. If she didn’t, it was one hell of a coincidence that she spent so much time in London.

His jaw twitched as he stared into space.

“Isn’t Marisa your girlfriend?”

He cut his eyes at me. “Marisa is none of your business.”

“I’d say she is. She’s gone out of her way to make my life a living hell,” I said, crossing my arms across my chest, my head thudded the headboard.

“She blamed me for your fake death. How did she find out you were alive? And, how long have you two been in a secret relationship?”

“Years.” He dragged the s out.

“How does she feel about your plan to marry me? ”

Like a robot his eyes darted back, focusing on the door in front of him. “That was a secret plan that only concerned me and you, sweetheart.” His eyes roamed my frame.

“You are the girl I love.”

I slammed my eyes shut. Telling him I always loved his brother in this moment would do nothing, but only poke the bear. Not something I was willing to do at this time. I needed to play it cool. Figure out a way to break free from his new hold.

“I’ll play the perfect girlfriend. You promise not to hurt Tate.” I sat up straight, staring into the eyes that mirrored the man I love.

“You will comply rather you want to or not.” He yanked my ankles, pulling me closer. “You’re my woman now.”

I closed my eyes and swallowed hard. “Please Mason, don’t hurt him?” I wrapped my arms around his neck. My stomach was in knots. I hated having to play along with my boyfriend’s psycho twin brother.

“I won’t order to have my twin brothers face pounded for the time being,” he growled. His deep vocals rattled my insides.

I ripped my arms from his neck and stood. Swiping at the fresh tears, I peeked at him. “Are we ready to return to the party? ”

Mason sauntered toward me. “How about a little play time?” He pulled me close and his lips slipped across my cheek.

The blood coursed through my veins as a rage of heat swept through me. I raised my knee, crushing his balls. “I don’t fucking think so.”

He dropped to the floor, clutching his dick.

I towered over him. “Mason, I agreed to play along. Sex is off the table. If you plan to have sex with Marisa, or whoever else, be discrete. No flirting with girls like Veronica in front of me. Once you’re done cradling your balls meet me downstairs. We need to play the part of the happy couple.” I turned on my heels and grabbed the door knob. “Oh.” I peeked over my shoulder. “If you are wondering where all the spunk came from, I spent most of my years hanging with two tough boys. You never liked me wimpy.”

He smirked and blew me a kiss. “You’re right, baby.” He stood slowly, cradling his dick. “Even with bruised balls you’re still hot as fuck.” Mason fixed his costume and kissed my temple. “Lead the way.”

WE STOOD OUT BY THE pool. Mason couldn’t keep his meat hooks off of me.

Thank God for Connie and Megan. They stole me away. So many thoughts ran through my head. For the first time, cutting myself wasn't an idea that plagued me. It was Tate. Where was he being held? Was he conscious? How did he react to Mason's return from the dead?

"Chelsea, are you all right?" Megan smiled, clutching her red cup.

"Yeah, I'm fine." I shook my head. "A liquor refill is needed."

They smirked.

My cup was plucked from my hand. "Hey." I glanced over my shoulder.

"Come on, I'll refill your drink. See you in a minute, Megan." Matt winked as he shoved me toward the kitchen.

"What's your deal, Doll?"

My smile rose and fell. "Matt, it has been a long day. I think I'm still bummed about the game."

He gripped my shoulder. "Yeah, me too. Is it just me or is my buddy behaving a little strange today?"

I snorted. Where did that come from? "He's fine. Just returned from visiting his grandfather. It didn't go as planned."

"Oh. I'll grab him another drink and cheer him up too."

Matt refilled my cup with vodka. "Thanks. How are you and Megan?"

“We’re fine. We flirt. That’s enough right?”

“I don’t know, you tell me.”

He braced his hand on the kitchen counter and leaned into my ear. “She broke my heart.”

I gasped. “Sorry, Matt. I had no idea.”

“So, we are better off keeping our distance from one another.”

He stood up straight, nodding to a few football jocks, strolling through.

“Matt.”

He met my gaze. “I need to talk to you soon. But not here. It’s important and private,” I stated, through a framed smile.

His forehead creased. “I knew something was wrong.” He leaned into my ear again.

“It’s Tate isn’t it?”

I nodded. “I’ll find you. Have fun.” Slipping away from my friend’s worried blue eyes, I peeked out the patio door. Mason stood amongst his friends, laughing like it was any other day. They had no idea they weren’t in the company of Tate. That deceiving bastard. So many feelings shook through me.

I shouldered through a crowd of obnoxious guys in route to the front door. Fleeing the party was all I cared about in that moment. Probably should have told Mason I was ready to leave. Mason. Saying his name after all these years was eerie. Chills rocked my body as I strolled down the driveway.

“Chelse.” I froze at the sound of his voice that mirrored my boyfriend’s.

“Where are you going?”

I never turned to face him. My temple pulsated a mile a minute. “Home.”

“All you had to say was, you’re ready to leave.” His hands smoothed over my arms.

My stomach churned.

“I’d like to go home, please.”

He stepped around me and opened the truck door. I slid inside.

Silence filled the air during our drive.

“I understand Tate hated you for years because of my accident.” He threw the gear shift in park.

Staring at the porch light, I wished my dad would save me. I didn’t want to talk to Mason any more than I had to.

“He did. Tate and I worked it out. He couldn’t blame me any longer. Tate finally admitted I wasn’t to blame for your death,” I snarled.

“I hated how he watched you when we were kids. Got all excited every time you stepped into the lake house. ”

I cut my eyes at him. “If you knew he felt the way he did, why did you interfere?” A tear slid down my cheek.

His eyes narrowed. “Because I felt the same way. Every time you arrived, I wanted to play games with you. Be close to you. Why Tate? What’s the difference between us?”

I sighed. “Tate and I shared a twisted little bond in kindergarten. He tortured me because he liked me. And I in turn, couldn’t wait for the next time he pulled a mean stunt. Over the years, we spent time together. We hid out in a tent on his bed whenever I spent the night and there was a storm. It was perfect.” I swiped at the tears. “I won’t let you tarnish our memories.”

Gripping my knee, I clutched my eyes shut. “I love Tate. He’s the only man I want to be with, Mason.”

I wrapped my hand around the door handle.

“Chelsea.” Mason grabbed my arm. “You will be my wife. We are moving to London after Christmas. I will head our family’s empire with you by my side. You will have my child, Chelsea. Our child will inherit the Forrester kingdom.”

My heart lurched against my ribcage. I clawed at my chest, gasping for air. “Mason, no. Please no.”

“Yes. Tate will marry Marisa. Everything will go as planned. ”

I slammed my fists into his chest. “He’ll never let that happen.”

His blue eyes darkened. “He will or he’ll fucking die. I don’t need him. He can take it or leave it. You better get on board. This is happening. The second we are man and wife; we’ll consummate our marriage.”

I dropped back in my seat, tears flooding my face. My fight fled. What did I have left? This had to be a dream. I’d wake up tomorrow and this nightmare would be just

that. Not waiting a second more, I hopped out of the truck and darted into my house.

Mason was the devil's spawn. Bitter. Filled with jealousy. Only wanted things in life to go his way; no matter whose feelings were crushed in the process. He wrecked my world.

After a hot shower, I laid in bed, staring at the window seat Tate often occupied. "I miss you, Tate. Please come back to me." The pillow beneath my face absorbed my cold tears.

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R ound and round the track I went. Feet pounding the pavement at top speed. My thoughts were still jumbled. I had no idea how to find my boyfriend. This morning, I fled the house before my family awoke. My life was flipped upside down again. Fuck! Why was this happening to me?

I needed to talk to Matt and Rocco. Maybe they could be my eyes and ears while I played nice to the narcissistic psycho, Mason.

The hot water pounding my skin only reminded me that my hell was real. Students flooded the halls as I stepped out of the locker room.

“Chelsea, hey girl,” Connie called out at my back.

I plastered on a fake smile. “Connie, are you ready for this crazy day?”

“Any bitch say something off kilter and I will put her in her place.”

“Oh, and when you say bitches stepping out of line are, we are thinking of the same gossip whores; Natasha and Jamie?”

“You know it. Now that you aren’t an outcast, you have the capability to tell those bitches to fall in line.”

“True or I could use them to my advantage. If I want to spread a rumor, they could spread it. For my benefit only.” My wheels were turning. I’d love to stick it to that bitch, Marisa.

“Hey, babe.” Mason’s pearly whites brightened as he gripped my waist. “You left my bed pretty early. Why didn’t you wake me before you left this morning?” He winked, kissing my temple.

Bile rose in my throat. He had my boyfriend’s mannerisms down to a tee. He’s been watching us for a while. Someone amongst us had to be his spy other than Marisa.

“Oh, you know me, sweetheart. I needed to get a run in. I want to be ready for my track meet. Will you be there?” Please say no.

“Wouldn’t miss it, baby.” His lips landed on mine. I wanted to bite his fucking lip. Bastard was milking our performance.

I looped my arm through Connie’s. “I better get to English. See you at lunch. ”

His eyes narrowed.

“Big fella,” Kyle called out, in the nick of time, slapping Mason’s hand.

“What’s up, dude?” he said, never tearing his eyes off of me.

Connie and me scurried off.

“Are you and Tate ok?”

My smile rose and fell. “Yeah. I just didn’t expect him to tell anyone that I spent the night at his house.” That fucking liar. Ugh!

The bell sounded.

“See you later, Chelsea.” Connie dipped off down the hall.

I strutted into the classroom with my head held high. Brittany sucked her teeth as I scooted into my seat beside her.

“Good morning class,” greeted Mr. Barrings.

“I hope you enjoyed Halloween. Now back to work. Discuss any parties you attended after class. We’ll prepare for Friday’s test.”

He turned to the board.

Brittany leaned in. “Tate’s already making his rounds.”

I ignored her statement.

“I heard he’s hooking up with Veronica this week. I don’t have the specifics, but it appears your relationship isn’t as solid as you thought.”

Snapping her neck crossed my mind. “Thanks for your concern, Brittany. Tate and I are a team.” I grinned writing the test notes in my notebook.

“This was my new life. Every jealous bitch would work overtime to get a rise out of me. Probably wasn’t too intelligent to disclose my issue with cutting. I’d be ready for the vicious and vindictive sluts who wanted my man. If I could tell everyone who he really was, I’d tell the bitches they could have him.

Right before fourth period, I darted into the bathroom. “Jamie, didn’t know you’d be in here. How are you today?” I smirked, smoothing my hands over my plaid skirt.

She squinted. “Oh, please,” Jamie hissed. “What do you want, Chelsea?” She dried her hands, then stared through me.

“I heard Veronica was hooking up with Tammy’s boyfriend. I just caught them behind the bleachers.”

Tammy’s boyfriend, Chris, was the captain of the basketball team. Veronica deserved to be the star of continued gossip as the school whore. Even though it wasn’t Tate, she thought it was him she was flirting with .

She checked her manicure. “What’s in it for me?”

I stepped closer. “You keep your shitty title as the gossip queen.” I blinked several times driving my point home.

“Ugh. Got it, Princess Chelsea.” She darted out of the bathroom.

A devilish smile took my lips. My plan for Marisa had to be methodical. If she knew I was the one who spread the rumor, she’d come back hard. Look what she’d done to me so far. Fucking bitch.

At lunch, there wasn’t a way to talk to Rocco without Mason’s knowledge. He sat beside me just like Tate had done.

“Everything ok, babe?” His dark brow rose over those heart stopping blue eyes.

“Yeah, I’m not very hungry.” I pressed my head into his chest. Didn’t want him to question my ability to play along. I’d play my part until I could get through my disturbing ordeal.

Later that afternoon, I left chemistry class on a bathroom break. Looking over my shoulder, I ducked into the media center. Huddled over a computer screen, I emailed Rocco and Matt asking them to meet me in the auditorium.

The thick red curtains were drawn on the stage. I glanced over my shoulder then stepped behind the curtain. Cloaked in darkness, I rang my hands as I paced the wooden floor.

“Sabrina, are you here?” Matt called, pulling back the curtains.

Biting my lower lip, I waved him over.

“Really, Sabrina the Teenage Witch?” Matt flashed his cell phone light in my face as he shook his head.

I placed my finger over my lips.

“Sabrina?” Rocco called out, as he came into view.

His brow furrowed. “What’s with the crypted message?”

“Are you both sure no one followed either of you?”

“Seriously?”

I met their gazes. “Yes. This is a matter of life or death. I can’t tell either of you anything unless you promise to keep what I am about to say between us.”

Matt threw his hands in the air. “Of course.”

“If either of you tell. I’ll know. And we have to find a better place to meet without alerting Mason.” I glared between them. Tears streamed down my cheeks.

Matt’s gray eyes darkened. “Are we participating in a séance, Sabrina?” He dragged out my fictitious name.

“Your sister traveled to London for years to visit Mason. They’ve worked out this crazy plan of revenge on Tate and me. Mason wanted me for himself.” My hand flew over my lips.

“He’s holding Tate hostage in London.”

Matt slipped his fingers through his blond locks. “That can’t be true.”

Rocco gruffly rubbed his chin. “No, it would make sense actually. The guy with dark hair I kept chasing. I’d only see the back of his head.” He retrieved his cell from his back pocket.

We stared at his screen.

He zoomed in on the mysterious guy. “See, from the back profile he could pass for Tate. Or, I guess, Mason.”

“But how do you know for sure?” Matt’s eyes narrowed.

“His horrible plays at the football game were sign number one. Then later that night at the Halloween party...” I cleared my throat. “I was making out with my boyfriend, so I thought. I slipped my fingers through his hair and I felt a raised scar that Tate didn’t have. It wasn’t a fresh scar. It felt like it had been there for a while. He came clean. Told me he was holding my boyfriend hostage. If I didn’t play along, he’d kill Tate.”

“Fuck,” Matt growled through gritted teeth, pacing.

“I knew something was off. Tate would never throw shitty passes.”

“He said he wanted to destroy Tate’s chances of going pro.”

“Yeah, well he may have succeeded. ”

“One game can’t end his chances of going pro. There has to be something he can do.”
I dropped my head.

“Tate has connections. He might be able to try out for a few teams and redeem himself.”

I clutched my chest, blowing out a breath. “I still have to do what Mason wants to keep Tate alive.”

Rocco placed his hand on my arm. “What?” His concerned brown eyes met mine.

“I’ll have to marry him. And Tate will marry Marisa. They will run their grandfathers’ company together.” I ran my hands tightly over my long hair.

“So, their grandfather was behind Mason’s fake death.”

“Matt, it sounds that way. Tate said his grandfather was pressuring him to graduate from high school, enroll in college in London, then run his empire. Tate went there to tell him he planned to follow his passion and play football.” My hands shook.

“I have to find Tate. Rocco, I need your help to find him.” I paced the floor.

“He said we were moving to London after Christmas. I imagine we’re getting married there. In the meantime, we need to gain as much information as we can. I’ll need you guys to hop on a jet and fly to London. You two will have to look for Tate. Get him out of there before I tie the knot. ”

“You know I have your back, Doll.” He pulled me into his arms.

“I’m up for an adventure.”

I peeked at Rocco. “This is a dangerous adventure. If you can’t help, now is the time to back out. I could hire a professional hacker to find Tate.”

His brows wrinkled. “You just insulted me. I am the best.”

I stepped away and looped my arms around Rocco’s neck. “I know you are. We better get back to class.” I took a step back.

They nodded.

“Please treat Mason like you would Tate. He can’t even have an inkling of what we are up to.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Matt’s sinister eyes held mine.

“Matt, I know this is upsetting. But I know we can find Tate together.”

“He makes me want to kill him again.”

“Matt, you and me both.”

I peeked at Rocco. “Can you create a student file for Sabrina Reuther’s? That way I can contact you both from that email undetected.”

“You know I can.” He winked.

A warm smile lit my lips. “I know.”

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My cheeks brightened as I listened to Carson's and Emma's banter over who was the best at the video game they played.

"I am more than willing to step in and ruin both of your scores."

Emma jumped on the sofa, tickling my belly. "You will be a good big sister and teach us all you know."

Carson's gray eyes lit up. He hopped on the sofa. They double teamed me. I couldn't stop laughing. Spending time with them kept my thoughts off my ordeal.

"Chelsea, you have company," Nina yelled from the atrium.

"Hey guys." Tate opened his arms as he stepped into the family room.

"Tate." Carson and Emma bounced into his arms.

My happy state was short lived.

"Hey, Chelse."

"Tate, I thought you'd be hanging with the guys." My fake grin was in place .

"I told them I had to spend time with my girlfriend." He sank into the sofa beside me.

The kids sat on the floor, staring at the seventy-five-inch screen TV. They argued over what they'd build next on the game. I laughed. My family was my comfort zone.

Mason's arm slipped over my shoulder. "I heard a rumor about Veronica yesterday. You have any idea who could have started that rumor?"

I stared at the TV arms folded. "Nope."

His nose nuzzled my hair behind my ear. "I have needs, Chelsea."

My blood coursed through my veins. I wanted to sock him in his mouth. Asshole.

"You've managed all this time with Marisa," I whispered.

"Yeah, but I'd like to test drive something different."

Ugh! I bit my lip.

"After we're married, it's just me and you, baby."

"Marriage," Dad growled from behind.

We sat up straight, peering over our shoulders. My heart raced. Of course, I knew Tate was the man I wanted to marry, but not now. We discussed our future briefly. Our goal was to focus on our passions and worry about marriage down the line .

"Mr. Culver, sorry you had to hear about Chelsea and I tying the knot casually. I assure you I planned to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage the correct way."

Dad's gray eyes narrowed. "Don't you think you two are a little young to discuss marriage?"

Dad sat in the chair beside us.

“No. She was the only girl I ever had any intention of being with for the rest of my life. Why wait? She’s the love of my life.” His eyes darted over at me. “I’ve loved, Chelsea since we were kids.”

The reminder was very clear. ‘She’ll never be yours.’ He planned to keep his word. My dad’s nosiness may have just escalated my marriage to Mason.

“Tate, you are excited to have her in your life all the time?”

Mason squeezed my hand as he stared at my dad.

“You have no idea, sir. I won’t waiver from my decision to marry your daughter.”

Dad’s eyes narrowed between us.

“Chelsea, is this what you want?”

Swallowing was next to impossible. I felt like cotton balls were lodged in my throat. I nodded. “Yes, Dad. I love Tate. ”

Not sure if my shaky voice was so convincing. Chelsea, hold on. You can do this. Maybe escalating the process would give you access to Tate sooner than later.

I snaked my arm around Mason’s. “He’s the love of my life. I can’t wait to become his wife.”

Keep the tears at bay, Chelsea. Instead, think of revenge. My face brightened.

Dad stood and Mason followed. “I’ll have a talk with my wife and your parents.” He extended his hand.

“You have my blessing. We’ll see if we have everyone else’s.”

Mason grinned from ear-to-ear. “Thank you, Mr. Culver.”

“You’re welcome.” He smiled.

Dad vacated the room.

Mason settled in beside me, pulling me into his arms. “Don’t cock block me again unless you plan on giving me some of that sweet little pussy you gave to my brother so eagerly.”

A chill shot up my spine. If I could have kneed him in the balls again, I would have.

“Come on, let’s go to the theater room and watch a movie.”

He grabbed my hand and led the way. How did he know where the theater room was? Had he broken into my house without our knowledge? The fucker must have .

Mason sat in the recliner and pulled me against his chest. The tiny hairs rose on the back of my neck. Oh, my God. He watched me and Tate. Was anything we’d done private?

SITTING ON A DESK IN the boiler room, I slipped a scrunchie around my hair. The smell of rusty pipes filled the air.

Matt then Rocco came into view.

“Well, if it isn’t our favorite teen witch,” Matt snickered.

“Funny.”

Rocco placed his laptop on the desk beside me. “I logged into the system and sent a message to your History teacher informing Mrs. Kipper you had an appointment with the school nurse.”

“That’s great. Gives us time to talk. We have to work fast guys. Mason upped our time table to get married.”

“How?” Matt’s brow creased as he loosened his navy tie.

“My dad overheard Mason mention marriage to me.” I smirked. “Dad, gave us his blessing.”

“We better work quick.” Rocco tapped away on his keyboard.

“I tracked the last time Douglas Forrester was in the states. Wouldn’t you know it was the week of Mason’s accident. I wonder who was buried in Mason’s grave. ”

Matt hovered beside Rocco, glaring at the screen. “Doesn’t matter. Probably some poor kid who was already dead.”

“What else did you uncover?” Matt asked.

“Douglas hired a team of doctors who he brought from the UK. They were on his payroll for two years.”

My eyes widened. “Wow, so that’s how he nursed Mason back to health. Why can’t their father run the company?”

Matt tapped his index finger against his temple. “There has to be something higher at stake. Why else would it matter which heir ran the empire? There’s another piece to the puzzle. We just haven’t uncovered it yet.”

I slammed my fist on the desk. “Matt, but we will. We have to. The second Marisa returns to town, I want to know.”

“Will do, Chelsea.”

“If you two are done, I’ll show you guys what else I found.”

“By all means, Rocco we’re paying attention.”

“Ok.” He pointed at the screen.

“I dug up a picture of the Forrester London compound.” He pointed at the blue print .

“There are two unlabeled rooms on each wing of the house. One could have been used as a hospital room. The other room could be where Tate is being held.”

“Do you think Douglas knows Mason is holding Tate?”

“Matt, I think anything is possible when it comes to him. Tate’s grandfather knew he was coming to visit him. And Mason returned instead. The fact that he would use his grandsons for his personal gain, shows he only cares about his shitty legacy.”

“Chelsea, I think it’s time for you to set a date.” Rocco peeked at me.

I swallowed hard.

“Yeah, Doll, I think a Christmas wedding is in order.”

He was right. Didn’t make sense to delay the inevitable. The sooner I set a date, the sooner I could find Tate.

Saturday afternoon, Mason and his buddies sat in the bleachers two rows up from my friends.

Connie and Megan waved. Trevor and Rocco gave me a thumbs up. Dad and the twins sat down front, waving. At the sound of the whistle, we took off along the grassy terrain. Tate's bloody face flashed in my head. The last few nights I envisioned him tied to a chair in the room Rocco found. I wished I could fly to London and find Tate on my own. I knew there was no chance. I had to play my cards right.

Five miles later, the point at which we started was in view. Myself and my teammate Sara waved to the cheering crowd as we reached the end.

Mason appeared to be fitting into Tate's life. Matt joked with him as they approached, I was sure to keep Mason from suspecting our plan to blow up his fucking world.

"Congratulations, Chelsea." Mason wrapped his arms around me. The nip of the cold air whipped through my heaving body. My body heat had kept me warm until that moment. I was reminded that I was in a chilling situation.

"Thanks." He released me and the twins moved in squeezing my legs.

"Chelsea, you won." I smoothed my hand over Emma's hair and grinned.

"Dad, said since you won, he'll take us to your favorite restaurant." Carson smiled.

"Hungry, huh, buddy?"

"Yeah."

Dad fell beside me. “Great job out there, sweetheart.” He kissed my cheek. “I recorded the start and finish of the race for mom. She’s in surgery.”

“Thanks, Dad. ”

Dad greeted our friends. Everyone stood around congratulating me.

“Tate, I bet your relieved you only have to worry about playing one sport instead of two.”

“Yup, only basketball until the spring, then I’ll have Lacrosse to worry about too.” Mason smiled.

The bastard knew my boyfriend’s life inside and out.

“Would you like to join us for lunch, Tate?”

My heart raced. Please say no. His blue eyes met mine, and a smile tipped the end of his lips. “No thanks. Chelsea and I are hanging out tonight. Y’all enjoy family time.” His southern accent, I didn’t know he still had, shined through.

Mason leaned down kissing my lips. “See you later, Chelse.” He winked before walking off with the guys.

Even though they were twins, Tate and Mason were different. Mason was twisted and evil. Tate could be evil too. I learned that first hand. But to infiltrate someone’s life making it your own, and forcing their girlfriend into marriage, I’d say was pretty sick. I felt like I was cheating on Tate. What else could I do other than play the part of the elated girlfriend? Rather than what I was; repulsed and counting the days until the charades was over.

I said my goodbyes to my friends.

“Chelsea, are you all right? Is everything ok with you and Tate?”

Tears stung the backs of my eyes and I swallowed hard. “Yeah, couldn’t be better. I’ll meet y’all in the car after my shower.” I never met my father’s gaze. If I did, I may have broken into a million pieces.

?

Connie and Megan tore through my closet searching for the perfect dress for Matt’s party.

I leaned against the door frame. “Guys, you are aware we don’t have to dress up. Knowing Matt, the atmosphere will be chill.”

“You are Tate Forrester’s girlfriend. You have to look like it. You can’t show up everywhere in jeans and a long sleeve blouse.”

“He doesn’t mind.”

Connie’s head snapped in my direction. “Wear your crown proud bitch. Now you are wearing the cutest dress tonight.”

I threw my hands in the air. “Fine.”

If I was truly dressing up for Tate, I wouldn’t have complained. But because I knew the person who would benefit made my skin crawl, he’d purposely keep his hands plastered all over my body. The night at Stephens hit my memory bank. Tate and I were all over each other. I felt like the universe was playing a cruel joke on me.

Pretending to be the perfect girlfriend to a sociopath every day was draining. Earlier, I soaked in a hot bath, remembering how Tate ignited my body with a simple touch. Not to mention, when we made love, I wished he was there holding me in his arms reassuring me we'd share our life together. Now our future hung in the balance. My boyfriend had been missing for over a week. I darted into the bathroom and hurled my guts out. Luckily, the girls didn't know I slipped away. My old wounds tickled. Begged to be slit with a razor. Months ago, I would have given in to the urge. This situation would've definitely afforded my body two new cut marks.

I brushed my teeth, staring in the oversized mirror. No more.

I wouldn't cut myself every time I was dealt a bad hand. Making Mason pay for kidnapping my boyfriend and ruining my life was my priority.

"Hang on, Tate," I whispered.

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Connie drove us to the party. Surprisingly, Mason was ok with meeting me at Matt's.

The Brauner residence was over the top, it dripped luxury. A grand marble, off-white staircase with silver banisters greeted us in the gray and white plush atrium. Loud music thudded the walls around us as we sauntered toward the kitchen. I hadn't been in Matt's house in years. It was always grand. The color scheme changed from stark white to gray. I glimpsed at the long keg line.

"Megan, do you see Matt? Maybe he can score a bottle of vodka for us."

She scanned the room then her smile dropped. "Found him."

I glanced over my shoulder.

"What's up, ladies?"

"We'd like drinks, Matt." I yelled over the busy chatter in the kitchen. There were a few make out sessions happening around us. Matt didn't bother shutting them down. He had his own agenda.

A gray T-shirt hugged his pecs. His hands were stuffed in his jeans pockets.

"Cabinet left of the stove." He never took his eyes off Megan.

He stepped forward, gripping her waist. Matt leaned down and devoured her lips. They kissed like we didn't exist.

“Chelsea, is it just me or is their kiss damn hot?”

I fanned myself. “Damn hot. Do we leave her?”

I cleared my throat. “Megan, we’ll be in the game room.”

Matt came up for air. “Enjoy the party. Megan and I have a playdate that’s long overdue.”

Megan’s flush face fell upon Matt’s broad chest. She grinned. I’d go out on a limb and say she was aw struck by man whore Matt. He whisked her away.

He said Megan broke his heart. I didn’t know how true that statement was.

Connie and I found the vodka and filled our cups. I darted over to the fridge, swung the door open, and scanned the abundance of beverages for juice.

“Connie, we are in business. Would you like cranberry juice mixed with your vodka?”

“Why, Chelsea I’d love some. ”

Her short one shoulder bodycon dress she designed fit perfectly on her slender frame.

“What do we have here, ladies?”

Trevor massaged my shoulders. “Bartending again, Chelsea.”

I snickered. “Yup. Grab a cup. Where’s Rocco?”

“He’s talking to a chick in the hall.”

Rocco deserved to date a girl, rather than spend all his time coming to my aid. I felt bad.

I peeked at Trevor. “Can you stay with Connie for a little while? I want to find Tate.”

“Sure.”

“I’ll be back.”

Connie nodded and sipped her drink.

Shouldering through the crowd, the music pulsated through my body. I waved at a few people who spoke to me. It was weird. The same kids who belittled me now bent over backwards to be nice.

Where the fuck was Mason? I stood at the top of the stairs, peering down the long hall. The last thing I wanted to hear was my friends getting hot and heavy. I turned the knob of each door, peeking inside the room. Luckily, I didn’t stop anyone’s hookups. Why didn’t they lock the door? I shook my head as I continued my search. The last door at the end of the hall screamed primadonna. Every door on the floor was stark white—except for Marisa’s. Her door was dark pink. Actually cute. I’d never pay her that compliment.

Muffled moaning and groaning filled my eardrums as I turned the knob. My heart beat against my ribcage at a rapid pace. Stunned and frozen at a sight I couldn’t unsee. Their sweaty bodies attached to each other.

Mason fisted her blonde hair from behind, pounding into her. How long had they been at it?

My throat closed for a different reason. Not because Mason was having sex with

Marisa. I felt like I was watching Tate have sex with Marisa. It was difficult to separate the two.

“Mason, you don’t need Chelsea. We should be enough. Our child together should be enough.”

My eyes bulged. What the fuck?

“Our heir will bond our families forever. My heir with Chelsea will bond our families too. I’ll hold all the cards.” A deep sinister laugh released from his throat.

“Don’t worry, baby.” He flipped her over, sliding into her again. Marisa’s face was red and wet with fresh tears.

“You know you’re my number one girl.”

She sobbed against his lips. “I love you, Mason. ”

She was a feeble mouse in his clutches. He took advantage of her love.

“Marisa, you are the only girl I could ever love. What I have with Chelsea is pure revenge. I needed to tear my brother down. He gets nothing in the end. Not one ounce of happiness.”

Hot tears streamed down my cheeks.

“Once she’s pregnant with my child, he’ll turn his back on her.”

I didn’t know if any of what he said to either of us were lies or the truth. Maybe it was a mix.

Mason tasted her lips as he stilled inside her a final time. I suppose creating their heir. She hung onto him, tangling their lips passionately.

Slowly, I closed the door. My entire body trembled. I was drunk off emotions. I hadn't even taken a sip of my liquor. Swaying down the hall, I tossed the contents in the cup to the back of my throat, and closed my eyes briefly at the top of the stairs in an effort to numb the pain. I needed to be alone. I swiped my dress sleeve across my wet face as I staggered down the stairs. There was no one to share my new knowledge with. Matt wouldn't ever keep that information quiet. He'd probably try to kill Mason. The damage was done anyway. Mason had a plan for everything, I was sure of it. He left nothing to chance. Not even her ovulation. Gross.

The darkened room hid my tears. In a daze I stood staring out the patio door. Kids bumped into me as they danced to the heavy metal blaring through the speakers. I stepped out the door and stumbled across the lush lawn into the pool house. A couple stood in the corner all hot and heavy.

"Get out. Matt said this area is off limits," I yelled.

Scrambling to fix their clothes, they darted out the door. I locked myself inside. The cloth sofa would be my place of solitude. Not sure if Mason would ever look for me. I hoped he never found me. The powder blue wall held my attention as I laid on the sofa hugging myself. I needed to get lost in our memories.

I stood on the hill next to Tate after Matt dropped me off at the lake house. "What do you want, Tate?"

"You."

My entire body shook. Was the bullshit we'd gone through finally over?

“I’ve always wanted you. At my lowest point I wanted you. Sitting in the hospital waiting area, outside Mason’s room, I hated myself for yelling those evil words at you that day. You’re to blame.”

A single tear slid down my cheek. Tate was the boy I loved all along. Never Mason.

Tate admitted he never really walked away. “How could I honestly walk away and I just got you back?”

I knew if he could be here, he would. Tate wouldn’t turn his back on me. I had to believe that. I’d hold on to his words. ‘My love runs too deep for you.’

“Chelsea, Chelsea.” A strong hand shook my thigh.

“Chelsea, wake up.”

“Tate.” I smiled and my eyes fluttered open.

Our blue gazes locked. For a split second, I thought he was Tate. Then I jumped back as I quickly came to my senses.

His lips twisted. “What’s wrong?” his brow wrinkled.

“Nothing.”

“Why are you in here all alone? You never texted me once you arrived. I’ve been looking everywhere for you?”

Sure, you have, Mason. You weren’t looking for me while you were making a baby with Marisa.

“I think I drank too much.” I rubbed my temple.

“Probably should have stayed home. The Cross-Country race caught up with me,” I lied .

Mason dropped his head. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have forced you to come out tonight.” He stood, stretching his hand out.

“I’ll take you home.”

I placed my hand in his. “Thanks.”

No calling Mason out. Why would I reveal my hand to my evil fiancé? I’d pretend everything was perfect.

We strolled into the house. How long was I asleep? My forehead creased. The dance floor brimmed with drunk kids bumping their bodies against each other.

“Tate, come here a sec.” Kyle motioned from the game room. “We need you to settle a disagreement.”

“Yeah, hang on.”

He glanced at me.

“Go ahead, I promise to wait in the atrium.”

He smiled and kissed my cheek.

“Coming through,” he shouted.

They parted the room like the red sea to allow their highness passage. King Tate. I chuckled inside as I continued on my path.

The loud music overflowed into the atrium. I sat on a slate gray bench near the stairs.

“Shocked you attended a party at my home.” The wicked witch, sauntered toward me, arms crossing her chest. She wore white footies, jeans, and a navy T-shirt. Surprised she allowed commoner threads amongst her expensive clothes.

My lips kicked up at one end. “Where else would I be? My boyfriend and soon to be fiancé insisted I join him tonight.”

Her face turned beet red. Oh, how I wanted to laugh at her expense. She was jealous, and it showed.

I stood and strolled toward her. “What’s the matter? Cat got your tongue. You traveled to another country to do anything to be noticed by your boyfriend.” I circled her slow like a shark waiting the eat its meal.

“I mean, you helped him kidnap my boyfriend and hold him hostage. Tate was the only guy I ever wanted until Mason returned. He reminded me that he was the only guy who’d do anything to be with me. Clearly, he would. Who fakes their death only to steal their brother’s life and profess their undying love for the girl they really loved?”

Her chest rose and fell as she clutched her fist, almost foaming at the mouth.

“I thought I loved Tate. Mason made me realize I didn’t. You can have Tate. I will become Mason’s wife on Christmas day. I will bore his first- born- child. My father already gave us his blessing.”

“You fucking country bumpkin. You have nothing. You are nothing to him. You hear me,” she growled .

“Careful, Marisa your fangs are showing.”

I snickered.

“Marisa, play nice,” Mason stated, coming into view.

“Yeah, play nice.” I met Mason in the middle of the room, gripped his neck, and crushed his lips. Marisa needed to pay for what she’d done to me. After watching her come undone for Mason, I thought what better way to get under her skin. Mason held my waist, deepening our kiss. I thought maybe he’d push back, but he didn’t. I pulled back and spun on my heels.

“He’s my fiancé. Bitch, stay in your place,” I growled.

Marisa’s body violently shook. “What the fuck are you doing?” she scowled, burning holes into Mason.

“You need to calm down,” he whispered.

“We’ve talked about this. Didn’t we?”

She nodded.

I was well aware of their little chat. Chelsea you got this.

The bitch was on the brink of bursting into flames. Her perfect boyfriend, and soon to be father of her child, was an asshole. Mason only cared about himself. Wasn’t it obvious? He had to make his brother pay no matter the cost.

“I’ll talk to you later,” he said in a low voice, careful not to draw attention to them .

Their pull toward each other was obvious. He didn’t have to be so vengeful toward his brother. He and Marisa could have their weird happiness.

?

I stared out the window as Mason turned on to our street.

“You didn’t have to push her buttons like that.”

“Oh, please. She had it coming. The way she treated me. Blamed me for your death.”
I looked him up and down. “Fuck her. She deserved so much more.”

I grabbed the door handle as he rolled to a stop in my driveway.

“The second you give me that engagement ring, I’ll shove it right in her face.”

I blew him a kiss and hopped out of the truck.

TATE

Grandfathers chauffeur drove through the wrought-iron gates. The gray, stone mansion hadn't changed. It's been years since I'd been here last. Mason was still alive. Our family celebrated Christmas with grandfather. He hosted a high society holiday party the week before Christmas. He knew everyone by name. At twelve-years-old, he introduced Mason and me to too many influential business people. He said we needed to learn how to entertain, because once we were the CEO and CFO of our corporation, we'd spend most of our time hammering out deals and understanding what motivated a person's financial decisions. He said the skill would prove invaluable.

Mason and grandfather spent a lot of time together. He was more inquisitive than I was about the family business. All I cared about was being the best player on our football team. We played football since we were little kids. Mason and I were the best players on the team. Coach said once we enrolled in high school, either of us could become the football captain. I wanted to become captain, which meant I had to train harder. I was the best football player in the state of Georgia. Football was still at the forefront of my brain after all these years.

Why couldn't the weather reflect how I felt inside my heart, full of vibrant light? Instead, the gray skies hung overhead threatening rain. Gardeners tended to the rich grounds. The driver rounded the circular cobblestone drive and halted in front of the oversized wooden door. The butler Benjamin walked out of the house and opened the rear passenger door.

"Master Tate, so good to see you. It's been too long." He smiled warmly.

“Hello, Benjamin. It has.”

His blond hair grayed around the temples. He’d worked for grandfather for years. This property had always been in our family. Grandfather didn’t move here full time until Mason and me were thirteen-years-old.

The chauffeur placed my suitcase in the foyer.

I stood in the foyer admiring the elegant crystal chandelier that hung above my head .

“Master Tate, I will show you to your sleeping quarters. Mr. Forrester will join you for dinner tonight. He had business to attend to this morning.”

I peeked at my watch. “At seven?”

“Oh, business never sleeps,” he chuckled.

I followed him up the wide, wooden staircase.

He opened the oversized door. I scanned the bedroom. There were still two beds in the dark blue room. I guess just because Mason wasn’t here anymore, he didn’t need to remove the other bed.

“If you need anything, dial zero on the phone on the nightstand. Myself or one of the maids will be right up. I assure you everything you need is at your fingertips. I could have the cook prepare breakfast.”

I turned and smiled. “That won’t be necessary. I ate on the jet. Lunch after a nap would suffice.”

“Very well.” His gray eyes brightened. “Enjoy your nap, Master Tate.”

“Thank you.”

He closed the door, and I quickly stripped down to my boxers. I was exhausted. Chelsea’s beautiful face came to mind. Get through the week, Tate and you can return to your woman. I rubbed my cock under the blanket as I closed my eyes.

?

Dressed in a button-down shirt, tie, and slacks, I stood in the grand dining room staring at the ancient art on the walls.

“Tate, so good to see you.” Grandfather entered the room smiling from ear-to-ear. He pulled me into his embrace. He was a foot shorter than me. His hair was mostly gray with brown streaks.

He stepped back and extended his arm. “Have a seat.”

There were age lines across his forehead. He still had a strong jawline. Except for the gray hair, he didn’t appear to have aged that much since I saw him last.

“How was your flight?” He sipped a glass of red wine.

The servers placed the food before us.

“Long. I’ll adjust to the time change soon.”

“Good. I spoke to Brian yesterday. He said you are consumed with football. I wish he never stuck you boys in that sport for heaven sakes.”

My brow rose as I drank the glass of ice-cold water. Shit, this would be a long visit. He wouldn’t budge about me choosing football over running the business.

I smirked. What the fuck else could I do at that moment?

“I ran into a little trouble in calculus, but I am recovering nicely. That was the only class I maintained less than an A average. ”

“Math is of the most importance. If you need help, let your father know he’ll hire a tutor.”

I scooped a spoonful of peas into my mouth. “I am fine. Chelsea is helping me.”

His eyes narrowed. “You aren’t speaking of the same girl who caused Mason’s accident?”

I swallowed hard. “She didn’t cause his accident. No one was to blame. Lightning struck the branch that knocked Mason over the edge.”

“Is it the same girl?”

“Yes. But like I said, she had nothing to do with the accident.” I squeezed my eyes shut. “Mason and I may have argued over her, but she did nothing wrong. I blamed her because she was the center of our disagreement.”

“Mason, told me you both liked the same girl.”

My brow furrowed. “He did?”

Their bond was a lot tighter than I imagined.

“Yup, he said you tried to move in on his girlfriend.”

“Whoa, whoa.” I waved my hands.

“Sorry, grandfather. Mason and Chelsea were never together. If anything, I spared his feelings. The only reason I didn’t ask her to be my girlfriend, was because I didn’t want to upset Mason. Chelsea wanted to be my girlfriend. Mason tried to kiss her, and she rejected him. That’s how we began fighting on the hill. You know let’s drop it.” I rubbed my brow.

He sighed. “Is she moving to London with you?”

“Chelsea has agreed to move wherever I go. We will probably attend Harvard together.”

His brow rose. “Nonsense. You will attend the University of Oxford.” His stern gaze held mine.

“I don’t want to argue about my future. You can’t make me run this company. Hire someone else to run the London office. The football scouts will be in attendance at my game next Friday. My goal is to go pro. Not to run the company.” My heartbeat thudded my chest. I thought it would burst through my rib cage. I was worried mainly about what he’d say. It felt good being honest about what I wanted.

“Next week, before you return to the states sit in on a few meetings. I’ll also invite the most important people in the company over for a dinner party. You never know, Tate, you might enjoy learning about the company that feeds this family.” His blue eyes darkened and he slammed his finger against the table. “The company that pays for your exquisite lifestyle. This is your legacy, Tate.”

Shit, that went well .

“Grandfather, I am capable of living on my own. That is the point I am trying to make. I don’t need your money to survive.”

He grimaced. “Oh, you don’t need my money. So, you can do without your trust fund when you turn eighteen. If you aren’t able to become a professional football player, will you live off your girlfriend’s family oil empire like her father does?”

I shook my head and held up my hand. “Her mother and father don’t live off of their parents’ money. They live off of the income they work for everyday. They lived in a small town. Lived off of the bare necessities. I admit, I’ve behaved frivolous when it came to spending money. Chelsea and I will manage. Next summer, I will ask for her hand in marriage. We will live in an apartment off campus.” I rubbed my brow.

“Maybe you forgot how far you’re willing to go for love because grandmother died years ago. But I would do anything to make Chelsea happy.”

“Then you’d be willing to run our empire and produce heirs that will carry on our name. Your children will grow up and run this company too. Your father knew that before you boys were born. Not sure when he went all liberal, but I won’t stand for it.” He shot out of his chair .

“Five suits await you in your quarters. Monday the chauffeur will drive you to the office. The remainder of the week, you’ll engage with the staff. You will begin working at Forrester enterprises June first of next year. Get your rest. You have a long week ahead of you.”

He turned on his heels and vacated the dining room.

“Fuck,” I roared, shoving away from the table.

Why did I come here? I darted out of the patio doors. Turning my face to the sky, I exhaled. The night sky was riddled with stars. I wished Chelsea and I could lie under the stars at the lake house. I was a bitter asshole for so long. Holding her in my arms would bring me peace. Why did grandfather mention Chelsea’s family empire? She

made it clear she didn't ask her grandfather for anything. I was sure the only luxury she'd be willing to utilize was the jet. Was grandfather, right? I've indulged in the finer things in life for so long, if I didn't have my family's resources at my fingertips, would I be able to survive?

I peered into the distance. I'd try. Chelsea didn't give a shit about the money. She only cared we'd be together.

Sunday, I studied for two exams I'd make up once I returned home. I spoke to Chelsea. Didn't make sense to alarm her. I had no intention to run the company.

My jaw twitched continuously on my drive into the office. This was ridiculous. I wasn't saying I didn't feed on power. Almost everyone did. I fed off a different kind of power. The energy from the crowd always gave me strength. I'd play grandfathers game this week. Once I returned home, I'd make arrangements to purchase a condo in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The moment graduation was over, Chelsea and I would hop on a plane and start our new life. Grandfather couldn't make me do anything I didn't want to do.

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TATE

S trolling around the huge, cherry wood table in the massive conference room, I shook several hands before taking a seat at the head of the table. I flipped through balance sheets and documents to solidify acquisitions of smaller corporations. I scanned our stock portfolio. My eyes bulged at the two companies I was familiar with, Stutton Oil Industry and Brauner Trading. The legal documents mentioned Mason's heirs with Marisa and Chelsea. Why would their names be mentioned with my dead brother's? What the fuck was going on? It appeared to be some sort of deal he worked out with Chelsea's grandfather and Marisa's father once the children were born. I needed to ask grandfather myself. Were they to have Mason's children if he would have lived? If so, how the fuck could they use their great grandchildren and grandchildren for their own personal gain .

I remember Rocco mentioned Marisa was in London often. Her presence here didn't add up.

THAT EVENING, I PONDERED on all the information I evaluated. Grandfather wasn't home. He traveled to Covington for an overnight business trip. This better not had been some sort of stall tactic.

Chelsea and I spoke again. I promised I'd be home in time for the game Friday night.

Tuesday morning, I scanned more financial documents. I asked each board member to weigh in about the longevity of the company.

"We are spending tons of money to acquire small companies. I'll talk to my father

and see if we can hold off on any of the future acquisitions. We are bleeding money.”

I didn’t need a business degree to run our corporation. Dad had taken me into the office several times over the last two years. I was also enrolled in advanced accounting and other pre college courses. Haven Saints High prepared us to run our families billion-dollar companies. Grandfather was on the school board. As long as I performed well in my studies, he never complained about football—until now.

I flipped through more documents .

“Sorry I’m late.”

The door slammed shut.

The tiny hairs stood on the back of my neck. Palming my hands on the table, my chest heaved. What was this some sort of sick joke? I peered across the room. A flush of heat shot through my body.

“It can’t be.” I staggered to my feet. My eyes narrowed.

“Give us the room, please,” he ordered.

Hands in his pockets, he sauntered toward me.

I blinked a couple of times, then the room was empty. He and I stood, staring at each other in silence. Or should I say, I was silent?

“I’m sure you have a lot of questions.” He smoothed his hand over his black tie.

“Yeah. First the obvious question. How are you alive?”

He flashed his pearly whites. “We haven’t seen each other in years. I miss you.” He wrapped his arms around me. I barely hugged him back. A million questions ran through my brain.

I pushed him back. “How, Mason?”

“Grandfather spent a lot of money nursing me back to health.” He paced the floor.

My hand flew over my brow. “The team of doctors. Grandfather spoke to me in the hallway outside of your hospital room. He told me everything would be ok. I thought he just said that to put my mind at ease.” I braced my palms on the table again, desperately trying to wrap my mind around the magnitude of this moment.

“Yes, the doctors were able to keep me alive. Another child died on that same floor. Grandfather paid that family to bury their child in my grave. They were pleased to be free of the funeral expenses. Grandfather persuaded mom and dad to have a closed casket. He said a child shouldn’t be displayed after death. They agreed. Once I regained consciousness, I had to learn how to talk all over again. The moment I felt rejuvenated, I set my plan in motion.”

“Marisa. That explains why she traveled to London often.”

“Yeah, she loved me. I loved Chelsea.” He flashed a sneaky grin.

“Love will make you do the strangest things.”

I walked in circles. “Mason, please tell me after all these years you still aren't holding a torch for Chelsea?”

His eyes darkened, and he banged his fist on the table. “I am not holding a torch. I told you that day we fought Chelsea will never be yours.”

“This is bullshit. You stay away from my woman. I can’t believe you’ve held this sick obsession over a girl who doesn’t want to be with you. Mason, Chelsea is in love with me. She is my girlfriend and next summer she’ll become my wife,” I snarled, pointing my finger at him.

He tilted his head to the side and grinned again. “Didn’t you read the documents, brother?” he stepped closer.

“Marisa and Chelsea will bore my heirs.” He stuck out his chest and raised his chin in the air.

I shoved him back. “Mason, you will not touch my woman. I will bury you for real this time,” I growled through gritted teeth.

A ridiculous, hysterical laugh erupted from his throat. “Tate, accept defeat. I will impregnate Marisa. Then I will pretend to be you.”

I grabbed his tie and punched him in his rock-solid jaw. He held his face. “Won’t stop me from getting what I want. Chelsea will become my wife and bore my heir, even if it has to be over your dead body.” His blue eyes narrowed.

I lost it. Saw fucking red. My fist slammed into his face again. We tussled around the room. He grabbed my suit jacket pulling me close. “These decisions have to be made by the stronger brother. You are so wrapped up in stupid football, you can’t let that shit go and run our family’s empire. You said it. We are bleeding money, Tate. These heirs will secure our financial future. Chelsea’s grandfather’s ready to sign the papers. The moment I impregnate Marisa, Mr. Brauner will be on board too.”

“You think I will stand by and let you marry my girlfriend? There’s no fucking way.”

I stalked toward the door. Two burly guys entered pinning me against the table.

“Let me go.” I struggled to break free.

“You see, Tate I had a long time to set my plan in motion. I know your life inside and out. Every car at home was bugged. Your bedroom was bugged.” He leaned over. “Your cleaning crew worked for me.” He raised his finger. “I can’t wait for Chelsea to moan for me louder and come harder for me than she did for you,” he snickered.

“Motherfucker,” I roared, jerking my arms, lunging toward him. I wanted to bash his face in until it cracked.

“You fucking, bastard. You will never get away with this.”

“Oh, but I will. Friday, I will successfully tank your football career. I’ll end the night deep inside my woman,” he chuckled.

“Let me go,” I growled.

“Take him to his hole,” Mason ordered.

?

Every day, I sat in an underground dungeon at our family estate. The only reason I knew it existed, is because Mason and I went exploring and stumbled upon it. Probably dated back to the sixteen-hundreds. No need to yell. I was so far underground no one would hear me. All I could do was study the guards routines and listen to their conversations. I was allowed to shower at gunpoint. There wasn’t any privacy. I dressed in front of them and was escorted back to my cell. No luxury. I had a place to lay my head, a toilet, and a sink. If I was never getting out of this hell hole why allow me fresh clothes?

Lying on the twin mattress, I closed my eyes. Mold and ancient dirt hit my nostrils. I

often pulled my shirt over my nose, so I didn't have to inhale the toxins.

"Tate, how are you enjoying your stay?"

A guard placed a chair in front of my cell and he sat, smiling.

My jaw ticked. I wanted to slip my hand through the rusty bars and strangle him. A guard stood beside him pointing his gun at me.

"What do you want? To gloat? Your lacky is out bearing his fucking seed in my girlfriend." I bit my lower lip. "You sick motherfucker," I growled.

"Manners, Tate. If I thought you'd get on board, we wouldn't have needed to go to such extreme measures."

"Right, you wanted me to be ok with lying to my girlfriend about why I needed to impregnate her. Baby, sorry we need to rush into marriage and have a baby. My family is on the brink of financial ruins. Your grandfather's a billionaire. He can bail us out of our financial down turn. Yeah, I love her too much to lie to Chelsea. My woman's smart, he won't be able to pull the wool over her eyes for long."

He laughed. "You are right. She's a smart girl. She detected Mason. But it didn't put a cramp in our plan. Mason threatened to kill you and she fell in line. She's agreed to marry Mason and bear his child. The wedding will be here of course." He stood.

"Grandson, you get to live another day." He dusted off his navy slacks and turned on his heels.

I ignored him. Propping my arms under my head, I laid back staring at the corroded ceiling.

The day of the wedding, I'd put my escape plan in motion. I'd take my woman back no matter what.

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CHELSEA

The twins and I sat on the sofa watching a classic holiday movie. Cinnamon and pine filled the air. Melissa's home was professionally decorated. Me and mom decorated the interior of our house. Dad hired a company to display the lights in our yard. There wasn't a nativity scene on our lawn like the Forrester's. They spared no expense around the Christmas holidays.

Rapid footsteps pounded the stairs.

"Carson and Emma, Happy Thanksgiving." He grinned.

"Happy Thanksgiving, Tate," they shouted.

He scooped up Carson and sat him on the other side of me.

"Hey?" His little brows wrinkled.

"Sorry, little man, this is my spot." He sat on the sofa next to me. He looked handsome in the heather gray cashmere sweater. The navy dress shirt peeked out the top. I almost forgot he was the devil and not Tate. My heart sank. Tate had been gone for weeks. This holiday sucked. I didn't feel like being amongst our families. Lying in bed would have sufficed. Emma and Carson served as a nice distraction. I could use them as an excuse not to be alone with him. He slipped his arm around my shoulder and nuzzled my hair.

"You smell good, Chelsea."

My body shook against him. I wished I could run and never look back.

“Dinner is served,” the chef announced.

My heart beat again. Thank god.

Mason intertwined our fingers and escorted me into the dining room. Emma and Carson rushed to their seats.

Our parents sat amongst us clutching their wine glasses.

“May I have everyone’s attention?” Mason’s deep voice bounced off the walls.

“You have the floor son,” Brian smiled.

Mason held my hand and dropped to one knee.

“Chelsea, I am so happy to have you back in my life. I never thought I’d get this chance.”

Sure, you didn’t, snake.

“You are the love of my life. Will you marry me?”

The fake plastic smile filled my lips. “Yes, Tate.”

He slid the oval diamond onto my finger. Cheering erupted around the room .

Mason swung me around and kissed my lips. I was so tired of faking it.

Our mothers asked Mason and I several questions halfway through dinner.

“Chelsea, do you have any idea when you’ll tie the knot?”

“Melissa, yes. Christmas.” I smiled from ear to ear.

“In London.”

Dad choked on the turkey breast.

“Are you ok, Dad? Why, should we wait?” I peeked at Mason, rubbing his hand.

“Right, Tate?”

He could barely muster a smile he was so upset. Yup, I threw a monkey wrench in his plan. I needed to save the real Tate. This farce had gone on long enough.

“Where do you two plan to live?” Mom asked.

“In London.” Mason was all teeth. Asshole.

“What?” Mom screeched.

“Chelsea will attend Oxford University while I run our London office.”

Brian’s eyes bulged.

“Tate, wait a minute. You said you talked to your grandfather, and you two reached an understanding.”

“We did. I told him I’d be happy to run the company. ”

“Tate, before you left you said you wouldn’t back down. I told you I was proud of you for standing on your own two feet.”

I laughed inside. Brian knew Tate would never back down. But he also didn't know Tate wasn't the son sitting before him, it was Mason. Standing to my feet and shouting Mason is alive, oh would feel good right about now. I also knew if I didn't step in Tate might lose his life.

“Brian, Tate, and I discussed it. We feel this is the best move for our family.”

Oh, did I let that tidbit slip?

Dad jumped up. “Is Chelsea pregnant? You two can't start a family now.”

Brain held dad back. I swear he was about to climb across the table and kill my fiancé.

“Dad, I am not pregnant. I am just saying this will be best for our family. Tate and I are a family until we one day have a child.”

Our fathers sat gulping their wine.

“Tate, if you don't want to move to London you can tell me. I will talk to my dad.”

Mason grabbed my hand. “We are fine.”

The servers placed the dessert on the table. We dug in. Silence fell around the table .

“Mom, please don't schedule surgeries around my wedding date. You have to be there.”

“I wouldn't miss it, honey.”

“Chelsea, are we allowed at your wedding?”

“Emma, of course. I need you to be my flower girl. And Carson, you can be my ring bearer.”

“Yay,” they chimed.

Melissa didn’t suspect anything off about fake Tate. She gave birth to the boys. Wouldn’t she be able to tell them apart? Maybe she did, but didn’t know what to say to her son.

We played charades and Candyland. The night was perfect minus fake Tate. What was it like for Mason being around his parents? I ran to the kitchen to grab a soda.

“Are you all right?” My heart lurched, and I gripped my chest.

“Yes, you didn’t have to scare me.”

He closed the space between us. “You didn’t have to tell our parents about us starting a family.”

“Shouldn’t they know? They will be grandparents next year.”

“You’re getting a kick out of all of this.”

“I sure am.” My southern accent shined through .

“Your dad was behind you to go pro. I guess you didn’t know that important detail. Do you know how much your family misses you?”

His brow wrinkled. “They don’t miss me.”

“Yes, they do. Come on.” We joined our families in the living room.

“Tate, honey light your candle.” His mom nodded him over.

He hesitated.

“Go on, Tate.” I pushed him toward the oversized mantel.

Brian kissed Melissa on the forehead and gripped his son’s shoulder.

I stood in dad’s arms. Mom clutched my hand, and the twins fidgeted in front of us.

“Mason, we will never forget you, son,” Brian’s voice wavered.

“We miss you so much. There isn’t a day that goes by we don’t think about you,”
Melissa sniffled.

She peeked at her son. “It’s all right. Go on, Tate.”

“Mason, I miss hanging out with you. You were my best friend. I love you,” his voice
cracked.

They each lit a candle, honoring Mason.

Maybe the annual holiday remembrance would soften the beast’s heart .

Mason turned and reached for my hand.

Melissa swiped at the tears and cranked up the holiday music. The twins jumped
around. Our parents huddled together sipping spiked eggnog.

Mason wrapped his arms around me. “That was a cute bonding moment with my
family.”

“You needed to know how they felt.”

His blue eyes glinted. “I’m a lucky guy. I’m engaged to the perfect woman.” His nose slipped across my neck. “I could never give you up, Chelsea.”

Fuck, my plan backfired. The evil prince still had to have me for himself. He was determined to make his brother suffer. I shook in his arms.

“No need to fret, princess.” He stood to his full height, staring down at me. “You’re in good hands.”

Our families were oblivious to my torture. He wanted me no matter what it cost him. I was the prize he had to win.

PULLING MYSELF TOGETHER became excruciating the longer this farce went on. The day after Thanksgiving, I laid in bed all day. Mom and dad checked on me. I lied, telling my mother, I wasn’t feeling good without any sign of a fever. The next best reason for a girl to remain in bed all day. Cramps .

She hovered over me. “Chelsea, I’ll grab a bottle of aspirin. I thought your cycle happened at the beginning of the month?” See this was why having a doctor for a mother could be problematic.

“Mom, it switched. Twice a year my cycle changes to the end of the month.”

“Oh, yeah. I remember.” She stood and clapped her hands. “I’ll return with chamomile tea, aspirin, and a heating pad.”

“Mom, you’re the best.”

She winked and scurried out of the room.

I needed the break from Mason. I'd milk this alone time for all it was worth.

Monday morning, I was on the prowl. Where was little Miss Priss? I spotted her a few minutes later. She strutted down the hall in her black Jimmy Choo's. I followed at a distance. She slipped into the restroom. Strolling in a few seconds later, I gazed in the mirror pretending to freshen up my makeup.

Marisa exited the stall and sighed. "What the fuck do you want?"

A wide grin stretched across my face. "Marisa, don't be bitter. I came to give you a personal invitation to my Christmas wedding." I placed the card in her hand at the same time flashing the ten-carat engagement ring in her line of sight.

Her nostrils flared and her gray eyes narrowed. She reluctantly snatched the invitation from my hand.

"Is that all, bitch?"

I closed the space between us. "We wouldn't be here if it weren't for you. You didn't have to serve me and Tate up to Mason. I bet you regret you ever went along with his destructive plan. Looks like I'll be barefoot and pregnant in a few months with his heir."

She motioned her hand toward my face. I caught her wrist. "You only have yourself to blame."

I twirled and clanked out of the restroom in my kitten heels. The door slammed behind me. A blood-curdling scream penetrated the thick wooden door. A devilish smile curled my lips. My work was done.

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“Are we ready?” I paced. “I mean, really ready?”

I glanced between Matt and Rocco.

“We are,” Rocco reassured.

“Let’s go over the plan one more time.” I smoothed my hand over my dark ponytail.

The wedding was upon us. There was no way I could marry Mason. We had to find Tate.

Matt and I peered over Rocco’s shoulder at the laptop screen. The boiler room was creepy and drafty, but the best place to discuss our plans.

“Matt, I will freeze the cameras. You have less than a minute to enter the basement.” He pointed at the screen. “Remember to follow the long hallway and make a right. Keep walking until you find the underground dungeon.”

Matt slipped his fingers through his blond locks. “I got this. And why again will my guns have blanks instead of bullets?”

“We’ll be in a foreign country. The last thing you want is to be tried for murder there.”

His lips protruded. “Good point.”

“The earbuds are a must to communicate with each other.”

“Agreed.” I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Matt, I’ll cut the power the moment you and Tate exit the basement.”

“Yup, I got it handled.”

“Rocco, thank your father again for calling in that favor. Without the original plans of the hidden underground, we may have never found Tate.”

“Chelsea, I will thank him. All right, see you two next week.” Rocco smiled.

I hugged both of them. “Thank you, guys for being my knight and shining armor.”

“Doll, there’s no way we’d stand by and allow this shit show to continue.”

I smiled as I stepped back. “Let’s bury those bastards.”

?

“How do you feel?” Worry laced his words to my surprise.

One eye popped open. “Just fine, Tate,” I whispered.

“Go to sleep like everyone else on the jet. The time change will suck later. I figured if I slept now, maybe I wouldn’t be so tired when we arrived. ”

I heard my dad whistle-snore three rows back like he did whenever he was exhausted. A single fluid low light bulb ran around the wall of the jet, providing minimal light while we slept.

I snuggled into the plush tan leather seat, pulling the blanket up to my neck.

“Are you ok?”

I hated to make eye contact. At that moment I saw the man I loved. Those blue eyes that stole my heart. Those curly dark locks I missed running my fingers through. And that broad chest that served as my haven.

“Yeah, you’re right. I’ll go to sleep.”

Did I sense Mason wasn’t thrilled to follow through with his grandfather’s deal? What did it matter? He’d clearly do anything he wanted. Didn’t matter if his true love sat in the audience watching him tie the knot with his obsession. Maybe the guilt of betraying his brother was weighing on his heart. If so good.

The twins darted down the hall. “Emma and Carson, hold on,” Nina yelled, scurrying behind them. Mason said he needed to find his grandfather. My heart lurched in my chest just thinking about that evil old man. What kind of person would harbor a child for years behind the parents’ backs? Brian and my dad said they were looking for the bar. The maid staff and seamstress whisked mom, Melissa, and me into an oversized bedroom on the second floor. I tried swallowing past the huge lump in my throat. All I wanted to do was ransack every room until I found Tate. Peeking out of the window at the lush green landscape, I clutched my arm. Get a grip, Chelsea. You have to hold it together. Don’t let them win. You will be reunited with Tate. I squeezed my eyes shut. You just have to believe .

His belongings have to be here somewhere. The moment I have time alone I’d uncover his clothes. To inhales his scent would bring me solace.

“Chelsea, Chelsea.” Mom gripped my arms, staring at me eyes wide. “What’s going on? Talk to me now.”

“I’m fine, Mom.” No smile followed to reassure her I was ok. Not sure how I’d sleep

knowing Tate, and me were under the same roof.

“Chelsea, if you aren’t ready to get married say the word and I will call it off.”

Melissa stepped over, stroking my hair. “Tate, will understand, if you cannot follow through.”

The tears streamed down my face. “I need to sit down and catch my breath.” They helped me over to the bed. Mom and Melissa wrapped their arms around me.

“Melissa and I are here if you want to talk. ”

I shook my head. “There isn’t another man I ever envisioned myself marrying.” Until, Mason hijacked me, forcing me into an arranged marriage.

“Time to try on my wedding dress.”

They sat back and smiled.

“All right,” Mom stated.

A few minutes later, I stared at my reflection in the tall mirror. My fingers lingered over the embroidered white A train skirt.

“You look stunning, honey.”

“Thanks, Mom.” I admired the off the shoulder dress.

“I am famished. Is it lunchtime yet?”

Melissa glanced at her watch. “Chelsea, I will call the kitchen and have the chef whip

up lunch for us.”

“Great.” I smiled.

“We should freshen up. We’ll meet you downstairs.”

The seamstress helped me climb out of the dress.

“Ok, Mom.”

The second I was alone, I ventured out on a private tour of the fortress.

Why would someone need so many bedrooms? I sauntered next door and peeked left to right, before entering. I turned the knob and scooted inside. My heart raced as I opened and closed every drawer. On my hands and knees, I glimpsed under the bed. I left nothing to chance. The walk-in closet was the last place I checked for anything Tate may have brought on the trip. I won’t give up . If I had to search the other wing, I’d wait until after the party. I sat on the bed closest to the door in the fifth bedroom. “Ugh,” I groaned.

Maybe his grandfather stored his luggage in the basement. I performed the same searches I did in the previous bedrooms. There were a couple of distinct differences between this room and the others. The masculine cherry wood wardrobe closet to my right was one. And the dark walls was the other. Was this Tate and Mason’s room? I hurled across the room, swinging the wardrobe doors open. I gaped and my chest heaved. I felt like the wind had been knocked out of me. A chill shot up my spine as I stared at the duffel. The same duffel I retrieved a shirt from at the lake house. Tremors over took my body. I slowly unzipped the bag. All of his personal items were inside. I grabbed a T-shirt out of the bag and buried my face in the soft cotton material. His scent embodied the T-shirt. Popping back to reality, I checked my surroundings. I couldn’t risk Mason finding me in the room he and his brother shared.

Quickly, I zipped the bag and closed the doors. I slipped the T-shirt under my blouse and scurried out of the room. Before joining the family for lunch, I stored Tate's T-shirt in my suitcase.

I tried pushing down the joy I felt, but no such luck.

Mason clutched my shoulder. "You're chipper, babe."

Fuck, I wanted to throat punch the asshole.

"I'm happy you cheered up. Melissa and I were ready to call off the wedding."

I wish mom wouldn't have mentioned my cold feet.

Mason gruffly rubbed his face. "What happened?"

My smile rose and fell. "Just a little teary eyed. We're getting married tomorrow. Everything is ok now."

Not one person at the table took their eyes off of me.

I caressed Mason's face, staring into his blue eyes. "I am marrying the boy who stole my heart when we were kids." Pain shot through my body probably because of the bald-faced lie.

He crushed my lips, I hated returning the kiss, but I had to play the game.

The second I returned to my room; I'd wash off my lips.

I scanned the blushed faces at the table. "I need a nap before tonight's big party. Please excuse me?"

“I’ll walk you to your room.” Mason stood.

Luckily, I hid Tate’s shirt in my bag. I almost placed it under my pillow .

The second we were through the door; I curled my legs into my stomach on the bed.
“Show’s over, you can go now.”

He locked the door and sat beside me.

“Fuck off.”

“How about you show me how well you can roll those hips while riding my cock,” he whispered in my ear.

“Get the fuck away from me.” I shoved my palms into his chest. Did he really think I was warming up to him? Hell no.

He snickered. “Tomorrow you’ll submit and perform your wifely duties.” He rose to his full height.

I hopped out of the bed. “Oh, yeah? You bring your dick anywhere near me and I will cut it clean off.”

His eyes darkened. “You will do as you are told. If you step out of line again, lover boy will pay the price. I’ll break his arm. Better yet, he can rot forever.”

I palmed my mouth. “You’ve had your fun. Got your revenge, now leave us alone.”

“I will be content after we are married. The look on his face when I tell him you are my wife—he’ll never be the same.”

“Get out.” I pointed at the door.

He pressed his hand against my mouth. “Keep your voice down. Rest those pretty blue eyes. I will see you downstairs in that pink dress I picked out for you.” He kissed my forehead, then walked out of the room.

I fell onto the bed, staring at the wall. Our plan had to work tonight. If Tate wasn’t in the basement, I was screwed.

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TATE

I stormed into grandfather's office. He shot out of his seat and pounded his fists on the desk.

"How the fuck did you escape?"

I grinned. "Sheer determination. I had plenty of time to learn the guards routine. Who cares about all of that? Let's discuss you trying to marry my woman off to my brother to line your fucking pockets," I roared, stalking closer.

"How dare you use my brother and Chelsea? You are a sick son of a bitch." I tilted my head.

"It's over."

Matt stepped beside me, pointing his weapon at my grandfather. "You strangled Chelsea tonight. You don't deserve to walk the earth."

My eyes widened and my body vibrated. I ran around the desk and wrapped my hands around his neck .

"How dare you lay a hand on her. You thought it was ok to abuse her because she's a woman," I bit out through gritted teeth.

"Hit a man, asshole." I shoved him back and slammed my fist into his mouth. He stumbled back, wiping the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand. Deep

laughter poured out of his throat. “You are indeed from my DNA.”

I grabbed his lapels and gave him an uppercut. He staggered, then swung at me. I stepped back. He pulled a Glock from the small of his back. “Pointing it at my head.”

“Put the gun down,” Matt yelled.

“Nope, I’m walking out of here.” He turned the Glock on Matt.

“No,” I roared, tackling him to the ground. The Glock fired.

We rolled on the floor, gripping the gun. “Let it go. You aren’t walking out of here a free man. You are going to prison.” I growled, trying to pry the gun from his hands. I turned the gun away from me, pointing it at him. I tried to remove his hand. The gun fired. His eyes widened. I glared between us. The crimson blood, pooled on his shirt .

“Why did you have to do this?” I roared. My heartbeat against my chest at top speed. The air caught in my throat. What have I done?

The life seeped from his eyes and his lips parted.

I fell to the side gripping my hair. “This didn’t have to happen. I never wanted this,” I shouted.

A hand stretched toward me. My mouth hung open. “You’re alive.”

“Quick reflexes.”

He pulled me to my feet. “I’m so happy you’re alive.” I threw my arms around him, slapping his back. He returned the hug.

“Tate, this wasn’t your fault.”

I leaned against the desk.

“Feels like it was.”

“If you wanted to truly harm him, you could have. The Glock resting against the small of your back is the only one loaded with real bullets. Thank God you didn’t draw your weapon.”

“But he did. On his own grandson.” I gruffly ran my fingers through my hair.

“Tate,” Chelsea stood at the door mouth gaped in tears.

I ran toward her. She fell into my chest.

Her watery blue eyes bore into mine. “What happened?”

“We tussled over the gun and I shot him. ”

“Tate, the police are on their way inside,” Chris stated.

“We have a long night ahead of us. I won’t leave your side while they question you. Before they get in here, let’s talk in private. I need to know exactly what happened.”

I nodded.

Chelsea stepped back.

“Tate, baby.” Mom gripped my face. “I love you. We’ll get through this ordeal as a family.”

A hand slipped around my neck. “All of us together, son.”

Christmas day was a blur. I went through every stage of grief while I was detained by the police.

I was shocked the grandfather I knew and loved tried to murder me. Denial hit me. He wasn't dead. He couldn't be. Especially, at my hand. The pain and guilt ate at me second after second. Maybe if I never flew to London, this wouldn't have happened to me and Chelsea. Pounding my fists against the cement walls, I begged. “Please make the pain stop.”

Depression wrapped me in its mitts. I wanted someone to put me out of my misery. If we wouldn't have followed Mason up the hill at the lake house, grandfather wouldn't have ever helped him seek revenge .

Then my emotions took an upward turn. If grandfather hadn't come to the hospital that day my brother would really be dead.

Chris approached the holding area. “Time to go, Tate. The police have concluded the part of the investigation that involves you.”

He was a disheveled mess. His tie was undone and one half of his shirt was tucked into his slacks.

“Thank goodness.”

We didn't return to grandfather's estate. Chris said the family was staying at a luxury hotel in London.

He placed a room key in my hand. “Try to rest.”

“Oh, I will.”

“Yeah ok,” he stated, as he strolled into his suite across the hall.

Once inside the room, my mouth fell open. The beautiful sight lying in my bed made everything I’d gone through worth it. The lamp across the room partially illuminated the dark room. Her hair was pulled up into a cute little bun. She had a death grip on something against her chest under the blanket. I walked over and lightly ran one finger over her soft porcelain cheek.

“Tate,” she whimpered in her slumber.

The sound of her voice made my cock twitch. Shit .

I peeled the blanket back a hair. Chelsea was clutching one of my T-shirts. I turned my head to the ceiling, desperately attempting to bury all the evil feelings that swept through my entire body at the moment.

A piping hot shower should tame some of the negative energy coursing through my veins.

The unsupervised shower felt indescribable. I massaged the soap deep into every inch of my skin. Turning my face to the ceiling, the water poured over my skin removing any signs of soap. Clutched hands braced the wall. Then a single shiver of emotion ripped through my body. The water hid the tears thudding my skin. How could one’s family be so despicable? Selfish.

Last but not least. Greedy.

Grandfather wanted Mason and I to impregnate and marry our girlfriends, all so he could continue his extravagant lifestyle. Like I said, selfish bastard.

“Fuck,” I roared in a low growl.

In that moment, I wish I did purposely kill him.

Hands swept along my chest. My eyes popped open. “Chelsea, you shouldn’t be in here.”

“Yes, I should,” she shouted. Her eyes were wild. She was on the brink of losing it like I was.

My fingers traced over the bruises on her neck. “I’m so sorry, Chelsea. ”

“Why? For being locked away because you refused to do your grandfather’s dirty work? Because you didn’t know you were walking into a trap? I think rather you came to London or not he would have found a way to get what he wanted. He was a spiteful, evil man.” Her eyes were cold.

“And now he’s gone.” A devilish smile lit her lips.

“I have you back. That’s all I wanted.” Then her eyes dimmed.

“What’s wrong?”

“Mason, said you wouldn’t want me after he married and impregnated me,” she cried.

I gripped her face. “That’s bullshit. Pregnant with my brother’s child and all, I would have kidnapped you. I won’t stop saying this. You are my woman. No one comes between us.”

She nodded. “He didn’t touch me.” Her eyes darted to the floor.

“I had to kiss him in public to go along with the farce. He threatened to hurt you if I didn’t play along. I didn’t know what else to do,” she cried.

“Look at me.”

Those beautiful blue eyes stared into mine. Nothing else mattered. “The day we are to finally marry I’ll sign a prenup. My family’s broke I suppose. But I don’t want you to ever think...”

She placed one finger over my lips. “Shut up. I want to feel you so deep inside me. Live in the moment with me. I have you back.”

I snickered. “You were a total badass. You know, coming to my rescue and all.”

She threw her head back in laughter. “I guess I was.”

I lifted her up into my arms.

She peered into my eyes. “You are all mine, Tate.”

“You better believe that, baby.”

I swept my lips across hers. Chelsea massaged my head.

She smiled against my lips. “It’s really you.”

My brows rustled together. “What?”

“I thought I was kissing you on Halloween. The moment I ran my fingers through your hair, I felt the raised scar. That’s when I confirmed Mason was alive.”

I will handle my brother.

“I know it's you because the faint mustache too.” She smirked.

“Carry on, baby. I know another way to ensure you it's me.”

“And how's that?” She pulled her lower lip into her mouth .

“Making love to you like only I can.”

I slipped my fingers within her slick folds as our tongues tangled.

Our lips unlocked. Chelsea's back fell against the cold wall. Her fingers caressed my face. I slid two fingers inside her tight walls. I leaned down, twirling my tongue around her pink pebbled nipple.

“Tate, fuck me,” my greedy princess begged.

I ignored her and sucked her other nipple. I licked the underside of her breast as I lined my cock up with her pussy. For weeks, I dreamed about being in between these soft legs. I planted soft kisses along the bruises circling her neck. Her anchored legs shivered around my waist. Her sobbing drew my eyes to her face.

“Chelsea, it's all right now.”

She shook her head, telling me she agreed, but I didn't buy it. The ordeal that occurred over the last several weeks would hang in the air like dirty socks for months to come. She almost married my brother for Pete's Sake. How could she turn a blind eye to all that happened recently? I knew I couldn't either. At that moment, we needed to get lost in each other.

Clutching her thighs, I slid inch by pleasurable inch inside her warmth. A place I knew as home.

“Oh, Tate, I missed us being together as one. ”

What she said registered, but I was comatose with each long thrust.

“Fuck...baby.” My eyes hooded. I was a babbling fool for her.

I felt her smile against my eyelids.

She knew she had my nose wide open. Only she could ever have this effect on me. Chelsea was always mine.

“Tate, oh, don’t stop.” She gripped my neck for dear life. Her hair cascaded around us.

“Kiss me, Chelse.”

“I-I can’t.”

Squeezing her ass, I circled inside her walls.

“Yes,” she screamed. Her legs slipped from my waist. I caught her shaky legs in my hands, keeping her steady. I captured her lips as I stilled inside her, releasing every ounce of come I had to give.

“So good, Chelsea,” I grunted.

“Anyone who attempts to come between us again, I’ll make an example out of them.”

She slipped her wet hair behind her ear. “That’s what I love to hear.”

I placed Chelsea on her feet. Her face immediately fell against my chest. “Do we have to leave this room? ”

“Yes. I need to help my dad clean up the mess at the Forrester estate. We need to distinguish what we can salvage of the company.”

“I’m staying with you.”

“You shouldn’t spend your Christmas vacation cleaning up my families bullshit.”

“I will not leave here without you. Period,” she growled. Terror filled her blue eyes. “Don’t make me go. Do you have any idea how strong I’ve been during the course of the catastrophic events? I organized the meet ups with Matt and Rocco to rescue you. And I haven’t cut myself one time. Despite how badly I wanted to.” Chelsea gripped her arm.

I placed my hand over hers. “Sweetheart, I am so proud of you. You’ve come so far. You stood up against Mason and my grandfather even if that decision was dangerous. I’d love to have you right here by my side.”

She exhaled. Her shoulders relaxed and her starry-eyed gaze held mine. “We’ll get through this together, Tate.”

“We sure will, Chelsea.”

CHELSEA

Bursting through the door I gaped, staring at Douglas's dead body on the floor.

Matt and Tate exchanged words, then Tate told me what happened.

Matt and I spoke briefly corroborating our stories. I suppose that was what he and Tate were doing when I walked into the room.

Dad escorted the police inside the office.

Matt and I were later questioned by the British police. Me and Matt had agreed to skirt around what happened to the armed guards in the dungeon. And not mention Rocco was ever involved.

Dad accompanied Tate to the police station.

Megan and I sat on the sofa in the living room. Melissa was a wreck. She sat on a nearby chair cursing Mason. She wasn't thrilled with me either. I was so exhausted we'd have to discuss all that happened tomorrow.

Matt walked toward us. "We're out of here, ladies. "

I sat straight up. "Seriously?"

"Yes, my dad's covering the cost for everyone to stay at the Four Seasons."

“Thank God. Please tell him thank you.”

Matt pulled Megan to her feet.

The second we were preparing to leave who strolled in? Marisa.

“Mason.” Concern loomed her pretty porcelain face. She ran into his arms. He must have spoken to her before she arrived. Informed her the charade was over. I was so relieved to get away from him. How was I to feel? Angry, sad, at peace. Not sure I’d be at peace for a while. I knew we had to talk to Mason sooner rather than later.

Melissa’s eyes widened. “After everyone has recovered somewhat in the morning, we will discuss all that’s happened under our noses,” she growled.

“Mason and Marisa, you two will stay in me and Brian’s suite. I cannot let Mason out of my sight.”

He didn’t give his mom a hard time. No snappy comeback. He conformed. A part of me felt she wanted her son near. She hadn’t seen him in four years. Parading around as Tate didn’t count. She needed to forgive him eventually for all the shit he’d done. That was her son so of course she’d forgive him. Forget probably not ever.

Mom clutched my shoulders and led me out of the house.

Once we arrived at the hotel, I helped her prepare the twins for bed.

“Mom, Matt reserved a room for Tate. I’ll stay in his room. I need to be there when he gets in.”

She nodded. I peeked at the twins deep in a peaceful slumber, then stalked toward the door.

“Chelsea.”

I peered over my shoulder. “Yes mom?”

“Why did you keep Mason’s secret?”

Running my fingers through my hair, I sighed. “I was blackmailed.” I faced her.

“He extorted money from granddaddy and Mr. Branuer.”

Her eyebrows wrinkled. “Why would my father pay him anything?”

I hated to tell mom the truth about her father. “Granddad was caught in a compromising situation.”

She dropped on the bed, staring at the floor.”

I stepped closer. “Mom, talk to him. I hate I had to be the one to tell you.” I sat beside her.

“I’ll be fine, honey.” Her smile didn’t quite meet her eyes.

“Continue. ”

“Over the years, Mason wanted me because I chose Tate. I think he learned toward the end the girl he really wanted was Marisa.

I believe Mason felt indebted to Mr. Forrester, because he paid millions to save his life. So he was willing to conceive a child with me and Marisa. I joined forces with the only friends I could trust and we devised a plan to rescue Tate. Oh, the other reason I didn’t make you aware Mason was blackmailing me was because he

threatened to hurt Tate. So, I played along.”

She wrapped her arms around me. “He’s lucky to have you.” I held her so tight, I thought I might squeeze the life out of her.

“Good night, baby.”

“Night.”

Tate pulled me closer. “Are you ok?”

His deep voice brought me back from my thoughts.

“Yes, I’m perfect now that I am with you.” I nuzzled my nose into the crook of his woodsy and citrus scented neck under the blanket.

“Merry Christmas, baby.”

My lips ticked upward. “Merry, Christmas, Tate.”

?

Tate and his father searched through Douglas’ financial records. I sat at the desk on the opposite side sorting through manila folders.

“Dad, do you think you can guess his password?”

He leaned over the keyboard, pecking away at the keys.

“I know someone who can get into the system.”

I dialed Rocco's number, then placed the cell on speaker.

"Hey, Chelsea? Are you all right?"

"Yes, but we need a favor."

"What do you need?"

"Can you access Tate's grandfather's computer again?"

"Yeah, I still have the passwords. Sit tight."

"No, problem."

We heard him pecking away at his keys for a few minutes.

"Try it now. Press enter."

Brian tapped the keys. "Yes, we're in."

"Thanks, Rocco. Have dinner with us tonight. My dad rented out the ballroom. We are going to party a little more. This time we'll be able to enjoy ourselves."

"I am in."

My lips widened.

"See you there, Rocco." Tate grinned.

I disconnected the call .

My lips tightened as I peered at Tate.

“What did I do wrong?”

“You always remind Rocco we’re a couple. Tate, he’s more than aware.”

“Chelsea, I know it’s wrong. I’ll do better.” He winked.

Asshole had no intention of easing up on Rocco.

“Look at this,” Brian pointed at the screen again.

I stepped around the desk, glaring at the screen.

“He owns all those properties in the Caymans? Oh my god, are those all his bank accounts overseas?”

“Yeah.”

“Dad, that’s a good sign, right?”

“It sure is, son. I will rebuild this company from the ground up if I have to. The London office has to go. I’ll sell it off. Ridding this office won’t stop the bleeding, but it will help salvage the Atlanta office.”

Tate patted his dad’s shoulder. “That’s great.”

“What about the engagement ring, Mason gave me?” I removed it from my pocket and placed it in Brian’s hand. “Can you sell it?”

“Yeah, we can, but-”

“No buts, Mr. Forrester. I never wanted that ring.”

“Trust me, Dad. Chelse is fine.”

“All right, great. Every little bit helps. ”

“Oh, and maybe you should keep the extortion money from my granddaddy.”

Brian’s eyes widened.

“Just until the company is viable again. I will talk to my granddaddy.” I peeked at Tate.

His jaw ticked. “I want to break Mason’s face.”

“Son, calm down. You have every right to be upset. But he’s still your brother.”

“Screw him. He tormented me. Going on and on about doing things to my woman. Two guards held me down while he spewed his hatred for me. He hated me.” Tate thumped on his chest with his fingertips. “Because Chelsea reciprocated her feelings for me. Dad, do you know how crazy that sounds?”

His dad gruffly rubbed his stubbled chin. “Yes, Tate.”

I stepped in between them splaying my hands on Tate’s heaving broad chest.

“Look at me. We are here...now...together.”

His cold gaze met mine. “Yeah.”

His breathing eased under my touch. Tate wrapped his arms around me. His lips

melted against my hair. “I’m ok, Chelse.” I slipped from his embrace and returned to my seat.

“Dad, I am ready to continue. ”

An hour later we sat around the theater room, gawking at each other. We waited an hour because Brian and I had to calm Tate down. He was ready to kill Mason. We couldn’t have him committing two murders in two days.

Mason was in the hot seat. Everyone had so many questions.

Melissa had the most. She stood. “Mason, I want you to tell us every painstaking moment that occurred after you woke up here in London.”

He clutched his spiky black hair. Pacing back and forth, he brought his parents and mine up to speed.

The room fell eerily silent.

“Don’t tell me you all feel sorry for him.” Tate rose.

I hopped in front of him. “Don’t do this.”

His vibrant blue eyes were gone. They were replaced with dark blue stones.

“Baby, move or I’ll sit you on your pretty little ass.”

My lips parted.

He leaned into my ear. “I told you about parting those sexy lips. We’ll discuss your punishment later.” He gripped my waist and sat me on my bottom in the leather

recliner.

Tate continued to the front of the room. “I don’t feel sorry for you. You may be my brother because we’re related, but that’s it. I don’t ever want to see your face again. ”

“Tate, you don’t mean that.” Melissa stood.

She was always pulled together nicely. Not today. She wore a red blouse, jeans, and knee-high brown boots. Not a lick of makeup in sight. Her hair was pulled into a messy ponytail. Her nostrils and eyes were red. She probably sobbed all night.

“I’m not happy with him either, but he’s coming home with us.”

“Then I will stay with nana and granddad Harlon.” Tate rammed his fists into Mason’s chest, backing him against the wall faster than the speed of light. “You locked me in a dungeon like a caged animal.” His fist jolted Mason’s chin. “To add insult to injury, you tanked my football career, motherfucker.”

He rocked Mason’s jaw again. He stumbled back. Chest heaving, he rammed into Tate. His back smacked the hardwood floor. They tussled. Mason plunged his fist into Tate’s nose.

“Get the fuck off of me,” Tate growled. He shoved him off. They jumped to their feet in a fighting stance. Tate kicked Mason in his gut. Their loud grunts and groans rocked through me. Dad and Brian didn’t stop the fight.

“Dad, do something. They’re going to kill each other,” I pleaded as I rose.

They pounded each other with their fists .

“All right, that’s enough.” Brian pressed his palm into Mason’s chest.

Dad gripped Tate's shoulders. "Knock it off."

Marisa ran her hand over her collar bone, tight lipped. Worry consumed her pretty features.

I stepped beside her. "Why so worried, bitch? After all you're partly to blame too."

Her eyes shot daggers at me. "Fuck off, Chelsea."

"You two deserve each other. I overheard you two the night of Matt's party." I quirked a brow, crossing my arms over my chest. "In your bedroom."

Her eyes bulged.

"How could you be ok with him impregnating the both of us and my sham of a marriage?"

"What?" Tate shouted. He charged toward Mason again. Our fathers kept them apart.

"You're a despicable person."

She tossed her hair over her shoulder. "Can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen."

I blacked out. Next thing I knew we were rolling on the floor, pulling each other's hair. I backhanded her across her cheek.

"Ah," she shouted.

"Fuck you, Chelsea. I hate you. "

My lip stung after Marisa punched me in my mouth. I slammed my fist into her eye.

“The feelings mutual, bitch.” Melissa and mom pried us apart.

Matt darted across the room, cocked his fist back, then connected it with Mason’s jaw. “You used my sister, you filthy son of a bitch. We were once the best of friends. I can’t believe you’d stoop to such levels. All for your grandfather. You’re a coward. A real man would have stood up for his family and friends.” Matt rolled his eyes and stalked toward Marisa.

“Let’s go.”

“No.”

His eyes narrowed. “What?”

She dusted herself off. “I won’t leave him.”

He spun on his heels. “Why?”

Her lips trembled. “Mason is the only man I’ve ever loved. And we’re having a baby.”

My eyes widened. I thought they were in the process of making a baby that night. I didn’t take into account they’d probably been working to get pregnant for months. Shit, and I just tackled her to the ground.

“Marisa, Melissa and I will exam you. We need to make sure the baby is ok.” Mom stretched her hand toward the door .

She nodded. Mason walked over to Marisa, intertwining their fingers.

“It will be ok, baby.” She wrapped her arms around him. He winced. “Ouch.”

“Mason and Tate come on. We’ll examine all of you.”

I limped over to Tate. He gripped his side. “I’ll wait in here. I don’t want to be in the same room with them,” Tate grimaced.

We helped each other to the brown recliners.

“Jenny, how about you examine Marisa and I’ll examine Mason.”

“Sure, sounds good.”

Dad appeared out of nowhere with towels and a bowl of water. “Thanks, Dad.”

His lips fell upon the top of my head. “I am proud of you, Chelsea.”

My brows rose. “You are?”

He placed the bowl on the side table. “Yes. You’ve faced your demons head on.”

“Mr. Culver, she hasn’t cut herself once either.” Tate attempted to smile. His hand flew over his lips.

“Dad, through all this turmoil I wanted to cut myself, but I willed myself not to. I kept pushing on.”

Dad sighed. “Good. When we return home, we should all have breakfast at your favorite restaurant- ”

“Mortons,” Tate finished his sentence.

Dad smirked. “Yeah.”

“Chris.”

Dads eyes darted toward the door. “What’s up, Brian?”

“How about a drink?”

“I thought you’d never ask.”

Happy our fathers had each other through this tragic ordeal.

I pressed the wet towel against Tate’s bloody mouth. “Rocky, I think you’ve seen enough action for a while.”

He chuckled. “Maybe. I do feel better.”

“I will too after I find out how Marisa’s exam went.”

Thirty-minutes later, I still sat on pins and needles, waiting for news about Marisa’s exam.

Mom bounced into the room. “Marisa and the baby are fine, Chelsea.”

I fell back against the sofa. “Wow, so she’s really pregnant. I can’t believe it.” I smoothed my hand over my hair.

“Do you need an exam too?” her black brow rose.

“No, mom. First of all, I didn’t do anything with Mason. And Tate and me...”

I scratched my neck. “...we use protection.” My cheeks heated. Admitting to my mother again Tate and I were sexually active was embarrassing.

Tate couldn't meet my mother's gaze either.

Her fists landed on her hips. "Well, don't stop using protection until you are absolutely ready to bring a child into this world."

"Yes, Mom."

Later that night, Tate and me laid in a steaming hot tub of water sprinkled with Epsom salt. Our limbs were aching from our altercations earlier.

"We can't kiss with busted lips."

His head dipped back in laughter. "My tongue works. We'll cuddle and I'll lick your neck, while I'm deep inside you from behind."

I stuck my tongue out. "Sounds good."

He pulled me flush against him. His fingers trailed down my arm. "Our first Christmas as a couple was ruined."

"No, it wasn't. I mean, it wasn't traditional, but we were together."

"True. "

"Tomorrow, we return to the states. I'm ready to move forward with our life."

"Me too. Sucks you'll no longer live across the street."

"My grandparents don't live far. I'll pick you up for school every day."

I caressed his neck. "Sounds perfect."

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I flopped in the red chaise lounge chair, clutching the phone to my ear. “Megan, are you sure the party won’t be lame?”

“Tyler’s known for throwing epic New Year’s Eve parties. This will be my first party. I bet Tate can attest to that.”

“Megan, I’ll take your word for it. What time will you and Matt pick us up?”

“You have forty minutes bitch, get a move on.”

I laughed, then disconnected the call.

The perfect silver shimmer mid-thigh dress was sprawled across my bed. I had already showered. My hair and makeup were all that were left to do.

A loud knock rattled against my door. “Chelsea, are you in here?”

“I’m in the bathroom.”

“Hey.” Tate kissed my shoulder and braced his hands on my hips.

“How did the meeting go with your parents and Marisa’s parents?”

“Matt was pissed. He said his dad gave them a monetary gift now and will give another million after the baby’s born.”

“Does Matt know about the blackmail?”

“No. We’ll keep it like that, Chelsea.”

“What? I wouldn’t tell him unless he asked. I don’t want to be the person to ruin his perfect view of marriage.”

“Yeah. I agree.”

Tate closed the door quietly.

“You are so sexy in that black tuxedo.”

His tongue slid along my neck. Tate’s handsome blue eyes met mine in the mirror. “I can’t get enough of you,” he breathed.

He hooked his thumbs in the waistband of my panties. Tate slipped them down my thighs. My skin tingled under his touch.

“Widen your legs, Chelse.”

I unhooked my bra, and it fell down my arms to the floor.

“Chelsea, I miss living across the street.” I heard him unfasten his pants from behind.

“Only because I could see you every day.”

He circled his fingers over my nipples. I tossed my head back and a surge of energy swept through my body. “Yes, Tate.” I stroked his cock .

Tate bent me over the sink and slid two fingers inside of me. The anticipation of his next move kept me on edge. His free hand massaged my breast. He planted kisses along my shoulders. “The remainder of the school year will be a challenge. But as

long as we're together, we'll get through it," he whispered.

Tate slid inside me.

"Shit, I am so happy to be back in your arms."

He hungrily kissed my lips. "I hated being away from you. No way am I bringing you home tonight. You're staying with me." Tate gripped my hips, quickening his pace. "I can't believe I hated you only to learn later my brother was never dead." His eyes slammed shut in an effort to hide the pain.

"Tate, look at me."

His jaw tightened.

"Tate."

Slowly, his eyes opened. Those blue eyes were dark and filled with pain. His twin betrayed him. Leaving us in an evil downward spiral for years. I hated as much as Tate we lost time. He leaned over again, caressing my chin. His tongue slipped between my lips. I almost lost the man I love to two psychos. Not a chance I'd let his brother get in his head next semester .

"Tate, stay here with me in the here and now. Not the past. We are together. That is all that matters."

Tate slipped out of me. "What are you doing?" I cried.

He turned me around and sat my bottom on the cold marble counter.

"I needed to be closer to you." Hooking my legs over his arms, he plunged deep

inside me.

My head dropped back. “This is the best,” I moaned.

“This is the only dick you will ever get. It’s just me and you, baby. You’re my world, Chelse.” The sincerity in his eyes warmed my heart.

I gripped his face sucking those delicious lips. “Only you and me, Tate. Fuck,” I screamed in pleasure, as my orgasm struck with force through my core. Goosebumps prickled my skin due to the intensity of our passion.

“Shit, Chelse. This is the only place I ever want to be,” he groaned against my lips.”

I swept my hands under his shirt, scratching his back. “Tate, Tate,” I cried.

He stilled inside me. “Fuck, yeah,” he growled as he came. Our chests heaved against each other.

“So happy, I’ll have you all to myself later tonight.”

“I look forward to screaming as loud as I can the next time I come tonight.” I winked.

He chuckled.

?

Glasses brimming with champagne held in the air, we bobbed our heads to the music in the rear plush tan leather seats of the black chauffeured Maybach. Tate caressed my waist.

“Matt, this was your idea. Are we toasting or not?”

“Tate, we agreed tonight would be chill, right?”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Megan and me smiled at each other.

“Ok. Here’s to having my boy back on American soil.” Matt grinned.

I plastered a kiss against Tate’s cheek. A wide smile flashed across his handsome face.

“Cheers,” we shouted.

We tossed the contents to the back of our throats.

The car rolled to a stop.

“We’re here,” Megan sang.

We poured out of the car. The guys clutched our hands leading us toward the natural stone mansion.

Guys were draped in designer tuxedos and the girls in their cocktail dresses drank and conversed upon our entry. Reminded me of a mini prom. Black and gold Happy New Year decorations hung throughout the massive atrium .

A tall muscled guy with handsome chiseled facial features and sweeping jet black hair greeted us at the door.

He and Matt slapped hands. Matt pulled him into a bro hug. “Tyler, dude the house is packed.”

They stepped apart. “Yeah, you know tonight will be fucking epic,” he grinned.

Tate stood seething. “Why the fuck did you greet us at the door?”

Matt slapped Tate’s arm. “Remember what we discussed?”

“Tate, I don’t want any shit at my party,” Tyler grimaced.

Tate’s eyes narrowed. “Dude, what the fuck are you talking about?”

Tyler stared at me as he leaned into Tate’s ear. I couldn’t hear what he said.

I tugged Tate’s tuxedo sleeve.

“Shit.” Tate pulled me close.

“Tyler, Chelsea is my woman and Marisa is Mason’s.” Tate’s jaw ticked. He didn’t want to talk about Mason tonight. Now he was forced to reveal the truth. Well partial truth anyway.

Tyler turned white as a ghost. “Tate, cut the shit dude.”

We stepped aside as more guests strolled through the door .

“My brother is alive. So, no I am not running around town with two chicks. Grab a mic for me and I’ll explain.”

“Yeah.” He nodded toward the oversized party room.

Tate’s lips melted against my temple. “Are you all right?”

“Yeah.” Tate was worried this shit would send me over the edge.

Matt draped his arm over Megan’s shoulder as we approached the stage.

The live band’s song came to a close as Tyler stepped center stage. “May I have your attention everyone?”

Tate fell beside Tyler.

“My buddy, Tate would like to say a few words.”

He patted Tate’s shoulder.

“Good evening, Haven Saints!” He threw his fist in the air.

The crowd roared.

“I wanted to address a rumor. I am not running around town with two women.” He glanced at me.

“Chelsea is my girlfriend.” He returned his attention to the crowd.

“Marisa is Mason’s. My brother is alive.”

Gasps fell around the room.

He waved someone toward the stage .

“Oh my God,” several people stated with wide eyes, as Mason clutched Marisa’s hand, walking toward the stage.

He stepped next to Tate leaving Marisa at my side. I hated being in her presence. An eerie silence fell over the room.

“Mason was living in London. I didn’t know he was alive until recently.”

It was so weird. Tate and Mason standing on stage side by side in their black tuxedos. Identical fucking twins. And I’ve kissed both. Not willingly.

Tate and Mason waved me and Marisa onto the stage.

We stood at our boyfriends’ sides.

“We will all be in attendance at Haven Saints High in the new year.” Tate passed the mic to Mason.

“I am back home and ready to fucking party,” he roared.

The room full of rich kids screamed with excitement, throwing their hands and drinks in the air.

Hundreds of camera phones snapped our picture throughout the room. Tate turned to the side, pulling me flush against him. His blue eyes gazed into mine.

“Tate, don’t.”

His lips tightened. “Fuck them.” He tipped my chin swiping his lips across mine lighting my core on fire. I gripped his lapels deepening our delicious kiss. In my mind, I had erased the people in the room. It was just me and Tate. The most popular guy in school was my boyfriend. So surreal.

Kyle threw his arms around Mason’s neck the second we were off the stage. “Dude, I

can't believe you're alive." He had his best friend back.

I was surprised Tate didn't out Mason for botching the football game.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 8:12 am

G uys patted Tate's shoulder. He had a death grip on my hand as we strolled out of the crowded room.

“Where are we going?”

“Doll, there's always an exclusive party room for the most elite kids at Haven Saints at every party. The space is set aside for us so we can party freely. Sometimes, Tate and I hang out in the space and other times we chill elsewhere. But I hate to say, Mason has become the star of the party tonight.”

“Matt, chill out. We don't want the girls to think we won't have a great time. We'll chill in the room for a little while then we'll chill with the others.”

“Others?” He said it like they were commoners. My boyfriend was definitely privileged. His father might struggle financially for a while rebuilding their family's empire, but Melissa's family was also filthy rich. Tate's other grandfather Harlon Hughes was a real estate tycoon. He owned real estate all over the world. So, Tate was never broke. His grandfather bought him a G- wagon for Christmas. Said his mother deserved to have her truck back. I couldn't talk either. My grandfather also gave me a new car for Christmas. A gold Bentley coupe awaited me when I returned to Atlanta. I wondered if granddaddy felt guilty for all I'd gone through in London. Pulling up in that beauty at school on the first day of the new semester would be epic.

White double doors opened as we approached. Tate and Matt fist bumped the oversized guys manning the doors. My favorite song blared through the speakers. The DJ stood in a booth in the back corner of the large room filled with snobby teens. They drank and smoked as they sat on the edge of pool tables and threw bowling

balls down the glow in the dark lanes. Waiters filled their trays with glasses of champagne at the bar before catering to us. Who needed to party elsewhere?

“I told you,” Megan yelled over the music in my ear.

I just realized my mouth hung open. Placing my hand under my chin, I forced my lips shut. Shit, I looked as if I wasn’t a part of this crowd. Not long ago I wasn’t.

First outcast, now jock princess.

Tate’s lips melted against my ear. Fuck, would I make it till the end of the night? I was hungry for Tate all the time. So thankful to have him back .

“Babe, I need to have a conversation with a couple of assholes. They’re begging for my attention.”

They yelled obscenities from across the room.

“Tate, you’re a pussy and a cheater,” they spewed.

“And I plan to give them my undivided attention with my fists.”

My hands splayed his chest. “Tyler said he didn’t want any trouble tonight.”

“Oh yeah, well maybe not out there, but in here I think he wants a show. Tyler played his part pretty convincingly at the door. But he knew Mason was alive. They were friends growing up. I’ll ask Rocco to do a little digging, but I bet I’m right. Take a peek.”

My eyes swept over the room and Tyler. He was whispering to another guy. They appeared to be conspiring in regard to something. I wasn’t sure what, but Tate felt he

knew.

“He’s wearing the shittiest, snarkiest grin I’ve ever seen. That fucker nodded to the guys near the bar.”

I pulled back meeting his angry gaze. “You don’t have to do this?”

“Chelsea, I do. I knew the shit would hit the fan. Thought I had another week.”

“Fuck, Tate,” the stalky guy shouted from across the room .

Tate stood to his full height peeling off his jacket.

My heart raced, and I clenched my fists, holding my breath.

“Not to worry, princess. I got this.” He placed his jacket in my arms. Tate and Matt stalked across the room.

Megan clutched Matt’s jacket.

“What the fuck just happened?” Her brown brows rose over her perfectly arched eyebrows.

“Tate and Matt felt they had to teach those guys a lesson.”

Tate grabbed the guy up by his lapels then slammed his fist into his jaw.

“You don’t ever speak ill about me,” Tate roared.

Matt and Tate pounded the faces of the guy and his entourage. I glimpsed across the crowded room again. Tyler snickered, drink brushing his pink lips, now holding a girl

under his arm. He was a little too tuned into the scuffle happening near the bar that he didn't bother breaking up. Before I knew it, our guys were back, pulling us to the dance floor. Tate placed a vodka cranberry in my hand.

"Was that necessary?"

"Yeah, it was. If we weren't at Tyler's home partying, I would have bashed his face in too. Didn't want to wreck the entire party. I won't let those fuckers ruin our night. I am with the most beautiful girl." His lips grazed my neck as he gripped my waist. We needed to rivet the year behind us. His big strong hands found my ass as our tongues tangled. Megan was right the party was epic. We left the elite party room and danced toward the middle of the main room. The banging of the drums pulsed through my body as Tate swayed my hips to the beat. Veronica and Rachelle giggled as they stared at me from across the room.

"Chelsea?"

I tore my eyes away from trouble and glanced in the direction of the voice to my left. "Connie, Rocco, Trevor." My face lit up as I hugged my friends.

"I am so happy y'all are here."

"Babe, catch up with your friends. Matt and I will be back."

I stared up at him. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah, you need time with the geek squad." He and Matt chuckled.

My fist slammed into his broad chest. He smacked my ass before walking off.

"Are y'all loving this party?"

“Fuck yeah,” Connie grinned .

“How did you guys enjoy your holiday?” I yelled over the music.

“Shit, not as fun as you bitches holiday in London.” Connie’s arms crossed her chest, and she quirked a brow.

I peeked at Rocco. “What the hell?”

“It wasn’t like that. Well maybe it was. I couldn’t help tell Connie and Trevor about the Christmas party fight involving Mason and Tate.” He winked.

I exhaled inside. “Sorry guys.” I glanced between Trevor and Connie.

“I had no idea Mason was coming back from the dead.”

“Good evening.” We turned to the waiter balancing a tray of drinks.

“Ms. Culver, this drink was sent over from the gentleman across the room.” I followed his gaze to a tall brown haired guy with gray eyes. He raised his glass. Who the fuck was he? He must’ve walked in after Tate’s public display of affection.

I smirked. “I can’t accept it. Tell him thank you, but no thank you.”

“Understood.”

Tate would kill him. I was saving his life.

“Could you bring me a vodka on the rocks, please?”

“Right away. ”

“Guys, do you know him?”

They shook their heads.

I scanned the room. Tate and Matt stood talking to Stephen and a few other jocks not far from Veronica.

Another waiter walked by. My friends swiped glasses of champagne and plates of hors d'oeuvre off the tray.

“Megan, are you and Matt an item now?” Connie waited for her answer as she sipped the champagne.

I snickered as I snatched a shrimp off of Megan’s plate.

“We are just having a little play time. Nothing more.” She downed the glass of champagne.

“Whoa, what the fuck?” I glared at her.

“So you two aren’t a couple?”

“No, we will never be a couple.” Her lips fell flat. She pondered on a thought, then a plastic smile lit her lips.

What the fuck was going on with my friends? “Megan, you need to spill,” Trevor pushed.

“I cannot, guys. If it were only that easy.”

Connie gripped Megan’s arm. “We’re your friends. You can tell us.”

All of our curious eyes stared at her.

She slipped a prosciutto wrapped date into her mouth.

Trevor's swift feet and arms moved to the beat. We followed suit. As always, others crowded around us. Rocco joined his buddy pulling his tuxedo shirt up showing off his abs. And who appears out of nowhere—some chick. I wondered was she the girl from the last party. Her blonde hair swayed from side to side as she shook her ass against him. We threw our hands in the air, cheering them on. I glanced to my right. Veronica leaned into Tate's ear. That fucking bitch. My fingers curled into tight balls at my sides.

"Hey, there Laura Croft. Slow your roll," the silky deep vocals said against my ear. I glared up over my shoulder.

"Who are you?" I glowered.

"Your boyfriend's quite the ladies man."

"You don't take rejection well."

"I love a challenge." His soft lips fell against my cheek.

I shoved him back. "You want your ass kicked. If Tate catches you, he will kill you."

"Not worried, sweetheart." He nodded his head in Tate's direction. "Uh, oh, looks like someone's headed to hook up."

Veronica gripped Tate's hand pulling him out the door. My arm heated. I scratched at the faint cut lines. What was happening?

“Come on, let's dance.” He twirled me around.

I threw the vodka, I'd been nursing since the waiter brought it a few minutes ago, to the back of my throat .

“Why are you dating such a jerk?”

“You know nothing about me and Tate?”

His arm slid along my waist as he danced against me. I shoved my palms against his abs. “Back the fuck up.”

He flashed a wicket boyish grin.

“All right, party Haven Saints, we are getting ready to countdown to midnight,” a band member shouted from the stage.

The mystery guy pulled me close and crushed my lips. Like a deer in headlights I stared at his flawless face as I braced my hands against his chest.

He stepped back. “Later, sexy.” He darted out the door.

What the fuck was that?

Connie nudged me. “He's a cutie. I see Tate has a little competition.”

“I've never seen him before. Doubt I'll ever see him again.”

I swiped two glasses of champagne off a waiter's tray. Chugging it, I glanced beside me at Trevor's watch.

Where the fuck was my boyfriend? I couldn't go running behind Tate. Not tonight any way. This was New Year's Eve. I chugged half the glass of bubbly.

Big strong arms wrapped around my waist from behind. My body vibrated against his rock-hard frame.

"Ten, nine, eight..." The band members counted down .

Tate turned me to face him. "I love you, baby." At the count of one, his lips devoured mine.

The famous song 'Auld Lang Syne' filled the room.

"There's no other girl for me but you," Tate confirmed against my lips.

"Not even, Veronica."

He laughed. "Definitely not her. She claimed she had to talk to me about something important. We stepped in the hall. She told me I came on to her at the Halloween party."

I slapped my hand against my forehead. "Shit, I forgot to tell you."

"No need. I figured it was Mason."

"Yeah, he was trying to destroy us."

Tate held me tight. "I want to beat his fucking face in again."

"Babe, you've done so well tonight ignoring him."

“I don’t want to think about how many other girls he went after, in an effort to rip apart our relationship.”

“Me too.”

Tate didn’t leave my side again. His friends gathered around us. Nosy Haven Saints eager gossipers and those looking to gain popularity across the room surrounded Mason and Marisa. Tate and Mason were never seen again in close proximity for the remainder of the night. We finally said our goodbyes and Tate led the way toward the door. Veronica flashed a devilish grin near the exit. I halted.

“Tate is my man, bitch. I am not Brittany. Try to get alone time with him again.” I cocked my fist back and slammed it into her pretty eyes. She stumbled to the floor holding her face.

“Shit, I told Tyler no trouble tonight.” Tate shrugged, before helping Veronica to her feet. “Guess I lied.

I leaned into Veronica. “Once again, find your own man, slut. If you see my man walking in your direction walk the other way. Or next time, it will be my three-inch stiletto on your throat.”

“I was fucked up the night of the Halloween party. Better believe I wasn’t in my right mind if I was flirting with you.” Tate pulled me into his arms. “We’re out.”

I sighed as we slid across the back seat of the Maybach.

Matt and Megan disappeared upstairs. Tate said he’d send the chauffeur back to pick them up.

Leaning against the door, my feet rested in Tate’s lap. “Babe, I hate I can’t tell her the

truth.”

“Me too. Relax, Chelsea.”

My eyelids hooded as he cradled one of my feet, pressing his thumbs into the center of my throbbing skin. “That feels so good, Tate. ”

He slid closer. His tongue stroked my neck. “In a moment, I have something else that will make you feel better.”

“Is it long and thick?” I purred

“You bet your sexy ass it is.”

TATE TOSSED ME ON THE bed the second we were through the suite doors.

Not sure how I forgot but the guy who kissed me came flooding back to memory.

My eyes widened. “Shit.”

Tate stood at the foot of the bed shedding his clothes.

His brows bunched together. “What’s wrong?”

“Tate try not to get upset.” I swallowed hard.

The bed dipped as he kneeled beside me. “What now?” Tate tugged my dress over my head.

“Well, once you and your friends were across the room talking. A guy sent me a drink.”

He tossed my dress in the chair across the room. “Did you take the drink?”

“No.”

“Good, only accept drinks from Matt, Stephen, and your geek pack.”

I shoved my fist against his muscled chest. Fuck, so sexy .

“What about Kyle?”

“The jury is still out on him. We may have lost him to Mason. What else?”

“Later he appeared as you were walking out of the door with Veronica. We danced.”

Tate sank against the headboard, seething in only his red boxers.

“He called you a jerk.”

Tate’s eyes darkened.

“And he kissed me.”

He sat straight up. “What?”

I tried pushing him off of me.

“What is his name, Chelsea?”

“I don’t know. He never told me. Trust me, I asked. After the kiss he disappeared.”

“I told him to leave me alone.”

He pulled me into his arms. “Baby, I believe you. And I will find that fucker. Tried to steal my girl.” His lips crushed mine.

I caressed his cheek. “I’m all yours, Tate.”

“Happy New Year, Chelsea. Can’t believe I was in a dungeon for weeks. Now I’m home with my woman.”

He held me tight. “It feels so good to be back in your arms.”

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 8:12 am

“Good morning, Tate.” Dad’s deep voice filled the kitchen, as he poured the twins each a glass of orange juice.

I glanced over my shoulder and flashed a warm smile. He made it. I told him to come inside once he arrived.

“Good morning, Mr. Culver.”

Tate strolled toward me. His lips pressed against my hair. He greeted the twins.

Tate was back. I bit into a strip of bacon. It was so surreal we were returning to school after the hell we’d gone through toward the end of the year.

“Are you ready to return to school?” Tate grinned.

“Yeah. I’m eager to play basketball if nothing else.” He nabbed a strip of bacon off of my plate.

“We’ll attend a few of your games to show support.” Dad’s heavy hand landed on his shoulder.

“Thanks.”

Dad pointed to the empty chair beside me. “Have a seat. ”

“Unfortunately, I can’t. We need to get to school.”

I bounced out of my seat. “Bye, Dad. I will text mom to tell her happy birthday the second I am in the car.”

He smiled. “Good.”

I kissed the twins. “See you two later.”

“Bye,” they chimed at the same time.

I wrapped several pieces of bacon in paper towel and darted out the door with Tate.

He was brooding more than usual as we walked toward the truck.

I turned to him. “Tate, we’ll get through today together.”

His turbulent blue eyes worried me. Tate opened the passenger door, and I slid inside. He climbed behind the wheel and drove out of the driveway. We chowed down on the bacon. I was convinced we equally loved the special pork goodness.

“Do you have practice after school?”

“Yeah, if you can’t stay take the truck. I’ll catch a ride to your house later with Matt.”

“Ok.”

“Whoa, what about me?”

Tate’s eyes widened and he had a death grip on the steering wheel.

I glared through the rearview mirror. “What the hell?” I shrilled .

The guy sprung up off the seat and whipped his fingers through his brown locks.

“Shit, you were so quiet I forgot you were back there.”

“Sorry, Chelse. This is my cousin, Lake. He’s transferring to Haven Saints.”

His lips tipped up at one end. “How are you doing, sweetheart?” He braced his arms against the front seats staring at me.

“You have got to be kidding.” I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Babe, what’s wrong?” Concern loomed Tate’s handsome features.

“He kissed me at the party.”

“What the fuck?” He was darn near foaming at the mouth.

Tate jerked the truck over to the side of the road. “Get the fuck out, Lake,” he growled.

Lake slouched into the plush leather. “I was just having a little fun.”

Tate leaned over the seat, gripping his uniform shirt. “Don’t come here stirring up trouble.”

“Hey, man. Not like you invited me to that ritzy party. So I borrowed one of granddad’s cars and followed you guys.”

“You’re fifteen, Lake. ”

“Dude, in Chicago I bet I partied harder than you.” Tate socked him in the stomach.

“Ah,” he groaned.

“Don’t touch my girl again,” Tate warned.

“Noted. Chelsea’s off limits. Any hot girls that look like her attend Haven Saints?”

Tate reclined back in his chair. “Lake, you are going to give me gray hair at seventeen.”

I chuckled under my breath.

“Oh, you find that funny.”

I squeezed my fingers a hair apart.

“Just a little.” I peeked at Lake.

“You could have just introduced yourself. We would’ve been happy to hang out with you.”

“Of course, you would’ve. I’m Tate’s charity case cousin.”

Tate shook his head. “Don’t mind him. He’s having a rough time. You can hang out with us. Be sure to sign up for Lacrosse. You are damn near a fucking pro after all.”

“Yeah, sounds good.”

“In the meantime. I can ask coach to add you to the basketball team. You might sit on the bench a lot since we’re mid-season, but I can get you some play time on the court.”

Tate pulled into the flow of traffic.

“Thanks, Tate.”

“What brings you to Atlanta?”

“Mom and dad calling it quits. We arrived a few days after Christmas. Just me and mom. My sister Francesca didn’t want to leave dad. Mom followed some lame dude to Georgia.”

“Part owner of Atlanta professional football team. Dudes not a lame.” Tate grinned, rolling to a stop in his parking space.

“My parents were cheating on each other.”

We climbed out of the truck.

“My father plays pro basketball in Chicago.”

“Sorry to hear about your parents, Lake.” Tate gripped my waist as we strolled into the school.

“Thanks.”

“The office is down the hall to your right. Our lockers are on the second floor on the senior hall. We’ll talk to coach this afternoon.”

Lake walked backwards down the hall. “All right.” He saluted Tate and blew me a kiss.

Tate lunged toward him. I grabbed his arm. “He’s just acting out.”

“That’s all right. I will catch his ass later tonight,” he snickered .

“This weekend I’d like you to have dinner with us at my grandparents. My mom keeps asking me to come home. Not happening.”

“She misses you so much. Melissa cries on my mom’s shoulder every day.”

We halted at my locker. I cupped his face. “She loves both of her sons. You can at least spend time with her.”

He sighed. “She can come to her parents’ house and see me.”

“Tate.” I kissed his lips.

“Chelse, you are trying to break me down with those irresistible blue eyes.” He dropped his head against mine.

“I’ll stop by tonight.”

“That’s my big man.” Tate’s nose nestled in the crook of my neck.

Someone pounded on the locker next to my head. I jolted out of Tate’s grasp.

“What the fuck, Mason?” Tate stepped toe to toe with him.

Marisa grinned, clutching her books against her chest.

“What the fuck are you smiling at? Pregnancy Barbie.” My lips tipped up at one end.

“Fuck you, outcast Barbie. You are still a minute, insignificant twit. ”

“Says the chick who’s knocked up by the evil spawn.”

She rolled her eyes and tossed her perfect blonde hair over her shoulder. “Mason, this was a total waste of time.”

“Marisa, sweetheart, chill.” He wrapped his arm around her shoulder, pulling her into his side.

Loud chatter quickly surrounded us as the students filled the hall. We arrived early so we beat the rush. We had to keep our voices down. Didn’t want to draw attention to ourselves.

“Mom, requested we sit down as a family for dinner Sunday.”

Tate’s jaw ticked. “Not on your fucking life.” He peeked around the hall. “Keeping up this farce of us being tight when you know damn well, we are anything but. You’re a piece of shit, Mason,” he growled in a low whisper.

“You’re my brother by blood and we unfucking fortunately share the same handsome mug. Matt is more my brother than you.”

Tate rubbed my shoulder. “Baby, grab your books, I’ll walk you to class.” He never took his eyes off his brother. “Don’t talk to Chelsea. My woman is off limits.”

Tate leaned down and kissed my lips in front of his brother. I’d say he was trying to piss him off.

Mason’s blue eyes darkened. It worked.

“Chelsea’s my woman, motherfucker.”

Mason's fist curled at his side.

"Let's go." I tugged his blazer.

Tate was drawing unwanted attention to us. We had to come up with a plan and figure out what to do about Mason and Marisa. We had to coexist every day until the end of May.

He threaded our fingers and stalked down the hall.

"Tate, why are we covering for them? And slow down. I can't walk that fast in these heels."

"Shit, sorry, babe." His stride turned into a stroll.

Students walked around us, never forgetting to wave at King Tate. He ignored them.

He slipped his fingers through his dark curly locks. Since he returned, he kept his hair longer. Giving him a distinctive look. I wanted to skip first period and fuck his brains out.

Tate pulled me into his arms and leaned into my ear. "My parents asked us to play nice. Said we needed to keep a united front."

My hands splayed his chest.

"Dad's trying to rebuild the company. In London the guests saw Mason and I face off. That's all. They didn't witness what happened to my grandfather. No one knows how he took advantage of Mason. So we are pretending to love each other."

"And what is the story? How is Mason alive?"

“Class, baby. We’ll discuss later. This isn’t the place.”

I stepped back. “You’re right.”

He swept his hands over his navy blazer. “The vultures here will grill you about Mason. I can’t afford to miss class, but I’ll meet you outside third period. Text me your new class schedule.”

“Ok.” He kissed my temple and walked in the opposite direction.

Two starry eyed bimbos smiled and waved as they crossed my boyfriend’s path. “Hi, Tate,” the blondes said in unison.

He continued on his path. They whispered and snickered as they walked past me.

Bitches.

Oh, this would turn out to be one hell of a second semester.

?

First period, Brittany attempted to gain my attention. I lied to Mr. Barrings. Told him I was having difficulty seeing the board. He allowed me to move to the front of the class.

Second period I wasn’t so lucky.

Clarita Tanner whispered over my shoulder almost the entire period. Grilling me about Mason and Tate. Was Mason really in London all this time? Who knew he was alive? How is Marisa his girlfriend? Had he changed?

I wanted to laugh at the last question. ‘Had he changed?’ Mason became a bigger narcissist. He wanted to control everyone in his life. He yearned for power. I bet he still does. Tate’s been the man at Haven Saints for almost four years. Not sure if Mason attended high school or was home schooled. Either way he’d adjust. Tate immortalized him. In Haven Saints eyes Mason’s already a God. Now that he returned from the dead, he’d become the most popular guy in school. I was sure it was just what Mason wanted.

The bell rang, I stood and smiled. “See you later, Clarita.”

Her mouth dropped open. I turned on my heels and sashayed toward the door.

“Wait.” I heard from behind.

“You said nothing. You have to tell me...”

Tate leaned with one foot braced against the locker across the hall. My tongue slid across my bottom lip. He was the star of the biggest cologne commercial in my mind. Obviously, every girl in passing felt the same. They gawked, pulled their lower lip into their mouths and went bat shit crazy over my man. I was convinced he had no idea the effect he had on the girls at Haven Saints High.

“He’s beautiful,” Clarita moaned.

I faced her and walked backwards until Tate’s hand snaked around my tummy. He sucked on the side of my neck. My core heated to a thousand degrees.

“Clarita, I’ve answered all of your questions.”

“But you didn’t say...”

Tate halted his movements and rested his chin on my shoulder.

“Clarita, what did you ask, Chelse?”

Her knees clamped together, and she spun a finger in her black ponytail. She stared at Tate. Who she obviously had a crush on.

This had to be the first time he’d ever spoken to her.

“Um, never mind.”

Tate stood to his full height. “See you around, Clarita.”

We left her standing there.

“She only asked too many questions about your brother.”

He massaged my neck with one hand. “We need to meet Jack and Jill and create a story that’s acceptable. And stick to it. ”

I laughed. “Your brother and Marisa are more like dark Jack and Jill.”

A deep chuckle released from his throat. “So true.”

“Tate, I love your hair.” A long-legged chick strolled up to him as if I wasn’t in his grasp. Literally.

We halted.

“Not sure what’s your deal. Don’t disrespect my woman,” he growled.

She tapped her cell screen and turned it toward Tate.

“I bet you taste amazing.” His lips caressed her stomach in the video. “Sorry sweetheart, I have to leave. My girlfriend will flip if I don’t see her today.”

He stood. “Rain check?”

“Absolutely.” She tapped the screen again, pausing the video. “So I’m ready to hook up.”

Tears threatened the backs of my eyes. I knew that wasn’t Tate. But it still hurt. Mason’s mission was to destroy me and Tate. I knew he was lurking in the shadows loving every minute of this spectacle.

“That ship has sailed. I don’t want to see your face again.”

Tears rolled down her rosy cheeks.

Tate’s thumb stroked my neck as we continued on. I peeked over my shoulder. She stood in the middle of the hallway broken.

“He’s making it impossible, Tate. I think he bugged your house and I know he placed a camera in my theater room.”

I swallowed hard. “And possibly the lake house. He’s probably watched us have sex.”

We halted outside my class. The bell rang, and the halls became desolate. His eyes darted to my hand on my arm. I didn’t realize I was clawing at my skin.

“Shit.” His eyes softened. He grabbed my arm, pulling it between us. Tate peeled back my sleeve and his lips melted against my cuts. My body tingled all over.

“Baby, I apologize for this shit.”

Tears burst forth, streaming down my cheeks. Mason knew what he’d done. Not sure he realized how strong our bond was. He swept his lips along my cuts, holding my gaze. His soft touch set every nerve ending on fire.

“What do you want to do? Stay or go?” His voice was groggy.

I swiped at the tears. “Stay.”

He nodded and pulled me into his arms. “He’ll pay for this somehow.”

“See you at lunch, Tate.” I didn’t meet his gaze before entering my class. How could I? I was aware it wasn’t Tate’s fault. Yet the image of my boyfriend kissing another girl made my heart ice cold.

“Fuck,” Tate roared, followed by a loud bang against the lockers. I almost jumped out of my skin.

Wide-eyed stares moved with me to my seat.

“I’ll let you off with a warning, Ms. Culver. Next time it’s detention.”

“Understood, Ms. Hanson.” I plopped in my seat and retrieved my notebook and fluffy pen from my backpack.

“Is everything all right?” she whispered with a snarky bite.

Just the bitch I didn’t want to hear from right now. Dark Jill. I dug my nails deep into my palms hoping to break the skin. Chelsea you’re stronger now. Don’t let them break you.

“What’s the matter, Chelsea? Your boyfriend’s a bit of a whore.” She dragged out the last word in a snarky tone.

It was a statement not a question. How did I think for one minute they’d be civil upon returning to the states? My boyfriend and I had fought them.

I sat straight up asserting all the confidence I could muster. Tate made Mason look deplorable in their parents’ eyes.

Dinging and buzzing echoed throughout the room.

Ms. Hanson’s eyes narrowed. “Don’t you dare peek at one cell phone screen. ”

“You don’t have to wave your hand so hard, Marisa. I see you. What’s your question?”

“Today will we discuss the statistics of teen pregnancy in America?”

Ms. Hanson smiled. “Someone has read her text book.”

“More like lived it,” I stated under my breath curtly.

Oh’s and Ah’s fell around the room. It was an inside joke for now. I’d out that bitch for sure soon.

Ms. Hanson turned, writing stats on the board.

Students couldn’t wait to gawk at their cell screens. They whispered and pointed at me.

A gentle hand clasped my shoulder as she slid her cell into my line of sight. “You,

poor girl,” Marisa’s crony Catherine whined to my right.

There were several videos of Tate making out with girls on social media.

My head snapped to the right. “Fuck you and your fake sympathy. I might not be able to beat dark Jill’s ass.” I glanced at Marisa. “But I can definitely beat yours,” I snarled.

I gripped the wooden chair as I glared into Marisa’s eyes. “It may appear my man is cheating.” I tapped my chin. “But who’s man really was?”

Her porcelain face reddened and with a blink of an eye she had a death grip on my hair .

“I loathe you.” Her sinister eyes glassed over.

A deep dark chuckle released from my throat. I reached over and pinched her nipple. She screeched, releasing my hair at the same time.

“What is going on here?” Ms. Hanson stalked over, yanking me out of my chair by my arm. “To the principal’s office immediately.”

I snatched up my belongings. “Go to hell. All of you,” I shouted, storming out of the class.

Laughter erupted to my left. “This is the perfect first day of school at Haven Saints High.”

I ran at top speed, then pounded my fists into his broad chest.

“This is so cute. Love taps.”

“Mason, you sick son of a bitch.” I staggered back, pointing my finger.

“I hate you,” I roared from the depths of my belly.

My legs gave out, and I was on my knees before I knew it. “All because I chose your brother. The sane twin. The one who would have rotted in a dungeon for doing the right thing for me.”

Tears clouded my view. “You wish I would have given myself to you. Now you’re trying to push me over the edge. I know you watched me and Tate. So you know about my problem with razors. You want me to unravel and slit my wrists again.” I scratched at my arms.

Finding strength deep down I rose. “Guess again.” I trekked toward him.

“I will not allow you to take...my...power,” I growled through gritted teeth.

Arms wrapped around me from behind. “Doll, let’s get you out of here.” I fell back into him, clawing at his chest.

“Matt, I don’t understand. What did I do wrong?”

He scooped me up into his arms. I wrapped my arms around his neck, sobbing into the crease of his neck. His heartbeat pounded against me.

“It will be ok.” His deep vocals vibrated through my body. Matt burst through the school doors. He opened a vehicle door and laid me across the plush leather seat. Mentally I shut down. I didn’t remember the car pulling away from the curb. Lights out.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 8:12 am

Slowly my eyes opened. My favorite woodsy scent crept up my nostrils. Butterflies fluttered in the pit of my stomach. “Where am I?”

His teeth clenched my earlobe. A direct signal shot to my clit. “Oh.”

I circled my ass against his hard cock.

His fingers slipped inside my panties, rounding my clit. My pussy pulsed against his fingers.

“Oh, shit.”

“That’s right, baby. I want you to come.” His tongue trailed along my neck. “Come, so hard in my mouth.”

He laid me flush against the bed. He lifted the T-shirt, he obviously dressed me in. Problem was whenever I wore one of his T-shirts, he was only tempted to peel it off of my body again. He sucked my nipple into his mouth as his thumb circled my nub.

“You’re so wet.”

As crazy as it was, I couldn’t look into his face. Not at that moment. I could barely stand his voice. But I needed him. I needed my boyfriend. The man who wouldn’t betray me. The man I rescued from the bowels of hell.

He slid my panties down my legs and tossed them aside. Spreading my legs, he whispered something to himself. Then his lips sank into my pussy.

My eyelids slammed shut and a pleasurable moan escaped my lips.

“I can’t ever let you go.”

My legs shut around his head and my eyes popped open. I tugged and massaged his scalp desperate to feel his smooth skin under my touch.

He pounded his fist against the bed. “Fuck! Look what’s become of us.”

He grabbed my hand and his lips melted against my palm. His empty deep blue eyes stared into mine.

“Tate.” I cried.

“Yes, baby it’s me.” He turned away hiding his sadness. Tate wasted no time sucking my clit into his mouth. My back arched off the bed as my fingers tangled in his curly hair. The orgasm heightened the faster he flicked his tongue. Shivers shot through my body. He didn’t let up. He constantly attacked my clit with his tongue. Waves of euphoric eruptions swept over my skin. Tate massaged my hips, and the tingles subsided.

“I love you so much. ”

“Chelsea, I love you too.”

I took in his new bedroom and exhaled. We were alone. No one watching us. It was just me and the man I loved.

“Chelsea, I’ll do whatever I can to keep us together.”

“You can’t. Come here.”

His head snapped up. “What?” Confusion flashed in his eyes.

My toes shoved his shorts down his ass and legs. “Make love to me.”

He kicked off his shorts. Gripping my thigh, Tate slid inside my warmth.

His glistening face came into view as he hovered over me. I crushed his lips.

“Chelsea, we’ll leave Haven River.”

I clenched his ass pushing him deeper inside me.

“Shush, don’t stop.”

Tate flipped me over on all fours. He pulled my ass toward him and slipped inside me again.

“I am not giving you up.” He fisted my hair and pounded into me. Tate bit down on my neck.

“You want me to walk away from you. Fuck, no,” he growled.

I slammed back against him, meeting his rhythm. Tate clutched my breasts. Our lips tangled hungrily. He circled inside me and I fell apart in his arms. Another orgasm tore through me breaking me into pieces. Tate stilled and exploded inside me.

“You’re mine,” he roared. Chest heaving, he held my body flush against him. He fell on the bed and pulled me onto his chest.

“Chelsea, we’ll figure it out.”

“Tate, we have to pretend to break up.”

He peeked at me under his wrinkled brows. “Go on.”

“At school we won’t be a couple.”

“Ok.” His eyes narrowed.

“But we can’t really be a couple away from school either. Yet we’ll still be a couple.”

He shook his head.

“Tate, we know we aren’t breaking up even if we do have to see other people.”

“Fuck, that,” he spat.

“I’m not letting you date another guy.”

“Tate, you don’t have a choice. If we break up at least it will allow all this shit to blow over.”

“There’s no way I’m kissing another chick and you are not kissing another guy.”

“But I already have. What if Lake pretends to be my boyfriend?”

“No,” he scowled .

“Or I can link up with some other guy who wouldn’t know we were in a fake relationship and would expect more.”

Tate squeezed his eyes with two fingers. “Fine fake relationship it is. Because I doubt

you want me going to jail for beating the shit out of some guy for kissing my woman.”

I pressed my lips against his chest. “No, I don’t.”

“You will date other females.”

“Nope, I’m not doing that.”

“Tate, invite them to sit at your lunch table and to your games.”

He caressed my face. “I need you at my games.”

“I’ll be there cheering you and Lake on.” My lips crushed his.

“That works. And how will I see you?”

“We’ll need a new place to meet.”

“My grandparents have properties all over the city. I will tell my granddad what’s up with Mason and me.”

“Has he seen him?”

“Yeah, he went to visit him at my parents. He understood I didn’t want him here. But if we fake break up, Mason will definitely start popping up to see if you are here.”

“And planting cameras. ”

“There have been only three places we’ve been really alone together. The hotel in London, the hotel on New Year’s, and here.”

He cupped my face. “I promise I will find another place for us to be alone together. Even if I have to tap into my trust fund from the Hughes, because I’m sure my Forrester trust fund is null and void. I will not allow them to take you from me.”

Tears escaped my eyes. “I hate that we can’t be happy. All because of your evil twin and his twisted woman. What kind of girl is ok with her man sleeping with other women to seek revenge? That’s just weird.”

“They’re both nuts.”

“Tate, I’m starving.”

“I’ll be right back.” He climbed into his shorts and darted out of the room.

How long had I been here? I grabbed my cell off the nightstand. My dad called twice, and I had several texts from my friends. I gripped my hair. Shit. My meltdown was all over social media.

I swallowed hard, then called my dad.

“Where the hell are you, Chelsea?”

“With Tate.”

“How could you get in another fight with Marisa?”

“But I didn’t... ”

“You’re the one who’s expelled. Get home now.”

“Yes, Dad.” I ended the call.

Tate placed two plates on the desk across the room. I turned and screamed into the pillow. The bed dipped.

“What happened?” His hand swayed my back.

I peeked up at him. “I’ve been expelled. That bitch pulled my hair, all I did was twist her nipple, so she’d release my hair.”

Tate chuckled.

“What else could I do? She is after all carrying a baby.”

“Come on and eat.”

“My dad ordered me home.”

Tate sat me on his lap and placed a potato chip in my mouth. “I wish we didn’t have to leave. But I probably should pick up Lake your new boyfriend.”

I threw my head back in laughter.

“I’ll take you home after I make love to you a second and a third time.” Tate pecked my lips.

“Not sure when we’ll be together again.” He dropped his forehead against mine.

I caressed his face. “You know we have to break up tonight?”

“Yeah,” he sighed.

?

I laid on the sofa staring at my father's lips. They moved a hundred miles a minute. He gestured several times to the house across the street. Not sure why. Mom, already called on her break between surgeries tearing me a new asshole. I think it was obvious I'd never been kicked out of school before.

"God, Dad. What was I supposed to do not defend myself? Then I exited the classroom and who was waiting for me? Mason." I sat on the edge of the sofa.

"He's evil. He wants me to be a broken shell. It won't happen."

Dad slipped his fingers through his blond hair and sat beside me. "I am proud of you for sticking up for yourself. Do you want to complete the semester in Texas?"

My eyes widened. "No." Tate would surely lose it if I moved out of state without him. The plan was for us to move together.

The doorbell chimed.

My heart plummeted to my feet. "I'll get it."

Tate and I were settling into our lives again and now we had to break up. I felt sick to my stomach. Grabbing the door knob, I swung the door open. "Come in, Tate."

"What was so urgent that I had to rush right over?"

He closed the door behind him and stalked toward me.

"Tate, we're over. "

He chuckled. "No, we're not. We were just together earlier. What happened?"

“All those pictures of you hooking up with other girls. We haven’t even been home a month, Tate.” I cried.

“What the hell,” dad roared from behind.

He darted past me. “Get out, Tate.”

“Sir, I did nothing wrong.” He widened his arms.

“I haven’t been with another girl.”

“Tate, there’s proof. Just go. I never want to see you again.” My fists slammed into his broad chest.

He caressed my arm. “Can we talk?”

I backed away toward the living room.

“There’s nothing to talk about.” I motioned with my hands behind dad’s back. What was Tate doing? He needed to be a little more convincing.

“Tate, I trusted you with my daughter. I just knew you would never hurt her. How could you break her heart?”

“Dad, this is between me and Tate. I have it handled. He’s leaving.”

“You know what? Good riddance. You’re high maintenance.” He rolled his eyes.

I wanted to laugh. Now he was just being lazy with our break up theatrics.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Culver, you’ll never see me again.”

Tate swung the door open and stormed out .

“That’s right. I never want to see your sorry ass again,” Dad roared, then slammed the door.

I crossed my arms over my chest. “Dad, I could break up with my boyfriend just fine.”

“You two suck at a fake break up. I had to make it look convincing.”

My hand flew over my mouth to hide the laughter. “I’m turning in.”

“What are you two up to?”

“Dad, I haven’t the foggiest idea what you are talking about.”

“Yeah, right? The last time you two really called it quits he was ready to fight me over you. Tate loves you. He wouldn’t jeopardize his future with you.”

“Dad, you can’t tell Mom. If you do...”

“She’ll tell Melissa. I’m aware. Do a better job at school pretending to be upset. Stay away from each other.”

I leaned on my tippy toes and kissed his cheek. “Will do. Thanks, Dad.”

I LAID ACROSS MY RED bedspread, staring at Tate.

“You know this shit sucks. We’re limited to FaceTime every day. I can’t even see you in the hallway because you’re expelled. ”

“At least we can see each other. My dad wanted to talk principal Wade out of my week long suspension. I told him don’t bother. Maybe all the chatter would have died down by the time I return to school.”

“I don’t know, babe. I think they are waiting for your return. You’ve announced on social media you’re single. Which I hate, by the way. Not sure that asshole couple will buy our break up.”

“I doubt they will either. But we have to try. This is more so for the girls bidding for your affection. I want the videos to stop. Remember when I return to school, you’ll need to invite girls to sit with you at lunch.”

He slipped his fingers through his hair. “I really don’t want to do that. All I want to do is crush those lips. How about I come over? You can let me in the back door.”

“Dad said we suck at fake break ups and we need to do a better job pretending to hate each other.”

“You’d think we’d be better at faking to hate each other seeing as though we did.”

“It’s hard to fake hate someone you love.”

“You’re right. I need to hold you.”

“Tate, it’s Friday night. I’m sure there’s a party you are supposed to attend. ”

The sexiest smile lit his lips. “Three to be exact. But I’m not going. Meet me at the diner. Wear a baseball cap. I’ll wait for you in a back booth under the name Gramm.”

“Tate, we shouldn’t.”

“I haven’t touched you since Monday. If it wasn’t for FaceTime, I’d be climbing the walls of your house.”

I threw my hand over my face and laughed. “Tate, you’re so romantic.”

“No, baby, I’m not. I need to be. When this shit is over you and I will frequent ritzy restaurants. Now get a move on. I’ll see you in forty-five minutes.”

I waved goodbye before tossing my cell on the bed.

My week was spent studying. The mountain of homework was outrageous. Dad emailed all my teachers requesting extra credit assignments. He wanted to ensure my focus was on my studies. I’d like to think my parents believed I wouldn’t cut myself while I was alone. But deep down I think they were still afraid all the pressure I was under would make me crack. Dad worked from home Tuesday and Wednesday. Mom moved her appointments to Friday so she could stay home Thursday. I hadn’t seen my mother much, so it was a real treat. Today was the first day I was home alone.

The gold Bentley screamed follow me, so I drove the Yukon to the diner. Hm, maybe I should drive the truck next week and park in the back lot. Bet I’d walk into school undetected.

I didn’t wait to be seated. There was only one big booth in the very back. I’d eaten at the diner enough to know where Tate was sitting.

I slid into the booth. “Hey,” I whispered.

His big blue eyes smiled from underneath his favorite team’s cap. “So good to see that beautiful face in person.”

My skin heated. I missed him so much. He locked our fingers, and we scanned the

menu.

“Matt said you could probably use your connections to try out for football teams.”

“Yeah, Uncle Lake Sr. knows the owner of my favorite team and a few other important coaches in the league. I’ll try out in April.”

I threw my arms around his neck. “I am so proud of you.”

“I want you there.”

Pulling back, my fingers slipped over his cheek. “Of course, I’ll be there.”

We placed our order with the waitress. She returned with our drinks a short time later.

“I’d been meaning to tell you about Kyle. ”

He sighed as his head thudded the wall. “Rocco told me a few days ago.”

“I can’t believe he knew Mason was alive too.”

“It makes sense now that I think back. He hated we were together. Stephen didn’t give a shit. But Kyle grilled you that night at his party.”

“Yeah. Did you tell him?”

“Nope. I might be able to use the knowledge to my advantage. He doesn’t sit with us anymore. Mason has his own table.”

“Good.”

“That reminds me. My granddad Harlon said I can use one of his condo’s up the street until the end of the school year.”

I looped my arm around his. “Yes.” I sipped my cola.

“Did your granddad Harlon ever ask you to work at his company?”

“He said I could if I wanted too. He also deposited money into my account. My granddad said he always had a bad feeling about grandfather Douglas. He said he had no idea he’d go to such lengths to force my hand into running the Forresters empire.” Tate shook his head. Besides, I much rather work in real estate. ”

The waitress returned and placed our orders before us. We expressed our appreciation, then returned to our conversation.

My hat tipped up as I nuzzled his neck. “So good to have you home.”

“Baby, it feels good to be home in a real bed. The Hughes estate is lavish, but I’d rather live at home with my parents. Not to mention sleep in my bedroom.”

“Tate, maybe you should go home. Or visit on the weekends.”

“I think you’re right. I’ll visit on the weekends for now. If I can tolerate Mason then I’ll return home full time.” He bit into his cheeseburger.

“It’s hard to believe he was living in London for four years. You were the only kid living in your parents’ house now your brother has returned. What is that like?” I slid a forkful of chicken fettuccine into my mouth.

“Sitting in that conference room and in walks Mason. I couldn’t believe it. How was he alive? His need to seek revenge seeped from his bones. His evil stare penetrated

my soul. It was enough to make me want to rip his head off. All he wanted was you.”

A chill swept up my spine as I remembered how he tried to pretend to be Tate.

“He couldn’t wait to lock me away. Mason wanted my girl and to ruin my life,” he stated through gritted teeth.

“Do you think he’ll ever change?”

“I don’t know. The second grandfather died, I thought Mason would snap out of it. See that he could become himself again. The revenge shit’s still at the forefront of his mind.”

“Believe it or not he loves Marisa. The way they stare into each other’s eyes...it’s almost like they feed off the other. One thing is for sure, he can do no wrong in her eyes.” I swiped a fry off Tate’s plate.

“Mason thought your family forgot about him. He didn’t know about the holiday candle y’all lit for him every year. For a millisecond, he wanted to do good. I was thankful he put your grandfather in his place. He pulled him off of me. Told him he wouldn’t allow him to abuse me. He grabbed him up by his shirt. Said he knew how he felt about Marisa but he was agreeing to marry me. After Mason carried me out of the office, I tried using his moment of clarity to free you. No such luck.” I shook my head.

“After Matt and I rescued you his hate for you returned. Outweighing anything else.”

Tate gripped my neck, staring into my eyes. He swallowed hard. “I hate I wasn’t able to put him down before he laid a hand on you.”

I rubbed my cheek along his hand. “I love that we’re in our special place.” I peeked

up. “The mood lighting is always perfect.”

“Yeah, it is.” He breathlessly took my lips.

I shoved my tongue into his mouth. Tate wasted no time tangling our tongues.

“We have to stop.” I broke our kiss. My head rested on his chest.

“Asshole Tate needs to be present Monday.”

He sighed. “Fine.”

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 8:12 am

“Chelsea.” Megan and Connie waved me down from the back door as I climbed out of the truck.

“Can’t believe you parked back here.” Megan shook her head.

I strutted toward them.

“Princess Megan, we know you never would,” I snickered looping my arm through hers.

“Megan, you know she’s right. You love parking amongst the row of Bentleys. I’m with Chelsea. The back lot is low on the radar.”

“Well, you two bitches go right ahead and park in the teachers' lot.”

“Megan, that is an overflow lot for students.” I shook my head, laughing.

“Once again you two can have it. I’ll remain on Bentley row waiting for you to reclaim your spot.”

We turned down the long hall on the second floor blending in with a sea of seniors .

“How are you doing? I can’t believe you and Tate called it quits a week ago.” Connie’s eyes were glued to my side profile.

“I can’t shed another tear for him.” Connie and Trevor had no idea Tate was locked up in London while Mason ran around Haven River wreaking havoc. Megan barely

said a word because she knew if I broke up with Tate over all the chicks it wasn't real. Which meant Matt didn't believe it either. Surprised Matt hadn't called Tate out about it.

"Don't look now. Tate's surrounded by girls across the way." Megan arched a brow at me.

His hair was combed and moussed perfectly to the back. Those heart stopping blue eyes met mine. Friday and Saturday night, he insisted on sleeping over. He parked one of his granddad's cars in our six-car garage. I didn't want to be separated from Tate. My body turned toward him. Megan gripped my arm. "No. Follow through," she whispered in my ear.

"Don't let him weaken you, Chelse." Connie yanked my arm in the other direction.

"Thanks, guys." I opened my locker.

"I'm down for a little fun," Tate blurted out .

"Not feeling any girls with dark hair. Just blondes. You know what they say blonde girls are freakier," Tate chuckled in the distance.

My fist slammed on a text book inside my locker.

"We'll walk you to class, Chelsea." Megan leaned her head against the locker.

"No need, ladies." We turned to the deep silky voice.

My brows dipped. "Lake, what happened to your lip?"

"Family squabble. Nothing more. I'll gladly fight for your honor, Chelsea." He

cocked a grin.

I tugged his lapels and kissed his cheek. “That’s so sweet.”

I closed my locker. “Well, girls I guess I’ll see y’all at lunch.”

Connie clapped. “Way to go, Chelse.”

I looped my arm around Lake’s. Tate stood at his locker; arms draped over two blonde chicks’ shoulders. His jaw twitched and his eyes narrowed. “What the fuck are you looking at, Lake?”

We turned in the opposite direction.

“My cousin has anger issues. Tell him to chill, would you?”

“Yes, I will. Sorry, Lake. Hey have you seen Matt?”

“No, he hadn’t been to the house.”

“That’s strange. I’ll have to call him.” I glimpsed at Lake .

“You probably shouldn’t help me. I don’t want Tate to keep taking his frustrations out on you.”

He smirked. “I can handle my cousin. He loves you, a lot though.”

I smiled, leaning my head on his shoulder. “I know. I’m a lucky girl.”

“Want to go bowling this weekend?”

“Yeah, sounds like fun. Can I invite my friends?”

“Yup.”

“Slut,” a chick blurted out in passing.

I laughed. “That’s perfect. I’m the slut for moving on. But he isn’t. He’s slept with almost every girl in this school you know,” I yelled.

Lakes gray eyes widened. “Don’t let them get to you.”

I slipped my fingers through my long dark locks. “You’re right. See you later.”

First hour, I kept my head down and listened to the lecture. Second hour and third hour were comical. Girls were happy to spread rumors about hooking up with Tate this past weekend. I chuckled inside because I knew he was with me. Marisa’s stone-cold gaze never left the front of the classroom. I peeked at her from my new seat next to the window. Slapping her across her face wouldn’t hurt the baby, right? No Chelsea, keep your distance.

Lunch was painful. Tate sat with a blonde on each side at his table. I had to tough it out. If I were to leave, he’d check on me. I glanced across the lunchroom at Mason’s table. It was like a team divided. Half the football and basketball team sat with Mason and the other half sat with Tate. Not sure why no one gossiped about how Tate and Mason never said more than two words to each other. After the shit Mason and Marisa pulled after Christmas break, Tate and I decided against having a conversation with them right now. We had to strategize.

I peeked at my cell. Matt hadn’t called or texted me back. Shit. I lowered my head before stalking across the lunch room.

“Marisa.”

Her lip ticked up in irritation. “What bumpkin?”

“Where’s Matt?”

She laughed. “Do I look like I keep tabs on him?”

Mason chuckled.

“Don’t.” My eyes narrowed.

I shouldn’t be over here. Tate’s eyes were burning a hole in my back. I could feel him.

“Can you not be a bitch for once? Was Matt at home this morning? ”

She stared me up and down. “Wait, now that you aren’t with precious Tate.” She cocked her head to the side.

“Are you fucking my brother now?”

Whispering fell over the table.

Her gray eyes glinted. This was a bad idea. I turned on my heels and stalked back to my table. I rested my hands in my lap, twiddling with my plaid skirt as I sat amongst my friends. Tate met my gaze. I squeezed my eyes shut. Don’t fall under his spell. He’ll have us end the break up right now if I let him.

“Megan, when was the last time you talked to Matt?”

She sipped her orange soda. Her fingers slipped over her brow. “I don’t remember.”

Lies.

The second lunch was over I darted out of the lunchroom. “Chelsea, where are you off to?” Connie yelled.

I peeked over my shoulder. “To class.”

“Are you sure? Isn’t your class the other way?” Trevor pointed over his shoulder.

“I need to ask around about Matt?” I continued down the hall.

“What about Matt, Chelse? ”

Jesus. I squeezed my eyes shut as I froze. What we’d done Friday and Saturday night shot through my brain. It was so good. A tingling sensation swept through my body. I remember he said, “Do you want it harder?”

“Chelsea.” His deep vocals heated my core.

“Um, yeah?”

“Why are you looking for Matt?”

I couldn’t turn and meet his gaze because I’d be tempted to take him to an empty classroom and have my way with my boyfriend.

“I haven’t talked to him. Have you?”

“Not since last week.”

“And you haven’t called him?”

“I have. He hadn’t called back. Sometimes he disappears. You know he does that from time to time.”

“Yeah, ok. I will find him.”

“We will find him. I’ll grab your keys from your locker and I’ll wait for you inside your truck out back,” he whispered.

I nodded.

The faint scent of his cologne lingered after he walked away.

By last period I was ready to claw my eyes out. I’d become the biggest whore in the entire school. I’d now linked up with Matt and Lake. They said Tate dumped me because of my whorish ways . Seriously. The idiots thrived on gossip. I skated out the back door. I knew Tate wouldn’t risk being seen. He probably left before the bell rang.

I climbed into the truck and shut the door. My eyes lingered over my handsome sleeping passenger in the reclined seat. My eyes bulged at his huge boner.

“Don’t stare at it. Rub it.” His eyes popped open.

“Several chicks tried today. Thanks to my girlfriend who said I need to act like an asshole.”

I smiled and gripped his cock. “They’re so excited to be back in your presence. It’s sickening.”

He laughed. "I think you get a kick out of it."

"Hm. A little. A few girls said they were with you this weekend. I chuckled because you were with me."

He clutched my face and sucked my lips into his.

I pulled back a hair. "Tate, we need to find Matt."

"Let's go. I'll give you directions."

Fifteen minutes later, we rolled to a stop outside a large mansion.

"Who lives here?"

"Matt's aunt and uncle."

"Didn't he used to hang at his grandparents too sometimes?"

"Yeah. He goes back and forth. Come on. "

We hopped out and strolled to the front door. Luckily, I kept a pair of sneakers in my backpack. I was tired of the kitten heels.

Tate pounded on the door.

The butler appeared. "May I help you?"

"Yes, we're here for Matt."

He held the door open and stretched his hand. "Come in."

“Matthew, you have guests,” he called out.

“Have a seat in the sitting room. Would you both like a beverage?”

“No thank you.” I sat on the sofa beside Tate.

“Water, please?” Tate stated.

Matt appeared out of thin air. His wild eyes darted between Tate and me.

I ran across the room and threw my arms around his neck. “I’ve been worried sick.”

He didn’t move. “You’ve been worried. Bullshit.”

“Matt, what the hell?” Tate growled.

I stepped back and stared into Matt’s empty red eyes. “Please talk to me. What happened?”

I pulled him onto the sofa between us.

“What happened to me?” He chuckled.

“My sister, Mason, you and Tate.” He dropped his head in his hands .

My heart plummeted to my feet. What did we do? I was afraid to ask.

“Matt, what is it?” I whispered.

He sank into the sofa staring into space. “Marisa told me how she blackmailed our father for Mason and your asshole grandfather. Tate,” he snarled.

Shit. That fucking bitch. Matt believed in love and happily ever afters. Our parents were a rarity in the affluent town of Haven River. All three couples were still happily married. Now he's learned his dad cheated on his mother.

"You two were my friends. I come running the moment you two are in trouble."

I peeked at Tate, then Matt. "We didn't want to break your heart. We figured your father and mother weren't getting a divorce so we left it alone. Marisa set your father up with a woman."

He cut his eyes at me.

I held my hands up like I was pumping the brakes. "I'm not saying it was right. She destroyed her own parents' relationship to keep her and Mason's solid."

"I read in the documents your father and Chelsea's grandfather agreed to payout upon their pregnancies with the heirs. Chelsea told me my grandfather mentioned that tidbit after he choked her about Marisa's part in the blackmail." Tate sipped the water the Butler brought him.

I sighed. "We'll get out of your hair."

I hugged him. "We love you too much to be vindictive. Just protective."

"I thought you two broke up."

He pushed me back and narrowed his eyes between us.

"Tate, you could have come alone."

"Chelsea was so desperate to find you she asked Marisa had she seen you. I'm sure

you could imagine how well that went. I had to help her. Even if she did dump me.”
He quirked a brow.

“Why did you break up with him, Chelse? You know he didn’t fuck any of those girls. Mason was trying to destroy Tate.”

“I know, Matt. The videos and the girls thinking it was my boyfriend they were messing around with...I couldn’t take it anymore. So I let him go, kind of.” My eyebrows wrinkled, and I tugged my hair. “Wait, when did Marisa tell you about your father?”

“Last week.”

I peered at Tate then back at Matt.

“I think, she told you about your father to get back at me and Tate for breaking up. Her and Mason wanted to watch me unravel. You witnessed first-hand how they tried to break me down.” I stood and paced the floor.

“Maybe Marisa wants to make me pay. And Mason wants to make Tate pay. She wants to embarrass me. And Mason wants to take what matters to Tate. So once Tate and I broke up she decided to take the only person who mattered away from us. You.” I stopped and pointed at Matt.

“Oh, how could I forget. Rocco found out Kyle also knew Mason was alive.”

Matt’s eyes darkened. “What the fuck?”

“It makes sense once you think about it. He hated me as much as Marisa and Mason.”

He poked out his bottom lip. “That’s true.”

“Tate doesn’t want to let him know we know. We might be able to use it to our advantage. If you don’t want anything to do with us Matt, we’ll have to understand.” I sat beside him cupping his hands. “We’ve been best friends. All three of us for too long to let those assholes come between us. We love you. If you need to distance yourself from us for a while fine. But we’re friends for life.”

“Matt, you’re like my brother. We’re past best friends. If you let my brother and your sister come between us. Then they won. ”

“They haven’t won shit. I am upset and I’ll need time.” He ran his hands tightly over his head.

“What did you do to Megan? She’s behaving weird.”

“I didn’t do anything to her. She’s not strong enough to be my woman.” He stood and paced.

“We’ve been forbidden to be together. Nothing new. But I expected the way we felt for each other would be enough to tell our fathers to go fuck themselves. But Megan complied. She said she couldn’t disobey her daddy. She was supposed to be mine. And they stole the only woman I ever loved right from my clutches,” he roared. “Excuse me if I’m tired of secretly seeing her only for her to remind me that we can’t ever be a couple. She was here last week, and that’s what happened. I told her what Marisa told me. I told her I needed her. She reminded me we have to move on.” He gripped the back of his neck.

“So see Chelse, you assumed I was the asshole first. Nope, it was your precious Megan. I am free to sleep with as many girls as I want,” he laughed hysterically.

My best friend was losing his grip on reality.

I stood and pulled him into my arms. “We love you. We’re staying right here tonight.” He held me tight .

I closed my eyes. No one knew what it was like better than Tate and me how someone could blatantly standby and destroy your happiness.

“Where’s the theater room, Matt?”

He stepped back. “Come on.”

“Oh, wait. Tate, can you grab my joggers out of my backpack?”

“Yeah.”

I glanced at Matt. “Do you have a T-shirt...”

“What?” Tate’s eyes narrowed.

“You’re not wearing his shirt. I have a change of clothes in my bag. You’ll wear my shirt.” Tate stalked out of the house.

Matt shook his head. “You’ll break him again if you ask him to go along with this false break up too long.”

He nodded toward the hall. I fell beside him.

“I just want to make it to the end of senior year. You can’t think I enjoy sneaking around with my boyfriend. Especially after we worked so hard to rescue him. My arm tingles every day. I want to give in to the urge to cut myself.” I locked my hand on my arm and squeezed my eyes shut. Today I wanted to run out of the lunch room after talking to Marisa, but I knew if I did Tate would have followed me. ”

Tears burned the backs of my eyes. I needed to remain strong. I flopped on the theater recliner. “Why are they making our lives a living hell? I want to out Marisa and Mason. Tell Haven Saints it wasn’t Tate posing in those videos with girls it was Mason. Tate’s parents asked them not to reveal the truth.”

He gruffly rubbed his chin. “That’s messed up. They’re doing nothing but feeding into Mason’s narcissistic ways.”

“Exactly.” Tate sighed as he walked into the room.

“To them they just got a second chance with the son they thought they lost. I think they’re afraid of losing him again. So they coddle him.” Tate placed the clothes on my lap.

“I need to have a talk with my parents.” He slipped off his navy blazer and reclined in the tan sofa seat next to me.

Matt sat to my right. “What’s the plan?”

“We’ll have to meet in secret like we did last year. But on the surface, it will appear we aren’t close as we are.”

“Are we dragging Rocco into this shit again?”

“Matt, I’m not sure yet.”

“Marisa’s rarely home. She spends the night with Mason. Tate are you ever going back home?” He leaned into the plush pillows .

“Maybe. Still thinking about it.”

Tate rubbed my neck. “Go change. The bathroom is the first door on your left.”

“Guys, order pizza please? You know what I want.”

Tate slipped his cell from his pocket. “On it.”

In route to the bathroom I tossed over in my head what we would really do to survive the second half of senior year. I stared at my reflection in the mirror. The most fun, memorable times of my life had been tainted by Mason and his evil princess. I was so tired already and I just returned to school for the second time this semester today. Gripping my hair, I leaned over the sink. You can do this. They don’t have control. You do.

I slipped into the comfy clothes and returned to the theater room.

“The pizza will be here in twenty minutes.”

“Where’s Matt?” I placed my clothes on the seat behind me.

“He went to grab beverages and popcorn.”

“Good. I wonder if he has any M&M’s.”

“Come here.” He slipped a shareable pack of my favorite candy from his pocket.

“I got you covered.” He rested his head against my stomach. My fingers circled his locks.

“You’re destroying my Clark Kent look. ”

“I hated how they fawned all over you today. And you didn’t have to hit Lake this

morning.”

“I did. He was too excited about becoming your fake boyfriend. I had to remind him this shit wasn’t real.”

My head dropped back in laughter. “Seriously, be nice.”

He sighed, sat up, and pulled me into his lap.

“Tate, I am sitting between you and Matt.”

He rolled his sexy eyes. “Baby, you’re killing me.”

I caressed his face. “I’m not trying to.”

He brushed his top lip against my bottom. “I know.” Tate pulled my lip into his mouth.

My hand splayed his chest. “I’m scooting over now.”

“We’re going to the condo later. I need you all to myself even if it’s for one hour.”

“As much as I want to, we need to be here for Matt.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

“All right, love birds I come bearing junk food.”

I crossed my ankles, rubbing my hands together. “Where are your aunt and uncle?”

“In Cali. They only return to Atlanta for the summer and holidays. Doubt my cousins

would ever consider moving back to Georgia,” he laughed.

“Do you want to watch ‘The Amazing Spider-Man’?”

Biting my lower lip, I glanced between them. “I don’t want to make you guys watch it only for the one hundredth time.”

Matt tossed the purple Powerade. Tate caught it midair. “We haven’t watched it in years.” He cracked the top.

“Remember when the movie debuted. All seven of us went to the movies. We were the best of friends.” My smile rose and fell.

“You and Marisa were best friends and Mason wasn’t an asshole.” Matt smirked.

“Kyle thought I was cool back then.”

“No one could tear us apart,” Tate said.

“Stephen’s stuck in the middle now.” I stared at the large screen while Matt searched for the movie.

“That he is. He splits his time between me and Mason.” Tate sipped the Powerade.

“All right, doll lets enjoy a classic.” He laid his head in my lap .

“What the fuck, Matt?” Tate smacked his head.

“She’s my friend too.”

Tate shoved a pillow under his head. “Your face doesn’t need to be too close to my

goods,” he growled.

“I’ll gladly beat your ass again.”

I gripped Tate’s hand. “Watch the movie.”

Matt snickered. He loved getting under Tate’s skin.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 8:12 am

Friday, had finally arrived. I survived the rest of the week. Tate hadn't been to his locker until today. Wednesday almost every girl arrived at school with blonde hair.

He cut his eyes at me as if it were my fault. Tate thought it was funny at the time he mentioned blondes were freakier. Now not so much. They broke their necks to wave and speak to him. He didn't bother eating lunch at school either. He left campus. A snow storm was coming to Haven River. Great time to be snowed in. I had to make it up to him this weekend. If I didn't, he'd tell everyone in Haven Saints high to go to hell. I didn't think he was above kidnapping me.

"Good morning, sweetheart." Lake wrapped his arms around me from behind.

"Morning."

"Are we still on for tonight after the game?"

"Yes, we are on. Can't wait."

"Can you hold my backpack open? "

"Sure."

I retrieved my books from my locker and slipped them into my bag.

A slinky girl in four-inch stilettos caught my attention. "What the hell?"

Lake peeked over his shoulder.

She staggered down the hall. “Tate.” She raised her hand.

“Tate.”

His eyes widened as the girl approached.

She smiled wide and placed her hand on his shoulder. Her blonde hair cascaded down her back.

“I’ve waited for this very moment. I knew you’d grow bored with her.” She glanced at me and snarled.

What was happening?

She became lost in his dreamy eyes. “Tate, baby, I’ve been patient since I arrived here in November. I didn’t want to come forward right away. I wanted to give you time to get over the bitches who threw themselves at you. You are my forever crush.”

He removed her hand from his shoulder like it was trash. “What’s your name?”

“Regina Bright.” Her smile widened .

“I am not interested in a relationship. The single life is better for me at this time. You’ll have to find your forever with someone else.”

She slipped her arms around his neck. “You’ll come around.” Her lips crashed into his.

Tate stood like a deer in headlights. He gripped her arms and pushed her back. His puffy lips were stained with red lipstick.

His horrid gaze met mine. “I’ve fucking had it, Chelsea,” he roared.

“Fix it.” He stepped closer.

“Call this shit?”

My hand flew over his mouth. “You know we can’t be a couple anymore.”

Regina appeared at his side, hanging off of his arm. “You don’t need her. She’s last years trash. You have me now.”

Tate grabbed my arm and leaned into my ear. “If you think the spanking was bad after we left Matts. That’s nothing. You will pay dearly for this. Chelsea, you will be on your knees all weekend starting tonight.”

We were supposed to spend the night at Matt’s but Tate told him he needed alone time with me.

He stepped back and glared at Regina. “There’s no me and you. I told you. I’m not interested in being in a relationship.” He snatched his arm out of her grip and stormed down the hall.

Her fists landed on her hips. “Clearly you bring out the worst in him.” She glowered.

I curved my finger under my lip. “Do I hear a Tennessee or Alabama twang?”

“Sweet Home Alabama. Best place to live in the south. Hated we had to relocate to Georgia,” she frowned.

“He said he didn’t want you. So move along.”

She closed the space between us, glaring down at me. “Oh, bitch I ain’t going nowhere. I’ve staked my claim on Tate Forrester. Already told daddy he’s going to be his son-in-law.”

My heart stopped.

“You aren’t listening. He doesn’t want you or anyone else.” I growled.

“Oh, why because he wants his little princess back. He’ll learn real soon he doesn’t need you. If I catch you around my man. I’ll make you pay.” She turned on her heels.

“You won’t do a thing,” I stated through gritted teeth.

Her head snapped around. “I like playing with fire. I’ll burn up that little gold car of yours. The first time empty.” She grinned before walking away .

The tiny hairs prickled my skin. The bitch was really crazy. Fuck, I didn’t anticipate this.

“What is going on at this school?”

“Lake, too much.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know yet. There has to be a restraining order against her. I’ll have a friend look into her.”

SUCKING DOWN AN ICE tea, I peeked across the lunchroom. Regina stood aimlessly, scanning the room for her prince charming. She wouldn’t find him. I knew where he was, though. Marisa, Mason and their band of cronies snickered at her

expense. Regina turned their way, waved and walked toward Marisa.

“No.” I read her lips.

Regina spun on her heels and sat at a table across the noisy lunchroom. I lowered my head and rubbed my brow, peeking at Marisa. She whispered something in Mason’s ear. He snickered.

I leaned my head on Connie’s shoulder. “Did you hear about my crazy run in with the new chick?”

“Chelsea, the entire school can’t stop talking about the nut job. Every girl has chosen not to flirt with Tate.”

I sighed. “This is all my fault. ”

“Why do you say that?” Trevor stabbed the meatloaf with his fork.

“Maybe we shouldn’t have broken up. There wouldn’t be any crazy chick issues. She’s the only crazy girl at this school. I’m convinced.”

Rocco cracked a smile across from me. “Oh, no there are more. She just happens to be the craziest.”

I flashed a plastic smile. “Thanks for the crazy report. Rocco, I need you to look into her. Tell me what you find. Is this her first transfer? Any restraining orders? The make, model, and license plate of her car. She’s threatened to blow up my car.”

They gaped.

“I will get on that asap.”

“Are you inviting Kelsea out with us tonight?”

He grinned. “Yeah, she’ll be there.”

“Cool. I have to go.”

“Are you sure it’s safe to walk around alone?” Megan asked.

“I’ll be fine. I have protection.” I winked.

I ducked out of the lunchroom and walked to my right. I’d have to take the long route. Didn’t want to make it obvious where I was going. Once in the lower level of the building, I peeked up and down the hall to make sure I wasn’t followed. The door creaked open as I squeezed inside. ‘Smells like teen spirit’ blared through the speakers. Tate laid on the weight bench. His muscles flexed as he bench pressed the weights above his head. I scanned the empty room. Hm. Why was it empty?

Arms crossing my chest, I strolled over. He looked at me but continued his workout.

“Tate, are you still upset?” I yelled over the music.

He placed the curl bar on the stand.

“Why are you in here alone?”

He towered over me, drying his face. “Stressed out, Chelsea.”

He ripped off the gloves and tossed them aside. Chest heaving, he stared into my eyes. Tate scooped me up into his arms. He stalked into the locker room. His lips devoured mine.

“Tate, we can’t.”

He scowled. “I’m fucking done, Chelsea. You’re my woman and I don’t give a shit who knows.”

I stroked my fingers through his dark damp hair. His tongue traced along my neck.

“Guy’s are always working out. How did you luck up with alone time?” I moaned.

“I told them to get the fuck out.” Anger poured over his words.

“Don’t worry. No one will come in here until I’m gone. ”

His lips crushed mine again. “I need to be inside you now.” Tate lowered me to the floor long enough for us to peel our clothes off of each other.

He reached into the shower and adjusted the water temperature. The shower wall shielded us from the rest of the locker room.

Tate intertwined our fingers and led me into the shower. I peered up at my boyfriend. If he said no one was coming, I believed him.

His fingers swept over my bare shoulder. “We were apart for over a month, Chelsea.”

My name sounded like velvet silk flowing from his lips. My core heated. I was turned on the second he was in close proximity. I almost felt I was hungrier for him since he returned. Maybe because I didn’t know if he’d die in London.

“I’ve been robbed.”

“What?”

“I can’t get over my brother asking for your hand in marriage. Only I was supposed to ask you to marry me.”

My head dropped against his chest. I couldn’t bear to stare into those sad blue eyes.

“Baby, I promise we are stronger together. We can’t allow them to win. We will prevail. Look at me, Chelsea. ”

I lifted my head from his pounding heart. Tears streamed down my cheeks.

How would we really get through this? I had to figure out a way to make it right. To save our relationship. Or they would destroy our future.

“Tate, trust me when you propose to me it will be my favorite moment in time.”

He smirked. “I hope so.”

“I know so.”

Clutching his broad shoulders, I hopped up into his arms. His lips slipped along my collarbone.

My legs loosely hung around his toned waist. Tate’s lips fell over mine as he slid inside me.

“Oh, so good. I love you so much. Don’t ever forget that.”

His brow wrinkled, and he stopped his movements. “Why did you say those words? Chelsea, don’t do anything crazy.”

Gripping the nape of his neck, I shoved my tongue past his lips.

Tate plowed into me. His tranquil blue eyes held mine. “Don’t do anything crazy,” he repeated. “Promise me you won’t.”

I intermingled our lips again. “I love being with you, Tate.”

“Chelsea, you are my home. ”

“And you are mine, Tate.” My head dropped back against the wall as he slipped deeper inside me. He gripped my trembling thigh.

“Shit, Tate. Oh, yes.” My orgasm washed over me. He didn’t let up.

Tate’s eyes hooded. “I won’t give you up. I’ve waited too...long to make you mine. Chelsea,” he groaned as he stilled inside me.

He caressed my back as he ferociously took my lips again.

“I will not let you out of my sight this weekend.” He smiled as he slid out of me.

“Bring your game console. I owe you an ass beating.”

He chuckled. “In your dreams, Chelse.” Tate placed me on my feet.

“I want to see your face behind the team bench tonight.”

“Yeah, I’ll be there.” We dried off.

“Can I persuade you to wait a little while longer to tell everyone we’re together?”

His nostrils flared. “No.”

“Listen, I think Marisa and Mason sicced crazy Regina on you.” I sighed.

“She threatened to blow up my car if I came near you.”

His fingers froze over his crisp white shirt buttons.

He turned white as a ghost. “What the fuck? ”

“Yeah. At lunch she was looking for you. She turned to Marisa and began walking toward her. Marisa told her no. Regina obeyed.

He slipped on his navy slacks. “Did anyone hear her threaten your life?”

“Lake did. I have Rocco looking into her. I wanted you to come bowling with us tonight but...”

The wheels were turning in his head. “Yeah, I get it. We can’t risk your life. Call the precinct and ask for Officer Bailey. File a restraining order against her.”

He cupped my face. For the first time I witnessed fear in his eyes. “I’ll be at the bowling alley, but I’ll keep my distance. Inform your father about the turbulent situation, but tell him you’d like to retain his services. That will keep our mothers in the dark.”

“Sounds good.”

“For now on you’ll be chauffeured everywhere you go.”

I nodded against his head.

Tate slipped my skirt over my hips and pushed the button through the hole against my

back. “There’s no way I’ll lose you.”

He smoothed his hands over my arms and kissed my lips.

I buttoned my jacket upon walking out of the weight training room.

?

Officer Bailey said he’d check the criminal database to see if Regina had any previous complaints against her. I told him my attorney would be in touch.

Dad paced the living room. “What the fuck is wrong with Tate’s brother and Marisa?”

“I don’t know. But I’ll take crazy for two hundred, Alex.”

His eyes narrowed. “This isn’t funny, Chelsea.”

“I know, Dad.”

“Luckily, my friend Alex Finch who’s a retired marine was available on short notice. He will drive you wherever you have to go. Tell Tate I said hiring a driver was a good call. The Bentley will remain in the garage.”

“Yes, Dad.”

He sat on the sofa and pulled me into his arms. “I never knew my little girl would go through so much just to get through high school. You really think the crazed girl is mixed up with Marisa and Mason?”

“I have a gut feeling.”

“Mr. Finch will give you a taser and mace. He specialized in explosives. He will sweep the vehicles every day. He’ll also keep an eye on surveillance at the house. Don’t give anyone other than Tate the new gate code.”

“Got it.”

THE CROWD ROARED, STANDING to their feet as Haven Saints number one shooting guard made another three.

Cupping my hands around my mouth, I shouted from behind the team bench. “Go, Lake.”

My friends and I consumed a mountain of snacks much like we’d done at the football games. Tate ran up the court in his navy and white jersey, hands in the air ready for the ball. Stephen passed the ball to Tate, he dribbled then made the jump shot.

We cheered.

“Keep up the good work Haven Saints,” I yelled.

A sickening feeling swept over my body. Someone was watching me. Didn’t know who. I kept my cool offering a weak smirk to Mr. Finch guarding the gym double doors.

Tate appeared cool calm and collected on the outside. On the inside he was beating himself up. I knew because we spoke before the game. Tate wanted to skip the game. He definitely wasn’t in the mood to go bowling later. He persuaded Stephen and a few other players to hang out.

I was thankful for Mr. Finch coming to my aid on short notice.

“Are we playing guys against the girls tonight?”

“Yup, and I’m bringing a date.” Trevor smirked .

“Oh, I wonder who it is,” Megan giggled.

“It’s a surprise. She doesn’t attend Haven Saints either. The chicks at this school are crazy.”

We burst into laughter.

“Rocco, Kelsea seems sweet.” I bumped his shoulder.

“That’s because she is. Everyone’s not crazy like Regina,” he laughed.

“Watch your mouth, geek boy,” I heard from Ms. Alabama.

A cold chill swept up my spine. I peeked over my shoulder. “Get lost, bitch.”

“I heard you were a spunky little thang.”

She wore a ton of dark eyeshadow and that damn deep red lipstick. Her long blonde hair was pulled up in a high ponytail. Her short skirt and low cleavage blouse left nothing to the imagination. I glanced up in the bleachers.

“Who told you that?”

“That little gossip girl Jaime.”

I nodded. “It appears you’re in the wrong section. Slutty and desperate sit in the nosebleed section.”

She balled up her fists. “You little?”

“It’s time to move along, Ms.”

“Who the fuck are you?”

“Security. Move it along. ”

She threw a tantrum as she stalked higher into the bleachers.

“Thanks, Mr. Finch.”

“I’ve got your back.”

Tate braced his palms on his knees as he stared at me. My boyfriend was about to lose it. I considered leaving. Then I decided I’d stay and support our team.

I stood and threw my fist in the air. “Go Saints.” My friends joined in at my side cheering.

Lake threw the ball in the hoop at the sound of the buzzer. We jumped up and down.

“Yes! We did it. Haven Saints won by one point,” I yelled.

Lake ran over and pulled me up into his arms. “Did you see that? I hit the game-winning shot.”

“Yes.” I hugged him tight.

He placed me on my feet.

“Lake, I’ll wait for you.”

He backed away. “Ok. I’ll be out soon.”

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 8:12 am

Lake and Connie entered our team names on the scoreboard. Tying my shoe, I peeked at the other end of the bowling alley. Tate stared back. Our pull was monumental. I wanted to run to him, and snuggle in his big strong arms. God, I couldn't wait until later tonight to be with him. Tate wore a black baseball cap low over his eyes. Dark, chiseled, and brooding never looked so good.

"All right, Chelsea, you and I are up." Lake cocked a crooked smile.

I stepped over and selected a ball.

"Lake, me and the guys are setting up beside you and the geek squad."

Asshole number one has joined us. Great.

I glanced over my shoulder. "Ugh. You are so lame, Tate."

My friends rolled their eyes and shot him the middle finger. His arrogant gaze roved over them. He wasn't at all offended.

"Relax princess, my friends and I won't interrupt your playtime," he snickered, turning his cap backwards.

Stephen gripped his shoulder and whispered in his ear. He glanced at the grinning waitress. Tate's smile widened. He walked over and struck up a conversation.

Asshole Tate had definitely returned? Or, was I the only one oblivious that he was always an asshole?

“Chelsea, Chelsea.” Megan shook my arm.

“Huh?”

“You’re staring. Did you forget you’re on a date?”

I wanted to squeeze my eyes closed, but I couldn’t. I needed to concentrate to have fun because Tate was bowling two lanes over.

“Thanks, Megan.”

I turned to our friends. “Alright, I’m up.”

I stalked toward the lanes with total concentration on the game. The bowling ball released from my hand and barreled toward the ten pins. Jumping up and down I squealed with anticipation. The ball crashed knocking down eight pins.

“Yeah,” my friends screamed.

“Lake, a strike. Good stuff.” We slapped hands.

“Chelsea, he’s not on our team,” Connie growled.

“But, he’s my date and so cute, right? ”

Connie laughed. “Sure is. If I were into cradle robbing, he’d definitely be my first target.”

“We’re only two years apart.”

“I think you also have a thing for cocky guys.”

I shoved her as a chuckle dropped from my mouth. “You are such the jokester tonight.”

She peeled back her blue jean jacket and flashed the flask.

“Oh, I’ll definitely take that.”

“Trevor has one too. We’re set for the night.”

I glanced at my friends. “You guys are the best.”

Connie placed the flask in my hand, then she strolled to the lane.

Our lane was at the very end. Perfect place to drink.

“Trevor, who’s the designated driver?”

“None of us. I rented a stretch Hummer for tonight.” He hooked his arm around the redhead girl. “You know this being my first date and all.” He introduced us earlier to Raven who attended Haven River.

“Awesome, Raven looks like you’re up next show us what you got.” I turned up the flask, pouring a stream of vodka down my throat. The burn lingered then crashed into the pit of my stomach.

My hair cascaded over my shoulders as I danced in a circle. This moment was what I needed. To be lost and free. Lose sight of the danger looming at every turn. My bodyguard was outside. He had my back. The toasty bowling alley made me forget it was winter, if just for a little while.

“Stephen, Mr. All-American. Gutter ball. What happened?”

He flipped me the bird. It was just like old times minus Matt. I hated my best friend couldn't hang with us. That had to change soon. Hopefully, before I graduated from Haven Saints Tate and I could hang out with our friends together. Not apart like we were tonight.

A smile crept across my lips as I peered at my friends, laughing, talking, and chowing down on pizza. I leaned on my elbow against the top of the circular seat.

"Are you alright?"

I peeked at him. He stared at me from the other side of the circular leather seat. I returned my attention to the lanes.

"Yes. What are you doing over here?" I mumbled, under my breath.

"Checking on my woman. I figured an hour in and everyone's inebriated this was a good time to see how you were holding up."

"I am enjoying my friends."

He quickly crossed over sitting behind me .

"Tate, don't. I can promise if you touch me, I'll fall apart."

Bowling balls crashing into pins filled the air around us.

"I won't. After what happened at the game, I needed to be next to you." Concern laced his words.

My eyes closed briefly.

“Cosmic bowling has begun,” an employee announced overhead.

My eyes popped open. Neon lights danced throughout the dark bowling alley.

“You play asshole convincingly.”

“Baby, I never pretended not to be an asshole. I was just no longer an asshole to you. Later tonight, I plan to bury my face between your legs and feast on your goodness that I love so much.”

His words left me breathless before he walked away. I swear I came a little. Only Tate had that effect on me. Faking I was attracted to Lake after that moment was difficult. Was that my boyfriend’s plan all along?

I strolled over to Connie and threw my arms around her neck from behind. “Vodka please?”

I took a swig after she gave me the flask.

“What did king douche want? And don’t lie. Not sure what’s up with you two, but I can tell you are still fucking him. And if I can, others can too. ”

I felt his eyes on me, but I didn’t peek. We were failing at pretending to not be in a relationship.

“You got me. I fell victim to him earlier. It’s just sex.”

She snickered. “The way he looks at you. That’s not lust. It’s love.” She gasped. “He loves you.”

Connie turned and yanked me into a dark corner.

“We’ve been friends since the school year started. I know you are holding out. You can trust me.”

Connie was the only person who didn’t care I was the outcast.

“I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to involve you in our dangerous world.”

Her eyes widened. “Dangerous?” She pondered on my words. “Spill.”

I divulged the important details in fifteen-minutes.

“Connie, close your mouth. You’ll draw attention to us.” I scanned the lanes. Lake, Tate and one of his jock buddies argued probably about sports. Rocco couldn’t stop smiling at Kelsea. They needed to come out with us more often.

My eyes fell back on Connie.

“Tate’s an asshole but Mason’s down right evil.”

I crossed my arms over my chest. “My ex-best friend wants me dead. And she’s sent the deep southerner from down home Alabama to handle her dirty work. I will take her down.”

She pulled me into a hug. “Whatever you need let me know.”

“I can’t pull you into my fucked up world.”

“Nonsense, we are in this together.”

“Thanks, Connie. Let’s join the gang.”

?

Mr. Finch searched every room of the condo for listening devices, and explosives.

I sat on the off-white sofa twirling the door key between my fingers. The light from the street lamp cascaded through the window across the gray paisley chair across from me.

Heavy footsteps pounded the wooden stairs.

“Why are you sitting in the dark?”

“I didn’t want to touch anything until you were finished with your walk through.”

He nodded. “Smart.” Mr. Finch rubbed his gruff face. My tall, stalky bodyguard continued into the kitchen.

“Where’s Tate?”

He stepped back into view, flipping on the crystal chandelier.

“Not sure.” My smile rose and fell. “He’ll be here. ”

Mr. Finch’s ears perked up. “Someone’s at the back door,” he whispered. His fingers flew over his lips.

My heartbeat pounded against my ribcage. Did someone find our secret place?

My bodyguard slipped his gun from his holster and stalked toward the back of the house.

“Hands up,” Mr. Finch growled. His deep vocals rattled my body.

“What the hell? It’s my house.”

“Keep your hands up and walk into the living room.”

Tate’s brooding face came into view.

“Ms. Culver, is this Tate?”

I walked toward him. “Yes.”

“How can you tell them apart?”

“Tate grew his hair out. We also agreed on a secret number only he and I would know.”

Tate’s hands remained in the air.

“What’s our number?”

“Eight,” he sighed.

I fell against his thick winter jacket. Tate kissed the top of my head and gripped my waist. His strong arms squeezed me tight through my coat.

“Thank you for keeping her safe, Mr. Finch.”

“You’re welcome. Why did you enter the back door? ”

“I parked two condo units back.” He gestured over his shoulder.

“Just in case someone was watching us they wouldn’t see us walk into the same house. It was also best we didn’t arrive at the same time. I had to drive around for twenty-minutes before arriving to ensure no one followed me.

I stepped beside Tate.

His heavy hand landed on Tate’s shoulder.

Mr. Finch nodded. “If you two decide you want to leave this weekend call me. I’ll be here in a heartbeat.”

I smiled. “Thank you so much, Mr. Finch.”

“You’re welcome.”

I sank into the sofa. Tate locked the door behind my bodyguard.

“Wow, that guy’s thorough.” He shrugged off his winter coat then tossed it on the chair. Tate sat on the sofa and kicked off his boots.

“He has to be. That bitch is really certifiable.”

His brow rose. “Agreed.” I’ll take your coat and boots. “You’re probably cold. Give me a sec. I’ll turn on the heat and start a fire.”

“Do we have food for the weekend? ”

“Yes, my granddad's assistant stocked the fridge and cabinets with items we like. Well that was what I requested. I’ll check.”

“Ok. I’ll walk around after you get that fire going.”

“Where’s your bag?”

“Not sure. Mr. Finch carried it upstairs.”

“Ok.” He tossed a match into the fireplace and pushed the logs around with the poker.

“Connie asked what was really going on between us,” I hesitated. “I told her.”

“Shocked you waited this long.”

“I didn’t want to endanger her. I already involved Matt and Rocco.”

“No, we did. I won’t allow you to take the blame alone.” He peeked over his shoulder. “I am proud of you, baby.”

My cheeks heated.

“Would you like tea or hot chocolate?” He stood and stretched those muscles. My body vibrated with need. I was tired of being away from him.

“Tate, come here.”

I gripped the edge of my sweater sleeves into my palms. He sat and pulled me into his lap.

“I wish we never had to leave.”

My head rested on his chest. I could feel his heart racing .

“Me either. You know I didn’t want to play today, and then she sat behind you. If Mr. Finch wasn’t there, I would have put a stop to her bullshit.”

“I hoped you wouldn’t have stepped off the court.”

He massaged my leg. “Not taking action is taking its toll. I want to kill my own brother. He’s returned from the dead and has done nothing but stir up trouble.”

Our blue-eyed gaze locked. “I want to be free to kiss you in public. Take you anywhere I want.”

He widened his hands. “Not hide out here. I have to confront Mason. Chelsea, I can’t guarantee the outcome. He needs to be put down.”

I caressed his face. “Tate, we will figure it out together.”

“Are you warm?”

He changed the subject.

“A little.”

“We’ll relax upstairs in front of the fireplace. We can drink hot chocolate and watch a movie.”

My eyes rolled in the back of my head. “That sounds perfect.”

He laughed. “We’ll create special memories right here until we head off to college.”

My lips pressed against his. “I am all for creating beautiful memories we’ll never forget.”

Lying fireside, I was mesmerized by the orange and blue flames warming my skin. Tate was in the kitchen grabbing snacks and our hot chocolate. His duffel bag caught

my attention. I darted over and retrieved a T-shirt. I whipped off my panties and stuffed them in my bag he placed next to his. Tate's fingers caressing my body was what I wanted more than anything else at that moment. We'd tackle a plan on how to handle Mason and Marisa. I swept my hair over one shoulder and returned to the bear skin run. I flipped through the channels until I found an action movie.

"You found my favorite movie." His boisterous deep voice bounced off the walls as he walked into the room. Tate placed the tray of goodies on the floor at my side.

"I did. Who could ever not watch Iron Man one through three at least a hundred times?"

His lips melted against mine. "At least." That boyish smile I missed appeared. He was the boy I always loved. Now he was all grown up.

"Tate strip down to your boxers. I want to caress that muscled chest." I winked.

"I have something else for you to caress." He flashed a cocky grin .

He tugged his shirt over his head and tossed it aside. "As promised, you'd be on your knees." He hooked his finger in the air, drawing me closer.

"The affection you showed my cousin was over the edge. A quick friendly hug. Not bodies touching. You're my woman," he growled.

I blinked, and he had completely shed every stitch of clothing. Standing on my knees, I peered into his lust filled eyes. My fingers smoothed along his hips. His rock-hard cock stole my attention. I gulped then my lips parted. Tate's fingers massaged my scalp, pulling me closer. I stroked his length and slipped my lips over the head.

"Fuck, Chelse." His head fell back.

I only ever loved my nickname falling from his lips. It was an instant turn on. Gripping his dick, I sucked faster. He fisted my hair and stilled into my mouth. I stared at him as I swallowed his release. He helped me to my feet and pressed his lips against mine.

I scooted onto the bed. “Lie back.”

Dropping to his knees, he lowered his head between my legs and his tongue circled my clit.

“Tate, I needed you.” Tears seeped down the sides of my face.

He paused. “Damn it, baby, believe me I know. I needed you too.”

I tugged his silky locks every time his tongue slid inside of me. My back arched and my legs trembled as a surge of heat shot through my body. The uncontrollable tears continued. They tried to steal the man I loved. They had to pay.

Tate scooped me up. He sat us in front of the fire, resting his head against the bed. I caressed his neck as Tate held me tight in his embrace. The salty tears slipped over my lips.

“Cry as long as you need to. Chelsea, I’ll do everything in my power to keep you safe.”

An alarm went off in my head. I straddled him, gripped his face, and stared into his eyes. He was ready to destroy the world to protect me. Shit.

“You can’t do anything crazy. Remember, you just asked me not to behave recklessly. You can’t either. I know you want them to pay, but we have to figure this out together. You need to hear me, Tate. Don’t take matters into your own hands.”

Darkness flashed in his eyes.

TATE

The pressure was building and building, and I was ready to break. Sitting in that dungeon, I had nothing but time to figure out what to do with my brother. The moment I was able to pound his face in gave me new life. He kissed my woman while I was locked away. He made plans to marry and impregnate my woman. Killing my own brother consumed my thoughts most days. Chelsea asked that we handle them together. I'd try to control my rage when the time came to have a face-to-face meeting with him. Right now, all that mattered was getting lost in Chelsea this weekend. I whipped my T-shirt over her head and chucked it on the floor. My teeth clenched her bottom lip, as I gripped her ass cheek, and buried my cock deep inside of her.

I'd do anything for her. She had no idea how far I was willing to go to keep her locked in my arms. Murder wasn't off the table. Stroking deeper inside her, I watched her come undone for me. I was the only man who'd bear witness to such beauty.

"Take it all, Chelsea."

Arms anchored around my neck, she stood on her knees. I plunged inside of her, keeping a steady rhythm. Her head dropped back and my tongue slid across her collarbone.

"Tate, don't stop. Faster," she breathed.

Her orgasm was coming. I loved watching her beautiful face contort. Nothing more beautiful in this world. Lying her on her back, I sat on my knees and slid inside her

warmth again. Holding her thigh, I plowed into her. Chelsea's eyes hooded and the cutest smile lit her lips. I knew she was ready to explode. The action movie playing in the background couldn't drown out our skin making constant contact. One of her breasts rose and fell under my hand. I loved every minute. Our eyes locked as her body shook in my grasp. Tiny shivers waved over her skin. I didn't let up. A sea of steady strokes brought on a ripple effect as she came again.

I fell apart inside of her as I slammed into her heat a final time. "You're mine," I grunted, through gritted teeth. I slumped over her chest heaving. "I'll kill him," I repeated on a loop .

Chelsea held my head against her heaving bosom. "Tate, no." she cried.

After I thoroughly cleaned Chelsea, I warmed up our hot chocolate. Resting my head against the headboard, I peeked down at her. "Are you all right?"

"No." Lying in the crook of my arm, she swayed my hand along her belly under the blanket as she sipped the piping hot cocoa.

My lips pressed against the side of her head. "I can't sit on my hands any longer."

"At least hear Rocco out tomorrow."

She met my gaze.

My lips melted against hers. "Ok."

I woke up in need of my face being between her legs again. My hunger for her was always insatiable. My friends witnessed first hand over the years my need to be near her. She just had no idea how bad it was. The second I received my driver's license I drove to her little hick town, sat in the bleachers and watched her run cross country.

Just watching her run off into the distance and return kept me from losing it.

But when she returned to Haven River for good, I hung on by a thread. The second she stood on her porch and kissed Ethan, I knew I had to shut that shit down. My stubborn princess wasn't trying to hear what I had to say. But the way she whimpered against my lips in my backyard, told me everything I needed to know. She wanted us just as bad. That fucker was working on borrowed time. She was my woman. Always had been. So you could imagine my rage when I learned my brother returned from the dead and wanted her for himself. No motherfucking way. If my brother would have stopped the stupid games once we were back in Atlanta, maybe I wouldn't be ready to commit murder. Mason knew what he was doing. It was all a part of his mischievous revenge plan. He needed to get the fuck over it already. Chelsea was back in my arms where she belonged and nothing would change that. Poor Lake received the brunt of my anger. It wasn't his fault Chelsea, and I had to run around in secret.

I considered being civil. Mason and I could pound each other's face in, until I was the last man standing. My lips tipped up.

"Tate. Tate, wake up."

I must've been dreaming about bashing in Mason's face.

My eyes slowly opened. "Huh?"

That cute little nose slid along my neck. "I cooked breakfast come and eat."

My hand swayed over her ass. "I already ate."

She giggled. "That was so fucking good. But I'd like it if you join me downstairs."

I sighed. “All right.”

Chomping on a slice of bacon, I stood with Chelsea staring out the window at the thick fluffy snow sticking to the ground.

“The weather channel said we may get six inches of snow. We’ll be snowed in until Tuesday.”

I kissed her cheek. “Fine by me. No place I’d rather be than right here with you.”

Her finger swept over my nose. “Me either.”

Chelsea shook her head trying to shake off my spell. I chuckled inside.

“First, we need to talk to Rocco.” She tugged my hand until I was sitting at the counter next to her.

She placed the cell on the marble counter between us.

The phone rang on speaker.

“Hello.”

“Hey, Rocco. Tate and I are here.”

“Rocco, what’s up?” I slipped my fingers through my tousled hair.

“I dug up info on the crazy chick. ”

“How crazy is she?” I caressed Chelsea’s arm.

“Full on stalker. Once you are in her line of sight, there’s almost no way of escaping.”

“How many other guys?”

“Four including you. They transferred to other schools.”

“I am not doing that shit. It’s obvious we need to prove she’s crazy. Once she’s locked up, she can’t cause anymore trouble. Chelsea would be safe again.”

“Rocco, did you find a connection between Marisa and Regina?” she asked.

“No. She probably paid her in cash.” Chelsea dropped her head and growled. I rubbed her back.

“I agree with Tate. Focus on proving she’s insane. If you don’t, I’m afraid she might follow you both to college.”

“Rocco, Regina said her father relocated to Atlanta for a job. Where does he work?” She bit her lower lip.

“Shit. Brauner Holdings.”

Chelsea’s eyes lit up. “I knew there was a connection. Can you forward her address and license plate info to my Sabrina email?”

“Sure.”

“Did anyone file restraining orders?” I asked.

“Yeah, two chicks who almost lost their lives.”

Chelsea gasped. “What the hell? ”

“Yeah, one girl’s car flew off the bridge with her in it. She was smart enough to roll down the window before the car hit the water and climbed out. The police couldn’t prove the faulty brake line on the new truck caused the accident.”

Chelsea rolled her eyes. “Oh please. We know she did it.”

“The other girl was nearly trapped in the girls burning locker room at school. She escaped within an inch of her life. You have to be careful not to piss her off, Chelsea.”

“I have a plan.” A devilish smile took her lips.

“We will drive her crazy. Her parents will be forced to commit her to a mental institution.”

“Let me know what you need.”

“Will do. Thanks, Rocco.”

“No problem. Bye, guys.”

Chelsea disconnected the call.

“God,” she screamed, jumping to her feet.

“This is crazy.”

I stood, pulling her into my arms. “Hey, we’ll get through this together. Tomorrow before we leave, we’ll devise a list of ways to display her craziness.”

Chelsea sighed. “Sounds like a plan.”

“I think we should build a snowman in the backyard, then warm up inside while baking chocolate chip cookies. ”

She wrapped her arms around my neck and leaned up on her tippy toes, kissing my lips. “Today will be a blast.”

I loved watching her face light up.

The remainder of Saturday we spent playing video games and watching movies. Making love was obvious. We couldn’t get enough of each other. We’d have to be careful returning to our special place at least for a few weeks.

?

We studied Regina’s routine for a week. Rocco hacked her laptop, and we bugged her house.

Regina insisted I meet her parents. I agreed.

“Rocco, we’re in place,” Chelsea stated, over the earbud.

Rocco and I sat outside in a white painter’s van. We watched the live feed camera on Chelsea and Megan’s jacket. Rocco unlocked their computerized house. The girls slipped inside. They scurried up to her personal bathroom and changed out her brand of toothpaste for the one we added numbing cream to.

Connie and Matt stood outside the organic grocery store pretending to ask customers to sign a petition. They chatted with Regina’s parents, asking them to help save the town mall from closing. It wasn’t closing, but they didn’t need to know that. I

laughed inside.

Chelsea and Megan walked into Regina's closet and sprinkled itching powder on her uniforms, underwear, and the dress that was displayed on a single hanger on the closet door.

"I bet this is the dress she's wearing for Tate tonight." Chelsea and Megan laughed.

"All right, ladies, you need to get out of there."

I peeked at the second monitor. "Connie and Matt just walked away from the parents."

"We're on our way out," Chelsea stated.

Hiding behind, dark wigs, hats, and sunglasses the girls peeked both ways before crossing the street and hopping into the van.

"What an adrenaline rush," Megan exhaled.

"Yeah, that was cool." Chelsea smiled.

They peeled off their disguises. Carefully, they ditched their leather gloves and the itching powder in a disposable plastic bag.

Rocco climbed into the driver's seat and drove toward the supermarket.

My cell rang, and I looked at the screen.

"Chelsea, it's for you. "

Her eyebrows rustled together as she grabbed the phone from my hand.

“Hey, Matt.”

She glanced out of the windshield. “We are pulling up now. I see you guys. Rocco, they are on the left.” She hung up the phone.

My best friend had forgiven Chelsea but not me. Today was the first time he called my cell in a long time. I figured he’d rather talk to Chelsea. She scooted into my lap. “Why didn’t you talk to Matt?”

“Chelse, I don’t want to argue about him. We’ll talk about it later.”

The side door slid open, and he climbed inside, shutting the door behind him. Connie hopped in the front seat.

Matt released a low whistle. “Rocco, nice surveillance set up.”

Rocco grinned from ear to ear. “Thanks, dude.”

Megan dropped her head on Matt’s chest. Those two were confusing as hell. They always ran hot and cold. His head thudded the wall. He was deep in thought. More than likely about her. I knew Matt better than anyone. He loved Megan. But if he couldn’t have her the way he wanted her, he’d rather be miserable and walk away. Megan lifted her head long enough to zip down his jacket then placed her head against his heart, clutching him tight.

His fists clenched at his sides. He was warring with himself to keep his hands off of her.

“Matt, how did it work out with Regina’s parents?” I swallowed hard. Taking one for

the team. Even if my friend wanted nothing to do with me, I had to save him.

He smiled. “It was like feeding candy to a baby. I gave them a complete rundown of the history of the mall.”

Chelsea chuckled. “Matt, that was awesome.”

Connie peeked over her shoulder. “Regina’s mother was perversely attracted to Matt. She smiled and laughed at everything he said. Her husband turned red as an apple.”

We burst into laughter.

Rocco rolled to a stop in my grandparents driveway.

Chelsea caressed my cheek. “We’ll be right up the street tonight. Don’t eat their food.”

“I’ll only eat bread if they have it.”

“Good. We’re all hanging at the theater in Alpharetta afterwards.”

I pressed my lips against hers. “I can’t wait, Chelse.”

SITTING ACROSS THE table from crazy Regina grated on my nerves. I couldn’t stand being in her presence. She asked me for two weeks straight if I’d have dinner with her family. She insisted we were meant to be together, based on how cute we were together. What the fuck? Regina was attractive but her crazy persona made her unattractive.

I straightened my red tie a few times.

“Tate, relax,” Chelsea said in the earbud.

I knew her and the geek squad got a kick out of this shit show.

“Mr. and Mrs. Bright, you have a lovely home.

His smile widened. “Thank you. I understand you and our little girl make quite the couple.”

My lips twisted. “I’m sorry. We aren’t a couple. We’re friends.”

My brows wrinkled as I brought the fork full of peas to my lips.

I peeked across the table. “Regina, everything ok?”

She scratched at her arms. “Fine,” she babbled. Drool hung from her lip.

My fork clinked against my plate. It took every muscle in my face to hold back the laughter.

“Regina,” Mrs. Bright hopped to her feet, ushering her daughter out of the room.

“Excuse us.” I rose as they vacated the dining room.

“I hope she will be ok. ”

“Tate, I am so sorry about dinner. I’m sure Regina will be ok,” Mr. Bright stated.

“She... Never mind.”

“What’s on your mind, Tate.”

I leaned in. “Sir, I’ve told your daughter several times we are just friends, but she threatened me.”

The burly dude laughed. “What? You feel threatened by a girl?”

“No, Mr. Bright, but she behaves strangely at school. She has a voodoo doll that looks like me in her locker. Regina said if I didn’t join your family for dinner, she’d kill me. Sir, obviously the doll isn’t real. But if the principal finds it. Let’s just say she’ll get kicked out,” I whispered.

“Several students are afraid of her random outbursts in class. After tonight, the drooling and itching. Sir, I’m concerned for her well-being. I don’t mean to overstep but she should probably be in a mental hospital. You don’t want her inflicting harm on an innocent person.”

“I assure you my daughter is just fine,” he grimaced.

“Is this the first time she’s behaved this way?”

He clenched his fist and didn’t answer.

Her parents were in denial. Regina was a bomb waiting to explode.

“Tate. ”

I peeked at Mrs. Bright standing in the archway.

“Yes, ma’am?”

“I do apologize. Regina’s under the weather. We’ll have to have you over another time.”

“Thanks, for having me over.” I stood, shaking Mr. Bright’s hand. He was deep in thought about what I said. If her parents didn’t institutionalize her, we would.

I kissed Mrs. Bright’s cheek on my way out. My eyes darkened the moment I stepped over the threshold.

The perfect way to start off our night out was watching the new Marvel movie at the theater. We arrived early and ordered our meals. Our group occupied the first row off the stairs.

Grease dripping from my cheeseburger never looked so good. I picked up the piping hot sandwich and devoured a mouthful of all my favorite toppings. “Oh god, the lettuce and the patty together never tasted so good,” I moaned.

Our friends stared at me.

“Starving Forrester,” Matt snickered.

I whipped the back of my hand across my mouth wiping away the mayo.

“Dude, did you see those half-cooked peas on my plate? ”

“Yeah, and you almost ate them,” Matt snickered.

Everyone laughed.

I pointed past Chelsea. “Rocco, those button cams are the best.”

“Thanks. It was fun pulling out all my gadgets for a good cause. To save my friend,” he grinned at her.

I swear he still held a torch for my girl.

“Yeah, you all came through for Chelse.”

I bumped her shoulder.

“We stick together,” Connie smiled.

“Thanks guys. Today was a blast. I admit I was a little scared. I felt my heartbeat in my ears.”

“Me too.” Megan peeked at Chelsea.

“Getting that opportunity to take back my power. Felt good. I can’t get over she threatened to kill me.” She sniffled, then a devilish smile crept across her lips.

“We will finish her.”

Her revenge snarl was such a fucking turn on.

“The drooling and scratching was a nice start to her take down.” Chelsea’s evil smile remained.

Everyone burst into laughter.

“The look on your face, Tate. I swear I thought you’d laugh in her face.”

I threw my head back, laughing. “Matt, I wanted to, but I had to keep my focus. ”

“Rocco, please tell me we can watch that footage again?” Connie pleaded.

“We sure can.” He sipped his cola.

“She didn’t know what hit her,” Megan giggled.

I tore into my hamburger again.

“Tate, slow down. Give us a chance to catch up.”

“Matt, I can’t. I am starving.”

The theater darkened as the first preview popped on the screen.

Thirty minutes later, Chelsea looped her arm through mine engrossed in the movie. Our friends oohed and ahed around us. It appeared the geek squad enjoyed Marvel movies as much as me, Matt, and Chelse. They were all right.

My lips pressed against her ear. “I love you, baby.”

She caressed my cheek. “I love you, too.”

Our goal to get rid of Regina was almost complete.

We had a few more tricks up our sleeves.

TATE

“H elp! Help!” rang out, from the center of the gym.

“Regina, climb down the rope. I assure you there aren’t any snakes,” Principal Wade urged.

“No, I swear to you there were snakes.”

He rubbed his temple. I wondered when was the last time the man had sound sleep. Those bags under his eyes were hanging pretty low. He glimpsed around the room.

“There is nothing here,” he sighed running his hand over the ball spot on top of his head.

“Ask Tate. He was in here with me when the snake tried to bite my leg off.”

Sitting on the bleachers, I stared at the spectacle at the top of the rope.

She was telling the truth. The snake almost nipped her. Thank goodness the snake trainer was present.

“Sir, she asked me to meet her somewhere so we could talk.” I walked toward Principal Wade .

“I said meet me in the gym, because I knew it was empty today.”

I glared at her. “Do you hear that? Empty.” I shook my head in disgust.

“Then next thing I knew she was hollering snakes. I didn’t know what else to do. I couldn’t persuade her to come down so I called you.”

“Good job, Tate.”

“No, he’s lying,” she spewed.

“A man took the snakes away.”

“Sir, there was no one else here.” I motioned my finger in a circle pointing it at my head.

“I am not crazy,” she yelled.

“We’ll view the surveillance footage.”

The principle finally persuaded her to climb down the rope. We sat in his office fifteen minutes later. Rocco was amazing with visual effects. We never saw the snakes in the footage that slithered all over the floor. The trainer removed the snakes in record time. They wouldn’t ever catch him leaving the premises.

Principal Wade found the voodoo doll and the journal detailing a plan to kill Chelsea. Inside the journal that was similar to the one the girls planted in her bedroom, Regina wrote, ‘the voices told me to kill Chelsea so I can have Tate all to myself. ’

Who knew Megan had mad skills mimicking others’ handwriting?

Hands stuffed in my navy slacks, I stood off to the side. A doctor from the local mental hospital and two orderlies carried Regina out the principal’s office kicking

and screaming.

“You’ll pay for this Tate Forrester. You will pay,” she warned.

A tiny smile tipped at one end of my lips.

I hoped she never saw the light of day. This was the perfect gift. Just in time for Valentine’s Day.

?

Saturday night, Chelsea sat across from me in a tall oversized booth in an exquisite five-star restaurant in Alpharetta. It was the safest place for us to spend time together outside of our condo. We had one less thorn in our sides. Mr. Finch still drove Chelsea around. We didn’t know what Marisa and Mason would try next.

“You look stunning tonight, Chelsea Culver.”

She blushed. “Don’t you look dapper in your gray suit, Tate Forrester.”

“Raise your glass. I’d like to propose a toast.”

She did as I requested. “We have three months remaining then our new life together begins after graduation. ”

We clinked our glasses together.

“I can’t wait.”

The waiter placed our meals before us. We thanked him before he stepped away.

“The herbed chicken smells amazing.” She slid her knife through the tender meat then slipped a sliver between her lips. Her eyes closed, and she savored the taste.

My tongue ran over my lips. “Two weeks.”

Her eyes popped open.

“Tate, I know it hasn’t been easy for me either.”

“Watching you come on FaceTime,” I whispered. “Only fueled my hunger.”

She placed her hand over mine. “We have tonight.”

“Chelsea, I don’t want just tonight. I want every night.”

“Tate, me too. I hate not sleeping in your arms. I feel safe when we’re together.”

I brought her hand to my lips, kissing her soft skin.

“Chelsea, happy Valentine’s Day.”

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Tate.”

We sipped our wine and dug into our meals.

“It was refreshing to see your face at the game last night. No crazy bitch to tear my concentration from the game. The only wanted sexy distraction there sat front and center cheering for me.”

She cocked her head to the side. “You meant to say you and Lake.”

My face contorted. “No, I said what I meant. I don’t give a shit about my little cousin.”

“Tate, careful. Your horns are showing.”

“Red with sharp pointed tips, baby,” I winked.

“King asshole, shut up and get over here.”

I placed my meal next to hers and slid beside her. My fingers lingered around her little waist in the tight red dress that stopped above her knees. “I plan to stare into those beautiful eyes for the rest of my life.”

Her lips pressed against mine again. “I can live with that forever.”

I slipped the slender box from my pocket and placed it on the table. Her hands flew over her lips.

“Open it.”

She cracked the Tiffany blue box open. Chelsea gaped as she marveled the eighteen-karat gold love heart tag key pendant. “It’s beautiful.”

“Read the back.”

She flipped it over. “Tate and Chelsea forever.”

Her eyes saddened. “But Tate, I can’t wear it to school.”

“Lift your hair.”

She followed directions, and I slipped the necklace around her neck and latched the hook .

“You can. Monday after school I want you to go over to my house. Not my grandparents.”

She rubbed her forehead. “I don’t understand.”

“Oh, but you will. Do you trust me?”

Her eyes brightened. “Yes.” Confidence rang out in that one word.

“Good.”

Later that night, we stepped inside the condo.

The huge chandelier brightened the first floor.

“Oh my god, what have you done?” Her hands framed her face.

She ran toward the sofa. “He’s so cute.” She wrapped her arms around the large tan bear with a big red bow around his neck.

Chelsea peeked at the array of candy on the glass coffee table.

“Tate, I can’t eat these huge boxes of chocolates alone.”

“You don’t have to. Take them to school Monday. Share them with Connie and Megan.”

“They even stamped my name in gold on the big red heart-shaped boxes. Nice touch,

babe. Thank you.”

I stepped closer, kissed her hair, and peeled off her coat. “It’s nothing. ”

This was our first Valentine’s Day together. I wanted the day to hold a special place in her heart. We had many more Valentine’s Days to come. I had to save the rest of my creative ideas for the future.

After I ditched our outerwear, I snaked my arms around her waist, and pushed her with my body toward the wooden steps.

“There are chocolate covered strawberries upstairs in the bedroom,” I whispered against her neck.

Her hands rested on mine as she walked up the stairs.

The second we were through the door; I unzipped her velvet dress. The girl I’d loved since kindergarten was here in my arms. I was the luckiest guy in the world. I was fortunate to get a second chance with her. After blaming her for my brother’s death, she never had to forgive me.

“Thanks for taking a chance on me.”

She turned in my arms and I caressed her soft skin.

Chelsea stared into my eyes. “I can’t say you didn’t make it hard to forgive you.”

I sighed. “Yeah, I was an asshole.”

She laughed. “King asshole.” Chelsea pecked my lips.

“But you were the only boy I ever loved.”

My eyes widened. “Yeah? ”

“How could I not love the boy who poured glue in my seat?”

We laughed.

“That was my signature move, baby.”

She laughed hysterically.

“Alexa play our song,” I ordered.

The classic tune bellowed from the speaker.

“And darling, darling stand by me. Oh, stand by me.”

We swayed to the beat.

That night was truly one of a kind. It wasn't about the sex. Our connection was important. And the bond between me and the only woman I ever loved was what mattered.

CHELSEA

Putting an end to Mason and Marisa's bullshit was gratifying. Tate expressing how he felt to Mason was heartbreaking. He loved his brother. Defended him with every fiber of his being. To learn the person that he built up and placed on a pedestal hated him... Hated him because he felt his love for a girl, was greater than his love for him. Once again, Mason had proven to be narcissistic.

Tate was deep in thought after we walked away from Mason and Marisa. For a moment, I thought Tate wouldn't want to be with me anymore. After all, I single-handedly destroyed part of his life. All for just being me. Facing each other on the bed, I tried peeking into his soul to sense his sincerity about us. After the haze over his eyes had been lifted, he crushed my lips with passion and need. It was far greater than anything I'd ever felt with him. It felt freeing. No more holding back. No more grief, sorrow, or confusion. All the cards had been laid out on the table. Tate could have a fresh start with me.

He paused and stared into my eyes. His fingers traced over my cheeks. "Chelsea Ann Marie Culver, I've been in love with you since kindergarten. It's true, I counted the days until I'd see you again. When we were apart..." He glanced down and then back into my eyes. "I watched you run Cross Country. Paid a kid to snap pictures of you laughing and smiling. Because you didn't smile that often thanks to me. I inflicted so much pain on your life."

He cupped my face. "I hope we can start over and you can truly forgive me. Baby, I know I don't deserve you. I am thankful for how deep your love is for me."

I leaned in. Our lips barely touched. “The first layer of your pain had been peeled away when you admitted to yourself and to the world I wasn’t to blame. This evening, the last layer holding you back was ripped off. We are free to love each other.”

His brows rose. “Holding me back?”

“Yes, Tate. Through everything we’d gone through, there was never a doubt in my mind I wanted to give myself to you. I wanted to be your girlfriend. How we would come together was a different story. For some time, our hate for each other outweighed our love.” I smiled.

“Let’s enjoy this time. Get back on our study schedule. And I can cheer for you and Lake at the games.”

He rolled his eyes.

I shoved him back against the pillows. “We can have sex right here for the first time in a long time.”

I unbuckled his jeans and worked them down his thighs and legs. He kicked them off.

“I love that you wear T-shirts around me. Means you are comfortable in your skin when we’re together. Now, take it off.”

A wide grin curled my lips as I whipped it over my head, revealing my sports bra. Tate leaned on his elbow. He pushed the bra over my breasts and sucked my nipple into his mouth.

“So mine,” he moaned.

Before I knew it, he yanked the bra over my head, chucked it across the room, and pinned my body against the pillows.

“I want to hear you call my name.”

My eyes bulged. “Tate, I will not. Remember what happened the last time?”

He continued freeing me of my clothes. “I do. But I know for a fact...” Tate reached over and glanced at his cell. “...my parents are still at the theater,” he winked.

“You can call my name as loud as you want.”

I bit the corner of my lip. “Tate, I don’t know.”

He stood and dropped his blue plaid boxers; setting his cock free.

I licked my lips. Fuck, my weakness had joined the party.

“Yup, that bastard gets to hear you call my name. Hear you shout out how much you love me. And I assure you I will do the same.” He settled between my legs.

“No more hiding, remember?”

My fingers lingered over his muscled, ripped abs. Slowly, I sat up and bit his neck.

“Are you marking me, Chelsea?”

I snickered. “Maybe. Tonight, I will post on social media I am in a relationship with Tate Forrester.”

I felt his lips lift against my hair. Tate pushed my body down again. His tongue

slithered around my neck. The hesitation to be free still lingered. Dark Jack and Jill couldn't torture us anymore, yet the apprehension was there. I'd grown accustomed to living in secret. Tate caressed my hips then dipped his fingers into my heat. I rubbed his back and swept my lips over his .

The intensity of his fingers circling my clit, held me on the edge. My breath caught in my throat as he sank inside me.

Pleasure encompassed his handsome face. "Fuck, fuck, you feel so good, Chelse," he groaned.

I feasted on his lips as my fingers dug deeper into his back with each deep stroke he delivered.

"That's right, baby take it all," he whispered. His dreamy black locks dangled between us.

"Chelsea," he moaned.

Tate clutched my ass with one hand and with the other he intertwined our fingers over my head. He leaned down tracing his bottom lip over mine. "I want to hear you, Chelse."

My brow wrinkled. "No, I won't scream your name."

His lips tipped up at one end. "No?"

Tate flipped me over and he sat back on his knees. "I know for a fact this is your favorite way to make love. There's no way you can keep quiet now." A dark chuckle released from his throat.

“I want there to be no mistake that they know you are mine,” he bit out, fisting my hair and sinking his teeth into my neck at the same time filling me.

“Fuck, Tate,” I yelled .

His head tilted and those tranquil blue eyes roved my face with each thrust. “I don’t hear you, baby.”

“Asshole,” I growled.

He laughed then licked under my chin. “I’ll take that, too.”

His finger circled my clit, and then there was no holding back.

“Tate, oh, fuck Tate. Yes, give it to me. Yeah, it feels so good. Don’t stop.”

“Your wish is my command, Chelsea. I am the only man who will ever have you,” he roared, as my body vibrated and shattered against his muscled frame.

He wrecked me in the best way. My lips trembled against his as we came together.

“I love you, Chelsea,” he groaned.

Tate pulled me into his arms as he fell against the bed.

I peeked at him. “You played dirty, Tate.”

He leaned over and kissed my nose. “Yup. You aren’t that mad though.” Tate squeezed me.

“No, that was so good,” I moaned against his chiseled jawline.

“Chelse, I’m famished. We’ll head to the kitchen after I clean you up.”

I smiled. “Order a pizza.”

“No problem, babe. ”

His sculpted ass disappeared into the bathroom. My fingers stroked through my hair. Chelsea, remember you two are finally free. I wondered how Haven Saints high would take the news of Tate and I being a couple again. I guess we’d find out.

I PLASTERED A WIDE smile across my face as Tate drove into the school parking lot. It wasn’t a ‘I’m thrilled smile.’ More like a nervous smile. Walking into the building with Tate, Lake, and Matt would surely have people whispering. Remember, I’d supposedly slept with all of them.

Tate updated his profile pic on social media. He’d taken a picture of us kissing after I hopped in the truck this morning. The caption was priceless. ‘She’s mine F%ck off.’

He slipped his arm over my shoulder and kissed the side of my head. “Chelse, the smile is a bit much. You have to chill.”

“Are you even listening to the peanut gallery behind us?”

“Chelsea, and I are over,” Matt said, grabbing a girl’s hand as we walked down the hall.

“I am also no longer dating Chelsea. I dig older chicks. If any of you gorgeous girls need a date to prom, I’m your guy.” He pointed at his chest as we strolled toward my locker.

A few girls winked in passing.

“Chelsea, dating you has made me the new popular guy at school,” he snickered as he dipped down the hall.

“See you guys later.”

“Bye, Lake,” I yelled.

Tate said nothing.

“Your face will keep that permanent brooding, scowl expression forever if you don’t stop.”

“I hate they think you were with my best friend and my cousin. I feel like cracking some skulls.”

Matt cracked his knuckles. “I’m down to bash in faces,” he chuckled.

We halted in front of my locker.

“Guys, let's have a great day.” I grinned.

Tate stepped in the middle of the hall. “Listen up.”

The students crowded around king Tate.

“If one more kid spreads a rumor about Chelsea hooking up with Matt or Lake, I will find you and outcast your ass next. It was never true. She was always with me. I don’t care what it looked like. Chelsea was always my woman. Now get to class,” he growled.

He stepped over and pulled me against his muscled frame. Those deep blue eyes

peered into mine under those thick black brows. “You’re fucking mine,” he muttered against my lips.

His big strong hand cupped my face and his soft pink lips sucked mine into his. My body quivered under his touch. The bell rang, but Tate didn’t let up.

I whimpered into his mouth as I clutched his lapels tighter. “I’m all yours, Tate.”

He released my lips as if he’d been waiting for me to say those words.

“Come on, I’ll walk you to class.” His sexy lips widened.

Finally, a smile.

No more bullshit. For an entire month, we ate at the mall with our friends. It was relaxing breaking away from the gossip for an hour. Girls still whispered. They didn’t understand why I’d be ok with having a cheating boyfriend. What they thought about us didn’t matter anymore. We were happy.

Me, Tate, Marisa, and Mason learned to coexist at school and after school. Luckily, we lived across the street from each other. If Tate and me wanted to watch a movie, we could relax at my house.

Once Marisa couldn’t hide her growing belly bump any longer, she requested a Haven Saints High teacher to tutor her for the remainder of the school year.

Marisa’s father continued to care for her financially. But she was no longer welcome in their home. Her mother turned her back on her. I had a feeling once the baby was born, they’d get past their bitterness.

The jury was still out on my friends, Megan and Matt. Maybe one day they’d be

together. In the interim, Matt was back to his old self king, man whore of Haven Saints High.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 8:12 am

The crimson V neck long sleeve satin dress drew attention to my breasts. The wide red belt hugged my waist, and the split stopping mid-thigh was sexy. I loved the flowing embroidered lower half of the dress falling over my black strappy stilettos. Connie out did herself.

She was so busy creating mine and Megan's dresses; she didn't have time to give much thought about a date. Lake agreed to accompany her to prom.

The blaring music pulsed through my body. Our friends abandoned us and ran to the dance floor. The grand ballroom at the popular Haven River hotel was brimming with girls in sexy dresses and guys in their dashing tuxedos. So why wouldn't my boyfriend let me out of his sight?

His hand was glued to my waist. My hand swept along his black tuxedo jacket and red bow tie. "Tate, everything all right?"

He smirked. "Yeah, beautiful."

His hand tightened against my hip .

Matt had to save me.

I waved him over.

He danced toward me. "Hey, doll. What's up?" He whipped his fingers over the top of his moussed blond hair.

“Will you keep me company while Tate grabs a couple of glasses of spiked punch?”

“Sure.”

Tate’s brooding eyes narrowed. “I’ll be right back.”

I nodded.

“Matt, what the hell is his deal?”

He stepped back and his eyes raked over me. “You did look at yourself in the mirror before you left home, right?”

I shook my head. “Yeah, so?”

“You are the most gorgeous girl here.”

“All because of the fake lashes, tons of makeup, a high princess bun, and the sexy dress? Maybe I should have cut back on the makeup.”

“No, you’re fine. Sending him to grab drinks was a good move. After he’s had two or three, he’ll loosen up.”

I looped my arm around Matts. “Thanks.”

“Get lost, Brauner,” Tate ordered.

“See you on the dance floor, doll.”

I smiled.

Tate placed the drink in my hand.

“Babe, we have to enjoy prom. Hiding out on the sidelines isn’t fun.”

He threw the harsh contents to the back of his throat.

“You look extra hot tonight. And if I can’t keep my boner down, these lames in here are probably drooling over you too.”

I sipped the drink, then cupped his face. “Fuck, them, Tate. I want to have fun with my man and my friends.”

“Hey hotness,” a drunk guy said in passing.

“Fuck off,” Tate growled.

“Come on, big guy. Connie and Trevor probably have vodka on the dance floor.”

His face relaxed. “Sounds good.” He threaded our fingers and led me onto the dance floor.

Dancing with our friends was all it took to loosen up my brooding boyfriend.

Tate, Mason, Marisa, and me were nominated for prom king and queen. Imagine my surprise when Tate and I were announced as prom king and queen. There was never any doubt that Tate would be chosen. I thought they’d pick Marisa. Maybe I grew on the students at Haven Saints High.

The party continued at a luxury hotel down the street. Matt rented out a massive suite. It was the best night ever. Tate and Mason even discussed sports amongst their friends at some point. I wouldn’t have ever believed that would’ve happened. That was the closest they’d been since their parents had snapped their picture before prom. Melissa was a ball of tears. She was delighted to have just one pic of her boys together after all those years.

The room was jammed packed. There were couples making out in every corner of the room. The jocks barely left the banquet table overflowing with food. No telling where Matt was.

“Sexy, why are you over here alone? Where’s the geek squad?” Tate yelled in my ear over the music.

“I wanted to take in this moment. We survived high school. We’re heading off to college soon. I can’t believe it.”

His lips pressed against my cheek. “Believe it.” Tate threaded our fingers and stalked into a bedroom.

“We need a little quiet time.” Tate closed the door. He pulled me into his lap in a chair by the window overlooking downtown Haven River.

“The party scene at Harvard will be epic.”

“Tate, we have to study more than party.”

He nodded. “Yeah, we’ll study, but I’ll also get you out of the house to a few parties.”

I laughed. “We’ll see. Are you sure you’re ok with your decision not to go pro after high school?”

He sighed. “Yes. I’d like to have one year to enjoy college with you.”

I leaned my forehead against his. “I am fine with that decision too. Playing college football only makes you a stronger player.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” His fingers trailed along my arm.

“Sometimes it felt like we’d never make it here. I can’t wait to have you all to myself.”

My lips picked up against his. “We leave in three weeks. Having the summer to settle in at Cambridge will be fun. One summer without drama.”

“And in the fall, I’ll see your face in the stands at every football game.”

I caressed the nape of his neck and my lips swept along his. “Every game,” I whispered.

“I love you, Tate. And I am with you all the way.”

His eyes softened. “Damn right you are. I love you with all my heart, Chelsea. We’ll tackle this world together.”

THE END