



Seven *Sleepless* Nights

When sleep is the *last* thing on your mind.

Chloe Walsh

SEVEN SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

CHLOE WALSH

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For Aleesha Davis – the milk to my teabag.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Seven Sleepless Nights contains seven elicited nights of passion from some of the characters from my best-selling novels, along with a few new additions. There is no order or time-frame to these chapters, they do not link to the other chapters, so they can be read in whatever order you would like to read them.

Warning: Seven Sleepless Nights is full of spoilers from The Broken Series, Carter Kids series, and Boys of Tommen.

If you are a new-to-me reader, thanks so much for taking a chance on me, and this book should be last on your Chloe Walsh TBR list as it contains spoilers regarding my earlier releases. If you're an old timer, I your your bones, and you should absolutely kick back, relax, and enjoy the trip down memory lane.

Because of its explicit sexual content, mature themes, triggers, self-harm, infidelity, and bad language, **Seven Sleepless Nights** is suitable for readers of **18+**.

Thank you so much for joining me on another adventure.

Lots of love,

Chlo xxx

Please note the bonus content has its own trigger warning

MONDAY

THE HILL, BOULDER

KYLE CARTER

David Henderson was really gone. Out of everything that had happened in the last seventy-two hours, and there had been a helluva lot – my daughter had given birth, her...whatever the hell Lucky was to her, had returned from the dead – and still, the only thing that seemed to stick in my mind was the fact that my father, if you could even call him that, was finally *dead*.

With my eyes trained on the ceiling, I remained rigid on the mattress, listening carefully to the sound of Lee breathing beside me. I knew I had a full house downstairs that I needed to entertain. Both of my brothers and their families had all stayed the night, along with my kids – adult and preteen – Cam's girl, Tillie, and their son, Liam.

We had another baby to celebrate, a hero to welcome home, and a funeral to plan, but I couldn't move. I was still *reeling* and needed the feel of her arm touching mine to ground me.

Forcing down the surge of panic that filled my chest every time I thought of David Henderson alone in that kitchen with my wife and my daughter, I tried to reason with myself.

David was dead.

Lucky made it in time.

He could never hurt my kids again.

He could never get to my wife again.

Breathe, Kyle.

Just...let it go.

A deep shudder of both terror and disbelief rolled through me and I craned my neck to the side, studying her sleeping face.

I could hear my family banging around downstairs, making enough noise to wake the dead, but Lee didn't stir.

Anxiety gnawed at my gut. Lee was always the first up every morning, fixing breakfast and fussing over her babies. I wondered what demons she was fighting in her sleep that kept her from mothering her babies – both fully grown and still growing.

God knows she had enough of those.

As always, my gaze honed in on the jagged scar running from her temple to her jawline. A scar that was now mirrored on my daughter's face. Fury, more potent than I'd ever experienced, flooded my body, making it hard to breathe.

Lee was paler than normal, with dark circles keeping company under her long lashes. We'd been through one hell of a year, and I knew she hadn't slept well since the fiasco that was our daughter and the whole Lucky/Jordan debate.

Hope had an affair with my brother's former cellmate, and Lee, both stunned and fearful of his intentions, had lashed out at our daughter's new beau, banishing him from our home.

Being the headstrong woman that she is, Hope took it as a personal insult, removed herself from her mother's life, and no amount of groveling on Lee's part had helped to thaw the ice around our daughter's heart.

I knew why Lee had reacted the way she had, of course. It was because of me. Because I was the dickhead that traumatized my wife beyond repair many years ago with Rachel and, well, for the want of a better phrase, my sheer lack of manning the hell up.

Lee had taken one look at our daughter's bruised and scarred face, put two and two together, came up with five, and reacted on motherly instinct, desperately trying to protect her child from the only threat she could see.

My daughter's rejection of any affection or communication from her mother had almost catapulted my wife into a nervous breakdown. I'd lost count of the nights the woman had cried herself to sleep, or the number of groveling voicemails she had left on Hope's cell. She'd lost weight – a lot of

it – and there was a sadness in her eyes that I hadn't seen since Cam Frey's passing.

Hope's cold attitude towards Lee these past several months fucking infuriated me, but I kept my thoughts and opinions to myself, somehow managing to walk a thin line between the two women in my life and keep the peace.

My daughter was hurting and needed someone to blame, but my wife had suffered enough. I understood that my daughter was grieving, but I also understood that her anger was being unfairly directed towards her mother.

The woman who had given up her entire life to birth, raise, love, and protect my children did not deserve to be treated like a cast-off because she made one bad decision.

I was the screw-up in our marriage.

I was the bad cop in our parenting double act.

It was fucking cruel to watch my wife be punished and pushed out of our daughter's pregnancy because she made *one* damn mistake in almost three decades of ultimate sacrifice and unconditional love.

To be honest, it was a good thing that Lucky had decided to resurface from the grave because I was fresh out of patience with my headstrong first-born.

I could only pray that Hope had a more relaxed and kinder approach to her mother once she was discharged from the hospital because I didn't think I could keep my opinions to myself a minute longer.

"You're staring," Lee whispered, drawing my attention back to the present. She cracked a lid and one gray eye peeked up at me. "Bad dreams again?"

The sound of her soft southern drawl floated through me and I stifled a groan. "No." Exhaling a heavy sigh, I rolled on top of her and buried my face in her neck. "I just needed to look at you," I mumbled into her curls as I pinned her tiny frame to the mattress. "Love you."

"Love you, too." I felt her small hands settle on my bare back and I shivered, wishing more than anything that I could just burrow deep inside this woman and never come back out. "What time is it?"

"A little after ten."

"For real?" Her eyes widened. "I should've been up hours ago."

"Relax. The kids can fend for themselves for one morning."

"But your brothers –"

"Fuck my brothers."

"Kyle." She frowned. "Mike traveled all the way from London to be here. You can't ignore him."

"And I'm not ignoring him," I countered. "I'm spending time with my wife." Nuzzling her neck with my nose, I pressed a lazy kiss to her collarbone. "We don't get enough time together."

A small chuckle escaped her. "We've had a lifetime together."

"Still not enough," I mumbled against her skin.

"So greedy," she sighed, patting my back.

"You feeling okay, princess?" Pulling back, I watched her carefully, ignoring my very noticeable morning wood nudging her stomach. "Are you..." I cleared my throat, brows furrowed, knowing that I had to be very careful with how I phrased my next sentence. "Is everything working okay?" Fucking great. Real tactful, asshole. "In your body?" Jesus, like that was any better. I couldn't help it, though. More than twenty-five years had passed since her transplant, but the fear never left me. A health scare when the twins were born kept the panic very much alive in my heart. This woman was my everything. Without her, I didn't want any of this.

My gaze flicked to the small prescription bottles on her nightstand containing the immunosuppressant meds needed to keep her body in check. "You been taking your meds?" I asked, risking her wrath. The stress she'd been under this past year had me fucking paranoid. "Are you peeing okay?" I continued, anxious. "Is it clear? Have you been checking every morning?"

"I'm fine, Kyle. Just tired." There was a long stretch of silence before a small sigh tore from her lips. "Do you think Hope will be okay with me?" I felt her body stiffen beneath me, gray eyes full of unrestrained pain. "I know she was fine at the hospital when we visited yesterday and the day before, but I'm just..." Lee shivered and peeked up at me, looking all uncertain and vulnerable. "When they bring Abi home today, do you think she'll still be —"

"She'll be fine," I cut her off by saying, desperate to reassure her. "I'll make sure of it." Resting my weight on one elbow, I brushed her hair off her face, tucking endless thick curls behind her ears. "Stop worrying, Grandma."

"Lord, can you believe it?" A smile spread across her full lips, revealing that smile that always socked me in the gut. "We have two grandchildren."

Reaching up, she trailed her fingers over the scar on my neck and bit down on her plump lip, eyes shining with emotion. "It's still so surreal."

"Pretty fucking weird, huh?" I chuckled, playfully nudging her nose with mine. "How'd we get here?" Holding still above her, I inclined my head towards our bedroom door and grinned when the sound of our kids fighting filled the silence. "From roommates to a full house?"

"I took a shot with you," she teased, reaching down to palm my ass. "The rest is history."

"Best fucking shot ever," I purred, capturing her lips with mine and feeling the familiar tingling sensation shoot down my spine. Probing her lips with mine and her thighs with my knees, I growled in victory when she submitted to me, letting her legs fall open and my tongue invade her sweet mouth.

Nestling between her thighs, I ground myself against her, pleased to find her pussy already wet and waiting for me. It wasn't often I got between my wife's legs when the kids were up, she was always too busy racing around after them. Foregoing foreplay, I settled against her, my thick crown probing her slick lips, and thrust inside in one swift movement.

Her breath caught in her throat and I quickly swallowed up her moans with my mouth, kissing her deeply as I pushed inside her over and over, needing the grounding of having this woman's body tangled up with mine.

Being inside her was more than just about sex for me. It was a need. I had to be joined with her. If I could, I'd keep my cock inside her all damn day. The hunger never seemed to be satiated no matter how many years passed us by. I was always starving for her. Her mind. Her thoughts. Her body. Her pussy. It didn't matter. I just couldn't get enough.

Breathing hard, Lee hooked her legs around my waist and dragged my body down on hers, loving having me pin her to the mattress almost as much as I loved feeling her beneath me. In the same room I'd taken her virginity in, I fucked my wife hard and fast, moving deeper, pushing further, grinding my hips the exact way she needed me to.

"God," she breathed against my lips, wrapping both arms around my neck. "Kyle."

Her back arched upwards, her tits pressing hard to my chest, and I growled in approval. Jesus, she was in amazing shape. For a woman who'd birthed six of my children, she had a phenomenal figure. All womanly curves, dainty features, and skin like silk. Her belly was a little softer and

looser now, and her skin was layered with a few more silvery lines from multiple pregnancies, but she was still my Lee. She was still every inch the girl I'd fallen for all those years ago. I still adored the ground she walked on, and she still made my dick hard as goddamn rock.

A lot of men didn't understand that when a woman gave you children, she wasn't just giving you a family. She was giving you her body. It would never be the same again.

Yeah, a man's life was rocked and altered forever with fatherhood, but nothing happened to our bodies. For a woman, pregnancy and childbirth was fucking hard. Raising kids was harder for them. And a real man? He treasured the sacrifice. He worshipped that body every damn day, grateful for the blessing he had been given.

I was barely a man when I became a father, but I was a fast learner. I knew the sacrifices she made to give me a family, and I made it my life's mission to teach my sons just that. If I never accomplished another thing in life, I would be proud just knowing that my boys respected their mother and would, in turn, respect the women who gave them children of their own.

Because of her sacrifices, I worked my ass off to keep in shape for Lee. I considered all those countless laps in the pool every morning a small price to pay to keep up with my wife.

"You like that?" I purred, deepening my thrusts. "You like my cock in there, princess? Inside that hot little pussy?"

"Oh god, Kyle," she cried out, bucking her hips upwards. "Yes!"

"Yeah?" Growling, I fucked her harder, causing the headboard to crack against the wall. "More?"

"More, Kyle," Lee mewled, breathing hard, as she tightened around me. "God, Kyle, I'm gonna –"

"Come?" I coaxed, slipping a hand between us to thumb her clit. "I'm gonna fill you up with my cum, Lee. That's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna break you in half, baby."

"Jesus," she breathed, digging her nails into my back. "Kyle, I can't–"

"Yeah, you can, princess," I growled in approval, pounding into her. "Give it to me, sweetheart. Scream for me –"

"Dad!" A familiar voice called out from behind the door. "Mom?"

Lee froze beneath me and I resisted the urge to maim and kill my own offspring.

"What is it?" I bit out, still thrusting inside her.

"Are you guys fighting?"

"Obviously not, Cash," I shot back, nuzzling Lee's neck, as I slowed my thrusts. "Now, go downstairs."

The door handle turned and we both froze, holding our breath. "Your door's locked."

We both sagged in relief.

"I know," I bit out. Now, fuck off.

"Why'd you lock me out, Dad?"

"Because Mom and Dad are having quiet time."

"Why?"

"Just go downstairs, Cash."

"Why?"

"Are you all breathing?" I barked.

"Uh, yeah?"

"Is anyone bleeding?" I demanded.

"Uh, not at the moment?"

"And what's Dad's rule?"

"Dad..."

"What's my rule, Cash?"

He huffed loudly. "Unless we're bleeding or not breathing, don't bang on the door when Mom and Dad are having quiet time."

"Very good," I shot back. "Now, go downstairs."

"But you weren't being quiet," he argued from the other side of the door. "You sounded like you were fighting. I could hear lots of banging and Mom was crying out."

"We're not fighting," I groaned. "We're fine. Now, go on down and have Colton make your breakfast."

"But why can't Mom get my breakfast?"

"Because Mom's busy, she's not your slave, and you're big enough to pour yourself a bowl of cereal."

"I like it when Mom does it for me."

"So do I," I bit out. "Now please go downstairs."

"Why?"

"Because I said so."

"But why?"

"Because Dad's busy."

"Doing what?"

"Mommy," I grumbled.

Lee's eyes widened and she slapped my chest. "Kyle!"

"Cash. Go!" I roared, knowing it was a lost cause when Lee pushed at my chest. With a huff, I pulled out and rolled onto my back. "Goddamn!"

"But what are you doing in there?" he pressed. "Why's Mom yelling your name?" There was a pause and then, "Are you hurting my mom?"

I turned to Lee. "I'm gonna kill him." Exhaling a heavy sigh, I sat up and threw the covers off my body. Leaning over her, I pecked her lips. "You can live with five, right?"

Chuckling softly, Lee covered my mouth with her hand. "Cash, honey, we're both fine. Dad will be down in just a sec. I'm just going for a shower first."

I narrowed my eyes in betrayal and licked at her palm, causing her to yank her hand away. "Are you sure we can't cull out the mouthy ones?"

"They're all mouthy," she pointed out, laughing softly. "Now, go tend to your spawn. I need a shower."

"Bad idea, bro," Colton's voice came from the other side of the door. "I wouldn't stand there unless you want to be scarred for life with the sound of our father ramming his –"

"Don't you dare finish that sentence," I warned, jerking off the bed and moving for my sweatpants. "Now, take your brother downstairs and make some bacon."

The sound of my son's laughter filled my ears moments before footsteps retreated from the door. "Come on, kid. Let's go downstairs and I can tell you about this stripper named Hayden I met the other night."

"What's a stripper?"

"Colt!"

"A special kind of dancer."

"I like dancers."

"Colton!"

"Me too, brother. Me too."

"That one." I turned to Lee and pointed an accusing thumb towards the door. "That one right there is gonna break my damn heart."

*Read about Kyle & Lee's journey
in the **Broken Series**,*

available now.

MONDAY

DENVER, COLORADO

LOGAN CARTER

With my hands hanging limply at my sides, I slumped against the tower of pillows at my back and kept my eyes, the only fucking decent part of my anatomy these days, trained on her.

Brooke Kennedy.

Black hair, pulled tight in a functional bun.

Doe brown eyes shielded behind the thickest lashes I'd ever seen.

Baggy blue scrubs, hiding silken skin the color of the sweetest chocolate.

She kept her chin tucked close to her neck, her gaze cast downwards, as she readjusted the ugly-ass stockings on my legs, the ones to prevent clots, and then spent an ornate amount of time fussing with my blankets.

She didn't speak today.

I didn't mind.

I wasn't much of a talker myself.

I was even less interested in mindless, fill-in-the-gaps chitchat.

In a weird way, I almost preferred when she had days like these.

I could read her better.

On her good days, her smile could light up the whole hospital wing. *It wasn't real.*

On her bad days, like this morning, she tried to hide the sadness in her eyes by keeping her head down and her bruises concealed, but I could see it all.

Every shuddering breath.

The change in her posture.

The way her shoulders slumped.

How she flinched.

The look of desolation in her eyes when she dared a glance at me.

She was never more *real* than she was on days like today.

Or more beautiful.

"Logan, stop," Brooke whispered, speaking for the first time today. "Please don't do that."

"Don't do what?" I replied, already knowing the answer. See? Being a cripple had its advantages. From a young child, when I realized that my body wasn't going to work the same as my identical brothers, I learned how to strengthen my mind. I learned how to read everything. I developed my own version of armor.

Knowing that I could never strike with a punch without risking a relapse, I taught myself how to strike with my mind. "What am I doing, Brooke?"

"You're trying to crawl into my head." Satisfied with her unnecessary straightening of my blankets, she moved for my chart, snatching it off the foot of my bed. "There's nothing in there that'll interest you."

"We both know that's a lie."

She flicked her big brown eyes my way and a shiver ran up my spine.

Maybe I imagined it.

Maybe it was purely a memory.

But I *felt* it.

She made me *feel* things.

Physically.

"I'll leave," she warned, snapping my chart back into place.

"I'm glad you remember you still can," I replied, keeping my eyes on hers. "Leave, that is."

Her cheeks flushed. "You don't know what you're talking about."

If I could have, I would have folded my arms across my chest, but since my limbs had given up on me, I settled for arching a brow. "Another lie."

"How are you feeling tonight?" she changed the subject by asking. "Any muscle movement?"

"I'm just back from a 10k run," I shot back. "Feeling great."

Her lips twitched as she tried her best to smother her smile.

"Do it," I teased, smirking. "Smile, Brooke. I dare you."

Her armor slipped and she released a labored breath. "I'm sorry." Sinking down on the edge of my bed, she placed her small hand on top of mine. "I'm being mean."

Now I felt *that*.

Her touch.

I felt it down to the deepest part of my discombobulated nerve endings.

"Any feeling?"

Age old habit had me trying to shake my head. Quickly adapting to the lack of movement, I used my words. "I can feel you, Brooke."

Her brows furrowed. "In general, or just me?"

"There's nothing general about you," I replied.

"Logan –"

"Just you."

She sighed heavily and it sounded like a great weight had settled on her chest.

I knew the feeling well.

"I wish this wasn't your life," she whispered then and I watched the way her fingers traced my wrist, working my brain to both memorize the visual and remember the old sensation. "It's not fair."

"Great pep talk," I mused, trying and failing to turn my hand over and entwine our fingers.

Using every ounce of mental strength inside of me, I willed my hand to move.

Nothing.

I tried again, sweating from the sheer fucking effort.

My finger twitched.

One finger.

It was something.

"I love you," I told her then, knowing that it was the worst possible thing to say in this moment, but committing to it just the same.

There was a method to my madness. One of these days, she was going to break down. That didn't mean to say that she would confess her undying

love for me or anything so romantic.

No, I just wanted the woman to know that she was desirable. I gave her my words, my truth, for no other reason than she deserved to hear someone tell her. She deserved to know that she was loved.

I was under no illusions of where I stood – lay – in the grand scheme of things. I wasn't exactly the catch of the day. The woman had washed my dick more times in the last three years than I cared to remember.

Degrading?

Perhaps.

But I wasn't in the position to be pitiful.

Feeling sorry for myself wouldn't fix my body. It wouldn't get me out of this bed any quicker. If anything, it would delay my progress.

I needed out.

I wanted back up.

In order to do that, I needed to keep my head, control my outlook, and work on my progress.

This relapse had been more testing than the others. Five months in and I was still crippled. It was the longest I'd spent in hospital since I was nineteen.

"You can't say things like that to me," she whispered, and I didn't miss the shudder that rolled through her.

"Come here, Brooke," was all I replied, keeping my grey eyes locked on her face.

"I can't." The words were barely more than a torn whisper.

"Come here," I repeated, willing her with everything I had in me to just come to me. "Please."

A tremor racked through her small frame, and then she was moving.

Twisting onto her side, she curled into my side, body trembling all over. "What am I doing?"

"You're letting me love you," I whispered, wishing I could comfort the broken woman who had stolen my heart. "And that's okay." Breathing in the smell of her coconut scented shampoo, I nuzzled my face in her hair and absorbed the sensations rushing through my body.

"No, it's not," she croaked out, lifting her face to mine. "There's so much that you don't know –" A pained sob tore from her chest and she crushed her lips against mine. "Oh god," she cried against my lips, her kiss laced with desperation and need.

"I know he hurts you," I replied, breaking the kiss, and rubbing my nose against hers. "I know he puts his hands on you." I kissed her softly. "Treats you badly."

A tear trickled down her cheek and she sagged against me. "Logan..."

"I know you're terrified and I know that you stay for the kids." Pressing a featherlight kiss to her lips, I breathed her in before pulling back to look at her. "And I know that I'm going to save you."

*You can find Logan Carter
in the **Carter Kids** series.*

TUESDAY

OCEAN BAY, FLORIDA

ROURKE OWENS

Today was my girlfriend's eighteenth birthday and I couldn't be happier.

No more rules.

No more fucking restrictions and stipulations.

Fucking finally.

I turned eighteen three months ago and had been waiting on Six to catch up. In a bid to make everything up to her – because, let's face it, I had a hell a lot of making up to her to do – I had planned a birthday surprise for my girl.

I'd been a complete fucking dick to her when we first met – when we were first thrown together. The things I did to her paled in comparison to the things I had said.

How she was still willing to hook her flag to my sail was a miracle in itself. I didn't apologize, either. It wasn't in me.

Instead, I focused on improving shit. In doing whatever I could to make it better. By giving her a version of me I knew she deserved. A version of me I never knew existed. A version that hadn't existed until she came and woke me up.

Problem was, my father was determined to cock block me at any given chance.

Dick.

To be honest, I was about done with listening to anything my old man had to say.

Fucker was full of shit.

Seriously, the man's mouth was turning brown from the crap he spewed daily.

If I heard the words 'forbidden' or 'icky' come out of his mouth one more time, I was going to lose my shit.

So I was in love with my stepsister.

Big fucking deal.

Dad needed to build a bridge and get over it, or step the hell aside, because I wasn't backing down on this.

Not when it came to Six.

It had taken me too fucking long to swallow my pride and chase the girl down. Now she was finally mine, I wasn't about to let him and Cassidy ruin what we had.

And we weren't fucking *icky*.

Our relationship was nothing like what they were insinuating.

They were the ones who had thrown two teenagers alone into a parent-less house and told us to get along.

The fuck did he think would happen?

Six was gorgeous and I had a dick.

Forbidding me from doing anything wasn't going to swing well for my old man. I had yet to listen to a damn thing that came out of his mouth, and I sure as hell wasn't starting now.

Pushing back against authority came naturally to me. Six, not so much. She was a stickler for the rules and I hated that I loved that about her. She was too damn obedient, dammit! For an independent girl, she listened too much – cared too much – about her mother.

Controlling me was something my father never had the ability of doing.

Six, on the other hand, was easily manipulated by her mother – made to feel guilty and responsible for everything – and it drove me batshit crazy.

It was *our* parents who were the goddamn *icky* ones for procreating at their stage in life.

Gabe needed to concentrate on the shit storm he'd made for himself – the pregnant woman-child keeping his bed warm.

I would handle her daughter.

This house and every goddamn thing around us belonged to me, and if Gabe and Cass wanted to push, I was pushing right back.

That girl was mine, and unlike my father, I only planned on having one wife.

Keeping our relationship hidden at home was *not* my idea. I wasn't happy about it and I let the whole damn world know about it on a daily basis. But Cassidy was pregnant and Six was determined not to upset her.

What a crock of shit.

I didn't give a fuck if she was growing a whole damn football team inside of her; Six wasn't something I was going to hide.

At school, she was careful. It was worse at home. I guess getting caught fucking the morning after homecoming was the reason for her secrecy.

I had been balls deep inside of her when both our parents stormed into that hotel room.

The shit storm that had occurred afterwards was entirely unnecessary. We weren't animals. I wasn't some feral dog chasing down a bitch in heat. We were two teenagers in love and showing it.

At night, when I crept into her room, we would talk until the sun came up about our plans.

About our future.

Because I knew my future would be entwined with hers.

See? Nothing goddamn *icky* about that.

I was an all or nothing kind of guy, and I had thrown my eggs, basket, and the henhouse itself into our relationship.

It wasn't something I did on a whim.

I was deadly serious about her.

I figured once we graduated from the Academy and got the hell out of Ocean Bay, we'd get married. Not right away, I knew she wasn't ready for that, but sometime during college.

I wasn't a patient person and knew I couldn't wait four years to put a ring on her finger.

I didn't trust time.

I guess that's what happens to a guy when he watches his mama die of cancer in her twenties.

Time was temporary.

Life was temporary.

I needed to make Six *permanent*.

The sound of a car pulling into the driveway filled my ears and I grinned to myself.

It's showtime, Six.

MERCEDES JAMES

Ariana Grande's version of *Santa Baby* was blasting from the second level story of our house as I climbed the staircase, laden down with more shopping bags than I knew what to do with.

Most of the bags contained items of clothing that would never in a million freaking years grace my body – courtesy of my pregnant mom-child and her tacky as hell taste in PVC pleather.

Fuck my life.

Exhausted from being dragged from store to store with an overly hormonal Cass, who had insisted on treating me to a birthday shopping trip, I made a beeline for my bedroom, wanting to sleep the day out of my system.

Birthday shopping trip my ass.

If the woman knew me even a little bit, she would know that any trip that involved shopping was like hell on freaking earth to me. Add that to the fact that Christmas was three days away, meaning the stores were packed to the rooftops with last-minute shoppers, and I was *not* a happy bunny.

"Ho fucking ho, Six!" my boyfriend announced the moment I stepped foot inside my bedroom. "Happy eighteenth birthday, babe."

Rourke was standing on my bed, clad in a red velvet Santa coat, a pair of Christmas-themed novelty boxers – glittery red, of course – black boots, and a Santa hat perched on his head.

More candles and flowers than I could count were scattered around my bedroom. A beautiful array of fresh red and white roses, spelling out the number 18, adorned my bedroom wall.

"Oh my fucking god," I laughed, dropping my bags on the floor before swiftly slamming and locking my bedroom door behind me. My mom had serious boundary issues and having her burst in and find her stepson nearly naked in my room wouldn't go down well.

"Surprised?" Rourke asked, cocky smile etched on his face, while he flexed his impressive pecs.

Understatement of the century.

"Uh, *yeah*, a little!" With my back pressed to the locked door, I allowed myself to take in the sight before me. "You are –" I couldn't stop the laugh that escaped me as I removed my hoodie and kicked off my sneakers, "a total freak, Rourke Owens."

"A freak?" Grinning devilishly, Rourke jumped off my bed and prowled towards me with exaggerated swagger, tipping his hat as he moved. "Now, now, now," he tutted, feigning disapproval, "Is that anyway to speak to Santa, little girl?"

Bad mood from my disastrous shopping trip with Mom instantly forgotten, I shimmied towards my man, jostling and shaking my hips to the music blasting from the iPod dock as I playfully fell into character.

"Oh, *Santa baby*, please forgive me." Batting my lashes dramatically, I closed the space between us and slipped my hands inside his Santa coat to rest on his ripped stomach. "Please don't put me on the naughty list, Mr. Santa Claus, *sir*." Wrapping my arms around his narrow waist, I let one hand trail down his back to squeeze his tight ass. "I'll be a good girl this time, I swear..." Reaching up on my tip-toes, I planted a lingering kiss on his lips, tongue snaking out to trace his bottom lip, before slowly pulling back and batting my lashes once more. "I'll do whatever it takes to stay on the nice list..." Teasingly, I let my hand trail to the front of his boxers. "*Anything*," I purred, cupping his junk. "*Sir*..."

"Well shit," Rourke groaned, instantly hardening against my hand. "This is supposed to be your birthday gift, but it's starting to feel like mine, Six."

"Ha." I grinned in victory. "So, my birthday gift is *role play*?"

"Tempting...but no." Tapping me on the nose with this finger, Rourke quickly moved for the black sack at the foot of my bed. "*These* –" he paused to tip the contents of his Santa sack onto my bed, "Are your birthday gifts."

"Whoa," I breathed, eyes widening at the sight. There had to be at list twenty gift boxes on my bed. "What the hell did you do to afford all of those? Rob a bank?"

"Close," he shot back, sinking down on the bed. "I turned eighteen and inherited this town."

"That's so *hot*," I countered, tone dripping with sarcasm. "Trust-fund baby."

"Not as hot as what I plan to do to your ass, *little miss promises to swallow but always spits*," came his quick-witted retort.

"Hey –" I narrowed my eyes, "I can't help it if I have a sensitive gag reflex!"

"*Selective* gag reflex," he shot back. "Now, get your sexy ass over here." He patted his thigh. "Come and sit on Santa's lap, baby," he purred, dimples deepening in his cheeks. "I've got a real special present for you."

It was a trick.

Of course it was a freaking *trick*.

It didn't stop me from springing onto his lap and straddling him, though. Nope. Because when it came to Rourke Owens, I was a lost cause.

"What's this?" I asked when he produced a small, rectangular shaped gift box from behind his back.

"Open it and see."

Wary, I narrowed my eyes. "Rourke..."

"Just open it, Six."

"Fine, but you better not have spent a lot of money on me –"

"I'll spend whatever I goddamn want on you, and you'll like it," he interrupted, ever the alpha male. "Now, open your gift."

Reluctantly, I did.

Carefully undoing the ribbon on top, I lifted the top of the box off and gaped at the contents inside. "You...bought me a rubber dick?" I strangled out, eyes locked on the neon-pink vibrator. "For my birthday?"

He grinned devilishly. "I sure fucking did, Six."

"You're an asshole."

He laughed. "Don't get pissy. It's in conjunction with this." Sliding his hand into the pocket of his Santa coat, he retrieved a small square box and quickly flipped it open.

"Oh my fucking god," I breathed, eyes glued to the diamond ring inside. "Is this a...because I'm not sure if I'm ready to get mar..."

"It's a promise ring," he quickly explained, taking the ring from the box and sliding it onto my finger.

My heart hammered violently in my chest. "A promise of what?"

"A promise to not put my dick in anyone else."

"Cute." I rolled my eyes. "Real cute, Rourke."

He grinned. "And *this* –" he took the vibrator out of the box, "Is another promise."

"Oh yeah?" I arched a brow. "A promise of what?"

"This is a promise that you're making to me."

"Oh really?"

"Really," he purred. "Aside from my cock, fingers, and tongue, this right here is the only thing you'll be feeling inside of your body from here on out."

Jesus Christ...

"Is that so?"

"It sure is."

"Well, I didn't give you that authority over me," I teased, rocking suggestively on his lap.

His gripped my hip tightly. "I didn't ask your permission."

Fuck.

"Get naked, Six," he commanded, eyes darkening with heat. "Because you're about to fuck yourself, and I'm about to watch."

It was scary the things I was prepared to let Rourke Owens do to my body – and how much I enjoyed him doing them.

Naked as the day I was born, I continued to play with myself, pushing the vibrator through my wet folds, in and out, deep and hard...

I needed to come.

Fast.

I was writhing in a state of deranged pleasure, while his eyes burned into me. Too aroused to stop, I just looked at Rourke and kept going. His eyes on my body only made it better. *More intense.*

On my back with my legs spread wide open, I continued to fuck myself, clicking the button at the base of the vibrator several times until the fastest vibration tore through me.

"Fuck," I cried out, eyes rolling back, as I held it deep inside, and reached down to roughly thumb my clit.

I needed the orgasm I was chasing. I needed to come so badly that I couldn't think about anything so minuscule as my self-respect.

My vision clouded when Rourke trailed a finger over the tips of my breasts.

Unsatisfied, I released a frustrated cry and pressed harder.

"Enjoying Rourke. Jr, Six?" he asked, sinking down on the edge of the bed, playing with my hardened nipples.

"Help me, asshole," I begged, crying out when I clumsily lost my rhythm and the rippling sensation building up inside of me faded out.

He arched a brow. "Asshole?"

"Please," I begged. "I need to come."

He trailed his hand down my body, stopping at my clit. I watched as he leaned over and pressed a small kiss to my hip.

I thrust my hips upwards but he pulled away, smile tormenting and teasing.

"You want me to make you come, Six?" he asked, tone soft.

I nodded eagerly.

"That rubber dick's not like the real thing, is it, baby?"

I shook my head. "No."

"Can't fuck you like I can..."

"No, Rourke, fuck! Please just..."

"Please just what, Six?" Rourke crooned mockingly. "Please just fuck you with this?" His hand wrapped around the vibrator. "Is this what you want?" And with a flick of his wrist, he managed to hit a pressure I hadn't been able to reach on my own.

Having his eyes on me only intensified the sensations thrashing through my body. "Yes...please, oh god... No –"

I screamed when he switched it off and stood up.

Quickly stripping off, Rourke reached for the waistband of his boxers and pushed them down until his cock sprang free; thick and hard and more appealing than any plastic knock off.

Without a word, he sank down on the bed beside me and patted his thighs. "Sit on my cock, Six."

Climbing on his lap, I slowly eased myself down on his thick erection; crying out when he filled me with every perfect inch of his cock.

I was filled to the point of pain, but then I sank down completely and he released a guttural snarl, the sensation driving me batshit crazy.

"Ride me, Six," he commanded, tone thick and raspy. "Fuck the real deal, baby."

So I did.

Bouncing up and down on his cock, I was relentless and taking this all for *me*. Hips bucking wildly, I didn't care about his pleasure in this moment.

"Harder baby," Rourke growled in approval. "Fuck me with that tight little pussy."

His tongue slid into my mouth hard, hot, and sexy as fuck.

My skin was damp, cheeks flushed, vision blurred, but I heard the distinct sound of the vibrator going.

"Wh-what are you doing?" I moaned against his mouth, bobbing up and down like a rag doll.

"You're going to take my cock, Six," he growled against my lips. "And whatever else I give you."

Oh sweet Jesus...

Nodding, I rode him hard and fast, stilling only when the searing sensation of pressure attacked my ass.

When I sank down on his lap, Rourke pushed up, pushing past my tight walls, fucking my ass with the lubed-up vibrator, filling my pussy with his cock, and my mouth with his tongue.

"Jesus..." I was so full, so turned on that I jerked violently in his arms.

He kept it in my ass, thrusting his hips upwards, holding me on his lap.

"Feel me," Rourke ordered, pumping me with his cock, fingers digging roughly into my hipbone, as he fucked my ass with the vibrator. "Feel me fucking you, Six."

Oh fuck, I could...

"I can't take it—" Crying out, I bucked wildly on his lap, unable to take the pressure rising up inside of my core. "Rourke, I'm gonna..."

The orgasm that crashed through my body was so powerful that I collapsed against his chest, a jittery, shaking mess. "T-turn it o-Off," I moaned, feeling like I had been electrocuted by sensations. "P-please, Rourke."

"I've got you, Six," he groaned, slowly pulling the vibrator out of my body while he emptied himself inside of me. "Jesus..."

Completely spent and thoroughly satiated, I sagged against him, boneless and still trembling. "I think we're going to hell," I managed to whimper when words finally found me again.

Chuckling, Rourke pressed a kiss to my hair. "Happy birthday, Six."

*Read Rourke and Mercy's story in
Endgame, Ocean Bay #1,
available now.*

TUESDAY

BALLYLAGGIN, CORK

CLAIRE BIGGS

Sitting around in a large circle in the back field, while my friends played spin the bottle, I could sense that things were changing this summer.

I felt *different*.

Gerard looked different now, too.

He was getting bigger.

So much bigger.

His voice was changing, but his eyes?

God, those silver eyes that twinkled with mischief were still the same.

The new boy from Dublin was sitting next to Gerard – the one with the pretty blue eyes and constant frown. He looked super bored as the girls who'd joined in the game tried to land their bottle on him.

He'd kissed more girls this afternoon than any of the other boys in the circle had, and I couldn't understand how his lips weren't stinging. They certainly looked swollen and I knew he used his *tongue*.

Ugh.

It didn't seem to faze Jonathon Kavanagh, though. He acted like he was a grown up and we were children. Like he was too old for us or something.

Every time he spoke, or said the words '*shite*' or '*bleeding*', the girls all giggled and batted their lashes at him.

I wanted to vomit.

Yuck.

These girls were thirteen and about to start first year at Tommen College with my brother, the Dub, and his friends.

I was eleven and still in primary school.

These girls had boobs, wore lipstick, and possessed all of the things that I either didn't have or hadn't grown yet.

On the plus side, this Jonathon boy was distracting them from their usual ogling of *my* Gerard – something I was very happy about.

It was in that moment that I decided that the Dublin boy could stay.

He could be an ally of sorts against these horny girls until I grew some knockers – and some courage.

"Ah, Jaysus, not again," the Dub grumbled in his lyrical twang, dragging me from my thoughts. "There's a smell of Tayto crisps off your breath that would knock a horse off a bleeding donkey."

"Rules are rules, Johnny. Now, pucker up."

Huffing out a breath, I stretched my legs out on the warm grass and watched for the fiftieth time today as Laura Collins deliberately stopped her spin of the bottle in front of Gerard's new BFF.

Giggling, Laura crawled over and pressed her lips to the Dub. He only looked mildly interested because he didn't even sit up to kiss her.

Instead, he continued to laze back on his elbows with his precious rugby ball on his lap.

Sitting cross-legged beside me, Lizzie was still fuming over having to kiss my brother Hughie earlier. The sun was splitting the stones, but that didn't matter to Liz. Oh no. Donning the biggest hoodie she could find, she kept the hood up, shielding her face from view.

Yeah, she was so *not* happy about this game.

I didn't blame her.

I couldn't think of a worse fate.

Hughie was gross.

When it was Gerard's turn to spin the bottle, I held my breath and desperately tried to feign impassiveness, when I was anything but.

Not her, not her.

Oh no, anyone but Luna.

Oh please, god, not Katie fecking Wilmot.

No, no, no, no.... yes!

The rim of the bottle landed at my feet and I felt the air thicken around me.

"Ugh," Lizzie growled, tone laced with disgust. "Don't do it, Claire."

"A dare's a dare, Claire," Pierce Ó Neill taunted from his perch in the circle. "You have to kiss him."

"She doesn't have to do shit," Lizzie snapped, glowering back at him. "You can say no, Claire. You can *always* say no."

"Yeah. Shut the fuck up, Pierce," Hughie agreed, looking slightly pale, as he glared at the bottle that had landed on me like it was a venomous spider. "My sister doesn't *have* to kiss anyone."

With my heart hammering violently in my chest, I watched *him* watch me, feeling a swell of uncertainty and excitement rise up inside of me.

"It's okay, Claire-Bear." Gerard's voice didn't sound so familiar anymore because it had broken over the summer. It was deeper now, he didn't sound like a boy anymore, and the notion caused my belly to do somersaults. A ghost of a smile tugged at his pretty lips. "I can spin again and kiss someone else instead."

No!

Jealously roared to life inside of me, white-hot and ugly, prompting me to stumble clumsily onto my hands and knees.

"Do it," I told him, shaking from head to toe, as I shimmied closer. "Kiss me." Puckering my lips, I held breath and waited to see what he would do.

Shaking his head, Gerard climbed to his feet.

Confused, I studied his outstretched hand. "What are you doing —"

"Look alive, Claire-Bear," his hands hooked around my ankles and he dragged me away from our friends, "If I'm kissing you, I'm not doing it in front of these lancers."

"If you drag me through cow-poo I'm going to be raging, Gerard Gibson," I choked out through fits of laughter, ignoring the chorus of cheers, as he dragged me across the field, with the heat of the evening sun shining down on us.

Only when we were on the far side of the field and out of sight of the others did Gerard stop pulling me by the ankles. "See? You're clean as a whistle, Biggs. No cow-shit shower for you." Laughing like a pair of giddy hyenas, he released my ankles and flopped down on the grass beside me.

"You're such a weirdo," I snickered, twisting onto my back to stare up at the cloudless sky. "They all probably think we've gone off to shift the faces off each other."

"Who fucking cares what they think?" he chuckled, rolling onto his back. "What I do or don't do with you won't ever be for their entertainment."

I thought about his words for a long time before turning my head to look at him. "Why do you do it, Gerard?"

"Do what?"

"Act like a clown when you're around everyone else, but not when you're alone with me?"

"Why don't you call me Gibsie?" came his immediate response.

I scrunched my nose up in disgust. "Because you're not Gibsie to me, *Gerard*."

"Exactly." Shrugging, he unfolded his arms from behind his head and reached a hand out to me. "Some things just make sense, Claire."

My heart leapt in my chest. "Like us?"

"Yeah." He smiled. "Like you and me."

Exhaling a sigh of pure contentment, I allowed myself to revel in the feel of the back of his hand touching mine.

Moments later, when his fingers moved to entwine with mine, I had to bite down on my lip to stop my grin from spreading. "Gerard?"

"Yeah?"

"I want you to do it."

"Do what?"

"Your dare." Pulling myself up on my knees, I turned to look at him, excitement rippling through my belly. "I want that kiss."

Warm grey eyes landed on mine. "You don't have to do that, Claire-Bear."

"I know I don't." I squeezed his hand between both of mine, bubbling up with nervous excitement. "But what if I... kind of want to give it a shot anyway?"

His brows furrowed and I felt a tremor of anxiety rack through me.

Don't say no.

Don't say no.

Oh please god, don't say no.

Slowly pulling himself into a sitting position opposite me, he blew out a breath. "Can I tell you something?"

I nodded eagerly. "You can tell me anything, Gerard."

"You're my favorite person in the world."

My eyes widened in surprise. "I am?"

"Yeah, you are."

"Even more than your mam?"

"Even more than Mam."

"And Brian?"

"Definitely more than Brian."

Whoa. "Even more than the Dub?"

"Yeah." He nodded slowly, looking a little sad. "Can I tell you something else?"

Another wide-eyed nod.

"I need you to *not* go away..." His hand tightened around mine. "Like ever, Claire."

"Why?"

"You're the only person who makes it stop." He swallowed deeper and ducked his head. "The noise in my head."

I didn't need to ask him what he was talking about.

Not when I already knew.

Too well.

"I won't go, Gerard," I whispered, shuffling closer until our knees were touching. Reaching out, I cupped his soft cheek in my hand. "I won't ever leave you."

Exhaling a shaky breath, he leaned in close, noses brushing, and whispered, "I'm going to hold you to that, Claire-bear."

And then Gerard Gibson kissed my lips for the very first time.

*Find Gibsie and Claire in the
Boys of Tommen series,
available now.*

WEDNESDAY

BALLYLAGGIN, CORK

LIZZIE YOUNG

Shaking my head, I gripped the sink, holding onto the last scrap of my sanity with all of my might.

Twitching violently when the memory of her lifeless corpse flashed through my mind, I shook my head and slapped my face.

"Block it out," I strangled out, unable to look at my own fucking reflection.

I couldn't look at me without seeing *her* and I couldn't think of her without remembering *them*.

"Fuck!" Gasping for air, I tightened my grip on the porcelain sink, and prayed the pressure would snap my fingernails off.

I needed it to stop.

I needed it all to be *not* here anymore.

Not in my head.

Not in my body.

Or my thoughts.

I just needed *silence*.

Grabbing the scissors off the sink, I yanked them open and put the blade to my flesh. Slowly at first; soft, light strokes of shallow splicing over my thigh until I grew braver, stronger, calmer, more in control of my own thoughts.

Furious, I thought of them all, each and every son of a bitch who'd ever put a foot wrong in my life. In my world right now, and the frame of mind I was currently residing in, these people were actually capable of feeling guilt.

It was almost as if every stroke of the blade across my flesh was a punishment for *their* actions.

I was making *them* pay.

It was a maddening notion.

It was fucking *revelry*.

Shuddering in the sudden and explosive overload of endorphins, I felt my body grow light.

Collapsing on the bathroom floor, I closed my eyes, feeling my damp lashes clot together, as my blood-soaked fingers continued to carve my flesh at a frantic pace.

The crazy thoughts and feelings whizzing inside of my mind dimmed and lulled, replaced now with warning signals of pain.

That was okay.

Physical pain, I could handle.

It was less confusing.

When blood spilled from my body, I could see the source of the problem – the root of the cause. When blood spilled from my mind, it was a gaping wound – a terminal abyss of mental torture that I couldn't heal.

Can't fix what you can't see.

"I fucking can!"

Lightheaded and trembling, I let myself in through the back door they never thought to lock. Cold to the bone and shaking like an ivy leaf, I moved through the darkness, knowing the layout of this house better than my own.

I'd spent enough time here, after all.

Soaked to the skin, raindrops trickled from my bare arms, landing on the plush carpet. Every stitch of clothing I had on was soaked right through, but still, I couldn't feel a thing. Not the stinging bite of the night air, or the razor prick of the icy rainwater on my torn flesh.

Toeing off my shoes at the bottom of the staircase, I tip-toed up each step, avoiding the creaky boards until I was standing on the landing.

The bedroom I would usually escape inside was right in front of me.

It wasn't the bedroom I was going to choose.

Not tonight.

My tears were free-falling now, and I fucking hated myself for it.

Teeth chattering, I moved for the forbidden door, not bothering to knock.

If I stopped now, I would second guess myself. I would think too much. I couldn't do that.

Not tonight.

Dragging in a shuddering breath, I steeled my spine and pushed the door inwards.

When I slipped inside, I was greeted with darkness and the universal smell of teenage boy. The moonlight shining through his open window illuminated his sleeping frame beneath the sheets, slumped face down on the mattress.

His blond hair was ruffled, no doubt by her fingers, and his lips were puffy and slightly swollen as he nuzzled his pillow.

"C-can we talk?"

Nothing.

Sniffling, I raised my hands to my face and roughly wiped the tears from my eyes, smearing mascara across my cheeks. "Please... just w-wake up."

"Fuck off, Claire," he mumbled sleepily into his pillow. "It's the middle of the night."

"I'm not C-Claire."

"I said fuck off, Claire..." Wincing, his eyes flickered open. Confusion filled his brown eyes for the briefest moment before they softened. "*Liz?*"

Holding my breath, I locked eyes on him and nodded, trying to hold my breath to keep my sobs at bay.

Slowly sitting up, he scratched his bare chest and glanced around the room before settling his sleepy gaze on me, blond hair mussed up in a million different directions. "Are you...okay?" he asked, flicking on the lamp on his nightstand.

"No," I half hiccupped/ half sobbed, hands hanging limply at my sides as I stood in his bedroom at three in the morning. "I'm really not."

"Do you...want to talk about it?" The concern in his eyes deepened. "Or I can get Claire?"

Sniffling, I shook my head.

He frowned. "Should I call your parents?"

Another sob escaped me. "No."

Something flashed in his eyes then, something I couldn't decipher, and then he was pushing the covers aside and patting the mattress. "Come here."

I didn't.

I couldn't.

So, instead, I said the only thing I could say – could *feel* – in this moment, "I d-don't want to be h-here anymore."

HUGHIE BIGGS

When I saw her standing in my bedroom tonight, dressed in nothing but her pajamas and soaked to the skin, I felt like someone had shoved their hand through my chest and ripped my heart clean out of my body.

Lizzie Young.

My sister's best friend.

The so-called viper in the flesh.

The broken girl...

She was bleeding all over my bedroom floor, her emotional scars far deeper than the ones I knew she secretly carved into her body, and I couldn't handle the pain that came with knowing that it had happened again.

"Tell me you didn't!" I demanded, not waiting for her to answer before throwing the covers off and stalking towards her.

I knew she had.

I fucking *knew* it, and when I pulled at her clothes, exposing her milky skin, not giving two shits if I upset her, I released a pained groan when my eyes found what my heart knew she was hiding.

"Why the *fuck*, Liz –" My voice cracked and I had to drag in several steady breaths before I could continue. "Where's Pierce?" I demanded, keeping my hands clamped firmly around her arms. "Liz?"

"It's, uh..." Sniffling, she held herself poker stiff, unwilling and unable to accept any kind of human affection. "It's over. He's, uh, done...with me."

Fucking Pierce.

"He's a wanker," I spat, fucking furious with my teammate for leaving his girl in this condition.

He could pretend he didn't know about what she did until the cows came home, but he saw this girl naked. He knew what was hiding beneath her clothes just as much as I did. His river of denial didn't float with me. If he cared about her at all, he would do something. *Anything, dammit!*

"I need to get my mam," I told her, keeping a firm grip on her body, knowing she was a flight risk. "You've cut yourself deep this time, Liz. I think you might need stitches –"

"No!" she strangled out, reaching up to grab my forearms. "Hughie, don't tell." Tears fell freely down her face as she trembled violently. "Please...*please* don't do that to me."

Pain.

I felt it everywhere.

Her words cut me deep and fuck if I wanted to betray her.

I just wanted to keep her alive, dammit.

"Fuck, Liz..." I was not emotionally equipped to deal with her breakdown – no matter how badly I wanted to save her from the demons in her mind. "I can't –" Shaking my head, I fought with my heart. "I can't help you if I don't tell –"

"You know where my mam and dad will send me if they find out I'm cutting again," she choked out. "I'm not fucking crazy, Hughie!"

No, you're just a lot broken, I thought to myself.

"I don't want to go back there," she cried, tension dissipating from her shoulders and she sagged weakly against my chest. "I'm just sad." Sob after heart wrenching sob escaped her. "I'm *allowed* to be sad."

Yeah, she was, and I couldn't turn it around for her.

I couldn't change the past.

I couldn't bring her sister back or erase the circumstances surrounding her death.

All I could do in this moment was be a part of her breakdown.

"I know," I whispered, wrapping her up in my arms so tightly I had a feeling I was cutting off her air supply.

I knew this was wrong. I knew she had no business being in my bedroom late at night, and I certainly had no business letting her cry on my shoulder when I had a long-term girlfriend. But I couldn't fucking help it, because long before Katie and every other girl that had crossed my path, there had been Lizzie.

She was the first girl I ever kissed, the first girl I ever crushed on, and I had crushed on her real fucking hard.

The lads didn't understand her, nobody *got* her, not even her parents, but I did.

I saw her, the real her, underneath all of that anger, and I wanted so badly to bring her back to life.

Before all of the bullshit and drama and growing pains, before she went dark, we had a friendship.

A real, honest to god friendship, and no matter how hard I tried, I could never forget the smiling little girl she used to be.

I wanted to save that little girl.

I wanted to protect her from the pain and the poison that flushed through her mind.

It was with these thoughts rushing wildly through my mind that I made my next decision.

Keeping my arms wrapped around her body, and without a single word spoken, I walked us over to my bed and pulled back the covers.

I didn't ask her permission when I sat down and pulled her onto my lap, and she didn't make any move to resist.

On the contrary, she shifted closer until our chests were flush together, her arms and legs wrapped tightly around my neck and lower back.

Fuck, she was trembling all over, teeth chattering violently, as her heart raced wildly against her ribcage.

Keeping an arm hooked around her lower back, I reached over and flicked off my lamp, cloaking us in darkness. "You're going to stay here tonight. Don't fight me on this."

She didn't protest.

She didn't fight back.

There were no stinging remarks or stubborn retorts.

She was cracked open for only me to see; oozing her heartache and pain all over my bedsheets – and my life.

Scrambling onto the far side of the mattress, she lay on her side, hands tucked beneath her head, and watched me.

Mirroring her actions, I rolled onto my side and stared back at her.

My mind continued to remind me that having this girl too close to me was a terrible fucking idea, but leaving her alone was an even worse one.

"S-sorry," she finally broke the silence by saying – more like chattering as she continued to jerk and tremble violently.

Concern roared to life inside of me, and I quickly pulled the duvet up to her shoulder. "It's okay." It wasn't, we both knew it, but there was nothing else to say.

Unable to stop myself, I reached up and wiped a rogue tear from her cheek, my pathetic attempt at comforting the broken girl in my bed.

The girl who isn't your girlfriend, eejit...

The moment my thumb made contact with her cheek, a deep shudder rolled through her. "No," she croaked out when I moved to pull my hand away. "No," she repeated, snatching up my hand and pressing it to her cheek. "Don't go."

Fuck.

Fuck, she was close.

Her lips were way too close.

Exhaling heavily, I allowed my fingers to curl around her tear stained cheek, my thumb moving in lazy circles against her soft skin. "I won't."

The way this girl clung to me was humbling. She was a strong person. She didn't rely or depend on anyone, but she was leaning on me now, seeking something from me that I wasn't sure was there to give.

"I miss her, Hugh." Her voice was raspy and torn; her words a pained admission. "So bad." Clenching her eyes shut, she kept my hand covered with her small one, while using her free hand to clutch my forearm. "It hurts."

"Liz..." Blowing out a pained breath, I pulled her closer, wanting to heal her and keep her and not fuck everything up all in one breath. "I don't know what to do here... I don't know how to help you."

"You already are." Her breath fanned my face, as she looked into my eyes with a sadness that was sobering. "Please don't ever stop not hating me."

"Stop not hating you?" I replied, forcing myself not to lean into her touch when her nose brushed mine. Keeping perfectly still, I whispered, "I've never hated you, Lizzie, and I never will."

"Yeah, you will," she replied, tone laced with sadness, her lips a hare's breath from mine. "Because that's what I do, Hughie. I drive people *away*. I make people *hate* me –" Her voice cracked and a sob tore from deep inside of her. "In the end, that's exactly what I'll do to you."

"Don't count on it."

Silence enveloped us then, with only the sound of our breathing filling the air, as we lay on our sides, eyes locked on each other, limbs tangled up.

"Hughie?"

"Yeah, Liz?"

"Don't hate me for this, okay?"

"For what —"

She kissed me.

She leaned forward and pressed her lips to mine.

And my heart almost leapt clean out of my chest.

Well shit.

What the fuck?

Don't kiss her back, eejit.

Don't do it.

It doesn't matter how good her lips feel, she's not in her full senses right now, and you have a girlfriend.

"Don't," I warned, but didn't pull back or let go of her, "You'll regret doing that in the morning."

"Will you?" she whispered, lips brushing against mine as she spoke. "Regret me?"

Yes!

No?

Maybe...

"I don't know," I confessed, feeling my heart hammer at the rate of a hundred miles an hour. "I, ah... We really probably shouldn't? I... fuck, I have Katie, and I don't want to take advan —"

Lizzie kissed me again, deeper this time.

Her full lips closed over mine and I was disgusted to admit that I lost my head in those lips.

Losing all contact with my moral compass, I closed my eyes and allowed my lips to meld with hers.

You're a piece of shit, my conscience sneered, but I blocked it out. I ignored the wave of self-loathing washing through me and fell into the kiss, my tongue snaking between her parted lips to duel with hers.

"Fuck," I groaned, pulling her on top of me.

"Don't stop," she begged, straddling my hips as our lips attacked the others almost desperately.

My heart thundered violently in my chest.

My dick strained against the fabric of my jocks.

I couldn't fucking see straight, let alone think about the repercussions of my actions when Lizzie stripped her t-shirt and bra off.

Her full breasts fell free, rubbing against my naked chest, and I groaned in approval, drowning in the fantastic fucking feelings and sensations she was evoking from my body.

Breathing hard and fast, I didn't dare think too much about what I was doing as I helped her out of her shorts and thong.

She pulled on the hem of my jocks, and I quickly lifted my hips off the mattress to accommodate her.

She was soft and fractured and completely naked above me. Her kisses were hot, her body hotter, as she slowly lowered herself onto my dick.

"This is so fucking wrong," I tried to protest before throwing myself into a kiss with her. Groaning against her lips, I slowly fed my dick inside her, inch by inch, until I was sheathed in her slick heat.

"Make me feel something," she cried out, rocking her hips and pushing herself down on my dick. "I just want to *feel*, Hugh."

"Fuck, Liz –" her lips came crashing down on mine once more and I was lost.

Giving myself up to the madness and the fact that I was a terrible fucking person.

With my hands pinned to the mattress beneath hers, I absorbed the sight of her naked body grinding on top of mine, eyes locked on where we were joined.

I couldn't take my eyes off the way I slid in and out of her. Watching her fuck me like this, seeing my dick sliding into her tight pussy, her pulling back and giving me a perfect view, before slamming back down on my cock was so fucking sexy.

I couldn't breathe.

My heart felt like it was bursting.

You're the worst piece of shit on the planet, Hughie Biggs.

Shut the fuck up, eejit, and enjoy this! You know how you feel about her.

Yeah, I did know how I felt about her, and it scared the shit out of me.

"Lizzie, I –"

"Don't say it –" Clamping a hand over my mouth, she continued to ride me relentlessly, hips bucking wildly, driving me closer to the edge, until I

went crashing and came hard.

"Fuck," she cried out, pulsing hard around me as I came deep inside of her tight channel.

"Fuck," I agreed, breathing hard and fast, as she collapsed in a sticky heap on top of my chest.

She made no move to climb off me, and I couldn't move if I tried.

Jesus Christ.

Only when she was sleeping next to me, several hours later, did reality come slamming down on me.

Fuck, what had I done?

LIZZIE YOUNG

The moment I stepped foot through the threshold of Tommen College, a scorching heat bubbled up inside of my stomach, so hot and putrid, that I felt like screaming at the top of my lungs for someone to save me.

I wanted to fall on my knees and beg someone to put this fire out inside of me because I honestly didn't think I could take much more, but I knew I wouldn't.

I couldn't.

So instead, I did what I always did; I turned that pain into poison, projected it at the one person I knew I could, and I kept moving.

Kept walking.

Kept living.

For now.

Pumping my MP3 player to the maximum volume, I drowned out the whispers and floating gossip with *Boulevard of Broken Dreams*.

With my head held high, I walked down the hallways, ignoring everyone and everything in my path... that was until I turned the corner and locked eyes on *him*.

His eyes landed on me, causing my feet to falter, and that's when it all started to unravel.

Like every other morning, his arm was draped around *her* shoulders.

He was laughing and joking with the enemy.

He was the fucking enemy!

Don't look at him, I mentally commanded myself, but of course, I didn't listen.

No, instead I chose to stand there and watch the guilt flicker in his eyes
– I chose to absorb the absolute regret etched on his face.

Because of *me*.

Because of *us*.

Because of *her*.

A warm hand clamped down on my shoulder then, pulling me backwards.

Feeling too off kilter to be furious, I spun around and locked eyes on a pair of steely blue eyes.

"Don't do it," Patrick Feely warned, his intelligent eyes boring into mine. "Whatever scene you're planning on causing right now? It won't change anything. He won't leave her."

*Read more about Lizzie, Hughie,
and the rest of the gang from Ballylaggin
in the **Boys of Tommen** series,
available now.*

WEDNESDAY

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

KEIRA BOWE

*I*t totally blew that I couldn't walk into my own kitchen to get a glass of water, without getting dry humped by a bunch of drunk groupies.

You would have to admit that's a pretty crappy hand of cards for an eighteen-year-old; not being able to walk around her own home without the risk of being groped or having beer spilled on her shirt.

Unfortunately, that was a typical, run of the mill, Saturday night in the Bowe household. I guess it was lucky for me that I had a high tolerance for assholes – and an even stronger stomach.

Music was pumping from the living room downstairs – the band was on fire tonight. My older brother Danny and his three best friends that made up the band, *Verbal Assault*, were belting out rock anthem after rock anthem for their final shindig before the band hit the road tomorrow. The boys were heading for the Cali, leaving Washington behind them. Blink-182's *Dammit* was their current cover of choice and a huge hit with our peers – and the fangirls who were screaming at the top of their lungs.

Gag.

A little over an hour later, they finished their set, the crowd downstairs erupted in cheers, and the familiar sound of club beats coming from Jonas Cadashi's DJ decks filled my ears.

Like every other time he'd entered my bedroom unannounced over the course of this summer, my stomach did the most deplorable somersault when he walked inside. He flicked the lock on my door, set his guitar case against the wall, and sauntered towards me.

Riley Odell.

Lead guitarist in Verbal Assault and my brother's best friend since freshman year. Oh, and the guy I had been fucking since prom. Yep, that's right. I gave it all up – v-card included – to a rocker who'd taken pity on me when my date bailed and accompanied me to my senior prom. That's exactly what I had done – and what I had continued to do every freaking night since.

With shaggy, dirty blond hair, eyes the color of turquoise, and a body covered in tats that oozed sex appeal, my brother's bandmate was undeniably gorgeous. He was twenty-one like Danny, three years my senior, and the absolute *wrong* person for me to be lusting after.

Tonight, he was dressed in his usual gig attire: faded denim jeans, a plain black tee, and his beige Timberlands, and the sight of him looking so damn fine made my clit throb.

"Keira Bowe." The way he always called me by my full name, and the way my name curled on his lips, caused my breath to catch in my throat. His lips curved into a devilish smile.

"Riley Odell," I replied, keeping my tone as nonchalant as possible, as I flicked through a magazine on my bed. "What can I do for you?"

He stared at me for a long while before letting out a harsh breath. "I came to say goodbye." His voice was raspy and hoarse from the set. "I'm leaving with the band in the morning."

Yeah, I already knew that and it made my chest hurt.

It made me want to cry, actually.

"Well, I hope you guys kill it on tour," I offered, trying so damn hard not to let my emotions come out. Because telling this boy that I had caught feelings this summer was not going to end well for me. I needed to keep my shit together and my business to myself.

"You gonna miss me?"

"Depends." I closed my magazine and flicked my gaze up to meet his, unable to mask my vulnerability this time – or the crack in my voice when I asked, "Are you gonna miss me?"

Riley exhaled a pained sigh and then he was moving. Closing the space between us, he lowered himself down on my bed. "I'm gonna need you to stay out of trouble while I'm gone, pretty girl." His breath flooded my senses and I could practically taste the mint and alcohol on his tongue. "Can you do that for me?"

Nodding sadly, I nuzzled my cheek against his shoulder. "I'm going to miss you. So much." It was the truth. "Don't forget me when you're rich and famous."

"Forget Keira Bowe?" He tipped my chin up, forcing me to look at him, his unusual bluish-green eyes locked on mine. "Not fucking possible."

With a mixture of lust and longing coursing through my veins, I wrapped my arms around his neck and pressed my lips to his.

The second our lips touched, a growl tore from the back of Riley's throat and my whole body ignited in fire – an aching of desperation thrummed low in my belly.

"I need in, Keira," he growled against my lips. "One more night, baby." He kissed me harder, his tongue dueling with mine. "Say yes."

There was only one response to his question and I was positive that it would break my heart. Still, I whispered the word, "yes," before leaning back and yanking my nightdress over my head.

Shivering, I watched as Riley quickly removed his clothes before settling between my bare thighs. "You're so fucking beautiful," he whispered, eyes roaming over my bare skin. "I need in you so fucking bad, Keira."

"Then be in me," I replied, breathless, as I lay beneath his powerful frame. Every groove and muscular indent on his body was carved to perfection and it hurt to think about the countless fangirls and groupies that would enjoy him once he walked out of my life tomorrow.

"Please don't forget me," I whispered, knowing that I was beginning to sound like a broken record, but unable to stop. It was important to me that he remembered us. Especially when I had a feeling that I would never get over the boy between my legs.

He lowered himself on to me before promising, "I won't. I'll come home, Keira." He slipped a hand between bodies and guided the head of his thick cock inside of me.

"God," I moaned, clutching his broad shoulders as he filled me to the point of pain. "I feel so full."

"When it's all over, I'll come home to you," he continued to whisper as he moved inside of me. "Where I belong."

Years passed by and the boys were signed to Kristal Records Inc. Within eighteen months, the band exploded and the boys had officially hit the big time.

Four years, two albums, and one world tour later, and they were burning out fast.

Chris Dennison, the band's drummer, had to pull out of the last three shows of the tour and check into rehab for *exhaustion* – or so I had read.

Chad Monroe – the so-called *sensible* band member – had flown straight back to Maine for divorce proceedings with the wife he had obtained during an alcohol-fueled binge in Vegas. *Well that was one weekend that would cost him...*

Danny had placed a phone call last week to his only sibling, letting her know that he would be flying into Seattle on Wednesday, and wanted to lay low and *hang* with his *baby sis* for a few months while the band took a much-needed break from the road.

What a crock...

When I'd received the call, I'd been a little more than surprised considering I hadn't seen my big brother since Mom's funeral the winter before last.

Still, since Danny was all I had in the world that I could call family, and he had bought the house I was living in for me, I didn't have much choice than to agree for him to come stay.

The morning Danny was due to arrive, I cleaned the entire house from top to bottom. I even got down on my hands and knees and scrubbed the baseboards before laying out a vase of lilies on the lamp desk in the hallway.

Call it a nervous trait, but when I was anxious, I cleaned. After I finished tidying up, I raced upstairs for a shower before dressing in my best jeans, my favorite white camisole, and my lucky beige cardigan.

I blow-dried my waist length, black hair and then pulled it back into a ponytail. I didn't bother with makeup, just a little concealer and lip-gloss,

and of course my black frames perched on top of my nose.

The thought of sharing my small, three-bedroom townhouse with the brother I hadn't seen in two years caused the nervous fluttering in my stomach to multiply and spread until it felt like there was a swarm of bees inside of me.

What would we talk about?

Would it be awkward?

Would he behave himself?

Regardless of how different we were, Danny was on his way to my house for a prolonged stay.

I hadn't lived with my brother since I was eighteen and he moved out of our home and hit the road with the band, but I remembered his house parties and the women...

I wasn't a forward person, my friends called me a pushover, but I needed to lay down the rules when he arrived.

I was twenty-two and this was my house – even if he had bought it for me.

If Danny wanted to stay under my roof, he would have to obey those rules.

Rule number one: no drugs.

Rule number two: no smoking in the house.

Rule number three: no sex in the kitchen.

Rule number four: repeat first three rules.

I shouldn't have worried because Danny never showed up like he said he would, and I really shouldn't have been surprised. The guy had never been on time a day in his whole life.

Disappointment flared inside of me and I felt like an idiot for cutting my afternoon classes to welcome home my prodigal brother.

If I had known it would be this way, then I would've taken my best friend up on her offer of a vacation. That's where Macy was right now – partying it up on Myrtle Beach, sipping cocktails, and seducing the locals.

I should be there with her, but ever-the-sensible-one, I'd passed up on the once in a lifetime offer, choosing to stay behind to welcome Danny home – and study for end of semester finals.

My dreams of making a career for myself as a librarian kept me focused. It wasn't the highflier lifestyle my rock star brother lived, but books were my passion.

Besides, Danny and I had both promised Mom that we would follow our dreams. Raising us by herself when her loser husband walked out when I was a little over a month old, Mom had always instilled in both of us the importance of following our own paths in life.

But I doubted Mom could have predicted her children would go in such different paths – a rock star and a librarian.

It was almost laughable.

It was late in the evening, after nine, when the doorbell finally rang.

Startled and disorientated, I leapt up from where I'd been sprawled out on the couch, reading Nicole. S. Goodin's latest work of magic and raced for the front door ready to give that brother of mine a piece of my mind.

Stalking into the hallway, I unlocked the front door and pulled it inwards, rearranging my reading glasses on my nose in the process. "You know you could have called me, jackass..." my words trailed off when my eyes landed on the man in front of me.

"Oh shit," I whispered, heart hammering violently in my chest.

"Keira Bowe," Riley purred with a smile. "It's been awhile."

You're telling me. "Yeah." I blew out a shaky breath. "It has."

"Are you going to invite me inside?"

"Depends." Trembling, I clutched the door for all I was worth. "Are you going to tell me what you're doing here?"

"Your brother called." Shrugging, he rubbed his stubbly jaw. "He invited me to stay with y'all while I was in town."

Jesus Christ, Danny! "And how long do you plan on being in town for?"

"Depends."

"On what?"

"On how long you want me to stay." His piercing eyes burned holes straight through me. "I wanna come home, Keira."

"Home?"

"Yeah." He nodded slowly. "To you."

Well shit...

*Keira and Riley are a fresh, new couple.
Their book has not been released yet.*

THURSDAY

ASPEN, COLORADO

HOPE CARTER

The date was set.
The day of reckoning was upon us.
It was *actually* happening.

Derek Porter was getting *married*.
To *Karen Valentine*.

I couldn't even count how many *WTF's* had floated through my mind since the news broke.

That was enough to stun me into silence, but what really blew my mind was the fact that Hunter and I had received an *invitation*.

Well, saying we had both received an invite was being a little optimistic.

Every member of my father's family had been invited to attend, spouses and dates included, so I guess they kind of *had* to invite us.

The pretty ivory card with laced edgings had stated, "*Hope, Abigail, and him,*" but still, it was progress.

I had no idea how to handle it.

The ceremony was in a little over an hour away, and I was still sitting on the bed in our hotel suite, with my dress laid out, twiddling my thumbs and battling down a huge surge of butterflies.

Should we go?

Should we not?

After a serious internal battle with myself, I settled on attending the wedding; knowing it was a big deal for them to invite us in the first place. It wouldn't be easy, though.

There were only three people on the entire planet who knew what happened that night – me, Jordan, and Hunter.

None of my family knew.

I never breathed a word to anyone – not even Teegs.

Right or wrong, that was my choice and I planned on taking it to grave with me.

The problem with keeping such a secret was the fact that neither my father nor Derek realized how dangerous it was to put these two men in the same state, let alone the same isolated ski-resort hotel in the middle of the mountains in Aspen.

Oh boy...

"Think you can manage not to kill each other for a couple of days for Derek's sake?" I heard my father say when I joined the rest of the guests in the main foyer who were waiting to be accompanied into the room the vows would take place in.

My father looked as uncomfortable as I felt as his eyes flicked between my ex-husband and current, uh, Lucky. "Well?"

Panic seizing my chest, my gaze darted to where Hunter was visibly bristling with tension.

Like the role of a lifetime movie, he was playing the villain. I could see it in everyone's eyes. They weren't saying it, they didn't dare, but they sure as hell were thinking it.

He was my dirty little secret.

My affair.

And the adorable baby he was holding in his arms?

The one we'd conceived when I was still married to another man?

Well, I was fairly certain that little girl was the only thing keeping Hunter from attacking.

"You won't have any trouble from me," Jordan replied quietly, and he had the good grace to look ashamed.

Nodding stiffly, Dad looked to me. "Hope?"

Exhaling a ragged breath, I shrugged limply. "I, ah...no trouble from me."

"Lucky?"

"We'll see," Hunter finally replied, tone cool, blue eyes locked on Jordan. "I'm not making promises." Turning to Derek, he hissed, "Keep your *boy* away from my woman. That's your only warning."

Oh boy.

This was going to be a long week.

"Can you just try and ignore him," I begged, voice hushed, as I struggled to balance our flailing daughter on my lap. "Please. It's over and done with."

"Really fucking hard thing to do, HC," Hunter muttered, jaw clenched, eyes trained on the back of Jordan's curly head, "when my woman's rapist ex-husband is sitting four rows ahead of me."

"We've been through this—" I began to say before Hunter cut me off.

"I spared his *life*," he hissed, as a vein ticked in his neck. "So he could go. Not come the fuck back here and shit on my mercy!"

Feeling panicked, I quickly thrust Abi into his arms, knowing Hunter would rather chew off his arm than cause distress to his little girl.

"I'm yours," I whispered, leaning into his ear. "Then, now, and always."

Turning to face me, Hunter cocked a brow. "Using our daughter as a shield?" A reluctant smirk spread across his face. "Low fucking blow, sweetheart."

"I've got a pretty dress on, Hunter Casarazzi," I reminded him, gesturing to myself. "One I've worked my ass off to fit into, and I have no intentions of letting you get it splattered in blood."

"That dress?" he purred, attention diverted to the lemon colored dress with a fitted corset I had on. "On *your* body?" His blue eyes danced with mischief. "Should be illegal." He shifted closer, and inclined his head towards my chest with a flirty wink. "Because the thoughts I'm having of you right now are fucking criminal, HC."

Well hell.

My heart.

My freaking body...

Smirking right back at him, I teased, "If you cuss in Church, you won't go to heaven."

Hunter snorted – literally snorted – at my warning before resuming his post of glaring at the back of Jordan's head. And he did it while looking like a fucking sex god.

All suited up in a tight-fitted white shirt and black slacks, Hunter bounced Abi on his knee, not caring one bit that she was yanking gleefully on his tie like it was her new favorite toy.

His blond hair, back to its former glory since his ordeal in Mexico, was slicked back in his signatory man-bun. His beard was neatly trimmed and styled. Only one visible scar remained on his face now, right above his left eye, and it only seemed to add to his appeal.

He was completely oblivious to the countless ogles and stares from the women sitting in the nearby makeshift pews. I felt like baring my teeth and growling at those women, but then I thought about where I was and I managed to reign it in – barely.

Everyone around us was getting engaged or married. People couldn't understand it; how Hunter and I were content just being together. They wouldn't understand. Marriage was not on our agenda. I knew he was never going to propose to me, and I took a weird comfort in that. A piece of paper didn't mean anything to us.

My father loved Hunter. He genuinely adored him, but he couldn't figure it out. Didn't understand why he refused to marry his daughter.

All of my family expected it to happen after Abi was born. But we were perfectly content living in sin. He was never going to give me a ring, and I didn't want one. I had one of those before. I said those words once. And it was a mistake. *Nothing* about Hunter Casarazzi was a mistake, and I wasn't tarring him with the same brush.

He looked my way and in that one glance I *knew*. I just knew he was going to fuck me seven ways from Sunday when this was all over. He was promising me all kinds of everything. I could see it in those blue eyes of his. He was watching me. Marking me. Laying claim on me.

Good.

I wanted to be owned by him. Wholly and completely.

Smirking, Hunter reached over and cupped the back of my head. "Gimme a kiss, sweetheart."

And then he kissed me in the middle of the church, in front of *everyone*. Stunned, I could do nothing but kiss him back, feeling more emotion than was safe for me. I was powerless when it came to this guy. He ruined me.

"Hey!" a familiar voice hissed from the row behind us, causing us to reluctantly pull apart. Moments later, a blonde head poked out between us. "Are you on birth control?"

"What?" I turned to gape at my best friend. "I'm on the pill, Teegs. Why?"

"The *pill*?" Teagan looked at me like I had grown three extra heads. "You think a tiny pink smarty is going to stop those Carter ovaries from snatching up the strongest swimmer?"

"Ew, Teegs."

"Don't *ew* me, Hope Carter," Teagan shot back as she patted her huge stomach. "If I've learned anything from my time with your family, it's that you guys possess over achieving reproductive organs." Gesturing to Hunter, she huffed out a breath. "Yeah, I see the way he's looking at you. Like you're breakfast, lunch, and freaking dinner. Careful, Hope, or you'll end up with another bundle of joy."

"Thorn," Noah grumbled from beside her. "Can you at least *try* to contain the crazy until the service is over?"

"Do you think he has an attitude problem?" Teagan asked later that evening, as we all sat around an impressive round table. "I'm deadly serious, guys." She glanced between her son and her husband. "He looks so mad."

"With you two as his parents?" Colton drawled sarcastically. "*Never*."

"Look at that frown," Teagan continued, ignoring my brother. "He's always frowning."

"What?" Noah frowned, mirroring his son's expression. "No, Thorn, he's fine."

"Looks just like his father if you ask me," Colton interjected with a snicker.

"No one asked you," Noah shot back in warning.

"He's angry," Teagan added, bouncing Finn on her hip. "*A lot*, Noah."

"He's just a baby." Rubbing his stubbly chin, Noah cast a quick glance towards his son before shaking his head. "You took your tit away, babe. He's pissed off."

"Don't say *pissed off* in front of our son, asshole," Teagan snapped, slapping her husband's hand away from her chest "Or *tit*."

Noah rolled his eyes. "What – like you just said?"

"Oh, fuck off, Noah!"

"That's lovely, Thorn."

"Guys, stop fighting," I offered, stifling a laugh.

"Abi smiles," Teagan hurried on, pointing to my daughter, who was, as per usual, smiling at her uncle Colt. "All the freaking time. And my baby? He *frowns*, Noah! He's like the king of frowning." Teagan's expression fell and she paled before whispering, "Oh my god. Do you think he's not happy?"

"The fuck?" Gaping at his wife, Noah pushed his chair back and hoisted Finn out of Teagan's arms before standing up. "He's not unhappy, Thorn. He's just... honest about his feelings."

"Honest?" Looking vulnerable, Teagan stared up at her husband with a hopeful expression. "Really?"

"Yeah," Noah coaxed. "Don't be fooled by that angelic smile of hers," he continued, pointing to my daughter. "I've seen her father wear that exact smirk seconds before he made a kill." Shrugging, he added, "Sometimes during a kill."

"Excuse me!" I choked out, feeling outraged. "My child is not a sadistic killer!"

"No," Colton snickered. "That's just your *lover*."

"Oh fuck off, Colton!"

"Speaking of sadistic killers," Teagan piped up. "Any idea where you left yours, Hopey-bear?"

I glanced around the table only to find Hunter's chair suspiciously empty.

Ah hell.

LUCKY CASARAZZI

For most of my adult life, I walked a thin line between moral and immoral, somehow managing to find a balance between right and wrong, good and evil, man and monster.

My sins were many and my soul was charred like the bones of my enemies.

Convictions? They were a dime a dozen to men like me.

Felonies? Fuck, I had those, too.

I lived in a war zone; a consistent frenzy of drug-fueled violence, constant paranoia, wicked bloodshed, and, inevitably, death. Christ, *I* had been knocking on Heaven's door for a long damn time. Almost met the man on a few occasions.

Still, it had never bothered me before now. I had never given much thought to the way I lived my life, or the lives I had taken.

And then there was Hope.

The woman.

The feeling.

The... everything.

She burst into my world and threw everything on its axis. All of sudden I had a woman to think about, to protect from the skeletons bursting out of my closet. *To protect from the demons that actively hunted me down.*

I was thirty-two years old and my body was fit for retirement. My knuckles were worn. The holes still left inside of me were hollow and angry. When I woke up in the morning, it was to crippling pain and a racing mind.

I hid it the best I could, Hope didn't need to worry about me, but it was there. The fear of being unable to protect her from the monsters I had brought to our doorstep was a very real concern for me.

I had no clue how the woman could see beyond what I was – how she could see beyond the crimes I'd committed, or the lives I'd taken.

But she did.

I wasn't so sure about my kid, though.

Growing up with a killer for a father?

Finding out who I was?

What I am...

Fuck me, for all I knew there would be kids in her grade whose relations I had taken out. It wasn't something I had kept track of and, if I was being honest, thought about. Because I didn't expect to be a father.

But here I was, trying to walk the line, be a little girl's daddy, and live within the boundaries of the law. Hard thing to do for a man who knew nothing but the other side of that line.

On a bright note, I was bossing this dad shit. Seriously, I had it down. Sterilizing bottles, night feeds, diaper changes. I had a handle on all of it. I was so damn determined not to fuck this kid up. I'd seen it in prison. That place was filled with guys with daddy issues so deep no psychiatrist could root them out.

Not my kid.

Whatever she needed, I would be down. I took my role as her father seriously, which came as a surprise to Noah and the rest of them. Apparently, I wasn't a serious kind of man. And hell, maybe I wasn't.

Up until Hope Carter, I went with the flow. She was the first thing I had intentionally hunted down. I'd never been more serious about anything in my life as I was about that woman.

And this kid?

The one we'd made together?

Goddamn, I was serious about her. Abi was mine. My daughter. I would not fuck this up. Hell, I didn't have a clue what I was doing most of the time, but I was trying dammit. She liked me. Smiled when she saw me. Settled when she was in my arms. Yeah, my girl knew who I was. She knew I had her back.

Out of the corner of my eye, I watched Colton bop around with Abi in his arms as a flock of women surrounded him. Fucker was using my

daughter to pick up women. Standing nearby was Logan, who was entertaining baby Finn, and looking on at his brother in dismay.

I shook my head and forced down the urge to kick his fuckboy ass for using my kid as pussy bait.

Remembering that I was on strict orders to not get bloody tonight, I reigned it in.

The tension somewhat eased from my shoulders a few moments later when Lee Carter hurried onto the dance floor to retrieve her grandbaby and scold her wayward son.

"Hello," Cameron Carter said, snapping his fingers in front of me. "Earth to Lucky."

Shaking my head to clear my thoughts, I cocked a brow at Hope's brother. "What?"

"I asked if you wanted another drink, dude?"

"The man is attending his baby mama's former father-in-law's wedding. Of course he wants another drink," Noah filled in, joining us at the bar. Setting his kid – the mirror image of him – on top of the counter, he flagged the bartender down and ordered a round of Jack before turning to look at me. "You good, Luck?"

Was I?

Hell to the no.

Would I admit it?

Not on my death bed.

"I still can't believe you didn't tell me that your sister's a stripper, dude," Colton said, coming to join us at the bar, and snagging his brother's freshly poured tumbler of whiskey. "Do you have any idea how many boxes she's ticking for me?" he asked before tossing the amber liquid back his throat. "Goddamn, I think I'm in love."

"That's my sister you're talking about, you little pervert," I growled, keeping my voice low, but my eyes locked on the horned-up fucker whose attention was fixated on Hayden. "So back the fuck off."

"And that's *my* sister you're shackled up with," Colton shot back with a pearly white grin, inclining his head to where Hope was sitting at our table talking to Teagan, Tillie, and Brooke – the pretty little brunette nurse Logan had brought as his date tonight. Unfortunately for me, the person Colton Carter had chosen to accompany him tonight just so happened to be my goddamn sister.

"Your sister is a grown ass woman," I informed him, taking a good long look at the fabulous fucking female I was taking home tonight before returning my attention to baby Carter. "Hayden is barely twenty."

"Bullshit," Colton scoffed. "You can't run with the hare and hunt with the hound, Lucky boy!" Grinning, he winked daringly before adding, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander."

"Listen here, farm boy," I snarled, feeling the urge to maim and kill rise up inside of me at a rapid pace. "Put your dick near that girl and I will fuck you up!"

Otis Redding's *Love Man* blasted from the speakers and I groaned in audible despair as Colton scampered off. "That fucker wants to die," I stated grimly as I watched baby Carter dance his ass off in the most animated fashion across the floor in the direction of *my little sister*.

Noah, who was concentrating on trying to make his son smile, shrugged nonchalantly. "Think my nephew wants to get laid —"

"Don't say it," I warned him. "Don't even think it, man."

Chuckling, Noah shook his head and lifted his son into his arms. "Could be worse," he added, bobbing with Finn in his arms.

"Oh yeah?" I raised a brow. "How'd you figure that one?"

He smirked and pointed across the room. "Could be that fucker you're warding off."

My eyes locked on the curly haired prick Noah was pointing at and a low growl ripped from my throat.

Jordan.

"Get me drunk, Noah," I pleaded before tossing my drink back. Slapping the glass down on the counter, I flagged the bar tender and grumbled, "Get me so fucking drunk that I can't aim a gun, man."

HOPE CARTER

"You did good, Angel," Dad said, twirling me out and then spinning me around to Loudon Wainwright III's *Daughter*. "And I honestly couldn't be prouder of you."

Listening intently to the lyrics of the song, I found myself smiling against his chest.

Like the habit of a lifetime, I snuggled close to the man who raised me and breathed him in, feeling that blanket of security cloak over me. "Even now, Dad?"

He knew what I was referring to.

I didn't need to verbalize the long list of my indiscretions.

"*Especially* now," he replied, tone confident and strong. "So, hold that head up high, my little pocketful of hope, because you've made your old man proud."

Pocketful of hope? "Ugh, Dad," I groaned, blushing at the stupid endearment. "That's so...cheesy."

"Don't give me that shit," he chuckled. "You just wait until Abi's older and every little thing you do or say embarrasses her."

"Yeah, well, if she watches this video back, she's going to feel justified in her shame," I chuckled, pointing over my shoulder to where my stupid brother was attempting to dance with my baby.

Concern pooled inside of my belly as I watched a notably drunk Colton fake-moonwalk Abi around the dancefloor, bobbing her up and down to the beat as he went.

The sunglasses, men's dress hat, and bowtie he'd decided to dress her in looked ridiculous, but she was grinning in delight, clearly enjoying her

uncle's antics.

I was far from impressed.

"What the hell is he doing now?" I growled, stopping short. "He knows she can't walk yet – Colton! If you drop my baby, I'm going to kill –"

My words fell off the tip of my tongue when I watched Hunter snatch our baby away from my brother.

Hoisting his daughter into his arms, he tossed the hat and glasses back to Colt, as he checked her over from head to toe, carefully undoing the bow-tie on her neck.

I smirked, watching as Colt held his hands up and slowly moonwalked away from the danger zone with Hunter glowering after him.

"She's going to ruin him," Dad mused, dragging me from my thoughts. "I can't wait."

"Who – Abi?" I asked, turning my attention back to my father.

"Mmm-hmm," Dad confirmed with a smirk, leading me off the dance floor. "Little girls always do the most damage to their father's hearts."

"You sound like you're speaking from experience, Dad," I half-joked, half-cringed, making a beeline for my baby. "Is she okay?" I asked Hunter when I reached our table.

"Yeah, she's all good, sweetheart." Sitting on the chair next to my mother, he cradled our sleepy-daughter to his chest. "It's way past her bedtime, though."

"I can take her up to our room if y'all wanna spend some time together," Mom offered, cooing and doting on her granddaughter.

"Are you sure?" Hunter asked, turning to look at Mom.

"Of course," she replied, offering him a genuine, warm smile. "It would be a real treat for me. Kyle, you don't mind if we get some snuggle-time in with our little grandbaby tonight, do you?"

My dad didn't look nearly as enthusiastic as Mom, but he smiled and agreed for Mom's sake. "Sure thing, princess."

"Thanks, Mom," I said, feeling strangely nervous at the prospect of having a night with Hunter that didn't include a baby sleeping between us.

"So," my father said then, blue eyes locked on Hunter. "When can we expect the next big day?"

Oh god...

"Dad," I warned, cheeks flushing. "No. Don't start this again. *Please*. Let it go."

Leaning back in his chair, Hunter rested an arm over the back of my mother's chair and smirked at my father. "Are you asking me to be your *son*, Kyle?"

"Hunter," I grumbled, feeling incredibly embarrassed. "Don't tease him."

"What I want, Lucky, is for you to step up."

The smirk on Hunter's face grew wider. "Is that so?"

"There's an order in life," Dad pressed. "Marriage first and then babies."

Hunter laughed. "I know."

"I see a baby, but no ring."

He laughed harder. "I know."

"Oh lord," Mom muttered.

"Yeah, Mom," I agreed with a sigh. "Oh lord indeed."

LUCKY CASARAZZI

Later that night, when Lee Carter had turned into Mary Poppins and herded all of the babies up to her room for a sleepover – much to her husband's dismay – Hope sidled up to me at the bar.

Slowly taking in the sight of her, I allowed my gaze to rake her over, revering in every soft curve and exposed slither of skin.

Nothing in my life had ever looked as good as Hope Carter.

Fuck me, she was beautiful.

She was dressed in yellow, her long dark brown curls styled to fall effortlessly down one shoulder.

And when she locked those big blue eyes on me, it was *painful*.

For a long time, being around this woman was a different kind of pain – because at the end of the night, I always had to give her back to *him*.

Not anymore.

No more pretenses.

No more having to hide how sickeningly in love I was with her.

No, because when Hope Carter danced with me tonight, she would be all mine.

And when this party was over, she would be coming home with me.

She looked up at me, those big blue eyes shining bright, and took a step closer.

That was all I needed.

I would take it from here.

I didn't give two fucks if her former in-laws were watching us.

"Hey, sweetheart," I slurred, having tossed back one too many shots with her brother. "You good?" I asked – slurred – pulling her close to press

a kiss to her hair.

Tall as Hope was in her skyscraper heels, the top of her hair grazed my chin and I smirked. I could take care of this woman. Be what she needed. Set her on fire and push her boundaries. I'd never been with a woman twice, not since Hayley, but Hope? Hope made me want to come back for more repeatedly. Hope made me want to *stay*.

Forever.

"Um, sure." She shifted around nervously. "Do you wanna get out of here?"

I could see the trepidation in her eyes, the anxiety in her body as she jittered from one foot to the other, and it made me anxious.

"Why?" Hyper-alert to all things HC, I frowned down at her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she replied, still shuffling around clumsily.

"HC," I pushed, not swallowing an ounce of her bullshit. "What happened?"

"Nothing," she continued to protest. "Honestly, it's not even a big deal —"

"What isn't a big deal?"

Chewing on her lip for a long moment, she finally blew out a heavy breath. "There were some women in the bathroom..." She eyed me warily. "Talking about me."

Anger rushed through me, so fucking hot that it turned my blood to lava. "And what were they saying about you, HC?" I asked, managing to mask my rage.

"I brought you as my date to his parents' *wedding*, Hunter," Hope said with a defeated sigh. "I brought the baby we conceived while I was *still married* to him to their wedding." Her small shoulders sagged in resignation. "What do you think they were saying about me?" Another sad sigh escaped her. "Doesn't even matter anyway, because Teagan heard them and she went completely batshit..."

Thank you, blondie!

"It just sucks, you know?" she sighed, snuggling into my chest. "They don't have a clue... not a damn clue of what I did for him, or how many years of my life that I sacrificed for him —" her breath hitched, "Or what he *did* to me."

"We're not leaving because of them," I told her, tipping her chin up. "We're not running from them, HC, and we're not hiding." Keeping my eyes locked on hers, I lowered my brow to rest against hers. "You are the best thing that ever happened to me, and I'll be damned if I don't show you off to these assholes."

"Jesus, Hunter, you reek of whiskey," she said with a sniff, pulling back to arch a brow at me. "What did you do tonight; drain the whole bar?"

"Shit." *Who knew?* "Probably." I shrugged. "I wanna dance with you."

Her eyes lit up. "You do?"

"Yeah, sweetheart." Pressing a kiss to her lips, I caught ahold of her hand and led her onto the dance floor. "Let's give these bastards something to talk about."

Ironically, The Verve's *Lucky Man* was playing when we reached the middle of the dancefloor.

Chuckling, Hope wrapped her arms around my neck while I tried my best to keep some semblance of a rhythm. I was failing miserably, the alcohol I had poisoned my body with tonight no doubt the cause of my clumsy movements, but I kept going, needing to keep her close to me.

"Hunter?" she whispered, stepping up to me, so close that our bodies were flush together.

"Yeah, HC?"

"I'm yours."

"Fuck." A shiver rolled down my spine.

She had no idea how badly I needed to hear that right now. Her hands came up to cup my face, causing my body to ignite in an almost pained sensation.

It was too much.

She was too fucking *much* for me.

"I love you," she whispered, blue eyes snaring me one blink at a time. "So much." Reaching up, she pressed a kiss to the corner of my mouth. "Only you."

Exhaling heavily, I rested my forehead against hers and closed my eyes, absorbing this moment, taking it all in.

I tried to loosen my hold on her waist, desperate not to hurt her, but only ended up tightening it instead. I was drowning in my feelings for this woman.

"I love you more," I admitted, my words a slurred truth, but a truth all the same. I opened my eyes then, taking in the sight of her. "With everything I have in me."

"I know you do," she replied, her voice a breathy whisper, barely audible above the music, but I heard it.

HOPE CARTER

Hunter's lips crashed down on mine again; hard, warm, and entirely welcome. Every insecure thought, notion, and worry I had was washed away when his tongue plunged into my mouth, stroking mine with passionate reverence, as I drowned in his familiar taste of mint, nicotine, and alcohol.

Jesus, his hands on my waistline, the feel of his warm, hard grip as he rocked against me to the rhythm of the music, was unbearably erotic.

Drunk or not, he was more than capable of giving me *exactly* what I needed.

Kissing me recklessly in the middle of the dance floor, with dozens of disapproving eyes on us, was his private fuck you to the man whose life he spared.

I didn't care about any of them. Let them think what they wanted. Hell, they already did.

Regardless of the skanky hoes in the bathroom earlier, I'd lost count of the number of times I'd overheard guests talking about how trashy I was, prancing my lover in front of my ex-husband all damn day.

I knew those people would suggest that our relationship was built on secrets and lies, but I knew better. It was built on friendships and moments. Hunter had taken the time to get to know me. My insecurities and flaws. My quirks and interests. He came, he stayed, and he conquered my heart. He knew more about me than I knew about myself, and our love was one that had grown from the solid foundations of friendship and respect.

He was my best friend, and I had two choice words for the people who thought otherwise; fuck off.

I was through with the worrying.

I left that part of me in the past, signed off on caring around the same time I signed those divorce papers.

Right now, I was dancing with the father of my child, and the man I loved most in the world. I was connected to him on another level. It wasn't like any other relationship I'd ever had with any other person in my life. It was different. More. He was just so much *more*.

If that made me trashy then so be it.

Hunter swung me out for a twirl and then quickly pulled me back to his chest, one hand pressed possessively to my lower back, the other tenderly clutching my hand, moving to the sound of The Verve's *Lucky Man* as it drowned out the noise around us. He smirked down at me, eyes glazed over but still focused on me, always me. It was unnerving how alert and aware he was of me.

I love you, my heart screamed at him, *I love you so freaking much it hurts*.

I loved him desperately, shamelessly, recklessly, and every other way humanly possible.

There was a saying that went something along the lines of people throw rocks at things that shine. There had never been a truer statement. We had more than our fair share of rocks thrown at us, but we were still standing. Still side by side. Still taking on the world together.

Being with him, having him sleep beside me at night, after going through six months of torture was the sweetest form of heaven.

"I hope you know that you have never been second best, Hunter Casarazzi," I heard myself say, as we moved to the music. "You were just... late."

He arched a brow. "Late?"

"Yeah." Chest heaving, I nodded at him in confirmation. "And I made some mistakes while I was waiting for you to show up in my life, but that doesn't mean that you're not number one, or that you're second best." Blowing out a shaky breath, I smiled up at him. "I know coming here wasn't easy for you, and I just...I needed you to know that."

"Well shit, HC," he replied, voice thick and gravelly. "I think you put a bullet in me with those words, sweetheart."

I didn't have time to respond, because in the blink of an eye, we were on the move. With my hand firmly clamped in his, Hunter pushed through

the crowd, moving like a man on a mission, as I struggled to keep up with him.

The moment we crashed into the foyer of the hotel, his lips were back on mine, his tongue seeking entry, his hands wild and wandering.

My back slapped hard against the cool metal doors of the elevator, causing our lips to break apart and a breathy laugh to escape my lips.

Releasing a frustrated growl, Hunter reached a hand out and slapped the keypad before claiming my mouth once more.

My head was too clouded to think rationally, everything inside of me was completely wrapped up in this moment – in the way he made me feel. I was aching all over, the need to have him inside of me unbearable.

Moaning into his mouth, I reached up and wrapped my arms around his neck. He took my weight easily, and I was glad. My legs were shaking so badly, I could hardly keep upright.

"Fucking love you, HC," he groaned into my mouth as his lips attacked mine almost viciously. "Want you like no one else."

"Oh god..." Whimpering into his mouth, I bit down hard on his bottom lip, hungry for more of him – dying for all of him.

Our actions were clumsy and desperate, neither one of us caring about the other wedding guests, as we fumbled into the awaiting elevator.

The instant the elevator doors closed around us, Hunter backed me into the corner, crowding my body with his.

And then his hands were on my dress, dragging it upwards to pool around my waist.

"Oh god." Frantic to feel him inside my body, I ripped and tore at his suit pants, desperate to free him. "I need you."

"You need me everywhere, don't you baby?"

I nodded. There was no point in lying. I'd take him wherever he wanted to put himself and that was the truth.

Clumsily, I clung to his shoulders as I stepped out of my panties, and then I was airborne, being hoisted up by this powerful man.

When he freed himself, my hand automatically reached for his cock. A sharp breath tore from his lips when I fisted him roughly, dragging him closer to me. "This is mine," I warned him, tightening my grip for emphasis, as his fingers dug into my thighs so hard, I knew I would bruise. "Mine."

He bit down roughly on my lip until I was sure I could taste my own blood on him. His tongue swiped out, lapping and suckling my cut.

"I'm gonna fuck you until I lose myself in you," he warned, his voice a low warning snarl. "Until you feel how hard you make me hurt."

My clit thrummed in excitement when I felt the head of his cock rub against my slit. "Oh god," I cried out, attacking him with my own version of passionate pain.

Reaching under his shirt, I scraped my nails down the deep ridges and grooves of his stomach, fingers finding the gun holster strapped to his back beneath his crisp white shirt.

Fuck...

He hissed from the contact and I reveled in the pain I was causing him.

I hooked my thighs around his hips just the same as I always did; my body pliant and completely submissive, programmed to accept and succumb to the dominance of his sheer masculinity.

With my back pressed against the elevator wall, I braced myself for the pressure I knew would come, and when it did, when he filled me up to the point of pain, the stretching sensation inside of my core caused me to cry out in pained pleasure.

"Say it, sweetheart," he ordered, eyes locked on mine. "Say. It," he repeated, his voice a raspy snarl, as he fucked me almost violently.

"I'm yours," I strangled out, hardly able to form the words, as his body crashed against mine over and over; a frenzied onslaught of passion and pain.

This man knew how to fuck, and he did it with as much dedication and skill as he did everything else in life. He was thorough and exceptional.

I enjoyed every second of him spearing into me.

I wanted nothing more than everything this man was and all he would ever be.

Screaming into his mouth, I came apart in his arms as an orgasm ripped through my body just before the elevator reached our floor.

When the elevator pinged, Hunter smirked down at me. "I hope you're not tired, HC, because I'm only getting warmed up."

Oh fudge...

Thoroughly fucked into submission, I fell onto my elbows, boneless and aching for more of whatever Hunter Casarazzi wanted to give me. He was the definition of the apex predator, and I his willing victim. For hours, he fucked me relentlessly and I continued to give myself up to him.

I felt Hunter's hand on my lower back, touch gentle, as he smoothed his palm over the globe of my ass, before lazily trailing his fingers up my spine.

And then his hand was between my shoulder blades, pushing my face into the mattress. I obliged, spreading my legs wide open, too aroused to overthink what we were doing.

"You good, HC?"

"Hmm." Breathless, I nodded, listening to the distinct sound of a bottle cap snapping shut. *Lube*. "All good."

"Hmm?" His cock was digging into the curve of my ass as he slowly rocked behind me, enjoying what he was doing to my body. "Too tired for more?"

"Don't you dare stop," I warned, my words a breathless moan, and then his face was there, in my most intimate of areas, followed by his tongue, as he touched and tasted me in ways I was sure should be illegal.

I could feel his tongue probing me, and then his finger was inside me, pushing past the point of no return, thrusting in and out against the bunch of nerve endings designed to drive a woman to insanity.

And fuck did he know how to work those nerve endings.

LUCKY CASARAZZI

I didn't realize I was looking for a partner until I found her, and I didn't know two bodies could be so compatible until ours fused together. Hope Carter blew my mind and I fucked her senseless.

"It's so intense," she mewled, bucking restlessly against me.

Yeah, she needed to stop pushing her ass into me. If she didn't, I was going to lose that tether of self-control I was clinging to.

Her ass was tighter than anything I'd ever experienced.

Fuck me, she was clamping down on me so tightly I was close to coming.

"Oh my god," she cried out, louder now. "Hunter!"

"Relax, sweetheart," I coaxed, smoothing my hand over the curve of her ass. "Keep squeezing on me and I'm gonna lose it."

"It's too much," she groaned, still thrusting against me.

"Do you want me to pull out?"

"No!" came her bark of a response. "I want you to fuck me like a dog."

That's my girl.

I grinned.

"Harder," she ordered, bracing herself for the impact.

Muscles tensing, I accepted the fact that I was a twisted bastard and began to fuck her hard and rough.

"Hunter," she whimpered. Dropping her face to the mattress, Hope bit down on her small fist, and held her ass up for my onslaught. "Don't stop," she begged. "Please...don't ever stop."

Insanely aroused, I fucked her to the point of pain for both her *and* me.

Sweat glistened on her body, while I was sweating all over from the sheer concentration it was taking not to come. I wanted to be everywhere. In every part of her. It wasn't enough. I couldn't get close enough.

"Jesus Christ," I groaned, vein bulging in my neck. "I'm gonna come in your ass, sweetheart."

"Good!" she screamed. "I wanna drown in you."

Ah fuck...

"I love you," I hissed, hips bucking frantically against her round ass. The sound of my balls slapping against her flesh was fucking audible. Jesus, I needed to slow down. I needed to take it easy but she wouldn't let me.

"I want it all," she commanded. "Every inch of you."

Reaching around, I found her pretty little clit and pinched. The way her tight ass clamped my cock when she came had me spilling into her with a guttural snarl.

"I love you," she whispered, flopping face down on the mattress. "I love you so much it hurts my chest."

"I know, HC," I soothed, pressing a kiss to the middle of her back. "I feel it, too."

*Read all about Lucky and Hope
in the **Carter Kids** series,
available now.*

THURSDAY

EARLY 1900'S, IRELAND

MAGGIE MCBRIDE

Barefoot and trembling from the cold, I continued to run, forcing my feet to move through the dirt. My nightdress was soaked right through, the downpour of rain assured that. I knew my feet were bleeding, toes cut from the sharp rocks beneath me, but I refused to give in.

"Where is he, Maggie?" he demanded, closing in on me. "Tell me where Donal is!"

"Leave me be!" I wailed, running as fast as my legs could carry me through the woods. "Go away, Daniel!"

The faces of the dead were fresh in my mind; the half-starved children, the sounds of weeping mothers, the fallen fathers and sons, brothers and husbands.

Boys younger than ten forced to take up arms to protect their families and homes.

Their bodies scattered around the country.

"Murderers," I cried out brokenly. "The lot of ye!"

"I'm trying to help you," he called out, but his words and the sound of his impending footsteps crunching behind me gave me no comfort. "Don't run from me."

"If you strike at, imprison, or kill us, out of our prisons or graves we will still evoke a spirit that will thwart you, and perhaps, raise a force that

will destroy you," I began to chant Connolly's words, breathless and terrified. "We *defy* you," I added, strengthening my resolve as I strangled out the words. Leveling him with a cold gaze, I spat, "Do your *worst*!"

"Maggie—"

"You've come to ruin us!" I screamed, backing away from the giant of a man walking towards me. "To take our homes from us."

My back hit the trunk of a tree and I sagged in defeat, cornered and prepared for death. Sinking to the damp ground, I exhaled an exhausted sigh. "Kill me now, Officer Daniel, because I will *never* give my brother up!"

"I don't want to do this," Daniel growled, voice laced with pain, as he stalked me like a predator would his prey. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"You've already killed me!" I screamed, tears dripping down my cheeks. "My father was dragged from his bed by *your* men. They shot him, Daniel. On *your* orders. Tied him to the post out back and shot him dead while my mother and sisters watched!"

"Not my orders," he growled. "I didn't want that to happen!"

"Liar!" Broken hearted, I began to pray to myself, for my family, for my people that would never be free.

"I am not going to hurt you," he repeated, marching towards me in the colors I so dearly despised. "*You* have nothing to fear from *me*."

"You lied to me," I snapped, heart palpitating as I studied this strange English man. *A man like none of the others.*

Fear spiraled inside of my body as I watched him take a knee in front of me. His eyes, those bright green eyes, burned holes in my resolve. Yellow hair that shone like the stars.

So different.

So strange.

My gaze flickered between his face and the rifle clasped in his large hands, and a different kind of fear blossomed inside of me.

"You betrayed me!"

"And you betrayed me," he replied in his lyrical tone, so different to my own people.

With wide eyes, I watched him slowly place his rifle on the grass at my feet.

Leaning back on his haunches, he slowly raised his hands in front of his chest, a sign of peace, and whispered, "You lied to me, too, sweet Maggie."

Pain.

It was everywhere.

"You lied about who you are." He swallowed deeply, pain flickering in his eyes. "You lied about the family you come from."

"You killed my father!" I snarled, heart hammering so hard against my ribcage, I felt I would die. "You *want* to kill my brother."

"Your brother is a traitor to the crown," he countered, tone calm, eyes locked on my face.

"Your crown," I sneered, digging my bare feet into the grass beneath me as I lunged for the rifle at my feet.

I got there first, and in truth, I was sure he let me take it from him.

"*Your* crown," I repeated, chest heaving. "Not mine." With trembling hands, I pressed my back to the tree and aimed the rifle straight at his heart. "*Never* mine."

"Are you going to shoot me, Maggie McBride?" he asked in a voice so soft I was thrown off kilter. His green eyes were filled with heat and... reluctant acceptance.

"You won't leave if I don't," I hissed, trembling from head to toe, "Officer Daniel."

"No," he agreed gently. Kneeling before me, he placed his hands on his thighs. With his back as straight as a poker, he inclined his head towards the heavy rifle in my hands and whispered, "I won't."

Falling onto my own knees, I scrambled closer until the barrel of the rifle pressed into his flesh.

"My father and three of my brothers are gone," I hissed, drowning in my pain. "Ye killed them all. They're all in the ground, Daniel. Because of *you*. Because of what you represent to us. My people are starving to death. The crops are gone. Everything is gone. Because of your crown."

"Maggie..."

"My mother wept at your officers' feet. She begged them for his life. And do you know what they did to her? They spat in her face. Held her up and forced her to watch, to see what they did to my father, and you want me to give my brother up? My last living brother!"

"You don't want to kill me, sweet Maggie," he whispered, gazing back at me with a look of warmth and pain.

Time stood still, as I battled with duty and heart.

Unblinking, we both knelt in front of each other, with only a rifle between us.

A rifle that had shed the blood of my people.

A man who had taken the lives of my people.

A man who had stolen my heart.

My body shook, resolve weakened, as I stared back at him. "You're one of them." My chest rose hard and fast, my breath coming in short, quick gasps. "You're my enemy."

"And you're mine," he replied, pressing his chest into the muzzle of the gun. Aching slowly, he reached up and covered my hands with his large ones. "But I love you like a man loves his wife."

"Your people won't leave," I breathed, feeling my upper hand slip away, as he gently took the gun from my grasp. "They won't *stop*."

"No." With sad eyes, he tossed the gun to one side and closed the space between us. "They won't."

His hands came around my body, touching me in ways only he had before. With his blood-soaked hands, he tugged my hips, causing me to fall forward – and into his arms. "I won't."

"I hate what you are," I hissed out, hating myself with every ounce of my being, as I tightened my fingers in his traitor jacket. "I hate every one of you!"

"No, sweet Maggie, you don't hate me," he soothed, dropping his brow to mine.

"I should," I bit back, trembling as he trailed his large, calloused hands up and down the length of my bare arms.

"Perhaps, but you don't," he whispered, his breath hot and welcome as it warmed my cold cheek.

I knew God would strike me dead for my betrayal, but the words came out all the same, "No." Clinging to my enemy, I dragged his body down on mine. "I don't."

His lips touched the curve of my neck, and my legs shook violently.

"Be mine, Maggie McBride," he coaxed, as his lips trailed up my neck to my jaw, stopping to hover over my mouth. "Be mine, sweet Maggie."

Unable to breathe, I stared straight into his eyes, as the aching inside of me threatened to burst.

Releasing a gasping breath, I pressed my lips to his, allowing my body to answer the questions my voice and pride would never allow me to.

Tucked away in the hills of the Ó Donovan farm, I knew we wouldn't be found by his comrades or my people.

Allowing myself one small moment of reprieve from the horror around me, I lay on my back on the damp grass and put up no fight or battle when the Englishman undressed me, revealing flesh and bone that had been seen by no Irish man before him.

"You are beautiful, sweet Maggie," he whispered, kneeling between my legs.

Wide eyed, I stared at the scars littered across his bare chest as he rid his flesh of the horrid uniform I despised. There were more than I could count, and still, it was the most magnificent naked male form I had ever laid eyes on.

He was broad and muscular, with two brown nipples accompanied by a flat stomach filled with deep groves and ridges.

His flesh was beautiful and golden from the sun he'd seen on his travels. A trail of hair beneath his bellybutton leading to his...

"It's okay," he whispered when I reached for him, but quickly thought better of it – the fear of god inside of me as the thoughts I had of this man caused a blossoming deep inside of my womb.

Startled by the painful and unfamiliar need growing inside of me, I covered my naked breasts and scrambled onto my knees.

Confused and frightened, I debated making a run for it, but quickly realized that I only wanted to run to *him*.

My traitorous heart skipped a beat.

What was I doing?

I would go to hell for this.

I would be disowned.

For being with a man.

For being with a *British soldier*.

Kneeling before me, he cupped my face with his large hands and forced me to look at him. "I'm yours, sweet Maggie," he whispered. "Whatever I have, it's yours."

Taking one of my hands in his, he gently pressed it to his stomach, green eyes never leaving mine.

When he removed his hand from mine, I continued to touch him, feeling the hardness of his stomach beneath my hand, feeling the way his muscles contracted beneath my touch.

"See," he whispered, when I placed both of my hands on his chest, curious and fascinated. "We're the same."

I shook my head.

We were not the same.

He was one of them.

And still, I continued to touch him.

I continued to yearn for him.

Conflicted and consumed in my lust, I scooted closer to him, unsure but willing.

"Are you mine, sweet Maggie?" he asked, voice low and gruff, as he placed his hands on my naked hips.

My heart raced erratically in my chest as I searched for the answer.

Was I his?

I wasn't.

I could never be.

And yet...

My lips crashed against his of their own accord, my heart making a choice that my head would never make.

I allowed myself to get caught up in the feeling of freedom he was offering me.

I allowed myself to pretend that this foreign soldier boy could love me forever.

His traitorous hands encompassed my body, making me feel things I knew were wrong.

Feelings a wife felt for her husband.

Feelings that should not be acted upon until a man was your husband.

And yet, I allowed this soldier to put his hands on me.

I enjoyed the feel of his mouth on my body, as he kissed me deeply, as he touched me in ways I would undoubtedly pay penance for.

When he pressed me onto my back once more, I let my legs fall open, and welcomed his body to settle between them.

I could feel him; powerful and terrifying.

He whispered soothing words of comfort and love in my ear as he covered my body with his.

With my hands, I encouraged him to take me to hell with him.

If I was to go, I would go only with him.

Breathing hard and fast, I cried out when his fingers slipped between my legs, touching me in ways no other had before.

His mouth on my breasts, his fingers inside my body, gentle and probing...it was more than I could take.

"I love you, my sweet Maggie," he promised as he pushed himself inside of me, ripping through both my innocence and pride. "I'll love you always."

And to my deepest detriment, I believed him.

I believed the soldier.

And just for a moment, I allowed myself to love only him in return.

In secret, of course.

He stretched me, claiming my body as his, and in return, I gladly gave myself over to him, blocking out all thoughts of tomorrow.

Blending my body with an English soldier.

Allowing him to fill me up with his seed.

This was ludicrous. But I couldn't stop it and I didn't want to.

He was deep inside of me, thrusting in and out, making me ache with need, soothing the burn with one kiss at a time.

He was big and terrifying, a murdering brute of a man, and still I allowed him to take over my body.

For a brief moment, I threw a prayer up to Saint Anthony to protect my soul.

As my body burned with fire, my soul descended into hell.

I had well and truly sold my soul to the devil and the consequence made me feel wonderful.

His big hands gripping at my flesh, pushing and pulling me in different directions. I went willingly, trusting in this soldier to keep me safe.

For a strange unknown reason, I knew he would.

Maybe he really did love me.

It wouldn't matter in the end.

We were doomed.

I knew this.

And still, I let him sacrilege my body.

He was ferocious, unstoppable, as he continued to move inside of me, unyielding, and I welcomed him. I encouraged him to keep going.

He was making me feel better than I had ever felt in my life and I never wanted him to stop.

Frightened, I clung to his broad shoulders, as he moved harder, faster, deeper.

Unable to help it, I cried out loudly, begging him with prayers and words to keep doing what he was doing to me. It was unlike anything else.

When he was finished, I noticed the blood smeared down both my thighs and his.

He didn't look angry about it, though.

Instead, he looked at me in wonder. "You're mine now, sweet Maggie."

"I'll never be yours," I told him sadly. "We're on opposite sides."

OFFICER DANIEL ROSE

She was half starved to look at – nothing like the women from back home. No, she had a look of wildness about her.

A feral kind of woman.

She wasn't clean either, and didn't wear pretty dresses or bonnets. And she certainly didn't smell like the girls back home.

None of them did.

Every bone in her body protruded through her pale, freckled skin.

But she was a beauty, sweet Maggie McBride.

Her long black hair, like shining coal, her piercing blue eyes. The freckles on her nose, and those long legs...

"I'll never be yours," she whispered, blue eyes locked on mine. "We're on opposite sides."

Her words caused me to stiffen and I stared hard at the woman beneath me. Even now in the throes of passion, she wouldn't give herself to me.

All of a sudden, I was stricken down by the unnecessary grief, the overwhelming pain, and the destitute poverty of this country.

Of my sweet, stubborn Maggie McBride and her people.

Why did they continue to do this to themselves?

Why couldn't they just *stop*?

Why?

Fucking *why*?

I didn't make the rules.

I was a soldier.

This was my *duty*.

We were at war.

The crown these people so vehemently distrusted and objected to was my purpose.

I was loyal to my country and cause.

A country that was good to me.

A country I loved and put my life on the line for every morning.

These people were fighting a losing battle.

"You can't win this war, Maggie," I told her, tone pained, heart weary. Surely she knew that by now. "You need to get yourself out of here. Get on a boat and leave this fucking island."

"No, Officer Daniel," she replied, tone hardened, as she glared up at my face, body stiffening beneath me. "We can't *lose*."

"I don't understand."

"Foreign kings and queens will never rule our land."

"You're mistaken," I growled, losing my patience with this fiery scrap of a girl. Pulling away, I quickly grabbed my clothes and re-dressed. "They're not foreign. They're your monarch. The sooner you people accept that, the sooner we will have peace."

"We are *free* Irish." Hurrying to throw on her raggedy nightdress, she scrambled to her feet. "We do not bow to foreign invaders."

"You don't have an army!" I roared, furious that she was prepared to die for a useless cause. "You have farmers and boys! Death is the only thing waiting for your people if you don't back down!"

"Eight hundred years of oppression, Daniel!" she roared right back at me. "Eight hundred years of raping and pillaging. Eight hundred years of invasions. You'd think your kings and queens would learn by now; you'll *never* beat us." With venom in her eyes, she spat at my feet. "We will be a free, united Ireland. Nothing your kings, queens, and government can do will stop that. Ireland *will be free* from British rule."

"Your people will die because of their pride," I warned her. "You'll all die for this fucking cause of yours."

"Then we'll *die*," she spat back. "But if we do, I can assure you that we'll die fighting."

The truth in her words took the wind out of me.

She meant it.

Every word.

She was willing to die for this.

For this free Ireland her people dreamt up.

"Maggie," I choked out, desperate to get through to her. "This doesn't have to be *our* fight. You don't have to stay here."

I wanted to protect this woman.

I had a need inside of me to keep her alive.

Why did she have to make it so fucking hard for me to do that?

"No, Daniel," she countered shakily. "This doesn't have to be *your* fight." With tear-filled eyes, she looked up at my face and said, "It has always been *my* fight."

"Let me take you away from here," I practically begged her. "Come away with me."

"What are you going to do, Officer Daniel?" she taunted. "Steal me away?"

When I didn't protest, she laughed harshly. "I would be shot on sight."

"I can keep you safe," I promised, and I would. With my life.

"But not here," she filled in.

"No." I shook my head. "It's not safe for us here."

"I'm not going to England," I warned him. "I'd rather die first."

Angry with her for being so stubborn, I growled, "You'd have a better life in England with me. A nice house, plenty of food, no more hunger, Maggie. No more of any of it. I can give you better. Come home with me."

"I am home, Officer Daniel," she replied mulishly. "This is my home."

"Your stubbornness will be the death of you," I seethed, feeling my chest tighten. "Fuck, Maggie. Fuck!"

"You're a good man fighting on the wrong side of a war, she whispered, reaching up to cup my cheek with her small hand. "You're loyal and honorable, and you won't walk away from your duties any more than I'll walk away from mine."

*Maggie and Officer Daniel are another new couple.
Their book is not available yet.*

CORK CITY, IRELAND

AOIFE MOLLOY

"Case, you bloody turncoat, don't leave me on my own!" I called after my so-called best friend as she shimmied out of the smoking area, arm in arm with the fella she'd made acquaintances with no more than five minutes ago when they shared a lighter to spark up. I wasn't a smoker, but I had loyally accompanied Casey outside to the smoking area. Pity she couldn't return the same loyalty when dick was on the menu. Whore. "Wait up, whore. You have my bag."

When Casey didn't turn back for me, choosing instead to saunter inside the jam-packed, not to mention strictly over 18s, nightclub in Cork City without me, I muttered a string of curses *not* under my breath before stalking after her. My cousin's I.D, the one I had used to lie my way into the club earlier tonight, was in my bag, along with my phone, house keys, and cash. If I lost Kim's driver's license, I would be as good as dead. Mentally plotting all of the ways I planned to cock-block my BFF when I found her, I started to push through the crowd, with malice on my mind.

The music blasting from the DJ booth was so loud that I had a hard time hearing myself bitch. The beat was literally vibrating through my bones as 2Pac and Dre's *California Love* had everyone in the nightclub dry humping like a pack of horned-up degenerates.

"Jesus, get a room," I hissed when I squeezed past a couple getting intimately acquainted with one another's genitals. "You're in Cork, not

California, cop on to yourselves!"

"How's it going, gorgeous?" a man, who had to be in his mid to late forties, purred in my ear. "You're looking well tonight."

"And *you're* looking old enough to be my grandad," I shot back without missing a beat. "Now, kindly remove your hand off my ass, old timer."

Not bothering to wait for the pervert with the grabby hands to comply, I shoved past him with my lip curled up in disgust; resting bitch face activated.

When *California Love* faded out and Mark McCabe's *Maniac 2000*, the unofficial Irish dance anthem of a generation, blasted from the DJ booth, the crowd went absolutely mental. The booming vibration from the speakers was thrumming through my veins, and I knew that I had no business being in a place like this.

As a reasonably well-behaved fifth-year student still attending secondary school, I knew that I was too young and far too fucking green to be partying it up in place full of drink, drugs, and explicit debauchery. I should be tucked up in bed right now, binging on a bag of Maltesers and my *One Tree Hill* boxset, not skulking around a bloody nightclub at one o'clock in the morning.

"I'm going to kill her," I continued to chant to myself, furious that my friend had broken the fundamental rule of girl code by leaving me alone. "You better hope I don't find you, Casey Lordan, you dick-obsessed deviant, because if I do, you're a dead woman walking –"

I was so caught up in my promises of revenge on my so-called gal pal that I didn't watch where I was going and collided with a lean wall of muscle.

When I stepped back and saw *him*, the person I had crashed into, and the real – secret – reason I had agreed to come here in the first place, I knew that there was no place else I wanted to be.

Achingly slowly, he turned around to find the perpetrator that ploughed into him, face set in his standard fuck-the-world-and-everyone-in-it glare, and my poor, teenage heart went on a violent rampage inside of my chest. When our eyes locked, green orbs the color of precious emerald burned holes straight through me. "Aoife Molloy."

Nope, there would be no sugar coma or Nathan Scott for me tonight.

Ah fuck.

"Joey Lynch."

"How is it that every time I turn around, you're in my face?" he slurred, as he swayed in front of me, looking like the worst possible decision a girl like me could make.

Dammit, he was a beautiful bastard – a terrible person, but Jesus, he was only divine to look at. Especially tonight in those faded jeans and fitted white shirt rolled up to his elbows, revealing that gorgeous golden tan that always complemented those piercing green eyes and dirty blond hair... *Focus, Aoife!* I mentally scolded myself. *He's a gobshite.*

Dysfunctional and destructive.

Two words our English teacher had once used to describe him – in front of our entire class, no less. Of course, said boy had responded by telling Mr. Langford to fly up the highest part of his hole, and another few choice words, before knocking over his desk and storming out of the classroom.

For five long years, I had shared both a school and a classroom with the boy standing in front of me, and I somehow knew less about him now than I had when we first met – if that even made sense. Elusive and closed off, Joey Lynch was my short-tempered classmate, star of the Cork minor hurling team, and the longed-after target of every girl in Ballylaggin Community School.

I knew he had a really fucked-up story tucked up tight inside of that beautifully broken brain of his. Of course, the walls he had erected around his heart were so high that Jesus Christ himself couldn't breach them.

"Just your good fortune, I guess," I shot back, determined to look unaffected by him.

He didn't laugh. In fact, he rarely laughed at all. "If I didn't know better, I'd think you were stalking me," he said instead, still frowning, still looking like something a porn producer dreamed up.

"Don't flatter yourself," I countered, taking a safe step back from the boy that melted more of pairs of knickers than they stocked in Patrick's Street Penneys.

The smell of alcohol wafting from his breath, not to mention the two bottles of bud dangling from his hand, was a firm indication as to what this boy was all about; a good time.

Standing in front of him tonight, I felt legitimately sick to my stomach with an impressive onslaught of butterflies. It made zero sense because he was not a good guy for me. Quite the opposite. One of the very few things that I did know about him was that he messed around with drugs, and every

girl knew that lusting after a chemically dependent boy was a recipe for heartache.

"I'm here with my friends," I lied, giving him my best fuck-you-right-back look. "Not for you."

"Friends?" Arching a brow mockingly, he looked around as a slow, salacious smile crept across his face. "Jesus, you're a popular one."

"And you're an asshole," I sneered, folding my arms across my chest. "Has anyone ever told you that?"

"Actually, I think *you've* told me that." His grin widened, revealing a perfect white smile. *Bastard*. "A time or two."

"Well, they say the third time's a charm," I replied, tone dripping with sarcasm. "*You're an asshole*, Joey Lynch."

A reluctant laugh escaped him.

He actually fucking *laughed*.

I almost fell out of my stilettos with shock.

"You shouldn't be here, Molloy." His voice was serious again as he stepped closer, causing the air to flee my lungs in an audible gasp. "Not in this shithole." Never taking his eyes off mine, he reached his free hand up and fingered a tendril of my hair. "And not with me." Right on cue, an illicit shiver rippled down my spine. "Again."

"I already told you that I didn't come here for you," I replied, vibrating with tension and fucking despising the way he could make me feel. "I came with Casey."

"You're such a bullshitter," he replied, sounding oddly forlorn. "You need to get out of here, Molloy. Run on home to your mammy and daddy." He stepped closer, invading my personal space, and making my heart jackknife in my chest. "Because if you knew what was good for you," he whispered, green eyes locked on mine. "You would stay far, *far* away from me."

The DJ had switched songs up, moving onto DJ Pulse's dance remix of Eminem's *Superman*, and all I could think was this boy was definitely *nobody's* superman.

"Hmm?" Tilting my chin up with one hand, he used the other to draw me closer. "Are you going to be smart?" I could feel the dampness from the beer bottles in his hand seeping into the fabric of my dress as he trailed his thumb over my bottom lip. "Are you going to be a good girl and run away this time?"

We'd been playing this game of cat and mouse for a lot of years now, and I needed to start making better decisions when it came to this boy because I knew that when I woke up tomorrow morning, just like every other morning after our paths had crossed the night before, I would undoubtedly drown in a sea of regret and shame.

Still, I resigned myself to one more night of recklessness.

One more night of *him*.

His smell was intoxicating, and my recklessness was encouraged further by the alcohol rushing through my bloodstream and the predatory gleam in his eyes.

Releasing a shaky breath, I reached behind me and grabbed one of the bottles in his hand before bringing it to my lips. "I don't run, Joe," I whispered, keeping my eyes locked on his as I swallowed deeply. My hand was trembling, matching the rest of me, but I didn't back down. "You should know that by now."

Relief flickered in his eyes for the briefest of moments before the shutters clamped down once more, masking all emotion. "It's your funeral," he replied in a noncommittal tone. Draining the contents of his beer bottle, he handed it to some random guy before taking my half-empty one and tossing it on the floor behind us. In the blink of an eye, he moved closer, how that was even possible was beyond me, but he did. With experienced movements, he aligned our bodies in such a way that I could hardly breathe. "One of these days, I'm going to break you," he whispered, his lips mere inches from mine. "And on that day, you'll hate me worse than you already do right now."

He was the worst possible version of wrong for me and I was well aware of that fact. Still, I didn't back away. I didn't move a muscle. I felt like I was snared in the lion's den, looking into the eyes of a lethal predator. He could kill me or keep me to toy with. Either way, I would never recover from him.

"Thanks for the warning, but I think I'll take my chances," was my breathlessly naive reply.

Edging out all possible chance of being separated by the crowd surrounding us on the dance floor, he kept his hand clamped down on my hip, as he moved our bodies to the music.

Gently tucking my hair behind my ear, his hand slipped to the nape of my neck, fingers digging into the flesh hidden beneath my long blonde hair.

One swift tug and then our brows were touching, bodies melded together, hearts thundering in synchrony, as Eminem's voice reverberated around the dance floor.

And then I kissed him.

Or he kissed me.

Fuck, I couldn't be sure.

We both moved at the same time, lips crashing against the others almost angrily, like we were punishing the other for making each other feel this way. My legs shook violently as his tongue invaded my mouth with dominant, experienced thrusts. Giving as good as I was getting, I hooked an arm around his neck and reached up on my tip-toes, meeting every thrust of his tongue with a sensual duel of my own. His arm came around my lower back, holding me flush to his chest as he devoured my lips with his, swaying our bodies in rhythm to the music.

God, he was such a good kisser...

Fuck, I was so screwed...

I always did this weird thing where I tried to memorize everything I was feeling in important moments in my life. From the smell, to the taste, to the feelings I was having, to the songs playing in the background, I tried to take it all in and then I wrote about it in my journal at night, desperate to keep those treasured moments safe and sacred.

Right now, with Joey Lynch's lips crushed to mine, the sound of *Superman Remix* playing in my ears, and my heart bursting to the seams from the pressure of the feelings this boy evoked inside of me, I knew I needed to store this night in my mind. I needed to keep it safe. It was special.

He's special, something deep inside of me hissed. *Keep him.*

I knew Joey couldn't give me the world – not even close. There was no future to this screwed-up game we had been playing all year, but he *could* give me everything I wanted for *tonight*, and somehow that was enough for me.

Without a word, he broke the kiss and walked us off the dance floor, not stopping until he had me backed up against the wall by the toilets with his body caging me in.

My heart raced violently in my chest, but I forced myself to meet his gaze and not back down.

At 5'7, I was a decent height for a girl, but this boy had several inches on me. He was all rough edges and lean muscle as he pinned me to the wall, his excellent attempt at looking menacing.

Keeping my chin tipped up, I stared into his blazing green eyes, feeling a trickle of fear and a tsunami of lust rush through me. I could feel him hardening against me and it was making me wet.

Breathing hard, I pressed my palms to the wall at my back, resisting the urge to do something reckless.

Tilting his head to one side, he eyed me curiously. It was so loud in the club that I barely heard the soft word he spoke. "Run."

One word.

One important fucking word full of hidden threats and warnings.

Do it.

Go now, Aoife.

Fucking run, girl!

I blew out a ragged breath and shook my head. "No."

"Fool," he whispered, lowering his head to press a featherlight kiss to my lips.

Eyelids fluttering, I leaned my back against the cool, tiled wall and arched the lower half of my body against him, uncaring if anyone saw us.

My body was on *fire* for him.

"Run," he repeated softly, pulling back, his hot breath fanning my lips. His pupils were so dilated now that I could hardly see the green in his eyes. "I'm bad for you." Kiss. "We both know it." Kiss. "Run, Molloy."

When I didn't respond, he pressed another barely-there kiss to my lips as he rocked his hips against mine. "Run, baby."

Releasing another ragged breath, I dragged his face down to mine and kissed him hard, wanting to punish him so badly for making me feel this way. Clutching his face between my hands, I dug my nails into his cheeks and bit down hard on his lip, reveling in the growl that tore from his chest when we both tasted blood.

Our movements grew more frantic, hungrier, more desperate, and if Casey had been here to witness another one of my *Joey Lynch slips in sanity*, she would say that we were eating the faces off each other, but she wasn't here. Nope, I was alone in the lion's den with Scar himself.

His hand moved to squeeze my ass cheek, hips grinding against mine, and I knew that I was completely fucked. Whatever dignity I had walked

into the club with tonight would *not* be coming home with me. There was nothing that could pull me away in this moment. I was in too deep with him to think clearly – to contemplate the repercussions of my inevitable actions. His lips were so soft, his tongue so hot, his body so damn appealing, and, once again, I was ready to give it all up to the only person who had ever been inside of me.

Clamping a hand on my hip, he pulled me roughly towards him. Wrapping a possessive arm around my back, he kept his lips on mine, driving me crazy with his fucking delicious kisses, as he walked us straight to hell.

"It was for you," he said against my lips.

"What was?"

"The other bottle."

"Of beer?"

"Yeah. Saw you walk in and I was...*glad*."

Fuck.

My heart.

My hormones.

Ugh.

I wasn't one bit apprehensive when my back hit a door and we practically crashed into the ladies bathroom.

I wasn't shy about admitting what I wanted, and right now I wanted Joey Lynch.

Badly.

No, not the ladies bathroom, I realized when he reached up and fumbled with the light switch, bathing us in a dull yellow hue. *The staff bathroom.*

Thrusting his tongue inside my mouth, he reached down and grabbed my thighs. Flicking the lock on the door, he hoisted me up and I quickly wrapped my legs around his waist, rocking my body against the hardening bulge in his jeans, as he walked us over to the sink.

My bare thighs landed on the cool porcelain sink and I didn't even have a chance to catch my breath before his lips crashed down on mine again, just as hard, hot, and unyielding as before.

Blaming it all on the gin, I gave myself up to this absolute madness and plunged my tongue into his mouth. Sagging against the mirror at my back, I reveled in the sensations rushing through me, while he fucked my mouth with his whiskey flavored tongue, and roughly pushed my legs apart.

The bass was vibrating through the bathroom walls, the room was spinning, and if the bitch on the other side of the door didn't back the fuck down and stop banging to be let in, I was going to lose it.

Furious and deranged with lust for this asshole boy, I hooked an arm around his neck and sank my teeth into his swollen lip. God only knew what had taken me over in this moment, but I couldn't control myself. Pain, anger, lust, and need were consuming me. I wanted to break him down like he'd broken me so many times before. I wanted to brand him.

Jesus, I was losing my mind.

Unable to stop myself, I reached up with my free hand and dragged my nails down his cheek.

Hard.

His eyes sprang open; wild, blazing, hungry, and staring right into mine.

Snarling against my lips, he snapped his teeth, catching my bottom lip and tugging hard, while he slipped a hand between us. Unsnapping his jeans with one hand, he used the other to push my thong aside, keeping my legs spread open with his hips as he palmed his impressive cock.

Baring my teeth, I snapped back at him, releasing a furious growl of my own when he pulled back, giving me that cocky smirk I couldn't stand. "Bad girl."

"Fuck you," I groaned, furious with him for making me feel this way. He smirked again, and I swear I felt so much for him that I wanted to die. Knotting my fingers in the front of his shirt, I dragged his lips back to mine. "Fuck me."

"You're so fucked up," he growled, brow pressed to mine. His hands moved to my hips and he tugged me to the edge of the sink. Releasing a frustrated growl, he positioned the head of his hardened cock against me, knotted a hand in my hair, and tugged my face up to meet his. "You win," he whispered, as the thick crown of his cock teased the entrance of my pussy. "Again."

Catching ahold of my chin, he kissed me hard and then ripped my mouth from his. Breathing hard, I sagged against the mirror and gripped the sink, watching him watch me.

Tilting his head to one side, he studied me for a long moment, tongue snaking out to trail over his cut lip.

"Watch me," he ordered, speaking for the first time in what felt like forever. Stroking his thick shaft with one hand, he roughly dragged my hips

towards him with the other and slowly fed himself into me. "Watch me stretch your pussy."

And then he thrust into me.

Hard.

Crying out hoarsely, I hooked my leg around his waist and bit down on his shoulder when he pushed all the way inside me. He was thick and long and oh so fucking hard. Feeling my eyes burn from the pressure of having his big body joined with mine, I exhaled a ragged breath and bit down harder as I arched into his rhythmic thrusts.

His fingers dug into the fleshy part of my thighs before moving to squeeze my ass. The move was decidedly masculine and when he hoisted me up and rocked deeper into me, I almost came.

Locking my legs around his waist, I tore at his neck with my nails, scratching and clawing, not giving two shits if I marked him.

"We need to stop this shit," he growled against my lips when my moans turned to screams.

"Wh-what shit?" I cried out.

"This," he grunted. "Us. Fucking. It's getting confusing."

"Don't you dare stop," I hissed, rocking my hips wildly against him.

"Don't worry." I felt his teeth on the lobe of my ear, dragging the flesh into his mouth with a sharp tug. "Couldn't if wanted to."

"Good," I groaned, rocking my hips into his thrust, wanting him to break me in half because I could think of no better way to go.

"You know..." His lips scorched a burning trail from my neck to the tips of my straining breasts. "I think I could see myself loving you." He kissed me again, softer this time. "Not right now... but I might... someday."

"That's really good to know." Cupping his jaw roughly between my fingers, I dragged his lips to mine and kissed him hard. "Because I think I could love you back."

His lips scorched a burning trail from my neck to the tips of my straining breasts, and then he was back to fucking me like I was his personal plaything.

My body's reaction to his delicious intrusion changed then; switching from violent thrusts to tiny jerks as I edged closer to the crest of ecstasy. Relentless, he continued to fuck me, slamming his big body against mine, filling me to the point of pain.

All of a sudden, my body went rigid as the orgasm I'd been chasing finally tore through me, harder and more overwhelming than ever before.

Shuddering violently, I rocked my hips into his thrust for many long, sensual moments until the overpowering feeling of lust dissipated into a slow burn of warmth and shockwaves. I felt him come inside me, the heat of his release sending a tremor through my body. When we were both breathless and spent, I sagged against his chest, breathing hard and ragged.

Instantly, he tensed back up.

That was nothing new.

"I want to come home with you tonight," he whispered against my collarbone, still pulsing inside of me. "Say I can."

Surprise rocked through me. "Wh-what?"

"You heard me."

Ripples of excitement flooded my belly. "We don't do sleepovers, Lynch, remember?"

"Make an exception," he replied. "I need this. Just for tonight."

Say no, dumbass. You'll never recover from him. "Okay," I blurted out instead. *Lovely.* "We could go to your house –"

"No." His response was fast, almost too fast, as he shook his head and pressed a kiss to my shoulder. "I don't want to do that."

"Oh," I breathed, eyelids fluttering when I felt him hardening inside of me again. "Why not?"

"Your place." His voice was soft and coaxing as he slowly pulled out and tucked himself back into his jeans. "It has to be yours." Readjusting his clothes, he returned to me and lifted me down from the sink. "I won't make trouble for you. I won't get us caught –" Stopping short, he pulled me into his arms and kissed me hard before pulling back and whispering, "Say I can stay with you tonight, Aoife." His eyes were almost pleading. "Please?"

"Okay, Joey Lynch." Trembling, I looked up at his worried expression and offered him a small smile. "You can stay with me."

JOEY LYNCH

Every inch of my body hurt and I was completely fucking done.

Done with my family.

Done with school.

Done with hurling.

Done with my whole fucking life.

I could feel the walls closing in on me, the sound of *his* voice in my head, picking away at my sanity, as I came crashing down from my high and freewheeled straight into her arms.

The only thing that was keeping me on the ground right now was the girl whose legs I was buried between.

It felt like I was floating away and she was the gravity anchoring me to earth.

Stabilizing me.

She would never know how fucking relieved I felt when I saw her in the club tonight, or how badly I needed to be here instead of home right now.

Desperate to feel something, anything at all, I wrapped her up in my arms, my kisses hungered and frantic as I moved into her.

I needed to make her want me enough to not send me away, but my body was drowning in the horrifying fucking feeling of withdrawal.

"Yes," she breathed against my lips, body bucking wildly beneath mine.
"Don't stop..."

Don't make me leave.

Don't send me away.

Don't make me go back there.

Sweat beaded my brow and tremors racked through my body as I fought against the nausea threatening to consume me.

"Joey, don't leave me here on my own with him."

"Please help me."

"You can't leave us."

"I'm so hungry..."

"No!"

Her eyes widened. "Huh?"

Don't think about it, lad.

None of it.

Focus on her.

Just concentrate on her...

"Are you okay?" Concern laced her voice. "Joey?" Her hands were on my face. "Oh my god, you're shaking all over."

She's too good for you.

You'll break her.

You'll ruin her like he ruined her.

Let her go.

"Hey..." Fingers gently traced my cheeks. "What's happening to you?"

"I'm, uh, grand," I managed to slur, body shuddering from the gentleness of her touch. "Just, ah..." Blinking the haze from my eyes, I shook my head and leaned my cheek into her hand. "Just...I, ah...fuck, I can't think straight."

"Roll over," she ordered.

Struggling to make sense of her words and not lose myself in the haze, I blinked rapidly. "Huh?"

With our bodies still joined, she somehow managed to roll me onto my back. "It's okay," she whispered, straddling my hips. "I've got you."

I wanted to scream at her that it wasn't okay – that she didn't have any fucking part of me and never would, but I couldn't find the words.

So, instead, I remained motionless and watched her body as she rocked her hips and took her fill of me.

Want to learn more about Joey and Aoife?

Sate your curiosity and read all about them in the Boys of Tommen series.

Binding 13 & Keeping 13

*And their very own book **Saving 6**, coming soon.*

SATURDAY

SOUTH PEAK ROAD, BOULDER

NOAH MESSINA

*I*n the movies, when wives threw cups at their husbands' heads, they always missed by a country mile and the argument ended with them kissing passionately and quickly making up.

Not in my world.

Not with my wife.

Teagan's aim was fucking perfect and I staggered backwards when the china teacup hit me square between the eyes. The porcelain shattered into a million pieces from the impact of it imploding against my skull before spraying all over our kitchen floor.

"Jesus Christ," my best friend, Lucky, choked out, falling off the stool beside me in his bid to find cover. "Run, Noah," he commanded. "Fucking haul ass, man."

"Yeah, you better run, turncoat," Teagan snarled, stalking into our kitchen, looking every inch the adorable lunatic I knew her to be, with a double breast pump bustier attached to her chest – or a double titty milker, as Colton liked to call it. All I knew was that it was fuck-off expensive and helped my wife nurse our daughter when her mastitis flared up. "Because I know you put him up to this!"

"Was that necessary?" I snarled, pressing my fingers to my forehead and then growling when I felt the familiar dampness of blood. "Goddammit, Thorn. You're a fucking lunatic!"

"And you're a lying bastard!" she snarled, stalking forward with a side plate in her hand.

"Thorn!" I slipped around the other side of the island and grabbed the laptop. "Back the fuck up, baby," I warned, holding it up like a shield. "Don't even think about –"

Crash.

"That's my computer!" she screamed, watching as it dropped to the ground, right along with the shattered side plate she'd tried to maim me with.

"And that's my head you just split open, you little fruitcake!" I yelled back at her, feeling droplets of blood trickle down my brow. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Yeah, well, you need to get used to bleeding again, don't you?" she sneered, looking wholly enraged. "What do you *think* is wrong with me, Mister fucking *Machine* Messina." Her eyes narrowed. "Mister *comeback kid* himself." Her scowl deepened. "Mister fucking cage fighter who doesn't tell his wife shit anymore!"

Oh shit.

I paled. "Thorn, just calm down." I held my hands up. "I was going to tell you."

"Oh, you were?" Furious, she prowled towards me. "When did you plan on doing that, Noah? When you were back in the fucking cage?"

Out of the corner of my eye, I watched Lucky reach up from under the island, grab the knife stand, and move it far away from my recently post-partum wife.

I sagged in relief.

Thank fuck for that.

"Baby –" Holding my hands up, I tried to placate her, but let's be honest; trying to placate a hormonal Teagan was like trying to cuddle a starving lion. "It's a title shot that comes with a shit ton of money whatever the outcome. I couldn't just walk away from it."

"There will be no title shot," my wife spat, closing the space between us to shove me in the chest. "Because you are *retired*! As in R. E. T. I. R. E. D and if you don't phone that jackass boss of yours up, you'll be Dolly Parton-ed."

"Dolly Parton-ed?"

"D. I. V. O. R. C. E. D," Teagan hissed, hands clamped firmly on her hips. Meanwhile, I was struggling to give the argument my full attention when the motorized part of the breast pump machine strapped to her hip continued to rumble while the bustier and the two plastic containers attached drew milk from her nipples. "Me and little *J.O.E* will be skedaddling out of here."

"Your son's name is Finn," Lucky reminded her from his hiding spot behind the island. "Just saying..."

"And you don't live here anymore so feel free to leave at any time," she shot back, turning her prickly sarcasm on him. "Just saying..."

"Wait." I frowned in confusion, bringing my focus back to the matter at hand. "Who's *J.O.E*?"

"It's in the *song*," Teagan ground out, swinging her attention back to me. "Google it."

I made a mental note to do just that – after I performed some cutting-edge damage control on my little ball of hormones. "Thorn, you know I've been thinking about coming out of retirement for a while now. We've talked about it, baby. I thought you were warming up to the idea."

"I was *humoring* you," she countered huffily. "Like I humor our son when he asks for a pet shark. It doesn't mean I'm seriously considering the notion."

I narrowed my eyes. "Humoring me? What am I – four?"

"Well, you sure as hell act like it." Temper tears filled her eyes. "You're not going back in the cage and that's final."

"Thorn..."

"It's not happening, Noah," she growled, hands moving to rest on the plastic containers full of breast milk. "I forbid it."

"Not even for thirty-five?"

"Not even –" Her words broke off and she paused, tears trickling down her cheeks. "Wait... when you say thirty-five, you're not talking about thousands, are you?"

I smirked. "No, baby."

"Well shit," she sniffled, eyes glued to mine. "That changes things, huh?"

My grin widened. "I know."

"Jesus Christ," Lucky muttered, casually slinking back on his stool now that the imminent danger was gone. "Thirty-five million dollars for one

fight." He blew out a whistle. "I'm in the wrong damn business."

Lost in thought and strangely silent, Teagan continued to stare up at me for several moments before shaking her head. "Nope." Sniffing, she wiped a tear from her cheek. "There's not enough money in the world that can make me change my mind about this –"

"I'm doing it, Thorn."

"We're a team." Her brown eyes turned to slits. "We make our decisions together."

"Not this time." Folding my arms across my chest, I glared right back at her. "I've got this, Thorn. I'm in the best shape of my life, and that money will set our *grandkids* up, never mind our own –"

"Grandkids that you won't be around to see if something bad happens," she reminded me, defiance wafting from her in waves.

"Bad shit happens every day," I countered. "We can't prevent that, but I *am* trained to fight, Thorn. I can control that, and you know that I'm safer in a goddamn cage than anywhere else. Fighting is what I'm programmed to do."

"Then stay home and fight with me!" she hissed, throwing her hands up. "We don't need more money."

"Thorn, you know I love to spar with you, but I need this." I stared hard at her, willing my wife to hear me – to see what I needed so badly. "I *need* this for *me*, baby," I repeated. "I really fucking do."

"It's like that, huh?"

"Yeah, Thorn. It is."

"Ugh." Groaning in frustration, she did a little shimmy-shake and stamped her feet. "You're an asshole."

"But you love him," Lucky offered, not bothering to hide his smile.

She sagged in defeat and nodded. "But I love you."

I mentally grinned in victory.

This was as close to having her blessing as I was going to get.

"Do you want to hug it out, Thorn?"

"Maybe." She shrugged sheepishly. "Do you want a band-aid for your, uh, head?"

Rolling my eyes, I closed the space between us and pulled the little viper into my arms. "Maybe."

TEAGAN MESSINA

"Let's roll, wife," Noah announced, sauntering into our bedroom later that night, fresh from a shower. "It's eight-thirty. The kids are sleeping. The house alarm is on. My nephews have been banished back to The Hill. Are you ready to fuck?"

"Oh my god." Tossing the remote down, I rolled off our bed and landed on my hands and knees with a loud thud. "Is this what we've come to?" I groaned, hoisting my fat ass up before smoothing down my vomit scented shirt. "Scheduled shagging?"

Shrugging, Noah placed the baby monitor down on the night stand and whipped his wife-beater over his head. "It was your idea," he offered, tossing the shirt in the laundry hamper I was supposed to sort through earlier – *but didn't* – before moving for his sweats. "We can fuck, or we can just order in some Chinese and pass out on the couch." He dropped his sweats. "Netflix and a coma?"

"No, no, we can fuck," I sighed, eyeing the bulge of the beast. "But I smell," I warned, yanking my shirt off. "I haven't showered in like three days, and I'm leaking breast milk." That was a lie. I had showered this morning, but with a preschooler, a toddler, and three-month old to care for, it may as well have been days instead of hours.

"Oh baby, I love it when you talk dirty," he shot back with a wink. "Such a turn on."

"Uh-huh." Rolling my eyes, I padded over to him and gestured to my saggy-skinned belly. "Okay, buddy. You've got exactly twenty-seven minutes to make me feel good before the Kardashians come on."

Noah cocked a brow. "Twenty-seven minutes? Your show doesn't start until nine."

"Yeah, I know." I blew out a breath and reached behind my back to unsnap my nursing bra and free the girls. "But you'll need at least three minutes to get my snacks." I smiled sweetly up at him. "You know how hungry I get when I'm post-horny."

"Well, I'm present-horny, which means I'm gonna eat that pussy, and then I'm gonna eat your sexy little ass, so you might wanna record your show, Thorn."

My eyes widened. "Jesus Christ, Noah!"

"Mom jeans off, Thorn," he ordered, prowling towards me, "And get on your back."

Oh.

My.

Fucking.

God.

Never one to look a gift horse in the mouth, I quickly stripped off my jeans and panties before diving onto our California King bed. "You're so fucked up," I told him, unable to wipe the smile from my face, as I rolled onto my back.

"If I'm fucked up, then what does that make you?" Noah chuckled, wasting no time in pinning me to the mattress with his big body.

"Your fucked-up lover," I replied, stretching up to press a kiss to the curve of his stubbly jaw. "I'm still mad by the way. About you coming out of retirement? Yeah, I'm so not over or okay with it."

He sighed heavily. "Can we pause it? At least for tonight?"

"Yeah." I sighed right back at him. "I'm too horny to use hurting words."

"Good," he agreed, nuzzling my neck with his lips. "Now, quick; sit on my face before one of our devil-spawn wakes up."

I was sprawled out on top of my husband, my legs spread wide open, knees on either side of Noah's face, as he fucked me with his tongue. He used one hand to thumb my clit, while the other was busy fingering my ass, and I honestly couldn't cope with the sensations rushing through my body.

Moaning around the thick ridge of his shaft, I took him deeper in my mouth, forcing back the urge to gag when the broad head of his cock slapped against the back of my throat.

I was too close, the pressure he was creating inside of me about to burst with every touch to that little bundle of nerves or flick of his tongue, but I wanted to get him there first.

Rocking on his face, I reached down and cupped his balls in my hand, resting my weight on the hand I had wedged on the mattress.

I went free-falling closer to the edge as Noah slid his finger deeper inside my ass and suctioned his lips around my clit, and it took all my will power to not explode.

Swallowing down a jolt of pre-cum, I sucked my lips in, pulling tighter on his shaft and rolling his balls in my hand until I felt his body tremble violently beneath me.

A hot explosion erupted in my mouth, heat spurting down my throat, as his thrusts became jerky. I swallowed him down, milking every last drop of him with my lips and tongue.

Tearing my mouth away, I fell back on my knees, still fisting his cock in my hands as I rode his face, my entire body jolting with every delicious invasion of his tongue as he speared my pussy.

Restless and impatient, I dragged my hand up and down his shaft, desperate for the dirty, fucking carnal way he made me feel. I felt him switch from a semi to rock hard between my fingers and I longed to drag him between my legs and have him fuck me until I couldn't see straight. I craved the invasive feeling of him inside of me. He was too big for me, too much, and I loved the feel of him breaking me in.

"I'm gonna come," I cried out, banging my hips down on his face, unable to take the sensations as they echoed through my core. A slow spasm began to build inside of me, sending mini vibrations through my body. "Noah, I'm so fucking close..."

My flesh ignited in a flush of burning heat when I felt his teeth tug on my clit. He slid a second finger inside me and I went off like a firework, coming hard on his face.

"Jesus," I strangled out, breathing hard and fast, as I rolled onto my back beside him. "My ears are ringing." Exhaling a shuddering breath, I twisted my face to look at my husband. "You tongue-fucked me so good, it messed with my hearing."

"Hmm," Noah mused. "Pity it didn't mess with your ability to speak."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing, baby."

Nuzzling into his chest, I suckled on his taut flesh. I knew that was his weak spot, that small slither of skin on his collar bone. The low growl of approval that tore from Noah's throat caused my clit to throb with anticipation.

He was so fucking beautiful that it hurt.

All I wanted to do was lie on my back and have him fuck me.

Thankfully, my husband was a like a finely tuned machine; untiring and relentless.

In one swift move, he was on top of me again, hips nestling between my thighs, cock thick, hard, and ready for round two, as he ran his tongue up the length of my neck, stopping to suckle and bite on my flesh. He was caging me in, letting me know in no uncertain terms who was running the show.

Fine by me, I thought to myself, *I could take a night off*.

Not interested in another round of foreplay, Noah covered my mouth with his and slid home, pushing himself deep inside of me. The movement was so comforting that we both groaned in unison. I knew that comforting was a weird phrase to define the sensation of having your husband enter you, but that's how I felt. My connection with this man was on a deeper level than anything I'd ever experienced before.

Sure, we fought like a pair of rowdy teenagers most days, but the man had saved me. Hell, he was still saving me. Daily. He never gave up on me. No matter what I said or did. I never had that before. When my mother died, I kind of gave up on the idea of unconditional love. It was something I'd felt once, but once she passed away, I pushed it to the back of my mind and moved on.

Never in my wildest dreams had I imagined that I would find that comfort and acceptance from the hostile boy next door. The boy that drove me batshit crazy and close to the brink of insanity.

But I did.

When we lost Einín and I completely fell apart, Noah was grieving, too, and still, he continued to push me, to make me rise, make me *live*. He kept my heart beating. And now I was here, happy to breathe again, because of

him. Because he refused to give up on me. Because he refused to live in a world without me in it.

Noah Messina quite literally loved me back to life. When my world caved in on top of me, he strode into the carnage and dragged me back to the safety and protection of his arms. And now we had an army of our own. The babies he had promised to give me, he had provided. The loving home he vowed we would have, he came through. Loyalty, fidelity, love, he'd given me everything and more...

"Noah," I whispered, reaching up to touch his face as he moved inside of me. "You have my blessing."

"Thorn." A pained groan escaped him and he pressed his brow to mine. "Fuck, Thorn..."

"When you come out of retirement, I'm going to be right by your side," I continued, feeling my eyes burn with emotion as he continued to make my body float with sensation. "And every time you step foot in that cage, I'm going to be in your corner, cheering you on."

"Thorn." His lips landed on mine; hard, hot, and a little desperate.

"Because you matter to me," I whispered, kissing him back. "Because you're everything to me."

"Noah! Get the hell in here!" I screamed an hour later, unable to feel my body.

Unable to feel a goddamn thing.

Trembling from head to toe, I fought to balance myself on the edge of the bathtub.

My heart was racing, my eyes trained on the evil bastard prowling towards me.

"You're going to die, you imposturous freak," I hissed and then yelped loudly. "You and every member of your family!"

"What?" Noah demanded, barging into the bathroom and almost blowing the door clean off the hinges in the process. "What's wrong?"

Even though I was in the middle of a personal crisis, I had to stop and take a moment to appreciate how fucking handsome my husband actually was.

Noah stood in the middle of our ensuite bathroom, clad only in a pair of black boxers, with one hand in his just fucked hair – courtesy of yours truly – and the other hand curled around the trigger of a gun.

"Jesus Christ, Thorn," he growled, eyes landing on me. "I thought you were dying in here."

"Kill him!" I demanded – okay, I screamed at the top of my lungs – as I pointed at the huge hairy spider in my bathtub. "I want him dead!"

"Would you shut the fuck up?" he whisper-hissed, eyes bulging. "You'll wake the damn dead with all that yodeling – not to mention the babies!"

"You won't be able to make any more babies if you don't save me," I warned him in a threatening tone. "Now, be a gentleman for once in your thuggish, criminal-filled life and rescue a poor damsel in distress, dammit!"

"Damsel my ass." Rolling his eyes, Noah walked over to where I was being held hostage and reached into the tub –

"Omigod! Don't touch him, you freak!" I screamed, heaving in disgust. "Take his life, Noah. Do it. Be brutal. He doesn't deserve your mercy."

"Relax, drama queen," Noah shot back with a smirk, as he carried the spider out of the bathroom.

"You did not just *touch* it!" I shuddered in revulsion and clambered to my feet. "You better disinfect those fingers before you come near me again."

Clad in Noah's t-shirt and a pair of black panties, I gingerly padded downstairs after him, determined to make sure that my eight-legged attacker was gone for good.

When I reached the bottom step, Noah was closing the front door.

"Well? Did you take his life? Hmm? Did you make him pay?"

"Kill a defenseless spider?" He arched a brow in disbelief. "And what would that make me?"

"The best husband in all of the land," I replied, deadly serious.

"I didn't kill the damn spider, Thorn. I set it free."

"Ugh." I pressed a hand to my chest. "I think you broke my heart just now."

"You're ridiculous," Noah said. "And weird." He frowned. "You're ridiculously weird." He shook his head and I could see the wheels of his brain shift into gear. I was fairly confident that I knew what he was thinking, too. *How the hell did I end up with this lunatic?*

Whatever.

I owned my crazy.

Shrugging off the notion, I jumped off the bottom step and pattered into the kitchen, heart set on a big-ass bagel for a mid-night snack. My plan was thwarted, however, when a huge, tattooed arm came around me.

Hooking his arm around my waist, Noah tugged me back to him. "I was so fucking right all those years ago."

"You were?" I breathed, eyelids fluttering when he leaned in to nuzzle my neck.

"Yeah." He pressed a hot kiss to the curve of my neck. "The crazy in me needs the crazy in you." He pressed a kiss to my cheek. "Thank you for your blessing, Thorn. It means more than you know."

"Yeah, yeah." Sighing heavily, I turned around and wrapped my arms around his waist. "I love you, baby daddy."

Chuckling, he tightened his arms around me. "I love you back, brat."

*Follow the adventures of Noah and Teagan
in the **Carter Kids** series,
available now.*

SUNDAY

BALLYLAGGIN, CORK

SHANNON LYNCH

*B*undled up in the warmest coat that I owned, I blew into my glove covered hands and attempted to warm what I knew were blue-tinged fingertips. It was springtime, and the cold front coming in from the north was severe. Still, there was nowhere else I would rather be than right here.

Bright eyed and bushy tailed, my best friend Claire jumped up and down beside me, cheering for our school rugby team. I knew the jersey number Claire was most interested in, as she screamed and cheered on Tommen College's infamous flanker; Gibsie.

As for me?

Well, I only had eyes for 13.

The team captain.

The Irish international.

The boy wonder himself.

Jonathon Kavanagh.

My Johnny.

It was the first time I'd seen him since he'd been called up for the Six Nations. His schedule during the tournament was insane, which meant we had spent barely any time together since February. Of course, we texted and phoned each other daily, but it wasn't the same. I missed him at school. I

missed him at home. I missed him in my *life*. Sometimes, I think I even missed him when I was *with* him.

"This is your cue to cheer," Claire chimed in, nudging me in the side. "Clap, Shan. The match is over. Your boyfriend just scored the winning try."

"Huh— oh... Good job!" I squealed, quickly rising from my seat and clapping furiously along with all of the other Tommen supporters. In truth, I still had no bloody idea what was happening, but the game was over, Johnny was still standing, with minimal blood on his jersey, so that was a win for me.

My heart hammered wildly in my chest when a boy from the opposite team signaled to Johnny that they should swap jerseys. Now, even with my minimal knowledge of the sport, I knew this didn't usually happen during school games, but Johnny nodded and whipped off his jersey before handing it to the other player.

A chorus of female screams erupted nearby, so loudly that I had to put my hands to my ears. Disgusted and burning with jealousy, I huffed out a breath and climbed out of our row before following Claire down the steps towards the pitch.

When I reached the bottom step of the stands, Johnny was already moving straight for me, blue eyes locked on my face.

"Oh no," Claire groaned, holding her hands up. "You guys are going to suck face, aren't you? Ugh. And I've just had a large lunch..." Shaking her head, she quickly scampered off, calling out the words, "Gerard, come save me," as she moved.

Like the habit of a lifetime, I clumsily raised a hand and waved at him, heart racing violently in my chest as I watched him close the space between us.

Way to go, idiot.

Wave at the boy who saved your family.

Bloody wave.

Ugh.

Ignoring the fans and reporters surrounding him, Johnny made a beeline for the bleachers, clearing the wall in one swift leap, and not stopping until he was standing in front of me.

"Hi, Shannon," he said with a smile, as he hooked one muddy arm around my waist and pulled me up against his chest.

His big, strong, muscular chest...

"Hi, Johnny," I breathed, shivering when I placed my hands on his stomach and felt the heat of his skin through my gloves. "You're back."

"I'll always come back to you, Shannon *like the river*," he replied, voice thick and gruff as he tipped my chin up with his fingers and lowered his mouth to mine. "It's all about you, baby."

The moment our lips touched, something settled deep inside of me. All was right in my world again because Johnny Kavanagh had come home to me.

Ignoring the screams, wolf whistles, and cameras flashing around us, I kissed him back with everything I had in me.

"I missed you so much, Johnny," I whimpered into his mouth as his tongue dueled with mine, swallowing up my breathy moans. His hands were rough and calloused from years of playing the game, but he still held me with a tenderness that only Johnny could possess.

"I missed you so fucking much, Shan," came his urgent reply, as the arm he had hooked around my waist tightened. "Like you wouldn't believe – Christ, you feel like coming home."

"You are home, Johnny."

"That's not what I mean."

Yeah, I knew *exactly* what he meant.

"Congratulations on the game by the way," I breathed against his mouth, lips moving against his. "You, uh, you were –"

"Good?" he offered, pulling back to smirk at me knowingly.

"Yeah." I blew out a shaky breath and grinned up at him. "More than good."

"Good." His smile deepened, dimples popping adorably. "Come on –" he draped an arm around my shoulders and tucked me into his side, "let's go home, Shan."

"Oh, I have good news about that," I replied, wrapping my arm around his waist.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." Smirking to myself, I said, "Your Mam told me to tell you that she's really sorry that she couldn't be there when you came home, but she got roped into some parent's association fundraiser down at Ollie's primary school, and that she'll see you later tonight."

Johnny's step faltered and he swung around to gape at me. "And you're only telling me this now?" I laughed as he shook his head in disbelief.

"Come on," he said, more anxious now, as he practically dragged me towards the club house. "I've got the car."

We were singing in his car, all caught up in the moment, as the windscreen wipers worked to the max to clear the rain from his windshield. It was all fogged up in here, even with the heater on full blast, and I could feel the damp in my bones, but I never felt more careless and *free*.

Unable to stop myself, I leaned over and pressed a kiss to the bare skin of his neck. I was rewarded with a low growl, and then his hand was on my thigh, fingers entwined with mine.

This is it, I decided with a contented sigh. *This is love*.

Kings of Leon's *Fans* blasted from the stereo as Johnny, still in his match gear, threw the car into fifth and put the pedal to the metal.

With my heart racing erratically in my chest, I tried and failed to focus on the blurred sights of fields and houses as we whizzed past, with only one destination in mind.

My bedroom.

He was acting reckless, driving too fast, and still, I couldn't wipe the smile off my face.

Drunk off hormones and freedom, I unfastened my seatbelt, leaned across the seats, and slipped my hand into the waistband of his shorts.

"Shan," he groaned, bucking his hips upwards when I closed my fist around him. "Fuck."

"Do you want me to stop?" I purred in his ear, tugging his earlobe with my teeth. "Hmm?"

"Fuck no, Shan, don't stop," he groaned, hips moving with the rhythm of my hand as I stroked his hard erection. "Don't ever fucking stop, baby."

Less than ten minutes later, we were back in my bedroom, with the door closed, our clothes scattered across his floor, and Him's metal version of *Wicked Game* blasted from the stereo.

The haunting lyrics filled my ears, drowning out the sound of my pounding heart, as my back hit the mattress, followed swiftly by his big body landing on top of me.

He was built like a fighter, he had a frame that was built and primed for violence, but showed me nothing but love. With hands as big as shovels, he cupped my face with a gentleness that I had come to trust.

It was an extraordinary feeling, to be this in love having lived so little of life. It didn't matter though. I had peaked with him. Never would I stray or wander.

Johnny Kavanagh was the boy I was supposed to be with. I had never been more sure of anything in my life. He was the other half of me. And I loved him. I loved him with everything I had in me.

Consumed in my feelings for him, I let my legs fall open, reveling in the feel of his big body nestled between them, the hardest part of him moving against the softest part of me.

He was hard, thick, and straining against me; every muscle in his impressive body coiled tight in anticipation as he teased my entrance with the head of his thick shaft.

"Love you, Shan," he whispered against my lips before pushing deep inside of me. "Love you most in the world, baby."

"I love you, too, Johnny," I cried out, grasping his broad shoulders and reveling in the way that, even though I was so much smaller than him when our bodies locked together, it was *perfect*. We *fit* perfectly. It was so right.

He was giving me everything I needed and more. With his lips, he gave me love. With his hands, he showed me how desirable I was to him.

When he was inside of my body, our movements were a frenzied mixture of pain and pleasure, an intoxicating concoction of sex and love. The connection we had ran deeper than words could begin to depict. It might have taken us awhile to figure it out, but once we had, I trusted that it would be the love of a lifetime – that *he* would be the love of my lifetime.

JOHNNY KAVANAGH

I was so disgustingly in love with this girl that I was fairly sure that nobody on the bleeding planet had ever experienced the emotions that coursed through my heart when she was near me.

Fuck, Shannon didn't even need to be nearby for her to *consume* my every waking thought and decision. My happiness was tied to hers. It didn't matter how far I went with the rugby, or how successful I became, if Shannon wasn't happy then neither was I.

Being inside her, feeling the walls of her heat close around me, pulling me in deeper, to the only place I wanted to be, was everything. Her hands on my body, touching me, grabbing at my flesh, demanding I give her all of me, was fucking heaven.

I was more than willing to give her all of me.

I would have kept telling her how much I loved her if it didn't make me sound like such a fucking vagina, so instead, I showed her with my body. Kissing her deeply, I moved above, pushing deeper inside of her, feeling like I wanted fall into this girl and never come back.

Fuck rugby.

Fuck school.

In this moment, the sky could fall down around me, and I wouldn't leave her.

I didn't want to be anywhere else.

"I'm looking forward to the summer," Shannon said several hours later, as we lay curled up on her bed, watching Fair City – her choice, not mine. "Less rain, less cold, longer nights, no school, more time with you..."

Smile faltering, her words drifted off and I knew why.

It was because we wouldn't have more time.

Because I was leaving again.

I wouldn't be at home this summer.

And come September, I wouldn't be around at all.

Fuck.

"Shan..."

"It's okay," she hurried to say, tightening her hold on my hand. "I forgot for a minute, but I remember now."

I wanted to ram my fist down my own throat I was so pissed with myself for the choices I had made.

"I'm sorry," I groaned, twisting onto my side to look at her. "Shan –"

"You have nothing to be sorry for," she replied in that small voice. "This is how it is. I understood what I was getting into."

"Yeah, but I'm still sorry." Reaching up, I tucked a curl behind her ear. "For how it has to be. For how hard it is being with me. I know it's not easy. I know I'm not giving you a normal teenage relationship." A pained sigh escaped me. "I wish I could, Shan. I wish I could give you the world."

"I don't want normal, Johnny," she replied. "I only want you."

Thank fuck for that.

"And I only want you back," I whispered.

She offered me a bright smile. "Then we'll figure it out."

"Yeah." I hoped so. "Because I'm not giving you up."

Not ever.

"Speaking of giving up –" Springing into a sitting position, Shan grabbed the remote and flicked off the television. "I'm about to," she continued, leaning over the edge of her bed to grab her schoolbag. "On maths, that is." Scrunching her nose up, she hoisted her bag onto the bed and gave me an adorable puppy look. "Mind saving me one more time, Captain Fantastic?"

Feigning an exaggerated sigh, I nodded. "Last time, Lynch."

SHANNON LYNCH

With The Goo Goo Dolls' *Iris* playing softly on my stereo, I listened intently to every instruction Johnny gave me. After all, the boy was the closest I had ever come to meeting a mathematical genius in the flesh – and that included every member of faculty at every school I had ever attended.

"Where's your ruler, Shan?"

"Pencil case," I replied, spitting out the pencil I had been balancing between my lips, while I desperately tried to solve equation 2.B of my maths homework.

"The fuck?"

"Hmm?"

"Shan?"

"Yeah?"

"Shannon, *look at me.*"

Brows furrowed, I tore my gaze off the page I was working on and looked at Johnny.

He was as pale as a ghost, still clutching my pencil case in one hand, while gaping at what he was holding in his other hand. "The fuck is this, Shannon?" he said, voice deathly quiet.

"I..." Stumped, I gaped at the pregnancy test in his hand and stared blankly back at him. "I don't know."

Johnny looked at me in disbelief. "You don't *know*?"

"No." I shook my head and grabbed the test, feeling completely dumbfounded. "I don't."

"Don't lie to me," Johnny bit out, running a hand through his hair. "Please don't fucking lie to me, Shannon. Not now, and not about something

like *this*."

"I'm not lying to you," I shot back as I sprang off his bed and backed away, eyes still glued to the stick in my hand. "This is *not* mine."

"You're pregnant," he whispered, still sitting on my bed, surrounded by textbooks. "And you didn't tell me."

"No." I shook my head. "No, Johnny, I'm not."

"You were sick before I left for camp last month," he accused, clearly frustrated now. "You threw up."

"I *always* throw up," I countered, unable to refrain from rolling my eyes. "You know that. I can't help it."

"Stop lying to me."

A laugh of pure astonishment escaped me. "I'm *not*."

"Shannon, you've got a fucking baby in your belly!" Johnny hissed, turning a scary shade of purple, as he jerked off the bed and paced my bedroom floor, hands flailing. "Jesus Christ, you've got *my* baby inside you. This is not a laughing matter, baby!"

"What are you *talking* about?" I choked out through fits of laughter, gaping at him in horror. "I don't have a *baby* inside me!"

"Oh, you don't?" Furious, he grabbed the pregnancy test out of my hand, scanned it quickly, groaned loudly, and waved it around like a mad man. "I can't fucking believe you were going to let me go and not tell me," he spat. "What did you think I was going to do? Leave you here on your own with my kid so I could go play rugby? Are you fucking insane?" He shook his head and ran a hand through his hair. "Do you know me at *all*?"

"Johnny, I have never seen that before in my life."

"It was in *your* pencil case," he growled, livid. "It's in your *body*."

"I know," I replied, stumped. "But it's not mine."

"You're lying to me," he snapped. "Again, Shan!"

"I'm not," I choked out, tossing what I realized was a *used*, pee-covered test on the floor. "Ew, my pencils," I groaned before my eyes widened. "Oh my god, who's *pregnant*?"

"*You*, Shannon." Johnny blinked in outrage. "You're pregnant!"

"No, I'm not!" I snapped, just about done with this madness. "We're not having a baby, so just calm down!"

"Oh my god!" he strangled out, rubbing a hand over his face. "You weren't going to keep it, were you?" He groaned and bit down on his fist, pacing resumed. "That's why you didn't tell me!"

"You are having a panic attack," I told him calmly. "You need to *breathe* and you need to *listen*."

"I'm keeping you!" he snarled, not listening one bit, as he stalked towards my door. "And that thing inside of ya!"

"Where are you going?" I called after him, smothering a laugh with my hand. "Johnny?"

"To buy a bleeding ring," he called over his shoulder. "And maybe hide the knives because I'm not going to have a dick for much longer, baby!"

He slammed my bedroom door closed behind him and I flopped back down on the bed, mind reeling.

Less than a minute later, my door flew back open and in he stalked like a man on a mission. Stomping over to where I was still sitting on the bed, Johnny dropped to his knees in front of me and pressed his ear to my stomach.

"What are you doing?" I laughed.

"I'm trying to get a sense of what the fuck I'm dealing with here," he muttered. "Jesus!"

"Oh my god, stop – stop!" I pushing at his head, unable to contain my laughter. "I'm going to wet myself."

"Incontinence," Johnny wailed, wrapping his arms around my waist and clinging to my belly. "That's a symptom of pregnancy." A comical yodel escaped him. "Ah shite, Shan, I'm so fucking sorry for putting a baby in ya!"

"You put a *what* in her?"

The fear of god spiraled inside of me when my eyes landed on Mrs. Kavanagh standing in my bedroom door.

"I'm sorry, Ma. I'm bleeding sorry –"

"I'm going to cut the willy off you, ya little toe-rag!"

Springing to his feet quicker than a cat, Johnny lunged towards the far side of my bed at the same time his mother lunged for him.

"How could you do this to me, Jonathon!" his mother wailed.

"Don't kill me! I need to be around for my baby, Ma –"

"It's not me! It's not me!" I began to exclaim, hurrying to save my boyfriend from the wooden spoon his mother was trying to maim him with. "Edel, Edel, wait – I'm *not* pregnant!"

Both mother and son froze in place. "You're not?" they asked in unison. I shook my head. "No, I'm not."

"Then who the fuck does that belong to?" Johnny demanded.

"April fool's," a familiar voice snickered from the doorway of my bedroom. "Best two-euro investment at the joke shop ever, Johnny lad. You should've seen your face. Fucking priceless."

"Tadhg Lynch." I narrowed my eyes. "You little shit."

"Language," Mrs. Kavanagh scolded, lowering the wooden spoon and then discreetly tucking it back into the front pocket of her apron. "That was a terrible prank, Tadhg. I almost throttled poor Johnny."

"Sorry, Dellie."

"Ah, Jaysus," Johnny heaved, relief evident, as he flopped down on my bed and clutched his chest. "Thank Christ for that. I'm so fucking relieved that I'm not even mad."

*Read all about Johnny and Shannon
in the **Boys of Tommen** series,
available now.*

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR READING!

*I really hope you enjoyed all of our couple's tales in Seven Sleepless Nights.
Keep an eye out on social media for my next release.*

*Lots of love,
Chloe xx*

Scroll on to read the bonus content...

BONUS CONTENT

Beware:

This is a dark and twisted story of obsession, power struggle, sinful urges, and extreme violence, set in a dystopian-like new world.

It contains explicit and detailed sexual content, and sexual violence, that some readers may find hard to stomach. This story is full of emotional triggers and is not for everyone. It is nothing like my previous work, so proceed with caution.

THE BASTARD PRINCE EXCERPT

ASHTON NORTHWOOD

Eight months had passed since my arrival at the Crellid estate and life was different here. I was different here. Lonely. The Crellid mansion was a scary place for a ten-year-old girl to live and I was homesick. Not for my father. No, I didn't miss him one bit, but I desperately missed Peter, my bird, and my tutor, Miss Charlotte.

There were no girls my age to play with here, and the older girls that slept in the apartments underground were always busy. Not that it mattered. They weren't allowed to speak to me, either way. The Crellid children never spoke to me, either. The girls were like zombies and the boys frightened me. They were always trying to touch parts of my body that shouldn't interest them.

Mrs. Solo, my tutor at the Crellids, told me that I should be happy Fabio's older boys wanted to touch and grope me. According to Miss Solo, one of the Crellid boys would own me one day and she constantly urged me to seek out my favorite one. If they liked me, they might be gentle later on, she said. She encouraged me to focus my attention on Jethro, one of the youngest boys with the sweet smile, but I had already picked my favorite.

The Spanish one.

The one Miss Solo said wasn't entitled to me because he was a bastard with the wrong last name.

I didn't care about his last name, or that he was a bastard. I didn't care that Miss Solo had forbidden me to seek him out, and I didn't even care that he didn't speak the same language as me.

He was big and dark and pretty, and he never tried to touch my private parts. He was my absolute favorite person at the Crellids. Maybe in the world.

"I want to fuck this," Trigger growled, breaking through my thoughts, as he threw his hands up in frustration and kicked the book away.

We were camped out in my bedroom and he was scowling at the floor. As per usual, he was frustrated and spitting mad.

"It is pointing!" he barked, shaking his head angrily.

"Pointless," I corrected quietly, burying my smile at his outburst. From watching his interactions with his half-siblings, I knew the very last thing I should be doing was laughing at him. He turned mean and used his fists all the time.

His siblings were scared of him.

So was Miss Solo.

Not me.

"Pointing is something you do with your finger. See –" Giggling, I wiggled my index finger in front of his face. "Pointing."

"You ha-ha-ha," he accused, giving me a look of outrage. "On me?"

"It's at you, not on you, and I'm not laughing," I lied, sidling closer until our shoulders were touching. He was thirteen but he looked like a man. He was just so big. And his smell? It was so yummy. I always wanted to move closer to him. "I promise," I added. "And you are doing so well, Trig. Honestly. Your English is getting better every day."

"I want to fuck this." Another burst of Spanish escaped him and he dropped his head in his hands. "I want to fuck this...fucking fuck!"

"Well –" I grinned and patted his big shoulder. "You seem to have the swear words locked down."

"Ah...swear word?" Brows furrowed, he turned to look at me. "I do not...uh...know that swear word?"

"Fuck," I explain, blushing. "Fuck is a swear word."

"Fuck," he repeated slowly, dark brown eyes lock on mine. "You fuck or no?"

"I don't know what you mean," I giggled and then quickly blushed, unable to take the heat that emanated from those big brown eyes.

"Eres un corderito," he said then, giving me a curious look. "Riéndose de un lobo."

"Are you making fun of me?" I whispered, edging closer to the huge boy with the golden skin. "Are you calling me mean names, Trigger?"

"No te preocupes." A hint of a smile ghosted his full lips. "No te morderé, corderito."

Clenching my eyes shut, I bowed my head and held perfectly still, willing the pain shooting through my body to fade, and my childhood memories of Trigger Laperro to not hurt so damn bad.

Moments later, the sound of *his* voice filled my ears and I stiffened.

"Why the fuck not?" Trig demanded, appearing from the hallway Jet had disappeared down, wearing nothing but a towel around his hips.

"Because he said not to," Jet strangled out, hurrying after his brother. "I didn't know what to do."

"Ashton," Trig said gruffly and I flinched.

Stopping several feet from me, he ran a hand through his wet hair and exhaled heavily, clearly noticing my physical reaction to him. "You're still bleeding?"

"No," the word was barely audible but I managed to squeeze it out. "I don't think so."

Another tremor racked through his body as he stood several feet from me, looking utterly helpless. "I will take you to a doctor —"

"No!" I snapped, tone harder now.

He frowned. "*Corderito*, let me take care —"

"I am *not* explaining *this* to anyone," I strangled out, pulse racing at the thought. "I just need to sleep. That's it. That's all I want to do."

"But —"

"I'm not fucking going, Trigger!" I screamed, spitting the words at him as my body shook violently.

Brows furrowed, he offered me a clipped nod. "Are you —" Pausing, he swallowed deeply and turned his hardened stare on Jethro, who quickly left his apartment without another word. "Are you staying?" Trig asked when the door closed behind Jet. "Here?" His heated gaze locked on mine. "With me?"

"Doesn't look like I have much of a choice," I replied wearily, knees bopping. "You claimed me, remember? I'm yours to do whatever you wish with." Sighing heavily, I dragged myself to my feet and tipped my chin up.

"However, if it's not too much to ask, I'd appreciate a couple of days to heal before you give me to your men."

"Don't," he warned, narrowing his eyes.

I glared back at him, defiance burning in my eyes. "I'm a whore, remember? A filthy puta traidora."

He flinched.

Good.

Feel some of my pain, Trigger!

Releasing a furious growl, he stalked towards me and I cowered from him. "Stop it," he choked out hoarsely as swept me into his arms, cradling me to his chest. "I won't hurt you."

Rigid, I locked my limbs tight, not bothering to resist when he carried me down the hallway and into the master bedroom. There was no point in fighting back. Not anymore. My life didn't belong to me. It belonged to *him*.

Setting me down on the edge of his king-sized bed, Trig pulled the covers back and gestured for me to climb in.

I didn't move.

"Do you want to shower?" he asked then. "Or bathe?"

I shook my head.

"Then lie down."

I remained frozen to the spot.

"Corderito, I will not fuck you again," he snapped, flustered. "Not without your consent."

"You will *never* have my consent," I strangled out, emotions spilling over now. "You are a —" My voice broke off as a huge sob racked through me. "I h-hate you!"

"I know," he deadpanned. "Lie down."

"I said I hate you!" I screamed, furious with his lack of response. "I hate you, Trigger Laperro! I fucking hate your guts and I wish you never came back!"

"I know!" he roared back at me, bristling now. "I heard you loud and clear, *Corderito*." Reaching for me, he lifted me into his bed. "Believe me, I *know*."

"All of those things you vowed to your father in Spanish tonight," I sniffled, curling up in a ball on his mattress and then scooting far away when he whipped off his towel and climbed in beside me. "About killing

him and enjoying knowing that he'll burn in hell?" I glared at the side of his face as he reached for the small lamp and flicked it off, bathing us in darkness. "Well, I made those same vows." A hiccupped sob tore through me. "I'm g-going to k-kill you, Trigger."

"You can't kill me, Corderito," he replied quietly, turning his back to me. "*Ya estoy muerto.*"

The moonlight shining through the window illuminated the tattoos etched across his broad, tanned back and I repressed a shiver.

From the age of nine to sixteen, when he left me, I had consistently stared at Trigger Laperro's back – his whole body, to be exact. When I first met him, his skin was mostly ink free, but as the years passed by, the tattoos had slowly accumulated to the point where he was now *covered*.

His back.

His chest.

His arms.

His neck.

His thighs.

Everywhere...

Blinking back my tears, I glared at the face of the inked devil staring back at me, the tattoo that covered the scars I knew were hidden underneath, before dropping my gaze to the words written across his lower back.

De las cenizas de mi odio.

From the ashes of my hatred, I will be reborn.

"I wouldn't fall asleep if I were you," I whispered menacingly, narrowing my eyes at the beady-eyed, tattooed devil with marijuana smoke wafting from the joint pursed between his lips. Strapped to his back was a double shoulder strap, in his hands were two matching pistols, identical to the ones Trigger used for work. "You might not wake up."

"My gun is on the nightstand," he said flatly, keeping his back to me. "Do your worst."

God, where did he go? Where did *I* go? How did we end up like this? In a matter of nine years, we had gone from acquaintances to tutors, friends to

allies, lovers to enemies, to *this*?

"Aren't you scared?" I was so full of turmoil that it was hard to *breathe*. I glared at his beautiful body and felt an immediate swell of inner repulsion for the flutter of excitement that erupted deep in my womb. "You could die tonight."

Silence.

"You know I'm capable of taking your life."

More silence.

"You would deserve it."

Nothing.

Furious at being ignored, I crawled over his hard, naked body and snatched his gun off the nightstand. He was ripped from head to toe in muscles and it terrified me. *Because those muscles had been used against me.* "Feel that?" I hissed, as I held the gun in shaky hands and pressed the barrel to his temple. "It's not nice, is it?" I pushed the cool metal into his flesh. "To not be in control of your body." Shivering, I steadied my hand. "To be at someone else's mercy?"

"Don't forget to cock it," was all he replied, keeping his back to me. "Like I taught you."

"Look at me –" Pushing on his big shoulder, I forced him onto his back and then straddled his naked body with mine. "Look in my eyes, you piece of shit –" Grabbing his big hand, I pinned it above his head before quickly reaching for the other hand. Trigger remained motionless beneath me, both pacifying and infuriating me by keeping his hands pinned in place when he could so easily overpower me. *Like earlier.*

A sob escaped me at the memory of what happened in his father's lair and I cocked the hammer before aiming the gun between his eyes. "Bang, bang," I hissed, eyes locked on his as I held the gun in both hands. "Bang."

"All of this talking is not killing me, Corderito," he replied gruffly, accent thick, watching me with an intense expression, hands still dutifully pinned above his head. "You can scratch me with your claws," he added thickly. "You can threaten my life – you can try to take it, if it heals what I broke." Stretching out beneath me, he made no move to overpower me. "Take what you need from me."

"Fight me," I demanded, enraged by his comfort. "*Fight me*, bastard prince." Hacking up a phlegm ball, I spat on his chest, returning his earlier favor. "Fight your *whore*."

He didn't.

Instead, Trigger remained motionless beneath me, brown eyes searing me. This huge, powerful gangster who was twice my size was denying me what I needed most.

Furious, I released a pained cry and grabbed his hair, yanking hard. "I said fight me, you piece of shit." Lowering my face to his, I glared into his eyes, wanting him to feel every inch of my fury. "Give me that, at least."

"I will not fight you," he told me, brown eyes locked on mine. "Do what you must."

"Guns aren't my style," I reminded him with a sneer, forcing the tremor from my voice, as I traced the side of his face with the barrel. "Too loud." Dropping my gaze to the piercing in his nipple, I reached down and tugged hard, reveling in the discomfort that flashed in his eyes. "I like knives."

"Open the drawer," he told me in a weary tone, inclining his head to the nightstand. "You'll find what you need in there."

"Why are you being like this?" I hissed, voice cracking with both temper and emotion. "You know you can beat me. You know I can't win. Why won't you just be *cruel*?"

"Never again," he vowed quietly. "So, do what you must, *mi reina*."

"Fuck you!" I cried, throwing the gun at the wall opposite us. Scrambling off his lap, I scurried to the far corner of his bed and watched, incensed with heartbreak, as he rolled onto his side once more. "I *hate* you, Trigger Laperro." Clutching his pillow to my chest with a death grip, I nuzzled my cheek against the achingly soft fabric and released a choked sob, too full of pain to hold it in.

He stiffened at the sound, muscles bunching together. I sniffled again, hiccupping another sob, and Trigger groaned into his pillow. "Stop crying."

"I c-can't."

"Try."

"F-fuck you," I hissed, lashing out at him with my foot and connecting with his taut ass. He didn't budge. Digging my heel into his butt cheek, I hissed, "You h-hurt me." Sniffing, I pushed on his back with all my might but I only ended up moving myself closer to the edge of the bed. "You m-make me s-sick."

"Then what do you want me to do?" His voice was low and gruff, his words torn from deep in his chest. "How do I fix this?"

"Go back in time and *believe* me, Trigger," I hissed, spitting my venom tinged outrage at him. "That's how you fix this!"

"I can't, *Corderito*," he groaned. "I fucking *can't*, okay? I wish I could, *mas que la vida*, but I can't roll back the clock."

"Then you can't fix this," I whispered, numb, soaking his pillowcase with my pain. Retracting my foot, I curled up in a ball. "It's too late."

"*A la mierda con esto!*" Exhaling a frustrated growl, Trig rolled onto his back and glared up at the ceiling. "*Joder mi vida!*" He rubbed his face with both hands and slammed one fist down on the mattress beside him. "I should not stay here." I stiffened, panic-stricken at his words. "With you." He released another heavy sigh, shoulders slumping. "I will leave."

"Wh-what?" I gaped at him. "*Leave?*"

"*Sí.*" Dropping his hands to rest on his bare stomach, he tilted his face to look at me. "I will make arrangements for you – to keep you safe." He swallowed deeply, Adam's apple bobbing in his throat. "You're under my protection now, so you cannot be harmed –"

"You are un-fucking-believable!" I cried, trembling. "You do all that – flex your muscles in front of your brother and father and mark your territory like a dog – and for *what*, Trigger? To walk *away*? To leave me here with your crazy father while you hunt your demons down? You can't run from them, Trigger, and you can't chase them down, either, because they're already inside of you! You can't run from me, either. You can't hide from *this*."

"I am sorry for what I did to you, *Corderito*. It was shameful and unforgivable of me. I am not running from my responsibilities," he growled. "But do not speak of *my* demons."

"She's dead!" I screamed brokenly, losing my ever-loving mind by bringing up the one person I knew could draw the devil out of him. "You're not avenging her honor anymore, Trigger. You're just chasing ghosts!"

"And whose fault is that?" he roared back at me, shaking with barely restrained violence. "I am in the wrong tonight," he added, attempting to calm himself down. "I know I am a devil. I was cruel. I was evil to you. I own what I have done. But you fucking *lie* –" Shaking his head, he snapped his mouth shut and ran a hand through his hair. Jaw clenched, he drew in several calming breaths before continuing, "You know what you did to me, *Corderito*." A vein throbbed in his temple as he spoke. "Do not ever pretend

that you don't know what you *cost* me that night." He ran a hand through his hair and hissed, "Do not pretend to be perfect."

I withered up inside as a tsunami of guilt washed through me. "What happened that night was *not* my fault," I croaked out, emotions bombarding me.

"Wasn't it?" he replied dryly. "I think it is pretty clear what happened, sweetheart, and, more importantly, *why* it happened."

"Trig." My shoulders sagged in defeat. "I didn't mean –" I shook my head. "You know that I *never* intentionally –"

"You *betrayed* me, Corderito!" he cut me off with a vicious snarl and then roughly cleared his throat. "Not in all the ways I once believed, and I will carry that regret with me until I take my last breath," he added in a gruffer tone. "But you *still* betrayed me – whether you *meant* to or not."

"It's not how it looked," I squeezed out, feeling my heart constrict in my chest.

"No," he sighed. "Nothing ever is, it seems."

"Trig." I shook my head, denying the ugliness.

"Tell me that I'm wrong," he urged then, tone thick. "Tell me that I am mistaken, *Corderito*. Tell me that you didn't betray me – that you didn't sell me out to *him*," he bit out. "Say it one time, only one, and I give you my word that I *will* believe you." Desperation tinged his tone. "Just tell me that I'm wrong. Tell me that it wasn't you, and I will spend forever making the last two years and tonight up to you." He gave me pleading look. "*Por favor, mi reina*."

I opened my mouth and then swiftly clamped it shut, unable to lie. "I *can't*."

Betrayal and hurt flashed in his eyes, similar to the betrayal and hurt that was blazing out of mine, and he nodded stiffly. "I see."

"But it wasn't what you think," I hurried to defend, shivering violently now. "But it – I didn't – I trusted – and you weren't – it was *not* on purpose." Swallowing down a sob, I whispered, "I made a mistake."

"*Sí*. As did I," he bit out in a tight tone. "And I, too, have many regrets. Unfortunately, regrets do not change what has come to pass."

"Do you still want me to pay?" I whispered, watching his face carefully for a reaction. "That night, you said that you would make me –" I stopped short, unwilling to allow my mind to go back there. "Do you still want me dead?"

"Do you still want *me* dead?" he challenged, staring right back at me, unblinking. "*Corderito*?"

"Yes," I breathed, unsure if I meant what I was saying, but too overwhelmed to think rationally. "I want you to pay for what you did to me."

"It is a strange world of irony we find ourselves in," he replied quietly.

"Are you going to kill me?" I asked then, feeling my blood run cold. "Is that what this is about? Did you claim me to get rid of me? To make good on your vow?" I held my breath while I waited for his response.

Several moments passed in tense silence before he finally spoke.

"No, *Corderito*," he said in a quiet tone. "If I still wanted you dead, then you would be dead."

Another round of tense silence enveloped us then.

I was reeling.

He was brooding.

"How did we get here, Trig?" I breathed, heart cracking in my chest, as I obliterated the silence. "Look at us." Shaking my head, I gestured around us. "Look at how we've turned out." I shrugged helplessly. "We had a plan."

"I know exactly how I got here," he replied. "I made the age-old mistake of falling in love with a girl. Worse than loving her, I made the detrimental decision to make her my whole world. To make her my equal. I lost my fucking mind in her. I built an army *for* her. I rallied against my family *for* her. I killed for her. I stole for her. I lied, cheated, schemed, and swindled for her. To avenge her. To *free* her. I trusted her with my secrets. With my —" Stopping short, he sighed heavily before finishing with, "The rest, as they say, is an unfortunate series of events that led us to this night."

"One mistake, Trigger," I squeezed out. "I only made one bad, impulsive decision with you."

"As did I, *Corderito*," he replied quietly. "But, as we've both learned tonight, one is all it takes to implode your own world."

"Do you still love me?" I whispered, heart thumping hard in my chest. "Right now." Sniffled. "Do you love me tonight?"

"Do you still love *me*?" he gave my words back to me. "Tonight?"

"No." I shook my head, denying my feelings. "I can't."

"Then we are at an impasse," he said before throwing off the covers and moving to climb out of bed. "You can stay here until I have suitable accommodation arranged for you. I will find another place to stay —"

"No – you can't leave!" I blurted out, dragging him back down on the mattress. "You know what will happen if you leave me. If you go, your father will see it as you giving me back to him. You already did that and I barely made it out alive. Jet won't save me this time. He's not strong like you. He doesn't have that kind of power –"

"A la mierda con esto." Groaning, Trig flopped onto his back and pressed the heels of his hands to his face. *"Corderito, usted me está matando."*

"It's true, Trig, and you know it. My father's name won't protect me if that happens," I hurried to add, telling him things he was already more than aware of. "I'm damaged goods – they all saw. The only reason they didn't touch me tonight, or join in, is because they fear *you*. You're the wildcard. The one they can't read. It scares them and that protects us. If you leave me, it'll be open season with my *body*! I'll be put to work downstairs with the other *girls*." Choking out a sob, I added, "I'd rather die."

"That won't happen," he snarled, chest rising and falling quickly now. "I will make sure you are well taken care of –"

"You've already *claimed* me, Trigger," I spat, interrupting him. "*You* did that and you can't take it back." Sniffling, I pulled myself onto my knees. "*I belong* to you now." When he didn't meet my eyes, I leaned forward and roughly cupped his stubbly jaw. "We both know this is as close as it gets to marriage in our world, which means I'm as good as your *wife*," I hissed, digging my nails into his flesh and praying to all that was holy that it was hurting him. "If you didn't want me, then you should have left me for your brother." Hurt speared me, making it hard to breathe. "At least Jet wouldn't abandon me."

"I just told you that I would make arrangements for you. I will keep you under my protection, Ashton," Trig snapped, glaring up at me. "The fuck else do you want me to do?" he demanded, roughly shaking my hand away. "Lay beside you every night and listen to you cry? Watch you shake with fear every time I come within five feet of you? You *hate* me. You want me *dead*. We are a fucking disaster! *Por el amor de cristo*, I *raped* you –"

"Stop," I begged, roughly grabbing his jaw again and then squeezing his cheeks together as if I could somehow stop him from saying the words that we could never come back from. "Don't say it –"

"I. Raped. You," Trig strangled out, voice torn, eyes glued to mine.

"No." Shaking my head, I clamped my hand over his mouth. *"Please."*

Gently, he reached up and pried my hand from his mouth. "I *did* that to you," he continued, forcing me to hear him. "To my queen. I *violated* you. I let them watch. A million lifetimes could pass and I still wouldn't be able to come back from *that*."

"I...I..." Tears dripped down my cheeks and I shivered, repressing the painful memories. "Someone had to do it."

"So, you're glad it was *me*?" he demanded with a pained snarl, sitting straight up. "No, *Corderito*, we made a deal a long time ago. I promised you that I would protect you. I swore to you that I would *never* allow a man to do your body what I did tonight." His chest was heaving, his jaw still firmly gripped between my fingers. "Ashton, what I did to you tonight? What I did to your body? Inside it?" He shuddered. "I can never change or take it back. You can never forgive me for it. And I can't expect you to." He reached up and brushed a tear off my cheek. "We are fucked, sweetheart. We are completely and utterly doomed."

"I know and I...I..." I shook my head. "But you still can't leave me." I leaned into his touch and then quickly checked myself. "I don't – I'm not – you just..."

"Say it," he ordered gruffly, dropping his hand to his side, still allowing me to clutch his face with my trembling hand. "Say how you feel, *Corderito*. I deserve to hear it."

"I *hate* you for what you did to me," I cried, knowing full well that I sounded like a broken record but unable and unwilling to change my tune. "You *hurt* me, Trig." Conflicted, I moved to shift away from him but only ended up shuffling closer until my knees were brushing his thigh. "You *tore* me," I strangled out, panicked at the thought of getting close to him, but growing even more frantic at the thought of *not* getting close to him. "Inside my body." I sagged weakly, confused and lost. "You broke me from the inside out."

"I know." He bowed his head and dragged in several shallow breaths before reaching up and gently prying my fingers away. "I can still call a doctor."

"Can he fix my heart, Trig? Because that hurts the most," I whispered, chewing on my lip. "Can he fix *yours*?"

"*Para ti tal vez*," he muttered under his breath. "*Nada me puede arreglar*."

"English," I warned him. "I want your words."

"I am not good with the words you want to hear," he admitted with a weary sigh before climbing out of bed. "If you want me to stay with you, I will stay. If you want me to leave you, I will leave." Eyeing me warily, he shrugged. "It is your choice, *Corderito*." With a sharp exhale, he added, "From this moment on, it will *always* be your choice."

"I *need* you to stay with me, *not want*," I forced the words out, disgusted with myself for valuing my life so greatly that I was making peace with sleeping with my rapist. "I *need* your protection."

"Then you have it," Trig replied with a clipped nod. "But I need something in return from you."

"What?" Instantly wary, I tipped my chin up and waited for his demands.

"I need you to come with me now," he said, moving to the door of his ensuite bathroom and flicking on the light. "I need to clean you."

"You're not touching me," I hissed, panicked, wrapping my arms around myself. "Not one fucking finger."

"Then you clean yourself," he shot back heatedly. "But you *will* show me."

"Over my dead –"

"I *need* that, *Corderito*," he ground out in a meaningful tone. "You have your demands and I have mine." He ran a hand through his dark hair and shrugged. "You are my responsibility and I *will* take care of you."

Anxious, I weighed up my options and found myself slowly climbing off his bed and following him into the bathroom, stopping at the nightstand on my way. Keeping a respectful distance from my body, Trig set to work on switching on the shower and gathering up towels and a spare t-shirt for me to sleep in. "You can go ahead," he said in a thick tone, waving a hand towards the glass shower doors and having the decency to avert his eyes from my body. "I will wait out here for you until you, uh –" He frowned at the tiled floor and blew out a harsh breath. "I need to know the blood is out."

"I taught you better than that," I whispered with a shake of my head, hands behind my back. "Pull your words together."

His brows furrowed in frustration and he flicked his gaze to mine. "What was it?"

"Gone, not out," I explained before swinging the glass door open and backing into the shower. "You know better."

"Gone," Trig muttered, correcting himself, tone embarrassed. "Not out."

I smothered a smile, knowing he deserved none of those, and waited for him to turn his back before placing the knife on his shampoo rack.

Protection, I assured myself. Just in case this was a trick. A game. A false sense of security. My brain was screaming danger, my heart was laughing at the notion, my body didn't seem to know what it wanted, and my pride was demanding vengeance.

Conflicted, I quickly set to work on lathering my hair with his shampoo and scrubbing myself raw with a loofah. My skin was littered with faint bruises, many of those being fingerprints, and my stomach turned at the sight.

"Can I..." Trig's voice came from the other side of the glass. "Is it gone?"

"I'm not bleeding anymore," I called back weakly. "I'm okay."

"I need to see," was his gruff reply. "*Just* see."

"I really don't..." Letting my words trail off, I decided to push the door open. There was little point in putting it off. If he wanted me, he could have me. Nobody was coming to save me. "See," I whispered, back pressed to the wall of the shower, as I watched Trig. He was still naked and standing in the shower doorway with his heated gaze locked on my lower half. "All gone."

"I marked you," he bit out, eyes locked on my thighs. "You are bruised."

"I'll heal."

Muttering a string of Spanish swear words under his breath, he stepped into the shower and I panicked, quickly scrambling into the corner and directly under the flow of scalding water. Holding his hands up, he eyed me warily. "I won't hurt you," he said in a slow, coaxing tone. "I won't."

Uncertain, I watched as he slowly closed the space between us and then sank to his knees. My pulse thundered in my ears, heart hammering violently in my chest, when he dipped his head and pressed a soft kiss to my left thigh and then my right. "What are you –" my words broke off, morphing into a throaty moan when he buried his face between my legs, nose grazing my mound as his tongue snaked out to lap at my swollen clit.

"Let me clean you," he whispered, nuzzling my pussy with his nose. "Let me take the pain away with my tongue."

"Oh god..." His words caused a dart of arousal to spear through me and I was instantly wet. "No – wait..." Breathing hard, I knotted my fingers in

his hair and whispered, "I'm scared."

"Shh, just relax, *mi reina*," he coaxed, encouraging me with his hand to hitch my thigh over his shoulder. "Let me clean you." Recklessly, I did just that, opening myself up to his mouth. Moaning, I felt him lick and kiss and suckle on me. "Fuck –"

Body betraying me, I rocked my hips against him, crying out when I felt his tongue spear me into my tender hole. He groaned, inhaling deeply, as his large hands trailed up my thighs to cup my ass. It was such a male sound, so deep and primal, that I found myself relaxing, pressing myself into face, craving more from his tongue. I was sore and tender and, to my absolute detriment, aching for *more* of him. "I won't hurt you," he continued to whisper, trailing his tongue back over my slit and returning to flick my clit. "I only want to kiss you." To prove the point, he fucked my pussy with his tongue.

"Mmm." My pussy clenched around his tongue, greedily trying to hold him there. His tongue wasn't enough. I needed more, I realized. I needed the penetration. I wanted him to fill me up with his thick, hard cock and I hated myself for it. There was something wrong with me. There had to be, to crave *that* again.

Drunk off desire and pulsing with need, I let my leg fall to the floor and pulled at Trig's face. "Are you too sore?" Trig asked, breathing elevated, as he popped his face out from between my thighs to look up at me, brown eyes almost black with desire. "Was it too much, *Cord* –" His words broke off when I roughly dragged his face to mine and crushed my lips against him.

He came willingly, rising to his feet, and caging me to the wall with his huge frame. His hands moved to my neck as he kissed me deeply, plunging his tongue into my mouth. I could taste the faint tinge of metallic as his tongue stroked against mine in a slow, drugging rhythm.

Painfully aroused, I felt him thicken against my belly, his erection digging into my flesh. "Tell me," he growled against my lips as water cascading down on us. "Tell me what I can do to you, *Corderito*."

"Wh-what?"

"Tell me," he repeated, grinding his body against mine. "What you want?" He kissed me again. "I need to hear the words."

"To fuck," I lost my mind and said, both cringing and moaning loudly when the words spilled from my lips. "I want –" Breathing hard, I reached a

hand between us and gripped his cock. "I want you to fuck me with this."

A deep, guttural groan escaped him and he reached for my thighs, lifting me up in one swift movement. "I will make you come so hard, you'll forget to hate me," he growled, lips ravaging mine, as he reached a hand between us and guided his cock to my entrance. "I will fuck away the pain, *mi reina*," he vowed, slowly feeding his cock into my hungry pussy. "I will fuck you all better –" We both groaned loudly when he was buried deep inside me. "And I will lick your cuts and bruises." With his hands clamped around my thighs, he rocked into me. "That will be my vow to you, *mi mujer*."

Gasping for air, I hooked an arm around his neck and clung to him, reveling in the delicious rippling sensations he was invoking inside of my body.

"Aplastaré tu coño, corderito..."

"You are worthless to me..."

"Putra traidora..."

"Good girl panties on a whore."

My hand was reaching for the knife on the rack before my brain could make sense of what I was doing.

"God doesn't answer the prayers of whores..."

"I can make it good for you..."

"Or painful..."

Moving on instinct, I drove the blade deep into his shoulder.

A loud, feral snarl tore from his chest and he froze inside me, gaze flicking from my eyes to the knife sticking out of his shoulder.

Breathing hard, I never took my eyes off his as I slowly pulled it out of him and tossed it on the floor.

Grunting out a pained breath, he glanced down at the blood oozing down his chest and then back to me. I held my breath, waiting for death to come, because he would surely kill me now.

He didn't kill me.

He didn't hit me, either.

Releasing another pained growl, he tightened his hold on my thighs and thrust inside me. Withdrawing slowly almost to the tip, he pushed inside me once more. Eyelids fluttering, I rocked into his thrusts as he slowly built up a sensual rhythm. He grunted out a pained breath with every thrust of his

hips, but he didn't stop fucking me. Burying his face in the crook of my neck, he nuzzled my flesh with his lips.

Exhaling a ragged breath, I gave myself up to the madness and wrapped both arms around his neck, welcoming the feel of his chest against mine as his blood rained down on both of us. "I think you might be dying," I cried out, pulse quickening to the rhythm of his relentless fucking as he moved harder, faster, *hungrier*.

"I already told you that you cannot kill me, *Corderito*," Trig growled, resting his brow against mine. "I'm already dead."

With that, he pressed a kiss to my lips and then slammed into me so hard that I exploded around him, screaming the words, "I hate you," at the top of my lungs, as he joined me in ecstasy and emptied his seed into my body.

When I woke the next day, after a night-long marathon of furious fucking, I was naked and alone. Pulling myself up on my elbows, I glanced out the huge window to see the sun setting in the sky. I'd slept the day away.

Bone weary, I flopped back down on his luxurious mattress and winced when my womb contracted tightly. Every part of my body ached and *not* in a bad way. I felt sated. I felt stretched. I felt *hungry*.

The smell of sex was all around me, my thighs were sticky and damp, and the blood smeared across his sheets assured me that the events of last night were not a figment of my imagination.

Disgusted with my thoughts, I glared at the empty patch of mattress where he'd laid beside me and bit back a sob. Drowning in a world of corruption and gangsters, I buried my face in my pillow and allowed myself to freak out.

"*El jefe dijo que necesitas tomar eso*," a deep male voice announced in Spanish, disrupting my personal meltdown.

Panicked, I scrambled to drape the blood-stained sheets over my body and locked eyes on the huge, suit-clad man sitting in the armchair next to the door. The black Glock resting on his thigh had my heart accelerating in my chest and my survival instincts on high alert.

Breathing labored, I let my gaze trail over his slicked back hair, his deeply tanned face and the jagged scar running down his left cheek, feeling a wave of recognition trickle through my mind.

"Patrice?" I frowned at Trig's righthand man. A man I hadn't seen in two years. *Since that night*. Loyal to his brother-in-arms, he and several of the younger members of Crellid's mob had left with Trig, willing to face the wrath of their king of the underworld in order to bleed with their prince. I hadn't realized he was back in the area until now.

If he had followed Trig back into hell, then the rest of them had, too.

What was left of them, at least.

"What are you doing in here?" Panicked as I was, I still spoke slowly, knowing that this man had a far weaker grasp on the English language than Trigger. "Why are you *here*?" I gestured around us. "In this room with me?"

"I guard," he said in a heavily accented tone of voice.

"Guard me?" I felt faint. "From what?"

"Men no good at rules," he confirmed grimly. "So, I guard."

My brows shot up. "Trig sent you to guard me?"

"*Sí*." He nodded stiffly. "I guard. You take."

"Take?" I frowned.

"*Jefe* say you take." He pointed to the Trigger's nightstand. "Take now."

"*Jefe*?" I arched a brow. *Boss man*. "You mean Trig?"

He nodded stiffly before quickly averting his gaze. "*Sí*."

"Where is he?" I forced myself to ask, urging my pulse to steady and my heart to stop thrashing around in my chest. "Is he here?" *I didn't care. I wouldn't. Don't feel it.* "Did he l-leave?"

"Not business of woman where man go," Patrice replied, tone clipped. "No ask."

Fuck you, Patrice.

"What is it?" I asked then, feeling weak at the sight of the pill sitting on the nightstand alongside a glass of water. "Why do I need pills?"

"You take," he repeated, moving to the window. "*Jefe* no want *bebé*."

"Excuse me?"

"*Jefe* no want *bebé bastardo*." He inclined his head to the nightstand. "Take now, *Señora*."

"Shouldn't that be *Señorita*, not *Señora*?" I muttered, reaching for the pill. "I'm not married."

"*Porque traicionaste a tu rey,*" he replied, stretching his legs out in front of him, as he polished his gun. "*Se habría casado contigo. Delante de dios. Un verdadero matrimonio. Una buena vida para una mujer en tu posición. Pero no pudiste mantener las piernas cerradas.*" Flicking his dark eyes up to meet mine, he sneered, "*O tu boca.*"

Furious to be once again insulted and blamed for something I *didn't* do, I grabbed the glass off the nightstand and flung it at him, enjoying the way he had to duck his head to avoid the glass flying past his face.

It shattered against the wall behind his head, water spraying everywhere.

"I don't take orders from you or your precious *jefe*," I hissed, throwing the pill across the floor to join the shards of broken glass. "And your *jefe* knows that I didn't do what you were all convinced I did." Tears filled my eyes and I quickly batted them away. "So, you can take your insults and your pills and leave me alone."

"*He oído.*"

"*You heard,*" I mimicked his words, broken. "Oh, so he *did* tell you? At least he's finally setting the record straight."

"*Sí. Eras puro y él áspero.*" Rising to his feet like an aggravated lion, Patrice, tucked his gun into the waistband of his tailored suit pants before stooping down and snatching up the pill. "You take," he added, stalking towards me. "Or I make."

"No," I argued, refusing to take another order. "I won't –" My words broke off when he grabbed my hair and dragged me towards him. "You must take," he repeated, fingers digging into my jaw, while he clutched my throat with his free hand. "Or I make."

"Isn't this against your precious code?" I choked out, forcing myself to not to flinch and cower away from him. "Preventing a claimed woman of conceiving? That's a big no-no, Patrice. You could be shanked for suggesting such treason."

Patrice shrugged, unfazed, and forced my mouth open. "I not make rules," he said before ramming the pill down my throat. "I not follow Crellid code." He clamped a hand over my mouth. "I follow *jefe*." With his free hand, he pegged my nose, cutting off my air supply. "Now, take."

Deviant, I scratched and tore at his huge arms, resisting his overpowering until my vision blurred and I grew lightheaded. It was no use. I was no match for these men.

Feeling weak, demoralized, and desperate for air, I relented and swallowed, eyes watering from both my pain and temper.

Teary-eyed, I felt my shoulders sag in defeat as I nodded my submission.

"*Buena niña*," he said approvingly, releasing his hold on my face and stepping away from the bed. "*Lo creas o no, esto es más para ti que para él. Es la forma del jefe de protegerte.*"

"His way of *protecting* me?" Gasping for air, I rubbed my tender throat as my brain hurried to translate his words. "His way of protecting me from what – him? Being raped?" I laughed humorlessly and wiped my cheeks. "How generous of him. What's he going to do next? Send for the doctor and have me shot up like the whores?"

"He no rape you, *señora*," Patrice snapped back at me. "No rape."

"You weren't *there*." I glared at him. "You didn't *see*."

"I no need see," he shot back, tone hard. "*Jefe* no rape his *reina*." He tapped his head. "I no need see to know truth." He placed his hand to his chest and stared hard at me. "*Reina* is heart of *Jefe*." His brows furrowed. "You –" he paused to point at me and then touch his own shoulder, "Wound your king."

"He deserved it," I strangled out guiltily.

"You no see *Jefe* before," he urged, shaking his head. "*Hombre loco* for two years." He held up two fingers for emphasis. "No *corderito* make *Jefe hombre loco*."

"No, he's always been crazy." Scrambling off the bed, I kept the sheet wrapped tightly around my naked body as I side-stepped the huge gangster and hurried into the ensuite bathroom. "And I'm even crazier for not sticking that knife where I should have; in his cold, dead heart!" I slammed the door in his face and turned the lock, unwilling to listen to another word.

Throwing off the bed sheet, I yanked the shower door open and climbed inside, blasting the water to full heat. Shivering, I stepped under the jets and leaned against the blood-stained tiles.

Wrapping my arms around myself protectively, I desperately tried to get a handle on my emotions. It was impossible with his smell all around me. With *him* still leaking from me.

Try as I did, I couldn't force Trigger from my thoughts, and, like a cruel twist of the knife, my heart decided to jump aboard the torment-Ashton train by forcing bittersweet memories to the surface...

"Come on, Vasily, just leave her alone," the youngest Crellid brother, Jethro, mumbled as he hovered restlessly in my bedroom doorway, watching his teenage brother stalk towards me with purposeful, menacing strides.

I had been at the Crellid estate less than a month and this was Vasily's fifth visit to my room. Infuriated with the small boy for just standing in the doorway and not helping me, I glared at him and felt a small smidgen of satisfaction when his pale cheeks reddened.

"Come here," Vasily coaxed, drawing my attention back to the immediate threat, blue eyes shining with malice. "I only want to talk to you."

A wave of panic swept through my body and I found myself scrambling off my bed, backing away from the big, blond, seventeen-year-old boy. I knew what he wanted to do with me and it wasn't talk.

Trick me once.

"Stay back," I warned, glaring daggers at the huge boy. I knew all about the workings of a boy's mind. I might have only turned ten last week, but I was no child. I'd grown up quickly in my father's world and I was all too aware of the twisted minds of men. Had been for years. And this one was dangerous. I could sense it. I could see it. I knew what he would try to do me if I let him. I also knew that I would rather throw myself out of my window before I let it happen.

Holding the book I had been reading in front of my body, I tried to sidestep him, but he blocked my path, leaving me cornered and trapped. Again. "Touch me again and I'll kill you," I warned. "I know how to shoot." I didn't, but he didn't know it. "My father showed me all the tricks." Another lie. "I'm dangerous."

A cruel laugh tore from his throat and he shook his head. "Did you hear that, Jethro? Northwood's baby-spawn whore is going to try to kill me." Snickering, he added, "She's 'dangerous'."

"Leave her alone, Vas," Jethro mumbled. "Father won't like this."

"Father said she was ours to do what we wanted with," Vasily shot back. "Just because you're all too pussy of Northwood's ghost doesn't mean I am." He smirked at me. "My brothers agreed to wait until you're thirteen before they unwrap you, but I intend to cash in on my gift now."

"I said that I will kill you, not try," I corrected, jutting my chin up in defiance. "Don't mistake my promises for threats."

"And how do you propose to kill me, baby whore?" he taunted, caging me into the corner. "With these scrawny arms?" Reaching down, he placed the palm of his hand against my flat chest and roughly slammed me against the wall at my back. "With this skinny body?"

The air escaped my lungs with an audible ooof and my book slipped from my fingers, clattering to the floor. "I'll find a way," I strangled out, panting now. "I promise you that."

"You'll do absolutely nothing because you have no power in this world," he challenged, stepping closer. "You are a girl. You are beneath me. You are only good for one thing –" he paused to cup my private area. "I'll break this."

"You'll die if you try!" Snarling, I shoved at his chest and he backhanded me, knocking me against the wall again. "Fuck you," I sobbed, lip wobbling, as I cradled my stinging cheek. "You'll pay for this."

"Oh, I will fuck you, baby whore," he promised darkly. "And then I'll share you with my brothers."

Shuddering, my lip curled up in disgust and I shoved at his chest again. "You are Crellid scum!"

"And you are Northwood pussy."

My stomach heaved. "I'm ten."

"I don't care."

"I don't want to."

"I don't care," he repeated, smiling down at me.

"Please," I begged now. "Don't."

"Don't you see yet?" He laughed cruelly when my attempt to push him away failed miserably. "You have no control here. You do what you're told, when you're told, like the good little whore you're being trained to be."

I whimpered, feeling my bravery slip. "I'm not a whore."

"You are a whore, and I am a prince," he correctly. "Living in my castle."

"You're all criminals," I spat, shaking. "And the only thing that you and your brothers are princes of is wickedness."

"You say that like it's a bad thing," he chuckled. "Like you're not cut from the same cloth of corruption." Narrowing his eyes, he hissed, "Your father was as bad as mine, if not worse."

I didn't deny it – couldn't if I wanted.

"I'm royalty around here, baby whore," he continued. "I'm the apex predator and you are whatever the fuck I say you are. If you were born a boy, your father's name would make you my equal, but you're completely worthless. An heiress whore. All of your father's inheritance; the property, the land, the business, it will go to whichever one of my brothers that claim you, and you can't do shit to stop –" His words twisted into a snarl when I ducked under his arm and bolted for the door. *"You can't run from us," he snarled, fisting my hair and dragging me back to him. "And there's nowhere to hide." Wrapping an unyielding arm around my small body, he carted me back to the bed. "We own you, Ashton Northwood. Your father gave you to us," he sneered, tossing me down on my bed and reaching for my jeans. "One of us. All of us." He grinned darkly. "At the same time."*

"Don't touch me," I cried out, scratching and pushing on his chest as he roughly dragged my jeans down my legs. "Please!"

"I love it when the whores beg," he growled hungrily. "Beg, baby whore." He hooked his long fingers into the waistband of my cotton panties and dragged them down, too. "Cry for me –" Choking and spluttering, Vasily's words faded on his tongue, his hungered expression morphed into one of panic, the whites of his eyes turning bloodshot, as he released his hold on my panties and frantically clawed at his neck.

Trembling from head to toe, I watched as his big body started to slump. Only when Vasily was on his knees on my bedroom floor did I notice the huge, dark-haired, foreign boy looming behind him, holding a piece of chord to his throat.

My breath escaped me in a sudden rush as I watched Fabio's bastard son strangle his half-brother into a state of semi-conscious submission.

"Te gusta follar bebés?" he asked in a deathly cold tone of voice, not relenting his tightly fisted grip on the chord wrapped around his brother's neck. "Eres un bastardo enfermo!"

"Trigger," Jethro began to say in a nervous tone, taking a step into the room. "I – uh... maybe you shouldn't –" He swallowed deeply, hands fluttering at his sides. "I think you're killing him..."

"Silencio, bebé príncipe," Trigger commanded, and even though I didn't know what he was saying, I could hear the warning in his voice.

Jethro did, too, because he swiftly snapped his mouth shut.

"Voy a enseñarle una lección a tu hermano," the black-haired boy growled, releasing his grip on the chord before reaching a hand behind his

back. *"Corre a lo largo si tienes miedo."*

Withdrawing a jagged edged dagger, the bastard prince tilted his head to one side and stared down at his brother gasping for air on his hands and knees.

At fourteen, the bastard was younger than his pure-blood brother but no one would have guessed it from the way he physically overpowered Vasily with ease.

"Si no te gusta la vista de la sangre, debes irte ahora," he said with a glint of madness shining in his dark eyes and my heart roared to life at the sight, heat flushing to my cheeks.

Ripping at his jeans, he managed to strip his older brother down to his boxer shorts.

"Don't, don't, don't," Vasily cried out, curling up on the floor when Trigger fisted his penis and lowered the blade. "Please...God...Jesus, don't do this to me!"

"Orar a Dios no te salvará," Trigger replied, voice deathly calm. "Mi madre también oró a Dios." Taking a knee, he pulled on Vasily's private parts so hard that he screamed out loudly. "Qué le dijiste a ella?" He tightened his grip. "Qué le dijiste a mi madre cuando pedía misericordia?"

"I don't understand what you're saying...Oh god, I can't...Jethro, get help!" Crying out, Vasily pressed his palms together and started to cry. "Don't hurt me, brother."

"Father!" Jethro screamed, running from the room. "Father, help!"

"Le dijiste a mi madre que gritara. Le dijiste a mi madre que disfrutaste sus gritos," the bastard continued, unfazed. "Esa fue tu misericordia." He released a pained snarl. "Y esto es mio."

His eyes, dark as night, flicked to mine, and I felt something shoot straight through me. Tilting his head to one-side, he watched carefully, waiting for something.

Fear?

Resistance?

Permission?

Heart racing hard in my chest, I blew out a shaky breath, eyes still locked on his, and nodded my head.

His eyes blazed with heat, nostrils flaring, and with one swift flick of his wrist, the bastard prince brought the knife down on his brother.

Vasily's screams were drowned out by the thunderous noise of my heart as it pounded violently against my chest bone. Blood was pouring from the older boy as he screamed and writhed on the floor, but I couldn't take my eyes off his.

His dark eyes searched mine for something once again.

I nodded; offering him my approval.

Silent as a ghost, he climbed to his feet, kicked his brother out his way, and came to stand in front of me. "Para ti," he said, speaking to me for the first time since arriving at the estate, as he held the dagger out for me like it was some sort of offering.

Trembling, I leaned forward and took the dagger from his blood-soaked hands. "Th-thank you."

Nodding stiffly, he held a hand out for me to take.

Without a second thought, I placed the dagger on my bed and placed my hand in his.

Setting me on my feet, he said, "No me temas," before reaching for my panties around my ankles and pulling them back up into place, covering me. "No te violaré, corderito."

A whole load of commotion occurred right after that, with dozens of men charging into my room, shouting and roaring. Two men hurried from the room with a ravaged Vasily limp in their arms, and then many more surrounded the bastard prince. He didn't cower or flinch. He didn't even fight when they grabbed him. Instead, he kept his dark eyes on locked on mine as they manhandled him from my room.

Shaking my head, I dragged my thoughts back to the present and switched off the water.

Numb, I stepped out of the shower and wrapped a towel around my body, unable to stop my limbs from shaking. I couldn't seem to shake the cold off. It was in my heart and tainting the rest of me.

"Aplastaré tu coño, corderito."

"Putra traidora."

"Putra reina."

Heaving, I lunged for the toilet bowl, barely making it in time as my body rejected both my thoughts and the contents of my stomach.

His words.

How he made me feel.

His hatred.

How he took me in front of those men.

I couldn't get it out of my head.

Gasping for air, I wiped the back of my mouth and climbed unsteadily to my feet. Breathing hard, I leaned against the sink and forced myself to look in the mirror, hardly recognizing myself when I plucked up the courage.

My greenish/gray eyes were bloodshot, the skin around them puffy and red. My full lips were cracked and also swollen.

Purple bite marks littered my neck, chest, and arms, and I knew if I removed the towel, I would find plenty more. Arousal smacked me straight in the face and my pussy clenched. "Stop it," I hissed, furious with myself for pulsing. "This is not good." Clit throbbing, I clenched my thighs together and forced my mind to block out the feel of *him* as I reached for his toothbrush and cleaned my teeth.

Finishing washing up, I made my way back to the bedroom, ready to tell Patrice and any of his cronies lurking nearby to fuck off, only to find Trig sitting on the edge of the bed. The bed had been stripped, replaced with fresh sheets, while the old ones lay in a pile at his feet.

Stunned at the sight of him, I felt my feet falter in the doorway of the bathroom. He was shirtless, with a white bandaged strapped to his shoulder and his head bent as he concentrated on rolling a joint. My heart raced violently in my chest as I reluctantly soaked him in.

"*Corderito*," he acknowledged gruffly, not looking up from his task in hand.

"Where were you?" I asked, voice breathy and weak, forcing my legs to move me forward.

"Working," Trig replied, setting the weed tin on his nightstand and reaching for an ashtray and matches. Sparking up, he shook out the match, tossed it into the ashtray, took a deep hit, holding his breath for several beats before finally exhaling a cloud of smoke.

Stepping around him, I moved for my side of the bed and then mentally checked myself for referring to it as *my side*. "Where's Patrice?"

"Around," he replied, rolling the joint between his fingers absentmindedly.

"I don't have any clothes here," I told him, watching him warily. "Everything I own is back in my room." Shrugging, I added, "I don't have

anything to change into."

"I will have your stuff brought here," he replied flatly before taking another deep drag, keeping his back to me. "Until then, you can –" Exhaling slowly, he rasped, "Have whatever you want of mine."

"Okay." I swallowed deeply, pulse fluttering. "Thank you."

He nodded once in response.

"So..." I shifted in discomfort, unsure of what to do or say. "How is your shoulder?"

"How is your pussy?" was his immediate response.

"Tender," I whispered, cheeks flaming in heat.

"Sí," he agreed with a sigh. "It is the same for me."

"Are you mad at me?" I asked then, unsure of what to make of his calmness when he was anything but calm with my body last night.

"Are *you* mad at me?" he threw my question back at me.

"Yes." I narrowed my eyes, irritated by his avoidance of answering a damn question. "I'm furious."

"Sí," he repeated his earlier words. "Then it is the same for me."

"Are you going to say anything?" I demanded then, huffing out a frustrated breath from his lack of...well, emotion.

"What would you like me to say, *Corderito*?" he replied in a flat, void tone.

"Something," I hissed, overwhelmed with emotion. "Anything." Swallowing a pained groan, I squeezed out, "Just talk... about us? What happened? Your day? I don't know?" Tucking my damp hair behind my ear, I stared at the visible burn marks on his back – the ones the tattoos couldn't cover. "Just say *something*, Trig."

"I had a very productive day at work, darling," he reeled off dryly. "I took the lives of no less than four men and delivered a substantial shipment of chiva – Alemanni cartel. No doubt, it will be reaching the streets any day now. More lives to ruin. More whores on the corners to work. More mother's sons to put in the ground. Just another day in the office." Shaking his head, he exhaled a weary sigh. "Does that suffice as enough *talking*?" Taking another hit, he let his shoulders sag, elbows resting on his thighs. "Or should I continue?"

"That's not funny, Trig," I whispered, unable to suppress the shiver that rolled through me.

"I am not laughing, *Corderito*," he replied, exhaling slowly.

Feeling at a complete loss, I glanced around the room and said, "It wasn't supposed to be like this." Wrapping my arms around my knees, I dropped my head and whispered, "We weren't supposed to end up like this."

"No," he agreed quietly. "It wasn't."

"Are you always going to stay with him?" I forced myself to ask, risking a peek. "Your father." I swallowed deeply. "Do you still plan –"

"You do not get to ask me questions," he quickly cut me off. "I do not trust you." His shoulders slumped. "I won't make the same mistake twice."

I withered inside. "Trig –"

"Did you know that I can still smell it?" he continued, ignoring me. "In my nose. Every night. That fucking horrific smell is what I wake up to – if I am lucky enough to fall asleep in the first place. And the sounds? I can still hear the screams –"

"Please don't," I begged, forcing the memory from my mind.

"I close my eyes and I see it, Ashton," he hissed, forcing me to hear his truth. "As if it was happening all over again." He shook his head. "Because of *you*." He tipped his head up to the ceiling and released a pained growl. "Because I *trusted* you."

"I'm so sorry, Trig," I choked out.

"I know," he confirmed gruffly. "I believe you."

"I wish I could take it back," I wheezed out, feeling faint.

"We cannot change what has come to pass," he replied. "But you do not ask me about my business again," he added. "I do not wish to treat you cruelly, *Corderito*, it gives me no pleasure to see you in pain, but you are not my equal anymore. You are no longer my comrade."

"Then what am I?" I strangled out, barely breathing from the agonizing pressure in my chest.

"You know," he replied gruffly. "Do not make me say it."

His whore.

"Am I the only one?" I asked then, body trembling.

Silence.

"Trigger!"

"What do you want me to say to you?"

"I want you to tell me that I'm the only one," I hissed, mind on emotional overdrive. "Tell me that, Trig. Fucking tell me!"

He didn't respond.

"If you touch another girl, I will cut your cock off while you sleep," I warned him, enraged at the thought of him fucking other women. "I mean it," I added, consumed in a white-hot flood of jealousy. "You don't fuck other whores."

Trig glanced over his shoulder, dark eyes finding mine. "Come here."

Shifting onto my knees, I crawled over to where he was sitting and settled down facing him. "Promise me," I said, breathing hard and fast. "Say you won't touch other whores."

"Hmm." His eyes took a long, drugging appraisal of my body and I grabbed his face, forcing him to look at me.

"Say it," I hissed through clenched teeth. "Tell me you won't touch another woman."

His dark eyes speared holes through me as he watched me watch him. "Are you my wife, *Corderito*?" he finally asked, tone soft. "Do you love me?"

"Absolutely not," I spat, furious with him for toying with my frazzled emotions. "No way."

"I see." Nodding slowly, Trig pulled his face from my grasp and took another drag. "Are you my whore?" he asked on a heavy exhale.

"Never," I snarled, reaching up to snatch the smoke from his fingers.

"Then what are you to me?" he asked, too quick for me. Holding the joint in front of my face, he snagged my chin between his fingers and guided my lips closer. "Hmm?" he coaxed, smoothing my hair behind my ear when I placed my lips around the joint and took a hit. "Bad little lamb."

Closing my eyes, I held my breath, reveling in the burn in my lungs as a tingling, dizzy feeling slowly crept through me.

"Well, *Corderito*?" Trailing his cracked knuckles over my cheek, Trig leaned close to my ear and whispered, "Why would I make such a promise to you?"

Flicking my eyes open, I cupped the back of his neck and dragged his face to mine, lips parted and touching. Looking deep into his dangerous eyes, I slowly exhaled a cloud of smoke from my lungs into his and whispered, "I'm your queen."

"Sí." His eyes blazed with heat and his arms came around me, pulling me onto his lap "*Mi reina*."

*For more information on Ashton and Trig from **The Bastard Prince**, check out chloewalshauthor.com*

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Love you all so much,

Chlo xx

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

International bestselling author Chloe Walsh writes heart wrenching, emotionally gripping, young and new adult fiction. Her books will suck you into deeply emotive storylines, where you'll fall in love with the complex, sexy heroes, hilarious sidekicks, and lovable female leads. Every adventure with Chloe is an angsty plot designed to give you the ultimate book hangover.

Chloe hails from a small town in the beautiful West Cork on the south coast of Ireland, where she resides with her two children and the tall, dark, and handsome man in her life – Garry, her overgrown Newfoundland pup. When Garry isn't dragging her around the farmer's fields and countryside lanes, she can be found glued to her kindle or binging on Netflix, inhaling GOT, devouring all things rugby, drowning in her Spotify playlists, and being a kick-ass autism mommy.

Animal lover, music addict, TV junkie, Chloe is your typical twenty-nine-year-old, with a passion for reading and an even bigger passion for putting pen to paper. A fiercely proud champion of mental health awareness, Chloe makes no secret of her own personal battles and construes this in her writing.

At present, she has more than twenty novels under her belt, many of which are bestsellers in multiple countries around the world. Several of her titles have been turned into audiobooks.

The best way to get in touch with Chloe is in her reader group on Facebook [Chloe's Clovers](#).

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