

A man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a black leather jacket, is driving a car at night. The background is dark with some light streaks, suggesting motion. The text is overlaid on the image.

A DARK
HITCHHIKER
ROMANCE

ALONG FOR THE RIDE

LAUREN BIEL

Along for the Ride

OceanofPDF.com

Lauren Biel

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*This book is for my readers who didn't learn the first time that it's
dangerous to pick up a sexy, tatted convict off the side of the road.
Ride or Die!*

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Prologue

Gentry

I trudge toward my front door with blood-covered hands and the whisper of a headache behind my bloodshot eyes. I'm exhausted after this hit, and all I want to do is crawl into bed and sleep for a week. This one was a real fighter.

When I get to the door, I stop at the unlocked knob and my breath catches. In my field of employment, you can't help but worry about bringing your work home. Not figuratively, but literally. Eye for an eye. Life for a life.

I don't have kids to worry about, but I have a wife that I care for at least a little. If she died in a car accident, I'd be a bit sad—I like her enough to possibly even miss her—but if she dies because of a revenge hit, I'd feel fucking guilty.

I draw my gun, wrapping my fingers around the grip as I push open the door. Muffled sounds penetrate the silence, and my mind shifts from murder to torture. If someone is in there torturing what belongs to me, they'll get the same in return. I raise the gun and step from the dark living room. The bright fluorescent lights above the kitchen reveal something far worse than someone torturing my wife.

She's bent over the kitchen table, a man standing behind her and thrusting into her.

Worse?

The man thrusting behind her is my fucking brother.

It's almost like watching myself fucking my wife. If I was a few inches shorter with a lot less muscle, that is. We share the same dark hair, dark eyes, and thirst for blood. We've been partners in the business for years, and while he's always had a screw loose, he's been the only person I could trust with my life.

Until now.

A blaze of red sweeps across my eyes. Never have I seen such a hue. It heats the blood in my veins until I feel like I'm burning. My focus is less on the hard, rhythmic thrusts of Karson's hips and more on the loose moan that leaves her lips. A sound I haven't heard in quite some time.

I holster my gun before I make a loud fucking mistake.

My shadow sweeps over them as I take a step forward, and Karson's eyes widen in surprise. He pulls out of my wife, forcing her forward when his hand leaves her chest.

"G!" he yells. "It's not what it looks like!" He looks down at his dick and zips up his pants. "Well, it is, but it's not what you think!" His tightening throat struggles to push the words through his quivering vocal cords because he knows I'm a fraction of a second away from blowing his head off.

"Honey," my wife says as she pulls her dress down and reaches out for me.

"Fucking don't," I snarl, pushing her to the ground. She hits the tile floor with a squeal and smacks against the cabinets. I throw Karson against the wall, the shelf of spices falling and crashing to my feet. "My wife, Karson? Really?" I lean my weight into him, cutting his oxygen off as my hands wrap around his neck. I envision killing him in twenty different ways, each one more painful than the last.

"Wait, let me explain!" he chokes out as his hand wraps around my wrist. He gasps in front of me. I consider letting him, but what could he possibly say? What could his fucking excuse possibly be? Something darkens his eyes, and I loosen my grip. "She's cheating on you!"

"Clearly," I snap. What a bright observation.

Karson coughs. "No! Well, yes. But I mean before me."

"Explain what the fuck you're talking about, and do it before I lose my fucking temper more than I already have."

"Don't listen to him!" my wife yells from the floor.

“Fuck you,” I say toward her. I turn my attention back to my brother. He better have a really good excuse or I’m burying them both in some shallow grave somewhere.

“Paulina has been fucking around on you for months. I was here for one thing.” He lifts his shirt to expose his favorite blade on his hip. “To kill her for you.”

“Did you trip and fall into her, dick first? What part of killing her involved doing this?” I motion between them with the gun. Paulina lets out a squeal and covers her cheating fucking face. “Do you even have proof that she was cheating, Karson? Do you?”

My eyes narrow on him. The one thing he came for didn’t involve bending my wife over my goddamn kitchen table. I don’t believe him anyway. Karson will say anything to save his own ass. I tighten my grip on his neck until his face reddens above my grasp. He reaches for his knife, and I let him go long enough to rip it away and shove it down the back of my pants.

“I thought it would be fun to slit her throat while I was fucking her. I swear it was just meant to be payback, Gentry! If you don’t believe me, look at her phone!” he pants.

I release him and turn toward the counter. My wife crawls to her knees and leaps for the device, but my arm swings back and rockets toward her face before she can reach it. Maybe she has something to hide after all.

I scroll through her phone, looking through her text messages first. My jaw muscles tighten into writhing knots with each lewd message I read. With each picture exchanged. Nights memorialized in graphic detail. There are even exchanges between her and Karson. In his last message, he tells her he’s going to come by and “take care” of her. Maybe he meant to kill her, but he didn’t have to fuck her first.

White-hot rage fills me, and I draw his knife from behind me and lift Paulina by her hair.

“Please don’t,” she begs. “I got lonely, Gentry. Sometimes you’re gone for weeks at a time, and I don’t hear from you for days.”

She doesn’t know much about what I do for work, but she knows enough to understand why I can’t chat on the goddamn phone when I’m preparing for what I need to do. I’ve never been the type for goodnight texts or daily check-ins. I’m not a fucking lover boy. I’m a hard ass, and I’ve been a hard ass since the day she met me. She’s the one who said she loved

me, regardless of my tough exterior, and I'm not the one who changed. I'm not the one who stepped out of our marriage.

"Fucking whore!" I scream before burying the blade in her chest and twisting.

A look of shocked betrayal crosses her expression, which is ironic since she's the Judas. Right alongside my brother. Her eyes focus ahead of her, somewhere beyond me, and I drop her lifeless body to the floor. I rip the blade from her chest and turn its crimson tip toward my brother. Anger boils over and spills from me in waves.

"Did you have to fuck her first, Karson?"

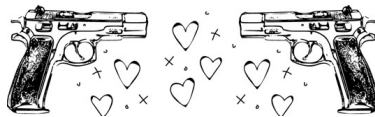
He shrugs. Just fucking shrugs in the most Karson-esque way.

Deep down in his fucked-up heart, he thought he was helping me. But he's a selfish fucking man. Karson does absolutely nothing unless he gets something out of it.

I step closer and throw my weight into him again. "Fuck you too," I growl. "Fuck both of you."

As much as I want to drive the knife into his chest, I can't do it. We didn't end up as murder-obsessed contract killers because we had happy childhoods filled with family dinners and trauma-free game nights. We've been through hell together, and Karson came out worse than I did. In his fucked-up way, I believe he was trying to do something for his older brother, and that's why I let him live. That's why I push the blade's handle against his chest until he takes it.

Because we're all we have at the end of the day, and nothing will come between us.



Leana

DIESEL EXHAUST FILLS MY LUNGS. If I cough too hard near an open flame, I'll probably start a wildfire. Bus stops aren't clean places, but they're where girls like me end up.

Girls who flee from broken homes.

Girls whose mothers don't believe them when they say their stepfather does unspeakable things to them.

I couldn't stay in that house. My eighteenth birthday was fast approaching, so they also couldn't make me stay. When I packed a bag and slammed the front door behind me, no one followed. No missing person reports were filed, either. I wasn't missing. I was forgotten. I took one bus after another until I ran out of money and found myself on the other end of the country.

New York. The land of opportunity.

I've been here a week, and so far it's more like the land where dreams go to die. I'm part of a homeless community that sticks near this bus station. Sometimes a few of the workers take pity on us and allow us to clean up in the bathroom, but only if we aren't stumbling drunk or strung out on drugs. I don't touch either.

I won't lie and say I'm not tempted. When I see that faraway look in Greasy Tom's eyes after he snorts a line or the deep sleep Chicken Wing slips into after shooting up, I crave that same escape. For a few hours, they aren't homeless and hungry and dirty and lost. They're gone, exploring some place in their mind that doesn't involve whatever hell brought them here.

Yeah, I'd probably try it if any of them offered.

But they don't. I've stayed clean and enjoyed the bathroom privileges a few times this week. It's a fair exchange, I guess, but it's still not enough. Something has to change.

I've thought about becoming a sex worker, but I haven't even been propositioned since arriving. I'm no blonde goddess, but I'm somewhat offended that no one has asked how much for a handy or a quick trip to the Red Room Inn down the street. I'd probably blow the first guy who asked if it meant spending an entire night in a bed. I wouldn't even mind getting roughed up a bit. It would beat the fuck out of the sweet love making all the high school boys wanted to do. Bonus points if it's consensual.

"You need help, miss?" says a dark, smooth voice beside me. I turn my head and lock eyes with a handsome man. He's tall, broad, and his tousled brown hair gives him a messy no-fucks-given look. He sits beside me, reaches toward my face, and tucks a strand of my blonde hair behind my ear, licking his lips as he meets my blue eyes again. "Too pretty of a girl to be out here on the streets," he whispers.

What does a pretty boy like him know about life out here?

He unzips his jacket, and his hand disappears into an interior pocket. When he pulls out a little baggie with a round pill, I can look at nothing else. It's as if he read my inner thoughts, as if he knows how much I'm craving an escape. My fingers move toward the bag, but he pulls it just out of reach.

"Ah, ah," he scolds. "What would you do for something to take the edge off?"

Anything. I'd do fucking anything.

"What do you want?" I ask, but I find the answer by looking down at the mass straining against his zipper.

"Come to my car and show me what you're willing to trade for a fix." He leans into me and runs his thumb along my jaw. "Show me how little you respect yourself."

I've spent my whole life respecting myself. Hell, my self-respect is what caused such a rift between me and my mother. But I can let that go. It hasn't gotten me anywhere good so far.

I lean on him as we walk toward the parking lot. He pulls his keys from his pocket when we reach a black Mercedes, and my eyes go wide. This car, with its black leather interior and the perfume of opulence, is the most expensive thing I've ever touched. It's about to be the most expensive place I've ever fucked, because he opens the back door and lets me get inside. When he follows me, I abandon what little dignity I have left as he takes the pill out and puts it into his mouth. He leans in and kisses me, slipping it onto my tongue. The moment I swallow, his hand loops behind my head, fists my hair, and pulls me down to his lap.

"Maybe I'll take you off these streets, baby," he says through a frustrated groan. "Make you my pretty little project. But first, show me what you can do with your mouth."

Maybe New York won't be so bad after all.

Chapter One

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Six Years Later

Gentry

I've been a free man for one week, but I thought about my brother every day during my prison stay. It wasn't my wife's murder that put me away. We called in a favor from George, our handler, and he had his clean-up crew take care of the mess. With no one to miss her—aside from the men who'd been fucking her down—we got away clean. What landed me in prison was a case of bad timing and empty pockets.

Hitmen are usually paid well for their services, but my brother and I weren't typical hitmen. Instead of working for a large payout, we worked for a gamble. The buyer paid George, George gave us the details, and we got to take whatever we wanted from the scene. Leaving out the bank transfers meant no paper trail, and George had a team that scrubbed scenes for us, so it usually felt like a fair trade. We got to kill—which we thoroughly enjoyed—and didn't have to worry about what happened later. This arrangement didn't always work in our favor, though. Our last two hits had been cash poor, which meant we were cash poor as well. We needed money, so Karson and I thought we'd harken back to our teenage years and do a quick robbery.

That quick robbery turned into six long years in a cell for me.

I can still hear the sound of Karson's voice as he sat in a wooden box and sang like a canary to cover his own ass. I encouraged him to do it, but it still fucking sucked. He's never been right in the head, and serving time in a cage would have resulted in an implosion of his mind. I still hadn't forgiven him for fucking my wife, but I had to protect him.

We'd been killing together long before it became a job, when it was just for sport and didn't matter who got caught in the crossfire. We were called the "Kursed" brothers. It was a play on our last name—Kursicki—coupled with the fact that the people around us always seemed to disappear.

We used to actually enjoy each other's company.

Before.

Before I walked in on him fucking my wife and we split our business. I didn't trust him, and trust was imperative in a business such as ours. I never thought there'd be a day when we had to go on separate paths. Or a day when I began to hate the work I was born to do. *Everything* began to piss me off, and it all centered on Karson and his shit behavior. He'd drag anyone to hell with him as long as he had someone to keep him company. That's why we no longer spoke, and I planned to keep it that way.

Most men in our business lived lonely lives, anyway. A duo was unheard of. Like grizzlies in the forest, we make contact to get laid or make a kill. You don't see us until it's too late.

Our way of thinking is unique, and I've only met one man whose brain worked like mine and Karson's. He was my brief cellmate, Lexington Rowe. Big, but not quite as wide as me, with prison tattoos covering his body. Ten tally marks in his flesh counted every year he was inside, but he'd have a lot more by the time he was done serving his lifetimes in prison. The first night I bunked with him, he broke my hand for touching his bed, and I went out of my way to break his nose in retaliation. We were *almost* friends after that, or as close to friends as people with our mindset can get. I remember when he came back to the cell after he committed an inter-prison homicide.

"What'd you do, Lex?" I asked when he returned from solitary.

"Good old-fashioned payback," he said.

"Violence isn't the answer."

He dropped onto the mattress beneath my bunk and grunted. "Violence is always the answer."

I've never felt such a close understanding like that with anyone besides my brother. Someone who understood that murder is as mundane as brushing your teeth in the morning. It's just something you did.

Then he escaped, and I had to serve the rest of my time with people who had mild homicidal tendencies, not a constant propensity for it. That's why it hurts that Karson and I are so estranged. Because no one knows evil like

someone possessed by the same devil. But someone that close can hurt you more than anyone else, and I won't give him the opportunity to shit on me again.

My phone vibrates in my pocket. I pull it out and see a familiar name on the screen.

"Hello?"

"Gentry, you ready for a job, or are you still settling in?" George asks.

I've been living on stashed cash since I got out, and the small stack has dwindled to nearly nothing. Work sounds pretty good right about now. "I'm ready," I say, "but I need a guaranteed payout."

"How about several?"

I run my hand through my beard and consider this. Multiple close-to-home hits right after getting out of jail? Doesn't seem smart. "I can do one, but not several. I don't think it's a good idea to work too close to home right now."

"I don't pay you to think," George says with a dry laugh. He should lay off the cigarettes.

"You don't pay me at all," I say.

"Fair enough, but leave the thinking to me all the same. I've already got it planned out. You and your brother are gonna take a little road trip. You'll find a van and your gear at—"

"I don't work with Karson anymore."

George laughs, and the sound rakes across every raw nerve in my body. "You don't have a choice. He botched a hit, Gentry. It happened a few weeks before you got out, but it's not looking good for him."

"He got himself into this, and he'll have to get himself out of it." I won't go out of my way for a man who pushed me out of his.

"I don't think you understand. Either you take him with you and keep him on a short leash or we'll hang him from one."

George's tone has sobered, so he means business. Karson's in deep shit, and now I have to let him sink or wade through it and pull him out. Fuck.

"Fine, I'll take him with me." What could go fucking wrong?

We could end up on the wrong side of a hit list because of Karson, that's what. And I'll have no one to blame but myself for letting him worm back into my life. I don't have a choice, though. He's an asshole, a liability, a snake, and a major piece of shit.

But he's also my brother.

I get the details for the first hit and finish up the conversation. With a sigh and a death grip on my phone, I dial Karson's number. He answers on the first ring.

"Hey, G," he says. "Since we still aren't speaking, I can only assume you're calling about my impending demise." He follows his sentence with laughter, then crunching as he snacks on whatever the fuck he's eating.

"You heard?"

"Nah, but I know it's coming. It cost George a lot of money to fix that job. I shouldn't have played so much, but I just couldn't help myself." *Crunch*. The sound makes my eye twitch. How can he discuss his death so coolly while eating the loudest snack known to man? I don't think Karson will ever take anything seriously. Not my life and not his own. "What will you say at my funeral, G? You'll probably need a closed casket for what they plan to do to my face."

"For fuck's sake, Karson. I'm calling to offer you an out."

Aside from the non-stop chewing, he's silent.

"Come work with me, and they'll let you live . . . probably."

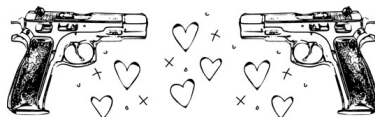
"Work for you? *Under* you? No thanks. I'll turn myself in to his firing squad before I work under you again. I've been doing fine on my own."

"Clearly. Have a good life, or what's left of it." I pull the phone away from my ear to hang up.

"Wait, *wait!*" he screams, loud enough for it to sound like he's on speakerphone. I put the phone to my ear. "Fine, I'll do it." Somehow he says it like he's agreeing to do *me* a favor. How he twists shit around in his mind is beyond me. Trust me, he is doing me no favors.

I give him the details and tell him to meet at my place in a few days.

The Kursed brothers are back in business.



Leana

I THROW CLOTHES INTO A BAG, but before I slide the strap over my shoulder, I freeze. Just like the time before this and the time before that, I can't complete the motions. I can't leave. My body rebels, begging for more

drugs before my most recent hit has even left my system. Mickey is a fucking asshole, but he deals narcotics like candy, and those are my friends.

I rub a hand down old track marks on my arm and think about when Mickey met me for the first time outside that bus station. He took me in. Fed me. Drugged me up and made me his. The chains on my wrists and ankles are invisible, but they still bind me in place.

My hand goes to other marks on my skin. Bruises that are still tender beneath my shaking fingertips. A scar near the base of my skull from the first time I told Mickey no. If I leave and the withdrawal doesn't kill me, he will.

I abandon the bag and kick it beneath the bed, going to the dresser instead. Tucked inside the top drawer is my meager stash of pills. I obsessively count them out. The dwindling number gives me anxiety, but asking for more will ensure another beating. The drugs are worth it, though. And besides, there's no pain they don't ease.

I dry swallow one of the pills and await the liftoff I crave. When it kicks in, each cell in my body will become weightless until I float above everything. I lie down, waiting for the release to set in. Just as I'm drifting toward peace, the bedroom door opens with a creak that tightens my stomach. I don't bother opening my eyes. I know who's stepping closer. I know who's standing over me, probably looking down at me like I'm an inconvenient shit stain on the sole of his shoe.

"You look like shit," he says as he rips off his grease-covered clothes.

I open my eyes as he tosses them at me, but I'm too far gone to catch them before they collide with my face. The powerful scent of sweat, gasoline, and oil suffocates me.

He scoffs and shakes his head. "High, too, I see."

His words mock me, but I'm the monster he created, chained to him by an addiction that freezes me in place at the thought of escape.

I've thought about contacting my mother and begging for help, but I'd rather remain in my current situation than apologize for telling the truth about what her pedo husband did to me. Though I've packed a bag and tried to gather the courage to brave the streets on my own, that isn't an option either. I don't have a car, and Mickey would find me if I'm on foot. He has connections all over this city, and the homeless are some of his best clients. Most of them would rat me out for a fix without thinking twice.

“Wash my fucking clothes,” Mickey says as he pulls a cigarette from his discarded jeans. He lights it and the smoke sends another craving crawling through my bones.

“Can I have one?” I ask.

His hand strikes out like a coiled snake and winds into my hair, pulling the roots until I whimper. He forces my face into the pile of dirty clothes, and I keep as still as I can. “You lay in the fucking house all day and get high, and you want a fucking smoke? You have to earn it. Wash my fucking clothes, cook my fucking dinner, suck my fucking dick, and don’t ask for a goddamn thing until it’s done.”

When he releases my hair, I gather his clothes from the bed and the bathroom and head for the laundry room downstairs. I know what sort of mood he’s in today, and I need to stay out of his way. Even if I do everything he’s commanded, there will be no cigarette. I’ll be grateful if he allows me to eat any of the dinner I’ll prepare.

On my way down the hall, one of his dealer buddies grips my arm and stops my one-track journey. “When you gonna come hang with us instead, Lee,” he says, his eyes darting from bruise to bruise like a silver ball in a pinball machine. This act is meant to show he’s sympathetic to my situation, but he’s no better than Mickey. In some ways, he’s worse. His girls don’t have bruises on their skin, but that’s only because he doesn’t want to damage the merchandise.

I pull my hand from his grasp. “No thank you,” I whisper.

Even if I somehow wanted to belong in some weird, doped-up harem, Mickey would find me and make sure the saying “if I can’t have you, no one can” rings true. Being the sole recipient of someone’s affection isn’t much better, but better the devil I know than the devil I don’t know.

I reach the laundry room and warm air rushes toward me when I open the glass door. I close my eyes and suck in a deep breath of dryer-sheet-scented air. If I block out the sound of a crying child and a woman yelling for it to shut up, I can almost imagine myself back in my childhood. Back when my mother would wash clothes every Monday and I would help her fold the towels. Back before she married a sick fuck. But those are distant memories that feel like they happened to someone else. I feel as if I’ve been a beaten junkie far longer than I was a child.

I throw his dirty clothes in the wash and slam the lid. Even through the haze of my high, my emotions are stirring and I can’t hold them back. I

drop to the ground, press my back against the machine, and cry.

I hate crying. It's seen as a sign of weakness, but this is me trying to be strong when I don't have the courage to face my fears and leave. I swipe the tears from my cheeks and make a promise to myself.

I'll get out. I'll get away.

Maybe not today, but soon.

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Chapter Two

Karson

I'm not happy about this. Working alongside my brother is not what I had in mind. We agreed to go our separate ways, and I did fine while he was in prison. Well, until I got a little overzealous during a kill and made a mess. Our boss doesn't like any messes.

Gentry didn't need to swoop in and save me from the repercussions of fucking up so royally, though. He's not my hero. I'd have figured it out or died like the fuck up I am. Death doesn't seem like such a terrible outcome for me. I'd probably come before my last breath.

He must feel like he owes me for that one time I saved his ass when we were much younger. He made a rookie mistake and the cops came knocking, asking him where he was that night. He hesitated, but before a guilty look could cross his face, I told them he'd been with me all night and there was absolutely no way he threw some dude in a ravine after stabbing him twenty-five times with a dull knife. Maybe he doesn't realize I did it to keep the cops from finding *my* bodies. I was covering my ass as much as his, so he doesn't owe me shit.

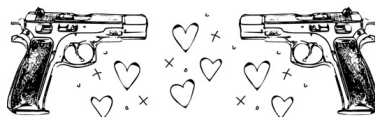
But here we are, back to a joint business. No other job lets people like us do the things we like to do. That we have an inherent need to do. A genetic propensity toward murder that can't be sated while working a typical nine-to-five job.

Things feel different this time, though, and it's not a good change. Gentry's never been a friendly guy, but now he's a miserable prick who answers in grunts and nods instead of speaking to me. No one is as tightly

wound as he is, with an asshole so puckered that it changes his gait when he walks, but it's worse than ever now. At least I can still enjoy one of my favorite pastimes—annoying the piss out of him. Bugging him gives me great joy.

What doesn't give me great joy is having to work under him again. Before he went to prison, I didn't mind it so much, but that was before I had a taste of doing things my way. He wants clean kills, in and out without much fuss or fanfare, and I want to play. The muzzle he slaps over my face stops me from getting too out of hand. I can't toy with my prey when Gentry's holding my leash. I'm a wild and unhinged thing, and like any wild thing, he has to cut me loose sometimes.

Maybe I'll remind him of that after we finish this hit. For now, I'll let him take the lead.



Gentry

A SQUELCH ECHOES in the silent room as I pull out the knife. I decided to go old school with this jackass. Karson sits on the balcony railing, digging at his nails with his pocketknife.

"A little help?" I call to him as I wipe the blade of my knife on a rag before pocketing it.

"You're doing great all on your own," he says with a quick tilt of his head.

I wipe my brow. "Get your ass out here before I push you off that balcony. *Lazy piece of shit.*" I whisper the last bit. My little brother is a pain in the ass. He's always been a risk I stuck my neck out for, but I'm beginning to regret taking him under my wing to try to keep his stupid ass alive.

Karson slides off the smooth metal railing, letting his boots hit the concrete with a dramatic thud. He puts out the cigarette in the palm of his hand and pockets it. His dark eyes match mine as he shoulders me when he walks by.

“I can denounce responsibility for you at any time, you know,” I remind him.

He scoffs at me and slips a pair of black leather gloves over his hands so we can hunt for our payday. Our official job is to kill our target, but the unofficial job is to take any cash or valuables we can find before their bratty little relatives get their grimy hands on it. Skim off some of the generational wealth for ourselves since we sure as fuck never had any.

Karson and I were poor as shit growing up, but it made us better killers. It was either take what you want or do without, and we got sick of doing without real quick. We’re also a match made in mental health hell. I’m the psychopath with the antisocial personality, and Karson is more the sociopath. Or do I have it reversed? It’s been two decades since we received our official diagnoses, so I don’t remember. Either way, we’re both exponentially fucked in the head.

We search drawers, cabinets, and safes, taking as much as we can and stuffing it into a duffel bag. While we’re mostly searching for untraceable cash, we’ll nab the occasional jewelry box to toss over the side of a bridge in the next town over because we’re assholes like that. Selling shit on the street or in a pawnshop isn’t an option. That’s how idiots get caught, and I refuse to go back to prison. I’m fairly certain my brother shares the sentiment.

Karson comes out of the bedroom with a fat wad of bills fanned between his hands. “This dude’s got enough to make it rain,” he says as he flicks the bills in my face like I’m his personal dancer. As they spin in the air and fall to the ground, I swear to god he’ll be the next dead man if he doesn’t quit it.

“Are you being serious right now?” I snarl as I rip the money from his hands and throw it in my bag.

“As serious as murder.”

I hate him.

He turns and walks beside the wall, his hand dragging along the cold marble until he stops in front of a row of pictures. “Look at his little grandkids,” Karson coos. He smirks and flicks his fingers toward the frame, sending it to the floor in a puddle of broken glass and bent metal. He continues his path of destruction, knocking every frame off one by one and humming a cheery tune. When he reaches an intricate, very expensive-looking vase, he stops and goes silent. He picks it up, rubbing a finger along

the blue paisley pattern before unzipping his jeans and tugging his limp dick from his boxers. As he strokes himself until he's hard, he tosses a devilish smile my way.

I should turn away, but he's a goddamn car crash and my eyes are glued to the scene. "Jesus, must you?" I ask.

Karson leans back on the balls of his feet, his hand working faster until he comes in the vase with a satisfied groan.

"Is this how you've been operating since I've been gone? It's a wonder you haven't been caught. They'll get your DNA off that, dumbass."

He goes to put it down.

"Ah, ah, you gotta bring your jizz jug with us."

Karson's lips pull into a frown as he shoves the vase beneath his arm, and I'm struck by how similar we look. Aside from the eight-year age gap and the height and build difference, we could almost be twins. I'm taller and better muscled, but we have the same jet-black hair, dark eyes, and thick facial hair.

His fingers drum against the side of the vase, and a smirk crosses his face. "This is the second most valuable thing I've ever come in." A playful spark lights his eyes, and I know where he's going with this.

"Don't," I warn.

"First thing was your wife."

Yup. There's about to be a second homicide in this swanky mansion. I try really hard to forget about the fact that he fucked my wife. My ex-wife.

My now very dead ex-wife.

I fight the urge to knock that vase out of his arms and let his felonious jizz spread over the Persian rug beneath his boots, but doing that would mean I'd have to worry about his stupid ass folding on me. And it's a valid concern. Karson will do whatever it takes to remain a free man.

I stuff the bills into my pockets and scan the room to be sure we haven't left anything behind. Karson has already left the building, and I wouldn't be surprised to find him beating his dick into the vase again. Murder is his aphrodisiac, after all. For me it's a means to an end. I want something, they have it, so I take it. I won't lie and pretend I don't enjoy it, but it's more like a schedule one drug than a dose of Viagra for me. I get a high from it, and that's the only way I'll get high because I don't fuck with real drugs.

Not after what I've seen them do to a person.

We never knew our mother because she died when we were young, so we grew up with our father as our . . . I don't know what to call him. He wasn't a parent or a guardian. I was forced into that role for both Karson and our father. When he was too strung out to provide food, I'd work odd jobs around the neighborhood to make sure we had something to eat. I needed a better solution, though, so my first kill was my father's dealer. I figured if I cut off the head of the snake, that would be the end of it. My dad could get off drugs and start taking care of us. But there were more snakes waiting to strike, and my dad never got clean.

That kill taught me something, though. When I looted his limp corpse and came home with more money than I could make doing honest work for a week, I learned how easy it was to take a life.

And I learned that I liked it.

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Chapter Three

Leana

The hand around my throat tightens until a black haze creeps across my eyes. The bitter scents of bile and alcohol wash over me, and I fight back the urge to gag. I grip Mickey's wrists and stare at the ring he placed on my finger when he proposed to me. What a bunch of fucking lies. And I was stupid enough to believe him.

This isn't how I wanted to wake up today.

My gaze rises to the angry furrow of his brows as his glassy eyes narrow in anger. I don't know what I did to deserve it this time. Not that I ever did anything to deserve the hell he puts me through. My existence seems like enough to throw him into a mindless rage at any given moment.

I can't imagine living with so much anger in my heart. Actually, I can imagine. The love I had for him has long warped into a bitterness as sour as his breath, and I have a building rage of my own.

"You sleeping around on me, Lee?" he asks.

There it is. Today's reason for the onslaught of abuse is an accusation of cheating. Yesterday it was because he thought I'd stolen some of his stash, which was unfortunately false. What new joys will tomorrow bring?

"Answer me, bitch! Are you cheating?"

I shake my head. *His* friends try to get me away from him, but I've never approached them or taken them up on their offers. One of his dealer buddies probably got sick of my constant rejections and decided to make me pay for it.

“Fucking slut,” he snarls, squeezing off the last of my air. I push at his chest as everything inside me tightens to chase the oxygen.

Just when I think I’m about to die, he releases me. Somehow he always knows the moment before he takes it too far. I pant, trying to overfill my lungs with air. I imagine them swelling instead of feeling like shriveled up kidney beans in there.

I rip out of his grasp and run for the door. I reach for my purse hanging from a standing mirror, halting when I catch sight of my reflection. I’m no longer a vibrant young woman. Weathered and beaten down, I more closely resemble the way my lungs felt only moments ago. Tears matt my unruly blonde hair to my cheeks, and my blue eyes are bloodshot from his choke hold.

“If you leave, Leana, I will find you. Do you hear me?” he screams, the alcohol tainting his words. “I will find you and I’ll fucking kill you!”

He takes a stumbling step toward me, then leans against the wall as the liquor tries to take out his legs. Based on the way his eyes dart back and forth, I can safely assume the room feels like it’s spinning beneath his feet. His threats are real, but this is the best opportunity I’ll have to escape. He won’t be sober enough to find anything but the liquor cabinet anytime soon.

Before he can find his feet again, I leave and slam the door, taking only my purse with me. Nothing in that apartment is worth going back for. I have a few pills stashed in my purse, so I’ll have to ration them to keep myself from getting sick. As hopeful as I am, it won’t be enough to stave off withdrawal forever. It’s something I’ll have to deal with, but first I need to put ground between myself and my keeper. I have no clue what’s in store for me outside of his home, but it’s gotta be better than this.

Anything has to be better than this.



GRAVEL CRUNCHES beneath my feet as I walk beneath an overpass bridge. Black and blue graffiti covers the peeling green pillars that support the concrete. It supplies a nice stretch of shade where I can escape the sun for a few hours during the day, and it’s a great place to catch a nap on a night like tonight. It’s a popular spot for those living on the street, but I’m happy to

find myself alone for the moment. The straps of my backpack rub against my sunburn. I had just enough money to get the bag and some clothes, leaving very little for food. The situation isn't dire enough to send me face first into a trashcan in search of food scraps, but it's getting to that point.

I've been on the run for several days now. If Mickey has been searching for me, he hasn't found me yet. It's only a matter of time if I don't get out of this city, though. I keep my head low when I walk the sidewalks, and I avoid other people as much as I can. Mickey has eyes everywhere.

I pull the backpack off my tender shoulders and try to get it open, but the zipper snags because my hands are so shaky. The immediate panic of such a simple malfunction reminds me why I'm so anxious right now. The skin-crawling feeling that leaves my body pebbled with goose bumps in the summer heat. The nausea that twists my stomach. I'm missing my high and I need a fix. I finally get the piece of fabric out of the way so the zipper can move freely, and I dig around for the mint container.

This tiny tin houses the last of my dwindling stash. When I run out, I'm fucked. Maybe that's what Mickey is waiting for. My eyes dart from shadow to shadow, making sure I'm really alone before I pull open the metal lid. Sure of my safety once more, I take a pill from the container and place it under my tongue to work up enough saliva to swallow it. As it finally slides down my parched throat, the core anxiety washes away, and I wait for the actual drug to take care of the rest.

Now I need a place to ride out my high. A few scraggly bushes at the edge of the gravel should conceal me if I lie behind them, so I trudge toward them and set down my bag. I fluff it up and drop to the ground. The moment my head hits the nylon, my body releases the tension I've been holding. The sound of traffic above me would drive most people nuts, but I'm not most people. I like it. It's soothing. And it's better than being killed by the person who says they love me and want me dead in the same breath.

Yeah. I'll take the brisk air and road noise any day.

I just wish I hadn't waited so long to leave. I touch the fading bruise on my cheek and the handprint around my neck. I wish I'd left the first time he put his hands on me. Better yet, I wish I'd never met him. I try to imagine where I'd be today if he'd never found me at that bus station, but my brain is too fuzzy to conjure up that sort of fantasy. My thoughts circle the drain, touching on things that happened instead of things that could have happened.

I am forever running from abusers.

But that's the past, and I can taste the freedom on my tongue now. Or maybe that's just the drugs. Either way, I'm lighter. If I keep the bad parts of traveling from happening again, I'll be okay. Nothing can be done about the complete vulnerability that comes from being a lone female in a world that doesn't follow society's rules, but if I can steer clear of Mickey—and men like Mickey—I'll make it.

Lights flash around me as the headlights from the cars and trucks break through the cracks in the concrete. Every so often, a rogue headlight drifts from the road beside me and filters through the bushes. It's as relaxing to me as a mobile spinning idly over a baby's bassinet.

I have no clue what I'll do or where I'll go, but this is enough for now. It has to be because I have no other choice. I've tried to get money by offering to work, but people take one look at me and turn me away. Not that I blame them. With all the bruises and the dark bags under my eyes, I look like a typical junkie. Turning tricks isn't an option because Mickey's friend could catch wind of a new girl working in his area, and then I'd really be in trouble. Taking a bus out of this shithole seems like the smartest option, but I don't have enough cash to travel ten feet, let alone ten miles. And I definitely don't have enough to score more pills once these last few are gone.

No wonder people resort to being a criminal. It's fucking easier. And faster.

Between the periodic honking above my head, the leaves rustle against the wind. The drugs drift through my system and slice the edge off my withdrawal, but it's not enough. I draw my sweater closer to my body, trying to keep the heat inside me. I curl up and tuck my knees toward my chest.

It's still better than home, I remind myself.

And it is. Sleeping under an overpass that smells like piss and asphalt after a heavy rain is exponentially better than being beaten and used.

I shiver until I feel warm and my eyes are too heavy to keep open a moment longer. With the city's lullaby thrumming around me, I welcome the comforting embrace of a much-needed sleep.

Chapter Four

Karson

George needed us to do one more hit near the city before we set off on our road trip, and Gentry was pissed about it. Not me. I fucking love doing hits. If I were stuck at a day job, I'd probably hang myself and be real dramatic about it before I do.

I just love killing. Was born to do it. Just like an artist or musician has a drive to draw or play music, I have an innate desire to slice throats and practice macrame with intestines. Going against it would be so . . . unnatural.

I unthread the silencer and holster my pistol. We've finished the hit, but it feels incomplete. Sometimes a gun just isn't enough. It lacks the thrill because it's so quick. So effortless. A pull of a trigger and *bam*, they're gone.

Boring.

I like to play with my victims. A nice mix of psychological torture and physical torment is usually enough to satisfy me, but sometimes I keep going after they're dead. Sometimes killing them just isn't enough.

Gentry *hates* when I play. He's way too serious. He sees it as a means to an end, and while he enjoys the thrill of it as well, he doesn't understand my need to drag it out. It's *supposed* to titillate you. If it wasn't so much fun, people wouldn't do it serially. If you love your job, you'll never have to work a day in your life, right? Well, I fucking love my job when I'm allowed to do it my way.

I let Gentry take the lead on our last hit, but now I'm crawling out of my skin to have a little fun with this one. I skim the room and listen. Drawers open and close behind me on near-silent rollers—rich fuck furniture never squeaks and squeals. Gentry's rifling through shit, looking for some cash, so I turn back to the man slumped on the floor in front of me. His pale hand presses against his abdomen, fighting to hold his blood inside his body. It's a losing battle. A red stain is already spreading across his jeans. His lips part in an open-mouthed pant as he tries to get more air. Nothing is wrong with his lungs, but he doesn't have enough blood to push the oxygen to his brain and probably feels like he's drowning.

Lovely.

I grab my knife from my pocket and flick it open. The moment he sees the shiny metal blade, his eyes widen and he opens his mouth to scream. I leap toward him and cover his mouth with a gloved hand before the initial sound erupts from his lungs. He strains against my grasp, but I refuse to let him alert my brother to my game. I'm not in the mood to be knife-blocked.

"Shh, rich boy. You need to conserve your energy for dying," I whisper with a laugh. I tease his neck with the blade, running the shining silver against the faintly pulsing skin.

Tears fall from his eyes, but I feel no pity. I particularly dislike his kind—well-off people who are younger than me. This fuck can't be older than twenty-five and he has more money than God.

Fuck him.

With a sharp jerk of my wrist, I nick the sensitive skin just beneath his ear. His eyes widen again, and he squeals behind my hand. That sheer display of instinctual panic gets me hard. No matter who they are, their fear goes right to my dick.

I feel for the pocket of emptiness by his right shoulder and plunge the knife into him. His eyes bulge out of his head and his feet push against the floor, but he's losing steam. I pull the knife from his flesh. *Pop*. I fucking live for that momentary feeling of suction as the steel battles to remain buried where I've placed it. It almost makes me giddy.

A weak trickle of blood oozes from the new wound, and this guy doesn't know what to do with himself. He removes his hand from the bullet hole in his gut and clamps it on his shoulder. Life is full of decisions, and I suppose death is as well. He's just made a terrible one.

I reach down and plunge the knife into his gunshot wound, twisting it within the valley of his already grievous injury. The flood gates open and create a crimson pool around his lap. Each breath he takes grows smaller until they're little more than quick gasps through flared nostrils.

Satisfied he no longer has the strength to scream, I remove my hand from his mouth and dip my gloved finger into his gut wound. It comes away soaked and slick. Leaning forward on my knees, I create a little artwork above his lolling head. My fingers swirl along as I write, and I keep having to dip my finger in to add more paint. His mouth just opens and closes like a fish stuck on land each time I dip back into the inkwell. He can't even keep his eyes open now, and they've become tiny slits as his life force drains from him.

Above his head is a message, dripping downward in an eerie pattern. It looks like something out of a horror movie or some shit, but instead of something cryptic like *REDRUM*, it says "Kiddie didler."

I snap a picture and turn the phone screen toward him, but he doesn't even react to my fucking art. Rude.

When I've grown bored, I finish him off by slicing his throat and letting him bleed like the rich little piggy he is. The sound of a knife going through neck flesh actually gets to me a little. Real squelchy.

"Much better," I whisper.

I wipe my blade on a rag and pocket it as I stand up.

"It's spelled diddler, dumbass," Gentry says behind me. Judgmental prick. "Sure doesn't look like the gunshot killed him, Karson. How will we explain that to George?"

"All I did was shoot him. I swear."

Gentry lifts the man's slumped head, which is nearly disconnected from his neck. "Real sharp bullet."

I shrug. "I helped him along. The train was coming too slowly and he was suffering."

"Aren't you a fucking saint." He lets the head slump forward again. "You complicate things when you use multiple weapons. We get in, eliminate, rob, and get out."

"You know, pre-prison Gentry was way more fun. We used to play 'how many weapons can we use before they die,' remember?"

Gentry's lips tighten.

“You remember,” I continue. “You were the running champion. What was it? Bullet, blade, claw hammer, screwdriver, and not one but *two* nails to the eyes before he finally died.” I sigh. “Good times.”

Gentry turns to walk away. “It was three nails. Two in the eyes, one in the ear.”

“We have such fond childhood memories,” I say with a shake of my head and a longing look toward the window.

“Let’s go,” Gentry yells from the mudroom area. Foyer? Whatever the snobs call it.

“I’m coming.”

We climb into the van and peel off our gloves. It’s the first thing we do after a hit because those fucking things are constricting. Safety first, though.

“How much did we get?” I ask as Gentry steers the van down the winding driveway.

He shakes his head and sighs. “Not enough.”

“We gotta get out from under George’s thumb. We do all the hard work, and he gets all the pay. Yeah, he throws us some scraps, but we should be living like kings instead of goddamn peasants.”

“That’s the plan,” he says, and I wish he’d say more. I’m getting sick of his short sentences.

I decide to press him. “What plan? Care to share with your partner?”

“No. Not really.”

Before I can ask anything else, Gentry’s phone rings. I lean closer, trying to hear the conversation once he answers, but he only pushes me away.

“All that way? There’s no one else—” Gentry is silenced by a rising tone on the other end. “How much . . . Alright. Alright. Fine.” He ends the call and cracks his neck after rolling his shoulders.

I lean back and throw my feet onto the dash. “What’s up?”

“We have to go to fucking Hollywood for a hit.”

“Like . . . drive?”

“Can’t get our guns on a plane, now, can we? So yeah, driving. George said we’d need to take a road trip, but I didn’t realize he meant we’d have to trek across the country.”

“Oh man, that’s like thirty-six hours on the road. With me.” I laugh. “Good fucking luck, brother.”

“I will beat my list of murder items in one body if you don’t behave yourself.”

“When do I ever misbehave?”

“Every day that ends in Y.” He pulls onto the main road and aims the van for the highway. “Let’s get this over with.”

“Who’s the hit?” I ask.

“Some actor that got into shit they shouldn’t have. Someone who can buy a new Lambo but not pay their debts. But he’s also someone with *a lot* of security.”

“Harder job means better pay, right?”

Gentry shrugs and looks out the window. “He says we’ll make more on this job than we ever have. If he’s telling the truth, maybe we can branch out on our own again. Cut the middleman.”

I never liked having a handler, so this plan sounds like a great idea to me. As long as I can survive this road trip, things are looking up.

The engine light comes on, blaring bright orange on the dashboard. A sickening sweet smell fills the front of the van, and a rush of steam rises from the hood. Gentry slams his hands on the wheel. We barely made a dent in our drive. We’re still tucked inside wooded hills, miles from the main highway. He’s going to be so fucking mad. And insufferable. Great.

He pulls onto the shoulder, and we climb out of the van. Gentry pops the hood, speaking every foul word he knows under his breath, and I drop to my knees. A dark, wet trail runs from where we were on the road to where we rolled to a stop. I place the sweet smell and rise to my feet.

“Cracked radiator,” I tell Gentry, lifting my eyes to a face so twisted with anger I don’t think it’s possible to untwist it at this point.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” He brushes his hand through his hair. “We *have* to get this done.”

I whip out my phone to call a tow. What else can we do? Gentry rips the cell from my hand and holds it away from me. “Chill out. I’m just trying to call for a tow.”

“And what? Have them tow away the van full of weapons and stolen money? I’m sure they won’t even notice the blood on your gloves. Fuck, Karson. Think with your head for once in your life.”

I lean against the steaming van and pull a cigarette from the pack in my pocket. I light it, which enrages Gentry to no end. He looks like his head

might combust and throw his brain matter all over the grass, and I should feel bad for bringing him to this level of pissed off.

But I don't.

"So we hitchhike?" I ask, bringing the smoke into my lungs.

"Another stupid suggestion. Who the fuck would pick up two men like us?" Gentry throws his hands down on the hood as he slams it closed.

I shrug. "It will look like one man until I pop out and get a gun on them."

"That's—" Gentry starts, his voice curt and ready to rip me a new asshole. "Actually not a bad idea."

Did my brother give me a fucking compliment? Am I dead? Where are the flames and heat of hell?

"But you need to be the face," he says. "No one is going to stop for a man my size. They still may not stop since you're a man too, but you're slightly less imposing."

"Sorry I didn't have access to the prison workout system for the past six years," I say with another drag on my cigarette, and that almost sends Gentry off the deep end. It's not a good time to poke the bear, but I can't help myself.

"Just get the goddamn bags. We'll keep the pistols, but I'll ditch the long guns in the woods. I'll wait there while you *try* to flag down some chump."

I won't just try. I'll show Gentry my ideas can be as good—if not better—than his.

Chapter Five

Leana

I'm fucking tired. I've been on the streets for a week, but it feels like much longer. It feels like an eternity. This was easier when I traveled as a ballsy teen. Back before I was hooked on pills and looked like death warmed over. Back when my blue eyes were still filled with hope.

I stand with my sign, waiting for the bright glint of a few measly coins to land in the small cardboard box at my feet. If I'm lucky, someone will toss in a half-eaten meal or a flat soda. Mostly I get men yelling, "Show me your tits!" as they wait for the light to change. Shit, I'm so desperate, I've considered it on more than one occasion.

Sweat collects on my brow and trickles toward my eyes. I wipe it away before it can reach my lashes. My sunburned skin heats my fingertips, and I'm not sure how much more I can take. The heat is killing me. What little water I take in is converted to sweat in my body's desperate effort to cool down. Running back to Mickey with my tail between my legs seems like a terrible idea, but it's growing more tempting by the day.

I lift my hand to my forehead and shield my eyes from the harsh glare as I look at the motel across the road. They would have water. They might even let me use the lobby bathroom so I can cool my face and rinse the grit from my skin. If I ask nicely enough, maybe I can score a Tylenol for this pounding headache as well. I've come toward the end of my stash of drugs, and what little I use is only enough to keep the shakes away.

I fold the cardboard sign and tuck it under my arm. My cardboard box netted little more than a wad of trash from a bratty kid in an SUV, so I leave

it behind. When the coast is clear, I walk across the road and work my way through the parking lot. Despite the glorious rush of cool air kissing my skin, I feel as if I might pass out by the time I walk through the sluggish automatic doors. Black ink spots dance in front of my eyes and obscure my vision. I reach for a display of travel brochures to steady myself, careful to keep it from crashing down.

“Are you okay, ma’am?” the woman behind the desk asks.

I stumble forward and lean against the lobby counter, my chest feeling heavy with every inhale. “I just really need some water. Do you have any?”

The woman looks around before reaching beneath the desk and handing me two bottles. “They’re for guests, so don’t tell me if you aren’t one,” she says with a tight smile.

I nod and rip the top from one of the bottles. Even though the liquid is room temperature, it soothes my cracked lips and coats my parched throat. I chug until I think I might puke, forcing myself to stop as my stomach begs for one more sip. It flows from the sides of my mouth, and I’m wearing half of it by the time I lower the bottle. The woman reaches beneath the desk once more and passes another bottle to me before motioning toward the automatic door with her chin.

I get the message. She’s done her good deed for the day and now I need to make myself scarce. The homeless are unwelcome by everyone, even those who feel the slightest twinge of pity for our sorry situation. We’re looked down upon, but only when someone takes the time to look at all. Most won’t even meet our gaze, as if they think we harbor some contagious disease they might catch by acknowledging our existence.

“Thanks,” I tell her, wiping the back of my hand along my mouth. I sigh as I leave the comfort of A/C and brave the heat once more.

The sun is taking no prisoners today.

I force my legs to carry me across the parking lot, my eyes focusing on a huge tree whose canopy would lend me some delicious shade if I can only muster the strength to reach it.

I’ve nearly made it to the edge of the lot when I spot a dark SUV idling with no one inside it. Black smoke chugs from the old exhaust, and sun rays glint from the sections of paint that haven’t peeled away. I reroute my steps until I’m standing beside the driver’s door. My head swivels in all directions as I search for an owner, but there’s no one nearby. It probably belongs to a guest at the motel.

My fingers graze the hot metal door handle, and my mouth drops open as I discover it's unlocked. *Don't do something illegal*, I try to tell myself, but the legal way hasn't worked so far and I'm fucking exhausted. I'm desperate to make it out of New York. It's only a matter of time before Mickey comes to claim me, and I've pressed my luck enough.

It's their fault for leaving the key in the ignition, I rationalize.

I whip open the door and selfishly sit in the seat. My eyes gloss over the ripped interior, cigarette butts in the cup holders, and bottles of half-empty drinks. The gas tank is full, and that's all that really matters if I plan to do this.

Do I plan to do this?

My body answers the question for me, and I throw the SUV in reverse and ease out of the parking space. As I back up, I watch the rows of doors and windows for movement. I expect someone to rush from the building and teach me a lesson for trying to take what isn't mine.

But it doesn't happen.

No one notices me as I exit the parking lot and pull onto the road. I blend into the light traffic and crank the air as high as it will go, not even daring a glance in the rearview mirror as I put miles between myself and hell.

It's getting dark by the time I near the highway that will lead me to the next state. The occasional oncoming headlights on this back road hurt my eyes, and my vision is already sensitive from the headache knocking at the base of my skull. The stress of stealing a car hasn't helped. Neither has the withdrawal. It's like steam in my veins, building and building with nowhere to go without the release valve.

I spot something ahead on the side of the road and slow the SUV so I can get a better look. It's a white van with its hood cranked open. A man with his pale thumb in the air stands beside it. The tug to pull over draws me toward him. I know what it means to rely on the help of others, and I know the feeling of helplessness as every car rushes by you without so much as slowing for your safety.

Don't do it, Leana.

It's not wise. I know it's not. This man could be a serial killer for all I know, and the whole reason I stole this piece of shit was to get myself to safety. Now I'm considering placing myself in danger once again. I can't.

My foot eases off the brake and moves toward the gas pedal. I roll past the van . . .

Against my better judgment, I pull to the side of the road. If I keep going, I'm no better than the hundreds of people who passed me by today. I also wouldn't mind handing the keys to someone in a better state of mind to drive, especially with this nagging headache biting at the backs of my eyes.

The man approaches my window with a smile, and I feel a little more at ease. He looks like he might be in his late thirties. His dark, unruly hair waves a bit in the breeze. I can't see the color of his eyes against the shadows, which means they're probably dark too. Scruff lines his strong jaw, and though he's not a broad man, I can see the strength in his toned arms. He's attractive, in a wild sort of way, and I find myself ashamed of my haggard appearance for the first time in a while.

"Hey," he says as he adjusts a duffle bag strap on his shoulder.

"What's wrong with your van?" I ask.

"Busted radiator. I need a ride to the shop a few miles from here. They have a loaner car waiting for me, but they can't pick up my piece of shit until later." He motions toward his van.

Everything seems okay so far, and my defenses begin to lower. If he's lying about any of this, he's doing a pretty convincing job. Besides, it's only for a few miles. Then I'll be on my own again.

"Get in," I tell him, pulling my purse off the passenger seat.

The man loops around the SUV, tapping the hood as he walks by. He climbs into the seat, but instead of closing the door so we can get moving, he stares into the trees lining the side of the road. I'm about to change my mind and ask him to get out when he turns to me and . . . just stares.

As his eyes harden, the hair on my neck stands at attention. I reach for the shifter, thinking I can fling him from the car if I drive off fast enough, but a metallic click stops my hands from doing anything at all. My stomach twists into a knot as I turn my head and find the barrel of a pistol aimed at my face.

"I don't want trouble," I say, keeping my voice steady.

"Unfortunately, trouble is exactly what you've got," he says, motioning toward the trees.

A lead curtain of silence weighs down the vehicle, only broken when I hear the crunch of heavy boots emerging from the woods. My heart crawls into my throat and I choke on it.

Another man approaches the SUV, this one much bigger than the man sitting beside me. His full, dark beard obscures the lower half of his face, but I can see his eyes and they're just as dark. His hair is much neater than the other man's, but they look as if they were cut from the same cloth.

My stomach twists, and it's not only from the sheer horror of the shit sandwich I've found myself wedged inside. I'm dope sick, and the water from earlier isn't happy where it's at.

The larger man gets in the seat behind the one holding his gun on me. "Thanks for the ride," he says as they close their doors.

"I didn't really have much of a choice, did I?" I snap. They might kill me, but I refuse to go out like a simpering child. I spent the last six years begging Mickey to go easy on me. I refuse to spend another second begging a man to lay off.

"Mouthy," the man beside me says with a laugh. "I like them with some fire. Then again, we could get rid of you and just take your car." He whips a knife from somewhere in the darkness and puts the metal to my throat.

When I swallow, my skin tenses beneath the blade. "It's not even my ride. I took it."

The man cocks his head, and a low growl leaves his throat. He turns toward the man in the back seat. "What do we have here, G? Seems like we caught a little thief."

I'm not in the mood. My insides are about to become my outsides, my skin is crawling, chills are setting in, and now I have to deal with *this*. I only wanted to get away from my abuser, and now I've landed myself with two psychos who will probably gut me. Or worse.

The thought of what they may do to me is enough to send my stomach into a full roll, and I get the door open in time to puke all over the pavement. The man beside me lets out a disgusted groan, but the big one in back seems more pissed than grossed out. He opens his door, comes around the vehicle, and lifts me by the back of my shirt like a momma cat carrying a kitten. With minimal effort, he tosses me into the back seat.

He gets in the driver's seat, and I lean back to gain control of the waves of nausea threatening to drown me.

The passenger's attention rushes back to me with a sharp turn of his head. "Do you know what we do to thieves?"

"Kill them?" I say.

The driver's deep voice echoes through the SUV, feeling louder with my eyes closed. His words are silky smooth. "No. We take them along for the ride."

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Chapter Six

Gentry

“Pull over!” she says from the back seat. The desperate edge to her voice tells me there’s no questioning the validity of this urgent demand. I pull to the shoulder, and she nearly leaps from the car to vomit in the grass.

I get out and walk to the hunched form. She’s fallen to her knees from the sheer force of her squeezing stomach, but she’s brought up little more than bile. When I squat down, she drops her gaze.

“What’s the matter with you?” I ask. “Are you knocked up or something?”

“You never ask a woman if she’s pregnant, asshole,” she snarls, wiping at a line of drool hanging from her lower lip. “But no. I’m not pregnant.”

It’s night, but the headlights cast enough glare to make the goose bumps visible on her skin. Sweat collects at the small of her back, where her shirt has risen enough to reveal a patch of pale skin.

I reach for her forehead, and she’s too shaky and weak to fight my unwanted touch. My fingertips connect with clammy skin. “Are you sick?”

“A kind of sickness, I guess,” she says, turning her head to vomit once more.

My eyebrows furrow. She looks rough—clearly homeless, but not entirely like a dope head. Even so, I’ve seen someone in her state before and I can’t deny the similarity. Our father was a junkie, and I spent many hours of my childhood beside him as he shivered and puked. When an addict goes without their addiction, they’re reduced to what I see before me now: a helpless, quivering husk.

“Are you dope sick?” I ask, hoping she has an alternative reason for her current state.

She drops to her back, careful not to land in her vomit. “Yes, and I think I just purged my soul from my body.”

Fuck. The last thing we need right now is to care for someone going through withdrawal. “Do you have any more drugs on you?” I ask, hoping she does. When my father would get sick, only a fix would stop the downward spiral.

She shakes her head, and her messy blonde hair rustles against the grass. “Negatory.”

That’s unfortunate. It means we’ll have to tend to her while she rides out the withdrawal.

What the fuck am I thinking? It would be better to end her life. She’s a liability at this point—has been since she saw our faces—and we have a long way to go before we reach our final destination. What do I plan to do with her at the end of the road? Even if she were well, there’s only one answer to that question.

My hand goes to the pistol on my hip. *It’s no different than putting down a dying deer on the side of the road*, I tell myself.

But I can’t do it.

I feel a bit of sympathy for her. As stupid as it was, she stopped when she saw a broken-down van, and now she’ll have to pay the ultimate price for an act of kindness. It doesn’t seem fair to end her life now. Right now, she looks broken. And I recognize brokenness like that. I’ve seen enough of her snark to know she’ll be a fighter when she’s better, so maybe we can wait until she gives us a reason to kill her.

I scoop her trembling body into my arms and carry her to the back seat. Her head lolls to the side, but she doesn’t fight me. Surrounded by my massive frame, she seems so small and fragile, like I could break her if I squeezed too hard. Despite the sickness infecting her mind and ravaging her body, I can see the low glint of a dying fire in her blue eyes.

I force myself to look away. After what happened with my wife, I refused to get sucked in by a woman again. This helpless girl in my arms won’t change that. She’s beautiful and I admire her attitude, but I won’t let her shake my resolve. I’ll let Karson end her once she’s better, but she deserves to die when she isn’t strung out and miserable. That’s how I’ll repay her kindness.

I place her into the back seat, and she raises her arm over her eyes to shield her pinpoint pupils from the dome light. Her tongue moves over her lips to wet them, and my body tenses, immediately regretting the decision to keep her around. She's a danger to me in more ways than one.

I return to the driver's seat before I do something stupid. Pushing away visions of what I could do to a girl like her, I turn the ignition and pull onto the road again.

"We should kill her, you know," Karson says, making no attempt to lower his voice. "At this point, it might be merciful."

The girl turns her head, her eyes firmly closed. "Fuck you," she whispers.

It almost makes me smile, but it enrages Karson. He whips his knife from his belt and turns in his seat, but I take a hand off the wheel and grab his wrist to block his motion toward her.

"Don't," I say.

"Fucking why not?" he snaps.

"Because I'm the boss and you listen to what I say. Don't forget that I'm saving your ass." It's a better answer than the truth. I have no clue why I can't let him carve her like a Christmas ham. Maybe I pity her because I found our father dead after a particularly gnarly bout of withdrawal. Maybe saving her means I've made up for not saving him. Either way, he can't finish her off . . . yet.

This isn't the smartest thing we've done, I know—generally speaking, taking anyone outside of our pairing is fucking dumb—but I'm intrigued by this stray we've picked up.

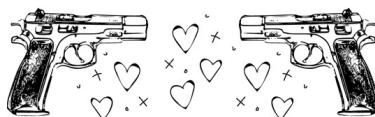
Karson scoffs. "She's fucked up on drugs, isn't she?"

I shake my head. "Fucked up because she's *off* drugs."

Karson's back thumps against his seat and his head drops to his balled fist. "I didn't sign up for a babysitting gig."

"I said the same thing."

He can't argue with that, so we continue into the night in blessed silence.



Leana

WHEN THE PASSENGER said they should kill me, I had no strength to argue beyond the two words I said. I don't want to die, but I'm too sick to stop them if that's what they plan to do, and it seems likely at this point. The muscles beneath my skin hurt. The twist of my intestines chokes me. My neck is a tight bundle of pain, and I consider pulling my eyes from their sockets to end the painful throb behind them. Every bump and jostle in the road sends my stomach into my mouth.

Someone lights a cigarette, and the heady aroma is both tempting and nauseating. The thick smoke wraps around me, comforting the tremble of my body in a familiar blanket. Maybe a little nicotine would take the edge off, but it might send me to the side of the road again, puking the emptiness from my stomach. I'm also reminded of Mickey's common reaction when I would ask for a cigarette, and asking for one might only get me killed quicker. I shouldn't press my luck.

Then again, I've never considered myself lucky.

Life has dealt me multiple shitty hands, but I'm forced to sit at the table and keep betting. A happy childhood ruined by my father's death. My mother's marriage to a predatory animal. An escape to a hell that was just as horrific. And now I'm stuck as a hostage, too sick to make a run for it.

I groan and sit up to look out the window. We've left the highway again, and dark trees tower against a star-filled sky. I don't know where we are or how far we've traveled, but at least we're moving away from Mickey and toward some unknown destination. Asking where we're headed would be pointless. They haven't offered their names, so I doubt they'll disclose anything else.

I lean against the window's cool glass and stare at the back of the passenger's head. I've come to see him as the dangerous one. His short temper and complete disregard for my life have been put on display more than once, and I need to be careful around him. My eyes shift to the driver. He's shown me an iota of sympathy, which is nice, but I still can't trust him. I'm about ninety percent sure the massive hands clutching the steering wheel will end up wrapped around my throat at some point, and not in a good way.

I laugh at the thought.

"What's funny back there?" the passenger asks.

“Just this situation,” I say. “Two weirdos and a dope-sick girl on a road trip.”

The passenger whips his head around, glaring at me with pitch-black eyes. “You’re the fucking weird one, girl.”

“Because you two are the crème de la crème of normalcy, right? Two big dudes playing around in the woods together in the middle of the night.” My caution regarding the wild one goes right out the window because my head hurts and it’s making me bitchy. I’ve held my tongue for most of my life, and now that my days are numbered, I can finally say whatever I want. It feels amazing.

“Just one little slice and I could end you, thief,” he says. He raises his knife again, and the dash lights reflect off the blade with an eerie green glow.

“Do it then,” I snarl, a strange laugh lifting the end of my demand. “Fucki—”

“Enough!” the driver shouts, silencing me mid curse. It’s just one word, but it projects and runs along every nerve in my body. It lingers. This man sure can make someone listen up. Even his friend has gone silent, though I can tell what a struggle that is because the muscles ripple in his arms with the effort. It looks like it’s taking everything in him not to beat my ass.

It wouldn’t be the first time a man’s fists rained down on me. I’ve learned how much of a beating the human body can take, and it’s so much more than I once believed. Knowing this, I decide to take my chances. I can’t stand the passenger, and I want to poke him a bit. Besides, the big one seems like he’d pull him off me before he killed me.

Probably.

I gather my waning energy and use it to send my knee into the back of the passenger’s seat. His chest rises as his back arches to escape the sudden pressure behind him. Before I can react, he’s over the center console and in tussling—or killing—range. Black eyes glare at me, yet I don’t regret what I’ve done. Maybe I have a death wish. I smirk, and this sends him off the deep end. His blade flashes for a millisecond before the driver whips his arm away.

The SUV swerves and bounces along the shoulder as the driver wrenches the blade from his friend’s hand. Instead of de-escalating the situation, I bring my leg under the passenger’s twig and berries with a solid

thud. He roars with anger, tumbling against the dash as the driver brings the SUV to a jarring halt. I stifle a laugh because fuck that guy. He deserved it.

“Karson! You’re driving,” the driver says as he tugs off his seat belt and charges around the front of the SUV. I worry he’ll rip the passenger door off the hinges when he whips it open.

“What? Why me?” Karson asks, his hand still holding his crotch.

“Because both of you are acting like fucking children. I can’t keep the car on the road *and* play goddamn referee at the same time. She’s clearly too sick to drive, so that leaves you. Now get in the driver’s seat before I lose my shit.”

“Oh, fuck you, Gentry,” Karson mumbles before crawling over the center console and dropping behind the steering wheel. “I’m going to kill that bitch, first chance I get.” He whispers this last bit, but it’s loud enough for me to hear.

It’s a warning I should take seriously, but I’m too sick to give a shit right now. If he kills me, at least I got a piece of him before I went. That’s more than I can say for my situation with Mickey. I’ll never have the chance to get my revenge on that piece of shit. From the way Karson reacted to me, I’m more certain than ever.

Wherever they’re headed, I won’t be alive when they reach their destination.

Chapter Seven

Karson

We don't talk for the rest of the drive, and I eventually pull the vehicle into a hotel parking lot. George instructed us to drive toward Hollywood, but he'd better line up more hits along the way to make this worth our while. It isn't cheap to bed down in a hotel every night, but we have to sleep sometimes. Gentry seems to think this run of hits will be our last under George, that the payout will be more than we've ever seen, but I don't have the same confidence in our sneaky asshole handler. If he shortchanges us, it won't be the first time.

Gentry always makes sure I know how stupid I am, but my brother is the one being fucking stupid. I'm not only talking about his belief that George will make good on his promises, either. This girl is a problem. We don't bring people along on road trips like this. Involving others is a risk we don't need, and she could blow our cover at any point. She could escape. She could rat us out to the first person she sees, an opportunity she'll have when we book this room. There's no way I'm going back to prison for some doped out whore Gentry seems to have adopted like a sick little puppy from the side of the road. But I can't say that to Gentry. He thinks he knows *everything*.

He'll learn how little he knows soon enough. When that puppy feels better, it will turn and bite the hand that fed it. She's already a snappy little bitch.

I don't care to see Gentry babying his new pet, so I grab my duffle bag, throw it over my shoulder, and head toward the hotel's entryway. It's not the

Hilton, but it's not a roach motel either. The lobby is small but clean, with a few chairs and a couch circled around a low table. A coffee maker stands on a counter nearby, and a muted TV hangs above it. Subtitles flash along the bottom of the screen.

I bypass the seating area and head straight for the older woman sitting behind the lobby desk. "Two rooms, please," I say. I refuse to room with those two. Gentry's show of kindness makes me physically ill, and I can't sleep in the same room as that thief anyhow. It would be smarter if we took turns keeping watch over her, but she's still sick enough that I doubt she'll make a run for it.

The woman at the front desk taps away on her keyboard without looking up at me. When she gives me the total, we exchange cash for key cards, and I return to the entrance to wait for my brother and his baggage. They start across the parking lot, and my jaw clenches at the sight of them. She's leaning against him for support, her useless, unsteady legs wobbling beneath her hips. He looks like a man leading his drunk date to the fuck palace after a night at the bar. It's a good cover, actually, but it still makes me want to gouge out my eyes with a dull stick. I don't like how cozy they look.

I toss Gentry his key when they near me. "You're in three-oh-five," I say. "I'm in the room next to yours." Before he can respond, I turn and head toward the elevator.

The short ride to our floor makes the thief sick again. She leans her blonde head against him and moans, clutching her stomach and nearly collapsing. His arm curls around her, a protective gesture that sends my eyes rolling. This isn't the brother I've known all my life. Sure, he's not as stabby as me, but he's never been caring. Not like this.

This is going to be a fucking problem.

We exit the elevator and I push past them to get to my room. I can't take another second of this shit.

"Karson," Gentry says before I can get the key card into the slot.

I grit my teeth and turn to face him. Whatever he has to say, I'm not in the mood to hear it.

Gentry tells the girl to go into their room, helping her inside as if she's some invalid who didn't kick me in the dick earlier. He closes the door behind her and joins me in front of my room.

“What are we doing?” I ask. I don’t give him a chance to speak first. “How do you think this is going to end, Gentry?”

“I know how it ends.”

Does he? I’m not convinced. “Then why prolong the inevitable? We should have killed her on the side of the road when she was sick. Now you’re taking care of her like you plan to keep her. Tell me I’m wrong. Please.”

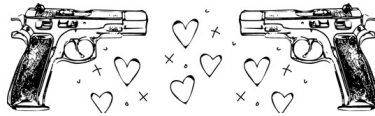
His lips tighten. “When it’s time, I’ll get rid of her.”

I shake my head. “If you don’t, I’ll kill both of you and then myself.”

Gentry’s eyebrows furrow. “Just let me handle it.”

“Sure thing, Gentry. You’re the boss,” I say, and he doesn’t miss the sarcastic bite to my words.

I leave him standing in the hall and retreat to my room. Gentry has always been the boss to an extent, but I’m sick of being on a leash. The moment I get loose, I’m getting rid of the excess baggage. The little thief isn’t the only dog with teeth.



Gentry

I STAND in front of my room in the ghostly quiet hall. Karson doesn’t understand. To be fair, neither do I, but this is my show and I’ll run it how I damn well please. If he doesn’t like it, he can take his chances with George.

The key card reader flashes green and I push open the heavy metal door. The girl is stretched out on the bed, her chest heaving as if the walk to our room was more of a monumental task than I could ever imagine. A lamp on the bedside table casts a dim yellow light over her face, and the shadows under her eyes stand out like two dark valleys on either side of her slender nose. Her scent comes toward me, and I wish she hadn’t dropped onto the comforter while reeking of vomit.

“Go on and shower,” I tell her. I want her cleaned up because I’ll never get to sleep if I have to smell that rancid perfume all night, but I worry what she’ll look like when that thin layer of grime and sweat isn’t coating her

skin. I'm already fighting a strange attraction to her when she looks a mess, so I don't know how I'll react when she's soft and clean.

She climbs out of bed like she's fighting against a body that weighs a thousand pounds. It's a familiar, struggling action my father made so many times. Maybe that's why I'm so intrigued by her. Maybe I need to see if she'll die like our father or find the will to live.

But then how can I kill her?

Because you have no choice.

She enters the bathroom, and the sound of running water silences my thoughts. I slip off my shoes at the door, flop onto the bed, and flip on the television. Watching TV is a really mundane luxury most people don't think twice about. We didn't have one growing up. Well, we *technically* had one, but the big boxy piece of shit was just a giant paperweight. I have no memory of its screen ever lighting up. Karson entertained himself by pulling the legs off of bugs in the weed-filled yard, and I preferred to spend my childhood trying to make a few dollars so we could eat something more than peanut butter sandwiches and stale saltine crackers.

The shower turns off and the girl emerges from the bathroom doorway in a puff of steam. I swallow hard because she looks more than half pretty when she's clean. She's wearing a bathrobe, the belt tied tight around her slender waist. She probably doesn't have shit for clothes to wear, and she sure as hell can't put on the vomit-soaked clothes she had on before.

But there's another problem more present on her mind. I'm lying on the only bed in the room, and I have no intention of giving up my spot.

"No clothes?" I ask.

"My bad. I didn't expect to travel across the country when I left my cardboard box this morning."

I shake my head and pull off my shirt, fighting off a laugh. Her wit annoys the piss out of Karson, but I like it. "Here, take this," I say, tossing the shirt into her lap. It'll be big on her, but it's better than that scratchy bathrobe.

"I have one other outfit in my backpack, but it stinks worse than the vomit ensemble. It's not easy to wash clothes when you're on the street," she says.

I gather her discarded clothes and find the backpack just inside the bathroom door. As I dig around for her extra outfit, my hand hits something small and square. It's a wallet. I pull it out and flip it open, reading the

name on her license. Tucked behind it is another license. It's expired by several years, but that's definitely her picture.

Leana Moore.

At least I now know the name of the intriguing little stranger. I return the wallet to the backpack and leave the bathroom before she sees me snooping.

"I'll go launder these," I say as I pass the bed.

As I reach for the door handle, her soft voice stops me. "Why are you being so nice to me?"

Really weird fucking question. I'm not being overly nice by giving her clothes to wear and not killing her . . . yet.

Instead of answering her, I slip on my shoes and leave the room.

I don't think she has the energy to make a run for it, but I still need to be cautious. I stop by Karson's room on my way down the hall and ask him to listen out for her. He's pissed, but he does as he's told and sits beside my door.

The on-site laundry room isn't hard to find. It's on the first floor, tucked away in an alcove off the lobby area. From the look of the dated machines, they cared more about the appearance of their entrance than the client amenities. I drop her clothes into a washer and spot a stain on my jeans. I don't need to sniff it to know what it is. I strip off my pants and toss them in as well, leaving me in nothing but my boxers. I don't worry that anyone will say something to me about it, because I don't have the most approachable face. Besides, it's late and the hotel seems fairly empty.

When I reach our hall, Karson is no longer seated by the door. He's either deserted his post or . . .

My breath catches in my throat. I was worried she might escape, but I hadn't considered what Karson might do to her if I wasn't there to stop him. I shouldn't care, but I do. I practically handed her to my brother on a silver fucking platter.

I pull the room key from the waistband of my boxer briefs and slide it into the slot. The light turns red, and I realize I've held it the wrong way in my panic. I turn it and the light blazes green. When I rush through the door, I'm able to breathe again. Leana is lying in the same position on the bed, wearing my black shirt instead of the robe. Her wet hair sticks to her skin and dampens the collar of my shirt. Her bright blue eyes stare at the television.

She turns her head and her brows furrow when she sees me in nothing more than underwear.

I answer her question before she can ask. “Decided to wash my jeans too.”

She nods and her attention returns to the television.

I knew my shirt would be big on her, but it practically swallows her whole. I’m struck again by how small she is. “How has a girl like you survived on the street?”

She shrugs. “I had no choice.”

She shifts onto her side and the collar of the T-shirt droops as her hair falls away from her neck. Greenish-yellow bruises stand out on her skin, wrapping around her throat like a fading noose. Someone has put this girl through hell.

“What are you running from?” I ask.

Her eyes drop and she readjusts, covering the bruises once more. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

I walk to the edge of the bed and pull back the covers, too tired to pry information from her sealed lips.

Her eyes go wide, and she shifts to look at me. “Aren’t you sleeping on the floor?”

I can’t hold back my laugh this time. Fuck no, I won’t sleep on the floor. I did enough of that growing up. We only had one bed in the house, and I let Karson have it. My dad had a permanent spot on the couch when he was home. When he wasn’t, I didn’t sleep there because it always smelled like sweat and piss.

“Not a chance,” I tell her as I get into bed. She tries to get out from beneath the covers, but I grab her arm and pull her down again. “No one is sleeping on the floor.”

“I’m not sleeping in bed with you!” She struggles in my grasp, but she doesn’t stand a chance against me.

I wrap my arm around her waist and haul her backward before forcing her down. She doesn’t realize what effect she has on me, and this struggle has only made it worse. If she knows what’s good for her, she’ll stop.

Because soon, I won’t be able to.

“You’re not leaving this bed, Leana.”

She quiets at the sound of her name, the will to fight evaporating from her eyes. “How do you know my name?”

I release her from my hold and turn onto my side, facing away from her so I won't be tempted. She won't try to leave again. "Go to sleep, wanderer."

She moves a bit, then places a pillow between us. A smile forces its way onto my face. If I wanted to take her, does she really think a pillow would stop me? I won't take her, though. I won't even touch her. She might feel too good or taste too sweet, and then I really won't be able to get rid of her. As tempting as she is, I refuse to give in.

I stay awake until she's snoring softly, then I allow myself to fall asleep.

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Chapter Eight

Leana

I wake up in bed with him. The tall one. The brick shithouse of a man. I don't even know how I fell asleep beside this hulking stranger. Probably because my body was so in need of sleep that it didn't matter if I was lying beside the devil himself, as long as I was in a fucking bed.

After getting a solid six hours on a memory foam mattress, I'm feeling a lot better too. The nausea has quieted to a whisper, so I can ignore it. I still have a slight headache, but it probably has more to do with dehydration than withdrawal. I still feel like shit, but less shitty. Functional, at least.

Which means I need to get the hell out of here.

I peer over the pillow separating my skin from his. He's on his back with his face turned toward me, and even though he's fast asleep, he's still imposing as hell. His muscles have been carved from marble, and I'm pretty sure his abs have abs. I picture him shirtless with an ax in his hand, hauling it over his shoulder and sending it into a block of wood with the ease of a hot knife through butter. Sweat slipping through the curves surrounding his pecs and . . .

And what the fuck is wrong with me?

He's not a sexy lumberjack making thirst traps for social media. He's the man holding me hostage, and I need to get the fuck away from him.

I quietly slip out of bed, careful not to wake the sleeping giant beside me. When I look around, I realize how fucked I am. My clothes—including the spare set in my bookbag—are in a laundry room somewhere in this hotel. I can't go out of the room like this, wearing only his oversized T-shirt

and a skimpy pair of panties. I can't call for help, either. Not when I was the idiot who stole the SUV that brought us here.

Jail isn't an alternative for me. Being crammed into a room with women who have done unspeakable things—and who might do unspeakable things to me—is just as bad as living with Mickey.

I'm stuck.

Instead of making my escape now, I'll have to wait for an opportune moment. One where I'm better prepared. And clothed. It's probably for the best, because as I reach the bathroom door, my legs threaten to buckle when a massive wave of nausea crashes over me. Lights spin in front of my eyes, and I grab the doorframe to stop my body from landing on the tile floor. A high whine pierces my ears.

Just as my grip loosens and I begin to fall forward, I'm wrapped in warmth and power. My head dips back and I see his face. His lips move within his beard, but I can't hear what he's saying. I blink until the fog begins to recede.

"You need to lie down." His voice comes from miles away, but it's getting closer.

He carries me to the bed and places me on top of the comforter before walking away. Moments later, he returns with a cool wash rag and places it on my forehead. I try to push his hands away. I don't want his help. This was a lesson I learned the hard way many years ago. Men don't help.

They hurt.

"Get the fuck off me," I mutter.

He walks away again and I close my eyes, thinking he's gotten the message, but he returns with a bottle of water from the mini fridge in the room. He sits on the edge of the bed and holds it out to me, and I take it because my body's needs outweigh my pride. I sit up and rip off the cap before guzzling the cold liquid.

His hand lurches forward and pulls the bottle from my grasp.

"What the fuck?" I say. "First you force feed me help, and now you're snatching it away. Make up your fucking mind."

"You'll just puke it up if you inhale it like that." He holds it toward me again but pulls it away when I reach for it. "Sip it."

I lean forward and snatch it from his hand, hating that he's probably right. Goddamn him.

Taking small gulps of water is a monumental task, but I manage to muster enough willpower to make it happen. Each icy gulp slides down my throat like a cold stone dropping into the empty well of my stomach. After a few sips, I force myself to stop, glad that I'm able to keep it down.

"How do you know so much about what I'm going through?" I ask as I screw the cap onto the bottle. "Are you a recovering addict or something?"

He shakes his head, opens his mouth, then decides to keep his secrets. It's probably best. The less we learn about each other, the better. I don't even know why I asked. I certainly don't give a shit.

When he gets to his feet again, I swallow hard. Against my will, my eyes glide to the massive erection at my eye level. It points toward his navel and nearly pokes from the top of his boxer briefs, but the thickness is what holds my attention. Disgustingly thick. Horrifyingly big. Fuck an ax. He could probably chop wood with *that* thing.

It would certainly split me in half, I think, and my cheeks blaze hot.

"Don't act like you've never seen a cock before," he says with a smirk, and I finally look away from his bulging crotch, embarrassed I've been caught staring.

"Most strangers don't make a habit of shoving their morning wood in my face, so you'll have to excuse my fucking surprise," I say. "Where are my clothes? I'd like to get dressed now."

He goes to the dresser against the wall and opens the top drawer. He pulls my clothes from inside and tosses them to me. I pull the fabric against my face and breathe in the fresh scent. Bright floral notes soothe my senses. A person can't understand the simple joy of clean clothes until they've gone without them, and I've been dirty for far too long.

"When did you get these from the laundry room?" I ask.

"I've been up for a couple of hours now."

Bullshit. I'm a light sleeper. If he'd left the room, I'd have heard it. "You were still sleeping when I got out of bed," I say.

"No, I was pretending to sleep when you got out of bed. I wanted to see what you'd do." He steps into his pants and buttons them, finally hiding the third leg. "I need that shirt."

I motion for him to turn around, but he only shakes his head. If he won't turn around and give me some privacy, I'll go to the bathroom. I put my feet on the floor, but before I can stand, his hands grip the hem of the shirt and

he lifts it over my head. As my arms lower to cover my breasts, the shirt comes off and I'm completely bare.

"What the hell?" I scream as I scramble to find my shirt. It's inside out, so I have to spend another mortifying thirty seconds righting it before I can cover my body. All while he's standing behind me, watching and laughing. I don't find any of this funny.

"If I wanted to see your tits, I'd have seen them by now," he says.

"Is that a threat?"

His shoulders lift in a shrug. "Maybe." He pulls his shirt over his torso, but it doesn't hide the muscles underneath. If anything, it accentuates them. "You need to learn to trust me a little."

I reach for my shorts, stand, and slide them over my ass. Fuck it. If he wants to look, he can look. I'm not playing games with him. "You're doing a piss-poor job of earning my trust if that's been your goal so far."

He grabs my backpack from the bathroom and tosses it onto the bed. I stuff my spare clothes inside and throw in the half-empty water bottle for good measure. I need to keep my strength up, and the first step will be hydrating my drug-hungry body.

He pulls his cell from his pocket, reads something, types a reply, and looks at me. "We need to get on the road, so do whatever you need to do in the bathroom and let's get out of here."

He's flipped a switch and he's back to being Mister Serious again. Joy.

"Where are we going, anyway?" I ask.

"Me and Karson are headed to California. You won't have to stick with us for the whole ride, though."

"Because you'll kill me before then?"

I'm not stupid. I've seen faces. I know at least one name. Now I know where they're going. I don't know what these men are up to, but it's probably illegal. I'm a risk to their operation.

He walks out the door without answering me, but that's all the answer I need.

Chapter Nine

Gentry

The calm we had in the hotel disappears the moment we meet Karson in the lobby. His scoff rubs us both the wrong way. My patience for Karson's antics wane by the day. Hell, by the minute.

My cock isn't hard anymore, but my balls still ache. I wanted to fuck the ever-loving hell out of her back at the hotel. I *still* do. But it would take more than a beautiful face and a nice pair of tits to get me to break my abstinence streak. The day I found my brother balls deep in my wife was the day I vowed to keep away from lying women.

My fucking hand is faithful, at least.

But I was tempted by her—*am* tempted—and the side-eyed glare she keeps throwing my way as we reach the SUV isn't helping. She's curious about me. I saw that lustful look in her eyes back in the room, and I see it again now. But let's not complicate things.

Karson tosses the keys to Leana, and she looks at me.

"Ass in seat, little thief," Karson says before I can respond.

As she gets in the driver's seat and pulls onto the road, I regret allowing her behind the wheel. My stomach knots up because of how she rides the damn shoulder, and it doesn't help that I chose to sit in the back seat. My eyes remain locked on my brother, though. Every time he gives her a side glance, I prepare to get between them. He wouldn't try to kill her while she's driving, though. He's not that stupid. Maybe it's a good thing her ass is behind the wheel.

Karson pulls his pistol from his waistband and starts flipping it in the air, catching it by the barrel or the grip as it somersaults into his palm. Leana eyes him, and every time her throat bobs when she swallows, I know she wants to say something. She shouldn't worry so much. In all the years Karson has played "catch" with his pistols, they've only gone off twice.

We were teens the first time it happened, and the bullet went through *my* fucking foot. Not the twerp spinning the damn thing. Mine. The second time he was playing his solo game of catch while we waited for my wife to finish dinner. He shattered the kitchen window. Even though she witnessed his regular displays of dumbassery, she still slept with him. I don't choose women very wisely, I guess.

Poor judgment on my part for forgiving him for all of his bullshit, too.

Forgiving him for fucking my wife was hard. I'm still not sure I believe he planned to kill her, but it makes more sense than the alternative. And I've had a long time to sit and think about it. I've also never known Karson to *like* anyone, including me.

"Can you stop?" Leana screeches, breaking me from my thoughts. She flinches as the pistol twists in the air and the barrel gets a bit too close for comfort.

"Nope." He sends it into the air again.

The smug satisfaction on his face pisses me off, so I lean over and snatch it away before it reaches his hands again. Unfortunately, this brings the barrel close to Leana's head again. She jerks the wheel with a squeal and sends the SUV bumping along the shoulder before straightening it out again.

"We're done playing around!" I yell, leaving no room for either of them to argue.

"Did your father not play catch with a ball like a normal person?" she says toward Karson, and I fight back a smirk.

I shake my head and meet her gaze in the rearview mirror. "No, *our* father didn't."

Her eyes dart between us as realization washes over her. "You're brothers?"

"Blood," Karson quips, tugging another pistol from his waistband and beginning his game again. A deep laugh rumbles from his chest and erupts from his mouth as he grabs the grip on his last throw and turns the barrel

toward Leana. His finger glides to the trigger and pulls it back before I can stop him.

Click.

The sound is almost lost beneath her scream. Her chest rises and falls with each ragged breath as fear grips her body in a chokehold. Karson's laughter grows louder and gains an edge that sets my hair on end.

Her eyes narrow and she whips the car to the side of the road, nearly sending me into the front seat when the tires grind to a stop. "Get out," she says. When we don't move, she raises her voice. "Get the *fuck* out!"

Her tone is potent enough to choke off Karson's laughter, and his mouth falls open from shock. No woman has yelled at us like that. Well, none that are still alive to talk about it.

Now I'm the one laughing. It's a low rumble of sound that I can't contain thanks to the sheer audacity of this girl. Her balls might be bigger than mine.

"You know what?" She snatches the keys from the ignition and throws them toward me. "Take the car. It's not even mine. Have a good life, Brothers Grimm." Her hand goes for the door handle.

I raise the pistol in my hand—the one that is very much loaded—and put it to the back of her soft blonde hair. "The Brothers Grimm were fucking scholars, so thanks." I push the barrel until her golden locks envelop the metal tip. "Now get your hand off the handle."

"Just kill her and get it over with," Karson says.

Her chest falls as the bravado fizzles out at the feel of my gun. The fear creeps back into her at my brother's words.

"I'd rather not," I say, "and if little miss here can behave herself, I won't have to."

"Fuck off," she mumbles, but I can still hear the bite in her voice. She's afraid, but she's also pissed. The hostility takes a detour to my dick.

I get out of the car, looping around the back and coming to a stop at the driver's side door. I whip it open and pull her from the seat. She writhes and tries to break free from my grasp, but I hold her against me until she's still.

"Watch your mouth," I growl in her ear. "Unless you're going to open your mouth and do something more useful with it, I'm kindly asking you to shut the fuck up and stop making this more complicated than it has to be."

The sweet scent of her panic rises to my nose, and I want nothing more than to press her against the side of the SUV and make something louder

than some muttered curses flow from her full lips. I turn her and pin her against the metal. My hand goes toward her throat, and she flinches at my touch. Holding her like this sends sunlight against the bruises on her neck. Bruises that look like a shadow crawling along her skin. The shadow of a hand. She doesn't need to tell me what she's running from now. I have a pretty good idea.

I drop my hand to her arm and open the back door, flicking the child locks before putting her onto the back seat and locking her inside. I'm disgusted by the way my stomach twists with a hint of sympathy for what she's been through. Assholes like me don't feel bad for others. We look out for ourselves, and that's it. I remind myself of that and swallow with gritted teeth, squashing the feelings like the meaningless bugs they are.

"I'm not in the mood for either of you," I growl as I sit in the driver's seat and throw the car in drive. We really don't have time for this bullshit.

Karson leans forward and turns on the radio. Music blares through the shitty speakers and for the fifth time, I reach over and silence them.

"The radio was literally invented for road trips," Karson snaps as he throws his back against the seat.

"This isn't a road trip, Karson. Road trips take you somewhere fun. It's business."

"You'd rather just listen to silence? That's fun for you?"

I shake my head before letting my gaze rise to the rearview mirror. Leana's blue eyes stare out the window, the rest of the car seemingly unworthy of her stark glare. Her hair clings to the thin sheen of sweat on her cheek. She doesn't need to sit there looking so bitchy. We've been more than fair with her. We took her car—correction, not even *her* car—and that's it. Well, we took her too, but we haven't hurt her. I've enjoyed our little distraction for the most part, and I plan to keep her with us until we get closer to a place I never thought I'd visit. Hollywood. Puke. A real rich place for two men who despise rich people.

I grip the steering wheel and sigh. "We need to find another car soon. We've been driving this one for a few days, and the cops are probably looking for it."

"Way ahead of you," Karson says with a satisfied smirk. "I found a matching SUV in the last hotel parking lot and swapped the plates. If any tag readers lock on, it won't show as stolen. This is a common car in a common color, so as long as we do that every few days, we'll stay ahead of

them. I guarantee the cops aren't hunting too hard for this hunk of junk anyway."

"What part of California are you heading to?" Leana asks, her eyes snapping to mine in the mirror.

Karson's head whips in my direction. "You told her where we're going? Are you fucking stupid, Gentry?"

"Hollywood," I tell her, ignoring Karson. "Where were you going? You were filthy and a thief, so you weren't heading home to visit Mommy and Daddy."

She scoffs. "Out of New York."

"What're you running from?" I ask again. I already know the answer, but I want to hear her say it.

"Nothing," she snaps, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Who the fuck *cares*, G?" Karson fiddles with his window, rolling it up and down in quick succession. Each time the glass leaves the seal at the top of the window, a roar of air vibrates the inside of the car. I use the controls beside me to raise his window and lock it. He mashes the button, getting more aggressive with every push. That incessant *click, click, click* begins to drive me nuts, and he knows it. He does shit just to make noise, I swear.

"Can you just fucking stop doing things?" I snap.

"I'm bored," Karson whines, drawing out the last word.

He sits up and looks behind his seat at Leana, and I regret taking away his toy when a feral smile crosses his lips. He unclips his seatbelt and climbs over the center console, something I could never do. I remain watchful as he drops onto the seat beside her. Karson's kind of a fucking pervert, and if I'm not touching her, I sure as fuck don't want him to lay a hand on her either.

She tugs her arms closer to her body and keeps her eyes pinned to the window. Karson stares at her. When that doesn't get the reaction he craves, he leans toward her and inhales a deep breath. It's really fucking creepy, and I don't fault Leana for what she does next.

Her arm pulls back, and she sends her palm into his nose with all the force she can muster. A crunch preludes a flurry of curse words roaring from Karson's mouth. I tighten my lips to keep from laughing. She did what I've wanted to do since our last gig.

"Fucking bitch," he snarls, yanking her toward him by her hair. He draws back a clenched fist, but she meets his gaze without flinching. She's

way too fucking calm about what he's going to do.

"Karson!" I shout, and the rage in my voice is enough to lower his arm.

"She fucking hit me! My nose is bleeding, for fuck's sake! I should shoot her in the face." Karson's hands fumble around his waistband, but I have both his pistols up front. He springs from the back seat and reaches for the gun on the dashboard, but I snatch it away.

"We're not doing this," I say as I tuck the pistol between my legs. "You deserved that for being a creep."

"You think that was creepy? I'll show you both what creepy really is." He grinds out the words through gritted teeth as he rips down the zipper of his fly. He's likely preparing to jerk off in the back seat.

"Wanderer, you have my permission to rip his dick off if it's out," I goad.

The sound of his zipper struggling back into place pierces the silence. "Wanderer? Nice nickname he gave you, thief," he snarls toward her as he leans over and grips her chin. "You're his good little pet, huh?" He throws her away from him and climbs into the front. "Fuck you, G. I'm your family. Is this how you treat family?"

I lift my chin. "Really going there, brother? Do you actually want me to answer that?" Karson didn't care about us being family when he gave me up for a slightly better deal, and he sure as fuck didn't care when he fucked my wife. He continues to show his lack of care as he recklessly bulldozes over every one of my hits.

Leana sits back and shakes out her hand, unfazed by the entire ordeal. Karson lifts his arm and uses the sleeve of his jacket to comfort his bleeding nose. Despite the anger radiating from beside and behind me, at least everyone is fucking silent for once. Maybe we can actually get some miles under our belt now.

I return my entire focus to the road and keep driving.

Chapter Ten

Leana

I don't utter a single word for the rest of the drive. My hand aches from the impact with Karson's stupid face, but it was worth it. They have a really weird relationship, and I have no interest in being in the middle of such hostility. They don't even seem like they like each other. How the hell do they travel together without someone winding up dead?

Gentry pulls into the parking lot of a hotel. It's slightly more run down than the one from last night, but it's still better than curling up beneath an overpass. They grab their duffle bags and start walking inside, and I'm left to press my face to the glass because the child locks are still engaged. Karson turns back and waves at me like an immature fucking child. Gentry turns around and takes a few long strides back to me. How kind of him to remember.

He opens the door, and I nearly face-plant onto the pavement. His powerful arms encase my body, saving me before I end up with road rash on my nose. He lifts me onto my unsteady feet and keeps his hand on my arm for longer than I'd like. I tug out of his grasp.

"You're welcome," he snaps.

Despite making it clear that I don't want him to touch me, his arm winds around my waist and guides me toward the automatic doors in front of the hotel. The glass parts as we approach, and an overpowering flowery scent rushes toward us. It smells like a Glade PlugIn exploded in here. Gentry motions to Karson, who heads to the front desk to secure our rooms. Hopefully three, because I don't want to room with either of them.

Karson returns with two sets of key cards in his hands.

Fuck.

We take the elevator to the fourth floor. Crusty flakes of dried blood flicker beneath Karson's nose with every exhale, and the stain on his sleeve has darkened to a rusty brown. He catches me eyeing it and throws a silent snarl my way that reads like a promise of retaliation.

We exit the elevator and find our side-by-side rooms. Karson turns to us with the key cards in his hand. "There were only single queen-sized beds available," he says.

"Enjoy sleeping together, boys." I reach for a card, hoping those two jackasses will room together, but Karson raises it above my head.

"We aren't leaving you alone, *thief*." He snarls the word with such veracity it becomes literal venom. "Pick who you'd rather shack up with for the night. Hint: don't pick me, because I will kill you and fuck your corpse." Karson releases a laugh that makes the hair on the back of my neck lift away from my skin.

Even if he hadn't just threatened me, there's no way I'd share a room with him. I take a step closer to Gentry, choosing the man who showed at least a hint of normalcy by caring for me when I was at my weakest. While I don't care for either of them, at least this one hesitates to take me out. Maybe earning his trust wouldn't be such a bad thing. It might even make escape easier.

Karson scoffs and tosses one of the keys to Gentry before unlocking his door and going into the room alone. If I'm lucky, he'll pull a David Carradine and hang himself while beating his dick in the closet. He seems like he'd be into some shit like that. I shouldn't wish death upon someone, but he's just so goddamn unlikable. He's as outwardly attractive as his brother, but his attitude turns him into a bridge troll with leprosy.

Gentry and I enter our generic three-star hotel room to a stiffness that makes me think the ghosts of businessmen past probably haunt the room. Gentry throws his bag onto the white comforter that covers the white sheets and white pillowcases. The only darkness comes from the mahogany headboard, screwed into the wall behind the mattress and reaching nearly to the floor. A single chair stands near the bed, but it looks uncomfortable, as if it's only there for show and isn't meant to be sat on. There isn't a couch in sight.

My shoulders drop. “I’m guessing there’s no way to get you to sleep on the floor, huh?”

“Not a chance.” He tugs off his shoes and walks to the bathroom.

I follow him to the door, and a low buzz breaks the stale silence as he flips on the overhead light. Instead of a shower-tub combo, there’s only a shower. Its glass door stands ajar, and my mouth waters at the prospect of cleaning myself two days in a row. Lathering my body with hotel soap when I don’t feel like I’m on death’s door is a luxury I crave.

“Go on,” he says, waving me toward the shower. He must have seen me salivating over it.

I slip past him and ease the door closed, dropping articles of clothing as I near the glass partition. When I turn the tap to hot, steam claws up the glass and fills the room. An exhaust fan sluggishly runs overhead, unable to keep up with the forming humidity. I close my eyes and suck in a breath of thick air. This is as close as I’ll ever get to a spa day, so I plan to make the most of it.

I step inside the shower and sigh as the hot water rushes over my skin. Despite the hotel’s lackluster accommodations, this showerhead puts out incredible pressure. As I tilt my head beneath the stream, the tiny jets massage my scalp and send a pleasurable shiver up my spine. It’s too bad it doesn’t come off the wall. I can’t remember the last time I made myself come, and this bad boy would have been nice to hold between my legs.

I can’t deny that I’m sexually frustrated, and as precarious as my situation is, having to look at a double dose of eye candy for days hasn’t helped. One is certifiable and the other is an enigma, but they’re both attractive as fuck.

I push away the rising ache between my legs and focus on washing my hair and body. My imagination isn’t my friend right now, and letting either man touch me isn’t an option. I can’t let my guard down.

I soak in the scalding stream of water for a little while longer before I get out and dry off with a scratchy towel. A robe hangs on the back of the door. I grab it, wrapping it around my body and tying it at the waist. My eyes roll to the back of my head at the thought of walking out in this. He’s seen me in less, but I don’t want to tempt him.

Or myself.

I don’t really have a choice, so I exit the bathroom and try to avoid his gaze as I cross to the bed. I don’t have to see his eyes to know they’re on

me, though. His dogged stare burns through the cheap terry cloth and sets my skin on fire. Before I'm reduced to ash, I need to get dressed. I reach for my bookbag, which I placed on the floor beside the bed, but it's not there.

"Looking for this?" He lifts my bag and jiggles it in the air. "I need to get a shower, but I don't trust you to stay put. You can stay in that robe until I get out, then I'll give your clothes back to you."

Running off while he showered hadn't crossed my mind, and I silently berate myself for allowing him to keep one step ahead of me. I don't argue with him, though. If I want to get on his good side, I'll need to be a little more compliant. This isn't the same as submitting out of fear—the way I survived under Mickey—so it doesn't bother me to give in a little for now.

He peels his eyes off me and goes to the bathroom to get ready for bed. I lie back on the mattress. The robe scratches at the backs of my thighs, and I wish I could take it off. I shouldn't complain—there are worse things out there than a shitty three-star robe—but I'm complaining.

I've nearly dozed off by the time Gentry emerges from the bathroom, but I'm wide awake when I see a massive statue of chiseled muscle standing shirtless in front of me again. His well-defined Adonis belt peeks from his waistband, and I consider using the tie from the robe to keep my jaw from hitting the floor. He tosses my bookbag at me, and it nearly collides with my face because I'm too busy gawking at perfection to catch it.

Forcing my eyes away from his body, I pull my spare clothes from the bag and start toward the bathroom. Before I can reach for the doorknob, his hand encircles my wrist, stopping me. Warmth radiates from his freshly showered body, and he smells like soap and sin.

"Get dressed in front of me," he says. "I liked it."

His low, sultry tone shoots straight to my pussy, and my panties would have melted if I had any on.

But I shake my head. My compliance has a limit.

"You gave Karson shit for being a creep and *that* is creepy," I say.

He chuckles, but he doesn't release my wrist. "Then I'm a creep."

I must be a creep too—or at least out of my mind—because I'm seriously considering offering an even trade. We can both get naked and dress in front of each other. Hell, maybe we can dress each other. With our teeth.

My vagina and I will need to have a talk later, because she is putting some really shitty ideas in my head. If I know what's good for me, I'll move away from him before I accidentally put his dick in my mouth.

Before I can move, he grips the tail of the tie around my waist and pulls. The scratchy fabric falls open, fully exposing my entire storefront. I grasp at the robe and pull it around me, dropping my bag in the process. With red cheeks, I scramble to snatch up my things and hurry into the bathroom, but he's on me before I can cover myself. He steps into me, and I flinch as he lifts my chin and examines my throat. The bruises are only whispers now, but they're still visible.

"Is this what you're running from?" His fingers leave my chin, and he engulfs the handprint with his grasp. "Who did this to you?"

I look away. "It's none of your business."

"It is my business when it could affect *my* business. I should know if it's someone I need to worry about."

I shiver when I remember Mickey's promise to find me. To kill me. But Gentry isn't asking because he's worried about *me*; his concern is for himself. If I want to earn his trust, this might not be a bad way to do that. Maybe it won't hurt to tell him.

"It's my fiancé," I whisper.

His hand drops from my throat and he takes the clothes from my hands and places them on the TV stand. "The only marks that should be on a woman are those made in a moment of pleasure. Did you like it when he wrapped his hand around your throat?"

I shake my head.

"Then he doesn't fucking deserve you." He grips my hand and pulls my ring from my finger. Instead of pocketing it or throwing it across the room, he slides it past his lips and swallows.

My eyes widen. "Did you really just do that? You couldn't toss it away like a normal person?"

"I'm the farthest thing from normal, wanderer." He pauses and shakes his head. "Actually, Karson is probably the farthest, but I'm just behind him."

"Karson didn't eat my ring," I mumble.

With a smirk, he slides the robe tie into my hand and starts toward the door. "Let's go wash our clothes."

“Like this?” I motion to my nearly naked body. “Can’t I get dressed first?”

His eyes rove down my body and light my cheeks on fire. “Yes, like that, and no, you can’t get dressed.”

I scoff. “I’m not running around this hotel in a robe.”

His big hand wraps around my waist and pulls my back against his body. A hard, thick mass presses against me, and I don’t need to look down to know what it is. I clench my thighs together. With a low chuckle, he puts a hand against my back and pushes me toward the door.

We exit the room and the flush in my cheeks creeps to my chest as we walk by a housekeeper. Her eyes widen and she pretends she doesn’t notice the shirtless man and the half-naked woman meandering the halls in the middle of the night. She doesn’t say anything, but I’m not sure I’d say jack shit to a man like Gentry, either.

We take the elevator to the first floor and find the laundry room near the fitness room. Gentry pulls me inside, and an automatic light flicks on. A chill runs through me, and my nipples poke against the thin fabric. I fold my arms over my chest to hide the diamond points before he notices. Thankfully, he’s busy putting the clothes into the washer.

“These shouldn’t take long,” he says as he starts the machine.

Great, what are we supposed to do until they’re done? Probably go back to the room. When I grip the handle to head back, he sneaks up behind me and puts his hand over mine.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“Back to the room?”

“There’s no point in going upstairs to come back in thirty minutes. I know you want to get out of that uncomfortable robe, but you could always take it off here.” He teases me by raising the robe’s hem up my thighs. The rough way his massive hands brush against my skin makes my stomach clench with need.

I slam my hands over his. “No, I just want my own clothes.”

His eyes fall to the washer, and the smirk that crosses his face goes right to the juncture between my legs. He places his hands at my waist and lifts me as if I’m made of air. I try to stop him, but each thrash is pointless. It’s like hitting a cement wall. He sets me on the washer, and the cold metal nips at the backs of my thighs because the robe has ridden up in the back.

“Fuck . . . off,” I say.

Instead of listening to my demand, he steps closer and spreads my legs with his body. His hands grip the robe and pull it away from my ass, and my bare lower half presses against the metal. The cool temperature begins to warm from the contact with my heat. He reaches behind me, adjusts something on the machine, and pulls me forward when he leans back. My swelling clit meets the metal as the vibrating machine trembles beneath me.

“How does that feel, wanderer?” he asks as I dig my nails into his bare shoulders.

The vibrations beneath me feel amazing, but the man pressed against me takes it to another level. I want to feel his skin against mine instead of this shitty robe.

As if reading my mind, he slips his hand between us and pulls the tie away. He parts the robe before pulling me against him again.

“*Fuck*,” I moan.

His hand snakes between us, and his fingers find my nipple. With an expert touch, he pinches, rubs, and twists the hardened point. His other hand moves to my ass, and he rocks me on the corner of the washer. Each movement teases my clit, adding and removing pressure and vibrations until my thighs quiver. His fingers squeeze my ass in time with his hand working my nipple, and the multitude of differing sensations spins my mind in a whirlwind of pleasure. I’m unable to think about how wrong this is when everything he does to me feels so good.

“Come, little wanderer,” he growls as my nails bury themselves in his muscles. He lowers his mouth to my neck, his teeth teasing my skin.

My hips rock on their own, my pussy gliding with ease through the wetness he’s brought out of me. His rock-hard dick brushes against the side of my calf. I imagine sliding that inside me, and it’s almost enough to push me over the edge.

But I can’t. It’s not enough. I’m desperate for release at this point, desperate enough to lower my walls and throw all caution to the wind, but the vibrations just aren’t strong enough. “I need more,” I pant. “Help me come.”

His fingers move toward my clit, and I lean back a little, giving him just enough room to touch me. The machine’s vibrations travel through his fingertips, and he creates the pressure and movement I need. I lean back more, bracing myself by putting my arms behind me. He leans forward and

captures my nipple in his mouth, nipping and sucking and swirling his tongue.

I spot the housekeeper outside the glass doors, and our eyes meet. Instead of feeling ashamed, I feel a sense of pride. This insanely massive and attractive man is currently working to get me off, and I'm almost glad someone was here to witness it. It's real. This moment is real.

I come.

Hard.

The orgasm rips through me, and I have to bury my mouth against his sweat-coated skin to keep from drawing attention to us as I cry out. My hands tighten their hold as every muscle in my body sings with relief, and he doesn't stop until he's sure he's drawn out every ounce of pleasure.

When the wave recedes, he lifts me from the washer and sets me on shaking legs. I've left a large wet spot on the machine, but I don't care. I'm not ashamed of the proof of what I've just experienced. His erection strains against his fly, and I expect him to take me.

At this point, I would let him.

Instead, he takes the robe tie and fastens it around my waist, concealing my body once more. With a sinful smirk, he looks down at me, and I almost rip off my robe and climb him like a tree.

But I take a deep breath and try to remember my morals. The man did abduct me, after all. I let him make me come, but I don't have to return the favor.

"Let's get back to the room so you can get dressed, wanderer," he says.

As I follow him to the elevator, I make a decision I'm sure I'll regret.

Instead of trying to escape, I'll stick with them a while longer.

Karson wants to kill me, but Gentry won't let that happen. I know that for certain after what just happened between us. If I remain under his protective wing, I'm untouchable.

Chapter Eleven

Gentry

Getting into bed with a hard-on that just wouldn't go down was tough, and trying to sleep with her curled up on her side beside me seems like a monumental task. She relaxed the moment her head hit the pillow, and she didn't even place a barrier between us. I almost wish she had.

Her soft, repetitive snores should make my skin crawl, but I like hearing them because it means she's sleeping well. Her smile should piss me off, but I like seeing it because it means she's content. Not even my wife affected me this way. This has to stop.

While I didn't break my vow of abstinence by making her come, it was too fucking close for comfort. I'm really trying to behave myself because I don't want this to become a thing. I'm on a mission. My focus has to remain on making enough money to get out from under George, and nothing should distract me from that. And that's exactly what Leana is. A walking, breathing, long-legged distraction who makes me do things—makes me hunger for things—that are better left alone.

Maybe I just need to rub one out and get it out of my system.

I turn onto my side and pull the covers away from her body so I can see every curve. The bathroom light reflects off her soft blonde hair. Her lips part as she breathes through her mouth. Her back isn't warmer than any other part of her body, but it's so close that it burns me.

I get ballsy and rub my hand up the back of her thigh with a ghost of my usual touch. She stirs and nestles into me, the warmth of her pussy pressing

against my leg. My feathery touch rises upward and grips her ass. A moan leaves her parted lips, and she opens her eyes, her lids heavy with sleep.

“Are you watching me?” she mutters. “Creepy.”

I move my hand over her hip and pull her against me, expecting her to jerk away when she feels my erection against her ass. She doesn't. Instead, she creates a slight arch in her back and pushes against it.

I'm fucked.

I need her to tell me no because then I can stop. If she gives in, if she welcomes me inside her, I won't have the strength to turn her down. I have to put distance between us, and I know which topic will do exactly that.

“Tell me about this shit-bag fiancé of yours,” I say.

Her body stiffens, and I almost sigh with relief. Now she'll shut me out again. Now she'll move away from me and put a pillow between us.

She relaxes. “Odd thing to talk about when you've got your hard dick pressed into my ass, but okay. Though there's not much to tell. I ran away from home when I was eighteen, and he found me at a bus station. Once he got me hooked on opiates, I was trapped.”

Well, that backfired. I didn't expect her to open up like this.

“I'd wanted to leave for a long time,” she continues, “but taking that first step was hard. The bruises you saw were the last straw. He'd beaten me plenty of times, but that was the first time I thought he'd kill me.”

Knowing a man put hands on her was enough to piss me off, but I see red when I think about some asshole repeatedly abusing her. Instead of pushing her away as I intended, I wrap my arm around her and bring her closer.

“I'm sorry you went through that,” I say against the back of her head.

“My turn,” she says through a yawn. “How did you know I was going through withdrawal?”

I've begun a game I have no desire to play. I've never shared my upbringing with anyone, and I don't like the idea of peeling back the curtain and giving her a glimpse of my pain. My father's struggle with addiction and his subsequent death aren't tokens I freely hand out, even if they could buy my way between her legs.

When I don't answer, she huffs like a moody teenager and tries to pull away. I tighten my hold until she settles.

“How old are you, wanderer?” I ask.

“Twenty-four.”

She's so fucking young. "I'm forty-six. Old enough to be your damn father."

She scoffs. "My daddy doesn't look like you, sir."

Pushed forward by the sass on her tongue, the word "sir" rolls past her sweet lips and travels straight to my dick. People have called me that while begging for their lives, but it never had any effect on me. When she says it, all hope of behaving goes out the window.

I roll her onto her back and push her legs apart so I can get between them. When I lean over her, she wraps her legs around my waist. Her blue eyes stare up at me as I raise her shirt and grip her stunning breasts with my hands. I like the idea of closing my lips around her pink nipples, so I lower my head and take one of the stiff peaks into my mouth. She moans as I nip the sensitive skin and tease it with my tongue. I'm lost in the sound of her voice.

I snake my hand between us and rub her clit. Her eyes roll back, her back arches, and I can't wait another moment to feel how wet she is. My fingers slide backward and plunge into her, and a whimper leaves her throat as I explore such a tight space.

"If you can't handle my fingers, you won't be able to handle my cock." I put a third finger inside her and her back raises from the bed, her chest colliding with mine. "You sure you want to try this?"

I don't know why I ask. I haven't cared about the pain my dick caused other women. When they consented to me, they consented to the pain that comes from someone as big as me. Like everything else, I'm learning that my little wanderer is new territory.

And I want to explore.

My mouth waters for her, and while I won't force myself inside her pussy, I'll probably beg her to put her pretty mouth on my cock to ease the ache I feel for her.

She nods, but I need to hear it. I need to hear that she knows what I'll do to her pussy and that she wants it. I grip her chin, forcing her to meet my eyes.

"Tell me. You haven't been shy about using your words so far, so tell me you want me to rip you in two."

"I want it," she whispers.

"Good girl."

That's all the answer I need, but I'll have to work her up to it first. I lean weight onto my arm and pin her to the bed so I can fuck her with my fingers. When her back rests on the mattress and stays there, when she writhes from pleasure instead of pain, I know she's almost ready for me.

Her whimpers shift to moans, rising to a volume that can probably be heard on the adjacent floors. I throw my hand over her mouth, silencing her. I don't need shit from Karson tomorrow. If he hears these sounds, he'll know what I've been up to and his desire to get rid of her will become a much bigger problem.

"Shh, wanderer."

Her nostrils flare above my hand, her eyes widening with fear. She reacts like someone who's been silenced like this before. I take my hand from her mouth and stick my fingers inside instead. The moans escape through the gaps, but they're muffled. Her tongue slides against my fingertips, and my cock twitches against my boxers.

I pull my fingers from her mouth and pussy, and her body responds to the emptiness by curling against my dick. I tug down the front of my boxers and rest my cock against her wet slit.

Even though I've worked her up to it and she's dripping for me, I still worry I'll be too much for her. I lean down and spit on her pussy.

"Oh, wanderer, this is going to hurt," I growl, "but you can handle me, can't you?"

After she nods, I grip myself and lean back to line myself up with her entrance, then I push my head inside her. She whimpers as her pussy grips my cock, sucking me inside the small space.

I'm not the type to make love to a woman, but I'll give her a few gentle strokes before I show her the full extent of my strength. I pull back and ease in, pushing until I reach her end. She screams out when I pull back and plunge into her once more, and I'll be forced to cover her mouth again if she can't keep quiet.

I stop thrusting, leaving myself buried inside her. I fist her hair and crane her neck. "If you can't keep quiet, I won't make you come."

She nods her understanding.

"Now call me sir."

"Yes, sir," she pants as I push into her again.

Yeah, I fucking like that.

I lean over her and fuck her with the selfishness that's pent up inside me. The selfishness that makes me who I am. I widen my stance, which spreads her open and stretches the muscles in her hips. She whimpers as I wrap my arm around her body and press her flush against my skin. I fuck her mercilessly. Her hands grip the sheets for support as I drill her pussy until I can't tell if her sounds hold more pleasure or pain. They're a package deal with a cock like mine.

So I don't stop.

"You feel so fucking good. I feel the flinch of your body every time I bottom out inside you. I'm hurting you, aren't I?"

Her fingers dig into my lower arm, raking my skin and causing pain of her own making. "Yes, sir."

"I told you I'd rip you in half, didn't I, wanderer?" I growl as I grip her hip bones so I can hold her in place and fuck her harder. She screams out, but I don't silence her this time. I'm lost in the feeling of her swollen clit against my pelvis. Between every thrust, I grind against her until she tightens around me, clamping down with so much force that I'm sure my cock will bear bruises tomorrow.

"Good fucking girl. Come for me. Come with my cock buried in your little pussy."

An orgasm rushes through her in a wave of pleasure that surrounds my dick. I tighten my grip on her hips to steady her core so I can fuck her through it.

"I'm coming, sir," she says through a fading moan, and it's enough to bring me to the edge of release.

"I'm going to fill you, and when I do, I'm going to keep my come inside you all night. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," she pants.

I empty myself inside her, coming harder than I have in years. I don't care if she's on birth control. The thought of breeding her, of keeping her bred for eternity, squeezes every drop from my balls. When I've finished, she looks at me as if she expects me to let her go, but I don't. I keep my cock inside her, with her throbbing clit resting against my pelvis. I like the warm squeeze of her come-filled pussy. Before my dick can soften, I turn her onto her side, lie beside her, and pull her against me. I stuff myself inside her, preventing even a drop of come from slipping out of her.

“You look so beautiful filled with my come.” I brush the sweat-coated hair from her cheek. “But now we have a problem.”

Confusion flashes across her face.

“If you have any fantasies about running off the first chance you get, get them out of your head. I’m real overprotective of what belongs to me.” I turn her face and look into her eyes. She needs to understand the weight of what I say next. “For the remainder of this night, keep my cock inside you. And for the remainder of this trip, you and your pussy are mine.”

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Chapter Twelve

Karson

I heard everything. The *tap, tap, tap* of the mattress slamming against the wall. Her moans. How the fuck did that even happen? Since when has Gentry ever been more fuckable than *me*? He's a miserable grouch, for fuck's sake. She's already caused problems, but now she's a serious threat to our operation. I need to talk to Gentry about this and make sure his mind is still in the game.

I knock on their door as I pass it and hope it annoys them as much as their late-night fuck fest annoyed me.

Dicks.

The lobby welcomes me with that god-awful flowery scent the moment I get off the elevator. My bag's strap digs into my shoulder, and I swap it to my other arm as I make my way to the sad breakfast on offer—crumbling muffins, dry-ass cookies, and coffee. Very nutritious. I make myself a cup of coffee and take a sip. At least it tastes okay.

I carry the foam cup to the SUV, whip open the passenger side door, and plop down, waiting for them to appear. He'll lie to my face. I already feel it.

And what about her? Who the hell has a consensual fuck with their abductor, anyway? Those sounds were definitely fucking consensual. I might have a few screws loose, but she's not rocking with a full toolkit, either. Gentry's fucking her because she's attractive—mouthy, obnoxious, and a total bitch, but she's beautiful despite her circumstances. But what does she see in him?

I don't know why I give a fuck—I didn't stake a claim on her or anything—but I still bubble with rage at the thought of him sinking into her. Maybe I should take a piece of her for myself. After all, Gentry didn't stake a claim, either. Yeah, he fucked her, but unless he says she belongs to him, she's fair fucking game.

I scoff and sit back, setting my bag at my feet. The whir of the automatic door breaks the stifling silence, and I look back and see them emerging from the hotel. She's dressed in some really lame clothes she must have bought at the gift shop. Correction, my brother would have bought them. The sweatpants say "Pennsylvania" down the leg, and "Pursue Your Happiness" blazes across the chest of her T-shirt. Guess they found the time to do a little shopping between all the gross fucking.

My eyes drop to the tense movement in her hips. She's almost limping. Did this mother fucker really . . . Heat creeps into my cheeks. I don't want him to see me react, so I try to let it go, even as she gets in the back seat with an obvious flinch when she sits.

Gentry slides into the driver's seat. "Sleep well?" he asks me.

If I had my gun, I'd have shot him for the casual line of questioning. No. I did not sleep at all while listening to their zoo noises. "Fine. You?" I lie.

"Yeah, slept fine."

That's it. That's all he says. I'm already pissed that some pussy is fucking up our job, but I'm irate that he's also lying to me now. His own flesh and blood! We don't betray each other.

The moment the thought floats across my mind, I taste the bitter sting of hypocrisy on my tongue. I betrayed Gentry in the worst ways. I fucked his wife. I gave him up for less prison time. In my defense, I planned to kill his wife while I was inside her, but he showed up before I could finish the job. And at least one of us had to do prison time, and he knew he could handle it better than me. I mean, look at him.

Gentry puts the car in drive, and I pull a some chips from my bag. I eat with my mouth open because I know it grinds his gears. His fingers wind around the steering wheel a little tighter with each satisfying crunch and smack. As his muscles flex in his lower arm, I notice the claw marks and shake my head.

"What the hell is the matter with you?" Gentry asks.

"You two fucked."

He readjusts in his seat and tries to lie. “We did not.”

I scoff. “Yeah, I suppose she tore up your forearms while you two were jumping on the bed. That would also explain the headboard banging against the wall, right? And then she fell and hurt herself, which is why she was moaning.”

“Shut the fuck up,” he mutters.

“What was that song we learned when we were kids?” I bounce two fingers near his face. “Two little monkeys jumping on the bed. One fell off and—”

“I said shut the fuck up!” He swats my hand away and clenches his jaw. “Hate to tell you, Karson, but what I do—or *who* I do—is none of your fucking business.”

“It’s my business when we’re supposed to be working.”

The little thief leans forward and sticks her pretty nose where it doesn’t belong. “What is it that you guys do, exactly?”

“Don’t ask that,” my brother and I say in near unison. At least we’re on the same page about *something*.

“You can’t keep it from me forever,” she says. “How do you plan to do your super-secret job when I’m with you everywhere you go?”

“Yeah, how?” I turn to G, and his lips tighten. “You gonna leave her in the car like a dog?”

“Fuck off, Karson!” His voice rises to an explosive level for such an enclosed area, and it silences both me and the girl.

While he’s still riled up, I reach out and flip on the radio. He roars out an inhuman sound before smashing the off button, leaving only the remnants of his scream behind.

I turn to the girl. “You know, thief, I have no clue what part of this made you spread your legs.” I gesture toward Gentry.

She shrugs and sits back, dropping her gaze. I hate how easily she gives up today. I’m about to hop into the back and see how long it takes to make her squirm when Gentry’s phone rings. The ringtone lets us know who’s calling, and I see the hesitation in Gentry’s muscles. He doesn’t want to answer it, but we always have to answer it. We’re *always* on call.

“Fuck,” he says under his breath before tugging his cell from his pocket and accepting the call. “Hey.”

I lean closer and try to listen in, but he hits the volume button down so I can’t. Or maybe it’s so she can’t. Either way, I’m left out of the loop.

“We’re still heading to the other gig,” Gentry says into the phone. “You sure you want us to take a . . . detour?” He’s making this call sound the least homicidal as possible and it’s tripping him up. “We’re almost in Ohio.” Gentry nods as he listens to our boss. “Alright. We’ll be there.” He hangs up and sighs.

“Still think you can ‘figure it out’?” I quip.

He glances in the rearview mirror and tightens his grip on the wheel.

“I don’t care what you two do,” the thief says from the back. “There’s no need to try to shield me. I’m not an innocent little girl, you know. In case you forgot how I got this vehicle.”

“Theft isn’t even on the same playing field as what we do,” I say, and it’s almost laughable that she thinks she’s reached our level. If she saw what we do for a living, she’d probably shit her panties.

“Do you deal drugs? Guns? Fucking organs?”

Growing tired of her stupid guessing game, I give an exasperated sigh and ignore her.

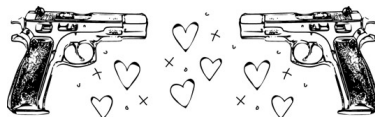
“You really aren’t going to tell me what you guys do?” she continues. She’s like a yappy little dog, and it’s wearing on my last nerve. “What are you guys like . . . hitmen or something?” She lets out a chuckle, and I’ve had enough.

My head whips toward her and my lip curls. “You’d be wise to stop asking questions, thief.”

“My name’s Leana,” she says with an inflated puff of her ample chest.

“Okay, thief.”

Gentry throws us both a stare—first me, and then her through the mirror—and we both shut up. His dark eyes are as lifeless as his personality, and this motherfucker *still* got inside her. I hate that my brain keeps harping on it, but it bugs the piss out of me that Gentry is getting laid and I’m not. We’ll have to change that, whether they like it or not.



Leana

HEARING them talk about a detour fills me with nervous energy that makes my leg shake, but a twinge of pain zaps my insides with every movement. I ache from the inside out, and I burn where he ripped through me when he first pushed inside me. I feel the pain in every movement of my hips from where his hands left bruises and the strain in the muscles as he spread me. My insides feel rearranged, like he pushed my uterus into my fucking chest. I've never been fucked like that.

And I hate how much I liked it.

I don't know what came over me last night. First I let him make me come in the laundry room, then I let him fuck me. I want to blame it entirely on my urge to get off, but I can't. The first orgasm should have cleared my head. Instead, it only made me want more. It can't happen again, though. Especially not when he still plans to get rid of me.

He said he would "figure it out" when Karson asked how they'd do their job while I'm tagging along. That can only mean one thing, and I didn't escape Mickey so I could fuck my future murderer. No matter how hard Gentry made me come, no matter how good he felt inside me, I have to keep my legs closed. If he fucks me like that again, I won't be able to run straight. I thought maybe he'd changed his mind about killing me, but I guess men never change.

Before I take off, I need to know what these men do for work. The not knowing will keep me up at night, even though it's probably best to keep my nose out of it. Whatever it is, I'm certain it's illegal. As long as it doesn't involve children, I can probably look past it, but they don't seem to care that I don't give a fuck if they rob or rip people off. Who am I to judge? Maybe if I can convince them I'm not the straight-and-narrow type, they'll rethink murdering me and I won't have to leave. I don't exactly look forward to struggling on the street again after spending a few nights in a bed—and having multiple mind-blowing orgasms.

We take the next exit, making what seems like more than a little detour.

Karson whips out his knife and drags the tip down the length of his finger. A bright line of blood springs to the surface. He rolls down the window and moves his fingers in the wind with an innocent playfulness. Crimson beads strike the glass and spread along the length of the window beside my head as the wind blows it toward the back of the car. When he tugs his hand back inside, he lifts it above his head and sends a few drops

into his mouth before putting his finger up to his lips. He sucks, his cheeks hollowing as he holds pressure to his wound with his tongue.

What the fuck is wrong with this dude? His brother seems so normal.

Normal people don't carjack and abduct strangers, I remind myself.

Gentry doesn't acknowledge his brother's behavior. Maybe Karson's one of those people who stops their attention-seeking behaviors if you don't react. Unfortunately, I struggle to keep my mouth closed as I watch his sadistic enjoyment of his own blood. I mean, he's really going to town on that finger. Total fucking weirdo.

We drive until we get off the highway in the middle of Nowheresville, Ohio, and there isn't a motel or hotel in sight. Gentry pulls to the side of the road and punches something into his phone, and Karson busies himself by pressing his nails into the cut on his finger, opening it again.

"We'll have to camp out until it gets later in the evening," Gentry says.

So much for enjoying a bed every night.

He drives to a campground and parks in the back of the lot, then he takes a hundred out of his wallet and hands it to me. "Go get a site," he says.

"Yes, sir," I say, and the corners of his lips tremble as he tries to avoid smiling at me.

"Buy a bundle of wood too!" Karson yells as he gets out and loops around the SUV.

I make my way to the tiny building, and a bell chimes overhead as I enter. A young woman sits behind the desk, a visor holding back her blonde hair.

"Checking in?"

"Well, no. I'm hoping there might be a site available for a walk-in tonight?"

The woman types on a yellowed keyboard that sounds sticky with every press of the keys. "Tuesdays are usually good for walk-ins," she says as her eyes scan the screen. "We have availability. Let me just get the paperwork." She leans over and pulls out a paper with three identical segments. She marks the areas for me to fill out my information, and marks three X's, one on the bottom of each.

After I fill the paper with false info, I slide it back to her.

She tears the top one off, writes D34, and marks tomorrow's date in bold marker. "Place this on the dash." She hands it to me. "That will be

thirty-five dollars.”

Karson passes the building’s window with a bundle of wood in his arms. “Oh, and a bundle of wood, please.”

“That will be forty dollars, then.”

I hand over the cash and she pulls out a money box to make change. She’s short five dollars. She looks around, the cash curling in her hand as my foot taps with growing nerves. “Just keep it, thank you!” I tell her, taking what change she has.

I walk back to the car and hand Gentry the paper for the dashboard. Karson loads the wood into the back as I walk by him. “Useful for something, at least,” he mumbles as I pass.

I get in the back seat, and Karson slams the back hatch and gets in the passenger seat. We pull onto maintained dirt roads that loop around lines of campsites. Gentry pulls to a stop in section D at pole thirty-four, and I glance around at the campers and tents surrounding our spot.

“We don’t have camping gear,” I say.

“It’s just a place to chill until late tonight,” Gentry gets out, grabs the wood from the back, and lights his cigarette before stacking the wood in the firepit.

As I sit against the rock on the outskirts of the site and watch them work, a heavy tunnel of dread surrounds me. Mickey’s words echo in my mind. I’ve put a lot of ground between us, but he swore he’d find me. I still feel the heaviness of his anger, even from this far away, the thread tethering me to our history trying to dissolve in front of me. He likely knows I’ve skipped town by now. Waiting for me to come crawling on my hands and knees has backfired, and he’s not one to lick his wounds. If he manages to track me down, he’ll have no chance against Gentry, but Karson would probably hand me over on a silver platter.

Fucking Karson.

“Wanderer!” Gentry raises his voice. “Did you hear anything I said?”

I shake my head.

He steps away from the fire and stands in front of me, dropping his voice. “What’s on your mind?”

My head keeps shaking until my eyes drop to the grass.

“Is it about what you’re running from?”

I scoff. “I’ll tell you what I was thinking about when you tell me what you guys do for work.”

“Fair.”

Karson appears beside me like some psychotically ill ghost. He puffs on a cigarette before drawing it from his lips and offering it to me.

I want to say no because I shouldn't accept anything he offers me, but the temptation overpowers me. I take the cigarette from his fingers and bring it to my mouth, inhaling a deep cloud of nicotine. My throat tightens, and I cough as I exhale.

“A criminal should be able to handle a cigarette, don't you think?” he quips, and the way he says it makes me want to stab the lit end into his eye.

“You don't know anything about me.”

“Enlighten me, thief. You sure love to ask *us* questions.”

“And you don't answer them either.”

Karson graces me with a sadistic smile and rubs a hand down his face. “Mouthy. Real mouthy.” He steps in front of me, and my glare rides up to his crazed eyes. His fingers twitch at his side, and I can see what he's thinking. And I don't like it.

“Karson!” Gentry shouts, stepping between us.

“He can't protect you forever, thief,” he says over Gentry's shoulder before stepping away.

The fire casts an orange glow on Gentry's face, accentuating each curve of his muscles and dancing in his dark eyes. A cigarette dangles from his lips as he maneuvers the logs, sending sparks and crackles from the wood. He stands upright and wipes his hands on his jeans.

“Come with me,” he says, juggling the cigarette between his lips as he speaks.

“Of course,” Karson clips.

I push off the rock and follow Gentry into the woods. For all I know, he could be leading me to my death, so why am I so unafraid? How have I put so much blind trust into this handsome stranger? Maybe he's about to tell me to get lost, and that strikes more fear into my heart than the thought of his hands wrapping around my throat. It seems more possible, at least.

Once we're far enough away from the campsite, Gentry stops and turns to face me. “Be careful with my brother,” he says. I meet his eyes in the darkness. “He's dangerous. Well, I'm dangerous too, but not like him. Watch your pretty mouth with him before you end up without a tongue.”

“You sound afraid of him.”

Gentry shakes his head and looks back toward our campsite. "I'm not scared of Karson. Being aware doesn't mean I'm fearful. I'm just being smart. Karson is like a rabid dog. And he's as predictable as one too. He's the type of person who can greet you with one hand while stabbing you in the neck with the other."

The words leaving his lips carry a heavy truth, and I can barely nod under that weight.

"Brave to call me sir earlier," he adds. A grin crosses his face, and I'm struck by the realization that he only really smiles when we're alone.

He steps toward me, and the look in his eyes makes me take a step back. My back hits a towering oak, but he keeps moving forward until I feel like I'm sandwiched between two trees. He leans closer and my breath catches in my chest.

"It makes me want to fuck your mouth when that word rolls across your tongue," he says near my lips. "As soon as you say 'yes, sir,' I want to drop you to your knees and bury my cock in your throat until I feel you beg for a breath."

He leans closer and kisses me. His tongue finds mine, and a soft whimper leaves my throat. Alarm bells spring to life in my gut, but they're silenced by the overpowering beat of my galloping heart.

Gentry feels so incredibly wrong. I've let him inside me and despite knowing it's a terrible idea, despite promising myself the last time was the last time, I want nothing more than to let him inside me again.

"Yes, *sir*," I whisper against his mouth.

He pushes me to my knees, and his hand works open his jeans until his cock stands in front of my face. His hand winds through my hair, gripping my head to hold it where he wants it as he lines himself up at my lips and shoves past them. I feel like a snake who has to unhinge its jaw to take its next meal. He drives his hips forward, pushing until he's filled my throat completely.

I suck air through my nostrils as his cock plugs my airway. I can't move away from him because my back still presses against the trunk of the oak tree. My hands grip the front of his jeans, smacking at his thigh as I think about the poor medical examiner discovering the trauma to my fucking throat. I never in my life thought I would actually die in the face of my own insult and choke on a dick, but here I am, choking away.

I'm fucking stupid for wanting this, but the feral groan that leaves his lips creates a deep, wet heat between my legs.

"You have no idea the beast you tempt, wanderer," he growls. "It takes so much restraint to let you draw a breath when I only want to feel your throat clamping down on my dick."

He finally pulls back so I can breathe, and I pant and wipe the drool from my chin.

"Still want to test my willpower?" he asks, balling my hair in his fist again. His fingertips graze my neck and send a pleasurable shiver through my core. "It takes me longer to come than you can hold your breath."

The way he looks down at me with such dominance is enough to make me pliable mush in his powerful hands. "Yes . . . sir . . ." I choke out.

Before I even finish the last word, he's back in my mouth, fucking my throat with renewed energy. My throat tenses around him as he gives a final push toward the farthest depths of my mouth.

"Ah, ah," he says, twirling my hair in his hand. "Feeling you squeeze around me like that gets me too close, and I don't want to come down that pretty throat of yours. I want to fill you." He tugs me to my feet and pulls me into him. His mouth moves to my ear, and his beard caresses the side of my neck. "I like you stuffed with my come. I like the thought of breeding you."

He lifts my arms and pins me against the bark of the tree. My chest rises to meet his as my pulse quickens. With a swift and powerful motion, he spins me around, tucking my ass into the curve of his pelvis. He grips my wrists with one hand and presses my palms against the rough bark as his other hand rides down my body. He hooks the waistband of my sweatpants and yanks them down.

"I can't take you again," I whimper as his cock heats the skin of my ass.

"Of course you can. Don't you want to be a good girl and take my cock?" Encouragement and seduction collide and saturate his words. Not even the painful reminder between my legs can overpower the persuasion in that dark, gravelly voice. He sounds like he knows what's best for me, and I want to listen.

"Yes, sir," I whimper.

The moment the words leave my lips, he pushes inside me, sliding his way to my core. I grip the wood, sending chunks of flaky bark to our feet. He's firm but gentle, selfish as he grips my bruised hip but kind as he eases

forward until he bottoms out inside me. His mouth drops toward my ear and praises me with a pleasure-laced growl.

“That’s my good girl.”

His hand leaves my hip and detours to the growing heat between my legs. He rubs along my slick slit, his touch battling the pain, rivaling it with brute strength and tenacity. It sends pleasure through my entire body, blanketing my skin with warmth against the cool night air. His fingertips stroke my clit, back and forth, and each swipe leaves me clenching the tree for dear life.

“You’re going to come, aren’t you?” he asks.

“Yes, sir,” I whimper.

“I want to fill you. I want to breed you. I’m going to come deep inside you, coat every inch of you,” he says with a groan, “but first, I want to feel you coming around my dick.”

His words speak directly to my clit, and I come. My body drops against the wood, and my moans gain a mind of their own as they erupt from my mouth and blend with the sounds of the forest.

“I’m coming, wanderer,” he groans as his hips dig into my ass and he buries himself deeper inside me. He twitches within me as he unloads his pleasure with a low rumble that vibrates my chest.

He stays inside me until he finally softens, then he pulls out of me and turns me to face him. A growl leaves his throat at the sight of his come dripping down my thigh. His fingers glide up my pale skin, gathering his come and pushing it back inside me.

“If you’re on birth control, don’t tell me. Let me imagine that every load I fill you with carries the risk of breeding you.”

Thank fuck I’m on the implant, because I have no interest in bringing a child into my shitty situation. I’ve kicked my addiction to opiates, but it seems I’m doomed to always find myself hooked on something that isn’t good for me. This time, his name is Gentry.

Chapter Thirteen

Gentry

We're back on the road a few hours later, on our way to a hit. Karson was in a mood when we returned to the campsite. I told him he could take the lead on this hit to try to cheer him up, and it seems to have worked. He's keeping quiet and has stopped his brooding and glaring. It's a short-term solution to a bigger problem, and I need to find the permanent fix. Logically, that's getting rid of Leana.

There has to be a way to keep her that doesn't piss off Karson. I just haven't figured it out yet.

I debated telling Leana what we do so she'd understand why it's so important to stay in the car while we work, but I don't know how she'll take it. Probably not as well as she takes my dick.

We reach the bottom of the driveway and tuck the car into the woods. The man in the house on top of the hill betrayed our boss in the worst kind of way. He acted as an informant to cover his own ass, and now George wants him to pay in blood. Because George wants him to suffer as much as possible, he also gave the go ahead to let Karson off his leash. A professional crew will come in to clean up our mess.

I'm more interested in getting the job done and securing a payday. I don't enjoy murdering as much as I used to. It lost its shine when I turned it into a full-time job, which is often what happens when someone shifts their hobby into a business. Karson still enjoys it, but he gets so carried away. His reckless abandon is a risk. He doesn't consider how his actions might get us caught, so I have to do the thinking for the both of us. It's exhausting.

I turn to Leana before we exit the car. She's asleep in the back, curled up on her side, and I consider letting her stay that way in the hopes that she'll remain knocked out while we do our job. I decide against it. Part of me hopes she might try to escape while we're occupied. That would get rid of so many problems.

"Hey," I say as I shake her awake.

Her eyes blink open, and she sits up and looks around.

"We've gotta take care of something. I need you to stay in the car."

She nods her head and closes her eyes again. She seems more than happy to go back to sleep, so maybe I'm worrying for nothing.

Karson pulls me aside, and he doesn't look as sure about this plan. "Do you really think she'll stay put?"

I shrug my shoulders and start toward the house.

"What's gotten into you, G?" he asks when he catches up. "You know we need to get rid of her, and you know it should have happened before we took her to a fucking job with us. You're not only gambling with your freedom. You're gambling with mine."

I stop and turn to face him. How fucking dare he be such a raging hypocrite. "You gamble with our freedom every time we do a fucking job, so I don't want to hear it. Or have you forgotten about the jizz jar?"

He rolls his eyes and throws his hands in the air. "It's not the same thing, and you know it. I don't like this, and I want you to promise me something. If she doesn't stay put in that car, if she sticks her nose where it doesn't belong, I get to handle her."

I don't like this, but I don't see another way to shut him up. "Fine. If she's dumb enough to let her curiosity get the better of her, you can do whatever you want with her."

He nods and turns for the house, but I don't like the smug smile that springs onto his face.

I grab his arm and turn him to face me. "I have one condition. If she's gone when we get back, we consider it settled and we don't go after her."

"You don't get it, do you?" he says. "She's not going anywhere. Maybe you don't see the way she looks at you now, but I do. She's got it bad for you, G. And I'm starting to think you might have it bad for her too."

"Bullshit."

"Oh, really? So you wouldn't mind if I borrowed her for a night? Hell, that might make it worth keeping her around." Karson waits for my answer,

knowing he's called my bluff. Of course I don't want to share her, but if he knows that, it will only paint a bigger target on her back.

"Do whatever you want. Good luck getting her to agree to spending a night with you, though."

"Who said she had to agree?"

I've had enough of this conversation, so I walk away before my fist finds its way to his mouth. We have a job to do, and I'm ready to get it over with.

Getting into the house is easy enough. The only security camera on the property faces the front. It's easy to skirt, and we find the back door unlocked. What a moron. It's not a large house, and Karson finds the target fast asleep in his king-size bed.

While he handles the asshole, I start my search for payment. I find a safe in the study, tucked away in a closet behind a stack of classical music records. What a pretentious fucking collection.

Screams echo from the room across the hall. "Ask him what the code is before you kill him!" I yell.

My brother repeats the question, but the man merely wails in response. I slam my fist against the safe and go to the bedroom to see what type of torture Karson has cooked up today. The man is in a pile on the ground, and both Achilles tendons have been severed. Karson stands over him, flipping the knife and catching the handle. The man's hands claw forward as he struggles to drag himself toward the door, but Karson halts his progress by placing his boot on his limp foot. He looks like a cat toying with a mouse by stepping on its tail.

"What's the safe code?" I ask again, leaning toward the man's bruised face.

"Fuck you," he snarls.

I bring my foot down on his hand, grinding the heel of my boot until I hear the satisfying cracks. He screams as his only remaining useful limb paws at my leg.

"Goddamn it!" he squeals. "Your boss knows why I did what I did. He acts like he wouldn't do what he could to keep his ass out of prison too!"

"It doesn't matter what our boss would or wouldn't do because he's not the one who was dumb enough to get caught," I say. "Now, what's the code to your fucking safe?"

His wide eyes rise to mine with a ridiculous amount of defiance for a man in this predicament. “You’re going to kill me anyway. Why would I give you anything more than my fucking life?”

Karson leaps onto the man’s back and straddles him. He grips a fistful of hair and pulls back his head. “Because if you tell us, I’ll leave you looking good *enough* that your family can have an open casket at your service. Don’t you want them to see this ugly mug one last time?” he asks through a laugh.

The man strains to hold himself up with his good hand. “I’m not . . . giving . . . you anything,” he grinds out.

“Alright,” Carson says with a sweet lilt to his words.

Which means he’s going to—

A visceral scream cuts the air as Carson puts the knife to the man’s cheek and skins him from his mouth to his eye. The flap comes off with a squelch, and he holds it in front of him. Red, raw muscle glistens beneath his eye socket, and I’ll admit it brings back good memories.

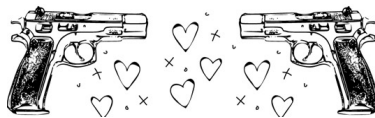
The man pants out the code, and I have to give it to Carson. He has a way with these idiots.

“See how easy that was?” Carson asks. He balls up the flap of skin and shoves it into the man’s mouth.

I turn to leave but the rip of flesh behind me stops my feet from moving. When I face them again, I find that Carson has slit his throat. “Goddamn it, Carson! Let me try the fucking code first!”

“You don’t have to yell,” he says, but he uses the gaping neck like a puppet as he speaks. The gasping, gurgling man doesn’t have long, and that’s a mercy I’m surprised Carson afforded him.

All in all, the hit has gone well. And I didn’t even have to make good on my promise to Carson.



Leana

I SHOULD HAVE STAYED in the car. When I heard the screams as I approached the house, I regretted my decision to be a nosy bitch, but I still

crept closer. Now I'm inside the house. I'm almost certain they've murdered someone, but I can't stop my feet from taking me toward the source of those screams.

I reach the doorway, and my wide eyes lock on Karson as he releases a man's head and it thumps to the ground. A greedy excitement casts a shadow over his eyes, and the snarl of his lip freezes my soul. The mutilated body doesn't affect me. The blood doesn't bother me. But that look on Karson's face when he sees me is enough to make me regret my curiosity.

"I told you she wouldn't stay in the car," Karson says to Gentry as he rises to his feet. He doesn't seem angry, which unsettles me. He should be pissed, but he seems almost happy that I've fucked up so royally. He licks up the length of the blade and turns his attention back to me. "Now the fun can really begin."

Gentry curses under his breath. "Run!" he says as Karson rushes for me.

My heart thumps a painful rhythm against my chest as I rip open the front door and take off into the night. My head whips from side to side as I try to gather the lay of the land, but aside from the woods, I see nowhere to run.

"Little thief?" Karson's voice calls behind me. The high, taunting sound breaks through my fear and spurs me forward.

My feet stomp with a muted thud across the grass until I reach the edge of the forest. Running over twigs and leaf litter will be anything but quiet, but I don't have another choice. Branches whip at my face, sides, and ankles. I risk a glance over my shoulder, and my heart stops beating when my eyes land on the ominous black shadow on my heels. He almost dances as he pursues me, as if this is all one big game to him. My near-exploding heart doesn't think it's a game.

The toe of my shoe snags on a root snaking across the path, and I fly forward. As the ground comes toward me, I push my arms forward and bear the brunt of the impact in my wrists. I try to kick off the ground, digging the toes of my shoes into the earth to gain traction, but arms wrap around me before I can find my feet.

Karson has me.

He's over me, pressing his weight into me. No matter how much I flail, I can't move him. My lungs beg for air, but I can't draw a full breath beneath him. I'm drowning.

“Naughty little thief,” he whispers near my ear. “When we say stay in the car, it’s because we’re doing something you can’t unsee. You’ve always been a liability, but now you’re a goddamn threat. Do you know what that means?”

“Please, Karson. I won’t say anything!” Tears stream down my face because I know exactly what that means, and Gentry is nowhere in sight. There’s nothing to stop him from ending me right here.

“Only the dead don’t speak,” he says. He brings his knife to my throat, and each panicked beat of my heart pushes my pulse against the cold steel. “But I want to feel what my brother has felt. What’s made him so . . . weak. Lower your pants.”

With the knife keeping me under his control, I don’t have a choice. I search for a reason to deter him from what he plans to do as I pull my pants past my ass. “Gentry had sex with me at the camp! He came inside me.”

Karson’s sadistic laugh rattles me to my core. “I don’t care whose come is inside you as long as mine follows. Besides, nothing turns me on more than a kill, and filled or not, your cunt is much better than my hand.”

I drop my chest to the grass again and give up. Maybe he’ll let me live if I don’t fight him.

Karson pushes inside me with a groan. He has some kind of piercing that rips through me with different sensations I’ve never felt. I dig my hands into the ground, gripping the soft earth as he fucks me like a man who still fully intends to kill me after. My tears don’t derail him in the slightest. If anything, they seem to fuel him.

“Fuck, little thief. Now I know why my brother likes you.” He fucks me harder, faster, removing the knife from my throat so he can place his hands on the ground for leverage. A groan leaves his mouth, and I can tell he’s getting closer.

“Please, Karson, Gentry is going to be pissed.”

“I don’t give a fuck what Gentry will do or think when I’m balls deep in a cunt like yours.” He grinds me into the ground.

Something catches my eye—the glint of moonlight reflecting from the blade beneath his palm. I rip it from his grasp and blindly stab behind me, jabbing until he finally lets out a scream. The sound he makes turns my blood to ice. It isn’t a sound born of pain.

It’s a sound born of intense pleasure.

He comes with the tip of the blade in his fucking thigh. An animalistic groan claws from deep in his gut as he sits back, and I scurry out from beneath him.

Gentry's heavy footfalls sound behind me. When he sees that I'm alive, his chest falls with a moment of relief, but then he takes in the rest of the situation.

My pants past my ass.

His brother on his knees, wiggling the blade of his knife in an almost pleasurable way.

The tears cutting a track through the dirt on my face.

Gentry is on me in a moment. The heat of his anger emanates from his skin and pours into me. He pulls me against him, pulling my pants up with his free hand.

"You didn't?" He snarls the question at Karson.

"Sure fucking did. Decided to give her a chance to convince me to keep her alive." He tugs the knife tip from his thigh. "Then she fucking stabbed me."

"You didn't," he says to me, soft and low.

I nod and rest my head on his chest.

"I decided to let her ass live." He gets to his feet. "For now."

I don't understand him. And I don't trust him.

Gentry steadies me on my feet before walking to Karson. With little effort, he lands a disgustingly hard punch in Karson's gut. "I told you not to touch her," he snarls before ramming another punch beneath his ribcage. I can taste the earthy tone of his anger on my tongue.

Karson smirks. "No, you told me to do what I want. And that was what I fucking wanted."

"Get out of my sight," Gentry commands, shaking out his fist.

"I'm not—"

"Now!" Gentry shouts, raising a pistol from behind his back and aiming it at Karson.

Karson throws his hands up. "Fine, don't get your panties in a wad," he says as he holds a hand to his thigh and takes off for the car.

Gentry turns his attention to me. His hands brush my wet, dirty hair from my face. His fingers sweep over my body, and I feel him everywhere. He's trying to see if I'm okay. He sits on the ground and drags me onto his lap. His strong arms wrap around me. "I didn't think he'd—I thought I'd

find you dead. Not beneath him.” He raises my chin. “I can’t believe you stabbed him, wanderer. My brave girl.”

His buttery-soft words push away the fear and pain coursing through my body. I drop into him, smelling the familiar scent of his shirt.

“You’re okay,” he soothes, his big hand rubbing up and down my back until I stop crying.

Until I stop feeling the guilt from his brother’s assault.

I hate that I enjoyed the feeling of his piercing, because I hate *him*. I hate that I enjoyed the thrill of being hunted. I hate that I didn’t fight harder because it started to feel good. What the fuck is wrong with me?

“Why didn’t you wait in the car?” Gentry asks. “When a man like me tells you to stay in the car, you stay in the fucking car.”

“I’m sorry,” I whisper.

“You walked into something you can’t walk out of. And I *know* I need to get rid of you, I do. But I can’t. I don’t know if Karson will, and that’s even more of a reason for *me* to take you out, because *he* enjoys the pain and punishment. He’d enjoy killing you. But against everything I believe in, against all the rules I’ve laid out, I can’t get rid of you, wanderer. I don’t want to.” He takes a deep breath. “Welcome to the fucking business.”

I sense the lack of permanence in his voice. There’s no finality. “For now?” I ask.

He leans in and kisses me, but he doesn’t answer the question. Instead, he grips my arm with one hand and the waistband of my pants with the other. “I don’t want his come inside you.” He slips my pants down to my thighs and brings his lips close to mine. “Push it out.”

I don’t argue, because I also don’t want Karson’s come inside me. I lean back on my heels and squat, using Gentry’s arm for support. I bear down as if I’m going to pee, and Karson’s come drips onto the ground. When I’ve voided every drop, I stand, pull up my pants, and follow Gentry to the car.

What a horrible fucking night. I learned more about myself than I ever wanted to. A deep seed of disgust takes root in my stomach and branches into my veins. I should be more bothered by the gory murder scene and Karson’s following assault. My legs should itch to beat a path away from these psychopaths. Instead, I want to run toward them. With them.

When Gentry welcomed me to the business, I didn’t feel an ounce of fear or trepidation. For the first time in a long time, I only felt like I belonged.

What does this say about me?

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Chapter Fourteen

Karson

I understand what has Gentry wound so tightly now. Sinking inside her certainly changed my outlook on things. I find myself looking for reasons to keep her as we drive through the night and put some road between us and the mess we left behind.

Slitting her throat is still a viable option, but maybe I don't have to do it immediately.

My abdomen hurts, and a wave of pain races through my core with every inhale. The pain in my gut is hardly a deterrent. I like it, and even though I should feel bad for what I've done, I don't. I've never felt bad about the pain I inflict on others. It's part of my diagnosis. I *wish* I felt some semblance of guilt so I wouldn't do it again, though.

We pull into a hotel parking lot, and Gentry ushers the little thief inside to get our rooms. He won't leave her alone with me. Not now that I've tasted the delicious haze of panic as I forced my way inside her. Just thinking about it gets me excited for the next time, and there will be a next time.

She hasn't spoken to me since we started driving again. Not a single word. But I get it. I took her against her will when I couldn't quiet the ache in my cock after such a glorious murder. Homicide sends a rush of hormones through my body, and coming after such an act gives me an indescribable release. Usually it's in my hand, but her cunt presented a much better prospect.

Yeah, I understand why Gentry acts like a stupid fuck because of her. I could lose myself inside her too, so I have to be careful to keep my mind on the prize. We can't both be dumb now, can we?

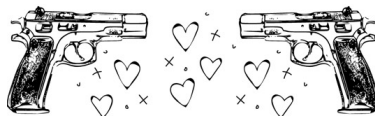
I suck in a deep breath and enjoy the sharp sear of pain rising into my chest. It should piss me off that he got in a few punches because I did what we agreed to, but I can't find the fucks to give. And he *did* agree to it. He even said he didn't care if I used her a little, but I guess we both know that's a lie now. The anguish was written all over his face when he saw that I'd played with his new toy. He'll need to build a bridge and get the fuck over it. Our piece of shit father didn't teach us much, but he always told us to share our toys.

My hand goes to the center console, and I pull out the pack of smokes tucked inside. I light one and watch the hotel entrance. I understand why they left me in the car while they went to secure the rooms—I'm the one covered in blood—but that doesn't mean I have to like it. This isn't a tricycle and I'm not the third goddamn wheel.

Gentry knocks on the car window and motions for me to follow them. I put out my cigarette, throw both duffle bags onto my shoulders, and head toward the back entrance. When we get to our floor and the elevator opens, Gentry throws the key card at me.

"Your room is on the next floor up, because fuck you," he says.

I drop his bag on the floor, and they leave me to ride up to the next floor alone. I don't miss the backward glance the thief gives me, though. I have a feeling that sexy piece of ass is going to rip us apart if we're not careful.



Gentry

THEY HAD three rooms—two of them on the same floor—but I made the decision that was best for everyone. I need to keep Leana close, and she didn't argue when I chose two rooms, so I feel better about that. There was no way I wanted to be anywhere near Karson, though. Not after what I walked up on.

Guilt eats away at me because I didn't get to them sooner. I can't run as fast as Karson, and a knee injury from my time in prison slowed me down further. But that's not entirely true. Guilt mostly eats away at me because I was relieved he'd fucked her instead of killing her. I expected to find her dead, and my red-hot anger cooled to a simmer when I saw she was alive. Used, yeah, but fucking alive.

I pull her toward me when we get inside our hotel room, but she flinches at my touch. She probably fears me after learning what we are. What we do. I loved how she looked at me before learning why the Kursicki brothers are "Kursed."

I replay the look I saw on her face when she spotted the dead man—eyes wide with shock—but her reaction wasn't what I expected from someone who just walked in on a grisly murder. Her head had cocked with an almost curious tilt.

I replay my galloping heart when I heard Karson's pleasure-laced scream—a sound I feared had come from a kill. She wasn't as freaked out about his assault as I thought she would be, either.

This girl glows with a gray hue around her.

And I'm fucking obsessed.

What switch is broken in her little head? She might be more like us than she realizes.

"I wish you had stayed in the car," I say.

She swallows. "I needed to know what you guys did, and you wouldn't tell me." Her voice is a low whisper, and I almost can't make out the words.

"I wasn't hiding it from you for *my* safety. I wanted to let you go in the end, but I knew there'd be no hope for you if you knew what we did. Now I have to figure out how to argue my point with Karson."

At the mention of his name, she looks away from me.

"Did he hurt you?" I ask.

She shakes her head. "No, not like I expected him to."

He's so fucking lucky he didn't hurt her, because I'd have to hurt him much worse if he had. But Karson will want her again after this. She's got a target between her legs.

I fist her hair and bring her lips close to mine. "Even if he fucks you, you're still mine, wanderer."

"Yes, sir," she says, and it hardens my dick in an instant. I don't want to intrude on her body any more than she's already experienced, though. She's

been through enough. I turn for the bed, but she grips my arm and holds me in place.

"I'm not a piece of glass," she whispers. "Do you think your brother was the first person to take that from me? I didn't shatter then, and I won't shatter now."

"Your fiancé?" I ask.

"It doesn't matter who it was. I just don't want you to treat me like something fragile."

If she doesn't want me to handle her with kid gloves, I won't. "Get in the shower, wanderer."

She doesn't argue because I'm sure she wants to rid herself of the memory between her legs. The steam welcomes me inside, and I strip off my clothes and join her. Hot water flows down my neck and back, soothing my tense muscles.

I brush the water-darkened strands of blonde hair from her face and pull her naked body against mine. I'll admit, I'm feeling some kind of way toward her, and I hate that she's become an obsession for me. As much as I'd love to push inside her right now, I'd rather put her above myself. "I want to make you feel good," I growl against her mouth. "My good girl."

I lift her, and her legs wrap around my waist. My cock moves through her slit, but I don't push inside her. I remove the showerhead from its cradle, and her eyes fall to the gleaming mass of silver in my hand. I put space between us, leaning her against the wall so the water can rain down in a direct stream on her swollen clit.

"Gentry," she begs. "Please."

"Tell me. Tell me what you want. Use that mouth I love."

"I want to come, sir." She knows I'll do just about anything if she calls me that.

I draw the stream closer to her clit and her fingers dig into my flesh. She throws her head back, those sexy lips spreading as she lets out a deep moan that draws her abdomen tight. Her heels dig into my back as she comes.

Screams of pain have always been music to my ears. The only songs I enjoyed. But now my favorite songs come in the form of those sounds that erupt from her mouth as she comes for me. It's fucking beautiful.

But as selfless as I am about wanting to make her come without fucking her, I selfishly need to fill her. This intense, animalistic desire to overpower Karson's come by filling her with mine won't be denied.

I carry her to the bed, grabbing a towel on the way, which I lay beneath her before I drop her onto it. “I need to come, and you know where I want to spill my load, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir,” she says with a nod.

I scoot closer and tilt her hips upward, and she keeps herself in that position, with her thighs hooked around mine. I stroke myself against her warm, slick slit. She moans as my fingers graze her clit with every pass over my dick. The thought of filling her little pussy at this angle pushes me closer. I lift her hips a little more and put the head of my cock to her entrance.

“I’m going to come,” I groan. I stroke myself until I explode, unleashing my load directly inside her. I lean over her with a growl, keeping her hips raised. “Stay like this, my wanderer. Let my come drip to the back of your pussy and coat your cervix. Let me breed you, even when I can’t bury myself inside you.”

“Gentry,” she moans as she keeps her hips tilted against my spent dick.

She’d have let me fuck her, let me bury myself inside her, but I wanted to show her I have more restraint than my psycho brother. That I can be her safe space. She may not be fragile, but if she needs to break, she can do so in my arms.

I lay beside her, finally releasing her hips and tugging her thigh over my legs as I brush my hand through her hair. “I’ll always protect you, but you’ll have to accept me for the killer I am. The man who can make you feel so fucking good after causing the ultimate pain to someone else. Can you do that, wanderer?”

“Yes,” she whispers as she cozies up to my body.

It feels so foreign to me. I didn’t even cuddle with my wife like this. I get the feeling this girl will rip me open and rearrange my insides until she finds some semblance of a heart.

And I’ll let her.

Chapter Fifteen

Leana

We're on the way to California for all of two hours before Gentry's phone rings again. He sighs and pulls it out. The stern voice screaming into his ear is loud enough to rise above the road noise, but I can't make out what the caller says. Whatever it is, it has Gentry's hand tightening on the wheel.

"You heard what?" Gentry says, his tone remaining stern as his eyes leap to Karson's. "No, I—"

The voice rises to a higher octave, and the words that slip through send a bolt of ice water through my veins.

Get rid of her.

Job to do.

I feel it in my bones. I'm fucked. Instead of convincing them to let me live, it's now in the hands of a faceless entity.

"I'll fucking handle it," Gentry says. He ends the call, and his angry eyes leap to his brother, completely ignoring the road. "Did you tell George about Leana?"

Karson scoffs and throws his foot onto the dash. "Why does it matter how George found out? We never should have kept her this long, anyway."

My heart gallops in my chest. Did Karson really turn me in? What kind of dick move is that? I'm the one who should have turned their fucking asses in, particularly that royal cunt in the passenger seat who assaulted me and murdered a man in front of my eyes.

Gentry pulls into the lot of an abandoned gas station. Woods have nearly overtaken the building, and the sign above the front door has rusted to unreadability. Gentry reaches down and removes his pistol from his waistband.

Karson looks back at me with a devilish grin. "If you're going to do it, you shouldn't do it in here. Let's chase her first."

Gentry aims down the sights, pointing the barrel on his brother instead of me.

A normal person would panic at this point, but Karson merely rolls his eyes and tosses his hands in the air. "Really?" he asks. "You'd kill me over a piece of ass? A dope whore?"

Gentry growls and leans into Karson, grabbing him by the collar of his shirt and pressing the barrel against his temple. I rub the back of my head, remembering that feeling against my scalp.

"I'm going to kill you because you went above my head," Gentry says through gritted teeth. "You're fucking with *my* business. He's *my* boss, not yours. He gives the orders, but I run shit the way I want to, not how *you* want to run it. You want to run things again? Go face the executioner on your own."

"Fuck you, G," Karson sneers, ripping his shirt to tug out of Gentry's grasp.

"I should have killed you after the stunt you pulled last night."

"What? The little assault on your pet?" A gross smile crosses Karson's lips. "She fucking liked it."

Shame blooms in my gut because he's not entirely wrong.

Gentry scoffs. "I know what she likes, and what I do to her doesn't get me stabbed in the thigh."

Karson puts his hand to his chin. "It's kind of like how your wife liked how I fucked her too."

Gentry punches the gun butt into the side of Karson's head. In the same motion, he pulls Karson's knife from his belt and holds it to Karson's throat. "I should have let them kill you."

"Why didn't you?" Karson laughs and leans into the blade until a slender trickle of blood slithers down his neck.

Gentry shakes his head and lowers the knife. "Fix this," he snarls, throwing the phone into Karson's lap. "You fucked it up, so you can fix it. Tell him it's done."

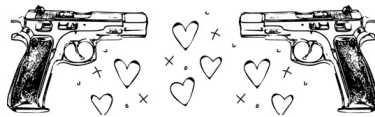
“He’ll find out it’s not and then we’ll all be in a load of shit.”

“If anyone tries to kill her, they’ll have to go through me. That includes you.”

Something swells in my chest as he chooses me over his piece of shit brother. The choice can’t be that difficult, though. I’d choose syphilis over Karson.

“You really think you can handle George? Not just him, but his men too?” Karson sits up taller. “You’ve always been the level-headed one between the two of us, always the responsible, cautious killer, so why the fuck are you throwing it all out the window for her?”

I don’t know if I’m ready to hear the answer.



Gentry

MY EYES HYPER-FOCUS on the heartbeat pounding a steady rhythm in the artery in his neck. It would be so easy to end him. I just need to send the blade across that jumpy bit of skin, and then life would be better. He betrayed me, yet again, and I shouldn’t even be surprised by it anymore. It’s so fucking normal for him.

He’s not wrong, though, which infuriates me. I’ve always been the responsible one. Even when we were younger, I made sure we picked targets that wouldn’t draw too much attention. I made sure not a bit of evidence was left at the scenes. Leana is making me throw away the saying I coined when we were kids. *No one’s Kursed but us*. Bringing a third person into a business like this triples our risk of getting caught. That’s just basic mathematics.

But I want the risk.

She is *my* responsibility. She’s *mine*.

And now she’s marked for death. Officially. Fucking Karson.

I get out of the SUV and get into the back seat with her. Her big eyes look up at me, and I try my damndest to keep a brave face. Karson twists in his seat and stares, and I can almost hear him wishing for a bowl of popcorn.

“Easiest way would be asphyxiation, but if you can’t bear to drain the breath from her body, try her blood.” He tosses me his knife, and I catch it.

She shakes her head, scooting backward until her spine connects with the door. I don’t want to do this, but I don’t see another option. If George gets his hands on her, he’ll torture her, then he’ll kill me when I try to stop him. I can offer her a swift death.

I grab her ankles and rip her toward me so I can lean over her. She’s crying, hands pushing at me as I flip open the blade and push it against her throat.

“Why’d you let us in the car?” I ask. It’s the same pleading tone I used when I asked her why she got out of the car at the last hit.

“Gentry, don’t,” she pleads.

“Don’t,” I snarl. “Don’t try to plead with me because you think I have a heart.” Despite my words, her voice has reached the bit of beating tissue in my chest. If I don’t hurry and silence her, I won’t have the willpower to finish the job.

With the blade against her throat, I lose sight of myself.

Some people lose themselves inside a mental labyrinth when they need to escape a situation that is too painful to experience, but that’s not what I do. I follow a red mist of rage into the depths, going until I find myself hovering over a scene that feeds my inner demons. I watch the murder unfold in front of my mind’s eye like a movie, committing it to memory so I can replay it as many times as I want. The playback moves past the boring parts and slows to a near standstill when it gets good. Like the moment their last breath arcs from their lips.

This is what I can offer Leana—a place where she can live in my mind forever.

“Please, sir,” she whispers as the pressure on her neck increases. The moment she says that, the cold killer thaws.

I can’t do it.

I sit up on my knees and toss the knife to Karson. “Tell them it’s done and make it believable,” I say, pointing at the phone. He better, because that cold killer will happily come for him instead.

“You want me to call George and lie?” Karson says. “That’s a death sentence.”

I lean back and look him in the eye. “If anything happens to Leana, it’s a death sentence, so you’re fucked either way. You can run from George, or

you can run from me. Pick your goddamn poison and drink up.”

Karson grips the phone and exits the car. Instead of making the call, he paces back and forth, scratching his head and muttering to himself. He’s flustered, and I’m glad. He deserves every ounce of hell he brought on himself when he ran his big mouth.

I scoot closer to Leana and wrap my arm around her, and I’m surprised when she doesn’t pull away. “I’m sorry, wanderer,” I say.

“Why are you apologizing?” she whispers against my chest. “You didn’t kill me.”

That’s exactly why I’m apologizing.

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Chapter Sixteen

Karson

I look around the wooded area and cram the phone into my pocket. “Fuck, fuck, fuck.”

Gentry and Leana have been listening from the open door, but now that I’ve failed to make the call, Gentry decides to get out of the SUV and rub it in. “That doesn’t sound like you’re fixing the problem you caused.”

“We need to kill her,” I say.

“I told you. You’ll have to go through me to—”

“Stop posturing. We won’t really kill her. We just have to make her look dead.”

“There’s no way that will work,” she says.

Gravel scatters beneath my feet with every step I take toward the mouthy thief. I lean into her face and grit my teeth. “Make it work.”

She doesn’t even bat an eye. She just shrugs her shoulders and says, “I failed theater courses two years in a row. It. Won’t. Work.”

I flip open my blade and go for her throat, but Gentry rushes between us. I’ve had enough of this bullshit. “Gentry, we have no fucking choice. George will want proof of the little thief’s demise. If she doesn’t want to play dead, we have to do what we have to do.”

Gentry looks between us. The smug, self-assured look on her face has my hands itching to wrap around her throat and squeeze until something pops. She enjoys a blissful ignorance we’ve never known. She doesn’t understand that Gentry and I live in a kill-or-be-killed world. We’ve broken the code of our universe by allowing her to stick with us for as long as she

has, and now it's time to set things right. If she won't give in and go with my scheme, I'll have to fix this shit myself, Gentry be damned.

"What's it going to be, you two? Fake or real death?"

Leana drops to the ground with a dramatic huff. "Get it over with," she says before lying back with her tongue sticking out and eyes rolling back in her head. It's the least convincing fake death I've ever fucking seen, and now I understand why she failed theater class.

I climb on top of her. If we're going to do this, it has to be believable.

"Get off her, Karson," Gentry says as he grabs my arms.

I rip out of his grasp. "No, Gentry. You'd pose her all nice, as if you just strangled the life out of her, but I plan to do this shit right." I pin her arms beneath my legs and look up at Gentry. "Get down here and choke out your sweet little 'wanderer.'"

"Excuse me, what?" she asks, trying to wiggle free.

"Fuck no!" Gentry shouts.

"Now, Gentry. I need you to trust me."

"I haven't trusted you in a very long time," he says as he drops to his knees. "You just keep fucking shit up."

I smirk at him. He may not trust me, but he doesn't have a choice right now.

"No, no, wait!" Leana says before Gentry's big fucking hands wrap around her throat and squeeze. She flails beneath me, bucking her hips against my crotch as she struggles. It gets me hard, and as red spreads from her throat to her face, it feels like I've got a rebar rod in my pants. Spit gathers on her lips in a foamy spew of panic at the prospect of death. Her hands claw at his. He looks down at her with a glassy stare that I know too well. He's enjoying it, even if he doesn't want to do it.

Even if he'd never admit it.

She strains more violently beneath me, and I groan as she grazes my dick. Her lashes flutter, her struggle wanes to a flop, and Gentry rips his hands away from her.

"What . . . the . . . fuck," she pants. "And why is your dick hard?" she asks me. Her gaze shifts to Gentry, and she lets out a weak groan. "Jesus Christ, yours too?"

I laugh because who the fuck comes out of a choking like that? Unfazed by the near-death experience, but totally offended by the stiff cocks.

"That was the easy part," I say.

“Wh-what do you mean?”

Gentry’s head pivots toward me. “Yeah, what do you mean?”

I grip the collar of her shirt and snatch down, ripping the thin fabric and fully exposing her left breast.

“What the fuck?” Gentry and Leana snarl in unison.

“Trust my process.” With a feral grin, I revel in the beautiful sight before me. Her breast is so round, and the nipple has peaked against the coolness. Seeing just one of her tits makes me want to see the rest of her. All of her. I reach down and trace the cupid’s arrow tattoo on the outside of her breast, wrapping around the curve. Gentry growls a warning, and I pull my hand away.

“What’d you get this for?” I ask.

“Don’t answer that,” Gentry commands, his body trembling.

“It’s from when I used to believe in love,” she says.

My stomach gives the slightest squeeze in my gut. I remember when I thought love was something to look forward to. I found a woman I liked a lot when I was eighteen. Gave her flowers and shit. Walked her home from school. Well, I walked behind her while she walked home from school. I thought we were heading toward fucking marriage until she rejected me. I had no choice but to kill her after that. Regardless, I also got it tattooed on my body. The word *bitch* down my forearm.

My open blade sits beside me. I grab it and bring it to her breast.

“Don’t you hurt her,” Gentry says.

“It’s a fucking knife, Gentry. It’s going to hurt her.”

“No! No!” she screams.

“If it’s blood you need, use mine.” He thrusts his arm forward. What a white fucking knight.

My dark eyes rise to his. “It needs to be hers. It needs to be perfect if you want her to live so badly.”

I cut into her, careful not to ruin her lame tattoo. She screams and I throw a hand over her mouth. Crimson rises to the surface. It pools for a moment before it drips under her breast, down her side, and onto her ripped shirt. Another line forms and gathers in the hollow of her neck. The cut looks deeper than it is, but the amount of blood it produces is fucking artistic beauty. I adjust the frayed fabric so it kind of looks like a fatal stab wound. The outside of her tit still hangs out, wet and bloody.

God, I’m so fucking hard.

“Fuck you,” she snarls as I rip my hand away from her mouth.

“Swear all you want, thief, just don’t fucking move.” I look up at Gentry, who’s furiously pacing at this point. “Now we need to do something with this,” I say, waving my hand above her face. “Give me your best dead face.”

She drops her head to the side and her jaw gapes. I sigh and smack her cheek. “I have killed so many people, and none of them died with their mouths hanging open like a yutz.”

“Fine, since you’re the professional, show me the death face.”

I lie on the grass beside her, turn my head—she was pretty accurate about that—and keep my mouth fucking closed. I relax my jaw, fix my eyes on the SUV’s tire, and hold my breath for good measure.

“Gentry, get a stick and poke him to see if he’s dead,” she says through a laugh, and even Gentry chuckles for a moment.

“Stop fucking around, thief. Look at me. Mirror what I’m doing.”

She turns her head toward me, but now her lips are pressed together too tightly.

“Relax your jaw. You want it somewhere between gaping like before and . . . whatever the fuck you’re doing now.” I look over at Gentry. “Real death would have been a lot less labor intensive, you know.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he says, throwing me a dismissive wave.

I turn back to Leana. “Now your eyes. Look at something beyond me. Focus on it. Count the ridges in the bark for all I care, but keep those eyes open and fixed.”

Her sexy lower lip is loose and relaxed. Coupled with the vacant stare, the blood, and the fresh marks on her neck, she looks pretty fucking dead. She’s a fucking masterpiece.

And I’m hard again.

Jesus. *Calm down, boy.*

Is this a new kink for me? Why’s my dick aching like this?

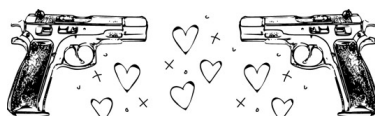
“Give me that phone,” I tell Gentry.

He hands it to me, and I snap a picture for . . . personal reasons. I look down at her once more, my hand across my chin. I kneel beside her, and she flinches from my touch as I grind her hair in the dirt, making it all messy. Yes, now she’s perfect.

I lean down to the shell of her ear. “Don’t breathe, little thief,” I whisper. When I stand, I bring up the camera and count her down from

three so she can hold her breath. For all intents and purposes, she looks dead, so I start recording. “Here’s your proof, Georgie.” I zoom in on her neck as I narrate. “Gentry’s a little bitch who couldn’t finish strangling her, but don’t you worry your ugly head about it, boss. I took care of her.” I move the camera to the cut in her breast and mentally tell her to keep still. If she moves now, this was all for nothing.

A light breeze kicks sand toward her face, and I’m certain she’ll flinch when the grit collides with her glassy eyes. She doesn’t, and I breathe a silent sigh of relief. Her acting isn’t so bad after all. She just needed the right teacher. Someone who has seen enough dead people to know how they should look. Someone like me.



Leana

I DON’T DARE MOVE or breathe until Karson pockets the phone. I sit up on my elbows, and the sticky film of blood makes my skin feel tingly. The wind sends a draft across my bare breast. Remembering how exposed I am, I turn the shirt around backward to cover myself. “I appreciate the help, but was this really necessary?”

Karson shrugs.

“Let me see it,” I say, putting my hand out for the phone. He hands it to me, and I watch the clip. I look dead. Really fucking dead. Dirt and twigs decorate my blonde hair as it fans around my head. I don’t even recognize my blue eyes. I touch the fresh marks on my throat. “Did you really have to do this?”

Karson squats down, and a terrifying darkness slides across his eyes. “It was either that or be killed in ways I couldn’t conjure.” He leans down and licks the blood from the pool that formed at the base of my throat. His warm tongue brushes across my skin and sends flutters through me that shouldn’t exist. “God, you taste like the thing that made the angel that became the devil fall.”

I push him away. “Poetic.”

“Don’t be a dick, thief.” He stands up and wipes his hands on his jeans, smearing dirt down the denim.

Gentry comes over and lends me his hand so he can help me to my feet. He pulls me into his chest, not caring about the blood covering me. “I’m sorry,” he whispers, tracing the handprint he left on my neck. “I’ll make up for every moment of hurt with twice the pleasure.”

“You didn’t have a choice.”

Gentry’s harsh glare lands on his brother. “None of this would have happened if someone had kept his big fucking mouth shut.”

Karson lifts his chest. “You know, if the roles were reversed, this wouldn’t . . . No, you know what? This would never happen to me. This isn’t take-your-whore-to-work week. I never would have brought her along.”

“Call her a whore again and I’ll castrate you,” Gentry says.

“It’s fine,” I say, and it is. His words don’t offend me. I’ve been called worse.

Gentry shakes his head. “No, it’s not fine. You’re an extension of me, which means he’s coming at me when he calls you names. If anyone is going to call you that, it’s me, and the word ‘good’ will come before it because you’re my good little whore.” He points his glare at Karson. “*Mine.*”

My heart thunders in my chest at his words. It also shuts down Karson, which is a major pro. But now, covered in blood and dirt, all I can think about is a hot shower.

Gentry stomps toward the SUV, but I turn to Karson before I follow him. I have a question, and I need the answer before I climb into the car with them again. “Did you tell your boss about me?”

Karson shoves his hands in his pockets and rams the toe of his shoe against the grass. He looks into the distance and shakes his head. “What does it matter? That’s the conclusion Gentry immediately jumped to, so it must be true. He’s always right, isn’t he?”

Before I can press him further, he joins Gentry in the SUV. I’m not convinced he was the one who ratted me out, but that’s an unsettling thought. If Karson didn’t tell their boss . . . who did?

Chapter Seventeen

Gentry

We don't get a response to our video. I'm not sure my boss believed it, but we tried our best. Well, she tried her best. I look over at her and swell with pride. She did so fucking good. Even though I almost choked her to the point of unconsciousness, she held no ill feelings toward either of us once it was finished.

Guilt taps on my shoulder when I remember how delicate her throat felt in my grasp. How much I enjoyed that fragility beneath my fingertips. It was hard for me to pull away when all those sweet endorphins fired off in my brain, but Karson's groan ripped all those feel-good hormones away from me. It also didn't help when I realized she was running from a man who'd done something similar to her. She seems to understand the difference, but it still concerns me. Especially since she knows how much it turned me on to choke her like that. It's one thing to fuck a killer, but it's another to fuck a killer who got hard at the thought of killing *you*.

I like this girl more than I've liked anyone else before—including my wife—yet the primitive urges to end her sometimes bubble beneath the surface. I can't cherish her without thinking about how her death at my hands would feel. Good, probably. So fucking good. But the aftermath, after the high wore off, would break me. The act would be self-sabotage of the highest level.

A heavy silence presses down on us as we pull into a motel parking lot. There aren't any hotels where we are, but I don't think Leana minds as long

as there's a bed. I wish I could guarantee it would be a clean one, but we're in the middle of nowhere and I don't have high hopes.

I throw my jacket to Leana so she can hide her blood-stained shirt before we head toward the front desk. A young girl mans this family-owned shithole, and she hardly looks old enough to drive, let alone run a business.

"Two rooms, please," I say.

She nods, hands over two keys, and has us sign a paper as she marks off two rooms with a dry-erase marker. What an archaic method. It's discreet, though, and I like that. I pay her and she shoves the cash into a box beneath the desk.

"Thanks," I tell her before we head down the hallway.

We head outside and walk toward our rooms. Duct tape and cardboard cover window damage to one of the rooms along the way. Rust has eaten through the metal roofing over the walkway, giving us a glimpse of the night sky through the many holes. The scent of piss overpowers my nose as we pass the vending machines, and I make a mental note to ignore my growling stomach. The place is an absolute dump, but what can you expect for fifty dollars a night?

I toss Karson his key, and we part ways at the metal stairwell. His room is on the upper story, and I can only hope the floor doesn't collapse and send his bed on top of us as we sleep.

Leana and I enter our room to the high-pitched squeal of aged hinges that have never seen WD-40 in all the years of their existence. When I flick the light switch, the bulbs send out a fluttering strobe before staying on with an obnoxious hum.

She slips off my leather jacket and hands it to me, her lips tight. I reach out for her, but she ducks away from my arm. "I'm still processing what happened earlier," she says. "I understand you and Karson did what was needed to keep me safe, but it was still . . . a lot. I didn't expect you to enjoy choking me so much." Her gaze falls to the crotch of my jeans before flitting away again.

"I'm a killer. I like to hold life in my hands before watching it crumble in front of my eyes."

Her eyes rise to mine and burn through me. "You fantasize about killing me? Is that what you're saying? Should I be concerned?"

I laugh. "Aside from my brother, I don't usually keep things around that I want to kill. He likes to toy with his prey, but that's not my M.O."

Her chest and chin rise in unison, and her little show of courage is adorable. “What if I don’t want to be kept? What if I want to leave?”

I step into her, forcing her back against the wall as I lean into her. “You’re mine, wanderer.”

“You can’t make someone stay with you.”

My hand rises and twirls strands of her blonde hair between my fingers. “I can when that *someone* saw what you did. There’s no going back after what you witnessed.”

“So I’m stuck?”

“There’s worse people to be stuck with.”

“Worse than two fucking contract killers? And I think it’s more than that. Hitmen don’t get turned on by hits. By killing. You two are sick.”

I saw the lack of shock on her face when she walked in on Karson with a nearly severed head in his hand. We might be sick, but she’s got a little touch of the illness herself. “We are sick. Very fucking sick. We’re horrible, vile men who will stop at nothing to get what we want. And wanderer? You’re what I want.”

“Well, I don’t want you!” She looks away, her body language betraying the lie she tells.

“Have you ever fantasized about killing someone?”

“What? No.” She tries to meet my gaze, but she looks away again. Another lie.

“Tell me your fantasy. Who have you thought about killing, and how did you want to do it?”

“I don’t want to play this game,” she says. She tries to move past me, but I push closer and hold her in place. “What part of ‘I don’t want you’ don’t you understand?”

I put my knee between her legs and spread them. My hand leaves her hair and dips down the front of her jeans. She strains against my hold, her hands wrapping around my wrist to stop my descent, but I can already feel what I suspected. She’s wet. Soaked.

“Yeah, you don’t want me at all.” I push my fingers inside her. “You don’t like that I could kill you, but you *love* that I’m too fucking obsessed with you to do so.” I kneel before her, taking her pants down with me. “It turns you on to know you made a big, selfish killer weak enough to drop to his knees. Even though I have a taste for blood, you want my tongue on your pussy.”

She shakes her head but scoops her pelvis closer to my face. I help her out of her jeans, throwing them aside. I don't normally go down on women, and I can't say I've ever wanted to be in this inferior position, but she's fighting me on it. By taking it, I'm still superior. In control. The moment I put my tongue on this girl, she'll melt into me and become a taste I would kill for.

I blow a warm breath on her slit and swipe my tongue through her. She shudders, falling forward to grip my shoulders for support. She curls her hips to give me more access to her pretty little pussy, showing me how badly she wants my mouth to devour her.

But I want to hear her say it.

"Tell me you want to come on a killer's face," I say.

She closes her eyes and leans her head against the wall. I fucking love her internal struggle. I can feel it. Her pussy wants one thing, but her mind tells her it's wrong. She should listen to her mind, but if she wants to feel good, she'll spread her legs a little wider and let me devour her until she comes on my face.

I put my hand on her clit, and her excited pulse throbs against my touch. The twitch of desire.

Her shoulders drop. "I want to come on your face."

I smirk. "That's not what I want to hear." I pull my hand away and blow another hot breath on her swollen clit. "Tell me."

"I want to come . . . on a killer's face." Shame drips from her words, and I guzzle it down.

With a rough grasp on her inner thighs, I spread her lips. Her body trembles with anticipation, and I've hardly touched her. I can't wait another moment to feel the explosion of pleasure against my mouth when I finally lick her, so I dip my tongue inside her pussy and put my mouth around her clit. I tongue the most sensitive part of her with quick lashings that turn her trembles to shudders.

"Fuck," she groans, as her hands grip my hair.

I lick her harder, faster, eating her until her thighs clench together and she ends up riding my face.

"You're . . . fucking . . . evil." She pants each word with every forward rock of her hips.

I pull away, eliciting a frustrated growl from her. "And yet you ride my face like I'm a saint."

I bury myself in her pussy once more and lick her until her clit twitches with a strong pulse against my tongue. With a long, thorough lick, I gather every ounce of wetness I brought out of her. I stand up, look down at this vulnerable, satiated girl, and drag my thumb across her bottom lip.

“Open your mouth, wanderer. I want you to taste yourself. I want you to swallow what I’ve done to you.”

She spreads her lips as if she expects my fingers to slip inside her mouth, but I tip her chin, ball up my spit and her come, and drip it into her waiting mouth.

I expect her to spit it out, but she doesn’t. “Good girl. Now swallow.”

Her throat bobs as she takes every drop. When her tongue flicks out to catch the bit that slipped onto her lip, I almost want to drop to my knees and worship her pussy again.

But I won’t. Not tonight.

“Go get cleaned up, and let’s get some sleep,” I say. “We have a lot of driving to do tomorrow.”

As she showers, I lie in bed and try to think of anything aside from the increasing risk we’re taking by keeping her with us. But I can’t let her go. As long as Karson keeps his mouth shut—and as long as our piss-poor snuff film works—I can only hope that George won’t be a problem for her anymore.

When she climbs into bed after her shower, she doesn’t put any space between us. She snuggles up to me, throws her leg over my thigh, and presses her pussy against my leg. My favorite sleeping position. I listen as each breath slows to a drowsy cadence, and when I’m sure she’s asleep, I cut off the lamp beside the bed.

“I fantasize about killing the man who sexually assaulted me throughout my childhood,” she whispers, and her voice nearly makes me jump.

What she says enrages me. There aren’t many lines a man like me won’t cross, but nobody should fuck with a kid. Knowing she was assaulted by someone sick enough to cross that boundary . . . There are no words to describe the anger I feel.

“Who?” I ask.

She doesn’t speak for a long time, but when she finally does, her voice is almost a whimper. “My stepfather.”

She hasn’t given me a name, but I’ll get it out of her eventually. And when I do, we’ll make her fantasy a reality.

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Chapter Eighteen

Leana

We've hardly pulled out of the motel parking lot when Gentry's phone rings. I'm beginning to dread that generic ringtone. Why do I get the feeling we'll never reach California? From what I can gather from the call, they've just been given another job. I don't hear any mention of my death video, which could be a good thing.

Or a very bad thing.

I can't dwell on it. Whatever happens is out of my hands.

Karson drives all day, and my stomach is a grumbling mess once dinner time rolls around. We've lived mostly on convenience-store fare since our journey began, and I could really go for a burger right about now.

"Any chance we could grab some fast food this time?" I ask.

Gentry glances at the time on the dash clock. "Yeah, as long as we eat in the car. Where do you want to go?"

I shrug my shoulders. "It doesn't matter to me."

"That's not how this works," Karson says. He turns to Gentry. "Why do chicks always do this shit? They say it doesn't matter, but the moment you name a place, they aren't in the mood for it. I'm not playing this game."

Gentry turns in his seat and looks at me. "Name the spot."

"It really doesn't matter," I say. "Anything will be better than a crusty hot dog from the gas station."

With a sigh, Gentry looks at the interstate. We near a sign that names off fast-food places, and he assesses it as we pass. "Get off at this exit," he says to Karson. "We'll grab something from Taco Bell."

“My stomach will be upset for days,” I say.

Karson’s head twists toward Gentry. “See? I fucking told you!” He glances in the rearview mirror and meets my gaze. “Pick what you want or go hungry, thief. Your choice.”

“Fine,” I mutter. “Just pick a burger place.”

Gentry turns to Karson with a smug grin. “There, problem solved. We’ll grab Wendy’s.”

“I don’t like their fries,” I say, and I regret even asking for food at this point because Karson looks as if his head might explode. The exit is quickly approaching, and Karson makes no indication that he plans to turn off. Golden arches gleam in the distance. “McDonald’s!” I shout before it’s too late.

He flicks on the turn signal and whips the SUV off the interstate. “Was that so fucking hard?”

We order our food and continue down back roads for a few miles. I’ve finished my fries by the time Karson pulls into the woods near the start of a driveway. He looks back at me, his dark eyes menacing. “Did we learn our lesson from last time?”

“What lesson?” I ask through a mouthful of burger.

“Don’t play dumb. We have something to take care of inside that house. You’re going to wait right where you are.”

I stuff another bite of burger into my mouth and toss him a casual nod. “Mmhm.”

“Why don’t I believe you?” Karson asks as he threads a silencer onto his pistol.

“If she knows what’s good for her, she’ll stay put,” Gentry says.

“If she knew what was good for her, she wouldn’t have pulled over for us in the first place.”

I scoff, sit back, and fold my arms across my chest.

They go inside and I try to stay put. I really try. But pretty soon my leg is shaking and I’m wondering what the heck is taking so long. What if something happened to them? What if their victim turned the tables and now they’re in trouble?

I shake my head. What the fuck would I even do if they needed help? If it’s something two big-ass psychos can’t handle, I’d be up shit creek without a paddle *and* I’d have a hole in my boat.

In the end, my curiosity gets the better of me. Even if I can't help them, I can at least figure out what I should do if they're dead. I get out of the SUV, make my way across the front lawn, and ascend the marble steps. My eyes rise up the Victorian home's dramatic arches and I'm intimidated by the age and grace of the building.

I round the house and reach for the back door, but I catch myself. If they're doing what I think they're doing, I don't want my fingerprints on the scene. I tug my sleeve over my hand before I open it. It slides open with an eerie creak, which is what I would expect from a door from the eighteen fucking hundreds. But it announces my presence much more than I'd have liked. Cursing beneath my breath, I look around, but I don't see or hear anything.

What if everyone's dead?

What if they ditched me?

Would that last one really be so bad?

I take a left, careful not to touch anything as I pass by delicate vases and intricate busts sitting atop pedestals. These knickknacks are probably worth more than my life.

My eyes widen as soon as I cross the threshold into the kitchen. Lying on top of the island is a balding older man with his cuffed hands held over his head by Karson. Duct tape seals off each scream he makes. When his wide, pained eyes turn to me, a look of relief flashes across his features. He talks beneath the tape, pleading with me to help him, before his eyes rush to the ceiling and his nostrils flare. My vision pans to the blade moving over his abdomen . . . to the large hands holding the knife that's carving something into the man's flesh.

"Goddamn it, wanderer," Gentry snarls. Before his face twisted with anger, I saw the enjoyment in his expression. It reminded me of Karson. That divide between them has lessened, becoming a blurred line in my mind.

"Don't you stop," Karson says to Gentry. "She needs to see the *real* you before she spreads her thighs again."

Gentry's mouth opens and closes, but he shakes his head and goes back to his task. Disgusted curiosity makes me take a step closer. He's not just slicing the man's stomach. He's etching words into his skin.

The younger they are, the—

He starts cutting into the man again.

B-e-t-t-e-r.

Gentry stares at me as he tugs down the man's sweatpants, exposing a thin, limp dick. A muffled scream pushes against the duct tape, and I can almost hear the words.

No. Please.

"Our friend here is a pedo," Gentry says as he grips the man's dick with a gloved hand.

"And a stupid one at that," Karson adds. "He stopped paying the man who kept all his dirty little secrets."

"We take extra pains with the fuckers who hurt kids," Gentry says as he slices the man's balls clean off. The sack hits the floor with a smack, followed by a freshet of blood.

The man's screams begin to fade, and his head drops heavily to the table as he passes out from the pain.

I can almost taste the blood on my tongue, and I fight back a gag. I'm not disgusted by what I see. I'm disgusted by the fact that I'm not terrified by what I've just witnessed. I'm disgusted that I'm glad the sick fuck is getting exactly what he deserves.

"Don't just stand there and gawk, thief," Karson says with a wild look in his eyes. "This is the part where you're supposed to run. So run."

"No, Karson! No. Goddamn it!" Gentry shouts.

I race out the door, choking on adrenaline as I dart toward the woods. My body remembers this chase before I even hear Karson's steps trailing after me. A burst of fear rips through my body. A nervous energy is breathed into my lungs. Anticipation tightens my throat, cutting off my breath.

"You know I like the chase!" Karson yells behind me. "The harder you make me work to catch you, the more I'll take it out on your cunt."

His words make my heart thud against my sternum. I put my hand against my chest, and I swear I can feel it protruding from the skin with every beat. I'm terrified of what will happen when Karson catches me.

But I kind of want to be caught.

Chapter Nineteen

Karson

I follow her scent through the trees, and it's strong enough to overpower the smell of Mother Nature's cunt. Chasing is fun for me, especially that final moment when I catch them—the moment they're snagged in my grasp and they falter like an animal whose leg just got snapped in a trap. The best part? That split second when I feel the hope dissipate in their chest when they realize they've been caught. That last breath of freedom they exhale.

It's fucking euphoric.

When I was younger, I made a habit of letting my prey escape. They'd gather bits of hope as they ran, each step propelling them toward perceived freedom. It made it that much sweeter when I caught them a second time.

I won't have time for a catch and release today, but I'll have more time to play than I did after our last game of chase. Gentry has to finish the job before he can catch up and stop me.

As the little thief runs from me, her shoes kick up dirt. We've played this game already, and she ended up on her hands and knees instead of in a fucking grave, so why is she bolting away as if her life depends on it? She wouldn't have to run if she'd stayed in the fucking car.

Girl doesn't listen.

"Fuck you," she shouts back. "Go back to your brother."

"Here's my proposition, thief," I say, trying to catch my breath between words. I can't run like I used to. "If you stop right here, right now, I'll just fuck your cunt. For every additional ten feet, that's another hole I'll take."

You have thirty feet and three holes. If you go beyond that, I'll stab this knife into you and fuck every new hole I make."

She stops, and disappointment smothers my excitement.

"Only one hole? Really? I expected more from you." I catch up to her and spear her to the ground, straddling her waist as her back hits the grass and a pained breath escapes her lips.

"Karson, don't," she squeals, her hands reaching for fistfuls of nothing above her head.

"I could take more, but what kind of man would I be if I went back on my word?" I say against her sweat-coated skin.

"You're a fucking psycho!" Her leg wiggles loose and she sends her knee right into my nuts.

I wish it numbed the ache I feel for her, but the sharp pain that shoots into my stomach only fuels my hunger.

"You aren't right in the head, Karson."

"Neither of us is right in the head. Why let one in so willingly but fight the other?"

Her cheeks puff as she struggles to get free. "Because you're an asshole!"

I sit up and look down at her, and she stops squirming. I love her fight, but I love when she stops and gives in to me more. I like watching the desperation seep from her. There is so much beauty in her defeat.

"Are you going to take off your jeans, little thief?"

"Probably not."

I whip out my knife and spin it in my hand. "Fair enough." I unbutton her jeans and unzip them until I can reach in with my knife and cut the crotch. That's all I'll need, anyway.

"No, no! Wait," she says, her hands gripping my wrist. "I'll take them off!"

She cares more about the damage to her only pair of jeans than she does about me stretching her around my cock. Hilarious.

"Atta girl," I tell her as I adjust my weight and sit over her abdomen instead.

"Asshole," she mumbles.

I pull out a cigarette and light it while I wait for her to finish undressing. She clenches her jaw, her lips tight. I'm sure it's agonizing to know what's

coming while I take my sweet time to get there. Whether she wants it or not, it's agony either way.

Her hands work down her jeans, and she kicks out of them like a flailing fish once she slides off her shoes. I put the cigarette between my lips and work off my belt. When I pull my cock from my boxers and place it between her perky tits, her eyes widen. Their eyes always widen when they get a good look at my dick. I'm pierced. Twice, to be exact, with a nice ball on all four sides of my head. A magic cross.

"What the fuck is that?" she squeals, straining beneath me.

I press the lit end of the cigarette against my wrist until it's out, then I tuck it behind my ear. "Stop being a baby. You've already had me inside you. You've felt these before."

"Not like this! It's different now that I've seen them."

Pinning her arms at her sides, I adjust myself until I get my legs between hers. "Then you don't need to see them. I'll do a fun little magic trick and make them disappear. Now you see it . . ." I smirk and throw her thighs over mine while pulling her into me. "Now you don't."

I push inside her without inhibition and growl as I sink to the depths of her. Her mouth gapes as the silver balls rake her tight cunt. There's no escaping the feeling, and she could enjoy it if she'd just fucking relax.

When I thrust into her again, the force sends a whimper out of her throat. She's squeezing around me, and I'm reminded again why my brother is so fucking obsessed. To have someone like her give herself so willingly to him must be nice. She hates my guts, but the hatred cools when I'm buried inside her. I pull my hips back so my piercings tease the most sensitive part of her, the ball at the top rubbing along her exposed clit. Her back arches off the ground, yet she holds back her moan.

"It's okay to enjoy it." I lean into her and bury myself inside her once more.

"The fuck it is," she says.

I ball her shirt in my fist and use it for leverage as I sit up and fuck her harder. Her tits wiggle beneath the raised hem with every thrust, and I'm mesmerized by the cut above her left breast. The only thing that draws my attention away is a bubble of blood that swells on her lower lip because she's bitten it hard enough to break the skin. All of that to hold back the sounds of pleasure. So fucking defiant.

"Give me your mouth."

“No,” she says. She reaches up to wipe the blood away, but I grip her wrist and pin it to the ground.

“Then I’ll take it.” I lean over her, open my mouth, and absorb the crimson droplet with my tongue. The sweet metallic taste bathes my brain in ecstasy.

But it’s not enough.

I snatch the knife from my belt and cut a shallow line along her collarbone. Blood springs into the channel and ignites a fuse inside me. Ignoring her subtle protest, I drop my mouth to her porcelain skin and suck her life force into me. A line of blood drips toward her shirt collar, but I stop it with my tongue. I fist her hair and whip her head back until her mouth parts from the strain on her neck.

“Taste what I taste,” I say.

Before she can register what’s happening, I spit at her parted lips. It hits her mouth and some of it dribbles out the side. I lean over and lick up the remnants with a deep groan, grazing her lower lip before leaning in and kissing her as hard as I can. I’ve never kissed anyone like this, and the way our breaths become one makes me dizzy.

Fucking weird.

I rip my mouth away from hers and bury whatever I just felt inside her cunt. I spread my knees, grab her by the back of her neck, and pound into her with deep, fast thrusts that finally force a moan out of her.

“Admit you like when I fuck you. How I take you. Use you. Admit that your sweet little cunt is clenching around me.”

“No,” she says. “I hate you.”

“Fine, I’ll make you love me.” I pull out of her but keep hold of her neck as I drop my other hand between her legs. Pushing three fingers inside her, I fuck her with more force than I can with my cock. As I pull her curved abdomen into me, putting all the pressure I need on her lower belly, she gushes on my fingers and saturates the grass. A feral moan pours from her gut, and I bite my lip.

As soon as she takes a breath, I pound her cunt with a relentless barrage that leaves her whimpering and moaning. The sinful tone makes my dick twitch against her thigh. She squirts again, coating the front of my jeans. As soon as her come splashes onto the fabric, I know Gentry will be pissed.

“Jesus,” she whimpers as I pull my hand from her. It makes me the slightest bit proud that her frigid ass warmed right up with my hand inside

her.

“If you were afraid of my piercings in your cunt, wait till you feel them in your throat,” I say as I rise to my feet and pull her onto her knees.

“I thought you said one hole,” she pants.

“I’m a liar.”

She settles heavily in front of me, like she doesn’t want to be there. Which is fine. I don’t need her to be enthusiastic.

“Make the sign of the cross,” I say, “but with your tongue.”

“I’m not—”

I grip the back of her head and bring her mouth to the head of my dick. “Now,” I command.

She looks up at me before she touches the top ball with the tip of her tongue. “In the name of the Father.” She goes for the underside of my dick. “And of the Son.” Her tongue moves from the left ball to the right. “And of the Holy Spirit.”

I shove my dick into her mouth and complete the prayer. “A-fucking-men.”

I keep hold of her chin as I push to the back of her throat. The metal balls clack against her teeth, but I know to be careful. I’m not stupid. If I break Gentry’s toy, he’ll break me.

“I’m going to come,” I growl, feeling the sudden tightness in my balls. “When I fill your mouth, do not fucking swallow.” I pull my hips back a bit, wanting my come to pool around her tongue instead of slipping down her throat. With a feral groan I don’t recognize, I unload inside her mouth before easing out. “Now show me what I gave you.”

She sits back on her heels and slowly parts her lips. Her throat tightens. She better not throw up so close to a crime scene.

“Tongue out.”

She sticks out her tongue, but her chest lurches forward with another violent heave.

“Fine, come give me what you don’t want.”

She tries to ask me what I mean, but that sends a dribble of come onto her lip. I pull her to her feet and wipe it away, bringing it to her forehead and anointing her with a cross. Her nostrils flare.

“Sorry, I’m getting carried away. Gentry and I grew up catholic. You know, real religious and shit until we started killing regularly. Then the

hypocrisy of kneeling in front of God became comical.” I kneel in front of her and open my mouth. “Spit it back in my mouth.”

She *happily* does as I ask. It’s so aggressive. So fucking hot.

“Show me,” she says, and fuck does it almost harden my dick again.

I stick out my tongue, wagging it around without a hint of protest from my tastebuds, then I swallow it. God, I’m starting to like her, and I fucking hate that for me.

My little thief. His wanderer.

Whoever the fuck she is, she’s getting under my skin.

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Chapter Twenty

Gentry

Why can't this girl do as she's told? I asked nothing more than for her to stay put. A third person means more risk. With her long hair, it would be too easy to leave DNA behind, and she doesn't even have gloves, for fuck's sake. I also didn't want her to see who I am. What I do. She already knew enough, but she didn't know everything. Now? Now she knows I'm just as crazy as my brother.

After finishing off the child predator and finding a nice stash of cash in his sock drawer, I walk out the back door of the house and listen for Leana and Karson. I take off the way they ran. I hate that I couldn't go after them sooner—especially when I know what Karson is likely doing to her right now—but I had my hands a bit full at the time.

When I get to them, I expect to see her trapped beneath him like last time. Instead, she's standing there, bare from the waist down. Karson's kneeling on the ground in front of her, with his head tilted back and his mouth gaped open. And she's . . . spitting in his mouth?

Jesus fuck.

"What the hell happened?" I ask.

Karson rises to his feet and tucks his dick away. "We played around, is all," he says. The casual way he speaks is like nails on a goddamn chalkboard.

"She consented to that?"

Karson buckles his belt. "Ish."

I go to Leana's side and check her body for marks. Not seeing any, I pull her into me and kiss her, thankful she's okay. The salty bite of her tears burns my tongue. She reaches for her pants when I step away, but I don't want his come inside her. "Squat and push it out before you dress."

Her eyes go to Karson, and realization hits me.

"She didn't catch it with her cunt," Karson says with a laugh.

I pull away from her, tasting the salt of his come—not her fucking tears—on my lips. Cool. That's what I wanted to experience today. I assess her face again and spot a glob of come on her forehead. I pull my sleeve over my hand and wipe it away.

"Wait . . ." I stop myself, sidetracked by the image of him on his knees in front of her. "Did you have her spit your shit back into your mouth? Is that what you were doing when I walked up?"

Karson smirks. "Don't act like you've never done that."

"I can say with utmost certainty I have not."

"You kiss women after they suck your dick, no?"

I scoff. "It's not the same."

"Don't kink shame me, Gentry. I'm not the one who gets off by having their hair shampooed. Now *that's* fucking weird."

This motherfucker. Clearly my ex-wife had a big mouth. Yeah, I'm a tripsolagniac. For me, the hair salon has always been the equivalent of going to a massage parlor for a rub and tug. After coming in my pants in the middle of a wash when I was younger, I started cutting my own hair.

"Need me to wash the dirt out of your hair when we get back to the hotel?" Leana asks with a giggle. "If you stop by the store and buy the supplies, I can even do a conditioning treatment. So fucking hot."

I do *not* need this judgmental shit. "See you back at the car," I say, turning away from them and heading toward the SUV. Fuck those two. If they want to sit back there and cackle about kinks, by all means, go nuts. At least I don't guzzle my own jizz like it's hors d'oeuvres.

I whip open the driver's seat, sit down, and wait with the door open. My fingers tap on the steering wheel. They eventually emerge from the woods, and Leana climbs into the back seat.

"Gentry," she begins.

"Can we just not talk?" I snap. I'll deal with them when I'm not so pissed off. When I'm less annoyed. When I don't want to ring both their necks, because I'm liable to do exactly that if they keep going.

Karson hops into the passenger seat and throws his foot onto the dash. "Sorry I exposed your kink. If it makes you feel any better, I almost came in my pants when the thief played dead. That kink is much worse than a little sudsy one."

Jesus Henry Christ. What did our mother take when she was pregnant with us? Just when I think we can't get any worse, now one of us is a pseudo-necrophiliac?

"Excuse me?" Leana says.

Karson turns toward her. "When I saw you playing dead, it got my dick hard. I don't think I can break it down into simpler terms."

"For fuck's sake," she says as she sits back with her arms crossed. I can't help but smirk at her reaction, mostly because it's not enough of a reaction when Karson just admitted he wants to fuck her corpse.

I love that about her.

"Let's just drive and stop talking about this. We've got a long drive to California, and I'm ready to finish this shit." I close my door, and they follow suit.

As we continue on our journey of destruction, I glance in the rearview mirror at Leana. For not being a Kursicki by birth, she's fucked up enough to be one of us. Instead of kicking and screaming and trying to escape, she's just resigned herself to the fate of one serial killer who wants to breed her and another who wants to fuck her dead body.

What a trio.

The sun sets as we inch closer to our final destination, but we have to keep going. Karson is already napping in the passenger seat, and Leana's eyelids hang heavy over her blue eyes. We're taking too long to get where we're going, so I plan to keep driving and let them nap. I'd like to change out of my bloody clothes, though, and Leana's last shirt has seen better days. We'll have to make a pit stop.

I pull into a strip mall and wake Karson. "I need you two to get us some clothes." I turn to Leana and place a wad of cash into her hand. "I need a shirt and some jeans. Do *not* let him pick anything out for me." I glare at Karson.

The last time I let him buy an outfit for me, I had to commit a double fucking homicide with the word "vagitarian" on the front of my shirt. I don't think he'll find anything like that in this little strip of outlet stores, but I refuse to risk it.

As they head inside, I'm left to sit and contemplate my life choices. What will we do with Leana when we're done with this trip? She's too much of a liability to release, but I can't kill her. I can't. I also haven't fully wrapped my head around this whole sharing thing. At least I know about it and Karson isn't doing it behind my back.

After a little while, the doors open and the dome light brightens Karson's beaming smile. He grips a shirt in his hand as he sits down. Here we fucking go. I glare at Leana, and she gives me a sorry-filled shrug. Karson spreads the gray shirt open and laughs. It says "Cereal Killer" right across the front. A playful skull smiles below the lettering, complete with crossed spoons instead of crossbones.

I scowl.

"Oh, come on. It's punny." He looks at the shirt proudly. It could be worse, I guess. Silver linings and shit.

I look into the back seat and pin Leana with a pleading glare. "Please tell me you also got something I can actually wear."

"Of course." Leana nods and shakes a bag beside her. "But if you don't do our next hit with a cereal killer shirt, what are we even doing?"

My eyes narrow on her. "It's not our hit. It's *our* hit." I gesture between me and Karson.

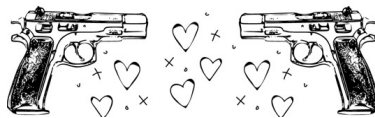
She tightens her lips. "You know what I mean."

No, I don't know what she means. She can't be a part of this. She can't even follow simple directions when I tell her to stay in the fucking car.

"Give me the goddamn shirt," I say.

Karson hands the monstrosity to me, and I rip off the blood-stained shirt and shove it beneath the seat. I'll discard it when we're back on the road. "I hate you. You know that, right?"

"Cute," he says, and I fight the urge to strangle him.



WE TAKE turns driving for the next twenty-nine hours, sleeping in shifts as we travel the road. When we finally reach Nevada, it's time for a break.

I eventually find a suitable hotel. It's much nicer than anywhere we've stayed before, and I'm more than ready to crawl beneath some clean sheets

and get some shuteye when we enter the lobby.

A wheedling little man in thick-framed glasses sits behind the lobby desk. When he spots us and offers a plastic smile, I fantasize about knocking his big teeth down his throat and watching him choke on them. My rage only intensifies when I ask for two rooms.

“Sorry, sir, but we’re nearly full tonight. There’s a big book signing in town, and we only have one room left.”

I groan. “A room with two beds, right?”

“Nope, only one. But it is a king!”

As if that makes it better.

I turn to Karson and Leana. “Next hotel it is.”

The little man raises his finger. “You won’t find a hotel with vacancies until the next town over, and that’s at least an hour away. This group of authors is very popular.”

I glare at the man. We’re all too tired to drive, and I won’t risk getting pulled over.

“Fine,” I growl, handing over a fake ID and cash.

After we receive the room keys, we begrudgingly head to the elevator.

“When was the last time we shared a bed together?” Karson asks. The pep in his step makes me want to stab him in the knee.

“When we were kids, Karson,” I deadpan. “Someone will have to sleep on the floor, but it won’t be me or her.”

We step inside our room and inhale the fresh scent of clean sheets and proper housekeeping. It’s a step up from our usual hotels. It’s fucking nice. My first stop is the bathroom because I’ve had to piss for the last two hours.

When I return to the main room, Karson is laid out on the white bed with his boots all over the pristine comforter. Leana perches on the other side.

“Get your shoes off my bed.” I go to the mini fridge and tug out a tiny bottle of vodka. “Want one?” I ask Leana.

“Yes, thanks for asking,” Karson interjects.

“Vodka is fine,” she says.

I toss the small bottle of vodka to her and fish out a bottle of bourbon for Karson. I walk to the side of the bed, where Leana is swigging her drink like it’s water. “Floor,” I tell Karson as I point to the carpet.

He just stares at me. “Or, hear me out . . .” He pulls Leana closer. “She can be our buffer, and I get to sleep in the bed.”

“Fuck off, Karson. Also, don’t think I didn’t notice it looked like you pissed your pants earlier. Take a fucking shower.”

“Oh yeah, no. I’m housebroken. That was just her come. A whole lot of it.”

I don’t know why I thought Karson was incapable of making someone come. I always imagined he was as selfish a lover as he was a person. I hate knowing he made her come. Even worse, he made her squirt hard enough to saturate his jeans like that.

“If this is going to be a thing, we need fucking ground rules,” I say. I don’t *want* this to be a thing, but Karson has been less adamant about killing her since he started playing with her. I don’t like the idea of her being his little plaything because he always breaks his things—and by break, I mean accidentally murders them—but I also feel like I don’t have a choice in the matter. “First, I know you have a thing for blood. If she lets you cut her, fine, but you better control yourself. If I need to stop the bleeding, you’ll become the bloody one. Second, her pussy is mine to fill. Come anywhere else. Third, don’t do shit in front of me. I don’t want to see it.”

The last rule will be hard for him to follow, but I don’t know that I can watch them and not feel the need to break his neck.

“What?” Karson says. “That means no sportsmanlike competition.”

He slides his hand between her thighs and drops it down the front of her pants. Her breath hitches, and she doesn’t know how to react. I can’t breathe either, because I don’t know how *I’ll* react. Jealousy-fueled anger lights a time bomb inside me, and I can hear the *tick, tick, tick* of the clock. I can feel the heat of the fuse. Her eyes roll back just a bit, and it’s enough to detonate my rage. I explode, reaching past Leana to grab Karson by the throat and pin him against the headboard. Even as I put dangerous pressure against his airway, he keeps moving his hand beneath her jeans.

“Get your hand off her, Karson.”

“Don’t I have a say in this?” Leana’s soft voice says beneath me.

“No,” I say.

Karson’s face darkens to a red hue, but that still doesn’t stop his hand from moving against her pussy. I swear to god, this dude’s death dream is to piss me off as he dies.

“I want one,” she says, her voice slightly raised.

I lower my gaze to her and loosen my hold on Karson’s throat. “What?”

“I want a choice.”

“I heard you. What’s your choice?”

I know what’s coming. I know because she hasn’t pulled his hand away from her. I don’t want to hear it.

But I need to.

“I want you to let him touch me,” she says as she sits up.

What game is she playing? I don’t know, but I don’t like it. I pull my hand from Karson’s throat, and he gasps for air. “He already had you once today, wanderer. He can’t have you again tonight.” I grip Karson’s wrist. “If you don’t take your hand off her right now, I’ll break your goddamn arm.”

He rips his hand away. “Fine, but only because that’s my good knifing arm.”

I get into bed beside her, turning her on her side and nestling her ass against my pelvis. And putting more space between her and Karson. I bring my mouth to her ear. “Don’t ever side with him again.” I drop my hand to her abdomen and slip it down the front of her pants. My hand soaks up her heat, and I leave my fingers wrapped around the curve of her mound. “This pussy is mine. Don’t forget it. Even if he touches you, even when he’s inside you, remember who you belong to.”

She gasps against my touch.

“You’re mine, and I will *always* be the last man to mark you.” My hand remains firmly planted on her pussy.

My pussy.

“Goodnight, wanderer.”

Chapter Twenty-One

Leana

I slept all night between two madmen, and Gentry's hand is still down my pants when I wake the next morning. The sinful thoughts I had during the night coat his fingertips. Gentry stirs, tugs his hand away, and puts his fingers into his mouth, tasting me. It lights a fire between my legs, as if his hand was the only thing that had smothered the eternal flames. He effortlessly pulls me over his lap, drawing me in for a kiss. He inhales all of me, as if he's taking my soul inside him. It'd probably be alone in there.

I grind my pelvis into his, rocking my hips and sliding my slit along his ridiculously huge dick. It feels like I'm grinding on a log. Un-fucking-necessary. I'm fanning the flame his hand created. I look over at Karson, curled up on his side, fast asleep.

"Just grind your sweet little pussy against me, wanderer. After my touch all night, you're aching for release, aren't you?"

I ride the inseam of my jeans against his zipper, back and forth, until my motions grow ragged. Until I'm digging my knees into the mattress and trying to hold down every moan to keep from waking Karson. Gentry drops his head back as he grips my hips and guides me along his shaft. I feel like I'm being unfair, chasing my pleasure while he can only sit there and feel mine.

My thoughts wander to last night and the sexy show of possession from Gentry. Then Karson kept rubbing my clit, even as he was being choked out. Imagine dying and the last thing you did was stroke the clit of your brother's girl.

Wait.

Am I Gentry's? Just his? Or has this transformed into something else entirely? A thrupple I never imagined or asked for. One where two psychopaths want to sandwich me between them and fuck me in different ways. Maybe fuck me together?

These thoughts fill me with the intense urge to come. I want to get off. I *need* a release.

"Bite me," Gentry whispers. "Moan your pleasure into my flesh."

I listen because I have no other choice. I'm about to scream through the intense orgasm cresting like a wave between my legs. I lean into Gentry, inhaling the scent of murder and cigarettes. My mouth opens and I sink my teeth into his shoulder. My moans slip past, so I bear down with my teeth until his hips rise and his hands press me tight against his lap.

"Fuck," Gentry says, and I release my grip on his shoulder.

Karson turns over, his eyes narrow. "What the fuck kind of junior-high bullshit is this?"

"How long have you been awake?" Gentry asks as he pushes me off his lap.

"Long enough to hear you two acting like horned-up teenagers in the back of your mom's borrowed minivan," he says with a curl of his lip. He gets out of bed and heads for the bathroom. "You two are lame, and I need a shower. Thief, if you want a real fucking, you know where I'll be." He slams the bathroom door behind him.

I hate that they talk about me like I'm an object. Like I'm a lamp and they're arguing about who has to get up and turn it off. I don't mind being used in the heat of the moment, but I expect to be treated like a fucking person at the end of the day.

"What is this?" I ask Gentry.

He tugs off his shirt and balls it in his fist. "What's what?"

I gesture from him to the bathroom. "This. You two. Me."

"A goddamn predicament, that's what it is." He sighs. "You really want us both? I mean, can your soul be any more damned after allowing two serial killers inside you? You have a chance at salvation, wanderer. We don't."

"If there's a god, I think he'd forgive me. I mean, he's the one who wants you on your knees, right?"

He rolls his eyes.

There's a bigger problem here than just sharing me, though. I see it in the way Gentry and Karson interact, and it goes beyond a simple annoyance born of Karson's antics. "Why do you hate him so much?"

Gentry chokes out a sarcastic laugh. "You've met him, right? Heard him speak? Heard him fucking eat? He does that shit on purpose, by the way."

"What's the real reason, Gentry?"

He sits on the bed. "Fine, you want me to spill my secrets?"

I nod.

"First, Karson fucked my wife. I came home from a hit and found him pounding her in the kitchen."

That's fucking gross of Karson. No wonder Gentry isn't too keen on sharing. "You said first, which means there's more."

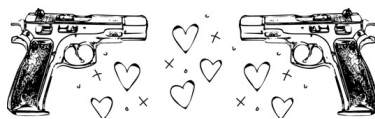
Gentry rubs a hand through his beard. "Shortly after that, he sold me out for less prison time when we got caught on a botched job. Granted, I'm the one who told him to take the deal, but I sat behind bars for ten years longer than I should have so his ass could be free, and he never once acknowledged the sacrifice I made. He's a fucking piece of shit."

I crawl over to Gentry and sit in his lap. My arms wrap around him in some kind of weird, comforting, sorry-your-brother's-a-dick embrace. His arms remain at his sides, clearly unaccustomed to comfort. I grab his arms and wrap them around my waist, and he finally leans into me. "You two need a mediation," I whisper.

"No thanks. Karson and I talk enough."

"Me and you talk about what?" Karson asks as he emerges from the bathroom. He brushes a towel through his dark hair and looks at us.

There's really no delicate way to do this, so I just go for it. "Did you really fuck Gentry's wife?"



Karson

WHAT THE FUCK do these two talk about when I'm gone? "Excuse me?"

"Did you or did you not fuck his wife?" She stands and her hand lands on her hip.

“Why bring up something that happened forever ago? I don’t even remember her.”

I do remember her. I remember the day she dropped to her knees while Gentry was working late. She gargled my balls like a whore chugs mouthwash after a gnarly John. Frankly, I was impressed. I gripped my knife to slit her throat, to let her go out on a swan song achievement, but then she wanted more. I’d never killed someone while fucking them, so I figured I could cross that off my bucket list and end her cheating ass in one fell swoop.

“Why can’t you just admit you did something wrong?” she asks. “Don’t you see that’s why he doesn’t want to share me?”

I swallow. I don’t really have these feely conversations. If I had feelings, I wouldn’t be such a phenomenal serial murderer. “Gentry doesn’t share. Even before he got married and I fucked up his unhappy little home, he’s always been selfish. But if you think I should apologize, fine.” I turn to Gentry. “I’m sorry I made your wife moan my name.”

Gentry jumps to his feet, but Leana gets between us before he can charge.

“Fucking stop, Karson!” she shouts. “You walk around with this obnoxious persona so everyone will dislike you. Why? Because if you push people away, they can’t reject you first?”

Ouch. As much as she’s pissing me off, I’m feeling a certain type of way about what she’s saying. And I don’t like it. I step into her, fist her hair, and pull her against me. “You don’t know me, thief. Just because I’ve been inside you doesn’t mean you’ve been inside *me*.”

“Get your hands off her,” Gentry says.

“She wants my hands on her. Isn’t that what this little come-to-Jesus meeting is about? Trying to make amends so we can all participate in a fucked-up circle jerk?” I release her hair with a sigh and meet Gentry’s eyes. Maybe she’s right. Maybe I should try a little harder here. “I’m sorry I fucked your wife, Gentry. I’m sorry I testified against you. And I’m kinda sorry about shooting you in the foot.” I sit on the edge of the bed.

“Was that so fucking hard?” she asks as she sits beside me.

“I just find it funny that you think this will make a difference,” I say.

“Actually, I think it did. As mad as he is right now, he hasn’t turned you inside out yet.” She reaches out and places her hand on Gentry’s arm. “Now it’s your turn. You need to let go of the past, Gentry.”

“I can’t,” he says, a low, deflated growl leaving his lips as he sits beside her.

“Everyone here is being honest. I’m not your wife, and sharing me with Karson isn’t the same as the betrayal you experienced before.”

Gentry brushes his hair back. “You think I don’t know that?”

“Then try,” she says. “Try to let go of the past and the anger.”

He won’t even look at her as she speaks, and it’s enough to piss me off. I took a step forward by apologizing to his burly ass, and now it’s his turn. If he won’t take that step on his own, I’ll give him a fucking push.

I stand and rip down Leana’s jeans. Tension wracks Gentry’s body with every inch the fabric falls, and it’s wrecking him.

But at least he’s still sitting. At least he hasn’t killed me yet.

I drop the towel from my waist, leaving it in a bundle at my feet as I tug her toward the edge of the bed. My attention is glued to her, but her blue eyes are glued to Gentry, seeking his approval. I don’t think we’ll get it, but I’m not ready to give up yet.

My cock rests against her absolutely soaked cunt. Her little humping session left her a sloppy mess, and the proof glistens on her pale thighs.

“Kiss me,” she whispers, but the demand isn’t directed at me. She’s speaking to him.

He shakes his head but leans toward her, as if he’s drawn by a rope that she’s tightening around her little finger.

“Please,” she begs. “Please, sir.”

The moment she calls him sir, the entire expression on his face changes, morphing from cold and angry to something fucking starved. He leans into her and captures her mouth, his hand burrowing into her hair. God, it’s sweet. I’ve never seen Gentry look comfortable, but he looks at home when he’s touching her like that. That one word turned a giant fucking serial killer into a little puppy.

As sweet as it is, my cock twitches for her, and I’m willing to risk his wrath to sink inside her. I run the length of my dick along her slit, drawing my hips back until I’m lined up with her opening. I push into her, and she inhales Gentry’s breath as the barbells rake against her insides.

He stops kissing her, and the corners of his lips twitch. That’s a face I’ve seen too many times. He’s trying to stay in control. It’s a look that preludes the ultimate demolition of everything around him. It masks an

untouchable anger that bubbles just beneath the surface until he rediscovers his control.

I still inside her. At this moment, we're all in danger. That's not me being a sarcastic asshole. Our lives literally teeter on the edge of a knife. Gentry is Zen as fuck for a serial killer. Centered as hell. Until he's not. And when that happens, it's fucking terrifying.

Her cunt squeezes around me, begging me to keep thrusting inside her, and all caution goes out the window. It feels too good to care. Too good to stop. If he wraps his hands around my throat and throttles the life from my body, I'll happily die inside her. I push into her with a long, deep stroke, and a moan rolls across her tongue. That sound may seal my fate.

"I hate that I want this," Gentry growls as he unbuttons his jeans and whips out his dick.

It's been a long time since I've seen my brother's junk, and I can't figure out why his wife wanted me when she had *that* to fuck. Like everything else on him, it's massive. Talk about insecurity inducing.

"Put her on her hands and knees," Gentry says as he runs his hand up his dick.

I pull out of her, and her pussy clenches and tugs at me. I can hardly resist telling Gentry to fuck off, but I *really* don't want to ruin this kinky therapy session.

I use her hips to turn her onto her belly, then pull her ass toward my pelvis. She leans over Gentry's lap, knowing exactly what she should do in this position. She takes him into her mouth, moaning on his cock as I push inside her, and she feels fucking incredible from behind.

He refuses to look at me, but I can't take my eyes off them. The way her head bobs and coats him in her spit. The way his hips rise every time my cock makes her moan. I enjoy seeing something other than bitterness on his face. Something that mimics happiness.

As she rides down his length with her mouth, Gentry buries his hand in her hair and pushes her down with his massive fingers. "Wanderer," he growls, spearing her throat with a thrust of his hips.

Her slick, warm walls tighten around me as she chokes on his dick. It's too much for me, and I come inside her with a groan I couldn't hide if I wanted to. I've already fucked up rule number two *and* three.

Gentry's eyes snap to mine, and the familiar haze of anger returns to his face. He starts to get up, but she keeps him down with a hand across his lap.

Nothing has ever held him back when he was angry, yet he's become this pliable wad of muscle from nothing more than her arm and her perfect fucking mouth.

"I told you her pussy is mine," he says.

"I know, dude. I didn't mean to. She started choking on your dick, then she tightened on mine, and . . . and I'll take care of it." I pull out of her and drop to my knees. "Give back what you stole from me, little thief." My tongue grazes her clit as I curl it around her entrance, and I love the way she jerks forward from nothing more than that tiny touch. My come emerges from her in creamy white ropes. She tilts her pelvis, and it drops onto my tongue. The salty mixture of semen and her pleasure dances on my taste buds, and I stick my tongue inside her so I can swallow every delicious drop.

"Come here," Gentry says, and she's tugged away from me and brought onto his lap.

I wipe the come from my lips and back away to put on my jeans. By the time I tuck my spent cock away, I'm blessed with a pretty sight. I may not know enough to appreciate fine art or understand the intricacies of a symphony, but I can grasp the beauty of what's happening before me. She rocks on his lap as she rides him, her round ass bouncing on his thighs, and musical moans spring from her throat with every curl of her hips. Fucking magnificent.

And then Gentry's phone breaks the magical moment. The ominous ringing that signals another hit. I stare as the phone vibrates on the desk beside Gentry. He's never missed a call from George, and for good reason.

I step toward the nightstand.

"Don't," he says. "Not with the noise she's about to make." He holds her hips and punctuates every word with a firm upward thrust. The strangled scream she releases would sound pained if I didn't see the pleasure woven through her eyes. He's right not to answer. Dead women don't scream like that.

Gentry's hips stall beneath her, and he grunts as he fills her. He leans into the crook of her neck, but his eyes meet mine. "My pussy, wanderer. Mine."

Two steps forward, one step back. I'll take it.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Gentry

I return George's missed call, and I'm shocked to find him in a pleasant mood. He's lined up one more hit before we reach the end of the line. The target is a man who likes to play the ponies but doesn't like to pay up when he loses. And he loses a lot, apparently. I get the details in the hall, then return to the hotel room. It's almost time to check out, but I need to speak with Leana before we push on.

Not wanting to have this discussion near Karson, I tell him we're walking to the lobby for food and that we'll bring something back for him. He's engrossed in a true-crime documentary on the flatscreen, so he's more than happy to hang back. He loves watching that shit and laughing at all the stupid mistakes the killers make, not realizing he'd be the star on one of those shows if I didn't always clean up after him.

Down in the lobby, Leana and I enter the attached restaurant and convince them to swap out the breakfast menu a little early by greasing their palms with some extra cash. I'm not in the mood for fluffy pancakes and crepes, and Leana had her heart set on spaghetti. We order everything to go, then step onto the veranda while we wait for our food. I don't want anyone to hear our conversation. I'm not even sure Leana will talk about it with me, but she'll definitely clam up if we're in front of strangers.

The hotel is attached to a winery, and a light breeze brushes over the fields below and shakes the grapevines. It's the sort of place where rich people go for brunch and mimosas, but we're alone for now. I glance at Leana as another puff of wind plays with the strands of blonde hair framing

her face. She looks so content. So serene. I hate to ruin it, but this conversation can't wait.

"Wanderer," I whisper as I lean against the balcony railing overlooking the sprawling vineyard. "What did your stepfather do to you?"

"Don't ask me that," she whispers, her head shaking. "It doesn't matter what he did. It was wrong, and that's all you need to know."

"Are you afraid I won't feel the same about you if you tell me? Because nothing you tell me would change the fact that I want to *live* inside you." I smirk, but I'm not sure she notices. My smile fades when she doesn't speak. "I don't think you're dirty or used or broken because someone took advantage of you. What happened to you wasn't your fault."

She scoffs and blinks away a thin veil of tears. "That's rich coming from someone whose brother forces himself on me regularly."

"I'm sorry." I grit my teeth as the truth of her words binds my chest with barbed wire. "I'll talk to him about it. He's not really capable of caring for someone, but I think he comes as close as he can with you. I think he'd stop if he knew it bothers you. He thinks you like it."

Her hands tighten around the railing, and she meets my gaze. "But that's the problem, Gentry. I don't want him to stop. I do like it. What the fuck does that say about me?"

I try to pull her against my chest, to comfort her the way she comforted me, but she pushes away. I let her have her physical space, but I won't back down. She made Karson and me work through our shit last night, and now it's her turn. "Let me in, wanderer. Let me give back what your stepfather took away when he hurt you."

"Hurt me? That's the understatement of the fucking year. More like he emotionally wrecked me, ruined my life, and shit on my soul," she says. "Do you really want to know what he did to me? What he did to a terrified child for *years*?"

I swallow and nod. I'm not certain I want to hear any of it, but it might help her if she finally tells someone what she went through.

She swipes her eyes, her chin shaking beneath her lower lip. "It started shortly after he married my mom, but I didn't realize it began there until years later. He'd buy clothes for me and ask me to model them while my mom was at work. I thought we were just playing dress up." She scoffs and stops speaking. I don't think she'll continue, but she takes a deep breath and presses on. "It only escalated from there, but slowly at first. Coming into

my room at night. Telling me he could make me feel good, but we had to keep it a secret.” She turns to me, her eyes hard and cold. “It never felt good. It felt scary and wrong.”

“Did you tell your mom?”

She laughs and folds her arms over her chest. “Yeah, eventually. It went further than touching when I was sixteen. Just before my eighteenth birthday, I decided I couldn’t take it anymore. I went to her and told her everything. I expected her to be angry, and she was, but her anger was directed at the wrong person. She called me a liar and said I was cruel to make up such terrible stories about a man who worked so hard to provide for us. That’s when I left.”

“And that’s when you met your fiancé?”

“Yeah, after traveling across the fucking country.”

Realization dawns on me. “We’re heading back the way you came.”

She nods. “Yep. All this time, we’ve been headed toward my origin point. California. We lived a few hours from LA. That’s why it scared me when you asked if I’d ever fantasized about killing someone. Because I have, Gentry. I’ve fantasized about what I’d do to him for years. I imagined all the ways I could hurt him every time he touched me.”

“What was his name?”

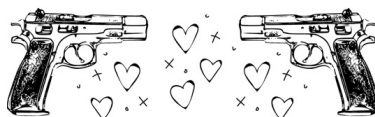
She looks at me, and I can see the wheels turning behind her blue eyes. She knows why I’m asking, and part of her wants to tell me everything I want to know.

But she turns away. “Please leave my past in the past, Gentry. Please.”

She knows better than to ask that of a man who held a grudge against his brother for six years. The past never stays in the past. “You can’t let him get away with this. He has to pay, and I plan to collect his debt.”

Before I can press her further, a waiter pops onto the veranda and tells us our food is ready. I drop it for now, but she taught me something last night that’s just as powerful as a grudge. When you have someone in your corner, fighting for your sanity, healing is possible.

And I plan to fight for her.



Karson

WHEN THEY GET BACK to the room, they both look absolutely miserable. We eat without speaking, but Leana only picks at her plate. Which is fucking odd considering how she's been bitching about eating some "real" food. After she chokes down little more than half her meal, she rises from the bed and says she wants to shower before we take off. I take the opportunity to talk to Gentry about the odd vibe.

"What's got you so upset this early in the morning? You and the thief get in a fight?" I ask.

"She's mentioned that someone assaulted her in the past, and I got more info on that today. I want to slit the fucker's throat, but she won't give me a name."

I'm surprised when my stomach tightens at hearing this. My stomach hasn't tightened when I've disemboweled people, fileted them while they were still alive, or used my condom-clad dick to fuck the holes my beloved knife created. I don't give a fuck. Ever.

"How far in the past are we talking?" I ask. "Is it me? Not that I would stop, but is it?"

"No, you unfeeling dumbass. I talked to her about that too, and she likes your sick little games." He shakes his head, his fist clenching into a ball. "This happened when she was just a goddamn kid."

My stomach unclenches and blossoms with red rage. I've done some supremely fucked-up shit in my life, but I have a line, and it's a hard stop at children. That's why I take so much joy in torturing the pedos of the world. Child predators and junkies are the fucking worst. Gentry hates dealers more than junkies because he still can't lay all the blame on our father, but I have no problem doing that. I carry a lot of hatred for dear old Dad, and I take it out on every addict I can. But we share our hatred for the sick fucks who touch kids. We may not have much in the way of a moral compass, but it points due north at those deplorables.

"What are you thinking, G?"

"I don't know yet. She said she wants to leave the past in the past, but I think she'll change her mind if we put her in front of him and give her the upper hand she deserves."

"Or she'll hate you for it," I say. She'd expect *me* to disobey her wishes, but she expects so much more from Gentry. "You've seen it too, though?"

“What are you talking about?”

“You said you think she’ll do what needs to be done if we give her the chance. You think she’d murder someone, which means you’ve noticed the same things I have. That she might be just a little fucked in the head. Like us.”

He nods and sighs. “But none of that matters if we can’t get a name.”

“Bullshit. We don’t need his name when we have hers.”

“What the fuck are you on about, Karson?”

“You know her full legal name, right?” I smile when he gives me another nod. “And how did you get that?”

His eyes widen and his spine straightens because he’s finally picking up on what I’ve already realized. One day he’ll have to admit I’m not as stupid as he makes me out to be.

“Bingo,” I say. “Her old address is probably still on that expired driver’s license.” When Gentry mentioned those licenses after our first night in a hotel, I tucked the info away. I figured we’d need it to track her down when she eventually bolted, but I like this outcome so much better.

Gentry goes to her bag and pulls the wallet from inside. He opens the camera on his phone, pulls the expired license from behind the current one, and snaps a picture of the address. After he tucks everything away, he looks at me and nods. We can’t let her know our plan. We can see the shadow lurking in her eyes, but it’s not the same shade of midnight as ours. She’s not as black as us. If she catches on, if she figures out where we’re headed before she’s in the car, she’ll fight us on it.

“This doesn’t guarantee the guy still lives there,” Gentry says as he sits on the edge of the bed. “We also need to figure out how to deal with the mother. Leana might be okay with carving a new eye socket into her stepfather’s forehead, but I doubt she’ll turn on her mom.”

“Did her mom know about this?”

The bathroom door opens, and we stop speaking. I’ll deal with the mom if Gentry and the thief are too weak to do what needs to be done. Even if she’s an innocent bystander in all this, it doesn’t matter to me.

As Leana dresses in front of us, I’m tempted to see if she and Gentry want to go for round two. But I’ll save it. If my little thief takes a life in front of me, it’ll be worth the wait.

“Grab your things and get ready to hit the road,” Gentry says as he heads toward the bathroom. He stops in front of her and kisses her before he

disappears behind the door.

Wearing nothing more than her shirt and a thin pair of panties, she stares at the door. I'm a bit jealous of the relationship between those two. He softens for her, and she melts like ice cream on a hot day. A girl like her will never like someone like me the same way. I'm unapologetically myself and I won't change for a woman, even one as perfect as her. But I'll make *changes*.

I walk over to her, cornering her against the dresser. Her breath hitches as mine washes over her, and she gasps as I drop my hand between her legs, sinking beneath the waistband of her panties. My eyes catch on the closed bathroom door. She's lucky I don't need much time to make her gush for me. A soft moan leaves her lips as I palm her and push my fingers inside her. I place my hand on her throat, and it bobs beneath my palm as she fights louder moans.

"Come for me," I whisper. "Before Gentry comes back, I want you to come on my fucking fingers."

"I can't," she pants, and I kiss her, drinking the sounds sliding from her mouth to mine. When her pussy clenches around me and her stomach draws in, I rip my fingers from her and a warm gush rains down on my palm.

"Fuck, that's a dirty little thief. You'll have to sit in that now."

The toilet flushes, and I pull my hand from her and sink my fingers into her mouth. She closes her lips around them.

"Show me what you taste like," I say, spreading my lips for her. She stands taller, prouder, and spits come-coated saliva into my mouth.

She steps into her pants, not bothering to clean herself up. I glance at the clock. It took three minutes to make her come. Maybe I don't have anything to be jealous about.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Leana

We say goodbye to the hotel, and I'm sad to watch it disappear in the rearview mirror. It's the nicest place I've ever stayed. As we pass through Nevada, I'm grateful Gentry doesn't press me for more information on my stepfather. The piece of shit definitely deserves whatever hellscape those psychos can conjure for him, but it's not something I'm ready to confront. I don't know if I'll ever be ready.

We reach the state border by early afternoon. After stopping long enough to piss and grab a few snacks from a gas station, we take a turn toward familiar town names. I try to swallow my fear that they've discovered my old address, telling myself their next target just happens to live near my mother's house. I don't bring it up, though. If my suspicion is incorrect, they'll know we're close and will likely force the information out of me. If I'm right . . . Well, it won't fucking matter.

I can't stop them.

I pass the time with small talk. Or try to. They're focused on getting ready for the job they have to do and don't have much to offer in the way of conversation. I eventually give up and stare out the window. My stomach rolls at the sight of every familiar landmark.

An hour later, they turn into the neighborhood where I grew up, and I can no longer pretend I don't know where we're going.

"You lied to me," I say from the back seat.

Karson turns to face me, his finger wagging in the air. "No, no. We didn't lie. We said we had a few more hits, and this is one of them."

Gentry turns onto my old street. I can see the house from here, and I don't recognize the car in the driveway. "Just stop! That's not even his car. I don't see my mother's car, either, so they probably moved. Let's just—"

"Let's just wait and see," Gentry says. His eyes meet mine in the rearview mirror, and my lips snap shut. I recognize the dark cast they've taken on. It's the same look I saw when he was carving words into that man.

We pull into the driveway, and my skin is ice. My mouth is a desert. My heart is a bass drum. The engine cuts off, and I can hardly hear the silence over the sound of blood rushing through my ears. I've boarded a train that's barreling toward a dark chasm, but there's nothing I can do to stop its forward momentum. I'm a passenger, taken against my will once more.

"Let's go, thief," Karson says. "We're home."

I shake my head, sending strands of blonde hair across my face. "No. If you guys feel the need to kill someone, go for it. I don't want any part of this. I'll wait in the car."

Gentry's head snaps in my direction. "Now you want to wait in the car? Of all the times, you choose now to be a good girl and stay put?"

"That's fine," Karson says. "If she doesn't want to make sure we're killing the right person, we'll just slaughter everyone in the house without verifying their identity first. This house is at the end of the street, and there's no one close enough to hear the screams. I have no problem with any of this." He reaches for the door handle.

"Wait!" I shout. When he puts it like that, I don't really have a choice. He's not bluffing. "If we knock on the door and it's not my stepfather, do you promise you'll let the people inside live?"

Karson looks away and sighs. "Yes, but only because this isn't an official hit. I've never willingly left a hit alive, and I don't plan to start today. But if your evil stepmonster opens that door, don't even think about pleading for his mercy. Got it?"

I nod.

We get out of the car and approach the front door. Aside from the car in the driveway, everything else looks the same. Even the curtains in the windows haven't changed after all these years. With Karson and Gentry behind me, I pool my courage, use the hem of my shirt to cover my fingertip, and ring the doorbell.

Silence answers. No footsteps approach. No blinds draw back.

"Well, we tried," I say. I turn for the SUV, but Gentry grips my arm.

“Where do they keep the spare key?” he asks.

My shoulders deflate, and I point to the wreath on the door. “In a metal box behind it. It’s magnetized.”

Before retrieving the key, they pull gloves from their pockets and slip them on. This singular act makes everything too real. Too final. My throat constricts, and I’m choking on my need for air.

“You can’t,” I say on a strangled breath.

“Can’t what?” Gentry asks, genuinely confused.

“You can’t kill him.”

Karson and Gentry raise their eyebrows at me.

“We aren’t going to,” Karson says with a smirk.

“I can’t kill him. Get that out of your head right now. I’m not one of you.”

Karson grits his teeth and struggles to keep his voice down. “How can you not feel homicidal when someone makes your body react so strongly to the thought of them? When they traumatized you to this point? Man up, thief. You have every reason to want him dead. Accept the blazing hatred for someone who hurt you, then embrace it. Let it cleanse you.”

I swallow. He’s right. But I can’t do this. “If you two want to kill him, fine, but I’m not doing it.”

“We’re gifting you a prize,” Gentry says. “You’ve fantasized about how you’d like to end this fucker’s life, and we’re making it possible. Sure, we could kill him, but we can’t kill him the way he deserves. By your hand.” He grips my shoulders with gloved hands. “Wanderer, listen to me. There are two kinds of people in this world: them and us. This is your chance to learn where you stand. Can you do this?”

I look into his dark eyes and finally draw a breath. “Yes, sir.”

“Good fucking girl.” He fists my hair and pulls me closer. As he kisses me, his length presses against me, and I don’t know if it’s because his lips are on mine or because we’re about to commit murder.

Probably both.

“We can fuck when this is over,” Karson says beside us. “My idea of foreplay is waiting inside, so can we get this show on the road?”

When Gentry releases me, I look at Karson, set my jaw, and nod. I’m ready to face the piece of shit.

Karson reaches into the bag on his shoulder, pulls out another pair of gloves, and slides them into my hands. “Put these on. Gentry will bitch and

moan if you leave any prints behind.”

I slip them on and try not to grimace when I notice what looks like old blood on the fingertips.

We enter the house, and I feel as if I’ve walked into a time capsule. All pictures of me have been removed, but everything else is exactly how I remember it. We silently search downstairs, but we find no sign of my stepfather in the living room or kitchen. The only other room is my old bedroom. My heart refuses to beat as we near the door.

Memories rush forward. Of the times my childhood was taken from me. Of the times the man who was supposed to protect me chose to hurt me instead. I don’t want to cross the threshold before me, but I don’t have a choice. With a shaking hand, I reach for the knob and turn it, opening the door just enough to peek inside.

This is no longer my bedroom. It’s been converted into an office, complete with a bookshelf, computer desk, and a large leather chair. Someone sits in that chair—a man wearing a pair of headphones as he watches something on the large computer monitor in front of him. I recognize the balding patch on top of his head, though it’s grown a bit since I last saw it.

My throat constricts again as I close the door, and I freeze. Heat burns in my chest and crawls up my neck. I struggle to breathe. This reaction is completely out of my control. I never thought I’d see this man again.

I never wanted to.

Gentry turns toward me, a genuine look of concern on his face. “Shh, wanderer,” he whispers. I don’t think he expected such a visceral reaction from me. *I* didn’t even expect this type of response. “It’s him, right?”

“Yes,” I whisper.

Gentry and Karson look at each other and nod before pushing past me and opening the door. The time for sneaking is over. They each go to one side of the chair and grab an arm, lifting the man before he realizes what’s happening. When they turn him to face me, his pants are around his thighs and his dick is out. I peer past him and see what’s on the computer screen. Bile rises into my throat.

“Looks like he still has a sick taste for kids,” Karson says. He reaches out a fist and shatters the screen. He turns his face toward my stepfather and snatches the headphones from his head. “Don’t worry, I didn’t damage the hard drive. All your nasty videos are still there for the cops to find.”

Gentry socks him in the mouth before he can scream. “What’s your name, you piece of shit?”

“M-Martin,” he mumbles through a swelling lip. “What are you doing in my house?”

“Where’s my mother?” I ask.

He turns and sees me for the first time, and a look of recognition washes across his face. It’s fucking priceless. The shock. The horror. The transient moment where he remembers what I felt like beneath him. The buffet of emotions he’s laid in front of me is the most gratifying meal I’ve ever seen, and I intend to eat my fill. My trepidation has fled, scared away by this unfamiliar hunger screaming inside me.

“I see you remember me,” I say as I walk up to him and lift his chin with my gloved hand. His green eyes are the same empty, floating orbs that haunted me every night of my childhood.

“What are you doing here, Leana?” he pants as he spits blood onto his T-shirt.

Karson pulls a roll of tape from his bag and begins securing Martin’s wrists, who then tries to scream. Gentry’s ready for him and sends his fist against his mouth again.

“You don’t know when to shut the fuck up, do you?” Gentry says. “Now answer her. Where’s her mother?”

He squirms against the tape on his wrists, his eyes darting between the three of us. “She died. About t-two years ago. She had a stroke.”

I don’t know how to process this information. Maybe part of me hoped my mother and I could make amends, as unrealistic as that sounds. That’s been taken away from me now. And he’s already taken everything else.

Karson sees the tears welling in my eyes, and darkness rushes over his gaze. He steps behind Martin, wraps his arm around his throat, and strangles the ever-loving hell out of him. My stepfather’s face reddens as he fights to suck a single breath past the pressure on his neck. Karson’s hold only tightens, and I worry he’s going to take the fucker’s head off. Just as Martin’s eyes roll back, Karson releases him.

Martin pants, trying to gulp every breath he missed out on. As soon as he’s breathing normally again, Karson repeats the process. He does this torturous dance three more times, and Martin sobs at every release.

“What did you do to our girl here, Martin?” Gentry asks as he stands in front of him and leans down.

“Fuck you,” Martin cries, and Gentry throws another punch to his face. White bone protrudes from the bridge of his nose this time and sends a gush of bright blood over his lips.

“Tell me what you did.” Gentry puts a hand up to the shell of his ear.

“I raised her like my fucking daughter. That’s all!” he squeals.

“Bullshit!” I scream. “You stole my innocence! You hurt me! You did things no one should ever do to a child!”

Karson unsheathes his knife and hands it to me with a wink. I embrace the handle and hold it at my side.

“That’s what you remember?” Martin smirks, spitting a gob of blood onto the floor. “You wanted it!”

His words fuel my arm as I thrust my hand forward and grip his cock. I send the blade through his flesh, slicing it off. Martin releases a hellish, girly scream, and Karson puts a hand to his own mouth to hide his shit-eating smile. Gentry tightens his lips to keep from laughing.

I grip the thinning hair at the back of Martin’s head and wrench his head back until I can look into his soulless eyes. “I was a fucking child. I didn’t consent to what you did to me. I didn’t like it, and it didn’t feel good. You took so much of me, and you never cared, did you? Have you ever wondered what you did to my fucking psyche?” I spit in his face. “Fuck you!”

“I didn’t hurt you! You were fucking fine!” he screams out, spit and blood flying from his lips.

“Fine? I’m fine? I’m fucking two serial killers for fun!” I shout.

Karson lets out a laugh, and Gentry punches him in the side. “Sorry, I just love her mouth,” Karson says through a heave. “Please, continue.”

“I have never been okay since you did what you did! I still have nightmares! I still close my eyes and see your ugly face.”

Martin lifts his chin and spits blood at me. Gentry brings back his arm to hit him again, but Karson holds him back. “Let her,” he whispers.

I bring the knife to Martin’s face and drag the blade down his cheek. He screams and tries to move away, but Karson and Gentry have him in a firm grip, holding him in place so I can continue.

And I do. I fucking do.

I carve his face until the flesh spreads and he becomes more and more unrecognizable. With every pass of the blade, I scream out the pain I’ve

held inside for most of my life. I grip the handle and prepare to drive the blade into his gut, to finally slay the demon who has haunted my mind.

But my hand won't move.

It was one thing to carve him up and slice off his dick like I've imagined doing, but ending a life . . . That's something else. My hand shakes, and the knife falls to the carpet. My eyes dart between Gentry and Karson, pleading for them to step in and finish this. "I can't do it. He deserves it, but I can't!"

Karson steps behind Martin and keeps him standing so Gentry can come to me. Gentry leans down, grabs the knife, and places it against my quivering fingers. When I don't grip it, he stands behind me and wraps his hand around mine, forcing my fingers to close. His other hand goes to my arm, rubbing it, comforting me.

I'm not alone. I'm not weak. That's what his touch tells me.

We step forward and plunge the knife beneath Martin's ribcage. I expect it to take more force, but the blade glides in, only stuttering a bit as it rubs against bone. I also expect to feel sickened by this act, by these sounds, by the horrific scream from Martin. Instead, I feel a rush. A dizzying wave courses through me, and I'm like a bird flying from a cage. I'm free.

Karson groans. "That is so fucking hot, thief."

"Good girl, wanderer," Gentry growls in my ear. "My little killer."

I melt into his touch as his words rush straight to my pelvis. Gentry eases our hands away from the knife handle, and he rubs my sides. Karson releases Martin, who falls to the ground in a gasping heap. Blood sputters from his lips, and he's stopped screaming.

Gentry hooks his gloved thumbs into my pants and tugs them to my thighs. When he pushes me down by the back of my neck, my hands land on the dying man's knees. Gentry unzips his jeans and pushes inside me. Martin shakes with each thrust, blood falling from his lips in heavy drops as his breathing grows more and more irregular. He blinks at me as if he wants to speak, but he can't. We've silenced him forever, and I hope he enjoys the show.

Gentry reaches between my legs and rubs me. "I want you to come for me, with your hands on his fucking knees as he bleeds out in front of you."

Karson walks over, unzips his pants, and pulls out his hard cock. His hand strokes his length as he brushes the hair away from my face. "Suck it, thief," he growls, and I turn my head toward him. "Not me," he says as he

guides my chin toward the handle sticking out of Martin's abdomen. "Suck my favorite knife."

I stare at the bird's-head grip and take the weapon's handle into my mouth, my tongue rolling over the finger grooves along the bottom. The tangy taste of metal, blood, and leather fill my mouth. Karson strokes faster as I suck off his knife.

"Like that, thief," Karson growls as he strokes himself above my head. Martin coughs, sending a spattering of blood across my face and Karson's dick, but we don't stop.

Karson's strokes oddly turn me on, and I find myself biting into the grip as Gentry's fingers bring me that much closer. I want to come before Martin dies. I want him to see what it looks like when a man makes a woman feel good. Gentry's thrusts knock me forward onto the handle, sending it deeper into Martin's gut. Each breath my stepfather takes grows shallower, more irregular.

I pull my mouth away from the handle of the knife and bear down on Gentry as he makes me come. Karson strokes himself harder and faster as each moan leaves my mouth. My entire body shudders in front of the man who hurt me. My pleasure overpowers any pain he caused, and his current pain only fuels my pleasure. As he dies, I find life—an undeniable and explosive dichotomy.

"I'm going to fill your perfect pussy," Gentry growls as his hips stutter against my ass. His thrusts grow ragged as he comes inside me. "Don't let a single drop fall out of you."

As he pulls away, I sit up so that my pussy hovers over my jeans, then I pull them up so I don't lose a drop of Gentry's precious come.

"We have to finish him off," Karson says. He turns to me, still stroking his dick. "May I?" He asks this with a childish excitement, and I don't have the heart to tell him no.

"Please do," I say. I've more than fulfilled my fantasy at this point.

I stand up and find myself wanting to put my hand on Karson as he steps between me and Martin. I stand behind him, reach around, and grip his dick. Karson lets me take over, leaning forward and ripping the knife from Martin's abdomen. He groans, and I'm not sure if it's from the squelching sound the blade makes as it pulls free or the movement of my hand or all of the above.

Karson lifts Martin by his blood-soaked hair and stabs the blade into his throat. Arterial blood sprays across my face as he removes the knife, and Martin finally stops breathing.

“Fuck, thief, you’re going to make me come. Squeeze my base,” he says through clenched teeth.

I do as he says. The last thing we want is for anyone’s come to be left at the scene of a homicide. Karson secures the knife on his hip, grabs my shoulders, and pushes me to my knees. He shoves his cock in my mouth, and the metal piercings clack against my teeth in his haste to be inside me. He pushes to the back of my throat three times before easing back and filling my mouth.

“Show me,” he says through a growl.

I spread my lips and show him what he gave me, then he rips off one of his gloves and smears his finger through the blood on my face before pushing it into my mouth. The metallic taste mixes with his salty come.

“Now swallow.”

I take the unpleasant mixture to the back of my throat and do as he commands. He pulls me to my feet and kisses me, his tongue exploring my mouth to taste what I tasted. He grips my chin and pulls away to lap at my cheek, licking my abuser’s blood from my skin. Gentry comes up behind me and buries his face in my shoulder. I love when both their hands are on me.

“You did such a good job, my dirty little killer,” Gentry whispers. “No one who hurts you will be allowed to draw breath. I promise you that.”

“We promise you that,” Karson clarifies as his tongue swipes my lips once more.

Gentry turns my face toward his and kisses me. With a low and loving voice, he says, “You got the revenge you deserve. Now you’re one of us.”

Chapter Twenty-Four

Gentry

I stare at Leana in the rearview mirror as we travel to our next hit, but I force my eyes back to the road so we don't end up in a ditch. Darkness blankets the earth, and an overcast sky silences the stars. A heaviness hangs in the air. I am so incredibly proud of her for facing her abuser and silencing him, but I'm still struggling with what's happening between the three of us.

My eyes rise to her once more.

How did years of bitterness sweeten up enough to let us share someone? Not just someone, *my someone*. My wanderer. How did knowing she was being fucked by him send an undeniable ache through me?

My brother and I used to be so connected, so close that it felt like we were twins instead of years apart. We shared so many things, like the hunger we felt before a kill and the satisfied elation after a job was finished. When he hurt, I hurt. When he was angry or happy, I felt those emotions as well. But the moment I saw him with my wife, our connection severed. Tore apart in an instant. Broke in ways I always thought were irreparable. Then she changed that. When he was inside Leana, I felt all of it. The desire and excitement. The need for her. And it made me need her too. She was the glue that reconnected the loose ends.

I don't know if Karson and I are capable of love, but our need to protect her comes pretty close. After the way she stepped into her role earlier, she's more than earned her place by our side. Hell, beginning to mend the years of hurt between us was probably enough, but it helps to know she's got a

touch of darkness inside her. Darkness that was there before we put more inside her, that is.

I pull into an alcove of trees and peer at the colonial home on the dead-end road. It looks so plain. So inexpensive. Our typical hits live in mansions, complete with wads of cash to pilfer after we've finished a job. I don't expect to leave with much money from this one, and I don't like that. This feels like a waste of fucking time. Regardless, it's a job, so I tuck my pistol down the back of my pants and climb out of the SUV. I go to the back door and open it.

"Stay," I command, though I know she won't listen. That's her thing—being a beautiful problem. Her eyes flash up at me, and I rub my finger along her lower lip before leaning down and capturing her mouth.

"Haven't I proved I can handle myself?" she asks.

She's not wrong, but I'm not sure she can handle just how depraved we become. Back at her house, she fed on her rage and pain. She might struggle more when she's faced with taking the life of someone who hasn't wronged her, and I don't need a voice of reason in my ear when I'm trying to work.

"Come on, G," Karson says.

"Stay," I tell her once more.

She sits back with a scoff, and I shut the door.

We walk through the trees, then along the side of the house until we reach the back door. Karson uses a gloved hand to check windows as we pass, but they're all locked. When we reach the door, it's locked as well. Karson pulls a lock-picking kit from his pocket and gets to work. He's always been a wizard with locks. He learned the trade when we were kids. Instead of collecting action figures or baseball cards—which we never had the money for anyway—he learned how to disengage every lock known to man.

His tongue peeks from between his lips as he faces a challenge with this one. He tries a few techniques and tools before he's greeted by a satisfying click, then he opens the door with a sinister smirk.

As we creep through the house, I draw my knife and ready my grip on the handle. We know nothing about this man other than his name and the reason for the hit—poor Allan owes a lot of money to a lot of people—which is unusual. We normally get more info than this, but George said he didn't have time for specifics. He was probably pissed that I missed his call

and figured he could annoy me by withholding info. It worked. I'm definitely annoyed. Karson and I like to know about our hits so we can tailor their death to their personality. Kind of like a personalized service. We should really charge more.

After searching the house, we find the man on his stomach, sprawled across his bed with one knee toward his chest. He's fast asleep, snoring away. I stay in the doorway, but Karson moves closer, leans down, and clears his throat in the man's ear. He wants to see the fear on his face when he emerges from his dreamy slumber and comes face to face with a nightmare.

The man slowly rolls over, his eyes widening as he takes in the confusing scene above him. He leaps from the bed and runs right into me as soon as he crosses the threshold. A single punch is all it takes to put him right back to sleep.

We grab a dining room chair and set it in the middle of the living room. Once we've hauled his body into the seat of honor, we duct tape his hands behind his back, threading the tape through the wooden slats. I go for his ankles next, wrapping the tape around each chair leg and connecting it to his skin. His head flops forward, his mouth gaped, blood dripping from his nose.

Karson goes to the kitchen and begins rifling through the drawers. There are tons of murder weapons right out in the open, but that's not what he's looking for. This is another Karson specialty. He finds random shit around the target's house and uses it to torture them. Bags, nail guns, walking sticks—you name it, he's used it on a hit.

He plucks a roll of plastic wrap from a drawer and holds it up with a grin. Happy to have found what he needs, he comes behind the man and tries to hold up his head while securing the plastic around his face. Unfortunately, the wrap sticks to itself and doesn't create the effect he's going for. He's an artist, after all, and he needs his masterpiece to mimic his vision.

"Little help?" he asks, shaking the man by the hair. "I can't hold his head and line this up."

I roll my eyes and walk over, replacing his hand with mine. Karson winds the plastic around the man's face, keeping the sheet flat to create the perfect viewing window. It sucks into the man's mouth with every attempted breath. I have to admit . . . it's beautiful. Unlike a bag, which

would have given him a few good breaths before the oxygen started to disappear, the wrap just instantly traps his face and obstructs all air.

The man's eyes widen as his brain kicks him awake. Within a haze of palpable panic, he jerks against the restraints, his chest heaving with every gasp. Fucking delicious. It will be over too soon like this, though. He needs more time to really feel the fear, to let it soak into his bones and leave it etched on his face, even after death.

I grab a fork from a drawer and use it to poke a pinhole into the plastic over his mouth. The air makes a whistling sound as he breathes. "Do you have any cash?" I ask.

He shakes his head.

Karson steps in front of the man and assesses his handiwork. "He's a gambling addict. If he had cash, it's probably gone by now."

"Even losers win sometimes," I say. "Keep him alive while I go look for a safe."

Karson scoffs. "Waste of time."

I turn around and head toward the bedroom. I rummage through the closet, but I don't find a safe or money or anything of value. Worthless sentimental shit clutters the shelves, and simple clothes hang from the racks. I go for the dresser drawers next, but they're just as disappointing as the closet. A wallet rests on the bedside table beside a half-empty glass of water. I snatch it up and flip it open, finding only a ten and some ones. When my eyes fall on the driver's license, my stomach sinks.

I rush back to the living room and slash my blade across the plastic over his mouth, slicing his skin in the process. Blood drips down his chin and stains his shirt. "What's your name?" I snarl.

"Roger!" he screams out.

"We've got the wrong fucking guy!" I yell.

Karson looks down at the trembling man. "He's not a target?"

I flip through the wallet again and find a business card. "He's a goddamn pastor."

"Have we ever killed a holy man?" Karson asks, cocking his head. His eyes rise back to mine. "I mean, we don't really have a choice now. We have to—" He swipes his finger across his own throat.

Unlike Karson, I feel things. I'm not totally on board with killing innocents, but sometimes it can't be helped. This is one of those times.

“If we confess now, do you think it absolves us of our sins?” Karson asks as he leans closer to the man.

Pastor Roger furiously shakes his head.

Karson smiles. “I think it does. I think that’s how this works. I tell you my sins, I do three or four Hail Marys, and then I go to heaven, right?” He leans closer and whispers something that makes the poor old pastor see the devil before his eyes, then Karson starts reciting the prayer.

Once.

Twice.

The third time, he stabs his knife into the pastor’s gut. “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” He twists the blade. “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of death.” He drives the knife upward. “In the name of the Father.” He rips it downward. “And of the Son.” He pulls the blade sideways to finish the cross. “And of the Holy Spirit.” With a wide grin, he removes the blade and flicks a splash of blood onto Pastor Roger’s forehead. “Amen.”

My lips tighten. What the ever-loving fuck is wrong with him? “Are we done?” I ask.

“Yeah, yeah.” He wipes his blade on the inside of his jacket and slides the knife into its sheath.

“Actually,” I say, “find a Ziploc bag.” I pull out my knife and hack the pastor’s right hand from his limp body.

The fact that he doesn’t question me is one of the *few* reasons I like my brother. Chopping off a hand and asking for a bag usually begs for questions, but he just rolls with it and begins searching cabinets and drawers.

“Oh my god, this man has a vacuum seal machine! And bags!” he shouts.

I meet him in the kitchen and toss the hand into the bag. Karson slides the bag’s open edge into the machine and it sucks out the air, leaving the hand looking like a bloody chicken breast. The machine clamps off the end with a mechanical click.

“What do you plan to do with it?” Karson asks, his eyes lighting up with anticipation.

“We have one more hit. One final job to do. I figure we can find some use for it and really go out in a blaze of glory.”

Karson gives a slow nod. "I like it."

"Let's get out of here." I start toward the door. "We need to call George and figure out where the wires were crossed. He's never fucked up like this before."

"I'm surprised the thief is actually waiting in the car," Karson says behind me.

Yeah, it is fucking surprising. She usually comes barging in when her morbid curiosity gets the better of her. A shitty feeling squeezes my gut, but I try to push it away. She probably had her fill of murder after what we did just hours ago. Considering she didn't put up too much of a fight when I told her to stay put in the car, I'm going with that.

Even as I try to reassure myself, my feet pick up their pace toward the SUV. I step off the porch, seeing only what's directly in front of me. Karson's boots crunch against the earth as he tries to keep up when I break into a run. When I see the car, my stomach drops.

The back door is open, and the dome light reveals an empty SUV. I blindly hope she's just run off, that she wants us to chase her, but that hope evaporates when I reach the open door. A track of drying blood streaks the seat, and claw marks run through it. My wanderer didn't run off. She put up one hell of a fight to stay.

Someone took her.

My eyes dart around. I see only trees, smell nothing more than nature and blood. Blazing anger sears my insides until I'm a boiling kettle of rage. I've never felt such an insurmountable sense of loss. Of emptiness. This is the exact fucking reason I've always been so guarded. I shouldn't be allowed to feel such strong emotions because it makes me fucking homicidal when I'm *already* homicidal.

Karson's feral smile fades when he reaches the car. "What's the matter?" he asks.

"Leana is gone."

"She probably ran—"

My glare hardens. "No, Karson. She's fucking gone."

"Wait, what?"

"There's blood. They pulled her out of the car!"

"Who's they, G?" he asks as he takes a cautious step toward me.

"You fucking know who. And it's your fault."

I whip out my pistol, and Karson takes several steps backward.

He raises his hands. "Gentry, wait!"

The terrified gleam in his eyes almost makes me laugh because Karson has *never* feared me. My rage usually inspires him to poke and prod and make me angrier. But not this time. I can only imagine what I must look like for him to step back like a scared little animal. Like the things we catch and kill.

I level my barrel at his face. My finger wraps around the trigger, and everything in me tells me to do it. To kill him. His finger has depressed the detonator on every single fucking thing in my life that's blown up on me. This is all his doing.

"You did this, Karson! You! If you hadn't called George and told him Leana was with us, none of this would be happening right now!"

"G, it wasn't me! I swear."

"Who else knew she was with us, Karson? Who else would have called George?"

He licks his lips, the wheels spinning in his mind as they struggle to gain traction on an answer that will lower my hand. "The guy she was with," he says, his eyes widening. "The guy before us. She was dope sick when we picked her up, so maybe that guy has connections to George's druggie side jobs. Maybe they're working together on this."

His words almost make sense. I can understand her ex going to great lengths to get her back.

"Think about it. This hit wasn't a mistake. It was a fucking setup. And I know where they might be," Karson adds. "George has a warehouse about an hour from here. I've only been there once, but I think I can find it again. Let's go there and get the truth. If I'm lying, you can kill me then."

I lower the gun. "Get in the fucking car."

We load into the SUV, and Karson just stares at me as we turn onto the road. "Are you going to kill me if we don't find her?"

My fingers tighten around the steering wheel. "Yes, and there's a good chance I'll kill you even *if* we find her."

He throws himself backward like a child. "Then why should I bother helping?"

"Because if you don't, I'll cut off both of your hands, put them in a prayer position, and shove them so far up your ass you'll be shitting Hail Marys for a goddamn year."

That's enough to shut him up, and aside from offering some directions, he doesn't speak again. That's a good thing. If I discover he's lying, I'll be forced to silence him permanently.

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Chapter Twenty-Five

Leana

Tape strangles my wrists, and I breathe used air beneath the heavy black sack on my head. I'm in the back seat of some luxury car that smells like expensive cigars, money, and warm leather. A hand lands on my thigh, and I jerk my leg away with a growl.

"Vicious one," someone says beside me.

I recognize that voice. It carries the same low, authoritative tone that told Gentry to get rid of me. Well. Fuck.

George's phone rings again, and I can only assume Gentry or Karson have been blowing it up. Probably before they come and actually blow shit up. If they can find me.

"They're going to kill you," I say through the hood.

He hears my muffled words and smacks my cheek hard enough to make my ear ring. "I hope they do. I want them to find you so I can kill them after I kill their little toy in front of them."

"You need home-turf advantage because you *know* what they'll do to you on a level playing field. You knew you couldn't take them out at that target's house."

"Target? What have they been teaching you? You haven't taken the prerequisite courses on living a life of hardship to get into this class."

"You don't know anything about me."

He lets out a hollow laugh and holds my thigh in a grip I can't shake off. "I know enough."

A sharp tingle runs through my arms and hands, and I shift my weight to relieve the building pressure. The vehicle eases to a stop, and so does my heart. The dozens of unknowns rush through my head and drown out any rational thought.

The door to my left opens, and hands wrap around my arms and haul me out of the car. I spew curse words beneath the hood and kick my legs until my feet connect with concrete. A garage door rises in front of me, clicking and clacking on its track as the motor whirs, so I'm probably at a house. I consider screaming, but if they're brazen enough to bring a hooded woman through the garage, I doubt there's anyone around to hear my cries for help. Doing so would only piss them off, so I keep my mouth shut as they lead me forward.

"Stairs," a gruff voice says behind me.

My foot searches for the first tread, and I clumsily climb a staircase that seems to go on forever. When we reach the top, I'm ushered through another doorway and my feet connect with the familiar thud of hardwood floors. The man behind me grips my shoulders, turns me to face him, and eases me backward until my spine touches something cold and tall. He slices through the tape on my wrist and secures something else in its place. I feel around with my fingertips until my mind can piece a picture together: I'm handcuffed to a fucking pole.

The hood lifts from my head, and I squint against the room's bright light. As my eyes adjust, my mouth falls open. I'm tethered in a spacious living room, dwarfed by the tallest ceilings I've ever seen and windows that would fill the room with sunlight if it wasn't late at night. The slick hardwoods gleam, and plush red couches and chairs surround a giant fireplace.

My eyes move to the men. George—wearing a three-piece suit in an ostentatious shade of baby blue—stands between four muscular men. He isn't at all what I expected. He's much older than he sounded, and he's kind of short. But I guess he doesn't need to be big when he has Vin Diesel's body-doubles for friends.

"So you're the reason my best men have been acting fucking suicidal?" George asks. He takes a step toward me, and his men mirror each move. He lifts a strand of my hair, screws up his mouth, then drops his hand. "Kind of plain if you ask me. Don't you think?" He turns to his men.

“She looks better than she did when she was high.” That voice crawls up my spine and raises the hair on the back of my neck. I refuse to believe it until he steps into the room, and then I can’t deny what’s right in front of my face.

“Mickey?” I breathe.

“What? You didn’t believe me when I said I’d find you if you ever left me?” He steps closer, and his cologne sends a million terrible memories rushing to the surface of my mind. “I had a tail on you the whole time you were on the street. I lost you for a bit when you stole that car, but when I found out George’s boys were riding in a similar make and model, I put two and two together.”

“So Karson really didn’t tell George?” I ask. “It was you?”

“I wasn’t certain at first, but when I saw that little video, there was no denying it. Your tattoo gave you away.” He drags his finger along the curve of my breast, and I wiggle away. “Great acting, by the way. He asked me if I thought it was real, but I know you. I said, ‘That’s my Lee, but she ain’t dead.’” He circles me.

“I’m not yours anymore, Mickey.”

“You’re damn right you’re not. Not after you’ve been all used up. I expected you to hop on the first dick you saw, but the Kursickis? You got yourself involved with some real bad people. Way worse than me.”

“How do you know them?” I ask, my eyes narrowing.

“We all work in the same circus, but we perform in different rings. I’m one of George’s dealers, but I’m well aware of George’s star acts. His deadly, daring duo.”

Go fucking figure. Just my luck.

He brushes a firm hand through my hair. “You’re looking good. Healthy,” he whispers in my ear, and I rip away from his words, straining against the handcuffs. His hand rides down my neck and grazes the scabby cut on my left breast. He rips my shirt, exposing my nipple. “Since you like to show your tits to random men.”

Refusing to give him the satisfaction of a reaction, I suck my lower lip into my mouth to stop the tremble. I curl my toes, letting the tension run through my calves so I don’t kick him. If he knows how much he’s hurting me, he’ll do more. Worse.

Mickey reaches into his pocket and tugs out a pill. The sight of it makes my mouth water. Makes my toes uncurl. It would help ease some of the

pain in my head from where they hit me when they took me.

I shouldn't want that pill.

But I do.

I stick out my tongue and allow Mickey to place the pill into my mouth, then I dry swallow and wash it down with immediate regret and guilt.

"Good girl, Lee. You're always more pliable when you're high."

George lets out a laugh and slaps a hand on Mickey's shoulder, then they all exit the room. As my head begins to swim a few minutes later, I can only think of Gentry and Karson. When I was with them, I no longer craved pills or escapes. I was happy. I found freedom. Now I'm caged again.

I sink to the floor. "Please hurry," I whisper before I close my eyes and slip beneath the waves.

Gentry. Karson. I want them. I trust them. I need them to save me again, to set me free.



MY EYES CRACK open as an immense weight presses down on my body. So heavy. I turn my head and glance out the window. It's still dark outside, but the moon has hardly moved across the sky. I haven't been out for very long, but enough time has passed to leave me feeling incredibly disoriented and confused. What did Mickey give me? Something stronger than I'm used to, that's for sure.

Metal digs into my wrists as my arms strain backward. I try to jiggle them against the pole, but everything happens in slow motion—a disconnect between my movements and my brain.

A rough grasp pulls my chin downward. The weight above me is George, and my thighs are spread around him. As if trying to scream underwater, my mouth opens and produces a silent cry. His fingers dig into my thighs as I try to kick at him.

"Morning," he says as he leans over and squeezes my cheeks, forcing me to close my mouth.

I can't even feel him between my legs. I'm either too high or he's too small. I only feel the thump of his hips slamming into me. The familiarity is

too much. My stepfather is dead, but George is a reincarnation of the worst kind. Just like Martin, he has stolen my voice. He has silenced me.

I'm so fucking tired. Every breath takes too much out of me. I gather enough strength to pull my face away from his grasp, but my head only lolls to the side. A lamp across the room catches my eye, and the light blurs as I try to focus on its tasseled shade. I move my gaze to the mahogany desk beneath it, but it all blurs until it's just an array of colors and shapes in the distance.

Am I going to die? Am I about to overdose with this bag of old bones inside me?

When I think my situation can't get any worse, words come from somewhere far away from me. "Your turn," George says as he climbs off me.

One of the guards kneels and brings his face close to mine. I shrink away from his warm breath, but my disgust doesn't deter him. He lifts my thighs and hooks them over his knees.

And it starts again.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Karson

I'm not showing it like Gentry, but I *am* upset about this. It's fucked up. We tried to keep her in the car to protect her from us. Protect her from our job. If we'd taken her with us, she'd be safe right now.

"G?"

"Don't, Karson. Don't speak unless you're giving directions to George's place."

I open my mouth and close it again. I'd normally push him a little further, annoy him a little more, but he's beyond the point of no return. If I even opened that bag of chips between us, he'd slice my jugular with his knife.

I don't know what else to say. I can't fix it. Even though it's not my fault, I can't make him believe me. I can only help get her back and let Gentry learn the truth so he can stop being so pissed off. He has no choice but to work with me in ways we haven't worked together in years. We used to know the exact move the other would make, like a fucked-up dance. Serial synchronization. For once in a very long time, he needs my help, and as much as it sucks, it's a chance to prove I'm not *as much* of a fuck up as he thinks.

My stomach grumbles and sends a hunger pang through my insides. "Do you think we should stop to eat?" I ask.

He glances at me.

I'm not being annoying, I'm starving.

“No. I won’t stop for a single fucking thing until we get there. Every extra minute she’s with George—” His hands tighten around the wheel in a death grip. The thing fucking squeals, and I worry he’s about to snap it in half.

“Alright.” I take the risk and pluck the bag of chips from the center console. The cellophane screams like a jet engine in this silent space, so I snatch the bag open and bring a single chip to my mouth.

But Gentry reaches over and smacks it out of my hand.

“Dude, chill!” I say. “I want to find her too. She’s grown on me, believe it or not, but I’m still a human being and I need to eat. And piss.”

“We can’t.”

“The little thief is tough, G. She’ll be okay.” Trying to relate to or comfort someone isn’t my strength, but I’m fucking trying. I can kill someone, but fuck off if I have to connect with someone on a personal level.

Except Leana.

Aside from my brother, the weird dynamic between me and the thief is the closest I’ve ever felt to caring for a person. I let her steal a part of whatever heart I have.

“George is a man even we fear, so how do you expect Leana to survive his wrath?” Gentry says. “We’ve always been on borrowed time with him, and that’s why I wanted this run to be our last.”

My eyes snap up to him. “I am *not* afraid of that sack of shit. I’ve been ready to turn on his ass for ages. Don’t forget that I gave zero fucks when he wanted to kill me.”

“What are you going to do, Karson? What do you really think you’ll be able to do when you face him?”

I grip my pistol in one hand, my knife in the other, and wave them in the air. “I’m going to find his old ass and humble him. Or die trying. You just worry about getting our girl while I’m busy.”

Gentry’s lips tighten but draw up at the corners. “If they touched her, you won’t be the only one doing some humbling.”

He pulls the SUV to a stop in front of a large building. The warehouse is beyond massive—even bigger than I remember—but my stomach twists when I spot the empty parking lot. George is in one of three places, but I’ve made the wrong choice. He’s not here.

We get out of the SUV, and the first thing I do is take a piss in the bushes. Gentry sighs and unzips his fly to do the same. The short time it takes to pee unnerves him and sets him on edge. A snarky comment lurks beneath my tongue, but I let it pass. He feels like every second matters, but George doesn't want *her*. He wants *us*. Well, he wants to kill all of us, no doubt, but he'll keep her alive until we get there. That's the sort of sick shit I would do, anyway.

I walk along the outside of the building with Gentry. We peer into windows scabbed over with dirt. When I check the only two entrances, there's a layer of scum on the knobs. No one has been here in a while.

"He's not here, G." My words aren't enough to get him to stop searching, and I have to physically pull his giant ass toward the car. "Come on, dude. You can't handle seven seconds to piss, but you'll wallow around an empty building for an eternity?"

"Fuck you!" he roars before turning back and socking me in the face.

He's punched me many times over the years—probably more times than I can count—but I've never felt so much hatred within his balled fist. My arms go behind me to brace myself for a collision, and I crash to the busted concrete. Even though he sucker punched me, I won't fight back. He's hurting more than I am right now.

"I'm sorry, Gentry."

Something in this apology seems to resonate with him more than the apologies in the hotel. This one sinks in. Maybe because I meant this one.

He shakes out his hand and groans before helping me to my feet. "Where to next?"

"His club," I say.

Gentry cocks his head. "You really think he'd bring her to a club?"

"There's a whole sketchy basement with soundproof walls and a side entrance. You don't have something like that unless you plan to bring some people down there who don't want to be there."

"Get in the car," he snaps.

We drive through the city until we reach the nightclub. A shitload of vehicles clutters the parking lot here, but I don't know if any belong to George and his men. I can only hope I'm right this time.

Gentry parks, wipes at his eyes, and gets out of the car, then we conceal our weapons and head toward the entrance. As soon as we step inside, music bumps in my chest and I'm mesmerized by the strobe lights flashing

over the shadowed bodies in the next room. The bouncer stares at us, as if we have “I’m going to ass fuck your boss before slitting his throat” written on our foreheads. He stands up and steps toward us.

Gentry rushes forward and pushes him against the wall before he can draw his gun, knocking into his shitty podium on the way. I whip out my knife and hold it against his throat, and suddenly the big, scary bouncer is nearly pissing his pants.

“Where’s your boss?” Gentry asks.

“Joe is inside,” he says through a tensed jaw.

“Not Joe. Your real boss. Where’s George?” He shakes him, which scrapes my blade over his skin.

“He’s been gone since last night,” the bouncer nearly whimpers. “We don’t know where. He doesn’t tell us anything.”

Gentry pats the man’s cheek. “If I find out you’re protecting him, I’ll come back here, cut off your dick, stuff it in your mouth, and choke you with it. Are we clear?”

I pocket my knife and stare him down.

“Crystal,” he says.

Gentry rams him into the wall once more before releasing him, then unholsters his pistol and pockets it. “I’m taking this for my inconvenience.” He backs away and motions for me to follow.

“Got any more bright ideas?” Gentry says through gritted teeth as we jog back to the SUV.

Before I can answer, his phone buzzes for the first time since Leana was taken. I rip it from his hands and open the message before he has a chance. I have a feeling I know who’s reaching out on this fine evening, and Gentry won’t be able to handle what I suspect will be embedded in this message. My shoulders fall when I open it.

“What is it?” he asks.

I don’t answer him, which is probably pretty alarming, considering I never shut the fuck up.

“What is it, goddamn it!”

My mouth falls open before I can stop it. He’s seen me fuck a knife wound before. *Nothing* makes my mouth gape. Which means it’s really something. And it is.

“Give it to me,” he commands.

I shake my head. “Trust me when I say no. You don’t want to see this. If it’s making *me* this upset, it will break you.”

He grips my wrist and bends it backward, but I hang on to the phone, even when I feel my bones strain to a breaking point.

“Stop, stop! You can watch it, but not now. Wait until just before you go in at the next stop. The video shows where they are. I know where to go, but we’ll never make it there if you look at that video.”

He releases my arm. “Where are they?”

“It’s a bad fucking idea to go there like this. They’ll overpower us.”

“We have four pistols, several knives, and a vendetta. What more do we need? Now tell me.”

“It’s his home, Gentry. He has guards, trained attack dogs, and who the fuck knows what else?”

Gentry sets his jaw and shakes his head. “We can’t leave her. We have to try. She wouldn’t be in this mess if we hadn’t taken her along on this messy goddamn ride. If we hadn’t climbed in her car and brought her into this fucked up world where she doesn’t belong.”

“We’ll figure it the fuck out,” I say.

I’m entirely unsure how we will, but we don’t have another choice.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Gentry

Any chance of getting out alive means working hand in hand with my brother and trusting him in ways I haven't in a very long time. I don't even know if I'm capable of this. I will have to trust him as if he didn't betray me so many fucking times. I'll have to lay my well-being in his lap and trust that he has my back.

Alone, we can't win.

Together? We might just stand a chance.

Karson silently broods beside me as we travel on winding back roads toward George's house. His nails dig into his thighs every so often, as if he's reliving the video in his mind. I squeeze the wheel. Was she being tortured? Touched? Fucked? I growl at the thought. He's right to withhold that video until we get there.

The man beside him right now is controlled.

Leashed.

Repressed.

When I see that video, I will become the old me, and the old me coupled with the current Karson might just be enough.

We turn onto a tree-lined road that snakes up a hill. As we near the top, the massive mansion comes into view, illuminated against the stark black sky. Floodlights perch on the perimeter like mechanical sentries with tall black bodies and brightly glowing heads. There's also a fucking guard post. Two, actually.

This will be fun.

We're hitmen, not fucking assassins, but if you get us mad enough, we might just change our line of work. And George has taken this too fucking far.

I kill the headlights and pull the SUV into the woods. An embankment blocks the view of the mansion, which means they can't see us, either. I gesture for the phone, and Karson places it against my palm and turns away. When I turn on the screen and run my finger over the giant crack in the glass, George's message pops into view.

I'm only looking at the cover image, but it's enough to make my blood heat to a simmer beneath my skin. Leana lies on a hardwood floor, her blonde hair fanned around her head. Her eyes are closed, and she looks like she's sleeping. I click the video and an icon swirls around on the black screen before it begins. The camera operator zooms in on Leana. Her face is toward the camera, but she doesn't move, even as the cameraman puts his dick in her mouth. Then her eyes flutter, and she gives a weak groan.

She's drugged up.

The camera pans downward and focuses on the ripped shirt and her bare chest. It moves lower and I don't want to watch, but I can't look away. It stops on her pale thighs, which hook around the legs of someone in black slacks.

Then, the cameraman speaks.

It's George.

"You want your girl, Gentry? Come and get her. We've come for her several times already."

It's the first time Karson has heard the audio, and his hands clench into fists when he hears the laughter from the other men in the room. He was wholly correct when he chose to keep this from me.

I crack my neck, then my knuckles, and expand my chest with a deep inhale to send another rush of snaps down my spine. "Get the fucking hand."

"What?" Karson asks, his eyes wide.

"The pastor's hand. Get. It."

He keeps his eyes on me as he reaches back and grabs the vacuum-sealed appendage. I lay the pistols and knives on the dash, then pick up my pistol and rack it to ensure it's loaded. I stuff my spare magazine in my pocket. I don't carry more than that because I've never needed to. If I run

out of ammo in one magazine, I use my hands. Or my blade. I check the Glock I pulled off the bouncer. Ten rounds. California “legal.”

Lame, but that’s ten more than I had.

I pocket the Glock, affix my blade to my hip, and tuck my larger pistol down the back of my pants as I get out of the car. I stuff the hand into my free pocket, but the baggy sticks out a bit, brushing the bottom of my arm. It’s annoying, but I need it. Karson follows me, racking one of his pistols and letting a bullet land in his open hand. He drops it into his pocket.

I stare at him. “Why?”

He slides his gun into the holster on his hip. “I always stash a bullet before a hit. Have since we started.” He shrugs. “It’s lucky.”

I shake my head. “If you were lucky, you wouldn’t have been a marked man yourself not too long ago. It sounds like a bad omen if you ask me.”

“You have your hand. I have my bullet. Don’t judge what I carry into battle,” he says with a scoff.

Touché.

We crest the embankment and I squat down. The view of the mansion is enough to shift my blood from a simmer to a boil. It’s a grand display of exquisite architecture and impressive craftsmanship, with intricate carvings and ornate details adorning the sprawling facade of brick and stone. All of it paid for with blood and drugs. My eyes focus on the entrance, which is framed by two towering pillars, each with a wrought iron lantern that casts a warm glow over the entryway. The double doors are made of heavy, dark wood, and feature intricate carvings of vines and leaves, giving the impression of a hidden garden. There’s a lot hidden beyond those doors, and it’s not a fucking garden. I scan the manicured lawns and spot the guard stations.

“Get that one,” I whisper to Karson as I jerk my chin toward the farthest booth. He likes to run, so I’ll let him run. “I’ll get this one.” I motion to the closer booth, and he nods and takes off.

I skulk along the perimeter, trying to avoid the spotlight swinging across the grass. It runs on a pattern, scanning each section before going to the next. I wait until it makes a pass before I walk among the shadows and end up beside the booth. When I take a quick look inside, a young man is fumbling with the CCTV. Based on the way his fingers jerk and move and reach for the walkie on his shoulder, I can only assume he’s spotted Karson. I lean inside and wrap a hand around the man’s mouth before he can

depress the button on his mic. He throws his body backward, trying to slam me into the wall. With a quick jut of my knife, I sink the blade into the base of his skull and push until I hear a satisfying pop. His arms still. I could have just broken his neck, but I want George to see the blood on my clothes. The blood of his men.

I grip the man's mic and tug the radio off his belt. I clip it on, lower the volume, and take off toward the other box to see if Karson needs help. When I lean in, I see a very dead man with a very determined Karson standing over him, stabbing his chest and abdomen with a very determined purpose. I don't stop him. He's taking out his anger the only way he knows how. Finally, a sigh leaves his lips, and he drops back with a glassy high to his eyes.

The radio makes a noise before a muddled voice breaks through the static. "Me and Roy are heading to the back of the house to have a smoke. It's just us, so don't release the dogs."

Karson was right. They have fucking dogs.

We look at each other and nod. Two men alone at the back of the property? It's the prime situation for us. Just as we're about to leave the booth, a deep growl rumbles from the tree line. Before I can even react, the sound of paws slamming against the ground draws closer. I step through the doorway and face the massive fur missile barreling toward me. A chain collar rattles an eerie tune with every movement the German Shepherd makes.

"I don't want to kill a dog," I say. I will, but I don't want to. My brother was the one who brought home dead animals, not me.

Karson takes a step in front of me, but the dog is focused on me. Just as his form comes into the spotlight, I move Karson out of my way and stare down the dog. His paws dig into the ground as he slows to a stop in front of me, his brown eyes trained on me as his head cocks. He comes to my feet and sits beside me, looking up at me with a drool covered maw.

Killers recognize killers, I guess.

Karson draws his blade, and I grab his wrist to keep him from stabbing the dog. "Leave him," I say.

"Remember what you're here for, Gentry. This dog can be used against us later."

He's right. But if there is a god, and if he's watching, we need all the karma we can get. I rub the dog's head, grab his collar, and look at Karson.

This dog can be used against someone . . .

But it won't be us.

"Fass!" I say, and the dog lunges forward to get to Karson, his paws kicking up dirt as I keep him in place.

"Hope you know the 'off' command too," Karson says as he takes a step back.

"Fuss!" I say, and the dog goes from grizzly to teddy in a near instant, though his focus remains on Karson.

"When the fuck did you learn German commands?"

"I was looking into getting my own trained dog for my business before I had to take on a different kind of dog." We start toward the back of the house, and the dog remains at my side, his collar jangling with every step.

"Bring the murder mutt. What could go wrong?" Karson quips.

I remove the collar and drop it to the grass.

We lurk in shadows as we crawl the perimeter of the unmanned front yard. When we reach the back of the house, the thick scent of cigarette smoke hangs in the air, and three men stand beneath a light, not two. Only one of them has a radio, though.

I look at Karson. "If you can avoid it, don't use the guns, and don't let them get to the radio."

Karson throws his blade up and catches it. "No problem."

"Fass," I snarl toward the dog. He races toward the men.

"Goddamn it, I told him it was just us!" a man screams, and the group scatters.

The dog latches on to the man in the middle. Another runs right into us and before he can do anything, Karson sends his blade through his eye socket. He pulls it out and shoves it into the soft space below the man's jaw, using so much force that it emerges from the bridge of his nose.

"Fass!" the man on the ground yells, which only continues to fuel the dog. Idiot. The murder mutt releases his leg and goes for his throat.

I grip the scruff of his neck. "Fuss!"

He releases the man, and I reroute him toward the dark figure running away. I give the command and release him. The man with the throat wound goes for his radio. He hits the button, sending a squeal over my own receiver, but I straddle him and use my knife to finish off what the dog couldn't. My blade cuts along his neck like butter, spreading the tissue until

it creates a gaping hole as his head separates from his neck. He paws at my hands for a few seconds, then he stills.

Snarls come from around the corner, and I follow the sounds. When I turn the corner, the guard's gun is aimed at the dog with a death grip on his calf. Karson flips his knife, catches it, and sends it through the air. The blade sinks between the man's eyes, and his upper body falls backward. True to his name, the murder mutt refuses to let go, even once the fight has been won.

"Fuss!" I command, gripping his scruff until he releases the man. I back up with him and pat his bloody head. I recognize that bloodlust in his eyes. We're not too different. Someone had to train him to do what I was born to do, but we're pretty much the same. "Platz." His belly hits the ground at my command. "Bleib." I turn to Karson. "When did you learn to throw knives?"

"How do you think I killed all those squirrels and shit when we were kids?" Karson says with a shrug. "Couldn't buy myself a gun at ten. Thank god." He leans down and rips his knife from the man's forehead. "If people didn't hear any of the barking, I'd be shocked. Gun time?"

I remove my pistol from its holster, and Karson does the same. We keep our weapons at our sides as we walk toward the wall of windows with a heavy-duty door beside it. I peer through the glass and look around the mansion's interior, but it's empty. These windows are a really stupid feature. Give up safety to overlook the hills behind this place? Wise.

Karson comes up behind me, smoking the dead man's cigarette.

"Really?" I ask.

"Shame to let it go to waste." He looks back toward the dog. "What about him?"

"He'll stay put until someone releases him. He'll be safer out here than in there."

We expose ourselves as we walk along the windows and rip open the back door, tracking mud across the expensive rugs as we enter. Fancy art pieces line the walls, and marble everything greets me everywhere I look. George is literally everything we hate. Taking Leana only elevated that hatred to a personal level.

As we reach the end of the hall, I glance up and spot a security camera. "Fuck," I mumble.

“Wh—” Karson looks up. “Oh.” He gives the camera a smile and his middle finger.

Boots pound down the hall, and I can see their owner’s reflections in the fancy fucking walls. Karson and I aim our pistols and take the first couple of men off guard. Their stunned comrades nearly fall over them as they gather their bearings and shift their rifles.

I want one of *those*.

Karson and I work in unison, clearing out the wave of men as we go. Bullets ricochet and shatter walls and vases, sending glass, ceramic, and marble everywhere. I get to one of the men with a rifle and rip it out of his cold hands. Just as I do, an unarmed man grabs Karson from behind—the idiot probably dropped his gun in a panic—and the two go hand to hand.

Karson is so much more muscular and rugged than the suited man in front of him. It’s hardly a fair fight. With his calloused hands clenched, Karson lunges forward with a powerful punch, but the agile suit dodges the blow with a sidestep. Karson growls before retaliating with a swift kick to the man’s knee, causing him to stumble. Then he charges forward, throwing a flurry of punches at his rival.

Someone comes around the corner with a pistol drawn, and I aim the rifle and drop him before turning my attention back to the violent dance in front of me. Karson and I used to fight when we were younger, and I’m pleased to see the level of skill that probably came from going hand to hand with someone as big as me. But this is different from the way we fight. He loves to hurt people, but with each heavy strike, it looks like he’s fighting for *her*.

“Finish him, brother,” I tell him, and I can’t help but call him brother. At this moment, as he fights for a reason other than his own selfish regard for death, I see myself in him for the first time in a while. He becomes the brother to me that he was before it all. Before I hated him.

Karson nods, sweat dripping down his forehead. He lands blow after blow, his fists raining down with the brutality I know and love. The man tries to fight back, but no one can match Karson when he’s that homicidal. So determined to kill. He throws himself forward, landing on the man as he falls backward. He digs his gloved thumbs into the eye sockets, and his eyeballs eventually deflate with a squelch beneath his weight. He bites his lower lip at the sound, loving it way too fucking much.

We’re definitely related.

That sound would disgust my little wanderer, but it's a symphony played over the silence of death for me. For Karson, it's a moan being whispered in his ear. We're so fucked up.

Karson rises to his feet with a satisfied sigh, and we continue down the hall. I've abandoned my pistol for the rifle, and I sweep the rooms with the barrel. There's a room at the end of the hall, tucked behind dark wooden doors. I take a deep breath before wrapping my hand around the doorknob, because it may be the last breath I take.

As long as I save Leana, I don't fucking care.

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Chapter Twenty-Eight

Leana

I wake up to the sounds of gunfire. At least, I think that's what I hear. I take inventory of myself as I try to sit up. I'm sore between my legs, and dry, sticky come clings to my thighs. And my chest. And my cheek. I gag when I remember blips of what they've done to me and the way they've taken turns with my body.

The guards draw their guns, and now I'm certain I heard gunshots. I get the energy to sit up at the prospect of my men barging through those doors, but I'm absolutely horrified by how I'll look when they see me.

Dirty. Used. Covered in the come of other men.

The doors whip open and like two weird, blood-covered, psychopathic guardian angels, Gentry and Karson charge in with guns blazing. Bullets buzz around me, and I can't dodge or do anything to defend my ears from each deafening blast.

"I want George alive!" Gentry screams, his voice straining as if he's in pain. The blood oozing from the tear in his sleeve confirms my fears. I can hardly see much of anything through the smoke and shattering glass, but I focus on that trail of crimson leaking from him.

"Over here, Gentry!" Karson yells. "Everyone else is down. Get Leana!" It's the first time I've heard him speak my name, and it's one of the sweetest sounds to grace my ringing ears.

Gentry makes it over to me. After assessing my body, he wipes at the come on my cheek, smearing blood on me in his attempt to clean me. "Oh,

wanderer,” he says. His body trembles as an earthquake of emotions ripples through him.

He reaches back and touches the handcuffs, then pulls a small keyring from his pocket. He finds a generic handcuff key on the ring and frees my wrists. I rub at my raw skin the moment I’m free. Gentry removes his shirt and helps me put it on, covering my bare chest. I don’t know where my pants are.

“Where is he?” I yell.

“George is over here,” Karson says from across the room.

“No, where is Mickey?” I ask. I don’t see him among the bodies.

“Who’s Mickey?” Gentry asks, clearly confused by how I could be on a first name basis with any of these fuckers.

My eyes narrow. “My ex, the one who put the bruises on me. He knows George. Works with him. Was here. He’s the one who told George I was with you. It was never Karson.”

“Told you!” Karson shouts from his side of the room before he sends a bullet through the head of a still-moving body.

A look of relief passes across Gentry’s face before he turns back to me. “What does he look like?”

“A fucking dumbass.”

His lips twitch upward. “We’ll find him, but we need to take care of our friend over there.”

I follow Gentry, who looks like a Greek fucking god as his muscled, shirtless form stomps through the destruction. Karson has George pinned on his stomach, a cigarette dangling from his lips as he holds him in place. Gentry’s body continues to tremble as he kneels and stops George’s flailing legs. He rips down the prone man’s slacks and boxers, leaving his bare ass out for everyone to see.

“What the fuck?” George screams, flailing more violently. Gentry takes out his knife and cuts a deep gash into his ass cheek, sending a slick of blood into his crack, then he pulls something from his pocket. A bag with . . . something inside. He rips through the plastic with his knife, and I get a good look at it.

“Why does he have a hand, Karson?” I ask, my mouth hanging open.

He shrugs. “For this, I guess.”

“For what?”

“No, no, wait!” George screams.

“Shh, George,” Gentry coos. “It will only hurt a lot.” Gentry’s muscles flex as he shoves the hand—fingers first—inside George’s asshole.

George releases a horrified scream. “Oh god, stop!” he wails.

I have no clue what I’m looking at, but Gentry is so fucking beautiful in his predatory anger. “The Pastor sends his regards,” he snarls as he pushes the hand until it disappears completely.

George sure has a lot of tears for someone who didn’t care about mine.

I walk over and drop to my knees in front of him. “Sexual assault sucks, doesn’t it, George?” I pull the cigarette from Karson’s lips and put it between mine. I inhale, long and deep, then blow the smoke into George’s face before pressing the blazing cherry against his cheek. I don’t pull away, not even when he screams for me to stop.

Karson hardens as he witnesses my depravity, and the feral smile on his face makes my cheeks flush.

“Kill him,” Gentry says as he climbs off him. He doesn’t worry George will try to get up, because his legs are stuck straight behind him from the intrusion in his ass. Karson whips out his blade and stabs it into George’s neck, finally silencing his screams.

“We have to find Mickey,” I say to Gentry.

He looks across the room, at a door that looks like a coat closet, and lets intuition guide him. Someone screams as Gentry nearly rips the door off the hinges, then he reaches into the darkness and pulls someone out by their hair.

It’s Mickey.

“This him?” Gentry asks, shaking him by his scalp.

“Yeah.”

“You’re the one who hurt my girl,” Gentry says as he lifts him to his feet.

Mickey flails. “She’s not *your* girl. She’s mine.”

“What an absolutely suicidal thing to say,” Gentry says. He turns to me. “He fucked you too, didn’t he, wanderer?”

When I nod, he shoves his fist into Mickey’s gut and sends him to his knees before kicking him onto his side.

Karson joins them and leans down until his breath is close enough to ruffle Mickey’s hair. “She’s not yours. She’s *ours*,” he growls.

“Hang on to him,” Gentry says as he crosses the room and guides me back to Karson and Mickey. He pulls me in and kisses me despite

everything that's been done to me. His hand rides up my thigh and grips my ass. "Let me fuck you in front of him, wanderer."

"Why ask? Just take," Karson quips, his murder-induced sexual frustration taking over.

Gentry's hand wraps around my chin and lifts it. "She's had enough taken from her already," he growls.

"Fair point," Karson agrees.

"Don't you say yes to him, Lee," Mickey says as he tries to pull out of Karson's steadfast grasp.

"Fuck you, Mickey. You don't own me anymore. But for the record, I didn't plan on saying yes to him." I turn to Gentry. "I planned to say yes, sir."

"I got an idea," Gentry says, his eyes lighting up like sadistic Christmas lights. "Bring him to the pole and handcuff him. Just like they had her."

Karson does as he's told, dragging a flailing Mickey across the bloody hardwoods. The metallic click of the handcuffs sends an eerie shiver up my spine.

"Keep his legs pinned," Gentry adds.

Karson holds him by the legs, getting obnoxiously overzealous about whatever he thinks Gentry has planned. He's a jumping bean of dark excitement. Gentry drags me to Mickey and steps on his right leg, moving Karson's hand away. Gentry pushes me down on my knees between Mickey's thrashing legs.

"If he kicks her, slice him from throat to asshole," Gentry says as he drops to his knees and leans over to replace his hold on Mickey's leg.

I hope he doesn't plan for me to suck Mickey's dick. I'm in the precise position for that, and I'm not fucking interested. I open my mouth to protest, but Gentry hands me his knife.

"Carve something into his fucking gut," he says.

Karson rips open Mickey's shirt, and he furiously kicks and bucks in front of me. "Lee, this isn't you!" he pleads. "Look what they're making you do!"

My hold tightens around the handle. "They aren't *making* me do anything."

"Come on, I love you! Remember all the things I did for you? You wouldn't even be alive right now if it weren't for me."

Gentry growls behind me, and I aim the blade's tip at Mickey's skin. He draws his hairy abdomen in, trying to avoid the cold steel. I want to do it. I want to make him hurt like he made me hurt. But just like before, I'm stuck in place. Even after everything he did to me, I can't do what I want to do. My morals draw swords and charge at the shadows in my soul, and I'm cemented in place as I wait to learn my fate.

Karson puts his hand over mine and depresses the knife into Mickey's flesh. "The first cut is the hardest. Not for me, but for most." He draws his hand away to control Mickey's renewed fight.

Mickey releases a scream, and I can almost hear a violin song woven somewhere in that sound. I kind of like hearing his pain.

Without any more help from Karson, I finish the first letter. The channel fills with blood as his skin spreads, and I move on to the next. As I transfer years of pain into the knife's handle, Gentry's free hand rides up my thigh and moves over my ass. He lifts my shirt, bunching it at my hips.

Mickey starts to slip in and out of consciousness from the pain, but I keep carving.

"Stay awake," Gentry says as he leans forward and smacks Mickey's cheek. "I want you to see me set free what you thought you could own."

Gentry's warm cock presses against me as I begin another letter. He leans me forward, nearly pushing my face into Mickey's blood so he can spit warm saliva onto my pussy. My eyes meet Mickey's for the first time—truly meet—and I see anguish on his face. It's so much more than the physical pain I'm causing.

And I love it.

Gentry pulls my hips toward him and pushes inside me with an unstifled hunger. His hard thrust makes me gasp, and I blow a pleasure-soaked breath across the gouges in Mickey's skin.

"You are all so fucked up," Mickey gathers the strength to say.

"Affirmative," Karson says.

"Cut him while I fuck you, wanderer," Gentry says. "Keep getting your vengeance."

I try to do as he tells me, but every thrust pushes me forward and smears the letter I'm working on. But I keep going. Mickey releases pained groans in front of me, Gentry utters pleasurable ones behind me, and I'm swept into a vortex of conflicting emotions around and inside me.

I don't need Karson's help with the next letter, but I look over at him. He's nearly frothing at the mouth over what he's witnessing: Gentry fucking me while I carve my feelings into my ex's belly.

"Keep going," Gentry says. "I won't last much longer like this. Your pussy needs to be claimed by me again. By someone who will kill anyone who tries to take you away from me."

"Or me," Karson whispers in a voice so low I almost don't hear it. It makes my heart swell until I think it might cut off the next breath to my lungs.

I finish the last letter just as Gentry slams his hips into me a final time. He holds himself inside me, savoring me as he fills me, then he leans over to look at what I wrote. In haphazard chicken scratch, I have scrawled a single word in all caps.

CUNT

Gentry wraps his arm around my chest and squeezes me to his. "Good fucking girl. Welcome to the dark side."

"Not yet," Karson says, handing me his larger blade. He sits up, holds Mickey's leg beneath his knee, and leans over, beaming at me with a sadistic pride. "You have to kill him, thief." He rubs his hand over the left side of his chest. "Stab here if you want him to die quickly." His hand lowers to Mickey's gut, beneath my writing. "Or here if you want him to suffer."

I bring the blade to both spots, trying to decide what feels right. Memories flash in front of my mind, and I'm forced to relive everything Mickey has done to me. The things that put the bruises on my body. And on my soul. The drugs he filled me with, the way he kept me sick so I couldn't leave. Yeah, I suffered plenty at his hands.

I drive the knife into his gut, and he lurches forward, his eyes wide. His body puts pressure on the blade as he squirms, and I'm thrilled to imagine all the ways it must be tearing up his insides. Blood sputters from his mouth, and I pull the blade from Mickey's flesh and run my fingers over the slick crimson marking the steel.

Karson stands up, unzipping his pants in front of me. "I know Gentry says we can't take, but if I don't get inside your mouth, thief, I'm going to burst. I've never been so fucking turned on in my life." He gathers the hair

at the base of my neck, and I raise my chest and grip his thigh as his cock springs from the fabric. "Let me feel your lips around me."

Too weak to move, Mickey stares at the scene playing out above him with glassy eyes. "Lee," he murmurs.

"Surprised she lets two men like us inside her, yet she hated every moment with you?" Karson says with a laugh. His hand wraps around my throat and tugs me into his pelvis, and I take his cock into my mouth. The barbells tap my teeth as he pushes to the back of my throat with a feral groan. He thrusts against my face, but I feel his heightened excitement with every pulse of his hips. "I'm going to come," he growls, and he draws his cock back to fill my mouth fully. "Don't swallow," he says as he pulls out of my mouth.

I fucking hate holding come in my mouth, but I do as he says because I'm curious to see what he's planned.

Karson cranes Mickey's head, holds his jaws open, and gives me a sick smirk. "Spit my come in his fucking mouth," he commands.

Gentry pulls out of me. "Keep your thighs together, wanderer, and don't leave a drop of me behind on his body."

I squeeze my legs together as I scoot forward and lean over Mickey's open mouth. His eyes are fixed on me, his breath coming in ragged, gulping gasps as death tightens its hold. I move closer, until our lips nearly touch, and I spit Karson's come into his mouth.

Karson rubs Mickey's throat with a gloved hand as if he's trying to make a cat swallow a pill. "Gulp it down," Karson says. "Be a good boy and swallow my come. I want my taste to be on your tongue when you meet the devil for what you did to her."

Instead of swallowing, Mickey takes another heaving breath and sucks the come into his windpipe. His body moves on autopilot and tries to expel it with a weak cough, but that only pushes more blood from the wound in his abdomen. After a few more garbled gasps, he stills.

Karson shakes his head. "Tsk, tsk. If you had swallowed it, you wouldn't have choked to death. What a shame."

I climb off Mickey, and Gentry zips up his jeans and takes a step toward me. He puts his hand between my legs, gathers the come that dripped down my thighs, and pushes it back inside me. He pulls me into him, with his fingers buried deep within me.

“No matter who touched you or who came inside you, you’re still ours. And we’ll show you that.” His arm wraps around me and he pulls me against his chest. “I’d do anything for you.”

“We’d do anything for you,” Karson adds as he fetches my jeans from the coat closet.

The fact that these men get so turned on by homicide is incredibly alarming. There’s a sick excitement that riddles them with joy as it maps its way through their veins. It’s sick. It’s disgusting.

But I’m beginning to understand that carnal desire.

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Chapter Twenty-Nine

Karson

When we get outside, the dog is still waiting in a down position. Its hind legs wiggle as it watches Gentry, waiting for the release command. Gentry says another German word, and the dog rushes toward him and sits at his leg, looking up expectantly.

“Did Gentry befriend an attack dog?” Leana asks.

“I know. It’s embarrassing,” I say.

She shakes her head. “No, it’s cute.”

When Gentry gives the dog a quick pat, she thinks she can do the same. I grab her by the waist and pull her into me. “He can pet the murder mutt, but that doesn’t mean you should,” I scold. I can’t have her getting mauled after all we went through to get her back.

I refuse to be as open and vulnerable as Gentry, but I *am* really glad we rescued her. Not just because she lets us do fucked-up things to her or because she doesn’t react the way others do around us. But because I *like* her. I like the person I can be around her. The way I can be around Gentry because of her. She brings out something warm in two very cold killers.

“You destroyed the cameras, right?” Gentry asks as he turns toward us.

“Not only did I destroy the hard drive, but I also took it with me,” I tell him as I pull the mangled plastic from my pocket. “Can’t recover what isn’t there.”

Gentry fights a smile. “Why is that one of the most intelligent things you’ve ever done?”

“I don’t tell you everything I do, and I’m not as stupid as you think.”

“Are we going to the hospital for your gunshot wound?” Leana asks.
So naïve.

“We don’t go to hospitals,” Gentry says with a laugh. “We’ll take care of it. It’s through and through, anyway.” He winces as he rubs his finger through the coagulated blood surrounding the hole.

Gentry and I have always dealt with the injuries that come from taking someone’s life. Or in this case, battling with the people trying to keep us from saving one. There’s nothing you can’t learn on the internet.

We start toward the SUV, and the dog remains at Gentry’s side, keeping pace with him.

I stop walking. “We cannot keep the murder mutt,” I say to Gentry. Judging by the softness in his eyes, that’s exactly what he’s considering.

Leana stops and turns to face me. “Why not? Look at all the dried blood in his fur. He’s one of us.”

“Absolutely not!” I say. “We’ve already taken in a stray thief. We don’t need to add another complication to our lives.”

Leana takes up a defiant stance, crossing her arms over her chest. “Aren’t we done with the murder spree? Your boss is dead, so it’s not as if another job is about to roll in.”

I match her stance and throw in a smirk for good measure. “No, we still have one more job, and the payout is too good to pass up.”

Gentry doesn’t hear either of us. He’s already continued toward the SUV . . . with the fucking dog.

I jog to catch up with him. “Hey, didn’t you hear me? We aren’t taking this dog.”

He stops and faces me, and the fucking canine does the same. It’s starting to creep me out. “George may be dead, and we may be working on our last lucrative hit, but I’m still the boss of *my* business, Karson. Don’t forget that.”

With a sigh, I give up. If he wants to keep the dog, that’s on him. He can work out the logistics.

When we reach the SUV, I climb into the driver’s seat. Gentry is happy to let me drive, and the thief and the furry baggage climb into the back seat. We can’t go to a hotel like this, so I search the phone for a campground and head that way. After a twenty-mile journey on some back roads, we drive into the park as if we belong there and park at an empty site.

“Put this on the dash,” Leana says as she hands a crinkled pass to me. Smart. It’s the pass from the last campground, and if no one looks at the date, it appears official enough. As long as no one else comes for this site.

A few leftover logs of wood from our last camping trip sit in the back of the SUV. I grab them and toss them into the fire pit. I draw a cigarette out of my pack and light it, then I scrounge up some kindling and ignite the wood. It finally catches and I pocket the lighter. Smoke gathers and orange flames singe the logs. Gentry steps closer and strips off his shirt, exposing the gunshot. A trickle of blood rushes from the wound any time he moves. We’ll need to take care of that.

I pull my knife from its sheath and hold the blade over the fire. The metal shifts from a cold gray to a slight glow, and I pull it away before it gets too hot.

“What are you doing?” Leana asks as she eyes the fire, eyes wide.

“Cauterizing,” Gentry says, pulling her into him with his good arm.

“But—”

“Just be with me,” he says.

“This is going to hurt,” I tell Gentry with a smirk.

“Yeah, I know, and you’re going to love it,” he snaps as he pulls her closer. Instead of biting down on something, he’s bracing against the one thing that brings him comfort. The dog comes over and flops down at Gentry’s feet with a yawn. It’s like a fucked-up Norman Rockwell painting.

I grab Gentry’s shoulder and pull him forward as I push the blade flat against his skin. The flesh sizzles, and he bites his lip to keep from screaming out. He’s so stoic when he feels pain. I swear he does it just to ruin my fun.

With a slow inhale, I revel in the scent of burning flesh the way someone might breathe a little deeper when they walk by a bakery. Delicious. “Now the back.” I dip the blade into the fire once more.

Sweat gathers on Gentry’s forehead, and the thief looks fucking queasy, which I’m enjoying. I put the blade to the exit wound, and it smokes and sizzles just like the front. His back curves, but he does little else to indicate how the pain rakes his spine.

“You guys are so fucked,” Leana says through a gag as the smell reaches her.

“Yep,” Gentry and I say in unison.

The bleeding stopped, Gentry assesses the wound care and nods. "I'm going to shower," he says, looking over at the building across the road. He drops his gaze to Leana. "You look like you could use one, too."

She does. Dark splotches of dried blood mark the pale canvas of her skin. It reminds me of the night she played dead for us, and my cock hardens at this thought.

I reach out and pull her into me. "I have a different idea," I say.

Gentry postures, raising his huge chest toward me.

Before he can tell me why I can't have her right now, I tell him why I can. "You always get her how you want her, G. Praise her and please her. Be all sweet to her." I brush the blonde hair away from her face. "I want to fuck her my way. I want to play with my fantasy." I want her to play dead for me again. But this time, I want to spread her thighs as she lies lifeless before me. I turn to Leana. "You'd let me play with you, wouldn't you? Let me fuck your dead body?"

What a fucking question to ask a person. But she's not just any person. She's *our* person, and she's not normal.

She swallows hard, as if she's choking on a golf ball, then she glances between us, torn but not scared. She looks to Gentry for permission, but I don't need permission from either of them. Regardless of what they feel, I *will* have her lifeless body beneath me.

He steps into her, sandwiching her between us. "Do you want this, wanderer?" I can't see the look she gives him, but it produces a scowl on his face. He leans in and kisses her before his dark eyes rise to mine and bore through me. "Fine, Karson, but don't fucking hurt her and *do not* actually kill her." He turns away. "Fucking freak."

Instead of heading for the showers, he plops in front of the fire with the dog. He really needs to clean up, but at least he's leaving me alone to do what I need to do with Leana. I won't press him.

I lead her toward the nearby lake, and a plan forms in my mind. As the water comes into view, so does the full moon. It hangs low in the sky—a big, bright orb of light that will allow me to see everything and etch it into my memory. The rippling water catches each moonbeam, and it's really pretty.

But not as pretty as my thief will look when I'm through with her.

"Take off your pants," I say as I begin to strip off mine.

"Are you really going to do this?"

“Absolutely. I want to fuck you while you pretend to be dead. Honestly, if I didn’t like you, I’d fuck you actually dead.”

Her eyes widen but her expression flattens. “This is insane.”

“Well, *I’m* insane.”

She doesn’t argue. Instead, she licks her lips, takes a deep breath, and removes her pants. Her hands go for her shirt, but I reach out and stop her.

“Leave it on.”

I guide her toward the water, and the sandy bottom caresses our feet. Staying in the shallows, I push her to her knees before easing her onto her back. She isn’t fully submerged, but each time the water reaches toward the shore, it covers more of her. Her breasts rise above the waterline, the nipples forming tight peaks at the top of each mound. The gentle waves pull at her hair, darkening the blonde strands as they sink beneath her head. Yeah, she looks fucking hot.

“This is so fucked up, Karson,” she says, but I don’t miss that excited glint to her eye. She might not be entirely okay with this, but she’s curious.

“Even when I do some shit you won’t like, I need you to trust me. Just keep still.” I know she likes praise, but I can’t bring myself to say some cringey shit and call her my good girl like Gentry does. I reach for the next best thing—the only thing I can bring myself to say. “Be my dead girl.”

I hook her thighs over mine as I drop to my knees and sink a bit into the sandy bottom. The cool water goes up to my balls, tightening them, but I lean over and push inside her. I let her gasp, let her live a little longer while I push deeper.

“Trust me, and don’t move,” I remind her as I lean over her. “Keep your eyes closed. Part those pretty lips like you did when we played dead before.” I put my palm against her cheek. “I’m going to drown you now.”

Before she can say anything, I turn her head and push her mouth and nose beneath the water. Her hands grip my wrists, and she flails. Her cunt tightens around me as she struggles. I let out a groan of pleasure, and as her body writhes, I draw back my hips so I can fuck her harder. I love her fight. I love how her cunt squeezes my dick.

Her hands fall away from my wrists, and she goes limp. I hold her there for a few more thrusts, then I grip her cheeks and bring her mouth above water. Her lips are perfectly parted, eyes closed, and she’s motionless. Water laps over her stomach and chest, and I can’t tell if she’s breathing.

For all intents and purposes, she looks dead—a drowned woman on my dick. Lifeless and beautiful.

The water ebbs and flows as I drop my hand from her face and dip it into the water. Silk strands of hair wrestle with my fingers, but I pull free and put them on her shoulder. No matter how hard I fuck her, she keeps those eyes closed. Those lips parted. She remains silent through every rough thrust. The only indication of life is the subtle twitch of her cunt around me and the slight, nearly negligible tilt of her pelvis. A dead woman most definitely wouldn't do that, but I can't fault her for enjoying this as much as I am.

I lean over her. "You're so fucking sexy like this, thief. Cold. Dead. Beautiful." I swear I see the corners of her lips twitch, but she doesn't break character. If her theater teacher could only see her now . . . Well, they'd probably have me arrested, but they'd also be pretty fucking impressed.

I dig my fingers into her skin as I fuck her harder, and the sand beneath us spreads with the strength of every thrust. I lift her upper body out of the water, and her head lolls to the side. Drops of water dribble down her chilled skin, and her full chest doesn't rise or fall. It's enough to make my balls tighten.

I reach up and grip her throat, drawing her to me and kissing her. Only once her lips meet mine do I feel the escape of breath in her gasp, but her lids remain closed.

"Open your eyes," I say.

They flutter open, and I've never felt more for a person. Who lets someone like me play out a sick fantasy like this?

My little thief, that's who.

I fill her cunt, burying myself inside her. I know Gentry doesn't want me to come in her pussy like this, but the water will wash away my sin. I smirk against her mouth when I imagine explaining my transgressions to the guard at the pearly gates. I murder for a living, but I also enjoy it, and I fuck the pseudo-dead body of my brother's girl. I imagine the shock and horror across St. Peter's face before the clouds blacken, open up, and swallow me to hell.

Worth it. Worth every fucking second of it.

Chapter Thirty

Leana

When we return to the campsite, Gentry is still seated in front of the fire. His eyes move to mine after they burn through Karson. My soaked shirt saturates my jeans, and my damp hair clings to my cheeks.

“Did you two go for a swim?” he asks, and I don’t miss the jealousy woven tightly within his voice. I like it. His ownership is my weakness.

“Something like that,” Karson says as he walks to the SUV to get a change of clothes.

Gentry steps into me, inhaling the scent of sex and nature. His warm hand hooks around the back of my neck and tugs me into him. “What’d he do to you, wanderer?”

I don’t know what to say. How do I even describe what happened? More importantly, how do I explain that I liked it?

“Can we talk about it later?” I ask in a whisper. By that I mean when I’ve had more time to process it. Or not at all.

Karson pops up behind Gentry, his shirt half on. “I put her face beneath the water until she stopped squirming, then I fucked her as she played dead for me.” He pulls his shirt over his stomach.

Then Gentry asks the dreaded question as his eyes darken. “Where’d he come?”

“Inside me,” I whisper, dropping my gaze from his heated stare.

Gentry turns toward Karson, giving him a shove that I’m surprised doesn’t send him into the next site over. “What did I tell you about coming inside her pussy? I let you enjoy her body, which is very much mine. Stop

fucking betraying the grain of trust I've given back to you. Spill your load anywhere else, but her pussy is mine. I'm the only one who can breed her."

His words, his possessive display of force—it makes my skin heat and my thighs clench. His body goes from stressed and tense to crumbling as he steps into me. He grips my chin and raises my eyes to his, then he leans down and kisses me.

He pulls away and speaks to Karson, but he keeps his gaze pinned on me. "Stay with the dog. I still need to shower." He lowers his voice so that only I can hear him. "And claim what belongs to me."

Karson mutters something about babysitting the four-legged weapon of mass destruction, but he stays put as Gentry leads me toward the showers. He already has my bag in his hand, so he's been thinking of this while Karson and I were gone.

A light buzzes to life when we enter the small shower area, and a pale yellow glow washes over us. The place is well cared for, and it smells clean enough. I strip off my wet clothes and head for the shower stall, pushing a button in the wall several times so I can wet my hair with something warmer than lake water. The trickle from the showerhead strengthens, and I stick my head beneath the stream.

Gentry steps into the stall doorway, a sexy smirk drawing his lips upward at the corners. He holds a small bottle of travel shampoo in his hand, which he passes to me. He steps out of his clothes and gets in beside me. His body heat warms me instantly. The water slows, reminding me to pump the button again.

I motion for Gentry to get beneath the water. As he wipes at his skin and sends a rush of red toward the drain, I squirt some shampoo into my hands and lean into him.

"What are you doing?" he asks.

"I helped Karson with his fantasy. What about yours?"

He scoffs. "My fantasy would involve your belly swelling with my child," he whispers, running a hand from my lower abdomen to my pussy.

"That's not something I can take care of right now, but what about your other thing?"

"What Karson told you? Don't listen to—"

I interrupt him by pressing my breasts against his chest and rubbing my hands through his hair. The moment my fingertips meet his scalp, his hard cock twitches against my stomach. He drops his head forward so I don't

have to strain as hard to wash his hair. His lips part, and soft groans ease past them.

“Fuck, wanderer,” he growls.

I scrub his silky strands, swirling my fingertips in circles as I move from the crown of his head to the nape of his neck. His head snaps up and he grips the base of his cock. Can he really come so fast from this?

His other hand drags mine from his hair to the back of his neck, and he speaks through ragged, frustrated breaths. “You know I don’t want to waste a drop of my come,” he says with raised eyebrows.

He lifts me and wraps my legs around him, lowering me until his warm cock presses against my entrance. He grips my ass and pushes inside me. I gasp as he stretches me. It burns, like I’m being impaled by a torch. Instead of thrusting, he eases his cock deeper until he can’t fit another centimeter of flesh inside me. He motions toward his hair, and I happily oblige.

I brush the dark, graying strands back as I scrub them. I dig my fingertips into his scalp, raking them against his skin. He groans and twitches inside me. Throbs. His fingers bruise my ass as he squeezes. His eyes are closed, like the most euphoric moment he’s ever known is right now, with my hands in his hair and his cock in my pussy.

He pulls me deeper into him as he gets close, each harsh breath more ragged than the last. I drag my fingers down and rub the hair behind his ears, and he lets out the most seductive moan I’ve ever heard. If my legs weren’t already wrapped around him, I wouldn’t be able to hold myself up.

“I’m coming,” he growls.

I yelp as he grips my ass and spills his come inside me. My fingers clench from the pain, going from washing his hair to gripping it in a tight hold. He groans, puts his arm beneath me, and lifts me off his dick before putting my feet onto the slick tiles. My legs shake, and I’m so sore, even without a single thrust from him. But it leaves me wanting more. He pulls me under the shower stream and kisses me as the shampoo falls from his hair in a sudsy veil.

“You want to come, don’t you, my wanderer? My girl?”

I nod because I’ve never wanted anything more. “Yes, sir.”

He reaches between my legs, but the moment he brushes my clit, Karson whips open the bathroom door and whistles.

“We gotta go. Now,” Karson says before slamming the door.

Gentry groans. “I’ll make it up to you.”

I nod, disappointed but understanding. When Karson says it's time to go, it's probably for a reason. We dress in a rush and meet the sun's early rays as we walk outside the dark building. A van idles beside our site . . . which must be *their* site. Gentry throws them an apologetic wave, and we climb into the SUV. Karson mans the steering wheel and points us toward the park's exit. We make our escape before anyone is the wiser.

"How long were they waiting?" Gentry asks.

"Just a few minutes. I told them we stopped to shower and didn't realize the spot was taken. And then I went and got you two."

"Did they seem suspicious of anything?"

Karson shakes his head. "Not really. Karen seemed annoyed, but that's probably because her little brats were screaming in the back. No clue why breeding is your fetish." Karson fakes a gag.

Gentry shrugs. "I like the idea of getting my sweet little wanderer pregnant. But actually dealing with the product of that? No thanks."

"What if I got pregnant?" I ask as I lean forward, putting my head between them.

"We'd deal with it," Gentry says.

"Deal with it how you deal with things?" I ask, swiping my finger across my throat.

Gentry laughs. "No, we'd somehow raise a kid in a world of homicide, I guess. They'd become like us, though, which is why I'm not the dad type, even if I love the risk I take each time I fill you."

Karson clears his throat. "I once had a dream that I had a baby. I picked up the little thing and ate it." My mouth drops open, and he tosses me his Karson smile. "So I'm going to say I'm probably not dad material, either."

Thank fuck I'm on birth control. That's all I'm saying. I enjoy Gentry's breeding fetish and love being filled by him, but I refuse to bring a baby into a world where it will either become a serial killer or get fucking eaten.

Even though I'm in a world where I'm faced with those options myself.

Chapter Thirty-One

Gentry

I t's odd to look at the phone on the dash and know it won't ring anymore.

George is dead, with a pastor's hand so far up his ass not even the funeral home will find it. I hope he's fisted for all eternity. Even so, we won't waste the last mark on our list.

Leana leans into the front seat, her hand idly scratching the dog's head. "Where are we headed now?"

"The last hit on our magical murder tour," Karson says.

She frowns. "We're still doing that?"

"Yes, we are. We're counting on a big payout so we can lie low for a while," I explain. "It's not like there's a hitman classifieds section. We'll have trickling work after this, but it won't be like it is now. The wife who hates her husband. The businessman with too much money and hatred for a competitor."

I'm a little nervous that the gigs are ending, and it's not only because of the financial aspect. What will happen to Karson and me when we don't have an outlet for our murderous tendencies? We've been killing since we were kids, and I don't think we can just turn it off. I'm more concerned we might funnel that aggression toward Leana.

I'd like to think we wouldn't turn on her, but when that blood lust hits, we forget who matters to us. Who's been there for us. As much as I want to keep her around, it might not be safe for her. Letting her go after this hit might be the best thing we can do for her, even if it sucks for us.

She sits back, but I keep glancing at her through the rearview mirror. Just the sight of her gives me an erection. Remembering how it felt when she washed my hair. How the tips of her fingers raked my spine as they rode along my scalp. She wanted to please me by fulfilling my fantasy. My wife never even indulged me like Leana did. She poked fun at me. But who am I kidding? It's a funny fetish.

But at least my fetish doesn't involve dead girls.

Jealousy warms my chest at the thought of her pleasing Karson as well as she pleases me. I imagine him fucking her, her eyes fixed in front of her. Her body cold from the water. She was probably such a good fucking girl for him.

The way she always is for me.

"Did he make you come?" I ask Leana.

She nearly spits out the water she's just placed to her lips. "What?"

"In the lake. Did he make you come?" It's the only thing I can think about. I need to ensure I please her better than Karson can, and I didn't have a chance to please her at all in the shower. I don't mean to get so jealous at the thought of them, but it's an ugly monster I can't seem to shake off my shoulder.

"No," Leana says. "I didn't get off in the lake."

Karson glances at me. "I may not have pleased her then, but I made her come in the three minutes while you were in the bathroom at the fancy hotel. Had her gushing all over my hand. Then she sat in a puddle for the drive to the next hit." He licks his lips as he looks at her in the rearview mirror.

The ugly monster on my shoulder roars.

"I can do it faster," I snarl toward Karson.

Sensing the rising tension, the dog rumbles with a low growl in the back seat. Karson closes his mouth. Whatever he considered saying, he thinks better of it.

"Please stop fighting," Leana says with a groan. "I thought we were past this."

Karson and I have gotten past a lot, but sharing my wanderer is proving increasingly difficult. And she *is* mine. I don't know how to quiet this possessive need to keep her to myself. Breeding her after Karson touches her should be enough, but it's not.

"Three minutes," Karson mumbles with a smirk.

It takes every ounce of strength to keep from reaching out and strangling him.



Leana

THE COMPETITIVENESS between those two is growing, and the increasing push and pull intimidates me. It would be any girl's dream to have two sexy brothers pining over her, but that's when the brothers are normal. I worry these two will turn on each other over me. A fight would likely end in a fatality—me or one of them—and I don't want that.

What *do* I want?

I don't want to think about it. I've been awake for too long, and I'm tired. Now that they've stopped arguing, I enjoy the silence, especially since we no longer need to worry about that godforsaken generic ringtone.

The dog groans and stretches out beside me. His head drops onto my lap, and I play with his ears. "We need to give this guy a name."

"He already has a name," Karson says. "It's Murder Mutt."

I roll my eyes. "Could you imagine walking him in the park and calling his name? We'd get so many stares."

"Could you imagine walking in the fucking park?" Karson asks.

Fair.

"Well, we're all murderers. He needs a name that fits." I think back on my serial killer knowledge. "I've got it! We'll call him Sam!"

Gentry turns to look at me, his face screwed up in disgust. "Sam? What kind of lame ass name is that for a murderous fur missile like him?"

"David Berkowitz," Karson says as he turns in at a cheap motel. "When he got caught, he told the cops a dog named Sam orchestrated the whole thing and dictated who he should kill."

"Yeah," I say, genuinely confused. "How did you know that?"

Gentry shakes his head. "He loves watching true-crime shit."

Odd, but okay. "So can we call him Sam?"

"Is that what you want, wanderer?"

I nod my head and smile.

“Then his name is Sam,” Gentry says with a sigh.

“Jesus fucking Christ on a cross. You two make me sick,” Karson says as he exits the SUV.

Karson goes inside to get a room so we can nap until nightfall. We’re all exhausted and need some sleep before we head on. Driving and killing and fucking for almost twenty-four hours straight will do that to a person. The place isn’t the nicest, but I couldn’t care less. I just want to lie down. We sneak the dog to our room and pile onto the bed. I close my eyes and begin to doze.

“Have we thought this through?” Karson’s voice breaks through my pre-sleep haze, but I keep my eyes shut and listen.

“We kind of committed to this. And besides, we need the money. Remember, it all stops for us after this hit. At least for a while.”

“Yeah, but this is a risky final target, G. I don’t exactly like the idea of taking down Ralph Weeks right after we—”

My eyes snap open. “Ralph Weeks? The actor?”

Gentry waves me off. “Don’t get excited. You know what happens when we pay people a visit. But if you’re a really good girl, before we slit his throat, we’ll get you an autograph.”

“In blood,” Karson adds.

“He just finished that movie, *The Glass*,” I say. “He’s really hot right now and should have tons of money. Why would he stop paying George?”

Karson looks at me and shrugs. “Rich people do stupid shit. Think they’re untouchable. We’re about to prove just how touchable they are.”

This seems so much worse than the other hits. I don’t *know* the guy, but I know *of* the guy. It’s not just some nameless person or shitbag human being.

“What’d he do?” I ask, hoping he’s done something to deserve whatever these guys have in store for him.

“He’s a goddamn junkie, for starters,” Gentry says as he looks at the ceiling. “He got a bunch of drugs on credit, and now he doesn’t want to pay.” He shifts and looks down at me. “Will you be okay with this?”

I tighten my lips. No. I won’t be. I know what it’s like to need drugs so desperately that you’ll go through hell to get them. My habit forced these men to take care of me when I was at my lowest, and I find it unfair that the same habit will cost someone else their life at their hands.

I rub the hem of my shirt between my fingers, locked in a prison of guilt they don't share. It's isolating to be the only one with normal human feelings. I drop my gaze and focus on the soft fabric.

"Wanderer?" Gentry says. "Will you be okay?"

I shake my head. "If I asked you to skip this hit, would you listen?"

Karson chuckles, and it makes me want to backhand him. Gentry's lips tighten. He looks torn between what he wants to say and what he thinks he should say.

"I guess if—"

Karson's voice hardens. "Speak for yourself. You'd let her stop a hit like this, knowing we have no job afterward? I'll do this hit with or without you, G." His eyes meet mine. "I like you, thief. More than I care to admit. But you're wrong for putting your guilt on us. We're felons, remember? We can't put our skill set on a resume. This is the life we've chosen since we were kids. Violence has always been the only thing we're qualified for."

Gentry narrows his eyes at Karson. "What Karson means, I think, is that if you want this life with us, you have to accept certain things. I can't provide for you without money from this hit."

"And the goddamn dog, G! Don't forget that." Karson shakes his head. "And no, I meant that she can't be a little bitch about what we've already been doing."

"Enough, Karson!" Gentry snaps.

"I'm just saying. She needs to learn to be a little selfish if she wants to be with us."

I know they're right, but it still conflicts with my humanity. I can't help that it feels wrong. Even so, I don't want to lose them, because being with them is the only thing that feels right in our fucked-up little world.

"Let's just get some sleep," Gentry says. He turns on his side and pulls me into him. "We have to do this hit, and we need clear heads when it goes down."

Sleep might clear my head, but it won't do shit for the smog surrounding my heart.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Gentry

We sleep until nightfall can safely conceal us from prying eyes, then we drive toward our final target. We park near the woods and conceal the SUV behind some heavy scrub. We left Sam back at the motel, but I almost wish we'd brought him now. He's an extra weapon we might need.

I get out of the car and open Leana's door. "I need you to wait—"

She silences me with the glare from hell.

"Will you let me finish? You need to wait outside the door when we get to the building. Let us get the lay of the land, then you can walk in like you always do."

"You still want to keep me from seeing parts of you." She shakes her head. "I've seen you shove a disembodied hand up another man's ass. There isn't much more to see."

Good point.

I ease away from her door and let her out.

I expect a heavy security detail, but we walk through the woods without any issues. We spot what appears to be a security box tucked away behind a huge marble pillar, but it's empty. I shake my head. The point of security is for them to be present. Obvious. Not hidden behind rich ass marble.

"There's a fucking pond," Karson says as we cross the expansive lawn behind Ralph's gloriously excessive mansion. He squats down, his finger hovering above the water. A massive koi surfaces, its mouth gaping at him. "And there's a big ass fish." He scoffs. "So dramatic."

"Will you stop fucking around?" I snarl.

“You know,” Karson says as he matches my step, “I saw our last murder on the news at the motel.”

“Fuck,” I curse. The con to George being dead is the lack of a clean-up crew. Bodies we leave behind will be found so much quicker. That ups the chance of getting caught. I’m not too worried, though. Karson and I didn’t have anyone to clean up shit when we were kids, and we did just fine.

Leana makes a small noise but says nothing. She wouldn’t stay in the car, and now she’s dragging her heels as we walk. I grab her arm and place a pair of gloves into her hand, then brush her hair from her face. “Are you sure you’ll be okay?” I ask. She absolutely doesn’t look okay.

“She’ll never be okay with it, G. That’s what separates her from you and me. But she’ll get over it, and that’s where she blends with us,” Karson says. So confident. So sure.

She blows out a breath because she knows it’s true. “What if the police come?” she asks as she slips on her gloves and pulls her hair into a ponytail.

I grip her chin. “I’ll put a bullet through your pretty head before Karson and I go out in a blaze of glory,” I tell her with a smirk.

“Stop. I’m serious.”

“So am I.” I will absolutely put her out of her misery before I let her go to jail, and we sure as fuck won’t willingly return to a cell. “Hopefully they don’t come.”

When we get to the driveway in front of the mansion, I’m struck by its size. Such an unnecessary expense for a single man and his part-time kid. The extravagant masterpiece of architectural design boasts towering columns, balconies along the entire second floor, and floor-to-ceiling windows. The security booth near the front is also empty. I expected more of a challenge.

When we get to the big arching door—probably meant to look historical—Karson gets to work on the locks. Once I hear the click and we get it open, we step into a dark, empty foyer. There’s no way this dude is here.

An alarm light flashes beside us. At least the guy was smart enough to keep his system on. This is a silent alarm, meant to get police here before we even know what happened. Typically that means we have about a minute to disarm the thing.

I rub my gloved finger on the outside of the pin pad and shine my flashlight over it.

“Better guess right, G,” Karson says behind me.

“Shut up, Karson,” I snarl, trying to focus.

I try Ralph’s birthday: 0417. *Invalid pin*. Next, I try his ex-wife’s birthday. *Invalid*. My research was for nothing. Sweat gathers on my forehead. We have three to five tries before it locks us out, then we’re fucked. I lift my finger to try the son’s birthday, but Leana’s small hand wraps around my wrist. She grabs the flashlight, leans close to the pin pad, and punches in four numbers before I can stop her. The alarm flashes green and deactivates.

“How?” I ask her.

She shrugs. “I saw the slightest bit of wear on the buttons. One, two, three, four. I assumed they were in order and that the guy is an idiot. And voilà!”

I grab her face and pull her into me for a kiss. My smart little wanderer. I should have noticed that first, but my mind was on too many other things. I take the flashlight from her and find the light switch.

We flip on the lights, and pristine marble floors gleam up at us. A grand staircase leads up to the second floor, and a chandelier over the dining room table reflects the foyer light. Chandeliers are such a douchey requirement for these people. Have you even made it if you don’t have one?

“What now, G?” Karson asks. “That piano is covered, and so is some of the artwork. If he’s been staying somewhere else, he’s probably stashed his cash somewhere else.”

I shrug my shoulders and shut off the flashlight. “We’ll have a look around. He’s definitely still living here. The couch is uncovered and the remote for the television is on the table beside it. Plus, this is the address George gave us long before shit went sideways. This is the right house.”

We go upstairs, sweeping the place for the master bedroom. When we find it at the end of the echoing hallway, it’s bigger than my entire apartment. Intricate patterns line the wallpaper, sectioned off by wood trim. A fireplace dominates the room, only rivaled by the massive king-size bed that faces it. How fucking romantic.

Karson and I open closet doors and scrounge through the clothes. These people have so many fucking closets. Karson moves aside a mirror and exposes a safe. Our payday.

I try his birthday again, his wife’s, the kid’s, and finally, the simple numerical pin that he stupidly used to safeguard his entire fucking home. The green flashing light shows that our dear friend Ralph is not only

predictable but extremely dumb. I hold my breath as I open the safe. We *really* need this. For her. For us.

Stacks of money stare back at us, standing tall like the pillars outside of this place. I release a sigh of relief. It's more than we expected. The anxiety about our future evaporates and leaves me feeling a few pounds lighter.

"Fill the bags," I tell Karson before stepping out of the closet.

"Did you find anything?" Leana asks.

"All of it," I growl as I pull her into me. I kiss her. For once, because of her, everything is going exactly right. I release her once Karson exits the closet, and the moment I do, she flops onto the bed with a contented sigh.

Goddamn it.

"You're leaving your fucking DNA all over that blanket," I snap, gripping her arm and yanking her into a sitting position.

Karson drops down beside her with a smirk.

"Really?" I ask.

"She's already on it. Might as well make the best of it. We'll just take the fancy fucking blanket with us," Karson says, leaning onto his elbow.

He's not wrong. We've already fucked it up.

His hand snakes around Leana and draws her into him, and a low growl leaves my throat. "Come on, G. I only need three minutes, remember?"

"We aren't playing here," I tell them. He's lucky I don't want to get caught. Otherwise I'd paint the fucking walls a gaudy shade of Karson red.

Leana grips my pants and pulls me closer. "Why don't we play a little and then get out of here? You got the money, so there's no need to kill him."

Before I can respond, Karson sits up and shakes his head. "Fuck that. As much as I'd love to fuck your brains out on this rich asshole's bed, we have a hit to do. I'm not leaving a job unfinished, and I'm sure as fuck not passing up the chance to murder a celebrity."

Tears fill Leana's eyes. She really thought she could make a difference. She believed she could change Karson's mind at the last second and save this man from his fate. Not even I could stop Karson from doing what he was made to do. That's like trying to teach a tiger to live a vegan lifestyle. Ain't happening.

"Are you crying, thief?" Karson asks. "Don't fucking cry. This guy is a piece-of-shit junkie. He's not worth your tears."

She looks at him, unashamed of the visible pain in her eyes. "I was a piece-of-shit junkie too. When you two found me, I was so hooked on that

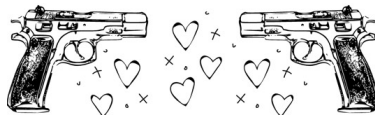
shit that I wanted to die. If you hadn't saved me, I would probably be six feet under. People can change, Karson. They can clean their shit up and find . . ." She stops, her voice breaking. "They can find something to live for."

I can't stand to see her like this. If he's too stupid to comfort her, I'll have to do it. I might suck at it, but I'm learning. I go against my better judgement and sit on the bed. When I pull her into me, she doesn't fight it and just leans against my chest.

I look at Karson over her head, and he only looks away. I'm about to try to help Leana understand when a door slams downstairs. The time for reasoning has ended.

"Showtime," Karson says with a gleeful laugh.

Leaving Leana on the bed, I go to Karson's side. If he can't see my wanderer's point of view, it can't be helped. I won't leave him to do this job alone.



Karson

"KARSON," Leana pleads, her voice a mere whisper.

"Save it, thief. We're doing what we came here to do, which is kill this fucker."

Gentry looks back at her, and the pained expression on his face disgusts me. Mostly because I feel it too. I want to give Leana what she wants because she's given so much to me, but we can't back out of this now. It's too late. The fucker's home, for Christ's sake. We don't run from hits with our tails between our legs, and we sure as fuck won't start today. I will smother him like I'm smothering the flicker of guilt in my gut.

Her hand grazes my arm before I pull it out of her grasp and leave her and Gentry behind. Gentry will follow me, though. The only thing that feels better than Leana's cunt is cold-blooded murder. She needs to understand that while we hold her higher than we've ever held another person, including each other, she can't transform our hearts from two lifeless stones to beating flesh. It's just who we are.

No amount of love can change that.

Gentry's heavy steps follow mine as we descend the stairs and come face to face with the man of the hour. Ralph's eyes widen the moment he sees us.

"Guys, wait," he begins. He's never seen our faces before. Most of them haven't, but they always seem to know who we are, as if we're wearing cloaks and carrying fucking scythes. They know we're coming. It's just the matter of when. And where. They also know there's no escaping once we get there.

"Ralphie boy," I say. He turns to run, but I draw my pistol. "I wouldn't. I *really* don't feel like chasing you."

He stops mid-step and slowly turns to face me. Gentry walks around me, and his overbearing stature makes Ralph swallow.

"Did you snort all your payment, Ralph?" Gentry lifts the bag. "Well, all of it except this."

"Come on, guys! You got the money. Give it to George and call it even!" he pleads. His eyes round as he looks behind us, which means—

Goddamn it, thief.

She looks like a little girl as she slips beside my brother. I pull my attention away from her and return it to the task at hand. Specifically, Ralph's hands, which need to be chopped the fuck off, pronto. My eyes clench closed for a moment as the embers of guilt catch hold of my insides and burn a little brighter. I shake my head and drop my hand to the blade on my hip, but then my eyes land on her instead of my target. How the fuck can I kill Ralph when I can't even kill the gross feelings in my gut that tell me what I'm doing will hurt the one person I don't want to hurt?

I draw my knife and step into Ralph, who recoils from my touch and pisses his pants. I've never wanted to get a killing done faster, and that thought terrifies me. I like to go slow and savor every moment before their heart ceases to beat and the fun *mostly* goes away for me.

"Karson!" she pleads, and the anguish in her voice reaches inside and chips away the stone surrounding my heart.

No, this can't happen. This is a terrible time to get a conscience. If I get one afterward, fine, but not when Ralph has seen our faces. He has to die. Period. End of story.

Yet . . . I fucking can't.

I release a long, drawn-out breath. Anger gnashes its teeth against my lungs, and my chest burns with the building rage. None of it's directed at her, though. Or the rich piece of shit in front of me. It's all aimed at myself.

I throw Ralph against the wall and hold the knife to his throat. He flails in front of me. "Please," he begs, tears falling down his cheeks. "My son. My son needs me."

Instead of increasing my guilt, his words smother it. Gentry and I didn't have a father to give a shit about us, and Leana had it even worse. If this prick dies, he at least leaves his child with a fuck ton of money to live on. Our father left us with a mess to clean up.

I press the blade against his skin.

"Please," Leana begs behind me. "Don't let him live for his kid. Let him live for me. Show me that you believe in me, because that's what you're doing if you give him a second chance."

My hand slams through the wall beside his head.

"You deserve to die, Ralph," I say into his face. "You should be dead. I should torture you until your very last breath, especially when you use your kid as a bargaining chip when you can't even stay clean long enough to spend any quality fucking time with him."

He trembles, his throat knocking into my blade with every swallow.

"But I won't kill you. Because of her." I gesture toward Leana. "Because she's walked in shoes like yours. Not the rich, expensive leather you wear, but the cement blocks that cling to your feet when you're high off your face." I take a sharp breath. "She wants us to show you a fraction of the sympathy we showed her, which is so incredibly gross. But this matters to her, so it matters to me."

He tries to blubber out his thanks, but I press the knife against his Adam's apple, and he closes his lips.

"I'm not fucking finished. Here's what's going to happen. We'll take the money and leave your ass alive, and you won't call the police. If you do, I'll send someone from fucking prison to find you *and* your son. Don't make me do that." I tap the tip of the knife on his nose. "Next, you're going to get off the drugs. I know all your dealers, Ralphie boy, and it would take a whole lot of nothing to get them to lace your next hit with some fentanyl so you can take a nice dirt nap. You wouldn't be the first celeb we took down."

His eyes widen with fear, and he almost looks more terrified to live without drugs than to die by my knife. "I can't go through withdrawal. It

will kill me!”

“If she can do it, you can fucking figure it out. These are my terms.”

He closes his eyes and tries to swallow again, but the blade won’t allow it. “Okay, okay,” he chokes out.

I grab him by the back of the neck and lead him to Leana. Shock fills her big blue eyes. Same, girl. “Thank the thief for saving your ass.”

“Thank you! Thank y-you!” he cries.

I roll my eyes.

“Promise you’ll get help,” she says to him.

He nods. “I promise.”

Against everything in my nature, I let him go and he falls to the floor. I can’t even look at Gentry because I have no clue what his expression is. Whether he’s happy or upset, I’ll end up annoyed with him. As we walk toward the door, Gentry calls out a parting shot.

“And change your security code. Jesus, a toddler could have guessed that,” he yells over his shoulder. I fight a smirk because he didn’t guess it.

My good little thief did.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Gentry

I feel like the world has imploded. The ground beneath us shattered, and everything we knew washed away as it broke apart. Karson turned down a kill. He's gotta be ill. Actually sick. Maybe even dying. "Come here. Let me check your forehead." I lean over and reach toward his face, but he smacks my hand away.

"Fuck you," he says. "It's her fault."

"My fault?" Leana asks, genuine surprise coloring her tone. She knows damn well it's her fault. Neither of us would leave a target alive like that.

But she would.

"Yeah, you had to walk over and look all fucking sad." Karson waves us off as he quickens his steps to pull ahead of us. It's a long walk across this damn yard.

"Since when do you care if anyone is sad?" she asks, and I let the retort lift the corners of my mouth.

So mouthy. I love it.

Karson stops and turns around. "*Your* sadness is the *only* one that bothers me. Not his. Not mine. Yours." He looks away. "And I hate it. I don't know how Gentry juggles feelings and homicidal thoughts in the same body. The same mind. How are you a killer with a conscience, G? It makes no fucking sense to me. I don't like how it feels, and I don't *want* those feelings. I was doing fine as I was!"

I cock my head at him. He has never been *doing fine*. He has never been fine a day in his life.

“Fine-ish!” he snaps before turning away from us again.

I pull Leana into me as we walk. “You know that was incredibly dumb, right?”

She knows. It doesn’t take someone who kills for a living to know that was dumb. That piece of shit might call the police before we even reach our car.

“Then why didn’t you stop it?” she snaps, and I squeeze her sides.

“For one, I was too shocked to stop it. But also, I wouldn’t have let him kill Ralph, anyway. So fucking stupid to do, but it was for you. If we get caught, we fall back on the plan. I’ll put a bullet through your head”—I lean over and kiss her forehead—“and then go out in an exchange of gunfire.”

She pulls away from me just as we get to the SUV.

“We forgot the blanket,” she says as she gets into the back seat.

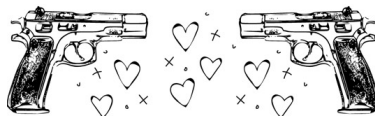
“He won’t do shit,” Karson says as he climbs into the passenger seat. “He’s probably still cleaning himself up. Dude pissed his pants. Besides, you don’t come face to face with reapers twice. He won’t like what happens to him if I have to pay him another visit. Not even you could save him, thief.” Karson punches the dash and looks out the window. “I hate that I don’t feel like much of a killer now.”

“Trust me, you’re a killer,” she says. “Just not this time.”

“Don’t get used to it,” Karson says. “I won’t always be selfless. Actually, I probably rarely will be, so just remember this moment when you think I’m a selfish dick.”

That sounds more like Karson.

We return to the motel parking lot, and Leana and Karson seem more than happy to crash here for the rest of the night, but I have something else in mind. I tell them to grab their things and walk Sam before we hit the road again.



Leana

WHEN GENTRY PULLS UP at the expensive hotel attached to the winery, I can almost forgive him for the long drive. He has to grease the wheels with a

little cash to get them to allow the dog in with us, but we eventually take the elevator to a fancier room than we stayed in before, complete with a lounge area and club-room access. I'm only surprised by one thing.

One king-size bed waits in the room.

"Three minutes?" Gentry says as soon as we've placed our bags on the floor.

Karson rolls his eyes. "Not this again."

"I can get her off in two." He captures my mouth and pulls my lower lip between his teeth. When he releases me, he tosses me onto the bed and lowers my pants until he can pull them off. He flips me over and raises my hips until I'm ass-up for him. "Time it."

Before I know what's happening, he buries his face in my pussy. Jealousy fuels his tongue, and he finds my swollen clit with ease. My moans gain in intensity as he hooks his hands around my thighs and pulls me against his face. Sounds of pleasure leave my lips, harder and faster, until my thighs tremble against his lips. He digs his fingertips into my skin to steady me.

I'm so close, and I'm sure he can feel it. He sinks a finger inside me to send me over the edge, and I gasp at the sudden addition to the pleasure coursing between my legs. He pushes his fingers deeper, searching for the next moan and bringing it out of me with ease.

He wants to make me come harder and faster than Karson could, and that's something Karson will never understand. He will never know what it's like to need to please me so desperately.

And that's okay.

Gentry will never know what it means to take me selfishly and use my body to fulfill his own hungry need. He can't understand what it means to take from me because he's too busy giving.

And that's okay.

They are the two opposing forces that somehow hold me together.

I can't control the orgasm as it rips through me. I clench around his fingers and cry out, shuddering and gripping the comforter to keep myself upright. I don't want to move away from his mouth. I don't want this feeling to stop.

When he pulls out of me, I turn my head and see that Karson's eyes are locked on us. Knowing that he watched his brother get me off makes me want more. I've just been fed, but I'm still so hungry.

“Two minutes and thirty-five seconds,” Karson says as he turns his phone toward us, displaying the stopwatch.

Gentry sits on the bed and pulls me onto his lap. His hard cock presses against my bare ass, and I’m glad to know I’m not the only one who wants more. “I know your body, sweet wanderer,” he says. “I know it better than my brother.”

“Who did it better, thief?” Karson asks.

I shake my head. I can’t compare Gentry and Karson. They almost become one when it comes to killing, but when it comes to caring about or loving someone, they’re a world apart.

“Please don’t ask me to pick between you guys,” I say. “There’s no way to choose. I need both of you. I need your selfishness, Karson.” I turn to Gentry. “But I also need your selflessness.”

Karson moves closer and leans in to kiss me. His hand wraps around the back of my neck as he draws me closer to his mouth. I kiss him, expecting Gentry to pull me away at any moment, but he doesn’t. I’m pressed between them, and I’ve never been so turned on.

When Karson releases me, I turn to Gentry. “Are you okay with this?”

He leans in and kisses me. “I will never be okay with sharing you, but Karson isn’t the only one willing to make a change for you. This is what you want, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir,” I say.

He growls against my mouth and kisses me once more. “Just remember who you belong to, wanderer.”

Karson turns my head toward him again. “Thief,” he whispers against my mouth, “I want my brother to stretch your cunt while I sink inside your perfect ass.”

I’ve never done that before, but I don’t think that will matter to Karson.

“Come here,” Gentry says, low and soft as he lies on his back. He drags me over him, and I straddle his wide hips, feeling the length of his hard dick through his jeans. There’s something so erotic about riding his zipper, but I want more. I *need* more. He reaches down and unfastens his jeans, releasing his cock. He’s so turned on that the bare skin burns hot as I lower myself against it. “I can’t wait a moment longer to stretch your sweet pussy,” he growls before burying his face into my neck and biting my flesh.

“Please, sir,” I beg. “Can I have your cock?” Whimpers punctuate my words as his teeth sink deeper.

“You know I love when you call me that,” he whispers. “I can’t tell you no when you’re such a good girl.”

I whimper as he slides his hand between us and glides the throbbing head of his cock toward my entrance. When he pulls my hips down, I’m impaled with pleasure and pain, mercilessly ripped in two. I cry out and he muffles my screams with his shoulder as he pulls me against his chest.

“Sorry, wanderer.” He brushes my hair away from my sweaty cheek. “Selfish of me to take your pussy like that, I know, but I needed to feel you around me.”

The burning subsides between my legs and leaves me feeling warm and full, but hair rises on the back of my neck as hands grip my waist, just below Gentry’s. Karson’s body heat warms me from behind. He leans closer and bites my shoulder before pushing my chest down to his brother’s. His hands grope my ass, pushing his fingertips into my flesh with a low growl.

“Gentry may own your pussy, little thief, but your ass is mine,” he says as his hands spread me. The moment he does, my body tenses and tightens, and Gentry jolts with this renewed pressure.

“Wait, Karson,” Gentry says. He lifts my chin, forcing my eyes to meet his. “Is this what you want?”

I hate that he asks, because I’m not sure. Based on how my body responded, it certainly seems like I don’t want this, but I *want* to want it. I’m just scared.

“I won’t hurt her, G,” Karson says. “Not any more than what comes with taking my pierced dick in such a tight hole.”

His words make me tense further. “You aren’t helping.”

Karson leans over, puts a hand to the front of my neck, and lifts me toward him, bringing my ear close to his mouth. “Let me inside you, thief. I’ll show you that Gentry isn’t the only giving lover.”

I sigh, exhaling a long breath as he releases my neck. Sweat rolls down my back, and I need to get out of this shirt. I peel it off and lean forward, putting my bare chest against Gentry’s shirt. I bury my face in the fabric as Karson’s hands wander to my ass again. He unzips his jeans and spreads me again. Warm saliva drips between my ass cheeks and coats me.

I’m fucking terrified.

Karson puts his cock up to me, and I brace myself for his intrusion. Instead of pushing inside me, he rests it between my cheeks as his hands soothe my lower back with a soft, caring caress. Dare I say . . . loving?

I relax a bit, and he doesn't seek out permission as one hand leaves my back and guides his cock inside me. I bite Gentry's shirt as his head spreads me, the piercings clicking past my opening. He pushes further inside me, slower than I expect, then he waits until I stretch around him before pushing further.

His fingertips dig into the small of my back. "Don't get used to my kindness, thief," he growls. "I plan to drill your ass the moment you stop fighting me."

I'm not fighting him. I'm just so full of his brother's cock, and there's only so much room inside my body. Just when I think I can't take another inch of Karson, he pushes until I feel the soft hairs of his pelvis against my ass. There's too much friction as he tries to ease back, so he spits again, coating his cock. When he pushes forward again, he glides inside me. I'm so fucking full.

"Fuck, thief," Karson grits out, his words laced with feral pleasure.

Gentry can't move much beneath us, but he remains buried so deep that I can feel it in my lower abdomen. He pulls my face toward him so he can kiss me, and his lips make me forget about everything as Karson rips away the glimpse of humanity and mercilessly fucks my ass. I cry out into Gentry's mouth, and he swallows all the pain.

"Good girl," he whispers.

Karson's hand winds through my hair, and he cranes my neck as he fucks me. "She's not a good girl," he growls. "She's a dirty little thief."

There's a competitive edge to his words, and it goes right to my pelvis and buries itself between them. I'm pulled from Gentry's soft sensuality and thrust into Karson's rough, passionate grasp. I feel so fucking alive, spared by the hands of death that grip parts of my body. My hips. My shoulders. My chest. I feel them everywhere.

Gentry lifts his hips, keeping pace with his brother so that I remain thoroughly and uncomfortably stuffed. I move my hips with Karson's thrusts. I like how it feels. How dirty and raw it is.

Gentry pulls me into him, wrapping his arms around me. "I'm going to come, wanderer," he groans, letting Karson's motions and my throbbing pussy work the come from him. His hips rise to meet mine as he fills me.

"Good. Now she can be mine," Karson says.

"Not a chance. I'll keep her stuffed with my cock so she doesn't lose a single drop of my come."

“Selfish,” Karson clips.

“Yeah, sometimes.” Gentry’s fingertips brush the hair from my cheek as he looks into my eyes. “She’s my breedable little wanderer,” he says, and fuck if it doesn’t make me throb. “Mine.”

“Ours,” Karson corrects as he smacks my ass. “There’s a reason she won’t choose between us. You like how we *both* use you, huh, little thief? You like how Gentry fucks you like he loves you and I fuck you like I hate you.”

“Yes,” I whimper.

It’s true. Karson is fucked beyond comprehension, and yet my body still craves his harsh, feral touch. Almost as much as I crave the protective, loving hand that belongs to Gentry. And I won’t choose. Not now. Not after we’ve clawed our way to this moment.

“Do you want both holes filled?” Karson asks as he puts one hand on my hip and the other on my shoulder, but he doesn’t wait for my response. It was never a question.

He fucks me harder and faster, the hollow pain of his dick pulsing through me. I moan, loving the friction as their cocks collide within me. It’s sick and twisted, but that’s what I’ve become.

And what they’ve always been.

Karson slows the hard thrusts that pound against the backs of my thighs.

“I’m going to fill you, thief. Officially claim this tight little ass of yours,” he growls as his hips stutter, and with a groan that sends shivers up my spine, he comes.

Sweat slicks my body as Gentry’s hands rove over me, playing with my nipples as we all gasp for air. I’m fucked and filled, and they’re empty and satiated. The heat of their bodies presses against me until I feel like we’re one. I’m sore and used, yet I’m more content than I’ve ever been. More free than I’ve ever felt.

I lean down and kiss Gentry, the man who will protect what’s his at any cost. Karson grips my hair and pulls me toward him, and I kiss him too. The man who will take what he wants, regardless of the repercussions.

And then there’s me. Right in the middle, where I belong.

Epilogue

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One Year Later

Gentry

The smell of blood is nearly overbearing. Not in an unpleasant way, but the way something too sweet can almost make you feel sick. Tonight was such a sloppy kill—bloody as fuck, with the perfect amount of torture for Karson. Even though Leana still hasn't taken the kill shot since her ex, she takes part in the torture when she feels like the victim deserves it. Which is cute because she was once so insistent that no one deserves death. Plenty of people deserve death, but fewer deserve life. I certainly don't. Especially not *this* life with her and my fucking brother.

And Sam. He greets us at the door as we enter the apartment, happy to sniff at the blood on our bodies. We take him along on the kills sometimes—the murder mutt is a Kursicki, through and through—but we left him to guard the apartment tonight.

The only downside to this life is having to share Leana. I hate handing her off to Karson because I want her for myself, but *she* wants both of us, and she gets whatever she wants. If she doesn't want to choose between us, I won't make her. Neither of us will.

As we shed our clothes, Karson turns to me with a grin. "I heard about a way we might make a little side money," he says. "There's this fighter named Ambrose not far from here, and he's making waves in the ring. We can fight on the weekends when we aren't busy. There's good money if we win."

"I'm not kicking your ass for money," I say as I pull off my shirt. "I'll do that for free."

Leana stands naked in front of the bathroom door and waves us toward her. “Stop the competitive shit and let’s get clean.”

We shed the rest of our clothes, and all three of us are naked by the time we get to the shower. High on the endorphins from the kill, we drag her in and close the door. The spray sends blood-tinged water toward the drain, cleansing us of our sins.

Until next time, that is.

“My thief,” Karson whispers as he kisses the back of her neck.

“Will you ever stop calling me that?” she asks. “I stole one car.”

So mouthy. As usual.

“You’ve stolen more than that,” Karson says through a laugh.

I cock my head at him. If he says some Hallmark shit like, “She stole my heart,” I will shoot him in it. Even if it’s kinda true. I call her wanderer because she’s taken me to places within me that I’d never have gone into alone, and she’s definitely a thief for stealing both of our hearts. She’s also force-fed humanity down our throats. But the sweet shit? That’s my half of the fucked-up equation. I’m the sap. I would put a knife through my own chest for her. I love her more than I love killing, and I never thought that would be a thing for me. She even makes me love my brother again, as an extension of her.

“I love you, wanderer,” I say as I pull her into me and kiss her.

“I love you too.” Her gaze bounces between us. “Both of you.”

Karson—because he’s still a mega douche—pulls her against his chest and whispers something into her ear. I’ve learned to harness the jealousy. Instead of allowing it to create hatred, I let it fuel my desire and need. I always want her more when I know my brother wants her too. I want to make her come harder, faster, and better than him.

Karson and I look at each other before we each pin one of her arms above her head. My free hand trails over the curve of her breast, where a new tattoo rests just below the arrow—the word “Kursed,” written in a mixture of our blood. She’s ours, completely and fully.

And she is Kursed.

We all are.

“Who can make you come faster, thief?” Karson asks, baiting me with the words as much as her. “Me or my brother?”

I drop my hand from her chest and bring it between her legs with a smirk. “Time it.”



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