


A BILLIONAIRE  
PROTECTOR  
ROMANCE

A muscular man with short brown hair and blue eyes is the central figure. He is shirtless, showing a large black tribal-style tattoo on his left shoulder and a tattoo on his right forearm that reads 'GGG' and 'THE YOUNG VTN'. He is wearing a white t-shirt draped over his right shoulder and a black boxing glove on his right hand. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a light, textured wall.

# BAD TWIN

*Stay Over*

ASHLEY B

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A BILLIONAIRE PROTECTOR ROMANCE

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## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



Thank you very much for choosing to read my book. I love writing stories about sexy, dominating bad boys and alpha males who make it their mission to possess their shy, innocent, beauties. If you like these types of stories too and want to find out when my next book is being released, why not join my exclusive mailing list by clicking the link below

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## TRISTAN

Stepping off the plane and into the sterile, bustling airport, I dug in my pocket for my phone and switched it off airplane mode.

Tossing my large duffle bag that served as my carry on over my shoulder, I found my way out of the large airport and splurged on a taxi.

“Covill Security, please,” I told the driver. As he merged into the sluggish New York traffic, I once again pulled out my phone and drafted a message to my brother, Cory.

Off plane. Heading your way.

I hit send and settled back in my seat, closing my eyes. Why my billionaire brother didn’t feel the need to pick me up in a limousine was beyond me. After all these years, he still treated me like the black sheep of the family.

The taxi pulled up to Covill Security’s large headquarters, these guys were the big wigs. I stepped onto the pavement, scaring away a few pigeons, and gave the driver his pay.

Slinging my bag up onto my shoulder, I strode through the large glass doors and into the large, modern building.

I walked straight up to the front desk, where an overweight man sat in a shirt and tie, clicking around on his computer. I glanced at his nametag, which read Tom Mayflower.

“Hey, mate,” I said. “Any chance I can get in touch with Cory Walker?”

“Name, please?” Tom asked.

“Tristan. Tristan Walker. He’s my brother.” I grinned.

Tom chewed at his fat lip as he clicked through files on his computer. “Oh, yeah. The crazy rich guy,” he snorted. “I’ll have to reach out to his secretary.”

I rolled my eyes. “You can’t just call him?” I asked

He shook his head. “He isn’t a Covill employee. He’s only squatting here

temporarily while he works out a deal with the big boss on some project or other.” He reached for his phone and dialed in a number, waiting a moment while it rang.

“Hello, yes? A Tristan Walker is here for Mr. Walker. Okay. Thank you.” Tom hung up. “Brittany is coming down to fetch you,” he said lazily.

I rapped his desk with my knuckles. “Thanks, Mr. Mayflower,” I said.

I wandered the lobby as I waited. The place was nice, ritzy even. Exactly the kind of company Cory would work for. I stared out the window at the bustling street. Pedestrians walked along the sidewalk and hurried across the street, coffee, and briefcases in hand.

After flying in from the mountains of Colorado, this was a suffocating change.

My phone vibrated, and I glanced down. Several notifications from Facebook and Instagram popped up on my screen. I grinned, the photo I had posted as I descended into New York was already a hit.

I noticed a personal text message and opened it.

Hi, Tristan. It’s Roxy. Remember me?

I squinted my eyes at the number, it was a California area code. I racked my brain, trying to remember California. The last time I was there, I was in Los Angeles. There was booze, bonfires, and women. I could have given my number out to anyone.

“Tristan Walker?”

I turned and spotted a woman with raven black hair walking towards me, her pencil skirt clutching her full hips. I smiled darkly, shaking my head, Cory even had the hot secretary.

She stopped in front of me, eyeing me up and down like something the cat dragged in. I supposed I could have shaved before arriving.

“That’s me,” I said. “I need to see Cory.”

“I’ve gathered that,” she said. “My name is Brittany. Follow me.”

She led me into a large elevator and hit the button for the tenth floor – the highest in the building. I snorted. Even at a company that was not his own, he had to have the best seat in the house.

The elevator dinged as we arrived and Brittany led me to an office door, knocking confidently.

“Come on in,” I heard my brother call from the other side.

Brittany opened the door and motioned for me to go inside. I nodded my head to her in a thank you and strode through the door.

The office was the size of a studio apartment, with a large oak desk stretched in front of a floor-to-ceiling window, looking over the city. My brother stood,



shoving his hands in his Armani pockets.

“Hey, bro!” I called, striding to his desk. “Nice place you’ve got here.”

“It’s temporary,” he said, not even a sliver of a smile gracing his lips. “The CEO, Walter Covill, is currently in California. I’ve taken his office in the meantime.”

I didn’t know who that was, and I didn’t care. I stepped around his desk and pulled him into a one-armed hug. He quickly backed away.

“You know I’m not the touchy-feely type,” he said curtly.

I laughed. “I don’t seem to remember that when you stole away my girlfriend in high school.”

That earned a crooked smile from Cory. “You’re not the only ladies’ man,” he said. He eyed me up and down, taking in my stubbled face and long hair. “You’re looking.... Rugged,” he said.

I shrugged. “What can I say? Don’t have time to shave every day.”

Cory snorted. “Because you’re off clowning around with your video camera.”

“Hey, I’m making a decent living from that thing,” I said.

Cory raised his brows condescendingly.

I rolled my eyes. “Not like *billions*, obviously. But I’ve become quite the celebrity on YouTube.”

Shaking his head, Cory sat back down behind his borrowed desk. “Maybe if you didn’t drop out of college and actually tried to hold down a job, you could have ended up like me.”

I scoffed. “You realize there are currently only about 500 billionaires in the US, don’t you? You’re just lucky that app you designed took off the way it did.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t stop there,” he said. “If you want something bad enough, you’ll get it.”

I scratched at my jaw, already tiring of my brother’s pompous ass. “I didn’t say I wanted what you have,” I said. “I am perfectly happy bringing in a comfortable six figures from my online business, thank you.” It was time for a subject change. “Hey, Mom said you were dating exclusively now,” I said. “When did *that* happen?”

Cory cleared his throat. “A few months ago, actually. Emalee is the real deal. I’ve slept around enough to know. She’s not in it for the money. She didn’t even realize I was rich on our first date.”

“Oh, whatever,” I said. “You brag about your wealth all the time.”

“Not this time,” Cory said, sighing. “This time... I wanted something real.”

I didn’t know whether to feel happy for my brother for taking the high road when it came to relationships or to barf at his romantic implications. “Tired of

the fake boobs?” I teased.

I’d gotten on Cory’s last nerve. He fished inside his pocket.

Cory extended his hand, a silver key in his fingers. He dropped it into my palm. “The apartment key,” he said. “Please try to behave yourself while you’re here.”

“I doubt that,” I said with a grin, pocketing the spare key. “Is Emalee living with you? Will she be home?”

Cory glanced at his watch. “No, Emalee works. She’s only currently staying at my place because she’s in the process of moving to another apartment. I’m meeting her for lunch in about an hour.”

“I’ll make myself comfortable, then,” I said. “See you tonight.”

I left my brother’s office, still silently laughing at how cocky he could be. I could only imagine what kind of stuck-up treat his new girlfriend would be.

## EMALEE

I wrapped two thick novels in brown paper and stuck them into a red paper bag, handing it to Mrs. Hansen with a smile. “Alexandre Dumas isn’t exactly a read-in-one-day type author,” I said. “But Count of Monte Cristo and The Three Musketeers are so enjoyable you’ll be finished with them before you know it.”

Mrs. Hansen took the bag from me gratefully. “I’ve heard of the swashbuckling fun and witty humor and I’ve decided I just can’t procrastinate Dumas any longer,” she said with a laugh. “Thank you, Emalee. Tell your mom I said hi.”

Mrs. Hansen left the small bookstore, and I glanced at the Hobbit clock hanging behind the cash register. “Amy, I’m taking my lunch,” I called to my older sister, who was busy stocking a new shipment of books on the shelf.

“Grab me something, please!” Amy called back. “I’m starving.”

I grabbed my purse from under the register. “We’re getting Chinese. What do you want?”

Amy peeked her strawberry blonde head around the bookshelf. “Peanut butter chicken? And rangoons!”

I made a mental note and exited the bookshop, the little welcome bell jangling in the doorway.

Stepping onto the New York street, I breathed in the smell of the coffee shop conveniently located next to our store and the Italian pizza place across the street.

Leaving McLaughlin Books behind, I took the subway. Cory said he’d meet me at Wang’s Kitchen at noon for lunch. I wasn’t about to miss a rare lunch date, it was hard to convince him to pull away from work for even five minutes.

I reached my destination and glanced around the small sit-down restaurant.

No Cory. Sighing in frustration, I sat on a cracked waiting bench and pulled my phone from my purse. I gave him a call, pressing the phone against my cheek.

It went to voicemail.

I noted the time – ten after twelve. He was late, but not *that* late. I sent him a quick text letting him know I was there and waited.

He walked through the glass door five minutes later, his phone pressed against his ear. “Yeah,” he was saying. “Yeah, we’re going to need to work with more than that. I need results, and fast. Okay. Just get it done.” He spotted me after hanging up the phone and strode over with a smile.

I stood. “Busy day at work?”

“The usual,” he said, but he was distracted. He made eye contact with the usher, who already had two menus in hand. “Two, please. Booth.”

We were led to the back and we slid into the red cushioned seats. “How’s work?” Cory asked, opening and staring at his laminated menu.

“Today’s a good day,” I said, watching him. “Mrs. Hansen came back in. Ever since my mom gave her that free book on the house...”

Cory’s phone vibrated. He held up a finger, answering it.

I clamped my mouth shut.

The waiter came by. “What to drink?” he asked.

“Just water for me, thanks,” I answered him, and we both turned to Cory. He pulled the end of the phone away from his mouth. “Cherry Coke,” he said quietly, and then refocused on his conversation.

The waiter smiled with a small bow and retreated.

I waited for Cory to finish his phone call, scrolling through Facebook. The politics and picture-perfect families irritated me, so I switched to Pinterest, looking for a way to freshen up McLaughlin Books with a summer flare. A beautiful stick-on map of the world caught my attention and I stared at it, wondering if we could make space for it along the children’s wall...

The waiter brought our drinks and I ordered crab rangoons.

Cory finally hung up. “Sorry,” he muttered, grabbing a rangoon. “This project with Covill is proving to be more work than I thought. If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself.”

I smiled at him. “At least they have you, you little worker bee.”

Cory didn’t reply, but I saw him flush with pride at my acknowledgement.

I cleared my throat. “So,” I said, “Phantom of the Opera. Where do you want to eat before we go? I was thinking we could—”

Cory was staring down at his lap.

“Cory?” I asked. “Are you on your phone? Come on, I want to talk to you.”

“Just a second, sweetheart,” he said, and he slid his hand out of mine so he

could reply to an email.

I sat back in my seat, irritated. "I feel like I never get to spend time with you anymore," I pouted.

"That's nice, Em," Cory said.

I bit at my bottom lip and silenced myself.

The waiter returned for our orders, and I requested sweet and sour chicken while Cory ordered orange chicken.

"Look, I know you're busy," I tried again. "But... I mean, you have enough money."

Cory's eyes snapped up to meet mine in a harsh gaze. "I need to work, Em," he said. "You know this. I can't stop, not when I know I can do more. I can create more. I can earn more."

I took a deep breath, trying to calm myself. "Okay, but you don't give me any time. I don't want to be one of those girls who appears clingy, but..."

"Then don't," he snapped. "I'm sorry you're feeling like I don't give you enough attention. But there are more important things going on with my newest company right now."

It was like a verbal slap to the face. I sat there, silent, as the waiter brought us our food. Cory took a bite of his chicken and made a face.

"Why did you want to meet here?" he asked. "This is basically a two-star restaurant. We could have gone to Ramsey's new place."

Frustrated tears stung my eyes.

Cory had been sweet when we first met. He'd appeared intellectual, engaged in conversation. But within the short eight months of dating him, I'd seen him slowly revert to a workaholic. The appeal of dating a billionaire was dying off fast. Why bother when he didn't have the time to spare for me?

I poked at my chicken and rice. "Cory..." I started. I sighed. "I don't think I can do this anymore."

Cory stuffed a forkful of food in his mouth. "What?"

"This. Date. I... thought I could handle it. But I can't."

Cory stared at me, his fork suspended in midair. "You.... You're *breaking up* with me?"

I bit my bottom lip, trying to stay strong. "Not... really. I just... I think we need a break. To reevaluate what's important."

Cory frowned at me. "I can give you whatever you want," he said.

"I know. But I want time with you. And you're not giving me that. So... I want a break."

Cory looked like he was going to argue, but took a slow breath, setting his fork down. "If that's what you want," he said. "You can still crash at my place

until your apartment is ready.”

I smiled. This was the generosity I sometimes glimpsed in him. Maybe we weren’t through yet. “Thanks,” I said.

Cory stood. “I need to get back. I’ll see you tonight.”

He brushed a quick kiss on my forehead before I could stop him. I watched him leave the restaurant, wondering if he knew what I meant by taking a “break.” I sighed, I’d have to set boundaries tonight.

I ordered Amy’s food to go before leaving the restaurant and heading back to my family’s bookshop.



SIX O’CLOCK chimed on the Hobbit clock, and I stood from my spot behind the register. “I’m going home,” I told Amy.

“You sure?” I heard Amy ask from a bean bag behind some bookshelves. She was most likely on her phone or reading a book. “Mom’s stopping by with cookies.”

It was tempting. “I should get back to Cory’s and unpack the rest of my stuff,” I said.

“Suit yourself.”

I left Amy and began my trek to Cory’s apartment, taking the subway. It took twenty minutes for me to get to the luxury apartment, which was good time for a New Yorker. Amy had an hour commute.

I entered the large and extravagant complex, taking the elevator up to the fourth floor. My keys clinked together as I drew them out of my purse. I flipped through the garage key, the bookstore key, the safe key, and the mail key before finding the one to the apartment.

Exiting the elevator, I made my way to apartment 418.

I paused as I inserted the key into the lock, listening. Rock music pounded on the other side of the door.

Did Cory come home early?

Unlocking the door, I peeked inside.

Cory was in the ornate living room, shirtless and doing one-handed push-ups. I hadn’t seen that man work out in months.

He glanced up as I entered the apartment. I breezed past him, setting my purse and keys on the kitchen counter. “I wasn’t expecting you to be home so soon,” I called above the noise.

The music was lowered. “What’s that, love?”

I peeked my head out of the kitchen and watched as Cory stood, wiping sweat from his neck with his t-shirt. His eyes ran up and down my body. "Damn," he said.

I felt a slight blush rise to my cheeks. "Hello to you, too," I said. "Look I know we're on a break but I've already planned dinner so how does lasagna sound for dinner. Double meat, the way you like it."

Cory raised his brows. "Do I, now?"

"And zucchini and mushrooms, the way I like it." I smirked. "You're not getting a pass on veggies."

Cory laughed. "Picky as always, is he?"

His remark confused me, but I ignored it, opening the fridge and pulling out ingredients. Cory always insisted he could hire a gourmet chef, but I wanted to repay him somehow for letting me crash at his place.

Cory slowly strode behind me. "He didn't tell you, did he?" he asked.

I turned to face him and found his gorgeous hazel eyes feet away from me. There was a humor and attentiveness in them I wasn't used to seeing...

Something was off. Cory's hair seemed longer than it had been when I met him today, and his stubble was darker on his jaw than he'd usually allow.

Cory cocked an eyebrow. "Come on, you're not really mistaking me for my pompous ass of a brother, are you?"

Everything clicked loudly in my head. "Oh, my gosh," I breathed. "Tristan?"

Tristan grinned. "In the flesh."

## TRISTAN

*I*t was fucking hilarious.

There I was, minding my own business and pumping some iron, when Cory's girlfriend walks through the door and *mistakes me for my brother*.

It was a classic twin situation, and it's happened before, but I hadn't been expecting it today.

And damn, was Cory's girl *hot*.

Honey hair softly curled down her back, swaying as she strode into the kitchen. Her tight jeans drew my eyes to her curved, petite ass, where pencil thin legs extended to small, rounded flats.

When I followed her into the kitchen, drawn by her body, she turned to face me, and everything inside me roared with desire.

Eyes as green as pine found mine. Her nose was small, with an adorable rounded tip.

And those lips...

Full, slightly parted with confusion, just begging to be engulfed by my fervent mouth...

"Tristan?" she asked.

"In the flesh," I said. Her already large eyes widened, giving her an innocence that was made to be shattered.

"How... how did you get in here?" she asked. "I'm sorry, I wasn't aware you were coming."

I pulled the key out of my shorts. "Dropped by Cory's office when I got in this morning," I said. I felt her heat radiating from her body and warming my still-bare chest. If she ever touched me with those slender fingers, there would be no going back. I took a step back to cool myself down.



Her delicate eyebrows pulled together in a frown. "Cory never said anything to me," she said. "Shit. I even had lunch with him."

I switched off the music and pulled my t-shirt on, which lowered my testosterone a bit. Now I wasn't at such a high risk of jumping this girl's bones, girlfriend to my brother or not.

"I'm sorry I wasn't prepared for your arrival," she called from the kitchen. "I'm Emalee, by the way."

The name suited her.

"Pleasure, Emalee," I said, tasting her name on my tongue. It rolled off beautifully, naturally. I wandered back into the kitchen. "I've already put my stuff in the spare bedroom. You won't even notice I'm here – I'll be at the gym most the time."

Emalee's eyes raked up and down my figure. "How long are you staying?" she asked suspiciously.

"At least three weeks," I said. "The Spartan race is on August tenth."

"What the hell, Cory," she muttered under her breath, pulling out a large pot and filling it with water. "Are you hungry? Would you like lasagna?"

I sat on a bar stool at the counter. "I take it Cory didn't tell you *anything*."

She shook her head. "Not a word. You're here for the Spartan race?"

"That's right," I said, leaning back and admiring her figure as she turned away from me, setting the pot on the stove and turning on the heat. "I wanted to train here for a few weeks before the big event. I knew Cory wouldn't mind."

Emalee placed her elbows on the black marble counter, leaning forward and examining me. "Gosh," she said. "Cory's told me how people would get you mixed up all the time, and I thought that was crazy, but looking at you..." she shook her head. "You look *identical*."

"That's the term," I said. "Mind if I grab a drink?"

"Oh," she pushed back from the counter. "I'm so sorry, I hardly ever have guests over. My manners are rusty."

I didn't answer. I had only asked for a drink so I could watch her reach for the glasses high up in the cupboard. As I predicted, she stood on her tiptoes, and as she reached for the shelf, her shirt lifted to expose a smooth, pale lower back with a perfect indent slicing down the middle.

For the first time in years, I was jealous of my brother.

"Milk, orange juice, or wine?" she asked.

"Just water, thanks," I said. She poured the glass and slid it over to me.

I gulped it down, watching as she dropped lasagna noodles into the now-boiling water. She peeled open a package of ground beef.

"Here, let me," I offered, standing. I stepped around the counter and sidled

up next to her, grabbing the spatula out of her hand.

“Oh. Um. No, you don’t have to do that,” she said. An adorable pink blush brushed her cheeks.

I smiled. “I insist,” I said. “It’s not fair to you that you weren’t expecting company. It’s my brother who’s forgotten his manners.”

She awkwardly stood there as I dumped the ground beef into a warmed pan, mixing it until it turned brown.

“So,” I said casually, “How’d you meet my brother?”

“He wandered into my family’s bookshop,” she said, smiling a little at the memory. “I think he was looking for books on finance.”

“Sounds about right,” I said. “You’re the first girlfriend I’ve met that he’s held onto this long.”

Emalee leaned against the counter with a sigh. “We’re actually taking a break.”

That was intriguing. “A break?” I asked. “He was just talking about you today. What happened?”

“I broke it to him during lunch,” she said. “He’s just... a lot more to handle than I thought. He has so much money. It’s intimidating. And he doesn’t make any time for me.”

The exclusive dating thing wasn’t working out for him, then. “I’m sorry to hear that,” I said. But another twisted part of me piped up that she was now up for grabs.

Emalee pulled out a cutting board and knife and sliced the zucchini and mushrooms. “Where are you living now?” she asked me. “Cory says you don’t really stay in one place.”

I wondered what else my brother had told her about me.

“Colorado,” I said. “For now.”

“Oooh.” She breathed softly. Her small body was up against mine now as she scraped the veggies into the meat pan with the back of her knife. “I hear it’s beautiful there.”

I recognized the aching wistfulness in her voice.

She had wanderlust. She had it bad. With all of Cory’s money, why didn’t she ask him for a trip or two? Hell, he could buy her an entire house for her to stay in while she was there.

“You should visit sometime,” I suggested, daring to put a gentle hand on her lower back. She flinched so I removed my hand. “The mountain views are breathtaking, the lakes crystal clear, the wildlife abundant...”

She’d moved away from me with a small laugh. “Yeah... Cory wouldn’t let me go.”

I frowned at the pan as I mixed the veggies and meat together. "Why not?"

She set the oven to 350 degrees. "He likes me here, with him," she said. "He wasn't too keen on me going to California to visit my best friend, Mia. She even offered to pay for the flight."

"That's bullshit," I said.

She glanced at me, surprised. I shook my head. My brother was stingy with her, which I could understand, but keeping her from traveling grated on my nerves. I knew how frustrated I got when he and my father both tried to convince me to stay put, settle down...

"Meat's cooked," I said, turning off the heat. "Let's put this puppy together."

Together, we layered the lasagna with noodles, tomato sauce, the cheese mixture, and meat and veggies.

To top it all off, Emalee poured a healthy amount of shredded mozzarella cheese on top.

"Beautiful," I said as I watched her bend, sliding the glass pan into the oven. Her shirt rode up again, and an image of her bent over a table as I laid into her came unbidden into my mind.

Shit. I had to pull myself together.

While the lasagna baked, Emalee led me to the linen closet, where she pulled out fresh white sheets. "No need to make up the bed," I told her, taking the linen from her arms. "I'd be too tempted to mess it up with you."

She blinked at me. "I'm not sure what you mean."

I was overstepping my bounds, but I couldn't resist. I leaned forward, speaking low in her ear. "You. Me. Bed. It'd get fucked up."

I saw my implications dawn on her, and the blush heightened on her cheeks. She laughed nervously. "Cory mentioned you were a bit of a flirt," she said.

I counted her reaction as a win. She didn't tell me off or berate me. She took it as a joke and shrugged it off.

I could have so much fun with this one. "I'd be careful if I were you," I told her as we returned to the living room. "You've mistaken me once for my brother. The next time I might not correct you." I gave her my most seductive smile. "Even if your clothes are off."

She had no idea how to handle me. She twisted her hands together, looking anywhere but at me. "I'm assuming you're joking," she said, taking a seat on the couch.

"Assume whatever you want," I said, sitting next to her. She became rigid. This was too fun. I swung a lazy arm over her shoulders. "Either way, I think you'd find I'm a master at realizing all your carnal desires and naughty fantasies."

She looked at me now, her green eyes flickering across my face. Her breathing had become irregular. "You're not like Cory at all," she said softly.

Before I could make a reply, the door opened.

"Speaking of the devil," I said, standing. "Welcome home, bro," I strode to him as he closed the door behind him and gave him a one-armed hug.

"Tristan, what have I told you?" Cory said, ducking out from my embrace. "I don't do PDA."

"Thanks for the heads up about your brother," Emalee said from the couch. She made no effort to hide her annoyance. I grinned. She was a feisty one, after all.

Cory swiped a hand through his hair. "I'm sorry, Em," he said. "It slipped my mind."

The timer for the lasagna beeped, and Emalee stood to retrieve it.

Cory looked at me. "All settled in, then?"

"Thanks to Emalee, here," I told him. I made a show of looking back at her, then raised my eyebrows dramatically at Cory. "Could I persuade you to share?"

Cory rolled his eyes. "Tristan, she's not a steak. Besides, you hook up with any girl that moves. I'm sure you'll run into someone at the gym. But I have one rule – *please* don't bring any tramps into my home."

I huffed. "I don't do tramps. I am quite selective when it comes to women."

Cory walked passed me and settled on a bar stool at the counter. He held up a porn magazine I had casually left there. "Clearly," he scoffed.

"Play nice, you two," Emalee said, taking down three plates.

She served up generous helpings of lasagna. While we ate, my eyes wandered to Emalee, taking in her mouth, that hair, the way she actually used a knife to cut her lasagna into bite-sized pieces.

That mouth could fit itself perfectly around the erection I was getting from watching her.

"How big is it?" Cory asked.

I blinked, turning to face my brother. "Excuse me, what?"

He stuffed a forkful of lasagna in his mouth. "The race. How big is it?"

I barked out a small laugh. So my brother *hadn't* been reading my mind...

"At least two thousand contestants every year," I replied. "There are cash prizes."

Cory snorted. "Of course there are. Otherwise, you wouldn't be here."

I shrugged. "You got me."

"Do you have any plans tomorrow?" Cory asked.

I honestly hadn't given it much thought. I had just arrived. "No, actually. I'll probably just train."

Cory pointed a fork at Emalee. "You have tomorrow off, right, babe?"

She cleared her throat, shaking her head at him. "No pet names, please," she said. I tried to hide my smile. She was really putting her foot down on the break.

My eyes locked with hers as she took a careful sip of water. "I do have tomorrow off," she said slowly.

"Why don't you show Tristan around the city? Hit up all the touristy spots."

Emalee pressed her lips together. She didn't look happy she had been volunteered for the job. "Sure," she finally said, picking up her plate and taking it to the sink.

I gave her a wink as she came back for mine. "It's a date," I said.

After the dishes were done, Emalee announced she was going to bed. She glanced at me before disappearing into the room next to the master bedroom.

"What did you do to piss that one off?" I asked Cory, imagining her stripping off her shirt and bra before snuggling under the soft covers.

How many times did they make love? Once, twice a week? Did she suck him off to relieve the stress from the day? What delicate sounds escaped from those plump lips as he fucked her?

"Apparently I'm not paying her enough attention," he sighed irritably. "But I'll win her back. It's hard to say no to money."

I made a face. "That's not sexy."

"Tristan, do you see that girl? Pretty sure she lied to me when she said she wasn't a virgin. I had to take things slow, the traditional way." He leaned forward, dropping his voice to a low whisper. "I'm not losing that hot ass."

My dick twitched at the implications.

"What was the secret to her heart? Poetry?" I laughed.

"You know I don't do poetry," Cory said, leaning back in his chair. "I think I promised her at one point we would go to Paris."

My eyebrows shot up. "And will you?"

"Maybe one day," Cory said, "But I'm too wrapped up in work to worry about it now. Covill Security runs a tight ship."

Emalee runs a tight ass... I thought.

Tomorrow would be fun. I was looking forward to fucking with her. If she and Cory were taking a break, it wouldn't technically be wrong, right?

## EMALEE

I pulled my hair away from my face, blown there by the sudden gust of wind that skirted along the water and to the ferry platform.

Tristan's hand was on my lower back, guiding me forward. "Windy day," he remarked. "Sure we should be getting on a boat?"

"We'll be fine," I said, turning to reassure him. I nearly tripped backwards as my foot slipped on the slick ramp. Tristan caught my wrist and pulled me back up. He was so close, so strong, so confident, so.... Cory.

But not like Cory at all.

It was strange hanging out with my lover's twin brother.

Obviously, I was attracted to him. After all, I was attracted to Cory. From the day we met, I fell for those clever hazel eyes and that crooked smile, always feigning bashfulness. They had taken their parent's best qualities and melded into super-hunks. They had it all – the cut and trim figure, the chiseled jaw, the height, the firm lips...

I blushed as I wondered if Tristan's dick was an equal match to Cory's.

Sex with Cory had been fun when we first started hooking up. I had balked at the sheer girth of him, certain it would never fully penetrate me.

But once he'd stretched me out, it became the same thing over again, and now it was just something we did to let off some steam or unwind after a long day.

I ripped my thoughts out of the gutter and moved forward, boarding the ferry.

"I can't believe your brother lives here and you've never seen Lady Liberty," I told Tristan as we moved up to the front of the boat, leaning over the railing.

"Honestly, I've only been to New York once," he said. "It's not exactly my favorite city."

I held my blonde hair back to keep it from blowing in my face. “What’s your favorite?” I asked him.

“Sydney, hands down,” he said.

I raised my eyebrows. “Australia? Have you been there?”

“Yeah, loads of times,” he said. His eyes grew distant as he looked out towards the harbor. “It’s crammed full of diverse culture, exotic foods, and best of all... surfing.”

I took in Tristan’s built form. He was nothing but solid muscle rippling underneath his shirt. I could believe he enjoyed surfing.

“And the locals are the friendliest people you’ll ever meet,” he said, turning his gaze to me. “Besides the Irish, I suppose.”

His eyes caught mine, and I looked away quickly, tempted to lose myself in them.

*This isn’t Cory*, I reminded myself.

“I haven’t traveled overseas,” I said. The boat lurched forward, and I had to grip Tristan to keep from losing my balance. The ferry began making its way towards Liberty Island.

“You should,” Tristan said, his arm slithering around my waist to hold me steady as we swayed on the boat. “It’ll change your life.”

“Cory said he’d take me to Paris,” I said.

Tristan looked down at me. “And do you believe him?” he asked.

It was a strange question for him to ask, but I didn’t have to consider it very long. “No,” I said bitterly. “I was hoping after this Covill project...”

He snorted. “Good luck. Here’s something you may not know.” He leaned his lips close to my ear. I shuddered with an unbidden desire for him to kiss my cheek, longing for a tender touch that Cory had used less and less often. “Cory has a mistress.”

I snapped my eyes to meet his. “What?”

He laughed. “His work, love. He seems to love it more than you. Or me.”

His words bit, but they rang true. Cory was obsessed with making more money.

“You don’t have much of a filter, do you?” I asked him.

He grinned. “I call it how I see it.”

When we reached Liberty Island, we wandered to the magnificent Statue of Liberty, which always looked larger up close for me.

Tristan took a few photos before he craned his head up to look. “Can we climb to the top?” he asked.

I shook my head. “No.”

He looked back at me, eyebrows furrowing. “Why not?” he asked. “Not up

to the challenge?”

I glanced at the crown, where I knew a handful of people were gazing. “Only like 250 people are allowed up there a day. You have to reserve tickets months in advance.”

“That’s bullshit,” Tristan said. “What was the point of us coming here, then?”

I shrugged. “If you like heights, we can go to the Empire State building.”

“That’s different,” he said. “Anyone can get up there. It’s hardly worth it. I heard you have to climb 20 stories in Lady Liberty,” he gestured above him. “Now *that’s* worth my while.”

“You’re crazy,” I said. “No one likes climbing 20 flights of stairs.”

“Have you done it?” he asked. “Climbed to the crown?”

“Once,” I said, leading him around the square. “It’s pretty cramped in there. And hot. Not for the faint of heart.”

My words seemed to make the climb even more desirable to Tristan.

We grabbed a couple of hot dogs and sat at a bench, gazing up at the magnificent statue. “Where to next?” Tristan asked, unwrapping his hot dog.

“If you want to skip the Empire State building, we can always wander Central Park,” I said.

Tristan leaned back, watching some children chase pigeons away. “I would kill for a beach and some waves right now,” he said.

“Well, we have paddleboats in Central Park,” I said, biting into my hot dog. “Sorry this isn’t Sydney.”

He watched me intently as I took a bite.

“What?” I asked around a mouthful of meat, bread, and condiments.

He shrugged. “Just wanted to see if you could take it all. I bet Cory is married to his job because you can’t fit his massive dick in your mouth.”

The comment was completely unnecessary and rude, I thought. “I can, though,” I said before I could stop myself. It was something I was proud of.

His eyes lit in amusement, and I clamped my mouth shut. “Will you stop assuming what’s going on with Cory and me? We’re just taking a break. Hopefully we’ll figure out where our relationship should go from there. Other than that, we’re happy.”

“Are you, though?”

I frowned at him. He laughed, throwing back his gorgeous head.

“Come on, love, I’m just fucking with ya.”

I somehow felt like my pride had been wounded. I hoped he wasn’t being serious when he implied I wasn’t satisfying Cory. I did everything I could and more... Cory just never seemed very interested. My gut twisted.



After riding the ferry back to the mainland, I took Tristan to Central Park. We rented a paddleboat and took to the water. I enjoyed the tranquility you couldn't find anywhere else in New York. The water rippled gently as we paddled with our feet, working as a team to get the boat where it needed to go.

"Cory has always been by the book," Tristan remarked. "Go to college, get a job, contribute to a 401K... get married. I'm assuming you're like that, too?"

I wasn't sure what he was getting at. "I didn't go to college," I told him. "My life is at my parent's bookstore. After Dad died..." I stopped, realizing I was about to open up to a complete stranger – one who didn't seem to care much for my feelings anyway.

But Tristan leaned towards me, listening. "I'm not like my brother, love," he said. "You can tell me. I'll listen."

I sighed. "After Dad died, I resolved to take care of his bookstore the way he'd want it run. I decided that would be my career. Then I met Cory, and... suddenly it didn't seem like I'd need to keep working. Especially if marriage was brought into it."

Tristan cocked an eyebrow. "Are you expecting a proposal?"

I bit my lip, pumping the paddles a bit faster. "Maybe. Cory had made a few suggestions early on in our relationship that he was ready to settle down. My mom would hate it if I ever admitted it out loud... but I'm not confident in the idea of marrying Cory if he ever asked."

His full attention was on me. "What drew you to him in the first place?"

I didn't answer right away. What *did* happen? "I guess Cory swept me away," I said with a smile.

Tristan snorted. "Barf," he said. "You two have the most boring story ever. There was only one girl who ever caused the thought of marriage to cross my mind, and you know where I found her?"

I shook my head, wary of what I was about to hear.

"Sucking my tour guide's dick in Barcelona while some other fiend fucked her from behind. I looked at that and thought... what a woman."

I seriously had no idea if he was joking or not. "That's gross," I said.

"It's pleasure at the most carnal level. You wouldn't know. You're still basically a virgin. Have you ever had a three-way?"

What the hell? "I can assure you I am not a virgin," I said, feeling the need to defend myself. "And... no. Why would I do that? Sex is what you do with someone you love."

"Oh, Lordy." Tristan laughed. "Aren't you a pretty little slice of apple pie. Have you *always* been a little goody two shoes?"

Tristan was really starting to get under my nerves. "No," I said.

“Prove it,” Tristan said. He pointed. “Jump into the water and swim over to that bridge there. Come on. I dare you.”

I looked at him incredulously. “What are you, two?”

“Too cool for you,” he teased. He leaned towards me so our noses were nearly touching. “Go ahead. Live a little.”

His proximity set my heartbeat racing. Cory had never dared me to do anything in our entire relationship. We always... went through the motions.

I looked at the rippling water in front of us. The August sun beat its rays on the back of my neck. It would feel so refreshing to just jump in...

“I don’t want to be wet the rest of the day,” I said.

He leaned away from me, disappointed. “As I thought. You really are a good fit for my brother.”

“Maybe that’s a good thing,” I said.

But not only did I feel I’d let him down... but myself.

I groaned, removing my camisole to reveal a tight-fitting white tank. Of course I had to wear white today...

I stood, rocking the boat slightly. I stared at the water, willing myself to just jump...

The boat suddenly rocked violently, and before I could react, Tristan had pounced on me, and we toppled together into the water.

The sounds of a splash was engulfed in the sudden silence of the water as it churned around me. It was *cold*.

I rose to the surface with a gasp.

Tristan appeared right next to me, flinging his wet hair out of his face. “Fuck, *yeah!*” he crowed.

I couldn’t resist a smile. I splashed him. “I was going to jump,” I shouted.

“No, you weren’t,” he teased. He splashed me back.

Oh, it was on.

What followed was a series of splashes and kicks, trying to fill each other’s mouths with the pond water. When that wasn’t enough, I tackled him, straddling his back and splashing water right up his nose.

Spluttering, he threw me off him, his shoulder muscles pulsing. I landed with a splash, and he cradled me, pinning my arms to my side in an effort to stop my splashing. I screeched with laughter.

“Not so boring now, are we?” he asked. I struggled against him for a moment before realizing it was futile. I stilled, and his eyes captured mine. Heat rose to my face as he held me there, completely defenseless and at his mercy. A thrill shot through me. Our legs tangled together as we tried to stay afloat, keeping our heads above water.

“You should let me go,” I told him with a small laugh.

“Nah. I want to see you try to escape.”

“...I’m not going to do that.”

His face was inches from mine. “Then I’m not letting you go,” he nearly growled.

*Why* was that such a turn on?

To prove his point, he wrapped his arms completely around me, pulling me against his warm chest.

I wriggled, kicking at his legs. I twisted in his arms, trying to find his weak spots and use them to my advantage. The problem was, he didn’t seem to have any....

I gasped as a mouthful of pond water went down my throat. “Please, just let me go,” I laughed.

I pushed against his chest, then wrapped my legs around his waist so I’d have some kind of purchase as I pushed him away.

Something warm and solid met me between my legs. I startled and looked up into his eyes. They glittered with amusement.

“Do you really have a hard on right now?” I whispered.

He shrugged. “So what if I do?”

I seriously pushed him away this time. “Let me go,” I commanded him and he did.

Flustered, I swam back to the paddleboat, heaving myself clumsily over the edge. He watched me from the water, his t-shirt plastered to his chiseled chest.

My heart was in my throat. Was he turned on by me? I had just announced a break from his brother yesterday. That was just... so *wrong*.

But it was so hot.

I didn’t think I’d had that effect on Cory in weeks. Not since the Covill project. It was nice to be desired again... especially by someone who looked *just like* him.

“I want to get dry,” I called to him. “Let’s go.”

With a single heave of his arms, Tristan was in the boat, water dripping from his hair, his elbows, his chin...

A warmth tickled between my legs and spread, making my head light and giddy. He made no effort to hide his stare.

“What?” I asked.

He parted his lips, and a slow smile crept up them. “If I were Cory, I’d make love to you right now, right here in this paddleboat.”

He had been skating across the line all day, and that was deliberately crossing right over it.

“Should I tell Cory his brother is making me severely uncomfortable?” I snapped. “Do you have *any* respect for women?”

He looked surprised that I had finally told him off. He ran a hand through his wet hair. “Yeesh. I’m just fucking with ya, love.”

“Yeah, you’ve said that,” I said, an icy edge to my tone. “Will you please cut it out?”

“As you wish.”

We paddled back to the dock. He gently helped me out of the boat and minded his manners this time. As we made our way back to Cory’s apartment, I caught him staring. The moment I frowned at him, he smiled and looked away. Jerk.

But he had kindled something inside me. Joking or not, his words had turned me on. Cory was never so forward, never said whatever came to his mind like Tristan did. I had to guess what Cory was thinking and feeling and sometimes my mind jumped to the worst conclusions. I’m not pretty enough for him. I’m not like one of the porn stars he watches on his tablet when he thinks I’m not around.

Worse yet.... Maybe he’s not interested because he’s seeing someone else.

I was usually able to banish the thoughts, but they often lingered at the back of my mind, hovering for the right moment....

Tristan... he had a different kind of mind. It was dirty, playful. Something I had craved without knowing it.

When we entered the apartment, he shed his shirt, peeling it from his back. “So, shower together, or...?”

I plucked his wet shirt from the couch and threw it at him. “Hamper, please,” I said. “And you can wait your turn.”

I turned the shower on and stripped completely naked after ensuring the door was locked. I didn’t think Tristan would be nasty enough to walk in on me while I was showering... but then again, I didn’t really know Tristan.

I stared at my naked form in the large mirror. My smooth breasts were pointed from the cold, and my torso curved perfectly to join with my round hips.

*Damn*, I thought. Why doesn’t Cory want to do more with this?

My mind wandered to what Tristan might do if he had the chance....

I stepped into the shower, feeling the warmth sprinkle down on me. Using my fingers, I placed them between my legs and parted my folds, letting the water hit the right spot...

Tristan’s erection had thrown me for a loop. It sparked a burning desire to have it inside me. I wanted to ride it harder than I’d ever ridden any of Cory’s erections. His rarely lasted five minutes anyway.

My fingers gingerly rubbed at my throbbing clit, and I let out a soft moan. What if I had told Tristan to fuck me right there, in the boat? He would pin me to the bottom, pressing his warm weight against mine, pulling my pants down just enough to get access...

I slid two fingers inside, drawing them delicately in and out. Pleasure shuddered through me as I imagined Tristan nearly suffocating me with his weight as he entered me with one, swift thrust...

The boat would rock as he made violent love to me.

My orgasm blossomed as my mouth hung open, my leg propped up on the side of the tub. I gasped, shuddering as it subsided, my blood pounding to my head.

I leaned my forehead against the cool shower wall.

Shit.

This was going to be a long three weeks....

## TRISTAN

S pending the day with Emalee had been a terrible idea.  
If I wasn't attracted to her before, I sure as hell was now.

Tackling her into the water, feeling her lithe body twist and turn in my arms... Damn. My desire for her had raged right to an obvious indication that even she could feel.

Then seeing her emerge from the pond, wearing see-through white and dripping wet, her clothes slick against her small, curved frame...

It was enough to drive me – and any man, for that matter -- wild.

I was just as surprised as she was when I blurted how much I wanted to take her for my own right then and there. Shit, I really needed to watch my tongue.

Still, as she took her shower, I couldn't tear my mind off her. She bit her bottom lip anytime she felt defiant to my demands and taunts. It was the most irresistible thing to watch and it turned me on as fast as the flip of a switch.

Later that night, after Emalee went to bed, Cory approached me as I lounged on the plush couch, lazily flipping through TV channels.

He sat next to me with a sigh and rubbed his forehead. "I've really been a dick to Emalee," he said.

I raised my eyebrows. "Ya think?"

"I don't really want to lose her," he admitted, staring blankly at the TV as I continued to switch channels. "What I told you earlier was mostly true – of course I want to fuck around, have a one-night stand once in a while. But I still want Emalee. I'm just not sure how to get her to stick around. She's different from the other girls."

I finally switched off the TV. Nothing good was playing, anyway. "For a start, maybe don't be so clingy and actually let her travel," I said, turning to face him.

He winced. "I can't do that."

"Why the hell not?"

He scowled. "Because I don't really trust her," he said. "All the girls I've known were whores. I don't want to find out she's the same way by fucking some guy on one of her trips."

His logic shocked me. "Okay," I said, leaning forward. "That's a *big* boyfriend no-no. I'm no expert, but even I can tell you long-term relationships need trust. And so what if she plays around with some other guys? You cheated on your past girlfriends all the time."

Cory stared at me, his hazel eyes narrowing. "I'm the billionaire. I can do whatever the fuck I want. But Emalee.... I want her to be mine and mine alone."

I shook my head. "You're not long-term relationship material, mate. Maybe it's best if you just let her go."

Cory set his jaw stubbornly. "No. She's gorgeous and kind and doesn't want me for my money. It's refreshing. I need her to stay with me."

His possessiveness was striking the wrong chord in me. "Cory, I think you need to see a therapist," I said. "Just because you make billions doesn't mean you get to be a shitty, clingy boyfriend."

"Tristan," he said, leaning back and flinging an arm over the back of the sofa. "I've learned that when I want something, I can take it. I want Emalee. It's a severe blow to my pride that she's initiated a break with me."

I didn't reply as my insides boiled with his pompous attitude. Cory always was the favorite in my family. They would give him whatever he wanted as a child. That spoiled kid had turned into a real piece of work.

Cory looked at me. "I wanted to ask you a favor."

I tensed, knowing this didn't bode well. "What is it?" I asked.

"I promised I would take Emalee to The Phantom of the Opera tomorrow night," he said. "The only problem is... I've been called away for business. I leave early tomorrow morning to catch a flight and won't be back until the next day – Thursday."

I sucked in a breath. "You'd better cancel that flight, Cory, otherwise you're not getting her back."

"That's where you come in," he said. "I knew you arriving here had to be some kind of blessing in disguise."

I snorted. So much for brotherly love.

"Pretend to be me tomorrow," he said, his eyes locked on mine.

I barked out a laugh. "No way! You're supposed to establish trust, remember?"

"Tristan, please," Cory said. "Just... take her to the play. Maybe dinner.

Just... try to salvage my relationship with her, would you?"

I was about to decline, but the implications settled on my mind. Emalee and I alone for an entire day....

"What if she wants to have sex?" I asked with a sly smile.

Cory rolled his eyes. "I doubt she will. We're on a break. But if you *are* that good, and it will save my relationship with her..." He paused. Rubbed at his temples. "Then I *suppose* you'll have no other choice but to sleep with her."

My grin stretched wide. Yahtzee.

"What do I get out of helping you out?" I asked coyly.

"Nothing," Cory grunted, standing from the couch. "But if you *don't* take her, I'm kicking you out and you can find your own lodging."

His threat blared in my mind. All I could think about was Emalee – the curve of her breasts, the pinch in her waist, her slender neck... it could all be mine tomorrow. And Cory was giving me *permission*. It was an offer I couldn't refuse.

"You've got a deal," I told him before standing from the couch.

I retreated to my room, thinking of all the dirty things I could do to her. What pleasant sounds could I elicit from her throat? How sweet would her lips taste against mine?

The thoughts consumed my brain as I laid in bed that night, letting myself grow hard as I played out various fantasies in my head.

Tomorrow alone could make this entire New York trip worth it.



I WOKE to three text messages, all from the same number.

*Hey, I didn't hear back from you. I understand you're busy.*

*I saw on your Insta that you're in NYC! I just landed there this morning! Let's meet up.*

*Are you ignoring me? I don't like being ignored...*

I could smell crazy ten miles away, and this chick... was definitely crazy. I ignored the texts, hoping this girl would drop it.

An hour later, I gave myself a final glance at the mirror.

My jaw was freshly shaven, smooth as a babe's butt. I had trimmed up my own hair so it was closer to Cory's length. I even went as far as to root around his closet for a dress shirt and tie.

Satisfied, I left the apartment, wandering towards McLaughlin Books, where I knew Emalee was currently working.

On my way there, I stopped by a small flower shop. It was cliché, but then



again, she dreamed of going to Paris. How much more cliché can you get?

I ordered a summer blend of flowers neatly tied up in a fetching bouquet and a dozen chocolate covered strawberries.

McLaughlin Books was a charming little bookshop nestled between a coffee shop and Hallmark store. The location couldn't be more ideal.

I took a deep breath, adrenaline spiking. I was going to have fun with this. The bell hanging above the door rang as I entered.

A woman with graying blonde hair looked up from the register. Her grin widened when she saw me. "Cory," she exclaimed. "What a pleasant surprise."

Was I supposed to know this woman?

"Emalee," she called. "Come look who's here."

"Just a sec, Mom," Emalee's voice responded from somewhere in the back of the store.

I stepped deeper inside. "How's business treating you today?" I asked her mother politely, throwing her a dashing smile. I had no idea what Cory was like around her mom. This was a curveball I hadn't been expecting.

"Well, summer tends to see a dip in sales, but it'll pick right up as soon as the holidays roll around," she said. Her eyes nearly crinkled closed with her smile. "Emalee will be so happy to see you," she said.

Damn. Did Cory never visit Emalee at work? Somehow, this didn't surprise me. The little bookshop was too beneath a billionaire.

Emalee entered the room and froze when she saw me. Her eyes wandered to the bouquet and chocolate in my hands.

And *shit* she looked like a fucking summer fairy in her little yellow-striped dress. It brought out the sprinkle of freckles on her cheeks.

"What's going on, Cory?" she asked. She was suspicious... Already.

I extended the flowers. "Wanted to take some time off work to see you," I told her with a subtle wink. "Have you had lunch?"

She shook her head, pink highlighting her cheeks. She turned to her mom.

She waved her off. "Go! I can handle the store until you get back," she said with a playful smile.

I extended my arm, and she took it, a light smile playing on her lips. "Can we go to Oldman's?" she asked.

"Oldman's?" I repeated.

"Yeah. My favorite bakery. You used to get me cherry pastries there all the time." She looked up at me with a tender smile.

Damn. What I wouldn't give to actually be Cory right now. The guy didn't know how lucky he had it.

"Of course," I told her. I leaned in to whisper, "You look beautiful."

Her eyes met mine. “Thank you,” she said softly.

We entered Oldman’s and the scent of freshly baked bread and cinnamon pastries assaulted my senses.

Emalee ordered a combo of half a summer berry salad and half a BLT and I ordered a roast beef sandwich.

After receiving our food, we sat outside, enjoying the warm sun and tantalizing breeze. I closed my eyes, briefly, imagining the roar of the ocean as it crashed against peppery sand...

“So how come you didn’t tell me about Tristan?” Emalee asked.

I opened my eyes. Emalee’s smile had turned serious. “It slipped my mind,” I said, cramming a large bite of sandwich in my mouth.

“That’s a big thing to forget,” she said.

I really didn’t want to get into a Cory/Emalee fight. “I’m sorry,” I said, because I wasn’t sure if Cory had apologized yet. If Emalee was bringing it up, I assumed he hadn’t. “I should have let you know. It was my mistake and not fair to you.”

I fed her all the typical apologetic phrases. She seemed to buy into them. “It’s okay,” she said. “I just wish we could have some better communication, you know?”

I nodded, feigning concern. “I completely agree,” I said. I reached for her petite hand and gave it a squeeze. “We’ll talk about it tonight, okay, love?” I winced.

She didn’t seem to catch on to the pet name I’d tacked at the end of my sentence.

“Sure,” she said with a sigh.

“Speaking of tonight...” I said. “Are you looking forward to Phantom?”

Her green eyes brightened. “Yes!”

“It starts at 7:30. We should leave the apartment by six. Sound doable?”

She nodded, piercing a forkful of vegetables. Her smile grew suddenly, and her eyes lit with excitement. “You know the original author of Phantom of the Opera based it on a true story, right?”

I listened, rapt at the way her voice flowed, rising and falling in pitch and volume as she explained the underground lake under the Paris opera house and the mysterious disappearance of so-and-so and how “the chandelier really *did* fall and kill someone in the late nineteenth century.”

I wasn’t into the history. I wasn’t into the literature or the themes or the legends.

I was into her. She talked for the rest of her lunch break, and I walked her back to the bookstore.

She was alight with the excitement for the coming evening. “Thanks for stopping by,” she said as we reached the front of the store. “And... thanks for listening to my ramblings. It must have been torture not reaching for your phone.” She laughed, nervously.

I instantly recognized her tone, the sudden nervous twisting of her hands.

She was insecure.

She’d opened up about something she was passionate about, and now she felt guilty, afraid she had bored me or pushed me away somehow.

I gave her hand a squeeze. “I just like seeing you happy,” I told her, and realized my statement was sincere. Her smile brightened, and she stood on her tip toes, reaching up to plant a warm, soft kiss on my lips.

It took me by surprise. She broke away quickly, turning to go back inside the store, but I grabbed her arm and twisted her back.

I firmly pressed my lips against hers, every fiber in my being pulsing with the desire to feel her skin touching mine.

She hesitated, and for a second, I thought she would pull away.

She leaned into my touch, her arms wrapping around my neck. I felt the pleasant curve of her body as she pressed against me.

Fuck, I wanted her. I wanted to make love to that bright smile and shapely body for hours, drunk in her embrace, her warmth, the slow, pleasurable thrills....

She pulled away, blinking hard. “We’re still on a break,” she reminded me.

“I know.” I smiled, risking a small grab at her ass. “I’ll see you tonight,” I promised.

## EMALEE

Cory's visit to the bookshop was unexpected, but pleasant. He hadn't taken me on a lunch date – a *real* lunch date – in months.

I wondered if it was the rivalry of his brother that spurred him into action. I liked to think I was worth fighting for.

After work, I rushed home to dress in the evening gown I had bought last month for a party of Cory's. I had to work late that night and never had the chance to wear it.

Now, I slipped it over my head, feeling the cool silk slide against my skin. I admired myself in the mirror. Sage green, the sleeves fell off the shoulders, giving it an elegant touch. The bottom fit tight around my curves, ending just above my knee. I'd always liked pencil dresses. They made me feel secure, in control. Like maybe I belonged in Cory's corporate world.

Adding touches of makeup here and there, I completed the look by donning the diamond earrings and necklace Cory had given me for Christmas. Flashy diamonds weren't my favorite, but I wanted to show him I was grateful he set aside time for me.

The apartment door opened and closed, and I quickly ran my fingers through my hair, making sure the full waves were picture perfect. I smiled at myself, loving the way my lip gloss shimmered.

Then, I exited the bathroom and walked into the living room.

Cory was there, and I audibly heard his sharp intake of breath. "Fuck," he said.

My heart raced and my confidence enjoyed a booster.

I smoothed my hands over the dress. "Do you like it? I was going to wear it at that party..."

Cory swept in before I could say another word and pressed a heated kiss on

my lips. He sparked a wild desire inside me, something that had been hiding deep down for a long time now.

I broke away, trying to look annoyed. "Need I remind you we're still on a break? We need to get going," I said, placing my hand on his chest and pushing him gently away.

"Just one quickie?" he pleaded.

I gave him a stern look but couldn't banish my smile. "No. Let's go, I don't want to be late."

Cory's eyes never left me as I grabbed my small purse and swung it over my shoulder. I took his arm and he led me outside, to the subway.

The whole ride there, he watched me, hungry and predatory.

It was a definite turn on.

Maybe I would end the break tonight, if he kept this up. We might even have some halfway decent sex.

We arrived at the famous Broadway Theater and entered its majestic entryway. My heart fluttered into my throat.

It was finally happening. Cory was taking me to a Broadway show and Phantom of the Opera, no less. I had the entire soundtrack memorized.

Cory guided me to our seats, which were in the left balcony. I looked down at the hundreds of people milling about the theater. It was so vast, so beautiful, with its red curtain and plush velvet seats and golden light spilling from the chandeliers overhead.

"So... why Paris?" Cory asked beside me.

I looked at him with a smile. "What do you mean?"

"Why do you want to go to Paris? Have you really fallen for all the romantic notions and clichés? Do you know how filthy it is there?"

I've heard this argument from Cory before, in an attempt to keep me from going. My happy bubble deflated a bit that he was going to bring it up here, now.

"There's a lot to love about Paris," I said. "The history, the architecture, the food, the Louvre..."

Cory cut in. "I hear you can't even actually see the Mona Lisa there up close. There's a crowd of people so congested it would take *hours* to get to the front."

"I wouldn't go just to see the Mona Lisa," I said. "There are thousands of other inspirational pieces to see. It would take the entire day and more to see them all. And of course I'd want to see Notre Dame."

I waited for him to tease me about meeting the hunchback, but he didn't. He only nodded. "Fair enough," he said.

The lights dimmed, and the performance began. Cory took my hand in his as the actors wandered on stage. I hung on to every word, every dramatic

movement.

Then, when the first magnificent, fiery chords of the opening song rang out, I felt chills roll down my spine. The chandelier that had been laying on the stage, covered by a thin cloth, lit into a thousand glimmering lights as it was raised high into the air, hovering over the audience. The organ wove a pounding, thrilling overture into the theater, setting the mood for the macabre. I squeezed Cory's hand to show my excitement. He squeezed back, gently.

I was so engrossed in the story and music that intermission took me by surprise, pulling me out of my reverie. I blinked as the lights were raised. "Amazing," I breathed.

"Not as amazing as you and me between the sheets tonight," Cory said, his voice heavy with desire. I looked at him. His hazel eyes roamed my face, my hair, my breasts. He didn't even try to hide his arousal.

I smiled and kissed him gently. He leaned into it, hungry, mad with lust. His tongue slipped between my lips. A hand ran underneath the fabric of my dress, moving up... I drew back, my face flushing. "Not in the theater," I hissed. But I couldn't stop a pleased smile.

"Oh, Em," he growled, his voice low. His mouth pressed against my ear. "The things I'm going to do tonight... You'll be begging for mercy."

Chills ran through my body. "That sounds... dangerous," I said, unsure how to handle his forwardness. Not in a public place. I glanced beside me, where an overweight man was perusing the playbill.

"Oh, but you'll love it," he continued, his breath hot in my ear. "I'll eat out your sweet pussy until you scream my name."

I swallowed, my throat suddenly dry. He pulled back, grinning at me wickedly.

I felt moisture collect between my legs, but alarm bells sounded in my head.

Cory, eat me out? He only did that on very, very special occasions. Usually I was the one who had to give him oral.

The briefest glimmer of suspicion crossed my mind, but it was fuzzy with the idea of him following through with his promises. I stared at his mouth, already feeling his lips brush against my folds, his tongue, warm and wet, penetrating me...

I shivered, trying to rip my mind out of the gutter.

"So..." I said, clearing my throat. "How are you liking it?"

"I can't tell if it gave me an erection, or if that's all you."

I laughed. "Um... okay? So you like it, then?"

He shrugged. "It's better than I thought it would be."

"That's what she said." The joke was out of my mouth before I could think

twice about it. Cory and I locked gazes, then burst out laughing.

“See, I knew you had a dirty side to you,” he laughed.

Another alarm bell rang in my head, distant. Cory never wanted to try half the things I did. All things considered, I was the dirtier one in this relationship. I certainly tried harder. Watched the porn. Copied the moves.

Cory knew I had a dirty side. But it had only developed after he’d stopped responding to me.

The lights dimmed, and the show was back on.

The second act was just as thrilling as the first. By the time it was finished, tears stung my eyes, threatening to spill over. I held them back, determined not to let Cory see.

But there was no hiding anything from Cory tonight.

“Aw. Did it make you cry?” he taunted.

I ignored him and clapped until my palms stung as each cast member did their series of bows. My heart swelled from the music, the characters, the choreography, the sheer *art* of the show.

It was better than I had imagined.

On the way back, Cory snuck a pinch to my ass. It was the second time he’d done it today, which was highly unusual for him. But I wasn’t about to complain. I had just had the best night in a long time... and it was about to get better.

“Ready for me to make sweet love to your ravishing self?” he whispered in my ear as we boarded the subway.

“I don’t believe I said our break was over,” I said.

He winked. “I’ll let you decide if you want me back after tonight.”

I did want him tonight. More than I cared to admit. I sighed. “Okay. Impress me. Let’s see if you can last,” I teased, then instantly regretted the jab.

Cory’s face faltered for a second. “I... don’t last?”

Seriously? We were going to talk about this now? On the *subway*?

I swallowed, picking my words carefully. “We’ve talked about this,” I said slowly. “You never give me enough foreplay. And I guess you’re so tired by the end of the day...” I shrugged, praying I wasn’t about to ruin his mood. “You come and go.”

“And you don’t?” There was something peculiar on Cory’s face – amazement, concern, curiosity? We’ve only had this discussion about a million times. It always resulted in his pride being wounded and a week of no sex.

“Not... usually,” I said. I shrugged again, feeling awkward. “You don’t give me enough time. I’m sorry.”

Cory shook his head, wrapping an arm around my waist and pulling me flush against him. “Never apologize for that,” he insisted. “And... I’m sorry.”

Unbidden tears sprang to my eyes. His apology was unexpected. I didn't think it'd ever come.

Months of pent up frustration washed away as I sighed. "It's okay," I said. "No, it's not," he said. "Tonight will be a night you'll never forget."



## TRISTAN

Cory was so fucking preoccupied with making billions that he wasn't even *making love* to his girlfriend correctly?

I'd always wondered who between us was more masterful at the fine art of sexual intercourse.

I guess I had my answer. Money couldn't buy you skill.

But damn.

The need to please Emalee was stronger than ever. During intermission, I'd wanted nothing more than to pull her into a room and fuck her senseless, the sound of her gasps and moans my source of music for the rest of the night.

But I was well on my way to getting that tonight. In fact, it was practically guaranteed. She didn't suspect a damn thing. My dick swelled eagerly on our way back to Cory's apartment.

I wouldn't be able to contain it much longer. The moment we arrived at the apartment, I would rip her clothes off, make passionate love to that sexy body, and coax her to come not once, not twice, but *thrice*. Because she had been missing out. And, as Cory's brother, I had a responsibility to remedy that.

And because I was that good.

We stepped through the apartment door, and I followed her as she went to get a glass of water, my hand wandering up her dress. She smacked it away. "Just hold up a second, will you?" she scolded.

There were two things I hated almost as much as an office job: waiting and being told what to do.

Still, I backed off, watching her throat as she extended her head back, swallowing water. It wouldn't be the only thing she swallowed tonight...

The second she put the glass down, I was there, fumbling for the zipper on her dress.

“Wait,” she said, turning to put a hand on my chest. “Let’s take it slow.”

I growled deep in my throat. “You’re so fucking sexy.”

She smiled, leading me to the couch. Sitting together, I took over, engulfing her warm mouth in mine. I pressed her thin form back into the cushions, shifting my weight so I hovered over her, not quite crushing her. My lips devoured her, sucking and pulling and wedging my tongue past her lips and past her teeth.

She tasted of the mint she had popped into her mouth on our way back. It heightened my senses. My dick pressed urgently against Cory’s thousand-dollar dress pants.

No, that would have to wait. She wanted to take it slow and her wish was my command. I would take it *ultra* slow. It would be so fucking maddening that she’d have to beg me for release.

My fingers traced her shoulders, running down her arms. I felt her shiver beneath me. My mouth wandered, kissing across her cheekbone, her jaw, then dipping down her neck. I nipped her with my teeth. I was pleased with her reaction – a small gasp.

She was fucking gorgeous and irresistible and all I wanted tonight.

I would make her mine.

My hands massaged her thighs, pushing up that tight green dress and coaxing her legs to spread open for me. She did so willingly. I snuck a hand under, feeling her smooth, flat stomach. I toyed with her panties, heightening her anticipation.

But they wouldn’t come off yet. No, they would be the last to go. Reaching behind her, I slowly unzipped her dress. Her body pressed up against me as my hand ran down her bare back, tracing the lovely curve of her spine.

Discarding the dress, I looked upon her.

She had the perfect hourglass figure, her waistline tiny, her breasts straining against her black lace bra.

Fuck.

This was going to take an immense amount of self-control.

My hands wandered. I caressed her neck, then slid both hands down her sides, grasping her hips and coaxing them to move seductively under me.

My lips crashed back down to meet hers.

She pulled away, suddenly. “Let’s go to the room,” she said breathlessly.

“Why?” I whispered, nibbling her ear.

“What if Tristan comes in?”

I had to choke back my laugh. “He’s probably out fucking some whore.”

“But...”

I silenced her by covering my mouth over hers again. “Just relax,” I

murmured against her sweet, soft, pliable lips. Fuck, if I could get them around my throbbing dick...

But no. This was her night. Everything was about making her feel sexy and submissive while I did things to her that made her scream.

Too bad she'd be screaming Cory's name...

That fucker didn't know what service I was giving him right now, spicing up his sex life and winning back his girl. I was doing a hell of a job.

I decided to kick it up a notch. My hands wandered again, and my right hand rubbed against the inside of her thigh. She willingly spread her legs apart, giving me full access. I carefully slid my fingers past her panties, found her opening, and...

She gasped, arching against me, her mouth gaping open. I took the opportunity to thrust my tongue deeper inside, my mouth completely locked on hers. I watched her green eyes as they lost focus, staring half-open at the ceiling as I rubbed circles against her clit. She closed her eyes with a deep-throated moan.

Fuck, yes.

I couldn't believe how easy it was. She would be mine, just like that. I just had to keep the slow burn going... have her beg for more before I finally gave in to her, letting her have her first orgasm at my hands.

My mind raced with possibilities. What else would I do to her? Bend her over the couch? Fuck her from behind? Pin her arms above her head? Blindfold her? Was slight asphyxiation too much?

I inserted three fingers, and her hips twisted beneath me. She was putty in my hands. "Your soaking pussy is mine," I growled in her ear. She whimpered, her hands digging into my hair. I licked behind her ear, careful to keep my rhythm steady.

"Fuck," she breathed. I moved my head down to nuzzle and nip between her swollen breasts.

Her hips moved with my fingers, rocking her body. The slight friction pressed against my dick, which responded accordingly.

I wanted to destroy her wet pussy. I wanted to fuck her so hard it would hurt just before blossoming into sweet, intoxicating pleasure.

I used my left hand to experiment, tracing a line up her arm and pressing my fingers lightly against her neck. She whimpered again and arched against me, which was a good sign. I cupped my hand around her throat, asserting exhilarating dominance.

Her eyes flew open. I immediately retracted my hand. "Don't like taking it rough?" I asked.

“I... you never want to try.”

Fuck fucking Cory. “Well, I do now,” I assured her, and reached for her slender throat again.

Her hips suddenly stopped moving. She knocked my hand out of the way. “Why?” she demanded. “After you made a fool of me for trying it last time?”

Fuck.

“I’m sorry, love,” I said.

*Shit.*

She shot straight up. “Get your hands off me,” she demanded.

I delicately extracted my fingers, which had worked their way so deep inside her wet pussy.

Her eyes searched mine. “Love? You never call me love, and you’ve done it at *least* twice tonight.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “Maybe my brother’s rubbing off on me.” I bent forward to capture her in another kiss, to fill her mind with hazy lust that would banish her suspicions.

But she ducked out of the way, grabbing her dress and holding it up against her body. “I knew this was all too good to be true,” she spat. “How did I not see it before? Fuck you, Tristan!”

Her eyes burned with a fury that, if possible, made her even sexier. But her realization splashed cold water over my lustful fantasies.

I stood. “Hold on,” I said slowly. “We were enjoying ourselves.”

With a disgusted huff, she pushed me out of the way, marching to her room. “It doesn’t fucking matter,” she called back. “I almost *cheated* on Cory with... with his *brother*.”

I heard her rip open a drawer.

Damn. I’d completely ruined my chance.

She emerged, a t-shirt and shorts hastily thrown on.

“It doesn’t count as cheating if you were on a break” I said, my voice lilting on the positive note.

“*Where* the *fuck* is Cory?” she demanded. “I swear, if he’d walked in on us...”

“He wouldn’t have. He’s on a business trip,” I informed her.

“On a... business trip?” Her face broke into deep disappointment. “He *promised* he’d take me to Phantom. He *hired* you to do it instead? Posed as *him*?”

I stood, slowly approaching her. “It was a stupid idea,” I said.

She flinched away from me. “Don’t you *dare* touch me!” she yelled. “I can’t believe Cory put you up to this!”

I pressed my lips together. “I actually enjoyed myself. What does it say about Cory that he doesn’t even want to spend time with you or follow through on his promises?”

Her face paled, and I knew I’d struck a deep chord.

Without another word, she disappeared back into her room, slamming the door shut.

I sighed.

Well, damn. I was so close.

I looked down between my legs. My erection was officially gone. I reached in my pocket for my phone. I had two missed calls and a text. A spark of irritation ignited.

It was that fucking crazy chick from California.

*I’m lonely tonight*, it said. *Meet up with me or I’ll jump in the Hudson.*

I deleted the text. Women were fucking nuts.

Emalee threw open the door and rushed out, a backpack slung over her shoulder.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“Away from here,” she said before slamming the apartment door closed.

Well, fuck.

## EMALEE

I arrived at my sister's place, which was closer than my mom's. Her eyes widened when she saw me, my mascara running, backpack slung over my shoulder.

"Em," she said. "Are you okay?"

I shook my head, and she quickly pulled me into a tight hug. "Here, come," she said, leading me inside and taking my backpack. "Settle down. You can tell me all about it when you're ready."

I collapsed on her sofa, shuddering in rage.

How could I have fallen for it? As I thought about it now, Tristan had slipped up multiple times with his pet names, his un-Cory-like caresses, his interest in what I had to say, never looking at his phone once.... The fire that lit behind his eyes.

I was a fucking idiot.

The thing that hurt the most? I had actually believed Cory had changed his ways for me. I thought his desire for me had been rekindled, and it was like when we first dated all over again.

But that hadn't been Cory.

Amy sat next to me on the couch, rubbing my shoulder and handing me a cup of chamomile tea, something our mother always gave us to calm us down after a bout of heavy crying.

"Was it Cory?" she asked softly. "Did he hurt you?"

I pressed a pillow against my face and groaned into it, not wanting to think about it. I didn't want to admit to my sister how fooled I had been.

She continued to rub my back. "I'll make up the guest bed," she finally said softly, and she left me.

I hadn't removed my face from the pillow. I didn't want to show my face

ever again.

I was shocked and mortified.... And honestly, angrier at Cory than Tristan. The idea that he'd let his brother parade around to try and get me back... what kind of person did that?

I slowly removed my face from the pillow and tried to wipe away the mascara stains I had left behind. Then, I stood to get a glass of water in Amy's kitchen.

"So, like... are you officially done...?" Amy called from the bedroom.

"I can't see a way back from this," I grumbled with a small hiccup.

I swallowed the rest of the water. Amy emerged from the second bedroom. She gave me a tight hug. "He didn't... cheat on you, did he? I know you were sometimes worried about that."

I shook my head. "No..." I sighed. "I just need to clear my head. I'll tell you about it later, okay?"

Amy nodded in understanding. "Sure. There are clean towels and soap in the bathroom if you'd like to wash up. Let me know if you need anything."

I thanked her before locking myself in the room.

After an hour of intermittent crying and staring up at the ceiling in disbelief, I realized I needed to talk to someone. And even though I knew Amy was there for me, it was also well past midnight and she needed her sleep.

In California, however... it was only eight or nine pm there.

I quickly pulled up Mia Birch's number and sent her a text. *You awake? Can I call?*

I waited only two minutes before she replied back. *Yes. And yes.*

Taking a deep breath, I hit the call button.

She answered on the second ring.

"Emalee," she nearly squealed. "How *are* you? I'm so bummed you couldn't make it over here last month."

"Yeah, me too," I said. My voice was thick from sticky tears.

She heard it right away. "Are you okay? You don't sound okay."

"It's Cory," I said. "I... he really hurt me tonight. I don't know what to do."

Mia's voice was laced with concern. "What did he do?" she asked.

I pressed my lips together, still embarrassed to admit the incident out loud. "So he has a twin brother, right?" I asked.

"Right, you've mentioned that before. But you've never met him."

"Exactly. Well, yesterday he dropped in to stay for a few weeks."

"Unannounced?" Mia asked skeptically.

"Well, *apparently* he told Cory, but Cory forgot to mention it to me."

"And men say *we're* the forgetful ones," Mia groaned.

I latched onto her comment, not wanting to continue the story. “How are you and Liam?” I asked.

“We’re dandy,” she replied. “Just been busy with getting new clients here at the Californian branch of Covill. It’s more work than I thought it’d be.”

“At least you’re not constantly on your phone like Cory is,” I muttered.

Mia paused. “Em, I know it’s hard when he doesn’t give you the attention you deserve... but we *do* appreciate Cory’s partnership in this project. We wish we had four more of him,” she laughed.

“But it’s like he hides behind his work,” I argued. “I don’t think he knows how to do long-term relationships.” I closed my eyes, my head pounding in pain. I’d need to take some aspirin before going to bed. “Apparently, he hasn’t been with a girl as long as me. We’ve only been together eight months... that’s not long at all.”

“Eight months is nothing,” Mia said. “Liam and I are going nearly two years already, and there’s still stuff we need to work out sometimes. It’s just what happens in a long-term relationship.” She paused. “Seriously, though... what did Cory do to make you so upset?”

I bit my lip. Might as well get it over with. “He agreed to let his brother pose as him to get to me. And he almost did.”

There was a long silence on the other end of the phone. “Wait... Cory told his brother... to have a go at you? As *Cory*?”

I nodded, even though I knew she couldn’t see. “He even borrowed Cory’s clothes.”

“Oh, my gosh,” Mia breathed. “But you saw through it right away, right?”

I winced. “Not exactly.”

Mia’s next question was hushed. “Did you.... Do it?”

“No!” I said. “But it was close.”

“Wow,” Mia breathed. She let out a small laugh. “Forgive me for saying it... but that’s kind of hot.”

I frowned, placing a hand against my forehead. “Hot?”

Mia sighed. “Since being with Liam.... I’ve definitely discovered I’m into the kinky stuff. And *that* is fucking kinky.”

I almost didn’t recognize my friend on the other end. “Mia...is that you over there or some sweet innocent turned porn star?”

Mia laughed. “I’m being serious, though. It sounds like your relationship with Cory... I don’t know, your sex life doesn’t seem that thrilling, to be honest.”

I didn’t want to admit it out loud. But it was true.

“And because of that... you’re still pretty innocent. Sorry.”



I rolled my eyes. “That doesn’t have anything to do with it. I’m not into being tricked to sleep with Cory’s brother in an attempt to win me back.”

“But maybe *Cory* thought it sounded hot,” Mia pressed. “Maybe the idea that his brother is making a go for you gets him worked up. Girl, you could be having some kinky sex coming your way...” She paused. “How far *did* you and his brother get?”

I felt a blush heat my face. “I mean... everything but penetration,” I said.

Mia laughed. “And how did it feel?”

Amazing. Exhilarating. Unlike anything I’d experienced before.

And we didn’t even actually have sex.

“He was... pretty good,” I said with a small laugh.

I could practically hear Mia’s grin on the other side. “Girl... maybe you’re with the wrong brother.”

The thought had been dancing around in my subconscious, but when Mia said it out loud, it sprang to the front of my mind. I pushed it hastily back.

“No,” I said firmly. “No, if I’m going to work this out, it’d be with Cory. I barely know his brother.”

“If you say so,” Mia said. “But this other guy... Tristan was his name?”

“Yeah.”

“He’s got the Cory looks. The Cory bod. But sounds like he’s more of a hot lover.”

“Exactly,” I said, leaning back on the pillows on the bed and staring at the ceiling. “He’s one-night fling material. I can’t see him wanting to settle down with a girl. Cory wants that, though.”

Mia cleared her throat. “I know you’re not like this, Em, but is Cory’s money maybe making you hesitant to leave him?”

I didn’t want to believe that was the case. I took a moment to think about it. No matter how many times Cory offered, I didn’t accept his money. I hated it when he bought me expensive gifts that could buy another family a small house. The only thing I had asked for was a trip to Paris and that seemed like the one thing he was too busy to pull off.

“No,” I said slowly. “All that wealth makes me uncomfortable. But... I know my mother is thrilled that we’re dating. I think she worries too much about money sometimes. She feels like the family would be taken care of if I married Cory.”

Mia snorted. “Come on, Em, she wouldn’t want you to marry a douche, though. If it ever came to that.”

Mia was right. “I just don’t want to let my family down,” I said. “It’s been tough since Dad died.”

"I understand," Mia said gently.

We settled into a pensive silence for a minute before she continued.

"Look... I know you're hurt. That probably sucked realizing the man you were fucking around with wasn't your boyfriend. But look at you. You have a pair of sexy *twins* after you. I'd use that to my advantage."

I bit my lip again, chewing on it. "I don't want to cheat on Cory."

"You guys are on a break. Possibly forever. It isn't cheating."

She had a point there.

"What if it was some kind of test?" I asked. "And I nearly failed it?"

"Then Cory is an even bigger douche than I thought," Mia replied. "Cause that's not fair. They look exactly alike."

My mind wandered back to Tristan, the way he overtook me on the couch, removing my dress, kissing me with a passion I hadn't felt in a long time... the feel of his fingers between my legs, coaxing a plethora of tantalizing emotions.

It *was* pretty sexy and Cory had been okay with it...

"But doesn't that decrease my value to Cory?" I asked quietly. "Does he really respect me so little that he doesn't blink an eye when he throws his brother after me?"

"I don't think that's it at all," Mia said slowly. "You said he hasn't really had a lot of time with you. Maybe he's burned himself out. Maybe he feels bad about it. Maybe he wanted you to have a good night tonight. I don't know. I would confront them both, demand an apology, and then have a steamy three-way."

I made a disgusted face. "No way." I said. "I'm not having a three-way with Cory and his twin brother."

"But it would be soooooooo hot!" Mia insisted.

It would, I admitted to myself.

Fuck, it would be the most exciting sex I'd ever had.

But that was too extreme for me. I'd been raised with the idea that when you were with someone, you were intimate *only* with them. It was hardwired into my brain. I wasn't about to go back on that.

I thought of her suggestion that Cory was trying to make me happy by setting Tristan up with me. He *had* promised me he would go to Phantom. But work must have come up. It proved he didn't want to lose me by trying to get Tristan to go as him to win me back... It sure as hell wasn't right, but I could see Cory's motive.

"Hey, random question," Mia said. "Liam and I are going to be in New York in two weeks for a big meeting at Covill Security. Want to hang out?"

"Duh," I said with a smile. "I miss you!"

"Seriously. I miss my New York lady!"

“I bet Cali’s nice, though.”

“It is,” Mia sighed. “The beaches, the surfing, the food, the weather... it’s all a dream.”

My thoughts snapped to Tristan when she mentioned surfing. He would look so hot on a board, catching the big waves, his muscles taut, his hair dripping salt water...

I pulled myself back into the present. “Okay, next time, I’m *definitely* coming to visit, whether Cory agrees with it or not.”

“Deal,” Mia said.

I glanced at the digital clock by the bed. One in the morning.

“I’d better let you go,” I said. “Thanks for talking.”

“Anytime, girl,” Mia said. “And seriously... think about that three-way, okay?”

She laughed and I rolled my eyes. “Goodnight,” I said.

I stared at my phone for a few moments after we hung up. I was feeling a lot better. My world wasn’t shattered the way it had felt before. Maybe I had been overdramatic.

I pulled Google up on my phone, hesitated, then looked up Sydney, Australia.

I browsed their pristine beaches, the modern architecture, the high bridges, the friendly smiles. My chest constricted as I remembered how Tristan had described it.

Sydney was quickly climbing to the top of my list of places to visit. But Paris first. I would not rest until I made it to Paris.

I closed out of the Sydney tabs and clicked in the search bar, hesitating. Mia had put the idea in my head. And the warmth between my legs let me know I still wanted to come tonight.

I typed in “three-way sex” and hit the search button.

Thousands of results popped up, and I selected a video.

I watched a couple, fascinated with the different positions and possibilities that came with an extra member joining in the intercourse.

I slipped my fingers between my legs. I was already wet.

I watched a couple more videos, imagining Cory and Tristan roughing me up and dominating me, pleasing themselves and me simultaneously.

My fantasies wandered to just Tristan, pulling from the experience I had with him tonight. If we had gone further....

I thought about the way he had lightly cupped my throat, applying just enough pressure to spike my heart rate but not enough to cut off air circulation.

I had told Cory repeatedly for weeks that he could pull any move he wanted

on me. We could roleplay, he could be rough, scream filthy names at me. But he made a huge deal out of it, and in the end, I felt humiliated and undesirable.

But Tristan....

My fingers worked faster, and I arched back, imagining his hand covering my mouth and coaxing me to come as he pounded his thick cock into my drenched pussy.

I gasped as the orgasm exploded, sending wave upon wave of pleasure through my veins.

## TRISTAN

I ran six miles on the treadmill the next morning, trying to focus my mind on training.

Emalee's hurt and fiery eyes had lodged themselves in my brain.

As I laid awake last night, alone in Cory's lavish apartment, I felt something I hadn't felt in a while: regret.

I was a dumbass and was only focused on gratifying my own selfish desires. I didn't stop to think how it would hurt her.

Fuck, I was an asshole.

I tried calling Cory first thing in the morning, but it went to his voicemail. After it beeped, I started talking. "So... uh. I messed it up. Your girlfriend probably hates you forever. But she hates me now, too, so... I guess we're square? Anyway, I think only you can fix it. She needs you to fix it if you want her back. Yeah. Kay. Bye."

I hung up and got dressed, heading for the complex gym.

Now, as I sopped up my sweat with a towel, my phone vibrated and I glanced at a text from Cory.

*This is your mess, ahole. You fix it.*

The fuck? Sure, I had messed it up. But he had wrongly commissioned me in the first place. I pocketed my phone, gritting my teeth. That Californian number continued to call and text me.

*I actually only came to NYC to see you again. Remember what you said to me when we met?*

*Tristan, stop ignoring me. I need to see you.*

*If you don't respond I'll hurt myself or someone else. And it'll be your fault.*

I had had enough. When I next saw Cory, I was going to tell him about my mysterious stalker. He was working with a security company now, after all.

Maybe they could put an end to it.

After a round of bench presses and curls, I called it a day.

I took a long shower, trying to recall all of my conversations with Emalee to get a feel of how I should apologize.

She liked attention, though she wouldn't admit it.

She wanted to go to Paris, obviously. If I could convince Cory to finally go with her... *maybe* she'd forgive me. Maybe.

But for now, I'd have to settle for chocolates and a sincere apology.

I dressed in plaid and tight jeans, deliberately skipping a shave. No more pretending to be Cory. Emalee would see me – the real me.

I browsed little trinket shops and a chocolate shop, making a few purchases here and there. I somehow managed to find a collage of photos of the Palais Garnier, the Paris opera house she had been telling me about. The one the Phantom famously haunted. I found an Eiffel Tower keychain, which was corny, but whatever.

Finally, I grabbed her a large box of an assortment of chocolates.

I knew it'd never be enough, but it was worth a shot.

I showed up at McLaughlin Books, swallowing down my pride. Entering the bookstore, the first face I saw was Amy's. She frowned at me. "Tristan?" she asked.

I nodded. "Can I see Emalee?"

She glanced towards the back of the store before saying, "She's not working today."

Amy was a terrible liar.

I strode right in, passing her by the register.

"Wait," she called after me. "Tristan, I insist that you leave."

Emalee emerged from behind a bookshelf. "I'm right here," she said tightly.

I froze when I saw her. She was as gorgeous as when I first laid eyes on her, even though she wore a loose t-shirt and leggings today. Somehow, it increased her sex appeal. She stared at me, waiting for me to speak.

"I... I'm sorry," I stumbled.

She bit at her bottom lip, glancing down at my bag of treats. "Those for me?"

I nodded and handed them over. The first thing she pulled out was the keychain. Her brows rose and she fixed me with a stare. "Really?"

I shrugged and watched as she dipped her hand back in, pulling out the chocolates. "And you call me cliché," she said.

I watched as she removed the collage. Her eyes widened and she stared at the photos, her lips parting.

Bingo.

Finally, she cleared her throat and replaced the gift, handing the bag back to me. "Take them back. I don't want anything from you."

"Pretty sure you wanted everything from me last night," I said before I could stop myself.

The smack across my face stung. I blinked, frozen in disbelief. "I... deserved that," I admitted. It was unexpected and strangely arousing.

"Yeah, you did," she said, and bent back to the lower shelf, inserting a few books.

I stared down at her. "Hey, I didn't want to hurt your feelings, love," I said gently.

"No, you wanted to trick me to get what you want. It was disgusting."

I winced. "You're right," I admitted. "But believe me when I say that yesterday was the most fun I've had with a girl in a long time."

She straightened, fixing me with a skeptical look. "I highly doubt that," she said.

"It's true," I insisted. "Surprising you at lunch, seeing your eyes light up when you talk about Paris, the way you held your breath whenever the Phantom sang..." I stopped myself, shaking my head. "You are intoxicating. My brother is a lucky man."

She didn't reply. She twisted her hands together. "I've tried calling Cory today," she said quietly. "He hasn't answered."

My heart twisted at the callousness of my brother. He was supposed to return to NYC this morning. "I'm sorry," I said.

Her green eyes met mine. "Can you go to him?" she asked. "Ask him to give me a call? I'm afraid I've done something wrong."

"You haven't done anything wrong," I assured her. She looked at me expectantly. I sighed. "Fine. I'll go see Cory. I haven't been able to talk to him yet, either."

She seemed to relax at my words. "Good. I'm not the only one," she said.

I hesitated, then offered her my bag of gifts. She ignored me, walking away.

I left them on the front counter.



TOM RECOGNIZED me when I walked into Covill Security. I asked for Cory, and he rang up my brother's secretary. He frowned, setting the receiver down. "I'm afraid Mr. Walker is unavailable right now," he informed me.

I frowned. "What, is he in a meeting?"

Tom shrugged. "I got voicemail."

"Fuck this." I walked past his desk, making my way to the elevator.

"Uh, sir!" Tom called. "You'll need to wait here in the lobby, sir!"

I ignored him, pressing the up button. The elevator arrived, and I didn't hear anything more from the front desk. He had given up quickly.

I marched my way to Cory's office door, which was closed. I peeked through the small side window. Someone was in there, alright. Without another thought, I opened the door and stepped right in.

Cory scrambled, sitting up in his chair and reshuffling papers on his desk. "Tristan!" he said. His cheeks flushed. "I... what are you doing here?"

My eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Checking up on my bro," I said, closing the door behind me. "Besides your douchy text, neither Emalee nor I have heard from you. And I think we need to talk about the situation from last night."

I settled myself in the chair across his desk.

"I... um. Now's not really a good time," Cory muttered.

I cocked an eyebrow. "Why? Too busy? Looked to me like you were falling asleep. Or..." I smirked. "Masturbating."

Cory's flush deepened, and he sighed. He looked under the desk. "Come on out," he snapped.

To my utter shock, the secretary, Brittany, poked her head out from under his desk, wiping at her mouth, her brown eyes large, her face flushed. But then again, maybe it wasn't such a shock after all.

I cleared my throat. "Getting a little action at work, dear brother?"

Cory scowled at me. "Emalee hears nothing of this. Okay?"

I eyed Brittany, who stood awkwardly beside Cory, straightening her pencil skirt and running her fingers nervously through her hair.

Yeah, she was hot. But not Emalee hot. What the fuck was he doing?

"First we talk. Then we'll see if I can promise that," I told him.

He sighed, dismissing Brittany with a wave. "You can go, Brittany."

She nodded, and swept past me, keeping her head down. She closed the door behind her.

I fixed my brother with a stare. "You know that would destroy your chances with Emalee, right?"

Cory scoffed. "Please. You'd rotate through the same three girls throughout high school and see three others on the side. You don't have a faithful bone in your body."

Well. That was true.

"Still..." I said, unable to get past the knotting in my stomach. "I thought you were trying to win Emalee back. It seems like you've... given up."



Cory scowled at me. "After your royal screw up last night, I might as well. There's no way Emalee will take me back now."

"That might be true," I said. "But Emalee sent me here. She wants you to give her a call. You might still be able to salvage something."

Cory grit his teeth. "I don't have *time* to deal with this."

I raised my eyebrows. "Clearly."

I watched my brother pop a handful of tictacs in his mouth. "I'll talk with her tonight," he said, turning back to his computer and unlocking the screen.

Something in me cracked, and I suddenly felt hostility towards him. "No," I growled at him. "You call her *now*. She's hurt, Cory. She needs to hear from you."

He pointed a finger at me. "None of this would've happened if you had just taken her to the opera and left it there. I said have sex with her if *necessary*. You pushed it too far. Haven't you learned to keep your pants on?"

"Hey, I was doing a hell of a job. She was about to cancel the break. What triggered her suspicions was that I was too *nice* to her. Me, too nice. That's really saying something, mate."

Cory ignored me, typing away at his computer. I sighed heavily.

"I'll *even* give you roundtrip flights to Paris," I said. "Only if you call her *right now*."

Cory frowned at his screen. "Why would I want to go to Paris?" he asked. "And I don't want anything from you. I could buy the entire airline."

I rolled my eyes. "Uh... cause you promised Emalee you'd take her."

"No one actually wants to go to Paris," he said. "She'll get over that fantasy eventually. I don't want to go with her and she shouldn't go alone."

I watched my brother carefully. "You really don't know Emalee at all, do you? You haven't taken the time to get to know her."

"Of course I have," Cory sniffed.

He refused to look at me. I tapped a finger on the arm of my chair, watching him. "Why do you want her?" I asked quietly.

"What?" he snapped. His eyes were still glued to the computer.

"*Why* do you want her back, goddamit?" I cried out in frustration.

"Because it's the next step," Cory said, finally looking at me condescendingly. "Emalee is everything one could want in a wife – beautiful, smart, hardworking, cleanly, submissive... I want to marry her, but there's something... missing." He sighed. "The commitment will wear down on me, that's for sure."

I stared at him, my eyes wide. "You want... to *marry* her?" I barked out a laugh. "You, getting married? I don't care if it's the 'next step' to make you look

successful. You don't know the first thing about being a husband."

"I only have to look like a good husband in public," he snapped. "And Emalee is the perfect companion for that."

I shook my head. "You don't deserve her," I told him. "And your libido sucks. *That's* what's missing." I stood. "Call her now or I'll fucking tell her what I walked in on today."

Cory scowled at me. Finally, he reached for his phone and pulled up Emalee's number.

His scowl was replaced by a forced smile when she picked up. "Hey, honey," he said. "Sorry I missed your call. Yes, I know. I know. I'm sorry, babe. Listen, we can talk it over tonight. I'll make it up to you, I promise. Okay. Bye."

He hung up and fixed me with an irritated stare. "Happy?"

"No, but she is." I walked out of the office and made a point to slam his door shut behind me.

## EMALEE

After Cory's phone call, I swept Tristan's gifts out from under the register. I attached the Eiffel Tower keychain to my ring of keys. Hung up the collage of Palais Garnier over in the travel section then popped open the box of chocolates.

Amy wandered my direction, eyeing me carefully. "You've forgiven him, then?"

"Who? Cory or Tristan?"

She shrugged. "Both?"

I chewed thoughtfully on the sweet chocolate, the buttery nougat inside coating my tongue. "No," I said. "But Tristan gets brownie points."

Amy snickered. "For buying you chocolate?"

"No," I said, offering her a piece, which she took. "For convincing Cory to finally call me."

Amy clocked out at six and left me to lock up the store. I scrolled on Pinterest for the last hour we were open.

The door chimed ten minutes before close. I looked up from my phone.

A gorgeous young woman who had to be at least five foot seven strode in, her head held high and her dark eyes scanning the bookshelves. Her hair was dyed a deep red.

"Hello," I greeted her from my stool at the register. "How can I help you?" I asked.

She turned her large eyes on me and smiled. "Just browsing, thanks," she said.

"Of course," I said. "Take your time."

I left her to it. Five minutes later, she approached me, two books in hand. "I was wondering if I could get your opinion," she said pleasantly.

I set my phone aside with a smile. “Of course. What do you need?”

She held up *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel. “I’m looking for a book for a traveler friend of mine,” she said. “Would you suggest this?” She held up the other book – *Around the World in Eighty Days* by Jules Verne. “Or this?”

“Hmm.” I reached for Jules Verne. “It depends,” I told her. “This one is certainly for those with wanderlust. *Life of Pi* is amazing but has many thought-provoking themes. If your traveler isn’t a deep thinker, they might not enjoy it as much.”

She laughed lightly. “No, he’s not very deep at all,” she said. “*Around the World in Eighty Days* it is, then.”

As I completed her purchase, I felt her eyes on me. I wrapped the book in brown paper and placed it inside a bag, handing it to her. “There you go,” I said. “Have a good night.”

“I wonder... have you done much traveling?” she asked me.

I shook my head. “Not as much as I’d like.”

She smiled. “Where would you like to go?”

I shrugged. “I know it’s cliché... but Paris. What about you? Have you traveled?”

She pressed her blood red lips together. “Here and there,” she said vaguely. She looked around at the store. “What a pleasant little bookshop,” she said. “It’s so charming.”

I smiled. “Thanks. My family owns it.”

Her thin eyebrows shot up. “Really? How fun.”

“Yep. I help run it with my sister and mother.”

She traced a long finger along the edge of the counter. She was around my age – perhaps a year or two younger. Twenty or twenty-one. “Are you often working here?” she asked.

“Every day except Tuesdays and sometimes Friday nights.”

“Ah.” She smiled. “You know... I have a cousin in France. If you ever decide to go, she would gladly house you for your stay. Free of charge.”

My eyes widened. “Really?” I asked. “That... that would be incredible.”

She nodded. “It would save you a good chunk of money you can spend on their delectable pastries.”

She had me intrigued. “Have you been there?” I asked.

“Yes,” she gushed. “The sights are unlike anything you’ve ever seen. The history, the art... everything about Paris is romantic.” She gave me a wink. “And it’s definitely not cliché.”

I couldn’t help laughing. I extended my hand. “I’m Emalee. What’s your name?”

“Roxanne,” she responded, taking my hand in hers and giving it a playful squeeze. “We should chat over coffee sometime. I’d love to tell you more about Paris. And you can give me more book advice.” She laughed, a light, tinkling sound.

“That would be great,” I told her. “Here, let me get you my number. Just text me whenever you’re free.” I quickly scrawled my name and number on a sticky note and handed it over.

She took it with a smile. “I will,” she promised.

She left, and I felt my insides glow from making a new friend – one who had been to Paris, no less.

I finished closing the store, locking up for the night, and left for Cory’s.



THANKFULLY, Tristan wasn’t around when I arrived at the apartment.

But Cory was. He greeted me with a hug, and I stiffened. “I am so sorry about last night,” he whispered into my hair.

“Why did you make Tristan do it?” I asked, pulling away.

He sighed, leading me to the couch. “It was a terrible idea on my part,” he admitted, sitting next to me. “I didn’t want to let you down. I knew you wanted to go to the play. I swear I didn’t think Tristan would take it so far.”

My mind riveted to last night, when Tristan had me pinned against this very couch... I banished the thoughts away. “It was so morally wrong,” I said, watching him carefully. “How in the world did you think that was a good idea?”

Cory rubbed at his temples. “I don’t know,” he said. “I was desperate. I don’t want to lose you.”

I bit at my bottom lip. I felt a twinge of sympathy for him, but it wasn’t enough for me to even begin to forgive him yet. If ever. “Wouldn’t it have just been easier to cancel the business trip?” I asked softly.

Cory tensed next to me. I waited for him to answer. “Yes,” he finally said. “I should have turned it down. I’m sorry.”

I wasn’t expecting him to admit to his mistake so readily. But it didn’t change anything. “I don’t think we’re going to work out, Cory,” I said quietly.

He took my hand in his. “What can I do to prove myself to you?”

I sighed. “I think it’s too late for that.”

“No, really.” He leaned in close, locking his eyes on mine. “I’ll take you out to the fanciest restaurant. Buy you all the clothes you want. Heck, I’ll purchase a private showing of the next Broadway show you want to see.”

I was shaking my head, frustration bubbling up inside me. “Cory, you really don’t know me,” I said, my throat constricting. “I’ve told you several times I don’t want you to buy me fine things. I’m not that kind of girl. I know it’s what you’re used to... but I’m sorry. You can’t buy my affections.”

He clenched his jaw. “Whatever you want. Name it.”

“You know what I want.”

His eyes lit in recognition. “We’ll go to Paris,” he promised.

I raised my brows at him doubtfully. “Really?”

“Really. After this Covill project.”

A small part of me fluttered at the idea, but I didn’t want to stay with a man I didn’t think I loved just because he promised me a trip to Paris.

“I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to do more than that,” I told him gently. “I want to be able to trust you. I want you to trust me. We need to work together as a team. Respect each other. Do you think you can do that?”

“Absolutely,” Cory said right away. The lack of hesitation made it seem less genuine. I sighed.

“My apartment will be ready in a week. If I’m not ready to get back together with you by then... we’re done. You won’t hear from me again.”

“Understood.” Cory squeezed my hand. “I won’t let you down. Starting tonight. I know you’ve had a rough day. Let me call in my personal masseuse and private chef to create a relaxing night just for you.”

I was about to protest. I rarely felt comfortable being pampered. But I *did* have a long day. And Cory owed me big time...

“Okay,” I consented. “But I’m not giving you any thank you sex.”

“Wasn’t expecting any,” he said with a smile as he stood and pulled out his phone. “I’ll get the chef here in fifteen minutes, the masseuse in an hour. Hang tight, sweetheart.”

I cringed at the pet name.

True to his word, the private chef arrived in ten minutes and set to whipping up a four-course dinner fit for royalty.

As the handsome chef served up our appetizer of perfectly fried calamari and delicate crab cakes, I decided that I could see what the appeal of a billionaire was to some women. To my mother. There was no financial stress – if you wanted something, you could have it. Billionaires had the potential to make all one’s fantasies come true.

But my fantasies were world travel and an intimate, exclusive relationship, two things Cory had been lacking in.

A billionaire boyfriend wasn’t all glittery trinkets and fast cars.

After the second course of roasted duck with a savory plum sauce, I didn’t

think I could eat another bite.

But there was no way I was saying no to a layered chocolate mousse.

By the time we had finished, Cory was smiling. “How was everything?” he asked.

“Incredible,” I said, leaning back in my chair and setting a light hand on my stomach. “I don’t think I can move.”

“You don’t have to,” Cory said, and stood so he was standing next to me. “May I?” he asked.

I wasn’t sure what he was asking, but it clicked when he wrapped an arm under my legs and another around my waist. I didn’t protest as he lifted me into his arms and carried me into my bedroom, where the masseuse was waiting.

He lowered me gently onto the massage bed and stuck his hands in his pockets as he smiled at me. “Enjoy your massage,” he said. He didn’t dare give me a parting kiss.

He left, leaving me in the dimly lit room with the middle-aged woman who stooped slightly when she walked.

“Just settle back and relax, my dear,” she said softly. I obeyed. She dimmed the lights further and turned on a light soundtrack of rain and waves in the background.

The background noise instantly transported me to a land far away, across the sea. As the masseuse gently removed my clothes and lathered her hands up with massage oil, I let my mind drift.

I thought of the lull of the ocean, the picture-perfect views and powdery soft sand. Tristan was there, surfing and throwing his head back in reckless pleasure.

After rolling in on a wave, he emerged from the water, his body slick with sea water, a grin lighting his hazel eyes as he walked up to me, board under a toned arm...

The area between my legs tingled, and I ripped my thoughts away from Tristan.

As I drifted into a relaxing bliss, one thought hovered in my mind: I couldn’t get back together with Cory. I didn’t love him.



LONG AFTER THE masseuse had left and Cory had gone to sleep, I was on the couch, reading an Agatha Christie novel.

The apartment door rattled, and Tristan walked through, his clothing drenched.

He startled when he saw me on the couch, then made a show of checking his watch.

"It's nearly two in the morning, love," he said. "Shouldn't you be tucked away in bed?"

I carefully placed my bookmark between the pages of my novel and set it aside. "I forgive you," I told him.

Tristan seemed to relax. "Don't know how I deserve that, but thanks."

He moved into the kitchen, filling his water bottle with tap water. I followed him in. "I don't think I can forgive Cory," I said as he swallowed back the water. "Where were you all night?"

Tristan set the bottle down, wiping at his mouth with a grin. "Fucking some pussy."

I blinked at him, taking in his drenched t-shirt, the shorts, and the gym shoes. His muscles bulged, gleaming with sweat. I hated the pang of jealousy I felt at his words. "Looks to me like you were at the gym."

He shrugged. "That, too. I've got a Spartan race to win." He considered me a moment. "What's wrong, love?"

Could he read me so easily?

I sighed. "Nothing," I said, breaking eye contact. "I just... Cory finally promised to take me to Paris after the Covill project."

"Congratulations." There was no warmth or sincerity in his voice. "That doesn't explain the pout on your lip. Or why you're wringing your hands."

I froze. Forced myself to untangle my fingers and lay my hands flat on the table. "I guess I'm just tired," I said.

Tristan was staring at me, leaning his back against the counter only three feet away from me.

"What?" I asked him.

"You have the cutest little line here," he said, pointing between his eyebrows. "It forms when you're thinking or when you're wistful."

My hand went to my face, feeling between my eyebrows. "Oh," I said. I'd never noticed that before. Nobody had told me.

Tristan shrugged. "Guess I'd better hit the hay." He smirked at me. "Want to join?"

I couldn't resist a small smile. "Would we be hitting it or rolling in it?" I teased. The words felt strange on my tongue, but I got a thrill from flirting back.

He responded with a wide grin. "I'd prefer rolling. Unless I'm hitting something besides the hay..."

Heat rose to my cheeks. I knew what he was implying, but a wild, needy side of me wanted him to say it out loud. "Like what?" I asked.



His smile smoldered. “Your pussy,” he said, his voice low, dripping with seduction. “I’d like to smack that little ass until it turns bright red.”

I swallowed. He barked out a laugh. “You know I’m fucking around with you, right?”

But was he?

I went along with it. “Yeah,” I gasped out. I took a calming breath. “Totally.”

He reached out and ruffled my hair. It spilled into my eyes and crumpled atop my head. “Goodnight, love.”

I was busy trying to scrape the hair out of my face, pulling it from my mouth. By the time I had it smoothed back, he had gone to his room and closed the door with a soft clack.

“Night,” I whispered.

## TRISTAN

On Monday, I finally approached Cory about the stalker messages I had received from the Californian girl named Roxy. He scoffed at my worries. “She’s a crazy chick, alright, but I highly doubt you need assistance from Covill,” he said. “You don’t even know who she is.”

“But she’s *here*,” I insisted. “And her texts get more desperate by the day. She continues to threaten her own life and others. That’s not okay.”

“I wouldn’t trouble yourself over it,” Cory said, drinking his morning coffee. “She’s most likely lying.”

My irritation got the best of me. “Look,” I said, standing close to him. “I’ve been around the world. I know that there are *legitimately* crazy people out there. I’m not worried about my own safety. I happen to be staying in an apartment another girl is occupying. Call me paranoid, but I don’t want anything happening to Emalee.”

Cory frowned at me. “Then maybe you should find another place to stay.”

I stared hard at him, our faces a foot apart, the testosterone levels rising.

“Fine,” I said finally. “I’ll be out of your hair tomorrow.”

Cory smirked. I wanted to slap him across the face. “I know you’re my brother, Tristan,” he said. “But *damn* it hurt to find out you were purposefully trying to have sex with my girlfriend.”

My jaw dropped open. “You literally told me...”

“If it would *help*,” Cory corrected. “Getting laid with Emalee wasn’t your end goal. It was making sure she was happy for the night. You could have done anything. But you had to get into her pants.”

“Listen, she wasn’t even technically your girl, Cory...”

Cory cut me off with a look. “It doesn’t matter that we’re on a break. You know I want her back. What you did was low, even for you. I’ll be glad you’re

not around to tempt my girl.”

My fist slammed on the counter, making him jump. “She’s *not* your fucking girl, Cory!” I snarled.

The room fell into silence. Cory stared at me, shaking his head. “I’ll reach out to Covill about your stalker,” he said. “For Emalee’s safety. But if I were you, I’d go ahead and invite her over to your hotel so you can blow off some steam.”

He placed his empty coffee mug in the sink and grabbed his briefcase. “You can stay tonight, but I expect you gone by tomorrow,” he called back before slamming the door.

I settled on the couch, my blood boiling. I had already been there for a week, and my attraction to Emalee had grown, pestering me as I trained, taunting me as I lay in bed at night, my dick hardening just from thinking about her.

I considered hooking up with one of the girls at the gym. But none of them quite compared to the woman sleeping in the bedroom across the hall from mine. She was so close... I could almost taste her sweetness on my tongue. The things I fantasized about at night...

The next morning, I packed up my few belongings to go hunt for another place to stay. I stepped into the kitchen for some coffee, and Emalee emerged from her bedroom, hair a mess and shorts riding tantalizingly up her thighs. It was her day off.

I watched her make coffee, getting a hard on when she bent to retrieve a packet she’d dropped.

“What are your plans for the day?” I asked her from the couch.

“I don’t know,” she said, fixing herself a slice of toast with orange marmalade. “I was hoping to finish my book. Maybe buy groceries.”

“That sounds boring,” I said. I paused. “Why don’t you take me to the Empire State Building today?”

She raised an eyebrow at me, buttering her toast. “I thought you weren’t interested.”

I shrugged. “Now I am.”

She pressed her lips together, glancing at the clock. “I suppose we can go this evening...” she said.

“Deal.” I sprang from the couch. “I’ve got more training to do. Race is next week already.”

After I spent several hours working out, and Emalee had finished her book, we set out for the evening.

Taking the subway, we made our way to Midtown Manhattan. We approached the towering building. I craned my neck to see the top. I couldn’t.

“That’ll be quite the view,” I said. “Especially with the sunset.”

“You don’t have to work hard for it,” Emalee teased. “But yes. The view is amazing.”

I followed her inside, where hundreds of people milled about. The ceiling was highly vaulted, and a gold embossing of the building took up nearly two stories on the back wall. The room echoed from all the people wandering around, reading informative plaques about the building and its construction.

Emalee led me to the ticket counter, and I bought us two tickets for \$20 each.

While we waited in line for the elevator to take us to the top, Emalee pulled out her phone and began texting.

I glanced at her. “Cory rubbing off on you?” I asked.

She frowned slightly at the jab, but still texted away. “No. I met a new friend at the bookshop the other day. She’s asking if I want to meet up for coffee Friday.”

“This Friday or next?” I asked.

“I believe this Friday,” she said pocketing her phone. “But that’s the day I’m moving into my new apartment. Why do you care?”

I smiled at the ground, pleased she was beginning to feel comfortable enough around me to show some of that hidden sass. “My race is next Friday,” I said. I looked at her.

She stared at a small family across from us, silent.

“You *are* coming to that, right?”

“I don’t know,” she said, finally looking at me. “I wasn’t planning on it.”

I couldn’t resist a small frown. “Aren’t you supportive?”

“To be fair, you never invited me,” she countered.

“Well. I’m inviting you now.” Without thinking I grasped her hand, giving it a firm squeeze. “Emalee. Will you attend my race?”

She flushed. “I’ll see if Cory wants to go,” she said.

I rolled my eyes. “Doubtful.”

Our group was next, and we crammed ourselves into the elevator. The way up was a long one. I didn’t mind, though. It forced Emalee to press up against me, and her scent of vanilla and coconut made my head light. I breathed her in, not quite touching my side, and restrained myself from grabbing her ass. It would be so easy...

The elevator dinged, and our group was let out.

We wandered into a hall full of more historical facts and infographics. But my eyes were drawn to the view outside – I could barely see the tops of the other buildings from here.

Emalee tugged on my sleeve. “You’ll enjoy it better outside,” she said.

I followed her out onto the observation deck, and my breath blew away with the wind.

I could see all of New York up here. The buildings sprawled below us, endless and chaotic. From this height, it was peaceful. Inspiring.

The orange sky from the sunset perfectly silhouetted the other buildings, which had started turning on their lights, thousands of pinpricks in the vast city.

“Damn,” I breathed. I glanced at Emalee. She bit her bottom lip as she looked down, her blonde waves tugging back in the wind.

In that moment, she was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen.

“Here,” I said, pulling out my phone. “Let’s get a selfie.”

She raised her eyebrows at me. “A selfie? Are you a teenage girl?”

“Come on,” I said. “I make a living off them.”

Before she could resist, I wrapped my arm around her waist and pulled her taut against me, holding up the camera. “Smile.”

She did, and I was lucky enough to capture it. Her hand was pressed against my chest, her smile genuine and soft. She belonged by my side.

After taking three photos, I pocketed my phone. “You’re so fucking photogenic,” I told her.

“Thanks.” She went back to staring out at the city below, stretching out to the horizon.

It might have been the height. It might have been the view. But in that moment, all I wanted was to drink her in and engulf her in my arms, pleasuring her in every way I knew how.

“I’m disappointed we never finished, you know,” I said.

Her eyes snapped to me. “What?”

I came up behind her, pressing myself against her back, trapping her between the netted wire of the building and me. I lowered my lips so they brushed against her ear. “We never finished our pleasure play,” I said. “I still want to.”

She shuddered against me. “No,” she said.

“Are you sure?” I asked, pressing myself closer to her and nuzzling her neck. “I stay up thinking about you. Your lips, your body, your pussy. I jerk myself off to thoughts of you. I’ve fantasized and dreamed up the most exquisite—”

“Stop,” she said, but she didn’t move away from me.

“You think about it, too,” I concluded. “I know you want me deep inside you.”

She was biting at her lip again. Her hands clutched the concrete barrier. “I’m not going to fuck around with my boyfriend’s brother. Even if we’re on a break, it still feels like cheating.”

A surge of frustration flashed through my system.

I almost... *almost* told her, right then, about Brittany. But I had promised Cory not to, and I never go back on my promises.

Besides, I didn't want to ruin her night with the knowledge. I definitely wouldn't be claiming her tonight after dropping that truth bomb.

I came up with another strategy.

"He was okay with it before," I coaxed. "He'll be okay with it now."

I could feel her heartbeat through my chest. I could almost hear the delicate sounds she'd make as I fucked her...

"But... it's wrong..." she said weakly.

I'd had enough of her excuses.

Grabbing her shoulders, I spun her to face me. My lips slammed against hers. She startled, and I thought she might push me away, but she remained frozen, unmoving.

I dug my hands deep into her hair, clutching her roots, my mouth working passionately over her delectable, pliable, soft ones. One hand dropped down to her lower back, pulling her body flush against mine.

She was tense for a few more seconds, but as I kissed her and she became breathless, she slowly relaxed. She let her mouth part, and I devoured her, my tongue wandering deep inside her mouth.

The fiery sky matched my soul. I wanted her. I *needed* her. I could not live another day without claiming her as my own.

Someone snickered beside us. "Get a room!" a male voice hollered.

I broke the kiss, staring deep into Emalee's green eyes. They were wide and I thought I saw flames flickering behind them. "Shall we?" I asked.

She nodded wordlessly.

We entered the next available elevator and waited as we plummeted down. My hand wandered to her ass now, giving it a hard squeeze. She uttered the smallest of gasps but didn't brush my hand away. I held her tight against me, refusing to let her go.

I splurged on a taxi, telling him to take us to the nearest hotel.

Emalee glanced at me, confused. I shrugged my shoulders. "Cory kicked me out."

Before she could react, I engulfed her mouth in mine once more. I shifted myself so I was pressing her back against the seat, trapped between me and the leather. My hand wandered up her thigh. She uttered a small moan.

Then, in a move I wasn't expecting, she threw herself against me, her hands fumbling under my shirt, clawing at my chest as her now-swollen lips moved against mine, pulling at my bottom lip with her teeth and pressing herself hard against me.

Her hand wandered down, and my dick swelled as she pressed her hand between my legs. “Fuck,” I growled. “Show a little restraint, love.”

She giggled, the sound vibrating against my mouth.

When the taxi finally pulled to a stop outside a three-star hotel, we stumbled out, unable to exit the taxi fast enough.

I quickly requested a room and thanked the heavens when they gave us the key to a master suite.

The moment we were alone in the elevator, I rammed Emalee against the wall, grinding my hips against her and biting at her neck. She gasped, then let a little “uh” sound escape her throat as I grabbed one of her breasts, pressing it against her body and squeezing hard.

The elevator dinged, but we didn’t stop. I hoisted her up on my hips, and she wrapped her legs around me. I carried her out of the elevator, and she didn’t once break away from the kiss. I fumbled for the key, inserting it in the door to our room and opening it.

Throwing her on the generic bedspread, a rush of adrenaline flowed through my veins.

At last, she would be mine.

## EMALEE

*E*yes wild with desire, Tristan threw me onto the hotel bed. “Let’s pick up where we left off,” he growled, and pulled my shirt off, tossing it to the side. His mouth crashed back onto mine, so hot, so eager, so *untamed*.

My heart hammered against my breastbone. Cory would hate it if he found out... but we were on a break that I didn’t think we’d ever come back from. I wanted Tristan. I wanted him now.

A hand slipped beneath a bra cup and rubbed my nipple, squeezing and pressing against the tender flesh. He paused only to remove his own shirt. I gazed at his rock solid chest, chiseled from years of hardcore workouts. His abs flexed as he bent to claim my mouth again, biting and sucking at my lower lip.

He unzipped my jeans. Slipped a hand inside, rubbing the inside of my thighs, not quite reaching my pussy, which had become slick with want half an hour ago.

I moaned, wanting nothing more than his fingers plunging between my folds. “Make me cum,” I pleaded, shocked as the demand slipped from my mouth.

He grinned, his breath hot on my face. “I will, love,” he growled.

His lips moved from mine to the edge of my jaw, then nipped at my ear, his breathing loud and erotic. His teeth grazed my neck, nipping at my collarbone.

Finally, he used both hands to yank my pants *and* panties all the way down. “Open up for me, love,” he commanded.

I did, spreading my legs wide.

His masterful fingers worked against my clit, rougher than the first time. I arched my back, pulsing my hips upward.

“Mmmm,” he breathed, taking a moment to lock his gaze with mine. “You’re already soaked through.”



His fingers plunged inside my pussy, easily sliding in and out, going deeper with each thrust. I threw my head back as spasms of pleasure raked through me. He took the opportunity to unclasp my bra with one hand, casting it aside.

His wet mouth latched on to my right nipple, his tongue swirling and flicking against the hardened nub.

I felt another moan build in my throat. I clenched my teeth, fighting it back, but when his fingers went in as far as they could go, I bucked my hips, releasing a high-pitched gasp. It encouraged Tristan, and he shoved four fingers into my pussy, stretching it out. I could hear the wet squelch as he pulled his hand in and out. "Fuck," he growled. His other hand gripped my hair tightly at the roots, pulling my head back and exposing my neck.

I wasn't used to such force, but it turned me on, sending a shudder of red-hot desire through my body.

His mouth switched to my other breast, sucking and biting. I winced in pain as he bit a little too hard on the sensitive skin, but the pain turned into a thrill of desire.

He released my hair and moved his body down until he was kneeling on the floor. He extracted his hand with a wicked smile.

Using both hands, he gathered my hips and, his arms bulging, pulled me towards his mouth.

The instant his mouth latched onto my wet pussy, I arched back against the firm mattress, my hands clutching at the sheets. My mind exploded as his tongue snaked its way between my folds, lapping up my juices and flicking my clit.

"Fuck!" I gasped, the word exploding from my mouth. "Please, don't stop!"

His eyes caught mine, and I could tell he was grinning in amusement as his tongue transitioned into long, strong strokes, driving me wild.

He ate me out, giving me all the thrills and pleasures I had craved, but never received, from Cory.

He dug even deeper, using his teeth to separate my folds so he had better access, sucking and lapping with his tongue.

I bucked my hips upwards, feeling an orgasm begin to bud deep inside me.

He didn't stop, even when I cried out, even when I twisted violently. He held me firm as my orgasm blossomed into a sweet, fiery release. My mouth gaped open as the waves of pleasure overtook me, carrying me through the most explosive orgasm I'd had in a long time.

But he wasn't finished.

Pulling away from my pussy, his mouth glistening, he dragged my legs to the edge of the bed. Flipping me over onto my stomach, he pulled my legs so they were hanging off the bed, touching the floor. I was bent over, exposed.

His hands massaged my buttocks, then the tip of him nudged me. I gasped. Without warning, he plunged his enlarged dick inside me, all the way in.

I cried out because it hurt, but also from the thrill of something new. I raised one knee and set it on the edge of the bed so he had better access.

He spanked my ass, my skin stinging. "Give me your pussy," he growled, and set to work pounding into me, his thick cock causing maddening friction.

I gasped and moaned as he fucked me from behind, plunging so deep into me that his hips smacked against my ass.

He gathered my hair, and yanked it back, forcing my head back in an almost painful angle. I cried out, but then let out a small laugh because it was *exhilarating*, being roughed up.

I expected him to cum within two minutes, but after five, he was still going strong, pounding into my wet pussy and causing enough friction that I orgasmed for a second time, hoarsely crying out "fuck" over and over.

"That's my girl," he purred, and he pulled himself out. Collecting me in his arms, he picked me up and threw me back onto the bed, crawling up with me and straddling my hips. He grasped my hips again, and as he stoked his giant dick in his hand, I gaped at it. It was slick with my cum and swollen to a size I didn't think I'd ever seen with Cory.

With one hand, Tristan hoisted my hips up. He slipped himself inside with a low moan, and began pounding into me, faster than before. My breasts bounced on my chest from the force.

The hand that wasn't holding me up shot out, entrapping my throat, forcing my head back into the pillows.

I gasped, the sensation of him dominating me making me even more wet, and I threw my head back, letting him massage and squeeze my throat.

Fuck, I was going to cum again.

He fucked me so, sounds tumbled out of my mouth that I'd never uttered before.

He drove his dick into me again and again, until I wasn't sure where he ended and I began.

He gasped, his fingers tightening around my throat.

"*Fuck!*" he growled.

His sudden reaction pushed me over the edge.

Moving as one, we came together, entwined in the shared explosion of sheer pleasure. I was drunk off it.

Then, it was over, and he released my throat, bracing himself up with both arms as he panted.

It was honestly the hottest sex I'd ever had in my life.

If tonight confirmed one thing, it was this: I did not belong with Cory.

## TRISTAN

Emalee woke early in the morning, anxious. “I wonder what Cory must have thought when he found us gone last night,” she whispered, nuzzling her head against my shoulder.

I didn’t care. He didn’t fucking deserve her. I gently rubbed her back, closing my eyes and drifting in and out of sleep.

Eventually, Emalee got up, walking naked to the coffee maker.

I opened my eyes, watching her from the bed. She was captivating – the after-sex hair, the smeared makeup, the sexy curve of her back.

I couldn’t help myself. My morning wood kept my mind riveted on her.

She noticed the bulge under the thin sheets, and her eyes became soft, sultry. “I can help you take care of that.”

She returned to the bed and sucked me off, eliciting feelings better than I could have imagined. I held her head in place, refusing to let her move it away so she could keep sucking. She whimpered, but her wide eyes on mine let me know she was okay that I was a little rough.

My cum ejaculated into her mouth, and she spit it into the palm of her hand.

It was fucking hot.

I returned to Cory’s apartment with her to grab my stuff. He wasn’t in the apartment – probably at work. Emalee snuck a kiss on my lips.

“I’m moving into my new apartment Friday,” she said. “If you still need a place to crash...” she shrugged, a light blush coloring her face.

I grinned. “You won’t kick me to the couch, will you?”

She bit her lip. “No.”

My body thrummed with the anticipation that I would be staying in NYC for a whole week in the apartment of this gorgeous woman. More than that – she was fun to be around. I felt drawn to her, not just physically. I had a heated

desire to protect her from all harm. From my brother, if necessary.

I returned to the hotel with my stuff and worked on work out videos to post on my popular YouTube channel. As I cut and edited the recordings, my phone vibrated and that damn number from California showed up.

I checked the text.

A picture of Cory's apartment complex was embedded in the text. *I know where you are. I don't want anything bad to happen to your friends.*

There was a psycho line, and she had just crossed it. I texted back. *Who the fuck are you?*

Her response came back seconds later. *You don't remember? Roxy! From the beach party.*

I racked my brain, trying to think of the girls I had partied with in California. I'd been to both north and south California and gone to multiple parties on each side. There was no way I could pinpoint one girl, whether I fucked her or not.

But there was no way I was letting this chick threaten Emalee.

*I don't remember you,* I texted her back. *But if you text me again, I'm calling the police.*

I sent the text, but still felt anxious. I dialed my brother's number.

"Hey, you back-stabbing bastard," Cory spat into the phone. "You enjoy yourself last night?"

I stood from the bed, pacing to the window. "Chill, okay? You two are on a break. She has every right to fuck who she wants."

"Out of everyone she could have slept with, why you?" Cory groaned. "You're my brother, for crying out loud."

"Cory, we'll duke this out later. Remember that crazy chick who keeps texting me?"

"Oh, my gosh, Tristan, are you in high school? Just ignore her, she'll leave you alone eventually."

"Listen to me, would you?" I said, gritting my teeth. "She sent me a picture of your apartment complex. She threatened my friends – I'm assuming that's you and Emalee. I need that Covill protection. I need it now."

"For you or Emalee?" Cory asked.

"Emalee, preferably," I said. "I can take care of myself."

Cory snorted. "Then you've wasted a phone call. I made a deal with Covill two months ago to keep an eye on her. I know where she is at all times. She'll be safe."

I breathed a sigh of relief. Then, a suspicion entered my mind. "Does she know about this?" I asked.

Cory didn't answer right away. "Why would she need to?" he asked. "I'm a

fucking billionaire, it's protocol to keep tabs on those close to me. They're automatically a target."

"...But she doesn't know you're basically spying on her."

"Dammit, Tristan, do I need to haul your ass back to Colorado?"

"Emalee is ditching your apartment for one of her own in two days," I reminded him. "It's not your business what she does with her life after that. And for the record... she said I could stay with her until the race. Guess kicking me out kind of backfired on you." I couldn't resist a sly grin.

Cory hung up.

I tossed my phone on the bed, sighing. At least now I knew Emalee was safe.

Roxy... It seemed like there were dozens of slutty girls named Roxy. The name did ring a bell, but no face materialized in my mind.

Shrugging it off, I went back to editing my video.



I DIDN'T SEE Emalee again until moving day. Cory had hired help to move all her stuff and unpack it, going as far as getting an interior designer to decorate the place.

Emalee was annoyed, to say the least.

"He took away the whole experience of unpacking and setting up my own place!" she grumbled. She glanced at the flowery arrangements in her apartment. "I don't even *like* this style."

I laughed. I hadn't told her about Cory's protection on her. I didn't want her to get upset and have it cancelled. Not after the threats I'd received.

Ever since I'd told Roxy I would call the police if she kept texting, she hadn't sent me another message. I was relieved, but still paranoid.

"Weren't you supposed to meet up with a friend today?" I asked.

"Yeah. I cancelled it. I figured I'd be too busy moving." She shrugged. "Guess not, though."

"Then let's grab dinner," I suggested.

She beamed at the idea.

We walked across the street from her one-bedroom apartment to a deli place. "It's not as fancy as you'd get with Cory," I said, opening the door for her.

She laughed. "Trust me – I'd take a hole in the wall place like this over those fancy five-star restaurants any day. I don't have to dress up."

After ordering our sandwiches we brought them back to her apartment and sat on the floor in front of her couch, chowing down. Emalee closed her eyes,

chewing with obvious pleasure. “It feels so nice to be in my own place again,” she said.

I swallowed my own bite. “You and Cory really are not compatible,” I observed.

She shrugged.

After finishing our meal, we stayed up and watched Netflix until Emalee fell asleep in my arms. I finished the episode we were on, then carried her to her bed, freshly made that morning. I curled myself up next to her petite form, my dick already hardening with the intimacy of the moment.

It would be hard to leave after my race was over.



THE WEEK PASSED IN BLISS. Because I was still paranoid and overly protective, I walked Emalee to work each morning and made sure to walk her home in the afternoon. She questioned my motives, but I chalked it up to wanting to spend more time with her. She didn't need to know some girl I screwed however long ago could possibly be lurking nearby.

She loved the attention. Her persona brightened and I discovered she was quite bubbly and had a thirst for adventure. Paris wasn't the only place she wanted to visit – she hoped to one day visit all 50 states, to backpack through Europe, to make the trek to Machu Picchu.

“I'm taking a trip back to Australia once winter hits,” I told her. “You should come along.”

Her eyes widened at my suggestion. “Really?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“No, but...” she leaned forward, a noodle slipping from her chopsticks and into her Chinese takeout box. “Are you *really* serious? Because I will totally go.”

I laughed. “I'm not my brother, love. If I'm inviting you, I'm being serious about it. Besides,” I said with a wink. “I'd love to see that ass in a white bikini.”

She giggled at that.

We had sex that night, hot and heavy and explosive.

Wednesday rolled around. I was alone at Emalee's apartment, working out, training for the race that was coming up in two days.

A loud knock came to the door.

My thoughts instantly went to Roxy. She still hadn't texted, but maybe she hadn't left New York yet.

I peered through the peephole and breathed a sigh of relief when I saw my

brother.

I opened the door. “Hey, bro,” I greeted him.

He strode right in, taking in Emalee’s apartment. “Why she would move out of my apartment for this is beyond me,” he said, turning his nose up in disgust. He spun to face me. “Why she would choose *you* is another mystery altogether. What do you have that I don’t?”

I should have known Cory would come looking for a fight. “I actually treat her like a human being,” I said. “She loves attention. Quality time. Not fancy gifts and empty promises.”

Cory snorted and frowned. “She’s so different from the other girls,” he mused.

I couldn’t resist a smile. “You only know how to cater to greedy whores, Cory,” I said. “That’s where you lost her.”

In a move faster than I thought possible for him, Cory rushed at me, slamming me up against the wall. “How dare you,” he growled. “How dare you show up at my home and take my girlfriend from me?”

I roughly shoved him away. “She initiated the break *before* I came along, remember?” I snapped. “I may share your face, Cory, but I at least give a shit about her.”

Cory ground his teeth. “As soon as you’re gone, she’ll return to me,” he said firmly. “Once you’ve had a taste of luxury, you can’t go back to...” he gestured to the little apartment. “This.”

I almost felt sorry for my brother. He was clueless when it came to Emalee.

“Who says I won’t stay longer?” I said. “Or take her away with me?”

Cory scowled at me. “Because I have the power to wipe out your puny online business that relies on your followers. Once your race is done and over with, I expect you to be out of NYC.”

I curled my hands into fists. “Are you really threatening me, brother?” I asked quietly.

“As fast as that,” Cory said, snapping his fingers in front of my face. “I can obliterate your income streams. Don’t test me.”

I charged, lunging at him. We toppled to the floor.

After wrestling for a moment, I gained the upper hand. I pulled his arm back, digging my knee into his shoulder blade. “No one tells me what to do,” I growled. “Not you, not Dad. If you ruin my business, Emalee will never be yours.”

I released him and he spluttered on the floor.

He spat at me, his eyes kindled with fire. “I won’t let you take what’s mine,” he hissed.



Standing, he limped out of Emalee's apartment.



I DRANK MY PROTEIN. Spent extra time stretching. Meditated a bit.

Today was the race.

A sea of people milled about the grounds, sporting jerseys with their race numbers tacked to the front and back. I checked in and received my own numbers and looked around at the hundreds of bodies to see if I could spot Emalee.

She'd said she'd be here. But she had the gall to invite Cory, who was actually making an effort this time, and had promised he would join her.

I gave her a call. She picked up on the third ring. "Hey, we're at the left court," she informed me.

"Is Cory with you?"

"Yes."

A prick of jealousy pierced my chest. "Give him my love," I said. "I'll see you at the finish line."

"Good luck." Emalee said. Her voice sounded sincere enough.

My adrenaline spiked as soon as I lined up at the starting line. I looked towards the left court, scanning the crowd for Emalee or Cory. I wanted to confirm they were there watching.

The starting horn blared, and suddenly the mass of people I was joined with moved as one being, surging forward, their feet already slipping in the mud as they jogged towards the first obstacle.

I had to tuck away my jealousy and focus. I moved quickly, conserving my energy as best I could. I would need it for the obstacles ahead.

I leapt over hurdles, crawled through barrels, climbed rock walls. I quickly become slick with mud, which cooled my heated body.

Sweaty, muddy bodies labored beside and in front of me, muscles straining as they climbed a rope course. Some fell, landing on thick mud with a cry.

I pressed on, keeping my focus.

But Emalee was in the back of my mind, the soft curve of her lips, the intelligence in her eyes. I didn't even care about the prize money at this point – all I wanted was her.

After another grueling hour of climbing, jumping, army crawling, swimming, and running, the end was in sight. I pumped my arms and legs, overtaking the men and women up front who had spent themselves completely

and were barely moving faster than a jog.

I saw the finish line.

I sprinted, and with a cry, leapt past the finish line just behind two others.

My heart hammering, I placed my hands on my head, taking deep breaths, my chest heaving. I forced myself to relax.

I caught Emalee and Cory approaching me – Cory as indifferent as ever, Emalee's eyes wide and glistening.

I didn't care what Cory thought. I swooped Emalee up in a crushing hug, smearing mud all over her yellow blouse. But she laughed, and yelped in surprise as I swung her through the air, holding her tight against my chest.

"Third place, that's not bad," she said with a beaming smile after I had set her down.

I shrugged. "It's \$500."

I wrapped an arm around Cory, who flinched away. I held him fast, mussing up his hair with my other hand. "Good to see you here, bro," I told him through gritted teeth.

He grumbled something under his breath, but I didn't care what he'd said. Throwing my other arm around Emalee, I led them away from the finish line, where scores of bodies were rushing through, completing the race of a lifetime.

EMALEE

*T*omorrow at nine?

I glanced at Mia's text. I'd have to convince Mom to let me come into work late. But it was doable. I already felt bad for cancelling on Roxanne for no reason last Friday.

*Let's do it. Coffee shop by my work?*

I sent the text, then looked up, scanning the many flexing bodies getting ready for the race, searching for Tristan.

I spotted him, his jersey hanging loose over his rock-solid body. He was all seriousness. He had trained for this for months and he wasn't about to fool around.

As I admired his body from here, a smug little side of me said, *I've had wild sex with that body.*

Cory wrapped an arm around my waist, holding me against him. "I've missed you," he told me, leaning to speak in my ear.

"And yet, besides this, you still haven't stopped by work to say hi. You didn't come congratulate me on my new apartment." My words were bold, blunt. "I'm not convinced you really miss me."

Cory didn't reply, but he kept his arm around my waist. I let him, because I knew I would be breaking it to him soon that we were done. Officially.

In another ten minutes, the race started, and I watched in fascination as the men and women accomplished feats that left me breathless. Tristan fell behind for the first half, but quickly overtook those in front of him as the second half of the race unfolded.

I found myself jumping up and down and cheering as he raced to the finish line, legs moving fast.

As soon as he crossed the finish, I screamed, elated from the action and that

Tristan did so well.

“Damn, woman,” Cory mumbled. “You don’t need to make a fool of yourself.”

Something triggered inside me, and I whirled on him. “You never let me have any fun,” I accused him. “You want me to be this proper, by-the-book girlfriend who is there for your meals and here for you when you want sex. You don’t let me venture off on my own, you don’t let me travel... I highly doubt you’ll even follow through on your promise to take me to Paris.” I leveled him with the most serious stare I could muster. “I’m going to be honest with you right now – we need to have a serious talk tonight.”

I saw the impact my words had on him. He flushed – from anger, embarrassment, I wasn’t sure. I didn’t wait to find out.

I made my way to Tristan, admiring the way his mud splattered skin rippled in the sunlight. When he saw me, he rushed at me, crushing me in a victorious hug.

“Why don’t we celebrate at your place, Cory?” Tristan asked with a wide grin.

Cory frowned and I knew he was about to say no. I cut in. “You could have your personal chef make us one hell of a dinner. Please, Cory?”

He knew it was too risky to deny my request. He sighed and forced a smile. “Yes, sure. Great idea.”

The three of us made our way back to Cory’s apartment, Tristan triumphant, his hands lingering on me, and Cory silent, sulky.

The moment we stepped through the door, Cory rounded on Tristan. “Do you mind?” he asked. “In my apartment, the only one touching Emalee will be me.”

I was shocked by his words. “I don’t think you get to make that call,” I told him flatly.

Tristan pulled me even closer against him. “You heard her,” he taunted. I pushed him away.

“Listen... I just want to celebrate Tristan’s race. I don’t want to be fought over.”

“Of course, sweetheart,” Cory said, leading me into the kitchen. “I’m sure you’ll want to spend a bit more time with Tristan before he leaves tomorrow.”

I slowed, turning to face the brothers. I looked at Tristan. “You’re leaving tomorrow?” I asked. I didn’t try to hide the disappointment in my voice.

Tristan was glaring at Cory. “Not if I can help it,” he said.

I looked between the two of them. The testosterone levels were high.

“Why can’t you just leave her alone?” Cory snapped.

I swallowed. Now was as good a time as any to tell him.

“Cory,” I said. “You don’t own me. And... I’m not your girlfriend. We’re officially done. I’m sorry.”

Cory’s eyes hardened as they turned on me. “What the fuck do you mean?” he demanded. “Can’t you see my idiot brother is clouding your mind? You’d be *crazy* not to stay with me, Em.”

“She’d be crazy if she went back to you,” Tristan interjected. “I’ve told you before and I’ll tell you again, mate... you’re not long-term relationship material.”

I could see Cory was feeling ganged up on. His face was becoming red with fury and humiliation. “I’m sorry, Cory,” I said quietly. “Tristan’s right. You don’t know how to treat regular, down-to-earth women with morals.” I shrugged. It was the truth.

“Oh, you think you’re better than them?” Cory sneered. “After fucking my brother for a solid week? Thinking I wouldn’t care? Don’t try to be the victim here, Em. You’re just as slutty as the rest of them.”

Tristan moved fast, pinning Cory against the counter. A glass vase of flowers slid off the table and shattered on the floor. I yelped in surprise.

“You take that back!” Tristan growled in Cory’s face, clutching him by the front of his shirt.

Cory kicked Tristan in the knees, making him lurch back in pain. He jumped on Tristan, and the brothers toppled to the ground.

“Guys! Stop! Please!” I cried out, trying to get between them.

They continued to wrestle each other to the ground, paying no heed to me.

“Bastard!” Tristan hissed at Cory. “Why don’t you tell her what I walked in on the other day?”

“Shut the fuck up, Tristan,” Cory growled.

“You’re a shitty boyfriend. And a hypocrite. Tell her what’s been going on between you and your secretary. Tell her!”

Cory smashed his fist into Tristan’s jaw. Toppling over, Tristan struggled on the ground as Cory pinned him down, panting. “You don’t know what you’re talking about,” he snapped.

But a sickening feeling churned my stomach. “Cory,” I said. “What is Tristan talking about?”

Cory grit his teeth. “It was only during our break...”

“You’re a filthy liar,” Tristan laughed, still pinned down.

I thought I knew, I had suspected it all along. “You were cheating on me, weren’t you?” I asked him quietly.

Cory frowned, then released Tristan, who scrambled up to his feet. Cory’s eyes flickered everywhere but at me. “Sometimes... I don’t know. I get bored.

I'm sorry."

His words stung. "What about me?" I demanded. "I was always wanting to try new things with you. I was always ready to please you, but you never gave me the time of day. And now I find out it's because you've been running around with other women?"

Cory sighed in frustration. "I'm still trying to figure out the exclusive thing," he admitted. "You knew that coming into the relationship."

I gaped at him. "No, I didn't," I said.

He barked out a dry laugh that reminded me of Tristan's. "You really don't know what the life of a billionaire is like, do you?" he asked me. "I'm pulled this way and that, always trying to please. And when my girlfriend doesn't accept my expensive gifts, it wounds my pride and I run off to some girl who would pay good money just to be in my presence. It's a different feeling, fucking whoever you want because you have money tied to your name."

I didn't want to hear anymore. Even Tristan stared at his brother, his eyes wide.

But I had disassociated myself from Cory once I realized his brother showed more interest in me than he did. Cory's words stung, and it confirmed to me that his mind was twisted, but I didn't feel anger. Just pity.

"Cory, it's obvious we're not meant to be together," I said quietly. "If you truly wanted me, you would have left those other girls behind."

He scowled at the floor.

"Did you not realize that a condition with being with me is that you'd *only* be with me?"

He sighed. "I... yes. I did. I thought I could get away with it."

I actually laughed now. I had wasted months of my time with this tool?

"You have to see how unhappy you would be with me," I said.

Cory was silent. He drew himself up, taking a deep breath. "I see your point," he said, straightening his rumpled shirt. "I haven't been happy. I'm so used to getting what I want... I thought that was you. Now I see that I just want the freedom to live how I want without any strings attached."

I let go of the breath I had been holding. "You can do that now," I said. "You're getting what you want. And... I'm getting what I want. Thank you."

Cory nodded, then a smile twitched at the side of his mouth. "I can't wait to hear your mother's reaction when you tell her you've given up a billionaire."

"I think she'll get over it," I said dryly. My mother would have never wanted me to end up with someone like Cory, billionaire or not.

Tristan cleared his throat. "Not to be the weirdo in the room, but I'm quite aroused from my recent victory and Emalee is fucking hot when she's angry. Is

anyone feeling up to a three-way?"

"You're so gross," I told him, but my heart rate picked up.

To my complete surprise, Cory spoke up. "Actually... I wouldn't mind letting some steam off right about now." He threw a wink at me. "And having a final run with my ex."

He and Tristan shared a glance, then both looked at me expectantly.

No way.

These two gorgeous brothers – one my new lover, the other my rich ex-boyfriend – wanted to have sex with me *together*?

I felt the heat reach my cheeks. Saw the desire in Tristan's eyes, the need for pent up release in Cory's.

I swallowed to wet my suddenly dry throat. "Uh, okay," I said. "Sure."

Within the next five minutes, I found myself thrown onto the master bed, my clothes being taken off by Tristan and Cory collectively.

"Let's see how you move, brother," Tristan said, removing his shirt and tossing it on the ground with a grin.

Cory rolled his eyes. "I'm certain I've racked up more girls than you by now, Tristan."

Tristan aimed his wild, crazy grin at me, and he winked.

I felt my blood rush hot.

Before I knew what was happening, both men were completely naked and leaning over me, hunger in their eyes. "Let us know if you ever feel uncomfortable," Tristan said. His fingers had already set to work between my legs, sending those familiar rushes of pleasure up my spine.

I nodded.

Cory straddled me, putting his knees on either side of my shoulders, and, clutching my hair, raised my head up and forced his dick into my mouth. I sucked and swirled my tongue, deep throating him as much as I could. As I pleased my ex, Tristan went down on me. I couldn't see him past Cory, but I sure as hell could feel him. His tongue lapped between my folds and flicked against my clit.

Cory's dick fully inside my mouth, I moaned loudly. Cory was encouraged and he pumped his hips, forcing his dick in and out of my throat. I forced myself to breathe through my nose as much as possible and I relished every move Tristan made below me.

They traded places and Tristan grinned at me, his lips wet with me. He pressed them against my mouth, kissing me passionately. "Run away with me," he murmured.

My heart fluttered. "When?"

“Now. Today. I won’t leave New York without you.”

Cory lifted my hips and plunged his enlarged dick into my wet pussy. I arched back as he stretched me out, and Tristan kissed my neck, massaging my breasts. “Say you’ll come with me,” he whispered against my skin.

I wasn’t sure if I could. Leave everything – my new apartment, my family, my job... and follow Tristan? It seemed too risky, too irrational...

Tristan grasped his dick in his hand, giving it broad strokes. He nudged its head against my cheek, caressing it. “Say it,” he repeated, his voice lowering.

Cory was pounding hard into me now, his breathing labored. I knew he was going to cum soon.

Tristan grabbed my jaw, forcing my mouth open. “Say it!” he growled and plunged his dick inside my mouth.

My body was rocked to and fro as Cory fucked me and Tristan moved his hips, pushing his dick down my throat.

The thrill of the two brothers taking me on at once was exhilarating.

“I will,” I tried to say around Tristan’s large dick. It came out muffled and unintelligible.

He pulled my hair, putting his lips by my ear. “What’s that, love?” he growled.

Cory gasped and moaned, and I felt his dick vibrate inside me.

Tristan pulled his dick out of my mouth. I gasped for air. “I will,” I said. “I’ll go with you.”

Tristan’s smile was wild. He moved off me and pushed Cory to the side. Cory flopped over onto the bed, spent.

Tristan inserted himself inside me and took control, pounding hard. A scream ripped through my throat as my orgasm shot through my body, exploding in my head. I could see stars.

Tristan growled and panted as he came, and finally, he slowed to a stop, pulling out and emptying himself on my stomach. He crumpled on the other side of me.

The three of us laid there together, panting, bodies gleaming.

I would leave New York with Tristan.

I didn’t know where we were going – Colorado, perhaps? – but every fiber of my being thrilled at the promise of adventure and a new life.



## TRISTAN

I woke feeling for Emalee in the bed. The sheets were cold. I groaned, turning over.

She had insisted on going to work today, to talk to her family about them hiring on extra help while she was gone.

But first, she was going to meet with a friend from California.

I faced the ceiling, closing my eyes and letting a smile creep up my face.

Last night was hot. And when it was all over, Cory's private chef had made the tastiest seabass meal complete with crème brulee for dessert.

Cory hadn't cared when Emalee and I crashed in the room I had stayed in my first week there. We were too exhausted to catch the subway back to her apartment.

Holding Emalee as she fell asleep felt exquisite. All the girls, all the travels, all my mistakes and risks.... they had led up to that moment. I needed to meet Emalee and hold her close. Her and no one else.

Now, I rose out of bed, stretching and throwing a shirt on.

Entering the kitchen, I saw Cory, sipping coffee and scrolling through his phone. "Good morning," he said without looking at me.

"Morning," I said. A part of me wanted to gloat. I mean, it's what brothers do. I sensed that even though Cory knew he needed to let her go, his pride had been damaged to a point where the subject was still sensitive for him.

And through all my life knowing Cory, I knew he hated a wounded pride.

I poured myself a cup of coffee and joined him on a bar stool. "Any plans for the day?" I asked him.

He rubbed at his unshaved jaw. "Yeah. I think I'm going to ask Brittiany to move in with me."

I nearly spat out my coffee. "Already?"

He shrugged. "You know I have my pride. If Emalee doesn't want me, it's time to move on. I'd rather do it sooner than later."

Sheesh. "Suit yourself," I said.

"And you?" he asked. "What will you and Emalee do?"

I stared at my phone, silent and still and black. The possibilities with Emalee were endless. "I don't know," I said. "But we're booking it out of here as soon as possible."

Cory's phone rang. He answered. "Hey, Mrs. McLaughlin," he said. A pause. "Well, she said she was meeting with a friend this morning. That could be the delay. Yeah, she must have forgotten to tell you. Sorry about that. Bye." He hung up the phone. "That might have been my last conversation with that woman..." he muttered.

"Emalee's mom?" I asked.

He nodded. "Just wondering where she was."

I stood, downing the rest of my coffee. "Right. Well. I'm off to make a new workout vid. See you in a few hours."

I grabbed my camera and tripod and headed down the elevator to the luxurious gym. My guess was celebrities had to be working out down there. The complex was too fancy to be inhabited by the middle class.

I set up my camera in a corner with mats and started recording. I kept it simple, with sets of high-burning cardio moves.

But my mind was distracted. I was taking Emalee back to Colorado with me. The idea thrilled me to my core, making me feel as giddy as a high school girl. I couldn't wait to travel the world with her, show her what she'd been missing out on. Give her that attention she craved and deserved.

I paused for water and checked my phone. Cory had tried calling. I'd get back to him after I finished recording the rest of my footage.

When I had finished twenty minutes later, I drank a long drought of water before packing up and making my way into the elevator. I was surprised when it opened and Cory stood there, scowling.

"Oh. Hello," I said.

"You didn't answer your phone," Cory said.

I shrugged. "I was busy. What's up?"

Cory exited the elevator. "Mia, Emalee's friend, called. Emalee never showed up this morning."

I frowned, shifting my tripod so it rested more comfortably against my shoulder. "Well, where is she?" I asked.

Cory's frown deepened. "We don't know."

Fear and irritation spiked in me all at once. "What do you mean, you don't

know?” I snapped at him. “You have her under Covill protection.”

“Yes,” he said. “Mia and Liam Covill tried tracking Emalee’s phone through GPS, but it’s dead. We managed to get a location from before the battery died, though.”

“And where was that?” I demanded. He held up Emalee’s phone. “Here. She didn’t have her charger last night. Her phone must have died and she decided to leave it behind.”

“Shit.” My heart was hammering against my chest. “Where could she be, then?”

“I don’t know,” Cory admitted. “We’re meeting with Mia and Liam in fifteen minutes to find out.”



I STARED across the table in Covill Security’s meeting rooms at the Californian couple. Liam Covill was big, I’ll give him that. The guy was built like a bull. As the son of Walter Covill, CEO of Covill Security, he looked pretty intimidating. And Mia looked tiny next to him, her large eyes filled with concern.

“What time did she leave the apartment this morning?” she asked Cory and I urgently.

Cory looked at me. “Shit,” I mumbled. “I was asleep... I’m guessing around 8?”

Mia nodded. “She was supposed to meet me for coffee at nine. She never showed.”

“Did anyone check her apartment?” Liam asked.

Cory and I exchanged glances. “No,” Cory admitted. “She could be there.”

I sprung from the chair. “I have a key. I’ll go check.”

“Hold on, Mr. Walker,” Liam said, standing himself. “Your brother here detailed us about the stalker who had been threatening you via text. Could she have had a hand in this?”

The thought had crossed my mind. I couldn’t remember who Roxy was. I didn’t know if she really was dangerous or all talk. “She might have,” I said slowly. “But I don’t know. I don’t know the girl.”

Liam nodded, looking at Mia. “I’m afraid you’ll have to wait until we put a team together. You don’t know what you could be getting yourself into.”

“I can handle myself,” I insisted.

Liam’s lips curled into a slow smile. “Trust me... I know the urgency you feel. But we need a team of professionals—”

“I’m just going to run in and check her apartment,” I said in frustration. “Maybe she just needed a day off. I’ll call you if I find her.”

I took off, leaving the meeting room and dashing through Covill Security’s doors.

I hadn’t heard from Roxy in over a week. I had assumed she had given up. I silently cursed myself, waving down a taxi. What if Emalee really was in danger? The one time I let my guard down... I would never forgive myself if something had happened to her.

Cory said he had her protected, dammit!

My chest constricted as I ducked inside a taxi, giving him the address to Emalee’s apartment. I prayed she was there, safe and sound...

## EMALEE

I peeled my eyes open, my head throbbing. I was laying face down on the floor in my new bedroom.

I tried to sit up, but something bound my hands together. Alarmed, I struggled, rolling onto my back and wincing as I rolled onto shattered ceramic.

I tried to remember what happened.

I had woken early that morning knowing I desperately needed a shower and clean clothes before going into work that day. I left Cory's apartment, heading for my own, which was only twenty minutes away.

But then I ran into Roxanne. I thought it was the craziest coincidence, and she wanted to see my book collection...

"Good. You're awake," a female voice sneered from my bed.

I twisted, spotting Roxanne perched on the edge of my bed, watching me.

I pulled again at my restraints. "What... happened?"

She grinned, tossing back her deep red hair. "You let me into your apartment, stupid bitch," she said. "I knocked you out with that ugly pot with the fake flowers. Now we're here." She examined her nails, clearly proud of herself.

I swallowed, trying to moisten my dry throat. My head still pounded in pain. "Why?" I asked, trying to move my legs. Those were bound, too.

"Because you're fucking my soulmate, that's why," she snapped.

I froze, staring at her, trying to comprehend... "Tristan?" I asked.

She stood from the bed and knelt down beside me. I swallowed. I was vulnerable. She could do anything to me right now. She grasped my jaw in her hand, forcing me to face her. "Yes, Tristan," she sneered. She pointed at my bed. "Is that where you've been fucking him, you bitch?"

I flinched at her sudden violence.

"I'm sorry," I said, because I didn't know what else to say. I worked on my bonds behind me, trying to loosen them. She had thoroughly duck taped my hands and legs together. "Tristan never mentioned you."

Her slap stung across my face. I gasped in surprise. "Shut your stupid mouth," she spat. "Tristan and I were made for each other. He told me so. He asked me if I believed in love at first sight."

My mind spun. "If that's what he said, he was joking around," I whispered. "He was flirting with you."

She smacked me again. This time I cried out. Her nails had clawed my skin.

"Well, *I* know he fell in love with me that night. I've been trying to remind him. But he doesn't remember me." She pouted. "Then you showed up. You're the whore who occupied all his time so he couldn't meet up with me."

"Look, I don't know anything about you," I said as calmly as I could. My voice shook. "Maybe cut me loose and we'll give him a call together, get things straightened out."

"Ha!" she laughed. "I won't fall for your tricks the way he has."

I was afraid to ask my next question. "What are you going to do with me?"

Roxanne reached into her back pocket and flipped open a pocketknife. "I'm glad you asked," she said.

My eyes widened. "There's an easier way to handle this," I told her.

"Tristan won't pay attention to me unless I follow through with my threats," she whimpered. "So I have no choice but to do something to you."

My adrenaline spiked. With a shaking hand, she pointed the blade at my face.

"It's your fault he's not with me right now," she said vehemently.

I knew I had to act. Summoning all my strength, I whipped my legs around, clocking her in the side of the head. She dropped the knife with a yelp.

I rolled, trying to force myself to stand. If I could just get to the door...

I pulled my upper body up and sprung myself forward, using my core muscles to bring me up to my feet.

The victory was short-lived.

With a cry, Roxanne jumped on me, bringing me back down. I twisted, trying to get out from under her, but she straddled me, eyes wide with hatred. She smacked me across the face again.

"You fucked Tristan in this room, didn't you?" she screamed. "Didn't you?"

She clamped her fingers around my throat, using her body weight to push down, crushing my windpipe.

My eyes widened as I tried to pull in a breath, but nothing came to fill my lungs. Roxanne's face hovered inches from mine. "Stupid bitch," she hissed at me. "Tristan loves *me*. He'll understand once you're out of the picture."

Through my panic, I felt something press sharply against my arm. I twisted, trying to grab it. Roxanne shifted on top of me, making sure not to loosen her grip. A choking sound escaped my throat.

“That’s right,” Roxanne cooed. “Just give up. I want to see your life fade from your eyes.”

My fingers curled around a large shard of ceramic. Black spots appearing in my vision, I sawed at the duck tape, knowing I was cutting at my flesh as well as the tape.

Would it be enough? Could I free myself before losing consciousness?

Roxanne was saying something, but I could no longer focus on her. The world was slipping away fast, my lungs screaming for air.

Then, with a snap, my hands broke free.

Using the last of my strength, I wriggled an arm out from behind me and grabbed a fistful of her hair, pulling hard.

She screamed, releasing my throat so she could grasp my hand, trying to tear it away.

I sucked in a desperate gulp of air. The spots cleared from my vision. I used my other hand to punch her as hard as I could in the jaw. She screeched, using one hand to claw at my face, but I rolled and tugged her by the hair, toppling her over.

Now gaining the upper hand, I wasn’t about to lose it. I held my grip on her hair, and with my other hand punched her repeatedly in the face. My heart hammered in my ears as I panted, pounding my fist into her face over and over again. Her screams filled the air.

“Emalee!”

I paused, looking up at the doorway.

Tristan stood there, his eyes wide.

“Don’t just stand there, call the police!” I yelled at him.

He rushed to my side, pulling me off Roxanne. “They’re on their way,” he assured me. He whirled on Roxanne. “Who the *fuck* are you?”

Roxanne whimpered. Her nose and lip were bleeding. “You don’t remember me, Tristan?”

I watched as Tristan peered at her for a few moments. Recognition lit in his face. “Wait... were you the girl selling hot dogs?”

A slow smile crept up her face. She sat up, wiping the blood from her mouth. “You do remember me,” she said.

“I remember the hot dogs,” he said. “It was love at first sight.”

I couldn’t help it. I laughed. Tristan looked at me in confusion. Roxanne scowled at me before turning back to Tristan. “But you danced with me...”

“Honey, I was nearly black-out drunk,” Tristan said, shaking his head. “I don’t remember anything else.”

Roxanne screamed in frustration and leapt at him. He swatted away her hands that clawed at his face, managing to pin her arms at her sides.

Seconds later, Mia barged into the room, followed by Liam and Cory.

“Oh, my gosh. Emalee, are you alright?” Mia asked, taking in the scene of my bedroom.

Liam and another Covill employee wrestled Roxanne off Tristan, clasp ing her wrists in handcuffs.

I put a hand to my head. “I’ll live.”

After Tristan had cut away the duck tape from my legs and Roxanne was taken into custody, Tristan scooped me up in his arms. “I’m so sorry,” he muttered in my hair.

I rubbed at the back of my head, which still throbbed in pain. “Just... promise me you won’t flirt near psycho bitches,” I said with a small laugh.

Mia cleared her throat. “I’m afraid you two will have to leave the premises. This is a crime scene and will need to be handled accordingly.”

I nodded, and Tristan led me out of the apartment and down the stairs, where Cory was waiting. He gave me a tight hug. “Thank goodness we got to you in time,” he said.

Tristan set a gentle hand on my shoulder. “She’s a tough one. She handled herself.”

Cory glanced up at the apartment. “I’m guessing you’ll need to stay somewhere while they sort everything out up there,” he said.

I nodded.

Cory smiled. “You and Tristan can crash at my place until you’re ready to leave.”

Tristan gave him a one-armed hug. “Thanks, bro.”

Cory looked annoyed at the show of affection, but this time he didn’t shove him away. “Don’t mention it,” he said through tight lips.



## EPILOGUE

TRISTAN

“*N*o,” I said, shaking my head violently. “I won’t do it.”  
“Come *on*,” Emalee pleaded, brushing her honey hair out of her eyes. “I can’t take it by myself.”

“I will not take part in the most cliché tradition that has ever traditioned.”

Emalee gave me a pout. She’d learned my weakness shortly after we moved in together and used it to her advantage every moment she got. Her pout was fucking adorable.

I sighed, booping her on the nose. “Fine,” I said.

Her face lit in a smile. “Actually look like you’re having fun,” she commanded as I nestled in beside her, facing her camera.

“I *am* having fun,” I said, and kissed her on the cheek right as she took the selfie. She checked the photo and nearly squealed.

“It’s *perfect!*” she said. I scooted in to see.

Yep. With the Eiffel Tower stabbing the cloudless blue sky behind us, it was the kind of photo Instagram models would clamor over.

Emalee’s eyes glittered as she faced me. “Thank you,” she said sincerely, and pressed her lips against mine in a kiss.

It didn’t matter how many times she did it, every kiss from her was arousing. I tilted her back, my hands on her hips as I deepened the kiss. “I’m starving,” I told her after breaking away. “Where are the famous pastries?”

Emalee laughed. “I figured we’d follow our noses.”

I ruffled her hair. “I like your thinking, love.”

We walked hand in hand down the streets of Paris. “So I saw on Facebook today...” Emalee started.

“Oh, my gosh, what is it now? It’s not another cat song, is it?”

She grinned at me. “Noooo. Cory’s engaged.”

Of course she knew that before me. “Oh,” I said. “Congrats to him. That didn’t take long. Who’s the not-so-lucky girl?”

“Brittany,” she said. “His secretary.”

I had to bite back my laugh. Of course he wanted to marry his secretary – he wasn’t only marrying a woman, but his job along with it.

A lot had changed in a year. Emalee had left New York with me as soon as her injuries healed, and we went straight back to Colorado for some mind-blowing sex. The girl would try anything. It was fucking hot.

But more than that, she supported me. She didn’t push me to get a “real” job. She didn’t complain that I didn’t have a college degree.

And she loved traveling. I’d taken her with me all across the U.S., exploring the sights and sounds and tastes of food from the east to the west.

Afterwards I took her to Sydney, where I had connections. We were able to stay in a luxury condo rent-free for a couple of weeks while I uploaded more workout videos and she started up a blog.

Turns out, all that reading Emalee likes to do transferred over and she’s a natural at writing engaging blog posts. We’ve been able to monetize off the blog *and* my YouTube channel and travel wherever the hell we wanted.

Of course Paris was first on her list.

It was a special trip for me, too, because it marked a full year of being with one girl. I never thought in a million years I’d hit that mark. And it looked like it wasn’t going to end any time soon.

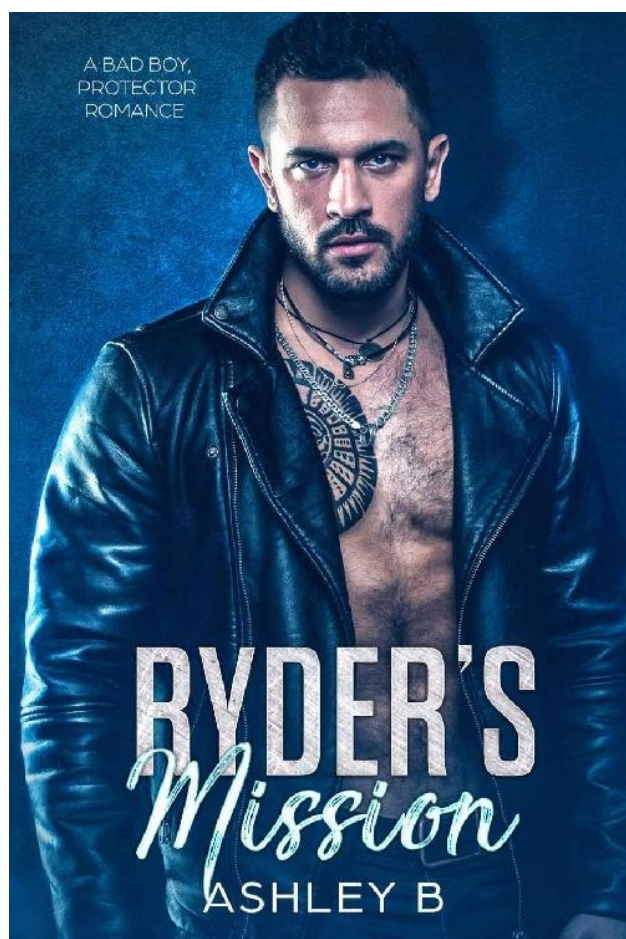
Emalee excitedly pulled my hand. “Ooo, let’s check this place out, it smells *amazing*,” she said.

Warm bread and fried meat hit my senses, and I gladly followed.

As we entered the restaurant and Emalee smiled up at me, I decided Paris wasn’t such a bad city after all.

**THE END**

## RYDER'S MISSION (PREVIEW)



## GABRIELLA

Whenever people asked me why I decided to follow in my mother's footsteps, my answer was always the same: because I had to. I wanted to be just like her, and I couldn't imagine doing anything else.

After all, my mother, Kalie Domino was a badass in every sense of the word. I would kill to be half the woman she was.

I couldn't help but smile as I watched her work, her desk phone pressed to her ear as she finished her conference call with Walter Covill. She'd worked with him for years, but he still insisted on meeting several times a week, even if he wasn't on-property.

"Walt, everything is fine," Mom assured him with a small smirk. "Will you just enjoy California? You haven't been out there in years, and I'm sure Liam is dying to show you the new office. Don't worry about us."

I smiled around the rim of my disposable coffee cup. I had never seen a more solid friendship than the one between my mother and her boss. They had a mutual respect and understanding that came from years of working together.

Mom hung up the phone with a slight roll of her eyes. "The man is across the country visiting his son *and* opening a new branch of Covill Security, and he's still asking how everything over *here* is running. I don't know how he does it."

"He doesn't sleep." I pointed out.

"That and he's obsessed," Mom said. Then, she leaned forward in her chair, all business. "I'm glad you came to see me."

"You're my boss. Did I really have a choice?" I teased before taking a sip of my coffee.

"Not really," Mom said with a proud smile.

"So spill it. What's going on?"

Mom shuffled a stack of papers in front of her. “We have an assignment. It’s delicate in nature—and dangerous.” She gave me a meaningful look. “More so than some of your other jobs.”

I smirked. “I can handle it.”

Mom ignored my comment. “Normally, we’d put together a team, but this job requires discretion.”

“Discretion is my middle name.”

“I’m being serious, Gabriella.”

I stuffed down my smile, resuming my professional demeanor. “What’s the assignment?”

“To protect a client who is turning state’s evidence against dangerous people,” Mom answered. She picked up her tablet. After tapping the screen a few times, she handed it to me. I put my coffee on the edge of her desk before taking the device from her. Several news articles took up the screen, all featuring one of the most prolific gangs in New York.

“The Bronxos crew has been growing over the last few years,” Mom explained, sitting back in her chair. “They started off small, only focusing on grand theft auto and holding up small banks, but they’ve moved up the ladder. Now, they control all drug trade coming in and out of the city. It’s suspected they launder cash in the millions. They’ve got several NYPD officials and politicians in their pockets.”

My gut twisted. Sometimes, I really hated people.

“They’re the big baddies,” I affirmed. “What about them?”

She took a deep breath before saying, “Our client is one of the key gang members.”

I pressed my lips together. “And we’re being hired to protect him?”

My mind jumped to all the terrible things he’d probably done in his life. I’d had my own run-ins with a gang member or two, and all of them were cocky, selfish bastards who liked to talk big. But when it came down to it, I could take them all out in a fight.

“He’s been trying to go straight,” Mom insisted, sensing my cold switch. “In exchange for immunity, he’s agreed to become an informant.”

I snorted. “Please. He got caught, and he didn’t want to go to jail. He’s not trying to go straight.” I looked again at the news articles which seemed to date all the way back to the early 80s. Drugs, theft, violence... the list went on. “How do the Feds know this isn’t a trap?”

“They don’t. That’s where you come in. They need someone to go undercover with their new informant.”

“Why not hire a cop or a detective?” I asked, handing back the tablet.

“As I said, the police force is compromised. They have a lot of moles. The Feds need someone unassociated with them who can still handle themselves.” She smiled at me. “Your file came up.”

I frowned. “Yeah, but in all those jobs, I was protecting the innocent from criminals. Not the other way around.”

Mom nodded her understanding. “I knew how you would feel about this, but, Gabriella, this is a huge opportunity for you.” She cleared her throat. “And for the company.”

There it was. “You want me to take the job because it’ll boost Covill’s reputation,” I said.

“It’ll establish our trustworthiness and that we are, in fact, the best in the business.” She reached for my hand and gave it a firm squeeze. “*You’re* the best in the business.”

It felt good to have her say it. With my mom being the senior partner, I had determined when I first started at Covill that no one would know of our familial relationship. I wanted to earn my way to the top, working through the ranks to earn the respect I deserved. If I turned down this job, I wouldn’t just be letting Mom down. I’d be letting myself—and my hard-earned reputation—fall by the wayside.

I sat up straight in my chair. “When do we start?”

“That’s my girl. Meet me in the conference room in ten minutes. We’re meeting with the client in twenty.” Mom stood and walked out of her office, giving my shoulder a small squeeze on her way.

I stared at her abandoned tablet for a moment before lifting it off the desk again. I opened it back up, flicking through the news stories, and swallowed against the metallic taste in my mouth.

They had assigned me to protect one of these jerks. I stared at a picture of a dark alley, bodies sprawled on the ground and yellow police tape wrapped around the scene. The murders had occurred in the Bronx where I’d grown up.

*That could have been me.* The thought came unbidden, and I pushed it away, dropping the tablet on the desk. With a deep breath, I glanced at my wristwatch.

I had time for a quick bathroom break before I had to meet my client.



I WAS SCRUBBING my hands with soap and water when the stall behind me opened, and it wasn’t until the woman who emerged was right beside me that I caught her face in the mirror.

My eyes widened. “Noelle?”

The tall, blonde federal agent beamed back at me, pumping soap into her hand. “Hey there, stranger.”

I was about to ask what she was doing there when all the dots aligned. “Oh, my gosh,” I said, ripping several paper towels from the dispenser. “You’re handling my case. You’re here with the client.”

Noelle Kane nodded as she shut the water off. I handed her a fistful of fresh paper towels. “Obviously, I put a good word in for you,” she said with a smirk. “You really saved my ass a few years ago.”

“I’ll say,” I teased. “You backed yourself into a tight corner.”

Agent Kane winked. “Your assistance with that case landed you this job. With the way money and power have swayed the criminal justice system...” She shook her head, glancing at the ceiling as if suspecting hidden cameras. “We shouldn’t discuss it here. But when this case opened, you were the first to pop into my head.”

“What, to protect some criminal?” I asked dryly.

“It’s a means to an end.” She tossed her used paper towels into the trash and fumbled around inside her purse. “How’ve you been? You’re not still with Nick, are you?”

“Oh, gosh, no,” I said, with a dismissive wave of my hand. “That didn’t last long at all.”

Noelle pulled a tube of rose-tinted lipstick out of her purse and leaned toward the mirror to apply it. “Why not?” she asked. “He was a nice guy.”

“Too nice,” I countered. “The guy had a spine like jello.”

Noelle laughed, capping her lipstick and dropping it back into her purse. “Maybe you should have let him take charge once in a while.”

I shrugged. “Either I find a man who can handle me, or I die alone.”

“Ouch,” Noelle said, giving herself one last look over in the mirror. “Harsh. Ready to meet our client?” She led the way to the door, giving me another wink as she pushed it open. “He’s quite the looker.”

I rolled my eyes, and we walked together to the conference room. Mom was already there, exchanging light chit-chat with the client, whose back was to us.

When our heels clicked toward the long table, he turned.

I nearly tripped forward.

He could’ve made it big in Hollywood with that face. Perfectly styled brown hair, a chiseled jawline, full lips curled into a wicked smile... he could have put those Greek statues to shame.

But the most striking thing about him was his eyes. Their blue-gray hue starkly contrasted with his olive skin. They flicked up and down Noelle’s body

before they wandered to me. He froze.

I wobbled into my seat next to Mom. The thermostat must have stopped working—it had to be at least eighty degrees in here.

Noelle took a seat next to the client, graceful as always. “Sorry we’re late,” she apologized.

A slow smile crept up the client’s lips, his eyes still fixed on me. “Worth the wait,” he said. His voice sounded like something out of a porno.

I gulped, trying to wet my dry throat, and mentally shook myself. This man was a criminal—and most likely preyed on women who got sucked in by his obscene good looks like I just had.

The thought made my heated body cool, and I stuck my hand out to him. “Gabriella Domino.”

He took it in a firm handshake. I tried to ignore the shock of attraction that rushed through my fingertips to my brain. *Get a grip, Gabriella*, I thought to myself, gritting my teeth.

“Ryder Canmore,” he returned in a lazy drawl. “A pleasure.”

I dropped his hand as soon as he loosened his grip and wiped my sweaty palms on my pencil skirt.

“Now that we’re all here, we need to get down to business,” Noelle said, removing a thick folder from her briefcase. She looked toward Mom. “I assume you have all the details of the case?”

“I do,” Mom confirmed. “And I can say, with the utmost confidence, we can handle this.”

“Of that, I have no doubt,” Noelle said with a smile in my direction. “Gabriella packs quite a punch.”

I tried not to let my pride show, but I couldn’t resist a broad smile. “Thank you.”

“That being said, I wouldn’t be doing my job if I didn’t stress the seriousness of our situation,” she went on. “My client’s safety should be our number one priority.”

I frowned at that. Noelle had just told me in the restroom protecting him was a means to an end. There was a bigger picture here.

I risked a glance at Ryder.

And instantly regretted it.

His eyes were still on me, his chin resting on his hand, his thumb running along his bottom lip. I could imagine how those lips would feel pressing along the base of my neck...

I looked away. If I couldn’t get myself under control, I would need a cold shower tonight.



I tried to refocus my mind. Of course Noelle would say he was our top priority. Without him, the entire operation would be impossible.

“Ahem,” Ryder spoke up, his hand gesturing to me. “And this... *this* is the partner you’re assigning me? My personal undercover bodyguard?”

Noelle nodded, her lips in a tight line. “Is anything the matter?”

His eyes locked on mine. He was trying to assert dominance. I stared back, feeling a frown tug at the corners of my mouth.

“No,” he said with a small laugh. Somehow, I found it condescending. He leaned forward. “No, I just think we should have stopped by the elementary school on the way up here and picked up a first-grade teacher. She’d be just as capable, I’m sure.” He gave me a subtle wink.

I felt my blood grow hot. Mom tensed next to me. But if there was anything I’d learned from years of meditation, it was to channel my anger. I forced myself to calm down, to reassess the situation.

“I can assure you, Mr. Canmore, you’re in the safest of hands,” I assured him with a humorless smile. “It’s either me or prison bars.”

He smirked, unphased by my confidence. “Oh, I’d love to be in your hands, baby doll.”

Mom cleared her throat next to me. “Watch yourself, Mr. Canmore.”

He feigned innocence. “Only testing the waters, Ms. Domino. I want to know who I’m dealing with here.” He threw me a pointed stare. “And if she can keep cool under pressure.”

I forced myself not to react. “Well? Did I pass?”

Another wink.

“Well,” Noelle said. “Let’s discuss legal paperwork, shall we?”

She and Mom busied themselves with the practicalities while Ryder and I stared at each other, neither one backing down.

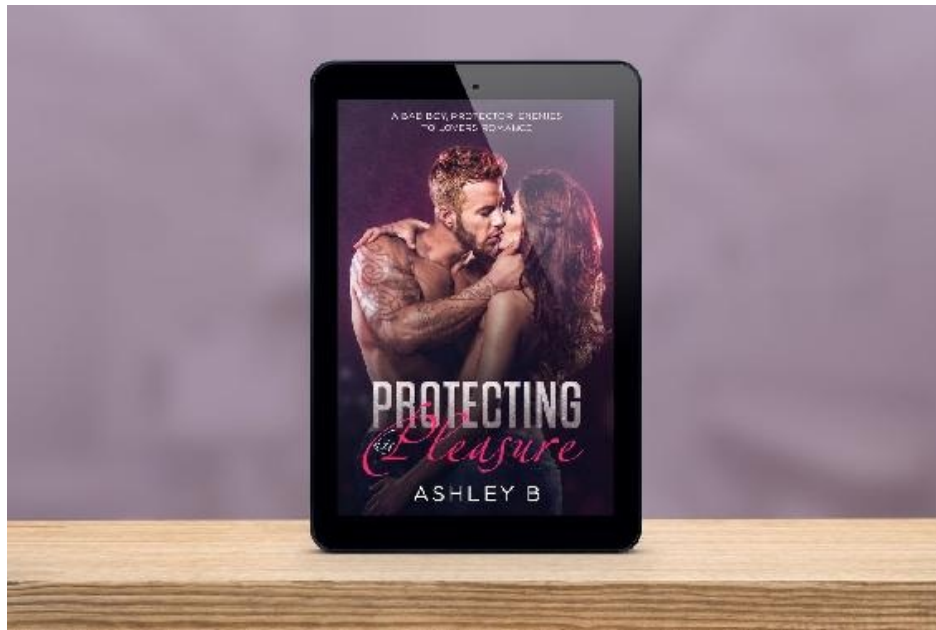
He was going to be difficult to work with. Ruthless, reckless, untrustworthy... this had all the makings of a disastrous partnership.

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