



RED AND WOLFE: PART THREE

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An Erotic Fairytale

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CHAPTER ONE

RED

A few seconds ago, I was breathless with excitement, but as I hear footsteps coming up the stairs that wind around the tree, I feel almost sick.

Race is “W.”

What will he say when he finds out I know?

As I stand frozen in the little wooden tree house, all the hims converge inside my mind: the pushy bastard who manipulated me, the sex god who made me lose my mind, the savior who pulled me from the ocean, the smooth-talker who rubbed shampoo into my tangled hair, and now the artist—my favorite living artist: the mysterious “W.”

“W.” is anonymous. Since he started putting out his wildly popular oil paintings five or so years ago, guessing at his identity has been an international pastime. No one knows *anything* about him. Because he wants it that way.

Suddenly I just can’t stand to be the ruin of his carefully kept secret.

The clomping footsteps grow louder. I step toward the painting, thinking of hurling it into the space above the tree house’s short walls and below its low roof.

Then he’ll think I stole it.

Shit!

I look around the tree house. It’s just a small, wood box, no larger than a good-sized walk-in closet. Three of its four short walls are lined with a wrap-around wood bench. I see the shadows flicker over in the direction of the stairs and I make a split-second decision.

I dive under the bench in one corner of the tree house. I press my back against the wooden wall as tightly as I can and tuck my knees up to my chin. I hold my breath and one big, leather boot steps onto the floor, and then another. My gaze rolls up his muscled legs, clad in beat-up jeans. There’s a hole in the thigh, only a few inches from his crotch. At least I think there is; it’s pretty dark in here, so maybe it’s just a trick of the moonlight streaming through the space between the roof and the half-walls, and my pervy imagination.

I clench my jaw, hoping he’ll think the tree house is empty and go look for me elsewhere.

Instead, his big feet step in a circular motion. My heart races. If he finds me here, he might not want me to stick around. In fact, he probably won’t. I’m surprised at the feeling of loss that accompanies that thought.

Clomp.

Clomp.

Hell yes. He’s turning back toward the stairs!

And then the phone I’m clutching starts trumpeting the *Star Wars* theme song. I try

desperately to hit the button that will silence the damn thing, but my fingers aren't fast enough.

His feet move quickly in another semi-circle, and when he stops, they're pointed at me. His face appears in front of mine a second later.

"Red?"

Emotion flickers through his handsome features, but I can't see clearly enough to discern which one. I'm looking into his eyes when his hands close around my forearms and he pulls me to my feet.

Moonlight spills over his face, and I'm struck anew by how hot he is. I want to twine my arms around his neck and press my breasts against his broad, bare chest. I want to run my palm over the sexy stubble on his cheeks. I want to bite that chin and kiss those lips and press my forehead against his.

My eyes cling to his face, because I'm nervously awaiting his reaction to me here, but he shifts his weight and shadows obscure it. I realize I'm still holding my phone. I hold it up with the screen facing out so I can see him.

When he tugs me to his chest, I'm momentarily stunned. His fingers skate up my forearms and over my elbows, then curl around my biceps. He crawls his hands up my shoulders where his fingers stroke my neck. His touch is whisper-light and gentle, but I can feel the tension in his hand.

"What the fuck are you doing up here, Red?"

My phone belts the Star Wars theme again, and his fingers wrest it from mine. He frowns down at it. "What's this?"

"A cell phone."

His frown deepens. "I know that."

"Oh." I'm so nervous I'm getting kind of dumb. "I, uh, didn't have service, so I came up here to call my friend."

The little screen lights up his face, revealing the lines of tension around his mouth, the hard-set jaw. His eyes bore into mine. "You gonna answer it?"

I can tell what he wants me to say. "I'll call her back in a few."

He turns the phone off. I hold out my hand, but he's already set it the bench behind him.

He turns back toward me. The clouds scoot out of the moon's way again, and pearly light illuminates his features. His eyes flicker from me to the canvas and back to me. Then he reaches through the darkness between us and cups my face with his warm hands. "Tell me the truth, Red. Did you tell her anything you shouldn't have?"

"My friend? No." I shake my head. "I haven't even talked to her yet."

His eyes are intense, but the rest of his face has softened. It's a strange contrast, one that feels even stranger when he puts his hands on my shoulders, and in a casual-sounding tone says,

“Did you see my painting?”

He keeps his face neutral, as if my answer doesn’t matter, but heat burns my neck and cheeks because I know it does.

His hands on my shoulders seem to weigh a hundred pounds. I watch the tanned skin of his throat as his pulse pumps underneath it. Then I raise my eyes to his.

“I did,” I whisper.

The skin around his left eye trembles—as if it wants to twitch and he won’t let it.

“Well,” he says evenly, “what do you think?”

I debate my answer for only an instant before I decide to end our little game. “It was amazing. I can’t believe you’re him!”

His brows narrow. “Him?”

“Race, I saw the ‘W.’—and I know your work. Until just a few months ago I worked as an art critic. Did you know that?” In the surreality of the moment I can’t remember if I told him. “But you probably knew. You knew I was a fan.” I gulp a breath in. “Did you know?”

The shock of his identity hits me anew and I grab his solid forearm. “Is that why you wanted this island so much? Because it’s where you do your painting? Race, I want to hear your story. I won’t ever tell, I promise. I’m a very—”

“Quiet.”

He takes my hand in his and, with that black gaze boring into mine, drags my palm down to his jeans-clad hip. Hypnotic eyes hold mine as he tugs my hand slowly lower, to where the denim rises to form his fly.

I hold my fingers straight, my palm pressed flat, tingling with anticipation.

“Lower,” he murmurs.

I slide my palm a lower and begin to feel the bulge of him.

A rumbling noise comes from his throat and his hands find my breasts, fondling as I cup my fingers under him, then curl them just a little, so I’m cradling the weight of him in my palm—or trying to. He’s so big, my hand can’t hold all of him.

I fumble with his fly, desperate to get my hand inside his jeans, get my fingers around his cock.

“What a dirty girl you are.”

He rocks himself against me and his erection takes full form. It’s long and thick—delicious—and my greedy fingers flail against his jeans.

He laughs, a wicked sound that makes my clit hum.

“I don’t want to talk about art, Red. I don’t want to hear you talk about it, either. What I want is for you to suck my dick.”

He rubs my shoulder with one hand and teases my nipple with the other. “That’s why you’re

here, remember? That's why I invited you to stay—so you could be my little fuck doll. Take my dick deep in your throat, then let me eat that sweet pussy. In fact, I'm hungry now."

He pushes me forward until the bench hits the back of my knees and I fall onto it.

"You will let me eat your pussy. You will come when I tell you to. Do you understand?"

I nod. My stomach clenches at the bossy way he's talking to me, but I can't deny it gets me hot. Knowing that he's "W."? Icing on the cake. I'm so wet.

My hand rubs his cock through his jeans as he lowers me, back first, onto the bench. The wood is hard and cool through my pink cotton shirt and black shorts, but the sensation barely registers. He's leaning over me, lifting my ass up off so he can yank my shorts off, and I can see his long, thick cock strain at his jeans. He jerks my shorts down, and I do a half sit-up, straining my abs so I can reach for his dick.

"God, I want to touch you."

He chuckles and tosses my shorts over his shoulder.

I tug at his jeans again and he drops them.

He's naked underneath. The moonlight gleams off his cock like sword. I spread my legs for its invasion, and fingers plunge into me instead.

"God." He's got two fingers in me, and he's spreading them out so I feel full, full, full.

"Race!" I lift my hips. I feel him part my ass cheeks and I pant as he strokes a finger over my asshole.

I gyrate on the bench. Do I move forward or back? "Jesus." I want him in both ends.

He slips his pinkie into my ass and I gasp. My pussy clenches around his fingers. I feel so good.

He presses his dick against my thigh and I want it inside me. The two fingers in my pussy and the pinkie in my ass are driving me insane, but all I can think about is that beautiful dick of his. I squeeze my eyes shut and imagine opening my mouth wide to take it down my throat. This was never a fantasy of mine before, but with him, I want it. Maybe because his cock is so perfect.

He wriggles his fingers, finding my g-spot, then licks my pussy with slow, expert precision.

He licks me up and down twice more, and I pant harder.

"Not yet," he warns.

I'm shocked when he slides his fingers out of my cunt, out of my ass. He turns me over and I can feel him leaning over me as he parts my ass cheeks.

"Race..."

"I want to taste this fine ham." He slaps my ass. "I need to make sure it's tender first."

He slaps me again, and then his rough hand glides up my inner thigh, and his fingertips find my slick clit. He tweaks it, and I gasp in pain-pleasure.

He rubs a wet circle around it, dipping into my pussy then dragging his finger back up as his

palm smacks one of my ass cheeks.

“You know what that was for?”

“No,” I whisper.

“Seeing things you’re not supposed to see.”

Two fingers frame my throbbing clit, pressing on it so a burst of pain shoots through me. At least I think it’s pain until it explodes like pleasure. I suck back a breath.

He smacks my ass again—the sound of it bouncing off the treehouse walls.

“You know what that one was for?”

I shake my head.

“Going places that you’re not supposed to go.”

He spanks me again. “Just because,” he rumbles. “Now I’m going to punish you. I’ll make the punishment fit the crime. I want to see what you don’t want *me* to see,” he says, parting my ass cheeks. “Have you ever had your asshole eaten, Red?”

I try to wriggle away from him, because of course I haven’t, but he grabs the back of my thigh and pulls me back to my spot on the bench.

“You’re going to love my tongue in your asshole.” He licks around it and my legs tremble with surprising pleasure. “You might call this an invasion of your personal space.”

Again, he licks me there while his fingers find my clit. I gasp.

It’s too much, almost too much out of my comfort zone to be enjoyable. His tongue might even be plunging inside now. But I’m gasping. Thrusting my ass into his face because what he’s doing there is making my pussy ache with need.

He licks circles around my asshole. His fingers slide into my pussy, then he drags them out, painting my sensitive lips and my throbbing clit with my own wetness.

He drags his fingers past my taint and circles around my asshole, spreading the wetness there as well.

I realize what he’s doing only a second before the head of him is pressed against my backdoor.

“Relax.” I feel his cock move and there’s a finger pushing in. He’s saying, “focus on my finger. Press against it.” I do, and his finger slides inside.

The sensation is shocking. Wonderful. Consuming. I rock against him.

“I feel drunk,” I whisper.

“Drunk on me.”

A few more strokes in and out of my ass, while his fingers pump my pussy, and I’m shattering apart, shouting his name.

“That’s the only name you know me by, fuck doll. That’s all I am to you. Just Race.” And I know just what he means. He’s telling me not to mention the painting or “W” again.

He turns me over on my back, lifts my legs over his shoulders so my ass is in air, and plows into my dripping cunt.

“I’m your new God, Red. Now I want you to close your eyes and let your pussy worship me.”

I can feel his length push into me deliciously. I’m so full I grip his shoulders and neck with my legs. I grunt and groan, wanting so much to take all of him. My fingernails dig into the hardness of his thigh.

With my body in the air and my head on the bench, I’m feeling dizzy. Every time he pounds me, I slide forward on the bench.

His finger pumps into my ass.

I pant and writhe. Then he turns me over, presses his dick against my asshole again, and pulls my cheeks apart.

“While you’re on this island, I own you.”

And then he shoves himself inside me.

I see stars. When I find my voice, I scream, so loud I swear I think it echoes, until the screams become guttural groans.

I can’t breathe, can’t think, can only make animal noises as his huge dick invades me, stinging, stretching, filling me so much I think I’ll come apart.

My cunt lights up every time he plows into me, almost as if he’s fucking it instead. My clit throbs. As my body falls forward, is pulled back, falls forward; as I push against his cock so he can fill me deeper, my clit is flashing like Christmas lights. But it’s a minor detail. Everything is secondary to the fire storm of his cock splitting me wide.

I feel his hand on my belly, pushing my back against his chest. His fingers dip down, gliding gently over my clit.

“Now. Come.”

And that’s all it takes.

I come so hard I think I black out.

When I open my eyes again, I’m sore and hollowed out by pleasure.

I lie there glittering in the sheen of my bliss, hating him as he pulls his pants up and grabs the canvas and my phone.

He leaves without a glance at me, which hurts my feelings and my pride. So why am I already hungry to be taken just like that again?

CHAPTER TWO

RED

I'm surprisingly sore when I move off my stomach and reach down to tug my pants back on. My ass is tender and my pussy is still slick and puffy. I'm a little surprised to find my hands and legs are shaking. Why is that? Because the afterglow's still here? Or is it something more?

Maybe it bothers me how fast I let him get me on my back and get his fingers into me. I let him put his cock in my ass! There was a moment where I had a choice: to clench around him or to push into the mind-bending sensation. I went with it. Why?

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't turned on by the painting. I've always been a bit of a star fucker, and to an art geek like me, "W." is a major star.

I smooth my shorts over my thighs and wonder if there's something wrong with me. Don't get me wrong: I'm no stranger to kinky sex, but it's different with Race. It's like I give him full control over me. It's like he hypnotizes me. Were there any limits with him tonight? Any walls I left up?

Damn. I let him fuck me in the ass. And I *liked* it.

I look down at my shirt, which, surprisingly, was never removed, and then I look around. My phone! Where is my phone? Oh yeah. He grabbed it. I was still in my post-fucked haze, and I didn't even make a move to stop him.

What a domineering motherfucker. Who does he think he is?

He took the painting, too.

Maybe he was worried I'd photograph it and send it to all my friends.

I look out the 'window' space between the half-wall of the tree house and the low-slung roof. The clouds must be covering the moon, because everything is dark. The forest around me sways and shadows flicker. In front of me is Gertrude's back yard. I can see the outline of her little flower garden, but not well. I have to squint to make out flowers.

I should probably climb down the stairs and find Race. Get my phone. I haven't called Katie back, and that makes me a terrible friend.

Still, I prop my elbows on top of the little half-wall and take a few deep breaths. Do I want to find Race? I wish I could make him come to me, but he's got my phone. I think about the way he left me. I'm trying to wrangle up a stronger feeling than insulted irritation, but I'm just too tired. That, and I think I know why he made such a speedy exit.

Dude clearly has issues with being 'found out.'

I take my time going down the stairs that wrap around the tree. The leaves and moss rustle in a gentle breeze that feels somehow wrong, given the way the last day of my life has gone. It should be storming. There should be a hurricane.

I step onto the warm grass with my bare feet, because when I stepped out of Race's cabin, I thought I was going to call Katie from the porch or somewhere equally nearby. I wander through the trees for a few minutes, looking for the pebbly trail between the two houses. I feel a renewed burst of concern for Katie. She's clearly okay, because she's calling me herself, but what if something happened to one of our mutual friends?

I think it will take at least five minutes to walk to Race's cabin—maybe more like ten. When I walked from his place to here, I was paying more attention to my cell phone signal than the time.

I notice the time now, because I feel sore everywhere. When I tense my leg muscles to avoid sticks and other pointy things in the pebble path, my calves and thighs feel shaky. How can I feel this way just from fucking?

Because he was amazing.

He pushed me, but I liked it.

And what now, I wonder as I walk. When I get him to actually talk about being "W.," what will I find out? I'm already gearing up to hear the mystery solved. If he tells me. I wonder if Gertrude knew.

Gertrude!

Hello, Red!

I'll go to Gertrude's house. Grab some shoes and use her phone, then go to Race's. Make him wait on me a while.

I turn around and scamper down the path back toward the tree house, which sits at the back edge of Gertrude's yard. The moonlight is back, swirling through the leaves and limbs, and now the pebbles look like pearls. I allow myself a minute or two of giddiness. I'm somewhere beautiful, with a beautiful, intriguing man who happens to be a wonderful artist. I know it's only temporary, but for the first time in a while, I truly can't imagine wanting to be anywhere else. Bonus points: I'm probably going to get some money out of this. Now that I know Race is "W.," there's no way I won't be sure he gets the island.

I walk below the treehouse, looking up. I smile a little, because he's right. I am a fuck doll.

I walk through Gertrude's garden, nothing but a smear of textures and colors, dancing in the breeze that blows across the point; everything is bathed in moonglow.

I'm relieved to find the back door unlocked. I walk through the sunroom, where two gray cats are curled up next to each other on the rug. I pass through the kitchen, where an orange cat sits on the counter, bathing its paws with its little cat tongue. A clock ticks somewhere. Inside the laundry room I walk past, a night light glows pale blue. I inhale deeply of the house's musty smell. I might not have known her, but she was my flesh and blood. I feel a pang wondering what this smell might mean to me if I'd spent any time here.

She could have made me so much less alone.

I smirk as I step into her office. Funny how things work. I'm here; she's not; but I am definitely less alone.

The office is dark, but light spills through the doorway, coming from the kitchen, where a lamp was on. I sit in her creaky office chair and stare at her desk. I push a newspaper aside and there's her landline.

Katie, be okay.

Everyone else I know, be okay.

I pick up the phone and hold it to my ear. The dial tone takes me by surprise; I haven't had my own land line in years.

I inhale deeply. Exhale.

I dial Katie's number and grit my teeth, awash in panic.

It's not just this moment. I feel like this a lot. I guess I have an anxiety problem. I think it started as perfectionism when I was really young, but as I've gotten older—and since I lost Mom—it's gotten more intense. I never feel secure. I never feel completely happy. I had a loose grip on something resembling contentment before Carl left, but I'm beginning to wonder if that was all for show. A show I put on for myself.

Just try to live how other people live.

What's good enough for them should be enough for you.

Boyfriend, good job. Later, house and kids.

I bite my lip until I taste blood, and quickly dial Katie.

If she's dead or injured...I don't know.

I tap my foot against the floor, hearing the thump of my bare sole against the sheet of plastic carpet protector under my—Gertrude's—rolling chair.

The phone rings once.

Then twice.

Three times.

Shit! Where is she?

I'm licking my bloody lip, wondering if fucking Race again would calm my frazzled mind, when I realize: I could call my own cell phone's voicemail. I didn't set it up yet, but most passwords are 1-2-3-4, or the last four digits of your phone number. I try the last four digits of my phone number and am greeted with a notification that I have sixteen messages.

My heart constricts.

I punch '1' to hear the first one.

Katie's voice greets me. I slump back in the chair.

“Red, you've got to call me back. I'm like...freaking out. That picture that you sent, the one

of the guy who works for your grandma? Red, you're gonna think I've lost my mind but...that's James Wolfe."

*

WOLFE

I don't turn Red's phone on to verify what she told me. She said she hadn't spoken to her friend yet, and I want to believe her.

I can count on one hand the number of people who know for sure I'm "W." My cousin, who doubles as my manager. That's it. The other was Trudie, who took my secret with her. Someone else guessed: Dominique, a 9-year-old girl I tutored in Madrid, around the time I first started using "W." for my signature. I got an e-mail from her last year—she's 14 now, a talented young artist—asking if I was "W." I thanked her for the compliment and told her "no."

I thought no one else would ever find me out, but clearly that was foolish. The only way to keep my identity ironclad is to never leave the island, and even if I hadn't had a need to fetch Red in order to gain ownership of this place, I'm not strong enough to stay by myself forever. I get too restless. Too fucking horny.

I tell myself, as I tromp through the woods toward my place, that this is something I can manage. What I did with Red just now and how I did it was deliberate. I've been too soft with her so far. Too open with her. I seem to've forgotten everything from my life as a dom back in New York. I trained more than a dozen subs before Cookie, and I sure as shit didn't do it by being their friend.

Unfortunately, something about Red inspires the protective alpha in me—a problem I need to get over. Step one: fuck her silly, leave her cold. It's a reasonable enough strategy in dom land, but in this case, I'm lying to myself.

That's not why I left her.

I ran.

Because I was scared.

Because I hate it that she knows one of my secrets.

If Red tells anyone who "W." is, it's the beginning of my end.

I have one of the most recognizable faces in the country. I can only assume the reason Red doesn't know I'm me is I'm in a place she'd never think of finding me. It doesn't hurt that I've traded the shaggy hair and clean shave I wore in my youth for a shorter cut and a light beard. My skin is dark, thanks to all the sun. I'm leaner. Harder. Wiser.

But none of this would stand up to scrutiny of obsessive "W." fans. If any of "W."s ardent

supporters also owned televisions during the year of my trial, they'd recognize me pretty fast.

It would be a domino effect, one I've invested everything I have in avoiding. It starts with someone finding out I'm "W." *Check*. Next step: Word spreads, and a picture of me leaks, or gawkers flock to the island and someone gets a glimpse of me. My solitude is gone. There's that. But it's not nearly as shitty as what happens when someone notices that "W." looks a lot like James Wolfe.

The way my art is viewed will change forever.

No one will want it anymore. Or everyone will want it, for the wrong reasons. Critics will find a killer's mind in every cloudless sky. The forest here becomes my psyche, tangled with the voices that drove me to murder my wife. The vast ocean: psychopathic emptiness.

If Red squeals, and it leads to people finding out "W." is also James Wolfe, I'm out of options. I can't change my name from "W." and keep painting. People would recognize my style.

But even if people did know who I really am, I can't give up my work.

It's all I have.

I swing my left arm out in front of me. I'm clutching the tattered remnants of the canvas where I painted her. My right hand grips her phone like it's the Holy Grail. I'm edgy as hell and craving a drink—something I haven't felt in a couple of years. A warning sign, since I've had alcohol issues since my teenage years.

I look up at the sky through the swaying pines. It's bathed in a waxy glow, and something about the particular shape of the moon and the way the clouds float over it reminds me of another night when I was feeling lost like this. I make a conscious effort not to go back there, to Paige's house.

Instead, I have a fleeting memory of the first time I turned Cookie over and pushed my dick into her pretty little ass.

I remember how sticky her face was after that first sobbing fit. The way I washed it with a bath towel. I should have known then, just a few weeks into our open marriage of convenience, that I was in over my head.

I remember the look in her eyes as she told me why she'd had such an intense reaction. The memory of the secret she told me makes my chest feel tight. Before I can think too hard about it, I bend down, pick up a broken limb, and whack the pines I pass by. I can't think of Cookie.

I try to think of Red, and that helps some. But, now awoken, the ghosts inside my mind are out to play.

They whisper: *'You killed her.'*

And it's not untrue. I've never been able to convince myself that it's untrue.

What I did after she told me about her sick fuck father is what cost us everything.

Not you, Jimmy.

It didn't cost you anything.

It cost Cookie her life.

I sprint the rest of the way home and toss my crumpled canvas into the compost pile before I open up the box under my bed and start preparing my room.

When Red turns up, I'm going to enjoy her.

Tomorrow, I'll have a non-disclosure agreement delivered and her paid off and discarded before she finds out anything else about me.

CHAPTER THREE

RED

Is Katie right about Race? I can't decide, so I let my intuition do it for me via my bare feet. I leave Gertrude's cottage in a post-sex, post-shock stupor, feeling like an escapee from a mental ward.

Race looks like James Wolfe.

Katie says he does.

Does he really?

Maybe yes. Or maybe no. I don't have an eye for faces. I never have. Names—now those I remember. Phone numbers—gravy. But if someone I know well changes their hair or gains a bunch of weight, it throws me off.

"He's leaner now," she told me. "Not quite as cut as he was during the trial. His spokespeople used to say he worked out twice a day to keep busy during house arrest," she told me. "But Red, look at his face. Look at his skin. How dark it is. If your Race is James, his mother is from Spain. Have you seen him much up close? Does he have those dark brown—almost black—eyes, with the long, girl eyelashes? It looks like he's got his hair short. Was that a beard?"

"He's got a light beard," I said.

"That's him. That's frecking him, Red. I watched him in that courtroom too much not to know. You need to get away from there!"

I told—well, I didn't tell her outright—I *misled* Katie into thinking Gertrude has other staff here. Apparently word of her death has finally gotten out, and, that considered, Katie went on and on about how I should leave the island right now.

I didn't tell her the whole story. Didn't tell her that my "Race" manipulated me into coming to Charleston, that he deposited and withdrew money from my account like it was nothing, that he reminded me of someone in finance (Wolfe's father was the president of NASDAQ, and James himself managed hedge funds).

I couldn't tell her about any of the crazy things I've done with him. How he pulled me from the sea and washed my hair. How I've already gotten far closer to him than I've ever been to anyone.

And I let him put his cock in my ass.

Katie wouldn't understand. Maybe no one would, but definitely not Katie. She'd worry herself sick.

I didn't tell her that he took my phone.

I didn't tell her about "W."

We agreed I'd call her again tomorrow. She conned me into agreeing to let her share the

photo I text'd with an old co-worker from the *New York Times*—a cousin of the father of Wolfe's deceased wife, Cookie. Apparently her father is former Secretary of State Robert Smythson—a detail I'd missed before.

"Cookie's family would know James Wolfe anywhere. They hate his guts," Katie said.

As I walk through the thick, ankle-length grass around Gertrude's cottage, I try to remember what I saw the night I watched the Wolfe documentary. I was drinking, so not much sticks out. But I do remember something about his wife, and their sex life. I want to say he testified that they had an open marriage. Both of them were having sex with other people, and the only reason they married anyway was because she—Cookie (what a crazy name)—needed to be married to inherit the Smythson fortune.

I'm pretty sure I remember someone interviewed saying Wolfe—"Jimmy," she called him—and Cookie were childhood friends. I have a vague sense that he was older than her, but what I remember for sure is that the friend said a few months before the murders, Cookie had told her Jimmy had fallen in love with her.

Jimmy Wolfe fell in love with his wife, but she was fucking someone else. And so he killed them both.

I stop in the grass, just over the rocks I climbed down earlier today. They're covered with sea foam and splattered by saltwater. They glisten in the moonlight like giant gemstones.

I stand still, listening to the ocean crashing against the rocks. I stand there, feeling my heart beat.

I'm not sure why I stopped. I sway with the salty breeze.

And then it hits me: one of the few details I remember from nearer to the end of the documentary. One of the few details I remember because it struck me as particularly awful: The police said the night of the murder, Cookie had been forced into anal sex.

I draw my hands up to my face and press my fingertips against my skin. I lick my lips. I look around, though I'm not sure for what.

Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.

He saved me today, I argue with myself.

Then he fucked me. He fucked me like an animal. Like a fiend. He fucked me so hard, I'll never forget it. So hard I'm still reeling, willing to put myself in danger for another taste of his cock.

Whoever he is, Race ruined me.

Reeled me in and got his barbs in me.

I'll never be the same.

If he's a killer, he's still hot as hell.

That kind of warped reaction he evokes in me is why I have to go.

I turn and run across the yard, pointed toward the south side of the island, where I think we left the boat.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOLFE

Two hours after I pillaged Red's tight bud and left her belly down on a bench in the tree stand, I'm stalking through the forest, feeling like an ass. While I called my cousin Bob to work on getting a NDA whipped up, then prepped my room for a night of pleasuring my former landlord's fair granddaughter, she was...what?

Falling down the stairs?

Getting carried out to sea?

It's not possible she left, is it? There's only one boat here, and I've got the key to the steering console in my pocket.

I duck under a veil of moss and rub a hand over my head. She's probably pissed off. Maybe it was a mistake leaving her there.

Hell, I guess it was.

I'm probably a bastard for fucking her the way I did. Woman throws off sub vibes like I've never felt before, from anyone, but she also seems...breakable.

Should I be pushing her "on" button just because I can?

It doesn't matter.

I'm not going to stop.

Not as long as she's here.

I can't help myself.

The others, in the past—they sought me out. Two of them, I dommed in club settings where things were regulated. The others came to my place, to the home I would later share with Cookie. One of them, I fucked while I was married to Cookie, but that girl—Sharee—Cookie found on my behalf. Because she knew we'd never satisfy each other and was willing to admit it before I was. We took turns dominating her.

I'm getting closer to Trudie's house, where the tree stand sits at the edge of her yard. My chest starts feeling tight. I have the impulse to shout Red's name. The notion of waiting until I climb the stairs around the tree to find out if she's okay is one that drives me mad. I wonder what the odds are that she's still there.

I was caught up in myself. So caught up in my anger that she'd seen the painting. I wanted to make her feel dominated. Make her feel used, even. I wanted her to know that I'm in charge. And why is that?

Because I hate her knowing even part of who I am. Because now that she does, part of me sees her as a threat.

Considering this, was I too rough with her?

“RED!” I start to jog, jumping fallen logs and saplings, lengthening my strides until I can see the tree stand I built, one of a few around the island that I made for painting.

I call her name once more, twice more, as I hurry to the stairs.

Maybe I wasn't as rough as I think. She got off, didn't she? Fuck yeah she got off.

I take the stairs two at a time, bursting through the doorway like a motherfucking one-man army. When I don't see her on the bench, I look under it. Nothing.

Shit.

Back down the stairs, moving faster now. What the fuck is wrong with me? All I had to do was carry her back. She should be tied to my bed right now, ready for a night of fun.

I stalk toward Trudie's house. She's probably here. She's probably upset and hiding out. The annoying memory of her cat allergy tugs at something in my gut, but I push it aside.

She's gonna be here.

When I find her I'll haul her back to my place, tie her up. It's true—she's not my sub; it's true—she seems fragile—so I'll make it good for her. I can be the best she's ever had.

I open the back door. “Red?”

I hear something in one of the rooms past the little den and cold fear grips me. The sensation of being too late... Of having not known where my woman was. Of not being there to protect her. I tell myself that's crazy. There's no one here but me—and her, I hope.

Through the kitchen, through the dinning room, past the wash room, to the office. Nothing. Fucking nothing. I roll through the rest of the cottage like a storm and then I'm running to the rocks.

Please...

Please.

I climb halfway down. Sweat is pouring down my neck and chest. I stop on one of the rocks and try to listen. After a minute convincing myself the howling wind is not a cry for help, I go back up and check two other tree stands, both on the far side of the island.

I'm calling her name the entire time. My voice is deep and low. It carries on the wind.

“Red!”

She's at my cabin.

Except, I get there and she's not.

I curse the lack of truck on the island. The lack of anything, even an ATV. My heart feels too big for my chest. What if she's dead? I swallow a few times, rub my hand over my face until I feel more grounded. How could she be dead?

I head to the beach where I first fucked her. Where the boat is. I know before I step out of the trees that something's up. There's a light on in the boat.

Shit.

What the fuck is going on?

As I fly across the beach, drop my jeans, and crash into the ocean, I can't take my eyes off of the boat. I'm looking for shadows—hers and someone else's? Why the hell would she be in the boat? If she's there, she swam there. It's still bobbing in ten-foot water. I break into a strong freestyle and as I move through the cold water it's so hard not to think. So hard not to remember.

My feet shuffle against an oil-stained cement floor. I'm walking through a dark, nine-car garage on the back of a wood-shingled, colonial New England home. I've got the fucking flu, but I'm here because she called me. Something's wrong. She didn't say so in so many words but I can feel it. My aching body trembles with adrenaline.

I step out of a darkened garage and into a dimly lit one.

I smell oil, rubber, sex.

I look across the garage and see Bryson Paige's nude body, hanging limp from the ropes Cookie likes so much. I look toward the ceiling and the world stops turning. Cookie face is purple. Dead.

I kick harder, tread until I reach the stern, and climb onto the boat, expecting to see a man. Someone hurting her. Someone coming after her because of me.

Instead, there's Red. She's drenched, clothes pasted to her body, hair matted to her head. And she's trying to start the boat.

CHAPTER FIVE

RED

Well, shit. This is going to be awkward. Or scary. Hopefully just awkward. I'm pretty much refusing to let myself think he could be James Wolfe, even as I'm trying to flee because I'm scared he could be.

I see him on the beach before he sees me in the boat, so I have a few minutes to decide what to do. I found a key in one of the cup holders, and I've been trying to use it to unlock a little door on the steering console. I don't know how to start a boat, but I'm hoping maybe there's a button inside that will make the engines come to life.

But the freakin' key won't fit!

I struggle with it until he's swimming quickly toward me. Then I move to the back of the boat and look at the choppy waves around me. The moon's close to full, so the tide seems serious tonight. It was scary enough swimming out to the boat, especially after what happened to me earlier today. There's no way in hell I'm diving off the back of this thing and hanging onto the side of the boat like they do in movies. Is there?

I'm shivering in my wet clothes. I look up at the moon, now encircled by a gleaming ring of light, and whisper, "Mom and Dad, *please*."

After that, I just watch him swim.

It's ridiculously typical of me. Once, when I was 17, I was driving a few friends to get ice cream after school. My car broke down about two feet away from a train track, and as soon as the engine conked, we heard a train's whistle. My friend Laura had to slap my face to get me to put my foot on the pedal and *go*. When I get really stressed out, I freeze. Mom used to hate that.

"Hesitate when you're driving and you're gonna hurt yourself, or me," she used to say.

Race's head and shoulders grow bigger as he moves through the water, approaching faster than I'd expected. Instead of the fear Katie recommended, my body responds with a shot of heat that originates somewhere near my throat and spreads straight down.

I assume if he's here, he's searched most of the island by now. Why? Because he's worried about me, or because he's worried I will get away?

I tell myself criminology is a science. (It is, isn't it? Yes. I'm going with yes). A crime of passion is much different than something premeditated. If he *is* James Wolfe and if James Wolfe did kill his wife and her lover—and both of those are pretty sizeable 'if's—that doesn't mean he'd hurt me. In fact, so far he's done nothing but save me from drowning and show my vajayjay a good time. Well, except when he left me in the tree house and snatched my phone. But it's logical to assume he did that because he was upset I'd found out his secret identity and worried

I'd tell Katie.

By the time he makes it to the back of the boat, where he pulls himself up and throws one of his muscular legs over the side, I've gotten myself calmed down some. That, or I'm further entrenched in denial.

Either way, as he falls on his hands and knees in the bottom of the boat, I realize he's completely nude, having presumably dropped his jeans on the shore, and am able to briefly appreciate the view. He stands, water sluicing down his chest and stomach, following his happy trail and dripping off his half-erect dick.

I'm gawking like the pervert I am when his eyes find mine and widen. "What the fuck are you doing?"

He looks around the boat, as if he's expecting to see me with someone else. Then his gaze boomerangs to me. He looks incredulous. Agitated. "Are you alone?"

I nod.

His face goes blank, and for a second he just stares at me. Then, softly, he says, "Did I hurt you, Red?"

His voice is so low, I feel warm between my legs. I inhale deeply and shake my head.

He looks impatient. Irritated. "What's going on then? Why are you standing in my boat in the middle of the night? You never came to the cabin."

He sounds so commanding. As if he gave me marching orders and I didn't follow them.

"Did you care? You just left me. After taking my phone. I mean, I get it—maybe—but still, that's kind of dickish."

"So you're trying to leave?"

I nod, a little too hesitantly. I can't decide if I want to go or stay, if I believe he's dangerous or not.

His eyes narrow, and I hear myself murmur, "I think I need to go. My friend...she had an accident. I called her from Gertrude's phone."

"She the one you were trying to reach?"

"Yeah. She got into a wreck, and she's in the hospital." My brain works quickly, spitting out bullshit. "One of our other friends is coming to get me at the harbor."

I dare a look into his eyes and find them hard. "Why didn't you ask me to take you? What are you not telling me, Red?"

"I'm telling you everything."

He steps over to me. Takes my chin in his hand. Tilts my face up. "I don't like liars, Red. You don't strike me as a liar. Why don't you be honest with me?"

Because I think you might be a murderer.

From this angle, I can see how long his eyelashes are. Long eyelashes around black eyes. The

sun has kissed his skin a deep olive...

I move subtly back, forcing him to drop my chin. "I want to go, Race. What does it matter? Don't give me the money if you don't think I earned it."

"This is not about money. Tell me again: Did I hurt you? If I did, you need to tell me." He caresses my cheek with the side of his hand. When he speaks again, his voice rumbles. "I like it rough, but I'm not in the business of hurting women."

I look down, at my still-bare feet. "I know. And I told you, Race, I need to go check on my friend."

He shakes his head, flicking little water droplets over his powerful shoulders. "I don't buy it."

"You don't have to."

"What happened, Red?"

I press my lips together and look up at him.

"With your friend?" he clarifies. "What happened?"

Shit. I...uh...oh shit.

"You can't say because you made the accident up." He takes a strand of my hair between his fingers and exhales. "You were going drive this boat yourself? Quit lying to me."

I step away from him, so the back of my legs are flush with the side of the boat. I can tell I'm going to do it—I'm just going to ask—and if it goes badly, I'm going to back-flip off the side and swim away.

His eyes are careful on my face. Black eyes. Dark skin. Deep voice.

For the longest moment, as the boat sways under us, it's just him and me. Man and woman. The only two people on the island.

But it can't stay that way. Not now, after what I heard from Katie. I have to know.

My lips move around the question, but my throat won't form it. I make a squeaky sound and look at his face. Is this man dangerous? I count my heartbeats, one through five. And then I spit it out. "Are you James Wolfe?"

The question seems to hit him like a slap. He flinches—a small, fast movement that's there then gone. And then his face goes absolutely still.

He takes a big step, reaching for the boat's side, and leans against it. He raises a hand to cover his eyes, then lifts it off. He looks at me. "Where did you hear that?"

"Are you?"

His face pinches, as if the question is a mere annoyance—but he's still not moving, even despite a wave that sprays right in his face. "What do you think?"

"I don't know. That's why I asked."

"That's why you tried to leave."

I nod. No point lying now. “I sent my friend your picture. That was before we left land. I didn’t—”

“Jesus, Red!” He’s on his feet. “Fuck! Which friend?”

“You wouldn’t know her. She’s someone I used to work with.”

“A reporter?”

I nod.

“A reporter for what?”

And I realize: If he’s James Wolfe, he would know her. If he’s James Wolfe, I want him to know someone real has his picture, knows I’m here with him. I let out the breath I’ve been holding. “Her name is Katie Stranger, and she covered your trial.”

*

WOLFE

Katie Stranger.

Short. Blonde. Curvy. Always chewing gum.

If I remember correctly, she was a junior reporter for *The New York Times*. And I’m sure I do remember correctly. Someone like me—someone under house arrest, someone whose life is based on the outcome of a trial—learns every face in the courtroom. Every bailiff, every sketch artist, every reporter, every juror, even the janitors. I was there nearly every day for months. And I remember Katie Stranger.

I try to swallow but my mouth is dry. I cough. “She ID’d me?”

Red nods, looking helpless.

I lean against the boat’s side, rocking with the waves as my world crashes around me.

CHAPTER SIX

March 2, 2008
PATTERSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE
WOLFE

Have you ever ordered a dress suit online? They look like shit. Which, in my case, is good. Can't look too pretty today. Gotta make the bastards—or, in my case, mostly bitches—of the jury think I'm a 'normal guy.'

So here I am. Just a normal guy standing in front of the wall-high, gold-plated mirror his dead wife picked out. You know, the family friend he married so she could inherit her great-great-grandfather's \$2 billion railroad fortune. The one who lured him into saying 'I do' with promises that the marriage would be short if he wanted and an offer to let him continue spanking, tying up, and fucking women willing to sign an ironclad NDA.

I look around the foyer and laugh. It's not a laugh, though. Just some bark-like sound that came from deep down in my throat, where I keep pushing all my screams.

Do you know how many days I've been in court this month? More than a lawyer just out of school. More than your average fucking judge.

Ah, but I'm not getting paid. (Not that I need it). I'm being tried for murder.

So very normal.

I turn my eyes back to the mirror and look at my garish tie. It's gold, with royal blue stripes. Bugs the shit out of me how the royal blue looks against the navy blue of the suit, but nobody asked me. The team of lawyers my father is bankrolling tell me what to do. How to walk. How to sit. How to hold my mouth.

Did you know clenching your jaw makes you look like a murderer? Go fucking figure.

I'll admit it: I'm in a worse mood than usual today. Running on about an hour of sleep—the hour just after I whacked off four times in a row—and today is the day I'm interviewed by the prosecution.

In preparation for my big day, I've been growing my dark brown hair shaggy over the last two months. My legal team thinks collar-length hair will make me look more relatable and working class. Because, you know, all the son of the former president of NASDAQ needs to look like Joe America is a new haircut.

As of last week, the stubble I sported so often in past years, mostly out of negligence, is gone. Apparently, men with facial hair appear more aggressive. Last night, I spent an hour getting my face as smooth as I can get it with an old-fashioned, single-blade razor my father gave me

years ago.

Without a light beard, I look pale. Or maybe I'm just pale. I don't know. I don't get out a lot. Under house arrest, it's kind of impossible if it's not a doctor's appointment or something with the court. I can barely fill the days without losing my mind. I'm bulky as shit from working out when I get bored. My legal team hates that. They don't want me to look threatening. Today, at least my face looks thin. I haven't eaten much the last few days.

Under the leg of my pants suit, my tracking bracelet feels especially heavy. I pull up my pants leg and scowl at the damn thing. It makes me feel like an animal. There's some irony there, for sure. After many years of shackling women for fun, I'm the one bound now. For not the first time, I wonder how many of them are watching me on TV.

The car comes for me a few minutes later. It's a gray Ford Escape with a New York government plate and a perpetual old French fry stench. Like most days, a gray-haired woman is driving. Her name is Pat, and I know she likes French Vanilla insta-coffee. Beside her sits Tom, a cop about my age who likes classical music and NPR. And beside me in the back is Lloyd. Another cop, this one with a fro and a red-cased iPhone he uses to play Angry Birds.

I spend my time in the car looking out the window, wondering how everyone in the other cars, in parks, on sidewalks, ended up with lives that are at least marginally functional, while mine has devolved into this. I vacillate between feeling like I don't deserve it and feeling like surely I did something to bring it on. Years of such talk from my father doesn't help.

At this exact second, my phone rings.

Dad. Damn. What timing. I have to answer. If I don't, he'll be a bigger pain in the ass later.

"What do you want?"

He clears his throat and gets right to it—no preamble, no sentimentality. "I wanted to tell you to do your best today. Don't embarrass yourself. Do what the legal team tells you."

I squeeze the phone. "Will do."

He clicks, and that's it. It's just his manner. I'm used to it by now.

Just before I arrive at the court house my cousin Bob calls.

I hit "send" feeling a little more optimistic this time, despite the thickening traffic around the car. Downtown seems congested today, and I can't help thinking I'm the reason why.

"Bob," I answer.

"Race. Just wanted to say I'm with ya in spirit, man."

Bob is a jack of all trades, and he's in Europe right now organizing a deal between a major antiques dealer and a chain department store based here in the U.S.

"Thanks, dude."

"You hear from Paul?"

“Nah.” My older brother, like so many others, doesn’t want to be associated with me.

“Ah. Okay, well hope it goes well today.”

“Thanks.” I can hear the fuzz on the line. Transatlantic fuzz I guess. “Thanks,” I say again.

“No worries.”

We arrive to the largest crowd I’ve ever seen outside the courthouse. I’m escorted inside by the two cops, whose job is both to protect me from people and to protect people from me. My throat is dry, so I drink some fountain water that tastes like metal.

As I sit on the bench, I think of Cookie and how ironic all this is. Cookie, propositioning me for marriage because, being six years younger and in tamer circles, she thought I was a nice guy. Cookie finding out about the subs. Cookie urging me onward with the subs. Cookie asking for her own playthings...

How jealous I was.

Sitting alone one night watching “Southpark” re-runs, realizing I’d let her tie me up if she would stay home with me. Upstairs in my bed, tied to the four posts, not getting off. Fucking her from the top, with her arms secured above her head. And Cookie crying.

“I can’t have sex that way... You see, my father...”

Cookie’s bastard of a father is behind me right now. One of my lawyers leans over and says, “Nice day,” which is a code for *stop scowling*.

I nod and put my face more neutral.

Time passes. I don’t know how much. All I know is I’m on the stand, and there are too many people in the crowd.

“Where were you the night of May 22, 2007?” the prosecutor asks. He’s tall and thin, with adult acne and blond-white hair.

“I was at home.”

“Who can witness this?”

“You’ve already heard from my housekeeper.”

“Tell me about your night.”

My heart pounds, but I’m good at hiding it. I have my days at Bridgewater to thank for that. “I ate dinner early and spent several hours in my study on work-related things.”

“What things?”

“I was researching the pork market. Specifically, I was checking into a tip about changes in the way a certain company’s hogs were selling to its largest buyers. I worked for about two hours, which my internet records reflect.”

“And then you got a phone call.”

“Yes.”

“You got a phone call from your wife. Cookie.” Prosecutor John Longman’s blue eyes hold mine. “Why wasn’t she at home that night?”

“She was out with an acquaintance.”

“You mean a man she was having an affair with?”

I work to keep my face neutral. “It wasn’t an affair. I knew she was seeing Paige. She had my blessing.”

“Is this due to your unusual marriage? Your sexually open marriage?”

God, I want to clench my jaw so much. Instead, I swallow. Look the prosecutor in the eye and say, “She had my blessing. The terms of my marriage are not your business.”

“I think you’re wrong. How long had she been ‘seeing’ Bryson Paige?”

“They knew each other for a long time.”

“Is it true that Mr. Paige was a sexual dominant, like yourself?”

“My sex life is none of your business,” I tell Longman. “Nor is his.” But that’s not true. Paige was a sub.

Longman’s blue eyes flash. He stands a little taller, like he always does right before he begins to make a point. “You passed your wife off to another man, who tied and bound her, then invited you over to share the spoils.”

“I didn’t arrive until after they were dead,” I say, as evenly as I can muster.

“Were you or were you not invited over to share in sexual intercourse?”

I inhale. Exhale. “I was not.”

“Are you or are you not a sexual dominant, known in such circles as a ‘dom?’”

“Objection,” my lawyer cries.

“Denied,” says Judge Jacobs.

“That’s none of your business.” No jaw clenching...

“Are you a submissive?”

“No, I’m not a fucking submissive.”

“Thank you for a straight answer,” Longman says. “We have records of your involvement with Club Rosalie, as well as Mayan Place and the sexual swinging circle known as ‘The Group’ that met up at the Parkman Hotel.” He straightens up again—not a good sign. He clears his throat. Another bad sign. “So that night, you got a phone call from your wife’s cell phone.”

“A call for help,” I offer. I’ve talked this over with my team, and I’m supposed to appear cooperative and forthcoming right here. “I assumed at the time that things with Mr. Paige had gotten out of hand. She wanted my help.”

“What time did you arrive at the Paige residence?” the prosecutor asks.

“Eight fifteen.”

“And yet, we have a witness, someone who worked at the Paige house, who heard your voice—a deep, resonant voice on the security cameras—at seven forty.”

“This has been hashed out a number of times. How deep is my voice? It’s relative.” I want to scream that Cookie’s father, Robert Smythson, has a deep voice, too, but I know I can’t do that. My team tells me pointing the finger while I’m on the stand will make me look guilty.

“Why did it take you thirty-five minutes to arrive?” Longman asks.

“There was traffic.”

“But your trek can’t be traced by satellite because you left your cell phone at home.”

I shrug my shoulders a few times, trying to look and feel looser. “What do you want me to say about that?”

“It seems awfully convenient.”

“Objection!”

“Stepping out of line, Longman,” the judge warns.

Motherfucker steps closer to me. “What did you find when you arrived?”

“They were in a garage. She was hanged,” I swallow past a lump in my throat, “and he was strangled by rope they had been using.”

“And you called the police immediately?”

“I did.”

A curvy blonde court reporter looks at me with solemn eyes. I wonder if she believes me. I wonder if anybody does.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RED

He moves quickly, closing the distance between the two of us with one long, steady stride. He wraps his arms around my back, sliding one down behind my knees as he lifts me up and slings me over his shoulder.

My body stiffens as adrenaline floods my blood. I try to jerk out of his grasp, but he's holding me too tightly. "What are you doing?" I cry, kicking at his thighs.

We're at the front tip of the boat now: the bow. I can feel it. He takes fast, small steps to keep his balance as the waves rock us.

Then he sits down on the bow. I push against him but his grip just tightens.

"Settle down!"

"Let go of me!" But he doesn't. Just before he lowers me over the edge of the boat, toward the black water, he says, "Sorry."

Then he drops me. The ridiculous thought swimming through my head as I bob under and pop up, flailing to keep from getting hit on the head by the bobbing boat, is this is so different than last time we got off the boat, my head tucked against his shoulder while he carried me toward the trees.

I might be screaming, because I gulp salt water. I feel something hard against my arm and push against it. Then his arms close around my waist and shoulders. I'm being pulled toward the shore. This, too, for the second time. I try to shove away from him, try to duck under a wave and disappear, but this man is a powerful swimmer.

Every time I claw him or try to kick him in the gut, he turns me around so I'm facing away from him, all the while continuing to pull me toward the sand. When the beach floor tickles my soles, I start to sob. I can't imagine why he's doing this. No—yes I can. He's doing this because he's going to hurt me.

Just as the waves start breaking all around us, I'm lifted out of the water and thrown over his mighty back again. My body vibrates with each step he takes across the sand. I take a chance and pinch the back of his neck. He lets go of me. I fall into the sand.

Standing over me, naked and ocean-wet, with his big dick hanging and his bearded face angry and taut, he looks like some primal man.

"My friend is coming to the harbor! If I'm not there she's calling the cops!" I choke on another sob. If only this were true!

He leans down low over me, black eyes bore into mine. "Did you tell her about 'W.?'"

I stop to think for a moment, wondering about the correct answer. I can't imagine where he's

going with the question, so I tell the truth. “No.”

I must have done something right. I can see the tension leave his shoulders.

I jump up, dashing back toward the sea. “I’m leaving! I’ll tell my friend it wasn’t you! You can use your money to pay someone to hunt me down and sign a NDA.” Even though my dash toward the boat doesn’t make much sense, since I can’t operate it, I dive into the crashing waves and kick off the sand.

He lets me get a few feet in before he scoops me up under my arms, hauling me out of the water and tucking me against his chest. A few big strides and we’re on sand again. Waves break at his feet. He hoists me up, so he’s holding me against his chest, more shepherd-and-lamb position.

His face scowls down on mine, seawater dripping off his chin and onto my cheeks.

“Little Red. What a naughty girl you are.”

I start to cry. It’s not something I’m proud of, but then neither is this. I’ve got a bucket list. I can’t die yet!

“She’s not coming,” he says as he turns toward the island forest. “I can tell.” His chest expands—a sigh? “Calm down Red.” His eyes flick down at me. “I’m not gonna hurt you. But I’m also not gonna let you leave this island.”

I tuck my chin against my chest. “Because you are going to hurt me!”

I can feel him shake his head. “Because my privacy is very important. I need you to sign a NDA, Red.”

My heart beats wildly as he carries me back to his house. My mind careens with wild ideas, horrific scenarios, desperate desires that involve mostly dry clothes and my old apartment back in Boston.

When he dumps me down on his couch and turns toward the bedroom, I make a wild lunge for the door. A strong hand grabs my elbow, throwing off my trajectory. I slip and go down to my knees.

As soon as they hit the hardwood floor, he locks an arm around me and turns me over, so I’m lying on my back like a felled turtle, and he’s looming over me. I can feel his erection against my thighs, but he doesn’t make a move on me.

“Red,” he says softly, “do I seem like a murderer to you?”

“You’re acting like one,” I breathe. “You’re pinning me down.”

His lips move only subtly: a smile, a grimace? “I’m not going to hurt you,” he says quietly. And there’s no malice, no flirtation, nothing in his tone at all. “In fact,” he places one hand on the side of my face, his fingertips gently stroking my hair, “I’m going to make you feel good, if you can trust me.”

I look away from him and match his quiet tone with one of my own. “I can’t. I’m scared.”

He strokes my nipple. I look down to find both of them hard, jutting out under my shirt.

“Are you sure, Red?”

Pleasure whispers through me, mocking. My body feels warm and restless. I’m amazed how strongly I react to just his fingers, stroking.

“I’m stupid,” I whisper.

Have I always been this stupid? Maybe. Maybe this Red was always waiting inside the other one, like a Russian nesting doll. Once the shell broke on my outer layers, this smaller, more colorful, more defunct Red is all that’s left.

His hands come down on my cheeks. “You don’t seem stupid to me. Just afraid. And you don’t need to be afraid.”

“You’re him, aren’t you?”

“I’m Race, remember? Only Race to you.”

I’m lying still under him, struggling to keep my breathing even. Somewhere deep inside my head, yet another, smaller, stupider doll is thinking of how raw my ass feels. How wet my pussy. If this man is James Wolfe, he could do all kinds of depraved things to me. I wonder what they would be.

His voice snaps through the air, jarring me from my stupor. “What do you want, Red?”

His eyes on mine are seeking. I can’t tell what I’m supposed to say. Part of me wants to ask again if he’s James Wolfe—to press the point—but I’m afraid to bring that up again.

“I don’t know what I want.” But I’m definitely aroused despite my fear.

I watch his face for a moment. His mouth flattens. His brow clenches. He looks like he’s trying to decide something. “You’re in charge of your own fantasies. You know that, right?”

His hand dips between my legs, and I know whatever twisted fantasies I have, they center on him.

Do I want to fuck him because of who he is, or am I willing to overlook who he is because his body calls to mine? I don’t know, and right now, I can’t seem to care as much as I should.

He scoops me up and carries me to his bed, where silky ties are secured to each of the four corners. He ties my ankles first, and then my wrists. My mind is screaming with would-be fear that never fully forms. I’m shocked to find, as he strips me of my shorts and shirt, I feel relieved.

It’s as if every fear I carry with me daily has been hoisted off my shoulders and onto his. I look up at him as he knots the ties around my ankles, then my wrists. The way I feel makes no sense whatsoever. Instead of panicked, I feel so relaxed I’m almost sleepy.

As if he can read my mind, he says, “Relax. I’m going to make this night perfect for you.”

He grabs a small, black box off of a wooden trunk, opens it, and reaches inside. I see him draw something out, but he keeps it tucked inside his hand. He pulls my wet pants off, parts my legs, and looks into my eyes.

“You want this don’t you, Red? You want to push your limits. I bet you like being afraid. Kind of takes you somewhere else.” He strokes my inner thigh. “Right now, you’re in my hands. You have no responsibility. You’ve surrendered everything to me, put your very life in my hands. That’s what you believe, although I’d never hurt you.”

His voice is low and sensual, but his eyes are alert—assessing me, as always—as his knuckles stroke my inner thigh. His fingers part my pussy lips, and I jump a little as he drags a small, cold, silver egg over my wet entrance. With a little pressure from his thumb, he pushes it inside me. Never dragging his gaze away from mine, he holds up a remote and grins.

“I love seeing you writhe.”

He flicks his hand and bliss ripples through me.

“Argghhh!” With each lightning fast undulation it shimmies deeper into me, its movement smooth and firm against my pussy walls. The effect is a stroking sensation, combined with the pressure of penetration, plus vibrations that ripple all through me, making me feel like I will burst. Making me needy for more. Tickling my clit.

I groan and scissor my legs, already so close. I’m panting, seeing stars when he rolls me over. My pussy spasms around the vibrating egg. I thrust my hips into the mattress, desperate to come.

“What a dirty girl. I bet you want your clit sucked. Am I right?”

He slides a hand under my hips, finding my clit with his fingertip as his other hand pulls my ass cheeks apart. I’m hyper-conscious of the roughness of his finger. My hips wiggle in time with the vibrating weight inside my cunt. I’m panting hard, so distracted I barely notice his slick finger rubbing my ass. A second later, I feel a burst of pressure as he pops another egg into me.

“Oh my God!”

I try to swallow, try to breathe, but all I can do is lie there, writhing as he fucks me by remote control.

“Oh...Race!” I buck and toss. I find my clit with my fingers, but I’m so strung out, I can barely manage rubbing it.

He sets both eggs on a slow simmer—just enough to drive me crazy, to keep me panting on the edge—and rolls me over again. He parts my knees and grins over me.

“My little fuck doll. Stuffed and dripping wet.” He leans over, giving my pussy a long, luxurious lick that obliterates all thought and has me shrieking. My frenzied fingers tug his hair. Pleasure is shorting out my brain. I can’t think straight. I can’t move. I start to come, and the eggs go still.

I scream. My legs scissor. My clit is so swollen it’s painful.

“Race...help me,” I sob. “I feel...drunk.”

“On lust, Red. And I’m about to black you out.”

Both eggs spring into motion, vibrating harder this time. My body jerks, and I start rolling my hips around.

“Fuck me,” I beg. “Please.”

“I want your mouth around my cock. Do you want to suck my dick?”

I nod and he helps me up. I’m lying on my back, leaning on my elbows, moaning every few seconds as the eggs do their work inside me. He straddles my chest and holy shit, he’s hard as hell. I open my mouth wide and he thrusts his length inside. I open as wide as I can, taking him deep into my mouth. I’m so close to coming I can barely coordinate the movement of sucking him off. I’m drooling all over him.

He keeps adjusting the settings of the eggs—fast to slow to fast—as if he can scent when I’m about to come.

In and out, in and out he pumps, and I’m moaning around him. He turns both eggs on high again and my whole body quivers. I’m so lust-blind, so desperate, I take his cock in both my hands and lick him all over his balls before gliding my mouth back up his shaft, over his head, back into my throat.

He’s got my hair. He’s pulling—hard.

“Red, Red, Red…”

I look up at him, at his beautiful abs clenched in pleasure as he—“oh fuck!”—shoots off into my mouth, cupping my head between his strong thighs as he pumps right down my throat.

I swallow. I sink back on the mattress and curl over on my side, stroking my clit. I’m so wet it’s ridiculous.

“Not yet. You come when I say you do, Red.”

He turns the eggs off, pushes me down flat on my back, and reaches two long fingers into my supercharged pussy, curling them around the egg, drawing it out.

I can only moan.

I’m almost limp as he scoops me up and tosses me down on my belly. Now he pulls me up, so I’m on my hands and knees, my head hanging between my arms.

“Are you going fuck me?”

“Yes, Red. Now you’re going to get fucked.”

I can feel the head of him pressed against the warm, wet entrance to my cunt. It’s too much.

“Please, Race!” I writhe, pressing back against him.

“Please what, Red?”

“Fuck me! Please!”

He pushes inside—only a little. Just the hard, plump head of him. “I’m gonna fuck you hard. You sure you’re ready?”

“Yes! Oh yes!”

He pushes in a little more, and even as sopping as I am, he's big; he stretches me.

He wants to inch his way inside, but I can't take it. I rock back against him, already lit up with the promise of his full length.

But as I move, Race rocks back, too.

"Red," he scolds. "Who's in charge here? You or me?"

"I don't know," I wail.

"I am," he says sternly. "You do what I say. And in this case, I say be still."

Unexpectedly, I start to sob. He stays in place for one, two, three seconds, then he thrusts in—hard.

I come as soon as I'm full of him.

The orgasm goes on and on, and he doesn't let up for me. In and out, in and out he goes as I curl over, collapsing on my elbows, cheek on the mattress, ass in the air.

Two strokes later and I feel his cock harden and expand. He groans my name, then pulls out in one smooth stroke, spilling all over my back.

"Stay here," he murmurs. "I'll go get something."

"I need to get up," I say hoarsely. "To use the restroom."

"Hold on first."

I feel a tug, and the egg slides out of me. He helps me off the bed. The room spins as I cross it. My legs quiver as I step into the bathroom. I can barely stand.

I lock the door and turn on the shower. I know I told him I needed the bathroom, but more than that, I need to shower. Something to ground me.

I stand there while the water heats, shivering with my arms around my waist.

As soon as I step into the shower, the bathroom door opens and Race walks in. I know as soon as I see him what's coming. I'm so tired I can barely keep my eyes open, but that doesn't matter. I step to the back of the shower as he pushes back the curtain and gets in with me.

He eases me down, on my back in the cool tub. He strokes two fingers into my aching pussy, wiggles one into my ass.

"Fuck me," I moan.

He spreads me open, jams his cock into my swollen cunt, and clasps one hand on my shoulder as he thrusts.

"Do you like this? Are you my fuck doll, Red?"

"Yes," I sigh. "Oh, yes."

CHAPTER EIGHT

WOLFE

After a thorough and, I hope, relaxing bath, I wrap her in towels and carry her to bed. She drifts to sleep in my arms, and I haven't even drugged her. I can't do that without her written consent, but I hardly need it.

I tie her ankles and wrists to the bed's four corners again and look into my little black box.

In a few hours, after she's slept some, I'm going to paint a pleasure-enhancing paste on her pussy and put the egg back in. I'll fuck her ass with my fingers and tell her again how she's my little fuck doll.

"This is your only purpose, being fucked by me."

I'll get her relaxed and lust-crazy and make her forget about her other life. The one where she lost her job and had to sell off all her shit. The one where some prick left her with a rent she couldn't handle by herself. I had someone follow her for a day and a half right after Trudie passed, and he told me she searched far and wide for work, just couldn't find anything.

Sitting beside her, watching her sleep, that makes me angry. I don't know much about her beyond the way her pussy feels, but I can tell that she's a good person. Probably mixed up about some things, maybe sad or hopeless, but she's Trudie's granddaughter. She deserves better than what she was getting before coming here.

I stroke her hair back off her face.

Never did like a redhead, but this one reminds me of a porcelain doll.

That's how I got her nickname: fuck doll.

I get up quietly off the bed and step onto the porch with my phone. I'm going to have to explain to Bob this Katie Stranger situation. Be sure he's got someone very good and very discreet handling the NDA. Be sure that person will be here tomorrow.

It's a shame my little fuck doll has to go.

I'd love to keep her here indefinitely, but if what she said is true—if she really sent my picture to the former *Times* reporter—I'm not even sure if I can stay here anymore.

*

RED

I open my eyes to a brilliant light. A few blinks and I'm confused. Am I dead? I have a vague

memory of something unusual happening. Something frightening and maybe also kind of wonderful. I try to reach up and shield my face, but I can't get my hand to—

What?

Neither of my hands will move. Same with my feet.

Finally, I look around instead of simply up. I see the little cabin room—topped by a glass ceiling that's letting the full glare of the sun in—and everything comes crashing back to me.

James Wolfe.

I think I just fucked James Wolfe.

How strange.

I look down at the soft blanket covering me and try to move my feet again. They're bound to the bedposts with something soft, like ribbon. I shut my eyes and hazily remember the few hours right before I went to sleep.

My God, that man is good in bed.

And if he's James Wolfe?

...He wasn't convicted, was he?

I lean my forehead against my bicep. I must be going crazy.

Last night, it didn't seem so crazy because I was caught up in my lust, but this morning I feel all kinds of unease. Not uneasy enough to try to steal the man's boat again, but still. I lie my head back on my pillow and shut my eyes, trying to think.

He mentioned something about a non-disclosure agreement. I guess I understand that. He's famous as "W.," so naturally he wouldn't want me telling people that "W." is James Wolfe. No one would want his paintings anymore. Or, hell, maybe everyone would. Regardless, I see the trouble.

What should I do after I sign the NDA?

I should go I guess. There's no reason to stay here. I mean, the sex is great, but I have a life to return to. At least I hope I do.

I press my lips together. Is that his voice I hear? Where is he? I look around for my phone. I promised Katie I would call today. I need to untie myself. It's not like he has me tied to hold me prisoner. It's a sex thing. But right now he's not here, and we're not having sex.

I jerk my legs a few times before realizing what I really need to do is free my arms. Then I can untie my legs. I squeeze my hands through the binds with relative ease—small hands, I guess—and untie my ankles. I can definitely hear Race talking to someone outside on the porch.

In the kitchen I spot my phone. I grab it and notice another door in the bedroom, this one to outside. I step out under the shade of the pines to call Katie. I think he is James Wolfe, but he hasn't hurt me. Maybe the man's not guilty. It's kind of sad, really.

I hold my breath, trying to hear Race on the other side of the couch. I can't make out

anything he's saying, and then it doesn't matter. Katie answers on the second ring. Her voice is tight and upset.

"My source says it's him. He's dangerous, Red."

I look around the forest, trying to think of how to calm her down. "Look, Katie, I appreciate your concern, but I'm pretty sure it's not him. Really."

"But this is a relative."

"Not his," I say defensively. "Hers. They're probably paranoid."

"You're making me really nervous, Red."

I roll my eyes. "I can make my own judgment calls, bestie."

"I'm just trying to be your friend."

"I know, but—"

Behind me, a door creaks. I turn to find Race standing there in just jeans. His brows are bunched together.

He steps out.

"Who are you talking to?"

"Hang on. Hey Katie, I've got to go. Tomorrow?"

"Doll, I thought I made myself clear. No phone calls."

I hear Katie talking to a dead line as he presses the red button on my phone. He pulls me inside, through the bedroom and into the bathroom. I glance at the shower, already warm and ready to be fuck-punished.

So I'm stunned when he locks his arms around me, pulls me over to a tall, dark wood bookshelf, and pushes it aside, revealing a large, square hole in the wall. Behind the hole, a dark staircase.

I scream. He scoops me up and starts down the stairs. "I promise not to eat you for breakfast." He leans down over my head, doing something that feels an awful lot like a brush of his lips on my hair. At the bottom of the staircase, he sets me on my feet and reaches to the side, flicking on a light.

"Look around. I'll be right back. I can't trust you, and I have to make another call."

"But Race, I—"

"Quiet, Red. Just look around. There's nothing to be scared of." He speaks over his shoulder as he hustles up the stairs.

The domineering bastard!

I rub my tired eyes and force myself to take a good look around the room. It's lit by a small, oval light at the center of the low ceiling, and is the size of...maybe two or three gas station bathrooms. It's made entirely of cement: ceilings, floors, and walls, which are lined with shelves that look like unfinished oak. And on the shelves, canvases. I feel a hint of interest in them

despite my irritation and fear.

I puff my breath out. Turn around. Moving makes me feel less trapped, even though, of course, it's an illusion. I'm very trapped. I don't see a single window. Not even those stupid, tiny ones you see in prison cells.

I look around at all the canvases once more before deciding I can't just stand here. I'll panic. I walk back up the cement stairs. There are only eighteen of them, which makes sense, because the walls in the art dungeon are not tall. I'd guess eight feet, max. Did Race have to duck when he stepped into the little room? I don't remember. Probably because I was too busy flipping out.

I take the last few stairs on my tiptoes and stand at the door—some kind of wood; maybe oak, like the shelves in the art dungeon. I can't tell for sure because there's no light up here at the top of the stairwell. A sliver of gold beams from beneath the door, but it doesn't do much for this dark space. I tap the door with one knuckle. I can't tell how thick it is, but maybe not too thick. Maybe I could kick it down if I needed to.

Surely I won't.

He hasn't hurt me yet.

That doesn't mean he won't, my inner pessimist whispers.

I walk back down the stairs. I think it's been fifteen or twenty minutes since he left me here, and the adrenaline that got kicked up when he put me here is starting to leave my body. I feel exhausted. I ache everywhere. I walk around the room, noting a few wood benches, a stockpile of paints, brushes, and a bunch of other cans and jars of miscellaneous painters' chemicals. In one corner, there are easels. They look store-bought, which stands out to me because the benches are clearly hand-made. In the center of the room, beneath the little light, is a metal stool, covered on top by a thin strip of industrial-looking black rubber.

I sink down on the stool and take another long breath. It doesn't smell musty here. I'm not feeling sneezy, like I do when I'm around a lot of dust. I tell myself he comes down here a lot. It's not a creepy basement; it's valued storage space.

I allow myself a look at the backs of several of the canvases nearest to me. They're standing with their painted sides against the back wall of the shelves, and each one is covered with what looks kind of like a long sheet of tissue paper. I peel the paper off one and turn it around. It's breathtaking, a spider web between two branches. The colors are perfect. The web is situated so W. perfectly observed the rule of thirds, making the dimensions feel pleasant. And yet...the mood is somehow somber. The web is painted with thick strokes of gray and white, but it has a fragile feeling. I turn it back toward the wall and cover it up.

I look down at the floor. There's no drain. I wonder if that's because we're below sea level. Now that I think about it, I bet that's why this room is just one big cement pod. So water can't leak in. I don't know much about construction, but it makes a kind of sense.

At the very least, this space doesn't seem like it was designed for captives.

Of course it wasn't.

Wolfe or not Wolfe, he doesn't want anyone around.

I get up and walk around the room again, and I notice for the first time a low hum. I peek behind some shelves and see a big, black box. My stomach twists as I imagine what it may be, but then I see a sticker on its side: HAMPDEN DEHUMIDIFIERS.

Duh. Below sea level, it's going to be moist, so he needs to keep the air dry. To protect his paintings.

I don't give a shit about his paintings!

When is he going to come back? Suddenly I can't stand being down here.

I take the stairs two at a time and press my body against the door.

"RACE," I call. "RACE, LET ME OUT! I'M SCARED OF SMALL SPACES!"

It isn't true. I love nooks and have been known to spend whole weekends in my apartment, watching movies and eating cookie dough with every curtain drawn. Thank God I'm not claustrophobic. I'd have already lost my mind.

I beat against the door with my fist, but I don't feel it give—at all.

I lean my cheek against the door and let my feelings have some reign. "Race, please! Let me out! I won't tell! I'll do whatever you want!"

My heart is pounding now.

"Race, please! Let me out!"

I think of hours sliding by, of days passing with no observation from me. I won't even know what time it is. I'll die of boredom.

No I won't. I'll starve!

I look down at myself. Under the little nightgown Race must have put me in last night, I'm thinner than I've ever been. I bet I lost at least ten pounds when I started running out of money, and I didn't have a lot of extra fat before that. What if he never comes back? How long would I last?

I walk back to the door. "I'll smash your paintings! One by one! Let me out! Let me out Race! Let me out!"

I take a few steps back on the little landing at the top of the stairs and make a decision that is either stupid or very smart.

I jump a few times in place, just to build momentum, and then I ram my shoulder into the door. It doesn't budge. Clearly, I didn't hit it hard enough.

I try again. This time, I hear a cracking sound. I use my knee until I get a bruise, and then I start to kick at it. I've seen karate movies—the way they stick their leg out sideways and snap at

the knee. I do that a few times. I'm rewarded with another faint crack.

I step back, pressing my back against the opposite wall—only three or four feet away, since the stairway is so narrow—and I jump at the door, smashing into it with all my weight.

I notice how sore my chest and knees are before I realize I did it! I broke the wall—which was actually the big bookshelf. I'm on my hands and knees on top of it, covered in dust and splinters but free.

I take vague note of the toilet, tub, and a painting of a squirrel before I'm on my feet. I look from the secret stairwell to the bathroom doorway. I can see his bedroom, smell the faint scent of something minty. I try to quiet my breathing and listen. As if he doesn't know I'm here. As if he didn't hear the massive crash of me busting through the shelf.

Maybe he really didn't. He hasn't come to check on me yet.

I'm staring at the doorway, wondering if I can get the drop on him during more mad sex, when someone jumps me from behind and throws a sack over my head.

#

Don't hate me! That's the end. I know I told a few of you I thought this story would be three installments, and that was true. I did. I think I told most of the rest of you it would be three or four, because for better or worse, I'm a "pantser." I let the story unfold as I write, so I can't always tell which way it's going.

The good news is, I've got most of the fourth—and definitely final—installment written already. I'll probably put it out sometime around the first week of July, but if you want to get a notice when I decide for sure, sign up for my release day newsletter: <http://ellajamesbooks.us8.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=a22900f40502ee2fc5671a7bc&id=e7b30fab36>

Believe me, I'll never message you except about releases. I'm terrible at remembering things like that!

You can also keep tabs on things by following me on Facebook. I'm www.facebook.com/ellajamesauthorpage. Don't forget to select 'get notifications' or whatever that little doohickey says!

I have another awesome surprise for you, a kind of consolation prize for not getting the end of Red and Wolfe's story yet. I teamed up with the wonderful Rockstars of Romance for an exclusive cover and blurb reveal, showcasing my next erotic fairy tale serials. You can check that out right here: <http://www.therockstarsofromance.com/3/post/2014/06/exclusive-cover-blurb-reveal-beast-by-ella-james.html>

#

I want to thank a few people who made this release awesome: My fabulous publicist Rachel Marks, my fabulous personal assistant Chelle, my fabulous agent Rebecca Friedman, my fabulous editor and friend Jessica, and my very fabulous family. My absolutely amazing street team, especially the core group that's around almost every day, giving a shit about what's going on with me. I love you guys. A few bloggers who have done much more for me than they had to: Milasy from TRSOR, Angie of Angie's Dreamy Reads, Nina from The SubClub, and Hetty from Bestsellers & Bestsellars of Romance. I'm sure I'm forgetting someone. If you know me, you know I've got the worst memory ever.

#

Looking for something to read while you're waiting on Red & Wolfe? Check out Selling Scarlett, the first book in my Love Inc. series. It's free!

http://www.amazon.com/Selling-Scarlett-ebook/dp/B00CCRTFSC/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1365967821&sr=8-1&keywords=selling+scarlett