

If I Can't Have You

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If I Can't Have You

by [Deathsdoll](#)

Summary

My fingers came up and gently trailed along the black marker marring my skin. My eyes lowered. It wasn't the large, black, boldly displayed letters that spelled out the word WHORE across my chest that had me truly crippled with fear in that moment, but the letters printed beneath them, below my belly, across my lower abdomen... large, menacing... a word with more far reaching implications than the simple derogatory insult someone who would drug and rape a woman might throw at them. No, this was far more unsettling, far more frightening. Drawn across my lower bellow, just above the neatly groomed curls nestled between my legs, written in black marker, in capital letters, was the word MINE.

One

Chapter Notes

****If you are new to my stories, please read the note on my bio before continuing!**

I have made a lot of mistakes in my life and done things I'm not proud of, and I've probably made decisions that would cause most people to pull their hair out in frustration but those mistakes and those decisions have made me who I am and those decisions have led me to him. You can judge, you can think your dark, contemptuous thoughts and call me weak and call me a stupid bitch and say it's sick and... look. I really don't care. I need to get this out, to make sense of it in my own head, because if I'm honest, those thoughts I'm accusing you of... I have those same thoughts myself. I cannot possibly reconcile the thoughts in my head with the feelings in my heart, so this is going to be my poor attempt to do so. So in the end, think what you will and know, I'll probably share many of your own thoughts, but it won't matter, because no matter what I think or feel, it all comes back to him and I don't care how much I might hate myself. As long as I'm with him. I'm happy.

I'll start here. I'm highly intelligent, I'm hardworking, I'm motivated. I have a great image of the person I am and the person I can be. I don't seem to have the ability to ever fully achieve these dreams. Throughout my entire life, I've had a problem with social interactions. That doesn't mean that I'm inept, but I'm awkward and I overthink. I get so focused on what I might say and how that might be interpreted that I stop thinking about what the situation actually calls for. Then I end up sitting there with long silences, looking uncomfortable and making everyone else uncomfortable around me. Or, I come out with short, abrupt, safe responses that once again, are awkward, leaving everyone around me uncomfortable. And let me be clear, this has nothing to do with some sort of childhood trauma. There's no big story as to why I'm so fucking awkward. I just am.

I think the only thing that has kept me from being an absolute social pariah are my looks. Now, I'm not saying I'm gorgeous or a model or anything like that. I'm just a bit overweight. Nothing drastic, but I work fourteen hours days nearly seven days a week. I think the only reason I'm not heavier is because the sheer magnitude of stress I suffer on a daily basis prevents me from eating as much as I could otherwise. But I've got nice skin, I have straight white teeth, I'm of average height, and I have hair the color of burnt caramel. I've been told it is very pretty. So, I might not be the woman men elbow each other out of the way to get to at the the bar, but I'm pleasant enough to look at that, despite my awkwardness, people will pop in their heads to say good morning or good night, and I always get invitations to the group outings. It's out of sympathy, not because anyone actually cares or wants me there. I just

never go. Unless of course, Nicholas makes it mandatory. *Team building. Morale boosting.* That's what he calls it. I call it absolutely fucking bullshit.

So, in a nutshell, that's who I am. I think it's important you know this before we begin. You might not understand, but please try to understand, I don't make decisions like other people do and never did.

That's all I really want to say about that. The rest, you'll just have to figure out yourself.

I work for a "big four" accounting company. I don't feel the need to say the name here. I'm a junior associate working in the mergers and acquisition out of the Boston office. I'm on the state and local tax team. In the business, it's just called SALT. When one business wants to buy another, part of the due diligence that they have done is to find out what the target company's tax exposure is. The Fed teams job is easy. Federal tax doesn't change based on a state. My team has fifty states to go through and more often than not, a company will have *just* enough reach into a state that it's not entirely clear if that state has the right to impose their tax law on the goods and services sold within their borders. Some deals are easy, most are not. In many cases, a company will have operated in a state, but never filed taxes in that state. If that company were selected for a state audit, in some cases, that company could have back taxes owed from about \$100,000 to 5 million. That was my biggest deal. Some company based in New Hampshire that expanded far beyond the business owners' grandest imaginings. Funny little thing about New Hampshire, they don't have a sales tax. This company operated in *every* surrounding New England state and most of the North East and never filed taxes. Needless to say, the buyer did not acquire the target after that report came out.

I've worked here for just about a year and I'm set for a promotion at my next review. My company has a shockingly complex hierarchical system. My team has four junior associates and two seniors. The juniors are divided up on deals and report to their seniors. That senior will review the word done by the senior, and once all was in place, would run it up the line to the Manager. Once the manager reviewed the final reports from the senior, that was then run up further to the partner. The partner made the final review and stamped his name on it and it was sent out.

My senior associate is Chris Johnston and he's a lovely guy and a great supervisor. He's attentive, understanding, and responsive. Even when there is something you should have

known, he corrects you kindly, makes a joke, and then moves on without making you feel like you've almost single-handedly destroyed the multi-billion dollar company we worked for her.

Unlike the other senior, Caleb Trent. Whenever I was placed on one of his deals, I felt something inside of me die. For those weeks, I hated coming into work. I'd get to work at 5:00am and leave the office at 10:00pm and it still wasn't enough. My work was destroyed with every pass. Everytime I received the soft ding of my email from inside my little cubical, my insides tightened and turned and I wanted to cry.

Chris would make the necessary changes and send the updated copy back to you with a note about what went wrong. If you make the same mistake again, he'll address it with you. Caleb Trent is cold and cruel. He sends it back to you untouched.

Needs work. - C.H. Trent, Esq.

It was a terrible feeling, because you had no idea what about it needed work. So you'd comb through it for hours, fixing whatever you think might need work, and you'd send it back. Then you'd wait in agony, try to work your other deals, and wait for that little *ding*.

Devil's in the details. You should know this. -C.H. Trent, Esq.

And then he'd point out to you what you *should* have seen the first time, but he won't tell you *how* to fix it. So then you spend another couple hours trying to fix it, but you don't know how, because if you knew, you'd have done it right the first time. Then you'd send it back. Once again, waiting for that little *ding*. At this point, you prayed for that *ding*.

It was when you saw him walking down the aisles of gray cubes that you knew you were in for it. His dark head would bob up and over, up and over as he walked, all six foot four of him, broad shouldered, dressed impeccably. He'd round the corner and stand there a moment, dark eyes glowering, emphasized by the little malicious smile dancing across his cruel mouth.

"Orla?" he'd ask. He was the only one to call me Orla. I hated my name. Orla Ellen Wright. God, it was old and pretentious. I signed my emails O. Ellen Wright, Esq., and introduced myself as Ellie. Everyone respected that, except for Caleb. "A moment?"

Every time. “Orla? A moment?”

“Yes, Caleb?” was always my response. Cold. Wooden. He’d hold up a print out of my internal summary. He’d walk over and slap it down on my desk. When it got to the point that Chris came to your cube, he would either pull up an extra chair or kneel down by your desk to go through it with you. Caleb loomed. He stood, far too close, his expensive aftershave wafting up into your nostrils and making you feel like you were the smallest creature on planet Earth. I can’t say how it made others feel, but when he left, after slowly, methodically, and masterfully walking me through my work and showing me how absolutely substandard it was, I would blink back tears and struggle to pull myself back together the rest of the day. Some days, he’d have me do it to match the criticisms he had given me. Other days, he’d leave without giving me a deadline. I’d ask knowingly, “when do you need the updated report by?”

“Don’t bother,” he’d respond cruelly and be on his way. Perhaps the worst part of this dressing down, was that he made sure to do it *loudly*. He had a loud voice as it was. Powerful, commanding. But his voice always seemed a bit louder when he was ripping a person to shreds. The only thing that got me through these moments is knowing, I’d heard him do it to others. It was simply my turn.

He had left my office just over an hour before I received the congratulatory email that our manager, Nicholas Oakes, was being made partner, and who was the senior associate being made manager? Not the kind hearted, friendly Chris Johnston.

No, the words that jumped out from this email had my feeling physically ill.

Caleb Henry Trent, Esquire.

My insides turned to liquid and I felt tears come to my eyes. After the half hour lecture I received earlier in the day, and now this news, my first thought was *well, I’ll fucking quit*. I stood from my desk, reaching out to retrieve my cell phone from my desk drawer, and I walked steadily to the bathroom.

I got into the bathroom stall before the tears burst forth and I pressed my hands to my face to try and smother my sobs. No one else was inside and honestly, I'd come into the bathroom to the sounds of sobs many times in my two years here. It was the culture. You worked until you couldn't stand it anymore, and you were either turned into a diamond under that pressure, you went home one night and ate a bullet, or you quite abruptly. People would come in and find your desk empty and management would never even mention our departure until someone asked at a team meeting.

By the time I had finished, my makeup was ruined. I don't wear a lot, what I wear is minimal, but that doesn't mean that when I went to the mirror and saw my naked eyes that I was happy about it. But I splashed cool water on my face, straightened out my blouse, and left the bathroom. I returned to my desk to an email invite to a celebratory drink at the bar across the street from our building. The whole team was on it. Chris sent out the invite. Of course he did. Good, kind hearted Chris, who always smelled so good, and had a smile that would make you feel so warm and valued. Of course he would show such grace in defeat. Caleb and Chris had gone to Northeastern together. They graduated together and got hired together. Both were up to this promotion. But it went to Caleb.

I watched the acceptances come piling in as the day progressed until it was 5:15pm and I was the only one on the team that hadn't responded. There was only a single no, and that was from Molly, who had a 8 week old baby at home. Her husband had quite work when the baby was born and Molly took off just enough time to recover from birth itself. She'd been back in work within two weeks but even Caleb didn't bat an eye when she was in at 8:00am and out by 5:00pm every day. I had no such excuse. I heard everyone getting up and readying to head out. I hovered my cursor over the decline button. I almost clicked it when I heard a voice behind me.

"Coming Ellie?"

I turned to see Chris smiling at the entrance of my cube. I sighed and glanced over toward the elevators where there was a growing group of smiling people. Caleb stood among them, smiling happily, looking almost like a normal human being. Scott walked over and gave him a slap on the shoulder.

"Do I have a choice?" I asked. Chris laughed. He was a handsome man. He was a year younger than Caleb, but he had not taken any time off between undergrad and law school. He had fair skin and bright grey eyes. He was tall as well. Chris would do well here. In another year or two, he'd get the promotion he deserved as well.

“Of course you do,” Chris said. “Caleb won’t mind.”

“It’s a bad look,” I said reluctantly. If he had said no, not at all, no one will think anything of me not going, I would have awkwardly made my excuses in the elevator, gave Caleb a stuttering congratulations, and then be on my way. But Chris gave a little grimace, accompanied by a shrug, and nodded.

“Kinda,” he replied. I grabbed my bag and slung it over my shoulder. I followed Chris down the hall toward the growing group at the elevators. Some of the Fed team were coming. I was happy to see Anna and Chloe there. It was still very much a boys club where I work. I don’t think that I have ever been mistreated because I’m a woman, but it can make things a bit uncomfortable when you’re sitting there, surrounded by men speaking about things you couldn’t ever hope to relate to or understand. Or maybe that was just me, but I hated being the only woman in the room.

Chloe flashed me a warm grin. She was stunning, intelligent as they came, and tough. In truth, Chloe was exactly who I wished I could be, but for whatever reason, I’d never be able to get out of my own goddamn head. But on top of it all, Chloe was one of the kindest people I know. She’d always pop her head in when events were being planned to make sure I received an invite and that I was in the loop.

“Are you coming, Ellie?” she asked happily. I noted the turn of Caleb’s head in my direction. He was speaking to a small group, including two from SALT and three from the Fed team. One of those women being Amelia Harper, who I absolutely detested. While Chloe had it all, but would never do a thing to hurt another if she could avoid it, Amelia took a perverse joy in bringing people down, other women in particular. Caleb and her were by no means friends, but they were friendly, and it was clear to everyone who had eyes that she would let him take her home in an instant.

“I am,” I answered. Chloe smiled, brilliant white teeth popping out from behind full red lips, which themselves popped out beautifully from her smooth, espresso colored skin. She wrapped an arm around my shoulder and jostled me. One of her braids draped over my shoulder and I could not help but smile as she did so. Chloe would be promoted within the year. That was certain. Maybe I could talk to her about being transferred from SALT to Fed?

“That everyone then?” Caleb asked, eyes moving over the group. His eyes briefly met mine, and I lowered my eyes back to my shoes. I noticed a scuff on the toe of my cream colored shoe. I noted how dingy they looked in comparison to Chloe’s black pumps. My cheeks burned. We split into two elevators. I thanked the lord I ended up in the elevator with Chloe, Anna, and Chris. The rest, two guys named Mark and Peter, who were junior associates of Caleb, nestled in the corner. I heard Mark mutter to Peter, “*say goodbye to our fucking lives. Never going to be able to see my family again.*”

Peter replied, “*I barely see my family as it is. See you guys more than my own kid. Might just fucking quit.*”

Mark answered, “*hundred thousand reasons you won’t.*”

I don’t think they thought anyone could hear them. Everyone else was chatting happily. No one would dare say those words to anyone who they didn’t trust implicitly. I certainly wouldn’t say anything, but I could end their careers with a word to Caleb. My stomach churned but I felt a bit better. I don’t think I was alone at all with my distress over this new development. And what Mark said at last was true. Hundred thousand reasons says you won’t. We got paid well, but we sold our souls for it.

The elevator doors opened. The other elevator had beaten us down, but they were waiting outside for us. I followed the group from a short distance behind, looking down the street and gazing after my T-stop longingly. I just wanted to go home and cry, sleep, and wake up tomorrow and hope this was all just a terrible nightmare.

We got into the bar and we all had to crush in on each other. It was a typical Boston bar. Small, old, Irish. The foyer was narrow and I somehow found myself pressed very close to Caleb. I could smell his aftershave and it made me feel ill. My heart rate increased and I felt nauseous. I cannot tell you how much I hated him, how his closeness made me feel. Even the smell of him, the heat of him, I was struck with the same feeling I had when he leaned over me to jab at my report and walk me through it with unnecessary cruelty, just loud enough for everyone else around to hear in painful detail, my own failings.

“So, you’re going to celebrate this weekend?” Amelia asked him. I could see her chewing on her lip, coated with pretty pink lip gloss that I stopped wearing when I got out of the seventh grade.

“No, I’ll work. I have a botched internal summary I have to fix.”

I closed my eyes and tried to take a calming breath. That comment was made for my benefit. There was no doubt about that. I rolled my lips in together. If I was braver, I would turn around and say something, but I’m not brave, and I can’t make myself talk.

“Ellie, you coming?”

I opened my eyes. It was Chloe and Chris still standing in the foyer. Everyone else had shuffled past me. I blushed and nodded.

“Yeah, yeah,” I said.

“You’re looking a bit pale,” Chloe said to me. She touched my forehead. “You alright?”

“Lot of long nights,” I said. *Botching internal summaries*, I thought darkly. Caleb was still right there. Just a few feet ahead. I wish I had the courage to say it. I wish I had made that little needling comment that let him know I’d heard it and I didn’t give a shit about it.

“Amen to that,” Chloe said. I ended up sitting between Chloe and Mark. Mark got a pint of beer and drank it down so fast I wasn’t sure he even tasted it. Almost immediately, he got up to order a new one at the bar so he didn’t have to wait for the waitress. He hit my shoulder with the back of his hand a bit firmly and I looked over.

“You want one, Ellie?” he asked. “I’m buying.”

“No, thanks,” I said, oddly touched he thought to ask me and not anyone else. It occurs to me sometimes that people might not think I’m as awkward as I think I am, that I’m actually a likable person and people do genuinely enjoy being around me. Then that fleeting moment of clarity and confidence passes. He nodded glumly and headed toward the bar. The

conversation was light and scattered. Chloe and Chris were talking about a particularly difficult client, but got into a bit of a heated debate when Chris blamed the Fed team for accepting budgets that SALT could not possibly meet.

“In what world can my team do twenty five states with a fifty K budget?” Chris asked over his beer.

“You’ve had ten deals with the same budget and always get it done,” Chloe said dismissively.

“And kill ourselves to do it!” Chris cried in mock agony.

“You’re not even going to go out a bit this weekend?” Amelia was asking Caleb. He was nursing a whiskey, but I’m not sure he’d taken more than three sips.

“No plans to,” he answered dryly. It was with some pleasure that I realized he was, at least at the moment, entirely uninterested in Amelia. There was no flirtatious twinkle in his eyes or familiar grin. Just a grim face and dark eyes. He was staring off straight ahead, over the head of David from Compliance.

“Well, I think I’m going to be going out with Stephanie from Compliance and a few of our friends if you change your mind. I haven’t been dancing in a long time,” I heard her say as I motioned to the waitress and tapped the side of my glass. The motion drew Caleb’s eyes, but he only glanced at the glass and then looked away again. He never met my gaze.

“I’ll text you if I change my mind,” he answered. He raised his voice. “Wait till I’m partner, Chloe, no more of these ridiculous budgets!”

Chloe gave a sarcastic look. “Wait till I’m partner, Trent, and I’ll accept even smaller ones.”

“Oh God, Trent and Robinson both partners. We’re fucking doomed,” David said.

“Like it affects you at all,” Trent said with a little sneer, though he appeared in good spirits and everyone took it as such. He twirled his whiskey glass absentmindedly in front of him. “Everyone else at this table works to the fucking bone when you get in at 9:00am every day and leave by 5:00.”

“Damn right I do,” David laughed. “I’m never leaving compliance.”

My second beer was placed down in front of me and I took a big sip. Mark returned by the time I had finished about half of the second beer. He placed a new one down beside me. I had hoped to graciously bow out after the second, but I smiled and thanked him all the same.

“Good work on that Blackburn calc, by the way,” Anna said to Chris. I hadn’t eaten any of the food that had been ordered and I was feeling a bit light headed. I sipped cautiously at the third drink. “That was a quick turnaround.”

“Oh, that was Ellie,” Chris said. “She’s my calc queen. Anyone needs a calc done, give it to her.”

I smiled gratefully for the recognition and Chris winked at me. I hated doing the summaries, but my goodness, give me a calc and I couldn’t be happier.

“Blackburn was complicated,” Caleb mused. That was the closest I think he would ever come to giving me any sort of recognition. I looked at Chris. If only he had been made manager. Even if I was then moved under Caleb as his junior, I could have managed it.

“I’m going to run out for a smoke,” Amelia said standing. Someone other than her was getting praise. It was time to change the subject.

“Oh, I could use one too,” Anna said. “Chlo?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Damon hates the smell. But what the hell. It’s only once in a blue moon. Ellie, want a smoke?”

I looked up in surprise. I considered. I didn’t smoke, I never had, but I was anxious to belong. I wondered if this might push me closer into their circle. I really liked Anna, I really liked Chloe. I was about to say yes, but the hesitation was long enough that I heard Amelia invite Caleb and his rather harsh response of, “I don’t smoke. It’s a disgusting habit.”

I glanced over at him very briefly and then found my head shaking when I looked back at Chloe. “No, thanks. I don’t smoke.”

Chloe did not seem at all disturbed by the response and flashed a grin, promised to be back, and filed out with the other few smokers who were joining. I glanced at Caleb, wondering if there might be found some moment of commonality between us, some sort of recognition, and our gazes did meet, but there was not a single ounce of warmth or familiarity in his gaze. He looked back down at his whiskey and turned to listen to something Chris was saying.

There was not a single sign that Chris was bitter or angry about being passed over for the promotion. I wish I could be like Chris. He was confident, sure of himself, competent, and when people came after him, it rolled right off his back like water on a duck’s back. I envied him immensely.

I excused myself to run to the bathroom. I’m not sure if anyone heard me. My voice was so soft. I didn’t like speaking too loudly. It brought too much attention to me. I came back to find the others back from their smoke break. Everyone was ordering a new round and I caught the waitress in time to tell her I wouldn’t need another one and to close me out.

“So soon?” Chris asked and I felt my cheeks heat slightly. He looked disappointed and I sucked in a short breath. I didn’t like disappointing people. I really, really hated it. Especially people I wanted to like me so badly. Chloe pouted. Was she just being nice or did she actually want me to stay? I wondered if, once I left, there would be some dark sniggering, and everyone would say how glad they were I finally left. Had I already worn out my welcome? I was just sitting here silently, contributing nothing. I could hardly be a bother, but I doubt anyone was all that invested in my presence anyway.

“Yeah,” I said. “I’m tired and I have work to do this weekend.”

Everyone said goodbye, stating their regret that I leave. I drained the last quarter of the beer that Mark had brought me. I didn't want him to think I was ungrateful for the gesture. I glanced one last time at Caleb. I said softly, "Congratulations," but my voice was hoarse, so I cleared my throat and said more clearly, Congratulations, Caleb."

"Thanks," he answered. He gave me a tight smile. I gave a nod and turned to leave. "Have a good night, Orla."

My face turned taut and my skin burned. I paused and hated myself for the moment of hesitation, the slight flinch. I did not look back. I pushed on. The only possible reason a person called you something you've said repeatedly you do not like to be called is to get under that person's skin. I had no idea why he disliked me so much. What kind of twisted joy did he get out of calling me Orla?

I got to the front of the restaurant and swayed slightly. I took a deep breath and blinked down the road. It was dark now, rain was coming pouring down onto the busy streets and I saw lights of red and white blurring in my vision. I blinked. This job had turned me into a lightweight. Three beers, empty stomach or no, would never had gotten to me like this in my law school days.

"Ellie?" it was Chris coming out of the restaurant. "You alright?"

"What?" I asked him. He took my elbow and gently pulled me under the awning.

"You've been standing out here for like... ten minutes. Everything OK?"

"Ten minutes?" I asked. I frowned and rubbed my eyes. "No, I uh... I need to get to Park Street."

"Yeah... here," his hands were warm as he took my phone out of my hand. "I'll get you an uber."

“No, I take the T all the time -”

I took a step closer to him. Unlike Caleb, Chris always smelled so good. I loved the smell of his cologne.

“Here, I’m going to call an uber, wait here. I’ll close out and make sure you get home.”

“I’m fine,” I laughed. “But um...” I swayed a bit. “I could use the uber actually.”

“Yeah, what’s your address?”

I told him. It was a small studio that I paid about 1500 bucks a month for. Once it was called, he handed me my phone.

“Alright. On its way. Hey, look, you’re swaying a bit. I’m gonna go close out. Just stay here.”

“Chris, I’m fine.”

Was I slurring? I couldn’t tell.

“Stay here, Ellie,” he said curtly. “I’ll be right back.”

He went back into the restaurant. I watched the little black car from down the grey roads. I checked the license plate, make and model. I saw it pull up. I glanced over my shoulder. I didn’t think I could stand the shame if Chris had to walk me home after three beers. It was just the stress of the day catching up to me. Once i got home, I’d be able to crawl into bed and pass out and not worry about dealing with the embarrassment of it all tomorrow. I

jumped into the backseat and closed the door. The car pulled away and I fumbled with my phone.

I just got into the uber. Thanks for your help! I'm all set though. Promise! See you Monday.

He texted back immediately. *You sure?*

Positive. I was just a bit dizzy. All cleared up.

I saw dots and then nothing. Dots. Nothing. Then, the response. *Ok... try and enjoy your weekend.*

After that, I really don't remember much.

-

I woke up to sunlight streaming in through the windows and I grimaced. My head was pounding violently. The light hurt my eyes. I opened my mouth. It was dry. Bone dry. And there was a foul taste in my mouth. My muscles ached and I groaned as I rolled over in bed and tried to shield my eyes from the sun.

My stomach turned violently and I felt like I was going to be sick. I reached a phone out and groped for the side table. I couldn't find my phone and I lifted my head. I glanced around and found my phone on the other side of the side table. I moaned and dropped my head to the pillow.

What the hell had happened last night? I couldn't remember a damn thing. I'd only had three beers though. Empty stomach or not... I hadn't had a hangover like that in years. I felt another vicious wave of nausea as the pounding in my head pulsed violently. It slowly faded to the back into a constant but dull thud.

The only thing that pushed me out of bed was my intense thirst. It was a deep, painful need. I pushed myself up and glanced into the kitchen. I breathed heavily as I stared at the sink. I licked my dry, chapped bottom lip. Slowly, a strange realization crept into my brain and I looked downward.

I was naked. I sat and stared a long while. Why was I naked? I didn't sleep in the nude and on nights I did come home drunk, I either changed or I fell asleep in my clothes. I'd never slept naked.

But those thoughts came and went rapidly. The soreness between my legs sent another wave of nausea coursing through me. I'd had sex.... Or... I touched the dark smudges on my skin. What did that say...

I looked up. I didn't see a single sign anyone else was here. My bathroom door was open. The light was off, but I could see it was empty. I was alone. I pushed myself up from the bed and crept toward the bathroom. I stepped into the bathroom and flicked the light on.

I looked terrible. I had dark circles under my eyes. My skin was pale. My hair was an absolute mess. But I didn't even notice it. My eyes found the marker on my chest, written across my skin in large, uppercase letters.

I felt nauseous and I swayed. I had to reach out to grab the wall to keep myself from falling. I had trouble processing it. I needed water, I needed to eat, but I needed to sleep, I needed to throw up, and I needed to do it all at once. My headache surged beneath my eyes. It pulsed. *Boom boom boom.*

My fingers came up and gently trailed along the black marker marring my skin. My eyes lowered. It wasn't the large, black, boldly displayed letters that spelled out the word WHORE across my chest that had me truly crippled with fear in that moment, but the letters printed beneath them, below my belly, across my lower abdomen... large, menacing... a word with more far reaching implications than the simple derogatory insult someone who would drug and rape a woman might throw at them. No, this was far more unsettling, far more frightening. Drawn across my lower bellow, just above the neatly groomed curls nestled between my legs, written in black marker, in capital letters, was the word MINE.

Chapter Notes

I promise you. The sex will come. I think a story about a stalker inherently requires at least minimal buildup. Hopefully you'll stick with me till we get there.

Ellie's chapters will be long, his chapters will be short, so don't be upset by the length of this one. For those of you who are wondering, I uploaded the story unaltered. So there is no change from the original.

Loving the theories! I've been reading a lot of mysteries lately, thought I'd play around with it. This is by no means meant to be a mystery and I can't promise I'll be particularly good at it (I'm prepared for people to figure it out relatively early on), but I thought being in Ellie's shoes of having no idea who this person is, while having a few hints a long the way from his POV could be fun. Hopefully you guys are enjoying it.

For those of you that hate it. Very likely my next story will be closer in style to Bought and Paid For, and this story probably won't take me five years to finish this time around. So there is a light at the end of the tunnel!

She didn't miss a day of work. That was surprising, even considering who she was. That Monday, she got there early and had the step-up basis calc done by the time David walked in smiling with his morning cup of coffee. She walked from her cubicle to the industrial copier with that same air of arrogance he had noted on her first day of work, that suggested she wanted nothing to do with any person in the building. She did great work. She'd learned so quickly, caught on so fast, she'd rubbed a few people the wrong way.

As she walked to the copier, waiting behind Mark, staring at the back of his head with a look that was simultaneously far off and aggressive, she reached up to hold the top of her button up blouse together at the throat. Her fingers caressed the white buttons and then finally tucked it into the maroon silk.

She was fashionable but she did not invest in new clothing. All she owned appeared to be what she had purchased for internships in law school. She lived in a tiny little studio. She didn't own a car. She wore old clothing. Her hair was long, usually kept up in a neat bun and it was not likely she spent much, if anything, on haircuts or styling. No doubt, she had paid off quite a bit of her loans by now.

Mark finished his copying and turned. He took a small startled step back. She jumped a mile. He laughed loudly and reached out to touch her shoulder. Her face was stone. A single poke to the cheek and she'd shatter. Finally, she managed to force a smile onto her face. She said something in that soft little voice of hers and then Mark moved on.

She steadied herself against the copier. Her eyes fluttered closed and she took in a sobering breath. Her eyes fluttered open, usually bright and green and vivid, darting around to observe her surroundings anxiously. She was always thinking, always sizing up those around her, taking in her surroundings. Now, they were glassy and bloodshot. She jammed at the buttons on the copier. She was playing with the buttons at the base of her throat, pulling the collar closer together. She looked down at her chest and pulled it together more tightly. She glanced over each shoulder anxiously before she returned to her copying.

She had a heavy workload this week. She had four moving deals at once. The only junior to have that much on her plate at once. She had only been at the job about ten months. A junior having four moving deals was virtually unheard of. Whenever asked if she could take a deal, she said yes. Everyone had waited for the day where she would fall on her face and realize that all she had to say was no, and the deal would be handed off to someone else. Mark had two moving deals. Peter had three, but he had been working here for three years. The man had no ambition. He'd be a junior until retirement and be happy.

When in doubt, you went to her. *Any availability?* You'd ask. *Of course*, she'd answer dutifully, even when she didn't. She'd leave the office at midnight and be back in by five, hunched over her computer in her cubicle, racing to get it finished. If she had less work, she'd make the same mistakes. Her mistakes were expected and she never made the same mistake twice. She took direction well. If she could handle the stress, if she could grow a thicker skin, which there was some serious doubt she could, she'd be made senior in less than six months. Her name had been bounced around to fill the recent vacancy, but she was still new. The decision had been made, unanimously, to hold the senior spot open a few months longer, in hopes she would fill the vacancy.

She walked over with her copies to duck into Brooke's cubical. Her shoulders were rigid and the back of her neck looked red. She was still fiddling with the front of her blouse, holding it tightly together at the neck. She stayed in there maybe five minutes, reviewing the document in detail. She would often find issues only the FED team was really expected to spot. More than once, Chloe had asked for her transfer to FED. No one on SALT would hear of it. She wasn't going anywhere. Both seniors and the manager had made certain of that. She was far too valuable to lose.

She left Brooke's cubicle and paused. She chewed on her bottom lip absentmindedly, green eyes darting across the page. She looked up, eyes scanning the cubicles that lined the massive open floor plan of the fourteenth floor. She walked down the cubicles. It was odd she wasn't using her email. She stopped in with Molly. It was a shorter visit. She left and retreated back down the long rows for the safety of her own cubicle.

She'd been here briefly for a tax internship during her last year of law school. She'd been placed in compliance during that time. She came in, sat at her desk, did her work, and left. She rarely asked questions and worked hard to avoid eye contact. No one spent much energy trying to get to know her. Interns came and went and no one expected her to be any different. Rumor had it that she didn't even apply for her current position. At least, not initially. She had impressed the head of compliance so much that Damien reached out to Nick Oakes personally when the new junior spot came open.

You want this girl on your team, he had told him at the copier one day, loudly enough for anyone in earshot could hear. She passed the bar with reportedly remarkably high scores, which was good, because she had been offered the job before she had taken the bar. Apparently, her resume had been that impressive.

She came back out about an hour later. Her voice was soft in the next cubicle. There was a tremor there. She was probably playing with the buttons at the collar of her shirt. It was a nice change seeing her so unsure and so nervous. It was nice, bringing her down a notch or two.

"It was calculated using the wrong tax year," she said. "Their fiscal year is 9/30 to 9/29. Do you see?"

"Well that's a monumental fuck up," Peter said. "Fuck."

There was the sound of rustling paper. "It hasn't gone out yet, but I'm going to blow the budget in order to fix it."

"It was a bullshit budget to begin with. Even Caleb won't blame you for that."

“Peter, I have to go to Nick to approve the extra hours,” she said. There was a long pause.

“Just add it to your billables,” he said.

“Then it looks like *I* made the mistake and *I* blew the budget,” she replied. Her voice had an edge to it. It was sharp, taut, but there was a quiver to it. She sounded congested. A cold, perhaps? Crying? Far more likely.

“Well,” Peter started. He let out a harsh laugh. “Come on, Ellie. Take one for the team. Go to Chris with it. He’ll cover for you in front of Nick. He won’t cover for me.”

“Peter, I, I can’t go to Chris, it’s still Caleb’s deal... either you fix it on your time, bill it and blow the budget, or I’m going to go talk to Nick.”

She wouldn’t go down for anybody. She was proud. Her ego wouldn’t allow it, but she had given him a chance.

“You know what, Ellie, do what you think is best. I’m going for a smoke.”

The sound of him rising and he grabbed his coat. “Pete, I’m sorry, but -”

Peter rushed past the cubicle entrance. She remained behind. She let out a deep, shaky sigh. Her shoulders were probably hunched, her eyes probably closed, soft, slender fingers pressed to her forehead, plump red lips quivering. She sniffled and let out a harsh breath. A few moments passed as she considered. It was clear what was going on inside her head; Who to go to; Caleb or Chris? Caleb or Chris?

She came to stand in the entrance of the cubicle. Her hand rested on the side and gave one of her soft little knocks.

“Hey, do you have a second?” she asked softly. One hand had the papers in her hands. The other was at her throat, playing with the buttons. Beneath lay large black letters, etched onto her breasts and belly. *Whore. Mine.*

And she was. The word *mine* had come after and there had been no ability to resist it. She had to know it. There had never been such an urge to write it on any of the others. She had been different. And to know those words were there, just beneath that dark red silk blouse...

The first time I saw her, she had dropped her bag coming out of the elevator. She had not noticed me. Not really. Her belongings had spilled out onto the ground. Her keys clanged on the ground, her bag slipped, papers sliding out onto the floor. She glanced around anxiously as she tried to collect everything. Her eyes had been wide, wet, cheeks erupting with pink, embarrassed blotches. I had helped her pick up her things and before a welcoming greeting could part from my lips she responded to my kindness with a curt and simple, “thanks,” before she went marching down the row of cubes toward her new desk. I knew I needed to have her. I needed to have her face down, ass up, hands bound. I resisted the urge. She was too close to me. We were co-workers. I fought that urge for ten months until it became too much. Every single thought was about her. No porn star looked enough like her. I’d make excuses to talk to her in her cubicle so I could breathe in the scent of her. She was in my dreams. She was the first thing I thought of when I woke up. The last thing I thought of before I went to sleep. It was all consuming.

It was wanting her and not being able to act on it that had the passion building up to such an uncontrollable level. Once I got what I wanted, I’d get bored. I just needed it once, to get it out of my system.

She bit her the inside of her bottom lip, mouth warped to the side. I reached up and removed the earbuds from my ears. I almost never actually have music playing, but no one actually knows that.

“Do you have a second?” she repeated. She glanced around. She rarely had reason to come to my office. I was usually in hers.

“What’s up?” I answered. She came over to my desk. She stood over me, placing the papers on the desk. She pointed to the numbers. I already knew what she had to say, so I only half listened. Instead, I noted the little tremble of her finger. The way her free hand continued to desperately hold her blouse tight to her throat. She sniffled every couple sentences.

“The budget’s too low as it is,” she finished. “I can’t keep this under five hours.”

She turned a hopeful gaze toward me. I felt a stirring in my limbs and looked down at the paper. I felt her beneath my hands, pliable and meek. She had a fruity smell to her. Her soap smelled like cherries. Her hair smelled like strawberries. It was a pleasant smell. I wanted to put my nose back to her hair and breathe her in deep. My body radiated tension.

“Fix it,” I said. “Take the time you need. I’ll take it to Nick.”

She let out a deep breath of relief. Her green eyes fixed on me and a smile came to her lips. She looked tired. She hadn’t slept. Her skin was pale. She wasn’t wearing any makeup. She always wore a little. Tasteful, professional. She looked like a shell of herself now. I wanted to wrap her in my arms and squeeze until she was crushed. *What are you doing here?* she had breathed. A little push and she’d fallen back onto the bed. Soft, absolute, exquisite, vulnerability. Spread open with no means of fighting. In the brief moments she had remained conscious, she had been so confused but so willing. A marvelous drug.

“Oh, thank you,” she breathed. She began to collect the papers.

“Scan me the docs,” I said. “I’ll need them for Nick.”

She nodded and left. She went back to the copier. I put my earbuds back into my ears. I pulled up my email and readied a message to Nick. I CC’d my fellow senior, her, and Peter and began typing. I glanced to my right as she came back from the copier. A violent surge of need exploded in my chest. She looked so tired, sad, frightened, alone. Energy raced through my body with no place to go. I squeezed on the stress ball hard as I watched her approach. She stopped by the opening of my cubicle and said woodenly, “Just scanned it.”

I gave a smile and a nod. She gave me a strange look. There was a furrow of her brow, a tightening of her jaw. She forced a smile. It looked like she was sucking on a lemon. She nodded abruptly and then walked away. I pulled up the scan and downloaded the document. I had trouble writing the email up. My thoughts were scattered. I knew one thing for certain though. She was not out of my system and once certainly would not be enough.

Day One:

I handled the situation by focusing on work. When I was at work, I had purpose, I had a goal, I had something to focus on. At work, I wasn't crying alone in my shower, sitting beneath the scaling spray of the water, scrubbing my flesh red and raw in a desperate attempt to get the marker from my skin. Even sitting at my desk listening to Caleb's lectures offered me a sense of relief.

On the Monday after it happened, Chris popped his head in early that morning and told me to check the information room for the Blue Sun project. He wanted me to review everything and if I found any problems, send it back to the associate that worked that part of the project and have them correct the issue. Once I'd reviewed it all, and it was good to go, I was supposed to send it to him and he'd do a final review before sending it to Nick.

It was the work of a senior and it wouldn't have been so bad if I didn't still have my current deals. Since that Monday, I was getting into work around six and leaving around nine every night. I was only on one of Caleb's remaining deals, which was good. The good thing about Caleb's promotion was that I wouldn't be working under Caleb directly anymore. It took off a lot of pressure. I had finished my last two reports for him that Monday. Peter wasn't speaking to me, but I got a nice email from Nick about saving the company a multi-million dollar lawsuit. It had not been my intention. I hadn't been looking for recognition or glory. I only hoped to avoid the blame. If Peter had just taken the work back and fixed it, it wouldn't have been a blip on the radar.

I just wanted things to return to normal. Once the transfer was complete, I'd be able to fall back into a rhythm. I'd get the marker off my skin and I'd stop waking up in the middle night in cold sweats. I'd stop the helpless wondering. It would fade to the back of my brain and it would become just another dream. I rubbed my eyes in between spreadsheets.

"Ellie."

A cry ripped from my throat and I jumped back in my chair. Chris chuckled and leaned against the cubicle door.

“Sorry. Didn’t mean to scare you.”

“No, I just wasn’t expecting you,” I tried to laugh.

“It’s six on a Friday,” Chris said. “Get home. Whatever it is can wait until Monday.”

“I just have to finish this research,” I said. In truth, I didn’t want it to be the weekend. I didn’t think I could just sit in my apartment alone for two days. My busy schedule this past week was the only thing that had kept me sane.

“Ellie,” he said, placing his arm up on the side of the cubicle wall. “People get burned out of jobs like this because they get lost in it. You’re going to be fried by the time you’re thirty, if you even make that long. The only person here besides us is Caleb. Go home. Enjoy the weekend. Whatever it is, it can wait. Come on. I’ll walk you to the T.”

I sighed but shut down my computer and packed up all my things. Chris grinned and stepped back as I walked from the cubicle. My hand clutched the neck of my peacoat together.

“Any fun weekend plans?” Chris asked.

“No. Probably just a lazy weekend. You?”

“Going down the cape with some buddies.”

“In February?” I asked.

“Yeah, bonfires, beers, bros,” he said and I laughed.

“Bonfires, beers and bros,” I repeated, looking down at my feet. As I approached the elevators, I could see into Nick’s office. The blinds were open, leaving the large bay windows bare. It would take some getting used to, seeing Caleb behind the desk. He sat there now, hand over his mouth, staring at the computer screen with an intent gaze. He’d spent the past week splitting his time between the new office and his cubicle. Nick had his office empty and was working upstairs by Wednesday. His gaze flickered upward. Chris brought up a hand in a silent wave. Caleb gave a nod, glanced at me momentarily, and then looked back down at the computer screen. Chris jammed the elevator button and I said, “that will be fun though.”

“Yeah, seeing some friends from undergrad. So it’ll be nice.”

The doors opened and we stepped inside. I let my eyes close for a few moments. I hadn’t had a decent night’s sleep since it happened.

“I know you’re probably not thrilled about Caleb’s promotion. He’s tough but you’ll be out of his direct line of fire now,” Chris offered. “Everything’ll come through me until we get another senior in here.”

“Thank God,” I breathed with a little blush. Chris smiled, pretty blue eyes twinkling. He had a very kind smile. We fell into easy conversation about one of the deals I was reviewing. I asked him how to best go about the reviews. I felt more at ease after that. I knew how to talk about work. I didn’t know how to talk about my personal life... or lack thereof.

We parted at Park Street. He continued on down the stairs to the red line and I moved on toward the green. The platform was packed. I crushed through toward the front of the platform. It was the one part of my life where I could act on pure aggression. The train came whizzing by and I slithered between bodies until I was to the left of the door. I felt the bodies crush in behind me, but I remained stone still, pushing backward to prevent being knocked out of the way. The moment the last person stepped off the bottom step, bodies fell in on themselves. One well placed shoulder and I was up on the stairs. The train was delayed. Bodies were trying to force their way on and the doors couldn’t close. I looped my arm around the silver bar and watched with detached amusement.

I dug into my purse and retrieved my headphones. I pressed the buds into my ears and put the music on my phone. I tried to think of something other than work, but the more I pushed my thoughts away from work, my brain ventured off into trying to figure out what had happened. Why? How? Who?

I didn't go to the police. By the time I realized I should have, I had been sitting under the hot spray of the water so long, the water had begun to cool. Whatever evidence there had been was gone. I didn't think I could go through the humiliation of an investigation with no likelihood of success. It was something I would get over. I was lucky I didn't remember it. That's what I kept telling myself.

I got off one stop early and did some grocery shopping. I picked up two bottles of wine along the way. I was going to need it. The walk back to my apartment was about twenty minutes but I found it refreshing. The air was frigid and brisk. I walked with fast, meaningful steps. It helped clear my head some.

My apartment building didn't have an elevator. I climbed the steps with burning lungs. When I arrived at my door, my back was slick with sweat, my arms were burning, and I was a bit out of breath. I fumbled with my keys. My stiff fingers struggled to keep hold of the metal. They fell to the floor with a loud clang.

"Fucking christ," I snapped and hunched over to pick up the keys. A head of garlic fell from the bag, followed by a lime, the salt and pepper followed. I dropped the bag and straightened. I stamped my foot and pressed my eyes shut. My heart rate came back down and I shoved the food back into the bag. I retrieved the keys, opened the door and collected my things. Once I was inside, I kicked the door shut behind me.

I walked into the little kitchen and laid out my things on the counter. The first thing I did was pour myself a healthy glass of chardonnay. I took a few big gulps before moving on to my closet. I tossed it open and wiped the little dribble off my chin with the back of my arm. I retrieved a t-shirt and a pair of shorts from my little clothing bin. I switched into my shorts, hopping from side to side as I forced a leg into each hole. Once done, I threw my hair up into a bun and grabbed the remote from the foot of my bed. I threw on NESN and tossed the remote dismissively onto my beanbag chair in the corner.

Cooking was always something that calmed me. It was fun and calming. It was something easy to control and since I had moved away from home four years ago at the start of law school, one of my favorite things to do was to throw on a sports game, turn the music up high, crack a bottle of wine, and cook a nice dinner.

I retrieved my phone from my bag, put on my favorite playlist, and hooked it up to my speakers. I couldn't hear the game over the speakers, so I turned it up. It was the pregame show and I liked to hear the analysis beforehand. I'd always loved sports but not many people knew that about me. I took another deep swig of wine and then refilled the glass.

I wasn't a virgin before it happened. I'd had a rather serious boyfriend during undergrad and I'd had a hookup in law school. I didn't know it was just a hookup until I stopped by his locker the next day to see what he was doing later that night. Long story short, it wasn't me. So, I had no real reason to be so upset. It was just sex. I wasn't robbed of my innocence. I had already scheduled an appointment with my doctor for a test in three months. Apparently, that was how long you needed to wait before getting tested to know what you might have contracted, but I was fairly certain whoever it was, they had used a condom. I would be fine. I was being over dramatic. Many women had sex ten times as much as I had at this point their life. It was fine.

I finished chopping the garlic and slid it off to the side. I grabbed the onion and glanced over my shoulder at the TV. The game would be starting soon. I'd probably have dinner ready in time for the second period. I'd plop down on my beanbag, drink the rest of my bottle of wine, most of the other, and then go to sleep.

I tossed the green peppers, onions, and garlic into the pan. I preheated the oven and patted the chicken dry. My neighbor's door opened and shut. I could hear it faintly over the music and the TV. Hopefully they wouldn't be partying too hard tonight. I wanted to fall into my drunken stupor relatively early this evening. I slid the chicken into the oven and set the time. I stirred the veggies and moved it over to the off burner. I flipped the burner off and reached for my glass.

Before my hand could close around the stem of the glass, a large, hot hand clamped over my mouth. My body was ripped backward with ease and a powerful arm crossed over the front of my body, holding my arms tightly to my own body. I was held firmly against a large, towering body, and a cry ripped past my throat.

"Scream and I cut your throat," a gravelly voice grated lowly against my ear. I felt the scratch of the mask against my skin, felt the heat of breath against my cheek. I fell silent, body still as stone. My heart pounded violently against my ribcage. My brain remained empty as he shuffled us backward toward my bed. I stumbled along, my bare feet colliding with his shoes as he hauled me backward. If not for the hold he had on me, I could have fallen hard to the floor.

He flung me down face first and was on me so fast, I wouldn't have been able to fight back if I had wanted to. His knee pressed hard into my lower back and my shoulder strained as he pulled back my arms hard at the wrist. Plastic bit into the skin of my wrists and he pulled the ties tightly around my skin. The moment his hands left my wrists and I made the attempt to pull free, I was struck with the intense danger of my situation. I tried to break free, but I could not. He grabbed my ankles and I let him tie them without an ounce of resistance. I continued to pull at my wrists, but my body lay limp, unwilling or unable to fight. He leaned down on my upper thighs and bent my legs at the knee. He got ties around my ankles and fastened them tightly.

"P-Please," I begged. "Please don't do this. Please."

"Shut up," he bit out, low and gravelly again. He wrapped a thick piece of fabric around my head and my eyes fluttered closed.

"Please don't," I whimpered pathetically. I could hear his footsteps as he crossed my wooden floors. They were heavy. The curtains were whipped across the blinds. I keep my blinds down anyway. I always thought the idea of letting the people in the building across the street look directly into my apartment was creepy. Now I wished I had left those blinds open. They might have seen what happened. Police might have been on the way. "Please don't hurt me."

I heard heavy footsteps cross the floor again. A piece of cloth was jammed into my mouth. I shook my head at the invasion. I began to fight then. I'd read about people suffocating like this. The cloth would get jammed too deeply into the person's throat and they'd choke to death. He held it there but stopped trying to force it into my lips. I stopped fighting. Every muscle in my body went limp. I laid weakly on the quilt.

The fabric was slowly removed from between my lips. I remained quiet. My chest heaved and I sucked in a deep, shuddering breath. I tried to calm my breathing as best I could, but I struggled. Every muscle in my body flinched when a hand closed over my calf. My cheek was gently caressed with the back of his fingers. The hand wrapped around my calf slowly moved upward and stopped just below my knee.

The hand was removed and I was heaved upward. I plopped down with my head against the pillow. There were a long few moments of silence before I felt his body drift away. There was

a moment of stillness and for a few moments, I actually thought he might have left. Then the music turned off. The Bruins announcer's voice shouted out loudly into the room, noting the remarkable athletic ability necessary for the other team's goalie to make such an amazing save. Then the TV clicked off, leaving us in silence.

The silence was deafening. It was absolute silence. It buzzed in my ears and I strained to hear. I held my breath a moment, trying to locate him. Then it became too much and I let out a deep sigh and sucked in air greedily. His footsteps slowly crossed the room. He was in the kitchen area.

"My name is Ellie," I offered softly. "I'm twenty six. I'm from Berlin, New Hampshire -"

The footsteps crossed the floor in fast, heavy, hard thuds. My heart seized and his hand grabbed my jaw hard. The cloth was pressed to my lips and he worked hard to force it past my teeth.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry," I pleaded, turning my head to the side so I could free my face from his grip. "I'll stop. I promise. I'll be quiet. I'll be quiet. I promise."

There was some hesitation. I remained as quiet as I could. He remained close. Hovering. Looming. Slowly, he backed away. He crossed the floor softly, back into the kitchen. I waited, listening intently, too frightened to move an inch. It was impossible to know how much time passed, but soon, his feet were crossing the floor.

I felt the weight of him press down on the side of the mattress and he lifted a leg over my waist. I could feel him hovering on top of me. The mattress pressed down on either side of my head.

His face pressed to my neck, the mask itchy and uncomfortable. I could feel his lips. He breathed in deeply and let out a soft, contented sigh. His face moved upward to settle against my temple. His face pressed to mine hard and I grimaced forcefully against the cloth around my eyes. It was the same man. I knew it. It wasn't a conscious thought, it was simply an understanding that was there, floating around in the back of my brain.

I sucked in a breath, parted my mouth to speak, but a finger gently pressed to my lips. I fell silent. I got another soft caress to my cheek. A gentle touch of approval. His fingers trailed downward, painfully soft against my jaw and throat, until he reached the white t-shirt. His fingers hooked at the collar and tugged downward. His fingers traced the tops of the fading marker.

Slowly, with agonizing tenderness, he leaned his head downward to place his lips to the burning skin beneath those black letters. Slowly, he moved downward, forcing my shirt up over my bra. His mouth was on my stomach. His lips were hot and wet. I felt his tongue trail along my belly button. He stopped at the top of my shorts.

He sat up, shifting on top of me. He was seated on my hips, hands trailing along my body slowly. He let out a kind of breathy laugh, like an excited child opening up the present he most wanted on Christmas morning. Large, powerful hands closed around my bra covered breasts and he squeezed gently. He prodded, feeling the weight of them. He massaged his thumbs against my nipples through the fabric.

It took everything in me not to beg him to stop, but the threat of the gag kept me silent. No matter how badly I hated my life at that moment, I didn't want to die, and I was terrified of suffocation. He must have noticed my increased trembling, because he leaned down and placed a kiss to my cheek. He placed another to my temple and then whispered, low in his throat, "I'm not going to hurt you."

I nodded. The blindfold was getting damp from the tears that were squeezing past my closed eyelids. His lips closed around my earlobe and sucked. His groin pressed against me. His fingers pressed hard into the flesh of my bottom, pressing me firmly against his jeans clad erection. He wore jeans and I could feel his erection straining against it as he pressed himself against my stomach.

His face went to my neck. One hand gripped my face, tilting my head back to give him better access to my throat. He kissed softly. Gentle caresses from his lips from around the itchy mask. He breathed in deeply. I felt a hot, wet trail of his tongue along the side of my neck. Then another kiss and a deep inhale. His teeth grazed my shoulder and I jumped. He shushed softly against my throat, hand gently caressing my forehead. I fell silent again, sagging against the bed. I continued to shudder slightly, but I received no sign this angered him.

I did cry out when he pulled back and with frightening abruptness, felt a tugging and then tearing of my shirt. I felt the tug and the pull and I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt he was using a knife to accomplish this task.

“Shh, Shh, Shh,” he continued to soothe. I took in an increasingly shuddering breath of air as he tossed the two sides of my shirt aside. I still had my bra on, partially concealing the word WHORE fading across my chest.

In what I could only take in as a sinister, blood curdling act, his fingers slowly traced the word mine written across my stomach. He took his time. His fingers left a tingling, scorching wake in their path.

“Ple-”

I stopped myself, biting down hard on my lower lip. His fingers paused. One finger pressed to my lower stomach. I kept my lips pressed together. I sniffled. Bit my lips again. Slowly his fingers resumed their trail. Once done, he moved to my shorts, and gently plucked at the edges. He did not remove them. Instead, his fingers went to my bra straps. He slid his fingers beneath them, sliding them back and forth, up and down. Slowly, painfully slowly, he pulled the straps down. He leaned down and placed his lips to my shoulders.

He nipped and licked at my chest. Slowly, he flipped a bra cup downward. I arched my back, straining my arms beneath me. A feeling, hot and wet, engulfed my hardening nipple. His tongue flicked at it and his hand tightened around my other breast. His teeth closed around it and I bucked in fear. His mask scraped against the swell of my breast and I could feel the curve of his smile against my skin.

He flicked down the other cup of my bra. His mouth went to that breast next. He gave it the same attention. Sucking and licking and biting. His hips ground against me, forcing his bulging erection more firmly against me.

Finally he sat back and with another tug of pressure and a quick flick, my bra was cut in half between the cups. He tossed it to either side and palmed a breast within each hand. My nipples strained hard against his palms and his squeezes grew more forceful.

His hand gripped me by the jaw hard and his lips pressed to mine. I remained rigid and unmoving beneath him. He kissed again, massaging my mouth with his. I remained rigid. His hand went into my hair and he tugged my head to the side. My scalp burned slightly.

His mouth hovered over mine. His breath was crisp and minty. He breathed, voice low and curt, "Kiss me back."

His mouth was back on mine. I parted my lips timidly. He tasted like wintergreen. His kisses were gentle at first. They grew more passionate, but what was most unsettling about it was that they felt no different than a kiss you might receive from a boyfriend or an attractive stranger at the bar. His hand went behind my head and he held me to him closely, mashing our mouths together as he opened his mouth more widely. Finally he pulled back and lifted me up. He made the necessary cuts and tossed my shirt and bra to the side in tatters. He made a noise, as if he was about to speak, but stopped himself.

His fingers grabbed the waistband of my shorts and pulled downward. I wore plain cotton panties. He pulled those down without ceremony. He unbound my feet and finished yanking the clothing to the side. He tossed a leg aside. On impulse I brought it back over, squeezing my thighs together as tightly as I could.

"N-no. Please. I'm begging you."

I was silenced with a firm slap across the face. It wasn't particularly hard, but it stung and was shocking enough to still me. His hand flattened over my mouth and he leaned downward, lips to my ear. His voice was low and grating. Like he was growling. It didn't sound natural. "Be quiet."

He pulled back and tossed my leg to the side. I was trembling, but I remained silent. I sniffled violently and he leaned down over me. He pressed his lips to mine and cooed softly, hushing my cries.

He paused a moment and then with some force, rolled me into my side. He released the bonds on my wrists and quickly yanked my hands up over my head. Without any resistance, I let him turn me back over and bind my hands to my headboard.

My hips were elevated and he readjusted me so my bottom was pressed to his thighs. There was a hot gust of breath air and then cold. A warm finger pressed to my clit, his thumb, and my hips bucks. A breathy laugh escaped from his nostrils and pressed a closed mouth kiss to the sensitive bud. I remained still, too afraid to try to inch away.

Slowly, I felt his tongue press to the sensitive skin, firm and hard. I could not help the reaction to try and squirm my hips away. He kept me in place, throwing my legs over each shoulder.

I was struck with an intense sense of embarrassment as I listened to him breathe in deeply through his nose and then push his tongue into me. I'd never let a man do this to me before and I wouldn't allow it now if I had the choice. Tears continued to leak from my eyes and I sniffled violently. His mouth did not stop moving. His lips kissed and sucked, his tongue poked and prodded, until with a horrifying realization I felt the building up of pressure in between my legs.

He pulled back and inserted a finger inside of me. Then two. He pumped them back and forth, his thumbs brushing my clit, until finally, his lips took the place of his thumb. It was a concentrated effort and I was unable to fight the build up of pressure, until I felt a quiver rush through me I pressed my thighs together. I felt the itch of the mask against my inner thigh. Any hope he didn't notice was immediately dashed.

He pulled back, removing his fingers from me and let my bottom fall to his lap once more. A little sob escaped me when, through the quiet of the apartment, he *laughed*. He shushed me as I began to cry with a bit more force. He lowered his body to mine and pressed a gentle kiss to my face. He stroked my hair and placed one kiss on top of either eyelid. He pushed himself back up. There was the sound of a belt fumbling and then my hips were lifted.

Slowly, he rubbed himself against me and I tried to squirm away. He did not hit me this time, but he held me firm. He continued to rub. Slowly, he pushed downward until he was pressed against my slick entrance. Hot, hard flesh slowly rubbed, up and down, up and down, against my glistening flesh. He groaned softly as he continued to push. Then, on one motion downward, he pressed firmly to my opening, and thrust inward.

I moaned softly as I spread apart. He moved slowly but without hesitation or concern. As I struggled with the emotions coursing through me, I tried to remind myself that it didn't matter. He'd already had sex with me once, and I wasn't a virgin when it happened. It didn't

matter. It was just sex. Women had sex all the time. I was just a prude. It was fine. The same as bringing someone home from the bar. I was fine. It didn't matter. It didn't mean anything. I'd be fine.

He continued to press inward. I groaned deeply as I struggled to adjust to the discomfort. He pushed as far as his body would allow. He collapsed on top of me, pressing his face back into my neck. He didn't move right away. He kissed my neck gently, like he was comforting a lover.

When he did begin to move again there was some discomfort but it was faded. He was a well endowed man, but he had made certain not to hurt me. His movements were measured though intense and as he continued to move over me, his thrusts grew harder and harder, and soon he was groaning loudly in my ear as he neared climax. I was struck with a violent rush of familiarity. He'd been here before though. He'd written those words on me.

He remained inside of me a while after he had finished. He placed scorching hot kisses along my neck and face. He breathed in deeply, pressing one hand to one of my breasts and squeezing. He placed an opened mouth kiss to the side of my mouth before slowly turning my face toward his. I accepted the kiss passively but I made sure not to be too rigid.

Finally, after an eternity, rolled off of me. The weight of his body weighted the mattress down beside me. He was breathing, loud and content. I laid there, too scared to move, praying he would get up and leave me alone.

He rolled off the bed by rolling on top of me. I felt the indent on the mattress, and then the warmth of his body as he rolled over me. On his way, he grabbed my face and pressed a hard kiss to my mouth. My ears strained as I waited for him to leave. I wanted to ask him to untie me first. It would be days before anyone thought to send a welfare check. I could go days without food or water before anyone would think to come looking for me. It was enough to bring me to tears.

"P-please," I chanced. "Don't leave me tied up- no one will come looking for me."

I was struck with the idiocy saying that. I hated myself. I wanted to collapse in on myself like a dying star. I bit my lip hard.

“Can I -” I swallowed thickly. His heavy footsteps crossed the floor. “Can I talk now?”

The TV came on. The Bruins were still on. Next I heard the fridge open. I waited. They were going into overtime. The bed sunk down by my feet. There was the crack and hiss of a soda can. He was still catching his breath, though the sound was softer now. The tv turned up.

“C-can I - ”

I fell silent when he got off the bed. I thought I was about to be hit and I cried, “I have to use the bathroom!”

There was a moment of pause. Footsteps crossed the room and I realized he had been nowhere near me.

He was wearing gloves now. Cold, latex. His hands unfastened me from the bed and he directed me with firm movements off the bed. I walked toward the bathroom. I stumbled along the floor, still naked. I realized he had finished inside of me as I felt, thick, warm, wetness begin to drip onto my thigh. There was the sound of porcelain slapping porcelain and then I was forced to sit down on the toilet.

My cheeks burned with shame. I could feel him there, standing over me. Looming. Eventually my bladder let loose. My eyes squeezed shut and I let out a humiliated sob. I heard the sound of smacking latex and warm fingers were pressed to my face. The touch was tender and comforting. It would have been soothing and reassuring, if they were not from the hands that had just raped me. I groped for the toilet paper with my bound hands once finished, but he stopped me. Further humiliation seized me as he stood me up, reached between my legs, and wiped me clean. He tossed it into the toilet and flushed it. The water turned on, soft scrubbing, and then his hands touched me bringing me back toward the bed. He sat me down but did not try and fasten me back to the bed frame.

He went to the fridge again. When he came back, he pressed a hand to the back of my head and a bottle of water to my lips. I drank it down greedily. Once the bottle was empty, he laid me back down on the bed. My hands were brought up over my head.

“Please don’t leave me like this. I won’t call the police, I promise. Please don’t leave me like this -”

A finger to my lips. Gentle but firm. He walked away and I heard the sound rummaging. He came back and his fingers slipped between my lips. I felt the pill, small and hard on my tongue. Then, the tin of one of my seltzer cans was placed to my lips. I swallowed without protest.

He got back onto the bed and laid down beside me. A hand pressed flat against my thigh. He slid it inward slowly. His fingers curled around my inner thigh and he prodded. The puck was about to drop. His fingers continued to grope. Slow, calm, squeezes of my thigh. I fell asleep just a few moments later, silently wondering if the chicken was burning in the oven.

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys so much for all the reviews. It's really very much appreciated. I know this one is different than Bought and Paid for, but I really am hoping you guys are enjoying it. Please let me know what you think! It's inspiring.

The chicken lay over cooked and partially eaten on the counter, next to the forgotten glass of Chardonnay. The vegetables had browned and shriveled. The TV buzzed softly and the only other sound in the tiny apartment rose up over the TV in deep, measured breaths. Her chest rose and fell with every intake of oxygen. Her hair spread up like a halo on the pillow behind her head. Her angelic face was partially hidden by the blindfold around her head.

She had been exquisite. Far better awake than she had been asleep. The soft little sounds that escaped her lips, the trembling of her thighs, the tightening of her nipples.

Her lips twitched where she lay. They parted and a little moan escaped. The benzo would keep her asleep for at least seven hours. I considered untying her, removing her blindfold, and holding her to me like we were lovers. I wanted to know how it might feel. My better judgment decided against that.

The first time, she had remained awake for only moments. She was asleep by the time I had her stripped down to nothing. I had come prepared with chloroform and GBH, but dragging her over to the bed had given me a feel of her frightened, trembling body against mine, and my well thought out plan had gone out the window. I needed her awake. I needed to feel her tremble, hear her moans and whimpers.

She had hair between her legs, but she was groomed. A dark little nestle of well placed curls. There was a very slight swell to her belly, but it only helped to extenuate her curves. Her breasts were large enough to fill a hand. Her nipples were small and pink. Round and hard beneath a tongue.

I wanted her again. Already my body was stirring at the sight of her. I got off of the bed. I flicked the TV off. I finished the glass of wine on the counter and then rinsed it out in the sink. I poked at the vegetables. It would have been a very good meal if I hadn't interrupted.

Once the kitchen was clean I walked into the bathroom. It was tiny. It was a walk in shower with enough room to sit if someone wanted to. The sink was directly beside the toilet, and there was only two body widths between them and the wall. She was living well below her means.

I opened the medicine cabinet. Before starting, I'd done a cursory search for birth control and checked to make sure it was current. I wanted to fuck her without a condom this time. There was time to clean her up after. Now I did a deeper dive.

Inside was makeup. One bottle of concealer turned to the side, the cap discarded and off in the corner, a tiny pile of cream colored goo collecting beneath the bottle. Some eyeliner, eyeshadow and blush, though she rarely wore it.

The pill bottles were more interesting. Little orange bottles, stacked neatly side by side, labels facing outward. Doxepine for sleep. Isocarboxide, for social disorders. Trazidone for depression. Xanax for panic attacks. Tucked inside was a handwritten note. It was her handwriting. It gave detailed instructions on when and how to take each pill. She was more fucked up than I thought. It was not frightening. It only reinvigorated the flame.

She had a pink toothbrush and used wintergreen flavored toothpaste. I smiled, reached into my pocket, and plopped a piece of gum between my lips.

He phone was on the night stand. She had received one text. A girl named Peg. The text messages were not that in depth. A few conversations here and there. Nothing serious. Peg asked what she was doing this weekend. Peg was headed up north for skiing.

Nothing. I typed. Just staying in and watching movies. Her camera roll was full of images of a baby and two dogs and a cat. Intermittently there was a picture of of her. A selfie with a sad looking, half hearted smile. One or two had the same three girls popping up in them. There wasn't a sign of a man on her phone. Not a sign of one in her apartment.

She had normal games. Candy crush. Sudoku. Some puzzle games.

Her fridge was well stocked. Juice, milk, soda, bread. A bottle of Chardonnay and enough food to get her through the weekend. Her cupboards had oatmeal, cereal, a full bag of chips, popcorn, peanut butter and jelly. A small smile came to my face. Many time I had come around to stand in the doorway of her cubicle, her report in my hand, to find her seated at her desk, staring off into space with her PBJ hovering in front of her lips as she chewed a tiny bite.

There was not much else to see in the tiny apartment. I searched for a journal but found none. I would have liked to take a little journey into her brain, but it did not appear she kept one.

I returned to her phone. Her Facebook was sparse. Ellie O. was her profile name. It explained why it was so difficult to find her. She only had about hundred or so friends, but they were active on her wall. Funny jokes and memes. Nothing to suggest she'd had physical contact with anyone in some time. She was not afraid to post about politics and she found herself on the correct side of the political aisle. She also liked Star Wars and the Office. So very original from every other white girl in New England.

She did have an interest in horror movies and mysteries, psychological thrillers and historical romances.

Her friends list included no one from work. It was a safe little haven for her, away from the stresses of her high paid job.

She stirred and made a soft little gasping noise. My head jerked to the side and I reached for my mask. Her blindfold was still on. Her lips parted, she let out a soft sigh, and her body relaxed again. I lowered my face so it was close to hers. Her breaths were soft little puffs of cool air against my face.

"No one will come looking for me," I murmured and trailed a finger along her lips. The first time, her kisses were limp and unresponsive. This time, the feel of her tongue, timidly and submissively pressed beneath mine, wiggling slightly, the soft caress of her mouth, had brought about an explosive pleasure.

Her body was soft and welcoming and so very responsive. Her back was to me when I came in. I'd had time to pull on the mask, pull the zip ties from my pocket, and walk right up behind her. It was lucky, but clearly, the universe was on my side.

No one will come looking for me. She wasn't expected anywhere this weekend. She wasn't going to get any phone calls that needed answering. It would not be until Monday when anyone would wonder where she was, and even then, no one at work would call in a welfare check for a day or so. Realistically, I had two more days to enjoy her.

Her nipples were still hard. The air was still cool. I closed a hand over her breast and felt it beneath my palm. Two more days, to fuck her at my leisure, to work through my need for her, and get her out of my system. I had been telling a friend earlier that I needed something to release the tension I'd been experiencing recently. To work through the stress. This was a perfect way to do it. I double checked the door to make sure it was locked. She had three locks on it. A good thing she hadn't used a single one. It wouldn't have mattered much. I had her spare keys in my bag. It didn't look like she'd noticed they were missing. The locks stayed the same.

What are you doing here? she'd asked in confusion when she'd opened the door.

I wanted to make sure you got home alright, I answered, stepping inside. She'd backed up to let me in, brow knitting. Her eyes were red and glassy. It was a miracle she had made it home at all. It was the biggest risk I'd taken to date, but it had been worth it. So very worth it.

I got up onto the bed and settled in next to her. I draped an arm over her belly and pulled her closer. I buried my nose in her hair and breathed in deeply. She smelled so good. It drove me crazy when I'd stand by her desk, pointing out mistakes she was too smart to have made. I tightened my hold on her. I pressed my groin against her thigh. I'd imagined this for so long. Having her naked body against mine, tied, vulnerable, and there for my use, felt better than I could have ever imagined it would. I had a great weekend ahead of me, but now, it was time to get some sleep.

Chapter Notes

Would she recognize his voice? I don't know.

Am I going to say for the sake of the fantasy it is perfectly reasonable under the circumstances that she wouldn't? Yes. And I will fight anyone who says otherwise.

Day Two:

I woke up feeling refreshed. There was no grogginess, no confusion, no ache of the head, no nausea. I started abruptly, ready and alert. I did not awaken disoriented, but I quickly became so. I started to open my eyes, but felt the weight of the fabric. I pulled at my wrists to find them still bound, up over my head. My first instinct was panic. It would be days before anyone noticed something was wrong. I'd be left there for days without food or water. I realized that was a bit of a dramatic belief. The walls were thin. I could scream and alert my neighbors to the fact that I needed help. That thought was not an appealing one. I was still naked. The thought of being found like this was horrifying.

I moved to sit up. I was going to get up on my knees and try to rip myself off of the bed frame. I'd rip the bed apart if I had to. I would not have my neighbors or the police come barging into my apartment with me tied to the bed naked. I'd break free and get the blindfold from my eyes and get dressed. Then I could decide if I wanted to call the police. I *could* rub my face against my bed until the blindfold came free. It was tight, but not so tight I couldn't get it off of I tried hard enough. That way, I could watch as I ripped the flesh from my skin trying to rip free from the zipties. I tried to move, but then I felt the weight of the arm across my belly. I felt his breath against my cheek.

He was still here.

My limbs tensed and I took in a sharp breath. I tried to stay as still as possible. I strained to hear, as if that might make my situation clearer. I heard nothing. No TV, no music. My fan wasn't even on. I always slept with my fan. The blindfold was thick. My skin burned hot. I sucked in a deep breath on impulse, and struggled to keep myself quiet. I gave a few more tentative tugs at my wrists.

His nose pressed to my cheek and he took in a deep breath. He'd removed the mask to sleep. I couldn't feel the scratch of the fabric against my skin. I rubbed the back of my head against my pillow but then stopped. If I got the blindfold off, if I got a sight of him, I was dead. It was like signing my own death warrant. I didn't need to be a hero. I just needed to get through this weekend alive. I remained still. His breathing turned steady again. Low and even. He was asleep. It was likely Saturday. Friday night? Maybe, but I felt too well rested. I couldn't have slept into Sunday. It had to be Saturday. But what time?

I remained still. I struggled to keep my breathing calm and my brain raced for a wise next step. I could lay there, remain silent, let him do what he pleased and hoped he'd leave me alive when he was done. I could try and get the blindfold off, get a good look at him, and then pretend to be asleep until he woke up. Then I could try and convince him it came off in my sleep. I never saw his face and there was no need to hurt me. I could try and rip free from my bonds and bludgeon him and get away.

If I had been given all the time in the world, I can't say what I would have done. I might have laid there trying to make up my mind until I died of thirst.

He shifted, groaned softly in a contented manner, and then stilled. The room was deathly quiet. The only sound was the slow, even breaths of the man laying in bed beside me. I could see nothing. I was surrounded by darkness. I was hyper aware of the sounds around me. My ears were buzzing. My heart thundered against my rib cage. It is impossible to say how long I lay there. I might have fallen back asleep at some point, because when he moved again, I jerked violently, pulling painfully on the zip ties around my wrists.

A soft half sigh, half groan escaped his lips. He breathed in deeply against my temple. After a moment more, his arm left my waist and the mattresses sagged beside me. I listened intently to his footsteps as he crossed the floor. The sound of a door creaking, porcelain hitting porcelain, and then running water. The toilet flushed, the sink ran, and then the door shut again.

"What time is it?" I asked. My voice was remarkably steady. It did not reflect the terror I felt coursing through me. I tried my binds weakly. I didn't want him to know I was testing the strength. Even with the slightest of force, the zip ties cut into my flesh. The skin ached and burned. I listened intently for his movements.

He was in the kitchen. The coffee bean grinder went on. The sink ran. My fridge opened and shut. I licked my lips nervously. My mouth was so dry. I wanted to ask for another bottle of water but I was too afraid speaking again might anger him.

I smelled garlic and onions. A pan sizzled. Then the smell of eggs and potatoes. My stomach growled angrily and I felt the pangs of hunger hit me hard. I hadn't eaten last night. He'd interrupted me before I could finish dinner.

The coffee maker began to drip. Pressure built up sharply in my bladder and I pressed my thighs together. I couldn't bring myself to ask him if I could use the bathroom. I couldn't handle the shame of being brought to the bathroom and wiped like a child again. I bit on the inside of my cheek as I waited, rubbing my thighs together to try and relieve the growing discomfort. Soon, it grew too much to let the shame stop me, but as I opened my mouth to speak, I found myself lacking the courage. No matter how many times I started, I could not get the request out.

His footsteps crossed the floor and approached me rapidly. I tensed, unsure of what was about to occur, but he simply grabbed my wrists and untied whatever kept them connected to the headboard behind me. It felt like something was cut. There was sudden tension, and then a snap. My arms then fell free. A single zip tie remained around each wrist. He brought my hands down and placed them still together in my lap. He squeezed my wrists hard. He waited then squeezed again. He did not need to speak, but the message was clear.

A coffee cup was soon placed into my hands. The distorted rumble said, "It's hot."

"Thank you," I murmured stupidly and brought the coffee up to my lips. Either it was as simple as a good guess or this person knew how I took my coffee.

My bladder protested as I took the second sip. The coffee scalded my tongue but I took another deep gulp. The apartment smelled wonderful. Garlic, onion, potatoes, eggs, fresh coffee and cream. I sat on the bed with my shoulders hunched and head down, gripping the coffee cup tightly in my hands. Not a lot of thought was going through my brain in those few minutes. I tried to replay leaving the bar on the day of Caleb's promotion. I had gotten into the uber by myself. Could it be the uber driver? No I did not think so. He'd had a very thick and distinctive accent and appeared a bit soft and short. This man had no hint of an accent, Boston or otherwise, and he was tall and well built. I trailed my finger along the front of the

mug. I felt the grooves and dips. It was my law school mug. I could feel the name engraved on the sides.

I'd tripped on the curb. The driver had asked me if I was ok. He'd had a deep crease in his brow. I'd tripped again but got to the stairs. I never used the elevator. It smelled like piss.

I had all but finished the cup of coffee when his footsteps came across the floor and the mattress pressed down next to me. I felt the fork hovering in front of my lips and I leaned forward anxiously to take a bite. I did my best not to groan in relief. It tasted delicious. I chewed and swallowed rapidly and then opened my mouth like a baby bird. I got another forkful. I pressed my thighs together tightly. I arched my back slightly and pressed my bottom into my mattress. The fork that was returning to my lips retreated. I took a deep breath and finally admitted, "I have to use the bathroom."

A pause and then the weight lifted off the bed beside me. Those large warm hands closed around my upper arm and he pulled me to my feet. I shuffled along the floor beside him. My apartment was small. I knew where I was going and saw the floor plan laid out in front of me as if my eyes were open. We passed the kitchen to our right, the futon and beanbag to our left, and then took the right into the cramped little bathroom. He sat me down on the toilet.

"Can I please have some privacy?" I asked. There was no ulterior motive. It was simply too humiliating. There was no response. I heard no footsteps. The door did not close. Finally I let my bladder go. I tried to be thankful I only had to urinate.

I felt him reach for me when finished and said, "I can do it. Please. Please."

My hands were not bound together. The zip ties each hugged a single wrist. Hesitation and then nothing. I groped for the toilet paper, found it, and took care of myself. I had no trouble finding the sink and washed my hands thoroughly. Once I turned off the water, his hand closed around my upper arm. His hand was large. He practically engulfed my bicep.

"Can I shower later?" I asked him. Speaking made me feel calmer. Like this was normal. Like I was safe. He did not answer me and sat me down on the bed. He'd made no efforts to silence me though and I felt encouraged by that. I took a deep, calming breath. I hardly even remembered I was completely naked. The more familiar a rapist was with you, the less likely

hey were to kill you. Many rapists were murderers. It took a lot to take a life. I kept telling myself as I finished my breakfast.

I got a big mouthful of potatoes, smothered in ketchup, and chewed peacefully. Now that my bladder was empty and those initial hunger pangs had subsided, I felt more at ease. I knew I was going to be raped again. He would have left if he was done, but I was confident, at least in that moment, that he wouldn't hurt me if I did what I was told. My goal now was getting out of it alive.

I ate until I was full and then shook my head silently at the next forkful. The bed shifted and I heard him take the few steps into the kitchen. The sink ran, dishes clinked, and I realized he was cleaning. I felt an absurd urge to laugh.

Another full cup of coffee was placed into my hands and I sipped at it peacefully until he was finished cleaning. He brought me back into the bathroom and I was hopeful I would get a shower, but he only positioned me in front of the mirror, placed my toothbrush in my hand, and put it between my lips.

I brushed my teeth and stood beside me. After I spit and rinsed, I could hear him beside me, brushing his own teeth. He spit and rinsed, and then his hand guided me out with a touch to my lower back. I reached out on impulse, frightened he might lead me directly into the wall, but then his arm snaked around my waist and he walked me out in a protective manner.

Warm hands pressed on my shoulders and I was forced down onto the futon. I sucked in a breath as he sat down beside me. I waited. Fingertips gently trailed over my cheekbone. Soft, hot tingles were left in their wake. The pads of his fingers gently brushed over my lips. My calm evaporated. I thought I had been ready for it again but I wasn't. My jaw trembled and I breathed out, "please, you already got what you want."

His palm cupped my cheek. His hand was warm. The pad of his thumb slowly stroked my bottom lip. My wrist was seized. Slowly, my hand was placed on the hardening flesh concealed within his jeans. He pushed my hand against him hard. He ground my palm against the hot bulge. His message was clear. "No I haven't."

His mouth pressed to mine and I flinched backward. My head was yanked back firmly with a hard grip to my hair and a little cry escaped past my lips.

“Kiss. Me. Back.” His was a low, grating whisper. He gave a hard yank again. A warning. His lips covered mine. Soft and warm. Fingers released their grip on my wrist and went to grope my breast. The kiss deepened. His hand held my face to his firmly. There was no room to escape even if I summoned the courage to try and wiggle free. His fingers slipped between my legs and prodded. He made a noise as if to speak, but decided against it. His lips continued their caress of mine.

His hands pressed at my inner thigh, throwing my legs apart with ease. My knees came back together on impulse. His hand pressed into me with more force and a cry of pain course through me as his fingers thrust inside of me without remorse. My lips parted and I let out a little cry of pain against his mouth.

I parted my legs and his forceful movements slowed. His thumb coaxed my clitoris and his lips pressed soft, closed mouth kisses of comfort to mine. He continued to work his fingers in and out of me until they were slick. I felt a crush of shame.

I knew, on some basic level, that a woman, or a man for that matter, can become physically aroused during a sexual assault, but I never quite believed it. How did the horrific nature of the act not completely shut down your body’s response. Part of me still didn’t understand it, even as it was happening. I was humiliated, ashamed, angry, and I felt a build up of pressure between my legs that I could not stop. I think I would have rather he be violent. It would have been less cruel.

“Whore,” he breathed against my mouth as he continued to pump his fingers in and out of me. I could feel his smile against my skin.

“No,” I said weakly. “I’m not.”

I don’t know why, but it mattered to me that he didn’t think that. I wasn’t a whore. I didn’t hook up. Unless you counted that fling in law school, but I’d cried for weeks over that.

“Mine,” he added. I felt a shiver of disgust rush through me as I remembered finding those letters drawn over my skin. It still hadn’t faded, no matter how hard I scrubbed. I felt the black letters burn on my naked flesh.

His tongue pressed to mine. I kept my mouth open for him, but the grip on my hair wouldn't have given me much of a choice either way. Abruptly he pulled back and with callous force spun me around. My body hit the futon hard and it scraped my skin. I'd had this futon since college. It was well cared for, but it was still an old futon.

My breasts crushed against the cushion. His hands curled around my hips hard and he yanked me closer to him. My body dragged along the futon and my hips were lifted upward. I got my forearms underneath me, but before I could get up onto my hands, he grabbed the back of my head and pushed it down onto the mattress.

He fumbled with his jeans. I could hear the sound of the button popping from the fabric, the sound of the zipper being yanked downward. My flesh was hot, tears leaked from behind my covered eyes. The pressure in my belly revolted me.

His erection pressed against the slick flesh. I felt the pressure, up and down, up and down, along the my wet opening. I wanted to cry and beg him to stop. My body trembled. He continued to rub and I heard a low sigh from him.

He entered me slowly. The tip of his erection slowly pressed into me. To my shame, he faced very little resistance. I moaned deep and low. Part uncontrollable pleasure, part absolute self-revulsion and disgust.

One hand grabbed my hip and moved me to give him a better angle inward. Once firmly inside of me, he grabbed my other hip, and slowly pulled me against him until my bottom was pressed to his hips.

He leaned forward, grabbed me by the hair, and turned my face to the side. He pressed on my cheek. Stay like that, he was telling me. He wanted to see my face. He pulled back and put his hands back on my hips. I wished I had something to bite into.

His movements began slow. He'd pull back, pushing my hips forward in a steady, controlled push and pull. Then he brought me back to him, movements just as slow and steady.

I had the absurd thought that at least he was handsome. I had no idea if this was true. He smelled clean, almost sterile, save the wintergreen breath. His body was tall, hard, fit, lean. Based on the pressure he was creating inside of me, his erection was quite large. Would this be worse if he was a fat, old, small pricked man with bad breath?

His movements grew faster. He brought me to him with more force. His fingertips dug into my skin harder and harder with each thrust. My face pressed hard into the futon, but at some point, he still felt the need to lean over my and pressed his hand to my face.

The full weight of him pressed down on my and he angled my hips upward. A low moan gurgled at the back of my throat and I bit down on my upper lip hard.

“Fuck yes,” he said. It was low, but it wasn’t the low or grating scratch he usually spoke with and I felt like I had been hit across the face. I DID know that voice. I knew it. I knew it... it was....it was...

His fingers pressed into my mouth. His middle and ring finger pressed down on my tongue and he continued with his hard, thrusting movements.

I bit my lip so hard it bled. I would not orgasm again. The shame was too great. He reached around me and placed his fingers between legs. He rubbed at my clit with hard, forceful movements and before I could register it, a ripple coursed through me. Fought back a moan, and then I lay limp. He continued his thrusts until finally, he tended above me. He ripped me upward. His lips were, smiling, panting against my cheek. Finally, he shuddered, and released me. I fell onto the futon and he slid out of me. I could feel, slowly, hot and wet, his climax oozing out of me and I curled up into a ball on the couch.

He left me there to cry for some time. Or at least it felt like it. When he did return, he sat on the floor in front of me, and gently stroked my wet cheek. I sniffled and curled my face away from him. I thought he might hit me, but he took to stroking my hair instead.

I almost fell asleep, lulled by the touch, when he gently gripped my shoulder and rolled me onto my back.

I heard a pop and the strong smell of indelible marker came to my nose. I jerked, bringing my hands up to my chest. He moved with amazing speed, and straddled my hips. He forced my hands underneath his thighs, and try as I might, I could not break my hands free from him. .

“Please just stop,” I wept pathetically. “Please. I’m begging you. Stop.”

I felt the cold press of the marker just under my right rib cage. It drew downward in slow, steady movement. It did not get far. Just a short, single line. He added the exact same directly beside it. I heard the click and the pen capped.

I stayed there in silence until the cold reality slowly crept through me. Two lines. He was counting my orgasms.

I burst into tears again and he began to laugh. *Laugh* . It only made me cry more. He leaned down, lifting his hips up, and I was able to get my hands free. I reached for my blindfold. I almost had it. I felt the fabric brush the tips of my fingers. His hands closed around my wrists hard and firm. He yanked my hands downward and flipped me over onto my stomach with fast, purposeful movements. His knee pressed to my back and I struggled to break free, but in no time at all, my wrists were firmly secured behind me. He flipped me over, sat on my legs, and slapped me hard across the face. I continued to struggle. The next blow knocked the wind out of me and I went still. He waited to see if I would continue my struggling. I simply lay limp.

Suddenly, he fixed the blind fold on my head. I took some deep breaths so calm myself. I still felt the cold of those two lines. Freezing. Itchy. Hot. My lower lip trembled and eyes filled up.

He took me by the arm and led me off the futon. He pushed me down to sit on the floor and I felt the warmth of the radiator beside me. My hands were brought down and I was tied to the fixture that kept the radiator fixed to the floor. He tightened the blind fold and then stepped away.

I sagged downward, pressed my feet flat to the floor and huddled near the radiator. He went into the bathroom. Smacking porcelain, the sound of urinating, and then more smacking porcelain. If I had not been struggling so hard to stop the tears from bursting past my eyes, I might have laughed. At least he was good enough to put the seat down.

The shower turned on. I sat up, hopelessly believing he might honor my request for a shower. But the water ran and turned off and I was never removed from the radiator. His heavy footsteps crossed the floor. The tv turned on, the fridge opened and closed, and footsteps moved to the futon. I sat there waiting. I think I fell asleep, because I started away by a soft hand on my shoulder. It slowly caressed my neck and cheek.

The soothing touch ended, and I felt the tug at the zipties. My hands were released from the radiator. The two zip ties still remained around either wrist. I rose on shaky legs. They had fallen asleep beneath me. I felt groggy and a bit nauseous. I was certainly asleep. He sat me down on the futon. His hand gently pet the top of my head. He disappeared. Footsteps. Then something pressed to my lips. My mouth opened on impulse and I found a straw. I sucked with blind trust. The moment the water touched my tongue, I realized how desperately thirsty I was. I sucked down greedily until the glass was empty. He disappeared again. Next, bread was placed into my hand. I brought it to my lips. A peanut butter and jelly. My favorite. I ate it up greedily. After that breakfast, it had to be late for me to be so hungry. He offered me more water. I drank it down and then he disappeared again.

I waited on the couch, still groggy. My stomach was knotted. It still felt empty. The water and sandwich were not sitting well. I curled my arms across my stomach and leaned forward so my elbows were pressed to my knees. I took some deep breaths. The futon crushed down beside me. A large hand pressed to my back.

“Can I please shower?” I asked. His fingers ghosted down my spine. He caressed a few moments. I felt a gentle tap between my eyes, pressing down the fabric of the blindfold. I vowed, “I won’t look. You have a mask.”

He tucked some of my hair that was coming loose behind my ear. My pony tail was a mess.

“Can I fix my hair? Please?”

He took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. His hand gently slid back down my back, finger tips traveling upward along my spine, and then his flattened hand traced the path downward.

“Please?” I asked softly. He straightened me up. His finger tapped either eye and then my nose.

“I’ll keep my eyes closed,” I promised solemnly. He took my up and turned me away from him. Slowly, he removed the blindfold. However it stayed on, it was secure. It fell away from my eyes and it took everything in me to open them. I kept them shut though. If I saw him I was dead. It was that simple.

“If I look at you, I’m dead,” I told him. I wanted him to know I understood that. “I won’t open my eyes.”

I said it out of hope he would let me shower, but he only combed through my dirtying hair with gentle fingers. He tenderly pulled out snags and once or twice I heard the sound of his hand smacking the air. Trying to get rid of the long strands my scalp was shedding no doubt. Once done, he brought my hair up into a high pony. It was how I wore it at work. The blind fold returned. I fought the urge to ask him to leave it off, but I fell silent.

“Thank you,” I said instead. He grabbed me by the chin and placed a kiss to my mouth. I did not react. He kissed me again. I tried to kiss him back, but I remained rigid. It seemed to please him. Then he put me back down on the futon. The TV switched and I heard the Bruins announcer droning on excitedly. It was a matinee game. It was 3:00pm on Saturday then.

He came back to the futon and sat down beside me. He positioned me so I was lying down, my head on his thigh. I curled up on the futon and tried to steady my breathing. I could feel my heart in my chest.

One of his arms draped across the length of my body. The other moved just inches from my face. I heard a metallic sound. Plucking buttons. A zipper.

I tried to sit up but the arm holding me there pressed firm.

“Shhh,” he said. My face was angled upward to rest on his abdomen. His fingers pressed hard into my cheek and he kept me pressed down against his belly. I felt hot flesh touch my lips and I tried to squirm away. I felt a rush of disgust and horror. I couldn’t do THAT.

The gentle hand turned cruel and he yanked on my hair so hard I cried out in pain. The hardened flesh was put back to my lips. It pressed to my closed mouth, massaging my lips back and forth, back and forth. I felt the wetness of precum on my lips.

He pressed more firm, his hand tightened in my hair. I opened my mouth and I screwed my eyes shut tightly beneath the blindfold. He shoved his cock into my mouth, flat against my tongue, deep to the back of my throat. He was clean, I reminded myself as he pulled back and pressed the head of his cock onto my tongue. He kept good hygiene. He had showered. He rubbed the head of his weeping cock along my mouth. I tried to squirm away, but he wrapped an arm around my head and held me firm. I tried to move my head but found it impossible.

“Suck it, whore,” he ordered, gravelly and low. I hesitated but before he could pull at my hair again, I obeyed. His hand moved beneath my chin, stroking to part of his erection not inside my mouth. “Like you like it,” he said sharply. I flinched, but closed my lips around the firm member. I lowered my head down, taking just a bit more of him into my mouth, and then pulled back. He grabbed the back of my head and forced me downward. I gagged as he bumped into the back of my throat but he continued to push downward. I erupted backwards when he released my head. His hand went back into my hair and he pulled me downward. He was kinder this time. After a few moments of stroking his wet cock against my cheek, he pressed it back into my mouth. He pushed me downward, but relented when I showed resistance.

“Good girl,” he whispered. It wasn’t that grating voice he was using, but I didn’t have the same rush of familiarity I’d had earlier. I tried to think back. I had known who it was. It had been right there, on the tip of my brain. Now it was gone. I couldn’t bring the voice back. I couldn’t play it again in my head. He grabbed me by the pony tail and pulled his cock from my mouth. My neck arched backward, and he rubbed the head of his cock across my lips again, this time in slow, steady strokes. He whispered again, “that’s a good girl.”

He put his cock back in between my lips. I tried to do what I could to keep him from getting violent. His touch remained firm but not overtly painful. Without warning he pulled me off of him and flung me onto my back.

He did not climb on top of me. He wrapped his arms around my legs and he dragged me toward him so my bottom was in his lap and my back fell flat along the futon.

His fingers found me bone dry and I felt a rush of triumph at that. I felt his breath against me and then a splat of dampness. He'd spit on me. His fingers rubbed the saliva into me with slow, meticulous motions. I knew what he was doing but I would not let him succeed again.

My hips were lifted upward and his mouth closed around my clit. He sucked on it hard and my hips bucked. He pulled back and dragged his tongue along the length of me. I tried to wrestle away but he held me firm. He blew hard on the sensitive bud and he pressed his mouth down again. His tongue pressed to it, massaging it firmly with the hot, wet muscle.

My hands reached down and I pressed at his head. I almost, almost, closed my hands around the mask to get a better grip to push him away with, but I was terrified he'd think I was trying to unmask him. My fingers curled and released immediately.

His mouth remained on my clit and a finger pressed inside of me. I felt the ripple and a release. I was crying again. My hands were pressed to my blindfolded face and my shoulders heaved. He licked me a few more times, base to clit, like a panting dog, and I knew he'd seen it too. He pulled back and took hold of my elbows with either hand. He pulled me up to straddle his lap with ease. I was very tired. I didn't have a lot of fight in me. I sagged against him. I didn't have the energy to sit up straight. He clicked his tongue at me in disapproval. His hands lifted me up at the bottom and his cock pressed to my leaning entrance.

"Whore," he whispered in my ear as he pressed himself at my entrance. I let out a sob and he lowered me down along the length of his pulsing shaft. I only hoped it wouldn't take that long. His arms wrapped around me and he gripped either side of my bottom. He lifted me up and lowered me down with slow movements. His lips were pressed to the side of my face and he whispered, "my whore."

The whisper held no hint of familiarity. "It's ok to like it," he added. He sucked my earlobe into his mouth. He lifted me up and down, and each time he lowered me down, I felt him, large and hot, stretching me apart. His tongue licked along the shell of my ear. His breathing was elevated.

My body tensed and I felt a terrible discomfort in my lower belly. I just wanted it to be over. I wanted him to leave me alone so I could go to sleep. Go to sleep and forget all about this.

Slowly, as I struggled the feeling of my body expanding and tightening around him, the rapid emptying of my insides, and then the forceful refilling, I felt a horrifying realization spread over me. It was happening again.

I pressed on his chest to try and separate myself from him, but he held me firm to him. He rapped one arm around me and used the other to better lift me up and down. I felt so small. Cocooned by this man. I let out a little sob. “Shh,” he breathed in my hair. “Shhh. Be a good girl.”

He continued his movements, pushing and pulling me up and down, up and down. He sucked on my earlobe, placed kisses behind my ear. A few times he was about to speak, but stopped himself. I was disappointed. I had been so close to pinning him down. I had to know him. That rush of familiarity hadn’t been from the two times he’d been in my apartment. I *knew* this man. I simply couldn’t place him. I breathed in deeply, trying to catch a scent, but I only smelled the sterile smell of unscented soap and wintergreen toothpaste.

I felt the rush, the pulse, and my body quivered. He climaxed very shortly afterward and I fell against him in a heap. I was sobbing. My shoulders shook and my blindfold was saturated. My face was pressed to his neck, my head resisting on his shoulder. His arms closed around me and he embraced me warmly. One hand rubbed gently circles along my back. The other stroked my hair.

“Shhhh,” he soothed. “It’s ok to like it.”

He shifted us. He lowered me down to my back and settle on top of me. He placed kisses along my neck and collar bone. His lips moved downward, along the swell of my breasts, and then to my nipples. I was crying softly, face contorted and tears dampening the blindfold.

“Please stop,” I begged him. “Please leave me alone.”

“Shhh, shhh,” he whispered. I heard the click. Smelled the overwhelming scent. “Dirty little slut.”

The marker pressed to my skin, cold and wet. He added one line. Slow and careful. He savored it. He added a second. How could something that was so cold, feel so hot?

He capped the marker and gently traced the lines he had drawn. One. Two. Three. Four. I brought my hands up to cover my face. My shoulders shuddered. His large hands closed around either wrist and he pulled my hands away. His lips covered mine, soft and firm. His kisses were soft and tender. "Dirty whore," he whispered. He pleased a tender kiss to my mouth, gently sucking my bottom lip between his. "Stupid cunt." another little kiss to the lips. This time our tongues touched. His hand gently gripped my chin.

"Are you a dirty whore?" he whispered quietly. I squeezed my eyes shut. "Answer me. Are you a dirty whore?"

To my shame, I nodded, because I knew it was what he wanted to hear.

"Are you a filthy slut?"

I nodded again. He kissed the tip of my nose. He kissed my jaw. "Say it. I'm a dirty whore."

"I'm a dirty whore," I whispered, voice breaking.

"I'm a dirty little cock slut."

"I'm a- a - a-" I hiccuped and sniffled.

"Shhhh," he soothed me. He stroked the top of my head. "I'm a dirty little cock slut."

"I'm a dirty little-little cock slut."

“Say thank you,” he whispered. I searched for familiarity but found none. It was a simple, disembodied, ghost of a whisper. If I knew this man, and I was sure I did, I’d never heard him whisper like this.

“Thank you,” I said, tears leaking from my closed eyes.

“For making me cum,” he added.

“For making me cum.”

“Like the dirty whore I am.”

“Like the dirty whore I am.”

“Say it all together now,” he instructed. His thumb pressed to my lips. My lips parted and he put his thumb into my mouth. I sucked on it. I knew it was what he wanted. I cannot explain why I did it. He slowly removed his thumb and traced my lips.

My voice was trembling, but I stuttered out, “thank you for making me cum like the dirty whore I am.”

He lowered down and placed another kiss to my lips. He slowly lifted himself off of me. He disappeared a few moments. I heard him in the kitchen. I simply laid there, my hands pressed to my face, smothering my sobs.

He returned and placed two pills between my lips. I swallowed them without question. He disappeared again, but returned with my fleece blanket I kept at the foot of my bed. He covered me with it and I clutched it tightly under my chin and rolled onto my side. I sniffled and curled my face inward, doing my very best to hide. He returned and collected me. I offered no resistance, but all he did was lay his head down on my lap.

“Can I please shower?” I whispered. His fingers gently brushed my hair. He said nothing. The channel changed. I was vaguely familiar with the movie.

I did not fall asleep. It was more like I slowly yo-yoed in between. One moment I could hear the tv clearly, the next I was at my office desk, jabbing my fingers into my calculator as I frantically tried to complete the Calc.

I moaned in protest when I felt his hands lift me upward, but I did not resist. I waited for another assault, but he only brought me over to the bed. I sat there, exhausted, shoulders hunched. He came back over to me and sat beside me on the bed.

I felt pressure on my lips and opened my mouth. I was greeted with a mouthful of mac and cheese. I ate it greedily, waiting impatiently for the next spoonful to be brought to my lips. Once I had finished eating, he brought me into the bathroom. Just as we had this morning, he had me brush my teeth and use the bathroom.

He brought me back to the bed and got me under the covers. I was hopeful this meant he was leaving, but he crawled in beside me. He was still fully clothed.

“You won’t kill me, will you?” I asked.

He put his finger to my lips. I fell silent and waited. He hesitated and then got out from under the covers.. I heard running water and dishes clinking. Then the heavy footsteps and the rumbling of fabric. The blankets were pulled back beside me and the mattress pressed down. He tilted my chin upward and placed another pill on my tongue.

“My medications, some of them can’t mix -” He placed a finger to my lips. A can with a straw pressed to my lips and I swallowed the pill.

He settled in beside me. My head rested on his arm and he leaned over me. I could feel his presence just in front of me, commanding, looming. A single finger tip touched the top of my forehead and slowly trailed downward.

“Please don’t leave me tied up,” I told him. His knuckles traced along my cheekbones.
“Please, I can’t be late for work on Monday.”

“Shhh,” he soothed. His finger trailed down the bridge of my nose. Over my lips. Along my jaw. The touch was gentle. A feather light touch. It almost tickled. His finger trailed in a curled along the outline of my face. I focused on the sensation. It was not at all unpleasant. Around. Around. Around. Soft, soothing, leaving a delicate tremble in its wake.

“I can’t - my boss...” my voice was fading. I focused on the touch.

“Shhh....” he whispered. “Shhh. Go to sleep.”

“Don’t... please don’t... leave me... tied...”

Soft, soothing circles.

“Shh. I’ll be here when you wake up,” he promised. I nodded.

“I need to be... I can’t be...”

I stopped, too tired to continue. I focused on the gentle touch of his finger tips. It was to that feeling, that I gently fell off to sleep.

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys for the support! Loving your thoughts! Honestly, the way I have the story planned, you'll know who the stalker is probably about a quarter into the story. Maybe closer to half way through, but a large portion of the story is going to occur with the identity of the stalker known.

There are some mixed ideas as to who it is. I just hope once the person is revealed, none of you will be too upset if it isn't who you think it is/want it to be.

Glad you're enjoying it!

(For my American readers - #BradyistheGOAT)

Her body was perfect. Soft and warm and welcoming. I almost fell asleep, nestled in close to her body, her curves pressed against the length of my body. Her hair was growing greasy, but she still smelled delicious. Cherries and strawberries and something uniquely her own. I breathed in deeply against her messy bun. I longed for sleep, but she needed to be bound before I found sleep. My phone buzzed in my pocket.

A report was due Monday morning. It was something that should have been done already but my work laptop was still resting on my desk at the office and hers was resting on her bean bag chair. She'd be beside herself when she finally checked her emails and realized that I had accepted the job because she did not respond. Emailed at 7:45pm on a Friday and she didn't answer. She'd get a terrible talking to on Monday.

My blood rushed downward. I could see her big green eyes now. Damp, frightened, full of stress. It was my deal. She'd come to me. Contrite, apologetic, or cold and defiant? I pressed myself against her. If she went to him, she'd pay for it. I'd make sure of that. I shot off my email response. If I got to the office around 4:00am on Monday, I'd get it done by 8:00am.

I rolled off the bed and went to rummage through my bag. I retrieved her spare keys and the copies I had made. Looking over them carefully, I found the ones with the little nicks and the specks of green paint. I placed them back up in the cabinet above the fridge. I put the spares in my pockets and walked back to the bed. I tried jostling her awake. She moaned softly, made a soft retort about sleeping, and then fell silent against. I bound her nonetheless, pulling

her head up over her head and securing her to the bedframe. I stepped out of the door and made sure to lock every lock. I had to protect the vulnerable body within.

I shoved my gloved hands in my pocket and kept my head down as I walked down the narrow hall, passed the peeling paint and the decrepit elevator. I used the stairs, keeping my head down as I hurried down the old, narrow wooden stairs. The building was too old and rundown to have cameras, but I kept my chin pressed to my chest none-the-less.

Outside, the air was frigid. Steam came from between my lips in plumes. Immediately, I thought of her lying in bed inside. I thought about pressing myself into her warm, soft, embrace. I let out a deep breath. I let the steam rush out into the freeing air, watching as it lit up bright in the lamp light.

I moved onward, down the curve of the street and toward the Walgreens. If I kept walking and turned right on Harvard street, and walked about twenty or so minutes straight, I'd come to my own apartment building. It was the route I walked Friday night after work. I got home, changed out of my suit, grabbed my prepacked bag, and went marching down the road. Her apartment building, though run down, was in a fine area.

I kept my head down, hands buried in my pockets, and walked passed the sliding doors and into the warmth of the store. I blinked into the lights and walked straight to the fridges. I grabbed a six pack of beer and went to the register. I paid in cash. The girl at the register was too busy trying to flirt with me to card me.

I thought of her lying back in the apartment. The curves of her body, the color of her nipples, the tightness of her pussy, the sound of her moans. I gave a tight smile and waited for my change to be handed back. I left and walked back with curt, quick strides. I wanted to be back in her apartment. I wanted to be back inside of her.

I opened the door for a group of drunk girls before stepping back into the apartment building. They giggled at me and I felt a flash of rage. Once again, I flashed a smile, and then moved onward. I walked down to the far stairwell and climbed up the steps. I found her right back where I left her. I put the beer in the fridge, peeled off my coat, kicked off my shoes, and climbed onto the bed. She was breathing softly.

I pressed myself to her, letting her warmth seep into my chilled bones. I lay there a while, taking in the warmth of her. I wanted her at the end of a hard work day. I wanted to go home and have her there to comfort me. Her warmth, of softness... the comfort and pleasure she offered. My blood began to stir.

I sat up and gently rolled her onto her back. Straddling her, I pulled up my camera and took a few more pictures. A couple months ago, I stumbled upon a video of a girl that looked just like her. I'd watched it on repeat, beating myself off until my flesh was raw. I started looking for more and more and more. The more degrading the better. I thought it might satiate me. More than once, after I left her cubicle, I went to the bathroom and imagined bending her over her desk, grabbing her by the hair, and fucking her until her vocal cords were raw. She pervaded my thoughts. I'd bring a girl home from the bar and close my eyes and I'd imagine it was her beneath me. But soon even that didn't work. She'd moan and pant and beg beneath me and it ripped me out of the fantasy. They didn't sound like *her*. I could only hope these pictures could get me through any lingering needs I had after this weekend.

I grabbed her by the chin and turned her face to the side. I gently removed the blindfold from her so I could see her face. My lips curved upward ever so slightly. I pressed my fingers into her mouth and tilted her head backward. Her lips parted and I took a picture. My cock got hard beneath my jeans. Her cheeks were still pink, her hair damp with sweat. It looked like she was conscious, in the midst of ecstasy, her nipples hard and breasts full, the word *whore* still drawn brazenly along her skin.

I swiped through the photos I had taken earlier in the day. My body burned. I pulled at my belt buckle and yanked down on my zipper. There is something exhilarating about fucking an unconscious woman. I do not need a woman unconscious, I do not prefer a woman unconscious, but the ability to do as you please without the slightest bit of resistance. Absolute dominance. Absolute control. I pushed on her right thigh, pushing her leg upward and leaving it at a right angle.

I felt the violent urge to wrap my hands around her neck and squeeze. It was fleeting and it passed. I removed my throbbing cock from my jeans and settled myself over her. *You have control*, I told myself. *You have control*. It calmed me. I rubbed the head of my cock along her pussy. It was soft, puffy, and pink. I massaged the weeping head of my erection against her opening. *She belongs to you. That's your pussy. You do what you want with it.*

I let out a low breath and pushed the head of my cock into her. I pulled it back out and rubbed against. Up and down along the wet folds of her pussy.

Look how wet she gets for you. Do what you want with her. She's yours. She's here for you.

"For me," I murmured. I pressed my cock back into her pussy. I pushed inside of her slowly.

What are you doing here? she had asked, face contorting with confusion. *I wanted to make sure you got home alright,* I had answered. I had removed my suit jacket as she lay back on the bed. I had pulled at my tie. I had hardly been able to breath.

What-what- C- " she had sputtered.

I deserve it after today, don't you think?

I elevated her hips to get in deep. I fucked her hard. She breathed and moaned and panted and I think she woke up. It was a sleeping pill, it wasn't GHB. I buried my face in her neck and sucked. I saw her clutching at the shirt around her neck. Let her try and hide this.

I fisted her hair hard and nipped at her cheek. She moaned. My blood rushed hard. "That's right. Take it. Take it."

She moaned again. I shifted her hips. I fucked her harder. *She belongs to you. Do what you want with her. She's yours. She's yours. She's yours.*

I groaned low. My spine tensed. My hips bucked. My entire body trembled and I pulled out of her. Still panting and sweating, I got off of her and spread her legs wider. I pulled out my phone as my cum slowly began to seep out of her. I'd never seen anything more arousing. I set my phone to record. I slipped my pointer and middle finger between her legs and spread them. My cum, thick and white, slowly oozed out of her. I shifted my fingers, pressing my middle finger into her and using my ring finger to hold her folds apart. I removed my middle finger. I scooped up a glob of cum on my pointer and middle finger. I slipped it between her lips. I snapped a picture. I rubbed my fingers on her lips. Tomorrow, I'd cum on her face. I'd cum in her hair. I'd cover her in my cum until she'd feel it on every part of her and she'd never be able to get it off of her.

Her fingers closed around my fingers. My lips parted. “Suck,” I instructed. She obeyed. I reached to my left and groped for my mask. I managed to get it on my head with one hand.

“Open your eyes,” I breathed. I was breathing hard. Her eyes fluttered and then opened. Her gaze was groggy and tired.

“Say ‘fuck me harder daddy’,” I ordered. I pressed my thumb to her lips and hit record.

“Fuck me harder daddy,” she said. I pressed my thumb between her lips. She sucked on impulse. I scanned down the length of her. I pinched a nipple. I groped a breast. I brought the camera back up.

“Like that?” I whispered. I pressed my fingers into her. She was still slick with my cum. She moaned softly, brow furrowing and lips pressing together tight. “Tell me.”

“I like it,” she breathed, voice slurring slightly. I pumped my fingers in and out of her. I curled my fingers inside of her. From an early age, I enjoyed bringing a woman to orgasm. It fueled my ego. As a teenager, I would listen to friends talk about how hard it was to get a girl to cum. It wasn’t worth it. It was so much work. I’d always enjoyed it. Putting my mouth to a woman, feeling her writhe and moan, turning her into a mess of jelly, hearing her moan for *me*, thank *me*. A female reaching orgasm, was one of the most arousing things there was. She moaned freely, panted, cheeks flushed. Intermittently, she would open her eyes and look at the camera. Her orgasm ripped through her, the freest and least restrained of all I’d experienced.

Her moans were delicious. What it would be like to hear her... moaning and begging, looking up at me, saying my *name*. I shut off the camera and groaned. I wanted her to say my name. I wanted her to look me in the eyes and see *me*. I wanted her to know who it was doing this to her. I wanted her to know it was *me*.

“Wha-Where-”

“Shhh, Shh,” I soothed her. I kissed her cheek. I licked the salty sweat from her throat. “Go back to sleep.”

“I...” she moaned softly and shifted her hips. “What-”

“Shhh, shh,” I calmed. I stroked her hair. “Go to sleep, baby.”

She slowly faded back to sleep. I kissed her temple, her cheek, her nose, her lips. I looked at her neck. The mark was growing there. Dark purple at the center, rippled red and pink around the edges. I left her briefly to retrieve my marker. I added the next line. I dragged it slowly, diagonal along the rest.

I wanted to fuck her again. I grabbed for my softened member in my jeans and stroked it hard and fast. But my body was spent. I had all day tomorrow. I’d wake up and put her mouth on my cock. She’d suck me clean and lick my balls until I could dump my load in her hair. I’d put on the football game and drink my beer and fuck her hard in the ass during halftime. I brought her hands up over her head. That’s something I haven’t done. Could I get her to cum with my cock shoved up her ass. What sounds would she make? She’d cry and sob and moan and cum like the fucking whore she was.

I laid down beside her. I pressed my lips to her neck. I rubbed my nose against her skin. I caressed her belly and her breasts. I breathed contentedly against her. I pressed myself to her. Sleep began to claw at me. I didn’t want to go to sleep. I wanted to stay awake and feel her against me, take in her scent, feel her warmth. My arms tightened around her. I breathed in deeply.

I fought sleep, only to enjoy the feel of her a bit longer. One thing was certain though. This weekend was not going to be enough to get her out of my system.

Day Three:

I think the hardest part of those three days was the darkness. When I woke up on the third day, I would have given anything to take off my blindfold and open my eyes. When my eyes fluttered beneath the thick fabric, and I felt the weight of his arm draped around my middle, his breath, slow and steady in my ear, I wondered if keeping my eyes closed for so long could make me go blind. I immediately discarded the thought.

He shifted behind me, let out a little groan, tensed, and then relaxed again. It was impossible for me to know what time it was. I couldn't tell if it was dark or light, morning or night. I'm not sure exactly how long I lay there before he shifted behind me and his lips gently began to caress to my neck. He groaned softly against and then shifted once more. Once again, he fell still.

It took everything in me to remain still. Once again, I struggled with the fight between remaining still and postponing the inevitable, and the overwhelming desire to move my humming limbs. At some point, he let out a low breath and then pushed himself up from the bed. I knew my breathing was not exactly measured, but I kept as still and calm as possible as he lowered his face to my cheek. I felt him there, hovering over me, listening to my breath, looking at my face, breathing in the smell of me? I could not be sure, but eventually, he rose from the bed without harming me and ventured to the bathroom. He ground the beans and began sautéing onions and garlic.

The zip ties around my wrists were beginning to ache and my muscles protested every moment I laid there still. My legs moved first, mostly on their own accord and I shifted onto my back. If I got his attention then or not, I cannot be sure, because I was left there. I heard mugs clinking. Smelled bacon sizzling. I pulled on my arms to try and release some of the tension in my cramping muscles.

His footsteps were soft as he crossed from the kitchen to the bed. His boots weren't on. As he unfastened my wrists and led me into the bathroom, I suddenly felt incredibly thirsty. My throat was dry and my lips had grown chapped.

As he had yesterday, he left me to care for myself, but I felt his presence close by as I relieved myself. Just as I finished washing my hands, he took me by the elbow and guided

me from the bathroom. He sat me on the futon. He gave two squeezes to my arms and then walked away, leaving me unrestrained. The zip ties were still around an individual wrist, but I was able to slip a finger beneath each one and give some relief to the raw skin. I groped for the throw blanket draped along the back of the Futon and wrapped it around my shoulders. The room was warm, he had turned the heat up, but I felt better with the soft fabric draped along my shoulders.

He returned after a couple of moments. The blanket was yanked away from my shoulders and I felt the rush of air as he tossed it over onto the beanbag chair. I flinched but I'm not sure if the blanket ever came anywhere near me. A cup of coffee was put into my hands. I traced my fingers along my school seal.

"I don't know who you are," I forced out, voice hoarse. Usually, I found solace in sitting quietly in a group of people, avoiding attention and sliding through the interactions without saying a single word. But now, the silence weighed heavily on me and I could not prevent myself from speaking. "Are you going to kill me?"

I didn't think he would. I would have expected more violence from him if that was his plan. I doubt he would have seen to all of my needs as he had. Unless this was some sort of sick game.

I did not receive a response. He wrung my hands together until my knuckles were bulging and white in my lap. I curled my toes underneath my feet and pressed my heels into the carpet beneath me. I sipped carefully at the coffee.

I thought of everyone I knew. Who could it possibly be? I couldn't understand it no matter how hard I tried. There was no one in my life that had shown any sort of recent romantic interest in me, let alone the type of obsession or aggression that would lead to an act of this nature. I wracked my brain for who I thought was capable of such a thing.

Everyone on the SALT M&A was clearly out of consideration. I passed over the lot of them in my brain with only cursory thought, but knew it wasn't worth the time. I spent some time considering the FED team, but that didn't make any sense either. None of them fit the image I had constructed of this man in my brain. None who had his build had his height. None who had his height had his build. The rest were all women, and this was clearly a man.

I turned next to everyone else I came into contact with on a daily basis. The guy that worked at Starbucks on the bottom floor of the building? He was too pudgy. The doorman? He was about forty, this person seemed young, but it could be him. He was in fine shape and looked well groomed. Someone from compliance? I thought of David. It wasn't him. David's voice wasn't this deep.

Perhaps someone from law school? My fling was out. He was married and moved back to Texas with his wife. There had been a kid named Jimmy that had an obvious crush on me, but he was short and had been skinny as a rail. This man towered over me.

I took a sip of my coffee.

It *had* to be someone at work. He knew exactly how I took my coffee. We shared our break room with the H&R Block people. Could it be one of them? I often overheard them talking at lunch when I went to retrieve my PB&J from the fridge before returning to my desk to finish my report. It would make sense I might recognize one of their voices. I was in there almost everyday. An obsession like this is bred from proximity most often than not right? Or was this some nut off the street? No, I had known his voice. It had been at the tip of my tongue. Right there. I knew him. It was not a familiarity that came from a single brief passing interaction. I'd heard his voice more than once.

It sent a shiver down my back.

I jumped a mile as I felt the futon shift beside me. His hand, massive and warm, closed around the back of my neck. I felt something hover in front my lips and, very hesitantly, I opened my mouth. The spoonful of eggs was a relief and his hand slowly trailed down my back. The touch was gentle. It would have been soothing under other circumstances.

"People will start looking for me if I don't show up for work tomorrow," I told him after my first mouthful was swallowed. My next spoonful was some chopped potatoes, cooked to perfection. I breathed out, "I really don't want to die."

"Shhh," he soothed softly. Another mouthful of eggs. I ate in silence until I heard the fork clink against the plate and it was placed beside me. His hands continued to pet me gently, stroking my hair, running up and down my arms. My muscles tensed. There was an intense tightening of the muscles in my neck, just at the base of my scalp, and pain radiated upward.

“Please, just tell me what you’re going to do,” I rushed out. I smothered a little sob and my shoulders shook. He hushed me again, voice low. He put an arm around me and scooted closer. His embrace was comforting. His lips were warm against my temple. He breathed in deeply. When I tried to shy away, his hand flattened against the top of my head and applied gentle pressure. He held me firm. His lips touched my cheek. His tongue flicked my earlobe. My body trembled as I waited.

“Shhh,” he said softly. He removed the elastic from my increasingly greasy hair and ran his fingers through it. He placed my head to his chest and I rested there as I tried to fight through the sudden rush of panic. His hands stroked my cheek as he held me to him. The intimacy of it was a thin veneer over the violent truth of it all. It was painfully surreal. It felt like my head was full of water. I felt the rise and fall of my pulse pumping blood frantically through my veins.

“Can I have a Xanax? Please?” I asked. My cheeks burned with embarrassment. His nose was in my hair. He nuzzled me, his cheek to the top of my head. I waited, throat so tight and dry it ached. Slowly, he released me from his hold. He rose from the futon and I listened to him in the bathroom. Whoever it was, he certainly had seen my slew of medications. I felt crippling shame. Whoever he was, now he knew how fucked up Orla Ellen Wright was.

He returned shortly after and placed a pill on my tongue. He brought a fresh glass of water to my lips and I sucked it down. I took a few deep breaths and thought of my parent’s dogs, my niece, summers at the lake in New Hampshire. My heart rate slowed. His hands stroked me softly. Another pill was put on my tongue. He went to retrieve another glass of water. When I checked my birth control the next morning, I would find myself up to date, and so I believe the second pill had been my birth control.

“Just say no or yes?” I asked. “Am I going to die?”

He pressed his lips close to my ear and whispered, “no.” He kissed my cheek gently. He collected my hair in his hand until he had a firm grip at the back of my head. He lowered my face downward. I resisted on impulse. My muscles tightened and my body pulled back in the opposite direction.

“Shhh,” he whispered, pushing me down with more force. The skin of my scalp burned and my body relented. I heard the clinking and zip of metallic before his hot flesh against my own.. The head of cock slid along my closed lips, pressing firmly and seeking entry into my mouth.

He seemed content for a few moments and then pushed more firmly at my lips and tugged at my hair. My mouth opened and I let him slide the hardening flesh inward. It’s embarrassing, shameful, and I don’t understand why I didn’t fight more. The promise I would not die had subdued me. “Get me hard.”

He was already semi-erect. He stroked the section of his cock that he had not forced into my mouth. My tongue flicked against the head of his cock. It was impossible for me to say up until this point if he was circumcised or not, but either way, he was cl

He let me move my lips and flick my tongue timidly for a few minutes before he took advantage of the grip he had on my head and began to move my head back and forth along his shaft. He pushed until I gagged and then relented. He did it a second time, this time holding me there a few moments longer. I pushed on his thighs but his hands in my hair were too strong. He did not make me suffer long, but when he let me pull back, my eyes were watering beneath the blind fold.

He pulled his cock free and smacked it along my lips. My lips parted and the hand not in my hair reached into my mouth and grabbed my tongue. He pulled on it and I kept my tongue out of my open mouth. He rubbed his weeping head along my tongue before he began to move my head up and down. His fingers gently caressed the sides of my face as I licked up and down his long shaft.

His breathing grew heavier. He pushed my hair back away from my eyes. His touch was frequent, controlling, but gentle. He stopped only long enough to nudge me off the futon and on my knees in front of him.

He tilted my face upward so he could see me. I felt the hard, pulsing erection press to my cheek and then to my lips.

“Good girl,” he breathed and pressed his cock back in between my lips. “Good girl.”

His touch grew harder, his thrusts more erratic. With a hard tug on my hair, he yanked my head backward so my face was nearly parallel with the ceiling.

I lips closed on impulse as I felt the first hot, wet gob of his climax hit my face. I felt another hot splash. He groaned softly and once done, the tip of his pulsating cock rubbed the speck of cum into my lips.

He squeezed my face and my lips parted. He dragged the head of his cock along my tongue and then released my head. I reached up to wipe the cum from my face but his hands seized mine and he yanked me around hard. I remained on the ground. But my back pressed hard into the futon. Fear seized me and my mouth flung open.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry!” I shouted, though I wasn’t sure what I did. He placed a hard slap to my cheek and I fell quiet, turning my cum covered face to the side because I could not use my hands.

He lead me over to the radiator and fastened me there. When I realized he had no intention of wiping my face clean, my lower jaw began to tremble.

He cleaned the kitchen. I pressed my face against the wall, trying to ignore the feel of his cum tightening and hardening against my skin. Dishes clinked, water ran, the fridge opened and closed.

He took a shower. I felt a flair of rage. I sat on the floor, naked, bound and blindfolded, covered in marker and semen, body sore, raped how many times. I just wanted a shower. He came out and I wondered if he was going to leave soon. Then I heard the fridge, the crack of a can, and the TV turned on. A tremor coursed through me and I pressed my face more firmly into the wall, as if it might provide me with some comfort.

I fought the urge to wipe my face along my shoulder, the radiator or the wall. I felt it on my skin. Burning, scorching, incredibly heavy. I knew better though. He left it there for a reason. I didn’t want to think about what he might do if I wiped my face clean.

It felt like an eternity that he left me there. "I'm hungry," I eventually voiced timidly. The sound of my own voice frightened me. I hadn't even thought about speaking before the words came from my lips.

There was a pause and then movement. He crouched down in front of me and placed a straw between my lips. I sucked down the water greedily. He left again and then came back with food. He did not untie me. He placed the sandwich to my lips. It was someone who knew what I had for lunch everyday. After I finished the sandwich, he fed me a few salt and vinegar chips. Someone who went into that break room then. I got another few sips of water.

"Bathroom?" he asked, lower and gravelly. He was making an effort to disguise his voice. I struggled to place it again, but it only heard me head. I nodded. He collected me and brought me to the bathroom. By the time he sat me back down at the radiator, I still felt his hardened cum resting on my face and in my hair.

My only sense of time was from the TV, and when I heard the start of the football game I knew it was one. As long as that stretch of time tied to the radiator seemed to pass, the moment I heard the voices, my initial feeling was surprise it was so late. He got up and went to the fridge, it opened and shut and then, as he plopped down on the futon, I heard the cracking of a can again.

I leaned against the wall and numbly listened to the drawl of the announcers. It was some time at the beginning of the second quarter that he came to collect me. I caught the scent of beer on his breath and I was struck with a sudden cold rush of fear. He brought me to the futon and laid me down on my back. His hands were warm and gentle. At the very least, the alcohol had not seemed to make him more violent to this point, and I chose to take comfort in that.

He spread my legs and my muscles tightened. I hated being blindfolded. I didn't know what he was doing until he was right up against me. Hot breath, ghosting along my inner thigh before I felt the soft tingle of his lips. His lips massaged against my skin. His nose trailed down the soft flesh. My flesh quivered and my pussy clenched together tightly. By the time his lips had made their way up to the apex of my legs, my body was trembling rather violently. His hands caressed me softly. I swear, I felt a curve of his lips as he kissed my thigh again.

I didn't think I could take another humiliation. He sucked in a deep breath and then blew softly at my opening. I took in a deep, shuddering breath. His tongue touched me and I jerked up. Faster than a bolt of lightning he was up and gently pressing on my shoulders. His hands gently gripped my face under the chin.

"Shhh," he said softly. His hands lowered downward. He touched my breasts, fingers gently prodded at my nipples. His hands groped tightly. He bent his head. His teeth scraped along a nipple, then the other. He sucked greedily and then ducked his head lower.

I tilted my head back, as if to look at the ceiling, but saw only darkness. He inserted two fingers into me. His hot mouth closed around my clitoris. I never felt comfortable when my ex-boyfriend had done it and I certainly did not like it now, but it was different. He did it because he liked it. His desire to bring me to orgasm was clearly born out of some sick desire to shame me, but that wasn't the only reason he did it. It wasn't just a means to an end. It was an end in and of itself. His tongue licked, his mouth sucked, and his teeth grazed with unbridled desire and not even the slightest hint of hesitation or distaste.

I felt a tightening sensation, a rush, and then a little tremble rippled through me. He laughed, hot puffs of air against my damp cunt.

"Th-That-That didn't count," I breathed. His lips left me and he loomed over me. My leg was tossed to the side, hanging over the side of the futon. He thrust into me abruptly but it did not hurt. I was quite ready for the invasion. I hated him, but he knew what he was doing. His hands reached beneath me and grabbed me by each ass cheek. He angled into me with purpose. Each hard, forceful thrust, designed for one purpose and one purpose only. The next little ripple that rushed through me was longer than the last, harder, more pronounced. He followed sooner after but I was already crying beneath the blindfold.

"Did that count?" he asked darkly. I could feel the smirk in his whisper. His tongue snaked along my earlobe. The feel of his hands squeezing my ass, pushing himself further inside of me despite his clear completion. His teeth nibbled at my earlobe.

I was too busy crying. Finally he pulled off of me, but he returned with the acidic fumes of his marker and I felt the little line, so cold it burned, drag across my ribcage. I didn't even know how many it was, I just knew one was too many.

I want to be clear. These weren't mind numbing, moaning so loud you'd wake the neighbors orgasms. Every single one had a tinge of pain to it. It was a build up of pressure so great that when it came to a head there was nothing I could do to stop the ripple of tension from flowing through every muscle of my body in a much needed release. It was physical and physical only. During those three days, I never once felt his touch as anything more than a horrible violation, and though even then, on some basic level, I knew that, inside, I felt such a crippling sense of humiliation, shame, and self loathing, that I laid there for some time sobbing into my blindfold.

He left me to cry. He moved about the apartment like it was his and I remember praying that he'd just leave. The futon sat pressed beside me again. His hand cupped a breast, fingers gently tugging at my nipple until it turned into a hardened bud beneath his caress. I waited for him to speak, ears straining for anything I could use to identify him, but he remained silent.

"Why are you doing this to me?" I got out between strangled sobs and debilitating hiccups. His hand left my breast and gently caressed my wet cheek with his knuckles.

The pressure on the futon released and whoever this person was, he stood and returned to the kitchen. The water ran a moment and then he returned. A damp, hot rag gently pressed to my forehead. It trailed down slowly. He continued until my face was clean and tossed the rag to the side. His fingers gently caressed my face.

By the time he stopped and gently pulled me up to a sitting position, the second half had started. He returned after the retrieval of a beer and draped his arm across my shoulder. He had me lean against his body, which was comfortably nestled in the corner of the futon. He draped his legs across the coffee table, and pulled my legs up over his.

And then he just watched the football game. He only got up once to fetch another beer, but when he did, he made sure I was back in the same position, nestled comfortably in his lap, my head against his chest. His hand rested on top of my head.

I fell asleep and woke with a start. My body jerked. My brain swelled in my skull. My heart raced. I reached out, pressing my hands out hard and swinging. His hands grabbed my wrists and he pushed me down to the couch.

“Shh, shhh,” he soothed. He lowered his head and pressed his lips to my cheek. His body covered mine. It should have made it worse, but my breathing calmed and my body fell limp. He whispered in my ear, “You’re so fucked up.”

I burst into tears. He left me there to cry. My hands covered my face, squeezing my blindfold tightly, but I made no attempt to remove it. When he came back, he sat me up. A cold glass of water was pressed to my lips. He pulled it back before I could finish. Two pills were put on my tongue. I took it and drank it down.

“Shh,” he said as I cried. He pulled me closer, wrapping large, strong arms around me. He rubbed my shoulders. He stroked my hair. “It’s ok to be fucked up.”

He lifted my face upward. I kissed him back because I knew he wanted me to. His tongue pressed to mine. His hand was gentle on the back of my head. He lowered me onto his back, but this time, he did not actively try to bring me to orgasm. He took his time. He kissed and caressed, rubbed and groped.

I felt the pills start to take hold of me. My body relaxed. The tension in my limbs released. I heard my orgasm this time. It broke through my lips with a soft, genuine, breathy moan. He blew softly in my ear. He whispered, “So fucked up.”

He kissed my lips. My jaw. My cheek. He picked me up from the futon and carried me into the bathroom. The shower turned on and he sat me down on the toilet. I have fallen asleep right there. His lips touched my ear.

“Eyes closed or I *will* kill you,” he whispered. I nodded. The blindfold fell away. It felt so good. Air rushed to my damp skin and it took everything in me not to let my eyes flutter open. I lowered my head and let them pop open. Only long enough to make sure I wasn’t blind. I blinked rapidly. I saw his feet. Black socks, dark blue jeans. He was standing just to my left in front of the sink. His feet turned toward me and I squeezed them shut.

The spray of the water felt glorious. He nudged me inside, his grip on my arm firm. I lowered myself to sit on the ground. I pressed my head to the wall of shower and opened my mouth.

It took me a while, through the haze and the comfort and the warmth, to realize that the comforting sensation of the hot soapy rag being dragged over my skin was not designed to soothe, but to destroy evidence. Even as I sat in the shower, I don't think I was completely aware of it. He pressed the rag between my legs and scrubbed firmly, though I do not think he wanted to hurt me.

I lowered my face downward. I shied away from the touch, but he persisted and there was only so far I could go in the cramped shower. He got beneath my arms, between my legs, my neck, shoulders, knees and toes. Not an inch of me wasn't scrubbed down. He even lathered my hair. I know I fell asleep then, because one moment he was rubbing his fingertips into my aching scalp, and the next the water was off and my damp flesh was laid bare to the cold air.

My eyes popped open. His hand covered my face so fast, I don't think I registered a single thing that I saw. I know my eyes were opened but his hand closed over my eyes and forced my head to the back of the shower.

"I didn't see, I didn't see," I hurried out. His hand remained there. There were long, painful moments of silence. Slowly, his hand withdrew. His hand hovered in front of my face until finally, it fell away. My eyes stayed closed and he quickly wrapped me up in my large blue towel. I knew it was because no other towel I owned could get me this warm.

He left me to stand in the middle of the bathroom for a few long moments. His arms were around me then, pulled me closer, and then gently placed his hand to my cheek. I wanted to open my eyes. He was standing right in front of me, his face directly before mine. If I opened my eyes, I'd know. My breath hitched. He breathed in deeply through his nose. The pad of his thumb was warm as he slowly dragged it along my lower lip. His knuckles traced along my cheek. His lips were right above mine.

"You belong to me," he whispered to me. I could hardly hear him, his voice was so soft. "Say it."

"I belong to you," I murmured. He kissed my mouth gently. It was oddly chaste. It felt wrong.

He murmured against my mouth, "again."

“I belong to you,” I said.

A low, audible breath escaped him. His thumb continued to caress my lips. I felt a charge. My eyes darted side to side rapidly behind my lids. I could feel him staring at me, face bare to his gaze without the blindfold covering my face. I felt a rush of air. A movement. He kissed me again. My heart nearly exploded. He’d taken off his mask. He kissed me more deeply, our tongues touching.

“Again,” he breathed.

“I belong to you.”

He squeezed the back of my neck hard. He wanted me again. I could feel it. The air was thick and I felt far too sober. Like the pills had left me completely. But I couldn’t open my eyes, no matter how badly I wanted to. I breathed in deeply through my nose. Once again, there was nothing. Not a hint of cologne or body wash. Again, that ruled out anyone in SALT M&A. Every single man in that department wore enough expensive cologne to put the entire country of France to shame.

He kissed me again. He whispered, his mouth still pressed to mine, his teeth ground together hard. “You. Belong. To me.”

“I belong to you,” I whispered again. He pulled back and then gently led me out of the bathroom. His breathing was a bit labored and he gently lowered me down to the futon, still wrapped in the towel. Another pill was put between my lips. He put me in my big robe and then lowered me onto my side. He stroked my cheek softly as the pill took hold. The last thing I heard before I fell asleep was a frighteningly familiar voice telling me, “I’m not done with you yet.”

I honestly don't know how I managed to get from Brookline to Government center when it took me almost twenty minutes to get my green silk shirt buttoned that morning. The elevator doors opened and I was hit with the smell of the building. It always had a musty, sterile smell to it at the end of every weekend. The floors were freshly vacuumed, all the trash cans emptied, desks sprayed down. I felt a wave of nausea as I thought back to my apartment. Bed stripped, sheets, blankets and linen sitting in bleach in my shower. Every inch of my little studio scrubbed with anti-septic. Every dish, pan, cup, and piece of silverware he might have touched scrubbed clean. He'd even washed out the coffee maker.

I glanced in the direction of Caleb's office as I walked down my cubicle row. The light was on but I was granted one small mercy. He wasn't inside. I dropped my things at my desk and made my way toward the break room. I checked to make sure my shirt was buttoned appropriately again. I made sure my black slacks were well creased and fully fastened. I couldn't remember if I had locked my door when I left. I must have. Even if I couldn't remember, after this weekend, I must have.

I reached up to touch the top of my head. My hair was still damp. I had awoken, wrapped snugly in my robe on the futon, draped in my three throws, a soft pillow underneath my head. I reached up a hand. Had I brushed my hair? I reached up and pulled the elastic free and ran my fingers through my damp hair as I walked. I pulled it back up into a tight bun. One more run of the hand over my head and I was satisfied it was as smooth as it was going to be.

I heard voices as I neared the break room. I slowed, but did not stop moving. Two men, laughing, low rumbles.

"Look at the smile on your face," Chris laughed. "Someone got laid this weekend."

"Couple of times," came Caleb's infuriating chuckle.

"Good lay?"

“Oh yeah.”

“Remember Ally from Contacts?” a pause. “She gives great head.”

“Oh yeah? How was that?”

“Oh great. She did this thing -”

“I meant the party,” Caleb laughed.

I came around the corner and didn’t break stride. The laughter broke off abruptly. Chris had the good sense to look embarrassed. Caleb kept that infuriating little smirk on his face. Caleb was leaning against the counter by the coffee maker, a hand in his pocket, the other bringing the coffee cup up to his lips.

“Good morning,” he greeted. “Have a good weekend?”

“Not as good as yours,” I answered and tossed my PB&J and chips into the fridge. I had fumbled over to the fridge, ready to make my lunch for the day, when I found the sandwich, premade and cut in my sandwich tupperware, a small ziplock bag of chips resting on top.

“Good enough not to answer any emails, apparently,” he said from behind his mug.

My hand had been on the handle of the coffee maker. I slammed it down hard. Hot coffee sloshed from side to side.

My head whipped over so quickly I nearly threw my neck out. I looked at him with gawking lips, wide eyes, and lifted brows. Three days. I’d gone three days without looking at my emails. My insides tightened. My stomach plummeted to my toes. Did I even still have a job to show up to?

Caleb's lips remained curved upward ever so slightly and his brow lifted upward as he took a small sip of his coffee. His slate grey eyes danced with amusement. I had to have been... fired. Why else would he find this so *funny*? He should be *furious*.

"It's fine, Ellie," Chris said. He had a bite to his voice. "We took care of it."

"*I* took care of it," Caleb clarified, pushing himself up from the counter. "You were getting your cock sucked."

"Caleb!" Chris barked.

I flinched and slammed my coffee cup down. Hot liquid burned my hand but I hardly felt it. Caleb mosied from the break room with his coffee in one hand, his other hand shoved into the pocket of his impeccably fitting blue suit.

"See you at eight, Orla," Caleb called as he left the room. I pressed my hands flat to the counter and closed my eyes. Everything around me was springing. Black spots covered my vision. Chris got up from the table and approached, a concerned frown etched across his face. I felt sick to my stomach. My head began to pound. Hard heavy thuds in the back of my brain. *Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud.*

"Ellie, you OK? It's really not a bi deal. Caleb's just being an asshole."

"What did I miss?" I asked, absolutely horrified. My eyes popped open and I fixed him with a frenzied stare.

"Ellie, we took care of it. Caleb and I -"

"I didn't look at my email at all. I um... I have to get to work."

“Ellie,” Chris grabbed me by the arm and whipped me around. My eyes widened and he steadied me against the counter. I looked down. Every ounce of my body was tense, my ears were ringing. “It was the edits for Baybridge. It’s all done. Nothing else came up. Relax. You can’t let him get to you like that.”

“It’s not that... it’s... I just have to go. Please let me go.”

My eyes were angled down to the floor. He stepped closer. “Are you alright? You look like you’re about to faint.”

“I’m fine,” I answered. I still couldn’t look up. I was aware I was trembling slightly. I brought up a hand to clutch at the top of my shirt. “I um... I had a rough weekend.”

Chris nodded thoughtfully. “About what you might have heard. I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable at work. I just -”

“It’s fine,” I said. I looked up and forced a smile. It took everything in me to burst into tears and I felt my face trembling. Chris had a deep frown on his face. I said with some bite, “Please let me go.”

He released me, looking surprised, and stepped back. I walked out without my coffee and made my way back to my desk. Caleb was in his new office, hand over his mouth, staring at his computer with a dark gaze. His jacket was off, and his crisp powder blue shirt showed off his broad, muscular shoulders.

I got into my chair and pulled up my email. Immediately I buried my face in my hands and tried not to cry. Twenty seven unread emails between Chris and Caleb from the email, trying to finish MY deal because I hadn’t responded.

I tried to work on my other deals until eight. I’d never not been able to focus. I had never been so absolutely unable to focus on a single thought. I almost forgot the Admin meeting scheduled for eight. I almost didn’t go on purpose. I had a fleeting thought that it might just be easier to go outside and throw myself in front of a bus. Did the windows open? How hard would it be to get to the roof?

I picked up my notebook and moved into the conference room. I took my usual seat. Caleb was already there, leaning back in his chair, rocking back and forth, twirling his pen in his hand. He had a satisfied little smile dancing across his lips and he looked at me very briefly as I passed by. He went back to his conversation with Mark.

Just after sitting down, Chris leaned over and murmured, “You sure you OK?”

“Please stop asking me that,” I said softly, giving him a forced smile. I glanced in Caleb’s direction. He was still talking to Mark about another deal, oblivious to me in the corner. The smug little smile on his face infuriated me. I had never wanted to hit someone so badly in my life. I decided then if I was ever going to give up on a high power career in the financial world, I’d quit by walking up to that smug asshole in the middle of a meeting and punching him right in the nose.

Nick walked in about ten past 8:00. It was his first official day as partner and everyone gave him a hearty round of applause. It took me a moment to realize what was going on, but I finally put my hands together. Nick raised his hands with a smile, gave a slight turn of his head, and then gave a mocking bow. Everyone laughed, but I couldn’t bring myself to even smile. I swallowed thickly. His eyes landed on me and his smile tightened. I felt my insides churn anxiously. He’d been copied on every single email sent. Every single email I hadn’t responded to.

“Alright, Wright?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Where are we on Baybridge?” he asked. The question was directed to Caleb, but his eyes remained on mind. I lowered my eyes.

“All done, sir,” Caleb answered. “Sent it to you around seven.”

“Good to see someone took initiative.”

“I thought it was better I take it anyway,” Chris added, playing with his pen. “Ellie’s on five moving deals right now. I told Ellie on Friday I was going to take it.”

I turned and shot him a grateful gaze. Caleb was staring at Chris, a hateful glimmer in his slate gray eyes. No doubt he wanted to watch me crash and burn. Chris was there to catch me before I could fall.

“Well, we all need to be in the loop. Ellie, you can’t go three days without responding to an email. That’s completely unacceptable.”

“Yes sir,” I said, giving a tight smile. “It won’t happen again.”

That was the culture. That was how the world worked. No concern about my health or wellbeing. The color of my skin didn’t seem to matter. The circles beneath my eyes. I didn’t answer an email and no matter what may be happening in my personal life, that couldn’t happen. He didn’t even stop to ask. Didn’t seem to have an ounce of concern.

“Be sure it doesn’t. You want to move up in this company? Well, you don’t do things like that. It’s about hard work and teamwork. Be a team player here. Everyone else gives up weekends, you’re expected to as well.”

I felt blind rage at the injustice of it. I worked the longest hours here. I took on the most work. I had the highest utilization. No one else came near to being 110% utilized.

I glanced over and met Caleb’s eyes. He took glee in my dressing down. He didn’t seem to care at all about the circles under my eyes or the paleness of my skin. He held my gaze a moment, slate grey eyes cold and critical.

He looked away back to Nick as Nick explained how the next couple of weeks were going to unfold. New deals we had coming through and a shift in the team. I hardly heard a word of it. It took me a moment to realize that Nick was saying my name.

“Yes?” I asked.

“After you close out your current deals, you’ll be taking on Caleb’s remaining deals. You get them to him for review. He’ll supervise. Understand?”

“Wait,” I frowned and leaned forward. “Caleb’s a senior.”

“*Yes,*” Nick said. He didn’t look impressed. “You’ll be finishing up his deals as a senior. We’ll see how you do. Think you can handle it because right now, I’m not so sure.”

I looked at Caleb. He was staring at me hard. I had trouble reading the look.

“No, I mean, yes. I can handle it,” I said firmly.

“Alright then. Caleb will get you set up. Any questions?”

No one had any. I lingered as everyone got up and began to file out. Caleb did as well. He gave Chris a small nod as Chris headed out the door. Once we were alone, Caleb opened up a folder.

“These are my call notes. I’ll email everything over to you. The report is due next wednesday EOD. Everyone will have their jobs to you by Friday at COB. You have the week to close up your current deals. All your deadlines are Thursday and Friday so it shouldn’t be a problem. Sound good?”

I nodded and took his notes. He rose and smiled. “Great. Good luck.”

He turned and left the room. I stared after him in shock. That was it? Great. Good luck. I collected his call notes and walked back to my office. Panic grew inside of me. My muscles

tightened and I felt like I was going to be sick. I actually grabbed my trash can and leaned over it. I wasn't a senior. I'd been here less than a year. I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. I considered going to ask Chris. I certainly couldn't ask Caleb.

I rubbed the bridge of my nose. My head was throbbing. I somehow managed to get my diligence reports over to Caleb by eleven. He had wanted it by ten, but it was the best I could do. I worked through a fog. I read words over and over and over and remembered nothing.

I had some research I needed to get done. The words of the statutes blurred. My eyes crossed and then fluttered closed. I sighed and pressed my face into my hands. My brain went blank. I felt myself slip onto the precipice of sleep.

“Orla?”

I started violently. I looked over at the entrance of my cubicle. My stomach roiled when I saw Caleb standing there. He quirked an eyebrow and then said, “A moment?”

I turned to look at him. I hadn't even gotten a ping. My lips parted and he walked toward me. His aftershave was overwhelming. I felt like I was going to be sick. I wondered how it might feel, to lean forward and vomit all over his expensive shoes.

He placed two pieces of paper on my desk. They were the diligence reports from my SourApple deal. One was from the company. One was from the tax return. He flattened the sheets out on the table. Silently, he placed a long, slender finger on the far left column of the paper and then the matching number on the tax return. Only the number didn't match. I felt my stomach sink into my toes and my lips parted.

“That's not a mistake you make,” he said coolly. He picked up the pages and turned to leave my cubicle.

“Was it addressed in my report?” I asked him.

“Would I be here if it was?” he asked. He didn’t walk away. He stood there a moment, giving me a long look. “If it’s too much work, say so. I can’t read your mind.”

He turned and left without any further discussion. I buried my face in my hands. I worked hard to collect myself. I sucked in deeply through my nose and let out quivering breaths from my lips.

My phone buzzed. I picked it up. It was a number I didn’t know. I swiped it right, jabbed my pincode in, and then opened it. I can’t explain what I felt. There aren’t enough words. My mouth went dry. My stomach roiled. Bile rose in my throat. My skin felt very hot and very cold all at once. My skin tingled. It was like I could feel every single cell tickling and twitching on my face. The air left my lungs. I couldn’t breath. I literally forgot how to. My eyes went dry. They hurt. My contacts threatened to tighten up and shrivel where they lay.

The unknown number sent me a picture. It was a picture of me. It wasn’t obscene. You couldn’t see my face, my breasts, nothing. Nothing but my ribcage and every single black line marking my skin. All damned seven of them.

I burst into tears, hardly smothering my sob with a hand over my mouth. My shoulders shook and I pressed my hands to my face. I didn’t feel fear right away. It was just that overwhelming rush of shame. I pressed my hands to my mouth. My eyes were screwed shut. My shoulders shook violently but no sound left me. Occasionally, I’d sniffle, I’d fight down the growing sob, and breath in hard.

After some time, I managed to stop my sobs but I continued to struggle with my breathing.

“Ellie?”

I squeezed my eyes shut as I heard Chris step into my office. The humiliation was too great. I just couldn’t bear it. Throwing myself in front of a bus was looking more and more tempting as time passed.

He crouched down by my desk and placed a hand on my back. The muscles of my body retracted and convulsed in a violent flinch. His hand left my back, but then slowly returned. I

pressed my hand to my mouth and let out a low, shuddering sob, only concealed by sheer force of will, unwilling to humiliate myself further.

“Ellie,” he murmured softly. “What’s wrong? Is it the workload?”

I squeezed my eyes shut harder and shook my head, face pressing firmly to my palm. I did not trust myself to speak, else I would break down completely.

“If it’s too much work you need to come to me about it. You keep saying you’re available. If you get the work done I’m going to keep giving you more until you tell me you can’t handle it.”

His voice was soft and gentle. I continued to shake my head into my hand. It was horrible. Everyone around me thought I couldn’t hack it. I couldn’t take the work. They’d be making bets on how much longer I could last. I’d be out by the end of March. They had no idea.

“Hey,” he said. “You need to go home.”

“No,” I said, sitting up abruptly and sucking in loudly through my nose. “I have a summary to get out. And the Peterson Calc-”

“I’ll take it. You need to go home.”

“Caleb -”

“I’ll deal with Caleb,” he said shortly. My eyes flickered to his and I nodded. I reached for my box of tissues and pressed a thin piece of paper to my eyes.

“This is embarrassing,” I admitted with a nervous laugh.

“No it isn’t,” Chris said. I glanced at him from behind the tissue and he flashed a toothy grin. I sniffled, wishing I could lean into him and let him hold me tightly until everything was better.

“Here,” he said, standing. He took my hand and helped me out of the chair. “I’ll help pack you up. Run to the bathroom and freshen up.”

I nodded and left the cubicle. I kept my head down as I walked. I looked up just in time to avoid a rather catastrophic collision with Caleb. My eyes widened in surprise and I took a step back. His brow knitted and his lips parted as he looked at me. My cheeks burned and I tried to side step him.

He reached out a long arm and pressed his fingers to the top of the cubicle wall, halting my escape. The action surprised me. His massive body took up the entirety of the narrow hallway.

“Are you alright?” he asked. His voice was surprisingly low. I said nothing. I did not trust myself to speak. I ducked beneath his arm and hurried into the bathroom. My body brushed against him as I passed. He made no attempts to move, but I could feel him turn and watch me go.

I washed my face in the bathroom and lingered until most of the redness had gone down. One woman came in, gave me a quick glance, and then went on her way. Someone crying in the bathroom wasn’t anything new.

When I left, I heard him in with Mark, meticulously ripping apart his cost basis Calc. I got into my cubicle without further incident and found Chris sitting at my desk, looking at my phone. My heart seized and my throat ached.

“Don’t -”

He looked up and smiled. “Getting you an Uber.”

“Oh, I can take the T -”

“Nonsense. Here,” he said, taking my bag and flinging it over his shoulder. “I’ll walk you out.”

I put my coat on and followed him to the elevator. We waited in silence, and I saw Caleb coming out of Mark’s cubicle. I lowered my eyes to my feet. I prayed he wouldn’t reach us until the elevator doors opened. I hoped against hope. I wasn’t so lucky. He walked over with quick, calculated strides.

“Leaving?” he asked tightly, eyes flickering back and forth between me and Chris.

“I’m just walking her down. I told her to go home.”

Caleb’s cheeks were flushed pink. A vein was bulging in his forehead. It’s the first time I could ever remember seeing him even slightly frazzled.

“That seems like something that the manager approves. Not a senior associate,” his voice was taut.

“Would you have said no?” Chris asked, a slight bite in his own voice. Caleb and Chris started a moment longer. Caleb’s grey eyes suddenly darted over and locked on mine. Somehow, I kept my eyes on his.

“Probably not,” he said. I struggled to hold his gaze. I hated that he thought he had done this to me, that he had this much power over me. “But it’s my decision to make.”

The doors opened and I retreated into the elevator. Chris held out a hand to keep it from closing. Chris and Caleb stared at each other.

“She’s still my junior,” Chris said. “I’ll make sure the work gets done.”

Caleb's eyes made their way back to me. I'd pay for this, I thought. Somehow, he'd make me pay for this. I thought of all the work that would be coming my way now. The endless nights. The cruel dressing downs. His brow raised to his hairline and his face warped into a tight, angry grin. "Let's hope so. Feel better, Orla. See you tomorrow."

He walked back toward his office. Chris stepped in and the doors closed. I sagged against the wall. I felt like I could barely stand. I whispered, "Fucking asshole," and brought my hand to my forehead.

Chris chuckled and slapped the lobby button. "He was like that all through law school. He was not well liked in our study group."

"You and he were in the same study group?" I asked. Chris shoved his hands in his pockets.

"Caleb and I are friends," he said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "One of my best friends."

My lips parted in surprise. "Yeah, he's an asshole, but we knew each other before law school."

"Really?"

"We went to BC undergrad together. We met shooting hoops in the gym and just, stuck together. He was supposed to come to that party with me on the cape this weekend but he bailed."

"Oh," I said dumbly, trying to think of all the bad things I might have said to Chris about Caleb in the past.

"Don't worry," Chris smiled. "He really is a fucking asshole."

“I can handle the work,” I said. It was important to me people knew that. “I just... I had a really bad weekend. I can handle the work.”

“It happens,” Chris said. “You just have to talk to me or Caleb. Ok,” he laughed at the face I gave. “Talk to me. You’ve taken one day off since you started. Sometimes you need to take some time for yourself. Only way we stay sane.”

I only nodded. I don’t think I could do that. The elevator doors opened and we stepped out.

“Look, about what you heard this morning -”

“It’s really fine,” I answered, a bit too curtly.

“No, it isn’t,” Chris said sharply. “You should feel comfortable at work and that couldn’t have been comfortable for you. I’m sorry.”

“I’m not making a report to HR,” I tried to smile.

“I know you wouldn’t but still. For what it’s worth, I’m sorry.”

“Thanks,” I mumbled and he opened the door for me. We stepped out onto the street and I stared out at the buzzing traffic. I didn’t think I could go and sit home alone in my apartment. I closed my eyes.

“You going to be OK?” Chris asked again. “I’m sorry Ellie but Christ you look rough. What happened? Death in the family? We get bereavement leave. Company sucks out our souls but we get that.”

“It’s personal,” I answered, voice trembling.

“Is it Caleb’s promotion? I mean I know a lot of people aren’t thrilled but -”

“It’s not the work,” I snapped. “I can handle the work.”

Chris fell silent. I let out a deep breath. I felt like crying again. I clutched at my coat. I could feel the lines on my ribs. Scorching hot and freezing cold all at once. I pressed my head to my forehead. My phone buzzed. I was too afraid to look at it.

“This is it,” Chris said, motioning to the car that pulled up. “Just uh, text me when you’re home? So I know you got there alright.”

I fought a grimace. I wasn’t a child. I had been top of my class. I scored a 338 on the bar exam. I worked for one of the biggest financial firms in the world and goddammit, despite what Caleb might say, I was damn good at it.

“I will,” I promised. I got into the car and held my purse in my lap. I offered a tight smile and he closed the door.

“Good day today?” The driver asked happily.

“I don’t want to talk,” I said curtly. He said nothing and headed my request. I pulled out my phone. My heart sank. Another unknown number.

“Are you crying?” the unknown number asked.

I stared at the phone and then closed my eyes. My eyelids only opened when I felt another buzz.

“Don’t cry. You’re too beautiful to cry.”

I pressed my hands to my mouth and screwed my eyes shut. I fought hard to keep myself from crying. I blocked the number. Silent tears fell from my eyes and I put my phone in my purse.

I got another buzz as I stepped out of the Uber. I fumbled to get the phone out of my purse. I dropped my keys on the ground. I hunched down to retrieve them and looked at my phone. It was another number.

“Don’t block me.”

I climbed up the stairs and opened my email. It was habit. I couldn’t possibly not look at my email, even when home. I saw an unread email from Caleb and my heart stopped beating. I clicked on it. Nick, Chris, Mark, and Molly were copied on it.

“Send all of Orla’s stuff to me. She’ll be out sick today and tomorrow.”

I emailed Caleb back privately. “Caleb, I saw your email. I’ll be in tomorrow. I can work from home today. I brought my laptop. - Ellie.”

I got the response promptly. “Orla, don’t worry about it. Come back with a clear head. I can’t have you making stupid mistakes. - C.H”

My skin burned red at the word stupid. I ground my teeth together and blinked rapidly.

“Are you still crying?”

The new number asked. I did not respond. I blocked it and put my phone down. Another buzz. A third number.

“Don’t ignore me.”

Another buzz. It was a picture. It was me again. On my bed, outstretched, naked. My legs were spread. My face crumpled. I typed through a haze of tears.

“I’ll send that to every single person you know.”

Another photo came through. It was a graphic shot. My legs spread. His fingers spread my lips apart. It was soft, pink, *wet*.

“Why are you doing this to me!!!!” I jabbed out rapidly. I started to cry again. I pulled my knees to my chest and buried my face downward.

“Because you belong to me.”

“Do I know you??” I asked. I don’t know why I would ask that. I didn’t actually expect an answer.

“I know you.”

“Please. Please leave me alone. I’m begging you,” I pleaded.

“Are you still crying?”

“ No , ” I lied. I waited. The messages stopped. I laid down on the futon and closed my eyes to sleep.

The next two days were a bit of a blur. I laid on the futon. I cried. I don’t remember eating, but I must have had cereal or a sandwich here or there. I didn’t get any more messages. I kept

my apartment locked tight. I beat myself up daily. If I'd just locked the door.

On the morning of the third day, with shaky arms and sore muscles, I groped for my phone. I texted Chris. "I need the week."

"Got it," he responded almost immediately. My insides roiled. I should be at the office right now. I checked the clock. It was 6:30am. Caleb would be there. Chris would be there. Another text came through, "you deserve the time. I'll deal with Caleb. We have this under control."

I fell back asleep. It's very possible I abused some of the medication in my cabinet on those first two or three days. All I did was sleep, get up to go to the bathroom, and then come back to the futon. I didn't bathe. The blankets were still balled up, destroyed with bleach, laying in the shower.

I woke abruptly the next day to a heavy thump at my door. My eyes popped open and I sat up abruptly. I stared at the door, ears straining to hear. My heart thundered violently against my ribcage and my muscles tensed. Though I remember little, by the time I slowly creaked the door open, I had a large kitchen knife in my hand.

A box was on the ground before the door. I looked to my left and right, a frown on my face. The hallway was empty. I brought the box inside. Once the door was shut, I locked the door and threw all the deadbolts. I checked it multiple times.

I examined the box closely. It was sent to me directly from Amazon. I grabbed my phone to check my orders. In my haze, I hadn't ordered anything. My parents wouldn't have sent me anything. We'd had a pretty good falling out the last time they had.

I used the knife in my hand to cut through the box. It was a set of sheets, almost identical to the ones I had, and a new quilt. It wasn't exactly the same, but it was very close. I swallowed thickly.

I knew where it came from. I felt the walls close in on me and I lowered my face into my hands. Tears leaked from eyes, hot and wet. It would have been down at the front entrance. A

neighbor would have brought it up.

I did not make my bed right away. I went into the bathroom, plopped a pill between my lips, and then went to fall asleep on the futon. It was dark out when I woke up.

I usually wash sheets before I put them on my bed, but I had no plans to walk down to the laundry room in the basement. I made the bed and then stood there. I stood in the middle of my small, silent apartment staring at the bed with tired eyes. I brought a hand up and trailed it along my collar bone.

He had gone over the words with his marker before he left. WHORE. MINE. I could feel them burning, etched deeply into my skin. And the lines. All those lines. I broke down again, crying hard into my pillow. I fell asleep because when I woke up it was light.

I had a text from Chris. “Hope everything is ok!”

I ignored it. I didn’t have an ounce of motivation in me. I considered going to the police. It was too late to go to the police at this point. I wouldn’t be believed. Who could possibly believe it? That I was held captive for three days in my own apartment.

“Oh what are those lines?” They’d ask me. “Oh, that’s how many times I orgasmed.” I would respond.

I lowered myself down to the futon and watched the TV with heavy eyes. I couldn’t handle the shame of people knowing. I’d *orgasmed*. How do you explain that?

I got a chime and I felt sick. I saw it was Caleb, but that didn’t make me feel any better.

“I know you’re off but check your email real quick. Need to verify something. Only you have the spreadsheet.”

I grabbed my laptop. His email was the kindest I had ever received from him. It was still curt and cold.

I confirmed the numbers and attached the spreadsheet. I got a beep back immediately. “Thanks, Orla. Rest up.”

His kindness bothered me. I didn’t need his sympathy. I didn’t need him thinking I couldn’t take it. I almost wrote back to tell him I’d be in on Friday. I didn’t have the strength though. Even with my bitter resentment, the thought of getting dressed and going outside, crossing the city and going into that building was too much.

I watched TV, though it wasn’t really watching. I’d sit, my legs curled up under me, shoulders hunched, wearing grey leggings and an oversized t-shirt, staring off with glazed eyes, mind far away.

I was watching the hockey game on Thursday night when I got another text message.

“Look how wet your pussy is.”

Another photo came through. His fingers were inside of me. Another. His fingers spreading me apart.

“Your pussy tastes so good. I want to put my face between your legs and suck on your clit until you’re a wet, writhing puddle.”

I watched the messages come in. I sniffled hard, breath hitching. A video came through. Dread overtook me. It was edited on a loop.

I saw myself on the bed, hands tied up on the bed frame. My knees were bent, legs spread open. I was breathing, whimpering, *moaning*. It was only about two seconds long, but it was clear. I was moaning. It replayed and replayed and replayed. I exited out of it and through my phone to the side. It landed face up and I felt the buzz, saw the screen light up.

“Listen to you. Do you remember how it felt, that tight pussy getting tongue fucked until you were moaning like a little whore?”

Another buzz.

“You like getting raped. I’ll rape you again.”

I buried my face in my hands.

“That green shirt. I like that shirt on you. What color was your bra today?”

“Black,” I answered.

“All I wanted to do was rip it right off you. I’d rip right through those buttons and fuck you, blouse torn, squeezing your tits through your black bra.”

My heart was pounding. He worked in my building. He had to. There was no other way he would know what I had been wearing.

“Send me a picture of your tits.”

My throat constricted.

“I want your face in it. Smile for me.”

“Please,” I typed. My eyes were red and puffy. “You already have pictures. Please don’t make me do this.”

“Send me a picture of your tits. I want your face in it. Smile for me.”

I squeezed my eyes shut. Fat, silent tears rolled down my cheeks.

“I’ll send that video to your boss. I’ll upload it online. Every fucking pervert in the world is going to jack themselves off to you moaning like a whore while you’re being raped. Send me the picture. You have five minutes.”

I peeled off my shirt and took off my bra. I didn’t cry. I think my eyes had run out of tears. I struggled taking the picture. I tried to smile. I couldn’t. Every picture I took, I looked like I was in pain. I didn’t want to anger him.

Finally, I sent the picture. I smiled as best I could. My breasts were clear. The word WHORE prominent and dark and shameful.

“That’s perfect. So perfect. Look at you, you look so sad. Don’t worry. Do what I say and no else will see these.”

There was a pause.

“Squeeze your nipples. Send another picture.”

I obeyed. I laid back and gently massaged my nipples until they were hard. My lower jaw quivered as I did so. I took another photo and sent it to him.

There wasn’t a message for a few minutes. I wondered what he was doing with those photos. I deleted them from my phone. I removed them from the text chain. I felt numb inside. I felt so... so filthy. So used so... so... so utterly violated.

“Do you belong to me?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“Good girl. Say it.”

“I belong to you,” I typed.

“You’re so sweet.” A picture came through. I almost didn’t look at it. It was me on the futon, in my pajamas, my blankets wrapped up around me, sleeping soundly. “Look how innocent you look. I just want to scoop you up and hold you. Say you’re my good girl.”

“I’m your good girl,” I sent the message.

“It’s true. You’re mine.”

“I know,” I said.

“If I find out you let someone else touch you...”

There was a pause.

“Will you let someone else touch you?”

“No,” I replied.

“Promise me.”

“I promise, no one else will touch me,” I said.

“Good girl. Go to sleep. You need your strength. Think of me inside of you. My hands on you.”

“Ok,” I said.

“Good night.”

“Good night.”

I waited but no other messages came through. I laid down and cried. I grabbed my phone and texted Chris. This had been bothering me for a while now. I needed to know one way or another. I couldn't find out by showing up to work on Monday. I couldn't.

“Am I off the senior deals now?” I asked. He responded immediately.

“No. Why?”

“Im just thinking I chose a terrible time to take a week off. Lol.” I wanted to be light and airy. I didn't need Chris to think I was sitting here an absolute mess.

“I'll be honest. Nick wasn't all that happy. But Caleb was pretty firm with him that you should still get the senior deals. I'm finishing up your Thursday/Friday deadlines. You just have to come in and pick up from Caleb on Monday. It'll be fine.”

“Thats a massive relief. Thanks.”

“You doing ok?” he asked. “Better?”

“Much better!” I lied. “Really needed to recharge. Thanks for being so cool about it. Still embarrassed.”

“No need to be embarrassed. Lol. See you Monday. Try and enjoy your weekend.”

“You too.”

I got out of the messages and then looked at messages from the unknown number. I deleted it. I didn’t want to see it. I didn’t want it on my phone. I put my bra and shirt back on and then crawled underneath the blankets he had bought for me. It felt like he was here again. Like I was wrapped in his arms. Like he was surrounding me. I pressed my face into the pillow and squeezed my eyes.

You belong to me. Ill rape you again. The words ricocheted around my brain. *Do what I say and no one else will see these.*

“Oh God,” I moaned into the pillow. “Oh, God.”

What the fuck was I going to do?

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for the reviews! I am going to go through some of the old chapters and clean them up a bit. I know there's a lot of minor grammar/spelling issues. I hate proof reading and as a result I'm just terrible at it. So I will commit some time to cleaning that up for people this coming weekend so it's a less jarring read.

I hope you guys are all right with last chapter and this chapter. What I want to do with the story, I can't have the identity a complete mystery throughout the entire thing. Hopefully the mystery was fun while it lasted!

Her strength was impressive. Even admirable. Her stubbornness was infuriating. The sight of her walking around the corner had been a shock. Her hair was a tight, messy bun. It was probably the least professional she had ever appeared at work, though it was by no means inappropriate. Other women had dressed in a far less professional manner. Amelia came to mind. Her clothing was fine. Well fitted black slacks and black flats. She was perfect in flats. She was a relatively tall woman, perhaps 5'6 or 5'7. In flats, she was the perfect height. Her shirt was green silk, well tailored, expensive, hiding the letters beneath her skin. Letters only we knew were there.

Her hair was the problem. It was still wet from the shower I had given her. It had clearly been pulled up on the top of her head using her fingers. She had a noticeable pallor. She had circles under her eyes. I had made a point not to set her alarm. She should be sleeping. She needed her sleep.

Nick had been harsh. As he spoke at the admin meeting, the faces around the table demonstrated a clear discomfort. She looked terrible. The appropriate course of action would have been to ask the status of Baybridge, speak to her in private and ask if she was unwell, and address the matter in private. I had not expected such a public shaming, one so unwarranted, and I felt a glimmer of remorse. Then her eyes flashed to mine, big, wet, so beautifully vulnerable, that the same violent rush of passion I had felt coursing through my blood that past eight months.

It had been foolish to think a weekend would satiate me. The very sight of her left my body tingling with need. Images course through my mind as I stared at her. The feel of her body,

the touch of her lips, the soft mewls, the whimpers, the scent of her, the taste. The need was stronger now than it had been when I made the decision to spike her drink. It had all come to a head, watching her stare into her beer forlornly. One night wasn't enough. I needed to feel her move, hear her sounds. A full weekend, how I wanted, when I wanted... I thought it would be enough. Now I needed to see her eyes. I needed her to look up at me while I fucked her. I needed her to know it was *me*.

I had a sudden movie play in my head. Walking into her cubicle and ordering her to her feet. Ripping her blouse open and throwing her down on her desk. Groping at her breasts through her bra. What color was her bra, I wondered. I imagined fear in her eyes. Fear of my anger, my strength, my disapproval. I'd hold her down with my hand around her throat, squeezing just hard enough to let her know who was in control, who had the power.

She didn't last the day. I hadn't expected her to. Not after I send that picture. As I reviewed her report in the morning, I waited for her to come to my office, trembling, teary eyed, asking me with fearful hope that I would approve the day off. I would rise from my desk and approach her, shutting my door behind her and giving her the privacy Nick should have given her.

I had a flash of slapping her across the face. Her wet tearful gaze turned toward mine, eyes twinkling with fear and vulnerability. I brushed that off. I would put my hand on her shoulder and pull her close. I could already smell her. I would get as close as I could to her, and I would ask if she was alright.

She might break down and fall into my arms. I'd wrap my arms around her and tell her I would take care of everything. She need only rely on me. She was stronger than that though. More stubborn. She would look up at me with those big eyes, jaw trembling, give a brave nod and leave.

I didn't get the satisfaction. It was robbed from me. It was a frightful rage. I hadn't been that angry in a long time. It was directed at her and it was directed at him. Her big green eyes looking up at me in surprise, wet and scared. I sat at my desk staring at my screen. I hardly lasted five minutes before I grabbed my phone. Would he see her home? My fingers tingled. He came back out of the elevator and walked back to his cubicle. He didn't so much as look at me as he returned to his desk.

So she was sitting alone in an uber crying, when she could be standing in my office, soft little body pressed up vulnerably against mine, my arms wrapped security around her shaking shoulders.

I pulled up the texting app on my phone.

Are you crying?

I needed to know. I would do no work if I thought she was alone and crying.

Don't cry. You're too beautiful to cry.

I waited maybe ten minutes before I tried sending the other message. The little red exclamation point that jumped out at me beside my message of comfort. I felt a violent flare of anger. My eyes fluttered. I generated a new number.

Don't block me.

I waited and then leaned forward. I jabbed at my keyboard and sent the email. Another white hot flood of rage filled me when she responded to my email. I looked at my phone. I answered her email quickly and picked my phone back up.

Are you still crying?

I gave her five minutes.

You're too beautiful to cry.

Another exclamation point. I felt the vein pulsing in my forehead. I generated a third number. I typed with rapid, violent jabs.

Don't ignore me.

I gave her five minutes before I grabbed my phone and scrolled through my photos. I felt the blood rush between my legs as I went through them. I stopped on an image of her on the bed, exactly where she should be. Naked, legs spread, tied to the bed and ready for a good fucking. That arrogant, haughty little whore thought she could ignore me. I sent the image along with the words, *I'll send that to every single person you know.*

I found another picture. I strained against my trousers. She had a perfect pussy. Tight, wet and pink. My mouth watered. She'd tasted so good. Another flash, her vulnerable body tied to the bed, legs spread, knees bent. I'd licked the length of her. Sucking her clit between my lips. The ever growing dampness beneath my tongue. I sent her the picture. Her pussy spread between my fingers, slick with every ounce of evidence that she was nothing but a dirty little whore.

Why are you doing this to me!!!!

I almost groaned. I was rock hard. I had so much work to do. I had no idea how on Earth I was going to manage to do it.

Because you belong to me. I wanted her to know it was me. I wanted her to look up at *me*. I wanted to hear it; that she knew she belonged to me, that she knew she was my whore.

Do I know you??

A small smile lifted my lips. She was too smart to think I'd actually answer that.

I know you.

Please. Please me alone. I'm begging you.

I liked to hear her beg. I wanted to hear more of it. Instead, I asked again, *are you still crying?*

I got back a single 'No.' It's impossible to know if that was true. I pulled up my new amazon account with my fake information and the giftcard. The new blankets and sheets would be delivered tomorrow. I would have liked to know she was at home curled up in the bed I fucked her in, comfortably wrapped in blankets. She would make herself comfortable on her little futon though.

"Trent."

I glanced up in surprise as Nick came into my office. "The diligence reports will be out soon. I need to finish reviewing them."

They were hers. I had to review it top to bottom. That she managed to throw something as coherent as this together was impressive in and of itself, but I couldn't sign my name to it and send it off as is.

Nick was red faced and crossed his arms defiantly across his chest. I watched Chris leave his cubicle and come to my office. Nick no doubt summoned him. Chris stepped in and shut the door.

"I put her on senior deals and she *leaves*?" Nick blustered. "After what she pulled this weekend?"

"I told her to go home," Chris said. "She was a mess."

“I knew this was a bad idea, making her a senior after eight months. It’s too much too fast. We give it to Peter. She goes back to junior.”

“She’s the best for it,” I said, leaning back and crossing my own arms. “You’ve seen her work. She’s years ahead of where she should be.”

“Which is why I don’t want to waste her. If she can’t handle the stress, we move her back.”

“It’s not the work,” I said dryly.

“Something happened,” Chris mused. “Ellie doesn’t just not answer emails. She’s answered emails at 11:00pm on a Saturday.”

“She did look rough,” Nick said with a sliver of sympathy. “Has she contacted the therapist?”

I always wanted to laugh when that came up. The company had a therapist on call. Our insurance covered up to six visits a year. That’s how bad it could be.

“I don’t think we’re allowed to get that information,” I answered dryly. Nick let out a deep sigh.

“Can’t just not answer emails,” he said, still clearly quite angry.

“It’s not like her,” I said. “She’ll be out at least today and tomorrow. If she asks for the week, I’ll approve it.”

Nick’s head looked like he was about to explode.

“Chris and I are splitting her jobs. We’ll get the Thursday/Friday deadlines out. She’ll take over my deals next week. That was the plan anyway.”

“This is on you, Trent. If she fucks this up...”

“She won’t,” I said. I knew she wouldn’t.

“Gets put on senior deals and goes home. She’s looking at a ten thousand dollar raise,” he shook his head. “Keep it together you two.”

He opened the door and stormed back to the elevators. Chris lingered, standing in the doorway, arms crossed over his chest. He continued to stare at me until my anger flared. I asked sharply, “Yes?”

“This affects her career,” Chris said.

“I’m handling it,” I answered curtly. He looked as though he wanted to say something, thought better of it, and then left. I glared after him before checking my phone. No messages. I got up, mindful of the strain between my legs. I made sure the blinds were pulled and shut my door. I locked it, checked it twice, and then sat back down behind my desk. I pressed my hands to the front of my trousers and flipped through my phone. I found the picture of her lying on the futon just before I left. She looked so innocent, so sweet, so vulnerable.

Those sweet green eyes. How they would look, wet and frightened, looking up at me. Every time she tossed one of her snarky little comments my way, I imagined the same thing; a hand to her throat, a curt slap to the cheek, a finger to her face.

I plucked at my belt buckle and leaned backward.

She would look up at me and apologize. She’d pull her bottom lip between her teeth. Shy and remorseful.

He pushed my hand into my pants and took hold of my pulsing erection. I slipped my other hand into my pocket.

I thought last weekend would put her in her place. I thought I'd feel the satisfaction I had been longing for for months. I wanted her so badly. I wanted to rape her again but it wasn't enough.

I wanted to rape her and I wanted her to *know*. I pictured her again, that sweet little girl curled up on the couch, bent over my desk, arms bent at her lower back, my hands wrapped tightly around her wrists, blouse torn, skirt bunched around her hips, crying with every powerful thrust into her.

I slipped the panties I'd taken out of my pocket and lifted it to my face. I breathed in deeply.

And when I was done fucking her, I'd let her fall to the ground at my feet, crying, overrun with shame. I'd sit back on my chair and let her cry there as I readjusted my trousers. And then I'd lean down and collect her face in my hands.

"That's my good little slut," I'd murmur lovingly and place a soft kiss to her lips. Her tears would be salty. Her mouth would quiver. "Who do you belong to?"

"You, Caleb," she would whisper. "I belong to you."

I got into work around five that Monday. I was the first one there, but I usually was. The night security guard let me in the front doors. My ID badge let me in the rest of the building without need for help.

“Good Morning, Ellie. Enjoy your weekend?” he asked me with a smile.

“You know it,” I answered and handed him the small black coffee I always got him. “Yours?”

“Same as always.”

“How’d Charlie do at the science fair?” I asked as I pressed the elevator buttons. It was pretty sure it had been on Thursday. He was so excited for it.

“Third Place!” He grinned proudly. He was beyond proud of his son.

“That’s fantastic!” I said happily, stepping in passed the opening doors. “Tell him I said congrats.”

“Of course. Thanks for the coffee,” he said holding it up with a smile. “Don’t you work too hard now.”

I flashed him a sideways smile and let the doors shut. Once closed I leaned back against the elevator wall and let out a sigh. I’d managed to sleep last night with the help of an extra Xanax. I didn’t get any more messages from him, but every time my phone went off, a violent rush of terror coursed through my limbs.

The doors opened and I was hit with that same sterile smell. I had finally got the sheets and blankets out of my shower. I’d hauled them down to the basement to toss in the dumpsters,

all the while waiting for someone to jump out at me. It had been a miserable few minutes. The new sheets were better quality, my new quilt more expensive. He hadn't skimped on value.

I dropped off my belongings and then made coffee. I checked my emails from the break room. I'd fill up my cup three times before finally returning to my desk with my fourth cup. Caleb and Chris got my deadlines through. Caleb sent his last email at 10:57 on Friday night. I rubbed the bridge of my nose.

I dreaded the day. I couldn't fathom facing everyone. I was humiliated that I broke down like that in front of Chris, I was beyond angry that Caleb might think he had done that to me. I couldn't stand giving him that level of satisfaction.

The team would think I was ridiculous. No doubt rumors had already spread across the company that another associate had a mental breakdown. I wondered darkly how many bets I was going to destroy by showing back up to work today.

Caleb walked into the break room around 5:46. I had responded to a number of his emails already. It was impossible to say if he had already read them in his office before coming down for coffee or if he had just shown up. I didn't look up from my computer. We very rarely spoke outside of deal work. We'd been in the break room together before and never said a word.

I looked up in surprise when I felt him approach. Silently, he topped my coffee mug off before he dumped the rest into his mug and set about making a fresh pot.

"Have a good vacation?" He finally rumbled, stirring his spoonful of sugar into his black coffee. I shot him a hateful gaze. I hadn't expected him to be leaning against the counter looking at me. The gaze should have been greeted by his back, not his piercing grey eyes and deadpan expression.

"It was fantastic," I responded. I looked back at my emails. I realized being cold might cement any thought he had that he had managed to put me in that state, so I lifted my face, smiled, and asked "did you have a nice weekend?"

“It was fine,” he answered. He added unnecessarily, “Worked most of it.”

I bit the inside of my lip. If he thought I was going to thank him he was wrong.

“Did you receive the reports from everyone for Project Plymouth?”

I nodded and looked back at my email.

“EOD Wednesday, Orla,” he said. “Very important it’s done by then.”

“It will be,” I snapped. I had no idea how. I had no idea how to do it. Caleb wouldn’t offer help and it should have come from him. I couldn’t bare speaking to Chris after the scene he had witnessed a week ago. I would figure it out. I always did.

“Very confident.”

I tasted blood as I bit down on the inside of my lip. I know that’s said a lot in books I’ve read, but I don’t think people really understand how hard you actually have to bite to draw blood. I released my aching inner lip and ran my tongue along the pulpy flesh. He was taunting me. He walked past me and took a sip of his coffee. As he left he drawled, “good luck.”

I didn’t finish my coffee. I went to the sink and dumped it out. I didn’t even refill it with the fresh pot Caleb had put on before I left. I carried my laptop back to my desk. I made a point not to look into his office and I ducked quickly passed Chris’ office. I couldn’t handle seeing his big eyes full of concern, asking softly, “you sure you ok?” I just wanted to be left alone to do my work.

I worked until about eleven until my bladder was about to burst. No one had bothered me. I received no check-ins from Chris, no text messages from my tormentor. I didn’t want to get up. I was scheduled for a call with one of the targets at noon. That would take a couple of hours. Theoretically, I could stay in my cubicle until everyone had left for the day. I left my lunch on my desk so I wouldn’t have to go down to the break room.

My heart pounded and I closed. I dreaded the feel of eyes. I knew he was in the building. We shared a break room. Other than that, I had no idea. No one on SALT M&A. I knew that. Compliance? Federal? Consulting? Auditing? Or were they even from the company? We shared the break room with H&R Block... a few others. I tried to think. My brain raced. Who could have seen me without my coat on?

Finally the discomfort got to be too much. I got up from my desk and walked down the row toward Caleb's office. I was wearing black slacks and a high necked pink blouse. I hadn't been able to bring myself to wear any of my skirts. The thought that he might be able to see my legs...

Caleb was on the phone, leaning back and rocking in his chair, a satisfied smile on his face. His eyes flickered up to me as I walked past him. I tried to smile. Who knows what my face warped itself into.

I hurried back to my office and sagged down in my chair. I didn't run into anyone and retreated back into safety.

The call was as expected. It was the first meeting with Caleb as manager. As he spoke with the target agents, I felt the growing sense of frustration and anger bubble up inside of me. It was about a half hour in before I realized he was going to be really really good at this. When he wasn't being cruel to those around him, he was undeniably charming. The agents were happy, laughing, providing information freely and without even realizing what they were saying.

I took notes rapidly. I looked up sharply when I got my ping. I pulled it up. It was from Caleb.

“ - financial disclosure value from 2019?”

The question wasn't clear but I knew exactly what he was looking for. He could only be bringing the conversation in one direction. I found it and answered in seconds.

“You said you had had less than 5% of sales in California?”

I double checked the information room to make sure my report had been correct. It had been.

“We have it here that you sold about 56,378 units for 2020. That’s around 78% isn’t it?”
That’s exactly what it was. The target began to sputter. Once all was said and done, we had a promise to receive all of their audits from the past ten years.

I had my notes up and out within the hour and then took the time to eat my sandwich at my desk. I sipped at my soda conservatively. I didn’t want to have to go to the bathroom again. When I did it was around 4:00p.m.

It was the first time I saw Chris that day. He was sitting in Caleb’s office. They were both smiling as they chatted. Caleb laughed and his eyes moved up to meet mine again. Nick never looked up when he worked there. It was just another element of torture added to my worklife. Chris turned his head and gave me a smile and a wave. I nodded and pushed on.

I’d seen them interact like that before. I’d just assumed it was a friendly conversation between colleagues. Now I saw it for what it was. They were close friends. It was actually upsetting to realize. I had trouble reconciling the kind, thoughtful, even tempered Chris with the cold, cruel, and callous Caleb. It didn’t make me think more of Caleb. It made me think less of Chris. I hated it.

As I returned, Chris came out of Caleb’s office to meet me.

“Nice work on the phone call,” Chris said as we walked down the row toward our cubicles. He paused at his cube and I waited to chat with him.

“What do you mean?” I asked, brow knitting.

“With the financial disclosure. Don’t know how you found that so fast.”

“I just remembered it,” I said. I glanced into Caleb’s office. He must have said something. God forbid he would say something positive directly to me.

I considered asking him for help on my report due on Wednesday but stopped. I was a bit horrified I hadn’t even started it yet. I couldn’t let him know that.

I got back to my desk and decided to look at the reports I had received from the team. I’d done all the reports before in the past. I spent a couple hours fixing Mark’s cost basis Calc. Peter was still in his cubicle. Everyone else was gone.

Tuesday went much the same way. It was around five in the evening when I realized I had absolutely no idea what I was doing and had absolutely no hope to. I pulled up my email and my calendar. I had an email drafted to Chris asking for some of his time tomorrow morning before I realized he was on vacation for the rest of the week.

I think I would have cried if I hadn’t spent the last couple weeks crying. I sagged into my chair, utterly defeated. I worked what might be considered a report. I worked until about 9:00 p.m. I got an Uber home. I didn’t want to take the T home alone.

Around eleven the next morning I knew I was in trouble. Chris was gone. Peter wasn’t a senior. No one else would be able to help me outside of Caleb or Nick. Nick had said nothing to me since I got back. He was clearly still not happy with me and I certainly wasn’t going to tell him I was on the verge of blowing the biggest opportunity I had received in my short career.

I finished up some of my other work. Research I’d been given to do for a partner from the New York office. Some calcs for my remaining deals with Chris. It was six when I pushed myself up from my chair. I didn’t want to lose this job. I loved this job. I hated it, but I loved it, and I was good at it. I wouldn’t let my fear of embarrassment take it from me. I wouldn’t let Caleb take it from me. Even if I’d already lost it, I had to do what I could to salvage the mess I’d put myself in

I walked down the long narrow hallway of cubicle walls toward Caleb’s office. He was standing behind his desk and looking at his phone. He tossed it on his desk, retrieved his coat

from the back of his chair and put it on over his shoulders. He was about to go home. I could only pray he'd give me *something* to go on. My hands trembled as I stepped into his doorway. He adjusted the collar of his coat. He looked at me, brow lifted a fraction or so, and waited.

I fought down the nausea, the terror, the shame, and I rushed out, "I'm in trouble."

It was all I could think to say. He stared a couple seconds longer, comprehending.

"Alright," he said. For a horrifying second I thought he was going to tell me that it wasn't his problem. Instead he pinned me with a hard stare and said his trademark, "what's up?"

"I'm going to blow the deadline."

He paused a moment, staring. Slowly, a small little smile crept across his face. My stomach plummeted. His eyes darted to the clock on the wall. He only said, the small smile still on his face, his voice deathly neutral, "Ok."

I knew it would be fruitless. My career was about to come to a screeching halt. The only person I had to blame it on was myself. The only person who could stop it, was going to take great joy in my downfall. But I had to do what all I could, even if it would come to nothing, and even if it meant my pride would take a beating.

"I need help."

He looked back to me. He considered his options. Slowly his eyes dropped to his desk. He began nodding slowly. He pulled the coat off his shoulders and draped it back along his chair.

"Ok," he said. "Get your laptop."

Relief flooded through me but I knew I wasn't out of the woods yet. He had no idea just how bad the situation was. I didn't even know if he could fix the mess I was in if he wanted to. I

hurried back and grabbed my laptop and reports. When I got back into his office, he was dragging a chair over to his desk for me to sit on.

“How much do you have written?” he asked. I swallowed thickly. He sat down at his desk and woke his computer back up. I said nothing. He looked up when he was met with nothing but silence. He said again, a bit more sharply, “How much do you have written?”

I took a deep breath before answering. “None of it.”

He said nothing. He stared at his computer and slowly shook his head. He looked less than pleased. His computer began to boot up. He pushed himself up from his chair. He forced a tight smile across his face. Fury pulsed in his grey eyes. “I’m going to go put on some coffee. I hope you’re ready for a long night.”

He stopped right in front of me. He looked at me, like he was trying to figure me out. He shook his head in exasperation and then stepped out of his office and walked down toward the break room.

I settled in the chair he had brought over for me. I went through the excel sheets I made up from the reports I received. I chewed on the pulpy shredded flesh of my bottom lip as I waited for him to return. He came back with two hot cups of coffee. I thanked him and took a sip. The coffee was delicious. Exactly what I needed.

“Chris didn’t help you at all?” he asked as he sat down.

“I didn’t want to bother him after the help last week,” I answered.

“But fuck me right,” Caleb said dryly. I blinked. I hadn’t meant it like that.

“I didn’t -”

“ - Send me the calcs,” he said sharply. “Email me what you have.”

I emailed everything over to him. I wanted to say something, but I didn't know what to say. It never occurred to me that Caleb had picked up just as much of my slack as Chris, though I should have. Honestly, I meant it was why I waited this long, not why I had come to *him*. I wouldn't be here if I wasn't desperate. If Chris was still here, I would have gone to him. Caleb was the only one left.

“What I generally do - come closer -“ he grabbed my chair and pulled it, with me in, toward him with remarkable ease. The move frightened me and our shoulders bumped together as I sagged toward him. I quickly shied away. Touching him sent a rush of anxiety through me and worked on my already frayed nerves. I got a whiff of his aftershave and cologne. It wasn't a bad smell, but it had a physiological effect on me. I didn't want to be this close to him. I didn't want to be that close to *anyone*, but certainly not him.

“There's no actual template, but I got mine from Nick when I started. Always, always, always, address reach first. What states are excluded, which are certainties, and which ones are risk and what risk level. In that order too. It's the clearest way to lay it out. So, what do we have on state research?”

I pulled up the spreadsheet I had put together using Mark's research. I turned it toward him to review. My throat was too dry to speak. He gave it a once over and then nodded. He plugged the information into his template, transferring what I said almost word for word. It took him about 30 minutes. I watched in silence.

“So we have that outlined. Now flesh out the exposed states and potential risk. Do risk first. It'll take the most time, but it's a good hurdle to get through. Where do we have unknown exposure.”

I selected the next page of my spreadsheet. He reached over and knocked my hand out of the way. I yanked my hand back to give him room. He dragged his finger along my touchpad and went through my excel sheet. He went through each page of my excel sheet. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, he spoke.

“You've done the report.” He had a manner of speaking that made him sound very detached, very uninterested in what he was doing. “You just don't know how to put it together.”

He downloaded the file to his computer and opened it up.

“Have these been verified?” he asked. “If Peter did it, we need to verify. He’s sloppy.”

“I didn’t,” I admitted. He spent the next forty five minutes reviewing the relevant statute. I felt my annoyance flare as he checked every single one. Slow and agonizing. He rewrote some of my sentences but overall didn’t make many changes. Overall, it was a colossal waste of time.

A couple hours had passed by the time the exposure risk was completed. We sat in silence and it was honestly one of the most painful stretches of time in my life. I jumped violently when there was a knock on the door. It was the night guard. He came in with a cup of coffee from dunkins.

“Would have brought two if I knew you were here, Ellie!” he smiled. “Late ever for you.”

“Hey, Eddie,” I smiled. “If I knew you’d buy I wouldn’t be bringing you coffee every morning.”

He laughed. Caleb glanced at me and then looked at Eddie. He took the coffee from him.

“I’ll have a coffee for you tomorrow morning,” Eddie promised.

“No, no,” I said, smiling sleepily. “You’ll get your coffee.”

“Thanks, Eddie,” Caleb finally said. “We’ll split it.”

Eddie gave a wave and left.

“Real nice guy,” Caleb said dryly.

“You’re getting the better deal,” I tried to joke. He took the large hot coffee and removed the lid. He split it between our two cups.

He tapped his screen. “Why didn’t you catch this?”

Caleb tapped on his monitor.

“I...” I followed his finger. I found it immediately. An entire section of Peter’s internal summary I had relied on was bad law. A repealed tax statute from Texas. “I just...”

“That’s lazy, Orla,” he said, jabbing at the keyboard. “You’re better than that.”

“I didn’t do that research,” I snapped.

“And you didn’t independently verify it. You’re doing senior work. You need to put in senior effort.”

“I put in more effort than half the people here,” I said again. My cheeks were flushed. It was more than that. I put in more effort than everyone, *everyone*.

“You need to double check all of it. Mistakes happen. That’s why we have so many eyes on everything. But if you’re the senior on the deal, you need to find that.”

I only nodded and said shortly, “ok.” I chewed on the inside of my lip.

He sighed, found the updated statute and entered it into the report. Once we finished all unknown risk states, completing the rest was relatively easy.

“So, the report is basically fleshed out. How many states have a Calc?”

“Thirteen,” I said. “They’re right here.” I tapped the page at the bottom of the spreadsheet on his second monitor. He pulled it up and reviewed the calculations.

“Insert them at the bottom of the state. Preceding them, make sure you explain the process of the Calc. This is a report that a client will end up seeing, so we want to make sure they understand, but you don’t need to dumb it down too much. It’s mostly for Nick and my benefit, but always keep in mind it might be handed off to a client.”

“Ok,” I said.

“I generally use the same stock language. Just some tweaks,” he said. “See this here? Nick hates that. Take it out.”

He deleted an entire part of my report.

I protested, “but then my final assessment won’t make sense.”

He moved to the bottom and pasted it there. He hadn’t deleted it. He’d just cut it.

“Nick likes it here. I get why you did this but Nick will send it back. So if you get it to me like this, I’ll have to move it, so when you’re preparing reports for me, you need to do it like this. Ok?”

“Yeah,” I answered. I didn’t like it. It didn’t make sense to me, but I’d do it.

I watched him go through it one last time.

“Knick of time,” he said with almost no emotion. I glanced at the clock as he saved the final document. It was ten to midnight.

He emailed the finished report to me. “Send it out.”

“But you already have it,” I said, though I was pulling it up anyway.

“Nick wants to make sure you get it to me by midnight and it’ll be better if it comes from you anyway. If I email it to him it’ll look like I did it and you’re still in his line of fire. Send it to me and CC Nick.”

“You did do it though,” I mumbled but did as he said. He reached out and draped his arm along the back of my chair. I felt his arm touch my back.

“You did most of the work. I just plugged it in,” Caleb said. It sounded oddly like a compliment. “I’m sending it back to you tomorrow by the way. We need to review this top to bottom before it gets the final ok from me. You need to verify *everything*.”

“That just seems like a big waste of time,” I murmured. “It’s already done.”

“You’ve got some serious weaknesses, Orla but laziness isn’t one of them. Not everyone is as thorough as you out the gate.”

My cheeks burned brightly at the backhanded compliment. I was processing it when he opened the email on his end. I watched him hit reply. He typed out. “Orla, Great work..” He typed out. I actually let out a little laugh. A tiny little smirk came to his face as he finished typing and gave me a sideways look. “Final review tomorrow due by COB. - C.H.” He sent it to me and CC’d Nick.

“Alright then,” he said, shutting down his laptop. “Time to go home.”

“If it needs to be done over again, should we have sent it to Nick?” I asked. A whole new sense of anxiety began crashing over me. I looked to Caleb. He was on his feet and reaching for his coat.

“He won’t sign it and send it out until he reads it through and shreds it up a few times. He won’t do that until I send it to him with my edits. He’ll look at it, but nothing will be done. He’s evaluating you for my senior spot. It’s a damn good first report, let me tell you that. You’ll be back in his good graces.”

Thanks to you, I would have said if he was anyone other than Caleb. If he had just offered help to begin with...

“Go get your things.”

I left and collected my things from my cubicle. I lingered for five or so minutes, hoping to step into the hallway and find the lights off in his office and him gone, but I wasn’t so lucky. He was throwing on his coat. I wasn’t sure if I should go straight to the elevator or wait for him. We weren’t friends. We’d never actually been alone together unless he was in my office destroying my report. But I knew at least I needed to say thank you.

I came to stand in the doorway. He pulled a stick of gum from his pack and extended it out to me. I felt nauseous as I saw the green packaging and shook my head. He placed a stick of gum between his lips.

“Thank you,” I said somewhat weakly. I added, “Seriously. For all the help.”

“You know, that’s really all it takes,” he drawled as he sling his bag over his shoulder. His voice dripped with condescension. Never had I met a more arrogant man. He adjusted his heavy coat. I waited, unsure what he meant. “ *‘Why?’*” He said as if speaking to a child. “ *‘How?’* It’s ok to admit you don’t know it all.”

“I don’t pretend to know it all,” I snapped. He gave me a hard look.

“Then why are you the only person that doesn’t ask how to do something when you clearly don’t know how to do it?”

“I - I do ask -“ I stammered. He walked toward me. I backed out of his office. He kept advancing.

“Of all the times I sent a report back, do you know how many times you’ve asked me what you needed to fix?” He lifted his eyebrows. When I did not answer, he raised a single finger to hover in front of his face.

“Why wouldn’t you just tell me what needed to be fixed?” I countered. He flicked the lights off in his office and walked out. He left the door open.

“I tried,” he answered. “Early on. You weren’t very receptive.”

“No, you didn’t,” I shot back.

“I went into your office with your report Orla, and tried to talk to you about the errors. Your exact words were, “I got it. I know that.’ *Ripped* it out of my hands and went to work. So I tell you what needs to be fixed after it becomes very clear you’re not willing to admit a very simple thing. ‘I. don’t. know.’”

My cheeks flushed red. My face felt hot. He laughed, grey eyes twinkling. He passed me on his way to the elevators. I followed dumbly.

“I make personal calls to others people’s desks when they fuck up royally. You don’t make huge fuck ups. You don’t repeat mistakes. That’s why you’re doing senior deals. I make personal calls to your desk because you make stupid, unnecessary mistakes, because you’re so stubborn you sit there and try and fix it on your own.”

“That’s not true,” I said. “I work fine with Chris.”

“Chris treats you like a child,” Caleb said, slapping the elevator button. He looked at me earnestly.. “You get that right? I treat you like I treat everyone else.”

He pointed along the rows of empty cubicles.

“You’re brilliant and so I hold you to a certain standard. Chris treats you like your fucking twelve.”

I don’t think I had ever heard him swear before. His ears were red. The doors opened and I followed him inside.

“You think I’m brilliant?” I asked, a bit dumbfounded. There was something in my voice that made it sound very very small. I hated myself for it.

“Is that what you just took from that conversation?” he asked. There was contempt in his voice. “You know you are. You’re just not a team player.”

“I take work that’s not mine all the time!” I replied back sharply. I nearly shouted it at him. My face flushed in embarrassment. How childish that must have looked.

A tiny little smirk slowly already across his face. His eyes raked down the length of me in a way that viciously attacked my self-esteem and I felt immediately self-conscious. It was cold, calculated contempt. He might think I was intelligent, but he made me feel like a bug. I fought to keep my jaw from trembling. I couldn’t understand why this man could be just so *cruel*.

“You can’t admit when you’re wrong,” he said matter of factly. He stepped close to me. I took a step back until I was backed against the elevator wall. “Tell me I’m wrong,” he

challenged me. I had to crane my neck to look up at him. The man was massive. I wracked my brain. I tried to think of an example to shove on his face but I couldn't. I stared up at him. I refused to look down. I thought back to my interactions with him. He couldn't put this on me. I wasn't the problem here.

"You're wrong," I answered. A dark smile spread across his face. I realized suddenly, in a way I hadn't really understood it in the past, he really just didn't like me.

"See, you can't even do it now."

The doors opened and he stepped away from. It wasn't until then that I realized how close he had been standing. We gave a nod Eddie as we left. Caleb reached out a long arm and held the door open for me. I brushed past him. I smelled wintergreen and my stomach turned. Then I was met with a whiff of his cologne and I tossed the thought aside. It was too ridiculous to really even consider. I didn't think any more of it.

"I'm not stupid," I finally said. His silence was driving me insane. "And I hate being treated like I am."

"Then you should save your attitude for Chris. Not me."

I turned to look at him. My ears were buzzing. He placed his hand on my shoulder and ushered me out of the way and down toward the T stop. My face flushed once again in embarrassment. I'd been standing right in the doorway, preventing him from moving. I certainly wasn't doing anything to improve his opinion of me.

That right there was my problem. I didn't like Caleb. I hated him. But a not so small part of me really, really, really needed him to like me. I wanted him to approve of me. I was so tired of him making me feel so small.

"I don't have an attitude," I mumbled, feeling a bit defeated. I'd had a great opportunity tonight to turn the tide of our work relationship. I'd failed. I was stuck in this limbo between thinking it was his fault and knowing it was mine. I wasn't going to look down and whimper

and admit he was right. But that just proved he was right. It had to have been the stress of the week, but I was on the verge of tears.

We waited silently at the intersection. He looked side to side and then said “come on.”

He stepped off the curb into the street. I glanced at the red glowing hand anxiously.

He glanced back when he realized I wasn't with him. He reached out and grabbed me by the arm. “Orla. Come on.”

I tugged me along and I stepped off the curb.

“I hate jaywalking,” I muttered. He released me once we were on the other side of the street. He opened the door for me and pushed me inside with a hand to my back. We walked together toward the terminals. I had a sinking feeling. I didn't want to ride the T with him. I prayed, *prayed*, he would take the blue line toward the other end of the city. I didn't think I could possibly keep a conversation going with him for another 40 minutes. If he wasn't berating me, we simply weren't having a conversation.

He slapped his Charlie card down on the reader and put his hand on my back. He ushered me through the opened terminal before I could register what was happening. He slapped it down again and stepped through.

“I have a monthly pass,” I said. He stared at me blankly, but said nothing. He walked passed me toward the stairs that lead toward the different lines. I followed him to the right and I closed my eyes briefly on the stairs. Oh god, I couldn't hold a conversation with him for an entire T ride. He could be heading to the red or orange line. It didn't mean he would be on the green line the entire trip.

“You and Chris have different management styles,” I said after about five minutes of waiting for the train in silence. He had been scrolling through his phone. I had been replaying his words over and over again in my brain and I felt the sudden need to defend Chris. “I don't think he thinks I'm stupid.”

Caleb gave me a look that suggested he didn't believe that for one second. A little needling of doubt came into my brain. Chris and Caleb were friends. Did Caleb know something that I didn't know? Has Chris talked about me? The thought that Chris had made fun of me behind my back left me feeling deflated. It was beyond that though. It had to have been the week, those terrible text messages, the time of night, Caleb's assessment of me, but I was very close to crying.

"He might not think you're stupid but that's how he treats you. Keep an eye out for it. You'll see it," Caleb said.

The train came whizzing by. Silently, we joined the other two people stepping up into the empty train. I took a seat on the far end of the train. It was a single seat. I took it so he would have to sit across from me. He chose to stand, hand on the bar, standing far too close, looming down ominously.

"You know, I think this is the longest conversation you and I have ever had." His voice was almost light, almost friendly.

"If you don't count admin meetings," I agreed.

"You don't talk at admin meetings," he added.

"I don't have anything to say."

"Oh, I don't believe that," a little smile played on his lips.

My voice sounded tired. I felt very small. "I like being left alone."

"So I'm guessing you're not coming next weekend?"

I frowned at him. His eyebrows lifted. “Happy hour? Not this Friday but next. We’re going to a couple bars on the seaport,” he clarified. “I sent out the invite earlier today. Everyone but you and Molly are going. Molly obviously said no. Doesn’t want to leave the little one that long. You’re the only one left to respond.”

“I didn’t even see it,” I said. I pressed my hand to my forehead. “Oh god, I haven’t checked my emails again.”

I scrambled for my phone. He held out a hand and halted me.

“Nothing came through for you,” he said. “Nothing pressing.”

I sagged back in my chair. I said softly, “I’m so tired.”

“It’ll be a good way to blow off steam. You should come. You need a break.”

“I’ve had a whole week,” Remember, I wanted to add, my *vacation*. I gave a painful laugh. He said nothing. He only stared down with twinkling eyes. I asked, “Who’s going?”

“Everyone. Chris, Peter, Mark, Ryan, Jason, like I said, Molly isn’t going, Chloe and Anna, I think Amelia and Brittany, probably David. Maybe a couple others. And of course... you.”

“I won’t be missed,” I gave a tight smile.

“Sure you will,” he said. I met his gaze briefly. His eyes were intense. “Look at us chatting up a storm. Come out with us, we might end up tolerating each other.”

I gave a little laugh. It was part amusement, part discomfort. He added, more gently than he had ever spoken to me before, “I’d like you to come.”

I looked up to meet his gaze again. I was surprised. I felt a sudden rush of excitement, a powerful urge to prove him wrong about me. I just really wanted him to know I wasn't what he thought I was. In an impulsive rush of desire to garner his approval, I said to him, "I'll come."

He flashed a grin. It would be nice to be out of the apartment anyway. I wouldn't have to worry about him busting in my door. I thought of this coming weekend, stomach sinking. Would he be back? I then felt another sinking feeling. What if he was one of them? Was I going bar hopping with my rapist? Not Mark or Peter. He had been too tall and too fit. Caleb and Chris were obviously excluded. Ryan was tall and fit, but he was very thin. What about -

He reached out and touched the yellow bell. I glanced up, suddenly realizing I hadn't even been paying attention. I let out a deep sigh of relief. Thank god we had the same T stop or I would have blown right passed it.

We jumped off and walked up the hill toward my apartment. The air was biting and I buried my hands deep into my pockets. Nothing was said until I got to my street. I pulled my keys from my pocket and said, I'm down this way. He only nodded and followed me down the road. I paused uncomfortably at the door. Was I supposed to offer to let him sleep on my couch? It was pretty late. But that seemed like an awfully weird thing to do. What was the right thing to do under these circumstances? I almost wanted to ask him to come in. If he was in the apartment, I knew I wouldn't end up with a surprise visit in the middle of the night.

"See you tomorrow then. 4am comes fast." He said and started backing up the way we had come, still facing me.

"You live nearby?" I asked curiously.

"About twenty minutes down that way."

"Oh..." I said. I frowned and asked, "why didn't you just take the B line?"

He stopped retreating and cocked his head. "And let you go home alone at 1am? Or should I have just put you in an Uber when you could barely walk or talk and hope for the best?"

The bite in his voice surprised me. Was he talking about that night? Had I been that bad before leaving the pub? Did he think I let myself get that drunk, that early, with my coworkers? Maybe he had seen something that might give me a clue. I wanted to ask him, god I wanted to ask him what he remembered. Who went with us? Who was there. I couldn't even remember. So many of us. The table had been huge. But Mark got the drink from the bar. He could have been sitting there. It wasn't Mark. I knew that. The build didn't fit. I didn't ask though. I couldn't let him know what happened. It would be humiliating.

“Good Night, Orla. I'll see you tomorrow.”

He turned and walked back the way we came.

“Caleb?” I called after I'd open the office door.

He turned, brow lifted, and walked backwards.

“Thank you. For tonight. You saved my job.”

“Next time, come to me before you're about to blow the deadline. Believe it or not, you ask me for help, I'll give it to you. Look forward to having a beer with you next weekend.” He winked

He turned and continued to walk away. I stared after him with a rapidly sinking feeling. Why on earth had I agreed to that and by God how the hell did I get out of it?

I didn't receive anything from him until Thursday afternoon around three o'clock. No pictures, no text messages, nothing. I had sent out my last big project for the week to Caleb and went off to use the bathroom. From here on out, the week would be smooth sailing. I had almost forgotten about it all for a moment. For the first time since it happened, my crippling anxiety and feelings of self-loathing and doom were entirely dictated by work. It was comforting.

That all came crashing down when I plopped back down on my desk with a tired, but contented sigh. My stomach lurched to my throat as I looked down and saw the phone notification lit up on its stand. The moment I saw that I had a new message I knew it was him.

I opened the message from the unknown number. “*You look beautiful today.*”

I swallowed thickly. I typed back, “*thank you.*”

“*What color are your panties?*”

I closed my eyes and put my phone down. I struggled to regain control of my breathing. I took in a deep breath through my nose and let it out slowly through pursed lips. I would not fall apart. I had work to do.

My phone buzzed. It was a picture. Then another. Another. I did not look at them. I stared at my computer screen. I felt another buzz. It wasn't a picture this time, but a block of text. It read: “*I'm not saying it again. Here's your final warning. When I text you answer. I tell you to do something, you do it. I tell you to say something, you say it. The next time you ignore me, these pretty pictures of you get sent to every person in this building, get posted all over Facebook, all over twitter, to everyone you went to law school with, to everyone you went to college with, to everyone you went to highschool with. I will ruin your life.*”

I pressed my fingers to my eye lids and fought back the tears. I picked up my phone back up and typed out: “*white.*”

He responded: “*cotton?*”

“*That's all I own,*” I answered. I swallowed and waited.

The next messages was a block: “*wear a black bra and blank panties tomorrow, your green silk blouse and a black skirt, black stockings, the ones with the seam up the back, and the black heels with the bow on the toe and your hair in a high ponytail.*”

The detail turned my stomach. I knew exactly what he was talking about. The thought that a man had watched me so closely to take in such detail...

I typed back. “*Ok.*”

The messages stopped after that. I left work at about seven. Caleb was leaning back in his chair, suit jacket draped on the back of his chair, the sleeves of his perfectly tailored shirt rolled up just below his elbow. His eyes flickered up from his computer screen.

I brought up a hand and offered a clumsy, awkward little wave. He just stared but I think a tight smile brought his lips upward. Fleeting, I wished he would leave as well so I wouldn't have to cross the city by myself, his eyes returned to the computer screen.

I sat on the T, staring down at my phone. I kept waiting for something to pop up. Nothing came. It was oddly comforting, knowing that if I said what he wanted me to say, he'd leave me alone.

When I got home, I poured myself a healthy serving of white wine and readied my outfit for the next day. My green silk button down was hanging in the closet amongst my forgotten skirts. I found a fresh pair of my charcoal pantyhose, the ones with the seam up the back, and a pair of black underwear and a bra to match. By the time I dug the heels out of the back of my closet, I'd finished the glass of wine. I tossed some pills back, washed them down with the remainder of my wine and crawled into bed without eating. I fell asleep regretting that I hadn't checked my email before bed.

I woke with a start, alarm clock glaring angrily at my side table. I groped for my phone and resisted the urge to hit snooze. I cannot explain to you what it felt like getting dressed that day.

My hands trembled as I pulled on the black pair of cotton underwear over my weakened legs. I could have fallen over if someone breathed on me. Each article of clothing that went on, the sense of violation only deepened. It felt like he was there, breathing on my neck, looming over me, ready to attack. I could feel him. I could feel his hands, his tongue, I could feel him, inside of me.

To know he'd be there all day... watching me...

Wearing what he'd wanted me to wear... knowing the thoughts that would be going through his head as he watched me. I had to splash cold water on my face prior to applying my normal amount of makeup. He hadn't given any explicit instructions on that.

I stood there, staring at the mirror on the back of my closet door for some time. I sucked my bottom lip into my mouth, sucking the lip gloss off. The skirt was close fitting, well tailored, and was deeply flattering to my figure. The green silk shirt hung around my curves, tucked in just below my belly button and hidden beneath the black skirt. It hung a bit more loosely than it used to. If I had known it was this easy to lose a quick five pounds, I would have gotten myself raped sooner.

I laughed bitterly in the middle of the room and closed the closet door with a bang. I grabbed my black peacoat and slipped on my black sneakers. I threw my heels into my bag, collected my briefcase, and headed out to the train. Once again, I sat on the train, staring at my phone, waiting for a message to come in. Something cruel or degrading. Nothing came and I tried to enjoy the slightly warming air as I stepped above ground and outside the stale smelling T

stop. I stopped to get Eddie his coffee and smiled at him through the glass doors as he came to let me in.

“You got beat today,” Eddie smiled as he accepted the coffee.

“There goes my streak,” I laughed breathily. I leaned against his security desk and switched off my shoes. “Anyone I know?”

“Your friend there. Caleb,” his tone was good natured. I made no attempt to smother my sigh. I hadn’t checked my email yet. I simply hadn’t had the strength to. I was having trouble facing the stress. I would have to get a grip on that if I was going to continue my upward movement in the company. Next week. I’d get it together next week. I said my goodbyes to Eddie and as I watched the numbers light up in the elevator, I said a silent prayer that Caleb wasn’t in early because I’d blown off a late evening email and he was mopping up the mess I created.

The doors opened and I almost didn’t step through. Finally, before the doors could close on me, I walked out into the main floor. My eyes were immediately drawn to the industrial copier. Caleb loomed over the copier, arms outstretched, palms pressed to either side, letting the weight of his body lean against it. The copier hummed as papers were spit out on the other end. His face was angled downward but his eyes were on me as I walked in his direction. I would have much rather not had to have gotten that close to him so early in the morning, but I had to pass the copiers to get to my cubicle.

“Good morning,” I greeted softly. My voice never got very loud when I greeted him. His greeting was more of a grunt and a small nod. His eyes lowered to the ground and then to the copier.

I collected my laptop and hurried down to the breakroom. I kept my lunch in my office. I poured myself a cup of coffee from the already made pot. It wasn’t enough to finish and start a new cup, but it wasn’t really enough for a cup either. I’d make another pot before I left. I simply didn’t have the strength. I sat down at the table and checked my email. Luckily, nothing came in that needed immediate attention. I responded to the absolute buffoon on the FED team that kept partnering me with. We had been fighting for some time that the budget had been sixty thousand. He was insistent it was ten thousand. *Ten*.

I emailed Caleb asking for verification on the budget and CC’ed the FED manager and associate on it. It was rather underhanded. I would be making no friends with him, but I simply couldn’t stand the idiocy any longer. If I regretted it later, I’d deal with it.

Caleb came strolling in about twenty minutes later. He topped off my cup and then dumped the rest. I watched him anxiously. I didn’t know if I should apologize for not making a fresh cup or not. I was contemplating the pro’s and con’s of apologizing or staying silent, what I should actually say if I decided to say something about the fact that I had not made another cup, and weighing the pro’s and con’s of those particular options, when he spoke.

“We got scheduled for an Admin meeting today at 4:00.”

“On a Friday?” I asked in exasperation.

“On a Friday,” he answered dryly, putting the coffee back up in the cabinet. He added, turning back and leaning against the table, “Shouldn’t be more than an hour.”

I suddenly regretted not making the fresh pot. We’d either sit here in silence as he waited for the pot to finish or worse... we’d have to make conversation for the next five minutes.

To fill the uncomfortable silence, I spoke about the only thing that could come to mind. “My utilization is going to be terrible this week.”

“Oh, yeah?” his voice was bland. His eyes were disinterested. “110 instead of 120?”

“I’m serious,” I snapped. It was far harsher than I intended and far harsher than the situation warranted. I pursed my lips together and looked down into my coffee.

“I’m at 88,” I mumbled. “I did the math.”

“I suggest you try to get to 95 then,” he answered. I looked back up. He had turned around. He poured what coffee there was into his mug. He poured in some cream, tested it, and added one more splash. He walked out of the room without another word. I pressed my hands to my face and sighed.

Around three in the afternoon I received my next message. I knew before I looked at the phone that it was him. I kept my eyes on the screen and did not reach for my phone until my email was written. I tilted the phone toward me. It read my face and the message popped up.

“ You look so beautiful today. ”

“Thank you. ”

I watched the bubbled pop up.

"What color is your bra?"

My heart rate began to increase. I knew I had to respond. I only prayed another picture wouldn’t come through. I answered, *"Black."*

“And your underwear?”

I answered, *“ black. Like you said.”*

“ Prove it. ”

I stared at those words. I blinked. I glanced over my shoulder and then looked back to the phone.

“ Right now. Take a picture. ”

My mouth went dry.

“ Thirty seconds. ”

I dropped my phone. It clattered on the desk and I fumbled with the buttons of my shirt. My mouth was dry, bone dry. I felt like I was going to throw up. I got my shirt down low enough that I could show off the color of my bra. I dropped the phone back down after I sent the picture and began buttoning my shirt back up.

“ Panties next. ”

I began to text my plea when his next message came through.

“ Thirty seconds. ”

I glanced over my shoulder. I pulled my skirt upward and slid my camera between my legs. It was not very clear to the eye. My pantyhose made it difficult to see, but my thighs were illuminated and it was clear my underwear was black. I sent it through and squeezed my eyes shut. My lower lip trembled. I would not cry though. I refused.

“ Good girl. ”

“ You’re so beautiful. ”

“ Look at your tits. ”

“ I want to fuck you so bad. ”

“ I could walk in there right now. Bend you over your desk and fuck you until I get to add another pretty little line to your perfect body. ”

“ You drive me crazy in those heels. ”

“ Your calves are from the Gods. ”

“ Your body is so perfect. ”

“ I want to smell you again. ”

“ Your hair. ”

“ Your skin. ”

“ Your skin is so soft. ”

“ Your pussy. God, your pussy smells so good. I want to come in there right now, kneel between your legs and kiss your thighs. ”

“ Do you know how absolutely perfect you are? ”

“ Answer me. Do you know? ”

I swallowed thickly. I had trouble moving my fingers. I had to delete a word more than once. My fingers didn’t listen to me.

“I’m not perfect,” I typed. I thought of the words written on me. The lines. I was far from perfect. I angrily wiped a tear away.

“Yes, you are.”

“I say you are.”

“You’re perfect.”

I typed back, *“Then why call me a whore?”*

“Because you are a whore.”

“Because you’re my whore.”

“My perfect, pretty whore.”

“Why didn’t you just ask me out,” I asked.

“Because I wanted to rape you.”

“I want to rape you again and again and again.”

“I want to feel you tremble and shake underneath my hands and listen to you cry and moan and fight.”

“I want you to look up at me with those big green eyes, frightened and vulnerable.”

“I want you to understand how much power I have over you.”

“You can’t do that if you keep me blindfolded,” I said. I saw dots and then they stopped. I swallowed thickly.

“I’ve looked you in the eyes.” My heart raced.

I typed, *“In real life?”*

“In real life? This is real life.”

“Headphones.”

A video popped up. I connected my headphones with trembling hands. It was me, lying on my back on my bed. I looked up at the camera, eyes hooded.

“Fuck me harder, daddy,” I breathed. His thumb pressed to my lips. I opened my mouth to suck. It looped back. *“Fuck me harder, daddy.”*

I squeezed my eyes shut and closed out the video. A fat tear slipped from my eye and I ripped the headphones from my ears.

“I was drugged,” I typed.

“Wear red on Monday. Black skirt. Black panty hose, sheer. Same heels. Pink panties and bra.”

I typed back, “Ok.”

“You’re going to be late.”

I frowned, glanced at my computer, and saw my calendar reminder was going off. I scrambled to collect my things and hurried for the conference room. I wished Chris was there. I would have given anything to have come around the corner and see his gentle smile.

“Good of you to join us,” Caleb said blandly from behind his laptop. I ignored him and took my seat at the far end of the table. I checked my watch as I settled in. It was 4:01.

The Admin meeting was set to kick off a large bundle of deals that would be rolling out the next few months. They were set to be coming out of financial due diligence, three deals a week, all from a single parent company in Europe. I had read the briefing email sent out by Caleb this afternoon. It was going to be a lot of work, but it boded well for our holiday bonuses this coming year.

I took notes, but as Caleb began speaking about the basics of the financial due diligence, repeating the report we had all received, concerning what companies would be likely acquisition targets, which ones were likely to be canceled, and which ones we needed to pay most careful attention to, I thought of the thumb from that video.

My eyes slowly scanned the room. I looked at every man’s hand I could, trying to find the match for the thumb. Jason bit his nails to the nub. They weren’t his. Eric’s hands were too fat. Duncan, though gorgeous, was the wrong skin color all together.

“-Care to join us?”

Duncan nudged my leg under the table.

“Orla, care to join us?” Caleb asked. His voice was curt, his eyes hard. Annoyance pulled his skin tight across his face.

“I’m taking notes,” I said lamely. His eyes did not leave mine as he began to speak again.

“So, we’ll be getting the first deal early next week. They’ll be rolling in over the next six months, two deals every three weeks. I’ll be handling all client communication. The CFO has been *very* hands-on. I don’t want anyone talking to him.”

“What’s his name?” I asked.

“Why don’t you check your notes,” Caleb answered. My eyes darted downward and my cheeks burned. “A lot of the documents rolling in will be in German. All the targets are American and Canadian companies. The Canadian teams in Ontario will handle those, but we’ll be working closely with them. Code name Operation Auto. Big budget. Huge. Take your time with these numbers. All CFO calls or emails come to me. I talked to him today. Guys a real fucking prick.”

He took a deep sigh.

“It’s a European deal, people. Which means out of hour meetings. Long hours. Breakdown was sent out in my email this morning. It’s going to be a rough couple months. Remember your bonuses people.”

He got some good natured laughs and he smiled around the table.

“If you *can* leave early, leave early today. We won’t have the opportunity for quite some time. Alright. Any questions, feel free to reach out.”

As people filed out, I heard some congratulate Caleb on his first admin meetings, others said goodnight to him, others told him to have a good weekend. I collected my belongings and began marching toward the door. My insides were trembling. I could feel every inch of my body quivering with anger. I couldn't help myself. I held out my notebook to him as I passed. I said to him, even by my own standards, rather snottily, “I was taking notes.”

I turned my back to him and stepped into the doorway.

“You’re a real *bitch*, you know,” he said with such venom that it shocked me. I turned around and locked eyes with him. He stared hard. I had known he thought it for some time. I was surprised how deeply wounded I felt in that moment. My cheeks burned bright and I pressed my lips together tightly.

“And you’re an arrogant prick,” I responded. I turned before I finished. I couldn’t look him in the eyes and say it.

“Good luck on your deals,” he rumbled behind me, voice monotone and cold. It was simultaneously a taunt, a threat, and a promise. I closed my eyes as I walked back to my cubicle. My life was about to get much, much harder. I ran into Danny from compliance hard and stumbled backward. I fell backwards, one heel falling off and my skirt riding up passed my knees. I sucked in a deep breath as I reached to push my skirt back down.

“Oh fuck, Ellie, Christ I’m sorry. Here,” he said, leaning down and helping me up with a hand to the elbows.

“That was my fault,” I said.

“No, no, I was looking down at the report, are you ok, I hit you pretty hard - Trent wait!” He suddenly called. “Need to talk to you about the fantasy team!”

I turned as I was pulled to my feet. Danny pulled me up with ease and I was struck with the size of him. Tall, almost as tall as Caleb. Fit, lean, but in great shape. I stared up at him with wide eyes. I turned my head to view Caleb. He was standing at the end of the long cubicle row, staring at me with that blank gaze of his.

“You sure you alright?” Danny asked. His eyes were pale blue and bright. I nodded and looked down. He was in the break room a lot. His office was close to mine.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I mumbled.

“Sorry again,” he said and brushed past me.

“Trent you owe me fifty bucks!” He called happily.

I slipped into my office and packed up my things. I didn’t even bother to check my email. I had to get out of here.

I marched out of my cubicle. Caleb and Danny were speaking outside of his office. Caleb had his hands in pocket. He was in a dark navy suit with brown shoes. His suit coat was opened to reveal his brown shoes and striped tie. He had a lemon sucking grin on his face as I passed. I glanced at Danny’s hand, trying to see his thumb.

He hadn’t been with us that night at the bar though. It had to have been someone at that table.

“You got up to 95 awfully fast,” Caleb called to me as I left. I jabbed at the elevator buttons. I couldn’t stand to look at him. I felt like I was about to explode. If I burst into tears now, in front of this arrogant, rude, cruel man, I don’t think I would ever forgive myself. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw as he turned his body away from Danny to face me. He took a few steps toward me. He leaned back on heels slightly. We were about twenty feet away from each other. “I’ll look forward to seeing your utilization report on Monday.”

I blinked rapidly. I glanced in his direction just long enough to see the smile on face. I heard violent whooshing sounds in my ears.

“I need the first summary Monday at 8:00am. I outlined it all in the meeting. Be sure to check your notes.”

The elevator doors opened and I rushed inside. I jabbed at the lobby button repeatedly. Finally it closed. I raged against the trembling in my lower jaw.

No conscious decision was made. I simply let my feet guide me and I walked into the Envoy and leaned against the counter.

“I need a room,” I said abruptly. “Tonight and tomorrow.”

“Oh, well... let me see,” the attendant said, looking concerned.

“I’m afraid we only have a junior suite open. It’s 448 a night -“

“I’ll take it,” I answered, slapping down my debit card. If only for the peace of mind. The woman looked surprised but took my information. I was checked in, sitting in my room, watching TV and eating Chinese food within the hour. My laptop was up and open on the massive king size bed I was sitting on. I was answering emails as I struggled to eat my lo mien with my chopsticks.

Around seven I cracked open the mini fridge. I drank two mini bottles of Prosecco before I emailed Caleb.

“Can you give me a rundown for the summary?” I emailed it and shut my laptop. My stomach roiled with anxiety. I couldn’t bear to read his response but if I didn’t email him now, the summary wouldn’t get done.

The room was glorious and I did not struggle to fall asleep as I retreated until the cool white sheets fully clothed. When I woke, my head pounded and I felt nauseous. I glanced at the clock to find 12:53pm staring back at me. I ate my leftover Chinese food and the headache subsided. I took some aspirin and grabbed my computer. I could go one more day without feeling any major withdrawals from my medications, but I had to return home Sunday night. I thought of Danny, tall, fit, handsome. No distinct smell to him.

I rubbed my temples. I saw Caleb’s response to my email. I couldn’t bring myself to open it. I lay on my back watching TV, wondering what subtly veiled cruelty was awaiting me.

I showered, scrubbing my skin raw until I had no choice but to give up, and came out in the fluffy hotel robe, hair up in my towel. I got to the computer and forced myself to open it. When I finally read it at 5:00pm that evening, I found a simple, to the point, explanation of what he needed. I had it sent out to him by 10:00pm.

I was pleasantly surprised that I received no messages from him that weekend. I rewatched the video over and over and over. I kept it muted. I could bear listening to those words leave my lips. I stared at his hands intently. He had a tiny little scar just underneath his thumb nail. A little pink lift of the flesh the shape of a tiny crescent. I stared at it again and again as the digit slipped between my lips. I’d go to Danny’s cubicle on Monday and demand to see his hands. I needed to know.

It took a couple of mini bottles of wine to fall asleep but I wasn’t all that groggy when I woke up. I packed up my things and headed out. I got an Uber. I didn’t feel like walking to the T and taking the forty minute ride in my three day old work clothes.

I didn’t go inside. I waited outside the building for a while, hands dug in my pocket. I checked my phone. I hadn’t received any messages from him. His last instruction to me was what to wear on Monday. I hoped that meant he planned on leaving me be this weekend. There had been no sign of him last.

Eventually, I summoned the courage to go upstairs, but that was partially due to the ache in my head and the cold that was beginning to set in my bones. With every step up the stairs, every foot I took toward my door, I waited to be grabbed. The tension inside of me grew and grew and grew until I was jamming my key into the locks with shaking hands, looking anxiously around me as I went. I dropped my keys. They clattered loudly on the floor and I scrambled to pick them up. I stepped inside and slammed the door shut behind me. I threw the deadbolts and then let out a deep sigh.

I turned slowly and took in the stillness of my studio. It was terribly quiet, so calm. Very very clean. I frowned slightly, stepping inside and looking around. The blinds were pulled and light streamed in through the sides of the curtains, illuminating the tiny room like it was dusk.

I looked around carefully. Everything was where I left it but I was acutely aware that the bed was made. It was a small studio. I always made the bed, but I never made it in the morning. It

shouldn't have been made.

I walked over to the bed. The envelope was on the pillow. When I swallowed, it was like swallowing shards of glass.

I picked it up as if it might burn me. Written across the top of the envelope were large black letters in upper case. The same handwriting as those on my body. It screamed out at home. CUNT.

I opened it. I struggled to. My hands were trembling. Inside was a stack of pictures printed on photo paper. Pictures of me, passed out, lying on my bed, without the words on my body. I was in various states of undress. Legs spread. Bra cups pulled down. Head turned to the side.

Another of my vagina, weeping with what I knew was his cum inside of me. I squeezed my eyes shut.

They popped back open and I kept flipping. The last photo was the one I had sent him. I was sitting on my bed, a smile on my face. I didn't think it was entirely clear that I was in absolute agony. I was smiling. I looked almost flirtatious. I felt the sticky note on the back and flipped it over. My blood ran cold and I felt like the world was going to collapse down around me.

Written on the sticky, in sharp marker, in all caps, clear as day, was my parents' address.

Chapter Notes

So, I think there's some minor confusion and it is likely my fault. I will go back and make sure the timeline is clearer.

Chapter 10 was Wednesday, report was due EOD (End of day) which is 11:59. Caleb brought Ellie home early Thursday morning. That was when he Caleb invited Ellie to the happy hour. He had told her not this weekend but next. So chapter 11 was that same Thursday. The weekend she spent in the hotel was that weekend immediately following chapters 10 and 11. So the weekend coming up after this chapter, is the weekend when happy hour is planned.

Again, most likely, my fault, but want to make sure that is clear. If anyone wants to point out where in the story I created the timeline confusion, please let me know, and I'll clean that up.

As for our asshole mystery German CFO, I can neither confirm nor deny his identity. Thank you all for the comments! It inspires me greatly!

I wore what he wanted on Monday. Of course I did. I certainly wouldn't show up to work wearing something he wouldn't like. He hadn't responded to the slew of text messages I'd sent throughout the night:

6:01pm

"Did you send my parents those pictures?"

6:04pm

"Did you send them?"

6:30pm

"Hello? Answer me. Did you send them?"

6:35pm

"Please, I'm sorry, I'm begging you, please tell me did you send them."

7:00pm

"I can't do this. I can't do this anymore. Please just tell me."

7:35pm

"Hello?"

7:38pm

"Please just tell me."

7:43pm

"What do you want?"

"Another picture?"

"I'll take another picture for you, just tell me what you want?"

8:32pm

"Were they sent."

8:50

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"I don't bother anyone."

"I keep to myself."

9:15pm

"You're going to drive me insane."

9:26pm

"Please just tell me? Did you send them?"

10:30pm

"Please. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry."

10:46pm

"What can I do! Please!"

10:47pm

"Please."

10:49pm

"Please."

10:51pm

"Please."

10:59pm

"Just tell me, please. I need to know."

11:35pm

"I'll send more pictures."

11:49pm

"Are you there? I know you've seen these."

12:33pm

"Please. I'm not going to sleep. Please. Don't send them. Please."

12:34pm

"I'm literally begging you please."

12:36pm

"I've done everything you've said. You never said you were coming this weekend."

12:43pm

"If you told me to stay home I would have."

1:20am

"I was alone in a hotel room."

"No one was with me."

1:33am

"ANSWER ME!!!!"

1:50AM

"ANSWER ME!!!!"

"ANSWER ME!!!!"

"ANSWER ME!!!!"

2:07am

“This is cruel. I know you aren’t cruel.”

2:25am

“Please just tell me. Please.”

3:30am

“Please. I’m sorry. Don’t send them. Please.”

It was 4:00am when I got my response. *“No, I haven’t sent them.”*

“What do you want?”

“Please don’t send them.”

Then nothing. I was at least slightly relieved that he hadn’t sent them yet. The next message I got, I’d answer it how he wanted.

I was running on zero sleep when I got into the office. All the rest I’d gotten for the weekend had been for nothing. I dropped my sandwich on my desk and walked down to the break room. It was almost seven already and I cursed myself for the late start. I had so much to do today but my brain just wouldn’t work. I was the slightest inconvenience away from a full blown meltdown. I only hoped he’d be happy to see I wore what he had told me to wear. Perhaps he’d be kinder today.

I heard voices as I approached. I heard Chris and I felt relief rush through me. It was so good to have Chris back from vacation. I heard Caleb’s voice next and I slowed as I approached the room.

“I just don’t understand why you’re tormenting her like this,” I heard Chris say. His voice was bland but friendly. He sounded more confused than angry.

“I’m not tormenting her,” Caleb responded. I paused just outside the door, listening intently. My ears hummed.

“You *are* tormenting her,” Chris countered.

“How is this any different than Maddie?”

“Because I didn’t -”

They rounded the corner and froze when they saw me. A moment of silence passed. Then, Caleb glowered, held out a hand to me and looked at Chris with a frightful scowl. After a moment more passed and color had come to Chris’ cheeks, Caleb dropped his hand, shot a look of such contempt that I felt it in my bones. He marched passed me down the hall with an angry shake of the head.

“I-I wasn’t eavesdropping,” I stammered as I forced out the obvious lie.

“I know,” Chris smiled. He put one hand in his pocket and held his coffee cup about mid chest height with the other.

“Was that -” I scratched the back of my ear. My skin was breaking out in pink little blotches.
“Was that about me?”

“Yeah. Caleb’s just been hard on you with all the senior work. I know you’re a big girl and can handle yourself but, I just think he could be kinder.”

“I agree,” I laughed. I wondered if he’d heard about our incident on Friday.

“He thinks a lot of you, believe it or not. If he respected you less he’d leave you alone,” Chris said. “He’s just a shit supervisor.”

“He holds me to a high standard,” I said neutrally. He certainly hadn’t told Chris that he’d called me a bitch on Friday and I’d called him an arrogant prick in return then. Chris nodded.

“How’re you holding up though? Good?”

“Yeah - yeah, I like the work,” I said. I did too. I just hated the stress. I wondered if it would be easier to handle if I had less going on in my personal life.

“Good. Good. Well if you need anything, let me know. I’ll see you later,” he smiled kindly. I didn’t think he was angry at all, but the conversation seemed rushed. We usually spent a couple more minutes chatting. I grew anxious, terrified Caleb had told him what happened, or his version of events anyway, and that he was picking his friends' side in the whole unfortunate circumstance. But then he turned back toward me and held out his coffee cup, “Oh, you’re coming on Friday, right?”

I swallowed and found myself nodding. “Yes.” I cursed myself but his smile was well worth it.

“Great,” he said. “Talk to you later.”

I poured myself some coffee but I didn’t take any time to sit and wait. I was already late as it was. And it was only seven. I had no idea how I was going to get through the day.

I was walking back to my cubicle when I heard Caleb’s voice.

“Orla.”

I turned. He was standing in the doorway of his office. His voice was a dark rumble. When he got very mad, it had a slight grating quality to it. Usually, his voice was rich and smooth. My mouth went dry. His massive frame took up nearly the entire door frame. He looked furious.

“Come in here a moment.”

I glanced around to see if anyone else had noticed. It was around that time that people would begin filing in. I walked into his office and closed the door behind me. He held out a hand to the chair on the other side of his desk.

“Sit down.”

His voice was curt. He leaned back in his chair, arms draped along the arms of the chair, and stared. I swallowed thickly as I sat down, wondering what I possibly could have screwed up this badly.

“Do you think I torment you, Orla?” he asked. His right hand was resting on the arm of his chair. His pointer finger caressed his thumb nail. My lips parted in surprise. “Do you feel tormented?”

Not by you, I thought. I was shaking my head.

“N-no. I think - no.”

“You think what?” he asked curtly. That vein was bulging in his forehead. I licked my lips.

“I think you could be kinder,” I said. “But I don’t think you’re tormenting me. Chris just - he’s very sweet, he -“

“I’m your boss,” Caleb said, leaning forward. “And tormenting behavior is cause for a lawsuit. So if you believe I’m tormenting you in anyway, please, tell me.”

“That didn’t come from me,” I said. “I swear I haven’t complained about you.”

“Because I would think if you had a problem with me you’d come to me like an adult and we could discuss it.”

“I didn’t say anything,” I promised. “I swear. I haven’t complained and I won’t. I have no reason to.”

“Because there’s a difference between you needing a thicker skin and accusing me of tormenting behavior.”

“That didn’t come from me,” I protested.

“Do you have a problem with me?” he asked suddenly. My mouth went dry. I felt like I was being interrogated. I shook my head rapidly.

“N-no.”

“If you do, now’s the time to discuss it.”

“I don’t,” I lied firmly.

“Calling someone an arrogant prick suggests there’s a problem.”

“You called me a bitch,” I said. It was accompanied by a breathy, painful laugh. “it was just a reaction. I don’t have a problem with you. That didn’t come from me. I wouldn’t complain about you. Y-you’re a good boss.”

“Good. Well then if that’s settled. You can get back to work.”

My legs trembled as I stood. I paused in the doorway. I couldn't bring myself to speak and he did not look up from his monitor. I went back to my cubicle and did my very best to return to work.

It bothered me deeply that he thought I complained to Chris. I understood the meaning of the word tormenting and as much as I disliked Caleb, I would never put his job in jeopardy. I printed my internal summary around twelve o'clock. My hands quivered as I picked up the hot paper from the printer and walked toward his office. He sat, hand over his mouth, staring intently at the screen. His eyes darted to the doorway as I approached and his brow lifted.

"Caleb?" I asked, knocking on the door frame. He removed his hand from his mouth and removed his earbuds from his ear.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Can you go over my summary with me before I send it over?"

He stared blankly a moment and then leaned back in his chair. "Sure." He waved me over and I went to stand beside him. It felt weird, standing over him while he sat, but it did nothing to make me feel more in control, more powerful. I swallowed thickly and I struggled to keep my finger steady as I pointed. He did nothing to suggest that he noticed the slight quiver. He reached for his pen and gently moved my hand out of the way. I watched him begin to edit. I only half listened as he explained the process, things I was missing and how to reorganize it. My heart was thudding and I wanted to run from the office and get away from the smell of his aftershave.

"Make sense?" he asked, once he had finished marking it up.

I nodded and picked up the paper. I had to clear my throat and begin speaking again before my voice made any sound. "Yes, it does. Thank you."

"See how easy that was," he commented blandly as I walked from the room. I did not turn around to acknowledge him. I walked from the office with closed eyes. I took in a deep breath through my nose and let it out slowly through my lips.

I went down to the break room to get a soda around one. I needed the caffeine. I had no idea how I was supposed to stay up until five, let alone seven or eight.

Caleb was sitting up on the counter near the coffee pot, talking about the upcoming baseball season with the others at the table. He had been smiling widely when I walked in. Our eyes met very briefly. I tried to smile at him, but he looked away immediately and added to the conversation.

I heard Danny's voice as I forced the dollar into the machine. Every muscle in my body turned tense. I saw the thumb, slowly pushing itself between my lips. I heard myself saying those damn words, over and over. I left the dollar there to be spit back out by the machine. The machine whirled and it slowly fell to the ground. I marched over to the table and grabbed his left hand. I looked at the thumb, certain I was about to see that little crescent and that would be that, I'd know for sure.

I saw only poorly maintained cuticles. Not a Mark, not a blemish. I grabbed the other hand in case the video had been flipped. Again. Nothing. All the air rushed out of my lungs. I dropped his hands and looked down at the table. The conversation had stopped abruptly and everyone stared. I looked up as sudden realization took me over. My eyes darted between a stunned looking Danny, a troubled looking Chris, and a deeply puzzled Mark. Peter's discomfort came out through a pained laugh and barely got out "what?" He looked around at the other men as if they might have any idea what just happened.

I turned and walked out. I turned and left. I left my dollar on the floor. I offered no explanation. I just had to get out of there. As I rounded the corner I heard Mark say, "well that was fucking weird."

"Shut up, man," Chris snapped.

"No but seriously, what the hell?" Danny asked, in bewilderment. I closed my eyes and felt tears begin to escape. I took a left out instead of a right, marching down the hallway toward the east staircase. A tiny sob escaped me in the stairwell and I placed a hand over my eyes to try and control myself. I grabbed onto the railway to keep myself steady as I descended. I went down three floors to use the accounting divisions bathroom. I didn't care if anyone heard me cry down there.

I was in the bathroom for about an hour. People came and went. No one came looking for me. I returned to my cubicle, eyes darting around. I searched for any person that might be casting a disparaging glance my way.

Danny was two cubicles over but I couldn't bring myself to go over to him. I wanted to come up with some sort of explanation. I wanted to apologize and hear him let me off the hook. I couldn't though. Honestly, I don't think the word humiliation really summed up what I was feeling at that time.

Caleb passed my cubicle around 3:00pm. I listened to him talk to Danny about the next compliance project that was coming out. They chatted a bit about sports, then the coming Happy Hour on Friday. When he left, I glanced at the opening of my cubicle. If he had looked in, I would have tried to smile again, but he passed without turning his head.

I sent him my report with all the changes he had marked. I got back a "all certified?"

"Yes," I emailed back.

"Good work."

I think it was the best that I would ever get from him. It was the added encouragement I needed to give me my second wind. I had a research assignment to do for the Fed team. I had thirty hours for it, and I'd only managed to put in about ten hours with all the upheaval.

I felt the gnaws of hunger begin to poke at me around 7:00pm. I was ready for a long night. I didn't want to go back to my apartment. I could purchase a membership to the gym in the lobby and use the showers down there, go home to change out my clothes, maybe get a little cot for my office...

I rose and walked down the long hallway toward the vending machines. The light in Caleb's office was off and I felt a trembling in my lower belly. I felt an unfair flair of anger at Chris. He had been trying to stick up for me but he'd only made things worse. Now Caleb had even

further reason to dislike me and what I hoped to have been a slow softening of our relationship now felt as tense as ever.

I got into the breakroom. On the fridge, held up by a magnet, was my forgotten dollar. On it was a sticky note. All that was written on it was *-Orla* .

I took the dollar and examined the sticky note with a tiny smile on my face. I turned to the vending machine and straightened out the dollar against the edge. I had a sudden craving for a chocolate bar. I was going to get it. I think I deserved it.

Suddenly, violently, the wind was knocked out of me. My face collided with the vending machine. A large hand covered my eyes, a hard body pressed against me.

“Think you can hide from me, bitch?” a grating voice seethed in my ear. No sound came out of my parted lips except a small gasp of pain and surprise.

His hands grabbed the front of my blouse and yanked hard. I heard the ripping of fabric, the popping of buttons.

“Stop,” I panted. His hand groped upward and grabbed the front of my bra. He ripped it downward. My bra straps tightened and my breasts spilled free. His hand went between my legs, nails ripping through the pantyhose. His fingers prodded hard between my legs. He pressed his erection hard into my bottom. Tears spilled from my eyes.

With the hand he had pressed to my eyes he yanked my head back. His face pressed to the side of my head and he inhaled deeply. His fingers forced my fingers to the side and thrust into me. I don’t know why. I didn’t make a single noise.

As he pressed his fingers into me, he pressed his lips against my face and gave my cheek a wet kiss. My breasts arched outward and pressed into the cold glass of the vending machine. The word WHORE was clearly visible to his line of sight if he chose to look down. His mouth closed around my earlobe. His teeth pressed down and I was horrified he might bite it clean off.

“Don’t test me,” he grated and then threw me down hard on the ground. I screwed my eyes shut and waited for the assault to continue.

Blood flooded through my ears in a whooshing sound one might hear when pressing a shell to their ear. My heart pounded so hard I thought I was about to vomit. But nothing else happened. I was left trembling in silence.

Slowly, I let my eyes flutter open. I was alone in the break room. I pulled the flipped cups of my bra up and covered my abused breasts. My entire body trembled and though my cheeks were wet, the tears fell silently through rapid blinks.

My shirt was destroyed. I managed to button two or three, but the rest were yanked off or the button holes too large.

My legs didn’t want to hold the weight of me. They shook and quivered as I bent down to readjust my underwear. I could still feel his fingers inside of me. Prodding, curling.

A heel had fallen from my right foot. I bent down to collect it and removed my other shoe so I could walk back to my cubicle on bare feet. I held my shirt together as I walked silently, shoulders hunched, wet faced and wide eyed. I took small steps as I went.

I did not touch my laptop. I put on my coat to shield me from prying eyes and collected my bag. I walked to the elevator doors, my hand holding my coat together tightly. I hadn’t been able to button it so I clutched at it tightly. I could still hear the whirling of blood in my ears. My heart pulsed fast and jagged and irregular in my throat.

When the elevator doors opened, I found Caleb leaning on the guards desk sipping a coffee from Dunkin’ Donuts. He had his briefcase on the floor by his feet. His coat was on and he was ready to head out. He was laughing at something Eddie said and Caleb replied with own prediction for the upcoming super bowl.

His head turned and the smile slowly slipped from his face as he looked me over. He straightened to his full height and his eyes moved to my feet. I remembered the note on my dollar. -*Orla*.

I'd left it upstairs again. I had the absurd thought that Caleb would be upset I lost the dollar again. It almost sent me bursting into tears.

"Ellie?" Eddie asked, concern dripping from his voice. Caleb said nothing but frowned. His eyes were alert, rapidly moving over my body. I walked toward him slowly and sucked in a shuddering breath.

"Caleb, can you please take me home?" I asked him. My voice was small and hollow.

"Yeah," he said. His was low, a bit slow, a bit confused. "Orla, what the hell -"

"I - I can call an Uber," I offered, fumbling with my purse. He stopped me with a hand to my wrist. His grip was warm and strong. He held me still with ease.

"No, I'll call it. Orla -"

"Death in the family," I lied. "Just found out."

He nodded slowly. He believed the lie.

"I'll get you set up on bereavement tomorrow. You -"

"No, uncle, haven't seen in years, I'm just surprised. Wasn't expecting it."

He was on his phone. His thumbs moved rapidly over the buttons.

“Do you need my address?”

“No I got it,” he mumbled and put it in. He looked up from his phone. I was frowning at him.

“I walked you home the other night, remember?”

Oh right. Yes, I remembered. He crouched down and gently removed my shoes from my hand. I’d forgotten I wasn’t wearing them. His eyes glimmered toward my legs and I hoped he couldn’t see the seams running down the sides where they had been ripped. His hand was large, warm, and gentle as he gripped the back of my calf. His fingertips pressed into the flesh of my calf to stay the trembling of my limb. I placed a hand to his shoulder to keep myself steady and he very gently put the shoe back on one foot, then the next. When he stood, he put his hands on either side of my shoulders.

In my memory, he immediately led me outside to the Uber, but I’m certain I lost some time in between. The next thing I clearly remember was Caleb reaching across me to pull my seatbelt on and I noticed my peacoat had been buttoned up.

“Do you need to take tomorrow off?” He murmured to me. He sat in the middle seat, our knees were touching. His face was lowered toward mine.

I already missed too much work. He’d be angry if I didn’t go to work. He’d send those photos to my parents.

“No, really, I’m fine,” I promised. Caleb nodded. He dropped his voice.

“Something is wrong,” he said. “What is it?”

“I’m just - please I don’t want to talk about it.”

I pressed my elbow to the car window and pressed my hand to cover my eyes. I squeezed out face tears. My face warped as I tried to fight off the sob. He did not speak, but he stayed close. I could feel his warmth to my right. It was comforting. I used it to calm myself. I focused on his warmth and his smell. I managed to stop the tears and regain control of my breathing. We were entering my neighborhood before I spoke again.

“I didn’t complain about you,” I said abruptly. “It’s important to me you know that. I didn’t complain about you.”

I turned my gaze toward him and looked up at him with wet, searching eyes.

“I believe you,” he murmured. He leaned in closer. He smelled very very good. His closeness was a comfort. “That’s not what this is about is it?”

“No,” I laughed, but it sounded more like a sob. “I just don’t want you to think I complained. You’ve been really helpful lately. I appreciate it a lot and just thank you. Thank you.”

There were a few moments of silence. “I’m sorry for being a bitch,” I said, face contorting and tears swelling up in my eyes again. My lip trembled and I shook my head. When I spoke, I sounded so pathetic. “I don’t mean to be.”

A look came over him that I did not have time to place. The car stopped and I nearly jumped out. I got my door opened before I got my seatbelt off. I fumbled with it. Caleb had to unbuckle me. Caleb unbuckled himself and leaned between the two front seats.

“Hey, can you wait a sec so I can talk to her?”

“Yeah man,” the driver said, switching to the second trip destination. Caleb lived less than 5 minutes away by car. “Take your time. Make sure she’s ok.”

Caleb patted the driver’s seat in thanks and jumped out of the car.

“Hey, Orla, wait - wait a second,” he said. I was halfway up the front steps. He grabbed me by the elbow and pulled me toward him. I flinched, but his hand was gentle on my arms. I was standing very, very close to him. If I lowered my head just a little bit, it would be touching his chest. I came so close to it; just lying my head on his chest and falling asleep there.

“Are you sure everything is alright?” he asked softly.

I nodded. I wanted to tell him. Caleb was the type that would take control of a problem and straighten everything out. I wanted him to do that now. I knew that was silly. He’d call the police and I’d have to go through every horrifying email. I was struck with the next crippling thought.

No one would believe me. It had gone on so long. I was a highly educated woman in a high power job. Who would believe I’d been so stupid?

I was tempted to ask him to stay and sleep on the futon. Or he could take the bed. I’d stay on the futon. I just didn’t want to be alone. I looked up and my lips actually parted. I started saying, “Could -”

I stopped. No it would make him furious if he found out I had a man stay in my apartment. The pictures would certainly go out at that rate. And how humiliating would that be if Caleb said no? How inappropriate was that? He was my boss now. I had to remember that.

“I’ll be in tomorrow. My work will get done.”

Caleb nodded.

“If you need anything, come to me.” His tone of voice was severe. “I can make your life easy. If you let me.”

I nodded. I would. If I was kinder to Caleb, more receptive to his instructions, less prideful, maybe our relationship would improve. I very much wanted him to like me. The word bitch rang in my ear. A fog of familiarity. I did not pursue that little seed of doubt.

“Caleb?” I asked him when he started retreating back to the Uber. He paused, one foot in the car, one on the street. His hand rested on the car door and his brow lifted. “You won’t tell Chris about this right? I know you guys are friends, I just - I don’t want the entire company knowing I had a complete breakdown at work.”

I tried to laugh it off. His face remained stoic and intense.

“I won’t say a word to anybody.”

“Thank you, Caleb,” I said. I smiled at him as best I could. “You’re a lifesaver.”

“Not a problem, Orla,” he answered kindly.

I asked, “You know I hate that name. Why do you have to call me that?”

He looked at me a moment. The side of his mouth lifted ever so slightly. When he spoke, his voice was very soft, “Because it’s beautiful.”

I blinked. He smiled at me, winked, and then got into the Uber. That night, I fell asleep in the shower and I woke up once the water had run cold.

I got to work early but spent most of the early morning hours browsing for women's lingerie online. By the time I would be done, I'd have dropped nearly a grand on the outfits I planned to put her in. Some sweet and demure, some slutty and salacious.

Plunging lace up bustier, lace baby dolls, thongs, thigh highs and garters. Green lace, black silks, white feathers. I took in a deep, steadying breath as I imagined her in my apartment, carrying me a beer at the start of a game, in a pair of stockings, a tiny little g-string...

My lips twitched. I'd have some delivered to her. This weekend, I'd have her try them on and take pictures for me. Next week, she'd be wearing them beneath her conservative little suits.

I trailed my finger along my thumb. I glanced down and looked it over closely. The event itself had been unexpected and amusing. It was not until after she had already left the break room and Danny set about trying to figure out what he might have done to upset her that I realized what she had been doing.

"I ran into her pretty good on Friday but it was an accident. I mean, I helped her up and apologized..." Danny said.

I looked down at my hands. That was when the little red half moon came into view. A fishing trip when I was a boy, my brother's reckless cast, and a fish hook right through the thumb. With realization came terror, anger, and excitement. In the past few days I had thought often of what might happen if she put all the pieces together. If she'd only look at the most obvious suspect, she'd have her answers.

Danny made sense though. He was about my height and of a similar build. I'd watched her examine the others closely during our admin meetings. The only two people she didn't seem to suspect at all was me and Chris. It was greatly amusing.

I caught Chris' gaze but only gave a tiny shake of the head. I glanced down at the coffee cup where I held it between my parted legs. I pushed myself off the counter to collect the

forgotten dollar on the floor. I smoothed it out, grabbed the sticky pad from the side of the fridge, and jotted down her name.

“Some people just can’t hack it,” Peter said. His tone was not unkind, but final. I felt a violent rush of annoyance.

“You’ve been a junior for three years, Pete?” I asked him as if I didn’t know the answer. He scowled at me.

“Just because some of you want to let this place suck your souls out for a couple hundred grand a year doesn’t mean I do.”

“Her work’s been fine,” I said. “Not that it’s any of your business but how about we don’t start rumors about shit we know nothin about.”

“You can’t tell me that girl’s ok,” Mark countered, softly, like he felt guilty for saying it.

“She’s fine,” I said again, more firmly this time. “No one says a word about what just happened. It stops here. And if I find out any of you decided to spread this around, I’ll make you fucking pay for it. You all know I can and you know I will. Understood?”

“Hey, you’re not my boss,” Danny said. He used a laugh to hide his discomfort, but he added, “Ellie’s a sweet girl. I’m not going to say anything.”

When I was around thirteen, my mother looked at me and told me there was something wrong with me. I was built different. Something inside me was broken. I was born broken. It didn’t bother me, looking up into my beloved mother’s eyes and hearing those words leave her lips, but I did go into the dining room and throw every single piece of her China onto the ground. I grabbed the money from my piggy bank, forty dollars and managed to get myself to the bus terminals. Call it immaturity or ignorance, but I thought that Bridgeport was a world away. After the police picked me up for stealing a bag of Doritos from a 7/11, my parents got to me within 40 minutes from our home in New Canaan. The boarding school they sent me to was elite and I had my own private room. I saw my parents and brothers on holidays.

I was fifteen the first time I saw a picture of a woman tied up. I had stumbled across it when I was rummaging through my older brother's room looking for some cash for the movies. I had been going out that night with a girl from the country club. I never ended up going. I took the magazine and hurried back into my bedroom. I spent the night staring at one picture. She had been tied up at the hands and feet, a gag in her mouth, looking up at the camera terrified. It had awakened something that I hadn't even known existed within me. That was what I needed. Nothing in my life ever came close to that moment of revelation.

After that, I found renewed focus in my life. I could concentrate. I could focus. My grades improved. My tall, gawky frame filled out. Women may desire tall men, but being 6,4 in the 8th grade, weighing barely 170 pounds left you open for ridicule. I went from being the gawky, defiant rich kid with a rage against authority and one incident left to go before I was expelled, to one of the most popular kids in school, amongst both my classmates and my teachers, and by the time I was eighteen and set to graduate, I was sleeping with half the cheerleading squad and was valedictorian with a full ride to Boston College.

In my drawer at home, I still have the page ripped from that magazine.

The ability to control my environment was paramount to my success. Things, ideas, people. I liked to own them. Especially the women I loved. I wanted Orla the first moment she walked through those doors and spilled her papers all over the floor. Her obvious disdain for the others around her had soured me to any thoughts of affection, but the lust remained. Slowly, I was realizing that beneath that haughty superior persona she displayed to the world, was a very fragile, very fucked up girl. A very fragile, fucked up girl that I needed to possess every part of. Mind, body, soul.

I had a rather problematic addiction to pornography. That's what I was told by my psychiatrist anyway. My mother sent me to him after she decided to look into my search history one day when I was home for the summer. It wasn't normal for men to become sexually aroused by women in distress. Arousal was only proper when a woman consented. I disagreed then and I disagree now. What is repulsive is when a man takes a woman by violence with no other purpose than to hurt her. There is a difference, one I cannot begin to describe, between the desire to hurt and humiliate women out of hatred, and the desire to dominate a woman out of pure sexual need.

I have never hated women. Women are capable of brilliance. A powerful, competent, intelligent woman... there was nothing more attractive. To own her, to control her, to have

her look up at you with such beautiful submission...

The more I saw of her the more I needed her. She was brilliant. She would be a partner one day, if she learned to accept she didn't know everything. I never desired to hurt before her. My attraction had been to women with brilliance, but sweet, kind dispositions. I detested stupidity, and I was fiercely attracted to intelligence. Orla was cool, aloof. My kindness was rebuffed. And with that rejection I felt, for the first time, an overwhelming desire to hurt her. But hand in hand with that desire to hurt, was an equally powerful, if inevitably conflicting desire to protect. I wanted to be her tormentor and her protector both. I wanted her to fear me, but I wanted her to come to me when she was scared.

I had come to a brief understanding of the conflicting duality of my need from her while I sat in the dark of her empty studio, waiting for her to come home. Sunday evening, when the first message came through, I fought my initial urge to respond to her. A million different pictures I might get her to send to me came to mind. I didn't want to give her the satisfaction of a response. She needed to understand I was serious. She'd do as I said or she'd suffer the consequences.

I only responded so she wouldn't fall apart at work. The incident in the break room had not been planned. I had not been so impulsive since I was nineteen and I forced my hand up my friend's girlfriend's skirt after we'd come home from the house party. When she woke up in the morning, I convinced her she hadn't said no like she thought she had, and we were both hammered. I'd fucked her a couple more times after making some veiled allusions to telling my buddy she'd let me fuck her without a second thought.

I had been about to leave and had just come out of the men's room to watch her walk down the hall toward the break room. I felt another violent rush of anger as I thought about waiting in her apartment all weekend. The frustration had been worse than anything I'd experienced in the past.

I marched after her, careful to keep my distance from her. Just outside the break room I had dropped my bag. I was on her in three strides. I slammed her face harder into the glass than I intended to. I couldn't risk her seeing me.

It was fast, hard, meant to hurt her more than to satisfy me. The sound of ripping fabric was glorious, the feel of her pussy clenching around my invading fingers, the sight of her breasts bared to view, WHORE displayed prominently...

If I knew I would not be discovered, I would have held her down on the ground and fucked her right then and there. I couldn't take the risk though. I threw her down and I was out of the room in an instant. I grabbed my bag without breaking stride and was around the corner and down the flight of stairs before she'd have been able to pull her shirt back together.

I often spoke with Eddie before I left for the night. We chatted about sports for almost a half hour before the elevator doors chimed and she stepped out. I thought I had been in love in the past. I realized then that I hadn't. What I felt as she stepped toward me, barefoot, small, frightened and alone, was nothing like I had ever felt before. It wasn't a thought I ran from. I embraced it. I planned to marry and have children. I had no fear of intimacy.

She inched forward on bare feet, wet cheeked and pale. She clutched her jacket together with white knuckles. I watched her closely as she made her way toward me. The sound of her voice when she asked to bring her home, was the most beautiful thing I had ever heard.

I made sure not to let Eddie see her ripped blouse as I briefly pulled her coat open. I pretended not to see the ruined fabric and ripped bra. I took my time, carefully buttoning each button on her coat. It had been absolutely exquisite.

I was ripped from my thoughts when my phone buzzed.

"You're going to cost me my job." It hadn't gone that far yet. I had shielded her from most of the repercussions. My concern for her mental health was growing however.

"Then do what I say," I answered.

"I've done everything you wanted." My lips twitched. Not yet. But she would.

"You hid from me. I sat in an empty apartment when I should have had my cock up your ass."

“I’m sorry.” I grabbed my erection through my trousers. What I would not give, to hear her say that, those big green eyes gazing up at me from the floor.

“You should be,” I typed back.

“I can’t lose this job. It’s all I have.” I believed that. From what I found in her apartment, she had little contact with anyone.

“Then be a good girl,” I instructed.

“If I do what you want, you won’t text me at work?”

“Or touch me at work?”

“I’ll touch you when I want to touch you.”

“PLEASE. I can’t sit here all day wondering if I’m going to be attacked. Please, just tell me when I know I’ll be safe. Promise you won’t touch me when I’m in the building. Please. I’m literally begging you.”

I squeezed at my erection and let out a slow breath through my nose.

“Send me a pretty picture and I’ll consider it.”

“What do you want?”

“Send me a picture of your lap, with your skirt pulled up to your mid thighs.” A picture came through. She was in the break room. I could tell by the floor. Her black skirt was pulled up. Her thighs were covered by sheer pantyhose. “Look how pretty,” I praised her. I promised, “I won’t bother you at work as long as you do what I say.”

“And the pictures? Please don’t send them to me when I’m working?”

“I won’t. Because you’re a good girl. Good girls get rewarded. Bad girls get punished.”

“I’ll be good.”

“You’ll be a good girl.”

“I’ll be a good girl.”

“Then I will let you be at work.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, baby.”

I made a quick stop in the breakroom to get myself under control. When I got into the break room, a fresh cup of coffee was already brewing. A small smile came to my lips as I poured my cup. I made my cup and readied to leave. I stopped at the table. She looked up at me. Her eyes glistened questioningly. Her eyes held fear, shame, and embarrassment. I wanted to touch her. I wanted to reach out and gently drag my knuckles along her cheek and tell her how sweet she looked.

“Alright?” I asked instead, voice a soft murmur. She nodded at me. There was a tiny lift to her lips as she tried to smile at me. I gave a little nod and left the room. Around eight I watched her slip inside Chris’ cubicle. My gaze fluttered upward consistently until she came out and went back to her cubicle.

“What was that about?” I texted Chris.

“Relax man. She’s still doing junior work on one of my deals. She had a question.”

I put the phone down and went to work. I struggled, not texting her. I had promised to reward her if she obeyed and I needed her to know that I would keep my word. Also, I did need to dial it down at work if I didn’t want her to have an absolute breakdown. Eventually my mind focused and the next thing I knew, I looked up from my computer and found her at the copier talking to Danny. Both of their faces were visible. She was making copies and Danny was waiting for her to finish, a stack of papers in his hands.

She was laughing at something he said. He had his own bright smile plastered stupidly across his face. He was jovial and light and he made her laugh. I grabbed my phone and then stopped. I placed it back down. She finished making her copies and lingered while Danny made his. They retreated down their row of cubicles together. Just before they stepped out of view, I watched Danny raise his hand and placed it on Orla’s back.

I grabbed my phone again. I squeezed it hard. I chose a different tact. I placed the phone down and pulled up my email.

“Orla,

Where are the diligent reports for Project Expo? Diligence call at three.

-CH”

She’d given the job to Peter. That was foolish. He wouldn’t touch it until the day they were due, which means she’d get them with almost no time to review them.

I waited for the email. She came to my office from the left, which led me to believe she went to Peter’s cubicle by going the long way around and avoid passing by my window. She popped her head in and promised, “I’ll have it to you in an hour.”

“You should have had it to me this morning. We have a diligence call in four hours,” my voice was curt and she nodded rapidly.

“I-I know. I’ll get it to you as soon as I can.” My eyes flickered ever so briefly to her blouse. I remembered the sounds of filling fabric, buttons falling to the floor. I didn’t know how much longer I could wait before I felt her mouth beneath mine again. Wet with salty tears, quivering, soft, yielding. She felt so good wrapped in my arms. Soft and delicate.

She retreated a half step and then paused. Her hands were on either side of the door frame and she leaned in slightly, unwilling to step into the office completely.

“Maybe when you have time, you could talk to me a bit about setting deadlines?”

I nodded, satisfied. I pointed out to her, “You give people too much time.”

She nodded, eyes lowering at the criticism.

“I just want to be fair,” she answered. I leaned back in my chair and clicked my pen. I turned my thumb toward her. Her eyes made no movement toward my hand.

“At the expense to yourself,” I said dryly. I added knowingly. “You’re off to do it yourself. Which means you won’t have the time you need to finish the Patterson report, which means you can’t start your Operation Auto deals, which means you’ll work late today and start early tomorrow. Sometimes, Orla, you need to put yourself first.”

“But -“

I saw the flash of defiance, the anger and annoyance at being lectured. Her gaze dropped and cut off abruptly. My mouth went dry. Bone dry. She nodded, eyes downcast.

“You’re right.”

A small smile came to my lips. I wanted to pat her on the head, reward her with a warm hug and a gentle word of praise.

“I need it by 2:00,” I said. “After the diligence call, come back here and we’ll talk about time management.”

“Ok. About Friday -”

“It’s going to be fun,” I said curtly. I turned my attention back to my laptop. She wasn’t going to get me to let her off the hook. I smiled at her. “I’m glad you’re coming.”

I sent out an email. “But what were you saying?”

“Oh, just um - what should I wear?”

My eyes fluttered upward. I pinned her with a hard gaze and her cheeks turned an adorable shade of pink.

“I mean, do I wear my work clothes? Or should I change?”

“I’m going in my suit,” I said, swallowing down razor blades. “You’d be fine doing either. I mean if you went in that, it would be perfectly fine.”

“Do you know where we’ll be going? I mean if I were to change my clothes what would I wear?”

I shrugged and leaned back. I took the opportunity to appraise her quite openly. When I looked back up, her cheek pinks had reddened.

“Usually dresses and skirts,” I said. “You’d need to be dressed up to get into some of these places. If you come dressed from work, you always get in.”

“I might just go in this then,” she said. “I’m not one for getting dressed up.”

I smiled. “Oh no?”

“Not really,” she laughed. “Ok then. After the diligence call I’ll come in here?”

“Sounds good,” I said. She lingered awkwardly a moment and then left. I noticed it more now. Her little moments of indecision. The hesitance. The embarrassment. I was rock hard beneath my trousers.

She sent me the diligence report. It was clearly her own work. That useless piece of shit Peter hadn’t even started it. My body stirred as I prepared for the diligence call. I made certain to check all her work. After last night, I wasn’t confident she’d be in the best mind set. I was pleased to see it was well done. I could barely focus, I was so excited, but I had to double check everything. After all, the poor thing had had a terrible start to her week.

After the diligence call, I collected a notebook and placed my phone in my pocket. I was relieved to know that I didn’t have to worry about text messages or being touched at work. I cannot begin to explain why, but I believed him. If I did what he wanted, I was safe at work. I felt almost giddy about it.

I walked in to find Caleb dragging a small, travel type electric razor across his face. He waved me in when he noted my hesitation and clicked the razor off. He tossed it into his desk and then retrieved a small black bottle from his desk. He poured a bit onto his hands and rubbed them together.

“I get a five o’clock shadow around noon,” he explained. He wasn’t smiling or laughing, and his tone was bland, but he appeared in good spirits. “I always give myself another quick shave around mid afternoon.”

I watched him massage it into his cheeks, jaw and neck. Next, he wiped his hands on a paper towel and tossed it down on the desk.

I nodded. The aftershave was fresh in the room. He had very dark hair and though he wasn’t pale, his complexion was not particularly dark. I would have to pay closer attention to his face around mid-afternoon. I had never noticed it before. I had a dark flash. The vending machines. The harsh rub of stubble.

He did not look at me. He rearranged the things on his desk and then leaned back with a sigh. His eyes fluttered down to the notebook in my lap and his lips twitched upward. I felt a little foolish and my cheeks flushed. He clicked his mouse and looked at his computer.

“So, you’re on two junior deals and you’re senioring three. The Operation Auto data room is full. Have you designated the work yet?”

“No,” I answered, twirling my pen nervously.

“That should have been done on Friday,” he said tersely. I nodded and pressed my lips together.

You’re a real bitch, you know. I nodded and bit my tongue.

“List out everything you have to do. Everything, no matter the deadline,” he instructed/

I did. He made a list on a pad of paper and I did the same. We spent a good hour or so discussing, but it was time well spent. I felt almost excited when I got up to go back to work. If I could get on top of everything, I might not need to spend so many long nights at work. I reached out to grab my pen.

“Careful,” he said abruptly and grabbed the discarded paper towel. “I wiped my aftershave on it. Get it on you and it’ll stick right to your clothes. It’s impossible to get out.”

“Oh,” I said and gave a nervous little laugh. I breathed in deeply through my nose. He tossed the napkin into his wastebasket. I stared at the trash can. My eyes darted up after a few moments. He was looking at me intently.

“Everything ok?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I answered. I forced a smile. “Thanks.”

I worked until about seven but my mind was preoccupied. I would have gone home immediately if I could have. I had too much work to do. Caleb was gone by the time I left. My mind kept returning to the break room, up against the vending machines, the pain between my legs, the coldness of the glass against my breasts.

I sat alone in a single seat at the back of the train with my eyes closed, replaying it second by second by second. I replayed his voice. I tried to reimagine it. I stopped. I imagined his voice. Had I heard it? Or was I imagining it now. I played it again and again and again. I shook my head. Now, it was all I could hear.

Every step up the road toward my apartment was agony. I kept waiting for a large hand to close over my eyes, to press to my mouth. I heard ripping fabric. Felt his invading fingers. I got inside without incident.

I replayed it. The low grating rumble, *Think you can hide from me bitch?*

Bitch. Bitch. Bitch.

I dropped my bag off on my futon and walked straight to my closet. It had to be. My heart pounded in my chest. I found the ruined silk on the floor and beant down for it.

Think you can hide from me bitch?

You're a real bitch, you know.

I grabbed the shirt and balled it up in my hands. My throat restricted. I felt as though I was going to be ill. My mouth had never been so dry.

I pressed it to my face. I breathed in deeply. I filled my things until I couldn't breath in any further. I pulled back. My brain ached, I couldn't... I couldn't tell...

You're a real bitch, you know. Think you can hide from me, bitch?

I pressed the shirt back to my face. I breathed in hard through my nose. I shuffled the silk in my hands so I could grab the collar. I pressed it back to my nose.

Bitch.

Bitch.

Bitch.

I heard it. Clear as day. I breathed in. I let out a deep sigh and dropped it to the floor.

Nothing.

It had been a stupid thought. I'd created a false memory. I'd be lucky if I was ever able to place his voice now. I'd tried to make it sound like his voice so badly. I'd never hear anything else.

I poured myself a glass of wine and sagged down on my futon. I didn't have the time to think too much about it. I'd only just taken my first sip when my phone began to buzz in earnest. I held it up and checked the phone.

A blocked number. A facetime call. My head spun. Bile rose in my throat. I didn't have a choice. I didn't have a choice. I brought up my thumb, hovered it over the green icon, and jabbed it hard.

My heart thundered violently. My ears flooded violently with the sound of swirling blood and I thought I might throw up as the call connected. The screen popped up black. I heard nothing. My breathing was a bit elevated. I waited, mouth dry. Finally, my phone buzzed, accompanied by the watch on my wrist. I had finally put the watch back on after he promised to leave me alone at work.

“ You look beautiful.”

I hesitated, nodding slightly. Another message dropped down from the top of my phone.

“ Speak your answers .”

I nodded again. “Ok,” I said very softly. “Will you talk?”

“I’ll text ,” he answered. I nodded, disappointed. I wanted to hear him speak again so I could get Caleb’s voice out of my head. He texted next, *“how are you feeling ?”*

I didn’t know how to respond to that. Did I lie? Did he want me to tell him everything was fine? Could I tell the truth? Would that bring him some twisted enjoyment? Or would that only anger him? I swallowed thickly as I decided.

“As good as can be,” I answered diplomatically and then added lamely, “considering.”

I waited. Finally another message came through. *“ You’re just so beautiful .”*

“Thank you,” I murmured softly. I tried to smile.

“Take off your shirt. I want to see those glorious tits of yours.”

I sucked in a shuddering breath. I pleaded, “Please, I’m begging you. Don’t make me do this.”

“ We had a deal .”

I nodded, eyes dipping to the floor. Slowly, I plucked at the buttons of my blouse. I rolled one shoulder free, then another. The word whore was beginning to fade and though the screen was blank, I couldn't raise my eyes to my phone. I did not remove my bra. He didn't tell me too. It was only when my wrist vibrated a few moments later that I looked up to see the message dropped down.

“ Do you touch yourself?”

I shook my head.

“ Have you ever ?”

I swallowed. “I mean... yeah, sometimes. I don’t sleep around so...”

I looked down at the letters. I said pathetically, on the verge of tears, “I’m not a whore.”

“ You are for me. Aren’t you? How many lines did I write on you ?”

“Seven,” I murmured. A message dropped down from the top of the phone. I opened it on my watch so I was able to read it all.

“Seven times in three days. I took care to make sure you enjoyed yourself as much as I did. I don’t think I ever got a thank you.”

“Thank you,” I said on impulse.

“ Slip your left bra strap over your shoulder .”

I obeyed and waited.

“ Look at the Camera. ”

“Good Girl. ”

“Die I hurt you yesterday?”

I felt myself slammed against the vending machine. His fingers ripping through my panty hose, forcing their way inside of me. I nodded. My eyes were wet. I struggled to keep my eyes lifted. I might have spoken and said yes, but I barely heard it.

“I’m sorry. ”

“I don’t want to hurt you. ”

“You shouldn’t have hidden from me. ”

“I get to fuck you when I want to fuck you. ”

“You knew I’d be angry. You did it anyway. ”

“I was scared,” I answered.

“Your right bra strap now. ”

“Perfect. Smile. ”

“That’s a pretty picture. Wipe your cheek. No tears.”

I obeyed hurriedly.

“Do you have sex toys?”

“I didn’t see any while I was there.”

I shook my head.

“I’ll buy you a vibrator. Something you can have inside of you all day.”

“Please, my job, it’s really all I have.”

His response came in before I could finish speaking:

“I won’t let you lose your job.”

“I don’t want to ruin your life.”

“But I want you. And I’ll have you. The way I want you. That won’t change.”

“I’m going to do what you want. I promise. But please, work needs to be off limits.”

He responded as I was speaking:

“Pull the cup down on your left breast. Just flip it down.”

“Fucking perfection.”

“Look at the Camera.”

“Please, not at work? Please?”

“Say - I’m your dirty whore, daddy.”

“I’m -” my voice broke off and I cleared my throat. “I’m your dirty whore, daddy.”

“Tell me you want me to fuck you again.”

“I want - please, I can’t...”

“Don’t cry.”

“It’s ok.”

“You’re so sweet.”

“I wanted to hug you yesterday. I wanted to kiss you on the forehead and tell you how perfect you are.”

“You’re so sweet.”

“Stop crying.”

I nodded and wiped my face. My lower lip trembled. I felt absolutely pathetic.

“Take off your bra, sweetheart.”

“It’s ok. No one else gets to see but me.”

I removed my bra and sniffled. My eyes stayed averted.

“Angle the phone downward. I want to see.”

“Good Girl.”

“Your nipples are so perfect.”

“They felt so good underneath my tongue. I’d suck on those all day long if I could.”

“Do you still have the blue blouse?”

“It’s too low cut for the words,” I answered.

“No one will see the words. It’s just below your collarbone. Wear it for me tomorrow.”

“Ok.”

“If I told you to go into a supply closet with the lights off and your eyes closed, would you try to see my face?”

“You promised,” I sounded like a whining child.

“Answer the question.”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so. After everything...” I covered my breasts with my arm. “... the pictures... it’s been so long...” I admitted softly, “I don’t think anyone would believe me.”

“They wouldn’t,” he answered. I sniffled. *“I won’t make you. Not yet.”*

“Thank you,” I answered, absolutely flooded with relief.

“You have an oversized blue t-shirt. Go put that on.”

I placed my phone down and hurried to obey. My wrist buzzed and I checked it.

“And those black shorts .”

I collected those and changed. When I picked the phone back up he said, “ *go sit on the bed* .”

I obeyed silently.

“Do you like the bedding ?”

“Yes. Thank you. For replacing it.”

“ You’re welcome.”

I couldn’t help myself. I grabbed my glass of wine and took a big gulp.

“ Should you drink on all that medication? ”

“No,” I laughed painfully, wiping my mouth. “My organs will probably give out by the time I’m thirty.” I felt the need to explain, “I don’t take them all everyday though. The doctor said as long as I drink in moderation it won’t kill me. Still said I shouldn’t though.”

I looked at the camera for a few seconds.

“Please just tell me who you are?” I begged. “I just need to know.”

“No. ”

“Have you eaten yet?”

“No, I just got home. I’m not that hungry.”

“You need to eat. You’re losing too much weight. You should have stopped five pounds ago .”

“It isn’t really a conscious decision,” I pointed out. I added painfully, “great diet technique though. Thanks for that.”

“ I don’t want you to lose anymore. ”

I only nodded.

“ Show me your tits one more time and then you can go make dinner. ”

“You’re so adorable. Go on. Lift the shirt up from the bottom.”

“There they are. Gorgeous.”

“I think about them all fucking day.”

“Lay back on the bed. Give the right one a squeeze.”

“You’re a good girl. Twist your nipple. Now the other one. Get them nice and hard.”

“Next time I fuck you, I’ll fuck you till you can’t walk.”

“Not being home this weekend wasn’t good for you, you know. I’m all worked up now. I’m going to fuck you so hard you won’t remember how to speak for days.”

“Keep playing with your nipples. Tell me you miss me.”

“I miss you,” I murmured.

“Louder. ”

“I miss you.”

“I want to hear you say my name.”

“Look at those big green eyes.”

“You’re perfect.”

“God I’d come over there right now if I could.”

“I want you at my beck and call.”

“Will you be a good girl for me, the next time I fuck you?”

“Yes.”

“Say it all out for me. Will you be a good girl for me the next time I fuck you?”

“Yes, I’ll be a good girl for you... the next time you fuck me.”

“Will you do what I say?”

“I’ll do what you say.”

“ Will you be at my disposal?”

“I’ll be at your disposal.”

“That’s what I want from you. Sex on demand.”

“Tell me I’m better than you.”

“You’re better than me.”

“Tell me you’ll listen to me.”

“I’ll listen to you.”

“I know better than you.”

“You know better than me.”

“Do you belong to me?”

“Yes, I belong to you.”

“You’re mine.”

“I’m yours.”

“You’re a good girl, baby.”

“Pull your shirt down now.”

I obeyed happily.

“You’re a sweet girl. Make your dinner and get to sleep. Don’t drink too much wine.”

“I won’t. I promise,” I added softly.

“ *You’re so sweet. Goodnight.* ”

“Good night.”

“ *No crying,* ” he said. “ *Everything will be ok. I’ll make everything ok for you.* ”

I nodded. I wish that was true. I wanted it to be true so badly. I wanted to hear it from anyone but him.

“I won’t cry,” I vowed.

“ *Good. Goodnight. I’ll see tomorrow. Don’t forget, wear the blue shirt for me.* ”

“I will.”

The call disconnected. I sat there a good long while. I was too numb to cry. I took a big swig of wine. I changed out of what I was wearing. I put on another oversized shirt and a different pair of shorts. I poured myself another glass of wine and then went to grab my discarded shirt from the closet one last time. I brought it to my face, pressed it to my nose, and breathed in deep. I could smell nothing. I threw it angrily on the floor. Out of spite, I tossed back a few pills, downed my glass of wine, and crawled into bed without eating dinner.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay! I got inspired by a character in a book I was reading, so kind of had to work that out. I'm about half way through a short story. I'm not going to post it until it's complete, as to not take away from this one. Little teaser though, it's about a cult leader, and he's pretty dreamy if I do say so myself.

Hope to get back into my regular updating scheduling after this one. Again, sorry for the delay.

I was about half way to work when I suddenly realized I was expected to be at my apartment all weekend and I had committed to a happy hour Friday night. I was seated in the corner, holding my book in my hand, eyes elevated to watch the newcomers step up onto the rickety train, when I was hit with that sudden realization. For such an intelligent person, I had the capability of being a real idiot. I realized, as my skin began to flush red and my heart began to race, that I really wanted to go. I thought about Caleb's cold eyes and the budding friendship that might be growing. At the very least, I was earning his respect. The thought of losing the opportunity to show him I wasn't an absolute bitch, that I could be a normal person in a social situation,

I beat everyone else into work as usual. I was able to spend an hour or so in the breakroom, going through my emails and trying to figure out what I was going to do for the weekend. I wore the blue blouse he had told me to wear and one of my black pencil skirts. He had not said I had to wear a skirt, but he didn't say I didn't need to either. After I poured my last cup, I dumped the coffee and put on a fresh pot.

Caleb came in rubbing his right eye, looking tired. His response to my good morning was a grunt. He poured his cup of coffee and slid the pot back into the holder with a clank.

"Morning, Caleb," I greeted a bit louder. He yawned and nodded. He gave a dismissive wave of the hand, informing me silently he'd heard me the first time. He opened up the fridge and scanned with tired eyes. "I'm not sure I'm going to make it this Friday."

He stood very still, staring into the fridge, and I wasn't sure if he heard me. He began to move again abruptly. He pulled the creamer out and set about making his coffee.

"How come?" he finally asked.

"Just something personal came up," I said. I didn't really know how to explain it. He stirred in his single spoonful of sugar and then tossed the spoon into the sink. He turned and began to walk from the room.

"Well that's too bad. I was looking forward to you being there," he said.

"I'm not sure yet," I hurried out. I was surprised by how badly I wanted to go again.

He nodded and gave a noncommittal shrug. "Well, it'd be great if you were there."

"I might come," I answered. "I want to go. I just don't think I can."

He offered a tight smile. He said, "Hope you can," and then walked out the door. My stomach was in knots most of the morning. I struggled to focus. More than once, I felt myself about to burst into a mess of tears. I fought it off. If I could separate work from everything else, I would be fine. It didn't change how badly I wanted to go. But every time I considered just going, I felt his fingers forcing themselves inside of me, his nails scraping the inside of my thighs, ripping my panty hose, the pain, the humiliation. I closed my eyes and shuddered.

Around ten o'clock I pushed myself up from my desk, leaving my subpar diligent report on my monitor, and left my cubicle to use the bathroom. I spotted Caleb. He was leaning back in his chair with a smile on his face, chatting to someone in his office. My eyes darted to the doorway to see who he was smiling at.

My face flushed when I found Amelia leaning against the door frame, laughing elegantly, pointedly trailing her fingertips over the pearls around her neck, drawing attention downward toward her breasts. It didn't seem a day went by that she didn't stop by to talk with him.

Friday night was supposed to be a SALT M&A Happy Hour. She wouldn't be there. Even if she did show up, Caleb wasn't interested in her. I looked to Caleb. He was smiling at her, gray eyes twinkling, nodding his head at Amelia as she spoke. He didn't look in my direction as I passed and Amelia's laugh echoed in my head all the way into the bathroom.

I washed my hands until my skin was red and raw. She was leaving his office as I walked back to my cubicle. She had a bright smile on her face, but as her eyes found me, they turned hard and stony. The smile dropped from her face the moment her back was to Caleb. I shot her a withering glare of contempt. We passed each other without a word but the air temperature had dropped a few degrees. By the time I sat down at my desk, I was blinking rapidly and I was wracking my brains for reasons to go into Caleb's office. I didn't care if he wanted to sleep with Amelia, not in the way I might have if I had feelings for Caleb, but I had always taken satisfaction in knowing as beautiful and perfect as she was, even *she* couldn't impress Caleb Trent. The thought she might leave me with a terrible feeling of inadequacy.

I grabbed my phone and pulled up his number. I jabbed with my thumbs rapidly, "I want to go out on Friday. There's a Happy Hour at work."

I waited, heart pounding. Mercifully, he did not make me wait long.

"Are you asking for permission?" he texted back almost immediately.

"You were angry I wasn't there last weekend."

"You said I had to be there."

"I don't want to get in any trouble."

"Can I go out on Friday?"

"You really want to go?"

"Yes."

A few minutes passed. I tried to return to my report. It was nearly impossible to do so. My watch buzzed and I grabbed my phone.

“You need to do something for me then.”

My stomach dropped to my toes. I let out a low, steady breath. I had got him to leave me alone at work. The thought of opening this door was sickening. I swallowed thickly, took one more deep breath and texted.

“A picture?”

“1:30pm. Third floor utility closet, 3C. It’s next to the conference room. Eyes closed, lights off, back to the door.”

My mouth went dry. My thumbs moved rapidly. I hadn’t allowed myself to put the thought into words in my head, but it had been floating around without form, causing a thick lump in my throat. With the message, that lump became dislodged and sunk like a rock to my belly.

“Please not at work. I’ll take any picture you want.”

“I fuck you now or I fuck you Friday.”

“You choose.”

I swallowed thickly and closed my eyes. A tear dribbled down my cheek and I took in a steady breath. I wiped the dampness away with a violent jerk of the hand.

“I have a meeting at one,” I texted. Everyone on SALT, both core and M&A, had access to my calendar and would have known that. I could cut out a fair few possibilities with that piece of information.

“11:50. Third floor utility closet, 3C. It’s next to the conference room. Eyes closed and light off back to the door. If you try to look at me, I’ll post all those videos to prove the bitch trying accuse me a rape was a whore that met me in a utility closet to fuck at work. Understand?”

I sniffled. I hated myself already. I was crushed with self loathing. I closed my eyes and took a breath.

“I understand. I won’t look.”

It was now or Friday. What difference did it really make anyway? I walked past Caleb’s office to find him alone. He was leaning back in his chair, smiling as he chatted on the phone. He didn’t so much as glance in my direction.

I felt embarrassed. I felt stupid. I felt cheap. Was I going to do this? At work? To go to a happy hour I didn’t want to go to, to make sure that a woman I despised didn’t go home with a man I hated?

I jabbed at the elevator button. I smoothed out my shirt and my buttons. I had no idea what I would do if he decided to rip my shirt open or tear my panty hose off. I’d have to miss the call. I couldn’t possibly go back up stairs in a building full of people in the same state he had put me in the other night.

I got to the third floor and hesitated outside the utility room. I almost considered not going inside. If I waited at that supply closet, who would I see coming down the hall? Or stepping out of the elevator?

But then I thought of those pictures, those videos and I grabbed the handle and turned. It wasn’t locked. I stepped inside and closed the door behind me. With a quick glance at my watch I saw it was 11:45. I pulled out my phone and texted him.

“I have to go back to work after this. Please don’t ruin my clothes?”

I lowered the phone back down and groped around in the darkness. It wasn't a tiny room, but it wasn't large either. There were two big metal shelves covered with tools and boxes and cleaning supplies. On the far right upon entering, there was a workbench with a mess of tools and papers on it. In the corner was a mop and bucket, which I had seen from the sliver of light as I had stepped inside.

I waited in the pitch black with a pounding heart and sweaty hands. In front of me, I groped around until I found a shelf. I pressed my hands flat to the shelf, laying all my weight down in an attempt to stay the violent trembling of my hands. I tested it's strength and then pressed down firmly. An eternity passed in the cramped, musty room. I rolled my wrist inward and the face lit up. 12:07. It was either a cruel joke or he was held up with something. When 12:15 rolled around, I wondered how long I needed to wait before leaving. If I left now, opened the door, and found him reaching for the door handle, did the pictures go out? Would videos of me moaning like a two cent hooker while a complete stranger raped me be sent out on a company wide chain for the entire company to see?

I only needed to wonder until 12:19. The door creaked open slowly and before I snapped my eyes shut, I watched the light slowly creep across the wall. The room suddenly felt smaller. Hotter. The door clicked shut softly. The sound was amplified in the tiny space. It felt so incredibly loud. The trembling returned to my limbs and I pressed my weight down into my palms.

I felt rather than heard his movement. I started violently when his hands gently touched my hips. One of his hands quickly closed around the back of my neck. He squeezed firmly and waited for me to calm down. His hand was large and warm. I had a horrifying thought that this man would have no trouble at all if he wanted to close his hands around my neck and choke the life out of me. It struck me how close I had come to death. The night of Caleb's promotion, the weekend at my apartment, the weekend I'd spent away at the hotel. This man could have killed me ten times over. His hand pulsed gently. A gentle reminder and a quiet threat.

Once he was satisfied I wasn't going anywhere, his hand slowly left my neck. He gripped my hips with both hands once more and with slow, methodical movements, he rubbed his erection against my bottom. A soft little breath of pleasure passed from between his lips. In the terrible stillness of the room, his breath sounded loud and raspy.

His lips nestled at the back of my head and he breathed in the smell of me deeply. One hand slowly slid up my hip, along my waist, over my belly, until it rested on one breast and squeezed firm. His other wrapped around my middle and held me close. He pressed me up against the shelf and ground his hips into mine a few more moments.

The arm around my middle eventually moved and he palmed the other breast. His massive hands squeezed through my blue blouse and bra. I stood there as he touched me, body trembling violently. His lips touched my ear and he shushed me softly, hands squeezing firmly.

As his hands fondled my breasts, he pressed his erection more firmly into my bottom. My hips were forced up to the shelf and my cheek was pressed against the edge. He gave off a single, low grunt of pleasure, and then his lips wrapped around my earlobe. He flicked the flesh with his tongue, before he removed his hands from my breasts. He pressed a firm grip back to the back of my neck and then turned us toward the work bench to our right. He moved me with ease and with an air of familiarity that made me wonder how many women he might have brought down here. He bent my body downward until my breasts were pressed firmly to the bench. It never occurred to me before that I wasn't the only one. It left me feeling ill and very very lonely.

Words cannot express how vulnerable I felt as I lay there in the darkness, upper body prostrate over the bench, a stranger looming over me in the darkness. His fingertips curled along the hem of my skirt until he had it collected in my hands. I heard a thud just in front of my nose.

“Please-”

“Shhh-shhhhh,” he said, both comfortingly and a bit harshly. I fell silent and nodded in the darkness. I had no idea if he could see anything at all.

His hands slowly tugged at my skirt, hiking it up around my hips.

One hand glided down my back. His hands reached underneath the black fabric. His fingertips poked and prodded until they hooked around my pantyhose. Very slowly, excruciatingly slowly, he rolled them downward. He rolled them downward until they held my knees together. He bent down and gently, very gently, placed a kiss to my inner thigh. His

hands caressed the outside of each leg. His face turned to place another feather light kiss to the other thigh. He turned his face again.

His breath was hot. His tongue hotter, and wet, as it dragged up along sensitive skin. My skin quivered and my heart beat violently against my ribcage. His fingers pressed into my upper, outer thighs. He placed one last kiss to my right thigh before standing. He carefully rolled down my underwear next.

I pressed my face harder into the bench. I felt the rough wood of the table grate against my cheek. A large palm gently trailed down my back. He was fully clothed when he pressed his clothed erection against my clenching pussy. The hand on my lower back pressed me more firmly into the bench. My flesh quivered with anticipation. I screwed my eyes shut. I just wanted it over.

He withdrew, and two long fingers pressed into me. He fingered me slow and steady. His free hand squeezed the back of my neck. If I had wanted to stand up, I couldn't have. He made sure of that. His other hand increased the pace. He pulled his fingers out of me and pressed the damp digits to my clit. He massaged firmly in slow circles. His thumb pressed into me as his fingers continue to rub. My hips bucked and I took in one violent breath.

"Shh," he reminded me. There was a ghost of a laugh in his breath. Tears pricked at my eyes. God, what was wrong with me?

He renewed his efforts. His thumb sunk deeply inside of me. His fingers pressed to my clit. Then, his thumb curled inside of me, creating a pressure that was indescribable. I knew then what he was trying to do. The hand on the back of my neck squeezed. He withdrew his fingers and his hand left my neck. I heard the clinking of his belt, the rustling of his clothing. He rubbed his cock against my slick opening. He took his time. He rubbed the tip firmly along my opening, setting the head of his cock with my shame. Finally, he pushed himself inside of me.

I felt my insides opening up as he thrust inward. He let out a slow, soft, breath of pleasure. I strained for an ounce of familiarity. I rejected any similarity I imagined with Caleb and searched for other sounds. I momentarily allowed myself to consider Chris, but Chris had a smooth, velvety sort of voice. This had a gravelly, kind of grating quality to it.

One hand closed around my shoulder. The other grabbed my waist. With his grip on me, he was able to bring me back and forth with firm control of every moment. He made sure I met each, steady thrust with equal force. His thrusts got rougher, firmer, but he was fueled by passion, not anger. He struggled to keep himself quiet. He had been more vocal during our weekend together. I wondered if that was because we were at work, and he was afraid I would be more attuned with the sound of him... which would mean we interacted somewhat regularly. That nagging feeling returned.

His hand left my hips and went back between my legs. His fingers pressed to my clit. He rubbed forcefully in rapid circles. I cannot tell you how much I hated myself in those moments, but as he thrust, his large, pulsing cock coming in and out of me, my hips bucking against the bench with each thrust, his fingers massaging my sensitive skin was expert attention.

Another violent ripple, a suppressed, strangled sounding moan of pleasure and despair, and I sagged against the table. His hand withdrew. It returned to my waist. His last thrusts were hard. Fast. He'd gotten what he'd wanted from me, now he had one thing in mind. I was on a timeline.

He was a man with immense strength and size. I was a rag doll slapped across a table, there for his pleasure. Sex on demand. That's what he said he wanted. In those moments, I realized he really didn't want to hurt me. That wasn't his goal. His goal was dominance and control. Submission and obedience.

He climaxed with a low groan. His fingertips squeezed deeply into my flesh hard. I was convinced I'd be bruised by the end of the day. He remained pulsing inside of me for a few moments. A few residual buck of the hips. His hands continued to pulse.

He did not remove himself from me. With a low sigh, he removed his hand from my shoulder and pressed his palm gently over my eyes. His hand was massive. His body enveloped me. He towered. He tilted my head all the way backwards on his shoulder and leaned down to place a kiss to my mouth. I was surrounded by him.

His tongue touched mine. He licked the gloss off my lips. His teeth scraped at the soft, plump flesh. His touch was very, very gentle, and very, very controlling. I breathed in deeply through my nose. As deeply as I could. If it got on your clothes you'd never get it out.

I smelled only dank must and mop water. I breathed in again through my nose. It was a fast, harsh, suking in of air through my nostrils. His mouth hovered over mine. No doubt, he was trying to figure out what I was doing, if he didn't know already.

The hand groping at my breast moved upward and pressed to my mouth. He parted my lips, forcing his fingers inside, and I took solace in the reminder that this was a clean man. I did it because I assumed he'd like it. I closed my lips around his fingers. His breath was on my cheek. He moved his fingers upward and downward, pulling my lips up and down. I opened my mouth because I knew that was what he wanted. I flinched in surprise. It took me a moment to release he'd spit into my mouth and a hot glob of his saliva was dribbling down my tongue. He closed my mouth and placed a firm kiss to my lips, holding me in place with a firm grip to my jaw.

The hand not on my eyes moved back to grope one of my breasts. Firm but gentle. He kissed me again. His tongue was soft on mine and I sent mine out to meet his timidly. I was rewarded with a low murmur of pleasure into the kiss and his hand tightened on my breast.

It was a fleeting moment, but the warmth of him, the firmness of his hold, and the sound of pleasure he made brought me an overwhelming sense of contentment. I let myself enjoy it for a fleeting moment, before I pushed it into the dark reserves of my mind.

He broke off the kiss and placed his lips to the top of my nose and to each cheek. His hand left my breast and went between my legs. His fingers prodded and massaged again. He was still inside of me. With one grope of the breast, he released me and stepped back.

I remained standing, eyes closed, chin pressed to my chest. My shoulders were hunched low. I heard the metal of his belt clink as he put himself back together. I reached down nervously to pull up my underwear and panty hoses.

A large, hot hand stopped me and I waited for an assault. Something violent and cruel. My heart lurched and my muscles. But his hands did nothing but take over my own attempts to get myself back together. His hands were gentle. He slid my panties up. Next, his hands moved down to my pantyhose. Slowly and with great care, he pulled those up too. He took great care to make sure they were not torn in the process. His hands were steady. I would not have done as good a job keeping them from ripping.

His hands caressed my thighs, pressing hot fingertips into the soft flesh. A featherlight, ghost of a kiss pressed to the back of my neck. He gently pulled my skirt back into place, smoothing it out gently along the curves of my hips. Another soft kiss to the other side of my neck.

He took my wrist and opened my watch. My stomach churned as he put in the passcode with the first attempt. I watched him set the alarm for ten minutes and then he gently lowered my hand back down. His fingertips ghosted along my arm. His hand covered my eyes again and I was met with another wet kiss that tasted of wintergreen. It was the only thing I could smell on him. His hands lowered and he groped my breasts again in slow, firm squeezes. He liked my breasts, I knew that.

Finally, he removed his lips from mine and gently uncovered my eyes. His warmth left me and I heard him cross the room. The door creaked open, filling the blackened room with light, and then clicked shut, once again enveloping me in darkness.

It was torture, knowing that all I had to do was walk out the door and I'd know who it was. I'd see him, clear as day, and I'd know. I checked my watch. I'd be cutting it close, but I knew better than to disobey him. His touch had been gentle and it conveyed a very simple message. If I did as I was told, I would get the soft kisses and gentle touch I had received today and not the painful violation of the vending machines.

When my alarm finally did go off in the darkened room, I jumped a mile high. I quickly jabbed at my watch and then silently left the room. I stopped by the bathroom on the third floor to fix my hair and make sure I was put back together. My shirt was ruffled and I had to smooth out my hair, but overall, it didn't look like I'd just gotten fucked in a janitor's closet. I blinked back the tears of shame and smoothed out my shirt one last time.

I got into the elevator and my phone buzzed.

"Best pussy I've ever had." I ignored it and said.

"I can go then?" I had a terrible fear he was going to say no, and it was just a cruel ploy.

“Yes. Have fun. But behave yourself.”

I let out a deep sigh of relief as my cheeks burned with shame and I pushed on to the elevators. As they opened, I was greeted with the sight of Caleb and Chris walking back from the break room, each with a soda in hand. They passed me with a smile each and then resumed their conversation. I followed a respectable distance behind, but as they broke off toward their respective offices, I followed Caleb.

“Oh, Caleb,” I said, ducking my head into his office as he took a seat. He answered with a slightly opened mouth and elevated brow. “That thing got cleared up. So I’ll be coming on Friday.”

He smiled, looking relaxed and content, “That’s great. Happy to hear it.”

“Is um... is Amelia coming?” I asked, trying to sound as light and detached as possible. I relished the dark look of annoyance that flashed across his face.

“Yeah, she’ll be there,” he said, slapping his pen down on his desk. He said brusquely, “You have a call to be on.”

I checked my watch. I had five minutes. I gave a nod, slightly embarrassed my attempt at small talk had failed so badly, and hurried back to my desk. I blinked, hoping all that humiliation hadn’t been for nothing.

The call went well. Caleb did most of the talking, as was expected. He messaged me twice for numbers that I had readily available for him. After the call I received the following email:

Caleb Trent Wed, February 23, 2:17pm

To me:

Orla,

Great job with those numbers.

-CH

I had trouble containing the smile on my face. Some of the disgust momentarily washed away. It quickly vanished when I received an email from Caleb absolutely decimating my last report.

Caleb Trent Wed, February 23, 2:58pm

To me:

Orla,

You would send this to a client? Needs work. See attached template.

-CH

I got those edits done around six. I packed up, beyond thrilled I was able to leave work at a reasonable time. I passed by Caleb in the aisle. He was leaning over the top of Chris's cubicle wall. They were discussing the NFL draft. Caleb looked at me, eyes lowering to my shoes and back to meet my eyes. I felt an intense rush of insecurity. Fearful I might look stupid, that he might think I was trying too hard... I swallowed them down.

"Going home early today, I see," he observed.

I began to sputter.

“W-well, I got the report back to you. I used your template and if there’s any issue, I have my laptop -”

“Orla, I’m joking,” he said dryly. My face flushed.

“Oh, well,” I tried to laugh. I tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. Chris pushed his chair away from his desk so he could see me through the opening.

“Caleb’s sense of humor is used so infrequently, he doesn’t know how jokes are supposed to sound.”

“It’s called advanced sarcasm,” Caleb mused. His arms were up over the cubicle wall and he was picking at a thumbnail absentmindedly. “Only those with certain intelligent levels understand it.”

“I guess ours just aren’t low enough then,” I said. Chris snickered and Caleb shot me a hard look with a little smirk on his face.

“You know, I have a few more projects I’m going to need you to do before you go home tonight,” he answered. I hesitated, unsure if he was serious, and then smiled. I glanced at Chris and then waved good night to them both. I lingered just a moment too long. Chris stared. Caleb lifted his eyebrows. I laughed awkwardly and then went on my way.

I cursed myself on the elevator ride. Why couldn’t I just act like a normal person? My wrist buzzed, taking me out of my thoughts.

“ You were so good today. I’m so hard right now. ”

I closed my eyes and let out a sigh. I wanted to cry. Another buzz.

“Text me when you get home. I want to see those tits again.”

“Don’t you have enough pictures?”

“Not a picture. I want to hear your pretty voice.”

I bit the inside of my cheek hard. Tears pricked at my eyes. I just let him fuck me at work. Couldn’t he just leave me alone? I wanted to scream, but as the elevator doors opened, I slapped a smile on my face. I gave a nod to the day guard and walked to the T.

I had a glass of wine and ate breakfast before I texted him. I knew I didn’t have a choice. If he didn’t get a text, the pictures could go out. I swallowed thickly. With trembling fingers, I typed out, *“I’m home.”*

I didn’t have to wait long.

“Where did you go?” I typed, jabbing the send button angrily.

She answered, *“What do you mean?”*

“It takes you thirty minutes to get from Government Center to Summit Ave.”

I plopped down on my couch and rubbed the front of my trousers. I had always had a high sex drive. What she did to me seemed physically impossible. Just thinking about this afternoon left me hot and worked up. The trembling of her thighs, the tenderness of her mouth, the soft little whimpers...

“I made dinner.”

“ I told you to text me when you got home. ” I pressed more firmly at my throbbing cock. I could still head her, hot, tight, and wet. Her body had trembled. Weak, soft, and compliant as she took me in that dark little utility closet.

“ I thought you just wanted to know when I was ready... ”

“ I’m sorry. ”

I swallowed thickly.

“ I told you to text me when you got home. If I tell you to do something, you do it. ”

“ I’m sorry. ”

I imagined those words coming from her lips. Her big green eyes looking up at me. I called her through the app, making certain my camera was off and my mic was muted. With my free hand, I tugged at my belt. The camera connected and a little smile came to my lips. I brought up my hand to type.

“ There’s that pretty face. ”

“ You’re so sweet. ”

“Thank you,” she said, voice soft and very demure.

“ You’re a good girl for wearing the skirt today. ”

“Thank you,” she said again.

“ Unbutton the shirt. ”

She began to obey, using one hand to fumble with the buttons. I watched, breathing slightly elevated, and squeezed my cock over my boxer-briefs. I would have given anything to have her between my legs, my hand buried in her hair, forcing her face against my straining erection.

“ Have you ever had a cock as big as mine?”

I watched her read with those big vulnerable eyes. She was still unbuttoning her shirt. She swallowed thickly and shook her head.

“ Are you always such a greedy little cock-slut? Or is that just for me?”

She swallowed thickly, eyes darted across the screen.

“ Answer me.”

“Just for you,” she answered. I groaned and reached down to grip my cock again. Missing out on a full weekend of her pussy had taken its toll. This afternoon hardly began to scratch the itch. I wanted to bend her back over and fucked her until she couldn’t walk. Make her moan and cry until she couldn’t speak. I wanted to pull her hand and spit in her mouth. I wanted to touch her tongue with mine and lick her plump lips.

“ You like getting raped.”

She looked down and I saw her face crumple.

“ Don’t cry.”

“It’s true.”

“You come for me so hard.”

“slut.”

“Dirty whore. You came for me this afternoon. Don’t lie. You did, didn’t you?”

“Women orgasm when they’re raped all the time,” she said, eyes darting.

“Right. Because women are whores.”

“Women’s purpose is to satisfy their man’s needs.”

“You satisfy me. You’re so good.”

“Open your closet door and sit in front of the mirror. Spread your legs and point the camera at the camera so I can see you.”

She got up and moved silently. I watched her floor swing by, heard the door creak, and then saw her in the mirror.

“Pull the cups of your bra down.”

She did, revealing large, soft breasts. Her nipples hardened to the air. She kept her apartment cool. My cock twitched. *“Touch pussy.”*

I watched panic come to her eyes. I squeezed myself again.

“Go on. Push up your skirt, pull down your panty hose and rub yourself through your panties.”

I watched her obey, silent, defeated, eyes submissively lowered. I watched her slender fingers pressed against the pink cotton underwear. I reached into my pocket and pulled out the panties I had taken from her drawer this past weekend. I pressed it to my nose and breathed in deeply.

“ Harder. ”

It looked like she obeyed.

“ Push your panties to the side and spread yourself. ”

Her fingers timidly plucked at the panties and pulled them aside. My cock twitched and I gave myself a hard stroke. She tasted so good. I could taste her now, I could feel her hard little clit beneath my continue. She'd drenched my mouth. Her tight canal had clenched around my tongue when I shoved it inside of her.

Her pussy was perfect. Her labia minora were visible, just peeking out from her outer lips, leaving her looking open and vulnerable. I wanted to suck on it, lick it, bite it.

I stroked myself hard.

“ Tell me that pussy is mine. ”

“ It's yours, ” she obeyed. I gritted my teeth.

“ Say it. Tell me your pussy belongs to me. Tell me how deep I fuck you. That your pussy gets wet for me. That your finger self when you think of me. Tell me how badly you want my cock inside of you right now. How hard you'd come for me. ”

I put my hand back on my cock. I massaged the tip firmly, watching her eyes dart over the words on the screen. My cock strained. I lifted a hand as her lips parted and pressed record.

“My pussy belongs to you,” she said. I could see her entire body. She leaned back, legs spread, phone held up, giving me a perfect view of her body. “I get so wet when I think about you. I...”

“*Rub yourself,*” I messaged, and brought my hand back to my cock. I stroked hard. Her fingers rubbed her clit.

“I finger myself and imagine you inside of me. I want you to fuck me. I want you to fuck me now.”

She sounded a bit forced, a bit uncomfortable, but it looked almost shy, timid. I tightened my hand on myself, stroking myself do hard, it almost hurt.

“Keep going,” I whispered. “Go on, baby. Make me proud. Keep talking.”

“I, you fuck me so deep. I like it.”

I took my hand away. Fingers inside of yourself. Fingerfuck yourself. Keep talking. Call yourself my dirty whore. You're a filthy little slut. You deserve to be raped. You want me to rape you. You want to be treated like a little fuck toy. Make yourself cum.”

Her voice was trembling as she spoke. She inserted two fingers inside of her.

“I’m your dirty whore. I like being raped by you. I want to be your fuck toy. I want you to fuck me. I- I’m not good at this,” she breathed. I bit into her panties and stifled a groan. She sounded embarrassed, shy. Just when I thought she couldn’t be more perfect, when I didn’t think I could want her more. She continued on breathlessly, “I deserve to be raped. I want you to rape me. I want you to treat me like your fucktoy.”

I lowered my eyes to her pussy. Her fingers went in and out of the tight flesh. I imagined cumming on the hot, pink flesh, marking it with mine and rubbing my semen along her wet opening. I groped along the side table and grabbed the first pair of panties I had taken the first time I fucked her. I had rolled them off her hips so gently, careful not to disturb her sleeping form, despite knowing I could have slapped her across the face and she wouldn’t have woken.

I wrapped the panties around my cock and stroked hard. I stroked until I felt my balls tighten and then release. I groaned, low in my throat. I stroked a few moments longer before I released my spent member.

“ *Can you make yourself cum?* ” I asked.

“I-I don’t know,” she answered.

“ *Make yourself cum and you can go to bed,* ” I said. I watched her try. To her credit, I think she really did. I didn’t blame her. It would be hard for her to cum, without my massive, throbbing cock shoved up her pussy.

She whimpered and moaned, and gave a pathetic little display. When she said, “I came,” I let myself smile. She hadn’t. I knew she hadn’t. I knew her orgasm. But anyone else who might watch it, they certainly wouldn’t know the difference.

“ *Good girl,* ” I praised. “ *Wear your pink top and your grey skirt.* ”

She pulled her legs together and tugged her skirt down. She turned the camera to face herself and lowered the camera so I could see her face.

“It’s been cold. Can I please wear my pants?” she asked. I considered. I didn’t want her cold, but seeing her legs in those skirts.

“ *I like seeing you in skirts. You’ve got gorgeous legs.* ”

She nodded. I sent her a video attachment.

“*Listen to this before bed.* ”

“Ok,” she said. “I will.”

“ *Good night.* ”

“Good night,” she murmured. I hung up the phone and leaned back in my chair. I wondered how she might react, listening to the sound of her moaning like a perfect whore in a darkened utility closet.

I looked forward to the weekend. My fingers tingled at the thought. I picked up the used panties and examined them. She wasn't going to tell a soul. I was convinced of it. And now with this newest little video, I'd like to see her cry. So when I got to work the next morning, and placed her crumpled panties, covered with my cum, on her office chair for her to find, I didn't have an ounce of concern of handing over my DNA to her on a silver platter.

Chapter Notes

A lot of "story" in this chapter, but I hope you guys still enjoy some of the subtleties and the tension. I'm very excited to move onto the next part of the story. It's gonna start getting good!

Thank you again for all the comments! It really means the world!

The next day, Caleb wore a new suit into work. Caleb's suits were all of the slim cut variety, two buttons, single breasted. He rotated between black, dark charcoal, and dark navy. But he only wore solid colors. So it was notable when he walked into the break room in a dark navy suit with very thin, very subtle pinstripes. I raised the steaming cup of the bitter brew to my lips and examined the suit silently.

He got his suits at Brooks Brothers. I know that because he and Miles, someone from consulting that would pop into the break room from time to time, were discussing the quality of the other's suits one day during lunch. The conversation had annoyed me at the time. Miles had made a snide comment about how the superior quality Brooks Brothers once boasted for their *affordable* suits had waned over the years, but the suits were still *respectable*. Indochino was rapidly surpassing them. I had thought the conversation was childish, but as I grabbed my peanut butter and jelly from the fridge and left, I gave one quick glance over their suits, and quickly determined the suits Caleb wore were superior.

He wore dark brown, leather derby shoes with a matching belt. His shirt was crisp and white, and he wore a dark burgundy grenadine tie. It fit him well. His dark head of hair was cut shorter on the sides and parted at the right side of his hair. I could smell his aftershave. It was thick and heavy in the breakroom and I continued to watch Caleb as he reached for the cream from the fridge and turned to finish making his coffee.

"Morning," he finally said with his back to me.

"Good morning," I murmured. He turned and stirred his spoonful of sugar into his Northeastern mug.

“That a new top?” he asked, gesturing the cup toward me. I looked down at my pink blouse in surprise.

“N-no, I’ve had it since law school, I think. I just haven’t worn it recently.”

He gave a nod and then took a sip of his coffee as he moved to the exit. As he walked out, he said softly, “you look beautiful.”

I sat stunned. My head spun. I couldn’t even be sure he actually said it. Immediately I doubted myself. It was early. I was tired. I was a mess as it was. Did he say the shirt was beautiful? It looks beautiful? Did he even say beautiful? What sounds like beautiful?

He asked if the shirt was new. He didn’t remember it, so he couldn’t have told me to wear it. But did he say I was beautiful? I certainly couldn’t chase him down and ask him. I could only imagine the confused look in his eyes. And after Monday, he’d think I had finally snapped. My chance of getting this senior position went right out the window.

It stuck with me all day. It was the reason that when I looked at the clock at 11:00, I realized I was supposed to have had the updated calcs back from Peter for our newest operation auto target.

I didn’t email him. Peter hardly ever answered his emails and the emails I had sent to Peter before my... rendezvous... yesterday, had gone unanswered. I checked my watch, took in a deep sigh, and pushed myself up to my feet.

“Peter,” I said softly, stepping into the cubicle. I prompted as kindly as I could, “I was supposed to have that Calc three hours ago.”

“Yeah, I’ll get it to you,” Peter said with a wave of his hand. “I need to get this diligence report done.”

My cheeks flushed.

“No, you don’t,” I said sharply. “I need those calcs now.”

“And Chris needs this diligence report before I leave,” Peter said. He didn’t even turn around. I was talking to the back of his head. “He wants to leave early tomorrow.”

“Chris doesn’t have that diligence call until Tuesday. His job doesn’t bump up in priority just because he’s leaving early tomorrow. I have my report due to Caleb at COB and I need those calcs I gave you.”

“Relax, you’ll get by five.”

My face flushed a deeper shade of red. No one would *ever* speak to Caleb like that.

“*Caleb* needs it by five. I need it now.” I was vaguely conscious of my tone. Caleb calling me a bitch rang in my ears. My hands were trembling ever so slightly, and so I reached up and grabbed the top of his cubicle wall to steady myself.

I jumped a mile when I heard Caleb’s gravelly voice behind me. I jumped backward, my back slamming into his chest. I had no idea how long he had been there, but he had been standing very very close when he spoke. He ignored me as I moved away from him, and kept his steely grey eyes on Peter, a deep frown on his face. He had a stack of papers in his hand, curled inward and tucked beneath an arm. He was on his way or had just finished ripping someone apart, and he didn’t look pleased.

“Are we really having this argument about order of priority?” Caleb asked, words dripping with contempt. Peter spun around in his chair immediately.

“Caleb -”

“That’s first year associate stuff, Pete. Get her the calcs.” I had twisted my body around to look up at him and he turned his attention to me. His grey eyes seemed a shade darker as they bore into mine and if I didn’t know better, I would have assumed I was the target of his ire. “If you don’t have those calcs by noon, let me know. You can get them to me by 10 tomorrow.”

“Sure thing,” Peter said to Caleb.

“Thanks,” I mumbled to Caleb. He left the cubicle and continued on down the aisle. Peter said nothing to me. He turned his back and started jabbing angrily at his keyboard. Satisfied, I went back to my cubicle to finish up some work.

He got the calcs to me at 12:04pm. It was 12:51pm when I realized it was worthless. With flushed cheeks, I walked to Peter’s cubicle and I slapped the report down on his desk. He shot me a cold glare.

“Peter, you need to redo this. I need it by three.”

“You said get it to you by noon, I got it to you by noon. I have to get this done for Chris,” he said.

“Peter, Texas changed its tax code last month. You used the wrong code. The step up-basis is useless.”

“I seriously don’t have time for that,” Peter said. “Can’t you just do it?”

“No. I can’t. I’m on five moving deals right now. Five. All moving. I need you to get this right.”

“Well, I can’t do it right now. I need to get this done. You know how to do it, you just fix it. You’re not a senior, Ellie. Chris is. I’m going to do what Chris tells me to do.”

He turned back to his computer. I stared at the back of his neck a few moments longer. When I did rip myself away, I marched down the aisle straight into Caleb's office. The door had been shut. I grabbed the handle, opened the door and marched right in.

"Caleb," I said severely, stepping inside red cheeked and angry. "I know."

He looked up sharply, eyes slightly widened, but I ignored the flash that crossed over his eyes. He could be annoyed with me for walking in without knocking all he wanted. This was too important.

I continued. "I know I'm not technically a senior."

His shoulders sagged and he leaned back in his chair, his chest sinking with the rush of air that escaped his lungs.

"But I don't have time to fix this." He blinked at me, but I pushed on. "The tax code for Texas changed last month. A simple search in the database would have found that. Almost 80% of this company's sales go to Texas. I don't have the time to fix that. I told him he had to do it. I can't get this done -"

"He has to redo it. That's his job, not yours," Caleb said matter of fact, but it was clear he wasn't entirely sure which deal I was talking about.

"He refuses," I said in exasperation.

"What do you mean he refuses?" Caleb asked. His disbelief was marred with obvious irritation. He then added, "Who's 'he'?"

"Peter. He says he needs to have the Colson diligence report to Chris by five because Chris is leaving early tomorrow, but the Colson report isn't due until Tuesday. This," I jabbed at my

notepad. "Needs to be done tonight."

"Have you spoken to Chris about this?" Caleb asked. I blinked. I hadn't. I'd gone straight to Caleb. I swallowed, frightened Caleb would be annoyed for wasting his time with this, and frightened Chris would think I was trying to get him into trouble.

"I didn't look for him," I admitted, he looked at his computer and a little smile played across his lips. He placed his hand on his mouse. "Peter said, you're not a senior, Chris is, so he'll do what Chris tells him before me, but I'm the senior on the deal -"

Caleb rose and walked around his desk, fastening one button as he did. I watched silently as he jerked his head toward the door. I scooped up my notepad and followed him. He walked with long, purposeful strides and I practically had to jog to keep up with him on our way to Peter's cubicle.

"Pete," he said. "A moment?"

Peter turned around. His eyes found me standing in the cubicle and his eyes darkened.

"You fucking *tell* on me, Ellie?" He asked with contempt.

"Watch your mouth," Caleb snapped. "You work for a big four, act like that. Chris is not your senior. Orla is. She tells you to change priority, you change it. If there's an issue between the seniors, they will come to me. That's how this works and you know that's how this works. What you should also know, is that standard priority is ranked in order of deadline. Something due by COB today is completed before something due COB on Monday for a call on Tuesday.

And another thing," Caleb continued. "You've been here three years and you didn't check the current tax code before doing an entire calc? That's basic, basic, stuff. This is stuff you should know. This is stuff that if you paid even the slightest bit of attention to, she wouldn't be in here telling you to fix it. So, Orla gives you a deadline, you meet it. If she has to come to me again asking me to get you to do your job, there's going to be a problem. Never once did you buck me on a deadline. You'll give her the same respect."

“I’ll get it done,” Peter said, voice wooden and taut.

Chris walked up, frown on his face, hands in his pocket. I caught his eye, and my cheeks flushed.

“Everything ok?” he asked. Peter clearly thought an ally had arrived.

“Can’t get that work for you today,” Peter said. He gave Chris a tight smile. “I’ve been overruled.”

Chris shrugged, unphased. “Well, Ellie’s technically your senior -”

“But she’s not a senior,” Peter snapped. “So I was listening to a senior. But if I’m supposed to ignore a senior for some chick who -”

There it was. My face got so hot I thought my head was about to set fire. I looked at Chris, who looked down, and then my eyes darted to Caleb. He looked almost crazed, his eyes were so wide, the intensity burned so bright.

“I’m not going to let you finish that statement,” Caleb cut him off immediately. “For your own sake. Get this done and to Orla by three. We’ll set up a meeting to discuss this behavior privately.”

Caleb moved to leave the cubicle. His hand touched my arm and gently ushered me out. I was too angry to function. Caleb turned to him, “you better hope she doesn’t go to HR with that because she has two witnesses that heard it and I’m not losing my job because I let some sexist bullshit like that stand. You understand?”

Peter looked enraged. Caleb left the cubicle and began marching down to his office. I shot Peter a hate fueled glare, which he matched with equal furor.

“Orla and Chris, can you come talk to me?” Caleb said with a frightening level of calm. He sounded almost light and airy.

I was coming down from my fog of rage as I sat down at one of the chairs in front of Caleb’s desk. I don’t really remember walking to his office, but I do remember that despite his rapid collection of emotion, The back of Caleb’s neck was very red. Chris came in behind me and closed the door. He leaned against the far wall with arms crossed, eyes waiting patiently for Caleb. Caleb took his seat and fixed his eyes on me hard.

“Orla, you need to know that Chris recommended you to fill my spot. I recommended you to fill my spot. The only reason Nick hasn’t officially promoted you is because you’ve been here such a short amount of time. He wants to make sure you’ll be able to handle the stress. It has nothing to do with the fact you’re a woman.”

“I know that,” I said.

“Just to set the record straight too,” Chris added. “I never told Peter to push priority. I said if he could get that to me by five it would be great because I wanted to leave early tomorrow to meet up with friends if I could before hooking up for Happy Hour. That’s all I said. I thought it was clear that if Ellie had deadlines those were priorities.”

“Peter’s a sexist prick,” Caleb said, grabbing his mouse and looking at a screen.

“Caleb,” Chris scolded sharply. It wasn’t the most professional thing to say, but underneath the fine veneer of calm on Caleb’s stoic face, he was very angry. The let down in his reserve gave me a strong feeling of self-importance. I bet Amelia had never seen this side of him before.

“I’m not going to HR,” I finally said. My throat hurt.

“You don’t have to,” Caleb dismissively. “I am.”

“I don’t want to get him in trouble -”

“Let me give you some advice,” he said curtly.

I glanced at Chris. He watched grimly, arms still crossed.

“You need to grow a backbone,” he said. My face flushed and my lips parted. “There’s more Peters out there than I think you realize. Not most of us, but a fair few. This is a pivotal moment in your career. You need to establish right now, you won’t be fucked with. Otherwise, they’ll walk all over you.”

“He’s right,” Chris added, a bit more gently. “That wasn’t OK. You let that go... besides, Caleb could get fired if he let that go. So, something needs to be done.”

“Maybe... you’re right. Both of you, but what if he didn’t mean it like that-”

Caleb leaned forward in his chair. His eyes were intense. “‘Some chick.’ What could he have meant by that? You’re not ‘some chick.’”

He looked back at his computer and jabbed the enter key. “You’re not *‘some fucking chick.’*”

“Caleb,” Chris murmured. Caleb looked at him. Chris added, “relax.”

Caleb fell silent. My stomach tightened. I could smell him. Rich, musky. It smelled good. It hung thick in the air. The entire office smelled like him. There was no mistaking it. It was decidedly Caleb.

You look beautiful. He thought the top was new though. He hadn’t remembered it. My head suddenly hurt very badly. I wanted to lay down on the floor and close my eyes.

Caleb ignored him and spoke to me, his eyes on his computer monitor. “If you need some time, to go out and go get a coffee and clear your head, you can. Do you need a few?”

“No, I’m fine,” I answered, though I wasn’t. He nodded.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

I nodded and forced a smile. My eyes flickered down to his hands and I pushed myself up to my feet. I got up and smoothed out my skirt.

Peter stayed until seven that night to redo the work. I stayed until nine. Caleb had emailed me shortly after I returned to my desk to tell me I had until noon tomorrow for my original EOD deadlines, but I wanted to get it done. I also didn’t really want to go home. If I did, I’d get another phone call.

I collected my things slowly. I was absolutely exhausted. I didn’t know if I should just call an Uber, but I decided against it. It wasn’t worth the money.

Caleb was still in his office. He had his suit jacket off, crisp white shirt sleeves rolled up to mid arms. His tie was loosened. His hair was still in perfect order.

His eyes darted up to mine as I approached. I waved a hand and gave a half hearted wave, offering a tired smile.

He only stared back. His eyes were intense as he stared, but at the same time, it was like he didn’t see me at all. I was just another person walking down the long row of cubicles. But he didn’t look away as he always did. He continued to stare. His eyes followed me until I was out of sight. I jammed the elevator button. I took in a deep breath. My head hurt so badly. I dozed. The elevator doors dinged and I jumped, my eyes popping open. As I stepped inside, I fought down the shiver that raced down my spine.

I received no texts or phone calls that night. I fell into bed and found sleep without even a glass of wine for help. I didn't get into work until seven thirty. When my alarm went off at 4:00am, I punched ignore, set my alarm for six, and went back to sleep. I had needed it and when I woke up in the morning, I actually felt rather well rested.

I came in with an extra large hot coffee from Dunks and went straight to my desk. The only thing that really needed to be done before five was an internal summary. It would take me two or three hours, but for the first time in a long time, I felt very much in control of my work.

I ate lunch at my desk. I went to the break room for a drink from the vending machine. Caleb was inside with Chris, Danny, and Mark. Danny got up to make room for me, but I shook my head.

"I'm gonna work through lunch," I said.

"You're coming tonight?" Danny asked with a smile. Caleb was looking down at his diet coke, spinning it slowly on the table.

"Yeah," I said. I ran my hand over my stomach. I hadn't been told what to wear. I had chosen one of my dresses. He would be able to see my legs and I was wearing heels. My chest was covered and it was long sleeved, cinched at the middle with a belt. It would keep him happy, and it was warm and comfortable, and I thought it would work well for after hours drinks as well.

"That's great. Let me buy you a drink?" Danny asked with a handsome smile.

Caleb's face remained angled downward. His eyes darted up to look at Danny.

"Um... sure," I said, laughing a little bit uncomfortably. He smiled and winked. I forced the dollar bill into the vending machine. I glanced in Caleb's direction once I retrieved my soda can. He was looking across the table at Mark as he talked about football. He had a tiny smile on his face but he didn't look happy.

“We’re leaving at five, Caleb?” I asked as I walked toward the door. His grey eyes found mind.

“Sharp,” he said. His voice remained a dry rumble, but there was a teasing element to it. “All your deadlines are met, so there’s no getting out of it.”

I forced a smile, nodded, and then went on my way.

Amelia looked amazing. She wore a pale pink, perfectly fitted skirt and a white turtleneck, two rows of pearls around her neck. She was at the copier as I returned to my desk. Her eyes raked over me coolly before giving a little, amused puff of disgust through her nose.

I looked down at myself as I walked to my desk. The dress fit well. I hadn’t worn it in some time, mainly because of the few extra pounds I had put on since starting the job. But I was back at my pre-law school weight, and when I had looked in the mirror this morning, I had actually thought I looked pretty good. It wasn’t flashy. I wasn’t showing a lot of skin. But it was professional, feminine... I had thought I actually looked pretty good.

My computer dinged and I looked up.

Good afternoon, Ellie. Time for a quick chat? It was from Nick.

Sure. I’m free now. I waited for the phone at my desk to ring. No doubt it was about the incident with Pete. Instead, another message came through.

Great. Come on up to my office.

I let out a sigh. There was very little I wanted to do less than go have a powwow with Nick about how I wasn’t going to sue the company. I got up all the same, took one more big bite of my sandwich, wiped my hands, and then headed out.

Caleb was walking down the hall. He had recently purchased new suits. The one he wore the day before was new, and this one was as well. It was a dark charcoal color, solid, and fitted perfectly to his body. I might not have been as educated on men's suit quality as Miles is, but I certainly didn't see anything wrong with the quality or fit. He preferred brown shoes and a brown belt. He wore them now. His shirt was an off white. His tie skinny and blue. He was a very fashionable man. I'm sure whatever Amelia had noticed about my outfit, he had too. I ran my hand along over my middle self consciously as he approached.

Caleb continued to approach and I stepped to the side to allow him to pass. He stopped right in front of me. I thought it was going to be a simple smile and head nod exchange before he moved on to rip someone apart with merciless precision, but he took one of his long arms and pressed it to the other cubicle, blocking my path. I wondered if he knew how intimidating the gesture was.

"Going to see, Nick?" he asked. I nodded. He smelled like after shave and wintergreen. I swallowed thickly. "I'm glad you're coming tonight. You let me buy that first drink for you. You can celebrate with that buffoon afterward."

"Celebrate?" I asked. "What buffoon?"

He winked at me and removed his arm from the cubicle. He strolled past me and patted my arm in a collegial manner with the stack of papers he had in his hand. He leaned in close, his lips actually touched my ear. I felt a jolt rocket through me as his breath, hot and smelling of wintergreen, said, "You'll get 112."

He pressed on in such a fluid moment I wondered if I'd imagined it. *You look beautiful.* I remained standing, processing, and heard his voice from behind me, "Mark. A moment?"

I was losing my mind.

I walked up the stairs to Nick's office. I needed to work off some of the nervous energy. I knocked on the door frame of Nick's office and he smiled and waved me in. His office was large. There were two large windows overlooking the city and I enjoyed the view as I lowered myself into the seat.

“How’re you doing today, Ellie?” he asked. I had always liked Nick. He expected a lot but was always fair, always kind. My most recent public dressing down had been out of character for him and it truly represented how monumental the transgression had been.

“Very good, thanks,” I answered. I waited anxiously.

“Well, I’ve heard about what happened with Peter,” he said. I nodded, wanting to be anywhere but there. The conversation was not necessary. It was awkward, embarrassing, and uncomfortable. I just wanted to go back to work. “And let me tell you, he has been reprimanded, it’s in his file, and we do not tolerate that kind of behavior in this company. If his behavior is not corrected, it will result in termination.”

“I know,” I smiled. “I’ve never been treated with anything but respect by management.”

It still made me uncomfortable. I didn’t want anyone to lose their job because of me.

“Well I’m glad to hear that,” Nick said. “You’re a very valued member of the M&A team. Best damn associate I’ve ever had, let me tell you that.”

I smiled proudly. It was the first real smile I’d managed in some time. “Thank you.”

“I know it’s been a rough transition into the senior role-”

“I had some family matters,” I hurried out. “It wasn’t the work. I can handle the work.”

“That’s what Caleb said. He says you’re doing great work. He can’t speak highly enough of you. Chris too.”

“That means a lot. I have a lot of respect for them.”

“So, considering the extra work you’ve taken on, your exemplary effort and product, the recommendation and feedback from Caleb and Chris, and my own experience as your manager, I’d like to offer you the open Senior Associate position with a new salary beginning at the next pay cycle of one-o-nine five.”

I struggled to contain the smile that wanted to burst across my face. I sucked in through my nose and I was a breath away from accepting with a passionate thank you and an excited shake of the hand. Caleb’s voice rumbled through my head.

You need to grow a backbone.

You’ll get 112.

“That’s fantastic, sir,” I said. “But I want 115.”

Nicks eyebrows rose in surprise. My heart was pounding violently in my ribcage. Doubt immediately raced through my mind. He looked down, rolled his pen.

“110,” he answered.

“Nick, that’s one of the most insulting counter offers I’d ever heard,” I answered, the actual ridiculousness of the offer spurring me on. Five hundred dollars more a year? For a company that generated over 20 *billion* in revenue the year before. “115. I’m worth that. I’m the only one that can replace Caleb and maintain his output. Anyone else will be a loss. You know that. 115,” I repeated. He jutted out his lower lip, glancing at his paper.

“I can approve you for 112,” he finally said. Flickering his eyes at me. “That’s what Caleb was making when he was promoted. You won’t get more than that.”

I reached out my hand and he met me with a firm grip. I accepted, “112.”

“You’ll get it this pay period. I’m making it retroactive to the 14th.”

“Yes, sir,” I said. I tried not to smile too widely, but the excitement of a twenty two thousand dollar pay raise was hard to contain.

“You’re going to be partner one day,” Nick told me, a bemused smile on his face. “Keep it up, Ellie.”

“Thank you,” I said, allowing myself a smile. I took the stairs again. I looked for Caleb in his office when I returned, but he wasn’t there. I tried to work. The combination of having no immediate deadlines and the delirious excitement made that nearly impossible. I texted a few friends. I texted my mother and father. My mother tried to call but I ignored the call.

I’m at work, I texted to her after ignoring the call.

Will you call me later? It’s been three weeks since your last call. Your father and I want to come down to take you out to dinner. Next week?

I bit my lower lip. “*I’ll let you know. I’m busier than ever. Soon.*”

I watched the dots appear, disappear, appear, and then disappear again. My mother knew. Soon meant next Christmas when I had no choice but to go home and see family. I got up to get a soda at 4:15. I spent some time finishing up my research assignment I had for a project out of the New York office. It was fairly productive considering.

As I walked, I passed Caleb and Amelia chatting by the water fountain. He had papers in his hand. Amelia’s back was to me as she spoke to him. Caleb’s grey eyes flickered upward to meet mine. His stoic face slowly morphed into a tiny satisfied smile.

“There she is,” he said, cutting Amelia off mid-word. She turned to look at me, brow quirked severely in disgust.

“I think two drinks are in order tonight,” I said. It was the closest I could get to sounding flirtatious.

“I think you should be buying me drinks,” he answered. Amelia flushed, pinching her lips together in angry confusion.

“I’ll just go talk to Danny then,” I said. I thought he was going to laugh. The smile stayed on his face, but his eyes darkened. I paused, creating a little triangle with Amelia and Caleb.

“Whiskey, right?” I said, guessing his drink. I added, trying to bring back the amusement to his eyes. “House only.”

“What are you drinking tonight?” he asked.

“Probably beer,” I answered. “I don’t want to get into trouble tonight.”

“You’re coming?” Amelia asked, a bit tightly. “I didn’t think you liked these kind of things.”

Don’t know what possessed me, possibly the high of the promotion, but I looked at her and said, “Well, Caleb said he wanted me to go so…”

Amelia put a tight smile on her face. The muscles in her neck tightened in a rather unattractive manner.

“Well, of course we all want you to be there, silly. You’re always so much fun,” she said, sickeningly sweet. I looked at Caleb again. The amusement was back in his eyes. I felt a little bit foolish, but then he spoke again.

“Company gets your first drink,” Caleb said. He tapped the center of his chest. “I get your second.”

“I promise,” I said.

“Congrats,” he said. “You earned it.”

“Thanks. I’ll see you later.”

“Elevators at five. Don’t be late.”

“I won’t,” I promised again. I walked toward the vending machines, a large smile on my face.

Chapter Notes

This chapter has probably gone through seven different versions and I've been sitting on this for about a week because I've been scared to actually upload it. Hopefully you like it! Let me know your thoughts!

I got up from my desk at 4:57 and grabbed my coat. I stared at the drawer of my desk as I carefully fastened the buttons. After the peacoat was fastened, I reached down to open it. After we left the elevators, I'd reach into my pocket and toss them into the garbage. Id' never have to see them again and no one would ever know.

“Ellie!”

I slammed the drawer shut without retrieving the ruined underwear I had wrapped in the plastic baggy left over from my peanut butter and jelly.

“Ope! Didn't mean to scare you,” Danny grinned. He leaned against the cubicle call. “Ready to go?”

I answered with a smile. I'd take care of it Monday. I walked with him toward the elevators. Caleb was in his office, buttoning his coat. He stared at Amelia with a friendly, but rather blank look on his face. His eyes darted over to meet mine, but they did not linger. He rather quickly looked back at Amelia.

At the elevators was a larger group than I had anticipated. Scott and Ethan, who were my fellow junior associates when I worked under Chris, were present. Mark and Tom, two of Caleb's, and now my, junior associates. Peter was noticeably not present.

Anna was there from the Fed team, but I did not see Chloe. Danny appeared to be coming and someone from consulting, a CPA I very vaguely knew as Christian Purdue, was in the

group. I only remembered his name because he played fantasy football with Chris and Caleb, and he usually went by Chris. To avoid confusion, he was referred to as Chris P, and he was not affectionately known as Crispy by most everyone in Mergers and Acquisitions.

“Everyone ready?” Caleb asked as he came out of his office. He flipped the lights off and then approached, Amelia right at his elbow.

“Where’re we going?” Ethan asked.

“McDitton’s,” Caleb answered. “One drink each and some apps. I’m not maxing out the company card on my first night out.”

“That’s a terrible attitude,” Tom joked.

“Never stopped Nick,” Ethan said.

“Jesus Christ,” Caleb said and hit the elevator button.

“That came out of his paycheck, actually,” Mark added.

“What happened?” I asked.

“It was when Nick was still manager, maybe two years before you got here?” Mark said.

“Yeah, yeah, because it was after Caleb got made senior, so like three years I think,” Ethan added. “Maybe even four?”

“So Nick gets hammered and we all end up staying out until 1 am. Bill came back to like 800 bucks,” Mark continued.

“Deb was furious.” Deb was a partner who had retired just after I arrived.

“Yeah and it came out of Nick’s paycheck. So don’t even think about it,” Caleb said and entered through the dingy elevator doors. Everyone filed in. I was in the back of the group, so when the bodies in front of me stopped moving and the doors closed behind me, I felt it brush against my coat.

I heard Amelia prattling to Caleb about going to a place called Deck 10. I’d never heard of it, but apparently Amelia and Stephanie loved it. Ethan and Tom spoke, asking me once how I liked being a senior. I smiled and shrugged in response. Danny and Anna were talking, though Anna was clearly trying to steer the conversation toward Crispy. I did what I did best, which was keep my head down and my eyes focused squarely on my shoes. A number of times I looked up to try and say something to Caleb, but he was settled into very comfortable conversations with Crispy, Amelia and Mark.

McDitton’s wasn’t far. It was why Caleb picked it. It was close enough that those who only wished to make an appearance could pop in, have a quick drink, and easily jump back on the bus or the train. We walked maybe three minutes before walking into the little restaurant.

We had a table reserved in the back and that fit everyone with one or two chairs left empty. Caleb was up toward the far wall with Crispy, Anna, and Amelia. I got sandwiched between Tom and Ethan. Mark sat across from me, Danny to his right.

“One drink each and fifty in apps,” I heard Caleb said. He outstretched his pointer and ring fingers toward the waitress, the red company card resting between. “After that they’re on their own. Put the girl at the end on this card.”

He handed her another card from his wallet. “That’ll be my tab. Bring me two whisky sodas.”

I looked away from Caleb and met Amelia’s piercing gaze. Ripping my eyes from hers, I quickly looked back to Mark. I ordered a Sam’s Winter in the bottle. Tom and Ethan mocked me for not going for the draft. Danny and Mark came to my defense, and I took the teasing in

good spirits, happily jabbing my thumb into the top of the beer neck once it was placed in front of me.

I made sure to eat enough. I still wasn't entirely sure I hadn't just had too much to drink on an empty stomach. It wasn't likely, but better safe than sorry. Danny, Ethan and Tom drove the conversation and seemed content with my intermittent responses. I took a great interest in the shy gazes and welcoming smiles passing between Anna and Crispy.

Caleb finished his first whiskey with a single lift of the hand and kick back of his head. He took his time on the second. He laughed loudly a few times, but I was rather certain they were all prompted by something Crispy said. He got up to use the bathroom once. I kept my eyes fixed on him. It didn't seem like he was going to look back and so I almost looked away. But his eyes darted over to meet mine. I lifted my beer bottle and tapped the side of the glass. He winked and moved on, stone faced.

He returned and placed an opened beer in front of me. Amelia's eyes lingered on the beer. Her smile remained untouched and she laughed airily when she looked back at Crispy and added to the conversation. We were there about an hour in all. I had my two beers and a decent amount of apps, and so I was well enough to have driven home if I had a car. Caleb closed out his tab rather quietly but as he got to his feet he said, "Thanks for coming everyone." He looked at me and put his coat on. "Crispy and I are headed out to meet Chris at Tony's. You're welcome to join."

It felt like he was speaking to me directly, but the entire table responded with their answers.

"Oh, Stefanie and some of our friends are headed over to Deck 10," Amelia said.

"Love that place," Danny grinned, pointing in her direction.

"You going to deck 10?" Crispy asked Anna. She shook her head. He added, "Come to Tony's."

"Deck 10 is so much nicer than Tony's. Too many college kids there."

“Not enough cocaine,” Mark pressed his fingers to his right nostrils and breathed in hard. He cackled along with Ethan and Tom.

“It’s not that kind of place,” Amelia snapped.

“You all go where you want,” Caleb said. “I’m going to Tony’s.”

“You’re such a bully,” Amelia smiled and touched his arm. “Fiiiine, I’ll come to Tony’s.”

I wanted to slap her. Like Caleb would even care. If anything, he was talking to *me*. For a very brief few moments I considered parting ways outside and slinking off toward the T stop. Ethan and Tom were calling it a night. They said their goodbyes and peeled off. Danny was talking to Mark. Amelia was flirting shamelessly with Caleb. She was talking about how Stephanie was going to go to Deck 10, but was coming to Tony’s now. Anna was texting rapidly on her phone.

I stepped back, opening my mouth to speak, to say my goodbyes. I hesitated for just a moment. I didn’t want to open my mouth. I didn’t want all those eyes on me. Then I remembered what I did so I could even come out. I felt the intense rush of humiliation and shame. Was I going to waste that? I glanced around anxiously, wondering if he was somewhere closeby, watching.

Caleb turned and scanned over the crowd until he found me. “Let’s go,” he said with a jerk of his head. I took great joy in the look on Amelia’s face as she followed his gaze to me. He had cut her off mid-word again.

He turned and began to walk down the street. Amelia began to speak again without missing a beat and I fell in step beside Anna and Danny. It took about five minutes to get to Tony’s. It was a sports bar. The lights were still up and it wasn’t too busy just yet, but the after work crowd was still filing in. Caleb led us directly to a table with Chris and two others. Caleb and Crispy clearly knew them. They all engaged in what I like to call their bro-shake, which was really just the macho manner in which they shook hands. Chris had his shirt sleeves rolled up and his tie loosened. The two other men were in their suits as well, but had also discarded their suit coats and ties.

“What are you drinking?” Caleb asked me. His voice was a deep rumble over my right shoulder. His hand closed around my left bicep and he pulled me to the left. In a very quick and fluid moment, he sat me down in a chair at the far end of the table. I was across from Chris. One of their friends was to my left, sitting at the head of the table. The seat to my right was empty and Caleb draped his coat over the back of the chair from his spot standing behind it.

“Oh, um,” I started, craning my neck to look up and behind myself. His hand was on the back of my chair. “Just a beer. Something in a bottle.”

“Something in a bottle?” he laughed. “What kind of liquor do you drink, Orla?”

“I don’t want to get drunk,” I explained. “A beer is fine.”

“The girl drinks gin,” Chris said. “And bullshit. You’re getting hammered tonight on us. Big fucking news right?”

I turned to look at him.

“What? Oh, the promotion, yeah,” I said, cheeks turning pink.

“Ellie here just got made senior today. She’s been with us less than a year.”

“That’s damn impressive,” one of the new friends said. “Congrats.”

He held out a hand to shake mine in a dirt, firm, congratulatory manner

“Ellie,” Chris said to me. Amelia, I noted, had slid in beside the chair with Caleb’s coat on it. She leaned her elbows on the table and twisted so her back was to Mark, and Danny. She

was smiling sweetly, hands clasped by her head. I don't think she was used to being the person on the outside looking in. Finding myself at the center of the main group left my mouth dry and my stomach in knots. I glanced to tell Caleb to just get me a beer, but he was already at the bar. I looked back at Chris, "This is Trevor and this is Jack. We all went to BC together, then these assholes decided to get CPA's instead of law degrees. That's how we know Crispy."

I greeted both with a silent smile and a nod. Chris continued. "Trevor is over at Deloitte."

"Oh," I answered. "I'm sorry."

Trevor laughed heartily and it made me feel more at ease, though judging by Chris' flushed cheeks, and the cheeks of the others, they'd been drinking for some time. Peter had managed to get that work to Chris, and Chris had left at two.

Caleb returned and placed a glass filled with ice, clear liquid, and lime. I didn't need to raise the skinny black straw to my lips to know it was a gin and tonic. He took his seat and held out a whiskey glass outward.

"Cheers," he said, sounding bored with it all. I raised my glass and clinked it against his.

"Thank you," I said softly, my lips hovering over the straw.

He winked at me and then looked back to his friends. As usual, I stayed quiet, listening to the conversations around the table. I learned a few things about Caleb while listening quietly to the different conversations. He had played varsity football and basketball, he had graduated top of his class in law school, and his family had more money than God. He had at least one older brother, a surgeon, and he owned a BMW, which he kept parked at his family home in Connecticut, and he paid to have his old Volvo parked in a secure parking garage for his rare trips out of the city. He owned the apartment he lived in, a graduation gift from his parents, and had plans to purchase the unit upstairs to rent out for some extra income. He rooted for Boston teams in hockey and football, but rooted for the Mets and Knicks for baseball and basketball. He was also funny, engaging, and very charming. The waitress came back a few times to flirt with him. He was kind and courteous, but with some subtle hints of indifference, she backed away. His laugh was a very rich timber. His shoulders shook and it came deep from the chest.

I learned that Chris' parents were both corporate Attorneys in New York. His grandfather had been a defense attorney who had worked on a high profile murder in the 80's. It was the only part of the conversation I actually interjected on. It was like meeting a celebrity.

Amelia was engaging and funny. The two friends were quite taken with her and she received the majority of their attention, even at the far end of the table. Part of me wished I sat further down the table so that I could talk to Anna, but I would be lying if I didn't have a little thrill at being in the heart of this particular group, even if I hardly said a word.

"Where are we going after this?" Trevor asked.

"Deck 10?" Amelia suggested.

"Fuck yes," Jack said. He downed his glass of beer.

"I'm not going to Deck 10," Caleb said, tossing down a crumpled piece of napkin in disgust. I listened anxiously.

"Come on, man," Trevor said. He leaned over across me and slapped his hands down onto Caleb's shoulders and murmured, "Maybe you'll get head in the bathroom again."

My face burned and Caleb jerked Trevor off him. I don't think I was supposed to hear that. I had a sudden image in my head of Caleb, red cheeked and sweating, a girl on her knees in front of him. I looked down at the table and pressed my fingers against it. Trevor cackled and slapped him on the shoulders before backing away. Caleb got up and grabbed his coat, drawing the others' gazes. I stood awkwardly, wondering if it was time to say my goodbyes. But I didn't want to go back to my apartment. God only knew what was waiting there for me. I turned to look at Caleb and as he turned to look at me he said, "At least I'll have you to complain to about that fucking place."

I nodded. He was gone in a moment. Off to the bar to close his tab. I was swept along with the crowd of bodies and stepped out to the cold evening air. Steam plumed from between my

lips and I dug my hands deep into my pockets.

Eventually, everyone who had been closing out their tabs filed out of the bar and everyone began walking. To be honest, I have never in my life understood the appeal of bar hopping. Alcohol got you drunk the same no matter what combination of plaster or brick or concrete surrounded you. And if you had a seat somewhere, somewhere comfortable that you liked, what was the point of getting up and leaving for another place?

I walked with Anna, who was accompanied by Crispy. Anne glanced over his shoulder to look behind them.

“Think she finally wears him down tonight?” Anna top murmured to Crispy. I looked backward. Caleb and Amelia were walking just ahead of Chris, Jack and Trevor. Caleb looked to be enjoying himself.

“No fucking way,” Crispy said. “He can’t stand her.”

“Did I say congrats yet?” Danny asked, jogging up beside me.

“Oh, yeah,” I smiled. I was smiling too. I chatted with Danny until we got into the long line outside of Deck 10. I watched Danny step up to the bouncer and hand him his ID. The bouncer handed the ID back, Danny handed him a twenty, and then stepped through the doors. Anna and Crispy went next. My mouth went dry and I felt my stomach plummet violently to my toes. He looked over my ID briefly.

“Twenty bucks,” the muscular man said, handing me my ID back.

“What?” I asked, blinking rapidly. The big bearded man in the tight long sleeve T just blinked, muscles bulging.

“The cover. Twenty bucks.”

“Oh, right,” I said. My skin burned red and I blinked rapidly. I grabbed my purse, wracking my brain for an escape. I could hear Amelia laughing already. How stupid could I be, not bringing cash for a cover? But I never went to places like this. It was a waste of money. Heat radiated along the back of my neck and over the top of my scalp. My heart raced violently and I continued to rummage through my purse, desperately searching for a bill I knew wasn’t there as I tried to figure out what to say.

“Twenty dollar cover for overpriced drinks and bad music,” Caleb rumbled behind me. I didn’t hear Chris’ response. Caleb reached out and handed the bouncer a fifty dollar bill. He put his hand on my lower back and pushed me forward into the club.

“I’ll-I’ll buy your drinks,” I offered as we shuffled along with a throng of bodies. Amelia was chattering to him, walking closely at his other side. He looked down at me, furrowed his brow, and shook his head.

We all piled into an elevator. Bodies and bodies and bodies came stumbling in until I was pressed up closely to Caleb’s chest. Amelia closed in, angling me outward and I found myself backing up into Chris. Caleb and Amelia were talking about work hours. I knew for a fact Amelia didn’t work near the hours we did on SALT.

I kept my eyes down at the floor as I listened. As people closed in, my heart began to race and my cheeks flushed. Crispy was talking to Chris about Anna. The doors dinged and opened and finally the build up of pressure let loose and bodies went piling from the elevator.

We stepped out into a large, narrow lobby with tall glass windows. To the right were a number of large open doors that lead into the Maine bar area. The lights were low, the music was loud, and it looked packed.

“I uh- I have to use the bathroom,” I called. Caleb, Chris and their friends were up ahead. Danny looked back and said, “we’ll be up at the bar. I’ll get you a drink!”

Caleb turned his head over the shoulder that was opposite Amelia. I nodded and retreated to the bathroom. It did little to help my nerves. As I got inside, I had to fight my way to the

sink. Someone said something about cutting in line, but I didn't need the toilet. I needed a moment of peace. I splashed some cool water on my face. It wasn't really enough to ruin my makeup, and it helped ground me a bit. I'm sure I got some odd looks as I leaned on the sink and took in deep, steady breaths, eyes squeezed shut.

One girl asked if I was alright, If someone had done something to me and if I needed help. One girl said she was going to call the cops and 'go after the fucking creep that did it' but I quickly straightened and shook my head.

"No, no, I'm fine," I said.

"I'll fucking do it, watch me, I don't care," the girl said, her Revere accent touching every word. I let out a little breathy laugh.

"I'm totally fine. Nothing happened."

I fought my way back out into the long narrow lobby, leaving my drunken sisterhood behind. My head was spinning a bit. I should have eaten more. If I had stuck to beer I would have been just fine. I wanted to go home. I wanted to walk straight to the door and leave and I'd text Chris to let him know so they didn't keep looking for me.

But Caleb paid for my cover. It would be terribly rude to just leave. I sucked in a deep breath and headed toward the bar. I stepped just inside the open door and looked from face to face. My heart began to race again. I looked down and took a deep breath. I thought I was going to fall over. Good god, not here and not now. I couldn't handle it.

I jumped a mile when a hand touched my shoulder. I looked up to see Caleb standing behind me, just inside the door. He asked, "You alright?"

I nodded. Thank God someone had decided to wait for me.

“We’re up this way,” he said. His hand closed around my elbow and he brought us through the crowd. His grip was firm.

We got up to the bar and he took his card out. I didn’t see anyone from our group there. I scanned the other side of the bar. He handed his card to the bartender and jerked his head toward me, “she’s on mine. Scotch and soda.”

“Whatcha doin’ for scotch?” Caleb had him rattle off a number of scotches before making his selection. The bartender looked to me next, elevating his brow and chin.

“Um, do you make gin and tonics?” I asked. I would have liked to have simply sipped on beer all night, but I didn’t want to mix alcohol. I went from beer to liquor to beer in undergrad. It went very badly for me and the girl I threw up later that night.

“Sure do,” he said. Obviously. What a stupid question. It was a bar for fucks sake.

“And for Gin?” he asked.

“Oh - house is fine.”

“She’ll take the Four Pillars,” Caleb said, leaning against the bar on one arm, threading his long fingers through the fingers of the hand. The bartender went to make our drinks, leaving Caleb and I alone. He smiled at me and asked, “Do you even know how to relax?”

My cheeks turned pink.

“I -“

“We got a table!” Trevor yelled, breaking through a throng of people. His arm flung around my shoulder and I got an immediate whiff of alcohol coming off of him. “We got a table over there!”

“Sounds great,” Caleb said, smile still on his face. “We’ll find you.”

Trevor stared, pink cheeked. “But we got a -”

Still smiling brightly, Caleb asked tightly over the bumping of music. “Why don’t you fuck off, man?”

Trevor looked at me, lifted his brow and said, “Fuck you, dude,” but he said it with a smile and walked off with a wave. The bartender came with our drinks, and Caleb retrieved a free bar stool from underneath the counter.

“Here, I need a break from all that for a second,” he said. I took the seat and my drink obediently. Caleb remained standing and sipped at his own drink. “I can’t believe I got dragged to this hell hole.”

“Your friends are fun though” I told him. He didn’t seem convinced. My brain was completely blank as I wracked my brain for something to say to him. I took a few healthy sips of my drink to help calm my nerves. Caleb was glancing to his left, scanning the sea of faces.

“So, what’s going on with you and Amelia?” I wouldn’t have asked it sober, but as the gin settled in my belly, I realized I had left sober behind a couple drinks ago. I think Caleb had replaced my drink twice at our second stop. He looked at me and stared, as if he hadn’t heard me, and then said incredulously, “absolutely nothing.”

“Does she know that?” I asked.

“I really don’t care,” he answered. He asked a bit flippantly, “so, what’s going on with you and Danny?”

“Danny?” I asked in surprise. “Nothing.”

“Does he know that?” he asked dryly.

“Danny wants to buy me a drink because of my promotion. Literally everyone out with us has tried to do the same,” I snapped. Caleb looked unimpressed. He caught the bartender's attention and lifted two fingers.

“Danny's a tool,” he said. “Don't waste your time on him.”

I sucked on my straw. I was surprised but stared at him for a few moments.

“He's not interested in me,” I said. He turned his grey eyes toward me. His gaze was penetrating and his lips had a slight upturn of amusement. I used to feel this way when I was speaking to a professor at school. All those times Caleb had torn me to shreds, all those times his words had sent me to the bathroom to cry my eyes out before I spent the rest of my night fixing the mistakes I never should have made. And here I was sitting with him at a bar, releasing what a pretty color his eyes were.

“Orla, You wouldn't have the first clue if a man was interested in you.”

“That's not true,” I said, offended. The bartender came and placed two drinks in front of us. I put my empty glass down and grabbed the new glass. His eyes watched the glass move from the table to my mouth. My lips searched for the straw. I could feel myself starting to calm down.

“Oh no?” he asked.

“No,” I answered firmly. His mouth warped into a tight smirk. His eyes were on my mouth as I sucked down the liquor.

“You could go home with any guy in here if you wanted,” he said. I swallowed thickly as he let his grey eyes wash over me from head to toe. I suddenly wished I’d worn a longer dress. His eyes seemed to linger on my legs. I pulled at the bottom of my skirt self consciously. My cheeks flushed and I blinked rapidly.

“Dont,” I said curtly. “Don’t make fun of me.”

I felt my eyes burn and water. I closed my lips around the skinny black straw.

“I’m not making fun of you,” he said, bringing the glass up to his lips. He asked, “Can I tell you a secret?” And then took a small sip.

My mouth was very dry, “What?”

He stared at me. He had a little smile playing across his lips.

“What?” I asked again. He stepped closer, leaning against the bar. I could smell his aftershave. It was easy to forget how handsome he was when we were at work and he was a moment away from stripping me down to a single thread bare nerve. I felt a little thrill realizing he was spending his time talking to me alone at the bar and not Amelia. After all, I was the one who spent the late hours working with him, I was the one that could answer all the questions he needed answered during a high pressure call, I was the one he thought was brilliant...why wouldn’t he rather spend his time with me than her. I leaned in closer to him. At that moment, I wanted him to know that, if by some miracle, he wanted to kiss me, I would let him.

You look beautiful. Maybe he had said it. I felt a little rush of fear. I calmed myself.

My lips parted as I looked up at him. He hadn’t recognized the blouse. His aftershave was too strong a smell. If you got it on your clothes, it never came out. I wanted to kiss him. I leaned forward, head swimming. He smelled heavenly. I really really wanted to kiss him. I might have too, if I wasn’t suddenly jostled by an arm over my shoulder.

“You two gonna join us or what?” Jack asked. Even in my own state, it was clear he was thoroughly intoxicated. “Caleb, if you plan on taking that girl home, you need to get on it. She’s going to leave if you don’t get over there.”

I felt like I’d been hit. I glanced up at Caleb, who was staring absolute lasers at his friend.

“What’s wrong with you?” Caleb asked him, but I was sliding off the bar stool.

“What?” Jack laughed. Caleb grabbed his drink and turned. I waited for Jack to lead us to the tables.

“Orla, sit back down,” Caleb instructed.

“I’ll just see you at the table,” I said.

“Orla, sit down,” Caleb snapped. I kept blinking as I tugged my skirt down. I raked my teeth along my lower lip hard. I felt so so small. So so stupid.

“What the actual fuck is wrong with you,” Caleb said again.

“What?” Jack sputtered.

“Over there?” I asked Jack, blinking, feeling incredibly, incredibly stupid.

“Orla, stay,” Caleb said.

“Yeah, in the corner,” Jack said with a wave of his hand. I began to press through the crowd. “Dude what? I was saving you.”

I found them relatively easily. My heart soared when I saw Chloe and she squealed when she saw me. Trevor got up from the table to give me his seat. Chloe moved to let me in. I was reintroduced to her husband, Damon, who was gorgeous and charming. Also seated at the table was Mark and Crispy, who was now very, very interested in Anna and, judging by Anna's smile, the interest was mutual.

I had been settled in for about thirty seconds when Danny switched places with the now standing Trevor, to stand beside me at the end of the table.

"Can I buy you that drink once you're done with that?" Danny asked me with a smile. Caleb was back about ten feet, another group between us and them with Jack. Jack looked thoroughly confused as Caleb berated him. I could almost hear Caleb. He was barking at him, using his free hand to gesticulate with small, but violent motions. As they closed in, I distinctly heard him say "you absolute fucking moron."

His eyes darted up to meet mine. I quickly looked over to smile at Danny. When I turned my gaze back to meet Caleb, I found the back of his head as he squeezed through the crowd. I turned my head back to smile at Danny.

"Sure," I grinned. My throat ached and my eyes were widened just a fraction of an inch.

"Vodka soda?" He asked, pointing at my glass and walking backward. He wasn't unattractive.

I nodded. "Gin and tonic."

"Any particular gin?" he asked.

"House is fine," I said. He snapped his fingers and gave two thumbs up before turning and heading to the bar.

“He is CUTE,” Chloe said, nudging me.

“He’s been asking about you,” Anna added, cutting Crispy off.

“And he’s out of department so nothing to worry about there,” Chloe said. Caleb was my boss. Even thinking about kissing him had been idiotic. To think he had been flirting with me. Even if he wanted to, he couldn’t. He could lose his job. And my god, I had been about to lean up and kiss him. Thank God Jack had interrupted us. How humiliating would that have been? I had

to slow down. I had to slow WAY down.

I talked to Damon for a few minutes. He was a CPA for Merrill Lynch. I loved talking shop with him.

“Here you go,” Danny said, putting the drink in front of me. I picked it up and sucked on the straw. It wasn’t as good as the one Caleb had ordered.

“Congrats again, by the way,” Danny said. “You hear, Robinson? Ellie got made senior.”

“No way!” Chloe said happily. “That’s awesome! Congrats, chica!”

“Thanks,” I said.

“My life is going to get a lot easier,” she said and looked to her husband. “Ellie’s my favorite person on SALT M&A. Trent! I guess you’re not totally brain dead!” She called. I looked back to see Caleb settling in between Chris and Trevor. I noted he could have easily stood to Trevor’s left, which would have had him standing directly beside the seat Amelia took up.

“Even brain dead, it was an easy call to make,” Caleb answered.

“You been IQ tested?” Danny asked. “You have to be like genius level right?”

“Oh, no, I don’t think so,” I said. I looked over to see Anna leaning across the table and Crispy doing the same, speaking to her privately. I looked away to give them privacy and glanced in Caleb’s direction. Amelia was now up out of her chair and standing next to him, chatting with a bright smile. She stirred the thin straw in her fruity drink slowly. Caleb was looking at her as she spoke. He certainly didn’t look uninterested.

I finished Danny’s drink too fast and he quickly went to buy me another. Caleb and Chris were speaking. Chris was drunk, but he still had an air of confidence and dignity about him. He had his arm over the shoulders of a girl I did not know, but he ignored her as she spoke to a man I did not know beside them.

When Caleb pulled himself away from Amelia, I suddenly had to use the bathroom. But after I made my excuses, I headed toward the bar after him.

“You bought my second,” I reminded him. He turned around and leaned against the bar. “So you can’t be mad at me.”

“You think I’m mad at you?” he asked with a neutral expression and a rumble.

“I don’t know,” I said. The bar stool was no longer open. I stepped up closer to avoid the crush of people. I asked, voice smaller than I intended, “Are you?”

“Well, we were having a conversation and you ran off pretty quickly,” he answered. He motioned to the bartender. He added dryly, “that’s a bit annoying.”

“You said you weren’t interested in Amelia,” I pointed out. I reached out and touched his tie. His ties almost always looked very textured. The one he wore now felt like wool. His eyes were on my hands as they fondled the woolen fabric.

“You said you weren’t interested in Danny,” he replied dryly. I stared at him as a scotch and soda and a fruity looking cocktail, one that looked identical to the one Amelia had been drinking was placed down in front of him. My face flushed red and I dropped his tie. I turned around without a word to walk away. His hand closed around my wrist and he yanked me back. I stumbled toward him. I collided with him hard and it took me a second to push back and straighten myself out. It was violent enough to draw a couple gazes from the bar and the bartender did a stutter step toward us.

“Stop walking away from me when I’m talking to you,” he scolded harshly. I stared at him, lips parted, and nodded dumbly. I took in a deep breath through my nose.

“Sorry,” I murmured, neck craned you look up at him. His hand squeezed around my wrist.

“Don’t leave without me,” he instructed, a bit more gently. “We’ll share an Uber. I’ll get you home safe.”

I nodded. I felt a glow of warmth. It felt good, knowing I’d be taken care of. My parents would be horrified if they knew how drunk I was right now, out on the seaport. His hand remained closed around my wrist. I swear I felt his thumb slowly caress back and forth. He asked, “do you want another drink?”

“I don’t know if I should,” I answered. I felt a bit hazy.

“I’ll get you home safe,” he promised. He motioned to the bartender and pointed at me. His hand left my wrist and he touched my hip. With the slightest movement forward, I would have been touching him.

“You can come stand beside me,” I offered. He looked down at me. His hand slid downward, along the side of my hip and thigh. My stomach fluttered.

“And you can come stand beside me,” he answered, dryly. He dropped his hand and picked up his and Amelia’s drink and left the bar. I waited only a few seconds before my drink was in front of me.

“Hey, you alright?” The bartender asked. I shook my head.

“I’m fine,” I answered and picked up the drink. I walked back to the tables. I glanced at Caleb. He looked toward me. If he had made even a remotely inviting gesture, I would have gone to stand beside him, but he only stared. I walked toward the beckoning and grinning Danny.

“I would have gotten you another,” he offered.

“That’s fine,” I said, placing the straw in my mouth. I didn’t want him to think I was going home with him and I didn’t want him to think I used him either. I sucked down the drink. It tasted so much better than the drinks Danny brought me.

“Shots!” Someone yelled at some point later in the evening. I was sucking down a glass of water that had been put into my hands somehow. I couldn’t remember how I got it.

I turned to see Jack arriving with a tray of shots. Everyone reached for one.

I met Caleb’s gaze as he plucked one from the tray. I said, mostly to him, “I don’t know if I should.”

He lifted his other hand and grabbed a shot. “Live a Little, Orla.” He handed me the shot.

“To Ellie,” Chris said, raising his shot. “On a well earned promotion.”

I blushed at the cheers of graduations. Shot glasses clinked. Caleb’s eyes were on mine as he knocked his back. I followed, gagged violently and shuddering as I did. There were some whoops as I surrendered my empty glass to the tray.

Another drink ended up in my hand. Based on the superior taste, I think it came from Caleb. Vaguely, I remember telling Chloe how beautiful she was and how much I loved her, pinching her cheeks between my creamy palms and smooshing her plump red lips together. She giggled, grabbed my wrists and pulled me into a hug.

“Drunk Ellie is absolutely amazing,” she said, an arm around mine. Anna and Crispy were, quite shamelessly, kissing each other in a side booth. I realized I was staring when Chris threw an arm around me.

“Did I congratulate you yet?” he asked.

I nodded, sucking on the little black straw.

“You’re perfect for the job. Nick knew it, but was afraid of your inexperience. Caleb was adamant though.”

“Really?” I asked.

“Oh yeah, Caleb thinks you're brilliant. I think he thinks you're better than I am by this point.” He laughed good naturedly.

“Oh, I don’t think that’s true.”

“Caleb’s a hardass, but he’s hardest on those he respects the most,” Chris said.

I looked over at Caleb.

“I’m going home with him tonight,” I told Chris. Chris’ eyebrows rose.

“Oh really?” He said.

“No!” I cried. “I mean, we’re gonna share an Uber,” I clarified. “We live close by.”

Chris laughed. “Good, I mean if I knew you were planning to go home with someone I would have made my pitch sooner.”

My eyes widened. “I’m teasing you. Not making you uncomfortable, I hope? No HR complaints coming my way?” He jostled me closer to him.

“No,” I assured. “No. No-no.”

I noticed Danny had moved away and was saying his goodbyes to the others.

“Can I tell you something,” Chris said. I nodded.

“Jack and Trevor are idiots. We have a group chat and Caleb texted this afternoon telling them to leave you alone. He didn’t want them hitting on you. Because obviously,” Chris said, looking me over, “they would. They got you and Amelia confused because she’s all over him. That’s why Jack said what he said.”

“Really?” I asked.

“Caleb doesn’t give a fuck about Amelia. He makes fun of her behind her back all the time.”

I looked over at her, her hand on his arm. I almost felt bad for her.

“He likes smart women. Like you.”

“Amelia’s smart,” I defended her. And she was. I didn’t like her, but I felt a certain level of sisterhood that required I come to her defense, though I doubted she would have come to mine if roles were reversed.

“Anyone ever tell you, you’re a bit oblivious in social settings?”

My cheeks burned. I nodded. “I know,” I said, feeling very embarrassed. “When Caleb takes you home, don’t put out too easy, make him fight for it.”

My lips parted and his arm left my shoulder.

“What?” I asked. Caleb was walking toward me.

“I think it’s time I got you home,” Caleb said. I nodded. I glanced back at Chris. He was with the girl he’d been chatting up most of the night. I felt very off base. Like the ground beneath me was shaking. “I’m gonna go close out. Go stand with Chris till I get back. No running off on me.”

“Ok,” I said, but Caleb walked me over to Chris before leaving me alone. Chris introduced me to the girl. She was very pretty. She looked younger than us, perhaps a college student, so I didn’t know how in the hell she could afford to be in this place, but sometimes I forgot how much money some people came from. She was very sweet. She had the confidence not to be a bitch to me, even when Chris put his arm back around my shoulder. Upon reflection, I think he introduced me as “Ellie, a good friend from work. She’s with Caleb.”

It had not even registered at the time. Caleb came to collect me. He had my coat. I couldn’t even remember taking it off. He helped me into it. I was talking to the girl. I can’t remember her name. I’ve never seen her since.

Caleb had me by the arm as we walked out of the bar. I don’t remember saying goodbye to everyone, but I know I hugged Chloe and Anna and spent some time telling them how much I

loved them and that I hoped they liked me and that I wasn't annoying. They thought it was rather funny and told me how much they liked me. Caleb had to pull me away with a chuckle.

"Get her home safe, please," Chloe called.

"Lots of water before you go to bed!" Anna called. "And aspirin!!"

The Uber pulled up as we got out of the door and Caleb opened the back door for me. I scooted over to the far side and Caleb settled in the middle seat beside me. He took the seat belt from my fumbling hands and clicked it in. The Uber driver read my address back to me and Caleb confirmed it was the right stop.

"I didn't embarrass myself tonight did I?" I asked Caleb.

"Of course not," Caleb assured me. His hand was on my knee, my dress pushed up to my mid thigh. "You were a bitch but you didn't embarrass yourself."

"How was I a bitch?" I asked, very hurt.

"You ran off on me. I told you to stay," he rumbled. His fingers pulsed. He was looking at my legs.

"Your friend said -"

"He said. What did I say?" He asked curtly. My eyes darted up to meet his.

"You told me to stay," I said.

“That’s right.” His hand moved upward, fingers pressing into my thigh. “You should do what I tell you. Not someone else.”

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“Good,” he said. I stared at him, frozen, unsure what to do. His eyes looked over my face. My lips parted and leaned forward. I stopped myself and leaned back. He smiled, “No, no,” he scolded. “Go on.”

I leaned forward and pushed myself upward. I pressed my lips to his. I fell back and bit my bottom lip. “I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“Don’t be sorry,” he said, voice soft, but heavy. “I’ve wanted that for a long time.”

I swallowed. My throat was bone dry. “Really?”

“Orla, you’ve been a cunt to me since the day you started,” he said. That word surprised me and sat stunned. “I told you, you wouldn’t know if a man was interested in you if your life depended on it.”

I only stared. His hand was on my thigh. “Kiss me again.”

I did. I sat up and kissed him, putting a bit more onto the kiss. His lips parted and he deepened it. I jerked backward and pressed myself up against the car door.

“Something wrong?” he asked, brow furrowed. I leaned forward and grabbed the collar of his shirt. I breathed in deeply. He was wearing one of his handsome new suits. There was nothing on the shirt. I tried his suit jacket. There was nothing. Remnants we’re on his outer coat. I pressed my nose to his neck. It was still strong on his flesh. I leaned back with a frown, eyes fixed on him hard. He laughed, “you’re so wasted.”

He cupped my cheek, his thumb gently caressed my flushed skin. “You alright?”

I nodded. He leaned down and kissed me again. His teeth scraped along my lower lip. His hand was on my upper waist when the car pulled to a stop. He thanked the driver and unbuckled me. He got me out of the car. I heard the Uber driver said “good luck bro,” and Caleb shut the door. He put his arm around my middle and reached into my purse. He retrieved my keys and opened the door. He did not attempt to use the questionable elevator and instead walked me up the three floors. At the door, he unlocked the deadbolts and let us inside. After stepping in, he made sure everything was locked up tight.

Chris’ words echoed in my head. Was I supposed to sleep with him? Was that the expectation? He’d spent a lot of money. I should have been more insistent. I glanced around in sudden terror, but was quickly satisfied we were completely alone.

“Do you - do you want a drink?” I asked. “I have wine.”

I tripped once, but eventually, I got to the fridge and poured two glasses of wine. I raised the glass to my lips and took two big sips before handing him his glass.

“Orla?” He asked. He stepped into the kitchen, one hand in his pocket. He put the glass of wine I handed to him on the counter. I took another three big gulps of mine. The glass was virtually empty when he took it from my hand and put it on the counter next to his. He stepped close and placed his hands on my hips. “Just relax.”

He pulled me closer. My heart was thundering violently. His body was very large. His hands, large and warm. I felt that rush of familiarity. He grabbed the back of my head and kissed me. Once done, and the air had violently escaped from my lungs, he pulled back and walked me to the futon.

We sat down and he pressed his hand to my thigh. It soon went to glide up my back. “Just think, it could be Danny’s greasy hands all over you right now.”

“I wouldn’t have gone home with Danny. I’m not a whore.” I slapped his hand off my knee. He reached up and grabbed my chin. His fingers pressed hard into my cheeks. I stared in

shock, eyes wide. He held my face firmly, forcing me to meet his gaze.

“Right there,” he snapped. “You sound like a bitch.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. He let out a low sigh.

“I like when you look at me like that,” he murmured. I stared. He looked at my lips and released my face. His hand touched the back of my neck. “So sweet. Submissive.”

I blinked. His hand squeezed. “I like submissive women.”

“I-” My mouth was dry.

“You were so fucking rude tonight,” he continued.

“I’m sorry - I didn’t mean -”

“You ready to put out then?” he asked.

“Caleb?” I asked again. I was suddenly very scared. He pushed backward. I laid on my back on the futon. I laid there, staring up at him.

“I think I deserve it,” he said. “Don’t you?”

I nodded. He smirked, eyes running over my body. One of his hands slid down my body.

He pushed my skirt up around my hips and then yanked my panties down. “You’re not as smart as you think you are,” he said. “If you think I’d rather have Amelia right now than this gorgeous sight.”

My belly burned and my lips parted. He pushed my dress up to my waist. I tried to yank it down to cover the words. He whipped my hands away hard and pushed the dress back up. Could he see it? The faded black letters that spelled MINE out just below the groomed little nestle of hair?

He didn’t seem to care. He licked his bottom lip.

“God you’re perfect,” he breathed. He forced his thumb into my mouth. He pulled back and began yanking at his tie. He tried to part my legs but the back of my futon got in the way.

“I hate this fucking futon,” he growled, getting off of me. He scooped me up in two power arms and walked me to the bed. My brow furrowed. My mouth was very very dry. My alcohol-addled brain searched and groped and prodded, but reality just escaped my trembling grasp.

He heaved me upward and plopped me down so my head was on my pillows.

“You’re so fucking beautiful,” he said, climbing on top of me. His legs straddled my waist. He was fumbling with his belt buckle.

I felt doubt begin to grow and I wanted to ask him to stop. I didn’t want him to think I was a bitch, though. He’d be so angry with me if I told him to stop now. He’d spent so much money on me tonight. I shouldn’t have allowed it. I took advantage. Now he thinks... it didn’t matter. Caleb slapped one of my calves to the side and then settled down between my two outstretched legs.

“I don’t do this,” I told him breathlessly. His fingers glided up my calves and up to my thighs. His fingertips pressed into the backs of my thighs and he brought my quivering body to his unbuckled groin. Through the fabric of his pants, I felt the rock hard flesh beneath. His dark gaze found mine. “I’m not - I’m not that kind of girl.”

He smiled softly. "I know," he said. He bent forward, leaning his weight on the hand planted beside my head. "Now be a good girl and shut up. I don't want to hear you the rest of the night."

I swallowed thickly. He unbuttoned and unzipped his pants. I looked up to the ceiling and then closed my eyes. The world spun.

"Should you wear a condom?" I asked, eyes still closed. His lips left scorching kisses along my jaw and throat.

"Shhh," he murmured in my ear. My muscles jerked violently. I pressed on his chest. His body closed over mine and I felt an intense pressure between my legs. "Be a good girl and take what I give you, Orla," he gritted against my ear. "Take it. You cunt."

His thrusts were hard and fast. It didn't hurt but the pressure was intense. He growled in my ear, "Dirty slut. You dirty girl."

I continued to press on his chest. His hands grabbed either globe of my ass and he shifted my hips. He thrust harder and deeper until each thrust brought a little cry from my throat.

"Be a good girl for me, Orla," he said. His lips sucked my earlobe into his mouth. His teeth scraped along the soft flesh. "Moan for me."

I did. Moans came from my throat and my hips moved to match his thrusts. One of his hands grabbed my face, fingers pressing into my cheek. He held my face to his and he panted against me.

"That's right," he panted. "You're my dirty little whore. My slutty little fuck toy. Oh, fuck, oh fuck, Orla, I want you so bad."

“C-Caleb -” I broke off as I felt a burst ripple through me.

“Yeah, say my name,” he demanded. His thrusts became jerky, unmeasured, but hard and fast. “Say my name,” he demanded. His hand squeezed around my jaw. His teeth nipped at my cheek. “Say my name.”

“Caleb,” I obeyed. “Caleb. Please -”

I pushed at his chest again. He groaned and his spine arched. He thrust hard. I couldn’t move. I couldn’t get him off even if I’d really tried. Another ripple coursed through me. His lips caressed my cheek and neck. He was murmuring to me.

“You’re so good,” he breathed. My eyes felt heavy. The pillow enveloped my head. My eyes were too heavy to lift. He kissed my nose. “you’re so perfect,” he whispered. “So beautiful. So sweet.”

“Thank you,” I whispered back, sleep slowly beginning to take hold. It seemed like the right thing to say given the compliments. My brain hurt. I continued to try and fumble through the haze, but I couldn’t.

“You’re so good,” he murmured. “and all mine.”

My lips parted. “Caleb?”

“Go to sleep, baby. Go to sleep,” he said. His hands reached around me and unzipped the back of my dress. He peeled it off of me. His lips ghosted along my collar bone. His tongue touched my nipples. I was asleep before the dress was off my hips.

Chapter Notes

Oh! There is a wonderful new story up by another author inspired by the Bought and Paid for Universe. It is called Service by Takes_on_To_Know_One. I will be adding a link here shortly, but it is linked to Bought and Paid For.

I have not contributed to it at all outside of inspiring some of the Characters. So all credit for plot, wonderful writing, and the new Characters goes straight to the author. Check it out!

My head pounded violently at the back of my skull and my eyeballs physically ached where they rest in their puffy sockets. My stomach churned and I longed for sleep. I tried to call back to the comfort of rest, but the pounding in my head did not let me. I groped my bedside table and grabbed my phone. I opened my aching eyes and checked the time. 7:38am. Even out too late and violently hungover, I still couldn't sleep past eight.

I sat up in the bed, hand pressed to my forehead, and screwed my eyes shut. I reached out and grabbed the glass of water beside my bed and popped the awaiting aspirin between my lips. I downed the water greedily. Once done, I let out a sigh and put the glass on my side table. I scanned the room, 'groping through the fog of my memories.

I was alone. I smelled coffee. A sickening feeling then took hold of me. My stomach plummeted to my toes. Oh god... I'd slept with Caleb. I'd had sex with Caleb Trent.

I'd fucked Caleb.

I looked around frantically.

I was hit with a mix of feelings. My entire mind exploded with a million different thoughts. Fear, terror, humiliation, regret. How in the world would I ever face him again.... My heart pounded. I checked my phones for messages... threats... for messages from friends or family telling me my nude photos, videos of me moaning like a whore, had been posted online. I

wanted to cry. He would be furious... he'd kill me... he'd send those photos out. I wasn't even thinking... It was the medication. I was mixing. I was drinking. I was slipping. I wasn't thinking clearly.

My mouth was bone dry. I needed more water. I needed to lay my head on the pillow and sleep forever. I stumbled into the bathroom and emptied the contents of my stomach into the toilet. The smell of vomit and alcohol brought about another round until my back aches and I dry heaved a little dribble of stomach acid onto the toilet seat. I fell back against the wall and placed a hand to my pounding head.

I could remember nothing. I remembered Caleb kissing me. I remembered laying back on the futon. After that...

My stomach roiled and I heaved over the toilet again. I groped for the shower spigot and twisted it on. I all but crawled into the shower, my shirt still on. I fell asleep under the burning spray. When I woke up, my head still throbbed. I pushed myself up and turned the water off. My eyes were puffy and my stomach churned. I was so hungry, but the mere thought of eating turned my stomach and brought acidic bile rising in my throat. I sagged over the bathroom sink for a long while. Water dribbled loudly from the bottom of my soaked oversized shirt and thudded onto the tile. I screwed my eyes shut as I fought the rising nausea. I wanted to crawl up onto a tiny ball and sleep forever.

After some time I finally stripped naked, turning my back away from the mirror. I didn't remember changing. Did I change after Caleb had left? During? Had he done it?

I fought down a vicious tremor that coursed along my spine. I felt another violent wave of nausea. To this day, I don't know how much of it was the alcohol and how much was the crippling realization I was coming to in those two days.

I dressed in an old pair of sweatpants, my alma mater boldly displayed along my right leg, and a baggy long sleeve t-shirt. I laid on the bed, face in the pillows. I cried and at some point fell asleep. I woke up to my phone buzzing. I picked it up.

Did you have fun?

I stared at it. My eyeballs felt like giant, painful meatballs in my skull. The back of my head pounded. My sinuses hurt.

I unlocked my phone and licked my chapped lips. I needed more water, but I couldn't bear the thought of lifting my head from the pillow. It felt like my skull was filled with concrete.

I went through the messages. I reread them. I looked at the use of punctuation. I looked at the words he used. I looked at the tone I read from them. I went to Caleb's number next. I went through our limited text messages. They were all from days I had taken off from work. He needed that tax value, he needed to know what data room the necessary documents were in.

Are you awake?

The messages came down from the top of the phone. He didn't seem angry. I bit my bottom lip. I squeezed my eyes shut. Fat tears rolled down my temples. I opened them and typed.

I'm awake. I said.

Did you have fun?

I waited. My heart pounded so violently in my chest I thought it was going to explode out of my throat. I wanted to go back to sleep. I wanted to have a drink of water. I wanted to go back in time and never go to that Happy Hour to celebrate Caleb's promotion.

I pulled up Caleb's name. I typed, *I hope last night won't make things awkward.*

I hesitated and pressed send. Caleb kept his read receipts on. I'd know when he opened it, assuming he did. I went back to my rapist's number.

I did. Thank you for letting me go.

I waited.

Did you behave yourself?

I swallowed thickly. I went back to my messages with Caleb. He hadn't read it yet. My head pounded violently.

I switched chats.

Yes. I lied.

Good.

I knew there was one of only two possibilities and it made my head spin. Either he honestly didn't know, or he honestly didn't have a reason to care. I pressed my face into my hands. I let out a strange little jerking sob.

Did you drink? I read the text. I answered honestly.

Too much. Are you coming over? I feel terrible.

I won't. You have to promise me something though.

What? Before I could finish typing, I saw Caleb's message come through.

Not at all. I'm glad it happened. No regrets, right?

I get to fuck you in the janitor's closet on Monday.

The two messages came through at almost the exact same time. The piercing pain in my head increased violently behind my eyes. My neck muscles tensed, sending pain radiating down my shoulders and back. My thoughts wouldn't form into words. It was all a feeling. A terrible, painful, confusing feeling.

Nope. I sent to Caleb. I didn't know what else to say. I didn't know how to respond. I didn't know what to do.

Ok. I responded to him. I bit my lower lip hard. I went into the medicine cabinet. I popped two Xanax into my mouth and washed it down with a half bottle of Nyquill.

I slept until about eleven o'clock that night.

I woke up feeling confused and tired. Caleb hadn't texted me. I looked back at the message. "Nope." Who said nope? I felt an uncomfortable tug in my chest.

My rapist hadn't texted me either. I rolled back over and tried to sleep but I was too hungry. I dragged myself from under the covers, soaked with sweat, and grabbed a bottle of water from my fridge. I drank it all standing in the kitchen. I tossed it blindly toward the trash can and then grabbed another. I stopped in the medicine cabinet, took another Xanax and crawled back into bed.

I felt better the next day, but just barely. I spent the day going through my messages with Caleb and my messages with him. Caleb did not text me all day, though he didn't either. I took a couple more Xanax to get me through. I sat on my futon, staring at my TV, eyes glazed over, a blanket over my shoulders.

The next message I got was from him.

Charcoal pantyhose. Black heels, open toed with the bow. Black pencil skirt. Green silk blouse. No panties.

I want you at our spot at 12:15. Have your skirt pulled up around your hips, pantyhose pulled down. Bent over the table.

I stared at the words. I felt so tired. So terribly, terribly alone. My first thought was of Caleb. His hard gray eyes. His broad shoulders. His large frame. His massive hands. How good it felt when he smiled at you. How good it felt when he was happy with you.

I crawled underneath the covers and cried for a good long time. I woke up around 2:00am Monday morning. I considered taking another Xanax, but I knew I'd be useless at work. I laid in bed a while staring at the ceiling until about 3:00am. I got into a scalding shower. I scrubbed myself raw.

When I got out of the shower around 4:20, I threw my hair up into a tight bun, put on some makeup, and dressed the way he told me to.

I got the first train in. I gave Eddie his coffee and slipped into the elevator without a word. When I walked in, I immediately noticed Caleb's light in his office was on. I ducked to the right to go down the first row of cubicles. I looped around the far side of the office. I tried to check to see if he was in the office or not. It was hard to see and so I sat down at my desk and decided against going in to get a cup of coffee.

By the time our 9:00 o'clock call started, I had chewed every nail on my hand down to the nub. The nail on my right pinky finger was bleeding slightly and the cuticle was swollen. My phone buzzed as Manager on the FED team chattered on. It was from him.

Don't forget today. I can't wait to be inside of you again.

I squeezed my eyes shut.

You're so fucking beautiful. It was Caleb's voice I heard. A sudden image of him, climbing on top of me, pulling at his belt. *Now be a good girl and shut up.*

My eyes popped open. My heart began to pound. I felt dizzy.

Take it. You cunt.

I raised a hand to my lips. My fingers trembled.

Dirty slut.

I pressed my palm flat to the desk and pressed my forehead to the back of my hand. I let out a low breath. My stomach churned. My phone buzzed again. It was another message from him.

Did you wear what I told you to wear?

I didn't answer. I put my phone face down. Caleb was speaking. I was supposed to be taking notes. My fingers bungled along the keys. I couldn't control my own fingers.

"The aftershave," I whispered. I double checked my computer to make sure I was muted. "I'd have smelled it."

I saw him, clear as day in my brain, walking into the breakroom in that suit with the thin pinstripes. My fingers froze on the keys.

"He bought new suits..." I murmured. My eyes darted side to side. "He bought new suits." I got up from my desk. I walked in a small circle, my hands on my cheeks. I took a deep breath.

I suddenly heard a ping. I hunched over my chair. The call ended and Caleb had sent a message. He wrote, *get me those call notes ASAP.*

On pure adrenaline, I pushed myself up from my desk and went marching out of my cubicle. I walked down the hall with a trembling hand to the collar of my shirt.

My rapist would have known I went home with someone. He would have been furious. He would be railing. He would be furious.

Caleb would have wanted to know what the fuck was written on my body. He would have said *something*. I was certain. I was horrified. I didn't know what to do.

His office door was open, the blinds open, and he had his suit coat draped over the back of his chair. Chris was standing in the doorway, leaning his forearm on the doorframe. I felt a sinking feeling. Did Chris know? Did he know I had slept with him? Did Chris know his best friend was raping me?

"Hey, Ellie," Chris smiled. "How you feeling? Three day hangover or what?"

I stepped beneath Chris' arm and into the office.

"I know," I said, pinning Caleb's grinning face with a frightful glare. The small smile that had been on his face froze. He looked at Chris a second. His eyes then dropped. He considered a moment, and then turned his eyes back on me.

"Know what?" he asked, brow crinkled in confusion.

"I know it's you," I said. I was unwilling to doubt myself. It *had* to be. His voice, it was his *voice*.

"Chris, could you give us a second," Caleb asked.

“Uh yeah,” Chris said and moved out of the doorway. I stepped inside and slammed the door. Caleb’s eyes darted over my shoulder. Someone would have heard that. He gave a jerky little nod of his head.

“Orla, if this is about this weekend -”

“Admit it,” I demanded. Caleb looked at me like I was insane.

“Admit *what*, Orla?” he asked. I hesitated. “We got drunk. We slept together. Are you accusing me of something? You were into it. *You* came onto *me* for fuck’s sake . I wasn’t even going to come inside but you *asked* ...”

I shook my head. I screwed my eyes shut and shook my head. “ *No*. Not that.”

“Then what?” he asked.

“You -”

My phone buzzed. I looked down. My brow knitted and I shook my head.

It was from him. I opened my mouth, sucked in a sharp breath as if to speak, and then stopped.

Did you wear what I told you? Answer me.

“Orla?”

“I...” I looked at Caleb. He stared, eyes questioning, brow slightly raised. His phone was on his desk, face down, out of his reach. He was leaning back in his chair, palms pressed down

to the arms of the chair.

I haven't been able to get a good look at you today. While you wait for me, play with yourself. I want you wet for me.

A deep breath escaped me and my knees weakened. Caleb got up from his chair and walked over to me. His hand wrapped around my arm and he lowered me into the chair in front of his desk. He yanked on the blinds and they crinkled shut. I pressed my elbow to the arm of the chair and buried my face in my hands. My hands trembled.

“Orla?” he asked softly. I wanted to cry. He must be cringing inside. Oh God, he must be thinking, I fucked the crazy chick.

“I’m sorry,” I told him. “I thought...” I shook my head. I turned my eyes toward him, face crumpling. Throat sore, hardly able to speak, I whispered to him, “I’m going insane.”

He crouched down in front of me and placed his hands on either arm of the chair. I didn’t see judgment in his eyes, fear, or regret. Only concern.

“You want to tell me what’s going on?” he asked softly. His hand touched my knee. It was warm and large.

He hadn't stuck around , I reminded myself. *He left before you woke up. He doesn't care.*

“You must think I’m a disaster,” I laughed. He placed my hand on top of his on my knee. His other hand pressed on top of mine.

“No, I don’t think you’re a disaster,” he said. “I think you’re under a lot of stress.”

“You have no idea,” I whispered. I cleared my throat. “I um...”

He lifted one hand up to wipe a tear away from my cheek. His touch was very tender. I must have imagined him saying those things. I was combing memories. My phone buzzed again. A sob came out of me.

He reached for my phone but I snapped it away.

“No,” I snapped. He pulled his hand back and placed it on my knee.

“That’s fine,” he said softly. “I know we had a bit too much to drink on Friday but... I didn’t think you were *that* bad. I mean, for my own ego’s sake, you’re not sorry are you?”

“No,” I answered. It wasn’t the truth. It wasn’t exactly the truth either. “I - I- I just - I really don’t do that.”

“I know,” he said. “Hey,” he added softly. He placed a knuckle beneath my chin and had me look at him. His slate grey eyes were darting across my face. He looked pensive. His features were very soft. I looked at his mouth first. He leaned toward me.

I stayed still, waiting, welcoming it. The comfort, the warmth. His lips were almost on mine. I felt a bolt of electricity. A jolt of familiarity at the closeness of him. I jerked backward in my chair, turning my head to the side. I rushed out, “I don’t think we should... it was a mistake.”

He stared at me, not comprehending. His eyes ping ponged between mine. A tense, frenetic energy began to radiate off of him. It felt like an eternity that he stared at me. He yanked his hand away from my knee like he suddenly realized it was a hot stove. He stood and straightened his tie.

“Right,” he said. He loomed over me. He cleared his throat.

“I just mean... I mean you’re my boss,” I said. He nodded, coming around the side of his desk and sat down. His skin was flushed. He was embarrassed. I felt an immediate rush of regret. “And...”

“No, yeah, you’re right,” he said, running his hand through his hair. He looked at me and gave a tight smile. “Stupid mistake.”

“I just mean -”

“I have a lot of work to do, Orla,” he said. He grabbed his phone from his desk. “Get me those call notes.”

“Oh um... I didn’t... actually take notes - ”

He looked at me sharply. “What do you mean you didn’t actually take notes?”

“I...” I laughed. “My head was just... Ashley on the FED team usually takes SALT notes so _”

“You’re a senior now, Orla. I don’t know what’s going on with you, but I can only protect you so much. If you don’t want to confide in me that’s fine, but you better get your head together or you might find out you don’t have a job anymore.”

He looked back at his computer. I stared at him, taking in the grim features and blotchy skin. Slowly, I got myself up to my feet and I let myself out of his office as gracefully as I could. I did my very best to keep myself calm. My heart was pounding. I passed Danny as I went. He hardly looked at me as he passed by. I refused to cry. I pushed my desire to weep to the back of my brain and pulled up the report I didn’t get out today. Then my phone buzzed again.

Answer me whore, he texted. I pressed my hand to my eyes and took a breath. I quickly texted.

I will, I promised.

Did you behave yourself this weekend? He asked. I frowned.

I already told you I did, I answered. He didn't know. He couldn't have. He would have said something. Had I been too affectionate with Caleb? I didn't think so. He would have had to have followed us home to know Caleb took me inside. But he hadn't said anything yet. He couldn't know. And he couldn't be Caleb. My head hurt so bad I thought I was going to throw up.

I heard a rumor about you today, he said. I stared. Mouth dry.

You can't trust rumors, I answered.

I heard you're fucking your boss.

I thought I might throw up. I pressed my hand to my forehead. My computer was buzzing. My head was spinning.

That's ridiculous. I jabbed back.

What were you doing in his office?

My heart rate accelerated. My mouth was dry.

Talking about work, I answered.

With the door closed and the blinds pulled?

I PROMISE.

I am not sleeping with Caleb.

I watched the dots. I sucked in a breath and began to type.

Trust me.

I can't stand him.

He's an arrogant asshole.

He thinks he's God's gift to the world. He's not.

Trust me. Caleb's the last person I'd ever let touch me.

The dots stopped.

I waited. They did not come back. I turned back to my laptop. It must have satisfied him because he did not respond again. I blocked my calendar off from noon to 1:00pm. It would be a late day, but at least I wouldn't have to worry about someone looking for me while I was gone.

Caleb was at his desk as I walked down the hall. He looked toward me as I came to the end of the aisle of cubicles. I offered a small smile. A peace offering from my earlier rejection. He stared a moment, face unflinching, and then looked back at his computer. I felt a twist of regret in my chest. It would have felt good, I was sure, to have let him kiss me in his office. And it was *Caleb*. Who was *I* to reject *him*? *But* he was cold and cruel to me before he decided he wanted to sleep with me, and he was cold and cruel to me after he found out it wasn't going to happen again.

He thought you were easy and could get more sex out of you. That's why he tried to kiss you. He doesn't like you, Ellie.

And now he's my boss. And if *he* ever found out...

I stepped into the darkened closed and closed the door behind me. I checked the messages again to make sure I did as I was told. I couldn't risk angering him now. I pulled my panty hose down to my knees. I felt oddly numb as I put my fingers between my legs and pushed them inside of me. I tried to get myself as wet as I could. I pressed one hand to the desk, my back to the door, and slipped my fingers more firmly into me. I thought about Caleb. It came easily, picturing his grey eyes, the smell of his aftershave, his large hands.

Now I was just imagining things. The familiarity. The similarities in their voice and their build. I had *wanted* it to be Caleb, so I forced the pieces together. I was cracking up. I had to get myself together.

My fingers were slick by the time the door opened. I removed my hands from slick folds and pressed my breasts to the desk. I pulled my skirt back up around my waist and waited. I kept my eyes screwed shut. One large hand closed around the back of my neck. His fingers slipped between my legs to test how wet I was. I waited, frightful he would be angry I wasn't wet enough.

His fingers left me and he pulled back with fingers to my hips. One hand went to my shoulder and he pushed me downward. He got me onto my knees and I heard the sound of his belt clicking in the darkness. I smelled must and dust and my knees hurt against the concrete floor. He grabbed me by the hair and dragged his cock across my lips. It was wet-with pre-cum. I kept my mouth shut and my eyes screwed shut. He applied a bit of pressure with the head of his cock and I opened my mouth.

"Blow me," he ordered with a low and grating whisper. All I could hear was Caleb. I cursed myself. I had focused so hard on making it his voice, now it was all I could hear. I obeyed him. I dragged my lips back along his cock and moved my head forward. His cock twitched and I felt a long, winding, hard vein pulse beneath my tongue as I dragged it along the hot flesh. I saw light flash behind my closed eyelids. I knew better than to open them.

I worked my lips along the sensitive head of his cock. I dragged my tongue along the little hole, licking away a glob of pre-cum. It was hot, salty, and bitter. I licked my lips to wet them. I wrapped my lips back around the head of his cock. I swirled my tongue along it slowly. He sucked in a deep breath. There were a few more flashes and then the light stayed on.

“Lick it,” he said. I removed his cock from my mouth and took the time to catch my breath. I pressed my tongue to the base of his cock, I followed the thick vein that stretched up the button of his cock until I got to the top.

“Suck my balls,” he said. I crouched down on my knees. He took his cock from my hand. He gave it a few hard strokes and angled it to the side. The light was bright in my eyes. His balls were smooth, hot, and tight. I sucked one into my mouth and then the next. He smelled clean, his balls were smooth, and I screwed my eyes together more tightly. “Touch yourself.”

My hand went between my legs. I was still wet from my earlier masturbation. I could feel him jerking himself off as I dragged my tongue along one large sack and then the other. His breath hitched and he released his cock. It slapped against my face. He stopped me to press his balls against my face. He groaned softly and then took hold of his testicles and forced them both into my mouth. I began to suck and his free hand returned to his cock. He stroked it hard and firm as I worked my tongue against his balls.

He pressed his cock back into my mouth. His free hand grabbed the back of my head with a fistfull of hair and he moved my head back and forth. He pulled me forward until I could feel his cock pressing down the back of my throat. I fought off the gag. I tried to pull back, but it was not until he released me of his own accord that I actually was able to pull back and take a deep breath.

He tapped my cheek with his cock as I caught my breath. Of my own volition, I reached out and took his cock from him and put it back into my mouth. I continued to suck until he pulled me off of him. He spun me around and bent me over the back before I had a chance to respond.

“Reach around,” he said, keeping his voice low. “Spread your ass cheeks.”

I swallowed thickly, frightened he might try to penetrate me anally. He didn’t. I felt the first hot spray of his orgasm splatter across my asshole. The tight hole flexed on instinct. He groaned again and I felt another hot glob. I opened my eyes for only a moment. The light still of his phone still glowed in the dark room and I squeezed my eyes back shut. Finally, the hot globs stopped and he took a deep breath. He spread his cum along my asshole. It clenched and quivered. He rubbed the thick cum into my asshole in firm, little circles.

Finally, he reached down and very carefully pulled my pantyhose back up. He pulled my skirt back down around my hips. I could feel his cum between my asscheeks. Wet and hot. I trembled as he slowly pulled me back against him. As he breathed in the smell of me, I didn't understand how it *couldn't* be Caleb. The voice... his height, his build, the feel of his lips. I breathed in deeply through my nose. I couldn't smell anything. Just the smell of plain soap. Caleb had smelled strongly of aftershave when I was in his office... hadn't he?

My brow knitted and his arm circled around my middle. His mouth went to my neck. His other hand groped at one of my breasts. I tried to think. I wracked my brain. Hadn't he? He always wore his aftershave. He wore cologne. Caleb had a smell to him. I... couldn't remember. I usually note it. I always notice it.

He groaned softly and I felt his teeth scrap along my neck. I tilted my head to the side. His lips were warm. His tongue was wet. He sucked hard.

But it didn't matter. Caleb hadn't been texting me. There it was. Proof. The man in the supply closet with me right now had been texting me, and Caleb's phone had been right on the table. I had seen his hands. It wasn't Caleb. It couldn't be. My eyes burned and my lower lip trembled. His hand pulsed around my breast and he continued to suck on the side of my neck.

Finally, he stopped. He nipped my neck again and then kissed my jaw. Then my cheek. Then my temple. He picked up my wrist and set my alarm. One of his large, warm hands pressed over my eyes and tilted my head back. He kissed me. Softly. Chastely.

Then, he slowly extricated himself from me. He stepped away and slipped from the room. Once again, I felt that violent urge to just run outside and end this all right now. To finally see who it was who was doing this to me. But I felt his cum between my asscheeks, dripping down between my legs, and I saw the white of the light beneath my eyelids.

My phone buzzed. I looked down at it. It was the video he had taken. I couldn't bear to look at it. I put my phone back down and pressed my hands to my face. Another buzz. I checked.

Walk straight into Caleb's office with the first three buttons of your shirt unbuttoned and ask him for help on your report. If I don't see you go into his office in the next two minutes, this video goes out to the entire company.

I frowned. I was standing in the closet, shaking my head silently. I typed quickly.

Why? I asked.

So he knows you're just a whore.

Please, I begged. Don't make me do this.

My alarm was already buzzing.

With my cum still dripping down your asshole. Now.

My heart banged against my sternum. I sucked in a deep breath. My wrist continued to buzz. It grew more instant. I let out a little cry of annoyance and jabbed at the button. I fixed my hair as I marched down the hall toward the elevator. I could feel his cum. My ass was slick as I walked. I felt it dampen my pantyhose.

In the elevator, I turned on my forward facing camera and checked myself. My hair was in perfect place. I wore very little makeup as it was. That wasn't a problem. I unbuttoned the first three buttons of my shirt. It wasn't so bad. It was how some women wore their shirts to begin with.

But on my neck, dark purple, large, unmistakable, was a hickey about an inch above my right shoulder. There was no hiding it. There was no mistaking it. My mouth went dry, my stomach churned. I picked up my phone and rapidly ran my thumbs along the screen.

Please. Please. We talked about this. This is my job. He's my boss. I can't do this.

I will do anything.

Literally anything.

Anything at all.

Please.

Hello?

PLEASE!!!!

The elevator dinged. The doors opened. I looked up to find Caleb standing there in his thick pea coat, one hand in his pocket, looking down at the phone in his hand. My heart stopped. He looked up. Our eyes met briefly and then his eyes immediately went to the massive hickey on my neck. My mouth went dry.

Christ stepped up beside him. “Got em,” he said, holding up his keys, his security pass dangling from them. His eyes found me and he smiled. His eyes went to my neck next. His brow skyrocketed up to his hairline. “Oh,” he laughed. “Ellie’s got the right idea about a mid-day break.”

I felt a crushing blow of humiliation. My skin was hot, red, and blotchy. Caleb had no doubt told him what happened Friday night, and now this.... Danny’s reaction to her suggestion he knew as well. People were talking. How else did *he* hear I was sleeping with Caleb? Did everyone know?

I looked at Caleb, my lips parted. His eyes were on my unbuttoned blouse. Chris had already stepped around me and got into the elevator. I looked down and realized that part of my bra was visible. I yanked my blouse back together. My fingers trembled.

“Caleb,” I started. He shook his head and side stepped me.

“Whatever, Orla,” he said and stepped into the elevator. I actually reached out and stopped the doors from closing.

“Caleb,” I started again. “You don’t understand.”

“Oh,” he said, jabbing the elevator button hard. “I think I understand just fine.”

I stepped back from the elevator. He shoved his hands into his pockets and gave me a tight smile. His eyes stayed locked on mine, those slate grey eyes staring critically. The doors dinged and slid shut. I stood there, staring at my own reflection in the reflective elevator doors, for some time.

“You could probably get her to fuck you,” Chris said as I stared down at my phone. I threw a frown in his direction. “I mean, you,” Chris pointed at the phone, “could probably get her to fuck *you*.” he pointed at me directly.

I said nothing. I waited for her to message. I stared at the phone.

“Man, you gotta relax,” Chris said, leaning back against the elevator doors. “She obviously didn’t mean it. She was all over you on Friday.”

“She did mean it,” I snapped. “I asked her out, remember. She laughed in my fucking face.”

“Well, no I don’t remember, because that girl is a fucking spazz and probably didn’t even know you were asking her out. Now you have this monster grudge against her for something she doesn’t even remember.”

““We can go over it together over a cup of coffee”” I repeated the offer I had made to her during her second week of work verbatim. ““There’s a nice coffee place about a block from here. I’ll buy you a cup.””

Chris just smiled, still leaning back against the elevator wall.

“I can buy my own coffee. Thanks,” I repeated her terse response. “And then she turned and fucking walked out.”

I had made the offer early one morning, stirring the sugar into my coffee as she sat at the table, typing rapidly at her laptop, *refusing* to admit she didn’t know what she was doing. She’d shot me a terrible glare, rejected me soundly, slapped the laptop shut, and left.

“Caleb, she’s a head case,” Chris said.

“Shut up, man,” I said. My phone buzzed rapidly.

He left.

He saw me though.

Does that count?

Did you see him leave?

A small smile came to my lips. Let her worry. Fucking bitch.

“You can’t be mad at her for rejecting you,” Chris said. Pointing at her phone, moving his hand back and forth at the wrist. “When you’re in her pocket telling her she better not let someone else touch her.”

I ignored him.

“Log off my account,” I said. “I don’t want you seeing our messages.”

Chris lifted his phone and the doors dinged. We stepped out into the lobby. We both gave a wave at the guard and stepped onto the street.

“Gone,” he said. I didn't make him show me. I trusted him. I would never log into his account unless he needed me to. I knew he would do the same for me.

A bitter wind whipped violently down the street and a taxi laid on his horn as we jogged across the street to the sandwich shop. My phone buzzed aggressively in my pocket. I pulled it free as we stepped into the pack little shop and out of the cold.

Please.

It's not my fault.

I was going to do it.

He still saw me.

Hello????

Hello?

It's not my fault.

My thumbs moved rapidly over the screen.

Can you still feel my cum on your asshole? I asked. I sent it and placed the phone in my pocket.

“I'm just saying,” Chris said softly. “You're not exactly being fair.”

“I know that,” I answered. It was the only reason I hadn't gone absolutely insane when I received those messages.

God's gift. Fuck you, cunt. You're my fuck toy, you arrogant slut.

I felt the buzz and immediately pulled my phone from my pocket.

Yes. She answered.

You suck cock so good. I can tell when a girl likes having cock in her mouth. Do you like how my cock tastes?

“I just have to figure out how to tell her it's me. You know, you only get to enjoy that once.”

Chris glanced around the deli. The bell jingled behind us and more bodies crushed in. Others funneled past and we stepped further into the small, hot restaurant. My stomach growled.

It tastes so good, she buzzed. I smirked. And I wanted her to know it was me so badly. *God's fucking gift*.

“Just be smart about it,” Chris said.

“I will,” I promised. “But I mean...”

I turned my volume down, cupped my hand around the screen, and showed him a clip of her dragging her tongue up my cock and putting it back into her mouth. Chris shook his head with a grin. We both knew. She wouldn't say shit. She couldn't. She just got promoted and I had countless videos of her looking more than pleased to have my cock inside her. And the recording from the other night. I had listened to it a thousand times. Soft, breathy moans. *My name*. Even if she did speak. Not a single person would believe her, post *metoo* or not.

And I needed her to know it was me. I needed her to look up at *me* while she sucked my cock like the dirty little cock-slut she was. Then we'd see who God's fucking gift was. She was lucky they were at work, or she'd be a

“I still don't get what you see in her,” Chris said. He was looking up at the menu. He dropped her voice. “I mean she's hot. I get that. I like her. She's sweet but... I just don't get why you

like her so much. I mean, the girl's nuts."

"She's got issues," I agreed cagily.

You sucked my balls like the greediest little girl I've ever met. Did you like that?

Yes, she responded immediately. My cock was hard as a rock and I readjusted my pea-coat to make sure I was covered.

"But she's not crazy like Lexie was."

"Oh, Jesus Christ," Chris remembered and I laughed. "That fucking girl. No one is Lexie crazy."

They shuffled closer to the counter.

What time will you be home tonight? I asked. She should be able to leave work early tonight. Things were mostly under control.

"I don't know man, I just..." he pulled up the picture from her linkedin profile. He sighed softly. Her response popped up.

It depends. If nothing comes down, like seven?

"God's Gift," I mumbled. Chris turned to look at me. He was smiling. Eyes twinkling. "I'll show her God's gift."

I wanted to stop by Caleb's office at the end of the day. I didn't have the stomach to. I wrapped myself in my coat and went the long way back around the office. Stepping out onto the street, I fought the urge to just call a rideshare. Instead, I took the short walk down the icy

sidewalk to the T and jammed myself into the packed car. The Bruins played tonight. I found a spot, crammed on the bottom step of the train, squeezed between three college guys smelling like vodka, wearing Bruins Jerseys and hats. Once I switched lines, the journey got easier.

I settled myself into a single seater and stared out the blackened windows as we went underground. A glass of wine and a couple pills certainly wouldn't hurt. After I told my tormentor when I would be home, he hadn't said anything. If he didn't make any demands, I would fall asleep and deal with the crumbling ruins of my life in the morning.

One of the things that concerned me the most was how he knew I slept with Caleb. He said he's heard a rumor. Did that explain the cold shoulder from Danny? Was it spreading like wild-fire that I fucked my boss the day I got my promotion and nearly fifteen thousand dollar raise? I pulled out my phone and texted Chloe.

Hey, girl. Quick question. Someone made a stupid joke today about the fact that Caleb helped me get home to other night. You haven't heard anything like that going around have you?

I waited, clutching my phone in my lap with sweaty hands as the car jostled from side to side down rickety tracks. Tried and true, Chloe responded almost immediately.

ummmm, no!? Woo said something?

I took a steady breath. I texted:

I don't want to start anything. It's not important. But you haven't heard anything yet?

Her response: *no not at all. And i'm pretty intune with gossip. If i do hear anything ill shut it right down.*

Thanks Chloe! I responded. *You're the best. Seriously.*

I GOTCHU! < 3

The train came to a screeching stop and I collected my bags slowly. I was a bit comforted by the knowledge it hadn't gotten around to Chloe. That didn't mean the guys in the office weren't talking though. Would Caleb have bragged? I fucked crazy Orla?

I beat it down and walked up the small hill to my building. As I stepped inside my apartment, I flicked on the lights and dropped my bag on the ground. I picked up my phone. I couldn't get it out of my head.

Who told you I slept with Caleb? I sent the text message.

Are you home? He responded.

Yes. I answered and then I waited for a response.

What do I have to do to know who you are? I asked when no response came. *Please. You know I won't say anything. Just tell me.*

A quick clip came in from my phone. It was my own, pink, outstretched asshole, lit by the light of his phone in the darkened closet. Fat, hot globs of cum spurted from his cock and landed on my stretched open asshole. It replayed in a loop.

I can't wait to fuck you in the ass.

Look at that tight little hole quiver.

Another clip came through. It was me on my knees, eyes shut, sucking one fat ball into my mouth as he stroked his cock off to the side. I dragged my lips along the smooth flesh, letting

it fall out of my mouth with a popping sound. It looped.

Did you feel all that hot cum in there for you while you sucked?

Another.

His cock was in my mouth, hard and thick, and he rested one hand on the top of my head.

Who are you? I asked. I saw the dots pop up but I knew he wouldn't tell me. I began to type again.

If you tell me who you are, we can see each other more often.

You can come over whenever you want.

You won't have to worry about me finding out.

I'll say your name during sex. You said you wanted that.

I waited, heart pounding.

I do want to hear you say my name, he answered. My heart swelled.

If you tell me, I can. You KNOW I won't say anything.

All those videos and pictures.

I need to know. Please. I am literally begging you.

I like to hear you beg, he said. I hung my head. He wasn't going to tell me. A buzz.

Maybe I will tell you.

My thumbs moved rapidly. *Really?*

Really.

You have to be a good girl for me this week.

If I could just know. If I could only know. Everything would be so much easier.

you promise? I asked.

The one word response came back: *Promise.*

Deal.

I almost felt happy. I almost felt giddy.

You have to do EVERYTHING I say. If you disobey once, we start over.

Deal. I said again.

Good. Go to sleep. You looked tired today.

Wait, I typed out quickly. *Can I cover the hickey? Tomorrow?*

I have some sweaters I can wear.

I was typing out a description of what I had when I got a response.

Wear the black and tan sweater with the cowl neck. That will cover it.

I felt a violent rush of relief.

Thnk you much, I sent it quickly.

Tank you

THnk you

*Thank you****

Go to sleep, baby. Remember. Be a good girl, and I'll tell you who I am.

Ok. I will. Goodnight.

He sent *goodnight* and then nothing. I wasn't hungry. I poured myself a healthy serving of wine and then went into the bathroom. I held the Xanax bottle in my hand. I was taking too many. They were for emergencies. That was what my doctor said.

“ I am trusting you with this. You're an educated young lady. Mixing Xanax with Trazidone will affect your ability to concentrate, your motor functions, and you could experience increased confusion.”

“No fucking shit, Doc,” I said, tossing a Xanax into my mouth along with a Trazidone. I downed it with a big gulp of wine. I would get my meds back in check tomorrow. Tonight I'd sleep.

Would taking a Doxepin with these kill me? I didn't think so.

“ Only for your increased stretches of insomnia,” my doctor had said severely, her mouth set firmly. “ Mixing this with either the trazadone or the Xanax can create a severe reaction. This can include changes in blood pressure, confusion, hallucinations, shivering, blurred vision...”

I had stopped listening at some point. I had to get back on track with my meds. It was clouding my vision. No wonder I thought it was Caleb. I was tweaking out of my mind. But that could wait for tomorrow. Tonight, I'd get a good night's sleep. I tossed the Doxepin back and checked the time. It was only 6:30pm. I'd be up and at 'em tomorrow. If I didn't get to work until 8:00am, I think the company would survive it.

Tomorrow would be a reset. I had to be fresh. I had to pull myself together. Because in just four or five days, I'd have the answer I so desperately needed.

I finished the wine and slid the skirt off my hips. I tossed the pantyhose in the corner. Those were ruined. I slipped into some sweatpants and a heavy sweatshirt to hide my body from myself.

I set my alarm as my vision began to blur. I felt so tired. I couldn't get my eyes open. Tomorrow would be better. Everything would be better tomorrow...

I slipped in passed the exiting man and gave him a quick nod as he held the door open for me. My heart was pounding as I climbed the stairs of the apartment building. Her keys jingled in my hands and I examined the hall for any newly installed video cameras. Satisfied there were none, I pressed my ear to her door and listened. I didn't hear a TV. No light shone from beneath the door.

From my bag, I retrieved my mask and held it at my side. I slid the key into the lock as slowly as I could. I waited. I heard nothing. No movement from the other side of the door I slowly turned the deadbolt. I moved to the next and repeated the process. I moved very slowly.

The door creaked softly as I slowly pushed it open and stepped into the black apartment. Once inside, I gently placed my bag to the ground and pulled the mask on over my face. I flicked the light on. The lamp beside her bed lit up.

I found her in bed, lying face down on top of the covers, a grey lump, a half empty glass of wine at her side table. I walked to her slowly, careful my boots did not make too much noise on the wooden floor. The apartment was quiet. I heard someone's TV next door. A baby was crying. But it felt very still.

Soft little breaths escaped from her partially opened lips. Her hair covered her face. I gently moved it to the side. She didn't make a sound. I frowned softly. I tucked some hair behind her hair. Nothing. I ran my knuckle down her cheek. Nothing.

My mouth watered. Blood rushed between my legs and I glanced back at my bag. Slowly, I lowered myself down to sit on the side of the bed.

"Orla?" I whispered, placing my hand on her back. I asked a bit more loudly, "Orla?"

I gently pressed on her back. I shook her gently. She made a little sound of protest but did not awake. I looked at the wine. Drunk or drugged? Or both? I looked her over. I should have told her what to wear to bed. She was a mass of unending gray.

Her body was light and compliant as I gently rolled her over onto her back. Another soft moan of protest left her. Her eyes remained closed. Her lips parted and a low sigh left her.

"Orla," I said again. I gently touched her shoulder. I placed my hand on the pillow beside her head, ready to cover her face if necessary. I shook her hard and called, "Orla!"

She jerked a bit, made a sound, and just angrily turned her face to the side. I removed the mask from my face and placed it beside her. My cock strained against my jeans. If I needed any more convincing that I was entitled to her, this was it. I had hoped to cum inside of her today in the closet, but goddamn had she not sucked the life out of me. And here she lay, ready for me, like she knew.

Very gently, I gripped the top of her sweat pants and gently pulled them down her legs. I placed a soft kiss to her upper thigh. I kissed the other. Then her inner thigh. Her knee cap. Her calves. I pressed his face to her calf and breathed in deeply. I dragged my tongue up her calf. Her leg dropped to the bed like deadweight. She muttered something.

“Oh, Orla,” I murmured. I helped her out of her sweatshirt. Her breasts jiggled free as I lowered her back down to the bed. The words were beginning to face on her chest. The word MINE as well. I left her naked on the bed and rummaged through my bag.

I returned with my marker, ignoring the fading lines on her chest. She whimpered as I pressed the cool tip to her flesh. I dragged it down slowly along the old outline.

Mine. I thought as I looked her over. *Mine.*

I finished carefully and then capped the marker. My lips found a pink nipple and I groped the breast firmly. A soft breath escaped her. I dragged my teeth along the sensitive flesh, rolling the soft bud between my teeth. She whimpered and I released the vulnerable flesh. I closed my lips back around the nipple. I soothed it with my tongue. I pressed a kiss to her tit and moved to the next one.

I hoped she would be a good girl for me this week. What fun we would have, and then, we’d spend a glorious weekend alone in my apartment and I’d fuck her in every way I’d wanted to fuck her since I she shut me down in that breakroom so cruelly. And I’d show her.

God’s gift.

I closed my teeth around the next nipple. I scraped it between my teeth until her nipple escaped. I once again soothed it with my tongue and then sucked hard. My cock burned. This woman did things to me.

Goddamn fucking right, cunt.

I ran my hands up her thighs, hips, and waist, and then firmly groped her tits. Her swollen nipples pressed to the inside of his palms like little stones. I pressed my fingers between her legs. I considered fucking her in the ass a moment. The first time I fucked her in the ass, she was going to know who I was.

And I was wonderfully pleased to find her pussy wet and warm for my prodding fingers. I slipped my pointer and middle finger into her without an ounce of resistance. Her flesh was hot and slick. She clenched around my fingers and moaned softly. Her hips bucked.

“That’s right baby,” I breathed. I reached up and brushed the hair from her face. Her cheeks were flushed. Her lips were parted. I put my hand back to her pussy. I parted her lips and looked at her pussy. Thick, clear cum was dripping out of her pussy. I massaged it into her tight little hole. I looked around for my phone. I got off the bed again and pressed my fingers to my nose. I breathed in deeply and then placed my fingers into my mouth. I sucked her juices from my fingers and rummaged in my bag for my phone. I retrieved it and returned to her bed. I tossed her leg to the side and lifted her bottom up on my knee. I spread her pussy wide and forced a finger inside of her. She clenched again, hips bucking one more. I hit record and moved my finger back and forth inside of her. She moaned loudly. Her limbs did not move, but her hips moved. I continued to finger her a few more moments before ending the video and removing my hand.

I unbuttoned my pants and pulled out my cock. She lay on the bed in front of me, perfectly peaceful, completely vulnerable, and I squeezed myself hard. I grabbed my phone again. I watched through my phone as the weeping head of my massive cock rubbed against her wet cunt. My cock looked so good nestled inside those hot wet folds. Pink, puffy, wet.

I gently massaged her clit with the head of my cock. She moaned again. I stopped recording long enough to grab her wrist and placed her limp hand on her right breast. I took her other hand and placed up over her head, bent at the elbow. I grabbed my phone again and continued rubbing my cock against her pussy.

Slowly, painfully slowly, I pressed my head into her tight hole. I tried to keep my breathing at bay as I recorded. I slowly withdrew the tip of my cock. I rubbed her pussy again and then slowly pressed my cock back into her. I spread my knees, draping one of her legs over each of my thighs, and tossed the phone to the side so I could grab her hips, far thinner now than the first time I fucked her, and thrust hard. I pulled her toward me with each thrust.

I squeezed my eyes shut and bared my teeth as I continued to thrust. I lifted up one hand, working my hips against hers, and pulled one eyelid down. I let it slip back, perfectly content, no matter the delicious sounds she was making, she was not waking up.

I bent down and pressed my mouth to her lips. I gripped her beneath the chin to part her mouth and I pressed my tongue to hers. She tasted so good. I moaned into her mouth, pressing my nose to hers. I dropped my body to hers, feeling her beneath me.

God's gift. I am God's gift. I thrust hard, down to the hilt. She moaned deeply. I groped a thigh and bent her leg at the knee, holding it up against my hip. My thrusts turned fast and jerky.

“Take it, slut,” I panted against her cheek. I licked the hot skin. “You’re a fucking slave to this cock, and you know it. Take it, cunt. Take it. Fuckin’ take it.”

I groaned right in her ear as my balls tightened, balls that felt so good wrapped securely in her wet, hot mouth, and I felt the first burst of my arousal burst deeply inside of her. My hips continued to buck and I breathed out a long, hot breath into her. I stayed inside of her, relishing the warmth. I turned to look at her, my nose pressed to her cheek, and gently trailed my finger along her lower lip.

“That’s a good slut,” I praised her. “Take my cum deep.” I kissed her cheek. I pulled back but remained inside of her. I grabbed my phone. Slowly, I removed my softening cock out of her sopping pussy. Our juices mixed, and I rubbed my cock against her pussy as a little dribble of my semen slowly seeped out of her. I collected a fat little glob in my fingers and brought it up to her lips. She sucked on my fingers greedily. I stopped myself from speaking. I wanted her to watch this video once she knew it was me. We’d watch them all together, and she’d see what a dirty little slut she was for me.

I sniffled and got off the bed. I went to her dresser and grabbed a pair of her panties. I wiped my cock off with it and then placed it beside her head on the pillow. I put my spent cock back into my jeans and I placed my phone in my pocket and ran my eyes over her one more time. It was a bit cool in the room so I turned the heat up a few notches. I draped a light blanket over her naked body.

I went to my bag next and retrieved my present for her. I placed it on the table beside her gently. Her watch was charging to the side. I rested the watch on top of the box. It was special. New just for her. I sat down on the bed beside her and gently stroked her forehead.

“Be a good girl for me this week,” I told her softly. I trailed my knuckles down her cheek. “And we’ll be so happy together.”

I ran the pad of my thumb along her lower lip and then bent down and placed a soft kiss to her lips. I backed away from her, reluctant to leave, but I knew I had to. Scanned the room and checked my pockets. Keys, Phone, wallet, bag, mask. I looked at her a moment longer before flicking off the lights and stepping out of the apartment. I locked the doors up tight and slipped from the apartment. I could hardly wait for the four days to come.

I envied her though, because I was certain, I wouldn’t be getting an ounce of sleep that night.

Chapter Notes

Part of the problem of taking big gaps between writing is I sometimes forget if I have done something already. Can someone please tell me if Orla has looked at Chris' hands yet (I think she only looked specifically at Danny's hands). I looked and looked and it didn't see it, but I wasn't about to sit down and re-read the entire story. Please point it out, if it happened.

Hope you like it and had a happy Thanksgiving to you all.

A small grunt escaped past my lips. My muscles ached underneath the strain of the weight. Slowly, I lifted it up toward my shoulder and then lowered it back down until my elbow was bent at a 90 degree angle on my knee. The girl on the squat machine was watching me, casting another furtive glance in my direction. I didn't blame her. I watched the vein bulge in my bicep and raised it back into the air. I sucked in a breath and lowered the weight back down. I let it drop to the ground softly and flexed my arm. Lean, muscular, toned. I lifted my arm up over my head and stretched the aching muscle. My dark hair was damp with sweat. My muscles were taut. I grabbed the weight with my left hand and began again. From her spot at the machines, the girl on the squat machine watched the muscles of biceps and triceps ripple from out of my sleeveless T.

I didn't sleep the night before. I tossed and turned. I wanted her in my bed. Just to hold her in my arms and feel her softness and warmth. I wanted to put my nose to her hair and breathe her in. I gave up sleeping around 2:00am and laid in bed until 3:00am watching videos of her pussy as it stroked up and down my fat hard cock.

The lights of the 24 hour gym by my apartment were bright and cool and jarring when I walked in at 3:15. I got in a good couple miles on the treadmill and some good back and arm reps in. My brain was a mess and I would have liked to have spent a couple more hours in the gym, but I wanted to get to work. I put the weight back down and grabbed my half-towel. I wiped my face down and took a swig from my water bottle. I checked my phone. 4:45am. She would normally be arriving at the Park Street stop.

Are you awake?

I sent the message and then wiped down the bench. I walked past the girl on the squat machine. I didn't give her the satisfaction of even the slightest of head turns. I could feel her eyes on me through the mirror as I walked down toward the men's locker room.

"Trent," a regular said and I raised a fist to bump his knuckles. There was no one in the bathrooms as I stepped inside and I put my bag on the sink and grabbed a fresh towel. I grabbed a shower stall and turned on the hot spray

I'm awake, she texted.

Groggy? You shouldn't be drinking with the pills you're on. I sent the text and put my phone into my bag and stepped into the water. I tried not to touch my cock. I was going to make this weekend special. I was going to give it to her hard. I wanted to make sure it would last. I'd have her a shaking, trembling, mess in my arms. I groaned as my cock sprang to life. I soaped myself up, giving myself a few tortuous tugs as I cleaned myself. Once I washed my hair, I turned the water on cold. I stood beneath the ice cold spray until the strain in my cock had lessened. I stepped outside to a couple messages from her.

I know, I shouldn't. My doctor tells me that all the time.

When were you here?

Should I open the box?

I ran the towel over my hair as I read, a small smile coming to my lips. I wrapped the towel around my waist.

I was there around 11:20. Left about 1.

I can't get over how fucking tight your pussy is.

You moaned like a whore. You came so hard.

Yes. open the box.

I brought it special for you.

I grabbed my back and walked to the sinks. I examined myself closely. My abs had suffered a bit from my promotion. I had never been “shredded” as Chris liked to say. He spent more time in the gym than I ever cared to. But my abs were visible and I had that crisp V-line on my hips. I looked at myself in the mirror, imagining how good it might feel to have her small hands run down my abs. I looked down at the buzz.

I opened it.

My cock hardened again. I typed out, *wear it for me today.*

I'll put it in now.

My lips curved upward. She was off to a wonderful start. My fingertips tingled with anticipation. I imagined her inserting the small purple vibrator into her pussy, remnants of my semen still inside of her from the night before.

Did you enjoy waking up with my cum inside you?

I sent the message and put some toothpaste on my toothbrush. I kept my eyes on the phone as I brushed.

Yes, she answered. I left my toothbrush in my mouth and typed.

I like doing things to you while you sleep. Your body is so responsive.

You're so submissive.

You'd be so much happier.

If you just embraced it.

I gave my molars a few more hard scrubs and then spit. I placed it down and grabbed my razor. I shaved and applied my aftershave. I applied it gently. My skin was easily irritated. I used it liberally. It faded throughout the day. I sprayed on my deodorant next, followed by a dash of cologne. Louis Vuitton. Three hundred dollars a fucking bottle. I picked up my phone again.

Is it inside of you?

She typed back: *yes.*

Prove it. Send me a picture.

I waited and pulled on a clean pair of boxer-briefs and put them on. My cock was grew hard beneath the clingy fabric. It was no small wonder she came like a 2-cent gutter slut every time I fucked her. My cock was huge. I got her so fucking deep.

A picture came through. She was lying down on her bed. Her legs were spread. The safety cord dangled out of her pussy.

Send another. Spread your lips for me. Let me see that tight hole.

I sent the text message and then went into the app on my phone. I turned it on. My cock strained painfully against my briefs. I thought about what she might be doing. How she might be feeling. A picture came through. It was her pussy, spread wide with two fingers. I fondled myself through my briefs and glanced over my shoulder at the only other occupied shower. I yanked my briefs down and my cock sprang free.

I gripped my erection. Eight hard inches, six inches of girth. I gave myself a few hard strokes of my cock until it was at full length. I took a picture of it resting in my palm.

That's how fucking hard you get me.

Look at that cock.

I pulled my briefs back up and put on a fresh pair of shorts. I threw on a fresh T and then my BC hoodie. A message came through.

It's perfect.

I actually groaned, bent at the knees and looked up at the ceiling with eyes screwed shut. She was trying so hard. What a good girl.

It's so big.

I slung my gym bag over my shoulder.

Only you get me this hard. You drive me fucking crazy.

How's that feel inside of you?

So good, she messaged.

I bet I'll be able to smell your cunt. I bet it smells so good.

I pulled up the app and turned it off.

You leave that in all day for me.

She answered, “ *I will.* ”

I walked past the front desk and gave a wave.

“See you tomorrow Trent.”

I gave a thumbs up and stepped out into the frigid cold. This coming weekend would be very much needed. I didn't care what happened. I'd have her all weekend, Friday after work until Sunday night, and I'd fuck her until she couldn't see straight and she'd forgotten her own name.

A bitter wind cut through the air and he bounced on the balls of my feet as I checked each side of the road. Hardly anyone was out this early and I jogged across the road. My apartment was close. It only took me about five minutes to get to the brownstone and I relished the warmth inside.

I felt a sense of longing wash over me. I wanted to call out sick and go over to Orla's. We'd spend the day curled up under the covers in bed. I walked into my bedroom and stared at the California king, covered with a navy blue lacrosse down comforter. Thick, dark and warm. She would look so perfect sprawled out in the center, perfect pale skin standing out sharply against the dark blue.

You only told me I could wear the sweater. What else should I wear? She asked.

I grinned.

You're such a good girl.

So obedient.

I'll take such good care of you, if you behave like this all the time.

A black skirt and caramel sheer pantyhose. Black flats.

As much as I loved seeing those calves in heels, I liked being able to tower over her. I picked out a navy blue suit, pale blue shirt, yellow tie, and brown leather shoes and belt.

Send me a picture of your tits.

She was dressed. She was holding her shirt up, her bra cups flipped down, tits out with hard little pink nipples. I could still feel them under my tongue and between my teeth.

Beautiful. Get ready for work. I'll see you soon.

I finished getting dressed and tossed on my heavy pea coat. I was on the train headed toward work at about 5:30am. She would still be sitting in the break room sipping coffee and working away on her laptop if she didn't deviate from her schedule. She had been doing that a lot recently.

Despite the number of empty seats this early in the morning, I remained standing. I spent too much money on my suits to *sit down* on the T.

I went through my camera roll for the majority of the trip. I took a short break to glance up and stare at a group of girls getting on the train. College students by the look of it. Freshman I would bet, based on the time they spent putting on their hair and makeup at 6:00am on a Tuesday. Their giggles were obnoxious, their voices high and shrill. They continued to break my concentration as I tried to look at the pictures on my phone. I patted my pea coat and put my earbuds in and turned my music up as high as I could. It helped drown them out.

I walked past them to get off the train. I did not miss the flirtatious giggles and smiles as I walked by. I looked down at my phone. I already missed her. I just wanted to see her. I wanted to hold her and breathe in the smell of her.

Eddie had his Dunkin's coffee as I walked in. I dropped my things in my office and marched down the hall. I pulled the app up on my phone and opened the scale.

I slid my phone into my pocket as I rounded the corner. She was at the table with her laptop open, but she wasn't working. She had her elbows on the table, her face in her hands, a steaming cup of coffee in front of her. She had put on a fresh pot for me.

I didn't say anything as I poured my cup. I turned around to look at her. I watched her. The slow intake of breath and the steady exhale. Her slender shoulders rose and fell, her breathing was soft, but slightly audible. A small smile came to my lips as I looked at her. She was sleeping. I sipped my coffee, content to watch her for a short while.

Too much time had passed since our last weekend together. Holding her as we slept, waking up with her soft, warm body pressed to mine, my nose in her hair. I finished my cup of coffee and poured another.

She had managed to give me a good scare the day before. It wasn't so much her finding out that concerned me. I knew I could keep her from saying anything as long as I had the opportunity to speak to her like an adult, but anger and confusion lead to impulsivity and I did not want to destroy her career. It would break my heart.

I ripped off a sheet of paper from the skinny notepad on the communal fridge. I scrawled out a little note for her, lips twitching upward. I poured myself a fresh cup of coffee and filled my thermos. I put on a fresh pot for when she woke up.

I carefully slid the note between her elbows and onto the counter directly in front of her. I bent down and breathed in deeply. I lingered. She was warm and soft. Four days and I'd have her all to myself again. I managed to tear myself away from her and I stepped into the hallway. I retrieved my phone and slid the scale upward. I heard a loud bump, heard her hands slapping down on the table, and walked away with a smile on my face, and blood rushing to my groin.

I jerked awake as the vibrator began pulsing inside of me. I pressed my thighs together hard, feeling the little silicon tube stretching me apart. It was a low, internal rumble. It was very quiet. Someone could hear it if they were listening for it, but it could be easily explained away or denied.

Just beside my cup of coffee was a strip of paper removed from the notepad on the fridge. The writing was in delicate cursive.

my beautiful girl, you sleep so sweetly . 2:15 @ our spot.

The buzzing grew in intensity and pulsed inside me. It grew warmer, I swear it expanded. I closed my eyes and ground my molars together.

A message came through on my phone:

I'll turn it off when you've come. Good girls get a nice orgasm in the morning. You took my cock like such a good slut last night.

It turned on and grew louder. A gasp escaped me and I turned around to make sure no one was coming into the breakroom. I squeezed my legs together tightly and pushed my hips downward into the chair.

The vibrations pulled through me, and I pushed my hips downward. The vibrator pressed into the inner vaginal wall and I felt an indescribable rush of pleasure shoot through me. The vibration sped up. I pressed my hips downward again, bucking aggressively. I looked around again, face turned downward and brow lifted. Seeing and hearing no one, I pushed my skirt up and slid my fingers between my legs to press down firmly on my clitoris. I massaged in small circles, pressing my hips toward my fingers, and driving the vibrator inside me further into the spot of agonizing pleasure.

I somehow remained quiet as the orgasm ripped through me. My fingers pressed violently into the table in front of me and as the last waves of pleasure washed over me, I went to my phone.

I orgasmed. I didn't want to use the word come. It felt so dirty.

That was fast.

You dirty whore.

I closed my eyes and then let them flutter open to look at the note: *my beautiful girl, you sleep so sweetly . 2:15 @ our spot.*

I swear, I typed out and sent it to him. The vibrator stopped.

I believe you.

Because I know what a slut you are.

You come for me so much I've lost count. I should have kept counting.

I looked at my coffee. I had a fresh cup beside me. I took a sip. I hadn't poured it, but it was made perfectly.

I'll see you at 2:15.

I read his message and bit my lip.

I have a HUGE call at 4:00 today. I need a couple hours to prepare.

He responded, *so what are you asking?*

I bit my lip and considered. I certainly wasn't going to ask to skip our 'meeting.' That would no doubt anger him to the point he might not reveal his identity. I wasn't so sure he was going to do it anyway. This could all just be some sick game he was playing. It wasn't something I would risk though.

Can I have a couple of hours without the vibrator to get ready?

I sent it and took another sip of my coffee. He was typing. The dots went away. Started again. Stopped. I typed: *I'll leave it in. Just not have it on for a bit so I can concentrate?*

Dots popped up.

You're such a good girl, you know that.

You have until noon. Then I get to play with you.

I felt relief flood through me. *Thank you!*

I collected my things and finished the coffee. I poured myself a fresh cup and then walked back to my cubicle. I ducked down and took the long loop around so I wouldn't have to walk past Caleb's office.

I used my morning reprieve to go through my preliminary report and prepare for the call. It was my first call as an actual Senior. I needed to be perfect. I spent more time reviewing the report than I should have. I didn't bill it all. It would hit my utilization a bit, but I'd rather have a good showing than have full utilization for the week

I read the report so many times, I probably could have recited it in my sleep. I was taking a fourth pass on my preliminary report when the vibrator erupted to life inside of me.

I jerked forward and a little cry escaped me. I smothered it and stared down at the ground. It continued to work inside of me. I pressed my hand to my mouth. My phone buzzed. I reached over and picked it up.

How's your pussy feel?

Does it miss my massive cock inside of it?

Unsure of how to actually respond, I answered evasively, but intimately enough I didn't think he'd mind : *I've never used a vibrator before.*

More dots and then : *no? Do you like it?*

I considered. Not in the middle of a work day sitting in my office, I didn't. I typed, *yes*.

He responded: *Dirty girl. Such a closet slut.*

He added: *did you get your work done that you needed to get done?*

The vibrator elevated in intensity. It warmed. I bit the inside of my cheek.

Yes, but my utilization is going to suck. I could only bill for half of it.

The vibrator began to pulse. I squeezed my thighs together again and pushed it harder into my vaginal wall as I had this morning.

Why is that? he asked .

It's my first diligence call as a senior associate. I want to do well. I answered honestly. .

You're so smart.

You will do well.

I want you to go as long as you can without cumming. When you cum, tell me and I will turn it off.

I could have lied. I could have worked harder to orgasm and be done with it. I didn't though. I had this terrible fear he would just *know*. I tried to focus on work and for about fifteen minutes it distracted me fairly well.

The vibrator started slowly. It was a steady, slow rumbling inside me. Slowly, it began to increase. My eyes worked over my screen with increased concentration and I re-read my

emails multiple times. I rocked my hips forward as the speed increased. I pushed it into my vaginal wall and bit down on my bottom lip hard.

My fingers began to tremble very slightly. Warmth pooled between my legs. The vibrator began to pulse inside of me. I pushed my chair about an inch away from my desk and tried to steady myself. I gripped the edge of my desk and tried to focus on my breathing. All I really cared about at this point was not making an audible sound when I eventually came.

The vibrator continued to buzz inside of me and I pressed my fingertips into the wood so hard one of my nails cracked under the pressure. I screwed my eyes shut, fighting the orgasm that was building up inside of me. I could feel it race up to the precipice and I forced it down, and then again and again. I kept my eyes screwed shut and took a breath.

I jumped a mile as a stack of papers were plopped down on my desk. The scent of his cologne wafted over me. My eyes darted open. Caleb stood there, absolutely oblivious to my discomfort, and pointed at the page. The smell of him washed over me in waves as the pulsing continued to course through me. I fought a shudder and closed my eyes.

He spoke, his deep rumble mingling warmly with the rich smell of his cologne and pulsing of the vibrator, "In situations where we're estimating tax consequences without full tax disclosure, you need to estimate separately. Property, sales, income, for each state and each specific apportionment, and then break it down separately in the report."

I looked at the page and nodded. My movements were fast and jerky. I couldn't look up at him. The vibrator pulsed.

"Does that make sense?" he asked.

"Yes," I got out sounding somewhat calm. He put his hands in his pockets and tilted his head as he looked down at the report. I turned my face away and squeezed my eyes shut as the vibrator pulsed more rapidly. I kept myself from making a sound and looked back at the page. My skin was hot and flushed and I felt a small bead of sweat slide down from my temple. I wiped it away, pretending to scratch an itch with trembling fingers.

“I think this is the first time you’ve ever seen that, so I wouldn’t have expected you to know it,” he said. “Other than that fix, it’s a solid report. Get those updates to me by 2:00.”

“Ok,” I croaked.

“Keep the hard copy. I have some notes on there that should help. Good?”

“Yupp,” I said tightly. He frowned at me.

“You ok?”

The vibrator turned up rapidly and I squeezed my legs together. His eyes were the color of clouds before a thunderstorm. That was how to best describe them.

“Grand.” I rustled up the best smile I could. The vibrator expanded and pulsed. I lowered my head for a second and breathed, “Feeling a little nauseous.”

I lowered my head. His scent washed over me. I breathed in deeply through my nose. God, please leave.

“Oh. You going to be ok for the call at four?” he asked.

“Couldn’t be more prepared,” I said with perhaps too much enthusiasm and a tight smile that I could only imagine I looked somewhat on the maniacal side. I focused a moment on the navy dots on his yellow tie. I hated that tie on him. I always had.

“Alright then. Get that to me by two.”

He turned to leave and I rejoiced. The buzzing was fast and rapid and I squeezed my legs together in concert with it. Once he was out of sight, I'd shove my gloves into my mouth and let myself orgasm. My eyes searched for them rapidly. I reached for them as he approached the exit of my cubicle. He was almost out the door and then stopped suddenly. "Hey, listen. About yesterday."

He turned back, eyes to the floor, and scratched just above his right eyebrow with his pointer finger.

"You gotta be fucking kidding me," I breathed into my palm.

He glanced over the top of my cubicle wall, oblivious to my discomfort. He was tall enough to see over without much difficulty. He walked back toward me, placing his hand back into his pocket.

"It's not going to be a problem. We've been working well together recently. I won't do anything to change that on my end."

I tried to provide a grateful smile. I squeezed my legs more tightly together.

"Not from me either," I got out with some difficulty. The smile was taut across my face.

"Hey, are you sure you're ok?"

He reached out, brow furrowed deeply in concern, and pressed his hand to my shoulder. His fingers were warm and fanned out across the back of my neck. My eyes locked on his. They watched me intently. His hand pulsed on my shoulder. My orgasm rocketed through me. I rolled my lips together and my body trembled ever so slightly, creating a minuscule, but rapid shake of my head. My eyes fluttered closed, but I forced them open again. His grey eyes darted over my face.

"Yes," I breathed out and then sucked in a deep breath. His hand squeezed softly.

“You’re sure? I know you’re going through something.”

“I’m good,” I lied. “I promise. And I’m ready for this call.”

He nodded. His hand lingered a moment. Slowly he withdrew and then exited my cubicle. I watched his head bob over the cubicles as he went. Once he was out of sight, I let my forehead slam onto the desk, and I let out a deep breath.

She walked past my office and toward the elevator. Her gate was slightly different. It would not draw a disinterested gaze, but it was obvious to me. My cock was throbbing. It was absolute agony. The anticipation would be worth it. I longed for Friday. I checked the time. 2:05. As lunch, I had spent a good amount of time scrubbing my face and neck clean. I continued to review her updated report. It was everything I needed and done as described. She had gotten it back to me at quarter of.

I turned the vibrator on. I gently dragged my finger tip along the little bar. I waited another five minute before pocketing my phone and getting up. I dug into my desk door and retrieved the extra tie. I shoved it into my pocket with my phone and took a sharp left after leaving my office. I walked past the copier and toward the staircase at the end of the building. I walked down the flights of stairs, moving quickly as my excitement propelled me further.

Walking toward the janitor closet door always elevated my stress levels. If she stepped outside, it was all over. The closer I got to the door, the better I felt. Even if she stepped out now, I could easily force her inside and talk some sense into her. I got to the door and turned the handle.

I found her leaning against the bench, her back to me, whimpering slightly as the vibrator buzzed inside of her. A smile came to my face. I retrieved the extra tie from my pocket and approached her. I pressed my clothed erection against her bottom, forcing her further into the bench. I ground my hips into her bottom and placed one hand to her shoulder. I pulled her back toward me. A soft, shuddering moan escaped her.

I lifted the tie to her face and wrapped it around her head. She remained very still as I fastened the tie securely over her eyes. I checked it twice to make sure it was tied tightly.

Once satisfied, I reached up and pulled the string, flooding the cramped room with light. Her body tensed and I slowly turned her toward me.

She trembled slightly. Her chin was angled downward. I ran my hands down her shoulders and to her wrists. She was absolute perfection. I took a few steps toward her. She retreated backward until her bottom was pressed against the bench. My fingers searched beneath her skirt. I dug my fingers into her pantyhose and yanked, ripping a hole in them the size of my hand. I forced my hand inward, rubbing my finger tips against her sopping pussy. The rubber string was slick and I could feel the soft vibration beneath my fingers.

With my other hand I tilted her face upward and pressed my mouth to hers. "Kiss me," I breathed. "Like you love me."

Her lips parted and she placed her hands on my forearms. Her slender hands groped firmly as she timidly pressed her tongue out to meet mine. I continued to rub her wet cunt, enjoying the feel of her tongue. I breathed into her mouth, licking her bottom lip. I sucked her bottom lip between mine and scraped my tongue along the vulnerable flesh. She whispered as I applied pressure, yanking her lip back toward me as I withdrew.

I looked behind her and pushed a tool box out of the way. I then took her by the waist and lifted her up. I pushed on her shoulders until she lay flat on her back, with her legs hanging off the edge of the bench. I pushed her skirt upward until it was bunched up around her hips. I made the hole in her pantyhose larger. She wasn't wearing panties, and the pantyhose were soaked.

I knelt down, lips parted, mouth watering greedily as I looked at her cunt. I breathed in deeply. I draped one slender leg over my right shoulder. Gingerly, I placed a tender kiss to the inside of her thigh. Her flesh quivered. I retrieved my phone and pulled up the app. I turned the vibrator up and straightened. I kept her thigh against my hip and hovered over her. I swallowed thickly and said in a throaty whisper, "you have 15 minutes, to cum three times."

I ran my fingers up her thigh, squeezing the soft flesh, before I lowered myself back to my knee. I put her legs over each shoulder. I pressed delicate kisses along each thigh. I glanced down at the vibrator controls on my phone. I turned it down slightly. I then placed my lips to her cunt. I kissed the softly buzzing hole softly. I pressed my tongue into her, feeling the hardened little vibrator against my tongue. When she told me she had never used a vibrator, I was pleased I had chosen to start her off slowly. I wondered if she knew how lucky she was.

I pulled back my tongue and kissed her again. She tasted so good. She smelled like heaven. My cock was straining violently against my boxer-briefs. I dragged my tongue up along her labia. Her pussy was pink, puffy, and hot. Her clit was swollen. I placed a soft kiss to her. Her heel kicked my spine.

My lips wrapped around her clit and sucked. The moan that escaped almost destroyed my resolve. I wanted to be inside of her again.. I pressed my tongue hard into the little bud, poking and rubbing and prodded. Her hands closed around my hair into tight little fists. Her thighs trembled around either side of my face, her heels dug into my back. I licked the sensitive little but in short, rapid strokes. Her hips bucked upward and her hands tightened. She let out a kind of smother sob, shoulders shaking. It almost sounded like a laugh.

One.

I dragged my teeth along the flesh just above her clit, threatening to scrape the little bundle of sensitive cells. I placed another kiss on the little bud and she gasped. I groped for my phone in my pocket and I turned the vibrator up. I could hear the soft buzz. I could feel it against my mouth. I pressed my tongue into her, fighting with the little vibrator for space inside her hot cunt. I curled my tongue inside of her, searching for her clit from the inside. Her hand slapped down on my head and tightened in my hair. This was torcher. Absolute torcher. Oh, this weekend, I was going to fuck her until she couldn't walk.

I reached a hand up and tugged her shirt free from her skirt. My hands went searching beneath the warm knit fabric of her sweater and groped at her breasts from above the black lacy bra. She moaned again. Her back arched and she forced her pussy into my mouth. I pressed my face to the weeping hole, dragging my tongue along the outside of the slick hole. I grabbed my cock through my trousers. My resolve was hanging on by a single thread.

I pulled the cups of her bra down and plucked at the hardened nipples. Her pussy was hot and wet. I pulled back to look a moment at her wet flesh, pink and soft, quivering around the vibrator. What a whore she was.

What a whore *for me*.

I pressed my mouth back on her clit and flicked my tongue against it hard. I felt her orgasm rip through her. I felt in her thighs. I felt it in her fisits as they tightened in my hair.

Two.

I dragged my tongue along the length of her cunt. She tried to mother a moan. I glanced up, ready to place my hand on her mouth, but she bit her bottom lip hard. She was glorious. Absolutely glorious. I placed her clit back into my mouth and licked. I wrapped my lips around the soft flesh and circled my tongue hard. She forced her hips upward and I ramped up the orgasm. The battery would likely die after this. I turned it up high. I sucked and dragged my teeth over her mons again. I opened my mouth and bit, dragging my teeth along her pussy. I placed my mouth back on her clit. I pressed my tongue to her again, Lapping at at her forcefully. My face was covered in her juices. I breathed in deeply through my nose. My fingers pinched her nipples.

Her hips bucked again, forcing her clit harder against my tongue. She bit down on her bottom lip hard. One of her hands gripped my hair hard, forcing my mouth harder into her pussy. Her other hand covered her mouth and she let out a pathetic sob of an orgasm. It ended with a soft gasp and then every part of her went lip.

I gave her pussy a chaste kiss of appreciation. I gave one more to her clit and then stepped between her legs. I wanted to press my erection against her hot center. I didn't. She'd soak through my trousers. I fought a groan. I was always too vocal with her. I couldn't wait until I could speak freely.

I leaned over her. My tie was still wrapped firmly around her eyes. Her lip opened and closed like a fish. I smiled triumphantly. I'd just *rocked* her. Her breathing was audible. Her skin was sweaty and flushed. I'd never seen a more beautiful sight. I groped a tit hard. I pulled her skirt down to enjoy the words *MINE* scrawled out on her belly.

I leaned down to place a soft kiss to her mouth. I pulled back to look at her. She let out a soft little mew. My brow lifted and I felt a shudder course through me. God, she was perfect. I placed my finger to her lips and watched the skin quiver. Her skin was perfect. So clear. I placed another kiss to her lips. She returned the kiss softly. Her lips closed around my bottom lip.

I let a soft groan come from my lips. It felt better than I ever imagined it would. Here she was, skirt bunched up around her waist, bra cups pulled down to show off her tight, pink nipples tight, pussy sopping wet, awake, sober, kissing me.

I kissed her again, gently stroking her hair up and away from her face. I took a sobering breath. Sometimes looking at her was just too much. I felt too overwhelmed. I needed her to look me in the eye and tell me she knew that she belonged to me, that she knew she was mine, and no one else's.

Her nostrils flared slightly as she breathed in through her nose. The right side of my mouth turned upward as I watched. What a fucking bitch it had been remembering to scribe myself before our little meetings.. Of everything, that had been the hardest. I placed a soft kiss to the tip of her nose.

I wanted to tell her she didn't have to worry about the call. I wouldn't turn the vibrator on while we were inside. I wouldn't do that to her. That Chris even felt the need to tell me the meeting was off limits angered me beyond all comprehension. She was mine. Mine to torment and mine to protect.

And for fucks sake it wasn't tormenting. I punished her when she acted like a bitch and she acted like a bitch a lot. It would be better once she knew. Her punishments didn't need to be so psychologically traumatizing. I could bend her over my desk and give her a hard spanking. I let out a deep breath.

I kissed her mouth again. I whispered against her lips, "say thank you."

"Thank you," she whispered. I kissed her again. I looked at the tie wrapped around her eyes. I felt a little smirk come to my face. It would be very cruel. Exceedingly cruel. I trailed my finger down her nose. Just the thought of those sad, frightened eyes... but these games would come to end in just four days' time. I wanted to enjoy it while I could.

God, not cumming for a week would be torture with this one. I pressed one last kiss to her mouth and stood. I took a picture of her. She was gorgeous. Glistening thighs, ripped pantyhose, vibrator pulsing softly inside of her. Her skirt was pressed up to her waist, sweater pushed up, tits out, small, hardened pink nipples straining.

I took another picture and then reached down for her wrist. I gave her fifteen minutes to collect herself. She didn't need to be back upstairs for about 30, but I didn't want her feeling stressed before the call.

I lingered at the door, staring at the tie around her neck. Just four more days. I was entitled to some fun. I let myself out of the janitor closet, and hurried for the elevator.

I sat up with trembling limbs and slipped the tie off of my eyes. I examined it and squeezed it firmly in my hand. It was yellow, with dark, navy blue dots. I slid off the bench on shaking legs.

I squeezed it in my hand. I held it tight. I lifted it to my nose and breathed in deeply. The faintest of smells. My heart thundered in my chest and I pulled up my panty hose. As long as I was careful, they shouldn't run too badly. I tugged down my skirt and straightened my clothing with trembling hands. My hands shook as I worked to remove the pins from my tousled hair.

I didn't understand it, but it had to be. It had to be. I had a horrific, sickening feeling that he was being helped. There was no other possibility. At least two people were doing this to me. It was, *is* beyond dispute, because in my hand, was Caleb Trent's neck tie. I knew it was. I'd seen it so many times. He always wore it with his blue suits. I used to think it was too flashy for him. He wore more muted colors. Solids. Fashionable but tasteful. I hated this tie on him. I always had. And I'd always noticed it. I struggled to put the pins back into my hair. My hands were shaking too badly.

I walked to the door and grabbed the handle. I waited. I checked my watch. Ten minutes. I couldn't leave for ten more minutes. My heart pointed and paced. I brought the tie back to my nose. I couldn't smell aftershave or cologne.

If it gets on your clothing it won't come out.

I felt doubt. Caleb hadn't been texting me, and *he* was possessive. He wouldn't share me. It *couldn't* be Caleb. I'd already been down this road. But it was his tie. I rammed it against my nostrils again.

You hafta lay off those pills, Ellie. You're losing your mind. I shook my head. This wasn't the pills or the wine. This was cold, hard, realty. It was in my hand. The same yellow. The same navy dots.

My wrist began to buzz. I went to the bathroom first. I wiped myself dry with a paper towel, hidden in the bathroom stall. My pussy was sensitive to the touch and I sucked on a breath as I dragged the paper towel across it. Once I was mostly dry, I left the bathroom and I marched for the elevators. This was a very simple issue to resolve. If he wasn't wearing a tie, or was wearing a different tie, then he was involved. He had to be. There was no other explanation. The elevator dinged and I stepped in between Mark and Danny to exit. I ignored their friendly greetings. Amelia was standing in the doorway of Caleb's office dressed in a flattering pink dress. I stepped in the doorway next to her and pinned my eyes on Caleb. He was biting into a sandwich on his desk. His suit jacket was off, draped on the back of his chair. His shirt sleeves were rolled up just below his elbow. He had the arms of someone who worked out.

I held the tie up to him. He looked at it and frowned. Then he looked down at his chest.

"This is yours," I said. He frowned. He was still chewing, pointing at his chest. Right at the identical tie wrapped around his neck. Yellow with navy blue dots.

My brow knitted and I shook my head. He was torturing me, I realized. He suspected, or knew really, that I had slept with Caleb and he was punishing me for it.

"No it's not," he finally said after swallowing thickly. He stood and wiped his hands together. He walked toward me and cracked his jaw. "Mine are custom ordered. Every one I own is embroidered."

He flipped it over to show me the skinny underside of the tie. Nestled in the yellow fabric was small, red italic thread making out CHT.

"Plus," Caleb said, taking the tie from me. "I'd never buy something this cheap."

I looked at the one that had just recently been my blindfold and then his tie. I actually reached out to touch it. The tie he wore was significantly better quality. Thicker. Heavier. Textured. I was vaguely aware that Amelia made a sound behind me. I ignored it. His breath smelled minty. I could smell the cologne on him.

“Looks like a Wayfair brand actually,” he said, taking the tie from me. He flipped it over and there was a tag there. “Yeah, bought at that place across the street.”

I looked up at him. He stared back, grey eyes searching. They narrowed slightly.

“You ok? Your eyes are a bit glassy.”

“Still drunk from Friday?” Amelia snickered. Caleb didn’t react.

“No - I - I just found this on the floor and was convinced it was yours. Ran right over.”

“Not mine,” he said.

“If um -” I looked up at him and laughed, “if you see someone without a tie, send him my way.”

Caleb’s eyes flickered down to where the hickey was on my neck. I pushed up the cowl neck and averted my eyes downward.

“Will do,” Caleb said.

I turned to leave. I couldn’t bear meeting Amelia’s gaze.

“So, what time are we going out on Saturday?” Amelia asked as I left his office. I screwed my eyes shut and turned to go into the bathroom.

I wasn't worried about being too quiet. I'd locked myself in a stall and cried in this bathroom more times than I could count. I wiped my eyes angrily and took out my phone.

Why are you being so mean to me?

I'm doing everything you said.

I'm trying so hard.

He responded immediately: *I'm not being mean to you.*

I typed rapidly: *you arr. you didn't do this on purpose. You bought the tie across the street because you saw it on him. I told you I didn't have sex with him. He doesn't even like me. He's with Amellia.*

I wiped my eyes and jammed send.

You shouldn't start rumors like that . he said. He's not with Amelia.

I typed: *I spent all of high school, college and law school crying in bathrooms you know. I'd thought that would end at some point.*

I sent it. Why not? I couldn't talk to anyone else about it. Dots popped up and then stopped.

You are crying?

I jammed at the keys: *yes .*

More dots and then nothing. I sniffled and wiped my nose.

Please don't cry.

I wiped an eye. Good. I hope he feels guilty.

I cry when I'm sad. You make me sad.

I didn't have to wait long: *I don't want to make you sad. I want to make you happy. I love you.*

I sucked in a sharp breath. I checked my watch. I had to be in a meeting with Caleb and Chris in twenty minutes.

I didn't sleep with Caleb. He thinks I'm a whore now because of yesterday anyway and he wants Amelia. They're going out on Saturday.

I have a meeting from 4:00 -5:00pm. Can you please not turn the vibrator on?

I won't turn it on again today , he said. Tell me you forgive me.

I swallowed. My throat hurt. *I forgive you*, I said.

Tell me you want me.

I want you, I said. As sick as it was, I had a fleeting desire for him to hug me. Just to feel safe and wanted.

I made you feel good today? He asked.

Yes, I answered.

Get ready for your call.

I spent another fifteen minutes or so collecting myself. I spent another five, splashing my face with cold water.

I splashed my face with cold water and then went back to my cubicle.

Chris was seated in Caleb's office as I went by, typing away at his laptop. Caleb was rolling his shirt sleeves back down. He watched me grimly as I went. I checked my watch. He'd wanted us in there 20 minutes early. He was obviously annoyed that I was so late.

I grabbed my laptop, straightened my clothing one last time, and then hurried toward Caleb's office. I hurried in and sat down.

"Oh shit," I said as my laptop turned on. "I'm sorry. I need to get my charger."

I got up and my cell phone fell from my lap. I let out a cry of frustration and bent down for it. Chris reached down to grab it for me and I hesitated.

"Use mine," Caleb grumbled. He handed me the charger cord from his bag. I stared at his tie a moment. When I looked up he was staring at me intently. I forced a smile. No doubt my eyes were red and puffy. I plugged in my laptop before it could die and pulled up the data room. It was my job to know it cold. I tried to shake the fog away from my brain.

"Ready?" he asked us. Chris and I both murmured our assent. Caleb began jabbing at the buttons. "This guy is always working," he said as he continued to jab numbers. "It's 10:00 pm in Berlin."

“Furst,” the deep rumbling voice greeted brusquely on the other end of the phone.

“Hello, Mr. Furst, Caleb here,” Caleb greeted. Even though there was no video, he dashed that charming grin across his face.

“Ah, Caleb.” I noted he did not give Caleb permission to use his first name.

“How you doing today, sir?” Caleb asked. He was so easy with people. Polite but casual. He had such confidence. I envied him.

“Very good, though it is now night. You have received the documents?”

His words were crisp, noticeably accented, though he spoke English well. I noted he was easily taken in by Caleb’s charm as most people were.

I jabbed at my word document.

CT and Client exchange greetings.

I jammed the enter button.

The Client immediately got into the nitty gritty, asking rather complex tax questions that most American tax attorneys wouldn’t have had the knowledge to ask. Caleb’s technical tax knowledge came through distinctly and it was really no wonder he received the promotion over Chris. I couldn’t imagine Chris being so calm under pressure.

It was when the client began getting into the data room that things got dicey. You were expected to know details on these calls. As a senior associate, I was billed out at \$850 an hour. They expected to get what they were paying for.

“I am concerned of California....” The deep rumble of the German CFO began. The neurons in my brain began to fire. California. Page thirty of my report. The Client continued talking. Caleb jabbed the mute button. I didn’t even look up.

“About 30k in sales in 2015, nothing else. New York is the concern.”

Caleb jabbed the button.

“Thirty thousand in sales won’t be much as far as tax exposure goes. The exposure is from a failure to file in 2015. If purchased, we would assist in filing an amended return with California and clean that up.”

I pulled up the calculator on my laptop. Caleb jabbed the mute button.

“Less than three grand exposure,” I said and then sniffled. He jabbed the button. His eyes stayed on me as he spoke.

“You’re looking at around 3 grand in exposure. Probably a bit less. It is New York you want to be worried about.”

I pulled up my prelim report. I heard the click of the button.

“New York over 200,” I said curtly. Another click.

“New York is well over 200K in exposure.”

I was quite aware Caleb was looking at me. I double checked my numbers.

He asked a few more questions about states. Answers I had and quickly handed over to Caleb. The Client asked about specific portions of financial documents. Documents he knew in detail, which was quite rare. Clients never had such in depth knowledge of the companies they were purchasing.

The Client continued to speak and Caleb jabbed the mute button.

“What page?”

“Page twenty four of my prelim.”

He banged the mute button and typed quickly at his laptop.

He moved on to more technical questions next. Chris had that covered. My technical knowledge was nowhere near Caleb’s or Chris’. I diligently took notes. The call took about an hour and a half all in all.

Caleb ended the call and I kept my eyes down at my laptop screen. I jumped a mile when Caleb slammed his fist down on his desk.

“Fuck. Yes!” he shouted. Chris was laughing and I looked between them. “That’s what I’m talking about!”

He shouted so loud I turned my head to look out the glass windows. Peter had lifted his head to peer over his cubicle wall. I looked back to find Caleb rounding around the side of the desk.

“Fucking A-team tight there,” he said, slapping his hand into Chris’. He reached out to me next and I gave him my hand. He slapped his fingers against mine hard but I didn’t care. I was laughing softly at his enthusiasm. I really hated to admit it, but he was turning out to be a fairly good boss. A part of me was sad I couldn’t remember sleeping with him. He sat back down in his chair. “Fucking crushed it, man.”

“That was probably the most difficult call I’ve ever been on. That guys insane,” Chris said, shaking his head with a disbelieving smile. He looked at me, “Most calls aren’t that intense. Ellie, you rocked it.”

“Fucking obliterated it,” Caleb corrected it. I smiled at him. He added, “Jesus Christ. New York better watch the fuck out.”

Boston was a small office compared to New York. New York ALWAYS got the bigger deals. The fact that we landed the Auto deal was a miracle. In the context of a big four accounting firm, Caleb’s reaction was not unwarranted. His passion also made it clear why he edged Chris out for the promotion. That was the kind of passion that saw someone make partner by 40. Caleb was the type to do it.

“This is the fucking Dream Team right here.”

He had calmed down some and was looking at his computer. He straightened his tie. It drew my gaze. When I looked up, his grey eyes were on me.

“Clean up your notes and get them to me, then head out.

“No, I uh - I have the Ostrich project.”

Ostrich . What a stupid code name. I continued, “All I really did today was prepare for this call.” I laughed anxiously, ready for the sharp rebuke about utilization.

“Thank God you did,” Chris muttered and then added, clicking away at his laptop. “And I can take Ostrich. Steve is about 70% utilized for the month so I can give it to him.”

Steve was an associate on my team with Chris before my promotion. He was always under utilized. How some people could just not care always amazed me.

“Oh - ok then...” relief flooded over me in waves. “Then yeah. If that’s ok?”

I looked at Caleb.

“Keep bringing it like that and you can leave at 5:00 every day. I won’t care,” he said. I smiled at him and then at Chris. He returned the smile. I felt approval wash over me and I collected my things happily.

“Orla,” Caleb stopped me in the threshold. I turned to look back anxiously. My eyes darted to his tie. “That was impressive. You should be proud of that. My first call was half as difficult and I did half as well.”

My smile widened. “Well um, while everyone is so impressed, I should let you know my utilization is going to take a hit today. I spent on a lot of time preparing.”

Caleb leaned back in his chair. I waited for a scolding. I was a little surprised when he smiled. “I’m really not worried about your utilization. If you come in under 70 for the month, we’ll deal with it.”

“Oh, I won’t be under 70,” I said. “I probably won’t hit 90 though.”

“Has she ever been under 90?” Caleb asked Chris, elbow to his desk, pointing in my direction.

“Never,” Chris said. Caleb nodded. He looked back at me.

“I’ll let it slide this time,” he said. He winked at me. My skin was flushed warmly.

I sat back down in my chair in my office and grabbed my phone. I wanted to tell someone about my call. I thought about Peggy. She wouldn't understand. My parents would ask to see me again if I messaged them...

I began to type

I did really well on the call, I sent the text messages to him. I waited for a response.

He answered, *I knew you would. You're so smart.*

Do you feel better?

I bit my bottom lip, *yes. Thank you.*

My girl is so smart.

You have no idea how much you turn me on.

I bit my bottom lip again. I typed, *what do you do for work?*

He responded, *well, I guess you're not that smart.*

If you think I'd answer that question.

It was worth a try, I said.

Your cunt tastes so good.

I'm going to fuck you so hard on Friday.

My computer buzzed. It was an email from Nick to me, Caleb, and Chris.

Nicholas Oakes, Tuesday, March 2, 5:36 pm.

To: Caleb Trent

CC: Christopher Johnston, Orla Writ

FYI: good job, team!

Nicholas Oakes, Esq.

--Forwarded Message --

From: Maximilian Furst

Date: Tues, Mar 2, 2021 at 5:32

Subject: Auto

To: Nicholas Oakes

I have completed my call with Mr. Trent. He has inspired great confidence. You should be proud of your team.

mfg,

M.Furst .

I got a text message. It was from Caleb to me and Chris.

Caleb : *Man, you guys make me look good.*

Chris: *I want a raise. God knows that's not fucking easy.*

I typed out a couple responses, but I wasn't sure how to respond. I bit my bottom lip hard. I went with *lol*. I cringed slightly.

Caleb : *I'd have been promoted six months ago if Orla had been my junior.*

Chris: *You'd have been promoted six months ago if you didn't suck so hard on land transfers.*

Caleb: *if I had Orla it wouldn't have mattered.*

I pressed my lips together firmly.

Another message came through from him:

I want you to sleep in your underwear tonight.

Not those sweatpants and sweatshirts.

I typed back: *ok.*

Always think about me when you get dressed. What I would like to see you in.

You should want to look sexy for me.

Ok. I will.

I finished up my notes and then collected my things. I checked the clock. 5:48 and I was going home. I went to Caleb's office before leaving. I just needed some confirmation he wouldn't be angry with me if I actually left. I stopped in the doorway. He looked up from his computer. He had his hand over his mouth and his suit coat was off.

“I’m just gonna head out then?” it was more of a question than a statement.

“Ok. See you tomorrow,” he said. I hesitated. I couldn’t really read his tone. Was he angry? I couldn’t tell.

“If you need me to stay...?”

“Orla,” he said, pinning me with an annoyed glance. My heart rate accelerated. “Go home.”

I offered a small smile. I lingered, wanting to say something. He waited; face turning into a tight smile.

“Ok, then, I’ll go,” I said.

“Have a good night.”

I turned to walk to the elevator. A man I did not recognize stood there on his phone. He wasn’t particularly attractive, but he was very tall. Not as tall as Caleb, Chris, or even Danny, but tall.

I stepped a bit closer to him to see if he would do anything strange. He glanced up and offered a tired smile. He looked back at his phone. There was a wedding ring on his finger.

He got into the elevator and I stepped to the opposite side as him. I sent him a text message.

Will you be coming over tonight? I asked.

I watched the man’s fingers. He continued to swipe lazily with his thumb.

Maybe. When will you be home?

Disappointed, I typed, *I'll be home around seven.*

He responded: *it doesn't take you an hour and a half to get home.*

I frowned. It couldn't be Caleb. Chris knew I was leaving. My stomach turned Chris?

I asked: *If I guess who you are, would you tell me?*

No. You'll find out on Friday if you behave.

“Chris was out of town,” I whispered to myself, rubbing my hand over the top of my head. The man in the elevator glanced in my direction before going back to scrolling. *He could have lied.*

He sent me another message: *who do you think I am?*

I considered it. Who else was tall enough. The only people I knew were Chris, Caleb, and Danny. It wasn't Danny. I'd seen his hands.

My head jerked to the side. The scar. He had the scar. I jabbed the elevator button.

It wasn't Caleb. It wasn't Danny. Chris was tall enough. He had the right build. I continued to jab at the button.

“Everything ok?” the stranger in the elevator asked.

“Yeah, just - forgot something,” I said. I continued to jab the button until we reached the next floor. The doors opened and I hurried over to the stairs. I hurried up, grateful he let me wear flats today. I burst through the doors and marched down toward Caleb’s office. The stairs brought me up along the far side of the copiers, and so I had to pass Caleb’s office from the opposite side. Neither Chris nor Caleb were inside.

I marched to Chris’ cubicle. I found it empty. I stepped inside to take a look at his notebook. It wasn’t a match for the note he had left today.

“Can I help you?”

I whirled around to find Chris standing in the doorway of his cubicle. He had on that winning grin of his. I marched over and grabbed his wrists. He watched me with elevated eyebrows. I examined both thumbs. I sighed deeply. I looked up at him to find his smile had morphed into a confused frown.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I winced. I brought up a hand to my forehead. “I just... can we just not?”

Chris laughed.

“Yeah, sure,” he said, kindly. “You on your way out?”

“Yeah,” I said. He stepped past me and toward his desk.

“Wait just a minute. I’ll walk to the T with you.”

My response was a forced smile. I stepped out into the hall as Chris threw on his coat and grabbed his bag. He stepped out and fixed the scarf over his shoulders.

“Ready?” he asked.

“Ready.”

Feeling a bit dejected, I walked back toward the elevators with Chris.

“How do you like it by the way?” I asked, gently hitting the elevator button. I clarified, “being a senior.”

“It’s fun,” she lied, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. She looked so tired. The doors opened and we stepped inside.

“Caleb isn’t being too much of an asshole?” I asked. I retrieved my phone from my pocket.

“Oh, no. He’s being great,” she lied again.

She came back upstairs to look at my hands. I punched the send button.

“Not a bad boss actually,” I said.

Where is she now?

With me.

We’re walking to the T.

You’ll beat her back.

“Chris?” she asked.

“Uh huh?”

Delay her if you can.

“You and Caleb are friends...”

“Uh huh,” I answered again. A smile began to put pressure on my lips.

“Did he say anything to you... about last Friday...?”

My lips twitched.

“It’s none of my business, Ellie,” I answered. It would hardly be believable for me to say Caleb didn’t say a word.

“So, he told you,” she said. I considered being unnecessarily evasive, but she’d been through enough this week.

“I didn’t get a play by play,” I teased. “He was more concerned you might have regrets and go to HR or something. That’s really all that was said.”

She nodded.

“And... did you say anything to anyone?”

“About that?” I asked in surprise. She was playing with the neck of her sweater, nodding. “Of course not.”

“It’s just, someone said something about it. I don’t want that floating around. I’m trying to figure out who might know.”

The elevator doors opened and we stepped out into the lobby.

“What was said?”

“It was just... it was just a really bad joke.”

“I don’t think there was anything to it then. I’ve known Caleb a while and he’s not the type to brag.” I opened the door for her and we stepped out into the street.

She’s asking if I know you fucked her.

“Who made the joke?” I asked. A bitter wind came crashing down the street.

“Oh, I don’t want to start anything.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it. I certainly haven’t heard anything.”

“Good,” she said and looked down at her feet.

“Hey, mind stopping in Dunks real quick. I need a coffee. I’ll buy you a coffee?” I jerked my thumb toward the doors.

“Um, sure,” she smiled and acquiesced sweetly.

We're getting coffee.

“What about um...”

She stopped, hands buried in her pockets, and looked down at her shoes.

“What about what?”

She looked up at the menu.

“Never mind,” she shook her head with a smile. I let my eyes drop slightly. I allowed myself to think about the vibrator inside of her for just a moment.

We stepped up to the counter and I ordered first. “Go on, Ellie,” he said once done.

“Are you sure? I can just -”

“Order your coffee,” I instructed with a smile. She obeyed and ordered a medium hot chocolate.

“I won’t sleep tonight if I drink coffee,” she explained. I offered up my phone for payment and then we stepped off to the side.

I'll be there in about 15.

I typed, *You'll beat her.*

I think she wants to ask me about Amelia but doesn't know how.

I put my phone back in my pocket.

“Peter hasn’t given me any trouble,” she offered.

“That’s great,” I answered. I glanced over her shoulder at the man trying to meet her gaze. She remained where she was, obviously staring at her feet.

“Next week is going to be rough. With Project Auto starting up for real.”

Our drinks were brought up and we grabbed them. She offered a soft thank you as we got out of the Dunkins.

“Just remember to keep Caleb involved. The moment you start to think you have too much on your plate or you’re falling behind, go tell him.”

“I will,” she said. I grabbed her arm as we got to the cross walk and began to run across the street before traffic could reach us. I could understand why Caleb liked her. She had an inherently submissive nature.

“Get home safe,” I said as I walked toward the red line and she toward the green. “See you tomorrow.”

“Bye. See you tomorrow.”

I pulled out my phone from my pocket.

Amelia can't take a fucking hint.

I swear to god if she doesn't stop coming to my office.

Did she say anything else?

I'm here.

I typed, she didn't say anything else. We just got to Park Street. You have about forty minutes.

Have fun.

I put my phone back into my pocket. I spotted a pretty college girl seated on the bench waiting for the train. She had her text book on her back and she was nibbling on her thumb nail. I stopped beside her, put on my best smile and whistled.

“Astrophysics huh?” I said.

She looked up at me a bit confused, gave me a once over, and then let a shy smile spread across her face.

The first time I had stepped into her apartment, I had smelled the remnants of a linen candle and cherry blossom body lotion. I had leaned against the door frame as I waited for her to open the door. The look of confusion that had slowly spread across her little face was forever cemented in his brain and he had taken the time to savor the moment. Everything about that moment was seared into my brain. *What are you doing here?* She had asked. I pushed away from the door frame, looking over her shoulder at the cramped, cluttered, but clean and orderly studio. *I wanted to make sure you got home alright.*

I had stepped inside and removed my coat. She had stuttered so sweetly. I hardly had the strength to take my eyes off of her and look around at the small space. I had wanted to see how she lived though. Simple, unassuming, neat and clean. As I stepped into her apartment now it was stale. It had hung in the air the night before, but without her delectable body lying prone on the bed, it was impossible to ignore. When I had arrived for our weekend together, the apartment had smelled of garlic and onions, a mango scented candle, and the lavender dish soap that filled the single coffee mug in the sink.

Dishes now filled the sink in mounds. The milk in her fridge had gone bad. On the counter was an opened loaf of bread, crust hardened like a rock. Crumbs stuck to smeared jelly on the unwashed cutting board. A jar of peanut butter was left uncovered and a sticky knife rested on the flipped over cover next to the empty jelly jar, resting on its side precariously close to the edge. Clothing was strewn about that god-forsaken futon and a wet, foul smelling towel was on the floor.

I checked my phone. She was just coming into Kent Street. I had a pretty good jump on her thanks to Chris. I unloaded her dishwasher, which was half full of clean dishes. The counter needed a good scrubbing. The jelly had turned to concrete, but once the counter was wiped and the dishes rinsed and loaded, the window thrown open despite the cold, the apartment smelled a bit fresher. The lighter was in the junk drawer and I lit the linen scented candle. It was the most burned down. I figured she liked that one best. I checked her location again on my phone. Coolidge Corner.

There was an empty bottle of wine in the trash bin, an empty bottle on the counter, and a half empty bottle in the fridge. I poured myself a glass and then dumped the rest down the drain. The bottles clinked as I put them into the large black trash bag. I left the spoiled milk in the fridge. When I left, I would add the spoiled milk to the fridge and take it down to the dumpster before leaving. She'd sleep better in a clean apartment.

I moved into the bathroom next. The counter was spotted with toothpaste, but nothing a warm rag couldn't take care of. Her pills were nestled neatly in the cabinet in the bathroom. I uncapped each one and dumped the pills into my palm. I counted carefully and then looked at the refill date. She was going to have some explaining to do when she called the doctor. I put the bottles back and wiped down the mirror and remaining surfaces with some windex and a clorox wipe. Other than a small bit of hair in the drain, the shower needed little attention. She had a russian doll of paper grocery bags underneath the sink. I dumped the overflowing bin into the bag and then went back into the kitchen.

I checked my phone. She was at Summit Ave. I turned off the lights in the apartment and went over to my bag and retrieved the blindfold. There would be no need for handcuffs. I nestled myself beside the door and waited with a pounding heart. As exciting as it was, I would be relieved when this was over for us. Five minutes or so passed as I stood in the dark apartment with a violent pounding in my ribcage. I heard the keys slide into the locks and slowly the door creaked open. My eyes were well adjusted to the light when I saw her slip inside. Her hand reached out, groping for the light switch. I slid behind her, pushing the door shut with an arm behind me. A gasp escaped her when the door clicked shut but she was otherwise silent. I pressed my palm to her eyes and pulled her back to my, trapping her arms against her body with mine around her middle.

Immediately, the feeling of her in my arms sent blood rushing from my brain and all my extremities. He buried my nose into her hair and breathed in deeply. She waited, body trembling, but offered no resistance. I wrapped my lips around her earlobe and nibbled gently. Fighting back the urge to sigh, I walked us toward the bed. Once the front of her thighs were pressed to the mattress, I slowly began to pull my hand away from her eyes. Gingerly, I pressed a featherlight kiss to her cheek.

Her lips were parted, her nostrils were flaring, her throat was quivering. She was so beautiful. So sweet. I placed a kiss to her nose and removed my hand the rest of the way. Her eyes were screwed shut tightly. I blew softly in her ear. She shivered, but her eyes stayed closed. She was such a good girl. Very carefully, but tightly, I fastened the blindfold around her eyes. Slowly, I turned her so she was facing me. I kept my eyes on her as I lowered myself to my knees. The sight of her calves in those stockings had my ears burning. I let my hand wander up the curve of her calf muscle and then gently lifted her leg to remove her black flats. I preferred her in heels, but I also enjoyed towering over her at full height. Once her other shoe was off, I rose to full height. I watched her throat muscles work as she swallowed. My cock continued to harden. I wet my lips with my tongue and stepped forward. She flinched slightly. I waited before I slid my arms around her middle and pinched the zipper at the back of her skirt between my fingers. I pulled it downwarn slowly, watching her nostrils and lips move. I swallowed my gun and then placed a soft kiss to the tip of her nose. I placed another chaste kiss to her mouth as the zipper reached its destination.

I shimmied the skirt over her hips and my eyes darted across her thighs. I took hold of her calf again and lifted up her foot. I felt her small hand touch my shoulder to lean on me as I helped her step out of the skirt. I glanced up to make sure the blindfold was still on. When she moved her hand away, I lamented the loss of her weight on me.

I slid my hands up her hops and slowly rolled the torn panty hose down. I could smell sex on them. Once I'd plucked them off of her bare, delicate feet, I lifted the mess of nylon to my nose and breathed in deeply. My eyes fluttered closed and I wrapped one hand around her calf tightly. I groped the soft flesh of her bare leg as I filled my lungs to capacity. I breathed out as I pushed myself up to full height. She was so wet for me today. I patted my back pocket to make sure the marker was still there. My cock strained and I played with the cowl neck of her sweater, pulling it down to reveal the mark I had left on her the day before.

The day of my promotion, I had hardly been able to contain myself as I undressed her. I had wanted to strip off every scrap of fabric from her body as fast as I could, but I had somehow managed to keep myself under control. I had undressed her slowly, revealing every little millimeter of vulnerable flesh slowly. The feeling that had spread through me as I slowly unwrapped her was rivaled only by the first time I had ever seen the picture of a bound woman in my brother's drawer. It had been a life defining moment. There was no coming back from it. Undressing her for the first time had been much like that.

I turned her very slowly and then gently lifted the sweater up over her head. She raised her arms obediently and I stifled a moan. A woman yielding to a man was such a beautiful thing. There was nothing like it. And to have *this* woman obeying him. I checked her blindfold as I pulled the sweater over her head. It remained in place. As I carefully unclasped her bra, running one hand over her more pronounced shoulder blades. This weekend, she'd sit at my feet naked, rubbing my feet and asking if I wanted another beer. I already knew what lingerie I'd put her in. The merlot, satin babydoll. My cock strained.

Slowly, I pulled her bra off of her. In college, girls never understood the eroticism of a slow undressing. The girls that wanted to be dominated wanted it fast and hard. Always fast and hard. There was more to it though. Domination wasn't just about the physical. It was about power. Control. To exert your will over someone without having to raise a hand, it was intoxicating. One element wasn't any better than the other.

I ran my hands down her naked arms and felt her body tremble beneath my touch. The thought of her crying in that bathroom stall had hurt me more than I anticipated. The thought of her, huddled in a bathroom stall in high school, college, law school, and now work, had created a chasm in my chest. I stepped closer and wrapped my arms around her, burying my

nose into the crook of her neck. I kissed her gently. The admission of vulnerability had only increased my affection for her. She didn't need to pretend to be so strong all the time. She needed to let the facade down. I wanted to squeeze her. Squeeze my arms around her until I heard her bones crack. I released her and gently guided her toward the bathroom. She held out her hand just a fraction of an inch or so in front of her as she followed me blindly.

Inside the bathroom, I sat her down on the closed toilet seat and turned on the shower. The spray was hard and hot against the shower floor and I unbuttoned my shirt. I yanked my undershirt off over my head and tossed it to the side. She sat naked on the toilet with her head hung and her shoulders hunched.

Mine, I thought, lowering my eyes to the fading marker on her body. I could add three more lines already. My goal was to leave with five new dark marks on her ribs. I glanced in the mirror and ran a hand down my abs. I flexed my arms, watching as one thick vein bulged in my bicep. I moved to my belt next and looked back down at her. She had her arms wrapped tightly around herself. She looked so small. I whipped the belt from the belt loops. She flinched and I dropped the belt onto the sink with a clang. I gently slid my fingers down one of the ridges on my hips and slipped it into the band of my boxer-briefs. Eventually, the glass fogged up and I stepped toward her. I collected one of her fragile wrists in my hand and brought it to my clothed erection. Her hand was timid and fragile, but her fingers closed around my throbbing erection on their own. I watched, a smile slowly making its way across my face, and slowly reached up and pulled the elastic band downward. My cock sprang free, massive, hard, pulsing. Her hand was cool as he groped at the shaft and she leaned forward to place her lips around the head of my cock. I lifted my head back until it was parallel with the ceiling. I closed my eyes, mouth hanging open as I felt the small, hot, wet warmth envelope my aching cock. It was torture. I allowed her to suck a moment before I grabbed her by the air and pulled her off of me. I guided her to her feet and opened the shower door. I checked the spray. It was hot, but it wouldn't burn, and gently pulled her inside. She allowed me to pull her under the spray and she tilted her face toward the water.

I watched the water droplets collect on her breasts. My cock twitched and I took a nipple in each hand, slowly twirling the pink peaks into tight little stones. Her lips were parted, face turned upward toward me. She was not a short woman, but she was short to me, and I stepped closer. I wanted to spin her around and bend her over, slip into her hot wet cunt and fuck her into oblivion. Instead, I reached for the shampoo and squeezed it on the top of her head. She seemed confused for a few moments, but I watched her body relax as I massaged the shampoo into her scalp around the blindfold. Her face took on a gentle, exquisite look of peaceful ecstasy. My mouth was bone dry. I wished I could remove the blindfold. I wanted to see her face unencumbered. I wanted to see her eyelids flutter and the muscles of her face relax. I rinsed the shampoo from her hair and then very gently massaged in the conditioner. I spun her and grabbed onto the body wash.

I slowly lathered up the silky flesh, saving her breasts and pussy for last. I moved my hands forward and massaged her fat breasts, squeezing the stony little buds until I heard a soft whimper from her. I pressed my cock against the soft globes of her ass and then slid my hand between her legs. I rubbed firmly, tracing my finger along the slit until I found the cord of the vibrator.

I dragged my teeth along her shoulder as I gently pulled it free and placed it on the rail. I bit again, earning another whimper from her. I sucked on her skin hard, leaving a dark, blue and purple mark on her when I pulled my lips away. I continued to massage my fingers into her pussy, relishing every inch of hot, soft flesh.

Very slowly, she turned in my arms. I watched carefully, eyes on the blindfold intently. I was on high alert as she turned, ready for an outburst of disobedience. Her hands reached out and her palms pressed to my pectorals, fanning out to feel the hard hot skin beneath the burning spray. Her blindfold was soaked and heavy. I wanted to remove it but I couldn't trust her. Her hands slid upward and gripped my broad shoulders. She stepped closer still, until I could feel those hard little buds pressed against my chest. I let my arms wrap around her and held her closer. Her head tilted backward and her lips parted.

I accepted the invitation and pressed my mouth to her. One of her hands came up to touch my cheek. Her nails raked over the stubble that was beginning to grow. It crinkled beneath her nails. Her hand moved upward to touch my brow. He took her by the wrist and lowered her hand. Her hands moved down my bicep and my chest and stomach. I watched her fingers move over the grooved flesh. I wanted to know what she thought.

Her hand continued to move lower until her hand was wrapped around my cock again. I swallowed a moan. I placed my hand on the shower door by her head. I struggled to keep my eyes open.

"What - What do you want me to do?" she whispered. I could barely hear it over the spray. A low breath escaped me. It was half a shudder, half a moan. I swallowed thickly and lifted my head toward the ceiling. I then let it drop.

"Keep going," I whispered. Her hand pumped my cock in slow, steady motions and I leaned forward to collect her ear between my lips. I nibbled and sucked but soon I needed her lips on mine instead. Her palm trailed over the sensitive head of my cock and my muscles jerked.

She moved as if she was going to get on her knees. I stopped her. I would stop her when I felt myself get close. This would only make things better.

“My dirty whore,” I whispered to her. “Talk dirty to me.”

“I-I...” she sucked in a breath. My cock got harder still. My hips bucked.

“You like that big hard cock?”

“Yes,” she answered. My tongue circled the shell of her ear.

“Tell me how hot I get you,” I whispered against her lips.

“You, um, I can’t,” she breathed.

I placed my other elbow against the wall beside her head. I loomed over her, looking down at her hand as it moved up and down the length of me.

“Say, ‘I’m your dirty little whore,’”

“I’m your dirty little whore,” she breathed. I squeezed my eyes shut and peeled my lips back from my clenching teeth.

““You get me so wet.””

“You get me so wet,” she said. “Y-you’re so big. You’re so perfect.”

“Keep going,” I groaned. My lips wrapped around her earlobe.

“I’m your dirty slut,” she whispered. I wanted to heave her up, wrap her legs around my middle and bury myself inside of her. But I couldn’t. I had to wait. I’d made a promise to myself. Just a few more moments and then I’d rinse her off, wrap her in a towel, and then turn the water to cold and step back in. “I’m your whore. I - you own me. I belong to you.”

I grabbed her face with one hand and forced her lips to mind. I kissed her hard and then sucked her lip into my mouth.

“You own me,” she panted.

“You belong to me,” I agreed.

“I-I’m your slave.”

Light exploded behind my eyes and I felt pleasure consume me. My brain stopped functioning and for a few glorious moments, all I could feel was her, all I could smell was her, and all I could hear were those words coming from Orla’s beautiful full lips. *I’m your slave.*

Slowly, blood returned to my brain and my senses began to come back to me. I could feel her body trembling in front of me. Her long, slender fingers continued to move up and down my softening cock.

“Was that good?” she asked me, voice soft and sweet. Frustration and anger welled up inside of me.

“Fuck,” I breathed.

“Was that good?” she asked again. Her hands came up and touched my sides. “Fuck,” I said again. I felt her hands freeze on my abdomen. I yanked my arm back. I landed three hard punches into the shower wall beside her head.

The flicker of recognition vanished. I fell to my knees, hands up over my head, and a cry ripped from my throat.

“I’m sorry!” I cried. “I’m sorry!”

“Shh,” he said. He took me by the arms and gently guided me to my feet. “Shh. Shhh.”

He wrapped his arms around me. His cheek went to the top of my head. “It’s OK.”

My heart pounded violently in my chest as I leaned against him. I pressed my cheek to his chest, warm and hard. His arms were broad and powerful. I lowered my hand, reaching for his cock. I pressed on through my confusion. I had no idea why he was angry, but I was sure sex would make him happy. And to be honest, standing there under the hot spray, tired, and sad, and lonely, I wanted the intimacy. I ran my hand over the thick appendage.

“Stop,” he ordered. He stepped away, removing my hand from his erection. If my eyes were not blindfolded, I would have blinked in surprise. He led me back under the spray and washed the conditioner from my hair and the soap from my body. Standing in the dark beneath the hot spray, feeling his hands move over my body, I kept waiting for his hot, wet mouth to close back around my skin, or for his hands to pinch a nipple. But he only rinsed me off. My hands tingled, as if I could still feel the lean muscle of his body beneath my fingers. I didn’t understand. Why a man built like that needed to *rape* anybody. Why he wanted to *rape* me.

Caleb went home with you and not Amelia, I reminded myself. And look at how good looking he is.

I reached out and touched him again, pulling him closer. He pushed me away gently and turned the water off. The sound was jarring and my head hurt then. Why hadn’t he had sex with me? He hadn’t in the closet today either? I hadn’t gotten *less* attractive since this started. I had lost weight. The lean softness that came from a sedentary job had dissipated. But my

cheek bones were more prominent. I had circles under my eyes. I looked more pale. I wasn't as pretty any more. However pretty I might have been. He'd be done soon. He was growing bored. And then I'd have to deal with this all on my own. I sucked in a breath, gasping for it, but I couldn't get enough. I thought I might die. The walls came crashing in around me and I was shaking my head. I continued to gasp for air, swallowing it down like a man dying of thirst, but I couldn't get enough.

I fell to the floor and pressed my hand to my chest, clutching at my throat as if that might help. My heart thundered and I heard buzzing in my ear. His hands were on my face. I heard him murmuring. I was choking out a word and pointing. "Xanax. Please. Two."

He left me and returned. I opened my mouth and I felt him put a single pill on my tongue. Despite what appeared in movies, it was an immediate fix. It took some time for the pill to hit your system, but the knowledge that it was there, ready to be absorbed into my bloodstream was sometimes enough. I reached out for him, clutching onto his large arms. I dug my nails into his flesh. I didn't want him to leave. Not yet.

"Shhh," he said, gently trailing his hand along the back of my head. "Shhh."

He stayed there like that for a while. Crouched in front of me on the shower floor, gently patting my head, and letting me keep my nails sunk deeply into his skin. I was almost asleep when he guided me to my feet and helped me out of the shower.

He wrapped me in a warm towel and dried off my hair. I stood before him with hunched shoulders, offering no resistance when he turned me and removed the blind fold to better dry my hair. I kept my eyes screwed shut, hopeful he'd be happy with me. I wondered if my sudden capitulation was boring him. It was what he demanded in return for his identity, but was this the beginning of the end? It wasn't a challenge anymore?

The times of the brush gently scraped along my scalp. It was a glorious feeling. Once again, as I felt the pill begin to take hold, I let myself fall into a little trance. When I came to, my hair was up in a neat bun on top of my head. The blindfold was fastened back into place and I felt a rush of frustration. *Why? Why* hide his identity at this point. I'd seen those pictures. I'd watched those videos. I could never say a word and he knew it.

He turned me then, gently tilting my face upward and kissed me tenderly. I pushed myself into the feeling and returned his kiss. He was still here and he was affectionate. He wasn't leaving me. I didn't have to deal with this alone. Not yet. I lowered my face and sagged into him. He had a towel around his waist, and I could feel the hard muscle of his torso. I pressed my cheek to his pectoral as his arms wrapped tightly around me. His lips touched the top of my head. He tilted my face up again. His hand wrapped around the juncture of my neck and jaw. His kiss was gentle, chaste, but commanding. He stepped away and I was certain he left the bathroom. I kept my eyes closed beneath the blindfold and I didn't move an inch. He returned and gently peeled me out of the towel. His hands were large, gentle, but confident on my legs as he slipped a pair of silk shorts around each leg. He next placed a camisole over my head. It had spaghetti straps, and my nipples hardened against the cool material. His hands gently tweaked my nipples, before his palm opened to caress a breast.

I was a bit chilly when he walked me out to sit on the futon, but I said nothing and he drew my wrists together, bringing them behind my back.

"Please don't," I begged as the silky strap touched my first wrist. "You don't have to tie me up."

He hushed me softly, but I liked my hands away and groped out in front of me for his powerful arms. His flesh was hot beneath my palm.

"I won't take the blindfold off. I want to know who you are, but if I'm good, I'll find out on Friday. That's what you agreed and you've lied to me. I trust you. And if I look, you have the pictures. My career rides in those never getting out. I wouldn't risk it by looking without permission."

He hesitated.

"And I know what I look like in those pictures. No one will ever believe I wasn't a willing participant. I would be completely ruined. Please?"

He pulled back. There was a moment of silence and then I was wrapped in my warm fleece throw from the back of the futon. I heard the sound of a window slamming shut and then the radiator began to click aggressively.

He turned on the TV just as the first period of the Bruins started. I picked up my legs and tucked them beneath me, enveloping myself in the blanket and leaned into the Xanax as it wrapped its arms around me. I would have preferred to have two, but I leaned into it, trying to make the very most of the warmth. I heard the fizzling of oil and the smell of garlic. Water began to boil. I listened to the announcers drone, breathed in the glorious smell from the kitchen, and sank deeper into the warmth.

At the end of the first period, I felt the futon sink down beside me. The apartment had grown warm, and so I did not resist as he pulled the blanket down around my shoulders. He placed the fork between my lips. I moaned softly. Pesto tortellini. The man knew how to cook. I couldn't remember the last time I'd cooked a real meal. I took three bites before my stomach began to ache.

"That-that's good," I breathed. "I'm full."

Another forkful was placed at my lips. I opened my mouth and accepted it. My brain strained to place him. The feel of him, the sound. Today was the second time I'd heard him and *known*. I had known. Why couldn't I remember? I groped into my foggy brain and took another mind. I heard a phone chime. It wasn't mine. I tried to think if I had heard it at work before. His insistence that I not see his face led me to believe I saw him frequently. I'd recognize him. At the very least, once I see his face, I would notice him at work. I saw him frequently. Frequently enough that it might affect work.

But I knew it wasn't Caleb. I knew it wasn't Chris. I knew it wasn't Danny. Who else was so tall and so fit? We had six floors. He could be on the other floors. But then, I wouldn't see them that often. Was it even someone in Tax? It could very well be someone in Audit or Advisory. But I didn't know. I went to my cubicle, I did my work, I went home. I sat in the breakroom, but other than the H&R Block guys, only Tax used that break room. And I knew it was someone in the company. Didn't I? How did I know that?

"My stomach hurts," I said after a few moments. He gave me two more bites and then stopped. I thought he was eating beside me. As the second period started, he went about cleaning.

The sink ran and the dishes clinked. I heard the spray and acrid smell of cleaning solution. The clink of the dishwasher. Halfway through the second period, the futon sagged beside me. He gently pulled me to him, pressing my cheek to his chest. He was dressed now. The shirt was soft beneath my cheek and his warmth radiated from underneath. His hands slowly trailed down my naked arm and rested on my hip. Certain he was after sex, I tilted my mouth up toward his and parted my lips. His mouth touched mine. His tongue went into my mouth. Or was my tongue in his mouth? One of his hands squeezed my sides and he caught my bottom lip between his teeth.

Rather abruptly he pulled back, scooping me up in his arms and tossing me on the bed. My hands closed around his biceps again and I squeezed, heart pounding. His lips were scorching along my jaw. His teeth scraped my neck. He sucked on my collarbone. He groped my breasts. I let out a contented sigh as he pulled my silk shorts downward.

He pushed up my shirt and I felt one warm finger tip trail the lines on my rib cage. I heard a click of a pen uncapping. I fought off a whimper of protest. He carefully drew three lines. Three for the supply closet. Then two more. Two with the vibrator.

Shame consumed me once again. What he must think of me... my skin flushed. His fingers prodded at my opening. I was slick, he would not need to do much before entering me. But he did not lift up. His finger continued to move in and out of me slowly. His lips left feather light kisses to my inner thigh. His stubble scratched the sensitive flesh. I wondered what color his hair was. I thought of Caleb's stubble. The dark five o'clock shadow that began creeping in at about 2:00pm.

His mouth left my inner and closed around my clit. I had always believed oral sex something submissive in nature, but this man seemed to enjoy it immensely. His tongue pressed, flicked, and prodded, and despite my pride. I felt an orgasm rattle through me after no time at all. I continued to lick, tasting my deeply, before placing wet, open mouth kisses to my clit. Satisfied, he placed one last, chaste kiss on my pussy. I heard the cap, smelled the pneumonia, and felt the cold wet tip leaving another line in its wake.

I watched as I slid her shorts back up her long slender legs. A black pencil skirt and charcoal pantyhose. Her dark red silky button up blouse. The black heels with a bow. I would have to make sure they were clean. Perhaps I could do a load of laundry for her before I left.

I settled up beside her and gently punched the blindfold. I lowered my lips to ear and whispered softly, "Eyes stay closed."

She nodded and I gently pulled the blind fold from her eyes. She had the sweetest little face when it wasn't morphed into a haughty snarl. I watched her green eyes start back and forth rapidly behind her delicate eyelids. Her lashes were long and dark, kissing the flushed hue coloring her ivory skin. Friday could not come soon enough.

"You disguise your voice." Her voice was unexpected. "So I would recognize it. Or, I would if I heard it again... I hear you enough. At work or the break room."

I trailed a fingertip down the gentle slope of her nose.

"I can't for the life of me figure it out."

I smiled.

"There's Danny. He doesn't have the scar and he's not fit enough. There's Chris. He's tall enough. He has the body."

And how the fuck would you know that?

"But he doesn't have the scar."

A pause.

"It's obviously not Caleb."

Obviously not.

“If I can guess, will you tell me?”

I placed a kiss to the top of her nose and then looked down at a nipple peeking through the pink, silk camisole I brought for her. I gently squeezed a breast beneath my hand. My cock was hard again,

“I’d like to hear about your day,” she said. I tilted my head and looked at her mouth as she spoke. Her fingernails gently scratched the skin of my biceps, slipping up beneath the short sleeve. “Your stressors. So that I can better comfort you.”

If she kept talking, I wouldn’t need her to touch me to come again. I caressed her cheek. Her face looked so small in my hand.

“If you tell me who you are, you can do those things. You can talk to me and I can try to soothe you.”

My lips were gentle on hers. Her mouth was soft and yeilding, but she participated. I leaned back, mouth still pressed to hers, and murmured, “you can’t manipulate me.”

Disappointment crashed over her and she sagged backward. I smiled and looked back down at her. It would be nice. Just two more days. I needed to enjoy the anticipation.

“You will tell me on Friday though? I’ve done everything you wanted so far.”

I kissed her tenderly in response. The sooner she knew, the sooner I’d be able to properly put her in her place. Her lack of respect toward me was infuriating. There was little I could do about it until she knew the truth, and knew that she was my little fuck toy for the last two months. My little plaything. My sex slave.

I rolled her onto her side and nestled up with my chest to her back. She sagged into me and I pressed my throbbing erection against her backside. My fuck up in the shower didn’t seem to have ruined thing much. My cock was hard and my balls were fucking blue. She pressed her

bottom against me in an invitation. Dirty little slut wanted to get fucked. She could wait until Friday. I was going to fill her with so much come I'd be leaking out of her for a month. She pressed again.

"Stop," I ground out curtly. I swallowed. That sounded a bit too much like me. Like in the shower. It was a miracle she didn't know. I was certain she was going to rip her blind fold off right then and there. Her body stopped moving and she tensed slightly. I wasn't sure if it was from the rebuke or if she recognized my voice. But I kissed her cheek and her muscles relaxed.

I nuzzled my nose into her neck and breathed her in. After a few moments, I told her to go to sleep. She nodded, and gently wrapped her long, delicate fingers around my wrist.

My heart was pounding as he continued to nuzzle his nose into my neck. Why wasn't he having sex with me? His stubble scratched my neck. His lips were hot and gentle. I could feel his erection. He was hard. I leaned into his chest. He was so large. I had always felt massive for a woman. I wasn't. In the grand scheme of things, 5'7 wasn't *that* tall. But then if you put heels on... and I've never been a size 2.

"I need my pills," I told him softly. "To sleep."

His response was a kiss to the back of my neck.

"Just um, one more Xanax. And one of the prozak?"

I swallowed thickly.

"And I'm, I haven't taken my birth control today."

I felt him push himself up from the bed and walk into the bathroom. I kept my eyes screwed shut. It was impossibly hard, especially when I heard the cupboard open and close in the kitchen and the sink turn on as he got me a glass of water. I took the birth control first. It was

the smallest pill. Then I felt another. It was my anti-depressant. I waited for the next Xanax. It did not come and my heart began to pound.

“I need the Xanax,” I said. I wanted to ask for a glass of wine to knock it down with, but I knew better. “I won’t sleep.”

“Shhh.” He shifted me to the side and pulled the blankets back. He got me into bed and I heard the light clock off. The Bruins had entered the third period. He shut off the tv. I felt him slide into bed beside me and he pressed his chest back into me.

“I won’t sleep,” I said against

“Shhh.” He kissed the back of my neck. His hands gently stroked my forehead.

“*Please*,” I sounded desperate.

“No,” he whispered. He kissed my earlobe. “Close your eyes. Breathe.”

His hand was large and gentle. It moved in a slow, rhythmic pattern against my forehead. His lips were soft and caressed my neck and cheek. I focused on the feel of him instead of the pounding in my chest and head. I focused on the smell of linen, the garlic, the soap and wintergreen smell of him. I breathed in deeply. Plain soap. No cologne. No aftershave. He hadn’t bothered to shave the growing stubble at the end of the day. His body was very warm. He shushed me softly every few moments. I felt like he was trying to corral a scared kitten into a carrier. But his voice was soft and his body warm and I enjoyed the scratch of his stubble.

I fell off the bed. I felt my body tumbling toward the ground and I braced myself for the fall. My body jerked and a gasp left me. But then I found myself in my dark apartment, nestled warmly in my blankets and I realized I wasn’t falling. I turned, reaching out for him. His hand pressed to my eyes and he pushed my back down to the pillow.

“I’m not looking,” I promised. I whispered it. “Are you leaving?”

“Shhh,” he said. “Go back to sleep.”

“Are you leaving?” I asked again, heart pounding. “I need another pill.”

I didn’t need him to get it. Once he left, I would get it. I added, “please?”

“No,” he whispered simply. He kissed my temple. Then my ear. He laid back down, on top of the blankets this time. He hushed me and rolled me over again. “Sleep.”

“I can’t,” I choked. He kissed the spot behind my ear. He breathed in deeply. He pressed to me, the blanket a barrier between us. “Will you stay until I’m asleep?”

He kissed my jaw. I nestled into him again. I don’t know how long it was before I did eventually fall asleep, but I know I laid there a long time, making sure he wouldn’t leave until I did.

I checked my phone and fought off a sigh. 2: 57 a.m. Tomorrow was going to suck. I could stay here. Sleep for a bit and then leave, but it was risky and I was only twenty minutes from home. She was right about one thing. Things would be so much better once she knew.

I looked over my shoulder at the blackness. Wind rattled the window and it looked damn cold. I looked back to the softly sleeping lump on the bed. I wanted to crawl back into bed with her, wrap myself around her and nestle into the warmth of her body. It took every ounce of strength to slowly slip from the bed. I moved slowly. As slowly and quietly as I could. Without a pill cocktail swigged down with wine, she was a light sleeper and she had convinced herself she could sleep without absolutely crushing her pills.

I fought off another sigh. I didn’t trust it not to wake her. I did not know how deep her sleep was. I had given her only what she was actually prescribed. I collected my things and slowly zipped up the bag. I checked a couple times to make sure I didn’t leave anything behind. I

blew out the candle. I made sure the oven was off. Then I grabbed the spoiled milk, placed it in the trash bag, and put it outside the door.

I stopped by her bed. She was still sleeping soundly. It was so hard to leave her. I looked out into the unforgiving cold of the early morning. Her body looked so warm, so inviting.

I longed to lean down and kiss her but I feared I might wake her. I had been certain she was asleep about an hour ago, but I hadn't had the strength to leave her. I was afraid she might wake up. I didn't want to lose her warmth. It was fine. I would see her tomorrow. I'd touch her again tomorrow. I'd feel her again tomorrow. I felt a longing in my chest like I'd never felt before. It bubbled up and I needed to touch her again. I need to roll her over and put myself inside of her. I wouldn't though. She needed her sleep and I had already fucked things up when I let her jerk me off in the shower. This was supposed to be about her. I was supposed to wait. But god, the feel of her hand.

I'll see you tomorrow, Orla, I told her silently. I turned with every ounce of willpower I had in me. I made certain to be as quiet as I possibly could leaving the apartment. Before I left, I made sure the door was locked up tight.

Sitting in the break room, clattering at my laptop with my second cup of coffee in front of me, I felt more rested than I had since this terrible ordeal first started. I had woken around 5:00am, an hour before he had set my alarm. I wasn't groggy. I wasn't confused. I wasn't in a stupor. I got into the office around 6:00am, a smile on my face and a hot cup of Dunkin's in my hand for Eddie. We chatted a bit about his nephew's hockey game and then I went up to catch up on some low priority deals I had put on the back burner. Reviewing Peter's work was abysmal. I would have to ask Caleb if this was normal or if he was halfassing his work because he knew it was going to me.

Caleb walked in about 7:45am, a large thermos in his hand. Chris had already been in and out. He asked me if I'd seen the end of the Bruins game last night. He knew I liked hockey. I told him I passed out and he filled me in on the OT thriller. I would have loved to have seen it. I watched Caleb go to the full, fresh pot of coffee I had put on and pour the entire pot into his thermos. He shuffled over to the fridge and retrieved the milk, pouring only a splash into the cup.

"Morning," I said to him after a few awkward moments of staring.

“Morning.” His eyes flickered to my blouse and then my neck. Last night, he had left clothing out for me. It didn’t hide the marks on my neck very well, but I managed to paint them over with some heavy concealer. I hoped he couldn’t see it.

“I have GSL and HLP in your inbox,” I told him. “And I am doing the final review for Saturn now. But... Peter’s work isn’t ... great.”

“Peter’s work is shit,” Caleb rumbled. “Double check everything in the data room.”

“I will,” I said. I noted he didn’t put on a fresh pot as he left, scrubbing a hand over his face as he went. I worked in the break room until about 8:10. I had put on a fresh pot of coffee. As I passed by Caleb’s office, I found him rubbing his eyes in annoyance with one hand, the other holding the receiver of his phone to his ear. He preferred the phone. Even when he worked in the cubicle, I never saw him with a headset.

Despite feeling refreshed, I had chewed the inside of my bottom lip to shreds. I picked up my phone as I sat down at my desk. I hadn’t received a text message from him today.

Why didn’t you have sex with me last night?

I stared at it for a moment. I deleted it and sent instead: *good morning* . I wanted to see if he would respond. I didn’t have to wait long.

Good morning, sexy. How did you sleep?

Good . I answered. *Thank you.*

I wanted to ask why he didn’t have sex with me but I couldn’t bring myself to type it again. I put my phone down, face up in case he texted. He also hadn’t told me to put the vibrator in. I brought it just in case. He hadn’t told me I was beautiful yet today either.

I got up from my desk and walked to the bathroom. My skirt was a bit loose on me. I wondered if my weight loss made me look frumpy in my clothing now. I looked up from myself to glance into Caleb's office as I went. He was still on the phone, sucking down his thermos full of coffee, staring right at me. I tried to smile. It felt more like a grimace. I quickly looked away and went into the bathroom. I checked the makeup on my neck. It was holding nicely. I pressed my fingers to my cheeks. I looked a bit sickly. Pale. I had circles under my eyes that could be seen from beneath my makeup, but only just. I looked like I did going into law school, when I used to run 10 miles a day, before this job sucked the soul out of me.

The toilet flushed and then a stall door opened. I cringed inwardly when Amelia stepped out. I put the lip gloss back to my lips and dabbed it on. I had to stop chewing on my lip or it would be visible.

"Hello," Amelia said with a pleasant enough smile. I offered her a tight smile and a nod in return. She turned on the water and began to wet her hands. I slowly applied the gloss. She was looking at me in the mirror. I did everything I could not to look over. I knew for a fact there was a ladies room closer to her cubicle. She came this way to pass Caleb's office.

"Any fun plans this weekend?" she asked, reaching out to the soap dispenser.

"Nope," I answered. She stared a moment and then made a feminine little noise. I asked, "you?"

"Nope," she answered with another tight smile. She grabbed the paper towels and cleaned her well manicured nails and then used the paper towel to open the door. She left without another word. I checked my hair in the mirror, pulling a strand of hair from behind my ear. I decided I didn't like the look and then tucked it back behind my hair. I walked out and was relieved not to find Amelia in Caleb's office.

Chris was leaning in the door frame and gave me a smile as I walked by. I returned it the best I could and walked back down the hallway without looking at Caleb. I had a text waiting for me when I got back to my desk.

You covered up my marks.

You don't like them?

I touched my neck where the cover-up was caked on. I thought of Chris's reaction the day he saw it. The laugh. I knew how men thought. The man that did it was a hero. I was a slut.

You don't know what it's like to be a woman working in Tax M&A.

It's a boy's club.

I waited, unsure if he would even care. I didn't receive an answer, so I got back to work. I had a very productive morning, though I struggled with my desire to ask him why he didn't have sex with me yesterday. It was about noon and he hadn't even told me when we were going to meet at our spot for the day. I thought about the bottle in my purse but fought off the overwhelming urge I had coursing through me since the morning. It was insurance at work, but I never allowed myself to actually take any. Not while I was at the job. It was the one line I had yet to cross.

Thank you for cleaning, I said to him, thinking it might start the conversation anew. It was off he hadn't texted me back yet. I wondered if that comment annoyed him. I added, *It was really nice to wake up to.*

I had chewed my nails back down to the nub by the time 12:30 had rolled around. I jumped when my phone buzzed.

Your sandwich is still in the fridge. You need to eat.

I swallowed. He had made me lunch. When I woke, I had a note on the fridge. Inside, I had a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a bag of chips inside.

I will . I promised.

My phone buzzed. *Now.*

Ok, I answered. I fixed my most recent changes in the calc and got up from my desk. I cringed inside when I heard the laughter halfway down the hall. When I rounded the corner, I found Danny, Chris, Mark, Steve, and Caleb seated around the table. With a sinking stomach, I noted the only empty chair between Chris and Caleb. One of Caleb's long arms was draped across the back and as I entered, his eyes found me, the amused smile still on his face.

"Ellie!" Danny greeted me with a smile. Chris dropped his sandwich on the sub wrapper and cleared the space beside him.

"Here you go," he said.

"That's OK," I said, moving to the drudge. Way too many eyes were fixed on me. I tried to think of something funny or amusing to say. I settled on, "I'll eat at my desk."

"No, join us," Steve said. "We haven't talked since you made senior. She's already forgot about us little people."

I grabbed my sandwich and bag of chips from the fridge and went to the vending machine.

"I'm sorry, little, Steve?" I asked. He was a big boy with a great sense of humor. We had interned together prior to getting the permanent spots. He had gone to a bigger name school than I did though. Steve erupted into laughter. "There's the Ellie I missed."

I walked back over my coke zero and sat down in the empty chair. Caleb did not bother to move the arm draped over the back of my chair, so I leaned forward and opened up my sandwich.

His right ankle rested over his left knee and slowly tapped his toe in the air. The soles of his shoes were pristine. He kept them in his office and traveled in boots or sneakers.

“Anyway, Trent,” Danny said, attention back on Caleb. “You’re cheating.”

Caleb gave a hearty chuckle. “How am I cheating?”

“I don’t know but no one is that fucking good.”

“I know hockey,” Caleb said dismissively. I popped my head up, momentarily interested, and then dropped my gaze when I felt Caleb’s, Chris’ and Danny’s gaze turn toward me.

“Caleb’s won every single fantasy league I’ve ever been in,” Chris said. He balled up the paper from his straw and tossed it down at his crumb covered wrapper. He and Caleb had gone to the place across the street. They had great subs.

“Ellie, you like hockey,” Danny said. I brought my eyes up. “Why didn’t you join the league?”

“I didn’t get an invite,” I answered cagily. I remembered my first couple weeks hearing all the guys talking about the trades they were making. The absolutely *idiotic* trades they were making. I’d bit my tongue, cheeks red, glaring at my computer. I added as casually as I could, “None of the girls did.”

I grabbed my sandwich out of the baggy and took a small bite. He had even cut the pieces in half. I wanted to take my phone out to see if he had texted me, but Caleb was too close. I was afraid he would see the messages.

Danny frowned.

“Really?” he asked.

“Crispy made the league and sent the invite,” Chris said, shifting uncomfortably. “He only knows a few of us here. It’s not a SALT thing, Ellie. It started with Crispy, me and Caleb and just evolved. It’s not work related.”

“It’s not a big deal,” I lied.

“Add her to the baseball league,” Caleb rumbled..

“Fuck yeah,” Danny grinned.

“Oh you don’t have to,” I said. As bitter as I was being left out, being added meant I would have to... socialize. I forced a smile from behind my peanut butter and jelly. Amelia came floating in with Anna and Courtney, but they hovered outside as she mounted in the doorway. Her thick blond curls bounced about her shoulders and her red lipstick was freshly applied.

“So, Trent,” she teased with a smile. “Have you made a decision?”

I turned to glance at his profile. He was stone face. He looked bored.

“Pretty sure I’ve said no about twenty times,” he drawled, leaning back in his chair. Over my left shoulder I could hear him cracking his knuckles.

“Literally everyone is coming,” Amelia said. Caleb barked out a laugh.

“How in the world did you convince Orla to go?” Caleb asked in disbelief. He looked in my direction.

“I’m not going,” I answered, unaware of what anyone was talking about. Amelia’s lips pinched together into a tight line.

“Well, then I guess not *everyone* is going,” Caleb mused.

My cheeks warmed and I poured my gratitude into the next bite of my sandwich.

“I asked and she said she didn’t want to,” Amelia answered, pinning me with a stare that dared me to contradict her. I looked back down at my chips.

“You should come,” Danny said to me. “It’ll be fun.”

“Oh I don’t -”

“Don’t pressure her, Danny. She doesn’t like doing social stuff,” Amelia said a bit too coldly. She put her gaze back toward Caleb. She teased, with iron in her voice, “You and Ellie have something planned, I don’t know about?”

“Yeah, we’re jetting off to bora bora on Friday,” Caleb said dryly. My cheeks burned at the clear disdain he had at the suggestion. “All inclusive.”

Amelia didn’t find the joke funny.

“Well, all are invited. Let me know if you change your mind.”

She disappeared with Anna and Courtney. A moment passed. I watched Caleb stare down at his empty soda bottle with a little frown.

“Why have you not fucked her yet,” Mark asked. My face burned and I straightened. Caleb’s head jerked up.

“Dude,” Caleb said, motioning toward the only female in the break room. Me.

“It’s fine,” I said, forcing a smile and began collecting my things.

“No, it’s fucking not,” Caleb said. I hated to put him in this position. He couldn’t just talk to the guys with me around. Not while he was our boss and I was a female.

“I didn’t mean - I just thought - Ellie’s cool,” Mark had the decency to be bright red.

“No, it’s totally fine,” I said. I grabbed my bag of chips. They fell off the table and onto the floor by Caleb’s one planted foot. I bent down to collect it. He didn’t make an effort to move out of my way. I picked it up, well aware that my neck and face was red and blotchy. I was beginning to sweat.

“Ellie, I’m sorry,” Mark said. I knocked my Coke Zero over. I thanked god it was still capped. I tried to grab it. I knocked it across the table. Chris caught it before it fell. He handed it back to me.

“Fucking idiot,” Caleb said. I stopped when Caleb’s hand closed tightly around my wrist.

“Orla, sit down,” he said.

“No, it’s fine. If you guys want to talk -”

“No. Mark’s an idiot and he knows better. Formal dressing down on you, Mark. Verbal warning. Orla. Sit. Down.”

I lowered back into my seat and glanced around. My face was so red. I wanted to leave, but I didn’t want Caleb upset with me. I felt so out of place, so unwelcome. I realized quickly that’s why Caleb wanted me to stay. He couldn’t have me feeling isolated due to gender.

The tense silence hung over the break room and I just wanted to get out of there.

“And to clear the air,” Caleb said. “I have made it very clear to Amelia I’m not interested.”

I turned to look at him. His arm had resumed its place, draped along the back of my chair.

“So there’s nothing there and everyone can stop talking about it,” Caleb said and I realized with some pleasure he was as annoyed on his own behalf as my own.

“But why,” Danny asked. “She’s not in your department. You could date her.”

Danny’s eyes fluttered over to me as he said it.

“There’s more important things than looks,” Caleb said. “Besides, as handsome and charming as I am? I want beauty and brains.”

I could have sworn he used the arm draped across the back of my chair to move my chair a fraction of an inch as he said it.

“Charming’s a bit far-fetched,” Chris said with a snicker.

“I like a challenge.” I could see Caleb wink, but I wasn’t sure at who. There was some laughter. My face burned even hotter and I wanted to get out of here. I had a horrible feeling that everyone at this table knew Caleb and I had slept together. I guess I wasn’t much of a challenge. Or maybe I was. Maybe that was why he brought me home instead of Amelia. It would certainly explain why he had chosen me that night. My eyes grew wet. I blinked quickly and continued eating my sandwich.

Danny sighed and checked his watch.

“Back to it then,” he said. “See you guys Saturday. Think about it, Ellie,” he said pointing at me as he left the room. Steve followed him out. Mark began tossing his garbage into his chips bag.

“I don’t remember her actually ever inviting me,” I admitted with a little laugh. I felt more comfortable with less people in the room. “I don’t even know what it is.”

“Amelia is throwing a house party on Saturday,” Caleb said.

I could think of few things I’d rather do less.

“Are you going?” I asked Chris. Mark said goodbye, sheepishly apologized one more time, and then left.

“I’m going skiing at Caleb’s parents place in New Hampshire.”

Sometimes I forgot how close they were.

“You too?” I asked Caleb. Our eyes met and he just stared.

“Nah. I’m an honorary son. I’m going up with his brothers,” Chris said.

“I don’t feel like going,” Caleb added.

“Where is it?” I asked.

“Attitash,” Caleb answered.

“My parents have a place there,” I said with a tight smile. Caleb laughed.

“I knew you were loaded,” he said. “Orla Ellen Wright.” He snickered. My cheeks burned. He snapped and pointed at Chris. “I called it right. I said that’s a money name.”

“My parents have money. I don’t,” I answered. I looked back at Caleb. His eyes were working their way down the length of my body and my stomach tightened. He was sizing me up. Making snap judgments about things he knew nothing about.

“I should get back to work,” I said and collected my half eaten sandwich. Caleb said nothing, but watched as I collected my things with a satisfied smile. I made sure not to knock anything over this time.

“No shame in having money,” Caleb as I struggled to gather my things.

“I got here on my own,” I snapped. I walked out before anything else could be said. I regretted it immediately upon sitting down at my desk. I grabbed my phone and pulled up my mother’s number. I put my phone back down. I cursed myself. I don’t know why I did this. Everyone who was kind to me. Who supported me. I just ruined everything. I pulled up Caleb’s number. I bit down on my lip hard.

I’m sorry if I was a bitch . I typed. I stopped. I deleted it and put my phone down. I picked my phone up again. *My family is a sore subject. I’m sorry if I was a bitch.*

I stopped again. I bit my lower lip hard. I wanted to cry. I picked up my phone and pulled up his number.

Are you here today? I asked and sent it.

Yes . He responded quickly.

Can I see you?

I waited, heart pounding. I watched the bubbles pop up and then go away.

What do you mean?

Could we meet in the closet for a few minutes. Please? I won't look.

Are you ok? I can't get away until four.

I'm fine. I lied.

No you aren't. What's wrong?

I don't know, I answered. That was the truth. I felt like crying. My eyes swelled up.

Just kind of want a hug . I wiped a tear away from my cheek. I stared at it, not sending.

“Orla?”

I dropped my phone and whirled around. Caleb stood in my cubicle entrance. I wiped my face frantically. Heat rose in my face again.

“Hey,” he said softly, coming closer. “You ok?”

He came closer. Humiliation rocked me. His hand pressed to my shoulder. It was large and warm and comforting.

“I’m sorry,” I said to him, eyes watering. I was painfully aware that my chin and lips were quivering. He stepped closer still. “I’m such a bitch.”

I breathed it out, fat tears dribbling down my cheeks. I pressed my hand to my face. His hand circled around and pressed to the back of my neck. His thumb gently caressed the nape of my neck. My entire body was trembling. His hand slid down my back and he stepped closer.

“Let’s chat. Come to my office.”

I shook my head. Wiping my face. I didn’t want people to see me crying. I turned my face up to him and he nodded. He crouched down.

“This about what Mark said?” he asked. He kept his voice low. I shook my head.

“It’s not the work,” I whispered to him. “I’m just feeling so...”

I waved my hand, unsure how to possibly explain it. He nodded. He gently reached up and wiped a tear from my cheek. His eyes glimmered thoughtfully as he looked over my face. He’d looked like this when he’d tried to kiss me in his office. I really wished I could remember sleeping with him. He’d chosen to come home with me that night. Not Amelia. And he could have had Amelia if he wanted. Because I was a challenge? What an easy challenge. I wondered what might happen if I leaned forward and kissed him or if I asked to spend the night at his apartment. I wondered if he would keep me safe. I wondered if he’d still want me if he and everyone else saw those pictures...

“I’m going to take you off Blackburn -”

“No -”

“- and put you on Neptune,” he finished. “Blackburn is a massive deal and I think it’s too much right now.”

“I can do it,” I pleaded.

“Orla,” he said. His hand tightened around the back of my neck. “You don’t have to be perfect all the time.” He said with soft intensity.

“Yes, I do,” I breathed. My eyes welled again. “I don’t have anything else to offer.”

His tongue clicked. His hand left my neck and he stood.

“Stand up,” he instructed. His hand closed around my elbow and he guided me to my feet. He led me out of the cubicle, releasing me as we got into the long hallway. I kept my face down and followed him to his office. Mercifully there was no one out and about as we got into his office. The blinds on the glass windows were already pulled when he shut the door. I heard the click. My insides tightened. One of his large hands closed around my waist. The other cupped my cheek.

“Caleb,” I protested as he stepped me up against the wall.

“Shut up,” he said to me. He leaned forward and pressed his mouth to mine. I sagged against him, breathing out a deep sigh into the kiss. His arm snaked around me, pulling me closer. I returned the kiss, relishing the feel of it. The smell of him consumed me.

He slowly pulled back. But the loss was only momentary and then his mouth was back on mine. My hands tightened into fists against his suit jacket and I parted my lips. I pulled him closer. His tongue touched mine and then he was closing his teeth around my lower lip. I could taste blood from where I had chewed it raw. I wondered if he could too. His hand lowered from my waist, gliding down around the curve of my backside. His fingers tightened around a firm globe and he pressed me into his sizable erection. I moaned softly. I held him closer. My mouth opened to better receive his probing tongue. His fingers began to pull my skirt upward.

Then I saw it. *I like a challenge*. A wink. Laughter.

I saw a flash behind my eyes and I raised my hands. I pushed back against him as hard as I could. It did nothing to move him, but there was a moment of hesitation and he broke the kiss.

“Orla?” he asked softly. Confused. I slapped him. As hard as I could I planted my palm against his cheek. His arms dropped from my side and he stumbled back, eyes wide.

“You’re my boss,” I spat at him. “How dare you.”

“Orla,” he said, a disbelieving smile coming to his face. “Why - why fight this?”

He seemed genuinely confused.

“You want me,” he said. “The way I want you.”

My lips parted in shock. This was a game. A horrible, horrible game. He fucked me when I couldn’t see straight. The way they talked about Amelia. That’s how they talked about me. Frigid, weird, crazy Orla. I wonder if they made a bet. If everyone knew what Caleb was going to do when he took me home. And the hickey Caleb saw. That would have spread around the entire office.

“You’re my boss,” I said again. “And you’re an arrogant prick who thinks he can get anything he wants by snapping his fingers. I’m not - I’m not a whore. I’m not easy.”

“I know you aren’t,” he said. His voice had a tremor of desperation in it. “Orla, why are you fighting this so hard? What -” his eyes were glued to mind. “What’s so wrong with me?”

“What’s wrong with you?” I asked. My face was flushed and my heart was pounding. My brain wouldn’t focus. I felt dizzy. “You think you can have whatever you want. You’re an entitled, arrogant, self-absorbed rich boy who got by easy in life and you think you’re just... you think you can get whoever you want. You're cold and cruel and you’re - you’re - if you think I’m going to go all love-sick and gooey eyed at you because you deigned to condescend to have sex with you have another thing coming.”

His face was red. He stared. His gray eyes looked black.

“I would never - never - let you touch me sober. I can’t even remember it. I was that drunk. The thought of you touching me turns my stomach. And if you ever try to touch me again I’m reporting you.” Let him go into their fantasy group chat and brag about *that* .

He stared.

“Understand?” I asked. A muscle twitched beneath his eye as he stared at me.

“Perfectly,” he said. I nodded rapidly, wiped my face, and fled his office. I washed my face in the bathroom with cold water and trembling hands. When I got back to my desk I groped for my phone.

Can I please see you? Just for a few minutes.

I sent it. I waited. Heart pounding. I received no response.

Please? I need you.

No response came. I put my phone down and swallowed thickly. He wouldn’t be available until four. He was likely in a meeting or up against a deadline. My heart was pounding so hard I thought I might throw up. I thought about Caleb. My chest hurt. The smell of him, the feel of him. I pushed down the regret I felt rush up inside of me. Would I feel better if I was in his office with his strong arms around me? Then I remembered. The wink. The laugh.

Someone like Caleb, rich, handsome, charismatic, confident, didn't have an interest in someone like me, awkward, dorky, unfashionable, boring. It was a terrible, terrible prank. Just like it had been in law school.

I scrambled in my bag with shaking hands and grabbed the orange pill bottle. I put two into my hand and popped them into my mouth. I swallowed them dry and then searched for my water bottle with bleary eyes. I waited for the pills to take effect. My heart continued to pound and I felt like I was going to throw up. I grabbed my phone. No response yet.

Please? I asked. He wanted me. I'm sure he did. A lurch of dread. *Why didn't you have sex with me last night?*

Nothing. I squeezed my eyes shut and felt tears escape. God, I hated myself. I hated myself so much. For the first time in my life, I really just wanted everything to stop. I didn't want to feel anymore. I wanted quiet. I kept my face buried in my hands. It wasn't working. I straightened and grabbed the bottle from my purse. I put another one between my lips and swallowed.

I grabbed my phone and texted Chris.

Are you free for a few minutes?

Yeah, what's up ? he answered after a few seconds.

I need to clear my head. Can we run across the street and grab a coffee???

I sent it. I needed someone. I needed someone to anchor me.

Yeah sure thing. Head on down. I felt a rush of warmth for Chris. If only he had been made manager.

I rose and grabbed my coat. My hands were shaking. I stopped in Chris' cubicle as he closed out of an excel sheet and got to his feet. He hesitated a moment at the sight of me. I wiped my eyes, hopeful my limited massacre hadn't run.

"Just gonna stop by and see if Caleb wants anything."

I nodded dumbly. My face was flushed as we walked toward the office. The blinds were open. His lights were on. The door was open. But his office was empty.

"Huh," Chris frowned and checked his watch. "Weird. Oh well." He smiled at me. "Let's go chat."

I was feeling a bit calmer. I felt tired. I gave a small smile, shoved my hands in my pocket, and headed toward the elevator.

I watched her closely as the elevator closed. It pained me slightly, to see kind and shy Ellie unraveling at the seams, but even I had to admit that, standing there in her coat, shoulders hunched, face wane, eyes damp, she looked absolutely adorable and I had an urge to wrap her in a warm hug and tell her everything would be alright. I wouldn't though. Ellie was a cute girl and she was sweet. If I ever thought she would be down for a no strings attached fuck I certainly wouldn't have said no, had Caleb not wanted her from the first. The first day she had started as an intern, he told me she was his. Sometimes I wondered if that was why I never felt any stirring of desire when looking at her. I never really considered her an option. She belonged to Caleb and that was that. He and I were brothers. Kindred spirits. I would never betray that friendship. Looking at her now though, I could see why he wanted her so badly.

"Everything ok?" I asked.

Something happen with Ellie? I texted Caleb. I didn't think so. He would have told me. He probably didn't know.

"No," she answered with a pained laugh. She jammed her hands into her pockets and leaned back against the wall of the elevator.

Yeah she's a fucking cunt

And needs to be brought down a few fucking pegs

Why

Did she say something

Where are you

Is she ok?

“If this is about what Mark said -” I asked.

“It’s not,” she cut me off. She stared at me a moment too long. Her eyes were glassy. “I don’t have ... people.”

“You don’t have people?” I asked with a facial expression that was somewhere between a smile and a frown.

“People I can talk to.”

I nodded. “Well you have me. And believe it or not you have Caleb.”

I watched as a pained expression came across her face. Any other girl, this little game Caleb was playing might have been fun. But Ellie was sick. Fragile. Seeing the pain on her face, this wasn’t fun.

She stepped toward me and took my hands. She looked at my thumbs carefully and dropped them with a sigh.

“I wish it was you,” she whispered sadly, tears swelling. That startled me slightly and I felt a small surge of arousal, but it faded. I don’t think I needed to tell Caleb about this. That

wouldn't help anybody.

“Wish what was me?” I asked.

“It would just be so much easier.”

She pressed a hand to her forehead. I still didn't understand why she'd never bothered to look at Caleb's hand. The scar was prominent. It was well on display today at lunch. All she had to do was look down. She'd also see the bruise from where he had punched her shower wall last night.

“Does Caleb think I'm easy?” she asked, looking up abruptly.

“What?” I asked.

“Or a challenge or - did he say anything about why he slept with me? I mean has he ever said what he thinks of me?”

“Is this about what was said about Amelia?”

“There's no way he wants me,” she said with such conviction I would have believed it if I didn't know otherwise. “I'm plain and boring and weird and fucked up and...”

I let her keep talking. Her eyelids fluttered. I realized she was high.

“Is he playing a game with me,” she asked, eyes wide and sad and desperate. Her lower lip trembled. Her voice was soft, weak, pathetic. Her face crumbled. “Are you all laughing at me?”

“Ellie,” he frowned. I stepped forward and grabbed her by the shoulders. “Christ, no. Ellie, you and I are friends. I wouldn’t let him do that. And he’s not. He’s been my best friend for a long time. I’ve never seen him play games.”

“Ellie,” I said, looking her over. She looked at me. “You do know you’re hot, right?”

She stared at me.

“Like - half the guys here want to fuck you. I’m not saying that to make you uncomfortable. But I don’t get why you’re so convinced anyone is playing a game with you.”

The elevator doors opened.

“Caleb he - you think... then...” she stared outside. Her eyes swelled and her jaw continued to bob. We stepped into the vestibule but she made move to walk outside

“Ellie,” I dropped my voice. She looked at me. “I don’t want you to fight me on this, ok.” I took her by the elbow and took her off to a quiet corner. She frowned. “You’re stoned.”

“No,” she said, shaking her head.

“I *said* don’t fight me,” I snapped. She blinked in surprise. I added more gently, “I’m not angry. I’m not going to say anything. But I can see it very clearly. I’m going to call you an Uber and you’re going to go home.”

“I can’t keep missing work,” she breathed. I saw panic in her face. “And Caleb’s furious and - and he’s going to expect me at four... oh god, why’d I take so many.”

I put my hands on her shoulders. My wrist was buzzing violently as Caleb texted me. The actual fuck just happened.

“Ellie,” I said again. She looked up.

“Caleb will understand. I will tell him I sent you home.”

I couldn’t imagine the agony she must have been going through. I was glad this was coming to an end. Caleb shouldn’t have pursued her as himself during this whole thing. It was clear as day that was what was really causing all the problems in her fucked up little head. She was too conflicted.

“He’ll be angry,” she said. She reached for her phone. I watched her pull up the number Caleb used to text her. She had sent him a number of texts that he had not responded to. She sighed in defeat and shoved her hands in her pockets again. I was pulling up the Uber.

“Ellie,” I used her name to anchor her. Her eyes found mine. “If Nick comes downstairs and sees you, you’re fired. Career over. You won’t even need to take PTO. Caleb and I will cover for you. You’re going home.”

“Oh, God,” she breathed. “This is humiliating.”

I called the Uber and then pulled up Caleb’s messages.

Where the fuck are you

Where is she right now

I swear to fucking god chris fucking answer me

Is she with you

I don’t want you to be her shoulder to cry on

You’re sabotaging me

I took exception to the last one but ignored it. Caleb could be a hot head.

Bring Ellie's stuff downstairs. Come see what you're doing to your woman. I'm sending her home.

Why?

I'm on my way

Is she ok?

What did she tell you.

Is she alright?

She's fine. We're down in the lobby waiting for the uber.

"No," I said to her. "It's not. Just relax ok."

She was nodding.

"It's just... what Caleb said at lunch and... why he'd chosen me and not Amelia? I don't... I don't get it."

"I think you have the wrong idea about Caleb," I said. Her eyes were swimming with confusion. They were wide, wet, and glassy. I envied her. God, she was high.

The elevator dinged and then opened. She sucked in a breath and looked down, stepping backwards. Caleb stepped out, Ellie's bag in his hand. He was stone faced and his eyes raced over her. They darted over to mine. I just stared back.

“Th-thank you,” Ellie said. She kept her eyes down to the ground. She tried to look up to ask, “D-do - did you bring my laptop?”

She wasn’t slurring yet, but I could see her deteriorating. Caleb looked down at her grimly. He took a moment to think. He was always thinking.

“Leave the laptop,” he rumbled, handing the bag to her. He stepped close and draped it carefully over her shoulder. She looked up, blinking rapidly at the sight of him, skin flushing red. “Unplug for the night.”

“Caleb,” she began. I saw regret in her eyes. Pain. Confusion. Fear. Caleb stepped back into the elevator and jammed the elevator button. It dinged and the doors closed. She pressed her face into her hands and started crying.

“Come on,” I said. I felt a tug of anxiety. “Will you be able to get home alright?”

She nodded and looked up as we stepped through the front doors and onto the cold city street.

“My entire life is falling apart,” she whispered. “I can’t do anything right. I just want it to stop. I’d do anything for it to stop.”

I shuffled my feet uneasily. “You won’t hurt yourself if I let you go home alone?”

She laughed. Cold and bitter. “No. I wouldn’t do that to my parents. I’m their only kid.”

I nodded. The explanation rang true.

“Caleb’s a good guy,” I told her. “Rough around the edges. Bit arrogant. But he’s a good guy. If he says he likes you he does. He’s not playing a game. There’s no bets or jokes. He’s not that type.”

She was shaking. A tear fell down her cheek. “I shouldn’t have - I should have let him...”

“I’m going to get you home,” I said. Caleb would be furious but I didn’t care. He’d be happy to know she got back safely. She shook her head.

“No, no I can do it. Promise.” She forced a smile. I nodded reluctantly.

“Text me when you get home,” I told her and gave a wave to the driver. I opened the door for her and helped her in the back seat.

“Can you tell Caleb I’m sorry?”

My eyes darted across her face as I considered. “I think you should. I mean you assumed something pretty shitty about him and you don’t really know him,” I told her. I watched her face fall. “Reaching out to apologize to him. It would go a long way.”

She just stared. I gave a smile, said, ‘text me,’ and then slammed the door. Then I set off to find Caleb. I needed a raise for this shit.

I looked up from my phone. Chris stepped inside my office and closed the door behind him.

“I kissed her,” I said simply as he sat down. “She slapped me. She said I was arrogant, entitled, self-absorbed. She said she didn’t remember having sex with me and that she’d never let me touch her sober.”

Chris blinked. They were the cliff notes, he would want a play-by-play, but it sufficed for the moment.

“You’re... calmer than I expected.”

I held up my phone as the messages continued to come in.

“She’s my whore,” I said. Another message came through. I started to laugh. “She’s begging me to come over tonight.”

I dropped my phone onto my desk with a clang. “I’m going to go over there tonight and I’m going to fuck her in the ass and she’s going to come like a 2-cent gutter slut for me on camera and I’m gonna have her begging for my cum. Never let me touch her sober?”

I shook my head. My hand trembled.

“And tomorrow,” he said, pointing at my phone. “Tomorrow she’s going to come in here and she’s going to ask me to fuck her and I’m going to fuck her until she can’t see straight.”

I looked at my computer as an email came in from Nick.

“And tomorrow after work, she’s going to come over to my place, where she’s going to finally be put in her place. And she’s going to watch herself come like a slut while I, the arrogant, entitled, piece of shit she’d net let touch her sober, drill her in the ass.”

I leaned back and looked at my phone, my hands clasped on my abdomen.

“Never let me touch her sober. You know why she doesn’t like me. Because I don’t put up with her bullshit. You coddle her. You take that little sob story and you prevent her from being what she can be. But she doesn’t like being challenged. She’s too proud. Well... well, we’ll see how proud she is Sunday night.”

I shook my head.

“She doesn’t know what humiliation is,” I told Chris. “And then, once she learns her place, and she sees how fucking lucky she is that I decided to look past how big of a fucking bitch she could be... then...”

I nodded, drumming my fingers along the desk. My phone buzzed again. I picked up the phone, smiled, and typed out my response.

Chapter Notes

So nervous to be posting this. Please give me your honest opinions. I ended up completely rewriting this chapter. Honestly, I have had like seventeen different versions in my head, but this is the one I think works the best. I very sincerely hope you enjoy it.

Regardless, thank you all for the kind and detailed comments. They really do make my day and make writing worthwhile.

It all started off to get her out of my system and give myself the reward I so richly deserved. It was readily apparent that once would not be enough. So I spent the weekend. Three days of using proud, little Orla as my personal pleasure outlet. I left only wanting more.

Women in bondage. Women tied up, on their knees, overpowered and subservient. Women loving, supporting, devoted. I knew it was what I wanted from the moment I saw that magazine. And now I knew I wanted that woman to be Orla.

It was a fun game while it lasted, but it was time it came to an end. It was time for it all to come out in the open for Orla to receive a big dose of reality. She, Orla Ellen Wright, belonged to me, Caleb Henry Trent, the man she claims she would never let touch her sober. It was high time that I didn't need to hide anymore. If I wanted a picture of her tits on a tough workday, I'd ask her for one. A nice blowjob between meetings, I'd call her in here and she'd get on her knees. I wanted a hard fuck in the supply closet to relieve some tension, we'd walk down there together.

I glanced up at Chris. He held my gaze with a mirthless smile and I reached for my AirPods case where it rested on my desk. I flicked open the case and grabbed one bud from the case. Chris watched silently as I pulled up her name and jabbed send. In my ear, the phone rang once before the call connected and her voice crackled from the speaker, soft and weepy. "Hello?"

I jabbed the mute button. My thumbs moved rapidly across my phone and I glanced at the computer. I had seven minutes before my call. She wouldn't be home before it started. I asked her, "*Are you ok?*"

“Um,” she sniffled. “Yes.”

“You’re calmer than I thought you’d be,” he mused again. I ignored him

“Caleb, you *saw* her right?” Chris added after a few moments passed. I did not respond. I merely looked up from my phone and held his gaze as I typed.

You’re on your way home?

“I saw her,” I finally responded. I put the phone down a moment to pull up our pre-call call notes. “Get your computer. You need to take notes.”

“Yes,” Orla sniffled in my ear. “I’m in an uber.”

“Just don’t make any decisions angry,” Chris ignored my instruction. He spoke with easy familiarity, but there was a slight edge to his voice.

Stay on the phone with me until you’re home safe.

“My mind is made up,” I told Chris.

“I will,” she sniffled.

How many did you take?

“Hurting her more won’t make her love you,” Chris said.

“Three,” she whispered, a tremor in her voice. Her voice overlapped with Chris’.

“I have no plans to hurt her. Go get your laptop.”

“You’re not mad are you?” Orla’s voice was soft and sleepy. I was. I was fucking furious.

I’m not mad.

I went into the workpapers and dragged them over to my second screen.

“If you heard some of the things she was saying -” Chris’ tone had been infuriatingly calm and quiet, as if he was trying to speak to an angry child or a lost dementia patient. He broke off when my fist hit the desk, but his face remained blank. He blinked at me, bored.

“Why doesn’t she say it to me!” I barked. It was a sudden, abrupt burst of rage. My face burned red.

“We’re at work,” Chris reminded me softly, with a bite and a tight smile that only infuriated me further.

Orla spoke and my eyes darted to the time. My calendar popped up, giving me my five minute reminder until my meeting. “Can you come over now?”

“That’s right,” I said to Chris. “And I’m your boss. Now, go get your *fucking* laptop.”

Chris’ face darkened and he got to his feet. He left my office and I pressed my hands to my face. I took a sharp breath and then reached for my phone, but Orla was already speaking again. “Please? I really need you.”

I already told you I can't leave until four. I will be there by five.

I put the phone down and pulled up the long list of numbers that made up the foreign phone number. Chris came back in with his laptop in one hand, his charger in the other. He retook his seat.

Orla said, "I'll make you dinner. I have pasta still, I think."

"All I'm saying is, you need to step back and see the forest for the trees, alright?" Chris said.

I'll take care of dinner.

"I see the forest just fine," I answered Chris.

"No, I want to," she offered.

I'm going into a meeting. Be quiet and don't fall asleep. Tell me when you get to your apartment door locked.

"Ok," she murmured softly.

I began jabbing at the buttons for the impossibly long numbers.

The phone rang once before it connected.

"Furst," rumbled the German CFO on the other end of the phone. Chris pinched his lips together. I glared at him as I spoke to the client. I went through the numbers with him. He

was not quite as intense as he was during our first phone call, but he continued to ask some rather involved questions. It made sense. As a CFO of a European company attempting to break into North America, he would have reason to become more intimately acquainted with American Tax practices and he found the State and Local side of things particularly interesting. I would have been lying if I tried to say it did not give me an intense sense of satisfaction that he was less than impressed with the Federal team lead.

About ten minutes into the conversation, she spoke in my ear. “Are you still there?”

I grabbed my phone. Something about the way she said it helped dilute my anger ever so slightly. It was a soft search for reassurance. I reached for my phone as I pulled up the expected tax exposure for the Californian target entity.

I’m here. Y ou ok?

Chris glanced up from his typing to watch my fingers work across the cell phone. I ignored him and glanced at the clock. A small part of me had hoped I might get out early, but the German man was thorough. He began to ask me about a specific calculation with knowledge that surprised me.

“I’m OK,” she answered and then fell silent again. I had to ask the CFO to repeat a question. The slight pause and his tone of voice indicated he was not pleased with having to repeat himself. I brushed it off. By the time I was answering the question, I had forgotten about it completely. Another ten minutes passed before she spoke again.

“I just got home.” I heard the sound of the car door shutting in the background and the jingle of keys.

Inside with the door locked.

“Ok,” she said softly and I heard her open the door and begin climbing the stairs. I could faintly hear the sound of the deadbolts and the door closing. She said again, “Ok.”

Take a nap. I will be there when you wake up.

“I wish you could come over now,” she said softly. I let out a heavy breath through my nose. Chris began snapping his fingers at me. I looked up. He pointed at the phone with large, exaggerated jabs of his finger.

“Herr Trent?” the German grumbled.

“So sorry, sir,” I answered. I added smoothly, “I am just looking through the workpapers. Just one moment.”

“Of course,” the German rumbled, placated.

I will be there as soon as I can.

Doors locked?

“Yes,” she answered. “You have keys?”

“Caleb,” Chris said softly.

Yes. Go to sleep.

“I will,” she promised.

I hung up the phone and turned my attention back to work.

“Very sorry, Mr. Furst. I wanted to make sure I had another look at the data.”

“Ja. Gut,” he rumbled. He was a man who wanted the right answer. He would appreciate a person taking their time to ensure he could get it. “Let me explain a bit more about the Townships...”

The rest of the call went by relatively quickly. I kept my eye on my phone in case she messaged, but it remained dark. I grew concerned the call would run late when my eyes found the clock and we were still engrossed in conversation concerning Franchise Taxes, when at 3:59, the German curtly requested I send him a new report within the next week explaining the difference between State and Federal taxation and how they relate to each other. I was more than pleased by it. That would be something stress free Orla could throw together on Monday.

“I bet she was a fat girl,” Chris said once the call was over. I looked up at him. “Or something. Acne probably. Lots of it. Does she wear glasses? Bet she was a fat girl that wore glasses and had bad acne. Then she got too hot too fast and her brain never adjusted.”

“She thinks she's too good for me,” I answered, not bothering to correct him that she did not need or wear glasses, and unplugged my laptop from the docking station and slid it into my bag.

“Caleb, I can promise you, she doesn’t,” Chris replied. “The things she was saying -”

“She thinks she's too good for me,” I repeated curtly. “Not in the way you’re thinking. I’m handsome, fit, tall, successful, wealthy, well educated, funny, charismatic -”

“Good to see your confidence hasn’t taken a hit,” Chris smiled dryly.

“ - I’m the guy every man wants to be and every woman wants to be with. But she’s so proud... *she* isn’t going to be just like any other girl. *She* isn’t impressed by it. She’s *better* than it all. She’s above it.”

I zipped up my bag, laptop nestled safely inside.

“But she’ll go begging for *him*,” I held up my cell phone.

A little smile was playing on Chris’ lips.

“Just remember some damage can’t be undone,” Chris cautioned. “And she’s vulnerable right now.”

“What do you think I’m going to do?” I asked, a bit insulted.

“I don’t know. Nothing. Just... have to say it.”

“She’ll be punished,” I said. “But not until she can understand it. I’m not going to do anything.”

“Alright,” Chris said, but he didn’t look convinced. I reached for my bag.

“I’ll be right over,” I told him, slinging my bag over my shoulder. Chris shook his head and left the office to return to his cubicle. I went down to the gym locker room on the third floor, just three doors down from our closet, and flicked on the hot water. I retrieved the bar of soap from my locker and yanked off my shoe and unbuttoned my shirt. I scrubbed my face, jaw, and neck and then selected a fresh shirt from the locker. It wasn’t an exact match for the blue I wore now, but it was close enough I didn’t think anyone would notice. I tossed my jacket back on, grabbed the gym bag, locked the locker, and then headed back up to my office. I grabbed my bag and walked into Chris’ cubicle. I greeted him by placing my arm over the back of his chair and leaning forward. “Ok.”

He turned with raised eyebrows and sighed deeply, “can’t wait until this is over. Fucking weird.”

He leaned in close to me and breathed in deeply through his nose. He shook his head. “Nothing.”

I slapped Chris on the shoulder in thanks and slung my bag back over my shoulder. “I’ll be available by phone.”

Chris just nodded and I made my way out of the building. It was raw outside, but there was the smell of spring in the air. A cold mist hung in the air, turning the tall buildings leaning over me looking gray and austere. As I usually did when I didn’t have her nearby, I felt a deep longing in my chest. It was like the pull of a rubber band, ready to snap. My chest strained painfully. I pulled the neck of my raincoat tightly together at the base of my throat and stepped off to walk diagonal across the intersection with the other masses, ignoring the tourists that walked along the crosswalks only to take another sharp right turn to cross the other, resulting in them missing the light and sending an eruption of horns blaring out into the gray. I only had to wait a couple minutes for the train to arrive.

I swallowed thickly. My throat hurt. It was tight and dry. I grabbed the pack of gum from my pocket and plucked out a small piece. I peeled it free and popped into my mouth. I shoved the wrapper into my pocket and did a quick survey of the train. I was out a bit early. The first true wave of rush hour was beginning to filter in. I nestled myself into a two seater, placing my bag in the spot beside me.

Rain spattered loudly against the window as the rattling train emerged from the underground tunnel. I lifted my eyes up from my phone and glanced out the window. Out of my periphery, I could see a girl glancing up from her text book in my direction. Chris would have met her gaze and smiled. He would have jerked his head toward the empty spot beside him, or meandered over to her, hand in his pocket, and asked what she was studying. He’d get an invite back to her apartment, or convince her to bring her back to hers. I didn’t bother to shoot her a disinterested glare.

I wanted to be with Orla. I wanted to smell her and feel her and touch her and remind myself that regardless of what she might think, want, or feel, she belonged to me.. I glanced at my phone. Her phone had not left her apartment since she arrived home. She should be sleeping, curled up warmly in her bed, sleeping off some of the Xanies. My cock throbbed and I grabbed my bag from where it rested beside me and placed it on my lap.

The train screeched to a halt. I watched the wet masses of mismatching fabric crush off the train and onto the platform and jump off the platform to try and cram into the train. The girl stepped off, casting a final glance at me. Our eyes met briefly. I looked back to my phone, lazily scrolling through our messages from earlier in the day.

All of Chris' lecturing was gone, filed away into the portion of my brain that I would never go into again. My mother used to ask me if I remembered a single thing she ever said to me. At the time, I had not realized it was a rhetorical question. The resounding slap that echoed through the large dining room when I responded simply, 'I make no effort to' had stunned everyone at the table.

I looked at our messages. After the slap, I had sat at my desk, watching my phone light up, chest heaving, cheek still burning and I had felt an unbridled and frightening rage well up inside of me as I watched. The messages had enraged me. I wanted to thrash her. I wanted to send out every single picture I had of her acting like the dirty little slut she was. Instead, I locked my phone in my drawer and went for a walk. I was splashing cold water on my face when Chris asked me what happened. It wasn't until Chris told me to come downstairs and see what I did that I felt some of the anger replaced with worry.

"Excuse me?" A feminine voice floated past my earbuds. I glanced up, annoyed. She was beautiful, blonde, with dark brown eyes and full lips. "Mind if I sit?"

I gave a disinterested nod and scanned the train. There was still an empty single. Another two seater was available, three seats over. I pulled up Orla's company headshot. It had been taken just after she started as a full time hire. Her hair fell over her suit jacket, and she smiled brightly. I could sense it; the girl beside me glancing toward me curiously, trying to think about a good segway into conversation. I gave her nothing. I continued looking at my Orla. My thumb gently touched her mouth. I had a sudden image of her on my bed, hands bound, gagged, legs spread, wearing a slutty little negligee, bunched up around her hips, being fucked to her senses all weekend long. Or an image of her at the lakehouse, stretched out on the dock in a bikini, rubbing tanning lotion into my back and massaging the muscles of my back.

"Yes?" I asked sharply, ripping my AirPods from my ear.

"Do you know how long it usually takes to get to Washington Square?" the woman beside me asked.

“Another half hour this time of day,” I answered.

“Oh, great. Sorry, I just -”

I grabbed my bag and stood. “Excuse me.” I slid past her and walked to the doors on the other train car and waited.

I felt my skin begin to tingle in anticipation. Something would need to be done about the pills and the booze. God, three fucking Xanax in thirty minutes. Thank God for Chris. I needed to thank him. A good bottle of scotch and a passed out naked college girl.

The next stop. Screeching tires. Bodies jostling. The door closed. I was close to her now. I grabbed my coat and brought it to my nose and breathed in deeply. I knew Chris would tell me if he smelled anything, but it had been my biggest source of anxiety for the past 2 months. I would be glad when it was over. The skin around my jaw was beginning to dry out. Too much fucking Dove Men.

Pictures flooded my brain. Orla in a black silk teddy, my cock in her mouth, wrists bound behind her back. Orla’s wrists bound in leather cuffs above her head, legs spread wide, pussy wet and ready for me. This weekend, we’d fall asleep together, warm and comfortable in my bed, and I’d kiss her and tell her how beautiful she was, how badly I wanted her, and how happy we would be together. No games. No bets. No jokes. Just pure desire. My cock throbbed and I situated my briefcase in front of me. The train screeched to another halt and I was already halfway down the stairs before the doors opened. I was the first off the train and walked up her hill with long, meaningful strides. Anticipation coursed through my muscles. By the time I got into her apartment building, my hair was damp and my skin was cold and wet. Water droplets dribbled onto the floor as I shook off my jacket and walked up the stairs.

I paused at her door. I took a steady breath to calm myself. This was the home stretch. No fucking up now. I pressed my ear to the chipped paint and listened. I heard nothing. No sound of running water, not the buzzing of the radio or the humming of the TV. I continued to listen a moment later before I pulled back and inserted the first key. Once turned, I pressed my ear back to the door. I undid the next two and then the door lock. I checked one more, before I slowly opened the door.

The apartment was dark and silent. I waited, listening for movement and allowed my eyes to adjust. My heart came out in regular, rhythmic beats. I found her quickly, a soft, small little lump, sleeping soundly on her bed. Three fucking xanax. I carefully pressed my right toe to my left and heel and kicked off my shoes. Three hundred dollar Oxfords worn home in a rainstorm. I cursed myself as I reviewed them for damage. I had been too distracted when I left. I placed my bag to the floor very softly and then padded over to the bed.

The bed creaked softly as I sat down beside her. My hand was large against her face, covering eyes very gently, and I leaned down to place a kiss to the top of her head. I breathed in the smell of her deeply. She stirred, breathing in deeply herself, and turned her nose toward me.

Her body tensed and her nostrils flared. She emerged from her fog of sleep. Then she breathed in recognition, "Oh, you're here."

Relief flooded her and her hands were on my damp raincoat, pulling me close. The blankets slid down to reveal the thin, pink, silk camisole I had purchased for her. Blood rushed to my lower extremities. She wore no bra. Her nipples tightened and hardened beneath the silky fabric. I swallowed my gum, eyes running over her, mouth watering.

"Will you have sex with me?" she asked, pushing my wet coat off my shoulders. I watched her closely, almost willing her to open her eyes, but she kept them closed. The side of my mouth curved upward. "Please?"

She tried to kiss me. Her lips ghosted across mine before I grabbed her by the hair and pulled her head back. The apartment was dark, but I could see the anxiety on her face, the soft quivering of her lips. Her eyes darted rapidly behind her eyelids. My proud, proud Orla. I reached up and gently groped one breast from over her cami.

"Are you my whore?" I asked her, voice low, lips against her ear.

"Yes," she breathed. "Please, have sex with me?"

I placed my lips to her earlobe. I sucked the gentle flesh between my lips and nibbled. She let out a little noise. A breathy little noise, half a moan, half a whimper.

“Are you my little plaything?” I asked her. Her hands closed around my suit jacket. Her grip was so tight, I was afraid she might rip the fabric.

“ Yes, ” she breathed desperately. “I’m yours. All yours.”

“My what?” I prompted gently, lips curving up into a smirk. She sucked in a little breath.

“Your slave,” she said and I closed my eyes. I sucked on her earlobe, nibbling gently. Once satiated, I pulled back and turned on the lamp by the side of her bed. “You still want me right?”

I released her hair and rose from the bed. She remained where she was, eyes closed. She was trembling ever so slightly. I went to my gym bag and went into the locked compartment. I retrieved the blindfold, gag, and restraints. My cock was straining painfully in my pants. I pulled her to her feet with a hand to her elbow and looked down at her. I placed the black leather cuffs around each wrist, watching her face closely, waiting for those green eyes to pop open and fix on mine. But she kept them closed and my mouth twitched. I fastened the cuffs to her ankles next. She looked so good bound. So beautiful.

I spun her around and shoved her toward the bed. She stumbled and fell over. I stepped behind her and bent her over the bed so her breasts were pressed into the blankets.

“Tiptoes,” I muttered. I smacked her thigh hard. She gasped and pushed up on her toes. I smacked her ass cheek and squeezed the silk clad globe hard. She gasped again and I pressed my clothed erection against her bottom. I carefully pulled at my tie, staring down at her trembling little body. I tied it around her eyes. I didn’t think she’d open her eyes, but I didn’t want to give her the option.

With a curt smack to the ass I guided her up onto the bed. With one hand to the back of her neck. I pressed her face down onto the covers, with her knees bent beneath her. I pulled her hands through so she was forced to balance on her shoulders and face, and tightly fastened her wrists and ankles together. I took a step back and took a look at my handy work.

Her muscles quivered softly, but she looked so unbelievably beautiful. I reached up and gently pulled the silk shorts down so her ass was bare and open. She shuddered softly, swallowing thickly. I stepped to the foot of the bed and placed my thumb to her mouth. Her lips parted, taking my thumb into her mouth and sucking gently.

“Slut,” I whispered softly to her. I removed my thumb from between her lips.

I returned to my bag and rummaged. I retrieved the small, metallic little plug and felt my mouth water. I smeared a bit of lube on the end and then approached her. I placed my hand at the small of her back, gently caressing my palm upward along the curve of her bottom and then down a quivering thigh.

I had planned on fucking her in the ass for the first time once she knew the truth, but plans had changed. I felt the hum course through my limbs as I spread her ass cheeks. Her pussy glistened. Little whore. Her body reacted to domination. She was made for this. For me.

“You weren’t a virgin,” I accused softly. She shook her head. I pressed my thumb to her asshole. Pink and tight and perfect. “You are here.”

I felt her body tighten and tense. My cock was raging. She ducked in a breath and shuddered out, “yes.”

My mouth was dry. I pressed the little plug to her asshole. She moaned slowly as I carefully inserted the metallic plug inside of her, stretching her insides apart, readying herself for me. I grabbed my phone and jabbed record, before throwing the phone on the bed beside her.

I leaned over her, reaching around to squeeze her tits and roll her nipples between my fingers. “Ask me nicely.”

“I -” her mouth was opening and closing like a fish. God, I couldn’t wait for her to know, to look up at me while I drilled her.

I wrapped my hand around her throat. I squeezed firmly, turned her face toward me. "Please, fuck me?"

"Where?" I asked. Her body trembled and I placed a tiny kiss to her eyelid beneath my tie. Then another.

"M-my -"

"Please fuck me in the ass," I whispered to her.

"Please fuck me in the ass," she breathed.

"Make it yours," I murmured. I gently rubbed my nose against hers.

"Make it yours," she whispered. I wanted her to say my name. "Please fuck me in the ass. Make my asshole yours."

I laughed softly, rubbing my nose against hers once more.

"Dirty whore," I murmured against her lips. I pulled back and placed a vicious slap to her ass cheek. A whimper left her. I grabbed my cock through my trousers and looked down at her. Her entire body was shaking, both from the stress the position put on her and the knowledge that she was about to take it hard in the ass. I smacked her ass hard. The tender flesh turned bright red beneath my hand. Her whimper drove me insane.

Her fingers wiggled between her ankles. She tugged gently. Not any real attempt to get out, but to test just how helpless she really was. The word sent a sudden surge of desire through me. *Helpless*. I pressed three fingers into her pussy and curled them toward the plug. Her hips bucked and a moan was suppressed by the blankets she buried her face in. Gathering a fistful of hair, I turned her face to the side.

“I want to hear you,” I murmured. She nodded and I released her hair. I unbuckled my belt and slid it free from the belt. My tongue darted out to wet my lips and I grabbed my cock through my trousers again. I draped my belt along the small of her back and began to unfasten my pants. She shivered slightly.

My cock sprang free and I gave myself a few hard strokes. I wanted to feel her soft, cool hands on my raging length. She could jerk me off in the break room while I had my coffee on Monday. My balls tightened and I bit my tongue. I rubbed the head of my cock along her glistening pussy. I pushed the head of my cock into her and then pulled out. She whimpered softly. I looked around and found the vibrator resting on the charger where I had left it this morning. A smile danced across my lips as I walked back to her, the vibrator in one hand, stroking my hard cock with the other. Oh, I loved playing with her.

I inserted the vibrator into her pussy and turned it on high. She didn't deserve it after the display she put on in my office, but she was sure as hell going to know she moaned and came like a whore while she took all nine inches of me in her tight, virgin asshole. I smacked her ass cheek again. I squeezed the pale globe hard, digging my fingertips into the jiggling flesh. I played my fingers around the flat head of the plug and slowly pulled it out of her. She moaned, low in the back of her throat. I wondered how thin these walls were. Another reason, after tomorrow, we were moving this to my apartment.

Her hole tightened back up the moment the plug was removed. I couldn't even begin to imagine how tight she was going to be. I massaged her clit in firm circles and pressed the plug back to her puckered entrance. Slowly, pushed the plug back into her lightly lubricated hole.

I bent back over her, wrapping my arms around her to close my hands around each breast and squeezed. I pressed my nose to her cheek and gave her a little lick.

“You want me, baby?” I asked her. She nodded.

“Yes,” she whimpered. “Please.”

“You wanna take my fat cock in your ass?”

“Yes, I want - I want it in my ass.”

“What are you?” I asked.

“Your slave,” she moaned. I pressed my cock to her slickening cunt. One of my hands closed around her throat. I pressed my mouth to hers. I pulled back and murmured to her.

“You like being my dirty little fuck toy?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

“My Sweet little plaything.”

“Yes,” she breathed. “Please, have sex with me?”

I pulled back. I pulled the plug out of her slowly and then pushed it back in. She moaned softly as I pulled it back out and placed it to the side. I dragged my fingers over her pulsing pussy and rubbed her slick juices along my cock. I rubbed my cock along the soft flesh, dripping around the vibratory, and then pressed my cock against her light hole.

She tensed and then changed my mind. I grabbed her by the hips and lifted her up. I scooted her toward the center of the bed and crawled on my behind her. Fisting my cock, I placed it back at the entrance of her tight little hole and slowly began to push.

A low moan came out of her as I got the head of my cock into her virgin asshole. She let out a soft little noise that sounded a bit like “ow” but I didn’t stop. Slowly and steady I pushed into her, marveling at the unbelievable tightness. She’d take what I gave her, when I gave it to her. I was half way inside of her when I paused for just a moment. I heard another little whimper of pain. My cock throbbed and I wanted to fuck her until she cried. I also wanted her to come. I wanted her to come like the filthy little cock whore she was. I reached around to massage her clit.

“You’re such a good girl,” I whispered. I knew I was taking too much but I didn’t care. If she figured it out why my cock in her ass she figured it out. “So sweet. Be my good girl and take it like the filthy slut you are.”

She was nodded, eyebrows lifted up toward her hairline. I began to push again. Her body clenched around me. Sweat beaded on my forehead. I tugged at my collar and unbuttoned the first couple buttons. My hand went to her hip and I stroked the skin gently.

“I’m ok,” she breathed. I leaned over to look at her. My lips curved. “You can go.”

She pushed backward and I squeezed her waist tightly. I slowly pulled my cock back out of her. I rubbed her cunt again, using her juices to slick my cock. I pulled about halfway out before slowly pushing back in. Another little moan escaped her.

I groped in my pocket for my marker. I uncapped it, mouth watering. I pressed the tip of the marker to her left asscheek, just where it began to curve beneath the small of her back. Slowly, I drew a little ‘C’ and then trailed my finger along her skin. I pushed into her hard, earning a moan, and added a neat little ‘H’ beside the ‘C’. I pulled out of her and as she moaned softly, in pleasure and pain, I drew the T and then gently trailed my finger around the spot. I capped my marker and pushed back into her. I shoved my pen into my pocket and grabbed onto her hips. I pulled back out of her and pushed back in, moving my hips at a faster pace. She sucked in a deep breath.

“Feel good?” I asked her. She nodded. I smacked her ass again. I smacked it hard. She was bleeding ever so slightly. I was pleased. I was afraid the bit of lube I gave her would make it too easy on her. I thrust harder, eyes darting between the blood on my cock and my initials on her ass. “You belong to me?”

She nodded. I smacked so hard she cried out.

“Tell me.”

“I belong to you,” she said, voice trembling as her breaths came out with each thrust. “I’m all yours.”

I spanked her again. She moaned loudly. Xanax was a beautiful thing.

“You still want me?” She asked, have a moan.

I leaned forward, lifting up a leg by her hip so I could get into her deeper. I grabbed her by the hair and pulled. My response to fuck her harder. I’d show her how badly I wanted her. How much I loved using her. How much pleasure I was able to derive from her sexy little body.

I felt her orgasm. She pulsed around me so tightly it was almost painful. There was so much I wanted to say to her but I bit my tongue. One more day. One more fucking day. We just needed to get through work tomorrow and I’d have the weekend to keep her from doing anything stupid.

A few more hard thrusts and I felt myself begin spilling myself inside of her. I leaned forward, careful not to put too much pressure on her neck, and pulled her face to mine. With each spurt of cun inside of her, I gave another hard thrust into her, pushing up to the hilt with each burst of pleasure. I forced my tongue into mouth, pulling her hair tightly, and rode out my orgasm with a soft grunt against her lips.

“My little whore,” I breathed, nuzzling my nose against hers again. I placed a chaste kiss to her panting lips. “Did you like that?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

“You like my cock in your ass?”

Another sleepy nod. “Yes.”

“Say thank you,” I murmured.

“Thank you,” she whispered. Her eyes were closed. She was falling asleep.

“Thank you for fucking my slutty asshole,” I murmured.

“Thank you for fucking my slutty asshole,” she murmured. “Your asshole. Your pussy. Your body.”

I rubbed my nose to hers.

“All mine?” I asked her softly. She nodded, our noses rubbing.

“All yours,” she murmured. “I belong to you.”

I kissed her and then rose. I pulled my cock out of her and stepped back to admire the scene. She remained in the bed, arms pulled under her, tied to her ankles, ass up, glowing red, my initials written in large black letters, my semen dripping out of her used and swollen asshole. I grabbed my phone and took some pictures before moving over to the kitchen. I snagged the Chinese menu off the fridge and looked it over.

She didn't eat sushi and she hated seafood. She loved chicken lo mein but would eat veggie if a vegetarian wanted to split with her. She liked sesame chicken. She didn't understand cashew chicken.

“Who puts peanuts on chicken,” she giggled in disbelief one day as she jabbed at her noodles. She had been wearing a blue blouse. Her hair was up. When she smiled, really smiled, her eyes lit up and her cheeks turned into little red apples. She looked sweet and innocent and shy.

“You’re so uncultured,” Chloe had shaken her head at her. The smile on her face had died when her eyes met mine and she had looked down at her chicken. I sat down a few chairs down from her where Chris and David were, but she quickly collected her things and left the room.

I pulled up my phone and ordered. Once done, I ran my hand through my hair and looked back at her. Her back rose and fell slowly. I felt a rush of warmth, need, passion, anger, hate, love... every emotion I could think of, this woman inspired in me. I checked my watch, sighed, and walked back toward her.

I was awoken by large, warm hands on my ankles and wrists, removing the bindings from me and tossing them onto the floor nearby. I kept my eyes closed beneath the blindfold and let out an involuntary moan as the vibrator was pulled out of me. I felt a sense of peace overcome me. His passion was comforting. The slaps, the pulling of hair, the biting and sucking. I was sore, I could feel him leaking out of my aching hole, but it mingled in with the mix of warmth and I could not say the aftermath was entirely unpleasant. It helped that I was still enjoying the tail end of a three Xanax high.

He moved me onto my back and I felt the mattress press down under his weight. The silky camisole was pushed up to my collar bone. His hands were large and warm as they closed around a breast each, and soon my right nipple was closed between his lips. His tongue stroked the tight little bud as he sucked. Cool air hardened my nipple as his mouth left the sensitive skin and he bit down on the side of my breast. He bit just hard enough to draw concern before he moved on to give equal attention to the next breast.

His lips slowly moved upward to my collar bone. Light kisses and nips. His tongue was warm along my throat. He sucked down hard on the skin. The same spot as the hickey and I felt him working to make it just as dark, purple, and angry looking as that day in the utility closet. He moved downward, adding another to my shoulder. He then moved back to my breasts, biting and sucking on my nipples before moving further down.

“Are you high?” he murmured, and then placed a soft kiss to my ribs.

“A little,” I admitted. “I’m tired.”

I smelled the marker as the cap came off. He gently trailed another line on my ribs. The cap clicked back on the marker. He moved up and kissed me. His lips were warm and soft. Tender. I parted my lips and kissed him back. He was looming over me, elbows on either side of me. He leaned down and pressed his nose to mine.

“Are you my good little cock slut?” he asked softly. I was slowly falling asleep. I nodded.

“Yes,” I murmured. He placed a soft kiss to my lips.

“Were you made for me?”

“Yes, I was made for you,” I murmured and reached up to press my hands to the back of his neck.

“Made to serve me?” he asked. His lips gently touched my cheek.

“Yes, I serve you,” I answered. I moved my hands up to trail through his hair. His body was nice and warm on top of me.

“Made to,” he corrected with a kiss to my opposite cheek.

“Made to serve you,” I said.

“Made to love me,” he murmured. He sucked my earlobe into his mouth.

“Made to love you,” I murmured.

“You want me so bad,” he breathed. His hands were pulling on my shorts.

“I want you,” I agreed quietly.

“So bad,” he said, pulling me by my thighs so I was flat on my back. He bent my knees and pressed into me with a steady thrust.

“So bad,” I said. “I want you badly.”

He thrust hard and I wrapped my arms around him. He was warm and strong and smelled so good. I pressed my nose to his temple and breathed in deeply.

“What color hair do you have?” I asked, somewhat breathily. His teeth scraped along my shoulder blade and he was breathing hard. I felt it, a build of pleasure and warmth, and I rode what was left of my high into another orgasm without much thought, breathing hard against his ear and digging my nails into the back of his neck. I don’t remember his own climax. I remember him climbing off of me and losing his warmth.

I laid there for a bit. He was in the kitchen. The sink went on. Then the fridge opened. I could feel him slowly leaking out of my sore holes and I reached up to touch my ribs. Did he add another before he went into the kitchen? I didn’t know.

“You’ll still tell me tomorrow?” I asked him. I didn’t pull up my shorts. He’s left them hanging around my one ankle. My camisole was still bunched up around my collarbone. I added, mostly to myself, “I just need to know.”

The bed sank down and he sat me up. A glass of cool water was pressed to my lips. The moment the water touched my tongue I realized how painfully thirsty I was. I took it from him and sucked it down.

“I can make dinner,” I offered. “I have the pasta.”

He took the empty glass from me and went back into the kitchen. I shifted, slightly uncomfortable as his come slowly dripped out of me. He returned and took me by the elbow. I followed him into the bathroom. He placed me down on the toilet. I could feel his semen, slick and wet between my cheeks. I was sore. He had been rough. Passionate. I felt a rush of warmth rush over me as the knowledge that he still wanted me rooted firmly in my mind. The water sprang on. He guided me under the spray and held my hand out to feel. It was burning hot.

“Too hot?”

“Perfect,” I answered. He pulled my shorts down and then moved my cami up over my head.

“Eyes closed,” he instructed and removed the blindfold. He helped me inside and said, “Clean yourself.”

The door closed and then I heard the bathroom door close. I opened my eyes after counting to thirty and washed my hair. I scrubbed my body clean, carefully removing as much of his cum out of me as I could. I didn’t really feel anything. I felt some shame. Some sadness. But mostly I just felt tired. Tired and hungry.

I shaved and scrubbed my face clean and then slowly lowered myself down to sit on the floor. He never said I was allowed to leave the shower, so I wouldn’t. I’d know who he was tomorrow and if I did what he said, he wouldn’t be angry with me either. I heard the bathroom door open and closed my eyes. He knocked three hard times on the foggy shower door.

“My eyes are closed,” I called and the door slid open. The water was turned off and he helped me up with a hand to my shoulder. “You still want me?” I asked as he dried me off. He was gently running the towel through my hair when I asked. He paused, let the towel drop. His hand gripped my chin, tilted my face back, and he placed a very tender kiss to my lips.

“Forever,” he murmured against my mouth. He placed another soft kiss. “My sweet.” Kiss. “Obedient.” Kiss. “Girl.”

He took me by the hand and lead me into the living room: he helped me into a pair of shorts and cami: they were not the same as the pink ones he had put me in the night before. He put the TV on and I heard the Bruins' announcers rambling about the start of the first period. It was about 7:30 then. I just wanted to go to sleep.

There was a knock on the door. I jumped a mile and my eyes popped open on impulse. Immediately, his hands were on my eyes. "I'm sorry," I whispered. "I didn't see. I didn't see."

The pressure of his hand lifted and I kept my eyes closed. My heart was pounding violently as I considered who it might be. My mother wouldn't have driven down. She knew better than that.

He rose from the couch and walked to the door. It opened and my ears buzzed. Then I heard the rustle of plastic, someone I didn't know say "here you go" and then "thanks man." And the door shut.

He was in the cabinets then. I heard the clink of ceramic plates on painted particle board. My stomach growled angrily as the glorious smell of Chinese food filled the apartment. By the time he sat down beside me, my mouth was watering. He placed the noodles to my lips and I realized he was using chopsticks. I ate my fill. It was the most I had eaten in months. He didn't stop until I leaned back, shaking my head, and said, "I can't take anymore." I placed my hand on my stomach and laid my head back. He halted my decent to the left side of the futon and pulled me to the opposite side, settling my head in his lap. I felt movement above me and assumed he was eating, but I soon lost consciousness, the feel of his fingers in my hair soothing me off to sleep.

I awoke briefly as he carried me to the bed. He nestled me down in the covers and put two pills in my mouth. My birthcontrol and my antidepressant, I assumed. He kissed me and said something, gently stroking my forehead as I fell off to sleep.

My alarm woke me at six. I hit snooze three times to fight through my grogginess and threw my covers off me to reveal my new purple pj set. I passed into the bathroom to brush my teeth and throw on some makeup, put my hair into a tight bun, dressed in the clothing he had laid out for me, and was off to the train by seven. I hated rush hour traffic, so I was already in a bad mood when I got into the building. I saw Eddie and three my head back and whispered "fuuuuuuck." To the ceiling. Eddie laughed at me good naturedly.

“Come on now, Ellie!” he cried. “You know a coffee from you in the morning was part of my compensation package!”

“Eddie, I’m sorry,” I said in despair. I wanted to cry. I felt like I’d let him down.

“Don’t you worry one bit,” Eddie said to me. He placed a warm hand on my shoulder. “You just take care of yourself at the moment. You’ve been looking a bit rough around the edges for a couple weeks now.”

I gave a pained smile.

“Still beautiful as ever though, if I can say that without getting strung up for it,” he said.

“I’ll bring you two on Monday,” I vowed, wondering if I hadn’t done as good a job covering up the circles around my eyes as I thought I had.

“How about this. I’ll buy *you* a coffee on Monday,” he said. I smiled.

“Bout time. Free loader,” I said and Eddie laughed. I made it to the elevator and sagged against it. I’d totally forgotten coffee. I had hoped to avoid the break room. It was almost eight. Caleb would have already gotten his coffee.

The elevator doors opened and I went the long way around to avoid Caleb’s office. I put my stuff down, grabbed the sandwich and chips he had prepared for me the night before, and began walking down the hall toward the break room. I was going to turn left to avoid Caleb’s office again, but Danny was walking down the aisle with David as I exited.

“Morning, Ellie,” they greeted in unison with smiles. “Surprised you’re in.”

I swallowed thickly. “Why?”

“Stomach bug right? That’s what Chris said.”

Thank God for Chris.

“Oh yeah,” I laughed. “Feeling better now though.”

“Sure as hell don’t look it,” David said.

“Dude,” Danny said.

“It’s fine,” I laughed. “The worst of it has passed.”

I fell in step with them and walked the usual way to the break room. The light was on in Caleb’s office, but he had his blinds pulled. I thanked God for the small mercy. Retrieving coffee was uneventful and I managed to get work done somewhat efficiently until about ten o’clock when we had our scheduling meeting.

I walked in with my notebook and sat down in the back. We weren’t at the table. We sat, about forty of us in total, for all of SALT in the Boston office, in a mass of chairs facing the front of the room where Nick would lead the meeting. I glanced up to see Chris stroll in Caleb. Chris wasn’t wearing his suit jacket, and was dressed in a crisp white shirt, blue tie, and steely gray trousers. Caleb wore the suit jacket to his dark navy suit. He wore a powder blue shirt and a mahogany tie.

Chris met my eye and gave me a jab of his chin in greeting and a smile. I watched in horror as he began walking toward me, Caleb in toe. Caleb reached his fingers against another man in compliance. They laughed about something.

“Morning,” Chris said, sitting down beside me. I scanned the room, sizing up the men as they came in. Caleb stood still speaking to the man he had high fived, his hands in his pockets, smile on his face.

“Hi,” I murmured.

“After the meeting let’s grab a conference room. I need to get you up to speed on Auto and Pratt.”

I nodded but said nothing. Caleb made his appearance and sat down on the other side of Chris. The two exchanged pleasantries as I continued to scan the room. It would make the most sense he was in SALT. Or maybe Core M&A. I *had* to work with him. Nick came in apparently in a good mood and the meeting started as usual. He went down the list, asking everyone about their projected availability. I absolutely despised these meetings. I hated having to speak in front of all these people. Even when it was as simple as this.

“Ellen,” Nick said. “Ellie, what do you have going on?”

“Um, I’ll be busy with dealwork,” I answered. It was all I ever said. I was never not busy.

“Auto is coming along?” Nick asked and I looked up from my scribbling in my notebook.

“Um, yes,” I answered.

“How’d the call go yesterday? Another success?” he asked. I let out a breathy laugh and tucked a nonexistent loose strand of hair behind my ear. I couldn’t lie. I waited for Caleb to say something. When I heard nothing I looked over at him. His eyes stared back at me coldly. He had a little lift to his lips.

“I wasn’t on the call,” I admitted. Nick frowned and looked at Caleb.

“Orla had to go home early yesterday. Chris covered it,” he said. My cheeks burned. Because of *him*. I went home early because of *him*. Because he kissed me in his office. My thirty something year old *boss* kissed his twenty six year old *associate*. What might Nick say if he heard *that*.

Nick looked at me. “Can’t be missing calls like that if you want to move up in M&A,” he told me. My cheeks burned. I looked around the room, blinking rapidly. I was violently angry at Caleb.

“Alright, Steph. How’re we looking?”

I wrang my hands tightly in my lap and looked over to glare at Caleb. He turned his head and met my gaze.

“Something you want to say?” he asked, leaning over Chris toward me.

“You could have helped me there,” I answered.

“I’m just your boss right? That’s it,” he said and leaned back. My cheeks burned red. One humiliation to suffer for him to leave me alone. That I could handle if it meant he would leave me alone again. But my face still burned and I was blinking rapidly. I was somewhat aware my teeth were chattering as my lower jaw trembled. Chris spoke. “Busy with dealwork,” he said and Nick moved on. It all felt terribly unfair. I wondered if he was in the room. If he was disappointed with me. Embarrassed of me.

“Forever,” he had said. I repeated that word over and over again in my mind.

“Caleb,” Nick said as he went through managers. “How we looking?”

“Fully staffed. No resource needs,” he answered.

“I can bring in another senior from the New York office if you need the extra support.”

I wanted to collapse in on myself. I couldn't bear it. I really couldn't. I waited for it. The crushing blow.

“Not necessary,” he answered. I looked over at him and then lowered my eyes to my hands.

“Well, alright,” Nick said and moved on. I stayed in my chair as the meeting ended, watching everyone file out, laying special attention to the taller men in the room. I simply didn't have the energy to move.

“You alright?” Chris asked conversationally. He gently nudged my shoulder with his pad of paper. I nodded and gave him a smile.

“12:45 lunch?” Caleb asked Chris.

“Yeah,” Chris said and the two exchanged their little bro clap. I looked down at my notepad. I didn't watch Caleb as he sauntered out of the room. I pressed my hand to my forehead and Chris sat down beside me. “Y'alright?”

“Can I ask you something? As a friend. Not a coworker?”

“Of course,” he said. He was leaning his elbows on his knee. His face was open, sincere, and grim.

“Did Caleb tell you anything?” I asked him. His eyes lowered a fraction of an inch and he slowly began to nod. He looked back up to meet my watery gaze.

“Gave me a quick rundown,” he answered.

“He’s my boss,” I said to Chris. The open quality of Chris’ face took on a more guarded look and I panicked. “I’m not - I would never report him. Honestly, I would never.”

Chris nodded, looking relieved. I never would. Then Chris would hate me too.

“I just mean...I’ve never thought of him that way and...” I laughed, breathy and painful. It didn’t sound happy. “... and I don’t really like him that much.”

A small smile came to Chris’ face.

“I didn’t... think I was giving out any signals -”

“You fucked him, Ellie,” Chris cut me off with a bluntness and a crassness that surprised me. Then I realized I had asked to talk to him as a friend, not a coworker. “Guys tend to think that means you’re interested.”

“I’m seeing someone,” I said. It just came out. Chris’ eyebrows rose and he looked genuinely surprised. My cheeks burned and I looked down at my hands. “We’re not official or anything and ... not telling people yet but... You won’t tell a soul?”

“Cross my heart,” Chris answered.

“Well, I was seeing him when I slept with Caleb and ... I’m terrified of him finding out. And I’m not ... I don’t cheat. I mean, I’ve never actually had the opportunity to cheat, but I wouldn’t, I won’t... and... It’s just even if I *wanted* to, I couldn’t let Caleb kiss me.”

“No, I get that,” Chris said. “We were all pretty loaded when we left the bar.”

“And now... things were getting good... between me and Caleb, I mean and...” I looked off toward the wall and the terrible painting they had hanging on it. “... What do I do?”

I met Chris' gaze who was looking at me with an intensity that was uncommon for him. It was almost alarming.

"Well, I think you explain that Caleb and you apologize," he said. "For leading him on, not telling him about the boyfriend."

"I don't think I led him on," I breathed.

"You fucked him, Ellie," Chris said, voice stern and face neutral. I swallowed thickly and nodded.

"I just..."

"Yesterday, you asked me if we were all laughing at you," Chris said. I met his gaze. I felt my lip trembling. I tried to bite the inside of my lip to stop it but couldn't. Chris' gaze was soft and his eyes momentarily went to my trembling lips. "You're a beautiful woman, Ellie. Caleb's said that since the day you started."

"I don't feel that way," I whispered. I looked down at my hands. I pressed my hand to my cheek and tried to wipe the tears away. I took a deep breath and looked up at the ceiling.

"You want to smooth things over, I'd just go tell Caleb the truth. Tell him how you feel, what's going on. Having a talk with him, you might find he's not a bad guy. I'm friends with him anyway, right?"

"Thank you," I said. "For everything. For yesterday and the past two months."

"Anything for a friend," he said and stood. He held out his hand and helped me up. He had both hands on either one of my shoulders and asked, "We're friends?"

“We’re friends,” I smiled.

“Great. Now come on. Let’s meet in five so we can do a run through of those deals.”

I smiled, nodded, and met him in the smaller conference room about five minutes later. We spoke for about forty five minutes before I returned to my desk, feeling a lot better about my deal work.

After that meeting I sat staring at my blank computer screen for some time. Heart pounding, hands sweating, throat aching, I pushed myself up to my feet. I had to do this. It was the same thing in Law School, when I had to stand up to make an argument for a grade. A few minutes of agony for future peace. It was the right thing to do. And Chris was right. There had to be more to Caleb if Chris was friends with him. I would tell him the truth, be honest with him, and maybe we could come to an understanding, a friendship, or at the absolute least, an amicable working relationship.

His office door was open, the blinds still pulled, but he was behind his desk when I stepped into the threshold. His suit coat was off, draped on the back of his chair. He sat as he usually did, leaning forward, propped up with a hand to his mouth and his elbow on the desk. His eyes shifted up from his computer screen as I stepped into the doorway. I knocked awkwardly on the door frame.

“Hi,” I said stupidly. “Um, can we talk for a second?”

He continued to stare for a second and then nodded slowly, leaning back from his desk.

“Sure.”

I stepped inside and closed the door behind me. His eyes flickered toward the windows as I did. I knew he might be worried, alone in his office with me, the door closed and the windows shut, but I was grateful for the privacy.

“Um... I’m sorry if you... got the wrong impression,” I said. His face did not change. He stared blankly. “I just mean... I’m seeing someone.”

His lips twitched slightly. His eyes darted to his right, looking at nothing in particular. His eyes landed back on me.

“I see,” he said.

“And... well, we’re not telling people yet. It’s new and... um. I just reacted yesterday and I shouldn’t have said what I said and...I’m sorry about that. So...”

I bit my lip. He stared long enough that it became uncomfortable. Slowly, with a little laugh, I turned toward the door.

“And...” I turned back to him as he spoke. “And you were with this guy when we slept together?”

My cheeks burned red.

“Y-Yes, we -”

“That’s pretty fucked up, Orla,” he said, leaning back. My cheeks burned defensively. My lips pressed together into a hard line. I felt the muscles in my jaw clench.

“I agree,” I said sharply. “So, obviously, that’s why I didn’t react well yesterday. So. Sorry,” I turned toward the door again.

“Hope he doesn’t work here,” Caleb said. I paused and turned to look at him. He added, “For your sake.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well when you do go public, I think he deserves to know.”

I suddenly felt very, very cold. I stared a moment, not truly comprehending what he meant.

“What?”

“If you’re cheating on him, I think he deserves to know.”

I thought of the things he said last night. The words he’s written on my body. Panic consumed me in a way it never did before. It was a cold, lonely feeling of absolute dread. I stared back at his cold gray eyes and began to shake my head in rapid, jagged motions.

“N-no, I never cheated - ”

“You fucked me while you were dating someone,” Caleb repeated slowly, eyebrows up to his hair line. “That’s *cheating* .”

I swallowed thickly and shook my head.

“N-no, I was drunk - ”

“So was I,” Caleb shot back. “And I’ve been pretty drunk without my girlfriend at the time, and I’ve never cheated *once* . You invited me up to your apartment. You grabbed my hand and dragged me toward your bed. Don’t act like it wasn’t consensual. Don’t be that kind of girl.”

“I’m not. I’m not - I’m not accusing you of that, I just... it wasn’t cheating. I’m a loyal - I’m faithful.”

“Clearly not,” he answered dismissively

“You’d get fired. If you said something. If anyone found out.”

“I’d get a slap on the wrist,” Caleb scoffed. “You know it and I know it. Whoever this guy is, he deserves to know. If I knew you were taken I’d have never touched you.”

My mind raced. What if he wanted me to be his girlfriend once I knew who he was? If he found out... if it was confirmed to him that I’d let Caleb touch me... I thought of the words on my body. Mine. How many times had he said that. Ordered me not to let anyone else touch me. He’d be furious. He’d hate me. He’d kill me.... He’d release those pictures...

They all came rushing back in a blur. All the pictures I’d taken. That would be a transgression worthy of such a punishment. I felt dizzy.

“What - what do you want?” I hardly remember saying it. I couldn’t even see straight.

“What do I want?” he asked incredulously.

“To not say anything?” I asked. “L-l-look it was stupid of me, I agree but I can’t - he can’t find out. Please. What do you want to just make this go away and it’ll be like nothing ever happened?”

He leaned back in his chair, suddenly pensive. He cocked his head, thinking. He looked back at me and said deadpan, “I could go for a blowjob right about now.”

I stared. Then I laughed. A painful, breathy, laugh. “You’re not serious.”

“Sure,” he said. “I saw you get off that elevator. Don’t act all shy and innocent now.”

My cheeks burned. My lower jaw trembled.

“Or you could just tell him the truth,” he offered.

“I can’t,” I said. My eyes darted side to side. He’d kill me. He’d send everyone those *pictures*.

“Your choice,” he said. “Quick blow and I won’t say a word.”

I bit the inside of my lip. He was punishing me for my rejection. It was perfectly plain to see. I wondered if I could do it. If I could stomach the humiliation.

The pictures. He’d be furious. He’d be beyond furious. What was better, let Caleb Trent have his little power trip and think he got one over in me, or have every single person at my job see me with my tits out, fingers shoved in my pussy, a cock in my mouth.

I walked around the desk. Saying nothing: I knelt down in front of him and he cocked his head. “Lock the door, Orla,” he said, voice dripping with such condescension that I bit my cheek so hard it bled. I pushed myself up to my feet, legs trembling, and then walked back to the door. I swallowed down razor blades as I turned the lock. When I turned to his desk, he was pushing back from his chest, a hand on the sizable bulge through his trousers.

I knelt down and reached for his belt. My hands were shaking violently. He could see it. I knew he could. He didn’t care. I hated him even more. I glanced up at him. I could not remember seeing a darker, smugger smirk on anyone I had ever met. It shouldn’t have surprised me. He was cold and arrogant, condescending, rude, entitled. I paused once his belt buckle was undone. My hands were on his thighs and I took a deep breath.

“Go on,” he urged gently. He placed his hand on the top of my head. My fingers plucked at the button of his trousers and then touched the zipper.

“Please, Caleb,” I breathed, looking up at him. “Please, what do you want?”

“I told you,” he said. “You tell him, I tell him, or you suck my dick. Your choice.”

“But you’re just making me cheat again,” I pointed out. “You know I belong to -” my eyes fluttered.... “that I’m with someone.”

“You have the opportunity to do the right thing,” he rumbled. “I didn’t force you on your knees. You got down there yourself.”

I wanted to scream at him. He didn’t *understand*. It wasn’t a risk of losing him. It wasn’t a risk of being dumped or labeled a cheater. There were *pictures*. I wondered... if I told Caleb I was afraid of pictures being released... if he’s help. I looked up at him, a tear dribbling down my cheek. He stared down with cold, unfeeling eyes.

My hands, still shaking, resumed. He lifted his hips to help and reached into his underwear. I looked away before his erection was freed, but he turned my head back by tightening his hand in his hair. My gaze met his clock, his hand moving up and down the impressive length with slow, hard strokes. Precum glistened at the tip of the pink head.

With a painfully dry mouth, I reached out and took hold of his cock. It was hard, hot, thick. I lowered my mouth to the head and dragged my tongue along the side. I licked the length of him. His hand had a vice grip on my hair. I continued to love my tongue along the other side of his cock.

“You lick too much,” he scolded, pulling on my hair. “Put it in your mouth.”

He moved my head with the hand in my hair and put his cock between my lips. He moved my head up and down his cock by tugging and pulling on my hair. “Open your eyes,” he

ordered. "Look at me."

I did. His gray eyes were dark and stormy. Thundercloud gray. They burned with... *anger*. It unsettled me, and then he said, almost tenderly, "you've got such amazing eyes."

He brought up another hand to brush some loose hair back. He used both hands to move my head up and down. "Don't look away. Look at me."

His phone buzzed and he removed one hand from my hair to grab it. He looked at his phone and then pulled his hands away to begin typing. He looked back down at me. "I didn't say stop."

I hadn't realized I had slowed down. I continued moving my head, pressing my tongue along the shaft. I took his cock out of my mouth to catch my breath and gave his cock a few hard strokes.

"Keep the head in your mouth even when you need to watch your breath. Suck and twirl your tongue along the head while you stroke. There you go," he said, still typing. "I'll send you back to this man with some new techniques."

I squeezed my eyes shut. I felt two tears slip from either eye. He tossed his phone down and looked back at me.

"Don't cry," he said gently. "You're so good at this."

His hand went to caress my face as I continued, my eyes still closed.

"Look at me," he urged gently. I ignored him. I just had to get through this. "Look at me or it doesn't *fucking* count."

My eyes popped open and I looked up at him. His eyes were hard, face set in stone. He licked his bottom lip.

“There we go,” he said. “You’ve got great lips.”

He bobbed my head up and down another few minutes before he yanked me off his cock. “Fuck this.”

I looked up confused, horrified I wasn’t good enough, it wasn’t worth it, that I did it for nothing and he’d tell him anyway. But in an instant, I was on my feet and spun around, my back against his chest. His hands pull my skirt up and my pantyhose down.

“Caleb,” I whispered.

“You’re sucking cock to keep your man from knowing you’re a whore,” Caleb bit angrily in my ear. His voice was low, but he was speaking normally. He got my pantyhose down around my bottom and pushed on my back until I was flat against the desk. He ran his hand up my bottom, lifting my skirt up to my lower back. His hand ghosted over the top of my ass. I squeezed my eyes shut hard, tears leaking out.

“I fuck you without a condom am I going to catch anything?”

My face crumpled in humiliation and I shook my head. I felt him at my entrance and braced myself. He didn’t waste time. He thrust into me hard and gave me no time to adjust. He thrust in and out of me at a steady pace. It wasn’t particularly violent, but he wasn’t gentle. My hips rocked against his desk. One of his hands closed around the back of my neck. He squeezed hard.

I felt the traitorous build up in my belly. The pressure. The terrible, horrible ripple through my limbs. I prayed he wouldn’t notice, but then I heard his dark little chuckle. He finished almost immediately afterward. His thrusting slowed and he let out a deep breath. His hand glided down my spine. It ghosted over my bottom.

Finally he stepped back. I straightened. Still trembling, I tugged my skirt down and pulled my pantyhose up as quickly as I could. I was well aware he was watching me as I did. My hands shook as I tried to push my blouse back into my skirt.

“You won’t tell?” I asked him, turning my wet gaze on him. He was buckling his belt, red cheeked and sweating. He stared for a long moment and I was certain he was about to tell me he would. That now he could tell him I’d done it *twice*. I was consumed with shame. I hadn’t wanted to be unfaithful. I wasn’t a cheater. I was overcome with guilt. But then he spoke.

“Won’t say a thing,” he said, pressing his hand to his chest and laughing. He asked me, “So how was it sober?”

I straightened my skirt and looked at him. I fought not to cry. I tried to think of something clever to say. Some off the cuff remark to show him I didn’t care, it meant nothing to me. He stared back.

“I have a call at two,” he said. “And I need to grab lunch so...”

I nodded and pulled the elastic from my hair. I put it back into a bun and went to the door. I paused, my hand on the handle.

“You promise, Caleb? You won’t say anything. Y-you don’t understand. It would ruin my life if he found out.”

His brow furrowed slightly.

“I won’t say a thing,” he answered. I nodded and left the office. I went into the bathroom and tried to scrub him out of me.

I was walking to the break room to get my sandwich when I heard Chris from down the hall. I felt a moment of dread before I heard Caleb’s low rumble. I had assumed they were going to the sub shop across the street. I paused in the hall, ready to retreat, when I felt a slender arm wrap around my shoulder.

“Hey there girly,” Chloe greeted me warmly. I began walking with her toward the break room, swept away like in an ocean wave.

“Hey Chloe,” I greeted. We walked into the break room and I kept my gaze down. I couldn’t even bear to look at him. “Hey there, Trent. Don’t know if I should be angry or relieved.”

I opened the fridge and grabbed my sandwich and chips. Chloe reached in after me to get her lunch bag.

“We’re more interesting than you guys,” Caleb answered. “And I’ve got a better team.”

“Well can’t disagree with you on that one,” Chloe said.

“Eh!” A Fed associate named Jack called. Chloe laughed and playfully shoved his shoulder.

“When’s he coming?”

“Three weeks,” he said.

“Who’s coming?” I asked, my curiosity getting the better of me. My eyes went to Chloe, then to Chris.

“That CFO,” Chloe said. “For Project Auto.”

“Here?” I asked. “Why?”

“Tour of the building. Wants to meet the team. He’s thinking about picking us up for audit and advisory, so he wants to come in person,” Chris answered.

“Guys a control freak,” Caleb rumbled. “I like him though.”

I looked over to shoot him a hate-filled glare. My eyes found him just as he brought a neat bunch of Lo Mein noodles from the Dragon Star Chinese food box to his mouth with a pair of black chopsticks.

“Yeah, because you’re a control freak,” Chris accused.

Caleb’s eyes met mine. They were dark. He held steady, bringing another bite to his lips.

“He’s right you know,” Chloe laughed. I barely heard her.

“Well, if we can get that contract over New York it would be huge,” Jack said. He was coming from the end of a long tunnel. My eyes did not leave Caleb's. I just stared.

“Y’alright there, Orla?” Caleb asked me, tone taunting.

“Oh my God,” Chloe said. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone so white.”

"Jesus," Jack breathed.

Chloe pressed her hands to my cheeks. “Ellie, sit down. Oh my God, your *lips* are white.”

“No,” I said. I shook my head. “I-I’m fine.”

Caleb's lips turned upward. His eyes twinkled. My eyes dropped to his hands. He collected a bunch of noodles in his chopsticks. I tried to look at his thumbs. I was too far away. I was about to demand to see them.

I looked around. Everyone was staring.

"I'm going back to my desk," I said abruptly. I thought I might throw up right then and there. I looked back at him. He placed a bite of chicken between his lips.

"Ellie, seriously, you look like a ghost."

"I've been fighting a bug," I answered with a tight smile. "Just trying to survive the week."

I smiled at the table. They responded with sympathetic smiles and nods. All but Caleb. He was *grinning* at me. White and black orbs blotted my vision.

"Ed's been wicked sick," Jack said. "Try and get lots of rest this weekend."

"I will," I said, waved at the room, and walked down the hall. I reached out to catch the wall and stumbled. I pressed my hand flat to my stomach to fight down the nausea. I pressed on. I was fortunate enough no one was in the hall already. I couldn't press my luck. My legs felt numb. I was terrified they'd stop working completely and everyone would find me just sitting in the middle of the hallway, unable to move. Instead, he pushed on. I ignored Danny as I passed him. He asked if I was OK. I said nothing. I had to get to my desk. I had to get to my desk.

And somehow I did. I lowered myself into my desk chair in a controlled fall. I did not move. I sat and stared. I didn't move an inch. I don't think I even blinked. And then, I reached for my mouse, logged into my computer, and started to work. I pushed out three reports that afternoon. I didn't allow myself to think. I didn't allow myself to process. I couldn't. I had work and that work needed to be done.

It was six o'clock, when he came into my cubicle. I didn't move. I didn't turn. I kept my eyes on the screen, typing rapidly. Because if I had work to do, if I could just keep working, then nothing else was real. He stood behind me for a moment. Then, he placed two, large hands, flat on my desk, arms enveloping my body, and I was overcome with the smell of him. I typed another two paragraphs before I stopped. He placed a tender kiss to my neck. It drew my eyes downward, to the dark red, little crescent moon on his thumb.

“Ready to go, Orla?”

I hesitated only a moment. And then, with a dry mouth, a pounding heart, and trembling hands, I nodded.

Chapter Notes

Very curious about your thoughts here. I sincerely hope you enjoy it. If not, feel free to let me know, but please be kind.

Also, it's a long weekend for most of us here in Massachusetts, and so I maintain my prediction of getting this up by the end of the weekend was accurate.

He loomed over me as he had a hundred times before. Every instance of humiliation washed over me anew, sending a frightful and unyielding rush of dread through my limbs. My lips tingled and spots momentarily blotted out my vision. I tried to explain a panic attack to my mother once. Her complete inability to understand why I couldn't 'just calm down' had always been something that kept our once close relationship strained. It wasn't *panic* that was terrible about panic attacks. It was the *dread*. A feeling of complete, indescribable dread where you quite literally believe, in those impossibly eternal moments, that you are about to die. Like your world is quite literally ending. It is a terrible, frightful, lonely feeling.

I heard the rustle of my coat and I focused all my attention on it. I didn't even breathe. I stared at my coat as he collected it between his large hands and turned back to me. I looked at his coat. He wore his dark green, L.L Bean raincoat. It was simple. He's had it for as long as I could remember. It was the same coat he wore last night. I remembered how it felt, still damp, crinkling beneath my hand as I pushed it over his shoulders and pleaded with him to have sex with me..

My knees buckled and I felt myself tumbling forward toward the ground. I knew what was coming next. I would lower myself down in a kind of bent, hunched position, my hand to the ground, keeping my knees from touching the carpet. My heart would continue to pound violently in my chest and I would soon realize there was no standing back up. Very carefully, I would lower myself the rest of the way to the ground, press my face to the carpet, sit back on my feet, and wait for the despair to either swallow me whole and crush me inside the black hole of nothingness until I woke up the next day feeling hungover, forlorn and depressed or for me to finally come to with wide eyed stares and bewildered cries of concern.

I began to move downward, but a large, warm hand closed around my elbow. He stepped closer to me and the raincoat fell to the ground at our feet. His newly freed hand gripped my other elbow. He rumbled, "Not here."

I nodded. It was Friday and it was past six o'clock, but that did not mean everyone was gone.

"Where are your meds?" he asked me. My cheeks burned with humiliation. I felt a flare of anger. It anchored me.

"I didn't bring them," I said and wiped away a single, rogue tear. I reached down and grabbed my raincoat off of his shoe.

My fingers struggled to grasp the buttons of my jacket and I cursed myself for not wearing my coat with the zipper. My knuckles ached as they struggled to curl and turn and manipulate the little sphere. His hands took over promptly. Gentle but firm. Warm and soft. My hands fell away and I watched his long well manicured fingers carefully manipulate the little spheres through the holes in the fabric. He stepped away once finished.

"You're welcome," he said after a moment of silence.

He moved away and went to my desk. Smoothly, he unhooked my laptop from the docking station and placed it into my bag. He took my bag and draped it over my shoulder. As he did, I was overcome with the musky scent of his aftershave and matching cologne. He turned his head, eyes scanning over the top of the cubicles. He reached into his pocket and retrieved a little blue packet. He plucked the rectangular white gum from the packet and popped it between his lips. I got a whiff of it and my eyes closed.

"Are you going to be OK?" he asked me, stepping closer. His deep, scratchy whisper and the smell of wintergreen had my face tingling again. My lower lip trembled and my eyes burned. It was so painfully obvious. Every kiss, every touch, every murmur and whisper came rushing back.

Caleb. All this time. All those mornings we got our coffee in the breakroom, all those times he had come into my cube... the vibrator... the hickeys... the marker... all Caleb. I wanted

to cry. It took me a moment to process what I was feeling. It hurt as badly as anything else I could remember in my life. Worse than walking up to Jimmy Palmer after our little one-night stand and realizing he wanted nothing more to do with me. More than Andy Lake asking me to prom and never showing up.

“Let’s go,” he said. *His voice.* I felt so stupid. So foolish. It had been so painfully obvious. I felt a crippling, devastating sense of... loss.

He took me by the elbow and tugged me in front of him before releasing me. I felt him behind me as I walked. The lights in the building were too bright. Glaring and painful. I was grateful we did not run into anybody as we approached the elevator. I pressed the button four times and then looked up at the ceiling. I took in a deep breath and then looked down as I pushed the breath out from my nostrils. His black sneakers came into view beside mine. The doors dinged and I let out a deep breath as I stepped inside.

The moment he stepped in, I felt the walls begin to close in around me. I pressed my hand to my mouth and screwed my eyes shut. I felt a build up of pressure inside of me and I cursed myself for not bringing my medication. It was stupid. I tried to get control of my breathing, but it came in harsh, jerky rushes.

“Hold the door!” I heard a call and I immediately looked up, ripping my hand from my mouth. I glanced up at the ceiling as Danny, Mark, and Steve hurried into the elevator. I met Caleb’s gaze briefly. His steely gray eyes were dark, but he had a tiny smile on his lips as he looked back down on his phone. Steve shoved his arm inside and prevented the doors from closing. As the door opened and everyone piled in, Steve shot a glare toward Caleb.

“Thanks, Trent,” Steve said sarcastically.

“Not a problem,” he answered dryly.

“How’re you feeling, Ellie?” Danny asked, coming to stand beside me. I glanced over at Caleb but he kept his face down as he scrolled through his phone. I dropped my eyes to his thumb.

“Better,” I answered Danny with a smile. The best I could muster at any rate.

“Hopefully you can enjoy the weekend. Probably won’t be seeing you at Amelia’s?” he asked.

I laughed. It was a bark of a laugh. Almost cackle. Caleb glanced up from his phone with a tiny smile on his lips.

“If I felt great you wouldn’t see me at Amelia’s,” I answered. Danny leaned against the wall of the elevator. The elevator stopped on the fifth floor. Two more men stepped on, blocking my view of Caleb.

“Well here,” Danny said, digging his phone from his pocket “Let me grab your number.”

“Oh,” I said. “Um.”

I tried to look at Caleb but our views were blocked.

“Just to make sure you stay in the loop,” he said and took my phone. “Between you and me, Amelia’s a massive bitch. We’d all like you to be there.”

He put his number into my phone and texted himself. He gave me the phone back as the doors opened. Everyone filed out. Caleb walked out ahead of Danny and I, still focused on his phone.

“Next time Amelia has a party, I’ll make sure you have a head up so you can come,” he said.

“I’d rather gouge out my eyes with an ice pick than go to a party thrown by Amelia,” Caleb said, turning back to face us and giving Danny a tight smile.

“Don’t have to go then,” Danny said somewhat flippantly.

“I’m not going to,” Caleb answered. He smiled at Danny and then turned to walk away. “This way, Orla, I’m in the garage.”

Danny’s smile faltered briefly and I tried to smile. I told him, “We live close and I’m not feeling well. He’s going to give me a lift.”

His smile brightened and he nodded. He was walking backward and said, “Sure thing. Hit me up if you decide you want to come.”

Caleb was already at the elevator that led down to the garage level. He stared up at the lights as they dinged along the floors. He turned his head to look at me as I approached. His eyes were dark. His face was stone. I looked down as I came to stand beside him. He held out his hand in front of me, palm up. When I did not move, he looked back at me, eyebrow quirked upward.

“Your phone,” he said. I dug into my pocket and handed it to him. I watched as he thumbed in my passcode. It was another moment of harsh reality. He went into my contacts and deleted Danny’s number and then the text message he had sent me. He handed me the phone back.

The elevator doors opened and he placed his hand on my lower back. He left his hand there as we stepped out into the garage and walked to the valet office. Slowly, his hand slid up my back, stopping at the base of my neck, and then lowered back down. It was a gentle, familiar, tender touch, but the soft pressure he applied to turn me toward the office left an unmistakably element of control just underneath.

“Hey, Tony,” he greeted the attendant and gave him his ticket. They chatted a bit as another attendant went to get his car. I can’t recall a word of what was said. I only remember the way his hand felt as it stroked up and down my back. By the time the car was brought down, he had slid his hand around my hip and gently held me against the side of his body. He was large and warm in the cold garage.

“Have a good weekend!” Caleb called to Tony, smiling as he walked me around to the passenger seat of his dark blue Volvo. He helped me in and shut the door gently. I flinched as the door shut. My heart began to race as I felt the walls of the car close in on me.

Caleb got in and glanced over at me as he put his buckle on. He reached over with a small sigh and pulled the buckle across my body and fastened it securely into place. Once done, he threw the car into drive and inched forward, throwing a wave and a smile of goodbye toward the attendants.

“The Chinese food, huh?” he asked me. I was confused for a second. I looked over at him. I remember my eyes were very dry and slightly wide, my lips parted ever so slightly. He glanced over at me. The little smile dancing across his lips tilted upward into the right side of his face. He rolled the window down and inserted the parking ticket. He paid and then rolled up the window.

“I really hoped you’d figure it out while I was inside of you,” he said. He inched forward on the ramp. The buzzer blared, loud and jarring, alerting pedestrians on the street a car was emerging from the garage. I felt filthy. I turned toward the window, knuckles pressed to my lips, and felt a silent sob wrack through my shoulders. I wanted *him* back. The man that I was supposed to wrap me in his arms and tell me how much he loved me, the man that was going to comfort me and protect me and make it all better. I felt my only source of safety being ripped out from underneath me and realization began to creep out of the recesses of my mind.

He drove on in silence as I tried to prevent myself from crying too audibly. I didn’t know what Caleb would do. Not this Caleb. No longer was he just the man that was arrogant, entitled, needlessly cruel and belittling, but a man that would stalk, torment, and rape a coworker. A man that tormented me and raped me and took pictures while he did it.

I felt so absolutely alone it rocked me to my core.

“You can cry,” he told me, voice a bit wooden. “I know how disappointed you must be.”

I sucked my bottom lip into my mouth. I didn’t want to cry. I didn’t want to give him the satisfaction. I turned to look at him. He was staring ahead, jaw set, eyes hard. I stifled a sob

and pressed my hand to the back of my mouth. I screwed my eyes shut and felt another silent sob shake my shoulders.

Some time later, I felt the car stop, but I kept my elbow against the door, my hand pressed to my eyes. Another sob wracked my shoulders and I sniffled. I finally wiped my face and turned to look at him, but my eyes remained cast downward. He had his left wrist propped on top of the steering wheel and his right hand on the back of my headrest. His gaze was direct and intense.

“What if I refuse?” I asked him, meeting his gaze. I expected them to darken and narrow. I waited for a dark and sinister glare to come over his face. Instead, his brow lifted and his face took on a more open nature to it.

“Refuse?” he asked gently. Like he was trying to find out why a distressed toddler had had a tantrum.

“If I just say ‘no, you can’t touch me,’” I asked. My heart was pounding violently against my ribcage. He stared back until I once again could no longer hold his dark gaze.

“Well, I’ll let you choose,” he said, voice still gentle. He leaned back and lifted his hips. He dug into his pocket and retrieved his cellphone. He jabbed in his password and I watched him enter an encrypted folder. My eyes squeezed shut the moment it opened and I lowered my chin to my chest. I felt a hard, cold shock rush through me. It physically hurt. Fat, hot tears leaked out from behind my eyelids.

“No, no,” he said. “You asked the question. I’m giving you the answer. Open up.”

He nudged my chin with his phone and my eyes fluttered open. I watched as he scrolled down hundreds and hundreds of photos. Some I was awake in. I recognized the ones I had taken myself, smiling at the camera, spreading myself open...

“It was so hot seeing you everyday,” he said, scrolling through the videos and pictures. “Knowing what I’d done to you. What a whore you turned out to be.”

I spotted the picture of his thumb in my mouth, my eyes opened, looking up at him. That little dark red crescent moon. I took in a shuddering breath and then found the energy to speak, though my voice was soft.

“If you... you release them then I’ll tell... I’ll go to the police,” I said. Even as I said it, it sounded half-hearted. My throat was scratchy.

“Orla, you’re not stupid and neither am I.”

He turned and threw his car door open. “Stay here. I’ll be right back.”

I turned my head and it took me a moment to realize that we were outside of my apartment building. He walked around the front of the car, pulling the hood up over his head as rain continued to bare down hard on the gray street. I watched him with aching eyes let himself into the apartment building.

I sat numbly for about twenty minutes before he came back to the car. He hung up my garment bag in the back seat and then came back around to the drivers’ side. He held my prescription pill bottles in his hand and looked them over.

“Are you going to have trouble getting these refilled?” he asked, shaking the Xanax bottle. I knew for a fact there were only three pills left in there. That alone sent another rush of dread coursing through me.

“I’ll tell my doctor my bathroom flooded and I need early refills. I’ve never needed an early refill so...”

I looked longingly at the bottle. He nodded and then popped off the top. He removed one xanax and held it out. I reached out on impulse but he pulled his hand back. He rolled it between his thumb and pointer finger, brow lifted, and then brought it to my lips. My need outweighed my pride, and I parted my lips. He placed the little white pill on my tongue and then placed his hand on the headrest. I swallowed the pill down dry.

“You’re welcome,” he rumbled.

“Thank you,” I whispered.. My eyes hurt very badly and I felt my head beginning to ache. He moved his hand from the headrest and gently ran his hand over my head. He traced his knuckles along my cheek.

“We’re going to have three first kisses,” he said, voice low. “Not many couples can say that.”

His eyes, dark and cloudy, darted across my face as his hand flattened on my cheek.

“Kiss me.” His voice was soft. It was the voice I usually heard in darkness. The gentle, low command. His hand slid into my hair and tightened.

“Kiss me. Like you love me.”

The words were a start to my system and I looked toward him. His five o’clock shadow was a bit more like scruff. He hadn’t shaved today. I thought back to the kiss in his office just the day before. Just a day? It felt like an eternity. His hand tightened in my hair.

“Kiss me.” His voice was harder, steelier. “Or I fuck your ass raw tonight.”

I leaned forward. He made no move toward me, but his lips parted and his eyes dropped to my mouth. I reached up and placed my hands to either side of his neck. His skin was burning hot. Or maybe my hands were very cold. I pulled back down toward me and pressed my mouth to his. His lips were warm and soft. His lips parted and I gingerly pressed my tongue out to meet his. His tongue trailed along my bottom lip. His hand went to my neck and pulsed. He ended the kiss, but stayed close.

“I can’t wait for my sheets to smell like you,” he breathed, thumb stroking my cheek bone. He placed another kiss to my lips. I wanted to push him away, slap him like I had when he

kissed me in his office, but I couldn't. I knew I couldn't.

"Oh, God," he breathed, pulling away from me. He turned on the car and threw it into drive. My lips tingled and my mind continued to race.

"You were so confused," he said as he pulled onto the main road. He paused a moment and then clarified. "When you opened the door and saw me standing there."

We fell into silence and I thought back to that first night. I tried to remember more. Forcing myself to conjure up images of him in my apartment. I couldn't. There was darkness.

"It wasn't supposed to take effect that quickly," he told me. He put on his blinker. "I didn't know you were on all those other medications. Obviously."

"When -how -"

"That's my little secret," he grinned over at me and winked. He reached out and touched my thigh. "Be a good girl this weekend, and I'll consider telling you."

His hand slid upward, pushing my skirt up. His fingers slid in to press against my inner thigh. I stayed perfectly still, but the touch sent shocks of electricity through me, radiating from his fingertips.

He removed his hand to put his blinker on again.

"We're going to check the pride at the door," he continued, accelerating to beat the light. "I already know how dirty you are. So let's cut through the bullshit alright."

He turned down a side street. He pulled up beside a car and then placed his hand back on the headrest. Carefully he maneuvered the car into a parking spot. Somehow, I had the sense to be annoyed he could parallel park with such ease. He didn't turn the car off once parked. He

turned to look at me. When I did nothing but meet his gaze tearfully, he reached out and placed a hand to my cheek.

He smiled very softly. He caressed my cheek a moment longer and then trailed his fingers along my ear. His hand went back to my cheek. His thumb trailed along my lip.

“Chris told me about what you said. About not seeing yourself as beautiful,” he said softly. I looked up, eyes wet. “Orla, you’re the most beautiful woman I have ever laid eyes on.”

My lips parted.

“Since the first day I saw you, I’ve fallen asleep every night thinking about your eyes.”

I took in a soft breath. I felt a little glow of warmth build up inside of me.

“The way your nose crinkles when you laugh,” he murmured, eyes moving slowly over my face. My lower lip trembled slightly. “The way you press your lips together when you’re unsure.”

My eyes fluttered closed. It was *his* voice. I took comfort in it. Leaned into it. He leaned down and placed a soft kiss to my mouth. I did not return it, but I did not move away. I kept my face where it was, accepting the chaste brush of his lips passively.

“But you don’t need to worry,” he murmured. He kissed my cheek. I leaned into him. It just felt so good. I latched onto his voice. *His* voice. It would be OK. He’d still keep me safe. He was Caleb. Caleb was him. It would be OK. “You deserve my attention,” he leaned back and stroked my cheek with the back of his knuckles. I looked up at him. Our eyes locked. Dark and stormy. Hot and intense. The knuckles of his pointer and middle finger gently moved up to caress my cheek bone. “You deserve me. You’re worthy of me.”

I stared, eyes hardening.

A small smile came to his lips. He leaned down to kiss me again. I elevated my face close to his, took a deep breath, and spit directly into his face.

I sat there a moment, feeling the warmth of her saliva slowly slide from my eye and down my cheek. My body radiated with an overwhelming sense of rage. Slowly, I brought up my hand to gently wipe the spit from my face. My ears rang and my face felt very hot.

“Fine,” I finally said. That’s all I could say. My voice shook with the rest of my body.

I threw open the car door and walked around the side to open her door. I grabbed her by the elbow and pulled her out. She didn’t do much by way of resisting. I slammed the car door shut and marched her up the steps. No one was around and her lack of resistance made it appear we were just hurrying inside to get out of the rain.

I didn’t bother to wait for the elevator. I had too much energy to work off. She tripped once. I hauled her up by the arm and we moved on. My hands shook as I retrieved my door key and rammed it into the lock. I opened the door and swung her inside.

My apartment is quite large. I only have two bedrooms, but mine is quite large. It had a full kitchen and dining room, a spacious living room, and two bathrooms. The apartment opened up into living room and kitchen, but the couches and TV were a good five feet to the left and the island in the kitchen a good five feet to the right. To the right was a long hallway that lead to the spare bedroom and the common bathroom and the laundry room.. On the far wall of the large living room were the large French doors that opened to the master bedroom. Attached to the bedroom, was the master bath. I dropped our bags to the floor and stalked toward her.

Those big green eyes widened and I felt a great wave of exhilaration course through me as I watched the fear spread across her perfect face. I removed my coat as I walked toward her. Images flashed through my head. Torn pantyhose. Ripped blouse. Bound hands. Red cheeks and wet eyes. Blood flooded south.

She continued to back up but the attempt was not in earnest. In three steps I had her wrists in my hands and I forced her backward toward the French doors. She slammed against them.

Glass rattled. I moved my hands to her shoulders and yanked her toward me. I placed a bruising kiss to her mouth.

She turned her head to the side. I grabbed her face and pulled it back, putting my mouth back on hers. I forced her chin up and shoved my tongue into her mouth. She knew better than to bite me. Her body was rigid but still. I pressed my tongue to hers. I tasted her deeply. Finally I pulled back and gave her a stern slap across the face. One hand went to her hair, the other reached around her to grab onto the door of the French door. I shoved it open and back her into my bedroom. I flicked the light on and then put my free hand to her throat.

“You want to be a cunt,” I said, removing my hand from her hair just long enough to place a curt slap to her cheek. “A snotty, arrogant bitch. Fine.”

I watched the fear in her gaze skyrocket. She didn’t understand things weren’t going to be the way they were. She was going to learn that this weekend. And I was going to enjoy every moment of it. Using the hand I had around her throat, I threw her backwards, stumbling onto my bed. This was what I had been waiting for, and I was going to make the most of it.

I went in and out of coherence that weekend but in the moment he threw me down on his bed, I had a painfully vivid moment of clarity.

Caleb Trent.

I was in the apartment of Caleb Trent. Company golden boy. Tall. Handsome. Intelligent. Arrogant. And I was on his bed.

And he was about to rape me.

Again.

He tugged at his tie. His cheeks were red. His hair was a bit out of place, spilling onto his forehead. I scrambled backward. I didn’t have a plan. I was waiting to crash into the wall, but the bed never seemed to end. He was on me in a moment. Grabbing my ankles and yanking

me down. My skirt rode up to my upper thighs. My blouse bunched up, revealing my stomach. He yanked me down toward him and grabbed the collar of my blouse. He pulled with all his strength. The tearing of silk filled the apartment. A cry ripped from my throat and I kicked my legs out on impulse.

“Yeah. Fight me, bitch.”

He smacked me. He didn't hit me as hard as he could. He was measured when he slapped me. It wouldn't cause swelling. It wouldn't leave a mark. It couldn't split a lip. Just hard enough to sting. Looking back I would have liked to have laid limp at that moment and not give him the satisfaction. But I did fight. I didn't scream or cry or yell. A not so small part of my brain knew there was no escaping this, and if the neighbors came or called the cops, those pictures would go out and my life would be over. But I fought and I fought as hard as I could.

I lashed out with my nails. I caught him across the cheek but he didn't so much as flinch. He started laughing, grabbing hold of my wrists. I kicked at him, trying to prevent him from getting on top of me. I tried to get him between the legs. I connected with his stomach. He leaned forward, air rushing from his lungs. He released my wrists and I tried to scramble away. He laughed breathlessly and then grabbed me again. I had turned and was scrambling up the bed. He grabbed me by the waist and pulled me down again. He flipped me over and forced his hands down on my upper thighs. He straddled me quickly and then grabbed my wrists before I could start clawing at him again.

“You're so hot,” he panted, tugging at his tie. He pulled it free and leaned forward. He used it to tie my wrists. It took him some time, but he finally got them tied through my struggling. He kept his hands up around my wrists and tugged at my ripped blouse. The simple black bra came into view above my heaving breasts. He tugged that down to let them spill free. It was a sight I knew he had seen a hundred times already but this was a fresh humiliation.

This was Caleb. Right there in front of me, holding me down, ripping my clothes off, and was about to rape me, and by the looks of things, it would be the most violent to date. The man that had held me and cuddled me was a lie. The man that had violently assaulted me at the vending machines was the truth. But even knowing that, and knowing it was him all this time, It was difficult to truly make the connection in my mind. It was as though he was raping me for the first time.

“Caleb,” I whimpered, as if I could change his mind. He slapped me again, lightly.

“I’ve wanted to hear you say my name for so long,” he said. Another light smack. He then forced his fingers into my mouth and grabbed my chin with his thumb. “Say you’re sorry. Apologize to me, and make it good, and I’ll make love to you.”

He pulled his fingers from my mouth. And grabbed my throat.

“Go on, Orla. Beg me.”

He licked his bottom lip. His eyes went to my bare tits. The hand on my throat began to grip my right breast. He pinched my nipples. He whipped his head back over his shoulder to push back the hair that was falling into his eyes. His face was still flushed. His forehead had little beads of sweat.

I leaned forward and tried to spit on him again. His response was immediate. He smacked me again. A bit harder this time. He leaned down and spit. It was hot and wet and landed squarely on my right eye. He spit again.

“Cunt,” he gritted out and then flipped me over. My hands were still bound, but he released my wrists. I tried to wipe his spit off my face. As I did, he flipped me again so I was on my stomach, my face toward the end of the bed. He pushed the skirt up and ripped through my pantyhose. I tried to kick again, but he shoved my hands down to my waist and then fell on top of me. With my hands stuck beneath me, his weight crushing me into the mattress, I was completely immobilized. His hands worked to unfasten his belt and pants while keeping me pinned.

“Open your eyes,” he breathed in my ear. “I want you to watch this.”

My eyes opened. I didn’t know what he meant by that. My question was answered immediately. Across from the foot of the bed was a massive mirror. It took up the majority of the wall, from floor to ceiling. I had little time to process. I felt him press at my opening. Fear flooded through me.

“No,” I choked out. He pressed one of his hands to my mouth. His hand covered my mouth and my nose and he pressed his lips to my ear.

“This is what you deserve,” he gritted out. “This is how I should have done it from day one.”

He pulled back briefly and spit into his hand, few movements behind me and he spit again. The head of his cock pressed at my clenching asshole. He was too big and I wasn’t ready. Tears welled in my ears, but try as I might, I couldn’t move.

“I hope it hurts,” he told me, forcing himself deeper. It did. It really did. I moaned in pain against his hand. “Bitch.”

He pushed more deeply inside of me. I met his gaze in the mirror. I wanted to beg him to stop. I wanted to apologize. But I couldn’t. I wouldn’t. Not to Caleb. My tears spilled over the top of his hand and he groaned softly as he pushed the rest of the way into my ass. Another moan of pain was muffled by his hand. It felt like he was going to rip me in half, like he was tearing me in two.

Once he was inside of me, he brought his other hand up. He wrapped one arm around my throat and used his arm to prop my chin up so my face was facing the mirror. His other hand forced my forehead back.

“You belong to me,” he gritted in my ear. He pulled his hips back and pushed inside of me. It hurt so badly, but I was grateful he had used at least some saliva to keep the burning at a minimum. He pushed back into me. Slow but steady.

“I own you,” he continued. “And if you don’t start showing some respect,” he was panting, his hips were beginning to move faster. “This is how you’ll take me.”

I closed my eyes shut hard and he pounded into me. It hurt like nothing I had ever felt before. “Look at me,” he gritted out, nails digging into my cheeks. I did. My eyes locked on his, but my vision was blurry. “That’s my asshole.” he sucked my ear into his mouth and bit my earlobe. “And it’s my pussy. And my mouth.”

His hips thrust harder and faster. His hold on me tightened. He let out a low, shuddering groan as he climaxed inside of me. He placed a long, lazy, open mouth kiss to the side of my face as he let out a low groan of pleasure.

“Nothing is going to change that,” he breathed. “But if you want to act like a bitch, you’ll take it like one.”

He placed another wet kiss to my face and then pushed off of me then, standing up on his knees, still straddling me. I laid on the bed, too tired to move, too afraid it would make the pain worse.

He zipped and buttoned his pants, watching me closely in the mirror. He left his belt unbuckled. He got off of the bed, breathing a bit hard, and walked over to the mirror. He slid it open to reveal a deep closet. I lowered my face into the covers and closed my eyes. I wondered if he was going to let me sleep. I felt something beside me. Something gently tossed on the bed beside my face, but I didn’t move. I heard rustling fabric.

“I’m going to go get your clothes and park my car. I don’t need to tell you what happens if you’re not here when I get back.”

I turned my face toward the voice and opened my eyes. He was pulling on a pair of well-fitted jeans over his hips. I said nothing. I just watched with tired eyes.

“We’ll order in tonight. There’s a nice Greek place down the street I can stop at.”

He removed his button down and tossed it into a hamper. He then pulled the undershirt off over his head, revealing a toned chest and rippling abs. I thought back to our showers together. How warm and safe I felt. He pulled on a sweater over his head. As he pulled down over his face, he jabbed with his chin.

“Be wearing that when I get back,” he said. “Put your clothing in the hamper and throw out the pantyhose. Don’t get blood on my quilt.”

He walked out of the room and left me there. My eyes lazily shifted to the dark green silk that was beside my face. I listened a moment and heard the door open and then close. I heard the locks thrown. I laid there a while. I'm not sure how long. I moved my gaze to the mirror. I stared at myself, wondering how this could have possibly happened to me.

I let my eyes close briefly. I woke with a start just a moment later. I tried to push myself up, but my arms, tied and still twisted beneath me, had gone completely numb. I fell back to the bed.

"Do you think you don't have to listen anymore?" Caleb's angry rumble drew my gaze to the bedroom door. He stood there, ripping off his rain jacket. "Would you have ignored an order like that before? Before you knew?"

My lips parted.

"You were so sweet this week for another man. But I'm just that repulsive to you."

"Caleb - " I started. I hadn't meant to disobey him. I really hadn't. I was just so *tired*.

"Be quiet," he said. "You want to know why some people don't like you? Why *I* don't like you?"

Those words hurt me far more than I cared to admit.

"Caleb, please, I - "

"Be. *Quiet* ."

He got to me and flipped me over onto my back. He then spun me so my feet were toward him. He dragged me to the edge of the bed. Pain rocketed through me. I let out a small cry of distress, but soon, he was looming over me, his hand over my mouth. Our noses were almost touching and his eyes burned brightly as he stared into mine.

“You act like you’re better than everyone else,” he said. I tried to protest. “You won’t ask for help. You won’t admit when you’re wrong.”

Tears were in my eyes.

“You’re a frigid bitch that pushes people away, and that’s why you’re alone and if you don’t change something, you’re always going to be alone ,” he said. A sob escaped me.

He pushed away from me and turned for his closet. I sat up. My arms were still partially numb. It tingled up my arms. I let out another sob. I think it was his name. He threw the closet door open so hard I thought the glass of the mirror was going to shatter. He turned and was on me again in an instant. He pushed me backward and the gag was shoved into my mouth. A piece of silicone, maybe an inch or two long, I don’t know, I’m not good at measurements, was forced into between my lips and my mouth was covered with a large strip of leather I couldn’t speak as he fastened it around the back of my head. He yanked the tie off my wrists and spun me over again. I struggled on impulse, but it was a half hearted attempt.

“You’re so fucked up you can’t see how lucky you are,” he said, shaking his head. He bound my wrists behind my back. He flipped me back over and glared down at me.

“You belong to me, Orla. You’re not going anywhere. There’s no getting out of this. I’ve taken care of you. I’ve protected you. I’ve focused on your pleasure...” he looked down at my torn blouse. He grabbed it and ripped it the rest of the way through.

“That’s not even every orgasm I gave you,” he said, gently trailing his finger along the lines on my ribs. “I can give you everything, Orla. I can take care of you. I can protect you. I can make you *so fucking happy* . But you *won’t let me* .”

His eyes were burning. A vein bulged in his forehead. Something quivered beneath his right eye. His brow lifted and he looked both sad and exasperated at the same time. “I *love* you.”

He paused. My ears buzzed.

“I love you so fucking much,” he said, voice actually breaking. His hand pulsed around my mouth. “You’re the only girl I’ve met that I really wanted. That I *really* wanted. You can make me happy.”

I bit down on the gag inside my mouth. I tried to speak but couldn’t and he was in no mood to release me.

“All I want is to be with you,” he was practically pleading. “We could be so happy. I don’t want this. I don’t want this. I want to be gentle. I want to love you.”

He hovered over me. He leaned back and gently placed his hand to my cheek. “I’ve wanted you for so long, Orla,” he all but murmured. He stroked my hair so... gently. I closed my eyes. “I tried every way I could. You’ve rejected me at every turn... and I just love you so fucking much...”

He picked me up and then tossed me up toward the headboard. He crawled over me and dug between the mattress and the backboard. He pulled out a black leather strap and fastened it to the bindings on my wrists. “I want you to think, Orla, about what you want, what I’m offering you, and what you stand to lose.”

A pause. He looked down at my heaving breasts. He leaned over me, fumbled with his knight stand, and came back with a knife. My eyes widened at the sight of it. He placed it beneath my bra strap and yanked, cutting it off my body. He cut through the bra straps and pulled it off of me. He got through my shirt and pulled it out from underneath me next.

“Do you know how sexy it was seeing you come in wearing what I told you to, everyday?” He placed the knife at my hip and sliced through my skirt. “Watching you walk down to the janitors closet to wait for me to come and fuck you.”

He ripped through my already torn pantyhose. He balled them up and tossed them to the side. I didn't wear underwear. My bodies quivered as I awaited another assault. He grabbed his cock through his jeans and let his eyes take over me.

"You looked so good, bent over my desk with your skirt up around your waist." He twisted a nipple. "You came for me. Less than 24 hours after you came with another man's cock up your ass."

He slapped me and my head went to the side, he pulled my face back to look at him. "You cheating whore. I bet you'd bend over for any man that looked twice at you."

He pushed two fingers inside of me.

"Awkward, ugly, Orla," he said. I choked on my sob. Those words hurt so badly I could hardly stand it. "A man smiles at you and you spread your legs for him?"

I thought back to Jimmy Palmer. Tears welled in my eyes.

"That's what you want me to believe? You want me to believe you feel that way? And not that you're just a stuck up, arrogant bitch?"

He was pumping his fingers in and out of me.

"What are you, Orla? A whore or a bitch?"

He reached up and yanked on my gag. The silicone was ripped from my mouth. It came away like a flap. It remained fastened tightly around my head, but it allowed me to speak.

"Tell me," he said and slapped me again. "Are you a whore or are you a bitch."

I was sobbing. "I'm not a bitch. I'm not."

"You're a whore then?" he asked me. "A pathetic little whore who offers men the one thing they want from her?"

"Would you suck Danny's dick if I told you to? Would you go to the janitor's closet and take a hard fucking from Peter?"

"No!" I cried, voice straining.

"No? You fucked me without hesitation," he said. "You belonged to a man and you let me use you like a 2-cent whore in my office and you didn't even put up a fight."

"Cheating." Slap to my face. "Whore." Slap. "Bitch."

"If you told him - the pictures - I was scared," I cried. "I didn't know what to do."

"Scared," he murmured. His fingertips gently trailed along my wet cheekbone. He asked me, lips hovering over mine, so soft it was almost a whisper, *his voice*, "Were you scared to lose him?" His fingertips were white hot against my skin. "Were you afraid of displeasing him?" He paused and hesitated above my mouth, as if he were going to kiss me, but stopped himself and asked, "or were you scared he was going to find out what a slut you are?"

"Yes," I said.

"Which one?" he asked. I hesitated. "Which." A light slap. "One."

"I don't know," I answered. "All three."

“Are you scared now?” he asked. I nodded. He leaned back and unbuttoned his jeans. “How’s your asshole feel?”

“It hurts,” I said pathetically.

He pushed his hands into his jeans and grabbed himself.

“You look so good like that,” he breathed, brow knitting. “Shhh.”

He leaned down and placed his lips to my jaw. “Don’t cry.” Another kiss. He gently caressed my clit with his thumb. “You have so much to lean,” he said, sucking my earlobe into his mouth. “I don’t want to hurt you. I didn’t want it to start like this.”

His fingers pushed inside of me again, more gently this time.

“Say you belong to me,” he whispered in my ear.

“I belong to you,” I whispered.

“Say you want me,” he ordered. He kissed my wet, stinging cheek.

“I want you,” I whispered.

“Only me,” he said. His lips were on my ear. I could feel him rub his weeping head against my pussy.

“I only want you,” I said, weepily.

“You’ve been a bad girl.” The head of his cock pressed into me. “You need me to teach you to be a good girl. Yeah?”

“Yeah,” I answered softly, because it was what he wanted to hear.

“Say it. ‘I’ve been a bad girl, Caleb’.”

“I’ve been a bad girl, Caleb.”

“Teach me to be your good girl,” he bit my earlobe.

“Teach me to be your good girl.”

“You want to be a good girl for me?” he breathed. He pushed further into me. He was breathing more heavily. His stubble scratched my face.

“Yes,” I breathed. My eyes were still wet.

“Say, ‘fuck me, daddy.’”

“Fuck me, daddy,” I whispered. His hair smelled so good. I felt a rush of familiarity. The smell of him. His hand closed around my throat.

“Teach me some respect.” His hand tightened.

“Teach me some respect.”

He let out a deep breath as he sank into me.

“From here on out, Orla, you do as you're told , ” he whispered. “That’s my pussy. My mouth. My poor, tender little asshole. And you’re going to cater to me. Be my sweet little sex kitten. Understand?”

I nodded. I only nodded. My throat hurt too badly to speak. He slowly pulled out of me and then gently pushed himself back in. He released the gag from my head and tossed to the side angrily. I sighed in relief. He leaned down and placed his mouth to mine. It was a soft, tender kiss.

“You belong to me,” he breathed. “Finally mine,” he kissed my mouth and moved down to place his lips to my neck. He grabbed me by the thighs to angle himself more deeply inside me. “All mine.”

He kissed me hard on the mouth as he continued his long, slow, steady thrusts.

“Do you know what I’ll do to you, Orla, if I ever found out you let another man touch you?” he asked throatily. “Have what’s mine?”

“I won’t,” I promised, terrified he’d hurt me again.

“Never?” he asked.

“Never,” I answered. I was absolutely horrified when it came out as a moan.

“Because you’re my whore,” he breathed with a chuckle. “If I want you to come for me, you will. If I want to rape your holes bloody, I can.”

He nibbled at my earlobe. He shifted his hips. I tried to swallow another moan.

“But I don’t want to hurt you,” he said. “I love feeling you come for me. I love making love with you.”

He sucked on my earlobe. I whimpered. “Be a good girl and you’ll be rewarded.”

I wanted him to hurry up. With every slow thrust, I felt my body opening for him. I felt the pressure build.

“My sweet little whore,” he taunted. “You’re not as strong as you think you are. You need me. I’ll take care of you.”

His teeth scraped my neck.

“Say you need me,” he ordered.

“I need you,” I said. He let out a groan.

“Ask me to take care of you.”

“Take care of me,” I said. He wrapped his arms around my middle. He pushed his hips in harder.

“With my name.”

“Take care of me, Caleb,” I breathed.

“You need me to,” he said.

“I need you to take care of me,” I answered. He groaned softly in my ear. A little orgasm rippled through me. I felt shame overwhelm me.

“Oh, fuck yes,” he grunted and thrust hard and fast. He came inside me with a shudder. He lowered me back down and settled on top of me. He gently kissed my lips. One kiss, two, then three. “That sounds even better than I imagined.”

He pushed off of me and fastened his jeans. I watched him, terrified the gag would go back on.

“We’ll try one more time,” he rumbled. He walked to the foot of the bed. He looked at himself in the mirror as he did, brushing his dark locks back from his eyes. His cheeks were flushed. He picked up the dark green silk and held it up to me. He then placed it back down on the foot of the bed. He sat down on the edge of the bed beside me and looked over my naked body. He flattened a large hand on my belly and then slid his fingers down over my mons and then back up to grope my left breast. “I don’t want to keep you bound and gagged all weekend and I don’t want to hurt you. He rolled a nipple between his fingers. “But don’t think I won’t keep you bound to this bed with a gag in your mouth, while I fuck you asshole dry until it’s a bloody pulpy mess.”

I swallowed thickly.

“You’re going to be put in your place,” he told me. “How painful that process is, is up to you.”

He stood and reached for my wrists. He released them from the binds and then stood. He walked out of the door without a word. I did not make the same mistake again. My entire body tingled. It felt like someone else was moving my limbs. I picked up the green silk. It was a simple baby doll chemise. It looked to be of good quality. I put it on over my bed, wincing slightly as I did so, and then examined myself in the mirror. I fixed my hair, putting it up in a little bun on top of my head. As I examined myself, I noticed a black smudge at the very edge of the skirt. I panicked, believing I had bled on it, and grabbed it to examine it more closely. It wasn’t blood but thick, black thread embroidering *CHT* into the silk. I didn’t

take the time to process my feelings. I wanted to ask Caleb if I could go to sleep. I think if I asked him nicely, he might let me.

I walked out of the bedroom into the large open floor plan of the main apartment area. He was leaning over the island, sucking down a glass of water and looking at his phone. He looked up as I came to stand about ten feet from the island. His eyes raked down my body.

“Isn’t that pretty,” he gave me a dark smile. “Come here.”

I walked around the island to stand in front of him. He placed a hand to my lower back and gently pulled me closer. I had to crane my neck to look up at him. It was easy sometimes to forget how tall he was. I tried to smile at him. He seemed amused by the effort.

“Kiss me,” he said. I stepped forward and tilted my face. He remained still, looking down at me with an upturned mouth. My hands trembled as I reached up and placed my hands to his neck. His skin felt so hot. He made me only apply minimal pressure before bending down. I had to get up on my tiptoes to place my mouth to his. His hand pressed gently to my lower back. I dropped down to flat feet when I thought my legs would no longer hold me. The kiss had been chaste, but he seemed pleased. He picked up my bottle of Xanax, popped it open, and took out one pill. He held it up between his fingers. I tilted my head back and opened my mouth. His eyes twinkled as he considered me.

“We’re going to get these under control,” he told me. I nodded, mouth still open. He placed it on my tongue and then handed me a glass of water he had poured for me. I swallowed it down greedily. He gave me my antidepressant and my birth control next. When I put the glass down he told me, “Finish your water.”

I did and then put the empty glass down.

“Get me a beer from the fridge,” he said, collecting two styrofoam boxes. He carried them over to the couch and placed them on the coffee table. I obeyed, removed the cap, and walked into the living room. I stopped on the other side of the coffee table. “Give it to me.”

He reached forward and I handed it to him. I waited as he leaned back and took a sip.

“I’ve imagined what it would be like to have you here in my apartment for so long,” he mused over the neck of the beer bottle and then took a sip. He groped his cock through his jeans. “Fuck, I think I could come again.”

He took a sip of his beer. “Come here, kneel here.”

He spread his legs and plucked at his jeans. I was a bit at a loss. I didn't think a man could come this many times. I had already thought it was a one and done kind of thing. He retrieved his cock, which even 75% flaccid, was large. My asshole clenched on impulse, sending a stinging pain through the vulnerable nerve endings.

“Might have to work a bit at it, but I think you can do it,” he said. He gave himself a stroke and then let it drop to his belly. “Come one. Make me come.”

He took his cock in my hand. I stroked it twice before he murmured into his beer bottle, “Put it in your mouth.”

I did. I did as best I could under the circumstances. I got him about half-mast before he placed a hand on my head. He did not push. He simply let his hand rest there as I moved my mouth up and down along his length.

“You know how to get me hard,” he told me. I looked up at him. His cock twitched in my mouth. “Look at me with those big green eyes and tell me who you belong to.”

I took his cock out of my mouth and looked up at him.

“I belong to you,” I said. I thought back to all the things he made me say. “You own me.”

“Kiss my cock,” he whispered. His hand tightened in my hair but he did not move my head. I obeyed, kissing the head of his cock and then dragging my tongue along the weeping slit.

“Fuck,” he breathed. “You want me to please me?”

“I want to please you,” I said and kissed the side of the head again. I licked quizzically. “I need you.”

I could feel his cock hardening in my hand. I wanted it over. I thought back to the things *he* used to make me say.

“I want to be a good girl for you,” I said. The words felt foreign on my tongue, but his eyes darkened. “I’m at your disposal.” I moved my hand up and down his shaft. “I’ll do whatever you tell me to do. I want to make you happy.”

“You want to take care of me,” he said hoarsely.

“I want to take care of you.”

“In your mouth,” he said. I put the head of his cock back into my mouth and he moved his hand up and down. My head bobbed as I worked my mouth over his cock. “Look at me.”

I hadn’t realized my eyes were closed. I looked up at him. He let out a low breath.

“You look so good down there,” he breathed. “So submissive.” I kept my eyes on him as he bobbed my head up and down. “You’re my sex slave?”

“Yes,” I said around his cock. He pulled my face off of his cock.

“Say it.”

“I’m your slave,” I said.

“Dirty girl,” he breathed. “My little sex slave.”

“I want you to take care of me,” I said. I knew what he wanted to hear and the Xanax was enveloping me in a nice warm hug. “I need you. You’re so perfect. You’re too good for me. I don’t deserve you.”

“Suck,” he said. He pushed my head down his cock and then pulled my head up with the fist in my hair. “Oh,” he signed. “You were born to suck cock.” “You’re so good.”

I was spurred on by those words. Just a few hours earlier he was telling me I wasn’t good at it. He had looked at me with disdain. I swirled my tongue around the head of his cock and then put his cock more deeply into my mouth. His hand loosened in my hair.

“Oh, good girl,” he said. “That’s right. My good little cock sucker.”

I put my hand on the based of his cock and worked my hand up and down as I gave special attention to the head. I knew he liked that.

“That’s right,” he continued to praise, hands caressing my face. “Eyes on me while you worship my cock.”

“Are you my good little cock sucker?” he asked me after a few minutes. I tried to speak with his cock in my mouth. He removed my mouth from his cock but I continued to work my hand up and down the rock hard length of him.

“Yes,” I repeated.

“Tell me,” he said huskily.

“I’m your good little cock sucker, Caleb.”

I saw his eyes light up as I spoke his name and he put my mouth back on his cock. My head bobbed a few minutes later before he pulled back and ordered for me to retrieve one of the containers of food. Confused, I obeyed. He ripped it from my hands. And tossed it open. Leaned over the edge of the couch, he worked his hand roughly over his cock. So hard and with such vigor I couldn’t understand how it wasn’t painful.

He came silently, long hot burst of cum across the rice and lamb resting inside the cooked bowl of Greek food. He tossed the container back down on the table and leaned back with a sigh. His hair was damp with sweat and he had a smile on his face as he put himself back into his jeans.

“I don’t think I’ve come four times in a day since I was sixteen,” he said, breathing a bit heavy. “Well that’s not true,” he breathed. He took a deep swig of his beer and then reached out for his yet unopened container of food. He handed me a fork and then leaned back and popped his container open.

“Go on,” he said, motioning to the opened container resting on the coffee table. I looked at him with a little frown. A slow smile spread across his face. “Go on, Baby. I want to watch you eat your dinner.”

I turned my head to look at it. I watched a fat glob of cum slide down the side of a piece of lamb. The warmth of the second Xanax made it difficult to understand why he would do that and what he was asking me to do. I looked back up at him and he gently leaned down to caress my face.

“It’s ok,” he said gently. He kissed my mouth. “Be a good girl and eat your dinner.”

He reached for it and handed it to me. I felt a bit off as I took it. It wasn’t the normal Xanax high. Even with my misuse, I would have felt the effects of taking two within such a short amount of time, but the stress of the situation should have stabilized me a bit more. I felt confused, a little dizzy, but very warm and very happy.

I jabbed at a piece of lamb and ate it. It tasted salty. Caleb watched, sipping at his beer lazily.

“You’re a good girl,” he told me. I looked at him and smiled.

“Keep looking at me like that,” he said, leaning forward and stroking my cheek tenderly, “and just might make it five.”

I smiled at him and placed another piece of lamb between my lips.

I should have gotten it into her system to begin with, but I had let my impulses get the better of me. I prided myself on being in control of emotions, but this woman drove me absolutely insane. With any luck she’d think it was the Xanax and I could transition her into acceptance without too much of a prolonged shock to her system. The ass fucking had been enjoyable but I had never been overly fond of that level of violence and I regretted doing it. I should have been in more control of myself.

I grabbed my phone and shot a text to my brother. *Can you get me some Xanies?*

If she thought it was her own feelings prompting the docility, I’d have a much easier time with her.

The fuck you need xanies for? he responded immediately.

Does it matter? I asked.

Let me call in a favor.

I smiled. Josh always came through. Usually he was scoring me GHB or Rohypnol, which I knew Chris would be getting from him on their last ski weekend of the year, but it was nice to have a doctor in the family in the events you want to get some legit drugs in a pinch.

I put my phone down and looked at Orla. It was surreal seeing her there, sitting on my floor, dressed in a dark green babydoll that made her eyes look abso-fucking-lutely gorgeous, eating her dinner covered in my cum like an obedient, submissive little thing. I watched her put her food down.

“Finish it,” I told her. She looked over at me, eyes a bit glossy.

“I ate it all,” she said.

“There’s still food in there,” I pointed out very gently.

“No, I ate all of... that...”

A small smile across my face. Oh, I’d be fucking her again. I always had a high sex drive. When I was sixteen, after I found that magnizine, I’d rub one off four, five times a day. When I started having sex in college, even more when I could. It had tapered off slightly when I turned twenty eight and was promoted to senior associate. Two years later when Orla walked through the door, my daily or twice daily porn sessions could no longer cut it.

“Orla,” I Said. Her wandering gaze came back to me. Glassy and wide. “You’re at least ten pounds underweight right now. I want you to eat. And you want to make me happy. Right?”

She stared at me, brow knitting, eyes narrowing; and then nodded and reached for the bowl. She picked it up and began to eat again. I finished my food and my beer before speaking again.

“Orla, sweetie,” I said. The way she looked at me. I knew it was the drugs, but it undid me. The day she finally looked at me like that sober would be the day I could die happy. “Go get me another beer.”

She pushed herself up and swayed into the kitchen.

“Get yourself a water,” I called to her. She obeyed, though it took her a moment to find the bottled water. She came back and handed me the beer. She remained standing. She looked very confused. If I hadn’t already enjoyed her so many times, I’d be inside of her again already.

“Everything ok?” I asked with a little smile.

“I -” she broke off, clearly confused. I probably have her a bit too much. Or maybe I shouldn’t have given her the other Xanax. It wasn’t going to knock her out; but she was more confused and disoriented than I intended. That didn’t stop me from enjoying it. Confused, vulnerable women were the best kind.

“Caleb,” she asked. She sat down beside me. I gently ran an my knuckles up her bare arm.

“Yes, baby,” I asked her.

“You’re him,” she said.

“I am,” I answered gently.

“So I - I won’t get in trouble?” she asked.

“Get in trouble?” I hardly kept myself from laughing. “No, you’re not in trouble,” I assured her. “I’m very happy with you.”

“Happy?” she asked.

“Of course,” I said, brow knitting. I reached out and tucked a phantom strand of hair behind her ear.

“Why are you always so mean to me?” She asked, turning her big green eyes toward me. “He was kind to me. He took care of me.”

I touched her cheek.

“You were good for him,” I murmured. “Why aren’t you ever good for *me*?”

She stared.

“Come here,” I said, taking hold of her wrist and gently tugging her down toward me. She sagged into me. That dark green silk looked better on her than I ever could have imagined. Her green eyes popped. Wide and scared and vulnerable. I spoke to her with a calm, gentle tone.

“Why aren’t you good for me?” I asked her.

“You’re cruel,” she said. My brow knitted. “I don’t like you.”

My Adam’s apple bobbed. My chest tightened and I took a deep steadying breath. I placed my hand to her face.

“You never gave me a chance,” I murmured. “Why wouldn’t you let me take you out to coffee.”

She frowned at me.

“When I asked you out. You didn’t even know me then,” I said. “Why didn’t you want to go?”

Her brow furrowed.

“I don’t like you.”

I swallowed and looked toward the window.

“That’s fine,” I said. I had a bitter taste in my mouth. “You don’t have to like me. But you have to obey me. Understand?”

She nodded.

“Kiss me,” I murmured. She reached up. Her hands were trembling and cool as they touched my cheeks. She leaned down and placed her soft lips to mine. We kissed briefly and then I scooped her up in my arms. Her body was weak but I kept my mouth on hers as I carried her into my room. I could feel the energy seeping from her and even though she wouldn’t pass out, her energy was depleted. My body stirred and I tossed her on the bed. She looked up at me, a bit confused. I whipped my shirt off the top of my head and tossed it on the floor. Her glazed eyes look r over my body. I smirked and my hand over my abdomen.

“That’s all yours baby,” I told her. I crawled onto the bed and loomed over her on my hands and knees. I kissed her neck. She pushed lightly on my chest. I pushed her back down. My lips went to her neck.

“Caleb?” she asked, confused.

“That’s me;” I said. I kissed her neck. Soft skin. So vulnerable.

“N-no,” she said. “He’ll be angry.”

I'd given her too much that was clear. Either the extra Xanax or I needed to lower the GHB.

"Shh," I murmured. "It's me. It's ok."

"No," she murmured. "He'll - I was supposed to be with him. Where -where -"

"It's me," I said again. "You don't need to be afraid."

I spread her legs apart and grabbed my phone from my pocket. Her pussy was pink. I tilted her up and looked at her tender little asshole. It was pink and puffy. I saw a little tear.

She fell back, sagging into my bed, and frowned at me.

"I don't... he'll be upset he - he's waiting for me." She groped toward the night stand. Looking for her phone to see if he texted her.

"Shhh. It's me," I told her, lowering my voice to match his. I bit into her neck. She tasted so good.

Her hands very gently pushed on my chest, trying to push me off, but she was so weak. My cock raged.

"He - he won't..."

"It's me. It's ok," I said. "Shhh. Shhh."

"Caleb. Stop."

“Fight me if you want,” I murmured to her. “But you belong to me.”

Her thighs quivered but parted with ease. I pushed myself inside of her, facing no resistance. Her arms wrapped around my neck. She moaned, soft and low. I flattened my hand over her eyes. I sank deep inside of her. Her hips bucked and she made a little sound.

“You’re mine,” I growled in her ear. “I own you.”

A soft, contented sigh escaped her. Her arms tightened around my neck.

“My sweet girl.” I nuzzled my face into her hair. She smelled so good. I breathed, “oh, Orla.”

Her skin was so soft.

“You want me like I want you, Orla,” I told her in a grating voice, moving in and out of her tight, wet cunt.

“No,” she whispered, arms trembling as they held me tight around the neck.

“Yes,” I said.

“I don’t like you.”

“Be quiet,” I snapped. I kissed her neck and continued to pump in and out of her. She fell silent, a soft moan passing her lips. I felt it vibrate in my ear. She shook and quivered. It took me a bit longer but when I did finally come inside of her, I saw spots on my eyes. I rolled onto my back, bringing her with me.

“Go to sleep,” I told her. She murmured something. I ran my hand along the back of her head. I strained to reach for the remote and then clicked the lights off. I was too spent to move. I didn’t even want to disrupt us by getting beneath the covers.

She nestled into me. I was breathing hard still. I felt a bit dizzy. I wrapped my arms around her tightly, holding her against me. It felt better than I ever could have imagined. I had her with me now, and I could do whatever I wanted with her. I laid there, contented with the fact that I finally had what I wanted, that for the past six hours I had been playing out the fantasy I had ever since she first rejected over that cup of coffee. It didn’t matter if she wanted me. I would have her. And I did, and it was perfect and it was what I wanted. I was in ecstasy. But as i felt her against me, staring up at the ceiling and trying to find sleep, I could not help but play those words over and over again, so honestly said, with her inhibitions stripped and the truth so painfully and rawly expressed: I don’t like you.

I don't like you.

Chapter Notes

Hopefully worth the wait. If not, I apologize. I really struggled with this one. Honestly, I'm just really excited for them to get back to work. Sometimes when I get really excited for a part of a story, I struggle to complete what I need to complete to actually get to that point. I hope the quality of this chapter didn't suffer as a result.

-Oh, there are quite a few different photoshoots Marilyn Monroe did in a yellow Bikini - Caleb is talking about whichever one floats your boat.

Please let me know what you think! I love your comments/thoughts/opinions.

Hope to have the next chapter up soon!

I saw it like I would see a movie.

The girl stepped off of the elevator wearing a light pink blouse and a dark gray pencil skirt. I hardly recognized her. She had a small smile on her face. She felt anxious, but hopeful and excited. She was doing well in her new job. Everyone said so. The manager, Nick, said that she was learning faster than any other associate fresh out of law school ever had. Chris, the senior associate she worked with the most, said he thought she was doing an absolutely great job. She'd be on a fast track for a promotion.

She fumbled with her things as she stepped through the open doors. She sidestepped the group of young men in business suits carefully. She knew now that she was going to find them all there more often than not. There would be no more embarrassing collisions and spilling her things all over the floor because she didn't look up from her shoes fast enough to find them all congregated there, damn anyone who might be needing to get on or off the elevator.

Her eyes scanned the group quickly, offering Chris a quick smile as she met his gaze. She ignored the rest and settled down for her work day at her desk. She carefully placed the sandwich bag holding her PB&J on the side of her desk. She didn't like going to the break room. There were always way too many people in there. She set to typing, carefully going through the next report.

She heard his deep rumble from down the hall of plain gray cubes. She could see the top of his dark head over the cubicle wall. He was leaning over someone's cubicle. Chris most likely. She felt some of the tension leave her body, but only some. With Mark out on vacation, she had been slotting to cover some of his deals, which meant, for the first time in the three months since she started her new dream job, she had to work with him. So now, every time he came down the hall, her body tensed and her stomach roiled, certain he would be coming to talk to her. Mercifully, that had not yet happened. Today that would change.

His head began to move again and she looked down at her keyboard. Praying he wouldn't come to her cubicle. She listened intently, ears buzzing. There was silence. She heard nothing. No movement. Her heart was pounding. Maybe he had passed.

"Orla?"

His voice was a deep, gravelly rumble. She turned in her chair. She pressed her hands together in her lap, anxiously. He smiled at her and held up the stack of papers in his hand.

"A moment?"

He was so tall. Head and shoulders over her. His well tailored suits clung to his obviously fit body perfectly. His dark brown hair, so dark it was almost black, perfectly styled. Neat, but somehow, also perfectly tousled as to not look too rigid. His steely gray eyes popped out from the darkness of his coloring and hard features, giving him an intense look, even when he was smiling as he was now. And he held himself so confidently. A hand in his pocket, he sauntered into her office before waiting for her answer, which was a delayed and hesitant jerky nod of the head.

She had spoken very little to Caleb since she started. She'd been introduced to him in the breakroom and he had looked her over with a small, amused little smile on his lips and she had deeply regretted wearing the slightly older, frumpy looking business dress she had bought for mock trial her 11 year. He made her nervous. She didn't want to be near him because she would embarrass herself. That was inevitable. Now she wished she had tried to make a bit more small talk with him. She might not be so nervous now.

He smacked the papers down on her desk. She got a whiff of him. He smelled so good. From her early observations, the man didn't have a flaw. Everytime he was near she felt jittery and

nervous. Her skin flushed and she looked down at the papers. She knew he liked to print his reports to review them. Her mouth went dry at the sheer amount of red she saw on the paper. His body angled toward her; his right hand in his pocket, two fingers on his left hand turning the pages slightly.

“Want to explain to me why we have exposure in New York and Delaware and not in Tennessee?”

She tried to think back to the report. She had sent it to him last night around 8:00pm. She had spent extra time on it because she wanted the report to go to him perfect. He wasn't going to find a single issue with it. He might think she was frumpy and awkward, but he wouldn't have one bad thing to say about her work.

“I ran the calc for all the states that met the nexus threshold,” she answered primly, certain he was trying to trick her and proud of herself for not falling for it.

“So when you double checked the census and saw that Tennessee had over one hundred employees in the state you didn't know that created nexus?” he asked. She felt a sinking feeling wash through her. “Or did you just decide not to look at the census?”

She blinked, cheeks burning red.

“I... I didn't look at the census -”

“I shouldn't be the first one looking at the census,” he said. He flipped the page. “You wrote about recent self-reporting in Returns in the relevant reporting periods.”

She nodded, though it wasn't a question.

“Why didn't you include the Amended Returns and how that affected the current exposure?” That was a question.

“I didn’t - there were no Amended Returns.”

“They were uploaded yesterday morning. You’re checking the data room every day?”

“Yes.”

“Then you just missed them?”

“I didn’t ... they said they had everything in the data room already -”

“Do we rely on representations from target entities?”

“No, but they said -”

He flipped the page.

“No depreciation analysis,” he droned. He flipped the page. “No SAS analysis.”

She swallowed thickly. Her lower lip was trembling slightly, but she pinched her mouth together so he wouldn’t see her cry. Her flesh was pulled tautly over her face.

“This report reads like a poorly written fifth grade book report,” he said. Rage fueled her. “Let’s go over it at lunch. We can grab a booth in the cafeteria.”

“No. That’s fine,” she said tightly. “I can do it.”

The hand in his pocket went to the back of her chair. She felt the weight of it. He turned her ever so slightly toward him.

"I don't mind walking you through it."

"No. I'm fine. I have work to do," she said. He paused, gray eyes down at the report. His brow lifted and he shrugged.

"Suit yourself. I need it by the end of the day." he collected the papers in his hand. She stared at her computer, willing her eyes to stay dry. She felt her head grow heavy, sway, and fall for the desk. Her overhead hit the wood with a violent whack.

My eyes popped open at the sound of a car door slamming loudly outside. I felt... strange. So strange, it took me a long moment to realize that odd, unsettling feeling was sobriety. The most sober I had been in a long time. Long before Caleb's promotion, I had used my pills a bit too freely, though admittedly, these past few weeks I had declined rapidly. Everything was so ... *crisp*. I listened. I heard people arguing outside. Voices I didn't know. They faded off and I was left with silence. Absolute silence. Not even the sound of a fan. I wouldn't fall back asleep without a fan, not if I was sober.

It had been a dream but it was also a memory. The first, but certainly not the last, time Caleb had come into my office and absolutely decimated one of my reports. It was still hard to fully comprehend in my sober state that Caleb was the same man that had been terrorizing me for weeks on end. Slowly, as I lay in bed staring up at the ceiling, listening to the absolute silence that filled his apartment, the pieces began to slot into place. What I really wanted to know, no, *needed* to know, was why. If I knew why, I thought I might be able to get out of it.

My thoughts at the time, I am sure, were not nearly as cohesive as I am about to lay them out to you, but I came away with a feeling of understanding and purpose. I recognized, at some level, there were three options. There could be some overlap, some interchangeability, but stripped down, I saw only three. One and two ran along the same vein.

One: Caleb hated me and decided to punish me by exerting dominance and control in a sexual violent nature, to both gratify his own dark desires and impose ultimate humiliation upon myself. I discarded that option relatively quickly. If that were truly the case, I would

have thought the pictures would have gone out the moment he decided to tell me who he was. It could still be the case. I realized that he could simply be willing to spend a few more days, weeks, or months tormenting me. In which case, once he was finished, those pictures would be sent out. There was nothing I could do to prevent that and so I moved on.

Two: Caleb had not been lying when he said he had been attracted to me and I rejected his advances. He enacted his punishment along the same lines as option one: by punishing me through sexual violence. Coupled with his moments of kind words and tenderness, I thought, possibly, there was more to this than option one. He was furious with me and hoped to hurt me the same way he perceived that I hurt him. I did not think this option held a much better outlook than option two. Caleb couldn't stand me. Under this option, Caleb thought I was a haughty, arrogant, bitch. Those were his words. He hated me as much under these circumstances as he did above. Those games he played... the hickeys at work, the tie, seducing me as himself, making me blow him in his office... that goddamn fucking *tie*. All the while trying to convince me that he loved me, that he cared about me, that we'd be together. No man who loved a woman did those things to her. It was a twisted game to make me love him despite it all - after all, how pathetic is a woman that falls in love with a man who does this to her - and then once I did, once I let go and let myself feel the warmth of that glow, he'd be done. Game over. Punishment inflicted. And once that was done... What happened to the pictures then?

Which led me to Option Three: The most unsettling and frightening of all three options. Caleb believed he loved me, he was obsessed with me, and this went far beyond simply using sexual violence on a woman he did not like or looking for revenge on a girl that dared reject him. Because if that was true, and this was something he had done out of an obsession or perceived love, and truly believed that we would be *together*, then that made him far more dangerous. That made him truly unhinged. That put him into murderer territory.

He had said it multiple times yesterday. That he loved me. If it wasn't punishment, if it wasn't hatred, then my situation was far more serious. If I angered him, if I tried to leave him, then the pictures went out. I wondered, if he thought this was love and he believed he was some benevolent lover, what would happen if he simply got bored with me? Would he keep them, destroy them? Or would he send them out out of spite, simply because he could. I didn't think so. He would be the good guy. See, Orla, I told you. You were a good girl, so I won't do that to you, I just don't want you anymore.

I saw him winking, the laugh, the smirk. *I like a challenge.*

And if I was no longer a challenge?

I swallowed thickly and threw off the blankets. I knew what I had to do.

Caleb stepped inside the apartment, head down, and collected his keys back into hand. He was wearing a dark gray BC hoodie and black shorts, he wore either no socks or ankle socks, and simple black sneakers. His calves were well defined and it was clear he didn't skip leg day. His hair was unstyled, slightly damp, but still looked like he had stepped right out of the salon chair. He had stubble on face. The most I'd ever seen on him. I knew exactly how it would feel on my skin.

Whether it was the smell of breakfast or something else, his attention was immediately drawn toward me in the kitchen. A frown came to his face and he stared at me, his phone still lifted in his hand.

"Good Morning," I greeted him. I didn't need to pretend to be nervous. I was nervous.

"Morning," he rumbled. He looked around the apartment slowly, as if he thought a trap was about to be sprung. "I thought you'd still be sleeping."

He turned and threw the deadbolts.

"A couple was fighting outside. It woke me up."

He was doing everything slowly. He walked toward the island slowly. He nodded slowly. His eyes moved over the breakfast I had prepared slowly. He pressed his tongue into the right side of his bottom lip, brow knitting.

"Sit," I said, coming around the side of the island and taking one of his arms in both my hands. His gym bag slid off his other shoulder and he let me direct him into one of the island seats. "Omelets with feta cheese, spinach and broccoli," I said, putting the plate in front of him. "Home fries with ketchup and some sausage."

I bit my lip and stepped back, ringing my hands. He stared at the food and then looked at me. His eyes penetrated. His face was impassive. Neither angry nor pleased, neither hard nor soft. It was difficult to read. My heart pounded, wondering which Caleb I'd have from here on out. The angry and violent man that raped last night, or the soft gentle lover who washed me in the shower. Slowly, his face morphed. It was hardly noticeable. His eyes took on a suspicious twinkle. His lips edged upward ever so slightly.

"What are you doing?" he asked me. I swallowed.

"I made you breakfast," I said simply.

"I can see that," he said looking at the still steaming plate. He looked back at me. "Why?"

My heart was pounding.

"Isn't this what you want?" I asked him. I took a step closer, though I wanted nothing more than to run away. "You said that you wanted me to take care of you."

He was thinking. I could see the wheels turning in his head as he looked at me. He had said it, but not as Caleb. Was he already disappointed? Could I be that lucky?

"I..." I took a deep breath. "I thought you'd be hungry when you came back."

I went over and poured him a fresh cup of coffee. I made it the way he liked it and put it in front of him. He looked at the cup and then his eyes darted back up to me. He had not touched his food.

"Is it the feta?" I asked. "I can make another omelet without. I just thought -"

"What are you doing?" he asked again. I considered meeting his gaze. Maybe he wanted to know this wasn't fear compliance, but out of actual adoration. I rejected the idea that his only

goal was only to inflict pain because no matter what, my actions would have to remain the same, and that option did not end well for me. He needed to think the chase was over and move on to the next challenge. I thought about expressing my undying love right then and there but I waited. Caleb was too smart for that and he was already suspicious. He looked me over slowly, as if the rest of my body would hold the truth he was looking for. His gray eyes moved back up to mine.

“I started to have very real feelings for you. You. Like, as in Caleb. But then I thought *he* would be so angry because I was supposed to belong to *him*. And *he* had so much power over me. With the pictures. So if I was going to choose it was going to be *him*. So, I pushed you away, even though I didn’t really want to.”

I laughed breathlessly and added, “I mean you put me in an impossible position.”

That seemed to chip away at his steely façade. He looked pained, regretful. I felt some hope stir in my chest. Please let him be unhinged. High risk, high reward.

“But you *are* him. So, I don’t have to choose.”

He rose to his feet abruptly and I staggered backwards. The stool scraped across the floor, filling the apartment in a jarring manner. Did he know? *He* always seemed to know everything. If he knew what I was doing, if he knew I was lying, or if he knew there was no winning this little game he was playing, would he simply release the pictures? If that was his only card to play, I was sure he would play it. I *had* to remember, he held the trump card.

“So you... you accept the situation?” he asked, rounding the island and coming toward me. As he got closer, I could smell him. He wasn’t wearing his aftershave or cologne, but I could smell his body wash and shampoo. His hair, I could see, was damp from a shower. “What this is?”

Against my will, my body took two steps back until I was pressed against the counter. He loomed over me and I arched my head to look up. His eyes, dark gray, the color of clouds before and a storm, were burning brightly. His cheeks were flushed. I looked at him. *Really* looked at him. There was no need to hide my gaze, no need to be embarrassed. As I looked at him, allowing myself to open up the possibility that he wanted me, desired me, I saw him for the first time. *Really* saw him. His eyes were blazing, his cheeks were flush, and there was a

look akin to a wild animal in his eyes. That high anxiety fear that could turn to rage at the slightest sign of perceived aggression. And I knew. I felt a chill run through me. Standing before him now in my silk shorts and cami, pressed against the counter, his massive, powerful body standing before me, I was struck with the reality that he could kill me. He could wrap his hands around my throat and squeeze and there would not be a thing I could do about it. He might hold the pictures over my head, but a man that could do what he did... who could say a man like that couldn't snap.

As I stepped closer, I could feel the heat radiating off of him. I wrapped my arms around him, pressing my body as tightly to his as I could. I felt him stiffen and I pressed my nose to his chest. His arms closed around my body and he held me close to him. His hand slid down the back of my head. His body was tight and rigid.

"Last night you were quite adamant about not liking me," he rumbled into my hair.

"I was in pain," I murmured into his chest. "I was hurt. I didn't understand why you did these things to me."

He pulled back and grabbed my face, tilting it upward to look me full on the face. His eyes were ablaze, his face cut from stone. A muscle quivered beneath his eye. He opened his mouth to speak and then closed his mouth. He swallowed thickly. His Adam's apple bobbed violently beneath the black stubble. I had surprised him. I had done something he hadn't been prepared for. He didn't know how to react. It would have been oddly satisfying, seeing him so off-center, if I didn't feel the immensity of the danger in the situation.

"Don't," he said softly. His eyes lifted from my mouth to my eyes. "Don't lie to me."

"I'm not lying," I lied. He swallowed again. His tongue darted out to wet his lips. His hands had a hard grip on my face. It didn't hurt, but it didn't feel good either. The muscle under his eye continued to twitch.

"Don't try and make a fool out of me," he said, voice low.

"Caleb I -"

“Stop!” he barked. I flinched. I never heard him yell like that. “I mean it. You can take your time to adjust. I know this is hard on you. I know I wasn’t who you wanted me to be. But don’t. Don’t try and manipulate me.”

His eyes were more intense than I had ever witnessed in my life. My lips parted and I felt doubt creep into my brain.

“We’re done with games, right? This isn’t a game. Not anymore. Don’t make me think you love me if you don’t. If you do, I’ll send out those pictures. I mean it, Orla. I swear to fucking God. Don’t fuck with me. I’m in charge, not you. Understand?”

“I understand I - I’m not claiming to love you,” I said. I saw the flicker of hurt and disappointment rush through his eyes and with it I felt a rush of clarity course through my veins. I gently removed his hands from my face. I was surprised he let me. I put my hands on his face. His flesh was burning hot.

“Caleb,” I spoke very softly. Slowly. I took a moment to look into his eyes. I saw a man I didn’t truly know staring back. The man that had stalked me, took pictures of me, raped me. He had tormented me, yes, but he had been playing me against *himself* the entire time. I felt another rush of understanding. This wasn’t some cruel game. He wasn’t doing this to torment and then inflict as much emotional pain as possible.

He hadn’t been an alter ego... the alter ego was *Caleb*.

And that was so, so, so.... terrifying. A chill ran down my spine.

“Caleb?”

He stepped closer to me. His face was so close to mine. He breathed heavily. His breath smelled fresh. Like wintergreen. His body trembled. He was struggling to control himself. I had never seen this side of him. Not from *Caleb* or from *him*.

“I’m not going to fight anymore,” I promised.

He’d lose interest. He would. I only had to play along long enough to keep the pictures from going out and from getting myself killed. If he just got bored, I didn’t think he’d release them. He’d just moved on. If I got him angry enough though... I had no idea what this man would do.

Our eyes met. My hands held his wrists down around my hips. He shifted his weight between his right and left foot. It gave him the appearance of swaying slightly. “I’m going to do everything I can to love you,” I lied. He pressed his forehead to mine. He sucked in a sharp breath. He took a step closer. I was pressed firmly into the counter. Heat radiated off of him and he trembled slightly. “And try to be the woman you want. .”

His mouth opened and he ducked his head in. For a second I thought he was going to bite me. Then he leaned back. His hands touched my hips. He stepped closer. I was pressed against the counter. His body now pressed into mine. I could feel his cock through his shorts. Hard, thick, and hot.

“You already are,” he told me. His fingers pressed into my waist. “You *are* the woman I want.”

I felt a slight flicker of hesitation. He sounded so genuine.

He’ll get bored, I assured myself.

“Don’t lie to me,” he said. He looked up. Those dark storm cloud eyes were piercing.

“I was confused and scared and high,” I answered. “I’m ready to do whatever you want. No more fighting. Whatever you want.”

He gripped my face again. His lips were close to mine but he did not kiss me. “We will be so happy together,” he spoke with a slight twinge of desperation in his voice. Like he was trying to convince me. “Both of us... we... we’re special, Orla. We’re beautiful, and intelligent, and we’re not like these other people. Vapid and shallow and just... *unworthy*.”

His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed. He looked at my mouth.

“We were made for each other,” he continued. “We’re going to be so amazing. A power couple like no other. God, people will look at us and just...” his lips curved up into a smile. “And you, the smartest, most competent woman in the company, getting on her knees for me whenever I want. Pussy on demand.”

His thumb traced my lower lip. “I want to fuck you all fucking day.”

He grabbed me and sat me up on the counter. I barely contained the cry of pain I wanted to unleash as he did so. He must have seen it on my face though, because he immediately took a half step back.

“Fuck,” he said. He ran his hand through his hair. “You must be sore.”

Sore was not how I would have described it.

Our eyes were almost level. Almost. He stepped closer and I arched my head up. His fingers walked up my thighs like pretend spiders and then he closed his massive hands around my hips. How could I *ever* have believed it was anyone else but Caleb. Now it seemed... so obvious. I took one of his hands and turned it over. I held his thumb, examining the dark pink crescent moon. He watched me closely.

“Why didn’t you ever ask to see my hands?” he asked softly. My eyes flickered to his and then back down to his thumb.

“I knew it wasn’t you,” I said with a pained laugh. “You were good at-” gaslighting “-convincing me it wasn’t.”

His fingertips moved in light circles on my upper thigh.

“You cooked enough for you two,” he asked, abruptly changing the subjects. “You need to eat. Then I’ll give you something for the pain.”

“I already ate,” I lied. I was already thinking about what he might give me. A xanax, I hoped, even though I was running out of those. Maybe he had something good. He had date rape drugs; who was the say he didn’t have something else, a percocet maybe? He stepped back and looked around. He looked into the sink last.

“No, you didn’t,” he said. He took another plate and then cut his omelet in half. He gave me half the home fries. He set about eating, eyes far away. He was clearly thinking. Processing. I ate the omelet and left the home fries. He clanged his fork against the plate. “All of it.”

“I don’t want to get fat again.”

His eyes lifted to meet mine.

“In what world were you ever fat?” he asked.

“Overweight,” I corrected.

He snorted. “Overweight. You’ve never been overweight. Not that I’ve ever seen. Besides, *I* like curvy girls.”

He jabbed at his home fries.

“And curvy doesn’t mean fat,” he said, stabbing at some potatoes. “I don’t know what’s wrong with women.”

I stared at him. *Women*. What was wrong with *women* ? I obeyed, though I truly wasn’t hungry.

“You know that picture of Marylin Monroe? In the yellow bikini?” he asked me. He looked me over, chewing thoroughly. I nodded, though I didn’t. I’d been compared to her so much when I was younger, I ended up in the hospital for two months in high school. I had *almost* convinced my mother that throwing up after my meals was a coincidence, that I wasn’t doing it on purpose.

“That was the first picture I ever jerked off to. I was like eleven I think,” he told me. I popped a piece of sausage between my lips. He watched me closely, like I was about to bolt out the door at the drop of a hat. “My brother had it in his room.”

“The first day we met. Really met. I went home and spent two hours finding a girl that looked like you,” he said. When he noted my confused frown he added, “in porn. I don’t think I’ve jerked off thinking about another girl since you started. Had a nice little cache or porno vids with girls that looked like you.” He flashed me a grin. “Don’t need those anymore.”

He ate quickly, shoveling food into his mouth. As he swallowed, it looked like he was in pain. With his plate clean he rose.

“That was good,” he said, putting his plate in the sink. “I’ll make us lunch. You should have a couple more bites.”

“I’m really not hungry,” I said. I lied, “I had a couple of pieces of sausage while I was cooking.”

I don’t think he believed me. He examined my plate and I added, “my stomach hurts a little.”

His hands slid over my waist and he nodded slowly. “Stress. You’ve been through a lot.”

He picked up a piece of sausage in his fingers and held it up. “One more bite. For me.”

I reached up to take it from him. He pulled it back, a playful smile on his lips. He brought it back and I opened my mouth. I ate the sausage from his hand. He pressed his pointer finger to my lips once I was done. My lips parted and he slid the digit inside. His lips parted as he watched me suck the grease from his fingers. He gave me his thumb next. He didn’t linger long. “Come on, we’ll clean up after.”

He guided me into his bedroom and into the bathroom with a hand on my lower back. He turned on the water in the shower. Immediately, steam began to cloud up the glass. He pulled his hoodie and shirt up over his head in a single motion and tossed it into a hamper. I watched the muscles ripple beneath the taut flesh of his back. When he turned, I looked at his powerful biceps, his broad pectorals, and well defined abdomen. He kicked off his shoes and yanked off his socks. He tossed the socks in the hamper and turned toward me.

“Waiting for me to undress you?” he asked. He grabbed a bottle from the cabinet and popped out a white pill into his palm. He came closer and held it up. I opened my mouth and stuck out my tongue because I knew he wouldn’t let me take it myself. His lips tilted upward.

“What is it?” I asked after I swallowed. He slid my shorts down my thighs before collecting the bottom of my cami in his fingers.

“The first night we made love,” he said, pulling the cami over my head. “I sucked on your tits for a good twenty minutes.”

His hand closed over my breast. His fingers rolled one of my nipples into a hard little bud. “We’ll watch after the shower. I have it recorded. You want to watch it?”

He lowered his lips to my neck. If I didn’t know it was impossible, I’d have thought his lips were burning my flesh in their wake, bubbling up the skin into pink, blistering flesh, peeling away to bone.

“Yes,” I said, because I thought that was what he wanted to hear.

“Let’s get you taken care of,” he said. He took me by the hand and led me to the shower. He checked the water before gently ushering me inside. The shower was glorious. A million different dials and settings, a million different locations the water could pour out of. Now it came from overhead, rushing over my tense and aching muscles. I wet my hair, turning my face upward, and relished the warmth. He stepped in a couple moments later. He had a handful of female soaps and shampoos in his hand. I looked at them a moment too long and he smirked at me. “Bought these new for you. I’ve never lived with a girl before.”

He opened the bottle and as if to prove his point, showed me the seal still on it. He ripped it off and rested it on the shelf. He poured a healthy amount of shampoo into his hand and ordered me closer. I wish his hands felt worse in my hair. I wish the water wasn’t so warm, the shower so comforting, and his hands so gentle.

“It’s the same scent you buy,” he told me. “Just better quality. I love the way you smell.”

He worked the shampoo in my hair and then guided me under the water. His hands gently ran over my arms, waist, and hips as I rinsed. He had me step out and applied the conditioner. He took an expensive looking loofah or scrub or whatever you call it. He lathered it with body wash and set about cleaning me. Whatever he’d given me, it felt fucking fantastic. As the warmth enveloped me, I reminded myself to keep my head on straight. I couldn’t fuck this up. Too much was at stake. He continued to clean me, but I tensed as I felt the loofah press between my cheeks.

“Shh, shh, shhh,” he soothed. He turned me toward him and resumed his cleaning with arms around me. “I’m going to take care of you now. I don’t want to hurt you and I won’t unless you make me.”

I nodded. He held me closer to him. I leaned into him. My face felt good against his pectoral. I could feel it flexing as he cleaned me. Very gently. Very carefully. I would have found it humiliating if it weren’t for the warmth of whatever he gave me. I didn’t think it was a benzo. I knew those feelings. It felt like an opioid. He walked us back under the water.

“What did you give me?” I asked, eyes heavy.

“Kicks your ass doesn’t it,” I could hear the smile in his voice. “Enjoy it. We’re getting your pills and drinking under control. But I know you’re in pain and you’ve been a good girl and I’m going to spend the bulk of the day inside of you.”

He placed the loofah to the side and used his hands to help rinse the soap off of me. He turned off the water far too soon, but I did not resist as he guided me out and wrapped a thick warm towel around me.

“Thank you,” I said. I padded softly After him as he left the bathroom and opened one of the large sliding mirror doors. He retrieved something made of fine, dark red silk and placed it on the bed. I wrapped the massive towel around me more tightly. It was the warmest, most comfortable towel I had ever felt in my entire life. I was cocooned in its warmth, my eyes closed, when he spoke. I jumped and must have let out a noise of surprise because he looked at me, as if I had startled him.

“Alright?” he asked me. I nodded. “Come here. Lie down on the bed. On your stomach.”

I took a hesitant step forward. He watched me closely, dark gray eyes assessing closely. I laid the towel down and then spread myself on top of it. I didn’t know what he’d do if I got his comforter wet. My hair still dripped. My body went rigid when one of his hands touched my thigh.

I turned my face toward the mirror when I felt the weight of the bed shift behind me. He crawled on, straddling my legs, and I waited for him to attack. To force my legs apart and rape me again. I readied myself for the pain.

“Relax,” he coaxed, sounding somewhat exasperated. His hands gently moved up my spine and over the curve of my hips. They slid back downward and he gently pulled my cheeks apart. His tongue clicked.

“That poor little asshole,” he said. He leaned down and placed a soft kiss to the stinging hole. The pain was gone when I didn’t think about it, thanks to whatever it was he’d given me.

These were even better than benzos. Who needed Xanax when I could have whatever this was he just gave me? He reached over, straining slightly, to open his nightstand table. He retrieved a couple of tubes, but it was hard to see from the mirror.

“It’s not that bad,” he told me, squeezing off a little blob onto his finger. “It’s a good thing I fucked your ass the night before.”

What he pressed against me was cold and wet, then turned warm, and then, blissfully, I felt nothing at all. He let my cheeks press back together. The strange numb feeling spread across the flesh as it rubbed together. It felt odd, but it didn’t matter. I let out a deep sigh. He very gently groped at a globe of each cheek. He looked at me in the mirror then, thoughtfully. He didn’t say anything. He just continued to run his hands over me. My thighs, my back, my spine, my shoulders, my arms. He leaned down and kissed my shoulder blade. He kissed my other shoulder blade next. His stubble was rough. I felt him squeeze my ass.

“How do you feel?”

“Good,” I answered.

“Any pain?”

“None.”

“Good,” he said and flipped me over. I expected to feel that sharp pain rush through me but it didn’t. He scooped me up and heaved me toward the pillows. He made me feel like a rag doll. “I want to eat you out so bad.”

He crawled toward me and grabbed my ankles. He tossed one to the side and tossed the other over his shoulder as he lowered himself. This still weirded me out. I don’t know why. I didn’t like a man down there. Just seemed so -

“Oh,” I gasped as his tongue dragged across me.

“I love your pussy,” he grated. His breath was hot and his beard scratched between my thighs. He pushed his tongue hard inside of me. He didn’t stop until an orgasm rippled through me, and even after that, continued to suck on my raw and sensitive pussy. Finally, he relented and crawled up over me.

“You’re so sexy, Orla,” he said, pulling his sweatpants off and kicking them off the bed. “You have to see that.”

He grabbed his swollen cock, giving himself a few hard tugs. He did take any time entering me. It didn’t hurt. He had more than prepared me. He stretched me apart, adding a wonderful pressure to the warmth I was feeling in my body. His face was buried in my neck. His stubble scratched my neck. He cared little for my pleasure. I suppose he figured I’d already reached climax. But just as I thought he was about to come, he pulled out of me and groaned. He scraped his teeth along my neck and sucked. Leaving more marks to match the others. He placed his mouth to mine. His tongue plunged deeply into my mouth. He tasted me deep.

“You taste so good. Feel so good.”

His hands cupped my breasts and squeezed. He was inside of me again, his mouth on mine. He shifted his hips. A low moan left me quite against my will.

“I know exactly what you need,” he breathed, smirking against my throat. “I know exactly how to fuck you.”

I didn’t fight the second orgasm the way I should have, but I told myself it was all part of the plan. He had to get bored. He liked a challenge. So, it was simple. I’d stop being that. He followed shortly after. Once he was done, catching his breath with feather light kisses to my shoulders, he asked, “you’re current on birth control?”

"Yes," I answered.

"Here, put this on," he said after a minute. He put the silk babydoll on over my head, shielding my naked body from his view, but only barely.

"I need to shave," he murmured. "Take a short nap if you want."

I nodded.

He immediately picked me up in his arms to carry me to the living room and I was a bit annoyed he didn't let me nap like he said he would, but upon looking at him, I could see he was freshly shaven, smelled of aftershave, and had dressed in a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt. The kitchen was clean when he carried me out into the main apartment and on the coffee table were two cups of coffee. The spacious couch had a thick, gloriously warm looking blanket spread across it and I just wanted to cocoon in and go back to sleep. He plopped me down and grabbed his cup of coffee. He glanced at the tv as he took a sip and then disappeared into the other side of the apartment. I grabbed my cup. It was fresh, hot, and just as I liked it. He had been watching the news. I was upset to see it was the same news channel I watched.

He came back out with a small, thin, black rectangle in his hands. He plugged it into the TV receiver and then sat down beside me. He reached out and touched my knee.

"Nice nap?"

I nodded. I cleared my throat. "How long?"

"Bout an hour," he said, looking into the kitchen toward the stove clock. "Any pain?"

I shook my head this time. I wasn't sore and the high had left. I simply felt comfortable, maybe a tad groggy, but I chalked that up to just waking up.

"Took everything in me not to climb on top of you while you slept," he said. He grabbed the front of his sweatpants and I could see he had an erection. That man's sex drive was insane. It

hardly seemed possible. “I’ll admit...”

He paused, examining the remote control.

“The first time, I didn’t last long, so don’t judge me too harshly,” he mused and then flicked off the TV. Then it woke back up and there was a screen full of files. “Come here.”

I scooted closer to him. My heart was pounding and I felt my body grow tense. I couldn’t ask for another pill though. My pride wouldn’t let me. He tucked me in under his arm and reached into his sweatpants with his left hand. He retrieved the hardened erection, gave himself the customary two or three strokes, and then grabbed the remote.

“Go on,” he said. “Go slow.”

My hand wrapped around him. Hard, smooth, hot, and pulsing.

“Ready?” he murmured. “We’re going to watch some videos. I think it’ll help you associate me with the man you started to care for. Make this transition easier for you.”

I barely nodded as I continued the slow strokes.

“Watch the screen now,” he directed. And I did.

The video started with Caleb seated on the bed, propping his phone or camera or whatever he used to record up against what I think was my lamp. He tugged at his tie, staring at the screen for a few moments. Then he leaned forward and carefully tilted it to the side so he was more in view. With the slight shift, I could see myself lying on the bed behind him, head on the pillows, chest slowly rising and falling.

He stood and slid off his suit coat, tossing it on the bed beside me. He walked around the other side of the bed. He went about unbuttoning the cuffs of his shirt, examining the camera.

Then he looked down at me. His face was set in a very serious manner, brow slightly furrowed. Once the cuffs were unbuttoned, he unbuttoned the still, absurdly, perfectly ironed dress shirt and tossed it somewhere off beside him. Off toward the futon, I think.

His white undershirt was form fitting, showing off the broad chest and powerful arms under the crisp white fabric. He knelt on the bed and came to straddle me as he removed his belt. I was already undressed. What he did to me before the camera had been turned on was lost forever. I could see his erection bulging beneath his trousers. He unfastened his pants, still kneeling over me, and reached his hands inside. Beneath the expensive black fabric, he was moving his hand up and down. His other hand gently trailed his fingers along my thigh.

He tossed my limp leg to the side. His lips slowly curved upward. He hunched down and his face disappeared between my legs. My legs moved and I shifted. A soft sigh left my lips. He glanced up to look at me briefly and then lowered his head back down. Some time later he got up, holding himself up with one arm, the other still moving in his pants. He removed the hand from his pants, and lowered himself down on top of me. He took one tit in each hand, alternating his mouth between each hardened nipple, though he seemed to favor the right.

He wasn't lying. He didn't last long. He pulled back to put himself inside me. The moment he did, slowly pressing his hard erection inside my tight body, his face contorted and he groaned softly, hanging his head down and tightened his muscles. Once fully inside, he lowered himself down, burying his face in the side of my neck. He thrust only a few minutes before I saw his body tensed and froze. He remained there a while. Finally he pushed himself up and rubbed his hands over his flushed face.

"Fuck," he breathed, sitting up, his limp cock hanging in front of him. He reached out and ran his hand over my belly. He squeezed one of my breasts. He grabbed his cock and stroked it back to life, his fingers plucking at my nipples as he did. Once his cock was hard again, he flipped me over onto my belly, settled down on top of me, and started again.

He turned my face toward his and leaned down. "Don't stop," he said as his lips touched mine. His hand closed around mine, still on his cock, and moved it up and down in steady motions. His tongue pressed into my mouth and he had the back of my hair in a tight grip. His kiss was deep and hard.

"Stand up and take off your clothes," he said between kisses. "Then get on your knees and suck my cock."

He broke off the kiss and leaned back. I obeyed with trembling hands. When the dark merlot silk was on the floor, I lowered myself down to my knees between his legs. His eyes were hot and partially hooded. He looked very much as he had in his office the day before. God, had it only been a day?

I gripped the base of his erection and chanced another glance at him before bringing my lips down to his weeping head. I closed my lips around the head of his cock and flicked my tongue to clean the precum away.

“Fuuuuck,” he said softly, reaching out to touch the back of my head. “You look even better down there than I thought you would. Keep your eyes on me.”

He let me work my own way along his cock before he applied pressure to the hand on my head. His cock slid down my throat, forcing me to gag. My throat tightened around his cock and he sucked in a breath. He pulled my head back to allow me a couple breaths before plunging back into my mouth. He moved my head up and down without care, like there wasn't a living breathing person attached to the soft, wet object he was fucking. He forced himself deep down inside of me before I felt the hot spurts of his semen go gushing down the back of my throat.

“Fuck,” he breathed. My body tensed and I gagged. I grabbed onto his sweatpants, fisting the gray material for dear life as I tried not to vomit. Finally, he released me and I fell back against the coffee table panting for breath. He pulled his sweatpants up over his hips and ran a hand through his hair.

“You really are getting good at that,” he said with a tiny smirk.

“Thank you,” I said because I thought he'd want to hear it. He made to stand and I flinched. He froze, half crouched, half standing, hands still on the couch to push him up. His eyes hardened as he looked at me.

“I've never hit you,” he said. “And I won't.”

I nodded, hurrying to reassure him. “I know. I know. I’m sorry.”

He continued to stare at me. His eyes hard.

“I’m going to make lunch.” He said, finally breaking eye contact and pushing himself to his feet. He jabbed at some buttons on the remote.

“Find something for us to watch,” he instructed, dropping the remote on the couch beside me. He was halfway into the kitchen and I had the remote in my hand when he called after me, “you can get dressed and sit on the couch.”

I quickly put my baby doll back on before he might change his mind. My hands were shaking as I turned the TV back on. I really wanted a Xanax. Or two. And a bottle of wine. I glanced into the kitchen. He was grabbing some stuff out of the fridge. I thought about how good it would feel. Chewing on my lip and watching his broad back as he moved about the kitchen, my red outweighed my pride. I pushed myself up to my feet and padded softly into the kitchen. He was putting some turkey out of the container and slapping it down on a piece of bread, his back still to me, as I came closer.

He tensed as my arms wrapped around from behind. His hands pressed to mine and he turned his head over his shoulder. I pressed my face into the center of his back and squeezed. He turned slowly and I caught a glimpse of the smile playing on his lips.

“Miss me that much, huh,” he chuckled, gently pulling me into his arms. I put my arms around his middle again, pressing my face into his t-shirt. “You ok?”

“Can I have a Xanax?” I asked. His brow crinkled, but he didn’t look angry or distrustful. I was holding him quite tightly. My breasts were pressed against him and he was still coming down from the high of his last orgasm.

“That Oxy is still working,” he told me. He removed an arm around me to put his hand on my cheek. That side of my body suddenly felt very cold. His thumb stroked gently.

“Please, Caleb?” I asked softly. His lips parted. His eyes moved across my face.

“You can’t mix benzos and opioids,” he said, almost reluctantly. “Maybe one and one could be fine but... it could kill you.”

“Then another Oxy?” I asked. I hated how desperate I sounded. He stared at me a while, considering, looking more concerned than angry.

“Half,” he said. “Because you asked so sweetly.”

He disappeared down the hall to the other side of the apartment. I glanced down at the lunch he was making. Nothing too glamorous. Sandwiches, chips, and soft drinks. He had peanut butter and jelly jars out on the counter. He came back with a perfectly cut white pill and I wondered if he had a pill cutter back there.

“Here you go,” he said. I almost reached for it, but then remembered. I tilted my head back a fraction of an inch and opened my mouth. He smiled at me and placed the pill on my tongue.

“Thank you,” I said. He placed his hand on my lower back and gently pulled me closer.

“The pills do need to stop,” he told me softly. “They’re not supposed to be taken like that.”

“I know,” I mumbled.

“But I know how stressful this has been and still is, and I’ll make it as easy on you as I can,” he said. He bent down and kissed me. It was a soft, tender kiss. One I did my best to return. As I did, he let out a deep sigh and pressed his forehead to mine. He breathed, “this is too good to be true.”

I prayed he didn’t feel my entire body tense. It was the second time he had said it.

“I keep thinking I’m going to wake up and we’ll be in your tiny bed and you’ll be blindfolded and bound.”

I relaxed a little.

“No more fighting,” I said, able to look directly in his eye as I said it. Because I meant it. I put a smile on my face. He’d get bored. And I’d move on. He cupped my cheek again, lips tilting.

“Go on, I’ll be right over with lunch,” he said. He patted my gently on the bottom.

I nestled myself on the couch, tugging the blanket over my legs and pushing myself up against the arm of the couch. He carried the plates over, our sodas tucked under one arm.

“I know, I got the easy meal,” he grinned, handing me my plate and putting his down on the counter. “But I’ll take care of dinner tonight.”

He squeezed my knee under the blanket.

“So, what are we watching?”

“Whatever,” I said, noncommittally but not rudely, handing him the remote.

“You like horror movies,” he said. “Want to watch one.”

I nodded and forced a smile. He went into Netflix and then selected a movie. We finished eating before he plopped the empty plates down on the coffee table. He moved me without much consideration, shifting in behind me and wrapping his arms around me. In any other situation, it would have been comfortable. I remained tense in his arms, but I tried to sag into

the feeling of the Oxy. My tolerance was through the roof, because I wasn't feeling what I knew I should have been feeling.

The movie started as any normal horror slasher movie. Young teen/20 somethings being too loud, laughing too much, drinking and smoking, waiting to be killed. I tried to focus on it. I tried to ignore the fact that in the past two hours I had one and half oxies and I felt *nothing*. I knew I had gone too far. I knew I was taking too many. I wasn't in pain. That gave me some comfort. That could be why I wasn't high. These pills weren't *supposed* to get you high or knock you out, not if you were using it appropriately. But I wanted another one. I needed another one. I felt it rushing through my limbs and my mouth was dry. I sucked down the soda and tried to watch the movie. I focused and focused and focused to forget where I was or the fact that I'd turned myself into a drug addict. But the moment those words flashed through my brain, I felt my self control snap and I burst into tears. I sat up loudly, pressing my hands to my face. The TV paused and Caleb sat up behind me. He leaned around to look at me, his arms tightening around me.

"What is it?" he asked me. I shook my head, still crying. He waited, gently running his hands up and down my arms.

"Harder pretending than you thought it would be?" he asked. There was an edge to his voice I heard through my cries.

"No," I cried, sniffing. I had to answer that. "I don't feel it."

"Don't feel what?"

"The Oxy," I said. "And I want more so bad. I want more. I want a Xanax and a glass of wine. I'm a - I've been - I'm a -"

I couldn't say it.

"We're going to work on that," he said. "You've been through a lot. I didn't make it easy on you. It isn't all your fault."

“I let it happen. I should have - I should have been stronger.”

“Shhh,” he said. “You want more right now?”

I nodded. He asked, “Before, how often did you take a Xanax?”

“Once every couple weeks,” I told him.

“How many are you taking now?” he asked. He sounded like he was talking to a small child.

“Like two a day... sometimes more.”

“And alcohol?”

“Couple glasses of wine at night.”

“And you haven’t been eating?” He asked. I shook my head.

“We’re going to get you back on track,” he vowed. “You don’t get a pill unless it comes from me. No more alcohol, unless I say you can. Now that you know it’s me, everything will be different. Like you said, it was not knowing. You were on edge all the time. You don’t have to worry about that anymore. Ok?”

I nodded. It would make things easier, not being so suspicious of everyone. And it would be a relief, not fighting anymore. I sagged into him, pressed my face to his chest, and closed my eyes. He held me close, gently stroking my hair as I fought off the remnants of sobs that threatened to wrack through me.

“I wish you had told me how bad it was getting,” he said. “I really didn’t know until I came that night to find you unconscious.”

And you still fucked me , I thought bitterly.

“Even then it never occurred to me...”

He sighed. “I should have taken better care of you.” I think that was the closest to an apology I would be getting.

“Are you feeling sick at all?” he asked, touching my face. “Shaky? Nauseous?”

“If I said I did, would you give me another Xanax?” I breathed pathetically, forcing out a pained laugh. He gave me a small, apologetic smile. I sniffled. “Can I go to the bathroom?”

He laughed softly, tucking some hair behind my ear. “You don’t have to ask me to go to the bathroom. You’re a grown woman.”

I looked at him, trying to keep any anger or hatred from my face. He met my gaze, considering. Then he jerked his head to the side.

“Go on,” he said, patting my thigh. “Pills are in my safe. So no rummaging.”

I did rummage. The first Oxy he gave me had come from the bathroom. So I looked in all the drawers and in the medicine cabinet. When I realized I wasn’t going to find them, I did my best to collect myself. I splashed cold water on my face. I drank some from the tap. I brushed my hair and put it up in a bun. I was a grown woman. I could wear it as I liked.

I walked back into the living room and noted he had not turned the move back on. He was waiting where I had left him, scrolling through his phone lazily. I froze halfway to him. Not his phone. My phone.

“Who is Micky?” he asked me, glancing up from my phone briefly.

“A friend from high school,” I answered. He grunted and put the phone in his pocket. “Come on.”

I went back over to him and nestled back into his arms, my back to him, facing the tv. My cheeks were flushed as he wrapped his arms around me. I wanted to ask what prompted the question, but I couldn't bring myself to speak. I tried to focus on the movie, but I struggled to keep the thought of another Percocet or Xanax out of my head. In the end it wasn't focusing on the movie that calmed the heavy pounding of my heart, but the soothing feel of his hand, as it gently ran through my hair.

She insisted on making dinner. I offered. I had planned on it. In truth, I had expected to keep her mostly drugged the entire weekend. But there she was, bustling away in the kitchen, cooking up some delicious smelling pork chops, sweet potato, and Brussel sprouts. She loved them as much as I did. On one of the rare occasions she brought in lunch that was not a simple peanut butter and jelly sandwich, she had Brussel sprouts. I had taken her side when the others engaged in some playful ribbing about Brussel sprouts. She had shot me a rather scathing glare when I did. She glanced up from the seasoning she was putting together and gave me a smile. I returned the smile and pinned my eyes on her. She hesitated a moment, before she turned and continued to fix dinner.

I didn't know what she was doing. I didn't know what game she was playing. It was ... unsettling. I knew very well this wasn't as it seemed. Nothing was with her. I felt my desire for her grow. I would have never believed that was possible, but it seemed to grow every day that passed. I looked back at my computer screen. She had wanted to work after the movie, but I hadn't allowed it. She needed some time. Tomorrow she could get some work done. For now, I would finish up the report she had due on Monday. It would be nice now that things were out in the open. It was hard enough doing my job. Having done mine and hers for the past three weeks or so had been exhausting.

“Dinner is ready,” she told me. I said nothing. I finished the sentence I was working on and then closed the laptop. I got up from the stool and walked around the island. She moved to step back but I caught her around the waist and stepped beside her.

“Smells delicious,” I said, pressing my nose to the side of her neck and breathed in deeply. Whatever it was she was doing, I didn’t hate it.

“I hope it tastes delicious,” she answered. I slid my hands around her hips and slid them up her belly. I slid my hands beneath the baby doll and moved my hands upward until I found her breasts. I squeezed hard, relishing the feel of her nipples hardening beneath my palm. Her body was tense. It could be her anxiety, the need for another painkiller, or... revulsion. I twirled her nipples between my fingers and turned my face to look at her. She turned her face toward mine. I searched her eyes for an answer. She kept her eyes on mine. I leaned down to kiss her. Slow, gentle, tender. My tongue pressed to her lips. She parted them, her own tongue coming out shyly to touch my own. I continued to squeeze her tits, rubbing her nipples between my fingers. I pushed my erection against her bottom as I deepened the kiss. I would have bent her over and fucked her right there if she hadn’t worked so hard on dinner. I didn’t want it to get cold. I broke the kiss with a sigh. Forehead pressed to hers, I closed my eyes.

Her hand reached up to touch my cheek. She pulled me into another kiss. Gentle and tender, her tongue pressing to request entrance into my mouth this time. I don’t know how long we kissed, our tongues swapping residences, my hands gently groping at her breasts, but soon, she was slowly lowering herself down to her knees, tugging my sweatpants down as she went.

I didn’t know what she was doing. I didn’t know what game she was playing. But as my toes curled and my eyes screwed shut, hand burrowing deeply in her hair, dinner growing cold in front of me, I was damn sure I was going to enjoy every second of it.

Chapter Notes

Probably not the best written chapter I ever put up, but here it is. I hope you like it. Please let me know what you think? Thank you all that take the time to comment. It really means the world to me.

I woke up in the morning and he was inside of me. He entered me from behind, his arms wrapped around me, his nose buried deeply in the crook of my neck. The room was cool, but the covers were thick, and his body was very warm. Still half asleep, it wasn't all that unpleasant an experience, and though I didn't climax, I couldn't really complain. He kissed my cheek and murmured in my ear, "I'm going to the gym. I'll be back by eight."

He kissed my cheek again and rolled out of bed. He pulled the covers back up around me before heading to the bathroom. He left a few minutes later. I glanced at the clock. It was only 4:45. I would have liked my phone to set an alarm so I could wake up to start breakfast, but I didn't know where my phone was. I could have set an alarm on the clock, but I was far too tired for that. I would get up in a moment to wash him out of me. I just wanted a few more moments to rest. I ended up closing my eyes for a moment. When they opened up again, the clock showed 8:25.

Throwing off the cocoon of warmth, I ran out of the bedroom. I could at least get something started before he got back. I slid to a stop halfway to the kitchen. Caleb stood in front of the stove in a hoodie and shorts, hair damp, the aroma of bacon surrounding him. I swallowed thickly as he turned, watching for signs of displeasure with slightly widened eyes.

"I'm sorry," I rushed out. He frowned at me and turned back around.

"What did you do?" he asked. I came around the side of the island to see what he was cooking. It looked like scrambled eggs and bacon.

"You said you'd be back at eight."

He looked over at me with a smile and a little twinkle in his gaze. His eyes slid over my legs. “And I was. Got back at about 7:50 actually.”

“I should have had breakfast going,” I answered. He had a little half smile on his face. He switched the hands holding the spatula and placed his hand on my waist, gently pulling me toward him.

“I cooked for you all the time before,” he said, moving to the other pan to stir the eggs. His hand slid down to rest on my bottom. He squeezed firmly.

“I was tied up and blindfolded,” I answered.

“I know,” he said, looking down at me, “and you looked so fucking hot.”

His hand squeezed harder. He asked, “you ever think about BDSM before?”

I shook my head, watching the bacon crack and sizzle.

“You like it though,” he told me. “You might not realize it yet, but all those pretty lines say so.”

I wasn’t stupid. I knew what went into it. It had not ever been something I balked at, but I had never taken a specific interest in it either. The majority of my exposure had been Fifty Shades of Grey. Something told me Caleb wouldn’t think highly of that comparison.

“Am I supposed to call you anything?”

“Call me anything?” he asked.

“Like... master or something...”

He flashed his perfect white teeth at me. “I like the sound of that.” He kissed my forehead. “No, just Caleb. I like when you say my name.”

I nodded, relieved. His hand slid up the back of my babydoll. The skin of my bottom felt cool against the room air. His thumb caressed the small of my back.

“How’re you feeling?” he asked.

“Good,” I said. I held onto the front pocket of his hoodie. It gave me something to do with my hands and I hoped it came off as an affectionate touch.

“Calm?”

“As can be.”

“It’ll get better,” he said. “I promise.”

I nodded. I wanted to believe him. But I also really really wanted a xanax and a crisp glass of wine. He stroked my hip gently and said, “Want to go get cleaned up. Breakfast will be ready when you come out.”

“Ok,” I said. I tried to pull away, but his arm held firm. I looked up at him silently. His face was stone. He stared closely. His eyes dropped to my lips and then back to my eyes. I tried to smile and stepped closer to him. I tilted my head back and parted my lips. He pressed his lips to mine gently. It was a slow, lingering kiss, before he let go. “Don’t take too long.”

I didn't take too long, but I wasn't quick either. The water felt so nice and I enjoyed the alone and quiet. It really was a glorious shower. But too soon I pulled myself from the warm spray and wrapped myself in one of those gloriously thick towels. I noticed clothing on the bed. A pair of pink cotton shorts, and an oversized t-shirt. It didn't take me long to realize it was one of his t-shirts.

I dressed and the moment the shirt covered me, I was surrounded by the smell of him. The smell I had loved so much and then grew to hate. When I came outside, I found him standing at the island in front of a stack of mail in his hands. He was staring down at it grimly.

"Unbelievable," he said, slapping the folded white cardboard down on the table. He didn't look at me as I walked over. He stared ahead grimly, fists pressed knuckle first into the granite counter.

"What is it?" I asked, coming close. He looked at me a moment, the grimace still on his face. He blinked, like he didn't recognize me for a second, and then picked up the paper again and stared at it.

"My brother. He's getting married September 18th," he said.

"You didn't know?" I asked.

He stared blankly at the wall. My heart beat a bit faster. I didn't like the stillness, the intensity of gaze. It reminded me far too forcefully of the danger in my current position, despite the strange appearance of normalcy to a casual observer.

"Not a lot of notice," I added, sitting down on a stool. I reached out and took the invitation from his hand. He let me take it. His eyes remained staring into space. I read the invitation. It was tasteful, elegant, and simple. Caleb finally spoke and I jumped.

"They were supposed to get married last weekend but postponed a while back because her mother was sick. I knew they were planning for this fall but..."

He plucked the invitation from my hand. He stared down at it. His chest rose and sank slowly and deeply.

“Still, not very considerate not to give more notice,” I said. I was certain that was why he was so angry and I wanted him to know I was on his side. I couldn’t think of anything else on its face that would have angered him so greatly. “I’m sure a good deal of people won’t be able to go. Especially if they have to travel.”

He leaned forward on his fists again, staring off into space. He seemed more put out than I would have thought. I understood being annoyed, but he seemed *angry*.

“Will you have to travel far?” I ventured. I didn’t want him taking his anger out on me. He looked at me for a second, face unchanging, and then collected his mail. He shoved it into a drawer.

“Not far,” he answered. “It’ll be back home at the country club.”

He opened the fridge and grabbed a Gatorade. He slammed the fridge shut. Glass and plastic clinked inside as the fridge shuddered. He was laughing as he turned, but there was nothing pleasant about his smile. He motioned to the drawer with his Gatorade.

“Schedules his fucking wedding on my birthday,” he said. “And I bet you not a single fucking one of them even noticed.”

He took a big gulp of his Gatorade and marched down toward the hall I had not yet been down. He stepped into view a just moment later. I still hadn’t had a moment to process. He clearly had more to say and abandoned whatever it was he had left to do. A large, bluish vein was bulging down the side of his neck and his cheeks were flushed. “It’s not like it even matters. Like my birthday doesn’t get ignored every fucking year anyway.”

He disappeared once more. Again, he returned too quickly to have gotten anything done.

“You know, ever since I was sent away to boarding school, my birthday’s been an afterthought. You want to know what my parents did? They scheduled a family vacation my junior year of high school. Them and my older brothers. I didn’t go because - ‘you’ll be in your first week of school, sweetie, we don’t want to stress you out.’ Fucking bullshit. Got a call the day after my birthday from my mother. She didn’t have great service on the boat they were on. On their way to Venice. Couldn’t believe she forgot my birthday. ‘My sweet baby boy, can you ever forgive me.’ Ridiculous. She knew what she was doing.”

He paused a moment and then shouted, “fuck!”

He punched the side of the fridge hard. I flinched. Suddenly I was in my shower again, listening to the sound of his fist as it slammed into the wall beside my head. He turned to walk back down the hall. I caught sight of the back of his neck. It was burning red. I slid off the stool and hurried after him.

“Caleb?” I called. He was halfway down the hall and he turned around. He had a tiny frown on his face. “Are you ok?”

His face flushed and he ground his teeth together.

“I’m not mad at you,” he said. “Don’t look so...” he sighed. He looked incredibly defeated. “Don’t look so scared of me.”

“I’m not,” I lied, walking down to stand before him. I took his hands in mine. “I would be really angry if my family did that. Really hurt. I just want to know if you’re alright.”

His hands squeezed mine, just to the point where it might hurt. He took a step closer. He was looking at me, eyes searching, and I had another sudden thought that if he ever suspected I wasn’t being sincere, that I was trying to manipulate him, my punishment would be far worse than I could imagine. He broke eye contact before he spoke.

“I’m fine,” he muttered down at our hands. His thumb caressed my knuckles. “It doesn’t bother me. Go eat before it gets cold.”

He released my hands reluctantly and turned down the other end of the hall. I turned and returned to the kitchen. My stomach was in knots as I stabbed at the eggs on the plate he had made up. I didn't want to eat. I glanced at the sink, wondering if I could get at least half down the drain before he came back, but then he returned and I forced a mouthful of eggs into my mouth. He had both our laptops. He set them up and signed into both. I watched him connect to the VPN, placing a small bite of bacon between my lips.

"What are you doing?" I asked. I wondered if he was going to have me work a bit today.

"Putting in PTO for the wedding," he said. I frowned. Why'd he have my laptop?

He let out another sigh. "Please don't be afraid of me," he said. The word please drew my gaze. I looked up my laptop to look at him. "You don't have to be. I won't hurt you. I don't want to."

"I know," I said. "I'm not."

He stared at me a moment, face shockingly open. It was a split second but I saw a flash of such raw vulnerability that I wasn't even sure I actually saw it. Then, in half a moment, it was the face of the man that had kept me tied up and blindfolded for three straight days, that made me tell him I loved him and I wanted him and belonged to him. It was terrifying. His face clouded over in an instant. It darkened, turned back to stone.

"Yes, you are," he said. He started typing again. "It's fine. It's early. It's fine."

He was talking to himself, not me. He jabbed the enter button on my laptop. I heard his ping and he began typing on his.

"What are you doing?" I asked again. He looked up sharply, clearly annoyed.

“Putting in PTO for the wedding,” he repeated slowly, an edge to his voice.

“For me?” I asked.

“I’m not going to a wedding without my girlfriend,” he snapped. He looked at me, eyes daring me to contradict him. I felt my face buzz ever so slightly. He looked back at the laptop.

“Obviously, for people at work, you’re going up north to see your parents.”

I nodded.

“Eat it all,” he said. He picked up his fork and started eating. He jabbed at his food. He was angry. That was clear. He jabbed at his food like it was the eggs that had schedule their wedding on his birthday. I ate as best I could. I had about a quarter left when I put my fork down.

“My stomach is getting sore,” I told him. It wasn’t a lie. He nodded slowly as he looked at my plate.

“You can go sit down on the couch if you want.”

I retreated to the couch. I thought it might be better that I stay close to him, but I simply didn’t have the strength for it.

I sat down and pulled the blanket over myself. I watched him as surreptitiously as I could. He ate and cleaned up. A couple times I thought he said something, but if he did, it was just an angry mutter. The back of his neck was red as he scrubbed at the dishes. He had a dishwasher but stayed at the sink to scrub regardless.

When he finally sat down on the couch beside me, I could feel the heat radiating off of him. His arm draped over the couch behind me and he took hold of chin. He looked over my face for a moment and then took my hand. He placed it flat against the side of his neck. His flesh was searing. His eyes closed and he took a settling breath. I think he was enjoying how cool my hands were in comparison with his skin. I brought my other hand up to press against his chest. His heart was pounding. I could feel it beating so hard and so fast that I was almost concerned.

“Sometimes I ... when I get really angry, I break things,” he said. “Plates, glasses, drawers, walls... faces.”

One of his large, hot hands touched my waist, slinking up beneath my tank top and touching my bare skin.

“But I don’t want to scare you,” he added. His hand squeezed. His hand was massive on the side of my face and he tilted my face up. His lips were soft, the kiss gentle and chaste. He ended the kiss with a sigh. Wintergreen. He resumed the kiss, deepening it slowly. I made sure to kiss him back.

His hand moved up to grope one of my breasts beneath the shirt. His body was trembling slightly. In a bid to control whatever rage was simmering below the surface I assumed. Normally, when this was anger directed at me, it meant humiliation was in my future. He’d break into my apartment with hundreds of naked pictures of me on my pillow, my parents address on the back, or he’d have me walk into my boss’s (his) office with an unbuttoned shirt and a large hickey on my neck... this anger wasn’t directed at me, but I was scared all the same.

“What do you want?” I murmured against his lips. I cupped his face with my hands, gently caressing the flushed cheeks. We shared another couple kisses before he murmured back his response.

“Want?” he asked.

“From me?” I asked. Our tongues were meeting now. “How do you want me?”

He let out a deep sigh. His hand, large and warm, gripped me firmly by the throat, just beneath my chin.

“You see,” he breathed. He placed a soft kiss to my mouth. “You know how to calm me down.”

Another tender kiss. He lowered his hand to the side of my neck, his hand still on my throat. He breathed in deeply and then dragged his teeth along my flesh. He pulled back and grated in my ear, “I want to violate you. I want to degrade you. I want to use you like my personal little sex toy.”

His lips wrapped my earlobe. His teeth scraped my skin. I nodded.

“I wish you could read my mind when we were at work... the things I thought about doing to you everyday...”

He moved his hand to my hair and pulled my head back. His eyes moved over my face rapidly.

“I want you to use my name and I want you to tell me how much you want me, how much you need me. I want to hear that - unprompted. I don’t want to ask for it. You understand?”

“Yes, Caleb. I do. It’s true.”

His eyes moved to my lips. He stared thoughtfully.

“I want you come as many times as you can,” he said. “I want to degrade you - but I want you to like it. Ok?”

His hand left my throat for a moment. He smoothed his palm across my cheek.

“I will,” I vowed. I didn’t know how, but I would. I promised myself I’d come as many times as I could.

“You’re so filthy, Orla,” he told me. “I never had to work that hard. You want it as much as I do.”

He gave me a light slap on the cheek.

“Tell me,” he said. I wasn’t sure what he meant exactly, but I had a good idea.

“I want it. I want you to use me.”

“Filthy girl,” he murmured. He lifted his hips and pulled down his shorts. His cock sprang free. Hot and pulsing. He kissed me one more time, hand squeezing around my throat, before he released me. Immediately, his hand went to the back of my neck and he pushed me down on his cock.

His hand remained on the back of my neck. “You know what I like,” he said huskily. “Show me.”

I licked too much, but he did like how it felt. I dragged my tongue from the base of his cock and up to the head, before wrapping my lips around the head of his cock.

He reached down and slid his hand into my shorts. He pressed his fingers into my pussy and prodded gently. He wanted me to enjoy it, so I clenched my insides and pressed into him. He chuckled darkly and my insides tremored with shame. I continued to suck.

“Get on your knees,” he said after a while. He slid his fingers out of me, wet and slick. I slid to my knees, eyes on his throbbing cock. He grabbed me by the hair again, a fistful on the top

of my head, and smacked my lips with his cock. He rubbed the wet, weeping head across my cheek, then the other.

“Look at me,” he said. My eyes had closed. He rested his cock on my cheek.

“Tell me how sorry you are, for being so disrespectful,” he said. My throat hurt.

“I’m sorry, Caleb,” I said. I knew he’d want me to say his name. “I’m sorry for being disrespectful to you. I’m sorry for being a bitch to you. I’m sorry for all of it.”

His lips parted and he stroked his cock.

“I want you so fucking bad,” he breathed. His hand tightened in my hair. “You can be a real *bitch*, though.”

Bitch. Bitch. Bitch. I was back at the vending machines for a second.

“I’m sorry, Caleb, I don’t mean to be.”

He dragged his cock along my lips. I opened my mouth and extended my tongue. His precum was tart and salty.

“I’ll teach you to be sweet,” he murmured. He stroked his cock and pressed the two fingers previously inside of me into my mouth. I sucked on his fingers. “You just need to be taught a lesson. Have some respect fucked into you.”

I could see the tautness to him. He was on a tightrope between rage and desire, and right now, if he fell off toward rage, it would become directed at me. I knew it would.

“I don’t mean to be, Caleb. I’m sorry. I want to be better. I’ll do whatever you want. I’m here for you.”

“Beg me to fuck you,” he said. “Tell me what you want me to do. Degrade yourself for me.”

He traced his cock along my lips.

“Please fuck me, Caleb. Teach me a lesson. Use me. I’m just your filthy whore. Put me in my place.”

He stood, pulling me to my feet with his hand on my hair.

“You want me to put you in your place?” His hand was back on my throat, the other not releasing their grip on my hair.

“Yes, please, Caleb,” I whimpered. The grip on my throat was hard, but I could breathe without issue.

“You going to come for me? Huh? Show me what a whore you are for me?”

“Yes.”

“Just for me?”

“Yes, Caleb. Just for you. I’m your whore.”

“My personal little fuck toy,” he breathed. “Proud little, Orla.”

He grabbed me and heaved me up over his shoulder. In an instant I was thrown down on the bed and he was whipping his shirt off over his head and kicking off his shorts and boxers. I started to take off my shirt but he halted me.

“Don’t,” he said, throwing his socks into the corner.

He crawled over to me. His bed was massive. He could throw me a foot in either direction and I’d still be safely on his tempurpedic mattress. He bent down over me and I felt his mouth on my collarbone. He jerked his head to the side and I heard thread ripping against teeth. He pulled back and ripped through the cami in ease. The show of strength surprised and frightened me, and a soft cry escaped my throat.

“Think you could fight me if you tried?” he asked. He tossed the torn fabric to the side. My eyes dropped to his powerful arms, the broad pectorals, and the rippling abdomen. He yanked my shorts down, a smile budding on his lips. “We both know what would happen if you tried to fight me.”

He leaned down over me, his mouth on my ear. “Don’t worry, baby. We’ll play that game later. I want you to see first, how good you’ll feel being my whore.”

He tossed my legs apart and settled in between them.

“My dirty little office slut,” he breathed. My eyes closed. He wanted me to come and a lot. I pressed my hips upward toward his, hoping to create some pressure against my clit. “Oh, you greedy slut. Are you wet?”

He slid down between my legs. His mouth closed around my clit and I gasped. I pressed my hips into his face. His tongue flicked and swirled and pressed. By the time he lowered his face to press his tongue at my entrance, I could feel my juices leaking out of me.

“You taste so good,” he said. His tongue pressed into me, deep inside of me. He pulled back and his face was damp.

“I want you to come with my cock inside of you,” he said. He crawled up. “I’m going to give it you hard and deep.”

He grabbed my arm and jerked me forward. I slammed face down on the soft mattress and his hands quickly grabbed me by the hips. His other hand kept my face pressed down to the carpet.

“Ass up, face down, Orla. That’s how I want you.”

His hand smacked my ass hard. The sound was loud in the quiet room.

“This is how dirty little girls get fucked,” he said. I felt him press at my pulsing opening. I had to orgasm, I knew that. I heard what he was saying, but I pushed down the revulsion and the shame. Instead, I focused on the pressure building between my legs. He pushed into me slowly. He spread me apart, his hand slowly sliding up my spine.

“That’s right,” he said. “Good Girl. You take my cock so good. Like it was made for you.”

He pushed into me completely. I felt so full, like I was going to be torn apart, but it didn’t hurt.

“Check on the mattress,” he said. “I want to look at you.”

I obeyed. He started to fuck me then. His thrusts were hard, but steady. Not too fast. I caught a glimpse of him in the mirror. He was looking down, watching his cock slowly move in and out of me.

I bit my lip. I needed to come. If I didn’t, it could set him off again, and then his fury would be directed toward me.

“Caleb?” I asked. My body was tingling. I clenched around him.

“Yeah, baby?” he asked.

“Harder? Please?”

“You want it harder?”

“Faster?”

“Say please,” he said. “Beg me.”

“Please, Caleb. Please, go faster.”

It was driving me insane. The tension in my belly, the tingling, the warmth. I needed that release. He grabbed my hips in his hands and rewarded me with hard, fast strokes. I felt the orgasm take hold of me. The violent rush and then the warm glow. He continued to pulse inside of me as my insides clenched around him.

“Good girl,” he praised. He pulled me up against him. My back pressed to his chest. One hand closed around my throat, another wrapped around my waist, holding my arms tight to my body. “Good fucking girl. Tell me. Who’s my little slut.”

“I am,” I breathed. “I’m your slut.”

“My eager girl,” he said, lips against my cheek.

“Obedient,” I panted, repeating words I knew he liked. He pulled out of me again and tossed me down on my back.

“Obedient,” he said, grabbed my lips and pulled back back toward him. “Submissive.”

“You belong to me,” he told me, pushing back into me. “You’re mine.”

He said it with such vehemence. His eyes were wild.

“Your pussy’s so fucking tight,” he gritted. “Lift your legs up and hug them to you. Legs to the side. Yeah, give it up.”

He pressed his hand to one of my cheeks and spread me apart. He watched himself pump in and out of me.

“I want you to come again,” he said. His forehead was coated with sweat. I nodded. He pulled out of me and moved to the side of the bed. Before I had a moment to react, his hand closed around my ankle and he dragged me across the bed. With my ass at the edge of the bed, he threw my legs up and entered me again. His thumb massaged my clit, working me up into another orgasm with ease. As the warmth of the orgasm enveloped me, his thumb pressed into my mouth. I could hear him through the glow.

“That’s right, dirty slut, you love it. Thank me for raping you. Say it.” A light slap on my cheek. “Thank me for raping you.”

My eyes fluttered open. My chest seized and my throat constricted.

“Thank you,” I said, a bit in a daze. “Thank you for raping me.”

He let out a groan as he came, he pulled out of me, jerked the final spurts of his cock off on my weeping hole. He spread my pussy lips apart as he covered the wet, pink flesh.

“As soon as I can get it back up,” he panted. “I’m going to spend the entire fucking day inside of you.”

I nodded. He grabbed me by the hair and angled my face toward him. “You want to come some more for me?”

More nodding. He grabbed my hand and placed it on my pussy.

“Rub my cum into you,” he ordered. “Get it deep.”

He disappeared a moment before he returned. I bit back my tears and swallowed hard. He dragged two fingers between my legs. My eyes were closed, and so I was not prepared for his fingers to press between my lips.

“How’s that taste?” he asked huskily. “You and me together. Sweet?”

Anything but, but I nodded anyway. He did it once more. Once I sucked his fingers clean to his satisfaction, he leaned back and slapped my thigh.

“Go clean yourself up,” he instructed.

I slid off the bed and nodded. It was slick between my legs.

“Caleb?” I asked softly. He had tugged on a pair of gray sweatpants. His thick dark hair was tousled, he had a smattering of stubble. He could have just stepped out of a shoot for GQ.

“I’m a little sore,” I told him. “From Friday.”

“Oh yeah?” he asked softly. “Internally or externally?”

“A little bit of both.”

“What are you asking for?”

His hand touched my lower back and he held me closer. I touched his chest. He had very little body hair, but it was dark. A fine smattering. On anyone else but him, I would have found it attractive.

“Maybe just some of the cream?” I asked: I really wanted a Xanax. I thought maybe if I didn’t ask for it, he’d offer. I needed a Xanax. Something. A glass of wine. Couple Percocet, all three? His eyes searched mine.

“You’ll get one Xanax a day for the next week or so,” he told me. “Then we’re down to half a day, then to as needed. I’ll give you one now if you want, but that’s it for the day.”

He tucked some loose hair behind my ear. I hated that he knew what I wanted.

“I’ll wait,” I said.

“Do you need the cream?”

I shook my head. He patted my bottom.

“Go on,” he said.

I used the bathroom and then washed myself up in the shower. When I came back out, he was looking at something on the bed.

He looked over at me and smiled. He lifted up a tie. Yellow with navy dots. My stomach turned.

“Remember this?” he asked. I nodded. “You were so adorable.”

He came to stand in front of me.

“When you texted me to tell me you were crying in the bathroom,” he murmured, taking my wrists and placing them behind my back. “It hurt me. I wanted to come in there and wrap my arms around you. It was fun, but I’m glad it’s over.”

The tie was fastened tightly around one wrist. He circled it around the other next. The tie bit into my skin. I could feel pressure in my hands. This wasn’t a playing binding. He made sure I wasn’t getting out unless he wanted me to. I had the presence of mind to note the ease in which he tied my hands without looking.

“You’re twenty six?” he asked me. I nodded.

“June 7th,” he mused. “You would have been a freshman my first year of law school.” He tilted my chin up. “If you went to BC…” his lips curved upward. “I’d have scooped you up so fast. First party I found you at. I’d have fucked your limp, virgin body into oblivion.”

He grabbed my throat and slowly walked me backward to his bed.

“Can you imagine it? Little freshman Orla, waking up naked and confused in a strangers bed off campus?”

I shuddered to think of it.

“I’d have made you feel better though,” he said. His hand pulsed. “You’d have been mine from then on. I bet you were sweet back then. Not jaded and cold yet. Huh?”

He slapped my cheek lightly. I nodded.

“I bet you’d have followed me around like a puppy dog,” he smirked. “God, I’d have had a field day with you.”

It was true. Even after prom, I had been so desperate for acceptance and love - if he looked at me? Handsome, built, rich, law student wanting me? I wouldn’t even had known he drugged me. I’d have thought I drank too much. I’d probably have been embarrassed and apologized to him. And he’d have mashed my heart into a bloody pulp and then laughed with all his friends about it.

“Who’d you give it up to huh?” he asked. His hand went between my legs, fingers pulsing inside of me. “Who got to my pussy first?”

“His name was James,” I said.

“Oh, yeah? How long were you with him?”

I blinked. “It was a one night stand.”

His hand tightened but he looked surprised.

“You? A one night stand?”

“I didn’t-” I cleared my throat. “I didn’t know it was going to be a one night stand at the time. I found out the next day.” Publicly, I didn’t have the strength to add. I watched his face twist in disgust and my throat hurt. Maybe this would do it, maybe he’d see I wasn’t what he thought I was. It was what I wanted, but still, the look on his face hurt.

“I’d beat his teeth down his throat if I could,” he said. “For getting to you first. For not seeing what he had.”

I swallowed and he stepped closer.

“Anyone else?” he asked. I shook my head.

“No,” I answered. His fingers slid between my slick folds.

“If you let another man touch you,” he said. He squeezed my throat hard.

“I never will,” I vowed. His eyes darted back to mine. His eyes were hot and hard. “I promise.”

“No,” he murmured softly. “No, you won’t.”

Using the hand he had on my throat, he threw me backward onto the bed. I stumbled backwards, terrified because I could not break my fall. I landed on the mattress, my legs hanging over the bed. He grabbed me by the hips and heaved me upward. He crawled over me and placed a light slap to my face. He tossed my legs over his shoulders. “Remember to come for me, baby. I know what I can do for you.”

He lowered his face to my pussy. I swallowed my pride, pushed away all thoughts of what he had done to me, and focused on how good he was making me feel.

When he finished, he added three lines to my ribs. He capped the marker and smirked down at me. We took a shower next, once the marker was dry. We kissed and he touched me, but his cock remained flaccid.

He put me in a pair of shorts and a t-shirt again. He settled me on the couch with a blanket and went into the kitchen. He returned with some sandwiches and diet cokes. He settled in behind me and turned on the TV.

“As much as I've dreamed of you making me a sandwich in a thong,” he said, kissing the back of my neck. “I can wait until next weekend when you feel a bit better.”

My face burned and I forced a smile. I took a bite of the sandwich. I murmured out a quick thank you.

“Eat it all,” he said, gently running his fingers through my wet hair and tucking it behind my ear. “The grapes too.”

I nodded. Maybe it was the orgasms, but I was hungry.

He plucked a grape off the plate he had balanced on the arm of the chair. His fingers continued to rub through my hair.

“What do you want to watch?” he asked.

“Whatever you want,” I smiled over at him. His knuckles stroked my cheek.

“A movie? A show? I can see if a game is on? Whatever you want, baby. You’ve been such a good girl for me today. What do you want to watch?”

“Maybe... maybe I can try and take a nap? And you can put on what you want? I don’t want to fall asleep if you’re watching something I picked.”

“Yeah, that’s fair. You’ll nap here though. With me.”

“Y-yes, of course. I want to stay.”

He nodded and I looked away. I couldn't keep my eyes on his. I reached for the remote instead and handed it to him.

“Thank you,” he said. I watched him flick through the TV as I ate. Once done, I placed the plate on the side table. He gave me his to do the same. I settled down on the couch,

lying on my side, my back to his chest. He paused looking for his show to settle in behind me. My bottom pressed to his flaccid cock. He pressed himself into me. He turned his face toward mine. He kissed me gently. Then again. One more.

“Take a nice nap,” he said. He kissed the back of my neck.

I didn't fall asleep. Not really. I went in and out. I went halfway between dreams and waking up. One moment I was in his office sitting at his feet, sobbing and begging him to love me, then I was jerking awake as he gently shifted behind me, just as soon, I was in college, but at my local, small town college, and Caleb was bringing me home from a party. Then he was raping me and I was thanking him for it as I cried. Then he shifted behind me, chuckling softly at something on the screen, and I was back in the apartment. Once, it was my first day of work and he came up to me in the break room. We were alone and he asked me where I went to school. I told him and he said if I ever needed anything, he'd be happy to help. Then he kissed me and I kissed him back like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Then he was very carefully extricating himself from me and moving off the couch. I kept my eyes closed. I didn't want to be awake and I didn't want to have to deal with him yet. Movement came from his bedroom and then from the kitchen. I tried to fall back asleep, but my body rebelled.

He crawled back onto the couch and settled in behind me. I sensed something in front of my face and I let my eyes flutter open. He was texting. I think he thought I was still asleep.

I'm bringing my girlfriend, he typed.

Bubbles and the response, *you said you weren't seeing anyone and I don't want some random slut at my wedding.*

Caleb reached his other arm around me to respond with both thumbs.

She's not some random slut. She's my girlfriend. Been together 3 months. I'm not going to a wedding without her. She comes with me or I don't go.

Bubbles. They stop. More doubles. They stop. More bubbles and then, *I didn't know you were seeing someone. I'll add her to the seating chart. Got a name?*

Caleb tossed his phone down on the coffee table without answering. It clamored loudly. I jumped in surprise and I realized I couldn't pretend I was asleep much longer.

"Sorry," he murmured, burying his face into the crook of my neck.

"It's ok," I murmured. His arms tightened around me.

"Did you sleep?"

I nodded. He breathed in against my temple. I asked, "how long?"

"About two hours."

That surprised me. His lips were hot against my neck.

"Danny texted you."

My entire body tensed. I forgot about my phone. No one messaged me anymore. I didn't respond. I didn't engage. I was avoidant. I wasn't so worried about people being worried I didn't respond. I was worried about him going through my phone.

"I - I didn't give him my number."

"Got it from Chloe apparently," He said. He was kissing my neck gently. "Missed you at Amelia's party."

"How many times did Amelia text you?" I asked. I wasn't trying to be rude, but I also wanted to point out I wasn't the only one getting messages from people we said we didn't want.

"Didn't," he answered. "Sent me a lot of snaps last night though."

I swallowed. She looked amazing. I was sure of it.

"I can cook you dinner," I offered. "You've cooked everything today."

"I don't mind cooking," he said. "You're adjusting still."

I nodded. He kissed my neck again and breathed in deeply. "We'll have an early dinner. Go to bed early. Sound good?"

I nodded and murmured my assent. He continued watching the movie and I asked if I could use the bathroom. He had me kiss him first, but let me slide from his arms. I lingered maybe a bit too long. When I came back into the living room, his eyes watched me closely. I managed a small smile and slid back onto the couch, nestling myself up against him. I tried to stay focused on the movie and not the feel of lips on the back of my neck, and somehow figure out how to stop the violent pounding of my heart.

She smelled better and better each time I breathed her in. Her skin was soft and warm. The anger bubbled up inside of me each time I thought of the invitation sitting in my mail drawer, but just the feel of her, a whiff of her shampoo, the sweet smell of her sweat, and I felt the rage fade and morph to comfort and contentment. I knew I wanted to fuck her again, but I couldn't get enough blood to flow to my cock, so I contented myself to listen to the tv and kiss her neck and breath in her scent.

"Turn around," I instructed softly. She turned in my arms and turned her emerald eyes up at me. It was what had been missing all those other times we'd been together. Being able to look into her eyes and look at the little dark flecks that littered the iris. Her right eye had one fleck larger than the others, a kind of sea foam green. They were big and deep and he could stare into her eyes forever. I wondered what color eyes our children would have. My knuckles ran across her cheek. Velvet and soft.

"How are you feeling?" I asked softly.

"Good," she answered. It was a lie. I could see the strain on her face. I pressed my fingers to her neck. Her pulse pounded hard and fast against my finger tips.

"I'll start making dinner, I'll give you a Xanax before we eat, that will help you sleep."

"Thank you," she whispered.

"Just kiss me a while," I instructed. I wanted her to come to me. I wanted *her* to kiss *me*. She scooted up and pressed her mouth to mind. Her lips were so soft and warm, her tongue sweet, her hands small and cool. I could have laid there forever like that, but soon hunger began to gnaw at me and I knew she would need a good night's sleep. Tomorrow needed to be a good day for her. I gave her lip a hard suck and a bite before I got up off the couch and padded into the bathroom. I took a piss and retrieved a small vial of GHB from my lock box. Once it was safely in my pocket I went back into the living room and grabbed my phone from the table. She was sitting up on the couch. I was well aware her eyes were on me. She could lie all she wanted and tell me she wasn't scared but I knew better. I'd seen the look on her face when she came around the corner. It would be a challenge showing her she didn't need to be.

How much GHB with Xanax? I texted Josh. He responded pretty quickly.

I'm not a fucking pharmacist.

She tensed ever so slightly as I blew out a rush of breath from my nose. I glanced up at her, pinned her with a hard gaze, and looked back at my phone.

Fuck off and tell me. I answered.

Just a tap.

I put the phone into my sweatpants and walked over to her. I bent down to kiss her. Soft and gentle, so she knew I wasn't mad at her.

"I'm going to make dinner. Just try and keep yourself calm for a bit, ok? Then I'll give you a Xanax."

She smiled and nodded. I gently turned her chin upward.

"Good girl," I told her, trailing my thumb across her mouth. She smiled at me. I looked for deceit in it, but I found none. Maybe because I was hoping more than anything there wasn't any. I enjoyed the sweet smile a moment longer and then went into the kitchen.

She left the living room once. To use the bathroom I assumed. She came back not too long afterward and sat down at the island. It was nice having her near me. It was calming. I wanted her with me always. I took her phone out of the drawer and handed it to her.

"Text your mother and tell her you're ok," I ordered. She looked up from her phone.

"She knows I'm fine," she answered.

“Text your mother and tell her you’re ok,” I repeated. I glanced behind me to see her texting.

“Tell her you have a boyfriend and you want them to meet him in the next couple weeks.”

“Caleb - ”

I turned around and she fell silent. “Tell me why you don’t want your parents to know about me,” I challenged calmly. “Make it good.”

She swallowed.

“I don’t have a great relationship with my parents and it’s just - It doesn’t have anything to do with you. I promise. Please - if i’m going to get clean, I can’t deal with them right now.”

She turned those big green eyes toward me. They were wet. I’d never seen anyone look so beautiful when they were about to cry.

“Please, Caleb,” she whispered. Her lower lip trembled and I walked over to stand beside the stool she sat on. I cupped her cheek.

“You don’t want them to know, because you think this won’t last,” I said very quietly. “Or you hope it won’t.”

“That’s not true,” she pleaded, reaching up to grab my hand. She held it to her breasts. I swallowed thickly and looked down to her mouth. “They’ll ask a million questions. They’ll be mad at me for not saying something sooner. I just - I’m not strong enough right now. Please. I just can’t do it. Please, I promise. It’s not a rejection.”

It felt like one. But I needed her to know I would take care of her. Physically and emotionally. I would protect her. I would take her hurt away when she asked me to.

“Ok,” I said. “We’ll wait until you’re stronger.”

“Oh, thank you,” she breathed. Her smile was bright and full of relief. She tugged me closer and pulled me down into a kiss. It was a sweet reward and I was so focused on how her tongue felt in my mouth, I almost forgot about dinner.

She was happy with me. That was clear. She had that little smile on her face as I cooked. Everytime I looked at her, it grew ever so slightly. I placed dinner in front of her. Nothing too fancy. Some steak tips and broccoli. She ate almost all of it in the time it took me to retrieve a Xanax and mix a bit of GHB into her soda. She put her fork down before the plate was empty though.

“That’s only like 500 calories on the whole plate, Orla. Eat it all,” I instructed.

“My stomach hurts,” she protested. Her eyes were on the pill in my hand. I stepped close to her. I held it up, like one might hold up a treat to entice a dog.

“Eat your meal,” I told her firmly. In reality, she only had a few bites left. I watched her as she ate. Once done, I smiled and placed the pill on her tongue.

“Good girl,” I praised. I handed her the soda to down the Xanax with. She drank it quickly. “Now, go brush your teeth and wash your face. Wait for me on the bed.”

She slid off the stool and made to leave. I stopped her with a firm grip in her hair. I didn’t hurt her, but I did see some fear flash in her eyes. I’d be able to fuck her once more before bed. I could feel myself beginning to come back to life.

“When we’re alone, I want you to kiss me before you leave a room,” I told her. She nodded.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“Don’t be sorry,” I said gently. I cupped her cheek. “You didn’t know. Can’t follow a rule I haven’t made yet, can you?”

“No,” she answered. I leaned down and kissed her again.

“Go on,” I said and released her. “Give me your phone.”

She surrendered it and hurried into the bedroom. I thought of her in there, waiting for me as I finished cleaning. I put my hand in my sweatpants to give myself a few hard strokes. I wanted her one more time today.

I was seated on the bed cross legged, my eyes closed, basking in the warm glow of the Xanax when he came into the room. I opened my eyes to look at him. He went into the closet and pulled out some new clothing. He tossed them in the bed and told me to change. He then disappeared into the bathroom.

I changed into the pair of panties, dark green, cotton bikini cut and the matching tank top. I looked at myself in the mirror. Once changed. My midriff was showing and I marveled at how thin I looked. I ran my hand over my flat stomach and touched one of my breasts. My hair had air dried and was up in a messy bun. I looked almost pretty.

The door opened and Caleb stepped out of the bathroom. He caught me looking at myself and grinned at me.

“So sexy,” he said. The flicker of the smile on my lips was almost real. I settled back down into a seated position. His eyes raked down my legs and he crawled onto the bed. His lips ghosts up my calf, my thigh, my belly, and finally my neck.

“Caleb?” I asked softly. His stubble was rough against my neck and he sucked hard. He grunted as he continued to suck and bite.

“Am I prettier than Amelia?”

I said it so softly, I almost didn’t hear it. His lips froze against my neck. He lingered a moment and then pulled back.

“You even have to ask me that?” he asked.

“If you had met me in college, if I slept with you, would you really have kept me? You wouldn’t have just - have just sent me on my way to find the next girl. A prettier girl?”

His eyes were earnest as I looked into mine. “There is no prettier girl. No one compares to you.”

I brought up my hands and touched the sides of his head. My hands moved through his hair and to the side of his neck.

“I’d have scooped you right up,” he said. “I’d have fucked you every single day.”

I took a breath.

“Orla,” he breathed. “You want to know what would have happened if I actually ended up at the same college party as you?”

I nodded, lips parted. I gently scratched the back of his neck with my finger nails.

“I’d have spotted you, sweet and shy, and brought you a drink. It would have been loud in the Frat house, so I’d have suggested we go outside. You’d have come with me, timidly nursing your drink.”

He dragged the pad of his thumb along my lower lip.

“I’d have chatted you up until you started feeling dizzy, and I’d offer to bring you home, but I’d take you back to my apartment. By the time I got you there, you’d be groggy and confused. By the time I got you onto my bed, you’d be unconscious, or close to it. - put your hand in my sweatpants. Grab my cock.”

His cock was hard again. I ran my hand up and down his shaft as he spoke. I listened intently, lips parted.

“I’d have undressed you slowly. What would you have worn, Orla? If you got dragged out to a frat party. What would you have worn?”

“I - I don't know. I didn't party. Jeans and a blouse? Maybe jeans and a hoodie if it was cold.”

He chuckled.

“I’d have unbuttoned your jeans but I wouldn’t have taken them off yet. Those come off last. I’d have taken off your hoodie and then your t-shirt. Once I saw your pretty, simple cotton bra, I’d pull your jeans off to see your matching panties.”

“I would have been a virgin then,” I told him. He looked up from where my hand was working in his sweatpants.

“I’d have known. I’d have spread your legs and looked at your tight virgin pussy. One finger. You’d have been dry, but I’d work you up. By the time I took your virginity, you’d have been wet for me.”

He leaned down and kissed my neck. “Were you on the pill then?”

I shook my head. “I wasn’t having sex and I didn’t need it.”

“It wouldn’t have mattered. I’d have fucked you hard and deep and filled you with my cum. That wouldn’t be it though. I’d keep fucking you. I’d suck on your nipples and lick your clit. And I’d fuck your pussy raw and fill you with my cum until I couldn’t anymore and you’d wake up in the morning alone, naked, pussy leaking with my cum, disoriented and confused.”

“Would you have been cruel to me?” I asked him. My hand tightened on his cock. I moved my hand up and down at a steady pace.

“No,” he breathed. “I’d have brought you a Gatorade and something greasy to eat. I’d have told you you didn’t need to be embarrassed. That you were very sweet and didn’t embarrass yourself. I’d let you spend the day in my bed, wearing a pair of my boxers and one of my shirts. I’d drive you home at the end of the day and I’d tell you I’d call.”

“And you’d call me?” I asked.

“I’d call you. I’d ask you out to another party - and I’d do it all again.”

“And you’d - you’d -”

He pushed my panties to the side and pressed his cock into me. I moaned softly as he did.

“You think I’d give up this pussy?” he asked. He leaned down and placed his lips to my ear. “You’re wet, Orla. Getting off while I describe how I’d rape you?”

He slowly lifted his hips out of me and then pushed back in. I moaned again, pressing my nails into his shoulders.

“You’re so beautiful, Orla,” he whispered to me. “You’re so sexy.”

I wrapped my arms around his neck. I held him close to me.

“I’ve wanted you like this for so long.” His nose pressed into my shoulder. “I’ve wanted you for so long.”

“Caleb,” I breathed. His thrusts were slow but deep. Hard but not fast.

“You don’t have to be afraid,” he murmured into my cheek. “I’m not what you think I am. I didn’t do this to hurt you. I did it because you’re meant to be with me. You’re mine and I made you mine. I took what I wanted. I took what was mine.”

“You think I’m sexy?”

“So fucking sexy,” he panted in my ear. “I can’t get deep enough inside of you.”

He wrapped his arms around my bottom and angled my hips upward. He thrust harder. The pressure was amazing. I felt so good. An orgasm rippled through me. One of the first orgasms where I could not help but let an audible rush of breathy moans break past my lips. I don’t remember him coming, but I remember losing the hot, warmth of him inside of me and he plopped down on his back beside me.

In order to make him bored with me, I rolled over and draped myself across him. His arm circled around me and he held me to him close. He was large and warm and it felt very good.

“You’re beautiful, Orla,” he murmured to me. My eyes were heavy and fluttered closed. I couldn’t have opened them if I wanted to. His hand gently stroked my hair. “You’re stunning.

You're everything. Intelligent, competent, gorgeous."

I fell into the soft rumble of his kind words. I relished the feel of his large, warm hand in my hair. He pressed my nose to his chest and breathed in deeply. Anything to make him bored.

"You're perfect. Absolutely perfect."

The last thing I remember was turning my face into his body, and pressing a kiss to his chest.

Chapter Notes

As always, thank you so much for taking time to read and comment. You have no idea what it means to me and how much inspiration it gives me.

The hardest part about going into work the next day was seeing Caleb but not for the reasons I would have initially believed. He had set my alarm for seven. When I awoke, confused and disoriented, I realized I was alone. He texted me before I could truly panic; he had set my alarm so late on purpose; he wanted me to sleep in and enjoy my morning; he didn't want to see me in the office until nine.

I had two hours to get ready and get to work. I spent about a half hour in the shower. It really was amazing. I turned the temperature up as hot as I could stand and scrubbed myself clean. I shaved, washed my hair, washed my face, and then spent another good while standing beneath the spray. I found a hairdryer and a hair straightener on the bathroom sink. Far nicer than anything I would ever buy myself. I found new makeup in a small basket next to my toothbrush. By the time I put on the clothing he had laid out for me on his side of the bed, it was just past eight o'clock. I didn't eat breakfast. I wasn't hungry and I didn't have time. Instead, I checked myself in the mirror, collected my bag, which he had packed by the door, and set off for the T. As my body jostled side to side on the T and I listened to the violent screeching of the brakes as the train came sliding into the next stop, I felt my heartrate accelerating and my palms turning damp with sweat.

For the entire train ride, I wondered what suit Caleb would be wearing. He liked blue suits, solid colors, but in the past couple weeks, he'd branched out. He had a nice charcoal suit with pinstripes. He had suits of varying colors of gray. He only had a couple black suits. He was wearing a blue suit the day I met him. He was wearing a blue suit when I found out what he was doing to me.

I walked out with him after I knew who he was. We were at work when I found out the truth. But despite those memories, which were so warped and foggy and faded, it felt as though the last time we were at the office, Caleb had been just Caleb. Seeing Caleb in his home, in sweatpants and t-shirts, shorts and a hoodie, was not the same as seeing him in one of his perfectly tailored suits, freshly shaven, with perfectly coiffed hair, in our office, listening to him tear my report to shreds, all the while knowing what he did to me. Knowing what he was

doing to me. This was the last step. The last step to combining the two men in my brain and I just didn't want to do that.

On the train, I looked for our messages to each other. The ones he sent from the fake number, before I knew the truth. I was upset to find them gone. Deleted. I wondered how long my phone provider would hold onto them for. I wouldn't do anything with them. I just wanted to read them again, to search for signs of Caleb in them.

I thought walking into the office would be easier. I thought once I knew, the fear and anxiety would subside. I wouldn't have to wonder every day who he was, where he was, if he was watching me, what he might do next? Instead, I had a whole new rush of anxiety. I didn't want to see him in the office now that I knew the truth.

When the elevator doors opened and I stepped out it was very quiet. It felt like an eternity since I was there last. It was hard to believe it had only been two days. I went the long way around to avoid going past Caleb's office. Anything to prolong the inevitable.

I was anxious. My heart was beating quickly. I could feel it thrumming against my throat. But my mind was clear and I felt the best I'd felt in a long time. I checked my emails. Caleb had sent a number of reports out this morning that he gave me credit for writing this weekend. One of his emails was sent at 6:00am, which meant he must have woken up much earlier to get it written. We had no calls on the calendar. It would hopefully be a quiet day and I could try to get control of my work.

A need for caffeine drew me out of my cubicle. I didn't think I would run into Caleb. He would have gone back for his second round of coffee already. I ended up going the long way around. He had not texted me yet. I wondered if there was a way I could somehow get through the day without seeing him. It would be difficult, but it wasn't impossible. I heard Mark and Peter's voices as I neared the break room. Dealing with Peter was one of the last things I wanted to do that morning, but it was better than running into Caleb. I turned the corner to find them seated at the table. Mark spotted me and his face brightened into a smile.

"Ellie!" he called. "How're you feeling?"

"Oh, so much better," I lied with a smile of my own. I marched to the coffee pot. "Had a wicked stomach bug."

“Aw, that sucks. Hopefully the worst has passed through.”

I had my back to them as I poured my cup of coffee.

“I think so,” I answered.

“Sure it wasn’t the stress?” Peter asked. I could hear the sneer in his voice. My cheeks flushed. I wanted to turn around and say something sarcastic. Instead, I closed my eyes and took a calming breath. He continued, “Senioring can be too much for some people.”

My knuckles flexed white as I squeezed the handle of my mug. As I searched for something clever to say, a deep rumble met my ears.

“That’s why you haven’t been promoted.”

Goosebumps erupted over my skin and I pushed out a deep breath from my lungs.

“Fuck off, Caleb,” Peter answered. Mark laughed. I didn’t need to look at Caleb to know there was a satisfied smirk on his face. I smelled him first. That rich, piny, earthy scent. He hadn’t worn it all weekend. I felt him second. He didn’t touch me, but I could feel him behind me. Then one arm reached around me to retrieve the coffee cup. I moved out of the way and he settled in beside me, reaching for the coffee pot.

“Swazey’s going to have a huge year,” Mark said, switching to baseball. Caleb poured himself his coffee. I kept my eyes down as I made my way over to the fridge to retrieve the creamer. He held out his hand before I could get back to the counter. Our fingers touched as he took it from me. He rumbled out, “Thank you.”

I nodded in response.

“He’ll hurt himself before spring training is over,” Caleb said dismissively.

I watched him pour in a splash to his coffee. He then turned and poured it in mine. I didn’t look up at him, but I could see what he was wearing. A navy suit, a powder blue shirt, and a yellow tie with little navy dots on it.

“No, I’m telling you, this is his year. I’m *telling* you. Cy Young is his.”

“He doesn’t have the arm strength,” Caleb said incredulously. I stirred my coffee and picked it up from the table. I turned around without looking up at Caleb. I gave a smile and a nod to Peter and Mark, and tried to make my escape.

“Oh, Orla.”

Caleb’s dark rumble came from behind me just as I got to the door frame. I hesitated. I was terrified I had only accomplished angering him by not looking or speaking to him. He hadn’t given me any rules. I knew how important it was to my reputation to pull myself together though, so I slapped a smile on my face and turned around to face him.

I was ready for amusement. I was ready for smugness. I was ready for a look that would make my skin crawl and require another scalding hot shower. I was not prepared to turn around and see complete and total disinterest. He looked bored. My skin flushed and I lifted my brow. I could feel my face tautening.

“Yes?” I asked.

“I need Jupiter and the Auto updates my COB today,” he said. He took a sip of his coffee.

“Sure thing,” I got out. I managed another smile. His acknowledgement was a short nod and a lift of his brow. He gestured with his mug toward Mark.

“Have a better shot with Kinsler on the mound,” he said. Mark looked outraged.

“Kinsler? Absolutely no way -”

I didn't care to wait around and listen. If Caleb wanted to pretend that I didn't exist at work that was his prerogative. I wanted him bored and maybe this was just a sign that it was working. Maybe seeing me come in today and knowing I know, maybe he was already realizing it wasn't fun anymore. There was no more cat and mouse game. There were no more mind games. No more tormenting.

I slid into my chair. I was relieved. Maybe this meant he would leave me alone at work. I didn't have any calls today. All I had to worry about was getting these reports written. I had a clear mind. I felt fresh. It didn't matter that Caleb planned on ignoring me at work. It was what I wanted.

After a few minutes of typing, I reached for my bag. I was rummaging for a good fifteen seconds before I remembered my pills weren't in there. I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to calm the pounding of my heart. My back was drenched with sweat and when I brought my fingers to my lips, I saw they were shaking. I grabbed my phone and pulled up Caleb's name. I struggled to move my thumbs across the keyboard. With the request written, I paused to read it. I read it over ten times before I deleted it. My pride wouldn't allow it.

I dropped my phone in my bag, shoved my bag in the drawer, and slammed it shut. Catching my breath, I pressed my hand to my forehead. My heart was pounding in my throat and my entire body buzzed. It felt like I was going to vibrate right out of my skin. Only one Xanax a day was cruel. I could have downed five right then and there and it probably wouldn't have touched me. It took me almost an hour by the time I could start typing again. Even as I tried making my way through the data room, my hands were shaky.

It was around one thirty when I heard his voice coming down the hall. The tension inside of me grew with each moment his deep rumble slowly became louder and louder with each step toward me. I glanced up to watch his dark, neatly combed hair bob over the top of the cubicle. I looked back down and squeezed my eyes shut.

“He'll be taking a tour of the building on Monday and then is going to meet with advisory and consulting. We'll have our meeting with him in the afternoon.”

I waited to hear who he was talking to.

“Nick is salivating over it. The amount of business we could bring in if we impress this guy.” It was Chris. I closed my eyes more tightly together. I wondered what Chris would think if he knew who his best friend really was. I wondered if he’d believe me if I told him. I waited for them to move past my cubicle, or, worse, for that dreaded ‘Orla? A moment?’

I heard nothing though, and I jumped softly when I felt him beside me. I heard a rustle in front of me and I opened my eyes. He’d placed a plastic bag and a Coke Zero in front of me. I recognized the bag from the sub spot across the street he and Chris liked going to. Caleb sat on the edge of my desk and put his hands in his pockets. He examined the entrance of the cubicle a few moments before he spoke. “How’s Auto coming?”

“Good,” I lied. I hadn’t started it yet. He nodded.

“And Jupiter?”

“Just want to give it a once over before I send,” I lied again. I was barely halfway through. He nodded again, more slowly this time. I followed his gaze toward the entrance to my cubicle. Chris was standing there, looking down at a stack of papers in his hands. I looked at Caleb to find those dark storm cloud eyes fixed on me. His face was infuriatingly blank. I couldn’t keep his gaze. I looked down at the bag he had placed in front of me instead. I fingered the plastic bag and readied myself to say thank you. He remained silent and soon it became too much. I looked up at him, ready to speak, but the look on his face left me silent. His eyes were expectant. He lifted his brow and tilted his head. He leaned down close. A beat. He leaned in closer, very close to my face, and murmured, “anything you need to ask me?”

My cheeks flushed. A Xanax? A shot of vodka? Chardonnay? A lobotomy?

“No,” I answered.

His eyes didn't harden exactly, but their intensity heightened. His lips curved but not into what I would call a smile. He bobbed his brow and leaned back.

"Alright then," he said, straightening. He got up from my desk.

"Orla," he said. I craned my neck to look up at him. He reached out and one of his massive hands closed around the back of my neck. He held my eyes, waiting a few more moments. Finally, he pointed at the bag. "All of it."

I nodded and turned my gaze back down. He grabbed my chin and forced my face up toward him. His eyes and face were now stone.

"Yes, Caleb," I whispered. He released my face and walked to the exit.

"COB, Orla," he called and exited the cubicle. He and Chris headed back up toward his office. I pressed my hands to my face and struggled not to cry. This needed to be a new start for me. I needed to show everyone I could do this. I was capable. I pulled out the drawer that held my phone. I wondered if it would really kill me to text Caleb and tell him I was struggling and needed a Xanax. But then I remembered the cool, disinterested look on his face in the breakroom.

I slammed the drawer shut. I leaned into my anger. It was easier than the alternative. I typed for about twenty minutes before glancing down at the bag Caleb had dropped off. I ripped it open, out of curiosity more than anything else. I wanted to know what he got me. It was a Buffalo chicken wrap. The few times we'd all ordered from across the street, it was what I always ordered. By the looks of it, he even ordered it with no cucumbers. I took the sandwich out of the wrapper and threw the wrapper and the bag in the trash. I took the sandwich and wrapped it in some of the napkins. I left my cubicle and marched down the hall toward the back of the building, safely shielded from Caleb's eyes. I went down a story and into the women's restroom to throw it in the trash. If I ate it, I'd throw up. There was no point in putting myself through the discomfort of it. I needed him to think he'd won. I didn't need to let him actually win.

He can't even smile at you.

I marched back up the stairs and into my cubicle. I struggled to type. My hands were shaking a bit violently. It made typing difficult. My forehead was slick with sweat. My hair was damp. I jumped a mile when I looked to my left and found Caleb standing over my shoulder. Suddenly the smell of his aftershave smacked me in the face. I wondered how long he'd been standing there. It couldn't have been long. I would have smelled him.

He was nodding slowly, his tongue pressed into his cheek. He hunched over and looked into my trash can. He didn't look too closely, which I was relieved by. I didn't put any of the sauce on the wrappers. He stood there a moment, staring down at me, hands in his pockets. It was a bit of a staring contest. Finally, he reached into his pocket and placed a little white pill in front of me. I grabbed it without delay and shoved it between my lips. I didn't even think to wait until he left before I bit down on it, letting the bitter taste of the dust cover my tongue. He waited a moment longer, but by the time I'd grabbed onto the Coke Zero he'd bought me and downed it, he was gone.

It took the edge off. I felt it wash over me and my heart slowed and I suddenly wasn't so unbearably hot anymore. I went to the bathroom and tried to dry some of my dampened clothing. I patted under my arms with the paper towel in the stall before coming out of the bathroom and splashing my face with cool water. I could still taste it on my tongue and I wondered how Caleb might react if I asked for another. Even a half. I stayed hunched over and continued to splash my face with the cool water. I had put on makeup this morning, part of my attempt to recover whatever part of my reputation I had destroyed the past couple weeks, but I wore so little as it was, I didn't think I'd do much damage.

I finally managed to push myself out of the bathroom. I ventured back the short way. I figured it would look strange if Caleb didn't see me pass by at least once in the day. I certainly didn't want him to think I was avoiding him. I knew I should wave to him as I passed by his office. He hadn't seemed all that pleased with me when he was in my office earlier. I couldn't do that if I kept the fight going, but here, in the office, it was just so *hard*.

As I walked down the hall, I saw him standing with Danny, Chris, and Steve. I did a little stutter step. He stood facing me, hands in his pockets, a satisfied little smile on his face. His eyes quickly left Steve and landed on me. He stared, which drew Danny's gaze. He turned and a large grin went to his face as he saw me.

"Ay! Ellie, there you are. This guy's keeping you busy today, huh?" he asked with a little nod of his head in Caleb's direction.

“All day, every day,” I smiled.

“Feeling better?” Danny asked me.

“Oh, much better,” I lied. My gaze flickered to Caleb. He was looking past me, a smile on his face, brow lifted.

“Is this where the party is?” Amelia’s shrill voice met my ears. My eyes fluttered closed a moment. I opened them to Caleb’s smiling face. But it wasn’t directed toward me. I looked at Amelia as she inserted herself into the circle. I wonder what she would think if she knew Caleb was inside of me last night, telling me how much better I was than her. My skin flushed as I considered whether or not they ever *had* been intimate. I had nothing but his word to go on. And Chris’, but they were best friends. I glanced at Chris. Would he tell me the truth if I asked him about Caleb and Amelia? Amelia was here before me. *Was* there a history there? I didn’t understand why he could smile at her and not me.

“You alright?” Danny asked me. His hand gently touched my elbow. I jumped, pulling my arm away. I laughed it off, well aware I had everyone’s attention now. Danny pulled his hand away and laughed sheepishly. “Sorry.”

“Oh, you’re fine,” I said. Caleb was looking at Danny. He was smiling, but his eyes were stone. I felt a glimmer of satisfaction, but then I remembered my genius master plan. Flirting with Danny to make him jealous wasn’t going to get me what I wanted. “Just getting back into the flow. I should get back to my desk. Have kind of an overbearing boss.”

Everyone thought that was pretty funny. Caleb gave a good-natured chuckle. I walked back down to my cubicle, the smile dropping from my lips the moment I turned around. I sat down and took a deep breath, ready to begin work.

The fact was it didn’t matter if Caleb was nice to me at work. It didn’t matter if I was good enough for him when no one was around, but he would hardly acknowledge me in public. It didn’t matter.

I threw together what I could. COB, said out loud C. O. B., just meant close of business. In my world, that was five o'clock. I knew they weren't great, but I had two full reports in Caleb's inbox by 5:01pm.

I didn't think he would be ok with me going home, so I waited. It was about 6:15 when I got a ping on my work computer from Caleb.

Come to my office.

I walked with heavy legs and a rapidly beating heart. His door was open, his blinds were pulled. I knocked on the door frame softly. He looked up at me, hand over his mouth and lifted his brow. He leaned back and motioned to me.

"Close the door," he instructed. I clicked the door shut. "Lock it."

I did and turned. I waited and he motioned to the chair. "Sit."

His words were clipped and short. My mouth was unbearably dry, and my throat ached. I moved slowly, lowering myself to the chair with shaky limbs. Leaning back in his chair, he eyed one of his computer screens, clicking lazily. He had shaved again by the looks of it. There was a slight bit of irritation on the right side of his jaw, just by the ear. His hair was neatly combed and in perfect shape.

"Well," he said, sighing and clasping in his hands on his stomach. He spoke very matter of factly. "These are probably the worst written reports I've ever received from you."

I felt my lower lip begin to tremble and I bit down hard on my tongue in an attempt to stop it. It was hard, and it hurt, but I managed it.

"That includes the first report I ever got from you, and you remember how bad that was."

I took a slow, steadying breath.

“I sent it to Chris, to see if he’d ever received such poor-quality writing from you.”

My head jerked up and my eyes met his. I felt a surge of rage pass through me and then I looked down. I couldn’t hold his gaze, because he would see it written on my face. My anger. My hatred.

“*That fucking* look on your face,” he said, leaning forward slightly in his chair. “You can’t hide it for long.”

I looked down, eyes closed.

“He said he’d never seen such sloppy work. He thought I was kidding when I said it was you.”

Silence hung heavy on the air. I could hear a clock ticking. He had a nice one on the wall. My hands shook in my lap.

“Orla. Look at me,” he ordered.

I swallowed thickly, took in a deep breath to brace myself, and then looked up at him. Our eyes locked and he stared hard. I didn’t know what he wanted me to say. In that moment, I don’t know if I would have been able to say it even if I knew what he wanted to hear. I kept my eyes on his.

“Stand up,” he said abruptly. He pushed himself up to his feet as well. His long fingers ran down his tie. I hesitated a moment longer before doing as he said. Making him happy and bored was harder at work than I could have imagined. I had to do this by myself, because I had to prove I could succeed on my own, because if I didn’t, I was just some trust fund baby that had it all given to her. And I wasn’t my family, and I wasn’t my family’s money. I was good enough to do it on my own.

“Come here,” he directed. I walked around the side of the desk. I stopped in front of him. He tilted my chin up with a finger. His eyes moved over me. His eyes burned.

“Bend over.” He removed his hand and took a step back. I knew I needed to apologize. I needed to clean up this mess I’d made. It had been so much harder than I thought it was going to be. Being in the office, seeing him like this, being used and degraded and ignored. It had been different. In his apartment it wasn’t like this.

“Caleb -”

I was too stunned for a moment to realize what had happened. He took an iron grip on the back of my neck and then forced me onto the desk with a hard thud. I gasped and he settled in behind me. I could feel his erection as it pressed into me. I squeezed my eyes shut. I forgot how to breathe. His lips were at my ear and he said lowly, “You will *obey* me.”

I blinked, stunned. I nodded. He leaned over me until his lips were pressed to my ear. “Inside this building, I am your boss, and you will respect me. Outside of this building, I am your boyfriend, and you will respect me. You will *not* use my affection to manipulate me. We’re done playing your games. It’s time we do things my way.”

He straightened. Unheard the sound of his belt sliding out from his belt loops.

“I’m going to do something no one’s done your entire life,” he said. “And put you in your place.”

He pushed my skirt up over my hips and yanked my pantyhose down. I felt a rush of familiarity. He’d done this often in the janitor closet. Suddenly, memories came rushing back to me. His body, his hands, his smell...

“Stubborn bitch.”

But this wasn't the man from the janitor closet though. This was the man from the vending machines.

I squeezed my eyes shut. I waited for him to force himself inside of me. I didn't know if I had it in me to orgasm. He dropped his phone down next to my face. Music started to play. A moment later, he laid the leather belt down hard on my bottom. A cry of surprise left me. Not very loud, but loud enough for him to grab me by the hair and tilt my head up.

"You want everyone to think you fucked your way to a promotion?" he asked sharply. I shook my head frantically. He kept his hand in my hair and smacked the belt down again. I swallowed another cry and he plopped the belt down by my face. I thought it was done, but after a ripple of fabric, he was shoving his tie into my mouth.

"Then bite down," he ordered. "And be quiet."

He hit me again.

"You're a prideful, stubborn, bitch," he said. "If you had asked me for a Xanax when you needed it..." a hard clap of the belt. "If you had asked me for help on your report..." an even harder clap. I bit down hard on that fucking yellow tie with its fucking tiny navy dots. "I wouldn't have to stay here until midnight to fix it." Another hard clap. My skin was burning. I could feel the welts swelling up on my skin. "We could go home and watch a movie. I'd cook you dinner and we'd make love and we'd go to bed."

He stopped talking but he didn't stop hitting me with the belt. It felt like an eternity. Finally, when my flesh was screaming and stinging, he dropped the belt. He stepped back and I slowly lowered myself to the ground. My entire body trembled, and I pressed the back of my hand to my mouth. I swallowed a sob and hiccupped painfully.

"Orla," he rumbled. I turned my wet eyes up at him. He calmly placed the belt back into his pants loops. His erection was notable in his pants and he grabbed it tightly. He lowered himself into his chair and reached into his drawer. He retrieved a pill bottle and took out a pill. He then retrieved a bottle of water and handed them both to me. I took it happily and sucked down the water hard. He watched. His chest rose and fell slowly, but deeply. I should have pulled up my panty hose, pulled my skirt down, but I was just so tired. And it didn't

matter. What he thought of me, deep down, was clear. My resolve strengthened. I could make him bored. I just had to swallow my pride. What little I had left.

“I thought we were on the same page. Either there was a miscommunication or you’re just that fucking stubborn.”

Slowly, my senses came back to me, and I started to tug my skirt down.

“No. Don’t. I like you like that,” he said. His eyes moved over me. He pushed down on his erection. So I sat there, with my skirt hunched up around my hips, my panty hose pulled down around my knees, my bottom aching.

“I’m going to give you the benefit of the doubt and be very clear with you,” he said. He unbuttoned his pants and pulled his cock free. He gave it a few hard strokes. “You need to learn how to ask for help.”

He wheeled his chair closer to me and grabbed me by the base of my ponytail. He drew me closer. “And you need to learn to be grateful.”

He stroked his cock hard again.

“Now be a good girl and suck my cock,” he said. He used my mouth relatively quickly, coming in my mouth and quickly placing himself back into his pants. He sighed as he fastened his pants again.

“I used to jerk off like four times a day imagining what your mouth would feel like. Imagining you looking just like this. I lived for the moments you’d walk by my cubicle. Just to get a glimpse of you.”

He was looking down at my legs. He pressed his tongue to his bottom lip. He said the mind games were over but they weren’t. Because he could say things like that, and refuse to show any warmth to me at all in public, and mean what he was saying.

“We should go away this summer. A week in the mountains, just us. I just want you to myself all the time. I hate the idea of other people even being able to *look* at you.”

He took a sobering breath and ran his hand through his hair. He leaned down and collected my face in his hands and tilted my face up. His thumb traced over my lips.

“You needed that first Xanax about four hours before I gave it to you. I only gave it to you because you were falling apart and you’re in withdrawals.”

He looked deep into my eyes. His thumb gently caressed my lower lip.

“You struggled today and you didn’t ask for me once. *Why* ?”

He asked it earnestly. I couldn’t answer him honestly. Not if I was going to make him bored. I wanted to though. I really wanted to. I just shook my head.

“I don’t know,” I whispered.

“Because you’re not as OK with this as you want me to believe,” he murmured knowingly. I almost protested, but I saw the look in his eye. My eyes lowered to the floor. I couldn’t even do this right. I felt so, so small.

“I know this is a lot for you,” he murmured. His thumb stroked my cheek. “And it’s hard, cutting down on the pills and the alcohol. I’m going to get you through this. But you need to understand that from here on out, there will be consequences to your actions. You’re going to be held accountable now.”

I closed my eyes. I wanted to go home and go to sleep.

“I can rewrite it,” I offered instead. I lifted my gaze to his. “I can rewrite it. The report.”

He slammed his fist down hard on his desk. I flinched, bringing my hands up to cover my face.

“That’s the *opposite* of what I want,” he snapped.

I nodded behind my hands. I think I apologized, but I couldn’t remember. His hands gently but firmly closed around my wrists and he lowered them. “Orla. Look at me.”

I did, but I was afraid to.

“I will *never* hit you,” he told me. “*Never*. Ok?”

I nodded, but my bottom felt differently. He’d rape me, he’d blackmail me, he’d verbally degrade me, he’d act like I wasn’t worth his time of day... what difference would it make?

“I need you to know that I want to take care of you. I want to be the one you come to when you need help. You need to ask me when you need a Xanax. You need to ask me when you need help with the reports. You need to *ask*. Ask and I will never tell you ‘no.’”

My eyes had dipped down. They moved back upward. His eyes were darting between mine. I nodded again, not trusting myself to speak. He kept looking at me. He leaned forward and reached for his phone.

“I’m going to stay and finish the reports. You’re going to go home and get a good night's sleep.”

I wanted to protest again. I didn’t need him to do this for me. I could do it. I was strong and intelligent. But I knew what arguing with him would do. *Swallow your pride and obey and he’ll move on* .

He retrieved an airpod from the holder and placed it into his ear. He spent a few more moments on his phone and then stood.

“Stand up,” he said, extending his hand. I put my hand in his and he pulled me to my feet. He very gently pulled my pantyhose up, next, he pulled my skirt down. I closed my eyes, placing myself back in the janitor’s closet. I felt warm. He took my chin in his hand. His other hand wrapped around my middle.

“I have an Uber coming for you. I’m going to walk you out front in a few minutes. We’re going to be on the phone while you go. When you get home, have some of the leftovers that are in the fridge from dinner last night. Eat and then I want you to put on some of the pajamas that are in the top drawer of the dresser to the right. The dark red ones. OK?”

His thumb felt nice on my cheek. I nodded. He placed a kiss to my lips.

“I want you to apologize to me,” he said softly. “For making me work late.”

“I’m sorry for making you work late,” I murmured. He kissed me again.

“I want you to apologize for not coming to me when you needed help.”

“I’m sorry,” I whispered. He turned my face up.

“Say it.”

I closed my eyes.

“I’m sorry for not coming to you when I needed help.”

He kissed me again, very gently. He deepened the kiss, his hand closing around my throat.

I nodded. His hand tightened slightly. I murmured, "I'm sorry."

He kissed me again. "Sore?"

I nodded. He looked at me a moment more, and then wrapped his arms around me. His body was warm and large and surrounded me and I pressed my cheek into his chest. I felt an ache in my chest. Why could he do this in private, but couldn't so much as smile at me in public? It was because he was lying. Even if he didn't know it. I wrapped my arms around his middle and squeezed tightly. He squeezed back. He held me a while longer and I could have fallen asleep. I was almost disappointed when he pulled back.

"Go get your things," he instructed. "Leave your laptop."

I nodded and obeyed. As I started toward the door, he grabbed my elbow and yanked me back. Our eyes locked a moment.

"Oh," I breathed. I remembered. I touched his face, his skin was hot, and got up on my tiptoes. I pressed my lips to his.

"Hmm, good girl," he murmured when I lowered myself back down to flat feet. "Go on."

I lingered a moment. I wanted to ask him a question. I didn't though. I turned and went back to my cube. I got my bag. Caleb stood outside his office in his coat. He scrolled through his phone, looking tired and disinterested. For a moment I thought he might be coming back to write the report at his apartment. I felt a glimmer of disappointment when I saw the lights to his office were still on, and his laptop was still plugged into the docking station.

He'd been shielding me for weeks now. Protecting me from Nick's wrath, and now he had two full reports to write before he could go home and sleep. I wanted to apologize again, but I kept my mouth shut.

He walked me to the elevator with a large hand to my lower back and directed me inside. We waited in the lobby, standing a respectable distance away from each other as we waited. My phone began to buzz. Once I had it out of my pocket he took it and answered the call.

"Stay on the phone with me the whole time," he said, handing it back. "Eat. Shower. Go to sleep."

I nodded. He stepped through the door before me and I followed. A black car pulled up and he opened the door for me. Before I slid in, I moved my face up and stepped closer. He took a step back and tilted his head away from me. His brow knitted. My cheeks turned pink and tears bit at my eyes. I slid into the car and he shut the door with a thud. He didn't say anything on the phone, but I knew he was there listening. He was short when I told him I'd arrived home safely. I made sure not to cry until I was certain he'd hung up.

I had been up for almost twenty-two hours when I finally unlocked the door to my apartment and stepped inside. Knowing my bed wasn't empty made it almost bearable. I dropped my bag to the floor with a soft thud and let my coat slip down beside it. I set the emails with the reports to go out at 7:00 am and 7:15 am tomorrow. It wouldn't help anyone for Nick to know I finished them at midnight.

I stripped off my suit and draped it over my bureau. Body aching, I crawled into bed until I felt the soft, warm lump I was looking for. I pressed my nose into her temple and set my alarm on my phone.

"Caleb?"

Her voice was a whisper. Soft but alert. I shouldn't have been surprised. I hadn't given her any GHB and she was so high strung at the moment, I doubted the second Xanax did much. I doubt she slept at all.

“Shh, Shh,” I said, moving over her. I wouldn’t have woken her up if she had managed to find sleep, but since she was awake, I was going to take some comfort in her. I spread her legs and pulled the dark red silk shorts to the side. Despite my exhaustion, just knowing she was in my bed, wearing what I told her to wear, there for me to use on a whim, I was hard as a rock when I slid into her. She was pliant. It was quick. I came inside of her with a sigh of comfort and breathed in her scent deeply. Those images of her, sitting at my feet, panty hose down around her knees, skirts up around her waist, had made it almost impossible to focus on those fucking reports.

“Caleb,” she whispered again.

“Mhm?” I asked, kissing her collarbone.

“Can I talk to you about something?” I sighed. I wanted to sleep. She added, voice shrinking, “I know you’re tired.”

“Ask me,” I said. Who knew what temperament she’d be in tomorrow. I rolled onto my back and closed my eyes. I felt her sit up beside me. I forced my eyes open and looked up at her silhouette.

“I don’t think one Xanax is enough right now,” she said. “I know you’re getting my ... addiction under control but... maybe if just for a week, I could have one in the morning and then one in the afternoon. Just for a week I...”

I reached out and ran my knuckles up and down her arm.

“You were right. I really struggled today. It was h-harder than I thought it was going to be.”

She sniffled.

“I think that might help me.”

“Just a week,” I relented. She nodded in the darkness. “Then it’s back down to one.”

“Thank you,” she breathed. She lowered herself back down. “Thank you.”

I pulled her down beside me. I missed having her near me today. I wrapped my arms around her and held her to me tightly.

“Will you be here when I wake up?” she whispered.

“Do you want me to be?” I asked. I slid my hand up her waist. I felt her nod against my chest. I didn’t make her say it. “Then I will be.”

She pressed her face into my chest and I fell asleep.

Chapter Notes

You guys are the absolute best. Seriously, reading these comments is so much fun.

I sincerely hope you enjoy this chapter as much as the others. As a heads up, I am going on a much-needed vacation and I will have zero internet access, so it is safe to say there will be no updates for the next two weeks. I'm hoping I'll be able to resume relatively quick updates once I return, but I can't make any promises. These past couple chapters have been relatively short. I predict they will start getting longer again in the next few chapters. These are kind of transitional chapters. Important but transitional.

Once again, thank you all so much. I absolutely love reading all your comments.

I woke up to warm lips on my neck. His hand gently pushed my hair away from my face. He kissed along my jaw. His stubble scraped my skin, but it felt nice.

“Time to wake up,” he said. He was sitting on the bed beside me. He kissed my mouth softly. “Take a shower and I’ll have breakfast for you.”

What time is it?” I asked softly.

“Five past six,” he answered. He kissed me again. His breath smelled good. Subconsciously, I pressed my lips together and began to sit up. The lights were off, but he had turned the blinds to let some light in.

“Good morning,” I said with a small smile.

“Good morning,” he said. “We’re going to have a good day today.”

I nodded. He squeezed the back of my neck and then left the room. When I came out of the bedroom he had clothing spread out for me. It was my dark navy business dress. I'd always liked it and I was happy he chose it for the day. When I came out of the bedroom, more or less ready to go, he was putting his food in the sink. With a smile and slid his hands over my waist and drew me closer.

"Beautiful," he told me. He leaned down and put a peck on my lips. "Breakfast is on the counter. I'll be right out."

He disappeared into the bedroom. I ate the eggs. It wasn't a grand breakfast like I was accustomed to him making, but it did feel nice having something in my belly. I had been too anxious to eat when I got back the night before. He was out by the time I had finished my cup of coffee. I forced myself to look at him.

He was in a gray suit. I didn't prefer him gray. I didn't think it best matched his coloring. I would have preferred he wear one of his black, navy, or charcoal suits, but it was still good to see him in his suit in his apartment. That was what I had wanted when I asked him to be here when I woke up. I needed to reconcile it all in my head. It was still hard, but I kept my eyes on him.

"Everything ok?" he asked. I nodded.

I don't know what possessed me, but as he turned to pour himself another cup of coffee, I told him, "I've never liked you in gray."

"Oh no?" he asked. He turned with a little smile and leaned against his counter.

"No. Navy is best. And Black. I like the charcoal. But I don't like the light gray."

"Good to know."

"I like the pinstripe suit. I usually like solid colors though."

He was nodding. He took a sip of his coffee. He had a small smile on his lips.

“Did you get the new suits because of me?” I asked. “The smell I mean. The aftershave. He never smelled like you. It. You. You never smelled like you...” I tapered off.

“It was time for some new suits, but that definitely prompted it,” he said, putting his hand in his pocket. He chuckled. “That was the hardest part you know. I was so paranoid you’d recognize the smell. Chris was at his wits end with the amount I made him smell me.”

I had been bringing my cup up to my lips. My cup froze halfway to its destination and my eyes darted up to his. He took his sip of coffee and watched me. Slowly, he lowered the cup from his mouth.

“Oh,” he said simply. “You didn’t know.”

The color was gone from my face. I thought I might fall off the bar stool and crack my head open on the floor. I almost welcomed it. He put his cup down and came around the side of the island.

“I just assumed you...” he paused and placed his hand to my cheek. “Orla. Who did you think spiked your drink? I was on the opposite end of the table.”

I sucked in a sharp breath.

“You’ve always preferred Chris. It infuriated me for so long. See, the difference between Chris and I, is I’m honest. I say what I think. I say what I feel. Chris has that fake charm that girls just....”

He gently caressed my cheek with the back of his knuckles. His skin was searing.

“I’d always been turned on by dominating women, but I’d never drugged anyone until I met Chris,” he said. He clicked his tongue. “I’m sorry. You’re disappointed. I would have broken that to you a bit more gently if I knew.”

“That day... I knew it was you. I *knew* it. And I told you so. But he - I got those texts from his number... it was Chris.”

“It was Chris,” he confirmed. I pushed back from the island and stood, my hand on my stomach. My stomach churned and I felt a pressure rising in my throat. My mouth flooded with saliva. Very quickly and very skillfully, he had me turned around and bent over before the eggs came rushing up and splattered against the sink. He rubbed small circles on my back.

“Not a great way to start the day off, huh,” he mused. “You didn’t even throw up when you found out it was me. Not sure if I should be offended or flattered.”

I spit onto the sink, eyes closed, head spinning. He rubbed little circles a bit longer. Finally, his voice broke through the haze. “Go brush your teeth.”

I did. I splashed cold water on my face. My head was spinning. When I came back out, he was in the bedroom, tossing down a pair of shorts and one of his t-shirts.

“Feeling better?” he asked. He came to me, placing one hand on my waist and the other hand on my cheek. I nodded. To be honest, I was embarrassed. I was so painfully embarrassed that I hadn’t even considered it. It hadn’t even entered my brain. And now... I felt more alone than ever.

“Go on and change. You’re going to work from home.”

“N-no, no, I’ve missed too much work. I -”

“Orla,” he said sternly. “Stop.”

I looked up into his eyes.

“Remember what we talked about last night? Right now, I’m telling you as your boss and as your boyfriend. You are working from home. You told me last night being in the office was harder than you thought it would be, right?”

He brushed his thumb over my cheek. “Yes.”

“It’s going to be just as hard today so why set yourself up for failure?” he asked. “Nick’s out on PTO all week.”

I snapped my head up. “He is?”

“Yeah,” he said. “That’s the last big surprise, I think. So, let’s do this the right way. Work from home today. We’ll have a fresh start tomorrow. Ok?”

I nodded, trying to steady myself. I started shaking my head. I grabbed his arms.

“No, um... I’m not refusing,” I hurried out. “I don’t know...” I looked off to the side. “I don’t know if I should be alone.”

“Do you think you might hurt yourself?” he asked with a frown. His hands were large and warm on my waist. They pulsed and pulled me a fraction of an inch closer.

“No, nothing like that,” I said. “Just, sitting here alone all day...”

He placed his finger under my chin and tilted my face up.

“What made yesterday so hard for you?” he asked. “Just the pills?”

I tried to look down but he wouldn't let me. I considered telling him. It would help. It would make him think I was needy or clingy or both.

Because you acted like I was nobody. You couldn't even smile at me. And I hate you.

“The pills,” I said. It wasn't completely untrue.

“I think working is best,” I told him. “I'll do what you tell me to. If you tell me to stay home I won't fight but ... I would like to go into work.”

He considered, head tilted, eyes down on my mouth. His brow knitted, but he didn't look angry, only pensive.

“I don't want you to see Chris and go into a tailspin. I want the next couple of days to go smoothly for you. We have the project auto CFO coming in next week and it's important you get some face time in.”

“It will go smoothly because -“ I sucked in another sharp breath. “Because if I need help I will have you.”

His eyes lifted from my mouth to meet my eyes.

“Like you said. I need to ask for help.”

“Do you think you can do that today?” he asked. “Ask for help?”

“I will. I promise.”

He nodded slowly and cupped my cheek.

“OK. I’ll send Chris in to see you so you’ll see him in your cubicle first. You don’t need to end up rounding the corner and seeing him for the first time.”

“Please, no. I -” He placed his thumb to my lips.

“Be quiet.” His order was spoken in a soft and measured tone. He looked back at me, waiting for me to continue. His lips quirked and I saw heat flood his eyes.

“Good girl,” he murmured, gently tapping my lips with his thumb. “I’ll give you a Xanax when we get to work. Then another around two? Sound fair?”

His thumb moved to caress my cheek. I nodded. He smiled and leaned down to kiss me. Slowly, he turned me around in his arms so I faced the mirror. His arms closed in around me and held me close. I looked very pale and very thin. I didn’t think I looked attractive at all. It was just my luck. I didn’t look good thin and I didn’t look good fat. Our eyes met in the mirror and he leaned his face in to breathe in deeply at my temple.

“It will get so much easier for you,” he told me. “Once you accept this.”

“I do -”

“Tell me you belong to me,” he cut me off. Our eyes met in the mirror.

“I belong to you,” I said.

He observed a moment longer before he kissed my cheek. He pulled back and walked to the door.

“Let’s go.”

I looked longingly at the clothing he had spread out on the bed, but I knew it was the right decision. If I was left alone, I would spiral. We paused at the door so he could kiss me. It began slow and chaste, but quickly deepened, and his tongue was in my mouth. His hand was on my lower back and he pulled me closer to him. I thought he might take me right there against the wall, but he finally pulled back with a sign.

“You drive me fucking crazy,” he breathed. “Ready?”

I nodded. We walked to the nearest T stop. It was a cold morning, it had rained the night before, and the wind was whipping my jacket rather violently. Luckily, we did not need to wait at the above ground stop long, and he ushered me inside. It was busier than I liked. I usually left much earlier. I closed my eyes, holding onto the bar above my head. I let my body sway and focused on the feeling of it. Anything other than work, Caleb, or Chris.

That wave of shame returned and my stomach flipped. I should have listened to Caleb and stayed home. Going into work was a bad idea. I felt heat beginning to prickle at my ears, spreading up from my shoulders, up my neck, and through my scalp. What did I have to do today? I couldn’t even remember what deals I was on. What I had moving next. What work I had to review. My heart was pounding. The floor was shifted beneath my feet.

“What do I have to work on today?” I asked him, eyes still closed. My voice sounded so loud, bursting over the blood swirling in my ears and the screech of the train.

“Euro and DFS. I need the calcs done.” He was standing directly in front of me. I could feel him there. It took everything in me not to reach out and grab onto him for dear life.

“What else?”

“Focus on Euro and DFS. Once you send those to me, I’ll give you next steps.”

I nodded. I liked that. Less to hyperfocus on. His hand touched my elbow. It was a warm, firm grip. I waited for him to pull me closer, but he didn't. The doors to the train opened and he dropped his hand. The cold air rushing in felt good and I gulped in a breath. I looked toward the open doors with wide eyes and then let out a deep exhale. He was looking at me, those dark gray eyes and that blank face cut from stone. I wondered if he was embarrassed. I wondered how much attention I had drawn. I didn't search for his disapproval. I only looked back down. I pressed my hand to the back of my neck. My palm felt nice and cool. I closed my eyes again.

I stayed like that until he told me we were at our stop. I followed him off the T and up into the street. He paused outside the building.

"I'm going to grab some coffee. Go on up," he said.

"I'll come with you -"

He was already shaking his head.

"I'm not walking in with you. Go."

He turned and began to walk away. My cheeks flushed red and I turned to walk into the building. I didn't see Eddie and I slipped into the elevator as quickly as I could to avoid seeing him. I just didn't have it in me at the moment. The office was fairly quiet when the elevators opened. I got into my office without having to interact with anyone. I got myself set up and then sat at my desk, staring at the wall. I wanted to go get something to drink, but I didn't want to leave my cubicle. I didn't want to see Caleb. I didn't want to see Chris.

About twenty minutes passed when I heard deep voices coming down the hall. I saw the very top of Caleb's head. I expected Caleb to come into my cubicle. I was surprised to turn my head and find Chris strolling toward me, a kind smile on his face. That smile didn't look so friendly anymore.

“Got you a coffee,” he said, putting an iced coffee down on my desk.

“Thank you,” I said. I cleared my throat. He grabbed the chair on the side of my cubicle and dragged it toward me. He sat down and leaned forward, as if he was going to go over a report with me. Elbows on his knees, he rubbed his hands together and continued to smile at me.

“No hard feelings, huh?” he said. His voice was not loud enough for anyone to hear unless they were really listening in the cubicle over. “He just got promoted. I wanted to give him something nice.”

I swallowed and stared at my hands in my lap.

“You ok?” he asked.

I nodded. I glanced over to find Caleb standing in my cubicle entrance, hands in his pockets, staring down the hall.

“I’m still your friend,” he said. “Right, Ellie? We’re friends?”

“Yes,” I said, trying to smile at him. I looked back at Caleb. Chris looked over his shoulder to where Caleb was. I longed for the Xanax.

“Caleb,” I said, ignoring Chris. He turned his attention to me. I couldn’t say it out loud, so I tried to make it clear with my eyes. He nodded. Chris rose and Caleb entered the cubicle. For a moment, they both stood over me and I felt very very small and very very vulnerable. Chris put his hand on my shoulder and squeezed, leaving a scorching mark in its wake, before he headed out. Caleb handed me the pill and I used the coffee to down it. Then he put a bag from Dunkin’s on my desk.

“Since you don’t have much in your stomach anymore,” he said. I blushed deeply.

“Thank you,” I said. He reached out and ran the back of his finger along her cheek.

“Alright?”

I nodded. He smiled softly and turned away, but not before giving me a quick wink.

I got the calcs done fairly quickly. Those were easy. I’d never had a problem with calcs. I emailed Caleb at eleven asking him what he wanted me to do next. He told me to focus next on an Internal Summary. Those were pretty simple, but could be time intensive.

After I sent him the internal summary, he sent me my next work tasks. I set out working on them next. I somehow managed to slip into the work. I thought of little else but the numbers as I went through the Returns in the data room. The sudden buzz of my phone made me jump.

You have lunch in the fridge. Your names on it . Go eat.

I took another sobering breath. The breakfast sandwich still lay unearthing next to me. I had forgotten it until then. I felt a pang of hunger. I grabbed it, threw the bag and the wrappers in the trash cans then carried the sandwich with me to the bathroom. I avoided Caleb’s office and got into the bathroom without running into anybody. I tossed the sandwich in the garbage and relieved myself. After I washed my hands, I splashed cold water on my face.

I gripped the sink and gave myself a steadying breath. What I really needed in that moment was a Xanax. It was too early for that though. Caleb said two. It was only about one o’clock. Besides, I wanted to be somewhat calm when I got back to his apartment. I felt a pang of longing for my apartment. My bed, and my dishes, and my blankets, and my futon. The door to the bathroom opened. It was a good thing. I don’t think I would have been able to collect myself if I hadn’t been forced to. Not really caring what they thought of me, I splashed a bit more cold water on my face as the newcomer moved into a stall. I dabbed at my face with the paper towel, leaving it over my eyes for a few moments. Before the newcomers left her stall, I exited the bathroom.

I walked back around the long way, passed directly by my cubicle, and walked up toward Caleb's office. He was at his desk with his suit jacket off, red tie tossed over his shoulder as he sat and ate lunch. Chris was there eating with him. I raised my hand, ready to wave, but he didn't look at me. I lowered it and rounded the corner toward the breakroom. From the corner of my eye, I saw his head lift and then turn toward me.

When I arrived in the breakroom, Amelia, Stephanie, and a girl I didn't know were seated around the table. I went to the fridge and opened the door. I found the styrofoam container with my name written on it inside.

"Let's plan another Happy Hour. He'll go to that," Stephanie said.

"Be quiet," Amelia snapped. She turned in her chair. "We missed you this weekend."

It took me a moment to realize she was talking to me. I glanced behind me and then looked back to see what he had ordered me. My skin was already burning when I opened it to find lo mein noodles within.

"I wasn't invited," I answered. I grabbed a plastic fork and knife from the drawer and spooned half the noodles onto a plate. I dumped the rest in the trash and walked to the microwave. It was still a bit warm. I wouldn't have to stay long.

"You got an invite. Caleb made sure of that," she said, making it sound like I was some pet project. I didn't bite and there was some silence.

"It's funny, you and Caleb were the only people that weren't there."

I paused. My ears buzzed. I was clear headed enough to hear an accusation in her tone.

"Well, I doubt Caleb wants to go to a house party with a bunch of people he supervises," I said, grabbing the noodles from the microwave. I paused a moment to think. A thought began to formulate through the haze.

“True. One indiscretion could get him fired,” Amelia said. “If done with the wrong person.”

Do you want people to think you fucked your way to a promotion?

I felt so stupid. So absolutely stupid. What had I expected exactly? Him to walk up and kiss me in the middle of the breakroom. For him to fawn over me like a schoolboy in front of all our coworkers? Wasn't he a leading voice in my promotion? What would people think of *me*? My reputation would be destroyed. I could kiss any further promotions goodbye. I could move to another big four, but those rumors followed you. The big four community talked. Oh God. I tried to kiss him outside of the Uber. It was a striking moment of clarity. It didn't last long, but it lasted long enough that I realized just how fucked up my head still was.

But it had upset me so much, despite the fact that I didn't even *care* if he was done with me. I *wanted* him done. But it had just made me so angry. So angry that he could do what he'd done and treat me that way.

“Right,” I said, turning with my plate of noodles. “So it's a good thing he didn't go.”

“And why didn't you go?” Amelia asked sweetly. I felt a violent flair of anger at the accusation. I marched to the door.

“Because, Amelia, I just don't like you that much.”

I didn't look into Caleb's office as I marched back and I sat down at my desk with a huff. What an absolute idiot, I was. Did I actually think his disinterest had been genuine? I wasn't that lucky. There was something wrong with him. He wouldn't lose interest in me until he was sufficiently satisfied that I was beaten. Rape wasn't about sex. It was power and control. I found my resolve. The same resolve I had over the weekend before that stupid blank look on his face had thrown me into a tailspin. My resolve hardened. I still had work to do. It would take some doing, but I *had* to do it. And I would.

I ate about a quarter of the noodles before Mark ducked his head into my cubicle, interrupting my musings.

“Oh, man, Chinese food!” he said. “I thought I smelled it. Next time let me know.”

“Sorry,” I started.

“No, no, not a problem. Hey, I wanted to ask. Do you want me to prioritize Auto or get FSG done first.”

For a moment, my brain was completely blank. After a second I shook my head.

“No, Auto’s due on.... Friday. I need FSG by EOD. Auto, I need tomorrow.”

Mark was nodding.

“Ok, awesome. Sounds good, Boss lady,” Mark said and left with a grin. A little smile came to my own face. I thought about Caleb’s needy kisses this morning before we left. About Amelia’s accusatory words just now.

“Get a fucking grip, Ellie,” I whispered to myself. I slapped both my cheeks with both hands. It rattled me still that I couldn’t fully comprehend that it had been Caleb all this time. I felt a surge of strength rush through me. If I could overcome that hurdle...

I reached for my phone and texted Caleb.

Do you want to meet in our spot?

I waited, staring at my phone. I saw bubbles pop up and waited with a pounding heart.

We'll wait until next week. I want you to get your bearings.

I typed back quickly.

It's ok. I want to.

I sent it. I pressed my lips together. I pushed the feelings down. I saw bubbles. Then nothing. Then more bubbles.

Ten minutes. I'll follow.

I put my phone down, a smile on my face. My phone buzzed again.

Walk by my office on your way. I want to see you.

He wanted to see me on my way to get fucked by him is what he wanted.

The ten minutes passed unbelievably slow. When I saw the time flick over on the screen I got to my feet. My eyes were on his office as I walked down the hall. His eyes were waiting for me. He leaned back in his chair, his hand on his mouse, but his eyes were not on the computer screen. They landed on me. His face was perfectly blank, cut from a perfect slab of flawless marble. But I *knew* there was something going on beneath the surface. I didn't know if he would have shown me anymore interest in public if he *could*. But I knew that he *did* still want me.

I held his eye contact until I had to turn. I hurried down the hall, down the stairs, and slipped into the closet. It felt strange being inside of it again. I stood in the dark, heart thundering and pounding. Memories flooded back to me. Some good and some bad. I wondered how he would do it. Against the shelves, on my back on the table, bent over the table.

I groped upward and found the string dangling from above. I didn't turn it on though. I wanted to feel him in the darkness. I wanted to smell him. Only then did I want to see him. I was struck with the logic of it only a fraction before I heard the door of it. I *needed* this. The door clicked shut.

"We don't have to hide in the dark anymore," he murmured, but he didn't put the light on. His voice was low. Not quite *his*, but not quite Caleb's either. A melding of the two. The sooner I got my head on straight, the stronger I could be and the better I could act. His hands slid over my hips and pulled me back against his erection. He pressed his nose to my temple.

"I wasn't expecting that text, let me tell you," he chuckled. He pushed me up against the workbench and pushed his hips more firmly into me. He touched me with easy confidence. Like he owned me. I reached up and put my hands on his face. He let me squirm around until I was facing him.

"I want you to take me like you did before," I told him.

"Like I did before?" he asked. There was a tinge of an edge to his voice. He asked, "Want to pretend it's not me?"

"No, no," I hurried out. I placed my hands on the side of his face. My hands were trembling. I'm sure he liked that. "I want to know it's you. I want both."

"Both, hmm," he mused, trying it on for size. Trying to see if he believed me.

"You're still two different people," I told him. "I need both at once."

"I can give you both," he said. My back dug into the desk behind me. He grabbed me by the hair and pulled my head back. He lowered his head and dragged his teeth along my jaw. "I am both."

"I know," I breathed.

“Close your eyes,” he ordered. I did. His mouth was on mine. His mouth was warm and hard. His hand tightened in my hair. His tongue forced its way into my mouth. It was *him* kissing me, but I could smell Caleb. He slid me toward him. He stepped between them and kissed me again.

“You barely even looked at me yesterday,” I accused. I doubt he wanted a needy woman and I was curious what he’d say.

“It’s only been two days,” he defended himself. “I’m giving you time.”

“I don’t want time,” I told him. His mouth was on my neck again. I wrapped my arms around him.

“You want more attention at work? Want me to text you when I’m thinking about calling you into my office, bending you over my desk, and fucking you hard in the ass?” he asked. I sucked in a breath. “Or how great I think your tits look when you’re on your way to the breakroom?”

“Yes,” I breathed. He yanked my pantyhose completely off my legs. My shoes fell to the floor and he stepped between my legs.

“Take my cock out,” he ordered. My hands went to his belt. My hands fumbled with it. “How hard you want it?”

“Hard.”

He took my bottom lip hard between his teeth. He yanked my head back with a hard grip on my hair. My eyes were still closed. I parted my lips. He spit into my mouth and I felt that same rush of familiarity. He entered me roughly, but with surprising ease. The bench shifted beneath us, slamming hard against the wall and I wondered what was on the other side.

“Your pussy’s so good,” he growled in my ear. His voice. I sighed. I clung to him, arms around his neck, legs wrapped around his waist. I squeezed, clinging on for dear life.

“Who do you belong to?” he asked me.

“You, Caleb,” I whimpered. “I belong to you. Harder.”

He pulled out of me. In a rush he yanked me down from the bench and turned me. His fingers dug into my shoulders as he bent me over and my dress was pushed back up around my hips. He reentered me. One of his hands went to my hair and the other to my waist. My hips slammed into the bench. He pulled hard on my hair, pulling my head back. He pushed hard on my back, keeping me from straightening. He fucked me hard, hips bruising. His hands left me and he leaned over me, his chest to my back. His hand wrapped around my throat.

“Hard enough for you?” He rasped. He fucked me hard and deep and I squeezed my eyes shut and nodded. I breathed in deeply through my nose. His hand squeezed my throat. “That’s my good girl. You’re so sexy, baby.”

I clenched tightly around him. He pressed his lips to my ear.

“That’s right. You take what I give you so good. You’re so good. So sexy.”

My hips bucked.

“You like hearing that,” he smirked into my ear. “How fucking hot you are. How crazy you make me. How much I fucking love you.”

My orgasm hit me hard behind my eyes and he had to clamp his hand over my mouth to quiet me. He followed not long after that. The next thing I remembered was standing, held up only by the strength of his arms, feeling him dripping down my thigh, hot and wet. His lips were on mine and kissed me tenderly, stroking my cheek. He was whispering to me. I strained to hear what he was saying.

“That’s my girl. You’re so beautiful. So sexy,” he said between kisses. I reached up and groped for the string. I pulled it with a yank and the room flooded with light. His cheeks were flushed, his hair was rumpled. I opened my mouth and he took the invitation. His tongue left my mouth. We kissed, mouths open, our tongues meeting between us.

“It’ll be nice to have my tight little office slut at my disposal again,” he murmured, running his hands down my waist.

Until you're bored, I thought darkly. And he would. Office slut. At his disposal. I felt a roil of anger rattle through me. I was still a shiny new toy. Once he found a new one, I would be free. Maybe one of the interns. They’d be starting in a couple weeks.

I closed my eyes and leaned my face against his chest. His heart was still pounding and he wrapped his arms around me. He shifted slightly and then pulled back. He said, “Orla.”

I looked up and he had a pill between his fingers. I reached out but he pulled it back, eyebrow quirked. I lowered my hand slowly, and then parted my lips. He lowered the pill down to my tongue. I swallowed it dry.

“Thank you,” I said. He kissed me.

“How do you feel?” he asked. He released me and bent down to collect my panty hose. He checked them for rips.

“Good,” I said. “Calm.”

“Amazing what a good, hard fuck can do for you,” he said. He grabbed me by the waist and lifted me up on the bench. He carefully put the foot of the pantyhose over my foot and slowly rolled it up. “The internal summary was very good.”

I looked up. “You looked it over?”

He nodded and moved to the other foot. He ran his hand up my calf. My skin tingled.

“The calcs too. Solid work.”

“Thank you,” I said. It was amazing how good those words made me feel.

“I need you to get the Echo report to me EOD. Once that’s done, you can go home. It’ll probably take you the rest of the day.”

“Ok,” I answered. He helped me jump down so he could get the pantyhose all the way up. He straightened my dress for me. He tilted my face up so he could kiss me again.

“Did this help?”

I nodded.

“I think once you fully accept it was me the whole time, it’ll be easier.”

I agreed. He kissed me again.

“If this is what you need to get through this, I’m more than happy to help,” he teased in my ear and nibbled on an earlobe.

“Next time ,” I said and then swallowed. It would make it all easier. Once I got through this haze and accepted the reality of it all, I could force myself to do what needed to be done. I just had to deal with the trauma first.

“Next time?” he asked. It didn’t matter. We’d be in the closet together again. He’d make sure of that. I could take advantage of what would help me in the meantime.

“Could you come down like before - without the aftershave? But we’ll keep the light on?”

He stroked my cheek.

“Don’t like my aftershave?”

“No, no I do, it’s just -”

“I’m teasing you,” he said. “Relax.” he ran his hand over the back of my head. “I can do that.”

“I’m like Pavlov’s dog,” I said with a pained laugh. He smiled at me.

“You go on first,” he said, running his hand down the back of my head. “I’ll wait”

He kissed me again and then nudged me out the door and closed it behind me. I had to admit to myself as I walked down the hall to the staircase, I did feel better.

The shock I had felt reading that text message. She just kept getting better. She liked it hard. She liked it rough. My body tingled at the memory of her body against mine. I could feel her, her phantom limbs still wrapped around my body. I ended the call with the client and exited out of the excel I had been looking at.

“I’ll send those notes once I’ve cleaned them up,” Chris said. He stayed in his chair and typed. I didn’t give a response, but Chris didn’t need one.

I checked my email. It was about four fifteen now and I hadn't heard from her. I should have. Echo was too complicated for her. She's never been on a deal with that level of complication, she'd certainly never seniored one. EOD meant 11:59 pm, but I already knew I wouldn't take it well if I got a shitty report at 11:59pm. I wouldn't take it well if I got a *good* report at 11:59pm. The report itself should take about five hours beginning to end. She started around two, so she was still well within her time limit, but I *should* have received an email asking for help by now.

I glanced down the hall when I saw movement. The sight of her ignited in me a violent rush of need. I'd felt overwhelming physical desire before. I felt it with Orla, but she inspired another, completely different feeling as well. It was in my chest. Hot and taut and painful. It was a frightening feeling, a feeling of a loss of control, fear. It always caused another surge inside of me, a need to dominate and control, to make sure she never left me, to make sure no one ever touched her or took away what was *mine*. It was a feeling I had grown addicted to.

She had her laptop in her arms, held snugly to her chest. It was with an overwhelming rush of satisfaction that I realized she had been waiting for me to be off my calls to come for help. She halted abruptly when she saw Chris. She took a step back, as if to retreat. I raised a finger and beckoned her forward. She looked back at the back of Chris' head and then obeyed the physical command. She paused in the doorway.

"What's up?" I asked her.

"Do you have a couple minutes to go over Echo?" she asked. It would have been nice to lean back and look her up and down. Take in those long legs that had been wrapped around me just a couple hours before. Peter stood at the copier. Steve was standing at a cubicle talking to Molly.

"Sure. Chris, I need the Lantern edits done before you go home. That was shit work."

I registered a look of surprise on Orla's face.

"You want Lantern first or Daisy?"

“Well one has a call scheduled for tomorrow and one has a call scheduled for Friday. So,” I shook my head and pulled up the Echo data room. Orla looked between us, mouth set firmly, eyes slightly wider than normal.

Chris stood from his chair and asked, “your downward feedback request is due at the end of the week?”

I didn’t react. They could all say what they wanted. I got results. It was why I got the promotion. Chris turned to leave the room. I looked over to watch Orla. She looked down as Chris left.

“Pull up a chair,” I instructed. I could probably get my hand up her skirt without being seen. I know my desk blocked it. It would all depend on how my upper body looked. I disregarded the thought. I’d have her again at home tonight. “Send me the report.”

She pulled over a chair, keeping a respectable distance. I would have pulled her closer, but Anne was now standing by the copier talking to Steve and Mark. The report was well done. I shouldn’t have been surprised. Of course she could manage this level of work right now. It wasn’t anywhere near done, but it was something to work with. She was amazing. Brilliant. If she just let go of some of that pride, there would be no stopping her. She had no ceiling. It was with some satisfaction I realized she used one of the templates I had given her however many weeks ago.

We started at the top and worked our way down. A lot of it was tax technical knowledge she couldn’t be expected to know intuitively. I showed her where to find the resources that would help her in the future. Her fingers clattered away on the laptop as I spoke. An hour later, I sent her back to her cubicle with some very specific instructions on how to complete it.

“Thank you,” she murmured and closed her laptop. I wanted to touch her legs.

“You’re welcome,” I answered. I kept my hands to myself. “Finish that up and go home.”

She hesitated a moment and then stepped to the edge of my desk.

“Would I be able to stop by my studio?” She asked, keeping her low. I pinned my gaze on her. She quickly clarified, “Not to stay. I’d like to bring some of my things over. A blanket I like, my planner, my personal laptop. Those things.”

“We’ll get them this weekend,” I said. She opened her mouth to protest but then fell silent. My body stirred. She turned to leave.

“Orla,” I stopped her. She turned in the doorway. “You did very good work today.”

Her face brightened with a smile. A real smile that touched her eyes. She was so beautiful when she smiled.

“Thank you,” she said softly. She lingered a moment and turned to retreat back to her desk. I watched her until she was out of sight. I reached between my legs and pushed down on my budding erection. That would have to wait until we got home.

Chapter Notes

There is a new chapter of Spare the Rod up for those of you that are interested. Got some nice Mr. Carmichaels introductions in there.

Hopefully you like this one.

She pulled the stuffed peppers out of the oven before the door clicked shut. Long creamy legs extended out from silk merlot shorts. The black oven mitts looked comical next to the silk cami she wore. Her pink lips formed a succulent 'O' as she looked up and caught sight of me. She whipped the oven mitts off and came around the side of the island. I let my bag fall to the ground beside me. Her feet pitter pattered softly on the ground as she came toward me. She pushed my coat off my shoulders and hung it up on the rack.

"I made dinner," she said. It was very much the same display from the weekend. I watched her closely. She turned back around to face me. She pressed her hands, small and fragile, flat against my chest. I let her push my suit jacket off. Normally I would do it myself, but it didn't matter. I wouldn't be wearing this suit again.

She collected it dutifully in her arms, treating it with the care a coat that expensive deserved. She turned to walk away.

"Do you want - "

I seized her elbow and tugged her back. She offered no resistance and I kept the touch as gentle as I could and still bring her back to me.

"I want a kiss from my girlfriend," I said with a smile.

“Oh,” she said. She stepped closer, her hands back on my chest, and she tilted her head back. I smiled and bent my head. I placed two, three kisses on her mouth, sliding my hands up beneath her cami, and caressing her gently.

“I’ll go change and then we’ll eat,” I said, giving her a fourth kiss.

“Ok,” she answered. I took my suit jacket from her and went into the bedroom. I hung it back up and placed it with the rest of the gray suits. I could probably get a decent trade in price for them. I moved them to the far corner of the closet. I changed into a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt. When I came back out, she had a plate ready for both of us.

“What would you like to drink?” she asked.

“Diet Coke is fine.” I slid onto a stool and picked up my fork. The food looked delicious. She grabbed a cup, added ice, and then poured the coke into the glass. I dug my fork into the pepper. It was tender. I didn’t need the knife to cut it. I raised the pepper to my lips and chewed. “Delicious.”

“Thank you.”

I raised the coke to my lips and took a sip. I watched her, her flushed cheeks, her slightly glassy eyes.

“How many did you have?”

I brought another bite to my lips. She blinked at me.

“What - ”

“If you think I didn’t count them, you’re wrong. How many are missing?”

Her shoulders sagged and she looked down. Shame reddened her cheeks.

“Just three.”

I nodded.

“I’ll dump the rest. Come sit,” I said. She slid into the stool beside me. She jabbed at the pepper but did not bring it to her lips.

“I just needed something,” she said. It was a weak, half hearted defense. I placed my hand on the soft skin of her thigh.

“I shouldn’t have left you alone in a house full of beer,” I said. I slid my fingers along the velvety flesh. “It wasn’t fair of me.”

I brought up another bite. “This is delicious.”

“Stuffed peppers are easy,” she said.

“You’re a great cook. That chicken you cooked our first weekend together? Delicious.”

“Thanks,” she said softly. She picked at her food. “When did you decide? Was it that day? Of the promotion?”

I considered carefully as I chewed. “I knew I got the promotion a couple days before the official announcement. It was the push I needed. When you actually came out to Happy Hour, I texted Chris and told him it was going to happen that night.”

She sat and processed in silence.

“So, if I didn’t go...”

“I’d have had you,” I said. I left no room for argument. I didn’t want her to get any ideas in her head. “One way or another.”

She nodded, pensive once more. I reached up to touch a loose curl that slipped out of her messy bun at the base of her neck.

“I wouldn’t have been able to stop myself.”

“Can you tell me what happened? From beginning to end?”

“You already know mostly everything,” I answered. I continued to play with the little curl. In the heat of summer it happened a lot. The little curls would fall from her neatly arranged bun or ponytail. I used to stare at those little ringlets in meetings. She’d have her head down, oblivious to my gaze. Maybe that was the kind of thing she needed to hear?

“I think it will help,” she said. “Hearing you talk about it. It’s just still so... surreal to me. I never - I really never even considered you. And when I did, with....” She broke off and closed her eyes. She steadied herself. “With Chris texting me, pretending it’s you, I totally wrote you off. Like, you can’t possibly understand, I just *knew* it wasn’t you. So it’s hard to wrap my head around.”

“Sure,” I told her. “I can do that.”

She smiled.

“Thank you.”

I returned her smile and dropped my hand. I resumed eating, eager to be inside of her again. I enjoyed telling her the different ways I would have raped her while I was inside of her last night. Tonight, I could tell her about the ways I *did* rape her while I was inside of her. My body tingled.

“Did we deliver Jupiter to Nick?” she asked.

“We did,” I said. “And sent over Auto. We have a call Thursday after our scheduling meeting.”

“I’ll be on this one?”

I nodded as I chewed. Associates didn’t get on these calls with the clients if a senior was available. This would be her first time.

“You won’t have to speak though,” I said once I swallowed. “But I want you and Chris on it.”

“I probably won’t be as useful as I was during the first call.”

“I’m going to give you time to prepare tomorrow. Bill the code. The budget is fucking massive.”

“Ok.”

“How’re you feeling?”

“Good.”

“A little buzzed?”

She only nodded. There was a hint of shame in her eyes. Her shoulders sagged and she looked down at the hands in her lap.

“Finish up,” I instructed, tapping the plate. I didn’t need to tell her she shouldn’t have stolen the alcohol. She knew it was wrong. She had an addiction right now. It was partially my fault.

“Caleb?”

“Mhm?” I asked as I chewed.

“Chris never... he never touched me... did he?”

I whipped my head around to look at her. She flinched slightly, eyes widened, apparently surprised by my reaction.

“I don’t share,” I answered sharply, searching intently for any sign she might be disappointed. The relief that flooded across her face calmed me. I felt a pull of desire. A rush of devotion. I placed my hand to the back of her neck. It was small and fragile beneath my hand. I wanted to throw her down and hold her down. I wanted to take what was mine again and again and listen to her moan like a whore as I did. I squeezed gently instead. The frenzy receiving that text from her this afternoon had put me in was unparalleled. I had dreamed of such a thing for so long. I couldn’t believe it had actually happened.

She finished eating and collected our plates. I watched her closely as she moved. She didn’t appear to be quite so guarded as she had been the first day I came home to a delicious smelling breakfast and a devoted Orla. She looked more thoughtful. Pensive.

She washed the dishes and tidied up. Once finished, she came to stand in front of me. I slid off the stool and took her hand in mine. I guided her into the bedroom in front of me, my

hands on her waist and I enjoyed the sight of her.

“I think I saw you once or twice as an intern,” I told her as we stepped into our bedroom. I slid my hands into the sides of her shorts. “I never paid any attention to the interns - and you weren’t M&A.”

I hunched over to kiss the side of her neck.

“Do you remember the first time we met?”

I continued to place soft kisses along her neck. I gently pulled a strap out of my way and kissed her shoulder.

“We were in the break room,” she answered. “You were with Chris, Amelia, Chloe and everyone.”

“No,” I murmured into another peck on the soft skin.

“You were leaving the elevator,” I reminded her. “And you spilled your things everywhere. I picked them up for you.”

“I - that was you?” She asked. I reached up to grope her breasts. They were so warm beneath the silk. Soft and warm and mine.

“It was,” I said. “In the next three months, I asked you out three times.”

“I honestly don’t remember you asking me out,” she said. I pushed my hand in the front of her shorts. I slid my finger between the hot folds.

“I asked you to coffee. To lunch. Out for a drink. You don’t even remember?”

“I...” she whimpered deliciously as I slid my finger into her. I scraped my teeth along her shoulder and groped her breast. “I only remember you just ... just absolutely ripping me apart.”

“Your work was terrible,” I reminded her.

“You were so mean,” she whispered. I looked at her. Her eyes were closed. I pushed a second finger into her.

“I was honest,” I murmured back. “You rejected me so aggressively, I gave up. Or I tried to. Every time I saw you, all I could think about were the things I wanted to do to you.”

I nibbled on her earlobe. Her body was soft and yielding in my hands.

“The amount of porn I watched... of girls that looked like you. Real degrading shit. It did nothing.”

Her pussy was hot and wet. I moved my fingers in and out of her at a slow but steady pace.

“When I saw you come to the elevators for Happy Hour... the moment I saw you, I knew I’d have you that night. I wish you could have heard what was going through my brain the entire fucking time.”

I pulled the front of the cami down to reveal a full breast. I gently tweaked the pink nipple.

“It was the last drink,” I told her. “You went to the bathroom. Mark nudged the table. Chris took the opportunity to reposition your drink so it wouldn’t spill. Dropped it in. Neither of us expected you to leave so soon, but you picked up the beer and drained it.”

I kissed her cheek.

“What if I... what if I ...”

“If you had just left? I would have had to wait.”

I turned her in my arms. I pushed my wet fingers between her lips and had her taste herself.

“It hit you fast. All those other meds. Chris went out after you because I couldn’t. You looked very confused. I was worried you wouldn’t make it home. While he was getting you the Uber, I closed out. Chris gave me your address, and I jumped in an Uber.”

I bent down and sucked a nipple into my mouth. I nudged her backward into the dark blue quilt. She looked so good on my bed. I pressed a knee to the side of her hip and lifted the cami up to look at my handiwork.

“I ran up the stairs after you, three at a time. I saw you walk into your apartment. Stumble in, I guess. I knocked on the door and you opened it. Everything would have been ruined if you locked the door and passed out before I could get in there with you.”

I traced the lines.

“You were so confused to see me there. But so sweet. So vulnerable. I closed the door. Locked it. And then we were alone. Me and this sexy, curvy, vulnerable body. And I enjoyed you for hours.”

I pulled her shorts down and tossed them to the side.

“You watched the rest.”

I threw her legs apart.

“I wanted you to wake up and feel degraded. I wanted to put you in your place. You don’t want to be my girlfriend, then I’d turn you into a piece of meat for me to use. So I wrote whore on you, because that’s what I’d made you.”

I massaged a breast.

“But when I pulled back, I watched you, you were spread eagle on the bed. My cum was dripping out of you and you looked so... I was overcome.”

I gently kissed the inside of her thigh. I draped a shapely calf over my shoulder.

“I couldn’t leave you there like that. I needed you to know. You were a whore... but I also made you mine.”

I breathed out gently on her thigh. She quivered.

“And I wanted you to know.”

I pressed my lips to her weeping cunt.

“Before I left, I took your spare keys from the cupboard above your bed. I made copies and returned them the next weekend when I came back.”

I pressed my tongue into her and listened to her moan.

“I’ll tell you more tomorrow,” I said. I sucked gently on her clit, flicking her with my tongue. “I’m still hungry.”

I relished in the gasp and the tightening of her thighs as I thrust my tongue inside of her.

He came out of the bathroom with a pill pinched between two fingers. I was disappointed to see my birth control. He handed it to me and then disappeared. When he returned, he had my anti-depressant. I knew better than to ask for a Xanax. He had already given me two today.

“Have you ever been to therapy?” he asked, coming around the other side of the bed. My cheeks reddened.

“All through High School,” I answered honestly. “I stopped in college. It just - it didn’t do much for me.”

“They never suggested any coping mechanisms?”

I shook my head.

“My shrink used to tell me to count backwards from 500. If I got to one and was still angry, I could do what I wanted.”

“You went to therapy?”

He scooted under the covers.

“I like to break things,” he reminded me. “I tried counting with you. Usually, my urges stop around 350. I must have counted to a million and back and still wanted you.”

He turned off the light and scooted closer. He turned me on my side and pressed himself against my back. He kissed my shoulder gently. I closed my eyes. He'd done this before, before I knew. I leaned back into him.

"Try it," he murmured. "Counting backwards from 500."

"Ok," I murmured, but I didn't think it would work. He gently caressed my forehead and hair, before moving his hand to stroke my arm. He kissed my neck softly.

I got to 250 before I fell asleep.

I woke up and Caleb was in the shower. I had clothes at the foot of the bed, and by the time I was up and looking at them, Caleb was coming out of the bathroom with a towel around his waist. He scrubbed a cloth through his damp hair and I looked over the fine smattering of dark hair on his chest.

"Good morning," he greeted. He walked to the closet and examined his suits. I watched the broad muscles of his back ripple as he reached up. I slipped into the bathroom to shower. He was gone when I came back out with dried and straightened hair. He wanted me in a black skirt and a navy blouse. I dressed and came out into the kitchen. He was leaning on the counter, held up by one hand, eating a piece of toast with the other, and was reading his phone.

"Hope you don't mind," he said. "Didn't have a full breakfast in me today."

"Toast is fine," I said. He was in one of his dark navy blue suits, brown belt, brown shoes. He looked very handsome.

"There's peanut butter in the cabinet."

I made myself some toast and he continued to read silently. With a quick glance, I could see it was a work email. I put the peanut butter on the toast and ate silently behind him. Once done, I placed my plates in the sink and went to collect my bag.

He did the same, stopping me at the door to kiss me for a few moments.

“11:15,” he murmured against my lips. “At our spot. Then we’ll eat lunch in the break room.”

He kissed me again.

“Think you’re up for that?”

I nodded as he broke off another kiss. He ran his thumb over my lips, eyes on my mouth, before sighing and opening the door.

The morning was cool and a harsh wind ripped through the outside train platform as we waited for the antiquated green train to pull up to our spot. Caleb, eyes still on his phone, stood to my side, blocking me from the brunt of the wind with his massive frame. I took a tiny step toward him, mindful not to be too close.

Once on the T, he took my elbow in a large hand and steered me into an empty single seater. Not a word was spoken, but he held onto a metal bar above his head and leaned over me, typing with one hand on his phone. His thumb moved quickly across the screen, his hand large enough that he didn’t have to struggle to cross his thumb across the screen.

“What should I focus on this morning?” I asked. He considered a few moments.

“Focus on Sphere. Take your time. Give it four hours. Go through the data room. I’ll pick up any slack. I want to see you go through the report without time constraints. We can set out a good baseline for where to go from there.”

I nodded. It felt good to know I could sit and work for four hours. It was almost unheard of. And I was surprised to find I trusted him. I trusted him to pick up what slack he needed to

protect me. I felt a rush of warmth and comfort flood through me. I reached out for him. My fingers brushed against his coat before I let my hand drop to my lap. I closed my eyes and focused on the sway of the train. When I opened my eyes to scan the sea of people, I noticed a young woman looking at Caleb. No doubt he was stared at quite a bit. My cheeks burned pink and I closed my eyes again. My hand reached out and groped air until my hand found his coat. I gave it one quick, but meaningful, touch before letting my hand drop again. When I glanced back at the girl, she was gone.

Once again, we broke off in front of the building. He went to get coffee for us. I tried to give him money for a coffee for Eddie, but he said he'd pay for it. I told Eddie as I walked in that Caleb would be bringing him his coffee and made him promise, if Caleb didn't get him his coffee, he'd call me at my extension. I got myself settled into my desk and went through my email as I waited for Caleb to bring me up my coffee.

"Ellie," I heard Chris say from the entrance of my cubicle. I turned to look at him but my face was flushed. He looked like a complete stranger, but it put a knot in my stomach. I started to count backwards from 500. "Where's Caleb?"

"He's getting us coffee," I answered.

"Alright, thanks," he said and was swiftly gone. I wished Amelia was in and I wished she sat closer to me. I wanted her to hear Chris coming to ask me where Caleb was and that he was getting me coffee.

When I did hear Caleb's voice coming down the hall, it was mingled with Chris'.

"I think we're going to stay in," I heard Caleb say.

"It would be fun," Chris said.

"Couple weekends. She's fragile. Hey, you get the invitation?"

“Yeah, I’ll be there,” Chris said. “Any girls going or should I bring one?”

“There’ll be plenty,” Caleb said, sounding almost annoyed. They rounded the corner and Caleb gave me a small smile on greeting. He put the coffee down in front of me and Chris took up almost the entire entrance of the cubicle. Caleb placed his hand on the back of my neck. His thumb stroked gently.

“I’m going to go through most of Orla’s reports today, so can you give another walk through the data rooms on your deals? I want to be able to give you a very cursory review,” he said to Chris.

“Yeah, for sure.”

Caleb’s hand slid down my back. He lifted it again and stroked the side of my neck gently.

“Orla, spend the morning on Sphere. We’ll touch base at lunch, see if you need more time. I want you to take your time so I can see what you know and what you don’t as far as throwing reports together. Alright?”

I nodded.

“I’m going to send an invite around so we can discuss Auto. Tomorrow or Friday.”

His hand dropped to my breast, draped over my shoulder, and he squeezed firmly. Chris’s twinkling eyes dropped to the touch and my cheeks burned red with humiliation. Caleb leaned over me, placed his other hand to my breast and squeezed. He placed a kiss to my cheek and then breathed in deeply at my temple.

“11:15,” he reminded me, hands tightening their hold on my breasts. He breathed in again and then placed another kiss on my face. I nodded again, eyes closed. One more squeeze, and then he let me go. He and Chris left my cubicle, leaving my breasts feeling heavy and hot.

I took a sip of coffee and tried to steady myself, but very quickly began to feel jittery. My neck grew stiff and pain radiated at the base of my scalp. It took me about fifteen minutes before I realized the problem. It occurred to me only as I began digging into my purse for the pills that were not there. I reached for my phone and took a steadying breath.

Caleb, can I have a Xanax?

I considered a moment. I deleted the message and typed again.

Caleb, may I have a Xanax, please?

I sent it and waited. Dots appeared and shortly a message followed.

I'm hard as a rock right now.

You're such a good girl.

I don't know how I'm supposed to wait until 11:15.

The messages stopped but I kept staring at my phone. I checked his calendar on the computer and then his bubble. He was green. He had no calls scheduled. I began to grow antsy and angry. I couldn't wait until 11:15 for my Xanax and he *knew* that. I had asked the way he wanted me to ask and he *still* was going to torture me.

I jumped a mile when I felt his hand on my shoulder. He was smiling at me. He glanced over his shoulder and then looked back at me. He held up the little white pill between his fingers and then lowered it to my mouth. I accepted it on my tongue and the wrapped my lips around the straw to my iced coffee.

"Thank you," I smiled as best I could. He took my hand and placed it between his legs. His cock was hard and hot. He leaned down and whispered in my ear, "that's all yours, and I'm going to fuck you so hard today."

He sucked my earlobe into his mouth and then stood. He took hold of a folder I think he must have brought with him. He held it casually below his belt, protecting himself from prying eyes, and then left my cubicle without another word. I felt my heart rate go down as the Xanax took effect and I tried to focus as best as I could on work. It became easier as time passed, but I could still feel his hands on me, feel the heat from his body beneath my hand.

I headed down to our spot at 11:10. I passed his office and found him at his desk. He looked at me, face stone, eyes emotionless. Three months ago I would have thought it was nothing more than a disinterested glare. I knew there was more roiling around beneath the surface now. I knew he would have to hide an erection when he walked down to meet me. I knew he wanted to squeeze my breasts and suck on my earlobe.

I got into the closet and closed the door softly behind me. I turned my back to the door and waited in the darkness, clearing a spot for us on the workbench. I checked my watch at 11:20. I wondered if he got a call. If he was held up. Maybe Amelia got to him in the hallway on his way down. I bit the inside of my cheek, trying to figure out how long I would wait for him. But just as I watched the clock tick to 11:22, the door opened and the room was momentarily flooded with light.

I heard the door click shut. He moved toward me in the darkness and I hoped he wouldn't turn the light on just yet. His arms circled around me and he held me close, his lips ghosting along my temple. He smelled of soap and wintergreen. I sighed and leaned into him. His hands slid up to close around my breasts and he squeezed hard.

"Your tits drive me crazy," he growled in my ear, low and gravelly. I felt a jolt rush through me. His voice. I tried to turn in his arms. One large hand closed around my eyes and he tilted my head back, holding me firm against his shoulder. He clicked his tongue in my ear. "Naughty bitch."

I felt a rush of heat between my legs. He forced his hands into the front of my skirt and pressed his fingers into me through my pantyhose. His teeth scraped my earlobe. He pushed harder on my forehead, forcing my head back on my shoulder.

"You know better than to peek," he said. He slapped my thigh. His hand closed around my throat, the other still on my eyes. "Say you're sorry."

“I’m sorry,” I breathed.

“Eyes closed,” he whispered and lowered his hand from my eyes. I kept my eyes closed. I waited for the soft ‘good girl’ but was left disappointed. He turned me with large hands on my hips and picked me up and deposited me easily on the bench. It was one thing I enjoyed most about him. The ease in which he could move me around. Like I wasn’t so tall or so heavy. He made me feel delicate. I would have never thought Caleb had that capability. But there it was. The melding of the two. That massive, powerful man that made me feel so small, and the strong, tall, broad, immaculate form of Caleb - one and the same. I would have to look at him more closely once we were back upstairs. Make sense of his large, tall frame against mine.

He stepped between my legs and grabbed my hair. He yanked my head back and forced his lips to mine. His tongue pushed far into my mouth, tasting me deeply. I parted my lips for him, wrapping my arms around his neck and holding him close.

I pulled my face from his and pressed my nose into his neck. I breathed in deeply. Plain soap, a hint of wintergreen. I reached up, groping for the light.

“Not yet,” he growled in my ear. He yanked my head back, hand in my hair. He kissed me again, pressing his erection into me. “Breath in.”

I did, him looming over me.

“Say my name,” he ordered. He leaned down and kissed my neck. His thick head of dark hair brushed against my cheek. I smelled his shampoo and felt a rush of familiarity. Without his aftershave, I realized I had smelled his shampoo as well. I turned my face and inhaled deeply.

“Caleb,” I whispered. His teeth scraped my skin. His breath was hot. His tongue was wet. “Caleb.”

I grabbed his head and held it to me, my nose smooshed against his cheek. I breathed in deeply. His jawline was strong, his skin was prickly already. I loved his stubble.

“Caleb, please, can I look at you?”

“Not yet,” he instructed. “Just focus on how I feel.”

He stepped back and very carefully removed my pantyhose. He pushed my skirt up around my hips so I was naked below the waist.

“Take my cock out,” he ordered. I fumbled with his belt. My hands were shaking. I wanted to open my eyes, but I didn’t. I reached into his trousers and his boxer briefs and wrapped my hand around his hot, thick cock.

“Rub my cock against your pussy. Lube me up with your sopping cunt.”

It was a combination between him and Caleb. I tugged his pants and underwear down. I scooted closed and rubbed the head of his weeping cock against my wet pussy. He breathed out against my face. Wintergreen. I wanted to press my face into his hair and breathe in deeply. I settled for pressing his cock more firmly against my pussy.

“Caleb,” I breathed. “Please.”

I pressed the head of his cock into me and then pulled it out. He hadn’t told me to put him inside of me. I rubbed it against my clit. He was breathing hard as I massaged my clit with the sensitive head of his throbbing erection. I was aware my hips were bucking toward him as I rubbed his cock against me.

“Please what?” he asked.

“Please let me look at you. Please fuck me.”

He sucked in a breath as I pressed the head of his cock into me. I pulled it out quickly. He kissed me, hard, hot, and messy.

“Put me inside of you,” he growled. “Put me in deep.”

I pressed him into my pussy. His head, and inch by inch, the rest of his thick shaft. I inched my bottom toward the edge of the desk, angling my hips up, so he could get deeper. I was only vaguely aware of a small ache in my bottom where he had violently raped me the Friday before.

“Caleb,” I panted, breathing his scent in deeply, focusing on the feel of him. I said again, “Caleb.”

“Beg me,” he breathed into my hair. “Beg me to give it to you how you want it.”

“Please, Caleb,” I whispered. “Fuck me like you want me.”

“Like I want you,” he growled, one of his massive hands wrapped around my throat. He reached up and I heard the clink of the chain as he yanked on the light. “Open your fucking eyes.”

I did readily. My eyes locked into his. As dark a gray as I’ve ever seen. His pupils were huge, but slowly shrank in the light. His fingertips dug into the flesh at the bar of my jaw.

“Like I want you,” he repeated. One of his arms wrapped around my waist and he pulled me close. He was as deep inside of me as I thought he could get. “You know how much I want you.”

I watched him, wide eyed, and breathed him in. My nostril flared. I focused on the grating quality of his voice. He pulled out of me and then pushed into me, slow and hard.

“More than any other woman on this fucking plant.”

In and out. Slow and steady.

“Your pussy is so fucking good. I want you so bad. God, Orla, how can’t you see that?”

“Caleb,” I breathed. I wrapped my legs around his waist. “Harder.”

“Demands?” he asked. “Good girls beg.”

“Please, Caleb, please, I’m begging you. Please.”

He took me off the bench and pulled out of me. I was struck with a rush of confusion and anger, but then I was turned and pressed down hard against the bench. My breasts were squashed hard beneath me. One of his hands was tight in my hair. The other was on my waist. He pushed back into me and thrust hard.

“Say my name and who you belong to.”

My head was yanked back and he thrust into me fast and hard. My body was flooded with warmth. It felt so good. And it was him, but it was Caleb too. My hips slammed into the bench, but I hardly noticed.

“I belong to you, Caleb.”

“No, tell yourself,” he said. I hesitated a moment, unsure what he wanted, and then I said, “I belong to Caleb. I’m Caleb’s.”

“Yes,” he said. Pain radiated through my bottom before I registered the sound of skin smacking skin. He slapped me again. “Like that. Say it.”

“I belong to Caleb,” I whispered against the rough wood of the desk. I started to talk to myself. I took in the familiar scent of the closet, the soap, the shampoo. “Caleb owns me. I belong to him.”

“Keep going,” he panted, voice hoarse with excitement. He pushed me down hard into the bench and thrust harder. His hips slammed against my bottom. Pressure continued to build, but then he shifted his hips and the pressure became insurmountable. I gasped.

“I’m Caleb’s. It’s Caleb. You’re Caleb.”

I was almost whispering now. I was talking to myself. He leaned over me, face close to mine as he thrust and listened.

“Caleb raped me.”

“Raped you. Made you mine,” he grated. He pressed his hand into the side of his face. My skin scraped against the hard wood.

“Caleb made me his. Caleb sent the messages. He took the pictures. Caleb. Caleb.”

A moan broke through me as he angled his hips again.

“I belong to Caleb. Caleb. Caleb.”

I moaned low as my orgasm rocked me. I clenched around him tightly. I jerked my hips backward into me. My hips bucked. He wrapped his arm around my neck and held me tightly as his hips became quick, jerky, and deep. Soon, he pulled me up to my feet and held me

against him, and we both stayed there, completely still, save our trembling and panting, and he kissed my cheek.

“Open your eyes,” he said. They fluttered open and I looked up at him. “Don’t ever doubt how much I want you. Your eyes, your hair, your skin, your tits, waist, hips, thighs, pussy, calves, feet. I want every inch of you.”

I looked into his eyes. His shampoo smelled good. I never noticed it when he had his aftershave and cologne on. I would need to look out for that.

“I have eyes only for you,” he breathed. “Everyone else is beneath us.”

I felt a rush of pleasure. It was such a strange sensation. A feeling of camaraderie. The idea made me feel warm. Just him and I. Belonging together. Being worthy of each other.

... but I knew that wasn’t true.

I leaned forward and pressed my cheek to his chest. His arms wrapped around me and I leaned into him. I felt a buzz and then heard an alarm. He stepped back and pressed his watch. His hands cupped my cheek and leaned forward to place his lips against the top of my head.

“You’re so perfect.” He kissed me again, this time on my mouth. “We need to plan a vacation. I need you to myself for a week or two. I don’t want to be away from you for a second.”

His lips were on my neck. I cried out when he yanked my head back and looked over at me.

“Do you think about me? Do you long for me like I do for you?” he asked, brow crinkling. I was nodding before my brain had time to think.

“Yes,” I said.

“It used to drive me insane, knowing I wanted you so badly, and knowing you couldn’t stand me.”

He kissed me.

“But you’re my little slut now, aren’t you?” he asked and kissed me again.

“Yes,” I whispered.

“What do you want for lunch?” he asked.

“A salad?”

“You didn’t like the sub yesterday?”

I swallowed. “I loved it. It’s just…”

I scraped my nails along the back of his neck.

“I’ll buy you a salad, but with a protein,” he said. “What do you want? Chef salad, or steak?”

I shivered. He just always seemed to know. He knew all my preferences.

“Steak,” I answered. “Please.”

He kissed me tenderly.

“Anything for you. When you ask me like that,” he murmured. “I’ll go back first, order our food and pick it up.”

He checked his watch.

“Come to the break room at 12:30. I’ll have it in the fridge for you.”

I nodded and he kissed me again and then pulled back. Gently he rolled my pantyhose up. I closed my eyes. His fingers crawled up my thighs and hips. I slid off the bench and he tugged my skirt down.

“You’re such a good fuck,” he said. My skin flushed red. “If I have to work late, I want you to suck me off before you go home. I want to come on those pretty lips of yours and watch you lick it off.”

He kissed me again.

“Wait five minutes,” he said. “Then head on up.”

“Ok,” I whispered. He held me close.

“Say it again,” he smirked down at me. “Who you belong to.”

“I belong to you, Caleb.” A kiss. “I’m yours.” Another kiss.

“And I’ll never let you go.”

The intensity on which he said washed over me. I felt very cold. He kissed me again and then pulled away. He hesitated a moment, as if it was an actual struggle to leave. Soon enough he was out the door.

I waited the five minutes before going to clean myself up in the bathroom. By the time I was up at my desk, it was time to go to the break room. I wanted nothing more than to hide in my cube. I wondered what Caleb might do if I asked him, very sweetly, submissively, and demurely, if I could eat in my cubicle, if he’d let me. I had a strong feeling he would. I typed out a text message and read it over a few times, but then paused. Probably best to wait, use it when he was more comfortable with me. More sure of my subjugation.

I got up and made my way to the break room. I entered to find it way too busy for my liking. Caleb was seated across from Chris, his arm draped over an empty chair to his right. On his left was Danny, speaking in a light and animated tone to Mark, who was seated across from him, next to Chris, about the upcoming baseball season.

I walked to the fridge and retrieved a salad and soda with a sticky note and my name on it.

“Oh, Orla, here, I saved a seat for you,” Danny said, motioning to the seat to his left. I looked at Chris, who looked amused, and then at Caleb, who was looking at me with a small smile and eyes of stone.

“Um,” I started.

“Yeah, come on, you can’t sit at your desk again today. Mark and I want to talk to you about the fantasy league. You’re in this year, yeah?”

Anne, Amelia, Chloe, and Stephanie walked in. I let out a breath and found myself sitting down beside Danny with hot, blotchy skin. I didn’t have the courage to look at Caleb. I opened up my salad. It was exactly what I had asked for. I felt a sudden rush of guilt and a terrible fear I was going to suffer for this when we got home. I picked at the bits of steak at

my salad while Danny explained the league rules and when the draft would be. I tried to act engaged in the conversation.

“Caleb usually wins,” Danny said. “But I bet if anyone could beat him, it’d be you.”

“Ellie’s playing?” Amelia, who was seated in the once vacant seat next to Caleb. Caleb’s arm was no longer draped over the back of the chair. I felt a rush of satisfaction, and another quick rush of guilt and dread. I should have sat next to Caleb. He’d kill me when he got home.

Amelia continued, “Oh, so the girls are finally allowed in?” She looked at Caleb. “Or is she just getting special treatment.”

Caleb didn’t so much as look up. My skin got hot.

“I asked to join,” I lied. “I like sports.”

“Anyone who wants can join,” Danny said. “It was never a male female thing. Right Caleb?”

“Right,” he rumbled, leaning back in his chair. He tossed a napkin down on his plate.

“Oh, yes then. I’d love to play,” Amelia grinned at the table.

I had a hard time eating. I nibbled at a few pieces of steak before standing.

“Done already?” Danny asked.

“I’m going to eat my desk,” I lied. I avoided both Chris and Caleb as I hurried out of the break room. I let out a hard breath as I stepped out of the unbearably hot room. I needed

another Xanax more than anything, but I was afraid to ask. I turned the corner and slipped into the women's room. I dumped the salad into the trash and then made my way back to my desk to throw out the empty plastic. I stepped out of the bathroom door and stopped in my tracks.

Caleb stood there, leaning against the opposite wall, his hands in his pockets. His eyes dropped to the empty plastic in my hands.

“Devour that up in the bathroom?” he asked. A taut smile was stretched across his face. His eyes glimmered furiously.

“What can I say? Boosts my appetite.”

I gave a halfhearted smile and an even weaker laugh. He didn't look amused. Just then, over a chorus of laughter, people came walking out of the break room. A terrible rush of terror rushed through me. It would be high school all over again. I could have burst into tears, but before anyone could see me leaving the bathroom with an until very recently full, but now empty container of salad, Caleb turned, took it from my hands, and began walking back to his office. I gave some smiles of greetings and fell in next to Chris. The group walked slowly, and I remained as they lingered at the water fountains. I very carefully extricated myself from my conversation about baseball with Danny and turned to Chris.

“How mad,” I asked Chris softly once Danny made his exit.

“You don't need me to answer that,” he said with a sympathetic smile. He gave a shrug, hands in his pockets, and then turned and walked away. When I arrived at my desk, I found a Gatorade and protein bar sitting there with a note that read “eat it.”

I did. I wasn't about to take any risks at the moment. I wrote out a million different texts, some apologizing, some explaining, some asking for my second Xanax - I sent none of them. I spent the afternoon getting my work done instead. I wasn't sure how good it was, but after spending eight hours on a report that should have taken me two, I emailed Caleb with it. I got a text message from Caleb about ten minutes later telling me to go home.

I packed up with a pounding heart. I gave a quick perusal of the office as I walked. It was just past seven and most everyone had already gone home. I paused outside of Caleb's office and took on a sobering breath. Finally, I turned the handle and stepped inside. I shut the door softly behind me. Only once the door was clicked shut and I took another calming breath, did I look up at him. He was at his desk, suit jacket off, shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows.

"I messed up," I told him. He said nothing. He just stared. "I'm sorry."

He continued to stare.

"I should have sat next to you. I know that - "

"You're not eating," he cut me off. I shook my head, eyes lowered. "Did you eat the sub yesterday? The day before?"

Another shake of the head. "I threw it out in the bathroom. I threw the wrapper in the garbage in case you checked."

He let out a deep sigh.

"I ate the protein bar. And drank the Gatorade," I hurried out, hoping to mitigate the damage.

He stared at his computer. I thought of the way his hands touched me in the closet, the way his lips felt. I bit my lip and walked over to him. I tossed a quick glance over my shoulder. The blinds were pulled so no one could see. I lowered myself down to my knees in front of him.

"I'm sorry," I said. He looked down at me. I was trembling very slightly. I whispered, "I'm trying."

He just stared at me. I wondered if he was counting. I wanted to say something. Something that would make him less angry, that would keep him happy with me - and make him bored. I wanted him to tell me again that he thought everyone else was beneath us. I didn't want him to think I wasn't the girl he thought I was - otherwise he might not get bored. I reached up and pulled at his belt buckle.

"I'm really sorry," I said. His lips parted. He watched me with hot eyes. It sent heat flooding through me. The desire I saw there. He lifted his hips and helped me lower his pants down. I removed his erection from his boxer-briefs. "Are you mad at me?"

"Yes," he said. I nodded, stroking his erection. His eyes closed for a moment. He leaned back and opened his eyes again. As our eyes met and I saw the heat in his eyes, I wrapped my lips around him, intent on making sure he would still feel the same when I left as he did while we were in the closet.

Chapter Notes

Shorter chapter, but don't go getting used to this people. I could disappear again for months at a moment's notice. ;-)

Thank as always for the comments. It truly inspires me to keep writing, knowing people enjoy the product so much. Makes it worthwhile putting my darkest fantasies down on paper. <3

I woke to the feel of her lips on my neck. For a while I actually thought it was a dream. Then my alarm began to blare and her lips did not disappear. Her lips continued to press against my throat and she grabbed onto my phone. The alarm paused and I pressed my hand to her hips. Lazily, I trailed my hands up her waist and focused on the touch of her lips. I didn't care what prompted it. I simply meant to enjoy it. I felt her lips moving down my chest and I let out a low sigh as her head slipped under the covers. Soft fingers pulled my boxers down. My cock was enveloped with hot, soft, heat. I sucked in a breath and pressed my hands to the side of my head. I wanted to grab her by the hair and shove my cock down her throat, but I didn't want to discourage such... wonderful behavior. I wondered a few more moments if I was dreaming. I had many of these dreams in the past. So many. It was hard to know if they were real. Her tongue moved around the head of my cock and then her lips slowly moved along the head. So deliciously soft and warm, I knew it was real. I groped for my phone and reset my alarm for another thirty minutes. I didn't want a nine minute snooze ruining this. She continued to suck and lick and move her head up and down until I felt my orgasm spasm through me. I grabbed her head for that, making sure every drop of my cum went right into that gloriously wonderful mouth of hers. Slowly, she put my boxers back up around my hips, and then crawled upward. She settled on my chest, pressed her face against my neck, and kissed me. Then she murmured softly in the dark.

"I'm sorry about yesterday."

I wrapped my arms around her waist. When I got home yesterday she had been awake, laying in bed, her phone illuminating her in the darkness. I had retrieved her birth control and antidepressant. I cut half a Xanax but withheld it. I turned on the lamp and gave her a glass of water with the pills. I changed, feeling her eyes on me, her lip between her teeth. I hung my suit in the closet, tossed my shirt in the hamper, and then went into the bathroom to piss and brush my teeth. When I came back out, she finally spoke.

“I can’t sleep,” she murmured. “I counted.”

I sat down back on the bed, my back to her.

“May I please have a Xanax?” she asked. “I didn’t have a second and... I just want to sleep.”

I kept my back to her. In truth, I was furious. I had *told* her I liked her figure and she still refused to eat. I didn’t know how to possibly get through to her and it drove me absolutely insane. I turned and handed her the half Xanax. She looked disappointed but took it, swallowing it dry.

She settled into the blankets, her eyes still on me. I turned the lights off and settled down beside her, but not touching her. There was silence and I thought she was asleep. Then she whispered, “Caleb?” I grunted and she continued, “Can you...”

She stopped. My eyes were heavy. I wanted to sleep.

“Can I what?” I rumbled.

“Yesterday, when I counted it worked.”

“Ok,” I said.

“I think maybe ... yesterday you were stroking my hair and...”

She fell silent again. I turned toward her, closing my arms around her and pulling her close. She had turned and pressed her back to my chest. I stroked her hair softly and told her to count out loud. She did. I told her to begin counting in her head when she got to 400. When I

softly whispered her name five minutes later, she did not respond, and her breathing was slow and steady.

“Caleb?” She said now, taking me out of my memory. “I really am sorry.”

“I don’t care that you didn’t sit with me. I care it’s just... is it because I bought the food, or just food in general?”

I couldn’t help but remember she ate the stuffed peppers she made the day before. Was it because I was watching or because it didn’t come from me?

“Just food, I - I look the best I’ve looked since before law school,” she said. “I don’t want ... I don’t want to go back to...”

“Shhh,” I murmured. I ran my hands up her waist. I checked the clock. I wasn’t sure if I would make it to the gym today, but I didn’t care. I tossed the blankets off of us and slid out from underneath her. I held out my hand and gently tugged her out of bed. I dragged her in front of the mirror and slowly pulled her shorts off her legs. Then I tossed off the cami, leaving her naked.

“Look at yourself,” I ordered. She closed her eyes and shook her head. “You don’t want me mad at you? Then look at yourself.”

A moment of hesitation and then she looked up at the mirror. I tapped her ribs. “You can see them.” I tapped her collar bone. “Too pronounced.” I caressed her hip bones. “Too bony.”

I brought up my hands to settle on the side of her ribs. “You think you don’t like your weight. You don’t like your *shape*.”

I gently pressed my fingertips into her skin. “Now watch this.” I murmured in her ear. “Look how *narrow* your waist is.” I breathed. I lowered my hands down the swell of her waist. “And that sexy curve of your hips.”

I pressed my lips to her temple. “You’re *curvy*. You’ve got that hourglass figure. The perfect female shape. And it always looks better just a bit *fuller*. ”

I kissed her neck.

“I told you. Curvy doesn’t mean fat.”

“Curvy is what mothers call their daughters when they find them throwing up in the bathroom,” she whispered hoarsely. I was stunned by the admission. I looked up at her, our eyes locking in the mirror. “It’s a lie.”

“ *Look. At. Your. Self.* ”

She did. I saw disgust in her eyes. I grabbed her by the chin and lifted her face up. I wanted to tell her what I thought. I wanted to tell her she was a *goddess*. She was a goddess before and she was a goddess now. I wanted to say it but the words were frozen on my tongue. I released her and she asked if she could go to the bathroom. I told her she could and went to the closet. I picked out a suit, one of my navy suits, and hung it up. When she came back up, she told me she’d have breakfast for me when I got back from the gym. She promised to eat.

“No,” I said. “We’re going to shower, I’m going to fuck you, and then we’re going to have a nice big breakfast. I’m going to watch you eat every bite, and if you need to go to the bathroom in the next three hours, I’ll be right there with you to make sure everything stays in your stomach.”

She lowered her eyes and nodded. “Can I go to the gym with you on Saturday? If I promise to eat?”

I fought off a sigh and nodded silently instead. I brought her into the bathroom. It was easy to strip down from my boxers and gently draw her into the warm spray. I lathered her up, shampooed and conditioned her, and did everything but shave her. But the time I was rubbing the body wash into her breasts, I was hard again.

I fucked her hard against the shower wall. I wanted to show her how much I wanted her. I didn't want to shame her for her thin frame. I wanted her to know it was *her* I wanted, not just her body. But I wanted her with a bit more on her. It truly baffled me she ever thought she was fat . She had always been perfect.

Her arms wrapped around me and she pressed her nose into me. She let out delicious little sounds. It spurred me on and I fucked her harder. She liked it hard and rough, no matter what she might try to tell herself. I felt her orgasm ripple through her and made sure to come deep inside of her. I left her to shave and finish cleaning up. I shaved my face in the fogged up mirror, wiping it clean every other stroke of the razor. She stepped out of the shower, surprised to see me there, and quickly covered herself with a towel.

She left the bathroom before I finished shaving. She was in the kitchen, preparing coffee and cooking up some omelets. I made us both a cup of coffee from the fresh pot and then went into the bedroom to select her outfit for the day. I chose a green blouse and a black skirt. Her eyes always looked so amazing when she wore green. The suit I chose was an older suit, but it held up. I had been wearing it the first night I fucked her. I ran my hands over the collar reverently.

I went back out, coffee finished, to find breakfast ready for me. I ate at the island, watching her where she stood by the coffee maker. She poured us each a new pot of coffee. We remained there in silence for a bit before she finally spoke.

"I don't like Amelia," she said, as if she were revealing some grand secret. She stared at me, waiting anxiously for my reaction.

"Ok," I answered, unsure what she was expecting. "I didn't think you did."

"I'd rather she not be around any more than necessary."

I took a sip of my coffee. I considered carefully and then asked, "can you give me an example of her being around when it was unnecessary?"

She blinked.

“I mean,” I continued, “I can’t tell her she can’t use the break room. I can’t tell her not to come to work. I can’t tell her not to interact with her coworkers. But if you think I’ve done anything to encourage her pursuit of me, tell me what it is and I’ll stop.”

She looked off to the side as she thought. I wasn’t sure if even in her seemingly warped perception of reality, she could pinpoint anything that could be perceived as interest on my part. I waited and kept the smile off my face as she came up empty.

“Amelia knows I don’t want her. I’ve told her so. If I wanted her, I’d have had her,” I said. I took another sip of coffee and brought up the last bite of omelet to my lips. Before putting the fork into my mouth I said, “now she’s just trying to mitigate her own humiliation.”

I put my fork on my plate and moved around to the sink. I paused by her, placed my hand on her hip and lowered a kiss to her mouth. “That was delicious. Thank you.”

I rinsed off the dish.

“She’s not friends with your friends then?” Orla asked. “If we ever go out with your friends, she’s not going to be there.”

“My friends don’t know her and those that do don’t really like her,” I answered obviously.

“So even before I got there, you two never hooked up?”

I turned to look at her, leaned against the counter, and crossed my arms.

“She’s tried but I’ve never been more than casually polite with her. I make it a rule not to date my coworkers.”

She looked up at me, those green eyes sparkling with thought. That spark had been missing from her gaze for some time. Getting her off those pills had done wonders for her.

“Present company excluded,” I smirked. I reached out and pulled her toward me. She had put her cami set back on. Her skin was still pink and warm from the shower. “I made an exception for you.”

I held her close to me, stroking my thumb against her lower back.

“I can’t be rude to her,” I told her. “She’s already throwing little comments around about you and I don’t think either of us wants to lose our jobs. Did I do anything yesterday that made you feel like I was flirting with her?”

She shook her head. She placed her hand on my bare chest, eyes on the spot her hand rested on. I was overwhelmed by the intimacy of the moment. I wanted to wrap my arms around her and squeeze and squeeze and squeeze. I raised my hand and gently trailed my knuckles along her cheek instead.

“I only want you,” I vowed. “The rest of them, they’re all beneath us.”

She looked up at me. The golden flecks in her green eyes were beautifully illuminated by the overhead lights.

“I don’t ever want you to doubt how much I want you or how beautiful I think you are,” I told her. For the millionth time I laid myself bare in front of her. She stared at me, eyes moving over my face intently. She nodded slowly. I felt a glimmer of hope that was beginning to accept her situation, our relationship. Time, space, and encouragement. It wasn’t my strong suit.

“Are my clothes laid out?” she asked. I swallowed down my annoyance that she gave no reassuring words in return. My fingers flexed on her waist and then I released her. I drained my mug and poured a third cup of coffee.

“On the bed.”

She went into the bedroom. When I entered, she had her skirt on, bra on and cami tucked into her skirt. She had eaten about half of her omelet but I didn't press. I'd make sure she had a good lunch.

I got dressed and was rubbing some product into my hair when she entered the bathroom. She grabbed her hairdryer, plugged it in, and began drying her hair. I watched her as she watched herself in the mirror. I'd dreamed of this so many times. A calm, comfortable morning getting ready for work with her with me. I left her to finish getting ready with a quick squeeze of her ass and a kiss to her neck.

I was reading through my email on my phone with my fourth cup of coffee when she came out of the bedroom, ready for work. It was a cool day and the train was delayed. I was about to take my coat and give it to her when I saw the train squealing toward us. I wasn't able to get her a seat, but I steered her against the wall so no one would be able to brush up against her. I wanted to put my hands on her waist and hold her closer, put my lips on hers and press our tongues together, but it wasn't worth the risk of being seen.

She stood with her eyes closed, hand on the bar above her head, allowing herself to be jostled by the noise train. I took the time to look at her. The gentle arch of her eyebrows, the slope of her nose, that unique color of her hair, not brown and not red, but so beautiful. The delicate flutter of her eyelids, the soft pursing of her lips.

I got us coffee at Dunkin' Donuts, brought Eddie a coffee and told him it was from Orla. He asked me how she was doing. I told her he was alright, feeling better, doing great work since her promotion. The man was genuinely excited to hear she had been promoted. She inspired that kind of devotion. I'd seen her, with those other than me, being genuinely kind without any sort of expectation of a return on her investment. It was hard not to love her. I dropped off her coffee and sat at the edge of her desk.

“I sent you comments back on Sphere. Take the morning to focus on Auto and the call, spend two hours going through my sphere comments. Then we'll discuss any questions you have and plan out the rest of this afternoon and tomorrow. Deal?”

She nodded and smiled. I touched her face and trailed my thumb along her lower lip. I gave her a Xanax, kissed her and left. I paused to talk to Chris about our weekend plans. He wanted us to go out with him, Crispy, and some of our other buddies. I told him it wasn't a good idea. Taking her out to a bar right now seemed like the worst possible thing I could do. Maybe she'd be able to one day have a normal relationship with alcohol, under strict supervision, but this weekend wasn't that day.

I finished up some minor deals that needed to be closed until our scheduling meeting. I walked into the conference room with Chris and Mark, discussing baseball. She was already in the conference room, her laptop on her lap, typing away rapidly, brow furrowed and eyes intent. I gave a smile and a nod to Chloe. I would try integrating with her a bit more. I respected her and Orla liked her. Her husband was a cool guy as well. We took a seat closer to the front. I watched Danny come into the room. His eyes scanned the room, and then a smile came to his face. I glanced back just long enough to see him take his seat next to Orla. She looked up in surprise just before I turned back around.

The scheduling meeting was monotonous and unnecessary. I waited for Orla's middle name to be said and for her soft, "busy with deal work."

Her voice sounded strong and steady. Immediately after the meeting, she followed Chris and I into my office. I shut the door, the blinds left open, and sat behind my desk.

"This should just be a status update. FDD isn't done with diligence. Nothing is routine with this guy though so, Orla I want you to have our calcs up. Chris, our technical charts."

"Aye, aye," Chris said dryly. I looked at Orla. She was looking at her laptop, but then nodded and said "ok. Ready."

The call went smoothly enough. I took it to mean we had passed the German's tests and he was less inclined to grill us during every call. I called on Chris for support a couple of times. I needed Orla once. Both came through in a pinch. After the call I was in a great mood. The two people I loved most in life were with me and supporting me. Chris got up to leave and Orla began to rise.

"Sit down," I told her. "Chris, leave the door open."

Chris gave a little salute, flashed a grin and a wink in Orla's direction and left the room.

"I have some calls this afternoon, so I just want to chat real quick. Go through those Sphere comments. Don't spend more than two hours on it. Then just send me what you have. It was a good report. You don't have too much to do but I don't want you to feel rushed. Then I want you to review the calcs you just got back from Peter. Check everything. He's lazy."

She was taking notes as I spoke. If she had just taken direction like this from her first day, she might be partner by now. The thought was a bit flippant and I let a small smile come to my face. She looked up and waited.

"We have calls for Desperado and Red Moon, on Tuesday and Wednesday, so tomorrow you need to go through those two reports and get them to me by COB. Think that's doable or too much?"

"I can do it," she said. I gave her a hard look.

"I want to enjoy my weekend. If I get shit reports I'm not going to be happy."

She opened her mouth and I held up a hand.

"If you don't think it's going to happen, I need you to tell me as early tomorrow as possible so I can readjust my schedule. I don't care right now if you don't think you can meet the timeline. I care if you don't communicate. Alright?"

She nodded.

"I'm booked all afternoon. I won't be able to leave for lunch, but," I cleared my throat and checked the area outside my office. It was empty, and so I dropped my voice but proceeded,

“I’ll have lunch for you in the fridge by 12:30. You’ll sit with Chris and he’s going to make sure you eat it all. And so help me God, if you go into the bathroom and...”

I didn’t want to say it. It was a heavy accusation, but I saw immediate recognition in her eyes. Her cheeks reddened and I sensed some guilt and shame creeping over her. I didn’t harp on it.

“Ok?” I asked instead. She nodded again. I hoped she would start speaking again soon. Her neck had to be sore with the sheer amount she was nodding or shaking her head recently.

“Alright. If you have questions that come up, just ask me. If I don’t answer you within five minutes or so, ask Chris.”

Her features took on an interesting expression when Chris was mentioned. Though it wasn’t really an expression. Her face was blank and rigid, her eyes a bit steelier.

“Alright, go on then,” I said. She rose, collected her things, and left my office. I didn’t look away from her until she was out of sight.

I was halfway through a diligence call when I got a text from her around 2:45.

I know you’re in a call, but when you have a second, could I please have a Xanax? I’m feeling a little anxious.

I took my phone and texted Chris. He came in a few seconds later, took the other half of the Xanax that I had given her last night and walked off toward Orla’s office. He had just dipped back into his cubicle when my phone buzzed and I saw *thank you* on my screen.

I got so wrapped up with my last call, which ran late, that I didn’t even realize the time until the call disconnected. It was ten past eight. The target, which was located out west, had requested a 6:00 PM call. Not unheard of, but it had sprung up at about 4:30 and I’d spent the afternoon updating notes for Nick. I texted Orla.

Did you go home?

I didn't get an immediate response. She could be sleeping, but I found that unlikely. I walked down the hall and looked into her cubicle. She was at her desk, typing up what looked like the Desperado report. I got up behind and had been reading over her shoulder for about thirty seconds before she jumped and let out a cry of surprise.

"You need to be more aware of your surroundings," I told her.

"I usually am," she said.

"I can tell you from experience, you're not and you never were," I answered dryly. "Looks like you've made some good progress today."

"So much," she said, happily turning back to the computer. "Can I stay another hour? I want to get this finished tonight."

As tempted as I was to give her whatever she asked for, I said no.

"I want to go to sleep and ..." I stepped up on the balls of my feet to do a quick scan around the office. "I don't want you walking to the T and back to the apartment alone."

She turned, ready to fight. I stared back, waiting. I watched the battle play out in her eyes and across her brow. She relented and nodded. She shut down, collected her things, and we headed for the T together. She talked to me about some of her questions on Desperado. Her questions were far and above what a senior was expected to know or do. At least, what she was expected to know or do this early on in her career. A small smile touched my lips as I listened to and watched her. I had always been successful, once I got my anger under control. I am intelligent, but my success came from my tenacity and my work ethic. Orla was truly brilliant. I had watched my brothers pass over girls before simply because they were smarter than they were. I'd never understood it. I had longed to come across a woman that could match me, but Orla surpassed me in raw intelligence. I felt blood rush between my legs and I

looked down at her mouth as she spoke. She fought me on a couple issues, but when I explained the nuance, she accepted it and seemed to process the information and committed it to memory.

I opened the door to my apartment and gently ushered her inside. She removed her coat and it up. I placed mine on the hook and then pulled her closer to me.

“Go change into the green silk pjs. I’ll make dinner.”

“Don’t you want to change first?” She asked. She accepted my kiss on the lips, returning it timidly.

“If I follow you into the bedroom, we won’t be eating anytime soon,” I said. I gave her lip a bite. “I’ll whip up something quick. Then I’ll give you a nice hard fuck.”

“Can you shower first? Smell like you did. And we’ll leave the lights on?” she asked.

“Do you not like my aftershave?”

I asked. It was fucking expensive and I’d worn it since I was in college. It would be hard adjusting to a different scent.

“No, I like it,” she hurried out. “I’m trying to... to combine the memories.”

I nodded.

“Ok.” I stroked her cheek. “I can do that.”

“Thank you,” she smiled. Her smile lit up her entire face. It touched her eyes. I didn’t want to let her go, but I did. I threw together some sandwiches and got us some seltzers. By the time she was out, I had half my sandwich down. I asked her if I could trust her to eat if I left to take a shower. She told me she would. She was hungry. I wasn’t entirely convinced, but I left anyway. I wanted to be inside of her, all around her.

I scrubbed myself clean and stepped out of the shower and threw on some clean boxers. When I came out, she was sitting on the edge of the bed closest to me, staring into space. When I entered she looked up with a small smile.

“I feel good today,” she said. “Today was a good day.”

She spoke in a measured tone but with certainty.

“Good,” I said, sitting down beside her. “That makes me happy.”

I took her hands and held them in mine.

“I want you to be happy.”

She looked at me, her eyes searching mine. She reached up and touched either side of my neck. Her hands were so cool to the touch. She pressed her lips to mine, but it was not a fleeting kiss. She deepened it, pressing her tongue between my lips and against my own. She pulled back and whispered, “is that ok?”

“Yes,” I breathed hoarsely. She pulled me back down to her mouth. I fought every urge I had not to take control of the kiss. It felt so amazingly euphoric having her tongue in my mouth, having her hands on my face, having her come to me. My problem was, had always been, I couldn’t just sit back. I needed to do something. I needed to take control. But it felt so good, *her kissing me*.

I kept the tremble from my hands as I grabbed her by the waist and broke off the kiss. I scooted back up to the pillows and laid back. I guided her over my hips to straddle me. I pulled her back down to kiss me. I kept my hands from her face but often, my hands crept up, ready to grab her by the hair and flip her over. Instead, as our mouths opened more widely and our tongues fought for dominance, I took hold of her hips and grinded her hard against my boxer clad erection.

“You’re so sexy,” I breathed into the kiss. I tugged at the bottom of her cami. “Take this off.”

She leaned back and obeyed. Her nipples were small, hard buds. I reached up and closed my hand around them both, feeling the hard buds against my palms. I released them and then slowly moved my hands back to her waist. Her hands pressed on my chest and she lifted her hips up. She lowered them back down on my covered erection. I watched, pulling her shorts to the side to watch her pussy grind against my boxers. I reached for her neck but then stopped myself.

“Kiss me,” I demanded. She hesitated, watching me. She had flushed cheeks and parted lips. It was only a moment of hesitation, and then she leaned forward and kissed me again. I groped a breast, my hand gliding up her spine. I pinched a nipple.

“Put me inside of you,” I said into her kiss. I lifted my hips to help her pull my boxers down. Her shorts were loose, but she needed to slip them off. She pressed me at her tight, wet opening. She looked a little hesitant. I laid back, hands at my sides and watched her with hot eyes. A soft pink tongue darted out to wet her bottom lip. Nervously, she moved herself down on me. A soft moan passed through her lips and she arched her hips. I could have come right then and there. I might have if not for the sharp pain and the taste of copper that flooded my mouth. She looked at me again, eyes searching.

“Ride me,” I ordered. She rolled her hips, grinding back and forth. It did little for me, but the look that spread across her face was absolutely amazing. I fought the urge to put my hands on her hips. I didn’t want her to stop. I didn’t want her to think I wanted her to change anything. When it got too much for me, I reached up and grabbed one of her breasts, massaging my thumb against the nipple.

“Make yourself cum,” I told her. “Don’t worry about me.”

Her eyes opened and she looked at me. I nodded. Truth was she didn't need to worry about me. I was on the verge of embarrassing myself as it was. She then closed her eyes and pressed her hands down on my chest. I trailed my hands up and down her thighs. Squeezing and slapping as I went. I had always thought she was beautiful, gorgeous, hot, cute, sexy, whatever variation of attraction, she was it. But watching her, moving her hips and finding pleasure in my body, was something else entirely. Even if she didn't accept it yet, she was already mine and had been for some time.

I sensed she might have trouble. Inexperience on her part. She's never ridden me and I highly doubted that buffoon she'd lost her virginity to. I pressed my thumb into her clit.

"I want to kiss you," she said. I lifted my chin and she fell forward, her mouth crushing onto mine. Unable to stop myself any longer, I grabbed her by the hips and moved her up and down, back and forth.

She jerked her hips back and forth, and then, a shudder escaped her. She was not over emotive with her orgasms, but they were unmistakable all the same. Her body tightened around mine and I released the tension I had been trying to hold on to so badly. She fell on top of me, her breasts smashing against my chest. I wrapped my arms around her and enjoyed the sound of our heavy breaths mingling together between us.

I let her clean herself up first then went into the bathroom and got her meds. When I came back out she was under the covers, nestled in the pillows, eyes growing heavy. I climbed on top of her and kissed her neck.

"I really don't know what you're doing," I murmured into her neck. "But I'm enjoying it."

"I'm not doing anything," she said. She ran her hands through my hair. "I'm just trying to ... not be so fucked up."

I pulled back and brushed her hair back.

"So, I was thinking. For Saturday, we'll wake up and go to the gym," I kissed her right cheek. "And then grab some breakfast." I kissed her jaw. "Then thought we'd go to the bookstore. You used to read all the time. It's a healthy thing to start focusing on other than booze and

pills. Like exercise. Then we can swing by your studio and grab some of your things, then come back here for a quiet afternoon. I'll pick up some tea. Earl grey?"

"And candles?" she asked.

"Candles?"

"I love candles."

I thought back. She had a few candles in her apartment, but I hadn't taken much notice of them.

I smiled. "Then we'll get candles." I thought back harder. "Fresh linen?"

A small smile.

"I'd like that," she said. "That sounds nice."

She said it softly, her fingers trailing over my shoulders. I leaned down and kissed her neck. I breathed her in deeply. Her fingers continued to thread through my hair. I loved how she did that. It was one of my favorite things she did. It felt so good.

"I'm tired," she murmured. "I could fall asleep right now."

"So fall asleep," I said. I kissed her neck.

"Can I - "

“Shhh,” I said. I moved under the covers and pulled her to me. She leaned into me and I stroked her hair the way she liked it. I fell asleep long after her, simply enjoying the smell of her hair.

I woke up when Caleb was crawling out of bed. I listened as he went to the bathroom, dressed, collected his gym bag, and then gently shut the door as he left. I felt remarkably good. Awake and clear headed. I was the most awake I’d felt in some time. Yesterday, I had felt the best I had in as long as I could remember. I was sure as I laid in bed that this day would be even better.

I could not have gone back to sleep, but I wasn’t awake enough to get out of bed. I laid there for a while and thought about the night before. I had realized something yesterday that gave me yet another wave of clarity. Caleb was difficult to read and I was particularly bad at reading him. It wasn’t until I was on top of him, watching his eyes move over my body, that I fully understood that this *wasn’t* just about punishment and humiliation. He did want dominance and control. Those were driving factors, but it also became clear to me, he *did* desire me. I saw it in his eyes. That wasn’t a lie.

I realized as I laid in bed, that the things he said to me, he meant. It did not shake my underlying belief though. He wanted me so badly because I had rejected him. He did find me attractive, but if I had thrown myself at him the same way Amelia did, he would look at me with the same level of contempt as he looked at Amelia. I just had to throw myself at him in the same way and he’d eventually come to resent me.

I got out of bed with a tight, sick feeling in my belly. I was out of the shower, dressed in one of Caleb’s large t-shirts, a towel on my head, sitting in the living room and drinking coffee when he came back from the gym. His eyes found me and he smiled. His gym bag hit the floor with a soft thud and he came toward me.

“Morning,” he greeted.

“Morning,” I replied. “What do you want for breakfast?”

“Just some scrambled eggs?” he asked. I nodded.

“I’ll be right out,” he said. He bent down to kiss me and then went into the bedroom. I finished my coffee before I got up to make breakfast. I put on a fresh pot of coffee and fought the urge to ask for a Xanax. It’s a strange feeling. I wanted to maintain my current clarity, but the thought of it, putting the pill between my lips and tasting the chalky bitterness, feeling the tiny, hard little pill go down my throat, it was such a comforting feeling. It was what I did. The mere act of taking the pill brought me calm.

He came out, dressed in his trousers and dress shirt, navy and powder blue, hair combed, face shaved, and bent down to kiss me. I focused on the smell of his aftershave, soap, and his shampoo. His lips were soft and gentle. His arms snaked around my waist.

“You drive me nuts dressed like that,” he rumbled and kissed me again. “Fucking adorable.”

I embraced the warmth I got from those words, disregarding who was saying it and what he’d done to me. It was a good momentary replacement of the Xanax. He kissed me again and then pulled back.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

“Good,” I said. “Better than yesterday.”

He looked over his shoulder as he opened the fridge. “Yeah? You said yesterday was a good day.”

“It was. I think today will be too,” I answered. He took out the creamer and milk, along with some orange juice.

“Good. That’s great,” he said. He poured two small glasses of orange juice and then came over to pull me into a gentle embrace, his hands on my waist. “Last night was great.”

He watched me.

“Did you enjoy it?”

I nodded. I wasn't lying. He kissed me.

“Let's try and get in a bit early,” he said. “I'd like to have a relaxing, early evening.”

That sounded perfect to me. I just nodded. I found it difficult to speak in front of him. I didn't trust my voice right now.

“Your clothing is on the bed,” he told me. I finished eating and dressed quickly. I took his suit coat from the hanger it was and brought it to him. He smiled at me and turned so I could help him into his coat.

“Let's switch to a half Xanax in the afternoon for a couple days. You've done well with that.”

“Ok,” I said, though I wanted more than anything to fight. If I could get two for as long as he was willing, I wanted nothing more than to do that. I knew I needed to be less resistant though, and so I smiled and nodded. He circled his large arms around me. I couldn't help but think about the muscles that lay beneath his suit, the ones that had been so clearly on display last night while I was on top of him.

“I can't wait for the weekend to start,” he said, pressing his cheek to the top of my head. He swayed us ever so slightly. After a few moments he asked, “ready.”

I nodded and we headed out. He outlined my day on the T. I asked him if we'd be seeing each other at all. I thought he would know what I meant. He seemed to and shook his head, still looking at his phone.

“I have calls all afternoon. Focus on work,” he said somewhat dismissively. He slipped his phone into his pocket and hung onto the bar above his head, bending toward me and flashing me a grin: “we’ll make up for it tonight.”

Caleb had two very distinct smiles. His closed mouth smiles were reserved for himself. Those little smirks where it appeared he was smiling more at whatever was going on in his head than what was happening in front of him. Only the right side of his mouth would elevate and his eyes never held any sort of mirth or joy. They were hard, mocking, and aggressive.

His opened mouth smiles were rare. He’d flash his perfectly straight, perfectly white teeth, his eyes would light up, and usually, a rich, deep chuckle would pass through his lips. He still looked guarded in those moments, self-assured and arrogant, but genuinely pleased at whatever he was doing.

The smile he gave me then was a third kind of smile I had never seen before. It was smaller, open lipped and lopsided, but his face was open and his eyes glimmered with a kind of comfort and familiarity. I had only ever seen that same level of unguarded news on Caleb’s face when he was interacting with Chris. It was a glimpse into the Caleb that existed when he wasn’t destroying peoples confidence at work and I felt a not so small rush of excitement to know that I was one of the few to be so freely exposed to it.

I looked down with an embarrassed smile of my own, though I was a bit disappointed. Our past couple excursions to the closet had been good for me and the more we had sex and I focused on melding the two men together in my mind, the more at ease I was feeling about the entire thing. It could have possibly been the fact that I wasn’t downing a dangerous cocktail of Xanax, antidepressants, and wine on a daily and nightly basis, but I didn’t think it was that alone.

I looked back up at him. I took in the slight shadow under his jaw, the length of his eyelashes, the way he styled his hair to make it impossible to notice the fact that he had a little cowlick on the right side of his otherwise straight hairline. He looked back at me, a tiny little curve to his mouth. I didn’t look away. There really wasn’t a need to anymore. I really took in his features, his coloring, his eyes.

That morning, I was truly considering the fact that I had just been reading him wrong all this time. That he kept his emotions well-guarded beneath his face of stone and what I thought had been contempt had been hidden desire (obsession) and his condescending tone and

remarks had been a genuine effort to help me. It made him no less frightening or arrogant, but it altered his motivations and with it, I could look at his mannerisms through a different lens. I still believed, in my core, that his obsession had been born from rejection. He might find me beautiful, but once the triumph of his victory had worn off, he'd move on to torment his next challenge. If I had given in to his good looks and fit body when I first started, let him take me out to coffee and fell into his bed like a giggling schoolgirl, we wouldn't be standing here today. Why else did he have zero interest in Amelia, other than that she simply tried too hard?

"Everything alright?" he asked softly. The train was crowded, bodies jostled around us. I nodded. I looked at him, feeling so wonderfully clear headed and so remarkably aware, that I felt a rush of exhilaration that mirrored a high. I felt content and for the first time in my life.... confident. The way he'd looked up at me last night, that all-encompassing, raw, *needy* desire. The way he'd talked about my body - I believed he meant it. I had the power to turn my life around and get rid of him. Want him the way he wants me, and I'd be free of him. I'd been working under that assumption, but I wasn't so certain of it until now.

I smiled at him, chanced a quick touch to his jacket, and told him softly, "I'm looking forward to the weekend too."

I focused on holding on to the surge of confidence I felt. It would be so much easier if I could reach out and hold his hand or slide my arm through his. The shortest bit of apparent indifference from him was crippling to any confidence I was able to scrape together from his words or looks in private. I focused on remembering the look in his eyes last night. The way he looked up at me as I lowered myself down on him. There was no faking that. If he was, he should have gone to Hollywood.

As we approached the building, I readied to veer off away from him, but he placed a hand to my hip and kept me straight. He removed his hand quickly, but the feel of his touch lingered on my hip and I felt another surge of confidence. Even when in public, he couldn't keep from touching me. We passed the building, and continued on toward the intersection. A brisk wind cut through the air, and I dug my hands into my pockets and lifted shoulders.

"We can't do it everyday," he said. "But we both take the green line. Not a stretch to say we run into each other occasionally."

It was one of the reasons that I knew he would tire of me eventually. Even he knew it. How conscious he was of the fact though, I didn't know. He never made a mention of the future. Never made mention of the steps we would have to take to be public. We hurried across the street before the walking signal turned. He looked down at me once we were safely on the sidewalk and said, "and your legs look great in those heels. I'm not ready to stop looking at them yet."

My cheeks burned as we stepped into the coffee shop. I took out my phone and pulled up my Dunkin app. He took my phone out of my hand, closed the app, and then slid my phone into my pocket.

"Caleb - "

"I got it," he said casually.

“Caleb,” I started again. He looked down at me with an amused twinkle in his eye.

“I got it,” he repeated. I sighed and shot him a bemused glare. He nudged me forward with his shoulder. His body was so warm while mine had been penetrated deeply by the frigid remnants of a winter wind. I wondered if we’d be meeting in the closet today.

He ordered the coffees. He did not stop at two. I watched him as he rattled off Eddie’s simple coffee order. A small curve came to my lips before I lowered my eyes and looked at the cashier.

“Thank you,” I said when we were off to the side. He looked at me, waiting for an explanation. “For getting Eddie’s coffee.”

“I’m a thoughtful guy,” he responded dryly and looked back at his phone. Our coffees were placed on the counter. I grabbed mine and Eddie’s and we headed back to the office..

“Ah, my favorite barista!” Eddie called when we entered. I smiled brightly at him.

“Eddie,” I greeted and gave him the coffee. I paused at the desk. “Any big events for Joey?”

“Starting baseball this spring,” he answered, pride evident on his face.

“Oh, that’s exciting!” I cried. “What position?”

“Third base. Like his old man.”

“Best position on the field.” I added severely, “When he goes pro and gives you boat loads of money don’t forget who brought you coffee every morning.”

“Wouldn’t think of it,” Eddie said, pulling the tab back on his coffee.

“Playing the long game,” I said, tapping my temple and walking backwards away from. He looked at Caleb and gave him a smile and a nod and we wished each other a good day.

“He’s a nice guy,” Caleb said when he swiped his badge and pressed the elevator button.

“Fascinating man too,” I said. “Speaks three languages. He’s a translator for the courts. He works the desk overnight as supplemental income to pay for the care home for his mother.”

“Boy, does she have a story,” Caleb said. I looked up at him. “You should ask him about it. Lost her two brothers and one sister in the Dirty Wars.” Caleb snapped his fingers. “Overnight. Never seen again.”

“I didn’t know you and Eddie were so close,” I answered.

“A lot of people find me charming,” he answered dryly. He looked at him, eyes a mixture of reproach and amusement. “Most, even.”

The door dinged open. He stepped past me and walked to his office. I followed, stepping out to find Peter and someone from Audit chatting just outside the doors. I was halfway to my office when I got a text from him.

Lunch at 11:45. What do you want?

I was a little disappointed it was so mundane. I had wanted something I could gain a little bit more confidence from. I settled into my desk before finally responding.

Buffalo chicken wrap?

I only had to wait a few seconds for my response.

It'll be in the fridge.

The morning was easy enough. I focused on work. I got a good deal completed. I didn't email them to him immediately. I wasn't sure if he would send me more work immediately upon receiving the reports or not and I wanted some time to think. I wanted the weekend to go well. To do that I needed to do exactly what Caleb wanted me to do. The problem was I still wasn't completely sure what that was. I considered, very briefly, asking Chris what Caleb liked. Positions, clothing, demeanor. Anything to become the perfect sex toy for him. That was what he really wanted. I was thinking clearly enough to disregard that almost instantly. Chris would go to Caleb immediately and I felt a visceral physical reaction as I imagined how he might react to that one. Caleb would be furious. He'd go absolutely insane. I could already hear his words and the painful thwack of his belt against my bottom.

Why didn't you come to me?

I paused a moment, my face in my hands, and then started laughing to myself. It was amazing what those pills had done to me. The mixture, the abuse, the alcohol. The answer was so obvious that the fact that I had even had to consider it was almost embarrassing. It was so simple. All I had to do was ask *him*. The act itself would please him. He wanted a simpering girl that needed his superior intellect and strength to get through her day. He wanted a girl that would submit to and rely on his experience in bed to teach her how to please him. Ellie on pills would have gone to Chris and totally fucked everything up. I was much more clear headed. I felt a rush of control. It was a euphoric feeling. I had missed it, the feeling of being present and in control in my life. I just hadn't realized it.

I sent the reports to Caleb and got up to go to the bathroom. He wasn't in his office as I walked by and I felt a wonderful sense of peace as I used the restroom, splashed some cool water on my face, and looked over at myself in the mirror. I did look quite thin. I felt confident I could eat lunch and keep it all down. It was the shameful thing about it. Something my mother never understood. When you got into those stretches, where you didn't eat, where you started to feel good, the smallest morsel of food past your lips felt like a poison. Despite the impossibility of it, immediately you felt those extra calories turning to fat, blowing you up to a size you've never been and never would be, and the compulsion to get it out of you was too great to fight. It wasn't logical. It was a terrible and violent need. You don't want to do it, but you had to. When you couldn't slip away and that food remained inside of you, you were overcome with a guilt and shame so great, you couldn't bear to exist inside your own skin, but if you were successful, and you managed to slip away and force

your fingers down your throat and get it out of you still fully formed, after the rush of satisfaction, the shame was just as crippling, and you were left with tiny little red dots on your cheeks and watery eyes and a congested head, nausea rolling around in your empty stomach, and after that it was hard to even keep water down.

I didn't want to go back to that. The solution seemed simple enough. You can't throw up if you didn't eat. But I'd put that away long ago and I promised myself as I smoothed out my skirt, that I was going to use this newest bout of sobriety to do things the right way. Eat healthy and exercise. Not starve, binge, purge.

I exited the bathroom feeling inspired. When I turned the corner to find a group congregated by the copier I felt a slight elevation of anxiety. I would push on, though and get back to work, survive lunch, and then start my first full weekend with my plan going into action. My confidence faltered when I saw Caleb in the group, laughing at something someone said, one hand in his pocket, suit coat to the side, looking like he'd just stepped out of a photo shoot for GQ. Something about the man just absolutely shattered my confidence. He stood beside Chris. They were by fair the tallest, fittest, best looking men in the office, if not the entire twenty story building.

Chris had made me nervous for a couple weeks when I first started, but only to the extent that most did. From jump, he was kind and understanding. He had such an approachable demeanor. Caleb had an easy detachment about him. He was disinterested in everything around him. He was either observing with a kind of lazy amusement or detached disinterest. I hated it. His words came back to me as I approached. The description of what he'd have done if I ended up at one of his friends' parties as a freshman. I didn't think he'd keep me like he claimed though. I'd have spent days or weeks trying to get into contact with him and then spend months crying when I couldn't. And he'd have a slew of other young college girls he'd go through in the meantime.

His eyes swung away from one of the guys he was talking to. They landed on me and I felt that same jolt I'd felt everytime he looked at me before this whole thing began, back when I had first started and before I realized I couldn't stand him. I looked at him through a new lens now and tried to see what was really shining in those cold, disinterested eyes. I looked for passion and desire. It was what I knew he was feeling, but there was no hint of the need I had seen on his face last night. I wished desperately I could get inside his mind and see myself the way he did. My cheeks were red and I felt like heat was growing up from my collar bone in blotchy spots. My pulse quickened and I wanted to run away from his watchful gaze.

I put on my best smile and gave a nod to the group as I passed. I hated that he could rattle me like that, just by standing there with a smile on his face. I felt a longing ache for a Xanax. I pushed it down and focused on my work. I told myself I didn't need one. I was stronger and smarter without them. My phone buzzed. I readied myself for something degrading. A photo or a text maybe.

You're more beautiful every time I see you.

I don't know how that's possible.

My heart rate skyrocketed and my watch buzzed angrily. My head was still fucked up. One moment I was certain this was all just a fun joke he and Chris were playing, then I was certain that as psychotic as he was, he meant it, that Caleb Trent truly believed I was beautiful and wanted to be with me. I read the texts again. A small breath escaped past my smiling lips as another text came through from him: *You are perfection*

Those words felt nice, no matter who they came from. His eyes from the light before returned to me. He did want me. I was beautiful. If Caleb believed it, then it was objectively true. I tried to think of something nice to say back, but such was the curse of a social anxiety disorder.

Thank you. :)

I sent it and immediately regretted it. What did a sexy flirty girl say? I couldn't think of anything. I bit my bottom lip and tried to think of something coy to say. I jumped a mile when I heard a curt knock on the top of my cubicle wall. I didn't hear the dreaded, "Orla, a moment?"

Instead, I turned to find Caleb there, looking down at a small stack of papers, and got a dry, "shouldn't you be working?"

My cheeks flushed and I put my phone down. It helped me shift my lens further though. He knew I was on the phone looking at messages *he'd* sent me. He would be angry if I didn't read them. It was with some wonder that I realized that dry, deadpan voice, coupled with his face of blank stone, had been delivering a *joke*. He looked up from his papers and walked over to me. He put the papers down on my desk and flipped one page. He pressed one long finger to the page and I read it over carefully. My shoulders slumped and I let out a sigh of defeat. I felt the crush of disappointment and my surging confidence faulted.

“Devil’s in the details,” I said a half second before him, our voices overlapping. I knew it was coming in my bones. I turned to look up to him. He was smiling at me, eyes twinkling. He reached out and stroked my cheek with a single finger.

“I really thought I got everything,” I told him.

“You’ll never get everything,” he said. “If that was possible we wouldn’t waste time having seven people review it before it goes out the door would we?”

“I guess not,” I answered.

“This is good work,” he said. I smiled brightly, surprised by the compliment. I touched the papers that had his notes on it. It had always been a quirk of his. He liked paper copies and would hand write his edits, then go back through and put them into track changes. He was methodical.

“Can I keep this?” I asked.

“I’ll make a copy and give it to you at lunch.”

“Thanks,” I said. He nodded slowly and turned to walk away. He paused in the doorway.

“Orla?” I turned my chair to face him. “You found the issue with their separate NOL tracking. Most people wouldn’t have found that. This is a good product.”

I was consumed with the warm glow of pride and I struggled to suppress my smile.

“The NOL schedules looked weird,” I told him. I wanted him to know how I spotted it and what I did to address it. “So I pulled the older pre-acquisition returns from the data room.”

“That’s good. Very good,” he said.

“Thank you,” I said, still smiling. He nodded, paused, a moment of indecision not common to him, and then left. Despite the critique, the compliment on the NOL issue had me grinning ear to ear, and I had to cover my mouth with my hand to try and cover it.

He sent me a couple small calcs to complete next, which I got through fairly quickly. It was about 11:20 when I finished. I sat back in my chair, content to kill some time between now and lunch. I reflected on the night previous, rereading his most recent text messages over and over again. I was beyond thrilled he noticed the NOL issue.

You look very handsome today.

I sent it before I could talk myself out of it. I didn’t receive a response. I hovered my mouse over his bubble and saw he was on a call. I fought down my embarrassment, told myself that it was what he would want to hear and if he wasn’t on a call, he’d have answered with some sort of praise. I headed down to the breakroom at about 11:40. There wasn’t enough time to start anything new and I had too much anxiety to burn. I hadn’t received a Xanax that morning. Caleb would be waiting for me to ask for one, but I didn’t want to take one. I wanted to get through the day clear minded. As badly as I wanted to taste that bitter chalkiness on my tongue.

He was leaning back in his chair when I walked by. He watched me, face impassive as he spoke, but his eyes never left mine. It filled me with a sense of accomplishment and I was sure he was pleased. A man like that needed his ego stroked. I stopped in the bathroom to splash some cool water on my face again, my skin was so hot, and then continued on to the breakroom. It was empty when I got there. I opened up the fridge, unsure if I would find my lunch there yet, but sure enough it was resting there, a little post-it note with my name on it. I grabbed the plastic bag from the fridge. As I straightened, I felt a hand on my elbow, and just about jumped a mile.

“Oh my God, Caleb,” I breathed. “You scared me.”

I barely got the words out. He grabbed me by the face, just below my mouth and pressed his lips to mine. His hand lowered to my throat as his tongue parted my lips and entered my mouth. He stepped closer, tilting my head back sharply. I was absolutely taken over by the smell of him. His cologne and aftershave, the taste of wintergreen on his tongue. The kiss ended all too abruptly and a soft breath of surprise escaped me as he stepped away. My cheeks were flushed and I stood there a bit dazed. He opened the refrigerator and looked inside, cool as could be. I was still standing there, processing, when I heard an eruption of laughter from the break room door. A moment later a small group walked in together. Caleb took his salad from the fridge and I turned my back to the newcomers. I needed to hide the redness of my skin and the dazed quality of my eyes. I grabbed a couple of paper plates and cleared my throat.

“This yours?” Caleb asked. He handed a Coke Zero to me and I took it from him.

“Hmm? Oh, yes. Thank you,” I got out.

“Caleb! Did you see the trade from the Mets?” Mark called, slapping down his sub and sitting down.

“Trash,” Caleb said. “Absolute trash.”

“Are you actually serious right now?” he asked in disbelief. Caleb took a seat beside him.

“Deadly,” he answered. Chloe came up beside me, taking her salad from the fridge. She thanked me when I handed her some plasticware.

“So,” Chloe said, a bit softer than her normal volume. “A senior FED position just opened up on my team.”

I turned my head to look at her. I had considered switching to FED so many times. Longer hours, but better pay and only one tax code to worry about. Plus, there was no Caleb Trent on FED.

“Nope,” I heard Caleb say. We turned to find him twisted in his chair, looking at Chloe.
“Poach someone else, Robinson.”

“She’s a grown woman, Trent,” Chloe responded.

“And currently on the fast track to MD in SALT,” Caleb said. My face flushed. MD were what we called managing directors, just below Partners. You could normally make it to MD after about 10 or 15 years. I don’t think he was suggesting it would happen anytime soon, but the fact that he thought I would ever make it there; and that I was on a fast track nonetheless, was surprising, and sent a nice rush of warmth spreading through me. “A transfer to FED would derail her career progression.”

“I think that’s her decision to make after speaking to Christian.”

Christian was the FED partner.

“You’re not taking my best associate,” Caleb said, turning in his chair.

“Wow,” Mark said sarcastically.

“We’re sitting right here,” Steve added with a laugh.

“Am I wrong?” Caleb asked.

“I didn’t say that,” Mark and Steve laughed. I felt myself tense, so many eyes on me, but I chose to look at it through this new lense Caleb had given me. The lense that didn’t require them all to be making fun of me, but that they actually meant what they were saying.

“Is it too late to switch you out for Ellie?” Steve asked. “And by the way, how come they got Ellie and we didn’t.”

Steve had been on my team when I worked under Chris. I had taken Caleb's spot, which meant I was the senior for Caleb's associates.

"Them's the rules," Mark smiled.

"Can we switch that up?" Steve asked.

"Two months and I'm already on the chopping block?" Chris asked as he strode in from the doorway. He smiled at me, touched my shoulder in greeting, and opened up the fridge. I looked away from him and stared at the back of Caleb's neck.

"You can all have Chris, when I bring Ellie over to FED," Chloe said, wrapping her arm around my shoulder. I leaned on to her, a smile on my face. It felt nice, thinking people actually liked me. Respected me.

"Chris could have gotten the promotion, Steve, and then you could still be working directly for Caleb," I said, making sure to throw a teasing smile toward Caleb as I took my seat.

"That is true. Never mind, Caleb, you can keep the job."

"A ringing endorsement," Caleb grumbled, but then his stony face broke into a tiny smirk toward Mark, eyes twinkling with amusement, and I was relieved to see he wasn't angry. In the past, I would not have watched him long enough to see the smile and the good natured twinkle in his eye. It was hard to believe his mouth was on mine just moments before, kissing me so deeply. For the first time since this all began, it felt like I had actually been kissed by *Caleb*. Not my stalker or the Caleb that was in the comfort of his own apartment, dressed in a well fitted t-shirt and sweatpants, but the amazing smelling, tall and broad, tailored suit clad, Caleb, my *boss*. If he kissed me like that in the office more often, he could ignore me all he wanted in front of everyone else.

"Speaking of not liking Caleb - " Mark began.

“ - no one said that - ” Caleb said through a bite full of lettuce, drawing a peel of laughter from the table.

“Not this Friday but next, a bunch of us are going to The Wharf,” Mark finished. He started pointing with both hands at everyone at the table. “Who’s in?”

I looked over at Caleb. He was staring at the table, one of his bored, lazy half smiles on his face. I leaned back and caught Amelia looking directly at me. I shouldn’t have looked at Caleb that way in front of everyone. My cheeks burned.

“Ellie’s coming,” Chloe said, sliding in beside me.

“Oh, I don’t - ”

“Great, so Ellie, Danny, Steve, Amelia, Anna, Stephanie. Caleb, you and crew coming? Crispy said he would come if Anna came and she just gave the go ahead so...”

“I’ll think about it,” he said.

“I’ll come,” Chris said. I unwrapped my wrap and took a bite. If my mouth was full, no one could expect me to talk.

Conversation splintered off. The boys talked about sports. I discussed books with Chloe. She recommended a good new mystery she thought I’d like. I made a note of it. I’d buy it if Caleb really did take me to the book store this weekend. Caleb got up relatively swiftly. I did my best not to look at him too long. He wasn’t looking at me anyway. I waited until I was safely back in my cubicle before I texted him. My last unanswered text was still there, but I told myself that kiss had been my answer.

Are you mad at me?

He answered quickly which I was grateful for: *why would I be mad at you?*

I answered: *I don't know. About going to the Wharf? The talk about transferring to FED.*

His response: *Well you're not transferring to FED and we'll talk about the Wharf later. So no, I'm not mad at you.*

My thumbs moved quickly across my phone:

Ok. Just checking.

I don't like when you're mad at me.

About ten seconds and then:

I don't mind it. You say sorry so sweetly.

I assumed he was talking about the blowjob I gave him in his office just a day or so again. I pressed my fingers to my lips.

I asked: *Will we be going to the closet today?*

I could almost see his smirk when he responded: *Do you want to?*

I chewed on my lip. Did I want to? I thought he was very happy with me today. I wanted to keep that going.

Yes.

Please.

He said:

Slut.

You'll get fucked nice and hard when we get home. Don't you worry.

I can't make up my mind on how I want to fuck you though.

Tell me how you want it.

He liked this kind of talk. And I was terrible at it. My cheeks were hot and I pressed the back of my knuckles to my skin to cool myself down a little. I didn't know what he wanted to hear. I wasn't sure if he wanted me to say I liked what we did last night, and I did, or if he wanted me to ask him to take me in some sort of degrading way.

I said: *However you want it.*

I waited, hoping that would be enough to get out of it. I wasn't so lucky:

No.

Tell me how you want it.

I considered. Whatever I said, I had to be prepared that it was going to happen.

I like when you chew on my ear.

Not what he was looking for, but it was true. I continued:

And how your stubble feels on my neck.

I like when you pick me up or toss me, or hold me up against a wall or down on the bed, because it makes me feel small.

I wasn't sure if he would make me keep going or not. He responded:

You like being overpowered.

I'll throw you on my bed and hold you down. Try and get me off of you. You won't be able to.

Your body is perfect. Tall, with legs for days, fat tits, and a great ass.

Finish reviewing the new Auto IRLs. Be at the elevators at five. I want to get you home and fuck you so hard you won't be walking tomorrow.

My cheeks were flushed and I typed out: *but you promised you'd let me go to the gym with you.*

It was a joke. I didn't know if he'd got it. I was about to send another message when his came through.

Maybe if you're very very sweet tonight. I want those big green eyes on me.

I put my phone down, a little smile on my face, and turned my attention to the new IRLs. I got them done about three, but held on to them until 3:30. After that, he just wanted me to focus on reviewing the numbers for our meeting with the German CFO. I did, so, and made sure I was standing at the elevators at 4:58 pm. At 4:59, he was shutting the lights off at his office, face set very grimly as he put his eyes on mine. Chris came out of his cubicle, scarf draped over his shoulders. He smiled at Caleb and turned his phone toward him. There was a smiling girl from a dating app, looking to be about college age. My stomach turned as Caleb and Chris shared a quick laugh. I turned and hit the elevator button.

"One of these days you'll find one you actually like," Caleb said. The doors opened and we stepped inside. They closed before anyone could join us.

"Maybe," Chris muttered. "Fucking Starbucks. In every picture."

“You could try matching with a girl you think you’d like,” Caleb suggested. “Usually has a higher chance of success.”

“We’ll see. I’ll have to settle on fucking Starbucks girl tonight,” he said, looking up and flashing a grin.

“Can we talk about something else?” I asked sharply. “Not about the girl you’re going to - ”

The beginnings of an R formed on my lips but I didn’t say it. I turned to look at Caleb, face flushed.

“Yeah,” Caleb said. He touched my arm and let it drop.

“Sorry, Ellie,” Chris said. He draped an arm over my shoulder and jostled me. “I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

My skin crawled and I lifted my shoulders to my ears. Caleb said, “Chris.”

Chris let me go, laughing softly. He went in, “Well, Trevor wants to do something for his birthday,” Chris was saying. Caleb was running his fingers over his face, feeling his beard growth.

“Yeah, we’ll see,” he said. The elevators opened and we stepped inside. “Can’t be in the city.”

“No one’s going to be there from work,” Chris said dismissively.

“I can’t risk it,” Caleb responded.

“She could stay home,” Chris said and I was certain she was me.

“No,” Caleb answered shortly.

“He might want it to be a boys’ trip.”

I didn’t like the sound of that. I saw another flash of Caleb in the bathroom of a club, some hot girl between his legs, his cheeks flushed and hair sweaty. I pinched my lips together. Well, I’d make certain *that* didn’t happen.

“We’ll talk about it,” Caleb said. Without me present, he didn’t need to add. The elevator doors opened and as we walked out onto the street, I made sure Caleb stood between me and Chris. We separated at the train station. Once on the T, Caleb got me nestled into a corner and hung on the bar above his head. His free hand stroked my cheek with the back of his knuckles. I looked up at him, my eyes meeting his, and he murmured, “you’re so beautiful.”

I smiled at him.

“You’re not bad yourself,” I said, looking at his tie. I picked it up and flipped it over. I ran my thumb over his initials sewed into the tie.

“Why’d you do that with the tie?” I asked. “I was already...”

“I wanted to punish you,” he said. I considered and then looked back at him. I still had his tie in my hand.

“Are you done? Punishing me?” I asked. He was nodding, watching my thumb on the initials. He looked around the train before taking my chin and pressing a kiss to my mouth. He placed one more before pulling back. We said very little the entire trip back. The evening was warm. Sun beat down hard and even the breeze was soothing.

In the lobby of the building, Caleb stopped to look over the numerous packages left on the floor. He picked a couple up and then met us into the building. Once inside, he opened up the packages. I slid onto a bar stool and watched him. He pulled out a pair of women's sneakers and looked them over.

"Try these on," he said, handing them over to me. I took them and obeyed, a little confused. He opened up the next pack and removed a couple pairs of leggings and t-shirts. The sneakers fit perfectly. I had a little bit of room, but I wore only pantyhose. They'd be perfect with socks. "The clothes might be a bit big right now, but they'll do for tomorrow."

I realized he ordered them because he didn't bring anything but work clothes with us. I said thank you and told him the shoes fit perfectly as I slid them off. He seemed pleased. Before he could start making demands, I decided to make my move. I slid off the bar stool and walked over to him. I took his hands, and he gave me that same critical look he gave when he thought I was up to something.

"Come sit with me," I said. We settled down on the couch and I wet my lips before beginning. I held one of his hands in both of mine. I caressed the little crescent moon scar. I took a steadying breath and then looked up at him.

"I almost texted Chris today to ask to meet with him privately."

I watched his eyes harden and his face turn to stone. I felt my stomach tighten and wondered if I made the wrong course of action. I pushed on though. There was no turning back.

"I wanted to ask him how I could make you happy. What things you like and what you don't like. I figured Chris would know."

I brought up his hand and kissed the scar. I lowered it back to my lap and continued to caress it with the pad of my thumb.

"And I could hear you," I said, chancing a smile. "'Why didn't you come to me?'" His eyes went back and forth between my eyes. "So this is me coming to you."

His lips parted and one large hand closed around the back of my neck.

“Tell me what you want from me. What you like,” I said. He took in a controlled but deep breath and looked down at my mouth. I added softly, “please.” His eyes snapped back to mine, and I knew I’d made the right decision, but to my frustration, he didn’t react the way I had anticipated.

“What I like?” he asked. His fingers trailed down the side of my neck. His hand closed around my knee and slid slowly up my thigh, sneaking up beneath my skirt. “I like a whole manner of things.”

“Tell me what they are,” I said. “I’ll do them.”

His lips curved upward and his hand slid between my legs.

“Let’s play a game,” he said. He ripped my panty hose open with a sudden jerk of his hand and I gasped. His fingers invaded me with little warning. “This weekend, I want you to initiate and I’ll tell you if it’s something I like or not.”

“I don’t - I don’t know - ”

“I do,” he said. He lowered his head and placed his lips to my ear. He sucked my lobe between his lips before he began to nibble on it. It sent a jolt through me. “You need to find five things that particularly turn me on. I promise to be honest. If you do, I’ll give you something real nice. If you don’t, then you’ll get a nice hard whipping with my belt.”

His stubble scraped along my jaw, but not in a bad way. I closed my eyes and breathed him in.

“Ok,” I whispered.

“We’ll start tomorrow though,” he said. His hands left me and he got to his feet, scooping me up in his arms as he went. I let out a tiny sound of surprise, followed by a breathy laugh. “Because I have some promises to keep right now.”

He carried me into the bedroom. A sound resembling genuine delight escaped me when he threw me down on the bed.

Chapter Notes

I contemplated making these two different chapters. I think it works though...

Please let me know what you think. I'm a tad nervous about this one.

I woke up warm and cocooned in the blankets, with the nice feeling of coarse stubble scraping against my cheek. Soft lips pressed gently along my skin and a large hand slid beneath the covers to caress my thigh.

“Time to get up,” Caleb murmured. His breath was hot on my throat. I made a soft murmur of dissent, but then stretched my arms up above my head and let out a retrained groan of satisfaction. He pulled away after one last kiss to my jaw. He laid out the clothing he wanted me to wear. Plain black leggings and a powder pink crop top. I changed, slid on a pair of socks, and put my new gym shoes on. As I suspected the night before, they fit perfectly.

Caleb did not shave. He came out of the bathroom in a sleeveless T and shorts, hair tousled and an abundant amount of dark scruff on his face. He had more scruff on his face than I had ever seen on him. It was not a bad look for him. I used the bathroom after him, brushed my teeth and then met him at the door. The morning was cool when we stepped outside and I immediately regretted leaving bed.

“It’s not a long walk,” Caleb said, as if reading my mind. We moved down the street. It was still dark out and I checked my watch. I tapped it but only blackness stared back at me. I needed to get my chargers from my studio today.

“It’s 4:30,” Caleb let me know. “The place fills up fast.”

“Are there treadmills?”

“It’s a lifting gym mostly, but there’s a modest cardio section. You’ll just walk today.”

I nodded. I didn’t think I could do much else even if I wanted to. I started to feel anxious as we approached the gyms. Gyms were always a source of extreme stress for me. So many people, so many eyes, so many judgments, so many ways to embarrass yourself. Despite my insecurities though, I felt confident in my ability to walk in a straight line.

“How long will we stay?” I asked.

“I’ll check in with you after a half hour, see how you feel,” he said.

“How long do you normally stay?” I asked. He shrugged.

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Caleb,” I sighed.

“Usually, on a Saturday, two or three hours, but it’s fine. We’ll see how you do,” he said. I suddenly felt guilty for even coming. No doubt he was annoyed with me. I would have been. I might have asked him to bring me home, but he suddenly turned and reached for a glass door. He opened it and ushered me inside. I shifted the strap of my gym bag on my shoulder anxiously. My eyes darted around the gym and I looked at Caleb. I prayed he wouldn’t just leave me to figure it out on my own. I followed him over to the front desk, where a buff, if short, man was standing behind the counter.

“Trent,” he greeted Caleb. He flashed a smile toward me, which I returned silently.

“Bennie, this is my girlfriend,” Caleb said. I tried to conceal my surprise. I had been expected to be an acquaintance, a casual friend. “Orla. Orla, this is Bennie. He’s the morning guy.”

“Hello,” I greeted. He responded in kind and looked at Caleb.

“It’s an extra thirty to have her on the account or you could just pay the one time guest fee,” Bennie said to Caleb.

“Add her to my account,” Caleb said. I gave my information to Bennie and he typed away at the keyboard. Then he retrieved a little plastic rectangle and handed it to me. I glanced at the barcode and then smiled. Caleb had pushed himself away from the desk, put his hand on my lower back, and thanked Bennie again.

“You want to go put your stuff in the locker room. There’s a lock in your bag. Code is your birthday. Fill up your water bottle. There’s one in the bag. Meet me back here.”

I nodded, but then reached out. I caught the sleeve of his sweatshirt before he could dip into the men’s locker room.

“Promise you’ll wait for me?” I asked.

“I promise. I’m going to put my stuff away and come right back here,” he promised. I nodded and let him go. I ducked into the locker room and grabbed a locker. I used the bathroom again and filled up my water bottle. I lingered. I didn’t want to go out until I knew Caleb would be there. When I walked out, I didn’t see him immediately. I had to step out of the way of a group of large men walking down toward the weight room. Once they were gone, I looked around the gym.

The gym was not especially big but it wasn’t small either. There were about ten treadmills, which was more than I was expecting, two stairmasters, five ellipticals, and two rowing machines. Across from the cardio section was a much larger free weight section. I didn’t see any of the traditional machines I would know how to use, and remembered Caleb said it was more of a lifting gym. It was all free weights. My heart rate began to increase as I looked around. I tried to find him amongst the men congregating around the bench press.

I knew he wouldn’t *leave*. That didn’t mean he wouldn’t run into a buddy and go off to talk to them, leaving me to walk up and introduce myself in a painfully awkward manner. I wiped my sweaty palms against the fabric of the overpriced leggings. Panic began to creep up inside of me when I couldn’t spot him.

“Orla.”

I spun around to find him leaning against the wall behind me. From stepping out of the gym to the moment I heard his voice, mere seconds had to have passed.

“Relax,” he said, not unkindly. “I’m not going to abandon you. I promise.”

I nodded at him, pressing my lips together, and looked around the gym. Some of the guys at the weights were looking toward us. My cheeks felt hot. I *didn't* want to embarrass him in front of his friends. Caleb had brought me into one of his spaces and I wouldn't make him regret it.

“I can just use the treadmills over there?” I asked, trying to keep my voice light.

“I’ll walk over with you,” he said and placed his hand on my lower back. I was grateful and he waited at the machine with me. He went over the rules briefly. Same as most gyms. Spray the machine when you’re done using it. He motioned to the weights, letting me know it was the entire gym. He’d be in sight the entire time.

“If I have to go anywhere, I’ll let you know first,” he said. He patted the top of the treadmill. “Good?”

I only nodded. He stepped closer to me. Standing on the elevated treadmill, I was almost on eye level with him. He kissed me and then left again without a word. I hit some buttons and started my painfully slow walking. In truth, I started to get tired after just a couple minutes. He didn't need to worry about me trying to over exert myself.

Caleb greeted the men standing around the weight bench. A couple looked in my direction. Caleb said something and a few moments later everyone was laughing. My cheeks burned brightly as I tried to imagine what he said about me. I stopped myself. It would do no good going down that rabbit hole. Caleb wouldn't let someone else say something bad about me. It

would hurt his pride. Whatever they laughed at, it had nothing to do with me. I turned to look at the mirrors lining the walls to see if there was anything there they could have laughed at.

Initially, I thought I saw another woman on the treadmills with me. I turned my head to find her, pleased I wasn't the only woman in the gym, but then found myself alone. I turned my head again. It was with a shock I realized it was *me* I was looking at. I looked amazing. Maybe too thin, *maybe*, but I hardly recognized the girl I was looking at walking slowly on the treadmill. Was this what Caleb saw when he looked at me? Was this always what he saw? From the moment I started? I looked very much the same as I always did but somehow I felt so much different.

I was taken out of my self-reflection early when I saw a man approaching me in the mirror. I turned my head and jumped, surprised to see him so close. He laughed, a bright grin on his face. He was of medium height, bulky build, and had blond hair and blue eyes. He wasn't an unattractive man but his presence was not a welcome one.

"Didn't mean to scare you," he grinned. He leaned on my treadmill, draping a rag over his shoulder. "You're new here. I know I'd remember seeing you."

"Um, yeah. This is my first time," I said a bit woodenly. I glanced over at Caleb, but he had his back to me, setting a weight onto a bar.

"Great. Well, welcome," he said. He seemed more or less harmless. He held out his hand. "Name's Greg."

"Orla," I said on impulse. I immediately regretted it. I was ready to tell him to call me Ellie, when he spoke again.

"That's a unique name. Very pretty. Let me know if you need anything. I can spot you if you need, help you out on the weights."

My face flushed slightly. I wouldn't know the first thing about using the weight benches and I would never go use them alone, but I was insulted at his automatic assumption nonetheless. I pulled a tight smile across my face.

“Thanks, but I think my boyfriend can help me,” I answered, motioning with my chin toward the weights.

“Oh shit,” he said. He turned to look toward the weights. “Who’s your boyfriend?”

I looked back, ready to point out Caleb’s broad back. But Caleb was on his feet facing us. He stood with his legs a good distance apart, holding on to either side of the towel he had draped over his shoulders. Even at this distance, I could see the hardness in his gray eyes, and, with his head tilted back ever so slightly, his lips parted, he looked thoroughly annoyed. His arms looked wonderful in the sleeveless T he wore though, muscles flexing as he squeezed the ends of the towel.

“Well shit,” Greg said and raised a hand to Caleb. Caleb gave a nod, but didn’t stop watching. Greg turned, put on a bashful smile, and stepped away from the treadmill. “Nice to meet you, Orla.”

He walked away, rubbing the back of his beet red neck. He approached Caleb and the two exchanged a little handshake. They chatted a minute, before parting ways. Caleb looked at me. I was fearful he was angry with me, though it wouldn’t be fair if he was, but it only lasted a moment. He gave me a quick wink and turned back to the bench press.

He spent a while at the bench press. He and another man traded off, spotting each other. I wasn’t able to observe much of his body until he switched to barbells. I had been walking for about thirty minutes when he made the switch. He looked in my direction and I just gave him a thumbs up. I felt a bit foolish, but he winked again and switched to his next bench. Caleb had by far, my favorite type of body. I had never found pronounced, large abdomens particularly attractive. They looked hard, bumpy and uncomfortable to me. That’s not to say that he didn’t have abs, he did, but they weren’t the focal point of his body. He had broad pectoral muscles and powerful arms. I needed to stop staring. God knows he didn’t need the ego boost.

I pulled up google on my phone, turned on incognito mode, and looked to my right and left. The gym was beginning to fill up, but I still had a fair bit of space to myself. Another girl had entered but she was on the stairmaster a couple machines to my right. I typed in ‘BDSM’ and hit search. Most of the articles that popped up were mundane and fruity. I didn’t think

anything in this list would make an impression on Caleb. The fact that the majority of them centered around ‘consent’ and ‘trust’ was a major factor in my reasoning. I considered a moment and typed on ‘Dominant submissive relationships.’ Again, there were a lot of fruity articles about spicing up your love life and surprising your partner. Nothing in the articles even scratched the surface of what Caleb had done to me. Next, I searched, ‘how to dominate a woman in bed.’ These articles were a bit more degrading, but there was nothing *I* could do. It was all about what he could do to me. Holding me down, pulling my hair, spitting in my mouth, putting me in submissive positions and smacking my bottom. I wasn’t sure how to initiate any of that. I typed on, ‘how to be the perfect submissive.’ Again, a lot of basics. Nothing I really knew how to put in practice. He had said to initiate. How do you initiate being told what to do and getting held down? I looked up submissive sex acts next. Most of it addressed things I don’t think Caleb would ever make me do and they weren’t things I’d ever try. But it did give me one or two ideas

Someone behind Caleb dropped a weight. The clang reverberated through the gym. It drew almost everyone’s attention momentarily. I glanced over at the girl on the stair master. She was pretty. Fit, thin but not skinny, with a nice muscle tone that I envied. Everyone had already gone back to their workouts, but the girl was still looking in that direction. I watched her closely, trying to figure out what she kept looking at. I realized with a flush she was watching Caleb.

Caleb wiped his face with his towel and moved off the bench press and over to a small bench. His muscular arms glistened and his dark hair was tousled. He had some beard growth, giving him a more rugged look than normal. He leaned forward, placed his elbow on a knee, and slowly curled the weight up and down. His back was to me, but I could see his face in the mirror. He really was a handsome man. Any girl’s dream. Every girl’s dream. What the hell was he doing with me?

He finished a rep and then switched arms, lifting his gaze to the mirror to watch himself work. But he wasn’t looking at himself. And he wasn’t looking at the girl. His eyes locked on mine in the mirror. That same look I was so used to, but was now beginning to mean something so different to me. That impassive, stony, hard as marble glare.

I felt a rush of satisfaction and I smiled at him. The girl turned her head to look at me. I felt her eyes on me for only a moment and I raised my hand to give him a little wave. She turned her head back, I hoped in time to see Caleb give a small smile and a wink in my direction. I wondered if he’d make me have sex with him before we went to breakfast. I wondered if I’d have a little red mark on my jaw and neck from where his stubble scraped my cheek. I noted that the girl, to her credit, did not look at Caleb again. It was clearly just an arm day, because I didn’t see him do any leg workouts, though he clearly didn’t skip leg day.

He ended his workout and walked toward the locker rooms. I ended incognito mode and ended my search into how to be a good submissive sexual partner. He beckoned me over with a jerk of his head. I shut off my work work, noting the calories I was said to have burned, cleaned off my machine and then joined him. He was talking to a meaty looking guy when I approached. He took his hand and placed it low on my back when I stopped beside him. He pulled me closer to him.

He smelled like sweat. It wasn't a bad smell. It was musky and masculine. His hair was a bit damp and he had perspiration still on his forehead.

"Alright, see you tomorrow."

The two bumped knuckles and then Caleb looked down at me.

"Get your things and let's head out. I want to shower back at my place. Though if I didn't think I'd get kicked out I might try to get you into the showers here."

He leaned down and placed a firm kiss to my mouth. I wondered if the girl was watching.

"You know why that guy came over and started to talk to you?" he asked, pulling back a fraction. I shook my head, brow crinkled. "Because you're fucking beautiful."

He kissed me again. And then again. And then again. "I don't get to kiss you enough in public."

I normally detested PDA, but I couldn't think of much but the feel of his lips on mine and the fact that here I was, in a crowded gym, being kissed by Caleb Trent, company golden boy.

"Alright," he finally said, pulling back. "I think I've staked my claim."

He smirked and then released me. I collected my things and went out toward the front door. He came shortly after, dressed in his hoodie.

“See you tomorrow, Trent,” the guy at the desk said. He gave a wave. “Orla.”

“Oh my God,” I gasped as we stepped out of the gym and into the cold.

“Not far,” he said, reaching out and taking hold of my hand in his. We walked back briskly, hand and hand, and I was beyond thankful to run up the stairs with him into the building. I remembered very vividly being dragged up those stairs not so long ago. A precursor to a violent attack.

Now, he slid his key into his lock, opened the door, and pulled me to him as he shut it behind us.

“You smell so good,” he growled, pressing his nose to the back of my neck. “Do you want to shower or skip it?”

I didn’t break a sweat. I didn’t think I needed one. I hesitated long enough that he slipped past me, giving me a slight tap on my bottom.

“I’ll be right out,” he said and went into the bathroom. I cursed myself. I should have gone with him. That would have initiated something. He’d have wanted me to join him. I could go in with him now. Surprise him while he was in the shower. Take off my clothes, slide in with him and drop down to my knees. He’d like that. My heart was pounding as I paced in his bedroom. I knew it was the thing I should do, but I hesitated. What if he was annoyed? What if he was hungry and wanted us to get to breakfast? What if he told me to wait outside? I don’t think I could handle the rejection. I finally decided I had to do it anyway. Risk the pain of the rejection to put the plan into place. I marched over to the bathroom door, but before I could open it, I heard the water shut off. I cursed under my breath and moved to sit down on the bed. He came out wearing a pair of jeans, rubbing his towel through his dark, wet hair. He had a nice V at his hips. His chest was so broad and strong.

“I’ll go put makeup on,” I said, getting up from the bed.

“No need,” he said. “I love your naked face. You’ve got that natural beauty.”

He went to the closet and grabbed a plain t-shirt and a dark navy jacket. He tossed the jacket on the bed and then retrieved a pair of dark blue jeans, and a comfortable looking cream colored knit sweater. He placed them beside me and told me to get ready and meet him in the kitchen.

When I came out, dressed in nicely fitting jeans and the comfortable sweater, I felt anything but the little sex kitten Caleb said he had wanted this weekend. I didn’t know why he would dress me this way. It was a fashionable look, but certainly not *sexy*. He turned to look at me from his place leaning over the island, a tiny smirk coming to his face. Messy bun, no makeup, large sweater, jeans... I felt so unsexy it was painful.

“You’re so adorable,” he said to me. He took me by the waist. “Hungry?”

I nodded. He grabbed his keys from the island and moved to the door.

“These should fit you,” he said. “Same sizing as the sneakers.”

He motioned to a pair of white slip on VANS by the door. I slipped into them. “Perfect.”

He handed me a coat from the closet. It was a deep tan coat that fit comfortably over my sweater and fell to about midhigh. “Ready?”

“Ready.”

We walked to the restaurant. It was a cute little diner. Clean, warm, and cozy. We were seated in a booth and the waitress scuttled off to get us coffee. It was the most surreal feeling, sitting across from Caleb at a breakfast place on a Saturday. He ran his hand through his still damp

hair as I slid out of my jacket. I found myself wishing I had joined him in the shower for the millionth time.

“What are you thinking of ordering?” he asked me. I gazed at the menu, shewing on the inside of my cheek. “And it needs to be more than a fruit bowl.”

I glanced up at him. He was reading the menu with that blank face of his. I stared a moment and then looked back down at the menu. That was exactly what I had planned on ordering. I remembered how great I looked in the mirror this morning. I didn’t want to do anything to risk that.

“Poached eggs and wheat toast,” I said. He looked up at me, waiting for me to continue. “And a side of bacon...”

He nodded and looked down. The waitress returned and I ordered. Caleb got almost the same thing, but he got his eggs over easy and got an extra side of sausage. We had just been left alone and I was wracking my brain for something to say, when my phone lit up beside me. I felt a crushingly brutal sinking feeling in my stomach when I saw the work ‘Mom’ scrawled across the screen. He reached for my phone, snatching it from the table before he could read it, but it was too late.

“Pick it up,” he said.

“Caleb -” I cut myself off. The look in his eyes was hard. I swallowed thickly and accepted the call. I raised the phone to my ear and got out a hoarse hello.

“Orla, honey!” my mother cried from the other end. “I’m so happy you picked up. I’ve missed your voice, sweetheart.”

“I know, I’m sorry,” I said. “I’ve just been really busy with work and...” I glanced at Caleb. He was watching closely. “I started seeing someone.”

I had to take the phone away from my ear as my mother began to squeal. A little smirk grew across Caleb's face.

"Yeah, I... his name is Caleb... I'm with him now actually, mom, we're having breakfast so..."

My mother continued talking about how we had to come up for a weekend. They could open up the guest house. A week for the summer. We could go to the lake house or maybe the time share. My face was flushed and my hands trembled. I was scratching at the table. Caleb reached out and placed his hand over mine, steadying it.

"I'll talk to Caleb about it. Look, I'm in a restaurant, I don't want to be rude. I'll call you."

I always said that. I never said when. I would eventually. Whether that was in an hour or month, it was hard to say. We hung up and I put my phone in my pocket.

"I love my parents," I told Caleb. "They're good parents, it's just..."

I pressed my hand to my forehead, feeling suddenly drained.

"You don't have to talk about it right now," he said, squeezing my hand. "I want you to enjoy the day."

He squeezed my hand again. I moved my hand so I could hold onto his. I squeezed back firmly. I couldn't put my gratitude into words, so I only squeezed as hard as I could. The waitress came back with our food. I would be lying if I said my mouth didn't start watering at the smell of bacon. I grabbed a piece from my plate and placed it between my lips. I let out a little sigh of pleasure and leaned back in the booth. Caleb chuckled softly.

"You made an impression on Greg today," Caleb said as he cut into his eggs.

“He was... forward,” I mused. Caleb looked up sharply and I hurried out, “He didn’t say anything inappropriate. Nothing like that. He offered to show me how to use the benches. I told him my boyfriend would help me.”

He nodded.

“Greg’s a nice guy,” he said as I shoveled a piece of toast with a helping of egg on it into my mouth.

“I’m surprised you don’t go to the gym with Chris,” I said, hand to my mouth. It was Caleb’s turn to bite into his food. I nibbled on the bacon.

“Chris has a place closer to him. We work out together sometimes, but it’s a decent way to travel just for a workout.”

“Makes sense,” I muttered and took another bite of my eggs and toast.

“I talked to my parents. They’re going to let me use their lakehouse, so we’ll head up to New Hampshire for Memorial Day. Spend the weekend at the lake.”

“OK,” I answered. I liked the lake. It might be nice. “Did they...” I paused, unsure if I should bring the subject up again. He looked up and raised his eyebrows as he chewed. “Did you mention your brother’s wedding date?”

Caleb snorted, shook his head, and jabbed at his eggs. He swallowed and said, “I’ll let them figure it out. If they haven’t already.”

“They wouldn’t say anything?” I asked.

“My father doesn’t like me and my mother is scared of me,” he said darkly, gripping his fork tightly. “I’m surprised they’re letting me come.”

“Why is she scared of you?” I was brave enough, or stupid enough, to ask. He stared down at his plate, face stone, eyes hard.

“I don’t know,” he finally said and skewered a piece of sausage with his fork. “I never raised a hand to her. She sent me away anyway.”

I wanted to follow up, but I could see him becoming agitated. I reached out and touched his hand. He jolted, genuinely surprised by the touch, and looked up at me.

“I’m sorry,” I told him softly. We held eye contact a moment longer before he nodded and looked back at his plate. He moved his hand so it held mine between us. I brought up work, discussing mundane topics and casual office gossip. The tension seemed to slide off of him and by the time he was paying the bill, he was laughing at a joke I made about Steve.

“We’ll grab my car, head to the bookstore, swing by the grocery store, stop at your studio and then head home,” he said, grabbing onto my hand as we left the diner. “You’ll have to recommend a book for me. It’s been a while since I’ve sat down to read.”

I was excited at the prospect. On our way to the bookstore, I asked him about what books he usually read. What style of writing he liked. Slow burns or thrillers. We left Brookline, driving into a smaller nearby town with actual parking. I got out of the car with a bit of a bounce in my step. It had been so long since I’d been in a bookstore. I just didn’t have time. I still read, before this whole thing began, but I ordered online mostly. I forgot how good bookstores smelled.

I forgot myself when we stepped through the doors and made a beeline for the mystery section. I was picking up the first book when I realized I was here with Caleb. I started to look around, but found him directly behind my left shoulder, looking at the book in my hand. I felt another rush of surrealness. Caleb Trent, standing beside me in a bookstore. It was still so strange seeing him out in the world, not in his suit at work. He let me pursue books in peace, always a step or two behind, looking at some books as he went.

“Oh,” I said when I spotted one of my favorites. I pointed it out to him. “This book was fantastic. A bit slow in the beginning honestly, but the twist was mind blowing. One of my

absolute favorites for sure.”

“Oh yeah?” he asked and picked it up from the shelf. I nodded and moved on. When I looked back at him, I saw he had the book tucked under his arm. I had one book in my hand. I had put two others I wanted down already, but then I found myself at the shelf, struggling between two.

“What’s wrong?” he asked me, reading the inside sleeve of a hardcover in his hand.

“I don’t know which one I want,” I answered.

“Get both,” he said, putting the book back on the shelf. “Problem solved.”

“If I didn’t limit myself to one, I’d buy twenty,” I said. I put one back down, but I felt a sense of longing as I stepped away. I looked back over at Caleb in time to see him grab the book and tuck it underneath his arm to join the other. He did it with another book I lingered too long on. By the time I told him I was done looking, he had four books under his arm. We walked up to the register and he read the back of one of the paper backs I had lingered on. We waited inline and I looked up at him.

“You don’t need to get me all those,” I told him.

“Maybe I want to read them,” he answered, voice a low grumble. The lady in front of us went up with her stack of books. He plucked the book from my hands and added it to his stack.

“I can pay for that,” I protested. He ignored me and read the back.

“Pay off your loans,” he answered dryly. My face flushed.

“My loans are paid,” I answered sharply. He laughed, eyes still on the back of the book.

“Of course they are,” he said. My lips pinched together and I turned to the side. I didn’t want him to see the anger on my face. I just wanted the lady ahead of us to stop asking stupid questions so we could move on. “Why do you assume everything is an insult?”

I turned to face him. “I don’t,” I answered.

“You’re mad. Why?” he finished reading the back of the book and then added it to the stack. He looked at me, eyes twinkling. I said nothing. “You take things people mean as compliments like insults. Right out of law school - paying off your loans - that’s impressive. You took ‘of course they are’ as an insult, but it wasn’t. It just means I should have known, someone as intelligent and disciplined as you, would have their loans paid already. You chose to get upset about it.”

We were called up and he walked past me up to the register. I followed, his words rattling around my head. What *had* I found so insulting about that statement? He checked out, charming the pants off the older lady behind the register. I was still mulling it over when we got back into the car.

“Saying it like that, it sounds like an insult,” I said as we left the parking lot. “It sounds dismissive.”

“Well, I didn’t mean to be dismissive,” he said. It wasn’t much as far as apologies went. “But I’ll try to sound less dismissive if you try not to read an insult into everything that comes out of my mouth.”

He merged onto the highway.

“Nine times out of ten, I’m giving you a complement,” he added.

“The other one?” I asked. He flashed me a smile.

“You’ll know.”

We got to the store about ten minutes later. I sat with my thoughts and was content to do so. He didn’t seem bothered by the silence either. I told him as we walked into the store that I wanted to cook him his favorite meal tonight. He retrieved the shopping cart and leaned his massive form over it.

“Well, my favorite meal is moussaka, but I don’t think you’ll have three hours to cook today,” he mused. “We can get the stuff though. Tonight, we can just make gyros.”

“Big fan of Greek food?” I asked him.

“Our cook was Greek growing up. I think she was my mom’s cousin or... cousin of a cousin.”

I looked at him. His dark hair, his light olive skin, his strong jaw, the curve of his nose. I could see Greek. It made sense. We moved along. He pointed out things for me to put into the cart. He steered us down another aisle and told me to pick out the tea I wanted. There was a decent candle section. He told me to grab the ones I wanted. I ended up with two. One I loved. The other, I struggled between two different candles. I put the one that lost the battle back reluctantly, as I had with the book earlier, but this time, I hadn’t realized he’d picked up the third candle and put it into the cart until it was on the conveyor belt.

The entire shopping experience was as surreal as the rest of the morning. Caleb spent much of it hunched over the cart, walking lazily behind me, completely at ease with the bizarre situation. He didn’t touch me, but the cart remained between us most of the time. He touched me once while he paid. A brief touch to my hip as he came to stand in front of the pin pad. He had me get into the car as he threw everything in the trunk. It was beginning to drizzle slightly and I didn’t protest.

“We’ll swing by your place quickly,” he said. “Then I’ll drop by my place. Bring the groceries up and I’ll go park my car.”

“Ok,” I said, picking up one of the books he had purchased me. He read the back again, finding myself excited to read again for the first time in a long run. We hadn’t had sex yet today, mainly because I wasn’t brave enough to follow him into the shower, so I knew I wouldn’t get the entire afternoon to read. The reminder of our little “game” came back to me full force and I felt a knot form in my stomach. It would be one thing if I didn’t know he preferred dominance and control. It was hard to take charge of a situation and be submissive. I wanted to reach over, take his hand, and ask him to just tell me what he liked and I’d do whatever he said. I couldn’t bring myself to do it though.

I was surprised by the longing I felt when we pulled up outside my building. I wanted to go up and change into a pair of shorts and an oversized hoodie and curl up on my futon and read.

“I’ll be right down,” I said and unbuckled. He turned the car off, shot me a look, and got out of the car. He followed me up the stairs. As I approached my door I patted my pockets and realized with a sinking feeling I didn’t have my keys. The thought of not being able to go into my apartment brought tears to my eyes and my jaw trembled violently. I was about to beg him to bring me back after we dropped off the groceries, apologize for being so stupid as to forget my keys, but he had already placed a key in the lock and opened my apartment.

“How long do you have on your lease?” he asked. If he saw the tears in my eyes, he didn’t show it.

“Um, September. September to September.”

He nodded to himself and ushered me inside. That sense of longing came rushing back to me. I knew I couldn’t ask him if I could stay here sometimes. That would infuriate him. It didn’t mean I didn’t want to. It was on the tip of my tongue, but my good sense kept it there.

I set about collecting the things I wanted. Caleb crouched down in front of my bookshelf and looked over the titles. He looked so at ease. He reached out and touched my things as if they were his. In my mind, Caleb had been in my studio only once and I had been so drunk, I barely remembered it. I had to remind myself though, he’d been here countless times. He’d spent a full weekend here. He’d made coffee and cooked my meals. He’d showered and brushed his teeth and watched sports. It was another little rip on the veil. The intrusion left a pit in my stomach and a pain in my chest. My little inner sanctum where I had kept myself comfortable and safe and protected, he’d been in so many times, without me ever knowing. I

glanced at my bed, thinking of the video he had shown me. My body, laid prone on the bed. Him unbuttoning his shirt cuffs. Tossing my legs apart.

“What are you thinking?” he asked, voice a low rumble. He placed a book back on the shelf and stood to his full height. He put his hands in his pockets and looked at me. I considered meeting his gaze without a need to look away.

“That in my mind you’ve only been here once before... but that’s not true...” I said. I gave him a tiny, mirthless smile. I picked up my phone charger, my headphones, and a couple of my favorite blankets.

“Can I bring some other clothes? Just hoodies and stuff I’m comfortable in?”

“Yeah, sure,” he said, sitting down on the futon. He took out his phone and started to type. “Bring what you want. We can always come back too.”

I ended up grabbing a couple pairs of jeans, pajamas, and some sweaters and hoodies I liked. I draped them on top of my blankets and looked around. I didn’t want to leave. I wanted to stay and curl up on my bed.

“If you forget something we can come back,” he promised. He got to his feet and slipped his phone back into his pocket. He moved to collect the stack of things from my bed, but I stopped him with a hand to his wrist. He paused, waiting, and I stepped closer to him. I reached up, placing my hands on either side of his clean shaven face, once again quite cognizant of his height and his strength. The flexing of his powerful arms beneath his clothing, the broadness of his chest, the way I’d looked in that mirror. His hands touched my hips. He managed to make me feel small. I pulled him down to a kiss and he let me. He deepened the kiss, and murmured into my mouth.

“We’ll go home and spend a few hours together,” he said and then kissed me again, hand covering my cheek. “And then we can curl up with a book and a cup of tea and a candle burning. How’s that sound?”

It sounded like heaven. I told him as much and he kissed me again. He pulled back with a smile and grabbed the stack I had on the bed. He handed me the keys and I opened and locked the door behind us. He carried the items down the stairs.

“I have never and will never use that death trap of an elevator, Orla,” he said dryly when I suggested it. He put my things in the back seat. I was excited to have some of my things at his apartment. It would make me feel better.

I got the groceries put away while he went to park the car. I plugged my chargers in on my side of the bed, spread out one of my blankets, and then placed a candle on the bedside table. It looked more comfortable, more me. I hoped he wouldn't make me move them. I hoped he wouldn't be angry with me for doing it to begin with, but if he was going to make me live here until he was done with me, I deserved to make myself more at home. Next, I placed another blanket on my spot on the couch and placed another candle on the coffee table. Already, the apartment felt less sterile. Not as cold.

I had just settled on the couch with a book when the door opened and he stepped back inside. I put the book down, got to my feet, and walked over to him.

“Hungry?” he asked me. I shook my head. I really wasn't. The breakfast had been filling.

“You?”

“No,” he answered. I directed him, as had become my habit, to sit on the couch, and asked if he wanted a drink. He asked for a Diet Coke and then I hurried to obey. I knew what I was going to try, but I felt that prickle of fear. The fear of humiliation and embarrassment. Of not being able to do it right. Of finding out he didn't like it. My heart was thundering.

“I feel bad,” I said as I handed him the soda. I slid onto the couch beside him.

“For what?” he asked, the hiss of the can cracking open filling the room.

“You’d probably be having a beer right now,” I said. “If I wasn’t...”

Wasn’t what? An alcoholic? A drunk. A freak.

“I don’t need alcohol to enjoy myself,” he said. “You’re the best drug a man could ask for.”

He gently trailed his knuckles along my cheek. I met his gaze and found no duplicity or anger there. It gave me the encouragement I needed. All the articles I’d read this morning, the good and the bad, had all had one thing that I could initiate that was inherently submissive or degrading in nature... in my opinion anyway. With a pounding heart, I slid down to my knees in front of him. He watched, lips twitched, and spread his legs so I could settle in between them. I carefully plucked the cool button of his jeans and pulled the zipper downward. Once he lifted his hips to help me, I was able to remove his semi-erect cock from his jeans and boxers. I gave it a few hard strokes, as I’d seen him do to himself.

“Use your mouth to get me hard,” he said. “Always use your mouth.”

I flushed, angry at myself for needing the instruction. But then I did what all the articles ask so said to do, which was obey. I lowered my mouth to the semi-soft organ. He was a shower *and* a grower. As I worked my tongue around the head of his cock in circles, I felt it come to life as blood engorged the vessel. I thought back to everything that I read this morning. I dragged my lips along the tip of his head and then dragged my tongue along the weeping tip. I glanced up at him. He was watching with a heated gaze and a slight curve of his lips. He gently stroked the top of my head and purred, “good girl.”

I was terrified of embarrassing myself, but I knew it was something I had to do. I took him into my mouth and with a deep breath, tried to take as much of him into my mouth as possible. I felt him touch the back of my throat and then pulled back with a gasp.

“Good. Girl!” he laughed. His voice was full of condescending amusement. I glanced up, cheeks burning, but he was *happy*. His eyes were alight with arousal and amusement. “You can do better than that though.”

I put him back into my mouth. I tried again, pushing his cock more firmly into the back of my throat. I tried to pull back but he grabbed the back of my head to halt my retreat.

“Nothing worth doing is easy,” he scolded. “Hold it a moment. I’m hardly even halfway in.”

I fought the urge to gag. It wasn’t a pleasant feeling, but I’d had my fingers fat further down the back of my throat before.

“Good. Girl,” he praised and then released my head. I pulled back to breathe. My eyes were watering and I breathed in deeply. “Look at me. Good fucking girl.” He gave me a curt, straining slap to my cheek. “Now choke yourself on it.”

He leaned back again and I grabbed the base of his now hardened erection. I tried again, fighting through my gag reflex.

“You sure you’ve never done this before?” Caleb asked, applying slight pressure to the back of my head. I might have told him I spent a good portion of my college years with my fingers shoved as far down my throat as I could get them, but thought that might kill the mood.

“What a slut you are,” he said in some wonder, applying more pressure to the back of my head. Finally, I felt my gag reflex trigger and my throat constricted around him. He held me in place and tears slipped from my eyes. When his hand left me, I fell backward, breathing heavily. He got to his feet, giving himself hard strokes, and ordered me to take off my clothes. I did, catching my breath and trying to remember what the article had said about breathing.

He returned with a pair of black leather cuffs in his hand. He grabbed my hands and put them behind my back, his nose pressed to my temple behind me. He murmured to me, “you’re going to show me how deep down your throat you can take me... how hard you’ll work to make me happy.”

The cuffs were pulled tight across my wrists and he took his spot back on the couch. I crawled closer, looking to him for my next move. He gave himself a few more strokes before

taking hold of the back of my ponytail. He put his cock back into my mouth. He pushed his cock in about halfway before pulling back and dragging the head of his cock over my lips.

“Relax,” he said and then pushed his cock back into my mouth. He pushed it further down and I fought down my reflex to gag as best as I could. My throat tightened and I waited for him to pull back. He held me there, about three quarters of his cock in my mouth. I pulled at my hands, wishing I could push myself away from him. Finally he let me pull back, spit falling from my lips and my cheeks flushed, eyes running. I couldn’t imagine how I might look. He placed another firm slap to my face.

“This is well overdue,” he said. “I thought about doing this to you so many times. Every time you spoke in a meeting. Every time you came at me with an attitude. That tight fucking smile.”

I flinched when he slapped me again. They were small, curt slaps. They stung, but they didn’t hurt. The grip he had on my hair was hard. “God, you could be a cunt.”

“I’m sorry,” I said softly, licking away some spit from my lips.

“Say it again,” he said hotly.

“I’m sorry, Caleb.”

He put my mouth back on him, forcing himself deep into my mouth. My nose was almost touching him and I yanked at my wrists. I needed them to push away from him, but his grip on me was firm. I struggled for a few moments before he released me and I was able to yank my head back.

“God, you take cock like it’s your fucking job. Whore,” he accented the word with a firm slap to my cheek and got to his feet. “You ok?”

I nodded, breathless. I couldn’t speak.

“You going to throw up?”

I shook my head. He took my face in his hands and put his cock back between my lips. He moved my head back and forth, sending his cock down my throat in quick, hard thrusts. My lungs began to burn and tears were leaking out of my eyes. He pulled back with a grunt and started to laugh. It was a kind of darkly amused laugh. He yanked my head back with his hand fisted in my hair.

“Watch those teeth, Orla,” he scolded with another curt slap to my cheek.

“I’m sorry,” I said on impulse. “I didn’t mean to.”

“Put that perfectionism to work. Be the best slut you can be.”

“Ok,” I breathed. He put his cock back into my mouth, forcing it deep down my throat. I gagged, I struggled to breathe, and his movements were relentless. I fell back with a gasp, hitting the coffee table behind me. Gasping for air.

“Ok?” he asked me. He pulled me back to my knees by my forearm. I nodded. I was sure that girl from the bar hadn’t been able to do this. I inched closer to him and swallowed thickly, preparing myself for the invasion.

“Ready?” he asked.

I nodded and that was the last of his concern for me. I don’t know how long it took, but eventually he was holding me by the throat, his other hand in my hair, cock deep down my throat, and he froze, body tense, and I could feel just the tickle of hot semen shooting into my throat. He released me and I sagged to the floor. My hands were still bound behind my back and I struggled to catch my breath. My vision was blurry and my head hurt. I was vaguely aware of him putting himself away and then disappearing into the kitchen. He returned and I was breathing a bit better. He placed a straw at my lips and I greedily sucked down the ice cold water.

“You took that like a champ,” he told me, voice oozing with condescension, but layered with heavy arousal. “I’ve never seen a girl take a deep throat so well on her first real try. Soon you’ll be able to take my cock in your throat as easily as your cunt.”

He stroked the top of my head. His eyes had an affectionate glimmer to them.

“Four more to go.”

I was overcome with relief, but I had to admit between greedy sips, “I’m all out of ideas.”

He smirked at me. “I can help you. And give you a nice reward in the process.”

I finished the water and he rose. He helped me to my feet and then guided me down the hall. It was with a glimmer of excitement that we went down the hall I had never been down before. We passed two closed doors before stepping into the door in the end.

The inside of the room was innocuous looking. There was a couch, a lifted ottoman, a coat rack and a small bench. His hands gently removed the binds at my wrists and then came in front of me. He refastened them in front of me and in a fluid motion raised them above my head.

“Don’t be scared,” he told me. “I want you to trust me.”

I heard a click and then a crank and he lowered his hands. I met his eyes, searching for malice. This was a man who had raped me, taunted me, and tortured me. Who knew what he might want to do to me now that I knew who he was. His resentment toward the way I had treated him had not gone away, that was clear. I felt another little prickle of fear, but then he touched my face and gently stroked my cheeks with his thumbs.

“Are you ok?” he asked me. I searched his eyes and nodded. He lowered his mouth down to mine and kissed me softly on the mouth. The room was cool, but his body was warm, and my nipples hardened as his shirt brushed against them.

“Try and pull free,” he instructed, as he stepped back. I obeyed, pulling down on the cuffs. He turned back as he opened a drawer. His face was blank. “Harder.”

I did, using all my strength, and when that didn’t work, jumped up and tried to use my falling weight to break me free. When I looked back at him, desire had flooded his face and he was already rubbing his erection through his jeans. He came closer and crouched down. He fastened matching leather cuffs around my ankles. I felt something click into place, and when I tried to move my legs, I found them held rigidly in place, both fastened to the ground, and held apart by a bar.

“I like when a woman can’t move,” he murmured, fingers sliding between my exposed lips. “I could hurt you right now... and you couldn’t do anything. Even after. We both know you couldn’t go to the police. Who would believe you? I have so many videos of you getting off to rough sex... really degrading stuff, Orla. You coming like a whore. What would your parents think?”

My lower lip trembled. Why was he saying that?

He gripped my chin at the top of my throat and looked down at me. I had to arch my neck back to look at those swirling gray depths. He kissed me softly and said, “open your mouth.”

I did. and without ceremony he spit into my mouth. I felt the hot glob of saliva land on my tongue and I swallowed. His eyes turned hotter and he slid his thumb into my mouth.

“Do you understand, Orla, that I could do literally anything I wanted to you right now? And no one would believe you didn’t want it?”

I nodded and closed my lips around his thumb. I didn’t want him to work himself up. I wanted him to be *happy* with me.

“I do want it,” I said. “What you want.”

My body was trembling quite violently. I could feel it rumble up from my insides. He cupped my cheek, the thumb stroking tenderly. His size was as obvious to me as ever. He *could* hurt me. He *could* do damage if he wanted. And there likely wasn't much he could do that would make me go to the cops. Not if it meant those pictures and videos went out and when they did... no one would believe me.

I was struck with a feeling of isolation. No one would believe it. Not my friends who I had neglected for so long, not my parents, not my coworkers or the public at large. I had no one. No one but Caleb, who had this strange dual desire to treat me like his girlfriend and a subhuman prostitute at the same time.

“Please don't hurt me,” I whispered. He kissed my lips softly. Chastely.

“I don't want to hurt you,” he murmured. He kissed me more deeply, our tongues touching.

“I belong to you,” I whispered into the kiss. He'd made me say that to him a lot before I knew he was. He made me repeat it often, so I knew it was something he liked to hear. “I know that.”

He pulled back and looked me over closely. He was looking for deception. I poured every ounce of being into my eyes. His thumb caressed my bottom lip. He stepped back abruptly and turned his back to me.

He opened another drawer and retrieved a somewhat large, but this box. He placed it on the top of the bureau and opened it carefully. I tried to press my legs together in anticipation but the bar and the binds around my ankles stopped me.

“Remember how good it felt when you wore that vibrator for me?” he asked, coming toward me with one that looked similar. I swallowed thickly and nodded.

“Holding on to you, and looking into those big green eyes, while you came right there in your office chair... was one of the hottest things I have experienced in my entire fucking life,” he said. He placed the vibrator at my mouth. I pulled back with a rush of revulsion and his lips twitched. He stared at me a moment, and then told me, “I wouldn’t use a toy on you that’s been used on another woman. I wouldn’t do that to you. Ok?”

I looked deeply into his eyes, searching for deceit. Then I looked over to the box he had retrieved from the drawer. It didn’t have any plastic or tags on it, but he could have purchased it when this all started. After all, the box he left me on my night stand had been unopened. I looked back into those stormy eyes. I asked softly, “you promise?”

“I promise,” he vowed. “Nothing I give you, put you in, or put in you, will have come from another woman. Ever. Whatever games I played in the past, I promise you, Orla, I will never lie to you.”

I nodded and then parted my lips. He placed the rough silicon onto my mouth and I wetted it. He slowly drew it out, watching my lips slowly stretch around it. He placed it between my legs, pushing it slowly into me, stretching and pushing, until it was deeply inside of me. It was larger than the one he had made me wear to work. I doubted if I’d be able to walk in this one.

“How’s it feel?” he asked.

“Um - goooo-oooooooooh,” I said as it turned on. He smirked at me, pressing his fingers to my clit. I pressed my hips onto his hand. He chuckled, low and grating. Humiliation and shame rippled through me as I realized how pathetic I must look, but I continued to grind myself into his thumb. I wanted it out of me. I wanted to feel the pulsing vibrator push deeper, retreat, push deeper, retreat.

“I want to see how long you can go without coming,” he said. “That’s a fun game don’t you think?”

“Caleb,” I breathed.

“Yes, Orla?” he asked, eyebrow quirking.

“Ok,” I breathed.

“Don’t come until I tell you you can. If you do,” he smirked. “Then I get to take my belt to you.”

His fingers dug into the soft flesh of my bottom. He licked his bottom lips. “Deal?”

“Y-yes,” I said, pushing my hips into his hand, just to get rid of that terrible, trance, glorious buzzing. Suddenly it was off and I let out a breath of relief.

He retrieved another item from the box. “I’ve told you, I’m not a sadist. I don’t get off on hurting you. It’s just about the power of it. I’m very single minded in some ways. My intensity can scare people.”

I wanted to ask him more about what he meant about single minded. What did that mean if he went on one of these ‘boy’s weekends’ for example?

He turned toward me, turning on the item in his hand. The rounded top began to vibrate and he pressed it into my clit. A moan escaped me, but then the one inside me came to life. A cry escaped me and I pressed my hips into the vibrator.

“I can promise you, Orla, no man will ever make you feel the way I do,” he said. The vibrator left my clit. My hips bucked. The one inside continued on, but then slowed, and finally shut off. He massaged my pussy lips, pressing his thumb to my clit hard.

“Because I know what you want,” he said, thumb moving in slow hard circles. “Deep down, underneath all the pride... your compulsion for perfection, you just want someone to take away every ounce of fear and indecision and anxiety that just ... *cripples* you.”

I looked up into his eyes. I wanted that more than anything. One of his fingers trailed the lines on my ribs.

“It talks to you. You came for me so many times...” his lips hovered just above mine. “You came for me while I was *raping* you. I didn’t even have to try to turn you into my whore. I got my cock in you and you turned into a greedy little cock whore in an instant.”

He kissed me again. The vibrations buzzed and my head swam and he smelled so good. The low buzz grew inside me. I wanted to press my thighs together. My ankles ached as I fought against the bar. His fingers slid along my slick folds.

“Be the good little whore I know you can be; and I’ll take such good care of you. You’ll never have to worry about anything again if you give me the control I want. Don’t you want that?”

The fact that his words appealed to me so deeply bothered me, but then the vibrator pressed to my clit and I nodded.

“Y-yes,” I said. “I do want that.”

“I know what you want. I know what you need.”

He pressed the wand harder into my clit. I yanked at the binds above my head, as if that would alleviate the hot, molten pressure building inside of me.

“It’ll feel so good, when you finally let go,” he said. My eyes were locked on his. He replaced the vibrator with his thumb. The other continued to buzz inside of me. His thumb moved in steady, firm circles. My hips bucked. I wanted so badly to bring my thighs together. My ankles hurt. My wrists hurt. But the pressure between my legs and in my belly. The color of his storm cloud eyes. The feel of his hands on my body.

“Tell me, Orla, what slut you are,” he said. The vibrator inside of me turned off. He ran his thumb along my soaking folds. He was so frustratingly calm as my entire body quaked.

“I’m a dirty slut,” I said. I thought back to the article I read on dirty talk this morning. Some of it was ridiculous. Some of it he had made me say before. “I’m your dirty whore - you make me - you make me so...so...”

“So what?” He asked, voice grating.

“So crazy,” I breathed honestly. My brow was furrowed as I struggled not to come. The vibrator pressed to my clit and turned on. A deep moan escaped me. I writhed, swaying slightly from the ceiling.

“I love the way you smell. And the sound of your voice. And how tall you are and how perfect your body is. And I don’t ...”

“Don’t what ...” he said. He had stepped very close to me.

“I don’t know,” I lied. “Oh, please Caleb. Please. I’m your slut. Please, I need to come.”

The vibrator inside of me turned up high. The vibrator pressed to my clit. I moaned and bucked my hips.

“Caleb!” I cried.

“Greedy whore.” His voice was low and rough. His lips were against my temple. He breathed in deeply and then bent down. He dragged his tongue along the side of my throat. The vibrator inside of me pulsed. The other massaged my clit. His teeth scraped my jaw. It all became too much.

“Caleb,” I said. I was almost in tears. I was slick with sweat. My entire body was warm and pulsed. It was a wonderful, blissful, terrible feeling. “Caleb.”

“That’s right,” he breathed, “Say my name, filthy cunt. Embarrass yourself. Show me what a whore you are and I’ll let you come.”

”I’m a dirty slut. I loved how you raped me,” I breathed. “I tried so hard not to come every time you did. I couldn’t.”

“Why not,” he growled, lips just over mine.

“Because I’m your whore,” I all but sobbed. “Please. I have to ...”

“Have to what?” He growled in my ear. He bit down on my earlobe. He smelled like a mixture. A faint hint of aftershave. His shampoo. Soap.

“Please, I need to come,” I said. “Please. I don’t want- I don’t want the belt. Please.”

He pulled back. His hand grabbed my hair and yanked it back. The vibrator pushed harder into my clit. The one inside me began to buzz. Now harder and faster.

My eyes locked back on his. My eyes felt wet and my mouth fell open as I panted.

“Please, Caleb,” I breathed. “Please. I’m begging you.”

His lips twitched and his eyes darted across my face. Hope flared.

“I’m begging you. I’m literally begging you. Please let me come. Please.”

“You want to come for me?” he asked. “My greedy whore wants to come?”

“Yes, please,” I begged. “Caleb. Please. I’m a greedy whore. Please, your greedy whore wants to come.”

“You can come for me,” he murmured. A violent orgasm ripped through me. The vibrator inside of me turned off as my orgasm slowly faded but the buzzing on my clit continued. Finally he turned it off. I felt drained. So tired. A bit humiliated. I wanted to cover myself. I wanted to push my legs together and try to hide the slick juices coating my thighs and leaking out of me.

He tilted my face up and placed a soft and tender kiss to my lips. He kissed me again, then once more.

“What a good girl,” he murmured. He kissed me again. I could feel the smile on his lips. He said, “two.”

“Wh-what was it?” I asked. A single tear fell from my right eye and dribbled down my temple. I wasn’t upset. My eyes were just wet from the rush of the orgasm.

“Begging, and you got so close to three,” he said and kissed my lips. “Ready for more?”

I looked up hopefully, but I felt exhausted already. I nodded. “Yes, please.”

I was relieved he was helping me. I really didn’t know what else to try, but begging seemed so simple in retrospect. I wracked my brain for simple things I might try. It came to me quickly. The dirty talk. I was shit at it. It felt so forced and unnatural. I don’t know if I’d be able to get past that.

He went to the dresser and retrieved a long black blindfold. I swallowed down deeply and took a steadying breath. He smirked as he walked around me and paused at my back. I closed my eyes when the blindfold pressed to my eyes.

“You’ve been so good,” he murmured low in my ear. It sounded like him, but he smelled like Caleb. I leaned back and breathed in deeply. He kissed my temple and reached up to grope my breasts gently. His hands were large and warm. He gently tweaked my nipples. I nodded.

“Come for me as often as you want. Ok?”

I nodded again. His hand slid between my legs. He asked me, one finger entering my slick folds, “any questions?”

I shook my head. He removed his fingers and moved away. He came back. I could feel him behind me. Something then pressed to my ears. Sound cut off completely. I couldn’t hear a thing. I felt the soft pressure on my ears. Noise canceling. My heart rate spiked and I pulled on the binds. I couldn’t see. I couldn’t hear. My hands were bound and my feet were fastened. I felt the crushing reality of my vulnerability wash over me. My panic rose, but then his hands gently slid down my spine. His hands were large, warm, and soft. His last words came back to me. He wouldn’t lie to me. He’d told me a couple times he wasn’t a sadist. He’d never hurt me before. He’d only ever hurt me when I disobeyed him. No, I knew he wouldn’t lie. Not about such clear statements. He told me he didn’t want to hurt me. He was happy with me. He wanted me to enjoy myself. I got my breathing under control. His hand continued to gently run over my body. They were soft, comforting touches. He moved away once I had my breathing under control.

He unlatched me from the fielding and my feet fell flat against the floor. The bar made it difficult to balance and I fell forward, catching myself against his chest with my bound hands.

He caught me, steadied me on my feet, and then nudged me toward the door. I had to walk very carefully with the bar. I moved in little shuffling steps. Lifting up my hands, I groped blindly in the air. He lowered my hands in front of me, but I made it only two more steps before my hands were up again, bracing for a wall I was bound to crash into. He lowered my hands again and then placed his hands on my hips. His finger tips prodded gently and he maneuvered me around the corner. He nudged me forward again and let go of me. I lifted up my hands again. This time he spun me around with a hard hand to my bicep and placed a firm

slap to my cheek. It hurt more than the others had and I took it for the rebuke it was. He spun me back around and nudged me forward. I walked, fighting against every urge I had to lift my hands. But then, I felt his hand on me again and he turned me, before setting me off to walk again. He wouldn't let me run into anything. That much was clear. I was startled by a firm slap to my ass. It didn't hurt. It stung. His hand then closed over over the kind, digging his fingers into my flesh, and after a firm squeeze, he slapped it again.

He spun me around. Another curt slap landed on my other cheek. I wanted more than anything to be able to see his eyes or hear him speak. The slapping stung. In an instant, I was forced back into my knees. I heard the shuffle of his jeans. Without preamble, his cock was back down my throat and he had a firm grip on my hair. He didn't take his time as he had before. His cock went deep into my throat and my nose pressed against the root of him. My eyes watered and I gagged. With my hands in front of me, I was able to lift up my hands and try to push again.

He yanked me off his cock with a firm grip on my pony tail. I felt a hard slap on the face. Harder than the last ones, and then a fat glob of spit landed on my nose. I gasped in surprise and then. He spit into my open mouth. I got another firm slap and then his cock was back down my throat. He jerked my head back and forth. I didn't push him away again, but I was certain I was making noises he couldn't possibly find attractive. He pulled back and the weight of his cock slapped down on my face. He tilted my head back. I waited, preparing myself for his cock to go back down my throat. His cock left my face and trailed along my lips. I was hauled back onto my feet next. Then he shoved me backward. I cried out, filled with confusion as to why he would want to hurt me, and readied for myself to hit the floor.

The back of my legs hit the bed and I landed safely on the soft blankets. His hands closed around my ankles and he lifted me up, tossing me up on the bed. He crawled on top of me, hand closing over my jaw, and he kissed me hard. His teeth scraped along my lower lip. I received more slaps to my face. He spit into my mouth, onto my cheeks and lips. He kissed me for a few minutes, tongue pressing against mine, while one of his hands pinched and plucked and twisted on my nipples.

Suddenly, the vibrator still inside of me turned on and his hand went between my legs. It went on for an eternity. My body built and built and built up until an orgasm rippled through me. As I came down from the orgasm, he slapped my cheek lightly, pressing it to the side then pulling it back to do it again. I was breathing heavily. It echoed in my head. It sounded so loud. I tried to quiet myself but it seemed impossible.

I reached out for him but I could not find him. My fingers spread out, groping. His hand closed around my wrist and he tugged me into a seated position. He flipped me over. It happened so fast and so unexpectedly. Every movement, every touch. It was overwhelming. I wanted to scream for him to stop. I wanted to reach up and rip the blind fold and the headphones from my head and tell him I was done. He couldn't continue.

But I did nothing. He grabbed me by the hips and lifted me up onto my hands and knees. Then he grabbed my bound wrists and yanked them out from under me. My face hit the e bed and he fastened my wrists to the bar between my ankles. It was a vaguely familiar position. His hand slid over my bottom and I braced myself for the curt slap that was coming. It did come, and by the time the three or four hard slaps were done, my bottom was burning.

My heart pounded loudly in my ears and I was breathing heavily. Moments passed with nothing. No movement. No sound. Just my breathing and my heart pounding. I felt a sudden urge to cry. Instead, I think I said his name. I heard it, but it was a strange sound. My panic began to increase and my breathing grew heavier. I strained my hands against the bar.

I started when a hand slid up my spine but relaxed quickly. It flattened, sliding up gently, then moving back up my spine. I calmed down. Then I felt his hands lower and spread me apart, exposing me at my most vulnerable. Panic lurched back to the surface and I struggled to keep my breathing under control. I don't know how I managed to stay still. I wanted to scrambled away from him, rage against the binds and break free like a feral animal. I didn't though. I stayed still and focused all of my energy on trying to slow my heart. It raced violently and memories came flooding back. I felt him pushing me down into the bed. The fear. Terror. His cruel words. His fingers biting into my skin. It all came rushing back to the surface. I sobbed. I wanted to be curled up on the couch with him, under a blanket, sipping tea, smelling a candle and reading my book. I wanted him to be looking at me from across the gym, throwing a wink my way. I didn't want him to hurt me or think of me this way...

Another cry left me. It sounded loud in my head. I wondered how ridiculous I sounded. Maybe he'd suddenly become unattracted to me and it would be all over after this. God knows what I sounded like. I couldn't imagine I sounded sexy. I felt a prickle of fear at the thought. His lips brushed against my temple. He nuzzled me, lips caressing my cheek. He did this until I got my breathing under control and managed to relax my muscles.

He pulled back, and I felt him pull my ass cheeks apart again. Something warm and wet pressed to my asshole. Slowly, one finger slid into me. I moaned. It was a strange feeling. I was scared but it didn't hurt. I almost felt a numbness around the digit, but inside, I felt warmth and I could feel him spreading me apart.

I was panting. I breathed in deeply through my mouth and slowly out my nose. I was grateful he hadn't gagged me. I didn't think I would be able to handle that. The feeling of warmth radiated through me. I was surprised I felt no pain. His finger continued to gently probe at me. Suddenly, the vibrator turned on inside of me. My hips bucked and he pulled his finger back. I felt more dampness. Then another digit entered me. Bigger this time. I thought maybe it had been his pinky, now his pointer. But the vibrator was on high and my back arched and my hips bucked. I knew logically he could see me, but not being able to hear, not being able to see, it was as if he wasn't there. I bucked my hips. I was aware I was making noise. I couldn't hear it though. I could feel it in my throat. I could sense it in my head but it was so strange. I think I said his name. My mouth moved and noise came out.

He moved his finger in wide circles. I'm not articulate enough to describe the feeling. The vibrator stopped suddenly and I know I made a noise of frustration. I felt a curt smack to my ass. The finger continued to circle. The vibrator turned back on again. I was vaguely aware his finger continued to move. But the vibrator felt so good. His fingers went to my clit. He massaged firmly. I know he'd want me to come again. He liked making me come. So I didn't fight it when I felt my orgasm rattle over me.

His finger had left me when I orgasmed. I didn't feel it leave. He dragged his fingers along my weeping pussy. Then I felt him rub his fingers along my asshole. There was a pause. Then I felt the pressure. My body tensed again, but a large hand squeezed the back of my neck. I braced myself for pain. I could feel him over me again. The pain, shame, and humiliation. The pressure continued. I don't know how long it took for him to be completely inside of me. There was slight discomfort, but none of that searing pain from before.

I focused on the pressure of the vibrator inside of me. It clenched around it tightly, as if I could turn it on. The hand on the back of my neck pulsed. Another warm palm slowly slid up and down my spine. Slowly, that hand slinked around my hip and his thumb brushed against my pulsing clit. I jerked slightly, trying to get closer to the touch. I felt him pull out of me slowly, about halfway, and then push back inside of me. His motions were slow and steady. I tugged at the bar between my ankles. The vibrator turned on and I think I moaned. I could hear it internally. Feel it vibrate in my chest. My entire body was sent into an overload. It was the strangest, worst, best, euphoric feeling I had ever felt. It blurred together, and as his thrusts grew faster and harder, the pressure inside of me built until I couldn't remember anything but the flashing behind my eyes and the sound of my breathing and panting from the inside of my skull.

I don't remember being put on the ground or him straddling my shoulders, but I remember the hand on my jaw, forcing my lips apart and the hot, bitter shot of his semen as it landed on

my lips. I stuck my tongue out. The head of his cock rested on my tongue and he continued to shoot the heavy load into the back of my throat.

He dropped my head gently. He'd had me by the hair. He was gone then, and I laid on the floor, covered in my own sweat and juices, his come on my tongue. I closed my mouth and swallowed. I licked my lips clean, breathing hair. He gently scooped me up some time later. Seconds, minutes, or hours, I had no way of knowing. His body was firm and strong. He'd removed his shirt. I could feel his broad muscular chest against my skin. The headphones were removed but the blindfold remained. His nose pressed to my temple and he murmured softly, "you're such a good girl, Orla. You did so well. I'm so proud of you."

I felt a rush of warmth flood through me and I turned my face into his collarbone. I could feel his heart pounding hard against my shoulder.

"My perfect girl," he said. "Such a good girl. Best I've ever had."

He sat me down on the toilet seat. It was so cold compared to his body. I reached for his arms, wanting to be back in their warmth. Gently, he resisted my attempts at restraining him and he unfastened the blindfold from my eyes. He blinked up at him and he retrieved a glass of ice water from the counter. I didn't reach for it. I leaned forward, mouth open, and sucked on the straw like a dying man in the desert. When it was gone, he placed the empty cup down. He wiped the inside of my thighs down with a warm, damp cloth, all the while, telling me how wonderful I did. How good I was. How much he enjoyed it.

I glanced to the side. The large soaking tub was full of water, steam coming off the surface, and it smelled amazing. He must have put oils on it. I wanted to sink into it and go to sleep.

"You did so well," he said again, gently pulling me to my feet. "You're such a good girl."

I leaned into him, wrapping my arms around his middle. My breasts pressed into his muscles and my hips rubbed against the rough fabric of his jeans. He lowered me into the water. It was the perfect temperature. Hot. So hot. But not hot enough to hurt. He kissed me gently. I was a bit embarrassed, thinking back at the sounds I might have made. How pathetic I must have looked. I looked up at him, praying I didn't find disgust or amusement. I saw only gentle warmth, and a soft affectionate smile on his face.

“I’m so happy with you,” he murmured softly, stroking the top of my head.

“Come in,” I said softly. I touched his wrists. We’d both fit. He smiled at me. I said, voice small, “please.”

He pulled back with a smirk and unbuttoned his jeans. He pulled them down, bringing his boxers with them. I couldn’t help but look at his now flaccid cock. It was sizable, even soft. He stepped into the water and sat down on the opposite side of the tub. His legs stretched out over mine. I hesitated only a moment, before I leaned forward and swam the short distance to him. I needed the validation of his touch. The terrible sounds I must have made. I hated not knowing what I sounded like. I pressed my face to his chest and his arms closed around me. He breathed in the top of my head. My hair was damp with sweat.

“You’re so perfect, Orla,” he told me. “You drive me crazy.”

His hands slid up and down my limbs beneath the water.

“I hate that you can’t see how beautiful you are,” he said. I squeezed my eyes shut. He sounded so genuine. “I wish you knew how gorgeous you are. How smart and funny. You’re everything.”

I felt my face contort. I wouldn’t ruin this by crying but I just felt so... emotional. A sob broke past my lips and I pressed my face into the crook of his neck. I breathed in deeply. I wanted to smell him before my nose clogged up.

“It’s not you. I’m just... it was so...”

“I know. Shh,” he soothed, stroking to the top of my head. “You’re ok.”

I tried to swallow my sob. His arms tightened around me.

“Cry, Orla. It’s ok,” he said. His knuckles stroked my cheek. I shook my head. I didn’t want to cry in front of him. I was already humiliated, but I wanted to cry so badly. His lips brushed against my temple. “Cry. I’ve got you.”

I took in a shuddering breath. It wasn’t until he lied, telling me softly, “I’m not going anywhere” that the tears really broke free.

The rest of the day was a blur. At some point I lifted us out of the tub, her asleep, water pooling all over the floor as it dripped off of our naked bodies. I wrapped her in the towel, held her a while like that as she swayed. I made us breakfast for dinner. Eggs and toast with a bit of bacon and sausage. She ate it up, eyes far away, but not in a scary, vacant, broken sort of way, but as if she were lost in thought, searching for something she couldn't quite find. She was still as much a mystery to me now as she was the day she started. I loved it. It was intoxicating, the not knowing, the mystery, the needing to learn any and every thing about her, but I knew deep in my bones that when the day finally came, when I knew everything there was to know, all her little quirks and all her little secrets, I would love her even more than I loved her now.

After dinner, we did the dishes together, standing side by side in front of the sink and silence. It was a comfortable silence, for her as well as me I think. She was thinking, processing, and I left her to do it. I offered her half a xanax for bed, which she took without complaint or a request for a second, and I had her change into a pair of matching green silk shorts and a cami. Her breasts were full and soft beneath the silky fabric and I watched her nipples harden beneath the cool fabric as I slid on my sweatpants.

I got into bed first, saying nothing as she went into the bathroom. When she came back out, she smelled like minty mouthwash and cranberry body lotion. She crawled on top of me, straddling my hips, and my hands immediately went to her breasts. I squeezed them firmly. Full, soft, firm, nipples erect. My mouth watered as I thought about sucking on them, but before I could push her cami up and suck one of the firm little buds between my lips, her mouth pressed to mine. Her hands, small and slender, were cool as they touched my face, and her kiss was fueled with neediness and uncertainty.

My cock grew hard, straining against my sweatpants, brushing against her pussy, which was just visible with the shorts disheveled by her sitting position. For the millionth time in my life, I felt that insatiable need to control rush through every single ounce of my DNA. I wanted to flip us over, pin her down, wrap my hand around her throat and fuck her like I wanted to hurt her. I waited through, enjoying the feel of her lips so soft and probing against my own, yet somehow also filled with a trembling sort of need of her own.

"I fucking love you, Orla," I breathed against her lips. Her entire body, smaller and more fragile than I think she would ever fully realize, tensed and contorted slightly before a soft, breathy noise passed her lips. It was partially a moan, partially a sob, and I removed my greedy hands from her breasts and slid them underneath her cami and up her back. She took

my bottom lip between hers, sucking gently, and pressed her partially exposed pussy harder into me. I could already feel her throat beneath my hand. Fragile and vulnerable.

Never in my life did I ever have a desire to kill or to truly hurt. I still didn't. The thoughts I had, thoughts that I was never able to fully describe to anyone, even my therapist, were not driven by a need to hurt. When I felt her teeth not on my lower lips, not nibbling, but *biting*, I thought about grabbing her by the throat and holding her down and pounding my hips against hers until she wailed and how easy it would be to choke the life out of her.

I *didn't* want to hurt her and I *didn't* want to kill her. I had tried to explain that to my shrink a million times as a teenaged boy before I finally gave up. It was that I could if I wanted. It was that I had the ability, the power, and the control *not* to. I was told how dangerous these thoughts were. That it was how it began. I tried to tell them that I was different. I wasn't a psychopath. I wasn't crazy. It was the only way to explain what was going on in my head but no one understood. My mother had pressed her hand to her mouth when my doctor told her I had confessed to dreaming about raping women. I had been sixteen, sitting in a chair with my powder blue oxford shirt tucked into my tan Hilfiger shorts, my ankles jutting out prominently from my white sperry's. I still remember the incessant rattle of the AC unit in the window and how my hair gel would not keep my hair where I wanted it to be. It had been longer then, parted in the middle. She'd canceled our summer outing with our cousins. We spent a week on the water alone, just my weeping mother, my silent father, and my two older brothers.

"We didn't need to cancel the trip," I heard my father say from inside the cabin of the family sailboat.

"He won't go near my sister's daughters, George," My mother had snapped and ripped the cork out of another bottle of wine.

"Orla, I love you," I said again. I wasn't positive she heard me the first time. She bit me again, harder this time, and her hand went into my sweat pants and her fingers closed around the base of my erect cock. She pulled her shorts to the side and pressed me at her entrance. My hands closed around her waist, but I only helped lower her down. I would let her continue for a few minutes longer, then I would take what I wanted. In truth, I loved the way her body was trembling, the uncertainty of her movements, but the need I could feel in them. It made me feel wanted and I let her come to me, despite the urge it inspired in me. She moved rhythmically, but her speed alternated. She ground her hips, rubbing her clit against me as she pressed my cock into her at different angles. I broke off a kiss and reached up, grabbing her by the throat and holding her back so I could look at her.

“That’s right, Orla,” I breathed, sliding my thumb between her lips. She sucked on the digit, eyes searching and vulnerable, but flooded with desire. I had been told when I was in college by a girl I talked too much during sex. It had enraged me. I ended up fucking her best friend at a party a couple weeks later and though I had done it to hurt her, I remember being a little bit surprised by just how upsetting she found it. We hadn’t been together. I knew for a fact she was fucking two other guys on the basketball team. She said to me once, at lunch, in front of all our friends, that she preferred black men. Her friend liked the way I talked.

I slid my hands up her thighs and squeezed, pressing my fingertips into the skin in an effort to leave a mark. I talked because it made me feel better. It helped tamp down that uncontrollable need I felt. When you couldn’t hold a woman down and fuck her, when you didn’t want to hurt her but you needed her to know you *could* .

“Tell me you belong to me,” I ordered her. She looked like she had stepped out from one of my dreams, thick auburn hair, wavy from air drying, spilling over her shoulders, her eyes closed, cheeks pink, lips parted.

“I belong to you,” she panted. I flexed my hand around her throat. My thumb pressed into her carotid. “Tell me you want me.”

A growl burst from my lips and I almost snarled. I flung myself forward, pressing her to her back in the center of the mattress. I remained inside of her and her legs wrapped around my middle. I squeezed my hand harder around her throat.

“I want you,” I told her. “I wanted you the second I saw you. I want you now. I’ll want you in sixty years.”

I moved my hips in slow, deep strokes. I angled her hips so I could get into her more deeply.

“I belong to you, Caleb,” she breathed. Her hands pressed to my chest firmly, but not to push me away, but to feel my hard muscles beneath my shirt. “I want you.”

I lowered my face to hers, our lips almost touching, and I gave her a few more hard strokes, my eyes fixed on hers, and my hand tightened on her throat, “You have me.”

I pulled out of her and flipped her over before I entered her again from behind. I wrapped my hand back around her throat, tilting her face back up toward me and I looked at her. Her back arched downward in the middle, her ass raised toward me, her head pulled backward. I fucked her as hard as I could. Hard, fast, and rough. I wasn’t particularly concerned about her coming. I’d given her plenty of orgasms today. This was for me. Even still, I felt an orgasm ripple through her and she moaned into my mouth.

“My fucking whore,” he growled against her lips as I felt it. “You like it rough, you slut.”

She moaned softly into my mouth and I pressed my tongue to hers. I came hard, spots in my eyes, and I sagged on top of her, body covered with a soft sheen of sweat, my cock still buried deeply inside of her. She fell asleep very shortly after cleaning herself up in the bathroom and I remained awake, holding her against me, breathing in the smell of her auburn hair. I trailed my fingers along her shoulders and down her arms, enjoying the color of her pale skin against the dark sheets. I don’t remember falling asleep, but I woke up as she crawled back into bed. She nestled herself back into my arms, pressing her cheek to my chest. I tightened my arms around her.

“Can I sleep in today?” she murmured. I said nothing. I gave her a squeeze and nodded. I reached for my phone, turned off my alarm, and fell back asleep. I woke again to the smell of coffee and bacon. I went to the bathroom, took a piss, and then padded into the kitchen with a big yawn. She was in the green silk pajama set, stirring eggs slowly in the pan.

“I wasn’t sure if I should wake you up,” she said as I approached.

“I turned my alarm off,” I told her. I stopped for a kiss before coffee. I was already getting hard again. Orla Wright, in my kitchen in silk pajamas, making me breakfast, and I could fuck her whenever I wanted...

I poured myself a cup of coffee and went over to turn on the TV and watch some news. She brought breakfast over and sat down beside me.

“Do you want another cup of coffee?” she asked after I took my last sip and put the empty cup down. I watched her cross the kitchen and pour a cup of coffee. When she came back, I pulled her down with a hand to her wrist.

“Get on your knees,” I murmured to her. She hesitated only a moment before she slid to her knees between my legs. I lifted my hips to help her pull out my erection. Her lips looked so good stretched across my hard cock, long and thick. I sipped my coffee as I watched her work. Eventually, I pulled myself free to rub the weeping head of my cock across her lips and cheek. I pushed the head of my cock back into her mouth and leaned back again. Her hands went to my thighs and she slowly tried to take my back, deeper into her throat. I tilted my head back, eyes closed, enjoying the feel of it.

I focused on a particular memory I had of her. I had laughed at something Chris said as my eyes coincidentally darted over to get a look of Orla in her gray pencil skirt and black blouse. The top button was loose and would sometimes come undone, giving a glorious little peak at her collarbone. Our eyes met and I continued laughing. Her lips tightened with disgust and she lifted her eyes toward the ceiling in a partial eye roll, before she shook her head and looked back at her notebook.

I opened my eyes and looked back at her. I placed my hand on the back of her head, helping give her the encouragement needed to push my cock further down her throat. Her throat was tight and warm and I made her look at me. When I came, I pulled her head back by the hair and came on her outstretched tongue.

“Good girl,” I told her when I finally gave her permission to swallow.

“How many am I up to?” she asked, collecting our dishes and going to the sink.

I held up my fingers to count. “The deepthroat. Begging. Total submission.”

“You said I had gotten close to one yesterday. What was it?” she asked.

“It’s not fun if I tell you, and I gave you two already.”

She did the dishes and came back to sit down next to me. She bit her inner lip. I watched her thinking, a smile on my face.

“I need two more?” she asked. I only nodded. There were countless things she could choose. She was making it far more harder than it needed to be. I knew what her struggle was. She had been so clearly anxious while we were grocery shopping yesterday, she hadn’t seemed to notice I was scrolling through her phone and not my own as we made our way around the store. Her google searches kept me hunched over the shopping cart, hoping to hide my erection from both her and the shoppers we shared the store with. She had been clever enough to use incognito mode, but far too innocent to realize there was a way of accessing *any* search history if you knew what you were doing.

She thought she needed to initiate and she didn’t. I’d count almost anything if she just asked me to do it. ‘Tie me up, Caleb. Pull my hair. Smack my ass. Cum in my hair. Call me your whore.’ I’d count any of those. I watched her struggle to think of something, when finally, she turned her big green eyes on me.

“I’ll do whatever you want me to do,” she said. “Does that count?”

I trailed my fingers over her arms, considering how much leeway I wanted to give her and how badly I wanted to be able to paint her ass red with my belt this afternoon.

“Do you want a massage?” she asked. “Back massage or a foot massage? Is there a game today? I’ll bring you a beer and rub your feet?”

I was getting hard again.

“There’s no alcohol in the house,” I told her. It wasn’t true. I’d dumped the beer. That didn’t bother me at all if it made things easier for her. I did have some liquor in the back though, but I’d locked that up in my safe with her pills.

“I wouldn’t say no to a nice massage in a bit though,” I said. “I’m going to go to the gym for a bit. Maybe when I get back?”

“Can I come with you?” she asked.

“If you want,” I said. “I don’t want you to over exert yourself.”

“I didn’t even break a sweat yesterday,” she said.

“And you won’t today either.”

“I won’t come if you don’t want me to, it's just... I want to be where you are,” she said. My tongue felt large and dry in my mouth. “Lot of pretty girls at that gym...”

She looked down at her hands. I considered briefly giving her four. My heart was pounding and my cock was stirring.

“Jealous?” I asked. She looked at me. Her eyes were wide and vulnerable.

At sixteen, a shrink told me I’d never have a healthy relationship if I couldn’t stop watching porn because the sex I was looking for was unattainable in reality. That my sexual proclivities were a means in which to satiate my own emotional traumas through the physical. I told him I had no emotional trauma. I lived a privileged life and had always gotten everything I’d ever wanted. I saw no reason why that shouldn’t extend to women. He tried to bring up some bullshit about my relationship with my mother, but my relationship with my mother deteriorated *because* of my desires and only after that traitorous hack in too much tweed told her I fantasized about raping girls and *after* he told me everything we said in that room was private. It was the last time I had ever told a shrink anything that even remotely scratched the surface of what went on inside of me. No one could be trusted, not even a doctor, no matter what they said about privacy.

This woman proved I had been right. It was attainable and I had it, right here in front of me, looking at me with those big green eyes. She nodded and murmured, “yes.”

My lips twitched upward. I gently took her by the chin and pressed my mouth to hers. I said, “good.” and got up to go into the bedroom. She followed, watching me calmly. I picked out some black leggings for her, a hot pink cropped top with a built in sports bra.

“Is there a shirt?” she asked when she picked up the cropped top.

“That’s the shirt,” I told her. “Put it on.”

She stared at the clothing and I waited for her to say something. She looked up at me. I saw the challenge in her eyes, but I saw the vulnerability too. She stripped down and dressed. Her ass looked great in the leggings, void of any underwear lines, and the top fit her as perfectly as I imagined it would. Her leggings were high waisted and ended just below her belly button, the top ended just above it. There was the slightest sliver of flesh. I spun her around to look in the mirror and pressed my semi-erect cock into her bottom.

“Tell me how sexy you are,” I said. “Look at yourself and tell me how hot you are.”

“Caleb ...” she sighed. I squeezed her ass and smacked it hard. I bit her earlobe. “I’m sexy.”

“That wasn’t convincing,” I scolded. I ran my hands from her ribcage, down over the narrow curve of her waist, and then over her hips. “Look at yourself.”

She did, eyes moving over her body. She pressed her hands to her flat stomach, her narrow waist, her hips.

“Everyone in that gym is going to want to fuck you,” I told her. “But...”

“I belong to you,” she finished. Our eyes met in the mirror.

“You think for a second I’d put you in something I didn’t think you looked fucking hot as hell in?” he asked. She shook her head. I smacked her ass one more time and then changed. I came out of the bathroom, considering what coat to put her in, when I found her sitting on my bed with my BC hoodie on her. It dwarfed her and she sat with her hands in her lap, shoulders bent inward. She stood up and it fell to her mid thigh.

“Is this OK?” she asked.

“More than OK,” I answered. I considered just skipping the gym, bend her over, pull her leggings down, and fuck her hard.

“It smells like you,” she said. She raised the collar to her nose and breathed in. “Like both of you.”

We walked to the gym holding hands. The morning was cool and breezy but the day would be hot. I struggled to keep from squeezing her hand too hard. It was small and fragile. If I wanted to, I probably could have broken it just by squeezing. It was busier than I liked it when we got there, but I got her situated on a treadmill and then went over to hit the weights. A couple of the early morning guys were still there and gave me a hard time as I got to the presses.

“Slacking there, Trent,” a guy named Colin said.

“Can you blame him? If I woke up with that girl in my bed, I’d never make it to the gym,” a man he only knew as Smithy said. They clapped hands together and Caleb felt a smirk on his lips.

“Where’d you find her, huh?” Colin asked.

“Dude, I’m her fucking boss,” Caleb laughed. The others joined in. “We started seeing each other before that, it would have been fine but we kept it kind of under wraps. Then I got the promotion and we’ve gotten more serious so... working through that.”

“Good for you, man, she’s fucking hot.”

“You got a spot at Deloitte if you want it man, you know that,” Colin said. Caleb leaned on the weight bench bar.

“I’d hate to jump ship right after the promotion, but I’m going to marry this girl, man. Thinking I’ll get through the summer and then send my resume over,” I said, dropping my voice as if anyone at the gym would breathe a word of it to anyone outside these walls. This was our church.

“We need people, man, have her apply, she’ll get a senior spot and a good raise,” Colin added. I shook my head. Orla needed to stay put. Not only did she not need the stress of switching jobs, meeting new people, and learning a new system, I needed her where Chris could keep an eye on her for me. When the move was made so we could go public, it had to be me.

“We’ll talk about it,” I said.

I settled in to do my legs. I’d never hated leg day the way others did, but I definitely didn’t enjoy it. I could feel eyes on me as I worked. I’d always been hyper aware of the looks I received. I was particularly aware of Orla now. I caught her eyes a few times in the mirror. She was walking faster than I wanted her to, but she looked good so I stayed put. Collin and Smithy stopped by before heading out and Collin gave me a pat on the arm.

“Ricky’s sniffing around your girl, man,” he said. I moved up to a standing position and put the bar back on the rack. I turned to find Orla pointing toward me. A man was walking on the treadmill beside her. I recognized him only vaguely. We worked out at different times usually, so I had only seen him in the rare instances we overlapped briefly. He looked at me, gave me a head nod, and went back to talking to Orla, a smile on his face. I was confident enough to know that Orla had told him I was her boyfriend, so I went back to finishing my set, but my eyes remained laser focused on Orla.

“Are you almost done?” I heard a flirty female voice ask to my right as I waited between sets. Orla was laughing at something this Ricky had said. He was lean, clearly a runner, and had

worked himself up to a jog on the treadmill. “When you’re done, think you could spot me?”

“What?” I asked, turning my head to look at her. She was a skinny blond with big tits. “No. Fuck off.”

I looked back at Orla. She looked over at me, smiled and waved.

“Wow, asshole,” the blond said and walked away to another press. She leaned over the bar and a big meaty lifter stopped to talk to her.

I glared back at Orla as she began speaking to Ricky again. She laughed again, a genuine laugh where she tossed her head back, touched her stomach. Her laugh made its way to my ears and I put the bar back. I’d seen her laugh like that before at work. The happy laugh that came from deep inside of her, that brought a real smile to her lips. Chloe made her laugh like that, Chris could make her laugh like that. She’d never laughed like that for me. I slapped my towel over my shoulder and walked away without cleaning the machine off.

“This is my boyfriend, Caleb,” Orla said as I approached.

“Hey, Caleb. Ricky,” he said with a grin. I gave a nod.

“Come on, Orla, let’s go,” I said and Orla blinked in surprise.

“It’s only been forty five minutes. You’re already done? I feel fine,” she said. I nodded.

“Let’s go,” I said curtly. Orla nodded, shut off her machine and said goodbye to Ricky. “I’ll clean off the treadmill.”

I nudged her toward the locker rooms and she cocked her head at me, gave a little frown, but kept moving. My face was still flushed when she came out of the locker room with her things. Seeing my hoodie on her alleviated some of my stress and I took her hand in mine.

“Caleb, what’s wrong?” she asked. I grunted, pulsing my hand around her tiny hand. I could break her hand if I wanted to, but I wouldn’t. I could break Ricky’s fucking head in with a crowbar too, but I wouldn’t. She didn’t speak again until I was down to about 430 and we were just halfway home.

“Are you jealous?” she asked.

My heart was pounding so hard against my ribcage, I thought the bones might break. I’d always get that lemon sucking smile when I made a joke at the office. A roll of the eyes. A scowl. A look in the other direction. Some asshole she just met at the gym got that laugh out of her. She pressed her other hand to my wrist, squeezing my hand firmly.

“He’s engaged, Caleb,” Orla said. “He was telling me about where they were going on their honeymoon.”

I did not speak because I knew better. I didn’t want to say anything that would hurt her because she hadn’t done anything wrong. We stepped inside and I locked the door. When I turned back, she slid her arms around my middle and stepped closer.

“Caleb, why are you so angry?” she asked. “Tell me, please. I can’t do anything if you don’t tell me.”

I looked down at her, cupped her cheek. Despite what my mother or shrink might think, it was moments like this where I knew there wasn’t really anything wrong with me, because even though my body was trembling with hardly concealed rage, I didn’t want to hurt her. I trailed my thumb over her lips tenderly.

“Caleb, I’m trying to be everything you want me to be, but I can’t unless you tell me what you want,” she said softly.

“You already are everything I want,” I murmured. My eyes were on her lips. I said, very softly, “I want you to love me the way I love you.”

The moment I said it, I regretted it. How many times had I said that to her in so many words, and how many times had she thrown it back in my face, cut me off at the knees and utterly emasculated me. I lifted my eyes back up to look at her. I swallowed thickly. My throat hurt. Her eyes were open and searching. They darted between mine rapidly.

“I love you, Orla,” I told her.

She reached up and held my face in her hands. She stared at me with incredible intensity, as if she could see a lie or a truth just by looking closely enough. I held her gaze.

“I don’t think I’m good enough for someone like you to want,” she said. She said it simply. Her voice was clear. “I never have.”

I stared at her. I looked for deceit, manipulation. I found none.

“I don’t know how to convince you,” I said. “What more do I have to do? Tell me what to do.”

She shook her head. “I don’t know,” she whispered, tears in her eyes. “I’m broken.”

The violent surge of love that overtook me was frightening. I grabbed her by the shoulders and held her tightly. I jostled her as I grappled for the right words. I released her and yanked her yoga pants down. She stepped out of them, leaning on my shoulders to help. She pulled my sweatshirt and her top off over her head and tossed it to the side. When I picked her up, she jumped up to assist, wrapping her naked legs around my waist and her arms around my neck. I kissed her, carrying her into my bedroom and threw her down on the bed.

“I like it when you’re rough because it makes me feel wanted,” she breathed in my ear as I fell down on top of her. I kicked off my shorts and underwear. Her hands felt impossible cold against the back of my burning neck. Her breath was hot against my ear. I pulled back and ripped my shirt off. She was looking at me with wide eyes, breasts heaving.

“I fucking want you,” I said. I leaned down and placed my mouth to hers. Her hand went to my cock and she lifted her hips. I grabbed her by the throat again and used my other hand to push her hips down.

“You don’t get to run this show, baby,” I told her. “I’m in charge, you understand?”

She nodded.

“You can get on top when I decide you’ve been a good girl or if I want a nice show,” I said. “That doesn’t happen everyday.”

She kept nodding. Her eyes moved over my body. Real desire glimmered in her big green eyes. I lifted my hand from her hip and pointed at her. “You belong to me. My sexy little plaything.”

I dragged my eyes down her body. I slid my hand up her hips and along the curve of her waist. I buried my face in her neck. I sucked hard. Bit, nipped, licked, sucked. Her nipples were hard and she lifted her hips to brush against my erection.

“I want to make a video,” I murmured against her mouth. I felt her tense. I twirled a hard nipple between my fingers.

“OK,” she breathed. I got off of her and found my phone. She remained on the bed, sprawled out against the navy spread, and I set up my phone on the nightstand. I grabbed her phone and got back on the bed. I flipped her onto her stomach with ease and then lifted her ass up.

“Face down,” I instructed. She obeyed, mostly I think, because her face was hidden from the camera. “Spread yourself open for me, Orla.”

I held her phone up to record and grabbed my cock, giving myself a few hard strokes. "That's right, open yourself up for me."

Her face was pressed to the bed and she reached around with both hands. She pulled her ass cheeks apart, revealing her wet, pink pussy and the quivering little asshole.

"Look at that wet, pussy," I said, prushing my thumb along the opening. She let out a little whimper when I smacked her ass hard. "Wider."

She readjusted and pulled herself apart for me. I pressed the head of my weeping cock against the lips of her pussy. She was warm and wet and mine. I pressed the tip of my head into her and she let out a little noise again. I pulled the head of my cock out of her then slipped it in again. I gave my shaft a few hard jerks, the head of my cock still inside of her, and then pulled out once again.

"Caleb," she sighed in frustration. I laughed.

"What do you want?" I asked her.

"Just put it in," she said with some annoyance. I smacked her ass again and then grabbed her by the hair.

"How about some respect?" I snapped.

"*Please*," she got out. "Please Caleb, I need you inside of me."

My balls tightened and I released her hair. I pushed my cock into her and was rewarded with a low, delicious moan.

"Oh, god," she moaned. "Thank you."

I fucked her like that, recording my cock slide in and out of her tight, wet pussy, her fingers holding herself open for me so I could get a good view.

“Harder, Caleb,” she finally moaned, then added, “Please, Caleb.”

I stopped recording on her phone and dropped it on the bed beside us. I glanced at my phone, and then grabbed her by the elbows. I yanked them to the small of her back and held her up so the camera could watch her tits sway and bob as I thrust in and out of her. She made delicious noises. Pants and moans and gasps. When I felt myself nearing the end, with my forehead slick with sweat, I released her arms and took her hips in a bruising grip. I fucked her as hard as I could. If she thought rough equaled desire, I’d show her how much I fucking wanted her. Her legs buckled beneath her and she ended up on her stomach. I didn’t stop. I don’t remember if she came or not, I hardly remembered my own orgasm, except that it was hard and hot and blinding. Afterward, as I fell on my back, she nestled her sweaty, tired body up against my own, draping a long slender leg over mine.

“Grab the phone,” I ordered when my breathing was back to normal. She obeyed. “After I recover,” I told her. “I’m going to watch our little movie and you’re going to work on your deepthroat skills.”

“OK,” she murmured, pressing her lips to my throat. She breathed, “That was so good.”

“Got yourself up to four,” I murmured, eyes closed.

“The videotaping?” she asked. I tightened my arms around her.

“Being honest with me,” I answered. My eyes fluttered open and I smiled at her. “Being vulnerable.”

Her eyes moved over my face.

“You know how you said, if I got to five, I’d get something nice and if I didn’t, you’d use the belt?”

I nodded silently. I wanted to take a nap.

“I want you to do that anyway,” she said. I remained still, trying to make sense of what it was she was telling me. My eyes opened and I looked at her. “You want to. You like that. That’s the whole point of this, isn’t it? To find out what you like?”

She sat up, pressing one delicate hand to the center of my chest.

“And I want you to punish me for everything you think I’ve ever done wrong to you. Disrespect or... whatever it was... and you’ll tell me and punish me and then we’ll ... we’ll move forward. I don’t want you to resent me anymore.”

“I don’t,” I said. I didn’t know it was a lie when I decided to say it, but I knew it was once the words were out of my mouth.

“You do,” she said. “Please. I can’t... I can’t feel comfortable with you if I think you’re still angry with me. If you resent me. Please. Punish me.”

I stared at her and she stared back at me and I knew one thing for certain. There was no force on this earth that could make me give her up.

I stepped out of the bathroom and into his bedroom. I was partially surprised not to find any clothing laid out for me, but then I remembered the look on his face when he came out to find me wearing his hoodie. I took one of his t-shirts from the closet and threw it on. I put on a pair of the underwear he had for me from the dresser and then went into the kitchen. He was eating a sandwich, staring down at his phone. He had a plate next to his, which I took for mine. I could feel him watching me as I walked to the fridge and pulled out a cold Diet Coke.

As I approached, I realized it was my phone he had. I stood beside him and watched the video playing it. Watched his hard, thick erection slowly sliding in and out of my pussy, held open for him by my own fingers. I looked up at him and found his eyes on me.

“When do you want to do it?” I asked him. He looked me over, his fingers gently moving up and down my arm.

“No time like the present,” he answered. I wet my lips and nodded.

“Eat up,” he said. He parted my hip and then collected my phone. “I’m gonna jump in the shower.”

I stopped him as he moved past me. I touched his white cotton t-shirt and then gently tugged him down to kiss me. His mouth was warm and gentle and my heart beat hard in my chest. He pulled back, gave me a tender look, and then disappeared into his bedroom. I ate what I could but nerves were eating away at my stomach and I only ate half the sandwich and some of the veggie sticks on my plate. I left it on the island so he’d see what I ate when he came back and wouldn’t think I was trying to hide it from him.

When he came back he was wearing black sweatpants and a gray shirt. Part of me was expecting to come out dressed in a full suit, but he wasn’t nearly that dramatic. Besides, he didn’t like games. Wasn’t that what he always said? He had a leather belt in his hands.

“Ready?” he asked me. I nodded. He looked down at the plate of mostly eaten food.

“I’m nervous,” I told him. He took my hand in his and squeezed gently.

“I won’t hurt you,” he said. “I promise.”

He walked me down the hall. I felt like I was walking to my own executioner, holding the hand of the executioner. We went into the same room as yesterday and he had me stand in the middle of the room.

“What’s so great about this,” he said, gently helping me out of his t-shirt. “Is that you don’t actually get to decide when we stop.”

He lifted my hands up above my head and fastened them tightly. He pulled on a bar and I felt myself lifting off the ground. He stopped when I was balancing on the pads of my toes.

“Do you know how exhilarating it was when I came back to your apartment,” he asked, running his finger tips down my spine. “I spent that whole week thinking about raping you again, and every time you gave me one of those fucking looks...”

“I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“Apologize once we’re done,” he said. “And then it’s all forgiven. Deal?”

I nodded. He stopped in front of me and took one of my nipples between his thumb and forefingers.

“Let’s start with... rejecting me,” he said and stepped beside me. The belt cracked down on me without much more warning than that. A cry left me. It hurt. Bad. Worse than I was expecting. I didn’t have too much of a concern he would hurt me beyond recovery, but the first blow set a little bubble of fear in me. I remembered, he didn’t like games.

“I asked you out three times,” he said and then hit me again on the other cheek.

“Fuck,” I gasped. His hand touched the burning flesh, pressing his fingers into me.

“I can buy my own coffee, thanks.” He said it sharply and then I was hit with the belt again. I knew it was a quote and I knew I said it. I remembered the interaction. I remember saying those words to him. The anger I had felt. The disgust on my face as I looked into his smug, condescending, perfectly handsome face.

“I thought you were making fun of me,” I breathed. He smacked the belt down again. “I thought you... were just being condescending and rude.”

“You should have let me take you out. You should have come home with me. You should have spread your legs for me,” he said. “I shouldn’t have had to force you.”

He struck me once more.

“I’m sorry,” I said. He stopped in front of me. He pressed his lips to mine, kissing me gently. My skin burned and goosebumps rippled over my limbs. He steadied my body with an arm across my middle, held me there a moment, and then choked up his grip on the belt. He landed it on my right cheek. Then another and another. I was letting out gasps of pain with each blow, stepping side to side on my toes.

“Caleb, please, I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” I said. “I should have gone out with you. I should have said yes. I’m sorry.” He looked at me, eyes moving quickly over my face.

“Yeah?” he asked softly.

“Yes. I’m sorry.”

He paused and rubbed my burning flesh gently.

“Now... how about your terrible attitude? Your disrespect. That fucking smile,” he said. He landed the belt hard on the other cheek. Another gasp came through me. “The nasty looks. The rolling eyes.” He hit me after each sentence. My body was trembling but his arm held me firm. My thighs trembled and my skin burned. “Sharp barbs. Being a mouthy bitch.”

“I’m sorry,” I hurried out. “I thought you hated me so I hated you for it.”

Another hard smack landed on my bottom.

“Not being a virgin when I fucked you,” he said. The belt landed on my right upper thigh. The skin was even more sensitive and I yelped. “I should have had your virginity.”

“I would have. If I could go back I would,” I said. I really meant it as I said it.

“For choosing Chris over me,” he said. I didn’t know if it was the sensitivity of my skin or if he was smacking the belt down harder. “For wishing I had been him.”

“It wasn’t like that,” I hurried out. “I swear. I was... it was because he was kind to me.”

He hit me again and looked at me, real fury in his eyes. It put a pit in my stomach and my mouth went dry.

“I’m glad it was you,” I hurried out. I pulled on the binds, not because I wanted to or thought I could get out, but because it provided some relief. “I promise. I’m glad it was you.”

He looked back at my flesh, growing red.

“For leaving me on happy hour. For being rude,” he said. He hit my right thigh a couple more thighs. He paused, gently stroking the burning flesh.

“Rejecting me in my office when I kissed you.”

His voice was low. He hit my left thigh this time. The smack reverberated through the room and I cried out.

“For calling me an arrogant asshole.” a hard smack. “For calling me ‘God’s gift.’”

I got a firm slap for that. “God’s” *Smack*. “Fucking.” *Smack*. “Gift.” *Smack*.

My skin burned and I gasped.

“For hiding in the hotel that weekend, when I had plans for us,” he said. Another hard smack. “For being a fucking *Bitch* .”

He hit me again and a real cry of pain passed through my lips. He paused and leaned back to look at me. His eyes moved over my face rapidly.

“Don’t stop,” I whispered, tears in my eyes. His eyes met mine, staring at me with an intensity that should have scared me, but all I could see was the *desire* shining in them and I swallowed down my pain thickly. “Please. Punish me.”

He released me and stepped to the side. My body swayed. He waited for me to steady before laying down another loud smack. I don’t know how long this went on, but I was crying softly by the time he dropped the belt at my feet and settled in behind me. His cock pressed into me. I didn’t come at all and he came quickly. His sweatpants brushed against the raw skin. When all was said and done, I was covered in a light sheen of sweat, my skin burning brightly, and I could feel his cum oozing down my thigh.

He walked around me, grabbed me by the chin, and my eyes fluttered open.

“Are you sorry?” he asked me. I swallowed thickly and nodded, eyes heavy.

“Yes. I’m sorry, Caleb,” I breathed. “I’m sorry.”

He kissed me. A soft, tender kiss.

“Do you forgive me?” I asked. The sooner he forgave me for my perceived sins, the sooner he’d move on. He kissed me again, more deeply. I pressed my tongue to his. I didn’t want the kiss to end.

“Yes,” he answered in a soft murmur. His hands moved up my ribcage and then back down to my burning bottom. “Do you believe me, Orla, that I love you? That I want you?”

I searched his storm cloud eyes. I nodded. And I did. I very truly did, but I knew it wouldn’t last. Men like him got bored. The obsession had grown simply because I said no.

I like a challenge.

It might not have meant what I thought it meant then, but it was true. I looked into his eyes and he leaned down to kiss me again. My heart began to ache and I was once again surprised by how much that knowledge bothered me.

We spent the rest of that afternoon reading, sipping tea, and watching TV. He sat in the chair, the book I had recommended in his hand, reading with a furrowed brow. I spent more time watching him than I did actually reading. My bottom burned and I couldn’t really get into a comfortable position. We cooked dinner together. He told me about the book, what he thought, what he predicted. I smiled as he got close, laughed when he guessed something outlandish, and told him he’d have to wait and see. I cleaned up the kitchen after we ate and he went in to get ready for bed. He was in bed reading when I walked into the bathroom to brush my teeth and wash my face. When I came back into the bedroom, he had a tiny little frown on his face.

I crawled into bed and curled up to him, pressing my head to his chest and looked to see where he was in the book. A rush of melancholy came over me. A small part of me would miss this. His warmth. His large body. Just not being alone. I buried my face in his shirt and breathed in deeply. I squeezed him tightly.

“Everything OK?” he asked. He closed the book and put it down on his bedside table.

“I’m fine,” I lied. He picked up some pills from the side table and handed them to me. I recognized my anti-depressant, my birth-control and half a xanax. I knocked it back with a

sip of his water. He put the glass down and I slid my hand into his sweatpants.

“Fuck, Orla,” he breathed. “I’m not sure I can again.”

My cheeks turned pink and I withdrew my hand.

“Sorry,” I murmured. I moved an inch or so away, blinking rapidly.

“Where’re you going?” he asked me.

“You said... you don’t think ...”

“Don’t you ever, *ever*, think I don’t want you to shove your hand down my pants and grab my cock,” he said. He settled on top of me. He brushed my hair back from my face. I struggled to keep my feelings of warmth at bay. This plan only worked if I didn’t get attached. Then I’d win. He’d be done with me and I’d be free of him. I *wouldn’t* grow an attachment to my rapist. That was *sick*.

“As long as it’s not me,” I murmured softly. I ran my fingers through his hair.

“Baby, I’d fuck you thirteen times a day if I could get it up,” he said.

“Well, you’re an old man now. Thirty-three? Thirty-four?” I teased gently, a bit afraid he’d fly off the handle.

“Thirty-two,” he said. “Bitch.”

He looked at me, a small smile on his face. I smiled back timidly. I vaguely wondered who he would end up marrying. I imagined him in bed with her, smiling at each other, sharing a

tender moment. I hated her, whoever she was, wherever she was. I cleared my throat. He lowered his head and pressed his lips to my neck. His hands squeezed my breasts. I closed my eyes and focused on the feel of his stubble.

“Did you come at all today?” he asked me. I nodded lazily. “How many times?”

I considered. “Couple times? Twice?”

“Well, that’s not fair,” he said, getting up on his hands and knees. I opened my eyes to see what he was doing. He tossed the blankets off of his and pulled my hips up. He slid my shorts down and threw them to the side. “I think I’m going to start making you sleep naked.”

He placed soft kisses from the center of my breasts downward. His lips were warm and hot. I had almost forgotten about the pain in my bottom. He tossed one of my calves over his shoulder and then kissed the inside of my thigh.

“You don’t have to ...” I started. I didn’t want him thinking he had to.

“I don’t have to do anything,” he said. “Because I have you dead to rights, Orla, and we both know it. That video from today....”

He settled down on his stomach. He blew on the inside of my thigh.

“No, I’m going to eat you out, because I like eating pussy. I like feeling your thighs tremble and your fingers pull my hair. And...your pussy is so tight,” he kissed one thigh. “So sweet.” He kissed the other. His hands slid up to my breasts. He squeezed firmly. “And I love your body.” I closed my eyes and forced any and all doubt from my mind. I was amazed to discovery, I really did believe him. “Come as many times as you want, Orla. I’ll finish when I feel like it.”

I nodded and closed my eyes. Then his tongue was inside of me and a gasp of pleasure ripped past my lips.

Chapter Notes

This chapter and the next chapter (not written) would very likely fit together very well as one chapter; however, I am sometimes a massive bitch and really just wanted to end the chapter at this moment. I have had this scene in my brain since literally the moment I started this story. I can't tell you how sincerely I am hoping you enjoy it.

I woke up before him. The mornings were getting lighter earlier now and streams of sunlight came in through the windows. I watched him for a few moments. His dark hair tousled, dark stubble already prominent on his face, one arm up over his head. He was remarkably handsome. I remember the first time I ever saw him, the anxiety that crept up my spine as he looked at me. I had *known* what he was thinking. I had *known* he would laugh about me with his friends the moment I walked away. It seemed so surreal to me now that that *wasn't* what happened. Was it truly possible that when he saw me, his first thought was desire? Had I been so wrapped up in my own fucked up brain that he had asked me out and I had made myself hate him so much that I just couldn't see that? I did believe him though. Sitting there watching him in the early morning light, with a clear head and a good night's sleep, I realized I did believe him. He did want me. He did find me attractive. It filled me with an inexplicable feeling of warmth, sadness, and fear. I chose not to dwell on it. Processing those thoughts needed to be saved for another day.

I put on coffee and had a cup to myself before I walked back into the bedroom to wake him. I sat down on the side of the bed, two minutes before his alarm was set to go off, and gently stroked the thick mess of black hair back from his forehead. He shifted and grimaced and then made a soft groan. I murmured a soft good morning to him and told him there was a fresh cup of coffee at his bedside table. I asked him if he wanted me to get his gym bag ready, but he declined sleepily, reminding me we had a big day at work ahead. He pulled me down for a morning kiss. I felt coldness wash over me as I realized today was the day the German CFO would be taking a tour of the premises. I felt a glimmer of panic, but then he sat up in bed, took hold of his coffee, and told me all he wanted me to do that morning was review the Auto deal. I could do anything with enough prep time, so it worked to calm me down.

He took a couple sips of coffee and then took me into the shower with him. He took me from behind, arms wrapped around me, keeping my arms at my side, my face pressed against the side of the shower. It was a more effective means of waking up than caffeine and as I dressed that morning, I was in awe of how confident I felt. My waist looked narrow, I had a nice swell

to my hips, my breasts were full. Caleb put me in a flattering black pencil skirt and a white button down made of silk. He came out of the bathroom in a black suit and was putting on a maroon tie. He was freshly shaved and his hair neatly combed.

“I’d wear blue,” he said, stopping in front of the mirror, chin lifted, to finish fastening the tie. “But this guy strikes me as old school. My dad always used to tell me,” his face went serious and grim and he put on an exaggerated voice, “no self-respecting man wears anything but a black suit until they’re forty. You haven’t earned it yet.”

He shook his head, the fake scowl off his face along with it.

“You look very handsome in black. It’s light gray I don’t like,” I answered. He smirked at me in the mirror.

“There’s a suit jacket for you in the closet. This is good facetime for you. You want to impress.”

He walked to the closet and grabbed the coat off the hanger. It was a feminine, professional cut, tapered in the middle and flared at the hips.

“God, as long as I don’t have to speak,” I said. He smiled softly.

“Nick will speak the most I’m sure. We’ll be there to look good,” he said. “He just wants to meet us. Talk more about what it would look like if we had any sort of long term deals. I don’t expect we’ll talk much about the actual work we have now but... we want to be prepared.”

On the T he continued to go over what he expected the day to hold with the special visitor. He’d be at the office around 10:00. He was going in order of the floors. Advisory, up to Audit, and then hit Tax, then, last. I was supposed to spend the entire day reviewing the auto reports and the numbers. The best part was that he told me to bill for all of it. Almost a full day of review, and it counted toward my utilization? That was heaven.

“You’re absolutely beautiful,” he said softly as we approached our stop. I looked up from my phone in surprise. A light blush came to my cheeks. “I mean it, Orla. I remember the first time I saw you. Like you stepped right out of one of my fantasies.”

“Stop,” I laughed breathily, looking around at the other commuters, but that was the last thing I wanted him to do. I had put my hair up. Caleb had said I should wear it down, but if he was right, and this guy was old school, a neat, unassuming bun was the way to go.

“I can’t wait to get you down to Connecticut so I can show you off to my family. My mother will love you.”

My lips parted and I looked up at him.

“What?” he asked. I was saved from answering and the train screeched to a loud halt. I wanted to raise my hands to my ears and press my face to his chest, but we were far too close to work for that. I closed my eyes instead, fighting off the flair of annoyance that swelled inside of me at the noise. Stepping off the train I saw another young couple dressed professionally, walking hand and hand with coffees in their hand. I envied them and wondered what it might feel like to reach out and take hold of Caleb’s hand and walk down the street with him. I reminded myself that I’d never know what that felt like and shifted my back back on my shoulders.

We stopped for coffee. The morning was cool but you could tell it was going to be hot this afternoon. We got a coffee for Eddie, chatted with him for a bit and then made our way up to the office.

I spent the entire morning scouring the numbers, re-reviewing them, going back into the returns, examining lead sheets. Chris asked me to point him the right direction for some numbers he was reviewing. I wasn’t sure if it was a test, but if it was, I passed with flying colors.

Fucking rockstar, he messaged me back on teams. I went to the breakroom at about 11:45. The wrap Caleb had promised me was in the fridge. I was the first one there and was about halfway through eating when a small group entered.

“I was down talking to Jenny and saw him,” Anna said.

“Oh yeah?” Stephanie asked.

“One word. *Daddy*.” Anna said and everyone laughed.

Chloe and Amelia were with them. I focused on my sandwich, replaying the numbers over and over again in my head. Caleb came in with Chris shortly after Anna, Chloe, and Amelia sat down, still chattering away about the handsome German. He was out for lunch with Tim and Frank, two Audit partners and would be coming to meet them afterward.

Caleb sat down beside me, Chris to his left, and they continued their conversation without so much as acknowledging me.

“So, what, you just aren’t coming?” Chris asked, dropping his lunch down.

“I’m coming but I’m not staying out,” Caleb said.

“She’ll be fine alone for one night, Caleb,” Chris said softly. My ears perked up and I knew they were talking about me.

Caleb’s voice was a murmur. “If she can’t come, I’m not staying out.”

“Big weekend plans?” I asked as lightly as I could. Caleb shot me a warning look. I was aware my cheeks were probably a bright shade of pink and I hadn’t put on any blush that morning.

“We’re heading out for a buddy’s birthday on Friday,” Chris said. “Probably going to head down to Providence.”

“You’re going to go all the way to Providence when you live in Boston?”

I was staring at Caleb, who was chewing a big bite of his sandwich. He was staring straight ahead now.

“Take it up with Crispy,” Chris shrugged.

“I’m coming back to the city that night though,” Caleb said. I pressed my lips together and balled up my sandwich wrapper. Caleb said to Chris, “we’ll talk about it later.”

“Ally might not even be there,” Chris said and the skin of my cheeks lifted about ten degrees. I got up from my seat and threw the wrapper away. So *girls* were going. Just not me.

“We’ll talk about it later,” Caleb repeated. He raised his voice slightly to say my name, “Orla.”

I ignored him. There was nothing he could do to me in the middle of a crowded break room. I got myself a Coke Zero from the vending machines. I wanted to slap him is what I wanted to do and then slap Chris for thinking he could tell my boyfriend I couldn’t go out with him and his friends but other girls could.

He’s not your boyfriend. Not really.

I twisted the cap off and took a big sip. When I turned, I saw Danny, Mark, Peter, and Steven coming into the breakroom. I shot a glance at Caleb. He was leaning with his elbows on the table, his sub in his hands, chewing slowly, and staring into space. If he thought he was going to go to Providence, drink with a bunch of girls and get sucked off in the bathroom of some club and then come back and crawl into bed drunk with some other girls cheap perfume on his skin and touch me, he had another thing coming. I would do what I needed to get rid of him but if he thought he could cheat on me in the meantime

“Oh, Danny,” I called, on my way out of the breakroom. He turned to look at me with a bright smile on his face.

“Ellie! Hey, what’s up?” he asked. He stepped; closer, his hands in his pockets.

“I actually am free this Friday,” I told him. Caleb’s head didn’t move, but his eyes darted over to me. A week ago the look would have terrified me. Now it just made me angrier. “Is Happy Hour still a thing?”

Danny’s face brightened. “Yeah, absolutely! We’re hitting McDuff’s first and then figuring it out from there. Meeting at the elevators at five.”

“Great, I’ll be there,” I smiled and then left the room. I half expected him to chase after me but I knew he couldn’t do that with so many witnesses. I felt my wrist buzz and checked it on the face.

We’ll talk after the meeting.

I should have been more mindful. The pictures and videos he had would absolutely destroy me. But I knew something else as well. If he *did* release those photos, he had nothing on me anymore. He wouldn’t play his trump card over one small argument. I’d pay for it in different ways, I was sure of that, but those pictures *wouldn’t* go out. I felt a rush of power at the realization. I took my phone from my skirt pocket. My thumbs went over the phone rapidly and I slowed to a halt.

The only way you can keep me from going is if you stay home on Friday or take me with you. Otherwise I’m going and you can’t stop me.

He read it but didn’t answer. I plopped down at my desk and tried to focus. I wanted to text Chris and tell him what a fucking asshole I thought he was. So another girl could go but not me. So that they could do what they wanted without me knowing. Maybe drug and rape another girl. I wouldn’t even know because Caleb had such a high sex drive. He could get head in the club bathroom and come right back and fuck me. I would NOT let that happen.

I sent an email to Peter telling him he was late on a report. I went back through the numbers for the millionth time. I kept waiting for Caleb to come into my office or send a text. He didn't and it got me even angrier. I picked up my phone more than once, ready to tell him again that if he didn't want me going to happy hour then he needed to stay home or bring me with him. I had a fleeting moment of guilt, that I had created more stress for him right before one of the biggest meetings of our careers to date, but I quickly pushed that aside. The torment he'd put me through the last couple weeks didn't even come *close* to this. And he *wasn't* going to go cheat on me without some sort of repercussion. I didn't care what he decided to do to me.

Ten to two Chris appeared in my cubicle. I turned around in my chair and glared at him. He grinned at me. He looked relaxed, with a hand in his pocket and his laptop under his other arm.

"Now this is the Ellie I like," he said. "That little spitfire that came here as an intern."

Yeah, before this job sucked out my soul and Caleb shattered my already fragile, nearly nonexistent confidence.

"They're waiting for us in the conference room."

I said nothing. I collected my laptop and phone and walked past him without a word. We got halfway down the hall before I turned to face him and almost spoke, but shook my head and turned back around. If Caleb really thought he could tell me he loved me so fucking much and then turn around and go have sex with some random girl and that I would just be ok with that then he wasn't nearly as smart as I thought he was.

Caleb was exiting his office and softly closing the door behind him as he approached. His face was grim, his dark eyes set on me. I turned toward the conference room and clutched my laptop to me tightly. Chris and Caleb followed me silently. Just before we arrived at the conference room doors I stopped, turned, and lifted my eyes up to Caleb. I glared and he stared, before he took a step and entered before me. I let Chris go next. I was the lowest ranking person in the room and I had never been the type to want to show anyone up. Plus, I did not want to go in first.

I stepped in after Chris and my eyes immediately sought out the CFO. I found him seated at the head of the table, a spot normally reserved for Nick, and almost stopped in my tracks.

Based on Anna's comments, I had expected an older man of average looks, a good build, and above average height. The man seated at the table was uncategorically one of the best looking men I had ever seen. I had never been the type to find older men particularly attractive. I had a lot of issues, but daddy issues weren't part of my repertoire. He was in his mid to late forties, with dark hair, which was graying at the temples and beginning to expand further up his head.

He remained seated as they entered, but even seated, it was apparent he was a tall man, though I doubted he was taller than Caleb. I glanced over at Caleb as we came to stand beside Nick, who had stood from his chair. Caleb was certainly taller. I looked back at the German as Nick began to introduce us.

"Ah, here they are, my dream team. This here is our manager, Caleb Trent."

Caleb leaned over, a hand to his chest to keep his tie from falling on the table. The German remained seated, extending his hand to Caleb's in a firm handshake.

The CFO wore a gorgeous, gorgeous, midnight blue suit, tailored to absolute perfection. It draped over every ounce of the firm hard muscle on his lean frame as he shifted. On his wrist, peaking out from beneath the expensive midnight blue fabric of his suit coat, which I knew at a glance was of European cut, was the glistening sparkle of his gold watch. His shirt was crisp and white. His tie a dark burgundy

The most striking thing about him were his eyes and the open, somewhat amused disinterest in which he appraised us made my stomach clench. They were the bluest eyes I'd ever seen, but not blue the way Chris's eyes were blue, like the warm blue waters you'd find off white sandy beaches on the Caribbean. His eyes shown like ice, with just enough color that they could pass for blue instead of white. Like a glacier, when the sun hits right and you see that they're actually blue instead of white.

"Good to meet you," Caleb said. The man responded with a quick lift of his brow before his eyes darted over to Chris.

“Our lead senior, Chris Johnston. He’s been with us four years now.”

“Five,” Chris corrected. They shook hands. Those blocks of ice then darted over to me and every ounce of my body turned very, very cold. I tried to tell myself it was the same look he had given both Caleb and Chris, that my own anxiety and the paranoia that was the unfortunate byproduct of being a female in a male dominated field, along with the coldness of his gaze, had made me imagine it. But my stomach was in knots and I wiped my palm on my skirt before I held out my hand.

“And our newest senior, a real genius with the numbers, Ellie Wright.”

“Sir,” I greeted, and extended my hand. His hand was large and warm. His grip was firm, just bordering on too hard. I squeezed his hand nearly as hard as I could, receiving no reaction from him in return but a small tilt of his head and a nearly imperceptible upward tilt to his lips. I released my hold before he surrendered his and I pressed my aching hand to my lower back. My eyes dropped to the hand he had pressed on the table. I spotted a simple gold band around his ring finger. I lifted my gaze and flinched. His eyes, cold and unforgiving, were fixed on me hard and I knew for a certainty he knew I had been looking for a wedding ring.

“Obviously, team, this is Mr. Faust.”

“Furst,” Caleb said, taking the seat immediately to the German’s right.

“Yes, yes of course. You’ll have to forgive me. I’m terrible with German names.” Nick retook his seat to the German’s left. I took the seat beside Caleb and Chris settled in beside Nick.

“*Austrian*,” Caleb said. Despite his body being angled toward Nick, he had his head turned Caleb with a smile.

“I like this one,” he said. He looked back at Nick then at Caleb again and said, “I hope he pays you enough.”

“I can’t complain,” Caleb grinned. The German’s voice was deep, deeper than Caleb’s, but rich and smooth. It didn’t have the same gravelly quality to it.

“The girl. You said she’s newest. How new?”

My face flushed slightly and my eyes darted over to Caleb. He was slowly tapping his fingers on the table in a soft rhythm. Pointer, middle, ring, pointer, middle, ring, pointer, middle, ring.

“She’s been with us 10 months, a senior for two, and of course she’s been here - Ellie, how long have you been here, two years since your internship started?”

“That’s right,” I said. The German - *Austrian* - was looking at me and then looked at Caleb.

“She is good?”

“The best,” Caleb interjected. “Ask her anything.”

I wanted to hit him, for yet another reason.

The Austrian turned his body to face our side of the table. His eyes pinned me to my chair and I swallowed. I tried to hide my anxiety, but I was sure it was bleeding through. I looked away from him briefly, taking in the look of Caleb’s Grecian profile. I turned my eyes back at those icy blocks.

“I read in the report, exposure of two hundred thousand. Where did this come from?”

“New York city, they failed to pay MTA income tax for 2017.”

It took every ounce of my strength to hold his gaze. My hands were trembling in my lap.

“A problem with 2016 in California. This was...?”

“Only three grand, they had seventeen employees in the state. They didn’t believe that was enough to create nexus because they didn’t have physical offices.”

He rattled off a few other questions. My morning reviewing had been well spent. Once finished, and Nick was dabbing his forehead with a napkin, he stared at me a moment longer.

“You know much of these targets?” he asked. His accent neither thick nor unpronounced, but seemed to have a happy middle ground, where it was clear he was not a native speaker, but clear enough no words were difficult to understand.

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“What do you know of my company?” he asked.

I saw Nick’s face drain of color. By the end of a deal, we knew *everything* about target companies. We never knew a thing about our actual clients. There was no need to. It was very clear to everyone in this room that the incorrect, or even an unsatisfactory, answer, would not be received well. I tried to tell myself it was my inexperience that prompted this drilling, not the fact that I was the only woman in the room. I didn’t like to look for sexism everywhere. I genuinely didn’t believe it was as prevalent in the workplace as some women tried to claim but this... well this felt different. I took a steadying breath.

“L.L.C.R, or Loeb, Lohse, Clauber, and Rothberg, started in 1999 as Loeb and Rothberg - A small consulting firm, initially working as an intermediary between buyers and sellers in Berlin. Loeb developed a new program that would assist in payroll. It took off in 2003, when a merger took place with Clauber and Lohse. After officially beginning Loeb, Lohse, Clauber, and Rothbeg, you continued to make improvements in software development and grew to provide payroll services for the majority of Germany and into Austria. And then in

2014, the very brilliant and capable Maximilian Furst was made CFO and has since taken a stranglehold on the majority of Western Europe and is beginning to make inroads in the North American market.”

I paused. Chris was smiling. Caleb had a tiny smirk on his face. Nick looked like a unicorn had just come trotting through the conference. Mr. Furst stared at me. I expected a smile, a laugh, a congratulations. He looked... annoyed.

He let out a little grunt and looked back at Nick. The meeting resumed, without another word on the matter. The meeting was much of what I expected. Nick spoke to him about the deal process, what we had been doing, each of our rolls in the process, and what a more expanded roll would look like moving forward. He asked why he could not have the four of us on all of their work. Federal, State, Audit, Advisory - all of it. It was an incredible compliment and Nick puffed up like a peacock, but he explained why we, unfortunately, were not able to do that. The Austrian CFO seemed to understand, but did not seem all that pleased.

“We do hope you will continue on with us,” Nick said as they all stood. I was right in my assessment. The Austrian was tall, but I let a little bit of a smug smile creep to my lips as I noticed Caleb was at least an inch taller than him. His suit was immaculate though and he wore it well. Anna had not been wrong in her assessment.

“I like this group of yours,” he said. “This Compliance work you mentioned... I can have these three.”

I felt some satisfaction that I was included in the conversation, despite his apparent dislike for me. I would have to ask Caleb if he had a similar impression as me. I quickly remembered his plans for the week though, and decided I’d keep that to myself until he agreed to stay home or take me with him.

“Unfortunately, our compliance and M&A groups are separate, but we can discuss what that might look like. If you’d like to come up to my office?”

They started walking toward the door. I collected my things and was about to follow suit when Caleb spoke.

“Orla, wait a moment,” he said. Chris walked out behind Nick and the CFO, giving us a quick glance back. I waited, mainly because I couldn’t outwardly disrespect Caleb in front of everyone we worked with and a client. We still stood side by side and once we were alone in the conference room, he turned toward me. I held my laptop to me tightly. I had only a moment of hesitation, where I grew frightened of his anger, but then saw him red cheeked and sweaty at some bar in Providence fucking some whore bent over a toilet and my resolve hardened.

“You’re going to go tell Danny that your plans are back on and you can’t go Friday,” he said very softly. He had his fingertips pressed to the table and he was looking down at his laptop, still resting on the surface of the table. He didn’t seem angry with me. He seemed quite composed. I wanted to reach out and slap him. “And we will speak about why I can’t bring you with me when we get home.”

“No,” I told him curtly. His eyes lifted from the table to meet mine. I saw a flare of anger and I felt a rush of triumph. “You want to go drinking with girls that aren’t me? I’m going to go drinking with men that aren’t you.”

His eyes darkened. Dark and stormy. He began to speak again. His voice was slow and deathly calm.

“You are going to go tell Danny —”

I turned to walk away, but he reached out, one hand grabbing me by the arm, the other on my throat and shoved me against the table. I let out a soft cry, more of surprise than anything else, and he kept his face close to mine.

“You forget something, Orla?” he asked, our noses almost touching. “I *fucking* own you. You’ll do what I fucking say or I swear to God I’ll - ”

The sound of a clearing throat managed to rip our gazes apart. A cold sense of dread coursed through me as I remembered that we were standing in a conference room at our place of work, with the door wide open. My mouth went dry, my heart stopped beating. Even reflecting back now, the scene plays out like a dream. All I could really process at the time was that Caleb had his hand around my throat and a tall lean figure was standing in the doorway and we were both pinned to the spot by a pair of icy blue eyes.

Chapter Notes

Woah-wee, I am nervous about this. Thank you so much to Takes On To Know One for talking through this one with me. (IF you haven't read her stuff yet go read.)

If you notice a perspective switch (i.e first person to third person) please point it out. I went back and forth between typing this chapter and the newest Community chapter, and I noticed I slipped a few times in both stories. I will not be offended, please leave a comment and tell me where you saw it so I can fix it for future readers.

I'm not a native German speaker. If you notice a mistake, please feel free to let me know as well.

Thank you! I sincerely hope you enjoy it.

There was a span of perhaps a half second or less where I was certain that my life was over. I waited for outrage and disgust to spread across the businessman's blank face, for his piercing blue eyes to widen in shock and dismay. For him to bark out a demand for an explanation, drawing my coworkers in to hear what a deviant I was. For him to put a protective arm around Orla and draw her away from me. I released Orla and stepped back. Stumbled back really, shock rippling across my face. She backed away too, sliding around the side of the table, as if the object between us would make a difference. I turned to look at her, waiting for her to run to the man in tears, beseeching him for his help and to reveal the whole sordid truth of what had occurred between us. But then she turned to look at me and I saw fear in her eyes. I felt a glimmer of relief. Whatever this man did with what he saw, at the very least I knew I still had Orla's fear of her naked body being displayed all over the internet for everyone to see. When this stranger reported what he saw, Orla would do what she could to shield me from the repercussions of that terrible word that started with R. I'd make sure of that. But the businessman remained in the doorway, without a reaction, without moving. Nick then filled the doorway behind the tall Austrian business man in his midnight blue St. Laurent suit, looking like a scrub off the street in comparison. His face was a bit ruddy and he had to push himself up onto the tips of his toes to look over his shoulder.

"Ah, yes, this is the one," Nick said. The Austrian stepped forward into the conference room. The foreign man walked with a smooth gate and slow confidence. A small smile took hold of the right side of his mouth. He did not look at either of us. Instead, he focused on the reason for his sudden return to the conference room. He stopped where he had been seated just moments earlier and picked up a simple looking silver pen from the table and slipped it into his inner pocket.

“A gift from my wife,” he explained to no one in particular. He twirled the pen in his fingers thoughtfully. “She likes to buy me expensive things with my own money.”

Nick gave a hearty laugh, unsure how to respond to that, and waved at me and Orla to come with him.

“Caleb, we’re going to use your office. Come join us. Mr. Furst is about to leave for the day.”

I could only nod. I did not trust myself to speak. Orla turned her face to look at me. Her eyes were wide. Her face was taught. Her eyes held a question in them and I knew what it was. If it all came out, and it wasn’t her fault, what would I do? I didn’t know the answer to that question.

We followed Nick and Mr. Furst down the hall in silence, both of us looking ahead, neither saying a word. She broke off to the left, crossing behind me to make her way to her cubicle as we approached my office. The Austrian snapped his fingers toward her without turning his head.

“Bring the girl.”

Orla stopped on her way down the hall and looked at me. Without having much more of an idea of what to do, I gave a curt nod to her. I let her enter before me and placed a hand furtively on arm to gently guide her in. My heart was throbbing and I felt what seemed to me remarkably like chest pain and for a fleeting moment, I thought I might be having a heart attack. I squeezed her elbow, as much in a search for comfort as to give her a warning. If she kept her mouth shut, if she said it was consensual and we liked it rough, I’d take my lumps, however severe they may be and protect her as best as I could.

Nick had the decency not to sit in my chair, and so I settled behind my desk, but it felt frightfully odd, looking out at the Partner and the CFO from that position and I wished either Nick or Furst had just taken it. Chris was in the room, leaning up against the wall with a hand in his pocket, a small upward tilt to his lips, blissfully oblivious to what had just occurred.

“Mr. Furst will be in the city for business for another week and has graciously accepted my invitation to bring him to the Country Club,” Nick said. I nodded with a smile, still unable to find my voice. I wasn’t sure what I would sound like if I tried to speak over the drumming in my head.

“You three must join us,” Mr. Furst said. He reached into his coat pocket and had retrieved a small card. “You all have clubs I presume?”

Chris and I did, but I doubted Orla did. I’d need to buy her a nice pair, teach her how to play as quickly as possible, get on the links and -

“Saturday, I’ll schedule T time,” Nick said, floating on air. Orla looked paler than before. I wonder if the full force of reality was just hitting her, or if the prospect of spending Saturday with the four men in this room on the golf course was that much more horrifying to her.

“A fine facility here, Mr. Oakes. We will speak tomorrow for our call,” he said. He was writing on the back of the card with the expensive pen his wife bought him with his own money. Then he rose and we all followed suit.

“Yes, yes. Here, let me bring you down to the garage. You drove here?” Nick asked. I wished he didn’t look *so* desperate to please. It made him look weak. Chris remained on the wall. Nick began to walk toward the door but before leaving, the Austrian held out his pointer and middle finger toward me. Between those two long fingers was a crisp white business card, neat black scroll on the back. I took it from him and glanced down. The front had his name and title. It was minimalist. Curt black font on white stock. I flipped it over and read what he had written on the back, in neat scrawling letters, *four seasons, presidential suite, 6 o’clock. alone.*

I could hear the blood rushing through my ears. Chris closed the door and looked at me with a grin and a thumbs up.

“Made an impression then, huh?” he asked.

“You could say that,” I said stiffly. Orla was still seated on the chair in the corner, staring off into space with a perplexed look on her face. She was white as a ghost, lips the same shade as her face.

“What the fuck,” she whispered and then looked at me. She looked incredulous, like she expected me to join in her disgust that nothing had been done to help her. I stared back blankly, overcome with my need to keep her. I felt like she was out in the ocean, bobbing up and down on a tiny lifesaver in fifty foot waves, and I had only an old, fraying rope in my hands with which to pull her back.

“What does it say?” she asked. I handed her the card. I couldn’t speak.

“Did I miss something?” Chris asked. I tried to find the words but my brain was uncharacteristically empty.

“You can tell Chris all about it later, I don’t want to talk with him in the room right now,” Orla said with a snap and forceful clarity. Chris frowned.

“What did I do?” Chris asked. Orla pinned emerald green daggers on him.

“Fuck you, Chris.”

Whatever Chris was about to say in response was thankfully cut off when the office door flung open and Nick came in beaming. I had a terrible ache in my head and Orla slid the business card into her pocket.

“My team!” he said loudly. “My god. Ellie. *Ellie* .”

Nick shook his head in awe. Orla smiled despite herself.

“That was fine work. All of you. I think we’re going to get the pull through work. That’s a lot of revenue you guys. A *lot* of revenue. He was very impressed with you all.”

Orla raised her thumb to her lips and was biting at her cuticle. I caught her eye and she dropped her hand to her lap.

“We’re all going out for some drinks. Right now, grab your things,” Nick gushed. He reached forward and slapped me hard on the chest a couple times, laughing heartily. He turned and left again, presumably to gather his things and meet us in the lobby.

“Ok. Spark notes?” Chris asked, looking between us. “What’s going on here?”

“I grabbed Orla by the throat and Furst saw it,” I said in a clipped tone. Chris blinked, not quite comprehending. “Let’s go. We’ll talk later.”

The pain behind my eyes was blinding. The inconvenience of Friday night, Orla’s infuriating and inexplicably sudden defiance, and now this... I was furious with myself. Never in my life had I been *this* infuriated at anyone and certainly this level of anger was never directed at myself. She had just made me so angry. The thought of her out on Friday night with Danny’s greedy eyes on her, his hands on her thigh, buying her drinks...

I grabbed my coat from the rack. I stopped by Orla, who was still sitting.

“Are you ok?” I asked. She looked up silently, face pensive. She rose without a word and left my office. Chris and I walked out to wait for her by the elevators. I couldn’t talk to Chris. Immediately, Chloe came walking over with long, purposely strides and the look of a woman possessed. She’d be a force to be reckoned with when she made partner.

“Well?” she asked, eyes penetrating. “What do we think?”

“We’ll get the work,” I said. I was confident of that. A smile came to her ruby lips, brightening up her entire face.

“Bonuses are going to be pretty good this year, boys,” she said. We shared smiles and Orla came walking over with her coat draped over her arm and bag over her shoulder.

“Trent gave me the good news. Sounds like it went well.”

“Well as it could, I think,” she said with a smile. A couple months ago I would have seen her demeanor as detached, disinterested, annoyed, better than it all. Now I could see the anxiety in her eyes. The subtle way in which her eyes fluttered around, not looking away, but not quite looking at the speaker. Her lips were pressed together and the muscles in her face taut. I wanted to reach out and take her hand.

The elevator doors closed and it was just me, Chris, and Orla for a few moments. I looked at her and said, “tomorrow morning, you’re going to tell Danny - ”

Her head whipped around to look at me.

“Really, Caleb, you want to talk about Danny right now?”

My face flushed with anger and I could have grabbed onto her again.

“What about Ally, huh?” she asked. I frowned at her.

“What?”

“Who’s. Ally?”

It was hard to think over the throbbing behind my eyes. I wanted to yell at her to shut up. To leave me alone. To let me think.

“What are you talking about?”

The elevator doors pinged open. Nick was already down there, chatting happily with one of the guards. I jutted my chin toward him, eyes locked with Chris, and Chris gave a nod. After more congratulations and a decision to go to the bar down the block, Chris intercepted Nick and walked ahead, letting out an occasional booming laugh at one of Nick’s bad jokes. I touched Orla’s elbow and we fell a few feet back.

“He thought it was *funny*,” she said. Voice soft and full of venom. I said nothing. I didn’t really trust her read on people, but I agreed with her assessment this time. He’d seemed darkly amused by the situation.

“What are you going to do?” she asked, taking the card out of her pocket and handing it to me.

“I’m going to the Four Seasons, Presidential Suite alone at six,” I answered. That was obvious. I needed to know what he wanted. I couldn’t not go. I didn’t think it was likely he’d try to blackmail me - the man made more in a week than I did in a year, I’d seen the company payroll - it was obscene - but I needed to know. What I wanted to talk about right now was what started the fight to begin with.

“What do you think he wants?” Orla asked.

“I don’t know.”

“What are you going to do?” she asked again. I felt a pang of annoyance.

“I’m going to go to the four seasons - ”

“With my pictures!” She shouted, voice cracking. Nick and Chris looked over their shoulders. She turned her head down to the sidewalk and blinked back tears.

I wanted to reach out and take her hand. Instead, I looked over the card and before we could speak further, I heard the jingle of bells over a door and almost walked straight into the back of Chris. I had to sit for two hours in a booth making small talk with Nick, staring across at Orla, who was staring at the glass of Chardonnay she had ordered with a far away look. Her fingers, long and delicate, so easy to break, gently twirled the glass around. The wine sloshed gently around the glass. She watched the little beads of white liquid slide down the inside edges of the glass. Chris was on his second Guinness and single handedly keeping the social outing from becoming unbearably awkward. I had just finished my first whiskey, and Nick was draining his third glass of red wine when he finally noticed Orla’s color and asked her if she was ok. She looked up in surprise and nodded.

“I’m great,” she lied with a convincing smile.

“Something wrong with the wine?” he asked, brow knitting. He was pulling out his company card from his wallet. He held it up to the waitress, who came scurrying over.

“Oh no,” she said. “Just have a tiny headache.”

She raised the glass to her lips. Her green eyes met mine and she gave the glass a tiny tilt. I gave my head an almost imperceptibly small shake. When she rested the glass back down, her lips were dry. Her hand was quivering slightly. She closed her eyes and pressed her trembling hands to her eyes. Nick was signing the receipt when I reached out my foot to touch her leg under the table. Her leg pressed into mine hard and I held it firm, letting her work some of that energy out. It started to hurt and she pressed the heel into my ankle bone. I felt a burning sensation and something warm and realized she cut me with it.

“Well, you kids take the rest of the day off. I need to head home to the ole wife and kids.”

I slid out of the booth so he could leave. He congratulated us one last time and made for the door. Once he was out of sight, I picked up her wine glass and walked it back over to the bar. I gave it to the bartender and told her there was nothing wrong with it. My friend just had a queasy stomach. When I got back, Orla was snapping at Chris.

“Don’t talk to me,” she said curtly.

“Who pissed in your cheerios this morning?” he asked. He looked up at me. “I didn’t think you were into that.”

“Chris, lay off,” I said. The whiskey had helped reduce my headache a little bit. I picked up Orla’s coat.

“Come on, let’s go,” I said.

“I’m fine,” she said and motioned to Chris’ half full beer.

“Let’s go,” I said again.

She slid out of the booth and I put her coat over her shoulders.

“Chris, can you get Orla home?”

“I can get home myself. I’m not a child.”

“I can do that,” Chris said. He drained his beer. She pinched her lips together and shook her head. I glanced around. This was a common place for people to go after work and though it was just after five, I wasn’t willing to risk anything.

“I need to go. Chris is going to get you home. We’re going to talk when I get back,” I said. “You have your keys.”

She nodded.

“I’ll text you when I’m on my way back,” I told her. Chris was pulling up an Uber. I checked my maps. The Four Seasons was about a ten-minute walk from us. We waited outside on the sidewalk. I wanted to pull Orla to me and give her a kiss. I’d already taken way too many risks today already. The Uber showed up and they got in. Before Chris could slide in after her, I grabbed him by the arm.

“Lay off her,” I told him. “That was hard for her sitting in the bar with a glass of wine staring her in the face. Ok?”

“She’s been a bitch to me all afternoon. I have no idea what the fuck I did,” Chris defended himself.

“You coming!” the driver shouted.

“Well find out,” I said. “*Nicely* .”

“Good luck,” Chris said and got into the back of the Uber. The car was pulling away as Chris pulled his seatbelt across from him. Orla sat looking out the window, her face away from me.

The afternoon was warm, so I kept my paces slow as I made my way to the Four Seasons. I didn’t want to show up slick with sweat and looking disheveled. I also wasn’t in a particular rush to get there. I’d be there early, and I had too much nervous energy to sit in the lobby and wait. I adjusted the leather no strap of my bag. It felt impossibly tight around my chest.

I was in a strange place between blind panic and a calm that bordered a void. I could not believe I had been so stupid, acted so impulsively, but that’s what that goddamn woman did to me. She drove me insane.

He said nothing, I remembered. He had *smiled*. I let myself grow hopeful. I knew Chris and I weren’t the only ones out there who felt this way and in our profession, highly motivated,

high performing men often had a tendency toward domination and control. Was it possible, even remotely so, that this man shared a similar interest? If he was going to raise the alarm, make a complaint, he would have done so. And what the fuck was Orla's problem and why did she care so much about who Ally was. Why would it matter to her in the slightest if Chris' ex-girlfriend was there?

I walked around the block twice before it was 5:55. I received a text from Chris telling me they'd made it back and Orla told him that when I wasn't there, the apartment was hers and she could decide who could and could not come in. She'd slammed the door in his face and he'd heard the locks thrown aggressively on the other side.

I put my phone in my pocket and walked over to the front desk. I gave my name and that I was expected at the presidential suite. I knew for a fact I wouldn't be able to access that floor without a key. The man behind the desk lifted his phone without a word and made a call.

"Ah, Mrs. Furst. Sorry to disturb you. A Mr. Caleb Trent here, says he has a meeting with your husband."

There was a moment of silence where the man and I held eye contact. My heart was pounding.

"Yes. Yes, I understand."

He hung up the phone and I was ready for him to say they had no idea what I was talking about, but he only smiled and extended a keycard to me.

"Fourth floor, use the elevators to the left, it will bring you right to the suite," he said. I took the key and gave a nod. My nerves were a bit frayed as I hit the elevator button. I couldn't recall ever being so on edge. I blinked back some white spots from my gaze and scanned the keycard. I hit the 4 button again, as if it would make the elevator move faster. The elevator felt like it was moving impossibly slow. Finally, the elevator came to a smooth stop and the doors slid open silently. I stepped out into a little lobby with marble floors and thick oak paneled walls. A large wooden door loomed ahead of me with a large gold door knocker. I stepped forward, swallowed thickly, and knocked. Only a couple of seconds passed before the door opened and a beautiful young woman opened the door. She looked to be about my age, but there could have been a couple more years on either side. She was short, but most

women were short to me, and her hair was loose, hanging down over her shoulders in pretty waves. The dress she wore, a pretty pale green, fell to her knees, buttoned from hem to collar bone, and the sleeves extended just past her delicate shoulders. She had a magnificent diamond necklace around her neck, a small cursive *M* settled neatly at the hollow of her throat. Her brown eyes were big and dark and there was something slightly familiar about the look of her, but I couldn't place it. She really was quite beautiful. Younger than Furst by at least a decade. The words 'trophy wife' came to mind as I examined her.

"Hello," I greeted. I wasn't calm enough to put a smile on my face, but my voice was strong and clear. "Mr. Furst is expecting me."

She looked me over, eyes detailing me somewhat critically, and then stepped back with a smile. The smile wasn't exactly warm, there was a hardness to it and she made me feel a little nervous. I stepped inside and she closed the door behind me.

"Maximilian," she called lightly with a German sounding accent, but then she turned half way down the hall and beckoned me closer in an American accent, "Come with me. He's just washing up."

We stepped into a large living room area with white leather couches, a large TV, and a fireplace. A young girl, perhaps two or three, was leaning on the ottoman of a sofa, tilting her head side to side as she sang along with the children's music on TV, very focused on the crayon in her hand and the large purple lines she was slashing across the entirety of the page.

"Emelia, clean those up please. I won't ask again," the woman I could only assume was Mrs. Furst said kindly. The little girl looked at her mother with her little dew drop mouth hanging open, big blue eyes wide, and then began to scoop up her crayons and put them into the plastic baggy. She had long, dark blonde hair normal to children that age, braided down her back and she wore a pretty pale blue dress.

"Right on time, I see. I had a good feeling about you the moment we first spoke. I am a man of good instinct."

Mr. Furst came into the room from a long hallway, a small child in his arms, with little Michelin tire man arms and legs jutting out of a simple white onesie. The Austrian's large

hand was sprawled along the tiny expanse shoulders and neck holding up a wobbly head. He handed the child to his wife and said, “ *Er ist Hungrig .*”

He was still in his suit pants and button down, but his tie and suit jacket were gone and his sleeves were rolled up. The two spoke briefly in hushed German before Mrs. Furst called to their daughter.

“ *Emelia, komm mit mir, bitte. Sag gute nacht zu deinem Vater.*”

The little girl skipped through the living room, her bag of crayons in her arms, and catapulted herself into her father’s awaiting arms. He heaved her up and the two spoke softly in German a few moments. The little girl was smiling shyly, playing with the collar of his shirt. Then he kissed her on the forehead and put her down. Mrs. Furst walked down the hall with the baby in her arms and the little girl in tow and closed the door. Mr. Furst walked over to a little bar on the far side of the room.

“What do you drink, Mr. Trent?”

Strangely enough, the use of my last name and the honorific felt more personal than if he used my first, as if we had someone stepped onto equal footing, but something about the man told me that wasn’t quite the case.

“Um, scotch, if you have it.”

I tried to keep my voice casual, but there was an undeniable tautness to it. He glanced over his shoulder with a smirk and then pulled out two glasses.

“If I was going to get you in trouble, I would have done it already,” he said and poured us two fingers each. He came forward and handed me the glass. I took it with thanks. He smirked at me, tapping his glass to mine in a way that seemed to me less than sincere. I took a sip to calm my nerves. I would have liked to have downed it, but I didn’t think that would be received well.

“That’s good,” I said, taking the glass from my lips to look at it.

“Better be, what I paid for it. Or what my wife paid for it. Another gift you see. She is very generous to me when she runs around with my checkbook.”

He sat down on one of the couches with a small sigh. He took a sip, eyeing me like someone would eye a large cat at a zoo. Like a neutered threat. Something that might be dangerous in any other situation, but was entirely anemic under the current circumstances. My face flushed.

“Sit.”

I did, taking another small sip of my scotch. I wanted to keep my head clear, but my nerves needed the amber liquid in my glass. It reminded me of Orla’s hair.

“Are you going to report me?” I found myself asking as I sat. “I’ll lose my job.”

He was a smart man, trying to minimize the situation would only insult him. In some ways he was impossible to read, in others he was an open book. I wondered if he felt the same way about me.

“Tell me what I saw today,” he said. I considered. What he had seen could very well be chalked up to an argument between two clandestine lovers that had gone too far, or perhaps an angry boss that didn’t like his female subordinate showing him up in a big meeting, there was something about the look in the Austrian’s eyes, that little glimmer of excitement and hope reflecting in the intense blue that had my heart pounding hard with the desire to tell him the truth.

“It’s complicated,” I settled on. He gave a bemused rush of air through his nose and dark curve of his lips.

“Indeed,” he said and then lifted his chin. We stared at each other, waiting for the other to flinch first. I didn’t know exactly what he had seen, and I didn’t know exactly what he expected. I’d never been in a situation like this. Chris and I had gotten into it gradually. We’d get drunk and talk about hot girls, then we’d talk about things we wanted to do to them, then we went a bit further and a bit further and a bit further until we were swapping stories about the girls we’d raped the night before.

“We’re seeing each other,” I said carefully. He raised his brow. “Obviously, I’m her boss, so that’s problematic.”

“Obviously,” he said dryly. We held eye contact a few moments longer. His eyes were penetrating. They held an intensity like I had never seen before. I refused to drop my gaze. He waited, unaffected by the stare down. Blood was rushing in my ears and my heart was pounding hard. I recalled what he had seen. What had I said to Orla? Had he been in there long enough to have heard it? Why did he want to meet with me at all? Why hadn’t he *said anything?*

“There’s a certain... power dynamic at play,” I said. His eyebrows elevated a fraction.

“A consensual one?” he asked. My answer was my grim, silent stare. His eyes remained on mine. His lips twitched. The dull throbbing intensified in my head. I couldn’t remember if I’d eaten today. He turned his head to the side and called, “Jessica!” His voice wasn’t particularly loud, but the abruptness of it gave me a jolt.

There was a moment of silence and then a door opened.

“*Ja ?*” called a soft voice.

“*Komm her .*”

“*Ich füttere Max.* ”

“No matter how much control you have over them, Mr. Trent, the child will always come first. Know that,” Furst said with a sigh and pushed himself up to his feet. “If they don’t, get yourself a different woman.”

He carried the scotch over and topped himself off. He made a small offer and I extended my glass. The word control buzzed around my skull.

“Your boss, Nick Oakes, is an idiot.”

I actually laughed. I couldn’t stop myself. The Austrian looked neither annoyed nor amused by my laugh.

“He can be,” I agreed. “He’s a nice guy, just... I don’t know, he’s just Nick.”

“He doesn’t take things as seriously as he should,” he said. “There is time for fun and time for business. Business is serious. You see this.”

“Absolutely,” I said, but I was annoyed by the change in conversation. I wanted to talk about what he had seen and what he thought and if he felt the way Chris and I did, not my boss. I felt a little sliver of panic erupt inside me. I knew he felt the same. He would not have reacted as he had if he didn’t. I felt panic bubble up inside of me. I was certain I’d lost my opportunity. He’d share a glass of scotch with me and send me on my way. He had brought me here to see if we shared something. It had been a test and I hadn’t passed.

“You are precise in calls. I like this. Nick, he wanders, needs to be brought back too often.”

“Mr. Furst - what you say today - ”

I cut myself off. He waited. Blood was rushing in my ears and my heart was pounding hard. I had to make a decision. I could play it completely safe, lie, and be sent on my way, or I could take a risk, a tiny risk, based on how this evening had played out thus far, and create a bond

with this man that was truly unsurpassed. I laughed nervously and said, “just tell me what you think you saw.”

His smile widened and his eyes glimmered.

“It’s delightfully frightening isn’t it? Almost exhilarating,” he mused, examining his glass. “It is always difficult. A little game of cat and mouse. Neither willing to say it first.”

He stared at me. My tongue was hot and thick in my mouth.

“Judging by how pale you look, I would guess you have never had to do this?”

I shook my head.

“I have a friend. But it happened slowly. Over time.”

He nodded in understanding and I felt a flush of kinship. Chris was my best friend. My other half. A pure, platonic male friendship that knew no bounds. I’d do anything for Chris and he’d do anything for me. I never once believed I’d meet another person who felt like we did. I knew others existed, but I never dreamed I’d ever meet them. I let myself imagine, hopefully, that he might actually be like we were. Not savage monsters who wanted to hurt and maim - the Bundys and Dahmers. The little smiling girl flashed in my brain, the way the young woman had looked up at him.

A door opened softly and I turned my head. His wife came down the hall. She had her hand on her stomach which, I could see now that she was smoothing out her dress, was swelling with a third child. On her hand was a sizable diamond. From the knee on, I could see lean, shapely calves. Her feet were bare. She was a woman I’d have gone after before I met Orla. The Austrian had good taste. I wondered if she liked anything about him other than his money.

“You need me, Maximilian?” she asked, pausing at the edge of the plush white carpet that covered most of the living room.

“I think we can trust him, *Mädchen*.”

Mrs. Furst looked at me, eyes cold and critical.

“If you say so, Master,” she said softly, eyes looking over me from the top of my head to the tip of my shoes. I suddenly wished I’d worn a navy suit today - damn my father. She looked back at her husband. “Emelia needs her bath.”

“Sit,” Furst said, pointing to the seat beside him. She sat down with no further protest and waited, big brown eyes on her husband, her hands folded in her lap. They reached out, searching for his. His free hand closed over hers firmly, but gently. Her hands clutched to his tightly. Her knuckles turned white as she squeezed. Furst looked at her, a smile on his face. He raised the hand that held his glass of scotch and trailed a finger down her cheek. “She is beautiful. Do you think?”

She turned to look at me, an expectant smile on her face.

“Um, yes, very,” I answered. My skin was very hot. “But I’m- ”

“I did not bring you here to fuck my wife, boy. Relax,” he said. My cheeks reddened and I cleared my throat. He asked, “Does she look familiar to you?”

I looked at her closely. She was beautiful. Orla was far more beautiful. No woman could compare with her fair skin, auburn hair and emerald eyes. There was something familiar about her though. I felt a little tickle in my brain. I tried to think about where I could have possibly seen the wife of Maximilian Furst. I tried to put it into context. Porn stars. I watched a lot of porn before Orla. After Orla, I only looked for dark redheads or reddish haired girls. I didn’t think this man would marry a porn star though. There was a possibility that she -

It was like a bucket of ice water had been dumped over my head, but it wasn't even remotely unpleasant. It was invigorating. I looked at Furst, very well aware I looked ridiculous, eyes wide, mouth open.

"Is that - she - is she the girl from the news? Like forever ago?" I said. His smile widened and she murmured something along the lines of "I wouldn't say *forever*." He tucked his fingers at the collar of her dress. He unbuttoned the first two buttons of her dress and pulled it down to reveal her shoulder.

I jumped to my feet. It was against my will. I had no control over it. The energy that ricocheted through me was beyond measure. Chris and I had talked about her for *hours*. We hadn't remembered when she'd gone missing, but we knew when she was found. That fucking bite mark was everywhere.

"That's fucked man," Chris had said, tossing an empty beer can into the trash and grabbing another from the fridge. He tossed it onto my lap. We had just returned from a game of pickup basketball and were slick with sweat.

"Wicked. Shit. What do you think they did to her?"

"Oh man, she got fucked hard," Chris said.

"Put to good use."

"Real good use."

"Shame she got away."

I laughed and cracked my beer. I'd spent days, weeks, *months*, jerking off, imagining what I'd have done if I had a girl at my disposal, locked in my basement...

I came back to reality, realizing I was staring at her. I looked at the Austrian. He looked quite pleased with himself. He wasn't looking at me. He was caressing the bite mark reverently. She had looked back at her husband, smiling happily at him.

" *Meine kleine Berühmtheit*, " he murmured and then kissed the scar gently. A door opened and a little girl came running down the hall.

" *Mutti !*" she called from the end of the hallway.

" *Geh ,*" Furst said and patted her thigh. She rose and went to her daughter.

"I'll race you," Mrs. Furst said and the girl squealed in delight.

"Deutsch!" Furst barked and shook his head.

"The child speaks with an American accent," he said as if it was an affront to nature. "She has Austrian friends but my wife homeschools her. I think I will put her into a good Catholic girls' school in Salzburg when she is old enough. You should hear her speak German."

He gave a derisive click of his tongue. I was still staring after her, trying to process. Furst continued speaking.

"Of course my wife's accent is so thick. She speaks very good German. But that accent. I like it on my wife. Not on my children."

"So that... God, what's her name. I remember that bite mark. Does that mean... was it you?"

He was smiling at me.

“But she got away... so it couldn’t ... I mean...”

“She came home,” he said. His smile softened and he stared at his glass. Then he muttered darkly. “Took too long though.”

He took a sip of his scotch and then looked at me. He chuckled. “Sit, Mr. Trent, please.”

I did, a bit embarrassed. My face was flushed. “I have a bit more protection than you, which I recognize. She’d never say a word against me. I will tell you this and then I want an honest and complete explanation. Deal?”

I nodded on impulse.

“I met her on a train. I wanted her. I bought her. I paid for her. I took her. I raped her. Repeatedly. Frequently. Violently. Now. What did I see today?”

I blinked, processing. I stared at him. His face was set grimly, but there was no sign of insincerity.

“I’ve been raping her for about two months. More than half of that - she didn’t know it was me.”

His brow lifted and his eyes lit up with delight and amusement.

“And now, I have hundreds of photos of her. Videos. Some vile stuff. She’ll never say a word.”

His eyes lit up and I felt immensely proud. “Indeed.”

I took a gulp of my scotch.

“You have these videos?”

I nodded.

“I would like to see one.”

He took another sip. I said curtly and clearly, “no.”

His brow lifted.

“There’s a ... professional relationship here that would be undermined if you saw that. And I don’t want...”

“You don’t want me in a meeting thinking about how great her tits are or how pink her pussy is.”

I swallowed thickly and nodded.

“She appears intelligent. Intelligent women... have bad attitudes. My girl - she’s smart. Was difficult to break. Even now - she’s not truly broken. And the children - day to day is a woman’s job, yes? I make sure my daughter, and soon my son, obey their mother. A child obeys their parents. And she’s a good mother. It’s given her ideas. Like she needs any of those. Two months after Emelia was born, she told me no. First time in years, and she meant it. *No*, she said. And of course it was to take care of our child. I could not even punish her for it. Children give them freedom. Far too much...”

Despite his words, he had a small smile on his lips as he gazed down the hall.

“When they have a child it is difficult - you only have so long to continue enjoying them fully. You can do more than you’d think. I have multiple doctors in my circle. Of course you must be careful, but you can enjoy them for some time. She is three months pregnant now. My son is only five months old. I was a bit overzealous, but our doctor tells me she will be ok. Even not having all your tools at your disposal, there is something to be said about seeing a woman swollen with your child. We will have many children. She likes this. She likes being a mother. I like putting them in her.”

“I want to have kids with Orla. We both have rare eyes. I can’t wait to see who’s eyes they’ll have.”

He observed me for a few seconds.

“Your boss said her name was Ellie.”

“Her middle name is Ellen. She goes by Ellie. She thinks Orla sounds ugly.”

“It does not,” Furst said as if it was the clearest thing ever said.

“I know. I don’t know - she thinks it’s old or something. Anyway, I like it so I’ve always called her Orla.”

His lips twitched.

“You will have children with this woman. You’ve decided this?”

“The moment I saw her,” I said. I regretted saying it for only a millisecond. But his eyes took on an intensity that I couldn’t quite explain, but I knew he understood.

“How did it begin?”

I told him. I told him about the first time we met. Her slamming into me right off the elevator. I explained her auburn hair to him. Her emerald eyes. Her curvy figure. I told him how badly I wanted her. I told him how I had asked her out, tried to get to know her, tried to do things the right way. I was a bit hesitant. This man I don't think had ever experienced rejection in his entire life. But I felt an overwhelming need to be completely honest. Then I told him how I grew to despise her. The porn I watched with porn stars that looked like her. How it kept getting more violent, more degrading, more vile as the months went on. But my need never abated.

Then I told him about my promotion. How I decided that was the night. I cut Chris out of the story. I told him I put the drugs into her drink. It wasn't my place to reveal Chris's role. As comfortable as I felt with Furst, that was a decision only Chris could make for himself. I thought I knew what decision he'd make, but I couldn't make it for him. I went on to tell him how I followed her home, how I raped her, recorded her, the pictures.

He topped us off when I told him how it just hadn't been enough. How I went back that next weekend. Spent the weekend there, taking her how I wanted. When I told him about the lines I'd drawn on her, one for each orgasm I gave her as I raped her, he grinned, eyes lit up brightly. I went on, telling him how I started texting her, the supply closet. I had just told him about how I made her come three times just by eating her pussy when he lifted his hand and began to snap.

For a moment rage surged inside my chest, but then I realized he had snapped at his wife, who had been about to slip into the kitchen behind me. I glanced over my shoulder and watched her walk over to the edge of the carpet.

"Since when do we start a new task without asking if I need assistance?" he asked her.

"I'm sorry, Master," she said, bowing her head, hands folding in front of her. She looked up and asked him, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No."

"Mr. Trent, is there anything you need from me?"

I was surprised for a moment, but my head was shaking.

“No, thank you,” I said.

“Don’t thank her. She’s a slave. She does what she’s told. Anything short of that is failure.”

I watched her walk back into the kitchen.

“When you say slave - ”

“Oh no, my friend, I want to hear more about this closet.”

My pride outweighed my curiosity. I told him about the videos I took there. The way I used her. When I told him about the tie, he threw his head back and laughed. It was a loud, booming laugh. Mrs. Furst came scurrying out of the kitchen, wringing her hands, and paused at the edge of the carpet.

“Master, *die Kinder*. ”

He waved her away. It seemed like the closest he would get to an apology. I told him about the text she sent after that and about the very real guilt I had felt.

“I want to be the one she comes to. I want her to feel safe with me. I liked it.. everything I did. Knowing how small and dirty I made her feel, but... I don’t want to hurt her like that.”

“You could not exert the complete domination you desired so you compensated in other ways. You have her now and got to work out the resentment you had for her.”

I shifted. That was the word she had used. I skipped forward, telling him about our last weekend together. The way she'd let me hit her despite having won the game.

"She was such a fucking cunt when we first met. Such a fucking bitch. But now I don't think that was it. I think she just -"

I cleared my throat and paused. There were things I could not divulge, no matter how badly I wanted to. I could let him believe she was the cold, frigid bitch I thought she was at the time or I could tell him the truth. That my opinion of her was ever changing and beneath that frigid facade was a deeply wounded, deeply vulnerable woman that I could never part from. I thought of the look she'd have on her face if she found out I'd told him about her struggles, her anxiety, her drug usage, her drinking, her bulimia. The *betrayal*. It made me sick. At that moment I wanted to teleport back to my apartment to wrap her in my arms and tell her I'd never do that to her. I would always protect her first.

"I think there's more to her though. She is difficult to read."

"I would imagine she can be haughty. Superior," he mused.

My blood boiled as I remembered some of her looks. The curt voice. The dismissive nature. Her pursed lips.

"Yes," I said hotly.

"Was this your first rape?" he asked.

"No," I said but then looked up. "I'm not a *rapist* though."

"Neither am I."

I knew then he understood. I felt a warmth for him I had not felt for anyone other than Chris. We understood each other. No more needed to be discussed in the matter.

“I’m in love with her. From the moment I first saw her.” My voice grew cold and bitter. “And she didn’t want a goddamn thing to do with me. She thought she was above me. I tried to stop wanting her, but I couldn’t.” I looked up to just his reaction. His face had not changed. “So I took her. And I taught her a lesson. But she needs me. She might not know that completely yet but... I’m going to marry her. In a couple months I’m going to make a lateral move to one of the other big fours. Then she can continue progressing where she is and we can be together and the world can know it.”

“Hmm, I should wait on making a recommendation then?” he said. I shook my head. “To my board. On the compliance work.”

“Oh. Oh! Oh no,” I said. “I mean, you’re in good hands where you’re at. And Chris will likely replace me and like I said, Orla’s brilliant. I don’t want to leave. It’s just the only way I can have her.”

“You make her leave,” he said as if it were the simplest solution.

“No. No, she doesn’t like change. It’s not good for her. Besides, if she stays put, I’ll have Chris to keep tabs on her while she’s at work.”

I was worried he might inquire into Chris. He seemed to catch it but did not pursue the issue.

“You will allow her to keep working?” he asked.

“Well, yeah,” I said. I hadn’t even considered her not working. “Orla can make partner if she wants. She’ll be a partner by forty if she wanted. I’m not kidding. She just needs to work on her people skills.”

“You would like this, if she was partner in tax?”

My chest bloomed with pride at the thought.

“Absolutely.”

“And when you have children?”

“I guess that’ll be up to her. If she wants to stay home with them or not.”

I would support her either way. Both would make me equally proud. I found myself missing her. I wanted to have my nose in her hair, my arms around her. The Austrian fell silent, examining me as if I were some sort of strange, exotic animal.

“If I had met you just five years ago I would not have liked you,” he mused thoughtfully. “If someone had told me five years ago I’d have one of these fucking things on my hand, I’d have called them insane.”

He held up his left hand to reveal a wedding band.

“Even more - she makes me switch hands based on where we are. It must be moved to the left in America. She’s a possessive little thing.”

He twirled the ring on his hand before pulling it off and placing it on his right hand.

“So what was it I walked into today?” he asked. I swallowed down my own anger and checked my phone. She had texted me.

Are you there?

What'd he say?

What's happening?

Are you ok????

I put my phone face down beside me.

“She - ”

“Master. Dinner is ready.”

He rose with a smile.

“My wife is a fine cook.”

I felt bad that I was eating without Orla. I wondered if she had eaten.

I took out my phone to reply as we walked to the dining room.

I'm fine. We're ok. What did you eat for dinner?

I got an immediate response.

I had leftovers. What'd he say? Are we in trouble?

My thumbs moved rapidly across the screen:

I'll tell you when I get home but we're fine. We don't have any leftovers. Make something to eat and take a video of you eating it then send it to me.

I quickly pulled up google. I typed ‘ *missing American girl in Europe.* ’ Sure enough, the first picture to pop up was a haggard young woman coming out of a hospital in Germany, face pale, dark circles around her eyes, eyelids pink and puffy, glaring at the camera hatefully.

Jessica Allan found at Eastern European rest stop by Australian Hero.

I slipped my phone into my pocket as we entered the dining room. The dining room had a table that could fit six. Three places were set. Two at the ends of the table, which was small enough it wouldn't be difficult to converse, and one to Furst's right. I assumed that would be my space, but Mrs. Furst motioned to the lone seat on the far side of the table. I took it, feeling like I had taken her spot. She poured a small glass of wine for her husband, before pausing to give him a gentle kiss on the temple. Her fingers gently ran through his hair and she kissed the top of his head before she came to pour me a small glass.

“Thank you,” I said softly, hoping it was loud enough for her to hear and soft enough for Furst not to. She gave me a little smirk, eyes twinkling.

“Smells delicious,” I told her. She did not say anything, but the smile continued to play across her lips. She looked at her husband, who stared back at her with a look that suggested he was less than impressed. With me or with her, I didn't know. She began to serve dinner, which was a dish of beef and vegetables. It really smelled amazing and I regretted how tacky it would sound to ask if I could bring some back to Orla. She'd probably enjoy eating what looked like a pretty authentic German dish, despite it being made by an American. When I looked away from her and back to Furst, he was watching me with the tiniest of smiles on his face, and I realized I'd been staring at his wife.

“She is beautiful, isn't she,” he said again. She took her seat beside him and he reached out to place a large hand on the back of her small neck.

“Yes,” I answered honestly. “What happened?”

Furst spoke now. He told me how he'd seen her on the train. How he had a contact in Eastern Europe. How she'd been taken, how much he paid for her, how he trained her, how she'd been separated from him for three long years and how, amazingly, she'd returned to him. I couldn't wait to tell Chris. I could see it now.

"Remember that girl that went missing? Jessica Allan?" I'd show him the picture of her. I could see his eyes light up in excitement as I told him all the things that *did* happen to her. It felt surreal, sitting here now, watching her eat, slowly and graceful, as her husband told him in graphic detail how he'd raped her over the course of eight months.

There was a soft crackle and Furst fell silent. Both waited, heads slightly elevated, and then there was a little cooing sound. It confused me for a second, before Mrs. Furst, Jessica Allan, rose from her seat, collected a small white monitor from an accent table, and walked down the hall.

"Traveling with young children is very difficult," Furst said. "Time zones wreak havoc on them. My wife attempts to keep them on the same schedule. It is harder for her than them. We return to Berlin not for two weeks, so she transitioned them this time. We were visiting her parents last week."

He said the last part as if he were explaining they had stopped off in hell to visit Satan.

"Does she travel with you every time," I asked. I had finished my beef, which was delicious and finished my wine.

"Usually," he answered. "I limit travel now. I do not like being away from my family. Whether the children travel is a decision I give her."

She returned, setting the monitor down on the table, and refilled our wine glasses. I took a sip of wine and watched her return to her place beside her husband and place a soft kiss on his temple. She stroked the side of his head with her nails. She said something to him in German. He only nodded. She stroked his cheek, kissed his temple again, and then settled back down into her chair. Her hand searched for his beneath the table. My question from before was

answered. She couldn't care less about his money. She loved the man. She was devoted to him. The look in her eyes was obvious. The longing in my chest hurt. I pulled out my phone.

I want you to tell me you love me when I get home. I swallowed thickly and then sent it. *And make it convincing.*

"Dinner was delicious, Mrs. Furst," I complimented, putting my phone back into my pocket. She smiled at me.

"I like your friend, Master," she said to her husband.

"Yes, you would like him. Young and handsome and American."

"I do not like American men, Master," she answered and took a bite of her food. He grunted.

"Mr. Trent. You want your woman to work. You want her to be successful."

"Yes."

"I think a woman is at her best as property, at home, barefoot and pregnant, ready to do whatever it is the man that owns her requires of her."

He looked at his wife. She reached out and ran her nails through the short gray hair at his temples. He looked back at Caleb.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

I looked at his wife and then back at Furst. I shifted and then answered honestly, "I can't say I hate that idea," I looked at Mrs. Furst. I imagined Orla like that, waiting for me to come

home everyday, dropping to her knees when I opened the door, bending over to take it however I wanted to give it whenever I chose. I forced the idea out of my head as I felt blood rush between my legs.

“How can a woman fulfill your needs and pursue a career of her own?”

Mrs. Furst turned her head towards me. She was smiling. It was almost unsettling. There was something in her eyes. Awareness. A steely strength. They were the eyes of someone who had suffered immensely and had come out stronger for it. I didn't know whose opinion actually meant more to me, Maximilian Furst, or his wife.

“Orla is the most intelligent and capable person I have ever met,” I said firmly, but I was squeezing my fork and knife tightly in my hands, turning the nail bed white. I repeated firmly, “Person.”

Furst's lips twitched and his wife's smile disappeared. A slight curve of her lips remained however. She glanced at her husband furtively.

“I get to put the proudest, most capable woman I've ever met on her knees every night. And I get to look at her across the boardroom table and relive every vulgar, degrading thing I've ever done to her, ever made her do.”

I paused, holding his gaze firmly.

“That fulfills my needs.”

“Still like him?” Furst asked his wife and then his face split into the largest smile I'd seen on him all day. “I do not understand you, but I would like to know you better.”

His wife took another bite of her beef and took a sip of her water.

“I have come to realize, it is exceedingly rare to ever find another man who will share your opinion of women exactly. Some men respect them too little - some too much. I have too few who understand the love I have for my wife. Too few who understand the value I put on her - but still understand that when you find the woman you want - you can do what you want. I wanted her. She didn’t want me. I raped her. Now we are happy. So, I will tolerate your progressive views as long as it does not put foolish notions in my wife’s head. I wish to know you better.”

“Thank you, sir. I would like that.” I glanced at Mrs. Furst.

“Mr. Furst, could I ask your wife a question?”

“My wife?” he asked, brow lifted. He took a sip of his wine. “By all means.”

“Mrs. Furst, my girlfriend, Orla... she’s very insecure about her body. I’ve told her a million times how beautiful I think she is. She doesn’t... I can’t get through to her.”

Mrs. Furst considered briefly. When she spoke next it was in German. Furst’s face was dark. His eyes took on a stronger intensity. He stared at his wife.

“You’ve just opened up a very sensitive topic,” Mrs. Furst explained, touching her husband’s arm. My face flushed.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to overstep or to ...it’s just she won’t *listen*. I don’t know what I’m doing wrong.”

“They don’t listen,” Furst said shortly, casting a dark look toward his wife.

Mrs. Furst ignored him and looked at me. Finally she turned to look back at her husband. She ran her knuckles down his cheek.

“ *Ich möchte ihnen helfen,* ” she murmured. “ *Bitte, Master. Please?* ”

“I didn’t mean to overstep,” I said again, looking at Furst.

Furst continued to stare. Finally, he picked up his glass and gave his wife a nod.

“Did my master tell you how we met?” she asked me. She was holding his hand in both of hers. He sipped at his wine, splitting his penetrating gaze between watching her and watching me.

“On a train,” I said.

“I was on a day trip with friends,” she said. “He saw me and he wanted me. He was thirty-eight. I was twenty-four. In those eight months I was with him... I looked amazing.”

Furst murmured something as he took a sip of his wine. I heard something that sounded like ‘too thin.’”

“We were separated for some time. I was already twenty-eight when I found him again,” she said. Her hand tightened around his and her face took on a pained look. “Older, but still young and in better shape than I had been before. I ran a lot.”

The two shared a long look.

“I was overjoyed when I found out I was pregnant. We were trying. It was planned. It never... never occurred to me what it would do to my body.”

She paused to reflect and neither I nor her husband interrupted.

“My value to my husband is in how I can bring him pleasure.”

Furst’s face took on a look I couldn’t quite read.

“My husband is a wealthy man. A handsome man. I am well past my prime now.”

She looked at the table, removing one hand from her husband’s to grab her water.

“She says this,” Furst said, spinning his glass on the table and watching the liquid swirl.
“These are not my words.”

“He could be with any beautiful young woman he wanted. I know this. He knows this.” She shot him a look. “I know he knows this.”

Furst was gazing down at the table, a finger pressed to his lips. He did not appear to be enjoying the conversation.

“In normal relationships - if a man cheats, she can leave. In a situation where there is such a power differential - women in our position tend to be perceived as irrational. Jealous. In my experience - the best way for a man in your position of extreme power - is honesty.”

I blinked.

“Honesty.” My voice was like hollow wood.

“You plan to switch companies so you can make your relationship public?”

I blinked. Had she been in the room when I told Furst that? She smirked at me.

“You’d be amazed what we hear,” she said. “That’s your plan?”

I nodded.

“You need to tell her that. My advice - go home and tell her tonight.”

I began to shake my head. She leaned forward ever so slightly. Furst was looking at his wife. He loved her too. That was clear.

“If she is insecure - if you’ve told her that you want her and she doesn’t believe you - she thinks you’re lying. We want action. Men can say whatever they want. Especially men like you. Your word doesn’t mean anything until you can prove it does.”

“I say lock her up in your basement until she loves you,” Furst murmured. “Worked for me.”

I considered what Mrs. Furst said, but Orla knew how I felt. Telling her I planned on switching companies would only bring her anxiety. I wanted to discuss that with Mrs. Furst, but I couldn’t. Furst couldn’t know about Orla’s struggles. She was already behind the eight ball because she was a woman.

“This girl of yours. Large breasts, narrow waist, curvy hips... what is there she thinks is displeasing?”

I glanced at Mrs. Furst, whose lips pursed.

“She was a bit curvier a month or so ago. She stopped eating when it all began. The stress. She’s lost a lot. I mean she’s still gorgeous, but I like some curves. Something to grab onto. You know, smacking an ass and seeing it jiggle...”

Furst smiled.

“Orla is uh...” I considered what to divulge. “She just thinks she's unattractive. She's not. I know for a fact half the men in the office want to fuck her. That's what you saw today. She agreed to go to happy hour on Friday without me with a man she *knows* wants her.”

“You need to tell her about your long-term plans with her. She might not fully believe you until you actually make the switch, but it will make a difference. I still get jealous. I can't help myself. That's why he wears - why is your wedding ring on your right hand?”

“Because that is where an Austrian man wears his wedding ring,” Furst said dryly.

“Master...” Mrs. Furst said. My eyes darted between them.

“I switched it here, talking to the boy. I don't like it on the left. It feels wrong.”

“I don't care how you feel about it, I care women know you're married.”

He removed the ring from his right hand and put it on his left. He took her hand in his.

“You know - she speaks of her stretch marks. After a birth - we cannot have sex anyway. I use her mouth. By the time I can use her fully, she is perfectly pleasing to me. I see those marks, those little lines, and it does more to touch a primal part of me than anything I ever saw in my life. Those marks are from bearing *my* child . I put the child there. She is producing *my* offspring. It makes me want to give her more. A different body than I first had yes. But this woman.”

He grabbed her by the hair and turned her face toward me. It was sudden and violent. I jerked in surprise, pressing my back against the chair, and my lips parted. I saw pain flash across her face. It sent blood flushing south.

“This woman is what every woman *should* be. She has brought me pleasure like no other. And she has given me two beautiful, healthy children. And soon another. I don’t want any other woman. Weak men think casual sex is the goal. Weak men find pleasure in a random warm body. A good man finds his mate and he makes her his. I see her body now - I want her more each and every day that passes.”

He released her hair. She reached out for his hands. She said something in German and he nodded. She slid to her knees and pressed her head into his lap.

“I would never find happiness in life if I did not tell her I loved her and that I would be faithful. I did not want to promise this to her. I did not think I owed her promises of fidelity. I thought it made me weak. But I love her, so I do. If you love this girl. Be honest with her. Do not let pride quiet your tongue.”

Furst turned his eyes down toward Mrs. Furst. She looked up at him and murmured, “I love you so much.”

He looked at her, a warm smile on his lips. He stroked her cheek gently. They stayed like that in silence for some time. I was content to watch.

I slid into the Uber and reached for my seatbelt. As the car began to pull away from the curb, I grabbed my phone and began to type.

I’m coming home.

Be naked when I get there.

Waiting on the bed. Touch yourself if you want.

Tell me you love me when I get there. Make it feel real.

And tell me you belong to me.

Ok. I will. Are we ok?

We're ok. Are you going to touch yourself?

Yes. You're not going to have to send out the pictures then?

I felt a flair of anger. She shouldn't fucking *care* about the pictures. Mrs. Furst didn't worry about things like that. She cared about taking care of her husband.

Maybe I should send them to Danny? Or do you just want to show him the real deal on Friday?

I was a little drunk. I didn't drink liquor often, and when I did, I nursed it. I hadn't wanted to stop talking to him and when he offered me another glass of scotch after dinner, I happily accepted. Mrs. Furst and went to clean. After she finished and she got us two more glasses, she laid down on the couch beside him and went to sleep with her head in his lap. He had stroked her hair softly as they spoke.

Caleb, please don't do this to me. I'm begging you.

My face flushed. I glanced over the driver's shoulder and watched the speedometer. He was going infuriatingly slow. Hardly ten over the speed limit. I wanted to be home now. I wanted to hold her close and kiss her and touch her and hear her tell me how much she loved me.

Are you naked yet?

Yes.

Send me a picture.

There was a pause, then the picture came through. She was laying on his bed, pale body naked, her auburn hair down, sprawled along the pillow. I pressed my hand into my groin.

Fingers in your pussy. Three knuckles deep.

Another picture came through. I was rock hard.

Please caleb don't do this to me. Please just tell me what's going on.

I hesitated. I should tell her. From what the Fursts said, I needed to tell her about my plan to switch companies so we could take our relationship public. I needed to tell her I was going to marry her, and we'd buy a house together, and we'd have children, and live in the suburbs and be gloriously happy together. There was something I withheld from them though. The rejection. How many times had I offered myself to her and laid my soul bare before her just to have her spit on my face. If I told her and saw nothing in her eyes. No happiness or relief, no affection, only disgust, disappointment, or indifference... I just couldn't take that right now.

You know I love you, Orla?

I'd told her that countless times. Surely that was enough. And now I said it again, yet another admission of love she wouldn't return.

Yes.

He waited.

You'll tell me you love me when I get there. Make it good.

I will.

I didn't realize I punched the window until I felt the pain in my knuckles and heard the driver yell, "fuck man!"

I apologized and then put the phone in my pocket. I closed my eyes, imaging what it might sound like to hear Orla say she loved me and to know she meant it.

I opened the door to my apartment and quickly locked it. I dropped my bag and whipped off my jacket on my way to the bedroom. I found her laying in the middle of my bed, her fingers buried deeply inside of her. She looked up from the pillow, cheeks flushed, eyes wide.

"What -"

"Shut up. You know what I want you to say," I said as I pressed my knee to the bed and wrestled with my tie. She watched me, her pink tongue wetting her tongue.

"I'm glad you're home," she said. I began to unbutton my shirt. My cock strained against my trousers.

"Get your fingers in your cunt."

I whipped my shirt off and moved on to my belt.

As I unbuttoned and unzipped my pants, her legs spread wider for me.

She reached for me as I fell on top of her.

“I love you, Caleb,” she murmured in my ear. I sucked in a sharp breath and freed my hardened cock. I wasn’t going to last long but I didn’t care all that much right now.

“I love you,” I murmured. Her body was warm and soft beneath my hands. I breathed in the smell of her deeply.

“I belong to you,” she said, lips closing around my earlobe. “Caleb, please. Please.”

“Keep saying it,” I told her. I got a firm grip on her hair. I held her tightly.

“I love you,” she whispered. I fucked her hard.

“I love you too,” I responded. I didn’t need to tell her about my plans for the end of the summer. She knew how I felt. Her hands touched my face, turning me away from her ear. Her lips were warm and soft.

“I love you,” she breathed into my mouth. I bit her bottom lip. She bit my top lip.

“I love you,” I growled. “I love you.”

Her tongue touched mine.

“Look at me,” I ordered, pulling my head back. Her eyes opened. They darted between mine.

“You belong to me,” I said.

“I belong to you,” she said. “I love you.”

My body tightened and I closed my eyes, riding out my orgasm without caring how stupid the look on my face might be. I let myself believe she meant it and it was a beautiful feeling. When I came down, and my head cleared and I thought more clearly, I pressed my lips along her neck.

“No one is going to help you,” I said. “You’re not getting away from me.”

Her fingers lazily worked through my hair.

“We’re safe then?” she asked. I nodded, falling asleep, still inside of her. “You won’t send out the pictures?”

I shook my head, trailing my lips along her neck.

Then she was telling me she loved me. She was telling me she wanted me to marry her. She was telling me she wanted me to tell everyone we were together.

“Caleb? Can I please have my medication, Caleb? I need a xanax.”

It drew me from my dream. I felt the disappointment of reality consume me and I rolled out of bed and got her medication. I came back with a glass of water and her pills. She took them with a small smile.

“What did you end up eating?” I asked, pulling on a pair of boxers.

“I made some of those chicken strips from your freezer.”

I nodded. She drank down the rest of her water. There was a little GHB in there. I probably wouldn’t have put it in there if I was clear headed, but I just wanted the affection. I licked my lips and crawled under the covers with her. I held her warm body to me firmly.

“I’ll never let you go, Orla,” I rumbled in the darkness. “Do you understand that?”

She was nodding. Her lips were very gently trailing across my neck.

“What... what happened?” she asked, groggy.

“We’ll talk tomorrow morning.”

I squeezed her ass and held her naked body against me tightly.

“Caleb?” she murmured.

“Yeah?”

“You won’t put the pictures out?” she asked me. “I love you.”

The taste on my tongue turned bitter and I squeezed my eyes shut.

“No. Go to sleep.”

“I love you.”

“Stop,” I said curtly. “Don’t say it again. Go to bed.”

She kissed my chest and nodded, sinking into me. After that, I couldn’t really fall asleep.

Chapter Notes

Kind of a shorter chapter and covers more time than normal, but I think this is the best way to do it. Hopefully you all agree.

I don't thank you guys frequently enough for all your very thoughtful comments and kind words. It really makes my day to read them and know that not only are people taking time out of their day to read my work but also enjoy it. It really really means more to me than you'll ever know. Thank you!

(And I am not saying that because I'm nervous about the pacing of this chapter and I'm trying to guilt you into not saying mean things.)

Caleb wasn't in bed with me when I woke up. I put on one of his t-shirts and used the bathroom. I found him sitting on the couch with a cup of coffee in his hand, wearing nothing but boxers, staring off into space, with tousled hair and an unshaved face. I stopped outside the bedroom door and stared at him, crossing my arms over my chest. He finally looked up, not surprised to see me, and took a sip of his coffee. I remained standing, staring at him, waiting for him to speak. When he finally did, I felt my rage surge.

"When we get to work today, you'll tell Danny your plans are back on and that you cannot go to Happy Hour," he said. "Is that clear?"

"What happened last night?"

"Goddammit, Orla!" he shouted. "Is that clear!"

I stared at him, lips pressed together tightly. I wanted to walk over to him and claw his eyes out.

"Yes. It's clear. What happened?"

He told me. His arrival at the Four Seasons. His conversation with Maximilian Furst. The revelation about his wife. I sat down on the edge of the couch, hands clasped in my lap as I listened. I swallowed thickly and fought back tears. Her lower jaw trembled and I shook my head. When I opened my eyes, red and wet, Caleb was staring at me.

“You need to get me out of golf on Saturday. I don’t care how. I don’t want to see that man again,” I said.

“I already bought you clubs. We’re picking them up tomorrow.”

“I will not smile at that man. If you value your career or my career, you will get me out of this,” I said. He didn’t say anything. He stared at his coffee cup. I got up and put on a fresh pot. I paused in the doorway again, staring at him. He did not look at me.

“I’m going to take a shower,” I told him. He turned to look at me. He just stared blankly. “I don’t understand what you have to be upset about.”

“Ally is Chris’ ex. We all went to law school together and they dated a couple months. They hooked up again at a party a couple months ago,” he said. “I avoid social events where she is there because it’s always awkward as fuck. Ally is no one to me.”

I just shook my head, a tight smile on my face. He claimed to love me, called me his girlfriend, but he couldn’t even bring me out with his friends and it was clear he saw no long term future with me. He’d go out, have drinks, find some hot girl he could get off with in a bathroom and come back and fuck me in the same night. I paused in the doorway. My chest hurt as I spoke. “Wear a condom if you fuck someone. I don’t want you bringing diseases back with you.”

I didn’t realize he had followed me until I was turning on the shower. He shut the door behind him with a hard click.

“I told you, Anna is going. I can’t bring you, Orla. If I could, I would.”

I should have been relieved. He saw no future with me, that was clear. For all his lies about loving me, the end was in sight.

“OK,” I said.

“Orla,” he said softly, stepping closer. He took my face in his hands. His hands were warm and strong and they felt nice. I wanted to lean into him and let him wrap me in his arms, but it hurt too much. He stroked my cheeks with his thumbs. “It’s just one night. I won’t even look at another girl. I promise. I only want you.”

“I don’t believe you,” I said honestly. He picked me up and put me on the counter. He stepped between my legs, hands pressed against the counter as he leaned over me.

“I’m in a tough spot, Orla. I can’t not go...”

He kissed my neck softly. His stubble felt nice.

“And I can’t bring you with me.” He kissed the other side of my neck. “So what do you expect me to do?”

I said nothing. He pulled back and gently turned my face to look at him. He placed a tender kiss to my lips. He tried to deepen the kiss but I turned my face away from him. He grabbed my face in a bruising grip and turned my face back.

“Why would I bother fucking some slut I met at a club, when I have you here at home and I can do whatever the fuck I want to you,” he asked, lips close to mine. He kissed me again, harder this time. “I have my own personal fuck toy.”

He pulled me off the counter and spun me around.

“That I get to experience every fantasy I’ve ever had with.” He bent me over, pressing me down on the counter. Hard. I grunted, and he bent over me, pressing his erection into my bottom, his hands sliding beneath me to squeeze my breasts hard. His lips were against my ear. I could feel his voice vibrating in my head. “Whether she wants it or not.”

I felt him pressed to my opening.

“Ready?” he asked, teeth nibbling on my ear, but he was already pressing inside of me. “Why would I need another woman... when I have the sweetest pussy on the planet at my disposal.”

His hands tightened around my breasts, pressing my back into his chest. His cock slid more deeply inside of me until he was all the way in.

“You never could help it. Getting wet when I raped you,” he said. He sucked on my ear lobe hard. “You have no idea how hot that makes me.”

His fingers groped hard. He pulled his hips back and pressed back into me.

“How hot I get knowing you *love* being a whore for me,” he grated. His movements picked up speed but remained quicker. One of his hands left my breast and went to close around my throat. “My smart, competent, *proud* Orla. Couldn’t stand me. Hated everything about me. Got angry the second I walked into a room. Sopping wet cunt every time I raped her.”

“Stop,” I said, hips bucking back to press him more deeply inside of me. I hated myself for it, but he felt so *good*.

“Everytime I went into your office,” he breathed in my ear. “All I could think about was how badly I wanted to fuck you.”

“S-stop,” I breathed softly.

“Rip your clothes off and shove my cock down your throat.”

“S...” he was fucking me harder now. Fast but steady pumps. The hand groping my breasts went to my hips, angling me upward so he could get deeper inside of me.

“Keep telling me to stop,” he said. His teeth big down on my earlobe. “Try to stop me, Orla. You can’t. I get what I want. And I want you.”

My entire body shuddered as my orgasm rippled through me. When I came down from my high, he was still thrusting into me, but he was laughing darkly in my ear.

“That’s right, my whore. My little fuck toy.” He straightened, his hand tightening on my throat and he held me to him. My hips pressed hard into the sink. Hard enough to bruise, but I hardly felt it. He turned my face toward his. “You’re fucking drenching me. Tell me how much you liked it. Tell me. You loved getting raped by me.”

My eyes were locked on his. My body was already exhausted. I wanted to go back to bed.

“Tell me.” His hand tightened around my throat. “*Say it.*”

“I liked it,” I breathed.

“All of it.”

“I liked it. When you raped me.”

“Say thank you,” he ground out, our mouths touching.

“Thank you - for raping me, Caleb.”

He thrust harder, my hips slamming into the sink. He slowed as he orgasmed, spilling himself deeply inside of me. I leaned backward, sagging against him, my head tilted back. He placed gentle kisses along the side of my face, his hand pulsing around my neck.

“Today, you’re going to tell Danny you have plans this weekend and can’t go. Then, at 11:15, you’re going to go wait for me in our spot, and I’m doing to skull fuck you until I blow my load deep down your throat, so best not wear too much makeup, because I’m going to make you cry. And you won’t say a fucking word, because I have pictures and videos that I know you don’t want anyone else seeing. You think I won’t send them out over this because I’d lose you - and you’re right. But I can show Chris... and I can show Furst.”

My body tensed against his. He smirked into the side of my face.

“Are you going to be a good girl, and are you going to tell Danny you can’t go?”

“Yes, Caleb,” I whispered. He kissed me gently.

“Good girl.”

He kissed me.

“Now come on. I want to soap you up.”

He spent a good amount of time lathering me up. I kept my eyes closed under the hot spray, just enjoying the heat and the feel of his large hands as they moved over me. It seemed to me just another excuse to feel me up, but it wasn’t all that unpleasant. He slid his hand between my legs, massaging firmly, sucking on my earlobe as he did.

He had laid out a gray skirt and a black blouse for me. As instructed, I didn't put on any eyeliner, but just a little bit of coverup and mascara. I made sure I had some in my back before we set off. On the T, he got me nestled back into the corner, and he stood in front of me, his hand on the hold bar. His eyes stayed on me the entire time. I lifted my gaze to look at him, but the intensity of his gaze sent my eyes toward his feet. I stared at his black sneakers, feeling his eyes on the top of my head. When we were about two stops away, I looked back up and met his eyes.

"I want you to tell me once you've spoken to Danny," he said. I nodded. I went to look back down, but his finger caught my chin. I met his gaze again. He dropped his hand but stepped closer. He murmured softly, "the thought of touching another girl turns my stomach. You're all I want. I promise."

I dropped my eyes.

"You can call me whenever you want," he said. My eyes snapped back up. "Once a minute. Three times a minute. And I'll pick up. So you'll know I'm not with another girl. OK? But I wish you'd know I won't.... Everyone else is beneath us."

The word 'us' touched something inside of me, but then we came into the next stop and the train screeched to a halt. He went to get coffee alone. I promised Eddie Caleb was getting a cup for him.

I worked most of the morning without interruption. Around ten I left my cubicle in search of Danny. He wasn't at his cubicle. It was a stroke of luck I found him at the copier, well within view of Caleb. I could feel his eyes on me as I talked to Danny, brushing off his disappointment with a smile and an apology. I blamed it on imaginary friends who changed plans on a whim as part of their personality. I looked at Caleb on my way to the bathroom. He only stared back grimly.

I was at our spot at 11:10. I waited anxiously. I didn't mind blowjobs, but I didn't like deep throats. I was pretty certain that was what I was going to get. I smoothed out my skirt and took a deep breath. I turned when the door opened and watched him step inside. He flashed me a little smirk as he shut and locked the door.

"On your knees."

I obeyed without a word. He was true to his promise, or warning, from that morning. I had very little time to prepare, and by the time he was done, my scalp hurt from the grip he had on my hair and tears were running down my cheeks. I sat back on my feet, breathing hard, when he said my name. I looked up, slightly dazed, and stared into the camera of his phone.

“God, that’s fucking hot,” he breathed. He bent down to help me to my feet. He removed the tie from my hair and smoothed it out with gentle hands. “Good girl.”

He stroked the dampness from my cheeks with his thumbs. “I’ll leave first and text you that the coast is clear. Then you can wash your face and straighten up in the bathroom, alright.”

I nodded and smiled. He didn’t kiss me before leaving. I waited and got the text about twenty seconds later. I slid out of the closet and cleaned myself up in the bathroom. The rest of the day was relatively uneventful. Danny asked me multiple times at lunch if I was sure about Friday.

“I can’t,” I lamented, ignoring Amelia’s unfriendly gaze. “Maybe next time.”

“When Caleb’s going,” Amelia murmured to Stephanie. I shot her a glare. I wondered if I should talk to her. Tell her I wasn’t involved with Caleb and that she could destroy both our lives by spreading lies like that. I didn’t really want her thinking we *weren’t* secretly together though. I would have to talk to Caleb about it. Caleb didn’t seem to notice any of what happened. He was talking to Chris and Marc about sports. I got up and left after I finished my salad. Other than a quick glance at my empty container, Caleb didn’t acknowledge my leaving.

I wrote a report and took notes for a couple calls. We had a brief call with the Austrian rapist. It was difficult listening to his voice, listening to Nick scrape for his approval, and hear the casual way he and Caleb joked with each other, like old friends, knowing what he had done. I managed to shove it deep inside of myself and get through the call with decent notes.

We ended up staying at work until about seven. Chris had left. He hadn’t spoken to me all day and I was glad for it. Our train ride home was mostly silent. He was on his phone and I stood there with my eyes closed, trying to keep my mind as blank as possible. It wasn’t until

we were inside his apartment that he pulled me into a warm hug, his hand running over my hair.

“I’m so proud of you,” he murmured. I frowned and looked up, not sure what it was he was talking about. He smiled and touched my face. “You didn’t ask for a Xanax. You got through the entire day.”

It brought a real smile to my face.

The next day was similar. He fucked me in the shower. We spent the ride to the office in relative silence. Only a couple girls noticed him and, as a result, made eyes at him. One girl looked away after we locked eyes and I gave her a pretty nasty glare.

He was booked most of the day, so I didn’t see him. Everytime my phone buzzed I picked it up, thinking I’d need to head down to our spot, but that text didn’t come. He didn’t text me until 5:15 when he told me to pack up and meet him at the Starbucks about three blocks over. He sent me the address to verify.

When I got there I found him standing outside, scrolling on his phone. We hadn’t spoken about the Austrian since yesterday morning and I wanted to ask more, but I also didn’t want to get angry. I couldn’t help it when we arrived at a sporting goods store in Brookline not far from his apartment. .

“Caleb, I’m not going on Saturday,” I said, stopping just outside the door.

“You’ll do what I tell you,” he said coldly and opened the door. “Inside.”

I held his gaze, ready to protest, but decided it wasn’t the place or time. We entered and he greeted the guy behind the desk by name.

“Ay, Trent! Those clubs are in,” he said. He went out back, leaving us alone in the store. He was looking at golf clothing.

“I’m not wearing a skirt,” I told him. He said nothing. His silence was infuriating me. He’d been so quiet this week. It didn’t matter that I had been too. He picked up a white skirt and then the same one in powder blue.

“Caleb,” I said. He moved to look at the polos.

“He’ll expect you to be in a skirt,” Caleb said. I blinked for a second.

“I don’t dress for *him* .”

“No. You dress for me,” he said. “And I want to see your legs.”

“You can see my legs whenever you want.”

“I’m thinking about your career,” he said. I was indignant. I stepped closer to him.

“You think it’ll help my career to wear a skirt for another man?” I asked, voice low. “Dress like the good little housewife he thinks I should be? The man’s a monster.”

“He’s *not* ,” Caleb snapped, flashing a dark look in my direction. “If you think he’s a monster then you think I’m one too. Do you think I’m a monster, Orla?”

I just stared.

“My career will be better served if he knows that not everyone is going to do what he wants. And that just because I’m a woman doesn’t mean I don’t deserve respect.”

“I can guarantee you, Chris and I looked into golfing culture in Austria. If you don’t think we’re going to dress and act in a way we know he’ll approve - ”

“But you’re not being objectified. You’re putting me in a skirt because women should wear skirts. It’s sexual.”

“It’s not sexual,” Caleb said. “It’s traditional. He’s a traditional man. You’ll wear what I tell you.”

“Caleb - ”

“Here we go!” the man called. “Sorry for the wait. They were tucked up in the back for safe keeping.”

“Not a problem, Jimmy. We’re just going to keep looking.” He selected a pair of gloves. He touched the inside and then put them back up. I examined some of the golf pants. Caleb glanced back to see what I was doing.

“Pick some out you like. You just can’t wear them Saturday,” he said. I glared at his back and then picked up a couple pairs I liked. “Take a Look at some of the shoes. Light colors only. White, pale blue, pale pink.”

With another glare, I went over and picked out some shoes. I went with white, so I wouldn’t have to worry about what I wore. He came over with a couple pairs of golf gloves in his hands. He gave an approving nod. I swallowed down my annoyance.

“You know, if you’re hung over on Saturday, that won’t be good for your career,” I told him. I was looking at some of the men’s polos.

“I’ll be driving home, so I doubt I’ll be hungover,” he said. I pinched my lips together. “I’ll be back by 1:00am.”

“One -” I cut off my own anger and just shook my head. “Fine. Do what you want. Just wear a condom.”

“Jesus, Orla,” he said, exasperated. “You can be a real psycho, you know.”

He turned and walked up to the counter. I felt like he’d slapped me. I remember what he said to me repeatedly on our first weekend together.

You’re so fucked up. The way he’d laughed.

I blinked rapidly and pretended to look at a few more shirts before going up to the desk. I plopped down the pants and shoes. Caleb was talking to Jimmy, leaning on the counter, a charming smile on his face as they talked golf. I didn’t understand a word they said.

“Alright, that’ll be... one thousand seventy eight dollars and fifteen cents,” Jimmy said. My eyes widened. Caleb laughed as he grabbed his wallet.

“I don’t know, that fifteen cents might break me,” he said and handed over his card.

“Caleb, let me pay,” I said. He gave me a face.

“Absolutely not,” he said.

“This is way too much,” I said. I checked the tag of a shirt and my eyes widened.

“The price is mostly the clubs,” Jimmy said. “Nice pair you picked out.”

He said it like I had anything to do with the clubs at all. I looked at Caleb. His hand touched the small of my back as his card was run. I would have found comfort in his touch if the word *psycho* hadn't been radiating through my skull. I looked at the golf clubs. They didn't look all that special to me. I was glad he didn't buy me something frilly or pink. They certainly had a feminine feel to them, the bag itself was black with dark teal ribbing. I liked them.

We weren't far from the apartment. He carried everything back. I mentioned the cost to him on our walk back.

"You know how much money I make. It doesn't make sense for you to pay for *everything* for me," I said.

"I want to," he said. "So I will."

I just wanted the Austrian to go home. Caleb had been much colder since he came back from his meeting with him. Less free with his affection.

I examined the clubs as he cooked dinner that night. I had no idea what I was looking at, but they looked nice. Caleb told me the rules of golf, some of the lingo. I got the basics, but he would certainly need to go over the details again before Saturday.

"I booked us some time at the range tomorrow so the first time you hit a ball won't be on Saturday," Caleb said. I was relieved to hear it, but I also wanted to do anything but golf with every fiber of my being. After dinner, we got ready for bed. He fucked me twice, but not before getting me off with his head buried between my legs. He gave me my pills but instead of a xanax, he gave me a slightly higher dose than normal of tylenol PM. I didn't protest. It took me longer to fall asleep, but I eventually did, listening to his slow and steady breathing behind me.

The next morning, as I ate breakfast, dressed in the black skirt and green blouse he laid out for me, I read through some articles explaining golf and golf etiquette. When he came out of the bedroom in his navy suit, I asked him some clarifying questions.

“You golf a lot?” I asked him.

“I used to,” Caleb said. “We were members at the country club so, I spent a good amount of time golfing growing up, before I got into basketball in high school.”

I said nothing, but I felt a bitter smile come to the right side of my mouth. He stared at me over his cup of coffee.

“What?” he asked. I looked up briefly and then looked back down at my phone.

“What what?”

“What was that face?”

I looked up at him. “I just know who you were in highschool.”

“Do you?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

“And who’s that?”

“An asshole.”

His eyes turned hard.

“I don’t know what the fuck got into you this week,” Caleb said. “But if you think I won’t show Chris or Furst some of those photos -”

“I can’t have a conversation with you now? I can’t say how I feel? I thought you liked that. Then you talk to that fucking - ” I shook my head. “You want to be like him - fine. He kidnapped, trafficked, and raped a girl. He took a chunk out of her shoulder. He kept her locked up in a basement. *That’s* your new best friend? And now I can’t say what I think.”

“You’ve been a bitch, Orla. You’re not voicing an opinion, you’re disrespecting me.”

“Disrespect,” I breathed. I pressed my face into my hands and burst into tears. I waited for him to hug me. Comfort me. Tell me he loved me and that he valued me. When it didn’t come I looked up, ready to shout at him. I was shocked to see he’d walked out of the room without a word.

I spent some time freshening up in the bathroom. Not a word was spoken on our way into work. Outside the office, he went straight to the coffee shop and I veered off in silence. An ice coffee was plopped in front of me and he left. Once again, nothing was said. I got no text telling me we’d be going to our spot, even though his entire afternoon was free.

I was raging by lunch time. I wanted a xanax but I refused to ask him for one. Maybe he’d be done with me by the end of the week and I wouldn’t have to worry about his stupid trip to Providence. We lived in Boston and he was going to Providence. I shook my head. What did concern me was that if he ended things because I wasn’t cooperative, what might he do?

He was sitting in a chair against the wall, facing the breakroom when I entered. His eyes immediately went to take in my waist and legs. I could feel them moving the length of me and I felt a bit calmer. He still wanted me, even if he wasn’t so free with his words of love the last couple days. I grabbed my food from the fridge. As I retrieved some napkins, I dropped a couple on the floor and then bent down to pick them up. When I turned to walk out, I met Caleb’s gaze, which was dark and intense. I left the room without a word, feeling a little triumph as I went. I was sure I would get a text after that, but it didn’t come. I worked the day, getting a fair amount done. I only had to deal with Chris once, but when I stopped at his cubicle to ask him a couple questions about how to handle a particularly complicated sales tax issue, he answered my questions calmly and professionally and I walked out. I sat down at my desk feeling irrationally annoyed with him for it. I reached for my phone, ready to ask Caleb if he had talked to Chris and told him to leave me alone. I didn’t though. I didn’t care. I

only cared that I was being left alone. We didn't leave until about 6:15. We got home, picked up our clubs, changed our clothing, and then we Ubered to the golf course.

"This is the one we'll be at on Saturday. I figured you'd want to see the place first. Get more comfortable with it. I read that that helps people with anxiety."

I was torn between feeling touched and mortified.

Fucked up.

Psycho.

I just nodded and stared out the window. He showed me around because we had some time before we got our spot on the driving range. He'd been here a couple times with Nick and Chris, I was surprised to learn. He was very handsome in his black golf pants and polo and I scanned the area for other young women that might be looking at him. Luckily there weren't too many who weren't already with other men. Most were middle aged women, probably married to well established men who could afford a place like this. I looked at them, wondering if their husbands had ever called them a psycho.

On the range, he talked me through the basics of a good drive. He demonstrated. His arms looked very good in his polo sleeves and his pants fit him very well. There were some young women present, but none by themselves.

"Orla, this is important," he sighed. I snapped my attention back to him. "I know you don't want to do this, but deals are made on the golf course. 'Good old boys club', fine, but if you want to succeed you need to play the game. It's the truth about M&A."

I nodded and mumbled out an apology. He was angry with me. He'd been so cold this week. It was certainly to do with my new streak of disobedience. I thought obstinance might keep him from going on Friday, but I could now see clearly that wasn't going to happen. If I wanted him to stay home on Friday, I'd need to change course. I considered what I might be able to do.

He still wanted me. That was clear by how hard he'd fucked me this morning and the way his eyes would still follow me in the office.. I didn't know why he didn't have us go to our spot when he didn't have many calls this afternoon, but I didn't think it was because he didn't *want* me. Maybe Furst had told him women weren't important and he shouldn't bother telling me what he felt about me. Or maybe he was already saving up his stamina so he could go out on Friday and still fuck me and make me think he hadn't been with another girl. Either way, I needed to offer him something better than whatever alternative he was now considering.

I watched him take another shot. He showed me what to do on my own clubs, and then set me up to take the shot. I held the club as close to how he instructed as possible, getting into the position he told me to. I tried my swing. I hit the ball, but it didn't go far. I looked around, positive people would be looking at me and laughing. My face was burning red, but no one even glanced in my direction. Caleb came toward me, not a hint of amusement on his face. He was nodding, face set firmly.

"That was good," he said, the same way he'd compliment a damn good report that deserved way more praise than he gave it. "Form is more important than you're giving it credit."

He stepped beside me, sliding his hand down my arm, his front pressing against my back. He smelled wonderful and his body was warm and it felt nice to have him touch me without the objective of rough sex. It felt like every time he'd touched me this week was for sex.

"Wrists like this. Turn them. Perfect. Bend your knees a little, just a bit more. Perfect. It feels weird doesn't it?"

I nodded. I could feel his breath on the side of my face. I was pretty sure what I needed to do to get him not to go on Friday. I knew what he liked. What turned him on. I was furious with myself for letting my anger get the better of me the past week. I was smarter than that.

"Like this?" I asked. I moved my hand down a bit lower.

"No. No, like you had it," he said, sounding slightly annoyed, and pulled my hand back up. I pressed my bottom back into him. His hand tightened on my wrists. I turned my face to look at him, turning a purposefully questioning gaze up toward him. I didn't really know how to

be coy, but I put on as vulnerable a look as I could manage. His eyes locked on mine and I saw heat flood them. I looked away and nodded.

“I think I got it,” I murmured. He lingered a moment and then stepped back.

“Ok,” he said, clearing his throat. He detailed how I should swing again. I did so, moving my feet and hips the way he instructed. I made solid contact, but I wasn’t all that concerned by how far the ball went. I only cared about the slight flush to his cheeks as he came closer and the smell of his cologne.

“That was good!” he said, eyes following the ball. “Your wrists are the problem. Hold them like this.”

He slid in behind me again. He pressed up against me a bit harder this time. It wasn’t an accident. I could feel his hardening cock against me. I pushed myself backwards. Whatever he had been saying, he stopped.

“Orla,” he said, voice low, warning. I suppose subtly wasn’t my strong suit, but I’d never done this before. I pressed my legs together. I felt a little bit... I’ve always hated the word horny. It sounds so juvenile but that’s the best word I could think of. I actually *wanted* to have sex. We’d only had sex once that morning.

“What?” I asked. “How do I hold my wrists?”

He gave me a stern look. He didn’t buy the innocent ruse, but he moved on. He turned them again.

“Like this.”

I pressed backward into him slightly.

“Fuck, Orla,” he said low. “You’re giving me a fucking hard on.”

“Maybe I want to,” I said. I looked back at him. His eyes were hard. Angry, annoyed, a little confused, but full of desire. My belly burned. “Maybe I’d rather be getting fucked than playing golf.”

I said it very softly. He let out a deep, quiet breath. I looked at his mouth. His eyes narrowed slightly.

“I know what you’re trying to do,” he said. My mouth went dry. “We need to practice. You need to know how to golf.” I felt some relief. “Just a couple more shots. I’ll fuck you till you can’t walk when we get home. Don’t worry about that.”

“Fuck me here,” I said. His lips parted. Part of me worried the brazenness would turn him off, but the flash of desire in his eyes gave me comfort. “You fucked other girls in bathrooms.”

“You aren’t other girls,” he said. His hands pulsed around my wrists. “But I wouldn’t mind fucking you in a public bathroom. I think I’d like it.”

“Then do it,” I said. I looked up from his mouth and our eyes met. “Fuck me.”

I said like it was a taunt.

“You cunt,” he breathed. He said it like he was calling me his sweetheart. His grip was hard. “Don’t tease me.”

“I’m not teasing.”

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep.”

His eyes lifted to take in our surroundings and see if we were being watched.

“How about this - since you want to be a fucking tease and get me hard here in the middle of a fucking driving range. Hit three balls 100 yards and I’ll take you into the bathroom and give you the best orgasm of your fucking life. If you don’t, I get to take you home and tie you up and play with you for a couple hours.”

I hated how those words made me feel. I pressed my thighs together.

“Deal?”

I nodded. He chanced a quick kiss to my neck.

“You have twenty minutes.”

He sat back, crossing his legs and placing his hands in his lap. I wanted to know what his erection would look like in those pants. I settled in to take my first shot. I didn’t do as badly as I thought I would. I got close to 100 yards once. I smiled proudly at him. He stared at me, face blank, eyes hard as stone, but I knew what it meant under these circumstances. I felt a little rush of power run through me as I took in the way he was seated, hiding his sizable erection from those around us. I smiled proudly, but not from the below average driver I hit. I knew how to get him to stay home on Friday.

“Times up,” he said. “We can practice again tomorrow. But it’s time to get you home. Put your money where your mouth is.”

He rose, holding his bag of clubs in front of him in a manner that was more than a little awkward. We checked out of the range and walked through the back toward the main lobby. He made me walk in front of him to help shield his erection. I couldn’t help the little smirk on my face as we headed toward the door. I was almost excited to get home. A little gasp left me as I felt myself jerked to the side by the elbow. Before I could register, I was pressed against the closed door of the single person handicap/unisex bathroom. Our multi thousand dollar golf clubs clattered to the very clean floor and I was pleased to see the country club

had nice bathrooms. Probably not the sticky, gross floor that whore had knelt on in whatever bar he got head in.

“Don’t ever say I don’t make sacrifices for you,” he breathed, yanking my panties down and pushing my skirt up. I helped him unbuckle his belt and unbutton pants. He’d made me wear the skirt. It would make me feel better about wearing it on Saturday. I think he just wanted to see me in it.

“You want to be fucked like a slut,” he breathed, voice hoarse with desire. “My little whore.”

The use of the possessive calmed me. He forced my legs apart. He dug his hand into my hair. He kissed me hard as he entered me. I was wet. He went in easily, but he stretched me wide.

“Aren’t you?” he asked. I nodded. I wrapped my arms around him. I dug my nails into the back of his neck. He slowed his movements. I let out a sigh of frustration. “You want a good hard fucking? Answer my question. Aren’t you my dirty little whore.”

“I’m your dirty little whore,” I said. “Please, fuck me.” I knew what he wanted to hear. Once again, I felt a rush of confidence. I could keep him from going on Friday. I was sure of that. Using blunt force with him wouldn’t work. He’d always need to come out on top. I needed to be a bit more subtle. Manipulate with more finesse. “I belong to you?”

I asked it like a question. His hand tightened in my hair. “Yes.”

He began to move his hips.

“You tease. Always were.” He slapped my thigh hard. “Now you put out whenever I want.”

I took his earlobe between my lips. I sucked hard, trailing my nails along the back of his neck. He grunted, shifting us so we were against the opposite wall and against the door.

“Deeper,” I breathed. “Over - over - oh!”

His hand slapped into my mouth. My head crashed against the wall. I moaned into his hand. I don’t remember him coming. I just remember him whispering in my ear, “my dirty slut. My slutty little whore.”

He kissed me again, hard, on the mouth. “Get cleaned up baby. “

He lowered my feet back down to the ground. My legs were trembling.

“I still get to play with you when we get home.”

I couldn’t help but feel excited. If I had to suffer through it, I didn’t think there wasn’t any harm in enjoying it from time to time.

We went to bed that night around eleven and I was absolutely exhausted when my head hit the pillow. Unlike in the past couple days, he got into bed and pressed his chest up against my back, arms wrapped around me, his nose in my hair.

“You’re so fucking good,” he murmured sleepily. I murmured something indistinctly. He kissed my shoulder. I wanted to ask him to stay in on Friday, but didn’t. It wasn’t the right time. Finesse. Even if it had been obvious to him what I was doing at the range, it had worked. He just thought I was falling for his charm and good looks and big cock. He didn’t know it was just to get home from going on Friday.

I turned in his arms and snuggled into his chest. His arms tightened around me. I fell asleep with his nose buried in my hair.

Thursday was uneventful. We had our scheduling meeting. I sat beside Danny, or Danny sat beside *me* . I had taken a seat beside Chloe and there was an empty seat beside me. Caleb glanced back at us more than once. Every time turned to look over his shoulder, he was shaking his head ever so slightly when he turned back to face the front. In the meeting, my phone buzzed. I checked it down by my side between me and Chloe. It was from Caleb.

2:00pm. I'm going to fucking destroy your pussy.

I flipped the phone back over, letting the little smirk come to my face. He did too. When I got to the closet at 1:55, he was already there. He bent me over the desk, his hand on the back of my neck. When he finished, he very carefully pulled my pantyhose back up. He held me to him, my back to his chest. One of his large hands was wrapped around my throat. He murmured in my ear.

"I raped you so many times in here," he reminded me. I closed my eyes. He placed a tender kiss to my lips. "You belong to me, Orla."

He hadn't told me he loved me since Monday. I wanted to know why, but I refused to ask. I kissed him, taking his lower lip between mine. His hand closed around my breast. His tongue went into my mouth. I pressed mine to meet his.

"I have a call at three," he murmured, but he did not end the kiss.

"OK," I murmured after a few moments. One of his hands ventured between my legs.

"Let's leave at five today," he murmured against my mouth. "I want to take a nice hot bath with you."

"Are we going to go golfing?" I asked. I didn't want to. I still didn't plan on actually going on Saturday. I opened my eyes to look up at him. "I'd rather take a bath with you."

"Yeah?" His eyes darted across my face. I nodded. He kissed me again. His touch was warm and affectionate and I felt some of the anxiety I had earlier in the week leave me. I was almost excited for tomorrow night. He left first. I followed a few minutes later. He was on the phone when I walked back. His eyes followed me as I walked back to my office.

We left closer to six than five because of a last minute deadline from the Fed team. Caleb told me about his three o'clock phone call on the way home. It hadn't gone well. It was nothing he had done. Our reports were solid and Nick wasn't angry. The client was just a pain. He asked me how my reports were coming. If I needed any help. If I was feeling on top of my work. I was.

"It's been four days," I told him. He frowned and gave a tiny shake of his head. I whispered, "Without a Xanax."

The smile that spread across his face was warm. I cooked dinner while he answered some emails at the island. He complained about the federal team for most of the time. He had to do some work, so we never got to take our bath, but I figured we could do that tomorrow night. I ended up grabbing my laptop and doing some work as we ate. We wrapped up the changes around nine. It would normally have kept me up well after midnight to make the same changes, but having Caleb seated next to me made it easy. I hated to admit how easy things became when you just asked questions. We didn't have sex that night and I wondered again if he was saving up his stamina again. I stayed awake a while, watching his face in the darkened room, before the tylenol PM finally made my eyelids too heavy to hold open.

I was fidgety most of Friday. Caleb and Chris worked out logistics for their night during lunch. I was talking to Chloe, but I struggled to follow the conversation and she needed to repeat things multiple times. I was trying to pick up every little deep rumble I heard beside me. Underneath the table, I felt his hand on my knee more than once. I didn't get a lot of work done. I was anxious and angry and I really *wanted* a xanax. I didn't want to disappoint Caleb though, so I didn't ask for one.

At the end of the day, I thought it was very odd that he hadn't asked me to go into the closet. We didn't have any meetings and we'd provided a big deliverable to Fed the night before. He would have had time. It was true we had sex that morning, but if he *did* go, I wanted to make sure he was too tired to do anything.

When we got home, he dropped his bag unceremoniously on the floor and said he was going to go shower. This time, I followed him in. He smirked at me as I shut the door.

"Horny, baby?" he asked me, unbuttoning his shirt. I took over, carefully unplucking every button of his shirt. He let me continue and pulled at the zipper of my skirt.

“You can trust me,” he said when I got to the last button and helped him out of his expensive shirt. My hands worked on his belt buckle. I didn’t look at him. “I’m a faithful man, Orla. Handsome and successful doesn't make me a cheater.”

I slid his belt off. He was unbuttoning my shirt very slowly. He was using one hand to work on the buttons. His eyes were fixed on my face. I said nothing and moved on to his pant buttons and zipper. He sighed.

“If I wanted to cheat I could and you wouldn’t be able to do anything about it. Why would I lie?”

He cupped my cheek and made me look at him.

“Why would I lie to you?” he asked again. I just shook my head. *Because I can be psycho sometimes*, I wanted to say, but my throat was closed up. He sighed and we finished undressing each other. We spent a long time in the shower. He fucked me infuriatingly slow underneath the hot spray of the shower, sucking on my neck and leaving some purple marks on my shoulder. When we were done, I watched him get ready silently. He put on a pair of dark jeans, a black t-shirt, and a very dark gray blazer. He caught my eye in the mirror as he put the blazer on.

“I won’t be gone long,” he promised. “A couple hours.”

I nodded. I had grand plans on keeping him here, but I couldn’t bring myself to say or do anything as he got ready.

“Call me whenever you want,” he said. “I’ll pick up.”

I nodded again. He seemed to be getting annoyed with my silence.

“I don’t want to go without you,” he said, looking at me through the mirror. “I really don’t. This fucking sucks for me too. OK?”

I nodded again, but tried to smile this time. He went into the bathroom. I stayed on the bed. I was dressed in a pair of silk shorts and a cami. I put on one of his shirts while he finished getting ready. He smelled amazing. He looked better. He checked his phone and sighed.

“I have to go,” he said. He kissed me deeply, his hand gripping the back of my neck hard. He pressed his forehead to mine and looked at me. “I’ll be home soon. And Orla? I’m not going to touch another girl. I won’t dance with another girl. I won’t look at another girl. OK?”

More nodding.

I followed him to the doorway. I reached out and grabbed his coat. He paused and stepped back. His eyes were pleading with me not to fight him.

“Please stay,” I said. His Adam's apple bobbed.

“I have to go,” he said. His hands were on my waist. “I’ll be back tonight. Not long. I promise. Couple hours in Providence and I’m back.”

“I can put on some slutty lingerie and give you a good back massage. A good foot massage. We can put on the game and I’ll bring you a drink. I’ll suck your cock between periods...”

His lips parted. His eyes burned.

“Fuck, Orla... I’ve literally dreamed about you saying that to me.”

“Then stay,” I said. “I’ll do whatever you want. I’ll be perfect for you. Submissive and affectionate.”

I ran my hands through his hair. I didn't like that he had combed it so neatly. He looked too handsome.

"Jesus fucking Christ," he breathed. He grabbed me by my waist. I stepped up on my tiptoes.

"Stay with me. I'll do anything you want," I murmured in his ear. "I belong to you." I nibbled on his ear lobe. His hands slid up my waist. "I'm yours."

He walked us deeper into the apartment. His lips caught mine as he steered us toward the couch. I felt a flare of triumph. He wouldn't be with another girl tonight. He was mine.

My lips left his earlobe with a little pop and I whispered, "I love you."

He shoved me backward with sudden and surprising force. I landed on the couch, eyes wide, staring up at him. He glared at me. He was flushed red. He trembled slightly.

"No. You fucking don't."

I blinked. I thought that was what he wanted.

"Caleb, I - "

He was walking toward the door.

"I'm going out. You're staying here. When I get back, you're going to be the perfect little slut you promised you'd be, or I'll treat you the way lying little cockteases deserve to be treated. Ok?"

I blinked. “Caleb - ”

“Alright?” He barked.

“Yes,” I whispered. He left, slamming the door shut. The locks were thrown. I lowered my face into my hands and cried.

Chapter Notes

The very last part of this chapter was going to be the beginning of next chapter, leaving the end of the golf outing as the end of this chapter, but I think this worked quite nicely.

****I want to make this abundantly clear - Jessica's advice is all well and good in a fantasy. However, if you ever find yourself in a relationship that is actually physically, mentally, sexually, or emotionally abusive - LEAVE.****

Do it safely and intelligently. Reach out and get help if you need to. In no way shape or form do I believe anything in my stories should happen in real life nor do I believe anyone behave the way my female characters behave. This is a FANTASY. Don't listen to my characters.

That being said, I want to remind people that I write stories where the bad guy stays bad and the bad guy wins. That doesn't mean a bad guy in a 'publishable' romance that is really just a good guy that broods a lot. My bad guys are the bad guys that the 'bad guys' in traditional romance books save the girl from. - Make sense of that if you can. I think my female characters and stories have varying levels of strength and autonomy, but there are no feminist plotlines here. No female empowerment. I say this only because I respect your time and I don't want people to feel robbed or like they've wasted their time reading my stories. I always try to be very up front about that.

Anyway, once again, thank you all so much for taking the time to read and comment. It means so much to me. I hope you enjoy this chapter as well.

I tried to focus on how good the ass of the nineteen-year-old with the fake ID looked grinding against my jeans, but it was difficult. I'd been buying her drinks all night and she'd already told me three times that her roommate was gone for the weekend. She looked young enough I made her show me her real ID, which did in fact have her at 19 years old. The tight, black dress clung to her in all the right ways and I slid my hands up to brush across her tits before I lowered them back to her hips to press her more firmly into my semi-hard cock. I looked back up toward the corner. I let out a small sigh of frustration. It was impossible to focus on even the most perfect ass while Caleb sat in the corner looking so fucking miserable. I let go of her hips and slid off the dance floor. Caleb leaned against the wall, holding the same scotch he ordered when we first arrived. I wasn't sure he'd taken more than a sip.

"Come on man," I said, leaning on the high top we had snagged.

“This fucking sucks,” he called over the music.

“You’re not doing anything wrong. You’re allowed to have fun. Enjoying yourself isn’t cheating,” I said.

“It is to her,” Caleb said. He leaned on the high top. A couple girls passed by, tossing flirtatious smiles our way, dressed in short tight dresses. He checked his phone and then held it up. “I told her to call me if she was worried so I could prove I wasn’t with a girl. She hasn’t called me fucking once.”

“You’re out with friends. You want her blowing up your phone?”

“I don’t want her sitting there alone in my apartment thinking I’m fucking another girl. Do you know how many times this week she told me to wear a fucking condom?”

“You could call her you know,” I pointed out. “Phones go two ways. Give her some assurance. Might make her feel better.” *Which will make you feel better*; I didn’t need to add. We both knew it. He said something but I couldn’t hear him over the pounding beat of the music. I leaned forward across the table toward him.

“What?”

“I told her a million fucking times,” he called. “If I call her she’ll convince herself it’s because I’m trying to cover for something.”

“Did you tell her?” I asked.

“I can’t hear you,” he said, shaking his head and leaning closer.

“Did you tell her? About Deloitte?”

Caleb shook his head and gave a dismissive wave of the hand.

“Dude this guy - ”

I paused and glanced toward the dance floor. Some asshole was dancing with my nineteen-year-old. I looked back at Caleb and jerked my head toward the door.

“Let’s get some air.”

We stepped outside, getting the go ahead from the bouncer we’d be let back in, and we walked around the side of the building, away from the line and away from the smokers. Caleb ran his hand through his hair.

“Caleb, this guy,” I said meaning Furst. We both knew better than to use names when talking about this kind of stuff. I tried to keep it as vague as possible. “Got a girl he fucking - ” I glanced over my shoulder to make sure we were alone. I further lowered my voice anyway. “This guy got a girl he abducted, raped, and beat to come back to him, all on her own, and is madly in love with him. Popping out babies like it’s her job. Don’t you think he might know what the fuck he’s talking about.”

“I couldn’t tell him everything,” Caleb said, leaning against the wall. “I couldn’t tell him that I’d already told her how much I loved her. That no matter how many times I put myself out there she just throws it back in my face. Chris, I can’t take another rejection.”

I leaned against the wall beside him, nudging my shoulder into his.

“She’s going to find out at some point and you’re going to have to deal with that. I mean - if it could help, why not just bite that bullet now?”

He said nothing. I went on.

“I’m just saying - the man got a woman he raped repeatedly to fall in love with him. Maybe you should listen to him.”

“He also told me to keep her tied up in my basement for a couple months,” Caleb said dryly.

“Well, I mean ...”

We both laughed.

“Yeah, I don’t know,” he said quietly. I took in his profile, his slightly hunched shoulders, the drawn nature of his face. I couldn’t remember ever seeing him this down.

“She’ll come around. In 50 years while you’re holding your fifteen grandkids, it might get through to her that you’re here to stay.”

A small smile came to his lips. He murmured, “Yeah. Maybe.”

“Hey, everyone’s seen you. Everyone’s gone their own way inside and we’re not planning on leaving. You duck out now. I’ll grab a ride home with Trevor. If anyone asks when you left, I’ll let them know you left around midnight.”

Caleb perked up, brow lifting.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Go fuck the crazy out of her,” I said. Caleb shot me a hard look and I laughed.

“You’re such a dick,” he said and we shared a hug.

“Yeah I know,” I said. I clapped him on the shoulder.

“Oh, if anyone asks you need to make sure that they know I wasn’t with a girl. I don’t want Anna running her mouth at work. That’s the last fucking thing I need.”

“Aye, aye captain,” I said and gave a fake salute.

“Chris,” Caleb said severely, walking backwards, his keys already in his hand. “Seriously. Thank you.”

I gave him a nod and he turned, practically jogging toward the parking lot. I headed back inside, in search of my nineteen-year-old with the fake ID.

I closed the door to my studio softly, flicking on the lights, and feeling a warm rush of familiarity and comfort. I looked at my bed longingly and wondered briefly if I had any wine in the fridge. I checked, but found it mostly empty. I sighed, poured myself some water, and went over to plop down on my futon. I flicked on the TV and put on the Bruins. They were just entering the second.

I considered going to the corner store down the street. I wouldn’t be out long. Just five minutes or so. Caleb said he wouldn’t be home until one. The truth was, I didn’t think he was going to be coming home at all. He’d be back tomorrow around eight, coming in looking disheveled, hungover, and reeking of some girl’s cheap perfume. I’d just throw the bottle out in the dumpsters, get back to his apartment by 5 a.m. and he’d never even know I had it. I brought my hand to my face, pressing my pointer and middle finger into the side of my nose. I was starting to get a headache.

I picked up my phone and looked at the clock. The Bruins scored on TV but I hardly even looked up. He said I could call him if I wanted. I could call him however much I wanted. I considered it. I'd be able to tell if he was out of breath or if he was in a loud club. He might not even answer. Maybe he couldn't hear the ringing over the music of whatever hellhole they went to. Or maybe he turned it off so he could focus on the girl sucking on his cock. I pinched my lips together and thought again about that bottle of wine.

"You don't need it," I whispered, pressing my fingers back to the side of my nose. "You the-complete-opposite-of need it."

I went to the closet and grabbed myself a throw. I didn't have my favorite. That was at Caleb's. I nestled up on the futon and covered myself in the blanket. I focused on the game. The intermission was tough. I saw myself walking down the street to the corner store. I fought it as intensely as I could, staring at my phone, pulling up Caleb's name and then putting the phone back down. I wanted to text Chris and tell him he was an asshole and that I didn't appreciate him telling Caleb he should go even when he couldn't bring me. If Chris had told Caleb it would be OK if he stayed home, Caleb would have stayed home.

Mercifully, the game came back on and I was able to distract myself. I had *no* idea how I was supposed to sleep. Caleb had left without giving me anything. I hadn't taken *any* of my medication. I could miss a day without anything terrible happening to me. It was if it stretched more than one or two that I would start having some side effects. But I really, really, really, wanted a bottle of wine and a couple Xanax.

The game went to overtime, which I was pleased about, even when the Bruins did eventually lose. It gave me a bit more time to be distracted. I watched some of the post-game show afterward and then threw on a good murder documentary on a streaming service. I was dozing off, my face in my hand, elbow propped up on the metal arm of the futon, when my phone began to ring. I jerked awake in surprise and gazed at my phone, a bit disoriented.

Caleb's name shown brightly on the screen and my heart rate accelerated a bit. I reminded myself he would have no idea where I was through the phone. He was just calling to check up on me. If he asked to face time me or for me to send a picture I was fucked though. I put my phone down. It was best if he just assumed I was asleep. Then there would be no risk. The phone then went quiet and I saw the one missed call screen pop up. I left it there. Now I couldn't use my phone for the night. I would go back and sleep, or pretend to sleep, until he got back. Then he could see the missed call and know I wasn't actually ignoring him.

The phone began to buzz again. I frowned. For a moment I was worried he might be hurt or in danger. I couldn't go get him. I didn't have a car and he took his. I could probably send him money if he needed, but he had no issue with money. Did he need to get bailed out? Was he arrested for drunk driving or something? I let out a little smug humph. I doubted he was lying in a ditch anywhere. If he was arrested, or needed me to bail him out, then he shouldn't have left me. Serves him right. He could get whatever girl he spent the evening with to bail him out. The phone stopped and I looked back at my TV. My phone buzzed then and a text came through.

Answer your fucking phone.

My heart rate spiked. Maybe he was just drunk and wanted to talk to me. That would serve him right too. He should have brought me. He was also clearly angry though. Who knew what he might do drunk. I thought of my photos. I thought of that awful man seeing some of them... of Chris' smug smiling face looking at me in the office. I considered the riskier option, ignoring him and pretending I was asleep and hope to God he wouldn't send the pictures out, or answering, pretend I missed the call because I was asleep or in the bathroom, and pray he didn't try to facetime or ask for a photo. There wasn't a place in my studio that could pass as his apartment. No way could I get back to his place in time.

The phone started to ring. My heart was pounding violently. I wished I'd gotten that bottle of wine. I was also thanking whatever higher power there was in the universe that I hadn't. I waited, watching it ring, and closed my eyes. My heart felt like it was going to explode. It stopped ringing and I panicked. My heart lurched into my throat and I tapped the missed call. I tapped and jabbed and hit until it started to call and I raised it to my ear. I stood, pacing across my tiny studio, waiting for him to pick up. It felt like an eternity before he finally did.

"Where the fuck are you?" he asked. I blinked. Did he have cameras? Was the place bugged?

"What -"

"Orla, if you're with Danny, I'll fucking kill him. Where are you? I'm coming to get you."

"N-No, I'm not out. I'm inside, I promise. You don't have to come back."

“Come back. I am back. I went into my bedroom, expecting to find you there, and there I was, looking through my entire fucking apartment for you and you weren’t there. Where are you?”

“Caleb, I... it’s 11:15.”

“I know where you are. Stay there.”

“Caleb -”

The phone call ended. I blinked, confused. It didn’t make any sense that he was back so early. If he was back, which meant he had to park his car and walk back to the apartment, look for me, and then realize I wasn’t there... he would have had to have left Providence by at least 10:15. I stood, pacing, typing out and deleting texts, but not knowing what to do. I was frozen, but I also couldn’t stand still. I shook my head. I heard the sound of keys, of locks turning, and then the door opened. Caleb stepped inside, face hard and stony.

“Caleb?” I asked. “It’s 11:15 I - I was going to go back I just - wanted to be home a while.”

“You were home!” he screamed. My lips parted and I stepped back, eyes widening. He laughed, darkly, bitterly, and whipped his blazer off. The veins in his arms were fat and bulging beneath his skin.

“I didn’t think you’d be home,” I implored him. I didn’t try to move as he came toward me. Somehow, my body knew that would only end badly for me. “I thought you’d be gone all night.”

He got to me by the time I was done speaking. His hand went to my hair and he pulled my head back.

“I told you I’d be back by one,” he said.

“I didn’t - I didn’t believe you,” I answered honestly. He started walking forward. I stumbled backward, my bare feet skittering across the floor. Then, he released my hair and his hands went to my hips. He lifted me up and tossed my back on the bed. I squirmed away then, holding out a hand toward him as one would toward an aggressive animal they were trying to calm.

“Caleb, please don’t hurt me,” I said. I watched his hands unbuckle his belt. “I’m sorry.”

“Hurt you?” he asked. He whipped his belt off his hips. “I won’t hurt you. I’d bet money your cunts already sopping wet.”

I yelped when he grabbed my wrists and yanked me downward. I was beneath him then, his hips straddling my waist.

“Maybe I should hurt you. Asshole can’t get wet, can it,” he said. His belt fastened tightly around my wrists. “I came home early for you. And this is the thanks I get.”

I felt a rush of warmth.

“You did -”

“I gave you two fucking options when I left. And I’m a man of my word.”

He jerked the belt upward and wrapped it around something. I wasn’t sure what. I didn’t care. My eyes were on his. He gritted, more to himself than me, “no matter what you might fucking think.”

“Please, don’t hurt me, Caleb. I’m sorry. It wasn’t - it wasn’t a statement,” I vowed. His eyes were hot, his face barely more neutral than a scowl. “I swear. I just wanted to be here.”

“You should have been with me,” he said. He bent down and put his teeth to the neck of my t-shirt. He jerked his head to the side and I heard fabric ripping. Then he pulled back and gave a violent jerk to my shirt. The t-shirt ripped, but only a little. The second jerk ripped it through. He tossed the shirt aside to reveal my bra.

“I wanted to be,” I reminded him. He looked at me. Some of his initial rage had been soothed. He was balancing on a seesaw between fury and tenderness. I just had to be very careful to tilt him toward the right side. I added softly, “I begged you to stay.”

“You didn’t beg,” he said. He reached around me and unhooked my bra. He slipped the bra straps up so they were around my bound wrists. He whipped his t-shirt off his head and tossed it to the side. My nipples were hard when his thumbs found them and I hated myself for it. “I’d have stayed if you’d begged.”

I frowned. Begging would make him stay, but not telling him I loved him. Telling him I loved him after *he* told me he wanted to hear it. I swallowed thickly.

“I wanted you to stay,” I said. My body was trembling slightly. I didn’t want him to take me anally. Not if he was going to be rough, and judging by the vein that was pulsing down his right bicep, it was going to be rough. “I did everything I could all week to get you to stay. I had no... there’s nothing I can do...”

He halted his movements, eyes darting up to mine. He wet his bottom lip.

“Are you my whore, Orla, or are you a cocktease?” he asked, voice thick. He touched the ties of my leggings.

“I- your whore,” I said quickly. He seemed to be calming down some. I wanted to keep going in that trend. He was not breathing hard, but his chest was rising and falling deeply. The subtle lines of his abdomen rippled and I could see the muscles in his arms flexing. He grabbed me by the throat. His fingers pressed into my lower jaw.

“You better be wet for me then,” he said. “If your pussy is wet... I’ll fuck your cunt. If it’s not... you’ll take it up the ass.”

I was nodding when he moved his hands to the drawstring of my leggings. I rushed out,,
“Will you... “ his eyes burned into mine and he cocked his head slightly. “Will you touch me a little first?”

I didn’t know if I was wet right now. Fear could keep that from happening to you. He usually played with me first. Even when it first started. His eyes were vacillating between desire and suspicion.

“Touch you,” he rumbled. His fingertips brushed over my nipples. “Like this?”

I nodded. I swallowed thickly. His fingers were soft, brushing against the sensitive skin.

“What else?” he asked. I closed my eyes. I thought about what made me feel good... things he did that I liked.

I whispered, “s-suck on them?”

It came out like a question.

“Suck on them?” he asked, voice gravelly. I felt a jolt rush through me. It was like I was there again, not knowing who he was, just a stranger who broke in to rape me, who wanted me so badly he’d risk all of this... I clenched tightly, hips pressing against his.

“Yes - yes please,” I added. He liked begging. That had been one of the ones in the game. He had said if I’d begged he’d have stayed. Well, I did everything but actually say I was begging to beg him to stay. Apparently, he needed something a bit more obvious. “Please, Caleb?” His eyes looked black. “Please suck on my nipples.”

He smacked my right breast. It stung, but then his hand closed around it. He pinched my hard, hot nipple, and then smacked it again.

“Please, Caleb. I’m begging you,” I said. He let out a deep breath and lowered himself down. His mouth was wet and hot. His tongue shot out, hard and forceful against the bud, and he sucked on it hard. His teeth scraped against the nipple, causing me to suck in a sharp breath, but then he soothed it, sucking hard. He did the same on the other nipple. I wanted to put my hands in his hair, but I couldn’t get them free from his belt.

“I’m wet,” I told him after he went back to my right breast. “I’m wet.”

“Better be,” he said. He moved off of me long enough to yank off my leggings and panties. His fingers were inside of me without preamble, testing me, three fingers, pressing me apart, pulsing hard and fast. “Good girl. That’s my slut.”

He unbuttoned his jeans and unzipped. He pulled his boxers down and gave his hard cock a few hard strokes. He looked at me and then drew up a mouthful of saliva and then let it drop into his palm. He gave himself a few hard strokes with the spit slick hand. Then, with the hand he had inside of me, lowered it, and wiped my juices along my ass. I felt a jolt of fear and my body tensed.

“Caleb, please. Please, I’m sorry, don’t… please....”

“You took it so well last time,” he reminded me. He spit into his hand again. He rubbed his cock along my pussy. “The pictures aren’t the only way I can punish you. There’s a lot of ways I can teach you a lesson.”

I swallowed thickly. He pressed his cock to the opening of my asshole. It tightened and quivered in response.

I whimpered softly. Last time there had been a lot of lube. This was hot and tight and I felt the friction of his hot, hard cock as it pushed into me. “Actions have consequences.”

He pushed his cock inward. I felt my body move apart and moaned softly. I whimpered again as his head pushed inside of me.

“Caleb,” I said, voice taut with the discomfort of the invasion. His eyes remained on the task at hand, pressing his cock into me. He could have prepared me more, but I knew from experience he could be doing a hell of a lot less too. “I almost went down to the corner store to get some wine.”

That drew his eyes upward. They were hard and intense. His cock continued to move further into me, now at a quicker pace.

“I didn’t,” I said very softly. His lips curved upward.

“That’s my good girl,” he purred. I felt my body clench happily. He let out something that was a partial strangled laugh, and something halfway between a moan and a groan. “Stay loose or it’ll hurt more. I’m not stopping either way.”

I nodded. I wanted to reach out and grab his arms but couldn’t. The leather of the belt strained but held true. I turned my head to look at his discarded shirt. I wanted to smell it to make sure there wasn’t any lingering perfume on it. I didn’t bother asking him. I knew what he’d say, whether it was true or not, but he *was* back early and he *was* very hard. He was almost completely inside of me and I let out a little wince.

“What time is it?” I asked.

“Doesn’t fucking matter right now,” he said, a bit exasperated.

“When did you leave providence?” I asked instead. He leaned down and kissed my neck. He sucked and nipped. His teeth scraped my jaw.

“Just after ten,” he answered. “It was fucking miserable.”

I sucked in a little breath.

“Very?” I asked, turning my face toward his. His lips touched mine. Our tongues touched. He bit my bottom lip.

“Very,” he said. He pulled his hips back and I sucked on a sharp breath. It wasn’t painful, but it wasn’t comfortable. “Now shut the fuck up, Orla. I don’t want to hear you. Unless you want to beg.”

He pushed back into me.

He gripped the base of his cock and thrust in again. My body resisted and he spit down on his cock and gave the base a couple strokes. Then, he slid his fingers along my slick pussy, fingers teasing, slipping into my pussy just a fraction before they pulled out to stroke his cock. He pushed back into me with a harder thrust. I moaned loudly at the sudden shift of his angle. He lifted up my hips and thrust a couple more times before he decided he didn’t like it. He pulled out of me and with a sudden motion he flipped me over. He pressed himself back into me and gave me no time to adjust. He pushed into me with slow, steady, deep thrusts.

“Caleb - ”

“Shut up,” he said. His body pressed to mine, his hand covering my throat and a good portion of my jaw. His other hand held my hip, shifting me so he could thrust in deep. “I want your body. Shut up or I’ll gag you.”

His fingers pressed between my lips and deep into my mouth. It took everything in me not to bite down on his fingers. His thrusts were hard and fast. It was the strangest sensation. It felt good, I could feel the pleasure radiating through me, but it hurt too. It was painful. Heat radiated through me. Pulling me apart. Burning. My brow furrowed and my teeth pressed to his fingers as I let out noises I couldn’t really control. Pleasure, pain, pleas for him to stop, pleas for him not too... I have no idea. He murmured in my ear. I don’t know what he said, but his thrusts were harder and deeper. I don’t remember much after that, or how long it lasted, but I do remember, as I blinked the orgasm out of my eyes and felt the pain settle in, I was vaguely aware of my neighbor banging on my wall, telling me to shut the fuck up.

I pulled myself out of Caleb's arms. He didn't stop me. He had untied me and held me a bit, enjoying the glow of his own orgasm. I could feel his semen, still hot and slick between my ass cheeks. I ignored it and padded over to his discarded shirt, which I grabbed and raised to my nose. I smelled it at every angle I could. I could smell only his cologne and matching aftershave. I went to his blazer next and did the same. When I received the same outcome, I tossed it on the futon and went to clean up in the bathroom.

When I came back, Caleb was rummaging through my kitchen drawers, buck naked, looking like a Greek God. The muscles in his broad back rippled. His abdomen was rippled from the earlier exertion. His thighs were strong and powerful, complemented by the muscular curve of his ass, complimented with little dimples on the side. His cock was flaccid, but still an impressive size. His arms, my favorite part of his body, were large and strong, though the veins were no longer bulging in them.

"Are you hungry?" he asked me. I shook my head and went back to my bed.

"Are we staying here tonight?" I asked.

"What did you eat for dinner?"

I hesitated just a moment too long. He pulled out a little box of oatmeal. He checked the expiration date and then made two bowls. He came back to bed, handing me one and taking the other. I looked at his.

"Apple cinnamon's my favorite," I told him softly. He paused, spoonful halfway to his mouth, and then dropped his spoon back into the bowl. We switched and I smiled softly.

"You weren't bleeding were you? When you went to the bathroom?"

"No," I lied.

I should have known he would have known I was lying. He saw himself pull out after all. He said nothing but I saw the rippling in his jaw. We ate for a few minutes in silence.

“Chris helped you leave early?”

He nodded, shoveling the last spoonful into his mouth. He put the bowl on the side table.

“What’s been the issue with Chris?”

I considered lying, but I’d already pissed him off enough tonight.

“He didn’t care at all that you were going out without me. He’s single and he doesn’t like that you’re not.”

Caleb looked at me as I ate. I looked at him and dropped my spoon in the half eaten oatmeal.

“He doesn’t. He didn’t care at all that I couldn’t go. And he’s - he’s not honest, Caleb. I know you’re friends with him and I’m sorry but he’s not an honest person.”

“How so?” he asked.

“He pretended to be my friend. He pretended to be kind. The whole time he knew what you were doing. He *helped*. You never pretended to like me. You never pretended to be - ”

“Kind?”

I looked him in the eye, considered, and then nodded. I shoveled a big spoonful into my mouth and dropped the bowl on the nightstand.

“Chris wouldn’t tell you if I cheated on you,” Caleb said. “That’s the truth. I’m not going to tell you he would. But I can tell you he would never try to get me to cheat. I’ve never seen Chris cheat since I’ve known him. He’s a pretty monogamous guy when he is with someone, though I’ve never seen anyone really keep his attention long. When he gets bored and wants another girl he’ll dump the girl he’s with. Besides, if I’m taken, he has his pick. When we’re both single, the pool gets divided. He’d be working against his own interest.”

I said nothing. He patted my thigh.

“Get dressed. We’re going home.”

He got off the bed and collected his clothing. I bit my lip and held up my blanket to my chest.

“Can we stay here tonight?”

“No,” he said. He pulled his boxers up over his hips and then pulled up his jeans.

“Caleb -”

“Orla.”

He said my name at an even volume, but his face was stone and his eyes were hard.

“I’m still not exactly happy with you. Don’t fight me. We’re going home. If there’s anything else here you want, take it. My car’s outside.”

I dressed and then looked around my apartment. I grabbed an old copy of my favorite book from my night stand, a little bust of Caesar I got on one of our family vacations to Italy, and a

photo album I had put together after my childhood cat died six months after law school. He had been nineteen and had got me through every major event in my entire life. A seal point Siamese named Percy.

He carried my things, and he was the one who shut off the lights, closed the doors, and then used his keys to lock them. We walked by and my neighbor through open his door, telling us not everyone wanted to hear us fuck. I was mortified but Caleb just smiled at him and continued on our way.

We got back to his place and he carried my things up. He put the items on my night side table and then stripped down to his boxers.

“I’m going to put my clothes in the hamper. Want to give them another sniff?”

I disliked his tone, but I picked them up and smelled them as I brought them over to the hamper for him. He had me get into bed naked. By the time we went to sleep it was about 2:00am.

When I woke up, I was warm. I smelled something masculine and rich, natural, but with a lingering smell of aftershave. I nestled in closer, pressing my face into the warmth. I tilted my face upward. I felt something firm and rough scratch against my face. It felt nice. Warm and with that rich scent. I breathed in deeply and let my eyes flutter open. I remembered then where I was. Caleb shifted, his arm tugging me closer.

“What time is it?” I asked.

“‘Bout seven,” he murmured.

“Are we going to the gym?” he asked. He shook his head, arms tightening.

“No, I want to stay in bed with you all morning.”

He used the bathroom, returned with a glass of water for us both, and crawled back into bed. I felt a little rush of warmth as I reached for my water and saw the cover of my photo album, those bright blue eyes of my Percy looking back at me. I sat up and took a sip of my water. Then I put it on the side table and sat back down.

“Figured we could go get breakfast and then get changed, go to an inside driving range a couple miles from here, shoot some balls, and then come back. Chris is going to take the T here and then we’ll drive over together.”

I felt a little nestle of dread consume me. I’d almost forgotten about golf. I nodded. He pulled me closer.

“You’ll be fine. Nick is terrible at golf. Chris is a little below average. Obviously, I’m good at everything.”

I looked up at him. He was smiling down at me. I shook my head, gave a tiny smile, and touched the fine smattering of dark hair on his chest.

“Caleb. I just want you to tell me the truth. I don’t care if you cheated,” it was a lie that tasted sour on my tongue. “But I care if you lie. Please, just tell me. Did anything happen?”

“No,” he answered. “I’m sorry, Orla. I know you don’t want me the way I want you, but I don’t want anyone else. I want you. You might want me to want to fuck other women - but I don’t.”

I nodded. I touched one of his nipples. The bumpy pink skin was hard and round.

“I don’t want you to say you love me anymore.”

I looked up at him. He hesitated a moment and then his dark gray eyes were fixed on me.

“I know I told you to say it the other night but - I don’t want to hear it from you. Not until - unless - you mean it. I don’t care if I tell you to. I don’t want to hear it, ok?”

I only nodded.

He tilted my face up toward his.

“I mean it. I never want to hear it again. Not unless you actually mean it. Ok?”

“I promise,” she answered. He nodded.

“After golf, what are we doing?” I asked. He slid his hands around my bottom and pressed me closer.

“Stay in? Watch a movie? Read a book? Fuck the shit out of you?”

I smothered a smile. I closed my eyes and placed my cheek to his chest. His heart was slow and steady. I must have fallen back asleep because I woke on my back, with his face buried in my neck, his hand in my hair, and his cock sliding inside of me. He fucked me slow, still quite tired himself.

“Harder,” I murmured, halfway between awake and asleep. Pressure was building and I was very close, but it wasn’t enough. I landed a weak slap on his back. “Harder.”

He grunted. His hand tightened on my hip but he didn’t move any faster. I reached up and pulled his hair. “Caleb.”

He groaned and lifted himself up. He moved his hips faster and I moaned. “Harder. Harder doesn’t mean faster.”

“Jesus,” he rumbled. He slowed again, lifting my hips, and pushed harder into me. Deeper. I moaned and ran my hands through his hair to show him it was perfect. I orgasmed and then sagged into the bed. I let him finish the way he wanted, perfectly content. When he did, he rolled out of bed and went to the bathroom. He padded back in naked and slid back under the covers with me.

“Bossy bitch,” he murmured, pulling me closer.

“Did you get home at eleven last night?” I asked. I propped myself up on his chest. I ran my fingers through his chest hair.

“I got *home* at eleven. Then I had to go out searching for you,” he said, clearly annoyed, eyes closed.

“Hardly searching,” I answered, though there was little fight in my voice. “I planned on being back before you got home. I thought you’d be out all night.”

He opened his eyes.

“I told you I wouldn’t,” he said. I said nothing. I considered. I traced my fingers down a tiny little white scar a half inch above his left nipple. I’d never noticed it before.

“Fight with my brother,” he said. “We crashed through a coffee table. My moms fault for having that glass monstrosity.”

He gently tossed me off of him and got out of bed. He dressed in his previously discarded boxers and then went into the kitchen. I spread out in bed. The sheets were soft and I sank into the softness of the mattress. He brought me a cup of coffee and flung the blankets off of me. I protested weakly, but he sipped at his coffee and played with my nipples with his free hand.

“How’s your asshole feel?” he asked.

“Sore,” I murmured. Our eyes met.

“Good.”

“I don’t think I’ll be able to golf.”

He actually snorted and stood up.

“Nice try.”

I reached back for the blankets and then grabbed my coffee. I took a couple sips and he came to stand in the doorway. He beckoned me to shower with a jerk of his head and a soft, “come one.”

I finished my coffee and then followed. He didn’t try to have sex in the shower. I tried to calculate how frequently we’d had sex in the last couple hours. At my apartment and just now. I turned toward him after we’d rinsed off all our soap and reached for his cock.

“Fuck, Orla, give me a fucking minute,” he breathed. My hand worked over him, stepping closer. He’d definitely fucked me more than twice in less time before. I narrowed my eyes slightly and looked him over for marks.

“You don’t want to?” I asked him. He chuckled and turned us so my back was against the wall, his hand on my waist.

“I want you to get on your knees and get to work,” he said. I could feel him perking up on my hand. I slid to my knees and put his semi erect cock into my mouth. He leaned against the shower wall, propping himself up on his forearm. He looked down at me, the spray of water dripping off his perfectly muscled body above me. It took a bit of work, but soon he was hard

on my mouth and I got a mouthful of come for my trouble. He pulled me up and pushed me against the shower wall. The water was cool. He gripped my chin hard.

“I didn’t touch another girl,” he said. “Are we clear?”

I nodded.

“You believe me?” he asked.

I nodded. I think I did.

We dressed and got ready for breakfast. He had me wear black leggings and one of his hoodies, no makeup and a messy bun on top of my head. We left the apartment around nine fifteen. We just hit the sidewalk when he reached out and took my hand. He’d done it before, held my hand. It felt nicer than before though. His hand was warm and gentle and I thoroughly enjoyed knowing girls would see him and know he was taken.

We went to a little mom and pop breakfast place that had a pretty long wait. He said it was nice but offered to bring us somewhere else if I was too hungry. I decided I could wait. We spent the time waiting in the crowded little lobby and he talked me through the golf rules again. Reminded me how I needed to keep my shoulder out. It got more crowded and I stepped closer to him. His response was to wrap his arms around my middle and pull me closer. I stood between his stretched feet. He shielded me from the cool morning hair that wafted in when the door opened and closed.

For the first time in my life I wanted to be one of those couples that sat on the same side of the booth at breakfast, but my pride forced me over to the opposite side of the booth. He made me order a full breakfast, but he didn’t make me finish it. He told me a bit about his night before as we ate, his foot sliding up and down my calf as he did.

They got to a friend’s apartment around seven, where they pre-gamed, though Caleb only had a light beer. After they moved to a club he’d never been to but absolutely hated it. He had been nursing his drink when Chris told him he’d tell everyone that he left around midnight so

he wouldn't be mocked by his buddies too much. He drove home well over the speed limit and got home very excited to surprise me, only to find the apartment empty.

"I'm sorry," I said weakly. "I didn't ... I just wanted..."

I shook my head and shrugged.

"I don't know. I'm just sorry."

He reached out and wiggled his fingers. His desire was clear and I gave him my hand. He held it firmly. He looked very pensive, brow furrowed, and stared at my phone. He looked a little pale and took a deep breath.

"Orla - "

"More coffee?" The waitress was standing there with a large pot of coffee. I smiled and turned her away.

"We'll take the check though," Caleb said and pulled his hand away from mine.

"What were you going to say?" I asked once she left. He jabbed at a leftover piece of sausage.

"Just that I'll never cheat on you." He looked up and gave a half smile. "I love you."

I love you, too.

It was on the tip of my tongue but I knew I couldn't say it. He didn't want to hear it until I meant it. I wondered if that was what it might take to make him leave, once he knew, or

thought he knew, I was in love with him. I paused though. I couldn't say it now. He'd know it wasn't true. It would have to wait. I just nodded and smiled at him.

We got the check, which Caleb paid for. We walked home, passing a little used bookshop that I asked to stop in. I picked up a few old Agatha Christies with covers I liked. I already owned them in newer paperback publications. Caleb paid for those as well. My bank account now had two full paychecks sitting inside, with nothing but my rent, and utilities taken out of it. I figured my savings would look pretty nice when this was all over. I deserved that at least.

When we got home, he picked out what I would be wearing to golf that afternoon. A white skirt and a pale pink polo. I refused to wear the pink.

"Pick a different color," I told him as he laid it out on the bed I had just finished making. He looked at me with that blank face of his. "*Pink*, Caleb? Want to put me in an apron too? Should I go barefoot?"

He picked a powder blue polo instead, which I liked better anyway. He also put a white visor down on top. I told him I wasn't going to wear it. I hated hats. He said nothing.

"There's a little inside driving range about ten minutes from here? Want to take a walk over and shoot a few balls?"

I did. We didn't change into the clothing we were going to wear for the day, but he did put me in a skirt and a polo. I didn't protest because I agreed with his analysis the other night. It was better to wear them and get comfortable in them now than when we were at the golf course. We were halfway there, holding hands and walking in silence, when I spoke.

"I'm anxious," I admitted. He kept looking ahead. His hand squeezed.

"I was going back and forth but - I think half of one - we'll see how you feel when we get there and give you the second half if needed."

“I don’t want one.” I was a little annoyed. That wasn’t why I said it.

“This is what it’s for,” Caleb said. “There’s nothing wrong with needing it in certain circumstances. That’s what it was prescribed for. High anxiety? You take it and it calms you down to a normal baseline. It’s when you take it to feel high that’s it’s a problem.”

“It doesn’t ...” I paused a moment, considering if I wanted to have this conversation. “It’s not that I wanted to feel high. I wanted to feel nothing.”

He was quiet, contemplating that. He put his arms around my shoulders and held me closer to him as we walked. I allowed myself to enjoy the comfort of his warmth. It was a cool morning but it was growing warmer and it would be hot. I reached up and held onto his hand, pulling it down across my chest and applying more pressure to my shoulders.

“Take half - if you feel calm we’ll save it. If you need it you can take it. It’s what it’s for.”

I nodded.

We rented clubs and got a spot. It was a small enclosed space that went just two hundred yards out. Caleb hit the wall frequently. I came close once. He kept correcting my form which annoyed me, but I said nothing.

“It’s going to feel ridiculous how far your knees are bent but trust me. It’s proper form. And don’t let your shoulder fall out. Keep it straight.”

When I did as he told me, I made my best swings, which annoyed me even more. I started to get a little bit a back ache and told Caleb it was best if we just went home. I didn’t want to be too sore while we played golf. He agreed and took a few more swings. I watched, pressing my hand to my lower back and grimacing. His arms and chest looked amazing in his polo.

We walked back and I felt a little bit of dampness between my legs. It might have been all the distractions but we were almost up the steps of his apartment when I realized what it was.

“Oh, shit,” I said and walked past him and into the bathroom. When I came out, it was with a triumphant smile and crossed arms. He was on the couch, drinking a Gatorade and watching sports highlights.

“You look like an absolute cunt right now,” he said blandly. “What is it?”

“I got my period.”

“Ok. You have three holes you know.”

He looked back at the TV and my smile dropped.

“It means I can’t wear the skirt, Caleb.”

“Why not?” he asked.

“Caleb,” I said with forced patience. “I’m not wearing a white skirt on the first day of my period.”

“It’s a good thing I bought a black one too then,” he answered. “You can wear a white polo. There’s tampons on the bottom drawer on your side of the sink and some painkillers on the top left drawer.”

I stared at him a second, before going into the bathroom. I put in a tampon, grabbed a handful so I wouldn’t forget them, and brought them over to the island. I waited for him to say something. To give a crinkled nose of disgust as he saw them in his kitchen. He wasn’t phased.

“Chris is going to be here at one thirty and we can drive over,” he said, looking down at his phone. I said nothing and plopped down on the couch beside him. He touched my lower back and rubbed gently. “How’s your back feel?”

“Fine,” I lied. I hoped I took the ibuprofen quick enough to get ahead of it. If the cramps took hold, it was hard to touch them.

“What are your symptoms usually?” he asked. I looked at him curiously. “I don’t have any sisters.”

“Back ache and cramps mostly. I don’t get headaches or nauseas or anything.”

I had a friend in college who used to get violently nauseous two days before her period like clockwork. I was always grateful that didn’t happen to me.

“You need something? I can run to CVS. Get a heating pad or ice pack. Ice cream?”

I smiled at him, almost laughing, and shook my head.

“I’ll be fine,” I answered. “You were fully stocked. How long will golf be?”

“Depends. Eighteen holes usually takes around four hours with a group of four or more. Nine, obviously about half. Not sure we’ll play all eighteen with a group this big.”

My stomach sank and cold dread took hold of me. I wanted to do almost anything else.

“Probably just nine,” he said, rubbing small circles on my back. I leaned into him, laying down in his arms, and closed my eyes.

“I don’t want to go,” I murmured.

“It’ll be over soon,” he said, stroking my hair. I nodded. I wanted to ask for a xanax now, but I held my tongue. He said half. One if I really needed it. As time passed though, and I laid on his chest, focusing on the slow, steady beat of his heart as he watched TV, I felt my own anxiety increasing exponentially with each passing moment. He patted my back and gently nudged me off of him.

“Chris’ll be here in about twenty minutes. Let’s get dressed.”

I went into the bedroom. He didn’t follow. When he did come back in, I had changed my tampon, put on that stupid black skirt, and was pulling the polo on over my head. He gave me a glass of water and half a xanax. I took it and sat on the bed as he dressed. He wore black pants and black sneakers, a navy blue polo, and a hat with our company logo on it. He looked very handsome, very country club, and very much like the asshole I always imagined he was.

“How do I look,” he asked me, examining himself in the mirror. “I should shave again.”

“You look handsome,” I told him. He paused, kissed me, and then went to shave.

When he came back, he was dabbing his aftershave into his skin.

“When I was fourteen, I could grow a full beard,” he told me. “Nickname was *bigfoot*. My oldest brother started it actually. Whose wedding we’re going to. I was made fun of so badly, I started shaving in the morning, at lunch, and when I got home. I broke out in this terrible razor burn. I mean... ingrown hairs, bumps, rash... then I was made fun of even more. As if being well over six feet tall and thin as a rail wasn’t bad enough.”

He examined himself in the mirror.

“Hurt like a bitch.”

“Most men want to be able to grow a good beard,” I said. I couldn’t picture Caleb, tall, but skinny, covered in little red bumps from over shaving, being bullied in the halls of school. I could only see him how he was now. Tall, strong, handsome, sure of himself, powerful.

“Yeah well, highschool boys are cruel.”

“Yeah, I know,” I said softly. He looked at me in the mirror, dabbing gently at his neck.

“I can’t imagine you being bullied,” he said.

“Same to you,” I said.

“What -”

There was a knock on the door and then it opened.

“Good morning, lovebirds! How was the sex last night, huh!”

Caleb shook his head, looking a little bit annoyed, but also amused.

“How was your night?” Caleb asked as we walked out into the living room. Chris looked great, in a black ball cap, black pants and a pale green polo.

“Fucking *awful*,” he said, plopping down on the chair. “That girl I spent like a hundred bucks on left with some other fucking guy. Ending up looking at pictures of Furst’s wife all night alone in Frankie’s spare room. Caleb, have you looked at the pictures of her when she was young. I forgot how fucking hot she is.”

Chris pulled up a google image that apparently made its rounds when she first went missing. It was a photo of her taken for a club she belonged to in college. Apple cheeked, with twinkling eyes and long brown hair, she was very beautiful.

“No wonder he took her,” Chris said.

“She’s probably in her mid thirties now,” I pointed out. “She was twenty four when she was taken.”

“Yeah, but you said she was still hot, right?” Chris asked Caleb. I looked at him.

“Yeah, she’s hot,” Caleb said. I pressed my lips together. He didn’t seem to notice he’d said anything I could find offensive. “You guys ready? We don’t want to be late.”

We walked to Caleb’s car together, all carrying our own clubs. Chris spent the walk talking about Mrs. Furst.

“I was so disappointed when it came out the disappearance was a hoax. Or a false alarm or whatever and it was just a lover’s tiff. God, I’d *love* to hear what he did to her.”

Caleb put my clubs in the trunk. I got into the back seat so he and Chris could talk about how badly they wanted to fuck Furst’s wife together. Caleb glanced back at me as he pulled his seatbelt on.

“You ok?” he asked. I nodded and tried to smile. Chris turned around to look at me when Caleb turned forward.

“I sent him back to you nice and early last night,” Chris said. “We good?”

“No,” I told him. He frowned at me.

“I liked it better when she was always mad at you,” Chris said and straightened back. I learned a lot about Jessica Furst, nee Alan, on the way to the golf course. She was born April 28, 1990 in Delaware and was an only child. She had been studying abroad in Austria, learning German, when she was taken during a solo backpacking trip through eastern Europe. She had been gone a total of eight months. She was found at a reststop by an Australian woman on holiday with her family. She returned to America for three years before she very suddenly returned to Germany where she married a very wealthy and very successful older man. The official story was that it was all a terrible misunderstanding and there was never any kidnapping, never any rape. There were conspiracy theories. The internet, reddit particularly, still had entire forums devoted to her, but nothing ever touched Maximilian Furst. Their wedding and the coming of their children helped insulate him. In the rare event she was photographed, mostly by second rate tabloids that didn’t verify their sources, she always looked happy, healthy, and well treated.

“Man, I bet he was real rough,” Chris said, voice not quiet enough that he was trying to hide it from me, but soft enough that he was talking to Caleb, not me. “Look at that fucking bite mark.”

Caleb leaned over to look at the photo while we were at a stoplight. I closed my eyes. I felt dizzy.

“Caleb,” I said. My voice sounded loud and abrupt. He looked at me in the rearview. I couldn’t see his eyes with glasses on.

“Yeah?”

“I’m going to need a whole one,” I told him. My heart was fluttering and I felt nauseous. The hand I had pressed to my forehead was shaking.

We turned into the parking lot and parked. Chris got out and Caleb turned in his seat.

“You ok?”

“No,” I answered and smiled at him. “I need another. It won’t make me high, I promise.”

I prayed he brought a full one. He nodded and reached into his pocket. He handed me a half finished gatorade and I drank it down. My back and stomach hurt. I felt terrible, but the moment the pill touched my tongue, I felt better. He took my hands in his and held them firmly.

“You’ll be OK,” he told me. “You have a solid shot. You look amazing. And you know your shit. OK?”

I looked at him, unable to see his eyes in his sunglasses. He took his glasses off and met my gaze. He nodded in encouragement. “OK?”

“Yes,” I said. “You wouldn’t let me embarrass you.”

“I wouldn’t let you embarrass *yourself*.”

I nodded. “We should go.”

I got out of the car. Chris had gotten our bags out of the trunk.

“Guys, I think that’s her,” Chris said, an almost childish grin on her face. He asked Caleb, “Do you think that’s her?”

I looked over toward the club. We were parked along the side of the building. Wrapping around the side was the VIP patio. I could recognize Nick, average height, a bit soft, wearing a company polo and tan pants, standing beside the striking figure of Maximilian Furst. Seated at a table was a young woman, face shielded by a large floppy hat.

“Orla,” Caleb said, extending the hat toward me. I shook my head.

“I don’t look good in hats,” I said.

“Yes, you do, put it on,” he said.

“You’ve never seen me in a hat,” I said.

You look like dumbo. Look how it pushes your ears out. Orla dumbo! Orla dumbo!

I had been in the fifth grade. I pushed the girl down and threw a rock at her. I was grounded for a month. I hadn’t worn a hat since.

“You’re going to want it,” Caleb said. I shook my head.

“They’ve seen us. Let’s go,” I said. Caleb sighed and I turned away. Chris was standing a bit straighter, waving toward Nick, Furst, and his beautiful wife. I picked up my bag and let Caleb lead the way.

Maximilian Furst looked infuriatingly handsome, even for an older man, standing tall in white chinos, black sneakers, and a wellfitting black knit sweater over his black polo. In his arms was his son, who was reaching up to pull the black sunglasses from his face. He ended up hitting the brim of his white ball cap with a fat little fist, drawing a laugh from the businessman. Clinging to his leg was a little girl in a pretty pink dress, her chin pressed into his hip, looking up and saying something about ice cream later. He was speaking to the woman at a table that was shielded from the sun by an umbrella jutting up from the center of the table. She wore a flowing and elegant day dress and wore large sunglasses on her face, a wide brimmed straw hat on her head. Thick brown hair hung about her shoulders. She was thin and young and beautiful. She laughed graciously at something Nick said. I had no doubt in my mind that whatever he said wasn’t funny. We walked toward them. Caleb and Chris took the lead. I fell back, following anxiously, tugging at my skirt self consciously. As we approached, I heard Nick telling a story I had heard him tell a million times. He thought it was fascinating. It was the most boring story I had ever heard.

Everyone's heads turned toward us. A small smile came to the woman's face. Furst placed his hand on top of the little girl's head as he looked toward us, his blue eyes covered by his sunglasses. The little girl glanced at us, her eyes that same brilliant, ice blue of her father, and then she shyly buried her face into her father's leg. Nick broke off his story, greeting us happily. I shifted the strap of my new clubs on my shoulder. I shot a quick look at Caleb and then tried to match the smiles of the others.

"Ah! There's my dream team," Nick greeted happily. Furst shook hands with Caleb, Chris, and then me, in that order, despite the fact that I stood between Caleb and Chris. I thought he held onto my hand just half a second too long. His hand squeezed firmly.

"Gentlemen, Miss Wright, my wife, Jessica Furst," he introduced the beautiful young woman in the hat and large sunglasses. She smiled to reveal straight white teeth, and she extended a delicate hand. She shook Caleb's hand first, telling him in a soft voice, and with a little smirk that it was very nice to meet him. Caleb nodded, sharing a little smile with her and responded in kind. She reached for my hand next, but Chris, star struck and with a boyish smile on his lips, intercepted her hand.

"Very good to meet you, Mrs. Furst. Very good," he said. Her smile widened ever so slightly in amusement and she returned the kind sentiment. Then she took my hand. Her hand squeezed mine hard. Not in an aggressive manner. At least that was not how I interpreted it. She removed her sunglasses with her free hand, locking her deep brown eyes on mine, and I felt like she was looking into my soul.

"It is very good to meet you," she told me, voice softer than it had been. Her hand squeezed again. I couldn't find my words and I tugged my hand back.

"Mrs. Furst is American," Nick said, as if he was revealing new information. I almost felt bad. There were two groups present. Those who knew everything, and those who knew nothing, and poor Nick was in the group with the toddler and the infant.

"Oh, where are you from?" Chris asked, as if he hadn't spent the entire car ride talking about her. I would have been surprised if he didn't know her credit score at this point.

"Delaware," she answered and then looked at her husband. "Though I like to say my life didn't really begin until I arrived in Salzburg."

“Emelia,” Furst said, voice stern, but tender. “How do we greet new friends?”

She turned her face to the side, not removing her arms from her father’s legs, and looked up at us with fearful blue eyes. She tightened her arms around his leg and said softly, “Hallo.”

I smiled at the little girl. She looked at me, brow furrowing, and then her face split into a smile. I let my smile widened and raised my hand to give her a little wave. She lifted her hand from her father long enough to wave back and then buried herself more firmly into her father. He patted her head.

“My daughter, Emelia,” he said. “And this is my son, Maximilian.”

I could have rolled my eyes. Of course he named his son after himself.

“Will you be joining us?” Chris asked, smiling down at Mrs. Furst, his hands in his pockets, leaning toward her hopefully. I stared at him, eyes narrowing ever so slightly. Mrs. Furst laughed and placed her sunglasses back on her face.

“Oh, no,” she said. “I will be sitting in the shade, sipping iced tea, and reading my book. I will leave the golfing to you all.”

“Well that’s a shame,” Chris said, oozing charm, and I stared at him a moment. His cheeks were a bit pink. I looked at Furst, curious to see if he was also cognizant of Chris’ rather obvious crush on his wife, but I found myself reflected clearly in his dark lenses.

“Well, about five minutes to T-time. Let’s get our carts and head out,” Nick said. We approached two black golf carts and my eyes sought out Caleb. Chris had plopped his clubs on the back of the cart that where Nick sat himself behind the driver’s seat. He very proudly announced he would lead the way since he knew the course very well.

I watched Caleb turn back toward me and I stepped forward, ready to slide in next to Nick in the front seat. A large hand then wrapped around my upper arm. I was drawn backward, away from the cart, and I glanced up to find my own face staring back at me in dark lenses.

“Let’s chat,” Furst said with a sideways smile, pulling me back until I was sliding into the empty golf cart. I looked toward Caleb, eyes imploring him to come rescue me. Our eyes met and he stepped toward us, but Nick said his name. They shared a few words and then he slid into the seat reluctantly beside Nick. I stared at him, mouth open, and Furst sat down beside me. He smelled very good. Not as good as Caleb, but he could clearly afford the best, judging by the Cartier watch on his wrist, the Gucci sunglasses, and the Lyle and Scott golf clothing.

“Have you ever golfed before?” he asked. I considered lying. Caleb had given me a play by play. We’d hit some balls the other night. I didn’t think I would humiliate myself. And Caleb promised to help me pick my clubs out so I didn’t look like a complete moron.

“No,” I answered honestly. He looked over at me, a little curve to his lips.

“I didn’t think so,” he answered. Nick began to drive and Furst accelerated at a smooth and gentle pace. My face flushed with indignation but I kept my mouth shut.

“Did he put you in that?” Furst asked me. I stared at him. He looked over at me, face blank and steely behind his dark-lense sunglasses. “Does he dress you?”

It was a hot day, but I felt even hotter.

“Yes,” I said woodenly.

“He has good taste,” Furst said, my legs now reflected brightly in his glasses. I tugged at my skirt self obviously. I wasn’t so sure he was talking about my clothes or my body. “Come on now, Miss Wright. You look so much prettier when you smile.”

My head jerked over to look at him. He had a little satisfied smirk on his face.

“He must get right under your skin,” he continued. “Proud little thing like you. It’s too easy.”

My cheeks were burning red, half mortification, half rage.

“Nothing to say? You were quite talkative at our meeting,” he mused, far too pleased with himself. The man was insufferable.

“You asked me a question and I answered it,” I said. I was proud of myself. My voice was calm and strong, void of the fury and hate pulsing through me.

“You did. You answered it quite well.” He sounded like he was talking to his three year old daughter. My face flushed. We stopped at the first hole. He parked beside the other cart. Nick, Caleb and Chris were getting out of their cart. Caleb looked over, face blank, but I knew he was anxious. Furst draped his arm over the back of the seat, not touching me, a perfectly respectable distance away, but the display of power was indisputable under the circumstances.

“He wouldn’t show me the pictures he has,” he said quietly. My body reflected in his glasses. “I was quite disappointed.”

I felt a prickle of disgust course through me but I turned a searching gaze toward Caleb. I couldn’t help but feel a rush of gratitude pulse through me. I don’t think I could have handled it if I knew this man had seen me naked.

He smirked and got out of the golf cart.

“A beautiful course!” he called to Nick. I walked around the back to grab my clubs. He grabbed mine without saying a word and hauled them off the cart. He handed them to me with a smile. “There you go, sweetheart.”

Sweetheart. I wasn't much younger than his wife.

“Thank you,” I said tightly. I put the clubs over my shoulder and followed them to the green.

Anxiety began to gnaw at my stomach and I momentarily forgot about how much I hated the Austrian man. I closed my eyes as everyone congregated. I smelled him first and then felt a large, warm hand pressed to my lower back. I opened my eyes and looked at Nick. His back was to me. I took the moment to reach out and touch his arm and squeezed. His hand slid to my hip and he tugged me closer. His body was sturdy and warm. He stepped away as Nick turned. Caleb already had one of my clubs out of the bag and in my hand. I saw him grab it in the reflection of the Austrian's glasses.

“Who should do the honors?” Nick asked, pleased as punch to be there.

“Ladies first, *nein* ?”

I looked at Caleb who gave me a nod and a smile. He was pulling on his gloves. Heart beating hard, palms sweaty, I bent down to put the ball on the tee. I could feel the Austrians' eyes on me. The ball fell, not steady with my shaking hands.

“That tee's chipped,” Caleb said. He came forward with another and bent down to replace the tee. I watched him press his thumb into the flat head of the tee and snap it off.

“Watch your shoulder,” he murmured, placing the ball on the tee. He walked backwards away from me and gave a nod and an encouraging smile. I settled in, took a deep breath. I remembered what Caleb said that morning. It would feel like I was bending my knees too much. Before I shoot, bend just a bit more. I did and focused on the ball. I shifted my weight, swung the club, and turned my foot.

I was pleased enough just to realize I hit the ball. I was amazed to see how far it went. Caleb looked grim, but I knew by now he was pleased. Nick said it was a fine shot. Chris was smiling. Furst was pulling on a Golf glove, his back to me. My face flushed in annoyance:

Nick went next. His shot barely got much further than mine. Chris went next. He was perhaps twenty yards further than Nick. Caleb and Furst were by far the most competent of us all. Caleb hit the ball with a fluid motion, the sound of the thwack and whipping air was quite satisfied.

“A fine shot,” Furst complimented after everyone paused to watch where the ball fell. “I am used to winning. I think that might change today.”

I watched with a pit of disgust in my stomach as Furst placed a familiar hand on Caleb’s shoulder, gave a firm squeeze and a pat, and moved on to take his own shot. His own form and swing was impressive, though I didn’t really know what I was looking for. All I know is that when his ball came to rest, it was a few yards ahead of Caleb’s.

“But we will see,” Furst grinned at Caleb. Nick was back on his golf cart, saying something to the group, but only Chris responded. I was focused on Furst’s smiling face, and the way he outstretched his hand as he said, “after you, Miss Wright.”

“That was a fine shot for a woman,” he said. My face flushed and I let my eyes close for a moment. I *knew* he was just trying to get under my skin, but I was also well aware he meant it, and as a result, it was working.

“Thank you,” I answered.

“You two make a fine pair. A very attractive young couple.”

I didn’t answer. He didn’t seem bothered.

“You would create a pretty little family.”

“Hah.” My laugh burst from my lips, short, curt, and dark. He looked at me with a little smile. He cocked his head.

“Is that funny?”

“Caleb said he told you everything? Then you know as well as I do there’s no future for us. If anyone found out at work we’d both be fired and black listed from every other big four.”

He said nothing, the little smile on his face remaining.

“It’s fine, though. You can’t taunt me with what I’ll never have. I don’t want it.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes.”

He stopped the golf cart and got my clubs for me again. He examined them and then pulled out a club, gave it a once over, and then handed it to me. I took it, looked at Caleb, and watched him give a little nod. I gave Furst the sweetest smile I could muster.

“Thank you, so much, sir.”

His smirk was small and lopsided. I marched over to the tee. Chris was in my way. I would have walked right into him if he didn’t step aside. I got the ball down without dropping it and then paused. I sank deep into my feet, took a deep breath, fixed my shoulder, and swung.

“Ellie!” Nick called, holding his hand up to watch my shot, even with his hat and sunglasses on. “I had no idea you were so good at golf! I would have invited you ages ago if I thought you had any interest.”

I believed Nick. He could be an asshole, but I'd never seen him treat the girls any different than the boys. I watched the ball, knowing it was below average for a female golfer, but it wasn't humiliating. I wouldn't have to cry myself to sleep that night. Besides, my below average shot for a female golfer was only marginally beaten by Nick. Chris' game was nothing to sniff at. Caleb and Furst were by far the best golfers present.

Luckily, Furst had little opportunity to speak to me as we finished the first hole. He and Caleb ended up with the same score. Then Chris. Nick was only a couple strokes better than me. We got back into the golf cart to move to the second hole. Unfortunately, it was a distance away.

"Very good game for a beginner."

"And a woman," I reminded him. He smirked. He looked at me. I ignored him. I did everything in my power not to turn my head and look at myself in those lenses.

"Would you like to know, Miss Wright, what would happen to you if any of my friends got their hands on you?"

I felt a nervous clenching in my stomach and goosebumps erupted along my skin.

"You should be mindful. A man could hear one of your smart remarks and decide it was time to teach you a lesson."

"I think that already happened?" I answered. He chuckled and shook his head.

"Oh no. He's been gentle with you. He protects you. You have no idea what happens out there."

He let me process for a few moments before he continued.

“You see - you think I’m a monster. In the world I live in - I’m considered soft. Your man there wouldn’t be able to stomach what I’ve seen men do to their property.”

He said the word so casually my stomach turned. To him, it was just another word for women.

“You’re very lucky to have caught his attention. There are far crueler men out there.”

“He drove me insane,” I said. I wouldn’t let him minimize what I went through. “Did he tell you that? That I was imagining things? I was accusing random coworkers? That I was washing down a handful of Xanax with a bottle of Chardonnay every night? Barely holding it together? Did he tell you that?”

His lips curved upward and he looked at me.

“He did not,” Furst answered, voice cool and tinged with amusement. My face flushed with embarrassment. I was a flush with humiliation, but tinged inside of it was a not so subtle glow of gratitude. He had his arm draped over the seat, and he looked over his shoulder at us. He gave a little wave and a smile. I mustered the best smile I could manage.

I said weakly, “Don’t tell me he’s not cruel.”

“Has he poured boiling water on you for burning his dinner?”

Now it was my turn to stare at his profile.

“Oh, it wasn’t me, Miss Wright. There are varying degrees of monsters in this world. I think you would be best served by appreciating the fact that you have the affection of a successful, handsome, and protective young man. One who values the attributes of you that I find most distasteful.”

I crinkled my brow, still staring at him.

“A working woman. One of the more displeasing creatures. What’s worse, you’re competent. Truly insufferable. Be mindful, Miss Wright, there are many men who would enjoy seeing you taken down a few notches. Many in ways far more painful than Mr. Trent.”

The golf cart came to a smooth halt. He smiled, and then went to collect my clubs for me. My second drive was not so good. My hands were trembling and Furst looked quite satisfied as I walked back to the edge. While Nick took his shot, Caleb touched my lower back, which was slick with sweat, and I wished I’d accepted the hat from Caleb at the car. I wiped my forehead and gave him a shake of the head. He went into his bag and pulled out the white hat he had offered me earlier. I could have kissed him right then and there, but then Nick turned around. I took the hat and carefully threaded my pony tail through the back of the hat.

I watched Caleb take his shot, anxiously pushing my ears back, trying to tuck them underneath the hat so they wouldn’t stick out. After Caleb took his shot and Nick was going toward the golf cart, he stopped by me and said, “you look so fucking hot right now.”

“Caleb,” I breathed but smiled. I lowered my hands from my ears to let him look. I saw no change in his eyes. I looked flushed and sweaty was what I looked like, but he just smirked at me, eyes running down me lustily.

“We’ll switch after hole 4,” he said, carrying my clubs over to the cart. Furst had already taken his seat.

“Going to be a close one,” Caleb said to Furst after he put my bag down.

“We’ll see,” Furst responded. Caleb gave me a nod and returned to the golf cart. There was little opportunity to speak while finishing the second and third, but on our way to fourth, there was another prolonged journey.

“If he did see a future with you, would you feel differently about him?” Furst asked.

I wasn't ready for the question. I hadn't allowed myself to think about it. It could only hurt me.

"It doesn't matter," I said. "And it's not any of your business."

"I would imagine it's hard, being in a relationship with a man you know you don't deserve. I would imagine that creates a lot of stress."

I said nothing. I stared ahead, eyes burning, praying the cart could come to a halt.

"He is too lenient with you. One night with me and you'd never disrespect a man ever again."

"I respect Caleb."

"Could have fooled me," he said. "Maybe he would want to keep you, if you treated him a little bit better."

My skin prickled. Maybe he would. Or maybe he would get bored and be done with me. My lower jaw was trembling. He looked at me, brow raised. He had that little smirk on his lips and I hated him. I turned my head so he couldn't see me. The cart came to a halt. He said nothing more and retrieved his clubs from the back. He left mine and began to walk toward the green, leaving me alone to collect myself.

After the fourth hole we mercifully switched. Caleb and Chris went with Furst and I was left with Nick. He asked how it went, telling me he wanted me to get one on one time with him.

"It's very important for your future career growth. I didn't want Caleb or Chris to box you out. Not that they would on purpose. But Mr. Furst is a bit old school and I don't think - I don't want to make you uncomfortable at all Ellie, but I don't think he's very receptive to women in positions of authority in the workplace. That's just the sense I get. And I do *not*

condone that. Not at all. But it's a big account. But I also wanted you to get your face time in one on one so that you could make an impression and build that connection."

I felt a little glow of warmth for Nick. I thanked him, told him it went very well, and that I appreciated the opportunity he gave me. Nick seemed pleased, cleared his throat, and told me, like an uncomfortable father who didn't feel comfortable expressing his feelings, that he thought I was going to go very far in my career if I wanted to, and that he was very impressed with me. I wondered how much of that was work Caleb had completed for me and put my name on and I felt like a fraud.

All in all, I came in dead last, but I had a halfway respectable score. My putting skills were solid and it was the only reason I didn't completely humiliate myself.

"Minigolf champion right here," I said when I made one rather long put.

The most difficult part of the last five holes was watching Chris and Caleb ham it up with Furst. Caleb had on one of his handsome, charming grins and his laugh reached me a couple different times. I wondered if they were making fun of me, but I pushed that down. I didn't think Caleb would do that. Still, I caught his eye once and he stepped beside me while Nick went to take his shot.

"You ok?"

I nodded and tried to smile.

"What's wrong?" he asked instead.

"You're not making fun of me right?" I asked very softly. He looked legitimately surprised and touched my waist.

"Of course not," he said. He dropped his hand and stepped back. Nick was walking back, a slightly concerned look on his face. My cheeks flushed and I turned away from him.

When the final hole was done, we went to the dining room for a meal somewhere between lunch and dinner. Mrs. Furst was there with a table, her children with her. I excused myself to the bathroom, telling Caleb I needed his keys to get something from the car. After a quick stop at the car to grab some more ibuprofen and a fresh tampon, I headed back inside to seek out the bathroom.

I found it at the end of a long corridor, floors faux marble, walls a warm cream color. I just wanted to go home and have a good cry. I didn't know what having a meal was going to be like, but I knew I didn't want to sit through it.

I opened the door of the bathroom and was face to face with the Austrian's pretty young wife. Well, not face to face exactly. She was almost half a foot shorter than me. Upon looking at her more closely, I could see the extra years on her. Lines were just beginning to form at the creases of her eyes. Small lines were beginning to form on either side of her mouth. My mother called them marionette lines. They were subtle and did not detract from her beauty.

"Orla," she said, in pleasant surprise. "Right?"

"Ellie," I answered. She nodded and then stepped backward into the bathroom, allowing me inside. I stepped inside, realizing with an internal cringe that I should have let her out instead of making her step aside. Usually it was the person on the outside that differed right? My stomach clenched slightly. It would be awkward when I returned to the table. Then I heard a little click and turned to find the rape survivor turned trophy wife locking the bathroom door. Nerves prickled along the back of my neck.

"I thought we could talk," she said. "Do what you need to. I'll wait."

I wouldn't have thought it would be hard to stand up to her. She was a weak woman who had been beaten into submission and tricked into believing she loved her rapist. She'd already given him two children and was pregnant *again*. Pregnant way too early in my opinion. So I was surprised when I met her gaze, wanting to inform her I had no desire to speak to her, only to find frightfully hard brown eyes pinning me down, a challenging smile playing on her lips. I found myself saying nothing, nodding through a tight swallow, and went into the bathroom to change my tampon.

I blushed slightly as I urinated, changed my tampon quickly, and went out to wash my hands. She was checking her makeup in the mirror. She wore little, but was touching up her clear lip gloss.

“Did my husband behave himself?” she asked. I started. I stopped rubbing my soapy hands together under the hot spray of the water.

“He didn't touch me,” I said. Her eyes met mine in the mirror and her lips twitched upward.

“That’s not what I meant,” she said. “Was he polite? I asked him to be polite.”

“If that was him being polite I feel bad for you,” I said. Her smile remained and she tilted her head, but her brow furrowed and her eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

“Judge me all you want, Ellie. You have no idea what I’ve been through.”

“I have some,” I answered icily. She turned, leaning against the pristine granite sink and crossed her slender arms. Our gazes met directly.

“Then your judgment is even more unfair,” she said.

“The worse he treated you the worse I judge you,” I answered honestly. It was sick. To love your rapist. It was sick and there was something wrong with her if she did.

“I feel bad for you,” she said. “If you don’t want to talk, we don’t have to.”

She turned to go back to the door. I stepped forward.

“You feel bad for *me*? ”

She paused and turned at the door. She answered simply, “yes.”

“Why?”

I was angry at her. How dare she feel bad for me. She was pathetic. I was doing the only right thing.

“You think I’m weak. Maybe. But I love my life. I love my husband. I love my children. Going back to him was the only chance I would ever have at happiness. I knew it wasn’t... *right*. I chose not to care. I wanted to be happy. And now I am. I love him more than anything, except our children of course. You care too much about what society says is right. You’re going to fight something you want because the world tells you you shouldn’t want it. And you’ll spend the rest of your life thinking about him. And I feel sorry for you.”

I stared at her. My face was flushed. I felt it creeping up the back of my neck and radiating in my scalp.

“We have no future,” I told her. “He took you to keep you. Caleb will have a new obsession in six months.”

She stared at me. Her brow furrowed. Her lips parted and then she stopped and glanced over her shoulder. She turned back and it was clear to me she wanted to say something, but wasn’t sure if she should... or *could* more likely.

“My advice to you, Ellie.” She paused. Her voice was soft, but it almost made it more impactful. Her face was pensive and eyes penetrating. “When this is all said and done - make sure you don’t have any regrets. No matter what that means or what that looks like for you. Damn everyone else and what they might think.”

She lingered just a moment before she unlocked the door. She turned to look at me again.

“You have more power than you realize. Your mistake is thinking they need to recognize it”

She made a face like she had just said something that would get her in trouble. It was reminiscent of that of a child caught with her hand on the cookie jar. Then she turned and abruptly left without another word. I stayed there for a few minutes. I splashed cool water on my face and tried to stay my shaking hands. I didn't want to go back out. I didn't want to go out and face her. I didn't want to see her criminal husband. I didn't want to see Caleb's handsome face.

I knew I had to emerge eventually though, and I forced myself out of the bathroom and walked back to the dining room. I had a Diet Coke waiting for me when I arrived. Nick apologized.

"Caleb said you asked for a Diet Coke. I tried to order you a Chardonnay. I know it's your favorite. It'll go on the company card. I'll grab the waitress."

"No, Diet Coke is just fine," I said, smiling and taking my seat. I was placed beside Mrs. Furst, who had the little boy on her knee. The little girl was sitting on her father's lap, drawing happily and casting shy smiles my way. They were talking about golf courses Furst liked in Austria. I tried to catch Mrs. Furst's eye, but she was focused on the child in her arms and smiled and answered kindly but aloofly when Chris tried to draw her into conversation. The little blond girl kept glancing up shyly, and finally, after I gave her a little smile and a wave, she pushed off her father's lap, grabbed her crayons and paper, and came around the table, biting her bottom lip. I was certain she was going to crawl into her mother's lap. So did Mrs. Furst, apparently, because she shifted the little boy wordlessly. This was clearly not an uncommon occurrence. But then she stepped past her mother's chair and came scrambling up on my lap. I was too surprised to stop her, and she plopped down her paper and began to draw without saying a word.

"Emelia," Mrs. Furst scolded softly.

"She has a trusting nature," Furst said. It didn't sound like he thought that was a good thing. He looked almost troubled as he looked at his little girl.

"Vati called them friends," the little girl said, clearly aware her actions were not approved of by her parents, but brave enough to preemptively defend herself. The look on her face

reminded me of the one I had just seen on her mother in the bathroom. She had her father's eyes, but I realized she looked just like her mother.

"You need to ask someone if it's ok before you climb on them," Mrs. Furst said. She gently brushed a loose strand of hair from her daughter's forehead with her pointer finger.

"I don't mind," I said, coming to her defense.

"You did call them friends," Mrs. Furst said to her husband. They shared a private communication through a look. She smiled, somewhat amused, and added, "I think it's time we introduce the word acquaintance to her vocabulary."

A few good natured chuckles and the conversation went back to golf. Not interested enough to listen, I accepted the purple crayon from the little girl and followed instructions when she pointed out the location of the paper I could draw on.

"What do you think, Ellie?" Nick asked about halfway through dinner.

"What? Sorry, I'm putting flowers in the garden," I said. The little girl giggled at me and handed me a pink crayon. Nick asked me a pretty simple question about transfer taxes in California. I answered it, drawing a pink flower in our little garden.

When it was time to go, Nick paid the bill on the company card, and we all walked out to the parking lot together. Emelia chose to hold my hand on the way through the parking lot. She asked her father if it was ok before doing so. He answered in German. I was sure it was a refusal, but then the little girl came forward and asked very politely if it would be ok with me if she held my hand in the parking lot because she needed to hold someone's hand in the parking lot and she wanted to hold my hand. Unable to say no to the sweet little girl, I agreed. She spoke with a little American accent but switched between German and English easily.

Nick didn't linger. His wife and children were waiting for him to start their weekly movie night and he'd promised to take them out to ice cream beforehand. The word icecream had the little girl perking up and looking toward her Father, with wide eyes and bared teeth, little hands balled up into excited fists. Furst told her she'd been a good girl and he'd get her an

icecream cone. After Nick left, that left the Furst family, myself, Caleb and Chris standing around their rental car. Furst wrote something down on a business card as Mrs. Furst put the baby boy into his car seat in the back of the black Mercedes SUV. I held onto Emelia's hand.

"Here's my private number. Don't hesitate to use it," Furst said and handed the card to Caleb. He pointed to Chris. "You too."

He motioned to Caleb.

"I want to talk with you for a moment."

"Can you come draw with me tomorrow?" Emelia asked me shyly.

"Miss Ellie is very busy, Emelia," Mrs. Furst said. The little girl jutted out her lower lip but nodded. She asked her mother if she would ever see me again. Mrs. Furst smiled and crouched down to look her in the eye. She trailed a finger along the side of her face from forehead to chin and then tapped her nose. The little girl giggled and hugged her mother. Mrs. Furst stood.

"Maybe," she answered her daughter, and looked at me. "Good luck, Ellie. I mean that. Whatever that looks like for you. I hope you have a happy life."

I believed she meant it and I regretted how I had behaved in the bathroom. Suddenly, I wanted to ask her questions. I wanted to ask for advice. I felt the bitter pang of regret settle in my chest and I nodded, blinking rapidly. She looked at me, smiling sadly, and then stepped closer. One arm still holding her daughter, she wrapped an arm around me. She smelled nice. Her skin was cool and soft. Ellis was happy, wrapping an arm around my neck and one around her mothers, pulling us into a more intimate hug than was initially intended.

"You can use that phone number too," she said softly, pulling away. "If you ever want to talk. We shouldn't be alone."

She smiled at Chris.

“It was nice meeting you, sir,” she said, extending a hand. He shook it, smiling at her, and nodded.

“You too, Mrs. Furst.”

I wonder if she knew that he had fantasized about how she was being raped while it was happening. I wonder what she thought of him because of it. She was not easy to read, but not in the same way Caleb was. When Caleb’s face wasn’t blank, his default was a look of anger. Mrs. Furst’s was private amusement. A ghost of a smile on her mouth. It could be genuine amusement, it could be anger, it could be affection, it could be contempt. I didn’t know, but I suddenly really wanted to.

“Do you have a number?” I asked her. The smile was now pointed at me and she lowered her daughter down and told her to climb up and get into her car seat.

“You’ve met my husband,” she said. “Do you think I have access to my own cell phone?”

I noted she said access, not that she didn’t have one. Furst, it seemed, did just enough to maintain the appearance of a normal relationship. I dropped my eyes to the Diamond necklace around her neck. For the first time, I noticed the *M* sitting at the hollow of her throat. I had a feeling what occurred between them behind closed doors was very different to what the world saw.

I saw Caleb walking back over with Furst. Caleb had his head down, looking at his feet, nodding as they approached. Furst had his hand on Caleb’s shoulder and spoke close to his ear. My face flushed with anger, readying myself for whatever misogynistic thoughts he was putting into his head. Like Caleb needed help in that. I just wanted them to leave. Mrs. Furst might be content to let her rapist win, but I wasn’t. I couldn’t be. He couldn’t win after what he did to me.

Caleb smiled at me as we approached. He touched my waist and kissed me. I let him. I couldn’t push him away in current company. I couldn’t push him away at all. He had to get

bored.

“I’m excited to work with you all in the future,” he said. He shook Caleb’s hand, then Chris’. I was certain he wasn’t going to reach for mine with Nick gone, but he did, and his hand dwarfed mine with a firm squeeze.

“You behave yourself now,” he said to me with a smile. He looked at Caleb. “If you need any help keeping her in line - you have my number.”

“Yes, sir,” Caleb grinned. He put an arm over my shoulders. I didn’t try to smile. Before parting ways, Mrs. Furst gave me a small smile and reached out to touch my elbow. It was a quick, gentle touch. Feather light and fleeting. And then she was stepping into the passenger side of the car door held open by her husband.

I felt a little numb as I got into the car. Chris sat in the back seat. Caleb got in next to me and started the car. It was hot and he turned on the AC. He cleared his throat. I continued to stare out the window.

“Orla - there’s something I - ”

“Can we not?” I asked. I pressed my hand to my eyes. My head hurt but my chest hurt more. “Please, Caleb. I don’t want to talk right now.”

“I think it’s important.”

“What?” I asked, whirling around to look at him. “What would you like to tell me, Caleb?”

I watched his face and eyes darken. An angry... *hateful* look took hold of his handsome features. He leaned back in his seat and put the car in drive.

“Forget it.”

“I’ll step out,” Chris offered.

“Forget it,” Caleb said, louder this time.

“Caleb.”

“Stop helping, Chris,” I sighed. Caleb began to drive. No one spoke the whole way home.

I made a decision that night that regardless of what I wanted, my attitude toward Caleb needed to make a consistent change. I needed to be obedient and submissive. We had eaten a light salad for dinner, both still somewhat full from our meal at the golf cart. We did so in relative silence. I offered to clean up, which he accepted and went to put on the Bruins game.

When I returned from the kitchen, I slid into his lap, wrapping my arms around his neck. He looked at me, that blank look on her face. He said so much with just eyes. I can’t believe I never saw it before.

“I’m sorry,” I told him softly. “For this weekend. I was mad at you and I lashed out.”

His hands slid up my sides.

“I did everything I could to get you to stay,” I admitted. One of his hands cupped my jaw.

“I made some promises on Friday,” I reminded him. His lips parted. “I plan to keep them, so...”

He put me in some lingerie. After I put it on, he had me look at myself in the mirror. He looked over my shoulder, a surprisingly lecherous look on his face.

“God, Orla. Look at you,” he breathed in my ear. I felt a smile play at my lips. His fingers slid over my hips, fingertips just slipping beneath the panty line of my panties.

“You are literally my ultimate sexual fantasy,” he continued, voice low and husky. “I wish I could go back and tell fifteen-year-old Caleb he’d have this woman in his bed whenever he wanted. Let me tell you.”

He paused to bite my earlobe and then suck on it.

“Fifteen or thirty two, I’d go nuts on you.”

There was something weirdly alluring about thinking of a teenage Caleb having a crush on me. I would *never* touch an underage kid. I had no attraction to young men. I didn’t even like baby faces on grown men. But just the feeling of power - a teenage Caleb lusting after me, not being able to have me, jerking off in the shower or between classes, thinking about me. I refused to even consider the fact that he’d have nothing to do with me if we had actually been high school at the same time.

“Look at yourself, Orla and try to tell me you don’t think you’re attractive.”

I looked at myself, trying to see myself through his eyes. He *did* find me attractive. That was obvious. This would be a lot of commitment for someone who wasn’t attracted to my body. I took my narrow waist and the swell of my hips. My stomach was flat now, my breasts still full.

“Tell me how fucking sexy you are,” he ordered.

“I... Caleb,” I said softly, a breathy, shy laugh leaving me.

“Look at me,” he ordered and I did. “Tell me how fucking sexy you are.”

“I’m sexy,” I said.

“How sexy?”

“So sexy,” I said, voice still soft and shy. His hands pulsed on my hips.

“So sexy,” he smirked. “The perfect fucking body.”

His lips were hot and scorching along my neck.

“You ever given a lap dance?” he asked.

“No,” I laughed nervously.

“You’re about to,” he told me. “Don’t *think*. Just feel. If you have to think I want you to think only one thing. ‘I’m fucking sexy. He wants me so bad. He loves my body. He wants my body. I’m fucking sexy.’ Got it?”

I nodded but felt nervous.

He took my hand and lead me into the living room. He double checked to make sure the blinds and curtains were pulled and then plopped down on the couch. He played with his phone, and then some music played. I started to feel anxious, silly, nervous, but then he met my eyes.

“You want my body,” I said softly. His eyes were hot.

“So bad,” he breathed.

“I’m sexy,” I said, coming toward him.

“So fucking sexy.”

I believed he meant it too. It sent a little electric thrill through me. I straddled him and moved my hips slightly. I began to feel silly, but watched his Adam’s Apple Bob and he licked his bottom lip. I felt another surge of confidence and lowered myself down to rest on his lap. His cock was hard and straining against his sweatpants.

“Fuck,” he breathed he reached up to touch my waist but stopped himself. “Five minutes,” he said to himself. “No touching for five minutes.”

I don’t know what it was that made me think it, but I suddenly had a challenge for myself. He’d made me come without ever touching him. I wanted to do the same. I pressed my center more firmly into the hard bulge on his sweatpants and twisted my hips. He tried to keep stone faced but a flush was rushing up his neck and he closed his eyes briefly.

My nerves abandoned me. I had a task to accomplish. I had five minutes to make him come. I closed my eyes. I didn’t want to see his face. I’d be too busy looking for amusement or disappointment. I swirled my hips, grinding them against him. I lifted myself up, hands on his shoulders, and then slowly lowered myself down. I focused on the music, replaying his words over and over and over in my voice. But I heard *his* voice say it. It made me warm. It spurred me on.

“Fuck, Orla,” he breathed. I reached behind me and unhooked my bra. I kept it on, holding it to my chest.

“Take it off,” he said, throaty. I began to but then paused. I lifted myself up, away from his erection.

“Fucking tease,” he breathed, but it wasn’t angry. I slowly slid the bra off. My nipples were hard. My pussy clenched.

“Look at me,” he breathed. “I want to see those big green eyes on me.”

I obeyed. His eyes were hooded and his lips were parted. His eyes moved down to my nipples. I pressed myself back on him. His hips bucked slightly but then he regained control. I felt a rush of encouragement. I pressed more firmly into him. His jaw clenched. I reached down and pulled his sweatpants down. His cock sprang free, hard and weeping. His eyes were glued on my panty clad pussy as I slid it along his bare cock. I bit my lower lip and then pulled the panties to the side. He sucked in a breath as I pressed my wet flesh against his. I moved my hips, sliding my slick skin up and down and his shaft.

“Put me inside you,” he growled. I shook my head, hands on my shoulders. His eyes darkened. “Put me in your ass.”

“Put yourself inside me,” I breathed. He moved his hands. “Has it been five minutes?”

He froze and looked at his phone. He tapped it and tilted his head back, eyes closing. I didn’t know how much time I had, but I knew I had some. I continued to move my pussy up and down his shaft. Finally, I felt him tense and he grabbed his cock. He gave it one hard stroke before grabbing me holding my hips still. His come came out in a hot, thick glob, hard against my pussy. I caught a glimpse of the clean white string coming out of my opening and felt a glimmer of embarrassment. Then I looked down to look at Caleb. His head was tilted back and his face was flushed, his hair sweaty. I ran my hands through his thick dark hair, slicking it back. His eyes fluttered open and he looked at me. It was a look of pleasure. Contentment.

You have more power than you realize. He doesn’t need to recognize it.

I leaned down and placed a kiss to his mouth. Then his cheek, his temple, his jaw, his hair. I gently ran my fingers through his hair.

“Orla,” he breathed. It was soft, throaty, and *reverent*. I pulled back and just looked down at him. I just looked, not caring that he was looking right back.

And for the first time, I wondered if I could actually make him fall in love with me.

Chapter Notes

So, we're getting there with this one. A bit to go, but doing a tad transition here. I have a very rough draft of the next STR done and I am about 3/4 of the way done with the next Community update. So HOPING you'll get at least one more update before the new year, but certainly shortly after.

Thank you all so much for taking the time to read and comment. As always, it means the absolutely world to me. I hope you like this chapter, even if it's not as action packed.

Happy reading, happy Holidays, and to those who celebrate, Merry Merry Christmas. <3

I was on top, but Caleb controlled the pace and depth. His hands had a firm grip on my hips. His fingers pressed hard into the flesh of my bottom. I leaned forward, my face buried in his neck, and panted hard. I knew he liked it, because once I started, he had let go of one globe and smacked my ass hard, asking me how I liked taking him in the ass. I told him I did, breathily in his ear, and his pace sped up and he fucked me more deeply. Little gasps of pleasure and soft murmurs of pain escaped my lips and I made sure he heard every one of them. Every so often I'd whimper out a pathetic 'ow'. His hips moved faster when I did that. Faster and harder.

When he got closer, he lifted his hand to squeeze the back of my neck. I turned my face toward his and licked the salt from his skin. His hand squeezed harder and my lips sought out his ear. My lips closed around the skin and I nibbled. He lurched forward, throwing me onto my back, still entwined, and lifted my ass with his bruising grip again. A gasp escaped past my lips as he shifted his angle. His hand went into my hair, holding me in place as he grunted out his orgasm.

He remained on top of me, careful not to put too much weight on me. We were both slick with sweat, breathing hard, and perfectly exhausted. He lazily trailed my hand down his back, feeling the muscles ripple underneath. His lips found my ear and he sucked and nibbled and told me I belonged to him. I almost fell asleep, but then his hard, sweaty body was off of me and I was no longer surrounded by that glorious warmth. I opened my eyes and watched him walk naked into the bathroom. The shower turned on and then he came back out. He had his hand on his cock, stroking the spent member and carefully bringing it back to life.

“Come on,” he said, slapping the outside of my thigh with the back of his hand. “I want to fuck you in the shower.”

I remained where I was a couple moments, nodding, my eyes closed, mouth still open and face up toward the ceiling. His hand gripped one of my breasts and squeezed. His fingers pinched one of my nipples and tugged. His hand moved lower, rubbing my pulsing clit.

“Let’s go.”

I pushed myself up and followed him into the bathroom. The shower was warm and felt wonderful, but I had little time to enjoy it. He put me on my knees and placed his semi-hard cock into my mouth. With a hand loosely tangled in my hair, he kept me there, but allowed me to do what I could to try and get him hard again. My back was against the wall and he pressed a forearm against the shower wall. He watched me, every so often, closing his eyes and simply enjoying the feel. I knew I did something right when his eyes would pop open or his hand would tighten in my hair. It inspired me to move on, sucking hard, licking eagerly, getting him as far down my throat as possible. I had him as deep as I could take him when he abruptly ripped me off of him and yanked me upward with his hand on my upper arm. He spun me around and pressed me hard against the shower wall hard enough to draw a gasp of surprise and a flood of warmth between my legs. I hated how much I loved the way he threw me around. He bent me over and pushed a knee between my legs to force them apart. He landed a hard slap to one ass cheek, then to the other. He entered me slowly. He had been careful when we started and he was careful now, pushing inside of me at a steady but slow pace. I told him it hurt and he stroked my hip.

“You’re so big,” I breathed, knowing exactly what it would do for his ego. His hand tightened on my hip and he continued his slow pace into me.

“You take me so good,” he praised. Once he was completely inside of me, he ran his hand down my spine. The water beat down on me hard. He didn’t ask me if I was ready. He pulled back slowly, pushing back into me, pulling back out. I moaned softly. It was still a strange feeling. I had been nervous when we woke up and he told me he wanted to fuck me. I reminded him of my period. He told me I had two other holes to use when my pussy was out of commission. I tried to get under the covers to use my mouth. He made it very clear that wasn’t the hole he wanted to use that morning.

He'd given me a number of orgasms already, so I wasn't upset when he fucked me without much regard for my own pleasure. I made more noise this time around. I was sore and he had upped his speed and force. His hand closed around my shoulder, the other on my hip.

"That hurt?" he asked me and then smacked my ass again.

"Yes, Caleb," I answered. He spanked me again. "But I like it."

He let go of my shoulder and put both hands on my hips. He fucked me hard. This time, it hurt more than it felt good, but I didn't tell him to stop. When he finished, he turned me around and pulled me against him. He held me under the spray, kissing my shoulders and my neck tenderly, rasping in my hair how good a fuck I was and that I was perfect and that I belonged to him. He told me he'd never let me go. He told me if I ever tried to leave him, I had no idea what he'd be willing to do. I enjoyed his lies, letting the warmth of them rush over me, and pressed my face into his chest.

We cleaned each other and then went to eat breakfast. I was starving, so I ate it all without much prompting. It helped that he stared hungrily at my legs as I made breakfast for us, peeking out from beneath his oversized t-shirt. We watched TV, and I started my new book. He read the one I had recommended to him. Throughout the morning, he was always touching me. Whether it was a hand to my ass or a breast, or a light brush of his fingers against my arm or his toe brushing my calf. His skin was always touching mine.

Once, while each of us were reading, our heads on opposite ends of the couch, our legs resting tangled in the middle, I looked up to find him staring at me. His gray eyes were dark. A month ago, I would have thought he was glaring at me. I could see it now as something very different. Desire, obsession, maybe a little bit of aggression, but it wasn't hateful or dismissive.

"What's wrong?" I asked anyway, extending my leg so my foot was in his lap.

"I mean it, Orla. I won't ever let you go. Do you understand that?"

He pinned me with his gaze, his voice low and deathly serious. I nodded.

“I understand,” I answered. “I belong to you, Caleb. I’m here for as long as you want me.”

He blinked and then nodded. He turned his attention back to his book, but it didn’t look like he was reading. Around 1:00 pm he said he wanted to take a nap. He took the book out of my hand gently and then guided me to my feet. I was marveling at his stamina, wondering how he could possibly have so much sex when he laid me down on the bed and pressed me up against him. His cock was soft as it pressed against my bottom. He breathed in my hair deeply. His lips pressed to the top of my head. It was with a bit of surprise that I realized he just wanted me there while he napped. His arm tightened around my middle, as if he thought I was going to escape. I reached around to put my hand in his hair. I stroked gently wondering if I could get him hard again. I pushed my bottom into him. He let out a little grunt. I was sore. I didn’t really want to have sex again, but I didn’t want him to go to sleep either.

“I’m tired,” he murmured, but then added, “Take this off.”

I sat up and tossed off his shirt. I snuggled back into him, facing him this time, and pressed my bare breasts against his shirt. I draped one of my legs over his leg. My heart was pounding hard, waiting to see if he would reject me, tell me to stop or send me out of the room.

“I want you,” I murmured, running my nails down his neck. “Please, Caleb?”

His eyes opened, hot and fiery and flooded with desire. My body tingled and I felt a rush of relief course through me.

“Please, what, Orla?” he asked. His handover over my waist and hip. I pressed my lips together, eyes on his, too embarrassed to continue. His hand skirted along my ass and pressed me into him. His cock was halfway hard again and my heart pounded.

“Please, fuck me, Caleb,” I said, voice quiet. I reached on between us and pushed my hand into his sweatpants. I felt him come alive and I tightened my grip.

“Going to break your asshole in hard this weekend,” he said. He settled on top of me and groped one of my breasts. “Thought you might want to save it for tomorrow.”

He spread my legs and then reached over to the side cabinet to grab some lube for me. He examined my opening and I blushed brightly, still not liking how vulnerable it made me feel. He applied a generous amount of lube before positioning himself at my entrance.

“Oh, good girl,” he breathed. I winced softly. “That hurt?”

I nodded and wrapped my arms around his neck.

“I’ll be gentle with you,” he promised. He slid out of me and pushed back inside. “You’re so fucking sexy. So fucking hot.”

I couldn’t speak, so I tried to ignore how each thrust hurt and focus on the look in his eyes instead.

“And all mine.”

His eyes dipped to my breasts, which were jiggling softly with each pump. One of his fingers trailed the almost faded lines on my skin. He leaned down and kissed the hint of the word whore. I hated those little lines. I much preferred the ones above my groin. His hand slid up my rib cage, over my breasts, and then wrapped around my neck. His hold was firm but it didn’t cut off any air or blood flow. He finished with a groan and then laid back. And despite the ache in my bottom and feeling of his semen leaking out of the battered hole, I laid my face to his chest and focused on the sound of his pounding heart and the way his hand stroked my hair. I fell asleep in just a couple minutes.

After our nap we watched a movie and read some more of our books. I made him dinner. He spent most of that time standing behind me with his hands on my waist, every so often stealing vegetables I’d cut and popping them into his mouth before I could stop him.

“Stop,” I finally pouted. He smiled at me and leaned against the counter beside me.

“You’re so goddamn beautiful,” he told me. The smile and blush on my face was real. I looked down at the food I was preparing.

“Want to go to the lake this weekend? My parents aren’t using it. We can take Friday off and head up Thursday night.”

I nodded and smiled. I don’t know why he asked. It’s not like I had the option to say no. I gave him the response he wanted though. He reached out to touch my waist again and pulled me between his spread legs. He kissed me gently.

“It’ll be really romantic,” he murmured against my lips. “Just the two of us.”

“That’ll be fun. People won’t think it’s weird? If we both take Friday off?”

He moved away, letting me resume my cooking.

“I’ve had this Friday off for months. Just send me a request tomorrow and say it’s a last minute family event. I’ll approve it.”

We ate at the island talking about our plans for the weekend. We’d leave after work, get up there around eight, grab takeout at a nice pizza place he liked, and then go for a hike Friday morning. He hoped we had one rainy day, so we could stay in. I told him we could anyway, but he said it was better when the day was rainy. As I did the dishes, I noticed him on his phone, thumbs moving rapidly across the screen.

Trying to sound as casual and detached as possible, I asked him, “Who are you texting?”

He glanced up in surprise.

“Oh. No one,” he said and placed it into his pocket. I kept my back to him, letting my lips purse and my mouth warp in a way he would certainly have called me a bitch for in the past. I scrubbed extra hard at the pan, my skin turning bright red under the scalding water.

We went to bed shortly after dinner. We laid on top of the covers, me on my back, him on top of me, our tongues finding new ways to press together. He didn't try to have sex with me and even though I didn't want to have sex - I was very sore - I wanted him to demand it anyway. I didn't initiate though. I was too afraid he'd say no.

After brushing our teeth and doing our nightly rituals, I swallowed down the pills he gave me, watching him closely as he plugged his phone into the charger and placed it on the side table. He slid in beside me and turned off the lights. He fell asleep first. I could hear his breathing slow, felt his chest grow steady against my back.

“Caleb?” I whispered into the pitch-black room. He did not move. There was no pause in his breathing. No change. I carefully extricated myself from his limbs, ready with my excuse that I needed to use the bathroom if he woke up. I crept around the edge of the bed and sat down on the mattress as gently as I could. I waited, watching his darkened lump on the bed. He didn't move.

I picked up his phone from the nightstand and flipped it over. It tried to read my face but it didn't register. It was password protected, obviously. That was required by the company for us to have our work emails on our phones. Plus, Caleb had some pretty incriminating things on this phone. I didn't care about any of that at the moment though. I just wanted to see who he had been texting.

I considered the possibilities. I had no idea what it might be. It wasn't his birthday. It wasn't my birthday. I tried to think, but I was terrified of locking him out of his phone. I gave up, but stayed where I was. I waited, staring down at the phone, waiting for a notification to come in. It wasn't too late. Certainly not out of the realm of possibility that a girl he was talking to would send a text. I waited, cognizant of any move that meant he might wake up. A text did finally come through and I sat forward, heart pounding. I was immediately met with disappointment when I realized that he had his privacy settings on. I couldn't see who sent what.

“Orla?”

My heart leapt and I turned. With my body blocking his view, I put the phone back as quietly as I could. He was reaching over on my side of the bed. When he didn't find me there, he began to turn. I shifted, so he might think I had just sat down. He turned, his hand seeking me out.

"You ok?"

It didn't seem like he knew what I was doing. His hand slid up my spine. It felt good.

"Sorry. I can't sleep," I told him. I twisted my body to face his. I put my hand on his chest. His heart was slow and steady.

He sat up and kissed my temple.

"I'll get you a half a Xanax. You didn't take one at all today."

He slid out of bed. Before he left, he picked up his phone. I slid back under the covers where he had been laying, enjoying his warmth. He came back with half a pill and a glass of water. He kissed the top of my head as I took the pill. He stroked the back of my head and looked down at his phone, his face illuminated with light. He finally slid into the bed beside me and pulled back into his arms.

"Better?" he asked. I nodded, pressing my nose into him. He fell back asleep easily. I didn't. I couldn't stop thinking about that phone. But soon, my eyes grew heavy despite all my efforts to stay awake.

I woke to his alarm going off at 4:30am. We had separated at some point in the night. After he turned off the blaring noise, he sought me out. I let him pull me into his arms and nestled into the warmth. He kept the bedroom at perfect temperature for sleep. I was blissfully warm in the cold room. I fell back asleep, but too soon the alarm was strong again, ripping me out of my slumber. He turned off the alarm and then tried to free himself from my arms. I tightened my hold, preventing him from leaving.

“Where are you going?” I grumbled.

“The gym. You stay and sleep.”

“Stay in bed,” I murmured, tugging on the sleeve of his t-shirt.

“I’ll be back soon,” he promised, and kissed the top of my head. I sat up, leaning over to turn the light on. I blinked the sleep from my eyes. Caleb turned back on his to the bathroom.

“I’ll come with you.”

“You can stay in bed,” he offered.

“Do you not want me to go?” I asked.

“Of course, I do. But you don’t have to.”

I nodded and flung the covers off my legs. He picked out clothing for me and then we headed out. The morning was cool and crisp, but summer was just around the corner. I sought out his hand as we moved on down the empty street. His hand squeezed mine and he tugged me closer.

I forgot to ask him to wait for me outside the locker room. I felt the familiar feeling of dizziness, sweat on my palms, and a tingling in my face. I briefly considered staying in the bathroom until he was done, but it was too embarrassing a prospect. Instead, I splashed some cool water on my face, took a couple deep breaths, and replayed the walk to the treadmills. I could do that. I was a lawyer. I worked at a big four. I could walk to a fucking treadmill.

I stepped outside and felt an overwhelming rush of gratitude. Caleb stood there, dressed in his shorts and sleeveless T.

“All set?” he asked. I nodded and tried to smile. I grabbed onto his hand. He didn’t leave me until I was situated on the treadmill. Before he left, he gave my ass a hard squeeze.

“Caleb,” I breathed, eyes looking around to see who might have seen.

“What, Orla? I need every man in here to know who this hot piece of ass belongs to.”

“You could just kiss me,” I answered. He shrugged.

“Or both.”

He stepped up on the treadmill and placed a hard kiss to my mouth, his hand squeezing my ass hard. He reached up and grabbed my ponytail, pulling my head back. He placed another firm kiss to my mouth.

“I want everyone to know you belong to me,” he murmured. “You have no idea what I’d do.”

The hand on my ass went to my cheek. His hand still had my ponytail. He held me firm, in a hard and commanding grip, and I’d never felt so secure.

“Sometimes it just... overwhelms me how much I need you.”

“It’s ok. I’m all yours. For as long as you want me.”

His eyes dropped to my mouth and he nodded. He let me go.

I watched him closely, eyeing any girl that came close to him. Any girl that looked in his direction. Caleb didn't seem to notice. He did his leg exercises, admiring himself in the mirror, and occasionally, he'd catch me staring and give a wink along with his self-satisfied smirk. When he came to get me, I didn't mind the way his hand lowered to my bottom and gave a few firm squeezes. I returned his kiss and checked to see if any of the beautiful women in the gym had seen. Maybe they'd stare less next time. I held his hand on our way back to the locker rooms and on our way back to the apartment. He was going to put on a navy blue suit, but I touched one of the dark charcoal suits.

"You should wear this one today," I told him. "I like how your eyes look in the dark gray."

"I thought you liked the navy," he said, but he was already putting the navy pants and suit coat back onto the hanger.

"I like the navy the best, but I like the charcoal too."

He changed the outfit he wanted me in as a result. Before I could put my pantyhose on, he fingered me for a bit, his hand around my throat. I ended up wearing my pink blouse and a gray pencil skirt. I felt good, and I noted every little look Caleb gave to my legs.

On the train, I noticed another girl looking at him, so I reached out to touch his tie. He looked up from his phone and smirked at me. It might have bothered me just a few days ago, but I was pleased with his amusement. He scanned the train and then leaned down to kiss me. After we parted ways, I set myself up at work with a smile. When he came in to deliver my coffee, I grabbed his tie and pulled him down for another kiss. He seemed pleased, lingering with his lips against mine and he murmured, "you're doing so much better. Soon I'll get to play with you again."

My body went rigid and he pulled back to look at me.

"Nothing like before. You didn't know me before. You do now. Do you trust me?"

I stared at him. Did I trust him? Was he asking that? I considered lying. I met his eyes, dark, like storm clouds, and said to him, “not at all.”

He stared at me, eyes searching, lips parted. He looked surprised, then confused, then grim in only half a moment.

“I know that...” his voice was low and he leaned in closer. “I know nothing I say matters to you. Not yet. But I’ll show you. Ok. I’ll *show* you. You can trust me.”

I tried to smile. I did my best. He leaned down and gave me a quick kiss. He gave one more squeeze to the back of my neck and then left.

It was about ten when he first texted me. I had been going through the new documents uploaded to the project Auto data room. He sent me a picture. I was a new associate. I knew because I was wearing one of my old black cardigans that I wore over everything. I was tucked away in the back of the group, shoulders hunched, looking uncomfortable. I was next to Peter, Marc was on the other side of him, followed by Steven, and a guy that had later left to work in indirect tax named Adam. In front of me was Molly, then Chris, and then Caleb, sitting in one of high lights gray suits that I didn’t like, leaning back in his chair, smirking at the camera.

Nick’s birthday party your first second or third week.. I spent that entire dinner thinking about how you’d look with my cock in your mouth.

I looked at the photo. At myself and then at him. My hair was up in a bun. My cheeks were flushed. I’d spent the morning crying after I got some of my first comments back. Then I looked at Caleb. Confident, handsome, smirking. I couldn’t quite believe he wanted me even then. I looked like a mouse. An ugly, awkward, gawky, little mouse.

I wanted you so bad. I only wish I hadn’t waited so long. I should have had you right then.

I don’t think I’d have made it through.

I'd have taken care of you. You hadn't pissed me off yet then. No need to punish you.

You're not still mad at me though right?

No, not at all. Salad or wrap for lunch?

Salad please.

Steak or chicken.

Steak please.

12:10.

I went back to work. I found myself looking forward to lunch just so I could be in the same room with him again. I shifted in my seat. I was sore. So sore. But I wanted him to ask me to go to the supply closet.

But noon came and I received no text. When I began walking back down the hall toward the breakroom, his office door was open and he wasn't inside. I stepped into the breakroom to find it pretty busy, with a couple tables full. Caleb was at the table with Caleb, Chris, Danny, Crispy, Amelia, and Anne. There were still two seats left and I hurried to the fridge to grab my lunch before they filled up and I had to either sit with strangers or go eat in my cubicle. I didn't think Caleb would be ok with that.

I grabbed my salad from the fridge and went into the drawer to collect some napkins.

"You coming this weekend. It's gonna be fucking awesome." It was Crispy and I knew he was talking to Caleb. My head whipped around. I felt a sharp twinge in my neck. Caleb wiped his hands together.

“Can’t man. On the cut. No drinking for this guy for a couple months at least.”

He smiled at Chris, his bright, straight smile favoring one side of his face, a strand of hair astray across his forehead. I felt an overwhelming sense of warmth as I looked at him.

“On the cut - eating bread?” Crispy asked incredulously.

“What do you want for me? I have to ease into it. Besides, I’m headed north for the long weekend. Had Friday off for months.”

“Your loss,” Amelia said, jabbing at her salad.

He leaned back in the chair, his tie tossed over his shoulder, coat off, sleeves rolled up to his forearms. I was struck again by how beautiful he was. Not just handsome and rugged - which he was. Beautiful. He really was the kind of man that could have a girl for every day of the week if he wanted. And somehow, he was spending all his time on me. There was no seat available next to him. Beside him was Chris and Crispy. Anna sat beside Crispy. Amelia was stuck on the other side of Chris and Danny. In just an instant, Amelia slid into Danny’s now empty seat. He sat down beside me with a smile.

“You have fun this weekend?” he asked as he sat down. I could feel Caleb’s gaze. My scalp prickled from the memory of him tugging my pony tail at the gym. I could feel his hand on my ass, his fingers pressing into my face. It sent a buzz of excitement through me. I smiled at Danny and told him I had a fun weekend.

“How’d golfing go?”

I told him, letting my eyes go to Caleb when Danny asked me if I had plans this weekend. He was chewing his sandwich, staring down at it just a few inches from his face, looking like the meat had gone rotten. My cheeks flushed happily.

“Oh, um. Yeah, I’m going to a friend's bachelorette party in New Hampshire. It’s pretty last minute. Caleb? Did you get my PTO request?”

“Yeah, I got it,” he said, dropping his sandwich and then wiping his hands together in disgust. “Monday morning request for a Friday off. Do you care about this company at all?”

My face flushed and I felt my heart rate skyrocket. It took me a moment to realize he was teasing.

“Don’t worry, Orla, I approved it this morning.”

“Why do you call her that?” Danny asked, voice sharp. He had a little frown on his face. “You know she doesn’t like it.”

My lips parted and I looked at Caleb. He was glaring at Danny, hardly able to hide his disdain.

“She’s never told me that,” Caleb said. “She’s a big girl. If she doesn’t like it, she can tell me.”

His eyes turned to meet mine. I saw the warning in his eyes. My heart fluttered in my throat.

“Do you want me to stop calling you Orla?”

Everyone in the room was staring at me. My face was hot and I was shaking my head before I could even comprehend what words were passing my lips.

“No. It’s fine. It’s my name.”

Caleb smiled but his eyes were hard and cold. He looked back at Danny.

“See. She likes it.”

He got up, fixing his tie, and balled up his half eaten sandwich in the food wrapper. He left the room without much more said to anyone. I was distracted from the awkwardness of the situation by my fear he was mad at me. I felt irrationally mad at Danny. Two months ago that might have made me happy. Now I was furious. It wasn't his place.

“God, he's a prick,” Danny muttered under his breath.

“Careful Danny. Your jealousy is showing,” Amelia taunted with a smile.

“You think I'm jealous of him?” Danny asked. “Guys an asshole.”

“Big one,” Chris said with a wicked grin. He met my eye and winked.

After lunch, I kept waiting for a text to come through. For him to rant and rave against me for what happened. I wanted him to send me to the closet. I knew I could calm him down if I got him alone. But my phone did not buzz. When I walked back to my cube, I stared past the opened blinds on the window at him seated at his desk. He kept his eyes on the computer. He didn't turn to look at me once.. Around two I took a trip to the bathroom. I cringed internally as I saw him standing by the copier with a group of his buddies. Chris was there, Crispy, and a few other guys from the Fed team that were into the fantasy leagues. He had his hands in his pockets, his suit coat back on, but the bottom pushed back behind his arms. He saw me coming, his eyes fixed on me even though his smile did not shift. He interrupted one of the Fed guys as I passed.

“Hey, think you can get me the BOLT report by three. These assholes upped the timeline again.”

“Not my fault,” one of the Fed guys said. He started pointing at his buddy, who, I think was named Aiden, shrugged.

“Yeah. For sure,” I smiled at him. He smiled back and I felt relief course through me. He wasn’t mad at me. His smile seemed sincere. His gaze almost tender. I began to walk passed them toward the bathroom, feeling lighter.

“Thanks, Ellie,” Caleb said with a grin. I actually came to a stop. That name on his lips felt so... wrong. I turned to look at them. None of the Fed guys seemed to notice. After all, it was what everyone else called me. Chris looked at me, not quite surprised, but waiting for my reaction with dark amusement. I tried to smile, feeling off balance and a bit dizzy.

“Welcome.”

In the bathroom I hunched over the sink, feeling like I might throw up. I calmed myself, relieved myself, washed my hands, and then splashed cold water on my face before forcing myself to go back to my cubicle. They were gone when I came back, but I had been hoping they’d still be there. I wanted to talk to Caleb. Danny was at the copier when I passed by. I gave him a quick smile and hurried passed, making it clear I wasn’t open to a conversation.

“Hey, Ellie?”

I turned. Caleb was standing in his office door. Danny glanced in his direction. My skin felt hot and blotchy.

“I need the Shore report too. By five?”

I nodded.

“Great.” Caleb looked at Danny and asked, “is that better, Danny?”

He didn't wait for a response. He just laughed and turned his back to Danny's grim face. He closed the door to his office after he retreated. He didn't look in my direction. I sat down at my chair. My forehead was beaded with sweat. My hands shook as I wiped my forehead. I wanted to ask Caleb for a Xanax but I knew I couldn't. Not with how he was acting. But I needed a Xanax - or for him to tell me he wasn't mad at me. I'd rather him just tell me he wasn't mad at me. I grabbed my phone.

Are you mad at me?

I stared at the text. It wasn't fair if he was. I hadn't done anything. I didn't complain about the name. I didn't call him out in front of everyone.

"Hey."

I jumped and slammed my phone down on my desk. I whirled around to find Danny in the doorway, looking sheepish.

"I'm sorry if I started shit with you and Caleb. I just know you introduce yourself as Ellie and he always calls you Orla. I was trying to help."

I was overcome with a rush of annoyance. Mostly, why now? Why now that I needed Caleb to be happy with me so I could get him bored with me did Danny decide to introduce a rift? But Danny looked so sheepish, I felt bad for him. He was like a lost puppy, but not in a I-want-to-take-him-home kind of way. One word came to mind as I looked at him. Pathetic.

"I appreciate that, Danny. But it's fine. Caleb has always called me Orla. I'm used to it now. Don't worry about it."

"Ok. Ok, good." He flashed a smile. "We're good then?"

"Yeah. Of course," I smiled back. He lingered and my annoyance grew. My fingers gripped my phone. I just wanted to flip my phone over and see if Caleb had texted me.

“Awesome. Well. Ok good. See you around,” he said with a wave and a pat to the side of the cubicle. I felt another rush of annoyance. At his embarrassment. His indecisiveness. He made my life more difficult. It wasn’t my job to make him feel better.

I picked up my phone.

I’m not mad at you. I couldn’t be happier with you.

I felt a little bit better. His annoyance was with Danny. Not me. Where it *should* be.

Ok good.

Another text came through.

Do you need a Xanax?

My cheeks flushed. I typed back quickly.

No. I feel strong today.

It was a lie. One that I thought would make him happy. I waited anxiously for the praise text to come through. None would come. I didn’t get many alerts. Usually spam emails or a sporadic alert that one of my “close” Facebook friends had posted something. Every time I did. get a little ping. I checked my phone immediately. Until Molly popped her head in and asked me very kindly if I wouldn’t mind muting my phone. Flustered, I apologized and told her I would. After that, I made sure my phone was face up. Every time it lit up I ripped my eyes away from the screen.

I finished the reports Caleb had asked for through the constant checking of the phone. I emailed him a couple questions throughout the day, but nothing that wasn't work related. At about six I walked down the little cubicle hallway to his office. Most people were gone and the blinds to his office were closed. Knowing he wasn't on a call, I stepped inside and softly shut the door behind me. He glanced over, leaning back in his chair, and then looked back at his computer.

"Just give me a few minutes and we can go home."

"No rush, it's fine."

I waited and bit on my bottom lip.

"Are you mad at me?" I asked again. I wanted to see his face when I asked. Just in case he had been lying to me. He looked up.

"Why would I be mad at you?"

"Because of what happened with Danny?"

His annoyance at the memory was clear. He scoffed and turned those dark gray eyes back at the computer.

"You did what you were supposed to do. I'm not mad at you."

I felt a rush of relief, but his eyes went back to the computer and I felt a little tingle of anxiety take hold. I walked over to him and sat on the side of the desk beside him. His head turned to look at my legs and then moved up the length of me.

"Promise you're not mad?" I asked again. The side of his mouth tilted upward.

“Get on your knees and ask me that,” he said softly. I obeyed, kneeling by his chair. He reached out, taking hold of my face, pressing his thumb to my bottom lip.

“Promise, you’re not mad?” I asked again, voice softer this time. I knew what he wanted. “I’m sorry, Caleb. Please don’t be mad at me.”

His thumb slipped past my lips. I sucked on it until he slowly withdrew it.

“Danny thinks about fucking you everytime he sees you,” he told me. “He thinks about taking off your clothing and taking one of those juicy tits in his mouth. He thinks about spreading your pussy apart and seeing how tight that pink little hole is. About spreading your ass cheeks and putting his cock in that puckered little asshole.”

A vein was bulging on the side of his neck. Another on his forehead.

“I belong to you, Caleb. Only you. Please, let me show you.”

He parted his legs so I could kneel between them and I unbuckled his belt.

“Don’t forget to talk to me,” he said, leaning back on his chair. He flipped his tie over his shoulder like he did when he ate, as if it would get in the way.

“Yes, Caleb,” I answered. I knew he liked it when I said that. I took out his erection and gave it a few hard strokes. I breathed, embarrassed, “I’m not very good at this.”

“At what, baby. Sucking dick or talking dirty?”

“Both,” I laughed.

“You suck dick like you were born for it. Get to work.”

I took him in my mouth, working hard to do a good job. After a few seconds, I pulled my mouth back and stroked him hard.

“Is that OK, Caleb?” I asked him. His eyes were hooded and he nodded.

“Perfect, baby.”

“I just want to make you happy.”

He took in a deep, slow breath.

“You do.”

I put my mouth back on him. I licked the precut from the head of cock. I licked up the length of him. I tried to give more attention to his balls. When I came up and placed the head of his cock back into my mouth, I could see his jaw clenching and his teeth grinding. I took him out of my mouth, overcame and spoke without thinking.

“Will you fuck me, Caleb? Please?”

He reached down to collect my hair in his hands.

“Please, Caleb.”

“My little whore,” he breathed. “Aren’t you? *Ellie* .”

He said it with a certain level of venom. I paused. I was too surprised to continue. He said it sarcastically, and it felt like it was directed at me.

“Caleb?” I asked. My voice sounded small. His face had taken on a dark look. Once again, I was looking into the face of the man that had raped and tormented me.

“Please call me, Orla. I like it when you call me Orla,” I murmured. I kissed the head of his cock. “Please?”

“Who do you belong to?”

“I belong to you. Only you, Caleb.”

“Stand up, Ellie.”

He rose and I stumbled back. I *didn't* like that. I blinked rapidly and pressed my lips together.

“Caleb, please,” I said, voice hoarse in its sincerity. “Don’t call me that.”

“Don’t make me ask again.”

I got my feet on shaky limbs. My chest was constricted and he bent me over so roughly on his desk, fear erupted inside me. I was still sore from the day before and he was getting angrier by the second. I just wanted him to stop calling me Ellie.

“Don’t be scared, Ellie. I won’t hurt you too badly.”

I took in a shuddering breath. He pushed my skirt up and yanked my pantyhose down, ripping them in the process. I screwed my eyes shut. My lower lip trembled as I waited for the assault. I didn't understand why he was so mad. I was trying to be good. I was trying to give him what he wanted. I felt his fingers begin to pull my cheeks apart.

"Caleb, I'm sorry," I said. "I don't know what I did wrong."

He paused. I felt tears in my eyes. They spilled out, falling onto the printer out report he had on his desk. I was one insult away from a sob and I thought about the Xanax I had refused earlier in the day. I thought that would make him proud too.

"You didn't do anything wrong," he told me. He leaned over me, looking down at the side of my face.

"Why are you trying to hurt me?"

He stepped around me and placed his hands on the desk, bending down so his face was next to mine.

"I'm really trying, Caleb. I promise," I whispered.

"Why are you crying?"

"I don't want you to call me that."

He gave me a small smile. I sniffled and wiped away a tear with a trembling hand.

"I didn't think that would upset you so much," he said.

“You call me Orla,” I reminded him. I hated how pathetic I sounded. I wanted a Xanax. His little smile turned warmer.

“I do. You remember why?”

“You think it’s beautiful,” I said.

“Because it is,” he said. “I’m not mad at you, baby. You’ve been so amazing. These past two days have been great haven’t they? Easy and stress free?”

I nodded.

“Because you’re obeying me. You’re respecting me.” He gently wiped away a tear. “I’m not mad at you. I want to dominate you. I don’t want to hurt you. Ok?”

“Yes, Caleb.”

“Now, I’m going to take what’s mine, and you’re going to take it like the good girl we both know you are. Make me proud, Orla.”

I felt the warmth of the way he said my name envelope me. He placed a gentle kiss to my lips and then settled back in behind me. I felt the cool and then warm sensation of lubricant press to my asshole, followed by his cock.

“Poor little asshole will be good and used by the end of the week. I think I can be gentle with it this time.”

“However - however you want,” I said.

“Good girl,” he said, pushing into me. “My proud little, Orla, taking it in the ass like a champ.”

My cheeks burned but I tried to remind myself he wasn't angry. It was just how he liked to talk.

He won't marry a girl like that though. He'll work his kinks out with you and then go marry Betty Crocker.

I squeezed my eyes shut. He fucked me hard, despite his promises to be gentle, but compared to the second time he'd fucked my ass, I suppose he *was* being gentle.

When he finished he sat back in his chair. He told me to stay where I was and I did. I felt him pull my asscheeks apart. Finally, he pull my hantyhose off and tugged my skirt down. As I stood, I watched him raise my pantyhose to his face and breathe in.

“I miss eating your pussy. How long until your period is over?”

“Another day or so,” I said. “They're usually not much longer than five days. I'm sorry - I -“

He shook his head at me, a little smile on his face. He pulled me closer, pressing his hand to my lower back. “That's not your fault. You don't need to apologize.”

He held out his phone and showed me the screen. It was of me, bent over his desk, my skirt bunched up at my waist, my pantyhose torn around my knees.

“Look how hot that is,” he said. He swiped to the side. It showed me at a slightly different angle. “God, you look good like that.”

I didn't like looking at them. The thought of anyone else ever seeing those photos...

I wrapped my arms around his middle. His arm draped over my shoulder.

“Keep looking. Look at what a slut you are for me.”

Next came my asshole. It was pink and a bit puffy. His semen was leaking out of me. I could feel it there now.

“Look at me.”

I did.

“I do like you obedient,” he smirked. His hand dipped to caress my bottom.

“Are you my dirty little slut?”

“Yes, Caleb.”

“That’s my good, Orla. Let’s go home,” he said. He stopped me from moving away.

“Give me a kiss.”

I had to get up on my tiptoes to kiss him. He didn’t make any effort to come to me.

“Go get your stuff.”

On the train, he got me a seat and leaned over me, his hand on the bar. He was on his phone and we spoke very little. He asked if I minded if we picked something up from the little Green place near his apartment. I didn't mind. I was tired and didn't really feel like cooking.

"God you're hot," he breathed when we were about halfway home.

I looked up, expecting him to be looking at me. Instead, I found him looking at his phone, flicking through photos. Luckily, no one else was around.

We picked up dinner and ate in front of the TV. It was a comfortable silence, but I spent most of that time wondering if we'd have sex again. I was very sore, but I didn't want him to be mad at me either. He cleaned up after dinner and then plopped down on the couch next to me. He turned off the TV and draped an arm across the back of the couch. I waited.

"I want to make something clear to you, Orla," he said and then paused, a glimmer of amusement crossing his face at my smile. "I get off on domination. That kind of goes hand and hand with humiliation. That's never going to change. You like the physical domination. I think you struggle with the verbal stuff. Am I right?"

I nodded.

"I won't hurt you as long as you obey me and you're respectful. I promise you that. Ok?"

I nodded again. He grabbed me by the hair to make sure I did not look away from him. It was firm, but it didn't hurt.

"I'm going to degrade you. And humiliate you. That turns me on. It doesn't mean I'm angry. That whole thing - calling you Ellie. That was for Danny's benefit not yours."

"Danny was only there once," I pointed out.

"I thought you were in on the joke," he said. I searched for insincerity. I didn't find any.

“Can you make a promise?” I asked. He just stared, but I knew he was waiting for me to continue. “Promise me that when you’re mad at me, or annoyed, or anything, you’ll tell me. I mean you’ll say those words. ‘Orla, I’m mad at you.’ And then tell me why. I can deal with the punishments, with the degrading stuff, as long as I know it’s because it turns you on and not because you’re mad at me. Promise?”

As I had spoken, a little smile came across his face.

“I promise. When I get angry or annoyed or anything - I will say those words. And you need to promise me that if you think I’m mad, you’ll ask me. Like you did today. Deal?”

“Deal,” I smiled. “I think that will help me. Before, *he’d* punish me, for things I did to *you* and I didn’t... it messed with my head so bad. I think this will help. I just need to be told, clearly, what you’re thinking.”

“Even though you don’t trust me,” he said with a wry smile.

“I might some day. If you do what you say you will.”

He stared, brow knitting. His tongue darted out to wet his bottom lip. He caressed my cheek.

“I don’t want you crying every time I decide to remind you that you’re my whore.”

“I get to put the woman I respect most - on her fucking knees.”

“I can’t help if Danny talks to me.”

The smile dropped from his face.

“You flirt with him,” he accused. “You do it to get me mad.”

“To get your attention,” I clarified, shocked by the admission.

“You always have my attention. I’m fucking obsessed with you,” he grumbled. His lips went to my neck and my eyes closed. His stubble scraped against my skin.

“I can’t wait to be inside your pussy again,” he breathed. I sought him out with my hand. He was hard again. I felt better about him not fucking me on the janitor’s closet today.

“Furst said that was the best thing about his wife’s pregnancy,” Caleb snickered. “No hole was ever out of service.”

He said with a German accent, leading me to believe that was a quote. I bristled and he stood, leading me into the bathroom and turning on the shower. We kissed as we undressed. At one point he was just smiling into the kiss, but when I asked him why he only shook his head.

Our shower was lazy. He didn’t try to fuck me, but washed me carefully, gingerly sliding the lofa between my cheeks and along my punished hole. I winced, sucking on a sharp breath. “We’ll give you some time to recover.”

I kissed him again and once we were both cleaned and rinsed, I dropped to my knees to give him another blowjob.

After our shower, while Caleb went out to get my meds, I crawled under the blankets and snuggled in the middle of the bed. When he came in he paused in the doorway and then gave out a little laugh.

“What?” I asked with a blush. He slapped the overhead light off and turned on the side lamp.

“You’re adorable,” he said. He handed me the pills and the water, which I drank down happily. I noted the half the Xanax in the mix this time. He stripped down into his boxer shorts and then crawled into bed with me. By then, it was only about nine, but I was exhausted.

“Caleb,” I murmured against his hot skin, pressing against him under the covers.

“Yeah?”

“Please don’t call me Ellie again. Even when you’re mad at me?”

He said nothing and I turned my face to his. He looked down at me thoughtfully. He wasn’t amused. He wasn’t angry. Just thoughtful.

“You call me Orla,” I said. He smiled.

“I call you Orla.”

He placed a chaste kiss to my lips. I pressed my cheek to his chest, listening to his heartbeat, slow and steady, closed my eyes and went to sleep.

Chapter Notes

Woah now. The Christmas spirit has taken over. Hope you enjoy this chapter and thank you to all who commented on the last!

And please, feel free to point out (kindly) mistakes you might see. Typos, perspective switches, etc. I will go back and fix them. (I occasionally forget after reading a comment so if you're rereading and see typos others have already pointed out, please feel free to re-point out - I know for a fact there's still some in this story that others have pointed out that I just never went back to fix.) But please, I'm as fragile as Orla, so be gentle. I say this again because last chapter Xean very kindly pointed out the first and third person switch. Sometimes I proofread better than other times and I tend to do this more so when I am writing chapters of different stories at the same time (IICHY is my only active first person POV). I will make it a 2024 resolution to try and be better at that.

Hope you enjoy it!

The third most annoying thing about Maximillian Furst was how good looking he was. Standing over six feet tall (but not as tall as Caleb), with a fine physique for a man of any age, and the added allure of a foreign accent and European charm, he turned the heads of women from twenty to sixty.

He walked down the hall, one hand at his middle, fingers playing with the first button of his two button suit jacket, a self-satisfied smirk curving his lips upward. His dark navy suit coat draped over his frame perfectly, hiding any flaw, boasting every attribute.

The second most annoying thing about him was that he *knew* how good looking he was. The self satisfaction that dripped off of him turned my stomach. I couldn't help but imagine what he'd done to his poor wife. Paid for her, bought her, kidnapped her, raped her, beat her, and now - she gave him two beautiful children with a third on the way. She loved him, was loyal to him, wanted to be with him. I didn't believe for a second he was faithful to her. Rich, successful, handsome men didn't know how to be faithful.

Caleb said something he found very funny. He touched Caleb's arm, tossing his head back and laughing. His laugh was warm and rich. They had gone for coffee up on the seventh floor

after our meeting. We didn't have to pay for it, but it was terrible coffee. They had slipped up there after a readout call. It had been scheduled with some of the other tax people from their company back in Germany, but since Furst was in the city he came in for it. The only reason I hadn't felt completely enraged by it was because Chris was also not invited.

The *most* annoying thing about him though, was how easily he had ensnared Caleb. Caleb deferred to him. Almost *groveled*. That wasn't who Caleb was. Caleb was three times the man Furst was. Ten times. A hundred times. I didn't want him listening to Furst. Learning from Furst. If he did, Caleb wouldn't respect my intelligence anymore. He wouldn't love me the way he claimed to. It would be impossible.

I watched them from the copier. They walked into his office, Caleb flashing me a smile, Furst giving me a cold, appraising look, and then following him inside. In a second, Anne was standing beside me, a stack of papers in her hand I was very certain did *not* need to be copied.

"How is one man so freaking sexy?" Anne asked me.

"I doubt he'd be as handsome if he wasn't European," I muttered, but even I knew that wasn't true.

"I like Crispy a lot but Jesus if the first thing I didn't do was look for a wedding ring on his hand."

"You think that matters to a man like him," Amelia said, joining them. "I don't think any of us would have a problem getting a nice quicky this afternoon if we tried. I mean, not that you can anyway, Ellie. How bad would it look, sleeping with a client. It would be just as bad as sleeping with ... I don't know, your direct supervisor."

"Who's sleeping with their supervisor?"

It was Molly. I met Amelia's eyes. "I don't know. Any ideas, Ellie?"

“God, he is a fine looking man.”

“He’s alright,” I answered and collected my papers. I would *not* be a part of the pack of girls ogling. Not over any man. Certainly not over a man like *him* . If they didn’t have any self respect that was fine. That wasn’t me.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said to Amelia. “Maybe think things through before you say things that could cost someone their job.”

She blinked in surprise. Surprise I’d called her out so directly or in public with witnesses, I didn’t know. I plopped back into my chair with a sigh. As long as I didn’t need to interact with the man, I’d be fine. I couldn’t stand him. I used my phone to google him. Not much popped up outside of his professional life. There was a nice little blurb at the bottom of one article that he enjoyed spending his free time with his wife and two young children.

Looking up Jessica Furst yielded very few results. Jessica Allen brought up quite a bit. It seemed so unfair that his name yielded only results of success, wealth, power, and business ingenuity. Hers showed pictures of her looking sickly, weak, detailed the international search, the eight month disappearance, details about what kind of sexual abuse and subjugation she suffered. Pictures from her medical exam after discovery had leaked to the internet not long after she returned to the United States. The bite mark. Bruises. Despite everyone saying she was malnourished and underfed, it didn’t look to be the case. She was slender, but her ribs weren’t visible in the one photo supposedly documenting a bruise with a little L shaped ruler a few inches above her belly button. She had dark circles under her eyes. She had a far away look in her eyes. Nothing appeared about the fabricated story that she had run away with Furst and didn’t realize the national manhunt for her until she has left him. There were theories that Furst had been the one to kidnap her and there was simply some sort of Stockholm syndrome thing occurring. Others thought they just met by chance, wholly unrelated to her disappearance. But her life was inextricably linked to her kidnaping and rape and it made me feel a bit sorry for her.

My phone buzzed. I grabbed it and felt a smile come to my face.

You are more beautiful every time I see you.

I can’t wait to spend the weekend with you. Just us.

I typed back, *I'm excited too. It's going to be fun.*

Forecast looks great. Friday and Saturday first 80 degree days of the year and then thunderstorms all day Sunday. Perfect.

The Furst's would be leaving Boston next week. I just needed to get through that and hopefully I'd never see either one of them again. I focused instead on getting as much work done as possible so we could unplug this weekend. We both worked late Tuesday and Wednesday. Now, Thursday, we had skipped the gym and got into the office at about five.

Chris would cover for me, but it seemed like the weekend would be quiet. That did happen. The tough part of M&A was the unpredictability. Some weeks were dead. Some were soul crushing.

We need to leave separately. At least an hour apart. Amelia made a comment to me about sleeping with your direct supervisor.

I saw dots pop up. Then stop. Then more dots.

Ok. Finish up the BOLT comments and then head out. I have some things I need to wrap up. I'll get the car on my way home. Can you get my toiletry pack into my suitcase and just have it by the door?

I told him I would and went back to the comments. I cleared them, finished up some admin tasks, and then logged off for the day. I made a point of saying goodbye to Steve, who sat next to Amelia, and left without even looking into Caleb's office. I texted him to let him know I was home and set about readying for our trip. I packed a bag with snacks. It wasn't a long trip but traffic was unpredictable heading north for a long weekend. My phone buzzed and I checked it immediately.

Be home around seven.

I felt bad. I should have offered to help. I reminded myself somewhat bitterly that he was a manager. His technical knowledge *far* surpassed mine. What help could I have offered? I got his things together and put them beside the door. I also collected his chargers and his book and put them on top. I double checked my own things and by 6:30, I was ready to go. I made us a couple sandwiches and added those to our snacks bag, which had a couple granola bars and two cans of diet cokes.

He came in with a smile on his face, happy to be on vacation. I told him what I'd done while he changed. He seemed pleased with me. He double checked to make sure he had everything and then we were off.

"I got you some special outfits," he grinned. "A new bikini. And I have a surprise for you tomorrow night."

"What is it?"

He smirked at me.

"That's not how surprises work."

We got out of the city without hitting too much traffic. We hit some as we passed Lowell then again by Lawrence. After that, it was just a straight shot north on empty roads and music playing. Moving north of Concord, he reached out and grabbed my hand, holding it in his lap.

We stopped at a gas station about halfway. I needed the bathroom, and even though I was nervous about asking, he had no problem stopping the car and getting out with me. This was the part of road trips that I always hated. I hated having to step outside and walk to the door, hoping one of them isn't inexplicably locked. Why is one door always locked? Who does that benefit? Then stepping inside and trying to figure out if there's a bathroom. Then trying to figure out if you need a key. Then having to *talk* to someone to get the key. And what if they need you to buy something? Ok, that's fine, I can buy something, but what if they think I wasn't going to or wasn't willing to buy something. I was. It was just way too much stress. But then if you drank too much it was inevitable, but I hated being thirsty, so then, you needed to drink just enough to ...

“Bathroom?” Caleb asked the attendant after opening the front door and guiding me inside.

“Right corner. No key.”

“Thanks man.”

Caleb squeezed my hand and walked me to the bathroom. The door didn't have a vacant/occupied sign. Why didn't every bathroom have that? Then you have to knock and *hope* you can hear someone through the heavy thick door. *Hope* they locked the door if you didn't hear them. *Hope* you didn't walk into them. And if you did...

Caleb wrapped on the women's restroom door with his knuckles, ear close to the door. He opened the door and glanced inside before pushing it open.

“I'll be right by the door. Unless you want me to wait for you here?”

I shook my head, a little smile on my face. I tugged on his hand and got to my tiptoes so I could place a soft kiss to his mouth. He was at the register buying some gum when I walked back up to him. I slid my arm around his and took hold of his hand. He grinned at me, giving my hand a squeeze.

I felt very light walking back to the car. He opened the door and guided me inside with a hand to my waist and lower back. I kissed him again when he got inside. He deepened the kiss, a smug smile on his face.

We talked briefly about work on the rest of the way up. We talked a bit about the lake house they were going to. About forty minutes from Attitash. I was relieved by that. During the spring and into the summer, my parents practically lived at their second summer home near the resort. They were almost certain to be there this weekend. I checked my phone. They hadn't texted me about it. They didn't invite me anymore. They knew I wouldn't go.

The lakehouse itself was amazing. Three stories high, the third floor loft style, with the entire west facing wall made of glass windows floor to ceiling.

“The sun rises right there,” Caleb told me, pointing just to the right. “It’s amazing. We’ll get up early and watch.”

He kissed my temple. I started laughing. If someone had told her two months ago that I’d have ended up at a romantic weekend getaway at Caleb Trent’s lake house I’d have called them delusional. He circled his arms around me and I sank into him.

“What’s so funny?” he asked with a smile of his own, a tilt of confusion to his voice.

“There’s no way this is real.”

We stared out the black windows in silence. Finally he turned me around.

“Listen, Orla...” he started. I looked into his eyes, heart pounding violently, waiting. He looked almost nervous, but I knew I was misreading him. Caleb Trent didn’t get nervous. He laughed. It was dark and bitter. “I know my words mean nothing to you. But I’m going to *show* you. I’m in this for the long haul, ok?”

He cupped my cheeks.

“I will *never* let you go. You’re *mine*. Understand?”

I wanted to cry. I nodded.

“I’ll show you,” he said, pulling me into a hug. “When we’re - when we’re married with kids, maybe you’ll believe me.”

I pulled him into a kiss. My chest hurt. I wanted him to stop talking. I kissed him, warmly and deeply. He picked me up and I put my legs around his waist. He walked me down the hall and pushed open a door, our mouths still together. He threw me on the bed, holding my wrists about my head with one hand, and yanked my leggings off with the other.

“Furst doesn’t let his wife wear pants,” he said. “But your ass looks so fucking good in these leggings.”

He smacked my ass for good measure.

Afterward, while he went into the bathroom, I laid in bed, staring up at the ceiling, very tired, a bit sore, and I wondered what a future with Caleb might actually look like. It was too painful to think about too long, so I got up and went into the bathroom. I peed, washed up, and put my leggings back on. He gave me a tour of the house. The master suite was locked. He wouldn’t sleep in his parents bed anyway but they didn’t trust any of their sons, least of all him. The kitchen was gorgeous, stone tile and granite countertops. My eyes found the wine shelf pretty quickly. When I looked back at him, he was looking at me. He leaned against the counter and scratched his temple.

“How do you feel about alcohol? I mean, do you think you’ll be able to get back to drinking casually? It’s fine if you can’t. I’ve never been a big drinker.”

“I don’t know,” I admitted. “I’m not sure if I ever had a healthy relationship with alcohol to be honest. Or my pills.”

“When you’re ready, we can try alcohol in moderation. I’ll give you a limit. If you find that you can’t do it, or it’s too hard, we’ll just go dry.”

“I can’t ask you to do that,” I said softly. He walked around the island and placed his hands around my waist. He gently pulled me closer.

“You’re the only drug I need,” he said. “You’re like a shot of heroin everytime I look at you.”

His lips very gently touched my neck. "I'll never get my fix though."

He pulled back. "Pizza and a movie?"

"I need to get into a bikini tomorrow," I reminded him.

"You think a couple slices of pizza tonight is going to matter?" he asked me. "Orla, I promise you, it's not as easy to gain weight as you think."

"I did a pretty fine job of it," I snapped and tried to pull away. He whipped me back with a hand around my wrist. His hand went into my hair.

"Orla. I need you to understand this. You were *never* fat. And I *like* curves."

"Promise you won't let me get fat again?" I asked him. He gave an exasperated sigh.

"You just don't listen to me. I promise, Orla. I won't let you get fat."

"Ok," I said.

We ordered pizza. I ate two slices and reached for a third. I hesitated and then withdrew my hand. Caleb picked up the slice and plopped it down on my paper plate.

"Fat tits and a big ass - don't get those eating salad," he told me. I blushed at the obscenity of it and ate the slice. I finished the movie curled up against him and ended up falling asleep. I woke up to him carrying me into the bedroom.

“Sorry,” I murmured. “I fell asleep.”

“Oh, is that what you were doing?”

I slapped him weakly and playfully. I pressed my face into his chest.

I murmured, “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For asking where the bathroom was. Bringing me to it. Offering to wait.”

“I’ll take care of everything for you,” he answered, laying me on the bed. He ran his hand over my hair. “I’ll take care of you. All you have to do is tell me what you need. And I’ll give it to you.”

He looked at me searchingly. He reached up and touched my cheek.

“Give me the chance, and I’ll be everything you’ve ever wanted. I am *exactly* what you need, Orla. And you’re exactly what I need. We were made for each other. And *don’t* laugh at me.”

I blinked, a bit more awake now. I wasn’t anywhere near laughing.

“We’re soul mates, Orla. And I won’t let you mess that up for us. We’re soul mates.”

He stood up, face flushed. I’d never seen his skin so red.

“Caleb - ”

“I forgot my charger in the car. I put your toothbrush and stuff in the bathroom.”

“Ok,” I murmured. He left, rubbing the hot, red skin at the back of his neck. I got up and walked to the bathroom. I brushed my teeth, washed my face, and got into bed. He was outside about a half hour before he came back inside.

“Is everything ok?” I asked him.

“What? Yeah. Yeah - I was - you know how my shrink told me to count to 500? Well he told me I needed to walk away when I was getting mad. When I knew it wasn’t the other person’s fault. So that’s what I did.”

I just nodded. I wanted to ask him why he was mad, but I didn’t. I waited for him to come back from the bathroom, tucked under the covers, the side lamp on. The bed was a queen. Dark blue sheets, dark blue comforter, like the one he had at home. The room wasn’t particularly large. It was cozy. He got into bed and turned off the light.

“Caleb? Are you mad at me?”

He pulled me into his arms and held me tightly.

“I’m not mad at you,” he murmured into my hair. “I love you.”

I opened my mouth. He told me not to say it unless I meant it. He’d get mad at me if I said it now. I snuggled closer to him. He squeezed me tight.

“Good night, Caleb.”

There was a long pause.

“Good night, Orla.”

“Get your ass out here!” He called from the living room. I stared at myself in the bathroom mirror, biting my bottom lip. I turned, glancing over my shoulder. There was a lot of ass. So much ass.

“Caleb - I I don't know about this.”

I grabbed a beach towel from the closet and walked down the hall. He was doing sit-ups in the living room, dressed in his bathing suit bottoms and a white tank. His arms looked fantastic.

“Drop the towel,” he ordered.

“Caleb, it's not really my style.”

He got out a few more sit-ups and then flipped over. He did push ups with ease.

“Drop it. Or your pretty little ass will be red when we get out to the dock. Actually. Leave it. I'd like to bend you over and give you a good spanking.”

I bit my bottom lip. He got up off the floor. Some veins were visible in his arms. He smiled at me and flexed.

“Wanted to get a little pump going. Get you all hot and bothered.”

He reached out and ripped the towel out of my grip.

“Caleb!” I cried. He spun me around and pushed me up against the back of the couch. His hand slapped down hard on my right ass cheek. I cried out.

“Actions have consequences,” he said and landed another hard slap on my ass. “And disobedience will be punished.”

Another slap. He squeezed hard.

“Because who's in charge, Orla?”

I hated the hot pulsing in my pussy and the overwhelming urge I had to ask him to put his cock inside of me.

“You are,” I breathed. He landed another hand slap to my ass. Once again, he held on, squeezing firmly.

“Who makes all the decisions?”

Another. God, it felt *good*. The heat. The stinging. The large, firm grip of his hand.

“You do.”

His free hand wrapped around my throat.

“What do you have to worry about?”

“Making you happy,” I answered, looking over my shoulder at him.

“I was looking for ‘nothing’ - but I like that better,” he smirked. He kissed my nose. “You know what makes me happy?”

His hand slid between my legs. He pressed his fingers into me.

“Ah,” I cried in surprise and pleasure. His cock was hard against my sore bottom.

“Fucking your pussy whenever the fuck I want.”

He yanked the bathing suit to the side and pressed the head of his cock to my pussy.

“Oh, you’re wet. A nice spanking will do that to a horny little slut like you.”

“Yes,” she agreed.

“Yes?”

“Yes. Please.”

I felt so empty. I moved my hips back into him. I wanted him inside of me.

“Please what, whore?” he asked me, hand tightening around my throat hard.

“Please fuck me, Caleb. Please.”

“Only good girls get daddy’s cock. Are you my good girl?”

“Yes, Caleb. I’m your good girl.”

“Beg for it.”

“Please, Caleb. I’m your good girl. Please fuck me. I’ll be so good for you.”

His fingers pulsed on and out of me. His thumb rubbed my clit.

“Caleb, please!” I cried, stamping my foot in frustration.

“Oh, now that’s not how good girls behave,” he taunted. An image flashed in my brain. My third week. Caleb standing over me. Looming. Pointing to each line of my report, telling me how poorly written it was. Pointing out every flaw. A glimmer of arrogant satisfaction in his voice as he spoke. I heard it there now. The way he said it. I sucked in a breath. What would he have wanted then? Me to tell him I needed help. Ask him to help me. Tell him I needed him.

“I’m sorry, Caleb. Please, teach me a lesson - just - just fuck me, please. Use me.”

“So selfish. Don’t try and manipulate me. You don’t want me to use you. You want to get off. Isn’t that right?”

“Y-yes. I’m selfish. I want - oh my god, Caleb, fuck.”

He was fingering me hard and deep. The pressure was terrible. Terrible and wonderful. He chuckled in my ear. I screwed my eyes shut, once again, I was back at my desk, Caleb, months later, telling me I shouldn’t still be making these mistakes. Sloppy. Lazy. Avoidable.

“Please, Caleb. I need you. Please. Please. I’m begging you. I - ” I cut off, a moan coursing through me. “Caleb. Caleb, you want me?”

“Oh, so bad, baby,” he breathed. He pressed his cock into me an inch.

“Please, Caleb. I want you so bad.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes, please. I - I need you. I need you to take care of me.”

He pushed more deeply into me and I moaned.

“That right?” he asked, tilting my face upward. He looked down at me, eyes burning. I realized with a shock I’d seen that look. I’d seen that look while he looked over me, after he’d thoroughly destroyed my report, after he’d asked me if I understood, if I needed help.

“Yes, Caleb. I need you.”

He pressed three fingers into my mouth.

“Good girl. Good girl. I think you’ve earned a reward.”

He pushed his cock the rest of the way into me.

“Oh, god. You’re fucking soaked.”

He grabbed me by the back of my hair and bent me over the back of the couch. He fucked me hard, pulling on my hair hard, and it was absolutely amazing. I came fast and he wasn't far behind. It wasn't long after we finished, as he was grabbing the sunblock from the linen closet, that I felt a familiar pulsing between my legs. I waited, hoping he'd fuck me again, but instead, he lead me out the side door and down to the dock.

Outside of the lake house, they had a grassy lawn area. Not large, but big enough to throw a football. The grill was still wrapped up from the winter. The dock was out, and jutted out in a skinny walkway. Once the boat was cleared, which was a relatively new, sleek looking deck boat, a larger dock was attached. It was a great place for lounging. Caleb got us some chairs and carried them out. The other homes were visible, but there was a lot of land on either side. Without a doubt, this place was expensive.

Caleb removed his shirt. It was only about ten, but that tell tale promise of a hot New England day hung in the air already. The first real hot day of spring, a promise of summer. I read a bit, but I found myself repeating the same sentences over and over again, and as the morning continued on, I still felt that pulsing between my legs. I lowered the book down onto my chest and looked at his leg. I was lying on my back on my towel. He was seated not far from me in his beach chair. He was almost done with the book I had recommended. I smiled, squinting out the sun. He was engrossed. I reached out and touched his leg. I ran my fingers through the thick black hair. I saw a tiny pink scar there. When I looked back at him. He was looking at me.

"What happened?" I asked, tracing the little scar.

"I was the youngest. My brothers used to beat the shit out of me. That was when we were here actually."

He bent down to touch the scar.

"Right out there... see that island? There's a tire swing - or was - I don't know if it's still there. They agreed to bring me out there with them. Our cousins were with us. Two boys and a girl, all older. They brought alcohol and when I came back from a swim they decided to 'prank' me. Held me down and basically waterboarded with me beer. I remember Rachel, the cousin, straddled me while my brothers held my arms, Jesse and Rick held my legs. It was terrible. An old Rusty can was in the sand. Stuck my leg pretty good while I tried to get away. Part of it was still imbedded in my leg when we got home."

“That’s terrible.”

“They’re assholes. You think *I’m* arrogant?” He laughed, flashing his teeth, looking handsome as ever in his dark sunglasses. “You’re going to hate them.”

I ran my hand up the back of his calf.

“I already do.”

He smiled at me. I could only see myself. In the reflection of his sunglasses, I looked *good*.

I got up and kneeled between his legs, elbows resting on his thighs.

“I think they were jealous of you,” I said. His face turned very stern.

“They were,” he agreed. I glanced around, wondering what angles the other houses had on us. I let my hand slide to his cock. I was encouraged to find him hard.

“You know... my shrink told me I had a porn addiction. He said it could turn into a sex addiction if I wasn’t careful.”

I gripped his erection through his bathing suit. Sex addiction? That made you promiscuous, didn’t it? People who had a sex addiction had sex with more than one partner. Or maybe one partner, but then they got bored easily and moved onto the next. I didn’t know. I bit my bottom lip. His hand was on the back of my head.

“If it means I get to fuck you four times a day, I’ll take a fucking sex addiction. Haven’t looked at porn since the night of my promotion. Not with you at my disposal.”

I glanced around again and then reached for the waistband of his bathing suit. I waited for him to tell me to stop but he didn't. I took out his erection and licked up the side. He let out a little sigh.

"I want you to fuck me again," I told him.

"Oh yeah? I knew you were a slut. The moment I saw you come off that elevator, and drop all your stuff. Your eyes were so big and wide. You looked so scared. So beautiful."

I sucked the tip of his head, licking in little circles. I took my mouth off of him and gave him steady, hard strokes.

"You really wanted me then? I thought you couldn't stand me."

"Mouth on my cock, slut," he said. I put his cock back in my mouth. "I wanted you the moment you looked in my eyes. I felt it, Orla. In my bones. It was like a jolt. Pure, a million volts of electricity. God, I wanted you. And you were such a *bitch*."

His hand gripped my hair tight.

"I'm sorry, Caleb," I told him. "I'm sorry. I should have... if I *knew*..."

"You'd what?"

His grip on my hand tightened. He pulled on my hair hard.

"If I thought you really wanted me, I'd... I'd..."

“ *What ?*”

“I’d have done anything you asked. Anything you wanted... if I knew...”

“Anything huh?”

He grabbed his cock and slapped my cheek a couple times.

“God, I wish I found you in college.”

“I’d have... you would have broken my heart.”

“No,” he said. “I’d have trained you right. None of this body image bullshit. This fear of rejection because of that absolute scum bag.”

He pulled me off his cock by the hair and laid me down on my towel. He slid his hand into my bathing suit bottoms. He rubbed me hard.

“He didn’t not talk to you because of your body, Orla. He didn’t talk to you because he was a fucking asshole who couldn’t see what kind of girl he had. He fucked you because he wanted you. He wanted your body. He couldn’t see the worth of you are. Your mind. He was a fucking idiot.”

“Please fuck me, Caleb.”

In that moment, I didn’t care who could see.

“Please. Caleb. Please, I... I want you inside of me so bad.”

He pulled my bathing suit bottom to the side. He slipped his fingers into me. He went in easily, I was wet.

“God, I want to get you pregnant,” he breathed. It didn’t quite register. I wrapped my arms around his neck.

“I’m ready,” I told him as he entered me. “I’m ready for you to... play with me again.”

“Yeah?” he panted.

“Do what you want... whatever you want I - I want to make you happy.”

“You want to make me happy?” he asked. I nodded. “Then shut up, spread your legs wider, and take what I give you.”

I closed my eyes, spread my legs as wide as I could, and obeyed.

“Do you feel beautiful?” he asked. “Because you should.”

I looked at myself in the mirror. He had bought me a beautiful sundress. One I imagined Jessica Furst would wear. It was dark purple. My eyes looked greener than ever, which I liked, but my hair looked more red than brown. I wasn’t sure if I liked that.

“God look at you.”

He was in tan chinos, pale blue button down, and a navy blazer. He gripped my waist.

“So fucking beautiful. Best woman on the planet. And fucking mine.”

“Think you’ll be able to fuck me again tonight?” I asked, a little smile playing on my lips. Our eyes met in the mirror. “I mean... if you can manage it.”

“You fucking bitch,” he said. I smothered a smile. “You won’t be walking in the morning.”

He smacked my sunburned button. I yelped. When we got into his car to head to dinner, he asked me if I could close my eyes without getting sick. I could. I’d never been one to get nauseous easily. He didn’t make me close my eyes until we were about twenty minutes away. I bit my bottom lip hard, enjoying the way his fingers felt in my inner thigh, the way they placed with the thong he’d made me wear. I felt the car park.

“Ok. Open. We’d come here all the time when we were young. My parents loved it. Not super fancy obviously, but pretty nice. Look at that view.”

The moment my eyes opened my lips parted. I looked around, eyes darting side to side. The beautiful restaurant sprawled across the bright green field, skirting up along the little hill. The mountains jutted up out of the horizon. Large, looming, and beautiful. It was paradise. Absolute perfection. If someone asked me to show them New Hampshire in a snapshot, it would be this view. These mountains. I felt sick. He got out of the car and I started to shake my head. No sound escaped my lips. He walked around the car and opened my door.

“You’re turning into a needy bitch,” he said, reaching around me and unbuckling my belt. He kissed my temple. I got out of the car, my entire body feeling numb. I couldn’t feel my legs.

“It’s nice though. I got us a nice table. It overlooks the mountain. Near sunset, it’s gorgeous.”

“Caleb..”

“And I ordered us a nice bottle of champagne. Just the bottle. We’ll have a couple glasses each. And then we’re done. I think that’s a good test and still romantic -”

“Caleb. Caleb.”

I turned to him, patting his chest hard.

“Are you alright?” He asked, touching my cheek. I turned my gaze upward. My eyes locked on his.

“Caleb, I know you had this whole thing planned and I know you wanted this to be special and it would be but please please can we leave?”

His brow furrowed.

“Caleb, please, you asked me to trust you? I need you to trust me now. *Please*. I'll explain later but please - we have to leave.”

“Yeah - yeah. I trust you. Ok.”

He looked deeply concerned, but he opened my door and was about to usher me inside, when I heard it. My limbs went numb. That icy chill of dread took hold.

“Ellie! Ellie! Is that you?”

I closed my eyes. My knees felt shaky.

“Ellie? Oh, Frank, I *told* you. I knew it was her. Ellie, darling, why didn't you tell us you were coming. You knew we'd be here.”

Caleb looked over his shoulder.

“Orla?” he asked.

“Ellie! I know you can hear me! Look at you! Oh my god. Frank, look at her!”

Then a woman in her late fifties was wrapped around me, holding me close, placing warm kisses to my cheek.

“Oh, my Ellie. Frank! Frank, why are you walking so slow? And oh my god. Who is *this*? Oh, Ellie. Who is this handsome young man?”

She pulled away, a bright smile on her face.

“Um, this is” My throat felt so tight. I thought I was going to faint.

She beckoned the slightly overweight man over. He limped over on his two fake knees. He had a bright smile stretched across his ruddy face.

I swallowed hard. The ruddy man kissed my cheeks. He patted the top of my head. “Ellie, what are you doing here, kiddo, huh?”

“M-m....”

I clutched the back of Caleb’s blazer. I leaned into him. He supported my weight, his arm circling around my middle.

“Mom.”

I met her bright green eyes.

“Dad.”

He grinned. His hair was as red as ever.

“This is... This is my boyfriend. Caleb.”

I let my eyes close and felt my knees dip, but Caleb was there, and he didn't let me fall.

Chapter Notes

I am deeply sorry for the wait. I struggled immensely with the dinner scene. I sincerely hope it was worth the wait.

I DO plan on finishing this story. Hopefully sooner rather than later. I'm hopeful getting over this hurdle will allow me to update with more consistency here. I really, really struggled with this one, but I am pleased with how it turned out. Hopefully you guys are too.

Please be kind!

I knew the restaurant well. It was part of a country club and had a hotel attached to it. My father came here as a boy and his parents came before him. My mother began summering here with her grandparents when she turned sixteen and it was here that they met. They would tell the same story every time we came, which in my youth had been almost every weekend in the summer. We would have the same table, talk to the same waiter, who I remembered being Stephen. It was here that they tried to force any man they could on me.

Oh, he's tall Ellie.

Oh, he's handsome, Ellie.

I think he smiled at you, Ellie.

Go talk to him, Ellie.

It got so bad that when I turned eighteen I just stopped going. I simply refused and after the horrible fight that resulted, I went in on an apartment with some girls I barely knew from school. I hadn't been home since. I kept the promise I made during that fight. They'd see me on holidays and the occasional special event. Birthdays, funerals, weddings, etc. They didn't understand me and they made no attempt to. Even now they didn't. If they did, they would accept the current arrangement and try to meet me where I was. Instead, at almost every interaction, I'd hear about it. It ranged. Sometimes it was a direct interrogation. Other times it was the slightest little dig. Usually from my mother. She had a way of slicing into your deepest insecurities with a smile and a giggle. Especially if she was on her second or third glass of wine. And now they were here, right in front of me, at this place I hated, and I had to introduce Caleb to them.

I forced my eyes open and put a smile on my face, but it felt tight and forced. My mother was dressed as she normally was. A dress that was just ever so too tight, though she was as skinny as ever. She had her pearls on. Always pearls. And her hair, cut just beneath her shoulders, was curled and held rigidly in place with far too much hairspray.

“You don’t look happy to see us,” my mother said with a tight smile of her own and a tilt to her head. Her ruby red lips curved upward, lines spider webbing out from her mouth. She was at the tail end of her Botox treatment by the looks of it. “Not expecting us?”

“Helen,” my father muttered, shaking his head. I loved my father, but he was a weak man, and he was never quite brave enough to stand up to my mother.

“You come here every weekend, mom, did you think I thought this would be the one weekend you wouldn’t be here?” I asked. “Oh, Caleb, let’s go to a place my parents have gone to every weekend for the past forty years, I’m sure they’ll skip this one.”

“Ellie, really,” her mother said, trailing her freshly manicured nails along the string of pearls around her neck. French tips. Perfect and square.

I put my fingers to my mouth and shook my head. I could feel my eyes filling with water. A stress reaction I often had when my parents were around. My heart was pounding violently against my ribcage, my face was hot and my chest was tight. I felt like I couldn’t breathe.

“I’m sorry, this was my fault,” Caleb interjected. He had a little smile playing across his lips. He looked bashful, almost embarrassed, but his grin was charming, and I could see the look of hesitant approval begin to gloss across my mother’s tanned face. His arm around me tightened and I caught my breath, my parents’ attention now centered squarely on the man I was with. “This was supposed to be a surprise.”

I looked up at him, brow knitting. He looked at me, eyes twinkling innocently. This was the Caleb that the world would see if I ever tried to tell anyone what he did to me. Charming, handsome, unassuming. Who would believe crazy, hysterical Orla next to a man like this? He continued on. And my parents already loved him. I could see it in my father’s stern face and mother’s glossy eyes.

“We were supposed to get here early, you’d be brought to our table, we’d have some champagne, a scotch for the gentlemen,” he said pointing at my father, who suddenly had a smile on his face. “Unfortunately, I couldn’t find my keys and Orla told me how punctual you both are. Honestly, I’m embarrassed.”

My mother’s smile warmed, easily charmed by good looks and designer clothing. Caleb was the child my parents wished they had. The child they thought I could be if I just tried a little bit harder. I hated them for it and I hated him for it.

“Oh, don’t be embarrassed. This was a surprise for us? That’s so unlike you, Ellie. How on earth did you get her to agree to such a thing?”

My face flush and Caleb’s smile widened.

“I can be very persuasive,” he said, his hand tightening on my hip. “Let me go talk to the front desk. I’m late so I’m hoping they didn’t give our table away. Orla, we booked it on your card, so why don’t you come with me?”

I was nodding dumbly, unable to speak. Caleb pushed on, calm, unphased, relaxed. The only good that came from this was that my parents’ eyes were fixed squarely on him.

“Why don’t you two wait at the lawn bar? I’m sure we’ll have everything sorted out once you’ve gotten your first drink.”

My mother was deeply pleased with the suggestion.

“Of course. Of course. What a fine young man you found, Ellie. You’ll have to tell me how you finally managed that.”

I stared at her as she turned and dragged my father along with her. I watched them and then felt Caleb's large, comforting hand on the back of my neck.

"Orla?"

"Come on," I said tightly. Perhaps this was for the best. If we could survive tonight, I could put off another interaction with them for at least half a year where I could hear them talk about how amazing the man that raped me was and how even more amazing it was that I actually managed to catch his attention. Until Christmas came around hopefully. And at least this way, I didn't have the days or weeks of anxiety prior to the encounter. Sleepless nights and painful knots in my stomach.

I looked at Caleb, wondering if I should warn him for the shit show he was about to witness. Well, if he wasn't going to get bored of me, certainly my parents would scare him away. I should be grateful, but I was scared and I was sad. He waited, looking back at me with a neutral expression on his face. I just shook my head, put on a bitter smile, and started toward the front door. "Let's get this over with."

Let's get this over with.

She walked away from me, up the front steps, her back rigid. Heat radiated up the back of my neck and along the crown of my head. The necklace in my breast pocket felt like a brick against my pounding heart.

Let's get this over with.

It was supposed to be a romantic dinner. Just the two of us. A glass of champagne, a gorgeous sunset against the mountains. Smiles and laughs and the romantic dinner I had wanted to give her from the moment I watched her struggle to pick up all those scattered paper at my feet. It wasn't *my* fault her parents were here. It wasn't *my* fault she didn't like her parents. I followed behind her, glaring at the back of her head. I caught up to her fairly easily. I probably had half a stride on her. By the time I caught up to her, I grabbed her by the arm and drew her toward me. I gained the attention of one old couple in the corner, but luckily for me, they were of the generation where you said nothing and minded your own business.

“Cut the attitude, Orla, do you hear me?” I said. For a moment, the scowl on her face flickered and her lips parted. I reached into my pocket, glanced around, and then put half a Xanax into her palm.

“This dinner will go smoothly because your parents are going to like me. Do you understand?” I told her. Her mouth was pinched tightly, her jaw jutted to the side, her eyes hard and angry. She shook her head. I reached up, almost grabbing her by the chin, but instead, I placed my hand on her cheek.

“I can’t...” she said and then looked down at her feet. I tilted her face back up.

“But *I* can,” I said. I shrugged and grinned. “Parents love me.”

She just stared, that sour look back on her face.

“Now come on,” I said, dropping my hand and turning away from her “*Let’s get this over with.*”

“Caleb,” I called after him but he ignored me. I swallowed down the tears I wanted to let loose and followed him up to the front desk. A woman was chattering on the phone. She was about fifty-five by the looks of her, very well dressed and aging beautifully. Her dark eyes lit up when she spotted Caleb and a smile erupted across her face. He gave a sheepish smile and a tilt of his head as we approached.

“Yes, yes. Eight thirty on the twelfth. Yes, thank you, Mr. Henderson.”

She hung up the phone and a large smile spread across her face.

“Caleb. Trent.”

She held out her hands to him and then came around the table.

“Hello, Marci,” he grinned and they embraced warmly. She touched his face as they pulled back.

“Oh, you just get more handsome every time I see you,” she gushed. “And even taller.”

“Same height as I’ve been for seventeen years, Marci,” he said.

“And this must be the gorgeous Orla you told me about. Oh my. Caleb said you were the most beautiful girl on Earth, I thought he was being hyperbolic. Now I can see he was just trying to do you justice. How’d you snag this one?” she turned to ask Caleb the last question. My cheeks were flushed and I struggled not to smile. I looked to Caleb to see his reaction. He was smiling, eyes moving from Marci to me.

“He’s persuasive,” I said to Marci. Caleb was looking down at his feet, the smile stuck on his face. It didn’t look so pleasant to me. They flickered up to mine, hard as stone, and I knew, as unfair as it all was, I’d regret it tonight. I looked back to smile at Marci. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“And you. Your table is all ready for you. Let me get Rachel to bring you over, but I want to see you again before you leave, child.”

“Actually,” Caleb began, leaning against the front desk. “I have a *massive* favor to ask you.”

Marci pretended to be annoyed.

“And what is it this time?” she asked primly, but judging by Caleb’s smile, she wasn’t really that angry.

“So, as you know... this was supposed to be a romantic dinner for two. Turns out her parents are here.” Caleb touched his chest. “I didn’t quite do my due diligence. So we need to make this look planned.”

“Say no more,” Marci said, holding up a finger. She picked up her phone and jabbed a couple numbers. While she waited for it to ring, I looked back at Caleb. He was looking at me, that little smile on his face, his eyes still hard. I trembled internally. I didn’t know why he was mad at *me*. I hadn’t done it. I hadn’t planned it. I would have told him this was a bad idea if he asked. I sucked in a breath, but it was shuddering and halting and I felt tears at the back of my eyes. Caleb took a few steps closer to me and took my hands.

“This is supposed to be a happy event,” he murmured. “No crying.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but Marci was saying his name.

“All set. Being turned into a table four as we speak. By the time you get there, the table will be ready.”

“You are an absolute life saver, Marci,” Caleb smiled. I reached out to take Caleb’s hand, my need for him to ground me outweighing the terrible fear of rejection. If he refused to take my hand I would walk out. I just wouldn’t be able to survive it all alone and I needed to know he’d at least give me *that* . Even as I had to watch him charm my parents and even as I would have to listen to him and my parents gang up on me.

She’s always so anxious about everything.

If she just put herself out there she’d see how charming she is.

If she dressed better she’d feel more confident.

Why can’t she just see how beautiful she is?

I didn’t need it from all of them. I didn’t need it from *him*.

My fingers brushed his and he looked down. Then his hand closed over mine, fingers threading together, and he squeezed. I stepped closer to him, relishing in the size of him. At least if I was near him no one would look at me.

“What an absolutely gorgeous couple. I expect an invite to the wedding,” Marci winked. Caleb laughed.

“You’ll be front and center, Marci,” he said and kissed her on the cheek. She slapped his chest playfully.

I tried to fight off the ache in my chest and instead, placed my other hand over his. He walked us to the table. I remembered looking at it as a young girl and wishing we could sit there, but for all the money my father had, he was very frugal, and he refused to spend the money. I wondered how much Caleb had spent to bring a girl he didn’t need to impress to a dinner like this.

The table was on a slightly elevated portion of the restaurant, surrounded by windows in a little alcove. Outside the windows was a large field that rolled on for miles until it turned to mountains. Green and lush and towering against a perfectly blue sky. It was brilliant. Beautiful and romantic. I shook my head again, trying to keep my tears at bay. Of course, they had ruined everything. I should be smiling across the table at Caleb right now, sipping on champagne and asking him if it was OK that I was drinking. He’d tell me it was and that he would take care of everything. Instead, I was on the verge of tears, hardly concealing my internal tremble from becoming visible, counting down the seconds for it to be over.

“I’ll go get your parents,” Caleb said as he pushed in my chair. He kissed me on the cheek but I caught his arm because he could go.

“You’ll sit next to me?” I asked. His eyes looked deeply into my own.

“Of course.”

I nodded. I squeezed the arm of his blazer, not wanting him to go. Eventually, I did let him go and put on the best smile I could manage. He looked at me, eyes narrowing intently.

“I’m going to take care of this, Orla. I promise you.”

I nodded, my lower lip trembling.

“Don’t cry,” he murmured. “Not here.”

His thumb gently brushed a tear away.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry,” he said. He knelt down in front of my chair, taking my hands in his. “You let me take the lead. These situations are the ones I handle best. I’m an asshole but I’m charming.”

I laughed at him, feeling some of the tension leave me. I nodded, looking at our hands in my lap.

“You should get up,” I forced a smile. “Before people think you’re proposing.”

He didn’t smile. He just looked at me. Finally, he nodded and got to his feet.

“I’ll be right back,” he said. He touched the back of my head and then I was left alone. I looked out at the mountains and tried to collect myself. I just hoped he wouldn’t take too long.

I walked to the lawn bar the long way. I wanted to gather myself and give Orla time to gather herself. By the time I did arrive at the lawn bar, I was no clearer headed than when I left her.

All I knew was that I desperately wanted to get back to her.

Mrs. Wright was leaning against the bar, one glass of white wine half empty in her right hand, holding up a finger on her left hand to the bartender. Mr. Wright had a dark colored liquid in a rocks glass.

“What’re we drinking?” I asked with a grin as I walked up. They turned to look at me, Mrs. Wright with a critical furrow of her brow and Mr. Wright with a neutral expression. Upon seeing me, Mrs. Wright’s judgmental gaze lightened, and she smiled instead. “I hope you didn’t pay for those yet.”

I reached into my pocket to retrieve my wallet.

“Oh, no, no,” Mrs. Wright giggled.

“We couldn’t let you do that, son.”

“Please,” I said. “I insist.”

They relented and let me hand over my card to the bartender.

“Luckily the table wasn’t given away. Orla’s guarding it for us.”

“I must say, when she said she had a boyfriend I was shocked,” Mrs. Wright said. I was signing the receipt and tried to keep the smile on my face friendly. I already detested the woman. “Especially one so handsome and in such fine shape.”

Five hundred. Four hundred and ninety-nine. Four hundred and ninety-eight.

“Not that she’s not a pretty girl but she never puts herself out there,” she continued. Based on her glassy eyes and the slight slur to her speech, I would have bet money she’d had a few drinks prior to leaving for the restaurant.

“Helen,” Mr. Wright said again, low and under his breath.

“What? Tell me it’s not true. How’d you two meet?”

“We’ll tell you the whole story once we’ve sat down,” I said, pushing the receipt forward and putting my wallet back into my pocket. It was important we said it together so one of us didn’t add in a contrary detail. I looked at Mr. Wright, because I didn’t think I could stomach looking at his wife.

“Really though, what is that? It’s a great color.”

“You like scotch?” Mr. Wright answered instead of answering.

“A man of your taste. That’s either Macallan or Glenfiddich.”

He let out a deep laugh as we walked into the main restaurant through the patio entrance.

“Ah, a good man. Macallan,” he answered. I preferred Glenfiddich myself.

“Oh, Macallan is my favorite,” I grinned. Orla was looking down at her nails when we arrived. I watched the pinched, tight look cross over her face again when she looked up and saw her parents. That same face I had hated for months. The face I had resented for months. Seeing her sitting there alone, shoulders slightly hunched, it was with a violent pang I finally saw it for what it was. She was deeply, overwhelmingly anxious. It wasn’t snobbery. She wasn’t above it all. She didn’t think she was too good for it all. She was scared.

In a manner that almost bordered on rude, I positioned her parents in such a way that I was seated next to Orla. I would have planned on it anyway, but her request had made it an absolute necessity. She needed to know I would protect her.

I reached out to take her hand. She gave it to me, threading her fingers through mine and holding it firmly in her lap. Her nails were biting into my skin, but I didn't care. I enjoyed the feeling.

"Ok, so I must know," Mrs. Wright said. "How did you two meet?"

A waitress interrupted us, arriving to take our drink orders. I ordered the same thing her father had. Mr. Wright motioned to his own drink, indicating he was fine. And after finishing her first glass, and handing it to the waitress, she asked for a Chardonnay, despite having a full glass already in front of her.

"We're on vacation," she said to me after she ordered and then giggled into her wine glass.

"Um, can I have a diet coke, please," Orla asked the waitress softly.

"Oh, come on, Orla. This is a celebration."

"I'm going to have the champagne," Orla said, motioning with her free hand at the chilled champagne to the side of the table. When she lowered it, she placed it back on top of mine. I looked over at her, relishing the way her hand squeezed mine.

"Order some wine, Orla," Mrs. Wright said dismissively.

"Order what you want to," I told her. She looked at me, her eyes glistening, making those green orbs even greener. "I can drive if you want to drink. If you don't want to, then don't."

Her hands squeezed mine so tightly, if she were stronger, she might have broken it. I felt a surge of desire for her and she looked at the waitress, who looked quite uncomfortable.

“A diet coke, please.”

The waitress left and Orla repositioned her arm slightly, her arm looping more tightly around mine.

“So?” Mrs. Wright asked. She waved her hand between them, the giant diamond on her finger glistening brightly. “How’d you both met?”

I smiled and Orla looked at me, uncertainty shining in her eyes.

“I think we should tell them the truth,” I said. I watched her brow flicker. I looked back at them.

“We work together,” I told them. “We’ve been together officially for about two months but... we’ve been seeing each other since about just a couple weeks after she first started.”

“I haven’t seen anything on facebook. That seems odd after so long,” Mrs. Wright wondered. I nodded.

“We uh...” I looked at her, pretending to be embarrassed. I wasn’t. Not at all. I wanted to turn to them both and say *your daughter belongs to me*. But instead, I just shrugged and pretended to be embarrassed. “It’s kind of under wraps for the moment. I’m uh... I’m her boss.”

I waited, trying to gauge their reactions. After a moment, I added, “our relationship began before that though. I wasn’t her direct supervisor.”

“Ellie, honey, I thought you said the one you didn’t like got the promotion?” she asked.

“Oh my God, mom,” Orla whispered, taking her hand from mind to touch her face.

“What?” she looked at her husband. “She said she hated her boss, didn’t she?”

Orla reached back out to collect my hand. She squeezed it tightly, looking at me with concern. I felt my smile falter slightly. Anger, rage... *hurt*.

“I said he was hard on me,” Orla said. “Which is *true*. He is. But he’s a good boss.”

She reached up and her hand touched the back of my neck. Her hand was cool and soothing. I looked at her, wondering if my face was as red as it felt. I took a sip of my ice water.

“Trust me. Orla tells me what an asshole I am right to my face,” I said, smiling at her. I was about to bring up Deloitte. The interviews I lined up. The plans to go public once I accepted an offer in the fall.

“Wait, so you call her Orla? I haven’t been allowed to call her that since the eighth grade.”

“You know why I don’t like Orla,” Orla answered.

“Why? I think it’s beautiful,” I said.

“As do I,” Mrs. Wright said, taking another sip of her wine. “That’s why I gave it to her. But like everything else I give her, she resents it.”

“Wow,” Orla murmured, placing her hand to her lips. I shifted in my seat, fighting off a glare. If I had it my way we would leave. I’d grab her by the hand and storm out. It was simply my affection for Orla that kept me rooted in my chair and my mouth shut. Orla didn’t need me adding to her family drama.

“Am I wrong?” Mrs. Wright asked her husband, motioning out toward Orla.

“Helen,” he said under his breath.

“Drinks are here!” the waitress arrived with a smile. She placed the drinks in front of us and the table fell quiet. I looked at Orla, removing my hand from hers and draping it along the back of her chair. I trailed my finger along the back of her neck. If I had it my way I’d take her by the hand and take her back to the lake house right now. She didn’t need to sit through this. Against my better judgment though, I kept the smile on my face, knowing it was far better for Orla if this went well than if I created a further rift in their relationship.

The waitress asked, “Are you ready to order?”

“Oh, goodness me, I haven't even looked,” Mrs. Wright said.

“Can you give us five minutes,” I asked the waitress. She smiled and left. Once she was gone, I made sure to speak first and put on the most charming grin I could muster, determined to make this as painless for Orla as possible.

Caleb oozed charm. He didn’t even have to try. Arm draped possessively over my shoulder, he was relaxed, calm, confident. I had never felt quite so inadequate and I’d felt damn inadequate in my life. I watched my parents as they listened to him. Charmed and enraptured. My knee bobbed rapidly under the table.

“She didn’t want me to use it at first but.. We got to know each other pretty well. I had been working for about five years before she showed up, so when she started I offered to show her the ropes and we got to know each other. I told her how much I loved the name Orla and finally I broke her down.”

I fought a sour look from crossing my face. So our romance lie was exactly what he thought should have happened. I met him, awed by his good looks and charm, and fell right into his arms.

“See, *Orla*,” my mother said. It was difficult to keep a smile on my face. I didn’t like hearing her say it and I didn’t like the way she said it. “I told you.”

“Adults are a lot less cruel than fifth graders,” I answered, bringing my diet coke to my lips. I could feel hives beginning to appear on my neck and shoulders. It was only a matter of time before my mother brought *that* up too.

“Oh, it wasn’t that bad,” my mother said and took a sip of wine. “It’s an Irish name, sweetie. It’s not an odd name at all in Ireland.”

“We don’t live in Ireland,” I snapped. “We lived in bum fuck nowhere New Hampshire. Half these kids don’t even know Ireland is a country.”

“You’re always so dramatic, Ellie. Really. I *am* glad to see that you’re finally wearing your hair naturally. Have you told him you dyed it all through college?”

I sucked in a breath. Typical. If they had let me go by Ellie when I had asked to, maybe I wouldn’t hate Orla so much today. Maybe I would have grown to appreciate it and realize only idiot children who had never heard the name before thought it was funny sounding. But no, they forced it on me like everything else and now I hated it. And now she had to bring up my *hair*? I had dyed it for a semester after some idiot asked me if the carpet matched the drapes and said I was cute for a ginger.

“She’s an absolutely beautiful girl. Gorgeous. Green eyes, red hair, and yet she -”

“My hair is not red,” I practically yelled. “Oh my god, how many times do we have to fight about this? Dad has red hair. I *don’t*.”

Her mother let out a huff of exasperation. I felt Caleb's hand in my hair. He still had that infuriating smile on his face. I *knew* he'd agree with them. I was too sensitive. I needed to calm down. I wasn't really awkward. It was all in my head. Why couldn't anyone just *listen* to me?

"I don't care what color it is, I like it," Caleb said. I looked at him with a frown. He shrugged and said, "Call it whatever color you want."

"It's not red," I told him. He tilted his head, smile shrinking slightly, but somehow, looking more genuine as a result. He looked at my hair and nodded.

"I agree. Definitely not red."

I felt a little smile come to my lips.

"You want us to call you Ellie still?" My dad asked, graciously changing the subject. "Or Orla?"

"No. Ellie. Only Caleb calls me Orla," I answered immediately.

The waitress appeared, asking us if we had decided what we wanted yet.

"Oh, drat," My mom said. I shook my head. She came here enough. Maybe if she wasn't a bottle of wine in by the time she arrived she wouldn't have such a hard time deciding.

"I know what I want. If I can start, will everyone be ready?" Caleb asked and I could have kissed him. I didn't want the waitress to leave. I wanted this dinner to go by as quickly as possible. Caleb waited about ten seconds, looking over the menu, before saying, "I'll take the tuscan chicken, please."

He handed the waitress his menu with a smile and then looked at me next. I opened my mouth to speak but my mother interrupted. “Oh, Orla! They have the bolognese back on the menu.”

“She doesn’t like meat sauce,” Caleb said, his voice overlapping my own. He ignored my mother and turned his dark gray eyes on me. “You’ll like the herb crusted chicken.”

“I was looking at that,” I answered softly. I looked at the waitress and nodded.

My parents ordered and then the waitress left, once again leaving us alone.

“You always loved their bolognese,” my mother said, utterly baffled.

“No, *you* always liked it.”

“You a scotch drinker then, son?” My dad asked Caleb. There was a blissful five or ten minutes where the conversation revolved entirely around scotch. I watched Caleb charm my father and mother and for a moment I thought everything would turn out ok, but my mom was drunk and with that came her own twisted version of sentimentality and I caught her staring at me, glassy eyed, like she was about to cry.

“You just look so beautiful tonight, Ellie.”

“Thank you,” I said stiffly. She looked at Caleb.

“Isn’t she just beautiful?”

“Most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen,” he agreed with a smile.

“She just doesn’t see it. It kills me.”

Caleb was nodding and I wanted to hit him. He should be on *my* side not hers. He had no idea what it was like. I didn’t need to be made to feel bad about how I felt. I didn’t think my mother understood she could call me beautiful without making me feel ridiculous for thinking I wasn’t. That she could tell me I wasn’t fat without insinuating I was a drama queen fishing for compliments.

“She always undersells herself. It makes no sense to me.”

“I really don’t think this needs to be a topic of conversation right now,” I said, looking to Caleb for help. He was looking at my mother. The smile wasn’t there anymore.

“She just doesn’t see what we see,” Caleb said.

“Or refuses too. I tell you, what that boy did to you in high school had nothing to do with you.”

Caleb shifted.

“What happened in high school?”

“Nothing. Nothing happened,” I snapped, face burning red.

“Oh, a popular boy we knew from the country club asked her to prom. We got her a beautiful dress. Spent a small fortune on it. Got her hair done. Makeup. She looked so beautiful. I think I have a picture on my phone,” my mother said, rummaging through her purse.

“Mom. *Stop it.*”

She loved showing everyone that picture. Look how beautiful my daughter was on prom night. She didn't care it was one of the most painful memories of my life. That seeing that picture brought me right back there, sobbing my closet in that stupid prom dress.

"Of course, he never came to pick her up. I still think it was a misunderstanding."

"He went with his *girlfriend*," I said. "Can we talk about literally anything else?"

"Oh, here it is!" she said and held the phone out to Caleb. I felt a soul crushing split of embarrassment course through me as I saw it. A beautiful purple dress that would bring out my eyes. Too much makeup, ridiculous hair. I was smiling in the photo, so excited to have been asked to prom. Quiet awkward, Orla. It wouldn't be for another forty five minutes after that photo was taken that I would realize he wasn't coming.

"Beautiful," Caleb said. He looked at me. "He was an idiot."

I reached for my Diet Coke, but my eyes went to the champagne. I should have just ordered some wine.

"Do you golf at all, sir? We had an outing with a client last weekend. You should have seen Orla. Beat our boss."

I was relieved that Caleb was trying to steer the conversation in a different direction.

"You went golfing?" my mother asked in surprise. "My goodness we could never get her to go."

"Oh yeah, she's a natural," Caleb smiled. Caleb talked a bit about the courses he enjoyed in Connecticut, drawing my father into the conversation again. I lost myself in the memory of prom night, trying my very best not to start crying at the table. I should have known it was a cruel joke when he asked. Handsome, tall, on the football team. Why would he want to go to prom with the quiet girl that hardly ever spoke to anyone. The girl who spent her lunch

reading alone in the back of the cafeteria? And it hadn't even taught me my lesson. I *still* slept with that asshole in law school.

"That's a beautiful dress you're wearing, sweetie. Is it new?" my mom asked, completely interrupting Caleb, who was talking about his time on the varsity basketball team. If my dad had a son, he'd have wanted him to be like Caleb.

"Um, yeah," I said. "I bought a new wardrobe since my promotion."

"Oh, well thank God for that," my mom said. "You're so beautiful, Ellie, I'm so happy to see you actually taking care of yourself."

"Can we not right now, mom?"

"I'm telling you how proud I am of you honey. She hates when I brag about her. I bet you won't even want me to tell Angie how much weight you've lost."

"Why would that even come up?" I asked through a breathy, painful laugh.

"Because I'm proud of my daughter and want to brag about her."

"But you weren't proud before, is that it?" I asked.

"I have always been proud of you, honey. You know that. You always twist my words around and make it some terrible insult. Sometimes I just don't get you."

"Yeah, no one does," I whispered.

"Ellie, can't you just accept a compliment?"

I could hear Caleb in the back of my head asking me the same thing. I'd never felt so alone in my life. I wanted to scream. I didn't *know* why I was like this. I didn't want to be. I just was. And no matter what my parents thought I couldn't just flip a switch and be normal. If I could I would. God knows I'd *tried*.

"I'm sorry," I said, lip trembling slightly. I didn't want to cry. Caleb told me not to and my mom would somehow make it about her. About how I had ruined such a nice evening out by being difficult. I moved my napkin and readied to make a quick escape to the bathroom. "I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize to her."

I turned to look at Caleb who was staring at my mother with a blank look, but with flushed skin and a vein pulsing under his eye.

"I'm sorry?" my mother asked, touching her hand to her chest.

"I told her not to apologize to you," Caleb repeated. "You need to apologize to her or we're leaving right now."

"Excuse me, but you're not going to tell me how I can speak to my daughter."

"Yes. I am," he said, pressing his forearm to the table and leaning forward. "We've been here for less than forty-five minutes and you've brought up every single insecurity she has. You've brought up her hair, her eyes, her weight, her clothing, what was probably one of the worst nights of her life and brought up a picture of it like it was a happy fucking memory."

"Excuse me!" my mother sputtered. "I've done nothing but compliment her -"

“No, you’ve scolded her for not seeing things your way. You’ve brought up topics she didn’t want brought up. I’ve been trying to make things go smoothly for her sake, but I’m not going to sit through this entire dinner and let you use her like a punching bag.”

“How dare you. How dare you!” she said, her voice getting shrill. Caleb got up from his chair and reached into his pocket.

“You two have a nice dinner. Orla and I are leaving.”

He tossed down a couple hundred dollar bills on the table.

“When you want to conduct yourself with a bit more class and a bit more *compassion* you can call your daughter. You’ll be lucky if she wants to give you the time of day.”

He looked at me and held out his hand.

“Let’s go.”

I put my hand on his and let him walk me out of the restaurant, leaving my stunned parents behind.

“Ellie.”

It was her father coming out behind us. I stopped, ready to tug her away and tell him to go to hell, but she stopped me, placing her hand on the back of my hand. She nodded at me and I released her. I took a couple steps away, but remained close, watching her face for any sign of distress. She nodded as her father spoke. He touched her cheeks and kissed her on the forehead. They shared a quick hug and then he went back into the restaurant. Orla began to walk toward me and I turned, walking a few feet ahead of her to the car. I jabbed at the fob in my pocket and opened the passenger side door. I paused when I turned and spoke to her.

“I know you’re mad at me and I’m not going to apologize, so you can yell all you want,” I said. “I wanted that to go well and I really tried, but you don’t have to put up with that and I’m not going to tolerate it. I’m only sorry I didn’t take you out of that sooner. So, yell at me all you want but...”

She stepped toward me and placed her hands on either side of my face. She looked up at me, face impossible to read, and then she pulled me toward her. She pressed her lips to mine hard. She breathed in deeply and then let out a slow sigh, mouth still on mine. When she pulled back, she wrapped her arms around my middle and squeezed, her head pressed to my chest.

Her voice was quiet and she spoke into my chest, “Thank you.”

I wrapped my arms around her and squeezed. I struggled not to squeeze too hard.

“I should have taken you out of there sooner,” I said. She looked up at me, a little smile on her face.

“You’re on my side,” she said.

“Always,” I said.

She looked at me and then her smile widened.

“I’m hungry.”

“Then let’s get you fed,” I answered. She grinned, wider now, lighter. She slipped past me and into the passenger seat.

We sat on top of the picnic table, devouring our cheeseburgers, and looked out over the little overlook at the mountains. The high of the moment had faded some, and I was left feeling strangely calm. I was sure the Xanax had helped.

“My mom loves me,” I said. “I know that, but I’m not what she wants me to be. She dreamed of having a kid like you. And I think the hardest part is, she thinks I do it on purpose. If I could be normal I would be. I know what I need to do. I just can’t do it. People don’t get that.”

“It’s hard to understand,” he agreed. “Because you don’t seem awkward. I mean it, Orla. Almost every social interaction you think is awkward, isn’t. No one can tell.”

“Apparently, my awkwardness comes across as being a bitch,” I said and tried to smile at him. He stared at his half eaten cheeseburger. “The few times I’ve put myself out there... I’ve been hurt. Prom. James. And even before that... my dad owned a mill. Did you know that? Employed half the town. More than half probably. He sold it to a contractor who was going to put in condos. Made a fortune. Impoverished the town. I went to school with those kids. It was torture.”

I took another big bite of my burger and chewed slowly.

“We went to country clubs and flew to New York for shows, my mom bought me designer clothing, the best makeup, nice jewelry. I *hated* it. I cut myself off during college. I didn’t want any part of that money. I wanted to do it on my own.”

We were quiet for a bit, both of us watching the sun begin to set behind the mountains.

“You can do it on your own,” he said. “But no one can get through life without *some* help.”

He paused before continuing, “why is it so hard for you to ask for help at work? Is it the anxiety of just having to talk to someone? Is it... putting yourself out there?”

His face was pensive. For the first time, I felt like he was actually trying to understand it.

“It’s that. I don’t like talking to people I don’t know. I feel like I’ll mess up the conversation or... once people get to know me, they’ll realize I’m really not that special.”

I took in a deep breath and looked out across the valley.

“I’ve never felt like the pretty girl or the charming girl, or the funny girl. I was always the smart girl. I never had an issue in school. From elementary up through law school. It was *easy*. And I always had that. And then I started this job and it was just so... *hard*. And then suddenly... there was nothing I had anymore. Nothing that made me special.”

“You’re wrong about that though,” he said. I looked away from the sunset to look at him. “There’s so much about you that makes you special.”

“Caleb, I’m an anxiety riddled basket case that turns into a bitch when I’m embarrassed which, surprise, is all the time,” I said. He laughed.

“No,” he murmured. “You’re kind. You’re brilliant. You’re funny. You’re hot as hell.”

I laughed and looked back out over the mountains.

“It’s just hard... knowing the two people that are supposed to love you most wish they could change you. *I* wish I could change me. I just can’t.”

“I don’t want to change you,” Caleb said. “And if it seemed like I tried to, I’m sorry. All I want to do is make life easier for you. Just tell me how to help.”

“You want to hear something really pathetic?” I asked. He just waited. “Our drive up, going into the gas station to use the bathroom. You were so perfect.”

He frowned. “What did I do?”

“You opened the door. You talked to the guy. You knocked on the bathroom door and opened it. You waited for me.”

He still looked confused and I told him all the thoughts that had gone through my head in those moments from parking to getting back in the car.

“You thought all that?” he asked. I nodded, embarrassed. “I’d never have known.”

He put his burger down and took mine out of my hand. He took my hands.

“I can do all that, Orla. It just comes natural to me. I don’t even think about it…” his eyes moved over my face. “I want to take care of you. I want to be that person for you.”

I bit the inside of my cheek. He looked earnest. He looked like he meant it. I thought he might. And I knew if he wanted to, he could. I wondered how amazing it might be to have that incident at the gas station play over and over in all social interactions. How nice it would be to have him beside me when I had to see my mother again. I could only imagine how wonderful it would feel. How *safe* I would feel.

And that terrified me. Because at some point he’d be gone and I’d be alone again, and where would that leave me?

“I love you, Orla,” he said. He looked at our hands, his face warping into a bitter sort of smile. “I know it’s not exactly what you would have wanted but… you’re stuck with me.” He looked back up and smiled. “Might as well get some benefit out of it, right?”

I reached out and touched his face.

“Can we go to bed?” I asked. He cocked his head and grinned.

“I thought you’d never ask.”

Orla was a different person when we woke up the next morning. She was already awake, half draped on top of me, gently running her pointer finger along my chin and throat. I looked down, and her green eyes settled on me.

“Good morning,” she said softly.

“Morning,” I greeted, looping my arm around her middle.

“What are we doing today?” she asked, looking back at my face as she trailed little circles along my skin.

“There’s this little spot I like. Has some sun and shade. It’s tucked away and real beautiful. I thought we could go there. Have lunch and dinner and then come back.”

“Sounds romantic,” she murmured. She pressed her lips to my collar bone.

“That’s the hope,” I replied. I ran my hand up her spine. “How’re you feeling this morning? About yesterday.”

“Good,” she said. Her brow crinkled. “Weirdly good.”

She got up on her elbow, her other hand touching my chest.

“Good,” I smiled.

“What do you want for breakfast?”

“Hmmm, pancakes,” I grinned. I expected a fight from her, but instead, she asked if everything was in the kitchen. I nodded and leaned down to kiss me with a smile. She got out of bed and told me, “I’ll let you know when it’s ready.”

I took a shower and got into my swim trunks and a white sleeveless tee. When I walked into the kitchen, she was adding a pancake to the stack, wearing just her bra and underwear.

It was like every dream I ever had came true. I’d seen something similar from her before, but when she turned, spatula in one hand, pan in the other, it was with a bright smile on her face. It felt real.

“You like cinnamon right?” she asked. “You always get the cinnamon swirl when we order from Mike’s.”

“You stalker,” I said. She looked at me, cheeks flushed. I smiled at her and then she laughed.

“That’s me,” she said. “I put some cinnamon in the mix.”

“That sounds delicious,” I said, placing my hands on her waist. I leaned down and placed a kiss to her mouth. I slid my hand to her bottom and squeezed before giving it a hard slap.

“You’re a pig.”

I smirked and kissed her again. After breakfast, which we had on the dock and watched the sun come up over the trees, I had her change into a new bathing suit. She came out of the bedroom as I was closing the cooler with the champagne and strawberries, looking hesitant. She didn’t say anything, just watched me slowly as I took her in.

“Absolutely gorgeous,” I said. He put my hands on her, turning her around so I could get a good view of her. “God, you’re hot.”

“Thank you,” she muttered. I gave her some jean shorts to wear and a light linen shirt for a cover. We set off soon after.

“Kayaks or boat?” I asked her. My parents never gave me permission to take it out, but I did whenever I came up anyway.

“How far is it? Kayaking could be fun.”

After a brief discussion we ended up choosing the kayaks. I put the bags on the back of mine, though she offered to help. She glided out into the water with a smile on her face, looking the most relaxed I had ever seen her in my presence. The only time I had ever got a glimpse of it before was when I was just entering a room, before she saw me and her face turned sour.

She took off ahead of me a few times, before twirling herself with a laugh. She used to love kayaking when she was younger. She did a camp once where they went down a different river everyday. She told me about it as we went. I told her a bit about basketball.

“When did you stop growing?” she asked.

“I was my full height at thirteen. Hadn’t filled out yet though. I looked like a stick bug.”

She threw her head back and laughed. A real, full belly laugh. It brought a smile to my face, despite the name having caused a lot of pain in my young years. Another name my brothers were responsible for bestowing upon me.

“I’ll see if I can find some old yearbook photos. Junior high school Caleb was a wreck. Skinny, freakishly tall, and braces, and covered with zits.”

“Yeah but I already know who you were in high school,” she said. “Tall, strong, charming, handsome. Probably made your way through the cheerleading team... invited a girl to prom and didn’t show up...”

I grabbed the side of her kayak and pulled myself over to her. We bobbed in the middle of the lake and she looked at me like she was a child about to get scolded.

“I would never do that to you. Or any girl for that matter.”

“Caleb, you rape women,” she whispered. I stared at her. I didn’t have an answer for that.

“I didn’t ... always. It’s just this... compulsion. And it’s not about rape. I’m not a rapist. It’s being in control. Of dominating. And drugging someone... having them so helpless...”

I felt blood rush between my legs at the memory of her, sprawled out on the bed, unconscious, unable to prevent me from using her anyway I wanted. Then I thought of her on my bed, naked, wrists and ankles bound, gagged, looking up at me in fear. My entire body surged to life.

“I can promise you,” I said. “From high school to right this fucking second, I’d never play games with you.”

“Caleb,” she said, still a whisper, but with more severity. “You tortured me. The tie?”

“I mean about my feelings for you. Or your feelings for me. I like physical domination and I like... being in control of things, and I liked putting you in your place and teaching you a lesson which I ... *thought* you needed. I can see now that I didn’t understand what you were going through and that I misinterpreted a lot of what I thought was disrespect... but I’ve *never* been the type of guy who thinks it’s funny to get a girl to fall in love with you and not plan on returning that love or to trick a girl into bed or anything like that. And... any girl I’ve ever... they were always girls I wanted or had a relationship with. It was never a one and done thing.”

I wasn't explaining it very well and I knew that, but she nodded.

"And I'll never do it again," I said gravely. "I mean, I'll never do it to another woman. I won't promise I'll never drug you and fuck your unconscious body. That I won't give up."

I kissed her and then pushed her kayak away from mine before she could respond. We fell silent after that, both of us lost in our own thoughts. I thought about bringing up Deloitte. I should tell her that I had my interviews scheduled, it was a sure thing, and I was going to give my notice on October 1 if everything went according to plan. Then I would propose and I wanted to be married before next spring. I kept quiet though, and we turned the corner of a little island and I pointed out the secluded little beach we could spend the day at. The smile that came to her face warmed my heart.

"You're going to kill yourself," I told him, closing my book and taking off my sunglasses. Caleb had taken to running at full speed toward the kayak on the shore and skating it as far down the bank as he could. There had been a near catastrophe at least three different times.

"I think I can do it," he said, indicating the line in the sand he had dug with his heel.

"With a broken neck to show for it, sure," I agreed. He steadied the kayak at the edge of the water and then took a few steps back. He was shirtless, body bronze from the sun, hair wet from one of the falls into the water, some sand on his elbow. He looked very serious, and lined up his hand like a kicker about to kick a field goal. I tried not to laugh. He went running forward, surfacing on the kayak a good distance until he lost his balance and landed hard on the sand. The kayak went flying into the air and for a horrifying second I thought it was going to land on him. Instead, it hit the side and went slowly floating down the edge of the water.

I dropped my book and went running over to him.

"Caleb!" I shouted and knelt down beside him. He was laughing and pointing.

“Get the kayak. Get the kayak.”

I looked over my shoulder and then jumped off my knees beside him. I ran into the water, which was still frigid from the melting snows, and grabbed it before it got past my shins. After I dragged it back to shore, I knelt back beside him.

“You’re a moron,” I told him, placing my hand on his abdomen. I could feel the hard muscles beneath my fingers. He was smiling at me, his fingers playing with my bathing suit strap.

“But look,” he said, and pointed to the line in the sand that he had passed.

“Very impressive,” I said. His hands went to my waist and then he flung me around so I was on my back. “What are you doing?”

His lips were on my collarbone, then the top of my breasts, and then just above my bathing suit bottoms.

“You sucked me off on the dock yesterday. Thought I could return the favor,” he smirked.

“Caleb - ” my eyes scanned the trees around us. I didn’t see any other boats, no fishermen, no lake houses.

“Shut up, Orla,” he said. He pulled my bathing suit to the side. “Just lay back and do as you’re told.”

I was surprised at how happy I was to oblige.

It was about five when we decided to eat. Caleb had packed sandwiches for us and after we ate those, he dragged the heavy cooler over.

“Since we couldn’t really enjoy last night,” he said, and flipped it open. He retrieved a bottle of champagne and two glasses. As he poured it he said, “if you decide it’s too difficult to have a glass or two, we’ll just cut out alcohol. Like I said, I’m not a huge drinker so I don’t really care, ok?”

I nodded and took the glass from him. He took out a little tray of chocolate covered strawberries and then smiled at me.

“Little bit different than I’d planned but...”

He clinked our glasses together. He took a sip and then leaned down on his elbow. I had a sip of the champagne and then bit into the strawberry. When I looked back at him, he was looking at me.

“What?” I asked, touching my lip to see if there was any melted chocolate on it.

“Just looking at you,” he murmured. “You’re gorgeous.”

My mom was right about some things. I never was good at accepting a compliment. I turned my face to look out at the water. We would need to go back soon if we were going to be home before dark.

“Orla?”

I looked at him. He had a long velvet rectangle in his hand. He opened it, revealing a delicate silver chain with a gorgeous pear shaped diamond.

“Caleb,” I whispered in surprise.

“I wanted to give it to you last night,” he said. “I really had a nice dinner planned.”

I gave him an apologetic smile.

“It has our initials in it,” he said. “That’s what they told me anyway, you can’t really see it. I don’t know how they do it but that’s what they said.”

He took the necklace from the box and draped it around my neck. The diamond settled at the hollow of my throat.

“Caleb, this must have cost a small fortune,” I whispered, delicately touching the precious stone. When I looked up I met his gaze.

“I love you,” he said. “And I’m going to take good care of you. I promise.”

I nodded at him, my throat sore. He smiled softly and then leaned forward to kiss me. I kissed him back, wondering why I was so disappointed it hadn’t been a ring.

I woke up before Caleb the next morning. I hadn’t slept very well. After he gave me the necklace, we drank our champagne and ate the strawberries. We talked a bit about some memories he had on the beach as boy, restaurants he liked to go to in the area. He told me how he used to go to the country club we were at last night all the time. He had known Marci since he was a little boy. She used to stock her office with his favorite snacks and have videos and a VCR ready on there when he wanted to hide from his family. I told him about the weekends there and the humiliating experiences my mother had forced upon me.

We got back to the house before dark. We were both full and went to bed, nestled in each other’s arms. He had sex with me, murmuring in my ear that I belonged to him and nothing would ever change that. He put his hand around my throat and made me say it.

“I belong to you, Caleb. Forever. Yours.”

After we cleaned up, he fell asleep quickly. I struggled. I was more confused than I had been in a long time and that was saying something. I struggled to muddle through it all. Instead, around four am, I slowly crawled out of bed and went to the bathroom. I observed my necklace in the mirror, touching the delicate stone. I thought about our initials that may or may not be in there with a painful ache in my chest.

I wandered out of the house around 5:30. It was still dark out. The sky was cloudy and the sun wasn't set to rise for at least another hour. I brought a blanket with me and sat on the dock. I stared out at the water and tried to make sense of the mess in my head.

I heard the slider door open and close sometime later. I didn't turn my head until Caleb sat down beside me on the dock and handed me a cup of coffee.

“Thought you ran away,” he said softly. I opened up the blanket and let him join me inside. I leaned into him and my eyes. The urge to burst into tears was violent and overwhelming, but it lasted only a few moments. Then I lifted my coffee and took a sip.

“I love my necklace,” I murmured to him.

“Yeah?” he asked.

“You spent too much money on me,” I said again.

“Not enough,” he answered, taking a sip of his own. “Everything ok?”

I just nodded. A cool breeze skittered across the water and I curled into him. We watched the water, steam lifting off the surface. Even with the clouds and the darkness, I found it eerily beautiful.

“Orla?” he murmured softly. I opened my eyes and realized I had fallen asleep against him.

“Sorry,” I whispered.

“Don’t be sorry. I almost threw you in the water.”

“I’d kill you,” I told him. I wanted another cup of coffee. I took a sip of the one I had and found it cold. I wondered what time it was.

“It’s not that bad,” he said. “The water is probably warmer than the air.”

“Then you jump in,” I said.

“What do I get if I do?” he asked.

“You can have anything you want anyway,” I said to him.

“Hmm. That’s true,” he said and kissed my neck. “But I do like bets.”

“Ok. You jump in right now and I’ll...”

I tried to think of something crazy and sexy. I stared at him, considered for a moment and then said, “I’ll give you a foot rub while we watch a movie this afternoon. Before I suck your dick.”

My cheeks were flushed and he smirked at me.

“Naked?” he asked. I nodded.

“Or in whatever you want to see me in.”

He grinned and got to his feet. He took off his shirt and dropped it down beside me. Next he slid out of his sweatpants. “Are you actually going to it?”

He shot me another smile and then went running, jumping into the water in nothing but his boxers. Water splashed around him and when he popped back up he whipped his head to the side, sending his hair flinging back away from his face.

“You’re insane.”

He grinned and swam back to the dock.

“It’s not that bad.”

“It’s like forty degrees. You’re going to get sick.”

“Come in and warm me up.”

“No,” I laughed. “Come on, Let’s get inside.”

“Come here,” he called, pretending to splash at me, but no water even hit the deck of the dock.

“Caleb, I’m serious. It’s going to start raining soon.”

He pushed himself up on the dock. Water rippled down the hard lines of his body. His perfect body. I placed my arms around my middle. He walked toward me and I held my hand out.

“Caleb. No. I’m warm and dry. Caleb. Caleb!” I squealed. He wrapped his arms around me, pressing his wet body into mine and pressed his lips to my ear. I giggled and held his arms around me.

“Movie day? Some cuddles. Lots of blowjobs?”

“What do I get?” I pretended to pout. The thought of a day spent on the couch, wrapped in a warm blanket and his arms, filled me with warmth.

“You get to suck my cock and give me a nice foot rub,” he said. He squeezed me tight. “We both know I won’t be able to keep my tongue out of your cunt.”

“God, Caleb,” I breathed, cheeks pink. I saw someone come out on their deck at the house next door. He looked at us, clearly an older man, and then went back inside.

“Mr. Burnham. He's probably already on the phone to my mom. Wonder if he watched you suck my cock the other day..”

“Stop, no he didn’t,” I said, smacking his arm and trying to get out of his hold. He held me firm. I thought he liked it when I tried to get away and couldn’t. I kept squirming. I felt him grow hot and hard. I stopped struggling when I met his gaze, head looking over my shoulder.

“Kiss me,” he murmured. I very happily obeyed.

We took a hot shower, but he got out a few minutes before me to make a pot of tea. I put on one of his t-shirts. He hadn't told me what to wear and he hadn't left anything out for me specifically. I gently ran my fingers along the diamond of my necklace, nibbling at my lower lip and pacing slowly.

"Everything ok?" I heard him call. I knew I couldn't dally any longer so I took a deep breath, steeled myself, and went out into the living room.

Caleb?" I asked, fingers gently playing with the diamond. He looked up from where he lounged on the couch, the remote in one hand, the other holding his cock through his sweatpants. His eyes slowly moved over me and his eyes darkened with desire.

"Yeah, baby?" he asked, eyes moving over me slowly. I took a deep breath, heart pounding and feeling nervous.

"Can we watch it again?"

He stared at me a second, brow furrowing.

"Watch what again?"

I stepped further into the room and curled my toes into the carpet.

"The first time?" I paused. "Our first time?"

He stared a moment before a slow smile came across his face.

"Our first time?" he asked, sitting up. "You mean the night of my promotion? While you were asleep?"

I nodded.

“You want to watch it?”

“Yes. Please.”

I watched his face darken at the word please. He got off the couch. My face tingled and I nodded. He grabbed my chin and tilted my face upward.

He leaned down and kissed me, slow and gentle, and I felt the stirrings of desire in my middle and was once again struck with a rush of gratitude. The gas station, my parents, the necklace. He pulled back too soon.

He set up his phone on the tv and I settled into where he had been on the couch. He came toward me, gripping his cock through his gray sweatpants, eyes feral, but face blank. He settled in behind me, laying us down so my back was to his. He gently stroked my thigh with one hand and went to his encrypted folder on his phone. He selected the video, one of fourteen in his ‘favorites’ folder. He pressed his erection into my bottom and my core turned hot.

He hit play and I felt anticipation rocket through me.

I didn’t realize until then how very little I remembered about even watching the video with him. I felt little glimmers of recognition, but it was almost like it was the first time I ever watched it.

Caleb sat on the bed, tugging at his tie, propping up his phone against the lamp. His hair was a bit mussed, his five o’clock shadow just visible against his olive skin. He gently deposited the camera and I came into view on the bed. I was already naked and my head was resting on the pillow. My chest rose and fell slowly.

I sucked in a deep breath the moment I saw myself, suddenly back on that day. I was at the elevators, feeling like I was headed off to my execution. Caleb's eyes were raking over the people gathered. They found me, dark and disinterested.

"Did you know then?" I whispered.

"Know what when?" he asked softly, lips brushing against my ear.

"When you saw me at the elevators. Did you decide then?"

"I knew I was going to try if the opportunity presented itself."

Caleb removed his suit coat and tossed it on the bed beside me. His attention was fixed on me and I could see the erection that swelled the front of his trousers. He slowly unbuttoned the cuffs of his shirt as he looked from me to the camera. His face was set in stone, serious, brow furrowed, and eyes dark. His attention went back to me. He unbuttoned his shirt slowly, as if savoring the moment. His lips parted ever so slightly and he took in a slow, deep breath. He discarded the shirt, tossing it off toward where my futon was. He remained in his form fitting undershirt, showing off his board chest and his powerful arms.

"What were you thinking?" I asked him.

"Finally," he grated in my ear. *His voice. Caleb's voice.*

He knelt on the bed and untucked his undershirt from his pants. As he unbuckled his belt, he moved to straddle me.

"How did you undress me?" I asked.

"Slowly," he answered. "It was like unwrapping a present at Christmas. I was so angry I didn't record it. I was just too excited. I laid you on the bed and took my time."

“Did you touch me?”

“I groped your tits. Pinched your nipples through your clothing. I rubbed your cunt through your panties.”

I closed my eyes and forced them open again. Head pooled between my legs.

He unbuttoned his pants and then reached inside to stroke his erection. I could see the movement of his hand beneath the expensive black fabric. His other hand went to slide up and down my thigh. After a few moments of looking me over, he tossed a lip leg to the side. A slow smile curved along his lips. He moved downward until his face disappeared from sight, but my leg moved and a soft sigh left my lips. He looked up quickly, waiting to see if I was going to wake up, and then disappeared between my legs again.

“My tongue was so far up your cunt,” he whispered. “I sucked on your clit like it was a piece of candy. You were so wet. You drenched my tongue. I could taste you for days afterward.”

He got up, hand still in his pants. He removed it in order to lower himself on top of me and take a breast in each hand. He closed his mouth around my nipples, going back and forth between my breasts. He sucked and licked and drew his teeth along the little buds. I made soft little noises. He would check to make sure I wasn't waking up and ever so often, looking at the camera with a little smirk.

I felt like he was looking right at me everytime he did it.

He straightened and removed his cock from his pants and underwear. He gave himself a few hard strokes, before taking the head of his dick and slipping it against my folds. He rubbed his cock along my pussy for a few moments, closed his eyes tightly and tilted his head back, before he slowly pushed it inside of me.

He thrust into me, face contorting in pleasure and he groaned softly. He hung his head, thick, dark hair blocking my view. I watched the muscles in his arm ripple and he took in a deep

breath. He began to thrust again, moving slowly and deliberately. He paused once or twice and after only a few moments, his hips froze and his entire body spasmed.

“That was longer than I thought I was going to last the first time I fucked you,” he murmured.

“Fuck,” Caleb said, rubbing his hand over his face. He sat up and looked down at me, slowly running his hands over my stomach, my legs, and my breasts. He grabbed his flaccid cock and gave a few hard strokes, fingers plucking at my nipples. With ease, he flipped me over onto my stomach. He pressed his nose to my back and slowly trailed his face down my spine. His hands slid down my sides, up my arms, through my hair, over my legs. He flipped me back over, lowering himself back down to suck on my nipples.

I sucked in another sharp breath. He shifted behind me, pressing his erection into my bottom. His lips ghosted along my ear and his tongue darted out to touch my earlobe.

He got and sat down beside me, giving his cock a few hard strokes before gently moving me. He held my head up by my hair. My jaw hung open and he trailed his cock along my lips. Once again, as he slid his erection into my mouth, he tilted his head back, eyes closed, and looked at the sky. He held my head, moving his hips back and forth as he worked his hardening member in and out of my mouth. Once he was hard again, he moved back between my legs.

I slid my hand between my legs, letting my fingers slide between my folds. I was wet, juices immediately slicking my fingers. I pressed the pads of my fingers into my clit and pushed.

He rubbed the head of his cock into my folds again.

“My cum was leaking out of you,” he whispered in my ear.

He continued to rub his cock against my pussy until he pushed into me again, slow and steady.

“You were so tight. So hot. So wet.”

He pulled back his hips and thrust into me, harder and faster this time.

I slid my fingers more firmly into me. I felt his breath on my neck.

“Are you touching yourself?” he asked hoarsely. I nodded, letting out a forceful breath.

My breasts jiggled as he thrust into me and he grabbed my hair with a hard fist. He leaned down and kissed me. His tongue went into my mouth. He sucked and bit on my lips.

I thought about him looming over me in my cubicle. The way he smelled. His finger, slowly moving down the page and shredding me to ribbons. And that whole time... every time he did that, he was thinking about doing *this*.

I put my fingers inside of myself and leaned back into him. His hands slid up my thighs, pressing his t-shirt up so he could watch.

“Fuck yourself,” he whispered. “Go on. Make yourself come. Watch me rape you and make yourself come.”

I thought about all those painful outings I was forced to go to. Sitting there and watching him laugh and joke with his buddies after he had me crying in the bathroom just hours earlier. I thought I was nothing to him. Just an annoying blip on the radar, and the whole time, he wanted to do *this*.

“Caleb,” I whispered. “Please.”

“Please what?” he asked.

“Please, I want you inside of me.”

“No, make yourself come,” he said. I removed my fingers from inside of me and brought my arms up behind my head. I grabbed the back of his hair and pulled. I pressed my bottom into his erection. I looked at the screen.

He grabbed my face and smooshed my lips. He pulled back and spit into my mouth before he slid two fingers into my mouth. He held my tongue down and looked into my mouth as he fucked me.

“Please, Caleb. I’m begging you. Please. I need you,” I whispered. I could feel him moving his hands into his sweatpants behind me.

“You need me?” he asked.

“Yes, please,” I whispered.

“I need you.”

He grabbed my chin and forced it back toward the screen. His other hand pressed his hard cock at my entrance and pushed inside of me. He faced no resistance and my body clamped down on him hard. His other hand went to my clit and he rubbed hard, his cock moving in and out of me in rhythm to the Caleb on screen.

“Cum for me,” he gritted, his hand around my throat, his lips against my cheek. “Show me you’re my little slut. My sweet little Orla.”

He felt my orgasm rip through me and I sagged back against him. He continued to thrust into me, both on screen and on the couch. His attention was on the screen now, reliving the rape like it was 3d cinema. He worked himself up, coming in tandem with himself on the screen and then sagged against me.

The video continued. He fucked me one more time before he left. I think he cut out some dead air because I saw a jolt on the screen. After he was done, I watched him scrawl the words WHORE on my chest. I felt a little stab of pain as I watched and I leaned into him. I turned my face to look up at him and gently brushed his sweaty hair away from his face.

“Your whore,” I corrected him. A tiny smirk played on his lips.

“My whore,” he agreed.

He looked back at the screen and my eyes followed suit.

Caleb had his suit jacket back on and he had capped the marker in his hand. He examined me, admiring his handiwork. I laid there spread eagle, naked, his cum leaking out of me, hair a mess, the words WHORE written across my chest. He moved around the side of the bed and then stopped. He continued to stare at me, his face unreadable. Then he tugged the cap off the marker and placed his knee back on the bed.

He drew out the words MINE slowly and when he was done, he leaned over me and placed a kiss to my mouth. His eyes moved over my face and his fingers gently traced my lips. He kissed me one more time before he reached for the phone and the screen went back.

“Caleb?” I asked softly.

“Yeah baby?” he asked.

“Can we watch another one?”

He smiled and reached for his phone.

It was late in the afternoon and I was absolutely exhausted. My throat was red, my bottom was red, and the shirt that Caleb had eventually taken off of me, was balled up in the corner, soaked with sweat.

“Let’s take a shower,” he said, getting off the couch and scooping me up in his arms. He lifted me with such ease. He pressed my head to his chest and played with the diamond at my throat.

“Can we take a bath?”

“You want a bath?”

“Yes, please.”

“Then we’ll take a Bath,” he said and kissed my forehead gently. It was a strange juxtaposition. My hair hurt from how hard he pulled and my cheek was red from where he slapped me, but the kiss to the forehead was soft and tender. He put me down on the toilet to draw the bath. It wasn’t a big tub. We’d need to be close to each other. I didn’t mind at all. I washed my face as he readied the bath. He put in some salts and smelling oils. The water was steaming when I turned around. He had removed his clothing and his soft cock hung between his legs, still big and proud.

“My eyes are up here,” he smirked at me. “Get over here, baby.”

I came toward him and he helped me into the tub before joining me. The water was hot and it stung my skin, but I loved it. I snuggled against him, running my hand over the smattering of hair on his chest and pressing my face to his chest.

“Can we just stay here?” I asked him. “Quit our jobs and stay here alone forever.”

His hand slid up and down my arm. His other hand stroked my hip.

“That sounds like Heaven,” he rumbled thickly. I squeezed him and pressed my face into his chest. I turned my face upward and kissed his neck. His Adam’s apple bobbed.

“Will it be like this when we go back?” I asked him. “Like it’s been the last couple days?”

“Of course. This is what I want.”

I swallowed hard and trailed my fingers down the center of his chest. I sprinkled some water on him and watched the beads trail down his chest.

And when you get bored?

The thought hit me so hard for a second I didn’t think I’d be able to breathe. I closed my eyes and my first thought was to ask for a xanax.

Ask the question. Ask the question. Just ask. Ask. you coward.

I kissed his chest. I would ask later. I didn’t want to ruin the moment. I just wanted it to continue on forever. Where I was warm and safe and there was a possibility that Caleb Trent would fall in love with me and stay in love with me.

I turned my face down and pressed my cheek back to his chest. I shifted, the water trickling. I tightened my hold on him. I felt a hollow ache in my chest. Like I’d been cut open and someone had dug my innards out with a spoon. I fought the urge to sniffle, but I knew he wouldn’t feel my tears in the water.

The rest of the afternoon, we watched a movie on the couch, but I couldn't focus. We had sex before we went to bed. It was surprisingly gentle, but no less passionate. He had whispered to me afterward, while he was still on top of me, still inside of me, "this was the best weekend of my entire life."

He gave me my pills. I asked him for a xanax, the first one of the weekend, notwithstanding the event with my parents, and he gave it to me without asking any questions. I eventually found sleep but I felt like I was in a daze all morning. I stripped the bed and put the sheets in the laundry while Caleb cooked breakfast. I cleared up the bathroom and packed our bags and carried them to the front door. We sat down to eat, but neither of us said very much. I wondered if he was feeling the same way I did, that when we got back to the city everything would go back to the way it was and the easiness would go away. I thought he must be wondering if I would turn into a raging bitch the moment we crossed the border again. I wondered if I should, if that would make it more interesting for him. We did the dishes together. He washed and I dried.

My thoughts were confirmed when he finally spoke after he handed me the last dish.

"I'd like things to stay like this," he said. "I think we had a good weekend."

"We did," I answered, looking at him.

"I want it to continue," he said. "Whatever you might need from me to make that happen, just let me know. OK?"

I looked at him, the question right there on the tip of my tongue again. I only nodded and forced a smile.

He smiled back, kissed me, and then went to carry our stuff back to the car. I made the bed and by the time he was done putting the kayaks back and loading the shed, we were ready to go.

We got into his car. It was a sunny day and he put his sunglasses on, looking as handsome as ever in a well fitted blue polo and tan shorts.

“Back to that hellhole,” he said with a bright smile on his face. I tried to match his smile but it was difficult.

“We’ll stop at a rest stop about halfway,” he said, checking his rear view mirrors. “You can give my cock a quick suck and we’ll be on our way.”

I swatted at him, but he grabbed my hand and placed it between his legs.

“Want to give it a go now?”

“You’re a pig,” I told him and tried to pull my hand away. He yanked me closer and he kissed me. His lips were soft, his tongue wet, and I was sad when the kiss ended.

“I’m a pig, you’re a whore. We’re perfect for eachother.”

I kissed him this time. He pulled back and placed his forehead on mine.

“And I love you,” he murmured.

I love you too.

He pulled away and began to reverse the car. I wanted to say it to him but I thought it would make him angry. It would ruin the mood. He wouldn’t believe me. I didn’t even know if it was true, but I wanted to say it.

And if he did believe me... would he truly get bored with me like I thought he would? Or did he love me? I looked him over. His strong jaw, his Grecian nose, the little smile on his lips. Handsome, successful, entitled, playboy. There seemed to be so much more too him now though.

I opened my mouth, heart pounding violently in my chest.

I love you too.

I couldn't say it. I couldn't say it and the reason wasn't because he might get mad, not because he might hurt me, not because it would ruin the mood or he might not believe me. I didn't say it because if he *did* believe me, he might get bored with me.

And for the first time, I fully realized just how badly I didn't want that to happen.

Chapter Notes

We're getting there, folks.

Thank you again for all the kind words and for putting up with my crazy, unreliable schedule.

I hope you enjoy!

Caleb had my clothing laid out for me when I came out of the shower. I didn't want to go back to work. Things had remained light between us since we arrived home. We watched a movie the night before. We had sex. We showered together that morning, but he got out early and I finished shaving my legs. When I went out into the kitchen, I found Caleb in a dark navy suit, looking as handsome as ever. Seeing him in a suit brought back a churning in my stomach and a tightness in my chest. Up north he had just been Caleb. Standing at the island, sipping his coffee, hair combed, perfectly tailored suit draped over his toned body, he was my boss, the man that had tormented me, the man that was cold and cruel and thought he was better than me.

"Today's going to fucking suck," he said, and passed me the box of cheerios. I poured some into my bowl and tried to smile at him.

"I'm afraid to check my email."

"Focus on Lattimer. I'll take Evermore. They scheduled a diligence call for eleven this morning so it's a tight turnaround."

My stomach dropped and I whipped my head over to look at him. He stood, carrying his empty bowl over to the sink. He dropped it in dismissively and then turned to look at me. He looked completely unbothered.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s a ridiculous ask. I’ll take care of it. I won’t be able to eat lunch with you though. It’s scheduled from eleven to two.”

He stopped beside me and placed his hand on my hip. His brow furrowed.

“You ok?” he asked softly. I nodded. “Things are good. Being back at work shouldn’t change that. If you need anything at all today, ask me. Ok?”

I nodded.

“Good.”

He smiled and touched the diamond hanging at my neck. He examined it closely.

“What do I tell people? They’ll ask about the necklace.”

“You got it from your boyfriend. Your very serious boyfriend. The one that’ll cut Danny’s cock off if he doesn’t stop sniffing around you.”

I ignored the comment.

“Amelia will say something. We keep taking PTO at the same time and then I come back with a diamond necklace?”

“Let her. It doesn’t matter. If we get asked, you lie. Ok?”

I nodded again. I touched his tie and flipped it over to examine the initials. I didn’t want to have to lie. I wanted the world to know he chose *me*.

“Good,” he said. He kissed me and then went into his room to get his bag.

We took the T into work. After getting on the train, I pulled him in for a quick kiss, mostly because of the pretty blond on the other side of the car. I knew I wouldn’t be able to touch him as we got closer to work. It was one of the things I loved about being up on the mountains. I could touch him whenever I wanted. I could kiss him whenever I wanted. I looked down at our feet and hung off the bar. I closed my eyes with each sound of the screeching breaks until finally we got off and walked to the office.

“Go on in. I’ll get your coffee,” he said as he passed the doors.

“And one for Eddie,” I reminded him. I wished we would go in together. We didn’t need to be dating. We could pretend to be *friends*.

It’s so he can go back to ignoring you when it’s over, no questions asked.

“Excuse me,” an annoyed voice spoke behind me.

I turned and found a man trying to get into the building.

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

I walked in and told Eddie his coffee was coming. The lights flickered on as I walked inside. I settled down at my desk and checked my email for the first time in four days. My heart rate skyrocketed as I saw the sheer volume.

Caleb will take care of it.

I kept repeating it as I filtered through the emails, half of which Caleb had responded to throughout the weekend. He had handled work all weekend without ever giving me any indication. He shielded me from the stress of work, allowed me to enjoy a glorious weekend, and not once had I suspected. Another sense of calm took over me as I realized Caleb *would* make my life easier, and the thought of growing accustomed to that was terrifying.

“Delivery.”

Caleb put the coffee down in front of me and gave a slow whistle.

“Got some emails to go through. You should be checking that on PTO.”

I felt a sharp rush of betrayal as I turned to look at him. He was smiling at me. He looked over the top of my cubicle and then bent down and kissed me.

“*Relax,*” he murmured. “And trust me.”

I grabbed his tie and prevented him from standing up.

“We can be friends,” I said quietly. “We don’t have to pretend to be strangers.”

He kept his eyes on me and then straightened. He looked over the edge of my cubicle walls to make sure we were alone and then he crouched back down.

“I don’t think my acting skills are that good. If I act like your friend my feelings for you are going to be very obvious.”

I was disappointed, but I understood - assuming it was the truth. It was just as possible he wanted to make sure a clean break was possible when he ended things. I looked down at my hands and nodded. He touched my chin and gently nudged it up. He smiled at me.

“Ok,” he said.

“Ok?” I asked with a budding smile of my own.

“Ok.”

He kissed me again and then got up and left my cubicle.

I spent the morning catching up on emails and prioritizing as Caleb had instructed. Around nine I went into the break room for a cup of coffee. Caleb was in there with Crispy and Chris. They were laughing about something when I walked in. I tamped down the thought that they were laughing about *me*. I smiled at them and walked over to the coffee pot.

“Hey, Orla, get this,” Caleb laughed. “Crispy got an email from a client this morning at 4am looking for a 7am call.”

“Shockingly, none of us made it,” Crispy laughed.

“That’s insane,” I said.

“Bunch of fucking assholes,” Chris said.

“Have fun with them,” I said, leaving my pot of coffee. I smiled at Caleb on my way out. I was halfway down the hall when my phone buzzed.

Your ass looks so good in that skirt.

You’re so fucking hot.

I smiled at my phone as I walked. I got a good amount of work done that morning, but I still felt a tightness in my belly. A dull ache in my chest and a nagging in my brain. It was too good to be true, but I wanted it to be true. I wanted it to be real. But I was just so *scared*.

I checked our calendar. Caleb was in that diligence call that morning into the afternoon and it would tie him up for about three hours. I double checked. Chris was on the call too.

I raised my thumb to my lips and nibbled at the nail as I contemplated. It was a really stupid idea, but it kept bubbling up inside of me.

At noon, I walked to the bathroom. Caleb was in his office with his coat off, leaning back in his chair, staring up at the ceiling. He'd have to wait until the very end of the call to give his report. It made diligence calls insanely boring.

I got back to my desk and checked my calendar. I was free and clear for the day. I felt sick but grabbed my phone and stood. Heart pounding out of my throat I stared at my phone and then placed it back on the desk.

I walked around the long way, telling myself it was a bad idea and I should turn around. Not only was it dangerous, not only did my pride bristle, but Caleb would be furious if he found out - and if *he* was there, he'd tell Caleb.

I stepped out onto the city street. The day was growing warm and my back began to sweat just a block down. I was vaguely aware of where the building was, assuming I remembered the right hotel, which I thought I did. That entire day was a bit of a blur.

I didn't allow myself to hesitate at the door. *Caleb* wouldn't hesitate. Caleb would just walk right through the door.

I approached the desk and realized I didn't even know if they were still here. They might not even let me talk to her if she *was* here. This was a terrible, half-baked plan and I hadn't even thought of the consequences. These people were insane, dangerous - and if they weren't here

I'd look like an idiot or a crazy person. I should turn around and go back. That way Caleb wouldn't be angry with me, that absolute psychopath wouldn't have any power over me, and I wouldn't go groveling to some weak willed woman who -

"Hello!" I smiled brightly at the person behind the desk. My heart was in my throat.

"Good afternoon, Miss. How can I help you?"

"I'm here to see Mrs. Furst."

The man frowned at me and I had a terrible feeling they had already left. I pushed on.

"She's expecting me."

"I do not have you on my list," he said with a tight smile, his warmth gone.

"You didn't even ask my name," I responded tightly.

"Because she has no guests listed."

I stared at him, cheeks flushing and I swallowed down the lump in my throat. At least I knew they were still here. Now I needed to avoid looking like some sort of stalker.

"Well, call up to her and tell her Ellie Wright is here to speak to her. She'll see me."

I said that with certainty because I believed it, even if I did still feel like my skin was on fire and I wanted to throw up all over the gorgeous wooden desk.

“I’m not going to disturb her when you’re not on the list.”

I stepped back, eyes darting side to side.

“That’s fine,” I said shortly. “I’ll just have to speak to Herr Furst about this.”

The man’s tight smile dropped as I turned to leave.

“Wait, wait, wait,” he said, glancing toward the dining room. He picked up the phone and jabbed some buttons.

“Mrs. Furst, very sorry to disturb you, it’s Austin with the front desk... yes, yes, very well thank you, and yourself?... wonderful. There is a young woman here claiming to have an appointment with you. I told her she wasn’t... Ellie Wright....”

The man looked at me and I stared back, heart pounding.

“Of course. Many apologies, ma’am. I’ll send her right up.... Yes ma’am. Thank you.”

He hung up the phone and that customer service smile was back on his face.

“Very sorry, Miss Wright,” he said and handed over a small keycard. “The elevator is right down the hall here to the left. 4th floor. It’ll bring you right up.”

“Thank you,” I grinned.

“Herr Furst surely doesn’t need to be bothered with this little mix up,” he said, shifting slightly.

“Of course not,” I answered. “Thank you again.”

I made my way down the hall as he instructed. Once inside, I felt my nerves return and I fought the nausea roiling inside of me. It took an eternity for the elevator to hit the top floor and I changed my mind at least ten times. I had settled on abandoning the plan once I reached the top. I’d jab the button to the lobby and run back. That way no one could ever say I was here.

The elevator doors opened and I stepped into a beautiful little foyer area, ignoring the voice to tell me to turn around. I don’t know what I might have done if I had to go up and knock on the door, but I didn’t have to worry about that. The door to the suite was opened and Jessica Furst stood in the doorway, a smile on her face, arms crossed over her chest, leaning across the doorframe. Her head was tilted ever so slightly to the side.

“Ellie,” she greeted. “This is a pleasant surprise.”

“Hello,” I greeted, glancing anxiously over her shoulder.

“He’s not here,” she said. “Off at a business lunch downstairs.”

She glanced at the delicate watch on her wrist.

“I would say we have about an hour,” she said. “Please, come in.”

I followed her into the suite, marveling at the beauty of it. I couldn’t imagine the money Furst spent staying here for two weeks.

“When do you go home?” I asked. Jessica looked over her shoulder briefly.

“We fly back to Berlin early tomorrow morning.” She turned her attention back to the front as we entered a little sitting area. “Sweetheart. Go play in your room please. Very quiet now, your brother is sleeping.”

The little blond girl looked up with an open mouth and then a smile broke across her face.

“Did you come to play with me?” she asked me. I smiled at her and got down on my knees to talk to her.

“No, I have to work. I wish I could though.”

“Emelia,” Jessica said lightly. The little girl pouted but she collected her things and went down the hall obediently. Jessica sat down on the couch and I took a chair. I looked around, struck by how *normal* the place looked. Beautiful. Elegant. But *normal*. Not the perverse sex dungeon I would expect from a man like Max Furst. I looked back at Jessica, who was still staring at me with that little smile.

“What?” I asked.

“You came to me.”

I blushed and looked at my hands. I touched the necklace at my throat. It drew her gaze but only for a moment.

I asked the question I had come to ask, “How do you deal with the fact that if he cheated on you there’s nothing you can do? How can you open yourself up to a man like that?”

Jessica considered thoughtfully.

“I trust him,” she answered after a few moments. “I trust him because I believe he loves me. He knows that if I ever discovered he was unfaithful, my devotion to him would be forever

altered. He's not willing to risk it."

"But you do love him?" I asked.

"More than anything," she answered. "Apart from our children, of course."

"But how did you let yourself get there?" I asked. "How do you... open yourself up like that?"

"I would argue I was opened up," Jessica said with a laugh. "I didn't have much say in the matter."

"So you just fell in love with him believing that he'd run around with other women and you were ok with that?"

"I didn't even consider it until it was right in front of me," she answered. "Ellie," she said, leaning forward and resting her elbows on her knees. "One moment I was on a street by a basilica in the middle of the day and the next I was waking up in a stranger's basement. I was raped, and beaten, and degraded... all I knew was him. And then he was so kind. Loving. Warm. I wanted to make him happy. I worked very hard to. We were alone in the alps for so long I never thought about him with another woman. It never even crossed my mind. By the time we were in a place where I realized he *could*... I was already too far gone. I was insanely jealous. It just happened to me. But I told him then... perhaps not very articulately, I'm not sure at the time I even knew I was telling him it, but I told him that there is one thing he could do that would take me from him - not physically, but emotionally - and that was infidelity. I can promise you, I believe with every fiber of my being, he would never risk that. Because what he wants from above all else is absolute devotion."

I sat with that and she continued after a few long moments.

"What makes *our* men so different is that they aren't content to control or master our bodies. It needs to go deeper than that. They want our souls. And like any possession, what good is it if it's broken? So they have to weigh the pros and cons of what they'll allow. That being said..."

She paused and examined me.

“I don’t believe they’re the type to cheat. Laugh at me all you want Ellie, I’ve been in this world a long time now. I’ve seen the men who sleep around. They might want the woman they’re with to be faithful but.... They don’t have the same....”

Our eyes met.

“Fixation?” She shrugged. “Obsession? I can’t think of a word strong enough for what drives my husband and what - from my limited experience - drives Caleb.”

I looked at my hands.

“Ellie.”

The severity of her voice made me look up at that.

“He worships you.” Her voice was a whisper. “You have so much power over him. You have no idea.”

I took a deep breath and looked down the hall. I just didn’t want to look at her.

“So, your expert advice is just... hope it works out?”

She leaned back on the couch, the solemnness leaving her. She suddenly looked very tired.

“Oh, I’m not an expert. I was extraordinarily lucky. My story is not reality. I have seen *terrible* things. I know what happens out there, what could have happened to me. We find ourselves in a position where we can make the very best of a very bad situation. I’ve had a lot of time to reflect. About what happened to me, what he did to me, and the fact that *I* searched *him* out. I waited for three years before I realized he wasn’t coming and I looked for him. I went to see a very dangerous man to do it. I understand.... I understand why you judge me. Believe me, it took me some time to come to terms with it all, but I don’t regret it, and honestly... I don’t care what you think of me. Because I *love* my master. And I know he loves me in every way he can love. And that makes me happy.”

“And if he were a poor man who locked you up in a trailer?” I asked, a cynical bite to my voice.

She smiled and shrugged. “We’ll never know, will we? I can tell you one thing. The man I fell in love with would have never settled for being a poor man in a trailer park. His money is incidental. A symptom of who he is. Not the cause.”

I looked off to the side, considering what she said.

“Caleb says he could make my life so much easier... before I didn’t believe him because I didn’t want it to be true. My pride wouldn’t allow it. I wanted to believe I could take care of myself. I didn’t need someone to make my life easier. It seemed like... taking the easy way out.”

I looked at Jessica. She watched patiently.

“If I... let him take care of me... the way he wants to. The way I want him to...”

I shook my head and lifted my eyes up to the ceiling. Saying that out loud physically hurt.

“Then what... what happens to me when he decides he’s done?”

“I don’t think he will,” Jessica answered softly.

“We *work* together. Not just work together but I work under him. We can’t even date. He ... there’s no future for us here. If he was so sure that he was in love with me the way he says he is - we would...he’d be having me interview or put in for a transfer and he hasn’t done that.”

Jessica’s brow knitted and she looked like she was in pain. I felt a painful ache in my chest as I realized she knew it was true too. If he saw a future for us, I would be sending out applications. He’d be talking to me about transferring.

“Have you talked to him about this?” she asked.

“No. He’d think... he’d think I was trying to get away from him or something.”

“If you explain to him that you’re thinking about your future...”

But I was shaking my head.

“So he can lord that over me too?” I asked.

“There is no reward without risk,” Jessica snapped. Snapped. There was no more of that gentle, condescending placation. I preferred it. There was hardness to her features now. I liked this woman much more. “You came here for advice and solutions. Or do you want me to tell you what a victim you are. You are. There. You’re a victim. You were raped and you were abused. You have no power and no autonomy and there’s nothing you can do to make your life better. Would you like a hug and we can cry it out?”

“Wow,” I said sarcastically. “You’re a bitch.”

“Well what do you want, Ellie? Do you want my *expert opinion* or do you want me to tell you what you want to hear?”

“I want your honest opinion.”

“Tell him there is no future for you while you work at the same company and *tell him* that you can’t open up to him the way you both want until you see that there is a future. That’s your solution.”

“A fine solution.”

I jumped a mile, twisting in my seat to find Maximilian Furst removing his suit jacket. Jessica immediately got to her knees and crawled across the floor to him. She pressed her face to his feet and he looked down at her like he was examining a stain on his carpet. I was struck with how much devotion she had for a man that could look at her like *that*. Then he looked up and his icy blue eyes were fixed on me and I realized that the look of disgust was *not* directed toward the woman at his feet, but at me.

“And if you ever call my wife a bitch again I’ll make you disappear.”

He looked back at his wife and held out his hand. She placed her hand in his and let him pull her to her feet.

“And that would be a shame. It would upset the boy quite a lot.”

Jessica spoke very softly, words in German. Furst listened, his eyes on me. He only looked down after his wife stopped talking. He began to speak to her. They conversed briefly before he kissed her gently. Then Jessica turned toward me. Her husband glared at me from over the top of her head.

“Caleb has my husband's number. If you ever wish to speak with me, please have him use it.”

Jessica smiled at me and then turned to kiss her husband on the cheek.

“Fur mich, bitte?”

He took his very critical gaze away from me and looked at his wife. Then, reluctantly, he nodded.

“Geh jetzt.”

She gave me one last smile and a nod and then walked down the hall, leaving me alone with this monster of a man. My heart pounded violently in my throat and I stared at him, waiting for him to charge me, or for fangs to come from his mouth, or horns to erupt from his scalp. Instead, he just stared.

“You should hide nothing from the man that owns you,” he said. I stared at him.

“Caleb doesn’t *own* me.”

A cold smile spread across his face.

“These pictures... he would not show me. I believe that means they are quite explicit. I bet you look like a whore in them.”

I lifted my chin up, refusing to let my jaw tremble.

“He could do what he wishes with you - or your life is over.”

“He would be too,” I said. “I’d take him down with me.”

“Oh, Miss Wright. That is not the world we live in,” he said. He took a step closer and I jerked back on instinct. He smiled, dark, cold, and thoroughly amused.

“Do you *really* think he could not recover? Do you *really* think you could?”

“I want to leave,” I said, vocal cords pulled taut. He was enjoying my fear. *Feeding* on it.

“Be a good girl and do what is expected of a good woman. Be honest with him. Hide nothing. I promise you, you will receive a just reward.”

“I want to leave,” I said again. He looked over his shoulder, down the hallway that he blocked with his tall frame.

“I will not stop you.”

I stared at him, looking down the hallway toward where Jessica went.

“Oh, you think she will save you now. My *bitch* wife.”

“I didn’t ... that’s not how I meant it.”

His eyes dropped to the diamond around my throat. He looked back up at me.

“I give you the same advice as my wife. Tell him. He will reward you. You will be surprised to find how well good girls are treated.”

He took another step into the room. I took a step to the side.

“What frightens you so much? Do you think he will tire of your mouth...” his blue eyes moved down me lecherously. “Or your body?”

My cheeks turned red and I fought every urge I had not to cry.

“I think it would be your mouth first - if I did not know he enjoys your... confidence so much. Your body...”

I waited for the insult. I readied myself. Braced myself for it. The harder part would be I couldn't go to Caleb for comfort afterward.

“Green eyes. Red hair.” I bristled. “Too thin now, but with a couple more pounds...I could make a fine profit off of you.”

I blinked in surprise.

He stepped further into the room and I stepped to my left, angling toward the hallway. His eyes twinkled savagely as he looked me over.

“A very fine profit. You would be a premium product. An exclusive offer. Even without your virginity. Even so old. You are quite beautiful, No, the boy will not grow tired of your body.”

“He's not a boy,” I snapped.

“I said it before. He cannot earn your respect. He is a boy.”

“I respect him.”

“You lie to him.”

“I’m not lying.”

“Omission is a lie. He deserves to know all you think and feel. So he may care for you. I can promise you, Miss Wright. Promise you. Tell him the truth - you will be rewarded.”

I stared at him, eyes darting just momentarily over my shoulder.

“When he raped you, did it hurt?” he asked. Then his smile widened. “I hope it did.”

I turned down the hall and walked to the point of running. I jabbed at the elevator button and luckily it was still at the top. No one pursued, no one followed, but I all but ran from the foyer of the hotel. By the time I got back to the office, my back was slick with sweat and my heart was pounding.

I walked past Caleb’s office and found him still on the phone. I felt a rush of relief. At least until this point, I had gotten away with it. Until Mr. First decided to call him and tell him not only did I run off in the middle of the day, but that I went and called our most valuable client’s wife a bitch and he heard it. His eyes lifted and met mine. The fierce glare did not alleviate as we looked at each other. I tried to wave, hoping he was annoyed with the call but he only picked up his cellphone and held it up.

I hurried back to my desk and logged onto my computer. I grabbed my phone and checked my messages as my computer woke up. I had sixteen text messages from Caleb.

Hey, where’d you go?

Why are you yellow?

Where did you go?

It’s been forty five minutes.

Your phone is still at your desk, where are you?

Are you ok?

Do you need help?

Orla, are you alright?

Answer me.

I'm seriously getting really fucking mad, Orla.

Orla I swear to God.

There better be a good fucking explanation because im worried.

I swear to fucking God, Orla.

I'm about to lose my fucking mind.

Chris just had to leave the call to look for you.

This better be fucking good, Orla. I don't like being ignored.

My heart seized and my computer dinged. I looked up and received all the Teams messages I had received from Caleb while I had been gone.

This call is a fucking joke.

FDD are a bunch of assholes.

Yellow during the workday? I'm shocked.

His text messages came in about five minutes after his last Teams message. My heart was pounding and a wave of nausea washed over me. I knew I shouldn't have gone. I'd ruined the good will this weekend had created between us. I swallowed thickly and took a deep breath. God, I wanted a fucking xanax so bad. My throat was aching and I tried to swallow down the bile rising in my throat. I thanked God I had nothing in my stomach. I looked over the text messages again. Jessica Furst seemed to think I had power over him. I took a deep breath and began to type.

Caleb, I'm so sorry. I went to clear my head and have some lunch.

Just a walk.

Please don't be mad at me, Caleb, I am so sorry. I should have told you. We had such a wonderful weekend I don't want to have ruined it.

Can I come talk to you?

Please?

I saw the dots and waited, heart pounding.

Goddamit Orla. Seriously.

Are you ok?

I let out a deep breath.

Yes. I'm totally fine. I'm really sorry.

Are you mad at me?

Can I come see you, please?

I'm freaking out.

I checked Teams. He was still in his call.

Caleb?

Are you mad at me?

Can I come talk to you when you're out of your call.

Caleb please don't do this to me.

Things have been so good.

I saw dots.

Come see me at five.

Yeah I'm fucking pissed.

My stomach tightened and roiled and I closed my eyes. When I looked down I had more messages.

We're ok. I love you.

I'm mad.

But I love you.

I'm not going to do anything stupid.

Fucking dammit, Orla. Seriously.

Relief coursed through me and I felt my stomach relax. I pressed my fingers to my eyes but then immediately texted him back.

Thank you.

For telling me that.

I saw dots appear and then nothing. I checked the clock. It was already about 3:30. I wouldn't have to wait long. I read the message again. We're OK. I love you. I'm mad. But I love you.

I took a deep steadying breath and threw myself into a report. Around 4:30 Mark poked his head in and asked if I needed anything. Danny stopped by to ask how my weekend was. I kept my eyes on the time as he talked, growing more and more anxious. If he didn't leave soon I'd be late and Caleb *wouldn't* take kindly to that. Especially not if it was because of Danny.

But finally he left, saying he was glad I had a good weekend and that he hoped to chat more at lunch tomorrow. As I watched people filter out, I packed up my bag. At 5:00 I walked

down to his office, trying to decide what I was going to do.

I should tell him where I went and why. I should listen to Mrs. Furst's advice, even if it was mirrored by her so-called husband. That misogynistic psychopath. Most importantly, the risk of Furst telling Caleb was *high*. It would be better to tell the truth. I went to speak to Jessica Furst because I wanted advice on how to handle our side of the relationship. The side with no power and no autonomy and now I could possibly allow myself to love a person who had the ability to destroy me on so many ways. I needed to tell him.

I stepped into his office and closed the door, noting the pulled blinds. I locked it and he looked up from his computer only briefly.

"Why didn't you bring your phone?" he asked, not looking at me. He was staring at his computer screen, face stone, and my heart clenched. I could feel us backsliding already, away from that glorious warmth I'd felt all weekend.

Tell him the truth. Tell him the truth.

"I just forgot it," I lied.

"You've never just forgotten your phone before," he said and looked away from his computer to look at me. "I need to know where you are."

"I just went for a walk," I said, looking for any sign he had been contacted. I saw none and felt a rush of relief and surprise. I knew it could still happen, that I needed to be honest, but I also felt certain if Furst was going to contact Caleb it would have happened already. For some reason, he was going to keep my presence at his hotel suite private.

I realized in the past I would have received a barrage of angry texts. Threatening texts. Degrading texts. I would have received pictures of me tied up and naked, unconscious, his cock inside any number of my holes. I would have been taken violently. Dry. Forcefully like at the vending machines or that first night we had sex in his bed. Instead, he was sitting there with the vein quivering beneath his eye, a vein bulging on his neck, his skin flushed.

You have an incredible amount of power.

Maybe she was right. Maybe there was something I could do to determine how my evening would go. Caleb was trying, but I could see the battle raging within him. I licked my bottom lip anxiously and checked over my shoulder to double check that the blinds were pulled completely. Then I got up and walked over to him. He pushed his chair back ever so slightly, giving me space to slide onto his lap. I grabbed his tie and flipped it over to read the initials on it. My heart was pounding so hard I wouldn't have been surprised if he heard it.

"I'm so sorry, Caleb. I should have brought my phone. I just had things under control and I needed time to think. About us."

His jaw clenched and his Adam's apple bobbed. I pressed my hands flat against his chest. I could feel his heart pounding hard and rapid against his sternum. As hard and fast as mine. I could have worked out my pulse by simply taking his own.

"I'm trying so hard to make this work. To make you happy."

"You do make me happy," he breathed.

"I just want to please you."

The word please earned in a slow but deep intake of breath. I pressed my lips together and then pushed onward, terrified, but also certain. He wouldn't reject me. Not in this. I slid off his lap and between his knees.

"I'm sorry," I said again, reaching for his belt. I could see blood filling his cock, watching it grow and harden beneath his pants. "Please don't be mad."

"I need to know where you are. At all times."

I unbuttoned his pants and pulled the zipper down.

“All the time. I need to know.”

I nodded. “I’m sorry.”

He nodded, lifting his hips so I could remove his erection.

“Please don’t be mad.”

He reached out and touched my cheek.

“Say you're sorry,” he murmured.

“I’m sorry,” I said, stroking his hard member slowly.

“Say you’re sorry,” he repeated again, hand gripping the hair on the top of my head. I was confused for a moment, before he grabbed his cock and placed it in my mouth. “That’s a good girl. That’s how you apologize.”

He pushed my head down on his cock until my eyes watered, but I didn’t try to pull back. I wanted things to stay the same.

“Look at me.”

I lifted my eyes up toward him and he pulled my head back. I trailed my lips along his hot flesh, and he slowly pushed me back down on his cock.

“Good girl,” he murmured. “That’s how you apologize.”

He continued to move me up and down his cock. He continued to move me up and down the length of his cock in slow, methodical movements.

“You can’t run away from me like that,” he murmured.

I wanted to argue. I didn’t run away from him. I left work for an hour and a half. That’s hardly running away from him. But that he interpreted that way was eye opening. It made his reaction to some of my previous actions that much more clear.

“You look so good down there,” he said, voice still a murmur. It didn’t rise from a murmur the entire time. “I need to know where you are.”

“I’m sorry,” I tried to say around his member. He pulled me off so I could speak.

“What was that, baby?”

“I’m sorry, Caleb. Please don’t be angry with me.”

He sucked in a breath and stroked his cock hard. I placed my hand over his and he let me take over. I moved my hand up and down his shaft at a firm, steady pace.

“I don’t want you to be mad at me,” I murmured. “Please, Caleb.”

“Please,” he murmured.

“Please forgive me, Caleb. I’m sorry.”

His hand tightened in my hair and he forced himself back into my mouth. I felt him ejaculate at the back of my throat, hard and fast. I swallowed, fighting the urge to cough and spit. When he was done, he tucked himself back into his pants and buckled his belt.

“Come here,” he murmured, beckoning to me. I got up onto his lap and wrapped my arms around his neck. I kissed him, very tenderly, very genuinely. He looked at me curiously.

“Thank you,” I murmured.

“For what?”

“When you told me you were mad at me,” I started. “You said you loved me and that we were ok. I needed that.”

He was nodding.

“I didn’t want you to be scared.”

“I would have,” I said. “That helps me.”

He ran his hand up my leg.

“What did you think about?” he asked. I looked at him, heart pounding hard. I slid my hand up the back of his neck. His skin was still burning. “On your walk?”

“Just... things.”

“Things,” he repeated.

“Just processing things.”

“Still feeling better?”

I nodded. I kissed him again.

“Please don’t be mad at me.”

“I’m still not *happy* about it but I’m not mad at you,” he said. “I *need* to know where you are.”

I nodded. “Ok.”

“I can’t explain why - I just need to know. You can’t just - you can’t just leave me because I feel...”

I watched the frustration take hold as he tried to explain a feeling he just couldn’t. I understood that feeling all too well. And I understood how it felt when the simple feeling wasn’t accepted. There needed to be a *why*. But there was no why. It just was.

“You don’t need to explain it,” I answered softly. He looked at me searchingly. I shrugged. “You don’t need to explain it. I get it.”

He cupped my cheek again.

“We’re going to be *so happy*, Orla,” he murmured, eyes moving rapidly across my face. “ *So happy*. ”

Once again, I saw the man that had blackmailed me, held me captive, stalked me, raped me. All because he was so obsessed with me. *Me*.

He leaned forward and kissed me, his hand on the back of my head. His kiss was hard and I could feel that he was shaking. I pulled back, lips still touching his.

“You’re shaking. You’re not mad?”

“No, I... sometimes I just... you tried to leave me and I just need to...”

“I didn’t try to leave you, Caleb. I went for a walk.”

He touched my face. His fingers trembled. His eyes burned and I could feel the frenetic energy coming off of him. It should have scared me. I found only comfort in it.

“Before you knew it was me... I would send you those messages. One right after the other. Boom. Boom. Boom. I just...needed you to know. That I *owned* you. That you were *mine*. I know that right now things are fragile, so I don’t want to upset you, but I need to... sometimes I just... I need you to know it.”

His eyes locked on mine.

“I need ...”

“You own me,” I said softly. It had been so repulsive when Furst said it to me this afternoon. I didn’t mind saying it now. “I belong to you. I know that.”

I touched his shoulders, one hand moving up to cradle the side of his burning neck. “What do you *want* to do right now?”

His hand slid down my cheek, down the front of my neck, and over my breasts.

“I want to dominate you. I want to take you home and tie you up and fuck you in the most degrading ways possible, until you remember who you belong to.”

“Ok.”

His eyes lifted from my breasts to my face. His eyes were burning. I felt a flutter. This was *him*. And Caleb. I saw both. I felt a flutter in my throat. “Let’s go home.”

His lips twitched. My heart was pounding and I felt awkward, but I leaned down and placed my lips on his ear. I tried to lick it the way he did mine. I touched my teeth to the earlobe. I pulled back, terrified I’d find him looking disgusted, disappointed, or embarrassed. Instead, his eyes were hot and full of need.

“Get your stuff,” he ordered. “I’m going to destroy you tonight.”

I happily obeyed.

We arrived home and Caleb threw the locks behind us. I dropped my bag and waited, both nervous and excited.

“Are you hungry?” he asked, taking me by the hips and gently pulling me closer. “Once I start I won’t stop until I’m satisfied.”

“I’m ok,” I answered. My heart was beating hard again.

“What did you have for lunch?” he asked.

“I - what?”

“It’s not a hard question, Orla. What did you eat for lunch.”

I bit my bottom lip and admitted, “I didn’t.”

He sighed and let go of my hips.

“I miss lunch once ...”

He went into the kitchen and pulled out some microwave meals. He told me very clearly he didn’t feel like waiting long. We ate - I had chicken Alfredo and he had chicken primavera - and then he tossed the forks into the sink and threw out the packages.

“Stand up,” he instructed, coming around the island. I obeyed, and he grabbed the back of my hair and tilted my head back.

“Can you...” I stopped, feeling silly.

“Can I?” he asked. “Can I what, Orla?”

“Can you throw me around a bit?” I asked. A little smirk came over his face.

“Yeah, you like when I do that, huh.”

I nodded, cheeks flushed pink.

“You know what I want tonight?” He trailed his hand down the side of my neck. “I want you to fight me.”

I frowned at him.

“You never *really* tried to fight me. You always gave in. It was the smart thing to do. It was what you should have done. I want you to *fight*. Do everything in your power to stop me. Ok?”

I swallowed, tongue darting out to wet my lips, nerves settling in deeply.

“Will it hurt?” I asked softly, remembering the first time we had sex in his bed. He cupped my cheek.

“No. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Should we - should we have a safe word or something?” I asked. He stared at me, eyes darkening.

“*No*. We don’t have safe words.”

“I just mean,” I hurried out, placing my hands on his chest. “If you want me to stop fighting. So I’ll know to obey you.”

“When I want you to stop, I’ll tell you to stop. If I’m hurting you, you’ll tell me, and I’ll decide what to do. But we don’t have safe words because this is *real*.”

“I know it’s real,” I said. “But I’m not actually fighting you so - ”

He grabbed my face, fingers on one cheek, thumb on the other. His eyes burned.

“Yes. You are. I want you to fight me. Kick, claw, scratch. I want you to do everything you can to stop me. No playing. *Hurt* me, if you can manage it...” he looked me over, that dark, arrogant smirk playing over his lips. He looked debilitatingly handsome. “I’ll show you just how easy it is to *throw you around*. ”

My heart quickened even further and I nodded.

“There’s no games, there’s no rules. If I tell you to do something, just do it. If you have a question just ask it. Ok?”

I nodded again, lips pressed together.

“Ok, then,” he smiled. He reached for my hand and I let him pull me toward him, not realizing we were starting. His lips touched my neck and his hand gently pulled at the zipper of my skirt. It felt nice and my eyes fluttered closed, but then I remembered I was supposed to fight. I pulled back from him, and his hand tightened around my wrists. His other hand jerked the zipper of my skirt down harder. His lips touched my earlobe, gently sucking it between his lips. I leaned back and hit him as hard as I could with an open hand, the same way I had in his office when he kissed me as himself. He looked at me, stunned, and I waited for him to grow angry. Instead, he only continued to stare.

He said no rules.

He said to fight.

So I turned around and walked away. I was halfway to the bedroom before I heard a chair scrape against the floor. Just a moment later one of his arms wrapped around my middle, pinning my arms to my side, and my feet left the floor.

“Turn your back on me, Orla? Walk away from me? Oh,” he laughed. “You arrogant little bitch.”

I tried to wrench my arms but he carried me down the hall with ease. I kicked out my legs, trying to use the wall as leverage but it had no effect.

“I thought we might enjoy that a little,” he taunted. I tried to twist, but it was like pushing against a brick wall. “Who would have thought your pride would be your downfall.”

His words dripped with condescension. He opened a door and then dropped me on the floor. The air rushed from my lungs and I didn’t take the moment I had to escape. He straddled my hips, sitting back on my legs, and held my hands above my head by the wrist.

“What was that, Orla? Ten seconds?”

He grabbed the top of my blouse and yanked hard. I heard ripping fabric and buttons popping. My lips parted in anger. I *liked* this shirt. My black lacy bra was visible from beneath the torn, green silk.

“You look so good like that,” he said. He slapped me then. Not hard. Certainly not as hard as I hit him, but it did sting. He’d hit me that hard before and it didn’t scare me. I tried something I’d learned in a self defense class in high school. I tried to push my hips up at an angle to wrench him off of me. Nothing happened except I managed to press my core into his rock hard cock.

“Dirty slut,” he said and gave my shirt another hard rip. “You’re just asking for it.”

Once my blouse was torn down to its last few buttons, he glanced to his right and reached for a drawer. I turned my head upward and watched him pull out a bundle of black leather. When I looked back at him, I saw his face straining to reach something. He lifted his hips, giving me just enough room to lift my knee.

I hit him much harder than I intended to, but he had been the one that said he wanted me to actually fight. He let out a loud grunt and he dropped the leather, his hands going between his legs. I shoved him hard and ran past him. He grabbed onto my shirt as I flew past him, his grip so hard, that I had to twist out of it completely to get away. I was at the door, throwing the locks, not knowing what I would actually do if I got the door open. I didn't need to worry though.

One of his hands went to my hair, another around my body and he dragged me backward toward the bedroom. I kicked my feet and tried to bite the arm that was wrapped around my chest.

"Fucking bitch," he gritted out. "I'm going to fuck some respect into you."

Once in the bedroom, one of his hands closed around my bicep and he jerked me hard toward the bed. I left my feet, hitting the mattress and sliding backward to the pillows. I felt a rush of excitement course through me. He closed the bedroom door and then stalked toward me. He had the black leather in his hands.

I tried to scramble across the other side of the bed but he grabbed it and yanked me backward. I let out a little scream but quickly smothered it. We *didn't* need the cops showing up.

He grabbed my wrists and held them up, his powerful legs holding me down below the waist. I continued to continue the struggle, but I was exhausted. I physically *couldn't*. He was too strong. One leather cuff closed around my wrists, followed by another. He flipped me over and jerked my arms behind my back. He clasped my wrists together as the small of my back. I yanked with my depleted muscles but the binds held firm.

"That's better," he said. His breathing was elevated, but he wasn't breathing nearly as hard as I was. One of his hands pressed to the flat of my back and he pushed me down into the mattress. He yanked down on the zipper and then jerked my skirt down over my kicking legs. He caught my feet and pinned one beneath his leg. His knee pressed hard into my calf but it only hurt vaguely. My other leg was bent at the knee, and a hard, tight strap fastened my calf to the back of my thigh. He then let the other foot go and did the same.

“Now that’s pretty,” he said and landed a hard smack on my ass, which thankfully was still covered with pantyhose. I sagged, momentarily too tired to fight. I was entirely subdued. I couldn’t free my arms or my legs, leaving me in just my bra and pantyhose. He slapped my ass a second time. His hands parted my ass cheeks and his fingers slid between my lower lips. I sucked in a breath.

“Did you ever have rape fantasies?” he asked, sounding genuinely curious. “Before I started raping you? Because you’re *soaked*.”

My cheeks burned and I shook my head. It was true. I’d never once considered such a thing erotic. But I knew how I felt in that moment, and it was *good*.

“Just for me?” he murmured, lips pressed to my ear. His hand went to my hair and he jerked my head back. His nose went to my throat and he breathed in deeply. “You’re shaking. Scared?”

Scared. Terrified. Exhilarated.

He pulled back and ripped through the crotch of my pantyhose. His fingers fished into me and they went in with ease. I sucked in a breath and he quickly withdrew his fingers.

“Slut,” he breathed, and I could hear him fumble with his trousers. The head of his cock slid between my lips, growing slick with my juices. He wasted little time, and then he was inside me, pushing me apart and stretching me from within. One of his hands held my face down into the mattress, my cheek pressed to the cool blue comforter, his hands buried deeply in my hair. The other pressed down on my shoulder.

I couldn’t stop the moans that escaped me as he thrust. He fucked me hard and deep, drawing uncontrollable noises from me that I didn’t even realize I was making until he spoke.

“Quiet or I’ll have to gag you. You’ll disturb the neighbors.”

He didn't sound angry. Instead, his voice was coated with arousal and amusement. I realized I couldn't really tell the difference anymore. It was *his* voice, but it was Caleb's. He was finally both. I turned my face and bit down on the blanket to try and stifle the strangle sound that escaped me with each violent thrust.

He continued to thrust into me with hard, steady thrusts. Finally, he pulled out of me.

"Fine, you can't shut up, I'll shut you up," he said. He yanked me toward the edge of the bed and flipped me over. I didn't know if he still wanted me to fight. I just didn't have the energy.

He pulled me to the edge until my head hung over the side and then he put his cock into my mouth. I gagged, the head of his cock touching the back of my throat. I could feel his balls on my face as he moved his cock on and out of my mouth. Tears streamed down my eyes and I was afraid I would throw up. I did everything I could not to. He flipped the cups of my bras down and groped one of my breasts.

"Isn't that a pretty picture," he said. My throat constricted and I let out a noise of discomfort. He pushed down my throat once more before he pulled out. He leaned down, slapping my cheek, and looked at me.

"You ok, baby?" he asked me. I nodded, as tears still came from my eyes. I was panting hard, sight blurry.

"Yeah?" he asked. He slapped me again and I nodded.

"You take it so well," he praised. He flipped me over and yanked my head up with a hand in my hair. His cock was back in my mouth and his other hand went to my chin. He fucked my throat until I made a noise and my body tensed and then he pulled out.

"Oh, you're doing so well, Orla. So well," he praised. I looked up at him. I felt a sense of pride and happiness take hold. He dragged his cock along my cheek as he let me catch my breath. Then, his cock was back in my mouth. It went on for a long time, but he always pulled out before I thought I might be sick. I was embarrassed only momentarily when he

paused to grab a napkin and gently wiped beneath my nose, but he praised me so warmly as he gently wiped my upper lip, I almost immediately forgot about it.

“You’re doing so well, Orla. Look at those eyes. So gorgeous. Such a good girl.”

I tried to smile and focused on getting my breathing under control again. He spun me around so my head was now facing away from him and he yanked me toward the edge of the bed by the hips. My hands were still bound behind my back, my legs bent up beneath me. It was one of the most vulnerable, exposed positions I had ever been in. Spread open, breasts pushed out, legs spread, unable to move in any meaningful way. He entered me again, thrusting hard and deep, hands on his hips.

“Fucking perfect,” he breathed. One of his hands went to my throat and he squeezed. “Isn’t that right, Orla? Aren’t you perfect?”

My lips parted and I gave a tiny shake of my head. It wasn’t really an argument. It was more an expression of confusion. But then he slapped my cheek again.

“Answer me, Orla. Aren’t you perfect for me?”

He slapped my other cheek. I was nodding and hardly heard myself speak.

“Say it.” Another slap. The pressure between my legs was unbearable. My head was congested and my eyes were puffy, sheets wet.

“I’m perfect for you.”

“Perfect,” he agreed and slapped my other cheek.

“I’m perfect,” I repeated.

“That’s right,” he said. He changed his pace, fucking hard and fast and then he tensed. He stayed inside of me, letting out soft sounds as he rode out his orgasm. I tilted my head back, and closed my eyes.

I pulled my cock out of her and watched my cum slowly ooze from her puffy, pink hole. Her body was marked red. Well used and leaking with my semen. I took a picture of her cunt, spreading her lips to better watch the white substance against the pink flesh. My entire body buzzed. It felt so good to see now, I couldn’t imagine how it would look when I knew it would *do* something. When I could come inside of her and know soon she’d be pregnant with my child.

I slid my hand over her lower abdomen and imagined it. When I looked back up, her eyelids were hooded and she was looking at me. Her puffy eyes, and red, wet cheeks, made her look small and vulnerable, and I picked up my phone and took a picture of her. Then I put my phone down and cupped her cheek.

“You were amazing,” I told her and she smiled softly. “So good.”

“You’re happy?” she asked softly. I worked on removing her binds. I wanted her in my arms. I wanted her close. Once she was unbound, I sat us up by the pillows and pulled her into my lap. I cradled her gently.

“I’m so happy,” I murmured into her hair. “I’m so happy. You’re perfect. So perfect.”

I tilted her face up toward me and stroked her cheek.

“I love you. You did so well.”

“I like...”

My heart was pounding as I waited. She looked up at the ceiling. "I like it, I think... the way it feels."

"Being dominated? Bound?" I asked. Her eyes moved from the ceiling to me and she nodded.

"I have so much to show you," I murmured. "You're going to love it. I know it. You're..." I laughed. "I never thought I'd say this. You're a natural submissive. You're a people pleaser, you're just so scared of rejection you put up this wall..."

I recalled dinner with her parents. Her insufferable mother and her spineless father.

I trailed my thumb along her lower lip.

"I have so much to teach you."

She nibbled on the inside of her lower lip before she nodded.

"I want to learn," she said softly. I smiled at her. She was perfect. Absolutely perfect. I couldn't believe how lucky I was. But I wasn't lucky. Not really. I deserved her. This was meant to be.

"Come on," I said. "Let's take a nice hot bath."

We got into bed around ten that evening. Orla nestled in the middle of the bed and I grabbed us both some water and a small snack. The sight of her nestled in my bed, but with her throw blanket over her, made my body buzz. I was overcome with a rush of happiness, peace, *contentment*.

I believe everything happens for a reason. I knew it long before I ever met Orla. Whatever it was, God, the universe, fate, I was meant to have Orla. It was why I inexplicably spilled coffee on my powder blue dress shirt the day I met her. It was why I ended up *just* missing the train as a result of needing to change, and it was why I ended up behind that slow walker as I tried to ascend the stairs and leave the T station. Because of all that, I left the elevator doors at the moment Crispy was leaving Chris' cubicle and stopped me to ask if I caught the basketball game the night before. We had been talking less than thirty seconds when the second set of elevator doors opened and the pretty new associate stepped off and slammed right into me, scattering her things on the floor like out of a goddamn movie, and stuttered out her apologies. She had looked so vulnerable and unsure, I felt an immediate attraction to her. I sometimes wonder if that didn't happen, if I hadn't seen her in such a vulnerable situation, if I ever would have wanted her the way I did, because the girl I perceived after that was not that same vulnerable, frightened girl fresh out of law school that I had lusted after in that moment.

I don't believe in what-ifs though. If I wasn't meant to have Orla, I wouldn't have spilled my coffee, and I wouldn't have missed the train, and I wouldn't have gotten behind that slow walker, and I wouldn't have run into Crispy just at the right time for Orla to step off that elevator and into my life. I was meant to have that momentary glimpse of the girl inside, because God knew my ego wouldn't have seen it myself after her first, second, third rejection.

And because I knew that things happened for a reason, I knew that I had done the right thing at dinner when I not only confronted her insufferable cunt of a mother, but cursed at her while doing so.

I had believed that what Orla wanted was for dinner to go smoothly. She didn't like confrontation and I wanted them to like me. I employed my counting to keep myself calm. After her comment about resentment, I decided I didn't really care if this woman liked me or not. I only wanted their approval to make Orla happy, but any disapproval of me would mean nothing. Orla couldn't leave me and I wasn't letting her go.

The rate of my counting ebbed and flowed as dinner progressed. I didn't know what I would have done if I reached zero and I still wanted to reach out and slap the work off that woman's face. But the moment I hit zero, Orla apologized, shoulders hunching, looking so sad and so defeated. It told me all I needed to know. My priority wasn't giving Orla what she *thought* she needed, but what she actually needed. What she needed was to be away from these awful people. She needed to be defended and protected and she either couldn't or wouldn't do it herself.

Her reaction, hugging and thanking me had been unexpected. I expected a fight. I expected her to tell me how much more difficult I had made her life and that she'd never hear the end of it and why couldn't I just leave well enough alone.

You're on my side.

That was what she had said to me and though I knew on some level it was what she needed, it shifted my perspective in a subtle, yet monumental way. There was something intrinsic to Orla that made her hyper critical of herself and she was born into a home with a hypercritical mother and a weak father, and then, in two of the most defining moments of her life, where she put herself out there and trusted someone, they used her and broke her heart. She needed someone to champion her because she wouldn't champion herself.

I also knew that telling her I was interviewing and that I would be leaving the company so we could go public would be useless. She wouldn't believe me even if I said it. I would *show* her she could trust me. I would *show* her that I would take care of her.

I put our bowls on my nightstand and turned off the light. I pulled her into my arms and stared up at the ceiling. I gently ran my fingers over her arms, relishing in the soft perfection of her skin.

"Caleb," she whispered.

"Yeah?" I asked. She shifted slightly, her arm tightened around my middle, her cheek pressing into my chest.

"Remember what I told you about the gas station?"

"Yeah," I answered, one of my hands gently gripping her elbow, the other running along her hair.

"That's the norm for me. That's how my brain works. Twentyfour-seven."

“Sounds exhausting,” I answered, only half teasing.

“It is... does it bother you?” she asked, gently trailing her nails up my forearm. I was slowly falling asleep, wrapped in a blissful warmth.

“Does what bother me?”

“That I’m so messed up.”

“Because I’m so fucking normal?”

She turned her face toward me. I cupped her cheek, stroking her skin gently. She stared at me, eyes glistening. I felt that same wave of protectiveness I felt at dinner.

“What do I do for you?” she whispered. I stared, in disbelief she could even ask that question. Yet, I couldn’t find the words myself.

“My mother used to say I was broken. I believed her for a long time. I thought I’d never find it, whatever it was inside me that was just missing...Ever since I was young I felt this emptiness in me. This gaping hole...”

I looked deeply into her glimmering eyes.

“You fill it up.”

She stared at me. I stared back unflinchingly. I hoped she could see into my soul, see the things I couldn’t say, and then she could trust me. Just a little longer. She stared for what felt like an eternity, until she nodded and leaned up to kiss me.

“Good night,” she murmured, nuzzling her nose into my side.

“Good night,” I answered. I fought off sleep this time. I just wanted to be awake to hold her a little while longer.

Across the city, at the very top of an expensive hotel, in a glorious suite, a woman and her older husband sat at the dining room table for dinner, their two children sleeping peacefully down the hall.

“ *Tell* him,” she urged, placing her hand on his. He brought another bite to his lips. She was pushing her luck. She knew that very well and her husband’s words had grown curter and shorter as the meal progressed.

“*Nein.*”

“Master, please.”

“He will not let her go. No harm will come to him. If they are meant to be, they will be. But *she* will learn her lesson.”

“It will make *his* life much easier if he knew she was concerned about their future. The entire reason he isn’t bringing it up - ”

“They *both* have a lesson to learn . He needs to learn it doesn’t matter what she wants. It is his duty to lead her to correct decisions. She needs to learn to be honest and obedient. It is her duty to follow.”

“It’s a different type of relationship. If - ”

“*Meines Mädchen*,” he paused and touched her cheek. “All will end as it should. We get what we deserve. If they will not listen, they must learn. You must trust me.”

“I do... I want what’s best for them.”

“As do I.”

“You should tell him at least that she came here. I’m sure he doesn’t know. He deserves to know where she is at all times. If she was doing this behind his back -”

“And force the conversation? An admirable try though, *Mädchen*. *Nein* .”

She watched him take another bite of his steak.

“I like her,” Jessica finally said, clasping her hands and resting her cheek on them. He snorted indignantly.

“I think I might go to work. What do you think? I can join your finance team.”

“I am not in the mood.”

She slid out of her seat and into his lap.

“I can start wearing business suits and sit in on meetings,” she said, sliding her hands through his hair. “I can tell you what I really think of you.”

She slapped her hands down on his cheek with little pats.

“You. Arrogant. Man.”

“Quiet. Wife.”

“You can’t tell me what to do. I don’t listen to you.”

She slid off his lap and he grabbed her by the wrists, slamming her down hard on the half eaten steak on his plate. They both paused and listened, waiting for the sound of a baby crying or the soft questioning call of their daughter. They were met with silence, and he bent down to grip his wife’s hair hard.

“Be careful, woman,” he said menacingly.

“Or what?” she asked.

And he showed her. He showed her well into the night.

Chapter Notes

A little birdie has told me some people think my stories have too much sex and to that I say...

You're probably right, but here we are.

Enjoy!

(If anyone here is concerned about my lack of Community updates, I am doing my darndest to get IICHY completed so I'm not being torn in so many different directions story-wise. This story probably only has 3-4 chapters left, so I will get back to the Community soon because Father just does something to my soul.)

That Friday Caleb gave a presentation on a new tax change that would affect a number of states. All of state and local were there. I would have preferred to get a seat in the back, but unfortunately, my last call ran late, and by the time I arrived, I had to sit in the front next to Nick. Caleb came in last, having left the same call I did. His suit jacket was gone, his powder blue shirt sleeves rolled up to his upper forearms. He was absolute perfection. His well-tailored clothing clung to him perfectly, fitted just enough to highlight the hard lines and powerful muscles beneath his clothing, but not so tight it looked like he was trying too hard.

His voice was clear and authoritative. He started the presentation with a joke, which was actually very funny. He clicked through his slides, holding the remote in his pocket, using his other hand to gesture. He walked across the front of the room, only directly turning to the slides behind him once to look at the stat that Mark was asking him about. He moved with such ease and confidence.

It occurred to me as I watched him, that there was no scenario I could come up with in which I would have realized *he* was asking *me* out. Not after prom. Not after James. Caleb was unattainable, he was the one that asked me to prom and then didn't show. He was the one that slept with me and then pretended to be confused when I asked when we would see each other again. I had been a fool twice. I promised myself I would never be the fool again.

“Great job, Caleb,” Nick was praising him as everyone filed out of the room. “Great job.”

“Thanks, Nick,” Caleb smiled and the two shook hands. He glanced at me as I got up from my chair and I gave him a small smile.

“It was very good,” I said quietly as I walked by them.

“Thanks, Orla,” Caleb said as I left.

“How’s she doing?” Nick asked.

I would have liked to linger to eavesdrop, but I knew Caleb would speak highly of me and Chris was standing by the copier with Danny and Steve. I ignored the smile and the wave from Chris, but gave a small smile and nod to Danny and Steve. I spent the rest of the afternoon getting work done and contemplating what life might have been like if I had said yes to Caleb when he first asked me out. If I had never been stood up at prom and if I hadn’t slept with James and if I had even the slightest bit of a normal brain, I wondered where Caleb and I would be now. In love? Engaged? Working in different departments and officially public? Would we have pictures posted on Facebook? A full relationship status change? Would I even have my own lease anymore?

“Ready to go?” Caleb asked me around seven. I jumped, lost in thought, but nodded and saved the document I was working on. I packed up and we walked out together. We spoke a little bit about work on our way to the train, but we were also growing more comfortable in silence together. That was why I didn’t think much of our more or less silent ride back on the T. I flipped through Facebook, liking memes and checking in on my cousin and her baby, all the while replaying that day Caleb first asked me out over and over again in my head. He had just been so smug. So arrogant. I *knew* who he was.

I remembered thinking that he thought I was an idiot. Some young fool fresh out of law school who needed his world of knowledge to help her through it. He thought he knew it all. God’s gift to the world of tax. He was going to help the frumpy, awkward girl out and be the likable hero for all the office to revere. And maybe, just for laughs, he’d try to sleep with me just because he thought he could, and I’d hear the snickers behind my back for the rest of my career.

A loud screeching drew me from my thoughts and I looked up at the green lettering on the screen at the front of the train. I looked up at Caleb, who was hanging with one from the bar above his head, his other hand in his pocket, smiling down at me with a thoughtful gaze.

“What?” I asked. My tone was soft.

“I just like looking at you. You’re beautiful,” he murmured. I blushed, but then he spoke again and I felt my stomach tighten. “I’m going to have fun with you this weekend.”

“What are we going to do?” I asked. He smirked, eyes moving down the length of me and then moving back up. He looked around the train, which was busy, but wasn’t completely packed.

“Do you trust me?” he asked.

“I’m trying to,” I answered honestly. He smiled. He stepped closer to me. The smell of him invaded my senses. He put his hand on my arm and slowly slid it down to my wrist. He leaned down and breathed in my hair deeply. His lips brushed my earlobe and then he placed two soft kisses to my neck.

“Trust me,” he murmured in my ear.

He pulled back and I frowned, a knot in my stomach. He stepped to the side and took my hand, leading us to the door just in time for it to open and beat the crush. I was a ball of anxiety as we walked back to the apartment. My hand pulsed around his squeezing hard and then loosening, squeezing hard and then loosening. Once inside, he removed his suit coat and loosened his tie.

“Go shower. Shave, use the lotion, come meet me out here. Naked.”

“Caleb -”

He grabbed me by the chin, eyes hard.

“We’re going to reestablish boundaries this weekend,” he murmured. “I’ve been very lenient with you and I’ve been going very slow... but I have ... desires and you’re here to fulfill them.”

His eyes narrowed slightly. He looked like he might want to say something, but then he just shook his head and said, “Now go. Don’t make me ask again.”

“Yes, Caleb,” I answered and went to shower. I was a ball of anxiety but I *wouldn’t* ask for a Xanax. I cut myself shaving. It bled a good amount and it stung terribly and I always thought it was unfair how badly a cut shin or ankle hurt with so little to show for it. I finished shaving, washed myself clean, washed my hair, and then stepped out into the bathroom. I cursed softly as I watched the blood run down my ankle. It hurt like a bitch, but I figured whatever was about to happen to me would be much worse. I rubbed the lotion into my skin, leaving it fresh and soft.

With a pounding heart, I walked out into the living room. Goosebumps erupted along my skin and my nipples were hard. I could forget about my nakedness during sex. Walking out into the living room felt so... exposed.

I found Caleb lounging on the couch, scrolling through his phone lazily. His shirt sleeves were rolled up, his tie pulled loose but still on, and he had run his hand through his hair, tousling it slightly. Dark stubble was coming in, leaving him looking particularly rugged. It made me feel even more exposed, even more vulnerable.

His eyes found me and his lips curved upward, eyes moving down me in lazy appraisal. He pressed a hand to his trousers, pushing down his budding erection. I had no idea how after all he had done to me, I could still feel so open and vulnerable in front of him, but seeing him there now, and after that brilliant and easy confidence he had on display today, I felt it more than ever.

“Kneel,” he instructed, pointing between his feet. I obeyed, fighting the internal tremble that was bubbling up inside of me. I touched the necklace around my neck as I approached and his eyes dropped to it. I felt a little prickle of comfort as I ran the diamond between my fingers. He had put our initials in it. *Our* initials. I continued to remind myself of that as I lowered myself to the ground at his feet and he took hold of my chin.

“No fighting this weekend. I want complete and total submission,” he said. I nodded.

“Yes, Caleb.”

He lowered his hand to close around my throat.

“I get off on control, Orla. Control, domination, power. And you belong to me. You’re here to fulfill my fantasies. To satisfy my desires. I’ve pulled back a lot, so you could recover. I think we’re ready for this, but I need you to be strong for me. I need you to remember that I love you and I respect you... and that’s why doing what I’m about to do to you turns me on so much... If I thought less of you, it wouldn’t get me so fucking hot. Do you understand?”

I nodded. He stroked my cheek.

“You’re my sweet little plaything. This weekend, I want the Orla that’s hidden deep down in there. The one you fight so hard to keep hidden from the world. The girl that spilled her stuff outside that elevator and looked into my eyes looking so lost and so confused and so scared. The girl I first fell in love with. I want her. Open. Raw. Stripped bare for me. Can you do that?”

“I’ll try,” I promised, voice softly. He smirked and leaned forward, placing his lips to my mouth. He kissed me, slow and tender. His tongue slipped into my mouth and his fingers pulsed around my throat. The kiss turned harder then, sucking my tongue into his mouth, forcing his tongue deep into mine. He tilted my head back, surrounding me completely, his hand tightening.

“I know you can do it, Orla,” he murmured against my mouth. “I know you’ll make me proud.”

“You just need to tell me if you’re mad at me,” I said. “Please, if you ever get actually mad at me... I need to know you’ll tell me. Directly.”

“I will,” he promised. He rose from his spot on the couch.

“Crawl,” he instructed. I thought of Jessica, crawling across the floor to kiss her rapist’s feet. I felt a rush of disgust. For her. For me. But I wasn’t going to fight and I wasn’t going to ruin the good will we’ve created. My knees ached on the hardwood floor as I followed him down the hall to the little room he kept his more deviant items. He had me stop in the middle of the room on my hands and knees. He observed me for a few moments, gripping his erection through his trousers. He tilted his head and walked toward me, his hand pulsing around the navy blue fabric. His eyes were dark and his tongue touched the corner of his mouth.

“Do you remember our first weekend together?” he asked. My stomach did a flip flop at the memory. “Answer me, Orla.”

“Yes, Caleb.”

“We had so much fun together...you came for me so. many. times.”

I squeezed my eyes shut and he ordered me on my feet. He stepped closer so he was looming over me. I arched my neck to look up at him and his hand closed around the back of my neck.

“You loved the way I raped you,” he gritted out. “Just dissolved into a filthy whore... soaking wet, so responsive. So submissive.”

I squeezed my eyes shut and he pinched my nipple.

“You’ll enjoy this weekend I think,” he said. He sucked my earlobe into his mouth. “You like being my dirty little cum depository. My living sex doll.”

He worked both nipples into hardened little buds. One of his hands then went between my legs. His fingers pressed inside of me and his thumb stroked my clit. He smirked at me, tilting his head.

“You looked like a thirsty little cunt watching me present today,” he mused. “I love having those big green eyes on me.”

“You speak so well,” I whispered. I wasn’t sure why I was whispering. He was speaking softly, but not so far below a normal volume. It just felt right to whisper. “You’re just so confident. I wish...”

One of his thumbs brushed over my bottom lip. The other pressed harder into my clit and rubbed little circles.

“I wish I could be more like you,” I admitted.

“No,” he said. “You’re too sweet. We’re two halves of a hole. You have everything I lack. I have everything you lack. We’re perfect.”

I felt that same tug I always felt when he spoke like that. Us. We. A team. Damn the rest of the world. If he had me he was happy. I wanted it to be true. I needed it to be true. I thought it might be. Especially because of the way he said it: *we’re* perfect. He didn’t just mean us as individuals, which I think he believed as well. He meant *us*. Together, as a relationship, as a unit. It was so miraculously comforting.

“Get on your knees for me,” he murmured, voice softer now. I obeyed, dropping to my knees and reached for his belt. He grabbed my wrists and I stared, wide eyed and with parted lips.

“What -”

“You greedy slut,” he said. “You want my cock you need to ask nicely for it.”

“Please, Caleb... can I please...”

“We’ll work on your dirty talk,” he smirked. “Can I please have your hard cock in my mouth.”

“Can I please have your hard cock in my mouth,” I asked him. “Please. I want... want to...”

What did I want to do? Everything I thought he would want to hear sounded so cheesy and corny. It just wasn’t who I was. I couldn’t say things I didn’t mean. I didn’t know how. It would sound disjointed and wooden and I don’t think that would make him happy and all I really wanted to do in that moment was make him happy.

I looked up from his hands on my wrists and we locked eyes. I licked my lips and said, “I want to make you happy. I want to please you. I want you to be happy with me.”

He just stared.

“Please let me suck your cock, Caleb. Please.”

“Well, when you ask so sweetly,” he said. He released my wrists and let me unbuckle his belt and remove his thick erection from his trousers. I stroked him firmly, trying to work up some saliva in my mouth, before I put the salty head between my lips. He stood back, his hands only making the occasional appearance to brush my hair back or tilt my chin up with the soft reminder to keep my eyes on him. He liked those big green eyes on him after all. I worked hard, hoping to bring him to climax quickly, not because I didn’t enjoy the act, I actually found the soft grunts and the appreciative sighs rather arousing, but because I wanted the praise that would come along with it.

He didn't let me finish him with my mouth, but I did receive the praise I had been hoping for. He pulled me off of him and stroked his cock a few hard times.

"I'm so proud of you," he praised, dragging the head of his cock against my lips, but he had it mostly covered with his hand, making it impossible for me to put it back in my mouth. "You're such a good girl, Orla. Do you see how good things are when you're good?"

I nodded and he pushed down on my head.

"Hands and knees."

I obeyed, body trembling. He rummaged momentarily in a drawer before settling down behind me. A soft slip of black fabric closed over my eyes and I tensed a moment. He fastened it tightly and I touched my necklace again, rubbing the diamond between my thumb and pointer. The fabric blocked out all the light and I couldn't see a thing.

"Face on the floor," he instructed. I obeyed, placing my cheek to the ground. "Hands behind your back."

I obeyed and one of his hands closed around my wrists.

"Beautiful."

With my blindfold on, as tired as I felt, I imagined him behind me just the way he looked in the conference room this afternoon. Handsome, confident, so sure of himself, owning the room and everyone in it. And of all the women in that room he chose *me*. It was *my* eyes he wanted on him.

He fastened my arms together behind my back in two places. My hands gripped the opposite arm just below my elbow and he fastened them tightly at the wrist and upper forearm. I was holding myself primarily using my core muscles and my face on the floor. His fingers slid into me with ease.

“Fucking drenched,” he mused. “That’s how your body should react to sucking my cock. You’re such a good girl.”

My body tightened around his fingers and he praised me. His voice was warm and dripping with a level of condescension that should have made me bristle. Instead, I clamped down around his fingers even harder.

“I grew up in a household that believed strongly in negative reinforcement,” he mused, his fingers moving in and out of me. “I think a little positive reinforcement early on and you’d have been my dirty little office slut from day one.”

My eyes were closed beneath the blindfold already, but I squeezed them even more tightly.

“You want to know what I think?” he asked, his thumb brushing my clit. He didn’t give me a chance to answer the rhetorical question. “I think you had a little crush on me and because of those assholes in your life, you thought I either wouldn’t give you the time of day, or I’d play some cruel joke on you. So you were going to hate me before I had the chance to hurt you.”

He pushed a third finger into me.

“Am I right?” he asked.

“I…” I didn’t know if he was right or not. If it was I never thought about it so consciously back then. It was a jumble. An amalgamation of reasons and motivations and feelings that sometimes contradicted each other, but was all true all at once..

“Think about it,” he said. “You’ll have a lot of time to think this weekend.”

He withdrew his fingers and I let out a little whimper of regret. He wasted no time filling me with him again. This time with something bigger, thicker, and harder.

“I like sweet, submissive, Orla.”

I did my best to let the tension leave my muscles. He kept a firm hold on my arms, one hand alternating between pushing down on my upper back and grabbing my waist to get more deeply into me.

I orgasmed before he finished, but it was very clear to me that wasn't his goal. My orgasm here was a happy coincidence. He finished inside of me, rubbing the head of his cock against my soaked folds afterward.

“You're so good, Orla. I'm very happy with you,” he praised. He gave my ass a firm slap and then stood and left me there, bound, blindfolded, and leaking cum, for a long time.

The door finally opened again. My muscles were aching and I had lowered myself down to my side and then up into a sitting position with some difficulty not long after he had left the room. He hadn't told me I couldn't move, so I was ready to prepare myself when he came back, but I felt a hand gently caress my cheek and he asked, “Hungry, sweetheart?”

I nodded, looking up at him, despite the fact that I couldn't see. I wished my blindfold was off so I could look at him. He took hold of one of my biceps and moved me back onto my knees. He held me up so I wouldn't fall face first into the floor, but lowered me down until my nose touched something that was certainly *not* hardwood. I jerked back, surprised by the sensation.

“Eat, baby. You need your strength.”

My mouth opened on impulse and I took in a mouthful of what I thought was lamb. Tears pricked at my eyes. It was absolutely humiliating. I didn't understand how you could do something like this to someone you loved. Before it made sense. I was being bad then. I was being good now though.

“Good girl,” he purred as he ate my dinner. His hand moved slowly down my spine. I felt like a prized show pony. My thighs quivered. His hand remained on me at all times for support, and he showered me with warm words that felt so adverse to what he was making me do now. He did that until the plate underneath me was empty.

“Good girl,” he praised again as he took the plate away. He put me back into a seated position against the wall and then ordered my mouth open. He fed me my pills one by one, providing me with water to drink through a straw. I took them obediently, sucking a few sips of water at a time. Then he led me to the bathroom where he had me relieve myself and brush my teeth. It felt just like that first weekend, but this time, I felt more secure. I felt safe.

“Caleb?” I asked when he laid me down in our bed but made no move to untie me. Instead, he fastened me to the bed with a leather strip around my bound arms.

“Shh, no speaking.”

I nodded in response, but I didn’t understand why. I wanted to curl up in his arms beneath the blanket and fall asleep breathing in the smell of him. I pictured him again in that conference room. Self-assured and confident, and I wanted to be close to it, because even if it would never rub off on me, it would protect me from everything I wasn’t.

“Good night, baby,” he murmured and kissed me softly. “I have work to do.”

“Caleb?” I asked again. He placed a finger to my lips before he placed a kiss to my mouth, and then he was gone again. I suppose I should have been relieved enough he let me lay down in bed and had draped my throw blanket over me. I wished he was there to lay with me as I fell asleep, but as I began to fade into oblivion I was grateful that he had given me something to help me sleep.

I woke up to his hand in my hair, the other gently stroking my cheek. I was in bed on my side, nestled underneath the covers. My right arm was numb and my shoulder was stiff. I turned toward him and smiled softly, breathing in the smell of him deeply. I wasn’t sure why I couldn’t see or move my arms, but he kissed me softly on the mouth.

“I’m going to the gym,” he said softly. “Your phone is next to you on speaker. If you need something just tell me and I’ll come back. Don’t speak unless there’s something wrong, ok?”

I nodded and tried to kiss him again. Some awareness returned to me and I was sad I couldn’t remember him coming to bed last night and tucking me under the covers. He hesitated just a fraction above my mouth, teasing me with the promise of a kiss. I fell back on the pillows and pouted.

“Kiss me,” I said pathetically.

“Do you think you make demands?” he asked.

“Please, Caleb. Please, kiss me.”

He kissed me, soft, gentle, and lingering and I wondered if I could get him to stay. I parted my lips and tried to turn toward him but it was difficult with my arms bound as they were. He finally pulled away from me and left the room. Despite the discomfort, I somehow fell back asleep. I’m not sure how long I slept though, because then I heard voices in the room and I jerked up. It took me a moment to realize it was coming from the phone, but it took a long time for my heart rate to slow.

“Hey, what’s up, man,” I heard Caleb say.

“Nothing. Where’s your girl?”

“Sleeping in. Didn’t let her sleep much last night. Not that she was complaining.”

There was some laughter and a few mundane comments, and then silence. I listened, enjoying the sound of his breathing as he lifted, the slow drop off, and then the return of the breathing. I closed my eyes and sank into the warmth of the bead as I listened. It felt like I was inside of him and I wished I could smell him. With some difficulty I moved so I was on his side of the

bed and pressed my nose to the pillow. I breathed in deeply, trying to overwhelm my senses with the scent of him.

“Hey there,” a feminine voice caught my attention and I listened and waited with a pounding heart. My entire body tenses and my ears buzzed. “Could you help me with the smith machine?”

“No,” Caleb said curtly. “Ask Ryan.”

“Oh, it’s just - ”

“I said no.”

There was silence and then the soft sound of Caleb breathing again. I smiled softly, wishing I could see the look on the girl's face and replaying the curtness in Caleb’s voice. I wondered what he might say if I suggested we were on the phone with each other all the time. One little earbud tucked in, a never ending call, so we both knew where the other was, what they were doing, who they were talking to...

He said some goodbyes before leaving the gym and then I heard a shower turn on and then nothing but running water and I assumed he’d taken his headphones out. When I heard him leave again I said softly.

“I have to go to the bathroom.”

I didn’t really. I could, but I didn’t *need* to. I just wanted to make sure he was coming straight home.

“I’ll be home in five minutes.”

“Ok.”

When he got back, he brought me to the bathroom and fed me some oatmeal. I was happy enough not to have to eat it on the floor out of a bowl, and he occasionally touched my cheek or my head while he fed me.

After breakfast, he led me over to the couch and had me sit in his lap. He kind of half cradled me, and put on some TV. We were covered by a soft throw blanket that I knew was mine from home, and I settled into him comfortably. I pressed my ear to his chest and listened to his heart. Occasionally, I would tilt my face up and breathe in the smell of his aftershave. His hands stroked my thighs, my hair. He was always touching me, always petting something. As disorienting as it was not to be able to see, it felt strangely nice. Like I was in this warm little cocoon where there was just this strong, confident man that would make all the bad things in life go away. And when you're head was as fucked up as mine, there was a lot of bad you had to face on a daily basis. Sometimes, just *existing* was a struggle.

At some point he laid us down, draping me on top of him. He was in sweatpants and a t-shirt, but in my mind he was still the Caleb that stood up in front of the conference room. The Caleb that walked into my cubicle with a report and said "Orla, a moment?" But this time he wasn't going to tear me to shreds or make me feel so unbelievably small I had to hide in the bathrooms and cry. He was going to wrap his arms around me and shield me from the world.

I pressed my lips to his throat. His skin was hot. He had stubble on his face. He slid his hands down my waist and squeezed my bottom, pressing me firmly into his growing erection. He tossed off the blanket and stood me up.

"Follow me," he said. I paused, not sure if I should wait for him to remove the blindfold. When he made no move to remove the blindfold I spoke.

"Th-the blindfold?"

"No. Follow me."

I couldn't see and my arms were still behind my back, leaving no ability to protect myself from walking straight into a wall or tripping over a chair or the coffee table.

“Caleb - ”

“Be quiet,” he snapped. “Follow. Me.”

I swallowed thickly and then took a step. A small, tiny step. I took another, my toe reaching out cautiously for an obstacle.

“Trust me, Orla,” he said. He was very close to me.

I struggled to trust. I didn’t trust anyone. Not even myself, but at least I knew I wouldn’t hurt myself on purpose.

I took a deep breath and then stepped forward. It took a great force of will to take another.

“Good girl,” he praised, just in front of me. “You’re doing so well, baby.”

I followed his voice, taking small steps. As I followed, I took larger steps, hoping to show him that I trusted him and praying that my trust would not be misplaced.

“We’re in the hall now. Just walk straight,” he said. I obeyed, walking toward his voice. When he got to the end of the hall he took my elbow and gently guided me toward the room. I felt an infuriating need to point out how difficult that was for me. I wanted him to realize that. How hard I was trying. And I wanted him, the handsome man at the front of the conference room, the arrogant man ducking into my cubicle to tear me apart, to tell me how pleased he was with me.

Instead, one hand grabbed me by the throat, the other at the back of my neck. His hands were large and enclosed around my neck completely. If he ever had the inclination, he could throttle me to death with ease... he could probably snap my neck in the process. He tilted my head back and his mouth was on mine. His tongue drove deeply into my mouth, tasting me. I

fell into it, a small whimper of need leaving me. He pulled back, using his thumbs to open my mouth. He spit and I felt it hot and wet on my tongue.

“You’re so beautiful,” he murmured. “Absolute perfection.”

He leaned down, brushing his nose against mine. His lips brushed mine.

“Who do you belong to?” he asked.

“You, Caleb,” I whispered back, my voice shaking.

“Do you want to be a whore for me?”

“Y-yes, Caleb.”

“Just for me?”

“Only you,” I breathed. It sounded reverent the way I said it. I was surprised by how genuine it sounded. He pulled back, pulling my jaw down with a thumb pressed to my tongue, and he spit again. It should have disgusted me. It used to. Now it just made me feel closer to him. He untied my arms and letting my arms fall forward offered immediate relief.

He laid me down on a table and immediately, my bottom was lifted up so that only my upper back and shoulders touched the surface beneath me. My legs were spread apart and fastened above my head. My pussy and ass were lifted, spread open, bare and vulnerable. My arms were pulled out to the side and looped underneath the table. He bound my wrists together with thick leather cuffs. My shoulders were already beginning to ache under the strain.

“I love this position,” he told me. I was below the level of his belt buckle if I were to guess, maybe a little lower. The perfect height for him to mount me, I thought with a shiver. I felt my pussy quiver and tighten. I wondered if he could see it. My muscles already hurt and my

skin had grown hot. I didn't like this position. I didn't like it all. In all my time with Caleb since this began, I had never felt quite so helpless, quite so exploded. As if to make that very point, two fingers slid along my folds and spread me open. His thumb circled my opening, probing in and out as he did so. I assumed one of the reasons this was his favorite position was the same reason I disliked it so much.

I gasped loudly when one of his hands landed hard on my right ass cheek, a resounding slap buzzing throughout the room. My skin turned hot and I blinked beneath the blindfold, a burning stinging radiating throughout the flesh.

"One of the reasons we're perfect together is because I need control and you... you just need to *give it up*."

He sounded almost exasperated the way he said it.

"It's the source of all your stress. You overthink things... so don't think, Orla. Be a good girl, and do. as. your. told."

His hand closed around my mouth and turned my head toward him. Then he provided a few hard slaps to my cheek. Then he bent down and he was kissing me again. His tongue plundered my mouth, examining every corner, his tongue circling around mine and vying for dominance. I gave it to him, folding into the kiss, and he growled into my mouth.

He used his belt first. At least I think it was his belt. The leather was biting against my exposed flesh and it was by far the hardest he had hit me. He didn't relent, giving my poor abused flesh only moments before he landed another vicious blow. Occasionally, he let out a little murmur of approval.

I finally received a break when he pushed his throbbing cock inside of me. The angle of my hips created a strange sensation and I arched against my binds. He rubbed my clit hard, a strange mixture between pleasure and pain. I felt the pressure built up inside of me, but the aching in my bottom hurt so badly it never reached a crescendo.

He pulled out of me before climaxing. I readied for him to enter my mouth, and even turned my head to give him access, but instead I felt another harsh blow of the belt. I yelped, shocked by just how badly it actually hurt.

“Caleb, please,” I forced out in a kind of half sob. “Caleb, can we stop, please.”

“Shhh, no, Orla. This isn't some glorified 50 shades of gray bullshit. You can beg me to stop all you want, but I'm not done yet. I *know* this isn't your limit. You need to trust me, OK?”

With a trembling lower lip, I nodded. His hand touched my cheek and I leaned into it.

“Take a nice deep breath,” he instructed and I obeyed, but the breath was shaky.

“You want to make me happy, right?” he asked.

I nodded and got out, “Yes, Caleb.”

He leaned down to kiss me. I returned the kiss, trying to keep the hiccups out of my chest.

“You're at my mercy, Orla, and that's a responsibility I take very seriously. I won't ever hurt you. I won't ever push you further than I know you can go.”

“It hurts...” I whispered.

“How badly?” he asked.

“A lot,” I answered.

“I promise you I didn’t hit you hard enough to leave a bruise. It just stings,” he comforted me. He cupped my cheek and I nodded. I sniffled and increased the speed of my nodding.

“Ok,” I said. “I trust you.”

He kissed me, a very soft, very tender kiss. When he walked away, I waited for another blow, but instead, he just pressed his lips to the burning flesh.

“My poor girl,” he mused. His hand caressed the skin gently. “Can you take a few more for me?”

“Yes,” I whimpered. “What-whatever you want.”

“Whatever I want,” he breathed and then closed his lips around my clit. He alternated between sucking hard and playing with it with his tongue. It felt so good, I almost forgot about the stinging of my legs. He lapped at me like I was a well and he was a man dying of thirst in the desert. A rush of pleasure rippled through me and he pulled back with a chuckle.

“I can always get you to come for me,” he said. The head of his cock rubbed against my soaking folds and he pushed inside of me again. He fucked me hard, fast, and deep. The angle was like nothing I’d ever felt before. I wasn’t sure if I liked it. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to come again or if I was to throw up. He fucked me, to the point I thought I might actually pass out. Mercilessly, he pulled out of me again, swearing softly under his breath.

He released me from that terrible contraception he had me in. I thought it might be over, but before I could process the loosening of my aching muscles and the stinging on my thighs, I was down on my knees and he had a fistful of hair and smacked his cock against my face. It stung, slapping my cheeks, lips, and chin.

“No teeth,” he said, and then his cock was in my mouth. My eyes watered and on impulse I reached up to push him away. I couldn’t breathe and my gag reflex activated. I felt my nose press into his skin before he pulled my head back. As dark as it was, I thanked God for my bulimia in my younger years. Much like the night before, he fucked my mouth like it was my cunt, but it was also so much worse. Tears ran down my cheeks and snot fell from my nose,

and I sputtered and coughed and cried and I had no idea how Caleb could look at the mess I was at his feet and find it even remotely attractive. He finally let me go and I fell back on my feet. I hardly felt the pain of my protesting thighs as they landed on my feet. I sniffled and wiped my nose.

“I’m sorry,” I hiccupped. “I’m sorry.”

I tried to get back on my knees, but my legs were shaking.

“Sorry for what?” he asked. I reached out and grabbed onto one of the legs of his sweatpants. I used it to help get me back up. I closed my hand around his cock, hot and thick and throbbing. I stroked it, slow and hard as I tried to catch my breath. I put it back in my mouth. He took off my blindfold and I blinked at the flood of light. My eyes felt big and puffy. “Sorry for what, Orla?”

I looked up at him, working my lips up and down over his cock. I swallowed thickly and pulled back.

“I’m not doing a good job,” I said. I put his cock back into my mouth and gave him the best blowjob I could manage. “I’m a mess.”

“Not a mess, baby. You look like a well-used whore, and that’s beautiful.”

My lips parted and I stared at him.

“You look perfect,” he said. “Back to work.”

He leaned back to watch me work my way up and down his cock. I cheated a little bit, giving myself time to catch my breath by paying extra attention to the sensitive head of his cock, but he seemed to enjoy it. I continued to suck and lick and kiss and occasionally, I’d put him as far down my throat as I could until my eyes watered and I couldn’t breathe, and I went sputtering backward.

“You were born for this,” he said, gathering my sweat drenched hair as I got back onto my aching knees. “I should have just locked you in a room day one and shoved my cock down your throat. You’d have responded well to that, wouldn’t you have?”

I nodded and he laughed.

“Oh yeah? Would you have been my sweet little office slut. Sucking cock at the snap of my fingers.”

I don’t know why, but I nodded again. He laughed and I felt like crying. My lower lip trembled.

“Shhh,” he soothed. “Wrap your slutty little lips around my cock.”

“I wish I said yes,” I suddenly said, my hand stroking him in those slow, hard movements. He blinked. “When you asked me out. I wish I said yes. I wish I knew... what I could have had...”

His lips parted as he watched me. I felt tears slip from my eyes and I whispered to him, “I’m trying so hard.”

“And you’re doing so well,” he praised me. I managed a smile. “And I’m so happy with you.”

“Good work. CH,” I said and then let out a breathy laugh. He frowned and then his exceedingly rare sign off clicked and he laughed.

“We’ll see once you’ve finished the job,” he said and put his hand on the back of my head. I put my mouth back on him and focused on the task at hand. I wanted that ‘good job’ when I was done.

“Look at me,” he directed. I obeyed, looking up with my aching eyes. He lifted his brow.
“You should have said yes. I would have taken care of you.”

“I know that now.”

I felt like crying again. I hated myself for it. It felt so silly, but I was overcome with emotion, and I just wanted to curl into a ball and weep.

“No more talking,” he instructed. I went back to work. I moved my mouth up and down and his hand tightened in my hair. He pulled me off him and grabbed his cock and squeezed. He grimaced and then opened his eyes and looked back at me.

“Tell me about prom.”

I blinked at him and felt a painful ache bloom in my chest.

“Caleb, please.”

“Tell me.” His voice was curt, his face stone. My eyes darted off to the side and I continued to blink rapidly.

“He asked me - he asked me to go, and he didn’t show up. That’s it.”

“No... tell me why he did it.”

“I don’t know,” I lied.

“If you lie to me, Orla, I’m going to be very angry with you. You don’t keep secrets from me. We share everything.”

He pinned me with a hard stare.

“Tell me.”

“His dad worked at the mill. My dad sold it while I was in elementary school. It was torture for years. No one would talk to me. I had no friends. My parents wanted to send me to private school but there were none in the area and I refused to board. It got better though. I made friends. People forgot.... Or forgave or ... I don’t know...”

I closed my eyes to steady myself.

“By High School... I had a few friends... no one bullied me anymore... his name was Eddie Durand. He asked me after math class. He was handsome, smart, popular... I was elated. I thought - I thought he liked me. He said he’s broken up with his girlfriend...”

I took in a deep, shuddering breath.

“My mom took me shopping. We had a whole day. It was actually really nice. I felt so pretty...”

I squeezed my eyes shut. Fat tears dribbled down my cheeks.

“And he just didn’t show up... I found out later he never broke up with his girlfriend. Half the school was in on the joke.”

It wasn’t an exaggeration. It was a small school.

“Thank God, I only had two weeks left. My teachers let me finish it out at home. I just went in for exams.”

He pulled his phone from his pocket and went to sit down against the wall. He beckoned me. I didn’t bother standing up. I was too tired anyway. I just crawled toward him.

“Hold my phone for me,” he instructed. I obeyed and the phone was already in my hand by the time I saw the picture on the screen. I squeezed my eyes shut, my face crinkling. Why was he doing this? He *knew* it hurt me. He knew. He had defended me against my parents. Why make me look at it?

“Open your eyes,” he ordered. He had retrieved his cock from his sweatpants. He grabbed the back of my head with a fistful of hair. “Put your mouth on me.”

He lowered my head down to his cock. He held my head in place and moved his hips up and down into my mouth.

“How old were you in this photo?”

He lifted my head off his cock.

“Seventeen,” I answered. My mouth was out back on his cock, but he released his hand from my head and took the phone. He held it level so I could see it.

“God, I just see an absolutely adorable, *fuckable*, cutie,” he breathed. “Don’t worry. I don’t like girls this young, but *you*. The thought of having *you* in that cute little prom dress. Oh fuck. So sweet and innocent.”

He paused for a few moments, moving my head up and down his cock.

“Tell me about James.”

He pulled me off his cock and placed my hand on it. I stroked slow and steady, aching eyes on my smiling face in the photo. My chest ached for that girl.

I told him. How he was kind to me. The night out. The bit of alcohol. How he told me I was beautiful and that he really loved talking to me. He thought I was super smart. He loved what I had to say in class. He was glad he got to get to know me...

I'd been too easy. I had kept to myself in undergrad. Put my head down, studied, got good grades. The first time I decided to put myself out there since prom...

I was crying now, my hand moving up and down his erection, his hand on the back of my head, holding it to his abdomen.

He turned me around so I was on my hands and knees and propped the phone against the wall in front of my face.

"Look at the photo," he ordered. He slid into me from behind. Despite the pain and the tears, my body had done the bare minimum to prepare me for him. He was met with no resistance.

"You know what I would have done to that girl?" he asked. My arms trembled as they struggled to hold me up. My response to him was a little whimper, but I kept my eyes on the photo.

"I'd have picked you up in my old s90. Brought you a corsage with purple roses to match your dress. I'd have worn a black tux with a dark green tie, to complement your dress, to match your eyes. We'd have had a hell of a time. I'd have danced with you, helped you to a little bit of smuggled in liquor from the flask in my pocket. I hadn't met Chris yet, so unfortunately for us, there'd be no GHB."

I actually laughed. A kind of half sob, half laugh. He moved in and out of me, slow, but deep.

“And at the end of the night, after you danced your heart out, I’d drive you home. First, we’d have stopped somewhere private. And I’d have taken that sweet, tipsy girl into the backseat with me and I’d have taken your virginity.”

I sucked in a breath as I imagined it. How happy I’d been that night - it would have been multiplied tenfold if someone like *Caleb* had asked me. Unable to picture him as anything other than he was now, I imagined him picking me up in one of his dark navy suits, smirking down at the brightly smiling young girl, knowing already how the night was going to play out.

“And I’d have talked you through it. Made you feel safe and comfortable. And I’d have fucked you without a condom and came inside of you and promised you you had nothing to worry about it. And you’d trust me, because that smile... that’s a trusting girl right there.”

She was. And that was why she got hurt.

“And after that, you’d be mine. There would be no going back after that. I’d have you hooked, and I wouldn’t ever give you up. Because I’d know what I had.”

His thrusts remained slow and steady but picked up ever so slightly.

“... if I was that idiot James. I wouldn’t have called you the next day.”

I kept staring at my younger self.

“I would have still been in bed next to you. You’d have been in my bed. We’d get breakfast. We’d cuddle. And you’d be my girlfriend. And if you refused.... We both know I’d have a video of our night together.”

That sent a jolt of pleasure through me. He’d make sure he could keep me. No matter what.

“What - ”

I stopped, unsure if I should speak.

“What do you want to say, sweetheart?”

“If she,” I nudged my chin at my younger self. “If she walked into a party you were at what would you have done?”

“I’ve told you,” he said, hips moving faster now.

“Tell me again. What would you do to *her*. ”

He let out a little groan.

“If she walked into a party I was at? You started college looking like that... seventeen. I’d have been twenty-two - ”

“No,” I breathed. “What would *you* have done to *her*? ”

He hesitated a moment, his hand sliding up my spine and then back down. I wanted to hear him say it though, because the truth was, I don’t think I ever really moved past that vulnerable girl smiling in that photograph. I was still her, just desperately wanting to be loved. I fought back a job, swallowing it down.

“If I got my hands on her,” he said, his hands gripping my waist firmly. “I wouldn’t even have to force you. You’d have fallen into my lap like jelly. A few compliments, a charming smile, the promise of possible approval. You’d be putty in my hands. Wouldn’t you?”

“Yes,” I croaked.

“I’d give you a few drinks, just to loosen you up a little. You wouldn’t be too shy to talk to me if you were a bit tipsy. I’d offer to drive you home. You’d say yes. Of course you would. That girl could still trust.”

It sounded like an accusation. My chest ached. What I wouldn’t give to have run into Caleb back then. Because he would have seen something in me. Whatever it was that he saw now, he’d have seen then. I lowered my head and closed my eyes, tears leaking free. I didn’t need to look at the photo. It was seared into my brain.

“And I’d have made that pussy mine. It would have been so easy. I’d have driven you to my place. Asked you if you wanted to come inside. Just to talk. You didn’t need to worry about anything else. You’d agree. I’d give you another drink. Seventeen-year-old Orla would take it, proud of being treated like an adult.”

His voice was a bit breathless. His hand tightened in my hair, and he thrust a bit faster now.

“And I’d kiss you. Soft and chaste and then I’d ask you if that was ok, but we’d both know the answer to that. I’d ask you if you were scared and you’d lie and say no because you wanted to make me happy. I’d kiss you again, then your neck.”

I was crying softly, and he let me lower my face to the floor.

“I’d have slid my hand up your leg. I only would have needed to apply the slightest bit of pressure, and you’d spread them for me. And just like prom, I’d have talked you through it. I would have told you how beautiful you are, how good you were being, how happy you made me.”

His hand tightened in my hair, his fist forcing my face harder into the floor.

“And you’d just... instantly ... fall in love with me.”

I felt him climax. His motions were jerky and hard, his breathing hard and labored, and when he withdrew from me, my entire body sagged to the floor, and I cried.

He didn’t leave me there long. I was instantly scooped up into his arms and cradled in his lap. He held me close, rocking me gently.

“I could have raped you and never said a word,” he told me, his voice firm and earnest. “I could have flooded the internet with pictures of you. I could have taken what I wanted and left you sad, broken, and alone.”

His fingers pulsed on my face, and he turned it upward to look at him. His cheeks were flushed, and his dark hair fell over his forehead. His gray eyes burned with a fierce intensity that should have scared me. It did once. Not that long ago too. Now I lost myself in them, I felt protected by it.

“But I didn’t because that’s not who I am. That’s not who we are. In any variation of any combination of us, we would be together. If I found you in high school, college, law school, work, twenty years from now. Same age, different ages, it doesn’t matter. Our *souls are joined*.”

His eyes moved over my face rapidly.

“I’m always going to be here for you. I want the Orla that got stood up at prom, because I would have shown up. I want the Orla that thought giving away her virginity meant something, because it means something to me. I want to have the power to destroy you, to obliterate you, and ... and not. I want to be everything you’ve ever needed and never had. I want to be your safety, your security, your comfort, your confidence... I want to be everything for you... and I want you to worship me for it...”

I looked into his eyes, those dark, earnest, storm cloud eyes. He stroked his thumb across my cheek.

“For all that I just need you to trust me.”

His thumb brushed over my lips. He let out a soft breath. He tilted his head to the side as he looked at my mouth, the look on his eyes reverent.

“Can you do that for me?” he murmured, and then looked back up at me.

I searched his gaze for deceit and found none. I nodded, looking over his face rapidly, trying to take in every ounce of his perfection. It was then that I fully understood, with a quickening of my breath and a tight squeeze in my stomach, that I was already desperately in love with him.

Chapter Notes

Hope you like it.

Thank you so much for all the kind words and the comments. They mean the world!

Let me know what you think of the pacing. This time jump was always planned, but curious to see what your opinions are on the execution.

Thanks!

I rolled over in bed and scooted up close to him, wrapping my arms around him and holding him close. I buried my face into his chest and breathed in deeply. He stirred, arms moving to enclose me in his sleep and he sighed. He was still sleeping. He did that sometimes. I pulled back to look at him, my eyes moving over his face in the dimly lit room. The days were getting longer and now when we got up to go to the gym, it was warm and light out. I checked the clock and saw we had about ten minutes before his alarm would go off.

I slid beneath the covers and pulled his boxer briefs down. He shifted and I placed his soft cock into my mouth. He let out a soft groan and his hand went to my hair. He liked when I woke him up this way. When I woke up before him, I made a point of it. I enjoyed the soft noises that left him as he slowly woke, the feeling of his cock hardening and growing in my mouth, and the searching out of his hand in my hair and then the tightening of his hand as he neared completion. Sometimes he was rougher than others, but he always held my head down as he drained himself down my throat. I wasn't to spill a drop, or I'd be doing the laundry naked that evening.

Once finished, I crawled back up and nestled myself in his arms. He didn't mind kissing me after I blew him. I was always touched by that. It made me feel less shameful about what I was willing to do for him. I felt dominated and controlled, but I never felt used.

"Good morning," he murmured into my hair and kissed my forehead.

“Good morning,” I answered. I tilted my head up to kiss his Adam's apple. He kissed me for the few remaining minutes before the alarm went off. We dressed for the gym and set off just five minutes later. We walked hand in hand, though sometimes I would slip my arm through his while we walked, just so I could be closer to him.

“I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon,” he said and took a big sip of his energy drink. “I'll be out for a few hours.”

“Oh, where?” I asked. He hesitated and then named some place in Brookline. I didn't think it was too strange. There was no need for him to tell me about his doctor's appointments prior to them. He was telling me now, which was what mattered.

“Can we stay on the phone?” I asked. He liked doing that as much as I did when we did need to separate. When I suggested it, I'd watched the delight cross over his face like an uncontained tidal wave. He was going to go golfing with Chris. He wanted me to go but I begged him not to make me. He finally relented, and as he left, I plucked up the courage to ask. He made a point to do it now everytime we separated.

We didn't do it at work, but if one of us went shopping without the other, which was usually him letting me sleep in, or if he went to the gym without me, or if he walked to get lunch Chris without me, we were in each other's ear. One night I left work before him, stopping at my apartment to bring over the last of my books. He didn't like the idea of me riding the train by myself. I reminded him I was a grown woman who traveled by myself for years before I met him. Still, I made no protest when he called and kissed him, the earbud in my ear, already connected to his phone..

It was two weeks later when he had a second doctor's appointment that my hackles started to raise. See, that summer was the most blissful I had ever experienced in my life, but as that comfort and euphoria grew, so did the agony. This terrible, unyielding, and growing terror that any moment he would realize I *wasn't* the girl he thought I was. As I slowly revealed more and more of myself to him, I waited for him to realize I really was the weird girl no one liked in school. I really was just too much work to make the sex worth it. I fought it off though, reminding myself that Caleb's behavior had not changed at all. If anything, he was more attentive, more affectionate, more loving than he ever had been before. I watched him closely for signs my submission was beginning to bore him, as I had originally believed it would. I was comforted when I saw no signs of that. If anything, his obsession only grew. I saw the full spectrum of Caleb's emotions. The confident, cocky, arrogant, flippant, golden boy, and the vulnerable, obsessive, controlling, crazed stalker.

One Saturday night, after a very romantic dinner in which he had brought me out to dinner at a nice restaurant about an hour away, as to not be seen, in which he had me wear a beautiful, if slightly slutty black dress, with a sexy lacy bra underneath and no underwear, (and where I was convinced I would be leaving the restaurant with a ring on my finger,) I caught him staring at me with that faraway, but somehow frighteningly intense stare. I was still in the dress and had been removing my earrings in the bathroom mirror, when I caught his gaze in the reflective glass and felt my brow knit.

“Caleb?” I asked him softly. He just stared and I watched his jaw clench and Adam's apple bob. He came to stand behind me and I expected him to slam me down on the counter and fuck me hard. I would be covered in bruises the next day. Usually when that happened, it didn't hurt that badly. I was always distracted by the intoxicating feel of his desire for me. Knowing it was real and knowing it was all for me was exhilarating and I lost myself in it. Usually, I was surprised by the bruises the next day, so lost in the just feel of how badly he wanted me that I didn't even realize how rough he was being. This time though, he placed his hands on my waist and lowered his head to place a soft kiss to my neck and shoulder. His breath was hot and it quivered. I could feel the tremble in his hands, the way his fingers prodded at my skin. I leaned back into him and he pressed his nose to my temple.

“What's wrong?” I asked him. He closed his eyes and pressed his head against mine. He took in a deep breath and just shook his head against mine. His arms tightened around me. I leaned back into him, nudging him. “Take me,” I murmured. He opened his eyes and met mine in the mirror. The look sent a thrill through me. A jolt of both fear and arousal.

“I'm afraid I'll hurt you,” he murmured. He was trembling and he leaned into me again and pressed his nose to my temple and breathed in. He did that sometimes. He wanted to have sex, but wouldn't because he didn't trust how badly he wanted me. How badly he felt the need to possess me. He told me he had compulsions to just squeeze me until I popped. Squeeze me as hard as he could because that was the only way he could be certain I was there and real and his. He whispered, “I love you so much... sometimes I think about losing you...”

“You won't,” I promised.

“I can't do enough... I need you in my bloodstream,” he continued, voice still a whisper. “I need to fucking, pump you straight into my veins. I need to...”

His hands squeezed me again and he let out another shuddering breath against my face. I let my eyes flutter closed. Wintergreen. It was one of my favorite smells now. I opened my eyes and turned to look at him over my shoulder. His eyes were closed. I turned in his arms and took his hand. I led him out to the living room and sat him down on the couch. I straddled him, pressing my bare pussy into his bulging erection through his black pants. I acted on instinct and it seemed to work.

I ran my hands over his face and through his hair and pressed myself into him more firmly.

“I belong to you, Caleb,” I told him. “I don’t want to leave you and no one compares to you...”

His eyes were burning hot as he watched me. He kept his arms spread out over the back of the couch. His entire body was tense, thick cords rippling in his neck and his jaw clenched. I ran my hands down his button-down and bit my bottom lip. My pussy ached with want and I pressed myself harder into him.

“You’re everything,” I told him.

I love you.

I wanted to say it. Perhaps, I should have, but I knew that there would be no middle ground if I uttered such a statement. It was the truth. I felt it so deeply in my bones that I thought I understood how Caleb was feeling in that moment. But Caleb was volatile. He had a temper that he struggled to contain and right now, while he was already overwhelmed with his need to prove his ownership of me, if he thought I was lying to him....

“I belong to you,” I said again instead. “I couldn’t leave you if I wanted.”

Oddly enough, it seemed to calm him. He was nodding and one of his hands cupped my cheek.

“You couldn’t,” he agreed. “You can’t ever leave me, Orla. I could destroy you.”

“You won’t ever have you,” I promised. I took his hand from my face and placed it on my breast. His hand closed around me and squeezed. He raised his other hand, but he slid it up my skirt, sliding his hand up my spine. His eyes raked over me and I ground my hips into him.

“Make yourself cum,” he ordered thickly. “Show me what a whore you are for me.”

I nodded and reached for his belt buckle. He grabbed my wrists, stopping me. I ground my pussy against his clothed cock.

“Please, Caleb,” I whispered. “I need you inside me.”

I found that talking dirty was easier when you meant it. I felt like there was a massive, gaping hole inside of me that only he could fill.

“Beg for it,” he said. His voice was low and grating, his eyes burning. “Show me what a slut you are.”

“Please, Caleb,” I begged. His dark trousers glistened with my juices. A month ago, I might have been embarrassed by the evidence of my need. Occasionally when this happened, he’d smirk at me, arrogant and condescending. Other times, this time, his lips parted and his eyes took on that uncontrollable, unbridled need that only came hand in hand with absolute obsession. The kind of obsession that drove a person to stalk, drug, rape, and blackmail a woman for months until she fell in love with you.

“Caleb,” I breathed. “I need you inside me. To fill me up. Please. I need you. I need your cock.”

He released my hands and I unbuckled his belt and removed his cock. The head was glistening with pre-cum. I felt again like I understood a fraction of what Caleb felt. I wanted to do everything at once for him. I wanted to be on my knees, his cock moving in and out of my mouth in hard, forceful thrusts, earning a violent gag with each touch to the back of my throat. I wanted to be on my knees, worshiping him with my mouth in gentle, devoted kisses and licks and sucks. I wanted to press my tongue to the weeping hole and lick his pre-cum into my mouth. I wanted to be on my hands and knees, his cock slamming in and out of my asshole, telling me what a slut you had to be to get off a man fucking you in the ass. I wanted to be on my back, his cock buried as deeply inside of me as possible, begging him to fill my womb with cum. The first time I came out with *that* one, he climaxed almost immediately.

But I lifted my thighs up and positioned his weeping cock at my slick opening and lowered myself down on him. I moaned softly, my eyes locked on his.

“Mine,” he said. His hands closed on my hips and held me down against him. “That’s my cunt.”

“Yes, Caleb,” I answered. He let go of my hips and put his arms back up.

“Ride me,” he ordered. I obeyed, doing what I knew he liked. I liked riding him, because he only wanted one thing when I was on top. He wanted to watch me pleasure myself with his body. He wanted to see me debase myself and act like the wanton little whore I was only for him. It was the one time in the bedroom I could be completely selfish and know he would *still* gain pleasure of his own. I was half way through when he leaned forward and bit the front of my dress. I was sad when he ripped through it. He left it on me, peaking at the lacy bra beneath the torn dress. He liked seeing me in ripped clothing. I was nearing orgasm when he pulled the cups of my bra down and pinched my nipples. “Come for me, Orla. Show me what a whore you are.”

“For you,” I breathed.

“Only me,” he agreed.

I clamped down on him, soaking his cock and his trousers with my arousal. I shuddered, body tensing, sucking in a sharp breath and then rode my orgasm out silently as I usually did. When I was done, I ran my fingers through his sweaty hair and slicked it back.

“Your cock is amazing, Caleb,” he told him. His eyes still burned with arousal. “But I need more.”

“More,” he said. I nodded.

“I need to be reminded,” I whispered, my lips touching his. “Show me. Who I belong to.”

He threw me down on the floor and fucked me so hard, his hand clamped over my mouth to silence my cries, that when I did come again, I saw spots. That night, while we lay in bed, him on top of me, his head on my desk, my hands in his hair, he gently circled a finger around one of my nipples.

“I love you so much,” he murmured. It was dark and we had been laying there for a long time. “I need you like I need oxygen.”

I love you too.

I wanted to tell him. I wanted to say it so badly. But I remained silent, and rubbed his hair until he fell asleep.

At work, he was the same arrogant, cock-sure Caleb that first asked me out to coffee, that ripped apart my reports, that drugged my drink, that raped me, that tormented me. But now, he wasn't the enemy. At lunch, I sat with him and his friends, though I still didn't speak much. When I passed him with a group of co-workers at the copier or the water fountain, I stopped to talk to them. I was part of fantasy baseball and I was already signed up for the fantasy football league.

I asked for help now. The first time I did, I had spent the entire morning grappling with a very complicated deal for a company that owned over sixty entities, half of them foreign. I needed to have a rough draft of the report to Caleb by five that afternoon and I had done nothing but spun my wheels for hours. I was still eating the salad Caleb had got me for lunch when he

and Chris stood to return to work. We made it a point not to arrive or leave together everyday. As he was at the door I stopped him, calling his name over the chatter.

“I’m having some trouble with that report,” I said. “Do you have time this afternoon to help me?”

He stared at me, patting the doorway with his palms and then nodded.

“Yeah, sure,” he said. “Stop by my office after lunch.”

He lingered just a beat too long, but I didn’t think anyone noticed. When I got back to my desk, I had a flurry of texts from him.

You never ask for help.

And then ask me for help in front of the entire breakroom.

I’m so fucking hard right now.

Go to our spot.

Now.

I met him in the supply closet and was put on my knees immediately. He praised me as I sucked him off. He tossed his tie over his shoulder and watched me, hands propping himself up on the workbench. He took to calling me his little office slut while we were in the closet. His own personal fuck toy. I worked harder, basking in the warmth of his praise. When I did walk into his office with my laptop for him to help me with the report, he had a relaxed, lazy smile on his lips. His arrogance was a comfort to me now. I can’t really explain it, but there was a kind of euphoria in realizing that a man so sure of himself wanted *me*.

I had just popped my head into his office to ask if he could help me with a difficult tax issue when I learned about his second ‘doctor’s appointment’. I had expected a darkening of his gaze and then a flurry of texts ordering me down to the closet. Instead, his gaze flicked to the clock on the wall.

“I’m out of office this afternoon,” he answered. He sounded somewhat cold and I told myself it was because someone was using the copier nearby.

“Oh?” I asked. I crossed my arms over my chest and leaned against the doorframe. “Where are you going?”

I realized my question was far too pointed for a disinterested, arms length co-worker, but I didn’t care.

“A doctor’s appointment,” he said and my skin flushed.

“Another one?” I asked. He looked at me, brow raising, telling me silently, *not now*. I pressed my tongue to the inside of my upper lip. “Weird you wouldn’t mention.”

I turned and walked back to my desk. I reached for my phone, and just as I predicted, I had a text from him.

It’s nothing. Just something with my blood pressure he wants to take another look at. I told him I just have a psycho girlfriend, but he wants to monitor it.

I didn’t believe that though. I didn’t believe it at all. I watched his bubble turn into a red arrow and then I got from my desk and walked down the hall to Chris’ cubicle. His back was to me and his headphones were in, so I had to step forward and tap his shoulder to get his attention. He turned with a smile on his face. Chris and I hadn’t seen much of each other out of work and at work we were just coworkers. He had tried to talk to me more than once, but I rebuffed him at every turn, and Caleb didn’t push it. When Chris and Caleb hung out outside of the office, I didn’t go, mainly because some of their other friends might be there, and we couldn’t risk being seen in public. That always left a stinging sensation in my chest, no matter how hard I wanted to tamp it down.

“Where is Caleb?” I asked.

Chris looked around and then shrugged and said, “the doctor.”

“No, he’s not,” I said. Chris looked around again and got to his feet. I stepped back. Not as tall as Caleb, he was still a tall man, and now, he was far more intimidating than he had been before I knew what he was capable of.

“Let me buy you a coffee,” he said. He grabbed his wallet and put it in his back pocket. I wanted to protest. He was using this as an excuse to force me to talk to him, but I wanted to know what was going on with Caleb. We walked to the Dunkin Donuts, where I ordered an iced latte with an added espresso shot, just to up the bill a bit, and Chris paid. Then we walked toward the Common.

“How have you been, Ellie? You and Caleb seem happy.”

“Tell me where he is,” I demanded.

“Ellie, even if he wasn’t at the doctor’s, and I knew differently, do you actually think I’d tell you?”

I took a sip of my latte and stared straight ahead. “No,” I finally muttered.

“Look,” he said. “I like you. I always did. I thought you were sweet. Caleb got all hot and bothered. He wanted you for so long and so bad... and now you’re very happy. You should be thanking me.”

“Thank you?” I asked, stopping abruptly. I got a nasty look from a businessman that had to stop short behind us on the sidewalk. Chris took my arm and kept us moving.

“I tried to talk reason into him. I told him you were too fragile. He was the one convinced you were just being a bitch. I tried to help you.”

“It wouldn’t have happened if not for you,” I snapped. Chris laughed.

“Oh, yes it would have,” he said. “He’d have found a way. Trust me. He thought it was going to be a one time thing. One and done, get her own my system, but let me tell you, bro was *obsessed* with you. Talked about you all the time. He was always looking you up on linked in to look at your photo. Going on your facebook and looking at old photos. It was never going to be one and done, let me tell you.”

“The difference, Chris, is I trusted you. I thought you were my friend. I thought you cared. I never.... I never thought Caleb liked me, or cared ... you took advantage of that,” I said. We walked in silence and Chris considered it. He looked genuinely pensive. We were both about halfway done with our coffees and had rounded the block to head back before he spoke again.

“I’m sorry,” he said. I stopped walking again. He took two large steps before he stopped and turned. He waited, brow raised.

“That’s it?” I asked.

“What do you want me to do, slit my wrists?”

“No, I mean... just ‘I’m sorry.’ No excuses?”

“No,” he answered. “I’d do it again, but I’m sorry I hurt you and I’m sorry you feel betrayed. It wasn’t my intention.”

I felt a flair of anger as I looked at him. I was mad at him for giving me the apology I had wanted. I wanted to be angry at him. I wanted to yell at him and tell him *why* he was wrong and why he should apologize. Instead... he just did.

“Where is Caleb?” I asked again.

“I can’t tell you that, Ellie. You’ll need to ask him.”

My shoulders sagged and I looked off into the street. He wasn’t cheating on me. He wouldn’t leave work in the middle of the day to do that. He wasn’t running errands. He’d just tell me that. I knew he wasn’t at the doctor’s though. One appointment, I would have believed, but a second. That was the kind of lie you told when you... My entire body suddenly went cold and I felt a rush of dread consume me.

He’s interviewing.

I stared at Chris, but I wasn't really looking at him, I was staring through him, into all the possibilities of why Caleb would be interviewing. Chris blinked at me and then frowned. I couldn’t bring myself to ask the full question I wanted to.

Is he interviewing so we can be together? Or is he interviewing so he can leave me.

In my defense, my rational brain told me it was more likely, if he was interviewing, he would be doing it so we could be together. His actions had done nothing to suggest to me he was losing interest. His obsession had not waned, his attention was laser focused, and we were together every waking moment of every day, save the times we were apart at work. It was what I wanted. It was the next logical step in the relationship. One of us had to leave if we wanted to have a real relationship.

But why wouldn’t he *tell* me that? It didn’t make any sense to keep that from me unless he was planning some sort of escape attempt. Get a new job, cut off all ties, never speak to me again. A clean break. It wasn’t the probable explanation. I knew that, but it was possible, and that was enough for me. My heart rate spiked and my watch began to buzz, alerting me to my sudden increase in my heart rate.

“Are you ok? You look pale.”

“I’m fine,” I lied. “I’d like to go back to the office now.”

Chris nodded and we began walking in that direction. As much as I told myself he was doing this so we could be together, that this was the sign I had been waiting for that he saw a real future with us, I felt a niggling in my brain. Why wouldn’t he tell me that? Why wouldn’t he just have one of us change groups? Why did he want to leave the company? The thought of being apart during the day made me feel dizzy. It made me feel queasy. The thought of not having him there to lean on, just when I was beginning to grow accustomed to it....

I pulled out my phone to text Caleb. I couldn’t think of what to say though, and I ended up putting my phone back into my pocket. Once we were in the elevator, I pulled it back out and typed, *how’s your appointment?*

Chris had read it over my shoulder, though he pretended not to. I didn’t really care, God knows Caleb told him everything anyway. I turned on him suddenly and asked, “Have you seen me naked?”

Chris grinned, “Unfortunately, not.”

The doors opened and I turned and marched back to my desk. Caleb didn’t respond for almost forty-five minutes. Another way I knew he wasn’t at a doctor’s appointment. He always texted me back immediately, which means he wasn’t checking his phone, which means he was interviewing. There was no other logical explanation and I didn’t believe for a second he was leaving in the middle of the workday to cheat. I also didn’t think he had the capacity to cheat. We had way too much sex.

Yeah. He agrees, my girlfriend needs to talk less and suck cock more.

I stared at the phone. It would normally make me smile, but now I just stared at the phone. He was lying to me and I didn’t know why.

I didn’t respond, and I didn’t hear from him again until seven in the evening when he came to get me to go home.

“Orla. Want to split an uber?” he asked, glancing down the hall. A few more people were still here.

“Sure,” I said softly. I got up and collected my things, the back of my neck burning red. We waited out on the street, and Caleb watched me with a small frown. He glanced around us and decided against saying anything. Once we were in the back of the uber, he scooted into the middle seat and crowded me against the door.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. I turned to look at him. My eyes moved over his face and I drank in the sight of him. My heart pounded hard in my chest and I wanted to say so many things to him. I wanted to tell him I loved him and that I knew he was interviewing and I needed to know why. I needed to ask him what the plan was. Why he wanted to leave the company. If he had me switch out of M&A, he could still see me every day. We could still go to our spot. We could travel into work together. Go home together. Be together every moment of every day. If he left, we couldn’t do that anymore. I didn’t want that to change. I didn’t want it to change at all. The thought made me feel physically ill.

“You would tell me if you didn’t want me anymore, right?” I asked softly. He frowned.

“That will never happen,” he answered.

“But you would,” I said, voice still quiet. “Promise? You’d tell me.”

“I’ll tell you,” he said. “But that’ll never happen.”

I reached out and took his hand. I squeezed firmly and he placed his other hand over mine.

“You’re never going to get rid of me,” he said. “You can feel it now, can’t you? How we were made for each other. The connection we have?”

I nodded, eyes wet. He cupped my cheek and pressed his forehead to mine.

“I need you to trust me,” he murmured. “Just a bit longer. Ok?”

I nodded again, eyes closed. I tilted my face up and kissed him.

“Just a bit longer,” he murmured and kissed me again. “I have it all planned out. It’ll be perfect.”

We didn’t talk about it again after that. That night, we had sex under the covers with the lights off. Very tender, very gentle, but his hand was around my throat and he murmured in my ear with each slow, steady thrust, that I belonged to him and if I ever thought he could leave me I was insane. Nothing would take me away from him. He’d do whatever it took. I was his for eternity.

I worked hard to ignore the possibilities of what his interviewing entailed. And I *was* certain he was interviewing. Two weeks later he had another “doctor’s appointment.” I said nothing and asked no questions.

By all planned out, I wavered between trying to convince myself he was going to take a new job and propose and telling myself I needed to be prepared for a breakup come the end of the summer. Well, I didn’t think Caleb would propose exactly. I assumed he’d give me a ring and tell me we were getting married. It was the logical conclusion. He was as attentive as ever. His hands were always on me. He was always staring at me. His bouts of frenzied, controlled but uncontrolled moments of obsession and need were increasing. He told me he loved me multiple times a day. He talked about our future. He asked me where I’d want to settle long term. He asked me how many kids I wanted for fuck’s sake. And he told me to trust him. He had it all planned out. *Obviously* that meant a proposal.

I wanted to just ask him, I should have just asked him, but that’s just not how I’m built and I didn’t have it in me at the time. I trusted him to an extent, but building that level of trust after years of being incapable of it was difficult and it wasn’t something I could do overnight. The truth was, in the slim possibility that things would be ending between us, and he actually was looking for a way out, I didn’t want to know. As painful as it was, as anxiety inducing as it was, I wanted to have just a few more months of him. If I asked and he told the truth... I wasn’t ready for it to end. So though I *knew* if I asked, he would tell me he was interviewing,

that he was going to propose in the only way Caleb could propose, and that everything would work out ok, I couldn't bring myself to risk that .01% that I might lose him then and there. I just couldn't stop my brain from finding every terrible possible outcome and the repercussions seemed so violently monumental. I truly didn't know if I'd survive it. Not after everything he did. Not after how he's made me feel since. Loved. Desired. *Safe*. Looking back, I think if I had, that terrible, awful moment in the staircase never would have happened.

My moods fluctuated as a result. Sometimes, I was more on edge than others. Then one morning in early August, I was feeling really on edge as we walked to get coffee before work. It didn't help that the last two weeks had been very busy and we had a massive report to get out that afternoon. He had his third "doctor's appointment" the week before and despite my best efforts the free times we were apart and I had access to his phone, I hadn't been able to get into it. I hadn't had a Xanax in over a month by that time and I was itching for one that morning. I'd spent most of the morning thinking about the future. I repeated the same thing in the shower over and over again.

Don't be a psycho. Don't be a psycho. Don't be a psycho.

I repeated it again while I did my hair and put on my makeup. I repeated it when I went into the kitchen and got my cup of coffee and placed a kiss to Caleb's lips, and I repeated it again while we walked to the T and listened to the screeching tires all the way into the city.

We ran into Eddie as we reentered the building and I gave him his coffee. He gave me a bright smile, which I was able to return with ease.

"Thank you lots, Ellie."

"She's stealing the credit for that by the way. I paid for it," Caleb pointed out.

"He wouldn't let me. He's just trying to steal my buddy," I said to Eddie, who's grin widened.

“Well, that will never happen. You’re my number one,” he replied. Caleb pretended to be offended and as we stepped into the elevator, I felt his hand on my lower back. It slid around to my hip in a touch that was *far* too affectionate, *far* too familiar for coworkers. Eddie’s eyes dropped to the hand before lifting back up and a knowing twinkle touched his eyes, his smile becoming a bit more private, a bit more secretly amused. My skin flushed hot and Caleb’s hand fell away immediately. He scanned his badge and hit our floor and the elevator doors began to close.

“Fuck,” he muttered at the same time I said, “what was that?”

“I can’t keep my hands off you,” he said.

“We’ll try harder,” I snapped. “I don’t need people thinking I fucked my way to a promotion.”

He said nothing and we sat in silence. I felt a tick beneath my eye and I rubbed my eyelid to stop the twitching. We were halfway up when I turned on him.

“Would I have gotten the promotion?” I asked. He looked at me, face stern and bemused.

“What?” he asked.

“You heard me. Would I have been promoted if you weren’t sleeping with me?”

“ *Yes* .”

“I was still making technical mistakes. I took too long on jobs. I never asked for help. Is that someone ready for a promotion?”

“Orla, don’t do this,” he sighed and the elevator doors opened. I walked out in front of him, ready to march down to my cubicle to silk.

“Orla.” His voice was crisp and short. I stopped to look at him and he jerked his head toward his office. “We’re not done talking.”

I considered turning and walking down the hall to my cube. There was nothing he could do at work. I’d pay for it at home, but I considered for a moment if a small victory would be worth it. I decided it wasn’t, simply because when it came down to it, I didn’t want him to be angry with me. That annoyed me in and of itself. I was mad at *him*. I was entitled to it, I thought. Yet I couldn’t be, because I was so desperate to keep him happy with me.

I followed him into the office and he closed the blinds. When he sat down at his desk, he smoothed out his tie.

“You were considered for the senior spot before I ever touched you, and I said I thought you had the intelligence and drive to fill the spot. Chris agreed and I can tell you his word went further than mine. I didn’t work with you as much.”

“But Chris said it for you. He’d do anything you told him to.”

Caleb laughed.

“Nothing could be further from the truth actually,” he said. “Chris believed very strongly that whatever happened between us needed to stay out of the workplace. He wasn’t happy with how much I let it seep in. If Chris didn’t think you were ready he would have said so and you wouldn’t have gotten the job. It would have reflected badly on him and trust me, his ego is about as big as mine. He just hides it better. It’s that simple. Your promotion had nothing to do with me.”

I placed my fingers on my forehead and looked down at my lap, a million thoughts racing through my head. If Caleb left, even if he stayed with me, how was I going to function? He still shielded me from the brunt of the work. He took me off almost everything on weekends. Sometimes, I would catch him, late at night, working till almost midnight on stuff *I* should have done. and the terrible, soul crushing thing, is I didn’t want to stop him. I didn’t want the long nights and the mountains of work, and the never ending stress. I wanted to live my life. *I* wanted to be the one to leave. Not Caleb. I was angry he was interviewing because I had the

chance to get out of this soul sucking, mind numbing job that made me miserable. But if I told him that, if I said that out loud, then I was the failure I fought so hard for so long not to be. I had counted on him forcing me to leave. Then it wasn't my fault. It wasn't *my* failure.

"Ok," I said and looked up at him.

"Ok?" he asked. I nodded and forced a smile.

"I believe you," I said. I looked at him. "Because I am trusting you, and I know you know if I ever found out you lied to me, our relationship would never recover. I need to know I can trust you. I need to know there's no nuance to the things you tell me. I need to know that I can trust you. I need to know that when you tell me something, I don't need to overthink it. I can accept it on face value."

I didn't know how to express to him how important that was. I couldn't sit there and constantly second guess everything he did and said. I needed to know that even in my fucked up little brain, if all I could see were all the reasons in the world to the contrary, I could accept that what he was telling me was the truth.

"If this... if *we're* going to work, you can't lie to me."

"I won't."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

I forced a smile and stood.

"You can't touch me at work. If anyone ever thought - "

“It won’t happen again,” he vowed and touched his heart. “Scouts honor.”

I smiled at him and went back to my desk. As I sat down, I felt my phone buzz in my purse.

I love you, Orla. Everything is going to be ok. We’re so close.

You’re going to do amazing things here if you want to.

You earned the job. I promise.

I couldn’t help the smile that came to my face, but with it, came a rush of tears and I squeezed my eyes shut.

Thank you, I responded, but there was so much more I would have liked to say. I want people to know. I want to go out and do things with his friends. I want him to be proud of me. I want to have free time to do things on the weekends and in the evenings. I wanted to stay with him. I didn’t want him to leave. I couldn’t do it alone. I didn’t *want* to do it alone. I pressed my hand to my face and tried to stifle a sob.

You’re mentally ill. You’re a fraud. You don’t deserve this job. You’re weak and you’re a failure.

I let out a little sob and buried my face in my hands. I knew it like I needed oxygen to breathe. Caleb made this horrible place bearable. I couldn’t function if he left me.

I grabbed my phone and texted Caleb : *I’m not ok right now.*

I slapped my phone down and put my face back into my hands. I don’t know how much time passed but I waited for the buzz of his return text. It didn’t come and I began to spiral. It was how a panic attack always began. A buildup of anxiety until every little thing in your life was just too much to face and you found every possible and even impossible negative

consequence to any action you might take until you felt like you had no options, there was no way out, and you were literally going to die.

I was certain he was annoyed with me. How could anyone not be? I was *so much work*. He had to be getting tired of it. Of shielding me, of doing my work, of dealing with my moods, of managing my meds...

I felt a hand on my shoulder and I turned around with a small gasp. I cast a tearful glance up at Caleb, whose face was neutral, but his eyes sparkled with concern.

“Let’s go for a walk,” he murmured.

I nodded silently and followed him down the hall. He brought us to a staircase. We said nothing as we walked down the steps to our closet. He opened the door and ushered me inside, turned on the lights, and wrapped me in his arms. I just cried, and he held me close, one hand covering the back of my head, the other wrapped around me, holding me tightly to his body.

“Tell me what you need. I’ll make it better.”

I shook my head, focusing on the steady beat of his heart instead and how good he smelled. Panic welled up and bubbled inside me and I struggled to breathe. I couldn’t lose him. I couldn’t.

“Orla, tell me what’s wrong.”

I told him. Well, I told him some of it. I told him I wasn’t ready for that promotion and if he was honest with himself he knew it was true. I wasn’t cut out for the job. I was too much of a mess.

“I didn’t earn it,” I finally hiccuped. “I can’t do it.”

“I disagree,” he said. There were a few long moments of silence. “What do you want to do?”

I looked up with a frown.

“What?”

“What do you want to do? Do you want to step down? You can. You won’t get a raise for a few years or they may lower your pay, but you can go back to associate if that is what you want. I don’t think you should, but if that’s what you want, if you want to feel like you earned it yourself - which you already did - I’ll support you.”

I stared at him like he had seven heads. He stared back blankly.

“I don’t - I don’t want that,” I answered.

“Tell me what you want then...”

I *wanted* to feel sorry for myself. I *wanted* to cry and have some wine and a Xanax and wallow. I didn’t *want* solutions.

“I don’t - I don’t know.” I then added defensively, but with certainty, “I can *do* the job.”

“I agree,” he answered. He stepped back and leaned on the workbench. I almost told him to stand up. He’d ruin his suit. But then memories flooded back. How many times had he fucked me in here? How many times before I knew who he was. The thought of me walking back from this closet, passing his office, Caleb watching me knowing...

“You can’t do it without help. No one can. If you think you don’t deserve the promotion because you can’t do it completely on your own - you’ll never be ready for it.”

I stared at him. Suddenly more annoyed than sad.

“You’ve looked at Marc’s work. Peter’s. Steve’s. Do you think they’re anywhere near your level?”

“No,” I answered. They couldn’t write for shit for one, and second, they were sloppy. It wasn’t hard to look at a tax return, find a number, and put it into a template.

“They’ve been here the two years required for a standard promotion. Yeah, you’re an early promotion. Because you’re where an associate is at when they get promoted. Half the fucking part of being promoted is *learning* the job.”

He reached into his pocket and beckoned me closer.

“Come here.”

I obeyed and watched him open his email. He typed in Nick’s name and scrolled through the emails. He tapped one and gave me the opportunity to read it. He moved on to the next one. He opened at least six in the past two weeks that were questions for Nick. How to find resources, how to best approach a client, areas of law he wasn’t sure of. Then he typed in another name. A manager out of New York. The same thing. Questions after questions after questions.

“Do you think I didn’t deserve my promotion?” he finally asked me. I shook my head.

“Of course not.”

“No one thinks less of you for asking questions. They think less of you if you *don’t*. What matters is - are you making the same mistakes twice. When you’re on your game, you don’t.”

He frowned at me.

“Orla, what do you think the purpose of the comment process is? To make you feel like shit. It’s to teach you. No one expects you to just magically know.”

“I always did though. I’ve never struggled.”

“You weren’t being pushed hard enough. You should struggle. At least a little.”

“What if ...” I stopped, licking a tear off my lip.

“What if what?” Caleb asked.

“What if I don’t want to?” I asked him softly.

“Don’t want to what? Do the job?” he asked. I nodded, feeling an overwhelming crush of regret wash over me. Immediately I wanted to take it back. I did want it. I wanted to be able to do it without the constant anxiety. I wanted to just be normal. I was smart enough for it. Why couldn’t I just ... “then we’ll find something else.”

I looked at him, lips parting. That sense of dread filled me again. A closing in of the walls, a tightening of my chest. I couldn’t give up my job. This was what I did. This was what was expected of me. Everyone. My parents, my old classmates, *Caleb*.

“Babe, you don’t need to do M&A to be successful. If you want to do something different, then tell me what it is and I’ll help you get it. But don’t stay in a job you hate so other people won’t think you failed.”

“I want to be a person who can do it,” I whispered. He leaned back on the desk, his hands in his pockets.

“I want you to be happy,” he said. “That’s the most important to me. But you can’t shove a square peg into a round hole. People who succeed in life, found the thing that best suits their nature. Your nature might not lend itself to be happy here. That *doesn’t* make you a failure.”

I squeezed my eyes shut. I honestly didn’t know what I wanted. I wanted the job. I wanted to do it well. I wanted to be like Chloe. Beautiful, confident, a badass boss bitch. Maybe that just wasn’t who I was.

“What did Shakespeare say? If you judged a fish by how he climbed a tree he’d be a failure.”

I was trying so hard not to cry, I was hiccuping and sucking in shuddering breaths, but I laughed. A very genuine laugh.

“*Einstein*. But he never actually said it. ”

“Right,” he said matter of factly. “Einstein.”

“If I could be normal I would be,” I said. I wiped a tear away from my cheek. I was still speaking in halting, shuddering breaths. “I’m not just weak. There’s something ... not right up here..”

I tapped my temple.

“It’s like constant fight or flight. Everything. Every little fucking thing is the end of the world and I just can’t turn it off. You don’t understand.”

Caleb took my face in his hands.

“There’s nothing wrong with you.”

“You fell in love with me because you thought I was some... competent - ”

“I fell in love with you because of who you are. Remember what I said before? Any variation. Any combination. You want to be a stay at home mom? I can support you. You want to work, we’ll find a job you can be *happy* in. What matters is that you’re happy.” A beat and then, “Happy with me.”

“Can I think about it?” I asked. “I don’t know what I want right now.”

“Of course. No decisions need to be made today.”

“How much time do I have?” I asked. He frowned, but I thought he knew what I was asking.

“All the time in the world.”

I stared at him, wanting to ask him when he was going to leave. I stepped closer and wrapped my arms around his neck. I held him close, my entire body shaking. He hugged me close.

“We’ll figure it out,” he promised. He kissed my neck. “Do you need to go home?”

I shook my head.

“I’m not giving you the day off. Do you want to work from home?”

“I want to be with you,” I answered, touching his tie. My head hurt.

“If all you had to do was sit at your desk and go through numbers and write reports. You’d never have to run a call. You’d never have to push for timelines. You never had to worry about the social side of the job - would you be happy?”

“That sounds like heaven,” I smiled sadly. Unfortunately, that wasn’t the job. There was no job like that.

He smiled and cupped my cheek.

“You’re going to go home and work from the couch,” he said. I opened my mouth to protest, my hands tightening on his shirt. He placed a finger to my lips.

“And we’ll stay on the phone all day,” he vowed. I couldn’t help the smile that came to my face.

“I’m sorry,” I murmured.

“Don’t ever apologize for needing me,” he said, tilting my face up to look at him. “I live for it.”

I love you.

I wanted to say it, but I didn’t. I didn’t want it to be done in a supply closet and I didn’t want to risk ruining this moment. I would wait until after the wedding. If he didn’t propose, I’d tell him, and I’d tell him I needed more from him. I needed him to tell me what was going on. But I needed him to know how much I needed him, so I stepped into his arms and wrapped my arms around him again and I squeezed him as hard as I possibly could, and he let me without protest.

“I’m home,” she said in my ear. I smiled at the sound of her voice. It killed me not to be there with her. I hated having her away from me, especially when she was feeling so vulnerable,

but I couldn't leave the office.

"Alright. Focus on Rain and Windermere."

"Ok."

"I love you."

She took on a breath and I waited for her to speak. It took me a while to realize she wasn't going to say anything.

I focused on work. In most aspects of my life I was able to compartmentalize. It had served me well to this point. Chris popped on to ask what we were doing for lunch. I asked him to grab me something and bring it to me. I wanted to work through lunch so I could get home to Orla sooner.

"Ok, sure. Just text me," he said and ducked out. I picked up my phone to send him my order when Orla spoke.

"Cooper's?" she asked.

"Yupp."

"Club sub, extra turkey, no tomato."

My smile widened as I finished typing out the exact order.

"What are you eating?"

“I made something.”

“PB&J, salt and vinegar chips, and a Coke Zero.”

“Ding. Ding. Ding.”

I was excited to get home. I wanted to finish our conversation or - since I didn't think it would be fully resolved in a single night - continue it at the very least.

“You can log off,” I told her around five.

“When will you be home?” she asked. I looked at the clock.

“Around seven probably.”

I wish I could go home then and there, but I had a couple reports I needed to get over to Nick.

“Don't eat,” she said. I promised I wouldn't. A small part of me hoped she'd cook for me, and like everything else she did in my life, she didn't disappoint. I walked inside to the smell of roasting chicken and an array of seasoning and spices. She came over wearing one of the silk robes I had purchased for her. It was a dark green silk that made her hair and eyes pop and I admired her in it for only a few moments before I began to wonder what she had on underneath it.

“Hi,” she greeted with a smile, cheeks flushed.

“Hi,” I greeted and let her take my bag and remove my suit jacket. We hadn't had sex yet that day, and my cock was growing hard in my trousers. I fought the urge to pull at the tie of her gown and instead, I let her guide me into the kitchen.

“We need to buy a dining room table,” she said. She led me over to the island where she set up two plates for us. She had me sit down and got me a Diet Coke. We didn’t have any alcohol in the house. I didn’t want her to have the temptation, though she hadn’t seemed to be struggling with it so much anymore.

“This looks delicious,” I said as she plated my food. “I should send you home every day.”

I couldn’t help but look her over again, enjoying the soft curves of her body.

“What’s under here, hmm?” I asked and touched the ties of her robe. She moved away from me, cheeks pink, a smile on her face.

“That’s for after dinner,” she said.

“Dessert too?” I asked. “I’m a lucky man.”

She slid into the chair next to me and picked up her fork and knife. She watched me cut mine though, and waited until I put it into my mouth to speak.

“Is it good?” she asked.

“Delicious,” I answered honestly. She smiled and started eating. We chatted a little bit about our days, though there wasn’t much need to catch up when we were on the phone all day long.

“I wanted to thank you,” she said as we neared the end of dinner. I had been thinking about what she might be wearing underneath the robe. Maybe the black bra and thong set I liked her in so much. Or maybe the emerald green set... or maybe nothing at all.

“For what?” I asked.

“For this afternoon. Just ... being there to talk to. It’s strange... I’ve never... felt like I could just...talk. You know without actually having it all figured you. Having someone to figure it all out with. It’s nice.”

“You can always talk to me,” I said. I reached out and took her hand.

“Do you remember what you said a bit ago?” she paused to rest her elbows on the counter, and she clasped her hands together by her ears. She was looking down at the plate and I could see the anxiety running through her eyes. They darted back and forth across my empty plate. “About how you think I’m this strong, capable woman, and that’s part of why you like to dominate me.”

I reached out and made her look at me.

“That doesn’t change if you find a new job or if you quit tomorrow.”

“I just feel like you had this vision of us being some sort of power couple and you - ”

“We *are* a power couple. I told you, nothing changes that. Besides, I don’t hate the idea of you staying home with our kids. I think it’s important. Of course, my mom was a stay at home mom and she didn’t spend any time with us at all... but... that’s not important. You asked me today not to lie right. You need to be able to trust what I say? I’m telling the truth. Stay at home, M&A, in-house somewhere, it doesn’t matter to me, as long as you’re happy and you’re with me at the end of the day.”

“I believe you,” she whispered. “I don’t know what I want. I just need to think about it.”

“Whenever you want to talk, just let me know. Even if it’s just to think out loud. You don’t have to do this stuff alone anymore.”

She got to her feet and put our dishes in the sink. I watched her come back with a little smile on my lips. I looked her over greedily, anticipation pounding hard in my chest.

“What do you want tonight?” she asked, reaching up and gently removing my tie. I put my hands on her thighs.

“I want to be taken care of,” I said.

“A foot rub?” she asked. “A back massage in the tub? A long, slow blowjob during the game?”

“That all sounds wonderful,” I said. She got my tie loosened and pulled it up over my head and then slipped it around her own neck. She smiled at me and I glared back. She knew exactly what she was doing. I took hold of the tie and tugged her closer to me and took a kiss.

“What’s under the robe?” I asked.

She took my hand and leaned backward, pulling me out of my chair. We were standing in front of the bedroom door when she stopped us and slid her hands up my chest. I slid my hand around her waist.

“I just want to make you happy,” she said. I looked her over again, a smirk on my face. I looked back at her and gave a little shrug.

“Show me.”

She bit her bottom lip and reached for the ties of her robe.

We both knew. I was certain of that in the last month leading up to the wedding. She knew I wasn't at doctor's appointments. After she told me I couldn't lie to her, I stopped trying to actively convince her I was somewhere else. I used the doctor's appointment as a kind of joke, making it clear I wasn't actually trying to convince her otherwise. After all, no one had five doctor's appointments in the span of two months unless something was very wrong.

Chris told me about their chat in detail and her questioning in the Uber had made it apparent she knew. I was also certain she believed she could trust me and that it was all worked out. I was almost disappointed, because I was absolutely convinced she knew I would be proposing in Connecticut, on my birthday, in my childhood home, right before my brother was set to be married. But I didn't want to say it to her so directly, even if that typically was what she wanted, because I'm a romantic and I wanted it to be special.

My doctor's appointments were adding up, but she'd stopped asking about them and things hadn't changed. I even cracked a smile one morning when I told her I'd be out of office. She asked me where I was going, I cocked my head, grinned, and slapped her hard on the ass.

Chris slipped inside my office when I got back, a grin on his face.

"Let me see it," he said and dragged a chair over. I removed the ring from my pocket and opened it. It was a gorgeous 1.5 carat round cut diamond in a solitaire setting in a platinum band. Superb coloring, better clarity. It would look gorgeous on her finger and I itched to put it there.

Chris let out a low whistle as he took the box and looked at it.

"Fuck me, dude. Sell a kidney?"

"Nah, dipped into the ole trust fund," I answered. I got about ten grand a month. I didn't use it often. I usually just funneled it all into savings. It was a pretty big hit, but it was worth it. The insurance policy on the thing was insane, but that was worth it too. I would have gone for an even bigger diamond if I didn't think it would look ridiculous on her finger.

“Think she’ll say yes?” Chris asked and I shot him a look.

“Well, I’m not exactly going to ask her,” I said. I took the ring back. “I think I might just... you know tell her that I love her and that I was being serious when I said I’d never let her go. She belongs to me already and so it doesn’t matter if she yes or not. It doesn’t change anything because she can’t belong to me more than she does already and we’re getting married regardless so - ”

“Can I recommend you *not* do it that way?” Chris cut me off with an amused grin. “Tell her you love her and want to spend the rest of your life with her. And get down on one knee.”

I looked at the diamond, my skin growing hot as I thought about it. I didn’t get nervous. I never got nervous. The thought of this terrified me. I knew she couldn’t say no. I knew she wouldn’t. What scared me was the sign of hesitation, or disappointment, or fear. My skin flushed and I scratched my eyebrow.

“I’m still working out the details,” I muttered.

“Well, you have two weeks to figure it out. I would suggest not telling her she doesn’t have a choice. Maybe only bring that out if she tries to say no. Which she won’t.”

“I’ll fucking lose it man,” I muttered. “If I pour my heart out and she tries to get out of it. At my parents house. At my brother’s wedding. On my birthday.”

“I’d bet my life on the fact she won’t.”

“I just love her so fucking much, man,” I said.

“Well, honestly, I think the feeling’s mutual,” Chris said. I looked at him sharply.

“Don’t fucking say that. She hasn’t said that to me.”

“Because the last time she said it, it went so well for her.”

“I told her not to say it until she meant it. She still hasn’t said it.”

Chris shrugged.

“Where’re you going to ask?”

“I think I’m gonna bring her down to the pond, before the ceremony. It’ll be quiet and beautiful, and just us.... I don’t know. I’m still thinking about it.”

I liked the idea of standing behind my brother as he got married, smiling out at Orla where she sat in the crowd, knowing my ring was on her finger and that she was that much closer to being completely mine.

“Let me know if I can do anything. It’s an amazing ring man. She’s gonna say yes. She doesn’t have a choice.”

I returned his laugh, but I felt an ache beginning to form in my stomach. I closed the box, and put the ring back into my pocket.

I watched her make dinner that night mostly silent. She talked to me about how she was feeling about work. She didn’t know what she wanted to do, but she knew she would be fine as long as I was with her. If I wasn’t with her she would need to think about things differently. She said that multiple times, and I wondered if I should just tell her. God knows Max Furst, his wife, and Chris thought I should. I wasn’t sure if she was saying it because she wanted me to know she trusted me, or if she was fishing for information.

Do you love me yet, Orla?

That was what I wanted to ask her. I thought about the diamond, locked away in my safe now, and stared at her. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. Some of her curves were back. Honestly, she was the most beautiful I'd ever seen her. I watched her take a little bit of cheese and put it between her lips as she cooked.

Once dinner was in the oven she walked over to me and slid into my lap. Her hands felt ice cool on my skin.

"What's wrong?" she asked me. I just shook my head and pinched a lock of her hair between my fingers. She pressed, "something is wrong."

"You know you're going to spend the rest of your life with me?" I asked. "You don't have a choice. You understand that? I can't lose you."

I didn't wait for her reaction. I just pressed my head to her chest and closed her eyes. She cradled my head close and stroked my hair. We stayed like that until dinner was ready.

We were a week out, and I was somewhere between being deliriously happy and violently nervous. I had my offer from Deloitte. I had countered and they were in talks to see what they could work with. I fully expected to be offered my asking price. Life at home with Orla couldn't be better. She had stopped asking me about my doctor's appointments. She still wasn't entirely sure what she wanted to do with her life. I think she was finally comfortable with the fact that I wouldn't mind either way.

Orla was smart. She had the intelligence to do whatever she wanted. If it came at the cost of her happiness though, I didn't think it was worth it. I had the means to support us both. I had never been particularly opposed to using my trust fund. I just didn't need it. It would more than supplement her income when we had children and we'd save a lot on child care...

Still, I could see the fight warring within her. She didn't *want* to stop working. She just wanted to put an end to the constant pressure. I didn't blame her. It could get to me, and I was

fairly good at compartmentalizing most things. For someone who felt things so deeply, who overthought things so frequently...

My phone began to buzz beside me and I reached for it instantly, expecting it to be Orla. My hand froze as I examined the name on the screen. My brow knitted. We had wrapped up the last of our reports a couple weeks ago and I had not heard from the Austrian man for some time. There was talk they were looking into more acquisitions, in which it appeared we would be hired again. But now he was calling my cell phone directly, using the private number he had provided me at the golf course. I felt a flutter of excitement and a flicker of nerves as I reached for the phone and raised it to my ear.

"Herr Furst," I greeted warmly. "How are you?"

"Ah, Mr. Trent. I am pleased you answered. What are you doing now?"

"Just working," I answered. I checked my watch.

"No lunch meetings, I hope? Do you have an hour?"

"Yes, of course," I said. "Never too busy for you, sir."

He chuckled on the other end of the phone. I heard voices in the background and Furst spoke brusquely.

"You know Ostra?" he asked.

I frowned.

"The restaurant?"

“ *Ja.* ”

“I’ve never been, but I heard it’s nice,” I answered.

“ *Ah, gut.* I will see you at one o’clock.”

I opened my mouth to clarify but he had already disconnected.

Chapter Notes

*Edit: this story WILL have a happy ending.

So, before you read this chapter, I have a kind of long author's note I'd appreciate if you read. If not I understand.

I just want to say that I fully understand why some people who have read this story have not liked Orla. At the same time, I do think it is important to point out that she is mentally ill.

I usually don't like explaining my characters and their motivations, but I do think this might need to be addressed based on some emails I've received and comments I've read. I would say 98% of people who have stuck around this long get what I'm doing here, but just in case...

I'm not trying to depict someone with some minor anxiety issues. This is someone with serious mental illness. When we first met her, she was already self-medicating, was deeply depressed, and was mixing medications and alcohol in an attempt to just feel normal and to obtain just a moment of peace. That spiraled and spiraled and spiraled as the story progressed and she went through immense trauma, resulting in poor choices, missing obvious warning signs, and becoming even more fragile and susceptible to someone like Caleb.

In my personal observation, for whatever reason, mentally ill men in stories like this are interpreted very differently than when you have a mentally ill woman. Maybe that's the kind of mental illness portrayed here. I don't know if it's because anxiety has become a much more acceptable emotion to discuss openly, as it should be, but I think that it has resulted in people forgetting that there is a difference between the normal anxiety human beings feel on a daily basis, and can be found a huge spectrum, and severe anxiety and depression can be debilitating. You can be highly intelligent and when you're in the throes of heightened anxiety you miss the simplest of details. You're so aggressively scared of shit that will never happen that you miss what's right in front of your face. You don't make rational decisions. It's not just a mere instance of sucking it up and being strong.

Again, I usually don't like explaining why I write a character the way I write them. I thoroughly enjoy reading the comments and hearing your thoughts and opinions. I also think it's important to allow the reader to have their own interpretations that might not be what my intention was when I wrote it.

In this case, mostly because I'm writing about a topic that I do feel strongly about, and I have made the mistake of putting a lot of myself into Orla, and so some of the criticism of Orla I feel is directed at me as well. That's not fair to the reader, and like I said, I have amplified Orla's struggles tenfold to anything I have ever experienced.

I just wanted to put that out there and obviously, everyone and anyone is free to disagree with my assessment above. This story isn't intended to be any sort of social commentary or have any sort of message on how to handle anxiety. I literally write what I hope is good porn with a decent plot. I would highly recommend doing the absolute opposite of everything that Orla did. But I just wanted to put my two cents in on why I wrote Orla the way I did and I guess come to her defense a little bit.

Anyway, if you're still reading this, bless you. I thoroughly hope you enjoy this chapter. Not gonna lie, I feel a little sick posting it. I plan on downing a glass of chardonnay and some sleeping pills and hope I don't wake up to hate comments in the morning. (For legal reasons that's a joke).

We're almost there and again, thank you to everyone who continues to read and comment. It really means the world to me.

** Also, I am not a psychologist, have no education in psychology and don't pretend to be expert. The above is merely speaking my own lay opinion based on my own person experiences with anxiety and depression and what research I do whenever I write a story**

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Caleb stepped out of the changing area and my heart fluttered in my throat. He was perfection. He was dressed in a beautiful black tuxedo, with a satin-faced shawl lapel. He didn't have his tie, pocket square or cufflinks, but it didn't matter. I could see him clear as day on our wedding day, standing at the end of the aisle for me.

Tall, strong, handsome, intelligent, successful, ambitious, confident... he was everything any heterosexual woman dreams of and everything I thought I'd never have. If men like Eddie and James hadn't wanted me, then certainly someone like *Caleb* never would. They weren't in the same league as Caleb. They weren't in the same *universe*. His eyes searched me out for approval, a small smile coming to his perfect lips as he saw me. I smiled at him, my heart warming. He instilled in me a feeling of perfect peace. Safety. Security.

In the months that had passed, each passing day, I held more and more love for him. I looked at him and felt safety, security, warmth and love. Yet, the more those feelings of safety and security grew, the more unbearable my fear of losing him grew along with it. As I sat in my chair, watching him examine the small black buttons of his crisp white shirt I felt another rush of overwhelming anxiety course through me. My pulse quickened and I let out a long, slow breath through partially parted lips.

"Ok?" he asked me, but I didn't think I could speak. I took in the sight of him and then, after registering the slightly confused look on the seamstress's face, forced myself to speak.

"You're perfect," I managed to get out and smiled at him. All I wanted was to be back at home with him, alone, wrapped securely in his arms.

“You’re one of my favorite clients to fit,” the seamstress agreed and though she was about ten years older than Caleb, I shot her a stony glare. He was her favorite because he was so beautiful. Tall, broad, hard, strong, but lean and wore a suit with the confidence fabric of that quality deserved. And I didn’t like the way she was looking at him.

I wanted to get up and embrace him, but I kept myself in my chair and let the seamstress finish her checks. The wedding was black tie and both Caleb and Chris were groomsmen. I wasn’t surprised by the news when I discovered it, but I wasn’t prepared for the news nonetheless. I hated the idea of being a plus one to a wedding, where I knew no one, and my date would be gone 90% of the time. My stomach clenched at the thought of it. I focused my attention on Caleb and pushed away any thoughts I might have about how uncomfortable the weekend was going to be.

Caleb looked at himself in the mirror, and then his eyes darted back to me. Through the reflective glass our eyes met and I smiled at him. His brow furrowed.

“You ok?” he asked. He was perceptive to my moods now. He knew when things were bothering me, even when I tried to hide it, which wasn’t frequent. I brightened my smile and nodded.

My anxiety levels weren’t rooted in reason. What I feared more than anything was losing him. He reminded me constantly that wasn’t going to happen. He told me all the time how much he loved me, that he would never let me go, that I was his forever. He talked about our connection. How we belonged with each other. We were made for each other. But I needed more. I needed a ring and I needed to be public. I needed a *future*. I needed a piece of paper sanctioned by the fucking government that said that legally I was his and he was mine and even though he could still leave me if he really wanted, I could make it really fucking hard for him then if he did.

I still hadn’t told him I loved him yet. That fueled my anxiety. I wanted him to know. Every time he told me he loved me and I didn’t say it back, I was afraid it would be the time he finally gave up, realized I wasn’t worth it. It was a frightening thing though, and I had settled on the perfect plan to tell him. A genuine, private, sentimental way, where I could truly communicate to him just how much he meant to me. I knew that if I did it this way, he would believe me. There would be no doubt in his mind. It would be a beautiful and happy memory. I would tell him on his birthday, before the wedding. He’d already promised us alone time that morning. I just had a few more days to wait.

“You’re a lucky woman,” the seamstress said to me with a smile. I did not smile back. I knew that and I didn’t appreciate the way she was ogling him. If I had a ring on my finger and he introduced me as his fiancée instead of his girlfriend maybe she wouldn’t be so brazen. Some women had no respect when a man was taken.

“I know,” I said and she said she was going to pick up my dress. Caleb walked over to me and held out his hand. He pulled me to him, wrapping his arm around my waist. He swayed us side to side, dancing slowly and in time to the phantom music.

“I can’t wait to dance with you on our wedding day,” he murmured. My heart sped up again. He said all the things I wanted - needed - to hear, but the more attainable it became, the more

crippling the fear of losing it became as well.

“Need to propose for that to happen,” I answered, giving a wry smile and tilting my head to the side. He smiled back, eyes dipping to my lips. He had been in a marvelously good mood the last few days. It had been nice but also disconcerting. He hadn’t had many of his unhinged spells recently, and he only went through my phone once in the past week and he barely even went through my personal email. He didn’t even glance at my bank account. I found that unsettling.

“Is that how that works?” he teased. I stared into his eyes.

“It is,” I responded. He leaned down to kiss me, still moving us to the invisible music.

“My goodness,” the seamstress’ voice interrupted us. “Aren’t you two just the most beautiful couple? You sure it’s not your wedding you’re going to?”

“That’s in the spring,” Caleb joked and turned back to the mirror, letting me go. The seamstress instructed Caleb to change out of the tux, no further alterations were needed, and then had me follow her to put on the dress.

It was a A-line green floor length gown with long sleeves that Caleb picked out. It was absolutely gorgeous, and as I looked at myself in the mirror in the dressing room, I could actually see for the briefest of moments what Caleb saw when he looked at me. Curvy, vivid, beautiful. It was that word vivid that stuck with me. I wasn’t so sure what he meant by it, but he had used it once during one of our picnics. We’d been finishing up our sandwiches and he was staring at me, that little smile on his face. After I told him to stop staring he shrugged and said, “You’re so...vivid.”

I came out of the dressing room after the second urging from the seamstress. Caleb was out already in his regular clothing and was hanging the garment bag up when I stepped back into the room. He turned and I waited anxiously. The hungry look that spread across his face sent a surge of dopamine rushing through my brain. This time when I smiled, it was real.

“Absolutely gorgeous. God, I love redheads,” the seamstress said. I wanted to correct her but Caleb gave me a stern look and I fell silent. I was a redhead, Caleb finally said one day, voice stern and certain, and denying it denied a part of me that he loved. Auburn, dark, lush, - red.

“Thank you,” I said to her, but my eyes were on him. He stepped toward me, taking my hands in his.

“She’s the love of my life,” he said, but his eyes were still on mine. His hands squeezed and I squeezed back. I had it better than him. I didn’t have to worry how hard I squeezed. I could squeeze as hard as I wanted and get out all that pent up energy. He liked it.

“You two are just too sweet,” the seamstress gushed and then shooed Caleb away. “Oh, the alterations are perfect. You’ll be beating the men back with a club.”

Caleb’s eyes took on that hard look. One I both loved and hated. Tonight, I loved it. I wanted that fierceness. I needed to be assured of how much he wanted me. That his obsession had

not waned. Only grew.

“I’m sure there isn’t a man on earth that looks better than him in a tux,” I answered. I knew I was playing with fire as I said it but I didn’t care. I added with a little smirk in his direction. “But we’ll see.”

The little pinched smile he’d managed to maintain until then vanished and his eyes pinned on me hard.

“That’s not fucking funny.”

The seamstress looked alarmed by the venom in his voice, but I’d gotten what I wanted. I’d get it when I got him. All his wrath, all his anger, all of his desperate need to assert total control and dominance. All his attention, all on me, so fiery and intense that I could forget for a few hours how precarious our relationship was... how I could lose everything in a blink of an eye.

With no further alterations needed to my dress, it was bagged, Caleb paid, and we went back to his car. His knuckles pulsed white on the steering wheel and I watched his jaw clench.

“Caleb?”

“Don’t fucking do that,” he snapped. “Don’t joke about other men.”

“I was just teasing,” I lied, but I wanted this reaction. I basked in it. A vein was bulging in his forehead and down his throat and I felt a little pulse between my legs.

“Well don’t,” he said. He was about to put the car in drive, but I reached out and placed my hand on his cock. He wasn’t hard, but I immediately felt it come to life beneath my hand.

“I’m sorry, Caleb,” I murmured. “You know you’re the only one I want.”

He looked at me, eyes darting between my own.

“You know how to say sorry,” he answered. I unbuttoned his jeans, pulled out his now semi-hard member, and apologized thoroughly.

I spent the next few days grilling Caleb on who would be at the wedding and what I could expect.

“It’s stressful being a plus one at a wedding where I know no one and the two people I do know will be gone 80% of the time,” I told him at dinner the next night.

“I’m going to keep you with me as much as I possibly can. Even if you’re just following me around for pictures. And it’ll really only be pictures, the ceremony, and just before dinner. I made sure that Valencia sat you with me.”

I nodded and processed. He let me. It was one of my favorite things about him. He was very good at letting me think things through. My normal reaction was usually to get curt, put a

tight, pinched smile on my face, and agree. He didn't like that. He didn't like the look on my face or the tone of my voice. It was bitchy. Disrespectful. So, I sat and thought it through.

"I'll be fine," I said. And I would be. The thing about being a functioning head case was that no matter how horrible I would feel, heart pounding, body hollow, legs tingling and numb all at the same time, you somehow survived it, and as long as I had Caleb on the other side of it, I could get through anything. I looked at him and smiled. "I'll be fine. I won't embarrass you. I promise."

"I know you won't. I don't care about that. I just want you to feel secure."

"I won't," I said simply. "Only you make me feel like that."

His eyes took on that look I had come to love so much. That faraway, yet fiercely intense look.

"But I can do it. I'll be fine," I promised. "Because I know no matter what I have you. Right?"

"Right?" he breathed. "What a stupid question."

I explained to him familiarity made me comfortable and so he was more than willing to answer all my questions. He told me that by the time we arrived, I would feel like I had known his family my entire life.

Georgie, named after their father, was his older brother. Now forty-one, he was a married doctor with no children.

"He's a doctor," Chris said, tossing his tie over his shoulder to bite into his sub one day at lunch. Caleb snorted with derision.

"He's a *dentist*."

"He's an OMFS and owns his own practice," Chris shot back.

He was married to his high school sweetheart Marci, although he had his bouts of infidelity, mostly in high school and college. He was too busy during and after med school, though Caleb didn't think he would refrain if the opportunity presented itself. Georgie didn't tie sex with love and didn't appreciate why a woman couldn't understand that.

"I think it was growing up watching our own parents, honestly. He never sat outside our mother's room listening to her cry when dad didn't come home. *I* did."

"Well - to be fair - he also doesn't want to do certain things to Marci and ... I mean do you think she'd ever be ok with that?"

"She wouldn't like it, but she'd definitely do it if he told her to."

"What does he like?" I asked.

Apparently, he was also interested in BDSM, but while Caleb was always drawn to the bondage, dominance, and submission part of that equation, Georgie was far more interested in the sadomasochism portion of it. He respected Marci too much to ever do half of what he wanted to her. I thought that was a cop out and said as much.

“He’s got some good Catholic guilt over it though let me tell you.”

“You’re not Catholic,” I said.

“He converted for Marci. Besides, I think Catholicism suits Georgie.”

He lived in Hartford, Connecticut and he and his wife had no children, but were going into their third round of IVF. Marci was very sensitive about it.

Josh, the middle brother, was also a doctor, but according to Caleb, he was a *real* doctor. He was thirty-seven, almost thirty-eight.

“What kind of doctor?” I asked.

“Same as dear old dad,” Caleb answered bitterly.

I made a face and Chris added, “plastic surgery. Beaucoup bucks. He will try to tell you you need work done. You don’t. He tells everyone that.”

“Good to know.”

“He’s been trying to give Caleb a nose job since he got licensed.”

“*Sell* me a nose job,” Caleb corrected.

“I love your nose,” I said. Caleb’s eyes darted up at the word love. Our eyes met and I looked down at my plate, cheeks flushed.

Josh wasn’t really into BDSM or anything like Caleb, Chris, or Georgie, but he didn’t have any semblance of respect for women. He watched his mom get walked on for years. He thought it was the way of things. Valencia was perfect for him. She was air headed, fake, and didn’t love Josh. Well, no more than Josh loved her. They both saw in the other what they thought the world most coveted. Beauty, wealth, and status.

“You’ll know immediately how they met,” Caleb said. Chris leaned back with a smirk.

“She’s actually pretty nice,” Chris said to me.

“She’s *fake* nice.”

“And you thought I was bitch,” I reminded him.

He stared at me, saying nothing.

“Trust me,” he finally said, tossing his napkin into his empty plate.

Josh was who Caleb got the GHB from that he used to drug me.

“So, I guess we can be thankful to him for something,” Caleb said. He and Chris laughed. I did not.

He told me about his Aunt Carol, who, according to Caleb, was one-hundred and fifty-six years old and was a nasty old woman whose mind was gone.

“It’s no excuse though. She was nasty before and she’s nasty now. Before she just had a sense of decorum.”

His mother had one sister, his aunt Lexi who had two daughters, Jane and Sophia. Both nice girls, but Caleb didn’t know them well anymore. After a disturbing revelation by Caleb’s mother when he was sixteen, he was kept away from all his female relatives.

“Like I’d want to rape my *cousin*.”

His father had two brothers and a sister. He went through their names, professions, ages, and the family dynamics. He related it all to me for the next couple days as I made sense of them all in my head and would test me on it randomly.

We were going down Friday morning and we’d stay at his parent’s house. The rehearsal dinner was Friday evening, the wedding Saturday, a 1:00pm start at the country club, and then we would head home Sunday. He assured me his parent’s home was big enough we likely wouldn’t run into them and because they “don’t come looking for me.”

He came from ‘money, money.’ That was what he called it anyway. That part didn’t bother me so much. I considered myself as having come from ‘money, money.’ As much as I hated it, I generally knew what was expected around those kinds of people.

His mom inherited a lot from her parents and his dad’s family were good old WASPs. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants for anyone who doesn’t know the American vernacular. Then his father opened what has become the most successful plastic surgery practice on the Northeast.

“The house is big,” Caleb said.

“It’s a fucking mansion,” Chris had said. I let him stay over the Thursday before we left so he wouldn’t have to travel across the city with all his stuff in the morning. Caleb had asked me if it was OK at lunch one day, to which Chris seemed appalled he was even asking.

“So gracious,” Chris said to me when I agreed. I had given him a tight smile.

“You know what, I changed my mind.”

Caleb shrugged and said, “Sorry man.”

“Are you kidding?”

I laughed at him and he started laughing, and then we were all laughing and I felt some of my hatred for him dissipate. I wasn’t ready to let him entirely off the hook though.

I was making pasta for the boys and Caleb was explaining the schedule to me for the seventeenth time that day, but showed no sign of being annoyed for having to repeat it. It was another thing I loved so much about him. I could hear something a thousand times, but I needed things repeated for me. I needed the confirmation that I hadn't misunderstood, that I knew what was going to happen, that the plan hadn't changed. We stayed up late into the night, going through all the details for the millionth time. By the time we fell asleep, tangled in each other's arms, I felt almost excited about the trip.

We left at 10:00 am the next morning to avoid traffic. It was only about a three-hour drive and Chris and Caleb had a tradition of stopping at a little diner about two hours into the drive for lunch. I sat in the front with Caleb, clutching his hand tightly on my lap, trailing the nails of my other hand along his skin. He liked how that felt.

"Georgie is forty-one, a *dentist*, wife Marci, high school sweetheart, who he cheats on -"

"Cheated on," Chris said.

"Cheats on," I repeated. "No kids. Going through IVF. Soft spoken, always looks bored. Meaner than he looks."

"That's good old Georgie."

"Josh. Thirty-seven, morally bankrupt, hates women -"

"He doesn't *hate* women," Chris said from the back seat. "He doesn't respect women."

"Same thing."

"I mean not really."

"Cheats on his fiancé. Loud, arrogant, has the capacity for cruelty."

"That's a pretty good description actually," Caleb said. I squeezed his hand and he squeezed back. We went through the rest of his relatives again, Chris dropping in little tidbits from the back seat as we went, less than half of them actually helpful. I felt like I had a good idea of the main cast of characters as we went, and I thought if I made a connection with someone at the rehearsal dinner I would be just fine.

I hated approaching people I didn't know and introducing myself. I hated it so much I was practically incapable of doing it. But the thought of being that person standing in the corner alone, out of place, nervously scanning the room, was equally as nauseating a thought. The problem was, one of those was usually an inevitability when in a room of strangers. I trusted Caleb that he would make sure neither of those happened. He would take care of me.

We stopped at a nice little plaza that had a gas station and a restaurant. We got out of the car, and as Caleb and I came around the car, I held out my hand to him. He took it and tugged me closer, before removing his hand from mine and draping his arm over my shoulder. I used my other hand to take his, pulling his arm across me. I smiled at him and he leaned down and kissed me.

“You’re so hot in that dress,” he said between kisses.

“You should see what’s underneath it,” I answered and he laughed.

“Oh, I will,” he answered.

“Promise?” I asked. He kissed me again as we approached the door to the restaurant.

“You guys are so disgusting,” Chris said and walked in in front of us. I blushed and tried to pull away from Caleb, but just as I was hoping he would, he held me to him.

We got seated in a booth by a pretty hostess. Caleb nudged me into the inside of the booth so he could crowd me. It was what he liked to do when we shared Ubers, and apparently, when we were out in public with other people around as well. His hand went up my thigh and pulsed as he grabbed the menu.

“They have amazing burgers here,” he told me. “And the fries are fantastic.”

I bit my bottom lip. My weight was still a topic of contention. I was happy where I was at now, and I think Caleb was too, but he wasn’t as worried about me gaining as I was. One day when we were ordering take out he told me he “liked to smack my ass and watch it jiggle,” and then had me order a burger. It helped, but it also was a brand-new source of anxiety I had to deal with. I didn’t want to be too thin, but I didn’t want to gain too much either.

“You’re on vacation,” he said and nudged me. I smiled and put my menu down.

“You order for me,” I said, handing control over to him. He grinned and our waiter came over.

“Good afternoon you guys, how we doing today?” he asked with a smile. I remember he had very pronounced dimples. I don’t remember if he was handsome or cute or what. I couldn’t even say how old he was. I just remember noticing his dimples and smiling in greeting. Caleb’s hand tightened on my knee.

“We’re doing well,” I answered with a smile. “Could I have a Diet Coke?”

“Of course, and you sir.”

“Diet Coke,” Caleb grumbled. Chris ordered the same.

“Oh, I’m sorry, could I get a water with lemon as well?” I asked as he was about to turn away.

“Of course,” he grinned, dimples popping. “I’ll go ahead and get those and give you some time to look at the menu.”

He smiled at me again and walked away. Caleb turned to glare at me.

“What?” I asked when he continued to stare without saying anything.

“You know for someone with social anxiety you do pretty damn good in social situations.”

I stared at him, a mixture of anger and hurt flickering through me. So many people just couldn't understand that just because a person might look calm it didn't mean they were. We'd had this discussion so many times. He couldn't understand how I could feel the things I told him I did, but still look so calm. Though I never really understood I came across as confident as I did to the outside world, I came to understand it like an iceberg. People only saw what was on the surface, and often failed to understand so much more could be going on under the surface at the same time.

“Want to ask him if he'd like to fuck you?” he asked. “I'll tell him what you like.”

“Caleb,” Chris said.

“*Excuse me*?” I asked. “I *know* I didn't hear you correctly.”

“You heard me,” he said. “What the fuck was that?”

He leaned his elbows on the table and leaned toward me.

“You're gonna just flirt with a total stranger right in front of me?”

“Caleb, man,” Chris said. “She wasn't flirting.”

“I was just being polite.”

“Yeah, smiling and batting your eyes at him like that. Just go ask him if you want to suck his cock.”

“Bat... batting my eyes? Caleb, I *wasn't*.”

“Caleb,” Chris said. “She really wasn't.”

“Ok. Yeah. I'm crazy then,” Caleb said and got up from the table and stormed off toward the door, rubbing the back of his neck. I looked at Chris, eyes wide in shock.

“I didn't do anything wrong right?”

“He's just wound a bit tight. Give him some time, he'll come back,” Chris said and picked up his menu. I looked at the menu long enough to tell Chris what to order for us if the waiter came back. “No tomatoes on Caleb's.”

I began to slide out of the booth, shaking my head as I went.

“I love him but sometimes - ”

I turned in time to see a slow smile spread across Chris' face. There was a moment of silence when the waiter dropped off our glasses. Chris was about to order but I asked him for a minute. When he left, Chris played with the wrapper of his straw and smirked at me.

“Don’t you dare tell him I said that,” I said.

“I won’t.”

“I mean it. That’s for me to say. Not you. When *I’m* ready.”

“Trust me, Ellie, I wouldn’t rob him of that moment.”

I swallowed thickly, my skin and flesh hot.

“I’m going to tell him this weekend when - when it’s the right moment.”

“I won’t say a word,” he grinned, twisting the straw paper. “But for the love of God, tell him sooner rather than later so I don’t have to deal with *that* much longer. ”

“You swear to me, Chris. Swear to me you won’t tell him. I’ll never forgive you.”

“I *promise*. If you don’t believe me for your sake, believe me I wouldn’t for his. He deserves to hear it from you first.”

I stared at him a moment longer, not quite trusting him, but then decided he was telling the truth. The one thing I didn’t doubt was Chris’ loyalty to Caleb.

“Ellie,” Chris said when I stood up. I looked at him with a blank face and waited. Chris raised his eyebrows, tearing the paper wrapped in two. “He wants to hear it.”

I said nothing and turned and walked back out to the car. I found him sitting inside it, the car off and growing warm, staring ahead in absolute silence. I slid into the passenger seat. He didn’t turn his head to look at me. After a moment I reached out and took his hand.

“Caleb?” I asked. He looked down at his lap and sighed and then looked back over at me. “I need to be able to interact with men.”

“I know,” he said. “You just... kept *smiling* at him.”

“Something people do in society, yes,” I agreed. He squeezed my hand and flipped it over in his lap. He trailed his finger along the lines of my palm.

“I’m just on edge... I hate seeing my parents.”

“I can’t relate,” I said blandly. He finally cracked a smile and looked over at me.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I shouldn’t have spoken to you like that. That was borderline abusive... maybe not so borderline.”

I looked at him, a crooked smile on my lips. The man who stalked and raped me, apologizing for being abusive. The strangest part of it all was that I understood. There was a difference. I couldn’t explain it, but there was.

“You know how you need assurances?” he asked. I nodded. “I need them too. Maybe more than you sometimes.”

“There is no other man on earth that compares to you, Caleb.”

He looked at me, eyes shining earnestly. I touched his cheek.

“I’m not interested in any other men. No other man can do for me what you do. I promise you that.”

He nodded. I kissed him gently.

“Caleb?” I said softly, my heart pounding violently in my chest. He kissed me again, gently and slow. His tongue slipped into my mouth. “Caleb,” I said again, feeling my stomach flutter and a tickle in my throat. I didn’t want to tell him right now, in a car at a rest stop after he demanded assurances. I wanted to do it the way I planned. It would be perfect, special and he would believe me. He’d know it was true. But I wanted to say it so bad. I pulled back and looked down. I took a steady breath and then looked up, but he was turning away from me and reaching for the door.

“Let’s get back inside,” he said, opening the door. He turned back and frowned at me. “What is it?”

“Nothing,” I said and smiled. I would stick to the plan. Plans served me well. Things went poorly when I deviated. Deviation scared me.

I made sure to hold his hand as we walked back. When we sat down, I looped my arm in his and pressed my head to his shoulder. When he felt insecure, the best thing I could do to calm him was touch him. His hand tugged my dress up so he could touch my bare knee.

“Ordered the burgers for you both, per Ellie’s orders. Extra tomatoes for you,” he said, pointing at Caleb. When our waiter did return with our food, I wrapped my arms around Caleb’s arm and squeezed. When he looked down at me, I leaned up to kiss him. He smiled and kissed me again.

“I’m gonna lose my appetite,” Chris muttered. “Really, you’re both absolutely grotesque.”

I blushed and removed my arm from Caleb’s so I could eat my burger. He gave me half his sweet potato fries and I gave him my steak fries. Chris watched, lazily biting a fry in half, and when our eyes met, a knowing smile spread across his face. He slowly began shaking his head and then winked at me.

“What?” Caleb laughed.

“Disgusting.” Chris said again, but there was an obvious glimmer of amusement and warmth in his tone and face. Chris met my eyes and he winked at me. Caleb went over the plan as we ate.

We would get to his parents house around two. He could give me a tour if I wanted, but he wanted to spend most of the day in our room. We would leave for the rehearsal dinner at 5:30

and be back and in bed no later than 10:00.

We went through his relatives once again as we drove our last hour to his parent's house.

The moment we entered the neighborhood I realized what Caleb meant when he said his family had 'money, money.' I had taken it to mean they had 'money, money' the same way my family had 'money, money.' Memberships at the country club, designer clothing, fancy vacations, first class plane rides, the newest and best cars, real jewelry, someone to come in and clean and make the beds, a couple extra rooms for relatives to stay in at your lavish holiday parties...

This wasn't 'money, money.'

"This is 'fuck you, money,'" I said to Caleb, turning my head away from the third mansion we passed along the way. Caleb looked toward one of the large iron gates that blocked off another four plus acre lot. The home I grew up in was a four thousand square foot remodeled farmhouse on three acres. It was clean, freshly painted, professionally landscaped, and was the most expensive home in the county, which didn't say too much since we lived in such an impoverished area.

These houses put the one I grew up in to shame. House after house after house. At least double the square footage with almost double the average. And these were not modest looking, but large farmhouses. These were a mix of Georgian colonials, Victorians, French Country, all large, towering, freshly manicured, and oozing money.

We took a right and my lips parted. The gate was high and towering, gray stone and cast-iron, and Caleb punched in the code. The gate slowly opened and we pulled forward down a long, winding drive, where the house slowly came into view from behind the towering pines in the front yard. The house was like the McAllister's on steroids. Cross hipped roof of French slate, gray granite exterior, partially covered with lush green ivy, large windows, attached and detached matching garage, looping, stone drive... it was exactly the kind of house I would have thought someone like Caleb grew up in, but I was taken aback all the same. I was Northern New Hampshire rich, he was New Canaan, Connecticut rich. He parked the car in front of the detached garage and I looked around as he unloaded our stuff from the car.

"This place is amazing," I said.

"It's alright," Caleb said, coming up behind me with our suitcases and our garment bags draped over his shoulder. "Feels more like walking into a museum than a home."

I took the garment bags from Caleb and Chris.

"Will we be staying in your old room?" I asked with a smile. I was excited to see it. A little snapshot into who Caleb was before I knew him. Caleb laughed.

"Please. That's a fucking closet now. I think my mom has her shoes in there."

I caught Chris's eye and he gave a tiny shake of his head. I followed his direction and didn't follow up anymore on it.

We stepped into a massive foyer with a grand main staircase, the floor and walls covered in white marble.

"Cozy, isn't it," Caleb said dryly, but I noted how similar his own apartment had been before I arrived. Clean, pristine, crisp, cold. I reached out and touched his lower back. He lead us up the massive staircase to the right, where he dipped down a hall covered with pictures. I paused, catching a portrait of a teenage boy with olive skin, dark hair, and light eyes.

"Is that you?" I asked. He turned back but didn't look at the photo.

"That's Georgie. We each have our own wall. Mines at the back of the house, in hall no one ever goes down. Because I'm the youngest they said."

I nodded absentmindedly and examined the pictures as I passed. Georgie got older as we made it down the hall. He looked very similar to Caleb, but I could see the difference more starkly as he aged. He was handsome, but a bit less striking, and appeared to have a slight frame, though he did look tall.

"I want to see yours," I said, catching up with Caleb and taking his hand. He squeezed and I squeezed back.

"Sure."

We got to Chris' room first. He opened the door, slid his suitcase inside and then took his garment bag from me.

"See you crazy kids at dinner?" he asked, sharing a bro shake with Caleb. "Sure you two will make good use of your afternoon."

I bristled and he slipped inside.

"Which are your parent's rooms?" I whispered, looking around. He jerked his chin over his shoulder and opened another room.

"Other side of the house. These are all guest rooms."

It felt odd to me that we wouldn't be on that side of the house. Caleb was their *son* after all. I slid my arm around his back again as we slipped inside. He liked when I touched him. He almost never got angry when I was touching him.

"Are you ok?" I asked. He nodded, sliding his hands around my waist and pulling me closer. He bent down and bit down on my earlobe. I let out a shudder of pleasure and closed my eyes. He picked me up and I pulled him down with me to the bed.

After hanging up our clothing for the wedding and the rehearsal dinner, he took me on a tour of the house. We looked at Georgie's pictures some more, though Caleb didn't care too. I was

curious and he waited patiently as I examined them. Mostly professional portraits, but with a few candids mixed in. I recognized the lake house in a few and paused at a picture of three young boys in their bathing suits on a small sandy beach, a tire swing in the background. I made sure not to linger on that one, despite wanting to see what young Caleb looked like. The most recent picture of Georgie was of him at his own wedding. He and a beautiful young woman with bleach blond hair, skinny as a rail, and with perfect hair and makeup stood beneath a giant oak tree on a lush green yard.

“That’s at the country club. Josh and Val will have the same picture taken I assume.”

“And then you?” I asked, looking over my shoulder at him. He smiled and draped his arm over my shoulder. He was warm and hard and I wrapped my arms around his middle.

“And then us,” he answered with a squeeze. I felt that same seizure of my heart. The more he assured me the more anxious I became. The thought of losing the life he promised me... it was unbearable.

He led us back down to the staircase, where there was a fork. The stairs were to our left, another hall that was the “lived in” wing was down the hall in front of us, (that was where Josh’s pictures were), and to the right, a long hallway that was rarely used, that held an office, a library, a TV room, and some storage. That was Caleb’s hall.

The pictures started the same as they did for Georgie. There first was a woman with black hair and dark brown eyes, seated in a hospital bed, a bright smile on her face, holding a red faced and squealing infant.

“Aww,” I said as I looked at him.

“I had colic basically straight from the womb. No one knows why. Stopped around six months though,” he said. Most of the pictures he was in he looked miserable. Red faced and crying, staring at the camera for help, begging to be taken out of the fancy outfits and just held. They made me terribly sad. I moved down to the next set of photos, bringing him with me by the hold I had on his hand.

The next set of photos were of him a little older in adorable little outfits. He was a plump, red cheeked baby who smiled with a crinkled nose and an open mouth. He was dressed in adorable tiny polos and chinos. I pressed my fingers to my mouth and giggled at one particular photo, where he was seated on a white couch, dressed in a powder blue button down, little tweed overall shorts, and a pageboy cap on his head.

“Oh my god, Caleb, you were so cute,” I said. He looked over the photo looking a tad unconvinced.

“How old were you here? One?”

“About five months,” he answered. I balked, not believing it. “I was always a big boy.”

“I hope our kids are half as cute as you were,” I said. He said nothing and I moved down the list and the pudgy wrecking ball of a child grew taller and leaner. He was a gangly looking

child. All arms and legs, a nose and two large ears. I felt a violent rush of affection for him. Before, it was far too easy to see the man in front of me when he told me about the bullying he endured from his brothers. I couldn't fathom how he could have taken that, I certainly never fully appreciated how much it must have bothered him. Not the calm, confident, Caleb Trent I knew from work.

"I was 5'4 at eight," he said, tapping the glass of a photo of him on a soccer field. He was towering over the other kids. His hair was cut close to his head, his front teeth massive, his nose big, and he waved at the camera with a long, skinny arm. We moved down the line and I pressed my hands back to my mouth. "Oh my god, Caleb. That's you?"

It was a school photo of him. He was dressed in a suit with a burgundy blazer. His hair was sticking straight up, his skin covered with large red acne spots, and he had a deep cut on his chin. His nose was still too big for his face, his ears even wider. He had a big smile on his face, his gray eyes opened wide.

"Don't laugh at me," he said, but I couldn't contain the giggles that kept coming.

"Caleb, you were *adorable*."

"That's the word you want to use?" he asked. "I was thirteen there. This was my first year of high school by the way," he said. "That's the kid you thought wouldn't give you the time of day."

"No," I said, turning my eyes toward the last two of four large school portraits. " *That's* the guy that wouldn't have given me the time of day."

He was in a navy jacket in the last three, looking very much like the Caleb I knew. He was still lean, still young, but his nose now fit perfectly on his face, his ears the right size, and he had a cocky smirk on his face, a dark challenging stare in his eyes. I imagined him picking me on prom night with that look on his face. I bit my lip and looked up at him. I'd have to ask him to tell me what he'd do again tonight... I liked when he did that.

"These three were at the all-boy's school. Walton's. Very prestigious. And in upstate New York. Far away from here..."

"I'm sorry," I said. He'd told me about it. He hadn't wanted to be sent away. He admitted his first week there, when he was alone at night he'd slip into the shower when he knew they were empty and cry. He got angrier after that. Being angry was easier than being hurt. I took his hand again. He shrugged.

"It wasn't so bad," he answered, but I knew that was a lie. I kept my hand in his as we walked toward the other side of the hall to go back down the other way. By college he was the Caleb I knew, if a bit more youthful. Tall, muscular, handsome. He had that challenging look and arrogant smirk perfected. I tugged him closer, wrapping his arms around me and pressing my back to her chest.

"Caleb..." I murmured, looking at a photo of him walking across the stage at his college graduation, grinning and holding the diploma up over his head.

“Yes?” he murmured, pressing his nose into my neck.

“Tell me you love me,” I said, turning my face toward his.

“I love you,” he said, lifting his face to kiss me.

“Tell me you’ll never let me go. Ever.”

He grabbed me by the face, his grip firm and hard. I relished it. I loved it. I wanted him to squeeze harder.

“I will *never* let you go.” He looked down at my mouth, his eyes own lips parting, the dark, frightening look in his eyes. “You’ll never leave me, Orla. Never.”

I nodded.

“Promise.”

“I promise.”

My lower jaw was trembling violently. His eyes burned. I felt a pull in my chest, a warmth flood through me, and tears came to my eyes. It was overwhelming, brutal and violent, neither good nor bad, but all consuming.

“Caleb.”

“Jesus Christ, Caleb. You fucking psycho. Let her go,” a voice called from down the hall. Caleb let me go like I was on fire and stepped away from me. I turned to find a tall blond walking toward us with a grin on his face. I recognized him immediately as Josh.

“You alright, babe?” he asked me but didn’t care to wait for my response. He looked back at Caleb. They were just about the same height, but Caleb was taller. He took Caleb by the face and placed three hard slaps to his face as he spoke. “Don’t worry, sweetheart, my baby brother is only rough with the ones he likes.”

Caleb shoved him off and Josh just laughed.

“When’d you get in?”

“Like an hour ago,” Caleb answered. He held his hand out. I placed my hand in his stepped close to him. “Orla, this is my brother, Josh. Josh, this is my girlfriend, she goes by Ellie.”

“Nice to meet you,” Josh smiled. “Looking at the old photographs huh?”

He stepped back and pointed at Caleb’s freshman photo.

“What a fucking loser, right?” he laughed. My skin flushed red and I was about to say something when he turned around. “God, we were ugly preteens. I don’t know how Georgie managed to look so normal.”

“Where is Georgie?” Caleb asked.

“That old man? He’s reading in the fucking den. Hasn’t done a single shot with me and he’s been here since yesterday.”

“I should introduce Orla.”

“No, come to the kitchen, we’re going to do shots before the rehearsal dinner,” Josh said and slapped Caleb’s shoulder.

“Maybe after,” Caleb said.

“Boo,” Josh said but walked with us down the stairs, chatting about tomorrow’s plans. I was nervously running my nails along Caleb’s wrist. He responded with a hard squeeze of my hand. After Josh broke off and headed to the kitchen, Caleb held me closer.

“We’re not going to the kitchen to do shots,” he murmured in my ear. “I want to take a nice long shower with you before we leave.”

I smiled, skin hot, and nodded. He bit down on my earlobe.

We rounded the corner and walked into a den to find it empty.

“Fine with me. More time to fuck you,” Caleb said. He slid his hands along my waist and squeezed. He smiled at me. “I love you.”

I wanted to say it back. I wanted to say it back so bad. It bubbled up inside my, right on the other side of my lips... but I had a plan. It was the perfect plan. I had to stick to it.

When we got back upstairs to the bathroom, he picked me up and sat me on the sink. He stood between my legs and slid his hands up my thighs. I slid my hands in his hair and smiled back. He just made me feel so warm, safe, and happy. I hardly ever even thought about pills or alcohol when he was near me. I squeezed my hands in his hair and pulled his head back.

We just looked at each other, charges passing between us. I felt heat pool between my legs and I ached for him to be inside of me.

“Tell me you love me,” I murmured again.

“I love you,” he said, eyes burning. “I love you more than anything.”

I looked down at his mouth.

“I’ll do anything for you,” he murmured reverently. “Just ask me and it’s yours.”

I want you to marry me.

I bit my bottom lip and pulled harder at his hair, like I was trying to yank it out of his head. He let me. I leaned toward him and pressed my lips to his. I bit his lip, scraping it hard

between my teeth as I pulled back. I kissed him again. This time it was his turn to bite my lip. I pushed my tongue into his mouth and he sucked on it.

“I want to feel you tonight,” I murmured, into his mouth.

“Feel me?” he asked. I nodded, his tongue pressing past my lips and deep into my mouth.

“Beneath my dress,” I said. He pulled back to look at me. He grabbed my hair and yanked my head back. He stepped closer, towering over me. I parted my lips so he could spit into my mouth. Then, he yanked me down and threw me onto the floor. I gasped, a thrill shooting up my spine, my entire body humming with anticipation. I spread my legs and took him inside of me and he fucked me as hard he could on the cold tile floor.

The flesh of my back was tender and sore as we got out of the car and walked to the front of the country club. I had a bruise on my bicep where he had held me down and I had spent about forty-five minutes covering up the hickey on my shoulder. I smiled and placed my hand on his back, right where I had left three deep scratches on his shoulder blades. He looked down at me with a smug smirk and his eyes dropped to where the hickey was hiding. The soreness brought a sense of peace over me.

Once we stepped inside, we were in a large foyer area, a reception desk immediately to the right, but no one was standing there. My heart quickened and I slid my hand into Caleb’s and squeezed as hard as I could. There was a small number of people scattering the room, but my eyes immediately went to the tallest man there, nestled in the corner with a woman, a drink in his hand.

Georgie Trent was the oldest and shortest of the brothers, but was still over six foot. He was what I imagined Caleb would like if he were four inches shorter and about fifty pounds lighter. He looked his age, had a thin frame, broad shoulders, and wore glasses. He looked, to put it bluntly, like a dentist. He wore plain khakis, a crisp white collared shirt, and a dark gray sweater on top. His glasses were thin framed and oval, but while I would normally have thought someone dressed like that would be dweeby, there was still something decidedly fashionable about him, as though he was being ironically nerdy. Perhaps that was just the air of money about him.

He was standing beside a very beautiful blond woman in a tight black dress. She had on understated but what I could only assume was very expensive jewelry and she held a glass of white wine in her long delicate fingers. The massive wedding ring on her finger caught the light and set a sparkle through the room. He looked over as we entered and found his brother first. A smile came to his face, neither particularly bright nor disingenuous. His eyes found me next. His smile grew ever so slightly and he gave a little nod of his head.

I tightened my hand around Caleb’s and smiled back, stepping closer to him subconsciously. Caleb followed my gaze and then led us toward his brother. He introduced us and I shook Georgie’s hand first. His hand was cool, dry, and was neither firm nor weak. All in all, he was almost completely unremarkable.

His wife smiled brightly as we shook hands and she told me how excited she was to meet Caleb's girlfriend. She'd heard so much about me and she was utterly devastated I didn't live closer. She loved the color of my hair and I had such beautiful eyes, didn't I, Georgie? Wow, what a shade of green. She thought I was beautiful. Her hair was mud brown so she dyed it blond. Georgie liked it better blond though he said he didn't, but we knew better, didn't we?

She talked so loud and so fast that I took an actual step backward when she began. Caleb cut her off, giving her a hug and asking her and Georgie where their parents were.

"In the lounge," Georgie said, motioning with his chin. "With Aunt Carol."

"Oh, fuck me," Caleb breathed.

"Hence why we're out here," Georgie said. He looked at me. "Don't look her directly in the eye. You'll turn to stone."

I laughed nervously and stepped closer to Caleb.

"Look on the bright side," Georgie said, turning his attention back to his brother. "This way, they might actually be happy to see you."

Georgie laughed and I decided I didn't like him any more than I did Josh. I tightened my hand around Caleb's and walked with him down the hall to the right.

"You ok," Caleb asked and squeezed my hand.

"Just nervous," I murmured.

"Don't be nervous," he answered. He squeezed again. "I'm with you."

I smiled and squeezed back as hard as I could. We entered the lounge. There were a number of people inside with a different array of drinks in their hands. I scanned the room, but paid no attention to anyone until I spotted his parents. I recognized them immediately from the pictures Caleb had shown me. His father was no longer blond, but white, and he was tall and rigid and very handsome for an older man. His wife stood beside him and immediately I took note of the fact that she was taller than me and in a shorter heel.

Her eyes found Caleb first, and though her face already had a displeased look on her face, I did not see an ounce of warmth seep into it as her hard, dark eyes turned on her son. Caleb's hand tensed around mine and I squeezed back. His father looked at us next. He briefly appraised his son and then his eyes landed on me.

"Mom. Dad," Caleb said. He gave his mother a short hug and then shook his father's hand. "Aunt Carol."

He hugged her too, a very tiny woman with white hair, thick glasses, and a scrunched face. She stared at Caleb, not pleased with her story being interrupted.

"This is my girlfriend, she goes by Ellie."

His hand went to my back. His father smiled at me but his mother stared at me with that same, cold, hard look she'd given her son.

"It's so nice to finally meet you both. Mr. Trent," I greeted and went to shake his hand. He chuckled and pulled me into a hug. His arm remained appropriately up around my shoulders and he did not press me too close.

"Come now. Here's a hug for the girl that finally managed to put up with this boy," he said. He pulled back and I smiled with an uncomfortable blush. I looked at Mrs. Trent, but she gave no indication she wanted to be touched. "And please, it's George."

"George," I corrected and let out a breathy, nervous laugh.

"How was the trip?" he asked Caleb.

"Good," Caleb said. "Easy drive."

George nodded, looking over his son. "You look good."

"Thank you."

George took to questioning Caleb about his job, how things were going, what his plans were. I felt a little uneasy knot form in my stomach when Caleb said work was going well and his career was progressing nicely. No announcement of another job, no mentions of interviews. I followed along with the conversation with a little smile on my face.

My eyes flickered back to Caleb's mother to find her dark eyes watching me closely. She did not look away when I caught her staring. She held eye contact for a few more moments, just long enough to make sure that I did in fact know she didn't care that I had seen her, and then turned her eyes toward her son.

Caleb's arm was around my lower back, holding me close with a hand on my hip. His thumb moved back and forth slowly.

"And you two work together?" George asked, motioning between the two of us with his drink. He was looking at me. I looked at Caleb to see how he wanted to answer.

He shocked me when he said, "I'm her boss."

My lips parted and my eyes darted immediately to his mother, who's only reaction was a pursing of her lips. I couldn't imagine what she thought of me. A woman sleeping with her boss to get ahead, no doubt. My cheeks flushed brightly. She kept her gaze on her son, her eyes dropping to the side only momentarily, her lips pinched.

"You're a lawyer as well?" George asked.

"Um, yes sir," I answered.

"Maybe I'll finally have an intelligent daughter in law then," he said to his wife who did not look amused by the joke.

“Speaking of - where is Josh?” Caleb asked, glancing over his shoulder.

“Speaking with the wedding planner,” George said. “Valencia isn’t happy with the shade of lavender of the centerpieces.”

“Are there different shades of lavender?” I asked.

“There are if you’re Valencia,” Mrs. Trent said. It was the first time I heard her speak. Her voice was measured, soft, and not particularly high, but it was decidedly feminine. We made eye contact again and I quickly looked away.

“Did you get your tux fitted, sweetheart?” she asked Caleb, reaching out to straighten the lapel of his blazer, though it didn’t need to be straightened.

“No, I figured I’d try it on tomorrow and hope for the best,” Caleb said. His mother looked at him with slightly narrowed eyes and gave a little smile and a tilt to the head.

“Do you find your rooms to your liking?” she asked, eyes once again on me. She had the slightest of accents.

“Oh, it’s beautiful. Your entire home is beautiful,” I answered. “Thank you so much for having me.”

A small, if cold smile touched her lips.

“Anything for the girl that will put up with Caleb,” Mr. Trent laughed and clapped his son good naturedly on the shoulder.

“Oh, I think he puts up with me,” I said, placing my other hand on top of his. I squeezed firmly and smiled at him. He returned the smile and placed a chaste kiss to my lips.

“Well, that looks like a man in love if I ever saw one,” Mr. Trent laughed warmly. Mrs. Trent watched her son coolly, her eyes dropping to the vice grip he had on my hand.

“I am,” Caleb said smiling at me. I was scared they might ask me if I loved *him*. I didn’t want him to hear it for the first time in front of his parents. He’d be absolutely certain I was lying. I also didn’t want to lie and end up embarrassing him.

Luckily, Josh arrived and punched Caleb hard in the arm.

“There’s my baby bro!”

“Josh,” Caleb said and they embraced, clapping each other on the back.

“And your smoking hot girlfriend. She’s way too good looking for you, my guy. You know that right? We’ve been trying to figure out how you bagged her.”

“Took some persuading,” Caleb answered with a grin and as they pulled back they did a little bro shake. I looked at Mrs. Trent to find her dark eyes once again fixed on me.

“Come on, I want to introduce her to Valencia,” Josh said.

Caleb turned to follow his brother, taking me along with him. He didn’t say a word to his parents as he pulled me away. I smiled at them and gave an awkward wave. His father smiled and his mother stared. As we left the room, I turned to find Mrs. Trent speaking to her husband with a stony look on her face. I was relieved to be freed from her watchful gaze. We quickly moved rooms and I was brought toward a very tall, very skinny, very blond woman with very little movement to her face, but she was beautiful and she smiled (as best she could) as I approached.

“Oh, you must be Ellie!” she said happily, gold bracelets rattling around her wrists as she shifted her glass of champagne from one French tipped hand to the other. She held her hand out to me. It was slender and cool. She was flanked by two other tall blondes, but I would have bet money not one of them was natural. “It’s so nice to meet you. I’ve heard such good things.”

I looked at Caleb, wondering how much he talked to his brothers. I had been under the impression there was no real relationship at all, but they seemed closer than I anticipated.

“I’m glad to hear that,” I said and was then introduced to her friends, Mallory and Rachelle, who both smiled kindly at me.

“Ellie is a *lawyer*,” Valencia told them and their faces lit up.

“It’s not that impressive,” I breathed in embarrassment.

“Sweetheart, don’t *ever* minimize your accomplishments,” Valencia said severely. “And certainly not in a room full of strangers. You own that shit.”

Her bracelets clinked around her wrists as she pointed at me. She then turned to look at Caleb and gave him a pinched smile. “I can see why *you* like her though.”

“How you doing Val?” Caleb asked and then circled a finger around his face. “I can’t tell.”

“Oh, I missed you, Caleb,” she said, crossing her long, slender arms in front of her. Caleb draped his arm over my shoulder.

“You look thin.”

“Thank you,” Valencia smiled and then looked at me. “Ellie, come with us. I was just going to show the girls my dress. Mallory hasn’t seen it yet.”

“No, she can see it tomorrow,” Caleb said. I had been stepping toward them, ready to go with them when he spoke. His hand tightened around my hand.

“It’s ok,” I told him. I knew he was looking out for me and my anxiety, but I wasn’t entirely unable to function. I didn’t *like* these events, but I could manage. I tried to let go of his hand, but his grip tightened and he shot me such a look that I froze in place. I realized suddenly that he didn’t want me to stay for *my sake*, but *his*.

I felt a sudden rush of warmth so violently pleasurable that I felt, at least in that moment, that if Caleb felt even a tenth of that when I needed him then I didn't have anything to worry about.

"But you promised me you'd show me around," I lied. I stepped back to him and put my hand in his. I looked at Valencia and smiled. "Plus, I like being surprised."

Valencia glanced at our hands and then at Caleb as she spoke.

"Yeah, of course, of course. You two have fun and I'll see you later, Ellie."

"I'm sorry," I said to him once we were alone and placed my hands on his chest.

"You know I don't like being apart from you," he accused.

"I didn't realize you didn't want me to go," I answered.

"I want you with me all the time. You know that."

He still sounded angry and I could see the heat rising on his face. I placed my hands on the back of his neck. His skin was scorching and I stepped closer.

"I'm sorry, Caleb. Please don't be mad at me," I whispered. His face softened and his eyes went to my mouth. I liked when he got like this, because it told me he still wanted me. It told me his need for me could still drive him to insanity.

"I don't like when you try to leave me."

I smothered a smile. He thought everything was trying to leave him. I left the couch to use the bathroom once and he'd scowled at the tv for another half hour before he told me he didn't like it when I just left the room without telling him where I was going. He needed to know my intentions.

"I'm sorry."

His hand cupped my cheek and then lowered to the front of my throat. His eyes were on my mouth, that same faraway look in his eyes that was both detached and frightfully intense. I got up on my tiptoes and kissed him.

"I belong to you," I whispered against his lips. "Forever."

His hand tightened and he nodded. He leaned down and kissed me, his hand now squeezing the back of my neck. His lips were soft and tender, but his grip on my neck was bruising.

"Am I interrupting?"

Georgie walked in, apparently not caring if he was actually interrupting or not. Caleb's hand pulsed around my neck before he lowered it and looked at his brother. Georgie seemed entirely unphased.

“If you don’t keep him away from me, I’m going to kill him,” Georgie said.

“Who?”

“Fucking Dalton. He’s a fucking toddler.”

“Kill him, see if I care.”

Dalton was one of Josh’s groomsmen, a friend from high school, and a total asshole from the way Chris and Caleb described him.

“Come on,” Georgie said. “We need to go meet Josh at the altar.”

My pulse quickened and Caleb turned to look at me.

“Want to hang out here? Or I can introduce you to my cousins? They’re wicked nice.”

“Yes, please. If you have time.”

I glanced at Georgie to give him an apologetic smile, but his eyes were slowly moving down and back up the length of me. When his eyes met mine, he didn’t look the least bit embarrassed.

He followed us over to their cousins, Jane and Sophia. They were all smiles and greeted me warmly, offering to get me a drink at the bar. Caleb’s parents were paying for everyone tonight so we best take advantage, and I told Caleb he was all set. He left me with a kiss on the mouth and I watched him go.

“How long have you two been together?” Jane, the oldest of the two sisters, with chestnut brown hair and pretty blue eyes, asked.

“Oh um, about eight months,” I said, counting from the day of his promotion. That was when he considered us officially together.

“Oh, wow. Getting serious.”

“Oh, yeah, it’s very serious. I hope,” I added with a laugh.

“Caleb doesn’t do things half way,” Sophia laughed. Her hair was a light brown, dirty blond, and she had the same bright blue eyes as her sister. “If he’s been seeing you that long, I’d say he’s all in.”

My smile was genuine.

“He’s amazing,” I said, wanting to make sure his family knew how much he meant to me. “I really can’t believe how lucky I am to have him.”

The two sisters made eye contact and I swallowed. They asked me a little bit about myself. Polite and expected small talk for the situation. Sophia went to get me a gin and tonic, which I didn’t really want, but I had to admit as I raised the straw to my lips and sucked it down, I

felt more at ease. I tried not to think too much about the words that came out of my mouth once they were out. I tried to focus on what was being said to me and what I should say in return. It was how I would get lost in conversations and end up sounding even more awkward than I already was.

We chatted for about ten more minutes before I excused myself to the bathroom. I dropped my glass off on the bar on the way, feeling a slight tingling in my face. Both the alcohol and nerves, but I felt ok as I left the bathroom and went to the little grazing platters they had set up near the bar. I wanted just a few more moments to myself before I returned to Caleb's cousins and the stressful small talk. I thought a moment, remembered their drinks, and made the decision to stop at the bar on my way back and top them off.

I plucked up a strawberry from the tray. I took a small bite before discarding the green stem in the trash. I turned and jumped back with a start, nudging the table behind me. Mrs. Trent, for the first time that night, smiled at me, but it was a tight smile, forced and strained. I waited for her to tell me I didn't belong here and I wasn't good enough for her son or her family. I braced myself for it, ready to tell her that Caleb loved me and I loved him and there was nothing on earth that could separate us.

I wouldn't allow it.

"You're a beautiful young woman," she said, surprising me.

"Thank you," I managed to get out. She clearly had work done, but she was still a beautiful woman. Her eyebrows were narrow and well-manicured. Her hair looked black, her skin fair, and she had only a thin gold necklace around her neck, her wedding ring on her left hand.

She continued her appraisal of me with one more word, "Quiet."

I nodded, eyes darting over her shoulder toward the door. I saw Mr. Trent over by the bar speaking to another older couple I would assume was Valencia's parents if I had to take a guess. It appeared the family portion of the rehearsal was done.

"I um... yes."

"I love my son," she told me. I nodded. "I love him very much. I did everything I could for him."

I didn't know what to say. I only shook my head, lips parted. A long, heavy silence settled between us as she stared at me. I was locked in place, frozen under the intensity of her gaze. A tight smile stretched across her face, but it was strained. It looked like her face was about to shatter.

"Does he hurt you?"

I stared back, unable to speak, and that was answer enough for her. She held my gaze a moment longer before she took a step back. She nodded, quick, jerky nods, and raised her glass of wine to her lips.

“I’m sorry,” she said, shaking her own head now. “I’m sorry.”

She turned and walked away from me. I stood there with a hollow feeling settling over me, and as I watched her go, I felt a violent wave of regret. I wanted to run after her and tell her how much I loved her son. How much he helped me. How much I needed him. That I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him because I loved him so much. I felt like I had betrayed him. I should have defended him. I should have told her he didn’t hurt me. He made me happier than I’d ever been in my life. I couldn’t function without him. I couldn’t breathe without him.

Movement drew my eyes on the other side of the large French doors and I saw Caleb walking with his brothers, a smile on his face. My feet began to move on their own and, like it only could when Caleb was involved, my brain didn’t think at all about those around me and what they might think of me. I could think only of Caleb and being close to him.

I walked out of the French doors and marched over to them. A bright smile came to his face as she saw me approach. I wrapped my arms around Caleb’s middle and smiled at him. He grinned back, closing his arms around me, and kissed me.

“I missed you,” I told him. There was a brief moment I was afraid I would embarrass him, but he squeezed me tighter and kissed me again. He half dragged me along with him, his arms holding me tightly. I wrapped my arms around his neck, feeling a rush of euphoria when I realized we were drawing looks. So many people around and I could hug him and kiss him and the entire world could see it. I bit my bottom lip and looked up at him. His hold brought forth a rush of pain along my tender skin and I pressed my hands to his face.

I wanted to say it. I wanted to tell him. My heart was pounding so hard in my chest. He would believe me, I was sure of that.

Tomorrow morning. It needs to be special.

“I missed you too,” Caleb said.

“Oh god,” Josh said with disgust.

“I told you,” I heard Chris call. He was standing with Caleb’s parents, a beer in his hand, smiling.

“They’re disgusting.”

I just smiled at Caleb and kissed him again. He released me and let me walk beside him, my hand in his. Before dinner, we ended up standing in a small circle with Valencia, Josh, and a couple of her friends. I was still riding the high of being able to be so affectionate with him in a public setting.

Valencia, I learned, actually owned and operated her own real estate company and was quite successful in her own right. She also was quick to brag about the accomplishments of others, which she did for all the women in the circle. Her friend Rachelle had an engineering degree from MIT and worked in aerospace engineering for Lockheed Martin. Her cousin Fiona was

a preschool teacher, and Valencia spent about five minutes forcing her to tell the story of how she had been honored by her school district for all she had done for children with special needs. Despite how much I had wanted not to, I found myself liking Valencia very much by the time dinner came around.

Just before dinner was served, she introduced one of her good friends from college, a pretty, if somewhat plain looking young woman named Madeline. I felt a tinge of familiarity as I looked at her, as if I had met her before, but I knew I hadn't. She was from the Boston area as well and worked for a bank drawing up mortgages.

"And you're both lawyers?" Madeline asked, pointing between Caleb and I with her glass of wine.

"We are," Caleb said. She asked what we did, which Caleb answered as well.

"Oh, very nice," she said, looking between us in a way I didn't like. I squeezed Caleb's hand and tried to meet his gaze, but he didn't look back at me. He only squeezed my hand back. "So, you two work together?"

My brow crinkled and Caleb answered in the affirmative.

"And that's allowed?" she asked.

"Well, we - " I began, but Caleb's voice drowned mine out.

"No. I'm her boss, actually."

I could have thrown my neck out, I whipped my head around so fast.

"Caleb," I snapped.

"We've been together longer than that though," Caleb lied. "We started dating a few months before my promotion."

That was a lie, but not even the lie he had settled on himself. He was quite insistent our official relationship began the day of his promotion, the first time he raped me. That's when he considered us officially together. I couldn't understand why he was lying now and why he was *also* being so honest.

"I don't know why he's telling everyone that," I laughed. I turned to look at him. "We could lose our jobs."

"Where is it you two work?" Madeline asked. I looked at her and our eyes locked. That was certainly none of her business, especially now that Caleb admitted he was my boss and we could lose our jobs if anyone found out. I couldn't fathom why he didn't seem to care about the repercussions of that information being so widely known, especially by someone who we just learned was from the Boston area. Telling his family was one thing. Telling anyone and everyone - complete strangers - was another. I considered lying, but then Caleb answered and I slowly turned my head to look at him, lips parted, eyes slightly widened.

“*Caleb*,” I said. He grinned and took a sip of his whiskey. I wondered if he was drunk, but I’d only seen him have the one drink he had now and he’d only had a sip.

Valencia looked between us, clearly registering the disconnect and tried to move us along.

“Let’s take our seats,” Valencia said. “I think it’s almost time.”

She ushered us into the dining room, which was really a massive, but beautiful ornate hall, with a long table to fit all the rehearsal guests. It was not where the reception would be held, which would be outside as long as the weather held. Luckily, with two wealthy families, with less than a quarter at the rehearsal than would be at the wedding, the tables were ample enough and large enough that we were not seated anywhere near Madeline.

“Caleb, what are you doing?” I asked him when we fell back from the group.

“What?” he asked.

“Why are you telling everyone you’re my boss,” I said. He squeezed my hand.

“Because I am your boss,” he said simply.

“And you want everyone to know that?” I asked. He drew me to the side as we approached our table.

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“Because, Caleb. Everyone is either going to think you pressured me into a relationship or I’m fucking you for special treatment.”

“I did pressure you into the relationship.”

“Don’t you want people to think I’m with you because I love you?” I asked.

He stared at me, eyes fixed on mine hard.

“Of course, I do,” he said. He dropped his voice. “Everything is going to be alright, OK. I promise.”

“If anyone found out back at work -”

“It will be OK,” he said again, cupping my face and gently caressing my cheek with his thumb. “I promise. Do you trust me?”

“I’m trying, I just...”

I wanted to tell him how anxious I was recently. I truly believed that it would get better once I could tell him I loved him, once I could tell him how scared I was of losing him.

I glanced toward our table. We were seated with Georgie, Marci, his aunt and uncle, and his cousins, Jane and Sophia. They were glancing toward us curiously and I swallowed down my

pounding heart. I could wait one more day. One more day and he'd know and, just like he always did, he would make everything better. I just smiled at him and nodded.

"I'm fine," I said. "We can talk when we can get back."

"You sure?" he asked, brow lifted. I felt another rush of affection for him and nodded. I could have burst into tears if we weren't in public. I just loved him so much. "Ok. I love you."

I love you too.

I closed my eyes and nodded. We settled down in our seats. A glass of champagne was in front of me. I didn't reach for it. I didn't want to take my hands off of Caleb's, which I was squeezing hard beneath the table.

Driving back to the house, I sat quietly, holding Caleb's hand in my lap, tenderly running the pad of my finger along the scar on his thumb.

"Remember how I got it?" he asked.

"Fishing hook," I answered. He nodded.

"Georgie."

"Your family is very nice," I told him. Caleb snorted with derision and kept staring ahead into the night. "Can we do something over Thanksgiving break? Go away somewhere? Do something romantic?"

Caleb smiled, eyes moving over my face in the orange light of a streetlight overhead.

"Of course," he said, running his thumb over my knuckles. "Let's go to the alps."

I stared at him.

"The *Alps*?" I laughed. "I meant like - Vermont."

"We'll talk about it tomorrow," he said.

"Will we have any time alone tomorrow?" I asked him. "I want to give you your birthday present."

He smiled at me.

"My birthday present, huh?" he asked and looked down at my lap. "I just want to spend the morning with my tongue up your cunt."

"You'll do that anyway," I said and he chuckled. I kissed his fingers tenderly.

“We’ll go for a walk tomorrow morning. 10:15. We’ll be back from breakfast by then. Meet me at the gazebo?”

“Ok,” I said. He smiled. He lifted my hand to his mouth and kissed my knuckles.

Later, I sat on the bed cross legged and watched him brush his teeth through the open bedroom door. I forced myself to remain calm. I *knew* he loved me. I *knew* he had no intentions of letting me go anytime soon. He’d know how I felt tomorrow. It would all be out in the open and then I could tell him I loved him all the time and he’d tell me he’d love me and we’d be in a blissful circle of constant reassurances to the other. It would all be ok. I *knew* it would be ok.

That was the thing about anxiety though, wasn’t it? You *knew* everything would be OK. You *knew* what the right thing to do was. You *knew* what was logically going to happen.

But it didn’t matter what you *knew*, because no matter how fucking hard you try, you can’t help what you *feel*.

Caleb came back to bed and pulled down the covers. I sank into him, holding him close, and pressed my cheek to his chest. He rubbed my hair and I listened to his heart beat.

“Tell me everything is going to be ok.”

“Everything is going to be ok.”

“Tell me you love me.”

“I love you, Orla,” he said. I nodded and did my very best to fall asleep.

The next morning I found myself in a car with Valencia and Marci, on our way to meet Mallory, Rachelle, and Maddie for breakfast. Caleb was going to breakfast with Georgie, Josh, Chris, and Dalton. It had been Valencia’s idea to invite me along. Caleb and I had been sitting at the island in the kitchen, slipping out coffee and chatting with Georgie and Marci, also early risers, when the others slowly began to trickle into the kitchen. I knew the breakfasts were happening, but the plan had been for me to stay home until Caleb got back and I could give him his birthday gift. Chris came in first, grunting sleepily, running his hand through his tousled hair, and Caleb told him he could have put a shirt on. He used a bit more expletives as he spoke. Despite any attraction I might have ever had to Chris being well and truly decimated, I made sure to keep my eyes on Caleb. I turned toward him in my chair and leaned into him, my chin on his shoulder and rubbed little circles along his back.

Valencia came in last, looking absolutely gorgeous, even with her hair up in a messy bun, no makeup on her face, and wrapped in a white fluffy robe. She grabbed some orange juice and a banana.

“You’re coming with us, Ellie?” she asked when she confirmed with Marci that Mallory, Rachelle, and Madeline would meet them at the restaurant at 7:30am.

“Oh, no, I was just going to stay up in the room,” I answered.

“Nonsense, you’re with Caleb now. You’re one of us,” Valencia said, motioning to Marci, who smiled at me and nodded. Despite how warm those words made me feel, I felt a prickle of anxiety and looked at Caleb.

“Is that OK?” I asked him softly.

“If you want to go,” he murmured and nodded. “You don’t have to though.”

“You’re sure?” I asked again and he nodded.

“Just be back by 10:15. OK? It’s important to me,” he said. I nodded and told Valencia and Marci I’d love to go.

We ended up in a beautiful restaurant, with cream carpets and white walls and vaulted ceilings, walls covered with large open glass windows, and were offered orange juice and champagne.

“Are you going to have a wedding mimosa or a regular one?” I asked Valencia. She picked up the champagne bottle and began to pour.

“What’s a wedding mimosa?” she asked.

“It’s like a regular mimosa but without the orange juice,” I answered. Immediately my cheeks began to glow and my lips tingled, but Valencia laughed so genuinely, followed quickly by the others, that I felt myself relax.

“Wedding mimosas!” she cried and poured us all a full glass of champagne. I listened to Valencia and her friends discuss the wedding details and the honeymoon plans. They were going to spend one week in France, one week in Italy, and then two in the Maldives. Josh worked at his father’s practice and had his own clientele and Valencia owned her own business, so they hadn’t had any trouble getting the month off. It didn’t need to be said that money was not an issue.

Toward the end of breakfast, while Marci was paying the check, the girls began discussing their nail appointment. I was checking my phone to see if Caleb had texted me. I was annoyed to see he hadn’t. I pulled up his name, ready to text him and tell him we were on our way, when I heard my name.

“What?” I asked looking up. I was a tad tipsy. I hadn’t had much alcohol in the last few months, and we had three ‘wedding mimosas’ at breakfast.

“We have room for one more at the nail appointment. Come with us,” Valencia said.

“Oh, I can’t. I need to be back for 10:15,” I said.

“We went a bit long,” Rachelle said. “We’ll be late if you have to drop her off.”

“Oh, shit,” Valencia said and checked her phone. She gave a wince. “I’m sorry honey, but we really can’t get you back.”

I felt a pit in my stomach.

“It’s... it’s Caleb’s birthday,” I breathed. “He told me I needed to be back.”

“Do you do everything he tells you to do?” Mallory asked, hardly containing her sneer. I felt my cheeks flush. Her eyebrow quirked. “That’s a pretty deep bruise.”

I glanced down and realized a deep purple bruise was visible on my forearm. I yanked my sleeve down.

“We had a bit too much fun the other night,” I said, trying to keep my voice light.

“He still likes it rough then?” Rachelle smirked. “He was always leaving marks on me.”

“Christ, Rachelle,” Valencia breathed. I stared at her, my face feeling hot and cold all at the same time.

“Does he spit in your mouth? What about that thing where he nibbles on your earlobe?” she asked. I felt sick as I looked at her. She just laughed and took another sip of her champagne. “Would have been the best sex I ever had if he just shut up during it.”

“It was *years* ago,” Valencia said to me. “They fucked for a summer. It meant nothing to either of them.”

“He didn’t tell you?” Mallory asked. “He one-hundred-percent should have told you.”

I agreed and I stared down at my phone. My hands trembled slightly.

“Sweetie, I’m sorry,” Valencia said and then glared at Rachelle. “That didn’t need to be brought up.”

“It’s fine,” I lied. “I don’t care. I mean, you said it was years ago... why do I care?”

Marci, the oldest of us all, had her lips rolled in on themselves and was looking from woman to woman.

“When are we getting our nails done?” I asked.

“oh, God, you’re taking this like a champ,” Valencia said. “Thank you, thank you. I do not need that stress on my wedding day.”

I followed them out of the restaurant, my skin hot, feeling a rush of humiliation and hurt wash over me. I felt like a joke. Like they all knew the inner workings of my sex life with Caleb. And worse, it wasn’t even special to me. I looked at the back of Rachelle’s head. She tilted her head back and laughed at something Mallory said. An image flashed through my brain, of his hand in *her* hair, pulling back *her* head, spitting in *her* mouth, and telling *her* she belonged to him and he’d never let go.

And to not tell me. To not tell me there were girls here, not just girls, no, bridesmaids, that he'd slept with. I deserved to know that. I should have known that before now. Anger and rage welled up in my chest as we walked out to get into the car.

I picked up my phone and texted Caleb.

Going to get my nails done with the girls.

Maybe I can trade some stories with Rachelle.

She told me how much you liked to spit in her mouth.

Did you tell her she belonged to you too?

Happy fucking birthday.

And I turned off my phone.

Marci parked the car and Valencia got out with Rachelle, and Mallory and they went over to Valencia's car. They were going to get ready at the venue with Valencia's two other bridesmaids. Two younger cousins who flew in last night. Madeline went back to her hotel to get ready and Marci would be getting ready at the house. She asked me if I wanted to join her. I accepted, feeling like she was the only one who understood how upset I actually was.

I roiled with regret, fear, anger, and hurt. I felt like I was standing on the precipice, a fraction of an inch from the edge, teetering precariously. I still hadn't turned my phone on. I was too afraid to. Not knowing was horrible, but knowing could be even worse. My head was aching and I felt like I was going to throw up my breakfast the moment I stepped out of the car. I didn't know if I overreacted. He didn't cheat on me. This was years before we even met. But he should have told me. I would give him his birthday gift later, when we had both calmed down.

"Georgie says he's never heard Caleb talk about a girl like the way he talks about you," Marci said softly as we walked toward the house. "He's never been serious about a girl like he is with you. He loves you."

I nodded, but the words sent a rush of fear through me. That same, debilitating fear I'd felt the last few days. The regret that took hold of me made my knees buckle and I pulled out my phone and turned it on. It began to buzz rapidly as his text messages and missed calls came through.

Rachelle was a fling.

It was years ago.

I didn't even think it was worth mentioning.

I'm sorry. Come back and we'll talk.

Orla, don't you dare do this to me.

Come back, we'll talk.

I told you how important this was to me Orla.

God fucking dammit, Orla pick up your fucking phone.

It's my fucking birthday. Come back now.

I really can't believe you're doing this.

You couldn't do this one fucking thing for me?

I had something fucking important planned.

This meant something to me you know.

Yeah, happy fucking birthday to me.

We're supposed to talk to each other.

The last one brought bile up my throat.

I hate you right now.

My lower lip was trembling and tears pricked at my eyes. My throat ached and I struggled to swallow. My voice was hoarse as I asked Marci where the boys were getting ready.

“In the master suite. His parents gave it to them to get ready in. Up the stairs to the left.”

I ran up the stairs and went into my bag. I dug in deep and pulled out the birthday present I got him. It was a picture of us we had taken after one of our far away dates so we wouldn't be seen. We hiked up a small mountain and had a picnic on top of it. In the pictures, I was nestled in his lap, my back to his chest. He was holding the phone up and we both smiled into the lens. It was his favorite photo of us. He said it all the time. He loved it because I looked so happy. And I was happy in that photo. So deliriously happy.

On the back, I had written out everything I felt for him, how grateful I was to him, and how much I needed him. The words ‘I love you; were not there. I had intended to say them to him when he had finished reading it. To express to him fully how deeply my feelings went to him and how earnest I was.

I hurried down the hall, realizing I had no idea what door to go to. Sweat had built up along my neck and my stomach churned.

“Caleb?” I called and began knocking on doors. I must have looked crazy, but I didn’t care. A door at the end of the hall opened and Josh stuck his head out.

“Hey there, sweetheart!” Josh called. “Hey, the stripper’s here!”

My cheeks burned at the crass joke, and I stepped in past Josh. The room really was a suite. I stepped into a sitting area. On the other side of the room were two large French doors that lead into the bedroom. Off to the right was a large bathroom, also with French doors, cream curtains on them, but they were open. Caleb was sitting in the corner on a brown chair, his elbow on the arm of the chair, his mouth resting on a closed fist.

“Caleb, can we talk,” I asked, voice sounding tense.

“No,” he answered simply. I swallowed thickly, staring at him.

“Caleb, please,” I asked. He looked at me, eyes burning. He lifted his face from his fist and leaned forward a fraction of an inch.

“ *No.* ”

“Caleb.”

“You shut your fucking phone off on me. We’ll talk after the wedding. I don’t want to talk to you right now.”

“Oh shit,” Josh said. “Someone’s been a naughty girl.”

He waved his finger at me and pretended to be stern. Then he picked up a flask and took another swig.

“Caleb, *please*. Let me give you your birthday present.”

“Oh, fuck,” Josh said. “Is today your birthday?”

“Orla, if you don’t want to break up right fucking now, you’ll get the fuck out.”

The words hit me like a fucking bus. I stood there, mouth open, staring at him. My legs went numb and I suddenly felt very, very cold.

Break up?

No. We couldn't break up.

We couldn't break up.

"Caleb...."

"Ellie," Chris said softly. He walked up to me and gently guided me into the hall. "Let him calm down."

"He can't break up with me, Chris," I whispered to him. He only shook his head.

"He's not going to. Just let him calm down," Chris said again. "Go on."

He jerked with his chin and I glanced down the hall to see Marci waiting at the end of the hall, wringing her hands anxiously.

Marci was kind and comforting. She balanced skillfully between addressing the situation and distracting me as she did my hair and makeup. .

"Caleb's always had a temper, Ellie. He says things he doesn't mean. He lashes out when he's angry. It will be OK."

"He lashes out when he's hurt," I murmured.

I reread the texts over and over again.

I was still angry, and I felt entitled to that anger, and I wasn't far removed enough to know if I had overacted. We had a walk planned and I was going to give him his birthday present. Was not showing up after what he did some unforgivable sin? Was he entitled to be *so* angry with me.

I had something fucking important planned.

The question tickled my brain. I could hardly bring myself to say it, but the words eventually formed in my brain and I sucked in a hard breath, pressing my fingers to my lips.

He was going to propose.

I choked back a sob and closed my eyes. I vacillated back and forth between being certain that was his intention and certain it wasn't. What madman would propose on the day of his brother's wedding? A madman who raped, stalked, and coerced a woman into a relationship? A madman who's entire family forgot about his birthday?

And if that was true... was this the unforgivable sin that would lead to his obsession severing? Would I suddenly be put into the bucket of all the other women he had nothing but contempt for? Would I go back to work and watch him flirt and woo a new intern? Bring *her* to the supply closet? Let *her* into his bed?

I think I was in shock. Maybe not in the true medical sense of the word, but my body felt numb. I felt too many things all at once.

"We can't break up over this." I said it to convince myself, not Marci. She was finishing a neat, pretty bun, some of my red curls falling out strategically.

"He's not breaking up with you, I promise," Marci said.

I looked up at her, eyes wet, but no tears falling, and I searched her eyes desperately.

"Georgie thinks you're good for him. He's never seen Caleb so happy."

"Has Georgie said anything? What's Caleb saying?" I asked. "Is he going to? Does he want to break up?"

I felt myself growing hysterical again. Marci sat me down and handed me a glass of wine, which I downed in two big gulps.

"I don't have all the details. They're at the venue now getting pictures taken so they're busy, but he doesn't seem worried."

I nodded, but my head was pounding so badly I didn't know how I was possibly going to get through this wedding.

I hardly remember the drive to the venue. We arrived a bit earlier than the other wedding guests and I hoped that I would have a chance to speak to Caleb before the wedding ceremony. My chest literally ached to talk to him. I felt like my insides had been ripped out and my worst nightmare was coming true.

I *couldn't* lose him. What would life be like without him? Dark, bleak, lonely. I managed to hold a conversation. I managed to smile. I even cracked a joke.

When Jane and Sophia's mother arrived she said how handsome all the men looked in their tuxes. People were beginning to take their seats, we were about ten minutes out from the start of the ceremony, and I asked her where she saw them.

"On the other side of the building, by that little garden they have for the club's founder. They're waiting to walk out. Speaking of walking out, we should get our seats," Sophia said. I was nodding, glancing down the hall, but before I could slip away, Marci touched my elbow.

"Come on, the ceremony will be short. You'll see him soon," she said.

"I just want to talk to him," I breathed.

“And you will. Now isn’t the time,” she said. “Come on.”

I nodded, and let her bring me to the chairs outside. It was a beautiful day. Not a cloud in the deep blue sky, the trees lush and the yard green. A comfortable breeze rolled up the hills. The arbor was beautifully decorated with bright pink and white roses. I hardly noticed any of it though.

When the music started and the groomsman came out, I turned in my seat to try and make eye contact with Caleb. He looked so amazingly handsome as he walked. His hair was perfectly combed, face freshly shaved, and I just *knew* he smelled like that aftershave I loved so much. I wanted to bury my face in his neck and breathe in as deeply as I possibly could.

He didn’t look at me. He marched on down, face straight head, jaw clenched. He stood behind Georgie and in front of Dalton and then Chris. He kept his hands clasped in front of him, his head hanging, eyes down at his shoes.

I hated myself in those moments. I had reacted immaturely, out of jealousy, and I hurt him on his birthday. His birthday, while everyone was celebrating his brother, and I wondered if anyone else had even wished him a happy birthday. And if he was going to propose to me... if that was what he had intended... I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

I had every right to be angry. I was entitled to that. But I should have come back. I should have talked to him about it. That was the promise we made to each other. We’d always talk. We’d always be honest. He had upheld his end of that bargain. I hadn’t.

I stared at him throughout the entire ceremony. I willed him to look at me, but he just stood looking straight ahead, grim faced. As I stared at him, I couldn’t help but picture him at our own wedding, dressed just like that, looking so strong and handsome. My protector. The man that just made everything so easy, made me feel so safe.

And because of me and my fucked up brain and my inability to just be *normal* - I had probably ruined any chance I might ever have at happiness.

He loves you.

It’s just a fight.

We’ll get through it.

But what if we don’t?

“Excuse me,” I breathed softly to Marci and slipped out of our row. I walked away, stifling the sob that was building up in my throat. I pressed my hand to my mouth and squeezed my eyes shut. I slipped inside and walked down the hall where I could be alone. I considered slipping into a bathroom, but I thought the chance of being seen was far too high. I walked down to the end of the hall where I saw a staircase sign and stepped inside. Just for one added

layer of protection, I walked up to the second floor and sat down, buried my face in my hands and cried.

Eventually, I stopped, wiped the tears and mascara from my eyes, I pulled out my phone to text him. I had messages from him, but before I could open them, an echo filled the staircase as one of the doors below opened. I listened intently, hoping it was Caleb coming to find me.

“I’ll be down in a second. Just wanna sneak a cigarette.”

I looked up, eyes red and puffy and glanced up the stairwell. It was Madeline’s voice, slightly slurred, and I wondered if she was drunk already. The ceremony would have ended less than an hour ago. I remained where I was, praying she wouldn’t come all the way to the third floor. I waited, my hand pressed to my mouth, and listened. I heard footsteps and my stomach twisted into knots. Then, I saw her round the corner, a cigarette in her lips. She stopped in surprise when she saw me. She remained on the landing below me.

“Ellie,” she said. “You look terrible. You alright?”

“I’m fine,” I answered. She nodded. She held out the cigarette to me and I shook my head. I got up and forced a smile.

“I should go,” I said and made to move past her. I walked down two steps before she stopped me.

“Hey, so just out of curiosity,” she said, looking at me, her tongue pressed to her bottom lip. “You don’t happen to know Amelia do you?”

I blinked in response and she laughed.

“Oh, my God, that’s hysterical,” she laughed and took a drag of her cigarette. “What a small world. I have been listening to my sister bitch for weeks about this hot guy at work she wanted to fuck. She was convinced he was sleeping with another girl instead. I feel like I’ve met a celebrity.”

“You can’t – you can’t tell Amelia,” I said simply.

“Caleb doesn’t seem too worried about it,” she said. “I already told her, Ellie. The moment I figured out who you two were. She doesn’t believe me, for what it’s worth. She thinks I’m fucking with her or it’s a coincidence or something.”

She laughed and closed her lips around the end of the cigarette. She took a few more steps toward me and then held the cigarette out to me again.

“Sure you don’t want a puff?”

I shook my head.

“I told her I’d send her some of the pictures the photographer got of you two together. Bet me fifty bucks it’s not you.”

She smiled and tilted her head back. She laughed.

“Calm down. Like you’re the first girl who fucked her hot boss. Don’t be such a prude. Amelia isn’t going to try and get you fired. She’s a gossip, she doesn’t want to ruin your life. Despite what Caleb might think. She’s a pot stirrer, but she’s not a total bitch.”

“No, no, you don’t understand. She... I can’t... it’s too much,” I said, my heart rate skyrocketing. Sweat covered my hands and the back of my neck and my eyes burned. I felt like I was going to die. Like I was literally going to die and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

I needed to stop and think. I needed to think *clearly*. What really could go wrong? Realistically what the most likely outcome for me and Caleb. Not the scenarios my tortured mind invented. Not the unrealistic scenarios of Caleb leaving me when everyone at work found out. Packing up my things and putting it all back into my tiny, cramped studio.

“What do you mean?” Madeline asked. “Ellie.”

She dropped her cigarette and stamped it out with her foot.

“Are you ok?” she asked. I pulled back from her hands. They were ice cold and too dry. I was shaking my head. She said something. To this day I can’t remember what it was. My vision went blurry and I was shaking my head rapidly. I needed to think rationally. I needed to think clearly. She couldn’t leave yet. Not until I thought this through. Not until I could talk to Caleb. She just needed to stay still. I blinked, trying to get the spots out of my vision. Madeline had taken one step down the stairs. My panic surged. I needed more time to think. Before she could take another, I reached out, and with my hands planted firmly in the middle of her back, I pushed.

She laid at the bottom of the steps not moving. I stared, my lips parting, my throat aching. I had no idea how long I stood there staring at her. Then, a soft groan escaped her, ripping me out of my thoughts. I scrambled in my bag for my phone, my hands shaking. I dropped my phone and it clanged along the steps. My fingers refused to grip the plastic rectangle as I groped for it. My breathing was impossibly loud in the stairwell.

My fingers jabbed at the screen, struggling to hit the right buttons. Finally, I found Caleb’s name. I was only vaguely aware that he had messaged me back multiple times. I lifted the phone to my ear. It only rang once.

“Jesus Christ, Orla where the fuck are you?”

“C-Caleb.”

“I’m going to throttle you when we get home. Where are you?”

“Caleb... I... I ...”

“Orla?” he asked, voice dropping. His tone changed immediately. Soft. Coaxing. “Orla, where are you?”

“I need your help,” I croaked. “I did something bad.”

“Where are you?”

“I don’t... I don’t know why...”

“Baby. I need you to listen to me. OK. I need you to tell me where you are.”

“The staircase... near the rehearsal dinner...”

“Stay there. I’m on my way.”

I nodded.

“Don’t hang up -”

I disconnected the phone and shook my head. I just kept shaking my head, not believing what I’d done. Not knowing *why*.

“Oh, no, no, no,” I breathed. I pressed my hands to my hair, pacing on the top of the landing. I heard a door open from below and my heart jumped into my throat. I waited, certain my heart was going to shoot out of my mouth and flop around on the floor.

“Orla?” I heard Caleb call softly.

“Caleb,” I called back and he hurried up the stairs. I watched him slow as he approached Madeline.

“What the hell,” he breathed and crouched down beside her. I saw blood come away on his hand and I felt nauseous. I turned away and pressed my hands to my face.

“Oh my god. Oh my god.”

“Orla, what happened?” he asked. I heard him come up the steps. “What did you do?”

A pulse of energy shot through me and I turned, eyes wide and burning.

“What did I do? I did this because of *you*. This is *your* fault.”

“My fault?” he asked.

“You... you were going to break up with me,” I accused. His brow furrowed and he shook his head.

“Orla,” he said, taking a step up the stairs.

“No. *No*.” I held out a finger at him and he halted his approach halfway up the stairs. “I won’t let you. You understand me? I won’t let you.”

He just stared. I barked out a laugh.

“You got what you wanted.”

I held my arms out to my side and let them fall to my sides with a hard slap.

“I love you, Caleb,” I said. “I’m in love with you.”

His lips parted.

“And then... then you think you can break up with me? After everything you did?”

I tilted my head to the side, my brow furrowing. My eyes remained wide, unblinking, but swollen with unfallen tears.

“I won’t let you,” I said, stepping to the edge of the landing. “You don’t have any power over me any more, Caleb,” I leaned toward him. “You don’t have anything to hold over my head anymore. You think I care about those photos? Those videos?”

He just kept staring.

“That’s the nuclear option isn’t it... because neither of us will survive it. Not really. Maybe you could ten years ago. Not today...and me? I don’t care. I don’t care. Because whatever happens to me once those are released, it’s nothing compared to not having you.”

I stared off over his shoulder, face crinkling, and I shook my head.

“It’s nothing compared to that.”

A sudden cold realization washed over me.

“You have so much more to lose.”

I looked back at him, our eyes locking.

“I hope you’re happy, Caleb, I hope this was what you really wanted, because you’re stuck with me now. Forever. Because...”

I licked my bottom lip, as fat tears finally slipped from my wide, unblinking eyes, trailing down my cheeks. My body trembled and my voice was hoarse.

“Because if I can’t have you.... I’ll destroy us *both*. ”

My entire body trembled and my voice broke. I stared into his eyes, feeling like my entire body was going to split in two.

He continued to stare and I stood there, panting... waiting to see the horror spread across his face, as he came to realize just who he was now stuck with for the rest of his life.

Chapter End Notes

Also, considering my earlier note, I would like to add that I have never panicked and pushed a person down a flight of stairs.

Chapter Notes

1. There will be one more chapter after this, then the epilogue. I think this chapter is too long as it is, but I didn't like any place to break it up either. Let me know if you think the length in the beginning diminishes the impact of the end of the chapter. I might cut it up if the majority of you think that's the case.

2. The name Maddie is a coincidence. I honestly forgot I used the name and will go back and change it lol. Sorry for the confusion.

And as always, thank you so so much to those who read and those who leave comments. It really means so much to me that people enjoy my writing, as unplanned and typo ridden as it often is. It really is a labor of love, so it means a lot so many of you enjoy it.

My life with Orla leading up to the wedding was by the far the happiest it had ever been in my life. It was also the least in control I had ever felt. I vacillated violently between joy and despair. There was joy in knowing I had her in my life. The despair from not knowing if she could ever love me after what I did. I struggled, as I had most of my life, to let my despair turn to anger.

My apartment was warmer now. I don't mean temperature. Everywhere I turned there was a reminder of her. Her books, her goddamned throw blankets, which she loved. Every time we were at the store she picked up a new one. That and candles. One of her pens was on the island with her notebook, a coat was draped across a chair. She'd taken over the bathroom sink, to the point where I was now strictly enforcing a half and half rule so I could keep my things in line. Sometimes, I would walk into the bathroom to find a single one of her items on my side, purposefully placed to get a rise out of me. It always made me smile.

For the first time in my life, the place I lived in felt like a home. We had almost all of her stuff out of her studio. On the weekends on our way home from the gym, we'd go to breakfast, stop at the bookstore, and then get my car and go to her studio to pick some more stuff up. She chose to throw a lot of her stuff out.

"I won't need these," she murmured once, on her knees in the kitchen, looking at her pans. "The set we have at home is much nicer."

She tossed it to the side dismissively, too busy sorting through her kitchenware to see the look on my face. I had to calm myself down. Count down from 500. I closed my eyes and felt my skin flush. I breathed in through my nose and out through my mouth. Slowly and silently. She had no idea what that simple statement meant to me. The hope it gave me.

I remember we spent the rest of that day curled up on the couch, reading our own copy of the same book. We read at almost the same pace. She was a little faster than me. After we finished, I fucked her and then we talked about the book.

The only thing I really had to worry about, other than the upcoming wedding and my impending proposal, was switching jobs and what that meant for our relationship. The upheaval would be monumental, but I didn't like the idea that we would be separated. I also poured over all the options that might be available to Orla considering her anxieties and struggles with the job she had now.

The evening after my lunch with Furst, I watched her with a small smile on my face. The screech of the train was loud and jarring as we came into the station. I barely heard it though. I was watching the top of her head as she looked down at her phone, a satisfied little smile on her lips.

"Peter's being a real asshole," Orla said on the T, scrolling through her email. She tucked a strand of red hair that had fallen loose from her bun behind her ear. "I asked him to prioritize Raine, so he sends me the worst draft I've ever seen. I've seen better work from interns. And then spends all day on Saturn. Jokes on him, he didn't know I had already taken that deal from Chris."

I watched her with a little smile on my lips.

"I sent back the Raine report to him at 5:01. Want to know what I put in my email?"

She turned her bright green eyes up at me. I lifted my brow and waited.

"I wrote back. 'Need by EOD. Dash. Needs work.'"

A smile split across her face, and I fought every urge in my body not to reach out and touch her, but we were still too close to the office. I realized though, that it didn't really matter anymore. I placed my hand on her lower back and pulled her closer to me. She glanced around momentarily, but then smiled at me and tilted her chin. I leaned down and kissed her. She glanced around again but then reached out and placed her hands in my pockets.

"Let me know if you need me to say something," I told her.

"If I don't have it in my inbox tomorrow morning, I might need to bring out the big guns," she said and then smiled. "Release the kraken."

She giggled and I smiled again.

We walked hand in hand to our favorite takeout spot. As we waited in line, she slid her arm beneath my suit jacket and circled it around my lower back. I kept my arm around her, holding her close to me. I pressed my nose to the top of her head as she ordered for us. I slid my hand up the back of her neck as we waited in the back for our order. I slid my fingers into the base of her bun and squeezed.

“I want you to spend the evening on your knees,” I murmured to her. She nodded, cheeks flushed red. As much as I had enjoyed those first few months, the thrill of the game, the satisfaction of teaching her her lesson, I liked her most like this. Submissive and eager to please.

“Yeah?” I asked, sliding my hand around to cup her cheek. I pulled her bottom lip down with my thumb.

“Yes, Caleb.”

“You’ll have to earn your meal tonight,” I told her. Her cheeks flushed a deeper red and I watched the desire fill her eyes. I smirked. It wasn’t the sexual act itself she enjoyed. It was making me happy. She thrived on praise, and there was nothing she liked more than making me happy. She always had; I just didn’t know it then. *She* didn’t know it then. She admitted it now though, to me and herself. The moment I realized how quickly she folded at words of praise, was the moment the sweet, hurt little girl buried behind those thick walls Orla had constructed around herself came out to play. Gone were the mere glimpses of her. She’d come out to stay.

“Ellie?” The worker called. She tried to move away from me, but I held her firm. She hesitated a moment but then she smiled and leaned forward to kiss me. She apologized and with one more kiss, I forgave her and let her go get our food. I took the food from her and carried it back for us. Once home, she put her food into the fridge.

She poured me a Diet Coke and plated my food before bringing it over to me on the couch. I turned on the tv, pulling my tie loose, and watched her put my food on the coffee table. Then, she slowly moved to her knees in front of me. I watched her remove my shoes and put them to the side. She rubbed one foot and then the other, her eyes fixed on me - where they should be.

“Can I suck your cock for you, Caleb? Please?” she asked.

“Of course,” I answered and parted my knees. I would deny her nothing when she asked so nicely. She handed me the plate with my wrap on it and slid between my knees. She unbuckled my belt, her bottom lip between her teeth. My dick was harder than I would have liked when she freed me from my underwear. Putting your hard cock into a woman’s mouth was wonderful, but there was something delightful about putting your soft member between a girl’s lips and watching her suck it hard. Honestly, there wasn’t really a bad way to put your cock in a girl’s mouth.

My eyes fluttered as her wet, hot tongue licked the top of my cock and I took a bite of my sandwich as I found the game. I tried to focus primarily on the game and my sandwich. I wanted to enjoy this for as long as I could. I once had a girl on my cock for an hour and a half before I finally came down her throat. That was nearly impossible knowing it was Orla between my knees, working so sweetly to make me happy. I tossed my plate on the coffee table and leaned back to admire her. Her green eyes turned to look up at me and my cock twitched. God... she was stunning. I placed my hand on the top of her head, letting it rest there, but not adding any pressure. I know she liked how that felt. She liked the weight of my hand there.

“Look at me,” I murmured. She obeyed immediately and I breathed, “good girl.”

She closed her lips around the head of my cock and sucked. I ground my molars together.

For a small stretch, when I would watch her suck me off, I wondered what it might have been like to get a blowjob from her in High School. We were too far apart to have actually been in high school together, and I in no way had any attraction to girls that young, but I couldn't help but fantasize about how sweet she would have been giving a nice blowjob in the locker room after practice, timid, obedient, and eager to please. Or bending her over and fucking her under the bleachers. Or taking her out to Old Mill Pond Road and feeling her up in my back seat while she squirmed nervously.

And then, one day, as she looked up at me from between my knees, green eyes nervously meeting mine, I realized I didn't need to imagine what it would be like - because I was experiencing it right then and there. She did want to please, she was eager to do it, and she was almost ... shy about it. Like somehow, even after everything, and after how well we knew each other now, and how close we had become, she was still a shy girl with a crush. The realization fueled me with indescribable pleasure and need. It drove me insane. Because she was finally *seeing* me.

“You want my come, baby?” I asked. She drew her lips down the length of my cock and gave me slow, hard strokes, the head of my cock pressed to her cheek.

“Yes, please, Caleb,” she whispered. I let out a low breath. I'd fantasized about this so many times, sitting in my cubicle, listening to her laugh at one of Chris' stupid jokes, ask him for help. Ask him for help with *my* comments. Oh, that had always royally pissed me off. I'd sit there and listen to them go over a report, imagining what she would look like on her knees for me, telling me sweetly she wanted to swallow my come and taste it coating her tongue.

She put my cock back in her mouth, sucking on the head and then circling her tongue along it the way I liked. I fisted her hair and kept the head of my cock between her closed mouth. I jerked my shaft hard until I was coming into her mouth. She kept her mouth closed like the good girl she was. Once I was done, I removed my cock from her mouth, and she opened her mouth for me to see the sticky white substance gather on her tongue.

“Hmm,” I said as I looked, gently tilting her chin back. “How's that taste?”

“Good, Caleb,” she said, mouth still open.

“Yeah?”

“Yes.”

“Swallow.”

She obeyed and I tucked myself back into my underwear. I leaned down and kissed her. My forehead pressed to hers, I told her how well she did, how hard her mouth got me, and that I was proud of her. She melted into my hands as I praised her and curled up happily on the couch as I went to get her food. She ate, nestled in the crook of my arm, and we watched

more of the game. Once done, she put her plate down on the coffee table and snuggled into my chest. I held her close, fighting the urge to squeeze. I pressed my nose into her hair and breathed in deeply. I felt that little sliver of panic that had slowly begun creeping into these peaceful moments we had together. I fought to keep myself calm. She wouldn't ever leave me, because *couldn't*. I'd have her forever. We'd grow old together. Only death could take her away from me.

"Caleb?" she murmured, and I looked down. Her eyes were closed.

"Don't fall asleep," I said. "You haven't come yet."

"It's ok," she murmured. I shut the TV and scooped her up and carried her into the bedroom. I toss her on the bed and remove my tie and button down. She watched me with hooded eyes and didn't move as I unfastened her skirt and yanked it down. I take off her pantyhose next, leaving her legs bare.

This is as much for me as her. I've always loved pussy. The way it looks, the way it smells, the way it tastes. And hers? It's heaven. I drag my tongue along her slit, relishing in the taste on my tongue, and fight down a smirk when I find her damp. Whether through nature, conditioning, or both, she's really turned into a dirty little whore for me. I spread her apart and placed my lips over her clit and sucked hard. I licked, kissed, and sucked, pressing my fingers into her at the angles I knew would please her, and soon she was writhing sleepily, hips arching, and I sucked up her juices. I pressed my face to her sweaty thigh and breathed in deeply. I placed gentle kisses along her skin.

"Hmm, Caleb," she murmured and tugged on my hair. I let her guide me upward and I kissed her, placing my tongue into her mouth. She turned her face away with a slight grimace. I smirked. I didn't mind kissing her after she sucked my cock. Chris refused to kiss a girl after she gave head, but I always thought that was a bit hypocritical. She just put it in her mouth, the least you could do was kiss her afterward.

She wrapped her arms around me and nestled my face into the side of her neck. I chuckled.

"Let's get ready for bed," I murmured, kissing her pulse. She shook her head and murmured out a no and said something about being sleepy. I pulled back and kissed her again.

"Be a good girl for me, baby. Let's go," I said. I got off the bed and walked to the bathroom door. I didn't try to hide my smile when I turned and found her padding after me.

I got into bed before her, scrolling through my phone. I opened up the offer email waiting in my email. My heart began to pound violently in my chest as I read it. My entire body buzzed with excitement. It killed me not to tell Orla immediately. I told her everything now. It got to the point, where when something happened at work, and I took my phone from pocket to text, I now texted her first and Chris second.

I closed out of the email as she came out of the bathroom in a simple pair of panties and a matching bra. Simple and practical. She had her toothbrush in mouth, absentmindedly brushing her teeth as she went to her side of the closet.

“No, sleep naked,” I said when I saw her open the drawer with her pajamas. She said nothing but slid the dresser drawer shut and moved back into the bathroom. When she came back, she took the pills I had waiting for her on my nightstand. Her eyes darted up to mine as she spotted the Xanax, but she said nothing before swallowing it down. I lifted up the blankets as she stripped down, and she nestled up next to me. I ran my fingers through her hair, waiting for the Xanax to take effect.

Her hand was gently running over my chest. Fingertips up, nails gently down, fingertips up, nails gently down. I loved how it felt.

“Josh is my brother,” I started. She turned her face up to mine.

“I’m aware.”

“I’m a groomsman,” I said, trying to rip off the band aid. She didn’t look surprised. She simply nodded. Her tongue darted out to wet her lips. She looked at me. I could see the fear in her eyes, but I knew the Xanax was working and I hoped she would trust me enough to take care of her.

“You um... need to answer all my questions,” she said. I nodded.

“Ok.”

“No matter how many times I ask the same thing, over and over and over again.”

“Ok.”

“And you can’t get annoyed with me,” she said the last part softly, a bit embarrassed, a bit nervous, a bit hopeful.

“Never,” I promised. “Ask me anything however many times you want.”

“I need you to be there for me. I know you can’t be *with* me the whole time, but I need you to be there for me. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah,” I murmured softly and cupped her cheek to drive home how seriously I was taking this. “I’ll always be there for you.”

Her eyes were beginning to grow heavy.

“Calm?” I asked her. She nodded.

“Yes. Thank you.”

“I love you, Orla,” I told her. I wrapped my arms around her and squeezed. “I love you so much.”

She placed her hand to my chest, over my pounding heart, and fell asleep.

I was true to my word in one regard. Despite my colossal failure to come, I never once got annoyed with her questions. About people, places, events, schedules. She could ask me the same questions ten times in the span of five minutes, and it didn't bother me. I'd answer as best I could, as clearly as I could, and never felt an ounce of anger. Even on our drive down, all I can really remember was the feel of her nails faintly trailing up and down my forearm as she grilled me.

Our stop at the diner was a pleasant reprieve, but it highlighted the lack of control I had over my emotions. Chris and I had been to that diner a thousand times. It was an accidental find from an ill-advised attempt to get home too close to an empty gas tank. It had turned into a favorite spot and a ritual. I was excited to bring Orla to it.

We walked inside hand in hand, but after a flippant comment from Chris, Orla tried to pull away from me. I held her close. I tried to fight the anger that bubbled up inside of me. I *didn't* like when she tried to pull away from me. So, I was already on edge when I told her how good the food was. I watched her tense. Her teeth caught her bottom lip and her eyes flashed. She was the perfect weight right now, because she was *eating* again. Still, I could see her anxiety every time she had more than even the smallest of salads. It bothered me that she didn't seem to care that I liked curves. I liked to feel soft, malleable flesh beneath my hand.

"You're on vacation," I reminded her. She looked up at me, placing her menu down, and smiled.

"You order for me."

I was flooded with satisfaction.

Any warmth I had seeped out of my body when our waiter appeared. Tall, broad, handsome, with bright blue eyes and blond hair, straight white teeth and a winning smile. His dimples were deep and pronounced and when I looked at Orla, she had a bright smile on her face. My chest tightened and I glared at her, trying to get her attention. Images flooded my brain of her on her knees for him, on her back, moaning like a wanton whore while he rammed into her, pulling her hair and -

I looked at Chris. He shook his head, but I looked back at the waiter with a steely gaze. Our eyes locked and the waiter hesitated before leaving. I pinned Orla with a hard stare and she frowned.

"What?"

I felt a flare of anger. She claimed she couldn't talk to me for weeks when we first met but she could smile and blush and bat her fucking eyes for some stranger without a problem.

"You know, for someone with social anxiety you do pretty damn good in social situations."

She blinked at me, playing dumb.

"Want me to ask him if he'd like to fuck you? I'll tell him what you like."

“Caleb,” Chris warned.

“Excuse me?” she asked. Her gaze hardened. “I know I didn’t hear you correctly.”

My anger only grew hotter at the denial.

“You heard me,” I bit out. “What the fuck was that? You’re just going to flirt with a total stranger in front of me?”

“Caleb, man,” Chris tried to force a laugh. “She wasn’t flirting.”

“I was just being polite,” Orla agreed.

“Yeah, smiling and batting your eyes at him like that. Just go ask him if you want to suck his cock.”

Surprise washed over her face and my skin flushed. I felt the prickle of regret already forming in the pit of my stomach.

“Bat... batting my eyes? Caleb, I wasn’t,” she said. I saw sincerity in her eyes. Genuine confusion. My skin prickled and a violent rush of self-loathing took hold. I pushed it down, needing to be right, because the alternative hurt too much.

“Caleb,” Chris tried to be gentle. “She really wasn’t.”

“Ok. Yeah. I’m crazy then,” I said. I slapped my hands down on the table and got up. I knew I couldn’t stay calm in here. I needed to get away and think clearly. I marched down to the car and slid inside. I punched the steering wheel once, earning a sharp pain in my knuckles and a soft beep of the horn. I stopped and squeezed the steering wheel hard.

She will say yes.

She can’t say no.

She has no choice.

Those words didn’t calm me the way they once did. I wanted her to *want* me to propose. I wanted her to *want* to marry me. I didn’t want her to be with me because she didn’t have a choice. I wanted her to want me. Need me. *Love* me. My throat hurt and I punched the steering wheel again. I gripped the steering wheel and closed my eyes, counting down slowly. I opened my eyes and stared straight ahead. I heard her open the car door and slid in beside me, but I didn’t look at her. I was afraid to. She took my hand, holding it firmly.

“Caleb?”

I looked down at my lap, the sound of her voice simultaneously fueling the rage surging within me and soothing it.

“I need to be able to interact with men.”

I felt some of my anger subside. She was right. I couldn’t just chain her up in my basement for the rest of our life, no matter how alluring that fantasy might be.

“I know,” I said. “You just... kept *smiling* at him.”

“Something people do in society, yes,” she teased lightly. The muscles in my neck were rigid and tight and my head was beginning to ache. I felt a rush of anxiety course through me. It wasn’t common. I rarely got anxious. I knew she’d agree. I knew she’d wear the ring. I just hadn’t truly realized how badly I wanted her to *want* to. I flipped her hand over and gently ran my fingertips over the delicate lines in her palm. It was something I did to calm myself when I was angry.

“I’m just on edge. I hate seeing my parents.”

“I can’t relate.”

A smile spread across my face, and I turned to look at her. It felt so good, having someone who could understand. I looked over her face, feeling a wave of regret wash over me. I couldn’t let myself overreact like that. She deserved better than that.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have spoken to you like that. That was borderline abusive.” I considered a moment and then added, “maybe not so borderline.”

She gave a little smile, but I knew she understood. There was a difference between what I’d done and abuse. In retrospect, I shouldn’t have messed with her to the extent that I did and if I could go back I would do things differently. I would be a good, loving husband though, and if I was going to accomplish that, I needed to have a better grip on my anger.

“You know how you need assurances?” I asked. She nodded. “I need them too. Maybe more than you sometimes.”

I hated to admit it and once I said it, I almost wished I hadn’t, but at the same time, it needed to be said. She was more affectionate than ever. She was always touching me, her eyes always searching me out, but I needed to *hear* it. I needed her to tell me she wanted to be with me, that she needed me.

I needed her to tell me she loved me...

“There’s no other man on earth that compares to you, Caleb,” she said and reached up to cup my cheek. The pounding of my heart slowed. “I’m not interested in any other men. No other man can do for me what you do. I promise you that.”

She kissed me, murmured my name, and I slipped my tongue past her lips. It would do for now, no matter how much I wanted more. I swallowed down the disappointment of not hearing those words and kissed her tenderly a moment or so more. My hunger forced me to

break off the kiss and I opened the door. I turned back to look at her and paused. She had that look on her face, one of indecision and anxiety. I paused, slowly pulling the door closed, but not clicking it shut.

“What is it?”

“Nothing,” she said and smiled. It wasn’t true, but I didn’t want to push her right now. I nodded and we walked back in together. She hung on me the rest of the meal, which kept me calm. Her touch was cool and soothing and her lips the perfect balm. Chris had an obnoxious little smirk on his face as he watched us, but it didn’t bother me. I smothered a smile in her hair, kissed the top of her head, and breathed her in deeply.

The rest of the meal was uneventful. We did some more quizzing and set off on our way. When I pulled into the driveway, I felt a tightening in the muscles of my back and shoulders.

“This place is amazing,” Orla mused as she gazed up at the house. I came forward with our suitcase and garment bags.

“It’s alright. Feels more like walking into a museum than a home.”

The house was always cold. We were allowed more leeway with our rooms. My room had always been dark. Painted a dark blue, navy comforter and pillows, a guitar in the corner, posters on the walls, naked women in various stages of undress in the magazines I had stuffed in my drawers.

“Will we be staying in your old room?” Orla asked me.

I laughed bitterly. As much as I’d love to have been able to fuck Orla in my old room, that was a fantasy I’d never get to live out.

“Please, that’s a fucking closet now. I think my mom has her shoes in there.”

She’d repainted and moved my furniture out the moment I graduated college. I suppose I should be thankful she kept it long enough that I could still enjoy it while home for the summers. That hadn’t extended to law school. I pushed onward, ignoring the tightness in my shoulders and the ache in my head. I watched her face as we got into the house. She looked at the marble staircase and matching floors, and the giant chandelier in awe. I gazed up at the sparkling monstrosity with a grim scowl.

“Cozy, isn’t it,” I said. Her hand touched my back, soft and cool. She had no idea what she could do to me with just a touch. It was a comforting touch. One that recognized how I was feeling, and one meant to convey her support.

I tried to ignore the pictures of Georgie that lined the walls. There was an occasional group shot where I made an appearance. I hated looking at them. Hated remembering my life in this place, where no one was ever happy to see me, no one ever tried to understand me, no one ever cared about *me* most.

“Is that you?” she asked. I glanced at the photo she was looking at. It was Georgie at about fourteen, but I could see why she thought it was me. Georgie and I had very similar coloring, and I likely would have looked very much like him if I hadn’t had the unfortunate puberty I did.

“That’s Georgie. We each have our own wall. Mine’s at the back of the house, in the hall no one ever goes down. Because I’m the youngest they said.”

I tried to keep the bitterness out of my voice. Georgie was in the guest hall to show off their oldest son. Josh was in the family wing, so they could see their favorite son every day. I was in the hall with unused offices and the forgotten library, and the storage rooms. I rolled my head around my shoulders and felt a satisfying crack. Orla was suddenly at my side, her hand closing around mine. I squeezed and she squeezed back.

We said goodbye to Chris and made short conversation about my parent’s side of the house. Once inside, I felt her hands, soft and cool on my skin.

“Are you OK?” she asked. I only nodded, gripping her waist and holding her closer to me. I leaned down to breathe in her smell, but sucked her earlobe between my lips and nibbled. She shuddered and let out a soft breath of pleasure. I felt her melt under my touch and a rush of pleasure coursed through me. I felt a delicious rush of power as I pressed my lips to her neck and trailed my tongue along her skin. She trembled, falling apart in my arms. I picked her up and made to toss her on the bed, but she held me tight, and dragged me down with her. I was all too happy to let her.

After getting our things ready for the rehearsal dinner, I agreed to bring Orla down the hall with my pictures. I didn’t want to, and I already felt my anger returning as we stopped to look at Georgie’s. Every photo brought back a bad memory. I had so few good memories in my childhood, and the truth was, I was still so angry, I didn’t care to remember them.

I watched her closely as she hesitated at a group photo of us at the lake house, right in front of the tire swing they would later torture me in front of. She moved on quickly and I smiled. *She* cared about my feelings. *She* would protect me when she could.

We stopped in front of the photo of Georgie at his wedding, standing beneath the oak tree with Marci, smiling handsomely at the camera. Josh and Val would be getting the same photo taken tomorrow. I told Orla as much.

“And then you?” she asked. I draped my arm over her shoulder. She turned toward me, wrapping her arms around me. Her chin pressed to my chest as she smiled.

“And then us,” I answered. I squeezed her closer and I watched her expression change. It was... unreadable. She didn’t look scared or sad or angry, but she didn’t smile either. She stared at me, brow slightly furrowed, lips parted. I didn’t want to place the look, so I pulled back and took her hand and led her back down the hall to my little forgotten hallway. She let go of my hand when we arrived, her eyes drinking in the photos.

She paused at the first photo. Me and my mother just hours after I was born. Me, screaming, in distress, maybe scared, in pain, needing a kiss or a cuddle or an ounce of warmth and love. She smiled happily at the camera, as if her newborn son wasn't screeching angrily, as if she hadn't just endured thirty-six hours of agonizing labor, as if she didn't hate the child in her arms for being a son and not a daughter.

"Aww," Orla said.

I told her about the colic I had. I didn't tell her how difficult I was for my mother to deal with. She always wanted a son and a daughter. The first born, handsome, intelligent, mild mannered, soft spoken, polite, Georgie and then a beautiful, polite, witty, and charming little girl. Josh threw a wrench into those plans. I don't think Josh liked hearing that story at family dinners any more than I did, but I think I hated it more. She got my father to agree to one more. One more, and if it wasn't a girl, then she didn't get her daughter. I once overheard her telling my aunt that if she didn't think word would get around, she'd have terminated it the moment she learned the gender.

Terminated it.

I don't know how old I was when I heard it, but I remembered it clear as day. And she wondered why I hated her. She wondered why I was so angry all the time.

I blinked away those thoughts when she spoke, looking at a photo of a chubby little me in an obnoxious little suit with a pageboy cap on.

"I hope our kids are half as cute as you were," she said. She moved down the wall, but I remained still, staring at her, taking in those words. I finally pushed onward, feeling for the first time like she might not be scared tomorrow. When I showed her the ring and told her we were going to get married, she might be ... happy about it. I was afraid to even dare hope.

I bit back a wave of embarrassment as we got to my pre-teen years.

"I was 5'4 at eight," I told her, tapping the photo of my soccer team. I had been teased mercilessly. Height at that age wasn't the plus it was as a teenager or a grown man. Despite how pleased I had been at the time, those words, songs, and names still stung. I shoved it down. She moved on to a school photo I had once *begged* my mother not to display. It was the height of my awkwardness, my gawkiness, my big nose and big ears, big teeth and bad skin.

"Oh my god, Caleb," Orla said when she found it. My skin flushed. "That's you?"

"Don't laugh at me," I said woodenly, my chest tightening. Her giggling continued.

"Caleb, you were adorable," she said. I didn't agree and I told her as much.

"That's the kid you thought wouldn't give you the time of day," I made sure to point out.

"No," she said and moved down to the last two of my high school portraits. "That's the guy that wouldn't have given me the time of day."

I looked at the photos. By my senior year of high school, I had come together well. My face grew into my nose and ears, orthodontist work had straightened my teeth, and I had filled out with a lot of work in the gym. I wanted to tell her that was the guy that would have given her a bit too much alcohol at prom and taken her virginity in the back of my car whether she wanted me to or not... put her on her knees between classes, get her to send me slutty photos because she was too innocent to know what I could do with them... I didn't though. That could wait for tonight.

"These three were at the all-boy's school. Walton's. Very prestigious. And in upstate New York. Far away from here..." I added bitterly.

"I'm sorry." her voice was soft. Not pitying exactly, but sad and sympathetic all the same. She took my hand and squeezed.

"It wasn't so bad," I lied. She kept her hold on my hand tight as we walked the rest of the way down the hall. Eventually, she stopped us, pressing her back to my chest and wrapping my arms around her.

"Caleb..." She murmured.

I pressed my nose into her neck and breathed in. God, she was like a drug to me.

"Yes?"

"Tell me you love me," She said. She twisted in my arms to face me. I made sure to look her in the eyes as I did so.

"I love you," I said and kissed her softly.

"Tell me you'll never let me go. Ever."

I felt a burst of lust course through me. A violent need for her to understand. I grabbed her by the face and squeezed, forcing her to look at me.

"I will never let you go," I said, my eyes dropping to her mouth. "You'll never leave me, Orla. Never."

"Promise."

It wasn't a question. It was a demand. A need for reassurance. I stared at her, eyes burning, feeling a tingling in my muscles.

"I promise," I vowed with as much feeling as I could put into the words. Her jaw trembled and I watched her eyes grow wet. I willed her to say it. She had to be feeling it. She *had* to be. I waited, my eyes on her. I gripped her chin harder, waiting for it. Willing it.

Just say it.

Just say it.

Just say it.

“Caleb,” she muttered. Her tongue came out to wet her bottom lip. My heart swelled and blood rushed violently through my veins.

“Jesus Christ, Caleb. You fucking psycho. Let her go,” a voice called from down the hall. I let her go before I could register it was just Josh, but the moment was gone. As angry as I was at him for interrupting, I felt a sudden rush of excitement.

She was going to say yes tomorrow, and she was going to be happy about it.

“You alright, babe?” he asked Orla. but then looked back at me and placed three hard slaps to my face. “Don’t worry, sweetheart, my baby brother is only rough with the ones he likes.”

I shoved a cackling Josh away, made some introductions, and we made some small talk about the trip. I saved us from taking shots in the kitchen and managed to avoid an introduction to Georgie by his sudden disappearance from the den.

When we got back to our room, getting ready to take a shower, I sat her on the kitchen sink to I could touch her while the water warmed up. We just looked at each other. We did that sometimes. Content just to look into the other’s eyes. I didn’t understand that she might not feel it too. She had to. I know she did. It was undeniable, this burst of electricity that could pass through us at times like this.

“Tell me you love me,” she said again. I hesitated. It felt like she was saying something else. God, just fucking say it. If I were built different, I might beg her for it. But I couldn’t do that. I’d made her say it to me once. I couldn’t do that again. I needed it to be real. I told her to say it when she meant it, when she was ready. She just wasn’t ready yet.

“I love you,” I said, trying to show her how much I meant it just by a look. “I love you more than anything. I’ll do anything for you. Just ask and it’s yours.”

She stared back. I could feel her trembling. She pulled my hair hard. My scalp stung. She kissed me, biting my lip hard. When she kissed me again, I made sure to return the favor. She forced her tongue between my lips. It was by the far the roughest and most forceful she had ever been with me.

“I want to feel you tonight,” she said.

“Feel me?” I asked and then put my tongue back into her mouth. I wanted her to remember who was in charge. Who owned who.

“Beneath my dress,” she murmured. I hesitated just a moment before I grabbed her hair and yanked her head back. She looked up at me with her neck arched completely back. I stepped closed and her lips parted. Blood surged into my cock. What a good girl. I collected some saliva in my mouth and let it fall between her awaiting lips.

I threw her onto the ground harder than I intended. It reminded me of the vending machines, after she had tried to hide from me. I thought momentarily of how she looked coming out of that elevator. Vulnerable and scared, needing me to protect her.

She spread her legs for me as I dropped her to the floor. Like the good little slut she was. *Mine*. I forced her legs apart wider, and she gasped. She wanted to feel me. I'd let her feel me. I forced myself inside of her and she gasped again, partially pain, partially pleasure. Her hands went to my hair, but I grabbed them and slammed them into the tile above her head.

"Tell me you belong to me," I told her, pulling out and slamming into her. She gasped.

"I belong to you," she said. She tried to get her hands free from mine, but I held her tight. I put my other hand around her throat.

"I love you," I told her. Her eyes lit up. "We're going to be together forever."

She nodded.

"Yes," she whispered. I slapped her and she gasped.

"Fucking louder, bitch," I told her. "We're going to be together forever."

"Yes, Caleb. I'm sorry. Yes. Forever," she said.

"You're going to give me children," I demanded, gripping her throat hard.

"Yes, Caleb. I want to. I want to," she said.

"You *want* me," I said.

"Yes. I want you. I ... I... I..." she stared into my eyes. I crashed my mouth into hers and fucked her without any regard for her own pleasure. She wanted to feel me, she'd feel me. My only goal was making sure I could get her as loud as I possibly could.

She looked gorgeous in her dress. She looked amazing in green. It made her hair look redder, her eyes look greener. She did a little spin for me and I told her how beautiful she was. She was a bit sore. After our shower, which in retrospect probably wasn't the best idea to put her under hot water after what I had done to her, I noticed the dark purple bruises that were peppering her back and arms.

I touched them gingerly, regret and a little bit of nausea bubbling in my stomach, but as I caught her gaze in the mirror, she smiled.

"I wanted it," she said to me.

"I was too rough," I said to her. She shook her head.

"You know your limit," she said. "I like it... seeing how much you want me. Feeling it."

She reached up to touch her necklace. I itched to give her the ring.

As we walked toward the entrance of the country club, she placed her hand on my back. It was a comforting, soothing gesture I always enjoyed. I recognized a few family friends in the lobby, but soon spotted Georgie in the corner with Marci. Orla was already squeezing my hand, indicating her anxiety. I squeezed back and began walking toward Georgie. He was, to be fair, the mildest of my family to meet right off the bat. He hid his own perversions well.

I introduced them, letting Marci ramble as she always did, so delightful and so anxious to make a good impression. In truth, Marci was, from my experience, a genuinely kind person, who was far too good for my brother, and I hoped that if she ever got the courage to leave him, she'd take him for all he was worth.

"Where's mom and dad?" I asked.

"In the lounge," Georgie said, motioning vaguely with his chin. "With Aunt Carol."

"Oh, fuck me," I said. I didn't want to deal with her. Georgie smirked.

"Hence why we're out here," Georgie said. He looked at Orla then, that easy charm of a psychopath dripping off of him. "Don't look her directly in the eye. You'll turn to stone."

Orla blushed and laughed, but stepped closer to me, and I put my arm around her.

"Look on the bright side," Georgie said, turning his attention back to me. "This way, they might actually be happy to see you."

Georgie laughed and, despite the sting, I laughed too. I led Orla and I down the hall to where my parents were, both terrified and excited to introduce her to them. I wasn't nervous because I cared about their opinion. I didn't give a shit what they thought of me. I cared about Orla's opinion of me, and what they might do to blacken that opinion, and right now, I was convinced she thought highly of me.

"You ok?" I asked her, giving her hand a squeeze.

"Just nervous."

"Don't be nervous. I'm with you."

The smile I got back warmed me. I walked toward my parents, trying to swallow down the bitterness in my chest. We made our introductions. My father was as charming as ever. Aunt Carole ended up wandering off at some point to terrorize someone else. I could barely look at my mother though, and that pinched look on her face, that flicker of concern as she looked at Orla. I wondered what she thought. I wondered if she thought I had forced her to come here with me. I wondered if she thought I was abusive to her, or if I mistreated her, or if Orla would ever report me and turn me into the real black stain on my family name. I talked to my father about work. I didn't bring up my new job. If I cared more about his opinion of me I might have, but I stopped trying to earn his approval long ago. The fight that had occurred when I told him I wasn't going to medical school... the things he said to me... and my

mother... she just sat there and listened, sipping at her wine with that pinched fucking look on her face.

“And you two work together?” my father asked.

“I’m her boss,” I said matter of factly. I wanted to see the horror on my mother’s face. I wanted her to know that she was right. That I had done everything she thought I had done to Orla. That Orla saw me, and she loved me anyway.

But she doesn’t

She hasn’t said it yet.

The thought prickled at my brain but I forced it away. Instead, I focused on the little rush of satisfaction that rushed through me at the look that spread across my mother’s face. My father easily pivoted, recognizing Orla’s intelligence, to my mother’s annoyance. She couldn’t stand the thought that I had the most beautiful, loving, kind, successful wife out of my brothers. Because she thought I didn’t deserve her. I held Orla closer to me, using her to steady me.

“Speaking of - where is Josh?” I asked.

“Speaking with the wedding planner,” my father answered. “Valencia isn’t happy with the shade of lavender of the centerpieces.”

“Are there different shades of lavender?” Orla asked and I let a little smile touch my lips. I loved her so much.

“There are if you’re Valencia,” my mother finally decided to speak. She reached out to me and touched the lapel of my blazer.

“Did you get your tux fitted, sweetheart?”

Sweetheart. Like she gave a damn about me. Like she didn’t wish she’d killed me in her womb when she had the chance. She was afraid of me, she was ashamed of me, and she hated me.

“No, I figured I’d try it on tomorrow and hope for the best,” I answered dryly. I returned my mother’s sour smile.

“Do you find your rooms to your liking?” she asked Orla.

“Oh, it’s beautiful. Your entire home is beautiful,” Orla answered gracefully. “Thank you so much for having me.”

“Anything for the girl that will put up with Caleb,” my dad laughed and clapped me on the shoulder harder than he had to.

“Oh, I think he puts up with me,” Orla responded. Her other hand covered mine and she squeezed. When she turned to smile at me, I couldn’t help but kiss her. I don’t think she’ll

ever know how grateful I was to her in those moments.

“Well, that looks like a man in love if I ever saw one,” my father observed. My mother just stared, not believing I deserved this kind of happiness.

“I am,” I admitted. I’d shout it on the roof tops. Whatever else might have been said was lost when Josh appeared and punched me hard on the shoulder. I hugged him, clapping him on the back, grateful for the rescue.

“There’s my baby bro! And your smoking hot girlfriend. She’s way too good looking for you, my guy. You know that right? We’ve been trying to figure out how you bagged her.”

I grinned, happy he said it. He meant it too. He’d fuck Orla in a heartbeat if he thought she was game and would keep her mouth shut afterward. I wanted her to hear it though. She needed to know how gorgeous she was.

“Took some persuading,” I replied. Josh’s eyes widened and his brow lifted in excited understanding. Our mother thought I was the monster. I wish she knew she’d brought three into this world. The difference between me and my brothers was that I was honest about who I was.

We went to meet Val. She looked as frail and plastic as ever and met my gaze with a hard stony glare. She was pleasant and charming with Ellie, as she always was. Everyone always thought she was delightful.

During introductions, Orla made a nervous laugh when Val mentioned she was a lawyer. She made a big show of telling her not to minimize her accomplishments and then looked at me with a tight smile on her face and said, “I can see why you like her though.”

If I wasn’t above hitting women, I’d have smacked her. She deserved it. But I’d never hit a woman and smacking the bride at her rehearsal dinner would not have been received well.

“How you doing, Val?” I asked and circled a finger around my face. “I can’t tell.”

She would have been a beautiful woman if she just let herself be.

“Oh, I missed you, Caleb,” she answered. I smirked and put my arms around Orla’s shoulders. She was a shield. None of their jabs or disdainful looks could hurt me if I had Orla with me. Because Orla was on *my* side. The same way I was on hers.

“You look thin.”

“Thank you,” Valencia smiled tightly. She knew it wasn’t a compliment. She then looked at Orla. “Ellie, come with us. I was just going to show the girls my dress. Mallory hasn’t seen it yet.”

“No, she can see it tomorrow,” I snapped. She was trying to separate us so she could dig for information, try and turn her against me. I wouldn’t let that happen. I also didn’t want to be away from her. She made this whole thing bearable.

“It’s ok,” Orla said lightly. She stepped away, our arms straightening, and she tried to let me go. I tightened my hand, heat radiating just below my skin. I stared at her, trying to figure out how I could keep her from leaving without being exactly the man they all thought I was.

“But you promised me you’d show me around,” she said and stepped back to me. She smiled at me and then at Val. “Plus, I like being surprised.”

Valencia glanced at our hands and then pinned me with her hard gaze.

“Yeah, of course, of course. You two have fun and I’ll see you later, Ellie.”

I watched them leave, and Orla placed her hands on my chest.

“I’m sorry.”

“You know I don’t like being apart from you.” My face felt very hot. I was trying not to be angry with her. I didn’t want us to fight here.

“I didn’t realize you didn’t want me to go,” she said. I was annoyed at that, but I buried it.

“I want you with me all the time. You know that.” I tried not to sound angry, but I know I failed. Her hands went to my neck. Small, cool, and gentle.

“I’m sorry, Caleb, please don’t be mad at me,” she whispered. I tried to calm myself down by looking at her mouth. She had the tiniest of marks on her lip from where I bit her too hard this afternoon. I remembered how she felt beneath me, the need in which she asked me to fuck her harder, when I was already fucking her as hard as I could.

“I don’t like when you try to leave me,” I murmured. She knew that, but she did it all the time anyway.

“I’m sorry.”

I cupped her cheek and then lowered my hand to the front of her throat. I kept staring at the bite on her lip, reminding myself that she belonged to me and even though she might try sometimes, she couldn’t ever leave me for long. She might not ever love me as much as I loved her, but I wouldn’t ever lose her. I’d do whatever it took. She kissed me and murmured against my lips.

“I belong to you. Forever.”

I gripped her neck hard and nodded. Forever. Forever. She’d say yes and she’d be happy. I squeezed, but not too hard, and kissed her. We were interrupted too soon, but luckily it was by Georgie, who could have walked in on me raping her and would have had the same bland question and he would have said it in the same bland way.

“Am I interrupting?” He looked toward the doorway. “If you don’t keep him away from me, I’m going to kill him.”

“Who?”

“Fucking Dalton. He’s a fucking toddler.”

Dalton was Josh’s longtime friend. No one really liked him. Not even Josh. He was kept around anyway.

“Kill him, see if I care.”

“Come on,” Georgie said. “We need to go meet Josh at the altar.”

I saw the panic that flashed across Orla’s face, but I reminded her I would introduce her to my cousins, and she seemed to relax. I introduced her to Jane and Sophia, who were as pleasant as always. I wish I could have been closer to them growing up, but we never saw each other outside family functions after my mother told my aunt about my sexual fantasies. It was difficult, not knowing who else that information got out to. I didn’t like leaving her, but I gave her a kiss and she flashed me a bright smile and told me she’d be ok.

I followed Georgie out of the French doors, and we walked down the stone pathway toward the beautiful green Josh and Valencia would be married on.

“You did a real number on her,” Georgie observed. “Congratulations. I can’t imagine you’ll want to wait long before your own wedding.”

“Spring,” I answered.

“She was the one... back in February?”

I nodded.

“I thought you hated her.”

“I did... I thought I did... I never really did. I just... she’s the one though.”

“I’m happy for you,” Georgie said. He was being genuine. The good thing about Georgie was, in private, he said what he thought. He could be cruel - vicious even. His words could cut deep. But he didn’t lie in private. “She’s good for you. You look happy with her.”

“I am,” I admitted. He slapped my back and then gripped the back of my neck.

“Good. You deserve to be happy.”

I smiled at him, but he looked straight ahead. That was as much as I would get out of him, but I was grateful for it all the same. If anyone ever asked me to try and explain my relationship with my brothers, I don’t think I could. I resented them, I hated them, but they knew me. They knew who I was. And they protected me anyway. They loved me anyway. And I loved them, even after everything. Love, I had come to realize some time ago, didn’t ever really make sense.

We ran through the rehearsal. It was going to be run very similarly to Georgie’s own wedding. I was relieved when we began walking back. I wanted to see Orla again. Chris gave me an elbow as we walked.

“Alright?” he asked. I looked at him a moment. Chris, unlike my brothers, had only ever supported me. He didn’t mince words. He told me when he thought I was being an asshole, which was often, and he kept me centered, but he loved me. He was my brother without the bitter memories, the humiliation and the hurt. He was the brother I’d chosen. I placed a hand on his shoulder.

“I’m good,” I answered.

“Sure?” he asked. I gave a nod. He patted my back and then broke off. He knew when to check in and when to back off. If I ever doubted that I deserved love, God, or the universe, or whatever it was, had sent me Orla and Chris. I was worthy of love. I knew that because of them.

As we returned to the back patio, I watched the french doors that lead to the bar open, and Orla stepped out. She hurried over to me, wrapping her arms around me and smiling.

“I missed you,” she said. I don’t think she could ever understand how important this was to me. Her showing everyone, *everyone*, that I wasn’t some freak. I wasn’t unloveable. This wonderful, glorious woman loved me.

But she didn’t, did she. At least, she hadn’t said it yet.

I kissed her, walking us along, half dragging her between my feet.

“I missed you too,” I said.

“Oh god,” Josh said with disgust.

“I told you,” I heard Chris call. He was standing with my parents, a beer in his hand.
“They’re disgusting.”

She kissed me again with a smile.

We ended up in a group with Val, Josh, and her friends. Orla was hanging on my arm, and I held her hand tightly, squeezing at different intervals, to which she happily squeezed back. Val was putting on her usual schtick of caring about other people’s accomplishments when one of her friends broke in. It was her friend from Boston, who worked at a bank apparently, who kept looking between us in such a manner that I was certain she knew who we were. I disliked the smug smile on her face and the familiarity of her features.

“And you’re both lawyers?” she asked, gesturing between us with her glass of wine.

“We are,” I answered. She asked for specifics, which I answered again. She didn’t seem to catch the way I was looking at her. I don’t know who she knew, but she knew someone. Orla was squeezing my hand, but I just squeezed back to let her know everything was OK.

“And that’s allowed?” she asked when I told her we both worked together.

“No. I’m her boss, actually,” I said with a hint of a challenge in my voice. Orla looked horrified and snapped my name. .

“We’ve been together longer than that though,” I said, giving the exact story I already sold Nick on. “We started dating a few months before my promotion.”

“I don’t know why he’s telling everyone that,” Orla laughed and then said for my benefit. “We could lose our jobs.”

“Where is it you two work?” Madeline asked. I met her gaze, leaned forward a fraction of an inch, and told her.

I grinned and took a sip of my drink. I felt high, but I had hardly had anything to drink. It felt so good. Nothing could touch us anymore. Nothing could separate us. Absolute bliss was in our grasp and nothing was going to change that. I was finally getting everything I deserved.

Val, sensing the tension, moved us along and Orla drew me aside on our way to our table.

“Caleb, what are you doing?” She asked me sharply.

“What?” I asked, playing dumb. I would tell her tomorrow, when I told her we were getting married.

“Why are you telling everyone you’re my boss,” she asked. I squeezed her hand.

“Because I am your boss.” I shouldn’t have been flippant, but I was buzzing. I could hardly keep from laughing as my euphoria bubbled up inside of me.

“And you want everyone to know that?” I asked. I pulled us to the side of the large room so we could finish the conversation before joining the others.

“Why wouldn’t I?” I asked her, taking in how beautiful she looked.

“Because, Caleb. Everyone is either going to think you pressured me into a relationship or I’m fucking you for special treatment.”

“I did pressure you into the relationship.” I said it simply. It was the truth and if I hadn’t, I wouldn’t have her. She didn’t know what was good for her, so I showed her, and now we were going to be *so* happy.”

“Don’t you want people to think I’m with you because I love you?” she asked.

My smile dropped and my eyes hardened. Of course, I wanted that. But she hadn’t *said* it yet.

“Of course, I do.” I saw a flicker of uncertainty, panic. I looked at her directly in the eyes. “Everything is going to be alright, OK. I promise.”

“If anyone found out back at work -”

“It will be OK,” I said. It wouldn’t matter.

I gave my notice.

I told Nick.

Our jobs were secured.

I stroked her cheek. "I promise. Do you trust me?"

"I'm trying, I just..."

She gave a little stamp of her foot and then looked over at our table.

"I'm fine," I said. "We can talk when we can get back."

"You sure?" I asked, brow lifted. She stared at me, so much going on inside her eyes, but I couldn't read it. She nodded. "Ok. I love you."

I knew she liked to hear it. We sat down at our table. She didn't touch her champagne. She was too busy clinging to my hand under the table. I couldn't wait for tomorrow.

by the time we arrived back home that night, I was exhausted. The tension that had been radiating through my back, shoulders, and neck all day culminated in a painful headache. I laid down on the bed with a sigh, fully clothed, my shoes still on, and Orla disappeared into the bathroom. My eyes were closed when she began to gently pulled my shoes off.

Her hands caressed my face and brushed through my hair. Her mouth was gentle and soft. My lips twitched. She moved downward, unbuckling my belt. I wasn't hard and my head was pounding, but I would *never* rebuff one of her advances. even when I was tired, even when my head hurt, I did the gentlemanly thing and let her continue.

She freed my flaccid cock and dutifully put her mouth the work to get me hard. She knew how much I liked that.

I woke up before her that morning. She was on her back, auburn hair fanned out on the pillow beside her, a delicate hand resting on her slowly rising and falling chest. I watched for a while, grappling with the feelings I had raging inside of me. I was vacillating between extreme confidence and abject terror. The day ahead could be remembered as the very best of our lives or the very worst... it all depended on how she reacted. I replayed it over and over again in my head and all the million ways it could go. Her nose crinkled and she let out a soft murmur. She would be waking up soon.

I imagined telling her how much I loved her, about the kind of husband I wanted to be, and that I wanted the entire world to know that we were together. I'd tell her about our future, our jobs, the security and my ability to protect her...

And then I imagine the disappointment I might see in her eyes when she realized there was no way out of this for her. She was mine. Nothing was ever going to change that. I found myself getting angry with her, despite her having not even woken up. I pressed my nose into her neck and nestled closer to her. She murmured softly and wrapped her arms around me.

Her nails trailed down my neck. Her fingers slid through my hair. My chest ached. I was never this nervous. It wasn't a sensation I was familiar with.

A little smile came to her lips and she murmured, "Happy birthday."

I slid inside of her, moving slowly and leisurely as I worked out some of the sleepiness from my system. She was only partially awake when I began, but after, her eyes were open and she smiled happily at me as she murmured out her good morning. She said happy birthday again and kissed my nose.

I felt calmer when we went downstairs to have our morning coffee. She kept a tight hold on me, and even when Chris decided to waltz into the kitchen half naked, she kept her focus on me. I turned my head to look at her when he walked in, but her chin was on my shoulder, her eyes on me.

I wasn't thrilled when Orla agreed to go to breakfast with Val. Val only asked to pissed me off, and I felt a bit queasy at the thought, but I wouldn't say no.

"Just be back by 10:15. OK? It's important to me," I told her, our eyes locked. I made sure she understood how important this was. I wanted her to be wearing my ring at the wedding. I needed this. She nodded and kissed me. We said goodbye out in the parking lot as we both went to separate cars.

"Ten-fifteen," I reminded her. I squeezed her hand.

"Ten-fifteen," she agreed with a smile. I tugged her closer and kissed her.

"I love you," I said and let her go. I walked back to the car and slid into the back seat, getting a good needling from the guys as I did so. The only one who stayed quiet was Chris. Dalton made a whipping motion toward me with the accompanying sound.

"Damn right," I answered. "It's a great pussy."

"Gotta lock that down fast," Josh said, turning around in the passenger seat. I was fairly certain he was already drunk. Georgie was driving.

"That's the goal."

"She have any friends?" Dalton asked. "Hey, wanna do a loyalty test?"

I bristled. 'Loyalty tests' were Josh's brain child. It was a win-win as far as he was concerned. If she refused, you knew she wouldn't fuck your friends. If she agreed, at least your friend got to fuck her on her way out. Usually you waited until you weren't interested anymore, your friend got her really drunk, and made his move. I never took part.

"She wouldn't touch you with a ten foot pole," Chris answered.

"So, let's give it a go," Dalton grinned.

"I trust Orla," I answered. "I don't need to play some stupid game with her to know that."

“Besides, Caleb makes more money than you,” Josh told Dalton.

“ *She* makes more money than him,” I responded. I didn’t like the insinuation, but I did enjoy seeing Dalton’s flushed face. Georgie had a little smile playing across his lips as he took his turn.

Breakfast was boring. I spent most of it silent, rehearsing what I was going to say to her instead. Josh and Dalton were being obnoxious, Chris was keeping them somewhat under control when a pretty young waitress had the bad luck of being given our table. Georgie was on his phone, presumably answering work emails most of the meal.

We got back to the house around nine thirty. We were going to begin getting ready at 11:00 in my parents' master suite. So I’d have some time to prepare and to spend with Orla once we were done. I went to our room, grabbed the ring, and flipped the box open. I examined the sparkling diamond with a pounding heart. I couldn’t remember being this scared. Again, I knew she’d say yes, but it was *how* she said yes that mattered.

I walked out to the gazebo at 9:45. It was a beautiful little place nestled in the gardens. Intimate and beautiful. A perfect place to propose. I wiped my hands on my pants and took a steadying breath. My phone buzzed and I picked it up.

Good luck!

She’s going to say yes!

It was from Chris .

I smiled and began to type back. My smile froze when I saw a text come through from Orla.

Going to get my nails done with the girls.

I frowned. I jabbed the message, heart rate accelerating. No, she wasn’t going to get her nails done. I told her to be here at ten-fifteen. I told her this was important. I *told* her. Another text came in from her.

Maybe I can trade some stories with Rachelle.

My stomach dropped.

Fuck. *Fuck.*

Another message.

She told me how much you liked to spit in her mouth.

God fucking dammit, Rachelle, that vicious fucking cunt. A couple of fucks eight years ago and she decides to run her fucking mouth. The messages from Orla kept coming.

Did you tell her she belonged to you too?

I started to type to her. This wasn't how this was supposed to happen. I should have told her she couldn't go. I should have just kept her with me the entire time. I should have...

One more message came through.

Happy fucking birthday.

I swallowed down my rush of rage. I typed quickly.

Rachelle was a fling.

It was years ago.

I didn't even think it was worth mentioning.

I waited for a response, walking in slow circles around the gazebo. The back of my neck itched and I felt unbearably hot in the cool morning air. I rolled my head around my shoulders.

I'm sorry. Come back and we'll talk.

I counted to one hundred before typing again.

Orla, don't you dare do this to me.

Come back, we'll talk.

I felt myself losing my grip on myself. This wasn't how it was supposed to happen. And now she was ignoring me. She knew what that did to me.

I told you how important this was to me Orla.

God fucking dammit, Orla pick up your fucking phone.

It's my fucking birthday. Come back now.

I ran my hand through my hair. It was ten thirty now. She was fifteen minutes late and she wasn't responding. I called her and waited, each second she didn't answer, etching away at my crumbling resolve. The call went straight to voicemail.

I really can't believe you're doing this.

You couldn't do this one fucking thing for me?

On my birthday, On the day I was going to propose. Stuck here around people who were afraid of me. People who hated me. And she would rather be with *them*. She was different. She was on *my* side.

I had something fucking important planned.

This meant something to me you know.

But she was siding with them. She chose to go with them instead of stay with me. She was leaving me again, like everyone always did when they saw something in me they didn't like. Shoved into the corner and ignored, forgotten, alone. It was one thing when it was them. I didn't care about them. I hated them. Not Orla though. She loved me anyway.

No. She doesn't.

I blinked rapidly, calling her again and raising the phone to my ear. My chest hurt. It was a terrible, hollow ache.

Yeah, happy fucking birthday to me.

We're supposed to talk to each other.

She should have come back to yell at me. She could have talked to me. I would have apologized. I would have explained. She was acting just like them. Sending me away because she was angry. Punishing me with what she knew would hurt me most.

I wiped the back of my hand across my eyes. I shook my head and breathed in hard through my nose. I tried calling her again. I licked my bottom lip. I called again. It went right to voicemail every time.

I felt the ring in my pocket, weighty and heavy. I patted the piece of paper in my pocket. I'd *written it down*, because I wanted to get it right. I wanted her to understand how much I love her. I wiped my eyes again and sent one last last text. I needed her to *understand* what this meant to me. How badly she was punishing me.

I hate you right now.

I put my phone in my pocket and marched back into the house.

I was in my tux, sitting in the corner, my phone resting on the arm of the chair. I stared at it, waiting for it to light up. Dalton and Josh were sharing a flask. Georgie was reading from a newspaper of all things in the corner. Despite him hating the nickname 'old man, Georgie' it was well earned.

I heard her voice at the same time as everyone else. Chris walked over to me and I stared at the door, feeling numb.

"Don't talk to her right now if you're going to say something stupid," he said to me. I glared at him. Chris had talked me down off a ledge. He kept reminding me she didn't know I was going to propose. She'd never have done that if she'd known. She was jealous and hurt and women got crazy when they were jealous and hurt.

Josh opened the door and stuck his head out.

"Hey there, sweetheart!" Josh called. "Hey, the stripper's here!"

My eyes darted up to him and if looks could kill he wouldn't have survived it. I would have gotten up off the chair and punched him in the mouth if I thought I would stop once I started. Despite everything, I didn't feel like going to prison for murdering my brother on his wedding day.

Orla stepped in, red cheeked and beautiful. She had something in her hands, which trembled in front of her. Her glistening green eyes scanned the room and stopped when they found me.

"Caleb, can we talk," She asked. Her voice quivered and she just looked so beautiful. The hole in my chest spread.

"No," I said. Because I didn't know what I would say. I didn't know what I would do. And I *wouldn't* say something I couldn't take back. I wouldn't let this destroy us, no matter how badly it hurt. She was mine, forever. And no matter how badly I hurt right now, I needed to be the strong one. As strong as I was capable of being in that moment.

"Caleb, please," she said, eyes still fixed on me. I leaned forward, trying to convey to her how deadly serious I was, how angry I was, and that I wasn't in the mood to talk. We would talk after the ceremony, when I had calmed down some more, when Chris had more time to center me.

"You're so angry right now because you're in love her," Chris had said when he was cleaning up the broken picture frame I had punched upon entering the house. "So don't do something that's going to fuck that up forever. In two days when you're both thinking clearly, you're not going to be able to forget what was said today."

"No," I said, succinctly and curtly. I wasn't *as* angry as I was in the gazebo. Seeing her gave me a sense of calm, and I could see the fear in her gaze. I could see the regret. Good. That's what should be there. My chest loosened and I wanted to get up and go to her. I wanted to hear her apologize for not coming back to me when I told her to. I wanted to feel her small, cool hands on my burning skin and her soft lips on mine. It was the only thing that ever made me feel whole. I couldn't though. I couldn't risk it right now.

"Caleb," she pleaded with a small tilt of her head and a droop of her shoulders. I felt a flair of annoyance. I should have told her about Rachelle, but she should have come back so we could *talk*. We promised each other, we'd always talk. No matter what.

"You shut your fucking phone off on me," I snapped. At the root of it, that was what angered me most. I could forgive her not coming back out of anger, but shutting her phone off, cutting off my access to her... She knew better. "We'll talk after the wedding. I don't want to talk to you right now."

"Oh shit," Josh said with raised eyebrows. "Someone's been a naughty girl."

He waved his finger at her and pretended to be stern.

"Caleb, please. Let me give you your birthday present," she said. She lifted her hands slightly. I didn't look at what she had. I didn't want to let it soften me, because I knew it would. I knew I couldn't stay angry at her for long, and I hated her for that. Because she

could stay mad at me. She could ignore me. She could turn off her fucking phone on me. But I just couldn't part with her. I couldn't function without her.

"Oh, fuck," Josh said. "Is today your birthday?"

I felt another stab of loneliness. I just wanted her to leave so I could think a little bit longer. So I could feel justified in my anger a little bit longer.

"Orla, if you don't want to break up right fucking now, you'll get the fuck out."

I said it to make a point. We both knew that wasn't going to happen. I don't know what it would take for me to end things with her... some form of infidelity perhaps. Even then, I might just kill him and actually decide to keep her locked up in a basement forever if it came to that. Because I *deserved* her Goddammit. I deserved to feel the way she made me feel. I wouldn't let her go. Ever. And she knew that. I looked down at my split knuckles. Punching the picture hadn't been the smartest thing I'd ever done, but it was probably better than if I had hit the drywall.

"Caleb," Orla started. When I looked up, Chris' back was to me, blocking my view of her, and he was gently guiding her out into the hall.

"What'd she do?" Josh asked me, button up his vest. We'd be leaving for the venue soon. My head was pounding and I took a sip of my bottle of water.

"None of your business," I answered. I placed my hand over the ring in my breast pocket. She'd be wearing it by the end of the night no matter what she fucking wanted, I knew that. Any dreams I had of a bright smile when I showed it to her were dashed. Beyond all else, I felt foolish. Foolish that I thought she'd ever love me the way I wanted her to love me. The way I loved her.

"Suck someone else's cock?"

"Dalton, could you shut your fucking mouth for once in your sad, pathetic life?" Georgie asked from the corner, letting the newspaper fall just long enough to let his utter disdain be shown.

"Fuck you, Georgie."

Maybe I'd never have the love I thought I deserved. Maybe I was the monster my mother thought I was. Maybe Orla could never look at me and see anything other than the man that had tormented and raped her for months.

"Caleb," Chris said when he stepped back in. He jerked his head toward the master bathroom and I walked over with him.

"She's very upset," Chris said softly once the bathroom door was shut.

"Good, she should be," I answered.

"You need to text her and tell her you're not going to break up with her," he said. I scowled.

“She knows I’m not going to do that,” I said dismissively.

“She doesn’t,” Chris said. “I can promise you, she doesn’t.”

“Fine then, let her sit with that for a bit,” I answered. The truth was, I didn’t believe she actually thought that. After everything I had done to her, after everything I’d told her I’d do if she ever tried to leave me, after all the times I’d told her how desperately I loved her, needed her, wanted her, there was no way she could logically believe I would break up with her over something like this. and if by some chance she did believe it, maybe she’d realize how good she had it with me, and she’d work a little harder to keep me. Show some goddamn appreciation.

“Caleb, just send her a fucking text.”

“No,” I said again.

“You are the two most infuriating people I have ever met in my entire life, you know that?” Chris said. “You two were fucking made for each other. You’re both absolute fucking psychos.”

He brushed past me and out of the door. I followed and ignored the rather homophobic joke Dalton made as we left the bathroom. Georgie lowered the newspaper down again long enough to shoot Dalton a dirty look. I was quiet as we drove to the venue. I managed to smile through photos, but I felt numb.

“Marci just got here with your girl,” Georgie told me as we finished up the photos. “Says she seems fine. Just a bit upset.”

“Thank you,” I said to him and nodded. It eased the tension in my neck just a little bit. I knew one thing for fucking certain. She wasn’t going to be walking tomorrow when I was through with her. She’d get a good reminder of who was in charge before this was over. Of who she belonged to. Who she obeyed.

There were too many guests to find her in the crowd. Instead, I stared ahead, hardly listening to the two people in front of me make vows neither of them actually intended to keep. That would be different for me and Orla. When we pledged our lives to each other, we’d mean it. I knew I would anyway. I felt that same ache and I began to wonder again if she would ever love me. It was a painful, bitter pill to swallow.

At the end of the ceremony, I tried to find her. I scanned the crowd as I left but didn’t find her there. It felt like an eternity before the final photos ended and we made our final entrance into the reception, but in truth, it was less than an hour. I got to our table as the room fell into a soft rumble of laughter and conversation. I frowned at the empty seat beside Marci.

“Where’s Orla?” I asked.

“She excused herself about midway through the ceremony. She hasn’t come back.”

I felt an uncomfortable tightening in my gut. Though I was still angry, I felt a wave of unease wash over me. I took out my phone and texted her.

Where are you?

I waited, not taking my seat, and stared at the phone. Her lack of response did not inspire rage this time. Instead, I felt a prickle of fear ripple through me.

Orla, baby, where are you?

Marci was watching me with a furrowed brow.

We're gonna work this out, Orla, but I need you to tell me where you are so I can come get you.

"I'm gonna kill her," I said when I felt Chris come stand beside me. "I'm literally gonna kill her."

Chris had a beer in his hand and looked at his phone, as if she might have texted him. I would have imploded right then and there if he had a text from her. Luckily, he didn't.

I was about to call her, when her name popped. I answered immediately.

"Jesus Christ, Orla, where the fuck are you," I asked, striding across the empty dance floor toward the exit to the main hall. I gave a tight smile to an uncle as I stepped out of the noise reception hall. I felt a glimmer of relief take hold of me though. At least we were talking and I'd be able to see her soon. "I'm going to throttle you when we get home. Where are you?"

"Caleb... I... I..."

I paused. There was something about her tone of voice that sent my stomach rolling.

"Orla? Orla, where are you?" I asked as softly as I could. She didn't sound OK. I had a terrible fear she might have hurt herself. My heart thudded against my ribcage and I realized Chris had been right. I should have texted her.

"I need your help. I did something bad." Her voice was low and hoarse.

"Where are you?"

I was already walking down the hall. She had to be in that direction, wherever she was.

"I don't... I don't know why..."

Her voice was a soft whisper. She sounded lost. Confused.

"Baby. I need you to listen to me. OK. I need you to tell me where you are."

"The staircase... near the rehearsal dinner..."

I picked up my pace.

“Stay there. I’m on my way. Don’t hang up. What happened?”

I heard nothing on the other end and then I looked down at my phone to find the call disconnected.

“Goddamit, Orla,” I whispered and walked as quickly as I could without drawing attention. I found the bright red exit sign that was over the stairwell. It felt an impossibly long way away as I marched toward it, my heart pounding. I told myself over and over again that she was alright. She didn’t sound good, but she didn’t sound hurt. I hoped the heavy door and the stairway was filled with the echo. I didn’t find her and called up tentatively, “Orla?”

“Caleb.”

Her voice sounded small as it echoed from above. I hurried up the stairs, taking three steps at a time. My heart lurched into my throat when I found the body on the ground, but almost immediately I realized it wasn’t Orla. I crouched down beside her and recognized Madeline. She was warm and she was breathing. I gently tilted her face to the side and found a decent sized gash across her forehead. I lowered her face and turned to find Orla at the top of the staircase. Her back was to me, her hands covering her face, and she was saying something too softly for me to hear.

“Orla, what happened?” I asked. “What did you do?”

She turned around, eyes wide and wet.

“What did I do? I did this because of you. This is your fault.”

My brow knitted together.

“My fault?”

“You... you were going to break up with me,” she said, a fat tear falling from her eye. I shook my head and reached for her.

“Orla.”

“No. No.”

She took a sharp step back and held her finger up at me. I paused, not wanting to scare her.

“I won’t let you. You understand me? I won’t let you.”

Wouldn’t let me what? I stared, trying to process. She laughed, a short, painful sound.

“You got what you wanted.”

Her lower lip was trembling violently. I just wanted to put my arms around her, but I didn’t want to scare her. I shook my head again.

She stared at me, eyes glistening with unfallen tears, cheeks flushed red. Her eyes were already puffy and red.

“I love you, Caleb.” Her voice was soft. She added with a crack in her voice. “I’m in love with you.”

I stared, not trusting my ears to have heard it or my brain to process it.

“And then... then you think you can break up with me? After everything you did? I won’t let you.”

I stared at her. I felt a loosening in my chest, a rush of adrenaline.

“You don’t have any power over me any more, Caleb. You don’t have anything to hold over my head anymore. You think I care about those photos? Those videos? That’s the nuclear option isn’t it... because neither of us will survive it. Not really. Maybe you could ten years ago. Not today...and me? I don’t care. I don’t care. Because whatever happens to me once those are released, it’s nothing compared to not having you.”

I took in a slow, deep breath, my lips parting. My ears buzzed with disbelief.

Her face crinkled and she shook her head.

“It’s nothing compared to that,” she whispered. She looked back at me. My skin was tingling, like someone was sticking me with a million little pin pricks. “You have so much more to lose.”

She stared. She was crying, large fat tears dribbling down her cheeks.

“I hope you’re happy, Caleb, I hope this was what you really wanted, because you’re stuck with me now. Forever. Because...”

She took a deep breath and continued.

“Because if I can’t have you.... I’ll destroy us *both* .”

The only sound that filled the stairwell was the sound of her breathing. I had stopped all together.

We stood in stunned silence, her small, quivering form at the top of the stairs remained stoney and sure for just a moment longer, before her face shattered and collapsed. She pressed her face into her hands and let the jagged sobs shake through her shoulders.

My heart pounded violently in my chest. Harder than it had as I waited for her to come back from breakfast, reciting my words of love over and over in my head, knowing she couldn’t say no, but still terrified she wouldn’t say yes. I heard a swooshing in my ears and the skin of my face prickled. The sensation that ran through my legs was close to numbness, yet it tingled. Like the muscles had fallen asleep, and there was that feeling of static, but it was almost imperceptible. Undeniable, yet faint.

The engagement ring I had been so excited to give her that morning felt heavy in my pocket. It heated, searing my flesh beneath the jacket and shirt of my tuxedo. I watched her cry at the top of the landing as I let her pronouncement seep into the deep recesses of my psyche.

I groped for understanding. What my ill-advised and thoughtless throwaway line about a breakup had to do with Madeline lying unconscious at the bottom of the landing, was lost to me, and through the haze I struggled to prioritize it. I was aware enough of the need for immediate and efficient action, but at the same time, I could hardly think. I couldn't move.

And then, all at once, everything slipped into place, like the last piece of the puzzle, and with it, came such an overwhelming wave of... calm. Clarity. Peace.

The fear and anger that has been driving me for months dissipated in one beautiful moment and all I could see was her, standing at the top of the stairs, a perfect illustration of everything I had felt for her since the day she refused my offer for coffee.

She loved me.

She loved me to the point of self-destruction.

She loved me enough to not only destroy my life, but to pull herself down with it.

The parasite of fear that had been worming its way through my brain shriveled and died and I was left with blissful clarity.

She loved me, and the proof of it lay unmoving at the bottom of the stairs. Love like ours didn't make sense. It didn't require logic. Just like I didn't need to know how pushing a girl down a flight of stairs could possibly prove her declaration of love for me genuine, but it *did*

.

I was just so utterly and deliriously happy.

The absolute rage I felt standing at the gazebo as the minutes ticked by, was gone and forgotten. Her reaction made so much sense to me now. How might I have reacted, to discover a man I had been out to lunch with had touched her? Touched what was mine? Touched who I loved most. It wasn't petulance that had driven her, it was pain. It was fear.

I was left with nothing but a feeling of triumph, joy, of absolute ecstasy. I'd never known such a feeling of euphoria could exist.

A tingle of pleasure radiated at the back of my neck and spread throughout my body in a slow, even pulse.

Her tears brought me a level of satisfaction that shamed me, but I watched her with a delightful burst of hunger.

Finally .

Finally she understood.

I felt such a burst of kinship. I had never dreamt that she would ever be able to comprehend what it felt like. The need. The desperation.

The *terror* .

My chest constricted and ached in the most beautiful of ways. I felt like I was floating. I took a step upward. A current of frenetic energy coursed up and down my legs as they pushed my weight upward. When I was one step below her, still towering a head above her, she looked up, eyes wet and face crumpled. I saw shame in her eyes. Fear. Self-loathing.

“I’m sorry, Caleb. I’m sorry. I’m so sor-”

I grabbed the back of her hair in a tight fist and pressed my mouth to hers. It was hard and bruising. It wasn’t meant to be enjoyable. It was meant to get us as close to each other as we could, to push some of that pulsing energy that was shooting through my veins into her. I wanted her to feel it. Her hands went to my face, digging her nails into the base of my skull. Her entire body was shaking. I could taste the salt of her tears, the iron on her lip and I wondered if I bit her or if she had bitten herself. I crushed my mouth to hers, kissing her hard, breathing in deeply through my nose, as if I could inhale her. When I released her, I pulled back to look into her eyes. My hands held her face in my hands, making her wet, tearful face look so small and so vulnerable.

“You’re the missing part of my soul, Orla,” I told her. “There is no power on earth that can separate us.”

“Caleb,” she whispered, and I kissed her again. When I pulled back, we both breathed hard, and I pressed my forehead against hers. Our eyes locked and I felt a charge pass through us. I wondered if she felt it too. I know she did. Because now she understood. She understood how it felt. How painful and terrifying it was every moment to think you might lose them. I’d never felt so close to her. I’d never felt so close to anybody in my life.

A burst of adrenaline coursed through my veins. I felt powerful. Like I had the strength of a thousand men and nothing could touch us. It was like I’d stepped out of the cloud of psychosis this woman had subjected me to for months on end and I could finally see clearly again.

“You love me?”

She nodded and I smiled at her, my eyes never leaving hers.

“I love you,” she answered.

“And do you trust me?”

“I’m trying.”

“We’re soulmates,” I breathed harshly, gripping the sides of her face with a brutal grip. I pressed my forehead to hers Even harder, my eyes searing.

“We are,” she said, her voice not at full volume, but not quite a whisper. Not a murmur, but not a squeak. It was strained and insistent. As if she was trying to convince *me*. “We are.”

That same pulsing desire coursed through me, and I had to stop from pressing harder on either side of her head. I could have popped it like a grape. I kissed her instead, biting her bottom lip and pulling on it. I pulled back, my thumbs prodding at the flesh beneath her eyes.

“I need you to trust me now. Ok? Do everything I say. It’s the only way we can be together, unless you want to come visit me through glass, understand?”

She nodded. her eyes swelled again and her lower lip trembled. I caught it with my thumb.

“Give me your phone.”

She reached into her pocket and handed it to me. I placed it on the edge of a step and slammed down hard with my foot, warping the plastic and shattering the screen.

“911 starts recording the moment you hit send, not when they pick up. It’s when it’s ringing. Once I hit send, everything you say you need to expect to be recorded, ok?”

Lips parted, she nodded. I gripped her chin and ripped her eyes away from Madeline and forced her to look at me.

“You need to listen to me as I speak. This is our story. No deviations. We need to do this quick. She needs help. Can you focus on me?”

She nodded. She blinked, but her eyes looked alert.

“If we have to talk to anyone, if you aren’t 100% positive what I said, you say you can’t remember, alright?”

She nodded again. Her eyes found me, searching and frightened. Regret and guilt niggled at my chest. I should have been stronger for her today. I should have kept myself together. I was supposed to be her strength. Her rock. I failed her in that. I wouldn’t ever let that happen again.

I took my phone from my pocket and dialed 911. I ran my hand over the top of her head as it rang, taking in every ounce of her perfection.

“911, what’s the location of your emergency?”

“Greenbrook Meadows Country Club located at 465 Milford Bridge Road, in New Canaan. We need an ambulance out here immediately.”

“And what’s the nature of your emergency?”

“A fall. We’re at a wedding. My fiancée and I snuck away to ... be alone. She got into the staircase and ran into another guest who was having a cigarette. She fell. My fiancée’s phone got crushed when she tried to catch her. I came in probably a minute behind her.”

“Is she conscious?”

I tucked the phone between my face and shoulder and reached into my inner pocket.

“No, she’s not conscious.”

“Is she breathing?”

I glanced down at Madeline.

“Yes, she’s breathing,” I answered. I felt a flicker of concern as I looked at her, but only to the extent it would affect Orla. A simple slip and fall would be far easier for my father to clean up. A death would be more difficult. Draw more eyes. Drag things out.

I still didn’t know what happened. I was working on limited information, but I knew enough. Orla was very upset, she believed she had done something bad, she blamed me for it, and she hadn’t called 911 herself. Whatever happened, she needed protection.

I retrieved the little velvet box from my pocket, removed the ring and put the box back into my pocket.

“OK, it’s best not to move her until the paramedics arrive. Can one of you meet them out front?”

I slid it onto her ring finger, the warm glow of satisfaction keeping me firmly detached from the situation we were in. My lips curved upward and I looked at Orla. Her lips were parted as she stared at the ring and then her eyes found me. Her lips twitched upward slightly. I saw relief glimmer in her eyes.

“Actually, could you have the ambulance come around the back? It’ll be easier for them to get here. There’s an event going on. George Trent will be there to greet them.”

I admired the ring on her finger a moment longer before I took the phone from my shoulder and put the phone on speaker.

“I understand, sir,” the 911 operator said. My lips twitched and I texted Georgie.

Emergency. Ambulance coming. Meet at staff parking lot A and bring to east staircase. Madeline fell and is hurt pretty bad.

I sent the text as the 911 operator asked me details about Madeline. I provided them. Sex, age, name, description. I answered calmly, easily, without need for much thought.

Orla was wrong about something though. She claimed I didn’t have any power over her anymore, but that wasn’t true. The *pictures* might not be the threat hanging over her head anymore. I had something now far more potent. Far more powerful. I knew, because it was the same power she had been wielding over me for months.

There was so much I wanted to say, so much I wanted to do. It was torture, listening to the operator drone on and on while she stood in front of me terrified, pale and clammy, shaking. I

tugged Orla closer to me and put my hand on the back of her neck. I was full of frenetic energy and I rolled my head around my neck. She grabbed the back of my vest with a tight fist.

“Alright, Mr. Trent, paramedics have made contact. I’m going to disconnect with you now.”

“Thank you,” I said and hung up. With a hand in Orla’s hair, I tugged her head back and kissed her again, this time, pushing my tongue into her mouth and tasting her as deeply as I could. She was breathless when I pulled back.

“What happened?” I asked her. She opened her mouth, about to explain, but I lifted my brow. Understanding flickered in her gaze before she began to speak.

“I came to meet you in the staircase to celebrate our engagement. I ran into Madeline. We were talking while she had her cigarette and when she turned to leave she fell. I reached for her and my phone fell and it got crushed.”

“Good, and that’s why you didn’t call 911 immediately,” I said, eyes dropping to her mouth.

“She knew I was really upset. She - ”

“Orla,” I said softly, but curtly. “I’m going to take care of it. I failed you today, and for that I’m sorry, but never again. Understand? I’ll never let you down again, for as long as I live. Do you trust me?”

“Yes,” she whispered. “I trust you, Caleb.”

Her hands clutched at me. I held her closer. She pressed her head into my chest.

“Let’s hope she doesn’t remember. If she does, that’s your story. Anything else, you demand a lawyer and we’ll figure it out from there. Understand? My dad’s got some good ones on retainer.”

She nodded.

“Hopefully, the police won’t even get involved. It was a fall. That’s it.”

I kissed her again and then reluctantly pulled away. I walked down the steps, holding Orla’s hand tightly. Her hand squeezed mine, crushing my fingers together. I stopped on the landing that Madeline laid on. She let out a little whimper, her hand reaching for the little pool of blood on her forehead.

“Can I leave you here for a moment?”

“Yes,” She answered.

“I’ll be right back,” I murmured and kissed the top of her head. I murmured, “Let her know she fell.”

Orla nodded and crouched down beside Madeline. I hurried down the remaining stairs and opened the exit door. The ambulance was parked at the curb and two paramedics were wheeling a gurney over, Georgie leading the way.

“Madeline, don’t move. Don’t move,” I heard Orla’s voice from above, growing more urgent, but retaining a gentle quality. The paramedics headed up the stairs, leaving the gurney on the ground level and I followed, not willing to leave Orla alone with the first responders.

“Get dad. She’s hammered. Orla tried to grab her but she slipped and fell down the stairs,” I was already halfway up the first set of stairs when I turned to find a curiously nodding Georgie. He asked no questions, and hurried back down the hall toward the reception. I climbed the steps to find Madeline sitting up, holding her forehead. Her eye was swollen and there was a nasty cut on her forehead. She was holding Orla’s hand tightly. Orla very gently helped Madeline push some hair away from the bleeding gash on her forehead. Her eyes found me and I gave her a comforting smile.

The back of my neck burned and prickled. I managed to keep from smiling too brightly. It stayed grim. I wanted to rip that dress right off of her and fuck her right there on the staircase.

“- and do you know who the president is?” the male paramedic asked. Madeline thought for a second, shook her head, and then answered correctly.

“What - what happened?” she asked.

“You slipped. I tried to catch you,” Orla added sadly, “I think I made it worse.”

I fought the urge to curve my lips upward.

“Oh, god, my head,” she muttered.

“We’re gonna get you something in the ambulance,” the female paramedic said. “You’re a wedding guest? How much have you had to drink?”

“God. A lot,” she answered.

“Let’s get you on the stretcher.”

A collar had been fastened to her neck.

“Would have been a lot worse if Ellie wasn’t there to catch you.”

The authoritative boom of my father’s voice echoed through the staircase, and I turned to see him standing beside me in his tux, the chief of police standing beside him in an ill-fitting black suit, both with cigars in their hands.

“Looking good, my boy,” Chief Becker said and clapped me on the shoulder. It had been years since I saw him last, informing me grimly that I was big for my age. Boys will be boys, but I couldn’t lose control like that. Not when the girl was so slight. People would get the wrong idea. It would put me in a bad position. It was just too easy for a woman to lie.

“Thanks chief,” I greeted with a nod.

“Staying out of trouble?”

“Of course,” I answered with a little grin.

The paramedics helped Madeline onto the stretcher. Orla got up and walked over to me. She slid her hand into mine, covering it with the other.

“Thank you, Ellie,” Madeline called softly as she was wheeled away.

Orla said nothing but watched her go and then turned her glassy eyes toward me.

“Chief Becker, this is my fiancée. She goes by Ellie.”

“Ellie. Good to meet you.”

“Good to meet you, sir,” she greeted. Both hands closed around mine and she turned her trembling body toward my arm.

“Bit of a fright, eh? Thank God you were here to catch her like you did. Could have been quite bad otherwise.”

She just nodded.

“I’m going to get her some fresh air. We won’t need to talk to the police or anything...” I said, feigning uncertainty by crinkling my brow.

“Oh, no. Run of the mill slip and fall. She shouldn’t have had so much to drink,” Chief Becker said. “Not worth the paperwork.”

“Perfect. Let us know if that changes.”

Chief Becker smiled and winked at me. I thanked my father with a quick nod and then led Orla back up the staircase to the very top floor. A number of private suites lined the hallways. As we got closer to ours, the one the women got ready in today, I began to walk faster, dragging her behind. It was a buildup of energy, a need to be alone with her, to have her all to myself. I opened the door.

“Caleb.”

I jerked her inside and she stumbled in after me. I slammed the door shut with her body, yanking her skirt up and pulling her pantyhose down. I growled when I felt another obstruction blocking me from her cunt.

“Underwear?” I asked, grabbing it and yanking it down hard.

“I’m sorry,” she breathed, but I felt like she was talking about more than just the underwear.

“How long?” I asked. Her shoes fell off as I ripped her underwear off over her ankles.

“I don’t...” she shook her head.

I lifted her up, bunching her dress up around her waist and walked us over to the couch. I threw her down on it and ripped at my belt.

“How long have you known that you loved me?”

Her hands had joined mine, free my erection from its confines.

“A month... a month or two,” she answered. I slapped at her hands, before grabbing them and holding them up above her head. If I had taken the time to run the head of my weeping cock against her opening, I would have found it hot and wet and ready. I didn’t have the self-control. In a desperate and violent need to be inside of her, I placed myself in her entrance and thrust inside of her with a single, forceful push, earning a beautiful cry of pleasure from her lips.

“A month,” I breathed, moving my hand from her wrists to wrap it around her throat. I pressed her into the couch with her, my fingers tightening. “You *bitch*.”

I kissed her then, hard and deep, trying to taste every inch of her. I broke off the kiss only when my lungs were burning for oxygen. Her legs wrapped around me and I buried my face into her neck, my mouth open, sucking and licking her soft flesh as I thrust into her. She clung to me tightly, her lips pressing to my ear as she panted with each violent thrust inside of her. I wanted to bite her. I wanted to bite her the way Furst bit his wife. But not in anger. I just wanted to be closer to her. Inside of her. I wanted to fuse with her. I couldn’t get close enough.

I felt sweat drop down the back of my neck, my temple, my forehead. My hair was damp and I could taste sweat on her skin.

“I need you like air, Orla. I love you,” I grit out in her ear. My voice broke and cracked, “I love you so fucking much.”

“I love you too,” she said. I squeezed my eyes shut. I wouldn’t cry, but I could have. “I love you, Caleb. Please. Please.”

She sobbed. She was crying. I caught her lips again. I tasted salt and iron. I pressed on foot to the floor and pulled her closer to adjust my angle. The couch scraped across the floor with each thrust, until we were pressed up against the wall. I pushed my lips to hers and pressed my tongue into her mouth, tasting every inch of her as I came in hard, deep thrusts. My body went rigid and my vision blurred. I groaned in her ear, holding her tight as I spent every ounce of myself deep inside of her.

She sagged limply against me, her head lolled back against the cushion. I ran my hand over her hair, half destroyed now. She opened her eyes and looked up at me.

“I love you,” she breathed. I could see it in her eyes. The trepidation and fear. Love was a terrible thing. The power it gave the other person was immeasurable, but when it was returned, it was ecstasy.

“And I love you,” I answered.

“We’re soulmates,” she said. It was both a statement and a question. I touched her face.

“Yes.”

She nodded and pulled me down toward her. I sagged into her, burying my face in her neck, breathing her in deeply. She ran her hands through my damp hair. There was so much more to say, so many more questions, so many more discussions to be had, but just for the moment, we were both content to enjoy the sound of the others breathing and know for once that everything was going to be OK.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I leaned back on the couch, fighting the urge to pull at my bowtie. Instead, I just slipped my fingers under my collar and tugged slightly. Before I could do too much damage, I draped my arms over the back of the couch and waited with a smile on my face. I heard the toilet flush and then the sound of the running water. Shortly after, Orla stepped out of the bathroom and shut the door softly behind her. She returned my smirk with a small smile of her own. She stopped in front of me.

“Caleb?” she asked. I lifted my eyebrows. “I love you.”

I let out a slow, deep breath, and then jerked my head to the spot beside me. She sat down beside me and I reached into my suit jacket.

“Caleb -”

I looked at her and shook my head. I pulled out the little piece of paper. I had written it down one night while she lay asleep beside me. I hadn’t been able to sleep. My nerves were too frayed.

“Don’t laugh at me,” I told her, meeting her gaze with a hard look. She just nodded, eyes opening and beautiful as they glistened. My heart was pounding hard in my chest, but it was easier to read now than it would have been this afternoon. I took a deep breath and began to read.

“I don’t do words very well and I don’t show love in the best ways,” I started, feeling a little ridiculous. If my brothers could see me now, they’d never let me live it down, but I didn’t care, because I knew this woman would want to hear it and she wouldn’t think less of me because of it. “My whole life I felt different. I didn’t belong anywhere or to anyone.”

I paused, surprised how difficult that was to say out loud. I stared at the page, trying to still the shaking of my hand.

““When I first met you, I thought you were beautiful. I loved the way your nose crinkled when you laughed. The little hiccup thing you do at the end.””

I smiled at her as she let out a breathy, embarrassed laugh. Her cheeks were pink and her eyes were wet.

““I liked your subtle humor and your composure. I liked how intelligent, kind, and thoughtful you were.””

I swallowed and took in a deep breath, forcing out of my lungs like a violent sigh.

““You are the most beautiful, most impressive woman, I ever met...””

I paused, my eyes moving over the rest of the page.

““I knew I wanted you more than I ever wanted anyone else in my life and you said no...I wasn't used to that.”

I took a long, deep breath.

““I made myself hate you. It made it easier to cope with, but I couldn't get you out of my head. All I could think about was you and how perfect you are and how I needed to be with you. I became obsessed with you. I needed to possess you.””

I paused a few more moments.

“I know I hurt you.”

I paused again, my tongue touching my bottom lip.

“When it started... I *wanted* to hurt you. I wanted to punish you for rejecting me. I wanted to teach you a lesson and hurt you like you hurt me.”

I blinked.

“If I could go back... I would do things differently. I would have been kinder. I would have been more patient. I would have been gentler. I would have told you more often how smart you are. How beautiful you are. How kind you are. The way I love your laugh and about the feeling I get in my chest when you smile. That I loved you and I wanted to take care of you.”

Her hand touched my bobbing knee and I reached out and put my free hand over hers. My fingers curled around her palm and she squeezed.

“but I’m not sorry that I made you mine and I won’t apologize because ... because we are meant to be together. I ...”

I stared at the pages, my neck hot, feeling like an idiot. I wasn’t a poet. I didn’t always have the words I needed to express myself. It was something I wasn’t good at. And I hated the way my hands were shaking. I was a consummate public speaker. I didn’t care what people thought of me.

I crumpled up the paper in my hands. I was about to toss it aside, but she placed her hand over mine.

“Please, Caleb?” she asked. I kept my gaze down and took a steadying breath. I had let her down enough today. I could do this small thing for her. I took the paper and straightened it out on my knee. I coughed, clearing my throat and breathed in hard through my nose.

“I need you in my life. I need you to feel whole. I need you to feel normal. I need you like I need my own heart and lungs to live. When you’re not with me I can’t breathe.”

Her nails dug into my hand.

“I promise that I will always love you, that I will always protect you, and that I will be a good, faithful husband to you and a warm and loving father to our children.”

I swallowed again.

“I’m sorry I caused you pain, but I’m not sorry I made you mine. And I won’t let you go, because I can’t live without you. But I’ll do everything in my power to make you as happy with me as I can. So you’re going to marry me and we’re going to have children and I’m going to make you happy. I love you.”

I stopped and folded the piece of paper. She took it from me and read it. I waited. When she looked up, her eyes were glistening.

“Can I keep this?”

“Of course,” I answered. She looked at it again and then folded it reverently.

“I liked the part where you asked,” she said through tears and laughed.

“I thought that might seem disingenuous,” I answered. She laughed again, placed her hands on either side of my face, and kissed me. It was a slow, soft, kiss, but our lips remained pressed together for some time. When the kiss ended, we kept our foreheads pressed together.

“I wish I had my picture,” she said. I frowned and she clarified. “Your birthday present, it’s a picture of us up at Monadnock. The one you love so much. I wrote out how I felt about you and I was going to give it to you and have you read it and then I was going to tell you I love you.”

“Best birthday present ever,” I responded. “I’d rather have heard it a month ago.”

She leaned back and nodded. We sat in a heavy but not uncomfortable silence.

“I shouldn’t have shut my phone off,” she finally said. “We promised to always talk. That was my demand and I didn’t do it for you. And I’m sorry. Full stop.”

“Thank you,” I said. I gave a smile. “*But...*”

“*And* - you should have told me about Rachelle,” she added.

“I know,” I said. “I really... I should have told you, I’m not trying to make excuses, but it never even occurred to me. We fucked eight years ago maybe five times? It meant nothing. I didn’t even remember we slept together until you said something. I should have thought about it and told you. What I’m trying to say is, I didn’t purposefully try and keep it from you. I wasn’t trying to hide it or get away with anything and it wasn’t malicious. I never had any feelings for her. I was just a fuckhead for a while and slept with a bunch of girls I didn’t care about. I’ve never had trouble getting girls into bed. I’m not kidding when I tell you I almost never got told no. There were so many that -”

“Caleb, you don’t need to tell me about all the girls you’ve slept with right now,” she said.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry for not telling you. I’m sorry.” I smiled at her. “Full stop.”

“You refused to talk to me too,” she added. “You can’t do that to me, Caleb.”

“You refused to talk to me first. *You shut off your phone*,” I reminded her, a tinge of defensiveness in my tone. She knew what that would do to me.

“Caleb, I’m not saying it’s fair,” she said looking at me. “So much about this,” she gestured between us, “Isn’t fair. And it never will be and if we try to force that we’ll never have any peace.”

She pointed to her temple. “It’s messy up here, Caleb. It’s real messy.”

I nodded. I touched her knee and she put her hands on mine.

“I needed you to talk to me,” she said. “Even if I’m being a crazy bitch. Which, I’m sorry Caleb, but that’s going to happen a lot.”

“I like your crazy,” I said. She looked at me, eyes wet, red, and puffy.

“You said you hated me,” she said, voice soft, broken. Pain flickered in her eyes.

“I said right now,” I said. She stared at me. “Like... right now, I’m so angry, I feel like I hate you, but that’s not permanent. I don’t actually hate you. I was just that angry.”

“Caleb...” she sighed. “That’s just...”

She smiled, but it was without amusement. She shook her head.

“You can’t say that to me. ‘I hate you.’ That’s what I saw. That’s what I read.”

I contemplated.

“Orla, I’m going to tell you a secret,” I said softly. “A secret I’ve never told anyone before.”

She waited, eyes wide with apprehension. I leveled her with a hard stare to drive home the severity of the admission.

“I don’t handle rejection well.”

A laugh burst from her lips. A mixture of pain and genuine amusement.

She stared at me and then a smile slowly spread across her face. Tired, darkly amused. She shook her head.

“I’d never have guessed.”

“Doesn’t seem like you do either.”

She paused and looked out the window. The sun was setting over the country club. It was a beautiful sight.

“I didn’t want to hurt her,” she said. “I just... it’s like being in a really dense fog, but if the air was thick like pea soup. You know? And when she said she was Amelia’s sister... I just needed her to stop so I could think. I needed to talk to you before she did anything. I never wanted to hurt her.”

“I believe you,” I said.

“She’s alright?”

“Yeah, she’s fine,” I said. I had no idea if that was true, but she was up and talking when she left. She had moved all her limbs. I thought she’d be fine, and I didn’t want Orla to worry. If she wasn’t, we’d deal with that when the time came.

“What happened?” I asked. She told me. How anxious she had been about telling me she loved me. How terrified she was of losing me because she hadn’t said it, or because I might get bored. How hurt and embarrassed she was when she found out about Rachelle. Her angry and knee jerk reaction to shut off the phone and the impending feeling of doom that came over her as she got her nails done. How she spiraled when I told her I hated her (but I said ‘right now’ and so I hadn’t actually told her I hated her. I didn’t correct her though), and how she was convinced I was going to break up with her.

I managed to keep the smile off my face as she told me what the thought of losing me meant to her. I didn’t enjoy her pain, but I enjoyed hearing her repeat the same feelings I had whenever I thought of losing her. It brought me a level of peace I didn’t know existed. I shared with her how I had felt leading up to my proposal. I told her how nervous I was. How scared. It would have been a lot better for everyone involved if she had told me she loved me a month ago.

“I couldn’t,” she said. “I was so scared... you wouldn’t believe me. Every moment I thought was right, I didn’t want to ruin. Then I had the birthday idea and I was so excited, because I knew you’d believe me if I did it this way. But I was just so scared at the same time... I was so convinced I was going to lose you somehow.”

I didn’t press her on that. She had told me countless times before that sometimes her fears didn’t make logical sense. It wasn’t about what she *knew*. It was about what she *felt*. I couldn’t relate to it, but I understood it on an intellectual level.

“I love you,” I told her. “That won’t ever change. You’re stuck with me. That’s all there is to it.”

“That simple, huh,” she said. She leaned back against the back of the couch. She looked utterly exhausted, her makeup long gone, her eyes still red rimmed and puffy, but she looked absolutely stunning in the fading light of the day all the same. I turned toward her and picked up her hand, admiring the ring on her finger.

“Now you really belong to me.”

It looked beautiful on her.

“Not yet,” she answered. “Not till the license is signed.”

“We can do a ceremony in the spring. Whatever you want, though my parents will want it here but... I want to go to the town hall on Monday. Get a license immediately. I can’t wait... I need it now.”

She smiled at me and nodded.

“9:01 am.”

I kissed her again.

“I understand you were anxious,” she said with a frown. “But why in the hell did you keep telling everyone you were my boss?”

I stiffened, my stomach tightening. It had seemed like a brilliant idea at the time, but now, I felt some anxiety in my chest. I knew this was the best option for us. I also knew I shouldn’t have done it without speaking to her first. That was going to be the point of contention.

“Amelia knows. What do we do about work? Did you get the job?”

I frowned.

“Oh, come on, Caleb. I’m a head case, I’m not stupid,” she said.

“I got an offer at Deloitte,” I admitted. She nodded and contemplated. She looked almost frightened and I felt a little glimmer of hope. Maybe she wouldn’t be too angry. “I turned it down.”

She looked up sharply.

“ *Why* ?”

“I’m not going to spend all day without you if I don’t have to. I need to have access to you. Get some head between calls, or bend you over my desk and fuck you after lunch.”

She didn’t return my smile.

“Then - then we’re right back where we started. Caleb - you could lose your job. Best case scenario, I keep my job and everyone thinks I’m a whore.”

“We don’t have to worry about that. I gave my notice on Thursday. Nick knows about us.”

“What? He... how? Were you made to resign? How did -”

“I told him. Well, confirmed,” I said, placing my hand over hers. “He had suspected... he asked if that was why I was leaving. I explained it to him in a palatable way... in case you decide to stay, you’ll still have your job.”

“In case I decide to stay? Do you want me to stop working?”

Her face was pulled downward with worry.

“No. No...” I took a sigh and then looked at her with a little smile. “Let me explain.”

Two Weeks Earlier

I hurried into the restaurant and straightened my tie. The receptionist smiled at me as I approached, and I checked myself in the mirror over her shoulder. I gently ran my hand over my hair, making sure the part was crisp and my hair was straight.

“I’m meeting with Mr. Maximilian Furst,” I informed her, not yet meeting her gaze. I fixed the collar of my shirt. I was about ten minutes late. I’d taken an Uber, which got me here faster than the train would have, but we got backed up in traffic approaching the restaurant, and I jumped out and all but ran the last four blocks.

“Oh, yes. He’s expecting you. Please follow me.”

I followed her into the restaurant, grateful for the air conditioner that was keeping the building cool. My shirt was stuck to my back.

Herr Furst was seated at a table in a dark navy suit and was moving his thumbs rapidly over his phone screen. He did not look pleased but he did not appear angry either. I pushed down the prickle of nerves as I approached. When he looked up, I inspected him for anger, but an easy smile came to his face. It seemed genuine and I relaxed.

“Very sorry, Herr Furst,” I said by way of greeting. I extended my hand to him, which he shook, but he did not stand. After a firm shake, I took my seat. “Traffic is a nightmare this time of day.”

“It always is in this city. Very narrow roads, poor public transport. Terribly planned city.”

“I agree. It never adapted for modern cars,” I answered, but I did feel a flicker of defensiveness for the city that I’d called home for over for over a decade. It was all well and good for someone from New England to shit on Boston. I didn’t take it kindly when it came

from an outsider. “I have to admit, you have me a bit off balance. I wasn’t expecting to see you today, that’s for sure. What brings you to Boston?”

“I am here to see you,” he answered. His smile was always a bit unnerving. It held a private kind of amusement. There was this sense that you had no idea why he was really smiling. “I was in New York on business. I flew here for this lunch. I leave for Berlin in...” he checked his watch.

“Five hours. I do not like being away from my girl when she is so close to giving birth but... I was assured by the doctor I had time.”

“To see me?” I asked in surprise. The waitress appeared and put down two drinks on the table.

“The Remy Martin,” Furst said and lifted his drink. I tried to hide my surprise. The little bit of cognac in my glass had to be at least fifty bucks. I clinked my glass with his and gave a smile.

“Are we celebrating something?” I asked.

“Hmm,” he said after taking a sip. “I hope so. How is that girl of yours?”

“Uh, she’s doing very well,” I smiled genuinely. “We’re very happy. Happier than ever actually.”

“Is that so,” he said. “I am pleased to hear it. She knows of your plans then?”

“Yes and no. She knows I’ve been interviewing. I’m certain of it, and she knows what that means for us. I’m going to keep it going just a bit longer. I’ll be proposing next weekend. I want to tell her it all then.”

Mr. Furst did not appear convinced and I fought down the urge to defend myself. That would only weaken my position and diminish myself in his eyes. I held my tongue. His lips curved upward slightly.

“You are a romantic, Mr. Trent.”

It was a simple observation. He gave no indication to me what he thought of the fact. I just gave a nod and a shrug, but I felt like my cheeks were flushed.

“She is behaving?”

“Yes. She’s been very obedient.”

“Hmm,” Furst mused, his eyes lighting up. I felt a tingle run through me as I thought of her. In truth, she’d been absolute perfection recently.

To not appear rude, I asked, “How is Mrs. Furst? Her pregnancy is going well?”

“Oh, yes. Child is healthy. Mother is healthy. She is due November 12. Another boy,” he added proudly.

“Congratulations.”

“Danke, my daughter will be well protected. We have not settled on a name. My wife likes Alexander. I like Niklas. If we could guarantee another son it would be no problem but... if our next children are girls...”

He waved his hand dismissively.

The waitress appeared and Furst ordered the Prime Rib. He handed his menu to the waitress and watched me scour the menu. “Money is no concern Mr. Trent. Order what your heart desires.”

I considered ordering something cheap, but ended up ordering the lamb chops, and Furst nodded appreciatively.

“A fine choice. Tell me, what is it you want out of your career?”

I sensed we were now approaching the purpose of his invitation. My heart was pounding and I took a moment to think. I considered the questions as I calmly examined the cognac in my glass. He let me think.

“I’ll stay in public accounting for a few more years. It’s great experience. I think eventually I’d like to go in-house somewhere. Head of tax for some bank or other company.”

“Why not now?” he asked.

“I don’t have the experience,” I answered honestly. “I’d never get hired.”

“Ah, but you think you could do it?” he asked, leaning forward. My brow knitted as I responded.

“I know I could,” I answered with certainty.

“I do not want a tax team you are not on,” he said simply.

“Sir, you’re in good hands. I promise you, if you stay - ”

“I do not care to switch to this other firm you leave for,” he said, waving his hand dismissively. “I have gained board approval for a US tax team on payroll. I have been given control to staff it. I am now in need of a head of tax.”

Whatever look came across my face, it brought a smirk to Furst’s.

“I want you.”

I stared at him, not sure I heard him correctly.

“You...” I laughed and shook my head. “I’m sorry, are you offering me a job?”

“I can offer you 1.2.”

I blinked at him.

“1.2?”

It took all my power not to stutter. He settled back into his seat with a self satisfied smirk.

“Of course, you will be entitled to bonuses, stock options, benefits, company paid trips to Europe.”

I sat, stunned, staring at him dumbly. He smirked and took a sip of his drink.

“You see why I think we should celebrate?”

“Sir I... what’s the catch?” I asked. I half expected him to tell me I needed to sell Orla into slavery.

“No catch,” he answered. “I am a businessman. I follow my instincts. I have good instincts with you. On top of that...” he leaned back and looked at me, icy blue burns frightening in their intensity, somehow ice cold, and burning hot at once. “We take care of our own.”

Furst stared intently. “You are not alone my friend. I remember - what a lonely feeling it once was.”

I blinked and I swallowed thickly.

“Chris ...”

His brow rose.

“Can I take him with me?”

“The team is yours to build,” he added, “and he is one of us.”

I held my tongue a moment, evaluated, and then decided to wait. I pressed on, “What would my job duties be?”

He outlined the position in detail. We shared another drink as we waited for our meal, but I nursed this one. I wanted to keep my wits about me. He was calm, relaxed, and described the job and his expectations. It would be more than I was perhaps ready for at that time, but I was no fool. This wasn’t an opportunity you passed up.

And 1.2. He confirmed my suspicions. 1.2 *million* . With bonuses and incentives and stocks and benefits on top of it. He’d had it all approved by the board. He agreed to use my current company for his M&A diligence. You couldn’t do that in-house. But in-house tax compliance for the entirety of the United States - that was mine. I would have the freedom to build my

own team, subject to Furst's and ultimately the board's approval. After a delicious meal, I finished the last of my cognac.

"I have to admit, sir. I'm a bit stunned. I never imagined being offered such an amazing opportunity."

"Sometimes half of life is who you know," Furst said. "But you've proven yourself capable. I would not offer you the position if I did not think you could do it. I want you for it."

I was surprised by his frankness. I would have expected a man like him to keep things a bit closer to the chest. I was both honored and frightened by that honesty. I considered my experience - it would be difficult - but I wasn't going to let that stop me. I was resourceful, I was intelligent. I'd figure it out.

"It's a better opportunity than I could ever ask for, and I will always be grateful to you for it, no matter how this conversation ends" I admitted. He looked both pleased and suspiciously curious. His lips curved and his eyes narrowed. "But I have one condition."

"And what is that?" he asked, leaning back with an amused smile on his face. I locked eyes with him and leaned forward. When I spoke, my voice was firm and brooked no room for argument.

"Orla."

The cold smile grew just a fraction of an inch, his already icy blue eyes hardening into little spheres of ice. I held his eyes, refusing to look away, and waited.

I walked out of the restaurant, unable to keep the smile from my face. Furst stepped out after me, looking far less pleased, but begrudgingly amused.

"You keep her in line," Furst told me as his car pulled up to the curb. "She's your responsibility."

“Yes, sir,” I answered. He clapped me on the arm and leaned.

“Put her to good use in the office and I’ll consider it a business investment. Need to keep my new head of tax happy.”

I shared in his laughter, feeling like I was on top of the world.

“She’ll be working overtime,” I told him. He laughed.

“Good man. Your offer letter will be in your email by the end of the week. I will hold off on Chris and your woman until you’ve spoken to them,” he said. “We will speak.”

He walked toward the car.

“Give my best to Mrs. Furst,” I called. He waved his response and shut the door of the black Tahoe.

I walked back to the office, taking my time, feeling almost high. I pulled out my phone as I stepped through the front doors. I walked over to the staircase, bypassing the elevators.

Get your sweet cunt to the supply closet.

I want to use my little office slut.

She replied in the affirmative. I got there before her, but she was stepping in after me very shortly afterward. It was some of the best sex I ever had.

Furst was true to his word and three days later I had the offer letter in my email. I was brushing my teeth in the morning, still rubbing sleep from my eyes when I saw it. My heart

surged and I was almost certain it was an email explaining it had all been some sick joke. I opened it, and sure enough, it was a bonafide, real deal, offer. I stared at the number again, head swimming.

I read it over again and quickly flipped my phone over when Orla came into the bathroom. She passed by me, her nails scraping down my bicep before she stepped into the shower.

I accepted the offer immediately, but I didn't go to Nick until the day before we left for the wedding. I had scheduled the in- person meeting with him the week before and he accepted without asking what it was about. I was certain before I stepped into his office that he knew. This was confirmed when I saw his grim face and sadly resigned eyes.

I sat down and gave him a somewhat melancholy smile.

"Let's hear it then," Nick said. "Is it Deloitte?"

"It was going to be," I admitted, and then told him the truth.

"That bastard," Nick said but not with any real malice. "I suppose even if I could match the salary, you wouldn't take it... considering your relationship with Ellie."

I stared at him and he shot me a bemused look.

"I have eyes," he said. "You two could have tried being a bit more subtle."

I sagged back in my chair with a self-deprecating smile.

"It just kind of happened," I lied. "Neither of us even knew it until we were in too deep. We started off as friends. It happened slowly. We started our romantic relationship well before my promotion. Months. We thought it would be fine because we didn't work on the same deals all that regularly and we didn't qualify for sequestration at our level. Then I got

promoted... I know once she got promoted we should have said something, but she'd been flagged for promotion for three months already... I didn't think it was an abuse of my position..."

I faked a wince and Nick nodded in grim understanding.

"I was young and in love once," Nick said. He smiled, "Now I'm... old and in love. Out of curiosity... is there anything I can do to get you to stay?"

I told him my salary.

"Well, I enjoyed working with you," he said and I let out a genuine laugh.

We talked for a bit longer. Some of it touched my new job, some of it my plans for the future. Nick said goodbye with a smile, a good luck, and an assurance he would say nothing, and Orla's job was secure. He only asked that we keep it quiet until after I had left. I agreed, though I wasn't thrilled about it. I respected Nick though, and he'd been good to me, so I was going to honor his request.

Orla stared at me after I finished, her face neutral, her eyes hard.

"Put her to good use in the office?" she said dryly. "I'll consider it a business investment?"

Of course that's what she took out of that explanation. Her lips pinched together and she looked off to the side. Blood was flowing between my legs and I checked my watch. We'd need to make an appearance soon, but I could probably fuck her one more time before we went.

"Will I have to interview with him?" she asked.

“No,” I answered. I put my hand on her knee. “You’ll have to interview with me.”

I slid my hand upward with a smirk.

“And I can be quite critical.”

My fingers brushed her abused pussy and she sucked in a breath. I pressed my mouth to hers, wanting her lips to be as swollen and puffy as her pussy when we went back downstairs.

“You’ll come with me then?” I asked, pushing my fingers inside of her. I had expected a fight.

“I’ll go anywhere with you, Caleb,” she murmured into my mouth. “I’m all in. I’m done fighting it. I want you. I love you. I’ll follow you anywhere.”

I placed my other hand on face, hand enveloping her slender neck and half her jaw.

“I’m choosing to believe you. To trust you. You have my whole heart. Please take care of it.”

I let out a deep breath against her lips as a shudder radiated through me. I lowered her down onto the couch.

“I want you to come off the pill,” I told her.

“Caleb,” she said. I stiffened as I felt her refusal incoming. “Caleb, look at me.”

Her hands grabbed either side of my face and drew my gaze up from her beautiful body to her earnest green eyes.

“Caleb, this is not a rejection,” she said sternly. “I want children. I want *your* children.” She leveled me with her gaze to drive the point home before continuing. “I just pushed somebody down a flight of stairs. Do you think I’m ready to be a mother?”

I said nothing and dropped my gaze back to her body. I couldn’t say yes, but I wouldn’t say no. Perhaps adding the stressor of children to our lives right now wouldn’t be the best course of action.

“Let’s string together a couple years of peace before we bring children into our lives,” she said.

I collected her wrists and lifted them above her head. I groped one of her tits firmly in my hand, before running my fingertips over her nipple through the fabric.

“You’re going to be an amazing mother,” I murmured. I smiled at her. “You already are.”

Her lips turned upward and she shifted her hips, spreading her legs beneath me.

“Can I get a head start on the interview process? Sir?”

I looked up to find her looking up at me demurely, with a little glimmer in her eye.

“I think that’d be best,” I answered, sliding my hand up her thigh and hiking her dress up. “The process will be very thorough.”

I pulled at my pants, freeing my already throbbing cock, eyes on her pink cunt.

“I think we’ll need to have multiple rounds,” I said. “To see how committed you are.”

“Of course, sir. Whatever you say,” she said. I slicked the head of my cock in her wet folds. She moaned in protest as I lingered, enjoying the way my cock looked sliding along her pussy.

“Caleb, please.”

My lips turned upward and I pinned her with a stare.

“I love when you beg,” I said.

“I need you inside me,” she said. “Please.”

I pressed the head of my cock into her before pulling free and pressing my weeping slit against her puffy clit. She whimpered.

“Caleb, please,” she said again, lifting her hips up. “Please.”

I continued to tease her.

“I think we should discuss your work duties,” I said, tilting my head slightly. I pressed the tip of my dick to her entrance again, gently pushing it deeper before pulling it free and sliding the shaft up her folds.

“I’ll do whatever you want,” she pouted. “Just please fuck me.”

“Naughty girl,” I teased, but my cock was straining. As much as I enjoyed teasing her, I was worried I would last long enough inside of her to get her to orgasm. I let my cock go, resting against her warmth, and pressed my thumb to her clit. “I have a strict dress code. No underwear in the office.”

“Yes, Caleb,” she answered. I massaged her clit in firm circles.

“Tight pencil skirts, silk button down blouses,” I said.

“Yes, whatever you want,” she agreed, lifting her hips into my hand. I slid two fingers into her and circled them upward. She moaned and I added a third finger.

“You’ll be tasked with limiting my stress,” I told her. “Keeping me calm and satisfied.”

“Yes, oh...”

I loved my fingers in and out of her, my thumb still on her clit.

“Does that turn you on?” I asked her.

“Yes, Caleb. Please, I want you inside me.”

“I am inside you,” I pointed out, moving my fingers faster and pushing down on her clit.

“Your cock. Please. I need it.”

“My dirty whore,” I purred. I felt a head of sweat on my forehead. “So desperate for me.”

“Yes. I am,” she whimpered. I looked up and caught her eye. She looked so gorgeous. Absolute perfection. Her face was contorted with pleasure, but painful desperation shone brightly in her eyes.

“Then say it,” I said.

“I’m desperate for you, Caleb. I need you. I want you. I love you,” she said. “I worship you.”

I slammed into her. I couldn’t stop myself. I needed to be inside her. The cry of pleasure that escaped her was intoxicating. I used the hand not on her wrist to scrunch her face together.

“Open.”

She obeyed, opening her mouth and presenting her tongue. I collected a healthy amount of saliva in my mouth before letting it fall onto her tongue. It collected on her tongue and I felt the veins of my neck bulge.

“Come for me,” I ordered, slapping her cheek hard. I forced my fingers into her mouth.

“Come for me, now.”

Her hips bucked against me, grinding her clit against me as hard as she could manage each time I thrust into her. I angled my hips the way I knew she liked, and soon she was writhing around me, her walls tightening and clutching, and I felt her pull against my grip with all her strength to try and wrap her arms around me. The feel of her feeble attempts, the way she tried to swallow her cry of pleasure by biting down hard on her lower lip, and the way her face scrunched up and her mouth sucked hard on my fingers had my entire body tensing, and she brought me to climax right along with her.

I buried my sweaty face in the crook of her sweaty neck and finally let go of her hands. Her fingers slicked back my damp hair and she turned her lips into my ear.

“I love you so much it scares me, Caleb,” she whispered to me. “I can’t live without you.”

I let out a low breath because those words touched my soul, deep in the center of my chest.

“You’ll never have to,” I vowed. “I’ll destroy us both.”

I smiled at her, trailing my thumb along her lower lip.

“I mean it, Caleb. It scares me. You broke down the walls and now I’m just... *exposed*. ”

“Terrifying isn’t it,” I said.

“But you have all the control,” she said softly. “You don’t know... what it feels like -”

“I can’t lose you anymore than you can lose me,” I answered. “We’re in deep. And there’s no place I’d rather be.”

Her nails gently scraped down my face and then looped around my neck.

“I love you, Orla. Desperately. Beyond reason. That won’t go away. I’ve always been... intense in my relationships. I can tell you - I’ve *never* felt this way. *Never*. I *love* you.”

She nodded and I pressed my forehead to hers.

“I wouldn’t release the pictures,” I admitted to her. “I would have - when it started. Not anymore. I couldn’t do that to you. I couldn’t let another man see you like that - that’s mine to see... no one else’s.”

I pushed my thumb into her mouth. Her swollen lips sucked gently. Her teeth pressed at the joint, holding me in place.

“I’d get you back though,” I murmured. “I’d find a way to get away with it, and you’d disappear, and you’d spend your life tied to my bed...” I shook my head. “You don’t have to worry about the pictures. But I’d find a way... I’d never let you go.”

“I’m sure our new boss would help you,” she responded with a smile. “Happily.”

“I bet he would,” I grinned. I grew graver, my eyes dropping to her mouth. “You have no idea... the lengths I’d go to...”

“I have some,” she answered. She pulled me down to a kiss.

“Should we go back down?” she finally asked, but I wished she hadn’t.

“We should,” I answered. We kissed a bit longer. I wanted to stay there forever. “We can’t talk it all through now...”

“We have forever to talk,” she agreed. “Right?”

“Oh, Orla,” I breathed. “I plan on dragging you down to hell with me when the time comes.”

Her response was a kiss.

We got cleaned up in the bathroom together. When we left, her lips were still puffy and my tux was rumpled, but we walked back into the reception with smiles on our faces, her hands clutching mine tightly. The lights were low and the dance floor was packed, so I wasn’t too concerned about my wrinkled tux or her puffy lips and mussed hair. Anyone would most likely chalk it up to dancing anyway.

We stepped into the room, and I caught Georgie looking over Orla, an amused, little smile on his lips. His eyes met mine next and he winked, before turning his eyes back to his wife where she was dancing with a cousin.

We got to our table and sat down. Our dinners were long gone but I told Orla I was going to go get her some desserts from the dessert table. Chris appeared then with a plate full of them.

“Well?” Chris, eyes darting between us.

“She said yes,” I told Chris, who beamed one of his rare, genuine smiles. He clapped me on the shoulder.

“Fuck yes man.”

“To be clear,” Orla said, glancing around before speaking. “He didn’t *ask*.”

“Georgie told me what happened,” Chris said. “You guys alright?”

“We’re good,” I answered. Orla was pulling apart a pastry when a breathless Marci appeared with a grin.

“Let me see,” she panted, reaching for Orla’s hand. “Oh my God, it’s stunning. You have impeccable taste, Caleb.”

“I know,” I answered, and my eyes met Orla’s.

“Congrats, you two.” She leaned down and kissed Orla’s cheek. “Happy to have you.”

“Indeed,” Georgie’s voice floated over my shoulder. I turned to find him with his hands in his pockets, grinning knowingly down at Orla. “Welcome to the family.”

She smiled at him and then cast a nervous glance toward me.

“What’re you playing at, baby brother?” Josh appeared next, arm over my shoulder, jostling me. “Getting engaged on my wedding day?”

“He got engaged on his birthday,” Orla answered sharply. Georgie’s grin widened.

“Good to see you two made up. I bet you apologized *thoroughly*,” Josh said, looking at Orla. Orla glared at him. “Come on. I want a picture of us three.”

Josh hit my chest and walked away with Georgie walking slowly behind. Orla gave me a little nod. We went outside to take the picture. Josh, as the groom in the middle, Georgie and I flanking him. A similar photo as the one we took at Georgie’s wedding, but Georgie was in the middle. As I smiled at the camera, I couldn’t help but think about how it would be my turn next, at my wedding to Orla.

I was cloud nine as I walked back to Orla. I wanted to dance with her. I wanted her to tell me she loved me again and again and again. My joy faltered ever so slightly when I returned to the dance hall, and found Orla on the dance floor in the arms of my father.

I watched Caleb walk away with his brothers, a smile on my face. Chris slid in beside me.

“So, did we say it?” he asked. I glared at him, but then a smile touched my lips against my will. I nodded and looked at my ring.

“Do you know how fucking crazy you two idiots made me. He’s going to propose and switch jobs, but won’t tell you. You’re in love with him, but won’t tell him. You’ve both sworn me to secrecy, and you’re both losing your mind over the other. It’s like a badly written twisted rom-com. It’s been fucking exhausting.”

“My apologies,” I said sarcastically.

“Well, I think we all learned a lesson in the importance of communication”.

“No. I thought she was you.”

He looked at me, eyes narrowing, and then smiled.

“I’m happy for you both,” he said genuinely. I smiled back at him. Then he added, “you’re welcome.”

My smile dropped and I shook my head, looking back toward where Caleb had gone. It was just in time to find Mr. Trent stopped at the end of our table.

“You two enjoying yourselves?” he asked us. My stomach constricted and I nodded while Chris answered.

“Ellie,” he said and held out his hand. “I’d like a dance with my future daughter-in-law.”

He grinned, but it was clear to me there was no refusing this request. I put on the best smile I could muster and rose, placing my hand in his, and allowed him to gently guide me onto the dance floor. A slow, melodic love song was playing.

Mr. Trent smiled at me, creases forming around his eyes. Caleb favored his mother when it came to coloring, but he had his father’s eyes, and the same square jaw and Grecian nose.

“Congratulations,” he said to me, moving us slowly, but skillfully across the floor. It felt strange being so close to a stranger, it wasn’t a thing I enjoyed. One of my hands was in his, the other on his shoulder. His other hand was on my mid back, the hand holding mine firm, but not uncomfortably so.

“Thank you, sir,” I answered. The creases around his eyes deepened.

“Please. George.”

“George,” I corrected. He tilted his head to the side as he looked at me. “Thank you for... for helping.”

I had no idea what he knew, if anything. I suspected he didn’t have details, I suspected further he didn’t want them, but I was certain he knew the story he himself told was not what happened.

“Anything for my family,” he said. The song continued on, soft and melodic, and I wished I was in Caleb’s embrace. I glanced over at the table and my heart lurched when I found Caleb back at the table, leaning against it, sipping a whiskey, eyes intently on me. I smiled at him, just the sight of him lowering my anxiety. George Trent followed my gaze.

“He’s a good boy.”

He turned his gaze back on me. His eyes dipped to my neck.

“Even if he can be a bit overzealous.”

I stared at him, not sure what to say. My face flushed and I wondered if the hickey was visible through the makeup.

“Of course, you know that about him already.”

I frowned and he lifted his brow. He continued.

“I would hope so. If you’re going to be married.”

“I know who he is,” I answered. George Trent nodded, a grimmer expression coming to his face.

“If you have any doubts that you can’t handle it, I’ll offer you an out now. Money, opportunities, whatever it will take. It is best for you and for him. If you need to get out, now is the time.”

I stared at him a few moments, a frown on my face.

“I love your son, Mr. Trent.”

I didn’t want to call him George. It was too familiar and I didn’t like him right now. The creases at his eyes deepened as his smile grew ever so slightly. I added firmly, “nothing can separate us.”

“Don’t misunderstand me, Ellie. I do not want to be rid of you. Georgie says you keep Caleb calm, that he listens to you, alters his behaviors because he knows what will please you and what will displease you. Chris tells me he’s never seen Caleb so happy, that you temper him. He speaks very highly of you. I think you’re very good for my son. I’m happy he found you.”

I nodded, feeling more at ease and I felt a rush of warmth for Caleb. I turned to look at him and smiled. He smiled back, eyes still on me, leaning against the table.

“But I know that can be a tall task, and if you don’t think you’re up for it, we best part ways as friends...”

I looked back at him and realized he was threatening me with a smile, a warm gaze, and a slow dance. The message was clear. If I ever thought I was going to turn on Caleb, cause problems for the family, I’d regret it.

“Caleb has done more for me than you will ever know. I love him more than anything. I would never hurt him. In any way.”

Not unless he tried to leave me.

“Well, that’s so wonderful to hear,” he said, smile widening. The song ended and he stepped back, taking both my hands and raising them to his mouth for a kiss. His lips never touched my skin.

“Welcome to the family.”

He moved away, giving a nod in Caleb’s direction. He was there to intercept me immediately. The next song was another slow love song, and Caleb collected me in his arms and held me close.

“How’d that go?” he asked. I smiled at him, taking in his dark gray eyes, Grecian nose, and broad face.

“I love you,” I answered. His eyes glimmered with that frightful intensity, that burning obsession.

He smiled and leaned down to murmur, “I’ll destroy us both.”

I flushed and smiled in embarrassment. I was comforted knowing Madeline was going to be just fine though, and she didn’t remember a thing.

“I’ll destroy us both,” I repeated. I wrapped my arms around his neck and he leaned down to kiss me. He kissed my teeth, the smile on my face impossible to contain, and we both laughed, softly swaying to the music.

“What did he say to you?” he asked again.

“That you were a good boy and that he loved you.”

Caleb frowned and looked over at his father, who was now dancing with his wife.

“He said that. He said those words?”

“He didn’t need to,” I answered. “He wanted to make sure I was good enough for you.”

“I highly doubt that,” he snorted. I smiled at him. He brought his gaze back to mine. “Probably wanted to make sure you didn’t plan on besmirching the good name of Trent with the truth of their son’s sexual deviance.”

Something must have flickered across his face because he let out a little laugh.

“Ah, I thought so,” he said.

“Your family loves you, Caleb. The same way mine does. Not the way we want them to, but the best they can. That’s why we have each other.”

He gazed down at me. I felt a pull on my chest. I was looking at the most important person in my entire world. The only thing I ever needed for the rest of my life was him.

“I love you so much,” he whispered. We swayed softly to the love song playing. His arms circled around my waist.

“I love you too,” I answered. He pressed his forehead to mine. We danced silently, swaying to the sound of the music, and I closed my eyes, so overcome with emotion that I was afraid I might cry.

“Are you alright?” he asked softly and I nodded. I looked up at him and smiled.

“I’m so happy,” I whispered.

“Me too,” he answered. I leaned into him, pressing my face to his chest. I closed my eyes and let myself get lost in the feeling, wishing the song would never end.

I was sweaty and breathless from dancing. Caleb and I spent most of the night on the dance floor. At one point, I found myself doing the YMCA with Josh. Then the Macarena with Georgie. At another point, I was being spun around by Chris, twirled into Caleb’s awaiting arms. Valencia tracked me down. She wanted a photo of her and Marci and she wanted me in it too. She congratulated me on the engagement, complimented the ring, and said she suspected Caleb would have something planned to get back at her for their choice of wedding date. I brushed it off, too happy to be bothered. When I returned, I found Caleb talking to his father, who smiled at me and nodded, departing when I got back to him.

“Madeline is fine,” Caleb told me. “Discharged and back at her hotel. She has a pretty solid concussion, says she can’t remember a thing other than running into you in the staircase and offering you a cigarette. Doctors say she’ll recover completely.”

The relief I felt after that moment left me feeling deliciously happy and I pulled Caleb into a kiss.

“We’re gonna head back,” Caleb told Chris, wrapping an arm around my middle.”

I was gulping down my water, hot, sweaty, and exhausted in the best kind of way.

“One for the road?” Chris asked us, pointing and walking away backwards. He returned to the table with a whiskey for Caleb, a beer for himself, and a gin and tonic for me. I looked at Caleb, unsure if I should drink, considering my reintroduction to alcohol this weekend hadn’t gone particularly well. Caleb gave me a little nod and I brought the straw to my lips.

“So, I was thinking,” Chris said, leaning an elbow on the table and spinning his glass once. “Totally random, but, I think in honor of our friendship, that just once, before the other is married, we fuck the other’s bride to be.”

My cheeks flushed and I pinned Chris with a hard glare. Chris pretended to be shocked.

“Oh my god, that’s you, Ellie, isn’t it?”

“Shut the fuck up, Chris,” Caleb said, not amused.

“I thought we shared everything?” Chris said, pretending to be hurt. Caleb had his arm around me. Chris’ eyes moved to my lips which were wrapped around my straw. They moved back to Caleb.

“No, but seriously,” he said, looking between me and Caleb. “I’m really fucking happy for you guys. Really. I love you both.”

My eyes burned and I stared at him, but then his blue eyes found mine and I saw no insincerity there. I looked at Caleb and smiled. I leaned forward and kissed him again.

“I love you,” I told him.

“I love you too,” he answered and kissed me again.

“Excuse me. I just said something fucking heartfelt, and your response is to tell each other you love each other.”

“I love you too, man,” Caleb said and reached out to slap his hand. “I wouldn’t have gotten her without you.”

“Damn fucking right,” Chris said. He looked at me, waiting expectantly. When I stared back he raised his eyebrows. “It’s your turn, Ellie.”

“I love how good a friend you are to Caleb,” I said. He jutted out his lower lip contemplatively and nodded.

“I’ll take it,” he said. He took a swig of his beer. I finished my gin and tonic quickly, a bit embarrassed by Chris’s glance at the empty drink. He looked back at Caleb. They chatted a few moments about logistics tomorrow. When we’d drive home. If Caleb thought we’d be up for breakfast. I just felt so good and so warm and I gazed at Caleb, unable to believe that he was mine and I was his. I wrapped my arms around his and pressed my nose into his arm.

“What do you think?” Caleb asked me.

I looked at him. “What? Oh um... it’s what... whatever you want.”

Was I slurring slightly?

Caleb frowned at me, glanced at my glass, and then a slow smirk came to his face and he looked at Chris. Chris grinned wolfishly and raised his beer bottle.

“My engagement gift to you,” Chris said. I didn’t understand, and Caleb draped his arm over my shoulder, and clinked his whiskey glass to Chris’ beer. Caleb smiled down at me, running his thumb over my lip.

“Don’t worry, baby. We’ll watch it together tomorrow.”

I frowned.

“What - what are you...”

Chris looked down at my gin and tonic and raised both eyebrows.

“For old times' sake,” he said with a grin.

Then I understood. I looked at Caleb, to find him looking me over with that dark, predatory look. I shivered as I thought about all the things he was going to do to me tonight... how I'd have no way to stop him, how I wouldn't even remember it... not until we watched it together. His eyes looked back up at me, his eyes burning with hungry and fiery intensity. I wrapped my arms around his neck.

“I'll destroy us both,” I told him. He smiled.

“I'll destroy us both,” he murmured. I kissed him. Deep, slow, lovingly. The last thing I can remember thinking before my memory was lost to me, was just how deeply I loved this man.

Waking up Monday, it felt like I was living a different life. I couldn't fathom being this happy, this at peace. It wasn't all bliss though. Caleb came to stand behind me at the sink and placed soft, warm kisses along my neck as he slowly slid the engagement ring off my finger. I watched him in the mirror as he unfastened my necklace. He slid the ring onto it and then put the necklace back around my neck. The dress he put me in that day and a high neckline, and he tucked the ring inside.

“Not for long,” he promised, wrapping his arms around me. “I want the entire world to know.”

“I believe you,” I said. And I did. For the first time in my life, I wasn't plagued by any doubt. Not about this. Not about him. I trusted him and that felt so... safe. We would be going for our marriage license on Wednesday when our schedules were clear. I convinced him we couldn't both call out sick and miss important calls. He wasn't thrilled, but he had relented.

We rode in on the T, my hand on his tie until we got to Arlington, and then I let him go. We walked to Dunkin Donuts, we got Eddie his coffee, and we went up to our desks. It was at 9:15am that Caleb sent the email announcing his departure from the firm. He thanked

everyone he had worked with, gave the date of his last day, and hoped he could stay in touch and keep the relationships he had fostered here for years to come. Everyone was shocked. I think they would be shocked more when Chris gave his notice in two months' time, with mine to follow shortly after.

It all just felt like a dream. An impossibly wonderful dream.

“Ellie?”

I turned in my chair around 11:30 to find Amelia standing in the doorway. I waited, my heart pounding violently in my chest. I hadn't left my cubicle today, and although all the emails in response to Caleb's departure were kind and congratulatory, I wondered if word had gotten around about our relationship yet. I might have pushed Madeline down a flight of stairs, but that didn't change the fact that Amelia already knew about us. She had already received the picture of us together. The rumors, or truth in this case, could still spread. These next few months could be painful, and although Caleb told me I could quit at any time if I needed to, I didn't want it to come to that.

“Do you have a sec?” she asked and I nodded. “Madeline told me what happened... what you did for her.”

My stomach tightened and knotted and I just nodded, my cheeks flushed red. Her voice was low and she stepped in toward my desk.

“Thank you... for taking care of her,” she said. Again, all I could was nod. My throat hurt. She glanced over the top of the cubicle wall before she put her phone flat on my desk. It was open to a text thread with her sister.

Is this them? The message read, with a picture of Caleb and I, hand and hand, grinning at each other at the rehearsal dinner, clearly far closer than simple work colleagues should be.

Omg yes! I saw underneath it. Whatever else was said I did not see, because Ameila pressed down on the photo, selected more options, and jabbed the little trash can. The photo was

deleted from her phone and though I knew it could still be saved somewhere, and Madeline might still have it, the message it was designed to send was clear.

“Won’t come from me,” Amelia said and picked up her phone. “Good luck. I mean that.”

She was almost out of the cubicle when I stopped her.

“Amelia?” I called. She turned. “Thank you.”

She nodded, gave a small smile, and then walked away.

The break room was packed when I got in. Caleb was leaning up against the counter, fielding questions from everyone on his new job. He was in his glory, the center of attention, hand in his pocket, coffee in the other, a cocky smile on his face, looking ungodly handsome in his navy suit, his hair perfectly combed. As I entered, he was pushing himself up from the counter. He would be eating a late lunch. He had a call at 12:30 he had to get to. We shared a small smile as we passed each other.

I opened the fridge and retrieved the sub and coke zero Caleb had bought for me. A few people were still tossing Caleb a few questions and congratulations, when his voice cut through them.

“Oh... Orla?” he said. I turned to find him standing in the doorway. The room had fallen silent and everyone waited for him to speak.

“Yeah?” I asked him.

“Can I take you out? Maybe buy you a cup of coffee?” he asked. My cheeks burned, all eyes turning to look at me.

“That’d be great,” I answered with a smile.

“Awesome,” he smiled and then turned his eyes to meet Danny’s in the corner. He smiled a beat or so more, before he turned and left the room without another word. I turned back to put my sub on my plate, for the first time in my life, not caring at all about the stunned silence and open stares I was receiving from everyone else in the room.

I made no attempt to hide the smile on my face.

Chapter End Notes

I know many of you wanted more of their happy life together... but I don't do happy (endings notwithstanding). I do tension and angst, and once that breaks, I bounce. Hopefully the epilogue will satisfy some of that for you. I hope to have that up soon.

Thank you to everyone who's still reading and leaving comments. It means the world to me and hopefully you enjoy the ending.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!