

THE EXODUS SERIES

CRY LITTLE SISTER

WILLOW MCQUARRY

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This is a **taboo dark romance**. Please keep out of reach of children. They don't need to know mommy/daddy reads some messed-up shit about half-siblings fucking. Seriously, they don't need to know.

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BLURB

*Cry, little sister, and I'll kill them all for you.
Scream, little sister, and I'll silence them all for you.
Laugh, little sister, and I'll rip my heart out for you.*

Moan, little sister, and use me, for I am yours.

*They don't listen to you, but I do. I hear your cries, and if no one will step up for you, then I will.
Let me be your voice, little sister, and I'll make everyone pay for hurting you.*



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SCHIZOAFFECTIVE DISORDER

Schizoaffective disorder is a chronic mental-health condition that involves symptoms of both schizophrenia and a mood disorder like major depressive disorder or bipolar disorder.

Many people with schizophrenia are incorrectly diagnosed at first with depression or bipolar disorder.

Scientists don't know for sure if schizoaffective disorder is related mainly to schizophrenia or a mood disorder, but it's usually viewed and treated as a combination of both conditions.

Only a tiny number of people get schizoaffective disorder—.03% of the population. It's equally likely to affect men and women, but men usually get it at a younger age. Doctors can help manage it, but most people diagnosed with it have relapses. People who have it often have problems with substance abuse as well.

Symptoms:

- Delusions (false, sometimes strange beliefs that the person refuses to give up, even when they get the facts)
- Depression symptoms (feeling empty, sad, or worthless)
- Hallucinations (sensing things that aren't real, such as hearing voices)
- Lack of personal care (not staying clean or keeping up appearance)
- Mania or sudden, out-of-character jumps in energy levels or happiness, racing thoughts, or risky behavior
- Problems with speech and communication, only giving partial answers to questions, or giving answers that are unrelated
(The doctor may call this disorganized thinking)
- Trouble at work, school, or in social settings

Source WebMD



Disclaimer: While Dahlia has a mental illness, Jaxon doesn't. He experiences a lot of anger because of his past trauma and hatred of people.

CONTENT

Mentions: past child sexual abuse, sex trafficking

Graphic: murder; self-harm; body shaming; bullying; ableism; mental illness (schizoaffective disorder, misophonia, depression, bipolar, hallucinations); blackout rage that stems from past trauma and hatred of people; neglectful parents; death of parents; main male character deceiving the female main character; using food to murder a character; eating said food covered in blood; cussing; assault; needles; injection to knock the FMC out; violence; verbal abuse by parents; turning body parts and fluids into jewelry; giving an underaged child alcohol

Relationship: graphic sexual content; incest; dub-con; unprotected sex; masturbation; forced marriage; virgins; pierced dick; oral sex; anal sex; ass to mouth; choking; manipulation; public sex; mask kink; kidnapping; praise kink; degradation kink; spanking

PLAYLIST

“Cry Little Sister” Marilyn Manson
“Like U” Rosenfield
“Under Your Skin” Aesthetic Perfection
“Dirty Mind” Boy Epic
“She Thinks of Me” Landon Tewers
“Dangerous Hands” Austin Giorgio
“Make Me Feel” Elvis Drew
“Who Do You Want” Ex Habit
“What It Cost” Bad Omens
“Like A Villain” Bad Omens
“Sure Thing” Miguel
“Custer” Slipknot
“Cute Girl” Diggy Graves
“Rein raus” Rammstein
“Creep” Radiohead
“Iliinnee” Izzamuzzic

Listen to more of the playlist on [Spotify](#).

Dedicated to the plus-size girlies who want to be folded like a pretzel by a hot biker with piercings that are for her pleasure

CHAPTER 1



DAHLIA

Eleven Years Old

I trail behind Mom as we enter the new home she told me about a couple of days ago. My jaw drops at how huge the house is. There's a neat fountain across from the front doors and a circle driveway that can easily fit five cars. The yard is large, with trees and flowers that I can't wait to explore. I'm curious how the backyard looks and if there's a jungle gym I can play on. The swing is my favorite. I hope my dad will push me on it while we laugh together.

A couple days before we moved, Mom promised me this would be our forever home and that I'd have a dad and a half-brother. I didn't understand why they weren't around before, and when I asked, Mom shut down and told me to be quiet. Even though it confuses me, I'm still excited that I'll have the dad I've been praying for. Having a brother is a cherry on top because playing by myself gets boring and lonely.

My heart hammers against my ribs, and I worry I'll puke any second now. I worry about what they'll think of me when we meet. I've never had luck with making friends, and even adults yell at me for no reason.

Two enormous front doors loom before me. I squint my eyes and look closer at the door handles, which are shaped like lions with a knocker between their teeth. Mom walks inside without knocking, and I hesitate, worrying we'll get in trouble. But that's a silly fear because this is our house now.

My jaw drops as I shuffle through the gigantic front room. Scenic paintings and detailed portraits hang on the cream walls that I'm sure I'd get yelled at for touching.

I take a deep breath, inhaling the scent of apple pie mixed with burning wood from a fireplace. The homey smell eases the tension in my muscles, little by little. Our old house always smelled like that, and Mom told me it was because of the candles she burned whenever we were home.

Voices carry from a room ahead of us, and Mom follows them, with me trailing close behind her. My steps falter as we enter the largest kitchen I've ever seen. It could easily swallow our old one and still have space left over.

"Evelyn," a large man greets Mom.

I wonder if that's my dad, but I don't want to jump to conclusions. Mom always told me assuming things makes an ass out

of you and me. I don't understand that last part or why she cussed in front of me when she always got onto me when I took the lord's name in vain.

"There you are," Mom coos. She falls into his arms, her head leaning back as he kisses her.

I pause and bury my fingers into the skirt of my dress, worrying the soft material. That must be my dad after all. His deep-navy suit and black tie remind me of the rich men in the romance movies Mom watches all the time. I touch a lock of my brown hair as I stare at him, noticing that we have the same shade.

"I hope the trip wasn't too bad," he says as he pulls away from the kiss, his bright eyes on Mom.

Why hasn't he said hi to me? He must've seen me by now, standing awkwardly aside and waiting to be noticed. I wait for Mom to introduce me, but she talks about the movers and how frustrating they've been.

Feeling my stare, Dad looks away from her and turns his attention to me. He shallowly nods while Mom complains about the move. His gaze sweeps over me, and I glance down at the pink dress I paired with white buckle shoes. My cheeks warm as his eyebrows hike up his forehead, then dip down like it upsets him that I'm wearing this. Just as quickly, he looks back at Mom, not saying a word to me or letting her know I'm standing here waiting for them to say something to me.

I bite the inside of my bottom lip, shifting my weight from one leg to the other. "Mom," I say.

She keeps talking and even raises her voice to cover mine.

My stomach twists into knots. I hear my teacher from class in my head, telling me to speak up because I talk too softly. I've always hated being called on during class because of that. Sometimes I stumble over my words, or I answer a question wrong. The kids in my class chuckle every time. Even while I talk to Mom, she rolls her eyes and tells me to spit it out and to stop mumbling.

Sighing, I lower my gaze to the floor. I'll ask her later, when she isn't busy.

I turn away from them and wander around the large house, exploring all the rooms. Floor-to-ceiling windows let sunlight into the living area, where a large couch that can fit all of us stands in the center of the room.

I find the master bedroom on the same floor, and it's the most humongous room I've ever seen. It has the same cream walls, and the white sheets and fluffy pillows remind me of feathers covering the bed. The attached bathroom might as well have been its own house because of all the space inside it.

Next to my parents' bedroom is an office with wooden floors, bookshelves lining the walls, a fireplace with logs stacked in it, and a desk with a chair behind it. Two chairs larger than me sit opposite the desk, and when I touch one of them, I find it firm and not at all comfortable to sit on.

I wander out of the office, listening for my mom. She's still talking loudly, like she wants the whole world to hear her. I climb the stairs, curious where my bedroom will be. I wonder if I can paint it pink and purple—my favorite colors.

There are a bunch of rooms, and most are furnished with beds, couches, and a desk here and there. One larger room looks like a movie theater, with seats and beanbags right in front of a large TV.

I get to the last room on the other end of the long hallway and crack open the door. A familiar song plays from a boombox, and I wonder if this is my brother's bedroom. I open the door wider and shuffle a few steps into the room.

My lips part as I take in all the band posters stuck to the black walls, clothes strewn over the floor, and a gigantic bed with unmade red sheets and a black comforter. Sitting at the desk on the other side of the room is a boy with messy black hair. He wears all black, and the chains hanging from the belt loops of his pants remind me of the goths at my old school.

The door's hinge squeaks, announcing my intrusion, and the boy snaps his head up, his narrowed eyes landing on me. I freeze under the weight of his glare. If looks could kill, I would be dead.

"H-hi," I whisper. I don't think he can hear me over the music and because of how softly I talk. I expect him to yell at me to speak up or get out of his room.

His dark eyebrows slash down, his lips thinning into a tight line. "Hi."

My stomach flips, and I twist my trembling hands behind my back to hide the evidence of my anxiety. I get the feeling that he can see everything, down to my trembling legs. I wait for him to say something, but he sits there, staring at me like he's yelling at me in his head to get out.

Lowering my gaze to the floor, I breathe through the nervousness.

"I like this song," I mumble.

"You like Radiohead?" he says in disbelief and disgust.

I peek at him for a split second before I drop my gaze back to the wooden floor. My cheeks warm with a blush, and I curse myself for acting like a bimbo. "I . . . I don't know any of their other songs. Just this one because I can relate to it."

He scoffs. "How could a prep like you relate to being a weirdo?"

"I'm not a prep," I snap. I suck in a breath, my blush burning hotter, and I bump into the edge of the door when I take a step back. Any second now, he'll get up and shove me while he insults me.

The song bleeds into a new one. Movement catches my eye, and I look at the boy again. He's crossing the room and heading toward me with the same scowl.

Here we go.

I scramble backward, knocking into the door again and hitting my elbow in the process. I hiss at the shot of pain and tingles from hitting my funny bone. He reaches past me, slams the door shut, and pins me against it with a shove in the middle of my chest. His lip curls as he flicks the white bow in my hair.

"If you're not a prep, then why are you dressed like this?" He flicks the bow again and looks down my body until he reaches my shoes. He rolls his eyes and meets my terrified gaze. "Is it because you're a Goody Two-Shoes? You want to be *Daddy's little princess?*"

I can barely breathe through the terror as the boy scolds me. My knees knock together, but by some miracle, I don't fall and embarrass myself further. I don't know what I did to deserve this type of treatment. Does it really bother him that I came into his bedroom without permission?

He bares his teeth. "Cat got your tongue? Are you stupid?"

Tears burn the backs of my eyes, and I numbly shake my head.

"Aww, poor baby is gonna cry." He shoves away from me and stalks back to the desk. "Get out." He glances at me with the same angry expression. "And I'll tell you this one time because I don't give second chances. If you come into my room again, I'll burn all your pretty little dresses and bows. Now, get the fuck out!"

I turn the door handle behind me, spin in place, and I fling it open, racing back downstairs. Tears trail down my cheek and my chin quivers as I hold back the sobs that bubble in my chest.

Mom is still in the kitchen, and she turns as she hears my shoes slapping on the wooden floors as I come toward her.

"Jesus, what, Dahlia?" she snaps.

I fling myself into her, wrapping my arms around her waist and shaking with silent cries.

Mom awkwardly pats my head and sighs. "Dahlia, you don't need to be dramatic about this. You'll love it here. You'll see."

She didn't ask why I'm upset, and that only makes me cry harder.

I won't love it here. Not with that jerk upstairs.



Tonight's dinner is a nightmare. I barely touch my food, and I want to go to my bedroom for once. Mom never has time for me, and I hate that. I've always despised being alone, and I wanted to hang out with her to not feel so lonely.

I sit across from my brother at the large table, hating every second of it. After listening to Mom talk the last few hours, she mentioned Jaxon's name, and that's how I pieced it together. I also learned that my dad is my real dad and that he couldn't be there for me until now because of some *unresolved issues*, whatever that means.

Our parents talk about boring stuff, leaving me out of the conversation as they eat their food. No matter how hard I try to understand what they're going on about, I can't follow. It has something to do with my aunt and needing to visit her.

Jaxon glares at his food and shoves the mashed potatoes and gravy around on the plate. He hasn't said a word to me since what happened in his room, and he refuses to look at me. It's like I'm invisible.

I shift in my seat, wanting to excuse myself to hide in my bedroom, which, unfortunately, is next to Jaxon's. It sucks that it has to be so close to his. He made a big deal to our dad when he found out. Dad shut him down and had a look in his eye that said he wanted to hurt Jaxon for it. I don't want Jaxon to burn everything I own, but he doesn't deserve to be hurt. I won't step foot in his room ever again.

But what if he finds a reason to punish me? What if I breathe wrong and it angers him? What if he already plans on ruining something of mine?

My palms tingle as anxiety creeps through my body, building up speed until it floods my veins. I glance at Jaxon. He's still glaring at his food and looking seconds away from losing his cool. If I'm in my room, then he can't destroy any of my things.

"Can I be excused?" I say softly to Mom.

Jaxon's hand freezes mid-swipe, and I know he's listening to me. Probably because he wants to race me to my bedroom, lock me out of it, and burn my things. He doesn't raise his gaze, but he must be planning to race me upstairs.

Mom keeps talking to Dad with a smile on her face that I haven't seen in so long. Jealousy battles the anxiety. She never smiles like that toward me. It always looks forced, like I've seen in those awful films with crappy actors she always watches.

"Can I go to my room?" I say a little louder, but clearly not loud enough, since Mom still chats about the time she vacationed in a different country.

I deflate and stare at my half-eaten food with a pout. From my periphery, Jaxon goes back to shoveling his food, sometimes taking a bite of it and taking his time chewing it.

My stress over Jaxon going into my room and burning things comes back tenfold. I peek at Mom, hoping she'll answer me. Like all the other times, she doesn't. Taking a deep breath, I push back my chair and stand. I count in my head as I leave the

room, hoping Mom won't yell at me for leaving the table without being excused. When the coast is clear, I bolt up the stairs and into my room.

I check all my dolls, clothes, bows, and shoes. Everything's still in its place, and nothing seems amiss. I breathe a sigh of relief, but the worry still clings to me like all the bad dreams I get every night.

I hate my brother. I hate how he makes me feel. All I want is for us to be friends, and I had to ruin it by being annoying and weird. I lie on my mattress and roll onto my side, staring at the window. The curtains hang aside, giving me a clear view of the trees and mountains.

I can't wait to leave this place when I graduate from high school. The day I'll move far away, live on my own, and be happy can't come fast enough.

Movement darts in the corner of my eye, and I swing my gaze toward it. Nothing. I look at the window, and a shadow moves in the corner of my eye again. When I look, I still see nothing. I squeeze my eyes shut and focus on my breathing.

Everything will be fine. It's only a few more years before I'm out of here.

CHAPTER 2



DAHLIA

Eleven Years Old

“W atch it.” A girl shoves past me, her shoulder bumping into mine. Her friends flock around her, snickering.

I stumble from the force and catch myself before I fall face first onto the floor of my new school’s hallway. The girl smirks and giggles with her friends as they walk away.

I squeeze my binder and books closer to my chest and check my surroundings for anyone who caught what happened. A few boys stand on the other side of the hallway, chuckling and talking with each other while they keep looking in my direction.

I duck my head, then power walk to my assigned locker down the hall. It takes me a minute to figure out the code, but eventually, the lock snaps open. I stuff my things into the small space and jump at a loud bang behind me. Spinning toward it, I face a grinning boy.

He looks a year older than me, and his smile exposes a missing front tooth and creates a dimple on his chubby left cheek. Freckles dot his cheeks and nose. I find them kind of cute.

There’s another bang behind me, and when I check, there’s a boy about the same age standing there. He has spiky brown hair that’s been iced at the tips with blonde highlights.

“You’re the new kid, aren’t you?” he says with a grin.

My heart jump-starts, and I nod, a shy smile lifting my lips. I warily eye the boys and hope this isn’t some cruel joke.

“What’s your name?” his friend behind me asks.

I face him. “Dahlia. What’s yours?”

“Mickey.” He holds his hand out for me to take.

My cheeks hurt from smiling so hard. Hope fills my chest, and all these ideas of hanging out with my new friends flash through my mind. I slide my palm into his and shake his hand.

“Like Mickey Mouse,” I say with a giggle.

Mickey’s eyebrows bunch together, and he yanks his hand from mine. His friend snickers beneath his breath behind me. I steal a quick look at him, and my face falls. My giddiness and excitement vanish as though someone poured ice water over my

head.

"What are you, five?" Mickey snarls while his friend still laughs like I'd just cracked a joke.

I shake my head. "No, I'm eleven."

His friend snorts in his laugh, and I hold back my smile because it reminds me of a pig. "She's so stupid! Her head is full of rocks."

"Yeah," Mickey says, nodding. He gives me a mocking look. "Kyle's right, rocks. Do you even know what sarcasm is?"

The little humor I had disappears, and a lump forms in my throat as my world comes crashing down. *Why am I the way I am?* I had to open my mouth and say something stupid.

I stand frozen in place, unable to say anything. What is there to say? Nothing. Just like the last school, fighting back will get me nowhere. It always ends with me being picked on even more, and then the rumors spread about me. It's not like I can go to Mom about this because, like all the other times, she won't care.

My breathing quickens as my gaze dances between the two boys. They throw insults at me, each one getting worse than the last. They call me stupid, and when I don't react, they insult my looks.

Nothing they say surprises me. It still hurts to hear it, but if I tell myself those things enough times, then I'll become numb to it one day.

They point at my chest, making fun of my small breasts and how I have "mosquito bites." Mom hasn't gotten me any training bras, so my aching and growing chest pokes through my shirt and looks weird. Then they make fun of my eyebrows, saying they're bushy. Then my nose, chin, chipped tooth, and everything else.

"Hey, look at the freaks."

I blink out of the daze and follow their line of sight. My brother walks with three other boys dressed similarly to him. They're wearing all black, and chains hang from their big pants that flare at the ankles and drag on the floor. Two of the boys wear a hoodie, while the others wear a band T-shirt.

Kyle barks, and Mickey joins him, forgetting about me. They get louder with each bark, and other students in the hallway join with them until the barking drowns out all other sound.

I step backward, my back brushing against my open locker door. Guilt clings to me like a ball of goo that I can't shake off. I don't understand why these bullies bark at my brother and his friends, but I feel awful and responsible for it. Why am I just standing here and not saying anything? Why aren't I gaining their attention so that they'll focus on me instead?

Jaxon glares at Mickey and Kyle, then turns his gaze to me, pinning me where I stand. Before I avert my gaze, I spot the simmering anger in his dark eyes, then the flash of betrayal before he locks it away.

"Fuck you!" one of Jaxon's friends hollers. They flip us off as they walk past us.

I can't take my eyes off of Jaxon, even after he walks past me and down the hallway, where more students bark at them. He thinks I've befriended these two jerks. He must think I'm a part of bullying him and his friends when that is the furthest from the truth.

I spin toward my locker and slam the door shut, then storm away. My first class is on the other end of the school, and the more distance I put between my brother and me, the more gutted and lonelier I become. The two jerks howl in laughter and bark some more. This time, I don't think they directed it at Jaxon or his friends. This time, it's toward me.



My first day at this new school was awful. This town is full of preps and rich kids, and I finally understand why Jaxon sneered at me, calling me a prep. They bullied him all day.

I never wanted to be the new target at this school, but a sudden protective feeling over my brother built inside me until it brimmed and threatened to spill over. So I made more ruckus and dragged their attention to me, and I gladly took their pranks and insults.

When I get home, I head straight to my bedroom. I sit at my desk, leg swinging and pencil in my hand as I scowl at my homework. My eyes are heavy with sleep, and my mind is fuzzy like static, but I need to finish this workbook.

School is awful, and if I could drop out, I would. Everyone there is a jerk, including the teachers. Like my last school, the teachers always chose me to answer a question I didn't know the answer to. Then they told me to speak up because no one could hear me. Even after I said something a second time, the stupid teacher held a hand beside her ear, gesturing for me to speak louder. Everyone in class laughed along with her, making me the butt of the joke.

To make matters worse, word spread because of those stupid boys, and now everyone calls me rocks or airhead. At first, I thought they meant Airheads, like the candy, but after they laughed harder at my confusion, I finally understood what they meant.

I glare at my homework and want to toss it in the trash. I'm not good at any of this. Math is too hard to understand, and no matter how much I try to remember what Miss Edwards said in class, I can't make sense out of it. I would ask Mom to help me,

but she and Dad left for a date an hour ago.

Jaxon's music thumps through the wall separating us. I raise my gaze, staring at the cream wall like I can see through it and watch Jaxon as he listens to his rock songs. I debate if I should go to him for help since I have no one else to ask.

Jaxon is older than me—and likely smarter, too—so he'd know how to do math. Plus, I want to make sure he's okay, no matter how much he hates my guts and insults me like those kids at school.

I pull my bottom lip between my teeth and peel off a flaky piece of skin. Jaxon won't like it if I go into his room, and I don't want to risk him burning something of mine if I piss him off.

I *almost* put my homework away and call it quits, but the fear of flunking my grade hangs over my head like a dark cloud. With my luck, I won't drop out of school but will be held back to suffer an extra year of being bullied.

Taking a deep breath, I get out of my seat and leave my room. Jaxon's door is shut, and I spot a sign taped to the wood, warning me to Stay Out. I pause and stare at the sign before I gently grab the knob, then hesitate as I think better about barging into his bedroom.

I let go of the knob, and I rap my knuckles against the wood instead, praying he hears it. Music still plays. A guitar riff wails through his boombox's speakers, louder than it was before I knocked. I steel my spine and knock again, this time louder. I wince as the door rattles on the hinges, then drop my hand to my side.

The door swings open, and I stumble back a few steps as Jaxon takes up the small space. His expression screams, *How dare you?*

I suddenly forget how to speak and why I'm standing outside his bedroom. My cheeks warm and my ears tingle as heat spreads from my face. I struggle to find my words and not sound stupid when I figure out why I'm out here.

Jaxon huffs and crosses his arms over his chest. "What?" he snaps.

I fumble with my trembling hands and avert my gaze. Now that I'm not looking at him, I remember why I'm here. "I need help with my homework."

"Get your mom for that." He tries to swing the door shut, but I catch it before it clicks into place. Jaxon's lip pulls back in a snarl. "You sure you want to do that, *sis*?"

"She's not home, and I need help. Please!" Tears sting the backs of my eyes. I hate that I cry when I get nervous and embarrassed.

Jaxon's dark eyebrows lower into a sharp slash over his mean eyes. His lips thin, and I mentally prepare myself for him to go off on me. "Not my problem. Maybe you shouldn't be so stupid. Pay attention in your classes instead of fucking around with the preppy douchebags."

"You can't curse!"

I recoil as he lunges at me. My eyes snap shut, and I turn my head, giving him my cheek as I mentally prepare for the sharp sting of a strike. When nothing happens, I peek at him and find him standing several feet away from me in his bedroom. My lips part as horror mingles with his softer expression, like he can't believe I flinched.

I don't understand his reaction, but I don't linger on that thought.

Sniffling, I rub my eyes with the back of my hand to wipe away the tears. "I promise I'll be a good girl."

Jaxon rears his head back, his eyes flaring wide.

"I'll do your chores, even clean your room if you want. Just *please* help me with this. I don't want to flunk my grade and get held back." If I get held back, it will be the end of the world for me.

Jaxon sighs and runs a hand through his wavy black hair. All the fight leaves him, loosening his tensed muscles, and his shoulders sag. "Get your stuff, and I'll help."

I smile and race to my bedroom, grab all of my schoolwork, then run back to Jaxon's room. I worry that he changed his mind and locked me out, but the anxiety melts away when his door stays open in invitation.

Jaxon's sitting on a black eight-ball beanbag, his expression flat like he's bored and has better things to do. He flicks his fingers at the open door. I spin and close it, then go to his side. I plop onto the floor in front of him with a relieved smile.

"Thank you for helping me," I say. "You're the best big brother."

Jaxon stiffens, and he sucks in a sharp breath. I tilt my head, worried I said something wrong.

"We're not making this a habit. You got it?" Jaxon mumbles after a moment of silence.

I blink and nod in agreement, then pull out my math book and the workbook. I offer him a smile, hoping it keeps him in this nicer mood, but he refuses to look at me.

"Promise," I say.

Time passes quickly as Jaxon helps me. He shocks me with patience and kindness as he guides me through the math problems. When we finish, he helps me with science, too. That one frustrates me more because of how confusing it is, but Jaxon remains patient and finds a different way to simplify the information and questions in the workbook.

My stomach growls once we finish, and after glancing at his digital clock, I realize we've been here for three hours. Dinner will be ready any time now, and I wonder if our parents came home yet.

I close the books and stuff them into my backpack. Jaxon fiddles with his boombox, most likely changing the cassette tapes

since the tape we were listening to ended ten minutes ago.

I should leave, but I can't look away from him. Under all that anger and rough exterior, I find him cute. He has long eyelashes, sharp cheekbones, and a jawline like those male models in magazines. Jaxon's longer hair showcases his waves, and the locks look silky soft. He's someone I would crush on at school if I wasn't some circus freak that everyone hates.

Also, if he wasn't my brother.

My cheeks burn from embarrassment and guilt from my wandering thoughts about my brother.

"I've got a question for you," Jaxon says.

I blink, my spine straightens, and I drop my gaze to the floor. I hope he didn't catch me staring at him and that he's not about to yell at me for it.

It's quiet between us, and I'm confused. Why isn't he saying anything?

Gathering courage and curling my fingers in my skirt, I meet his stare, already finding him looking at me like he's been waiting for me to do so.

"Has anyone hit you?" he says, throwing me through a loop with his blunt question.

My eyebrows draw inward. "Why?"

Music plays, filling the tense silence between us as Jaxon continues to stare at me unblinkingly.

"You flinched," he says. "I wasn't going to hit you, and you flinched."

I drop my gaze and pull at a loose thread on the seam of my dress. I shrug a shoulder.

"It doesn't matter," I mumble.

I wait for Jaxon to snap at me or say something snarky. Instead, he remains silent. The rock song plays, and I thank the stars for it because then Jaxon won't hear my heavy breathing as I panic. He won't care what I've been through. In his eyes, I'm a *prep* and a *Goody Two-Shoes* who wants to be *Daddy's little girl*. I'm not supposed to be this meek and broken girl.

"I should go. Thank you for helping me." I stand with my backpack in my hand.

Jaxon doesn't step in my path when I walk past him, nor does he call out to me and demand answers. He lets me go, just like everybody else in my life.

On my way out the door, I feel the weight of his stare on the back of my head.

CHAPTER 3



JAXON *Thirteen Years Old*

I chew a french fry and watch my little sister eat at a different table in the lunchroom. She's a few tables over, giving me a good view of her sullen face. Her peers talk, laugh, and joke with each other while they leave Dahlia out of the conversations. All the gossiping girls at school are two-faced and full of drama.

Dahlia makes the occasional comment, but no one looks her way. She stops after that, eyes cast down at her lunch tray as she chews her pizza a little slower.

Here I thought my friends and I were the social pariahs, but Dahlia takes the cake. It appears everyone forgets about her until she gets the wrong type of attention. I hate the protective streak running through me for her, but she doesn't deserve to be treated as the school's dunce and an easy target.

I hate people—especially girls because of the bullshit my mother did—but Dahlia burrowed beneath my skin like a tick and stayed there like she'd made herself at home. She might as well drain me for all I have, like the bloodsucking bug she is.

There's a darkness inside me that craves to hurt and make girls cry. To punish them for what my deadbeat mom and her best friend did to me before my dad stepped in to play the hero he proclaims he is. My little sister isn't an exception.

She came into my space like she has every right to barge into my sanctuary and claim it as hers. The tears in her glossy eyes only fed into the darkness inside me. Her fear feeds the monster that my mom created.

But the other night . . .

I saw a different side of my little sister. The scared and desperate girl who couldn't do her homework. The girl who flinched when I lunged for her, then said she'd be a good girl. I don't know what I would've done to her, but hitting her wasn't it. Maybe pin her against the wall again and warn her that I'll keep to my threat of ruining her things.

She didn't answer my question when I asked if someone hit her. Sadness crept into her brown eyes, and her bubbly demeanor gave way to a broken girl. I wanted to pull her into my arms and protect her.

That's a problem. Unfortunately for her and others, she now has my full attention.

I've been watching her without her knowledge. I've witnessed the behavior of everyone who crosses her path. The insults,

the shoves, the pranks. They even put gum in her hair, forcing her to cut it. Her mom didn't help her, even when Dahlia went to her. Evelyn barely glanced at Dahlia, then shooed her away like a fucking fly.

I grind my teeth and curl my fingers into my palms, my blunt nails biting into my flesh until a bead of blood wells to the surface. Mickey saunters down the aisle on Dahlia's side, passing behind her to head to the trash can. He smacks the back of my little sister's head. Tendrils of Dahlia's brown hair shoot forward and slap against her face.

She grabs the spot the asshole hit and turns in her seat to look at Mickey's back as he struts away with a stupid grin on his face. Everyone at her table snickers, a few of them louder than the rest.

The tight cord in me snaps, and I slowly stand up, my chair's legs groaning against the tile floor.

"Looks like they have a new target," my friend Ryder says beside me.

Aiden sighs, drops his fork onto his lunch tray, and leans back in his seat. "I feel awful for being relieved that someone else is taking our place."

Red bleeds into my vision, my heart pounding as the barely contained rage inside me surfaces. I ignore my friends calling my name as I stalk through the large cafeteria, eating up the distance between Mickey and me.

He tosses his leftovers into the trash can, then sets his plate on top for the cafeteria lady to grab when we all leave. Mickey's eyes widen when he turns and notices me.

"What the heck are you—"

I ball my hand into a fist and throw my whole body forward, punching him in the face. The crunch of his nose beneath my knuckles brings a smile out of me. Mickey screams like a little bitch and cups his bloody nose.

"You broke it!" he wails.

Screams erupt in the room. Through the ringing in my ears, I make out the cheers of *fight, fight, fight!* The dark side of me demands more of his blood. It urges me to send this asshole to the hospital.

I swing again and again and again until the bully stumbles back and falls on his ass. I follow him down and strangle him, needing to make him pay for giving Dahlia a hard time. This isn't about me or my friends anymore.

Mickey's face disappears, and all I can see is Dahlia's head snapping forward, her face crumpling in anguish as she touches where Mickey slapped her.

Hands grab my shoulder and yank me away from a bloody Mickey, who sobs words I can't understand. I jerk away from the person who's holding me back. Before I can get back to Mickey, the person grabs me again. They scream in my ear, but I can't hear them over my roaring pulse and the monster in me demanding I keep hurting Mickey.

All the rage, adrenaline, and thirst for blood grow stronger.

Dahlia's crumpled face pops into my vision again. My rage flares brighter, and my body trembles from all the adrenaline rushing through my veins.

Everything goes dark.

When I come to, I'm sitting in the front office, slumped against the wall and panting. I wait for the regret to hit me like a brick falling from the tallest building. Minutes pass, and all I feel is satisfaction and the need to punish everyone who fucks with my little sister.

How did it get to this point when I've only known Dahlia for such a short time?

Because a broken soul recognizes another broken soul.

Dahlia. My sweet little sister who wouldn't harm a fly. My little flower, who wants to be accepted and noticed. To be loved. Fate cursed her with a monster like me who will kill for her.

My lips curl into a feral smile, scaring the front desk woman, who whips her terrified gaze away from me.

Cry, little sister, and I'll kill them all for you.

CHAPTER 4



DAHLIA

Eleven Years Old

I hurt to breathe. I grab the collar of my dress, loosening it to make room. The teacher ignores my frantic panting and guides me through the narrow hallway, and I miss a step when we pass by Jaxon, who's sitting in a chair, his head leaned back against the wall. Our eyes meet, and the corner of his lip quirks into a cocky smirk.

The fresh memory of what happened in the lunchroom pops into my mind.

Jaxon's expression darkened, his lips pulled back in a snarl as rage twisted his boyish features. Through all the chaos, he found me and offered a grin that held no humor.

I shiver as a chill scatters up my spine. That creepy grin reminded me too much of all the villains in the scary movies I've watched.

His eyes were like dark pits, yawning wide and thirsty for more blood. The lights were on, but nobody was home.

"Cry, little sister!" he'd yelled when the teachers ordered him to the principal's office. He dug his heels into the floor, bouncing with each yank from the older woman and man dragging him out of the room. Jaxon didn't look away from me, and his smug smile morphed into a cruel one.

My breath hitched, and I stood from my seat, my legs trembling.

"Call his parents!" one teacher yelled to another, who stalked toward Jaxon with the intention of detaining him too. I couldn't believe it took three adults to get him to the office.

Jaxon whipped his shoulders and cackled while keeping his bottomless black eyes on me. "Cry, little sister, and I'll kill them all for you!"

"With me," Mrs. Morrison snaps, pulling me out of my thoughts.

I have no choice but to follow her into the principal's office.

The principal turns away from his computer and settles his gaze on me. "This is his sister?" he says as he takes off his reading glasses and stands.

My knees knock together, and I hide my hands behind my back.

"Yes," Mrs. Morrison says. "Jaxon is waiting outside. Do you want him to come in too?"

The principal shakes his head and comes around his desk, standing at the corner nearest me. "He can wait. Thank you for bringing her to me."

Mrs. Morrison lingers in the office, unsure if she should leave me alone with the principal. He shoots her an annoyed look, and she reluctantly leaves, shutting the door behind her. I shift my weight onto one shaking leg, and I look anywhere but at the scary man who turns his glare to me.

"Have a seat," he orders, all emotion gone from his voice. He returns behind his desk and settles back in his chair.

I swallow hard around the lump in my throat and sit across from him. My leg bounces, and I nervously smooth out the wrinkles in my dress while I avoid eye contact with him.

"What's your name?" the principal asks, breaking the tense silence.

"Dahlia."

"Speak up."

I clear my throat and lift my gaze, looking him in the eye for a split second. "Dahlia."

"Well, Miss Dahlia, I'm sure you know why you're here."

I nod, and he folds his hands in front of him on the desk.

"Tell me why your brother beat up another boy during lunch."

I catch a flap of dead skin on my lip and pull it until it stings and blood beads to the surface. My leg bounces faster as I think about what to say and how much to tell him.

"Why isn't Jaxon in here with us?" I whisper.

"What?"

I take a deep breath and look at him head on. "Why isn't my brother in here with me? Shouldn't you be asking him that question?"

Principal Johnson raises his chin. "Because I want both sides of the story and to see if they match up."

That's stupid. The entire school saw what happened, so what's the point?

Instead of talking back, I stay quiet and think about what to say without getting Jaxon into even more trouble. Eventually, I go with the truth, hoping it'll be good enough. "Mickey picked on me, and I think Jaxon saw it, so he hit him."

He raises an eyebrow. "Just hit him? He didn't punch him?"

"Well . . ." I curl my fingers into my dress on my lap. "Yeah, he did, but he was defending me. I'm being bullied here."

"Speak up, child. I can't hear a lick of what you're saying when you mumble like that."

My cheeks burn with a blush, and I repeat what I said, louder this time.

Principal Johnson leans back in his chair, the hinges squeaking under his weight. He heaves a sigh and adjusts his tie around his throat. "It's still not a good enough reason to hit somebody."

I jump at the knock on the closed door. The principal's attention turns past my shoulder as an older woman pops her head through the small crack as she opens the door.

"Are you ready to see Jaxon?" she asks.

Principal Johnson shakes his head, then huffs when Jaxon slips past the woman and sits beside me. He rocks his chair closer to me until our arms are a hair from touching. He crosses his arms over his chest and leans back in the seat, glaring at the older man across from us. I silently beg him to look at me, but he keeps his narrowed eyes on Principal Johnson, as if he's a threat.

"Thanks, Barbara," Principal Johnson grumbles, and flicks two fingers for the older woman to shut the door. When the door closes behind her and her footsteps fade, he turns to us with a scowl. "Your sister told me what happened, but hitting isn't okay." He leans his elbows on his desk, pinning Jaxon with a glare. "We've already called your parents, and your mom is on her way to pick the both of you up. We take violence and threats of ending someone's life seriously here."

"He didn't mean it," I say in a rush.

Principal Johnson turns to me. "Speak up."

I open my mouth to repeat what I said, but Jaxon speaks up for me. "She said I didn't mean it." He drops his arms and leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees. His lips curl back in a snarl. "You should get your ears cleaned out if you can't hear her. Or maybe you should start listening better."

The older man's face scrunches up, and a muscle tics in the corner of his jaw. "I can hear just fine, Mr. Evergreen." He turns to me, and my spine straightens. "You say you're being bullied, but I have heard nothing about anyone picking on you. Maybe these boys who are being 'mean' are just being boys. It's because they like you."

Jaxon shoots out of his seat and slams his fists on the principal's desk, baring his teeth. The older man jerks back, his eyes widening.

"That's a bullshit excuse if I've ever heard one." Jaxon leans in, intimidating the principal, who looks like he's about to wet himself. "Why don't I bully you and we'll see if you'll say the same thing? I just like you, *right*? That's why I'm hurting you, because I *like* you, *right*?"

I shift in my seat and move to stand up to save the principal from my brother, but shock freezes me in place. For the second time today, my mind spins over a thirteen-year-old boy yelling at adults who look like they've just seen a ghost.

The principal's shock disappears, and he sobers. He stands from his rolling chair and leans on his desk, meeting Jaxon's glare head on. "That is very different, Mr. Evergreen, and you know that. Now. Sit. Down."

"Different?" Jaxon scoffs. "Because you're a man and not a girl?"

"Sit. Down," Principal Johnson says through clenched teeth.

Jaxon looks ready to climb over the desk and beat up the older man. I nervously stand and creep to Jaxon's side, my fingers outstretched toward his back. I freeze when Jaxon slaps the table again.

"Jaxon," I whisper.

"No," Jaxon snaps at the principal. "You need to understand the difference between like and dislike. Those shitheads out there have been making Dahlia's life a living hell."

"Language!" Principal Johnson yells.

"Not a single adult in this hellhole has stood up for her. They turned a blind eye to her as these assholes insulted her, shoved her, hit her, and made her feel like shit. All because she's a girl?"

"Language!"

"Jaxon," I say, then touch his shoulder.

He whirls toward me, teeth bared, and holds the same bottomless-pit look in his eyes. He sucks in a sharp breath, relaxing when he sees it's just me, and then his expression softens at whatever he sees on my face.

Jaxon turns to the principal and shoves a finger in my direction while keeping his glare on the older man. "Look what you did. You made her fucking cry!"

"*Cry, little sister, and I'll kill them all for you.*" Jaxon's words rush back to me. It's what he said when he was pummeling Mickey.

I touch my wet cheek and blink away the tears I didn't realize were there.

The principal strides around his desk and shoves me out of the way before he grabs Jaxon's arm. "Listen here, you little shit," he seethes. "I'm sick of your—"

"Get your hands off of my son."

The room goes quiet, and we all turn to the doorway, where our dad stands, taking up the tiny space. He slips his hands into his pocket and coolly settles his gaze on the principal, who still holds Jaxon in a death grip.

"Mr. Evergreen, I'm glad you're here," the principal says. He moves away from Jaxon, who shakes him off with a harsh shrug. "Your son got violent earlier and badly hurt another student. I highly recommend you have a little talk with him and let him know that hitting people isn't okay."

Dad cocks his head. He doesn't acknowledge Jaxon—or even me—as he steps further into the office. "I'll keep that in mind. Are you done with the kids?"

Principal Johnson straightens his jacket and raises his chin to look just as scary as Dad, but he falls short. "Jaxon is suspended for a week."

My stomach drops. I'm already anxious about being alone in school without Jaxon there. I'll be left with the sharks who will punish me for my brother's actions.

"Step outside." Dad keeps his voice neutral, but a shiver goes down my spine from the undertone of something horrible about to happen.

I back up a step, terrified of what's coming. Sensing my fear, Jaxon comes to my side, acting as a barrier as we leave the office and stand in the hallway. I turn to him, wanting to thank him and ask why he did what he did, what changed, and so much more. Instead, I stand here. Anger still radiates from him in toxic waves, and instead of asking those questions, I keep my mouth shut.

I notice the change when he looks at me. His expression softens, and the tense lines around his mouth smooth. It confuses me because I want so badly to go into his arms and hug him, but I'm terrified he'll get angry at me for touching him.

The principal's door opens, and our dad steps out. "Come, children."

Jaxon and I share a look before we follow him. Every person we pass ducks out of the way.

"Someone get the first aid kit," a woman whisper-yells behind us. I peek over my shoulder, finding Barbara rushing out of the principal's office, frantic and getting the attention of someone out of eyeshot in a cubicle nearby.

I look at Jaxon in shock and find he isn't in the least bit surprised.

CHAPTER 5



JAXON

Thirteen Years Old

Dad pulls me into his office not long after we get home. He told Dahlia to go to her room. She's still shaking like a leaf and terrified of being left alone. It takes me mumbling that everything will be okay before she relaxes just a little and goes upstairs to her bedroom.

"Have a seat," Dad says.

He crosses the spacious room lined with colorful books he's collected over the years. Some of them are antiques and first editions of classics. He's never let me read them—not that I'm interested in those types of books. I just want to know what it feels like to touch something that's been around for a long time.

Dad grabs two chilled glasses from the small fridge at the minibar. Shit. I hate it when he drinks, because he gets meaner and loosened up enough to beat me.

I frown and take a seat across from his desk. This feels similar to going to the principal's office and having to listen to that ball sack of a human spout stupid shit about why it's okay to pick on a girl. If my father had arrived three minutes later, I would have shown the principal how much I liked him.

I ball my hands into tight fists, and the familiar weightless feeling of leaving my body before I black out returns. With that comes the memory of Mickey slapping Dahlia and how the brute force of the blow knocked her head forward. He'd intended to hurt her, and now I want to hurt him again.

"I had to call the police station for a favor," Dad says from behind me at the minibar.

I tense but keep my gaze forward. No point in turning around when he's just going to sit behind his desk. His footsteps come closer and, just as I expected, he goes around his desk and sits in his squeaky leather chair. He slides a glass filled with an ice cube and amber liquid toward me.

"Since you're making adult decisions, you might as well lean into it." He relaxes back in his seat and cradles his cup in his large hand.

My fingers twitch. I'd take the drink, but my father enjoys being sneaky. It could all be a test—more ammunition to use

against me.

"Take the drink, boy." He sighs with a shake of his head and sips his drink. He swallows loudly, grating my already frayed nerves.

Steeling myself for the backlash, I snatch the offered drink and gulp two swallows before I sputter at the burn. I cough until my eyes water, and I set the cup back on the desk. My throat works with each swallow of the lingering nasty taste. I swipe my mouth with the back of my hand and consider licking my jacket sleeve to get the taste off my tongue.

"Honest reaction," Dad mumbles. He sips his alcohol and places his cup down, then faces me and folds his hands. His thumbs steeple while he studies me for a moment. "Mickey Richards' father wanted to hold you accountable. You don't understand whom you laid your hands on."

I don't care who Mickey Richards is to society, nor do I care about his father. Their status means nothing to me.

"You'll find out soon," he says. "It's time for you to understand your role in Exodus."

I frown. Exodus?

Dad catches my confusion because he says, "You were born into the secret society called Exodus. Every ten years on October tenth, we have a celebration. Despite you being a Disciple, I need you to prove to me that you accept this role. In the meantime, I'll teach you everything you need to know."

"Like what?"

Dad sips his drink, swallowing loudly again, and my eye twitches. "How to kill," he finally says after a long stretch of silence.

I grind my molars together. I don't know if I'm screwed and have to be a part of this society or if I can opt out. Either way, if he wants to teach me to fight and kill, then I won't pass that up.

"What's the real reason you beat up that boy?" Dad asks.

I keep quiet, refusing to explain myself. My father has a knack for finding the truth with little effort. I don't believe for one second he only talked to Principal Johnson when he was in his office. The cuts on Dad's knuckles prove it.

"He'll want payback. You know that, right?" Dad says, and swirls his amber drink. He doesn't look away from it, which relieves me, since that means I don't have his piercing stare on me. "I won't keep fighting your battles."

I never asked him to.

"You and your sister seem to be getting along." Dad's thumb swirls over the glass rim, and he looks me straight in the eye, searching for the secrets I keep from him. "Don't let some girl make you lose your mind. Even if she's your sister. Do you hear me?"

The small portion of alcohol I consumed creeps up on me. My head swims, and warmth spreads through me, starting from my stomach. I bite my tongue to hold back from telling him that my sister has a name.

The corners of his eyes wrinkle with a knowing smile. I pretend to be relaxed and hide the momentary worry that he knows my deepest desires and thoughts I have about Dahlia.

His thumb stills, and he tilts his head. "I asked you a question, boy."

"I heard you," I say, my words slurring.

His eyebrows dip low on his forehead. "You won't get into any more fights with him, yes?"

I nod, probably looking like an idiot because of how jerky the small movements are.

Dad relaxes in his chair, downs the rest of his drink, and turns away from me to face his computer. "You can go now."

I peel myself from the chair and walk out of his office, leaving the door open behind me. My legs move like Jell-O as the alcohol hits harder and amplifies each passing minute. I stumble upstairs and pause outside of Dahlia's room.

She left her door cracked open, and her lights are on, but I don't hear her. The pull to go into her bedroom and make sure she's okay tugs against the other side that demands to leave her alone. I scared her the last few weeks, and especially during lunch. I don't want her to see me like this, unable to stand without swaying and breathing hard from being drunk.

Forcing my legs to move, I go into my bedroom, crawl onto my bed, and pass out as soon as my head hits the pillow.

CHAPTER 6



DAHLIA *Twelve Years Old*

Now that I don't have to worry so much about the bullying at school, the months fly by. I no longer have to duck my head and slip past people, hoping the bullies don't notice me. Ever since Jaxon stood up for me, everybody steers clear.

"What are you doing?" I ask Jaxon. I linger outside his bedroom door, curious about why he's putting on his boots when it's nine in the evening.

He looks up from his spot on the bed, bent in the middle as he fixes his bootstraps. "Going out."

My eyebrows rise up my forehead, and I timidly step forward, hesitant to go any closer. "Where are you going?"

"Out." He stands and pulls on the black jacket lying on the mattress. I notice a black object that was under his jacket, out of sight until he grabs it.

I tilt my head, scrunching my face as I try to get a closer look by leaning just past his doorway. Jaxon notices my curiosity and snatches the thing from his bed, then stuffs it into his pocket.

"What was that?" I ask, unable to help myself. Jaxon's been a lot more patient with me, and for that, I'm grateful. Had I asked that question earlier this year, he would've already been yelling at me.

He eats the space between us with long strides and pinches my chin between his fingers. "Stop asking questions, Dahlia."

His eyebrows slash down in a glare that holds no heat. I stand a little taller than him, thanks to the growth spurt and how girls mature faster than boys.

I jerk my chin out of his hold, only for him to catch it again. "Is Dad taking you out again?"

"Dahlia," he warns.

He pulls me inside his bedroom, then shoves me against the wall. I grunt from the force, but it doesn't hurt. It only shocks me and steals my breath for a moment. Jaxon leans in closer, his fingers tightening their grip on my chin.

"Stay inside and make sure all the lights are off."

I blink, then wrack my mind, trying to figure out what he means by that. Halloween happens in three weeks, so it can't be about trick-or-treaters. "Why?"

Jaxon's eyes harden, and I know I'm pushing his buttons. "Just do as I say, little sister."

"But—"

He slaps his hand over my mouth and rests his forehead against mine. "Do you trust me?"

I nod, because of course I do. He's been by my side since the beginning of the year. He's the only one who got me a birthday present, and he even made my favorite type of cake. Not even my mom knows that I prefer strawberry cake over chocolate. Jaxon learned so much about me and shows repeatedly that he listens to me, unlike everyone else.

"Then you'll have the lights turned off, doors locked, and you'll stay here in my bedroom. Got it?" he says.

I mumble a question, and Jaxon lowers his hand.

"I'm sorry, flower," he whispers. "Say that again. I'm listening."

My lips tremble, and my heart fumbles a few beats. He called me *flower*? I swallow hard. "When will you be back?"

He shrugs. "I don't know, but don't wait up for me."

I bite my bottom lip, holding back everything else I want to ask. He already looks stretched thin, and if I keep asking questions, he'll eventually lose his cool on me.

Jaxon cocks his head, and tendrils of inky-black hair fall over his eyes. His face softens the longer he looks at me, and his gaze dips down to my lips. His tongue pokes out, wetting his bottom lip. My stomach flips and butterflies fly around, and I don't understand *why*.

"You won't get in trouble, will you?" I ask, wanting to distract myself from where my thoughts are headed with him looking at me like that.

Jaxon flicks his gaze upward, and the corner of his lip curls. He settles his palm on the wall above my shoulder, blocking me in like a caged, frightened bunny. "What if I do?" he teases.

I blink back the shock, because Jaxon never teases me. This is a new side to him, and after a moment of digesting it, I smile. "Well, then you don't get your surprise."

"Surprise?" he murmurs with a wicked smile. "What surprise is that?"

"It's not a surprise if I tell you." I poke his stomach and freeze when I realize what I just did. My eyes round, and I stop breathing, watching Jaxon's face as he too realizes I touched him. His pupils expand, and I cower back, wishing I could melt into the wall.

"What's the surprise, Dahlia?" he says, his voice deep and rough.

I gulp and tuck my hands behind my back. He catches my wrist in a firm grip and places my hand on his chest, right above his pounding heart.

"Jaxon?" I whisper.

He leans in, as though he's about to tell me a secret. "It's all right, sis. I won't hurt you."

My cheeks warm with a blush, and I turn my head to look at him. Our noses brush, and tingles shoot from my neck to my toes. A voice in the back of my head screams that this is wrong and not something siblings do.

"I was going to . . ." I stumble over my words and can't think straight with him this close to me.

His warm breath fans against my cheek and lips. "You were going to what?"

"I was going to . . ." I gather my courage and throw caution to the wind. I lunge forward, smashing my lips to his in a quick kiss before I push him aside.

In his startled state, he stumbles back, and I run past him.

"Dahlia!" he yells.

"Be safe, big brother!" I call over my shoulder.

My cheeks are on fire, and my heart won't stop hammering against my ribs. I slam my door shut and lock it. It still isn't enough to make me feel safe from whatever repercussions that kiss brought to me, so I run into my enormous bathroom and lock that door too.

I listen for Jaxon calling my name or even pounding on my door, but that never happens. Some time passes, and when I creep out of my bathroom, I look at the clock. Two hours have gone by.

Two hours? It only felt like five minutes.

I leave my bedroom and check Jaxon's bedroom for him, finding it empty. When I go downstairs, no one is there either. Mom must be in bed already, once again forgetting about me.

I remember what Jaxon said, and I check the locks on the doors, finding them latched. Heading toward the staircase, I stop when I notice boards over the windows. Why are there boards on the windows?

Chalking it up to it being close to Halloween, I shrug and go to my bedroom. I climb into bed and leave my bathroom light on with the door cracked. I have too many nightmares and see weird things at night, forcing me to resort to something as childish as a nightlight. But it helps me sleep, and I don't care if that makes me a baby.

The last thing I think about before I fall asleep is Jaxon and the kiss. He didn't shove me away—not that I left much time for him to do so. I swear I felt him kiss me back, but that has to be wishful thinking.

CHAPTER 7



DAHLIA

Twenty-Two Years Old

PRESENT DAY

I grunt as my back collides with the bricks on the side of the coffee shop's exterior. My head cracks against the hard surface, and a fiery pain radiates from my neck to my shoulders. My muscles burn and tense, making it hard to twist my neck to look at the jerk who can't let the past be the past.

"Want to tell me why I heard from a little birdie that you called me an asshole?" Mickey says, his face directly in front of mine. His breath puffs against my face in a thick cloud of cigarettes and halitosis, and it takes everything in me to not gag. Has he ever heard of a toothbrush?

"Get your hands off of me!" I shove his shoulders, feeling a momentary high that I finally did what I've been dying to do since middle school.

"Puh-lease." Mickey snorts and rolls his eyes.

His fingers fist my shirt above my breasts, and then he jerks me around like a rag doll. He acts as though I'm putting up a fight, which I mean, yeah, I'm fighting back, but my strength is nowhere near his. I stumble and hurt myself in the process while I hit him.

"I said get off!" I try to slap him, but I miss his cheek and wind up hitting the corner of his chin.

His teeth click together as his head jerks to the side. Pride fills my chest, but that evaporates when he turns his face and glares at me.

"You shouldn't have done that," he growls.

He grabs a fistful of my hair and yanks me further into the alleyway he shoved me into. I stumble and drag my booted heels on the brick path as he leads me into the narrow space between the buildings. I look in horror behind us at the receding people who can save me from this asshole. No one's coming to my rescue—which isn't anything new, but it still hurts.

"I called you that in high school, you asshole!" I suck in a terrified breath. Fuck.

Mickey's fingers tighten in my hair, and he snarls, shoving me against the building again. His eyes darken, and I swear I see the evil in his soul through them.

He draws back his fist and slams it into my cheekbone. I scream, my head whipping to the side from the blow. The whole side of my face throbs, along with my teeth. Tears gather in my eyes, and I barely have time to recover before he punches me again, this time on the side of my throat. My cries die out as the muscles contract, and I fight for air that never comes. Every attempted breath creates a wheezing sound with a deep groan.

I'm going to die, all because Mickey got his little feelings hurt because I told the truth. He would keep the promise he made all those years ago and kill me as payback for Jaxon beating him up.

Mickey holds me up as my legs threaten to come out from under me. He punches me right in my ribs, forcing out what little air I have in my lungs. Black dots speckle my vision, and I sway as I struggle to stay awake. He keeps hitting me, calling me names while laughing like he's lost his mind. I fall to my knees and cup my throat with one hand, the other firmly on the ground to hold me up.

"I kinda like how you look on your knees, rocks," Mickey says. He grabs a fistful of my hair and yanks my head back. He bends down, putting his ugly face in front of mine, forcing me to look at him through the tears.

I groan as my body struggles to suck in a breath.

He smirks and shakes my head, pulling out strands of my hair. "October tenth, you're mine."

I finally catch my breath and bare my teeth. "You're a pussy."

His face falls in shock that *I*, a "stupid" girl, would call him something that "emasculating." I laugh through the pain, and when it starts, it doesn't stop. My laughter grows louder, peeling and echoing in the narrow space.

"You're so fucking dead!" He shoves me down with the intention of straddling me.

I roll to the side, gritting my teeth and ignoring the pain as I jump to my feet and get all of two strides away from Mickey before my steps falter and I stop dead in my tracks.

A tall biker with a tinted black helmet over his head stands three feet away. I don't know how long he's watched what happened, but I know Mickey is so screwed now that my brother is here.

"What the fuck do you want?" Mickey snarls.

I don't look behind me to watch Mickey's face crumple when he realizes it's Jaxon. I keep my eyes on Jaxon like he's a god riding in on a black armored horse. The ex-football player doesn't stand a chance against my brother.

Jaxon takes careful steps toward me, his head slightly tilting as he assesses every bruise and cut on my body. I don't need to see his face to know he's counting them. He stops in front of me and tucks his gloved fingers under my chin to lean my head back. I look at my reflection in the tinted helmet.

"Jaxon," I whisper.

His thumb brushes my lower lip, gently, like a lover's caress, and then he drops his hand and looks at Mickey. Slowly, he removes his helmet and shakes out his wavy black hair until it falls over his forehead. His earring chain with a flower dangling at the bottom flicks with his movements and taps against his neck. Jaxon glares at Mickey, shadows caressing his face.

"Oh man," I mumble to Mickey, who takes a step back. "You're so fucked."

Jaxon eases me aside, and I suck in a painful breath as he gives me a warning look before he walks toward Mickey. It's the same look as all the other times he's put people in the hospital.

I step into my brother's path, not wanting Mickey to lose his life, no matter how much he hurt me.

"Jaxon," I murmur, hoping my voice draws him back from the dark recesses of his mind.

Mickey whimpers but raises his chin, attempting to look stronger than he actually is at this moment.

I raise my hand to touch the back of Jaxon's shoulder, but I hesitate. He doesn't like it when people touch him, and I don't want to cross any boundaries, but I don't want him to murder this jerk, either. Mickey isn't worth it.

Mickey takes two steps backward, losing all the courage he had when it was just the two of us. "It's not what it looks like," he says, his voice quivering.

"It's not what it looks like," Jaxon repeats softly. He raises his helmet in front of him, his gloved fingers digging into the soft material on the inside of it as he studies it like all the answers in the world are written there.

"Oh no," I say softly, right as my brother lunges toward Mickey with his arm swinging backward, hand gripping his helmet.

CHAPTER 8



JAXON *Twenty-Four Years Old*

My helmet slams against the side of Mickey's face. He screams like the little bitch he is, his body twisting from the force of the hit. Giving him no time to collect himself, I swing again. The helmet connects with the back of his head, and he crashes to the ground like a dead tree that finally tumbles after the trunk can't handle the stress.

I follow him and pin him down with all of my weight. I toss my helmet aside and punch him repeatedly, barely feeling anything but the need to hurt him. To kill him.

He hurt my sister. The one person I give a fuck about.

Mickey screams, and it ends with a grunt. "You asshole!"

"Jaxon." Dahlia's voice becomes farther away, like Mickey's as he pleads for his life.

I fist his shirt, supporting his upper half while I punch him until black edges into my periphery. It creeps over the crimson, creating an odd combination. Everything dims except for my need to punish Mickey for once again hurting my sweet little sister.

"Jaxon!" Dahlia yells louder than I've ever heard her.

The black in my vision takes over, and everything goes dark.



Arms wrap around me as I come to, and a head leans against my chest, right over my heart. I blink until the black dots stop blinding me. Glancing to the side, I notice we're near the woods, on the shoulder of a winding road at the bottom of Vail Mountain.

How did we get here? Last I recall, we were at the heart of the town in an alleyway, and I was close to killing Mickey with

my bare hands.

A small whimper drags me out of my confused thoughts. I look down at Dahlia's head, her bright green hair catching the light streaming through the overcast sky. I realize how tight I'm holding her to me, her soft curves pressed against my hard body. I ease up on my hold and suck in a breath as my little sister nuzzles into my chest, her warm breath fanning through my thin black shirt.

I lean my head into her, breathing in her intoxicating scent. She smells like warm honey and the sweet-pea perfume she's worn since freshman year in high school. I hold back the shudder as tingles shoot up my spine from her heady scent.

She shifts her body closer to mine, like she can't get enough of me, and molds her breasts against my chest and her pelvis flush against mine. Fuck me. My little sister doesn't know the effects she has on me.

"Are you back with me?" Dahlia whispers, her lips moving against the sensitive skin at the base of my throat.

I cup the back of her head, gently threading my fingers through her green-dyed hair. I grate out, "Yes."

"You scared me back there," she says softly.

It's getting harder to concentrate on her voice and hear her every word because all my focus is on her breasts pressing against me. I can feel her hardened nipples, and I don't think she knows. I'll be damned if I tell her to speak up. This is my problem. A very wicked, disgusting problem that I should be ashamed of.

But I'm not.

I squeeze her tighter, not one bit sorry over my attraction to her. Blood rushes to my cock, which presses painfully against my zipper. Her stomach is right against it, but if she feels my erection, she doesn't say anything.

What she said finally sinks into my hazy mind. I lean back while still holding her. My fingers twitch on her back. She tilts her head to look up at me, and I can't tear my attention away from those fuckable parted lips.

"You're not scared of me, are you?" I ask.

She frowns. "No."

"You should be." I lean down until our eyes are level and our mouths are an inch apart. She doesn't know what goes through my mind whenever she's near me. If she did, she would have been long gone by now, never speaking to me again.

Dahlia's tongue peeks out and wets her bottom lip. I drop my gaze, watching the slight movement with longing.

Her black lipstick smudges to one side of her cheek from Mickey beating the shit out of her. I snap out of the lust haze and cup her chin, gently turning her head at different angles to assess the damage. My molars grind together as I study all the cuts littering her skin. I want to get on my motorcycle and head back into town to find the fucker and beat him up all over again. Bruises have already formed on Dahlia's skin, a cruel reminder that I got to her too late.

"Why should I be scared of you?" she asks softly.

I rub my thumb on the outside of her bottom lip, gently cleaning the smear of lipstick mixed with blood. "He didn't touch you, did he?"

Dahlia gives me a questioning look.

"Did he sexually assault you?"

Pink colors her cheeks, and she shakes her head while resting her hands on my chest. Her touch burns through my clothes, and my skin absorbs her warmth, leaving its blessed mark in my bones and soul.

Dahlia tilts her head, concerned about my silence. "Jaxon?"

I drop my hand from her face and pick up the helmet she'd tossed aside while she brought me out of the blackout rage. I stare at her as I hand it to her, and she shyly smiles. It strains her face and looks painful as the discolored skin stretches tight.

The anger I thought I'd contained comes back, and another rush of adrenaline pumps through my veins.

Dahlia notices and throws herself against me, wrapping her arms around my waist. I close my eyes and breathe through my nose. My fists clench at my sides, my nails biting into my palms. I've been planning to kill Mickey for a long time, but killing him right now sounds really fucking nice. He doesn't deserve to breathe any longer.

"Big brother."

My spine straightens at her soft, breathy plea. I snap open my eyes and look down at Dahlia, who bends her head to look at my face with pleading brown eyes. She must know how I feel about her calling me that. It's not something innocent to me. It's fucking dirty talk.

I fist her hair and gentle my hold when she winces. Bending down, I hover my face close to hers and rasp out, "He'll pay with his life for what he did to you."

Dahlia's lips part, shock crossing her face. "It's not worth it."

I smash my lips to her uninjured forehead and pull back. Dahlia's shock lasts all of a few seconds before it looks like she's about to argue with me, so I ease her helmet over her head, silencing her. I put mine on, fiddle with the buttons on the side, and set my phone to play music at the loudest setting.

She shakes her head and crosses her arms over her chest while cocking her hip out. I smirk at the bratty display, then get on the motorcycle. Dahlia straddles the seat behind me. Her arms wind around my back to rest her hands on my stomach.

The engine purrs after I turn the ignition. I knock back the kickstand and balance the bike with my feet on the ground. When

the music starts and our favorite song comes on, I check the street to ensure it's clear before I put the motorcycle into first gear and we take off. Dahlia's hold tightens as the speed increases. Her breasts press against my back, and my cock twitches as a shudder rolls through me.

I might be a terrible brother for liking this, but I stopped caring years ago when she kissed me. I'm a sick son of a bitch, and my sister is the wrong medicine that I desperately want. She's the very poison that will kill me.

The ride back to our parents' home is quick. I show off to my sister by going faster than the speed limit, leaning the bike around corners and grinning as she squeals with laughter. She may be afraid of the motorcycle, but she trusts me and knows I won't ever let anything happen to her.

I slow down as I drive up the long driveway. Trees loom over us, lining the way until we get to the rustic mansion that's tucked at the back. Lights shine from inside, as well as the bulbs outside that point at the house in a display I never understood. It may be rich-asshole behavior on my dad's part. Our parents don't know what privacy is and never got shades to cover the windows, so everyone can see everything that happens inside.

I drive around the fountain in the center of the mini cul-de-sac. Dad replaced it two years ago, and the new Medusa statue holds the decapitated head of a man who looks at her with terror in his wide eyes. Snake hair frames her heart-shaped face, puffy lips parted like she's just as surprised that she's killed a man. Her sultry eyes stare into the void, unseeing, but they hold so much grief, anger, and pain. Instead of being portrayed as an ugly creature, she's beautiful, with soft, feminine features.

Her body is shaped much like Dahlia's, with large breasts, wide hips, and an apron stomach, which makes me appreciate the fountain more than I should. Evelyn planted rose bushes and other types of flowers around it and in the front yard. During the spring, summer, and early fall, it smells like nothing but roses when in this portion of the yard.

I cut the engine and drop my booted feet to the ground to hold us steady while Dahlia slips off the seat and takes off her helmet.

"I can talk to our parents and tell Mom what happened." Dahlia hands me her borrowed helmet.

I pull mine off and set it and the safety gear on the seat. I shake my head to set my hair back in place, then glare at my stubborn sister.

"No," I say. "Leave it to me."

Her mother won't give a fuck, anyway. If she does, she'll blow it up into a bigger deal just so she can be dramatic and make it about her. I hate Evelyn for many reasons, but the major one boils down to how she treats Dahlia.

The second reason being that she was my father's mistress while he was married to my mother.

They tried to keep their affair a secret, but I saw more than people realized. All the nights he had to work late and phone calls when he thought he was alone. My dad is with Evelyn because my shitty mom left him when she found out about the affair.

When I told Dahlia about it, she wasn't surprised. The anger she tries so hard to hide kindled and burned brighter. It's a matter of time before she snaps and lays into her mom for all the shit she's done to my little sister.

Dahlia sighs and hikes her small bat-shaped backpack's straps higher on her shoulders. She opens her mouth, most likely to argue. I raise an eyebrow and fold my arms over my chest. After seeing that I'm ready to argue with her, she closes her mouth, huffs, and walks away.

My lips quirk, and I follow close behind her like the protective and scary guard dog I am. I look around as we go inside. The lights are dim, and I don't hear Evelyn's loud voice or my father's deep, soft one.

We may be alone for a while, and that excites me more than it should. I don't plan on trying anything with my sister just yet. I need to ease her into the idea of being with me. Which means keeping my dick in my pants.

Dahlia veers straight to the staircase, and I follow. I can't stop looking at her ass, which is practically in my face. She's wearing my favorite outfit: a black crop top paired with black shorts and ripped fishnets. It's such a drastic change from when she was a kid who wore frilly dresses, buckle shoes, and bows in her brown hair.

My mouth waters as I imagine licking the skin on the inside of her thick thigh, parting her ass cheeks, and tasting her pussy and ass from behind. I drag in a deep breath, hoping to smell her, but all I can smell is Evelyn's vanilla-and-sugar air fragrance she plugged into the walls at every turn in the home.

I cock my head as Dahlia heads toward her room, and I gently grab her by the crook of her elbow. She gasps as I bring her to my bedroom instead.

"What are you doing?" she squeaks.

I drag her to my bathroom.

"Tending to your wounds," I murmur.

CHAPTER 9



DAHLIA

“I can do it myself,” I say. I ache *everywhere*. My mouth, my face, my throat. The thought of doing it myself exhausts me already, but I don’t want Jaxon to do something he doesn’t want to do.

Jaxon gives me a warning look before he grabs my waist and lifts me like I weigh nothing. He sets me on the edge of the black marble counter, my legs dangling, then fishes around the cabinets for the first-aid kit and sets the navy-blue bag beside me.

My thighs squeeze together as I eye his hands. Under the tattoos, I spot the bulging veins. Jaxon’s always had a nice body—not that I’ve seen him naked. I’ve only seen him in his swim trunks during the summer or when he wore shorts and no shirt. But the veins on his hands and along his arms make things flutter where they shouldn’t.

Realizing I haven’t checked to see if I have any missing teeth, I twist around and look in the mirror with my finger hooked into the corner of my mouth.

“What are you doing?” Jaxon turns to me with a scowl.

“Seeing if I have any missing teeth,” I say after I drop my hand.

He sighs and grabs my chin, turning me back to face him. Tapping my bottom lip, he says, “Open.”

My cheeks warm, and I open my mouth. Jaxon tilts his head as he looks inside and sticks his finger into my mouth, searching for anything missing. My core pulses as dirty images pop into my mind. Things I’ve read in the manga books I enjoy getting lost in play a part in it and feed the fantasy. Or the fan fiction of said books that these creative authors came up with.

A forbidden fantasy plays in my mind, where Jaxon says for me to open my mouth for a different reason. Or how his fingers would be in my mouth while he’s behind me when I’m on all fours, holding me like that as he slams his cock into me.

A small moan slips past my lips. Jaxon freezes, his finger pausing mid-swipe in my mouth. Our eyes meet for a moment before I quickly avert mine, too embarrassed to look at him.

This is why I’m bullied. I’m so goddamn awkward.

Jaxon finishes checking my teeth and drags his finger out of my mouth, his touch lingering on my bottom lip. “How’s your

throat?" he murmurs huskily.

I swallow and wince. "Hurts."

He cups my neck, his fingers gently prodding at the sore areas. I hold back the squeak working up my chest as he lodges his hips between my spread legs so he can get a closer look at me. My pulse drums in my ears, and every part of me becomes hyper-aware of my big brother's touch.

"Where else do you hurt?" Jaxon drags his hands down my neck, lingering over the top of my sternum.

"My ribs," I whisper. They don't hurt as bad as my throat, but Mickey landed a powerful kick to my side.

Jaxon looks me in the eye, a warning of what he's about to do. I don't stop him as he raises my crop top, exposing my stomach rolls and stretch marks, then my see-through lace bra. I forgot I put that on earlier, and gasp as my hands fly up to my chest to cover my breasts from his view.

Jaxon lifts his gaze to my face, his eyebrows drawing downward with a frown.

"I forgot I put this bra on," I say in a rush. "I'm sorry."

"You're apologizing to me for seeing your tits?" He cocks his head, confused, but amusement reflects in his dark-brown eyes. Shaking his head, he looks back at my ribs and eases my hands from my breasts.

"Why are you doing that?" I stammer, and shove his hands away.

"Checking for any wounds that might be there." He grabs my wrists.

I shake my head and cover myself again. "I can check myself later."

"No offense, little sister," Jaxon says, "but you have big tits, and it'll be hard for you to see everything. Let me help you."

My stomach flips several times, and I breathe harder. I don't want him to know how much this turns me on or that I don't even feel pain at this moment—unless you count the pain between my legs.

Jaxon notices my worry, and he leans forward until his nose brushes against mine. His hands settle on my waist, which has always been the spot he grabs when he touches me. "I'm not judging you," he coos as he squeezes my love handles.

Oh, he'll judge for sure if he sticks his hands down my shorts. That will be the one place I won't ever, *ever* let him check for any wounds whatsoever. *Ever*.

Jaxon patiently waits, his eyes hooded and lips parted. He relaxes while he takes care of me, and I can't bring myself to say no to him. I slowly nod. He smiles and leans away from me to continue exploring.

I bite my bottom lip and tuck my hands beneath my thighs to keep from covering myself while he inspects me. Jaxon drags his fingers over my sides, pointing out some bruises before going higher. My legs squeeze around his waist as he gently lifts my bra, freeing my heavy breasts from their confines.

My nipples harden into tight, sensitive peaks that ache to be played with. Jaxon trails his fingertips over one, then spreads his fingers over my breast as he raises it to look underneath. I squeeze my eyes shut, biting back a whimper as he touches me. I have to remind myself that he's only helping me and not trying anything sexual with me.

He lets my breast fall, but he keeps grabbing it, his fingers tightening as he palms my breast like a kitten would when it's fluffing a spot to sleep on. A breathy moan escapes me the moment he touches my nipple, pinching it between his fingers.

"Is that necessary?" I shift my hips to stop the pulsing in my clit.

"Yes."

I can't muster any more words as he turns his attention to my other breast, doing the same thing by touching it, lifting it, then pinching my nipple. When I think he's done, he surprises me as he cups both breasts. I blink open my eyes, my lips parting and hips moving on their own as he palms me more roughly, like he's losing control.

"Does this hurt?" he asks in a gravelly voice. His split tongue pokes out of his mouth, wetting his bottom lip. If I didn't know better, I would think he's imagining what I taste like.

I quickly shake my head.

He tilts his head, now staring at my face as he plays with my breasts. My face flushes and sweat builds on my forehead as tiny electrical currents of pleasure shoot straight between my legs. I want to come so badly, but not by my brother's hand. It's so wrong, and he'll definitely judge me for that. Especially if I scream his name and beg him to touch my pussy.

We stare at each other for a moment or two, and I don't think either of us breathes as we wait for the other to say or do something. What I want probably isn't something he wants, so I stay quiet.

Reluctantly, he lets go of my breasts, his fingertips dragging on the sensitive skin like he loathes to part with them. He pulls my bra into place, tucking each breast into the cups before he lowers my crop top to cover me.

I sag the moment he turns to grab a bottle of hydrogen peroxide and soaks a cotton pad with it.

"This will sting," he says.

"Can't be worse than what happened with Mickey," I tease.

Jaxon tenses. His expression turns blank, then twists into rage. His eyes shutter and lose focus.

I jump off the counter and huddle near him, careful as I gently touch his arm with one hand and his chest with the other. My brother stands still, like he's a brick building and I'm some idiot trying to shove it. I jerk my hands away from him as he turns his cold, dark eyes to me.

"I'm sorry," I whisper with a tremble in my voice.

Jaxon follows me with every backward step. My thighs brush against the large jacuzzi bathtub behind me, stopping me from going anywhere else now that my blacked-out brother corners me.

"Jaxon," I whisper, hoping he doesn't lose his shit on me.

Jaxon's hand shoots out, his fingers circle around my wrist, and he jerks me forward and forces me to touch his chest.

"Keep me here," he grates out. He pitches his voice lower by an octave, sounding like he swallowed rocks. I shiver as he guides my hand upward until I cup his throat. "Touch me."

Warmth pools low in my belly. I know he doesn't mean it that way, but the thought is there in my head, and I can't get it out after hearing it. I flex my fingers around his neck and step closer to him. His lips thin into a harsh line, and his breathing quickens. The position is awkward. He may not be too much taller than I am, but it's weird to hold him like this while we stand so close together.

"Sit down," I say.

Jaxon's hands settle on my waist, and he moves us until he lowers himself onto the bathtub's wide outer edge. I gasp as he yanks me down to straddle his lap, my knees resting on the marble tub. Jaxon grabs my wrist, guiding me to wrap my fingers around his tattooed throat again.

My clit flutters as I squeeze on him, feeling his Adam's apple move every time he swallows. His eyes remain clouded with anger, and he trembles from the adrenaline rushing through his body, preparing him for a fight that won't happen. Despite all of that, he doesn't attack me. If anything, he's gentle as he winds an arm around my waist, pulling me close enough that my aching center grinds against his pelvis. My cheeks warm as I feel the large stiffness between his legs, nestled right where our bodies would join if we ever got to that point—which we won't.

Fuck me. I shouldn't be attracted to my brother. Especially not while he's fighting his anger.

I lean my forehead against his and thread my fingers through his hair, the same way I've always loved being done to me. Mom used to do it when I was a kid, but she stopped when I got a little older and her annoyance with me grew into an ugly beast.

"I'm okay, big brother."

Calling him that always brings him back to me. It's been in my arsenal forever, at the ready for times like these.

My grip on his throat tightens until I control each breath he takes. I've never questioned why this works for him, but it just does. His eyelashes flutter, and he struggles for breath, all while keeping his eyes on me. The faraway look dissipates like a storm breaking apart and revealing blue skies. I breathe a sigh of relief and sag against him, my fingers loosening to rest on his warm skin.

"What would I do without you?" Jaxon murmurs.

"Probably be in jail," I tease.

"You have no idea."

Jaxon's hand slips over my bare love handles and travels up my ribs, his fingers brushing along each one. I suck in a breath as his thumbs inch higher, right beneath my breasts. My core flutters, and arousal burns through my veins until I have to shift my hips to ease the ache between my legs. I freeze as Jaxon's breath hisses through his teeth and his grip on me tightens, holding me still.

"Sorry," I squeak.

He groans under his breath, and the sound vibrates against my chest. "Apologize again, flower, and you won't like what will happen."

I lean back, cocking my head with my eyebrows pinching together. "You just snapped out of a blacked-out rage and had me choke you, and you're going to sit here and contradict yourself by threatening violence on me?"

"Violence? That's cute." Jaxon's lips quirk into a brief smile, and the subliminal promise in his teasing is enough to bring butterflies into my stomach.

He shifts me, clearly wanting me off his lap, so I get up and already miss feeling him. I don't know what possesses me to look down, but when I see the outline of his hard cock straining against his tight black jeans, my pulse thunders harder in my ears and those butterflies turn into bats. I only stare for a second, but it feels like an eternity. I glance away and retreat to the abandoned first-aid kit on the counter.

"I can clean myself, if you want," I say, hoping he'll let me this time. Not that I need his permission, but my brother is nothing but persistent and always gets whatever he wants.

"No," he says as he comes to my side. He picks me up without making a sound and sets me down in the same spot. "I told you I'd take care of you."

I bite the inside of my cheek, holding myself back from arguing with him. It's not worth it.

He soaks a cotton pad with hydrogen peroxide and murmurs a soft warning before he pats it against a cut on my cheekbone. I hiss and pull my head away from him.

"That hurts!" I cry.

"Sorry. I did warn you." He cups the back of my head, bringing me back to him to keep tenderly cleaning the cut. As Jaxon cleans me, his gaze loses focus, like he's receding into his mind, so I say the first thing I think of to keep him here with me.

"Do you think this house is haunted?" It's a strange question, but it accomplishes what I intended.

Jaxon blinks, and his hand pauses as he focuses on me. "No," he drawls. "Why?"

"Well . . ." I close my eyes. "I've just been hearing some stuff. Seeing stuff too. Probably ghosts."

Jaxon's touch disappears, and I crack an eye open. He cocks his head curiously. "What sorts of things?"

I shrug and close my eye because I always find more courage through that than looking directly at him. "They look like burned demons. Then there are these faces that are right next to me while I try to sleep."

I open my eyes at the sound of crinkling paper. Jaxon opens bandages and gently lays each one on the sore cuts on my face. He says nothing after I just told him something embarrassing. I may as well never talk about it again. I know it sounds stupid and childish, but the things I see are terrifying and I've been dying to talk about them.

I sag, disappointed and embarrassed with myself. All I want to do is crawl into bed and sleep. Exhaustion settles in my bones at the thought of sleeping, and I sway in place as Jaxon finishes tending to me.

"That adrenaline is wearing off," he murmurs into my ear, then drags me into his arms and carries me out of the bathroom. I rest my cheek against his shoulder. "Where are you taking me?"

"Bed."

"I'm fine," I grumble. "Just resting my eyes."

His chest vibrates with a soft laugh, and his arms tighten around me, one hooked beneath my bottom. The sway of his gait lulls me closer to sleep, and I shiver from being cold.

You know what? Curling up in my bed doesn't sound so bad after all.

Jaxon carries me out of his room and into mine, gently laying me on the mattress. I'm a little disappointed that he didn't take me to his bed, but at the end of the day, it's for the best. In my sleepy state, I would have said or done something I'll later regret. I don't want to lose my brother and best friend because of this weird attraction I have for him. Eventually, I'll grow out of it.

An idea pops into my mind. I can speed things along by dating someone who will distract me from my brother. That sounds great, actually, but I don't know how Jaxon will feel about that. He's protective of me, and I'm sure he'll try to scare off potential dates.

I yawn. We'll cross that bridge when we get to it.

"Go to sleep," he murmurs. He pulls off my boots, then tucks me under my sheets.

I roll onto my back, my arm covering my eyes to block out the light streaming through my window. "You're the best big brother," I mumble.

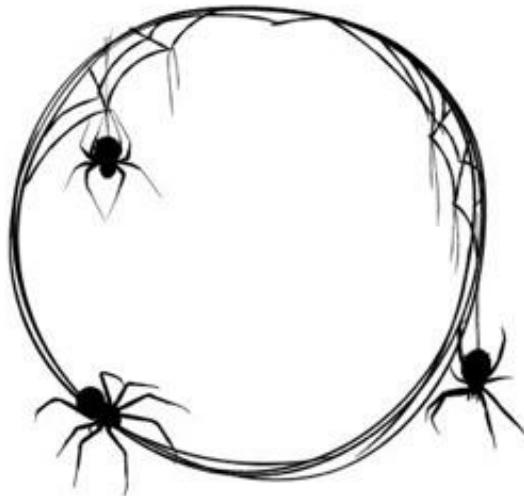
He stays quiet. I assume he's left, but then I peek out from under my arm and find him staring at me with a strange look on his face.

He shakes his head, guilt twisting his features. "I don't think I am, flower."

"Why?" I slur.

Before I fall asleep, I hear him say, "Because what's in my head would scare you."

CHAPTER 10



JAXON

Dahlia is asleep seconds after I hint at the things I think about her. I leave her bedroom, my hard dick straining against my zipper and demanding that I relieve myself. I can still feel her breasts in my palms and hear the breathy, wanton moans she made while I felt her up.

My poor little sister. She really thought playing with her tits was a part of assessing her wounds.

Instead of heading back to my bedroom, I leave the house. Riding my motorcycle is a challenge when my erection hasn't gone away. I play music in my helmet, hoping that will help replace my sister's moans, but I can still hear them as I pull up to the abandoned mansion I've used for "fun" for the last year and a half.

The moment I go up to the door, adrenaline rushes through me like I'm about to get into a fight. I'm still thirsty for blood after my altercation with Mickey, and what better way to quench it than with his best friend?

I knock on the door, putting space between each rap to let Ryder know that it's only me. It flies open and his tall, bulky body takes up the whole doorway. A skull mask covers his nose and mouth, and a head wrap with a beanie on top covers his hair. He's paired a long-sleeve shirt with cargo pants and boots, and a bulletproof vest rests over his torso.

"You're back," he says in greeting.

"Yeah." I squeeze past him and breathe in the stale scent of cigarettes, booze, and mold.

Once upon a time, it used to smell like fresh paint and bacon—which is an awful combination but better than the one now. I guess the family who abandoned this place had sat down to eat breakfast, then split during the last Reckoning. The whole neighborhood left, and the homes are all in a similar state, with abandoned furniture, clothes, and everything else. It's like a time capsule from when these people thought everything was okay before all hell broke loose.

Ryder's eyebrows draw together, and he folds his arms over his chest. "Something happened?"

"Something like that," I say, and roll my neck until it pops and eases the tension. "Is he in his room?"

We're keeping Kyle locked in the laundry room with nothing but a blanket and a TV that plays static from a lost signal. Ryder glances that way, then returns his knowing stare to me.

"Let me guess," he says. "You ran into someone on our list, and they upset you."

I barely dip my head in a nod, but he still catches it.

He sighs and waves his gloved hand, abandoning the twenty-question game when he's barely getting anything out of me.

"Let me set everything up for you, then," he says, and strides toward the laundry room to get Kyle. "Don't go easy on him tonight, Jax. He bit Aiden earlier."

My fingers curl into a tight fist. Of course he did. Kyle is a biter, and now I plan on returning the gesture.

"Tell him he's fighting for his freedom," I say to Ryder's back.

His laugh echoes through the rooms, and he disappears around the corner.



I swipe blood from the corner of my lip while keeping my gaze trained on Kyle. He holds his fists up in a sloppy position that shows he's never fought a day in his life until recently. His bare shoulders heave as he pants from overexertion. I've worked him to that point, dodging most of his punches.

By putting all of his strength into the beginning of this fight, Kyle has gone into this all wrong and worn himself out. Which means he's making this way too easy and not at all the tension-reliever I need. He was an idiot in school and is still that way now.

Kyle lunges, his fist hooking and missing me by a hair. I twist my body at an angle, dodging his hit and blocking another failed punch. The meathead snarls and rushes me, knocking me to the ground and pinning me beneath him. I grunt under his crushing weight, then laugh with each clumsy strike. His knuckles slam beside my temple with enough force that everything goes dark. Shrill rings fill my ears, and I slowly blink my eyes open, barely able to make anything out.

"Not laughing now, are you, fucker?" Kyle yells. His voice warbles like my head's underwater and I'm desperately trying to catch my breath. His weight on me disappears, and he screams at the top of his lungs.

I suck in a shaky breath and turn my head toward him. I make out fuzzy shapes that are supposed to be people as they dogpile Kyle.

"You cheating bastards!" he roars.

My heart beats faster, then slows until I think it's about to stop. In the back of my mind, I know I'm in shock after Kyle landed that lucky blow. I blink and blink again, clearing my vision until I see my best friend piling on Kyle. I smile as Aiden straddles Kyle's chest and punches into the sobbing pussy, who begs for his life.

"You're all liars!" Kyle cries.

He grunts with each punch and weakly shoves at Aiden, who's laying into him. I'm surprised by how easily my friend can move in all that gear he's wearing. It's like Ryder's, but he has a tool belt loaded with guns, ammunition, and even a hair-trigger grenade I've been nervous about.

I roll onto my side and shakily get to my feet. Ryder comes to my side and, with a hand on my arm, holds on to me until we're both sure I won't topple over.

I gain my bearings and tilt my head at an angle, stretching the tense muscles in my neck and cracking the cartilage. I groan with relief and do the same to the other side.

"I'll admit, you almost had me there, Kyle." I pop my knuckles and limp toward the bastard. "But we don't fight fair. You want freedom?"

Kyle's screams go quiet, and all that's left is the sound of flesh meeting flesh until that stops too. He lies limp beneath Aiden, blood covering his face and chest.

I crouch beside him and rest my wrists on my bent knees. Kyle's good eye turns toward me, pleading for me to show him mercy. Funny that this bastard thinks I'll give him that when he didn't do the same for Dahlia.

"I have so much planned for you," I murmur, and lean into him to ensure he hears my every word. I sniff, twisting my lips to push away the blood dripping from my nose to my busted lips. When that doesn't work, I swipe it away and study the dark crimson stain on the side of my finger. "Close to ten years of a grudge I hold for you"—I look at him and grin—"but it's not just because of me."

A bloody tear trails down Kyle's cheek, and his chin quivers with his soft sobs.

"Please," he croaks.

Ryder snorts. Aiden laughs. And I just keep smiling, though the action is more like baring my teeth than being mildly amused by Kyle's begging.

I swipe my fingertip over a smear of blood on the corner of his mouth and draw an upside down cross in the middle of his forehead. It reminds me of that band all the girls are crazy for—Satan's Priest. Tilting my head, I admire the symbol and can't help but widen my grin. Fitting for what my group is called. Satan's Deplorables. We were once the losers in school, but the

losers turned into bitter, angry men who formed a gang with a long list of those who wronged us and Dahlia.

"Let's get you back in bed, hm?" I say.

Kyle sobs quietly until the whining turns louder and grates at my every raw nerve. I don't know how he has it in him after being beaten to the last inch of his life.

Aiden stands and grabs Kyle by his wrists, then drags him back to his room. If I listen close enough, I can hear the static that plays twenty-four-seven. He's been in that room for three weeks straight, with nothing but that sound and the occasional shitty food we give him to keep him alive. I don't want to just kill Kyle Rife. I want to drive him mad before I send him straight to hell.

"You need stitches," Ryder says.

Touching the tender flesh where Kyle punched me, I wince at the sharp sting that pulses through the rest of my skull and down my neck to my shoulders. I follow Ryder to the kitchen we keep stocked with canned items and medical supplies we use for ourselves and the people we bring here to torture. I fold myself into the chair, and all the heaviness from the last thirty minutes settles deep into my bones until I can barely keep my eyes open.

I let Ryder do his thing as he grabs the first-aid kit and pulls out a bottle of hydrogen peroxide. It reminds me of earlier today, when I did the same for Dahlia. Even through my exhaustion, my body responds to the fresh memory. I bite back the groan threatening to slip past my lips as blood rushes to my dick.

"You lost your shit back there, man," Ryder says as he cleans my wounds.

I wince with each dab of the cotton ball soaked in peroxide. Fuck this. I fish in my pocket and pull out the rolled joint that miraculously made it through the fight. After sparking my lighter, I hold the tip to the flame, suck in the skunk smoke, and relax further into my seat.

Ryder sighs and finishes cleaning my wounds before he pulls out the needle and thread to stitch me up. I take another hit, forming donuts with the smoke and inhaling it. Ryder turns to me, warning me with a look before he stitches the wound at my temple. The sting of the needle piercing my skin and his gloved fingers holding the flaps together become a faded memory as I get high.

Ryder shifts and his eyes flick down to mine, like he's mentally preparing himself to have a talk with me. I inwardly sigh, not in the mood to be scolded like I'm his child.

"I'd be careful about who you allow to see you break. Eventually, one of them will have enough brain cells to figure out that Dahlia is your weakness," he says.

If I didn't know better, I'd also think he's prying for more information.

I cut him a dangerous look. "Are you implying that I shouldn't trust you?"

"Not at all." He pops the needle through my skin, and the thread snakes through with tremors as it pulls the flesh taut. It's an odd sensation, especially when I'm smoking. It's like my skin is wax with very few nerve endings. Thank god for the Indica strain I'm inhaling.

"What's your point?" I mutter.

"I don't understand why you're so protective of your sister." He finishes the last stitch and ties the ends before he snips it off his needle. "What will you do when she dates?"

I stiffen and curl my fingers into tight fists until my knuckles turn white. Red fills my vision as an uninvited image of Dahlia sleeping with another man pops into my mind. I refuse to allow some other man to touch her.

"You're her brother, dude," Ryder whispers, pulling me out of the spiral.

He gives me a knowing look, full of sympathy and understanding. He's been nothing but a great friend since we were five, so it's not surprising that he knows how I really feel about my sister.

There are a lot of complications and history between Dahlia and me. She and I are two atoms colliding and creating a new universe from the explosion. It's only a matter of time before we're discovered.

I wait for him to say it aloud, to point out the big elephant in the room. Instead, he turns his back to me and cleans up the area he used for first aid.

Once upon a time, I gave a shit about my weird fascination with Dahlia. I used to be embarrassed, but I can't bring myself to give a damn anymore. The world might not understand the level of obsession and love I have for my sister, and I'm fine with that. She just needs to come around and accept it, too.

I unfold myself from my seat and fix my jacket lapels. I glance at Ryder's back and consider ending his life. The thought is fleeting, and one that I should feel guilty over. Maybe deep down, I feel awful, but when it comes to Dahlia's safety—including her mental health—I'll do anything for her. If she doesn't want anyone to know yet, then I'll silence everyone for her. I'm her hand, and I'll do whatever she asks of me.

And if Ryder's dead, then no one else will know about me and my sister.

Feeling my glare, Ryder peeks at me over his shoulder. His eyebrows rise and he faces me. "Come on, bro," he says slowly, like he's talking to a large dog that's foaming at the mouth. "You know I won't tell anyone. All I'm saying is that you need to loosen up on your big-brother act. One of these days, she'll date someone, and it won't be—"

"It won't be *who*?" I wait for him to finish what he's saying, but he stares at me with a terrified look. "She won't date," I finally say. Not anybody else but me, that is.

Ryder shakes his head. "You can't deprive her of that."

"For her to be used like a fuck doll and have her heart broken?" I clench my jaw. "That's a hard pass."

Ryder sighs and leans his head back, looking to the ceiling for patience. "She's stronger than you give her credit for."

Ignoring him, I walk away, because if I stay any longer, I'll black out again and possibly kill my best friend.

My motorcycle waits outside for me. I don't take my time while I ride through the abandoned street. Music plays through the headphones in my helmet. It's ironic that the song talks about a big brother and his little sister.

I have so much planned for Dahlia. To make her mine. No one can have her but me, even if it means killing those who get in the way.

CHAPTER 11



DAHLIA

I wake up feeling exactly like what happened: like I got the shit kicked out of me. My face throbs, the skin is tight, and all I want to do is curl up and cry myself back to sleep. I lie on my back in bed because rolling onto my side hurts worse. I don't know how I fell asleep on my side when Jaxon brought me in here earlier.

My stomach flips. Jaxon.

I groan deep in my belly as I sit up and blow strands of hair out of my face. Darkness bathes my room, and a quick glance at the alarm clock on the nightstand shows that it's eight p.m. I wonder if he told our parents what happened or if he opted to hide in his room.

I get out of bed and limp to the bathroom. Raising my crop top, I check my reflection and wince at all the bruises on my ribs and the top of my stomach. My face isn't any better. I have so many marks on my skin that show the world some fragile man got his feelings hurt.

"Ugh. Fucking asshole."

I drop my shirt and use the toilet. When I finish, I wash my hands and leave my bedroom. My steps falter as I glance at Jaxon's closed door. The fresh memory of him touching me pops into my head.

Wait, no. He didn't touch me. He *assessed* the wounds. That's it. Brothers don't cop a feel. They just don't, and that's totally not what he did.

My cheeks warm and the familiar flutter in my stomach builds.

Movement catches my eye. I look to the other side and tense. A tall figure stands at the end of the hallway, its frame thin and its legs longer than what's normal. I stumble back a step, then another, until I'm against Jaxon's door.

"Jax," I whisper, with a tremor in my voice. I knock my knuckles gently against his door, hoping he hears me. There's no answer, because of course not.

The tall figure puts one leg in front of the other, closing the distance between me and it. My legs tremble, and I'm frozen in place. Why am I frozen? Why the fuck am I not screaming and running into Jaxon's room?

It moves closer and reaches its slender fingers toward me. I scream and bolt into Jaxon's room, slamming the door shut and locking it. I ignore the pain in my body as I run and jump on Jaxon's bed and throw the covers over me to hide from that *thing*.

"What the fuck was that?" I sob and squeeze my eyes shut as tears trail down my cheeks. "Hold it together, Dahl. Fucking Hold. It. Together."

I'm not holding it together. I'm freaking out and can't stop shaking. My once-empty bladder threatens to open the floodgates, and dear god, if I piss on my brother's bed, I won't ever wake up. I'll die, and even in death, I'll be ashamed for soaking his mattress out of terror.

As minutes pass, my trembling slows, then stops. Whatever that thing was, it hasn't pulled back the sheets yet, so I may live another day. I peek from under the fabric, checking to see if it followed me in here. I'm sure a locked door won't stop it from coming in. That thing didn't look human, so it could have some type of magical abilities to, I don't know, walk through walls or some shit.

After checking if the coast is clear, I let out a shaky, relieved sigh when I see nothing. I melt into the mattress as every stiff muscle relaxes until I'm practically a puddle of goo. Then I realize Jaxon isn't here.

He's probably out doing whatever it is he does. He and his friends always hang out and ride their motorcycles. I've gone with him a few times, watching as he pops wheelies and races with his friends.

I roll onto my side and wince at the sharp sting that dulls to a throb in my ribs. Jaxon's intoxicating scent fills my lungs, and I start to bury my face in his pillow before I'm cruelly reminded that my face hurts.

I roll out of his bed and head to the door, but I stop as the fear returns. What if that thing is waiting for me outside? The trembles come back, and I debate if it's a risk I'm willing to take.

I shake my head and go to his bathroom. The large room is pristine, giving the impression that it has never been used. I search for the first-aid kit Jaxon used earlier, hoping I can find something for the pain. My clothes are suddenly too tight, and the bands of my shorts and underwear are digging into me.

I find the kit under his sink and dig through, hoping to find something. I huff. "Nothing. Of course there's nothing."

I shift uncomfortably and adjust my bra, then my shorts. My face throbs without me touching it. I check my reflection and cringe at the swelling and redness. I growl under my breath from the bands digging into my skin. Whoever made these clothes sucks. It leaves little to no room when you're swelling like a ripening berry.

I drag my shirt off, followed by my bra, then my shorts and underwear. I stand naked in place for a moment. A groan slips out of my mouth, and I drop my head back, ignoring the sharp, uncomfortable charley-horse cramps in my neck. This feels so good. Freeing your breasts from a bra has to be the best feeling in the world.

No, having your older brother play with your tits is the best feeling in the world, and you know that.

I stiffen and curl my lips back with a cringe. Jaxon didn't feel me up. He was checking for more cuts and possibly broken ribs. That's it.

I leave the bathroom and rifle through Jaxon's clothes. Wearing anything of his is always the best. He may be leaner than me, but he's still bigger and his clothes are baggy. It's the closest thing to wearing a boyfriend's "borrowed" shirt. I pull out a T-shirt and sweats and put them on. Instantly, I feel ten times better and even a little safer, like nothing can harm me.

My stomach growls, reminding me I haven't eaten since early this morning. All I had was a bagel and cream cheese before I went into town to shop for Halloween with Jaxon. That obviously went well.

Thanks for nothing, Mickey.

The scary-looking creature is gone when I check outside the bedroom. After waiting for a moment, I head downstairs and go straight to the kitchen. All the lights are off and the home is quiet, so it's safe to say that Mom and Dad are already in bed. They're morning people, which means they retire for the night by seven p.m.

I pull out the plastic container of Mexican leftovers. Mom isn't the best cook, but she can make a mean enchilada dish. I wait for the food to heat up in the microwave and lean against the counter, eyeing the time as it counts down.

Arms wind around me, tattooed hands resting on my stomach, one above the other. I suck in a breath at the sudden touch and whip my head to the side to look over my shoulder. I wince at the sting and drop my head forward with a small whimper.

Jaxon pulls me into him until his chest is flush against my back. "You're hurting," he murmurs.

I nod and bite on my bottom lip to stop from making any more noises. The last thing I need is our parents hearing me cry, then seeing all the cuts and bruises and dismissing it with a, "*Get over it.*"

"I can help you with that," Jaxon says quietly.

My cheeks warm, and my mouth opens without me having a moment to think before I speak. "What, like playing with my breasts to make me feel better?"

I mentally facepalm and curse myself for being so awkward.

Jaxon tenses. His fingers twitch as though he's fighting himself back from taking my invitation. "Is that what you want, sis?" The microwave beeps, announcing my food is ready. I ignore it, all of my attention on Jaxon.

My cheeks flame with a blush and my breathing picks up. "I was just being sarcastic. That would be wrong."

"Would it?" He shifts closer, pushing me against the edge of the counter until it digs into my stomach. His breath fans

against my neck, and he dips his hand lower to rest right above my pelvis.

I can't concentrate. My mind goes fuzzy, and that dipping feeling in my stomach returns full force. I want Jaxon's hands on me, but not innocently. My pussy aches to be filled by him—fingers, tongue, or cock.

This is wrong, I chide myself. He's my brother. This isn't something to give in to. He's just teasing me.

"Answer me," Jaxon says. He fingers the waistband of the borrowed sweats, and I swear I can feel his pleased reaction now that he knows I'm wearing his pants.

"Yes, it would." My nipples harden into sensitive peaks, and I bite the inside of my cheek to distract myself from how he's making me feel.

He makes a noise in the back of his throat. I can't tell if he's agreeing or disagreeing. Jaxon's silence eats at me.

"What are you thinking about?" I say, and peek at him. Shadows dance over his face, and it's hard to make everything out, but I still catch his eyes darkening and his lips curling back in an evil smile.

"Don't ask questions you don't want to know the answers to."

He loosens his hold on me and turns me to face him. Jaxon's nostrils flare as he takes in all the bruises on my face.

My eyes widen at all the cuts and bruises marring his complexion. "What happened?"

He picks me up, forcing me to wrap my legs around his waist before he sets me on the counter. I can't bring myself to unwind from him, desperate to keep feeling him nestled between my thighs. It's a guilty pleasure, and I can pretend it doesn't affect me at all, even though warmth pools low in my belly.

Jaxon brushes his knuckles down my cheek where I'm not bruised, his touch gentle and featherlight, like a breeze grazing my skin. "You know I'll do anything for you, right?"

"Jaxon . . ." I reach for his face, then stop. My fingers curl into my palm. "What happened?"

He cups my love handles and leans forward, putting our faces an inch apart. A dangerous gleam passes through his gaze. "Don't worry your pretty little head about me."

"That's not—"

He moves in closer until his lips brush mine, but it can't be a kiss because of how soft it is. He cups the back of my head, his fingers threading through my hair at the scalp.

"I said, don't worry about it," he whispers, and tilts his head, still brushing his mouth against mine and bringing a strange flutter to my stomach. "If you want, you can kiss it to make it feel better."

My heart beats faster the longer he lingers.

"Kiss it?" I breathe. "Or kiss you?"

Jaxon's lips curl into a rueful smile, as if he finally got what he's been wanting, and his fingers slip inside the waistband of my sweats and ease them down my hips. My breath catches in my throat.

"Beg me for it," he murmurs.

I bury my trembling hands in his hair and pull at the strands, making him groan. "Please, Jaxon."

He growls and closes the small space between our mouths, crushing his lips against mine.

The light in the kitchen flips on. Jaxon eases my sweats back up and moves closer to block me from view as he glares over his shoulder at whoever just walked in.

"What are you two doing?" I tense at Dad's deep voice, which borders on a growl.

Jaxon's jaw muscle tics. "Fucking. What does it look like?" he deadpans.

My jaw drops, and I watch in horror as Dad storms into the kitchen and stops beside Jaxon. His face falls when he sees it's me, and then he suspiciously looks between us. When he doesn't see the missing clothes or Jaxon's dick inside me, he shoots my brother a glare.

"What's wrong with her face?" Dad asks, though he asks Jaxon and not me, like I'm not even here. Why isn't he concerned about what Jaxon said? We aren't fucking, but he literally just walked in the moment we kissed.

"Why don't you ask her yourself?" Jaxon says, speaking my thoughts out loud.

Dad looks from me to Jaxon and gets a better look at his injuries. "Did you two get into a fight?"

"No," I say.

"Yes."

I glare at Jaxon but feel silly when I realize Dad meant get in a fight with someone else and not with each other.

Airhead. Rocks. Stupid.

Dad huffs. "Which is it?"

Jaxon settles his hands on my hips, and a scatter of goosebumps rises on my arms and legs. "Someone laid their hands on Dahlia, so I laid mine on him and his friend."

Dad doesn't look in the least bit surprised, just annoyed. I, however, am shocked and now have a thousand questions for Jaxon.

Dad's frown deepens when he notices Jaxon's hands gripping my sides. His eyebrow twitches and he cocks his head, the wheels spinning in his mind. I can only imagine what's going through his head because I'm thinking the same things.

Is this a territorial display?

Is this him letting our dad know how he feels about me without saying it?

Is he trying to be obvious about what we were doing before Dad barged in here?

"Get cleaned up and go to bed." Dad cuts his eyes to Jaxon. "*Separately.*"

Jaxon keeps a blank expression, but fire burns in his gaze. Our father ignores the challenge and grabs a bottle of water from the fridge, then gives us a warning look and heads back to his bedroom.

Jaxon turns to me, and I wiggle out of his grasp, ungracefully landing on my feet.

"Where are you going?" he says.

I dodge his hand as it swipes out to grab me. "Bed. I'm exhausted."

Jaxon doesn't chase after me. He drops his arms to his sides and looks at me from head to toe, the corner of his lip quirking.

Backing up another step, I put more space between us, then the island table that he'll have to go around if he chases me. I shiver at the thought of him chasing me. I can only imagine what it would be like to run through the woods late at night with the threat of my brother pinning me to the ground.

Jaxon smirks like he knows what's going through my head. "You better go to your room, sis. Wouldn't want your big brother to corrupt you."

"What if I'm already corrupt?" The words are out of my mouth before I realize what I've said.

His smile widens dangerously. "Liar."

A blush works its way to my cheeks, and I rush out of the kitchen and hide in my bedroom. I slip under the sheets and lie on my back, since that's the only comfortable position I can be in until I heal.

Jaxon doesn't think I'm corrupt?

He doesn't know the things that run through my head and the fantasies I have about him. He may tease me with his innocent flirting, maybe even kiss me out of amusement, but my reactions to him are genuine. I want my brother, but I can't have him, so the next best thing to get over these feelings is to put myself out there in the dating pool.

I fish under my pillows until I find my phone, then pull up the app store to download as many dating apps as possible. The only hitch is that Jaxon can't know about this. He'll lose his shit and murder any guy I talk to.

I just have to make sure he never finds out.

CHAPTER 12



JAXON

I lean against the counter where Dahlia sat before our fucking dad came in and broke apart a moment I didn't want to end. My head hangs forward between my shoulders, and I breathe through my nose to will my erection away. It's been ten minutes and I'm still trembling with the need to come.

Dad is on my shit list, especially after he tore me and Dahlia apart. She was right there for the taking, and he had to fuck it up. To make matters worse, she wanted to give in to me, but then flipped, reverting to the whole it's-wrong spiel.

I straighten and shove my hand through my hair to move it out of my eyes. If Dahlia wants to be a tease, then that's fine. I can be a tease, too.

I leave the kitchen and head upstairs to my bedroom. My steps slow as I pass Dahlia's closed door, and I listen closely for any sounds but hear nothing. She must be asleep, dreaming about other men and god knows what else.

Is it wrong that I'm jealous of the men in her dreams?

Clenching my jaw, I go into my bedroom and leave the door open. I pass by my bed, taking in the twisted sheets and wrinkles on my pillows that weren't there before I left to visit Kyle. I arch an eyebrow, wondering why she came in here while I was gone. Not that I care if she comes and goes in my bedroom, but she's sneaking around, thinking I won't notice. Especially after seeing her in my clothes and how my shirt clung to her stomach, giving me an eyeful of her delicious curves.

I walk into my bathroom, flip on the light, and undress. My briefs barely touch the ground before I get in the shower. I turn on the cold water first, praying it'll be enough to get rid of my boner. My skin shivers from the temperature, but I still feel so hot, and my muscles are straining. I grab myself, languidly stroking my dick and squeezing out drops of pre-cum.

Dahlia's sighs and soft moans echo in my head. The euphoric feeling of her thighs wrapped around my waist follows close behind. I squeeze my eyes shut and pant as I stroke with more vigor. How quickly I come is embarrassing, and I catch my load in an empty pill bottle. It's already half full and just needs a couple more loads before it holds enough for what I plan.

I clean myself off and wash my hair, then get out of the shower once I rinse off. Wrapping a towel around my waist, I pause when I notice a pile of clothes I didn't see before. I cross the space and scoop up the discarded shorts and crop top. A smaller

piece of clothing falls, and I grab it mid-air. Dahlia's thong dangles from my fingers, and my softening cock jerks back to life. Of course she would wear green-and-black undergarments.

I groan and bring the used underwear to my nose and breathe in the musky scent. It's so strong, like I have my face between her legs right now. With a shudder, I run my tongue along the small patch where her pussy rubbed. She tastes so fucking good. I lick again, my hand flying down to my cock. My towel falls to the floor and pools around my feet as I stroke myself while licking her panties like some goddamn desperate pervert.

My palm burns my shaft, and I let go of myself long enough to spit in my open hand before I fist myself again. My legs tremble as I work myself closer to another orgasm that lingers but won't come fast enough. I walk into my room and have to stop just outside the bathroom doorway and lean my shoulder against the wooden frame.

"Fuck, Dahlia," I growl.

I lick her panties and revel in her faint taste, and I hate myself for it. If it weren't for me licking her underwear, I'd still be able to smell her musky scent. My eyes slide shut, and a deep groan works its way up my chest and out of my throat as my balls draw up tight.

"Do you hear me, sis?" I yell.

Silence.

I drop my head back and wrap her thong around my dick, stroking myself until I'm coming so much that I hate wasting it. It should be in the pill bottle.

Better yet, it should be deep inside my sister's cunt.

My cum soaks into the cotton underwear and dampens my fingers and palm as I shake my dick, squeezing the head while I finish. My legs give out and I fall on my ass with a breathless chuckle as I lean against the wall, head back and eyes closed.

I bask in the high from my climax and shudder as another shot of cum leaks from my pierced tip as I think about her riding me. Her thick thighs will clench on my waist, her pussy swallowing every inch of me while her breasts sway as she bounces on my cock like it's a goddamn trampoline.

"Soon," I whisper.

Soon I'll have her, and she'll be completely mine. Mind, body, and soul. All of her belongs to me.

Until then, I'll return her gift to me with one of my own as a thank you. I'm nothing but a good big brother who returns items that belong to his sister.

CHAPTER 13



DAHLIA

I roll onto my side, sighing as I pry my eyes open after a fitful sleep. I woke up several times throughout the night. At first, it was to check my room to ensure the creepy *thing* or the burnt demon wasn't standing beside my bed. Then it was because of nightmares about the world ending in the most painful way.

My phone vibrates with a new notification, but I can't find the energy to grab it. I lie on my side, orienting myself. The sunlight streams through my windows, bathing my room with dim dawn light.

All the events that happened the last twenty-four hours play through my head like a broken record. Like last night's kiss with Jaxon, then hearing him moaning in his bedroom. I clench my thighs together to stop the pulsing. He said my name while he touched himself and became louder the closer he got to his orgasm.

I squeeze my eyes shut and breathe hard through my nose as lust for my brother builds inside me. Its focus settles low in my belly and between my clenched legs. I stick my hand down my sweats, curling my fingers between my wet folds as I rub my clit. My mouth drops open, and my heavy breaths fill the silence. Jaxon's kiss and moans create a fantasy in my head. One where we're alone, naked and writhing together on my bed.

My front teeth sink into my bottom lip as every muscle in my body tenses when my orgasm sweeps me away. I stop breathing and ride it out. It's not the best one I've had, but it's also not awful. I let out a shaky breath, pop my head up, and pull my hand out of my pants as I stare at the thong I wore yesterday lying nearby.

How come I didn't notice it until now?

I sit up and grab it, immediately dropping it when I feel a damp substance on it. "Ew!"

I wrack my brain, trying to remember how the underwear got on my bed. Normally, I throw my dirty laundry into the basket, so this isn't like me at all. Then the answer crashes into me.

I left my clothes in Jaxon's bathroom and never brought them back to my bedroom.

Pinching my dirty underwear, I inspect it to see what the sticky, wet residue is. It's a partially clear, partially milky substance. My stomach twists into sickening knots.

"Ugh." My face turns a few shades of green as I look at the gross stuff. "What is that?"

Is that snot? Did he blow his nose in my underwear?

"Jesus, Jaxon," I growl.

Climbing off my bed, I keep the underwear pinched between my fingers. I storm out of my room, stop outside of his, and pound on his door with my fist. Minutes pass, and he doesn't answer, so I pound on it and slap my palm on the wood.

The door flies open, and Jaxon's tall, lean form fills the doorway. I stare at his messy hair, telling myself that I'm the reason the strands are sticking up and out of place. I rake my gaze down his body, my cheeks flaming hot as I take in every bare inch of him. I suck in a breath at the hard outline on his gym shorts, hanging to the left between his legs.

He crosses his arms over his chest and glares at me with little to no heat. "What?"

I snap out of it and remember why I'm here. Raising my hand, I show off my dirty underwear so he can see the disgusting snot. "Seriously?"

Jaxon keeps his piercing stare on my face, not bothering to look at the thong dangling on my finger. The corner of his lip curls, and I want to kiss the smirk off his face.

No. Slap, Dahlia. You want to slap.

"You don't like my gift?" he asks, his voice raspy and deep.

"No, I don't like it," I say. "This is so gross! You need to see a damn doctor if you can blow out that much."

Jaxon cocks his head, his dark eyebrows drawing inward for a split second. "That's a normal amount, sis. If you want a bigger load, give me a few days and I'll give you what you want."

My head rears back, lips curling in disgust. "That's so fucked up. I don't know what I did to deserve this." I hold my underwear higher and push them into his face—the equivalent of rubbing a dog's nose in its mess.

Jaxon raises an eyebrow. "I didn't realize you're scared of a little of cu—"

"What if I rolled over onto it and it got on my face? Or if Mom comes into my room and sees this snot-covered underwear, you weirdo!" I stomp my foot and chuck the panties at his chest.

Without so much as a flinch, he catches them while keeping his perplexed gaze on me. I can see the wheels turning in Jaxon's head.

"Snot?"

"Yes, snot. What else would it be?" I cross my arms over my chest and glare.

He glances at the underwear, then back at me. "Dahlia," he says, his voice pitched lower. "That's not—"

I scoff and give him my back. "Don't lie to me."

I take all of two steps away from him before he catches my arm and spins me to face him again. He jerks me inside his room and slams the door before he pins me to it. Jaxon chuckles the underwear to the floor, uncaring about snot smearing on it. He leans in until his breath fans across my face. My heart picks up speed and slams against my ribcage.

"Now tell me, little sister, and don't even try to lie to me," he says. "Have you fucked around with a guy?"

My mouth drops open, and I'm sure I look stupid because of how wide my eyes are. He stuns me into silence and I'm having to reboot everything to find words. A moment passes and I gather myself.

"Why are you asking that?"

"Answer the question." He places both hands next to my head, caging me between him and the door.

My cheeks warm, and it's difficult to look into Jaxon's eyes while talking about my sex life—or the lack thereof. I avert my gaze and pinch my lips together.

"I'm not answering that."

Jaxon stares at me with an unreadable expression. I don't know why he changed the subject or how it pertains to underwear.

"Fuck," he finally whispers, and drops his head to my shoulder. After a moment, he raises his head. His eyes darken and I stiffen, now worrying if he's about to lose his shit on me.

"Why did you ask that?" I mumble.

Shadows creep over Jaxon's face, and the wild look in his eyes intensifies. "You've never seen a man's cum, have you?"

Despite it coming out as a question, I know he means it as a statement. He's pointing out the obvious.

"I'm not answering that, either," I stammer.

Jaxon tilts his head. His dark gaze bores into my face, giving me the impression that he can see into my soul and learn my every dirty secret.

"You're a virgin," he says, clearly not dropping the subject.

I've had enough and shove him away, throwing him off balance. I swing the door open and peace the hell out.

A squeak slips out of me as Jaxon's arm wraps around me, jerking me into him until we're flush. I turn my head, peeking at him in horror. Jaxon leans in, brushing his straight nose against my cheek. His hand gently squeezes my love handle like he can't resist the temptation.

"If anyone pops your cherry, I'll cut him into pieces. I'll fashion his parts into jewelry for you to wear as a reminder of

what will happen to the next man who touches you," he whispers. His lips brush my skin, and a shiver creeps up my spine.

"What I do with my body is my business," I say.

"You and your body are my business," he says.

His lips curl into a humorless smile, and his hand on my waist slips over my pudgy stomach, stealing the breath from my lungs from the simple touch that feels so dirty and intimate.

He slides his palms up and brushes them over my breasts. My nipples harden into sensitive peaks and my mind screams at the confusion his touch brings. I clench my thighs together and pant as he plays with me, his touch growing bolder as he squeezes my breast. He raises one of his hands to my throat and curls his fingers around my neck with enough pressure to make my head spin.

"No one touches what's mine," he growls.

My knees go weak as butterflies fly around in my stomach. I can't feel this way about him, but the fight is quickly leaving me. "You're my brother."

Jaxon's eyebrows lower into a scowl. "I don't care, flower."

My eyelashes flutter, and I bite back a moan as he pinches my nipple and grinds his hard dick against my backside. His hand disappears for a moment before he shoves it up my shirt, his palm playing with my bare breast. My legs go weak, but he catches me before I fall, then steadies me in his strong hold.

"Keep fighting this, Dahlia. I like a good chase," he murmurs into my ear.

He guides me to the hallway, shoving me against the wall until I'm sandwiched between him and it. His hand moves to my other breast, giving it the same attention by pinching my nipple until I gasp from the sting.

I can't remember why I'm fighting this. My mushy mind screams at me to let him do more.

"Are you wet for me, sis?" he rasps.

I nod without thinking, then realize what I'm doing and shake my head.

"Which is it?" Jaxon laughs and drops his hand. His rough palm glides over my stomach, then creeps to my waistband. He lingers there, waiting for my consent.

Voices downstairs draw me back to reality and yank me into my body. I wiggle in his hold and throw my elbow backward, hitting him in the stomach. His hold tightens, but I still fight him, then slip away. I run down the hall toward the staircase. Jaxon's deep chuckles fade as I put more space between us.

CHAPTER 14



DAHLIA

I gasp for air as I lean against the kitchen island, my arms and legs shaking like a leaf being thrown into a hurricane. Jaxon's touch lingers, tingling and licking every nerve ending in my body.

This is what I wanted. I've been dying to be with him for so long, but now that it's in my face and he's making it clear he wants me too, I'm scared. Really fucking scared because the world won't understand. I don't know how much longer I can fight this attraction to him.

I check behind me, ensuring Jaxon didn't follow me down here and decide to keep pursuing me out in the open. Dad caught us but said nothing about it. Possibly because of Jaxon's sarcastic remark, which put him at ease.

Breathing a sigh of relief, I make myself a cup of coffee and a bowl of cereal before I sit down at the table. On the first bite, I wince from the dull pain as the skin on the side of my face pulls even tighter.

To distract myself from the pain, I grab my phone out of my pocket and check my notifications. A lot of them are from the dating apps I joined last night. There are several matches and new messages. Jaxon's warning plays in my head as I open the first message. I hesitate. He wouldn't actually kill someone . . .

"Dahlia."

I jump at Mom's voice as she bustles into the kitchen.

"I need you to run into town and get decorations and pumpkins."

"Why can't you do it?" I mumble.

Mom comes around from behind me, heading straight to the coffeepot. "Speak up and stop mumbling."

I glare at her back as she pours herself a cup, then turns to me. Her eyes widen when she notices my swollen and bruised face.

"What happened?" she screeches, then sets her coffee on the counter before she rushes to my side.

I gently touch my cheek and wince. "I'm okay."

Mom crowds me as she leans in and touches the cuts way too hard. I hiss in a breath through my clenched teeth and jerk

away from her, but Mom touches my face like it doesn't hurt me. I slap her hand away and she gasps, clutching her figurative pearls because I established boundaries and refused to let her keep hurting me. She looks so funny with her wide eyes and thin, parted lips. She almost looks like a caricature of herself.

I roll my lips inward, holding back the laugh building in my chest.

Mom recovers, her shock twisting into anger. I almost feel bad for wanting to laugh at her, but my disdain overrides that. A giggle slips from me, then another, until I'm cackling with tears in my eyes.

"Why are you laughing?" she snaps. "This isn't funny, Dahlia. Quit being a baby and let me see."

I shake my head as my laughter dies out. "You were hurting me."

"Dahlia." Mom huffs and reaches for me. "Stop it. I'm not hurting you. I just want to see how bad these are."

She's a nursing-student dropout from over twenty years ago who thinks she knows what she's doing. I'm glad she's not a nurse because I can only imagine how awful she would be to her patients.

I jerk back again, and Mom grabs the nape of my neck. Her acrylic nails dig into my skin and draw a whimper from me.

"What happened?" she asks.

I wince as she peels off a Band-Aid like she doesn't know how much it hurts when it's done that slowly. "Nothing major. Please, just stop."

"Honey, you're mumbling again. Speak up." She touches the wound, applying too much pressure again. It's like she wants to hurt me while disguising it as caring about me. Maybe this is why I'm so fucked up. My mom isn't any better.

I yelp and jump out of my seat, my elbow and knees knocking against the chair, counter, and Mom, who yells like I just stabbed her. The metal spoon in my bowl clatters onto the onyx-marble counter, flicking milk and cereal onto it.

"That didn't hurt, Dahlia," Mom chides, and chases me around the kitchen.

I duck past her and dash to the other side of the counter, holding my hands up, palms out to keep her at bay. "Why do you need to touch it? And with no gloves or at least freshly washed hands. It'll get an infection now."

Mom rolls her eyes. "It won't get infected. I was checking if there's puss."

I shake my head. "I told you, I'm fine."

"Dahlia, I need you to use your voice and speak up. I'm sick of you mumbling!"

"She said she's fine," Jaxon says. "You need to listen instead of opening your mouth just to hear yourself talk."

I suck in a breath and swing my gaze to the wide doorway leading into the kitchen. Jaxon walks into the room, his lips pulled down in a frown as he glares at my mom with vitriol.

Mom softens as she looks at my brother, even though he insulted her. It's wild how she changes when around him. "Do you know anything about this?"

Jaxon crosses the room, plucks a sugary marshmallow from my cereal bowl, and pops it into his mouth. He steps in front of me, acting as a barrier between my mother and me.

"Like you care?" Jaxon says, and slips his hands into his pockets.

Mom touches her throat, her eyes shining with forced tears. "You're saying that I don't care about my daughter? I gave birth to her!"

Jaxon leans into Mom's personal bubble, and her lips part like she expects him to kiss her.

"You think giving birth to someone automatically means you care about them?" He leans back, and it's hard to miss Mom's disappointment when he didn't do more. "Let me worry about my sister, and you worry about my father's wallet."

I stop breathing, and I prepare myself for an all-out argument. Mom won't put up with that—especially from me. All the fight in her leaves. She huffs, turns on her heels, and storms out of the room. Of course she does. She doesn't want to argue with Jaxon when he has anger issues, but she's okay with crossing every line and boundary with me.

Jaxon turns to me, and I slowly expel the air from my burning lungs after holding my breath for who knows how long. He looks me over, assessing my face with a more clinical eye than the possessive look he had not even thirty minutes ago when we were upstairs.

He cups my cheek. His thumb brushes against my skin in a whisper-soft caress. "How are you feeling?"

I shift my weight on my legs and sink my front teeth into my bottom lip for a moment to distract myself from his touch. "Like crap," I say after a moment. "Everything hurts. What about you?"

His stroke freezes for a moment before he continues the gentle touch. "I can give you something for the pain."

"Like what?" I can't stop myself as I lean into his caress, and my hands creep up to touch him. My palms hover an inch away from his chest.

The corners of Jaxon's lips tilt up like he's just won a battle. He rubs his thumb over my bottom lip. "Follow me."

He drops his arm and walks out of the kitchen. I wait for a moment, swallowing my nerves because I know he's most likely taking me back to his bedroom.

And I don't think I can fight this any longer.

CHAPTER 15



DAHLIA

Jaxon closes his bedroom door behind me and locks it.

My stomach flips, and I shift my weight as he crosses the room and sits on the edge of his four-poster bed, pats the space next to him, and waits.

"I don't know how you'll react to taking a hit off a joint, so I have a better idea," he explains when I hesitate. He pulls the joint out of his pocket, along with a lighter.

I take a small step toward him, then pause. I don't know if this is a good idea. Dad lost his shit when he smelled weed in Jaxon's bedroom when we were in high school. He brought Jaxon to his office, and I heard the beating—which is nothing new, but it's still terrible that he did that to Jaxon.

He lights the end of the joint and puffs it until large plumes of smoke roll out of his nose and mouth. He sucks more of the skunk plant into his lungs and holds it for a moment before he blows it out.

I frown. "So you're just going to hot box me or something?"

He lowers the joint, his eyelids drooping as he relaxes from the few hits. "No." He jerks his head to the side, gesturing to where he wants me. "Sit."

Sighing, I join him on the bed and sit on the edge. Jaxon maneuvers me way too easily as he holds the joint between his lips and drags me into the middle of his bed. He sets me on his lap, my back against his chest and my rear on his crossed legs. He wraps his arm around my middle, his hand resting on my side to keep me in place, as if I'm about to run away like I did earlier. I shift, trying to hold some of my weight off of him so I'm not crushing his dick with my big butt. Jaxon tightens his hold, forcing me to sit directly on his groin.

"Doesn't that hurt?" I ask.

He taps my love handle. "Quite the opposite," he murmurs in my ear. "Now turn your head toward me."

I suppress a shudder that wants to break loose. I turn my head and realize just how close our faces are. He meets my stare and sucks the unlit end of the joint, grabs my jaw, and holds me in place while he lowers his mouth to mine. I freeze, my

stomach somersaulting at the gentle press.

He licks my bottom lip, smoke curling out as he waits for me to open up to him. I breathe shakily as I do, his tongue flicking my upper lip as he eases the plume of smoke into my mouth. Time stands still, and every part of me becomes sensitive.

I can't fight this anymore. I want him so fucking bad that it hurts.

I suck in the smoke, and my stomach flips as he keeps his lips against mine, barely moving in gentle kisses. My head spins and bright dots flash behind my closed eyelids. I don't even know when I closed them.

"Relax," he murmurs. His breath joins mine, and I realize my mouth is still open. I close my lips, but Jaxon doesn't pull away. "How do you feel?"

Leaning into him, I crane my neck toward him and wish this would never end. "I-I . . ." I swallow to wet my dry throat. "I'm still hurting."

I can't feel shit, but I want to see what Jaxon will do.

He leans back, and I curse in my head, regretting telling him that. That regret disappears as he takes a drag from the joint and crushes his lips against mine again. I eagerly open my mouth and suck in the smoke, coughing as it chokes me. Jaxon pulls back just a little so that I can get through the coughing fit. When it stops, I crack open my eyes and find him watching me with amusement and something else. Something . . . primal and hungry.

Jaxon's hand glides over my stomach, taking his time as he touches me. He sucks in another hit and puts the joint on the ashtray he pulled out. I barely have enough time to think before his lips are back on mine and he blows more smoke into my mouth. Even after I suck in the last wisps, he moves his mouth against mine in a gentle kiss that builds into a frenzy.

My head feels fuzzy, like I'm sinking back into my mind. Instead of pain, I feel only his hand gliding over my stomach under my shirt, teasing me with his gentle touches. There's a buzz beneath my skin. It could be the weed, but also his hand creeping upward, getting closer to my breasts.

"How are you now?" He pitches his voice lower and rumbles deep in his chest. His fingertips graze the underside of my breast.

Thank god I'm not wearing a bra. Maybe I should be cursing God, but I can't bring myself to do it. Not anymore. Not when a pulse builds between my legs and I wish Jaxon would dip his hand into my sweats to make me come.

"Still hurting," I say.

He inches higher, his palm gliding over my breast and testing the weight of it. I arch my back, pushing my breast further into his hand, realizing too late what I've done.

"Still hurting?" he croons. He twitches beneath me, and the hard outline beneath my ass might as well burn a hole through my clothes. He's hard and I want to touch him so badly, but I can't seem to move.

Jaxon's lips move harder against mine, the kiss building as our tongues tangle together. I breathe harder and shift my hips to ease the ache.

"Shh, little sister," he whispers. "Where are you hurting?"

I follow his lead, unsure if I'm doing this right. I've never kissed before. Never went all the way with a guy, either. I should be ashamed that my first kiss is with my brother, but I'm not.

"Between my legs," I say softly, a tremble in my voice. It's the weed that's given me more of a backbone now. It has to be.

Jaxon nips at my lip and soothes the sting with his tongue. I moan as he flexes his fingers on my breast, squeezing it harder, like he can't help himself.

"Where between your legs?" he says, his mouth hovering over mine. "Show me."

I swallow hard and grab his wrist, dragging his hand down the front of my sweats. His fingers extend, and he curls them to cup my pussy. A small moan works out of me from the barest of touches. He growls and crushes his mouth to mine as he dips his middle finger between my folds and sweeps it up and down.

"Fuck, flower, you're sopping wet," he snarls into the kiss.

I nod and rock my hips against him, searching for the friction I need. My orgasm is right there, and he's barely touching me. I'm the fuse and he's the lighter. All we need is his spark for us to burn in the flames of our hunger and *need* for each other.

"Tell me what you need," he says with a rasp. He pulls back to watch my face as he dips his finger outside my entrance, teasing me by sinking it a knuckle deep, then pulling out. "What do you want me to do?"

"Rub my clit," I beg breathlessly.

A strange expression crosses his face. He's unsure, like he doesn't know where my clit is.

I shove the waistband of my sweats down, and he helps me as I kick them off so I'm sitting half-naked on his lap. I grab his hand, guiding his fingers to the bundle of nerves and rolling his fingertip on it. He's a fast learner and takes control, going at the same pace I showed him, then changing the rhythm. He watches my every expression, noting what makes me moan and jerk my hips.

"Jaxon," I gasp when he pinches my clit and rolls it between his fingertips.

His pupils expand until there's little brown left of his iris. I try to kiss him again, but he pulls back with a shake of his head. "I wanna watch you fall apart for me."

My mouth drops open as he sinks a finger inside me, expertly rolling his thumb on my clit like he's done this to me a thousand times. I arch my back and tense as my orgasm drags me away. My hips move on their own, riding his hand as he works me through the climax until I'm nothing but a puddle in his arms.

Jaxon's control snaps and he shoves me onto my back. He spreads my legs wide and hooks them over his shoulders as he settles on his stomach.

"Take your shirt off," he growls.

I snatch it off and throw it to the floor. My fingers burrow into his hair, pulling at the strands as he gazes at my pussy like it's the holy grail he's been searching for his whole life. He spreads my lips apart with two fingers, and his nostrils flare as he breathes in deep, holding it for a moment, like he doesn't want anything else but my scent. Reluctantly, he lets out the breath and swipes his split tongue up my folds, curling and flicking it against my clit.

I bite into my fist to keep from screaming at the jolt of pleasure that arcs from between my legs to my stomach and down to my toes. Jaxon licks me several more times, his eyes flicking up to my face, seeking my approval and guidance.

I never thought he'd be the type to submit or even be a giver, but the look of pure bliss—dark eyes clouded with desire and his mouth latched on me, eagerly lapping at me—clearly shows he longs for my approval.

I nod and spread my legs wider, my hips jumping off the bed with every flick of his split tongue on my clit. "I'm close," I whimper. I fist his wavy black hair, holding him in place. "Fuck me with your fingers. I want to feel you stretch me."

Jaxon shoots his hand between us, his finger teasing my weeping center before he plunges it inside me. I throw back my head, biting my bottom lip to keep quiet and avoid gaining our parents' attention.

"Come for me," he says huskily, then moans as my inner walls spasm around his finger. A second digit eases inside until he's stretching me to the point of pain.

I can't hold back the scream. Stars burst into my vision, and my ears ring as he sends me hurtling into the best climax I've ever had. Jaxon works me through every second of it, his tongue flicking against my sensitive clit and his fingers thrusting faster.

The climax fades, and my clit screams at me as Jaxon continues to flick his tongue over it. He pumps his fingers inside me, never slowing down. It's like he's searching for his own happy ending.

I yank Jaxon's hair in protest. "Jax—"

I jump at the knock on the bedroom door.

"Dahlia?" Mom says, and knocks again. "Are you okay?"

Jaxon squeezes his arms tighter around me, his mouth still latched onto me like he's on a mission to send me to outer space for my next orgasm. I jerk my hips and whimper, only for him to yank me back to him.

I look toward the door with my heart in my throat and dread filling me. "I-I'm fine."

Jaxon doesn't move from his spot, clearly unbothered that my mom is on the other side of the door. His tongue continues lapping at my pussy, creating loud, wet sounds I'm scared she'll hear.

"You don't sound fine," she says.

The doorknob turns, and I jump up, only to slam back onto the bed from Jaxon catching me. He pins me down with his hand on my stomach and locks his arm around my thigh to keep me spread open for him.

"Why is the door locked?" Mom asks.

I look down at Jaxon, begging him with my eyes to say something, but he only smirks before sticking his long tongue inside me and curling it just right. My eyes roll into the back of my head.

"Dahlia Marie, open the door right now!" Mom bangs on the wood.

I convulse as I orgasm again. My teeth grind together, and I dig my heels into Jaxon's back as I fuck his face, pushing at the back of his head to smother him with my pussy.

The haze clears only a little, and Jaxon still eats me out, determined to make me come my goddamn soul out.

I forget Mom is outside, but then I clear my head enough to yell, "Don't tell Jaxon I'm in his room!"

Mom goes quiet for a moment, and I can hear the wheels spinning in her mind. She's always been a gossiper and a shit starter. "I'm getting him. This is unacceptable."

I melt into the mattress and throw an arm behind my head while still holding Jaxon to my cunt. Mom's footsteps fade, and it's just the two of us again.

I suck in lungfuls of air as I sweep my fingers through Jaxon's damp hair. His eyelids slide shut, and he groans into me as he grinds his pelvis into the mattress.

"Naughty, naughty little sister." He murmurs the words against my pussy and kisses my swollen clit, then opens his eyes and meets my heavy-lidded stare.

I swallow hard, and my eyelids slide shut from exhaustion. Jaxon stays between my legs, making me come one more time before he pulls away and gathers me in his arms. He sits up and has me straddle his lap, my arms around his shoulders as I rest the uninjured side of my face against his trap.

"What about you?" I mumble.

“Another time,” he says, and pets the back of my head.

“I need to go into town.”

“Take a nap first.”

I nod and doze off while he holds me.

CHAPTER 15



JAXON

Dahlia slept in my arms for about two hours, and I never wanted to let go of her. Her eyes rapidly moved behind her closed eyelids. I wondered what she dreamed about and what made her whimper in fear. My poor sister has been through so much. Life dealt her a shitty hand, but she has me and there's no getting rid of me.

When she woke up, she changed her clothes and applied makeup that covered the bruises, and I drove her into town with my Camaro instead of my Yamaha.

Dahlia shifts in her seat and taps her finger on her knee, drawing my attention to how fucking sexy her legs are in those fishnets. My mouth waters as I remember how delicious she is. I want to mark her inner thighs with my teeth or carve my name into them so no one else will claim what's mine.

Dahlia's cheeks turn a pretty shade of pink when she notices that I'm staring, and then she shyly looks out the window. I side-eye her and shake my head as I turn my attention back to the winding road into town.

"Don't do that," I say.

She turns toward me, eyebrows drawing together. "Don't do what?"

"Don't pretend what we did earlier never happened. I want to see you. All of you," I say. "Even when you're looking at me like you can't stand another minute without feeling my tongue in your pussy."

"Jaxon," she says with a gasp.

I'm sure she meant that as an objection, but it came out huskier and more like a plea.

I reach over the console and place my hand on her thigh, slipping it inward so my knuckles brush against her pussy. Dahlia doesn't push me away like she would have twenty-four hours ago. She opens her legs wider, inviting me to keep touching her as I drive. I squeeze her thigh, enjoying the feel of her thickness and soon-to-be earmuffs after we're done shopping.

"Jaxon."

"Hm?" I glance at Dahlia, giving her my full attention for a moment.

She nibbles her plump bottom lip for a second as she gathers courage for what she'll say next, which makes me uneasy

because she always keeps me on my toes.

"No one can know about this," she says. "About us."

"People will find out eventually." My fingertips burrow beneath the wide fishnets, seeking more of her skin.

"They can't, though, or this won't work." Dahlia shifts her hips, needing more from me. My needy little sister. Multiple orgasms a few hours ago didn't cut it, now, did it?

"Fuck what everyone else thinks, flower," I say.

I slow the car but keep it cruising. My fingers ease beneath the waistband of her shorts and dive lower until I find her cunt, rubbing circles outside her panties, right over her clit. Dahlia's hips buck, and she grabs my wrist, holding me in place as she grinds against my hand.

"It's frowned upon," she says, finding reasons to convince herself that we can't be together. Her wet pussy says differently, and we both know it.

I dip my finger inside her weeping cunt, and groan at her keening cry.

"I don't care." I add a second finger inside her, stretching her further.

I'm not small, and judging by how tight she is, it'll take some work for my dick's head to even squeeze inside her.

"You shouldn't care either," I say. "What will they do? Mock us? They already do. Try to start fights? I'm capable of finishing what they start, sister."

"Fuck, please don't call me that while you're fingering me," she breathes.

Her pussy squeezes on my fingers. I smirk.

"You sure about that, sis?" I rub my palm against her clit. My smile widens as she arches her back and bites her bottom lip to quiet her cries as she comes.

I ride out the orgasm with her by pumping my fingers in her quivering pussy. She gyrates her hips against my hand until she goes limp, panting in her seat. I slip out of her, stick my coated fingers into my mouth, and groan. My eyes close as her taste courses through my veins like a potent drug.

We drive into the town that's already decorated for Halloween. Orange and purple lights twinkle on buildings. Carved pumpkins sit outside shops, along with homemade ghosts made from thin paper that flutter in the fall breeze. I park in the crowded lot outside of the Halloween store.

"Please behave," Dahlia says before she's out of the car and shutting the door behind her.

My good mood sours. I get out and lock the doors behind me before I follow Dahlia into the shop. I stick by her side, refusing to endure a repeat of what happened yesterday. We're greeted by loud music and even louder people. Squealing kids run around in the large store.

"Did your mom tell you what she wanted?" I ask.

Dahlia shakes her head. "Just that she wants decorations and pumpkins."

Of course she didn't specify, and I'm sure Evelyn will find a reason to bitch about the things Dahlia picks out.

We pass through an aisle with fake spiders, webs, gravestones, and bloody hands. Dahlia picks up a package of spiderwebs and examines it before she moves down the aisle with it in her hand. I pluck it from her, so it's me who's holding everything for her. She gives me a quizzical look, like she's not used to me helping her all the time.

"Are you going to get anything here for yourself?" she asks as she goes back to shopping.

"No."

Dahlia frowns and picks up a fake bloody dagger and eyes it before she looks at me. "Why not?"

"No need."

She lets out a cute snort and rolls her eyes. "C'mon, Jax. I know you like this holiday. You don't need to pretend that you're over it."

I step behind her and lean in so my lips are next to her ear. Her spine straightens, and she turns enough to peek at me from the corner of her eye.

"Yeah, I enjoy it," I whisper.

I tilt my head, angling it to look like I'm about to kiss her, then move my body closer to hers to hide my hand as I squeeze her ass. She freezes, then leans into my touch and swallows hard.

"I enjoy seeing you dressed in slutty outfits while you hand out candy to the kids. Especially when you bend over and give me an eyeful of your juicy ass when you think I'm not looking," I say.

"Jaxon!" she gasps.

A young couple about our age side-eyes us. The girl's face twists in disgust and her boyfriend glares at me, but I see the jealousy in his gaze when he looks at Dahlia.

I grin. "So yeah, I *love* Halloween. If you'll let me, I can pick out your outfit this year."

Dahlia whips around and shushes me while pushing her fingers against my lips. I know I'm a dick for being blatantly open about my attraction and feelings toward my sister, but I meant what I said about not giving a fuck what people think. The town is small, and people talk. It's only a matter of time before they spread the rumor. This time around, it'll be true.

I catch Dahlia's fingers between my teeth and gently nibble on them. Her pupils dilate and her breathing quickens as I lick her finger pads like I flicked her clit earlier.

"Dahlia?"

I stiffen at the deep voice and swing my gaze to the tall blond man walking up to us with an excited smile. Dahlia drops her hand and faces him. Now I want to snap his neck for getting her attention when it should be me. He stops a foot away from my sister, standing a few inches taller than her and only an inch shorter than me.

"Um, yeah?" she says.

"Hey, sorry, I don't mean to intrude," he says. "I'm Michael Smith, by the way. I don't know if you remember me."

His name sounds familiar. I sift through my mind, recalling all the people I've met. It's at the tip of my tongue, but I can't remember.

"I'm . . . sorry." She shakes her head and forces a smile. "I don't remember."

He holds up his phone, the screen displaying an app with her picture on it. "We matched, and it's such a lucky coincidence to see you here."

I narrow my eyes at the screen, my lip curling back. It's a dating website, and Dahlia's picture looks back at me, along with her name, age, and the city she lives in. She notices too and sucks in a sharp breath. I snap my gaze to her and clench my teeth until they grind together.

She's on a goddamn dating website?

Jealousy runs rampant inside me, battling the tiny voice in the back of my head that tells me I can't make a scene. She doesn't want anyone to know about us, and that's the only thing holding me back from punching Michael.

Dahlia gives the asshole a tight-lipped smile, her shoulders practically up to her ears. "Oh, that's—"

"I don't know if you remember me from high school, but we had the same geometry class in the tenth grade." He eases Dahlia's confusion with a soft chuckle and lowers his phone. "It's fine if you don't remember me. I kept to myself to avoid any attention."

He nervously glances at me, and I cock my head. I never fucked with anyone in high school unless they started it. Mickey being a prime example.

The light bulb in Dahlia's head blinks on, and her eyes widen as she remembers him. "Oh, yeah! You had black hair and always wore headphones. I think I remember you talking to me about one of our favorite bands."

Michael leans forward. I know that move. He can't hear her, probably because he's been so busy looking her over and settling his gaze on her breasts.

What she said finally clicks, and his smile widens as he rubs the back of his head. "Yeah, emo was the thing back then, and I couldn't be that without the black hair."

Dahlia giggles.

I slowly turn to her, my face falling flat as red fills my vision. She acts oblivious to the fact that I'm about to lose my mind.

"How have you been?" she asks him.

Oh. So she's going to play this game. Act interested in him, lead him on, piss me off, and expect good results from it.

Michael's grin widens, and he puffs out his chest like she just said she'll marry him or some shit. "I've been great. Went to the gym, lost all that weight, and now I'm working toward getting my master's in engineering." He looks at me again, but his eyes dart away when he meets my glare. "I know you're hanging out with your brother, but would you want to get a late lunch?"

Dahlia's cheeks pinken, and she refuses to look at me. Her legs tremble, and I arch an eyebrow. She knows what I'll do if she goes on a date with this asshole, yet she still entertains him. Maybe my jealousy is getting to me, but I'm curious about what she'll do with him. I fold my arms over my chest, keeping my expression blank.

"W-well, I'm kind of—" she says.

"Oh, I know. How about I get your number and we can set up a date?" Michael briefly touches her arm, an excited smile on his face.

I don't hold back my grin when he looks at me. It's genuine, but for all the wrong reasons.

"You know what, sis?" I turn to Dahlia and lick my lips, my tongue curling against the sharp end of my canine tooth. "I'll finish shopping. You go ahead and go on a date with him. I wouldn't want to clam-jam you. Text me when you need a ride."

Dahlia's cheeks flush, and fear creeps into her eyes. "Jaxon—"

I turn to Michael and blow him a kiss before I leave the aisle to put space between me and him. The weight of Dahlia's stare follows me until I round the corner and I'm out of her sight. I fish my cell phone from my pocket and pull up the group chat thread with my friends.

JAXON

We have a new target.

AIDEN

Please tell me it's Mickey this time.

RYDER

Who?

Jaxon! WHO?

AIDEN

Dude, give him a fucking second to respond.

HAWK

Guys, I'm trying to fucking sleep.

AIDEN

Then put your phone on silent, ya ass.

HAWK

I can still feel the phone vibrate, dick.

AIDEN

Not my problem. ;)

JAXON

Michael Smith. Ring any bells?

HAWK

Wait. The same Michael from high school?

AIDEN

Oh shit! Is that the same dude who cried about being a nice guy but took pics of girls in the locker room?

RYDER

He also spread rumors about any of the girls who turned him down and went under the radar for it. No one knew it was him.

AIDEN

If no one knew, then how do you know?

RYDER

I know things. You should know that by now.

AIDEN

har har har.

HAWK

Why is Michael a target all of a sudden?

JAXON

I think you know the reason by now.

RYDER

... Jaxon.

HAWK

Well. I'm awake. Where are we meeting and when are we getting him?

JAXON

I'm at Spooks. Meet me here as soon as possible.

I slip my phone back into my pocket, not needing to read any more of the messages. If it's important, they'll call. In the meantime, I'll wait for them and keep an eye on Dahlia. I don't want Mr. I'm-A-Nice-Guy to try something with my girl.

CHAPTER 17



DAHLIA

F uck.

I crane my neck as I search the Halloween store for Jaxon on my way out with Michael. He has a pep in his step and lays his hand on my lower back as we walk outside. Jaxon is still out of view, but I can feel the weight of his gaze on me. The comfortable fall air envelops me, which would have put me at ease if it weren't for Michael being so pushy.

“So you and your brother are still inseparable, huh?”

My spine straightens. I adjust the straps of my small bat backpack. “Yeah. I guess we are.”

“I see he hasn’t changed much since graduation,” he says as he leads me to the right with a short, slow stride to drag this out. His hand on me feels so wrong. His palms are slimy with sweat, and it just doesn’t feel as right as Jaxon’s touch does.

“Do people change after high school?” I say.

Michael glances at me with a weird look that I can’t read, and the small hairs on the back of my neck rise. “I would say so.”

Jaxon hasn’t changed, and I don’t know if I did. I feel the same, but when I was a kid, I wore dresses with bows. Now I wear black grunge- and goth-style clothes and feel way more like myself.

“So, um,” I say. “Do you go up to women you match with often, or . . . ?”

Michael smiles, his cheeks turning a light shade of pink. “This is the first time.”

I nod and follow his lead as we walk along the sidewalk through the busiest part of town.

“So, where are we going?” I ask.

I already want this “date” to end. Michael gives me the creeps, and I hate how he’s still touching my lower back and dragging his fingertips up and down in slow strokes. It’s almost like he’s resisting the temptation to touch my ass.

Michael may be good-looking, with his blond hair neatly styled and a bright, friendly smile that can put anyone at ease, but he’s not Jaxon. He’s not broody or tattooed, and he lacks a split tongue that can flick my clit in opposite directions at the same time. His touch doesn’t light me up like a firecracker, either.

"I figured we could get something light." He eyes me up and down, leaving me feeling gross from his barely contained judgment.

"I'm not much of a salad girl, if that's what you're thinking."

Michael chuckles and opens a door to a deli sandwich shop. "Yeah, I can tell. Not that I'm judging or anything."

I frown and duck past him, entering the building. My mouth waters from the array of smells, especially the sweet scent of ham and honey bread.

My phone buzzes in my back pocket, and my heart picks up its pace. The vibration is the one I made specifically for Jaxon.

Michael orders for the both of us at the counter, and we take a seat at an available table. I slip my phone out of my pocket and rest it on my lap, my fingers itching to touch the screen so I can read Jaxon's text message. Michael talks about himself and what he's been up to after graduation. He acts like we've been friends since our teens and I'm dying to know more about him.

My phone vibrates again. I sink my front teeth into my bottom lip and bounce my leg, thankful the table covers the nervous habit. A third text comes in, and I can't hold back anymore. I open the screen and read the texts as Michael goes on about how the gym saved him when he was at his lowest.

JAXON

You've been a very bad girl, sis.

I'm turning your ass a pretty shade of red before I fuck your throat later tonight.

He touched you and you let him. I hope this was worth it, flower, because his hand now belongs to me.

DAHLIA

please, don't do anything to him.

you literally told me to go on a date with him

I never wanted to go out with him. You walked away, Jax

He doesn't respond, leaving me on the edge of my seat. The unknown always scares me, and he knows that. I look up from my phone, finding Michael staring at me with a clenched jaw and narrowed eyes.

"Are you seriously talking to some other guy while you're on a date with me?"

"That's not what's happening." I shake my head.

Michael leans forward, resting his elbows on the table. "You still mumble? I thought you would've gotten over that."

My lips thin as I hold back every insult that pops into my mind. I just got into a fight yesterday, and I prefer to avoid another beating because of some fragile male ego.

"It was Jaxon," I say through clenched teeth.

Michael's facial features twist in disgust, and he leans back in his seat to put more space between us, like I'm carrying some disease. "You two really are close, aren't you?"

I shrug. I'm not answering that question because I'm afraid I'll spill the beans about us being *really, really* close. It's not something I would tell anyone, but sometimes I say things without thinking it over.

"Did he ever get a girlfriend, or is he still a virgin with a *weird fascination* with you?" Michael says with a smirk.

The brakes screech in my mind as I reel over what he said. In school, people spread rumors that Jaxon and I were fucking. They weren't true, but it was one of the many reasons people ruthlessly bullied me. It's weird how even though that rumor spread, Michael asks that question. Then another thing Michael said stands out.

Is Jaxon a virgin?

I shrug and play with a string on my fishnets, pulling it, then letting it snap back to my skin. "First, he doesn't have a weird fascination with me. He's a protective brother. Second, his sex life is no one's business but his."

Michael holds his hands up, palms out in a placating gesture. "Hey, I get it. You don't need to get so defensive. You two kind of make it easy to assume there's more between you, which is . . . gross."

"We're not doing anything," I say. My cheeks burn with a blush, which only intensifies as I recall how my big brother ate me out and fingered me earlier today.

Michael looks down at my chest, then my lap, like he can see my phone sitting on my thighs. "Sure you're not. But when we get together, you can't be talking to your brother. Especially when we're fucking."

My spine straightens as, for the second time, the wheels in my mind pump the brakes. "When we get together? Fucking?"

Our food arrives, and the server smiles at Michael as she sets his plate of food before him, then does the same for me. When she's out of earshot, Michael turns back to me.

"Yeah?" he says slowly. "I'm buying you lunch. I thought this was common knowledge?"

"You know what?" I stand from my seat and glare right at the asshole. "I don't even want to be here. Especially not with you."

Michael guffaws. "So you're just going to walk away after I paid for your food?"

I roll my eyes and head for the door.

"Dahlia!"

I ignore the jerk and shove the door open. It goes flying and narrowly misses hitting an older woman, who gasps and glares at me.

“Sorry,” I mumble, then power walk back to Spooks to look for Jaxon.

“Dahlia!” A hand grabs my arm and whips me around. It’s Michael. His fingers tighten on me. “Are you being serious? I was just joking.”

I glare at him and shake my shoulder to knock his hand off me. “Where’s the joke? Nothing you said was funny.”

Michael’s eyes harden and turn cold. “You’re a real bitch, you know that?”

“And you’re an asshole.” I hiss between my teeth as his fingers tighten on my arm. His harsh grip will most likely leave bruises behind.

Michael’s jaw clenches, and he yanks me toward him. I stumble a few steps and he catches me, pulling my body flush against his. “No wonder you have bruises and cuts beneath all that makeup. Let me guess, you opened your mouth when you should have done your part as a female and shut the fuck—”

Sport motorcycles scream down the road and grow closer. Jaxon appears out of nowhere and grabs Michael by the throat. His eyes narrow and lose focus as they turn into bottomless pits.

Shit. He’s blacked out.

“Jaxon,” I whisper.

Michael scratches his blunt nails on the back of Jaxon’s hand, scrabbling to get out of his grip. He knocks back into him, and Jaxon leans with it to prevent him from losing his footing. I gasp and cover my mouth as Jaxon turns Michael around and punches him square in the face.

Michael screams and bends forward, touching his nose with shaking fingers. Jaxon gives him no time to assess his wound before he’s pummeling his fist into Michael over and over. He hits his face, chest, ribs, stomach.

I’ll give Michael credit where it’s due. He puts up a good fight at first but eventually wilts like a dried flower. Jaxon is more seasoned when it comes to fighting. He knows what to do and where his opponent’s weakness is, and he uses it against them.

A crowd gathers around us, watching the fight with concern and horror as Jaxon shoves Michael to the ground and straddles his stomach to keep him down. Two people hold their phones to their ears, most likely calling the police.

The motorcycles draw closer until they’re pulling up and parking right by us. All the riders are wearing their helmets, and I know immediately they’re Jaxon’s friends. I’ve seen them enough times to recognize their forms, along with the stickers they have on their helmets.

My hands shake as fear builds inside me. I’m not scared for myself. I fear for Jaxon possibly going to jail for assault and battery.

“Jaxon. Listen to my voice,” I say, and shove past his friends, rushing to his side. I crouch beside him and wind my arms around his shoulders, gently pulling him to me. “We have to go. They’re calling the police.”

Jaxon doesn’t listen. He just grunts with each punch.

Sirens wail in the distance, and with each passing second, they get louder.

I squeeze Jaxon tighter and push my breasts into his side while I kiss his cheek, then his ear, before I whisper, “Come on, big brother. You still need to punish me. You can’t do that if you’re in jail.”

Jaxon freezes and blinks several times before he turns his icy gaze to me. Little by little, life returns to his eyes. He moves like he’s about to kiss me, then second-guesses himself as he remembers my request. I hold my breath, waiting for what he’ll do next. It’s so wrong that I want him to say fuck it and kiss me anyway.

“Come on, man,” Ryder says, and taps Jaxon on the back of his shoulder.

The sirens get closer.

Jaxon lets go of Michael, who lies limp and bloody.

I help Jaxon up. He shares a look with Ryder and his other friends before he grabs my hand and runs down the sidewalk to his car. I pray my platform boots don’t catch on something and break my ankle as I struggle to keep up with his long strides.

His friends stay behind, and I glance past my shoulder to see what they’re doing. My eyebrows draw together as they lift Michael and maneuver him in their arms.

Jaxon unlocks the car, and I slide inside. The engine comes to life and we peel out, then stop where his friends are.

“What are you doing?” I ask, then turn in my seat as Ryder and Aiden open the door.

“Get out real quick,” Ryder says, loud enough for me to hear through his helmet.

I hesitate, but I do as they say. They toss Michael into the backseat among the plastic bags filled with decorations.

“We’ll meet you at the house,” Ryder says, and shuts the door once I’m back in my seat.

“What the hell is going on?” I say.

Jaxon shifts the gear into drive and peels out, right as the police show up.

CHAPTER 18



JAXON

I blink and take in my new surroundings. I barely remember Dahlia calling me big brother to pull me out of the blackout rage I was put in when I saw Michael getting aggressive with her. I'm not fully out of it now, just enough to be aware.

I stride to my car, where Dahlia waits inside. My friends parked their motorcycles in their usual spots outside of the abandoned mansion. I count myself lucky that Dahlia didn't follow me into the house. I don't have the patience to explain why I have Kyle locked in a small room or why we brought Michael here.

She doesn't need to know about the list of names and the people we've been torturing because of their mistreatment of her. My friends may not be in love with her like I am, but they still see her as their own and even hold grudges against these shitty people.

Dahlia meets my gaze as I stride to the passenger side, open the door, and yank her out. My cock hardens at the feel of her supple flesh giving as I drag her beside me, heading toward the tree line.

"What are you doing, Jaxon?" she says as she stumbles.

"Did you already forget my warning?"

"I thought you were just saying that." Dahlia misses a step, and I steady her. She keeps up with my long strides and pants to catch her breath. I glance at her, finding her face flush and eyes hooded.

Oh.

My lip curls into a smirk, and I let go of her as soon as we're out of earshot in the woods.

"Oh, Dahlia," I croon. I lean into her, brushing my knuckles along her cheek. "When will you learn that I mean what I say?"

Her eyelashes flutter, and she shifts her weight to one leg. She hesitates as she reaches for me, and like the good big brother I am, I meet her in the middle. I close the space between us and crush my lips to hers. She molds her body to mine and buries her hands in my hair. Our tongues tangle and I shudder at the taste of her. She's sweet like mint from the toothpaste she used before we headed into town. My little sister is so desperate for me and meets my every harsh kiss with one of her own.

I don't think she realizes how much power she holds over me. She's the siren, and I'm the lost sailor. She tempts me, and I

fall, drowning in her and hoping to be under her spell for eternity.

I nip Dahlia's bottom lip and end the kiss. She leans in, not wanting it to end, but I have other things I want to do with her. Our breaths mingle, and we look into each other's eyes with longing and deep-seated, carnal hunger.

It'll only be a matter of time before something more comes out of this. I plan to make her mine in every way possible. October tenth can't come fast enough.

"You're going to run," I murmur, and brush my lips against hers in a chaste kiss.

Dahlia chases more as I pull away and let go of her. I step backward, missing her touch with every foot of space I put between us. My erection presses painfully against my zipper and strains to be freed.

"Run?" She blinks out of the spell and glances around the shadowed woods. It's overcast, which means less light, which creates the perfect ambience for primal chasing. I've been dying to see her run from me for a long, long time.

My lips curl into a wicked smile. "You're going to run, and if I catch you, I'm punishing you."

"I'm not wearing the right shoes for that."

I shrug. "Not my problem." I look her over, imagining all the bruises I'll leave on her, especially on her ass. "You have sixty seconds. Sixty."

"Jaxon!" Her eyes widen as she frantically shakes her head. "I'm serious! I can break my ankle with these."

"Fifty-nine."

"Just give me a second!"

"Fifty-eight."

"These are hard to take off!"

"Fifty-seven."

Dahlia takes off faster than I thought she would. She wasted all that time to bitch about her shoes when she could have been hiding by now.

"Fifty-four." I cock my head, enjoying the sight of her ass bouncing with her frantic strides. "Fifty-three. Fifty-two."

The foliage surrounds her and removes her from eyesight, but her rushed steps are as clear as day. Dried leaves and snapping twigs crunch beneath her boots. Jesus, she makes this way too easy.

I count down to the last number but don't say the last one aloud. She knows time's up. Feeling nice, I give her an extra minute before I chase after her. Running with an erection is a feat in itself, but I know I'll resolve it shortly. It hurts, but it feels so good at the same time because of the promise of shoving it deep into my sister's mouth and touching the back of her throat.

I listen to Dahlia's boots *thump* on the foliage and her panting moans as she pushes her body past its limit. She comes into view, and I pick up speed, eating up the short distance between us.

Sensing me behind her, she peeks over her shoulder. Her brown eyes widen, and she screams. I grin and snatch her by the arm. She throws her elbow back, hitting me in the gut. I grunt and miss a step. We fall together in a tangle of limbs, and I land on top of her. I smash my lips to hers, groaning into the kiss as I taste her, sampling the fear and excitement coming from her.

Dahlia may act sweet and innocent, but I know my sister. She's a freak like me, begging to be let out of her cage.

She drags her nails down my back and spreads her legs, drawing me in until her thighs cradle my hips. I thrust against her, grinding my erection against her pussy while I devour her mouth. She moves with me, desperate and needy for my touch.

I want to fuck her, but I have to wait. There are many reasons why, the big one being that I still need to work her up to accept me into her tight pussy. I would split her open with my girth, and I don't want to hurt her in that way.

I pull back, ending the kiss. Dahlia pants, her cheeks flushed and pupils dilated with desire.

"You ready for your punishment?" I don't wait for her answer. I pull her up with me as I get to my feet.

She puts up a weak fight as I sit on a bent tree. I jerk her over my lap, my hand settling on her ass.

"Please, Jaxon." She struggles against my hold. "I didn't want to go on that date with him!"

I jerk her shorts and fishnets down, along with her underwear. A groan slips out of my mouth at the sight of all the curves and supple flesh. My gaze traces over every soft-pink stretch mark lining her hips, thighs, and ass. I find the grooves from the cellulite endearing because they're imperfect, which makes her perfect in my eyes. Everything about her is sexy.

I smooth my palm over her ass cheek and grab a handful, pulling it to the side so I can see her wet pussy. "You still flirted with him, little sister."

"Don't call me that! Not while we're like this."

I smack her ass and grin when she yelps. "You're a little liar, just as much as you are a tease." I swipe my fingers between her folds. "You're so wet, sis. Oh, your pussy just clenched when I called you that."

Dahlia sputters, rambling nonsensical words as she comes up with excuses explaining why she isn't turned on by me calling her my sister. My fingertip circles on her clit, and she bucks her hips, pretending she doesn't want this. She grabs my knee and arches her back as I tease her weeping hole before I sink my finger inside her. Pre-cum leaks at the tip of my cock as I finger her until she's a screaming, crying mess about to come. Then I pull out.

"Ah, ah, ah," I say. "You're not coming anymore today."

"Please, Jaxon," she cries.

I chuckle and slap her ass, admiring how it jiggles and reddens with my handprint. She yells and arches her back, shoving her backside further out and inviting more pain and pleasure.

"I'm sorry!" she sobs. "Please, Jax. Please!"

I bring back my hand and whip it down, smacking her ass. She screams and jerks forward, her nails digging into my jeans and pinching the skin underneath. I shudder at the throbbing in my palm and how spanking her feeds into the sickness inside me. I really am a sick son of a bitch.

I spank her until she's wiggling and crying in my lap. She takes it like a champ, panting and moaning my name. I swipe my fingers up her folds again, finding her drenched and pulsing with need. Sticking my coated finger into my mouth, I groan at the musky scent and taste as it sinks into my tastebuds.

My cock jerks. I can't take it anymore. I need to know what it'll feel like to have her lips wrapped around me.

"On your fucking knees," I snarl.

Dahlia scrambles off my lap and turns toward me as I stand. She drops to her knees and raises those red-rimmed eyes to me. Tears track down her cheeks, smearing her makeup in an inky mess. I curl my fists to keep from throwing her onto her back as I imagine how much her makeup will smear when I'm through with her.

"Take my cock out," I say through clenched teeth.

She slides my belt out of its buckle, then unbuttons my pants. The zipper hisses as she pulls it down. She jerks my pants down my hips, freeing my heavy erection. Dahlia's eyes widen as she takes in every detail of my dick.

"Oh, god," she whispers. She looks away to meet my heavy-lidded stare. "You're huge *and* pierced?"

"That's right, sis. I'm your god and you're my church. Now open your mouth and let your god baptize you with his unholy cum." I grab my shaft and languidly stroke it, then slap the tip against her mouth. Threading my fingers through her hair with my other hand, I hold her right where I want her.

Dahlia's eyelashes flutter, but she does what I say. She sticks her tongue out, and I slip my dick inside her mouth, one slow inch at a time so she can get used to the size. I damn near jump out of my skin as Dahlia sucks on me, her cheeks hollowing until there's no air left and all I feel is her mouth cushioning my dick.

I clench my jaw at how warm and wet her mouth feels. She closes her lips around me and swallows me like the needy slut she is.

"Fuck, you feel so good," I growl, then shove my hips forward until I hit the back of her throat.

Dahlia gags, her shoulders rocking with each heave as she tries to breathe through her nose. She surprises me when she doesn't shove me away. Instead, she draws me closer with her hands on my ass. Her nails bite into my skin, sending zaps of pain and pleasure to the rest of my body and drawing my balls upward. Fuck me. If she keeps that up, I won't last for much longer.

A shiver runs up my spine as my orgasm rises closer, threatening to knock me off my feet and hurl me into the middle of the ocean. I hiss in a breath through my teeth and shove the back of her head, forcing more of my dick down her throat to choke her. Her mouth squeezes on me, but she stops sucking as she struggles for air.

Dropping my head back, I think about gross things, like toe cheese, infected nails, and dog shit, to fight back my climax. I don't want my sister to get the impression that I'm a two-stroke type of guy.

I grit my teeth and look down at her, my fingers tightening in her hair. "You dirty fucking girl."

Her eyes sparkle with amusement, but I want to see them full of tears, her mascara running down her cheeks. I grind my teeth together and hold her in place while I drag my cock out, then slam it back in.

"You want to fuck with me? That's fine. I'll just fuck you." I grunt as my hips slap against her face while I fuck her throat.

Dahlia's gags and muffled coughs vibrate against my dick. Saliva drips out of her mouth and clings to my cock and her chin. I drop my head back as it becomes too hard to keep my eyes open. Tingles spread through my groin, travel up my back, and shoot down to my toes. I can't hold back the orgasm this time. It strips everything out of me until I'm nothing but a man taking what he wants from the woman he loves.

I mutter Dahlia's name, grunting each time my cock hits the back of her throat. Cum shoots from the tip and rapidly fills her mouth. She struggles to swallow my load but still tries anyway because she's never been a quitter.

"Goddamn, sis," I growl, and shallowly thrust, shoving more of my cum into her mouth.

Panting, I pull out of my sister and look down at her. She gasps for air, tears shining in her eyes and, just as I hoped, her makeup runs down her cheeks. I groan as she swallows my load, licking her bruised and swollen lips.

My cock jerks, and I stroke myself while I angle her head back. I pant as I work myself to a weak orgasm and groan as more cum shoots out and lands on Dahlia's face. She closes her eyes and sticks her tongue out to catch some of it. Another shot lands on her left eye and hangs from her eyelashes. I let go of myself and suck in heavy breaths as I take in how gorgeous Dahlia looks when covered with my semen.

I dip my finger in my cum and draw an upside-down cross in the middle of Dahlia's forehead, baptizing her as I said I would. When I finish, I put myself away and crouch in front of her.

Dahlia struggles to open the eye with cum on it, so I swipe my tongue up her cheek, clearing the cum away and cleaning her

off. A groan slips out of me at the salty and musky taste. She whimpers and grabs my shoulder as I taste myself, not bothered in the least. I enjoy anything that touches my sweet little sister.

My fingers twist tighter in her hair, and I jerk her head back and hover my lips over hers. I wait until she opens her eyes and meets my stare before I say, "I hope you learned your lesson, flower, because next time, I won't go easy on you."

She swallows hard. "There won't be a next time."

I grin. "We'll see about that."

CHAPTER 19



DAHLIA

After Jaxon “punished” me—if we’re going to call it that—I’ve been on autopilot. Every nerve ending is a live wire, and Jaxon is the water creeping closer to electrify me. Throughout the night and into this morning, I randomly remember how it felt when he touched me and how his cock tasted beyond what I could have imagined. It didn’t taste like candy or whatever weird description I’ve read in fanfics. He was musky and salty from his sweat and arousal, but with a hint of his body wash. It’s Jaxon, and I love it so much because I love everything about him.

I lower my manga paperback and stare at the wall across from me as the realization dawns on me.

I’m in love with my brother.

Oh fuck, I’m in love with him.

If I was standing right now, my legs would give out from under me at this startling discovery.

When did I fall in love with him?

Thinking about it, it may have been the day he stood up for me in the cafeteria. He needed me then, just as much as he needs me now.

“Dahlia.”

My eyebrows furrow as I glance toward where the voice came from.

No one’s there.

I turn in my seat and search the living room for the person who said my name. The TV is on low volume, so it could have been that.

Letting out a calming breath, I return to reading my book, but I can’t focus on it.

“I know. I know.” Mom’s voice carries from the front of the house and gets closer. “I’ll figure something out for that day. It’s Dahlia that complicates things. I swear, she’s never happy with anything.”

I sit straighter in my seat and make a nasty face at the audacity of my mother’s words. A moment later, she walks past the doorway and her steps falter when she spots me.

Yeah, I'm glad she's nervous now that she got caught talking shit about me.
I glare at her, and she rolls her eyes before she disappears into the kitchen. She lowers her voice, but not enough.
"She doesn't know about the Reckoning," Mom says.

The Reckoning?

I sit at the edge of my seat and strain to hear her.

"My husband prefers she doesn't know. Mhmm. Yeah, I agree. As much as she's too much to handle, I don't want her getting her hands dirty."

Too much to handle? Get my hands dirty?

A piece of my soul, a piece that I thought had already broken, shatters into tinier pieces. At this point, what else can hurt me? I didn't think her saying I'm too much would have hurt, but it does. She might as well have stabbed me in the chest and twisted the blade.

Rocks. Stupid. Airhead. Weird. Loser. Freak.

All the insults thrown my way as a kid rise to the surface. I wince, wishing I could forget everything and start over.

How dare she. This isn't the first time she's painted me as this horrible person. She's told her friends that I'm lazy and a slob, when really, I'm having a hard time holding a job and figuring out what I want to do with my life. As for being a slob, I'm embarrassed as it is that I can't pick up after myself. It's exhausting when all I want to do is relax with a book or doomscroll on social media.

I'd like to confront Mom, but that will end with me in tears. Not that I'm not already fighting them back.

I've been nothing but a broken doll to her for all of my life. Over the years, she's made her true feelings more obvious. I'm the puppet and she's the master who controls everything I do and feel. I wish I could move on and avoid getting hurt by her, but that's harder than it looks.

The front door slams shut, followed by heavy footsteps approaching the living room. Jaxon walks in, phone out and his fingers flying over the screen as he types out a text message.

I swipe my tears away so he doesn't see them. My mom may be a bitch, but I don't want Jaxon to let loose on her because of something so stupid.

As if he's connected to me and knows exactly where I am at all times, he turns his gaze to me and stops walking. He cocks his head and narrows his eyes. Whatever he's seeing, it angers him, and his nostrils flare. His gaze drops to the paperback in my lap, then rises back to my face. His eyebrows pull together as he tries to figure out whatever is going through his thoughts.

"Flower," he drawls.

Oh god, he's about to play twenty questions with me.

"Shh." I hold my finger to my lips as I listen to Mom, who still chats in the kitchen as she closes the cupboards way too hard.

Jaxon frowns and slips his phone into his pocket while he walks toward me. He stops when he hears my mom, and I barely make out her saying how hard dealing with my lack of employment has been.

She may as well talk about me right in my face, since she's not trying too hard to be quiet.

Jaxon's shoulders tense, and he glances toward the kitchen. Anger clouds his features, casting shadows over his face. His eyes lose focus, and the situation becomes serious.

I fly off the couch and throw myself at him. Jaxon's lips pull into a snarl, and I catch him right as he turns.

I squeeze my arms tight around him to stop him from storming into the kitchen. "Stay with me."

Jaxon jerks in my hold, and I squeeze tighter. I rest my forehead against his chest and breathe through the anxiety.

"Please." I gently kiss his pec, which makes him pause. "Just hang out with me."

He relaxes, and I can finally take a breath without feeling like I'm about to burst. He hugs me tighter than what's normal, as if he's trying to pull my broken pieces back together.

"I'm gonna kill her," he mutters, then sweeps me off my feet. With a sharp intake of air, I hold on to him while he carries me to the couch and folds himself on it, settling me on his lap.

"It's not that big of a deal," I say, and kiss the base of his throat.

Jaxon fists my hair and jerks my head back. His lips crash against mine, and he swallows my startled yelp. I freeze for a moment, panicking over being caught, but his fingers tighten in my locks in warning when I try pulling away. He shoves his tongue past my parted lips and tangles it with mine. After a moment, I melt into him and return the kiss with fervor.

Kissing him is similar to a battle for dominance. Sometimes he gives me a taste of what it's like to overpower him, but at the end of the day, he's the one in charge.

He doesn't care about getting caught. My mom can walk in the room at any second and see us in this position. I imagine all the things she'd say, and each imagined dialogue ends with me losing my thinly veiled control over my anger toward her.

Jaxon's free hand cups my breast under my shirt, and he pinches my nipple through my thin lace bra. He greedily swallows my every sound and ignores me shoving him. If we don't end this now, it'll escalate into something I really don't want our parents finding out.

"Stop listening to her lies," he murmurs into the kiss.

"Stop." I push him again, this time with more force.

Jaxon's lips curve into a smile against my mouth. He pulls away, far enough to look at me, but still crowds my personal space. "Make me."

My cheeks burn with a blush. I get the sensation of my stomach dropping as he raises his hips to grind his erection against my ass. My vision becomes hazy with desire, and now all I want is him.

The tiny voice of reason in the back of my mind yells that we aren't alone. My mother is literally in the next room.

Even with that knowledge, I roll my hips, moving with him like we're making love. His face slackens, and his full lips part with a quiet moan.

"Someone could walk in," I whisper.

"So?" He grips my love handles and pushes me down harder on him. I buck back and forth on his erection, taking my time and enjoying the feel of him and how his eyes lose focus.

"We'll get in trouble."

Jaxon clenches his jaw. He thrusts harder, making my pussy clench in need. "We're adults, Dahlia."

"We're siblings," I say breathlessly. "Mom will—"

Jaxon grabs my hair and jerks my head backward at an uncomfortable angle. He leans forward until his mouth is next to my ear. "She's dead. What she says and thinks won't matter for long."

For a moment, I forget how to breathe. Once upon a time, I would have passed off what he said as a figure of speech, but I've learned that Jaxon never lies.

I loop my arms behind his neck, hoping it'll be enough to rein him in. "Don't hurt her."

Our bodies still move together, uncaring that we're talking about life and death.

Jaxon kisses the sensitive spot right under my ear. He nips, licks, and sucks, drawing out more of my whimpers like a thirsty man who craves a sip of what I can give him.

"I won't hurt her," he says, and I sag with relief for a second before he continues. "I'm going to kill her. *And our dad.*"

I freeze. "You don't mean that."

Jaxon smiles against my throat, enjoying my fear. "I told you long ago. *Cry, little sister, and I'll kill them all for you.* Do you not remember?"

"I remember," I whisper.

Mom's heels clack on the kitchen floor and get closer. I scramble off Jaxon's lap, wincing as he grunts when I accidentally knee his dick. He brushes his hand on my bottom and thighs but doesn't make any other sound. I put space between us and grab my manga paperback to rest on my lap, hoping it'll look like we weren't just dry-humping each other while making out.

Annoyed at the interruption, Jaxon spreads his legs wider to hide the hard outline of his erection. He side-eyes me, and there's still a gleam of mischief in his gaze and a quirk in his lips.

Mom enters the living room. She's not on her phone anymore, and her focus goes to Jaxon first. Her annoyed expression softens for a moment, then returns when she looks at me. If she can get any sourer, the owners of Sour Patch Kids will call her.

"We're having a getaway for a few days." She keeps her voice flat, which is nothing new. Either she ignores me, snaps at me, or she's devoid of any emotion.

My fingers curl into my paperback, bending the corners of the thin pages. "When?"

"Next week," she says, and hesitantly peeks at Jaxon. She's nervous around him, and rightfully so. He has a short fuse and will attack if anyone tries anything with me.

"Why next week?" I know the answer. If Dad doesn't want me here during the Reckoning, then that must be why Mom is taking me out for a getaway. I just want to know more about it and why I can't be here.

Jaxon pulls out his phone and opens the screen. He pretends to be engaged with that to make it seem like he doesn't care, but he's listening. He's always listening.

Mom sighs. "Can I not just spend time with my daughter?"

My lips thin as I hold back the sarcastic laugh bubbling in my chest. I can mention the Reckoning. I can also bring up how I'm *too much* and wouldn't want to weigh her down during a *fun* getaway, but that will make Jaxon snap.

"I don't know, can you?" I say instead.

A ghost of a smirk tugs at Jaxon's lip, but the rest of his face stays blank. His approval gives me the serotonin I need after hearing the shit Mom said ten minutes ago.

She rears her head back as though I slapped her. Mom struggles for words and keeps looking at Jaxon like she's waiting for him to step in and defend her. He disregards her completely, focused on scrolling on his phone. I inwardly preen over that. I'm glad he's not giving in to her theatrics.

Mom clenches her jaw. Her lips part as she's about to spew venom aimed to hurt me. She pauses, and a weird, unfamiliar expression crosses her face.

"What is that on your neck?" she says.

I touch my throat and stupidly look down to see what she's talking about, but obviously, I can't see anything.

Mom bends at the waist to get a closer look at my neck.

"Is that a hickey?" Her lips flatten and her nostrils flare with every angry breath she takes. "Are you seeing someone and letting him dip his hand in your cookie jar?"

I cringe at her use of the weird analogy instead of her outright asking if I'm having sex.

"Mom," I say in disgust, and cover my neck with my hands. Jaxon must've given me this hickey before she came in here. Thank god she's not smart enough to notice the difference between a new hickey and a fading one.

Jaxon peeks at me from the corner of his eye with mischief and pride.

Mom doesn't notice since her attention is still on me, and she slaps my hands away from my neck. "Did you sleep with him, Dahlia?"

I lean into the sofa to escape her outstretched hands. I don't understand why she always feels the need to touch my bruises. "I didn't sleep with anybody. Besides, I'm an adult. What I do is my business."

Mom gives me an *oh-really* look.

"That's bull." She straightens to her full height, folds her arms under her breasts, and gives me the bulldog expression that I so badly want to laugh at. "I'm telling your father about this."

The shit-starter side of her makes an appearance. How lovely.

My face relaxes, and every part of my body follows suit. My vision tunnels, and I briefly wonder if this is what Jaxon experiences when he blacks out. His presence is the strongest. He's the cord tethered to me, keeping me here instead of allowing me to disappear into the clouds.

"Do you have nothing to say for yourself?" Mom asks as she taps her finger on her arm. When I stare blankly and don't answer her, she turns to Jaxon. "Do you know who she's seeing?"

He stares at his phone, his thumb swiping along the screen in slow strokes. "Yeah."

I hold my breath, wishing it's enough to slow down my racing heart as I sit on the edge of my seat.

Mom waits for him to give more details, but when he doesn't, she huffs. "Well, who?"

"So you can fuck him too?" Jaxon peeks at her from beneath his lashes.

Her face reddens with an angry blush. "What kind of question is that? I just want a name."

"Why?" He pauses for a second, dragging this out and building the tension. "You've seen Dahlia as your competition for as long as I've known you. Anything she does, you try to do better."

"That's not true!" Mom shouts.

Jaxon raises an eyebrow. "Yeah? Those green streaks in your hair are just because you felt like it? After you got on her ass about dyeing her hair, you immediately went to the salon. What about the time she painted a scenery piece? You decided to take up painting and rub your abilities in Dahlia's face, saying how much better you are."

He's noticed all of that? I mean, I know he knows everything, but down to the little details?

Mom sputters, grasping for something to say.

Jaxon adjusts his hips, getting more comfortable in his seat. He looks back at his phone as he says, "So now that Dahlia is seeing someone, I'm sure you'll try to fuck him and rub it in her face about how you're a better lay." He smirks. "I promise you'll be like the equivalent of fucking a fish. He won't be interested in you. He'll also more than likely tell your husband all about your infidelity."

It's so quiet that I can hear the wind blow through the trees beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows behind the couch.

"If that's what you think of me, then I'm sorry you feel that way." Mom glares at me. "We're leaving early in the morning on Thursday. Pack light." She storms out of the room, and the moment she's gone, I let out a shaky breath. The bedroom door slams shut.

I stare straight ahead, absorbing everything that happened.

This whole time, I thought she hated me just because. But she sees me as competition? I don't believe that. There's no way . . .

"I meant what I said," Jaxon murmurs. He stuffs his phone into his pocket.

"Which part?" I say.

His lips curve into a dangerous smile that sends a shiver down my spine. "All of it."

CHAPTER 20



JAXON

I stick around the house for a little longer, keeping an eye on Dahlia and ensuring her mother doesn't try anything. She said something to Dahlia that made her cry before I walked into the room. The image of her crumpled face, sagging shoulders, and tears shimmering in her brown eyes will haunt me for a long time. No one who makes Dahlia cry can live.

I want to beat Evelyn's face in with a soldering iron. If she doesn't die from that, I'll finish the job by cutting out her tongue and watching her suffocate on her blood. She's talked long enough, and it's time the bitch shuts up and chokes on her words.

My father will not be happy about it, but his disappointment won't last for long since he's next. Our parents are standing in the way. Dahlia and I can't truly be together as long as they're still in the picture. But that's okay. I already have a few aces up my sleeve to ensure she's completely mine and that no one stops us from being together.

When Evelyn doesn't come out of her bedroom—being the drama queen she is—I slip out of the house and ride into town. I can't wait to see Dahlia wearing the gifts I had someone make for her.

I park outside the small shop that's overlooked far too often. It's an eccentric jewelry store that stands out from the rest of the shops in town. Maybe the way they make things deters most people, but since they haven't permanently closed, they're getting enough customers to stay afloat.

The chimes tinkle above me as I walk into the store. Tiffany pops her head up, and she brightens when she recognizes me.

"It's good to see you again!" she says as she grabs a black bag from the holding case and waves me over.

I cross the room and stand on the other side of the glass case. She pulls jewelry boxes from the black bag with the shop's logo on it.

"This has been so much fun to make," Tiffany says as she opens the smaller box with the diamond ring tucked between the cushions.

It's larger than I thought it would be, and I can't complain.

"She's going to love it," Tiffany says with a giggle. With two fingers, she pushes her glasses further up her nose. "It's perfect to show your devotion, and if she's a jewelry gal, I'm sure she'll appreciate the size."

I tilt my head as I gaze at the ring, picturing it on Dahlia's left hand. "The earrings?"

Tiffany sets the ring box aside and opens another, revealing diamond earrings about the same size as the ring. I imagine my sister wearing this jewelry for me and how she'll always carry a part of me with her, no matter how far apart we are.

"Perfect?" Tiffany nervously smiles.

"Yeah. She'll love them."

She perks at the praise and grabs the bigger necklace box. I picked out the thin silver chain to signify how delicate Dahlia can be. Clusters of smaller diamonds cradle the larger one that forms a skull. Hearts and other shit aren't her style.

After I've approved everything, she wraps the boxes in tissue paper, puts them inside the black bag, and says I'm all good since I paid when I placed the order.

I leave and stuff the bag under the seat of my Yamaha motorcycle.

I have a few more errands to run before I head back home to check on Dahlia. The Reckoning is quickly approaching, and I need things perfect before then.

Glancing at the crowd, I spot Exodus members blending in with the others. Unsuspecting people are clueless about the presence of wolves hiding in sheep's skin amongst them. Only a few regular people know about the secret society. They've lived here all their lives and have been through a few Reckonings. It's bound to happen that someone pieces things together.

The crowds have thinned over the last few days. People have skipped out of town so they won't be around when the Reckoning happens. For ten hours, the laws won't apply to us and we can do whatever we want without consequences—killing, stealing, kidnapping, and so much more.

Ten years ago, I joined Dad during the Reckoning to learn more about the secret society and to prepare for this one as an adult. That's the same night Dahlia kissed me. It was then that I realized she wanted me as much as I wanted her.

By that time, my feelings for her had already taken root and grown into a need. I'd claimed her as mine not long after by beating the shit out of Mickey for the first time.

Dahlia had been bold that night. She'd faced her fears and run from me, thinking I'd get upset over my sister kissing me. The only thing that pissed me off was her bolting away from me. If she can take what she wants from me, then I can do the same. I want her. She wants me. So why let laws and societal expectations stop us from being together?

During my last errand, I walk past a sex shop and pause. Lingerie displays stand in the large window. Spider-web designs run through the lace of one set, and it has Dahlia's name written all over it. My mind creates an image of her wearing the skimpy outfit with a garter belt I want to pull down with my teeth. My cock twitches, and I curl my fingers into a tight fist. It'll give me an eyeful of her large breasts, the curve of her round stomach, and all that ass begging for my teeth marks.

I'm walking through the door before I realize what I'm doing. A bell chimes, announcing my presence to the pink-haired girl behind the counter.

She pops her gum and looks up at me. "Hey. Do you need help finding anything?"

"The outfit in the display case."

She leaves her spot behind the counter and leads me to the back, where all the clothes are. "Do you know her size?"

With a nod, I give her Dahlia's size. I've gone through her clothes enough to memorize her size in pants, dresses, shirts, and underwear.

She goes through the rack, then pulls out Dahlia's size. "She's a lucky girl."

I raise an eyebrow.

The young woman shifts nervously and looks anywhere but at me. "Are you wanting to get anything else?"

I point at a pink vibrator. "This too."

Jealousy fills her gaze as she grabs it and hands it to me. "Anything else, Jaxon?"

I narrow my eyes. "You know my name."

She nods, a nervous smile lifting the corners of her lips. "Yeah. We went to school together."

It's a small town and I'm surprised that I don't remember her, since I have an excellent memory.

She clears her throat when all I do is stare at her. I refuse to ask how she's doing or try some small talk with her when I really don't give a fuck. "It's nice to see you dating. Like I said, the girl is lucky."

I say nothing.

"How's Dahlia doing?"

She's fucking me. That's how she's doing. Fine.

After striding to the counter, I wait for the girl to scan my items. I don't wait for her to ask another question. I'm ready to get the hell out of here and get back to my sister.

She goes to the register and rings in the items with a sour attitude. "Last I saw Dahlia, we were a few days from graduating. Kyle cornered her when you weren't around." She gives me a pointed look. "I wanted to make sure she's okay after what he did."

My spine straightens, and I focus on her.

"What he did?" I drawl.

She nods and takes my bank card. "I don't want to say more since it's not my story to tell. But I'm guessing she never told you, and maybe for a good reason."

Red fills my vision, and I cling to the present. I don't want to lose my shit while I'm here, and Dahlia isn't around to bring me back. I hate that I have to depend on her like this, but she doesn't seem to mind.

Then the girl folds like a deck of cards when she meets my harsh gaze. "He and his friends had her in the boy's changing room. They . . ." She hands the card back to me with a trembling hand. "They undressed her and took pics to put on the internet. It's been floating around since."

Everything in my mind blanks. It's quiet, which is new because I'm always thinking. I'm rarely on social media and never check in with the people from school, so it figures that I haven't heard about the photos. Why didn't Dahlia tell me about it?

"I see," I say. "Who else was there?"

She raises her gaze to the ceiling as she thinks. "Mickey, Kyle, and Connor."

I grab the bag with all the items and leave without another word.



Ryder shuts the door and locks the deadbolts behind me in the abandoned home. I cross the room and head to the bathroom Kyle has been staying in.

"Jaxon," Ryder calls.

"Unlock the door," I say.

Ryder comes to my side and rests his hand on my shoulder. "What's going on, man?"

I tense and glare at him while I grind my molars. Rolling my shoulder to get him off of me, I growl, "Unlock. The. Fucking. Door."

"What's going on?" Aiden says behind us.

"He's losing his shit," Ryder says.

I grab him by the collar of his shirt and jerk the keys out of his pocket. My friends dive in and hold me back from getting into the room with Kyle.

"You need to calm down, Jax!" Ryder yells directly into my ear.

I twist my body and punch him to get him the fuck off me. Aiden charges toward me and pulls me against his body, dragging me away from the small bathroom. The bastard whimpers inside the room, knowing that death is coming.

Black spots creep into my vision as I get closer to blacking out. My blood roars in my ears, along with the pounding of my heart against my ribcage. I throw my elbow back into Aiden's gut, and he lets out a wheezing grunt.

"Come back to us, Jax!" Ryder moves into my line of vision and whips off his mask. He puts his face in mine, forcing me to look at him instead of the door that's calling my name.

"What the hell is going on? *Oh, shit.*" Hawk sprints to us and holds me back as I loosen Aiden's death grip.

I jump and kick my boots out, slamming them into Ryder's and Hawk's dicks. Aiden loses his balance and stumbles backward. We careen to the ground in a tangle of limbs and flying fists.

Kyle's chains rattle, but the fucker doesn't say a word. I'm sure he's shaking in fear as my friends hold me back from killing the asshole for what he and his friends did to my sister. When I'm done with him, I'll find Mickey and Conner and kill them, too. After that, I'm punishing Dahlia for not telling me about this.

"We need to call Dahlia," Aiden says, then grunts when I punch him.

"It'll be too late," Ryder says.

I get on top of Aiden, and Ryder hooks his arm around my neck, holding me in a headlock. Aiden punches me in the gut. All the breath in my lungs wheezes out, and I grapple with Ryder's arm as I gasp for air.

"I'm getting her," Hawk says.

"No! She can't fucking know about this!" Ryder yells, and squeezes harder.

"I'm still getting her, asshole. Do you want him to fucking murder us?"

My lungs burn for oxygen, and everything spins. I scratch my blunt nails on Ryder's arm. Seconds later, I slump backward into him and everything goes dark.

I don't know how long I'm out, but when I come to, I'm surrounded by my friends on the couch. Ryder tilts his head back with a bloody napkin held to his nose. The fight left Aiden with a scuffed and bloody face. His limbs stretch out while he leans against the cushions. Hawk lights a cigarette, blood dripping from his eyebrow. He winces each time his busted lip wraps around the smoke as he takes a drag.

Hawk's the first one to notice my open eyes. He sighs in relief. "He's back."

The other two look my way, sharing the same relieved expression.

"Want to tell us what the fuck that was?" Aiden growls.

I move to swipe my hand under my nose from a tickle—most likely blood—but my wrists are bound behind my back. I huff and drop my head against the cushions to look at the ceiling. "Someone untie me."

Hawk guffaws. "For you to lose your shit again?"

I narrow my eyes. "I'm not going to."

"What the hell happened, Jax?" Ryder asks.

Rage fills me at the reminder of what set me off.

"Jesus, not again," Aiden whines. "I don't have it in me to get my ass kicked for a second time."

I rein back the anger, which takes more energy than I can spare. When I don't feel like I'm about to black out, I say through clenched teeth, "Kyle and the others touched Dahlia."

Ryder snaps his head toward me with a knowing and concerned expression. I give him a warning look, urging him to keep his mouth shut. He hasn't said it aloud, and when I confronted him a few days ago, he couldn't say it then, either.

Hawk blows out smoke and leans forward. He rests his elbows on his bent knees while he pins me with a glare. "What do you mean, *touched her*?"

I'm not saying any more than that. I love my friends, but I don't want them to know there are photos floating around on the internet. Curiosity will kill the cat, and if I find out they searched for her photos, I won't hold back on them like I did earlier.

Aiden swallows loudly, and Hawk looks seconds away from taking revenge himself.

"Fuck," Ryder whispers with a shake of his head. He looks at the ceiling like it holds all the answers to the questions in his mind.

Aiden bounces his knee, a nervous habit he picked up in middle school and hasn't stopped since.

"Untie me." I shift in my seat, searching for a way to escape the bindings.

Ryder drops the bloody napkin onto the arm of the sofa, helps me to my feet, and turns me so I'm facing away from him. Using his knife, he cuts the ropes.

"Has anyone found Mickey?" I ask. The rope falls away from my wrists, and I drop my arms to my sides.

Hawk huffs a sarcastic laugh. "The fucker is in hiding. I haven't found him."

My lips flatten. "What about Connor O'Hann?"

All three of my friends swing their gazes toward me, each one having a similar expression of shock that morphs into rage.

"He's in college, living on campus. Do you want us to get him while we look for Mickey?"

I nod. "If we can't bring them here to us, we'll find them during the Reckoning and end them."

The room goes quiet, full of solemn agreement. We all direct our gazes toward the bathroom at the same time, where Kyle is currently locked inside.

"We can have fun until then, yeah?" Hawk asks as he puts out his cigarette.

"Yeah," we all say in unison.

"Then let's get dear old Kyle out to join the party," Aiden says. He jumps out of his seat, his steps containing more of a pep now that he understands why I lost my shit.

I search the room for something to use on Kyle, then notice my discarded helmet. I don't remember throwing it off.

That'll do.

CHAPTER 21



DAHLIA

I roll over in my bed, keeping my eyes shut. I want to catch a few more hours of sleep, but the more I wake up, the harder it is to slip back into the one pleasant dream I had. Light filters through my windows and brightens the darkness behind my eyelids. I sigh and sit up, swaying as sleep clings to me while simultaneously refusing to let me drift off.

Movement catches my attention, and I slap my hand over my mouth to muffle a scream. I scramble back into the headboard, eyes wide and my heart slamming against my chest.

A demon stands at the foot of my bed, skin mottled with shades between gray and brown. There's nothing in its sunken eyes, and its jaw hangs low, as if someone has ripped it out of its socket.

I can't look away from it, but from the corner of my eye, I notice my bathroom door. It's shut. I always keep the light on as a safety blanket since it helps me feel better when I see this *thing*. This house is haunted, and it chose to show itself to me out of everyone.

It reaches its long, spindly, claw-tipped fingers toward me. A strangled noise makes its way out of me, and I start out of my shock. I fall out of bed as I scramble off the mattress; the sheets catch on my legs, stopping me from getting out faster. I glance at the demon, finding it crouching beside me. I yell and bolt out of my room and straight into Jaxon's.

Diving onto his mattress, I realize he's out cold. I don't give a shit. I need my protector, my security blanket who will always keep me safe.

I yelp as he rolls over and settles between my legs with his hand around my throat. He draws back his fist, readying to punch me. He freezes when he notices it's me, and the rage twisting his features softens. His fingers loosen around my neck, but he still holds me against the mattress, hovering over me menacingly.

Pain etches his features. "I'm sorry, flower," he rasps. "What are you doing here?"

I grab his wrist and weakly jerk to push him away, but he stays right where he is.

The hairs on the nape of my neck stand, and the unease lingers. I gasp for air and turn my eyes to the doorway, hoping the demon didn't follow me in here.

Jaxon follows my gaze, and his eyebrows pull down into a harsh slant. Instead of waiting for me to answer, he shoves off of me and storms across the room to the open door, giving me a full view of his naked back and ass. My jaw slackens and I sit up, unable to look away from my brother's bare ass as he checks outside of the room. He cranes his neck as he leans out of the doorway, looking left, then right. Satisfied, he turns and slams his door shut behind him.

"Oh my god," I whisper. A dull ache throbs between my legs, and I squeeze my thighs together as I study his naked body.

Jaxon shamelessly strides back to the bed, his large dick out in the open and half-hard. I've already seen it. Tattoos cover his body with unique pieces that blend together perfectly. I've already seen the straight bars running through each of his nipples. I try my best to look away from his quickly hardening cock and how it bounces with his rushed steps, even though I already know what it feels like to have him in my mouth. I know how he tastes and what he sounds like when he comes. But that doesn't mean I can't get shy and embarrassed when seeing him like this.

After giving him a blow job, I had to look up what piercings he has. I found out he has a Prince Albert, a Jacob's ladder, and some scrotum piercings. Trimmed pubic hair dusts the base, and his balls are a darker shade, making the skin appear leathery.

The longer I stare, the more I notice the tattoo on his pelvis that I haven't seen before. It's a flower with so many petals they're hard to count. Beautiful shades of black and red fill in the artwork, making it look gothic but delicate at the same time.

My eyebrows pinch together. That flower looks familiar. My eyes widen when realization slams into me like a linebacker.

"Is that a dahlia?" I whisper.

Jaxon stops at the end of the mattress and keeps his heated gaze on me instead of looking at the tattoo. He grabs my ankles and yanks me toward him. I squeak and splay my legs to make room for him as he leans over me. My clit thumps a fast beat, matching my pulse's pace. Jaxon grips my thighs, his fingertips digging into the softness as he leans down until his face hovers an inch above mine.

"You won't distract me, but I'll answer your question," he murmurs. "Yeah, it is a dahlia."

I swallow hard. "When did you get it?"

It doesn't look fresh. The ink has settled into his skin, blending perfectly with his complexion.

He brushes his lips against mine in a chaste kiss, clearly wanting to tease me even though he looks bothered after I hurtled into his room without a warning. "As soon as I turned eighteen. You wanna know why I put it in that spot?"

I nod, and he chastely kisses me again, then teases me with a kiss on the corner of my mouth.

"I put the flower right above my dick because I knew you'd be eye level with it one day, and it would serve as a constant reminder that you belong to me."

Oh, fuck me. Butterflies dance in my stomach, and liquid heat pools low between my legs.

Jaxon kisses over my jaw, nipping the skin as he trails his way down my throat. He moves us together so smoothly that I barely feel us moving backward on the bed. He settles between my legs and shallowly thrusts his hard cock against my sleep shorts, right against my pussy. I throw my head back and dig my nails into Jaxon's shoulders, holding on for dear life as his kisses and grinding work me closer to an orgasm. It should be embarrassing, but Jaxon's groans and purposeful movements tell me he's feeling the same way.

He settles his hand on my lower stomach, right above my pelvis, under my shorts. A shiver rolls down my spine, and I bite my bottom lip as he moans in my ear, clearly aware of how it affects me. I buck harder against him.

"I'll tattoo you one day, sis," he whispers in my ear. "Right here, so it'll remind me that I belong to you. I'll be the only one who gets to worship your cunt."

A choked sound works its way out of me. My thighs tremble and my climax is *right there*, but it dies when Jaxon stops moving and raises his head.

"Please," I whine, and rock against him, not embarrassed in the slightest about how desperate I seem.

He slants his mouth over mine and shoves his tongue into my mouth. He puts everything into this kiss. Every strong feeling of love, need, lust, devotion, and possession.

"I told you I'm not getting distracted," he murmurs against my lips with a smile. "Who scared you?"

Not *what* scared you, which fits better for this circumstance, considering that a demon made me damn near piss myself.

The mood in my mind dies on the spot, but my pussy doesn't get the memo as it still clenches and demands to be filled by my older brother. I can't focus, not with his fat dick pressing against me, hard as an iron bar that's branding my skin.

"Put some clothes on," I say breathlessly.

His smile turns mischievous, and he moves his hips, sliding his pierced cock between my pussy lips, which are outlined by my tight shorts. He groans, and my toes curl.

"You're the one who came into my room, little sister." He slips his mouth beside my ear. "Don't think I've forgotten what I said about what I find in my room being mine."

He said that long ago. I'm the one who's forgotten about it until now. It happened when we were kids, after I kissed him for the first time. I'd snuck into his room to feel less lonely while he was gone with our dad. One of my ribbons came out while I napped, and I didn't realize it until he found it and confronted me.

My lips part and I arch my neck as he grinds against me. I shift my hips, helping him as he peels my shorts off and blindly tosses them to the floor. Gravity doesn't exist, and every organ in my body flips. This is it. We're taking this to the next level by having sex and no longer kissing and giving head.

Jaxon slips his cock between my wet folds and holds it down to fuck between the lips. Each stroke rubs my clit with the delicious friction I need. I'm so close to coming that I'll scream if he stops. My fingernails dig deeper into his back and scratch down, making him groan and shiver with each long swipe.

"I want to feel you," he murmurs, then brushes his nose along my jawline and leaves kisses here and there. "I wanna bury myself so deep inside you that I leave an imprint of my cock in your tight pussy. I want my cum filling you until it leaks out. Then I want to taste the combination of us out of your cunt."

My eyelashes flutter as I fight to keep my eyes open. Jaxon looks at me with a pinched expression. He's struggling to keep his calm demeanor, and I can see the strain from him holding back on me. I want more from him. I want him unrestrained. I want him to show me how I drive him wild with need like he does to me.

"Fuck me," I say as I roll my hips to meet his each time he pushes forward. "I want it all."

Pain etches across his beautiful features. The thin string of control he's holding stretches tighter. It's only a matter of time before it snaps and he gives in. I don't know why he's holding back. Why hasn't he fucked me? Deep down, it hurts, and I wonder if there's something wrong with me.

"Tell me who scared you," he says.

I dig my heels into his ass and grab his erection. He hisses through his teeth as I guide the tip outside my entrance.

"I don't remember," I say.

I do, but that's on the back burner. The demon isn't about to ruin this, too. I want Jaxon, and he clearly wants me, so what's stopping him?

"Please, big brother. I want you so bad it hurts," I whine.

His control snaps and he thrusts forward, barely getting the fat tip of his dick inside me. I arch my back and yell as he stretches my opening. Jaxon's eyebrows lower, and he clenches his jaw as he applies more pressure into his thrust.

"Fuck," he growls, then stops. His chest rises and falls with each quick breath, and sweat gathers on his forehead.

I swallow down the cries from the burn of his head barely penetrating me. My inner walls spasm, pleasure joining the pain and concocting a mind-blowing combination.

Jaxon's expression falls as he realizes what we're doing, and he pulls away. His dick slips out, leaving me feeling empty and disappointed. He gathers his control and puts on a cool mask to seem unbothered.

"Another time, flower." His voice pitches lower by an octave and sounds like he's growling. "You still need to answer my question."

I don't want to push him to sleep with me. I'll feel like shit if I have to convince him. So I swallow back my disappointment and say, "I saw something in my room."

"You saw something in your room?"

I nod. "I woke up and saw this . . . thing."

"Are you fucking with me right now?"

The panic doubles as I remember how the demon looked when it reached toward me like it wanted to steal my soul.

"No," I say. "I woke up and saw it standing at the end of my bed. I'm terrified of it, and it keeps showing up. It looks like a demon." I snap my mouth shut, my teeth clicking together when I notice the weird look on Jaxon's face.

His forehead crinkles with his frown, and he cocks his head as he looks me over with a new perspective. Tendrils of wavy hair slip over his eyes, and I want to push them out of the way. I stay still, not wanting to annoy him.

"The same demons you were telling me about the other day?" he asks.

I nod, and the fear from earlier hits me again. I'm back to trembling and trying to hide it from him. My eyes move on their own, and I peek from the corner, checking to make sure we're alone. I don't want Jaxon to see me like this. Over the last few years, I've kept it together and want him to see only the tough side of me. But little by little, over time, things scared me, and I can't control my reactions and emotions every time.

Jaxon gets off me and gathers me in his arms to straddle his lap. He holds me tight, just like all the other times, as if he's holding my shattered pieces together so I'm whole again. I let out a shaky breath and melt into his arms, holding on to him, thankful he's not judging me.

"We'll figure this out," he murmurs, and kisses the crown of my head.

Tears form in my eyes, and I hate that I'm crying like a baby just because someone I love cares about me. I mean, my god, my mother really fucked me up in the head if I become a bumbling, crying mess whenever I receive the slightest hint of affection.

My tenacious brother feels things ten times more than others I've met. When he puts his mind to something and wants it done, he gets it done. I trust that he'll help me figure this out, but the worry that this is a bigger problem than we think still creeps inside me.

"I don't want to be alone, Jaxon. I'm always terrified because these things keep popping out of nowhere." I close my eyes.

"Then you don't need to be alone. I'm here."

"It's not that easy. You're gone all the time, and I'm barely getting any sleep."

"Then sleep with me."

I nibble on my bottom lip. "I don't know. Our parents—"

"Fuck what they have to say." He leans back and glares down at me. "They can try to tear us apart, but we're stronger than that. Trust me when I say that we'll always be together."

My chest tightens, but I hold back the words of undying love that are bubbling up my throat. I'm hesitating because of the small bit of guilt from admitting I'm in love with my brother.

"Don't leave me," I breathe. Those three words hold more weight and meaning. Jaxon gets it without me having to spell it out.

He crushes his lips to mine and puts just as much feeling into the kiss as I do. Nothing can rip us apart, and I believe him when he says so. He'll make sure we're always together at the end of the day.

A feeling of something bad looming in the distance fills me until I'm unable to continue kissing him. Jaxon smooths my hair and lovingly pecks my forehead.

"You and me forever, flower," he murmurs.

I nod and swallow around the lump forming in my throat. I won't tell him how panicky I am that this won't last forever.

CHAPTER 22



DAHLIA

After our cuddle session, I left so Jaxon could take a shower. I'm already aware that he's planning on leaving soon. I don't know where he's going, but I'm not about to be some jealous girlfriend asking him hundreds of questions. If he plans on hanging out with his friends and riding, I'll ask if I can tag along. I don't want to be here alone. Especially with my mom.

I hum to myself as I make sourdough starter—flour and water that I've fermented for a week or longer. I got this sudden burst of energy to try something new, and I've been dying to make some bread. It'll be great if I can make it Halloween themed, since the holiday is just around the corner. Maybe I can form the bread into a bat shape, or even a pumpkin. I'll need to talk to Jaxon about taking me into town and buying fun-shaped cutters.

"Dahlia."

"Hm?" I raise my head and search the empty kitchen for the person who called my name. My eyebrows pinch together. No one is here.

Shaking off the uncomfortable feeling, I turn back to what I'm doing. I add flour to the water in the large, decorated jar I found in the cabinet.

"Dahliaaa. Dahlia!"

I yell and jump. My flinging hands knock into the jar, and it tumbles to the floor, shattering into pieces. My heart makes itself at home in my throat as I turn to face the rest of the kitchen.

"Save me." Sobs echo in my mind, then in the kitchen. *"Save me, Dahlia! Save me!"*

"Save us."

"Do the world a fucking favor and cut your wrists."

I slap my hands over my ears and squeeze my eyes shut as the voices scream at me to hurt myself. My legs tremble, and I breathe hard through a panic attack that grips me in a chokehold. No matter how hard I push on my ears, it doesn't muffle the voices.

"Kill yourself."

"No!" I yell.

"You're a pathetic waste of space."

"Dahlia!"

More sobs fill my head, and all the voices join as one. Every so often, one stands out from the rest.

"Stab yourself."

"Cut. Cut. Cut."

My lips move with drowned-out words, and I don't know how long they yell, but it feels like an eternity. They promise that if I cut myself, they'll stop.

"Cut," I cry. "Cut. Cut. Cut. Cut."

I shake my head and hold my hands tighter over my ears as they get louder. It's like someone is screaming right next to me, but no one is here. It's just me and these demons. Tears sting my eyes and break free to trail a wet path down my cheeks.

"Dahlia."

They won't shut up, no matter how much I yell at them. I scream and snap open my eyes. I grab a knife from the drawer and hold it to my wrist. My hands tremble, so when I slide the sharp end of the knife over my skin, it forms a jagged cut. The voices laugh, blending together and screaming louder for me to keep cutting. I whimper as I cut another line, then another, until blood wells to the surface and drips to the floor.

"Dahlia!"

A tattooed hand slaps the knife out of my hold and spins me around to face a terrified Jaxon. He grabs my arm where I cut myself, then yells something that I can't hear. Not when the voices are still yelling at me. Fear clouds his eyes, and he grabs a dish towel to wrap around my forearm. He applies pressure, and I wince with a scream.

"Look at me, flower." Jaxon's strong voice filters through all the voices and screaming.

They die down until I hear myself repeatedly screaming, "Cut!"

"Dahlia," Jaxon says in a strained voice. He pulls his phone out of his pocket with one hand while still holding my bleeding arm with the other. "Look at me, baby."

I struggle to breathe as another panic attack slams into me, knocking the breath out of my lungs. My stomach churns, and I swear I'm about to shit myself because of how terrified I am.

"Jaxon," I cry.

He snaps his gaze to me, terror still evident. "It's okay. You'll be okay."

Fat tears roll down my cheeks. I want to fall into his embrace, but I'm frozen in place, unable to move. All I can do is sob and whisper his name repeatedly, hoping it's enough to chase away the panic.

"What's going on?" Mom says as she walks into the kitchen. She looks at me first, then down to the floor where the mess of glass and sourdough starter lies scattered near my bare feet. "My jar! No!"

"You're more worried about a fucking jar?" Jaxon yells.

Mom chokes on a cry, and she rushes toward us with her hands reaching toward the glass pieces. "This was my grandmother's! It's an antique!"

I sway on my feet, unable to find balance. Jaxon steadies me and holds his phone to his ear. I'm assuming he's calling the ambulance, and whatever he hears on the other end sets his jaw in a hard line.

Mom gathers the broken pieces and places them on the counter before she spins and faces me. I stumble back a step, and Jaxon follows me with a glare directed toward my mother.

She stabs a finger at me. "I can't ever have anything nice because you're a selfish little bitch. I know you're faking all of this to get out of trouble."

Tears burn my eyes, and her cruel words repeat in my head.

Mom storms toward me and raises her hand. Before her palm connects with my cheek, Jaxon drops his phone and catches her wrist.

"Hurt her, and I'll ruin something else of yours," Jaxon says through his teeth. "You're more worried about a broken fucking jar than your daughter who was cutting herself?"

Mom's eyes widen, her thin lips parted in horror. She looks at me with no sympathy and turns back to Jaxon. "You won't hurt me."

He leans toward her, the corners of his lips curling into a mocking smile. I shiver and hesitantly step closer to him.

"Hurt Dahlia, and let's find out together if I'm lying." He arches an eyebrow, challenging Mom.

She yanks her hand away from him and scrambles backward to put space between her and Jaxon.

"I'm talking to your father about this," she says before she storms out.

Jaxon turns back to me and peels the towel off my arm to inspect the injuries. I hiss when the cool air hits the fresh wounds. Jaxon's eyebrows lower, and a muscle jumps in his jaw.

"I was hoping it wasn't deep." He folds the cloth around my arm. "We need to go to the hospital."

He gathers me in his arms and picks me up princess style. I hold out my injured arm so it's not squeezed between me and

his chest. He carries me to his Camaro, then drives like a bat out of hell to the hospital.

The moment we're in the emergency room, he's yelling at the nurses to get me seen. The poor women scramble and open the doors to rush me into an empty room. The nurses clean the wounds, and the doctor comes in to stitch them while they ask me what happened. I'm still so shaken up that I barely give answers, just enough to talk about the voices. A few times, the doctor looks at me from beneath his lashes with a perplexed look.

"Was this an attempt to end your life?" he asks.

I shake my head. "No. They told me if I did it, they'd leave me alone."

"Are you on any medication?"

"No. Unless you count birth control."

The doctor sighs and throws his used gloves into the biohazard bin. "I'm going to refer you to psychiatrists who may be able to help you. Hearing voices is concerning, and not something to ignore. Do you understand?"

I frown and curl my fingers into a tight fist. I don't like the way he's talking to me, but I'm not about to say that out loud.

Jaxon huffs a laugh from the chair next to my small examination bed. He raises his head to look at me with exhausted eyes that hold only a flicker of amusement.

"Did I say that out loud?" My cheeks burn with a blush.

The doctor rolls his eyes and grabs the door handle, but he stops when he remembers something. "I'm required by law to have you sent to the psychiatric unit. You need help and will get the answers you need there."

"What?" I yell. By the time the word is out of my mouth, the door shuts behind him.

I slump back in my bed and flatten my lips as I glare at the door.

"You need the help," Jaxon says softly. "We'll get answers about why you're seeing and hearing things." A muscle by his eye twitches, and I suspect he knows something I don't.

"I don't want to be in there." I look down at the bandages over my sore arm.

"I know you don't, but it'll be okay. Remember what I said?" He takes my hand, lacing our fingers together as I nod. "We'll figure this out together."

I relax as I gaze at our joined hands. His envelop mine. This sort of intimacy—the kind that's only shared between lovers—feels so right. Jaxon's the only one I trust. If he says it'll be okay, then it'll be okay.

"Mom was a real bitch," I mumble.

He stands from his chair with a soft laugh and a shake of his head. Sitting on the edge of the cot, he pulls me into his arms in an awkward hold. Shadows move over his face as unspoken thoughts rush through his head. He stays quiet, and I worry my bottom lip, waiting for him to say something.

"You're not having second thoughts about us, are you?" I ask.

Jaxon snaps his gaze to my face, and his lips pull down in a snarl. "Never. I meant what I said, Dahlia. You're mine until the day we die."

I nod and let out a shaky breath.

An hour passes, and then I'm discharged from the emergency room and transferred to the psych ward. Jaxon trails behind me and stops when a guard puts his hand on my brother's chest. I stiffen and wait for Jaxon to lose his shit on him, but his attention remains on me.

"Your girlfriend will be taken care of," the guard says.

I mouth, *I love you*, to Jaxon and don't wait for his reaction. I face forward to walk through the double doors into the unit, leaving my older brother behind.

CHAPTER 23



DAHLIA

Three days passed in the psych ward. Mom pretended to care about me and the stitches. Dad reacted about the same, and it makes me feel like shit. I still feel like utter crap because they make it very obvious that I'm not worthy of their love.

Being away from Jaxon was torture as well, even though he visited me every day. Sometimes we didn't talk. We just sat next to each other and played footsie under the table while I zoned out.

I left the hospital with pill bottles and instructions to call a psychiatrist as soon as possible. They put me on antipsychotics, antidepressants, mood stabilizers, and anxiety meds to help with the panic attacks. They started me on low dosages that make me lethargic all the time, and I feel like a zombie.

Jaxon takes me out for the evening, so we're away from our parents and the place that now holds bad memories. We ride with his friends, and I mold myself to Jaxon's back while we weave through lanes on the highway. In the blink of an eye, we're at a park tucked into the mountains. During the day, it's a place to have fun. By night, the outcasts and horny teenagers hang out.

Ryder and Jaxon start a fire in a metal barrel out in the soccer field. The warmth from the flames is a welcome relief, since it's chilly outside. A couple of girls are hanging out with us, though I can't recall their names.

I'm zoning in and out way too much and need something to stimulate me. I glance at the parking area clear across the field on the other side of the gazebo. Jaxon is crouched by his bike, fiddling with it. He's been by my side since I've been out of the hospital and always checks on me to make sure I'm not hearing things. I know what happened traumatized him, because how can it not?

Guilt eats at me. Jaxon has always been there for me and protected me, but have I done the same for him? I can't recall a time other than when we were in school.

I stand from my seat and wander to my brother. Ryder and the others are great company, but they aren't Jaxon. I take every chance to be near Jaxon while he's around.

He's been hanging around the house less every day. I don't know where he's going or why he's gone all day and late into late at night. A nagging worry builds inside me until it's nothing but an ugly monster creeping up on me—much like the things

I've been seeing.

I join Jaxon's side as he messes with his motorcycle. Instead of looking at me, he turns his head this way and that. Immediately, I go down the mental path that tells me I'm invisible and no one cares about me.

"You're overthinking, flower."

I blink and the overpowering emotions pop like a balloon, leaving me lighter than before. I fold my arms under my breasts.

"It's what I do," I mumble, and smile to put him at ease.

He huffs a soft laugh. "I know."

I playfully tap his leg with the tip of my boot. "I suck at this, but are you okay?"

He finally looks at me and frowns. "Am I okay?"

I drop my arms and crouch beside him. Our shoulders touch, and I shiver at the contact. "I'm really sorry for what happened and that you saw me at the worst moment of my life."

"Dahlia." He fully turns toward me, eyes hardened. I prepare myself for a tongue lashing, because it's coming. "You couldn't help what happened. It's not your fault, and no, I'm not upset with you."

I sigh and more of that weight rises from my shoulders. "I saw the terror on your face, Jax. You can't tell me you're okay."

"You really want to know the truth?"

I nod.

He leans in like he's about to kiss me. "Yeah, hearing your screams and seeing you cut yourself was fucking terrifying. But you're here with me still, and as long as I can see you, I'm fine."

"So you're not going out anymore?" I shake my head and plop down on my bottom because crouching for too long causes my muscles to cramp.

Jaxon glances down at my spread thighs, his pupils blowing wider. A muscle jumps in his jaw, and he looks at my face again. "Not for a while, and neither are you."

"What about the trip Mom planned?"

She had to push the date back because of my "little mishap," so we're leaving on the tenth. I randomly remember what Mickey said about his inability to wait until the tenth, then Mom talking about the Reckoning.

Jaxon shakes his head, his frown deepening. "You're not going."

"I don't know if Mom will allow that."

"Fuck what she does and doesn't allow. You weren't going to begin with."

"Why? Are you going to kidnap me or something?" I say with a little laugh.

Jaxon's full lips curl into an ornery smirk. "Yeah. Who's saying that I won't?"

I snort a laugh and roll my eyes. "I don't think it'll be considered kidnapping if I'm a willing participant."

His eyes darken and his smile broadens into something more than ornery. It's disturbing and makes him look evil. "I hope you remember that, little sister."

"What?" For a split second, I think that he's going to kill me. I shake it off because that's a stupid thought. It's hard to do, but I manage.

"Just saying," he says, and turns back to his motorcycle.

It's quiet between us for a while as he tinkers with his bike and I watch, more transfixed by his hands than what he's actually doing. I move my leg out of nervousness. Also because of the need to move since taking these meds. It's been hard to stay still.

It draws Jaxon's attention back to my thighs, and the same hungry look I've seen on his face multiple times makes an appearance. Even though it's a little cooler tonight, I still wore my fishnets and black shorts paired with a shirt to match. It shows off my legs and thighs, which is like a beacon for my brother.

"Can you teach me how to drive this?" I blurt.

Jaxon finishes up and arches his brow at me. "You want to learn how to ride it?"

I nod, holding my breath and expecting him to say no.

The gears turn in his head, and I hope he's considering it. His smile rips the air from my lungs, and I swear the heavens open up and a choir of angels sing. Fuck me, he's beautiful. Especially when he smiles—which is rare for others to see.

"Sure," he says.

I perk up. "Really? Right now?"

Jaxon stands and holds his hand out for me, then helps me up. "I'll teach you the gears, but I won't have you ride tonight."

I pout. "But I want to ride you." My eyes widen. "I mean, ride your bike."

The corners of his lips creep up in a deviant smile, and he leans in to whisper in my ear, "Oh, don't worry, sis. You'll be riding me soon."

I squeeze my thighs together to stop the fluttering between them.

"Others are around," I say. "I don't want them to hear us."

"Is that an invitation to fuck you somewhere we can be alone?"

My heart bangs against my ribs, and I shift my weight on my feet, unable to get comfortable. I glance at the group still hanging out by the fire. There's no way they can hear us, but my paranoia doesn't care.

"Let's change the subject," I say, and turn back to him. "Can I at least ride it around here?"

"What, my bike or my dick?" He touches my hip, and I swear my soul leaves my body.

"Seriously?" I mutter. My cheeks warm with a blush.

Jaxon grabs his helmet and shoves it into my hands. "Put this on."

My eyebrows pinch together. Is it just me, or does he seem angry? Why is he angry?

I don't fight him. I just do as he says. He puts on his helmet and gestures for me to get on his motorcycle.

"Hey, man!"

We turn at the same time to face Aiden as he jogs up to us with an excited smile. "Are we riding?"

"Teaching her how to ride," Jaxon says loud enough for us to hear through his helmet.

His clipped tone definitely sounds angry.

Aiden turns his friendly smile to me. "Seriously? I can help."

"No. You stay here," Jaxon says. He points at me, then stabs his finger toward his bike.

I dart past him and straddle the seat, expecting him to show me how to drive it while he's behind me, but he shakes his head. With a sigh, I scooch back, giving him room to sit in front of me.

Jaxon turns the ignition and revs the engine to a growl. I shiver at the sound and how it brings good memories. Every one of them involves Jaxon.

"You're no fun," Aiden yells over the noise.

I give Aiden an apologetic look that's pointless since he can't see my face. Wrapping my arms around Jaxon, I hold on tight as we take off. A strange feeling compels me to look at the others still sitting at the fire, and I find Ryder staring at me with a strange expression that I can't put my finger on.

I squeeze my legs on the seat, holding on to Jaxon for dear life as we speed down the road. Every time Jaxon leans into a turn, I join him so we aren't thrown off balance.

My hold on him tightens, his muscles contracting beneath my touch. When we straighten, I slowly drag my hands under his shirt and touch his bare skin. The motorcycle screams louder and jerks us forward faster as Jaxon changes the gear. I grin and lower my hand to his pants. Working them undone is a challenge, but I manage. I slip my hand in and bite my bottom lip when I find him hard. His piercings bump against my palm as I awkwardly stroke his shaft.

I've missed this so much—missed him so much while I was in the hospital. The only complaint I have is not seeing his face while I jerk him off. It may be stupid to do this while we're literally riding a death bike and going over one hundred miles per hour, but I trust my brother with my life.

The ride is short, and we pull into the other side of the hiking trail with a gazebo and picnic tables. Jaxon cuts the engine, and I let go of him and glance around. We remove our helmets and set them on the bike.

"Why did we come out this far for you to teach me ho—" I yelp in surprise as he roughly cups my cheeks and crushes his lips against mine. I walk backward as he guides me to where he wants me. I move on instinct, my arms winding around his shoulders and holding him close to me.

I missed this so much, too. Being alone with him and giving in to our uninhibited desires. We can't do that at home. We can't hold each other and make out or give head. I mean, we can, but we risk being caught.

"You fucking tease," Jaxon murmurs into the kiss as he picks me up. His arms lock around me so I don't slip and fall from his grasp.

I squeeze my legs around his narrow waist and smile as much as I can while his mouth moves against mine. "You're a tease, too," I say breathlessly.

"I'm gonna fuck you, flower." He grabs my ass, his fingers curling between the crack. I shudder and rock my hips against him. "I'm gonna take your ass first, then later, I'll fuck your tight pussy."

A moan slips out of me, and I pull back enough to take a deep breath. "I don't think that's a good idea."

Everything we do together is my first time. If he couldn't slip his dick inside my pussy, then how the hell will he manage that with my asshole?

"It's a good idea," he murmurs, then harshly kisses me. It's the complete opposite of how he talks to me. "I want to know what my sister feels like when she's squeezing on my dick."

"I don't know if you can fit that inside me."

"We'll make it fit."

He settles me on the picnic table and leans back to remove my clothes. I gasp as he jerks me with his rough movements. I peer into his eyes, and my mouth dries at the wild look in them. Time slows as he takes off his clothes, then jerks me off the table and turns me around so my back is to him.

"Jaxon, wait," I breathe.

He bends me over, shoving between my shoulders. "You have no idea how badly I've wanted to do this with you."

Why can't it be my pussy? He enjoys eating me out, so I thought he'd go for that first, then work me up to ass play. "Does it have to be my ass?"

"Yes."

I wait for him to explain why, but he doesn't. He molds his body against mine. His hand curls around my throat, and he turns my face toward him for a brutal kiss that makes my knees weak.

A lid pops open, and I tense.

"Just the lube, flower," he murmurs.

He greedily swallows the moan that escapes me as he shoves his knee between my legs, spreading them wider and parting my ass cheeks.

I crack open my eyes, finding him already looking at me as he leans his head back.

"What if someone finds us?" I ask.

"No one will find us." He drizzles the cold lube on my back hole, then sets the bottle on the table next to me. His fingers prod me, massaging the tight ring. "Relax."

I gasp as he slowly inches his finger past the ring of muscle and stretches me.

"Oh, god. It hurts," I whine, and try to escape his fingers.

Jaxon stills and grabs my shoulder, holding me in place. He doesn't move his finger, letting me get used to the weird feeling. Then I figure out how to make this better. I grab his free hand and shove it between my legs, showing him to touch my clit. He's a fast learner and rubs his fingertips between my folds.

He groans. "So wet for me."

My worry over being caught fades away until my focus is solely on him and how he makes me feel. He sinks his finger deeper in my ass, slowly thrusting it to loosen me, then adds another digit.

A strangled noise that sounds like a dying cat escapes me. Colorful dots pop behind my closed eyelids as the tickle in my lower stomach reaches down to my curling toes. An orgasm builds like a snowball rolling down a hill. I scream as it hits me and takes me to a higher dimension with my head in the clouds.

Jaxon's lips cover mine and he swallows my sounds, greedy for each one as he works me through the climax, milking me for everything I have.

I grab the edge of the picnic table and hold on while he adds a third finger, then a fourth.

"You're doing so good for me," he murmurs, his lips brushing against mine.

"I want you." I reach behind me to grab his dick. A shiver runs through me at his low moan, and he fucks me harder with his fingers.

"My nasty girl. You want my dick inside you?"

I nod, panting and unable to form words as he keeps me in this constant state of bliss.

Jaxon slips his fingers out of me and pours more lube on my stretched hole, then his dick. He strokes himself and lines the head up with my back hole.

"This is it, Dahlia," Jaxon says with a growl as he fists my hair to hold me where he wants me. He jerks me up from the table, with my ass still stuck out in a curved position. "We're really doing this."

I dig my nails into the wood, unable to feel pain from potential splinters burrowing under my skin.

I push back into him. "Just please fuck me already."

Jaxon's fingers tighten, and he snarls as he pushes into me. He glides in smoothly after leaving my back hole gaping from his fingers. My eyes widen from the stretch and the uncomfortable feeling of fullness. He takes up every space inside me, and then some. Every piercing he sinks into me rubs against the tight ring of muscle, making me taste colors. I tremble from an orgasm already edging in.

"Goddamn." He slams the rest of the way until he settles to the root.

I scream and squeeze my eyes shut from the blinding pain of being stretched so wide that I think I might tear—if I haven't already. Jaxon isn't small. Add the piercings on top of it, and it's uncomfortable but feels so fucking good. I realize I might have a thing for pain because of how wet I'm getting.

"It's too much," I cry. "Fuck, it's too much." I don't think I mean his size—which, yes, it's a lot—but the overwhelming feeling of euphoria.

"You can take it, baby."

He alternates between flicking and pinching my clit because I think he knows how much I enjoy being hurt. My tense muscles relax, and I become pliant in his hold, accepting him and everything he gives me. He drags his cock out, then slams it back in. His tempo is slow but hard, gaining speed with each thrust.

"Fuck me, sis. You're taking me so well. It's like we were made for each other."

We move as one, as if we've done this thousands of times before. Our bodies meet echoes in the space around us, and I no longer care if someone finds us like this. We can't stop until we see it to the end. He strips everything away from me until there's nothing left.

He touches me with small strokes on my lower back, then flicks my clit. He murmurs my name with praises, like he's worshiping me, no matter how rough he is. His focus is solely on me and making me feel good rather than seeking his own pleasure and leaving me behind.

He uses my body like it's an extension of himself, knowing exactly what I need and how I need it. I won't be the same after this, and I don't think he will either. We've crossed the line between right and wrong, and it's too late now to turn back.

He changes his tempo from slow and hard to fast and punishing. I keen as my climax rips through me, shattering more of the barriers I hold in my mind. Any guilt I've felt is wiped away and replaced with the overwhelming need to never let this die. I need my brother just as much as he needs me.

Jaxon moans louder, and his hips brutally slap against my ass. His dick jerks inside me as he climaxes, filling me with warm cum.

I groan as he lets go of me, his dick slipping out of me. Slumping against the table, I tremble from the mini, post-orgasm shocks. He's quiet, and a thousand reasons why that might be fly in my mind, each one getting worse than the last. Did I do something wrong? Is he done with me now that he fucked me?

Peeking over my shoulder, my anxiety bubble pops when I find him staring at my ass with reverence. His cock throbs like a heartbeat as he recovers from his orgasm. I don't know if it's normal for a man to still be hard after having sex, but Jaxon is at full mast, with cum leaking from the pierced tip.

Slowly, he raises his gaze to my face, showing a glimpse of what he plans to do before he's on his knees and spreading my ass cheeks. His mouth latches onto my pussy, his tongue flicking my clit. I drop my head forward and shudder as another small orgasm takes over.

Jaxon moans, and the vibration takes me higher. After I come down, he pulls away and stands. I squeak as he roughly turns me around and his lips smash against mine, forcing me to taste myself on his tongue. After the brief kiss, he rests his forehead against mine.

"I love you," he says huskily.

My stomach flips and I wind my arms around his shoulders. "Wow, I must've really blown your mind if you're telling me that after what we just did."

He huffs a laugh and tightens his arms around me. "I've been wanting to tell you for a long time."

He buries his nose in my sweat-damp hair and breathes me in. A shiver rolls through him, and his cock jerks against my stomach. There's no way I can do this again tonight.

"I love you too," I whisper, and kiss his shoulder where it meets his neck.

Jaxon groans. "Don't do that."

I lean back, my eyebrows pinching together. "I thought you like me touching you."

He scowls. "That's the problem, flower. I like it too much."

"Oh."

He shakes his head and pulls away. I follow his lead by picking up my clothes and then dressing.

"Now, about teaching you how to ride . . ." Jaxon leads me to his bike.

He shows me how to work the brakes and gears, which confuses me. While he shows me the gears again, a powerful pull to look up takes over me. I turn my head and search through the darkness. Then I stiffen.

A shadowed figure walks behind a tree, fading into the darkness only two hundred feet away from us.

I don't know who it is or how much they saw, but I shut down, unable to focus on anything Jaxon says. My mind goes straight to the demons I've been seeing, but the figure I saw looked human.

Jaxon turns to me and follows the direction of my gaze. The figure is already gone by then, and I can barely breathe.

"What is it?"

"I think someone saw us together," I say.

CHAPTER 24



JAXON

Sitting on my desk chair in my bedroom, I watch Dahlia sleep in my bed. She looks perfect, tangled up in my sheets and thoroughly fucked. Her cheeks lost their flush, but I'm sure if I feel like it, my face can burrow between her thick thighs and bring back the color.

The thing is, I'm not in the mood. I keep thinking about what she said earlier about someone watching us. My mind went straight to my friends and them finding us, but if they had, they would've already called or texted me about it.

So it's not them.

I flex my fingers and settle more in my seat as I go through everything that happened, searching for potential clues. Dahlia didn't have any solid descriptions of this person, and I wonder if it's one of her hallucinations. I've researched mental illnesses that make someone see demons and, after dismissing all the blogs about demonic possessions, I came across articles about schizophrenia.

The information lines up with her symptoms, except for a few that aren't listed. She sometimes becomes bubblier than usual. More daring and outgoing. She's terrible at holding a job, and I don't think it's because of the schizophrenia—if she has it. My best bet is she struggles because of the antipsychotics she's taking.

Even with all of that knowledge, worry still sours my stomach.

I meant what I said to her. I don't care if everybody knows about us. Dahlia, on the other hand, is stressed about it. I'm merely a mortal man bowing at the feet of my goddess. I bend at her will, and if she doesn't want anyone to know about our relationship, then so be it. People will find out eventually, and I hate that for her. I hate being a dirty little secret, but I refuse to break Dahlia's trust.

My jaw clenches.

It doesn't mean that I won't break it in a different way. I hope she'll overcome her anger toward me when I put my plans into action. It's all in her best interest.

Dahlia shifts in her sleep and sighs with a little moan. I lick my front teeth behind my closed lips. I hope she isn't having

any nightmares. She's mentioned them before, and now that I know about what's really happening, it fucking terrifies me. I want to protect my sister, but how can I protect her from the one thing I can't touch? Her mind must be a scary place, and I hope I can be her safety. Her haven. Just as she is for me.

Her piece-of-shit mom doesn't care about what happened. Neither does our dad. If I could kill them right now, I would, but I have to wait less than twenty-four hours until I unleash every bit of rage on them, Kyle, Connor, and Mickey.

Michael, too.

I haven't forgotten about that fucker sitting like a waiting duck at the mansion with a barely alive Kyle. Every single person on my shit list is a dead man walking. Even though I can't find Mickey, he'll eventually show his face. It doesn't matter if the Reckoning is happening or not. I'll gladly go to jail for ridding the world of that piece of shit.

Dahlia turns onto her other side. Her arm slips over the side of the mattress and dangles. I want to climb into bed and lie behind her, hugging her against me. I hate being touched, but I crave Dahlia's hands on me. Holding her has always been my happy place because she provides me peace in the hell that is my mind. I realize that she's right there beside me, and I didn't realize until three days ago.

Standing, I angle my head to the side to work out the tension in my muscles. Cartilage pops, and I groan under my breath from the slight relief it brings.

As much as I want to stay here with Dahlia, I need to get ready for tomorrow night if I can't sleep.

I look at the time. It's 1:24 a.m. Okay. So technically, later tonight is when the ten-hour reckoning happens. The last time I went, I was thirteen, flustered by Dahlia kissing me, and saw a lot of shit that would traumatize anyone. People were having sex, and others were killing. There was a party and general mayhem.

Now, as an adult, I crave it all. The same darkness that was inside me as a kid festered and became a monster. Because that's what I am. I'm a monster who corrupted his little sister, and I can't let her go.

I'll never allow her out of my grasp, and when the time is right, I'm fucking a baby into her. I'll have her dripping my cum at all hours of the day and night until she tells me she's pregnant. Even then, I'm still fucking her to make up for all the time we've missed out on.

I cross the room and move Dahlia's messy green hair out of her face. Leaning down, I kiss her forehead and linger for a moment, enjoying the feel of her warm, silky skin against my lips. Her deep, even breaths fan against my throat, making my cock twitch. This girl proves Pavlov's theory on me. Just the barest touch on my skin from her, and I'm hard.

After a moment, I pull away, already missing touching her. I check her arm, making sure the stitches are still intact and don't look infected. Dahlia groans, still fast asleep but aware enough to feel my fingers brushing over her uninjured skin.

"I'll be back soon, flower," I murmur, then leave the bedroom and close the door behind me. I've left the bathroom light on for her since she's mentioned in passing how she can't sleep without it.

I leave the house and straddle my motorcycle after gearing up. In eighteen hours and thirty minutes, Dahlia will be my wife.

CHAPTER 25



DAHLIA

“I really don’t want to go,” I say.

Mom sighs and aggressively scrambles the egg mixture in a bowl. Once upon a time, that would have made me squirm in my seat and worry about what I’ve done to make her mad.

“You have no choice in this,” she says. “Besides, it’ll be good for you to get out of the house.”

I roll my eyes and lean into my chair. The manga paperback I’ve been reading drops to the table with a *thump* that earns me a glare from my mom.

“Okay,” I mumble. “I’ll bite. Why?”

“Speak up, Dahlia. You’re mumbling.”

I bite back the snarky comment I want to say, and I refrain from starting anything. I’m exhausted and don’t have the spoons for her bullshit. When will people listen and stop focusing on themselves for once? I’m sick and tired of everyone but Jaxon not listening to me.

“I said, I’ll bite. Why?”

Mom pours the egg mixture into the frying pan. I hate scrambled eggs. Anything she cooks is always terrible, and to avoid hurting her fragile feelings, I have to pretend I like it. “After your little tantrum the other day, I figure this is a great reason to do a mental-health vacation.”

My little *tantrum* the other day . . . Are you *fucking* kidding me?

That’s not the real reason, and we both know it. She knows I heard her conversation on the phone the other day. “What is a Reckoning?”

Mom’s shoulders tense, but she doesn’t look at me. She whisks the mixture in the pan, pretending to be busy with cooking. “Look it up in the dictionary.”

I stand from my seat, snatch my paperback, and give her back an icy glare. “I’m not stupid.”

Mom huffs, turns around, and folds her arms over her chest. “Speak up.”

"I'm sick and tired of you not listening to me. If you can't hear me, maybe you should shut the fuck up for once and listen." I snap my mouth closed, my eyes widening a fraction. Did I just say that out loud?

Her lips flatten, and fire burns in her gaze. "How dare you talk to me like that! I'm your mother. Show a little respect." I let out a sarcastic laugh. "Respect is earned, not given. You haven't done anything to earn it."

"Tell me how you really feel, Dahlia." Mom storms across the kitchen to me.

"You're the most ungrateful child I've ever known," she continues. "I feed you, clothe you, pay for anything you need and want. You're under *my* roof and don't have a job because you're a lazy piece of shit."

Rage ignites in my veins like a match striking the box. The lid I kept tightly shut over the years bursts open, and I can't hold back all the things I've been dying to tell my mother.

"And you're a self-centered, money-hungry bitch who slept with a married man and became his mistress!"

Mom grabs her chest, horror-stricken. "Who the hell do you think you are? My relationship with your father is *my* business. So stay the hell out of it!"

She raises her hand to slap me. I duck to escape the blow but move too late. Her palm cracks against my cheek, the force whipping my head to the side. The side of my face throbs like a heartbeat, and tears sting my eyes. I pinch my lips together and touch the sensitive skin with my fingertips while I glare at my mom.

She stabs a finger at me and makes that stupid bulldog face that shows off her bottom teeth. "I don't know what's gotten into you, but it stops now." She backs away, then stops to drive the figurative knife deeper in my chest. "You know what? I do know. You're around Jaxon way too much, and he's clearly rubbing off on you. If you have half a mind, you'll stay away from that boy."

I ball my fingers into tight fists by my sides. "Yeah, maybe he is rubbing off on me, but he's taught me more about boundaries and sticking up for myself than you ever did. I'm not going with you. I'm staying here."

"You're coming with me whether you like it or not," she says. "You want to know what the Reckoning is? Just ask your precious brother. He'll know all about it and maybe then it will repel you from him."

"The only person who repels me is you. You did this! Not me." I put distance between her and me, but she doesn't understand personal space and looks seconds away from beating the fuck out of me. "By the way, I didn't have a little tantrum the other day. It was a mental break. Tantrums are what you're good at."

"Oh, please, Dahlia." She waves her hand to dismiss everything I said. "You've always been the dramatic one. You want the attention. Well, guess what? You got it from everyone else, but I refuse to give in to your childish behavior. You broke something of mine that's important, just out of spite, and I know those stitches on your arm are fake."

"They are not." I want to strangle that woman so bad. When this is over, I'm looking into places to live. I don't know how I'll get a place without a job, but there has to be something out there. I can't do this shit anymore.

Mom rolls her eyes. "Stop it. You're always lying."

I tremble with rage and hold myself back from attacking her. Then something inside me snaps, and I relax my body. My face falls, and an icy demeanor takes over.

She notices the change and takes it as a win. She sniffs and turns, giving me her back as she returns to the stove.

"And you're a creepy old hag who has a thing for my brother," I say calmly.

Mom freezes. In a blink, she's crossed the room and raised her hand to slap me again.

A flash of tan skin and black fabric knocks her away from me. I cover my mouth and stumble back into the seat I abandoned. Jaxon slams Mom onto the table. Her back smacks the surface with a loud *thump*, and the silverware and china clatter on the table.

"Get off me!" She grabs Jaxon's arm . . . the arm he's pressed against her throat to pin her down.

He ignores her and holds a large pocketknife to her throat. Leaning down, he bares his teeth. His eyes lose their light and become vacant as he blacks out.

I lunge at him and wrap my arms around his lean body. I mold myself against his side and tug him to get him off of my mom. He doesn't budge and shoves his arm into her throat to quiet her screams.

"I warned you, Evelyn." Jaxon's voice deepens and is scratchy from his barely held together restraint. "I told you we can find out together what would happen if you hurt her."

She shouts for Dad as she struggles to get out of Jaxon's hold. "Get your"—she sucks in a ragged breath—"hands off of me."

The corners of Jaxon's lips tip up in a humorless smile. "No."

"Jaxon," I murmur, and squeeze my arms around him.

"You've made her cry," Jaxon growls. "Hit her. Ignored her. You've done a lot of things to Dahlia, and I've given you chance after chance over the years to change your ways."

Mom whimpers and kicks her legs. Her feet weakly knock into me. Jaxon digs the knife's blade into her neck, drawing a bead of blood.

"Jaxon, please." I tug him again.

His smile broadens and his pupils dilate. "My father is gone. It's just us, bitch. No one's going to save you."

A shiver rolls down my spine, and I suck in a breath as he drags the tip of the knife down mom's throat to the top of her chest.

He chuckles. "Let's see how you like it when I make you cry."

I swallow hard and weigh my next decision before I throw caution to the wind. "Let's go to your bedroom, big brother," I whisper in his ear, low enough for only him to hear.

Jaxon freezes and holds his breath. I slip my hand down his back and grab his ass, hoping that'll be enough to distract him. He loosens his hold on Mom, and life returns to his dark eyes.

"Get off of me!" Mom weeps.

He shoves off her, swings his fist back, and punches her. Her eyes close and she slumps off the table and lands in a heap on the floor.

My jaw drops. I barely have time to check on her before Jaxon grabs my hand and drags me up to his room. He twists my arm so that I face him before the door shuts, and then he pounces on me. His mouth devours mine, full of need and desperate for more than what we've been doing. Despite his roughness, his hand on my cheek is gentle and loving, treating me like I'm a baby bird with a broken wing.

"I need to feel you wrapped around my cock, sis," he says.

I bury my fingers in his wavy black hair, pulling at the strands just to hear him snarl. He walks me backward until I bump into the mattress and fall onto my back. I open my legs wide, allowing Jaxon room to settle between them.

He grabs a bottle of lube from his nightstand. Disappointment tightens my chest because I know he won't fuck my pussy. I don't understand why he won't.

Jaxon rips my shorts, fishnets, and underwear down my legs to pool around my ankles. The way he manhandles me makes me feel smaller than I actually am. He frees his cock and slathers it with lube, then turns his attention to my asshole. When we're all greased up, he tosses the bottle onto the mattress and yanks me to the edge so he's standing with my legs over his shoulder. He positions himself outside of the tight hole.

"I want you to know something, flower," he says as he bends over me to squeeze my throat. "I love you with everything in me, but right now, I'm about to fuck you like I hate you."

I yell as he spears into me, sinking every pierced inch of his dick inside me until he bottoms out. He pulls out and drills back into me. Every thrust of his hips shoves me backward. He has to hold my waist with his free hand to keep me from escaping him.

"You're doing so fucking good for me." He grunts. "My slutty little sister."

Our flesh claps, and he bares his teeth as he ruts harder into my ass.

My lips part on a breathless scream. His fingers tighten around my throat, cutting off my airflow.

Jesus, he didn't lie about fucking me like he hates me. His expression twists in anger and his eyes blacken like he's losing himself, but he hasn't blacked out. The spark of life in his dark eyes burns brighter every time I let out a breathless wheeze. I can't move because he has me bent like a pretzel, so I'm left taking everything he gives me.

"You know why I like your ass so much?" He rolls his hips, grinding into me. "It's because I get to see it clap as you take my fat cock like the good little fuck toy that you are."

He slaps my ass to make his point.

"You're going to come," he snarls. "Show your big brother how thankful you are for him."

My eyes roll into the back of my head as my climax reaches its highest point and I'm sent hurtling over the edge. I've never come without having my clit played with.

Jaxon loosens his hold on my neck, allowing me to breathe while he ruthlessly fucks me into the mattress. Blood rushes to my head, making it spin like I drank too much.

"That's my good slut. Come all over yourself." He swipes his fingers between my soaked folds and shoves them into my mouth, forcing me to taste myself. "Suck it."

I curl my tongue around his fingers, tasting the muskiness of my arousal. He groans, his hips stuttering. I yelp as he pulls out of me and forces me onto my knees, putting his glistening dick in my face.

"Suck my cock and make me come." He fists my hair and pushes me toward his groin.

I barely open my mouth before he's forcing himself past my lips and hitting the back of my throat. My shoulders heave with a gag as he roughly fucks my face. I can't take all of his length, so I hollow my cheeks and suction his driving dick.

Jaxon's moans feed the fire burning in my body and make this act of ass-to-mouth worth it. His head drops back and he glances to the side, his mouth parting in a slight smile. Thick ropes of cum spurt into my mouth. I barely keep up with swallowing his load before more floods down my throat. His dick throbs as he finishes with grunts, and then he shoves my head farther down his length until it bruises the sensitive skin at the back of my throat.

"What the hell is going on here?" Dad's voice booms behind Jaxon.

I tense and shove my hands against Jaxon's thighs. He holds me still, keeping his dick in my mouth as he continues

unloading in me. His lips curve into a deviant smile, but he doesn't stop fucking my face. My heart breaks over the fact that Jaxon knew our dad was in the bedroom before I did.

Dad grabs Jaxon's shoulder and yanks him away from me. His dick slides out of my sore mouth, and I fall forward and catch myself on my hands. I suck in ragged breaths, filling my burning lungs with the oxygen he deprived me of.

Jaxon tumbles back, then turns, taking a swing at our father.

I shakily get to my feet and fix my clothes. "Stop it!"

"You sick son of a bitch." Dad blocks the punch and swings. His much larger fist connects with Jaxon's jaw, throwing him off balance. "She's your sister!"

Jaxon laughs, and the evil coldness in that sound raises the hairs on my arms. He pulls up his pants and faces our father with a bloody smile.

"Yeah, she is." He swipes his arm over his mouth and laughs again, devoid of emotion. "You wanna know how she feels when she's taking my dick? Like a fucking dream."

Dad's face turns a bright shade of red, and he lets loose on Jaxon, catching him off guard as he slams him against the wall. His arm pins Jaxon in place, like what Jaxon did with my mom.

Jaxon laughs through the punches until blood leaks from his nose and travels over his busted lip.

"She sucks a mean cock, too," Jaxon says with a louder cackle. He grunts when Dad punches him in the gut. "She can take all nine inches of me like a greedy slut."

How dare he? How could he say all of those things like it doesn't matter to him?

Like I don't matter to him.

Mom runs into the room, her hand already on her chest and eyes wide as she takes in the unfolding scene. Bruises have already formed on her temple and neck from Jaxon almost killing her.

Dad grabs Jaxon by the collar and shakes him. "She's your goddamn sister, boy."

Mom looks me over, taking in the messy hair, ruffled clothes, and the flush on my cheeks. Her eyebrows furrow in confusion, and then she realizes what Dad means. "You had sex with your brother, Dahlia?"

This is why I wanted to keep us a secret. Our parents won't understand. No one will. We'll be the town's laughingstock, and the bullying will get worse.

"You have nothing to say?" Mom shakes her head in disgust.

"Take her with you. You're both leaving," Dad says to Mom over his shoulder.

"Let's go, Dahlia," my mother says.

I take a step back, then another. "I'm not leaving."

Dad glares at me while still holding Jaxon against the wall. "Go with your mother."

I cross my arms over my chest and stand my ground. "No. I'm not leaving Jaxon."

Dad's eyes narrow.

Mom closes the space between us and grabs my arm. "We're leaving."

"No!" I dig my heels into the wooden floor and shove her hands away.

Mom growls and grabs me again.

"I'm not leaving him!" I scream.

Dad shifts as he pulls a gun from behind his back. He holds the barrel against Jaxon's head. My older brother frowns, but he doesn't show any fear about the possibility of dying.

"If you don't leave in five seconds, I'll shoot him, and his blood will be on your hands." Dad clicks the safety off.

My stomach twists in knots until I'm seconds away from puking.

Jaxon turns his gaze to me with a strange look that I can't put my finger on.

There's no way they'll let us be together. If I leave now, I have a feeling this will be the last time I see him.

"Five," Dad growls.

My bottom lip wobbles, and tears form in my eyes. Jaxon's face falls, and his eyelids droop as something sinister inside him looks back at me.

"Four."

My vision blurs as I longingly gaze at him, wishing he'd do something. I can get over the heartbreak of him betraying me like this. What I can't get over is the heartbreak if he dies. I'd join him in death.

"Three."

Jaxon mouths, *Go*, and smirks.

I don't understand what he finds so funny about this.

"Two."

"Let's go, Dahlia." Mom yanks my arm and drags me to the door.

Jaxon's head dips so that he's looking at me from beneath his lashes. The corner of his lip quirks, and death looks back at me. My heart beats quicker and feels like it's skipping in my chest.

"Find me," I whisper, and a tear drops from my bottom lashes and travels down my cheek, followed by another one.

Jaxon's disturbing stare follows me as I'm dragged out of the room.

"Cry, little sister," he says in a dead voice. His warning nips at my heels and sticks with me as I'm forced to grab my bags and get in Mom's car.

CHAPTER 26



DAHLIA

I look down at my phone for the hundredth time since we left, checking the messages and finding none. A lump forms in my throat with worry over Jaxon and whether he's alive. It's been an hour, and I shared my location with him as soon as we pulled out of the driveway. I still haven't heard from him, and I'm terrified that Dad killed him, even though I left when he told me to.

"You won't ever see him again, Dahlia, so stop checking your phone," Mom says.

I drop my cell on my lap and glare at her, wishing it's enough to kill her on the spot. "You're lying."

Her lips flatten. "Why would I lie about something like this?"

"You're answering with a question. Proof enough that you're lying."

Mom rolls her eyes and looks back at the road. "Strange logic," she mutters.

"Speak up, Mom. I can't hear you." I smirk and pat myself on the back.

She glares at me like that's enough to damage me more than I already am, then presses harder on the gas. The engine purrs louder. "I don't know why you're so ungrateful and horrible to me."

I guffaw and cover my mouth in a lame attempt to hide my smile. "*Me? Horrible to you?*"

Her lower lip wobbles as she holds back the sobs building in her chest. I know they're crocodile tears. I've seen them countless times. At this point, I'm immune to them. She manipulates everyone—especially me—with her tears because her *wittle* feelings matter more.

"I'm a good mother," she says with a dramatic sniffle. "I raised you the best I could. My mother wasn't good to me, and I promised myself that I'd treat my daughter so much better. But you still turned out the way you did. I didn't realize how disgusting of a human you are, Dahlia. Having sex with your brother is wrong, and you know it."

I swear I see my brain when I roll my eyes. "How's being a good mom working out for you?"

I bypass her snide remarks about me and Jaxon. She can judge all she wants. I'm done with her shit, and I'm done with the world's shit. Love is love, and what Jaxon and I have is special.

She gasps, her jaw dropping. "I don't know what I did to deserve this treatment. I'm your mother."

"You keep saying that," I say, and shake my head as I look out the passenger window, finding the scenery more interesting. "If you have to keep saying that, then deep down, you know that you've been a terrible mom."

"I was a good mother to you," she snaps. "Did you not have a good childhood? Was I not there for you? Have I failed somewhere along the way?"

I know this act. She's fishing for me to pander to her feelings and coo, *No, you were a great mom. I had such an awesome childhood. You never celebrated my birthday, then ignored me when it suited you, then snapped orders at me like I'm waiting on you hand and foot.*

But I say none of that. I ignore her, choosing to sidestep her woe-is-me trap. I hate her mood swings. I despise everything about her and what she's done to me. If she thinks I'm a terrible daughter now, she needs to look at herself and realize I'm the monster she created. A neglected child can only tolerate so much before they bite back.

Jaxon said he'd kill her and our dad, and as much as I'm against murder, I wish my mom wasn't here anymore. I want to be somewhere safe, not somewhere I'm constantly ignored and hated. I'm sick of being someone's punching bag. With Jaxon, I felt wanted, loved, needed, and safe. He's given me more in life than my shitty mom could.

Tears well in my eyes, and I swipe them away. Now I won't see Jaxon until who knows when. With every minute that passes, the feeling of dread sinks deeper.

What if something really did happen to him?

No. I can't think about that. For once, I need to think positive. Jaxon is alive. He'll find me and bring me back with him to somewhere we can live alone together.

I cling to that hope for the next hour as we ride in silence on the highway.

Mom takes the next exit and finds a gas station. She parks at a pump and sits there. I feel her gaze on me, silently demanding I look at her, but I refuse to give her anything.

"Stay here," Mom says. She exits the car, and the door slams behind her before she storms across the parking lot to the station's front door.

I check my cell, hoping to see a message and, once again, I'm let down. The ball of worry eats at me until I'm nothing but raw nerves. Scenarios of what happened to Jaxon after I left fly in my mind, each one worse than the last.

Besides us, the gas station lot is empty. If someone else had been here, I would have approached them about taking me back to Vail. Or at least halfway so I can find a different ride.

Or . . . I could just stop feeling bad about myself and take Mom's car.

I look at the driver's side, where the keys dangle from the ignition. After checking if the coast is clear, I groan and slump into my seat. Speak of the devil. Mom walks out of the station, sunglasses on, and she's already frowning.

Next stop, then.



There is no next stop, and I want to kick my own ass.

The sun has set, and we're at an expensive five-star hotel hours out of town. Mom ordered a five-course meal half an hour ago, which I refuse to eat out of spite.

I sit on one of the queen-sized beds, facing the balcony where she sits outside at the table with her plate of food. She acts like she doesn't care and falls back into how she's treated me my whole life, by ignoring me and enjoying a glass of white wine.

Her phone rings, and she looks at the caller ID before she answers it. The heavy plating on the back doors makes it difficult for me to hear her voice and understand what she says. Whoever is on the other end says something upsetting because she clenches her jaw and snaps at them. She must feel my gaze on her because she turns and gives me the "shoo" gesture.

Fine. I'll find out later who she's talking to and what they said.

Deep down, I feel like it has to do with Jaxon. Why else would she be so upset and tell me to go away?

I grab the keycard and my phone before I leave the room. I would've taken the car keys, but for once, Mom was smart enough to hide them from me.

The door glides shut behind me, and I go down the large hallway to the elevator. As I wait for it, I dial Jaxon's number and hold my phone to my ear. It rings several times, and with each passing second, my heart picks up its pace until the organ is slamming against my ribcage. I swallow hard around the lump forming in my throat and fight back the tears as the call goes to voicemail. The jerk didn't set it up to where I can hear his voice; instead, I'm greeted by the automated recording.

The elevator doors slide open, and I raise my head, sniffing back the tears. I stop mid-step when I notice the gigantic figure in all black with a crimson demon mask.

It's not Halloween. Why are they dressed like that?

The hairs on the back of my neck stand as an uneasy feeling washes over me.

The stranger cocks their head, and the feeling of their gaze slowly raking over my body sends a chill down my spine. I take a step back.

I'll wait for the next elevator.

The masked man follows me—and I'm almost certain it's a man now—and I scramble away from him. I yelp as he grabs my arm, yanks me into him and turns me so that my back is to his chest. I scream and fling myself out of his grasp, only for him to snatch me against him again.

The doors slide shut, closing me in with this sick bastard. Jaxon's name is the first thing I scream as the stranger covers my mouth with his gloved hand. I stare wide-eyed into the mirror across from us as he pulls a capped needle out of his jacket pocket. He expertly flicks off the cap and sticks the needle into my neck, pushing the plunger to inject me with whatever drug is inside it.

My legs give out from under me. I try to kick him or even jab him in the gut with my elbow, but my movements are sluggish as the drug courses through my veins like magma burning my blood.

Jaxon's name curls on my numbing tongue as I fight back the urge to pass out. Black dots ebb from the corners of my vision and creep into the middle, acting as a countdown to the moment of unconsciousness. It feels as if my head expands into a numb balloon, and a ringing shrills in my ears as sleep grips me. Whatever the hell this asshole injected me with is strong, and my fight fizzles out of me.

I slump in the man's arms, and everything goes black.

CHAPTER 27



DAHLIA

“**S** he’s fine,” a man whispers. His voice seems familiar, but at the same time, it doesn’t. Everything sounds far away but close. It’s a strange feeling and not something I can break free from, no matter how hard I fight to rise.

I mumble and fall back into the darkness I’ve been in for however long. At some point, I become aware again but can barely open my eyes.

“I don’t think it’s a good—” another man says through the murky depths.

“I don’t care what you thin—”

Darkness.

I swim to the surface like I’m at the bottom of the ocean and running out of air. It’s right there, and yet, so far away. Something keeps pulling me down, preventing me from taking a full breath.

“Say, I do,” the first man whispers in my ear. Fingers trail over my forehead and down my temple in a loving gesture. I don’t understand why he’s touching me like that. I don’t know him.

I mumble again, not understanding what I’m saying.

“Open your eyes.”

My eyelashes flutter, fighting the sleep that holds me. Everything’s so blurry that it’s hard to make out the masculine face in front of me. All I see is tan and black. I jolt at the feeling of his lips on mine. His kiss is rough and demanding, with his teeth nipping my bottom lip. He smells like he ate candy corn before this.

I freeze in surprise. The man continues kissing me, urging me to respond with little nips here and there as his fingers tighten in the hair at the back of my head. He still seems familiar, but I can’t put my finger on it.

I shiver and attempt to pull away. Instead, I slump forward into his embrace and kiss him back. In my mind, I imagine it’s Jaxon because of the way he sucks my bottom lip and squeezes my ass cheek. He pulls away from my mouth and leaves a trail of kisses from my jaw to my ear.

“You’re mine,” he says huskily. “No one will take you from me.”

Then everything goes dark again.

CHAPTER 28



DAHLIA

I come to, groggy and having a hard time opening my eyes. My eyebrows pinch together as I try to orient myself to my surroundings. The seat behind me moves with the familiar feeling of a car traveling over the road. I turn my head, staring out a window at the night whizzing by. Looking to the other side, I slowly blink to make sure what I see is right.

“Wh-who are you?” I whisper to the man wearing black clothes and a crimson demon mask.

The demonic form is made of my nightmares and the things I’ve been seeing. As we pass by the few headlights and streetlamps, it glimmers, exposing the black base colors and delicately carved designs that could be easily overlooked if one isn’t paying attention. Which I wasn’t in the elevator.

He doesn’t answer, only turns his head to look at me through the holes for his eyes. His skin underneath is dark, like he painted his face before he put on the mask. I wince at the annoyance in his bottomless eyes. He may as well have stabbed me because of how much that one glare affects me, and I don’t know why.

I lick my lips to moisten them. It doesn’t help. Swallowing to wet my dry throat doesn’t either. I don’t know what the hell this dude injected me with, but it’s messing with me still. Everything feels heavy, like I’m being pinned down with bricks stacked on top of each other.

I shift in my seat and slowly reach for the door handle. I won’t jump out of the car while we’re going eighty miles per hour, but when he slows down, I’ll tuck and roll. I just hope to god that I survive this.

“I don’t know what you want,” I slur. “But if I were you, I’d take me back right now before something bad happens to you.”

He turns his head, taking his creepy time about it. It reminds me too much of those eerie dolls that turn their heads by themselves and have a hard time doing it. Mirth shines in his gaze and crinkles the corners of his eyes from a hidden smile.

Okay. That’s annoying. Why isn’t he taking me seriously? Yeah, there isn’t much I can do at the moment, but if Jaxon doesn’t get to him first, then I’ll fuck him up by myself.

Keep telling yourself that, Dahlia, I chide in my thoughts.

Either way, he’s a dead man walking because there’s no way my brother will let him get away with this. My chest tightens

until it hurts, and it becomes hard to breathe. I just hope Jaxon is alive and looking for me.

My kidnapper turns his attention back to the road and lowers his foot on the gas pedal. The engine purrs with the speed increase, and the streets fly past us in a blur.

“Don’t you fucking cry,” I whisper to myself. A lump forms in my throat, and I look out the window, hiding my tears from the stranger. I swallow hard a few times to clear my throat, and I try to be stealthy as I check my pockets for my phone. My shoulders slump and more tears sting my eyes. All of my things are gone, including the ChapStick I carry with me everywhere.

“What do you want?” I ask, my voice coming out clearer and less drunk.

He’s quiet, which pisses me off, but I’ll take anger over sadness any day. I cling to it until all I feel is rage and the need to beat his ass. Who the fuck does this man think he is? He clearly doesn’t know who I am or that his life is in danger because of my obsessed brother.

The rest of the drive is tense, and the small space electrifies me with a heady amount of fear and anger. Meanwhile, my kidnapper is sporting a boner. My hands tremble more from adrenaline than fear—which, yes, I’m scared, but I don’t plan on letting him take me to a second location without a fight.

He turns the car right and drives up a driveway to a large cabin that might as well have been a mansion. It’s massive. He parks behind a Lamborghini, and I scream in my head. I know it’s stupid to freak out because of a mansion and an expensive car, but if he’s bringing me to where mega-rich people are, then this isn’t good. I’ve seen too many movies where rich people are always the slimiest of human slimes. There’s also the billionaires and their sick kinks.

The kidnapper cuts the engine and climbs out of his seat, slamming the door behind him. My spine straightens, and I tremble as he comes around to my side.

Nah, fuck this.

I crawl over the console, and the passenger door flies open. He grabs my ankles and I yelp, then shriek as he drags me back to the passenger side and out of the car. I scream as I slap, kick, elbow, and head-butt. He doesn’t make a sound as I land a few blows. He just sighs, grabs my wrists, and pins them behind my back before he shoves me against the car.

I squeak as his body presses against my backside, forcing his erection against my ass. My stomach flips at the impressive outline, then guilt floods through me. Because what the fuck? I don’t know this man, and I’m in love with Jaxon, which means no clutterflies are allowed right now.

He leans against me, brushing his mask against the side of my face. “You’re going inside with me,” he whispers, “and you’re going to be a good girl and do as I say.”

I wince as he tightens his grip on my wrists. Shaking my head, I glare at him the best I can from the corner of my eye. “No, I’m not.”

He knocks my legs open with his knee and wedges his body firmly against mine. His thigh rests right against my core and rubs in all the right places. My eyes roll to the back of my head in my moment of weakness. This is wrong. He kidnapped me and brought me to this place to turn me into some billionaire’s sex slave before they kill me. I’m not about to be the next Black Dahlia murderer.

“You’re going in there as my wife,” he murmurs, “and you’ll sacrifice your virginity to me.”

Virginity? Technically, I’m not a virgin anymore. I’ve had sex—just not vaginally.

I bare my teeth and turn my face to look at him, but all I get is an eyeful of the side of his demon mask. “I’d rather shit in my hands and clap.”

He pauses and cocks his head. If I didn’t know any better, I’d think he’s grinning at that lame comeback—as embarrassing as it is. “You don’t have a choice.”

“Yeah, well, I hope you have fun with that,” I snap, “because my brother will have a lot of fun with you when he finds me. He’ll use your intestines as a rope to hang you with.”

More silence and him staring at me with those soulless eyes.

After a moment, he leans in until his mask brushes my cheek. “I’d like to see him try.”

The record in my mind scratches as I realize what he said a minute ago.

“Wh-what did you say?” I croak.

“You heard me,” he growls.

I shake my head and nervously lick my dry lips. “Did you say . . . did you say I’m your wife?”

“Ahh.” A pleased hum rumbles in his chest and into my back. He transfers his hold on my wrists to one hand so he can drag his knuckles down the exposed skin on my side. Goosebumps pebble over me, and I hold my breath.

Tapping my love-handle, he says with amusement in his voice, “You haven’t noticed your ring, wife?”

I try to swallow, but I fail every time because of the lump forming in my throat. “You’re lying.”

Sighing, he grabs my left hand and brings it in front of my face. My eyes widen at the large stone cradled in a white-gold band with smaller diamonds clustered around the larger one.

I shake my head. “No,” I whisper. “No. No. No.”

He curls his gloved fingers over mine and holds on tight. I wince and jerk in his hold to get him off of me. He’s taller and

much stronger than I am, so it's pointless to even try.

"You're fucking weird!" I scream. "I'm not married to you!"

What will Jaxon do? Where is he? I can't be married to this asshole. I want to be with Jaxon. It should be him that takes my pussy for the first time and not this creep.

The masked stranger doesn't make a sound, but the weight of his stare is heavy on me as he watches me lose my sanity. Everything feels like it's slipping, and I'm not talking about figuratively. I feel like I'm swaying on water. Something darts past the corner of my eye, and I gasp for air as panic settles in.

The man tenses, unsure of what to do. Good. I'm glad my freak out is scaring him because if he wants to be married to me, then he'll have to deal with my bad—that is, if Jaxon doesn't kill him.

"Easy," he murmurs, his voice deeper, like he's holding himself back from doing more than brushing his knuckles along my cheek.

I slap his arm and turn my head to bite his wrist. He hisses through his teeth but doesn't move away. I don't know how long I freak out and scream for Jaxon, but my throat hurts and my voice goes out.

"You done?" the man growls. He whips me around, shoves my back against the car, and forces me to wrap my legs around his waist as he lifts me. Even though it's dark out, I still notice the hunger in his dark eyes as I wiggle against him.

"No!" I sniffle from the unwanted tears. "If my brother doesn't kill you first, then I will. I hope you know that."

He tilts his head to the side as he considers my warning, then slowly blinks. "I don't doubt you." He leans in until his cold mask brushes against my nose and I'm looking straight into his eyes. "You're still my wife, and you're mine. No man, not even your brother, will stop me."

He lowers me, and I dig my boots into the ground as he drags me to the front door. The whole way, I'm cussing and calling him names, hoping something sticks and offends him, but he's unbothered. If anything, he seems pleased about it. I don't know why, unless he has a degradation kink.

A security guard stands near the front door. I can't believe I didn't notice him until now. He turns to us and briefly glances at me with a bored look before he turns to my kidnapper.

"Please help me," I say, raising my voice. "This man kidnapped me!"

The guard swivels his attention back to me and raises his bushy eyebrow. "And?"

My jaw drops. My worry about this place being a cult for old rich men was right.

He jerks his chin toward my kidnapper. "Need to scan."

The masked man turns me with him as he gives the security guard his back. The guard raises a scanner and clicks the button, making it beep as it scans a barcode on the nape of the masked man's neck. My kidnapper stares at me the whole time, and once the machine dings, the guard opens the door and waves us in.

As I'm dragged past the security guy, I snarl, "I'll be sure he kills you, too."

He scoffs and turns his back to me. "Not if I kill him first."

CHAPTER 29



DAHLIA

The inside is larger than the outside. As I look through the crowd, I notice that the back of the cabin overlooks the lake, which I would have admired if someone hadn't kidnapped me and brought me here against my will. The dim lights in here make it moodier and more seductive as masked people dance, drink, and fuck. Bass thumps through the speakers, vibrating straight into my bones.

My kidnapper guides me through the house and into what I'm assuming is the living room. My head swivels as I look at each person, hoping they'll see the terror on my face. A few people look at me, but they show no concern.

I'm screwed. There's no one here to save me, and it's up to me to get out of this.

A flash of red near the ceiling catches my attention. As my gaze rises, my lips part in surprise. Scarlet silks hang from the beams, with acrobats weaving through them to the beat of the song.

The further we walk into the building, the more the sinking feeling in my gut grows. It's consuming me, and a strange sense of seeing this happening before fills my mind.

We pass a large table with champagne flutes, and my stomach threatens to empty itself when I look up. Men and women hang above the drinks, blood dripping from their slit throats to the glasses below.

"Oh god," I whisper.

What in the house of horrors is this? Is this my fate? Is my kidnapper going to use me, then slit my throat to bleed out in their drinks? I swear to god, if there's life after death, I'll haunt his ass and make sure he regrets what he does to me every single second.

The masked man guides me to the back of the cabin and into a room full of shelves lined with old books. A bearskin rug—complete with attached head—sprawls over the wooden floor for the comfort of these shitty rich people. Three masked men sit on leather recliners by the fireplace. They raise their heads and look at me, then my kidnapper.

I don't need to be a part of this group to know these men are the leaders. The way they carry themselves, with their shoulders drawn back as they relax in their seats, screams power.

"I come bearing gifts," my kidnapper says.

I whip my widening eyes to him, and my mouth dries. "Gifts?"

One of the men leans back in his seat, folds his hands in his lap, and steeplest his thumbs. "And what do you plan on sacrificing, Dahlia?"

I face the three large men who bore a hole in my face with their gazes. I swear I can't breathe through this panic. "You know my name?"

The one who spoke dips his chin and pauses his steepling. "We all know who you are."

I wait for them to explain, but they don't.

"This is your chance," my kidnapper whispers as he positions himself behind me and leans down until his mask is right beside my head. "Prove your loyalty to them and pledge yourself to the Exodus."

He trails his gloved fingers down my arms and sides, then over my round stomach. Goosebumps pebble on my skin, and my nipples harden into tight peaks. The adoring and gentle way he touches me is confusing because he literally doesn't know me. What's more confusing is that my body responds to him as if we've done this before. Like it recognizes his touch.

"The choice is yours, Dahlia Evergreen. Sacrifice something or die." The leader stands from his seat and straightens his black jacket to free it from wrinkles.

"What the fuck is the Exodus?" I raise my voice, not bothering to keep quiet.

The man wearing a creepy spider mask with sharp pincers chuckles. "You didn't tell her?"

"Tell me what?"

My kidnapper runs his hand down my pelvis and brushes his fingers over my mound, teasing me with his soft touches. "Welcome to the Reckoning," he murmurs into my ear. "The one night every ten years when laws don't touch us. We're told to bring party favors, and I chose you as mine."

Everything in me stills. "The Reckoning . . ."

My husband brushes his mask against my ear. "You know what to sacrifice, wife."

"What if I don't want to?"

He pauses, then his hand shoots up to grab my throat in a tight grip that makes my head spin. "Then you die."

If I were watching this from an outside perspective, I'd scream for the victim to do the sacrifice. The last of my innocence doesn't matter to me. It never did. I don't know if I'm innocent since I've had anal sex with Jaxon.

Facing a life-or-death situation brings out the very core of who you are. Are you fighting your way out? Or are you rolling over and accepting your fate?

I don't want to die. I want to live so I can see Jaxon when he finds me, because I firmly believe he will.

"My virginity," I whisper shakily.

"Repeat that," one leader says. "We can't hear you."

My husband stiffens. "She said she'll sacrifice her virginity."

They hum in unique tones, pleased with my answer.

"Then, by all means." One leader gestures for us to begin.

"Right here?" I squeak.

"What?" The leader leans forward to hear better.

Annoyance rolls off my husband in noxious waves. "She asked, *right here*." He angrily taps his finger on my abdomen, right beneath my breasts.

The man in the creepy frog mask waves him off, then rolls his wrist, two fingers held up as he silently urges us to fuck.

I suck in a breath as my husband peels off my crop top and tosses it aside on the bear rug. He snaps my bra undone, freeing my heavy breasts from their confines for the viewing pleasure of the men watching with disinterest. I can't look away from them as they relax in their seats. One looks bored, with his leg crossed over the other, his elbow resting on the chair's arm, and his fingers tucked against the cheek of his spider mask.

"Please don't do this," I whisper to my kidnapper.

"You have no choice, wife."

He undoes my shorts and yanks them down to pool around my boots. Coming around to stand in front of me, he tilts his head as he stares at my crotch. I'm left standing in my underwear, fishnets, and shoes. His gaze rises to my face with a look of warning before he drags down my fishnets, rips my panties in half, then jerks them off of me.

I gasp and stumble forward, then steady myself by holding on to his shoulders in his bent position as he pulls up my fishnets.

My eyebrows fly up to my forehead.

He looks up at me, and I swear I can see the smirk behind his mask. "I want to fuck you while you're wearing these. I love how they cling to your curves."

My cheeks warm with a blush, and I squeeze my eyes shut to close myself off from the outside world. This is so fucked up. I have to remind myself that this is a life-or-death situation and not something I can run away from. If I bolt out of here, he'll

chase me and enjoy it a little too much.

I sink my front teeth into my bottom lip as his fingers swipe between my folds through the gaps in the fishnets. He teases my clit until I soak his hand with my arousal. My eyes flutter open and find him staring at me with a hooded gaze full of hunger.

A predator looks back at me through him, and I should hate it, but my body once again responds to him as though we're two halves of the same whole. There's something familiar about him, but I can't put my finger on it.

I study his eyes; rather, I study what little I can see of them. Flecks of amber dance within his dark-brown irises, and just a hint of blue lingers near his pupils. My lips part on a sigh as he focuses on my clit, rolling it between his fingers.

"That's my girl," he murmurs.

I shudder and bury my hands in his dark hair.

He kidnapped you, I chide. You can't be getting butterflies over his small praise.

He removes his hand from between my legs and stands to his full height in front of me. With his hand on my shoulder, he guides me to my knees. My face is directly in line with his dick, which strains beneath his jeans, the large outline making my pussy clench with need.

He kidnapped you. He kidnapped you.

He takes my hand and covers his stiff bulge with my palm. "This is what you do to me." He grates out each word as though he's struggling to speak. "I've been hard since the moment I saw you in the elevator."

My stomach free falls, like I'm on a rollercoaster that's just dropped over the first hill, and I lose all sense of gravity.

He steps behind me. His clothes rustle, and a moment later, his jacket, shirt, and pants join my shorts. I turn my head to look at him, but his gloved hand whips forward, fists my hair, and yanks my head back so that I have to look at the ceiling. I bare my teeth and hiss from the sting in my scalp as he roughly shoves me onto my hands and knees.

"All the way down," he growls.

"Please," I whisper, not sure if I'm begging for him to stop or keep going.

I lower my torso until my breasts are squished beneath me. My cheek rests on the rug, and I'm forced to stare at all the antique books collecting dust on the bookshelf across from me. It looks as though they haven't been touched in years. I squeeze my eyes shut to stop the tears before they come.

I've never felt so vulnerable before.

The music plays louder, drowning out my soft cries as he widens my stance, showing him everything. I expect to feel the blunt head of his erection against my pussy, but he leans over me. His mouth brushes against my ear, causing my eyes to snap open as he lifts his mask slightly to give me a gentle kiss.

"I need you soaking wet for me," he murmurs.

I jump as he rips a hole in my fishnets to give himself easier access. His fingers slip between my folds, and he groans deep in his chest.

The corners of his mouth lift against my sensitive skin. "You're wet, but not wet enough."

My lips part on a sigh as he draws back, his weight disappearing. I curl my fingers into the fur, and a startled moan slips out of me as his tongue laps between my pussy lips. My hips move on their own, bucking back against him as he focuses his tongue against my clit. When two of his fingers slip inside me, I try so hard to dislike this, but it feels so good.

I'm so sorry, Jaxon, I cry in my thoughts. *He gave me no choice, and I can't help that he's making this feel so good.*

My eyebrows furrow when his tongue flicks against my swollen bundle of nerves. His tongue feels like it's split in the middle. The two ends move in different directions, just as Jaxon's can.

A tear rolls down my cheek, and I imagine the man behind me is him and not this stranger.

My orgasm gives me no warning and slams into me, ripping the air from my lungs. His fingers fuck me harder, coaxing out every bit of my climax until I'm keening like a wanton bitch.

"Get on with it," one of the leaders grumbles, loud enough to be heard over the music.

My husband gets back to his knees and swipes the head of his cock between my folds several times, teasing me and allowing me to feel him as he drags this moment out. The anticipation is killing me.

I pant and push my hips back to meet him as he notches the tip outside my entrance. His hand rests on the small of my back, holding me in place as he forces himself inside me. I grit my teeth at his massive size and how he can barely pop the tip past the tight ring.

I scream from the burn, and grapple at the rug. My back arches on its own, my body trying to escape the source of the pain. He pauses and grips my waist, yanking me back to him as the head of his pulsing cock stretches me just past the opening.

"Count the piercings," he says gruffly. "One for each inch. When you get to nine, the worst will be over."

"N-nine?" He has piercings too? Does every man have their junk pierced or what?

"Start counting." He slaps my ass.

I yelp, then grind my molars until they feel like they'll turn to dust. He sinks an inch inside me. The first piercing glides against my inner walls.

"One," I breathe.

Another inch.

"Two."

He shifts behind me and pants loud enough for me to hear over the music. He eases in another inch.

"Three."

"You're doing so good for me," he murmurs, and strokes my ass. "My beautiful, slutty wife. Your pussy is swallowing my dick like it needs it."

He dips his hand between my legs from the front, his fingers finding my clit and rolling it at a slow pace that curls my toes and makes me whine. I need more from him.

"Four. Five." I yell as he stretches me beyond what his fingers could manage. Another scream catches in my throat as he shoves more of himself inside me. "Six. Seven. *Eight!*"

"Goddamn, you're so fucking tight." He squeezes my hip in a bruising grip. "Final stretch, baby. You can do it." He slams the last inch into me until he's balls deep.

"*Nine!*"

Lights burst behind my closed eyelids, and I sob from the pain. He fills me, stretching me beyond what I thought I could take.

Jaxon comes to my mind, and guilt tightens my chest. My kidnapper's piercings glide against the sensitive parts inside me, bumping along secret spots that make me damn near astral project. These confusing feelings are wrong, yes, but rationality slips away as I imagine it's Jaxon who's fucking me.

He pulls out until only the head is left, then he slams back in. My body jerks forward with each brutal blow. He holds me still, but it doesn't stop me from sliding forward and crumpling the rug beneath me. I scream and wiggle against him, begging for more like a slut. Pleasure joins the pain, but rapidly overpowers it until all I feel is ecstasy. Maybe it's because I'm picturing my brother on his knees, lips parted, and his dark hair falling over his eyes as he looks down at me with reverence as he takes my virginity. I arch my back and meet him every time he pistons into me.

"Jaxon," I moan softly.

I don't think the man heard me, because he says nothing. He fucks me harder, like he's losing control and can't help himself from getting lost in my body. I hiss through my teeth as he jerks my hair in his fist, pulling me up to my hands and knees.

"My needy whore. You can't get enough of me, can you?" He lets go of my hair, slaps my ass, then leans over me to mold his chest to my back like a second skin. His hand rests next to mine, and his panting moans fill my ear as he kisses the shell and over my jaw.

What he said minutes ago comes back to me. He said he's nine inches. Jaxon once told our dad I could take all of his nine-inch dick like a needy whore. This man who's rutting into me like he can't get enough keeps calling me a slut and a whore. He also has piercings like Jaxon's, and his tongue is split too.

Butterflies fill my stomach, and hope blooms inside me.

I look at his arm and stop breathing. He hasn't taken off his gloves, but his wrist and up are bare, showing off his tattoos. Tears well in my eyes when I spot the familiar pink Band-Aid with *crybaby* scrawled on the wings.

There are only so many times something can be a coincidence until it's not. The man fucking me right now isn't a stranger, and he isn't just my husband.

He's my brother.

"Jaxon," I breathe.

He groans and nips at the sensitive skin on my jaw. I know he heard me this time. His dick jerks inside me and he fucks me harder as he moans louder in my ear, knowing full well what that does to me. At that moment, I realize he's matching the beat of the song that's playing. I won't be able to listen to "Custer" by Slipknot the same ever again.

"Jaxon!" I wail in relief and move with him in abandon.

"It's about time, flower. I was getting worried." He nips my earlobe, which is meant to punish me but does the opposite.

"Fuck," I breathe, and melt under him. The guilt that's gripping me fades away like a bad dream, and the dark clouds over my head clear. I can finally fully enjoy this moment without worrying about Jaxon punishing me.

"Come on my cock," he growls.

He fists my hair and yanks me upward until my chest is suspended off the ground, leaving only my knees on the floor. I grab his wrists, which push my bouncing breasts outward. Arching my spine, I shove my hips backward to meet his every thrust.

"Come all over your big brother's cock, sis," he mutters in my ear. "Let me hear how good of a big brother I am by taking care of your needs."

I tense and stop breathing as I come. My vision goes dark, and I can only hear his heavy breathing, our flesh meeting, and my screams.

He groans in my ear and shoves me onto my stomach, cheek flat against the fur. His body blankets mine, his knees straddling my waist, and he moans louder as his jerking cock drills into me. He mutters my name, and warmth floods my core as he comes. All I can do is lie here, eyes hooded and lips parted with panting breaths as he finishes inside me.

"My good girl. My good, *slutty* girl," he whispers, and puts more of his weight on me. He lies on me, shallowly thrusting with aftershocks from his climax. His forearm rests beside my head, trembling from exertion.

The high of my orgasm fades, and I'm left feeling lighter. The shock wears off and anger replaces all the good feelings sex brought.

My brother lied to me. He made me believe he was someone else and scared me.

"Get off me," I say through clenched teeth.

CHAPTER 30



JAXON

“That’s good enough,” an Elder says. I recognized his voice the moment Dahlia and I walked in here. Jerry Richmond is Ryder’s father, and my best friend will find out through him that I fucked my sister. He already knows about my attraction to her, but it hasn’t been confirmed until tonight.

The other two elders—Gerard Buckingham and Stan Richards—are two of the richest and deadliest men in Vail. Stan is Mickey’s father and has known how I feel about his piece-of-shit son for a long time.

My father is an elder. He may not be the most lethal of them, but he’s the sneakiest motherfucker. I found out early on that my dad is an accountant by day and a thief by night. He’s stolen millions of dollars from his clients and claims he’s paid their taxes. When he’s questioned, he makes them disappear.

I pull out of Dahlia, and my softening dick jerks as cum leaks out of her abused pussy. A shudder rolls through me, and desire licks every nerve ending in my body.

The time I spent railing my sister to the last inch of her life wasn’t enough. I’m not through with her tonight. I plan on pumping her full of my spunk, just so I can see it oozing out and taste the combination of us on my greedy tongue. She says she’s on birth control, and that’s for the best right now. I don’t want to share her with a child yet, so I intend on practicing in the meantime.

Dahlia’s arms wobble as she pushes up to her knees. I help her to her feet, ignoring the icy glare she gives me. I assist her with her shorts, but she slaps my hands away. Sighing, I gather my clothes and get dressed.

“Welcome to the Exodus, Dahlia.” Jerry stands and adjusts his jacket. His pants strain at his groin, and the sudden need to kill him overtakes me.

Dahlia senses my change in mood and swallows her anger for a moment to step into my path, her hands resting on my chest.

Stan and Gerard join Jerry, and both of them are sporting boners. I work my jaw and keep my glare on them when Dahlia is whispering my name, calling me to her like she always does when I’m about to lose my shit.

“I’m sure your brother will fill you in on the laws within the society,” Gerard says. He parts from the others, his gaze

sweeping over Dahlia, and I know the asshole is imagining her stuffed full of his cock.

“Keep looking at her and find out what I’ll do with your eyes,” I say.

The older man strolls across the room and, as he passes me, he gives me a challenging look. He’s not the least bit intimidated by my threat. “Three against one? It’s quite audacious of you to think you’d come out on top.” He heads to the door while he says over his shoulder, “I have no interest in your . . . lover.”

Jerry follows him and dips his chin in a slight nod.

Stan is the last to leave, and he slows his steps. “Good luck, kid. You’ll need it.”

Dahlia frowns and slowly blinks. Stan’s mysterious comment means little to me. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Mickey is a pussy who enjoys picking on those smaller than him. So does his father.

Dahlia moves closer to me, seeking my comfort and protection from them. They won’t harm her. For one, they have better things to do, and two, I absolutely refuse to allow them to touch a hair on her head.

The elders leave. The tension in the air eases, but not by a lot. Dahlia is still upset with me, and I can understand why. She’ll come around.

“Why did you do that?” Dahlia asks. Her voice trembles, and it’s not from sadness. She’s angry and about to lay into me about how I’m a terrible jerk. I’ve heard it all before. In the end, she’ll forgive me and will be beneath me before the end of the night.

“We had no other choice.”

“Yes, we did!” she snaps. “I thought something horrible happened to you. I thought . . .” She swallows hard and punches my chest. “I thought Dad killed you.”

I close the small space between us and cup her cheeks, ignoring the way her head shakes to knock my hands from her. My thumbs hook beneath her jaw, and my fingers curl to hold her in place, not allowing her to push me away.

“He didn’t hurt me.” But I can’t reverse that sentence and still speak the truth. “I tracked you down not long after you left. No one will keep us apart again. Do you understand?”

She clutches my arms, holding on to me like she needs to feel me as much as I need to feel her. “I’m still mad at you for tricking me, you dick.”

I grin and kiss her on the lips. She leans away from me, but still returns the kiss as I chase her mouth for more.

“Be mad all you want,” I say. “You can hate fuck me if it’ll make you feel better.”

She shoves my chest with a growl. “I don’t want to hate fuck you! I want to slap the taste out of your fucking mouth.”

“Oh baby,” I moan, and close my eyes. My cock thumps like a heartbeat and pre-cum leaks from the tip. “I fucking love your dirty talk.”

“Jesus, Jax!” She smacks my face.

I groan and blink open my unfocused eyes as I stop thinking with the head above my shoulders. “Do it again,” I say hoarsely. “Hit me again. Call me names. Tell me how I’m horrible to you.”

Dahlia’s expression morphs into surprise. “What?”

I catch her wrist and smack her palm against my face. “Hit me, Dahlia.”

She rears her head back in horror, and her fingers curl into her palm. I envy them, wishing they were around my throat or clawing at my face. The few times she’s strangled me always got me hard. Until now, I didn’t realize just how much it turns me on when she gets violent with me.

I lean in with a smile. Her pupils expand, eating up all the brown in her irises. “You have a lot of anger inside you, sis. You just need an outlet. Let me be that for you.” My grip on her wrist tightens until she winces. “Fucking. Hit. Me. Choke me. Punch me. Do whatever you want. I’m sorry that I deceived you.”

Her jaw clenches. “Those things you said about me to Dad . . .”

“Were to antagonize him and wear him out. Don’t tell me the things I said didn’t get you wet. I’m not sorry about that. So go ahead. Hit me.” Desire warms my body at the promise of pain inflicted by the girl I love.

Indecision casts shadows over her face, and she pinches her lips together as she makes her decision. She throws her hand back and slaps me hard against the face. I smile and turn back to her, only for the next strike to whip my head to the side again. I chuckle as she screams about how horrible I am, all while hitting and slapping me.

“I hate you!” she yells, and slaps me again. “I fucking hate you!”

My laughter dies, and I slowly turn my head, eyes narrowed. “Don’t say that.”

“No. I’m going to say that because it’s true! You’re such an asshole for what you did. I don’t want you!” Tears and pain contort her soft features into something sharp and gut-wrenching.

I shove her backward, enjoying her soft whimper of fear. My strides elongate until she can barely keep up with me. She trips over her own feet and falls onto the desk, catching herself on her elbows.

“Don’t. Say. That.”

The fearful expression doesn’t go away, but I see the anger, heartbreak, and confusion in her chocolate eyes. She doesn’t mean it, and we both know it. Dahlia needs to be put in her place and reminded why we’re so perfect together. She needed that

outlet, and I readily took that role. But hearing her say she hates me strikes a nerve.

I yank her shorts down to her ankles and rip her fishnets wider between her legs. Dahlia kicks her boot out, shoving me back. I catch her ankle and throw her legs wide to hook around my waist while I undo my pants and pull out my aching cock.

“You want to tell me how much you hate me? Fine,” I say through clenched teeth. “Just be prepared for the consequences.”

I grab her hips and slide all the way inside her, denying her time to accommodate my size. Not holding back, I rut into her, fucking her into the wooden desk and reveling in her screams and how she drags her nails down my back.

“Tell me again how you hate me,” I snap as I rub her clit.

Dahlia shakes her head and arches her back. “I hate you!”

I dig my fingers into her soft skin. That will probably leave behind bruises, and I hope it does. Knowing she’s wearing proof of how savage she makes me will quiet the monster in my head.

“Say it again, Dahlia. Tell me how much you hate my fucking guts.”

“I hate you so much!” She tenses and sucks in a breath, then orgasms. Her inner walls clamp on my cock, choking it and making it hard to move.

I bare my teeth and hiss. It’s all mind over matter. Pain is my kink, and my sister gives it to me in heaps. She mutters my name like a prayer and worships me as her god by squeezing her inner walls tighter around me. Her tense muscles loosen, and she relaxes, sated from coming so hard.

“Tell me again,” I growl.

She shakes her head and squeezes her eyes shut. I grab her jaw and force her to look at me with her sad and hurt eyes.

“No,” she whimpers.

I lean in with my teeth bared. “Go ahead, Dahlia. I’m listening. Tell me how much you hate me and how you don’t want to be my wife.”

She parts her lips on a moan and shakes her head.

“Then tell me you love me,” I say.

She wraps her arms around my shoulders and widens her legs for me. It takes a moment for her to overcome her pride before she whispers, “I love you.”

I groan her name and crush my lips against hers, forcing my tongue into her mouth. I chase an orgasm that starts in my balls and travels up my spine. My cock jerks, and I spill deep inside her, pushing my load deeper with every thrust.

Dahlia squirms, letting out needy noises against my mouth. I swallow every sound she makes, desperate for more. Breath trembles out of me, and I stop moving when the last of my spunk spills.

“I have a surprise for you,” I say into the kiss.

Dahlia tightens her hold on me, letting me know she’s listening.

I pull out of her and tuck myself into my pants while staring between her legs.

“Fuck,” I mutter. “I don’t know if I’ll get used to that.” My cum leaks out of her and drips down to her asshole.

Dahlia’s cheeks turn a pretty shade of pink, and she squirms as she fixes her clothes. “What’s the surprise?” she asks.

“You’ll see.” I help her stand, then put on my mask and take her hand as I guide her out of the library. The music gets louder as we go toward the front door.

“Seriously, what’s the surprise?” Dahlia asks after we step outside.

My lips curl into a deviant smile that she can’t see. “Like I said, you’ll see, sis.”

CHAPTER 31



DAHLIA

Jaxon blindfolds me when we get to what I assume is his car. I don't know when he got an Impala, but it's giving *Supernatural* vibes and fits my brother perfectly. The ride is quiet except for the music he turns on. I'm not sure how long the trip is, and the anticipation is slowly killing me. Jaxon always keeps me on my toes, and I'm unsure if I'm excited or nervous.

Both. It's probably both.

The car stops, and he throws it into park. His door opens then shuts, and a few seconds later, mine opens, letting in the cool air.

"Come here, flower," he says.

I blindly reach for him as I slip out of the vehicle. Jaxon helps me and slides his palm to my lower back to steady me.

"Can I take the blindfold off yet?" I ask.

"No."

He ignores my pout and guides me. We walk on a hard surface that feels like stones. Wind rustles through the tree limbs. In the distance, someone screams, and I tense. Jaxon tucks me against his side, his palm sliding down my backside and squeezing my bottom.

"It's okay. You're safe," he murmurs.

"I never doubted that."

"The Reckoning is happening. No one comes out this way. So all the . . . excitement happens in the more populated areas." He helps me up two stairs, and wood creaks beneath our weight.

"Are you going to wreak havoc too?"

A door squeaks on its hinges, and he grabs my hand as he leads me into a building. "Watch your step."

I awkwardly raise my feet higher so I'm not tumbling face first and embarrassing myself in front of him. The room smells like sweet-pea perfume and stale paint. Music plays through speakers, low enough that I can still hear Jaxon.

"I have a question," he murmurs. "It's something that I've been dying to know for a long time."

"What's that?" I face him and reach out, wanting to touch him. He laces his fingers through mine and holds our hands to his chest, right above his heart.

He's quiet for a moment as he brushes his thumb over my skin. "Do you remember when we were kids and you asked me for help with your homework?"

"Yeah." I remember it clearly. He was so annoyed with me and didn't want to be near me. I begged him for help, and he gave in after I said I would be a good girl.

"Why did you flinch?"

Everything in me stills as I'm thrown into the past and the horrible things that were done to me.

"Flower," he coaxes.

I take a deep breath and step closer to him until my chest brushes against his. He loops his arm around my lower back, holding me in place.

"Before Mom married our dad, she dated a man for two years. I must have some bullseye on me where everyone wants to pick on me. Her boyfriend was awful to me. When she wasn't in the room, he always told me how worthless I am. He made fun of my weight and even mentioned how no one would ever want to be with someone like me."

Jaxon's heart beats faster, and his chest rises and falls in quick breaths.

"I won't give all the details, because I don't want you blacking out." I cup his cheek with my free hand. He leans into my touch, and I smile softly. "There were times he slapped me. I used to ask him for help with my homework, and when I didn't understand and answered the questions wrong, he'd hit me and call me stupid."

I won't tell Jaxon about Mom seeing it happen. She walked in a handful of times and didn't say a word. Sometimes, she joined in.

He grinds his teeth, and I wince at the sound. "And when you said that you'd be a good girl . . . ?"

"Because I firmly believed he hit me because I was bad," I say. I realize now how wrong it was and that none of what happened was my fault. Sadly, I'm a magnet for horrible people who let out their anger on me. It's only by a miracle that Jaxon stood up after he witnessed how I'm treated.

Jaxon swallows audibly, and he crushes me to him, leaving no space between us. I rest my cheek against his chest and squeeze my eyes shut.

He cups the back of my head and kisses the crown. "I'm so sorry for every terrible thing I said to you. I was an angry kid and took it out on the wrong person."

I smile. "You're still angry."

He chuckles and tightens his arm, then loosens it to let me breathe. "For all the right reasons."

I think about my next question, but I'm nervous about asking. The last thing I want is to upset him. The tiny voice in the back of my mind reminds me that we're close and there isn't any question he won't answer.

"Why do you hate being touched?" I finally ask.

He doesn't hesitate. It's like he's been dying to tell me and has been waiting for me to ask. "My mother and her friend violated me at a young age." He pauses for a moment. "They didn't rape me. Just . . . touching."

My stomach sinks like a stone in the ocean. I wish I could see his face and let him know through my gaze that I'm here for him. Perhaps he finds it easier to tell me his story without fear of judgment because I'm blindfolded.

"That's one reason why I was so angry. I'm still angry about it. I swore I wouldn't date or have anyone touch me. But there you were. Waltzing into my life like a ball of sunshine and ribbons, eager to talk to me. I was already pissed about my mother, then learning that our father had a mistress. It confused me, and the only outlet I had was you."

He unwinds his arms from me and unties the blindfold. The scrap of silk falls from my face, but I keep my gaze on him as he looks down at me with regret and sadness in his dark eyes.

"I'm sorry, Dahlia. For every unkind thing I said to you and for not being there for you in the beginning."

I push onto the tips of my toes, ease his mask up, and press my lips against his. "All is forgiven, big brother."

He groans and deepens the kiss. His arm loops around my lower back and pins me against him. His erection presses against my lower stomach and grinds into me as he takes control of the kiss.

I lean into him with a sigh that ends on a soft moan. He drags his gloved hand under my crop top and cups my breast. His touch starts off gentle and becomes rougher. He's close to losing control of his inhibitions, and I don't mind it at all. Knowing my brother, he won't let me get a wink of sleep tonight.

"Is the Reckoning the reason you didn't have sex with me?"

Jaxon pauses. "We've had sex, Dahlia. Is all that time really that forgettable?"

I shake my head. "That's not what I meant." Craning my neck, I nuzzle against his throat. "I meant you fucking my pussy. I didn't understand why you never wanted to and always preferred my ass."

Jaxon's hand squeezes my tit harder. He slips his other palm down my stomach and into my shorts to cup my pussy. We both groan at the same time as his fingers spread my lips apart.

"Oh, believe me, I wanted to fuck you here so bad. I had to wait for tonight. Otherwise, I would've had to think of something different for you to sacrifice."

I kiss his throat and smirk at his shudder. He dips his finger inside me, stretching me. It feels odd to have his gloved digit in my pussy. It's definitely a new sensation, though I can't complain about it.

"Am I really part of the cult?" I ask softly.

"You're full of questions tonight." He sinks deeper inside me and removes his hand from my breast. He pulls his mask all the way off and lets it drop to the floor.

I nip the sensitive spot on his neck, knowing full well how it affects him. I squeak when his mouth slams against mine, full of desperation and need.

"I can't fuck you right now," he murmurs huskily. "But just know that later, I'll punish you for being a tease."

I grin. "Don't threaten me with a good time."

He growls and devours my mouth, leaving little room for me to breathe. Making out with Jaxon is a losing battle. I can try all I want to gain power over him, but in the end, he's the one who's in control. He's the one who decides if I can breathe, think, or move.

He parts his lips from mine, and a string of saliva attaches our mouths. He doesn't pull away or make a disgusted sound, so I refuse to be grossed out by it.

"You're very much a part of Exodus, but I plan on protecting you from those people. You won't be anyone's pawn."

"I don't have to kill or anything?"

"No. The only thing you'll have to do is attend the party and bring a gift."

"Do I have to fuck them?"

Jaxon stiffens. His hand shoots to my throat and squeezes. His fingers fuck me harder, drawing breathless whimpers from me. "If another man touches you, so help me god, Dahlia, I'll do much, much worse to him than what I did to Michael."

I suck in a sharp breath that's cut short as he tightens his grip, closing off my airway. I completely trust my brother to let me live. He's not the type to end my life out of jealousy, or for any reason, for that matter. If I died, he'd join me in the grave.

"When I'm done with him," he says coldly, "I'll string you up in front of everyone, torture you with denied orgasms until you're begging me for mercy, and then I'll fill all of your slutty holes right there at the party so everyone can see that you belong to me. No one touches you. Got it?"

I jerk my head in a small nod.

Jaxon crushes his lips against mine as he flicks my clit with his thumb. I open my mouth on a soundless scream as an orgasm hits me. He lets go of my neck, allowing blood to rush to my head. Waves of intense euphoria roll through me, and I lose my balance. Jaxon catches me, still pumping his fingers in my spasming core as he works me through it until I go limp in his arms.

I pant and shift my legs to stabilize myself. Jaxon slips his fingers out and brings them to his mouth. He groans deep in his chest as he savors the taste.

"You said you'll do worse than what you did to Michael," I say breathlessly.

Jaxon brushes his mouth against my ear. "I did. Ready for your surprises?"

"There's more than one?"

He ignores my question and steps away from me to let me take in the room. My heart gallops in my chest, and I crane my neck, taking in the details. I don't recognize this place.

We're standing in a kitchen with pristine marble countertops and new appliances. Large plants sit on the floor by the large windows that overlook the trees in the backyard and the mountain in the distance. The forest-green walls and white trim look freshly painted. A cozy table with chairs sits near the windows, giving the space an exotic look among the plants. Everything about this feels so comfortable. It feels like . . .

"Welcome home, baby," Jaxon says.

My lips part in surprise. "You bought a house?"

A secretive smile curves across his lips. "Something like that."

My eyebrows furrow. "What do you mean?"

"This neighborhood is abandoned. No one has lived here for ten years, since the last reckoning. I figured starting fresh would be best for us."

I swallow hard past the lump forming in my throat. "What about our parents?" I've been too afraid to ask him about Dad and how he got away. I can still see the deadly look on Jaxon's face and his dead voice as he said, "Cry, little sister."

Jaxon steps closer to me and tucks a lock of hair behind my ear. "Taken care of."

I wince. "I'm too afraid to ask, but . . . what do you mean, 'taken care of'?"

Jaxon leans down until our noses brush. "You really wanna know?"

I hesitate for a moment, unsure. It'll bug me the rest of my life if I don't discover the truth, though. Fuck it.

I nod.

His eyes fill with deadly amusement, his lips curling into a wicked smile. "I killed them," he says, pleased and on the verge of laughing. "They're dead, baby. I warned you that I'd kill them."

Gravity pops like a balloon, and my body becomes weightless. Receding into my mind as I process this news, I can't look away from him.

Sadness takes root in me. Our parents were terrible to us and especially to me, but they were still our parents. There are memories with them, and some of them are good. There were moments when my mom was kind to me.

But the bad memories stand out the most. Too many times I went to bed crying and feeling lonely.

"Shh." Jaxon swipes my tears away and folds me into his arms. I didn't realize I started crying, and now that I know, the tears fall faster. "Tell me what's going through your head."

I swallow back the sobs, then clutch him, my nails digging into his back. I clear my throat and quiet my crying before I speak. "They were our parents. If it weren't for them, we wouldn't be here."

Jaxon listens, letting me talk through this. He strokes my hair and massages my scalp every few seconds. I melt into him until I'm a puddle of goo in his hands. I love having my hair played with. It's something I do for Jaxon often when he's upset, so it's nice that he's returning the favor.

"I guess I'm mourning what could have been. We could have developed a better relationship with them if they hadn't been so awful," I whisper, leaning my forehead against his chest. "Am I a terrible person for not being upset with you?"

Jaxon strokes his fingers through my locks and kisses the crown of my head. "No, flower. Their deaths are on my hands. They put themselves in that situation and backed us into a corner. They would have done anything to keep us apart, and I couldn't let that happen." He gently eases me back and cups my cheeks. Love shines in his dark eyes, and if I wasn't already in love with him, I would fall for him right here. "They made you cry, little sister."

I hold on to his sides and sniffle. "What will you do when you make me cry?"

He doesn't blink when he says, "I'll rip my heart out for you. If I ever make you cry and feel unloved, like everyone else did to you, then I don't deserve you."

"I don't want you to leave me. Even if you make me cry, I'll always forgive you. You're my everything, big brother."

His pupils blow and eat up his irises. I have to bite back my smile. I always enjoy seeing his reactions when I call him that.

Jaxon's nostrils flare. He fists my locks and yanks my head at an angle. "Don't do that."

I shiver at his grating voice that deepens with desire. Looking into his eyes, they're the same dark shade as when he's blacked out. I now know the difference. It's getting easier to read him and know when he's thinking dirty thoughts about me.

I fist his hair and tug at the strands, smiling when he grunts. He walks me backward until my bottom meets the counter.

"Let go, Dahlia," he growls.

"No."

His jaw tenses, a muscle fluttering as he clenches his teeth. "Let go, or I'll mark your pretty skin."

I yank his hair and yelp as he moves like lightning. He manhandles me as he lifts me, forcing me to wrap my legs around his hips. He shoves my crop top up and pulls my nipple into his warm mouth. I scream as he bites down until it feels like his teeth sink beneath the surface.

"Fuck!" I rock against him, needing more from him. More friction. More touches. More guttural confessions about how I'm his dirty slut.

Jaxon unlatches from my nipple and bites near the bottom of my breast with the same pressure. I tug his hair and clench my thighs, squeezing him closer to me.

"Goddammit, Dahlia," he snarls into my flesh.

"I'm not sorry!" I yell.

He rips off my clothes, then his. My back slams against the fridge as he slides into me and devours my mouth.

As Jaxon spends the rest of the night fucking me on every surface in the house, the other surprises he mentioned are momentarily forgotten. Whatever other terrible thing he has in store can wait until morning.

CHAPTER 32



JAXON

Dahlia passes out in our new bed. After finishing five minutes ago, she rolled over and mumbled something about needing a quick nap before I could ravage her again. Her words, not mine.

I gently brush her sweaty hair from her forehead and kiss her. She stirs enough to return the kiss before she softly snores against my lips. I grin and peck her on the nose.

"I'll be back, flower."

She doesn't wake up this time, and her snores become louder. My smile widens. I'll never get annoyed with her for snoring. She's been sleeping harder because of her meds, and they also cause her to snore. I'd rather she do that than have another episode where she harms herself. Besides, if I can wear her out this much, then I did a damn good job.

I roll out of bed and dress in a fresh pair of black jeans and a black V-neck shirt. I need to finish the job with the Three Stooges locked in the other house before the ten hours of the Reckoning is over. Checking my cell phone for the time, I realize how late it is. It's not even four a.m. yet. My friends should already be back from attending the party and having their own fun in town. I don't mind that I missed out. Dahlia will always be more important than everyone else.

I put on my helmet and ride my motorcycle to the house under the blanket of bright stars in the sky. My high beams light up the road as I ride up a hill and curve through a large neighborhood that needs more TLC. I've been spending the last year and a half tending to the overgrown bushes and fallen tree limbs to create an aesthetically pleasing street. During that period, I waited patiently until I could make Dahlia completely mine.

My friends' motorcycles are parked in their usual spots outside the mansion. Instead of hanging out inside, they've started a contained fire pit in the front yard. Music plays through speakers, and they each have a beer in hand.

"I didn't think you would come," Ryder says in greeting.

Aiden swallows a sip of his beverage. "Thought we had to finish the job."

"I got sidetracked." I pull my helmet off and shake out my damp hair.

Ryder eyes me, once again holding that knowing look. I meet his stare, daring him to say something.

"Finally got your dick wet?" Hawk asks.

I turn my glare toward him.

"Hawk," Ryder says, and shakes his head in warning.

Aiden groans and throws his head back. "When are we going to talk about the elephant in the room? I'm sick of dancing around it." He dips his chin and points at me. "Dude, we know you're banging your sister."

"Aiden!" Ryder and Hawk yell at the same time.

I narrow my eyes and look at each friend. "How long have you known?"

"Fuck me." Hawk sighs, swigs his beer, and loudly swallows. "We've known you've had the hots for her since middle school."

"Listen," Ryder says as he approaches me. "Your feelings for her have been obvious for a long time. We've been afraid for you and Dahlia and how others will receive your relationship. You're our best friend, Jax. We're not going anywhere and will support you and Dahlia. If we didn't, we wouldn't be here with you right now."

"It's a little freaky," Aiden says with an embarrassed smile. "But who are we to judge? We have our vices. Besides, Dahlia is a cool cat, and if anyone deserves you, it's her."

"It's the other way around," I say.

"What?"

I brush past Ryder and grab a beer from the cooler. "If anyone deserves her, it's me. Even though I sometimes feel like I don't deserve her at all."

I meant what I said to her earlier. If I ever make her cry, I don't deserve her. She's everything good that I lack. I'm a sinner and she's a saint. I'm a monster and she's a princess. Yet we come together so perfectly, like shooting stars colliding and painting the night sky in bright lights. She gives me what I'm missing.

I was the one who picked up her broken pieces and put her back together, little by little. She may still have cracks, but that's what makes her unique.

Aiden shrugs, then downns the rest of his beer before he throws the empty bottle into the fire. "Whatever you say, man."

"Are we going to have fun now?" Hawk asks.

I smirk.

"Yeah." I chug my beer and throw it into the fire to join Aiden's. The flames flicker and rise higher for a moment. "Did you guys find Mickey?"

I looked for the asshole, but he's nowhere to be seen. He wasn't at the party, and he hasn't been at his usual haunts over the last week. It's like he fell off the face of the planet.

"We can't find him," Ryder says.

I close my eyes and sigh hard through my nose. "That's fine. I'll just wait him out, then."

"We'll figure it out," Ryder says.

"He'll turn up." Hawk lights a cigarette. "That piece of shit can't ever stay away for too long, since he needs tears and blood to feed his tainted soul."

I give my friend a weird look.

He shrugs. "He's literally the spawn of Satan."

I shake my head and look toward the front door. All the things I want to do to Kyle, Connor, and Michael flash through my head. I've tortured them long enough, and I only have a few short hours before the Reckoning ends. They all need to pay the piper, and I'm dying to make more jewelry for Dahlia.

Especially from Michael and Kyle.

"Let's get this over with so I can go back home to my wife," I say.

"You married your sister?" Aiden says in disbelief.

I give him a rueful smile. "No laws touch us during the Reckoning, so I took advantage of that."

Ryder shakes his head and lets out a soft laugh. He walks past me and says, "You never fail to surprise me. Now . . . let's do what we came here for."

CHAPTER 33



DAHLIA

I wake up early in the morning, feeling refreshed but sore. Jaxon still sleeps beside me on his stomach, his face burrowed in the pillow. I slip out of bed, do my business in the bathroom, and get dressed. I'm rummaging through the kitchen, looking for something to eat, when I spot a jar with sourdough starter that I didn't notice last night.

A smile tugs at my lips. "God, I love him."

I spend the next hour making sourdough bread and reading random internet instructions about the best temperature and time to bake the bread.

Jaxon slips behind me as I pull a bowl-shaped sourdough from the oven and place it on the cooling racks. It's a little crispy, but it's still edible. I put another bowl into the oven to bake for forty minutes.

Jaxon's hands settle on my waist, and he brushes his lips along my throat. A shiver runs up my spine, and I giggle at the tickle of his five o'clock shadow against my skin. I sink my front teeth into my bottom lip as tingles shoot between my legs.

"Stop." I laugh and raise my shoulder, gently knocking him off of me. "How do you have this much stamina?"

"Mmm." Jaxon's hand creeps around my middle, palming my apron belly. "Because it's you."

I lay my hand over his, noticing that he isn't wearing a ring on his finger. "We need to get you a wedding ring."

"Yeah?" He kisses my shoulder and raises his hand to gaze at the bare finger.

"Maybe we can renew our wedding vows and I can at least remember it this time."

He nips my skin, earning a yelp from me. "Maybe if you ask with a little less attitude."

I grin and turn my head to look at him over my shoulder. His eyes dance with mirth, and the gentle smile curling his full lips steals the breath from my lungs. "Do you want me to get on my knees to ask you?"

His expression darkens. "Be careful," he growls.

I smile at him innocently. "What? Just a question."

He slaps my ass, stinging the cheek. I yell and jump forward, but he catches me and brings me back against his body. His mouth descends, and my eyes flutter closed as I part my lips for a kiss. His breath fans against my mouth and I wait and wait

and wait before I open my eyes and find him smirking.

"Good girls get kisses. Bad, slutty girls get fucked," he murmurs.

My cheeks warm with a blush. "But I am a good girl."

He pinches his fingers under my chin, turning my head a little more toward him. "You're my good, slutty girl."

My heart thumps faster, tightening my chest and making it a little harder to breathe. I love being called a good girl, but if I'm Jaxon's good, slutty girl, then I'll be that. He can say he wants a dog, and I'll start barking. I'll be whatever he wants me to be.

The corners of his lips quirk. "You like being called that?"

I nod, unable to find words without stuttering and sounding stupid.

"Good." He grins and pecks me on the tip of my nose when I really want him to kiss me on the lips. "I see you've found the starter."

I blink out of the state of shock and follow the direction of his gaze. I perk and turn to face him. "I did. Thank you for doing that for me."

Jaxon's features soften, and he tucks a lock of hair behind my ear. "I'd do anything for you, flower."

I catch his wrist and kiss the middle of his palm, enjoying his sharp intake of breath. Something I've been meaning to ask him pops into my mind. "By the way, I meant to tell you thank you for the ring. It's beautiful. Where did you get it? Maybe we can go to the shop and find you a band."

Jaxon's grin turns wicked. "You like it, huh?"

My eyebrows furrow. "Yeah. What's that smile for?"

"It's a custom ring. I also have a few other pieces that I've been meaning to give you." He holds his finger up and leaves the kitchen. A minute later, he comes back with a black bag.

I take the offered gift and pull out the boxes. Jaxon eagerly watches as I open one, revealing a beautiful skull necklace with more diamonds. The other box has a pair of diamond earrings with what look like bones attached to them.

"It's beautiful." I pull out the necklace, and he helps me put it on. Brushing my fingertips over the earrings, I say, "What kind of bones are these?"

Jaxon crowds behind me and shuffles me toward the counter, where I lay the boxes down. He cages me in, with his hands on the edge of the table. "Fingers that have been whittled down."

My spine straightens, and I look ahead of me, my heart making itself at home in my throat. "Fingers?"

He drapes my hair over one shoulder and kisses my neck. I wait for him to answer, but he focuses entirely on kissing my skin like he's making love. Slow and delicate. One of his hands moves to my apron belly, squeezing the roll and slipping down the front of the sleep shorts I threw on earlier this morning.

"Jaxon," I whisper, and settle my hands on the counter to hold myself up.

"Hm?"

"What do you mean, fingers? They aren't . . . they aren't human fingers, are they?"

He chuckles and spreads my pussy lips apart and dips his middle finger to rub my clit in slow circles. "Oh, they're human fingers. Michael's, to be exact."

I stiffen. "Why would you . . . ?"

His fingers still, and he lifts his head, his gaze burning a hole in the side of my face. Thick tension fills the space between us. "Do you remember now?"

I swallow and nod. "Yes."

"I'm always good about keeping my word," he murmurs.

Shifting, he drags my shorts down to my knees and jerks my hips backward so my ass is out. I barely have any warning before he frees his cock and thrusts into me with a loud grunt.

"He touched you." Thrust. "Hurt you." Thrust. "So I took his hand, and you'll wear those earrings to serve as a reminder of what happens when someone touches and hurts you. I killed Connor and Kyle too. Last night, in fact, and soon you'll be wearing their bones as well."

It takes a moment for me to know who he's talking about. "So you know? About the pictures?"

Jaxon's fingers trail over my jaw in a loving caress. "Yes, and they paid with their lives."

Guilt eats at me but not for the reason it should. I feel awful for feeling relieved about their deaths, but they were assholes to me in high school, and those pictures still haunt me to this day.

"What about the pictures?" I ask.

Jaxon thrusts harder, jerking me forward. He stops me from falling face first into the counter with his hands on my hips. "I got rid of them. They're not floating around the internet anymore."

"But what about the people who might've saved—"

"They're dead." He leans forward and kisses right behind my ear. "This is the reason why I've been gone so much. My friends and I have been busy getting rid of the pieces of shit who made you cry and screwed you over."

His movements are slow but deep. Each time he spears into me, it's done so as a punishment. He wants me to feel every inch of him and wince when he hits too deep. I should hate him for this. I should hate him for using a human's finger to make earrings.

But I can't bring myself to. Nor can I hate him for killing Kyle, Connor, and whoever else. I've always told myself that what goes around comes around, and Jaxon happened to be the one to hurry karma up.

Jaxon leans his chest against my back, curling himself against me like he's using himself as a blanket. His hand rests on the edge of the counter, and his lips brush my ear, ensuring I hear every moan and whimper from him.

"You know what those diamonds are made from?" he whispers.

I shake my head and part my lips on a breathless sigh when he angles his hips, his pierced shaft hitting a spot that makes my toes curl.

"My cum."

"How sweet," someone says behind us.

We both tense and look over our shoulders. Jaxon stays balls deep inside me, still rocking his hips against mine as though having a gun pointed at us isn't something to be concerned with.

Rage burns in Mickey's eyes as he holds the weapon, his finger resting on the trigger. His lips curl back in a snarl, like all the other people who look at us in disgust. "I warned you," he says. "I told you I'd get my payback. I didn't realize you'd be fucking your sister, you sick freak."

"Mickey—"

"Shut the fuck up, bitch," he snaps. "This *whole* time you've been fucking your brother? I knew it!"

Jaxon rocks into me a little harder and smirks when I look at him. "Not the whole time," he says in a bored tone. "But we might as well have been."

Jesus Christ. Is he not scared to die? Mickey looks like he's seconds away from emptying the magazine into us.

"Get away from her or I'll blow your brains out!" Mickey yells, then shoves his gun closer to intimidate us.

It works for me, but not for my brother. Jaxon grabs my shoulder and holds me still when I try to wiggle away from him. He side-eyes Mickey, clearly not impressed. "Put the gun down."

Mickey guffaws. "Your lame attempt at intimidating me while you're still balls deep in your *sister* isn't working the way you were hoping it would." His lips curl in disgust. "I thought I was seeing things the other night when I saw you two together, but clearly not."

I stiffen. *That was Mickey at the park the other night?*

I push back against Jaxon, intending to knock him away, but he shoves forward, his cock hitting deeper. I bite my bottom lip to quiet myself.

"Put the gun down," Jaxon says through clenched teeth.

"Jaxon," I say. I meant for it to be scornful, not sound like I'm moaning his name.

Mickey turns his icy gaze to me and sneers. "I knew you were a sick bitch. Is he really the one you want fucking you?" He scoffs. "You couldn't get laid, so you settled for the next best thing? You both need help."

Jaxon's full lips quirk, and I know from that small smile that bad things are about to happen. He grabs my waist with both hands and pistons into me. "Yeah, we are sick," he says with the same mischievous smile I saw when he goaded our dad.

"Wanna see how good my little sister makes me feel?"

Mickey's eyebrows pinch together, and his head rears back. He looks at his gun, then back to Jaxon, clearly confused as to why my brother is still fucking me while he's at gunpoint. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

"You think a gun scares me?" Jaxon raises my leg to reach a different angle inside me. The position gives Mickey a better view of where we're joined, and he stares with parted lips, his chest rising and falling faster. This is so fucked up, and I don't understand why Mickey hasn't shot us yet.

Mickey's finger twitches on the trigger. Jaxon moves so quickly that I stumble, nearly falling on my ass as he slips out of me. He grabs the hot sourdough and whips around, his arm held back. In the process of swinging it, he cuts me and barely gives me an apologetic look before he bashes it against Mickey's head.

The gun goes flying and lands on the ground. A loud bang echoes in the kitchen, and I duck, praying the bullet doesn't hit me. Wood splinters and I twist to the right, a shaky, relieved breath spilling out of me at the bullet hole that's an inch past my shoulder.

"Call her a freak again," Jaxon says, all too calmly.

I turn back to my brother and fall to my ass in shock.

Jaxon straddles Mickey's stomach and slashes the sourdough across his neck. I didn't realize how sharp the crust was until now.

Mickey screams and grapples at his throat. Jaxon bludgeons Mickey's face with the bread and tosses it aside to punch him repeatedly. My stomach churns at the meaty sounds of muscles and tissue being ripped apart amid Mickey's guttural and wet noises.

"Jaxon," I whisper.

Shadows hang over my brother's vacant eyes as he bashes Mickey's face in until blood pools beneath his head. I crawl to him and wrap my arms around his shoulders and bury my face in his arm. "Big brother," I whisper.

Jaxon freezes. I don't let go of him, too afraid that if I do, he'll black out again and keep hitting a dead body. He turns and draws me into his chest. Relief fills not only him, but me as well. I'm always afraid he'll get lost in his mind and won't ever come back to me. His fingers burrow in my hair as he cradles the nape of my neck.

"Are you with me?" I mumble.

"Yes." His chest vibrates with the growled word.

"What have you done?"

He's quiet for a moment, then says, "The Reckoning is until eight."

Meaning the laws don't touch him . . . touch us.

Jaxon shifts, and I lean away from him. He helps me stand, tucks his soft cock back into his sweats, then brings the blood-splattered sourdough to the counter.

My eyebrows furrow as he grabs a bread knife. "What are you doing? You're not eating that, are you?"

He slices off a barely bloody piece on the end and takes a huge bite out of it. His eyes slide closed as he savors the taste, like he's eating an aphrodisiac and not just bread. I cringe as he slowly chews, then swallows.

"I got you earlier," he says, his voice huskier.

"What?"

He opens his eyes and nods toward my arm. "I cut you with the sourdough."

I glance down and notice the cut along my bicep. Slowly, I look at him, just as he bites into the bloody slice, his eyes dark and full of a hunger that no food can sate as he stares at me.

"Are you . . . ?" I grab my stomach as nausea hits me hard. "Are you eating the sourdough with my blood on it?"

Jaxon blinks, then smirks as he takes another bite. "You've always tasted amazing, sis."

I stumble against the counter and lean on it to keep myself standing. Jaxon pops the rest of the slice into his mouth and dusts off his hands. He checks Mickey's dead body, then the time, and grabs the gun that's several feet away from the corpse. He squeezes the trigger and unloads the rest of the clip into Mickey.

I yell and cover my ears as the noise rings in my eardrums until they threaten to burst.

"What the hell?" I shriek.

"Making sure he's dead."

"Well, is he?"

Jaxon looks at me with a deadpan stare. "He is now."

EPILOGUE



DAHLIA

ONE YEAR LATER

I stand a foot away from Mom and Dad's headstone. Jaxon lingers behind me, not interested in saying goodbye to them. If I don't give my farewells, I'll feel awful for the rest of my life.

Over the year since their deaths, I've learned it's best to let go of the past. It's something my therapist told me. I don't have to forgive them for what they did to me.

I mourn the loss of a mother who could've been better than she was. So many chances she could have taken to bridge the gap she put between us. Instead of treating me with love and care, she neglected me. Mom buried her head deep in her ass, and she chased the high of money and the idea of love. I was never good enough for her, but it's not my fault. It's never been about me or Jaxon. No one is responsible for other's choices and decisions. That's something I needed to hear a long time ago because it could have saved me a lot of heartache.

"I have schizoaffective disorder," I say numbly to the gravestone. "That's why I am the way I am."

Jaxon's presence moves closer behind me as he offers me his comfort. Like the protective brother and husband he is, he knows when I'm upset and when I need him.

His hand slips down my waist and settles over my stomach. He rests his chin on my shoulder, offering me his strength in this scary moment. Facing my fears is hard. Talking to the dead is harder because I feel silly, but my therapist suggested I do this.

She doesn't know everything that happened or that Jaxon is my half-brother. She just knows that Jaxon has been there for me since we were kids. She's aware that we tied the knot a year ago and are renewing our vows in a week. She also knows all about how my parents were and that I can't stop the nightmares about them.

"I'm not weird," I firmly say. "I'm not unlovable."

Jaxon tightens his hold on me, and he rubs soothing circles on my stomach.

"I'm not a failure, and I'm especially not *too much*."

It still hurts that Mom said I'm too much to handle. That nobody will want to be around me because of the episodes of mania, depression, and psychosis. I didn't know I had this disorder during that time. Jaxon proved time and time again that I am worthy of everything good.

"He might be my half-brother, but he's so much more than that. He's my best friend. He's my husband, and one day he'll be the father of our children. I'm glad the both of you are gone because I would've hated for our children to have met you. You both would have been terrible to them because you never understood my relationship with Jaxon."

Angry tears sting my eyes as I think about all the things they would have said to our children. I swipe away the tears that break free, then turn in Jaxon's hold, burying my face in his chest. He folds his arms around me, hugging me tightly to him.

We say nothing. There's no need. Jaxon can say everything under the sun to make me feel better, but in the end, his hold gives me the comfort I need.

I lean my head back, inviting him for a kiss that he doesn't pass up. His lips press against mine, starting off soft and sweet before turning deeper as he ravages my mouth. He nips my bottom lip, catching it between his teeth, and sucks on it to soothe the sting.

"I love you," I whisper.

He cups the back of my head and kisses me, putting all of himself into it to show how he feels about me. He steals my breath away, and if I never breathe again, I don't want it any differently.

My brother completes me, as cheesy as that thought is. I'm set for life with him. There won't be a day when I doubt our relationship and where I stand. Jaxon always makes it clear that I'm his entire universe. He's my heaven. My everything. And I always let him know how much I love and care for him because, as much as our parents fucked me up, they did the same to him as well.

"I love you," he whispers against my lips. "Always and forever, flower."

I grin against his mouth and peck him one last time before I put space between us. He puts his hand in mine and raises an eyebrow, nodding toward his motorcycle, silently asking if we're done.

"Yeah. I want to go home," I say with a little smile.

He graces me with one of his million-dollar smiles and kisses the back of my hand before he leads me to his ride. Instead of placing the helmet in my hands, he slides it over my head for me.

His wedding band catches in the ray of sunlight, making the silver glimmer. I admire it for a moment with a tiny smile and raise my left hand to look at the diamond ring Jaxon commissioned for me. Despite knowing it's made from his cum, I still proudly wear it. What's the point of getting a new ring when this one is perfect? It's more personal and thoughtful than something that can be bought in any generic jewelry store.

Jaxon catches my wrist and kisses the middle of my palm. Goosebumps scatter over my arms, and I step closer to him, needing to feel his hardness against my softness. His dark eyes remain on my face, even though he can't see past the black tint of my helmet.

For a long moment, we get lost in each other, relaying so many unsaid things that don't need to be voiced. We've been through hell and back. In the end, we got our happily ever after. As he's said so many times: Fuck what everyone else thinks. We have each other and that's all that matters.

Breaking the moment, he puts his helmet on, and I climb behind him on his motorcycle. We race through the graveyard; the motor screams as we whiz past the old and new headstones. I hold on to him, enjoying the feel of his lean body against my curves.

We leave our parents behind us, never to return. There are better things to do, and we have each other now. Our parents can't stop us from being together.

My therapist may not know about my relationship with Jaxon, but the town does. Maybe she knows but has said nothing to spare my mental health. Either way, I don't care. I ignore the comments in town and the weird looks I often get.

Focusing on others took a lot from me when I should've focused on Jaxon. I now have the rest of my life to show him just how much I love him. Besides, if I cry, Jaxon will keep his promise. He always does.

Cry, little sister, and I'll kill them all for you.

THE END

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Thank you, dear reader, for picking up my book. You're a bad ass, and I hope everything good happens in your life.

For those who are struggling with their mental health:

You're loved.

You're needed.

You're wanted.

You're not alone.

Call 988 if you're thinking about ending your life. If you have anxiety about talking on a phone call, text 741741 to talk to someone through messaging.

Much love.

Willow McQuerry

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Willow McQuerry is a schizophrenic dark romance author who loves long walks in the psych ward with her grippy socks, and having coffee with her demon roommate. Throw in antidepressants, antipsychotics, sleep meds, and mood stabilizers, then it's a party.

They say she'll appear out of a plume of smoke and glitter if you make a pentagram out of ground coffee and leave offerings of Sour Patch Kids, Dr. Pepper, 7 Brew iced coffee, and pictures of your pet birds.

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