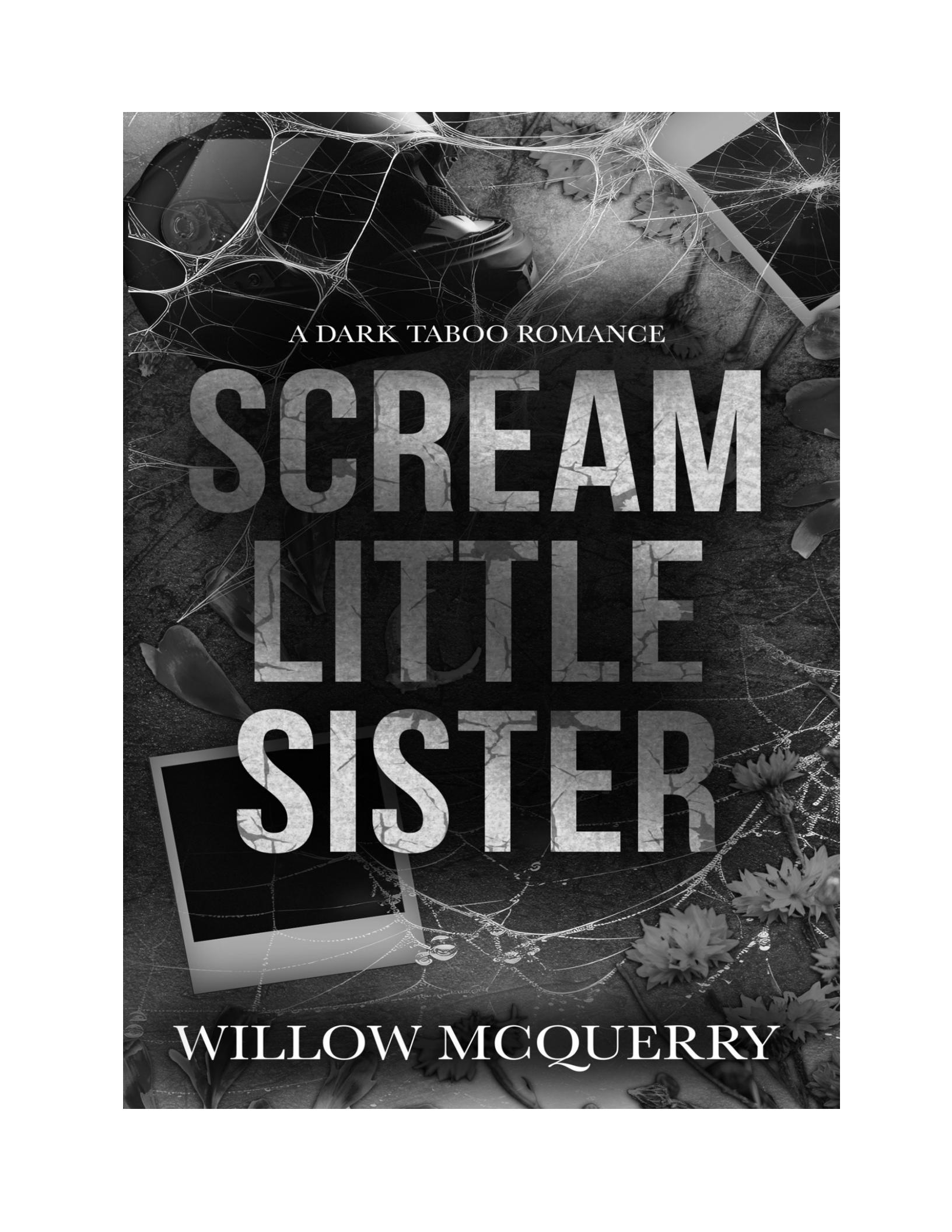


A DARK TABOO ROMANCE

# SCREAM LITTLE SISTER

WILLOW MCQUERRY



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[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## **SCREAM LITTLE SISTER**

**Willow McQuerry**

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

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## **BLURB**

Scream, little sister, and I'll silence them all for you.

Laugh, little sister, and I'll carve my heart out for you.

Whimper, little sister, and I'll burn the world for you.

Cry, little sister, and I'll wipe your eyes for you.

I thought I could stay away from you. It was for your best interest because everything I touch is always left ruined, but I can't hold back anymore.

You're mine.

And nothing will stop me from taking what belongs to me. Not even your fiancé or dad can keep us apart.

*Scream for me, little sister.*



*Dedicated to all the depressed and anxious babes who feel like they aren't  
worthy of love.  
**Yes. The fuck. You. Are.***

---

*To those who are depressed and need a sign to stay. This is your sign.  
You're loved and wanted. Please stay here with us.*

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# **DEPRESSION & SUICIDAL IDEATION**

## **DEPRESSION**

Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. Fortunately, it is also treatable. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease your ability to function at work and at home.

Depression symptoms can vary from mild to severe and can include:

- Feeling sad or having a depressed mood
  - Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
  - Changes in appetite — weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting
  - Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
  - Loss of energy or increased fatigue
  - Increase in purposeless physical activity (e.g., inability to sit still, pacing, handwringing) or slowed movements or speech (these actions must be severe enough to be observable by others)
  - Feeling worthless or guilty
  - Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions
  - Thoughts of death or suicide

## **SUICIDAL IDEATION**

Suicidal ideation is when you think about killing yourself. The thoughts might or might not include a plan to die by suicide.

You may have heard suicidal ideation referred to as "suicidal thoughts." Not everyone with suicidal ideation acts on it.

**Active suicidal thoughts.** This is when you're not only having suicidal thoughts but also have the intention to complete suicide. This may include having plans or a method to carry it out. (For example, using a weapon.)

**Passive suicidal thoughts.** This is when you have thoughts of suicide, like "I wish I could go to sleep and not wake up," but you have no real intention to harm yourself or plans to complete suicide.

### **Some people with suicidal ideation say they feel:**

Empty or hopeless, guilty or shamed, trapped or out of options, in severe mental or physical pain, like a burden to loved ones.

They might show outward signs of mental distress. For example, they could:

Use more alcohol or drugs, act aggressively, retreat from family and friends, have severe mood swings, behave recklessly or impulsively

### **Someone with severe suicidal ideation may also:**

Buy a weapon, collect or save pills, give away their valuables, tell friends and family goodbye, search online for ways to kill themselves, take dangerous risks, like driving far too fast, take out a will or set other affairs in order.

### **Passive things they will say that isn't "I want to die.":**

- I wish I was never born
- I didn't ask to be here
- I wish I could go to sleep and never wake up
- Life is too much, and I don't know how much more I can take
- This world is terrible, and I wish I wasn't here
- If I die, I die. I don't care
- I'm tired of this life
- I'm numb to everything and don't care about anything anymore
- There's no point for me being alive
- No one will miss me when I'm gone
- If anyone or anything will kill me, it'll be me

If you or someone you know needs support and live in the United States,  
call or text [988](https://988lifeline.org), or chat [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)

If you're having suicidal thoughts and don't want to talk over the phone,  
you can text 741741 to talk to someone through messages.

This feeling will pass, I promise.

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# **ANXIETY**

Experiencing occasional anxiety is a normal part of life. However, people with anxiety disorders frequently have intense, excessive and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations. Often, anxiety disorders involve repeated episodes of sudden feelings of intense anxiety and fear or terror that reach a peak within minutes (panic attacks).

These feelings of anxiety and panic interfere with daily activities, are difficult to control, are out of proportion to the actual danger and can last a long time. You may avoid places or situations to prevent these feelings. Symptoms may start during childhood or the teen years and continue into adulthood.

Examples of anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder (social phobia), specific phobias and separation anxiety disorder. You can have more than one anxiety disorder. Sometimes anxiety results from a medical condition that needs treatment.

## **Symptoms**

Common anxiety signs and symptoms include:

- Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- Sweating

- Trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
  - Having trouble sleeping
  - Experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) problems
  - Having difficulty controlling worry
  - Having the urge to avoid things that trigger anxiety

### **Types of anxiety mentioned in *Scream Little Sister***

*Generalized anxiety disorder* includes persistent and excessive anxiety and worry about activities or events — even ordinary, routine issues. The worry is out of proportion to the actual circumstance, is difficult to control and affects how you feel physically. It often occurs along with other anxiety disorders or depression.

*Panic disorder* involves repeated episodes of sudden feelings of intense anxiety and fear or terror that reach a peak within minutes (panic attacks). You may have feelings of impending doom, shortness of breath, chest pain, or a rapid, fluttering or pounding heart (heart palpitations). These panic attacks may lead to worrying about them happening again or avoiding situations in which they've occurred.

# **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCES**

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-7233  
Text BEGIN to 88788

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

If you haven't read *Cry Little Sister* yet, I highly recommend you read it first since it's the first book in the interconnected standalone series. *Scream Little Sister* picks up where *Cry Little Sister* ended (with a different couple), and there are characters, scenes, and information that may confuse you. It's only available on my website [www.willowmcquery.com](http://www.willowmcquery.com)

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*Scream Little Sister* contains: child abuse; mental health (depression, passive suicidal ideation, anxiety, and panic attacks); body shaming (not by the MMC); domestic violence; bullying; graphic violence and deaths; sexual assault; biological father intending to rape his daughter; cheating (FMC cheats on her fiancé with the MMC; MMC receives oral from another woman—please note: the FMC and MMC are NOT together when this happens, but I feel it's worth mentioning), graphic sexual content; non-con; dub-con; asphyxiation; period sex; sibling kink; somnophilia; and other themes that can be upsetting. For an in-depth list, please visit my website [www.willowmcquery.com](http://www.willowmcquery.com)

Any kink and BDSM themes in *Scream Little Sister* should **not** be used as a guide or standard. Please use a reputable resource and do your research. Play safe, doll. xoxo

# **SCREAM LITTLE SISTER PLAYLIST**

“COLD BLOODED” Chris Grey

“US AGAINST THE WORLD” Chris Grey

“If u think I’m pretty” Artemas

“Play pretend” margø

“Give Me A Reason” Versus Me

“Wipe Your Eyes” Maroon 5

“HOT DEMON B!TCHES NEAR U ! ! !” CORPSE, Night Lovell

“WASTE” KXLLSWXTCH

“More than friends” Isabel LaRosa

“Right Here” Chase Atlantic

“West Coast Smoker” Fall Out Boy

“The Ghost of You” My Chemical Romance

“Wet dreams” Artemas

“Often” The Weekend

“Do I Wanna Know?” Arctic Monkeys

“MILLION DOLLAR BABY” Tommy Richman

“After Dark” Mr.Kitty

“Mary On A Cross” Ghost

“Past Lives” sapiendream, Slushii

“Bad Habit” Steve Lacy

“Under The Influence” Chris Brown

“Circles” Post Malone

“ROME” Arankai, Dal Av

Listen to more on my Spotify *Scream Little Sister* playlist [here](#).

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# CHAPTER ONE



## MADISON

*10 years old*

### ***“DUALITY” SLIPKNOT***

I watch my older stepbrother from the swings during recess at school. He's hanging out with his group of friends. They scare the willies out of me. The one time I approached Ryder while he was with them was the scariest day of my life. His friend, Jaxon, glared at me and looked seconds away from shoving me against the lockers and pummeling me with his clenched fist. He curled and uncurled his fingers, as though my mere presence annoyed him, but Ryder distracted Jaxon, saving me from a knuckle

sandwich. I still don't know what I did to deserve that kind of reaction, but either way, it didn't get me what I really wanted.

What I still want.

I want Ryder to look at me. To acknowledge me and treat me as a normal person and not some nuisance he wishes would disappear.

My brown hair flutters in the wind as I swing back and forth, watching Ryder like a hawk. He hides his hands in the front pocket of his black hoodie, his expression flat while his friends talk. I shudder as I peek at him and find the same angry look he wears twenty-four seven.

I wonder what they're talking about and why Ryder is hiding what's on his mind. Though, he always keeps to himself and never shows his feelings. At least not around me. Ryder's been this way since I first met him when I was seven and he was eight. I still remember that day like it happened yesterday.

Dad brought me with him to lunch to meet my new family. This was before he married my stepmother, and I think he planned the meeting to gauge how I'd react to the possibility of having a new mom and brother.

When Dad and I arrived at the restaurant, Ryder sat on the other side of the table as Dad seated himself next to Carolyn after brief introductions. I sat beside Ryder and kept glancing at him, expecting him to say something to me. It didn't matter if it was just a simple "hey" or even a compliment on the new fake-seashell necklace my Aunt Mary—whom I've always called Minnie—bought me.

But he wouldn't look at me.

He simply sat there, silent, hands fisted on his lap and a blank stare on his face while he stared sightlessly at the space where his plate of food would go once it arrived.

"Hi," I said, then waited for him to blink out of the zombie state he was in.

Ryder didn't move a muscle. Didn't blink. He just occasionally peeked at my dad, who was talking to the server about different wines and what would pair better with a dish.

Anger simmered in my veins, and I had the urge to yell at Ryder. I wasn't used to being ignored—the exception being my father, but it was nothing new for him. Everyone at school talked to me. They wanted to be my friends. Even my aunt spoiled me and gave me attention. But not Ryder.

It was as if I were a ghost, flicking items off the counters and still not getting any reaction out of it.

*Just look at me!* I wanted to scream at him. *I want to be friends with you!*

I blink out of the memory and kick my legs out to gain more momentum as I swing.

*Look at me. Please look at me,* I beg Ryder in my thoughts. It's useless, but if I screamed, then I might get in trouble and look stupid in front of the other kids on the playground.

As if he can hear my desperate thoughts, Ryder turns his back to me, ignoring me as he always does.

I just want to play with him. Get to know him more than the basic things, such as his favorite color—which is black—and his favorite candy—Starbursts. He's always snacking on them whenever his mom brings him along with her to the store while leaving me at home. A few times, she brought home some candy for me, too, but never Starbursts, which I always want because Ryder makes them look delicious. It's always M&M's, which is my least favorite candy.

Sensing my gaze, Jaxon turns his head, looks directly at me, then frowns. His expression sours, and I don't need to be a mind reader to know he's cussing me out inside his head.

My heart stops for a moment, then kicks into a quick pace. I stop swinging, unable to look away from Jaxon's piercing eyes. It's like I'm staring into the endless abyss of darkness that threatens to swallow me whole and spit me out in pieces.

Ryder notices his friend's inattention and follows the direction of his glare. I tear my gaze from Jaxon to Ryder. His dark eyebrows slash together, his lips thinning while he gives me an odd look I can't read.

My swing slows until it stops. From my periphery, a faceless kid eagerly steps toward me with the assumption that I'm done with the swing.

*He's looking at me. Finally!*

I want him to walk away from his group and come to me. Instead of doing that, he turns and gives me his back *again*.

"Stupid jerk," I mutter, and jump off the swing's seat.

I take one step forward, then pause when Jaxon stiffens and steps toward me, like he's about to beat me up for even daring to think I can join his group of friends. I don't know what I did this time or why he has such a

grudge against me. He reminds me too much of a guard dog protecting what's his.

"Maddy!" someone hollers from my right.

Forcing a smile, I turn to them. Olivia grins and waves her hand above her head to catch my attention. My other friends—Mickey, Kyle, Conner, Kaila, and Nova—wave me over to join them. I peek at Ryder again. He and his friends walk away, leaving me with a sinking feeling in my stomach as they head toward the other side of the playground.

A scream lodges in my throat. Why can't Ryder just talk to me?

*Why are you so annoying and obsessed with him?*

I wince at the tiny voice in the back of my mind that cruelly points out the obvious things I don't want to hear.

"Maddy!" Olivia yells again.

I sigh and slip on the mask I've perfected over the last few years so that I can seem like the cheery person I sometimes don't feel inside.

I jog to my group, my cheeks hurting from the forced smile. "Hey, guys."

Mickey hooks his arm around my shoulder and yanks me to his side. "'Bout time, loser. What took you so long?" The banter might be playful, but I think it's his excuse to be a jerk.

I can't answer his question, though. I can't say I dragged my feet because of my stepbrother. Mickey and the rest of the group hate Ryder and his friends. Because of that, I have to pretend they're sore losers and that I hate them, too.

In truth, I hate how Mickey picks on them because they dress differently. Who cares if people wear black and have safety pins all over their jeans and hoodies?

I never join Mickey and his friends when they make fun of Ryder and his group. When Mickey and Kyle play pranks on them, I look the other way to show I'm not a part of their cruel games. It saves me from seeing it and also, in my mind, means that I'm not partaking in it either.

In the back of my mind, I wonder if this is why Jaxon hates my guts, but I shake the thought away.

I shrug with a corny smile. "Thought I saw something."

"What, like a ghost?" Mickey snickers, and except for Olivia and Nova, the others join in.

My cheeks warm with a blush, and I shove Mickey off of me. "No."

“Probably the outcasts.” Kyle slaps the back of his hand against Mickey’s arm. He snorts a laugh and looks to Mickey for approval.

That’s the thing with Kyle and Connor. They always check with Mickey to ensure they aren’t stepping out of line. Mickey has consistently been the one in charge. He can make you or break you. That’s why I’m still hanging around him; if I part ways, he’ll make my life a living hell.

Nova and Olivia feel the same way. It’s a given because their brothers are Mickey’s targets. Nova has a better relationship with her brother, Aiden, who seems to understand and forgive her for Mickey’s actions. Hawk is a bit more standoffish with Olivia, but he doesn’t completely ignore her like Ryder ignores me.

Mickey peers over his shoulder at Ryder and his friends as they walk toward the bleachers. His expression clouds with annoyance, and his lips curl back in a slight snarl.

“The outcasts, huh?” Mickey turns to me. “Is that true?”

I try to hide my panic, but my eyes widen all on their own, revealing my true emotions. “What? Pff.” I wave my hand to dismiss what he said. “No way.”

Mickey cocks his head, his lips curving into a smile that screams he’s up to no good. “Let’s go say hi to them. See if they’re up for playing with us.”

“C’mon, Mickey,” Olivia says with a shake of her head. She’s in the same boat as I am, not wanting to partake in the bullying. “Let’s leave them alone. I want to play hopscotch.”

I nod. “That sounds like fun, Oli.”

Nova nods but warily glances at Aiden, most likely debating if she should chase after him to warn him of what Mickey has planned.

Olivia brightens and holds out her hand for me to take. “Then we should play!”

“No, don’t be a wuss.” Mickey grabs me by the arm, and I wince at the harshness in his grip as he drags me toward Ryder’s group.

“Oh, crap.” Olivia groans behind me, and I know she and Nova are following us. They’ll have my back.

“What the heck are you doing?” I drag my feet and frantically shake my head. Whatever he has planned, it’s not good. It never is, and I don’t want another wrongdoing added to the growing pile of reasons why Ryder should hate my guts.

“Hey!” Mickey yells, ignoring me as he leads me across the playground, catching up with Ryder and the others.

Ryder, Jaxon, Hawk, and Aiden turn to us, each with their own degree of a glare. I duck my head and dig my heels into the ground as Mickey hauls me toward Ryder’s group. My shoes catch on the pavement, annoying Mickey enough that he jerks my arm and digs his fingers deeper, which I’m sure will leave bruises.

“Why are you guys running from me so fast?” Mickey says as he stops a few feet from the outcasts.

Ryder cocks his head. “Didn’t know you were there.”

Kyle and Connor flank us. Olivia and Nova brush against my back, acting as my moral support.

Kaila moves into my view and rolls her eyes. “Quit being a baby.”

I shoot her a glare. She gives me the stink face and flicks her red hair over her shoulder.

Great. She’ll go to Mickey later and fill his head with lies for him to use against me to keep me in line.

“You didn’t hear me calling for you?” Mickey scoffs. “No, I think you guys were running from us like a bunch of cowards.”

Jaxon’s hands ball into tight fists until his knuckles turn white and his nostrils flare. Ryder keeps his expressionless mask on, which drives me up a wall. How can he always look so calm during a conflict?

“What do you want, Mickey?” Ryder’s voice comes out flat, the typical tone he uses, even at home with the family.

“Just to see if you guys want to play.”

Ryder’s shoulders stiffen. He’s clearly not buying Mickey’s lie. “Why?”

“Am I not allowed to play with other kids? Or are you too cool to hang out with us?”

I shift my weight to one leg, then the other. I don’t like this at all and can already tell it’s going to blow up into something bigger.

Olivia notices my discomfort and squeezes my hand in silent support.

“Don’t worry,” Nova whispers close to my ear. “Aiden can take them on.”

Ryder’s attention finally slides to me. All the air from my lungs disappears, and it feels like someone’s sitting on my chest as my stepbrother’s gaze remains on me.

*He's looking at me. He's finally looking at me, and it's all because of Mickey being a jerk. This is wrong. This is so wrong!*

Ryder's gaze dips from my face to where Mickey has a death grip on my arm. His dark eyebrows twitch. His calm expression cracks piece by piece, like dried paint on wood, twisting into an emotion I can't put my finger on.

"Get the fuck out of here," Aiden all but yells. His lips curl into a snarl as he holds himself back from attacking Mickey. Jaxon moves closer to Aiden, ready to grab him if it comes to it.

"Well, that's not nice," Mickey says with a mocking smile. "You're not allowed to curse."

I flinch as Mickey's death grip tightens. I swear he's about to crack a bone, and I know the jerk doesn't care.

Ryder notices, and what remains of his calm mask shatters. His jaw clenches and shadows creep over his face as he steps forward, putting his friends behind him. "Let go of my little sister."

"Why?" Mickey laughs and yanks me against his side. His fingers dig deeper into my already sensitive skin. "What are you gonna do about it?"

Ryder's hands ball into fists at his sides. "I said, let go of her."

Mickey backs away and jerks me in front of him to act as a shield as my brother and his friends move closer. He lets go of me, and I barely have a moment of relief before he squeezes my throat. I gasp and grapple at his wrists. My nails dig into his skin, earning a hissed breath from Mickey.

Ryder's eyes widen, then narrow, before he lunges forward. He grabs my arm and yanks me toward him, only to stop short when Mickey refuses to let go of me. Aiden, Jaxon, and Hawk circle us. Everything happens so fast. Kyle and Connor scramble to fight Jaxon and Aiden, who attack like vicious dogs foaming at the mouth.

Mickey's grip on my throat tightens until I can't breathe, and he tugs me backward against him while Ryder yanks at my arm to get me out of Mickey's grasp.

"Stop!" I scream. They ignore me, too deep in the fight.

Ryder jerks me out of Mickey's grip, throws me behind him, and swings at Mickey. I back away, too shocked to say or do anything.

Olivia and Nova scatter away from the group of boys and flank me as we watch the fight in horror.

“Get off of him!” Kaila slaps at Ryder, who ignores her. “I’m getting the teacher!” She turns and sprints toward the adults.

Ryder has the upper hand. With his fist gripping Mickey’s hair, he bends him over and punches him in the gut. Jaxon straddles Kyle’s chest as he pummels his face. Aiden and Hawk double-team Conner. One holds him, and the other punches the living daylights out of him.

I curse in my head, angry at myself for hanging out with Mickey after knowing the bull crap he does to other kids.

A whistle blows in the distance. A teacher will be here any second to stop the fight, and it’s not fast enough. I’m not worried about Mickey and his buddies. It’s Ryder and his friends that I’m frightened for. I don’t want them to get in trouble, and I especially don’t want them to get hurt.

Two teachers jog over to us, one still blowing the whistle to get their attention while the other talks through the walkie-talkie, most likely speaking to the office or the old security guard we have here at the school.

“Ryder!” I yell.

My brother ignores me, too lost in the fight with Mickey.

*Look at me. Freaking look at me!*

“Ryder!” I scream.

He stiffens and turns to me with narrowed eyes. His chest heaves with heavy breaths, and I can’t form words because of the hatred reflected in his gaze. Mickey takes that moment to shove himself out of Ryder’s grip, then hooks his fist into Ryder’s turned cheek. My stepbrother grunts and staggers to the side as Mickey tackles him to the ground.

The teachers shove themselves into the middle of the fight, throwing the boys apart and yelling at them to stop. All I can do is stand here, watching it happen and wishing there was something I could do to stop my brother from getting in trouble.

“To the principal’s office!” The teacher’s voice cracks from her shrill yell. “Stop hitting him!”

Jaxon punches Kyle repeatedly, not listening to a word the teacher says.

Ryder swipes at his nose. A bead of blood slips onto his upper lip as he gets up from the ground when the teacher yanks Mickey off of him. He backs away from Mickey, all while keeping his attention on me. I’d give anything to know what he’s thinking. Especially with the unreadable expression on his face.

An apology clings to the tip of my tongue. I'm not sure what I'm sorry about. Maybe I'm sorry my "friends" attacked his friends. Or maybe I'm sorry about being a bother and getting him in trouble. Or that my mere existence annoys him so much that he ignores me, hoping I'll leave him alone.

Before I can get the words out, the teachers herd the boys across the playground and inside the building. My heart pounds against my ribs like a drum, and my mind flies through so many scenarios about what will happen to my stepbrother.

If he isn't already, Mickey will be mad at me for this. Ryder will also be angry and continue to treat me like a pesky ghost.

I do the only thing I can. I stand in the same spot with Nova and Olivia, watching my stepbrother disappear inside the school.

I'll talk to Ryder after school when we're home and no one can interrupt us. I'll apologize to him and hope he'll forgive me. If I just explain everything to him, then he'll understand, and we can be friends.

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# CHAPTER TWO



## RYDER

*11 years old*

### ***“LIMBO” FREDDIE DREDD***

I grunt as my stepfather’s fist slams against my bruised cheek. A shrill ring fills my ears until it’s all I can hear. I lose balance and rapidly blink to fight off the woozy feeling. Jerry fists my hair at the top of my head to hold me still before he slaps my face with enough force to deafen me.

This is his form of punishment for fighting at school earlier today—a fight he doesn’t care about. Really, he’s just looking for an excuse to beat me.

Jerry has had it out for me since he was dating my mother. No matter what I do or say, it's never good enough for him. He tells my mother he needs a word with me while smiling to ease her worries, then he drags me into my bedroom and lashes out at me. It started off with words that can cut —and cut they did.

*You're a worthless son of a bitch.*

*You'll never amount to anything.*

*Even your father couldn't stand you, and that's why he's gone.*

*No one will ever love you.*

I take each blow with a strangled noise in the back of my throat, but I don't cry. I refuse to give him that satisfaction. Besides, this is nothing compared to the other punishments. Sometimes he uses his belt, and I'd rather he punch me than force me to deal with *that*.

He lands one more punch in my stomach before he backs away and sweeps his fingers through his messy salt-and-pepper hair. He takes a deep breath, like he's the one struggling to fill his burning lungs with oxygen.

My stomach twists, and pain radiates through the rest of my body. I lean forward, my arms tucked against my midsection as I struggle to breathe. Tears sting my eyes, and I squeeze them shut to hold them back.

The asshole doesn't deserve to see them.

"I hope you learned your lesson, boy. Never lay your hands on someone ever again." He fixes his crooked tie with thick fingers that I long to cut off and throw into a creek to become fish food, then fish shit. My blood boils at the sight of his busted and bloody knuckles as he ensures his stupid tie is perfectly in place. "Hitting isn't okay. No matter the situation."

I glare at him from beneath my lashes. Of course he would be a hypocrite about it. Hitting isn't okay unless you're him. Then sure, it's totally okay.

I suppress rolling my eyes. That'll only piss him off even more. I won't be eleven years old for long. Soon I'll become an adult, and we'll see how he feels when I make him pay for all the beatings and mistreatment toward me.

I swipe my nose and mouth with the back of my hand, removing the blood coating my skin as I straighten to my full height. Adrenaline rushes through my veins like poison as I imagine strangling my stepfather. He's a terrible person who doesn't deserve to breathe.

I hate him. I hate that he beats me up and that no one ever does anything about it. It's so obvious that my stepfather abuses me, so my mother can't claim she doesn't know about it. Madison is oblivious and would most likely deny that her precious father would ever do something like this to me. It's just me, myself, and I at this point. I can't depend on anyone. My friends know about the shit Jerry does to me, but they can't do anything about it either.

My stepfather turns his glare to me, as though he can hear my thoughts.  
"Get the fuck out of my house."

His meaning: go to my room in the pool house located in the backyard. My mother thinks I want to be in the pool house. Jerry lied to her, saying that I asked to be out there.

What the fuck kind of logic is that?

He doesn't want me to be part of his picture-perfect family. Jerry wants all traces of my existence gone. He wants my stain removed from the image.

I scowl at him one last time and leave his office. I cut through the empty living room, then open the back door. As soon as I get outside, I'm met with a sweltering September heat that stings the cuts on my face. The sun sits on the horizon as it sets for the evening, turning the sky deep shades of orange and pink, with hints of blue. Any normal person would marvel at the beauty, but I ignore it. I'm too fucked-up to really enjoy anything these days.

*That's a lie. There's one thing I enjoy looking at.*

I shake my head to get rid of the trail my thoughts were about to take. I'm not going down that path again.

Gentle waves lap against the in-ground pool's edge. The underwater lights cut on as dusk shifts to darkness, turning the water into a teal color my mother loves because it reminds her so much of the tropic beaches. Madison sits on the opposite side of the pool, her long legs gently kicking back and forth to create ripples in the water. She bows her head as she watches her legs, as if it's more entertaining to her than anything else.

My steps falter. She never pays attention when I steal glances at her, and that's for the best. The shock wears off, and all that's left is the anger churning the contents inside my stomach.

Anyone associated with me always winds up getting hurt in some way. My friends don't care because they have their own things to deal with at home and school, but Madison's different. If I give her an ounce of

attention, it'll put a target on her back. That's the last thing I want, even though I hate her because of her dad.

Her choice of friends doesn't help matters, either. I don't know how she can be friends with those assholes and be okay with them bullying kids at our school. How can she be okay with the way my friends and I are treated?

I stride toward the stairs to go to the pool house under the deck. Madison looks up. I ignore her and descend the steps, then storm to my bedroom and swing the door open. It shuts behind me with a reverberating thud.

Not five seconds later, there's a timid knock. I know it's Madison, because who else would knock on the door? My mother never comes out here, and my stepfather barges in to punish me for whatever reason he deems worthy. So that leaves my stepsister, who has a knack for staring at me.

Since we were first introduced, she's tried talking to me. She's even attempted to include me when she plays board games with her aunt, who lives with us in the main house. Every time she does, I pay her no attention.

Madison knocks on the door again. I step further into the room that's been painted black and looks like a normal bedroom except for the pool supplies I shoved in the corner. Clothes are strewn across the floor and my bed is unmade, but I don't care. What's the point of tidying everything when no one comes in here except for me and occasionally Jerry?

I have no sense of privacy since I moved in after my mother married Jerry. All I want is to be left alone and to have a space that isn't violated.

Madison knocks once more, grating on my already frayed nerves.

"Go away," I grumble beneath my breath. I don't care if she can't hear me. It should be obvious by now that I don't want anything to do with her.

"Can I come in?"

I drop onto the mattress and close my eyes as I bury my face in my pillow. The day's events finally hit me. I could sleep for a week because of how exhausted I am. The fight at school drained all of my energy, and after seeing Jerry in his office, I feel like death on legs.

Why did I fight Mickey?

I'm not sure, but something about seeing him hurt my stepsister sent me over the edge. If there's anyone who's allowed to hurt her, it should be me. *I* should be the one who punishes her.

*Knock. Knock. Knock.*

I ignore Madison's attempt to talk to me. There's nothing to say to her.

What more does she want from me? I stupidly stand up for her, and suddenly she wants to come into my room like she's earned that right.

I wish I could go to sleep and never wake up. It would be a great escape from the bullshit I have to deal with on a daily basis. No more Jerry. No more Mickey and his stupid friends. No more reminders about how I'm worthless and how my father couldn't stand me so he left.

*Knock. Knock. Knock.*

I glare at the door, my mind rapidly running through different ways to get Madison to leave me alone. She needs to hate me just as much as I hate her. This following me around and always wanting to talk to me is exhausting.

The not-so-funny thing is how two-faced she is. When she's with her friends, she doesn't push as much as she does while in private. Almost like she's ashamed of being seen hanging around me.

A tiny smile curls my lips as I stare blankly at the door my little sister keeps knocking on.

I'll make her hate me.

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# CHAPTER THREE



## MADISON

*10 years old*

### ***“THE YOUNG AND THE HOPELESS” GOOD CHARLOTTE***

After Ryder locked himself in his bedroom in the pool house yesterday, I gave up knocking and begging him to let me in. It's Saturday, which means he'll most likely sleep in before he pops into the house to sneak a Pop-Tart. Then he'll disappear into his bedroom or walk into town to hang out with his friends.

Wanting to catch him before he leaves, I sneak outside with a plate of scrambled eggs, sausage patties, grits, and buttered sourdough toast with a side of blackberry jelly. Minnie cooked breakfast and made him a plate. When Dad wasn't paying attention, she whispered that I should sneak it out to Ryder.

My steps are quick but silent as I rush to the pool house. A shiver rolls down my spine from the cool air that leaves a bite of frost on the grass. Ryder can tell me to leave him alone all he wants, but I refuse to let him rot away in his bedroom. He's always there when we're home. He's always alone, and I don't like that. No one should ever be alone.

"Ryder," I whisper-yell before knocking on the door. I balance the plate of food with my free hand and knock again when I don't get an answer. It's nothing new, but it still hurts that he's treating me this way.

I test the doorknob and find it unlocked. A smile tugs at my lips as I ease the door open, slip inside the room, and then quietly shut the door behind me. It's still dark, but the rising sun provides enough light through the window for me to see in the shadowed room. Ryder lies on his stomach, legs sprawled out on the mattress. He hugs his pillow like it's his safety net, bringing him comfort, even while asleep.

I probably shouldn't be bothering him so early in the morning, but I can't help myself. He noticed me yesterday. Even defended me against Mickey. That has to mean something, right?

I tiptoe to his bed and ease the plate onto the nightstand. Glancing around the room, I ensure we're alone before I crawl onto the mattress and curl against his side. His face is turned toward me, his eyes closed and lips parted with each deep, even breath as he continues sleeping.

All I want to do is hug him and apologize for yesterday at school. I still feel awful about what happened. I didn't get into a fight with him and his friends, but the fight happened because Ryder stood up for me. He noticed the way Mickey squeezed my arm and used me as a shield. I didn't think Ryder would ever care, let alone demand someone let go of his little sister. *His* little sister.

My cheeks warm with a blush.

"What're you doing here?" Ryder mumbles, his voice thick from sleep.

I stiffen and put a small amount of space between us, afraid he'll hurt me for touching him. For a moment, I feel awful for waking him, but a rush of excitement replaces the negative emotion.

“How long have you been awake?” I squeak.

“Answer the question.”

My lips press together as his flat voice dismisses me. “I brought you some breakfast.”

Ryder pops open an eyelid. “Why?”

“Just because.” I shrug.

He closes the eye.

I lean forward after several silent minutes, worried he fell asleep again, but he turns his head away from me.

“Leave,” he mutters.

I frown and sit up with my legs crossed. “Can’t I do something nice for you?”

“Nice?” He scoffs. “Since when would you do something nice for me?”

I glare at him. “Am I mean to you?”

“No, but your friends are assholes, so in my book that makes you—”

“Then I won’t be friends with them!” I feel awful for interrupting, but I don’t want him to finish what he was about to say. I’m not an asshole. It’s not *me* who’s shoving kids into their lockers or sticking chewed gum in their hair.

Ryder pushes himself onto his elbow and scowls at me. “You’re willing to give up your friends for me?”

I frantically nod.

A strange expression twists Ryder’s features before he locks it away. It happens so fast I’m not sure I really saw it. The familiar, emotionless mask settles on his face. It works the same as slamming a door in my face, preventing me from getting any closer to him.

“Bullshit,” he says. Ryder looks at the plate of food on his nightstand, and his eyebrows draw inward before they smooth out again. It’s the only emotion he shows before he turns his attention back to me. “I fucking hate scrambled eggs.”

I force my gaze away from the offending plate. “Then what do you like?”

“For you to leave.”

I swallow down a plea for him to meet me in the middle. Clearly, I have a lot of work ahead of me to get him to trust me, but it’s exciting that he’s talking to me instead of ignoring me.

“You know,” I say, then trail off before I even start.

“I don’t care what you have to say. Get the hell out of my room.” Ryder sits up and runs his hand through his messy dark-brown hair, causing it to stand in different directions.

I blink several times. “Why are you being so mean to me?”

Ryder clammers off the bed and stares at the plate of food with the same bored expression. It’s his eyes that give him away. Anger and hatred fill them, transforming his light-blue irises into a darker shade. He looks seconds away from smashing the plate of food against the wall. “Because I don’t entertain bullies.”

My heart sinks to my stomach, and I suck in my bottom lip to keep it from trembling. When I don’t move, Ryder turns to me, and a chill rolls down my spine at the hatred in his cold gaze.

“Why would you say something like that?” I whisper.

“Can’t handle the truth?” He scoffs with a shake of his head. “You’re pathetic. Get your stupid ass out of here. I won’t repeat myself again.”

I leap out of his bed and hold back the angry tears threatening to spill free. Venom clings to the tip of my tongue. Words that would cut deep, much like how he cut me. “You’re such a jerk!”

“If that’s the best insult you can come up with, then you really are stupid.” He points at the door, his message clear.

I don’t understand what’s made him flip so quickly, but I don’t try to ask. He’ll only get angrier and come up with different ways to insult me.

“I came here to apologize, you jerk!” I storm out of his bedroom before he has enough time to dig the knife deeper.

The tears slip free by the time I get inside the house and close the door behind me. I swipe them away so no one will see them and ask questions. My dad won’t be around to see them, so that leaves Carolyn—my stepmom—and Minnie.

My aunt’s humming fills the silence. Once the lump in my throat unknots itself, I stroll into the kitchen. Minnie loads the last of the dirty dishes into the dishwasher and turns it on. Sensing my entrance, she turns and breaks out the warm smile she reserves just for me.

“Hey, baby. Did he like it?” She pauses and tilts her head at whatever she sees on my face. “What’s the matter, sweetheart?”

The annoying lump returns and clogs my throat again. My eyes sting with tears, and I look away from her as I fight back the sobs working their way up my throat. I don’t want to talk to her about what happened. It would

mean explaining everything about Mickey. It would mean admitting I'm "friends" with the school bully. Minnie would be disappointed in me, and I don't want her to look at me differently because of it.

She clicks her tongue and rushes to my side. I curl my fingers into fists as she kneels in front of me and hugs me. Minnie's hugs always make everything feel better. It's like snuggling into a blanket when it's cold outside. She's a bigger woman, and soft like a pillow, which makes cuddling with her comfortable.

"Aw, baby. You know you can talk to me." She pets the back of my head in soothing strokes and gently works some knots out of my hair.

I bury my face in her neck as I hug her like my life depends on it, because it sure feels like it does. "I know."

"You don't have to talk if you don't want to. I understand, honey, but I'm going to guess it's because of Ryder." She kisses my temple while working her fingers through my hair. "Don't take what he says to heart, okay? He's a troubled soul, and sometimes it takes a little more patience and love for people like him to see he's not alone."

I shake my head but keep my face buried in her neck. "You don't understand."

*I'm a terrible person*, I want to shout at her. *He's punishing me because of Mickey*.

She tsks. "I may not understand, but I know things." She eases away and forces me to look at her. "Patience, baby. He'll come around."

"Who will come around?" a man says from behind.

My spine straightens, and I turn. Dad stands in the kitchen's entryway, dressed in his usual suit and tie, with his salt-and-pepper hair slicked back.

Minnie strokes my arm once before she stands to her full height. Her easygoing nature fades until only a cold expression and tense shoulders remain. I'm not sure why she changes when he's around, but thankfully, it's never directed toward me. They're siblings, and my best guess is they don't get along, like Ryder and me.

"Girl talk," she says.

Dad frowns. "I don't like secrets, Mary. You know that."

Minnie forces a smile. "There are no secrets here, Jerry. Just having girl time. Unless you prefer to hear all about a man I'm seeing. Do you need some advice from Madison, too?"

Dad's frown deepens, and he glances at me, then turns back to Minnie.  
“You’re getting advice from a nine-year-old?”

“She’s ten, and yes. You’d be surprised at the wealth of wisdom she has,” Minnie says.

Dad waves his hand to dismiss her. “Stop going to my daughter for nonsense advice.” He turns to me. “We need to talk.”

Those four words bring a sense of dread.

*What did I do?*

“Am I in trouble?” I inch closer to Minnie for protection.

Dad sighs and slips his hand into his pocket. “Don’t ask stupid questions.” He glares at Minnie. “You can leave now.”

Minnie squeezes my shoulder. “I’ll be in the other room, then.”

Dad’s head turns as he watches my aunt leave the kitchen. When she disappears around the corner, he faces me. “I have a meeting to get to, so this will be quick.”

My eyebrows pinch together. “Okay?”

“Starting today, you’ll learn how to be a proper young woman. These lessons will teach dining etiquette, poise, and dancing.” Dad checks his watch like he’d rather be at his meeting than speaking to me. “There will be a freshly pressed outfit on your bed. You’ll wear it for each of your lessons. Tim will drive you to and from these lessons. You won’t skip any of them, as I’ve already paid well in advance. Do I make myself clear?”

I don’t understand why I need lessons about things I already know. Dad taught me the difference between a salad and an entrée fork at a young age. It’s all stupid and pointless. Why can’t people eat with whatever fork they want?

I blink. “Why do I need lessons?”

Dad sighs and slips his hand back into his pocket. “Because someday you’ll become a wife to a gentleman who will require you to be a lady.”

“But I’m ten.”

“And soon you’ll be eighteen.” Dad pulls his cell phone out of his pocket and looks at the screen with a heavy sigh. “I need to go. Be ready for Tim by noon.”

Without another word, he leaves me in the kitchen.

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Tim—Dad's driver—stayed silent on the ride to the gothic mansion. The whole time, I restlessly shifted in my seat while my mind raced with thoughts about what would happen.

I never got close to understanding how stressful it would be.

The teacher—Madam Joan, as she stressed for me to address her as—is an uptight middle-aged woman with a close-cropped haircut. She also has a habit of slapping my hands with a long ruler if I do something wrong.

“That’s not how you do it,” Madam Joan snaps. Her shrill voice grates on my nerves every time she opens her mouth.

I clench my molars together until they grind as I try to curtsy while holding the skirt of my new white dress. She showed me once and now expects me to do it exactly as she did, which I’ve been doing, and she still keeps swatting my already stinging arm with that stupid ruler.

“No, no, no.” The ruler whistles as it flies down with a sharp swing and slaps against my arm. I yelp and flinch away from her reach, but that doesn’t stop her from closing the space and swatting me again.

“Stop it!” I scream.

Madam Joan thwacks me again. “I will once you do it right.”

“I have been!”

She gives me a displeased look and arches a thin eyebrow. “You call whatever that monstrosity you’ve been doing, *right*? Any potential suitor for your hand will take one look at your pathetic excuse of a curtsy and walk away. Now do it as I showed you.”

I suck in a breath and hold it, just so I don’t lash out at her. Raising my chin, I carefully lift my skirt and curtsy. I squeeze my eyes closed as I brace for the looming swat from Madam Joan’s ruler. When it doesn’t come, I pop open an eyelid and peek at her. Madam Joan nods once with the same displeased expression.

“Better,” she says, then strides toward the long table lined with large wooden chairs splashed with red velvet. “Next lesson.”

The next few hours drag as Madam Joan lectures about fine dining. I’ve already heard most of her lessons from my father. It’s so boring that I sometimes zone out, only to be brought back when Madam Joan smacks me with her stupid ruler. I leave the first lesson with red welts on my arm and the urge to angry-cry.

“How did it go?” Tim asks, breaking the silence on the drive home.

I don't bother looking at him from the back seat. My gaze remains out the window. If Dad wants to send me to Madam Joan, then I'll make sure I do a horrible job at learning how to be a lady. Maybe then he'll realize I don't want any of this and will remove me from the lessons.

"I don't ever want to get married," I finally say.

Tim makes a sound in the back of his throat that could pass as a sarcastic laugh. "Not sure if you'll have a choice in that, kiddo."

My fingers curl into my palms on my lap. Another surge of anger rushes through my veins. "I'm not marrying anyone."

If I say it enough times, then maybe he'll believe me. My dad wouldn't make me marry some boy, would he? I don't want to curtsy. I don't want to sit at a dinner table with a back so straight that it hurts while I try to somehow eat my food without looking like a slob. Madam Joan's words, not mine. I don't care if I look rude for eating like a normal person would.

"You may not want to marry right now," Tim says, "but when you aren't a kid anymore, you'll be paired with someone."

I glare at the back of Tim's head. The rest of the ride is quiet, and the whole time, I want to scream.

I make a promise to myself that I'll never marry or even kiss a boy. My nose scrunches at the thought of even pushing my mouth against a boy's lips like what I've seen in movies.

I'll never have a boyfriend or even a stupid husband.

# CHAPTER FOUR



## RYDER

*12 years old*

### **“FOLLOW YOU” BRING ME THE HORIZON**

I swear I'll end Mickey. Even if it's the last thing I do before I grow up and ditch this town. Blood trickles from my nose to my busted upper lip, and I don't bother swiping it away. The bleeding slowed on my walk back to Jerry's house from hanging out with my friends in town.

I couldn't enjoy one day with them without Mickey finding us and starting a fight. He may have gotten me a few times, but at least he's now

sporting a black eye, along with scratches over his cheek from when I shoved him onto the asphalt outside the mall's entrance.

Keeping my head ducked, I walk through the large house that smells so different from the place where I came from. It doesn't have the sweet notes to it like the air fresheners my mother uses. It's earthy and smells like leather, along with a stale, sour scent I can't put my finger on. Jerry smells exactly like this.

Rage bubbles in my veins at the reminder of my stepfather. Hatred twists my insides, and all I want to do is take all of this anger out on him. I don't care that I spent all of my energy on fighting Mickey and that Jerry will easily overpower me.

I hate it here.

I hate him.

I hate his daughter.

I even hate my mother for marrying that asshole.

My steps slow as I slip out the back door to hide in my bedroom. Madison's back is to me as she sits on the top step, blocking my escape.

My eyes narrow. She never hides like this.

My fists clench at my sides.

It doesn't matter why she's hiding. It's not my problem. I storm toward the stairs, not caring if I have to shove her out of the way so I can go to my room.

Madison doesn't look at me, despite hearing my loud footsteps. She keeps her head bowed, her hair curtaining her face and hiding her from the outside world. Her arms are wrapped around her bent legs, making her look smaller and more fragile. Something I haven't seen her do when I steal glances at her from time to time.

I shove past her, using my leg to force her to make room, but she doesn't make a sound. I descend two steps before the tiny hairs on the nape of my neck and arms stand on alert. A strange feeling tugs at my insides, and I can't pinpoint what, exactly, it is.

Slowly, I peek at her over my shoulder. It's not that I care about her. It's more out of curiosity and annoyance. Normally, she'd grunt, then whine at me for being a jerk.

Madison keeps her gaze downcast, completely avoiding looking at me. Her cheeks and nose are flushed pink, and her eyes are swollen and shiny from crying.

The same strange feeling returns to my chest and strengthens at the sight of her tears.

I glance past her, toward the back door, then at her again. Sighing, I stomp up the two stairs and sit beside her. I stare straight ahead, not saying a word, but her silence grates on my nerves. For the first time since moving into this house and being around Madison, I silently call a temporary truce. Despite hating her guts, I don't like seeing her upset.

"What happened?" I ask after a while.

From my periphery, I watch her head turn toward me. Sadness darkens her eyes, and her lips don't pull up in the tiny smile she usually offers whenever she looks at me. "I could ask you the same thing."

I clench my jaw and force myself to ignore the blood drying on my upper lip. I have no need to be ashamed of it. I don't care what people think about the bruises and cuts I get from Mickey and Jerry. That ship sailed long ago.

"I asked you first." I shoot her a glare from the corner of my eye.

She turns forward again and stares sightlessly at her bent knees. "It doesn't matter. You don't care."

My fingers curl into my palms, and I fist my hands until my knuckles turn white. Silence stretches between us, and I bite the inside of my cheek. I won't coddle her just to learn why she's crying, even though it's eating at me. She chose to be out here alone when she could have gone to her aunt and cried about it to her.

"Look," I say, losing my inner battle, "I normally wouldn't care, but this isn't like you. If someone hurt you, I wanna know."

Madison tenses, and she peeks at me. "For all you know, this could be normal for me."

"It's not." I scowl at her.

I watch her more often than she thinks. Over the years, I've learned her habits and her personality. It started out as getting to know my enemy. Wanting to find her weaknesses to use against her and make her hate me. But at some point, I did these things more out of curiosity than anything else. I want to know why she hangs around Mickey and the others. I still haven't figured out the reason, but I will. It's just a matter of time.

Madison blinks, and it chases away some of the sadness lingering in her gaze. She averts her eyes and mumbles, "I feel like I have no control over anything."

I cock my head but say nothing, allowing her the space and time needed to gather her thoughts.

“I just want to live my life. I want to play with my friends, not go to stupid lessons.” She sucks in a shuddering breath. The summer sunlight reflects in her tear-filled eyes, making her brown irises appear lighter, with different shades speckling near her pupils. I hate how looking at them softens me toward her. How I think she’s pretty, even while crying.

Madison turns to me and swipes a straggling tear from her cheek. “I hate feeling like this. Like I have to be careful what I say and what I do around certain people.”

“Certain people?”

She nods. “I’ll tell you a little secret.”

I straighten and fold my arms over my chest when I realize I’ve been leaning closer to Madison and hanging on her every word.

“I don’t like Mickey and his friends,” she says. “They’re a bunch of jerks, and I hate how they treat you and the others.”

Rage rushes through my veins and I bite out, “Then why do you hang out with them?”

“Because they’ll turn against me. I don’t want that.”

I turn my head forward and glare straight ahead as I digest her words. As much as it annoys me that she’d rather stick around with Mickey, I now understand why she does it. It’s self-preservation. Keep your friends close and enemies closer.

“Are you going to tell me who did that to you?” Madison’s soft voice draws me out of my thoughts.

I blink and shift my focus to her. “Guess.”

She flinches, her shoulders tensing and touching the bottoms of her ears.

“Mickey,” she whispers.

I nod once.

Madison leaps to her feet and brings me with her. She grabs my hand and drags me across the balcony and inside the house. I stare at the back of her head, confused but not saying a word. Probably because I’m curious about what she’s doing and why she has a determined expression on her face. She leads me upstairs and into her bedroom, and then into her adjoined bathroom.

“Sit.” She pushes me onto the small loveseat chair tucked against the far wall. I don’t know why she has a chair in her bathroom, but I don’t question

it. Her family comes from money. Enough said.

I watch Madison as she rummages through the cabinets under the sink until she pulls out cotton balls and Band-Aids. My eyebrows slash down as she approaches me with the items and a tiny smile.

“I’ll get you cleaned up,” she says.

I stay silent as she pulls out a cotton ball and dampens it with water, then dabs it beneath my nose. I stare at her face, analyzing her micro-expressions as she concentrates on removing the blood.

Why is she doing this?

Why is she helping me?

No one’s taken care of me.

No one’s cleaned my wounds or softened their touch to ensure they don’t hurt me.

No one cares about me. So why is she pretending to?

My heart thumps faster, banging against my ribs as a swirl of tension and nerves builds in my chest. I catch Madison’s wrist, stopping her from helping me. She meets my gaze, surprise and a hint of fear reflecting in her eyes.

“Ryder?” she whispers.

“Stop pretending.” My grip tightens on her wrist.

She blinks. “Pretending what?”

“Pretending that you care.” My hands tremble, and the strong, foreign emotions tighten my chest.

What is this feeling? I’m supposed to hate her, not feel *this*.

It’s tender. Too *fucking* tender.

Madison shakes her head. “I’m not pretending. I do care about you, and I meant it when I said I hate what Mickey does to you.”

“You don’t know me.” I swallow hard and bite back the insults clinging to the tip of my tongue. I want to lash out, to push her away from me. To make her hate me and for me not to feel this way about her.

*She cares.*

*She sees me.*

*She’s seeing too much.*

Madison’s gaze softens. “I know you more than you think.”

My face blanks and everything in me shatters. She’s breaking through my barriers, one wall at a time. She knows too much.

A lump forms in my throat, and I shove her away from me. Madison gasps and stumbles backward, giving me enough room to slip past her. I flee out of the bathroom with my legs trembling and heart racing.

“Ryder!” Madison calls from behind.

I ignore her and storm down the stairs and out the back door. My breath comes out in sharp, quick pants as panic grips me in a chokehold.

These feelings . . .

I know what they are now.

# CHAPTER FIVE



## RYDER

*13 years old*

### ***"HEAVYDIRTYSOUL" TWENTY ONE PILOTS***

Voices in the school cafeteria blend together until they're a buzzing sound. The occasional loud laugh or someone yelling something at their friends breaks through the noise, but it always returns to the same sound. Jaxon, Hawk, Aiden, and I sit at our usual spot. I observe the crowd while I chew on a slice of pizza.

It's the same as it always is. Cliques sit together. Some classes gather at one table to keep them in the same spot, but mostly, kids mingle with their

selected friend group.

My gaze slides to Madison for the tenth time since stepping foot in here. She's hanging out at the popular table with her friends—the little shit, Mickey, included. Madison chats with her best friends Olivia and Nova, waving her hands in the air, then grinning and nodding as Nova says something. My stepsister throws her head back as she laughs at whatever Nova says.

Kaila, the mean girl of the group, frowns at Madison. She rolls her eyes and leans into Mickey to whisper something into his ear. He gently nods while staring at Madison.

Their group is made up of snakes who eat their own with a smile on their faces. They trick each other, claiming they would never hurt them. But the school talks. Whatever drama the popular kids have, the rest of the school hears about it. For example, Kaila likes Mickey, but he's more interested in my little sister. Kaila hates that, so she's been spreading lies about Madison. Stupid, petty, bullshit lies.

It must be nice to only care about yourself and what you want. It also must be nice to walk the halls without the fear of getting shoved into a locker or one of the large trash bins in the hallways.

Watching Madison thoroughly pisses me off. How can she care about no one but herself? Every time I look at her, I can't stop seeing her piece-of-shit dad who enjoys making my life hell at home. I see the girl who continues to be friends with the bastards who make it their mission to bully my friends and me.

Madison claimed she would drop them for me two years ago. A year after that, she said she doesn't like Mickey and hangs around him out of self-preservation. But I wonder if what she said was a lie—a way to get under my skin.

Job well done, if that's the case. She got what she wanted, and despite all the dark thoughts about her, this sick part of me is drawn to her like a moth to a flame.

I want to hurt her. Break her. I long to see tears in her eyes, smearing over her face. These feelings aren't normal feelings one should have for their sibling. This hate-crush on Madison is like a monster under my bed that's slowly driving me mad. I'm at the point where I'm ready to stomp the monster in its fucking face.

I bite into my half-eaten pizza and chew while keeping my gaze on Madison. She's dressed like the popular kids here at school, with her tight pink T-shirt and jean shorts. Her long brown hair is pulled into a high ponytail, and a few strands frame her oval face. She recently started wearing makeup, and even from across the room, her sparkly glitter eyeshadow stands out.

Madison laughs at whatever Olivia said, her hand covering her mouth to hide her smile. I hate how she covers it. There's nothing embarrassing about her teeth or her smile in particular. I want to know who's making her feel like she needs to hide parts of herself so that I can have a little chat with them.

Guilt stabs at me. She may not be my blood sibling, but we still grew up together, and this infatuation isn't right.

*Just cut them out*, a tiny voice in the back of my head whispers.

I internally shake it away and glance at Jaxon, who's sitting beside me. He scowls at whoever grabbed his attention, which is pretty unfortunate for them because Jaxon is full of anger just begging to be released. I don't need to look to know who he's glaring at. My best friend is in love with his sister, and he hasn't admitted it out loud. I don't know if he ever will, given how Jaxon keeps to himself and doesn't overshare.

I shift my focus to Mickey. He glances across the room with a smirk that I've been dying to punch off his face. I follow the direction of his stare. Dahlia—Jaxon's little sister—has her head down while she eats, completely clueless that she's about to fall victim to whatever Mickey has planned for her.

Not good.

Mickey stands from his seat, lunch tray in hand. He crosses the room and passes behind Dahlia. My jaw clenches as Mickey smacks her upside the head, then walks away with a gloating smile directed toward his friends.

That stupid son of a bitch.

Jaxon's chair groans against the tile floor as he rises from his seat.

"Looks like they have a new target," I say. Guilt rises until it nearly chokes me. The girl doesn't deserve any of this. No one deserves to be bullied, and unfortunately for Dahlia, she caught the attention of the biggest asshole in this school.

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."

Jaxon ignores us and storms across the cafeteria. I call after him, already knowing what he's about to do. Aiden and Hawk join in and call his name, and we watch in horror as our best friend beats the ever-loving fuck out of Mickey while in a blackout rage. There's no pulling him out of it. When he snaps the way he does, everyone—including his closest friends—is fair game.

In the middle of the fight, Jaxon wrestles against the teachers as they drag him out of the cafeteria. He looks directly at Dahlia and smiles. It's soulless and evil. Nothing I've ever seen him do. A chill runs down my spine as he continues to grin and stare at his little sister with depthless eyes.

"Cry, little sister!" he yells while digging his heels into the ground.  
"And I'll kill them all for you!"

If it isn't already clear how he feels about his little sister, it is now. At least to me, anyway, and most likely to Aiden and Hawk.

I don't need to look at my friends to know they share the same expression as me: shock and horror.

What will the school think now that they know about Jaxon's feelings for Dahlia? What will his parents think? Or even Dahlia, for that matter?

I slide my attention to Madison. Her face slackens and her skin leaches of all its color. I gauge her every expression, waiting for the disgust to come.

*Will it click for her too?*

*Will Jaxon's feelings for his sister make her want to puke?*

*Will it disgust her like it would disgust any normal person?*

*Will she judge him for his feelings?*

*Or will she express that love is love?*

It doesn't matter. Whatever she thinks won't change how I view my feelings for her. It's wrong and something I should avoid acting upon. I'll continue to ignore her, hoping one day it's enough to make her leave me alone.

Maybe one day, this sick crush I have on her will fade away, too.

# CHAPTER SIX



## MADISON

*16 years old*

### ***“FLESH” GHOSTEMANE***

S tanding aside while Mickey and his goons taunt and torture the kids at school is eating away at me, and I can't do it anymore—especially when they bully Dahlia. Jaxon made it clear over the years that if someone fucks with her, he'll send them to the hospital. He's made good on that promise multiple times.

I admire the level of loyalty he has toward his sister. Deep down, I'm a little jealous because I wish I had the same close relationship with Ryder. But, no, Ryder has to be a dick to me and ruin any relationship we could

have had as siblings. There are times when he isn't so bad to me. Those are the moments I cherish the most. When I'm alone in the living room and studying, Ryder will walk by the couch and drop a sleeve of Starbursts beside me before he disappears through the back door. I don't question him doing it anymore. What's the point of picking it apart when I come to the same conclusion that I don't know his intentions behind it?

Minnie's soothing voice fills my head at times like these, when I doubt Ryder will ever come around. She'd stroke the back of my head while saying, "*Patience, baby. He'll eventually see you've had good intentions with him.*"

Patience is difficult when my days are numbered.

Even though I did everything I could to show my father I had no desire to be a lady, the etiquette lessons continued. Dad broke the news this year that he'll pair me with a suitor as soon as I turn eighteen. Despite the looming marriage, I kept the promise I made to myself that I would never date.

And then Mickey . . . stupid, sleazy asshole Mickey made me break that promise.

He was so insistent on it, pestering me until I gave in. The relationship didn't last long, but the association with him dug my grave. Everyone here knows I'm part of the popular crowd too. All I want is to run and hide, hoping to find safety and a sense of control over my life. I'm sure every student in high school has a lot to say about me and the people I hang out with.

As if I've willed a disastrous situation into existence, I round the corner and spot Mickey and Kyle standing off to the side of the drama room. They're fucking around with some helpless soul, and I wish I could help. Unfortunately for them, this is a survival-of-the-fittest situation. If I turn Mickey's attention to me, I'll never get away and give him the cold shoulder as I plan. I whisper a prayer beneath my breath, full of hope they don't notice me as I duck my head and walk past.

Because I have the worst luck ever, they call out my name. I pretend I don't hear them as I maintain the same steady pace. If I slow down even a little, it'll look like I heard them. It's the last thing I want. It'll only piss Mickey off even more, and an angry Mickey is a scary Mickey.

"Mad!" Mickey yells.

My shoulders stiffen and reach my ears. My heart pounds harder against my ribs, threatening to burst free. I calm my breathing, hoping it's enough to slow my racing heart.

“Yo, Mad!” Kyle bellows.

Students in the hallway turn at the commotion, shifting their focus to me with raised eyebrows. I hate being under their scrutiny.

I extend my strides and keep my gaze forward while wishing I could duck into my next class to get away from Mickey and Kyle. Unfortunately, it's on the other side of the school, and I now have two football players hot on my trail.

A hand grabs my shoulder and whips me around, forcing me to come face to face with Mickey. Kyle stands behind him, though they share the same fuming expression as they look me over. I suppress a disgusted shudder at the familiar, leering expression on Mickey's face.

“What the fuck, Madison?” Mickey snarls. “I called your name.”

I pull out the bitchy side I've perfected over the years. All the pretend arguments with Mickey and Madam Joan certainly helped.

“Yeah?” I jerk my shoulder out of Mickey's grip. It takes every bit of self-control to stop my hand from rubbing away the feeling of his touch, which lingers on my skin like a nightmare. “I heard you, but I don't want to deal with your bullshit right now. I have better things to do.”

Mickey rolls his eyes. “Don't tell me you're still upset about Kaila kissing me. I told you, I didn't kiss her back. You know it's only you that I want.”

I hold back the cringe threatening to break free. I hate myself so much for dating Mickey, but he terrifies me. He looked close to slapping me when I kept telling him no. Survival mode kicked in, and I said yes. It's a miracle Kaila threw herself at Mickey, giving me a reason to break up with him. She's a two-faced bitch, but it worked out in my favor for once.

Dating Mickey pissed Ryder off; that's the only positive that came out of it. He didn't throw a fit like I hoped, but he always had a clenched jaw and tightened fists anytime we were near each other. He continued to ignore me and pretend I didn't exist, but my brother couldn't hide his annoyance at the relationship.

There is no escape now, though, and I have to face this mess. I plant a hand on my hip and pop out my hip in a don't-fuck-with-me stance. “We broke up two weeks ago. I don't care what you do with other girls.”

His expression darkens as he steps into my personal space. “Don’t pretend you don’t want me, Mad. I know you do. I just don’t understand why you’re playing hard to get.”

That was his major complaint while dating: I play hard to get. Being a tease. A prude. All because I didn’t want to make out with him or let him touch me. Just the thought of him putting his hands on me makes my skin crawl. I can’t imagine having his lips on mine without wanting to puke.

“I don’t want you,” I say firmly, wishing it’s enough to make him stop.

Shadows cross Mickey’s face, contorting the sharp features. “I wouldn’t say that if I were you.”

I shake my head and scoff. “Why? Are you going to kick my ass too? All because you’re not getting what you want?”

Patronizing him is a dangerous move, but I’m so sick and tired of his bullshit. I’m sick of people in my life telling me what to do. For once, I want to make my own decisions.

Mickey closes the space and grips my jaw. He forces me backward until my back meets the wall with a dull *thump*. “Don’t. Say. That.”

I jerk my chin out of his grasp, but he catches me again, his grip tightening until the sharp pain digs into my gums through my cheeks.

“Fuck. You,” I growl. “Get your hands off me.”

“You’re really pushing it, Mad,” Mickey snarls. He leans closer, until his strong cologne burns my nostrils. “We’re not done, and you need to get that through your thick skull.”

I grind my teeth together and grab his wrist. My nails dig into his skin, and his fingers press deeper into my cheeks. “I’m not someone you can boss around.”

Mickey raises his hand, and I flinch, fully expecting him to hit me. Instead, he slaps the wall beside my head and offers a cruel smile. “It seems you’re forgetting who I am and need a reminder. Maybe you need a punishment to learn your place, bitch.”

Mickey’s hand releases my face and drops to my throat. I let out a ragged cry as his fingers curl into a tighter grip.

I shove his chest with all my strength, but he barely budges. He moves in closer and squeezes his fingers around my neck until I can’t draw a breath. Kyle positions himself at an angle to hide Mickey and me from curious eyes.

It's not like anyone will help me. They'll stand aside and watch as Mickey chokes the life out of me and growls cruel things in my ear. Maybe this is karma for all the times I turned my back on everyone in my current position.

Mickey leans in until his nose touches mine. He bares his teeth in a humorless grin. All the life in his eyes fades, leaving soulless pits in its place. I struggle to get out of his grip, but he's holding me so that I can barely move. He drags me forward, then slams me against the wall again, fisting my hair with his other hand to keep me in place.

"Keep struggling, Mad. I enjoy that shit," Mickey says through clenched teeth. "You don't get to ignore me after ending things with me when I haven't done anything wrong."

Ringing fills my ears, and black dots creep into the corners of my vision. I sway and blindly grapple at Mickey. Vaguely, I'm aware that I'm about to pass out. No one will care. They'll ogle the show Mickey is putting on, shrug their shoulders, and keep walking.

Tears sting my eyes. A scream works its way up my throat and dies before it reaches my mouth. My head swims from dizziness. Everything seems to draw backward as though I'm floating down a long, dark hallway. I barely feel my nails scratching into Mickey's wrist with one last attempt to fight him off.

A shadow blankets Mickey right before he's roughly yanked off of me. I suck in a ragged breath tinged with a weak cry. My chest and lungs burn as I desperately suck in more air.

"What the fuck?" Mickey snarls.

A tall, lean body squeezes between Mickey and me, his back facing the fuming football player. I crane my neck and look into familiar blue eyes that are narrowed and full of rage. Ryder slams his palm on the wall beside my neck as he slowly turns his head and glares at Mickey.

"I'd leave if I were you," Ryder drawls, emotionless.

My stomach flips. I can't look away from my stepbrother as he protects me from my ex-boyfriend. He's so close to me, his chest brushing against mine and his amber-and-cypress scent filling my senses until it's all I can focus on.

Mickey's eyes widen and, like the scaredy cat he is, he spins on his heels to flee. He stops when he notices Jaxon standing a foot away from him with a blank expression and his hands balled into tight fists by his

sides. I know that look all too well. He's close to losing his shit and beating Mickey's ass.

*Jaxon hates me. Why would he want to defend me?*

"C'mon, man. Let's go," Kyle says. He backed out of Ryder and Jaxon's orbit at some point. "The losers want to play the hero. Let them. We'll take care of Maddy later."

Mickey's features slacken, and I don't miss the flash of fear in his eyes. I'm sure he's remembering the time Jaxon lost his shit on him in the cafeteria, when everyone watched him scream and cry like a baby. Snapping out of it, he forces a cocky smile and tilts his head as he works out a kink. He turns to me and leans to the side, ensuring I see him past Ryder. "I'll see you later, Mad. We're not done talking."

An empty smile lifts the corners of Ryder's lips, his attention still on Mickey. "No, you won't. Come near her again and find out what happens."

Mickey scoffs and leaves with Kyle hot on his trail. Jaxon watches them until they're out of sight, then glances at Ryder. They share a look before Jaxon walks away, leaving me alone with my stepbrother.

Ryder keeps me boxed in, blocking out the rest of the world from interrupting this moment. After what feels like an eternity, he turns his head and pins me with a scowl. "One of these days, that bratty side will get you in a lot of trouble, sis."

"I don't care," I snap without thinking. My cheeks warm out of embarrassment and guilt. Even though he said some horrible things to me over the years, I can't be angry at him. All I want is for him to accept me. He's my brother, for crying out loud.

Ryder's expression doesn't change. His gaze slides down to my throat and lingers there. His nostrils flare and he grabs my chin, then angles my head to the side as he inspects the damage Mickey caused. I suck in a breath and sway for an entirely different reason this time. Butterflies fill my stomach and worsen as Ryder continues to touch me.

His expression turns thunderous as he eases my head the other way. He traces the sensitive skin on my throat, like he's memorizing the bruises Mickey left.

"What the fuck were you thinking, sis?" he says. It's so strange to hear the venom in his voice when I'm so used to it being flat and emotionless.

"What should I have done, *bro*?" I say. "Let him pull me in every direction until he gets what he wants?"

Ryder drops his hand to his side. A muscle ticks in the corner of his jaw.  
“You have me to keep you safe.”

“I don’t want you fighting my battles for me.”

“Because you’re doing so well protecting yourself,” he deadpans, and shakes his head in disappointment.

Why does that cut so much deeper than anything else?

I shove his chest so I can have room to think, but he doesn’t budge. Ryder moves closer, eliminating the small space between us.

“I had it handled,” I say softly. I meant for it to come out stronger, but having him this close is making it hard to breathe.

I withdraw my hands from Ryder. He catches my wrists in a tight hold, but it doesn’t hurt. Not like Mickey’s grasp. Ryder places my palms on his chest, with one right over his pounding heart.

“I’d say otherwise from what I saw,” Ryder says. “Mickey and Kyle looked seconds away from hurting you worse than what I walked into, and I’m afraid of what would have happened if they did.”

“Nothing would have happened. They wouldn’t have done anything else.” The lie tastes bitter on my tongue. I could have died if Ryder and Jaxon hadn’t shown up.

Ryder shakes his head. “I’m not talking about them. I’m talking about *me*. I would have killed them in the worst possible ways, Madison.”

*He said my name.*

I pause and blink a few times. “Wh-what? You can’t be serious.”

Ryder leans in until his face hovers above mine and his warm breath puffs against my lips. His lips draw back in a snarl. “I would have killed Mickey, then Kyle, for hurting you. Possibly even drag Mickey’s dead body behind my car. Only I get to mess with you. Only I get to hurt you. Do you understand?”

I freeze and stare at him, wide-eyed.

*Did he really just threaten to kill someone?*

Shaking out of my shock, I shove him again. Ryder’s grip on my wrist tightens until I wince.

“Of course you had ulterior motives for helping me. Go away, Ryder,” I growl.

He grins like he’s won some game I didn’t know we were playing. He leans in closer until his mouth is right beside my ear. “Only I get to watch

you crumble under my words. You always look so goddamn pretty when you're flustered."

I grind my teeth together. "Fuck. You."

"Next time Mickey touches you, I'm taking a pound of flesh." Ryder chuckles and tucks an escaped lock of hair behind my ear. He cocks his head as he looks me over, searching for more injuries Mickey may have caused. "Next time someone bothers you, scream."

"Scream?"

Ryder drags his knuckles along my cheekbone and catches my chin between his fingers. "Scream, little sister, and I'll silence them all for you."

My heart beats faster as his words sink in.

Ryder lets go of me, and his features smooth out to the familiar blank expression. He turns and walks away like he didn't just give off confusing signals.

He talked to me.

For once in a long time, he didn't treat me like the pesky ghost he's mad at.

Maybe Minnie was right the whole time. Patience. He'll eventually come around.

The butterflies in my stomach return, along with the confusing feelings I've had toward him for some time now. I shake my head before my thoughts steer in an unwanted direction.

I need to keep my promise. No boyfriends. No kissing. No marriage. Especially with my stepbrother.

# CHAPTER SEVEN



## RYDER

*Present day (October 11th)  
One hour after Hellfire Night*

### “A GOOD DAY TO DI3” ARANKAI

“If I can go one day without smelling the stench of burned flesh, I’ll die a happy man,” Aiden says. He tosses an arm into the bonfire we built in the large front yard of our makeshift home base in an abandoned neighborhood. The flames lick at the flesh, eating away at it until it melts from the bones.

Hawk points at Aiden with a cigarette tucked between his fingers. “Quit lying, bro. You live for this shit.”

“What?” Aiden gasps and lays his palm over his chest in mock disbelief.  
“That’s a bald-faced lie!”

I roll my eyes and light a cigarette.

It’s always an argument between these two. I get it. It’s friendly banter, but Jesus, they go at each other’s throats every hour about something. Whether it’s who’s chopping up the body, who gets the first kill, or who has to stay at the mansion to watch the captives. Now it’s about the cleanup.

I scoff.

Typical.

“I call bullshit,” Hawk says. He inhales a drag of the smoke, then releases it with a heavy breath. “If you don’t want to discard the bodies, then why do you keep going on about wanting to kill people?”

Aiden picks up another bloody arm and points it at Hawk. It’s almost comical as the stiff fingers jab in Hawk’s direction, like it’s an extension of Aiden. “It’s the killing that’s fun. Smelling cooking dead bodies is another thing, ya ass.”

“That’s enough, guys,” I say. I knock my black combat boot against Kyle’s dismembered torso and take a long drag from my cigarette as I mentally prepare myself for lifting the body part. “Someone help me with this fucker.”

Aiden clicks his tongue, tosses the arm into the fire, then meanders to me. He shoves tendrils of his silver hair off his forehead, not giving a shit about smearing blood and whatever other grime into the locks. “Why isn’t Jaxon here helping us, anyway?”

“Because he’s busy fucking his wife. That’s why,” Hawk says from the side of the bonfire.

I shoot a warning look in his direction as I prop my cigarette between my pierced lips. Then I softly count to three before Aiden and I pick up the heavy torso.

I never knew how heavy a dead body was until my friends and I started going down our list of people to kill. No matter how many times we do this, the deadweight is still a surprise.

It’s not like we’re killing every day, anyway. Hellfire Night happens once every five years. Last night was our first time experiencing it as adults. My stepfather made the whole experience a living hell when I was a teen—fitting, considering the name of the event. Jerry kept calling me a worthless pussy because I vomited after seeing a dead body for the first time.

But as adults? I'd say it was a little more enjoyable.

Aiden grunts as we toss the body part into the fire, then claps his hands together to wipe off the blood and dirt.

"Not gonna lie, you guys," Aiden says with a sigh. His expression sobers as he places his hands on his hips and gathers his next words. "I'm kind of jealous of Jaxon, and not for the reason you think."

Well, that's out of the blue.

Hawk and I share a look, then turn to Aiden as he stares at the fire with longing. We're talking about our sisters, for Christ's sake. He can't seriously be jealous of Jaxon's relationship with his sister?

"I like how he doesn't give a flying fuck what anyone thinks." Aiden pulls out his vape and draws in a long inhale of whatever flavor he chose for this week. "Love is love, right?"

Didn't Aiden tell Jaxon he's weirded out by his relationship with his sister? What changed in such a short time?

Aiden drags in another lungful of the sweet vapor and blows it out with a shake of his head. He turns to us, his lips flattened and eyebrows pinched together, which is mildly concerning because he always jokes around and smiles. "I keep thinking about what I'd do if I fell in love with Nova." A strange look passes over his face before he locks it away. "You guys have sisters. What would you do if you caught feelings?"

Hawk snorts. "It'll never happen."

"So you're telling me you wouldn't fuck your hot-as-hell sister?" Aiden jabs his tattooed finger in Hawk's direction.

Hawk waves his hands by his blond head, clearly frustrated about this conversation. "No! What the fuck?"

"Technically, she isn't even your sister. She's adopted," Aiden says. "So you still wouldn't get your dick wet with her?"

"Same applies to you about your foster sister. Would you fuck her?" Hawk snaps.

Aiden's mouth slams shut.

"Exactly, fucker," Hawk says with another wave of his hand.

I wander to the cooler and grab a beer from the ice. I pop off the metal cap and toss it aside, then sip the cold beverage while I watch my friends argue. My thoughts center on Aiden's question, wondering what I would do if I caught feelings for my stepsister.

I've had a crush on her since we were pre-teens, feelings for her that are sick and wrong. I can't be around her for a second without my dick getting hard as I secretly check her out. But she's my sister, for god's sake.

So to answer Aiden's question: Nothing. I would do absolutely nothing as I tried to get past those feelings. I've already been doing it for years now.

Besides, even if she weren't my sister, why would I want to be with someone who ran with the crowd who made my life a living hell in school? Why would I want to touch someone whose father had no problem laying his hands on me while making me lose the will to live? My friends are the only reasons I've stuck around this long.

*That's a lie. Madison has helped, too,* a tiny voice whispers in the back of my mind.

"Come on," I say to the two jokers. "We still need to burn the rest of the bodies so I can go home."

After graduating high school, I left my stepfather's house and moved into an abandoned mansion in this neighborhood. It's been a nice break from being under Jerry's thumb, but it gets lonely as shit. Even when a woman warms my bed for the night, I still feel alone.

Aiden smirks and waggles his eyebrows. "Wanting to get home to the sister so fast, I see."

I scoff. He knows I'm not going to Jerry's house, where Madison still lives. "If you're so dead set on fucking a sister, you should fuck yours. Now shut the hell up and help me with the rest of the bodies."

"Ooh," Hawk sings, then bites his bottom lip while looking at Aiden. "Daddy Ryder is out to play. You better behave, Aiden, or he'll whoop your ass."

I shake my head and down the rest of the beer.

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I kick the front door shut behind me. The entryway is dark, not because the sun hasn't risen yet, but because I don't take off my tinted helmet. I pull off my gloves and toss them onto the catch-all table next to the door.

*Home sweet home.*

It's not much, but it's been a safe place for me. The mansion I chose for myself was furnished by the last owners, who didn't bother packing up

before they left in fear of being targeted by the Exiled.

I stride through the hallway and cut through to the living room. Before I left last night for Hellfire Night, I left the TV on with music playing. It's something I've done since day one of living here. It helps ease the loud silence every time I return.

I take off my helmet and set it on the large kitchen island. My stomach growls as soon as I approach the fridge to search for something to eat. I frown at the lack of options: spoiled milk, food that's molded and becoming sentient, and a couple of beer bottles.

Huh. I thought I had stocked the place, but clearly, I didn't.

I snatch the beer bottle, pop the cap off, and take deep swallows. Then I head upstairs and don't bother turning on the light when I walk into my bedroom. The beer is already halfway gone, and I'm still tense, all thanks to Aiden's question repeating in my head.

Would I fuck my sister?

I slam back the rest of the beer in two swallows.

What the hell went through his mind to ask something like that?

I discard the empty bottle on my dresser, intending to throw it out later when I get up for the day. A quick glance at the rest of the empty bottles tells me I won't do it.

I need to clean up my place, but I don't have the time or energy. Maybe sleep will help pull me out of this funk I've been in for years.

I kick off my shoes and strip to my boxers, then crawl into my unmade bed. Lying on my stomach and hugging my pillow, I wait for sleep to come. It never does, and I'm not surprised. There's only one thing that helps me fall asleep faster, but it feels wrong to do it, especially after Aiden's question.

I pop an eyelid open and glare at the nightstand beside my mattress.

It's not like my best friend will ever know about it. He's not a mind reader. Shit, he never noticed the longing in my gaze as I stole glances at my stepsister while in school.

Since sleep won't come and my cock is hardening at the thought of Madison, I grab my phone, then settle back on the mattress. My thumb immediately taps the TikTok icon, and I scroll for what feels like forever. Time is nonexistent when I'm on this godforsaken app. When a video doesn't hold my interest, I scroll. Video after video plays.

None of them is what I'm looking for.

I scroll to the next one, and “Little Sinner” by Satan’s Priest plays, though it’s been remixed to make it more sexual, with heavy bass and slowed verses. Another song’s beat bleeds into it and creates a mood the Lara Croft cosplayer captures on screen.

Jackpot.

The camera pans from the woman’s knees and slowly glides up to her waist. Her face isn’t in the video, but she has the curves of a goddess, reminding me of a certain somebody in my life who I wish I could forget about. She plagues my thoughts far too often. My hands twitch, itching to reach through the screen and grab her wide hips to pull her closer to me. Her apron stomach begs to be squeezed. Her shorts ride up her thick thighs, accentuating her outlined pussy, leaving nothing to the imagination. Not that I’m complaining, because Jesus fuck, she’s sexy.

More blood rushes to my cock.

The woman in the video sways her hips to the beat of the song, her barely covered breasts bouncing as the camera pans to them. My heart picks up its pace as I wait with bated breath for her face to be revealed, even though she wants to remain anonymous.

Then the video restarts, and the lead singer’s haunting voice sings about his little sinner.

My jaw clenches. No matter how much it pisses me off that I can’t see her face, I watch the video until it starts for the third time. I shove my boxers down my hips, freeing my painful erection. A bead of pre-cum wells from the pierced tip, and I smear it over the head as lube.

This is the perfect video to create a fantasy I’ve imagined hundreds of times.

The video replays countless times, and with each pass, my dick gets harder. I spit in my palm, then fist my cock with a low groan. My front teeth dig into my bottom lip as I stroke my shaft and picture the woman as Madison. Her wide hips sway, and I imagine what it’d be like to hold them, to bury my fingers in her soft skin while I make her ride me hard and fast. The fantasy bleeds into another where she’s on all fours and I’m behind her. I imagine how good her ass looks, clapping while I pound into her and tease her asshole with my thumb.

It’s my stepsister’s pleasure-filled face taking the place of this faceless woman. How her curvy body bounces beneath me as I roughly fuck her with the intention of filling her with my cum. I imagine her whining and

telling me not to come inside her when she knows damn well I plan on doing it anyway.

“Fuck,” I breathe out.

My hand flies faster on my cock, working toward the end goal and slowing only enough so I don’t come. I edge myself until my balls ache from the need to release all this pent-up tension. It’s something I do often, making the orgasm ten times better than if I stroke myself for a quick nut and a lousy climax. I’ve slept harder since I started doing this, and it’s become a habit of mine. Even when I hook up with a woman, I edge the both of us until she’s sobbing and begging for release.

Loud moans spill out of me as I chase my orgasm. I picture my sister beneath me, her eyelids hooded, fuckable lips parted as she screams my name. I tighten my fist until I’m strangling my dick, all to make it feel like I’m fucking Madison’s tight pussy. Her nails would scratch down my back as I showed her no mercy for all the years of sexual frustration. She’d claw at me and scream for me to slow down, but I have a feeling my sister would say one thing and beg for another.

“*Fuck me harder, big brother,*” she whispers into my ear.

A strangled noise escapes me, and warm cum jets out of me in pulses. It oozes down my fist and gathers at the base of my cock. Low groans well in my chest as I ride the wave of my orgasm, all while imagining my seed filling my sister’s cunt until it leaks out of her.

My hand pauses when everything fades and I’m left on a high. Time passes, and it takes the last bit of energy I have to grab a Kleenex from my nightstand. After cleaning myself, I toss the tissue into the trash bin beside my bed and roll onto my stomach.

What would it be like to give in and make Madison mine? As my eyes slip closed and sleep takes me, that’s all I can think about. She’d likely look at me in disgust. I wouldn’t blame her. These desires are fucked-up and wrong. It would be for the best if I never got with her. I’d only ruin her.

# CHAPTER EIGHT



## RYDER

### *“CODE MISTAKE” CORPSE, BRING ME THE HORIZON*

I nurse the cup of coffee I brewed after catching a couple hours of sleep. I sit in my usual seat on the back porch, facing the woods. The sun is at the highest peak of the day, but the trees in my backyard block out the majority of its rays so I’m not blinded.

Sightlessly staring at the dense foliage as I wake up, I reflect on the last twenty-four hours during Hellfire Night. It’s a blur. It was a night full of torture and murder. But one thing stands out from the rest.

I wince at Aiden’s question from this morning replaying in my head like a goddamn broken record I can’t seem to stop.

*“Would you fuck your sister?”*

The answer is a strong *no*. I’d rather stick my dick in a wasp nest than do anything with Madison. Just because I stroke my dick to the thought of her doesn’t mean I forgot about her hanging out with those assholes in high school, or about who her piece of shit father is.

The back door slides open, drawing me out of my thoughts. I don’t need to look to know who it is. Hawk’s large, familiar form steps into my periphery and sits on the lounge chair beside me. He kicks out his legs, folds his arms behind his head, and relaxes with a soft sigh.

“Jaxon texted me earlier,” he says. “Mickey’s dead. The bastard went to Jaxon’s home and tried to kill him and Dahlia.”

My eyebrows rise up my forehead as I turn my head toward Hawk. He continues staring at the woods as though the forest put him under a spell too.

“Is she okay?” I ask.

I know Jaxon is fine. He’s always been the type to bounce back from any injuries. It’s his half-sister we all protect and worry over. It’s been that way since middle school.

Hawk smirks at me. “She’s fine. Jaxon killed Mickey with a sourdough she made earlier this morning. Can you believe it?”

“You’re shitting on my dick.” My imagination runs wild as I picture how Jaxon could have used the bread to kill someone. “How the hell is that possible?”

Hawk shrugs. “Don’t know. I didn’t ask, but I believe him. Jax has always been”—he tongues his cheek as he considers the right words for our best friend—“creative with how he hurts people.”

I nod, fully agreeing with him. Call him John Wick because that bastard can kill a man with a pencil if he really wants to. If anything, he surpassed the movie character by killing Mickey with sourdough.

“Do we need to do cleanup?” I ask.

Hawk nods. “Aiden is already on it, but we’ll need to join him soon. Jaxon doesn’t want Dahlia around the dead body, so he took her out on a date as a distraction.”

I can’t be mad at my best friend for protecting his girl’s mental health. I first saw a corpse at the ripe age of seventeen when my stepfather took me to Hellfire Night to prepare me for what was to come. A man ran toward him, and I’d held my breath, hoping he would kill my stepfather, but the

barbed wire on Jerry's bat sank into the man's face and ripped it off in gnarly chunks. When he fell to the ground, Jerry beat him until he was nothing but bloody scrambled eggs. Seeing dead bodies changes you. It changed things for me, anyway.

I down the rest of my lukewarm coffee and stand. "Let's get this over with."

Hawk follows me as I head inside. I set my empty mug on the counter and grab my leather jacket, gloves, and motorcycle helmet. Hawk's helmet sits beside mine, along with the keys he tossed on the counter.

We don our gear and ride to Jaxon's house on the other side of the abandoned neighborhood. One of my favorite songs blasts through the speakers in my helmet, drowning out any thoughts. Riding has always been my happy place. It's the closest I can get to the feeling of flying. Controlling a powerful machine that can kill me creates an adrenaline rush that never dulls, no matter how many times I ride.

As soon as we pull up to Jaxon's house, Aiden shuffles out the front door, ass first, dragging Mickey's dead body outside. I park my bike, remove my helmet, then help Aiden move the body.

"I'm chopping him up," he says as we move the corpse onto the dead grass. "I've been dying to fuck him up for years."

"Welcome to the club," Hawk calls as he strides toward us. He lights the cigarette hanging between his lips.

I drop Mickey's legs and straighten to my full height as I eye his mutilated body. Blood stains the fair skin at his throat where it's been slashed. The cut isn't clean, like what a knife would do. I wonder if Jaxon somehow used the sourdough to slash Mickey's throat. The fucker barely has a face because of how badly Jaxon bashed it in.

Hawk stands beside me, smoking his cigarette and staring at the corpse with the same flat expression I'm wearing. Aiden stares at the body for a good minute with a scowl before he kicks it multiple times, each thrust of his leg rougher than the last.

I don't need to question him about why he's doing it.

Something happened to Mickey that made him feel the need to hurt others, but I don't care enough to find out. It would humanize the asshole, and I don't have it in me to feel sorry for whatever trauma he went through. People like Mickey are full of hatred that rots them from the inside out. He got what was coming to him, and I couldn't be any happier about it. It's just

unfortunate I wasn't there when Jaxon killed him so I could watch the terror screwing up Mickey's face as he realized he was going to die.

"I'm guessing Jaxon slashed his throat open with the bread," Hawk says, voicing what I was just thinking. "Who knew sourdough could be used as a weapon?"

Rigor mortis already set in, stiffening Mickey's corpse, which doesn't budge all that much from the brunt of Aiden's kicks. I part from my friends and walk to the shed full of tools behind the large house. The door creaks as I open it, and I'm met with the aroma of sawdust and mildewed wood. Chains hang from the ceiling and gently sway in the wind blowing inside the structure.

I search through the tools and find a shovel, then a chainsaw. Even though Mickey is dead and can't feel anything, I still want his corpse to be taken apart in a gruesome way. He doesn't deserve to be hacked into pieces like all the rest of his friends. Knowing Aiden, he'll want to use the shovel first, since it'll be bloodier and more gruesome. Mickey deserves nothing less.

I head back with the shovel and toss it near Aiden's feet, then retrieve the chainsaw. Aiden shoves his fingers through his hair as he looks between the two before smiling brightly at the shovel.

Yup. I knew it.

I light a cigarette out of habit and suck in the smoke while Aiden starts with Mickey's head. The crunch of bone beneath the shovel is enough to send a shiver down my spine. Coagulated blood oozes out and plops onto the ground beneath the body.

A part of me wishes Mickey was still alive so he could feel the shovel cutting through the tendons and bones in his neck. It would have been the painful death he deserves. Then again, death by sourdough is a hell of a way to go too.

My phone vibrating in my pocket drags me out of my wandering thoughts. I fish it out and tense at the notification on the screen. Dear old stepdaddy, whose name is on my shit list, sent a text. Nothing good happens when he reaches out to me.

JERRY

Come by the house. We need to talk.

My fingers tighten around my phone. When I was a child, those words evoked way too much anxiety and panic, leaving me wondering what I did wrong this time. As an adult, they don't do shit. Jerry can no longer break me like he could when I was a kid. Instead of a will to live, I'm filled with anger.

I can only imagine what he needs to talk about. Possibly fishing for information about the secret society we're a part of. He'll use any dirt I have on members within the society to his advantage. The possibilities are endless, and there's no fucking way I'm helping him.

Choosing to ignore him, I slip my phone into my pocket.

"What does he want?" Hawk asks behind me. He hovers inches away, practically breathing down my neck with a somber expression that's at odds with his usual easygoing nature.

My eyebrows rise. "Reading over my shoulder, hmm?" I shake my head as though I'm disappointed. I don't give two shits about it, but it's fun to tease him.

Hawk's lips curl into a lopsided smile. "Can't help it." The amusement disappears as quickly as it came. "What does Jerry want?"

"I don't know, but it must be important." Because why else would my stepfather, who hates my guts, text me? It's certainly not to join him for a cold one and talk about our latest fling—and yes, the motherfucker is cheating on my mother.

Hawk nods, his gaze slipping past me.

"All right, assholes," Aiden hollers. He tosses the shovel and glares at us. "I need some fucking help. This is taking way too damn long, and I want to go home and visit the family."

I raise an eyebrow. "By family, do you mean—"

Aiden shoves a finger in my direction, and scowls. "Don't even say it."

"Your sister?" Hawk finishes with a smirk.

"You motherfucker," Aiden snarks.

"It's a pass for me. I prefer—"

"Your sister? I fucking knew it!" Aiden cackles.

"Shut the hell up!" Hawk bellows.

Aiden gives him a smug look. "If I remember correctly, you got pissed when she dated Anthony. You wanted to bash his face in and everything."

"Because he was a piece of shit, ya dick! I don't like my sister like that. What's up with you talking about fucking sisters, anyway? Are you

projecting?"

"Not projecting if I'm pointing out the truth." Aiden looks at me with a gleam in his eye, and I internally sigh as I ready myself for him to pull me into their argument. "C'mon, Ry. Take my side on this."

I shake my head. "We have a body to get rid of. We don't have time to argue about fucking our sisters."

Aiden and Hawk fully turn toward me, their eyes wide and lips parted in surprise. I mutter a curse when I realize what I said.

"Fucking *our* sisters, huh?" Hawk smirks and waggles his eyebrows.

I groan and shake my head. "That's not what I meant."

"Sure it isn't," Aiden says with a snicker.

I roll my eyes and grab Mickey's decapitated head by the hair. "Let's get this shit done so I can leave."

"So you can see your sister?" Aiden teases.

I give him a warning look. "So I can see my stepfather."

Aiden sobers, all the joy leaching from him. I know exactly how he feels. My stepfather sucks the joy out of you and spits you out when he's done. The only positive of being at his house is stealing glances at Madison when she isn't paying attention. I worry I won't be able to resist her this time around, since Aiden's question still haunts me.

It's tempting. Way too fucking tempting, and my will can only go so far until I break.

# CHAPTER NINE



## MADISON

### *"PLAY PRETEND" MARGØ*

**B**eing a cam girl and influencer is exhausting. It's so much more involved than people realize. Outsiders think it's so easy to take pictures and post them. They see a video of me swaying to a Satan's Priest song like it was written just for me. What they don't see is me squeezing into the cosplay outfit and remaking the video hundreds of times until it's perfect.

My aunt almost walked in on me once. I was recording a video while dressed in a cat e-girl outfit, bouncing on my heels to shake my tits for the camera. It would have been an embarrassing moment. Thank god for door locks.

But doing this is what's making me money. Money I desperately need if I want to get out of my arranged marriage.

I drag my finger down my bare chest, pinch my pierced nipple, then cup my breast for the camera. My regular client, CallMeSir69, watches in the private chat. A small moan slips out of me as I squeeze my tit, imagining it's someone else's hand.

"I've been a bad girl, Sir," I say, pitching my voice higher, which is what he likes.

The message bubbles dance on the screen before Sir's text appears.

CALLMESIR69

Have you now? You know what that means, baby girl?

I shyly smile and nod. "You're going to punish me."

That's right. Get my favorite toy out. You know what to do.

Biting back a smile, I reach for my nightstand and grab the bottle of lube and a pink butt plug.

Over the last two weeks while talking to Sir, I learned he's an ass man. He gets off to me sticking things in my back hole—either butt plugs or large dildos I've collected over the last few months. And Sir pays a lot of money every time we're in a private session. Enough for me to get closer to my goal of moving out of my dad's house.

No matter how I tried to seem unappealing to the potential suitors my dad paired me with, Justin agreed to take my hand in marriage. Maybe it's out of pity. Perhaps it's because I don't show interest and Justin enjoys the chase. All I know is I can't stand him, and the thought of having Justin touch me makes me want to puke.

My life's purpose is to join two powerful families by marriage and pop out an heir who will assume my father's legacy. One that's bathed in blood.

I'm not supposed to know what my father does when he isn't working as a middle school principal. He's part of a secret society—a cult, to be exact—and he's a King. Over the years, the power of that position went to my father's head.

I don't want to be used as some object he can trade for his gain. If I have to gnaw off my own leg to escape him and this looming marriage, then I will. In the meantime, I pop the cap off the lube and squeeze the cold liquid onto the bulbous plug's tapered end.

A new message chimes, snagging my attention.

Get on all fours and show what belongs to me.

My face flushes with heat. The idea of belonging to someone completely turns me off. I don't belong to anyone, nor do I want to. That's why I'm trying to get out of this hellhole.

During our sessions, I turn off the regular side of me and play the part he's expecting of me. My body reacts to his words like they matter, even though in my mind I couldn't care less. While I cam for him, I imagine what he really looks like. His picture is a stock image of a man's suit-clad torso, his hand caught mid-motion as he pulls his tie undone, but my mind conjures an image of a tall man with dark hair. He's handsome, maybe even covered in tattoos. He has piercing blue eyes, like I'm looking into a turbulent ocean as its waves crash into a cliff.

The same color as Ryder's eyes.

I shake away the wandering thoughts about my stepbrother. It's not right, imagining him while I'm doing something he'd flip a gasket over.

"I'm so wet for you, Sir. I'm sorry for being a bad girl," I say, playing into the role he's paying me for.

I move onto my knees and give the camera my back. Placing a hand on the mattress to stay balanced, I reach behind and probe my back hole with the plug's tip. My eyes squeeze shut as I push the toy past the tight ring of muscles. As soon as I relax and focus on breathing, it glides in with no issues. A low groan wells out of me as the toy settles into place. No matter how many times I've done this, it's like the first time all over again as my body adjusts to the feeling of being full.

The message alerts ping, one after the other. I blindly reach behind me for my laptop so that I can pull it beside my head and read the messages.

That's my good girl.

Now rub your clit, but don't you dare come.

I pout. "But, Sir!"

Don't give me attitude. Do as I say.

"I don't know how long I'll last."

I reach between my legs and arch my back to give him a better view between my thick thighs. I spread my legs further apart, settling my upper body on the bed and keeping my ass in the air. Double-checking the video

feed on the laptop screen, I ensure he can see the butt plug and my pussy before I rub my clit. Being in this position makes it harder to read his messages. Thank god he doesn't say anything while I touch myself.

My eyes squeeze shut as warmth pools low in my belly. A soft moan spills past my parted lips as I rock my hips and rub the swollen bundle of nerves faster. The butt plug strokes against a sensitive spot. If I don't think too much about it, I could psych myself into thinking I'm being fucked by a man and not by a toy.

My toes curl as I get closer to an orgasm. Sweat beads on my temples as I hold it off for as long as I can.

"I'm going to come. Please let me come." I bite my bottom lip to quiet my noises so my aunt can't hear me. Her bedroom is right across from mine, and I would die of embarrassment if she walked in while I'm like this.

The messages chime with barely any break between.

My muscles contract as I ride the edge of my climax. I should stop, but I can't. The promise of a mind-blowing orgasm is right there for the taking.

Blue eyes pop into my vision behind my closed eyelids. I mentally swat the image away and imagine every girl's wet dream—an older man dressed in a suit, with sharp features.

It's hard to keep the mental picture. The orgasm fades, and I huff. My mind takes the opportunity to shift directions. The mental image turns into someone I've had a crush on since we were kids. He's taller, leaner, dressed in all black, with matching combat boots and tattoos littered all over his body.

Tingles spread through my body, and my inner walls spasm as the orgasm builds.

"Oh, fuck," I moan. My hips rock with more vigor as I ride my hand harder.

The fantasy takes on a life of its own. Ryder's blue eyes flare with momentary surprise when he walks into my room, then narrow as they settle on me. My heart pounds harder as imaginary Ryder looks at me. It's as though he's judging me for being in this position, and for whatever reason, I love it. Maybe it's because he'll then punish me for misbehaving. He'll give me a tongue-lashing or maybe a different kind of lashing . . .

My back arches, and a soft keen slips past my lips as fantasy Ryder stalks closer to me with a pinched expression. His darkened gaze roams

over my body and settles between my legs, watching as I furiously rub my clit.

More messages chime. The first few draw me out of the fantasy, but I slip back into it as I focus on the daydream.

Ryder stops at the side of my bed and tears his gaze from my ass to settle on my face. He strokes his palm down my back and cocks his head, gauging my reaction as his skeleton-tattooed hand drifts to my bottom.

*“Naughty, little sister.”* His deep voice goes straight to my clit. The final thing to break me.

“I’m going to—” I pant and rock my hips faster. “I’m such a bad girl. I’m going to come!”

My speakers crackle as Sir turns on his mic. “Don’t you dare!”

I bury my face in the pillow to muffle my cry as the orgasm rocks through me like an earthquake. Every muscle in my body contracts as I ride out the tidal wave of pleasure while Ryder’s face fills the darkness behind my closed eyelids. His pierced lips curl into a tiny smile, as though he knows a secret of mine and fully intends on using it to his advantage.

Sir groans as he comes. His breaths come out choppy and labored until they even out, leaving the room dead silent.

I wince as I realize what I just did.

Who in their right mind would get turned on by someone who loathes their existence? Let alone their *sibling*?

“Jesus Christ,” Sir says after a moment. Hearing his voice instead of Ryder’s is like dumping cold water over my head and snuffing the last of the burning desire I had left. “Show me your pussy. I want to see your cum.”

Using the last of my energy, I arch my back and spread my ass cheeks so he has a good view of my weeping center. I check the laptop screen, making sure I got it on camera.

“Goddamn. You made a mess, baby girl,” he growls.

I bury my face in the pillow to hide my cringe, and shudder in disgust. *He’s not Ryder.*

*He doesn’t know thinking about my stepbrother made me come so hard.* Shame curdles my stomach.

*Stop thinking about your brother,* I want to scream. If I say it out loud, then maybe I’ll actually listen and avoid this path instead of going down it for the thousandth time.

I peek over my shoulder with a forced smile. “And it’s all because of you.”

It’s a lie, but he doesn’t need to know.

*Remember why you’re doing this.*

“I have to go, but since you were a bad girl and didn’t listen to me, keep the butt plug in until we can chat tonight,” Sir says.

I turn over and sit cross-legged on the mattress. The toy shifts and pushes deeper inside. I suck in a sharp breath at the odd feeling and shift my hips to get more comfortable. “I don’t know if I can do that.”

It’s risky to cam during the day, but even riskier at night when the house is quiet and my aunt is fast asleep. She’s a light sleeper, and she’s knocked on my door too many times to ask if I’m okay. But what I’m definitely not about to do is go throughout my day with this butt plug inside me. I don’t have the best poker face, and Minnie can read me like an open book.

“Not even for me?”

I force a flirty smile to keep up the charade when all I want to do is end this session and soak in the bath. Maybe even take a nap. My body feels like Jell-O, and it’s taking every bit of energy I have to keep my eyes open. “You know I would do anything for you, but I have to be around my family today. I can’t do that when I have a butt plug in me.”

The notification chimes, and a silver block appears in the corner of the computer screen. My eyes bulge at the amount of money Sir sent me.

“I’ll tip you even more tonight if the plug is still inside your tight ass,” he says.

I force myself to swallow around the lump forming in my throat.

*Three hundred dollars.* It puts me closer to my goal. All I have to do is continue playing my part.

I nod. “Okay, I’ll do it.”

“That’s my good girl. I’ll talk to you later.”

The call disconnects, and the private-chat screen switches to the homepage. I sightlessly stare at the screen as I digest our interaction. This is the first time he’s tipped this amount. If he continues paying me this much, then I’ll be out of here in no time.

“Right.” I slip off the bed and stumble at the weird sensation of the plug moving inside me. My teeth sink into my bottom lip to muffle the choked noise in the back of my throat.

This may be harder than I thought.

I shuffle to the bathroom, do my business while praying the plug doesn't fall out, then jump in the shower. After cleaning and drying myself off, I dress for the day in a black skirt, matching shirt, and a light jacket. I head downstairs while mentally preparing myself to pretend like I'm not walking around with a butt plug inside me.

My phone vibrates in my jacket pocket. I pluck it out and open the group text with my best friends.

OLIVIA

The boys are having a Halloween party in three weeks. U in?

NOVA

You know I can't miss it.

Of course I am. Where will it be?

OLIVIA

I overheard Hawk saying it'll be at the creepy cabin in the haunted forest.

NOVA

I swear our brothers are weird for liking that place. I don't care what Aiden says, it's haunted, I just know it.

OLIVIA

I guess it's fitting for the holiday.

Who else will be there?

OLIVIA

ur guess is as good as mine.

NOVA

If it's a Halloween party, I'm guessing there will be a bunch of people there.

Are we dressing up?

OLIVIA

Is the sky blue?

Does the sun rise in the east and set in the west?

Of course we're dressing up, girl! Duh!

NOVA

I call being a sexy nun!

OLIVIA



I think I'll let my outfit be a surprise 😊

OLIVIA

Then I'll dress up as a cat e-girl.

Ouu. Who are you trying to impress?

OLIVIA

No one

NOVA

C'mon, Liv. Dressing up as a cat e-girl is totally eye catching and giving the "fuck me, daddy" vibes. We're besties. Tell usssss

OLIVIA

And dressing as a sexy nun isn't? Who are \*u\* trying to impress?

NOVA

Puh-lease. I just like the outfit.

I snicker and smack into a hard, warm object. I grunt and whip my head up. Large hands settle on my waist, steadyng me before I fall flat on my face and make a fool of myself. My lips part as ocean eyes stare back at me.

"What are you doing here?" I ask as I look up at Ryder.

His expression is as flat as always. Dark brown hair falls over his forehead like a curtain, giving me just enough space to drink my fill of his eyes.

God, how long has it been since I last saw him? Three weeks? I'm not sure, but it's been too long.

He stares at me for a long moment, not saying a word. His hands flex on my wide hips. If I didn't know better, I'd think he wanted to pull me closer to him. It has to be all in my head, though. There's no way he'd want to do something like that.

My cheeks warm when he doesn't let go. Any other time, he would have already released me and walked away.

As if he can read my mind, Ryder's gaze moves down my body. Then he turns and walks away. The spots where he touched me cool, but the

feeling lingers, like the ghost of him still touches me. He puts more space between us, then turns the corner to the hallway.

I don't know what he's doing here. It's been weeks since I last saw him. Maybe he's here to work out?

Ryder spent a lot of time in the gym when we were in high school. I snooped on him sometimes, sneaking away before he could catch me being a creep. Ever since he moved out, he pops by and works out before disappearing again.

Whatever Ryder's reason is for being here, nothing's changed. He's resuming the cold-shoulder treatment and pretending I don't exist. It still hurts like the first time because all I want is a good relationship with him.

Shaking my head, I walk past the hallway and head into the kitchen to grab a light snack. I'll give Ryder a few minutes before I try to sneak to the gym.

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# CHAPTER TEN



## RYDER

### *“ANXIETY” PALAYE ROYALE*

The old grandfather clock ticks away the silent seconds as I sit in Jerry’s office, wishing to be anywhere but here. This suffocating home always brings back the harsh memories of my stolen childhood.

Jerry used to beat me in this office. If I didn’t get to the dinner table on time, he would bring me in here and land a few blows to my gut. If I left a crumb on the counter after sneaking a snack, he’d bring me in here to teach me a lesson.

“*Hitting isn’t okay, no matter the situation!*” he would scream as he beat me for fighting at school.

This man’s hypocrisy is ironic.

It also seriously fucked me up. I got hit as a kid, and it's knocked a few screws loose, so now I enjoy spanking women and calling them filthy names while I fuck them into the mattress. Some of those women leave crying after I finish because it's too much. *I'm* too much. All because of this bastard who sits at his desk, drinking whiskey like it's water and staring at his computer screen, pretending I'm not in the room with him.

I settle further into the leather sofa and drape an arm over the backside. My gaze drifts to the cracked door for the tenth time since walking in here. If I listen hard enough, I can make out Madison's voice. After not seeing her for weeks, I've turned into this desperate simp who needs to hear her voice and stare at her when she's not looking.

My sister is the only reason I still come around. It's fucked up because I want to emphasize that she's my sister, but sometimes it doesn't stick. We aren't related by blood, but we still grew up together.

Madison is my wet dream. She has been for a long time. I've imagined all the different ways I could taint her with my darkness. I want to hate-fuck her out of my system, but my stepsister wouldn't be able to handle me. I'd extinguish her bright flame. I'm a greedy man and I'm often tempted to give in to my desires. The only thing that's stopped me so far is the constant reminder of our familial ties.

If Jerry ever found out about my attraction toward his daughter, he'd finish what he started all those years ago and bury my body in an unmarked grave.

"How did Hellfire Night go?"

I blink out of my thoughts and shift my attention back to Jerry. He's still staring at his computer screen, whiskey in hand. The muscle tics in his jaw, and his meaty fingers squeeze the crystal glass—the only signs that show he's focused on me.

"Hellfire Night was fine," I say.

Jerry breaks his staring contest with the computer and glares at me.  
"That's it?"

I don't allow any emotion to show on my face. The less I show, the better. Any time I express myself, it only angers him. Jerry doesn't scare me anymore, though. Those fears turned to ash and smoke when I turned seventeen and hit my breaking point. I school my face to save *him* from me, not the other way around.

When I don't say anything, Jerry turns back to his computer with a huff and sips his drink. A moment passes before he sets his half-empty glass on the desk. "I heard through the grapevine you killed Stan Richards' son."

My eye twitches.

Word seems to get around in this town. It hasn't been twelve hours since my friends and I burned his body. I wonder who's been watching us. No one ever ventures into the abandoned neighborhood, and no one watched us as we chopped up Mickey's body before throwing him into the fire.

Who in the fuck is snooping where they don't belong?

Jerry eyes me with a curled lip. "That's a problem. You know that, right?"

I frown. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought there were no laws during Hellfire Night."

"It doesn't mean you won't be held accountable for those actions. You killed a King's son. A Lord. That's a big problem to the Exiled society." Jerry bares his teeth when I remain quiet. "I should do the world a favor and slit your useless fucking throat right here. Instead, you'll live here until I can figure out what I'm going to do with you. Do you understand?"

*I'd like to see you try to kill me, old man. If anyone is going to take my life, it'll be me.*

That's what I want to say. Instead, I say, "And what do you want me to do here? You can barely stand my presence."

Jerry's nostrils flare, and he downs the rest of his whiskey. He shoots to his feet and stalks to the wet bar across the room. With his back to me, it would be easy to sneak behind him and snap his neck. It's amusing how he trusts I won't do anything when his defenses are down.

My fingers dig into the plush leather sofa as I imagine how relieved I'll feel when I end Jerry's life. Keyword: *when*. I was too busy torturing Kyle during Hellfire Night—another piece-of-shit high-school bully on Jaxon's list. Time slipped away from me, and by the time morning came, it was too late to find Jerry. Killing him now will put me in hot water that I *really* don't want to be in. He's a King, and if I take him out any time between now and the next Hellfire Night in five years, people will come for my head.

"You'll stay out of my way," Jerry says as he pours two knuckles of whiskey into the crystal glass. "Anything I tell you to do, you will do without argument."

“And if I say no?”

Jerry places the crystal finial back on the decanter and twists around with a snarl. “I know you’re saying that to get a rise out of me, boy, but I’ll bite. If you don’t do as I say, then I’ll destroy everything you love while making you watch. When you’re done crying like a little bitch after losing everything, I’ll bury a bullet in your brain.”

Well, that was disappointing. I expected something more detailed, drawn out, and even a little creative, but it seems my stepfather is fresh out of ideas on how to scare me. Maybe I’m too numb to fear anything or anyone anymore.

Jerry cocks his head and sips his drink as he yearns for a reaction from me. My expression remains blank. I refuse to give Jerry what he wants when he’ll use it against me.

As much as I hate my stepdad, he’s still a smart man, and he’s good at reading people. He’s like a rabid dog. When he catches the hint of blood, he won’t stop until he rips apart his victim. That’s why he’s so good at being a King.

“Those friends of yours?” Jerry slowly smiles, like he won the battle before it even began. “I can take them from you, one by one. Don’t think for a second I’m unable to do so when I have the connections.”

I rise from my seat and adjust my jacket. “You must want something from me. Otherwise, you wouldn’t be threatening me so heavily.”

Jerry’s smug smile falls. “You have nothing I want.”

I nod with a slight curl of my lips. “Sure. Is that all you need from me?”

“So you’re making the rules now, hm? You’re the one in charge?”

A heavy sigh slips out of me as my gaze rises to the ceiling. I search for patience that’s hard to grasp whenever I’m near this vile bastard. “If that’s all, I’ll be on my way.”

“I saw your little friend Jaxon at the party.”

I take three steps, then stop and glare at the door, hating that I can’t leave when freedom is within my reach.

Jerry’s heavy footsteps thud closer behind me. “He brought his sister with him as a gift.” He emphasizes this ghastly information with a pause. “Her virginity was the sacrifice.”

I slowly blink.

I’m sure my stepfather is hoping for a startled reaction to this news. Maybe he’s expecting me to spin around and yell about how it isn’t true. Or

perhaps he wants me to act disgusted. Whatever his reasons, I'm sure he plans to use this new information against me.

When I don't say anything, he says, "You'd do well to remember the friends you keep."

I leave the office with my stepfather's warning chasing me through the halls like a phantom.

If I'll believe one thing Jerry says, it's his promise to take everyone I care about away from me. It's another reason I shouldn't ever give in to my desires for my stepsister—hate-crush be damned. He isn't above killing his own flesh and blood to spite me.

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# CHAPTER ELEVEN



## MADISON

### *"TEAR YOU APART" SHE WANTS REVENGE*

I frown at Carolyn's turned back as she cooks dinner. The aroma of lobster and garlic fills the kitchen, souring my mood further. I prefer when Minnie cooks, not only because she's a damned good cook but also because she acknowledges my shellfish allergy and avoids using ingredients that will send me to the hospital. I keep an EpiPen in the medicine cabinet, but I'd prefer not to use it.

I lower my gaze to my phone as I sit at the table, passing time before I sneak to the home gym. It's been ten minutes and there's no sign of Ryder.

There's a good chance he's already well into his workout and won't notice me peeping.

New notifications flood my Instagram feed. Some commenters compliment the suggestive picture I shared earlier today, while others feel the need to judge me and nitpick my body.

I shudder at the thought of my dad looking at all the faceless pictures and videos I post on social media. The last thing I need is for my father or my fiancé to find out what I do. They'd likely shit a brick. I only show my face on OnlyFans, and that's just because I don't want to put in the extra work to hide my identity. Wearing a mask or worrying about camera angles during an entire stream is too much for me.

My phone chimes with a new text message, sucking away what little joy I had left in me.

JUSTIN

Evening, wife.

I'm taking you out for brunch tomorrow. Please be ready for me at 11, and wear something nice.

I glare at the message.

I can't stand when he calls me his wife. We aren't married yet, and if my escape plan works, we never will be.

I wish I could send a picture of me flipping him off, but Dad would hear about it and scold me. He'd tell me how it wasn't ladylike, then send me to Madam Joan for new lessons. The old hag would make it her mission to find petty reasons to swat me with her ruler.

*You know what?*

*It may be worth it.*

I tap the camera icon and angle it at the perfect spot as I snap a selfie with my middle finger held up. I send the picture to Justin and wait for the message bubbles to appear. Not even ten seconds later, they pop onto the screen as he types out his response.

How lovely. Where's your ring?

Oh. I must've lost it. Oops.

That was a 10k ring, and you lost it . . . ?

Sounds like a you problem.

We'll discuss this tomorrow.

I roll my eyes, but my heart races as anxiety floods my system. Justin is close to my father, and he'll fill Dad in on what I did. Regardless, I don't regret sending the picture and getting snippy. The man is a jerk, through and through.

Dress shoes clack on the wooden floors right before my father walks into the kitchen with a scowl. He ignores me as he approaches Carolyn and lands a small kiss on her cheek, his hand pressed to her lower back.

"Smells good," he says.

Carolyn turns her head with a wide smile. "Thank you, darling. I've been craving lobster these last few weeks."

Dad nods and kisses her on the lips. It starts soft but quickly turns into a full-on make-out session.

Well, this is my sign to get the hell out of here so I don't witness my father ripping my stepmother's clothes off and blowing her back out. I would need therapy if I had to see that. Besides, this is a great moment for me to sneak to the gym room and watch Ryder. Maybe even try to talk to him. About what, I don't know.

I cringe and stand as Dad kisses Carolyn's jaw and whispers something into her ear. She brightens at whatever he says. Probably something dirty. I rush across the large kitchen, and as soon as I pass through the entryway into the living room, Carolyn calls my name.

"Madison? Can you get Ryder's dirty clothes from his room? Strip his bed too. I want my boy to have clean clothes and fresh linen while he's here."

I grimace, then recover as her words sink in. "Ryder is staying here?"

"Your father just let me know he'll be here for a while." Carolyn peeks at me from over her shoulder, a beaming smile brightening her features and making her look a few years younger.

Meanwhile, Dad looks seconds away from exploding in a fit of rage.

Carolyn steps out of Dad's arms. Her dark-brown eyebrows raised on her forehead. "Well?"

"Do I have to do it?" I say. "I'm sure Ryder can take care of—"

"He's busy and can't do it. You're not doing anything and can at least help a little around here." Carolyn sighs and turns back to the pan over the stove.

Dad eyes me with a look I know all too well. He's seconds away from snapping, and I don't want to be on the receiving end. At least he hasn't mentioned Justin. Yet.

Sighing, I leave the kitchen, then go out the back door. The fall air hits me like an arctic blast, raising goosebumps on my arms. I should have put on a heavier jacket before coming out here. I rush down the balcony steps and head to the pool house.

I ease the door open and slip inside. Because it's not attached to the house, it doesn't have heating or cooling, but Ryder always kept a space heater here during the colder weather. He hasn't stayed here in years, so I'm not sure where it is so I can plug it in and start it for him.

When I was younger, I didn't understand why he chose to stay here instead of the main house, but after years of observing him and his interactions with my father, I realized Dad purposely separated my stepbrother from the rest of us. Ryder would creep inside late in the evening to stuff his face as quickly as possible with the dinner the rest of us had earlier. Rarely did he ever linger inside the house, and when he did, my father would drag him into his office.

I can only assume what my dad did to him. It's one of the many reasons why I wanted to get closer to Ryder, because I didn't want him to feel alone. I wanted him to know he had someone in his corner and that he wasn't the only one my father tried to control. It's why I would sometimes leave snacks and a can of soda outside his bedroom door, hoping he'd know that I cared about him.

I draw the blackout curtains away from the window to light up the room. I glance around the space that was transformed into a typical boy's bedroom. Ryder's bed is tucked against the far wall. Clothes are strewn over the floor, and a guitar and amp sit in the corner. Band posters line the walls, giving life to the room. Some bands I know, others I don't.

I grab the empty laundry basket near the bathroom and chuck all the dirty clothes inside it. Even though they're dirty, they still faintly smell like Ryder—amber and cypress, with undertones of stale cigarettes and leather. It's not a scent most people would enjoy, but it still brings a smile to my face as longing fills my chest. It's messed up how much I love Ryder's smell.

Shaking away the confusing emotions, I bend at the waist as I reach for a black T-shirt. The movement presses the butt plug against a sensitive spot

inside me, and my clit throbs. I wiggle my hips to move the toy again as I stifle the groan creeping up my throat.

I cringe at myself. How stupid am I for getting turned on while inside my brother's room? It's weird behavior.

I straighten to my full height and jump at the dull thud as an object falls from the twisted shirt in my hands. Taking a step back, I look at the ground, then tilt my head. A black-on-black skull mask's empty eye sockets look back at me. It's similar to the masks I've seen in TikTok thirst traps.

I snatch the mask from the floor and examine it. My thumb absently strokes the skull's black duct-tape teeth, as though touching them brings some semblance of peace.

Liquid heat pools low in my belly as I imagine Ryder wearing it while shirtless. Guilt squeezes my chest, and the image of him fades.

*Jesus, Maddy. He's your brother. Calm the fuck down.*

Wood groans.

My heart leaps into my throat as I spin around. My hand and the mask fly to my chest. Ryder leans against the closed door, arms crossed over his chest and his piercing gaze on my face. I don't know how I didn't hear him come in.

I take a calming breath and curl my fingers tighter into the mask. "You scared me."

Ryder's blank expression doesn't change. He just stares at me, not even blinking.

*What is he thinking?*

As frightened as I am, excitement rushes through my veins.

*He's looking at me. I'm not a ghost.*

Time seems to slow, and it stretches uncomfortably from the silence. I shift my weight and look away from him. He doesn't need to say a word for me to know I fucked up by being in his room. The more time passes, the more nervous I get. I peek at him, finding him still watching me with the same blank expression.

"Your mom wanted me to get your dirty clothes and sheets. I promise I wasn't going through anything," I say, then hesitantly add, "I'm happy you're staying here."

I bite my tongue to stop myself from admitting how much I've missed him. He may loathe me, but I can't find it in my heart to hate him. Not after all the stolen moments we had throughout the years.

Ryder slowly blinks and eases his head to the side. Dark-brown tendrils of hair fall over his eyes, blocking my view of them.

My hands tremble. If Ryder notices this detail, he doesn't give away that he knows. I lower my gaze to the skull mask, pretending to find it more interesting than my hot-as-sin brother who's watching me like a predator hunting its prey.

"I should go." My voice comes out shaky and weak. *Where's the girl who sent a selfie with her middle finger held up?*

I rush toward the door, which he's still very much leaning against with no intention of moving. I stop in front of him and struggle to swallow around the nervous lump in my throat. My gaze remains on his broad chest, as I'm too afraid to look any higher and find hatred in his eyes. Tattoos creep from the neckline of his black V-neck shirt and twist around his throat, creating demon faces and puffs of smoke.

My heavy breathing fills the silence, and my face tingles from the weight of his silent demand to look at him.

It's all in my head. He doesn't care, and I'm overthinking things again.

"I can't leave if you're standing in the way," I whisper.

A second passes, then another, before he straightens and moves aside. I force my gaze forward when it wants to go to him like it's drawn by a magnet. I open the door and barely feel the cold as it sweeps into the room. Before I can take a step, Ryder slaps his palm in the middle of the door and slams it shut. A scream lodges inside my throat, and I whip my head toward him. His emotionless mask is gone, and his darkening blue eyes pin me in place.

I don't know what I did to deserve this. It's not like I can ask him, because he refuses to open up to me.

Ryder leans forward until his nose bumps into mine. Amber and cypress fill my lungs, and I gulp in deep breaths, greedy to have him inside me any way I can. My legs threaten to give out from under me as I consume my stepbrother's unique smell.

"What?" I squeak.

Ryder holds out his hand. I glance at it, my eyebrows pinching together. His other hand roughly grasps my jaw and forces me to look at him again. A shudder sweeps through me as he holds me in place, his touch burning its memory into my skin.

"What?" I whisper. "Why can't you just talk to me?"

*“Mine,”* he growls.

I black out for a moment. Or maybe my soul leaves my body and I transcend into a different realm meant for the gods. There’s no way my brother just laid claim on me. I’m trying to get the hell out of marrying a man who thinks he owns me, not jump into my stepbrother’s bed because he called me his.

“No, I’m not,” I stammer. Blood rushes to my cheeks as Ryder’s eyebrow rises and his head tilts.

His gaze flicks to my hand, which is still pressed to my chest. “The mask. That’s mine.”

Heat crawls up my neck. “Oh.”

With stiff movements, I ease the skull mask into Ryder’s waiting palm. He jerks it away from me and straightens. I suck in a ragged breath as he brushes past me and strides to the end of his bed. The basket of dirty clothes remains in the same spot. It’s too close to him, and any chance I had of grabbing it is now nonexistent. No way in hell will I be dragged back into his orbit and risk another confusing interaction.

“Leave,” Ryder says. His tone holds no room for argument, and he doesn’t have to raise it to let me know I’m not welcome here.

It grates on my already frayed nerves. How can he continue to dismiss me like I’m nothing to him? I’m tired of Ryder holding this grudge against me, whatever the reason is. My former friendship with Mickey can’t be the only reason.

This started long before him.

I leave empty-handed and with my heart lodged in my throat. I duck inside the house and dash all the way to my bedroom to escape the potential onslaught of questions from Carolyn. She’ll ask where Ryder’s dirty clothes are, then scold me for being disobedient.

I lean against the closed bedroom door and close my eyes. Heat floods my veins as I reminisce about the interaction with Ryder.

His growled word repeats in my head like a broken record.

*“Mine.”*

How could I have been so stupid to think he meant me? Of course I’m not his. He’s my brother, and I’m engaged to a pig who calls me his wife.

*“Mine.”*

I sink my front teeth into my bottom lip as a shiver skips down my spine.

These sick thoughts about Ryder will get me into a lot of trouble. As happy as I am about him staying the night here, I won't go against my promises and the desperate need to get out of town.

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# CHAPTER TWELVE



## RYDER

### *“DANGEROUS” SLEEP TOKEN*

I walk out of the humid bathroom with a towel wrapped low around my waist. Squeezing into the small shower stall brought back so many rough memories I spent years drowning. Being in my old bedroom isn't great for my mental health. It feels like I've been thrown into a suffocating box and buried six feet below with no hope of getting out.

I don't have to be here. It'd be easy to get on my motorcycle and speed back home, where a larger bed calls my name. I wouldn't have to deal with Jerry breathing down my neck and threatening me every chance he gets. The only thing stopping me from leaving is his threat against my friends.

I find a clean T-shirt and pants to change into. The hamper full of dirty clothes sits at the end of the bed where Madison left it when I kicked her

out. The memory of her wide eyes and the pretty pink shade tinting her cheeks pops into my mind. My cock twitches, and I mutter a curse. I got rid of my erection while in the shower. The last thing I need is to chafe myself by rubbing one out again so soon.

But fuck me. Madison looked stunning with fear in her eyes. She cowered before me, clearly intimidated by having my full attention on her. In that short span of time, I imagined all the ways I would have made her scream for me. I wanted to punish her for being in my bedroom.

She said she didn't go through any of my things, but I find that hard to believe. Madison always walked around like the world owed her, like she had every right to things that didn't belong to her. I caught her wearing my T-shirt when we were in high school. I never confronted her about it because that meant speaking to her.

So many confusing thoughts and feelings about my little sister. One minute I want to break her, make her cry. The next minute, I want to make her scream while she bounces on my cock. Then, shortly following that thought, I remind myself how I would break her down until she left my room in tears.

I'm fucked up in the head for having these thoughts and feelings about Madison. I hate the girl, and the hatred alone should be enough reason for me to be repulsed by her. But the crush I've had hinders my ability to nip the problem in the bud.

*"Would you fuck your sister?"*

I cringe at Aiden's question, which seems to echo in my mind at all the wrong times.

I shove my feet into my boots and slip on my jacket. My phone buzzes with an incoming text message. I snatch it from beside the skull mask Madison tried sneaking off with earlier.

I shake my head and read the text message.

HAWK

We're all meeting at Susana's at midnight. Also, how did it go with Jerry?

Well, let's just say I'm now living at his place again for a little while.

The fuck? Why?

I'll fill you in when we meet up later, but keep your eyes peeled for anyone who shouldn't be hanging out in the neighborhood.

ooookay. That's not suspicious at all...

You see a person creeping around, take them to the hideout.

You seriously need to stop with the subliminal shit and just fill me in now.

I've gotta go. If I'm late for dinner, Jerry will lose it.

---

“This smells good, darling,” Jerry says to my mother.

Mom grins at him, delighted by his approval. She waits to dig into her dish, keeping her gaze on Jerry as he shoves a forkful of food into his mouth. At his soft hum, her smile widens and crinkles the corners of her eyes.

I can't remember the last time she cooked. It's always been Mary, and I have to admit, her cooking is far superior to my mother's.

Mary sits beside Madison with a deep scowl as she looks at her plate. She raises her head and gives my mother the stink eye. The two never got along, but they played nice when I was a kid. They pretended to be on each other's good side, but when they thought I wasn't around, they bickered like two old hens.

They were from two different worlds. My mother grew up in poverty, and before she married Jerry, she struggled financially. My father wasn't around to take care of us like he should have been. When my mom was pregnant with me, he left for work one day and never came back.

Mary grew up in a wealthy family and didn't have to worry about where her next meal would come from. She's the complete opposite of her brother, however. He's an abrasive asshole with an ego the size of a planet, while Mary is caring and gives a shit about people.

My mom lost touch with where she came from and became a snobby rich woman who turns a blind eye to her husband beating her child. It's a valid reason for Mary to dislike her—not that Mary knows what Jerry did to me.

Mom smiles at me as she picks up her fork. “How have you been, son? I’ve missed you.”

“Fine,” I say.

It’s a knee-jerk response. No one wants to hear you boo-hoo about how much you hate living. People say they support mental health until the minute you show the uglier parts of your mental illness. They complain about how you’re no fun anymore or how you were more tolerable to be around when you pretended to be happy. It’s something I’ve witnessed repeatedly, which makes it hard to say anything to anyone.

Hesitation freezes my mother’s smile, and she stabs a cubed potato on her plate. “Just fine?”

I recline in my seat and fold my arms over my chest while keeping a blank face.

Jerry raises his head and glares at me, all while noisily chewing his food. Pretty sure he isn’t tasting a bit of what’s on his plate because of how fast he’s consuming it.

I peek at Madison from the corner of my eye as she sits in silence beside me. She hasn’t touched her food, and I expected as much, given the dish my mother made. Madison’s hands rest in her lap with her fingers curled into her skirt until her knuckles turn white. Her discomfort is palpable, and it would take an idiot not to see it.

My mother clears her throat and shifts in her seat as she pops the seasoned potato into her mouth. “So, how long will you be visiting?”

I glance at Jerry. He doesn’t look up from his meal, but I know his full attention is on me, and he will judge my answer.

“A while,” I say.

“Oh?” Glee brightens her face. “That’s wonderful! I’ve missed seeing you around here. Did your sister grab your dirty laundry for me to wash?”

Madison turns her head, and it’s the first time she’s looked at me since sitting down at the table. It’s only a moment before she drops her gaze to her lap.

*Good girl. You don’t want a monster like me.*

“I can do my own laundry,” I say.

Mom scoffs with a playful smile. “Oh, honey, please. No need to do it when I’m more than willing to do it for you.”

Madison scoots her chair back and begins to stand.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Jerry says.

Madison freezes. “To my bedroom.”

Jerry sits back and swallows his mouthful of food. “And why would you do that when you haven’t touched your food?”

“I’m not—”

“Sit down,” Jerry says. “Your fiancé called me and told me about what you said to him earlier. That alone demands a conversation, don’t you think?”

*Fiancé?*

Madison is engaged?

I stare straight ahead at the wall when all I want to do is look at her. Especially at her left hand, where a ring should be. I don’t remember seeing one, but then again, I was too engrossed in watching her expressions.

My little sister is engaged to another man, and that fucking infuriates me. I can’t have her for so many reasons. But none of that stops the rampant jealousy now colliding in my chest.

Another man touches her, hears her moans, and receives her attention. I clench my fists and glare straight ahead.

Madison sits in her seat with her back straight. “Whatever Justin told you, I’m sure he lied.”

“So the picture he forwarded to me is . . . fake? You think I’m stupid?” Jerry says.

“This can wait until later, Jerry.” Mary uses her brother’s same blunt tone.

Jerry turns his glare to his sister. “This doesn’t involve you. I’d keep my mouth shut if I were you.”

“You’re involving all of us by talking about this at the dinner table,” Mary says. I admire her spirit and how she doesn’t take Jerry’s bullshit. “You don’t want our opinion on the matter? Don’t fucking talk about it at the table.”

Jerry’s face turns a dark shade of red, and I just know he’s debating if he should lay his hands on Mary. I’d like to see him try. “I’m the man of the house, and what I say—”

“You’re not the man of the house.” Mary cackles and leans forward to make sure Jerry hears her every word. “You don’t do shit around here. You couldn’t even be bothered to raise your daughter and stepson.”

“Mary,” my mother snaps. “Shut your mouth.”

Jerry's lips flatten. "What I do with my children and how I parent is my business. Not yours." He tongues his cheek. "You're dismissed from dinner. Leave."

"I'm not leaving." Mary crosses her arms over her chest.

"We'll speak about this after I'm done. Leave," Jerry grinds out.

My mother's gaze bounces between Jerry and Mary. Worry exaggerates the lines on her face. She's always hated confrontation, preferring to talk shit about people behind their backs.

Mom shifts her focus to me. "Ryder," she says with a slight tremble in her voice. "Are you going to eat? I made this meal specifically for you."

"Eat your dinner, boy," Jerry says.

My mother's diversion tactic works. Unfortunately for me, I'm now in the limelight.

I lick my front teeth beneath my lips. "I'd rather eat something else."

*Like my sister's pussy.*

Hurt crosses my mother's face, and she glances at my untouched food. "Don't you like lobster tails?"

"Strange," I say.

Jerry drops his silverware on his plate with a clatter. "Eat."

"What's strange?" Mom says. She lays her hand over her chest, already preparing to clutch her pearls for the theatrics.

Mary stifles a laugh by sipping her glass of wine. She knows what I'm about to say because she actually gives a shit about Madison.

I purse my lips. "You made a meal Madison can't have."

Mom turns her attention to my stepsister. Her eyebrows pinch together, and a muscle thrums in the corner of Jerry's jaw as he keeps his scowl directed at me. Madison's back straightens, and her head inches toward me.

Did she really think I wouldn't know about this after years of her reminding my mother she can't have shellfish?

Mom's gaze drifts back to me. "What do you mean?"

I lean forward and shove Madison's plate toward the middle of the table. The glass groans against the wood, filling in the silence. "She's allergic to shellfish."

Realization dawns on my mother, and she pivots to Madison. "Oh, honey." Regret fills her voice. "I'm so sorry. I forgot."

Madison shifts in her seat. "It's fine."

A vein bulges beneath the surface of Jerry's forehead. "And you refuse to eat because your sister can't?"

I fold my hands together and prop my chin on top of them while I rest my elbows on the table. "Yes."

"That's unacceptable," Jerry growls.

I shrug. "Sounds like a you problem."

"Is this what you really want to do?" Jerry's nostrils flare. "Do I need to remind you of what I said earlier?"

He doesn't need to remind me of anything. His message was clear in his office. It's pitiful he wants to use his "power" over me because of something as simple as food. He knows I'm not scared of him anymore. Otherwise, he wouldn't try to threaten me as much as he's doing in just one day.

"I won't eat what she can't have," I say.

Madison fidgets with her napkin, clearly uncomfortable that I'm fighting our parents about her. "It's—"

"No," I say, while I keep my gaze on Jerry. "It's not fine."

Jerry grinds his teeth, loud enough for me to hear from across the table. "Then I guess you'll both go without dinner."

The corner of my lip curls in a subtle smirk. My chair groans against the marble floor as I scoot it back and stand. "Enjoy your meal."

I stride out of the room, ignoring my mother calling my name and Mary yelling at Jerry. It's all white noise to me because I don't care. I leave the house through the back door, and as I walk toward the stairs, I pull out my pack of cigarettes and light one before inhaling the smoke deep into my lungs.

The sun set already, darkening the outside world with shadows. The sky is clear enough for the stars and half-moon to shine, giving enough light for me to see where I'm going. A gust of wind blows straight through me, flinging pieces of hair over my face and into my eyes.

The back door opens, then snicks shut.

I don't need to turn to see who joined me outside. I already know. The wind carries her sweet perfume toward me, filling my lungs. She keeps her footsteps light, intending to sneak up on me. It never works because a part of me is always in tune with her.

With Madison.

I don't know why she came out here. There isn't anything to say. The less attention I give her, the better it will be for us all around. If Madison's father notices her hanging around me, he'll set his sights on her and use her against me.

"How did you know?" she says.

I keep my back to her and take another drag from the cigarette. If she doesn't leave in the next minute, I'm afraid of what I'll do to get it through her head that she doesn't want my attention.

She's soft, while I'm rough.

She's light, while I'm dark.

She's smooth silk, while I'm jagged, broken pieces of glass.

*"Would you fuck your sister?"*

My molars grind together.

Madison huffs. She stomps in front of me and rests her hands on her hips. My gaze slips down her body while I pretend I'm disinterested in what I see. Her thin shirt barely hides her hardened nipples, and her short skirt gives me my fill of her thick thighs and long legs.

Fuck, I want them thrown over my shoulders, squeezing my head as I eat her out. I want them wrapped around my waist as I pound into her pussy, removing all traces of her fiancé and making her completely and utterly mine.

My jaw clenches, but I refuse to look away from her as fear and trepidation creep back into her eyes. I inhale another drag of my cigarette while keeping my expression blank.

*I can't have her. She's my fucking sister.*

"Ryder?"

My attention snaps back to her face.

"Go inside," I say.

Madison folds her arms over her chest and hunches her shoulders to stay warm, but she doesn't back off. Because of course she wouldn't.

I don't trust myself with Madison. It's cold out, and if she hangs around, I might do something to keep her warm. I've always lacked self-control, and my stepsister won't be an exception.

I bite my tongue as she does the opposite of what's good for her. She steps forward until we're nearly chest to chest, and her vanilla-ocean-breeze perfume surrounds me. Blood rushes to my dick, and I hold my breath so her scent doesn't continue its wicked spell against me.

My sister doesn't realize what the fuck she's doing to me. She'd rather poke the bear who's close to losing control. She won't stop until I have her pinned naked beneath me on my bed. Anger swirls in my chest, and my hands tremble.

"How did you know about my allergy?" she asks.

I finish the last of my cigarette and flick it aside, not caring where it lands. Jerry can go fuck himself if he has an issue with all the cigarette butts beside the pool. Madison follows the movement with eyebrows raised and lips parted in surprise.

The corner of my lip curves into a subtle smirk.

God, she's so innocent. Way too innocent for me.

I brush past her, ensuring I don't touch her in the process. It's already enough that I touched her soft love handles earlier today. If I feel her warmth one more time, all bets are off.

I descend the stairs and shove my bedroom door open.

"Ryder!" Madison's racing footsteps get louder as she follows me.

"Wait!"

I step over the threshold and close the door without looking back. It flings open and I turn, glaring at my stepsister as she barges into my room. Even in the barely lit space, I can make out the pink flush on her cheeks and the tip of her nose.

Madison closes the door behind her. "Why did you do it?"

I arch an eyebrow.

"Why did you stand up for me?"

That's a good question, but she wouldn't understand the answer. My hate-filled obsession with her would confuse and sicken her as much as it does me.

I bend so we're nose to nose and stare into her fear-filled brown eyes. Madison sucks in a sharp breath and holds still.

"Leave," I mutter.

Her pupils dilate, and a familiar look crosses her face. It's a look countless women have given me before her, but it can't be because I ordered her to leave.

The corner of my lip curls in a small smile.

My voice alone is turning her on. That detail is dangerous. So fucking dangerous because I can use it against her.

“What?” she whispers. Madison shakes her head, breaking the spell I put her under as she squares her shoulders. “Not until you tell me why you did it.”

Stubborn girl.

Had she been anyone else, I’d have bent her over my knees and spanked her until she learned to do as I told her.

“Leave.”

“No. Why did you stand up for me?”

Her chest rubs against mine, and it’s all I can focus on. Control slips through my fingers, and I’m all but holding on to a thread.

“Get out, sis. This is your final warning.”

She swallows hard enough for me to hear. Her palms press against my stomach and slip up my sides. The move is intimate, meant for only lovers, not a brother and sister, yet it’s got me harder than a rock.

I barely hear Madison’s whisper. “Just tell me.”

A little smile forms on my lips. Madison’s eyes widen, and she steps back while dropping her hands. I snatch her arm and drag her to my bed.

“I warned you.”

“Wait!” She tries to jerk her arm out of my grasp, but I tighten my hold. The hungry beast rises from the dark cage I keep it locked away in. It bubbles to the surface, bringing excitement and a ferocious need to mark her.

My control snaps.

I sit on the edge of the mattress and yank Madison across my lap. She yells and squirms to escape me, but the pitiful amount of fight has me wondering if she really wants to get away from me. I shove her head down and keep my hand there to force her into submission. With my free hand, I flip her skirt so that it pools around her waist. I freeze at the sight before me.

*She’s your sister.*

Madison’s bare ass beckons me to unleash my frustration on her. Not just because she tempted me and refused to listen, but because I now know she hasn’t been wearing any goddamn underwear this whole time.

*She’s your sister.*

I raise my hand and strike her ass cheek. My teeth clench together, and I bare them at the beautiful sight of her jiggling ass. Madison yelps and arches her back to escape my itching palm. Pre-cum leaks from the tip of

my cock at the sweet sounds she makes as she grinds against the erection now straining against my pants.

*She's your sister.*

I land a blow on the other ass cheek. Her fair skin reddens and forms an outline of my hand.

*She's your fucking sister.*

“Ryder!” she shrieks.

I land another blow and rub the same spot to soothe the sting. Madison’s squirming lessens, and she grunts with each spank until little whimpers escape her. My breathing quickens as desire licks at every nerve ending in my body. It won’t take much more to make me come in my pants, and I don’t care if it happens.

*It's her fault.*

*It's all her fucking fault.*

I roughly squeeze her ass and hook my thumb between her cheeks to creep closer to her back hole.

*It won't hurt anyone if I finger-fuck her. She clearly wants me.*

Madison whines and shoves her hips backward to push more of her ass into my hand.

*She's your sister.*

The lust-haze clears enough for me to realize what I’m doing and how wrong this is. I jerk my hand away, then swing it back down to connect with her ass.

How dare she tempt me when I’ve fought this hunger for her for years. How dare my stepsister come into my space, dressed in a skirt with no underwear on, and pester me like I wouldn’t do anything. How dare she reveal these awful and confusing feelings inside me.

I’m not Jaxon. He’s never tried hiding his attraction to his sister, and he’s never cared what people thought, but I give a fuck about crossing lines.

I’d ruin Madison. I’d taint her with the darkness inside me and the need to own her. To hurt her. To punish her. To make her *scream*. I’d use my sister as a fuck doll until she ran from my room in tears. Doesn’t she get it? I’m not good for her.

“You don’t want this, doll,” I say through clenched teeth.

“Please, Ryder!” she cries.

My cock jerks at her pathetic sobs.

I’m at the edge of my orgasm, and all I need—

Madison wiggles against my erection in a weak attempt to get away from me.

“Fuck,” I snarl.

My muscles contort, and I pant through the climax. Warm jets of cum shoot from the tip of my dick and dampen my pants. Bliss fogs my mind, and I ride the high.

Madison squirms on my lap, unaware of what happened. I slide my hand between her ass crack and brush my fingertips over her back hole. I pause when I reach a smooth texture that isn’t skin, then spread her ass apart, exposing her hole to my greedy eyes.

“Fuck,” I rasp. The end of a bright-pink butt plug lodges snugly at the entrance. “Why the hell do you have that in you?”

“None of your business.” Madison trembles and pants. Her thighs squeeze together to hide the toy.

I click my tongue and stop her by shoving her legs apart.

“Let go of me!” she yells.

I pinch the toy’s flat edge and wiggle it. A choked sound slips from Madison, and her back arches. Her ass pushes further into the air and into my hand.

It seems my little sister isn’t as innocent as I thought.

My gaze lowers to her pussy. Thick arousal glistens on her folds, and my softening cock twitches as all the blood in my body rushes back to it. I would give anything to touch her cunt. It would be so easy to sink two fingers inside her and make her scream my name. It’d be easier to make her come so much she’d forget her own.

*She’s your sister!*

I let go of her and shove her off my lap. She’s fire, and I’ve stuck my hands in her flames for too long. Madison squeaks and lands on her hands and knees by my boots.

“Leave.” My voice surprises me, sounding more animal than man.

Madison shoots to her feet and fixes her skirt to hide the little *secret* she thought she could get away with, then raises her chin in an act of defiance. She can pretend this doesn’t affect her, but we both know the truth. Hurt shines in her pretty brown eyes, and for a split second, I regret pushing her away from me.

Her next words burst the momentary sympathy.

“You’re disgusting.” Her chin quivers as she holds back the tears.

A ghost of a smile creeps to my face.

“You’re my brother.” Madison’s lips thin. “Don’t you ever do that again.”

My eyebrows rise. “I warned you.”

Her skin flushes a light shade of pink. I’m not sure if it’s out of embarrassment or anger. Maybe both. She folds her arms over her chest, and steps back, putting more space between us.

If she thinks that will save her from me, she’s in for a rude awakening.

I lean forward as I bare my teeth in a smile. “If you don’t leave in the next five seconds, I’ll have you naked and tied to my bed with your ass in the air. Something much, *much* bigger will replace the butt plug.”

Madison’s eyes widen, and she stumbles back another step. Her lips fall open on choked noises meant to be words. Her gaze drops to my lap, and the pink on her cheeks brightens as she finally notices the outline of my erection.

“Five,” I say.

Madison rips her gaze away from my groin. Uncertainty twists her features and, oh god, knowing about her twisted desires shouldn’t excite me this much. I may be disgusting for what I did, but she’s just as sick for enjoying it.

“Four,” I growl.

Madison stumbles backward, inching closer to the door. Her chest rises and falls with her deep, panicked breaths.

*She’s your sister!*

“Three,” I say through clenched teeth.

She swallows hard, the muscles in her throat constricting from the movement.

*Why is she hesitating?*

*Why isn’t she leaving?*

*Doesn’t she know I’ll ruin her?*

*Would you fuck your sister?”*

“Two.” My fingers curl into the sheets. Adrenaline pumps through my veins at the very real promise of chasing my sister. She’d make me work for it. Maybe even scream as she’s running to safety inside the house.

No one will save her. Not even her precious fiancé.

Before I can utter the last number, Madison spins around and dashes into the chilly fall evening. The door slams against the wall but doesn’t shut

as my sister's retreating figure fades into the darkness.

"Run, little sister," I mutter, knowing she can't hear me. "Stay far away from me because I'll ruin you."

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# CHAPTER THIRTEEN



## RYDER

### *“WASTE” KXLLSWXTCH*

After cleaning up and changing my clothes, I meet up with my friends at Susana’s. The restaurant closed hours ago, leaving the parking lot empty aside from the two familiar motorcycles. Hawk and Aiden—who are still sporting their helmets—turn as I slow to a stop.

Jaxon isn’t here, and I’m not entirely convinced he’ll ride with us tonight. Not that I blame him for ditching us to stay with Dahlia. He’s always glued to her. Especially after he walked in as she was self-harming while screaming. The hospital put her under a 72-hour hold in the psych ward to ensure her safety.

I switch off the engine and knock the kickstand down. It barely touches the ground before Hawk storms toward me. He shoves his tinted visor up,

exposing his narrowed eyes. “I should kick your ass for making us wait hours to learn what the hell you meant by *keeping our eyes peeled*. The fuck is going on, bro?”

I dismount my Suzuki and flip my visor so I don’t have to yell for him to hear me. “Someone’s been watching us.”

Hawk freezes.

“Who?” Aiden says. He stalks to Hawk’s side and folds his arms over his chest.

I shrug. “I don’t know. Otherwise, I would have given you a name.”

“Tell us everything,” Hawk says.

“Jerry got word about Mickey’s death. There’s no way information can travel that fast in just a few hours. Someone was watching.” I purposely leave out the details about Jerry’s plan to punish me for Mickey’s death. It’s not a burden I want to put on them. Besides, I can handle it on my own.

Hawk’s shoulders stiffen.

“The fuck?” Aiden snarls. “I didn’t see anyone at Jaxon’s place while waiting for you and Hawk.”

“There weren’t any fucking cars,” Hawk says. “They would have to be stupid to walk into our neighborhood.”

“What about the cameras?” I ask.

“I’ll check.” Hawk fishes his phone out of his riding jacket and taps the screen with his gloved finger.

Aiden winces.

I raise an eyebrow. “What’s that look for, Aiden?”

He chuckles and rubs the back of his helmet. “I may have forgotten to set up the cameras by Jaxon’s house.”

Hawk sighs and lowers his phone as he looks past me with blank eyes. “You’re fucking kidding me.”

“I’m sorry, okay?” Aiden throws his hands in the air and drops them to his sides. “I got distracted, and it slipped my mind. Shit happens.”

Hawk turns to Aiden and shoves a finger in his direction. “Forgetting to bring beer to a bonfire is a shit-happens moment. This is different, bro.”

“No one’s dead,” Aiden says. “Don’t put that shit on me.”

“Dahlia and Jax almost died this morning!” Hawk invades Aiden’s personal space, his stiff shoulders raised enough to brush against the underside of his helmet.

I step toward them and reach out to yank Hawk away from Aiden. Hawk shrugs off my hand and pushes closer to Aiden. The switch in his mood is concerning. He's good at holding it together, so I'm not sure what's going on, but whatever it is, Aiden doesn't deserve to be the punching bag.

"I want to bitch-smack you so fucking bad, I swear to god." Hawk raises his gloved hand and curls his fingers into a tight fist.

"Do it!" Aiden closes the tiny gap between them, and their helmets clash. "If it makes you feel better, then do it."

Hawk steps back and swings at the same time. His fist crashes against the side of Aiden's helmet. Aiden stumbles to the side, and laughter spills out of him.

"This isn't funny, man!" Hawk roars.

Aiden shakes his head and straightens, his laughter softening. "You're right. It isn't."

"Then quit fucking laughing!" Hawk shoves Aiden. "They could have died!"

"I know!" Aiden yells, his voice catching. Pain flares in his eyes.

I shove myself between them and hold Hawk back from attacking Aiden again. Hawk's chest and shoulders rise and fall with quick, shallow breaths as he scowls at me.

"Check the other camera angles," I say. "See if you can find anyone sneaking around, but don't take this out on Aiden."

The look in his eyes raises warning flags. He wants to punch me next. At the very least, he's considering it. We all deal with anger issues, thanks to our fucked-up pasts, but Hawk keeps his bottled up. He's a loaded gun with a hairpin trigger. I've seen him explode once, and the unfortunate asshole he let loose on almost didn't make it out alive.

A motorcycle's scream from down the road breaks through the tense silence. Hawk shakes me off and stalks away to put a generous amount of space between us. While he paces near the restaurant's front doors, he taps at his phone's screen, probably investigating the other camera angles.

"I'm sorry," Aiden mumbles.

I turn to him and cup the sides of his helmet, forcing him to look at me, but he keeps his eyes downcast and refuses to meet my stare. His happy-go-lucky attitude is gone, replaced by defeat.

"It's not your fault, okay?" I say.

Aiden nods.

I jerk him closer by the helmet, forcing him to look at me. “Mickey was going to attack them no matter what. We’ll catch the person who ran to the Kings. We’ll take care of them.”

Aiden grabs my wrists and clings to me. His vulnerability twists the organ inside my chest as he swallows hard and nods. “Yeah.”

The motorcycle’s screams get louder until Jaxon pulls into the parking lot and stops three feet from us. Hawk peeks over his shoulder, then turns back to his phone. Jaxon parks and dismounts from the seat.

I cock my head. He didn’t bring Dahlia with him.

Jaxon shoves his visor up as he strides toward us, sparing a glance at Hawk. Aiden releases me and steps back. I let my arms drop to my sides, and I watch Aiden carefully as he waves at Jaxon.

“Hey, man.” In a blink, the despair in Aiden’s gaze disappears. He forces cheer into his voice, and life returns to his eyes.

Jaxon nods in greeting. “We riding?”

“Yeah,” I say. “But did you, by chance, see anyone else hanging around your house when Mickey was there?”

“No.” He looks between Aiden and me. “Someone else was there?”

I give Jaxon the same quick rundown. Anger leaches into his gaze, but his posture remains loose, as if he’s not upset at hearing this news.

“I’ll look at the video feed,” he says.

“Hawk is looking at all the cameras placed around the neighborhood. There aren’t any by your house,” I say.

Aiden’s cheery mask slips.

Jaxon shakes his head. “I set up cameras a while ago as a precaution.” He glances at Aiden in understanding, then turns to me again. “Give me a day, and I’ll see what I can find.”

I nod. “Until then, we should be on the lookout for any shadows.”

“Thank fuck for your obsession with Dahlia,” Aiden breathes. He slaps his gloved palm on his chest over his heart. “I thought I fucked up.”

Jaxon shrugs. “You didn’t fuck up.”

Aiden sucks in a calming breath and releases it in a heavy sigh. I nod and pat his shoulder. The pure relief in his gaze is enough to make my insides relax. I wasn’t mad at him because I know firsthand that shit can happen, but Aiden took it hard. If Mickey had hurt or killed Jaxon and Dahlia, Aiden would have carried the burden to his grave.

We part ways and head toward our bikes. I've been dying to ride with them so I can clear my head. After the shit that's been happening the last few days—not just physically, but mentally—it's needed.

Hawk strides toward his bike, then changes direction at the last second. He stops beside Aiden and says something I can't hear over the engines. Whatever he says is brief, but it's enough to make the latter's posture more relaxed. They playfully swat each other before Hawk rushes to his bike and mounts it.

I take the lead and ride out of the parking lot with the others following close behind. Once on the main street, I gain speed and fly down the empty road. Wind lashes me, and the familiar stomach-drop feeling is enough to chase away the numbness I've been dealing with since I was a kid.

The only time I feel alive is when I ride. The adrenaline pumps through my veins until it's almost unbearable. *I feel* so much. If someone were to examine my head, they'd find how much I love chasing a high that drugs can't touch.

Despite knowing the rope can snap or the parachute might not deploy, people still bungee jump and skydive. They're all chasing the exhilarating feeling of death on the horizon. The same can be said for riding a sports motorcycle. A car could hit me, or my tires might blow out and toss me from the bike. I could lose control while going well over one hundred miles per hour. Shit, I could accidentally hit a pothole, go flying, and become a goddamn pancake.

That's why I do it. The constant threat of death gives me the adrenaline rush I crave. It makes me feel so fucking alive.

*Madison . . . She does the same thing for me.*

The realization hits me, and I nearly lose my balance as I turn onto another street.

What happened earlier tonight is perplexing. No woman has ever given me the same thrill. Spanking her and briefly touching her brought the same adrenaline and endorphins, not just because she's my sister, but because she's off-limits. Madison is engaged to another man. Her father would kill her, then me, faster than I can blink if he found out I touched his daughter.

*She's your sister.*

And that's part of the reason why I loved touching her, and for years jacking off to the thought of fucking her. I'm fucked in the head because of

it. It's like placing candy in front of a toddler and demanding they not touch it.

I mentally shake away the thoughts and focus on riding.

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It's three in the morning by the time I return to Jerry's house. As I sit outside after cutting the engine, I tip back my head and aim my tinted visor toward the night sky. I close my eyes and focus on breathing. The high from riding is already fading, allowing room for the numbness to spread through my body until I can't feel anything anymore.

I prefer staying right where I am for the time being. As much as I want to crawl into bed and sleep for a week, I don't enjoy being anywhere near Jerry. His presence is a toxic gas that clings to every corner of the home.

It doesn't help that Madison lives here as well.

The ghost of her soft skin and the burn in my palm from spanking her choose this moment to return. Her screams and pathetic whimpers echo in my mind. It's a direct shot of lust straight to my veins.

I mutter a curse. I have more important shit to focus on, like who the hell was watching Jaxon kill Mickey and how I can take care of them without the Exiled society coming for my head. But no. I'm stuck on my stepsister and the burning need to feel more of her. To hear more of the needy sounds she makes when she's turned on.

I barely register getting off my motorcycle and walking into the house. All the main lights are off, except for a small lamp in the living room. The place is quiet while everyone sleeps, so my heavy footsteps are louder in my ears.

I blink and I'm standing at Madison's bedside. She's fast asleep, curled on her side beneath the duvet. One long leg pokes outside of the blanket, with the comforter tucked between her thick thighs. It's fucked up how jealous I am of that damn blanket, wishing it was my head locked within her warmth. My cock jerks as I gaze at her curves. Her silk shorts barely cover the bottom of her ass—a temptation that's almost too hard for me to resist.

How did a girl like her worm past all my defenses? How was she able to get under my skin and stay there this whole time? I've worked so hard to

shut people out. I did everything I could to close off my emotions, and yet this little bitch gets a rise out of me every single time, especially when she shows me she cares about me.

Why does she have to be Jerry's daughter? Why did she have to be friends with those assholes in high school? To this day, I still don't know if she told me the truth about hating Mickey when I was twelve and developed the crush on her.

Why, despite all of that, do I *still* want her?

I reach out and ghost my gloved fingers along her thigh, toward the bottom of her ass cheek. I pause as Madison shifts and her full lips part with a tiny sigh.

My hand balls into a tight fist.

I cock my head as my fingertips creep beneath the hem of her shorts. My riding gloves prevent me from feeling her smooth skin and warmth, but also from determining if she's wearing underwear.

A tiny whimper spills out of Madison as I slide my fingers between her ass cheeks. It's been driving me wild, knowing she had a butt plug in her earlier. I'm dying to know if she still has it in. I don't think she'd sleep with a toy inside her, but I also don't know what my sister does behind closed doors.

I pause and draw my hand out of her shorts.

*She's my sister.*

What the fuck am I doing? It's one thing to fantasize. It's another to delve into those fantasies.

My fingers curl into tight fists by my sides as I glare at Madison. Once again, she makes me act on my desires when I know I'll only end up hurting her.

I rush out of her bedroom and down the stairs. Once I'm outside in the backyard, I hurry to my room, throw my helmet on the floor, and change into something more comfortable. The only way I can work through these feelings and fight back the urge to return to her room is to lift weights.

These desires for Madison will pass. It'll become manageable once I'm out from under Jerry's thumb. I don't even know why he wants me here. There's something up his sleeve, and he needs me here for it, but I don't know if I can wait until the next Hellfire Night to kill Jerry.

Not if I have to be under the same roof as Madison. She's the thrill I've been dying for, and I'm about to jump without a parachute.

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# CHAPTER FOURTEEN



## MADISON

***“BABYDOLL” ARI ABDUL***

After running out of Ryder’s bedroom and soaking in the bathtub with Epsom salts to soothe the sting, my ass still hurts. I thought the soak would have eased the ache, but the skin is hot to the touch. Not to mention the handprint-shaped bruises I’ve been staring at for the last thirty minutes. I’ve been in front of the mirror since I woke from a concerning dream.

I’m just sexually frustrated. That’s all this is. Give it another hour and I’ll forget that I dreamed about Ryder stopping me from leaving his bedroom, then stripping me and tying me face-down on his bed. It felt so real as he yanked my waist to raise my bottom, pulled the butt plug out, and shoved his cock inside my ass.

I should be way more worried than I actually am right now, but no one will ever know about these sick thoughts. He's my brother, and it's wrong to get turned on by him. Blood or not, we're still family.

It's something that should have me running for the hills.

In a way, I *am* nervous because I'm torn about how I feel. Maybe he said those things to get me to leave his room—and it worked—but no amount of reasoning can get around his erection.

Goosebumps scatter on my arms at the memory of Ryder's cold smile when I told him he was my brother after he shoved me off his lap. His normally bright-blue eyes had darkened with arousal, and his grin promised wicked things. It was so unlike him. He's never looked at me like that. He hardly looks at me at all.

*This is what you wanted*, the tiny voice in the back of my mind whispers.

I frantically shake my head and race out of my bedroom.

It's not what I wanted. I don't want *anyone*. I want the freedom to make my own choices. I want a closer relationship with my brother, like what Nova and Olivia have with theirs. As a kid, I wanted Ryder's attention so I wouldn't feel alone. As a teen, I wanted to have Ryder's back and for him to have mine. As an adult . . .

The ghost of Ryder's rough touch stops me in the hallway. I close my eyes and take calming breaths. In through my nose and out through my mouth.

I recover from the momentary shock and descend the stairs. The house is still dark and quiet as everyone sleeps. I don't ever wake up this early, so it's strange being up before everyone else.

I pause at the threshold of the barely lit kitchen, my lips parting in surprise. Ryder stands at the island, a steaming mug of coffee on the counter in front of him. His bare chest is on display, showing off the large tattoo covering the left side of his body. Inky tendrils swirl over his chest and creep up his neck. There isn't enough light to really make out the details of the piece, but I'm able to glimpse the curvy woman within the smoky swirls of demon faces.

It's wrong to stare at him, to appreciate his lean physique and toned muscles. But I can't stop.

He keeps his head bent, his dark hair hanging over his face like a curtain that closes him off from the outside world. His cell phone casts a blue glow

on his face, and other than his thumb swiping over the screen, he doesn't move.

Last night's events play over in my head, and the sore skin on my ass burns hotter at the memory. This ache is a cruel reminder of how the lines blurred in the snap of a finger.

If I pretend what he did never happened, then maybe Ryder will play along. What's the worst that can happen? He goes back to treating me like a ghost?

I creep past him so I can make tea. Every muscle in my body tenses, and I'm hyper aware of every noise—or lack thereof. I pull the box of tea bags from the cabinet, followed by my favorite pink mug. Purple ghosts hover near the text that reads Mean Ghoul.

As I make my drink, Ryder doesn't say a word. I peek at him, but he doesn't move, either.

I sift through my mind, trying to call back all the times he's come into the house after waking up. From what I remember, he's never been a morning person. He always slept late and didn't show his face until noon.

I stir in honey to sweeten my tea, then carefully place the spoon beside the sink so it doesn't make too much noise. I bring my mug with me out of the kitchen. There's no way I'm sitting in there and risking another confusing interaction with Ryder. I don't want him asking questions about sex toys or finding another reason to spank me. It's embarrassing enough he knows about the butt plug and saw how wet I was after he punished me.

I wince as I settle on the large sectional couch in the living room. With the lights off, I have a perfect view of the mountains stretching into the distance. The tops of the trees peek over the deck's railing.

I shift in my seat to get more comfortable, then sip my tea and doomscroll on social media. Notifications flood my Instagram—followers liking and commenting on my pictures, and haters attacking my looks and weight.

It used to bug me when people pointed out my bigger size, but I stopped giving a crap about what people think about me. Plus-size women are just as beautiful as skinny women, and the faceless accounts on the internet won't change my mind.

Scrolling through my feed, I come across my friends' posts from yesterday. Nova's picture shows her straddling her older brother's sports

motorcycle. I'm sure she had Aiden take the picture since he never seems to mind helping her out.

A smile creeps to my face at how good she looks dressed in the pink leather outfit. The caption reads: *Do you think he'll let me ride it? \*smirk emoji\* \*kiss emoji\**

I double-tap the image, liking it to show my support, then type out a comment saying, *I think you'd need some lessons first, but go for it!*

I scroll down, and Olivia's most recent post pops up. She's standing in front of a fountain, wearing a tiny black dress that accentuates her curves. She peers over her shoulder with a sultry expression, and I don't think Hawk was the one who took this picture. They don't have a close relationship. He'd likely burst a blood vessel if he saw her in this tiny outfit. That thought alone brings me so much joy. I'm all for my friends doing what they love, despite their brothers' opinions.

Olivia's caption reads, *No thoughts. Just vibes. \*sparkle emoji\**

I double-tap the image with a huge grin and comment, *These are the vibes I live for.*

I love my friends so much. They got me through school and the hell I went through with Madam Joan. When Mickey stole my first kiss, it was Olivia and Nova I ran to. They were so angry about it that they keyed Mickey's car in the school parking lot. To this day, he doesn't know. He shifted the blame to Dahlia and cornered her in the girl's bathroom when her brother wasn't paying attention. I didn't witness Mickey doing it. Otherwise, I would have stopped him. I'll never forget hearing about how Jaxon barged in there when he heard his sister crying.

I wince at the memory.

I miss the sleepovers and talking shit about Mickey and his friends. We always concocted plans to embarrass the jerks in front of the school, but we never followed through. What happened to Dahlia was proof enough of that, and it was all my fault. If I hadn't gone to my best friends about what happened, they wouldn't have keyed his car.

I roll my lips in as I type Dahlia's name into the search bar and check out her profile. Aside from her interactions with Jaxon, Dahlia has always kept to herself. Over the years, I've longed to reach out to her and become friends, but Jaxon scares the living shit out of me. Anytime I tried approaching Dahlia at school, he stood nearby and glared at me.

Dahlia's profile pops onto the screen, and her recent post is a selfie with Jaxon behind her. His chin rests atop her bright-green hair, his arms curled over her shoulders and his hands resting in the middle of her chest. Dahlia's huge smile crinkles the corners of her eyes. Even Jaxon has a slight curl to his lips—something so at odds with his usual glower. His brown eyes are soft and more vulnerable than I've ever seen.

I slide to the next picture and suck in a sharp breath. Jaxon's tattooed hand cups Dahlia's throat, forcing her head back while he kisses her with a smile.

*They're half-siblings . . .*

*And they're kissing.*

I snoop through more of Dahlia's recent pictures and discover her diamond wedding ring and necklace.

"Holy shit," I whisper. "They're married?"

A large body folds itself two feet away from me on the couch. I jump, and my phone flies out of my hands. I snatch the device from mid-air and juggle it before I catch it and place it onto my lap. Ryder doesn't look at me as he stretches out his legs and stares at his phone. It's hard to breathe with him so close to me. Not just because of what happened last night—though it's a big reason—but because he's still rocking grey sweatpants without a shirt. My attention zooms in on the distinct V and the sprinkle of hair disappearing beneath the waistband. I swallow hard at the little veins bulging from his taut skin.

"What are you doing?" I whisper. If I raise my voice any higher, I'm afraid our parents will walk in and find me ogling my older brother.

His thumb pauses on the screen, then resumes. "What does it look like?"

I squirm in my seat. "You have the kitchen to yourself to sit in and drink your coffee. Why are you in here with me?"

"Am I not allowed to sit where I want?"

My lips part, then clamp shut as I mull over what to say.

Ryder can sit wherever he pleases, but I don't think I can be anywhere near him after what happened last night in his bedroom. I'm scared he'll somehow know I touched myself afterward. Or worse, that he starred in my sex dream.

Ryder peeks at me from the corner of his eye. He drags his gaze down my body as I shift in my seat and wince at the sting in my bottom. His icy

exterior cracks as he smirks. “Don’t let Jaxon know what you think about him being married to Dahlia.”

My back straightens, and I sit a little higher. “H-how did you know?”

“You’re not as quiet as you think you are.” He turns back to his phone, his smirk widening.

Heat creeps from my neck to my cheeks. I don’t want to analyze what he said, because it would lead to more questions about what he means. It’s already driving me mad, wondering why he got hard last night while spanking me.

I mentally swat away the thoughts. I’m getting off track here, and Ryder is finally talking to me.

“And you’re okay with that?” I ask.

He turns his head, and the same heated look from last night makes an appearance. “With you not being quiet?”

Fuck. I can’t breathe.

“That’s . . .” I shake my head and lean away to put more distance between us. It doesn’t clear my head as I had hoped it would, because Ryder’s lips curve into a knowing smile. He knows exactly what he did. I grind my teeth. “That’s not what I meant.”

Ryder raises an eyebrow, amusement still reflecting in his eyes.

“You’re okay with Jaxon and Dahlia being . . . together like that?” I say.

Ryder’s face falls, and he locks away his emotions as he turns back to his phone. I hate it when he does this. How he builds an icy wall to close the world out. “It’s not for me to decide.”

“They’re brother and sister,” I say.

Ryder cocks his head as he assesses me with the same perplexed look. “Do you think it’s wrong?”

My head rears back, and I try to force out the immediate answer. Yes, it’s not okay to date your sibling. When I part my lips, nothing comes out.

The corner of Ryder’s lip curves into a slight smirk as he goes back to his phone. He didn’t answer my question, though. He has to be okay with it because why else would he have spanked me like *that* last night? Thick with sexual tension. Squeezing my ass and playing with the butt plug. He got hard and didn’t try to hide it.

My thighs clench together, and I shift my hips to stop the thumping in my clit.

Ryder is in the same room with me, so it's not a great moment to get aroused. I glance toward the staircase, wondering if I should excuse myself so I can handle this alone in my bedroom.

"If you don't take care of your problem, sis, I will." Ryder pitches his voice lower.

My gaze snaps to him, my jaw hitting the ground. "Excuse me?"

Ryder locks his screen and peeks at me with the same hungry look. Gone is the emotionless mask, and I don't know if I can lie to myself any longer.

"It turns you on, thinking about a brother and sister fucking, doesn't it? It's why you're squirming. Or were you thinking about last night?"

My heart bangs against my ribs like a drum.

Ryder leans toward me and rests his tattooed hand on the sofa's cushion, close to my thigh. I envy the damn couch. Having him so close isn't enough.

*He's your brother.*

*He's your brother.*

*He's your brother!*

"How's your ass feeling, doll?" he murmurs with a conspiratorial smile.

I choke on my words and stutter out, "Fine."

Ryder's gaze drags down my body and lingers on the juncture between my thigh and ass. He clicks his tongue and returns his attention to my face. "That's too bad. I'll go harder on you next time."

"Next time?" I screech.

I wince, realizing I could have woken up our parents. Ryder grins, proud that I proved his point about me being too loud.

Lowering my voice, I say, "There won't be a next time."

"We'll see about that." He stands and crowds my space as he moves in front of me. My breath catches in my throat as he bends and places his hands beside my thighs. Shadows fall on his face, darkening his blue eyes.

The way he's looking at me should scare me, but I know deep in my bones I'm safe with him.

Ryder's face hovers close to mine. "Are you still wearing the plug?"

I shake my head.

He doesn't seem convinced. The muscles in the corner of his jaw thrum.

"Are you lying?"

"Why does it matter?"

Ryder's eyes narrow. "If I bend you over and check for myself, will I find the toy stretching your tight asshole?"

My core spasms, clenching around nothing when I'm dying to be filled with—

I mentally shake my head to remove the dirty thoughts about Ryder. I dig my nails into the silky material of my sleep shorts. "You shouldn't be talking about your sister like that."

"Answer the question, Madison," Ryder growls.

"I'm not answering." I raise my chin, putting on an appearance of strength when all I want to do is escape Ryder and the feelings he's bringing out of me. Feelings I'm ashamed of.

Ryder smiles. "Then turn over and show me your ass."

My blood sets on fire, and I'm unsure if it's from anger or lust. Maybe both? "No. You're not the boss of me."

Ryder leans closer. "I'm your brother. I think that's enough authority to tell you to avoid doing something stupid like that."

"Or what?" I snap. "You'll hit me again?"

"Oh, doll. I didn't hit you. I spanked you, and you loved every second of it." He bends forward until his mouth is right beside my ear. "You were so wet. All that cum coated your pretty pussy and thick thighs. No one will ever know. It'll be our little secret."

I squeeze my eyes shut and focus on my breathing so I don't hyperventilate and pass out. There's no way the brother I grew up with is talking about my pussy. When I said I wanted a relationship with Ryder, I didn't mean *this*.

*Liar*, the tiny voice whispers.

My fingers curl deeper into the silk shorts. I turn my head so I can talk directly into his ear. "Aren't you embarrassed about this?" I breathe.

"You're my brother."

"Stepbrother," he growls.

"We grew up together."

"Why did you wear the butt plug?" Ryder asks, completely dismissing what I said.

"None of your business."

"Did your fiancé put you up to it?"

I cringe at the insinuation I would do anything for Justin. He'd have a stroke if he found out I'm a sex worker.

Ryder's eyebrows scrunch together, and he frowns. "Are you doing it for another man?"

My heart hammers faster. I swallow hard and glance away. He catches my chin and forces me to look at him again. Anger brims in his darkened irises.

My silence is digging my grave. Ryder will tell my dad about my side gig, forcing me to give it up. I haven't saved enough for me to leave yet, so that's a fucking problem. Maybe it'll be enough of a wake-up call to the both of us. Whatever's happening right now is wrong. The lines have blurred, and this entire interaction has spun out of control, with little time to turn back.

"Are you talking to other men?" Ryder growls.

"No."

Ryder's expression darkens. "Don't fuck with me, sis."

A shudder rolls through me. I'm so fucked up for enjoying it when he calls me his sister.

I rest my palms on his bare chest, my fingers curling into his soft skin. My plan was to shove him away from me. Instead, I slip my hands behind his neck and ease him closer to me. Ryder's nose bumps against mine, and our lips brush. He sucks in a breath, and something changes in his eyes. It's dark, primal, and hungry.

"Am I not allowed to play with myself, big brother?" I whisper. I hope this is enough to push him away from me.

"Don't say that," he growls. His hand slips from my chin and settles around my throat. He squeezes with enough pressure to tell me he could take my life if he wanted to.

Then the blurred lines fade as he drops his gaze to my parted lips. I hold my breath, silently begging him to kiss me.

Footsteps from the second floor fill the silence.

Ryder's attention snaps back to my face, and shadows creep over his features as he scowls. The walls shoot up and close my access to his emotions before he shoves me away and puts space between us.

I suck in a shaky breath, filling my lungs with oxygen that doesn't smell like amber and cypress. The lust-filled haze parts, and realization slams into me.

The footsteps on the second floor draw closer and descend the stairs. Ryder turns and storms out the back door, likely to hide in his room.

I sag in my seat and close my eyes.

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# CHAPTER FIFTEEN



## RYDER

### *“WEST COAST SMOKER” FALL OUT BOY*

I storm through the back door. The cold weather doesn't kill the buzz beneath my skin or soften my painful erection. The ghost of Madison's hands on my chest burns just as hot as when she was touching me. It imprints itself deep into my bones, branding me for the rest of my useless life. I can't come close to being disgusted about how much I love it. My fingers curl tighter into fists.

My sickness for my sister is deeper than I first thought.

I pass the covered pool and stomp down the stairs to the shadowed backyard. My heartbeat matches the loud thuds of my feet on the wooden steps.

*“Am I not allowed to play with myself, big brother?”* Madison’s breathy voice echoes in my head.

It’s not the question itself that’s making me lose all rational thought. It’s her calling me *big brother* that almost got her face down on the couch, shorts shoved down to her thick thighs, and my cock ramming into her pussy. She didn’t know she was playing with fire and was lucky I walked away when I was seconds from ripping her clothes off.

I shove open the bedroom door and kick it shut behind me. My hand moves to my erection from outside of my sweats, and I groan as I rub the heel of my palm against the length. Realizing what I’m doing, I drop my hand and curl my fingers into a tight fist until my knuckles turn white.

If I continue to stroke myself to the thought of Madison, it’ll feed into the disease that is my obsession with her. I may loathe the girl, but I want to hate-fuck her so badly. I want to make her see what she does to me. How she drives me mad and how her own flesh and blood fucked me up for life.

I want to punish her.

If I can’t fuck her, then I’ll chase her away. I’ll make her hate me as much as I hate her. For her own good if not for mine. If I do anything more with Madison than what I’ve already done, Jerry will find out. No ifs, ands, or buts.

I fish my phone out of my pocket and scroll through my contacts until I find Tiffany’s name. I shoot her a quick message. A few seconds pass before she sends back a text.

TIFFANY

Hey sexy. ;) I've been dying to hear from you. I'll be over soon.

I send her the address and lock the screen.

Tiffany has been on my dick for months, ever since I ran into her outside of Susana’s while hanging out with my friends. She made a beeline right to me and flirted like most other girls do when they see a biker. I wasn’t interested in her, but I still got her number just in case of an emergency. Lo and behold, I now have an emergency.

While I wait for Tiffany, I shower to wash away the memory of Madison’s touch. I scrub my body with soap until my skin becomes red. Beads of blood rise to the surface in a few raw areas. My cock doesn’t soften from the pain; it only gets harder and more demanding. I mutter a

curse and leave the shower. There's no use scrubbing myself when Madison left her mark on my soul.

I barely dry off before I dress in a different pair of sweats. My phone chimes with an incoming text. I grab it and read the message.

TIFFANY

I'm here.

I leave my bedroom and cut through the house. Light from the kitchen bleeds into the living room. I don't bother checking who woke up while I was with Madison earlier. I keep walking with a mission in mind and meet my sneaky link at the front door.

Tiffany's eyes light up, and a smile forms on her full lips. "Hey you."

I grab her hand without a word and tug her inside. The door snicks shut behind her, and I lead her through the house with long strides.

"What are you doing up so early?" Tiffany says.

"Couldn't sleep," I say.

After riding with my friends last night, I haven't been able to shut off my mind. I definitely won't be able to sleep after the little interaction with my stepsister. Not until I can get rid of this erection.

"Well, it's a good thing I was already up, huh?" Tiffany giggles.

Without answering her, I lead her out the back door.

"Where are we going?" she says with a nervous hitch in her voice.

Her fear is understandable. She hasn't been here before, so she doesn't know my bedroom is in a pool house. For all she knows, she's being taken to the backyard so that I can murder her and bury her body.

I open the door to the pool house, and Tiffany relaxes as we step into the dimly lit room.

"Wow. This is nice." She peers around with a pinched expression, clearly not impressed.

I pull out my cell phone and send a quick text message to the girl who's the reason for me losing my mind.

"So," Tiffany drawls, and turns to me. She bites her bottom lip and looks at me from head to toe, like I'm a gourmet buffet she wants to consume. "What do you wanna do?"

I toss my cell phone onto the bed before I cup the back of her head. My lips smash against hers, and I swallow her surprised gasp. Tiffany melts into

the kiss and winds her arms around my neck. Her lips move with mine, and she shoves her tongue into my mouth.

Tiffany kisses me with the same fervor and need to dominate. She's sloppy and, honestly, not that great of a kisser. It's not something I'll have to worry about after I'm done using her.

But this feels wrong. Of everything I tried to get rid of my erection, *this* is what's making me go soft.

Not wanting to waste time, I untangle her arms from my neck. Jesus, the girl is like an octopus with its tentacles wrapped around its next meal. I shove her onto her knees, and Tiffany gasps, a glimmer of fear shining in her darkened green eyes.

I step closer until my erection is directly in her face. "Take my dick out."

Recovering from her surprise, Tiffany grins and lowers my sweats to my thighs. My erection springs out, wilting as seconds pass. It's embarrassing how it's softening the longer I look at her. She doesn't notice, and if she does, she's putting on a good show by acting clueless. Her lips part, and a low moan wells out of her as her fingers circle the middle of my shaft.

"Fuck, you're huge." She licks her bottom lip and peeks up at me through her lashes. "I had a feeling you would be."

I thread my fingers through her bleached-blonde hair, grimacing at how dry the strands are. She licks her lips and watches her fist stroke my cock. I grind my teeth together as it softens even more.

She doesn't have the right hair color. Her features are sharper and not softened like—

I groan as Tiffany parts her lips and slips the thick, pierced head inside her mouth. Her tongue swirls around the tip, then flattens to lick the underside of my shaft as she takes more of me. She doesn't gag or pull back for air as I hit the back of her throat. Instead, she hollows her cheeks and sucks like she's trying to steal my soul through my dick.

*I'm still softening. Any second now, she'll notice.*

A subtle noise catches my attention. I crane my neck as I look at the door. All the blood in my body rushes between my legs, stiffening my cock until it becomes painful. Tiffany notices and moans. She bobs her head up and down with an enthusiasm that wasn't there seconds ago.

Madison stands in the doorway, her gaze glued to the blonde who's now deep-throating me. Not even the shadows can hide Madison's emotions

from me. Her dark eyebrows pinch together with her frown. I would kill to know what she's thinking.

Does she think I'm disgusting? Does she think I'm gross for needing to bring some chick over here to relieve me after my little sister turned me on so much I almost lost control?

Those eyes . . .

Fuck. I love how they're full of surprise and hurt.

This is what I wanted. I need her to hate me. I need her to know we'll never be together, and what happened last night was a mistake. She needs to see how cruel I can be. How I can break her, just like what I'm about to do to Tiffany.

Tiffany cups my balls and squeezes. My eyelashes flutter, but I force my eyes to remain open. I don't want to look away from my little sister. Not when she's seconds away from crying.

I'm a monster for doing this. A sick freak who shouldn't breathe anymore. Madison needs to see me for who I am.

"You ready, baby?" I murmur huskily.

Tiffany moans in response, even though I wasn't talking to her.

Madison's gaze snaps to my face, her lips parting in surprise.

Oh.

Ohhh.

My little sister was so engrossed in staring at this bitch swallowing my cock that she didn't notice me watching her this whole time, and I'm so fucked up for finding it exhilarating.

I cup the sides of Tiffany's head, holding her in place. Shifting my attention to her, I stare at my thick cock stretching her lips. Saliva drips down her chin. She pauses and raises her watery gaze to my face, eager for me to take control. I thrust my hips forward, shoving my dick deeper into her throat. A smile forms on my lips as she gags. I do it again, going deeper and harder until I'm fucking her face without mercy.

The side of my head tingles from Madison's stare. I don't know why she hasn't run out of the room in tears as I use Tiffany like she's nothing but a whore.

My balls draw upward, and warmth spreads through my body. I'm so close, but I worry this won't be enough. Madison is within reach. She's so close I could yank her to me and shove my dick down her throat instead. I

could use her as a doll and cover her face with my cum in a vile display of ownership.

No.

Not ownership. I don't want to own my sister. That's not why I'm doing this, goddamn it.

I grit my teeth and pull out of Tiffany's mouth. She sucks in a ragged breath, then sticks her tongue out, eager for my cum as I stroke my cock. Mascara-stained tears track down her cheeks, and hurt reflects in her eyes.

I didn't go easy on her. She's probably not used to being treated this way.

For a moment, I feel sorry for her. Even regret it a little bit because she got pulled into this mess so I could teach my little sister a lesson. Then I meet Madison's stare right as I come, and any sympathy I had toward Tiffany goes out the window. I growl and fist Tiffany's hair, yanking her head closer as cum jets out in pulses.

*Run, little sister. Stay far away from me.*

Madison's chest rises and falls faster with heavy breaths. The hurt in her eyes shifted into something else when I wasn't paying attention. Her thighs squeeze together and her hard nipples poke against her thin T-shirt.

Goddamn it. Madison's turned on. This isn't what I intended, and now that I know she's enjoying it, I want to spank her all over again. My lips flatten, and I turn back to Tiffany as the last of my load lands on her cheek. I suck in ragged breaths and release my throbbing member.

Tiffany hums in approval and scoops the cum off her cheek, then pops it into her mouth. She keeps her gaze steady on my face and shakily smiles. It's all an act to feed into my ego. She dislikes confrontation, preferring to fawn rather than run from the danger.

"My turn." Her voice comes out rough and with a tremor. I mean, it's a given after I just used her like a Fleshlight.

I fix my sweats and step away from her. "No."

Her face falls. "What do you mean, *no*?"

I check the doorway, expecting Madison to still be there. It's empty, with no sign of my little sister. I frown and shove the disappointment below the surface.

Tiffany huffs and clammers to her feet. She struggles to find her balance, and I don't move to help her. The thought of touching her any more than I already did makes my skin crawl.

“So that’s it?” Tiffany growls. “I don’t get to come after you were rough with me? I sucked your dick!”

I keep my expression blank. “I know. I was there.”

She smooths the wrinkles in her pants and shirt. “Whatever. Lose my number.”

I don’t bother moving out of the way as she stomps past me and flings the door open. It slams behind her, and I’m left alone in my bedroom, surrounded by bad memories. What’s one more?

My bed calls my name, promising sleep after I didn’t get any last night. Instead of crashing, I change my clothes and slip on my boots. I’d rather go for a joyride than be here. If I get in a wreck and die because of exhaustion, I don’t care.

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# CHAPTER SIXTEEN



## MADISON

### *“PUKE” EMINEM*

Justin and I sit at a table in a five-star restaurant he picked out for our brunch date. I would have preferred eating at Susana’s, but my *lovely* fiancé sneers at “poor” people.

If I stab myself in the ear with this knife, would I die immediately or would I just damage my eardrum? I guess it might be up to how hard I stab myself. I don’t think I could plunge the knife deep enough to kill myself. The pain would stop me from ending my life.

Besides, what the fuck kind of death is that? Shooting myself would be easier, but I don’t have a gun.

I don’t want to die, but I feel so trapped. I’m suffocating. The money I’m saving isn’t building up fast enough. My dad wants nothing to do with

me. The only thing he cares about is my looming marriage to Justin. It's all he talks about when he spares me attention.

My life is out of control. *I have no control.*

Justin finishes texting whoever he's been talking to for the past fifteen minutes. He locks his phone and sets it face down on the table, then turns his full attention to me. I shudder at the coldness in his eyes and how he looks at me like I'm an object and not a person.

"Isn't this wonderful?" He relaxes in his seat while fixing the cuffs of his business jacket. When he can't straighten them anymore, he moves on to pluck invisible lint off his arms.

I cast a disinterested eye around the room and sip my mimosa. The alcohol is helping with the anxiety and thoughts of harming myself, but it's still not enough. If I had it my way, I'd drink until I'm on the floor.

Justin frowns and folds his arms over his chest, his index finger tapping his bicep. "I bought you a ten-grand diamond ring. Spoil you with new clothes every week. I lavish you with expensive meals and drinks."

I down the rest of my mimosa and set the empty glass on the table. My focus lingers on the cup. "Where are you going with this?"

"Glad you asked." Justin's smile lacks amusement and is more sarcastic. "I do these things and more, and yet you're still ungrateful. You treat me like a stranger."

The meals he's ordered for me were foods I hate or can't eat because of my allergy. The ten-grand engagement ring is a sign of ownership and class. It's also the ugliest ring I've ever laid eyes on. There's no way in hell I'm ever being seen with that thing on my finger. Also, he purposely left out the details about buying me clothes I can't fit in. When I told him they weren't my size, he had something to say about that.

*"Think of it as motivation for when you melt off that weight,"* he'd said.

We have very different worldviews where finances are concerned as well. Money never meant anything to me. I'd rather struggle in life and have the best time while doing so. It's unfortunate I can't do that right now, as I'm trying to escape this rotten bastard across from me.

Has Justin ever gone to a carnival during the summer? Has he shared cotton candy with someone he likes while talking about something other than money, power, or sex? Did he ever skinny-dip after his friends dared him?

No. I don't think he has, and it shows.

But back to the matter at hand . . . I treat Justin like a stranger because he is one. “Maybe you should call off the wedding then,” I say.

“Oh, please, Madison.” Justin scoffs. “You don’t need to be so dramatic and emotional.”

My fingers curl in my lap. It takes every bit of self-control to keep my mouth shut. If I insult him, I’ll only prove him right about being *emotional*. He’ll then go to my father and tell him everything I said and how ungrateful I am, and then I’ll have to deal with Dad laying into me when I go home. I have way more important things to deal with than my volatile father.

Justin sweeps his gaze around the room, drawing out a long pause. He’s good at building my anxiety until I’m dreading what he’ll say next. Only two other couples sit at tables, quietly chatting while enjoying their expensive meals made up of small portions.

Justin returns his attention to me and sits a little straighter. He keeps his voice lowered as he says, “What happened to the ring, wife?”

I force a smile. “Must’ve slipped off my finger when I wasn’t paying attention.”

Justin arches an eyebrow and glances at my left hand. He doesn’t need to say what he’s thinking out loud because it’s clear as day on his face.

“I had it fitted to you perfectly,” he says.

I shift in my seat and wince at the dull pain in my bottom. Warmth crawls up my neck, forcing me to avert my gaze so he doesn’t see my shame. If he found out what my brother did to me, he’d kill Ryder, then me.

“Well?” Justin snaps.

“What do you want me to say?”

“You can first apologize to me, then lose the attitude and be the docile wife you’re supposed to be.” Justin’s phone vibrates, and he picks it up to read the message.

My cheeks flush. I glare at him while he’s too busy texting. “I’m not your wife.”

“*Yet*,” he says without looking up. “But you will be soon. Now apologize so we can move on from this and have a better morning.”

I relax as much as I can into my seat while keeping my lips sealed.

No way in hell am I giving him what he wants.

Justin lowers his phone and peeks at me from beneath his lashes. If he weren’t glaring at me, I would have thought he was cute. All that ugliness in his heart makes his outward appearance disgusting.

“Is this what you really want to do?” he says.

I fold my arms across my chest, refusing to look away from him as we have a staring contest. I hate looking into people’s eyes because it brings way too much anxiety, but I can be stubborn when I want to be. Justin tends to bring that stubborn side out of me.

My fiancé tucks his phone into his jacket pocket and stands. He checks the room and smooths the wrinkles over his chest before closing the small space between us in a single stride. He grabs my upper arm and ignores my surprised yelp as he jerks me out of my seat.

“Don’t create a scene, wife,” he growls in my ear.

I stumble to keep up with him while he drags me away from the table. Partly from the strong drink I had, but also because Justin is treating me like a rag doll as he rushes me through the dining area to the restrooms in the back.

“Let go of me,” I snap.

Ignoring me, he opens the men’s bathroom and shoves me inside. The door shuts behind him, and he locks the deadbolt. My stomach sinks with dread. I back away from him and check the area for another door or even a window to slip through.

Warning bells go off in my head.

Justin loosens his tie and prowls toward me. “Since you don’t want to apologize with words, you can with your mouth.”

My jaw falls open, and I scramble backward. “We can’t do anything until we’re married.”

“Says who?” He snatches my arm, his fingers digging into the tender flesh.

“My father,” I stammer.

Shadows creep over Justin’s features. “Your father doesn’t give a fuck, but he won’t know about this. Kneel.”

I shake my head and slap the hand gripping me. “I’m not sucking your cock!”

Justin throws his head back and laughs. “You think you have a choice?”

My pulse thunders in my ears, drowning out my voice as I fight Justin off. He swats my hands mid-air, then shoves me against a stall with a growl.

“No!” I scream.

Ignoring me, Justin forces me onto my knees and keeps a hand in my hair to hold me in place while I struggle. My heart palpitates, and a cold

sweat breaks out on my skin as he undoes his pants with his other hand.

“I told you, I’m not sucking your dick!” Tears sting my eyes, and I suck in ragged breaths as a panic attack rises until it’s choking me.

Justin’s four-inch, pencil-thin erection springs free from his pants. Pre-cum leaks from the circumcised tip, and he smears it with his thumb while guiding it to my mouth.

I jerk back and shove his thighs. “I’m not putting that thing in my mouth.”

“You had your chance to apologize.” Justin’s fingers tighten in my hair, and he jerks me forward until his dick rubs against my closed lips. “I gave you enough time, and you decided to keep your mouth shut. You need to be put in your place, wife, and I’m more than willing to do the work to make you submit to me. Now open your filthy mouth and suck.”

The tears blur my vision as I glare up at Justin. He stares back down at me, seeming bored, but his eyes speak the most. They’re full of hatred, lust, and an emotion I can’t put my finger on. He still looks at me like I’m an object, with no trace of regret or hesitation.

Justin’s nostrils flare when I keep my lips pinched shut. He releases his erection and pinches my nose. I push and scratch at his legs, digging my nails into his exposed skin as much as I can.

The only reaction I get out of him is a hissed breath and a muttered, “Stupid slut.”

My lungs burn from the lack of oxygen. Any second now and I’ll have to open my mouth to breathe. Justin will take advantage and shove his tiny penis into my mouth.

What did I do in life to deserve this?

No one heard me yelling. No one has knocked on the door to check on us. No one cares about me. Now I’m about to be raped, and even then, no one will care to help me.

With the remaining fight I have left in me, I open my mouth and sink my teeth into Justin’s cock. He bellows and jerks away from me, his hand disappearing from my hair. I dig my teeth into the sensitive skin, refusing to let go.

“You little bitch!” he roars, and punches the top of my head.

I grunt and fall backward, black dots creeping into my vision. My skull throbs like a heartbeat, and my back arches as fire radiates to my shoulders.

Justin stumbles back and cups his groin. “You fucking bit me!”

Ignoring the pain, I leap to my feet and dodge him as he makes pathetic noises while checking his manhood. I unlock the door and run out of the bathroom, ignoring him as he calls my name. I duck my head as I run through the restaurant to the front door. Tears stream down my cheeks, making it hard to see, and I nearly run into a table.

“Madison!” Justin yells.

*Don’t look. Don’t look. Don’t look.*

I peek over my shoulder, curious how close he is. My eyes widen. Justin storms through the restaurant, ignoring the stares we’re getting from the waiters and patrons. His body language screams murder, and I’m certain he plans to do far worse to me than shoving his dick in my mouth.

I bolt out the front door and into the cold morning. The cool air refreshes my overheated skin. I widen my strides as I run from Justin, who’s hot on my heels.

*Someone help me.*

*Please.*

The crowd around the restaurant in the heart of downtown isn’t as congested as it is in the summer. I sprint down the sidewalk, barely avoiding colliding with an older woman.

“Madison!” Justin yells. “Get back here!”

Justin drove this morning, so I don’t have my car. There is no way for me to get away from him. I’m terrified to go back home because he knows where I live.

A scream lodges in my throat.

*Someone help me. Take me away from here, please.*

I cross the road and go down another block, hoping it’s enough to lose Justin. I glance over my shoulder and whimper. The asshole is still chasing me. I turn forward and grunt as I slam into a warm, hard wall. Large hands land on my hips and squeeze. I gasp and look up.

# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



## MADISON

### *“OVERWHELMED” ROYAL & THE SERPENT*

“R yder,” I breathe.

Relief floods me, even though I shouldn’t be this happy to see him. It’s not like my brother will protect me. He’s made it clear I mean nothing to him. He can’t stand me.

I expect him to let go of me and walk away like he always does. He’ll put me back in the role of a ghost, and he’ll leave me here with whatever Justin has planned for me.

Ryder’s dark eyebrows furrow as his gaze flicks over my face, taking in my horrified state. I’m still in fight-or-flight mode. The cold weather dried

my tears, but I'm sure my makeup left behind stains.

"Madison!" Justin yells.

Ryder's attention snaps past my head. Shadows creep over his features, and his lips curl in a snarl. He takes my hand and drags me to his motorcycle. The difference in his touch compared to Justin's is worlds apart. While Justin is rough and punishing, Ryder handles me with more care, though his grip is firm as he gets me to safety.

*I'm okay. He'll keep me safe.* I hold back the sob swelling in my chest.

Ryder stops at his parked motorcycle and hands his helmet to me. "Put this on."

I pull the safety gear over my head, but I'm in such a panic that I struggle to fasten the straps beneath my chin. Ryder's hands replace mine. He works fast, then helps me onto the seat behind him. I start as the engine growls to life.

"Madison!" Justin sprints toward us, only ten feet away. My stomach sinks at the fury on his face. "We're not done. Get back here!"

I yelp and clamp my arms around Ryder as we take off. The shops whiz past in a blur. They meld into a mosaic of bright colors and Halloween decorations. I peek over my shoulder, certain Justin will be right behind us. He can't run as fast as a motorcycle, but in my panic-stricken state, I can't think clearly. He's nothing but a speck down the road. I turn forward and squeeze Ryder so I don't fall off the speeding bike.

We blast past cars as he splits lanes, making it look easier than it really is. Ryder yells and leans into a sharp left while keeping us balanced so we don't topple over and slide across the pavement. I tense and look to my right as a car slams on its brakes to avoid colliding with us. They honk their horn, and I barely catch them flipping us off before Ryder speeds out of traffic.

Panic turns my lungs into lead as I raise my gaze to the back of Ryder's head. He's not wearing a helmet. Because, of course he isn't. He handed his to me, and I was too frazzled to ask about his own safety gear. We could crash at any point, and he'd get seriously injured. Considering how fast we're going, he could even die.

He leans forward as we fly past cars honking at us. Ryder doesn't seem bothered by their noise. In fact, he flips the drivers off behind us and increases the speed.

My mind screams that we're going to crash any second, though I can barely hear my thoughts over the loud engine. The earlier panic attack resurfaces, and I'm left choking for air as I clutch my unbothered stepbrother like he's a lifeline.

Traffic thins to a trickle, and we race down a back road leading to the hiking trails. Ryder doesn't slow down, even though no one trails us. Justin is back in town, and there's no way he'd know where we're going.

Ryder slows the motorcycle as we pull into the park outside of the walking trail. I cling to him, even when he stops and uses his boot to put the kickstand down.

Can he feel my racing heart against his back? Does he notice how my hands tremble as I clutch the front of his hoodie?

He switches off the engine and straightens from his bent position. My arms squeeze tighter around him, and I tense as his large hand covers my smaller one. I squeeze my eyes shut as he turns his head to look at me.

Ryder untangles himself from me as he dismounts from the seat. He notices that I'm caught in the clutches of a panic attack, so he inches toward me, his hand stretched out.

"Need help?" He keeps his voice low.

I barely manage a nod.

Ryder's fingers circle my arm and my other wrist as he gently guides me off the bike. He holds me steady on my shaky legs as my feet touch the gravel. A whimper slips out of me as the world wobbles and I lose my balance.

"Easy," he murmurs as he catches me before I fall.

He tucks me against him, with my breasts smashed against his chest. A muscle thrums in the corner of his jaw, but he keeps the expressionless mask in place. His arm winds around my waist, his palm flat on my lower back. His free hand grips my throat beneath the helmet—a placement that should concern me, but if I'm being honest with myself, it brings more relief than fear. It's as if I'm handing over my power and allowing him to take care of me.

Ryder works the straps undone and eases the helmet off my head. He carelessly tosses the gear to the ground while keeping his focus on my face. I suck in fresh air and snake my arms around his neck to stay upright.

*I can't breathe. I'm going to die.*

*Fuck, I'm going to die right in front of my brother.*

Ryder hooks his arm around my waist, palm on my lower back and his other hand taking its place around my throat. He cocks his head as he watches me.

“Breathe with me.” He sucks in a breath through his nose.

I follow his instructions, but my lungs can barely hold the oxygen. Then the air rushes out through my mouth as he does the same.

“Good girl,” he coos, then repeats the same breathing technique.

“You’re safe. No one will hurt you. I’ve got you, doll.”

I follow along until I’m able to fill my lungs without feeling like I’m about to puke. He whispers words of encouragement while I focus on breathing. I’m safe. Justin can’t hurt me. Ryder and I didn’t get hurt on our way here.

*No one is dead.*

*We’re safe.*

*He’ll keep me safe.*

My mind shifts its focus to Ryder. My breasts still press against his chest, and our hips lock together, leaving no room for anything other than unspoken words to slip between us. His hand remains on my throat. Can he feel my fluttering pulse?

“Eyes on me.” His fingers flex around my throat, a warning to do as he says.

I didn’t realize I’d closed my eyes until he said something. My lids pop open, and I train my gaze on his face.

Ryder’s thumb strokes my neck, sending tingles straight between my legs. Our warm breaths mingle, and I take in his heady scent. Amber and cypress fill my lungs, my head now dizzy for an entirely different reason as the panic subsides.

“We could have died.” A sob bubbles out of me, and tears spring to my eyes.

Ryder’s blank expression cracks, revealing a softer emotion I saw once when we were kids and I cleaned his bloody nose. “We didn’t, though.”

“We could have!”

Maybe I’m being a little dramatic, but there is no rationality left in my bones after a panic attack that severe. My brain still clings to the potential of death. Or worse. Any second now, Ryder could let go of me, scoff, and tell me to stop being a baby. He could revert to treating me like a ghost.

I don’t know which outcome is worse.

Ryder releases my throat and slips his hand behind my head to hold me in place as he leans down until our noses touch. I suck in a breath as our lips brush, but he makes no move to kiss me fully.

“I’ve been riding since I was sixteen. There’ve been a lot of close calls in that time. What happened back there wasn’t anything I couldn’t handle.” His fingers thread through my hair and tighten in a firm grip. “You had the helmet on, doll. If something happened to someone, it would have happened to me.”

I swallow around the lump in my throat. Another sob works its way up my chest and bubbles out of my mouth. “Is that supposed to make me feel better?”

“It should.” He offers a smile, but something’s off in his gaze. He’s not upset about our near-death experience. If anything, he welcomes it.

I fist his hair and tug, desperate for him to understand how those thoughts scare me. I don’t want anything to happen to him, no matter how much he hates me. No matter how much he treats me like I’m shit beneath his shoe. I don’t want Ryder to get hurt. *Ever*.

Ryder’s pupils expand, and he inhales a sharp breath as he pulls me closer to him. With our hips flush together, I’m forced to feel the growing hardness within his pants. After what happened with Justin, my body shouldn’t respond this way right now. Butterflies fill my stomach, and my nipples harden into sensitive peaks.

“Well, it doesn’t make me feel better,” I say with conviction. Hoping he can hear the desperation in my voice. “I don’t want you to get hurt.”

His eyes widen in shock, then he locks it away as fast as it came. The same frustrating blank expression takes its place as he shuts me out.

No.

No.

No.

I don’t want him to hide from me. I don’t want the icy demeanor he uses so often.

Ryder drops his hands and steps away from me. With every inch of space he puts between us, the weight on my shoulders becomes heavier. He’s slipping through my fingers, and I don’t want to lose him. Not just physically, but emotionally.

“Ryder,” I croak.

He backs away. “What happened back there, Madison?”

Even his voice has gone cold. Detached. Lacking humanity.

I swallow hard and force myself to stay put when I want to rush into his arms, where everything feels so right. “Justin . . .” The next words die on my tongue as the lump in my throat makes a reappearance. I shake my head and avert my gaze. “It was a misunderstanding.”

Ryder’s blank expression doesn’t crack as he says, “A misunderstanding.”

I wince and turn away from him so he doesn’t see my shame. It was more than a misunderstanding, but it’s not like my moody stepbrother will understand or care. He’ll say I’m overreacting and that what Justin said and did wasn’t that bad.

Nibbling on a piece of loose skin on my bottom lip, I glance around the empty park. No kids playing on swings with their parents watching. No dog owners walking their pets. It’s a ghost town here, which makes being alone with Ryder that much more nerve-wracking.

“Why did you bring me here?” I say while still avoiding his gaze.

Ryder cocks his head. “Because your *fiancé* would look for you at home. It’s safer being here than where he can find you.”

I wince. Why did he say it like he holds a grudge against Justin? Ryder doesn’t know him, nor does he know what happened.

“I would have been fine at home.” The lie tastes like ash on my tongue, and the panic from earlier creeps to the surface at the thought of Justin finding me. Ryder’s correct. Being at home isn’t safe right now. I could hide in my bedroom, and Justin would still barge in and pick up where he left off. Dad wouldn’t keep me safe. Carolyn wouldn’t either. The only person I can depend on is my aunt, and she’ll give him hell.

Ryder raises an eyebrow.

My cheeks burn with a blush. “It’s not like you want to be here with me. You can barely stand me.”

His lips thin—the only sign of his displeasure—and he strides toward the picnic tables beneath a gazebo.

“Where are you going?” I chase after him.

Ryder stalks forward without sparing me a glance. He settles on the bench with his back resting against the table. As he relaxes and stretches out his long legs, he folds his arms over his chest and closes his eyes.

I can’t stop myself from checking him out, even though I know better. He’s dressed in his usual goth clothes—a black hoodie clinging to his form

like second skin; loose-fitting black cargo pants with pops of white straps weaving through the fabric.

Looking down at my attire, I'm reminded of just how different we are. Instead of all-black everything, I'm a veritable neon sign. With my bright-pink top, a lightweight jacket, and designer jeans, I look like Hannah Montana standing next to the lead singer of Satan's Priest.

"What are you doing?" I say.

"What does it look like I'm doing?"

"Like you're about to take a nap."

He pops open an eyelid and gives me a pointed look, then rolls his eye and closes it.

My spine straightens when I realize that something isn't right. I creep closer to get a better look at him. Dark circles hang beneath his eyes, and lines of exhaustion appear beside his mouth. His chest rises and falls with deep, even breaths.

Did he really fall asleep? And why the hell was he riding his motorcycle if he was this tired?

Knots form in my stomach as the events from this morning and last night play in my head. I mentally swat away the memory of the blonde sucking my brother's thick cock, but my sex-deprived mind keeps focusing on it. And how I was dying to be in her place.

What I don't understand is why he texted me to come to his room. It's why I caught him in the first place and couldn't make my legs work to leave.

"Did you get any sleep this morning after you . . . ?" I trail off, too afraid to say the rest out loud. It'll make what transpired real.

Ryder cracks open his eyelids. The light-blue irises darken, and hunger flares as he refuses to look away from me. "No." His voice comes out deep and raspy.

I break the staring contest and check our surroundings for anyone who might catch us together—not that I plan on doing anything with him. I settle on the bench beside him, keeping a safe amount of space between us. It doesn't matter how much distance there is; he still feels too close to me and yet so far away.

"So you've been riding around with no sleep?" I shake my head and mimic his posture. Folding my arms over my chest, I lean my head back. "God, you're an idiot."

Ryder huffs an unamused laugh and closes his eyes. “You don’t need to tell me what I already know.”

My eyebrows pinch together. “You really think that about yourself?”

His pierced lips flatten, and his dark eyebrows dip with his frown. “I’m taking a nap. Then I’ll take you back home.”

I stare at him in silence while a turbulent storm of questions ravages my thoughts. The last thing I want is to get on his nerves, but I’ve clearly been on his bad side for a long time now. What’s the worst he can do if I keep him talking for a little longer?

*He’ll spank you again.*

I shudder at the memory.

“Am I really that annoying to you?” I whisper.

Ryder remains quiet, likely already fallen asleep so he doesn’t have to listen to me anymore. Yet here I am, selfish and wanting his time and attention.

I sigh and turn my face toward the gazebo’s ceiling.

“Sometimes I really wish I were a ghost so I could have control over my life. At least then, no one can force me to do things I don’t want to do.” I mutter the confession like no one is around. It’s not like Ryder will hear me. I expect the vise around my chest to loosen with the confession, but it only tightens until I can’t breathe.

I focus on anything other than Justin and what happened. If I go down that path, it’ll end in another panic attack. Instead, I think about what life will be like when I get away from my father’s rule.

When Ryder takes me home, I’ll snap new photos and record a video for my subscribers so I can get more money to add to my savings. Things will be so much simpler when I’m out of my father’s house. I can start a new life and make it how I want it.

# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



## RYDER

### *“SUICIDE GRIP” PIERCETHESKIES*

I could sleep for a week, and even then, I still don’t think it’ll make up for staying awake for twenty-four hours. I’m not sure how much time passed while I was out, but when I rise from the sticky depths, my eyes are too heavy to open. It takes a minute for everything to catch up with me. Where I am, *who* I’m with.

Madison’s whispered confession as I fell asleep wiggles its way to the front, bringing the same strange emotion with it. My chest tightens until it’s hard to breathe.

Nope. Fuck that. I can’t think about it. I’m supposed to hate my stepsister, not empathize with her and wonder who made her feel like she

has no control. It's clearly not Mickey since they haven't kept in touch since graduation, and he's, oh yeah, dead.

A gust of wind blows against me. Goosebumps rise on my arms and legs from the chill. The temperature must've dropped while I slept because I don't remember it being this cold.

A shiver rolls through my body, and I clench my teeth to prevent them from chattering. I crack open my eyelids and inch my head to the side to peek at my stepsister. Madison still sits beside me, this time facing the table. Her phone screen's light reflects on her face as she scrolls on Instagram.

I frown.

Shit, I was out for a couple of hours if it's already past dusk.

Madison taps her notifications, then taps again. The screen switches to her most recent post with comments flooding in. My muscles stiffen at the brief flash of the picture.

That can't be her. It just can't.

She's posed in the sauna room at her father's house, with the hot tub behind her. She's wearing a barely there bright-blue bikini, with the small waterfall serving as her backdrop.

What in the actual fuck is she doing posting pictures dressed like that?

I don't move a muscle, not wanting to reveal that I'm awake. Fury floods my veins, burning every inch until it's charred. Jealousy follows, which infuriates me even more. I have no right to be jealous. However, I have every right to be fuming about strangers on the internet seeing her like this. I don't know if I should explode and demand to know why she's posting shit like this or remain quiet and hold this bit of information for later use. I don't know how I'll use it, but I'm sure I'll figure it out down the road.

But I'm a masochist just as much as I am a sadist, so I remain quiet and continue staring at her phone screen, drinking up every detail I can make out.

Madison scrolls through the hundreds of comments, none of which I can read because of the small print. I catch a few heart-eye emojis and one or two red-faced, panting emojis. She breezes past them, then scrolls back to her picture and lingers on it.

I would be lying if I said I'm not getting hard while looking at the image. Even from this distance, I can still make out her curves. Madison

posed with her arms raised, disappearing out of shot, along with her face. The blue triangles of her bikini top strain against her chest, the material bumping over her hardened nipples. My eyebrows pinch together when I spot the bar outlines; she's pierced. Her bikini covers the bottom of her stomach and her pussy, the side straps sitting higher on her waist, making it appear smaller than it actually is.

Does her fiancé know about this?

My molars grind together at the thought of the motherfucker. If he knows, I'm still beating his ass. I already have a list of reasons, but what happened earlier is at the top. Madison didn't run from him because of some *misunderstanding*. I can't unsee the terror written all over her tear-stained face. Or unhear her having a panic attack. I know damn well she wasn't panicking because of the asshole who almost hit us. It went deeper, and her fiancé's name is written all over it.

Madison exits the picture and scrolls on the feed. Images blur together, and none of them catches my attention or interest. As much as I'd like to continue snooping, my back is killing me and it's getting harder to stay still.

Turning my head forward, I unlock my stiff muscles and unfold myself from the bench. Madison locks her phone screen and looks at me with the same doe eyes she uses whenever I'm near her. Her perfect, innocent mask once fooled me, but she's freakier than she lets on, and that's dangerous.

"Oh, good," she says with a hint of a smile. "You're awake."

I stretch my arms above my head, working out the knots in my muscles. My hoodie and shirt ride up my stomach. I bite back a smirk as Madison's gaze drops to the sliver of exposed, tanned skin. She catches herself staring and shoots out of her seat, busying herself by smoothing out the wrinkles in her clothes.

I used a woman I don't give a shit about to take care of the problem my sister created, and Madison watched the entire show and *still* wants me. What the fuck is wrong with her? Why can't she see that I'm not a good man?

Madison shivers as wind blows beneath the gazebo. She wraps her arms around herself to keep warm.

Goddamn it. How the fuck did I not notice she's wearing a light jacket over a thin T-shirt and jeans?

I peel my hoodie over my head and toss at Madison. "Put this on."

She catches it with wide eyes. "Why?"

“Because it’s cold and will get colder when we ride.”

She eyes me warily. “But what about you?”

“Put the hoodie on, Madison.”

She sighs and threads her arms through the sleeves, then carefully pushes her head through. As she pulls it over her chest, it struggles to go any further. I didn’t think about my clothes being smaller than her. I close the small space between us and help her. My fingers curl under the hem on the sides of her breasts as I tug it down. Madison doesn’t tell me to stop. If anything, she urges me on by placing her hands on my shoulders, giving me free rein to feel her up like a filthy freak.

I tug at the hoodie, slowly working the material over her tits. Madison jerks with the rough movements but doesn’t protest. She completely and totally trusts I’ll help her.

She whispers something, and I pause.

My gaze rises to her face. “What did you say?”

Madison shakes her head, keeping her eyes downcast. “Nothing.”

“No, I heard you before. I just need to hear it again.”

She takes a fortifying breath before she meets my stare. “I’m sorry.”

“Why are you sorry?”

Pink tinges her cheeks as she struggles to get the words out. I don’t know what’s going through her head, but it’s obviously killing her. She opens her mouth, then shuts it.

I shake my head and return to working the hoodie down her chest. It needs one good tug for it to come down, but something keeps catching it.

“You wearing a padded bra?” I ask.

Madison freezes. “Why are you asking that?”

“If you take it off, it’ll help with getting this hoodie on.”

“I don’t need to wear the hoodie. You can take it back.”

My finger taps against her side. “You’ll regret it once we’re going eighty down the road.”

She raises her chin and squares her shoulders. It’s cute how she thinks she can stand up to me. “Like you won’t?”

I shrug. “I ride shirtless sometimes. It’s nothing new to me.”

Her head rears back, full lips parting in horror. Her reaction brings an odd feeling into my chest. The same one as earlier, when she learned I didn’t care if I died in an accident.

“I’m not taking off my bra. It’s not like it’ll make a difference since my breasts are already too big,” she says.

My gaze drops to her chest, and I bite my tongue to keep from telling her they aren’t too big. They’re perfect the way they are. Instead of voicing my thoughts, I roll my eyes and tug off the hoodie.

“I’m not doing it!” She crosses her arms, protecting herself from a fight that won’t happen.

I pull on my hoodie and stuff my hands into the front pocket. “Wasn’t going to force you, sis.”

Madison blinks, shocked that I’m not demanding she do something she doesn’t want to do.

“Let’s go,” I say, and walk toward my motorcycle.

The helmet is still on the ground near the bike, so I scoop it up and hand it over to Madison. She looks at the gear, then at me, and blinks.

We don’t need to say anything to know we’re thinking the same thing.

Empathy I really shouldn’t feel creeps up on me. I didn’t realize I moved closer to her and plucked the helmet out of her hands until it was too late for me to stop. I lower it over her head and work the straps beneath her jaw.

“Wait.” Madison pushes my chest—a weak fight she has no chance of winning.

“I’m not taking you home until you’re safe.” I fix the straps beneath her chin and tilt her head as I work it through the loops.

Madison huffs but doesn’t remove her hands from my chest. She keeps them there, and it’s all I can focus on.

I hate how good she feels while touching me.

I hate how right it feels.

I especially hate her for still tempting me and making me forget why I can’t have her.

“I don’t want anything to happen to you,” Madison says, her voice softer than before.

I ignore her.

What the hell am I supposed to say? *If I get hurt, I don’t care. As long as you survive?*

Her warmth seeps beneath my skin, and it’s enough to light me on fire. I can’t feel the cold anymore. Not when she’s so close to me. Madison is wiggling her way beneath my skin, making herself at home in my soul. It’s

not right. It's not what I want. Yet, it's still happening. This is the same girl who was friends with the assholes who made my life miserable in school. She's the same girl who dated Mickey after telling me she couldn't stand him.

A sick glee fills my chest at the thought of her dead ex. Murdered by sourdough. I wonder if she'll cry when she finds out.

My teeth grind together, and my fingers work the straps a bit rougher. Madison's body jerks forward.

“Ryder?” she says.

I can't get the mental image of Mickey's arm slung around her shoulders out of my head. They may not have been dating for long, but he pranced her around like a prized pony. He was proud about getting with her. I don't know what all they did together, and I don't want to know because the thought of someone else touching her enrages me.

*She's mine.*

*Madison is fucking mine. No one is allowed to touch her but me.*

*I'm the only one who can make her feel good.*

*I'm the only one who can hear her moans and feel her milking my cock.*

“Big brother.”

My muscles lock, and I freeze mid-tug. Slowly, I raise my head. Blood pumps to my dick, turning the chub I've been sporting since waking up into a full-on erection.

Madison's fingers circle my wrist and ease my hand away from her throat. She smooths her other palm down my chest and keeps going until she reaches my stomach. I'm a statue as her fingers curl past the waistline and tug our hips flush together.

“Who hurt you?” she whispers.

Everything in me comes to a screeching halt. I frown as the same emotion from earlier squeezes tighter around my chest.

At my visible confusion, she says, “You don't care about dying if we crash. Who hurt you so badly to make you apathetic about your life?”

For a split second, I feel seen by her again. I didn't have to say it out loud. Madison sees my struggle, and instead of antagonizing me about it and saying I'm weak, she asks me who made me feel this way. She fucking cares about me, and that scares the shit out of me.

*Who hurt me?*

Her fucking father hurt me.

My deadbeat dad hurt me.

My mother turning her back on me hurt me.

Every bully in school hurt me.

The worst part?

Madison fucking hurt me. She hung around the people who thrived off making my life a living hell, and now she wants to pretend she doesn't know how deep that cut is.

I jerk my wrist out of her hold and step away from her. Madison reaches for me and decides against it when she gets a good look at my fuming expression. She drops her arm and gives me the most pathetic puppy eyes I've ever seen.

"Get on the bike," I growl.

I mount the seat and, despite being angry, I still help her as she struggles to sit behind me. She winds her arms around my waist and clutches the hoodie over my stomach. I let out a heavy breath from my nose as I think about disgusting shit so I don't come in my pants just from her touching me.

The engine roars to life as I turn the key I left in the ignition. Thank fuck no one stole my bike while I was passed out. I lean forward as we take off. Madison yelps and clutches me tighter as we jerk forward.

As we turn into the bend down the road, Madison leans with me so we don't lose balance. With the turns and hills, I keep at a safe speed so I don't lose control or, god forbid, have an accident. I may want to die, but I refuse to bring Madison with me.

Her fingers wring my hoodie in a white-knuckle grip, and after a few minutes of riding, she taps my chest to get my attention. I pull over to the side of the road and twist in my seat, giving her my full attention.

She flips the visor up before saying, "I changed my mind. I want the hoodie."

My lips pull back in a cocky smile. "Take off your bra, doll."

Madison's eyes widen as she stares at me like a deer caught in headlights. When my smile falters, she snaps out of it and mumbles an apology. I cock my head, my curiosity piqued by her reaction, but I file it away for later inspection. I help Madison off the motorcycle and take off her helmet. She checks if the coast is clear before she peels off her jacket, then reaches behind her to unhook her bra.

"Crap," she growls.

“Need help?” I step closer to her, my hand already stretched toward her. Madison almost breaks her neck with how hard she shakes her head. “That’ll be too weird.”

I raise an eyebrow. Did she already forget about all the *weird* things we did together in the last twenty-four hours?

Her lips flatten, and she averts her gaze.

Oh, she remembers.

“Fine,” she mutters, and turns her back to me. “Don’t you dare look.”

I’m about to ask her what the fuck I’m going to look at, but I stop short when she peels her shirt over her head and balls it into her hands.

Goosebumps rise over her skin from the chill of the evening, and yet I’m on fire with hunger for my sister.

I can’t stay away from her. There’s no way I can keep fighting this. The threat of her piece-of-shit dad is getting harder to care about. I’d kill him before he could ever lay a hand on her. No matter how much I hate her because of him—and for making me crush on her—I don’t want anyone else harming her. It’ll only be me.

Madison peeks at me over her shoulder. “Well?”

I shake away the troubling thoughts and snap her bra undone with two fingers. My fingertips linger on her soft skin, memorizing how she feels. The band relaxes, and she removes the bra.

At my height and angle, I still get an eyeful of her tits. I bite my bottom lip at the flash of jewelry in her nipples.

Jesus fuck, my earlier suspicion was correct.

Of course she’s pierced. Why wouldn’t she be? She’s a freak pretending to be innocent.

Madison throws her shirt back on, cutting off my view of her chest.

“Ryder?”

I snap out of my dirty thoughts. Madison turned around and donned her jacket while I wasn’t paying attention. I peel off my hoodie and help my flustered sister put it on. I still have to wrestle the material over her breasts, and it’s a tight squeeze, but it’s workable without the padded bra in the way.

“I don’t think it’ll work,” she grumbles.

My eyebrows slash down while I concentrate.

“I’m sorry,” I say.

Madison tilts her head. “For what?”

She gasps as I palm the soft mounds for a split second before I jerk down the hoodie. It settles around her waist. It's a tight fit, but it's better than wearing a light jacket.

"You groped me, you jerk!" Madison swats my chest.

"I already apologized." I snatch her bra out of her hand and stuff it into my pocket. "I'll hang on to this until we get back."

She sputters and puts up a pathetic fight to get the bra back, but with one swat of my hand against her ass, she stops and looks at me, aghast. "You have a lot of nerve, you know that?"

I flip the visor down on her helmet. "Let's go."

She climbs onto the seat behind me and winds her arms around my middle. *Where they belong.* Fuck me, I didn't think I'd ever enjoy having a backpack, but the thrill of her touch brings me to life.

The entire ride home, Madison clutches me like I'm her lifeline. Not even the whipping arctic wind can overpower the heat of her touch. Her nails dig into the soft material of my shirt, and every nerve ending in my body flares with unadulterated pleasure.

We ride through the town, and the traffic light turns red. I jerk us to a stop, and Madison falls into my back. Her hand drops to my lap from the sudden movement. I swallow a groan as her palm lands right over my cock.

*It's a mistake.*

*She didn't mean to touch me there.*

*It's because of the sudden stop, and she's getting her balance.*

Madison doesn't move. Seconds pass, and still, she doesn't move away.

I set my booted feet on the ground to keep us balanced while waiting for the light to turn green. The roads are empty and we're alone, but Jerry has friends all over the place. I never know who's watching and relaying information to my stepfather. The last thing I need right now is him finding out his daughter is feeling me up.

Madison straightens and slips her hand from my groin. I glare straight ahead, my lips pinched together as I try not to linger on the irritation from the loss of her touch.

The light turns green, and we peel out. Madison's breasts smash against my back as she grips me tighter when the bike gains speed. I clench my jaw as she backs away to give me room.

It's fucked up, but I hit the brake again, and she smashes against me. I shudder at the feeling of her piercings through the layers of clothes between

us. Madison's hand drops to my stomach and clings to my bare skin above my pelvis. With her other, she clutches my chest, her fingers curled into my shirt. She doesn't back off like the other times, though. The little vixen knows what she's doing.

The rest of the ride is painful with her holding me like this, but I wouldn't give it up for anything.

I slow the bike and glance at the driveway. My eyes narrow when I spot something that doesn't belong, and I shift gears, peeling out of the neighborhood. I follow the familiar route to the abandoned neighborhood, then park outside my house and hit the kill switch to cut the engine.

"What are we doing here?" Madison yells through the helmet.

I untangle myself from her and give her a hand as she slips off the seat. "Seems your lovely fiancé was waiting for you."

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# CHAPTER NINETEEN



## MADISON

### *“AFTER DARK” MR. KITTY*

My jaw drops as I stand frozen in place. Over my pounding heart, I barely hear Ryder’s words replay in my head. My stomach twists in knots.

Justin was waiting for me at home.

I’m glad Ryder took me to the hiking trail to hang out, but I didn’t think he was right about Justin searching for me at the house. This means Dad knows about what happened—or at least what Justin told him. Knowing him, he probably left out the assault in the bathroom, then painted me as the bad guy.

Ryder moves in front of me until our chests brush. I bite my bottom lip as he gently undoes the straps beneath my chin, then rests his hand on my

throat. His grip is firm as he moves my head in different angles as he works. My tense shoulders slacken, and I lean into his touch, hating how safe he makes me feel. The way Ryder invades my personal space and forces me to look at him is enough to chase away the rising panic.

In the short time since he's started talking to me, I've come to realize he grounds me. No one—not even Minnie or my friends—has ever accomplished this. I can chalk it up to my infatuation with him, but that wouldn't be entirely true. A hidden piece of myself recognizes him. Maybe it has something to do with the struggles he refuses to voice.

The straps click, then loosen, as Ryder unsnaps them. He eases the helmet off my head and tucks it against his side. I avert my gaze and busy myself by fixing my hair. Ryder keeps his expression blank, but his eyes hold no secrets. He's searching for signs of distress, seeking answers about why I've been freaking out since running into him earlier.

But I can't bring myself to tell my stepbrother what Justin did and how it's messing with my head. I can't explain that my father has stripped me of my right to choose and is forcing this marriage.

Not finding the answer he's looking for, Ryder steps back. "We'll stay here for the night."

Chewing the loose skin on my bottom lip, I face the mansion. From the outside, it appears abandoned. Spiderwebs stretch across the dark windows, and unkempt bushes struggle to survive the cold. Moss coats the horse fountain in the circle drive, its giant basin filled with stagnant water and algae. Dead leaves litter the ground, and the trees look one big gust of wind away from toppling over.

"Who's house is this, anyway?" I say. "It looks haunted."

Ryder brushes past me and says over his shoulder, "Mine, and it probably is. Follow me, and I'll help you out of the hoodie."

My spine straightens.

Shit. I just insulted his home. I hope he doesn't take offense and punish me by ignoring me again. It doesn't matter that he's shown me more kindness and care in the past few hours. He could take everything back and treat me like shit again.

My fingers burrow into the bottom of the hoodie that smells like Ryder. I don't know how I'll survive another round of him undressing me. I don't even want to give the hoodie back to him. It's not like he's my boyfriend, but this is the first time a man has given me something of his to wear.

Ryder unlocks the front door and swings it open. I rush after him, too afraid he'll change his mind and lock me outside.

I breathe a sigh of relief as warm air hugs me as I pass through the entryway and shut the door behind me. Ryder flips on a light and strides down the massive hallway leading deeper into the house. I follow close behind him with my head on a swivel.

Dust blankets the portraits hanging from the chipped walls. A lot of them remind me of Halloween decorations. They feature creepy farmers posing with their families. All that's missing are the pitchforks. None of this screams *Ryder*, however. My brother would go for a more gothic color scheme, not beige and forest green with a pop of yellow.

There are a few traces of his personality dotted throughout the space. A large TV hangs on the wall opposite the furniture, and large speakers tower in the corners of the den. Motorcycle helmets lie scattered on the floor, and two more sit on the coffee table.

Ryder leads me into the living room and picks up a remote from the dark coffee table. Blue LED lights wrapped around the ceiling's upper trim flip on, bathing us in a soft glow. Ryder switches on a lamp on the end table beside a dark leather sectional couch. Its back faces floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking a back patio and forest.

"Wow," I breathe. "How did you get this place? That's a lot—oomph." I bump into a solid wall of muscle.

Ryder catches my waist and squeezes a little harder and longer than necessary. Like all the other times he's touched me, it's as though he can't help himself.

I mentally shake away the thoughts. No, there's no way Ryder would be interested in me like *that*. Doesn't matter we had a moment or two. He can't stand me. Which means he doesn't want anything to do with me.

"Sorry," I mutter.

He cocks his head while keeping his hold on me. His icy demeanor hasn't melted a centimeter. I hate how he hides his emotions from me. It's the equivalent of him holding me at arm's length.

"Arms up." Ryder's deep voice draws me out of my spiraling thoughts.

"I can do it myself, really," I say.

Ryder raises an eyebrow and taps my side with an impatient finger.

I groan and raise my arms above my head, holding as still as I can while he works the material to my chest. He has some difficulty getting the hoodie

over my breasts, and I bite my bottom lip while he raises the material one inch at a time.

To my embarrassment, when the hoodie finally comes free, my shirt comes right along with it, leaving me standing before him—topless. His eyes widen a fraction. He's just as shocked as I am as he stares at my breasts.

"Jesus!" I gasp and cover myself with my arm, then snatch the clothes out of his grip with my free hand.

Ryder backs away, his shock wearing off. I turn my back to him and unravel my shirt from the hoodie.

"Sleep in whatever room you want," Ryder says, "but stay out of my bedroom."

I turn after yanking my shirt on, but Ryder has already disappeared, his footsteps fading until I can't hear them anymore.

"How will I know which one is yours?" I yell.

Silence meets my question.

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After rummaging around the kitchen for something to snack on, I find Starbursts hidden behind two lonesome Vienna sausage cans in the cabinet. How Ryder has survived with an empty kitchen, I will never know.

I pop a pink Starburst into my mouth and suck on the candy with a low moan. It's not enough to stave off the hunger pangs, but this will have to do until Ryder takes me home in the morning. I didn't have a chance to eat at the restaurant with Justin, which I'm not upset about. The man would have ordered a meal I can't have or don't like.

Ryder's kitchen has the same personality as the front of the home—chipped paint in the same color scheme, and rooster decorations that aren't like him at all. If it weren't for the living room full of helmets and LED lights, I wouldn't think this is Ryder's house at all.

I chew on the Starburst and check my phone for the first time since stepping foot in the house.

Eighty missed calls.

Ten voicemails.

Thirty unopened text messages.

I wince.

Justin and Dad have been trying to get ahold of me. Justin more so than my father. My thumb hovers over Dad's name on the text messages, but I don't know if I can read them right now. It'll be bad.

I can already imagine what my father and Justin have been saying. Dad is likely scolding me for hurting Justin and running away from him. He'll remind me how it's my duty and place to serve my husband. Then he'll sprinkle in a hefty dose of shaming me for embarrassing him.

Justin will be more passive-aggressive. He'll warn me that we're going to have a little *talk* about what happened. It'll all be silky words, aimed to relax me, but in truth, it's a disguise to hide the malicious nature that is Justin. He and I both know it won't be just a *talk*. I fear it'll end up with him finishing what he started, and this time I won't be able to get away.

My heart leaps into my throat as my phone vibrates. The screen displays an incoming call from Justin. The shrill ringtone blasts, killing the silence. I check my surroundings, ensuring Ryder hasn't joined me in the living room without my knowing. Not that he would extend any hospitality by entertaining me as his guest. He'd likely give me the cold shoulder, maybe even give me the stink eye as Justin continues blowing up my phone.

The screen returns to its normal setting, and I barely have time to breathe a sigh of relief before Justin calls again. I stare at the screen, counting the seconds ticking by. It feels like forever before the call ends and sends Justin to voicemail. I hold my breath, waiting for him to call me again.

My phone vibrates and chirps with a new voicemail.

With a trembling finger, I click it and listen.

*"I can be a patient man, Madison,"* Justin says, *"but you're pushing it. Answer the fucking phone."*

I barely exit the voicemail before his name pops up again. The ringtone echoes in the room, increasing my panic. My hold on the phone slips, and I accidentally touch the screen, sending Justin to voicemail.

"Shit," I growl.

Great. Now he'll know I'm refusing to pick up when I could have lied and said I didn't have my phone on me.

I listen to the voicemail as soon as it comes through. Justin remains calm, but his voice holds an icy undertone, sending a chill down my spine.

*“This is how you want to play, wife? Fine, have it your way, but don’t think I won’t be able to find you. That scum won’t keep you safe for much longer. I’ll see you soon.”*

The remaining Starbursts falls from my limp hand. One by one, they *thump* against the marble floor.

I look through the large windows overlooking the backyard. With the lights on, all that looks back at me is my terrified reflection.

There’s no way Justin knows where I’m at. He’s never met Ryder—at least I don’t think so. Either way, it doesn’t stop the panic rising in me at the threat of Justin coming here and dragging me out by the hair.

I scramble to the coffee table and grab the tiny remote, clicking a button to turn off the LED lights. They flicker different colors, and I curse under my breath before I find the button to turn them off. I flip off the lamp, bathing the room in darkness.

I should feel better now that no one can look inside from the backyard, but I still have the urge to puke.

Ryder needs to know Justin is on his way. I wince, already feeling awful about crashing into his bedroom and telling him the bad news. But this is an emergency. I only hope he won’t be too upset with me after I explain what’s going on.

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# CHAPTER TWENTY



## RYDER

*“COME GET HER” RAE SREMMURD*

No matter how long I glare at the ceiling, I still can't fall asleep. My erection hasn't softened since leaving Madison downstairs half an hour ago. If I close my eyes for even a second, I see her standing in front of me again. Her breasts are more than a handful. They sag a little low because of the weight, but that weight is what makes them so perfect. My cock jerks as I think about the silver barbells I desperately wanted to catch between my teeth.

My sister could barely hold it together while I helped her out of the hoodie, and I was bad for feeling her up when I can't have her. Not yet.

The line between what is right and wrong has blurred over the last twenty-four hours. I thought I could stay away from her. Believed that if I

pushed her away for her sake, she would leave me alone and stop tempting me. Instead, her desperation for my attention will be my undoing.

I'm holding on by a thread. Despite claiming her in my thoughts earlier, I'm giving her another chance to stay the fuck away from me before I ruin her. We're siblings. It's fucked up and we both know it, but I couldn't care less. She, however, has a lot more to worry about if I ever say *fuck it* and have my way with her.

Madison is engaged, which means she's off-limits. The man is an asshole, but she's still promised to him. The dark and twisted side of me wants to mock him. I could send videos that show me fucking his fiancée, with captions that would get a rise out of him.

*This your girl, bro?*

*Look how well she takes my cock.*

I shudder at how satisfying it would be to do something like that, but Madison would never go through with it. No matter how much of a freak she is online, she would draw the line there.

I breathe through my nose as my hand inches toward my dick. My erection tents the thin sheet thrown over my waist as it begs for me to rub one out so I can sleep. My balls tighten as I fist myself at the base, and I swallow a groan as the bite of pain joins with pleasure.

Fuck it. I've been fighting this for too long.

With my free hand, I snatch my phone from the nightstand and open Instagram, then type in Madison's name. Accounts pull up, but none of them belongs to her. I try different variations of her name and still come up empty-handed. Pursing my lips, I tap my finger on the backside of my phone while I try to recall what I saw on her phone. Goddamn it. The words were blurry, and I didn't catch her screen name because I was too busy staring at the picture.

Thinking of a different idea, I go to Aiden's page and search through his followers until I find Nova's Instagram. After scrolling through the list of people she's following, I finally find Madison's account under a pseudonym.

Pre-cum leaks from the tip of my strangled cock as I read the name.

***DirtyDoll***

It has to be a coincidence. There's no way she would go by a variation of the pet name I gave her.

I tap her most recent picture. It's the same one I saw earlier—the pic she posted a few hours ago while I was asleep. Lust and anger ignite my blood until the emotions consume me.

I'm not angry about her doing what she wants with her body. It's her choice, and I respect that. I'm angry because others got to see her like this before I did. I'm sure a lot of men have now saved that racy picture in their spank-bank album.

I slide down to the next post. It's just as risqué as the previous one. She's wearing a different tiny swimsuit, barely hiding anything, but she's in the kitchen. I don't know how she got away with taking a picture dressed like this when there's always someone there. Unless she waited until everyone was gone or asleep.

The next post is different. She's dressed in a tiny maid uniform, kneeling in front of a full-length mirror in her bedroom. She paired the outfit with high stockings that reach the tops of her thighs. This picture doesn't show much skin, but when I slide to the next, she's raised the skirt to show off her thick thighs and curvy waist.

I groan as I stroke my dick once while I stare at the bottom half of her face. She hasn't shown her face in any of her pictures, but this one teases with a mouth reveal. She isn't smiling like a normal person would for a picture. No. She's captured her O face—or what she wants everyone to think is her O face. Her lipstick is smudged, like she just got done sucking a cock, and her lips are parted as though she took the picture mid-moan.

After taking screenshots to save in a private album, I read the caption.

*He wanted to show me his thanks for letting him eat his dessert. ;) What a mess he made of the both of us.*

*Want more? Link in bio ;)*

My molars grind together at the mental image of Madison with her fiancé. Where he's *showing his thanks* for letting him eat her pussy, as she so graciously described in her post. Jealousy courses through my veins as I imagine the piece of shit fucking her face right before the picture. I don't believe he did, since her lips aren't swollen. Maybe he's small and couldn't bring that reaction out of her like I would. But for the sake of my sanity, I tell myself none of what she implied happened.

Curious about what she means by the link in her bio, I check out her profile and tap the link. Options pop up to go to her TikTok, Instagram, and OnlyFans.

Jesus Christ.

She's not just posting on social media. She's creating content for a website many people use to upload sex videos and nudes for money. There's no way her fiancé knows about this. Madison isn't using her real name on her social media or OnlyFans, so it's safe to assume she doesn't want him to know. It could be because he would react horribly to this new information. Toxic men often feel threatened and inadequate when a woman does sex work.

I click on the OnlyFans link, and it directs me to a funnel page where I can subscribe to see her content. I don't hesitate as I sign up under a fake name. Once the payment goes through, the paywall drops and I have unlimited access to all of her videos and pictures.

My fingers tighten around my thickened cock, and I bare my teeth from pain and pleasure.

Now that the bout of anger and jealousy has faded, only uninhibited desire remains. Madison willingly posts this type of content, knowing full well people masturbate to it. It would be stupid of me to deny myself the enjoyment.

I choose a random video. Madison kneels in front of the mirror, with soft music playing in the background. She slowly strips out of the maid outfit while touching herself. I hiss through my teeth as I stroke my cock, not giving a shit that I didn't spit in my palm or grab some lotion to use as lube. She opens her legs and slips her hands between her thighs to tease her pussy.

"Oh, god," Madison whimpers in the video. "I'm so wet."

My fist flies faster on my dick, the burning sensation adding to the pleasure. I can't look away from my phone as my little sister puts on a show. She arches her back, pushing her breasts higher while she fingers herself.

I'd kill to be in the video with her, just so I can shove her onto her back and spread those thick thighs, giving the patron a good view of her pussy before I devour her until she soaks my face with cum.

I edge myself to her video, matching her pace. Right before I come, I stop stroking myself and wait for the orgasm to fade.

"Fuck yes, baby," I growl as Madison sinks a finger inside her wet pussy.

My breaths come out choppy, matching Madison's frantic gasps as she pushes herself closer to the edge. Right as she throws her head back and whines in pleasure, my bedroom door flies open. Light from the hallway spills into the dark room, exposing what I've been doing in private.

"Fuck!" I exit out of the app, cutting off Madison's loud moan right as it hits its crescendo. I release my white-knuckle grip on my dick and push myself up with my elbows on the mattress. "What the—"

"Ryder!" Madison dashes into my bedroom and throws herself onto my bed, right on top of me.

Pain mixes with pleasure and jolts through me until I see stars. My lips pinch together, and I hold back a pained groan. It hurts, but like the sick freak I am, I get even more turned on.

"What the fuck are you doing in here?" I grab Madison by the arms as she shifts to get off me. I mean to throw her off the bed. Instead, she ends up straddling me, with only the thin sheet between my erection and her pussy.

I clench my jaw and settle my palms on her love handles. A normal brother would shove her off and tell her to get out until he's decent, but I never fit in that box. I hold her in place and shift my hips, swallowing a moan as my cock grinds against her center. There's no way she doesn't feel my erection as she sits here with a terrified—

Terrified? Why is she afraid?

I sit up and slip my hand over her lower back. "What's wrong?"

"Justin. My fiancé. He said he'll see me soon," she blurts out. Tears shine in her eyes as she looks at me like I'm the hero who will protect her from the rest of the world.

I frown. "Why the fuck did you talk to him?"

"No." Madison shakes her head and grabs my shoulders, her nails biting into my skin as she gently shakes me. "I didn't. He's been calling nonstop and leaving voicemails. We have to go."

I cock my head and rip my gaze from her face to look for her cell phone. She's attached to it, so there's no way she would leave it downstairs. The light spilling into the bedroom from the hallway gives enough illumination for me to spot the pink case on the edge of the mattress. I snatch it and hold the screen toward her.

"Unlock it. Are you sharing your location with him?"

I wouldn't put it past Jerry to help Justin plant a tracking device in her phone. Being in a secret society like the Exiled means you—including your family— forfeit privacy. If you don't want people to watch you take a shit, you have to get creative with finding the bugs.

"I'm not sharing my location with anyone." She hesitantly taps in the passcode.

Right before she can pluck the phone from my hand, I snatch it back and search through her settings for the Share Location feature. I'm surprised when I find the option toggled off, but also relieved I don't have to deal with her fiancé tonight. He'll enjoy a bloody face and broken fingers if I don't end up killing him. That's if he makes it here without running into some trouble, but since there are cameras littered all over the neighborhood, I'd know the second he entered this part of town.

"You didn't give him the address, did you?" I search through the rest of her settings. I look for any signs someone added a tracking app or bug without her knowing.

"How would I give him that information if I don't know it myself?" Madison snatches the phone out of my hand and holds it against her chest.

I raise an eyebrow. It's a guilty move, but I know it's because of what she has hidden in her photo album and not so much to do with Justin.

I put on a show so she doesn't catch on that I know about her second life. "Are you lying?"

Madison doesn't disappoint as she squirms and averts her gaze. She shakes her head. "Aren't you concerned about Justin coming here?"

I scoff. "No."

"What if Dad told him where you live?" She turns back to me with the cutest pout I want to kiss. My cock twitches at the thought, and the embers of lust from earlier catch fire, burning out the momentary irritation. Madison's fiancé has a knack for creating.

"Jerry doesn't know where I live," I say. The all-consuming anger doesn't come whenever I think about my stepfather. All I can focus on is how badly I want to strip her out of her clothes and sink deep inside her.

Madison's lips part like she's about to ask another question, but then she rethinks it and closes her mouth. The wheels in her mind turn as she considers her next words.

"Why aren't you freaking out?" she says softly.

I lean forward until our noses brush. My hands slip over the swells of her ass, and I smirk at her gasp. “You think your fiancé scares me, little sister? I had to learn how to fight when I was ten. If anyone should be scared, it’s Justin, because he won’t leave here in one piece.”

Madison swallows hard, and I watch as everything clicks in her mind. She witnessed a lot of what her friends put me through. How Mickey and his goons beat me up but never walked away without far worse injuries than I received. Whatever Justin plans on doing to me to get to Madison won’t be any different from Mickey.

I lean to the side to brush my lips against Madison’s ear. She whimpers as I slip my hands beneath her to cup her ass.

“I told you not to come into my room,” I whisper.

“I’m sorry,” she breathes.

Leaning back, I watch her face as I thrust my straining erection against her pussy, forcing her to feel what she does to me.

Pink creeps to her cheeks. “What are you doing?”

I rock her hips against me, testing her reaction to such a bold move, and she doesn’t disappoint. Her pupils expand, and she moves with me, slow and gentle.

“You interrupted my alone time, sis,” I say. “It’s only right you make it up to me.”

Madison’s hand trembles around her phone. “We can’t do this.”

“Why?” I raise an eyebrow. “Because you’re engaged?”

“Because you’re my brother. Isn’t that a good enough reason?”

“It doesn’t count if there’s no penetration.” I pop the button on her jeans and drag the zipper down before peeling off her pants. “You have five seconds to leave. If you’re not out of here by the time I get to one, I’ll have you naked and grinding on my cock.”

It’ll only buy her more time before I claim her. I enjoy rough play and even some dubious consent. Hell, even consensual non-consent. But Madison looks seconds away from passing out or having another panic attack. I like my women willing, not frozen in fear.

“Five,” I say.

Madison swallows. With furrowed brows, she peeks over her shoulder at the open door. She could leave at any second, and I wouldn’t chase her. Not this time.

“Four.”

She lowers her hand from her chest and drops her phone to the bed. “No penetration, right?”

“Just grinding. Three.”

“No one will know about this?”

I shake my head. “It’ll be our little secret. Two.”

Madison eases off my lap and lowers her panties. My cock jerks as I stare at the triangle of pubic hair above her perfect pussy. The rest is bare. I ease her shirt over her head to join the rest of her clothes before I pull her onto my lap.

“Fuck,” I grind out as I palm her supple breasts. They spill out from all sides from the rough groping.

Madison lets out a needy sound as I pinch her pierced nipples. “You didn’t say anything about feeling me up.”

“That comes with the territory.” I lean forward and capture a pierced nipple in my mouth. Her soft moan shoots straight to my groin, pushing me closer to my orgasm without even having to touch myself. “Move the blanket,” I say between sucking and biting her nipple. “Slide your pussy up and down on my cock and get it nice and wet.”

Madison shoves the blanket to the side, freeing my erection, and with awkward, nervous movements, she straddles my lap. A groan works itself out of me as her pussy rubs against the underside of my dick.

“This doesn’t feel weird to you?” she whispers.

I unlatch my mouth from her nipple and snake an arm around her lower back while I move with her. My lips trail along her jaw, and she drops her head to the side, giving me more access to her throat that I cover in wet kisses. “Quite the contrary.”

She pants and rocks faster. In this position, she can only rub against the base of my shaft. I lie back, bringing her with me so she’s bent above me while bucking her hips faster.

“Just like that,” I growl.

Madison shivers and buries her face in my hair. She takes a deep breath, and the same odd feeling from earlier returns to my chest. I love how she breathes me into her lungs, as though she can’t get enough of me, like how I can’t ever get enough of her.

Years of fantasizing about being with my stepsister can’t touch what’s happening right now. I’ve imagined all the ways I’d fuck her, how I’d mark

her pretty skin so the world could see she belongs to me, but none of what I imagined can compare to the real deal.

I shudder as Madison tangles her fingers in my hair and fists strands until she's nearly pulling them out by the root. My cock thickens and my balls draw up tight as my orgasm builds. I hold it back, but it's hard to do when my sister moves with me, so eager to please.

The girl can act innocent all she wants, but we both know the truth. She's a freak like me. I just wonder how deep her kinks go. Clearly, she's into anal. Also pain. Those piercings don't lie, and how she reacted when I spanked her didn't either.

"Are you on the pill?" A shiver runs through me as I hold back the orgasm. I should have asked her this before starting, but I was too eager to feel her wet pussy.

Her face turns a brighter red, and she gives me the doe-eyed look that drives me wild. She shakes her head, her mouth forming words that die on her tongue.

I don't stop her from grinding as I awkwardly dig through my nightstand's drawer for a condom. After finding one, I rip open the foil packet with my teeth, then stop her movements before I roll the rubber down my shaft. I hiss as it stretches over my skin and strangles my dick.

"Fuck," I growl. "I forgot these are too small."

It's been too long since I've needed to use these condoms. I stole them from the drugstore my senior year in high school without looking at the sizes. The store associate was busy stocking the same aisle as the condoms, and I didn't have time to pretend I was shopping.

Madison's gaze dips to my cock as I force the last inch over the base of my shaft. I grit my teeth as the rubber ring cuts off the circulation. She bites her bottom lip, the wheels turning in her mind.

I stroke my shaft once, and that's all it takes for the condom to rip from the base to the tip. Pieces wilt and dangle from the rubber ring still choking my dick.

Madison's eyes widen. "Screw it."

My shoulders tighten, and my spine straightens. "Screw it?"

She meets my gaze. "I don't care about a condom."

My heart pounds against my chest. "You want me to fuck you raw?"

"We're not fucking. Just grinding." She reaches between us and peels the broken condom off me, her movements jerky and unsure. My eyes slide

closed as she strokes my dick, her thumb swiping over the head to smear the bead of pre-cum.

I shudder as her strokes become surer and faster. My balls draw up, and heat coils low in my stomach and at the base of my spine. I catch her wrist, stopping her from jerking me off. Two more strokes and I would have come.

“You don’t know what you’re asking for, doll.”

I’ve never done anything with a woman bareback. The idea of a fling winding up pregnant always made me feel sick. Even with my breeding kink—which I’ve never acted upon—I kept my shit wrapped. I don’t need a mini-me running around, tying me to a woman I have no feelings for.

But if Madison—

“It’s not like I’ll get pregnant,” she whispers.

My head drops backward, and I groan at the thought of Madison heavy with my child.

*Yup. I still have a breeding kink, but it’s ten times worse with it being my sister.*

I kiss her throat and mumble, “We’ll see about that.”

“Wh-what?”

Ignoring her startled question, I turn my head and brush kisses along her jaw, trailing closer to her lips. Madison loses her rhythm, startled as I kiss the corner of her mouth.

“Make yourself come,” I whisper.

Madison holds her head as still as a statue. A tiny smile tugs at my lips at her nervousness. If she wants a kiss, she’ll need to do it herself. Until then, I’ll tease her until she can’t take it anymore. The win will feel that much sweeter if she isn’t forced.

“I don’t know if I can,” she breathes.

My eyebrows rise. “What’s stopping you?”

She bucks her hips faster against me, desperate to come but clearly unable to. Her breasts thrust against my chest with each roll of our hips. A delicious appetizer for what it’ll feel like when they bounce against me while I mindlessly fuck her. Because make no mistake, it’ll happen. Soon, at that.

I cup the back of her head. “What do you need?”

She bites her bottom lip and squeezes her eyes shut.

“Eyes on me, doll. Tell me what you need to come.” I fist her hair and yank.

Madison yelps, her eyes flying open to meet mine. “It’s fucked up.”

“Nothing’s too fucked up for me.”

She bites her bottom lip and averts her gaze before returning it to my face. “Call me your sister. Remind me you’re my big brother and how good I make you feel.”

That’s when I snap and lose control.

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



## MADISON

### *“CIRCLES” POST MALONE*

Ryder's fingers tighten in my hair, pulling at the roots. I whimper at the burning sensation in my scalp, but I buck against him. With his teeth bared in a snarl, Ryder holds me in place by my hair and pistons his hips against mine with punishing blows. Each thrust bounces me on his lap, our flesh clapping together every time we meet.

“You dirty doll,” he growls. “Acting like you don’t enjoy my attention, but look at you, soaking your big brother’s cock.”

Heat flares in my body, like fireworks bursting in bright colors. He’s not angry or disgusted, and the weight on my chest lightens until I can finally take a full breath.

Ryder lunges for my neck and drags his tongue over the sensitive skin. I gasp as he bites down, his hot breath fanning against my neck and raising goosebumps on my flesh. My head lightens and my body burns hotter as the pain transforms into pleasure with every bite and lick.

I fist his hair and tug at the strands, earning a grunt from Ryder. He suckles a bite mark before he leans back to look at me.

“My pretty doll.”

I shiver at his compliment and try not to linger on his pet name for me.

Ryder releases my hair and circles my throat with his hand, squeezing with enough pressure to limit my air intake. I lean into his touch without an ounce of fear, silently urging him to choke me.

His eyes darken and his pierced lips curl into a tiny, deviant smile. His grip on my throat tightens until my lungs burn. The pressure on my neck isn’t terrible, and with him pleasuring me, it’s bordering on orgasmic. My mind goes blank, and everything fades until it’s just me and him and how good he feels while rubbing my clit with the underside of his dick.

“Come for me, little sister.” Ryder’s hand guides my hip faster, and he groans when the fat head of his cock nudges my opening as I glide backward. The pressure of the slight intrusion jolts me, and he shifts so that his erection slips out and nestles between my folds.

My eyes roll back, and the noise in my head fades to a low buzz. Dots pop into my vision as I get closer to blacking out.

“Fuck,” Ryder hisses through his teeth. “Come for me, baby. Show me how good I make you feel.”

My eyelashes flutter, and I scratch his chest as he reaches behind me and dips his fingers between my ass cheeks, probing my back hole with a finger. He cocks his head, his narrowed gaze trained on my face.

I thrust out my backside, demanding he finish what he started. We said no penetration, but I’m curious how it’ll feel to have someone else play with my asshole.

Ryder graces me with a smile as he breaches the tight ring of muscles. I arch my back as he stretches me, anticipating the burn.

“Relax for me. That’s my girl.” He sinks the digit deeper, until he reaches the last knuckle. He groans as I ride him faster, pushing my ass further out to take him deeper. “It won’t be long before I fuck your tight ass and fill you with my cum, sis. That butt plug will be child’s play after I’m through with you.”

My lips part on a silent scream as my body convulses with the orgasm. Stars burst behind my closed eyelids as wave after wave of ecstasy takes me further from Ryder. He loosens his hold on my throat. Blood rushes back to my head, and I suck in a ragged breath coupled with a cry as the climax intensifies.

Ryder's whimpers bring me back from the high, his thrusts quickening until warmth coats my pussy and inner thighs. I look between us, watching as cum shoots from his pierced tip. It lands in large globs on his pelvis and spreads down his shaft to where we meet, where it mixes with my arousal.

He drops his hand and pulls his finger out of me before reaching into his nightstand to grab a small packet of sanitary wipes. After cleaning his hands and tossing the napkin into the trashcan beside his bed, he drags me closer to him. With a tattooed arm hooked behind my neck, my breasts smash against his flat chest. Ryder eases my head closer until his lips are centimeters from touching mine. My stomach twists when he doesn't kiss me.

"You did so good for me," he murmurs. His mouth skims along my jaw before he catches my earlobe between his teeth. "God, sis, you made me feel so fucking good."

I shiver as his fingers thread through my messy hair, stroking the tendrils back into place as a lover would. He's gentler than he was moments ago. His tone is full of adoration, and his soft kisses along my throat speak volumes compared to the anger and hatred when we were lost in the moment.

Realization dawns on me. He didn't force me into submission by putting me on my knees, and now he's giving me aftercare. I didn't stick around to see if he cuddled the other girl, but I don't think so. I imagine he brushed her aside like a piece of trash. It should make me feel awful, but it doesn't. I guess jealousy is jealousy.

Ryder kisses the corner of my mouth and along my jaw. His teeth nip here and there, then soothe the stings with his pierced tongue. It's a strange and foreign sensation, but it doesn't hurt. The longer he kisses me like this, the more I enjoy it. A breath shudders out of me, and I rock my hips, rubbing my swollen clit against his hard dick. I squeeze my eyes shut as he finds a sensitive spot on my neck. He notices my reaction and focuses entirely on that spot, kissing and sucking until the embers of my hunger for him spark back to life.

The vibration of his groan settles deep in my core. “I wonder how your pussy tastes after being covered in my cum.”

Blood rushes to my cheeks.

He seriously wants to eat me out right now? With his cum still there?

Ryder cups my ass and squeezes. “Sit on my face, doll.”

Reality sets in as quickly as a freight train smashing into a bus full of false happiness and escapism. I push out of Ryder’s arms and stand on shaking legs. My heart slams against my ribcage and doubles with each second I’m under his gaze. I gather my clothes and try to focus on my breathing so I don’t go into a full-blown panic attack while I dress.

If Dad finds out what I did with my brother . . .

*Fuck.* If Justin finds out—

“Madison.”

I’ll never hear the end of it. Dad and the others will shun me for being a freak who messes around with her stepbrother. I can only pray Justin will end the engagement if he ever finds out. It’ll be the only good thing that comes out of this.

A hand grabs my wrist and jerks me into a wall of naked muscle and warmth that smells of amber and cypress. “Look at me.”

I snap out of my spiraling thoughts and look up at Ryder with wide eyes. “We shouldn’t have done that.” I jerk my arm out of his hold. “If Dad finds—”

He shakes his head and closes the space between us, walking me backward until I’m shoved against the wall. “Jerry won’t find out. I meant what I said about this being a secret.”

“You don’t understand.” I reach for him and stop right before I touch him. Ryder’s shoulder and chest muscles bunch up, already prepared for when and *if* I touch him again. “If Dad gets a hint that something is going on, he’ll dig until he finds out for sure.”

Ryder places his hands on the wall, caging me between his arms. I tense as his tattooed hand settles at the base of my throat. My muscles relax, and I lean into his hold.

He has to know how it affects me when he does this. There’s no way he’s oblivious to how he both drives me mad and grounds me.

“No one will find out,” he says.

I shake my head. “We can’t do this again.”

“You opened the door, doll,” he whispers. His thumb strokes gentle circles over what I’m certain is a hickey. “This is only just the beginning. But for your sake, and the sake of the reputation you’re desperately clinging to, I’ll treat you the same. Just so no one will ever catch on.”

He drops his arms to his sides, then steps back, giving me room to squeeze past him and flee his bedroom. I rush down the stairs and don’t bother turning on any lights as I enter the living room and plop onto the sectional couch.

If I took a time machine to tell my younger self that Ryder would one day want me as badly as I wanted him, my younger self would have laughed and called me a liar. I never thought this would happen. My crush on him was innocent because I believed he wouldn’t reciprocate the feelings.

I turn onto my side and close my eyes, willing sleep to come. My mind is my worst enemy as it replays the grinding session with my stepbrother. Warmth pools and settles between my lungs as Ryder’s groans echo in my head. His sweaty body moving beneath me and how he looked at me like I was his god. His lifeless, dull eyes were so full of life. All because of *me* and what *I* was doing to him.

He’s finally looking at me and speaking to me after years of pining for him, but all I feel is remorse and shame.

And I don’t know how to move on from him after this.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



## MADISON

### *"THROW ME TO THE WOLVES" FUTURE ROYALTY*

I sway in place as Ryder helps me with the same helmet from yesterday. He hasn't said much since waking up earlier this morning and handing over my phone, which I accidentally left in his bedroom. Then he tossed a hoodie to me and told me he's taking me home. That's it. He didn't help me as I struggled to get the slightly bigger hoodie on. Instead, he disappeared to the back deck, where he spent his time texting somebody.

For all I know, he could have been chatting with Hawk or the others in his friend group. I don't know and I shouldn't care.

But I do. A lot, actually.

The way he's acting feels almost sneaky, so I wonder if he's talking to another woman. I have no right to be jealous. I'm not single, unfortunately, but he is.

My eyes slide shut as Ryder fastens the helmet's straps beneath my chin. He hasn't said much to me since last night—which cuts deep—but he's still gentle while handling me.

I barely got any sleep last night. My nerves were everywhere because of what we did, as well as the looming threat of Justin finding me here. Every creak from the house's settling structure startled me awake. I held my breath while searching through the darkness, afraid to find him sneaking into the living room. He'd probably drag me out of the house by my hair.

I believed Ryder when he said he'd take care of Justin if he were to show up, but anxiety is a workaholic. It never takes a day off.

Ryder drops his hand, then taps the side of my helmet, signaling he's finished. I blink open my eyes as he backs away and waits for me to get on his motorcycle. The slight curl of his fingers as he beckons me brings all sorts of dirty thoughts to mind.

I duck my head, thankful he can't see my blush, and I squeeze past him. I mentally prepare for him to grab me or even spank my ass. It's something I wouldn't put past him.

Nothing happens.

My shoulders slacken, and disappointment coils in my stomach. I hate how he's messing with my head. Gone are the heated looks and passing touches meant to turn me on.

Ryder is keeping his word by treating me the same way as before, even though we're alone.

I can't help but wonder if it was a one-and-done thing. A heat-of-the-moment mistake where we said things we didn't mean as passion consumed us.

I slide onto the bike and inch backward to give Ryder room as he straddles the seat in front of me. The engine roars to life, and I lock my arms around his waist. He picks his way down the long driveway before we take off on the main road.

My stomach flips as he increases the speed exiting the neighborhood. It's early on a Sunday, so not a lot of people are out. I thank the sky above because the last thing I need right now is for someone to see us.

The ride takes less time than when driving a car. I knew Ryder enjoyed riding his motorcycle, but I didn't realize how much he loved speeding until these last two days.

Ryder parks on the far side of the driveway, and my stomach knots as our parents' house looms over us.

*Home sweet home.*

Back to my prison, where I have to be the good daughter of Jerry Richmond. Time to face the music and find out what Justin told my father happened yesterday.

I slip off the seat as Ryder knocks out the kickstand, and I linger nearby for him to help me with the helmet. Not that I need the help. I just want to drag this out for as long as possible and feel his hands on me before we go back to how things were. He doesn't spare me a glance as he straightens to his full height and stalks toward the path leading to the backyard. My heart sinks as he disappears around the corner, leaving me standing here looking like a fool.

*"This is only just the beginning. But for your sake, and the sake of the reputation you're desperately clinging to, I'll treat you the same. Just so no one will ever catch on."* Ryder's promise resurfaces, cruelly reminding me this is exactly what I wanted, and he's keeping his word.

*Suck it up, Maddy. It's for the best.*

I square my shoulders and take the opposite path from Ryder, leading to the front door. Two uncarved pumpkins sit on each side of the entrance. Carolyn must have put them there. Dad never puts in any effort, but the effort is too minimal to have been Minnie. That woman loves Halloween.

I still need to prepare for the party my friends and I are planning to crash. My main concern is Ryder. If he's there, I don't know if he'll try anything or if it'll just be awkward as we give each other the cold shoulder. Or he could always take it a step further and make a huge scene in front of everyone because I invited myself to his party.

Shaking away the thought, I open the door and quietly shut it behind me. I squint so I can see through the tinted visor as I creep through the entrance, hoping my father won't hear my arrival and confront me. My heart pounds harder with each step I take.

I can't fucking breathe with this helmet on. Its straps dig into the underside of my jaw.

My hands tremble as I fumble with the straps. It's hard to see what I'm doing. When I think I have it loosened, it still doesn't come undone. I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from cursing as the strap refuses to budge.

"Why won't you come off?" I whisper.

A door squeaks open, and footsteps stomp through the hallway that leads to Dad's office and the gym. My hands fall limp to my sides, and I slowly turn toward the sound. I know Dad's footsteps like the back of my hand. They're always so loud and hard, like he's stomping the marble deeper into the earth for insulting his dead mother.

Dad rounds the corner, a scowl already set in place, and his hands slip into his pockets. It's Sunday, and he's still dressed in a business suit. "And where have you been?"

I cringe, thankful he can't see my expression beneath the helmet.

*I didn't realize I had to answer to you like I'm still a child,* I want to say, but I don't. It'll only dig my grave deeper.

"Out," I say.

Dad raises an eyebrow and looks me over with a critical eye. His frown deepens at whatever he sees. "Clearly."

I wince. It's not like I'm wearing anything different from my usual outfits. I glance down, suddenly self-conscious about my wardrobe. My eyes widen.

Shit. Ryder's hoodie.

A cold sweat breaks out on my clammy skin as I wait for Dad to put two and two together. From glimpsing the clothing alone, there's no way he'll know what Ryder and I did last night, but if there's a will, there's a way for that man.

"Take the helmet off, Madison," Dad orders. "I want to see your face when I'm talking to you."

With stiff movements, I unclip the strap and raise the helmet from my head.

"What happened yesterday was disrespectful to your future husband," Dad says.

Dad yanks the helmet from my hands and regards me with indifference. "It was disrespectful to me as well. Your misbehavior reflects on me, Madison, and I can't have that."

I fix my hair and glare at him. "Did Justin tell you what happened?"

His gaze sharpens into daggers. "He told me everything."

“And you’re still taking his side?” My head rears back like he just backhanded me without a thought. He might as well have done so, because how the hell can he excuse Justin assaulting and almost raping me? I know my dad can be heartless, but I didn’t realize he actually lacks a soul.

“Don’t act like a child. It’s unbecoming of you.” He turns his attention to the helmet he’s still holding in a death grip. His lips curl in disgust as he shifts his focus to me. “It looks like you and your brother have a newfound friendship. How intriguing.”

I freeze, afraid he’ll see through me and learn all my secrets if I move in the slightest. I try to choose my next words carefully so Ryder doesn’t get dragged into this. “Not really. We can’t stand each other. I had him take me to my friend’s house.”

Dad tilts his head but doesn’t break the staring contest or his silence. His eyes that were once kind turn cold and callous, lacking any humanity. With each passing second, my chest constricts until it’s hard to breathe through the rising panic.

*He knows what happened. He was just testing me to see what I would say. I failed.*

“Stay away from him,” he says, finally breaking the silence. “Do you hear me? He’s nothing but bad news.”

I swallow around the lump building in my throat.

Dad widens the gap between us, taking the helmet with him. I reach for it, and he gives me his back, then strides toward the hallway leading to his office.

I inch forward, wanting to follow him so I can grab the helmet and return it to Ryder.

“Oh, and Madison?” He stops and turns his narrowed gaze to me. “The next time you try to stab Justin while he’s using the restroom, I’ll allow him to press charges against you, just so we’re clear. Your little stunt put a hole in my wallet to prevent that outcome this time around, but don’t think I’ll always protect you when you act like a petulant brat.”

My jaw drops, right along with my heart, which shatters into a million pieces.

The jerk didn’t tell my father the truth. Of course he lied!

Rage burns through my veins, scaring me for the first time. It’s consuming me until all I can picture is strangling Justin until life leaves his eyes.

Dad dismisses me, then says over his shoulder, “Your new ring is waiting for you on your vanity. It stays on no matter what, and you’ll thank Justin when he comes over for dinner tomorrow evening.”

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



## RYDER

### *“BLACK RAINBOW” GRIM SALVO, WITCHHOUSE 40K*

I kick my bedroom door shut behind me. My chest rises and falls with quick, angry breaths. My nails bite into my palms as my hands curl into tight fists by my sides. The skin over my knuckles pulls taut. Red bleeds into my vision, obscuring it more than my helmet’s tinted visor. I still haven’t taken it off since arriving back at this godforsaken house.

I’m tempted to take Madison back to my place to hide her from Jerry, and I’m struggling to stop myself from storming inside and demanding just that. She’s alone in there with him, and I can’t be there as a buffer when he

talks to her. Or when his palm itches too much to resist, and he hits her. If he can do it to me, he can and *will* do it to her, too.

My chest tightens and burns as the strange feeling returns whenever I think about Madison. It's not anger or hatred, the emotions I've felt for her for so long that they've consumed me. No, this new feeling is taking control of me at a frightening speed. It's the same way I felt five years ago when I witnessed Mickey strangling Madison.

Unlike that time, I don't know why Madison ran from Justin yesterday. It wasn't because of a fucking *misunderstanding*. Misunderstandings don't cause people to run for their lives with a look of terror on their faces. Whatever the reason, I have a sick feeling in my gut about it. Especially since Jerry participated in harassing her yesterday evening while she was with me.

After Madison abandoned her phone in my bedroom in her desperation to escape me, I spent an ungodly amount of time going through it. I read the messages from Jerry and Justin. None of them was good, and it was clear they've been working in tandem to wilt her fighting spirit and shove her into a gilded cage. Jerry called Madison just as much as Justin did. He didn't leave concerning voicemails, unlike her piece of shit fiancé, but his text messages raised red flags.

Also, who is Justin? Where the fuck did he come from? How in the hell did he convince Madison to marry him? Where does he fit in all of this? Is he part of the Exiled Society and I just never heard of him? My stepfather doesn't have friends. He has acquaintances and pawns. He judges people based on how useful they are or how far they're willing to go for him. If Justin has wormed his way into Jerry's good graces, there's a reason, and I'm dying to know what he has up his sleeve for him.

Regardless, if either of them hurts Madison, they'll find out just how terrifying I can be.

I pull at the straps under my jaw, then rip off my helmet. My phone rings, pulling me from the edge of losing control. I toss the helmet to the ground and fish my cell out of my pocket.

"Yeah?" I answer.

"I promised I'd call you if I found something," Jaxon says. "Caught a blurry image of someone hanging around outside my place from that morning."

I know my friend well enough to not mistake the boredom in his tone as apathy. He must be fuming over this. Someone was with Mickey, and the motherfucker would have gotten away undetected if Jerry hadn't opened his mouth.

I raise my head. "Can you recognize them?"

"No." He pauses, then says, "Hawk is sending the images to his cousin, Declan. He's good at cleaning up images. We should have more info soon."

I nod, even though he can't see it. "Keep me updated."

"One more thing," Jaxon says.

I put my phone back to my ear. "Yeah?"

"The person isn't working alone, either. Someone pulled up outside of the neighborhood and picked them up."

"Did you get any details on the car?" I ask.

"Dark grey Honda Accord. Declan will get the plates and info on it."

"Thanks, man."

We end the call, and I stare blankly at my unmade bed.

Mickey's mystery accomplice will be a thorn in my side until I get a name and a face. Whoever they are, they're close to my father and the other Kings in the Exiled Society. At this point, it could be anyone.

Nervous energy buzzes beneath my skin, begging to be released. If I wasn't worried about Madison being hurt, I'd go for a joyride on my motorcycle, but I can't bring myself to leave her alone with her father. I trust Jerry as far as I can throw him.

I strip out of my clothes and change into a pair of basketball shorts and my workout sneakers. The only way to rid myself of the nervous energy while also monitoring Madison is a workout in the home gym.

I leave my bedroom and take the stairs on the deck two at a time. The back door noiselessly slides open, and I squeeze through the small space before I shut it behind me. The den is dead silent as I cross the room and head toward the hallway.

Madison is nowhere in sight. Not even her voice carries through the house.

I glare at Jerry's closed office door as I pass it. His low, muffled voice is absent for the first time. I stop outside the gym and peer down the hallway, debating if I should find Madison. The thought lasts for all of a second before I brush it aside.

She would get upset if sought her out and got caught by anyone.

Shaking away the uneasy feeling, I enter the gym and pull my phone out of my pocket to check Madison's Instagram. If she can post, she's not hurt. My fingers tighten on my phone when I spy the image she uploaded five minutes ago.

She's okay. Thank fuck for that.

I lock my phone screen, and start my workout routine by stretching, then move on to jogging for a few minutes. I eventually swap to heavy lifting. With no music playing in the background, I can listen for any sounds from Jerry or Madison.

An hour drags by. After working out the tension, I head toward the kitchen to grab some water and food. My steps falter when hushed voices reach my ears just outside the threshold.

"I'm fine, sweetheart," Mary says.

Madison's voice strains as she says, "No you're not. You can't just excuse a black eye like it's nothing."

My eyebrows furrow as I move closer, keeping out of sight so I'm not caught eavesdropping on their conversation.

Madison's back faces me as she crowds Mary, who's trying to console her niece. My teeth grind together at the sight of the deep purple bruise beneath Mary's left eye.

That motherfucker. Not only is Jerry okay with hitting a child, but he also beats his sister.

"You think this is the first time he's done this? Because it isn't. Trust and believe me when I say karma will get him one day," Mary says.

Madison flails her hands by her sides. "How can you act so nonchalant about this, Minnie? He hit you! We need to go to the police about this."

Mary draws Madison into a hug, one of her hands cupping the back of Madison's head. My sister doesn't fight the embrace. She clings to the older woman as though her life depends on it.

"I don't need to go to the police. It's okay." Mary kisses Madison's temple. "You think I didn't get my own punches in? I'm not scared of him, and he knows it."

Madison makes a disgruntled noise and squeezes Mary tighter.

"One of these days, someone much bigger than him will knock him down a peg or two. Until then, all I can do is ruffle his feathers and remind him our grandfather wouldn't stand for his bullshit." Mary smooths the back of Madison's head, then untangles herself from the hug.

Madison sighs. “Did you really punch Dad?”

“Damn straight I did.” Mary cackles. “He whimpered like a little bitch, too.”

“Who taught you how to fight?”

Mary’s face softens. “Your great-grandfather. He was the best boxer of his time and taught me fighting skills at an early age. He said it’d come in handy to fight off all the boys when I got older.” She shakes her head with a darkened expression. “He was right.”

Feeling like I’m intruding on their private moment, I head for the back door. Unfortunately, that means I have to pass by the kitchen’s entryway. There’s no escaping being seen, but I can make it look like I haven’t been listening in on their conversation. Both women go quiet as I cross the small path to the door.

I know the very second when Madison looks at me. Like all the other times, tingles spread through the side of my face, and heat waves roll through my body.

I spent years hating and lustng after that woman, wishing she would stop looking at me with those eyes. It always made it harder to resist her, and it’s the same, even now. I love and hate her attention because she’s making it difficult to keep my promise to treat her the same way when all I want to do is punish her for the years of anger toward her.

“You hungry, Ryder?” Mary calls.

I keep my expression blank as I barely turn my head to side-eye the women who turned toward me.

Mary leaves Madison’s side and rounds the kitchen island, where two stacks of pizza boxes stand. I was too engrossed in their conversation and watching Madison to notice the food.

“I got your favorite.” Mary raises the topmost box in a proud display. “Meat Lovers.”

I stare at her, ignoring Madison as she burns a hole in my face. My sister can lie to everyone else but me. We both know the truth about how deep her feelings for me go, and now that she has my attention, there’s no escaping it. Even when I’m ignoring her, she steals my every thought.

I turn back to the door and leave without a word. I meant what I said about keeping our tryst a secret. I’ll treat her the same as before. I’m a man of my word, even though this one will kill me.

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



## MADISON

*“LIKE YXU WXULD KNXW (AUTUMN TREES)” KORDHELL, SCARLXRD, CORPSE*

My nerves are unattended live wires jumping too close to a puddle. Any second now, the water will touch the wires and set off a chain reaction. I'm moments from screaming and making a fool of myself as I sit beside Justin at the dinner table. The entire family is here, and even Ryder has joined. He hasn't spared me a glance since yesterday when we arrived home.

Justin's hand lies heavily on my thigh, his fingers spread out and gripping me with the strength of a python coiled around its next meal. He's

played nice since he first arrived this evening. It's all for show, of course, so he doesn't alarm my family by revealing how he behaves when we're alone.

Dad and Justin chat about confusing topics. It all sounds like mumbo-jumbo bullshit to me, but they seem to understand each other just fine.

It's hard to pay attention when Justin keeps squeezing my thigh and sliding his hand closer to my core. Bile rises in my throat, and my skin crawls beneath Justin's touch. I'm right back in the bathroom at the restaurant, on my knees, with Justin shoving his dick in my face for me to suck.

I shift in my seat, hoping it's enough to move his hand. Justin barks out a laugh at whatever Dad said, giving my leg a warning squeeze at the same time. I side-eye him, then glare at my half-empty plate of food. Minnie cooked tonight, and I hate that I'm unable to finish the meal. What little I've eaten already sits heavily on my stomach.

"We'll have to go there sometime. Maybe after your honeymoon?" Dad says.

My head snaps up, and I catch Ryder staring at me before he slides his attention away. His expression is blank, lacking any emotion, but I still catch the fire burning in his cold eyes as he stares at Justin. Any second now and my fiancé will combust into flames.

"We'll see how the missus fares when we get back. Then we'll talk," Justin says with a smirk.

Dad's grin is more wolfish than amused. "Ah, yes. Good point. I know all this waiting is riling you up. I'm sure you'll take great care of Madison while she's meeting your needs."

My face slackens and my jaw drops. They're going to sit here and bluntly talk about the wedding night? And Justin will see how I *fare*? What the fuck does he plan to do, beat me?

I wouldn't put it past him, actually.

"I'm right here," I snap. My heart hammers and I tremble with rage as the two men chuckle at me like I'm some dainty woman who can't think for herself.

Minnie drops her silverware onto her plate and glares at my father. "That's your daughter you're talking about, Jerry."

Dad's amusement melts away, and his face pinches as he turns to his sister. "It's not like the girl doesn't know what will happen on her wedding night."

“She’s still your child,” Minnie growls. “You have no business discussing something like that.”

My stomach knots while I watch Dad and Aunt Mary argue. It’s nice knowing she’ll call my father out on his bullshit, but I’m worried he’ll hit her again when they’re alone. She says she can handle her own, but he’s far bigger than she is and can easily overpower her if he chooses to.

Ryder relaxes into his seat, his fingers toying with his steak knife on the table. The skeleton fingers tattooed on his hand and fingers ripple with the movement, bringing the art to life with a promise of violence.

Minnie is the only good thing about being here with Justin and Dad. Carolyn is useless. She’ll take my father’s side about everything, no matter how messed up things get.

Speaking of Carolyn, she sits quietly beside my dad, but when she looks at my aunt, irritation flashes across her sharp features.

“It’s fine, Mr. Richmond,” Justin says. “We can have our more private discussions in your office. Wouldn’t want the delicate ears listening in on men’s businesses.”

I bite the inside of my cheek and swallow the insult hanging on my tongue.

Ryder’s fingers tighten around the knife, then loosen. He shoves his seat back and stands, then leaves the living room without a word. I keep my gaze trained forward, just in case the others are watching for my reaction.

I snatch up my champagne glass, glad there’s still a good amount left for me to drink. If I have to put up with this, I’d rather be drunk than sober. The carbonated bubbles fizz all the way down my throat until they settle in my stomach. Warmth blooms within my body as I tip back the glass until I’m left wanting more. That wasn’t enough to drown everything out.

The rest of the meal is uneventful. My lower back is killing me from sitting with a straight spine and tensed shoulders. Madam Joan would be proud if she saw me now, though her approval means nothing to me. It’s hard to relax when Justin keeps touching my leg.

My stomach churns, and I glance toward the kitchen.

I can’t take this anymore.

I excuse myself from the table and bring my empty champagne glass with me for a refill. A happy hum spills out of me as I grab the bottle from the refrigerator. I pop the cork and pour the fizzling alcohol into my glass.

Justin's voice carries from the other room, killing my short-lived buzz. "If it's all right, Mr. Richmond, I'd like to stay the night. I had a little too much to drink, and I don't think I can drive."

"Of course. I'm sure you'd like some alone time with your fiancée, too," Dad says, loud enough for me to hear. "I'm positive Madison has something important to tell you concerning what happened yesterday."

I scowl at my glass and squeeze my eyes shut as I tip my head back. I finish the champagne in three gulps. It burns all the way down and settles in my churning stomach.

The memory of Justin's touch raises goosebumps on my arms, bringing helpless rage with it as it lingers.

I pour another glass so I can numb the sensations.

Justin asking to stay the night is his way of slithering into my bed. How can my dad be okay with Justin staying the night here, when he's made it clear we aren't allowed to do anything until we're married?

And there is no way in hell I'll apologize to Justin, if that's what he's implying.

Footsteps approach from behind, and a hand slides over my shoulders, then settles on my lower back.

"You've had enough to drink," Justin murmurs into my ear.

Ignoring him, I tilt my head back and chug the rest of the champagne in my glass.

"Madison," he warns, and squeezes my waist.

I shrug him off. "I don't need your permission."

Justin plucks the glass from my hand and sets it on the marble countertop in front of me. He grabs me by the elbow and guides me out of the kitchen.

My heart sinks to my stomach, and I dig the heels of my flats into the floor. "I'm not going anywhere with you."

He ignores me, sending my panic into overdrive. I dig my elbow into his side, but Justin doesn't even grunt. The only reaction I get is his tightening grip—another warning. I hold back a wince, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of seeing me hurt. He drags me out of the kitchen, then out the back door before anyone can spot us and save me from whatever punishment Justin has in store.

"Let go of me." I shove out of his grasp, and this time he releases me as he slides the door shut behind him.

Justin adjusts his tie, then stalks toward me. Gone is the perfect gentleman, replaced by the monster he keeps hidden from everyone but me.

“Who am I?” he says as he advances.

I scramble backward, putting as much space between us as possible. This is a game I can’t win. For every step I take, he takes two. My chest squeezes as my heart fights for its life, pounding against its cage so it can escape Justin as well.

“I didn’t know your brain was between your legs. Did I bite you so hard that you got a concussion and forgot your name?” I stammer. My tongue is thick from the alcohol, which thankfully gives me a little extra courage to tell him off.

His lips flatten into a harsh line. Shadows blanket his face, with only the moonlight highlighting the sharp edges of his nose and cheekbones.

“You think you’re cute, don’t you?” He shakes his head. “You forget who I am.”

It was a lame jab toward him, but I call it a win because it got under his skin.

But at what cost?

I gasp and stumble over my own feet as he lunges the last foot between us. His hand snaps out and fists my hair on the side of my head. I yelp as he yanks me into a standing position, then walks me backward until my ass meets the banister overlooking the woods in the backyard. I clutch Justin’s shoulders as he bends me backward until I’m dangling over the edge. The toes of my shoes barely touch the ground as he hovers above me with a deep-set scowl.

It’s a twenty-foot drop if he lets go of me, and I wouldn’t put it past him to do exactly that.

“You’re my fiancée,” he says through bared teeth, “which means you answer to *me*. You’ll do everything I tell you to do without questioning me or talking back.”

“Justin,” I whimper. “Please. You’re hurting me.”

He scoffs. “You’re being dramatic, Madison. Isn’t this what you wanted? To see me angry after I’ve shown you nothing but kindness? I’ve spent thousands of dollars on you, and you’re still acting like a bitch.”

I shove his chest. “Stop it!”

Justin smirks and drops me, only firming his hold at the last second. A choked scream slips out of me as I grapple with his dress shirt, clutching

him so I don't fall. He grins and holds me in place with his fist in my hair, his hips pinning mine to keep me balanced.

"I didn't ask for this," I say.

He's going to kill me. I can see it in his bottomless-pit eyes.

Justin snorts. "You didn't ask for this? You bit me, you bitch! Then you ran off with one of your biker friends. Tell me, sweet wife. Did you let him touch you?"

The alcohol curdles in my stomach, threatening to make a reappearance all over Justin's face and chest.

I don't think. I just act. I gather saliva in my mouth and spit it directly onto his face.

Justin's jaw tightens, and he shoves away from me. I rock forward and scramble away from the banister so he doesn't put me in that position again. He removes a cloth handkerchief from his pocket and swipes the saliva from his face, all while keeping his fiery gaze on me.

I raise my chin.

"I really don't want to do this," he says as he calmly slips the handkerchief back into his pocket, "but you're forcing my hand here."

He lunges for me, and I yelp as he snatches me by the hair to keep me in place. He swings his other arm, fingers extended and palm flying toward my cheek.

Skeleton fingers catch Justin's wrist, stopping him right before his hand collides with my face.

The night stills, like it's holding its breath as a new danger makes itself known. No wind. No insects chirping. Just the sound of my labored breaths.

"I'd let her go if you wish to keep your hand." Ryder's expression is flat, like he's bored and would rather be anywhere else but here, but his stare says something else as he burns a hole into the side of Justin's head.

Justin turns to my stepbrother while still fisting my hair. His eyes widen a fraction, then narrow. "Get your filthy hand off of me."

Ryder cocks his head, his fingers tightening around Justin's wrists. His lips slowly curve into a smile, stealing my breath. His smiles are always terrifying, but my god, they're so beautiful.

"Interesting you say that. My sister told you to get off of her not even five seconds ago, and you didn't listen to her." He steps closer to Justin. His grin slips, and shadows creep over his features. "Let go of her."

“Go back inside,” Justin snarls as he tries to jerk his hand out of Ryder’s grip. He puffs his chest out to look tougher than he really is, but fear trickles over his face the longer Ryder stares at him. “This is between me and your sister.”

“You didn’t make sure you were alone. It wasn’t between you and her. It’s between you and me. Now let go of her, or I’ll take your tongue as a souvenir as well.”

Justin’s fingers tighten in my hair. I hiss through my teeth as strands pull from my scalp. Ryder shifts his attention to me, a muscle thrumming in the corner of his jaw as Justin scowls at him. Justin’s lips part, like he’s about to argue some more, but he thinks better of it and clamps them shut before releasing my hair and stepping back.

“Good boy,” Ryder murmurs. He lets go of Justin and slips his tall, lean frame between us. “Run along, now.”

Justin rubs the spot where Ryder had a death grip on him. With one final glare at Ryder, he storms back inside. He’s probably running to my dad right now to tell him a loose version of what happened. After lying to my father about the other day, it won’t surprise me if he twists it to make himself look like the victim.

Ryder faces me, his gaze sweeping over my trembling body for any injuries. He steps closer and pauses when I stumble backward.

“You’re afraid of me.” He cocks his head.

I swallow hard. “No, I’m not.”

It’s the opposite, actually. I’m more afraid of what I’ll do if he touches me. We can’t be caught together, and he knows this.

Ryder doesn’t move a muscle as he towers over me. He’s ripping me open and pulling back all my layers to discover my secrets.

I shiver despite the warmth from the booze.

Ducking my head, I stumble past him and fall into his side as my feet have a hard time deciding which direction to take. Ryder catches me, his touch gentle but demanding as he guides me down the stairs and into his bedroom in the pool house.

I don’t know why I’m not fighting him. Nothing good will come from being alone with him in his bedroom. Arousal soaks my panties at the thought of grinding on Ryder again.

I squeak as he shoves me against his closed door and cages me in with his palms flat by my shoulders. Only a sliver of space exists between us, but

it feels like miles because of how badly I want to feel him against me. Heat crawls up my neck as the heady scent of amber and cypress fills my lungs.

This is so wrong. What happened the other night was a mistake—one that can't happen again—but the reason is being drowned out by the alcohol.

“The next time the shit stain tries to hurt you, fight back,” he murmurs. “Or at the very least, scream for me, little sister.”

His words send me back to five years ago, when he told me to scream for him after Mickey strangled me in the high school’s hallway.

“How?”

“You don’t know self-defense?” Ryder frowns.

“Not really.” After talking to Minnie yesterday about how my grandfather taught her to fight, I’ve thought about nothing else. I’d kill to know how to punch and defend myself from creeps like Justin.

Ryder’s frown deepens. He straightens to his full height and gently grabs my hand, then places my palm over his cheek, right below his eye. “You go for the eyes.” He lowers my hand to his neck. “Throat.” My knees threaten to give out as he lowers my hand to his groin, his cock pressed against my palm. “Dick and balls.”

“Ry-Ryder.” Everything spins as he squeezes my hand on him. He’s already hardening, and it jerks beneath my touch as I curl my fingers around his shaft from outside his pants.

He bends over me, his face hovering above mine. I sway as he leans in, until his lips are dangerously close to mine, until I can feel his every breath puffing against my parted mouth.

“Don’t act so innocent, sis,” he murmurs. “It’s not like you haven’t felt me before.”

Blood rushes to my cheeks, and all the fight leaves my body. “We can’t do this.”

Ryder leans his forehead against mine. His pupils dilate as I stroke his cock once, then fumble with his button and zipper.

I don’t blame him for not believing anything coming out of my mouth. Actions speak louder than words, and I’m trying so hard to fight this attraction toward my brother. It’s difficult when he’s looking at me like I’m the sexiest woman he’s ever laid eyes on. Like he wants to burn the world for me.

“Madison.” His chest rumbles against mine from his hushed plea.

I slip my hand into his pants and grab his erection. Ryder groans, his fingers digging into my love handles as he resists touching me anywhere else.

I can't stop touching him, though, just like I can't stop silently begging him to kiss me.

I awkwardly shove his pants down his thighs, freeing his cock so I can stroke him at a better angle. My head tilts back, as does Ryder's, and he groans as I brush my thumb over the pierced tip. An ache builds between my legs as I lazily stroke him with one hand and thread my fingers through his hair with the other. He lets out a shaky breath and shallowly thrusts his hips to fuck my fist.

Ryder tilts his head like he's about to kiss me. My heart skyrockets, and I close my eyes, waiting to feel his lips on mine.

"I want you." My words come out in a drunken slur.

"Fuck," Ryder grates in a whisper.

Disappointment tightens my chest as Ryder pulls away from me. He gently removes my hand from his cock before he tucks himself away.

I open my eyes. "What did I do wrong?"

He steadies me with his hands on my shoulders as I stumble toward him. "You're drunk."

"Don't tell me you're also mad about me drinking?" I swat his hands away. "I'm an adult."

Ryder ignores my slaps and picks me up like I weigh nothing. I squeeze my eyes shut as gravity becomes nonexistent. Even behind my closed eyelids, everything spins. My back meets a soft mattress, and I peek at Ryder as he lays me on his bed.

"Get some sleep." He eases my shoes off my feet, his fingers brushing over my ankles. "I'm not touching you while you're drunk."

I push myself onto my elbows and plop back down when the spinning returns with a vengeance. "Ugh. Isn't this what you wanted? For me to want you?"

He slips the blanket over me, his expression blank while he tucks me in like I'm a child.

Angry tears sting my eyes as he walks toward the door without a word. He picks something up from his dresser, along with his motorcycle helmet. I sit up and breathe through the nausea slamming into me.

The emotional pain hits differently this time. I threw myself at him, and he denied me.

“I thought this was what you wanted, Ryder!”

He stops at the doorway and glances at me over his shoulder. “I want you willing. If you need liquid courage to touch me, that’s the opposite of willing. Get some sleep.”

“Where are you going?”

A secret smile tugs at his pierced lips. “I’ll be back later, doll. Behave.”

He turns and leaves without another word.

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



## RYDER

*“ROME” ARANKAI, DAL AV*

**S**ticking to the shadows close to the front of the mansion, I watch Justin and Jerry argue in angry whispers near Justin’s parked car. While I was taking care of a drunk Madison, Justin must have run straight to Jerry and told him what happened.

From what I can hear when their voices rise enough for me to make out what they’re saying, Justin claims he was trying to have a private moment with Madison before I interrupted them in a “fit of rage.”

Justin paints a detailed picture made out of shit, and Jerry falls for it. It’s interesting how quickly my stepfather panders to this man’s whims.

“—had a deal. If she doesn’t come around soon, I’ll take matters into my own hands, Jerry,” Justin snarls, raising his voice loud enough for me to

hear.

I cock my head.

*A deal?*

“I’ll have a talk with her.” Jerry pinches the bridge of his nose and slips his other hand into his pocket.

*Over my dead body, he will.*

Justin raises his chin and squares his shoulders. “And if you don’t take care of that asshole, then I will.”

A tiny smile breaks across my face. Good. I’m glad I got under his skin. I only hope Jerry doesn’t get suspicious of Madison and me because I defended her. It’s already too late to take it back. Not that I would anyway, but I don’t want my sister to panic.

Jerry drops his hand and pins Justin with a hardened expression. He says something in a lower tone, but I can’t catch the exact words.

My eyebrows pinch together, and I creep closer so I can hear better. I pause when Jerry takes a step away from Justin, his other hand slipping into his pocket.

“You sure you can drive?” he says. “You can still stay here for the night.”

Justin turns his head toward the house, looking directly at me, but not seeing me. He’s silent for a few seconds, and I begin to wonder if he really can see me, but his attention slips back to Jerry.

“I’d rather not,” Justin says. “Not when *he*’s there.”

Jerry nods once. “Very well. Be safe.”

Justin slips behind the wheel and shuts the door once he’s settled in the seat. Jerry doesn’t hang around to see him off. He turns and strides toward the front door. I sink further into the shadows, my back pressing against the house as Jerry passes by and walks inside. The front door quietly shuts behind him, and I creep toward my motorcycle as Justin pulls out of the driveway.

I slip my hand into my pocket, pull out my skull mask, and lower it over my head, followed by my helmet. I grab my key from my pocket and push it into the ignition, then follow Justin as he drives across town. I leave a good amount of space between us so he doesn’t get spooked and take off—not that I couldn’t keep up, but it would ruin the fun I’d have with him.

Rage burns through my veins as the memory of Justin hurting Madison pops into my head. The look of terror on her face as he dangled her over the

patio banister will haunt me for the rest of my life.

By the time Justin pulls into his driveway, I'm seeing red, and ideas about how I'll make him pay for what he did rush through my mind. Justin climbs from behind the wheel and turns toward me as I race up the driveway and park a foot away from him. He jumps back, his features twisting in fear.

I storm toward him and flip up the visor so nothing gets lost in translation. Justin lunges to the side, and I catch him before he can escape. I turn him around and shove his chest against his car with my arm looped around his neck.

"What . . . the . . . fuck?" Justin growls between gasping breaths as I close his airway.

"We're not done talking." I shove my chest against his back to pin him against the car, leaving him no room to wiggle his way out of my grasp.

His breath gurgles and his movements slow the longer I hold him in a headlock. Justin digs his blunt nails into my bare forearm, though the pressure lessens as he struggles for air.

"Let me make myself clear, Justin," I say. "You're going to end your engagement with Madison. You won't come near her again. You won't breathe anywhere near her. You won't call or text her. And you sure as shit won't ever think about her again, especially when you're beating your dick. Do you understand me?"

Justin's hands fall limp, and right before he passes out, I loosen my hold around his throat. He sucks in a ragged breath.

It pisses me off that this motherfucker is alive, but I can't kill him. Not with Jerry in his corner, making this into a bigger mess than it needs to be. Silencing Justin and forcing him to walk away from my sister is the best I can do right now.

A husky laugh breaks me out of my seething thoughts. Justin turns his head, his cheek flat on the car, and his gaze shifts to me as he laughs. "You think you can threaten me and get away with it?"

"Oh, I know I can." I grab my pocketknife and release the blade. Justin tenses as I tap the blade's flat side against his thigh. "I know where you live, and I will kill you in your sleep before you can utter a word to Jerry."

Justin huffs out a laugh. "You think that scares me? I know far scarier people than you."

A tiny smile tugs at my lips. "You need a demonstration, then. Got it."

Justin's eyes widen. He yelps as I grab his hand and slam it against the car while keeping him pinned in place.

"You owe me your hand and tongue, but I'll only collect two of your fingers tonight," I say.

Justin yells as I extend the fingers on his right hand. I wind my arm around his neck and tighten until his screams die out. Justin's body slumps as he toes the line of blacking out. I drag him to the ground and straddle his stomach while holding his right hand and my knife. Justin's eyelashes flutter and his eyes roll as all the blood rushes back to his head.

"Make a sound and I'm taking a third finger," I warn.

All I get from him is a subtle groan. I single out his index finger and drag my blade through flesh and bone. Justin's body arches, and he throws his head back with a scream.

I shake my head and smile. "Three, then."

I cut off his thumb, and Justin flails beneath me, begging me to stop. By the time I take his middle finger, he's sobbing as sweat coats his forehead and temples. I lean back and watch him as he cries like the pussy that he is.

"I won't tell anyone," he says between sobs. "Just let me go!"

This is the man Madison was going to marry? It's pathetic, really, how he changes his tune as soon as he experiences pain.

"What did you mean earlier about a deal?" I ask.

Justin's eyelids crack open, and he peers at me with glassy, bloodshot eyes. "Wh-what?"

"You said something to Jerry about a deal. What deal?"

"N-nothing."

I lean forward and grab him by the throat, squeezing with enough pressure to make it harder for him to breathe, but not impossible. "That fourth finger of yours is calling my name."

Justin's eyes flare wide, and he stumbles over his words. "Jerry is paying me to marry Madison. It was a deal."

I grit my teeth. "What does he get out of it?"

"An heir."

"That can't be all," I say.

My stepfather doesn't care about anybody but himself. Having a grandchild to pass any wealth or power to isn't something Jerry would do. It's always what can benefit him *now*.

Justin swallows hard and shakes his head. “He’ll receive ownership of a stock from my uncle—”

Red bleeds into my vision, and I squeeze my hand over his wounds. Justin screws his eyes shut and yells, all the fight returning to him as he throws himself from side to side to get out from beneath me.

It doesn’t make sense for Justin’s uncle to lose stock in exchange for his nephew marrying Madison. The only one who benefits from that would be Jerry.

My molars grind together until they feel like they’re about to break. Jerry sold Madison to a man to get richer. That’s how little she means to him.

“I told you everything!” Justin yells.

I tighten my grip around his throat. Justin’s screams die out, and his eyes bulge out of his head as he fights for air. I lean forward until the extended piece of my helmet touches his face.

“You come near my sister again, and I’ll throw you down a set of stairs, drag you outside, and curb-stomp the fuck out of you until you’re a part of the cement. Do you hear me?”

Justin’s eyes roll into the back of his head; he’s most likely on the brink of passing out. I loosen my hold on his throat, once again allowing this piece of shit to breathe when he doesn’t deserve it.

Most of the people within the secret society aren’t good—even the people who unknowingly work with them. They’re corrupt. The Kings and Queens don’t care about anything but themselves and what they can gain.

None of them deserves to breathe.

They can threaten to kill me all they want. Death hasn’t scared me since I stopped giving a fuck about life. The only thing that makes life remotely good is Madison—as much as she drives me up a wall.

Now this asshole wants to take the one person I give a fuck about. He hurt her. Scared her.

Madison is mine. Always has been and always will be, and no one will take her from me.

Justin lets out a ragged breath. “Fine. I’ll leave her alone and won’t tell anyone. Just let go of me.”

I smile and gently slap his cheek. “Good choice.”

I release Justin and gather his dismembered fingers, then shove them into my pocket before I stand. He rolls onto his side and curls into a fetal

position as he tucks his mutilated hand against his chest. I mount my motorcycle and right before I take off, Justin says something loud enough for me to hear over the engine.

“Watch your back,” he says. “You never know who’s got their eye on you.”

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



## MADISON

### *“SICK THOUGHTS” LOU BLISS*

I roll onto my side as I slowly wake from a deep sleep. The pillow beneath my head is perfectly soft, and the warm blanket I snuggle into smells like Ryder. If lying on a cloud while being hugged from behind by my stepbrother came in a package, this would be it.

Wait.

My eyes snap open, and I pop my head up to take in my surroundings. Colorful LEDs give the shadowed room a deep-blue hue bordering on violet. Band posters cover the walls, and clothes are strewn over the floor.

This isn't my bedroom.

Last night's events rush back to me. Parts are spotty, thanks to the alcohol, while others stand out from the rest.

Anger squeezes my throat and tightens my chest as I remember how Justin got upset with me for drinking so much, then dragged me outside to *teach me a lesson*. It could have ended worse than it did if not for Ryder stepping in and sending Justin inside with a bruised ego.

Hurt and self-pity override the anger.

I threw myself at Ryder, and he rejected me, then left me all alone in his room. I passed out not long after he disappeared, but not before I shed a few tears. It's silly, I know, but I can't stop the ache in my chest.

He left me here.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't disappointed about waking up alone. After what happened with Justin, all I want is to be held and told he'll never hurt me again. I'm tired of being a punching bag—a girl to be bossed around by shitty men.

My bladder screams at me, reminding me how much I drank. I push back the sheet and crawl out of bed. Dizziness hits me, and I stumble a few steps before I catch myself on the nightstand. I drop my chin and take a few deep, calming breaths. Cool air kisses my legs and my bottom. I crack open my eyes and notice I'm not wearing my clothes. Pinching the T-shirt between my fingers, I frown at it before it clicks in my head.

It's Ryder's shirt.

After he left, I must've drunkenly stripped out of my clothes and thrown on one of his shirts to stay cool while I slept. It's larger than him and fits me better than the hoodie he let me borrow. I still haven't returned it, too attached to it to give it back.

Shaking away the strange, warm feeling glowing in my chest, I go to the bathroom to relieve myself.

I'll admit, I drank too much last night. But in my defense, I couldn't stand another sober moment around Justin and my father. Hell, even Ryder's absence bothered me, because for whatever reason, he makes me feel safe when no one else has.

After I finish relieving myself and washing my hands, I crawl back into bed and check the time on my phone. It's three in the morning. I don't know how I woke up so early after being dead to the world. My head is still foggy. I could sleep for a week and it wouldn't be enough to recover.

My gaze slips to the covered window. Wind whistles against the panes and through the crack in the sill. I cover myself with the thin sheet and cuddle the spare pillow I hug closer to my chest.

There's no way I'm going outside in the cold to sneak into my bedroom and sleep the rest of the morning. Besides, I don't know if Justin camped out in my room or if he opted for the guest bedroom. It's not something I'm willing to risk finding out, either. Knowing my luck, the jerk will be in my bed like he has every right to it.

Something shifts, similar to clothes rubbing together.

My breath catches in my throat, right along with my heart, as I shoot into a sitting position. I glance around the room, my gaze freezing as it lands on Ryder, who's sitting on the floor in the corner of the bedroom. I guess I didn't see him before.

My cheeks warm when I realize he must've seen me wearing nothing but his shirt. It doesn't pool around my knees like it would on a skinny girl. The hem stops above my pelvis, and I just know Ryder got an eyeful of my ass when I went into the bathroom.

Ryder stares back at me, his face covered with the same skull mask I found in here the other day. Butterflies fill my stomach. I knew I had a thing for masked men, but it hits differently when it's Ryder. He's wearing the same dark clothes and boots from earlier. The only pop of color is the silver chain around his throat that sparkles beneath the blue LED lights.

My thighs squeeze together on their own to dull the ache building between them. I wonder what it would feel like to grab his necklace and tug him against my body. To feel his long fingers wrapping around my throat right before he kisses me.

"What are you doing down there?" I whisper, too afraid to speak any louder.

Ryder leans his head against the wall behind him and shifts his hips to get more comfortable. "Watching you."

I frown, but my stomach flips at the deep rumble in his voice. "Why?"

He remains silent.

I avert my gaze, but it slips back to him, drinking in the desire reflected in his eyes. He doesn't hide it from me, letting me see how much I affect him.

*Oh yeah, he saw everything when I got up.*

It's strange, having his attention after years of him ignoring me. I expected him to treat me the way he promised he would, even in the privacy of his bedroom. The longer he stares at me, the more I want to grind over his cock like I did the other night, but I'm afraid he'll reject me again.

*“I want you willing . . .”*

Fighting back the urge, I lie back on the bed and curl onto my side with my eyes closed.

The room falls quiet except for my breathing and the occasional shifting from Ryder as he sits across the room. The weight of his stare tingles on my face and doesn't let up, even after ten minutes of trying to fall back asleep. It'd be so easy to turn onto my other side and give him my back, but deep down, I enjoy this. I love that he can't look away from me.

I bite my tongue to stop myself from begging him to join me on the bed. I'd look like a desperate fool.

After several minutes, Ryder must think I'm asleep because he rises and stands at the end of the bed, where he strips out of his shirt. The muscles in his stomach ripple with his movements as he tosses the garment onto the floor and fixes his skull mask back in place. My mouth waters at the view of his defined, lean muscles. Black ink runs over his ribs, up his chest and neck. Then my eyes land on his Adonis belt, and I can't look away. Veins bulge above his pelvis, his black cargo pants sitting low on his waist.

My inner walls spasm as I imagine licking him there. Feeling his fingers thread through my hair as he guides me to his groin and makes me take his cock into my mouth.

*He's your brother.*

I pinch my lips together to hold back a frustrated growl.

He tugs the button free on his pants, and the familiar sound of a hissing zipper fills the silent room. Ryder is literally putting on a show for me and doesn't even realize it. I only feel bad that I don't harbor an ounce of regret for being a peeping Tom while he changes into something more comfortable. At least he's finally joining me in bed, but under the presumption that I'm asleep.

A shaky breath escapes me as he shoves his pants down. He stops right before he frees his cock.

He turns and tilts his head, amusement filling his gaze. “You're awake.” I don't know how to respond.

*Yeah, I've been awake for a minute and have been watching you undress without you knowing, because I'm a creep.* That wouldn't go over too well. At least, I don't think so, but Ryder is always full of surprises.

He drops his hands from the waistband of his pants, then steps toward me with unhurried movements that remind me too much of a panther

creeping up on its prey. I sit up and scramble backward to the other side of the mattress, putting as much space between us as possible.

*Don't come any closer, I want to scream. I'm trying so hard to be a good girl and not jump your bones.*

Ryder stops directly in front of me, leaving only two feet of space between us, which he could easily cross by bending over and grabbing me. I shudder at the thought—not in repulsion, but excitement.

“Don’t be shy now, sis. There’s no need for it after everything we’ve done,” Ryder murmurs. I don’t need to see his face to know he’s smirking.

I barely shake my head. “I’m not being shy.”

*Walk away.*

*Walk away.*

*Don’t do this.*

“Yeah?” His breathy laugh goes straight to my heart and between my legs.

Jesus. What is he doing to me? I haven’t heard him laugh in . . . I’m not sure how long. *Too long, to be exact.*

“I don’t want to see my brother naked, is all,” I say without thinking.

*Liar, the tiny voice in the back of my mind whispers.*

Goddamn right, I’m a liar. I need to lie when my heart is on the line.

Ryder bends down and lays his huge palms flat on the mattress. The tips of his fingers are mere inches from touching my toes. He doesn’t move any further than that, purposefully drawing this out when we both know what’s about to happen.

“How long are you going to lie to yourself?” he murmurs. “Because we both know I turn you on.”

The fresh memory from the other night floods my mind—Ryder’s husky moans and him urging me to come while calling me his *little sister*.

If I lie to him and myself until I’m blue in the face, will it erase what happened, as well as his memory from that night? I don’t think it will, but my resistance toward him is weakening at a blinding rate.

Ryder’s fingers inch closer to my feet. His chest expands as he inhales, and when he lets out his breath, a growl joins it. “I can smell your wet pussy from here.”

A wave of dizziness slams into me, and I catch myself before I fall over and make a fool of myself. I’m not the fainting type. Blood? Doesn’t make

me light-headed. Gore from scary movies? Meh. Ryder talking filthy to me? Yep. That'll do it.

"We can't do this," I say.

"Is that right?" Amusement laces his voice. "Let me guess . . . because you're my sister?"

"Step-sister."

The corners of his eyes crinkle with a hidden smile. "Such a good girl."

I scowl. "I'm not some dog you can talk to like it's stupid."

Ryder falls silent for a beat, then says, "Oh, you're a brat. It's a shame that I love taming brats. If you don't like praise, would you prefer I insult you? Would you rather have me tell you that you're a dirty slut I plan on using as my personal fuck-toy?"

I sway from the impact of his words. If I were normal, I'd get grossed out by him admitting that he plans on using me as a sex doll. But I guess I'm not normal. I never was, and that's okay.

Wait. No. It's *not* okay.

My mouth takes over before I can process what I'm saying. It's my last stand before everything explodes, and there won't be any coming back from it. "I don't know what's gotten into you, Ryder, but I'm not fucking you. You're beneath me."

It's a low blow, considering what's between us isn't one-sided.

Ryder grabs my ankles, yanks me toward him, and hovers over me with his face above mine. I expected to see anger in his gaze. Instead, I find only amusement.

He lowers his head until his masked mouth is centimeters from my parted lips. "Beneath you. Over you. Behind you. All the positions. Don't worry, doll, I'm a giver, and you'll be screaming for me in no time."

The fight I've been clinging to shatters into thousands of pieces at my feet.

*Fuck it.*

I hook my arm around his neck and shove his mask up his face. Ryder's shoulders tense beneath my palm, his eyes flaring wide in shock. My lips smash against his, and I squeeze my eyes shut, shuddering at the feeling of his piercings rubbing against me. He doesn't respond right away, but after a heartbeat, he melts and kisses me back with as much—if not more—hunger and desperation. He threads his fingers through my hair at the back of my head, holding me in place while he dominates my mouth with his.

The world falls away, leaving us in our own bubble as we consume each other. I breathe in his every shaky breath, and he swallows my every whimper. Kissing him feels like a missing piece inside me clicks into place. He's changing my very DNA and rewiring me into someone I don't recognize.

But I'm not mad about it.

He cradles my head with surprising gentleness, as though he doesn't want to hurt me by losing control. Ryder slips his tongue into my mouth, tangling it with mine. I shudder at the feeling of the piercing stroking against me. He slips his hand between my legs and cups my pussy.

"Mine," he growls into the kiss.

When he growled *mine* to me the other day, I don't think he meant the mask. It was a warning of things to come.

I tighten my hold around his neck and let my legs fall open to give him easier access.

Ryder ends the kiss and smiles against my mouth as he rubs two fingers between my folds. "Oh, doll. It's like you're begging for my touch. You're soaking wet for your big brother."

"Only for you." My hips buck and chase Ryder's fingers as he teases me with gentle strokes.

He tips his head back and watches me as he works me toward an orgasm that ebbs and flows like the tide. Each time I think I'm about to come, Ryder probes my opening with a thick finger. I growl in frustration after the third time, but Ryder's smile tells me he knows what he's doing.

"Please!" I whine.

"Please what, sis?" He avoids my clit and continues teasing me by rubbing everywhere else, then sinking a finger inside me. My eyelashes flutter, and the tension in my core tightens. Ryder pulls out, his grin widening at my frustration.

"Please"—I grasp his wrist and guide his fingers back to my clit—"make me come."

His humor melts, leaving behind a hungry expression saved for only me. He doesn't say anything as he sits up, peels off my borrowed T-shirt, and tosses it to the floor. Heat pools between my legs as he stands and shoves his pants off, freeing his cock from its confines.

Fear wells in my chest as I stare at his massive girth. I don't know how he'll fit inside me. The girl he brought over the other morning could barely

fit him inside her mouth.

Ryder climbs back onto the bed and maneuvers me, making more room for his wide shoulders as he settles on his stomach between my spread legs.

“What are you doing?” I choke out.

“Eating my dinner.” He sticks his tongue out, letting saliva gather on the tip. I watch, mesmerized, as it drips onto my pussy. My core spasms from the warmth and another clear display of ownership.

“Oh, fuck!” My back arches off the bed at the first sweep of his pierced tongue. I grab the top of his head, and my fingers grasp the soft, pliant fabric of his mask.

No one has ever done this to me. I’ve only seen it done in porn videos. No amount of imagery could have prepared me for the intensity of the act.

Ryder focuses on my clit with the tip of his tongue. He flicks the sensitive bud with his piercing and occasionally groans to send vibrations through me. He locks his arms around my thighs, holding me open and keeping me still as he drives me to the brink of madness.

“I’m so close,” I choke out.

My eyes roll into the back of my head, and tingles spread through my body. Ryder grunts, captures my clit between his lips, and teases my spasming opening with a finger before he sinks the digit inside me.

“You’re so tight for me,” he growls.

Now would be a good time to tell him I’m a virgin, but I can’t muster the energy to say anything but his name. It’s a prayer to the moody god between my legs, his sole focus on my pleasure. He adds a second finger and stretches me wider. I hiss between my teeth at the burn. It lasts only a second before the pleasure overpowers it.

Ryder raises his darkened eyes to my face, his tongue flicking faster against my clit. “Come for me, little sister.”

He adds a third finger, and it’s enough to shove me over the edge. My back bows off the bed, my lips parted on a silent scream as the orgasm rips through me. Ryder works me through the pleasure, lengthening it for as long as possible.

The last orgasm he gave me was mind-blowing. This one has me seeing God and begging to come back to Earth. As I float back to my body, Ryder kisses my mound and pulls away. He kneels between my legs and licks his bottom lip, which glistens with my cum.

Then he grabs my phone.

“What are you doing?” I reach with a trembling hand to snatch my cell phone back.

He pulls his mask over his face and unlocks my phone. His thumb taps the screen, and then he points the camera between my open legs. “Giving your subscribers some good content, baby.”

My eyes widen, and I push myself up by my elbows. “Wh-what?”

Ryder fists his cock and strokes himself while he meets my gaze. “You think I wouldn’t find out about your OnlyFans?”

My pulse thunders in my ears as I stare at him in shock. I wait for him to yell at me, to demand that I don’t post any more videos or content to my social media.

When he doesn’t, I swallow down the nerves before I whisper, “You’re not angry?”

Ryder’s fist pauses mid-stroke, and he squeezes his thick cock. “No.”

No.

The pressure in my chest deflates. I search his gaze, and he doesn’t look away. There’s no anger evident in his body language.

I let out a shaky breath and lie down.

He’s not mad.

That knowledge calms the storm brewing in my head. Any hesitation I had disappears. Ryder isn’t like most guys. They’d get upset after finding out their girl is a sex worker. Instead, he wants to join in by making content with me, and I can’t tell him no.

Ryder lays the phone next to him and shoves a pillow beneath my bottom to angle my hips so he has better access. He drags me closer, then picks up the phone again. He fists himself and slaps my pussy twice with his dick.

“You ready to scream for me, sis?” he rumbles.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN



## MADISON

### *“CAN YOU SEE ME?” REZZ*

Ryder holds his cock between my pussy lips, then thrusts his hips. His thick shaft glides through my folds, smearing my arousal on himself and over my sensitive clit.

I bite my lip to hold back the noises creeping up my throat, but that grows more difficult as Ryder picks up his pace until his hips snap against the backs of my thighs.

The coil of tension in my core tightens with each pass over my bundle of nerves. It feels good, but it's not enough to make me come.

Sensing that, Ryder draws back and notches the fat head of his dick outside my opening. His thumb rubs my clit while he eases forward. The pressure from him trying to invade my body makes me tense up.

“Just the tip,” I blurt without thinking.

Ryder pauses and raises his darkened gaze to my face. “Just the tip?”

My stomach twists. No matter how much he prepares me to take him, his size still intimidates me. I know it’ll hurt, but I’m not ready yet. Once again, now would be the perfect time to tell him I’m a virgin, but I hesitate, worried he’ll change his mind about having sex with me.

What if he finds it repulsive? Or what if he thinks I should sleep with someone else first so I can learn a few things in the bedroom before he—

“Madison.” Ryder’s commanding voice drags me out of my spiraling thoughts.

I swallow to wet my suddenly dry throat. “Just the tip. For right now.”

He tilts his head as he considers me for a moment. Maybe I’m seeing things, but I swear I catch the fleeting look of understanding in his gaze before he locks it away.

“I won’t hurt you, little sister,” he whispers. “I’ll make sure you’re soaking wet and writhing beneath me before I fuck you.”

My lungs deflate as all the oxygen *whooshes* out of me.

“Fuck.” I squeeze my eyes shut and bite my bottom lip. “Don’t call me that.”

Ryder’s chuckle is dark and full of mischief. He knows I don’t mean it. Hell, even I know I don’t mean it.

“You’re a little liar.” His cock glides between my pussy lips, rubbing his piercing against my clit. “You love it when I call you my sister. Especially when you’re riding my dick.” He slaps my mound with his cock. “Isn’t that right, sis?”

My toes curl with each maddening stroke as he goes back to thrusting between my folds. Each time his lean waist rams against the backs of my thighs, my body jerks backward on the bed.

“Look at me,” Ryder growls.

My eyes fly open, and I meet Ryder’s stare. His thrusts quicken and become harder, then slow after a minute, and he lets out a shaky breath. He’s edging himself and forcing me to tag along on this cruel kink of his.

A few times, the tip of his cock slips too far back and presses into my opening. It invades just a little before he pulls out.

“Ryder, please!” I reach between us and barely grab him before he shoves my hand aside with a warning growl.

“You want my dick inside your pretty little cunt, sis?”

“God, yes!”

He slaps my clit with his palm. “Wrong name, baby. Let’s try that again.”

“Ryder,” I whimper.

The corners of his eyes crinkle with a smile. “And who am I to you?”

My heart pounds so hard I’m afraid he can hear it. “Big brother.”

His groan goes straight to my core as it clenches around nothing. Ryder draws his hips back and pushes the fat head of his cock against my entrance.

“Relax for me. Breathe.” We both groan at the same time as the crown pops past the outer barrier. “That’s my good girl. Fuck, you’re so tight.”

I grab the blankets behind my head as my inner walls burn from the stretch of his invasion, but he remains still while I grow accustomed to the feeling of him inside me. Noticing my discomfort, Ryder rubs my clit with his thumb. Pleasure bleeds through the pain, making it more comfortable and enjoyable as he invades my body.

“You’re taking me so well.” Ryder rocks his hips and shallowly moves inside me. I suck in a breath as he sinks deeper and the pressure builds. He pulls out and goes back to fucking my folds with his earlier roughness, as though he can’t help himself.

“My naughty little sister,” he growls. “You respond to me so fucking beautifully.”

I pant as my orgasm crests, holding me at the edge and needing one last push for me to fall over. The sensation fades as Ryder thrusts the head of his cock inside me with slow, shallow strokes. Our bodies move as one as we ride the wave of euphoria, getting lost in one another.

My eyes roll into the back of my head as he eases another inch inside me, testing me, seeing how much I can take and if I’ll stop him. At this point, I’ll take everything he gives me, as long as he makes me come and continues uttering those toe-curling whimpers. The sounds of his pleasure are everything to me, because it’s *me* who’s making him feel good. It’ll always be *me*.

My anxious brain takes this moment to imagine our parents catching us like this. It would end what only just began. I’m too selfish to turn back now. I don’t want to lose Ryder and what we have between us.

I turn my head, glancing at the closed door to ensure no one is standing there and watching this happen. It’s still early in the morning, and they

should be asleep, but I can't be too careful.

Ryder grabs my jaw and forces my head back toward him. He eases in another inch, stealing the breath right out of my lungs. "Eyes on me, doll. Don't fucking look away from me again."

I train my gaze on him and nod.

"That's my girl," he murmurs.

Ryder's darkened eyes lower from my face. The way he drinks in my curves and watches my apron stomach jiggle sends an electric bolt of pleasure straight to my clit. He growls as he sinks in another inch, painfully stretching me with his fat girth.

"You feel so good." His hand skims over my love handle, moving to my stomach and squeezing a roll before creeping higher and palming my breast. Every harsh squeeze is full of desperation and the rising need to make me feel just how badly he wants me.

"Are you going to watch this video later and touch yourself to it?" His voice comes out husky and strained.

I nod and whimper.

A breath shudders out of him. "I had no idea how big of a freak you are." He leans back on his haunches and angles the phone's camera to better capture the tip of his cock gliding in and out of me. "I need you to come, sis. I'm barely holding back my orgasm. Coat my dick with your cum."

His free hand comes between us, and he rubs my clit with enough pressure to bring back my orgasm from earlier. My gaze moves on its own, returning to the door as worry fills me.

Ryder snatches my jaw and forces my attention back to him. "Scared, doll? Afraid Daddy will hear his little girl being her big brother's slut?"

My legs squeeze around Ryder's waist, and I sink my teeth into my bottom lip.

Ryder tilts his head and shoves another inch inside me. He hums in pleasure at my pained gasp. "I told you I'd be your dirty little secret, but I'm not against your father seeing us like this. For him to witness how I make his daughter moan so prettily."

I shake my head. "Please, no. I don't want him to see—"

"Then you better come before he wakes up and finds you like this." He releases my jaw and rubs my bundle of nerves with renewed determination.

My hips buck, forcing more of Ryder's fat cock inside me. Pain zaps from my stomach down to my toes as I stretch around him. Pleasure drowns

out pain as Ryder focuses on my clit.

“That’s it, baby doll,” Ryder growls. “Get me nice and wet with your cum.”

All of my muscles seize as he forces me over the brink. Ringing fills my ears, along with the distant moans I realize are mine. Ryder works me through the orgasm while his thrusts quicken.

“I’m gonna come,” he warns breathlessly. “Where do you want it?”

I hesitate, unsure of what the right answer is.

I say the first thing that pops into my mind. “My face.”

“Fuck,” he growls.

Ryder pulls out of me and crawls over my body with his dick in his fist. He strokes himself with maddening pumps, then moans as cum shoots from the tip and lands on my face. I open my mouth and stick out my tongue as he unloads on me. Some lands on my cheek, while most of it goes into my waiting mouth.

I’ve never tasted cum before. The texture is not the best, but the taste isn’t terrible. It’s salty, with a combination of musk and everything that makes him *Ryder*. Maybe I’m so far gone in my feelings for him that I actually love tasting him.

Ryder squeezes the bluish-purple tip of his cock. The last of the semen beads at the tip, and he releases himself. We stare at each other for a moment, silent and comfortable as we come back from our high. After a moment, he taps the phone screen and tosses it onto the bed before climbing off me and disappearing into the bathroom.

I lay here, staring at the space he occupied, confused as hell about why he walked away without saying anything. The confusion lasts all of a second before he returns to my side, his mask gone and a warm washcloth in his hand, which he uses to clean my face. Satisfied he didn’t miss any spots, he tosses the rag onto his nightstand and gathers me in his arms.

Butterflies dance in my stomach as he takes the big-spoon position behind me and holds me close, with his half-hard cock pressed against my ass. The room falls into a comfortable silence as we bask in the afterglow. It doesn’t last for long—at least not for me, anyway—as all of my worries come rushing back.

Sensing the change in my mood, Ryder squeezes his arms around me and kisses my shoulder. “No one will find out.”

I cling to his words like they're a life-saving raft in the middle of the ocean. "Promise?"

"I swear." He tenderly kisses my neck, his palm stroking my stomach.

I turn my head and capture his lips with mine. The kiss is the opposite of the one we shared moments ago. It's soft and sweet, filled with unspoken words, as we take our time exploring each other.

*I'm never letting him go.*

Ryder ends the kiss. "Get some sleep, sis. You'll need it."

My eyebrows rise up my forehead.

He smirks and dips his hand between my legs, his fingers curling over my pussy as he cups me. "I'm not done with you."

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT



## RYDER

### “LUDENS” BRING ME THE HORIZON

It's only been an hour since Madison fell asleep in my arms, but I can't stop watching her. Little snores escape her every now and again. Anyone else, and the sounds would have bugged me. I've never had a woman sleep in my arms. Most times I messed around with a chick, I fucked her into the mattress and she left in tears. When they didn't, I'd still kick them out after I was done so I could sleep in peace without the chick waking me up, thinking we were more than just a fling.

She's got me wrapped around her little finger and she doesn't even know it. I'm so done for, because there's nothing I wouldn't do for this woman. If she told me to rob a bank, I'd ask her which one and how much she wants.

Now I understand the level of obsession Jaxon has for Dahlia.

*“Would you fuck your sister?”*

I’ll fucking marry her and put a baby in her if she isn’t already pregnant before our wedding.

My cock twitches at the thought of Madison carrying my child.

When the hell did my anger and hate toward her turn into this softer and far scarier emotion? I’ve always had a thing for her, even while we were kids, but I still wanted to hurt her because of the people she ran with and the shit Jerry did to me.

I can’t punish her for it anymore. She’s burrowed so deep beneath my skin that I would have to destroy myself to remove her. I can’t do that.

No.

I *won’t* do it.

I cup my chin with my palm, my elbow resting on the mattress as I watch Madison. She sleeps flat on her back, an arm thrown across her forehead. The blanket pools around her waist, baring her body to my greedy gaze. The blue LED lights reflect off her nipple piercings. They’ve been enticing me for an hour, begging me to catch them between my teeth and find out just how much pain my sister can handle.

I brush my fingers over her stomach’s silky-soft skin. Madison stirs, but doesn’t wake up. She tilts her head back, arching her back to thrust her tits further out.

I swallow a groan.

I’d planned on letting her sleep for another hour, but I can’t wait any longer. I need to feel her wrapped around my cock and hear her scream my name. It’s not just the sex that I crave. It’s the need to feel closer to her. To chase the adrenaline and feel alive.

I position myself between her legs and spread them before I lie on my stomach with my head between her thighs. My eyes slide shut as I inhale her musky scent, breathing her deep into my lungs.

Madison’s scent is by far my favorite. She always smells nice—vanilla paired with a salty ocean breeze.

Cupping the backs of her thighs, I bend her legs and gaze at her pussy and asshole, imagining all the ways I’ll defile her. My only hope is that she doesn’t leave my room in tears—not that I would let her. For once, I’ll stop a woman from running from me.

Madison isn't wet, which won't be a problem for too much longer. I meant what I said about having her writhing beneath me and soaking wet before I fuck her. I'm not oblivious to my size and the work it takes to squeeze my dick into a chick's pussy. Madison won't be any different, but I want her to enjoy every second.

I lower my head and swipe my tongue up the seam of her cunt. A groan escapes me at the first taste of her, and I lick her again, dipping the pierced tip between her lips and flicking against her clit.

Madison stirs and bucks her hips against my face, grinding herself against my lashing tongue.

It's fucked up to mess around with her while she's asleep, but I can't help myself. Having her naked in my bed as she takes everything I give her turns me on more than I imagined. Don't get me wrong, I am all for consent and willingness, but I have a feeling she won't mind this one bit.

I capture her clit between my teeth, then flick my tongue against it. My gaze stays steady on her face, watching as her lips part with panting breaths. I reach up and roughly squeeze her breast with one hand, and with the other, I probe her wet opening with two fingers. Madison's eyelashes flutter, and her gaze drops to my face. Her eyes widen in surprise, then a beat later, desire takes over.

"Ryder." Her voice comes out husky from sleep and lust. She threads her fingers through my hair and holds me in place while she rides my tongue.

I dip my finger into her tight channel until she takes me to the last knuckle. Madison hisses through her teeth and bites her bottom lip as I add a second finger to stretch her. Her inner walls clamp on the digits, resisting the intrusion but sucking me deeper inside her to be part of her forever.

*Jesus, fuck. Did she sleep with men who only had small dicks?*

I frown. I don't like the thought of her fucking other men. In fact, I hate it. But it's sad that she's never been stretched to her limits like what I'll do to her. Her piece of shit fiancé likely couldn't pleasure her like what I'm doing, and that alone makes me want to gloat.

*I'm so much better for you, little sister. I promise I'll make you see God.*

*"Breathe, baby," I murmur.*

She sucks in a ragged breath, and I don't bother to hold back my smile.  
*Such a good girl for trusting me.*

I don't move my fingers, keeping them still inside her so she can get accustomed to the feeling. Instead of roughly fucking her with them, I focus on her clit to bring pleasure with the pain. I lick and suck while watching her body language and listening to her little noises so I can map out what she likes. When I nibble on her clit, her hips jump and her fingers tighten in my hair until they're pulling strands from the roots. A growl rumbles deep in my chest at the pain, my erection stiffening until I fear I'll bust right here. It wouldn't be the first time I came without ever sticking my dick in her, and it likely won't be the last.

"More," she demands on a whimper.

My grin widens.

I love that my girl is making demands now. Who am I to tell her no?

I nibble her clit again, then flick my tongue against it while I work a third finger inside her. Madison arches her back and squeezes my head with her thighs. I still for a moment, allowing her the time to get used to the discomfort before I thrust at a steady pace.

"Fuck." Madison yanks my hair, attempting to pull my head away from her. "I need you. Please."

Like fuck am I going to stop. Not when she's close to coming. I've earned this. Maybe all the other guys she's slept with would have given in and gotten their rocks off, but this isn't just about me. I want her to feel good. To be ready to take me into her body so we can become one.

Right before she teeters over the edge, I pull back and hold my fingers still inside her. Madison looks down at me with bleary eyes, confused about why I would prevent her from finishing. I dive back in and repeat the process, building her orgasm, then stopping right before she explodes.

"You sadistic bastard!" she cries, and yanks at my hair.

I growl, but I don't lose focus on my mission.

Yeah, I am sadistic, but I'm also masochistic. I love edging and know from personal experience how much better an orgasm is if you prolong it for as long as possible. This is hurting me as much as it's hurting her.

"Please, Ryder!" She writhes beneath me and undulates her pussy against my face to get more friction against her clit, but I once again avoid touching her when she gets too close to coming.

I lick my lips and look at her from beneath my lashes, a smile creeping to my face. "Aww. Am I hurting you, doll?"

Madison glares at me, her face flushed a dark shade of pink. “You’re being a jerk.”

I laugh and tease her opening with a fourth finger. “You know what to do if you want to come.”

She swallows hard, her eyes slamming closed as I squeeze the fingers inside her and spread the digits. Her features twist in pain, but she doesn’t tell me to stop. She braves it, fully trusting me. My chest tightens until it’s hard to breathe.

Why she would trust me, of all people, I have no idea. I’ve treated her like shit for years, yet she still fawns over me and trusts that I’ll take care of her. I don’t deserve her, but I’m too selfish to give her up.

“Please.” Madison peeks at me. “Make me come, big brother.”

My eyes roll to the back of my head, and I groan.

I flick her clit, then suck it into my mouth as I pound my fingers into her with brutal blows. It doesn’t take long before Madison’s back bows off the mattress and her fists tighten in my hair. Her screams fill the room as she orgasms. It won’t surprise me if our parents hear her in the main house and think I’m murdering her.

I promised her I would make her scream, and *Jesus fuck*, it’s better than I could have ever imagined. My hips grind of their own accord, gyrating my throbbing dick into the mattress. While I work Madison through her climax, I try to think of gross things so I don’t come. It’d only take a few minutes to get hard again, but I need to feel her wrapped around me *now*.

Madison’s muscles slacken and her legs fall open, freeing my head from the cushioned prison of her thighs. I draw back and lick my lips, cleaning up every drop of her cum before settling between her spread legs.

“You ready, baby?” I swipe the swollen head between her soaked folds. I get myself nice and wet before I line up the tip outside of her entrance. Madison leans her head to the side, giving me better access to her throat as I trail wet kisses over her soft skin. She sucks in a sharp breath and tenses as I ease the pierced crown into her tight hole.

“Breathe for me, doll,” I murmur into her ear. “That’s my girl. Keep relaxing for me.” I kiss over her neck and find the spot that makes her mewl for me. Madison arches her back, pushing her breasts flat against my chest. I groan as she scratches her nails down my back as I squeeze more of my cock inside her tight heat.

*There it is.*

I lick and suck the spot, taking my time until she melts beneath me.

“Ryder, please,” she whines.

“God, sis, I love how needy you are for me.” I grab the backsides of her legs and shove them until her knees almost touch her shoulders. I draw back from her neck to meet her gaze. She must see what I plan to do next, because fear creeps into her eyes right before I slam the rest of the way inside her.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” I whimper. Her inner walls clamp around me, strangling me worse than the condom did.

Madison throws her head back and screams—and not in the way I love. She struggles against me, as if she’s trying to get me off of her. I freeze, my heart lurching into my throat and panic seizing my muscles. Tears swim in her eyes, and her cries shrink to small whimpers the longer I hold still.

I know I’m thick, but I’ve never gotten this type of reaction before.

“Baby?” I whisper.

She covers her face with her hands, muffling her cries as though she fears they’ll offend me.

I move to my knees and drop my gaze to where we’re joined, as if it’ll answer my concerns. Madison whimpers from the slight movement, her thighs clenching around my waist. I shift my gaze back to her face and tilt my head.

“Be honest with me,” I murmur. “Have you ever slept with anyone?”

She shakes her head.

*How? How the fuck is she—*

“You were a virgin,” I breathe, shocked that she’s gone this whole time without fucking someone.

Madison drops her hands by her sides and looks at me with tears swimming in her eyes. “I’m sorry.”

“You’re sorry?” I clench my jaw. Despite my blood boiling at her apology, I keep my touch soft as I wrap her legs around my waist. “Why the fuck are you apologizing to me?”

“Because I didn’t tell you.” She swallows hard and averts her gaze. I snatch her chin and force her to look at me. She can’t run from me. There’s no more hiding. “I just didn’t want you to get turned off by it. I really want—”

I groan and swoop down, capturing her lips with mine to shut her up. She’s talking too much, and it’s pissing me off even more. How the fuck did

I not realize she's been a virgin this whole time?

Madison gasps into the kiss, and I take full advantage by slipping my tongue past her parted lips. There's no hesitation when she returns the gesture. Her arms loop around my shoulders, pulling me closer to her, which makes my dick slip back inside her cunt. We both groan at the same time but don't part from the frenzy as our lips, teeth, and tongues mark the other.

I ease my dick deeper inside her, allowing her the needed time to get used to my size. She winces and freezes beneath me. Our lips stay pressed against each other as we share each breath. I open my eyes and watch her face as I reach between us and rub her clit.

"There's nothing about you that will ever turn me off, sis." I kiss the corner of her mouth and bury myself to the hilt, all the while strumming her bundle of nerves to dull the pain with pleasure. I had planned on fucking her hard and letting out some of my anger, but I can't do that to her. She deserves soft and loving for her first time. It's new territory for me.

It may be a bad time to ask when I'm barely holding on to my last shred of control, but I need to know how she's made it untouched. I heard the whispers in the hallways about Mickey sleeping with her and how she was a freak in the bedroom. Clearly they were rumors, and if the bastard wasn't already dead, I'd kill him myself. I want to kick my own ass for even believing those lies.

"How the fuck were you a virgin this whole time?"

"It was the one thing I had control over." Her words weigh heavy on my soul. She whispered them, but they might as well have been screams. "Dad has been controlling me since I was a kid. He forced my engagement to Justin. I wanted one thing for myself, and that was my virginity."

"Fuck." I press my forehead against hers and close my eyes. My hips move on their own, drawing back and pulling out of her until only the tip is inside, then I ease in until I'm balls deep.

*And she chose me.*

"You're not mad, are you?" She threads her fingers through my hair and pulls at the strands. I groan and clench my teeth together. Madison has to know what that does to me.

"No, baby. I'm not mad. Quite the opposite, actually. I'm trying very hard to be gentle."

Madison tilts her head, brushing her lips against mine in a gentle kiss meant to tease me. “I don’t mind the pain.”

“You don’t understand.”

*I’ll break you,* I want to say, but I opt to bite back the plea. Because that’s what it is. I’m begging at this point, pleading for her to let me love her. To show her that this can feel good for her, too.

I put my weight into my palms on either side of her head, and my arms tremble with the effort. Our hips move together as one. Every time I surge forward, she meets me halfway. She doesn’t argue with me, already too far gone in the throes of pleasure. Every now and again, she winces but doesn’t tell me to stop. In fact, she gives as much as she gets—if not more.

I sit up on my knees and grab my phone. I don’t stop fucking her as I pull up the camera app and begin recording, angling the shot to show the place where we join. She may be a cam girl who makes money off of content like this, but I’m a selfish bastard. I want this for my own personal greed. For the nights when she won’t be in my bed and I can’t sleep.

Tingles shoot to the base of my spine as I near my orgasm. I thrust faster, then right before I come, I stop and circle my hips to grind against Madison’s clit.

I grab her throat and squeeze. It’s enough pressure to make her pupils dilate as fear flashes in her eyes, but not enough to suffocate her. It’s a message. One that says I own her. She’ll never get away from me, no matter how far she runs. I’ll always be right behind her.

Madison’s eyes roll into the back of her head, her inner walls clenching tighter on my cock. Her lips part on a strangled scream, and her muscles contort as she orgasms. A breath hisses through my teeth as her cunt strangles my dick. It’s enough pain for me to join her. I let go of her throat and grab her leg, hiking it higher for a better angle as I pound into her with loud grunts. As I spill myself inside her, my gaze drops to my shaft, and I watch my cum leak out of her. I push it deeper inside with every harsh stroke. Seeing it only makes me come harder.

My control slips.

I end the video and toss the phone onto the mattress, then pound harder into her until my cock softens and I’m out of breath. Madison fists my hair and yanks my face toward her. My eyes widen and a whimper slips out of me, but my shock quickly fades as her mouth crashes against mine.

Everything else around us melts away.

No shitty pool house made into a bedroom.

No parents sleeping in the main house.

No ex-fiancé whose name is on my list of people to kill.

No worrying about getting caught together.

It's just us, finally giving in to the years of sexual tension. I could get lost in Madison for the rest of my life and wouldn't care to ever find my way back. She's given me everything I've been searching for.

The need to be seen.

To feel something other than apathy and self-loathing.

The adrenaline rush.

To feel wanted and given a fuck about.

Madison tugs my hair *again*, yanking my head back.

*Jesus fucking Christ, that shit turns me on more than she fucking knows.*

She licks her bottom lip, and I groan, loving how she's tasting me on her mouth. I kiss over her jaw and rock my hips against her, my hardening dick bottoming out inside her. Madison lets out the cutest whimper, and I do it again.

How did I go years without this? Without her? Madison has officially ruined me for anyone else when it should have been the other way around. No other woman will ever live up to the high standards my stepsister set.

We stay like that for a while, basking in the glow of the high. Only the sound of my kisses on her throat fills the quiet room.

"I can't believe we did that," she says, breaking the silence.

I tense and raise my head to look down at her.

Is she already regretting this?

Madison's expression becomes more guarded. "Say something."

I slant my mouth over hers, kissing her deep but quick. "I can believe it."

Surprise crosses her features. "What?"

"This would have eventually happened. You were made for me, Madison."

I fought tooth and nail because of my attraction to her. For the longest time, I believed we couldn't be together for one reason or another. If I hadn't already given in, I would have sooner than later. I never believed in any higher powers or fate, but Madison makes me a believer. She's been thrown into my path of self-destruction, and no matter how many times I dismiss her, there she is, back in front of me.

I don't give a flying fuck what happens after this, so long as I still have Madison. I'll burn the world just to keep her as mine.

Madison's eyebrows pinch together, and she whispers in a broken voice, "I thought you've always hated me."

I stay quiet, not wanting to break the moment between us by admitting that I hated her for a long time. But feelings change. Now I want to hide her away from the world and keep her to myself.

"Baby, I don't hate you," I say.

Pink creeps to her cheeks, and she hesitantly leans up, pressing her soft lips against mine. I groan and close my eyes, surrendering to the kiss and making the most out of it.

The kiss eventually slows, and I pull out of her, then get off the bed. I wet a washcloth in the bathroom and return to the bed to clean her. Madison winces a few times, and I gentle my touch so I don't hurt her any more than I have to. I wipe away our combined cum, unable to look away from it.

*She was a virgin. I came inside her.*

My cock twitches as it hardens again. I don't plan on fucking her right away. I'm sure she's sore and needs a break, so I'm okay with holding her for a while.

Madison searches for her phone and picks it up when she finds it. I toss the rag aside, and right as I lower myself to the mattress, she gasps and leaps out of bed.

"I need to go." She throws on her clothes, hopping on one leg as she puts on her leggings. "I don't want our parents catching us together. Justin will probably look for me soon, and I really don't want him to see us like this."

My mood immediately sours at the mention of her ex. I sit up and scowl at her while she finishes dressing. I told her I have no problem being her dirty little secret, but now that I finally got to feel her beneath me, I want more. The world needs to know she belongs to me.

I stand and prowl toward Madison as she rushes to the door. "He won't be a problem anymore."

She freezes and slowly turns to look at me over her shoulder. "What do you mean?"

I stop directly behind her, leaving no space between us as my chest presses against her back. My fingers skate down her sides, a smirk lifting

the corners of my mouth as she bites her bottom lip. I grip her waist and lean forward until my lips are beside her ear.

“Exactly what I said. He won’t be a problem anymore,” I whisper.

She turns her head, her gaze turning quizzical and unsure. “What did you do?”

I nip her earlobe and soothe the sting with my pierced tongue. Madison mewls and shifts her weight on her legs, not realizing she’s leaning back into me.

“Ryder,” she breathes.

“I meant everything I said about you being mine, little sister. No one will ever come between us. No one can keep you from me.”

She swallows hard, her cheeks turning a light pink. Her lips part but clamp shut in the next breath. I drop my hands from her waist as she opens the door. Then she leaves.

I close my eyes for a moment, breathing in through my nose and out through my mouth. The rush of adrenaline and dopamine fades like the ocean tides sucking away from the beach. It leaves me chasing after the feelings and coming up empty-handed as water slips through my fingers.

My glare shifts to the black box on the ground, where I’d been sitting while watching Madison sleep. Justin’s fingers are inside as a souvenir.

He isn’t out of the picture. Not yet, anyway. He will be soon enough, but until then, he needs a reminder to keep his mouth shut or deal with the consequences.

I cross the room and snatch my phone off the bed, then open the video I recorded of Madison. It plays as I type out a caption over a clip of her bouncing on my cock smeared with her pleasure.

Madison will be mad if she finds out about this, but it’s nothing I can’t handle.

I pull up Justin’s number, then send the video to him, followed by a text.

This your girl, bro?

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# CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE



## MADISON

### *“ANXIETY” DOECHII*

I wince with every step as I creep inside the house. Everything is so sore, especially between my legs. I knew sex with Ryder would hurt, but I didn't realize just how painful it would be.

Opening the back door, I listen for any sounds that someone is already awake. When I checked the time in Ryder's bedroom, I almost had a panic attack. It's six in the morning and our parents should already be up and around. I don't know how time passed as fast as it did.

*Because you were busy getting fucked by your brother,* the guilty voice in the back of my mind whispers.

My heart races and my stomach churns. I'm engaged, damn it. I haven't been in a lot of relationships, but I'm not one to cheat, no matter how big of

an asshole Justin is.

Unless it's with Ryder.

My dad will kill me if he ever finds out about this.

My hand trembles as I slide the door shut behind me. I tiptoe through the living room, heading straight to the staircase so I can lock myself in my bedroom.

I freeze and squeeze my eyes shut. Crap. Justin will be in there, waiting for me like a viper in its den.

"Madison?" Carolyn says. "Where have you been?"

My eyes snap open, and I turn. My stepmother is already dressed for the day, wearing loose black dress pants and a cream-colored sweater. It's so bland and boring compared to her son's sense of style. A claw clip holds the bulk of her hair in place, though a few loose tendrils frame her face.

I avert my gaze and fumble with my phone. "I didn't want to be anywhere near Justin."

She sighs and crosses her arms over her chest. "He's not here. He left in a rush last night after you two went outside. Care to tell me what happened?"

I blink. "He didn't stay the night?"

She rolls her eyes and steps toward me. "I just told you he left last night. What happened?"

My stepmother has a thing for gossip. She always wants to know everything about everybody. I refuse to allow her to insert herself into my business, however, because that big mouth of hers will tell my father and her friends. But if I tell her nothing, she'll bug me until I crack and spill everything.

"We had a little misunderstanding," I say.

Carolyn looks me over, her dainty eyebrows pinching with a frown that she smooths out as fast as it appeared. "You didn't come back in last night. Where did you go?"

*Shit. She knows.*

"I had a friend pick me up so I could crash at her place."

Carolyn narrows her eyes. "Which friend?"

"Does it matter? I don't have to answer to you."

"You're my daughter and I worry about you." She scoffs. "Is that too much for you?"

"Leave me alone."

I storm past her and into the kitchen. I don't know what I'm doing here when I want to lock myself in my bedroom and soak in the bathtub to ease the aches.

Carolyn follows me. "Why are you getting so defensive when I'm just asking questions?"

I grab a chilled water bottle from the fridge and pop the cap off before I drink half of it in just a few gulps.

"Madison, I'm talking to you."

I roll my eyes and stride past her, heading out of the kitchen so I can get away from her. Carolyn grabs my shoulder, jerking me back and forcing me to look at her.

My heart pounds against my chest, and my hands tremble. I'm so tired of having to answer to people who think they have full control of my life. Is it too much to ask for some privacy and a sense of freedom without someone breathing down my neck to know where I'm at, who I'm with, where I've been, and so on?

"I'm twenty-one years old and don't need to tell you everything. I'm here, aren't I?" I try to keep my voice steady, but a few words come out squeaky, which only makes me more frustrated with myself.

Carolyn clutches her pearls, her long, skinny fingers splayed over her chest. "Who do you think you are, talking to me like that?"

"Obviously not your daughter, so don't act like I am. I'm so tired of everyone in this hellhole wanting to control me without ever giving a shit about me."

Carolyn narrows her eyes. "No one is controlling you."

"Yes, you are! You're making me marry that asshole when I've made it clear that I don't want him."

She steps closer to me, her expression turning thunderous. "You've known you'd be part of an arranged marriage since you were ten, so don't act like this is something new. You've had plenty of freedom to do whatever you want. You had a normal childhood." She reaches toward me, and I jerk back before she can touch me. "Honey, I think you're having a serious case of cold feet now that the wedding is around the corner. It'll be fine. Justin is a great kid and will take—"

A cold breeze puffs against my backside.

Carolyn turns her attention past my shoulder, and her scowl morphs into a gentler expression. "Oh, good. You're awake. How do you feel about

spending the day with me?”

I stand frozen with my heart in my throat.

*Don’t look.*

*Don’t look.*

*Act normal, even though you want to get an eyeful of your sexy-as-sin brother.*

The cold blast of outside air fades as warmth cocoons me once more. Amber and cypress fill my lungs. A shudder rolls through me at the memory of Ryder’s body over mine and his deep, husky voice filling my head with naughty things no brother should ever say to his sister.

“Spending the day doing what, exactly?” Ryder’s voice is flat, like he’s already bored with the conversation. It’s the complete opposite of how he talked to me not even ten minutes ago.

Carolyn huffs, but a playful smile lifts her lips. “What, are you too good to hang out with your mother now? We can go shopping for Halloween. Maybe even have brunch at Susana’s. It’ll be on me, of course.” Remembering that I’m still here, she frowns at me. “Honey, go to your room and get into something more appropriate. There are men in this house.”

I glance at my top and leggings. How is this inappropriate? It’s weird she would think that, especially around people who are supposed to be family. It’s also odd, considering I wore this to dinner. Is she afraid my father will lose all willpower if I’m showing too much skin? Gross.

I glare at her and cross my arms over my chest. Now I don’t even want to go to my bedroom, just out of spite.

Ryder’s hand ghosts over my lower back as he moves in closer behind me. I peek at him from the corner of my eye as he pretends to step around me, but then his hand descends to my ass and squeezes. Right here, in front of his mother, who doesn’t even notice because she’s too focused on his face.

“I’ve already got plans,” Ryder says.

Carolyn’s shoulders slump, and her previous excitement fizzles out. “Really? With who?”

There she goes again with the twenty questions, but I would be lying to myself if I said I’m not curious who Ryder plans on hanging out with when I’m dying to spend more time with him.

Ryder squeezes my ass again, and I turn, catching his brief smirk before he schools his expression once more. “Friends.”

Carolyn sighs and shakes her head. “Fine. When are you next free?”

Seriously? *Fine*? No pressure to tell names and spill all the juicy details?

My earlier irritation spins back. I bite my tongue so I don’t lose my cool on her again. I drop my arms and storm out of the room.

I need to get out of this house and away from everyone for a while. The best way to cope and clear my head is a day spent with my friends. When Carolyn brought up Halloween, it reminded me I still need to shop for my costume for the party.

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“So why are we eating here at the mall and not at Susana’s?” Nova asks, then picks up her half-eaten slice of pizza.

I shift in my seat and swallow my bite of food. The cheeseburger isn’t as good as Susana’s, but I don’t want to risk running into Carolyn while she’s out shopping. I don’t want to tell the full reason to my friends. We’re talking about my stepbrother and me. I can’t tell them what’s happening without them scrunching their noses and heavily judging me.

“Well,” I say, drawing out the moment so I can think of something good and believable.

“Bet you ten bucks it’s because she doesn’t want to see Justin,” Olivia says around a mouthful of sub sandwich. She smirks and uses a napkin to swipe some mayonnaise from her lips.

Nova snickers. “Justin would never show his face in that place. It’s too low-brow for him.”

I shudder at the mention of him. My best friends hate Justin as much as I do.

My mind goes back to the bathroom, when he forced me onto my knees. Then last night when he almost pushed me off the deck.

“But going to Susana’s would hurt his precious reputation.” Nova bites into her pizza with a smug smile. She’s right. Justin may be unhinged, but he would never dirty himself by going somewhere on the poorer side of town.

“It’s not because of Justin,” I say, ready to change the topic.

Olivia turns to me. “So why are you avoiding Susana’s?”

I look away from my friends to focus on my half-eaten order of fries. “I just wanted a different view this morning. Besides, *shopping*.” I wave a hand toward all the shops that are calling my name. We barely touched the stores here, and I still need a few more items for my costume.

Nova snorts a laugh. “Girl, you’re turning different shades of pink. You’re hiding something from us. Spit it out.”

“There’s nothing to tell,” I say a little too fast.

They share a look, then turn to me at the same time with smirks that are downright evil. It spells trouble, and I’m not prepared to get them off my trail.

“Uh-huh. Sure,” Nova says.

Olivia leans forward and whisper-yells, “Are you messing around with a server at the restaurant or something?”

“What? No!” I face-palm and shake my head. “I just don’t want to see my stepmother there, okay?”

“That’s a valid enough reason for me,” Nova says. “So, we’ll stay away from Susana’s.”

Olivia drops back into her seat and crosses her arms over her chest, all the while frowning. “Girl, I thought you were about to confess to a secret affair with some hottie. But I don’t mind eating here. Besides”—she gestures broadly—“*shopping*.”

“I love you guys,” I say with a smile.

I’m glad they aren’t pushing for more information. Yeah, they can be nosy and give me a hard time, but I appreciate them for sensing when I don’t want to talk about it.

“Did you hear about Mickey?” Nova says, shifting the conversation.

“What about him?” I say.

Olivia munches on her sandwich, her eyebrows hiking up her forehead as she curiously looks at Nova. I haven’t heard much about Mickey since graduation, and I kept it that way for a reason. He’s old news, and I’m sure he’s just as much of a jerk now as he was back then.

Nova leans a little closer as she lowers her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. “Aiden told me he’s dead.”

“What?” Olivia gasps. “No way! How?”

“You can’t tell anyone, okay? Or Aiden will have my head.” Nova looks around before she turns back to us. “Jaxon killed him. Aiden said he beat him until he wasn’t recognizable.”

Olivia makes a comment, but I don’t hear what she says. My ears ring, and I lean back in my seat as I digest the news.

*Holy crap. He’s dead.*

Karma finally caught up with Mickey after years of tormenting me, my stepbrother, and his friends. I’m not even the slightest bit unhappy about this news. The only thing upsetting me right now is my reaction, because I’m *relieved*. It means there’s one less asshole in the world.

“Is that Dahlia?” Nova’s outburst brings me back to reality.

Olivia and I follow the direction of Nova’s stare.

Dahlia sits at a table away from the crowd. Jaxon sits next to her, with his arm slung over the back of her chair. He plucks a french fry from his plate and holds it in front of Dahlia’s mouth. Her black-painted lips part with a smile, and she nibbles the fry from his fingers. Jaxon’s pleased smile is the gentlest expression I’ve seen on him—besides the pictures on Dahlia’s Instagram. His eyes light up with adoration and love as he feeds her another french fry.

Warmth fills my chest as I watch them together. They’re clearly in love, oblivious to the stares they’re receiving. They don’t care about the judgement, and I truly envy them for it.

Yeah, I was shocked when I first learned about their relationship, but I don’t find it disgusting. Watching them together, I realize they’re perfect for each other.

Jaxon waits for Dahlia to swallow before he grabs her jaw, turns her head toward him, and smashes his lips against hers. She smiles and kisses him once before leaning away from him and playfully shoving his shoulder. She says something to him, but I can’t make out the words over this distance.

Olivia gasps. “Oh my god.”

“Did he . . . Did he just kiss his sister?” Nova says.

I rip my attention away from the couple in question and turn to my friends. They share the same shocked expression. I wonder if it’s the same one I had when I learned about Jaxon and Dahlia.

I shift in my seat and swallow hard.

If they find Dahlia and Jaxon's relationship gross, what will they think if they ever find out about Ryder and me?

They'd shun me.

They'd make fun of me.

My heart hammers wildly, and racing thoughts fill my head. I'm terrified of their judgements and cruel words. Not just toward myself, but toward Dahlia and Jaxon.

"Let's go say hi to them." Olivia stands and grabs her tray.

My eyes round like saucers as my friends dump their trays and leave them on top of the trash can before prancing toward Dahlia.

"Guys, wait!" I scramble out of my seat and follow them.

*"Don't let Jaxon hear what you think about his marriage with Dahlia."*

Ryder's warning echoes in my mind, with flashing red lights and noisy alarm bells.

Olivia and Nova walk faster, and by the time I catch up with them, they're already at Dahlia and Jaxon's table.

Sensing our approach, Dahlia turns to us. Her warm expression fades, leaving behind a look of trepidation. I don't blame her for being worried. Ever since she transferred to our school, she's been singled out and bullied.

Jaxon sits straighter and scowls at Olivia and Nova, then settles his death glare on me. I shiver and almost trip on my own feet. Jaxon has always scared me. He's had this personal vendetta against me, and I know it has to be because of the people I hung out with in school. I would hate me too if I were in his position.

"Hey, Jax." Olivia awkwardly waves. "Been a while since I've seen you."

Jaxon keeps his glare on me, not acknowledging Olivia, and I swear I'm about to catch fire. I avert my gaze and shift my weight on one leg.

"We should go," I mutter.

Jaxon doesn't want us—specifically me—here, and I don't want to cause any trouble.

I slump when Jaxon finally tears his attention away from me and turns to Olivia. "Do you need something?"

Olivia shrugs. "Just wanted to say hi."

Jaxon tilts his head, his flower earring dangling from his ear. I don't blame him for being suspicious.

"Can we sit with you guys?" Nova grabs the chair opposite them.

“No,” Jaxon growls.

“Sure,” Dahlia says at the same time.

He swings his head toward her, eyes still narrowed and shoulders tense. Dahlia ignores him and smiles at the three of us. She seems genuinely excited about us being here.

“It would be nice to have some interaction with girls,” she says softly.

Jaxon doesn’t look away from her, but he watches our reactions from the corner of his eye.

Taking a calming breath, I sit in the seat directly across from her and smile. “Girl time is always the best.”

“Agreed.” Nova sits beside me.

“I like what you did with your hair,” Olivia says as she sits on my other side.

Dahlia touches a green-dyed lock, her smile growing. “Thanks.”

Jaxon watches Dahlia like a hawk, but I don’t miss the subtle upturn of his lips, as though he’s happy to see her have a good time.

“So,” Nova drawls with a smirk.

My stomach drops, and I give her a pleading look. I already know what she’s planning on saying because of her tone, and I want to yell at her to not say it.

She ignores me.

Dahlia raises both eyebrows. “So?”

Nova huffs and leans forward to rest her elbows on the table while cupping her cheeks with a goofy smile. “When did you and Jax tie the knot?”

Dahlia’s face falls, and the scared look returns in full force. Jaxon whips his head toward Nova and scowls at her, probably imagining ways to kill her if she so much as says something negative. It’s a miracle he’s giving her a chance to clarify her intentions.

“Last week,” Dahlia says hesitantly.

Not noticing her life being on the line, or maybe she does and doesn’t care, Nova claps and does a small dance in her chair. “Aw, you’re still in the honeymoon phase. Are you guys planning on going somewhere nice?”

“Oh! What about the Halloween party?” Olivia asks. “Are you both doing something fun? I can totally see you guys pulling off Morticia and Gomez.”

Jaxon's dark eyebrows bunch together as he looks between Olivia and Nova.

Yeah, I'm just as shocked as he is. I was so worried about them being awful toward Dahlia and Jaxon, which leaves me feeling awful I even assumed that of them. They were on the same page about Mickey and his friends being jerks. We were just too scared to walk away because of the backlash we would have gotten.

"Right, Maddy?" Nova says, drawing me out of my thoughts.

I blink and turn to her. "Hm?"

Everyone at the table stares at me, expecting an answer.

Nova smiles. "I was telling Dahlia how we don't mind if she wants to join us shopping."

"Oh." I look at Dahlia, then Jaxon, who's staring at me with less hate, but it's clear he's still guarded. "Yeah, I don't mind at all. It'll be fun."

"See!" Nova claps her hands. "We can get stuff for our Halloween costumes."

Yeah. It'll be fun. I only hope I can keep my mouth shut about her relationship. That will be hard when I hoped to get advice about dating my brother.

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# CHAPTER THIRTY



## MADISON

### *“MILLION DOLLAR BABY” TOMMY RICHMAN*

After Dahlia finishes eating, we leave the food court and walk through the mall. Time passes quickly as we shop. After visiting a few stores, I realize I'll have to purchase the items I need online. I only hope I can get them before the Halloween party.

I peek at Dahlia for the hundredth time. She's holding hands with Jaxon, who refuses to leave her side.

It's sweet how perfect they are for each other. The more I watch them, the more I notice how Jaxon will do anything to make Dahlia happy, whether it's holding her shopping bags, buying things she looks at for

longer than fifteen seconds, or giving her a heart-wrenching smile when she shows him something that's piqued her interest.

I can't help but wonder what it would be like to have a love like that.

Justin wouldn't do anything sweet like Jaxon does for Dahlia. My fiancé would sneer at anything I showed him. He'd walk ahead of me and tell me to hurry up. Hell, he probably wouldn't even want me around my friends. He's the type who'll shut me away from the world so he can control my every move.

My thoughts slip to Ryder and how he would treat me.

Butterflies fill my stomach.

Ryder would likely be my shadow. His hand would slip onto my waist as he leaned over to look at whatever I held. He'd probably murmur something dirty in my ear or compliment me. If we were alone together, he'd hold my hand. At least, that's what I would hope for, anyway.

Or he'd be like how he's always been: distant and cold. He'd shrug and tell me to move it along so we could leave.

I frown at how fast my thoughts turned for the worst.

"You look upset."

I jump and slap my hand over my chest, directly over my racing heart. Dahlia offers me an apologetic smile and briefly touches my arm to apologize for spooking me.

I force a smile and shake my head. "I'm fine."

She glances at my friends, who huddle at a clothing rack as they search for the next thing they'd like to buy. Jaxon stands off to the side, acting as Dahlia's own personal guard dog while giving her space to interact with me.

"The classic response when you really aren't fine," Dahlia says with a soft laugh. "It's okay if you don't want to talk about it."

"Wait." I snag her wrist as she pulls away from me. Dahlia's lips part in surprise, but she doesn't move.

My face tingles from the weight of Jaxon's glare, but I refuse to look away from Dahlia. He doesn't move from his spot, arms crossed over his chest. At least he isn't automatically going on the defense.

"Are you . . ." I nervously lick my lip.

Dahlia leans into me, eager to know what I'm too afraid to ask.

I take a fortifying breath and drop my arm to my side. Fuck it. "Were you scared of your feelings for Jaxon? What with him being your brother and all that?"

Dahlia averts her gaze.

“Sorry!” I wave my hands in front of me, my cheeks burning with a blush. “I didn’t mean to pry.”

“You really want to know?” she asks so softly that I have to lean in to hear her.

I nod and drop my hands.

Dahlia glances at Jaxon, finding the courage to talk about something so private between them, before she turns back to me. “Yeah, at first I was scared. People in this town are pretty terrible and will find any reason to bully me. It was hard to resist him in the beginning. It’s socially unacceptable to have feelings for your brother, but being without him was breaking me apart. Jaxon didn’t care what anyone thought and, through that, I found the courage to stop caring. In the end, it’s me and him against the world. It’s always been that way, so why fight it?”

What she went through—feelings wise—is similar to what I’m going through. It’s wrong to be with my stepbrother, and our family will tear us apart if they ever find out. Not only that, but I’ve been walking on eggshells, scared my dad will somehow know I cheated on Justin. I’m supposed to be loyal to *him*, but I would rather gouge my eyeballs out of my head.

Sensing the dark path of my thoughts, Dahlia offers a smile. “Who cares what people think? They’ll talk no matter what you do, what you say, what you wear, and who you love. You can’t always please everyone, so you may as well live for yourself and do what makes you happy.”

A cold sweat breaks out over my suddenly overheated skin. Are my feelings for Ryder that obvious to Dahlia?

Jaxon moves in and kisses the top of Dahlia’s head. “My wise little flower.”

I force a smile, even though I want to puke because of how nervous I am about my secret being discovered. “Thank you. You two really deserve each other.”

Dahlia beams a bright smile, then lunges at me with a bear hug. “Thank you for being nice to me.”

Jaxon’s eyes soften for once as he looks at me. I know it’s not directed toward me, but somehow, with Dahlia’s acceptance of me, he doesn’t look seconds away from beating me up.

The world really did this girl a disservice, and I swear I'll never be party to hurting her.

We leave the store empty-handed, and I follow Olivia and Nova as they lead the way to the escalators for the second floor. A large body leans against the banister, tattooed hands folded together. I peer in his direction as the automatic stairs carry me and my friends to the second floor. My breath catches in my throat.

Ryder stares back at me, his expression blank, but his eyes darkened with unrestrained desire. He's wearing his usual black clothes, paired this time with red-and-black Vans. His black hoodie with a red star design etched into the chest hugs his broad chest and shoulders. The black parachute pants with countless straps hanging from the large red pockets hug his lean waist and fall into a straight line. His pants stop at his calves, tied off to give them the parachute effect, and he's wearing high black socks to cover his tanned skin.

Once I get to the top, I debate walking toward him. I demanded he ignore me as usual so no one would catch on to us, but all I want is to throw myself into his arms.

"Oh, look!" Olivia gasps. "Ryder's here."

With his hand on her lower back, Jaxon leads Dahlia toward my stepbrother. Olivia and Nova follow them, and I force my legs to move, lingering further back so I can keep the attention off of me.

"Didn't know you liked going to the mall," Jaxon says in greeting to Ryder.

Ryder blinks and shifts his attention to his best friend. He shrugs and sticks his hands into his hoodie's front pocket. "I like to watch people."

Ryder peeks at me, and I catch the subtle uptick of his lips before the smile disappears.

Butterflies fill my stomach, and I pull my phone out of my purse and scroll through social media to appear busy and not at all interested in my stepbrother.

"Wanna join us?" Nova asks.

"Sure," Ryder says.

"Oh!" Olivia taps Nova's arm. "We should check out Lucky's for their plus-sized clothes."

Nova grins. "I've been meaning to go there for . . ."

Her words fade as I part from the group and glance around. No way am I going into Lucky's with Ryder. It's a great store where I get a lot of my lingerie for content, but if Ryder watches me pick out my next outfit with those bedroom eyes, I'll combust into flames.

"I'll catch up with you guys," I say as I walk backward. The group turns to me, but it's Ryder's gaze I'm hyper-aware of. "I want to check out a different store real quick."

Olivia inches toward me. "You want me to come along?"

"You go ahead. I won't be long." I shake my head and offer her a smile, hoping it's enough to dissuade her. I don't even know where I'm going, but if she comes with me, then everyone else will come with me and it'll all be for naught.

Olivia's eyebrows draw inward, and she stares at me with an unreadable expression. The longer she looks at me, the more it feels like she's peeling back all of my layers and finding the real reason why I'm acting so weird.

"Okay, are you sure?" Nova says.

"Yeah. Go on without me."

Olivia and Nova are the first to turn and leave. Jaxon and Dahlia stare at me. The former's expression is slack—similar to Ryder's—but I can see the gears turning in his mind. Dahlia glances at Ryder, then at me. She hides a smile by biting her bottom lip, then tugs Jaxon's hand as she walks away.

That leaves Ryder, and he doesn't move a muscle as he watches me. His eyes lower as he looks me over. The dull, dead appearance of his gaze cracks until it reveals a burning inferno of hunger. And it's all for *me*.

I duck my head and turn around, then put distance between us. The whole time, my body hums beneath the weight of Ryder's stare. He's still watching. I don't have to turn around to know that.

My legs move on their own, and I eventually end up inside a Spencer's of all places—low lighting, loud music, and crammed with racks full of T-shirts decorated in vulgar sayings. Not that I'm complaining. I happen to own a T-shirt from here that says Cum Dumpster, which is ironic, considering I let Ryder come inside me.

I glance around the store, working my way to the sex toys in the back. A small rack of monster dildos stands nearby. One of them takes inspiration from a demon, another from a tentacle monster. I eye them and nibble my bottom lip. If I get one of them and use it in a video, it'll bring in more money. Which means I can get out of town quicker.

*Do I really want to move? Now that I got a taste of what it's like being with Ryder?*

I shake away the thought.

Dad won't allow us to be together, and he'll still force me to marry Justin. I'll be in a loveless marriage, pining after a man I can't have.

Large hands grip my waist, and a chest presses against my back. I squeak and jump, but the person behind me holds me still with a low chuckle. "You should get it. I'll pay."

My face instantly heats with a blush. Ryder slips a hand around my front and places it over my stomach, tucking me closer against him while he keeps his head bent with his lips next to my ear.

"What are you doing here?" I whisper.

Ryder raises an eyebrow. "You thought I would let you wander off without me following? Baby," he coos. "You don't know me well enough."

I check to ensure we're alone. For once, the small shop is empty except for the employees hanging out behind the cash register.

"Look at me." Ryder catches my chin between two tattooed skeleton fingers. He forces me to look at him as he cocks his head.

"We can't be caught like this," I whisper. I suck in a breath as he smirks at me, breaking the blank expression he uses as a shield.

Irritation flashes across his features, but he reins it in, leaving his cockiness out in the open.

"We're not doing anything." He pauses for a moment. "Yet."

Oh, fuck me.

I sway in place, and Ryder steadies me with his hands on my waist, his smirk growing into a full-on fuck-boy smile that I desperately want to kiss off his stupid face. "What do you mean, yet? We're at the mall."

Ryder jerks his chin toward the monster dildos. "Which one do you want?"

"You don't mean that."

Ryder leans against me as he reaches for the nearest box, and he tilts his head as he analyzes it for a long moment. My pulse thunders in my ears, and I try to calm down, but it's impossible with him wrapped around me as he toys with the notion of buying the dildo in his hand.

"Ryder," I say.

He finally turns his attention to me, his pierced lips tugging into a secretive smile. "Baby, I saw you looking at these. I know you want one, so

let me buy you one.”

“You just want to use it on me, don’t you?”

Ryder swoops in. Right before his lips touch mine, he stops and grins at my startled gasp and how I leaned forward to meet him halfway. “Maybe I do, little sister.” He regards the monster dildo, then steps away from me. “I think this one is perfect.”

I chase after him as he walks away, heading straight to the cash register. “Wait!”

He ignores me and sets the box on the counter, then fishes his wallet out of his pocket. The clerk doesn’t bat an eye as she scans the barcode.

“Would you like to add lube and toy disinfectant?” she asks.

Ryder gives me a sideways glance, his expression flat. The humor shines in his eyes, though. He turns back to the clerk and nods. “Yeah, go ahead and add those, too.”

The clerk nods and adds a medium-sized bottle of lube and toy cleaner. Ryder pays, then takes the black plastic bag with all the new items.

“I can’t believe you did that,” I say.

Ryder shrugs and guides me out of the store. I watch in real time as his playful demeanor switches to a blank slate in the snap of a finger.

Guilt stabs at me.

It’s my fault he has to do that. All because I’m too embarrassed and selfish to want us to act like a couple in public.

“How do you do that?” I say without thinking it over first.

Ryder turns his head toward me. He doesn’t say anything, but I can see the question on his face.

“Turning off your emotions. How do you do that?” I stay in step by his side as we walk past shops.

Ryder turns away from me, shutting me out. He stays silent for a while as we wander aimlessly. Soon, we’ll have to join our friends at Lucky’s or Nova and Olivia will come looking for me.

“I don’t know,” he says, finally breaking the heavy silence. “It’s something I’ve done since I was a kid.”

“You’ve done it since we first met in that restaurant.” I chew on my bottom lip and peek at him. “Did something happen to you?”

Ryder’s shoulders stiffen, his spine straightening. His strides elongate, and I have to power-walk to keep up with him.

I want to hit myself for asking him that question. Especially out of the blue and with no tact. Ryder has shut everyone out for years, including me, and I've always wanted to know why. His little comments and reactions after I thought we were about to die in a motorcycle accident have been replaying in my head. They're little clues to something much deeper than what's on the surface.

"Ryder," I say, and touch his arm.

His steps falter, and fury twists his features as he turns to face me. I drop my hand and back away from him, only for him to follow me and pin me against the banister. My mind sends me back to last night, when Justin held me over the edge on the patio, fury written over his face as he threatened to hurt me.

Ryder drops the Spencer's bag and plants his hands on either side of me on the ledge. "How about this, doll? You tell me what happened when you ran from Justin, and I'll tell you why I shut down so fast."

My head rears back, and I stare at Ryder.

If I tell Ryder what happened, he'll lose it and go after Justin. He threatened to dismember him the other night, and I wouldn't put it past him to keep his promise. I'm not trying to defend my fiancé, but I don't want his blood on my hands. Or Ryder's.

"I don't want to talk about it," I say.

A muscle jumps in the corner of his jaw, and he glares into my eyes for what feels like forever before he drops his hands and steps away from me. His expression fades, and the blank mask is back on.

My heart cracks.

He's closing me out again.

I grab the Spencer's bag and cast it a sullen look as I follow Ryder. His strides are long, but not as quick as they were before. We end up bumping into our friends just as they walk out of Lucky's.

Olivia notices my change in mood and slinks up to my side and whispers, "You okay?"

I force a smile and nod. "Peachy."

She turns a scowl to Ryder's back, then looks at me again. "Was he being a jerk again?"

Not wanting to talk about it, I shrug. "It's nothing I'm not used to already. Don't worry about it."

"I'll tell Aiden to kick his ass if you want me to?" Nova says softly, so Ryder can't hear her.

I snort out an unamused laugh and shake my head. "It's fine. *I'm* fine. Where to next?"

Olivia hums as she thinks over the options, then says, "How about we visit the Halloween store?"

I nod. I wouldn't mind walking through the store and seeing what all they have stocked for this year. There's always something there that I can use year-round. Plus, it'll be fun to make some spooky-sexy content with whatever I get from the store.

We make the long trek to the parking lot. Ryder and Jaxon linger behind us, talking softly. Dahlia joins us girls, already fitting in and occasionally adding comments while Olivia and Nova talk. I'm not paying close enough attention to the topic since I'm so lost in my thoughts.

"Oh my god!" a woman yells.

My head pops up, and I look around the parking lot. My gaze lands on a familiar face, and I scrunch my nose.

"Is that Kaila?" Nova whispers with a curl of her lip. It's an honest reaction and one that I can't judge her for.

"Crap, she's coming toward us." Olivia squares her shoulders and sucks in a deep breath as she mentally prepares for this unwanted run-in with the snake.

Kaila struts toward us, her red hair dancing around her shoulders in the breeze. Her clothing choices haven't changed since I last saw her, which was graduation day. She still wears expensive name brands that are bland and not all that great looking. There's no personality to them.

Jaxon steps forward and positions himself in front of Dahlia, his hands shoved into his pockets to make it appear that he's relaxed. His tense shoulders and pinched lips say otherwise. Ryder surprises me as he comes to my side, leaving an inch of space between us so our arms don't touch.

The guys know how terrible Kaila is. She was Mickey's right hand and always partook in bullying my brother and his friends. All because she was obsessed with my ex, which meant doing anything to get his attention.

Kaila slows her steps, and she puts on a show of excitement with her huge grin and spread arms. "Hey, besties! It's so good to see you here. God, it's been, what, like, three years?"

"Yeah," Olivia drawls with an eyebrow raised.

Kaila glances at her, then slips her attention to Dahlia. Her fake smile tightens, and her eyes lose the minimal warmth in them.

“You got a problem?” Jaxon’s expression doesn’t change. He may look bored, but violence rolls off of him in toxic clouds.

Kaila turns to Jaxon and broadens her smile, which is all teeth and no humor. “Not at all. Just saying hi to some old friends.”

I bite my tongue so I don’t say anything snarky to her. If there’s one thing I don’t want to be, it’s a mean girl.

Ryder glances at our friend group, then turns back to Kaila. “Old friends? I don’t see old friends anywhere. You sure you aren’t lost?”

My eyes round like saucers, and my jaw drops.

Kaila’s eyes narrow, but she forces a smile that only makes her appear like she’s lost her mind. “You know, I was going to play nice and leave the past where it belongs—in the past—but it looks like you’re still the same loser you were years ago. Aren’t you a little too old to be dressing like an emo? Wear something more mature and slit your wrists in private.”

My blood simmers into a boiling rage, sparking into a blazing fire.

Ryder doesn’t blink or look affected by Kaila’s insult. “Bold of you to act like this is your kingdom. Do you believe there won’t be consequences for throwing your weight around?”

Kaila’s face scrunches, and she tilts her head. “The hell are you saying?”

“Fuck around,” Jaxon says in a dead voice. He creeps closer to her, with his hands balling into tight fists. “And find out.”

Are they seriously threatening to beat her up?

“Where’s your crew?” Ryder smirks. “Or did they ditch you for tighter pussy?”

Kaila gives him the stink face. “You’re an asshole.” She glances at Jaxon, then at me. “Whatever. I’m out of here. I see you have clearly switched sides and become one of the losers.”

She flicks her red hair and walks away.

I roll my eyes.

“God, now I need to go to church and have a priest bless my soul after being near that evil bitch,” Nova says with a shake of her head.

We walk through the parking lot, and I linger in the back with Ryder. He keeps his gaze forward and his emotional mask in place so I can’t read what he’s thinking. I sink my front teeth into my bottom lip and glance around to

make sure no one is watching before I inch my hand toward his. Our fingers touch, and Ryder peeks at me, dark eyebrows bunched together. I thread my fingers through his and slow our steps even more.

“Are you okay?” I whisper. What Kaila said was inconsiderate and mean. Mental health isn’t a joke and should never be used as an insult. You don’t know what someone is going through or if that one little jab at them will be their final straw.

Ryder cocks his head as he considers me before murmuring, “I’m fine.”

My chest tightens. Fuck, that breaks my heart. I know that answer all too well because I find myself using it often.

I step closer to him and tighten my grip on his hand. He squeezes in return and holds as still as a statue as I mold the front of my body against his. I have to lean my head back to look into his eyes.

“I’m glad you’re here,” I say.

Ryder leans down until our eyes are at the same level and his mouth is so close to mine that I can feel his breath against my parted lips. “You surprised me, little sister.”

“How so?”

“We’re out in public. Our friends could turn around any second and find us like this. Strangers could walk by and recognize us.” His lips twist into a toe-curling smile. “And yet, you’ve kept your eyes on me, and your body language screams that you want me to kiss you right here for the world to see.”

My face flushes with heat.

Ryder leans to the side until his lips are beside my ear. “If you want that kiss, you know where to find me tonight.”

Disappointment fills my chest as Ryder steps back and untangles his hand from mine. He smirks and winks at me before he turns and walks away.

As I watch him leave, I realize two things.

One: He changed the topic, which leads me to believe that my stepbrother is struggling with an invisible monster in his head. He doesn’t care if he gets in a crash and dies. He doesn’t care that he’s still here, and knowing he’s been fighting this alone hurts me so much.

Two: I’m disappointed that he didn’t kiss me right here in public. He didn’t say “fuck the rules” and claim me for everyone to see. I had a lot to

lose if he had done that, but it doesn't stop the hurt. I'm obsessed with Ryder, and any form of rejection from him is like a shot to the heart.

No. Make that a realization of three things, because I'm not just obsessed . . .

I love him. I'm *in* love with him.

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE



## MADISON

### *“DADDY ISSUES” THE NEIGHBORHOOD*

The lead singer’s voice from *Satan’s Priest* croons over my phone’s speaker, filling the candlelit bathroom with his serenading. It’s seven minutes of pure heaven, and it’s a great song to piggyback off of their last single “Little Sinner.”

I relax in a bubble bath after spending an ungodly amount of time taking pictures for social media. This soak is long overdue. I need to work out the kinks in my sore muscles, specifically my crotch, since it still aches after last night. It’s not as uncomfortable as it was this morning when I was walking funny, but it’s still tender. Soaking right now is already working its magic.

Warmth pools low in my belly at the thought of Ryder and everything we've done together. My chest tightens the longer I think about him. I'm in love with my stepbrother, and I think I have been for a long time now.

*"If you want that kiss, you know where to find me tonight."*

My front teeth dig into my bottom lip. I grab my cell phone from the outer edge of the tub and check the time. It's midnight, and everyone in the house retired to their bedrooms hours ago. The risk of anyone finding us together would be low, but never zero.

I shudder. I don't want to run into my father. He'll play Twenty Questions and sniff out every single lie until he puts it together that I'm sleeping with my brother.

My stomach knots, and I'm vaguely aware of the impending anxiety attack because I have no control over my life. I want to be with Ryder, not just in private, but out in the open for the world to see that he's mine and I'm his.

And I can't have that.

I suck in a ragged breath, trying to calm down. I sit up and squeeze my eyes shut, trying to shift my thoughts away from the path of doom that'll only make this anxiety worse.

I crack open my eyes and bring up Ryder's name to send him a text message. The distraction is needed. I just hope he's still awake and hasn't given up on waiting for me.

I send him a picture I took tonight. It's not a full-frontal nude. More like an enticing thirst trap.

You still awake?

The Delivered receipt changes to Read. Three dots appear at the bottom of the screen.

Fuck me, sis. 😬

I'm definitely awake now.

Can I see you?

The Delivered receipt turns to Read, but no bubbles appear. He leaves me hanging, wondering what happened and where I went wrong.

Did I say something he didn't like? Was it too bold of me to ask if I could see him? Is he still upset from my refusal to tell him what happened

with Justin the other morning?

I groan and slip deeper under the water while holding my phone out so it doesn't get wet. I'm trying to save money, not spend it on a phone replacement. Candy-scented bubbles reach my chin, filling my nostrils with the sweet perfume.

After a minute of silence, I sit up and start to type out an apology to him. A picture appears in the thread. My thumbs freeze, and I stare at the image.

Ryder stands in front of a full-length mirror, wearing only his black skull mask. He holds a towel over his pelvis. His erection strains against the material, and it's hard to ignore. Aside from the blue LED lights, the room is dark. His rib tattoos swirl up his chest and neck, standing out, along with the planes and grooves the shadows create on his abs.

I swallow to wet my suddenly dry mouth. The picture is too good to delete, and I won't even try defending myself for saving it. Pretty sure Ryder has saved pictures of me, what with him finding my OnlyFans. Hell, he has a video of us fucking. Saving this picture shouldn't upset him.

It doesn't bother me that Ryder has videos of us together. In fact, I love the thought of him needing to save them along with pictures of me on his phone for when he's alone.

Does he touch himself while looking at them?

My clit throbs at the thought of Ryder, alone and naked in his bedroom with his cock in his hand. I squeeze my thighs together to stop the building ache.

Out of everything in the picture, it's his mask that's turning me on the most. Something about not seeing his face—as handsome as my brother is—adds a mysterious vibe to him. He could be anybody underneath it. Could do whatever he wants to me and I'd have to accept it. Maybe I should hint about role playing.

I type out a response, then delete the words and type something else. There's so much I want to say to him, but I don't want to come off as desperate.

That's not what I meant, but you won't hear me complain. I meant can I see you after my bath?

Baby, you can see me whenever and however you want. You know where to find me. Unless you want me to join you?

I'll come to you.

I pull the plug from the drain and exit the tub, then wrap a towel around me as I head toward the closet.

I bite my bottom lip and smile at the plunge teddy I bought a while back. A cute bow ties at the front and holds the piece together, but the see-through silk leaves nothing to the imagination. It's backless, except for the ruffled string for the thong. While I put it on, I hype myself up so I don't back out last second.

*Go to his bedroom. Flirt. Kiss. Maybe do more stuff with him. Don't be shy. Just pretend this is another live cam with an audience.*

I've got this.

My heart pounds as my mind plays through all the ways this can go wrong. We're not exactly being careful about our relationship. I mean, we're fooling around in our parents' home, for crying out loud.

After checking myself in the full-length mirror, I cover myself with a fluffy blue robe and tie the belt into a loose knot at the front. I step into a pair of house slippers, grab my phone, then ease my bedroom door open.

*I'm really doing this. I'm cheating on my fiancé with my stepbrother. I'm fucking my brother, and we could get caught at any time by our parents.*

The living room is quiet as I pass through and head straight to the back door. Wind howls outside, shaking the trees' limbs in the backyard. A shiver goes down my spine as I mentally prepare myself to go out in the cold. I ease the door open and step outside, then slide it closed behind me. Keeping my footsteps light, I shuffle down the stairs and rush to the pool house. Ryder's bedroom door is shut, but blue light peeks through the window.

A smile tugs at my lips.

I don't bother knocking before I enter his room. My gaze immediately finds him, and I stumble over my own feet.

Ryder relaxes on the end of his bed, still wearing the mask.

Only the mask.

"You're still wearing it," I breathe.

The towel is thrown haphazardly across his lap, hiding his erection from my curious gaze. Ryder raises his tattooed hand, then curls his middle and ring finger in a come-here motion.

My thighs clench together, and my core pulses as I imagine those fingers making that motion inside me.

I close the distance between us. Ryder grabs my waist and drags me onto his lap with his erection nestled against my core.

“Can I have that kiss now?” I lift his mask to his forehead so I have access to his mouth.

Ryder’s pierced lips tilt into a cocky smile. “I’m yours, doll. Take whatever you want from me, even my heart.”

Butterflies fill my stomach, and I lean forward. Ryder meets me in the middle, too impatient to wait for the kiss. Our mouths crash, and it’s a flurry of tongue, teeth, and bites.

The world fades until it’s just us in his bedroom, our hands exploring like we’re reacquainting ourselves after being separated for years.

Ryder fists my hair and grips my waist before rolling me onto the mattress and settling between my spread legs. The kiss never falters, even when my lungs burn with the need for oxygen.

“Ryder,” I whisper between kisses. I dig my nails into his back, torn between needing to breathe and needing him to keep kissing me.

He nips my bottom lip before trailing wet kisses along my jaw toward my ear. I suck in a ragged breath and grind my pelvis against his as he catches my earlobe between his teeth. Tingles spread through my body and build in my core.

“Please.” I rock my hips faster against him, seeking more friction against my throbbing clit. “Touch me.”

Ryder chuckles and thrusts against me. “My girl is so needy.”

My mind blanks.

Noticing my reaction, Ryder drops his mouth to my neck, where he assaults me with his teeth and tongue. “Say something, beautiful.”

I lick my bottom lip. “I’m your girl?”

Ryder raises his head. “You think I’m just going to let you walk away after I finally got you?” He tsks. “One of these days, I’ll marry you and put a baby in you. It doesn’t matter which comes first.”

Butterflies fill my stomach. “But I’m already engaged.”

A strange look passes over Ryder’s face, and he quickly locks it away. “Are you?”

“What do you mean, *are you?* You met him the other night.”

His lips curve into a wicked smile. “He thinks he owns you, but we both know who you really belong to.”

“It doesn’t work like that.” I swallow hard around the rising lump in my throat. Something I haven’t felt for a very long time creeps to the center of my chest and tightens its grip until it’s hard to ignore.

It’s hope. Ryder talking like this is giving me so much needed hope that he won’t allow Justin to marry me.

Ryder rocks his hips against mine, grinding his erection against my pussy in slow, hard strokes. “I promise, when you walk down the aisle, it’ll be toward me. No other man will ever have you. They’ll eat dirt for even thinking they get to touch you like I do.”

I tug Ryder’s hair as he grinds against me, stoking the embers of my desire until they blaze out of control. He lets out a toe-curling groan and rocks against me faster. It’s hard to think past the haze of lust clouding my mind. I reach between us and stroke his cock.

“I want you to use me.” I try to sound firm with the demand, but my voice comes out breathy. Shaky.

Ryder cocks his head in a silent question and kneels between my legs while he fists his shaft.

I lick my dry lips. “You said you’d use me as your own personal fuck-toy.”

His pupils dilate, and his strokes stop. “Is that what you really want?”  
“God, yes.”

His eyes narrow. “We’ve been over this. That’s not my name.”

I part my lips to argue with him, but he moves fast and cuts me off before I can even begin.

Ryder rips open my robe and drinks me in with his gaze. “You’ve been wearing this the whole time and didn’t tell me?”

He squeezes my breast over the top of my lingerie, and I hiss through my teeth. My back arches, pushing more of myself into his palm. He lets go and yanks off the robe, then tosses it to the floor before lowering himself to his stomach between my legs.

“Ryder . . .” I gasp as he slides the string aside to expose my pussy. My hips buck off the bed as his pierced tongue swipes up the seam and circles my clit.

He hums against me and captures the sensitive bundle of nerves between his lips and suckles. My hands snap out and burrow in his hair as he eats me out like it’s his last meal. I tug at the strands, earning a growl and a heated look from him. My legs fall open as his fingers probe the

outside of my entrance, teasing me with what's to come. I throw my head back and whine as he sinks two digits between my spasming inner walls.

Goosebumps rise on my flesh, and my nipples tighten into sensitive peaks as my climax builds until the pressure becomes too much.

“I’m going to—”

Ryder pounds his fingers in me while flicking my clit with his tongue. “Come for me, little sister.”

My eyes roll into the back of my head, and I let go. My muscles contort, and I arch my back while grinding my pussy against Ryder’s tongue. Colorful dots pop into my vision as the orgasm takes me to a new world, and an unrelenting Ryder follows as he works me through it. I whimper and shove his head to get him off me.

Ryder draws back and licks his lips, cleaning the glistening cum from his mouth. He moves to his knees and eyes me with a calculating look.

“Video?” he asks.

I pant and force a nod, too breathless and weak to say anything.

Ryder grabs his phone and opens the camera app, then sets it up on his nightstand. He pulls on his mask, then turns to me with hunger darkening his eyes.

“You ready, fuck-toy?”

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO



## MADISON

### *“SCREAM MY NAME” THOMAS LAROSA*

Ryder drags me off the bed and forces me to my knees. I swallow and stare at his cock in front of my face.

He gathers my hair into a ponytail and holds my head in place while he shoves the pierced head against my mouth. “Open up, baby, and swallow me down.”

I look up at his face and do as he says. My lips part, and I lean forward, inching his thick cock past my lips. His silky skin tastes like salt and musk, and he’s so big. I’d have to unhinge my jaw to make more room for him, and that’s impossible, so I pray I don’t hurt him with my teeth as he fills every available space. It’s the first time I’ve ever had a dick in my mouth. I’m scared I’ll do this wrong and disappoint him.

Sensing my hesitation, Ryder tilts his head and cups my cheek, his thumb stroking in a gentle circle. “Breathe through your nose and relax your throat. That’s it, baby. You’re doing so good for me.”

The tip hits the back of my throat, and my body lurches forward. I cough and gag around him as he holds himself in place, forcing me to accept the intrusion.

“Oh, *fuck*.” Ryder thrusts his hips, forcing more of himself deeper into my throat. “You look fucking beautiful, choking on my cock.”

Tears sting my eyes and roll down my cheeks, but I don’t pull away from him. I keep my gaze on his masked face, eager for more of his praises. Ryder hisses through his teeth and drags his cock out until the head bumps against the back of my teeth.

“Use your tongue and suck,” he growls.

I stick out my tongue and lick the underside of his shaft, then swirl around the head. Leaning forward, I take more of him into my mouth and hollow my cheeks to create suction. Ryder drops his head back with a whimper that goes straight to my pounding clit. Warm, salty liquid leaks into the back of my throat, and I swallow it.

“You still want me to use you like a fuck-toy?” Ryder looks at me beneath hooded eyelids.

I blink away the tears and manage a moan and half-nod.

He cups the sides of my head, the same way he held the blonde woman the other morning. An excited thrill buzzes beneath my skin.

This is it. This is what I’ve been dying for. I want him to be rough. To use *me* for his own pleasure. No one else.

“Tap my thigh if it becomes too much, okay?” he says through gritted teeth.

His hold tightens, and he draws back and slams his cock into my mouth until it touches the back of my throat. I gag and grapple with his waist, holding on as he fucks my face. It’s hard to catch my breath as he chokes me with his dick. His balls slap against my chin, and my mouth makes weird, wet noises as he uses me.

Ryder pulls out of my mouth and tosses me onto the bed, positioning me on my back so that my head hangs over the edge of the mattress. He tucks his hand beneath my chin, tilting my face further back before he shoves his dick into my mouth.

As he pumps his hips and groans, I reach between my legs and rub my clit beneath my lingerie. Ryder rips the middle of my teddy apart, freeing my breasts for his greedy gaze. He squeezes both of my tits and pinches my pierced nipples.

“You like this, don’t you, sis?” He slaps one breast, then the other. “You love being your big brother’s sex doll. What would your daddy think if he found out how you enjoy being reduced to an object?”

I squeeze my eyes shut and dry heave as he continues hitting the back of my throat. I squirm and sink a finger inside my quivering walls, imagining it’s Ryder’s cock sliding in and out of me.

Ryder moves the underwear aside and watches as I finger myself. “What would Justin think if he saw us like this? I’m sure he’d rage if he knew how big of a slut you are for your brother.”

My heart skips a beat at the mention of Justin. If he found out about Ryder and me, it would be the end of the freedom and peace I discovered with my stepbrother. He’d go straight to my father. I don’t know what Dad would do, but it wouldn’t be good.

Ryder grinds his pelvis against my face and moans as my teeth graze his hard shaft. “Maybe he should see you like this. I’m sure he’ll want nothing to do with you afterward.”

Fear trickles in, and I reach behind my head to shove Ryder away. He doesn’t budge, still fucking my face and showing no sign of slowing. I can tap his thigh and he’ll stop right away, but I hesitate.

If what Ryder says is true, then I’d be free from Justin. I just don’t want him to know his identity.

*He’s wearing a mask. Justin won’t know he’s my stepbrother.*

Sensing where my thoughts are going, Ryder chuckles and slows his movements. He pinches my clit between two fingers. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

Ryder steps back, his cock slipping out from between my lips. A string of saliva connects us together. I suck in a ragged breath and swallow the spit that’s gathered in my mouth.

“Let’s show him how nasty you can get.” Ryder flips me over, grabs a pillow, and stuffs it beneath my stomach. He then raises my ass in the air while he settles behind me. “You still want me to use you as a doll?”

I squeeze my eyes shut. “Yes!”

“Fuck you until all you can remember is my name?”

“Please!”

“Then spread your legs and remember that I’m the only man who can use you. Understand, fuck-toy?” He slaps my ass when I don’t answer right away. “Say, Yes, big brother, I understand.”

“Yes, big brother, I understand.” I swallow a whimper as he shoves my thighs apart.

He moves the thong aside and notches the pierced crown outside my opening. “Fuck, you’re so wet for me.”

“Ryder, please—”

I scream and clutch the sheets as he shoves inside me. He pulls out an inch, then thrusts in again, going deeper each time. When he finally bottoms out, blinding pain shoots through my body as my inner walls stretch to accommodate his size. No matter how turned on I am, it’s still not enough to ease the pain of his invasion.

“Fuck,” he breathes out. It’s closer to a whimper than anything else. “I’ll never get used to this.”

I reach between my legs and rub my clit. Pleasure bleeds into the pain until it’s a perfect combination. Ryder adds to it as he slides out of me, then slams back in. The rough movement jerks me forward and smashes my face into the pillow. I turn my head and gasp.

“You don’t know what you did, Madison, but you’ll find out soon enough.” He slaps one ass cheek, then the other before he grabs my love handles and holds me in place while pistonning into me. The piercing glides against a spot inside me that makes my toes curl, and the building climax creeps closer. “You want me to use you? Fine. Just be prepared for me to bend you over at any point and fill your pussy until my cum drips down your thick, pretty thighs.”

I shudder and buck my hips against his, meeting him stroke for stroke. Ryder fists my hair and yanks my head back until all that comes out of me are shrieks and garbled nonsense.

“More,” I manage to say.

He grinds against my ass in slow circles. “You don’t want that.”

I shake my head. “You don’t know that. I see you holding back. Give it all to me.”

“Doll,” he growls in warning. “I don’t want to scare you any more than I already have.”

"I'm not some china doll. You don't scare me." I buck into him, forcing more of his thick cock deeper inside me.

Ryder grunts and digs his fingers into my love handles.

"Fuck me hard, big brother."

Ryder's eyes narrow to thin slits, and I watch as his fight shatters. He rips off the lingerie still dangling from my body, then drags out his cock and slams back in. I yelp and grab the bed, stopping myself from banging my face against the headboard. He does it again, harder this time.

"Hold the headboard," he growls.

I slap my palm against the wooden frame and brace myself as he pounds into me with punishing strokes. I scream each time he spanks me and calls me his dirty slut.

Pressure against my back hole drags me out of the mindless state he put me in. Ryder forces his thumb past the tight ring of muscles and sinks the digit deep into my ass.

"Your asshole is next, little sister." Ryder leans over me and snatches the camera from the nightstand.

I peek over my shoulder and catch him recording his cock driving into my pussy while he fingers my ass. My inner walls spasm, and I mentally wince at the thought of having his dick in my ass. He's packing a monster between his legs, and my pussy hurts from the way he stretches me, so I can only imagine the pain from taking him in my ass. But I can't deny the arousal at the thought of him invading my back hole.

Ryder slows and lets out a shaky breath. He's edging himself. I squeeze my inner walls and hide my smile as his widened gaze flicks to my face, then narrows.

"You little bitch." He snaps his hips against mine in punishment. "You sure you want to play this game with me?"

He bends over me until he presses against my back and I'm squashed beneath him. He positions the camera in front of us to capture my pleasure-slackened face as he pounds into me.

"Take a breath and hold it," he whispers beside my ear.

Having full trust in him, I do as he says. Ryder uses his free hand and squeezes my throat until it cuts the airflow. My head swims and my lips part on a soundless cry as the coil in my core tightens until it's close to snapping. My eyes roll into the back of my head, my inner walls spasming around his driving cock that hits a sensitive spot with every stroke.

Ryder stops moving, ending the orgasm before it begins. He nuzzles my ear and slackens his grip on my throat to let me suck in a ragged breath.  
“You want to come?”

“Yes!” I cry.

“Then tell Justin how much you love your big brother’s cock.”

I don’t hesitate as I shriek out, “I love my big brother’s cock!”

“Such a good fuck-toy. You’ve always been a slut for me.” He pumps his hips and drags his piercing against the sensitive spot again. “Now come for me.”

My screams die out before they can even begin when Ryder squeezes my throat, once again cutting off my air supply. The steady rise of the climax builds into a roar. My head spins as he dangles me over the precipice of pure ecstasy. Right as my muscles contract, Ryder releases my neck. Oxygen fills my burning lungs, setting the embers of my desire ablaze. The orgasm triples in intensity, and all I can do is lie beneath him and scream.

He grunts in my ear and places his palm on the mattress beside my turned head. “Just so you know, I’d ask you where you want my cum, but I’m feeling very selfish right now, sis.”

I crack open my eyes and peek at him with my eyebrows pinching together.

His cock twitches and swells as he chases his own orgasm. “You wanted to be used. You wanted me to unleash everything on you. That’s what you’re getting. Now I’m going to breed the fuck out of you, little sister.”

He sits up on his knees and ruts into me with everything he has, all the while keeping the camera pointed at us. He moves it to a different angle, capturing the moment as warmth floods my inner walls. Ryder’s whimpers get louder as he spills every last drop.

And what do I do? Do I tell him to stop? No. I push my ass against him, taking him deeper so his cum reaches farther inside me.

After three more pumps, Ryder stills and drops his forehead to the back of my shoulder. Our harsh breathing fills the quiet room, and my pounding pulse thrums in my ears. I worry he can hear each rapid beat of my heart the way I feel his racing against my back.

Ryder eases away and disappears into the bathroom. He returns a moment later with a warm washcloth. I roll onto my back and spread my legs as he cleans me with the same tenderness as last time. He kisses the inside of my thigh with his masked lips after he finishes. A shiver rolls

through me, and I lazily reach for him. He meets my gaze and takes off his mask, tosses the rag aside and turns off his phone before climbing into bed with me.

“Come here.” He doesn’t wait for me and drags me into his arms so my back is pressed against his chest. I snuggle into him and get comfortable—not that I need to do much for it to happen, because when I’m with him, I can relax.

I roll onto my other side so my face is pressed into his neck. His heady scent mixed with sexual musk and sweat fills my lungs, relaxing me until I’m a pile of goop in his arms.

“You didn’t run,” he whispers after a while.

I tangle our legs together and kiss his throat. “Was I supposed to?”

Ryder threads his fingers through my damp hair and massages my scalp at the back of my head. His other hand gently strokes my lower back, soothing me. “I thought it would have been too much for you to handle, but once again, you surprised me.”

“You’re never too much to handle,” I whisper.

His features slacken, and his guard drops like a veil of smoke dissipating into nothingness. His gaze softens and appears hesitant, maybe even unsure.

I cup the back of his head, forcing him to keep his gaze on me. I need him to know how much I care about him, that I’m so happy he’s here with me. Whoever hurt Ryder in the past needs to go play in traffic.

I lean in and press my lips to his. Ryder doesn’t hesitate as he kisses me back, quickly taking over and turning the sweet gesture into something more frantic and needy. His pierced tongue curls with mine in a dance made only for us. He forces himself closer to me, imprinting his touch on my very soul.

Why couldn’t he have been my first kiss? Why did Mickey have to steal it away from me?

Mickey may have been my first kiss, but he sucked at it. When Ryder kisses me, it’s so different. He sets my high standards even higher, to unreachable heights. Every time Justin touches me after our wedding, I’ll only think of Ryder.

I inwardly cringe. Of course my fiancé pops into my head at the most inconvenient times. My mind is a cruel place, and I can’t ever escape.

Ryder notices the shift in my demeanor and ends the kiss. He leans back and tucks a strand of hair behind my ear. “What’s the matter?”

I curl up to him. “Nothing.”

“Madison,” he says in warning. When I don’t respond, he growls and fists my hair, then jerks my head back so I’m forced to look at him again. “Tell me.”

I sigh and place my hand over his chest. “I was thinking about how I wish you had been my first kiss instead of Mickey.”

Ryder’s hold slackens. “Mickey was your first kiss?”

I nod. “Unfortunately. I didn’t want to date him, but I was too scared of what he’d do if I told him no. He stole my first kiss when I didn’t want to give it to him.”

A muscle in the corner of Ryder’s jaw flexes. “So he forced you into a relationship.”

“Did you think I went into it willingly?”

He blinks and looks away from me.

He did. This entire time, he thought I was into Mickey. In reality, I tried so hard to separate myself from him without getting any dirt on my hands.

I gently push Ryder’s chest. He turns a questioning look toward me, but follows my lead as he rolls onto his back. I straddle his waist and lie on top of him, loving the feel of his rigid muscles beneath my soft body. He doesn’t make a sound of complaint with me on top, which I love even more.

“If it were up to me and I had a choice,” I whisper, “I would have saved everything for you. First kiss. First touch.” I kiss his throat, focusing on a spot that makes him suck in a sharp breath. I tangle my fingers in his messy hair to hold him still while I suckle. It’ll leave behind a hickey, and I don’t care. I like the idea of him carrying my mark.

“Someone else has touched you?” Ryder groans and grabs my hips, squeezing them with enough pressure to let me know how good I’m making him feel.

“No. You’re the only one who’s ever touched me like this.” I suck one last time, then shift to catch his earlobe between my teeth.

Ryder turns his head and catches my lips with his. He doesn’t waste any time as he shoves his tongue into my mouth. The kiss is searing as he brands me with it, marking me as his. It’s what I want so badly that it physically hurts.

“Ride me,” he orders into the kiss.

I reach between us and raise my hips as I line the head outside of my opening, and then I slide down until I'm fully seated.

"You're so perfect for me, doll," he says through clenched teeth. "Now show your big brother how well you can ride him."

I spend the rest of the night fucking my stepbrother like it's our last time, and the deep sense of dread remains. There's an invisible countdown above my head, ticking away the seconds until I'm forced to walk down the aisle to marry a man I loathe.

I just have to escape before the clock strikes midnight, even if that means saying goodbye to the best thing that ever happened to me. But then . . . maybe I don't have to.

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE



## RYDER

### *“PAINT IT BLACK” ARANKAI*

I relax in my seat at Aiden’s place, releasing the smoke from my lungs. It tickles and burns my throat, and I don’t resist the urge to cough. It makes the high hit faster, and I won’t complain.

“How’s it going at Jerry’s?” Aiden asks as he takes the offered joint from my hand.

I cough one last time and rest my head against the edge of the sofa.  
“Same as usual.”

It’s not entirely the truth. Yes, it’s the same with my stepfather and mother, but things changed between Madison and me. It’s been two days since she came into my room and demanded I use her as a fuck-toy. Two days of sneaking around and keeping my promise about bending her over

and fucking her senseless. The private album on my phone is already increasing in size.

“You haven’t been hanging out with us much.” Aiden takes a drag of the skunky smoke and holds it in for a few seconds before blowing it out.

I make a noncommittal sound at the back of my throat. “Too busy getting my cock sucked.”

*Goddamn it.*

I didn’t mean to say that out loud. I want to blame the weed for my loose tongue, but I can’t. Not when I already have it in my head that Madison is mine. I want to flaunt her for the world to see. Being a dirty little secret is all fun and games until it’s not anymore, and I don’t want her to be ashamed of our relationship.

Not that I have room to talk. It wasn’t so long ago that I was hesitant and worried about being judged about being with my sister, but I’ve hit the point where I don’t care anymore. I want her. She’s *mine*.

“You’ve been getting your dick sucked?” Aiden’s head whips toward me, his eyes wide and jaw on the ground. “By your sister?”

“No, you idiot. Why are you so stuck on fucking sisters?” I roll my eyes and kick his leg. He flinches, even though I didn’t hurt him, and moves to the other end of the couch.

He blows a raspberry and waves me off. “Fuck you. I’m not.” A beat of silence passes before he adds, “Then who are you getting your dick wet with? Is it Emily?”

I don’t know an Emily, and if I do, she’s obviously forgettable.

It feels weird, talking about sleeping with anyone other than Madison. But for her sake, I have to play it cool and pretend she doesn’t exist.

“Tiffany,” I say. It’s as close to the truth as I can get.

Aiden looks at the ceiling as he sifts through his memory for any Tiffany he might’ve met. She’s just as forgettable to him.

All the women I’ve slept with blur together until they’re a jumbled mess. I can’t recall just one. Only that it took little effort to get them into bed with me. These are the same girls who made fun of me in high school because I was the “emo” kid. Now look at them. They all fall at my feet, begging for a chance now that I’ve gained height, muscle, and have piercings.

Aiden shakes his head, then shrugs. “Yeah, I don’t know. Is she at least hot?”

“Mediocre at best.” I fish my phone out of my pocket and open the text thread with Justin. The corner of my lip curves into a subtle smirk. I sent him several videos over the past few days, with captions to antagonize him. It’s working.

On the first video—when I took Madison’s virginity—I wrote, *This your girl, bro?* in the caption. Justin responded with a slew of threats that only made me laugh.

For the second video, I sent a clip of Madison on her back on my bed, with her head hanging over the edge and my dick ramming into her throat. The caption reads, *She sucks a mean cock. Almost came twice.* Again, Justin wasn’t amused. He even got creative and tried insulting my dick size.

The third video was the best, though. I sent a clip of me behind Madison as my fat cock stretched her tight pussy. She’s bent over the kitchen counter, her pants and underwear pooled around her thighs, and she’s death-gripping the edge of the table while I pound into her. The video captures the moment I came inside her and pulled out to watch as my cum oozed out of her abused hole. The caption reads, *You begged her for a kiss. She begged me to come inside her. We’re not the same. 10/10 will do it again \*thumbs-up emoji\**

Aiden clicks his tongue, dragging my attention away from the phone. “That’s a damn shame. I’m a little jealous you got some action while I’m over here unable to bring anyone home because my sister will chase them off.”

“Why is she chasing them off?”

“Beats me.” He grabs his Xbox controller and unpauses the video game. “If I can’t come soon, I’ll lose my mind. I swear my dick is about to fall off from neglect.”

“Why can’t you just jack off like a normal person?” I look back at my phone and stare at Justin’s last text message.

“Because,” Aiden growls. His thumbs hit the buttons on the controller harder than necessary. “Nova always interrupts. She keeps wanting me to take her out. Or she needs the shower. Or god forbid we have a thunderstorm at night. She runs into my room and dives into my bed because she’s scared. Do you know how awkward it is to have your dick out, then your grown-ass sister barrels into your room? I can’t have a moment of peace.”

I don't answer his question. I know what it's like because it's happened to me with Madison. Things escalated from there, and obviously not for Aiden.

I raise an eyebrow and peek at him from the corner of my eye. "Isn't she twenty?"

"Yes!"

"And she's scared of thunderstorms?"

The TV blasts gunshots and explosions as Aiden fights the boss. "Yeah. I don't get it."

I watch him for a moment, wondering if he'll get with his sister too. He admitted he's jealous of Jaxon's relationship with Dahlia. There has to be a deeper meaning beneath all the teasing and joking he does about us potentially sleeping with our sisters.

Wanting to test the waters, I say, "Well, if she keeps interrupting, then I'd give her the choice of leaving your room or letting you fuck her."

Aiden's shoulders stiffen, and his head whips toward me, eyebrows bunched together and a look of utter shock on his face. "Bro? What the fuck? She's my sister."

I crack a smile. "And I'm sure if you give her that offer, it'll make her leave and you can go back to beating your meat in peace."

He stares at me with a frown, but his gaze becomes distant as he gets lost in his thoughts. I turn back to my phone, and Aiden returns to his game and stays quiet. Probably weighing the pros and cons of doing something like demanding sex from his sister.

JUSTIN

If you think you can get away with this, you have another thing coming. I'd be very careful if I were you.

I roll my eyes at the message. Justin is spewing hot air and empty threats he'll never dream of keeping. If he squeals, I'll take care of the problem, along with anyone else he brings into it. Namely, my stepfather.

Footsteps thud from above. I raise my head and stare at the ceiling, listening to the steps as they pace. "Is your sister here?"

"Yep." Aiden says, popping the P.

Strange how he bitches about his sister while she's here at the house. I wonder if she heard everything he and I said. The worry passes as fast as it comes. I shrug. It's not my problem to deal with.

“What is she doing?” I say.

The footsteps fade until all I hear is Aiden’s video game.

He shrugs, keeping his focus on the TV. “I don’t know. She went to lie down for a nap not too long before you got here.”

I look back at my phone, checking the time. It’s past noon, and I’m already antsy about seeing Madison again, even though I saw her earlier this morning.

Nova enters the room dressed in her usual all-pink clothes. Her pigtails sport black ribbons, adding a little pop of darkness to the mix. “Aiden, I can’t sleep. Can you come cu—” She stops as she notices me. “Oh, hey, Ryder. What are you doing here?”

“Killing time.” More like staying away from my stepfather so I’m not hanging out in my room all by myself. It becomes too much to bear, locking myself away in a small space with nothing to do. It’s not like I can hang out with Madison. It’d bring too much attention to us.

Aiden pauses the game and turns to look at his sister. I don’t miss how his gaze drops over her body, taking in her tight shirt and miniskirt. “What do you need?”

Nova glances at me, then returns her gaze to him. Her cheeks turn a light shade of pink, and she nibbles her bottom lip. “N-nothing. It’s not important.”

I raise my eyebrows.

Aiden turns around and lets out a long, heavy sigh as he runs his fingers through his hair. “You know you can tell me anything.”

Nova shifts her weight and peeks at me again. Whatever is happening with her, she’s clearly nervous about me being here.

Tires squeal outside, growing louder as the sound moves toward the front of the house. I jump to my feet as the living-room window shatters and shards of glass rain down on the floor. Nova yells and scrambles backward with her hands raised to protect herself. The car’s engine screams as the vehicle speeds away.

“Stay here!” Aiden yells at Nova.

He follows me as I run to the front door and fling it open. We rush outside and down the driveway, glimpsing a dark sports car speeding around the corner and disappearing.

“Goddamn it,” I growl.

“What was that?” Nova screams from inside.

Aiden strides to the street and checks the area. I search for anyone with the hope of ambushing us.

Aiden storms up the driveway, a deep frown marring his usually relaxed features. He glances at the damage, then enters the house. I follow him and stop dead in my tracks.

Nova hugs the wall furthest from the broken window in the living room. Aiden rushes to her and drags her into his arms, and she buries her face in his throat, gripping him like he's the anchor holding her swaying ship in place. He leans down and kisses the top of her head, all the while burying his fingers in her hair.

"What was that?" she whimpers.

"Don't know yet. Are you okay?"

She trembles and presses herself against him. "Just shaken up."

Aiden picks her up, and she wraps her legs around his lean waist. He carries her to the couch, then settles on the cushioned seat with her straddling his lap, a tattooed hand on her waist. She doesn't move away from him and winds her arms around his neck while still hiding her face in his throat.

My eyebrows shoot up my forehead at the sight of them acting more like lovers than siblings. And that motherfucker wanted to complain about how his sister wants to be babied? But I'm not judging them for it, because I'm in the same boat.

I take measured steps toward the window and peer at the ground, looking for whatever was used to break the glass. My eyes widen.

"Who would do that?" Nova says, on the brink of tears.

"I don't know, but you're safe. I promise," Aiden says, attempting to soothe her. "You can sleep in my room tonight if it'll make you feel better."

I bend at the waist and carefully pick up the severed hand tied to a brick. The body part is cool to the touch. Decomposition hasn't started yet, so my best guess is the person lost their limb hours ago. I twist the brick around, looking for a note.

"What the fuck is that?" Aiden's voice hardens, a complete contrast to how he just sweetly talked to Nova.

I straighten while still searching for the message. It can be one word for all I fucking care, but there has to be *something*.

"Is that . . . is that a hand?" Nova screeches.

"Hey, why don't you go up to your room for a bit, yeah?" Aiden says.

“No! I’m staying—”

Aiden lowers his voice to a growl. “That wasn’t a suggestion, sis. Go to your room.”

Nova huffs and stomps out of the room and up the stairs. I turn to Aiden as he gets up from the couch.

“Who do you think did this?” he says.

I pull out my knife to cut through the layers of duct tape holding the severed hand to the brick. “Don’t know, but we’ll find out.”

“How?”

The brick falls to the floor, and I couldn’t care less if it caused any damage. My focus stays solely on the hand while Aiden scoops up the brick and looks it over on all sides.

“It’s obviously a message,” he says.

“My thoughts exactly.”

Aiden raises his head and looks at me with a serious expression. It gives me a glimpse of the monster he tries so hard to hide beneath the surface.

“This isn’t the last we’ll see of them.”

I nod in agreement.

I only came here to get high for a bit before I return to Jerry’s house and sneak around with Madison, not have some motherfucker do a drive-by with a hand tied to a brick.

My phone vibrates before it rings. I snatch it out of my pocket and answer.

“We’ve got a problem,” Jaxon says from the other end.

“Yeah, no shit,” I growl.

“Declan is in the hospital. Someone snatched him up from the streets and took his hand.”

I drop my gaze to the severed appendage. “Left hand with a rose tattoo?”

Jaxon is silent for a moment before he says, “Yeah. How do you know that?”

“Someone thought it would be funny to throw it through Aiden’s living-room window with a brick.”

“When did this happen?”

“Not even five minutes ago.”

“We’ll check the footage to see if we can get any info. Any way you can bring the severed hand to the hospital?”

I nod. “Yeah, I’ll be on my way right now.”

“Be careful.” He hangs up.

I turn to Aiden. “Check the camera feed and see if you can get the car tags and an image of the person.”

He nods and pulls out his cell. “On it.”

I stride past him and search through his kitchen for a container. Once I find something suitable, I pack it with ice, then place the hand in a plastic bag and put it in the ice. I don’t know if they can save it because of how much time has passed, but I have a feeling that’s what Jaxon hopes for.

Jaxon texts me which hospital Declan is at, and I climb onto my motorcycle. There’s no time to waste. I only hope Declan will have enough information for us to go off of so that we can take care of the problem before it becomes something bigger.

# CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR



## RYDER

### *“LIGHTS OUT” KXLLSWXTCH*

“I don’t fucking get it,” Hawk mutters as we exit the hospital. It’s late in the evening. Lamps light the lot, and there are fewer cars parked here than when I first arrived.

His cousin Declan got out of surgery hours ago. Unfortunately, it was wishful thinking to assume they could reattach his hand like nothing happened. Too much time passed between losing the limb and being wheeled into the operating room once I arrived with the severed hand on ice. The doctor explained to Hawk that the injuries weren’t clean. It looked as if he’d been ripped apart with a dull blade. When Declan woke up, he confirmed the doc’s suspicion.

“I just wanna know who the fuck is coming after us. Them hiding their identity is a pussy move.” Aiden pulls on his helmet and works the straps beneath his chin.

Jaxon strides ahead of us, his gloved hand on Dahlia’s lower back as he guides her toward our motorcycles parked in the very back.

Declan didn’t get the information we needed from the images Jaxon caught. He’d been busy with other tasks, and by the time he started working on finding out who the hell had been lurking around our neighborhood, men dressed in masks kidnapped and tortured him.

Whoever they are, they’re watching us. They knew we went to Declan, so they prevented him from finding out more about them. I don’t know how the fuck that was possible.

We approach our motorcycles. I put on my helmet and glance at Jaxon and Dahlia. I’m happy to see my best friend being open about his relationship. He doesn’t hide his affection for his sister in front of us anymore. I’ll admit, I’m in the same boat as Aiden when he said he’s jealous. I want this with Madison. Being able to hold her hand, kiss her in front of everyone. I want to whisper in her ear until she blushes from my private confessions in such a public setting.

We stand around our bikes, getting ready for a ride through the town. A nervous energy passes through all of us. We don’t know who’s after us, and with such minimal information about the people targeting us, we’re sitting ducks.

Aiden turns to Jaxon and flips his visor. “So you gonna teach her how to ride a motorcycle?”

“Yes.” Jaxon eases a helmet over Dahlia’s green hair and cocks his head as he ensures the helmet won’t fly off. He tucks his fingers beneath the helmet, where Dahlia’s chin is. “You already know how to ride. Don’t you, flower?”

“Taught by the best,” Dahlia says loud enough to be heard. She touches Jaxon’s arms, the corners of her eyes crinkling with a hidden smile.

I don’t miss the effect it has on my best friend. He relaxes and steps closer to her, like he wants her to continue touching him. Jaxon has always hated being touched—even as a kid.

“That’s my girl,” he murmurs. “Are you going to show them how it’s done?”

I smile at the teasing note in his voice. I don't know how long he's been teaching Dahlia how to ride, but she's still a new rider. She'll make rookie mistakes and will need to take it easy—especially on a powerful bike like Jaxon's.

"Hey!" Aiden says, acting offended. "I know how to ride better than all of you combined."

"Sure you do," Hawk says, and straddles his bike. "That's why you always end up wobbling when you redline it."

I won't lie. Every time I see Aiden's motorcycle close to losing control from the speed, my stomach drops and I stop breathing. We all ride one-thousand cc bikes—the highest-powered motorcycles you can get on the market. They're called Death Bikes for a reason. I don't care if it happens to me. It's not like I'll be around to feel the pain or miss anything. But I can't lose my friends.

Or Madison.

I care about her so fucking much that it's hard to breathe. If something happened to her while she was my backpack, I would lose it. No one would be safe. Not even myself.

I mount my motorcycle and stick the key into the ignition. Everyone follows suit, revving engines and glancing at each other to see if we're ready to ride. Adrenaline rushes through my veins as I prepare to ride like a bat out of hell before I go back to Jerry's to see Madison.

I'm the first out of the parking lot, but the others aren't far behind. My mind clears and focuses on the powerful machine beneath me. Hawk and I fuck around by doing wheelies at a more reasonable speed. Aiden eventually joins in, while Jaxon takes it easy since he has Dahlia.

We ride closer to the abandoned neighborhood, and for once, I don't long to go home. All I want to do is go to Madison, even if it's only to sneak into her bedroom and curl against her while she sleeps.

The tiny hairs on the back of my neck stand, prickling with awareness. I glance over my shoulder, spotting Jaxon behind, while Aiden and Hawk ride ahead, still popping wheelies and having fun. I face front and check the road once more before I peek over my shoulder again, this time catching different pairs of headlights rushing toward us.

Jaxon looks back, then lowers himself over the bike as he speeds up. I catch Aiden's and Hawk's attention, signing with one hand to look behind us.

Whoever's behind us, they're coming up quick.

As a group, we speed up and zip through the streets, racing closer to the abandoned neighborhood. If the newcomers are following us, then they'll be in our territory and we'll have the advantage.

Woods line both sides of the road, bathing us in darkness. Our headlights provide the only light. My heart pounds against my chest, a flood of adrenaline rushing through my veins as my body prepares for a fight. It's been a minute since I've let off some steam and beaten the fuck out of someone. Justin doesn't count. The pussy buckled beneath me while screaming for help.

I peer over my shoulder, checking for the unfamiliar headlights. They're closer, so I can see that the headlights are spread apart.

They're riders too.

I turn around and suck in a sharp breath as someone steps out of the shadows, directly into my path.

“Shit!”

I swerve out of the way and hit the brakes. My front tire jerks, and I lose balance, tumbling to the ground while the bike drags me several feet. I jerk my hand off the handlebars, and the bike slides across the pavement, leaving behind a trail of red sparks as it grates against the asphalt. I grunt as I roll and slide against the pavement, knocking my helmet several times against the ground.

One second, I'm sliding on the road, and the next, I'm sitting up and swaying from the force of the crash. Shouts filter through the ringing in my ears, and my vision is spotty. Everything is numb, and I blame it on the adrenaline and shock.

“Grab Ryder!” Hawk yells.

Two pairs of legs appear, and I tip back my head.

Aiden grabs me by the forearms and drags me to my feet while Dahlia takes my other side to help him.

“You okay?” he asks.

I manage a nod.

Aiden wraps an arm around my shoulders, holding me steady as I regain my balance. I suck in a breath, then another, working through my body's reaction to the accident.

“Who the fuck are you?” Hawk stalks toward the group of bikers parked ten feet away from us.

Jaxon follows him, both of my friends acting as shields while I gather myself.

The three newcomers dismount their bikes and take two steps toward Hawk and Jaxon, who stop, leaving some space between them. Their visors remain lowered, meaning we can't see any of their faces.

The person who caused my crash strides past my friends and hides behind his friends, all while holding a bat against his shoulder. He wears black from head to toe, and like his friends, his visor shields his identity.

"You took something of ours," one rider says. I don't recognize his voice, but that's probably because it's muffled by his helmet.

Hawk slips his gloved hand into his pocket, reaching for the pocketknife he keeps on him at all times. "Yeah? You almost killed my friend, asshole."

"We were aiming for that." Amusement laces the second rider's deep voice.

I clench my jaw and curl my fingers into tight fists by my sides.

Hawk's face twists into a snarl. "Is that right? I'll ask again: who the fuck are you?"

The rider at the front cocks his head. "You don't recognize us?"

"How the hell do you expect us to know who you are when you're hiding behind helmets?" Hawk pulls out the pocketknife and releases the blade.

The riders chuckle, and the leader takes another step toward Jaxon and Hawk. "Maybe it's best if you don't know who we are yet. In fact, I like this better because it'll keep you guessing. It's been fun watching you try to figure it out. But I'll throw you a scrap. You killed our friend, and that doesn't go unpunished."

"An eye for an eye," the other man says.

Aiden and I rush to Hawk and Jaxon, though I wave Dahlia off when she tries to follow. She stops in her tracks, her eyes narrowing at me, but she doesn't say anything. Jaxon will have my balls if I let her get into any danger. I don't see this ending with a few angry words followed by beers around a bonfire.

"We've killed a lot of people. Narrow it down, motherfucker," Aiden says.

The man holding a baseball bat stiffens and turns his head toward Aiden and me. Good. I'm glad what Aiden said got under his skin. I hope it hurts like hell.

“I want you to think long and hard about it,” the man says, annoyance tinging his voice.

Aiden scoffs. “I’ll give you something long and hard.”

I move nearer to Jaxon as he stalks closer to the group. Holding out my arm, I stop him from closing the last of the space between them. He might be a badass, but he needs to focus on staying near Dahlia.

“You realize Hellfire Night has no laws, right?” I ask. This has to be about Hellfire Night. The rules are strict, and the repercussions are too great for us to take a kill at any other time.

*That’s a lie. I’ll kill anyone at any time if it means I can have Madison.*

“Don’t care. That doesn’t mean you’re free from the consequences of what you do during those hours,” the leader says. He sounds bored and not at all pissed about us killing his friend.

I slip my hand into my pocket, where my large pocketknife is ready to use in case this goes south. “So you want revenge.”

Not a question. Just a statement.

“Of course I want revenge.”

“You really don’t want this bad blood between us, man,” Hawk says.

The leader pulls a switchblade from his pocket and snaps it out. “There already is.”

“Just so you know”—the light dims in Jaxon’s eyes—“your friend screamed like a bitch when I cut out his tongue.”

It’s a bluff. We all know it, but it hits its mark and all hell breaks loose.

The four riders sprint toward us, and we meet them in the middle. Fists fly. Boots meet groins and stomachs. Elbows jab into chests. Jaxon pulls off his helmet and uses it to beat the ever-loving fuck out of the guy pinned beneath him.

One rider rushes toward Dahlia. I tackle him to the ground and jerk off his helmet so I can get a good look at his face before I bloody it.

“Ryder!” Dahlia screams.

Right as I swing my head to the side, a bat flies toward my helmet and connects, throwing me backward.

Everything goes dark.

# CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE



## MADISON

### *"NO PLACE LIKE YOU" THOUSAND BELOW*

I lie in the middle of my bed with a heating pad on my lower stomach to ease the cramps. My period started after having a quickie with Ryder this morning, and since then, I've been lethargic and feeling like utter crap. The pain isn't so bad after popping some Midol, though I've been attached to the heating pad between recording content for TikTok.

I haven't been as active on OnlyFans since being with Ryder. I post videos and pictures on there, but I haven't gone live or done private sessions with fans for the extra money.

I still want to escape this hellhole and looming marriage, but it feels wrong to talk to other men. It's like I'm cheating on Ryder, which is laughable since I'm literally cheating on my piece-of-shit fiancé with my stepbrother.

My gaze slips to the corner of the phone screen to check the time for the tenth time in the last five minutes as I edit the clip to upload on TikTok.

It's past midnight. Since we've started our secret relationship, Ryder has been consistent about texting, even if it's just to let me know he's thinking about me. But he hasn't said a word since noon, which is raising the alarms in my head.

Something is wrong. Call it a gut feeling.

Despite being on a high since the first night I slept with Ryder, I've had this looming sense of dread. Like the other shoe is about to drop and our secret will get out.

My stomach takes that moment to growl, reminding me I haven't eaten anything since this afternoon. I've been so busy napping, recording videos, and editing that I haven't taken a moment to eat anything.

Sighing, I take off the heating pad and roll out of bed. I sneak out of my bedroom and wander into the kitchen, all the while attempting to stay as quiet as possible so I don't wake my family.

My phone vibrates in my hand as I open the fridge. I turn my attention to the screen, and my eyes widen at the message from an unknown number.

UNKNOWN SENDER

I know your secrets, DirtyDoll.

Who is this?

I knew you were a slut, but I didn't want to believe you'd ever dirty yourself by sleeping with your brother.

A new message from the sender pops onto the screen, and my stomach sinks to my feet. It's a screenshot from a video I uploaded on my OnlyFans of Ryder and me. The image is a still shot of me on my knees with Ryder's tattooed-skeleton fingers tangled in my hair, his cock jammed deep in my stretched-open mouth. Tears shine in my eyes, and mascara smears my cheeks.

The message bubbles from the sender dance at the bottom of the screen before a new text pops up in the thread.

UNKNOWN SENDER

I must admit, seeing you choke on a cock is a beautiful sight.  
But it's disgusting that it's your brother.

Who the hell are you?

End things with him, delete the videos and your accounts, and I won't send this out to everyone you know—especially your family.

I stare at the message, not breathing or moving.

Another message pops up when I don't respond.

If you want your brother to live, delete everything and end things. You have twenty-four hours, DirtyDoll. Tick Tock.

They send a new message with a ten-second clip. I play the video and stumble back from shock as I watch Ryder punch someone while another biker creeps behind him with a baseball bat. Dahlia screams his name in the clip, and right as he turns his head, the biker swings the bat at my stepbrother.

The front door slams against the wall, and male voices carry through the house to the kitchen. I jolt and duck down, hiding behind the kitchen island so the intruders won't see me as they walk through the house.

My heartbeat thunders in my ears, and I glance down at the text thread with the unknown sender. Is he now here to do the same thing to me?

“Grab his legs!” a man yells.

I slap my palm over my mouth to quiet my gasp.

“No, his fucking *legs*, you dumbass,” the same man growls.

Crap. Crap. Crap.

I swallow hard and work on calming down. My gaze slides to the cabinet right by my head, where the pots and pans are. Gingerly, I open the door and ease out a frying pan.

Counting to three in my head, I gather as much courage as I can. I creep out of the kitchen with my makeshift weapon poised like I'm about to

swing a bat.

The men's voices grow louder as I sneak through the dark toward them. Right as I turn the corner, two large, shadowed men come into my view. I screech and swing for their heads.

"Shit!" one yells, then ducks before my weapon hits him.

"Goddamn it, she has a fucking pan!" the other bellows.

As I swing again, my vision takes that moment to adjust to the darkness. I stop mid-swing and gasp.

"Oh my god!" I rush toward them, my gaze zeroing in on Ryder's slumped body as they hold him like a sack of potatoes.

Aiden and Hawk stare at me in bewilderment. Their chests heave with their efforts as they cling to Ryder so he doesn't fall.

"Jesus Christ, woman. You almost gave us a heart attack." Aiden hitches Ryder's leg higher into his arms, and Hawk does the same with Ryder's shoulders.

I glare at him. "I almost gave you a heart attack? Imagine me!"

Hawk turns to me. "We need to get him to his room."

I nod and glance at Ryder passed out in their arms. My chest squeezes when I notice the blood on his face. I spin on my heels and lead the guys through the house and out the back door.

*Please be okay. Please be okay.*

I hold open Ryder's bedroom door as they maneuver him through and lay him on his bed. Tears sting my eyes at how caring and gentle they are with him, situating him into a comfortable position and even removing his boots.

"What happened?" I ask. I already know about Ryder taking a baseball bat to the head, but there's more to it.

How did they get away?

Who did this?

Hawk steps back from the bed and runs his fingers through his hair.  
"Ran into some problems."

"Nothing we couldn't handle," Aiden says as he turns to me with fire in his eyes. I'm used to seeing him smiling and joking, so witnessing his anger is strange.

I look at Aiden and Hawk—like, *really* look at them. They have the same cuts and bruises, along with blood smeared on their faces and knuckles.

I turn away from Hawk and Aiden. “Wait here and I’ll patch you guys up.”

Hawk catches my arm. “No need to help us. Focus on Ryder. He’ll be fine. He’s just knocked out for the moment.”

“Yeah,” Aiden says with a little smile. “If you want to play nurse with someone, let it be him.” He jerks his chin toward Ryder.

Hawk drops his hand to his side. “We’ll see you later.”

They leave, shutting the door behind them.

Taking a deep breath, I search through Ryder’s bathroom for a first-aid kit. All I find are Band-Aids, Neosporin, and gauze. I fill a random bowl with warm water and toss a clean washcloth in. Taking all of my findings with me, I return to Ryder’s side and set them on the nightstand. I don’t know how bad his injuries are, but if his friends aren’t too worried, then I shouldn’t be, either.

I gently strip off his jacket, then his T-shirt. Because he’s dead to the world, it’s hard to maneuver his arms, but I still manage. My heart breaks at the bruises on his chest, along with more blood smeared over his tatted skin.

I don’t want to just beat up the person who did this to him. I want to murder them.

My hands tremble as I unbutton his torn pants, then shimmy them down his legs, revealing his lack of boxers underneath. My attention zeroes in on his legs. There are more bruises, accompanied by what looks like road rash on his thighs and shins.

“Oh, baby,” I whine softly.

*This is my fault. All because I’m selfish and wanted to be with him and some nameless person caught me in the act.*

I grab the bowl of warm water, then wring out the washcloth and dab his face, cleaning off the smears of blood to reveal the cuts. They aren’t deep gashes. Nothing to go to the emergency room over.

Ryder doesn’t open his eyes as I clean him. His chest moves up and down with steady breaths.

*He’s breathing. He’s fine. He’s not going to die.*

I swipe away the tears blurring my vision and return to cleaning off the blood on his neck, then his chest and stomach. The whole time, I bite the inside of my cheek to stop myself from confessing everything to him, even in his unconscious state.

Because after I clean him up and make sure he'll be okay, I have to leave. I have to end things with him. I don't want him to die. Especially not because of me.

My hands tremble as I rinse the rag in the bowl of water that now has a pink hue to it. I wring it out, then continue cleaning him.

My gaze flicks to Ryder's face, checking if he's woken up in the time I've been tending to him. His dark eyelashes dust the tops of his cheeks. His full, pierced lips tempt me to kiss him. He's so beautiful, even while asleep. The tension in his features slackens, and he appears younger and less stressed.

I lose the inner battle to keep quiet. "I'm so sorry, Ryder," I whisper. "This is all my fault. I promise I'll make it right."

I duck my head and apply ointment to Ryder's cuts and road rashes. I look over his naked body one last time, intending on leaving afterward. Everyone is asleep and won't catch me as I pack my bags. I may not have a bunch of money saved, but there's enough for me to survive off of as I travel.

A smear of pink on Ryder's ball sack catches my attention. I lean closer and check the area, making sure I didn't miss any cuts. My eyebrows pinch together. Maybe droplets of water slid down his body while I cleaned him and I didn't notice. I grab the washcloth again and reach out, then stop midway when an idea pops into my head.

*It's not right.*

My gaze flicks back to Ryder's face, ensuring he's still asleep before I do something heinous.

*He's passed out.*

I won't see him after this. I'll have to cut all ties with my old life and pray Dad and Justin won't find me, because I know they'll hunt me down and drag me back into this life. The unknown sender is watching me as well, and if I'm around Ryder after being dragged back home, I'll be tempted to start our relationship again. This person will keep their promise, and I can't have that. I love Ryder too much.

*It's blood; it's unsanitary.*

*But I want to touch him one last time, even if he's passed out.*

Shaking away the nervous thoughts, I ease the bowl of water and cloth back onto the nightstand before I settle between his legs again. Warning bells go off in my head, and I can practically see the guy from the TikTok

videos waving a large red flag as he remarks on how I'm making him more nervous than a salmon in a bear hug.

I lean in and circle the base of Ryder's flaccid cock with my fingers, holding the appendage while I swipe my tongue up his balls to clean off the blood.

A small moan escapes me at the coppery flavor. I thought I'd hate the taste, but it's not horrible. Musk and the salt of his skin burst on my tastebuds. I suck his left ball into my mouth and tongue the leathery skin, too lost in the moment to care that I'm doing this while Ryder is passed out.

His cock twitches and hardens in my palm.

Ryder will hate me if he ever finds out about this. Maybe it'll help him move on from me.

My fingers tighten around his shaft, and I pump my fist up and down in slow strokes. I suck his right testicle into my mouth, showing it the same attention. Ryder's low groan spurs me on. His ball sack pops out of my mouth as I lean back and stare at his cock, a bead of pre-cum leaking from the pierced hole.

My mouth waters as I watch the droplet grow in size as I continue working his shaft. With a soft groan, I lean down and lick the underside of his shaft, all the way to the tip, where I take him past my lips.

Ryder shallowly thrusts his hips, forcing more of his dick into my salivating mouth. I gag as he hits the back of my throat, but I don't move away. My clit pulses like a heartbeat, demanding attention and relief. I stick my hand down my shorts and rub the sensitive nub in quick circles.

Ryder shifts, and I flinch as his hand winds through my hair. He holds me in place, his thrusts increasing in roughness and bordering on desperation.

I raise my watery gaze to his face and find his eyes still closed. His dark eyebrows pinch together, and his pierced lips part as he fucks my face.

Heat flushes my cheeks as my orgasm builds. My eyes roll into the back of my head as I get close, but I hold back. I want Ryder to come first.

I lick the underside of his shaft while I bob my head. Ryder's fingers tighten in my hair, his hips slowing when I take control. I take more of him until he hits the back of my throat again. An undignified choking noise slips out of me, and strings of saliva pool around his shaft and pelvis. My jaw burns from keeping my mouth open so wide for so long.

Needing a moment to work out the tension in my jaw, I pull back and suck the tip for a second. Ryder shoves the back of my head, sinking his cock into my throat. His groan rumbles deep in his chest and moves straight to my clit.

I grab his thigh with one hand and hold myself steady as he fucks my face with the same desperation I feel. His cock thickens, and ropes of cum jet into my throat. I swallow each load, not wanting to drown.

My hips buck against my hand, and I let out a muffled moan as my orgasm slams into me. Tingles spread through me, and I ride out the high while Ryder continues to fill my mouth with his spunk.

He releases my hair and drops his hands at his sides. I raise my head and suck in a ragged breath as his twitching dick slips out of my mouth. I pant and lick my swollen lips to clean the stray beads of cum I didn't catch.

I pull my hand out of my shorts and stumble to the bathroom to wash up. When I return to the bedroom, Ryder is still passed out on the bed, sweat coating his tanned skin. I glance at the door and nibble on my swollen bottom lip, then look at Ryder again.

Tears sting my eyes.

I can't leave him yet. Just a few more minutes with him.

I turn off the lights and crawl into bed with him, then cover us with the comforter. The heady scent of amber and cypress fills my lungs, relaxing my muscles and quieting my racing thoughts.

Five minutes, then I'll leave. Just five more minutes with him so I can enjoy his presence and memorize every detail about him.

I curl into his side and kiss his shoulder. "I love you so much, big brother. I'm so sorry for being a coward and having to run, but I hope one day you'll understand why. It's to protect you."

# CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX



## MADISON

### *“ALWAYS BEEN YOU” CHRIS GREY*

My toes curl, and I let out a soft whimper as ecstasy fills my veins and spreads through my body. Pleasure coils tight in my lower stomach, drawing tighter with each swipe of his tongue on my clit.

*More. I want more.*

His warm, wet tongue flicks the bundle of nerves, and he slows to a gentle tease until my orgasm fades.

“Please,” I cry.

Ryder’s eyes flare with hunger and determination. He sucks my clit between his pierced lips and moans, sending vibrations through me and driving me back to the edge, only to pull away before I explode. He grips

my thigh, holding me open, and with his other hand, he probes my opening with two fingers before he plunges them inside me.

I throw my head back with a cry and push my hips against his face, riding his eager tongue. My climax rushes forward with the promise of making me see God. I growl when he releases my clit, killing the orgasm before it could sweep me away.

“You’re so mean,” I whine.

Ryder huffs out a laugh. “I know, baby, but this will make you feel so good. Let me make you come hard for me.”

His fingers spread, then scissor inside me. The motion stretches my inner walls, bringing a burning sensation that he drowns out by tonguing my clit again. My back arches off the bed, my muscles tensing as the orgasm builds faster than the last time.

“Ryder,” I choke out. “I’m right there. Please let me come!”

He moans against me, adding vibration into the mix. “Come for me, little sister. Show me how much you love me.”

My lips part on a silent scream. I writhe underneath him as the climax knocks the air out of my lungs and all I can do is hold on to him while I ride it out.

This is a dream. I know it is, and I don’t want to wake up from this. It’s safe here. Safe to be with him.

But like every good dream, it eventually comes to an end, and I’m dragged back to reality.

My eyes fly open as I wake, my ragged shriek piercing my ears. Sweat coats my face and between my breasts. The dark, humid bedroom smells like sex. And the sensation of Ryder’s tongue on my clit doesn’t disappear, nor does the feeling of his fingers plunging in and out of me.

I look between my spread legs and freeze.

Ryder’s head is between my thighs, his darkened gaze already on my face, watching my reaction as his tongue lashes against my sensitive nub. Two thick, tattooed fingers pound in and out of my spasming walls as he works me through the last of my orgasm. My mouth dries when I notice the blood staining the sides of his mouth and cheeks.

“Shit!” I shove his forehead to get him off me, but he dives back and latches his mouth on my mound. His arm locks around my waist, preventing me from escaping him as he swipes his tongue from bottom to top, repeatedly. “Ryder, please! I’m on my period.”

He hums in approval, then kisses my clit before raising his head and licking his bloody lips. “I know.”

I sputter, sounding like an idiot as my mind tries to catch up with what’s happening. He doesn’t show any signs of disgust at being covered in my blood. My core spasms as he grinds his hips into the bed. If my period disgusts him, he has a weird way of showing it.

“My tampon?” I choke out.

He smirks and glances at the trash bin beside the bed, then turns his head back toward me. His grin widens; he’s pleased with himself.

“You took it out of me while I was asleep?” It’s a dumb question, I know, but I’m in shock.

Ryder releases my leg and sits up on his knees. His erection stands proud and tall in the air, leaking pre-cum from the pierced tip. “Don’t act so innocent, sis. You had no problem sucking my cock while you thought I was asleep.”

He grabs the washcloth from the bowl of water on his nightstand and cleans his face and hands. I squeak as he grabs my hips and drags me closer to him, then lines up the head of his cock outside of my opening.

My cheeks burn from embarrassment. “How long were you—”

Ryder’s hungry gaze flicks to my face right as he plunges inside me. I yelp at the sudden fullness and discomfort. He whimpers and holds still for a moment, allowing me time to adjust.

Ryder really does look like a dark god, blessing me with his presence. He’s bathed in shadows, but moonlight filters through the window and highlights the sharp planes of his body.

I should stop him, but I can’t, not when my heart is in control right now.

Somehow sensing where my thoughts are headed, Ryder blankets my body with his and scoops me into his arms. We groan at the same time as he pulls out until only the head stretches my entrance. Then he slams forward, burying himself to the hilt. I wrap my legs around his narrow waist and dig my heels into his ass cheeks, loving how his muscles flex with every thrust.

“When you started undressing me,” he whispers into my ear. “I heard everything.”

I squeeze my eyes shut and dig my nails into his back. My clit pulses like a heartbeat as I drag my fingernails down his shoulders, leaving behind red marks.

Ryder trails kisses along my neck and finds the sensitive spot on my throat. My toes curl, and I whimper as he nips the tender skin, then soothes the pain with his tongue. His hips slap against mine, each stroke hard yet slow, as though he wants to take his time with me.

“You’re not leaving me, Madison.” He raises his head and looks down at me with determination and a glint of anger in his eyes. “Look at me.”

He heard everything I said, and now it feels like he’s trying to force me to understand what he’s incapable of saying as he balances over me, his hands settling beside my shoulders on the mattress. He pounds into me with punishing strokes, our flesh clapping together and filling the bedroom with wet sounds. The longer I refuse to open my eyes, the harder the headboard slams against the wall.

“Eyes on me, little sister. I want you to look at me and see the truth on my face when I tell you how much you mean to me.”

Ryder’s hand slips around my throat. Out of habit, I suck in a breath right before he squeezes the sides of my neck, cutting the blood flow to my head. My eyes fly open and I arch my back, pushing my throat into his grip. Ryder glares down at me, his pierced lips curled back in a snarl, and he lets out little grunts with every smack of his hips against mine.

Ryder’s hand squeezes tighter. “I don’t give a fuck if someone is threatening my life. You’re not ending things and running from me.”

My nails dig into his shoulders, and I stare at him.

Ryder bares his teeth. “Yeah, I went through your phone while you were asleep. You think some piece of shit threatening to kill me is gonna scare me? Baby. You don’t know me well enough, but you will in time.”

Tears sting my eyes. All I can do is take every punishing stroke of his cock as he continues choking me while pouring his heart out to me.

Ryder’s grip on my throat loosens enough for me to suck in a breath before he cuts it off again. “I’m head over heels for you. I don’t want anyone else, because you’re the air I fucking breathe. I can’t go a second without thinking about you and how you make me feel so alive. Don’t you understand? You won. You have my heart, and I can’t stand the thought of you leaving me.”

I blink up at him, unable to process his loving words.

His grip loosens, and he kisses my face, licking every stray tear breaking free. “I love how you cared about me this whole time and never gave up, even when I pushed you away. I love your smile. Your laugh. How

you scrunch your nose when someone says something you don't like. I love how you can't look away from me, even when you don't realize I'm watching you, too. I love you, Madison. Even if you're my stepsister. Some nameless asshole isn't going to stop us from being together. Let me protect you."

I can't hold back the sob bubbling out of me. I loop my arms around him and drag him closer so I can bury my face in the crook of his neck. Relief floods my system, and I hang onto his promise to take care of this. I don't want him to die, but I don't want to leave him either. We're too deep in this to walk away.

"Shh." He kisses the side of my head. "It's okay, baby. Let me love you. Let me be with you, and I'll make you so fucking happy for the rest of our lives. I'll find this asshole and kill him for you."

I cup his cheeks and sniffle. He swipes away the tears underneath my eyes with his thumbs, his expression soft and full of so much love and hope.

"I want you happy too," I say. "But I don't want to lose you."

Ryder groans and smashes his lips against mine. Our tongues meet halfway, tangling together and mimicking the long, sure strokes of his cock. It's not long before I come, safely wrapped in his arms and breathing him in. He follows, grunting into my mouth as he pumps his cum deep inside me.

"Don't leave me," he whimpers after a long stretch of silence. "I don't think I can survive if you ever disappear."

"Never. I'm yours. Forever, Ryder." I hug him closer, and he relaxes his weight on me, pinning me deeper into the mattress.

He rests his cheek on my chest, listening to my heart as it slows to a normal pace. I thread my fingers through his hair and play with the damp strands, relaxing him further.

I close my eyes and try to shove the negative thoughts out of my head, but they still come.

Like I said, anxiety is a bitch.

I can't help but feel guilty that I even considered leaving him here, alone and passed out after he was injured. What if the person who threatened to kill him snuck into the house and finished the job?

"You're coming home with me," he mumbles.

"What?" I blink and look down at the top of his head.

Ryder doesn't move, keeping his cheek flat on my chest and his eyes closed. He curls his arms underneath me and hugs me as he gets more comfortable. Any second now and he'll pass out. "In the morning, you're moving out of here and coming home with me. I don't want you anywhere near Jerry."

I don't need to ask why he doesn't want me around my father. With us staying together, this person will leak the info to Dad. If I stay, I'll have to face his wrath.

"He won't be happy about it."

"I don't give a shit," he growls.

I close my eyes and continue massaging his scalp and playing with his hair. Ryder shudders and hums in approval, reminding me of a cat curling against his favorite person.

"He'll know about us," I whisper.

He'll find out either way, but I'll feel safer with Ryder.

Ryder stays quiet for a moment before he asks, "Do you want me to continue being your dirty little secret?"

My fingers tremble and my heartbeats double-time against my ribs. Hearing the change in tempo, Ryder raises his head and looks at me with a guarded expression.

"I don't want to keep you as a secret, but I—"

His face falls flat, and he pulls out of me, then climbs out of bed. I sit up and watch as he disappears into the bathroom, flipping on the light before he shuts the door behind him.

Shit. I fucked up.

I wait for him for what feels like forever, hoping it's taking him a little longer than usual to grab a towel to clean me with. Then I hear the shower turn on and the water pounding against the tile floor. I groan and fall back on the mattress, flinging my arm over my eyes.

*Way to go, Maddy. You confessed your feelings, made love, then made him feel dirty by wanting to keep him as a secret.*

I can't lie here and risk Ryder coming into the bedroom, closed off and refusing to open up to me again. Setting aside my worry, I shoot off the bed and join him in the bathroom.

Mist curls in the tiny space, the small mirror above the sink already covered with a layer of fog. I open the door to the walk-in shower and shut

it behind me. Ryder takes up the majority of the tiny space, but I don't care. At least he'll have a difficult time escaping me.

Ryder keeps his back to me, his head bent forward underneath the stream of hot water. I hesitantly step forward and wrap my arms around him in a hug, pressing my breasts against his firm back. My chin quivers when he stiffens beneath me, clearly not enjoying my touch, but he doesn't step out of my hold or push me away.

"You're not my dirty secret, Ryder," I whisper, and close my eyes. "I'm a coward. I'm terrified of the world judging us and doing everything in its power to tear us apart."

Water cascades over us, hitting the tile floor and breaking the tense silence.

"I want you. I've wanted you for so long, and I'm scared of losing you." My voice cracks, and I press against him, my palms flat against his stomach and chest.

Still no response.

"I'll leave you alone." I loosen my hold and back away.

Ryder catches my wrist and faces me, his eyes narrowed and lips pulled down in a scowl. "Do you trust me?"

I don't hesitate with my answer. "Yes."

He tugs me closer, and I lay my hand over his chest, feeling the steady beat of his heart.

"Then trust me when I say that I'll always keep you safe and we'll always be together. There's nowhere I won't follow you, in this life or in death."

I shiver at the conviction in his deep, husky voice. "You don't plan on hurting yourself, do you?"

Ryder shakes his head, and wet strands of hair flop into his eyes. "No, baby."

Taking a calming breath, I nod.

I trust him and his promise that he'll take care of this. It'll be scary, facing my father about my relationship with Ryder, but I can't deny us anymore.

I push up on the tips of my toes and kiss him. Ryder groans and releases my wrist to cup the back of my head. My lips part on a sigh, and he takes advantage by slipping his tongue into my mouth. It's not a sweet kiss like we shared moments ago in his bedroom. This one is full of desperation and

a fiery need to consume. It's full of hopes and promises, putting my mind at ease; he'll take care of me. Whatever happens will happen, because in the end, we'll still have each other. We'll still be together.

What Dahlia told me the other day finally clicks.

Fuck what people have to say about my relationship with my brother. No one else matters because the only thing I care about is the man holding me like he's terrified I might disappear. He loves me. I'm not the ghost anymore, and I refuse to lose him because I'm too much of a chicken to face my fears.

Ryder ends the kiss and rests his forehead against mine. "I'll say it one more time, doll."

I stare into his eyes, silent and waiting.

His fingers tighten in my hair, pulling at the strands. "You're moving out in the morning and living with me. Whatever happens, we'll face it together."

I brush my lips against his. "Okay."

Ryder blesses me with a brilliant smile, then turns us around and shoves me against the shower wall. "Good. Now, hold on to me. I'm about to use you like a toy."

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN



## RYDER

### *“LAST RESORT” PAPA ROACH*

The house was quiet when Madison and I gathered some of her belongings and packed them in her car. The sun hadn't risen yet, and everyone was still asleep. We grabbed only the bare necessities—clothes, makeup, toiletries, and whatever prized possessions she couldn't part with. I plan to get the rest of her things, but I warned her she may never see them again. Jerry is a malicious cunt, and once he knows I “took” his daughter, he may destroy everything.

If I'm gonna be honest with myself, I'm preening over the fact that I'm taking his daughter from him. It's one of the best paybacks I've come up with. I've hated this man since the first day I met him. For years, I thought of ways to make him pay for every bruise he left on my body.

But this is bigger than payback.

I'm in love with Madison. There isn't a day that goes by when I don't think about her, even if I just steal glances at her to make sure she's okay. Now she gets to be my safe place to land *and* my epic vengeance.

I eye the kitchen entryway, checking if Madison has come down from our bedroom yet. She's been up there for most of the day, arranging her clothes in our closet and making it into her room too. Warmth fills my chest at the thought of us sharing the same space. When I grab a T-shirt from my dresser, I'm sure I'll find her clothes next to mine. It'll be a nice reminder of her always being within touching distance.

I head toward the staircase so I can let Madison know I'm going to the grocery store to stock up on food. The cupboards are still bare to the point of embarrassment, and now I have more than myself to worry about.

My phone vibrates in my pocket from a new text message. I grab it, and my eyes narrow at the unknown number.

UNKNOWN SENDER

I have something of yours.

My head snaps up and I look at the staircase.

*Madison.*

I bolt toward the stairs, my mind blazing with the visceral need to check on her. She's been upstairs this whole time. I didn't hear anyone come into my home or any sounds of a struggle.

She's fine.

No one took her from me. And if someone did, then I'll find them and slowly kill them all for touching her.

I'll gouge out their eyes and feed them to them covered in ranch.

I'll cut their hands off and shove them up their asses.

I'll cut off their tongues and—

“What's going on?” Madison's soft voice draws me out of my thoughts.

My steps falter, and I blink away the red haze of rage from my vision. A breath shudders out of me, and my knees wobble from the flood of relief.

Madison closes the small gap between us and rests her palms over my chest. Her touch works its magic, loosening my tense muscles.

If she's here, then—

My phone pings with a new message, and I read it.

UNKNOWN SENDER

It's fitting, really. He loves to fuck his sister, too. His screams for her are \*so\* amusing. Like music to my ears.

If you want to save your friend, meet me here. And don't tell anyone. I'd hate to end this game before it's even begun.

They send the address where they want me to meet them.

The earlier rage returns, and my vision turns red.

“Ryder?” Madison’s voice breaks through the haze just enough to pull me out and shift my focus back to her. “What’s the matter?”

I school my features so I don’t concern her any more than I already have. “Nothing, baby. But something came up, and I need to leave for a while.”

She tilts her head, her eyebrows pinching together in visible confusion. “Okay. I’ll be here when you get back.”

I shake my head and tuck a blue lock of hair behind her ear. “Why don’t you go visit Nova or Olivia for a while? I’ll pick you up when I’m done.”

Madison hesitates, and I brace myself for her questions. Like why I want her to hang out with her friends instead of in her new home. Or what business I need to take care of.

She surprises me when she nods and offers me a tiny smile. “Sure. Want to walk there with me?”

I dip my chin in a slight nod and return her smile to put her at ease.

Madison grabs my hand and laces our fingers together as we walk out of the house and down the street to Aiden’s place. The whole way, an eerie calm blankets me, one that I’m not a stranger to. It’s like an old friend to me. One that’s kept me in its clutches since I was a young boy, fighting like my life depended on it. This time, it may very well be that.

“Looks like it’ll rain soon,” Madison says as she tilts her head back to look at the darkened sky.

I hum in response, but don’t say anything.

She looks at me with a slight frown. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

I give her hand a reassuring squeeze. “I promise, doll.”

Madison side-eyes me but doesn’t say anything else. I walk her up Aiden’s driveway and knock on the front door. Checking the area, I don’t

find his motorcycle in sight.

Did they grab him too?

I shake away the thought and cup Madison's cheeks. "I love you, baby. I'll see you soon."

The door opens, and Nova appears in the doorway. "What are you guys doing here?"

Madison ignores her friend, her focus locked on me. I expect her to pull away, but she surprises me.

"I love you, too," Madison says without a hint of shame.

I kiss her hard. It's quick, but it's filled with desperation, love, devotion, and a promise to always keep her safe.

I rest my forehead against hers and play with a lock of her hair at the back of her head.

Madison tangles her fingers in my hair, earning a groan from me. "This isn't goodbye, so don't make it seem like one."

"Behave, sis." I flash her a smile and kiss her one more time before I pull away and jog back to my house.

---

I ride like a bat out of hell, with my cellphone perched in its holder on my bike's tank in front of me. I glance every few seconds at the screen, hoping to see a message from my friends in the group chat after I sent them a text asking if they've seen Jaxon. Every time I check, I'm let down when I find no new messages.

The storm clouds gather in the sky. With every passing minute, they block out more of the setting sun, bathing the evening in darkness.

The GPS on my phone directs me out of town and onto the highway. I zip past cars that are going the speed limit, earning honks from a few of them. Some try to chase after me in a fit of road rage but can't keep up with me. I continue weaving through the traffic with little care for my safety. Not when my best friend's life is on the line.

The more distance I put between me and the town, the more the sinking feeling in my gut deepens into an ache that's getting harder to ignore.

Something about this doesn't feel right. I just can't put my finger on it.

Time blurs, and by the time I take my exit, I'm surrounded by trees in the middle of nowhere. I follow the directions to the location and slow my bike, stopping outside the abandoned house from the image. Boards are nailed over the windows, and rot eats away at the old wooden structure. All but one step has fallen away from the stairs, and the last soldier clings to thoughts and prayers to hold its place.

I switch off my bike's engine, grab my phone, and storm toward the house. Adrenaline pumps in my veins, right along with simmering rage. I slip my hand into my pocket and finger my switchblade.

My notifications chime, one after the other. I shove my tinted visor up and read the new messages in the group chat.

AIDEN

Sorry for the late response. We've been busy fucking up a rider we snatched the other night. Would have told you about it, but we wanted to give you some time to rest up.

HAWK

How you feeling, bro?

JAXON

You good?

My eyes widen, and my heart lurches to my throat.

“Fuck.” I sprint to my bike. “It was a fucking trap!”

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT



## MADISON

### *“LABOUR” PARIS PALOMA*

Nova and I camp out on the sectional couch with a classic horror movie as background noise. We haven't been paying much attention to it, as we've been chatting and talking about everything under the sun. None of which is about what she saw outside before Ryder dropped me off here.

“I can't wait for the party.” Nova twirls her cherry-flavored Twizzlers between her fingers. “I'm curious who all will be there.”

I sip the red wine she found stashed in a cabinet. “I'm not sure. I honestly didn't think they'd do something like that since the guys always kept to themselves.”

“Aiden has made a lot of friends since graduation. Maybe they'll be there.” She shrugs, then scrunches her nose at whatever popped into her

head.

“Oh god,” I say with a groan. “Don’t tell me he’ll invite all his ex-flings to the party.”

Aiden is a player. Nova told Olivia and me all about how he keeps a girl around for a short time before a new one takes her place. I don’t want to think about what it’ll be like, having a bunch of women he slept with, all in one space.

Nova groans and drops her head against the sofa’s cushion. “I really hope not.”

“We’ll just pretend your brother wouldn’t be dumb enough to invite them to the party,” I say.

Nova straightens and pins me with a smirk. “Speaking of brothers . . . So you and Ryder, huh?” She bites into her Twizzlers. “How long have you been keeping that secret?”

My cheeks warm with a blush. “A few days.”

I feel like crap for keeping it from Nova and Olivia, but to be fair, I didn’t expect them to understand. It’s silly of me to assume something like that, especially after seeing how open-minded they were with Dahlia and Jaxon’s marriage.

Nova chews her candy while staring at me with an unreadable look.

I grimace and avert my gaze. “I’m sorry for not telling you and Olivia.”

“I don’t hold it against you.” She shrugs and rips off another bite. “It’s scary to have a relationship with a sibling, blood or not, because there’s a ton of people out in the world who will judge.”

Tension melts from my muscles that have been stiff since Nova watched Ryder kiss me. I sag in my seat and suck in a breath that brings another wave of comfort. I didn’t realize how tensed up I’d been until Nova finally addressed the pink elephant in the room.

She notices the change in me and grins. “We’re best friends. I don’t care who you date so long as he treats you like a queen and doesn’t cheat.”

I cringe. “If anyone is a cheater, it’s me.”

“What?” Nova’s back straightens, and she drops her candy. “You’re cheating on Ryder?”

“No.”

“Then who are—” Realization crosses her features, and she blows a raspberry with a wave of her hand. “I forgot Justin even existed. Fuck him. He doesn’t count, so that doesn’t make you a cheater.”

I don't try to argue with her logic, even though it's skewed.

Thunder rumbles in the distance. Its vibrations tremble the glass in the kitchen and the floor beneath my feet.

Nova glances at the TV, but her eyes lose focus.

"You okay?" I ask.

She plucks the candy from the seat beside her and bites into it. "I'm fine." She blinks, but the same detached expression remains on her face as she turns to me. "Is it okay if I blast some music or something?"

My eyebrows pinch together, and I nod.

Nova lunges for the remote on the coffee table. She turns off the movie and changes the app to Spotify, then chooses the first song on her liked playlist. She relaxes into the seat but refuses to look at me as she munches on candy and glances at the covered windows every time lightning flashes outside.

"Nova?" I scoot to the edge of my seat. "Seriously, are you okay?"

She must not hear me over the music because she continues staring at the TV, her gaze slipping every now and again toward the window.

My phone vibrates in my hand. I hesitate to read the messages, torn if I should move closer to Nova and figure out what's going on. Over the years, I've noticed her shutting down during thunderstorms. Aiden has always been able to help keep her calm.

Thunder quakes the room, but the music drowns out most of the rumble. I eye Nova, watching to see how she reacts. She continues munching on the candy and staring at the TV with a glazed look.

I peek at the new messages.

DAD

Where are you?

You can't run from this, Madison.

He can't save you, girl.

Come back home and let's talk about this like adults.

I scrunch my nose and exit the thread.

Dad is out of his mind if he thinks I'll crawl back home to talk. His version of having any discussion is to order me around and expect me to listen to him. I'm not doing it anymore. I refuse to allow him to control me.

The song switches, leaving the room quiet for a split second. Thunder booms, followed by lightning flashing through the drawn curtains.

Nova leaps from her spot, the bag of Twizzlers and the untouched bowl of popcorn dropping to the floor and scattering into a mess. I leap to my feet, my wine sloshing over the lip of the cup and drenching the front of my shirt.

“Be right back.” Nova races out of the room, her frantic footsteps pounding the stairs and fading once she reaches the top.

“Nova!” I set the wineglass on the table and chase after her.

I follow the flash of pink into her bedroom. Nova rushes to her gaming desk and grabs her headphones with pointed pink kitty ears at the top. She places them over her head and holds the muffs against her ears.

“Hey,” I say softly. “What’s going on?”

Nova plops onto her gaming chair and squeezes her eyes shut. “I’ll be okay. I just”—she swallows hard and looks at me with sad, pleading eyes—“need to listen to music for a while. Drown out all the noise.”

I nod and ease closer to her. “Do you want me to stay here with you?”

Her shoulders jerk up to her jaw at another loud clap of thunder. She squeezes her eyes shut. “You don’t have to.”

I stop and frown. “I will. You just need to let me know.”

Lightning flashes and lights up the right of the room. Nova whimpers and swivels the chair to face her computer, then shakes her mouse to bring the screen to life. She taps a few times and plays music that blasts through her headphones, but it’s loud enough for me to hear.

I awkwardly stand behind her, unsure of what to do. Nova keeps her back to me, her trembling lessening the more she listens to her music.

I’ve never seen her like this during a storm. Usually she goes quiet and has a faraway look in her eyes, but never full-on shivering and needing to hide.

The heater kicks on, cooling my wine-damp shirt to my skin. Goosebumps rise on my arms, and I suppress a shiver. I glance down at my top and wince at the large red stain.

“I’ll be right back,” I say, even though Nova can’t hear me. “I won’t be gone for long.”

Nova is a few sizes smaller than me, so I can’t exactly raid her closet.

I leave her bedroom and tuck my phone in my pocket before I head out the front door. Rain lashes against my face, stinging my eyes. I hunch my

shoulders and jog down the street to Ryder's house. Well, *our* house.

"Please don't let me get struck by—" I scream as lightning cracks close by and lights up the night with torrents of blue and white. "This wasn't worth it. Fuck!"

I race down the sidewalk until I reach the house, then zig-zag up the driveway and barrel through the front door. My heart pounds erratically against my chest, and I check my phone to make sure there isn't any water damage. The screen lights up, showing no sign of an issue.

I glance behind me and nibble my bottom lip.

I hope Ryder's okay.

Maybe he hasn't come home yet because of the weather.

That eases my mind just a smidge, but only for a split second before unwanted thoughts rush forward.

*Did he get in a crash and that's why he's not here?*

I pull up his name on my cell and hit the dial button before I hold my phone against my ear.

"Pick up, pick up, pick up," I whisper.

I turn the corner into the living room and stop dead in my tracks. Two large figures sit on the couch. The one on the right has his leg crossed over the other, with his ankle resting on his knee. The other figure sits on the end of the couch like a king, legs spread and arm on the rest, with his thick fingers tucked against his temple. It's too dark to make out their faces, but I recognize the slicked-back hairstyles and business suits.

"Hello, wife," Justin drawls. "Your father and I would like to speak to you."

My fingers slacken on my phone, and I catch it before it falls. I swallow hard and ease back a step. "What are you doing here? How did you get in?"

How do they even know where Ryder lives?

Justin doesn't move or say anything for a long moment. Despite not being able to see his face, I can still feel his gaze burning a hole in me.

"You've been quite the busy girl, haven't you?"

My pulse pounds in my ears like a drum, drowning out the storm outside. I tremble and inch backward. "You need to leave, Justin." I slide my gaze to Dad, who's been silent this whole time. "Both of you."

Justin turns his head, taking in the dark room. Lightning flashes across the windows behind him, briefly chasing away the shadows as his head turns back to me. His cold glare settles on my face. "When I accepted your

father's arrangement, I didn't realize I would be tied to a female who has a thing for her brother. Had I known you were a fucking slut for him, I would have taken care of him a long time ago."

My eyes widen. "What did you do to him?"

Dad lets out an undignified snort, and I don't need to see him to know he rolled his eyes, too. "Pathetic, Madison. He's your brother, for god's sake."

Justin unfolds his large body from the couch and smooths the wrinkles from his jacket. "How long have you been whoring yourself out to him? Hmm? You two haven't been so secretive about it lately, what with him sending me those lovely videos of you two fucking like rabbits. But I'm curious if this has been going on for longer than I initially thought."

I suck in a breath and stare wide-eyed at Dad, waiting for him to explode. His comment about Ryder being my brother was expected, but I thought he'd do more than just make petty remarks.

Dad glares at me, not saying a word.

I raise my chin and square my shoulders, trying to come off stronger than I actually feel right now. I know what Justin is capable of. He's shown multiple times that he doesn't mind hurting me.

"How did you find me?" I say, attempting to change the subject to something a little less sore for him. Justin is a man. Like most men, they get angry when another man is involved in a relationship. Or in our case, a *situationship*.

"You're a stupid girl if you believed I wouldn't keep my eye on you." Justin steps forward, only stopping when I take a step back to keep space between us. "I know your every move. Where you go. Who you're with. Who you're fucking."

He takes another step and cocks his head as he thinks over his next words.

"What you do online," he murmurs, bordering on a growl.

My stomach drops to my feet, and I freeze, unable to draw in a breath or think clearly. "You know about—"

"Yes, *wife*. I know all about the filthy pictures you post on social media, along with the sex website you do deplorable things on."

Lightning flashes, and I catch another peek of his blank expression, but his eyes burn with a quiet rage, promising pain.

"How?" I whisper.

Justin closes more of the gap between us. The closer he gets, the more air his imposing figure sucks from my lungs. It adds fifty pounds to my chest and shoulders.

*Run.*

*Run.*

*He's going to hurt you, and Dad won't stop him.*

"Keeping an eye on your possessions is pretty standard for those of us in the Exiled Society. But you should know that. Your father is a King. My uncle is a King. Your brother is a Lord." An evil smirk cuts across his face with the next lightning strike. "But he won't be for much longer. I'll make sure he's out of the picture and far from my property from now on."

"It was you who texted us," I whisper. "You're the unknown sender."

Justin's chuckle lacks humor and is the equivalent of nails on a chalkboard. "Something like that."

A scream lodges in my throat as he lunges at me. I tumble backward, only for Justin to catch me by my throat. He yanks me toward him and shoves his face in mine, forcing me to look into his dead eyes.

"No more running from me. It's time you learn your place," he says through clenched teeth.

I drop my phone and shove his shoulders to get him away from me, but he only tightens his grip on my throat. I shove again and slap him, hoping it's enough to get him off me. Justin ignores my attempts and walks me backward.

"Dad," I wheeze.

Tears sting my eyes as I look past Justin's shoulder. My father relaxes in his seat and watches in silence, refusing to help me as Justin smashes his lips against mine. Justin curls his other hand into my hair and yanks at the strands to tilt my head back for a deeper kiss. I shake my head and throw myself to the side, but Justin is one step ahead of me. His mouth covers mine again, ignoring the fact that I'm not returning the kiss. He nips and sucks at my bottom lip as I use what little air I have left to get him off me.

Justin ends the kiss and whispers, "I plan on returning the favor to your brother by sending videos of me coming inside you. Every hole you have will leak with my cum, and I can't wait to see Ryder's face when you gag on my cock and suck me dry."

I grimace. "You're disgusting."

He bares his teeth. “Not as much as you. Maybe I’ll even cut off three of your fingers and send them to him as a gift for taking mine.”

My eyes widen as he releases my hair and flashes his left hand in front of my face. Bandages cover three stumps where his thumb, index, and middle fingers should be.

“I’m glad he took them. You’re stupid if you think I’d ever let you touch me,” I snarl.

He chuckles and tears my leggings and panties down my legs. “Never say never, wife. Until then, I’ll take what’s rightfully mine.”

I cringe as he drags his tongue up my neck and under my jaw. He leaves wet kisses on my throat and cups me between my legs with his right hand.

“Get off!” I scream. “Dad! Please, help me!”

“No,” Dad says calmly. “If you had just been a good daughter and done as I told you, then this wouldn’t be happening right now.”

Justin ignores me and dips his fingers between my folds, finding my clit and smashing his fingertip against it in hard strokes that do the complete opposite of what he intends. Or maybe this pain is what he intended after all.

What happened in the bathroom at the restaurant was abhorrent and scary, but this is terrifying. Justin won’t stop at forcing me to give him a blow job. No matter how much I fight to get away from him, he overpowers me and has every intention of raping me as my father—who’s supposed to love and protect me—sits aside and watches.

“*Go for the eyes. Throat. Dick and balls.*” The memory of Ryder’s voice fills my head, reminding me I’d tried calling him.

My gaze drops to my phone on the floor several feet away. The screen is lit up and showing a connected call.

*Ryder’s listening. He’s been listening this whole time.*

*Fuck. I’m sorry, Ryder. I’m so sorry you have to listen to this.*

Angry tears sting my eyes, and I bite my tongue to keep from making any more sounds while Justin dips his fingers outside my entrance. He shoves two inside, then stops short when he feels resistance. The scream lodged in my throat lets loose when Justin pulls out the tampon and tosses it aside with little care before he thrusts his fingers inside me.

My mind blanks as Justin pins me against the wall, his fingers pounding into me as he kisses my neck like an animal. He grinds his erection against my stomach and moans with every thrust. I lock up, unable to move or

close my eyes. I stare past Justin's shoulder, at my father palming his erection outside his pants. He shifts his hips to get more comfortable.

Bile rises up my throat, and I raise my tongue to block the vomit from spewing out of me.

I'm tired of being scared.

I'm tired of men controlling me.

I'm so angry about not having any power over myself and my life.

No one is here to help me.

*“Go for the eyes. Throat. Dick and balls.”*

Tightening my hold on Justin's shoulders, I use all of my strength as I knee him in the balls. Justin grunts and stumbles backward, his hands cupping his groin.

“You little bitch!” he wheezes.

I hook my arm back and swing, throwing all my weight into the punch. White-hot heat flares through my hand and arm as my fist connects with Justin's throat. He falls backward and lands on his back with a gurgle. I climb over him and straddle his stomach, not giving a damn that I'm not wearing any pants. Angry tears blur my vision as I punch him repeatedly. I put my all into every punch, hoping he can feel my hatred and anger.

Dad grabs me from behind and tosses me to the floor. I scream and straighten to sit up, only for him to grab my wrists as he crouches behind my head. He pins my arms to the floor and shakes his head at me as though I disappointed him by fighting back.

“Stupid girl,” he mutters.

Justin slips between my legs and pulls his erection from his pants.  
“You'll pay for that, wife.”

I scream Ryder's name at the top of my lungs, and Justin bares his bloody teeth at me.

“He's not going to help you. You'll never see him again,” he snarls.

Dad's grip tightens around my wrists as Justin guides his erection outside of my entrance. I squeeze my eyes shut and brace myself for the invasion.

“I'll let you fuck her ass after I'm done. I know how she likes to keep it in the family,” Justin says.

*Sick assholes.*

An object whistles through the room, followed by a wet smacking sound. Dad screams and falls forward, where his sounds abruptly stop. He

slumps to the ground and lies on his face, still and silent. I glance at him, my lips parting on silent scream. The butt of a large switchblade sticks from his left eye. I guess the blade sank into his evil brain when he toppled forward.

I twist around again and watch as a man in all-black attire steps into view. He's wearing a motorcycle helmet, and I can't see his face, but he grabs Justin by the back of his shoulder and drags him off me. Justin squirms and yells as the rider hauls him toward the front door.

"Ryder," I choke out.

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# CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE



## RYDER

### *“BRODYAGA FUNK” ETERNXLKZ*

Red fills my vision. I’m close to blacking out, and it’s taking everything in me to hold on so I’m aware of every second as I kill this motherfucker. All I can hear is the sound of Madison’s screams. She called me, and I listened to her conversation turn into an assault. While I drove like a bat out of hell in the rain, I listened to her fight, then scream as Justin touched her while Jerry watched. I didn’t think I would make it in time.

She needed me, and I almost didn’t make it to her.

She screamed for me, just as I told her to do all those years ago.

And had I not arrived when I did, she would have been raped by not only Justin, but also by her own fucking father.

Justin squirms and rolls his body to get out of my tight grip as I drag him toward the front door. I stop and turn my head to look at the staircase. Justin cusses behind me and grapples with my wrists in a lame attempt to make me release him. Ignoring him, I haul him up the stairs and turn him in my arms, forcing him to look at me. Because I have my tinted visor down, he can't see the rage burning in my eyes. For now, he'll have to look at his own reflection and see the monster that he is.

I'm a man of my word. I promised him I'd shove him down a flight of stairs before making him bite the curb, and that's exactly what I'm about to do.

Justin glowers at me and fists the front of my hoodie at my chest. "You won't get away with this."

I grab his fingers and bend them back, one by one. The pussy flinches and stumbles backward, stopping right before he trips over the first step. My lips curve into a slight smile, and I shove him. His eyes widen, jaw slackening on a yell as he falls backward and tumbles all the way down with loud thumps.

My grin widens with every scream he lets out.

He lands in a heap at the bottom, with keening noises coming out of him I never thought he'd make.

He's pathetic. A worthless piece of trash who doesn't deserve to breathe anymore.

"You . . . you hurt me!" he wheezes.

I roll my eyes.

*That's the intention, dumbass.*

He struggles to roll onto his side as I descend the stairs and take in his injuries. Blood coats his forehead and drips into his eyes. He squeezes them shut and holds his stomach, his features twisting in pain as he cries like the little bitch he is.

"Not so tough now, are you?" I grab a fistful of his hair, then drag him to the front door. His garbled threats and sobs weaken until they're nothing more than whimpers.

I hope the fucker doesn't die yet, because I have something way worse planned for him.

I drag Justin into the downpour, barely feeling the bite of cold rain. Rage turned my blood into fire, mixing with a familiar numbness as

Madison's screams echo in my head. I clench my teeth and yank Justin harder to get him across the lawn faster.

Justin kicks his legs, thinking it's enough to slow me down as I pull him through the front yard and onto the street. I let go of his hair and shove his head closer to the curb.

"Here's what you're going to do." I point at the curb and crouch beside him. "You're gonna bite that or I'll drag you behind my motorcycle until all your skin peels off."

Justin's eyes widen. "You're not serious, are you?"

I stand and place the bottom of my boot against the back of his head. Justin lays his palms flat on the ground and jerks his neck to keep his face away from the curb.

"Bite it," I snarl.

Fear flares in Justin's eyes, and he arches his back and shoves the ground to get up. I kick him between the shoulders and hold all my weight on him to keep him down, flipping up the helmet's visor so I can hear him whimpering over the rain and thunder. Crouching down, I keep my boot between his shoulder blades and put my head close to his face.

"If you don't bite the curb, I'll spend all night torturing you in ways you can't even imagine," I say.

Justin meets my gaze and stares for what feels like forever. Tears swim in his eyes and trail down his cheeks, mixing with the raindrops. Finally, he opens his mouth and sets his teeth on the curb.

"Such a good boy." I run a gloved finger over his cheek, then flick his forehead. I straighten and move my boot off of him so I can stand by his head. "Now look at me."

He raises his eyes and ugly cries as he keeps his teeth in place.

"There we go." I pull out my cell phone and snap a few pictures of him. "Now rot in hell, motherfucker."

Fear flashes across Justin's face as I raise my leg. His fingers curl into the cement, his shoulders tensing as he braces himself for the impact. I stomp my boot on the back of his head and grin at the satisfying crunch. His teeth smash into the curb, and he lets out a wail. I raise my leg and stomp again, crushing his skull into the pavement. Blood splashes against the curb and mixes with the rain.

Lightning flashes nearby, followed by a loud boom, covering Justin's weakening gurgles. I stomp on the back of his head again and take a step

back as his body shakes. His leg kicks out—a normal response as his dying brain sends trauma signals to the rest of his body.

I wish I could bring him back to life, just to do this all over again and make him suffer even more. It's too fucking bad it's not possible.

*C'est la vie.*

My chest heaves, and sweat coats my skin, cooling me down. I spit on Justin's corpse and snap a few more pictures of him before I tap on Jaxon's name in my contacts. The phone rings three times before he answers.

“Yeah?” he says, his voice thick with sleep.

“Need help with cleanup.”

“Where you at?”

“At my house.”

“Jesus.” There’s shifting of what sounds like sheets, then heavy footsteps on his side of the call. “I’ll be there in five minutes.”

“I’ll let Hawk and Aiden know,” I say. “Bring something that will clean off blood from asphalt and marble floors.”

Jaxon is silent for a moment before he asks, “So, you need a power washer and chemicals?”

“Might be safe.” I nudge Justin’s body with the tip of my boot and cock my head as I assess him. My mind flies through all the things we’ll need to remove the evidence so we don’t have the cops or the Exiled on my ass.

“Got it. I’ll be there in a minute.” Jaxon hangs up.

I call Aiden, then Hawk, letting them know I’ll need their help. Per usual, Aiden isn’t happy about getting rid of another body, but I know he’ll do it anyway.

After I end the call, I leave Justin’s dead body and stalk toward the house. I need to go to Madison. Not only because she needs me, but because I need to make sure she’s okay.

My steps slow as I approach the porch. Madison stands outside, under the shelter of the porch roof. She put her underwear back on, but a trail of blood runs down the inside of her thigh.

I remove my helmet and shake my head to set my damp hair back into place. The helmet drops from my hands, and I leave it forgotten on the ground as I stop in front of her. I want to cup her cheeks, look her over and make sure she’s okay, but I don’t want to scare her any more than she already is right now.

Tears shine in her eyes, giving them a glossy look. Her chest rises and falls with quick, panicked breaths.

*Let me touch you, little sister. Let me hold you.* I bite my tongue to keep myself from begging her.

We stay quiet for a moment, staring at each other as I wait for her to run from me. I don't want her scared of me, but she just witnessed me murdering two men.

A whimper spills past her lips, and she throws herself at me. I wind my arms around her, catching her before she falls. My eyes slide shut, and I squeeze her closer to me, needing her to be one with me, to burrow beneath my skin and never part from me again.

"You're here," she chokes out.

I bury my face in her hair at the top of her head. "Always, baby doll. I'll always be here and keep you safe."

Madison cries into my chest, her fingers curling into my drenched hoodie. My temples ache from the pressure of holding back tears.

I thought she would have been safe with Nova. I wasn't planning on all of this going to shit, but I should have known better. Jerry and Justin warned me repeatedly, and I fucking ignored every single one of them. It doesn't matter right now. All that matters is *her* and needing her to know how fucking sorry I am.

Madison shakes her head. "It's not your fault."

It *is* my fault. I should have waited for my friends to call or text me back, or at the very least, I should have called them before blindly riding out of town. Instead, I fell for Jerry and Justin's trap. They found my weakness in her and my friends and used it against me. I should have listened to those assholes when they hinted at taking me down.

I'm a fucking idiot who doesn't deserve to breathe anymore.

I take Madison's hand and lead her through the house and into the kitchen instead of the living room. I don't want her to see her father's corpse again. Dropping onto a chair, I drag Madison onto my lap and hold her close. She melts in my arms and buries her face in the crook of my neck as I cling to her like a lifeline.

I want to kiss her so badly. I want to chase the memory of Justin's touch from her skin, but I don't want to violate her any more than she already has been. Instead of giving in to my selfish needs, I hold her while she softly cries against my throat.

Her screams echo in my head, bringing the fright I felt while I listened to them on the dangerous ride here. With all the rain, I could have easily wrecked and died, but Madison is always worth the risk. She's successfully wrapped me around her little finger, and I refuse to release my hold now.

My fingers curl into her shirt at the small of her back from the fresh memory of Jerry pinning Madison down and Justin forcing himself between her legs. Justin's promise to Jerry plays like a broken record, paired with Madison's screams.

Fingers brush against my cheeks, then under my eyes. I blink them open, and Madison looks back at me, her eyes puffy and red from crying. Her chin quivers as she holds back her sobs. She swipes her thumb underneath my eye again, catching more tears.

*I'm crying?*

Everything hurts. Not physically, but emotionally and mentally. It fucking aches, and I want it to go away. I've never felt so deeply. Once upon a time, I would have blamed her for making me feel like this. I would have been angry and hated her even more for making me feel *everything*. But right now, I wouldn't give it up for the world. She brought me to life and is now comforting *me* when *she* was the one who'd been assaulted.

*Fuck my feelings.*

*Who gives a fuck about me and how I feel?*

*She was the one who—*

Madison leans in and softly presses her lips against mine, silencing my spiraling thoughts.

Everything goes quiet.

My mind.

The outside world.

All that matters is my sister—the love of my life and the only woman I give a fuck about.

I hold still, not wanting to spook her with my overwhelming need to snatch her closer and consume her mouth with mine.

Sensing my hesitation, Madison loops her arm around my neck and cups the back of my head. Her lips smash against mine, and she flicks her tongue against my bottom lip, catching one piercing in a slow stroke.

"It's okay," she breathes against my parted lips. "I know it's you, Ryder. You would never hurt me. *Please.*" Her voice cracks with her soft plea.

“Please kiss me. Touch me. Do whatever you need to come back to me. I’m yours.”

I lunge forward and deepen the kiss, tasting her sweetness and needing more. She lets out a whimper but doesn’t hesitate when she kisses me back with as much fervor.

Her sweet vanilla-and-ocean-breeze perfume fills my lungs as I breathe her in. Her touch raises goosebumps on my arms and sends heat through my veins. Madison’s soft sounds light a fire in my chest that blazes out of control at the first spark. My cock hardens with each passing second, but I don’t intend to fuck her right now. I just want to hold her. Kiss her. Hear her say my name and keep tugging my hair the way I like.

Madison is grounding me. She’s chasing away the monsters in my head who are telling me I’m better off dead. I don’t think she realizes what she’s doing, and if I’m being honest with myself, I don’t think I can tell her right now. This isn’t about me.

A motorcycle’s growling engine breaks the moment. I catch Madison’s bottom lip and nip, then suck, before I pull away. She blinks open her eyes and pants, her soft expression now lacking the terror that was there moments ago.

“I have to help them clean up,” I whisper. I cup her cheeks and peck her nose. “Will you be okay by yourself? I’ll be right outside, I promise.”

She nods. Her swollen lips tempt me to kiss her again to make it more noticeable. “Promise you won’t leave?”

“I swear on my life,” I say.

Madison crawls off my lap, and I already miss the weight of her on me, the feel of her warmth seeping through my soaked clothes, and her mouth moving over mine. I have to force myself to walk away before I sweep her into my arms and carry her to our bedroom.

I step outside, glad the rain stopped while I was busy comforting Madison.

Hawk stands by Justin’s corpse, his head tilting this way and that as he surveys the damage. He turns to me and frowns when I approach him.

“What the hell happened, man? It’s a fucking bloodbath.”

“He fucked around,” I say.

A flash of humor crosses Hawk’s face. “And he found out. Got it.”

Another motorcycle approaches us and parks. Aiden takes off his helmet and wanders over with a low whistle as he looks at Justin’s body.

“Goddamn. The hell did you do to bash his head in like that?” He looks at me. “A bat? No, wait. Did you run him over with your bike?”

“I curb-stomped him,” I say.

Hawk’s gaze whips to me, his eyebrows hiking up his forehead. “You what?”

Jaxon pulls up in his car and grabs tarps from the backseat.

“Did you just say you curb-stomped him?” Aiden yells, then hoots out a laugh. “The fuck did he do to deserve a death like that? You must’ve been pissed. I can’t believe I missed it!”

“Dude, you never get pissed off,” Hawk says in disbelief. “I mean, I’ve seen you annoyed but never—” He runs his hands through his hair and holds the back of his neck. With wide eyes, he stares at me like I grew two heads.

Jaxon drops the tarps beside the corpse and unrolls them. “We’ll need to get rid of your boots.”

I look at my feet and frown. “These are my favorite ones.”

Jaxon peeks at me from over his shoulder. “We’ll get you new ones, then.”

Aiden crosses the space and approaches me with a more serious expression. “Seriously, what did he do to get you to that state? Also, who the hell is he?”

“He was Madison’s fiancé, and he hurt her.” I look my friends dead in their eyes as I say that.

No more hiding. No more being a dirty little secret.

Hawk is the first to piece it together, his pinched eyebrows slackening as it clicks. Jaxon’s expression doesn’t change. It’s always flat or a scowl, but his eyes are always a dead giveaway. Maybe he’s known this whole time, and he finally got the confirmation and isn’t surprised.

“Holy shit,” Aiden breathes. “You really are fucking your sister.”

“She’s in there, isn’t she?” Hawk jerks his chin toward the house.

I nod. “There’s also another body in there.”

Aiden stabs his fingers through his hair and stares at me. No jokes. No laughing. No teasing. I expected all of that from him, and I’m surprised when he only gazes at me with a slackened jaw.

“Whose body?” Hawk says, breaking the tense silence.

“Jerry’s.” I glance at the front door. “We’ll need to remove it right now so Madison doesn’t have to look at him anymore.”

Jaxon stands from his crouched position and moves behind Justin's mangled head. He turns and catches my attention. "Then let's get this shit done so I can go back home to Dahlia."

That snaps us out of the weird moment.

For once in my life, I'm able to drag in a full breath and not feel like I'm choking. The secrets, longing for my little sister, Jerry's threats and abuse—those things no longer hang over my head like a dark cloud.

This will be the new beginning. Not only for me, but also for Madison.

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# EPILOGUE



## MADISON

### *“SCARLET TEETH” KAMAARA, KILL EBOLA*

My cheeks warm, and I flex my thighs to dull the throbbing in my clit as I weave through the dancing crowd in the cabin tucked in the woods. A song I recognize blasts through the speakers, the bass thumping through me like a giant’s heartbeat. It’s KAMAARA, one of Ryder’s favorite artists and his go-to when we ride together for the fun of it.

I’ll never forget the moment he introduced me to their music. He played the album in the background while he ate me out for an hour in our bedroom. I never thought Ryder could give head for that long. Nor that he could give me multiple orgasms until I begged for mercy.

It's safe to say, I'll never doubt his abilities again or listen to anything by KAMAARA without feeling the ghost of Ryder's tongue on my clit.

It's been almost two weeks since Ryder killed my father and Justin. Two weeks of finding a new normal for us, and getting used to living together as a couple instead of as siblings. In that short time, I can't count how many times he's bent me over every piece of furniture and whispered dirty shit in my ear while he used me like a toy.

For now, life is good, but I know there's more happening behind the scenes. Ryder doesn't keep any secrets from me, not after my father and ex tricked him so they could assault me.

He told me about the nameless riders who attacked him and his friends. While I took care of Ryder, his friends wrangled one of the riders back to their safe house so that they could torture him for information, but he's been tightlipped. I should feel bad, knowing someone is being tortured a few houses down from where I live, but I don't. The guys are still trying to find out who the other three are, and who cut off Hawk's cousin's hand. Ryder mentioned Aiden taking it upon himself to get the information. Until then, it's a waiting game.

While it's been nothing but crickets from the Exiled society, I'm still concerned they'll come after Ryder for killing a King, especially outside of Hellfire Night. Ryder keeps assuring me that he and his friends removed all traces leading back to them. He claims they know some people who are helping behind the scenes. I don't think I'll ever stop worrying about him being taken from me, though.

The Halloween party is in full swing, and the booze keeps flowing. More people show up every hour, each time surprising me. I didn't think Ryder and his friends knew this many people. They've always stuck together, closed off from everyone else, so I'm positive these are friends of friends of Aiden's.

I weave through the crowd with two red Solo cups in my hands. A girl dressed as a sexy mummy with half her face covered in gauze steps directly into my path, knocking into my arm and splashing the beer from my cup. The alcohol hits her bare arm. It's not a lot, but it's enough to earn a stink-eye from her, as if I'm the one who bumped into her and not the other way around.

I roll my eyes and keep walking.

*Whatever. She's not worth the fight.*

I cut through the cabin and slip through the open front door. A crowd lingers nearby, talking and laughing amongst themselves. A couple are sucking each other's tongues and petting each other like they're about to rip each other's clothes off and start fucking right here in front of everybody.

A shiver rolls down my spine as the fall's evening air cools my overheated skin. I descend the three steps on the porch and wander to where I last left my friends. I stop when I don't spot a flash of pink, green, or purple hair.

"Madison!"

I turn and squint. My shoulders relax and my smile beams. Dahlia, Olivia, and Nova wave at me, gesturing for me to join them by the bonfire. I make a beeline toward my friends, passing by a group of guys dressed as jocks with their letterman jackets. One turns his head toward me, his gaze dipping down my body, and he groans loud enough for me to hear.

"Goddamn," he mutters. "I'd pay that maid to milk me anytime."

I cringe and shoot him a nasty look over my shoulder, then keep walking.

His blond friend smacks him in the chest with the back of his hand. "Dude, shut the fuck up." He checks the area, on high alert, fear clouding his eyes. "Ryder is here somewhere. If he finds out about what you said, he'll—"

Whatever else he says fades as I join my friends by the fire. Yeah, the comment was gross, but the fear on his friend's face made it worth it. Ryder has made a name for himself. Everyone knows not to mess with him. Because of my relationship with him, people also know I'm off-limits.

"What're you grinning about?" Olivia squints and flattens her lips to appear like she's annoyed, but I know she's trying to hold back her own smile. Whatever I find amusing, she'll get a kick out of it too. It's part of the reason we're best friends.

I snicker and shake my head. "It's nothing."

I peer around, searching for Ryder and not finding him. The other guys disappeared as well, and I can only imagine what kind of mayhem they're up to.

"Mmhmm. Sure." She peers past me in the direction I came from.

*You can look all you want, but you won't get the answer you're dying for.*

I hand Dahlia the cup I filled with soda since she made a comment earlier about not wanting to drink alcohol because it makes her feel weird. She softly thanks me as she takes the offered drink and sips it.

“Have you heard from your aunt lately?” Nova asks.

My smile returns at the mention of Minnie. “She’s still sending me random pictures of her meals in Italy. Also cats. Lots of cats she finds wandering the streets.”

After Ryder left the house to help his friends get rid of Justin’s and Dad’s bodies, I called Minnie. It was early in the morning and I didn’t want to bug my friends. Minnie had always told me I could go to her, no matter the day or time. I needed someone to talk to, and she’s always been there for me.

It was hard, breaking the news to her about her brother’s passing. She listened to my whole story, and I didn’t spare any details, not even about how Dad seemed eager to rape me after Justin. By the end of the story, I was in tears, worried about her reaction. I mean, he was her brother, and sometimes people stick by their family even though they’re toxic.

She surprised me when she told me she was proud of me. I broke down, relieved she didn’t blame or hate me. In the middle of sobbing, I admitted I’m in love with Ryder, thinking this would be the one thing she would push me away for. Her response reminded me how I need to stop worrying so much about what other people think because these anxious thoughts lie.

The only person I haven’t heard from is Carolyn, and neither has Ryder. We think she tucked tail and left town to find someone else to marry for their money. It must scare my stepmother, knowing she’ll go right back to struggling to make ends meet. I think it’s the perfect outcome for her since she lost touch with where she came from. Sometimes I wonder if she tried driving a wedge between my stepbrother and me since the beginning.

“Aw, let me see the kitty pictures.” Olivia sidles up to me and holds her hand out for my phone.

I offer her an apologetic smile. “I don’t have my phone on me. Ryder has it.”

She raises her eyebrows. “What? Why?”

“Uhh.” I glance down at my outfit. The dress wasn’t made for function, so it lacks pockets. There’s so little fabric, I’m lucky I haven’t slipped a tit or flashed everyone my crotch or ass.

Nova snickers, and Dahlia looks me over with a tiny smile.

Olivia frowns and rests her hand on her hip. “That’s why God gave you big tits, Mad. You slip your phone between them and it’ll go nowhere.”

I scrunch my nose. “That’s not sanitary. I sweat a lot down there.”

Dahlia nods, agreeing with me about being cursed with breast sweat.

“Wipe it off, then.” Olivia shrugs, then gives me a smug look. “I’m sure Ryder wouldn’t mind helping you clean up. The man can’t keep his hands to himself now that you two are out.”

My cheeks burn with a blush. I’m not embarrassed about everyone knowing about my relationship with Ryder, but I still get butterflies in my stomach just thinking about him. “Okay, calm down, girl. I’ll send you the pics later.”

Olivia pouts but changes the subject. I don’t pay attention as I glance around the crowd, looking for a familiar head of dark-brown hair and piercing blue eyes.

Where the hell did he disappear to? He said he wouldn’t be gone for long, but that was thirty minutes ago.

“I’ll be back,” I mumble to the girls.

I crane my neck as I search the dancing crowd for Ryder. The music thumps and vibrates through my body, my heart matching its rhythm.

A man bumps into me, his hand briefly brushing against my arm in apology. I don’t spare him a look as I weave through the swaying and grinding bodies.

How in the hell did Ryder manage to disappear? The cabin is bigger than two standard-size bedrooms, but it’s not large enough to lose somebody in. He couldn’t have gone far.

I ditch my drink on a table beside the couch where a couple is making out, lost to the world around them as they heavily pet each other.

The current song switches to another KAMAARA single, and my body immediately responds as though I’m in my bedroom with Ryder’s head between my spread legs. The song’s deep bass and the singer’s gravelly voice thump through my chest and straight to my core.

Fingers trail through my hair at the back of my head, drawing me out of the spell the music put me under. I spin with Ryder’s name on the tip of my tongue. My shoulders slump in disappointment when I don’t find him standing there. No one is close enough to have done it.

Maybe this place really is haunted.

Shaking away the thought, I turn and wander into the hallway leading to the bedrooms. I open the nearest door and stiffen at the sight of a man with his pants pooled around his thighs. He jackhammers into a woman on the bed with her dressed flipped over her head. I shut the door and walk to the next, already reaching for the knob.

The tiny hairs on the back of my neck stand in awareness as a tall shadow creeps behind me. I start to turn my head to look at who's approaching, but the person covers my mouth and forces me to look forward again. I stiffen as he jerks me across the hallway into the shadowed bathroom. Candles provide the only source of light. Amber and cypress fill my lungs, and the familiar touch eases the tension from my body.

Ryder shoves me against the sink, facing the mirror as he looms behind me. He pins my waist with his hips while still covering my mouth with his hand. I meet his reflected gaze and arch my back to push against him, just to get a rise out of him. The candlelight reflects in his icy eyes, transforming his features to look more monster than man.

He groans and grinds against my ass, then leans forward until his painted lips are beside my ear. "Feel like screaming for me, sis?"

I grab the edge of the counter to balance myself and nod, my whimpered yes muffled in his palm.

"If I touch your pussy right now, will I find you wet?" Ryder drags his pierced tongue along the corner of my jaw, then moves up to my ear before he catches the soft lobe between his teeth.

Liquid heat pools low in my belly. I rub my thighs together to stop the ache in my core as he flashes me a knowing smile.

We both know I'm wet. He trained my body to respond to this music, like some messed-up, sexual, Pavlovian experiment.

I nod, unable to look away from his reflection in the mirror, afraid that if I close my eyes for a second, he'll disappear and I'll be left wanting.

"Use your words, doll." Ryder drops his hand from my mouth and cups my throat, his skeleton-finger tattoos more prominent in the low lighting against my fair skin. He keeps his grip loose, but it still sends the message. He owns me and my ability to breathe.

"Yes." I grind my ass against the bulge straining the front of his pants. "I'm soaking wet for you."

Ryder's fingers tighten on the sides of my throat. "Who are you wet for?"

“My big brother.” I bite my bottom lip and whine when he pulls his groin away from me. “Please fuck me, Ryder.”

“Fuck you?” His eyes darken, and he unbuckles his belt. “Or use your holes for my pleasure?”

My face flushes with warmth. “Use me. I want to be your toy.”

Ryder’s painted lips curl into a wolfish smile. He releases my throat and raises the bottom of my dress to pool around my waist. He frees his erection from his pants and swipes the pierced crown between my folds.

“That’s right, baby. You’re my favorite doll who will take every single inch of my cock. You know why?” He doesn’t wait for me to answer his question. “Because you’re *mine*.”

I cry out as he shoves inside me in one brutal thrust. Ryder groans and grabs me by the throat again to hold me in place as he pounds into me with punishing strokes. Every time he bottoms out, black dots pop into my vision and pain bursts in my core. The pleasure drowns out the uncomfortable feeling as he bruises my cervix.

Ryder squeezes my neck and snarls, “No one else can touch you. No other man will ever feel your tight pussy milking his cock.” He slaps my ass with his free hand. “Do you understand?”

“Yes!” My eyes roll to the back of my head as my clit rubs perfectly against the edge of the sink.

Ryder leans into me, his chest flat against my back. I slap my palm against the mirror so I don’t fall flat on my face as he puts all his body weight on me.

“I should punish you for wearing this outfit.” He bares his teeth at me in the mirror. “But that wouldn’t be fair to you because you look so goddamn edible. So I made an example out of a motherfucker who thought he could take what’s mine.”

My inner walls spasm on his driving cock. Ryder flashes me a sadistic grin, pleased with my reaction to his territorial confession.

“Scream louder, little sister. I want everyone here to listen to you getting fucked by your brother.”

I scream as my orgasm rips through my very existence. My ears ring, and colored dots dance behind my closed eyelids. My muscles lock and I tip forward only for Ryder to catch me before I bang my head against the mirror. He works me through the climax, whimpering in my ear and telling

me how much he loves me. As I float back, he straightens his position and holds my hips like handlebars as he uses me.

“Ready for me to pop your cherry again?” Ryder smooths his palm over my ass cheek.

I blink and barely manage to croak out, “My cherry?”

His gaze flicks up to meet mine. “Your ass, baby. I want to see it stretch around my cock.”

My lips part in surprise and maybe even a little fear. I may have used toys back there, but they don’t compare to Ryder’s size.

Ryder shoves two fingers into my opened mouth. “Suck.”

Pushing aside my worry, I swirl my tongue around his fingers to get them wet. He pops them out and probes my back hole with the digits. I groan and squeeze my eyes shut as he breaches the tight ring of muscles and sinks them until the last knuckle.

I’ve never felt so full until now. Feeling his fingers and cock inside me at the same time wasn’t something I’d ever thought would happen, but here we are.

“Fuck.” He bares his teeth, and scissors his fingers. “Such a tight fit. I can feel my cock through your ass, doll.”

He yanks his fingers and dick out of me, then notches the pierced crown against my back hole.

Ryder raises my hips to adjust my position before he forces the monster between his legs into my ass. A strangled yell slips out of me as he feeds more of his fat length in me.

His gaze flicks up from watching it all happen. “Breathe, doll. I know you can take me. Just a little more and the worst will be over.”

I suck in a ragged breath, then another. It burns so fucking bad. I swear I’m about to tear because of how much he’s stretching me.

Noticing my discomfort, Ryder reaches between my legs and rubs my clit to drown out the pain. He pulls out until only the head is left, then sinks back in until his hips are flush with my bottom.

“That’s my good fuck doll.” He strokes his thumb on my waist. “You were made for me.”

I shudder at his praise. I love how cruel he can be when we fuck but also how he can be so reassuring at the same time.

“Hold on tight.” Ryder eases out of me again, his darkened gaze glimmering mischievously. “Because I’m about to use you hard and fast.”

I scream as he slams forward and circles his hips against me. He smirks and does it again, gaining speed each time until he's fucking me into the counter. I widen my legs and balance myself with a hand on the mirror and the other death-gripping the edge of the counter.

His finger rubs my clit the whole time, working me toward another orgasm. Ryder joins me, whimpering and muttering my name as warmth floods my ass.

My arms and legs tremble from the force of my climax and give out. I slump forward and rest my cheek against the cool counter. My eyelids slide shut, and I focus on calming my breathing and heart.

Ryder stops moving and kisses over my shoulder and up to my throat. "You did so good for me, baby doll. I love you so much."

A tiny smile tugs at my lips. I'm too exhausted to open my eyes or even say anything. I hope he takes it as a compliment rather than an insult by my lack of words.

He brushes my damp hair away from my neck and kisses his favorite spot. My core clenches around nothing, and I groan as the embers of my desire spark back to life.

"No fair," I whine.

Ryder chuckles and nips the sensitive spot. "Don't care."

I crack open my eyes and shoot him a half-hearted glare. He smirks and pecks me on the lips, then pulls out of me. I shudder as his cum drips out of my abused backside. Ryder grabs a rag and wets it before he cleans me, then himself.

"I don't know if I can walk after this." I wince as I straighten and fix my dress back into place.

Ryder throws back his head and laughs, the sound rich and intoxicating. God, I love this man so much.

He crowds my space and tucks a lock of blue-and-brown hair behind my ear. "If you can't walk, then I'll carry you. Always and forever, doll."

I smile and loop my arms around his shoulders. He ducks and kisses me, not caring that he's messing up the Halloween makeup he spent an hour perfecting.

If he doesn't care, then I don't either.

Ryder slips his arm around my waist and tucks me against him as he kisses me like we only have five minutes left to live and he wants to make the best of it.

Being in his arms and having his attention on me is everything I've ever dreamed of and more. I worried for years that Ryder never saw me, when really, I've always been the center of his attention. I just didn't know it.

His promise echoes in my head, bringing butterflies to my stomach.  
*Scream, little sister, and I'll silence them all for you.*

This is only the beginning for us, and I can't wait to see what the future holds.

THE END

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Thank you so much for reading *Scream Little Sister*. I hope you enjoyed Ryder and Madison's story as much as I did while writing it.

Stay tuned for book three in the Little Sister series.  
Follow my socials so you don't miss future announcements.

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Christina, thank you from the bottom of my heart for sticking by my side all the years and helping me when I became overwhelmed with all the responsibilities that come with being an author. Having you as a friend has truly been a blessing in my life, and I never take you for granted. Thank you for the all the times you've talked me from the ledge and reality checked me. Having you by my side at book signings have helped me so much and made me feel safe while being overwhelmed by the crowds. You're my emotional support human. <3 I'm so sorry for always being an awkward noodle lol. Socializing can be hard for me, even on my toughest mental health days.

Sarah, I'm so glad we connected and became friends. Working with you on artwork for my books have been so much fun and touching—and, yes, even emotional. *I'm a crybaby, leave me alone.* But I'm always blown away by

how you bring my characters to life and how much care you put into the details. Talking on the phone with you while we illustrate is always a highlight to my day/night. I can't wait to see what the future holds for the both of us in this creative industry. I just know you'll go far and continue to be successful.

Thank you to my beta readers who have been a major help with tidying up this book's plot and characters. Your comments and reactions gave me the boost I needed to fight the imposter syndrome while wrapping up the story.

Thank YOU dear reader for picking up my book. I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for you, so thank you. I hope you enjoyed Madison and Ryder's story as much as I did. If no one has told you today: your hair is on point, you're a bad ass, and you're loved.

In memory of Kimmy Diaz. There isn't a day where I think about you and not cry.

If you're struggling with your mental health, please reach out for help. The United States suicide hotline is 988. If talking on the phone gives you anxiety, text 741741. Please know that you aren't alone and you're not weak for asking for help.

You're loved.  
You're wanted.  
You're needed.  
You're not alone.

Much love,

Willow McQuerry

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# 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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