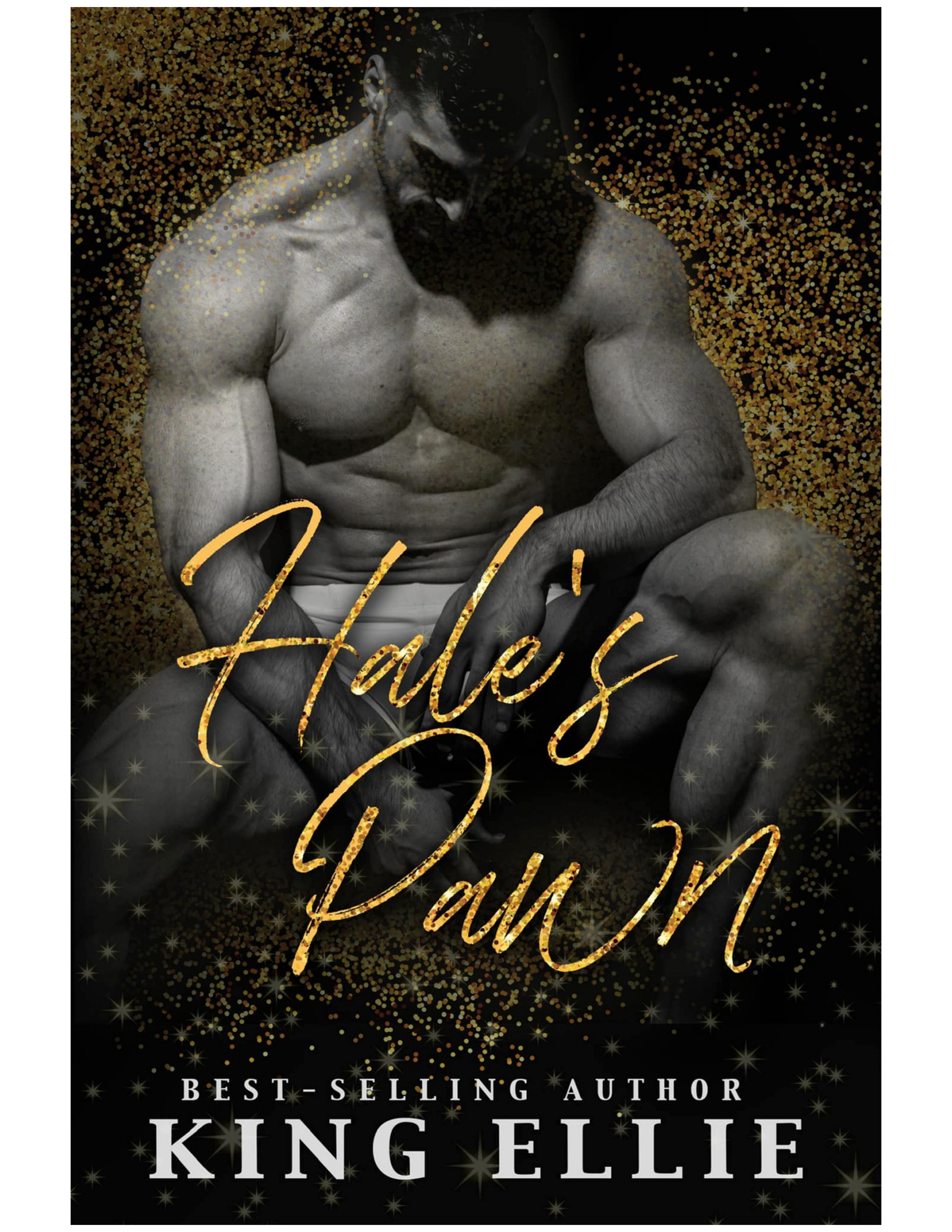




Fake's Pam

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
KING ELLIE

HALE'S PAWN

KING ELLIE

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PROLOGUE

AINSLEE

I MAKE my way towards the front of the bakery. I stop short when I see my dad sitting right there with Eli, at the same table. Everyone else in the bakery is going on about their day like nothing is happening, but my father is practically glaring at Eli.

I walk over to them with a café con leche and pan de agua for my dad. He looks up at me. “You look good, Ains. Haven’t seen you in a bit. How’s your influencer stuff going?” I stare at my dad as I take a seat across from him, wondering why he’s asking. He never usually asks.

“It’s umm... going good, I think,” I say. “So, what’s up, dad?”

“You’re getting married. This year actually,” he starts off. I look at Eli and then at my dad. Is there something I’m missing? My dad pulls out some pictures. “So, you’ve got Caerwyn Hale, Harley Hanlon, maybe even Bowie Hanlon or Oran Hale.”

“What?” I ask my dad. “I have a fiance, dad, he’s right here.”

My dad looks over at Eli and then back at me. “This is over.”

“Dad.” My heart skips a beat because I know he’s serious.

My dad cocks his brow. “You can either choose one of these men or... you know?” he winks at me and smirks at Eli. “It’s sad that these are the circumstances we’re meeting in. It’s nice to meet you, in some way.” My dad looks at me. “Wrap this up for me, will you?”

I say nothing. My entire body trembles as I stand, wrapping my dad’s pastry up and making his coffee to go. I turn away from the counter and face the wall, trying not to cry. I take a deep breath and turn back to face my father.

There will be consequences to this and I won’t have a choice. Well, I have choices. They’re just not the man that I want. My father walks out after I give him what he’s waiting for. After a minute, I walk out to follow him, without Eli on my trail. “Dad, what if I say no?”

My dad doesn’t look at me, but he speaks before he gets in the car. “Then he’ll be dead before I turn the corner of this street.”

I gasp and without even thinking about anyone else, I go for the one person that I feel is the safest bet and will leave me alone. “Oran Hale!” I yell. I shut my eyes as my father climbs in the Escalade and Mikonos drives him away.

What have I done?

ORAN

A couple months later

ANDRES BISHOPS SAUNTERS *into my office looking unbothered by the world. I look up at him and my brows furrow. “Hi, Mr. Bishops. How may I help you?”*

Andres sits down in the chair across from me and the brothers stand closer to the door. “Did your father tell you what has been decided, or did the fucker pretend like he’s too good to pass the message?” he asks.

“He told me I’m supposed to get married, but I told him I have no interest in it,” I answer. A smart businessman never lets the narrative be controlled by someone else. “Why? And does this have to do with the nature of this visit?”

Andres cocks his brow. “Let me break it down especially with what your...father seemed to leave out. You are going to marry my daughter.”

“What? I’m not interested, no offense to your beautiful daughter.”

Andres smirks and the brothers move quickly towards me. Markos holds a gun to my head and I blink. What is going on? I look at Andres and his eyes lose the calmness he had moments ago. “This is going to happen. Whether you or Ainslee likes it.”

“What if I say no?” I must be out of my mind.

“I’ll shoot you myself. You’re a businessman, a CEO. You know business. We’re cutthroat about what we do and we say what we mean.”

Without another word, Andres gets up and the door opens up for him, which means there’s more of his men out there. He walks out and the brothers follow. Mikonos turns to look at me and smirks, shaking his head as he leaves.

“Fuck!”

“THIS JUST ALL SEEMS WRONG,” I say to my best friend, Jagger. “Why the fuck do I need to do anything?” I shut my eyes, breathing in and out.

“First off, stop pacing.”

“I’m not pacing. I’m thinking,” I reply.

“Thinking about what?”

“Thinking about calling my sperm donor and cursing him out again. I still can’t believe this

bastard actually left that little tidbit out.”

“Oran, stop pacing,” Jagger says again.

“I’m not pacing. I’m thinking. Once again, there’s a difference.”

I can just see Jagger rolling his eyes at me, and I don’t even have to be present. “Dude, we both have to get married. I mean, do I like who I’m marrying? No, but am I mad? Not really. Think of it this way, at least she’s not fucking ugly.”

This time, I roll my eyes. Something that I don’t regularly do, but this moment deserves it. “Be serious for a second, you’re not mad that I’m marrying a girl you’ve liked for as long as I can remember?” I ask. “You’re my best friend and nothing comes between us.”

Jagger makes a sound. “Aww, I love you too. But nope,” he says with an extra pop to it. “Do I like it? Obviously not, but you can just tell me how it feels to swim in her pussy. I’ll jerk off to thoughts of that.”

I shake my head. “Pounded?” I repeat.

“I don’t take you as a silent, cry-after-sex type of lover so yeah... pounded. Give her a good fucking thrust while you’re at it.”

I can’t help but break out into a chuckle that’s cut short as my door opens and I turn to see who it is. Ainslee, as if summoned, pops her head in. She gives me a smile, one that looks genuine, but I don’t want to smile because this shit is fucked up. I can’t deny her beauty and how gorgeous she is. I stare at her for a beat and then I go back to looking out the window of my office. “Speak of the nugget,” I say to Jagger.

Jagger chuckles. “What is she wearing? Actually never mind. I’ve got my own future wife to think about. You still haven’t seen Karessa LeClaire, have you?”

“No.”

Jagger groans. “You’re missing out. She’s so damned sexy. Like my very own Rihanna. I plan on cumming in her umbrella, if you catch my drift.”

I sigh. “Anyone with a brain has caught your drift, Jag.”

I don’t get a chance to hear another word he says as Ainslee grabs me by my tie and she pulls me to her. “What are yo—?” I don’t finish my sentence because Ainslee crashes her lips onto mine. I drop my phone and pull away from her. I’m not mad at seeing her, more or less upset at the situation, but now I’m mad. “What are you doing?” I grit through my teeth.

Ainslee eyes me up and down as if measuring me for something. She doesn’t look away from me when she speaks. “Hold him down. I need to check our chemistry before this wedding shit happens.”

I glance at who she’s talking to and I see those two big motherfuckers, her brothers.

AINSLEE

I have never thought about having my own Superman, or rather, Geralt of Rivia, but fuck, look at

him. Mikonos and Markos hold Oran down and he glares at me like he wants to kill me. “What are you doing?” he asks. I can tell he’s controlling how loud he wants to yell at me.

“Testing our chemistry, I just told you that.”

“Why am I being held down in my own damn seat in my fucking office?” he yells a little louder.

I shut my eyes. He seems like a nice guy and I don’t want to do this, but I have no choice. I chose him because he was a better bet than anyone else. Jagger and I would’ve killed each other. I made sure to send him peanut butter and strawberry cookies just to prove my point. He called to threaten me and tell me that he hopes I choke on my champagne cork on my wedding night. I open my eyes again and look into those gray eyes, something we have in common. “You’re being held down only temporarily. They won’t hurt you. I just want to test something.”

Oran narrows his eyes at me and I take this opportunity to walk my ass over to him. I unbutton my striped dress shirt, revealing my lace bra and panties. I want to make sure that he’s attracted to me because this will go much smoother if he’s at least into my body. Oran doesn’t say anything but he does a quick one-two glance at my body. I notice that he lingers a bit the second time around. I take this distraction as an opportunity. I climb into his lap, making sure to place my pussy right over where his dick is situated. I slide my fingers into his hair and tug a little. Oran doesn’t give anything away, but I don’t need him to. I lean in close to his face and I lick his lips before kissing him. Oran’s body stiffens for a beat, but then as I grind my pussy on his pant-suit covered dick, I feel it grow harder and harder. He kisses me back hard, like he’s fighting me. I let a moan escape as he bites my bottom lip. Fuck, he’s taken over and I feel completely subdued. This isn’t what I was looking for. I just needed chemistry, not this. I shudder and I pull away from the kiss. I blink and stare at him but before I could say another word, he pulls one of his arms away from Mikonos, who I know wasn’t actually doing much. He cups right under my chin and I sway because of how much bigger his hand is compared to me. He pulls me in, kissing me hard and when he pulls away, my eyes are still closed. “Don’t fucking ambush me, nugget. I do what the fuck I want,” he says to me.

I sigh because I don’t want to even comment or dwell on how wet I am. I slide off his lap, fix my buttons, and walk out of his office without another word.

“You alright?” Mikonos asks.

“I think I made a mistake. He is not a safer bet.”

“It’s too late now,” Markos taunts.

“Fuck you both,” I say and they laugh at me while we get into the elevator.

I WATCH AS THE GUESTS, well... our families, sit down. My father, Elmer, is sitting smugly, like he deserved this invitation. Jagger elbows me. "You ready?"

I look at my best friend. "Are you?"

Jagger shakes his head. "It's not my wedding. It's yours." Jagger looks around, "Oh look, her character of an ex-boyfriend is here."

"Where? Wait, forget it, I don't give a fuck," I reply.

Jagger chuckles. "Mmhmm. You telling me that after she jumped your big ass you didn't think about throwing her across the room and fucking her silly?"

I glare at Jagger. "I didn't say that. I said I don't give a fuck about her boyfriend. Jumped me, my ass. She violated me," I say, knowing I'm hiding it.

"Violated you?" Jagger laughs. "Anyway, at least you're not ending up in a marriage with an ugly girl."

"Your obsession with ugly is just...wow. So outside of the boyfriend, what does she get out of this whole shit? I know for me, it was not having my fucking brains blown out." The memory of having a gun pointed to my head still pisses me off.

"Him." Jagger nods at Eli.

"Elaborate, before I call this whole shit off," I say, getting pissed off all over again.

Jagger shakes his head. "Calm down, asshole. I mean she did it for him. He gets to walk away scot-free and not get his head pummeled by one of the Bishops. You know what they're about when it comes to how they want their family to be."

"So, she what? Asked who was single on the Island?"

"No, her parents gave her the choice of picking which Founder's kid she wants to be with and she chose you. Apparently, you were a safer bet." Jagger snickers. "Safer bet, my ass."

"So, what? She sent daddy to do her bidding by forcing me into this?" A fucking little brat calling her daddy to do her bidding, that's what Ainslee is.

"Now, let's not pretend like her quote-on-quote daddy is just some simple man. This is Andres Bishops we're talking about. So yeah, she might be a fucking brat for sure, but she's the next-in-line

mafia brat.”

“I don’t care,” I say and I begin to walk away.

“Where are you going?” Jagger asks.

“To get my brat of a future wife. She thinks she’s made me a pawn, but what she doesn’t realize is that even though she’s a Bishops, she needs me, a knight, for it to be a checkmate.”

“My boy,” Jagger says and I don’t have to turn around to see the smile on his face. “Make me proud.”

I shake my head, walking away. All of a sudden, the cream-on-cream suit with the white dress shirt feels too tight for my big body. The black fucking bowtie needs to come undone. I tug at it for a beat, not caring if it does come undone. I walk down the walkway, which if this was a wedding I wanted to be in, would be beautiful. Jagger says his future bride Karessa LeClaire did all of this. The theme of blue and orange is beautiful and the fact that the sun is going to set as the ceremony starts should be a nice view, but the only view I want right now is shaking my future wife for using me as a pawn.

As I get closer, I spot Ainslee with her mother. I don’t really see Ainslee’s face, but her hair is straightened from the back and it’s long. It reaches mid-back. I don’t know what the front of her getup is like, but she didn’t do a traditional wedding dress. It’s a two-piece cream one that matches me to perfection. I can see a little bit of skin on her mid back, but only when she switches from one foot to the other. It’s a short sleeve lace-embroidered top with those fancy buttons in the back. It’s see through, but again, I can’t see much. The bottom half is a tulle type of material which makes her look both naked and not. I wonder what it looks like from the front? I shake my head because I’m losing fucking focus.

Before I can even take another step, her mother, Natasha Bishops’ voice carries to me. “Ainslee, now I don’t understand what would possess you to walk out with this atrocious dress. We have a reputation to uphold. Look at this bouquet! It’s literal trash. Throw it out.” Natasha Bishops yanks the bouquet out of Ainslee’s hand and throws it to the ground.

I can’t see Ainslee’s face or anything, but her shoulders are stiff and she doesn’t move. “Mom, it’s not that serious, it’s just a split and a dress. I don’t want to wear a ball gown wedding dress. That’s ridiculous. You know why I’m doing this and so does dad. Let’s not act like I wanted to do this. This is not my fucking fault, it’s yours!” Ainslee says strongly.

Natasha Bishops reacts with a smirk and she raises her hand, backhanding Ainslee. Ainslee stumbles a bit but she rights herself. She tucks her hair behind her back and puts it back into place. Her hair swishes over the peekaboo lower back and I spot some odd scarring, but I can’t see it all. I want to ask her about it but there are more pressing matters. I’m appalled by Natasha Bishops. Anytime I’ve met her, she’s been the perfect Founder’s belle, but what the hell is this about? I walk up and without saying another word, I grab Ainslee’s wrist pulling her with me.

“Wait! My bouquet!” Ainslee yells out as if she’s just now coming back into the moment.

“Leave it!” I demand.

“I can’t. It was made especially for me and I feel like if Karessa saw it on the ground, she’d hate me.”

I fight the urge to roll my eyes. “You’re not even friends, are you?”

“No, but it’s just wrong.” Ainslee yanks her wrist out of my hold, but I beat her to it as I walk back the short distance to pick up her bouquet.

Once I stand, I’m face to face with Natasha.

“Don’t grab my daughter to go anywhere when I’m talking to her.” I don’t like her tone.

It’s not only condescending, but it’s also disrespectful. I’m not lower than her, I’m her fucking equal on this Island. I stand tall and straighten my suit, closing the distance between us. “You may scare some other bitches on this Island, but you don’t scare me. This girl is not your daughter anymore after today. She’s going to be my wife and the next time I see your hand touching her in any way, I guess I’ll have to have a word with the same man who threatened me into marrying her. Mind your business when it comes to me and my wife!” I say the last word with both anger and animosity.

I walk back to where Ainslee is standing staring at me. She doesn’t say anything, she just looks at me. “Why didn’t you stop her from doing that?” I ask her.

Ainslee sighs, but she doesn’t say a word. Instead, she fully faces me. “Can you come down a bit closer?” she asks.

I roll my eyes this time and do as she asks, just for shits and giggles. She better not think I won’t bring it up, because I will. I want to know about the random scarring on her back too. Ainslee fixes my bow tie and I take her in. Her face is done up to perfection and what I’m even more astonished about is how Natasha Bishops has managed to slap Ainslee and yet there isn’t a mark on her face. I see the faint redness creeping from Ainslee’s neck and she lets go of me. “Here.” I shove the bouquet at her then I slip my free hand into hers and begin this shitty journey.

AINSLEE

My entire face is on fire, but I don’t show it at all. This is nothing new. My mother has always treated me like this. If I would’ve moved, it would’ve turned into World War 3. I sigh as the warmth of holding Oran’s hand runs through my body. I want to hug him for rescuing me, but I don’t need a knight in shining armor. I don’t need a single soul.

The photographer stands a couple of feet in front of us as he takes some pictures. “Mr. and Mrs. Hale, can you pose for some pictures?” I want to yell at him and tell him I’m a Bishops but right now, nothing sounds great. Oran and I pose like a couple that doesn’t hate each other. If I wasn’t so distraught, I’d compliment Oran on how sexy he looks. The light beard on his face, the way his hair is tapered to perfection. His hair is slicked back, but the front is coiffed to leave a bit of the longer hair in the front in its curly state. He looks like prime rib-eye steak. Ready for the tasting. Oran’s gray eyes

land on mine and I hurry to fix my face before he notices what I'm doing. He smirks but says nothing.

Oran eyes me up and down. He lingers on the split for a second. I open my mouth to defend myself but he doesn't say a word, instead he lets my hand go and moves me in front of him. I know it's for the pictures, so I don't complain. I feel Oran's hand as it slowly glides down my arm giving me goosebumps. He doesn't stop until he sneaks his hand into the split. I stand stiff as a board on purpose. Oran doesn't do much more but wrap his arm around my thigh. "Relax, nugget. It's just for the pictures. I wouldn't dare jump you like you did me."

I take a deep breath in and out. "Stop calling me nugget. My name is Ainslee," I reply.

I feel him shrug. "It's that or brat since you had daddy pick me for you," he says harshly. "Safe bet, huh? We'll see." There's an edge to his words, but my mind is hyper focused on the feel of his knuckle brushing up against the side of my pussy every time he caresses my thigh.

"Can you stop doing that? Let go," I grit through my teeth.

I feel as Oran leans down lower, right by my ear. "You're my wife, I do as I please with your body. Isn't that why you chose me? To be safe and boring for you? How safe and bored are you now?"

I shudder at his words. Oran straightens his big body, and on his way up, he grabs my ass. Before I can turn to ask him what he's doing, my mother walks by and she threatens me with her eyes. The little girl in me runs back inside myself and I turn off my emotions. *Don't ever show your enemies your emotions.*

Oran turns me around like we're freaking ballroom dancing and he tips my chin up with his finger. "You look at me."

I blink. *Huh?*

"So are you two going to stand there eye-fucking each other or...?" I turn away from looking at Oran and come face to face with Jagger.

I eye him up and down. Usually, I'd say something mean or rude, but he actually looks good. I can't pretend like I've never once thought about Jagger Hanlon. I have, but in the end, I want to choke him out and I don't care if he lives. Jagger whistles as he smirks. "Don't you just look one more inch of a split away from getting fucked."

"Kiss my ass, Jagger," I say with enough venom for him to leave me alone.

"Don't threaten me with a good time, Ains. I'll throw you out after, but it'll be worth it." I roll my eyes and Jagger laughs. The sound echoes through my body. *The fuck?* I glare at him for his audacity and slip my hand into Oran's. He flinches, but probably because he's not used to it. Whatever. I'm not offended. Oran has a smirk that matches Jagger's and I don't have to even wonder why they're best friends. Oran is quieter than Jagger for sure, but clearly, as I'm learning, he has his moments too.

"Let's get this shit over with," Oran states. He holds on to my hand and Jagger moves out of our way. He gives me one last glance over and hums in approval. I look at him, but it seems like I looked too damned long because I know the color of his eyes. I glare at him and look away.

When we walk into a replica of a botanical sphere-shaped garden venue, I look around. The guests are all sitting down at the round tables and I love how they don't have to stand like at a traditional wedding. It's beautiful, and as the sun begins to set, it makes me wish that this was for real. I'm so awestruck by this entire moment. I take a deep breath in and release another as I try my best not to cry over what I'm doing. Oran isn't the problem, everything else is. Me having to marry a man opposite of me in not only skin tone, but ethnicity as well. The Bishops' are known for mixing races and we've kept it going for a long time. It doesn't matter what ethnicity as long as it's done and you're not a pure blood, or for those not from the Island, fully black; doesn't matter from where. Which is funny considering that we never lose that part of us and we never will. It's an odd thing to understand and I gave up a long time ago trying to do all that. I sigh as the music plays while we walk down the aisle together. I catch a glimpse of Eli and I almost balk, but Oran doesn't give me the chance to stop. He doesn't realize that he just saved Eli's life again because Eli is sitting right next to my father, Andres Bishops, and at the same table as Markos and Mikonos. My father looks right into my eyes, maintaining eye contact, and I'm not stupid enough to look away first. I continue walking until he blinks, tilts his head a little and nods, looking elsewhere. I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. We continue walking. It's a soft nudge but I know what it means.

I sigh, shutting my eyes and I open them back up. I admire the walkway with the lighting. The wedding/reception is together in the same place. This is perfect for us because I want to get this over with as soon as possible. I might need a few drinks to get through the whole thing. Once we make it up to the altar, I hand my bouquet off to Lina, who is still upset because I didn't bother with the maid of honor status. There's nothing to fucking honor right now. Lina sort of snatches the bouquet from me as if I did something to piss her off. I don't pay it any mind and face Oran. It's like his attractiveness hits me every time I look at him. I blink, trying to shake it off and concentrate, but him staring right into my eyes makes me very self conscious. Why is he looking at me like that? Is that how intense my eyes look because of the color, or is it just him? Oran doesn't say anything but he grunts, making a hmm sound and my eyes widen. It reminds me of my favorite tv show, *The Witcher*. This isn't helping, especially considering the fact that he also resembles him.

"Can you stop looking at me like that?" I mumble as the officiant starts talking.

"Why? Does it make you uncomfortable, Ainslee?" he taunts.

"A little," I reply.

"Good. Let me do you one better," he says and moves in closer, not giving us any space. My eyes widen and I know better than to cause a scene, well... I should know better. I move back and Oran pulls me back to him. The officiant clears his throat and I stay put.

Oran doesn't look anywhere else but at me. It's too unnerving. I've never had someone look at me like this. I feel his hand wrap around my back and his fingers touch the peekaboo skin, but I stiffen because I don't want him to feel the scars. "Please ...don't," I mumble, pleading with him.

"Don't worry, I'm being safe," Oran says to me once again. I clamp my mouth shut.

THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE CEREMONY, I stared at Ainslee to make her uncomfortable as fuck, but then the longer I looked at her, the more I wanted to just keep doing that. I'm still irritated that she thinks I'm the safest man she could find, but you know what? I'm okay with that because now I've been given the opportunity to turn her life upside down in my own way. Ainslee's and my path seems like it would've never really crossed outside of the typical shit of parties but now she's directly placed in front of me. There must be something she needs to learn and I'd be glad to teach her.

After we repeated what the officiant said, we exchanged rings. Ainslee looks down at her ring finger and then back at me, then down again as she admires her ring. I'm not such a hateful bastard that I wouldn't at least ask Jagger's ass to find out her favorite color and engagement ring. Every woman in this world knows what ring they want and if they say they don't, it's a lie. Ainslee stares at her Rosée du Matin rose gold oval-cut diamond ring. She picks up my left hand to compare the two. It's an odd thing, but I watch her as she puts ours side by side; Rose gold to match. Ainslee clears her throat and lets go of my hand. I don't say anything, instead I just watch her.

When the officiant says that I may kiss my bride, I notice that Ainslee is trying to avoid eye contact with me. I smile as I grab her jaw and make her look up at me. I lean in and kiss her. At first, it seems innocent. Then she kisses me back and I forget that this isn't real. I let out a grunt, kissing her deeper. I feel her small hand on my wrist. I don't know if she wants me to stop or keep going, but I keep going. Ainslee melts into my body as she lets me devour her whole in front of everyone. If this was what they wanted, this is what they get. I let Ainslee go and she's looking up at me like she wants to fuck, or better yet, suck my dick. I lick my lips because I'd let her, even though I'm still fucking pissed at her and everything else.

THE RECEPTION DOESN'T SEEM to be too dramatic but I can tell that neither Ainslee or I want to be here right now. Pretty sure she wishes she could be with her ex, while I desire to just be left

alone. I'd rather be in my house all by myself more than anything else. The damn host announces that it's time for Ainslee and I's first dance. I roll my eyes and Ainslee grumbles under her breath. We both stand and walk to the dance floor. Ainslee stands there, trying not to look at me. The song begins and I pull her closer. The song starts and I cock my brow, trying to determine what song it is. "Salvatore by Lana Del Rey, my queen," Ainslee offers.

"Morbid as fuck," I say. Ainslee shrugs as some woman sings the song, but I clue in on how the song sounds like there's a sad undertone to it. It sounds different though, not a bad difference, but sort of like saying goodbye to something and welcoming another adventure. Weird. The chorus comes on and I look at her. "Sounds like loving and losing to me."

Ainslee opens her mouth to say something but I show her that none of us ever missed dance lessons. I spin her out and then pull her back in. She breathes in when she softly slams into my chest. I wrap my arm around her as I lift the other to continue dancing to the song that she chose. It's such a soft ballad that you forget everything else going on around.

AINSLEE

The song brings emotions I don't want. I know that it's wrong to choose such a song for your first dance and probably a bad sign, but at the same time, it encourages me to let go. To make the best of what I have right now. I chose Oran Hale even though he didn't choose me. I'm okay with that. I look up at him as he watches me and whoever hasn't fallen for him is a fool. Someone could get lost in his eyes. Doesn't matter how upset or grumpy he appears, his eyes are the window to his soul and I feel like in this tiny window of a first dance we have, there's something that I'm seeing. Something I can't say yet because it would be weird to break this moment. I take a deep breath, knowing the song is coming to an end. The lyrics *Salvatore can wait, now it's time to eat soft ice cream...* For me, it is simple. I have to let go of my Salvatore and move on with my soft ice cream. That's the thing about soft ice cream though, you're never too sure about what it will do to you. I doubt that my ice cream is actually soft.

The song ends and I'm the first to break away from the intense man that is Oran Hale. I turn to walk away but he pulls me back in and the rhythm continues to play on. The musicians are fucking killing me. I blink a couple of times, trying my best not to break, but fuck, this is too much. I need a second. "It's too late to run now, Ainslee," Oran says to me.

There's an edge, a sharpness to his words and it makes me shudder. Not because I'm afraid, but because it seems like there is more to it. Like the devil has wrapped its clawed fingers around my ankle and won't let go. "I wasn't going to run," I say.

"We'll see." The musicians end the song this time and we walk slowly towards our center table. My heart is pounding in my chest and I don't understand what is going on. Too much of this song, the staring, the confusion, the letting go. I shut my eyes, taking a deep breath.

“You need to go to the bathroom?” Lina asks. She’s sitting at the table with me, Oran, Jagger, Karessa, and her sisters.

I nod. “Yeah, I do.” I get up, not bothering to say a word to Oran or anyone else at the table. I’m sure they heard what Lina asked. When we walk down the beautiful walk-way that looks even better now that it’s darker outside, I can’t help but stop to take a look at it. The lights light up the walkway and it gives this whole illusion of a million little lights. I’m in awe. We continue on and walk down a different, sort of secret looking pathway leading to the venue’s bathrooms.

“Baby...” I could never mistake Eli’s voice for anyone else. I stop in my tracks. I take a deep breath in and another out. I turn to look at him. He moves towards me and I take a step back, “You shouldn’t have done all this,” he says to me with anger lacing his voice.

“You need to leave, Eli. Doesn’t matter where you go, but you need to leave,” I say firmly.

“Are you serious right now, Ainslee? You chose someone else over me and you want me to leave? You claim I didn’t fight for you, but did you not see me when you walked down that fucking aisle? I tried to make you look at me, but you didn’t. It’s not too late,” Eli pleads with me, making my heart break even more.

“Stop walking towards me, Eli. This is over. We’re over. Let me go.” I look at Lina who isn’t even bothering to help me. Instead, she’s staring between us both. “Lina, help me.”

Lina shakes her head, her straight bob moving side to side with her. Her usually pretty face forms into an *you’ve got to be kidding me* expression. “She’s right, Eli. You have to let her go.”

Eli turns to look at her. “What? How could you say that to me? You’ve been watching me go through it all. You’ve been there with me.”

“What?” I ask. “What does that even mean?”

“It means nothing, baby,” Eli says. “Lina was just being a good friend to me. She comforted me while we tried to figure out how to get you and me back together. That’s all.”

I shake my head. “I haven’t seen you in two months, Eli. I did my best and you don’t know how hard I’m trying right now. Don’t make this harder than it needs to be. Seriously. Just leave.”

Lina makes a sound. “Let’s just leave, Eli.”

I tilt my head, confused by Lina telling Eli that they should leave, like she’s not my friend. “Are you not my friend, Lina? What the hell do you mean by you leaving with him? You’re not with him, you came to be here for me.”

Lina’s mask falls away and everything is clear as day. “I came here to support Eli. I thought you were a friend for sure, Ainslee, but seeing the way you treat people... How you treated Eli when he’s done nothing but try to love you, that’s cold, and I would choose him a thousand times over you.”

I want to open my mouth and yell at her. I want to go off on her, but the gut punch takes over. I’ve never really had friends growing up because they were too scared to be my friend due to being Andres Bishops’ daughter. Yet, I became friends with Lina because she was cool and she didn’t care who I was, but now it’s all falling into place. Lina became friends with me after I became friends

with Eli. I didn't date him at first. Actually, I met him in high school, but we started dating just last year. I should've known better but, fuck, I just wanted a damned friend. Just one friend. One good fucking friend. Is that too much to ask? I shut my eyes, pulling myself together, channeling who the fuck my dad raised so that I could walk off with some damned dignity left in me. Nobody is ever going to treat me like shit again.

ORAN

“NOT EVEN 4 hours of being married and yet, you’ve lost your wife,” Jagger teases me.

I side eye him. I shake my head, trying not to snicker. “I didn’t lose her. Not like it’s hard to find Ainslee Bishops here.”

“Ainslee Hale,” Jagger corrects.

Karessa LeClaire, Jagger’s fiancée, coughs, choking on whatever it was she was drinking. Jagger leans closer to her and pats her back. “She okay?” I ask Jagger.

Karessa looks up at me and I look at her. She’s very pretty. Stunning even. Jagger was right, she does favor Rihanna. I break eye contact and stand to go look for Ainslee. She’s probably somewhere trying to escape this damn place and leave me to suffer alone. Yeah right. I’m not dealing with these damned people. I need a damn drink but I drove here like a fool. I walk away from the table and make my way towards where that creepy little walkway is. It may look cute to everyone else but for me, shit looks weird. Like a creepy, serial killer type of vibe. I hear voices and I don’t catch everything in the conversation, but clearly I keep running into people talking to Ainslee recklessly and I’m more annoyed that she’s letting them. Isn’t she the one with the smart mouth?

“You’d choose Eli over me, Lina? I’m your best friend,” Ainslee says and even though she’s trying to appear tough, that mask has already slipped away. I can see the tears pooling in her eyes.

“I didn’t have to try so hard to choose, Ainslee. You made it so easy for me. For us. Eli is everything and you’d give all that up for what?”

A tear slips out of Ainslee’s eye and she wipes at it aggressively. “You know why I had to, Lina.” Which indicates that she confided in her about the whole arrangement deal.

“Weren’t you supposed to go to the bathroom?” I announce my presence. Ainslee quickly wipes any evidence of tears from her face. Why doesn’t she want me to see them?

“I did,” she says and I know she’s lying. I narrow my eyes at her. One thing I hate is lies and liars, however you want to put it, and she just lied to me about the most basic thing ever. “Let’s just go back to the reception,” Ainslee says, trying to move away from her ex without touching him.

“Shut up,” I say to her. Ainslee looks up at me like a deer in headlights, then her face morphs into something deadly. I’ve never seen this expression on her face. She doesn’t say anything. She just

glares at me. “Eli, is it?” I address her ex. “Get the fuck out of here. I won’t say it twice. I’m going to pretend to be hospitable for the sake of not fucking you up.”

Reaching out and wrapping my fingers around Ainslee’s wrist causes her to suck her breath in but she says nothing else. I turn to leave but then I turn back around to look at the two snakes. “You and my wife’s relationship, be it friendship or whatever the fuck this is, is over. Lina, you’re pathetic. As for you, Eli, let me catch you making eyes at my wife again, bitch. She’s not Ainslee Bishops, she’s Ainslee Hale. Respect that shit or get put down.”

“Get put down?” Eli repeats, acting like he’s going to do something about it.

“Like a fucking bitch,” I say nonchalantly. I eye Eli up and down and then turn to leave, but before that can happen, Mikonos appears, practically out of thin air. He isn’t looking at us, but past us. The look in his eyes resembles Ainslee’s just a moment ago. He tucks his chin in towards his chest and he looks like a predator stalking his prey. I know that neither Lina nor Eli have moved. Mikonos takes one step forward as if in a haze and Ainslee’s hand shoots up, touching his chest. It’s like a switch goes off and if I wasn’t looking, I would’ve never noticed it. If you would have asked me, Mikonos doesn’t have any emotions, but clearly he does with Ainslee.

Mikonos smirks without looking down at Ainslee, he’s still looking past us. “I’ll kill anyone who hurts Ainslee,” he declares. “I don’t care if she likes you or loves you. I’ll let her hate me for the rest of her life but whoever hurts her will be six feet under.”

Ainslee says something to him in a language that I’m sure is Latin, meaning it’s not for any of our ears. Mikonos finally takes his eyes off the idiots behind us but then he directs them towards me. I can see his warning as clear as day but I mean, I’m not trying to hurt her. Shit, I was forced into this.

“Don’t move or do anything, Oran,” Ainslee says, as if she knows I was about to ask Mikonos what the fuck he’s looking at. “Don’t even speak,” she says calmly, a little too calmly. “None of you do a fucking thing.”

Ainslee grabs the lapel of Mikonos’s all-black suit and pulls him closer to her face, placing her forehead on his. It takes him a minute but then he fully snaps out of whatever trance he was in. His smirk transforms into a grin and he rolls his eyes over to Ainslee. They look at each other, communicating with their eyes. I’m tempted to ask about their familiarity, but I’m not picking up any tension or sexual tension for that fact. They don’t say or do anything. Mikonos is the first to pull away. He kisses Ainslee’s forehead and then he’s gone like he came. Silent as ever. Way too silent for me, especially as I watch him walk away without making a sound, even with his dress shoes. He must be where they got the silent-but-deadly definition from.

“Thank you for saving me, us, Ainslee,” Eli shamelessly says. Ainslee clears her throat, squares her shoulders and walks out of the walkway without speaking.

I follow her and she’s walking towards the reception but we need to get some shit down, so fuck that. “We need to talk,” I say to her.

I grab her wrist and she tries to pull back, “Let go.” Ainslee grits through her teeth as I continue to

go in the direction of the parking lot instead of the reception. Fuck it.

“You found your voice?” I taunt her as we get to my car and I let her go.

“I didn’t need you.” Ainslee raises her head up and looks at me.

I cock my brow. “Right and that’s why you were on the verge of tears?”

There’s a look in her eyes, one that I want to decipher because that’s just who I am, but she beats me to it. “Just leave me alone,” Ainslee grits through her teeth.

“Shut up and get in the fucking car.”

Ainslee glares at me and she takes a step away from me, like she’s heading towards the venue. I yank her back to me and lift her by her waist. I slam her ass into my car, grab her face with my free hand, and kiss her hard. Ainslee makes a surprised sound but she matches my energy as she kisses me back just as hard. Her hands find their way into my hair again, but this time I don’t care. I groan as I press into her warmth, getting some of my frustration out. The second Ainslee moans, I pull away and force her to her feet. I press the fob, unlocking the door. I open the passenger door and shove her little ass inside. I watch as her ass bounces and I smirk at her as she situates herself. She glares at me, ready to pounce, and I shut the door. When I get in the car, Ainslee narrows her eyes at me. “Don’t do that. Don’t sneak attack me and don’t push me into the fucking car.” The authority in her voice is fucking sexy but it doesn’t scare me. It simply turns me on.

“You chose me and here I am, showing you just what you wanted. You’re in my world now, Mrs. Hale. I make the rules. Deal with it.” Ainslee puts her seatbelt on with the dramatics and I peel off before she can even respond. The second I feel her about to say something, I speed up and not a peep from Ainslee is heard. We arrive at my home, away from everyone. “Get the fuck out.”

Ainslee sighs dramatically and I’m beginning to wonder if she does everything in a dramatic way. Like would she moan my name just as dramatically or can I make her scream it? We get out and I watch as her hips sway. For a small thing, she has curves. Curves that I want to see without clothes. I shake that thought out of my head as I let us into my home. I walk past her in the foyer as the lights come on. Ainslee stands there on her phone. “What are you doing?” I ask.

“Getting an Uber to go to a hotel so I can be left alone,” she answers.

I cock my brow at her and watch her for a moment. Is she testing me? I take the couple of steps towards her and yank the phone out of her hand. I lift my arm up knowing she can’t reach it even if she wanted to. “Where do you think you’re going?” I taunt her.

Ainslee growls at me and all I want to do is laugh at how funny that sounds. Ainslee charges at me and manages to climb up my body. I’m caught off guard for a second but then it brings out a dormant part of me that I didn’t put out there anymore. I groan and slam her back into the wall. “Give me my phone!” Ainslee yells at me.

“This is your home now, you fucking brat. Where else would you learn to be put in your fucking place?”

“Fuck you!” Ainslee says breathlessly, due to my body holding her hostage against the wall.

“Thought you’d never ask,” I taunt her. Ainslee manages to slide down my body and it honestly makes me hard so fast that it’s painful. I let her turn her back to me, which is a rookie mistake. I reach out, not even leaving the spot I was just in, and I grab her by the back of her neck. “You wanted to check our chemistry, right? So do I. Come get fucked.” I bring her back to me and push her against the wall.

I turn her around to face me. Ainslee swings, catching me on my chin and she doesn’t rest either. She only gets the advantage because she caught me off guard. I groan and grab her wrists placing them over her head. “First things first, don’t ever fucking hit me. Jagger and you had your little fighting thing and that’s that, but not here, wife.” I say it like it’s acid dripping from my lips.

“Don’t do shit to get knocked on your ass then,” Ainslee grits through her teeth.

“As if you could.” There’s this pull between us and I move in closer as she tightens her legs around my waist. “You want to fight me? Don’t use your fist, use your pussy. Ride my dick like you’re at war with me, but never put your hands on me again. Are we clear?”

Ainslee smirks. “That’s fine with me, I don’t need my hands. You’d love to tame me, wouldn’t you? I can see it in your eyes, Oran Hale. You think I’m some wild-ass fucking thing that needs to be broken down and made into some fucking belle. Well let me tell you now, I’m Ainslee Bishops, and nobody will ever fucking tame me.”

I chuckle. “You’re no longer a Bishops, Ainslee. You’re a Hale now. Oh, how the tables have turned...I don’t need to tame you, Ainslee. You’ll give in to me yourself without me so much as lifting a fucking finger.” I let go of her wrists and place her on her feet. I get on one knee and rip at the split. I groan at her because this flimsy ass material is telling me how quickly I could’ve fucked her before. She had nothing on underneath, just some weird shit covering her up.

“You talk a fucking good game,” she practically moans. Ainslee’s breathing hard and I can tell she’s turned on. I stand as she reaches for my suit jacket, opening it up and pulling it off me as much as she can. She fumbles with my shirt and then gives up. She moves over to my belt, gets that off, and pops the button open. The second the sound of the zipper hits my ears, I forget what the fuck I’m supposed to be doing. I don’t even bother taking my dress shirt off. I lift Ainslee up and kiss her hard again. Ainslee moans in my mouth as she presses her chest against me. I groan as I position myself at her entrance. Fuck, the warmth coming from her pussy is going to make me act like I haven’t acted like in a long time. I slip inside slowly and shudder at how fucking tight she is. I pull away from kissing her. “Fuck.”

I use the wall as part of my prop. I place my hands under her thighs and I bring them up on both sides of her upper body. She’s flexible. Good. She’s going to need to stretch again after this. I slam into her and her body rides up the wall. “No, no, don’t run from me. Come back here. Take this dick as a reminder that everytime you catch an attitude with me, this is what’s going to happen.”

“I...oh, oh god...” Ainslee throws her head back as I fuck her like a man with a mission. I’m frustrated, pissed off, and horny.

“You fuck up, you get fucked. Am I understood?” I whisper in her ear.

Ainslee moans louder this time. “No,” she defies me.

Placing my arms right under her legs gives me better leverage with my palms on the wall. I lean in, resting my nose in the crook of her neck. She smells like fucking vanilla and sweet cherry. I don’t even know how to get that combo together but I inhale some more. I thrust inside of her. In and out, not stopping until she answers me. “Yes! Yes!” she breaks into sobs. “Oh I can’t... stop, please, it’s too much.”

I grunt. “It’s not enough, Ains...” A nickname I’ve never called her before slips out and it's like a trigger for her because she cums. The lovely little purring sound she makes sends me over the edge too.

I don’t stop pumping until I’m completely spent. “Are you on anything?” I ask.

Ainslee hums. “Yea—, yes. Kinda late for that, no?” she says.

I haven’t slipped out of her pussy yet so I move my hips a certain way and she shudders. “Exactly,” I say. “Watch your mouth around me, Ainslee. I won’t tell you again.”

“I’m done,” she says breathlessly.

I chuckle in her ear as I bite her exposed skin that I can reach, “And I’m just getting started.”

AINSLEE

“MIKOS, COME PICK ME UP,” I whisper into the phone.

“I’m outside,” he answers.

“Okay.” I hang up.

I slowly crawl out of Oran’s walk-in closet, trying not to make a sound. I’ve had better escape plans. I can’t stay here. Oran Hale proved to me just how safe he isn’t all night long and although I’m exhausted, I didn’t sleep because everytime I so much as huffed the wrong way, he slipped his dick inside of me. In his words, it’s simply because of my audacity.

I roll my eyes as I stand once I make it into the hall. It’s still dark but the sun is going to rise soon. Oran’s shirt makes me feel like I’m playing dress up. I haven’t had the chance to go into the spare bedroom where all my things are. I tiptoe, but stop when I hear him groan. I swear he says my name in anger but then nothing. Is this man dreaming about putting me in my damn place? I don’t have time to react as I make it out of the house and run over to Mikonos’ black navigator. I climb into the backseat and he looks at me from the rear view mirror. “Do I need to bury anything?”

“No,” I answer.

He snickers and drives off, shaking his head. “You look like a fucking raccoon. Godzilla-ass bride.” I kick his seat while he’s driving and he laughs. “Hungry?”

I shake my head. I lay down, stretching out in the backseat. My chest is hurting again but I pretend it’s not because Mikonos will make me go to the hospital when it’s nothing, probably just stress. “Just sleepy. Wake me up when we’re at your place.”

ORAN

When I come to, I reach over to pull that midget next to me. I’m horny and her pussy is wet each time I slip in. I groan when I open my eyes and realize she’s not in bed. She better not be making me breakfast like we’re a couple. Ainslee Bish—err no, Ainslee Hale doesn’t really seem like an ‘I’ll cook and clean’ type of woman and if she is, she’s a stepford wife who will probably poison you slowly. That thought was courtesy of Jagger getting those cookies filled with everything he’s allergic

to. I snicker because I married someone who tries to kill my best friend every other week. I might need to put my foot down about that too and her stupid ass notion about me wanting to tame her into a belle. If I wanted a belle, I would've said so. I just simply don't think about anyone and now, I have no choice but to think about my wife. A girl who can take care of herself, yet at the same time, she really lets those who are close to her treat her like shit. It doesn't make any sense.

I move the sheets out of the way and set my feet on my floor. The warmth of it reminds me why I invested in warmed floors. I get out of bed and look around for the little shrimp. "Ainslee?" I call her name out, but nothing. I shrug. I tried. I change my direction and head for the shower. I jerk off in the shower, needing release. Next time, I won't go so long without getting my dick wet. It's never a priority but once I start up, I want to fuck it out of my system.

After my shower, I dry myself and do every basic thing I need to do. I go to my walk-in, ready to get dressed, and I notice my shirt that I wanted to wear for work is not where it needs to be. I narrow my eyes at the top half of Ainslee's dress from yesterday. I tilt my head. Now that I think about it, she didn't take that off at all. She managed to take her makeup off, but not this? Weirdo.

I get dressed and then I call Ainslee. Her phone rings but then nothing. Is she ignoring my phone calls? Mine? I don't think I've ever met a woman who ignored my phone calls...ever. And they never became my wife. I roll my eyes and press the call button again. It rings a couple times and then a man picks up.

"She's at my place," he says.

"Who the fuck is this?" I ask calmly.

"Mikonos. Who the fuck else?" the big asshole replies.

"So then why didn't you just say so, asshole? Phone etiquette works."

He chuckles. "You want my address or do you want to teach me phone etiquette? Come get your runaway bride. Be happy she's not eating Oreos."

"What does that even mean?" I ask.

"You'll figure it out. I'll text you my address from my phone so the next time you lose your wife, you can text me."

"I didn't—." My sentence is cut short because the big fuck hung up.

How the fuck does this man even conduct business with his shitty phone etiquette? My phone pings with a message from a number and there's an address. I save his number as *Big Asshole*. Ainslee likes to play cat and mouse but I'm not opposed to devouring the little mouse as soon as I get her in my grasp.

While I'm in the car, I get a call from Jagger. "What?"

Jagger laughs. "Did you get some pussy?"

"That's what you called me for?" I ask.

"No. I was going to suggest coffee but with the way you answered, I know you definitely got some. It's in your tone."

“My tone? How?”

“You answer like your balls finally got soaked in pussy juice. So tell me, was it just as good as I imagine it is?”

I hesitate to answer him. I mean, he’s my best friend and this conversation doesn’t usually bother me, but I don’t want to talk about my wife’s pussy. Wait... why don’t I want to talk about that shrimp? “Don’t talk about my wife’s pussy like that.”

Jagger makes a noise. “Ugh, don’t get all *I am a man, hear me roar* bullshit with me. You fucked her for one night, we can stop discussing this when you actually like her, dickhead.”

I laugh. “Shut up, asshole. Her pussy is good. Always wet. Happy?”

Jagger groans. “Yeah. That’s good enough for me. Anyway, where are you going?”

“The fact that you know I’m in my car just doesn’t surprise me anymore,” I say to him.

Jagger chuckles. “Like you don’t know what I’m doing right now.”

“Drinking coffee in the nude, leaning on your counter. Hope you drop the hot coffee on your dick.”

He snorts. “You forget, I don’t need my dick to please my woman. There’s so many other ways to fuck.”

I try not to laugh but I can’t help it. “Sick bastard but, yeah, I’m in the car and I’m going to pick up my wife. She tried the whole fuck and duck shit.”

“Sheesh. Where is she?”

“With the big fuck, Mikonos.”

“Damn, my boy, you scared her with your fucking, didn’t you? That’s what I like to hear. When you get her back, spank her hard and leave a mark so she can have a little trinket with her.”

“Sick fuck., I reply to Jagger, but he’s not wrong. I plan on spanking her and fucking her again, just to prove a point. She clearly didn’t get it yesterday. The more attitude she gives me, the harder I fuck her.

“Speaking of fucks... I gotta go get a nut. Call me later.”

I shake my head. “Yeah.” I hang up.

AINSLEE

I GET out of the bath after soaking for what feels like a long while. I've dozed off twice and I'd rather not die by drowning in a tub. My dad would just be so disappointed, on top of everything else. I sigh and climb out. I unplug the stopper and let the water rinse out. I climb into the shower, rinse my body, and wash my hair in the process. The fact that Mikonos has the same hair products as I do makes me happy. Then again, I've spent enough time here that he probably buys them because of me. I lather the leave-in conditioner into my hair and just put it up, not wanting to bother drying it. I'm tired. I grab whatever towel that's left in here since Mikonos didn't bother to hand me one. This little shit barely wraps around my body. "Mikos, do you have anything to eat and what the fuck kind of towel is this? It barely fi—." I stop talking.

"Hello, wife," Oran says as he stretches out on Mikonos's couch.

I turn to look at Mikonos while he eats his breakfast. "You called him?" I ask.

Mikonos shakes his head. "No, I didn't. He called you. Go home, little one. You know the rules. If Papa knows you're here..."

I shut my eyes and want to just yell. "Imagine me waking up, ready to fuck my new wife, and boom, she's gone. Wearing my damned shirt like she has the right to, nonetheless."

I place my hand on my hip. "I needed to sleep!" I yell back at him.

Oran smirks. "I let you sleep, but now, I don't think you learned your lesson when I told you that if you catch an attitude with me, I'll teach you how it works. Let's go. I'm going to fuck the attitude out of you."

I take a step back. "No, you've done enough."

Oran stands placing his hands in his pockets and he walks towards me like fucking sin on a stick. "I have to fuck you like my life depends on it, don't I?"

I say nothing because I know he's being petty. You put a gun to someone's head once and they never let it go. I take a deep breath when he gets closer. I hold on to the towel for dear life. I don't have to look away to know that Mikonos just got up and left his loft. "Oran..." I call his name out and he tilts his head, sort of studying me. Is it because I don't really say his name?

"Hmm..." That's all the warning I get before Oran tugs my towel off me. He stands there and

admires my body for a minute. His eyes linger on the scar where I got my heart transplant when I was a baby. His eyes take me in and there's a hungry look in them that travels all the way from my toes to my scalp. "Get dressed and meet me outside, Mrs. Hale," he says with a warning lacing in his tone.

I don't say a word as I slowly walk back into the bathroom without turning my back. Oran looks at me, not breaking eye contact until I bump into the bathroom door. I slip in and look around for the shirt. I put the dress shirt on and when I get to the second to last button, the door slams open. "The hell?" I turn towards the door.

"I changed my mind," Oran says with a shrug, like he's bored. "Bend over the counter."

"I need to sleep," I say, but fuck, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't turned on by the authority in his voice. I'm used to seeing Oran talking with Jagger, laughing at the shit Jagger says, and co-signing it, but he's talking to me now.

"I'll put you to sleep," he says as he removes his suit jacket and unbuttons his dress shirt, removing both and hanging them up on the hook by the door. "Come. Here," he commands and my feet take a couple steps, but then I catch myself.

I suck in a breath when Oran removes his undershirt pulling it over his head. God. I don't remember if I've ever seen him half naked this close up before. I don't know if I'm even breathing as I take him in. This man puts in work and he's what I'd always say to my viewers. *Thick. Thick.* He's a thick-muscled man with chest hair. I shudder as he watches me while he unbuckles his belt, pops the button, and unzips. Oran reaches into his black boxer-briefs, pulling out his dick. I whimper. Fuck this man is perfect. "I..."

Oran starts to stroke his dick and I completely shut up. I'm not some sex vixen or anything like that, so I don't understand how this is so sexy and appealing to me. Is it getting hot in here or is it just me? "Come," Oran says one more time.

I don't even think this time, I get closer to him and he acts fast. He turns me around and bends me over the sink counter. My legs hang off because it's fit for Mikonos' height, not mine. Judging by Oran's grunt, he seems to agree with the height boost. He lifts my ass up and I arch, coming up on my knees. Oran slips into me and I feel like I'm being ripped apart in a good way. I bite my bottom lip and I make the mistake of looking at him in the mirror. Oran's eyes shine with mischief as he stares at my ass, fucking me. I shudder as I place my palms on the mirror and I join him.

Oran grins and he looks up at me oh-so-slowly. My chest pain increases and my eyes flutter. God, I feel like he's trying to break his new toy in and it's delicious. I hang my head and get lost in the moment. It feels like I'm on a high that I don't know how to come back down from. Oran starts to spank me while fucking me and tears pool in my eyes. I don't hate it. In fact, it makes me feel alive. Like I'm part of reality now. I moan. "Yes, oh damn it. Yes. Hale. Fuck."

Oran chuckles without missing a beat. "Hale huh? Well then, Ains. Check fucking mate." I know what he means. He was a pawn, but now he's letting me know that he's just checked the king., me, and I can't move unless he does. He thrusts once more and I cum hard. Fuck. Me.

ORAN

I LOOK OVER AT AINSLEE, she's passed out. I told her I'd let her sleep. I get out of the car, slamming the door, but she doesn't wake up. I sigh. I walk over to her side and get her out of the car. This girl barely weighs a damn thing in my arms. The weights that I bench are heavier than her. I bring her to the only place where there's a bed, my room. I drop her on the bed and all she does is groan, but she rolls over while sleeping. I study her for a beat. My shirt swallows her up, making her look like she's playing dress up. I narrow my eyes at her because I know now that she's a damned flight risk. I take a good look at her. Ainslee isn't unattractive or anything. She's beautiful as fuck, but she's not my usual type. My type is usually taller so that I don't have to fucking bend down to talk to her face to face. She's so fucking little.

I let her sleep and I change my clothes to something more appropriate for staying home. I'll work from here instead.

As I take my clothes off, I smell her all over me. Now I get where she gets that damned vanilla and sweet cherry scent from. It's her shampoo or something and now it's all over my fucking clothes. I remove the clothes, placing them in the basket for my maid to take to the cleaners as soon as possible. I lift my t-shirt up, ready to remove that as well, but I smell it. I inhale deeply and exhale. Hold on? What the fuck am I even doing? I change out of that and put on running gear. I walk over to my room and I lock Ainslee inside since she's hard of hearing.

RUNNING WAS the smart choice because now that I'm back, I'm very much less annoyed, grumpy, and horny. Usually, when I want to get my dick wet, as Jagger would say, I'd cross over to the States to avoid bullshit, but now I'm married and have access to unlimited pussy. If Ainslee didn't want to fuck, she'd say it by now. I think she enjoys the push and pull. The fact that she came to me when I called her a second time, she deserved to get fucked good enough to sleep. The house is fairly quiet, like I'm used to it being when I'm here by myself. I walk to my room, unlocking it, but Ainslee hasn't woken up. She's moved from the position she was in at first and now, she's more on my side. I go

check on her. “Ainslee... Ains?” I place my hand on her back and she jolts awake.

She turns away from my touch like I just did something inappropriate to her. What the hell? Her eyes are wide and she stares at me for a moment as if she doesn’t know who I am. She blinks a couple of times and then I see recognition in her eyes. “Sorry,” she apologizes. She looks around the bed sitting up. “Did I fall asleep in the car?”

“Yeah. Why did you just do that?” I ask her.

“Do what?” I may not know what Ainslee’s tells are, but this is easy to see. There’s something about touching her back that she doesn’t like or something. I’m a businessman and I can tell when someone grows uncomfortable. It’s my job to make a room uncomfortable when it needs to be, but that’s not what I’m trying to do here. If I’m going to be married to this woman, then we need to figure out our common ground. Not today, but when it comes time to.

“Look, I’m going to say this once. I don’t like lies. Don’t fucking lie to me. You didn’t know that before, but now you do, so take that shit to your grave.”

Ainslee stares at me. “If that’s what we’re going to do then I don’t like being yelled at. Just don’t yell at me and everything is fine. You don’t yell and I won’t lie. Deal?”

“Whatever,” I say and begin to walk away.

“Uh, question, are all my things in the other room? I need to do my job and check on things,” Ainslee says.

I look at her, cocking my brow. “You work?”

Ainslee looks offended. “The hell? Of course, I do. I own Margot’s French Press and I work my ass off with my online business.”

I stare at her for a second. How did I not know that she owned Margot’s French Press? “Hmm, interesting. Anyway, your things are in the other room but your bed is in here. Are we clear?”

“Crystal,” she says and moves up the bed.

I shake my head and head for the shower to get my day started.

AINSLEE

After Oran goes to shower, I get out of bed. My entire body is in some weird, blissful soreness. I don’t hate the soreness, to be honest, I just am in a tight spot right now. If I’m not careful, this man is going to stretch my pussy out for fun and I won’t have a choice but to always remain with him. Or worse, he’s going to fuck me so good and well that I’ll follow him around like a lost puppy. I could already see it happening to me. He’s like the perfect, life-size bear that I could snuggle up against. I shudder at the thought of cuddling when that’s the last thing I want to do.

I head into the room and my eyes widen at his boxes and the lack of furniture in the room except for my plush, white couch. My desk is the only thing Mikonos set up. What an ass, but the rest of my equipment is in a box and so is everything else. I sigh at how much room I have, but I have to figure

out what to do with the space. Thank God for the backdrops that I have with me and the new ones I ordered. I enter the room, shutting the door behind me. I change into one of my many shorts and cropped sweater outfits. I go for the teal one. This one has cinched sides on the shorts. I braid my hair into a french braid and the first thing I do is set my camera up, my iMac, and then my speakers. I start the music in the background as I press record on the camera. I pause the music and begin to tell my followers what I'm doing; setting things up in the room. I smile at the camera and show my outfit as well so they can see what I'm wearing. I press play on the music again, letting all the songs just play and I begin to do what I need to do.

I lose myself in my work, not really hearing anything as I finish up for the day. I look around the room, I can do a part two tomorrow or something. So far, it isn't bad. The walls are all white but my computer station is there, giving it a bit of a modern vibe. My makeup station is set up parallel to it so that if I have to turn to it, it won't take me long; it's entirely glass and all my things are in there. My ring light is strategically placed right behind the other camera that's set up to give me different angles. I go over to the camera I set down. I pick it up and do a once over turning the music down low for ambience. "Okay guys, so this is day one of setting up this new area that I will be filming from. I will put the description in my bio of this video for the white plush carpet, I know I've seen the comments asking where I got it. I didn't do anything crazy, like spend thousands on this. It's affordable. This glass desk is a bit on the expensive side but we can work with a promo code for y'all, I'll get that figured out. My desk, my iMac, and the Pro are all the same. I didn't upgrade because I don't need to just yet. Finally, there is the coffee and chill place; the glass coffee table and the plush white couch. Trust me guys, it's worth setting it up. I can't wait to break it in! Oh! Before I forget," I say as I turn it towards me. "I will be doing a giveaway for the kabuki brushes that I had last season since the new ones are dropping soon. I will include a new one in there because, duh! But you know what to do; follow, like, and subscribe to this channel. Also, follow me on Instagram, leave a comment and let me know where your favorite vacation spot is and what kind of makeup look you love going for! Oh! I almost forgot guys, lipsticks... I'm not wearing our new red lip today but I did wear it for my wedding day. I will be posting pictures as soon as I get them back! I didn't forge—,"

"Who the hell are you talking to?" I hear Oran ask me. I face him and he's looking at me like I'm crazy. "Are you filming yourself just talking? What the shit?"

I snicker. "I'm a YouTuber, dude."

"YouTuber?" he asks.

"Yeah. Like I have a channel and stuff. I post makeup tutorials, tips and tricks. I also promote my brand, *xosexee*."

"That's your brand?" he asks.

"Have you been living under a rock? What the fuck do you think I've been doing?"

"Honestly, asking your daddy to put guns to people's heads." He shrugs.

"My God... it was one time, Oran. Once. I'm sorry, okay? When are you going to let it go?" I ask.

“Never,” he answers without hesitation. He licks his lips as he eyes me up and down, lingering in the doorway.

“Is there anything else I can help you with?” I ask. “I’m kind of the type of person that likes to be alone. You seem like you’d understand.”

There’s a strange look on his face and he opens his mouth to say something, but he changes his mind and walks away. I sigh and I realize that I didn’t stop recording. I’ll just edit that out. I lift the camera and do my signature goodbye with a kiss and a wink. I walk over to my desk area and fire up the desktop. I sit down and begin loading the video to my computer. Not even 10 minutes later, the door is opened. I look up from my video, pausing it. Oran walks in with his laptop and other shit. He walks over to the coffee table area and sits on the couch. I stare at him as he sets his shit up and he continues to work like he didn’t just walk into my space. Oran looks up at me. “Yes?”

I can feel my brows creasing. “Why are you in here?”

“I live here,” he answers nonchalantly.

I roll my eyes. “In this room. You have a study, no?”

“I do, but doesn’t mean I can’t work from somewhere else.”

“But I wanted to be alone,” I say. “I always do this alone,” I emphasize.

“Good to know. Now, continue what you were doing. I’m busy,” he replies. I let out a frustrated noise. I get up to walk out of the room. “Where are you going?” he asks.

“To the kitchen. I need a drink.”

“Ah. Bring me some water, thanks.”

“I’m not your maid.”

He looks at me smirking and licks his lips. “No, no you are not. You’re my wife who is a businesswoman just like me, so you value time. Hop to it, bun.”

“Bun?” I repeat.

“Yeah. You remind me of Lola Bunny from Looney Tunes and she always called Bugs, Bun-Bun. It was annoying as fuck, but cute.”

Did Oran Hale just insult me and pay me a compliment all in the same breath?

AINSLEE

TODAY IS MY LAZY DAY. So waking up early is not the move. I yawn my way through the quiet house with my EarPods in. I hum along with Snoh Aalegra as she sings her song Dying 4 Your Love to perfection. Oran is most likely already at work, so it gives me some more time to adjust to being here. It's new and not new for me, only because after my dad instilled in me that this was it, I came to terms with it. Sort of. I can't call Oran my roommate because that would be a lie since roommates do not have sex. I contemplate what his title would be as I decide which K-Cup I want and check my business email. After doing so, I look around for my favorite to-go mug, but it's not here. I could've sworn I packed it. I made sure I—err, Mikonos packed it. I switch over from my emails to text, but the ever-present nosy man, Mikonos, texts me first.

Mikos: I packed it and it should be in there. Don't even harass me this morning.

Me: But did you pack it, though?

Mikos: Did you?

I lift up my middle finger, flipping Mikos the bird because I know there are private cameras around. I roll my eyes and switch back to the important things as I grab the next mug in the cupboard. I make a bagel with cream cheese while my coffee is brewing. After my coffee is done brewing, I grab almond creamer and then head towards my office. Because I'm not filming and just editing, I didn't bother to pick out an outfit. Instead, my dark green lounge shorts and a tanktop with no bra works for me. My hair is braided into two flat braids just so that they stay out of my way.

My husband-roommate is the first thing I see when I step into my studio. I take a good look around and narrow my eyes at his set up. He has added a fucking desk to work on, opposite of mine. This man is never out of his office, why is he here again? "So, you're not working at your office because...?"

"Because my wife has an attitude and the desk space that I need, so there's that." He shrugs without looking up.

I throw up a middle finger and march towards my desk. I set everything down and pretend like he doesn't exist. "For me? You shouldn't have," Oran says as he reaches for my bagel. He grabs it and practically devours it before I can speak. He lifts up his coffee and my eyes widen at my favorite to-go mug.

"You have got to be shitting me. Oran, there are so many cups in your cupboard, why do you have to take my favorite?"

His brows crease. "You said I could."

"When?"

"This morning. You specifically said it's your good luck charm," he answers.

"I don't believe you," I retort.

"You also called me Zach Morris." He glares at me.

I giggle. "Oops." I stand. Oran doesn't say anything as he continues to sip his coffee. His eyes have left mine and are now glued to my chest. "Stop staring, you're just going to make them hard for no reason. I have work to do."

Oran puts the mug down and smirks. "I do too, but they're practically begging for me to say good morning since you didn't," Oran accuses me. He peers up at me for a second and then he looks at my chest again. This time, my nipples truly peak at his attention. "Like fucking clockwork, baby. Come here, I'll make taking your favorite mug up to you and you can let the girls say *morning, Mr. Hale*."

I step closer to him and wait for him to turn his desk chair around. I slide into his lap, straddling him. He may get on my damn nerves, but the man is good with his tongue. "Say good morning, Mr. Hale. They're so ready for you." I practically shove them in his face which was a mistake because Oran is not to be challenged.

ORAN

THE NEXT DAY, Ainslee still doesn't beat me to her studio and it makes me smile because I've managed to steal her favorite mug again. It's not even hers anymore. By the time she wakes up, I'm already deep into my work. It's not late, but if she wants to beat me, she has to be up before five in the morning. I'm a businessman, we value time and time is money, baby.

When Ainslee enters the room, she stops for a second but then she walks over to her area. I can see from the corner of my eyes that she's going to do something mischievous. I shake my head, just waiting for it. Ainslee sets up her camera in the corner, where you can't really see much of me. She presses the record button and then she walks over to her desk area and music blasts through the speakers. I look up at her as she glares right back at me. She bobs her head then shimmies her shoulders, gaining a half smirk from me. Ainslee winks at me as she goes to work finishing up whatever the hell she didn't yesterday. She's wearing some lounge shorts combo like yesterday, but this one is all white. Her furry white slippers make me shake my head because this really is Andres Bishops' daughter. Anyone who sees her won't think she's that dangerous, especially with her little outfits.

A chuckle escapes my mouth as the next song comes on while she's jumping, trying to put up a frame of herself. I get up and walk over to where she is. I grab it out of her hands. "Where do you want it?" I ask.

Ainslee moves back a bit as she stares at the wall. "Higher, in the middle."

"Any others?" I ask her after I put that one up. Ainslee hands me two more frames and I put it up, sort of like a picture collage. I do as she wants, then I move back, making sure it's exactly where it needs to be. I want to admire how precise I can be but that's not as important as these three pictures. They're sort of like a boudoir shoot. In the first one, Ainslee is much closer and staring right into the camera with a red lip while her hair is pulled back, probably in a ponytail or something, I can't tell. In the second picture, you see more of her. She's sitting on a leather chaise with black heels and is nude as hell with her legs open but her hand strategically placed over her pussy, so you can't see a thing. Her arm is over her breasts, covering her nipples. She's giving a sexy look, one that could rival other models. In the last one, she is straddling the chaise with her head thrown back. Her hair is

straight and down to her butt in this position. You can see the outline of her body but you can't fully see how nude she is, except for her ample ass cheeks.

“Admiring art, Mr. Hale?” she says to me. I reach out and grab the middle frame, taking it off the wall. “What are you doing?” Ainslee asks.

I don't answer her as I leave the room. Ainslee follows me all the way to my walk-in where I put the picture up. “Now, learn to not question where I place things in my house.”

Ainslee snorts, mumbling under her breath as she walks away, but I hear her words. “Just say you like the picture, asshole.”

“What did you say?” I ask quietly, sneaking up on her from behind.

Ainslee spins on her heel and she stops herself from whatever she was about to do. “Oran! Stop sneaking up on me like that!”

I smirk. “Or what?”

“Let's spare you the details,” Ainslee says. “Don't you have work to do?” Ainslee rolls her eyes and turns to walk away. This earns her a quick smack on her ass cheek.

“ORAN!” she yelps, as if it hurts. Dramatic ass.

Before she could say another word, I rub it. “See? All better, Now, I want to say good morning to my girls since you just keep forgetting to say it.” I spin her towards me and lift her, placing her on the closet island. I lift her top and say good morning. Hopefully, if I keep going like this, she'll defy me some more so I can figure out different ways to catch her slipping. I like this.

ORAN

THE REASON why I'm in here over the next couple of days while Ainslee does her video editing is to simply let her know that I do what I want. That and the fact that she doesn't have the good manners to say *Good morning* to me. Not only that, but each morning that I'm in here, I've found different ways to say good morning to Ainslee, my stubborn wife and her loving body. Each body part for a different day. Who knew a man of my caliber simply had to get his dick sucked before looking at paperwork for the workday to just run so damned smoothly? As smoothly as she takes me into her mouth, in between those luscious fucking lips.

I shake my head, trying to not think about pleasuring my wife, or vice versa. If she wants to be left alone, well... not gonna happen. I never thought much about those things, but now halfway watching her do it, I can admit it's fascinating. I've set up a makeshift office here. My desk is right across from hers, just because she told me to leave her alone. If she wants to be left alone, well oops, should've never married me. I would've let her be if she didn't insist on being alone.

I tune her in and try not to jump my wife while she's in the middle of doing her videos. Ainslee is recording about her makeup brushes and talking about the different ones. Honestly, my question is why are there so many? Ainslee sighs and looks my way. "You've been making a sound every time I pick up a brush, you could just, I don't know, go to your own study? Or better yet, your physical office."

I smile, knowing it'll throw her off. "I could... but then again, that's not how couples spend time together."

Ainslee glares at me. "I thought you were the silent one."

"And I thought you were a lazy-ass brat. We all have our misconceptions."

"Oran!"

"If you don't want another reason to be saying my name that loud, don't do it again," I warn her.

I can sense the shift in the room from just the look in her gray eyes. I think hers have speckles of brown in them. They change color in the sun as well. Leaning towards a more brown than gray. Does she know that? Ainslee opens her mouth to say something that I know might get her spanked, but my cell rings. I look at it and it's Jagger video-calling me. I pick up and I lift my forefinger, giving

Ainslee the universal sign for one second. Ainslee flips me the bird and I grin. I'm going to enjoy taming her. "What's up, asshole?"

Jagger smirks. "Guess what I just found on my Facebook!" Jagger says.

"Facebook?"

Jagger makes a face. "Don't ask. I had a point to prove, but anyway, a memory came up from when we went to that *Unknown Elites* dare game shit. You remember that one?"

"Hmm... I don't think so. Send me the picture."

"Sent."

I look at the picture. "Shit. Now, it's coming back to me. That night was fucked up. To this day, I don't know how my drink was spiked."

Jagger snorts. "Mine was just fine. There's another picture I took with that bird bitch."

"Who?"

"Lina," I snort while Ainslee looks at me with curiosity.

"If you want to see, come look at it yourself instead of staring at me for an answer," I say to her. Ainslee sighs but she stands up, coming over in what I've noticed is her at-home lounge wear. This time, it's a dark blue satin shorts and shirt combo. She comes near me, but not close enough to look at the picture. I reach out, pulling her to me and I sit her right in my lap. "See?"

Ainslee doesn't realize that she's relaxed already. "Oh. Huh, I'm pretty sure I was there but by the end of the night, shit got fuzzy."

"Oh hiiii, Ainslee," Jagger calls out to her.

I can see how that affects her. Goosebumps break out on her exposed skin. Huh. That's interesting. Does Ainslee find Jagger attractive? "Jagger," she answers back.

"Oh, come on now, you can do better than that," Jagger teases. I know when he's being a flirt and this is one of the times. I'm not worried, it's sexy to watch how Ainslee is squirming on top of me because of it.

I tap back to the video, knowing that Jagger is probably nude and that Ainslee doesn't know that. Jagger sees her face and he smirks. He moves his phone back a bit just to show off and I lean in, brushing my nose in the crook of her neck. "You smell good," I say to her. Ainslee breathes in when my hand slips under her shirt, but I make sure not to linger on her back, because from what she did last time, she's not a fan. I caress her skin. "Open," I command.

"Oran..." she calls my name on a breathless whisper.

"Shut the fuck up and do it. I know you want to, plus I'm just saying good morning once again since you haven't learned to greet me." I flick her earlobe with my tongue.

Ainslee shudders and opens up for me, placing her legs over mine. Another rookie mistake. I dip my hand into her shorts and I bite down on her shoulders. *Does this girl ever wear panties?* She's already wet and ready. I play with her clit, then I stop. She relaxes a bit and I start to finger-fuck her. I fuck her hard, knowing it'll cause her to lose control. "Ssstop, please."

“Hmm. No. Don’t be shy now, Ainslee. Look at him. You’re always being mean or rude to my best friend. This stops now. Okay?” I press on her clit.

Ainslee can’t help it as she throws her head back, arching for me. Her fingernails dig into my thighs. “Yes, yes, Oran.”

I look at Jagger who’s watching with avid concentration on his face. I know him. He likes her, yeah, but also would never take advantage of this. Jagger and I have done worse in our prime. “Good, baby. Now, who did I say you’re going to be good with? What’s his name?”

Ainslee’s breath catches, her body so close. “Jagger...” she says so breathlessly you’d think she’d notice that she’s physically attracted to the fucker.

I wrap my hand around her throat and tilt it. I kiss, bite, and suck on it. “What’s my name, baby? Who is going to be fucking you tonight?”

“You.”

I tsk. “No, no... Don’t be afraid to say it for Jagger to hear. If it’s any consolation, he thinks it’s hot. What’s my motherfucking name, baby?”

“Oran Hale.” She says it so dreamy-like, I can’t help but swell with pride as she cums with my name on her lips. Jagger has a grin on his face. He winks at me and hangs up.

“Did that turn you on? Jagger watching? Be honest,” I ask her. I won’t do it again if it’s weird for her, I’m not a pervert.

“Yes,” Ainslee replies.

“Good. Now back to work. You need to talk about your new brush set with the Kabuki brush, no?”

I slip my fingers out of her sweet pussy and as she stands facing me, I lick her juices clean off my fingers. “You were listening?” she asks, still coming down from her high.

“Mmhmm. It’d be odd to not pick up on some things when I’m right here.”

Ainslee just stares at me but says nothing. After a stare that’s gone too long, she clears her throat and goes back to her work station. Ainslee is now avoiding eye contact. Oh, when will she learn?

AINSLEE HAS BEEN AVOIDING me all week. She’s been trying to act discreet about it, but it’s me, you can’t really hide that from me. Just like now, for some reason I can’t sleep. I sigh and I turn to watch her as she sleeps so close to the edge on her side of the bed. I don’t know why she keeps doing that, the bed is big enough. Ever since I woke her up by touching her back, she’s been doing that and then like clockwork, she turns, unconsciously searching for warmth. I always wake up with her holding me like I’m the one who needs comfort. I shake my head as I move a bit closer to her. Ainslee finds what she’s searching for in her sleep and this time she’s restless until she’s literally sleeping on top of me. She relaxes and I know she’s not going to wake up again. I glare at her damned head, but I don’t bother moving, there’s no point. I bend my arm under my head and I stare at the ceiling.

Ainslee's fingers find their way into my hair and she plays with it. I swear she needs to get checked for doing weird shit in her sleep, but her fingers playing in my hair cause me to fall asleep.

"Jag, do you feel funny?" I ask him. We're at this Unknown Elites location party. They always change locations and I don't like going all the time but this time, Jagger convinced me.

"What I feel is that you need to fix your mask before they know who you are. You want to be in the damned gossip column tomorrow morning?" he says as he makes sure his black mask covers half of his face. I know it's him because we're close but others who don't know us won't know.

I fix my mask. Jagger had it custom made for me and when I saw it, I smiled. It was sort of a twist on the Man in the Iron Mask. Half of my face is obscured but you can see my eyes, lips, and I can breathe. If someone knows the story, not the movie version of it, they'll get it, especially the black velvet exterior. My phone pings from the app and we look at it. "I got room B and my dare is to kiss whoever walks out the other door."

"Hesitating?" Jagger asks.

I should be but there's some excitement in my body. I shake my head. "Nah, this might be fun. It's just a kiss."

"Cool. I got Room E and I have to get them to confess to something by using my fingers only."

That's the thing about the Unknown Elites. It's sort of like a moving sex club for people who want to do things and not have it traced back to them. You set your limits in the app before registering. Once that's done, there's a time and location, but it's hard to track down who the owners are because they use different IP addresses and VPNs that bounce off each other. I'm not that invested to find out. Jagger and I just had one too many drinks one night and decided to research it.

I down the rest of my drink and I get up from the club area where everyone is dancing and partying. I head towards the elevator. Once I climb in, there's a girl there. At that time, I didn't know who she was. She had deep blue eyes and porcelain skin that I could see from the part of her face that stuck out, but I didn't recognize her. I shrug as I get off before her and I walk towards Room B. Once I enter, the door on the other side opens as well. I lock the door and so does she. These are the rules so that nobody comes in. We stare at each other. She has gray eyes like I do. She smiles at me and I give her a smile as well. She walks up to me in her tiny shorts, long sleeve shirt, and sneakers. She's a small thing. So damned tiny compared to me. "Maybe I should stand on the bed, I didn't know you'd be this tall," she chuckles.

"I got you." I reply and I scoop her up, placing her on the bed. She's still shorter but there is some leverage.

"Okay, let's do this." She grabs my t-shirt and pulls me closer to her. She gets on the tip of her toes and kisses me.

I don't know what it is. Could be the drinks or something, but I groan. I kiss her back just as quickly as she kissed me. I don't really know what takes over, but I know that I'm kissing her like

I'm eating her pussy. My tongue takes control as it licks her lips while kissing her passionately. I don't think I've ever kissed anyone this damned way. I groan and pull away. "Shit," I say.

"Fuck. I thought..." she says but then stops. "I thought this was going to be so simple. Where did you learn to kiss like that?" she asks.

I chuckle and shrug. "I'm just good at whatever I do."

She laughs. She observes me and looks at my mask, gasping in awe. "Marchioly."

I grin at her reference. "The fact that you got it is so amazing. But why is your mask so simple?"

Seems like you could've gone anywhere with it."

"Yeah, I switched with my friend because she said hers was itching her face. I had the Phantom of the Opera but with a Venetian twist to it."

"Damn."

"Damn is right," she replies.

I don't know what happened next to trigger us to get hot and heavy, but we ended up fucking. I took her virginity and she let me. She told me she wasn't waiting for anyone in particular. I was horny as fuck and a little out of it. We fucked with our masks on, never taking them off, but we stared into each other's eyes the whole time. Eyes similar in color to mine but off by the brown flecks.

I jolt awake. What the hell did I dream about that night for? I shake my head, disoriented as hell. Ainslee is not in bed, which means she's probably getting ready for Jagger and Karessa's wedding. I get out of bed, trying to ignore it all, especially the dream. Those gray eyes with the brown in them is triggering a memory. I get in the shower, shutting my eyes as the water hits my body.

"What's that on your back?" I ask her.

She turns, facing me. "Please, don't... Don't ask me." She looks like she's ready to bolt.

"Wait! Wait. I won't hurt you or tell anybody. We're not allowed to, remember? It just looks painful."

She shakes her head. "It's not painful. Not anymore."

I lay back on the bed. "Come to me." She doesn't hesitate as she gets closer to me and she lays on top of me. "Can I touch it? I won't hurt you."

She nods but says nothing. I softly caress her back, rubbing up and down. The marks are in the middle of her back. Red and angry on her beautiful, light caramel skin. It's ugly compared to the rest of her soft and beautiful skin. I can feel her tears on my bare chest and it tugs at me. I don't like tears. It reminds me of my mom, and those memories are painful as fuck. "Who did this to you?"

"The woman who was meant to love me," she answers. "Please, don't ask me anymore. That's all I can tell you."

"Okay, fine, but give me something. Something to remember you by."

"My name is Margot."

“Okay, Margot, and my favorite color is orange.” That’s the closest to my name I can get.

She accepts it and I hold her like that until our time is up. She leaves from the door she came from and I leave out the door I came from.

I shake my head again, realizing that I’m already out of the shower and halfway to my walk in closet without even remembering how the fuck I did it. I go back to the room and grab my phone. I dial Jagger. “Yeah?”

“What’s Ainslee’s middle name?” I ask him.

“Margot.”

I hang up. *Oh. Huh, I’m pretty sure I was there but by the end of the night, shit got fuzzy.*

I try not to jump to conclusions. I make my way to where Ainslee is. She’s filming and talking. She hums and moves her body to the song as she puts on a red lip. I watch Ainslee for a moment as she finishes up what she’s doing as she continues to hum to another song. I recognize this one for some reason, Stay the Night by Mariah Carey. I can’t help but laugh when she sings and man, this girl cannot hold a single note. Ainslee finally looks up at me and glares. She stands and I take in what she’s wearing. A fucking big, white boa-feathered kimono robe, as if she’s part of the old Hollywood glamour, and the matching feathered heels. She looks like a wet dream come true with the big rollers in her hair. A whole pin up goddess with her little all-white lace lingerie set. She looks so fucking stunning, I almost forget why I’m in here. “I think it’s time for me to finally say good morning,” she teases.

My brow creases because my brain isn’t following what she is saying, but when she tugs at my towel and her brows lift, a grin spreads all over my face. “This is what we’re doing?” I tease.

Ainslee bends over forward with her lips near my semi-hard dick. She peers up at me through her lashes as if she’s talking to a mic. “Good morning, Mr. Hale.” If ‘mesmerizing’ was a person, it would be Ainslee.

FUCK. The way Ainslee sucks dick should be a sin and damn, if I was a believer, I’d go straight to hell with happiness attached to me like the tail pinned on the goddamn donkey. A happy go-lucky jackass, if I may add. Instead of me getting ready to head to the wedding, I’m still sitting on what is now my couch and not hers—she doesn’t realize it yet—in the studio. Ainslee is done fixing her makeup again and she keeps giving me a sideways glance. I know why, because I haven’t taken my eyes off her. Ainslee takes a deep breath and turns to me, “What is it, Oran? You’ve been staring at me for a bit now. Did my good morning stun you a little bit too much?”

I break out into a grin and I grunt as I dip my hand into my boxers that I unfortunately had to put on to concentrate on why I came in here in the first place. Concentrate, dick. “It was just right. Do it all the time and I might even gift you a new Range. A pink one.” I wink at her.

Ainslee's face lights up. "Who told you?"

"I, too, can check on the shit my wife fancies. Anyway, don't make me lose focus, I have to ask you something."

"Shoot," she says.

"Ains, what was Eustache Dauter buried as and what kind of mask was he really wearing?"

"Marchioly, of course, and a witness said it was black velvet, not Iron."

"Okay, what's your middle name again?" I have no clue why I ask, when Jagger confirmed it, but I have to ask, just because.

"It's Margot. Why?"

I stare at her. Holy shit. Ainslee Margot Bishops. *Margot*. Like her bakery, Margot's French Press...

I walk over to her and grab her by her robe. Ainslee stands from the force of my hands. "Oran, I'm live!" I stop her as I kiss her hard.

I don't care what the fuck she means by being *live* or whatever. I move us to the couch and we fall down on it. I don't think as I kiss her and rip at her robe and the panties that she has on, for once. I groan as I tug at my boxers. I rub myself against her slit once I've properly placed her where she needs to be. I pull away from her lips and she looks at me, confused. "You don't even know why you chose me, do you?" I taunt her and I smirk. "You've always wanted me," I say.

"I what?" I slip in and take her breath away. She moans as her hands land on my biceps for support. I flex just to fuck with her and she grips my dick like a vice and I love it. I moan this time and don't give a fuck how I sound. I place her legs over my shoulders, fucking her as I stare into her eyes. I kiss her like I first kissed her in that room. Ainslee doesn't realize it, but she does the same. She kisses me just like she did then. Fuck, this is crazy. I thrust my hips, giving her rougher and harder thrusts. Her fingers land in my hair and she tugs. She stops kissing me, she looks at me. She leans in and bites my chin. I see she likes that I shaved. My face is bare and Ainslee is definitely into it. I move my hips in a way that I know drives women crazy and she arches, throwing her head back moaning so damned loud. I swear if I had neighbors, they'd call the police. I hear pinging sounds from her computer, but I don't care. Both our phones go off, but I'm on a mission. I need to cum harder than I did that night and so does she.

"Say my name, baby..." I whisper in her ear and I bite her neck.

"Oran," she moans.

"The full name, the whole fucking name, Ainslee."

"Oran Hale!" she moans and cums. I smirk and pull her in for another kiss while I cum just as hard. Fuck.

AINSLEE

I CAN'T LOOK Oran in the eye after he thoroughly fucked me, basically live. I've never really had a scandal and now it seems like my name is in more tabloids. I'm surprised that we're not running late for the wedding. Oran has left some sort of imprint on my body and in my mind, because when I close my eyes, all I hear and feel is him. I try it once more just to make sure I'm not nuts and I shudder when I hear his moans and groans in my memory. I quickly open my eyes and make sure that everything is in place. I make my way to where Oran is waiting for me. "Okay, we can go," I announce.

"Finally," Oran says. He stands and I take him in. He turns my way and I swear to God, I'm really going to have to go to my doctor soon. This man looks like he models for GQ. He's wearing a light gray checkered tweed suit with a turquoise dress shirt underneath. The top couple of buttons are open and he looks delicious. Very casual. "You clean up nice," I say.

"Don't I always?" Oran winks and takes me in. "Nice color." He smirks.

"Mm, thanks," I say. I made sure to look nice and presentable, but I couldn't skip my splits.

We walk out of the house and I turn to find Oran staring at my ass. Oran looks at me and shrugs with a damned boyish grin. He walks by me and I inhale. When I saw women on the tv or movies literally wanting to throw their pussies at a nice smelling man I thought they were idiots, but damn, it's so real. I shut my eyes and try my best to keep my composure. I don't think I've ever wanted to suck somebody's dick just because they smell really good. Oran revs the engine of his burnt orange Aston Martin DBX and I roll my eyes, because I know that's my only warning. I head to the car with my purse and I slide in. I put my belt on and Oran revs the engine again. I roll my eyes towards him and stick my tongue out.

He leans in and sucks my tongue like it's the most important thing he's supposed to be doing. When he lets go, he licks his lips and peels out. It gives me an adrenaline rush and then I settle. Oran's hand reaches out and caresses my bare thigh against the burnt orange dress that I chose. It's cinched on the split side, snug to my body, and doesn't show my scars even though it's strapless. The more he rubs my leg, the harder my nipples become. We stop at a red light and Oran looks at me. I turn away from him and stare out the window. He leans in and bites my exposed neck. "Are you wearing panties this time around, nugget?"

I shudder at the mere action of him nipping at my neck. “Here we go with the nugget name again. I’m not that small.” I try hard to pretend like he doesn’t affect me, but he does.

“You’re so fucking little, you disappear in my damn shirts.” He says once he settles back in his seat.

I snort. “But I’m big enough to take your dick.”

Oran laughs and I turn to gauge his laughter. Does he know what he looks like when he laughs? It’s a different sight. One that I don’t want to lose. I pull out my phone and I take a picture mid-smile.

“Did you just take a picture of me?” he asks.

“I did. It’s for my IG. Of course.”

“Hmm,” is all he answers with.

It gets quiet and I look at him while he drives. “Oran…”

He makes a face. “Feels weird to hear you say my name outside of me fucking you.”

I think about it for a moment. I think about a time when I went out of my way to say his name. “That’s oddly true. But I have a question for you.”

“Okay.”

“Why did you ask me that earlier? The Iron Mask reference? I don’t get it.”

He glances my way, then back at the road. “Who took your virginity?”

I think about it. I don’t really remember that night too well, but I do remember the way he sexed me up. It was almost like he was making love to me, but obviously that would be absurd. He didn’t even know me like that. “I don’t really know him. I just remember glimpses here and there.”

“Like what?”

“Um, don’t make it weird, okay?” I look at him.

Oran squeezes my thigh, then he softens, but he doesn’t remove it. “I won’t.”

“Okay.” I believe him for some reason. “Well, I remember his shoulders. The way they looked when he moved. We didn’t remove our masks, but, fuck, his lips are what I can’t seem to forget. He kissed me like he was fucking both my mouth and my pussy. Hmm, let’s see, outside of the sex, I remember just laying on his chest. It was just warm and comfortable. The cleft in his chin. That was an oddly happy two hours or whatever it was. It was safe. I was safe. He made me feel like I had nothing to be ashamed about or embarrassed about, even though I found out the next day that I was drugged. I wouldn’t have changed a thing.”

“Did he touch your back, Ainslee? Did he caress you and say he’d never hurt you?” Oran asks.

I feel the crease in the middle of my forehead. I look at him. “What do you mean? What does my back have to do with anything? Why would anyone hurt me?”

“Just answer the question, Ainslee.”

“I don’t remember, okay? And he probably saw it and thought it was ugly.”

Oran swerves and stops the car. He places his hand over half his face. “Look at me, Ainslee. Fucking look at me! What am I trying to tell you?” I look at him for a beat, not saying a word. His

jawline, his lips, the tip of his nose and the cleft in his chin. I suck a breath in. Oran removes his hands from his face and I look into his gray eyes. The same eyes that I couldn't stop dreaming about from time to time. "I've seen it all, Ainslee. Stop covering up."

"No," I say. *Orange... Oran... Orange...Oran.* I feel like I've been slapped and this time, it actually hurts. "Did you know this whole time?" I ask him.

"That's a stupid fucking question and you know it."

"Answer me," I demand.

"Ainslee, I don't fucking work for you. You don't demand shit from me. I don't even know why you're upset. I'm just telling you."

"It's not the same. You don't get it," I say to him. I feel like someone's stripped me bare. If I could help it, no one would ever see my back. I thought about getting the surgery, but then it would mean that Mikonos, Markos, and my father would find out about it. My mother, although I still love her, broke me. She knows that, and deep down inside, I know it too.

"You think if someone sees your scars, they'll love you?" my mother says and laughs right after. "Your own father doesn't even love you. If he did, would he leave you all the time? He says he's keeping you safe, but, really, is he? You'll never be safe, Ainslee. I will make sure of it."

9-year-old me didn't understand it. It didn't make any sense what she was saying. "He loves me. Daddy tells me all the time!" I made the mistake of yelling at her.

My mother struck me and I fell from my knees to the floor. I quickly righted myself. I didn't cry. I didn't fuss. I stayed on my knees in my belle's dress that I ruined by running around with a guard's daughter and son. He was fired today. "Ainslee, take that out of your head right now! He doesn't love you!" My mother lowered herself down to my level, looked me in the eyes, and grabbed my chin. "He will never love you more than he loves me. He's incapable of loving more than one of us and he chooses me every time. Watch."

"What don't I get, Ainslee?" Oran asks, pulling me out of the memory.

"Nothing. Just please drive."

Oran glares at me. "Well when you want to act like A BIG FUCKING GIRL AND NOT A BRAT, TALK TO ME!" his voice booms throughout the car.

I look at him, surprised that he's even yelling at me. I didn't even deserve this. I revert to the little girl that got yelled at constantly and I blink. I say nothing to him. I turn away and look out the window. I will not cry. I can't cry. I won't be ugly. I use my curly hair as a shield for my face. I can feel his stare, but he doesn't say anything. Oran starts driving again and when he touches me, I flinch. "Are you fucking serious?" he says.

"I'm sorry," I say and I shrink into my door. Into myself. I'm trying to tell my body that my brain is right. Oran is just pissed and, usually, the yelling at me wouldn't have fazed me, but the insecurity, the embarrassment, the sadness of who I was is resurfacing. I just... I just need a moment.

Oran doesn't address me even when we get to the venue. He walks out first, slamming his door. I

clear my throat, put on my game face, and head inside. I almost stop walking when I spot Lina and Eli. I would ask why they're here, but I don't want to care anymore. They left me, not the other way around. I lift my head high and walk like the woman my father, Andres Bishops, taught me to be. I find my seat and stare at nothing in particular. Bishops' never show their emotions in public. Our emotions are our weakness. *So then, why can't I fucking control it?*

ORAN

I LAUGH hard with Jagger while walking towards the guests. We make our way to the front. He goes to the altar and I sit next to Ainslee. I purposefully rub my thigh against her exposed leg. She moves her leg, staring at nothing. I do it again and this time, she doesn't move her leg. I smirk as I place my hand over her exposed skin. I rub her thigh with my thumb as the ceremony starts. The song Lust for Life by Lana Del Rey starts playing, prompting Karessa to walk down the aisle. I watch as she passes by and I look at her dress. She looks naked underneath the dress. The only thing that looks decently dressed is the single cherry blossom she's holding as a bouquet. I look at Jagger, he has a shit-eating grin planted on his face. He makes eye contact with me for a second, and this time, I wink. He wiggles his brows and looks back at Karessa like she's his favorite double fudge chocolate ice cream and he wants her melting all over his hand. My hand seems to have taken a trip of its own as it travels down to Ainslee's knee and back up. This time, I slip a little bit further into her dress, but with the way we're sitting, I can't do much. I bite my bottom lip, keeping my hand there throughout the ceremony. When the officiant announces that it's time to kiss the bride, Jagger goes out in true Jagger fashion. I whistle encouragingly at him as he tongues the fuck out of Karessa. These are going to be some kind of interesting arranged marriages we've both gotten ourselves into.

I HANG BACK at the bar with Jagger, who can't take his eyes off his bride. It's like he's hunting her. It's funny, but I'm glad the asshole doesn't look as distraught as he did with Layla. I know that it takes time to get over a heartbreak, but sometimes, you have to let things go. Speaking of his bride, I don't know how I've never noticed her before, but she is beautiful. She looked stunning walking down the aisle and now that she's mingling with her guests, she looks poised. It's funny because I thought that I would end up with someone like her; a poised woman, a belle. A trophy wife. That's not what happened. I ended up with someone who makes me go from hot to cold in a matter of minutes. I don't think I've argued with someone as much as I've argued with Ainslee. I don't like arguing with people and wasting time talking about bullshit.

“Why are you here and your wife is over there? In the corner, sitting by herself like she wasn't

invited?” Jagger asks.

I look over to where he nods his head and I tilt my head. “We argued. It was stupid. She was being fucking childish again.”

“Hmm...what happened?”

“I asked a fucking simple question and she acts like I’m trying to learn the insides of her body.”

Jagger snickers as he drinks his whiskey. “So, you pushed?”

“Pushed?”

“Yeah. You push sometimes.”

I look at my best friend. “I do not push.”

Jagger smirks. “You do, but that’s okay. You just need straight answers. Nothing going in circles. I know that, but she doesn’t. She’s not your employee, Oran. She’s your wife.”

I narrow my eyes. “I fucking know that. I just married her last week.”

“Right. So relax, get your dick wet, and enjoy shit as it comes,” Jagger says.

“I don’t do that. She came into my life without permission, I can’t just fucking relax,” I say to him.

Jagger doesn’t say anything. He stares at me for a second, then turns to the bartender and orders me a drink. “Something happened, what is it?” Jagger looks at me and I stare back at him. I hate that he knows me so well.

I sigh. “The girl from Room B at the *Unknown Elites* night we went. That was Ainslee,” I say to him and run my fingers through my hair, probably fucking it up.

“Holy shit.”

“Yeah, holy shit.” Jagger opens up his mouth to ask me something else and I shake my head. “Not right now. Go, be a husband and suffer like me. Your bride looks especially sexy tonight. I might take a bite if you’re not careful,” I tease him.

Jagger laughs. “She tastes exquisite, if that’s what you’re wondering.”

“Good to know.” I smirk at him. I feel a hand on my wrist and I know it’s Ainslee’s. She can barely fucking fit her small hand around my wrist.

Jagger stands up straight. He eyes her up and down. “Mmm, I see you know how to make heads practically fucking roll off their shoulders. I’m still wondering if that’s figurative though. Either way, good play on wearing your husband’s favorite color.”

“Uh, thank you?” Ainslee ends it as a question, because honestly everything Jagger says is questionable to everyone else, including me sometimes. “You look really good too,” Ainslee pays him a compliment.

“I know.” Jagger licks his lips and walks away. No winks this time.

“What is it, Ainslee?” I say, turning to face her.

She lets go of my wrist. “I’m sorry,” she says.

“Huh?” This is my reaction only because I didn’t expect it. Most women don’t apologize, thinking that only men are wrong in every fucking thing.

“I said I’m sorry. I could’ve handled that better. Could’ve probably said let’s talk about it once I’ve processed the bomb you dropped on my lap,” Ainslee says.

I grin. “I like that it doesn’t hurt you to apologize,” I admit.

“I was a belle too, even though I don’t really act like one,” she says and takes the drink that was ordered for me. She chugs it and drops the glass down. She cringes, clutching her chest. “Shit, that burns. What is that?”

“Jagger’s favorite whiskey.”

“Jesus, no wonder he’s a nutjob.”

I chuckle and I get in her space. “I’ve got an idea on how you could make it up to me.”

Ainslee cocks her brow. “Lead the way, sir. I’m in the mood to put you in your place.”

When we reach a makeshift room, I take Ainslee in. The fact that she’s wearing my favorite color makes her look so fucking sexy. I spot a table. “Get on the table, back flat,” I say as I remove my suit jacket and watch Ainslee do exactly as I say. “Spread your legs for me.” I lick my lips as I pull the chair back and I take a seat.

I place my suit jacket on the back of the chair and I scoot closer to my dessert. I pull up the satin dress, exposing her legs. I groan as I realize that she’s wearing a matching lace g-string. I lean in and tug with my teeth, not stopping until the sound of them ripping echoes in my ears. Ainslee’s breathing increases. I don’t wait this time around. I taste her, realizing that I haven’t done so at all. I was too busy giving my dick all the attention when my tongue needs this more. I fuck her pussy with my tongue, sucking and licking until Ainslee is yelling my name out. I lift her legs up and feast on her until she’s tugging at my hair and pleading with me to stop. I don’t stop though. I build her up and I look up at the mirror again, knowing that it’s not only double-sided but that both ends can see each other. This time, I’m met by green eyes that are staring at me as she bounces up and down. My dick gets harder as I realize that it’s Karessa LeClaire... err Hanlon. I groan as Jagger holds her head in place with his hand around her neck. Her eyes flutter every time he flexes that hand. I go back to eating Ainslee out as I watch Karessa ride my best friend. *Fuck. I need to nut.* In her eyes, I can see the lust that she has for me. I hear her faint moans mixed in with Ainslee’s. I shut my eyes for a second, trapping both sounds. I open my eyes again and I finger-fuck Ainslee to the beat that Karessa is setting. Her tits bounce in Jagger’s face as she digs her fingernails into his shoulders. He grabs one of them and squeezes hard, which has her tugging on his hair at the same time Ainslee tugs mine, and it’s so damned euphoric. Ainslee’s back arches while Jagger slaps Karessa’s ass, and from the look in her eyes, she’s going to cum. She bites her bottom lip, but Jagger bites her chin. She lets it out and throws her head back as her and Ainslee cum at the same time. I clean Ainslee up with my tongue and she lays back on the table. “You’re forgiven,” she says.

I look at her and I laugh. “It wasn’t me apologizing, you know?”

“I know.”

“Come here, I want to show you something.” I pull Ainslee to me and I set her on her feet. I walk

her over to the mirror, taking the chair with us to where Jagger has flipped Karessa over and is fucking her on the table. I lift up her dress but I stop around her waist. “You trust me, baby?” I ask her.

“No, not really,” she answers.

I laugh. “Good.” I sit down and I make her stand with her legs spread apart. Each one on the side of mine. I do what I need to do and once my dick is free, I guide her down my length. She fits like a fucking glove. I grunt at how wet she is. I hold her neck like I did when she was on the video-call and play with her clit while she rides me. “Look at him, baby. Do you like the way he’s fucking Karessa?” I whisper in her ear.

Ainslee moans as her hand comes around, grabbing my neck. She turns her head and kisses me hard while riding me. My hand slips from her neck, dipping into her dress, and I play with her nipples. I tug and squeeze. It's insane to everyone else what we’re doing, but fuck it. This is what seems to turn all four of us on. I take it in stride. I lose myself in the moment with Ainslee as Jagger focuses on Karessa even more. The moans and groans fill the two rooms and it’s everything that I need in this moment.

AINSLEE

AFTER THE FUCK session that's rocked my world and has changed my views on voyeurism in a seriously complex, yet simple way, I went to clean up. Now, I'm getting fresh air. It feels like tonight isn't going to be too bad. I shut my eyes and lean my head back against the wall outside. The idea of marrying and choosing Oran happened within months, but now it feels like I've been stressing out for years. I take a deep breath and my phone rings. I look at it, it's my dad. I pick it up even though he's probably calling because of the live. My dad has never raised his voice at me, but I prepare myself nonetheless. "Hello."

"Ainslee..." he calls my name out. "I'm just calling because I feel like something's not right. Everything good?" he asks.

"Yeah. I'm at Jagger's wedding."

"Good. Just..." he hesitates. "That's all. Do right, stay strong, and be a Bishops, even if you are a Hale now. Get it?" my dad says.

"Got it, dad."

"Alright. I love you. Bye."

"I love you too," I say, even though I don't believe that he loves me. He just says it to say it. I shut my eyes.

"Thought I'd find you out here." My entire body freezes up.

"Eli..." I whisper. "What do you want? Just leave me alone."

"I'm trying, but it's not easy. I planned on proposing to you, you can't just expect me to let you go. Even though it makes me question if you ever even saw a future with me, the way you're prancing around with Oran."

My brows crease. "Prancing around? I don't even go out of the house much."

"Your channel, your videos on that channel. You let that man degrade you by fucking you live while you've never even really posted me like that. Yet, you didn't want to expose me to your world? Those are your words, by the way. I practically bent over backwards so that you could be happy, and now you're telling me to leave you alone?" Eli laughs. "How ironic."

"Well, this conversation is moronic. I don't have to explain myself to you anymore. We aren't

together. Just leave it alone. Leave. Me. Alone.” I enunciate each word.

The longer I’m out here with him, the worse it’ll get. I don’t want his blood on my hands no matter what. Plus, the more he acts like this, the less I want him.

“I have one last thing to say to you, and then we’re done,” he says with a mean glare. “I want you to know that you don’t deserve me. You can’t ever come back to me now, and I understand that, but one thing you need to know is that I did everything. I did right by you, even though you were damaged. Fucking broken.” I take a step back like he just slapped me. “What kind of girlfriend won’t let me see her fucking back? You never let me touch you like that. You kept so much from me and kept me on a need-to-know basis. I really tried. Fuck, how could I fall for someone who doesn’t even know what love is? Has anyone ever loved you, Ainslee? Huh! WHO THE FUCK HAS EVER LOVED YOU?”

His words make me angry and I react. I slap him hard and tears escape my eyes. Fuck these emotions. I open my mouth to say something, but I can’t. Instead, my chest hurts in such a bad way that I can’t focus. I step back again needing to...I don’t know. I turn to walk away, but my body feels like it’s locked in place. I try not to cry out, but the pain intensifies. I drop to my knees, feeling the ground beneath me. “Ainslee! Ainslee! Ainslee!” Eli yells my name out.

“9-1-1...” I manage to say. Something is seriously wrong with me. I can’t hold it in anymore as I sob loudly. I feel like I’m being ripped apart.

I hear someone else coming towards us. “What’s wrong?” It’s Esme.

“I don’t know she just...I’m taking her to the hospital!” Eli says as he gets down and picks me up in his arms. I try to tell him to let me go. I don’t want to go with him, but I pass out from the pain. It’s so unbearable. I can’t handle it.

ORAN

I sit where Ainslee was sitting earlier, waiting for her. I look up to see a teary eyed Esme running towards me. “Oran! Oran!” She gets to the table, causing a commotion. “It’s Ainslee...”

I stand. “Where is she?”

“She... He.” I place my hands on Esme’s shoulders to calm her and keep her steady.

“Breathe. What happened?”

“She was on the ground, crying, clutching her chest. I don’t know, she just... she was.”

My body shuts down as Esme gives me the bad news. I don’t know why I’m expecting the worst right now, but I forget whatever it is I was supposed to ask as I run towards the front entrance. When I get outside, I spot her little handbag and phone on the floor. I pick them up, holding them tight in my hands. “Where THE FUCK IS SHE?” My voice booms and I don’t care.

Jagger comes outside. “What is it?”

“It’s Ainslee,” Esme offers.

“What’s wrong with her?” Jagger asks.

“I don’t know, but Eli took her to the hospital,” Esme offers up.

“He DID WHAT?” both Jagger and I say at the same time. I know for him it’s more of a shock that Eli didn’t tell any of us, and for me, it’s simply... why the fuck was he around her again?

Jagger grabs me by the shoulder as Karessa joins him. “Karessa, I’m going to need you to drive. I’ve been drinking and I don’t trust Oran to drive,” Jagger says. “No offense,” Jagger says to me.

I look down at my trembling hands. He’s right.

I CAN’T THINK or see straight as my mind is filled with memories. Painful, bitter memories of losing my mother, the only woman that I’ve ever called family. I run my fingers through my hair for the umpteenth time. Can’t she drive any fucking faster? “Have you called the hospital?”

“Yeah. I called the Bishops’ hospital. That’s the only place that I can think of that the fucking idiot can take her.”

I run a hand over my face as my leg bounces up and down in Jagger’s Range. Me sitting cooped up in the backseat is driving me nuts. Fuck, what if she’s gone? What kind of fucking shit is this? What was wrong with her? Is it her heart?

Karissa barely parks and I’m out of the car. I run right to the lobby in the Emergency area. “There’s a woman here... wait no, my wife. She’s here. She just got, fuck.”

“What’s her name, sir?” the nurse asks without looking at me.

“Ainslee Hale.”

The nurse types it in. She looks up at me. “There’s no one by that name here.”

I should snatch her ass out of her fucking seat. I’m considering doing it when I feel a hand on my shoulder. “Can you look for Ainslee Bishops?” Jagger asks.

The nurse types away. “Yeah, she just got admitted here, but she’s being checked out by a doctor while her personal doctor is on his way. Please have a seat.”

I turn to Jagger, irritated as fuck. “Who the fuck forgets to update their last name?” I glare back at the nurse, “Update her file. Her last name is Hale. H-A-L-E. Hale. Don’t ask me any fucking thing. Just do it, and tell me, is she okay?” I ask.

“Sir, we’re not at liberty to share that.”

“What?” I ask. I look at Jagger. “Did she just say at liberty? At FUCKING liberty? My fucking wife is in here and she won’t tell me how she’s doing!”

Jagger nods his head at me. “Hey... Oran,” he moves closer. “Listen to me, I will call Mikonos and ask him to give us her doctor’s number. Chill. Not here, bro. Not here. Okay? I understand.”

“Here is Ainslee Bishops’ information that I just finished filling out,” I hear a voice from behind me say. I turn around and I growl the second I spot Eli.

My mind goes blank. I don’t think as I swing, knocking him out cold. Jagger grabs my arm and I

pull away from him. “Motherfucker...” Jagger grits through his teeth. I face him and lift my hands.

“I warned him, and since he wanted to be here so bad, I helped him with it.”

Jagger fights a smirk. He clears his throat. “Go take a fucking seat in our private waiting area while I figure this shit out. Karessa, can you go with him?”

I look at her and I instantly feel bad. Fuck, even if it was an arrangement type of shit, it doesn’t mean I wanted to ruin it. I offer her a small smile as I make my way to the private waiting area. Walking down that corridor brings back memories of being here when my mother passed. I take a deep breath in and release another. When we get into the room, I sit down, but I can’t sit still. I stand and pace. “Do you need anything? A coffee or something? Do you want me to take those items for you?”

I stop and look down at my hands. I still have her cell and little-ass purse. “No. Thank you though. I just...I need to get out of here,” I mumble the last part. I pace again and Karessa just watches me, not knowing what to do. I keep Ainslee’s stuff tight in my hands, just like I kept an item that belonged to my mother in my arms.

AINSLEE

MY DOCTOR LOOKS at me before we leave the hospital room. “There are people out there worried about you, you know. Don’t do that, Ainslee. Don’t forget to take your meds. I know you’ve been stressed, and it’s been hard, but I don’t want to see you back here for this again. You’re only coming back in a couple of weeks to check if we need to continue on with a permanent pacemaker or to see if we’re going to keep going with the temporary. Your dad almost killed me when I said he couldn’t come in here because we needed to assist you and monitor you.”

I look up at Dr. Patterson. “My dad’s here?”

“Yeah.”

I pick up my heels and we walk out through the private corridor and into the private waiting area. When I walk in, I see my dad, Mikonos, and Markos standing. My dad is the first to see me. He marches over and I brace for his speech, but he pulls me into a hug. “Fuck, Ainslee, I thought I lost you.” My dad hugs me and I try not to cry. I drop my shoes as I hold on to him. I haven’t hugged him in ages.

My dad is a tall man and I do what I always did as a little girl. I stand on his shoes to get more leverage. “I’m sorry,” I apologize.

“Don’t scare me like that,” my dad says and kisses my temple.

My dad lets me go and he gives room for both Markos and Mikonos to hug me. Mikonos holds me the longest. “You ever forget to take that fucking medicine of yours and you’ll deal with me. I’m serious,” Mikonos says to me in Greek.

“Okay.” I let him go and I spot Karessa, Jagger, and Oran. I look at Oran but he’s not making eye contact with me. This is odd, because he doesn’t usually shy away from it at all.

“Glad you’re okay,” Karessa says. “Would it be weird if I hug you?” she asks.

I smile and shake my head. “No, I’ll take all the hugs I can get.” I let her hug me and I hug her back. Once she lets go, Jagger doesn’t even ask, he just pulls me into a hug. I don’t remember the last time I hugged him, but he’s warm. I don’t have it in me to say something hateful, I just need this. We hug like we were once friends, old friends who let go of each other but now have realized that life is too short. I sigh when he lets go.

“We’ll give you guys a minute,” my dad says. He kisses my temple and walks out with the boys in tow. Jagger and Karessa go too. It’s just me and Oran left.

I walk over to him and he just stares at my feet. “Hey...” I poke him in the shoulder and he looks up at me, spooked. “You okay?” I ask. He starts to nod but he shakes his head. He looks like he’s seen a ghost. “Why are you so pale?”

“You shouldn’t even be the one asking me questions. I don’t know whether I should hug you or shake you.” He glares at me, but his eyes soften.

“Well, let me make this easier for you.” I move closer and stand between his legs. I hug him. His head rests on my chest, and I rest my chin on his head. “I’m sorry that I dragged everyone here. Sorry I made people worry. I’m fine.”

Oran moves out of my hold. “You’re not fine, Ainslee. You had chest pains this whole time and you told no one. NOBODY! I was right there. You don’t think somebody would’ve wanted to know?”

“I...” I start and Oran stands. He walks towards the window. “I’m not used to telling others about this. I’m...” I’m conflicted. What am I supposed to say to him? How do I comfort him? I don’t understand. I take a step back, and I sit in the chair. There’s something about the look that Oran just gave me minutes ago. It reminded me of that night with him. The vulnerability in his eyes. I knew he was hurting. There was something there, but I didn’t press. How could I when I was hurting in my own way? I just wanted to forget. I did forget everything. I forgot that night, him, and the way he made me feel. “I’m sorry,” I say. “I usually do this alone. I come to the appointments by myself, I take my pills and everything. I just try to do what I need to do, alone. It’s the only way.” Why is this night like this?

I shut my eyes and run my fingers through my hair. A strand tugs and I open my eyes, looking at my nails. Their usual primped selves are ruined. I don’t even know how I chipped one. I laugh hard and Oran comes over to me, crouching. “Ainslee, what the fuck is so funny?”

“My nails, my hair, everything is ruined,” I say.

“Let me see,” Oran says, and when he looks at my nails, he makes a face. “Yeah, you’re right. That is the worst manicure I’ve ever seen. You can do better, Mrs. Hale,” he teases me. I chuckle because I know he’s trying to cheer me up.

“Yeah, my husband is a real stickler for order and such things. Gotta look top notch, you know?”

Oran smirks. “Your husband sounds like a real dirtbag, glad he’s not here right now, ‘cause I don’t mind a bad manicure and bad hair. Like, really bad hair... it’s still kinda sexy,” he emphasizes and it causes me to laugh.

My laughter turns into a sob. The fear creeps in and travels down my spine. I think it’s because I haven’t cried about all of this, everything that’s happened. Oran’s mask falls and I look down at my trembling hands. “I thought... Oh God, Oran, I don’t know what I, I could’ve—” Oran catches my eye again and I see the empathy he has. He’s only known me for a week, almost two weeks now, but besides Mikonos and Markos, he’s the only other person I’ve ever expressed how I’m really feeling

to. Oran pulls me into his arms. I wrap my arms around him and he stands. I wrap my legs around him. He shushes me and rubs my back. “I was so scared. I thought I was going to die. I don’t want to die, Oran. I don’t want to.”

“Oh, Bug, it’s okay. Come on now, don’t cry, baby. It’s okay. You’re okay.” I try to stop crying, but I tighten my hold on him as he wraps me into his arms. I’ve never felt such warmth from a person. It’s like when I hugged Jagger but this is a million times better. “You’re good with me,” Oran whispers as he snuggles into the crook of my neck. “I’ll keep you safe, just stop crying, please.”

I bury my fingers in his hair as we stay in the moment we just created. Something that would’ve never happened if I didn’t choose him. A choice that I made with my emotions, even if I didn’t realize it.

ORAN

How can I even let her go right now? I can’t even be mad at her about picking me as a safe bet. Fuck, why does this girl keep making me care about her? I can admit that knowing about our little encounter in the past has heightened a lot of emotions for me, well, us. I still can’t believe she’s the girl from the room. “You ready for everyone to come back in?”

Ainslee shrugs. “I guess so.”

“What are you thinking about?” I ask her.

“What you told me earlier. In the car. I can’t believe that that was you. It’s shocking to me, especially because I don’t believe in bullshit like destiny,” Ainslee says, and I chuckle.

I kiss her cheek. “I don’t believe in destiny either, but it is something. I thought about you sometimes. Not the you now, but the one who connected with me from the second she came into the room until we said our goodbyes.”

Ainslee gives me a kiss on the cheek too and it helps me relax a bit. “I thought about you too. A lot, really. I didn’t want to leave after those two hours. If I had the strength to speak up, I would’ve asked for you to take off your mask.”

I shake my head. “Not my number, but my mask instead?” I ask.

“Man, I was not allowed to date then. Shoot, me going to that damn exclusive club was because I sneaked out. My mom was strict as hell. I moved out the year after.”

“You’ve lived by yourself since then?”

“Hell yeah.”

“What made you move out?”

“So many different things... Don’t get me started.”

Everyone comes back in the room with the doctor, which stops our conversation. Ainslee is clearly letting me know she’s not going to get down. I sigh, “She won’t get down, just tell us what’s going on, Doc.”

Mikonos says something in Greek that has Ainslee snickering. “What did he say?” I whisper to her since I wasn’t really paying attention.

“He called me a big fucking baby.”

“You are, but for right now, that’s okay.” I smile a little when Ainslee kisses my cheek.

“So, the thing is, we’ve put a temporary pacemaker in just to monitor her over the few weeks. She’s going to come back in a couple of weeks and then we can run more tests and see if she needs a permanent pacemaker.”

“What caused this? She’s been fine for years,” Andres says.

“She’s been under a lot of stress, and not only that, she forgot to take her pills. I’ve prescribed her some new ones that she’ll pick up in the lobby and the rest, we’ll send to her. Mr. Hale,” the doctor addresses me. “It’s imperative that you help your wife. Remind her to take her pills, drink a lot of water. She needs to stay away from certain household items, like microwaves. Cell phones are fine nowadays with their advanced technology. She just needs to relax. The pacemaker isn’t permanent, but it is good that she just rests. I’m not talking about bed rest, I just mean something that’s going to keep her calm. Before you ask about other activities, let’s wait until we get the temporary one out. Yeah?”

I nod. “Got it.”

The doctor gave us a bit more information on everything else and now, we’re finally home.

Ainslee has finally let me go and being home makes me feel like I need to relax, but I’m too wound up. I get undressed and crack my neck, but nothing. There’s a feeling in my chest that is eating at me. I shut my eyes, sitting on the bed, naked as the day I was born. I clear my throat, trying to understand what the hell is going on with me. One fucking week, ONE WEEK of being married, and all this shit is happening to me. Yes, both Ainslee and I have known for a little over a month, her longer than I knew, but now, every single thing seems so serious. I hear the shower going and I get up, walking towards the bathroom.

Ainslee’s dress is on the floor and she’s in the open concept shower. There is a glass wall protecting her. I look at her as she has her back to me. I climb in behind her and she flinches the second I touch her back. She turns. “No, don’t...” She shakes her head. “Don’t do that, Oran.”

“Ainslee...you don’t have to run away from me.” Ainslee moves back until she hits the shower wall right under the shower head. I move in closer to her. “Come to me,” I say.

“Oran, I think you should get out.”

I shake my head, feeling like everything I’ve been suppressing is ready to just blow. “I just... I need this. Come to me...please,” I beg her.

Ainslee pauses for what seems like forever. “Don’t hurt me, Oran,” Ainslee finally says as she clears her throat. She turns away, revealing her back to me. “Do not fucking hurt me,” she grits through her teeth.

I sigh as I take the final step, closing the space between us. I press my body against hers. Ainslee

relaxes against me, but I pull back. I look at the faded marks on her back. They're angry and what the normal eye would see as ugly. I reach out, running my finger over one of them. Ainslee stiffens but I keep going until I've touched every part of her slashes. I feel overwhelmed, a little too overwhelmed. I don't know what it is. If it's being back in the hospital, or what. "I," my voice breaks. Ainslee tries to turn around but I keep her back to me. I hold her to me as I internally break apart.

"Oran..." she calls my name sweetly, reminding me of my mother, Bethany.

My sweet boy...My sweet, sweet boy, Oran. Don't ever be afraid to cry. Crying is good for the soul. It reminds us that we're human.

My mother. I haven't thought about her since the anniversary of her death. I'll never forget her, but I just... I try not to think about her... The fond memory of her running her hands through my hair hits me hard. I don't even realize that Ainslee and I are on the shower floor. Ainslee's holding me, running her fingers through my hair. She doesn't complain about the water turning cold, instead she just holds me like that.

IT'S ALMOST BEEN a week since everything happened and I don't think I can do this. Oran is driving me nuts. I take a deep breath, shutting my eyes while I relax in the bath. This is relaxing. A little bit of me-time. Time to just think about everything and how I know that I'm seriously catching feelings for Oran. I don't know when I even started to care for him, beyond the obvious fact that he's my husband, but now I keep finding myself asleep on top of him. The first time it happened, it seemed like nothing. He's like a big teddy bear mixed with grumpiness in there. A grumpy teddy bear of my own. Maybe I should call him that to see his reaction. Maybe it'll make him annoyed enough to not watch my every move. I can't cough without him telling me *okay look at your Fitbit and check the heart rate*. He won't even kiss me, and I like kissing him... a lot more than I can admit. The man won't even let me go to the nail salon to get my nails fixed because *the fumes will fuck with my heart*. Where did he even read that?

I sigh but I feel the tug of a smile on my face. Even with my eyes shut, I know he's in here. "Hi, Oran."

"Uh, hi, Ainslee. How did you even hear me? I tried to be as silent as I could be."

I pop my eyes open. "You're forgetting who my father is, aren't you? Plus, my dad took me hunting a couple of times. Taught me a few things."

"Oh?" he says, sitting on the side of the tub. "What did you guys hunt?"

The people who betray him. "Uh, you know, just the usual kill."

"Deer?" he adds.

"Uh... yeah. Yeah! Deer!" I say. Oran narrows his eyes at me as if he doesn't believe me. For a moment, we sit there staring at each other. I know he wants me to say something, but there are things even he can't ever know. "So..." I continue.

Oran smirks. "Sooo?"

"How can I be of service to you?" I ask.

Oran's face morphs into one so lust-filled that I shudder. "Rerword your question, baby."

I smile. "What can I help you with?"

"Nothing." Oran shrugs.

“Okay, so you’re just what? Going to sit on the edge of the tub like a nanny? Get in.”

“No,” Oran says firmly.

For a second, I just stare at him. I don’t say anything. I lift my leg out and poke him with my big toe. He flicks my toe away but I do it again. Oran looks at me and I gaze right back at him. After a moment, he smiles and I die a little inside. He’s so mesmerizing to look at. Does he know that when he smiles, his entire face transforms? He looks so happy. So carefree. I want to smile like that.

“Please...” I beg. I poke my lip out, knowing that I have one power of persuasion, my pout.

Oran widens his eyes. “Really?” He sighs and instead of removing his sweats and t-shirt, he gets into the bath with them on.

I can’t help but laugh. “You know, you’re actually kind of silly once you get past all that extra-ness that you give off.”

“Extra-ness?” Oran repeats.

“Mmhmm. So, you came in here to sit with me in the tub with clothes on?” I ask again. “Aren’t you supposed to be working?”

“Yeah, I took a break for a couple of minutes,” Oran answers.

“Why?”

“I need a reason to take a fucking break now? What am I, your employee?” Oran answers with no bite in his voice.

“Sheesh, Mr. Hale, that tone will not be tolerated in my company.” I grin.

Oran reaches under the water and pulls my foot out. “You know, I found out something about you.”

“What is that?”

Oran surprises me as he tickles my foot. I can’t help it as I laugh wholeheartedly. “Stop, Stop it. Okay, okay, I quit. I surrender!” I can’t stop laughing, but Oran stops tickling me and kisses the sole of my foot.

“How are you feeling?” he asks. “Come over here, let me see your heart rate.” I roll my eyes and move closer but I take advantage of that. I wait until Oran is distracted monitoring my watch and I slip into his lap. “Ains...” he calls my name softly.

“I just want to be in your lap. You don’t touch me, you won’t even kiss me.”

Oran smirks. “It’s only been a week, you fiend.”

“It’s been a long week.”

Oran’s smirk turns into a full blown grin. “That’s what this is about? You want me to kiss you?” I nod. He rolls his eyes at me but he closes the space between us and kisses me quickly. I wrap my arms around his neck, pulling him back for another kiss. I want to show him my gratitude for being with me even though I’m annoyed. Oran automatically kisses me back. I moan into his mouth and he pulls away. “Good?”

I suck my bottom lip into my mouth, trying not to grin. I nod. Oran looks at my bottom lip when I pop it back out of my mouth. He licks his lips and he looks down at my exposed breasts that the suds

have all melted off of. “Oran...” I call his name huskily and after a moment of silence, he looks up at me.

“Come on, bug, I need to go back to work now,” he says.

I pout, but I nod my head. I stand up right in front of him and he grips my legs. He leans in and for the first time, I’m pretty sure my pussy being right in his face is something he enjoys about my height. Oran’s hands move up to my ass, gripping both cheeks, and he inhales my scent. He exhales and stands, getting out of the tub. He gets me out even though I can do it myself. He wraps a robe around me. “You know I can manage to do this right? I’m good,” I say camly.

“Doesn’t matter,” he says. I shake my head because this is so weird for me.

ORAN

I know that Ainslee is getting annoyed with me checking on her, but I just can’t help it. Even now that I try to work, I can’t help but move around to where she is. After the bath, I changed my clothes and really tried to give her room, but memories of how I had to do this with mom swept over my mind, taking me hostage . She doesn’t get it. I’ve lost someone before and I won’t lose another. Ainslee sighs again as she lays back on the couch and then she sits up. “What do you need? I’ll get it.”

Ainslee glares at me. “I’ve got it. I’m just getting a snack.” I stand too, instead of doing my work. “What are you doing?”

“Helping.”

Ainslee lets out a frustrated sigh. “Oran! I can do things by myself. You’re up my ass! Why? You’re being super weird. I know what to avoid and what not to avoid. I have the fucking Fitbit on, is that not good enough? What is wrong with you? You don’t give two shits about me like that, so just... I don’t know, stop it!”

I feel like she just slapped me. “What are you talking about? I do give a shit. When did I act like I didn’t?”

Ainslee sighs. “Look, Oran, I’m not saying you weren’t scared when all that happened. I was scared too, but you don’t have to do that. All this,” she says and I know she’s not trying to be rude. She’s just saying, but for some reason, it ticks me off.

“You don’t know what the hell I was feeling when Esme ran up to me saying something happened to you! You don’t know how I felt when I was in the car holding on to your things because I couldn’t check on you myself.” I feel my anger growing. “You don’t know how I felt when I had to wait TWO HOURS! TWO FUCKING HOURS just to make sure everything was good. Don’t tell me how to feel! YOU DON’T KNOW ME!”

“Don’t yell at me!” Ainslee says firmly. “Stop yelling at me!”

“WHY THE FUCK NOT? You keep thinking that you have to do this alone! It’s not about you doing it all alone. I could have lost you like I lost my mother! You don’t understand, Ainslee. I wasn’t

attentive enough! I didn't pay her the attention that I should've. I let someone else take care of her. My mother deserved a chance to live. She shouldn't have DIED! She didn't deserve to die! You can't die, Ainslee!" I yell out and I see the shock on her face. I feel the tears that I've been keeping in since the night in the shower.

Ainslee's face falls. "Oran..." she calls my name softly. "Babe." She moves closer to me and she wraps her arms around me. I don't cry out loud, but the tears don't stop. I hear her sniffing, "Don't cry, please don't cry," Ainslee says.

I pull away from her and look at her. "Why are you crying, bug?"

Ainslee looks up at me. All the sadness in the world couldn't stop her from looking like the sweetest girl alive. "Because..." she starts. "I don't want you to cry." She sniffles as she wraps her arms around me. This stops me from tearing up and I don't know why it's so funny. Instead of tearing up, I laugh hard. I don't mean to laugh at her, but it's funny that she's crying for me so hard. My little crybaby.

She holds onto me tight and I kiss the top of her head.

AFTER THE CRY-FEST, Ainslee and I decided to try something we both do not do when we're awake. We cuddle on the couch while looking for a movie to watch on Netflix. She doesn't pressure me to talk or anything like that. We pick a random movie.

"Was she good to you?" Ainslee asks me softly.

I look at her, but she's staring at the screen. I smile. "Yeah, she was. She was the best mother I could ever ask for. She's from the States and one time, she came here on vacation. She had a whirlwind vacation affair with Elmer, but she didn't find out she was pregnant until she went back home. During her time with Elmer, she saw him for what he truly was and his lies didn't cover up what a piece of shit he was. So, she didn't tell him. It was just her and me until I was 13. She was diagnosed with lupus. We weren't well off, so Mom brought us back to Founders after some negotiations. I met the asshole who didn't empty his load into a condom for the first time." I sigh and Ainslee rubs my arm for comfort.

I know she's listening. "The bastard didn't acknowledge me. He actually wanted a fucking DNA test and didn't acknowledge me until then. For the time that we stayed with him, he seemed...nice. There was something that just seemed off about him. I couldn't put my finger on it then, but slowly he revealed what kind of monster he truly was. He started to call my mother names like 'lazy' whenever she had her flare ups. But whenever the camera was clicking and he was in public, he was the victim. He had people fooled for a lot of years. He made my mother seem like some gold digger who had a child just for the money. He made it out to be like he had no choice but to marry her. Things turned bad one night when my mother and I got back from a party. Elmer was jealous because of her

popularity and he tried to choke her out. I got in between them and told him that if he ever tried to do that again, he would deal with me. My mom was a wonderful and caring woman, but it hurt both of us in the end. She hid things from me that Elmer would make her do in exchange for her medication. I didn't know this until my mother went into kidney failure, but the motherfucker just fucked with her meds too much. It broke my heart when I found out I wasn't a match. She was on the transplant list and the fucker wouldn't quit messing with her dialysis appointments, so I took over. I took her to her appointments, made sure she was taking her meds and everything. Things were looking up and Jagger even helped out. But, one night, the night she passed, she had a cold. I checked on her and made sure she was good. I left, but Elmer, the fucking asshole, gave her Theraflu instead of warm water with lemon. That's all he had to do. Just that. Just fucking that..." I hear my voice go quiet.

Ainslee sighs and moves out of my arms. "Get up," she says. I look at her like she's crazy, but I do it.

"Ainslee, I'm not fucking you after I just told you that about my mother," I say defensively.

Ainslee sighs and sits back on the couch. She lays flat. "Come to me," she says and I smirk at her use of words. "Lay your head on my heart." I do as she tells me to, but I try to keep my weight off her.

"Am I hurting you?" I ask her.

"No," she answers. She runs her fingers through my hair without saying anything for a moment. "Close your eyes." I do as I'm told. "Feel, hear, and breathe in your surroundings. Don't use your eyes."

"Okay."

"Do you hear my heart beating?" she asks me.

"Yeah."

"I want you to know something. I've never told anyone this because of ... things. Anyway, your mother, I didn't know her well. I didn't know her as you did, but I've met her. It was at some socialite party and I had gotten my period for the first time ever. I was 14 years old and a late bloomer, at that. I wore a white dress that day. I ran to the bathroom, too embarrassed, and cried my heart out because I thought I was dying. I know... dramatic AF, but I couldn't ask Mikonos or Markos because they weren't there. Your mom saw me run away and she followed me. She knocked on the bathroom door and I let her in. She sat with me, told me I wasn't going to die, and that it meant I was becoming a woman. She gave me a pad out of her purse and told me to always carry one. She asked me where my room was and I told her. She brought me a clean pair of clothes. She saw the marks on my back, they were...fresh." I suck a breath in. I keep my eyes shut, trying not to react. I just love that she met my mother. "She didn't judge me or try to touch me. Instead, she turned away, letting me change, and when I was all done, she pulled me into a hug. I'm pretty sure she cried. I didn't get it then. I didn't know why she cried for me when I didn't deserve that, but I'm happy she brought me a pad. It was probably the nicest thing a mother has ever done for me."

Ainslee hums as she rises up a little. She kisses my hair and falls back on the couch. "Thank you,"

I say to her. We stay quiet with the tv playing in the background. Ainslee is still playing in my hair.

“Oran...”

“Yeah, bug?”

“Thank you,” she says.

“For what?”

“For being there for me. For sharing that with me and for letting me into your world. Into your life. I want to be your wife.”

I turn, placing my forehead on her belly, exposed from her crop top riding higher. “And I want to be your husband,” I say.

We’ve called a truce. We’re going to try.

THE SECOND WEEK WITHOUT SEX, and Oran still up my ass, is driving me crazy. Not him entirely, but the fact that he's so insistent on me not taking my ass anywhere. That makes me crazy. The man is insufferable. So damned insufferable that I'm sitting here in the pantry eating Oreos because he's making me crazy. I want to thump him over the head with something. I know we called a truce and said that we'd try, but trying doesn't just happen in a day. Oran is probably somewhere monitoring my heart rate on the app on his phone. Sick fuck. I hear a knock on the pantry door. "Can I come in? It's Karessa."

"Huh? Uh, come in."

"Hey, hey..." she says as she comes in. She's dressed down and this is the first time I've ever seen Karessa not wearing heels. "Heard you were in here."

"Hey." I give her a weak smile. "I had to stay away from that man. He likes to try me."

Karessa laughs as she sits down with me. "Well, I'm here to rescue you. You have my number, call me when you need rescuing from the man."

"Spa date?" I suggest.

"For sure. I'll bring my bodyguards, Esme and Imala."

I laugh. "I'm so for it."

We stay quiet for a beat and then Karessa clears her throat. "Can I ask you something? Totally unrelated to everything else, but is related to Jagger?"

"Sure."

"You know, with what happened to him, and the whole Elmer ordeal, I was wondering if maybe you know a bit about this? He's not sleeping very well and I don't want to pressure him to talk. He seems tense about it. Should I sort of ease him into a conversation?"

I look at her and I know she's concerned about him. I'm glad that fucker Jagger has someone who cares about him this much. "Honestly, you just give him time. There's not much you can do about it because, depending on the person, that shit might be keeping them up at night, but it doesn't mean he isn't trying to maintain his normalcy. Which is where you come in. You need to provide him with normalcy. Let him know that whatever happens, you're there. but don't say it. Just let him be. When he

wants to hang out, do it. When he wants to cuddle, do that. And when he wants to get all Jagger-like, let him do it. Let him feel like he's in control of his life."

Karessa nods. "Sheesh, that was some good advice."

I nod back. "Yeah, I've been through what he's going through. It's not as crazy as his, but I've been held up at gunpoint. I was 14 and scared out of my mind. I thought those men were going to come back and kill me for months. I had nightmares, but my dad let me rage. He let me lose my shit, and Jagger doesn't know this, but he provided me with a sense of normalcy when he fought with me. So yeah, it takes time, but he'll be alright. He's a fighter."

Karessa smiles. "He is."

"Yeah... don't tell him I said that though." I roll my eyes and we laugh.

"WHAT'S your favorite song that you're happy dropped after 2015?" Karessa asks.

"I have two; Watermelon Sugar by Harry Styles and Problem With You by Sabrina Claudio," I answer.

"Now playing Problem With You by Sabrina," Alexa repeats.

I go to stop it but I laugh instead. "I don't know this song, but let's listen. Can I get an Oreo?" Karessa asks.

I stop eating one halfway through. "Uh..." I don't say anything, but I reluctantly push the box over to her. If I'm going to make friends, I have to learn to share Oreos.

Karessa smiles. "So, how's everything with you? Have you been feeling okay?"

I nod. "Yeah, thanks for asking. How are you doing? I kind of ruined your wedding."

Karessa laughs. "Girl, I'm pretty sure my dad did that when he forced me into this predicament."

"Shit, at least you guys got to the cake cutting. We, on the other hand...left because my ex-boyfriend and my ex-best friend basically decided it was the day to just shit on me even more. People are fucking weird."

"I concur. So, since we're in here, tell me two interesting things about you," Karessa says.

I know she's just making conversation and I appreciate her for that. "Hmm, I used to dance ballet but I stopped, and I have a favorite gun. It's rose gold and custom made. Hold on..." I crawl over to the door and I open it to make sure the coast is clear. "BRB," I whisper.

I tiptoe into my filming room and reach under my computer desk. I tap it three times and my gun is released. I lift up my shirt, tucking the gun into my shorts at the small of my back, then cover it with my shirt again. I tiptoe back to the pantry. Karessa looks up from her phone. "I was going to tell you something, but I'll wait until after the gun demonstration," she says.

I laugh. "Okay." I sit down with my legs wide open, placing the gun in the middle. "I'm going to take the bullets out in front of you so that you know that I'm not trying to hurt you."

Karessa smiles and nods. “A relief, really.”

I laugh. I take the bullets out, emptying the clip. “This is a Glock 43X. The frame is rose gold. My father got it for me for my 25th birthday. It's engraved.”

“A gun for your birthday?” Karessa asks.

I shrug. “I really wanted it,” I answer. “Want to time how fast it takes me to take it apart and put it back together. I haven't done it in a while, but I used to do it in under five minutes.”

Karessa whistles. “Okay,” she presses a timer on her phone and she sets it “...go!”

I take the gun apart piece by piece, not thinking about anything else, and then I put it back together, trying my best not to be pressured by my five minute record. “Done! How'd I do?”

Karessa stops the timer, but she stares at me like I'm an anomaly. “Karessa? That bad? Ugh. It's been awhile, so maybe I'll have to brush up on it. I used to do it all the time because it was hard to fall asleep. A habit I picked up from my dad. When he can't fall asleep or when something is wrong, his thought process goes along with stripping the guns and putting them back together. I almost beat his time but I couldn't. He's too good at it.” I realized I overshared. “Sorry, I'm rambling.”

“Ainslee...What the hell? How can you be so good at this? You did it in three minutes and fifty-five seconds.”

“What!”

“Can you do it again? Let's see if you can beat the time or if you get close,” Karessa says with excitement in her eyes.

I nod. “Okay.”

Karessa sets the time again and as it starts, the music is changed and I hear Watermelon Sugar playing from the built-in speakers. I can't help it as I break into a smile. It's the song that was playing when Oran nearly made me into a porn star. Luckily, he pulled me to the side, but now I get tagged in videos of me moaning and him groaning. I don't even want to talk about it. “Done!” I yell.

Karessa shows me the timer. Three minutes and two seconds. I smile at my new record. I am going to beat my dad the next time we do this. “That was impressive.”

“Thank you!” I say. “Now, you tell me a thing or two about yourself,” I say as I check my gun out.

“Hmm, my biggest crush on the Island was Oran,” she says and shuts her eyes.

I stay quiet but then I laugh. She opens one eye and then the other. “Oran as in Oran Hale? The asshole Oran? Grumpy-ass Oran?”

Karessa nods, opening both eyes. “Yeah.”

“Holy hell. That's a crush.” Then the smile falls away.

“What is it? Did I make it awkward?” Karessa asks.

I shake my head. “No, I just... I realized that I'm married to him and I'm probably making shit weird. I'm sorry.”

Karessa laughs. “Girl, it's not like you knew. I'll even do you one better, we didn't get to really choose.”

“But I did choose him. My dad gave me a choice and I chose him because I thought he was the safest bet,” I confess.

“Safest bet? Who? The same Oran Hale sitting out there?” she asks.

I snicker. “Don’t remind me. I was obviously tripping on some new drug that’s not out on the market. I learned the hard way. He did not make it easy for me when he found out.”

Karessa laughs. “Question though, how did you convince him to go through with it? What kind of leverage did you have?”

I lift up my gun. “This. Well, not this particular one, but he was held at gunpoint. I didn’t exactly approve of the method. Apparently, no one can make Oran Hale do what he doesn’t want to do, but I’m sure when faced with death, people tend to make a decision.”

“I mean, I would’ve lost my mind if I was held at gunpoint too. I think I would’ve cried, not even going to lie,” Karessa says.

I shake my head. “Nah, I think you’re tougher than that. Let’s try it out.” I point my empty gun at her head. Karessa’s eyes widen, but other than that, there’s no other shock. “The Belles taught you well.”

Karessa opens her mouth to respond and the pantry door flies open. I turn to look at Jagger and Oran. Both of them assess the situation and Jagger is the first to speak. “Put the gun down, Ainslee! All of this because she had a crush on your husband!”

Both Karessa and I look at him like he’s dumb. Oran looks at her, the gun, and then me. He narrows his eyes at me. “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

I roll my eyes. “Excuse me, your dramatic highness! It’s fucking empty. There’s no need to be rude, assholes!” I pick up the bullets and show them.

Karessa stands, trying to avoid the awkwardness that she feels. “Ainslee, thank you for showing me that. I’m just going to grab some things in the car. Be right back.”

She pushes through the boys. Idiots. I shake my head. I grab my bullets, putting them in my pocket, and I shove between the two. I take my baby back to my filming room. Not even a moment later, Oran walks in and slams the door. “You have a gun in my house and you didn’t tell me? How long have you had it here?”

“From the second I moved in,” I answer as I unconsciously begin to strip the gun apart as I sit on the couch.

“So, you’re going to just bring shit into my house and not tell me?”

“Ugh. It’s not like I brought some blow into the house. I’m a fucking Bishop. Do you know what that means?” I ask as I put the gun back together.

“Yeah, that you threaten people to do shit for you with guns.”

I can’t help it as I laugh mirthlessly. I shake my head. “The gun was empty, Oran.”

“Come again?”

“The gun that was aimed at your head was empty, dude.” I strip the gun again, shaking my head.

Something isn't right. What did I do wrong with this gun just now?

Oran laughs but I know it's not out of amusement. "So, you're telling me I could've said no?"

I snicker. "Was my dad there when it happened?"

"Yeah."

"Then no, he would've shot you with his gun. The man never goes back on his word. I just wanted you to know that the gun pointed at your head was empty. Just for you to sleep better at night." I shrug.

Oran watches me silently as I put the gun back together properly. "Look at me, Ainslee," Oran says. I look up at him. "No more secrets. If you have things in the house, then you tell me. I'm not mad that you have it. I'm upset that you chose not to tell me. I need to know these things."

"I understand." I get up and place the gun back where I got it.

"Come here, show me your heart rate because you got a little fucking excited there with all this shit."

I roll my eyes and try not to punch Oran in the gut. "You're like my grandfather. I couldn't even fall in peace. Sheesh. I'm fine, dude."

Oran checks my Fitbit to make sure everything is good. "Don't call me dude, Bug. It's either Oran or babe, if you're feeling froggy." He kisses my temple. He stands and brings me out of the room. Jagger and Karessa are sitting on the couch, cuddling. Both Oran and I make a noise. I shake my head, the fuck is this lovey-dovey shit? Eww.

We sit on the couch. "What do you guys want to watch?" Oran asks.

"Don't care," I say. Jagger agrees with me. I pick up my phone that I left on the coffee table. I sit back on the couch, bending my knees, bringing them to my chest while Oran and Karessa agree on some bullshit rom-com. I make a gagging sound as I unlock my phone. Why the fuck do I have over a hundred comments from some *Hale_Spawn* account on Instagram? When I get to the profile, I click on the only picture they have. It's Oran in some kind of fucking thirst trap. The fuck? His shirt is lifted up, he's holding the hem of it between his teeth, and he's showing half of his chest and abs. His black Versace boxer briefs band is showing and that's where the picture ends. I go back to my notifications and on each one of my pictures, there's the word *DELETE* in capital letters. "What the actual fuck is this?"

"Oh, I see you've finally checked your Instagram. Kindly delete every picture I commented on," Oran says as he watches the movie.

Karessa snickers. "I tried to tell you, but you had a gun."

"He commented on a hundred posts. Where did you even get the time for that?"

"Jagger helped me," Oran answers nonchalantly. "Anyway, I'm ordering takeout. You guys in?"

Karessa and Jagger agree. "Yeah, yeah," I say. "What are you ordering?"

"The only place that knows what I like." He calls off his phone. "Hey, Mr. Wong, it's me, Oran. Yeah, you ready? Can I get a number one, three, five, seven, ten and hmmm... a number six. Add in like a dozen rolls; egg and spring. Yeah, that's it for my order, hold on, what do you guys want?"

Both Karessa and I's mouths drop. Jagger carries on like nothing. "Get me a number four, five and half a dozen spring rolls."

Oran repeats Jagger's order and he looks at us. Karessa speaks first, "Get me something good."

Oran looks at me and his fingers curl around my ankle. "You want me to order for you?"

I nod, because did this man just order six meals and a dozen egg rolls for himself?

Oran snatches my phone from me after 30 minutes of me being inactive with them and trying to look at his fucking thirst trap comments. "Give it back," I say.

"No. I read that too much use of a cell isn't good for your pacemaker. It fucks with it."

"Oran."

"Ainslee."

"There's no such fucking research. Give me my phone, I'm trying to report your thirst trap," I say.

Oran smirks. "Oh, is that right? You want me to delete that post?"

"Uh, duh! Why else would I report it?"

"Delete your pictures that I marked on your posts, then I'll delete mine," he says.

"That's not even remotely the same thing. Give me the phone," I say and reach for it on the other side of him.

Oran picks me up, placing me in his lap. He turns me around, bending my knees to my chest like I was sitting before, and wraps his arms around me. "Stay still." He kisses behind my ear and I melt. Fuck, why does he know my weakness? "Just so you're aware, for every picture that you post that's even remotely sexy or where you look like if you sneeze one of your body parts will be exposed, I'm going to post another thirst trap."

"You're being ridiculously unfair, I swear," I retort.

"Am I being unfair, guys?" Oran asks Karessa and Jagger.

"With suffocating the troll, no, but with this gag worthy rom-com movie, yes. Even I have limits," Jagger says.

"You have limits?" Karessa says surprised. "You had a butt plug up my ass and *this* is your limit?" she asks. "Oh shit! Sorry guys!" Karessa hides her face in Jagger's chest.

Jagger laughs. "Don't be shy now, sweet baby. It made you feel good though, right? There's regular limits and Hanlon Limits."

I'm intrigued. "Butt plugs? How do they feel?" I ask Karessa.

"You want to try it out or something?" Oran asks.

"Hmm, maybe. I'm curious," I say.

Oran pulls his phone out, using one arm to subdue me. He places his phone in front of both of us. "I don't hate it. We can try it and see if it's something." He goes to the sex shop website.

"How do you even know which one to go to?" I ask.

"It's Jagger's favorite site."

Jagger smiles. "You won't be disappointed. If you don't know what to choose, pick the mystery

box. You won't regret it." He smirks, winking at me.

The last person I'd trust with mystery boxes is Jagger Hanlon.

ORAN

IT'S late and after the umpteenth movie, I look down at Ainslee. She's passed out on top of me and the little crazy is still sleeping in the same position. Does this girl not care about her body? Her curly waves are everywhere. I'm used to that, but usually it's not in my mouth. I stretch her legs out and she groans. "Stop it, Oran," she mumbles in her sleep.

"Even in her sleep, she's ready to say some slick shit," Jagger teases.

I look over at Karessa who is fast asleep too. What is it with women and sleeping while watching movies and cuddling? "You guys can sleep here. Bug furnished the guest room for her stupid videos," I say, rolling my eyes.

Jagger snickers. "Bug, huh?" he repeats.

"Don't give me shit," I say.

Jagger sobers but the smile is still on his face. "You know anyone who makes you happy, makes me happy. She's bringing out the Oran that I haven't seen in a long time. I missed him," he says.

"Why didn't you say anything?" I ask him as I scoop Ainslee up in my arms.

"Because, it's not my journey, dude. It's yours, and I'm just here to ride in the passenger seat."

"Deep shit, bro."

"Thanks, motherfucker." Jagger slowly gets up and manages to lift Karessa in his arms.

"Did you think we'd be doing this? Like, carrying our wives?" I whisper as Ainslee hums. Her fingers find their way into my hair and she smiles.

"You spoil her too much," Jagger teases. "But no, I didn't think that."

We reach the hall and we both go our own separate ways after we tell each other goodnight.

AINSLEE

"WHY WEREN'T you at the commencement ceremony? Huh?" My mother digs her nails into my arm. She's going to leave a mark which means she won't let me go anywhere until it heals. I sigh as

my mother drags me into our private dance studio. I already know what she wants me to do. Sometimes this is her form of punishment. Especially when my dad is gone for the week. I walk over to my ballet flats and I put them on. My mother shuts the door.

“Plié,” my mother shouts the first move. I do it without a word. “Double plié! Grand plié, retiré!” she yells.

Usually, this punishment doesn’t take long, but there was an evil look in her eyes, and I should’ve known. I should’ve realized what it was that she was going to do. She grabs a counting stick. She slams it against the wall each time to tell me which move she wants me to do.

After what seems like forever, my body is aching for me to stop but she won’t let me. “Mom! Please! I can’t...” I cry out.

“AGAIN!” my mother yells at me. “It’s only been an hour, Ainslee. This is nothing. We won’t stop until you reach two hours without puking or passing out.”

“TWO!” she yells and I drop to my knees. I puke up the contents of my birthday party, cake and pizza, still heaving when it’s all gone.

“Happy Birthday, Ainslee Bishops,” my mother says in an icy tone.

For my 18th birthday, I cried my heart out. My feet bled, the blood soaking through the material of the ballet flats, but she didn’t care. In my head, I was stuck in a loop while I dropped to the floor next to my own puke. I was too tired to move. The loop of the full two hours was too far away. My feet throbbed, my head ached, and everything inside of me broke apart. “Mommy! Please. Please,” I begged.

ORAN

A beeping sound jolts me awake. I know that damn Fitbit sound anywhere. I turn to search for Ainslee with my hands first but find nothing. I sit up, opening my eyes. My eyes adjust to the dark room that’s highlighted by the moonlight. The moon’s light shines on Ainslee and this would’ve been a beautiful scene if she wasn’t doing some ballet moves in the middle of the night. “Ainslee.” I call her name out but she won’t stop.

“Please... Please...” I hear her whimper.

I jump out of bed and make my way to her, but she won’t stop. “Ainslee, stop! Ainslee!” I yell her name out.

She hears her name and she looks at me, but her eyes are so vacant. Is she even awake? Is she sleep dancing? “Please, it hurts, mom. I want to stop. Please...Please,” she cries harder as she continues to dance.

I sigh and try not to shake her. I know they say you shouldn’t shock sleepwalkers but I strike her

lightly and Ainslee stumbles a bit, but she stops. Her eyes open up. “Oran?”

I walk closer to her and hug her. “Fuck, you scared me!” I say to her.

“What happened? I was dreaming. I was having a ...”

“A nightmare? About your mom?”

She nods. “Yes.”

A knock on the door stops me from asking her more questions. “Everything okay in there?” Jagger asks.

“Yeah, Ainslee just had a bad dream.”

“Is she okay?” Jagger asks.

“Yeah, I think so.” I answer.

“Okay, let me know if you need me,” Jagger says.

“Cool. Ainslee, sit on the bed. I’ll be right back.” I walk into our ensuite bathroom and grab a face towel. I fill up the sink with hot water. I shut it off and I go back into the room to pick her up. I lift her up and once we get into the bathroom, I place her on the counter. I put her feet in the water. I don’t say anything to her, but I’m glad her feet aren’t bruised with as much as she was doing that. I listen to her heartbeat from her Fitbit. It’s beating at the normal rate. I don’t ask her anything about the nightmare. I want her to tell me. “You want to go back to sleep?” I ask her.

I look up at Ainslee. She has her arms wrapped around her upper body. She shakes her head. “No, but if you want to, you can. I’ll just stay up.”

“Ains...”

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay, we’re learning. You want to get out of here?” I say to her.

“Yeah.”

I BRING Ainslee to my favorite 24-hour diner. Ainslee is dressed down in one of my hoodies and a pair of leggings with sneakers. She has her feet up on the booth upholstery, her knees to her body. Her curly hair is up in a messy bun. She’s gorgeous. I take her in as she sips her tea. I don’t think I’ve ever really paid attention to her freckles or her cute, big ears. I knew she had some, but I never really just wanted to store them in my head. Her full lips are luscious. That’s probably why she can pout at anybody and they give in. Her gray eyes are big, almond shaped. I’ve never really thought about her ethnicity or anything like that, but at this moment, I wonder how it was for her growing up multiracial. Having so many cultures intertwined with each other and having to keep up with it while trying to find your own identity.

Ainslee sighs and looks at me. She opens her mouth and she starts to relay what the nightmare was about and what actually happened with her mother. I try not to react. How could a mother do that to

her? How could she try to ruin the skin of such a gorgeous creature? What is wrong with that bitch? After Ainslee finishes telling me, I shut my eyes. I place my elbows on the table and cover my face. “Did she also do that to your back, Bug? Tell me.”

“Oran, don’t ask me to tell you things I’m not ready to say. Please don’t.”

“I understand,” I say to her even though I’m ready to march to Natasha Bishops’ house and do something. I don’t know what.

We get quiet for a beat and the song *At Last* by Etta James comes on. Ainslee shuts her eyes and sways to the song with a smile on her face. “This was my grandmother’s favorite song. My dad’s mom. Adriana Bishops. She died when I was 8, but I remember everything about her. We danced to this song as often as we could. She used to sing it to me saying that it was hers and her husband’s, Montgomery ‘Mont’ Bishops, who was named after our first founder. I never met him because he died when my father was 16. That’s when my dad took over and became the head.”

“Wow,” I say “I didn’t even know that.”

“Yeah, it’s things we don’t really pay attention to, if we’re being honest.”

I smile. “True.”

We sit there for a bit longer talking about random things when I see the sun about to rise. “Ains, come with me,” I say to her. “I want to show you something.” I take her with me back to the house and we ditch the shoes and phones inside. I take her for a stroll on the beach. We don’t talk, but we admire the scenery as the sun rises. I slip my hand into hers and she intertwines our fingers together.

After watching the sun rise, Ainslee stops. She lets go of my hand and starts taking her leggings off. “If you beat me to the water, I’ll cook you dinner three nights a week,” she teases. She gets her leggings off and I watch her.

“Make it four nights,” I say. “Throw in some muffins. Assortment works too. I want one before I go to work and on Fridays, bring me lunch at my office.”

Ainslee smirks. “I’ll only go to your office if you say we’re going to have dirty sex in the copy machine room.”

I shake my head as I chuckle. “Ains…”

“What about the coffee break room then?” she teases. “Hmm, no, let’s do it in the parking lot… wait… no, no, the boardroom, so that every time you have a meeting in there, you’ll always think of how good you fucked me.” She wiggles her brows. Ainslee smiles as she removes my hoodie, revealing a tight tank and her panties. She runs towards the water and I watch her for a minute. The smile that she gave me right before she turned away from me is so serene and she’s happy. I make her happy. I did that. I quickly strip, knowing that I’m letting her win.

I make it to her as she’s getting into the water. I wrap my arm around her waist, lifting her up. Ainslee yelps but she laughs as I walk us further into the cold-ass water. Our bodies get shocked but we stay in. I let her go and she turns to face me. I lean in and she wraps her legs and arms around me. “You’d deny me a kiss in this cold-ass water?” she teases as she rubs her lips over mine.

I groan as I wrap my arms around her waist. “I just might,” I say.

“Thank you,” she whispers.

“I’m your husband, woman. It’s my duty to be here.” Ainslee kisses me hard and I kiss her back. I pull away for a moment. “After you get some shut eye, we’re going to see your doctor. Understand?”

“Understood.”

“Good,” I say and I don’t bother doing anything else as I kiss her silly.

THE CAUSE of that nightmare was the temporary pills that they put me on. My doctor told me to start up with the same prescription. They removed the temporary pacemaker and I feel like a free woman. I promised my doctor that I wouldn't forget my meds again.

After that, all four of us went out for some breakfast at one of my family's bistros. I felt like a normal human being all because I could consume a damn alcoholic beverage. Oran watched me like a hawk but Jagger provided enough distractions for me to get a little buzzed. I'm not an alcoholic, but I do love the drinks at our bistros. I assisted Mikonos when he chose the menus. That's his super power, making a menu so perfect that it makes you wonder why the big shit never became a chef or owned a restaurant. I look up to find Mikonos behind the bar acting like he's not watching my every move. I lift my glass and tip it towards him. He smirks and flips me the finger. Markos comes out of the kitchen with a plate and he walks by everyone else like they don't matter. He places the cupcake right in front of me. He leans closer to my face like he's going to do something mischievous. I roll my eyes at him. "This is my 'you're allowed to make us worry once free' cupcake, little shit," he says in Greek.

"Yeah, yeah," I say as I lick my lips at the cupcake.

"He treating you good?" he continues in Greek, "because if he's not, next time, my gun won't be empty."

Oran grumbles, "I understand and speak Greek, motherfucker."

Markos grins like a fucking Cheshire cat. "I know you do, brother-in-law," he replies in English. "Don't forget to lock the kitchen sliding doors to your pool next time. Be smart." Markos winks at him and before he walks off, he places a kiss on the side of my temple.

"Was that fucker in my house?" Oran asks me.

I snicker. "Oran, both of them have keys and access to your house, but don't worry, they won't go in. What he's saying is to lock up so no one gets in. I'm a Bishop, the next in line, I'll always be a target. Paparazzi or not," I say nodding to the guys outside taking pictures of the four of us.

"Heard we're in a polyamorous relationship," Jagger speaks. "That's what the news is saying. We just all share each other."

I laugh. “Actually, according to the gossip sites, you two got married to cover up your relationship. They’ve caught Oran sneaking out of your penthouse in the middle of the night, Jagger... a couple days before your wedding! Shame on you, Hanlon!”

Jagger laughs and then narrows his eyes at me. “Why are you acting like this with me, you sick fucker? You told them to poison me in the kitchen, didn’t you?” he teases.

“I could punch you in the dick to show you how I really feel.”

“I keep telling you people I don’t need my dick to please a woman, isn’t that right, sweet baby?” he coos to Karessa. She coughs as she was mid-drink. Jagger pats her back. “See what I mean? I make her choke even without stuffing my dick down her throat.”

Karessa shoves him and Jagger laughs. He pulls her in for a quick kiss. It’s odd to say but I don’t hate that even Jagger Hanlon has found someone he truly likes. Didn’t care much for Layla, but it wasn’t my place to tell him that, plus he would’ve told me to shut the hell up.

After we finish brunch, we head outside. I put my shades on as we pass by the paparazzi. I swear they seem bolder ever since I got married to Oran. I used to be able to avoid them with my status but I guess they think it’s okay now. “Ainslee! Ainslee! We heard you were in the hospital! Is it bad? Someone said it’s your heart.”

I stop and face whoever asked the question. I stick my tongue out and give them the universal rockstar gesture; the hand-horn. I walk away knowing my mother is going to flip. Not only did I do that, but my shorts and sweater outfit looks like I should only wear it inside. My hair is in its curly state down my back. Natasha Bishops is definitely going to call me to talk shit to me.

WHEN WE GET BACK to the house, Jagger and Oran go grab groceries, saying they’re making food tonight. Karessa and I watch YouTube dance videos. “Did you do cheerleading in high school too?” Karessa asks me.

“Yeah! I did just about anything that my mother wanted me to do. The belles, cheerleading, ballet, fucking band camp. I didn’t hate that, but still. You name it, I did it.” The next song that plays is Hey Ya by Outkast. “Oh my God! I remember the routine we had to do for this. I know you know it because after that song came out, they looooved to just blast it with this one routine.”

Karessa laughs. “Holy shit! Yes. I think I still remember it.”

I stand. “Okay! Wait here! I had to do this reenactment of a cheerleading thing on my channel. Wait until you see this.” I jog to one of Oran’s other rooms that I’ve made into my walk-in closet. He’d know if he went in there but he barely does. I move over to the wall labelled ‘costumes’ and pull out the two cheerleading outfits. I make it back to Karessa. “Catch!”

She catches it and she laughs. “They look exactly like our academy colors. Papi, really, Ainslee?”

“It was a gag sort of thing.” I laugh. “I purposefully got those just to tell the academy to suck my

ass for never letting me skip classes in peace.”

“Nice,” Karessa laughs.

“Change and let's get this show on the road.” I quickly change, knowing that I've practiced how to do it in front of people without showing my back. I put the cheerleading top on that covers almost my whole back. I put the skirt over my shorts pulling it over my belly button. I remove my shorts, leaving just my underwear. Karessa changes quickly. Once she's done, I smile. This is going to be so much fun. “Let's move this table out of the way and show me what you got, Mrs. Hanlon.”

“You're on, Mrs. Hale!”

“Wait! Before we start... I have an idea. Since Oran keeps fucking teasing me, I think it's my turn, no?” I ask Karessa.

Karessa smiles like I just told her the biggest secret in the world. “What is your plan? I enjoy putting people in their place sometimes.”

I fake gasp. “Karessa! You? Oh this is perfect. I fuck with it. Let us go into my lair.”

“Lead the way.”

We head to my makeup room. I do a quick one-two with her makeup, bringing out her eyes. I do my make-up as well and add a red lip to both of our looks. I never realized how much fun it would be to do this with someone else. Karessa looked at the finished result. “I'd fuck me too.”

I laugh. “Agreed. Now for the kill.” I set up my phone on the stand and add the ring light in the back. “We can thirst trap with clothes on. Oran said if ‘half-naked’, right? And I'm not naked at all.”

“Girl...” She laughs.

I show her the typical ‘basic bitch’ Instagram pose that seems to get more likes and shit. We pose together for a couple of pictures, then I take pictures of her. I grab a couple of red Blow Pops that I had for a shoot idea with this red lip. I give Karessa one and she poses. If Jagger doesn't fuck her into next week, I don't know what to say. We switch and I tell Karessa where to press. I over exaggerate because I'm trying to get some tonight. I sit back on my knees, open my legs a little bit, plant my palm on the floor while looking into the camera. I give what I consider my typical *get me out of trouble* pout for the first pic. For the second one, I stick half of the Blow Pop in my mouth, throwing my head back with my freshly manicured nails scratching my neck.

“We're going to need to do some tutorials for these pictures because, girl, these are some next level ‘come fuck me’ looks.” I laugh at Karessa. She's so much cooler than I thought. I wish I knew this before so that I could've become friends with her.

We finish choosing pictures. I post two pictures of us together for the first post of the day where we look simply radiant, beautiful, and like a man's wet dream. The caption: *Founder's Keepers*. And for my second post, I post both pictures I took alone with the caption: *Hale's Spawn*. I make sure to tag Oran, the ball is in his court now.

We go back to the living room and we get our dancing on, figuring out if we remember every damned routine.

When we get out of the grocery store, Jagger stops me. “How are you holding up with the whole thing about Elmer?”

I snort and shrug. “He’s dead. What else can I say? He tried to hurt you and he got what was coming. I stopped feeling any way about him when he stopped being my dad...which he never was. I should be asking you this question.”

Jagger nods in understanding. “I can’t really talk about it now, but later.”

“You’ve got two weeks to yourself,” I say.

Jagger chuckles. He pulls out his phone, looks at it, then groans. “Have you seen your wife’s Instagram post? Damn, if she wasn’t your wife, I’d take them both. Give both Karessa and her a night they won’t ever forget.” Jagger laughs.

I pull my cell out and my notifications are going off because of some tagged post. I’m still trying to understand how the fuck this app works. I get in the car after loading things and I look at the first post of Ainslee and Karessa. They really look like a fucking wet dream come true. I stare at it for longer than I should. The comments are blowing up every second and when I go to the other post, I don’t know whether I should be mad or shove my dick down her throat instead of that Blow Pop. I read her caption and, fuck, she’s playing with fire. I smirk. “Fuck.”

“Fuck is right.”

I’m going to fuck her with that cheer costume on if she keeps fucking with me. Red lip and all. When we enter the living room, Karessa and Ainslee are doing some dance routine in cheerleading outfits. I know it’s a routine because of the damn pep rallies. Now, we didn’t have these two in our graduating classes but, damn... Andre 3000 is telling them to lend him some sugar and once the shake it part comes on. Both Ainslee and Karessa lift their right heel and shake their right ass cheek. Ainslee’s skirt lifts and I see her orange lace panties. She’s going to fucking kill me. I want to snatch her little ass up, but I won’t. Just because the doctor gave her the okay, it doesn’t mean shit to me. When Andre 3000 starts talking to all the Beyonces and Lucy Lius, Ainslee and Karessa swing their hips side to side. They do this twirl thing that lands them at the opposite end of each other again switching spots. They dip to the front, arching their backs, touching the floor, then coming back up.

I would be a liar if I didn’t say I was enjoying this a little too much. They finished their little routine with a twist, hands in the air, while Karessa did a side split and Ainslee did a front split. I tilt my head, looking at that split. I know my head actually moved because now I know I can bend her in so many little ways. She’s so damned flexible.

Jagger claps, taking me out of my thoughts and what I could with her. “Now, I deserve my own cheerleader. Any of you want to apply for the position to be put in many fucking positions?”

I don’t usually join Jagger’s antics but I lick my lips, staring at the way Ainslee’s tits sit so perked up in the cheer costume. She looks like a fucking wet dream. “It’s like that one song I heard in

passing... You want to know what it said, Ains?” She nods. “Should I tell her, Jag?” I look at him. He has this devilish look on his face as he stares at Karessa.

“I vote yes. Let her know out loud, Oran.”

I look at Karessa smirking then slowly move my line of vision to Ainslee. “I wanna put you in seven different positions in seventy minutes... You want to experience something like that, Bug?”

She nods. “Yes.”

I smile with all my teeth showing. “Good. Want to play a game? You like wordplay, right?”

She nods again. “You know I do.”

I smirk. “Good. We’re playing Scrabble. Stay in that outfit.”

Jagger tries not to laugh, but he breaks. I know he’s enjoying it because he gets to touch up on Karessa in that little-ass outfit that barely covers their asses.

THIS IS my favorite type of Scrabble game. Ainslee is avoiding rubbing her leg against me because I keep touching her and she keeps losing focus. “Should we do couple vs. couple?” Jagger asks even though he’s looking at Karessa’s legs.

“I’m game.” As Jagger gets the board ready again, I sit right on the floor. I pull Ainslee into my lap even though she grumbles. She’s still mad about being teased.

I don’t do anything to her, leaving her thinking that I won’t continue teasing her. Ainslee gets into the flow of the game as the throwback songs play. I guess this is a song she likes since she forgets and begins to move on top of me. I’ve never really been an ass man and I wondered what the fuck Jagger always saw in biting an ass cheek, but I’m a converted man. I place my palm flat on her stomach, causing her to breathe in, but I know she’s trying to resist as she hums the Jason Derulo’s Want to Want Me. We play for a little bit and some rap song begins to play in the background. Ainslee doesn’t even realize she’s rapping along to it. Karessa seems to know the song too. They both rap/sing to the chorus. “*Shawty a little baddie, shawty my little boo thang. Shawty got the fatty, shawty be catchin’ mood swings.*”

“I want to ask, but I won’t,” I say, shaking my head at the lyrics. It’s funny that they’re rapping along with it when they can’t actually do what he says.

“Don’t,” Jagger says.

“Hey! Don’t disrespect Pop Smokes, okay? This is a good song, babe,” Ainslee says.

“Your move,” Jagger says to Ainslee. “Let’s see what you got!”

She looks over at the board, trying to concentrate on the word. My hand travels lower to her thighs. I lift up her little cheer skirt and slip my hand into her panties. I don’t plan on fucking her tonight, but I still want to touch her. I haven’t touched her for the past two weeks and even if it was for her own good, I’m horny as fuck. I could’ve lasted a couple more days but she pulled out one of

my favorite fantasies; a fucking dirty cheerleader with orange panties, my favorite color. I lather my fingers in her juices then I move a bit higher to her clit, using that as extra lubrication. Ainslee's chest rises as she clears her throat. She tries to move forward but I bring her back. I lazily play with it as her right-hand trembles, trying to form a word. I lean down to her ear. "Next time, you'll think before you challenge me, Hale's Spawn." I bite her earlobe. I look up and I know Jagger's doing some slick shit from his end because Karessa looks just about ready to lose her shit. Before Ainslee can finish her word, Karessa flips the Scrabble board. Jagger laughs as she stands. She blinks rapidly as she walks out of the room. "Excuse us for a minute, I've got a mission to accomplish," Jagger says.

Jagger walks out and I press hard on Ainslee's clit. She moans, throwing her head back against my shoulder. I pull my cell out and go to her post. "Let's read a couple of the comments on your post, shall we?" I tease. I increase how quickly I'm stroking her clit. "Mmm. Your husband is a lucky man. You look edible. That is a sexy-ass costume. That lollipop should be replaced with something else. They get even worse... Can you squirt?" I whisper in her ear. "Should I answer them? And my ultimate favorite... was sleeping last night with your name tattooed on my heart, your hole feels like home." I grunt in her ear. I bite her shoulder hard and I know she's close. "Who the FUCK do these people think they are, talking to my wife like this? Who was this post for, huh?"

Ainslee moans. "For you," she replies with her eyes shut. She's trying to ride my fingers, but nope. "They're nobody, baby. Nobody. They're not you," she coos.

I smile like a fucking mentally unstable man. "I've got a name. Say that shit."

"Fuck..."

"Something you want me to do. You want me to replace that fucking Blow Pop with my dick, right? You need something to suck on, you dirty little freak?"

Ainslee moans. "Yessss," she hisses.

"Soon, baby...soon enough I'll give you what the fuck you're testing me for. When that time comes, take it like my wife would. For now, say my name for me to hear."

She's so close and she doesn't hesitate. "Oran Hale," she says on a breath and moans as she cums.

I kiss her cheek and suck on her neck until she settles down. I know it's going to leave a mark. "Post this mark for your followers. This one you're not allowed to delete. Show them who has the right to fuck you."

"Yes, Oran. Yes."

I grin. As it should be. The fuck.

I LOOK up at the same time Ainslee starts to take her outfit off when she comes back into the room after removing her make-up. “What are you doing?” I ask as I sit up, leaning against the headboard.

“Taking this off so I can go shower,” she answers.

“Alexa play Dirty by Christina Aguilera,” I say and the song starts.

Ainslee smirks. “Who told you? Jagger?”

I shake my head. “No. Surprisingly, I got a text from Mikonos saying to ask you about this song and the routine. If you want to get wet with my fingers instead of the shower water then get that ass to shaking.”

Ainslee rolls her eyes and commands Alexa to restart the song. She spins on her heel once, showing me her ballet moves. When she lands, she’s facing the large mirror, strategically placed to face my bed. I smirk when she timidly moves her hips. The hem of the little skirt sways with her, brushing against her ass. I look at her eyes as she gazes right back at me. She begins to move harder and more explicitly, using her hair as an accessory. She bends her knees as she rolls her waist, showing me a little of her panties. Her hands land on the floor next. She moves her hands forward as she slides to the floor without missing a beat. I know this is definitely not part of the fucking routine. I still watch. I forget whatever it is I was supposed to be doing. I move the bedsheet off my lower body and I grip my dick in my hands as I start to stroke. Ainslee arches for me as she pops her ass in the air. Her panties are now visible. She comes back up and does this cutesy little dance, making her skirt slide side to side on her body. She climbs on the bed and automatically turns with her ass in the air. She moves back, still on beat. I pump, not breaking rhythm. I look through the mirror into her eyes as she slides her upper body lower and her ass is in my face. I tilt my head, watching her as she shakes her ass like a stripper. Well, fuck, my personal stripper. It bounces and I now see the power of the ass that Jagger is always going on and on about.

I slide her panties to the side as I play with her clit. Ainslee moans as I rip a hole in her lace panties just big for me. I grip her waist and I lower her onto my dick. Ainslee moans and brings her body up a bit. I slap her ass. “Shake your ass on my dick. Let me watch,” I command.

Ainslee shakes her ass as best as she can with me inside her. I slap her ass to make it bounce

harder. I dig my fingers into her waist as I bounce her ass up and down on my dick while fucking her pussy. The best sight ever. This is how all nights should end.

I GROAN, feeling like my body is trying to tell me something. I feel as though my dick is engulfed by the wettest thing I've ever slid into before. I shudder in my sleep. This wet dream feels so real, I feel like if I wake up, I'm going to be pissed.

I hear Ainslee's voice in my dreams. Her moans and, fuck, I know it's her pussy. Fuck. "Oran..." she calls my name and I feel her touch. I feel as her nails dig a little deep in my shoulders. I hiss at that feeling. It feels so damned real. So out of this world that my dick jolts. She bounces up and down and I feel her moving her body like she's dancing on me. "Oh, Oran..." she calls out to me again.

My eyes pop open and I see her just as she flips her head back. Her hair is out and has reverted to its natural state. She rides me with her eyes closed, her head thrown back, like this is where she belongs. I want to disturb her but I don't. I watch this goddess as she shows me another side of her. Her nails leave a rough trail down my chest and I flinch but I don't hate it. "Ainslee... Fuck, baby." I'm not even mad that she woke me up like this.

This time the moonlight catches her tits and her pussy glistens as she bounces on my dick. Ainslee plants her hands behind her on my legs as she rides me like a fucking champ. She moans, taking what she needs. I love it. Fuck, I don't want this to end. I reach out rubbing her clit, urging her on, and her entire body shakes as she cums. But I take this moment as I sit up and push her to her back. Ainslee is on her back as I slip out and thrust back in. Ainslee groans, throwing her head back as I fuck her further down the bed. I hold her still, wrapping my hand around her throat. I don't squeeze or anything, but when Ainslee opens her eyes. She groans. "Tighter, Oran," she moans.

I lean in, covering her body with mine. She wraps her legs around me and I fuck her like this is my mission on earth. I tighten my hold on her neck. She grows wetter. Her pussy grips me tighter, like my hand did to her neck. "This is what you like, Ains? You like being fucked dirty? Fucked like you're owned?"

Ainslee shudders as her fingers glide down my body. I move up a little, knowing where she's headed. My chest is to her face. Ainslee licks my nipples and I groan as her nails dig into my ass cheeks. She widens her legs giving me even more access to her as she pushes me into her. Fuck, how deep does she want me to go? "Oh, Oran, fuck me like you own me. Talk dirty to me," Ainslee moans.

I don't bother asking the typical questions as I go with the flow. I move back down to face her. I move my hand from her throat to her hair. I pull hard, not bothering to tug. Ainslee's eyes flutter and she moans. My girl likes to be fucked with no respect. She wants me to fucking disrespect her pussy, her ass, and every part of her. I'll do just that because she asked me so sweetly. "Fuck, bug. You dirty, filthy fucking slut. You're gushing all over my dick and my bedsheets. You want me to punish you?"

Call you my fucking whore? Is that what you want?"

I pull out of her and flip her. I lift her up on all fours. I compel her to arch and spread her knees apart even further. I wrap her hair around my wrist, pulling at the same time that I thrust back inside of her. Ainslee moans so deep, it's downright fucking guttural. "Open your eyes, baby," I say to her. Ainslee does just that as she looks at me through the mirror. I fuck her, slapping her ass in the process. I watch as it bounces back against my body. Fuck this is sexy. Ainslee doesn't take her eyes away from me as I watch her too. Something about this moment shifts everything for her and I.

I stop for a moment, wanting to prove something to her. I kiss her scars and she shudders. "Please..." she whispers, her voice already going hoarse. I see the tears in her eyes forming already, but I kiss up and down her body.

I lean in, placing my palm right over hers. I intertwine our fingers as I use my other hand to move her head. I get all up in her space and kiss her hard as I rub my dick up and down her wet slit. I rub myself against her ass and bite her tongue when my dick slips in between her cheeks. I rub in between, letting her know that soon enough this is where I'll be. I untangle our fingers for a moment as I position myself again at her entrance. Once I've slipped in, I return my fingers where they were. I continue to kiss her as I take her again. I can't stop and God knows I won't stop until I'm probably cramping or some shit. How the fuck did I resist for two whole damn weeks?

I don't rush the process at all as I fuck her deep. "You're so fucking beautiful, my dirty fucking brat." Calling her that is her undoing and I follow right after, but this isn't going to be the only time I take her tonight. I want to fuck her as the sun comes up.

I WATCH Ainslee as she sleeps. Her hair is everywhere and there are bruises from her wanting me to take her rougher. I don't really do rough but if that's what she wants, I'll give her that. I got some shut-eye after the sun rose and Ainslee was riding me again. She turns, then she does her daily routine of ending up on top of me. I watch as her fingers find their way into my hair. I rub her back as she snores lightly. My fingers rub aimlessly but then both my hands slide up her body once more and back down. This time they don't stop as they grip her ass cheeks. I rub and grip like I'm kneading dough. I groan as her fingers play in my hair, making this even worse for me. I slide her body up a bit and position her right over my tip. I slide her down. Ainslee moans, but she grips me so damned tight. "Oran..." Ainslee calls my name out in her sleep.

I know she's now awake because her mouth finds my neck and she sucks. She bites as I start to fuck her in this position. Ainslee nips at my Adam's apple lightly and I grip her ass cheeks, spreading them further so she could feel me deeper. Ainslee plants her knees on both sides of my body and arches for me. "Oh, you're so good to me, Bug. Let me show you how much I appreciate it when you do things without me asking you to." I bend my knees for better leverage as I take her roughly, the way

that she loves. I groan when I feel her biting on my shoulder. So that's how that feels. I groan, kind of liking it. She plants kisses as she tries not to lose herself in the moment, but I want her lost. I want her so far gone that she won't know how to get from A to Z without shouting O.

I speed up a bit, then I confuse her by showing her what she's missing if she ever wants me to take her body slowly. To not just fuck her but make love to her. I give her a preview and I'm rewarded with her pussy gushing all over me again. She moans in my ear and I know that I won't ever go without hearing this sound again unless I have to punish her little ass. "Oh, Oh, Oh, Oran..." she calls my name out, not like the brat that I met not too long ago, but as a fucking woman. A siren whose call I don't mind answering. "Cum inside me, Oran. I want to feel you fill me up. Oh show me why I should be worshipping you. Take me, Oran. Fucking take me."

I chuckle not because it's funny but because she doesn't know what she's asking me. I flip us unexpectedly. I sit up, reaching out for the headboard. One hand holds on to it while the other flattens on her stomach. "Hold on to my wrist, Bug. Let me show you why you've just sealed your fate. Welcome to Hale's world, baby," I say to her as I hold her down, fucking her into submission. Ainslee widens her eyes. She notices that I was holding back and now, I'm not. She wanted this and this is what she's going to get.

Take it like a fucking champ, baby. Show me that you can do this with me. Don't give up. Ainslee holds on to my wrist so that she doesn't move further up the bed. I fuck her and fuck her until I give in, cumming inside of her like she wants me to. I fall apart on top of her body. Ainslee is shaking hard. "You okay?" I ask her leaning in close to kiss her lazily when she turns her face to me. I kiss her until one of us pulls away.

"Alexa, play O by Omarion." That is her response to me. As the song comes on, I begin to drift off when Omarion says something about *no disrespect but I want it bad as they do, the only difference is they're doing it for themselves but I'm doing it just to hear you yell...Oh.*

"Smart-ass," I murmur as I begin to fall asleep.

I feel Ainslee's kiss on my cheek as she is most likely drifting off too, but then I hear her humming the song. The chorus comes on and she sings the chorus with her now-raspy voice. I like that. Ainslee thinks this is it but we're going to have the fuckfest that she wants so fucking bad. I'm going to make sure I make her say 'Oh' until she learns to cum on command to my fucking name. I fight sleep for a second... "Bug? You sleeping?"

Ainslee whispers. "Just about..." she says.

"Mmm," I grunt. "Just know this is a break. When we wake up, I'm going to show you what it means to be almost broken but not completely broken yet." My dick twitches and I shudder, realizing I'm still inside of her. I slowly pull out of her so that she can sleep.

"Yes, daddy," she teases.

"Fucking brat," I whisper. I know I should get off her but I don't want to move. I sigh and begin to move, but Ainslee whimpers holding me to her with wrapping her legs around my waist.

“No, don’t move. Stay like this. Let’s sleep just like this,” she coos.

“As you wish. Now, get your rest, Ains... You’ll need it,” I whisper as I make myself comfortable in the crook of her neck.

“Yes...” she answers and we both finally fall asleep for real this time.

AINSLEE

There are men in this world who talk the talk but can’t walk for shit, and then there’s Oran fucking Hale. I have never in my life had a day filled with just sexing it up. My everything hurts, but I wonder if it makes me crazy that I love the soreness. Everytime I take a step or sit some way, my body twitches and I exhale, thinking of the memories of Oran taking me on almost every surface in this house. The floors, the counters, the bedroom, the bathroom, the tub. So many places to both take dick, ride it, and get your pussy eaten out. I’ve never once thought about a man eating my ass, but Oran showed me the endless stars that I could see and how to never say that man doesn’t back up his shit.

Today, Oran has gone out to do some shit. I don’t ask because, well, I just don’t care to ask. I wonder if that’s normal or if that’s a bad thing to be doing. I’m already on my live, answering questions and hanging out with my online followers. “Oooh let’s see what questions you guys have for me... hmmm.” I scroll up. “Is that really your husband’s Instagram account commenting DELETE?” I laugh hard.

“Yeah, it is,” Oran says as he walks into my filming home studio. He walks up right behind me. He leans closer to me to look at the questions. “What are you doing?” he asks as he nuzzles my neck. He plants a kiss on my shoulder. I look away from my computer and check him out as he stands behind me. I fully turn on my stool to take him in. I bite my bottom lip, he looks good. He’s wearing a simple black dress shirt with the first top button open, showing his chest hair. The dress shirt is tucked into some khaki colored pants and he doesn’t have to lift his shoes up for me to know that they’re Ferragamos. He has a simple pinky ring on his right hand and his wedding band on his left. I look back up at his face. He left his clean shaven beard and he looks sexy as fuck. “You’re missing your comments. You’re live, right?” He smirks at me.

“You look good, husband. Very fucking good.” I match his smirk as I turn around to read the comments. “They want you to sit and us to do a little game challenge thing. You want to try?” I look up at him, ready for him to say no.

He shrugs as he walks off camera. He grabs the other stool that I have in the corner of the room and takes a seat right next to me. “What have we got?” He leans in and reads the comments. “Wait, stand for me.” I do as he says, wondering what he needs. Oran moves from his seat and sits in mine. He pulls me into his lap. “Better.”

My comments blow the hell up and I sigh because Oran has no idea what he just did. The number of viewers watching multiplies and I want to thump Oran over the head but I’m not going to move. If I

try some shit, we might as well sign up for damned Pornhub, or if we're feeling bougie, an Onlyfans, which my father would just probably kill me for shits and giggles. "They want to know if you know the exact color of my eyes. That's an easy one."

"Hmm, thought this was some challenge, not questions., he retorts.

I chuckle. "We'll only answer this one and then we move on. How's that?"

"Works for me. The color of your eyes. Well, naturally gray, like mine, except yours have small flecks of brown and are lighter. Sometimes in the sunlight, when it hits it, it kind of goes more blue-brown. Just a tad bit. Now, challenge."

"Okay, let me pick from Instagram this time." I smile and lean into my phone that's set up right next to my other camera to see which challenge I should pick. I look at Oran from the screen and his eyes are on me. I look away and back at the challenge. "Okay! So this one, I'm going to have to move. We have to stare into each other's eyes with Snoh Aalegra's song, Dying 4 Your Love playing in the background and see who'll crack a smile first. I guess it's called The Smolder Challenge." I stand and wait for Oran to hand me the other stool.

He turns to face me and with his eyes, he tells me to straddle him. This man does not understand how social media will want him to come back online. The people in the comments alone are acting a fool. I do it anyway to avoid a bigger thing. Oran instructs Alexa to play the song. The song begins and we gaze into each other's eyes. This song is sexy as fuck and it's hard to concentrate. I don't think I've ever looked into Oran's eyes this long before outside of sex. It feels intimate as hell and the heat creeps up my body. I'm not scared or anything but I think what I've been avoiding is all over my face now. I don't know how this happened so fast, how this is okay or normal for me, because I swear I was just in love. Damn...do I like Oran Hale? Snoh Aalegra sings the chorus and Oran breaks first. He smirks and his smirk turns into a full blown grin. "I win!" I say and in my excitement, I give him a quick peck.

Oran shakes his head, not satisfied with that. "Give me some sugar." He wiggles his right brow. I roll my eyes and before I can respond, Oran kisses me tenderly. This isn't like how he kissed me at the wedding. This is different, like he's trying to tell me something. I want to hear it because I don't know what it is. I can't figure it out and when he lets me go, it takes me a second to realize what he's just said.

"What did you say?" I ask him.

"I said, end your live and meet me in the car." He quickly kisses me again and then helps me out of his lap.

Oran walks out of the room and I try not to look goofy as fuck on my live. I fold my lips into my mouth for a moment trying to keep my smile at bay. I hide my face for a second trying not to act like a fucking school girl, but I can't help it. I separate my fingers and I talk like that. "Guys, I have to go. I know I said I'd stay on longer, but I have to meet my guy outside. Love you guys! If you have other questions and comments, please leave them and I'll try to do another live soon! Love you!!" I end

both lives and get up to go change. I quickly don a two-piece multicolored plaid skirt ensemble. The top is a sort of thin-strapped halter that comes around my neck. My upper back is exposed but not midback or lower back. I complete that with white airmaxes and I smooth my hair up in the high ponytail that it's in. I grab my cell and another one of my small purses, then meet Oran right outside. I climb into his BMW 330i M. I don't naturally know cars, but Mikonos has one. "What color is this one?" I ask.

"Sunset orange, baby." Oran looks my way. "You smell nice. I like this," he says as he tugs hard on the ponytail as I buckle myself in.

I glare at him, yet all he does is chuckle. "Thanks. Words work just fine," I tease and he gives me a look that says he knows I enjoyed it. "Where are you taking me?" I ask.

"Taking you on a date. Gotta take the girl that I like on a first date sooner or later, right?" he says as he zooms away from his house.

I can feel the fucking goofy smile on my face. "I like you too," I say quietly.

Oran's hand finds its way to my thigh. He caresses it. "I know, Bug, that's why I smirked because you told me with your eyes. I know a hopelessly-in-like woman when I see one," he teases.

I swat his hand. "Whatever. I'm going to eat the entire menu just for that." I know money isn't the issue but it's still funny to say.

Oran chuckles. "I like a girl that can eat. Let's eat the whole menu together, babe."

"Corny ass," I say, but the goofy smile is still there.

AINSLEE'S EYES widen as she realizes where we are 45 minutes later. I texted Deacon Fairhope, a friend that Jagger and I met through the rivalries of our two towns, if we could call it that. Fairhope is more of a peninsula, while we're an island. There's just this serene thing about Fairhope, once you start to drive around. It's like a piece of Long Island, the Hamptons, and the south in the way of accent, all put together. I park right in front of the resort and spa. It's as beautiful on the outside as I'm sure it is inside. I haven't been here since the grand opening and they did renovations too. The black and white concept of the spa is worth stepping in for alone. We get out and I hand my keys to the valet. We walk towards the front double doors. There are bikes parked there for when someone wants to ride. We make our way inside. Whoever designed the place is a genius. The lobby reads Fairhope. A brunette woman smiles at me and Ainslee. "Welcome to Fairhope Resort & Spa, Mr. and Mrs. Hale! How was your drive over?"

"It was good. Relaxing." Ainslee smiles at her.

"It was cool," I reply.

"Well, Mr. Fairhope called and said to give you the keys and that all expenses are covered. Here are your keys, and please do not hesitate to come down to the bistro to enjoy some refreshments. The spa is open for you and closed to the public, you can go in there and stay for as long as you'd like. The staff is there as well. It's on the ground floor. So from here, you just take a right and go down the stairs, the spa is there. All the robes, slippers, and everything else is prepared in your room. He also says that your dinner is at 8pm at the Fairhope Country Club, Is there anything I can bring up to your room right now? Coffee or tea?" she asks.

I shake my head. "No, not for me." I look at Ainslee. "Do you need anything?"

She shakes her head as well. "No, I'm alright. Thank you though."

"Great. We'll here you go, Room 14. If you need anything, I'm here and my name is Sisi." She smiles.

"Thank you," we both say. I take Ainslee's hand in mine as I lead us to the right and up the stairs with a dark blue carpeting. The layout is simply stunning.

Once we get into the room, I look around. It is huge and they used the minimalist idea of

decorating to perfection. The room scheme is white and beige. There's a simple leafless branch in the corner of the room behind a small coffee table. The king size bed has white sheets with beige and gray pillows and a beige throw at the foot of the bed. On the throw, there is a note. I walk over to pick it up while Ainslee checks everything out.

Life's a game made for everyone and love is the price.

~Deacon Fairhope~

I smile at the asshole. One of the random Avicii songs that I like. Sentimental fuck. "Do you like the bathroom?" I ask Ainslee as I walk over to her.

She turns to look at me, nodding. "I do. This is really nice, Oran. Seriously, it's so peaceful already. You're in here," she points at her heart, "and, up here." She points to her mind. She walks over to me and pulls me down to her, giving me a quick kiss.

I don't deepen the kiss for fear that we won't leave the room. I let her go with a sigh. "Grab your robe, let's get our asses to the spa," I tell her.

"Okay." Ainslee grabs her robe and drops her phone on the bed. I look at it and then her.

"You're not going to take your phone with you? You know, to take pictures of it? For your vlog or whatever?" I ask her.

"No." She smiles. "This is about us. I don't document my personal life. I don't know how to even begin. Pretty sure the most they've seen of my personal life is you."

I nod in understanding. I grab her phone with me and signal for us to go with our robes and slippers in tow. Once we're out of the room and it's locked, I ask her. "Why don't you like posting your life on there? Not that I'm big on sharing either, but I mean, you do that for a living, no?"

"Yeah, I'm barely at the bakery, but that's because I feel like my employees tense up every time I come around, like I'm going to shoot up the damned place. Anyway, I just... I think I was afraid that they would look at my life, then just shake their heads. Like, your life is trash and a hot mess, fix it," she chuckles, but I hear the hurt in her tone.

I say nothing until we enter the spa portion of the resort. Another employee smiles at Ainslee and I. "Welcome Mr. and Mrs. Hale. We're all ready for you when you come out of the changing rooms. Thank you for coming to check out our spa."

We say thank you and head to remove our clothes. I don't bother heading into the men's end to get changed. I follow Ainslee into the women's changing room. I look around, it looks like something typical of a woman's changing room. The large couch really doesn't even need to be in here. Ainslee smiles. "Mr. Hale, you do not need to be in here, this is for women only."

"Oh yeah?" I tease Ainslee. I throw my robe on the couch as I remove my shoes and socks, then begin working on the buttons of my shirt. Ainslee says nothing as she watches me in silence. She sways to the music playing over the built-in speakers. I'll have to tell Deacon that I like how it's not

regular spa tranquility bullshit. It's more of the oldies. Ainslee is swaying side to side to the song I'd Rather Go Blind by Etta James. I remove my shirt from my pants. I throw it at her and she catches it. I take my pants off next and remain in boxers. "Knight to Bishop. Checkmate," I say the chess reference.

Ainslee smiles wide. She removes her top first and her breasts bounce. Damn. She shimmies out of her skirt, remaining only in her purple lace G-string. I bite my bottom lip as she slips her robe on and takes her shoes off and slips into the slippers. The furry pink slippers fit her and match her nail polish color of the week. I deliberately ordered that she have those. I slip into simple black slippers. I get into my robe as well and we leave our clothes on the couch since we're the only ones here. When we walk back to the lobby, another song comes on. We both look at each other with smiles on our faces. "Jagger!" we say at the same time. It's Jagger's favorite song, Can't Take My Eyes Off of You, but this one is Lauryn Hill's version.

"He used to annoy me when he would repeat the fucking song but now I get it," I say to Ainslee.

Ainslee smiles as we head through another set of wooden and glass double doors. "Every damned time there was a song request, when it came on, I knew it was him who requested it at those damned stuffy-ass Founder's parties."

I chuckle along with her.

"Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Hale." A male employee comes up to us with a smile on his face. I swear if I hear that damn greeting again...

"Oran and Ainslee is fine," I say to him.

He nods. "Okay, Oran and Ainslee. What would you like done for today?"

"It's her choice," I look at Ainslee who is excited. "She did say she'd want the whole menu. How about this, get us everything on your spa treatments menu that will give us the chance to be at the country club by eight."

"We can have you out by seven, if that's good."

"Great!" Ainslee exclaims. "I'm excited."

AINSLEE

Spending a first date at a spa is not something I would've come up with and I'm glad I didn't think of this because the surprise was so worth it. Oran and I don't bother changing back into our clothes as we leave the spa. I love how they did my make-up too. It's an added bonus and I don't have to waste time doing it. Oran stops and turns his grin towards me. "I want to do another bet..." he says as he walks backwards down the hall that leads back upstairs.

"I never back down from a challenge, if that's what you're getting at," I reply.

Oran smiles like the Cheshire cat. "There's a back entrance to get upstairs and if you beat me to it, I'll let you pick our next trip."

“We’re going on another trip?”

“Of course, we’ll go on as many trips as you want, but first, you have to beat me in order to get the chance to make that choice,” he says slyly.

I narrow my eyes at him, holding on to my robe. “Okay.”

“I’ll let you get a head start...one...two...” Before Oran could get to three, I run for it. I run up the stairs and I don’t look back to see if Oran has figured another way to the room. Once I get to the main floor, I drop my shoes and I stop to pick them up.

“Mrs. Hale!” Sisi from the front desk gets my attention.

I look up at her. “Yes?” I answer, ready to bolt.

“There’s a delivery for you,” she says.

“Can I bring these upstairs and then come back to get it?”

Sisi steps out from around the desk with the biggest bouquet of red, white, yellow, and orange roses. “A girl can’t pass this up now, can she? Apparently, I’m supposed to tell you the meaning. Red symbolizes love and romance. White represents new beginnings and budding love, and yellow is for friendship. So a mixture of all this, is for you.”

I know I have that same goofy-ass smile and it’s because of Oran. “Thank you.” I balance the bouquet and make it upstairs. I try the door and it's unlocked. I walk in.

“Whoever gave you those roses is a fucking gentleman,” Oran says as he leans against the wall, looking like the sexiest man alive. I check him out, he’s wearing a blue jean shirt with the top buttons open, folded up at the elbows, and tucked into dark gray jeans and a brown belt. The brown boots match his personality. I look up at his hair and I love how it’s wavy up top as it dries.

“Thank you and, yeah, I’m the luckiest girl ever,” I say. “You look very handsome.”

“I agree.” He grins. “You are the luckiest girl in the world. You’re Oran Hale’s girl, obviously.” His grin gets wider. “Thank you for the compliment and pass me those flowers, plus the clothes. Go get ready. I have a gift for you in the bathroom.”

I nod, giving him everything. I go to the bathroom and there’s a red dress hanging on the wall. I smile when I spot the splits. The black open-toe heels are a perfect match. I don’t hesitate as I get dressed. It takes me about ten minutes since my hair is also done already. It was parted on the side and gelled down into a low ponytail. I look myself over in the mirror. The halter-like dress is lace at the top and gives the illusion of me being nude underneath. It covers my back perfectly in the spots that need to be covered. As for the bottom half, it is open around the sides and then it cinches into a long dress with two splits positioned right near my thighs. I walk out of the bathroom once I’m settled. “How is it?” I ask Oran.

Oran looks up from his phone. He doesn’t say anything for what feels like so long and then he clears his throat. “Fuck, I can’t believe I bought you this dress, but now I want to take it back. You look fucking edible, Bug.” A look crosses his face between lust and admiration. “We should stay in.” Oran frowns for the first time ever since I’ve met him and that’s saying a lot.

I snicker. “We, my sexy-ass husband, are not staying in. We did not get dressed up for us to stay in.”

Oran mumbles something underneath his breath but he still gets up. I make my way to Oran and I bring my elbow out so he can slip his arm right in. Oran rolls his eyes lightly, slapping my elbow away. I laugh as we walk to the door. We walk out and once the door is locked, Oran gives me his elbow. I smile at him.

TONIGHT WAS THE PERFECT NIGHT. I’ve never had a perfect date before and I want to share it with everyone. We’re on our way back to the resort and Oran has his hand caressing my thigh. I switch to the camera on my phone and I take a picture for myself. A picture of his hand laying possessively on my thigh. I keep that for me. I take a 30 second video of the way Oran caresses my thigh with his thumb. I rewatch the video, wondering what he’s saying in that touch. I post it with the caption: *A peaceful night with the most perfect man in the world...@HaleSpawn*

The craziest thing is that to me, it’s the truth. I look at my other notifications that I didn’t bother to look at all day and see I’m tagged in a picture. It’s a picture of me at dinner looking out at the sunset and I don’t think I’ve ever seen myself smile so hard. His caption makes me want to tell him what I fear is too early to say. *Conversations in the Dark ~John Legend~*

I look at Oran but he’s driving and not really paying attention. When did he post this? Tears well up in my eyes and I look out the window. I know the song and it tugs at my heart. This can’t be right. I can’t possibly feel like this already, can I? I’ve known this man for a little under a month and it took me years to fall in love with Eli. I sigh, trying to keep my feelings at bay. I shut my eyes because my soul is ready to say it but my mouth can’t because of the uncertainty. The hurt and the pain that I’ve endured wrecked me and it’s crippling me, keeping me from wanting to express what I feel so easily. I clear my throat, turning the music playing low in the car. Oran squeezes my thigh as we get to a red light. I look at him and he returns the look. I lose my breath and my heart in the deep gray of his eyes. I can’t fight it, but I can’t tell him either. He smiles at me as if he knows, but he says nothing. Oran leans in giving me a quick kiss and when the light turns green, we’re back on the road.

Once we get to the resort, Oran comes around and opens my door. He gives me his hand and I place mine in his. I trust him. He took care of me when I needed it, he held me when I cried, he kissed me when I truly wanted to be kissed. He did these things for me and asked for nothing in return. *Don’t fucking hurt me.* I told him that night in the shower when he saw my back and now, through the song, he let me know simply he won’t break my heart. Is that why he was smiling at me like he knew a secret that I didn’t know? I say nothing as I let him lead us to the room. Once we get in, I stop as I hear John Legend’s song You & I starting to play. I take a deep breath and enter first. The bouquet that was there earlier is no longer on the bed, instead the petals are sprinkled all over the floor leading to

the bed. My emotions get stuck in my throat and Oran turns me around. “We never really did have a proper wedding song. How about we replace that morbid shit with this one, huh?”

I’m speechless so I just nod. Oran gives me his signature smirk as he dances with me. I can’t handle the look in his eyes so I shut mine and lay my head on his chest, dancing with him. He chuckles but doesn’t elaborate on why. “Tell me something you’ve never told a soul before,” Oran speaks up as we continue dancing.

“I’ve never been on a date,” I confess.

“Eli?” he questions.

“We didn’t go out on proper dates. Now that I think about it., it was always us three. Him, Lina, and I. Eli and I were only together when it came to sex or just hanging out at the house. He’s never taken me anywhere, really.”

“It didn’t bother you?”

“I didn’t notice. I thought that was what couples did.”

Oran says nothing. He just holds me closer to him and when the song ends, he walks me over to the bed and sits me down. He gets on one knee, lifting my leg up. “Let me show you what a boyfriend does.” He winks.

I playfully scoff as he takes my heels off. “You kind of missed that chance. We’re married,” I say as a sort of a ‘duh’ moment.

Oran shrugs. “Yeah, we are, but baby, we’re starting from the beginning. After one date, I’ve decided that I want to make you my girl, so you’re my girlfriend. We’ve made it official.” He wiggles his brows.

“You’re a mess,” I say, laughing.

“A hot mess,” he offers. He reaches out for me, pulling me off the bed. He cups my face in his hands and kisses me hard. I moan into his mouth, kissing him right back.

Oran pulls away and turns me around. He unzips my dress slowly and he lets it fall to the floor. I’m bare and, for the first time ever, I don’t feel uncomfortable with my back to him. I let him touch my scars and I feel as he kisses my back. I slightly turn to look and Oran is on one knee, kissing all my scars. Then I feel as he comes back up. He turns me to face him. “Let me worship your body tonight, Ains. Let me show you what this knight can do for a Bishop.” He winks. Before I could say something smart, Oran kisses me hard, showing me exactly that. Oran worships my body like it's been offered to him and I let myself fall completely, not caring about how scared I should really be.

Once Oran has completely destroyed my world once again, he grumbles something about sleeping here and leaving in the morning. I’m not opposed to anything. I slip out of his arms, going to the bathroom. Once I’m done, I make my way to bed, but before that, I grab my phone and go back to Oran’s post. I know I can’t say it just yet, but I can write it. Under the comments, I leave him the only one that I need to say. *I love you.* My chest feels less heavy and my body seems to be coming down to earth again. I slide into the bed and Oran wraps his arm around me. He’s asleep, or so I think, but he

pulls me close to him. “I know...” he whispers and buries his nose in the crook of my neck. All I can think about before I fell asleep was that he knows... He knows how I feel about him.

ORAN

AINSLEE IS STILL ASLEEP when I get out of the shower. I watch her as she flips to her stomach and she kicks the sheets away, grumbling something about it being hot. I sit down on the one-person sofa right in front of the bed, watching my naked wife as she sleeps. I grab my cell from the side table and look at my messages.

Hanlon: Sending me a picture in your robe at the spa is tacky, bitch.

Hanlon: Saw your Insta post about your wife, how fucking cute.

Hanlon: Also, tell the Deacon of Fairhope to not be a dick.

I snicker.

Me: You loved the picture, asshat. Don't pretend like you're not jealous.

Me: Speaking of, come down. I extended our trip to the weekend. I think it would be a good getaway and maybe you can tell me what the fuck is going on with you and your dad.

Me: Don't bullshit me either, bitch. I got the room and shit already set for you.

I check my emails and everything else. I know Jagger is up because the man never sleeps which says something, because I barely get any shut-eye.

Hanlon: I'm jealous of the robe. *wink-wink*

Hanlon: I'm surprised you waited this long to threaten me into talking. I expected it weeks ago.

Me: The only thing you were jealous of is the facial that I got. You need it, ugly.

Me: Also, I was busy.

Hanlon: Fuck off. We both know who's the ugly in this friendship and it's not me, but I'd still consider picking you if the world was ending.

Me: Sounds like a marriage proposal.

Hanlon: You proposed first at my wedding, so technically, you want me first.

Me: You didn't hesitate to answer that, sick fuck.

Me: Anyway, hurry the fuck up.

Hanlon: Pushy much? Lol. I'm coming. After I cum, that is.

I chuckle, placing my phone down. I walk over to where Ainslee is still sleeping. I climb on to the bed and I hover over her. I lean in and kiss all over her face. Ainslee groans, "Stop it..." she says sleepily. She turns her face to the other side. I kiss on her face again and snicker as she moans again.

I kiss down her body and when I get to her ass, I bite her ass cheek. I lift her up a little by the waist and start to tease her clit. Ainslee moans my name like she's been waiting to say it. I suck her clit into my mouth and tongue fuck her, showing her that I need her to wake up. She arches some more and I show her what she's been missing as I move up, eating her ass like it's the best fucking fresh-baked croissant in a Parisian bakery.

Ainslee lets me and the whole floor know just how good I am at making her feel like she's on top of the world. This is the way to start your day.

JAGGER AND KARESSA made it to us a bit after Ainslee and I bought some clothes to wear. I look at Ainslee as she chats with Karessa and Kimberly. Ainslee looks good in her black jeans, a matching tank top and my black dress shirt topping it off, with these heels she bought. They're all-black open-toe with some little red fur for the front. Ainslee's wearing her hair up in a bun and she didn't care to wear makeup today. She looks naturally beautiful. "You invited me here to stare at your wife?" Jagger asks me.

I look at him and chuckle. "No, I invited you because I know you need it."

Deacon snorts. "You two are exactly the same," he says. "Feels weird to only see you now, when we don't live that far away from each other."

"We're not trying to be your best friend, cowboy," Jagger says, teasing him even though we've known each other for the longest time. Can't say that Deacon isn't a friend. We stood by and watched as Kimberly ripped his heart in two, twice, but this hopeless man is still in love with her.

"Shut up," Deacon says.

"So, what exactly have we gotten ourselves into today?" Jagger asks.

I shake my head. "Your girl, not mine, came up with this brilliant idea to go ride bicycles."

"I see. So then, how did your girl, not mine, convince us to also do a fucking photoshoot?" Jagger asks me.

"It's the pout. I tend to not look her in the eye when she's doing it. She's worse than Puss from Puss in Boots," I reply.

Deacon shakes his head. "That's how she convinced me to go ride my bike later? I don't miss it," he laughs.

“Like a motorcycle bike?” Jagger asks with excitement.

“Yeah.”

“I’m in!” Jagger says.

Ainslee takes this opportunity to walk over to where we’re sitting in the little bistro in the resort.

“Do I hear a challenge?” She looks at Jagger.

Jagger takes his sweet time looking at her and he smirks doing it. “How much are we betting, little Ainslee?”

Ainslee smiles wide. “Fifteen.”

“1500? Low balling much?” Jagger teases.

“No, no, little Jagger. 15K. Your balls are on the line.” She smiles.

Jagger chuckles. “You always find ways to bring up my balls, don’t you? Hmm, we’ll see what happens when you lose.”

Ainslee smiles.

DURING THE DAY, Deacon and Kimberly joined us. They didn’t want any part of being in the photoshoot, but they stuck around. Ainslee had us looking like one of the Beatles’ iconic Abbey Road album art, the one of them walking down the street. I was George, Karessa was Paul, Jagger was next as Ringo, and last, but not least, Ainslee was John. It was weird but I guess it was fun because Ainslee didn’t want us to change out of what we were wearing. I wore a t-shirt and jeans with my boots. Karessa had on a dress with heels. Jagger had on something similar to me, except his tattoos were on display, and finally, Ainslee walked with what she had on earlier, my shirt included. She made it extra by lifting her fist in the air. Now that I look at it, it’s funny that the smallest person seems to be giving out some sort of *I’ll always have your backs* type of message. We took another set of Beatles pictures sitting at a coffee place like one of their photo op pictures. I was talking to Jagger, Ainslee was right by me with her feet up on the chair, sipping coffee, Jagger had an equivalence to a newspaper, his phone out, and Karessa was smiling at the camera.

After that, we went bicycle riding to the beach and yes, both Karessa and Ainslee made it a fashion statement to ride in heels. I don’t know what the hell they are on, but they’re grown enough to do what they want. When we got to the beach, it was peaceful. Walking in the sand is something that I love being able to do. We spent time there just talking and catching up with everything.

Now, we’re at Deacon’s place for an early dinner before Jagger and Ainslee have to race. Their bet is stupid, but it’s not like the money isn’t there for either of them to pay up. As we eat and relax, Jagger keeps going on his phone and Karessa looks uncomfortable. I don’t think it’s really him being on his phone, it has to be something else. I watch her for a second as she fidgets in her seat. I’m way too observant for my own good. I look at Jagger again and I catch his eye. He’s smiling wide at me

and I know he's convinced Karessa to try out some other freaky shit. I don't say anything but it does pique my interest. I want to see if she's going to cum right at the table or if she's going to last long enough to get caught up in Jagger's web later. I watch enough to not attract attention and the way Karessa is trying to hold her composure is funny to me. Sexy for sure, but still funny nonetheless. After what seems like a battle of wills, Karessa's body somewhat relaxes then tenses up again. Karessa concentrates on her food a little too damned hard as she bites her left hand. Not even a second after that, she cums. I can just tell by the way her body seems to let go of what was shaking her up at this table. Karessa's eyes connect with mine right before she shuts them. She should know by now that I'm very attentive. I see just about everything when it requires attention.

After dinner, Ainslee put on her riding boots that she bought and braided her hair back. Karessa and I hang back with Kimberly and Deacon. Jagger and Ainslee put on their helmets. They both get on and Jagger revs his bike. Ainslee flips him a gloved middle finger. Deacon's brother, Mack, who appeared after dinner, signals the go ahead. Ainslee and Jagger take off fast. At first you can't tell who's going to win.

"Do you think Jagger will win?" Karessa whispers as she gets closer to me, brushing her body up on me.

I know she isn't doing it on purpose but she feels the random jolt and she takes a step back. I smirk at her. "I hope he does so I can spank Ainslee for challenging my best friend."

Karessa chuckles. "And if she wins?"

"Maybe Jagger will spank you, because he's going to definitely be turned on." I wink at her and she blushes.

I look back up as they come racing back. Ainslee and Jagger both pop wheelies like they're in sync and once they're fully back on the ground, they speed up even more, passing by us. "Who won?" Karessa asks Deacon.

Deacon laughs and whistles as the bikes slow down. They both turn around and come back to us, slowly this time. Once they stop and turn the engine off, Ainslee removes her helmet with the biggest smile on her face. She pushes the tendrils of hair back as she climbs off. "That, my good frenemy Jagger Hanlon, is 15K worth of beating your ass. Keep your chump change."

Jagger laughs as he removes his helmet. "When did you get so good? I remember when I first taught you to ride."

Ainslee joins him. "Fuck, you remember when I fell and scrapped the fuck out of my arm? Your mother yelled at the both of us and my dad was so proud of the scrape."

Jagger laughs even harder. "My mother cursed me out the rest of the night because of your reckless ass."

"It was fun though," she admits.

"It really was," Jagger answers back.

"Are you done with your little trip down memory lane?" I say to the both of them. These two are

odd. Their love and hate relationship started the moment he dropped her on her head as a baby and when Ainslee became old enough to scrap him, they'd fight. What a hot-ass mess.

Jagger smirks. "Don't be mad that I taught your wife how to be on top and ride well."

I laugh. "Funny. Did you teach her how to be annoying as well?"

"Hey!" Ainslee says to me.

"Sorry, babe." I walk over to her and give her a quick kiss.

"I'm not annoying," she defends herself.

I playfully scoff. "You're not annoying right now."

She shoves at me, pretending to be mad, but the smile on her face is evident. "Whatever, asshole. Kiss my ass." She goes to walk away from me.

I catch her in time. Wrapping my arm around her and making sure she feels every part of me. "I did kiss your ass... This morning, remember?" I whisper. "You want me to show you how I did it again? I don't mind doing a demonstration again. I think you deserve it."

Ainslee moves her head back and she's under my chin. She gets on the tip of her toes and kisses under my chin. "That's why I like you." She nips at my chin.

Everyone's walking back inside the house and I stay back with Ainslee. I turn Ainslee around to face me and place her on the bike she was riding. I cup her face in my hands and kiss her hard. Ainslee opens her legs, giving me the space and chance to move in closer. Her legs come around my body and for the first time in my life, I don't mind being stuck somewhere, because I'm not stuck. I want to be here, kissing my girl after she beats my best friend in a riding contest. I pull away from kissing her. I look at her, waiting for her to open her eyes. "You know I'm going to spank you tonight, right?"

"Yeah?" she answers.

"Yeah and wear those heels you just bought today. I want to fuck you with them on."

"Yes sir," she says breathlessly.

I smirk. "Come on, let's go inside." I let her get to her feet and take her hand in mine. We walk into Deacon's place to join everyone else. "You ready to soak in the hot tub?" I ask.

"Hell yeah, baby!"

WHEN WE GET BACK to the resort, we all go change into attire for the hot tub. “Babe?” I call out to her.

“Hmm?”

“What do you think about Cancun?” I ask Ainslee.

“Cancun sounds like somewhere sunny and nice, why?” she says from the bathroom.

“Honeymoon. Us four, since we technically didn’t go on one because of bullshit,” I say to her.

“What do you think about that? Would you like to do that?” I ask her to make sure this is something that she’s okay with.

“Okay, I’m down,” Ainslee answers as she comes out of the bathroom in her white one-piece bathing suit. I look at her bathing suit and how good she looks in it. I narrow my eyes. I make a circular motion with my index finger pointing down for her to turn around. Ainslee cocks her brow but still does it.

“You don’t like it?” she teases as she grabs a pair of baggy shorts. She bends over a little to put the shorts on. “I’m fully covered, according to your standards,” she teases.

I take advantage of this opportunity and slap her ass hard. “Don’t get cheeky with your boyfriend, woman. There are consequences to your actions.” She yelps as she stands straight. She turns, glaring at me. I laugh. “Don’t bend over if you don’t want your ass to get spanked. Plus, I remember I need to spank you for that racing challenge.” I shrug.

She frowns as she rubs her ass cheek. “But I won, that has to count for something? No?”

“It does.” I wink at her. “That’s why your reward is you get spanked and fucked really good. If you would’ve lost the challenge then it would’ve been just spanking and sleep because you tried my best friend.” I change into my swim trunks.

“Your best friend is lucky I didn’t triple the price, would’ve sucked for him,” Ainslee says. She watches me as I take my robe, putting it on, and I throw hers at her too. She catches it. “You play too much, Oran.”

“I haven’t played enough with you yet, Bug,” I tease her and lick my lips. “Not like I want to anyways, so we’ve still got time for it.”

She kisses her teeth but there is a smile planted on her face all the way down to the hot tub. I want her to always smile around me. That's all.

AINSLEE

I shut my eyes with my head resting at the edge of the hot tub. I love the feeling of the bubbles as they massage my body and the heat of the hot tub heals me. I slowly move along with the music quietly playing in the background. This is the life. I feel as the water ripples and I don't have to open my eyes to know that Oran is the one that's right in between my legs. I feel his kisses on my neck and I moan. Big Sean's I Don't F*ck With You comes on and I laugh.

"What's so funny?" he asks as he slips his arm around my waist, turning us.

"This song has you written all over it. It could be your theme song and you have no clue, you know that?"

"Yeah?" Oran asks. I don't know if this man wants to write the book on sex appeal but, damn, I'd let him.

Oran turns me again, my back to his front, and his hands travel until they reach my legs. He opens them and he slips my one-piece bathing suit to the side. Before he can even touch me, I hear a moan. My eyes pop open and Karessa is fucking Jagger. Her head is thrown back as she's lost in the moment, but I can tell she doesn't care whether me or Oran are here. This isn't like the wedding where there's a mirror separating us, there isn't anything in front of us except water and the size of the hot tub. Jagger looks up at me as he sucks Karessa's earlobe and plays with her nipple over her bathing suit.

"You think that's hot, baby?" Oran asks me as he nips at my exposed shoulder. He starts to play with my pussy and I throw my head back.

"Yes, Oran, yeah, it's hot," I answer. The feel of his hardened dick right under me lets me know he thinks it's hot too. He's enjoying what Karessa is doing and what's being done to her.

Oran's other hand grabs at the nape of my neck and makes me look right at them. Jagger's fingers disappear under the water and Karessa hums, then moans. "Oh, Jagger... I need more," Karessa moans.

I drop my head, not able to handle what Oran is doing to me. "No, no, sweetheart, don't you run from this. I know you want this. If you want to cum, Ainslee, keep looking up," Oran says to me. I look up as Jagger takes over. I know he's fucking Karessa now with the way the water is rippling right above. I shudder as Oran teases me with the same rhythm as Jagger.

"I can't... Oran, I can't hang on any longer," I admit.

Oran moves his hand to the front of my neck. "I see the look in your eyes and I'm here to tell you that you'll get exactly what you're yearning for. I'll give it all to you." He makes me look up at him and he kisses me hard while speeding up his movements. He doesn't stop until I moan in his mouth,

the same time as Karessa does.

THE WEEKEND GETAWAY was so worth it. Coming back to Founder's, I feel refreshed. I ignored my mother's messages about having a family dinner but when my father calls me, I accept right away. Maybe it's the joy of Oran telling me about the honeymoon to Cancun or simply that my dad wants to see us.

We haven't had family dinners in awhile so it makes me wonder what this is about, but I'm glad that it's before we go on this honeymoon that Oran and Jagger surprised Karessa and I with. I don't have to knock as I enter the house. "In all the years that I've been to Jagger's house, I don't think we've ever come in here," Oran says as we walk past the foyer.

I snicker. "Yeah? Well, you weren't old enough to be invited here. Dad doesn't have too many friends and well, mom is... mom."

Oran makes a face but says nothing more about my mom. I know he wants to but he remains quiet instead. We walk to where the dining room is in and once we get in, I am met by my family sitting already. Markos, Mikonos, and my father on one end of the table and my mother on the other end. Her blonde hair is coiffed to perfection as she has it pulled back into a high ponytail, showing off the definition of her face. Her and I don't look alike much, but there are features still there, especially when her hair is out of her face. My mother doesn't even acknowledge me, which isn't hard to believe since she's probably told some lies about being mad at me.

"Hi, dad."

My dad is still studying my mom and then he turns his eyes on me. "You look good, healthy and happy. I'm happy to see that," he says to me as a way of saying Oran is good for me.

"Thank you," I reply.

"Oran Hale," my father calls his name out. "You look healthy, son." My eyes widen.

Oran thanks my dad, but he has no clue what any of it means. My father has never called anyone outside of the two men now sitting across from me son. The dinner is calm and quiet until dessert comes around.

"Ainslee, can I talk to you for a minute alone?" my mother asks.

I open my mouth to speak but Oran beats me to it. "No, you may not."

I turn to look at him. I'm not mad, I'm just in shock. My eyes widen and I see the train fall off its tracks even before it happens. I place my hand over his wrist but Oran looks away from me.

"What does that mean? She's still my daughter and you're in my house, I will be respected," my mother speaks out.

"What's your beef with my wife?" my dad asks, sitting back.

He's not the type to ever flip the fuck out. He takes delight in hearing people out before they die. I don't know if that's a genius thing, or a flaw, or maybe it makes him a sociopath. "We have no beef," my mother answers quickly.

"Now, now, Tasha, let the man speak. We don't let others not speak. The man's obviously got a lot on his mind. Go ahead, son, tell me the beef that needs to be brought up right now?" My father leans back in his chair. Markos and Mikonos act like they're not part of the damn conversation.

"I just think that it's rather fucking odd that she would want to talk to my wife alone. Everytime she talks to her alone, Ainslee ends up with some sort of fucking bruise on her."

"What!?" My mother stands, as if to do something. "What are you talking about?"

"Tasha..." my father calls her name softly. "Let him speak."

"Why? So, he could spread more fucking lies? No!" she yells, losing her composure, something she never does in front of my father. "Leave my house, you're disrespectful as hell."

"Natasha!" my father yells her name out. "Sit. The. Fuck. Down so we can hear our guest. Everyone gets a chance to say something to me. If it's not true, then sit your ass here and wait. Fuck." I look at my father's expression. I don't think I can put a word to it. He's either mad or he doesn't care. "Continue..." he says to Oran.

My mother tries to say something and my father gives her a look that could freeze even the scariest man.

My father nods at Oran to continue, "You know, when she slapped her at our wedding I was upset, but when I connected the pieces, I was disgusted by such a fucking monster who would hurt their own fucking child like that. She not only terrorized her, but she put her through hell, and what did you do about it? NOTHING! I don't give a fuck if you shoot me in the fucking head, you will hear me when I say, when it comes to my wife, no one and I mean NO ONE will put their fucking hands on her again. So forgive me if I don't want your wife, the pathetic excuse of a mother, to talk to her alone. She blemished her daughter's skin, and for what? To be a fucking belle! To be the perfect ballerina, she made her repeat dances over and over until she puked? All on her fucking 18th birthday. She deserves to be happy. Why won't you people let her be happy? Why can't you support her in shit that she does?"

I grab his wrist tighter. "Oran...stop," I whisper.

My father looks at me, my hand around Oran's wrist, and then at my mother, who is barely batting an eyelash. "I will not sit here with this shit. You don't come into my house and talk about us like you know us." My mother gets up to walk away, again.

My father doesn't say anything. He merely reaches behind him and places the gun on the table. My mother blanches. She's standing there, not saying anything anymore. "Natasha, is this true?" my father asks calmly.

It kind of hurts my feelings that he didn't ask me. "Why aren't you actually asking Ain—," Oran stops talking when my father puts his hand up. Smart.

"I'm talking to her. To my wife. To the woman that I chose to marry, to raise a fucking child with, and one that I trusted. I want to know if it's true. Did you fucking put your hands on my daughter? On the one person that I love in this fucking world? Is that what you did?" There's an icy tone to his words. "You touched her?"

My mother looks my father in the eye. "No," she answers and my world breaks apart. How could she do this?

"Ainslee..." my father calls for my attention. "Show me."

My tears pool my eyes.

"She doesn't have to do shit," Oran says.

My father almost smirks. "Out of respect for my daughter, I'm going to let that go." He looks at me.

I let go of Oran's wrist. I stand, turning to give them my back. I pull my t-shirt out of my jeans and I lift it up slowly. The room is quiet, you could hear a pin drop. I don't know what to say. "Oran, take my daughter home." I can feel my dad's anger.

"Yes, sir," Oran answers.

I fix myself and when I turn around, Mikonos is staring at his drink. He doesn't have to look at me for me to know that he's waiting...waiting for my dad's word to act. I've never told him because I was protecting him. I didn't want him to end up getting killed. He isn't rational when it comes to me being hurt. I look at Markos. He just blankly stares at my mother, he's going to kill her if my dad doesn't do it himself.

"Do you remember what I said when Ainslee was born, Tasha?" my father speaks and Oran tries to pull me out of the room, but I don't want to go.

My mother fixes her shoulders. "No, I don't," she says, still with an attitude. Mikonos stands up and spits on the floor next to her foot. My mother flinches, but I know she's trying to pretend she's not scared. Mikonos walks out of the room.

My father laughs and this isn't my dad anymore, this is Andres Bishops, the man who will take you out in the worst possible way. His laughter turns my blood cold and I shiver. "Oran, I said take my FUCKING daughter out of the room!" his voice booms loudly.

Oran jumps into action and he takes me out of the room forcefully. I'm not hurt or anything, but I need to see what's happening. We're out of the eating area. I manage to slip out of Oran's arms but he catches me again. He wraps his arms around me then I hear a slam on the table. I don't know who did it but then I hear my mother's voice. "Fuck you, Andres!" my mother yells and the world spins on its

axis. “You never loved me. You loved her more than me. I competed for your love with a fucking child. You gave me nothing! I had her so you would look at me differently, but you’re just as fucking broken as her. You deserve each other. I will never love her. Nev—,” her sentence is cut short as I hear a gunshot go off. I stand there in shock, not sure what I was expecting. My body is shaking and I feel my whole world crumbling, but I don’t know what to do. For so long, I wanted my mother to love me. I didn’t even care that she hit me or hurt me, none of that mattered to me as long as she showed me a little bit of love. To hear my mother say she will never love me breaks my heart even more because I protected her.

“I protected her,” I say out loud. Oran holds me tighter in his arms. “I did everything to make sure no one knew what she did to me. I hid it from my brothers for her. I didn’t go out to play with anyone, I didn’t make friends because she said I couldn’t. I did it all, Oran. I don’t understand. I don’t get it. Why?” I know Oran doesn’t have the answers at all, I just need to say it out loud.

My father appears and Oran lets me go. I sniffle and I look up at my dad. “I thought you didn’t love me...” I whisper.

“Why wouldn’t I love you Ainslee? You’re my child,” my dad asks me as if that doesn’t make sense.

“She just... she told me you never wanted me. That I was just an obligation for you.”

My dad stands in front of me and Oran gives us space, probably because he’s still in shock, while the rest of us are going on like this happens everyday. My dad cups my face in his hands. “Ainslee... I love you. You’re the only person in this world that I could love, because you’re my child. I loved you from the moment you were born. I held you while you cried for the world to hear that a Bishops was born into this world. I’m so proud of everything you’ve ever done. I know I did you a disservice by not telling you this everyday but *mija*, there’s no other excuses I can give you so I’m sorry. I’m sorry that I made you feel like I didn’t love or cherish you. I’m sorry for everything, *lo siento, princesa*,” my dad calls me a nickname I haven’t heard in forever and I smile, trying not to cry. My father wipes my tears and I want to be mad, but I can’t because the first man that broke my heart has made it whole again. Whole enough for me to love the man that I’m married to for the rest of my life.

AINSLEE

ONCE WE'RE OUTSIDE, Mikonos is waiting by the car for us. "Can you give us a minute?" I say to Oran.

He blinks, still so shell-shocked. Mikonos looks at him. "No, you're not driving. Walk around the estate and breathe." Mikonos may sound rough but he means it in a good way.

Once Oran starts walking, Mikonos turns his anger on me. Mikonos is never really mad, he's just antisocial. He crosses his arms over his chest. "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't lose my shit, Ainslee? ONE!" he yells.

I flinch. Mikonos hasn't yelled at me in forever. "I can explain..." I say.

"Explain then. Explain why this... this fucking woman was hurting you and you said nothing. NOTHING! Not to me, not to Markos. We're your family, we would have protected you. You mean everything to me!" A tear slips out of his eye.

I take a step towards him but he glares at me, causing me to stop. He wipes his lone tear away. "I love... I loved her," I say.

Mikonos bends a bit, acting like he didn't hear me. "Come again? Because it sounds like I'm going to have to lose my shit even more."

"I did love her, Ry." a nickname from his real name, Orion. "She was my mother and I thought I could convince her to love me, even like that. She was all I had as a mom. You don't know how that feels." The moment I say it, I regret it. "I didn't mean th—."

"Fuck off. Go get in the Escalade. I'm tempted to shake your ass, but I won't. Don't you dare act like the rest of us don't love you. I get you wanted your mother, but fuck her and fuck you for acting like I don't know what it feels like to want a mom. Mine unfortunately DIED, AINSLEE! SHE DIED BECAUSE MY FATHER IS A PIECE OF SHIT! So fuck you, royally. Get your little ass in the car and Markos is going to drive you home. I can't look at you right now."

Mikonos starts to walk away and I grab his arm. "Don't be mad at me, please. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that."

He softly pulls away. "I forgive you, Ainslee, but I'm going to that bad place right now and I need an outlet. That outlet is getting rid of your mother's body," he says in Greek.

He walks away and I sigh.

ORAN

The car ride is quiet. Honestly, I'm just trying to process what's going on. Did Andres Bishops just shoot his wife? I mean, sure, I thought he was going to send her to jail or something, but no, the man did something I could never even think of doing. I'm no punk, but neither am I some killer. What the hell have I just witnessed?

"You okay?" Ainslee reaches out and slips her fingers into mine.

No. I blink. "Yeah, I think so."

"Don't lie to me, Oran. I know you're not okay. I see it in your eyes."

"So then, why did you ask?"

"Because I need you to admit it out loud. If you don't tell me out loud, I won't always know. I was like you when I first saw my dad shoot someone. You need a minute to take things in," Ainslee says calmly.

"I don't know how you can be so calm about it. I feel like I'm still in some dream," I say.

"You just need to relax. Take a good swig of some hard ass liquor and take your ass to bed. It'll eventually blow over," Markos suggests.

"If that doesn't work?"

"Then fuck it out of your system. No holding back. Let that anger seep through your body and then boom. Done."

"That sounds like you're instructing me to have rough sex." I glare at Markos.

He looks at Ainslee and smirks. "She can take it. She's a big girl. Sometimes you have to make sacrifices for the one that's yours. We all know about that," he says, looking out of the window.

I nod and say nothing else. After a bit, Ainslee speaks. "Do you think Mikos will forgive me?" she asks Markos.

"Mikonos is mad at you?" I ask. "What happened?"

Ainslee shrugs. "I was out of line. I said something that triggered him and now he doesn't want to talk to me."

"When is he not mad at you?" Markos teases her. It works because she smiles a little. "But, just try tomorrow or something. He's not going to be mad at you forever. You know what you said is triggering, give him a moment."

Ainslee looks away. "I can't handle it when Mikonos is mad at me. That's the last thing I want him to be like with me. He means the world to me," Ainslee says and if I didn't know how close they were as siblings, I would be a bit jealous, but I understand her. I get it.

"I'm sorry, honey," I say to her and pull her into my arms. Today has been a trying day for the both of us. There's not much else I can say about it but that I'm looking forward to getting the hell out of

here.

I COULDN'T SLEEP MUCH, so here I am, looking like a crazy person, standing outside of Mikonos's loft at 4 in the morning. I opt for knocking, but I know he won't open it. I take out my spare key and quietly enter. I don't make it far before a moan fills the damn loft. "Too much, Mikos, it's too much," the female cries out and I feel like I've heard that voice before. I know I should leave, but I can't. I'm stuck, my eyes wide as fuck as this train wreck happens. The girl throws her head back on the counter and it's Esra Fairhope. Judge David Fairhope's daughter, from Fairhope. When the fuck? How the fuck?

Mikonos's hand comes around her throat as he pumps in and out of her. "Shut the fuck up and take it. You wanted to play with me right, so take it all."

"Oh God, I can't," she yelps, as Mikonos bites her shoulder. "Don't stop."

He pulls her closer and he looks up at me. "WHAT?" he barks. "Why are you here?"

That's the thing with Mikonos, when he's mad...he's mad. "I... I'll."

"What's going on? Who are you talking to?" Esra asks, trying to turn to look at me but Mikonos tightens his hold on her throat.

"Shut the fuck up and open your legs wider, show me what the fuck you meant by taking this like you own it," Mikonos growls to Esra and she shudders. He moves his hand to her jaw and I know he's applying a lot of pressure. He sniffs. "Who the fuck do you own?" The authority in his voice causes a tingle to run down my spine. I have never thought about Mikonos in this way. It's the oddest thing to me. I know he has sex, I know all about his *girls* for a lack of better word but this is... it's ...

This is... a lot and a little too intimate for me. "I'll, umm, I'll come back later." I pivot on my heel giving them my back. I blink profusely, trying to process what is happening.

"Don't come back until I come to you, Ainslee. Learn to stop fucking with me. You're all going to learn to stop that shit," Mikonos says.

I want to turn around and ask, but Esra repeats my name with a question mark and Mikonos slaps something on her body. I run out, locking the door, and get my ass back in the car. I drive back home, when I get inside the house, Oran is moving around in the kitchen with only his boxers on.

"Hey, you're up," I say to him.

“You know, you disappear a lot. If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you hated sleeping in my bed,” Oran teases, but then he sees the look on my face as I make my way to one of the stools.

I sit and look at the counter. Images of Mikonos with his hair down, Esra’s hand in it, tugging with one hand while the other is behind her, supporting her as her legs wrap around Mikonos’s body to take his brutal fucking, won’t leave my head.

“I, uhh...” I start.

“What’s wrong? Are you okay?” His face is full of worry and I want to take that away immediately. I don’t want him to be worried about me.

“Mikonos and Esra... Esra and Mikonos,” I say, trying to form a sentence. How did I not see it? Was I not paying attention? Is that it?

“I’m confused. Esra who?” Oran asks.

“Esra Fairhope, Judge Fairhope’s daughter. That Esra,” I say.

Oran’s eyes are wide. “Oh, wow. Didn’t see that coming. What about them?” Oran says as he slides a cup of coffee to me. He goes back to making another. Finally, I notice that he’s making breakfast.

“He’s fucking her,” I start “Wait, she’s fucking him? I don’t know.” It’s not even that I’m against any of it. It’s just so weird, well weird because I heard her moan his name, and for the first time in my life, I get it. I get why all those girls were obsessed with the big motherfucker.

“What?” Oran turns to face me. “How are you so sure? Where did this happen?”

I look up at him. “On his counter. In his house. They were fucking and he was being all *shut the fuck up and who do you think you own?*”

Oran snickers. “You uncomfortable?”

I shrug. “Not really. Just super surprised. I don’t think I thought about Mikos like that. He’s intense but this is just... I need to forget it.”

“That’ll teach you to go to a grown man’s house without letting him know.” Oran grins.

I roll my eyes. “Don’t make this worse. Don’t stick up for him.”

Oran puts his hands up. “I’m not, but he is my brother-in-law, babe. I’ve got to have his back, right?”

I glare at him. “I suggest you stop it if you want me to bring you that lunch at your job, Mr. Hale.”

Oran’s smirk turns devious and he goes back to making breakfast. “You better bring me my shit, Ainslee. Or else,” he warns.

“Or else what?” I ask.

Oran looks at me from over his shoulder. “Watch that little mouth of yours. Mrs. Hale, I’m your boyfriend right now. There’s so many ways I could fuck with your body and not give you anything.”

I suck my bottom lip into my mouth. “Mmmm.” I pop it out. “You promise?”

Oran tsks. “Little horndog. I mention sex once and there you are, fucking heart eyes for my dick.”

I laugh hard. “Should I stop?” I ask as he places breakfast on two plates.

He places pancakes, sausage, and eggs on my plate. His is triple the servings on my plate. He comes around and pulls me in for a scorching kiss. “Good morning.”

“Good morning,” I hum.

He goes back to sit across from me. “You couldn’t stop those fucking heart eyes if you wanted to. Your heart eyes, your heart, those chocolatey ass nipples, that juicy ass and that gushing pussy is all mine. I think about tattooing my name on your ass sometimes, you know?”

I roll my eyes. “Oran...”

He shrugs. “What? I do. It’ll say ‘here cums Oran’, maybe for both your pussy and your ass actually.”

“My ass isn’t yours though, not officially,” I tease him.

Oran chokes on his coffee for a second. He calms and then he gives me a look that lets me know I’m fucked. “We’re changing that, Bug. We’re so changing that. You just wait.” There’s this twinkle in his eye and I know the mischievous expression on his face won’t go away, no matter what.

TO KEEP my mind off things, I go to my bakery and I bake. Luci is sitting on a stool in the kitchen, watching me like I'm some kind of idiot. "Word on the street is that that big guy is pissed at you."

I look up at Luci and flip her the bird, even if my hand has flour all over it. "He's...just slightly upset. He's not even that mad," I say, looking at one of the cousins that I know for a fact wouldn't bat an eyelash at killing someone.

Luci sips her iced coffee and shrugs with a smirk. "I could teach him a little lesson if you want."

I laugh, "He'd love to be poisoned so he can prove a point. No thanks."

"Let's shoot him in the kneecap," she offers, her eyes sparkling from that.

"You shoot me in the kneecap, I'll aim for your fucking head, psycho," Mikonos says as he walks into the kitchen.

Luci's eyes take him in as she continues to sip her iced coffee as if he didn't just tell her he'd shoot her in the head. "Sounds like you're looking to fuck, big guy."

Mikonos smirks and I shake my head. I don't know why Luci and Mikonos always do this around each other. I shudder at the thought of them fucking; Mikonos has planted a damned seed in my head that I cannot unsee.

"Are you thinking about me fucking, Ainslee?" Mikonos says to me.

I look up at him, glaring hard. "No. Fuck off," I say. He cocks his brow like he's leaving. "Wait... no, this is fucked. Look, I'm sorry, okay?"

Mikonos smirks. "Since I know nosey-ass Luci won't leave the room, I'll tell you this. I'm not mad at whatever the fuck you think I'm mad at. I know the mom thing was a slip up and you weren't trying to hurt my feelings. It doesn't hurt as much as finding out that you were being fucking hurt right under my nose. Ains, we grew up together, I'm livid that I didn't fucking know! Do you understand?"

I sigh, stopping what I'm doing. "Yes. I understand. I couldn't tell you. If I did, you would've killed her without a word to my dad and you would've had to face that punishment. I couldn't lose you or Markos."

"You don't make that decision for me, you hear me?" Mikonos says with unfiltered anger.

I start to nod but then I stop, shaking my head instead. "No, fuck that, you are my family. I will

always make that decision for you, Orion. Always.”

Mikonos glares at me for a minute and then I see the change in his eyes before he comes over and hugs me. He hugs me tight and I nestle in his arms. “Forever?” I ask him.

“Infinity, baby,” he replies to me.

“Fucking right,” I respond and he laughs. “Okay, let me go, because you’ve scarred me for life and I cannot unsee what I saw earlier.”

Mikonos lets me go and grins. “Sucks to be you, really. I mean me and Esr—.”

I put my hand up, stopping him, “I’m not interested at all. Thanks. It is not my business and the less I know, the less I have to think about it.”

Mikonos snickers. “Whatever, asshole. Anyway, there’s someone here to see you.”

“Who?” I ask.

“You can come in now, dipshit.”

I look towards the kitchen archway and my favorite person in the entire world comes in. My cousin, Ajedi Bishops, wiggles his brows. “Hey, babycakes.”

I drop what I’m doing and scream as I run to him. See, usually, I wouldn’t even have this many people in here, let alone be in the damn bakery, but thankfully it’s closed for brunch. “Baby!!!” I scream as soon as I jump into his arms.

Ajedi catches me and spins me around. “I missed you! I can’t believe you got married and I missed it,” he says.

After what seems like forever, we finally let go of each other. I take a good look at my cousin; he looks good. He grew his hair out and he has it in a low bun. Ajedi Bishops is my father’s younger brother’s kid. Antonio Bishops wanted his own territory, so he left Founder’s and took Pennsylvania over on the State side. Antonio stuck with the typical Bishops rule of marrying outside his race. He, a Puerto Rican-black man married a Korean woman. Aera Bishops, the sweetest, yet most lethal woman when it comes to her mouth. She raised Ajedi to know the life, experience the life, and still keep all his culture, both hers and her husband’s. Ajedi doesn’t have the full-on signature Bishops’ eye color, but his light gray with brown flecks is still very much present. He is dressed just like the right-hand man of Antonio Bishops would be dressed. He looks good in the light blue fitted suit with the white dress shirt underneath and shoes that shine, yet I know he’d kill someone in a heartbeat in them. Ajedi only wears one skull ring on his right middle finger. He’s had that ring for as long as I can remember.

I whistle. “You clean up nice, my boy.”

Ajedi grin and his deep dimples pop out. It fits him from his heart shaped face, the bushy yet arched brows, his medium bulb nose, to his balbo facial hair style. “Thanks, babycakes. Now, let’s go meet this husband of yours. I heard you married fucking Oran Hale? How? You two barely speak to each other, or, well, spoke...What happened to the simple choice... Jagger, ‘cause Oran is the one that’s out of his mind.”

I snort. “The fuck? So that I could kill him where he sleeps? You should’ve warned me about Oran ahead of time. Too late now.” I smile.

Ajedi scoffs. “Oh, come on, think about it, your marriage would never have a dull moment.”

“It doesn’t,” Mikonos answers for me.

I glare at him. “Shut up.”

“You don’t see her baking fucking chocolate chip muffins for the fucker?” Mikonos teases.

Ajedi smiles. “Never said it was gonna be dull with Oran either. He looks like the type to make her work for it.”

“Are you saying Jagger is easy?” I tease.

Ajedi snickers. “How would I know, I’m not his girl.”

“I hate you,” I tease and he laughs.

“I love you even more,” he answers.

“I know damn well you see me, little shit,” Luci says to Ajedi.

He rolls his eyes, the biggest smile on his face. “You see me too. Crazy ass.”

“Don’t die while you’re here,” she says as she brushes by him.

Ajedi laughs. “I missed this damn island.” He claps his hands. “Hurry the fuck up, baby cakes. Grab those muffins and let’s go have a formal introduction.” He shoves me back towards the table I was prepping the muffins at.

“Don’t rush me!” I glare at him, but I can’t stop smiling. “I’m so happy to see you.”

Ajedi winks at me. “Happy to be here, Ains. So happy.”

“Let’s let her finish, Aje. Let’s go open up and make these tourist girls spend even more money with our good looks,” Mikonos says, throwing him an apron. They both put one on and leave me to finish what I’m doing.

If Ajedi is here, it’s either because my uncle is in town or something else is going on. I hope everything is good. My cousin may seem harmless, but he is one of the most ruthless killers I’ve ever been around. Everyone may not jump at the name Ajedi, but they for sure run and hide when someone lets them know that *Shadow* is coming for you.

ORAN

There’s a knock on my door. “You expecting someone?” my cousin Wyn asks me.

“Hmm, no, come in,” I say but I don’t look up from my laptop. The smell of baked goods hits my nose and I look up. I see Ainslee standing there with her little ass bag and muffins in tow.

“Hi Wyn. Hi baby.” She gives me a smile that I know others would envy. I never thought about having a girl this gone for me, but when I look at her, I see it. She hasn’t said it, but I know she loves me and I want her to say it first. I want her to be comfortable with me. To know that she can trust me with her love. That I wouldn’t do her wrong or fuck with it.

“Hey, Ainslee, you come bearing gifts?” Wyn inhales, then exhales. “Smells fresh.”

“Oh, they are fresh! Just made them,” Ainslee tells Wyn. She smiles at him.

I roll my eyes and glare at my cousin. “Asshole, get out, don’t smile at my wife like that.”

Wyn looks at me and laughs. “Come on, man. I’m just smiling,” he says and I glare at him.

He gets up, still in that good mood of his. Ainslee moves the first plastic container with the muffins. “Hold this for a minute, will you?” she says to Wyn. He does as she says. She opens the second plastic container and out comes a juicy-ass looking cupcake. “How about a cupcake?” She winks at Wyn.

Wyn’s grin grows. “I love cupcakes. Thank you.” He grabs it and she shuts the container. He hands her back the first one. “Well, don’t you feel any type of way about stopping by with more sweets. You’re family.” He winks at her and looks at me. He tips his big ass cupcake and walks out. Asshole.

I smile at her. “Chocolate chip?” I gesture with my chin.

Ainslee bites her bottom lip and nods, which I know is an indication that she wants a kiss. I watch her for a second. I take in her little outfit. Her blush-pink sleeveless dress barely goes over her thighs, but it does hug her curves and her tits. Her hair is in its curly-coily state in(my new favorite) style; up in a messy bun, a term I picked up from her damned videos. Her white open-toe heels are a tad bit higher today, making her legs look longer.

I gesture with my eyes for her to come to me and she does it without hesitating. She places the containers on my desk and hops right on. “I’ve always wanted to do that to someone.”

I roll my chair a bit closer to her. I grab her ankles and glide my hands up her legs. “You look fucking adorable as shit today, why? Kind of like a random glow. You change something in your makeup routine?”

Ainslee’s eyes widen in appreciation that I noticed. “Yeah, can you tell? How is it? We’re working on a new glowy primer right now and I wanted to test it out before it goes out to everyone else.”

“Makes you look even more fuckable and shit. I think I’m turned on even more that you work so hard, even though you’re still a fucking brat.”

Ainslee playfully rolls her eyes. “Backwards ass compliment.”

“You want to get spanked?” I ask as my hands continue their journey under her dress but I pause as I feel some sheer material-band around her upper thighs. “Stand.” I tell Ainslee. Ainslee stands. I press the button for my secretary. “Yes, Mr. Hale?”

“Don’t let anyone in my office until I say so.”

“Yes sir.”

I hang up and lift up Ainslee’s dress. It’s a fading floral yellow-colored lingerie set; It’s sheer as hell and leaves nothing to the imagination. I move her dress higher and take the whole thing off; the little floral barely hides her erect nipples and it’s some weird set up where the straps come down

from her shoulders then split around her breasts, leaving the sheer cups. There's a sheer corset with a criss-cross and the straps of that clip to the garter around her thighs that I first felt. Her panties are my favorite part. The floral print is higher and I see her pussy clearly. "Turn around," I command. She does as I say and I inhale at the g-string. The little unnecessary damned triangle. Why is it even there?

Ainslee places her hands on my desk and arches her back. "You don't like it? A lingerie brand sent it to me to try on and review."

I run my hands down her back and back up again. "I love it. Review it how? On your channel?" I ask.

"Yeah... They want me to show it. Of course, I'm not going to show the back."

I grunt as I slap her ass cheek lightly watching it bounce back. "No, you're not reviewing shit. Tell them your husband saw it and he wants it in every color, especially orange."

"Aww, I made the video and everything," Ainslee says and I slap her other ass cheek. Ainslee moans.

"Is that so?" I ask, sitting back in my chair, unbuttoning my pants and unzipping.

"Yes." Ainslee shudders as I take a bite of her ass.

"Have you uploaded it?" I ask as I pull my dick out of my boxer-briefs and begin stroking it.

"No, not yet. Gotta edit first."

"Hmm, play with your pussy for me, baby." Ainslee does what she's told and I discover something even more fascinating, there's a little hole right at the entrance of her panties. "There is a god," I mumble.

"What's that, baby?" Ainslee moans.

I grab her by her waist with my free hand and I bring her back to me. Ainslee doesn't stop playing with her pussy as she sits on my dick. Ainslee's head is thrown back as she takes me in, inch-by-inch. "Goddamn. You're so wet already, all for me?" I tease her.

"Always," she moans.

I grab her waist, digging my fingers into her skin as I fuck her hard. Ainslee moans loudly and I move my hand, slapping my hand over her mouth. "Fuck, baby. What a snack you've got for me. Fuck me."

I get lost in fucking Ainslee and I don't even care. I fuck her until her entire body grows limp and she falls back against me. We cum together from this position and we sit there, not moving for a moment. Ainslee breathes hard. "Are you going to taste my muffins, now?" she asks.

I laugh. "Sounds like an innuendo for something else," I tease her. "You still want to grab lunch?" I kiss her neck.

"Yes," she shudders. "My cousin Aje wants to officially meet you."

"But I already know him, that weird fuck." Ainslee snickers as she tries to get up but I pull her back. "Let's stay like this for a bit. I like this."

"Me too." Ainslee says. She turns her head to face me and she pulls me into a kiss. One that

makes me groan into her mouth. Fuck, this woman is going to drive me insane, but I love her just as much as she loves me.

I WAS RAISED around protective men and I realize that now more than I did before. Things with my mother made me very isolated and wary of everyone. Her words poisoned my mind and there wasn't much I could do about it. Before we get out of the car to join Ajedi and Mikonos for lunch, I stop Oran from getting out. "I want to talk to you about something, it's nothing crazy."

Oran looks my way and gives me his full attention. "As long as it's not about posting that video review, I'll listen," he says, winking at me.

"Don't be rude. Let me just post it," I tease him.

He glares at me. "Send it to me and let me go over it then ... just then I might let you post a snippet of it."

"Really?" I squeal.

"No, are you out of your mind, baby?" He laughs. "It's not happening."

"Fine, that's not what I want to talk about anyway." I smile at him.

I smile at how much of a caring man he is. How much of a contrast from any other man I've ever met. I reach out, caressing his face. Oran leans into my touch and it makes me grateful for him. "What is it? You okay, Bug?"

I nod. "Yeah, I am. I think that I want to cover up what my mom did. Hear me out. There's too much pain here." I point at my heart. "Years of rejection, feeling like no one else could see me. Could see how hard I try to be me. She did that to me. She made me regret so much. I loved so hard, yet I lost because she took it from me. My mother hated me and I loved her. I loved for the both of us and it hurts like hell, Oran. I don't want it anymore. I don't want memories of her. I want it all gone."

Oran places a hand over mine on his face. "Whatever you want to do, I've got your back. Okay? Look, I would never tell you to keep something that would give you bad memories and feelings. Shit, I know all about having an awful parent. Even though my mom was the sweetest, kindest human being in my life, that bird-brain Elmer was not. For a long time, I feared I was just like him. A fucking replica, but I needed to know, to see for myself that I am nothing like him. We may have some similar features, but as far as I'm concerned, I had one parent and her name was Bethany. He doesn't get to drag me down with him, he doesn't deserve me as his son, even if we share DNA. He won't ever

make me who I am because I did that with the help of my mother's memories. So, darling, do what you need to do. I support you."

Oran's words make my heart flutter. "I..." I start to say but I stop.

"I know, Bug, I know," he replies and I reach over, hugging him tight.

"Thank you, for being here for me. Thank you for supporting me."

"I'm your husband, woman! Who else is supposed to do this?" he teases, placing a kiss on my bare shoulder.

"I thought you were my boyfriend?" I tease.

Oran chuckles. "Shut up."

I laugh, leaning in to give him another quick kiss and I finally let him go so we can get out of the car.

ORAN

Lunch was... not bad, even though Ajedi Bishops is a nutcase that should be locked up in a mental hospital. I don't know how many different ways Ajedi told me he could take me out if I hurt his cousin. I rolled my eyes each time, letting him know that she was my damned wife and he needed to check himself into a mental institution outside of the Island, that way we don't have to ever cross paths.

After lunch, I go back to work and enjoy the hell out of the damn muffins and cupcakes. I don't share with anyone else either. Hours later, I text Ainslee, making sure her ass delivers each time. Just her.

Me: Muffins; Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at lunch time.

The little shit doesn't message me back until an hour later, like she has something better to do.

Midget(Wife): Is this an order that you're putting in? Have you called the bakery, sir? Please have Maisy do so, I bribed her earlier to let me into your office.

Me: How?

Midget(Wife): Showed her a nipple.

Me: She's married...To A MAN!

Midget(Wife): Kidding, obviously. I gave her a cupcake and told her that whenever she wants to stop by before going to work for a grump, she can get a free coffee of her choice and some pastries. On the house.

Me: So you bribed her with treats?

Midget(Wife): I'm a Bishops, baby.

Me: You want to get spanked?

Midget(Wife): What did I do this time?

Me: You're a HALE. Don't you forget it again or I'll imprint it on your ass.

Midget(Wife): Damn, talk dirty to me...

Me: Ainslee...

Midget(Wife): Fine! I think for you I can make some sort of accommodations.

Me: You're the only one who can deliver them too.

Midget (Wife): This is not part of our services, sir. I am very sorry.

Me: Don't play with me...

Midget(Wife): But I like playing with you. Don't you like playing with me?

I can feel a smile spread over my face and Wyn chuckles. "Are you sexting?"

I look up at him. "No, asshole, I'm in the middle of a business transaction. Is there a reason for this visit?"

Wyn chuckles. "Right... I've never even seen you so much as a smirk at a business transaction but, yeah, I'm here for a reason."

"Shut up." I say to Wyn, grabbing my water. As I sip, my phone dings one more time and I look down. I don't think I've even heard a word Wyn has just told me because Ainslee, the little fucking midget wife of mine, sends me a gif of her in some blue bikini set and her hair dyed blonde. The only thing she has to say to me is *I heard blondes have more fun*. I choke on my water and Wyn comes around patting my back like a fucking jackass. I shake him off. "Stop before I swing, asshole," I grit through my teeth. Wyn's trying to fucking kill me at the same time as Ainslee.

Wyn looks at why I choked. He whistles and I glare at him. I put my phone down. "Back to what we're talking about."

Wyn says nothing and sits down. He cocks his brow at me. "Give me two minutes and then I'll move on from it."

"Counting," I say to him.

"Damn. She's gorgeous, of course, but the blonde looks good on her. She looks like a sex bunny."

"Thirty seconds left."

Wyn widens his eyes. "What?" This makes him laugh harder. "Okay, I'm done. Won't ever bring it up again."

"You better not," I warn him.

INSTEAD OF GOING HOME after work, I drive up to the lounge where Ainslee, Ajedi, Mikonos, Luci, Karessa, and Jagger are. I remove my suit jacket, leaving my dress shirt and waistcoat on. I roll the sleeves up on my midnight blue dress shirt and remove my tie, leaving it in the car. I'm on edge. My wife gave me blue balls. Does she know what it's like for a man of my caliber to work with blue balls? Everyone suffers.

I walk in the lounge and go to the private area that's closed off. I open the door and when I get in, my wife is dancing without her shoes. I shake my head, smiling. We're so opposite, yet it works for us. I would never be caught dead dancing, but it's good that she's dancing with Karessa and Luci.

I slip by them, going to sit with the guys, and I notice that Ainslee has a bandage on her back. I tilt my head, wondering what that's about, but I'll ask her once she settles down. The blonde looks even better in person. I take in her little-ass outfit. Her top is basically nonexistent; it covers her breasts, looping through her arms, as straps on her shoulders, then the back is just a thin strap holding it in place. The skirt reaches right below her knees, but it molds to her body.

Ainslee dances even more, mouthing the words to Dance to This by Troye Sivan. Karessa taps her and points to me. Ainslee turns around with the biggest smile on her face. I can't help it as I smile back. She waves and I snicker, shaking my head, but I wave back. She gestures her head towards the door. She slips back into her heels and walks out of the room. "Public sex, huh? You kinky fucker," Jagger says.

I roll my eyes, scoffing. "Order me a drink." I get up and follow Ainslee. I join her in the private hall. "Hi," I say to her.

"Hi. Now, before everything, I want to show you something. I didn't want anyone else besides Mikonos to see it before you. He did it, so that's why."

I nod. "First, I love your hair. You look gorgeous. Second, okay. You want me to remove the bandage out here?"

"Thank you." She smiles. "Mmhmm. They all know why I called you out here." Ainslee turns around and unclips the bottom strap from the side.

"Is it ready for me to do this?" I ask her.

"Yeah, I took it off a while ago to wash it like I'm supposed to, but I put the bandage back on because I wanted you to see it first," Ainslee says.

I slowly remove the bandage and when I get it off completely, I am in awe of her tattoo. From the bottom, where the memory of what her mother did to her was, she has a huge lotus flower with a little bit of fading red to match her scars. Then, coming out of the flower, a half lotus leaf morphs into some bird wings, like a bird is hiding. At first, you can't see it, but the next tattoo that goes up and right, you see as it spreads its wings, and the final piece is a little over her shoulder. It's a hummingbird. I smile because it fits her so well. There's a small quote there that says *Baby, you're the best part of my day*. "Wow..."

"What do you think?" Ainslee asks.

"First, I'm in awe of it. It just fits you so much more than I could've imagined. It's beautiful, baby. I love it. Who chose the bird?"

"Markos. He helped speed the process up. He said I remind him of a hummingbird. The fact that even though it's a small bird, what is so special about it is that it can fly forward, backward, and even upside down and that a hummingbird is the only one capable of hovering for a period of time during

flight. He wanted me to know that size doesn't matter, it's what I can do."

I kiss her bare shoulder. "You are very special, Ains. What about the quote, what's that about?"

"Something I'm keeping as a reminder of you," she confesses.

I'm taken aback. "You know it's permanent, right?" I say to her. "Not that I don't love it or appreciate the shit out of it, but I'm just saying."

"And we're just as permanent, Oran. I'm not going anywhere. It's just something for us. That's all."

I'm both shocked and grateful as hell. "I'm not going anywhere, either. I—," I catch myself.

"I know, baby, I know," she says to me. I smile at her words.

"Good, you better." Ainslee clips her tiny top back and turns around to kiss me. I lean in as she places her arms around my neck. She kisses me, letting me know she loves me through our kiss instead of speaking.

She lets me go and runs her fingers through my hair with one hand and then wipes lipstick off my lips with the other. "How many times did you run your fingers through your hair at work today?"

"I was frustrated. My midget wife gave me blue balls."

"Aww, maybe I can make it all better later," she teases.

I wiggle my brows. "Like you have a choice."

Ainslee laughs. "You grump."

"Your grump, little asshole," I answer back.

"Who the hell else would take your mean ass?" Ainslee says, laughing harder as we walk back into the room.

Later on, we're joined by Wyn and the other two LeClaire sisters. It's funny how different this generation of the Founder's kids are. We aren't as problematic as our parents and it makes me wonder if it's because we have different goals than them or if we're just better human beings than some of them. It's a wonder if they had a time like this too before we were born. I doubt it though.

AINSLEE

THE MOMENT we arrive at the vacation house, we get drinks. My mango margarita is just right. Karessa gives her drink to Oran and leaves her bag to Jagger. My bags are definitely somewhere... maybe in my room. Somebody is going to do it, like one of the boys. We go around the villa to check it out. We leave the men behind after our stroll, making the decision to go for a swim.

WHEN THE BOYS come back around, they announce to us that we're going sailing. Karessa and I get out of our relaxing mode and go get ready. Once we're in our room, I flip through my suitcase, looking for something simple to wear. Oran is pacing back and forth, I look up at him. "Are you okay?" I ask.

"Hmm?" he replies.

"Your hand." I point at the big band-aid on his palm.

"This is nothing." He shakes his head. "No, Jagger just told me about his attack. I didn't know that he almost lost his life. That someone actually hired someone to do it!" Oran expresses. I listen to his frustrations as he airs them out. I sit on the bed to give him my undivided attention. "I'm trying to connect the dots here. That is something you don't just do as a simple thing. I'm angry that my father tried to kill him. All because..."

"Of Karessa. Yeah, I don't get it. Not the fact that it's Karessa, but because what makes him think she would even want him? It's creepy as hell." I shake my head.

Oran stops in his tracks. "Come again?" he asks.

I look up at him. "You didn't know?"

"How long have you known?" Oran asks. I don't say anything. Instead, I stand and go back to looking for my dress. I know that I packed a specific sundress. "Ainslee."

"I've known from the moment Nikolai subdued the other guy that was trying to hurt Jagger. Nikolai had no choice but to tell one of the boys that is assigned to watch over on that side of town."

"Why do you know that information?"

I continue to slowly rummage through my clothes now. “Because I’m the next in line, babe. I know everything that’s happening around Founder’s.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asks.

I look up at him. “I can’t always disclose certain things. Husband or not.”

“What are you trying to say, that it’s not my place?”

“Yes and no,” I answer. “When are we leaving?”

Oran blankly stares at me for a moment and naturally, I stare back. I’m not sure what he wants to say, so I wait to hear him out. Maybe he wants to air out more of his frustrations. “Do you not care about anything? Like my best friend, a person who is practically like my brother, was about to die.”

“He didn’t,” I say to clarify that Jagger is okay.

“You don’t fucking get it, do you?”

“What don’t I get? I totally understand that you are visibly upset about what happened to Jagger and how it had to do with your father, but Jagger is fine. He’s doing okay and with each day, he’s going to get over it. A brush with death brings clarity. We’ve all been there. You see it and then you accept it to move on.” I begin untying my bathing suit top and bottom. “How long until we leave?” I ask.

Oran glares at me. “What the fuck is wrong with you, Ainslee? It’s like you don’t fucking understand anything I’m saying? That’s the most insensitive shit I’ve ever heard. Did you even consider that maybe just maybe all I needed was a fucking hug instead of a 101 on how people almost die everyday? I’m reeling from my best friend almost dying and you drop another bomb about why, then you tell me it basically is none of my business.” He shakes his head. Oran walks out of the room, slamming the door.

What the fuck is wrong with you? Those are his words, but it mirrors my mom’s. She’d ask me that all the time, and lately I’ve been trying not to think about her. I don’t miss her as much as I thought I would but her words seep into my blood, making it run cold. If there’s one thing that Andreas Bishops has taught me is that no one should ever see you crack under pressure, even if it’s your spouse.

I SETTLE for wearing a black strapless bikini swimsuit underneath my little black dress. When I get to where everyone is, I avoid looking at Oran. “You ready?” Karessa asks.

“Yeah,” I say. We walk out and head to the car and on the drive to where we’re going, I stare outside the window. I shut my eyes and I try to think about anything else but those words. What would my dad do right now? How would he further shove down this pain and how much it hurts coming from people that I love...love? Hell, I love Oran, don’t I? I sigh. Dammit. This wouldn’t have hurt as much if only I didn’t love the way that I do.

During lunch, I'm happy that it's not as noticeable and no one is asking me anything. I smile when everyone else does and I laugh on cue but inside there is no happiness or emotion to pull from. It's not all the time that I feel like this but right now I feel sick to my stomach. "Excuse me for a second, bathroom," I quickly say. I go over below deck and head into the bathroom. I shut myself in there and I look at my reflection. "Come on, Ainslee, he didn't mean it like that. Snap out of it," I say to myself but it's harder now because that shoving down of emotions has worked.

I blink and wash my face, not caring about the light makeup I did. I want it off right now anyway. I tie my hair into a ponytail, anything to try to make me feel normal. Why can't I be normal? *What the fuck is wrong with you, Ainslee? Why don't you get that no matter how much you love people, they'll always be disappointed in you! You are a disappointment.*

I shut my eyes and I rub them. My mother's words have no place in my life. They don't belong but somehow they keep me prisoner and won't let me go. A feeling takes over of wanting to run so far away that no one can ever find me. Next thing I know, I'm walking out of the bathroom and back up to the deck, but I don't stop where I hear Karessa, Jagger, and Oran laughing about something. Instead, I climb up to the higher deck. I remove my dress and shoes, then untie my hair. I step close to the edge and without thinking about it, I jump into the ocean. Once my body hits the water, I don't swim. Instead I fight the body's natural reaction to thinking it's drowning, but I'm not. I've had training. I open my eyes, making sure that I'm not going too deep to where it'll be harder for me to come back. There's a level of panic that hits me hard and I begin swimming away, as if running from something, but then I stop. I can't run away from the people that I love anymore. It's not fair or right. I turn back and swim closer to the boat. I come up for air and I'm face to face with Oran.

He's still upset, I can see it in his eyes. My brows crease and that panicked feeling comes back. I turn, ready to bolt. "Why did you jump like that? Do you not care that others give a fuck or something?"

"What?" I ask.

"It's like there's a switch that went off. There's this blank look in your eyes, Ainslee., Oran says.

"It's nothing," I say and I shut my eyes.

"This is why I was upset," Oran says.

"Was?" I ask, opening my eyes again.

He gives me a half a smirk. "Okay, fine, I'm still a little upset."

"You're upset that I didn't tell you about your dad and Jagger?"

"Yes and no,. Oran runs a hand through his wet hair, sweeping it back. "Listen, sometimes you miss the cues and you completely come off as insensitive. Had that been maybe another topic or, fuck, even if we were talking about Elmer himself, I wouldn't have given a damn, but we were talking about someone close to me. Do I have to really just tell you that I want my wife to give me a hug because my friend was hurt?"

"If you wanted a hug, why didn't you just say that instead of pacing back and forth?" I ask.

“Because, Ainslee, people naturally just give hugs when bad news is delivered.”

I nod. “I see that now, but you have to understand, I didn’t come from that life. My dad didn’t hug me every time something happened and my mother didn’t know what hugging was unless she was choking me out. I’m sorry that I didn’t see that you needed that. I need time, Oran. To get to know your tells. To see what you look like when you need a hug or when you need space. For now, you have to just tell me. I’m not normal and I know I’ll never be. What you consider insensitive or ask what the fuck is wrong with me, that’s just how I am. It’s how I have always been and I’m trying to not be desensitized to things that concern those around me outside of my dad and brothers. I was raised around violence, Oran. From a young age, my dad taught me one thing, and that was that people, especially those around me, will have brushes of death. The only thing that can be done is to suck it up and be happy that you don’t bury them, but if you do, then no tears. That’s all.”

I think it’s clicking for Oran because there’s this look in his eyes I’ve picked up on. Recognition. “Is that why...with your mom?”

I nod. “Yes, but I will say I’m sorry that it seemed like I dismissed your feelings. I totally understood that you were upset and frustrated. I’m not some kind of monster that doesn’t have some sliver of empathy, but just see that I was raised by a father who gave me guns instead of teddy bears and a mother who taught me that I don’t deserve love. I have had only about ten years of trying to reprogram that and each time she found a way to fuck it up, but she’s gone now,” I say quietly.

Oran moves even closer. “Don’t call yourself a monster. Ever. I’m sorry that I called you insensitive and asked what’s wrong with you. There’s nothing wrong with you. It’s not just on you to do better. I’m your husband, so I’m in this too, Ainslee. We just need to communicate better. Transparency goes a long way. A really long way.”

“Yeah, so is this one of the times you want me to hug you?” I ask.

Oran chuckles and rolls his eyes. He pulls me into a hug and I smile. I hug him just as tight. “Can we get out of this damned ocean? I’m over it,” Oran says.

I nod. We swim back and climb over to the empty deck. Jagger and Karessa are most likely below deck. Oran and I go to the upper deck, I sit down on one of the deck chairs and remove my top. I lay down on my stomach and shut my eyes. “Ains...” Oran calls my name and I feel his fingertips on my arms.

“Hmm?”

“Come,” he says softly. I open my eyes and he’s lying right next to me. I wonder if he can tell that although we’re okay, I need time to snap out of it. The pleading in his eyes is what does it for me. I get up from where I’m laying down and I straddle Oran. “Kiss me,” he says.

I lean in and I kiss him. My body melts the deeper the kiss becomes. My hands find his biceps as my nipples harden as they rub over his chest. Oran’s fingertips dig into my hips, then he slips his hand inside of my swim bottom. Oran squeezes my ass cheeks as I rub against him. Oran moves one hand from my ass to my pussy. He plays with my clit and I moan into his mouth. My fingernails dig into

Oran's skin as he dips his hand inside me. Oran pulls away and moves his other hand to my jaw. "Look at me, darling, seriously."

I open my eyes and look at him. "Oran..." I moan.

Oran sits us up as he moves to my breasts. He sucks a nipple into his mouth and I arch my body towards him some more. I sink my fingers into his hair and forget about everything else but Oran. Oran brings his attention to my other nipple and then his lips travel up and up until he's sucking on my neck. I moan. Before Oran I had never had so many hickeys. "Open your eyes, Ains." I shudder because I'm close. I look at him. Oran looks at me for a while. "Nothing is wrong with you. I promise you." A combination of the soft way he's saying it and the love in his eyes causes me to break apart. I come undone and I feel the tears as they fall down my face. "Shhh, don't cry, baby." Oran wipes my tears with his free hand. He pulls me to him as I wrap my arms around him.

"You give the warmest hugs in the world," I confess after a beat of silence.

Oran chuckles again as he kisses my temple. "I know, that's why you should always hug me."

I hug him tighter and Oran leans back. I properly situate myself on top of him like I usually do in our bed. "I-," I sigh. This would be the perfect moment to say it. "Oran Hale," I say his name instead.

"I know, Ainslee Hale." I fall asleep with my fingers in his hair, a smile on my face and exploding love in my soul.

DURING THE FIRST week of our honeymoon, I realized something. Ainslee is a complete psychopath. From the second day here, my Energizer Bunny wife has me going on all these damned tours.

Today, she swears, is the last damned tour for the week. Jagger and Karessa opted out. I wish I could've too but noooo, I have to suffer because my wife is in love with ancient civilization. I glare as the tour guide and her talk about everything in rapid Spanish. If they were speaking slower, I could understand but this isn't it. I roll my eyes as she laughs and the tour guide sighs like he's in love.

"Can you go back to what the fuck we were talking about? Tell us about this damned place." I give him his last warning with my eyes.

Ainslee says nothing, but she moves closer, standing in front of me. "Baby..."

"What?" I grit through my teeth.

"I want to tell you a secret, come closer," Ainslee says.

She wraps her arms around my waist. I lean lower and she meets me halfway, kissing me tenderly. I can tell the differences in her kisses and this one is her *I love you* kiss. She pulls away and smiles. "Better?" she asks.

"Much," I answer.

"Good, because you're always going to be the man I try my best to impress."

"You fucking better."

AFTER EXPLORING and taking pictures at the Chichen Itza, we're brought to the cenote; an underground swimming hole formed from a collapsed limestone cavern. There's not that many people here. Ainslee removes her jean shorts and her shirt, revealing her swim wear. "Is that swimwear or a panties set?" I ask her.

Ainslee laughs. "You're so extra. Come on." She pulls me towards the water.

"Okay, hold on." I strip until all I have on are the damn swimming shorts she made me wear

underneath my linen pants. I shake my head and follow her into the water.

I take in the scenery. Ainslee has her camera and she takes pictures of everything. I look around, loving that for once in my life, I get to relax. No boardrooms, no hearing my phone go off, none of that. I lean back, floating. I hear the camera clicks and something makes me stand back up. I look at Ainslee holding her camera, taking pictures of me. “Are you going to pay me for this model shoot?” I ask her.

Ainslee laughs. “Hell no. You’ve got enough money in your bank account.”

“Should I even ask, Ains? Do you guys not know anything about me?” I shake my head, trying to fight the grin on my face.

She shrugs. “Hmm, whatever I didn’t want to check into, I didn’t. We all deserve a little privacy. Now, pose for me, baby. Show the camera some love.”

I narrow my eyes at her and she takes a picture. I feel my brow naturally lift and she takes another. It doesn’t matter what I do, she just keeps going. I can’t help but laugh.

MY WIFE’S psychotic tendencies are showing again as we make our way back to the villa. The tour guide has learned to talk to Ainslee less as he engages the driver in conversation. I turn to face my wife again and I shudder as she bites into the ice cream she wanted so badly that we had to stop. I watch her as she chews the ice cream she just bought. Ainslee turns to me. “Yes?”

I blink. “Please tell me that you don’t chew ice too.”

Ainslee snorts. “Yeah, I do. On the rare occasion that I’m feeling low. Who doesn’t chew ice?”

“Everyone else, you psycho-ass woman,” I say with no bite in my tone.

Ainslee laughs hard. After she’s calmed, she scoots closer to me and plants a kiss on my lips. She licks her lips, “This psycho-ass woman loves you nonetheless, so get used to it.” She smiles wider and goes back to swaying to the music while chewing her damned ice cream.

I’m stuck there, just staring at her. Did she just tell me she loves me? I mean, I shouldn’t be surprised because I know she does, but to actually hear her say it out loud? It just feels different. I grab her jaw and make her look at me. “Say it again,” I command.

The tone in my voice is serious and my voice is a bit hoarse. Ainslee tilts her head. “Say what again?”

“Don’t fuck with me, Bug.”

Ainslee smiles wide. She leans in even closer, leaving barely any space between our lips. “I love you, Oran Hale.”

I gaze at her for a moment, taking in the look she has while she says it. Her eyes shine with adoration and I can tell she’s happy. “I’m happy,” I say to her. “You make me happy, Ainslee, and I promise you I will never hurt you. I heard you the first time you said it to me and baby, I’ve got you. I

love you, Ainslee Margot Hale.”

Ainslee takes a deep breath in. “Why does it feel like this?” Her eyes are already misty.

“Like what?” I rub my lips over hers.

“Like,” her breathing becomes shallower, “like, the world is finally right. Like everything is going my way. Like loving you is something that I will never regret. Fuck, I want to tell you again but I don’t want to make it weird.”

“Because it is right, Bug. It’s for you and me. I won’t ever give you a reason to regret it. I want to hear it one more time.”

Ainslee shuts her eyes and opens them. “I love you, Oran.”

“I love you too, Ainslee.” I kiss her hard, forgetting all about her melting ice cream. She can bite that shit later. Fucking weirdo.

AINSLEE

FINALLY, after all the tours are done, I get to relax and do my yoga. Karessa is busy with her crossword and while she relaxes that way, I relax this way. “Can I ask you a question, Ressa?” I ask as I get into a cobra move.

“Yeah, sure, what’s up?” Karessa responds.

“Do you think you can be in love and still desire someone else?”

“What do you mean? Not that I’m saying no, but elaborate please,” Karessa says.

“Like, hmm.” I stand up and go into a standing split. “Let me just say it like it really is.” I look at Karessa from my position and she chuckles. “You want to fuck Oran just as much as I want to fuck Jagger. I love Oran and you are falling in love with Jagger. Don’t even deny it, *mami*. Anyway, that’s not what we’re discussing. So, if the boys want to fuck each other’s wives, would you do it?”

Karessa puts down her crossword and looks at me. “I would do it. You wouldn’t want to fight me after, right? Like say if I end up moaning Oran’s name?”

I chuckle. “Ressa, lady, you will end up moaning his name. It’s Oran fucking Hale. Good luck with him.”

Karessa’s eyes widen and I know the interest is there. “You know if this was any other woman I’d lose my shit, but because I know all of our lust is surface level and we’re those kind of people who obviously are curious about the other, I’ll let you know, Jagger is freaky. Full of tricks and I don’t know how you’re going to handle it.”

I come back down, planting my two feet on the yoga mat and smirk. I get into the handstand scorpion position. This helps me with my core. “Karessa, I’m sorry if this is going to sound like the most disturbing thing that’s ever come out of my mouth but I’ve developed a tolerance to pain. I need it to continue on a daily basis. Oran gives me a balance of both pleasure and pain without even realizing it sometimes. He hasn’t given the amount of pain that I would claim is too much just yet, but I can see it in his demeanor that he will. So, if it means Jagger has to be the one to give it to me so that Oran can notice how much more I can take, then so be it. Jagger can bring all the heat in the fucking world and I’ll take it. If I moan his name, I owe you a dozen margaritas.”

Karessa throws her head back and laughs. “Well then, we would’ve been some great friends in

high school, wish we could've gotten that chance."

"We would've gotten into some bullshit for sure." I chuckle with her, then I switch to my last position. The simple downward dog pose. I concentrate, pushing all my energy into the stretch. I feel someone behind me and before I can process who it is, I turn and land a punch to Jagger's midsection. Jagger grunts but his smile deepens. "Fuck, Jagger! Don't sneak up on me like that. You'll never know where I'll punch your ass next time."

"Is that a promise?" Jagger asks me. He walks closer to me, swallowing up the space between us. I peer up at him. "What if I tell you I like pain?"

"Are you asking me to hurt you?" I ask him and my body does this weird thing where it's like I'm doing a backflip. Images of ways that I could cause him pain travels through my mind. I mentally shake my head but the images aren't disappearing. Deep indents on his asscheeks from my manicured nails, choking him while I'm riding him, pulling his hair hard. I wonder if he'd ever let me use a whip on him? I try it out by pushing him and Jagger catches my wrists.

Jagger pushes me back down on the mat and I cock my brow because he knows that I'm letting this happen. Jagger pins my wrists over my head with one hand and I can't see a damn thing past the lust. All my blood has drained from my brain to my pulsing clit. Everyone assumes that men are the only ones who lose their train of thought when it comes to sex, but no. We women do too. Especially me. I forget everything else when there's pain involved. I want it to happen. Jagger knows what I'm asking him to do. He grabs my chin and doesn't stop leaning in until we're a breath away from kissing. "You act like you want to be tied up and spanked," he says.

Fuck. I hear Oran in the background because I could never not hear his voice, but all it does is make this moment even more blissful. Jagger and I stare at each other for a good minute with no words exchanged. He runs his thumb over my bottom lip. "*Cuidado*," he tells me and my nipples perk up at that. He's found one of my weaknesses, speaking to me in Spanish. That shit is so sexy to me. I narrow my eyes at him, wondering how he knew. Jagger bites the air between us and he grinds his covered dick against me and then pushes off me. I want to swing but I don't do anything. We look at each other longer than we need to. If we fight, we're going to end up fucking because that's how intense it is right now. Jagger stands and backs away from me.

I shut my eyes, trying to calm my horny self down because this is not okay. When I open them, Oran is walking towards me. I stand up and try to busy myself with rolling my mat but that's a huge mistake because Oran wraps his arm around my midsection and I squeal. Oran and I don't make it far into the hall before he slams me against the wall. Oran snatches my yoga shorts off and I remove my sports bra. He takes his shirt off and he pulls his shorts and boxers down. Neither of us say much as Oran lifts me up against the wall. He slips inside of me so roughly that I gasp loudly. I throw my head back, not able to control my moans. "Oh God..." Oran's roughness with me must be a mixture of build up from Jagger and now him. I can't take this right now but I love it.

I let Oran use me like a fucking rag doll and my world seems so right. I right my head and kiss him

hard. I don't even care if Jagger or Karessa can hear us. It's been established that so much is on the table. Fuck. Me. Hard. Oran groans in my mouth and pulls away. He sucks on my neck. "You're so fucking sexy when you're horny. I love it. Look at Jagger and tell him thank you for getting you wet for me," Oran says.

I turn my head and focus again, Both Jagger and Karessa are in their own sex haze on the floor but when Jagger hears his name, he looks up into my eyes while Oran fucks me. "Thank you, Jagger," I moan and there's a look in Jagger's eyes. Karessa moans from the intense way he's fucking her.

Jagger smirks. "You're welcome." He winks at me and we both break eye contact as Oran flicks my clit. I throw my head back as I cum but Oran is nowhere near finished. The tables have officially turned, in the best possible way.

ORAN

Our wives have decided to go out for drinks today since Ainslee's tours were officially done yesterday. I watch as Jagger's phone goes off once more. "Who the fuck are you texting that much?" I ask.

Jagger looks at me like I'm dumb. "My wife, who the fuck else? It's not my fault you don't like texting yours," he taunts.

I flip him the finger and laugh. "I feel like I'm over here blowing up some random girl's phone, like it's not my wife. That little asshole. We just talked about communication. She's really not texting me back, as if I didn't blow her fucking back out this morning. What am I, a fucking sex doll?" I scoff in disbelief.

Jagger laughs and stands. "Let's go."

I cock my brow. "Where are we going?"

"To see why the hell your tiny-ass wife isn't answering your texts and then once we figure that out, we'll fold her little ass into your pocket so she can't go anywhere. I think she likes pressing your buttons since you're so reserved."

I laugh. "It's not that serious. It's just something I realized."

"Aww, look at you being *safe*..." Jagger taunts me.

I narrow my eyes at him. I know he's taunting me, but for some reason that damned word still irks me. I look at my phone once again. How many damned texts did I send her?

"Let's go," Jagger says. "They're not that far. They're in the restaurant having drinks and partying."

I don't bother to change out of my beige linen pants and white t-shirt. I put on some shoes and we head there.

Once we get there, the music is blasting and there are a lot more people than I thought. We spot Karessa first. She's sitting, having a drink. She looks stunning. Jagger reaches her first and kisses her

shoulder. She looks at him with admiration in her eyes. “Hi,” she says.

Jagger smiles right back at her. “Hey, sweet baby. Miss me?” he asks her.

Karessa moans into Jagger’s mouth as he kisses her hard. I hang back and wait until they’re done. I look around the makeshift dance floor for that fucking midget-ass wife of mine. I swear if this was a mission to find her in the crowd, she’d be the fucking definition of *Where’s Waldo?* Little asshat. Once the international lip-lockers have finished doing what they do best, I sneak my question in. “Where’s Bu—?” I don’t even have to finish the sentence because some people move and I hear Ainslee whistle as some song comes on.

I take her in as her back is facing me; she’s wearing a black mid-thigh long sleeve dress so sheer, I can see everything. She’s wearing some high waisted black panties underneath. It makes her tattoo come alive under her lacey bra. The problem is the way she’s moving her body to the music. She lifts her arms and runs her fingers through her hair as she dances with the guy in front of her. She isn’t close enough that they’re dry humping, but it’s close enough for me. I’m not a jealous man, but I am possessive. She’s my wife and nobody else’s. I growl low and narrow my eyes. I stand but stop as she turns around. Her eyes are shut and she has that face she makes when she’s about to cum. It’s such a pretty little fucking look. She sucks her bottom lip into her mouth as she moves. My eyes are basically slits right now as I take in the front of her little dress. The front of her dress is open, stopping to her belly button. Her lacey bra is just as sheer and I shut my eyes and then open them again. I know for damn sure I don’t see her nipples?

I try to look at it some more but the song seems to change, the tempo going more into salsa, and the guy that was right behind her wraps his arm around her waist. He spins her over to him and she lands right. Him and her begin to dance like she’s some kind of fucking professional dancer. I can only see her back as her dress lifts a little with each spin and effortless moves he guides her with. When he spins her out facing us, my eyes almost bug out at how her tits bounce. It’s like every man can see what is mine. “I’m going to lose my fucking mind,” I say as I walk towards Ainslee and the guy.

The guy continues to dance with Ainslee until I spin her ass towards me. She lands on my chest with a hard ‘oomph’. I grab her hand and pull her towards the bar where it’s less crowded. When we get there, she looks up at me and when she notices who it is, her smile turns sexy. “Baby...” she says breathlessly. She rubs her body against me. “You look so sexy right now.”

I lean in to have her little short ass look me in the eye and notice how serious I am. “Ainslee, are you fucking drunk?” I grab her jaw hard and she moans.

“Hmmmm,” she answers. Instead of giving me an actual answer, she slips her hands around my neck and pulls me in for a rough kiss. She moans as I kiss her back just as hard.

I pull away from her kiss. “Good to see you remember the men you came with, especially your husband,” Jagger slips in.

A smirk crosses Ainslee’s face and her eyes roll to his. “I’m aware of who my husband is, I can’t see past him,” Ainslee flirts back and I don’t even think she realizes what she’s saying. She almost got

away with not texting me today.

All week there's been this cat and mouse game between the four of us. One touch here, another risky touch there. It ups the ante for the sexual tension that we seem to always have with the other. Like Karessa and I, then Jagger and Ainslee. I let her get out of my embrace and pinch a nipple that stands at attention. "She's seriously trying to get fucked, isn't she Jagger?"

Jagger is now sitting on the barstool with Karessa between his legs. "She is," he says and his eyes zero in on her erect nipples.

"Help her out," Karessa says and grabs Jagger's wrist, leading it towards her nipple.

Jagger watches her as he plays with her nipple through her sheer dress and bra. Ainslee's eyes flutter as I place my hand in the apex of her throat and jaw. I nip at her jaw and whisper in her ear, "We promised to communicate better but I see that I might have to show you how it's properly done and what not to do, since you can't see past me."

I watch as Jagger pinches her nipple harder and Ainslee moans into the music blaring around us. "Fuck," Jagger says and he pulls away, shifting his attention to tonguing Karessa down hard.

I let Ainslee go and I move back a bit, resting on the bar. "Go ahead, baby, have fun. You've got one more song in you before I show you what you've been missing."

A song comes on, stealing her attention from what she was going to say to me. Ainslee screams as though her day has been made. "Ah! La Bomba!" she exclaims. Ainslee takes advantage of this moment. She places her hand on Jagger's knee which causes it to jerk. I'm sure he knows it's not his wife's. Jagger pulls away from the kiss to watch as Ainslee's hand travels higher and higher on his thigh. The back of her hand grazes his clothes-covered dick and she grabs Karessa's wrist. "I'll bring her back and make it up to you." Jagger is both intrigued and turned on. He cocks his brow and a smile spreads on his face as we both watch them walk to the dance floor.

"This is one of the songs that makes her crazy. Ricky Martin does that to her," Jagger offers.

"She's going to make me crazy," I offer.

"True, but I do love how much fun they're having and how bold they are in wanting the both of us," Jagger says.

"Love a woman who knows what the fuck she wants and why," I respond to him. We watch our wives; I look at Ainslee as she moves her little body to the rhythm. Some guy comes up behind her and I don't even give her the chance to do it herself. I march up to them and I grab her little ass, dragging her off the dance floor. I don't even know where I'm going but, fuck, my little minx wants to be punished, I see. I pass by a smirking Jagger who's still smiling at Karessa as she dances on the dance floor.

I find a bathroom and I pull her ass inside, locking it. "You fucked up," I say to her. "You know the drill, ass up. Arch for me," I say hoarsely.

"No, take me like this. I want to look into your eyes when you punish me," Ainslee says.

I smirk. "If only you knew what your punishment really is. What am I, a fucking sex doll? How

about you act like I fucked you right earlier? Enough to have you texting me like a crazy bitch, you know the psychos. Let me demonstrate, ONCE AGAIN, what I do to make you crazy. If I'm acting crazy over you, you're going to do the fucking same, Bug." I grab her little ass and slam her against the wall. I lift her up and she wraps her legs around me. She bunches the front of my shirt in her fists and pulls me to her, kissing me. I kiss her as I remove my dick from its restraints. Once I do, I rub my dick over her panty-covered pussy. I tug at her panties, wanting them to shed somehow. I don't give a fuck how, but I know she'll be nude if I do that, so I skip it. I groan into her mouth tugging her panties down. I position myself at her entrance and slip in. This time, there's no marveling at the fact that she's always so wet. I grip her thighs and push my body into hers to keep her from moving. I pull away from her lips and whisper into her ear, "Tonight, you're going to experience what my form of punishment is. I won't let you cum, Bug. It's a fucking privilege to be fucked by me and you'll do well to remember that. Hands over your head. Now, you're not allowed to fucking touch me."

"Oh, God, yes," she moans.

"No, not God. Me. Oran Hale. I'm fucking you and I'm going to fuck you so good, you'll understand what craving someone means," I grit out into her ear. "You think you're dangerous, Ainslee? Well, you're not. I'm fucking dangerous. You know why?"

"Why?" Ainslee moans loud as I fuck her roughly. I hold her legs back against the wall right next to her body and fuck her into oblivion, showing her why instead of telling her.

She tries to run up but I pull her back down. Giving her deep strokes then switching them so she can't cum. I move my arms, placing her legs in the crook of my elbows. I rest my forehead on hers and intertwine our hands. "Look at me, Bug." Ainslee opens her eyes and the emotions there are intense as fuck. I know they're mirroring mine, but I don't care. "You want to touch me? You want to cum?"

Ainslee nods. "Yes."

I smirk as I bend a little, slipping almost all the way out. I give her a second to catch her breath and then I thrust in so roughly that Ainslee throws her head back, moaning and screaming. I didn't know someone could do that simultaneously. My body loves it but she won't get to cum. "You want me to cum inside you, my little minx? Huh, little asshole?"

Ainslee looks at me and her walls are down. All of them. She's not holding back from me. "Give it to me, Oran. I want it all."

I grin devilishly, kissing her and pumping in even more until her breath rises but then as she's about to cum, I pull all the way out. My body jolts like it knows I'm being an absolute sick fuck. I give her a second and then I use the tip of my dick, rubbing her clit. I slip in only halfway, giving her shallow strokes. I suck on her neck hard, knowing that I'm leaving a mark. My mark. Ainslee moans and she cums, but it's not as powerful as she wants it to be. When you're on punishment, that's what happens. I refuse to cum inside of her and pull out of her. I set her on her feet, fix her clothing, then pull her with me towards the toilet. "Watch." I wrap my hand around my dick and begin to mimic how I was fucking her. Ainslee watches, licking her lips. I cock my brow, enjoying how she loves to watch

me. I underestimate how powerful this nut is. I hold the wall with my other hand to steady myself as I cum, releasing into the toilet. I empty it all in the toilet and once I'm done, I clean up and tuck myself back into my pants. I flush the toilet and take Ainslee over to the sink. I make her face the mirror and I lean lower, placing my chin on her shoulder. I look at her through the mirror. "Because of this, I am going to destroy your pussy for good. No one else will be able to fuck you like me. You look really pretty when you're sexually frustrated, baby." I bite her cheek before washing my hands and taking her ass with me back to where Jagger and Karessa are.

When we come back out, Jagger and Karessa look at Ainslee, then me. "We're ready to go," I say. I look down at Ainslee who is still giving me fuck-me eyes.

WHEN WE GET to the villa, we decide to play games since it's not late. At first, we start with the basic-ass Pictionary and the girls almost beat us, but Jagger and I are more in sync than they could ever be. I smirk at Ainslee because her and Karessa have to chug whiskey. Ainslee grins right back as she snatches the bottle instead and chugs it like she's out of her mind. "Next game, baby," she says.

Both Jagger and I stare at her like she's out of her mind. "You're kind of hot when you're competitive, but you're going to lose, baby," I say to her.

"What game do you have in mind, Jags?" Karessa says and she has to be cheating because she's giving him this fuck-me look. I shake my head as Jagger responds with a groan.

"We're going to play darts. I'm pretty good."

Ainslee shrugs. "I'm not really good at this game, but whatever. Let's up the ante."

"What's the challenge?" Jagger asks.

"Strip Darts. Anyone who doesn't hit the bullseye strips. No cheating, since we don't have socks on."

Jagger's grin widens. "Done," he answers. "Karebear, you down?"

"Anything to get you to lose," Karessa says and then her eyes roll over to me. She's much bolder when she's tipsy. "And naked."

I look from Karessa to Ainslee, who wiggles her brows at me. "I guess it's about damn time I see you naked in person, right, Karebear?" I tease her by using the nickname Jagger just used.

There's this twinkle in Karessa's eyes and she licks her lips. I chuckle, she's so going down. "Let's get this game going." I slap Ainslee's ass cheek without looking away from Karessa. The sexual tension from before seems to have amplified by a thousand.

THE GAME ENDS WITH, of course, us beating the girls. Ainslee sucks worse than Karessa and she was the first one to be nude. I'm obviously too lost in staring at her that Karessa hits a bullseye. Karessa's squeal gets me out of my trance. "Strip," she says to me and I smirk. I play with my boxers

waistband for a second and, without taking my eyes from hers, I remove them. Karessa eyes me from head to toe and I know she appreciates what she sees. “Baby,” Ainslee calls me.

“Yes?”

“Have you tasted Karessa’s margarita? It’s so good. Don’t you want to give him a taste, Ressa?”

I look at Ainslee really quick and she winks at me. “I like to watch, Oran.” That comment alone has Jagger groaning. Ainslee watches me as I walk up to Karessa and I grab her drink.

I chug it and pass the glass to Ainslee. “It wasn’t that bad, I think it tastes a little different, don’t you, Karessa?” I ask.

“I don—,” Karessa starts to answer and I place my hand behind her head, then drop my lips to hers. I grab her ass and bring her close to my body which makes Karessa give a surprised gasp that causes her mouth to open, giving me access to her tongue. I kiss her like a man on a mission. Karessa gives just as good as she gets. I feel her lust for me in this kiss. It’s hot, sexy, and downright fucking erotic. I groan, deepening the kiss and her hands become bold as they touch all over me without restraint. I don’t let go until she moans.

I pull away from her and Karessa’s eyes are still closed. She clears her throat after a minute and I smirk. “See, I told you, it tastes different.”

“Fuck,” Jagger says and he’s staring at Karessa with so much lust, I’m sure it’s transferred to all of us in this villa.

AINSLEE

Watching Oran kiss is an experience I didn’t think I’d get the chance to see, but it makes me wetter. I don’t take my eyes off of him and the way Karessa is caressing his body. I think it’s beautiful to watch my man being adored by someone other than me for tonight. He deserves this and so do I. This feels natural, especially with all the teasing and the tension that could be cut with a knife.

“So you lost to me like you always do, Ains,” Jagger teases me.

I smirk. “Did I? Or did I simply want to be naked? You ever wonder how I’m the worst player in the room?” I ask him.

Jagger tilts his head. He eyes me from head to toe. “No, I didn’t wonder, I saw you lose.”

I tsk. “Jagger Liam Hanlon, it’s like you don’t remember whose daughter I am. I could make that bullseye three times with my eyes shut awhile kissing at the same time.”

Jagger chuckles. “Let’s see that shit.”

Jagger waits for me to move over to Oran but instead, I walk up to him, bypassing Oran. I get close to him and then turn, giving him my back, but my ass is rubbing against him. I innocently look at Oran. “Babe, can you give me three darts?”

Oran smirks and narrows his eyes at me. “What are you up to, baby?” he asks, but he does hand me three darts.

“Thank you and you’ll see. I just want you all to know that I am a different kind of MOFO.” I wink at him, blowing him a kiss.

I turn to face Jagger and beckon him to lean in closer to me. Jagger cocks his brow but he does it. I grip the back of his neck and get on the tip of my toes. I kiss Jagger like my life depends on it. Jagger bites my lip, sucking on it, and I moan into his mouth. Then he moves his hands to grip my ass so hard that my body shudders. I know he thinks I can’t do it when I’m distracted by his kiss. I have never met anyone that could tell me what they want in their kisses besides Oran. I arch, trying to lose myself in Jagger for a moment. I throw all three darts at the same time and the gasp from Karessa makes me smile as both my hands end up in his hair and I tug hard.

I pull away. “Now, who really lost?” I say. Jagger looks at the dartboard and realizes that all three are in the bullseye. Jagger doesn’t give me a moment as his hand grips my waist and the other wraps around my throat.

“Don’t grab my neck like I’m your little bitch.” Jagger groans as he pulls away, but the hold on my neck is still tight. Not causing me to go into panic mode or anything, but fucking erotic. I grip his wrist and the atmosphere shifts. I’m not sure if he’s trying to fuck or fight.

“You’re not?” I ask. Jagger smirks and it expands to a grin when he looks past me. I feel my hair being pulled. I follow the direction with my eyes and it’s Oran. Fuck.

One is teasing me and the other is fucking with me. I don’t know which is which. “You played us, huh? You forgot that you were already on punishment, but now let’s make it even worse, why don’t we?” I love everything about the roughness in his tone.

“Baby…” I call out to him. “I’m sorry,” I say but I know he knows it’s a bullshit apology.

Jagger lets go of my throat as Oran turns me to face him. “For what?” he feigns ignorance. He lets me go. Oran starts to walk to the couch and he turns to me. “Stay here,” he says and walks over to the couch to sit back.

I watch him for a bit. I don’t bother with anything else as I move my hair, tucking it behind my ears. I stand a couple of steps away from him. Oran watches me as I get on all fours. “What do you want me to do to make it up to you?” I ask him.

Oran widens his stance and I can see that he’s still hard. He calls me over with his finger. “Come to me, Bug. Crawl to your husband.” The way he demands it makes me want to give him whatever he desires.

“Yes, daddy.”

Oran runs his fingers through his hair and throws his head back before he looks at me again. “Fuck, baby…” I finally make it to him and sit back on my knees. I look at him like he’s everything I’ve ever wanted. Like he’s my favorite ice cream. Oran strokes his dick. I watch as precum drips from his tip. I lick my lips as I slip my hands over his bare skin. I move my hands and plant them at his knees. I travel with my hands up his powerful thighs as I get closer to his dick. I lick the precum, flattening my tongue as much as I can and I look up at Oran. There is a mirror behind Oran and I see

how Jagger is teasing Karessa. “Would you let me share you for a night if I could?” Oran asks me.

I look at him and I know what he means. I look at Jagger as he watches me move my hand to grip Oran’s dick. “Yes,” I say, giving in to one night of curiosity with Jagger Hanlon. Jagger smirks like the devil that he is and kisses Karessa’s shoulder. I quickly look at Oran. “As long as I get to share you too.” Oran grins and I look at Jagger again. I don’t bother with my hand, letting that fall away as I take Oran into my mouth without the assistance of my hands. Oran groans as I suck his dick while looking into Jagger’s eyes. I concentrate on Oran again.

Oran looks past me as he slides his fingers into my hair. He grips my scalp. “Open up for me, baby,” he says and without another warning, he begins fucking my mouth. Both his hands land in my hair, gripping tight. Oran groans when he discovers my other superpower... I don’t have a gag reflex. I’ve been holding back. Oran pulls back out of my mouth and stops face fucking me.

“Let me.” I look up at him innocently and he glares at me, but the look in his eyes transforms to one of someone who wants to rip me apart with his dick. I lick my teeth and before he can say anything, I spit on his dick. I wink at him as I show him that a Bishop’s never backs down from a challenge. Oran moans, throwing his head back, not focusing on me anymore. I caress his balls with my hands while I give him the dirtiest, messiest head I could ever.

Oran’s hands find his way back into my hair and I know he’s close. He rights his head, looking at Karessa. “Say please and you might be able to get fucked tonight, too. One of you will cum and it’s not Ainslee. She’s on punishment,” he says to me and before he can cum, he pulls out of my mouth.

I whimper, but before anything could be said, Oran’s hand wraps around my throat and he leans down, kissing me hard. He groans into my mouth and I want to cry at how badly I want to cum. Oran lets my mouth go and he kisses along my jaw. He whispers in my ear. “This is your one night with Jagger. You’re never getting another one. Enjoy it while it lasts.” He makes me look at him and kisses me hard once more.

Oran looks up at Jagger. “She’s not allowed to cum and don’t fucking cum inside my wife.”

Jagger chuckles. “Agreed. Let’s keep it a little vanilla. No oral. Foreplay is a go.” The intensity in that sentence alone makes me turn. I face Jagger as Karessa whimpers from the one seater couch parallel to where we’re sitting. She throws her head back and Jagger makes her cum while looking me in my eyes.

Jagger stands with Karessa, making her face Oran. Oran nuzzles her neck as he takes over playing with her clit while Jagger pulls her head back further and kisses her silly. Karessa moans as Oran plays with her nipple. I watch because it’s hot and I could watch through the whole thing. Jagger pulls away from kissing her and he turns his gaze on me. He smirks as he saunters my way. There’s a bowl there with condoms. He grabs a couple and faces Oran. “Here, asshole. No fucking raw.”

Oran snorts as he stops teasing Karessa, who is now on top of him. She’s not riding him yet, just straddling him. “I’m not a fucking idiot.” Jagger flips him off and throws some condoms his way. Oran catches them all at the same time in one of his hands. He looks at me and winks.

I smile at him but stop when Jagger fists my hair and pulls me up. “Hello, little asshole. You’ve finally got a chance to do what you’ve always wanted to do with me.”

I smirk and roll my eyes but that’s short lived as Jagger pushes me back on the couch. He looks like he wants a fight but then the look disappears from his eyes. He slips the condom onto his already hardened dick. Jagger lowers himself down, not even bothering with pleasantries. He repositions me on the couch and leans down to bite my chin. I moan at how sexually charged the air is. Jagger lightly nips down my body and pulls a nipple into his mouth. I moan, throwing my head back. The feel of his fingers on my clit almost makes me cum, he’s applying just enough pressure, but he isn’t giving me what I want.

“If you’re going to play with me, then get the fuck off me,” I say with anger laced through my words.

“Hmmm... or what?” he teases as he positions himself on top of me.

“I’ll kill you.”

I feel Jagger at my entrance. “You promise?” He pushes all the way in and I gasp, losing my breath. Jagger groans. “So fucking...” Jagger grabs my wrists, placing them over my head with one hand and with the other, he lifts my leg up some more.

Jagger fucks me like he hates me, but, dear God, my body loves it and each time, when I think I’m getting closer to cumming, I don’t. I shut my eyes, trying to concentrate on cumming, but the fact that I can’t do it myself makes me want to get up and choke the fuck out of my husband. I moan at the deep strokes that have my entire body trembling and so close, yet I can’t achieve what I want. Jagger fucks me harder and I feel delirious. So close to losing my fucking mind.

Jagger sucks on my earlobe. “Thank you for this,” he says.

“Fuck you,” I grit through my teeth.

“Look at me.” There’s a tone to his words, so I instantly open my eyes.

I look at Jagger as he slows his strokes and it’s a peaceful kind of sex. He lets go of my leg and grabs each wrist as he moves in closer. Jagger kisses me, making me forget that I’m on punishment once again. We don’t kiss like we’re lovers, we kiss like we are sworn enemies and this is how it will always be. Our tongues are at war and there will never be a time where it isn’t. Jagger stops kissing me and we watch each other as he shows me why his name is Jagger.

Without a warning, Jagger sits up and takes me along with him. He tells me with his eyes to ride him. I shudder as Jagger stands up. I wrap my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist. I feel as Oran comes up right behind me. I feel his fingers in my hair and he pulls my head back harshly, gripping my neck. I hiss and my body loves it. Oran’s other hand dips down and teases my nipple as Jagger fucks me standing up. “Play with yourself, Karessa. Show me what the fuck you’ve always wanted to show me. Show me your pussy.”

“Do it, sweet baby, show him. Let him see how wet you can get,” Jagger says to her as he fucks me harder.

“Oh God...” I can’t hold it in.

Oran tugs even harder, the pain shooting to my toes. “God isn’t here. I am.” It’s funny because he’s not fucking me, Jagger is, but I feel Oran everywhere. I feel Oran near my ear. He bites it, then lets go, “Show me how you’d ride him, Ainslee. Show him how much your pussy gushes, baby.” Oran nips at my shoulder, slaps my ass hard, and then he’s gone. Jagger moves to the couch and we sit. Jagger slips out of me and turns me away from him. He slips in roughly and I begin riding him reverse cowgirl style. I position my hands on his knees as I look at Oran. As Karessa rides him, Oran makes eye contact with me. I take in all his features. He bites his bottom lip as he grips Karessa’s ass in the palm of his hands and takes her a bit rougher. Jagger’s hands slip into my hair and he tugs so hard, I feel like some of the strands of my hair are pulled out. “Is this all you’ve got, Ainslee? That’s it?” he taunts me.

“Let me show you then,” I say to him, gritting my teeth.

Jagger pulls all the way out and then turns me to face him. I reposition myself and slowly take him in. My body shivers as my nails dig into his skin and Jagger hisses but his dick twitches. I begin riding him again and he groans. “Harder,” he grunts.

I do as I’m instructed, I bounce harder and find my hands at his throat. I look down at Jagger, whose eyes are on me. He gives me a look and I tighten my hold on his throat. This tips Jagger off and he grabs my hips, taking over. Jagger shows me what he means by harder and I’m so close... so damned close then he sits up again laying me on my back. “Your husband said no cumming for you but, fuck, this is worth me being both good to you for the rest of the honeymoon and having him side eye me for a little bit tonight.” Jagger winks at me.

I laugh but it’s cut short as his strokes not only deepen, but get harder. Almost borderline painful, then as I’m almost all the way to the end, Jagger stops. He slows and I cum, but it’s not like how it would’ve been or rather could be. He slips out of me, causing my body to shudder, then he slips back in roughly. I moan, throwing my head back. He fucks me some more, giving me soft strokes and rough ones, then he sighs. Jagger grabs my jaw and looks at me. “The present that you wanted for Oran,” he whispers. “I’ll help you. He’ll love it.” He bites my chin and lets me go completely. He slips out and my body reacts, “And thank you for this,” Jagger says and I shut my eyes.

He lets me go but I can’t open my eyes because I feel like I’m almost off the edge. This is so... I need more. This is too little and too much. I hear more groans and I open my legs, ready to make myself cum. I feel as my wrists are captured and put over my head again. I whimper because if I open my eyes and I look into my man’s eyes, I’m going to lose my shit. “Open your eyes, Ainslee...” Oran taunts me. “Look at your husband cum without you while you can’t. You don’t fucking listen, do you? You can’t make yourself cum either.” I open my eyes at the same moment Oran removes his condom, discarding it somewhere. He slips inside of me, taking me just as hard as Jagger did, and he cums inside of me.

This is the final straw and the tears finally slip out. Oran leans in and kisses me. I kiss him back

just as hard, not caring about a damn thing at all. He pulls out slowly and stands. My eyes pop open. He tries to touch me and I shift. “Don’t fucking touch me,” I grit through my teeth, still feeling delirious as hell.

Oran simply scoops me up in his arms and leads me to our bedroom. “Next time, you won’t treat me like a fucking stalker looking for the woman that’s his.” Once we get upstairs, Oran lets me out of his arms, but when I try to walk away, he pulls me back to him. “Fucking kiss me, Ainslee,” he demands.

My arousal is back by a thousand percent. Oran sinks his fingers into my hair, which is reverting back to its curly state. He wraps an arm around my waist, lifting me up his body. He kisses me. His tongue mimics the way he eats me out. I shudder as he captures my tongue, sucking hard on it. I moan and I know all he has to do is touch me and I’d cum. He pulls away. “Lets go to bed, long day tomorrow.”

He lets me down and I growl at him. “I’m going to shower!” I say as I storm off.

“Come back to me so I can play with your pussy before I sleep,” Oran says, chuckling like Lucifer’s fucking son himself. “I love you,” he says to me.

I turn back and look at him. “I love you too,” I grit through my teeth.

IN THE SHOWER, I make myself cum but it’s fucking subpar, which makes me angrier than I need to be. I want to shout but I am going to act real mature about this. I can handle punishments, or so I think...

“What are you doing out here?” Mikonos asks me while I lay in the hammock with a light cover. He places another blanket over me as he settles into the other hammock by me.

“Just felt like sleeping out here,” I say.

Mikonos laughs but says nothing. “Alright then. Sleep, you big-ass baby.”

“Fuck you.”

“We’ll spar tomorrow to help you out.”

I smile and shut my eyes.

I LAUGH when I don't find Ainslee in our bed after I come out of the shower. I know where she's hiding. I get dressed, throwing on some sweats, and I head downstairs to where the hammocks are in the backyard. Mikonos is there in the next hammock. I just watch my girl sleep for a bit. I should probably stop punishing her but, see, I heard her when she made herself cum.

"If you want to take her back to the room, take her instead of fucking watching us like a fucking pervert."

I roll my eyes, wondering how the hell he even knew I was standing here at the entrance to the backyard. "Fuck off. I was going to let her sleep it off, but since she likes being punished, we've got some unfinished business."

Mikonos laughs. "Because you're my brother in law, I'll do you a solid and spar with her so she burns off some of her anger."

"Thanks?" I say as I walk closer, scooping her up in my arms.

Ainslee curls into my arms and sighs. It makes me smile. I walk off and head back into the room. Once we get into the room, I place her on the bed softly. I go over to my suitcase and pull out the box that we ordered. Since Ainslee wanted to try some of the toys, I ordered a mystery box, but I made sure there were some butt plugs in there. This is one of the few times, I can actually thank Jagger for this shit. I open the box and I spot some furry handcuffs, two buttplugs, lube, a feather, a small vibrator, a leather crop, a black satin blindfold, and a mask. I squint at the mask. Fucking Jagger tampered with my order. I smirk though because it makes me think back to the first night with Ainslee back at the *Unknown Elites* club.

I roll my shoulders back as I bring the black box with me. Shit looks elegant with the black velvet on top. I don't have to guess why. I climb on the bed and I flip Ainslee to her back. She groans and slowly comes to as I straddle her, making sure not to put my weight on her. "Hello, hello, my favorite little person. I see you like to disobey my orders, don't you?"

Ainslee fully wakes up and I can already see how aroused she is. She clears her throat, looking up at me. "I haven't disobeyed you yet."

I smirk. "Yet, huh?" I tease. "Well, well, class is in session, Mrs. Hale. I've got a lesson for you

tonight and you're going to learn it, have it so deeply implanted in your mind that you'll never forget it."

I grab her wrists and begin the process of handcuffing her to the headboard railing. Didn't think this would come in handy, but what do you know? "Handcuffs?" she questions. "Doesn't seem like an Oran thing," she taunts me.

I grin. "It isn't, but, see, my wife, I've realized some things. You have this curious nature about you. You like to try things and I noticed you like it even more when I'm rough with you." I lift the mask out of the box, putting it on, "You recognize this?"

Ainslee's eyes widen as she takes in the Venetian Phantom of the Opera mask. She smiles and nods. "I do. Where did you get that?"

"I didn't. Seems like you've got a guardian angel that remembers everything I told him about the girl that I met years ago that I never thought I'd see again. But, aren't you glad I got the mask? Now I can eat your pussy with it on." I lick my lips as I move down Ainslee's body and I get completely off her.

Ainslee shuts her legs tight and I pry them open. I cock my brow at her. I dip my head close to her shorts-covered pussy. I inhale and rub her clit with my nose through the thin shorts. I bite one of her pussy lips and my eyes flash up to look at her. I bite harder and Ainslee arches her back, moaning. I let her go and I sit up, playing with the hem of her tank. "Tell me...do you want me to fuck with you and not let you cum or leave you alone, letting you sleep it off? Yes or no, Ainslee?"

Ainslee breathes hard. She shuts her eyes and I reach for the little leather riding crop. I test it on my hand to see how much it bites and Ainslee watches me with that same curious glint in her eyes. I suck my bottom lip into my mouth and I strike her nipple, not too harshly, and she moans again, looking close to cumming. "This is..."

I smirk. "What will it be, baby?" I say to her.

"No," she answers quickly.

I stare at her, tilting my head, and there's this strange look in her eyes. "Are you the kind of person I think you are, Bug?" I ask. "You say no with your mouth, but your body is practically humping the air and looking at your eyes, you want me to, despite your no. Now, that can't be true, is it?"

"Oran..." she calls my name like a prayer. "I said no," she says with a grit to her teeth, but no bite in her words.

My dick grows so hard, it's painful. I'm not into anything like this, but seeing how much she wants me and the desire that leaks from her eyes should confuse me because her words are different, but Ainslee teases me with her legs, rubbing up against me. I've read about this kind of play. When Jagger and I researched the *Unknown Elites*, this was part of their sex play groups. The room that I went to was one of them, but how come I didn't pay attention then? I should have known from the way that Ainslee let me take her up against the wall our first time after the wedding, or even when she came marching into my office before we got married.

My eyes trail from her pretty pink-polished toes all the way up to her eyes. She bites her lips and I spring into action. I grab the hem of her tank, ripping it open. Ainslee breathes harder than she was a moment ago. I lean in and take one nipple into my mouth, sucking like my life depends on it. I pop it out of my mouth and look at her. "Still no?" I ask her with a cocked brow.

"No," she says with determination and her eyes widen when I lean back and use the crop on her flat belly.

"Don't tell me no again, Ains. Never tell me no." I slap her nipple with the crop again, then do it to the other.

Ainslee cries out, her skin turning a light shade of red. I lick my lips. I'm not really sure that I cared for this kind of play, but it's turning her on, and that makes me so fucking horny. I can't deny how charged the energy is in here.

Ainslee looks at me as I drop the crop and rip at her flimsy shorts. I dip my head down, making love to her pussy. I pull away for a second, "Fuck! How are you this wet, baby? Have you not had enough?" I taunt her as I nip at her clit.

Ainslee moans her yes, agreeing that she's had enough, and that makes me chuckle because we've just gotten started. I move away from her, getting off the bed. I remove my sweats, dropping them to the floor. I rip off the mask, throwing it somewhere on the floor, and I grab the blindfold. I move back in between her legs and slip the blindfold over her face. "I want you to store my touch, my kiss, and the way I make your body go up in flames because baby, I'm so deep inside you that even when I'm not fucking you, you feel it. You feel it right now. I'm going to break you so good, you'll wonder why you ever had walls up to begin with." I kiss down her body, licking and sucking, leaving marks in places that are visible and not visible. I want everyone to see just how much I fuck her and fucking love to fuck her.

Ainslee shudders. I reach out for the buttplug and lube it up. I play with her puckered hole and Ainslee trusts me as I slip the butt-plug in. She relaxes. I smile when I notice that it's a vibrating one. I press the button and it hums low. "Please..." Ainslee begs.

"What are you begging me for, baby? Be clear," I tease.

"Fuck me," she says with that same authority she used when she first met me. It turns me the fuck on.

"No, no, no, Ains. No can do." I grab the feather and I trace it over her body while I slip my fingers inside her wetness. Ainslee moans louder as I finger-fuck her. I move the feather down to her clit, lightly caressing her. I see the build-up and when she's close to cumming, so, so close, I stop. I tsk. "You were so close, babe. Too close."

"Fuck you," Ainslee grits through her teeth.

I laugh hard. "Oh yeah?" I say and I can feel the crackle in the air. I lean in and slip inside her roughly. Ainslee sucks in so much air, I'm surprised she's not coughing. I hold her body down, placing my hand around her throat. I fuck her as hard as she likes, not giving her any reprieve.

THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT, I tease Ainslee like a man with a purpose and a mission. I let her sleep, then I get a little bit of shut eye myself. I wake up and eat her out to wake her up, just to have her crying out for that orgasm that isn't coming. After she settles, I fuck her, denying myself an orgasm as well to build anticipation. Now that the sun is creeping up, I let her out of the cuffs as she sleeps, but her body goes super alert the moment I remove the buttplug. She hoarsely moans again. I don't eat her out this time, instead I pull her into my arms and I lift her leg. I slip into her forever wet core and I lazily fuck her, knowing nothing can be accomplished like this. "Please, stop doing this to me," Ainslee cries out, close to sobbing.

I chuckle, kissing her shoulder. "That's not what I want to hear, Bug. That isn't how lessons are learned," I whisper as I bite her shoulder. "But I will give you one thing, something so simple, so tender, you'll have no choice but to forgive me for this." I flip us and she's on her stomach as I fuck her. She can't move because she's basically subdued. "Have I broken you yet, Ainslee, Like I told you I would?"

Ainslee moans her 'fuck you' to me and I lean in, kissing her hard. Ainslee kisses me back hard, biting on my lip, wanting to inflict the pain on me of not cumming all night. After I pull away, I lean into the crook of her neck, giving her a bit of my weight. "I was going to let you cum, but I see you forgot about that attitude that I like to fuck out of you. Remember, baby, I love you," I say and then I fuck her right back to sleep, this time so rough and hard that when she cums, she passes the fuck out. It's a talent, truly.

I cum and collapse right beside her. I pull her close to me, her back to my front, not even bothering with properly pulling out. I drift off right after her. My wife will be the end of me. I swear.

When I come to, Ainslee is not in my arms. Instead, she's far away from me. She's halfway hanging off the bed while her hair is everywhere. Some of it has matted to her face while she sleeps on her stomach. Fuck. She's beautiful. I get out of bed and go use the bathroom. I make sure to put on my boxers so there's a barrier between us and I'll let her rest. I come back into the room and look through Ainslee's makeup stuff. I grab a small face towel and go wet it. I come back and move her hair out of her face. I wipe her face and give her a quick kiss on her forehead. I discard the face towel in the bathroom and climb back into bed. I reach out and I grab her ass cheek, squeezing it tight. I groan as she flinches, but nothing else. I turn and pull her close to me again. Ainslee groans, "Five more minutes."

I smirk but then I get a little panicky because I worry I took it too far. "You okay, Bug?" I move her hair out of her face and try to move it all out of her face. "Wake up for a minute. Talk to me, Ainslee."

Ainslee slowly opens one eye, then the next. She gives me a smile. "I love you so much." She leans in and gives me a kiss on my lips, then my cheek, and lastly, my neck. She lazily kisses my neck

a couple of times, then nips at it.

“You want more? Are you trying to die, Ainslee?” I ask genuinely out of concern.

“No, I don’t want to die,” she says as she’s falling back asleep. Sort of like she doesn’t even know what she’s saying. “I just want...” Ainslee knocks out again.

I don’t know what triggers it but I laugh so hard, yet this doesn’t wake her up at all. I feel bad for her and proud at the same time that I knocked her slick-talking self out. I reward her by moving her to lay on top of me. Ainslee groans as her body automatically moves up my body and I know what she wants to do. I grab one of her hands and slip her fingers into my hair. Her whole body relaxes and she’s definitely out. I rub her back in a circular motion and my mind thinks of a million different things because I’m definitely not going back to sleep now. There’s a knock on my door a little while later. “Come in,” I say.

Jagger strolls in, in sweatpants and a shirt. “I was going to ask if you wanted to go out for a run. I’ve got all this energy now and I think a run will do me some good.” He looks at Ainslee and chuckles. “So, this is how you’re tortured every night? She doesn’t even need a separate bed, you are the bed.”

I shake my head and chuckle. “I know. Anyway, yeah, I’ll join you. Let me freshen up.” I move Ainslee off me and when I sit up in bed, I feel her arms around me.

“She’s very clingy in her sleep,” Jagger says and I laugh, shaking my head.

“Yeah, she doesn’t realize that she does it, and if I brought it up when she’s awake, she’d deny it, so I just leave her be.”

“Does she do this every single time you get out of bed?” Jagger asks, amused as hell.

“Yeah, it’s funny how I’m so used to it that I slowly get out of bed. Watch,” I say and I demonstrate as I slowly remove her arm from around my waist. I kiss the palm of her hand a couple of times and it goes slack. I put her back in bed and wrap her around like a burrito, just to piss her off later. “She’s going to be so pissed when she wakes up.”

“Petty,” Jagger chuckles as he walks out, knowing I’ll be there in a bit.

I look at Ainslee one more time, I guess Mikonos won’t have to spar with her after all.

AINSLEE

I wake up in a shocked state. I roll around, trying to get out of the damn burrito that Oran has put me in. This is not the first time he’s done it. I should punch him so he will stop. I roll back and forth until I fall off the bed and finally get out of it. I groan as my body finally wakes up and lets me know that I am in a world of pure, blissful pain. I groan as I get up. That beast of a man made me shut the hell up and didn’t let me sleep. I make my way to the bathroom, not even bothering to check my phone. I’ll do that later. If there was anything important, I would have been notified by Mikos. I take a shower for a good while and wash my hair as well. Oran has managed to fuck with my hair too. It’s

all over the place.

After my shower, I apply lotion and get dressed, wearing my white ribbed fleece shorts with a matching bralette, topped with one of Oran's t-shirts. I dry my hair and it looks freaking insane. I put it in a high ponytail and honestly, I don't bother spending time on my hair, I'm too lazy. I slowly pad out of the room and follow the noise downstairs. When I get there, I notice it must be movie night. All three are watching a movie that if I paid attention, I would know. I move over to the couch next to Oran and he slowly looks at me. "You haven't learned to say hi to me, have you?" he says.

I jump up on my knees and lean in, giving him a kiss on the cheek. "Hi," I say and sit back down.

"You must be tired still, huh?" he teases. I nod. "Come here." Oran doesn't give me the chance to get to him. He wraps his arm around my midsection and pulls me to sit on top of him.

"What time is it? What have you guys been doing all day? I can't believe I've been asleep all day."

Oran chuckles. "Honey, you've been asleep for a day and a half, basically."

"Whaaaaaaaat? No way, I don't believe you," I say.

Karessa laughs. "You have! I thought you were dead at one point, but Oran demonstrated for us that you were very much alive and well."

I cock my brow. "How?"

Oran pulls his phone out and shows me the evidence. I watch as Oran gets me out of the burrito he put me in and lays next to me. Out of instinct, I turn and climb on top of him and my hand ends up in his hair. He shakes his head while I hear Jagger and Karessa laugh in the background, they must be the ones recording it. Oran then moves me off him and he sits up. All of a sudden, I groan and move to him, wrapping my hand around his waist. "Oh my God," I say. Then he takes my hand and kisses my palm three times and my body relaxes. "What the hell?" I'm so embarrassed.

I give him his phone and cover my face. I feel as Oran turns me on his lap. I feel his kisses on the back of my hands and my neck, then behind my ear. "Don't be embarrassed, I love it and I love you," he whispers. "Now, watch this movie, it's cute."

"What movie is it?" I ask opening my fingers to look through them.

"The Wedding Date."

"The one with Dermot Mulroney?" I ask.

Oran glares at me as I sit up and turn towards the television. "Yes," he answers. "You've seen it?"

"Yeah, but it's been so long. Ooh, it's still the beginning, yay! I haven't missed his shower scene. He's my baby daddy."

Oran slaps my thigh. "Cut it out. You had your one and only hall pass, baby. No more."

I whimper. "Can I change it?"

Oran nips at my shoulder as he slips his hand underneath the shirt and into my bralette. He cups one of my breasts and continues to watch the movie, completely ignoring me. I've officially been dismissed.

THE SMELL of baked goods fills the downstairs area when I get there after a fresh shower. Jagger and Karessa are at the kitchen counter, sitting on their stools, watching something outside. “What are you guys doing?”

“Watching your wife,” Jagger says. “She’s fucking good.”

“I agree,” Karessa says. “She might be my shero.”

I grab a chocolate chip muffin and get closer to see what they’re talking about. Ainslee is wearing workout gear, except her shorts are basically fucking underwear. She and Mikonos spar like they’re doing a dance. Something they’ve mastered. She cracks her neck when Mikonos switches spots with another dude. “Who the fuck is that and the rest of the other men?” I ask.

“Apparently, they’ve been in Cancun with us since we got here?” Jagger says.

“Huh,” I answer. I watch as Ainslee smiles, but it isn’t the smiles she gives me. It’s one of a killer. One who has seen too much and one that knows how to shut it all off if she has to. I watch as the guy catches her. He hits her and I stand, ready to beat his ass, but then I watch as Ainslee retaliates and I’m in awe of how fast she does it. Her hair is in a bun and all her features are clear as day. I’m in awe of my wife as she roundhouse kicks this dude in the face and he drops.

Ainslee is breathing hard and I want to bend her over the table and fuck her senseless. Deep down inside of me, I smile because I’m breaking her apart. Piece by piece, she’s chipping away. She turns those cold, dead eyes on me and it freaks me out, but also turns me the fuck on some more. Mikonos grabs her face and makes her look at him. He says some words to her and she steps to him, but he simply mashes her face. He doesn’t let her fall, but he does laugh and she breaks, laughing. She shoves him, flipping him the finger. She walks back into the house while the guys go somewhere else. “Morning, guys. Hope you enjoy the muffins and cupcakes.” She looks at me. “Avoid the chocolate chip muffins, they might have a little bit of poison in them.” She blows me a kiss and walks away to go shower.

Jagger throws his head back, laughing hard. I continue to eat the muffin like it’s nothing. Karessa looks at the muffin and then me. I’m glad she knows I’m just as insane as my wife. “I’m going to go see if she wants to go out shopping. Just us girls though.” Karessa gets up, leans over and kisses

Jagger.

The girls come downstairs a couple of hours later while Jagger and I are in the pool relaxing. I look at Ainslee who has her hair down in its curly, halo state, falling to mid-back. Her little floral ruffle dress is sexy; its mid-thigh, quarter sleeve and corset like. It pushes her breasts up more, making them look delicious. I count each button on her dress. She's wearing white sneakers with it. Ainslee is trying to avoid eye contact, but I also know how to fuck with someone's mind. I swim over to the edge of the pool that she's near. I plant my hands on the edge and pull myself up. I let her take me in while in swim trunks. I push my hair back and walk over to her. Ainslee's eyes are wide, but she hasn't moved. "Do you know what I don't like, Bug?"

"What?" she says breathlessly. I watch as her hand reaches out to touch my chest but she stops and instead puts her finger in her mouth. She bites down on her finger as she follows the water flowing down my body until they disappear in my swim trunks.

"When my wife acts like she can't acknowledge me. Now, are you going to not acknowledge me?" I taunt her.

Ainslee blinks and I know she's so close to breaking. So damned close.

Karessa elbows Ainslee. "Huh?" she says as she looks at Karessa. "Did you say something?"

Karessa tries not to laugh. "Just asked if you're ready to go."

"Um..." Ainslee answers.

I reach out, tugging on a curl. "You don't want to stay with me, baby?" I ask her, turning up my charm. I let go of a curl as it bounces back. My finger trails down her shoulder to her collarbone and down to her tits. "Fucking kiss me," I demand and I lean down low enough for Ainslee. She doesn't even think about it as stretches on the tips of her toes, wrapping her arms around my neck and kissing me. She kisses me and in her kiss, she's begging me to give her what she needs. I hear Karessa and Jagger clearing their throats. I flip Jagger the finger, wherever he is, and he laughs along with Karessa. I let go of Ainslee and she still has her eyes shut. She clears her throat and moves back. She wraps her hand around her throat as if thinking about how to get what she needs and how to get out of this predicament. I watch her for a moment, amused by her.

She shakes her head then opens her eyes. "That was part of my plan, just so you know," she says to me. "Let's go, Karessa." She starts to walk off with Karessa but she turns to look at me again. I give her a little finger wave. Ainslee trips a little but she catches herself. "Karessa, help me," Ainslee says and Karessa drags her away this time while she's still looking at me.

Jagger laughs hard. "Oh man, she's gone in the brain."

I jump back in the pool and when I come back up, I answer Jagger, "As she fucking should be. I'm her number one priority and vice versa, but I have to make sure she gets that."

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Petty Oscar Award goes to King Oran Hale of Pettyville."

I laugh. "Asshole."

Jagger laughs along with me and we hang back for the day, letting the girls do what they need to

do. I'll have her all to myself when she steps foot back in the villa. One thing about her though is that she always pushes my buttons and I can't deny that I love it. I love how she just brings out this side of me. I just have to match her and we become a perfect thing. Destructive, but perfect. Like a contained chaos. Sexually, that is.

AINSLEE

"Can I ask you a question?" I say to Karessa while we sit at a restaurant, sipping mimosas. It was my idea, and drinking mimosas in Cancun is the best idea I've ever had. The heavy handedness of the bartender is the best part of this day.

Karessa looks up at me from her cell. "Yeah, go ahead."

"I." I clear my throat. "Should I be texting Oran a lot more? I didn't do it with Eli and he never said anything, but I feel like I fucked up. I don't want him to think I don't care about him."

"Has he texted you?" Karessa asks.

"Uh... I didn't check," I mumble. I pull my cell out and look at the texts.

30 minutes ago

Hale's Spawn(Husband): I better be the only man you're tripping over, Bug.

Hale's Spawn(Husband): I forgot to check...Are you wearing panties?

I clear my throat and look up. I know my neck is red and I'm blushing. Karessa smirks. "Text him back. Go ahead. The more you do it, the easier it gets for you to remember doing it."

"Okay," I say timidly.

Me: I didn't trip. You were seeing things, OH.

Me: . Yes, I'm wearing panties.

Hale's Spawn: OH. Are you drunk?

Hale's Spawn: What color?

Me: Yeah, Oran Hale. OH. Like... Oh. Oh yeah! Oh this! Oh that! Also, I am not drunk, thank you very much. I am feeling the tipsiness though. #Mimosas.

Me: The color isn't orange, so there's that.

Hale's Spawn: Don't hashtag me, asshole.

Hale's Spawn: I'll fix that slick-ass tongue. Watch.

Me: Yes, daddy.

Hale's Spawn: Bring your ass back to me right now, Bug!

Me: OH daddy!

Hale's Spawn: Ainslee...

Karessa laughs. "See? Now you know how to text him back. Should we leave?"

I playfully roll my eyes. “I guess.”

Karessa laughs harder. We make our way out, knowing that my boys will pay, and leave a hefty tip for the bartender. As we get driven back to the villa, I ask Karessa another question. “So, this might be even more intimate, but how are you feeling after everything? I didn’t get a chance to ask you since I lost a day to sleep, courtesy of the big bastard.”

“What do you mean?” Karessa asks.

“Like, I’m pretending to act like I don’t need to soak my pussy in the hot tub. I feel broken, my pussy feels like it’s never going to recover from this.” Karessa didn’t expect my answer so she laughs hard as hell and I can’t help but laugh with her. “I’m for real. I’ve never known someone to just break me apart so easily. It’s like Oran is in my bloodstream. I fucking cried in the shower because I was like this night of pleasure is one I’m never going to forget. Like, who the fuck created these two nut jobs? And then I was sexually attacked. The man didn’t let me sleep at all.”

Karessa laughs, wiping her tears away. “Honestly, I’m happy we went out, because I might come out of this without a pussy. I just...how the hell did we let them both take us like that? I don’t think I could handle them both again. Jagger is more than enough for me.”

“I’m right there with you, sister. I’d die if anyone brought it up again. I’d be like ‘no thanks, guys’. Maybe in a million years.”

Karessa laughs. “Agreed.” We stay silent. When we get close to the villa, Karessa speaks up. “You really love him, don’t you?”

“Yeah...” I say as I lay my head on the window. “I really do, and I want to punch him in the face for it. This might be awkward to ask after all this shit, and especially after the other night, but will you please be my friend? I have no friends besides Mikonos and Markos, but they’re not all the way there in the head sometimes. I want a friend who can give me advice that won’t end in me killing the person,” I say. I’m chuckling but it hurts to even say. “God, I must really be drunk or something.” The hurt subdues me.

“Can we get a minute, guys?” she asks the boys. They nod and leave us in the U-shaped driveway. After they leave, Karessa makes me face her. “Hey, of course I’ll be your friend. I’ll even be your best friend in due time, if that’s what you want. I can even share my sisters if they act right. You don’t have to do it all alone, Ainslee. There’s people around you who would love to spend time with you.”

I pull her into a hug. “Thank you,” I say. “Oran would be so proud of me if he saw that I initiated a hug and read the social cues,” I tease.

Karessa chuckles. “Girl, stop crying because you’re going to make me cry, and then we’ll have to deal with these men. Oran is standing in the damn doorway already.”

“Okay... Maybe we can go sight-seeing and do other stuff during the honeymoon. Just us?” I ask.

“Of course! I’d love to go dancing again. I had fun.”

I pull away and wipe at my tears. “Me too.” I smile and clear my throat. “Okay, Karessa, game face on.”

Karessa giggles. “Your game face is too tipsy. Oran will see right through it.”

“Pssht., I say and open my door, sliding right out.

Oran cocks his brow. He eyes me, narrowing his eyes at me. He waits for me to walk towards him. “Who made you cry?”

“Nobody,” I say. “Just a girl’s moment.”

“Oh.” He makes a face like *eww*. As if him and Jagger don’t do the absolute most with their little friendship.

“Can I get through, though?” I ask.

He smirks. “Pay the toll.” He leans lower. I smile, standing on the tip of my toes, and I give him a quick kiss. Oran scoffs. He cups my face and gives me a kiss to end all kisses. When he lets go, he moves out of the way. “You can pass now.” I pass and he slaps my ass. I try not to, but I giggle like a fucking school girl.

“That’s new,” Oran says as he walks in behind me. “I like it.”

My cheeks hurt from smiling. “Oh, guess what, baby?”

“What?”

“I picked up a social cue and hugged Karessa... first,” I emphasize dramatically, opening my eyes wide and gesturing with my hands.

Oran whistles. “That’s good, baby. So you’re learning everyone, that’s good. Which reminds me, what did we talk about with communication? What happened to the texting?”

“I technically communicated because we said our goodbyes at the pool soooo you knew we were doing something and I knew you knew, plus we did text. So, ta-da, communication!” I say with a serious face.

Oran can’t hide the amusement on his face even if he tries. He laughs as he follows me to the kitchen. “I’ll let you have that. For today. Anyway, Jagger and I are headed out. We got invited by some other dudes we met earlier on our run. We’re going to grab a beer.”

“Oh,” I say, disappointed, but I put a smile on my face as I grab a bottle of water from the fridge. “Okay!”

Oran doesn’t say anything but I know he’s behind me. I turn to face him while drinking my water bottle. He looks good in vacation clothes, just as much as he does in work clothes and stuff. He leans on the fridge, crossing one foot over the other. He smirks like he knows something I don’t. “You can tell me to stay if you want me to,” he says.

I shake my head. “No, no that wouldn’t be fair to you. Go have a good time. I don’t want to be that kind of wife.”

“What kind of wife is that?” he asks.

“You know, all up under her husband. Wanting him to consume her entire day and shit. Hugging up on him like she can’t detach from him. Attached to the fucking hip and worshipping him.”

Oran chuckles. “Thing is...you just described yourself. You’re always all up under me when I

fuck you. I consume your entire day and shit. You always hug up on me when you're asleep. If I even move one inch, there you are, following like a lost puppy. You're attached to my fucking hip when you don't realize it and baby, you worship me, especially when I fuck you. You might as well pray to me."

I stick my finger in my mouth, making a gagging expression, but I smile. Oran moves, he lifts my ass up and sits me down on the counter. After he snatches the water bottle from my grip and sets it aside, he flattens his palms on the counter on both sides of my body. Oran leans in and I open my legs to give him space. Oran nuzzles my neck, then bites it. My fingers find their way under Oran's shirt and travel to his back. "You're so perfect," I whisper to him.

"Yeah, baby? You think so?"

"Mmmm," I hum.

Oran nips at my jaw. "You're so beautiful, baby. Just so you know, I like that kind of wife. Be all up under me if you want. Get lost in me, if it makes you feel better. I'm the type of husband that's all up under you. I want to feel you all the time. I'm a possessive man, Ainslee. When you're mine, that's it. What we did with each other, that was a way to get that shit out of your system and now, it's just me. I'm your fucking world. I'm your man, your first and your last, and I am especially the only husband you'll ever have."

I moan as he sucks on my neck. "If we weren't married, I think I would've proposed. Just know that for you too, it was an exception, because I'll cut a bitch for my man."

Oran chuckles and moves back to look at me. There must be something about the way I'm looking at him because he grins. "You're so into me, you don't know where you end and where I begin, aren't you?"

I nod. "I am."

He kisses me tenderly this time, showing me what else he can do. Kissing with and without emotion is always different. Even the different levels of emotions appear in the kisses. He tells me how he feels about me through this. Oran slowly pulls away. "I feel the same way, Bug. I really do."

"Good. I'd have to beat your ass if you didn't," I threaten.

Oran laughs. "I'd like to see you try."

AFTER THE GUYS LEAVE, I get changed into a t-shirt and gray lounge shorts. I wrap my hair up into a messy bun. When I get downstairs, Karessa is flipping through channels. “Hey, you know how to knife throw?” I ask her as I head to the kitchen.

The open concept of the villa makes it easier for me to hear her. “Nooo, sounds interesting though. I can make drinks.”

“Oooo, what can you make?” I ask her. “I’m good at making mojitos. Any kind of mojito, I can make.”

Karessa walks over to where I am searching for drink ingredients and placing them next to the blender. “I make a mean margarita.”

“Well then, sister... Let’s get this party started.”

After making mojitos and margaritas, I start to feel my tipsiness coming back. I sigh. This is the life. “So, knife throwing?” Karessa asks with excitement.

I sip my drink. “Wanna see a magic trick?” I say to her.

“Sure.”

“Okay, watch. Knife throwing target practice, Mikonos.”

Not even two minutes pass and Mikonos comes in through the poolside door. Karessa’s eyes widen. “How did he hear you when he’s not in the house?”

Mikonos smirks as he steps in wearing linen pants, a linen dress shirt, and his hair in a messy bun. This fucker went out and got some, I can tell by the smirk on his face. He winks at me and I roll my eyes. “I hear everything, sweet baby.”

Karessa clears her throat. She chugs her margarita and I try not to laugh. “Don’t worry. Mikonos doesn’t really listen. He just checks in and out.”

Mikonos places his bare foot on a stool and lifts his leg, pulling out a couple of small throwing knives. He sets his foot back on the floor. He lifts his linen shirt up, pulling out more knives that are secured there. He places them on the counter. Karessa looks at him and then at me. “Do you carry them too?” she asks.

“Always.”

Karessa looks me over. “Where?”

“Well, all my shoes have a built-in place for the daggers. I don’t need many. There’s a hidden compartment in my small purses for them. Another is in my phone case.”

Karessa nods her head slowly. “Okay, but what about now? Where are they?”

“Ah...” I reach under the counter, pulling out two more small throwing knives. “Some are in the fridge. My room, in the bedding, in the living room, in the couch, so many places.”

“Wow.”

I nod. “Come on, let’s get this show on the road.” Once we get outside, Mikonos goes to stand on the other side of the grass. He smirks as I notice the bowl of fruits he snagged from the kitchen. He places it on the floor and picks up an apple. I hold three small knives in my hand.

“Ainslee... Where’s the target?” Karessa asks.

I smile. “Right there,” I say and throw the first dagger. I catch the other side of the apple that Mikonos is eating.

Mikonos cocks his brow at me, but smiles. He takes a bite of the apple and continues to munch like it’s nothing. I can see the look Karessa is giving us. Before Mikonos can take another bite, I throw one knife after the other, landing them in the same spot.

“Holy shit!” Karessa claps her hands. I take a bow. “Hold on! I want proof for my sisters!” Karessa runs back in the house while I go grab my drink, telling Mikonos not to move. I turn the music on to my 2000s and up hip hop music.

The first song that comes on is Jay-Z’s I Just Wanna Love U. I bring my mojito outside as I rap the song, it’s one of my favorites. Mikonos is rapping along too, as he texts on his phone. Karessa comes outside, ready to go. I pick up the other small knives, placing them in my pocket. “Ready?” I ask her.

“Yeah. What about Mikonos?” she asks.

Mikonos continues to text with one hand as he holds up an orange in his hand this time. He doesn’t even bother to look up. He mouths the chorus and I give Karessa the go ahead. I drink my mojito as I throw the first one and I don’t stop downing my drink until the other two are in the same spot. Karessa laughs and my favorite song on the whole playlist comes on. Excuse Me Miss by Jay-Z. “Ainslee, girl where the hell have you been hiding all this talent?”

“Whatever do you mean?” I laugh with her. “Swim?”

“Hell yeah! But seriously, you have to teach me.”

“By the end of this honeymoon, you’ll be able to throw a dagger at Jagger.”

“Dagger, Jagger...” Karessa laughs. “Jagger the Dagger.”

“Oh,” I chuckle, shaking my head. “You’re so gone, aren’t you? Sheesh. Jagger got you wrapped around his dagger.”

Karessa shakes her head, trying not to laugh. “You are not right.”

“How long are you guys here for?” the blonde asks me. I look at her and I know my right brow moves of its own accord. It always does. I don’t respond, but I guess she likes the silent type because she keeps talking.

Jagger snickers and I look at him. “What’s so funny?”

“The murderous look your wife is giving you right now is what’s funny.”

I look in the direction that Jagger is looking. Ainslee has her arms crossed over her chest as she gives the blonde the dirtiest look I’ve ever seen.

“You texted Karessa, didn’t you?” I accuse him.

Jagger shrugs. “I’m bored. I want to see some action.”

“Asshole,” I say.

I look at Ainslee again, at the long floral yellow sundress. The deep v-neck of the front of the dress has me admiring her. Her hair is straightened, falling to her waist. She has it sort of parted more on the right than her usual middle. Her face is done up which means she was probably filming some make-up tutorial—I take a moment to acknowledge that I just said tutorial—and I shake my head and smile at Ainslee as she makes her way over to us. “You guys having fun?” she asks the question.

She says her hellos to the other dudes who wanted to have a beer. She says hi to the other girls that Jagger and I didn’t know were going to join. Ainslee finally sets her eyes on the blonde sitting by me. She smiles sweetly and then she bites her lip as she throws something. A small dagger-like knife lands right in the middle of the girl’s fingers that she had on the table. The girl shrieks, “What the fuck?”

“Get up,” Ainslee says.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” the blonde retorts. “You can just pull up another chair, you didn’t have to throw anything at me.”

Ainslee smiles. “That’s my man you’re sitting next to. When I tell you to get the fuck up, you do it, but you know what, that’s fine. Sit your ass on that chair then. I don’t need it.” Ainslee walks around next to us and slides into my lap. She narrows her eyes at me. “I’m sick of your fan club.”

I chuckle as I wrap my arm around her waist and pull her closer. “I didn’t realize I had a fan club.”

She rolls her eyes. “You do and I fucking dislike it.”

“You a little jealous, Bug?”

“Big jealous,” she says.

I lean into the crook of her neck, inhaling her sweet scent. I lightly bite her neck and groan. “Should’ve just told me to stay with you. I didn’t care to come and be around these people,” I confess.

Ainslee wraps her arm around my neck. Her fingers find their way into my hair from the nape of my neck. She’s figured out something I like but never say out loud; someone playing with my hair. “Next time, I’ll ask you to stay, okay?”

“Okay,” I reply and kiss her shoulder.

“How about a game?” Ainslee wiggles her brows at me.

“What did you have in mind?” I whisper as I lean into her neck.

“First, let’s make a bet, husband,” Ainslee says.

I lick my lips as I tip her chin to face me. “What did you have in mind?”

“Let’s ...” Ainslee stops talking as Mikonos does a particular whistle.

Ainslee turns her head towards the door and in walks a man dressed in a suit with Converse.

“Papi!” Ainslee exclaims and runs to him.

Jagger leans in. “Papi?”

I watch in silence as Ainslee hugs the dude, but she isn’t overly affectionate or anything. He looks to be either her age or a bit older. Ainslee is talking so animatedly and he’s smiling from ear to ear.

“I thought that she was your wife?” the blonde asks.

“You’re still here?” I look at her. It was more of a question than a fuck-off statement. I didn’t get what her reason to still be sitting next to me was for.

She scoffs and turns to her friend after calling me an asshole. Ainslee talks to whoever the fuck that is and then she points at me. She grabs the guy by the wrist and drags him to the table. “Babe, meet Joaquin Quintanilla. Papi, this is my husband, Oran Hale.”

Joaquin stretches his hand out and I shake it, but I do notice how quiet the bar has gotten. There’s a teardrop tattoo underneath his right eye, his hair is shaved close to his scalp, and even though he’s smiling, he looks menacing. I already know if anyone knows a Bishop’s, it’s not the legal way.

“It’s nice to finally meet the man who tied this crazy girl down. Good luck to you,” Joaquin says.

I chuckle. “Thank you?”

“Let’s catch up!” Ainslee says, dragging him towards an empty table. “Tell me about your wife? How is she and how’s Max? I miss them.”

“Who the hell is this guy?” Jagger asks.

Mikonos pulls the blonde’s chair back and she doesn’t say anything. She gets up and moves. Mikonos sits. “He’s cartel and a very good...acquaintance.”

I look at him. The man barely talks but now he’s just sitting here like we’ve been friends for years. “He looks more like a friend,” I say.

“Her friend, yes. Mine? I don’t do that. Joaquin and I would have no issue killing each other, but because of Ainslee, there’s a truce.”

“So, why is he here?” I ask, even more annoyed that he takes Ainslee’s hands in his.

“To see her. Why else?” Mikonos answers.

Then it clicks. “He likes her,” I state.

Mikonos scoffs. “No, he loves her, but that’s as far as he would ever go.”

I don’t know how I’m not trying to fight with anyone right now. I glare at Ainslee as she gives him a dimpled smile. “Does she know?”

I see in my peripheral vision that Mikonos shakes his head. “That’s like asking if she knows just how much you love her yourself or how you would have died at the dinner table just to tell her dad about what was happening. Ainslee isn’t the type to see what she doesn’t want to see. Plus, Papa said no when he asked for her hand in marriage. He doesn’t want to mix with the cartel, they’re fucking reckless. No morals, no rules, no family structure. A lot of that shit is just kill or be killed. Too many bosses getting betrayed.”

I take a deep breath. “You are telling me a lot,” I say.

Mikonos shrugs. “You’re married into the Bishops family, it’s your job to know. As for your wife, that’s what I’m here for, to remind her.”

I turn to ask him what he’s talking about. Mikonos plucks the little knife from the table and aims, throwing it right at Joaquin. Ainslee catches it while Joaquin’s men pull their guns out. The restaurant is dead silent now and Mikonos snaps his fingers. The men that no one saw come out from the shadows and hidden places. Joaquin breaks out into a smile while Ainslee glares at Mikonos.

They don’t break eye contact, as if having a conversation.

“The tension is both thicker and tighter than our wives put together,” Jagger whispers.

This isn’t even the place or time but I break out laughing, then I clear my throat because I look crazy.

I turn my attention back to Ainslee who breaks first to glance at me. Her eyes soften when she looks my way and then she looks at Mikonos. She nods her head and the men are gone. Ainslee looks at Joaquin, says something, and then they get up. She gives him a quick hug and he walks out as Ainslee walks towards us.

Mikonos stands. “Come to me when she’s gone too far into the life. She lacks balance sometimes.” He moves his chair back and crouches low. He looks under the table and smirks. “Karessa, you can come out from under the table. I wouldn’t let anything happen to you, sweet baby.”

I look down in between me and Jagger as Karessa crawls out. She looks at Mikonos and she’s blushing. She stands and goes back to her seat on the other side of Jagger. She sits in her seat. “Thank you,” she says sweetly. Mikonos winks at her and walks off.

“Why the fuck are you blushing?” Jagger pulls her out of whatever moment she was in.

Karessa scoffs, “I wasn’t blushing, Jagger. I was just in survival mode.”

I snicker. “Survival mode? Under the table?”

Karessa looks at me for the first time since last night. “Uh...yeah! Let me let you guys in on something. I’m black, okay? We take cover first, then ask questions later. That’s just how it should be.”

“That sounds crazy,” I say. “So if everyone tries to run out of her—“ I don’t even finish my sentence as she answers.

“Yes, I’m running and asking why we ran after. That’s how you stay alive.”

I laugh. “You should show this side of you more. It’s refreshing.” I decide to flip the tables on

Jagger, “Sweet baby?” I repeat and look at Jagger. “You’re going to just let that man call your wife what you call her?”

Jagger shrugs, as he’s still scrutinizing Karessa’s every move. He looks at me like I’m crazy. “No, that’s okay. I have a lot to lose. Plus, that’s not a man. That’s a mentally unstable trained killer. I have no reason to get killed when I have access to her. You’re not in my position cause that’s your brother-in-law, he doesn’t want Ainslee.”

I snicker and agree with his logic. “You’re right, he doesn’t and yeah, let’s leave him alone. Crazy ass.” I look back as Mikonos playfully shoves her and she stumbles but gains her footing. She laughs, pushing him back even though he barely moves. Mikonos whispers something in her ear and kisses the side of her head. He walks away, going outside.

AFTER JOAQUIN LEFT, Oran is still giving me the cold shoulder again. I lean in while he's trying to not look my way. "Don't be mad at me, babe. Hmm?"

"Hmm, I'll think about it," Oran says.

This man is the biggest grump I've ever encountered, but I do understand why, especially this time around. I should have explained that Joaquin's nickname is actually Papi and it's not just me that calls him that, but Oran doesn't want to hear me out right now, so I leave him be for a bit.

Karessa and I laugh as we nurse our drinks and talk about everything at the table. "Have you ever had a crush?" Karessa asks me.

"Hmm." I think. "Weirdly, no, not really. First kiss?"

Wyn," Karessa answers. "Yours?"

"Like Caerwyn Hale, Wyn?" I reiterate.

Karessa laughs. "Yeah, it was when I got pushed by a certain someone at this table at his pool party. Wyn helped me out of the pool and I kissed him. I was both grateful and stunned as fuck. We laughed it off after and kept it pushing."

"Woowoow. Girl, he's fine, so you did good."

Both Jagger and Oran make a noise and we look at them. Each man is glaring at us like we did something wrong. *What?* I mouth to Oran. He narrows his eyes for a beat. I blow him a kiss and he almost cracks.

"What about yours?" Karessa asks me again.

"Girl, mine is boring. It was Mikonos." I roll my eyes and kiss my teeth. "Before you ask, we were like 13. Trust me, we realized we didn't see each other like that. We just wanted to see what the big deal was."

Karessa chuckles. "Don't I get that. So, you really never crushed on anyone? What about someone crushing on you? Oooh Valentine's Day, like when we were younger and got cards!"

I try to think. "None. Most kids were scared of me because first, Mikonos, and second, I'm a Bishops. Their parents were like 'okay, no tea parties for you'." I laugh. "No one has ever told me they crushed on me, unless you count some of my bold-ass followers."

Karessa laughs. “Jagger counts too.” Her eyes widen and she covers her mouth but she snickers. “Oops.”

I chuckle. “Girl, you’re tipsier than me,” I say. “Jagger could barely stand me at a certain point in our lives.”

“Jagger is right here and can speak for himself,” Jagger says from across the table that we moved over to, just us four. “And she’s not wrong, you know. At some point in my life, I did like you, but then I moved on. It’s life.”

I look at Jagger, tilting my head from side to side. I shake my head, no way. “That’s a lie, “ I laugh. “I don’t believe you.”

Oran leans in, he places his hand on my thigh and bites my neck. My entire body wakes up like it’s supercharged. “It’s true,” Oran answers, the only words he’s said to me since I started laughing with Karessa.

“Oomph, would you look at us, finding out random shit,” I say, then laugh. I lift my glass to Jagger. “To crushes!” He smirks and clinks his glass. I look at Karessa, telling her to join. She smiles and joins. Oran reluctantly stops kissing up on me and my body reacts to that badly. Oran lets me go and I glare at him. “That was not cool,” I say.

“Yeah?” Oran asks. “Next time, you’ll stop fucking with me. Now, go have fun because soon enough, you’re going to be back on punishment.”

I pout. “Petty,” I say to him and ask Karessa if she wants to do something while we’re here.

I chug my drink and Karessa and I decide to play games. Karessa is showing me time and time again why it’s amazing to have a female friend. Mikonos would not have done this with me. Karessa and I laugh as I teach her how to hit a bullseye during darts. With each throw, she gets better, and now we have a drinking game going. We switch over to playing pool. This one, Karessa knows how to play. At first, we just play amongst each other, but as the night progresses, a couple of guys place a bet with us. A drinking sort of bet.

I stare at the shot glass of tequila. The nastiest shit on earth. I’m beginning to get tipsy again and I’m enjoying this, then a hand covers the ball. Frustrated, I look up. Jagger is standing there with a smirk on his face. “Time to go, girls,” he says.

“Why?” we both whine and, yep, we’re going to be a handful tonight.

“Oran wants to go, so let’s take this party back to the villa.”

I snort. “The same man who’s giving me a death glare? You want me to go back and enjoy myself?” I laugh mirthlessly. “So, he can punish me some more? Noooo thanks. I’m staying right here.”

Jagger has this look in his eyes that he had when we were younger, indicating he’s about to do something fucking crazy. Before I can even drop the stick and move, Jagger bends and lifts me up over his shoulder. “Put me down!” I grit through my teeth.

“Nope. Party’s over. Come on, Karebear.” He holds his hand out for Karessa.

She smiles. "Sorry, Ainslee."

"Et tu, Brute?" I say to her and Karessa laughs.

Jagger walks us out and the fucker lets me hit my head on the damn door frame. "Oww! Jesus, Jagger just put me down!" I shriek.

I feel a slap on my ass so firm, it travels through my entire body. "Shut up, Ains..." Oran warns me. "Don't make me spank you right here."

"Fucking petty," I mumble under my breath.

Oran is no longer on the side of Jagger and is now walking behind him, glaring at me with some wicked promises. "What was that, babe?"

I glare at him. "Nothing."

"Good, you might cum tonight. Do some slick shit again and we can stretch it out to another day," Oran threatens and I know he means it.

I look away and stew in my own anger. My hormones are raging and my horniness is back with a vengeance. I'm so angry and horny that I feel the damned angry tears again, but it's cause I can't possibly wring my husband's neck. First, I love this man, and second, I don't want to be a widow. I want to be with him.

"Give her here," Oran says to Jagger.

Jagger stops walking and turns to Oran. They transfer me like I'm a fucking sack of potatoes with no feelings. I'm now over Oran's fucking shoulder. I'm trying my best not to touch or brush up against him. As we walk, I feel the tips of Oran's fingers crawling up my leg. I wiggle so that he will stop, but he pulls his hands out of my dress and another smack lands on my ass. I bite my tongue. Oran's fingers come back under my dress and this time, he doesn't stop until his fingers caress my clit. "Oran... please don't do this to me," I whisper, only for his ears.

He stops walking, letting Karessa and Jagger go. "You did this, not me. Guys, we're going to take a walk on the beach," he announces to them and he goes towards the vacant beach. As Oran walks, he slips his finger past my panties and dips it inside me. I moan as he finger-fucks me while walking. I don't want to touch him, but I hold on to him because this is not normal. "You will learn to not piss me off, Ainslee, and you will understand what kind of respect your man needs. I demand respect, nothing less, nothing more. Got it?" His fingers slip out and he pulls me off his shoulder, then slides me down his body.

"Yes," I breathe hard.

I look and nobody is around but us and the moonlight. "On all fours."

I whimper, loving this side of him, and I do as he asks.

Oran's arm wraps around my waist and he flips me. "I changed my mind, I want to see you," he says, his voice soft, contradicting everything else.

I breathe in as I feel his lips on my exposed skin as he lifts my dress up. I shut my eyes, not caring who comes around, and I lose myself in Oran. My fingers find their way into his hair as he rips my

panties to shreds. I release a moan the second his tongue captures my pussy in a scorching kiss. I don't know if I can come back down to earth. I don't care if the world was to end right now, just as long as me and him are not touched. My breathing hitches as I'm close to cumming. I growl when Oran stops and moves away. I place my hands over my face and scream, "Please, just stop. Let's go. I can't do this toni—."

My words are cut off by the feel of Oran slipping all the way in. My hands move and I tug on my hair as Oran takes me roughly. I open my eyes and almost shut them as Oran stares at me. I shudder as he lifts one leg and fucks me like he knows how to do best. There are no words exchanged, nothing else to deter us from what's happening. I can feel my orgasm building and I shut my eyes, ready for him to deny me again, but I feel a soft kiss on my lips. "Open your eyes, baby. Look at me." I do as he asks. "I love punishing you the most, you know that, right? But I hate it even more when you cry, even if it's out of frustration. I told you, I'm possessive and shit gets me going, so work with me, will you?"

"Yes, Oran. I'll work with you."

"You want to cum?"

"Yes..." I answer without any shame or hesitation. I let the last brick that he's been chipping away fall. I'm completely broken by him and I don't care. I let him see me and I know the moment he realizes it.

"Oh Ains... baby." He caresses my face. Suddenly, everything shifts as Oran leans lower and makes love to me as I cum. He doesn't stop, nor does he care, as he continues taking me so beautifully. I wrap my legs around his waist and my arms around his neck. "Tell me what I want to hear."

"I love you, Oran Hale."

"How much?" he asks.

"Enough to let you frustrate me," I say softly and lean in, biting his bottom lip into my mouth.

Oran groans as he speeds up a bit. He pulls away to rest his forehead on mine. "That's good enough for me." He smirks as he kisses me hard.

It reminds me of a famous quote that a lot of chess players use.

Every man needs a woman when his life is in a mess, because just like in a game of chess, the queen protects the king

AFTER WE GOT BACK to the villa and I wash the sand out of every crevice that it was in—I roll my eyes hard at the thought—Mikonos let Oran know to be up early and that they would be gone most of the day.

Getting Oran to leave for the next day was hard but I got it done, well, Mikonos did. I had to beg him and promise him that I'll get him something extravagant for his birthday before he even grunted his yes. It honestly wasn't even a hard task, all he had to do was distract Oran, with the help of Jagger, for the whole day.

"Tell me to stay," Oran says to me.

I snicker. "No, I'm still mad at you. You got sand in my ass." I close my eyes, trying to get some shut-eye.

Oran chuckles as he pulls me to his body. He plants light kisses on my shoulder. "I said I was sorry but either way, you deserved it. You made me feel some type of way when you were talking to Joaquin and Mikonos told me something about him."

I turn to face him. "Something like what?"

"Like he's in love with you."

I blink. "Huh?"

Oran shakes his head, trying not to smile. "You're so clueless sometimes. How could you not know? You didn't see the special treatment you received from him or maybe from other guys who liked you?"

I think on it. "No, I was busy trying to balance every activity that my mother signed me up for and trying not to get on her bad side. I was a busy teenager and young adult, my dear husband. Is that where the whole 'I demand respect' stuff was coming from?"

Oran nods. "Yeah, and the fact that I want you to have fun with me too, not just everyone else."

I lift his hand and kiss the palm of it. "You've got it. We'll have one day to ourselves and you can take me to all the fun places you want to go to, even if fun means sitting on the couch watching rom-coms all day."

Oran snickers. "Thanks, asshole, but I like other things."

“I don’t doubt it at all. I can’t wait to do what you like to do.” I kiss his palm again and hold on to his arm as I drift back to sleep.

After Oran, Jagger, and Mikonos were gone in the early hours, both Karessa and I jumped into action. I smile as I see all the supplies and materials that both Karessa and I had delivered. Karessa checks everything out. “I’m going to need a hand or two,” she says as I slip my apron on.

“Brady, Marshall...” I answer her and she looks at me like I’m a nut, but when two of the men come from the backyard entrance, Karessa nods.

I get to work too, deciding that instead of making Oran only one cake, I’ll make 3 rows of different flavours of cupcakes. I make chocolate, vanilla, red velvet, lemon and blueberries, and a birthday cake.

I make the orange velvet birthday cake first, and as it cools off for the next two to three hours before I can add the chocolate buttercream frosting, I work on the cupcakes. After that, I leave both to cool off before the icing.

I look up at what Karessa is doing and I love how simple, yet great, it looks. It’s not all over the villa, but there’s orange and gray balloons that create an archway big enough for Oran to stand in the middle and take pictures, even if he doesn’t want to. I’m going to make him.

I move on to do the one thing I know everyone thinks I can’t do; cook. You would think people would know that I’m, first-off a damned belle and second, my mother. She tried to bend, shape and mold me into the perfect housewife, but I don’t know what that is. I was too rebellious in my ways, too questioning, too much of a *why the hell must I be the one doing that* type of girl. It’s a surprise Oran doesn’t ask me over and over again if I was dropped on my head. Which I was...by Jagger stupid-ass Hanlon.

But I smile because if it wasn’t for this stupid-ass man, I wouldn’t have been able to do what I did for Oran’s birthday.

HOURS LATER, the decorations are done, the food is set on the table, and the cupcakes and cake are done as well. I don’t get a chance to change before I hear the guys coming in. I hang up my apron and remain in my dark blue shorts and Superman t-shirt. I know I probably look crazy but whatever. Once they come around the corner, I’m practically on the tips of my toes. “Happy birthday!” Karessa and I shout.

Oran’s eyes are wide as he takes everything in. I stand there, waiting for his reaction and when he takes too long, I feel like I’ve done something wrong. I look at Jagger for help and he elbows Oran. Oran blinks and smiles. It’s a genuine smile that has me off that negative thought of him not liking it. “Thank you, guys.” He spots the cupcakes and cake. “Is that an orange cake?” He grins.

“It is. It’s an orange velvet cake.”

“They do that?” Oran asks and I nod. He looks around again and sees the massive assortment of food. His smile widens. “Food.”

Mikonos scoffs and he looks at me, telling me he fed him in Greek. I snicker when Oran glares at him. Jagger walks over to Karessa and pulls her into a kiss that has me blushing. Sheesh, but I can see how fast they’re falling for each other and it makes me happy.

“You did this for me?” Oran asks me.

I nod. “Yeah, I did. Well, not the decorating because that is not my area of expertise.”

Oran closes up the space between us. “You cooked for me?”

“I did.”

Jagger takes this opportunity to get on my nerves. “You can cook?”

I roll my eyes. “Why does everyone think I can’t cook? I was a belle, dammit. Anyway, besides all that, I have something to give you!” I say excitedly. “Wait right here.” I run up the stairs and retrieve what I need.

I make it downstairs and Oran is trying to sneak a cupcake. He sees me and winks. I laugh and exchange the cupcake for the envelope. “Here.”

Oran gives me a look and opens it up. He reads through it but says nothing. The silence is deafening, so I decide to talk. “I know that it’s not much of a present, but I wanted to get you something different. Bethany J’s Home for Abused Women and Children and men too, they have their own home, but I just... I thought that this would be a great way to remember her, and Jamie too,” I say.

“Jamie?” Jagger asks.

“Yeah, that’s what the J stands for. I know about the heart, Jagger. I know who it belonged to. Maybe that’s why no matter how hard I try to fight you, we always seem to not hate each other as much as we say. I’ll always be grateful to Jamie and your entire family for giving me a second chance to live. I won’t fail him, Jags. I promise.” Jagger has this look in his eyes and before I know it, he hugs me tight.

“Why didn’t you ever tell me?” Jagger asks.

“Because you wouldn’t have treated me normally. You wouldn’t have fought with me or anything else. You would have treated me like a fragile thing. I just wanted a normal childhood.”

“Dammit, Ains...” Jagger hugs me even tighter and I hug him back for the first time ever.

“You’re crushing me,” I whine and he lets go, but I don’t get a chance to relax because Oran pulls me into a hug so warm and tight, I can’t complain.

“Thank you, baby. Thank you for this. For the birthday surprise and everything else. I won’t ever forget it. I love you.”

I smile. “Wait! One more thing.” I let go of him and go back to the pantry where I had to hide the damn gift or else Oran would have noticed it there. I grab the huge poster and walk back with it. “Here,”

Oran cocks a brow and looks at the poster covered in black wrapping paper. “Should I guess or open it?”

“What do you think?” I say sarcastically.

Oran smirks and unwraps it slowly. He doesn’t say anything, just sucks in a breath. He looks up at me sharply and then back down at the poster. Jagger whistles as he takes in the whole picture and Karessa gives me a double thumbs up, letting me know it’s a great gift. I smile. Oran still hasn’t said anything and this is the second time he’s hushed up with his gifts. “Who took the picture?” Oran asks.

I shake my head and try not to laugh. “It was a female photographer, like I always use, Oran. I figured you wanted another one to hang up in your walk-in.” I wink.

Oran grins from ear to ear. He sort of says something, but I can’t hear him right because it’s like he’s grunting his words. Like, did he forget how to speak? Jagger chuckles. I move closer and look at the picture of myself again. I got inspiration from Tupac’s bathtub picture, but instead of gold jewelry, we used orange rose petals to cover my private area. I’m in a tub full of orange petals and bath foam. My legs are hanging over the sides of the tub, my breasts are bare and they can be seen very easily. One of my hands is buried in my hair as if I’m pulling it and I have a finger in my mouth. All in all, I’m staring at the camera. The caption at the bottom is borrowed from the title of Ariana Grande’s song God is a Woman.

“I love you more than you think, Oran. Happy birthday, old man,” I say to him.

That snaps him out of whatever he was thinking about as he looks at me. Oran does something unexpected, he wraps his hand around my throat and my eyes flutter as I stand on the tips of my toes. Oran chuckles. “See how good your rewards are when you treat me just as good as I treat you?” he teases, and before I can say a word, he pulls me in for a scorching kiss that has me gripping his wrists with both hands. Oran takes it up a notch and lifts me off the floor a bit. I moan into his mouth and then he switches the kiss to so tender that I whimper. He reluctantly lets me go. “You’ll regret that old man jab later,” he taunts. He places me on my feet and gives me a quick peck, and instead of stopping, he does it two more times. “Let’s go get some grub, baby,” he says pulling me towards the table.

ORAN

As if my birthday couldn’t get any better, the next day, I get to wake Ainslee up as early as I want. The first thing that’s done is I make her go on a morning run with me.

“Oran...” Ainslee calls my name.

I turn around and slow down as I run backwards. For someone who can kick ass, Ainslee is not a runner. She looks at me like she wants to knock me out. I take a page out of her book and I pull my cell out. I record her struggling to get to me. “Come on, baby, it’s not even that bad. Look, I stopped and I’ll wait for you, then this is over,” I coax her.

Ainslee’s eyes light up and she runs towards me but as she gets close, I run again. “Baaaabe!” she

cries out and I laugh hard. I stop running and I can't stop laughing.

"Okay, okay, I'll be good. I promise." I capture her little pout that she always has and then I stop recording as soon as she makes it to me. "See, I always keep my word." I kiss the top of her head as we begin walking towards the villa.

Ainslee shoves me and I put my phone away. "Run," I say and Ainslee takes off, laughing as I chase her. I catch her right as she's about to open the door.

Ainslee laughs hard and I turn her to face me. I capture her lips in a kiss, pushing her against the door. I groan into her mouth as her hands find their way into my hair. I pull away and kiss her a couple of times before letting her go. "We've got shit to do, baby, let's go."

We make it in the villa and we get ready for our day. I decide to show Ainslee that she can share our lives a little by posting the video of her as my story on Instagram. I learned that trick from Jagger. I make it even worse for her because she thought I forgot about her provocative posts. A picture for a picture. I move to the bathroom where she's showering. The shower is foggy so you can't really see her. I stand in front of the mirror with my white shirt clinging to my upper body and I snap the picture. I try to think of a clever caption and the only thing I can think of was a simple *Hale's Pawn*. There's multiple meanings to it, but mine is simple; although it's rare to see a pawn checkmate, they surely can. Ainslee thought I was her pawn, but she's mine. To move diagonally or directly, either way it doesn't matter, because my pawn can only move forward.

I take Ainslee sailing and I don't think I've ever seen her so animated before. I've now promised to do it as much as I can with her. Teaching her isn't as easy with this little-ass leopard print two-piece bikini, but I do my best. After that, I let Ainslee experience my love for water sports, from the jetpack to jet skiing, hoverboarding on the water, and her all time favorite one now, subwinging. Basically like flying underwater.

By the time we get back to the villa, Ainslee is wiped out. She's still bouncing on her feet like the Energizer Bunny, but just at a lower rate. "Hey guys," Karessa and Jagger greet us.

"Hey!" Ainslee says with excitement. "Girl! I had so much fun. I tried all these different water sports. You ever been subwinging?"

Karessa smiles, genuinely happy for Ainslee. "No, is it really fun?"

"Hell yeah!" Ainslee turns to me. "Babe, can we go tomorrow? I want her to try it and then I'll bring my equipment so that I can film it."

"Up to you guys," I say to Jagger and Karessa.

Jagger nods. "I'm for it."

Karessa nods too. "Same. We had a lazy day today. We wanted to play charades but we need more players. Are you guys too tired?"

"I'm not. Are you?" I ask Ainslee.

She's still bursting with excitement. I swear it's like giving a kid coffee. "I'll be ready in twenty minutes. Anybody want me to make my famous coffee? The sexy-mexy?" She wiggles her brows.

We all say yes because we've had it and that shit is like coffee crack. Ainslee and I head upstairs to shower and get ready to come back down. I'm enjoying this vacation more than anything else.

AINSLEE

OUR HONEYMOON IS COMING to an end and it's been the best time of my life. I look over at Oran as he talks to Jagger around our impromptu bonfire. I've always wanted to be part of one. I sigh as I take in my beautiful husband. I'm so thankful to him for this trip. I can't say I hated any part of this. I enjoyed getting closer with everyone and being able to tell my husband I love him with every bit of me.

I stare out at the sunset, it's beautiful. It's pure paradise. "What are you thinking about?" Oran asks me.

I smile before I look at him. "Just how wonderful this all is and how I truly appreciate each and everyone of you. Outside of Mikos and Markos, I've never had the chance to experience true love and friendship, so that's why I want to tell you, Karessa and Jagger." I look at them. "I want to share something with you both."

Oran takes my hand in his. "I'm right here," he says, giving me full support.

Karessa and Jagger look at me expectantly and slowly I begin. "As you know, my mother was never really a good person to, well, anyone, but it didn't stop there. My mother physically and mentally abused me from when I was a really young age. She would say hurtful things to me and beat me. Sometimes it wasn't so bad and other times, like the year, before I moved out, she made me dance for two hours straight with no break. She hated me and I don't know why. I loved her, I really did, but she didn't love me back. My father and brothers never knew because I was afraid." I look up and I see Mikonos as he sits besides me. I give him a small smile. He gives me a wink as he holds my other free hand. "I, well, I didn't know how to process her death when my father did what he had to do, but I'm happy he loved me enough to do it. I searched for love for so long, yet I didn't realize I had it all along."

"I'm so sorry," Karessa offers. There are tears threatening to fall from her eyes. Jagger looks like he's going to knock someone out.

"Thank you, Jagger," I say.

"For what?" he asks after a pregnant pause.

"You were my outlet. I remember one time you asked me why I fought with you so much and it's because of this. I needed an outlet, someone who would go toe to toe with me and not see the bruises." I see the look on his face and rush to give my explanation. "No, don't take it the wrong way. You helped me in ways you didn't know that you did and I wouldn't change the help. It took me a long time to understand that you gave me the energy that I gave you. I was angry, angry at the world and at

my mom, but then I found Oran. He made me see a future, he showed me what it's like to have someone love you back, and how much those words mean when you say it to someone who reciprocates them. I love you guys. All of you. Even you, Jagger." I smile because I'm not shedding any tears for me or my mother.

I am happy, loved, cherished, and most of all, I've found people who love me back ten-fold. I will never take this for granted. Mikonos is the first to say something. "Fuck that bitch and may she rot in hell." He lifts his bottle of whiskey up and then chugs the rest.

I laugh and everyone joins in. Yeah, I've found my people. My family.

AINSLEE

WHEN WE GET BACK from the honeymoon, I feel refreshed and I'm happy, but there's something in the air. Once we get off the private jet, we're met by some paparazzi. This I don't miss. "Ainslee! Ainslee! How's your father? How's Andres Bishops doing?" someone says to me.

"What?" I ask.

"Move," Mikonos says to the paparazzi and they listen.

I reach for my phone and power it up. Jagger and Oran are behind with Karessa while I'm speed walking. They know I hate the pap so maybe that's why they think I'm doing this. When my phone turns on, I see the missed calls from the hospital and one of the boys. I look at Mikonos. "What is it?"

"Not here," he says. "Keep walking." We make it away from the paps and once we get to the car, he looks at me. "It's Papa and Phoenix."

"What do you mean? What about them?" I ask, even though I know something is wrong.

"They were in Vegas and something went down. They both got caught in the crossfire," Mikonos says with no emotion on his face. I know he's just as worried as I am.

ORAN

"Uh..." I hear Jagger saying and I look up at him. He's staring off at something and I stop looking at my phone while ignoring the paps. When I do look at where Jagger is staring, my wife and Mikonos jump in the backseat of the big black Cadillac SUV. Ainslee rolls her window down and she looks at me.

"Something's wrong," I say. I can just tell. We begin to walk faster.

"Maybe it's not what it seems," Karessa says.

I nod. I appreciate the sentiment and hopefully, everything is okay.

"What happened?" I ask as soon as we get in the Escalade.

"It's Dad and Phoenix, they're in the hospital."

I widen my eyes. "Oh no, baby, I'm so sorry." I pull Ainslee into my arms. On our way to the hospital, I turn my cell on, prompting all my notifications to start pinging back to back. How many

times have they been trying to get into contact with one of us to tell Ainslee and Mikonos what just happened? I kiss Ainslee's temple. This is bad, really bad.

WHEN WE GET to the hospital, Ainslee and Mikonos rush out before us and are nowhere to be found when we enter the hospital. Not even a minute after, one of the Bishops' men escorts Jagger, Karessa and I to where they are. I hear Ainslee screaming and I walk faster, trying to figure out what is going on. I turn the corner and Ainslee is yelling at some of the other men who stand there with their eyes concentrated somewhere else. "You were supposed to protect them. They are your number one priority. Who the fuck do you think you are, huh? What were you doing? Somebody answer me!" There's an air of authority around Ainslee that I've never witnessed before.

Ainslee paces back and forth in her heels. The fact that she's all dolled up wearing a cropped tank and a lace skirt that reaches her knees p does not take away from her looking like she'd beat the shit out of one of them.

One of the men she was talking to takes his eyes off her and looks our way. Ainslee reaches out and slaps the shit out of him. "Don't fucking look at them. Look at me! My father is lying there in the hospital bed alongside my fucking brother. They were both shot. How? If you don't answer me now, I'm two seconds away from losing my shit."

"It was at a restaurant in Vegas. They were aiming for Ciro Sarkozy's wife, not boss."

Ainslee snaps her fingers and one of them gives her a gun. Jagger, Karessa and I watch as Ainslee grabs the man, who is about six feet tall, by the tie. "Kneel," she says as if she's the head of the family now. She aims the gun right at his head. I try to move closer to her to stop it but Mikonos comes out of nowhere. He has his hand on my shoulder. I look at him and he shakes his head. "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't fucking send you to the morgue right now. ONE!" she yells.

"We know who did it," the guy blurts out.

Ainslee doesn't say anything for a bit and then turns, not even looking at me. She looks right at Mikonos. "Set up a meeting with Ciro."

"Done," Mikonos answers.

"Who's Ciro?" Jagger whispers to me. "I'm a little fucking intimidated by this Ainslee. She's hot, but jeez, this isn't just for shits and giggles," he says.

I side eye him and he shrugs. Karessa looks just as worried and honestly, a little terrified. Shit, we all should be terrified of what just happened. Things are changing and I don't know how it'll affect my wife. My first priority is my wife. I need to make sure that she's alright. Ainslee turns back around, grabbing the guy's jaw and digging her nails into his skin. He pops his mouth open. She puts the barrel of the gun in his mouth. She bends, staring him in the eye. "If Andres or Markos Bishops dies, I will torture you myself. Your job was simple. Watch Markos' back while he watches our

father's. He did his duty, what the fuck did you do?" she hisses. She looks at the others standing. "Tell Luci I need her. You, Matthews, you watch my family while I'm in Quebec. Count your days, big boy." She stands and hands the gun to the other guy.

She turns and she walks towards us but it's like she's operating in a different mode. I grab her elbow as she tries to walk by me. Ainslee turns like she's about to attack. "Whoa! Babe, it's me. Baby, what's going on? Talk to me. Are you okay?"

Ainslee looks up at me, then her elbow, then back up at me. "You don't understand, Oran. You can't possibly understand what's happening," she says to me and I can see that mask slowly starting to take place again.

"So then explain it to me," I say softly.

Ainslee sighs. She shuts her eyes and when she opens them again that vibrant spirit of hers is gone. "Let me go. Go home. I'll be there later."

I cock my brow. What the fuck? I try to reply but Mikonos does that damn hand over the shoulder thing again. He shakes his head. I'm pissed the fuck off but she's right, I don't know what's happening. I let go of her elbow and she walks off with her head held high and Mikonos right by her side.

"Dude, your wife is the temporary head of the Bishops family while Andres is down. That's what's happening," Jagger says.

"Is she going to be okay?" Karessa asks. I look at her as she cuddles into Jagger's arms.

He kisses her temple and he looks at me with worry in his eyes. I wish I could tell him that I know what to do, but I don't. I'm jealous for a second because I just want my wife back, but I know that my wife has taken a backseat to the Don of the Bishops family, Ainslee Bishops.

"I don't know, Karebear," Jagger says to her. "I really don't know."

AINSLEE

"You need to go home," Mikonos says to me.

I shake my head as I look over my dad's books and try to figure out who really put a hit out on him. Ciro Sarkozy is going to have a meeting with me in a few days. I sigh, pinching the bridge of my nose. "Okay, let's go."

The car ride is silent. Neither Mikonos nor I have much to say. It's hard to believe that both Markos and dad are in the hospital. "I'm going to check on them. I need you to go home and sleep. I will be back in an hour. There are more men in the back of the house watching," Mikonos says as we pull up to the house .

The lights are off so Oran must be asleep. My heart aches for him and I realize that maybe I should've spoken to him about everything but I just... I can't stop. "I'm going to try and get some sleep then. Oran's probably pissed off at me but at least he's home safe."

Mikonos looks at me. "He's not here."

“Where is he?”

“At Jagger’s,” Mikonos responds. “Ains...your husband isn’t part of this life. He doesn’t understand it, so don’t torture him for it. Speak to him or don’t speak to him, but figure it out because your head needs to be in the fucking now. We don’t have time to be sad,” he says.

I nod and get out of the car. The car doesn’t leave until I’m inside the house. The lights automatically come on and it feels so empty. I feel empty without Oran. I call him and on the third ring, he picks up. “So, you finally give a fuck enough to call me?” he says. I know he’s angry.

“Listen, can you at least tell me next time when you’re not going to be home?” I say.

Oran chuckles but there’s no happiness behind it. “You don’t get to fucking say that to me. Don’t do that, Ainslee. I’m trying to take into consideration what the hell is going on, but you’re pushing it. All I want is to understand. You’re my wife and I worry about you. I’m worried right now because of your dad and brother, but I’m upset too, because you dismissed me. I’m not your lackey, I’m your husband.”

“Look, all I’m saying is...consider your fucking safety, Oran! That’s all.”

“Don’t,” he warns.

I sigh. “Maybe it’s good that you’re at Jagger’s place,” I say softly, suddenly so tired.

“Why? Is it cause I can see through the bullshit lie you’re telling yourself right now?” Oran bites out.

“I deserve that. But no, because there’s Karessa and Jagger there. Two people. The more witnesses, the better, and the easier I’ll sleep at night. I’ll send some men over there too, they won’t come in though. I think I’ll try to get some sleep. Call me in the morning?” I try.

“We’ll see.” Oran hangs up. I can’t be mad at him, I get it. Anyone with common sense would react like he is. I sigh heavily, making my way to our room. I remove my clothing and throw them in the hamper. I jump in the shower and try not to break down. I have to be strong. I need to be strong for my family

After my shower, I grab one of Oran’s t-shirts and slip into bed. I toss and turn, not able to sleep at first. I grab Oran’s pillow, pulling it close to my body. I inhale his scent and I realize how much I miss my husband. I fold myself into the fetal position. I fall asleep.

When I come to, Oran’s side of the bed is cold. I clear my throat and get my day started. I shower and do what needs to be done. What others don’t know is that my status right now is different, so everything about me is going to be different. I do the bare minimum with my makeup, then I stare at my hair. It’s straight and long but something doesn’t feel right. Nothing feels right. I grab a pair of scissors and I cut a few inches off. Instead of it being to my butt, it’s now mid-back. I’m glad that I was trained in cutting my own hair or else I would look insane today.

I put the scissors down and sign. I reach for my phone and I dial Oran. “Pick up, pick up, pick up... please pick up.”

The phone rings and goes to voicemail. I clear my throat. I take a deep breath in and release

another one. I leave my phone on the dresser as I get dressed. I put on a long sleeve, black satin dress shirt and I tuck it into fitted dress pants. I gather my hair up in a high ponytail and slip some all-black Red Bottoms on. I hold my black blazer in my arm as I go into my filming room. I grab my gun, placing it in the small of my back, then I put on my blazer.

I grab my phone and there's a message.

Mr. Hale: Communication.

I look at that one word text. I sigh because I know I'm guilty of this right now. I walk out the house and Mikonos is standing outside waiting for me. He looks at me with a smirk on his face. I can see how tired he is, and distraught, but he's only showing me because he wants me to know that he's here with me.

"How's he doing?" I ask him about Oran.

"He stayed at Jagger's all night. Now he's at their gym's private location. He's been there since four in the morning. You want to pass by?"

I nod as he opens the door for me. I climb in and sit in the back, looking over my phone. I call Ciro Sarkozy.

"Calling a married man in the early hours is like a sin, don't you think, Don?" he addresses me by my temporary title.

I snicker. "Honestly, Ciro, had I been invited to this wedding of yours, things would be easier for you," I joke.

Ciro chuckles a bit. "I wasn't invited to yours either, so it's tie, but I'm sorry about your father. I'm looking into it. When are you coming down?"

"How's later on this week?"

"Done. Till then."

"Till then, Mr. Sarkozy."

"Don Ainslee."

After Ciro hangs up, I shut my eyes and sit back. After a little while, Mikonos announces that we're at the gym. I get out and walk towards the gym with my hands in my pockets. Even my fucking walk has changed. When I step in the doorway, I'm met with Nikolai. He looks at me and I look at him. We say nothing to each other. He clears his throat because not only is Mikonos behind me, but I know my cousin, Ajedi, is here. He didn't end up leaving, but instead chose to stay here.

"Let me see the feed. I just want to see that he's okay."

"Can't do that," Nikolai answers.

"You sure?" Mikonos says. "She's on the list."

"She is, but he doesn't want to see you."

"Well, make him," Mikonos grits through his teeth and I know he takes a step, but I stop him.

"It's okay. Let him do what he does best. His job. Just tell me, is he okay?" I ask.

Nikolai looks at me and he doesn't have to say anything. "Can't do that."

“Well, the head of the Bishops family says so. So move,” I say to Nikolai.

He looks like he’s about to say something but he doesn’t. He follows me as my heels click on the floors. Oran is fighting with Edis, the famous boxer. Edis breaks up their session and both men look at me. I place my hands in my pockets as I stare at Oran. “You lost?” he taunts.

I smirk and shrug. I turn to Edis. “Give me gloves, I’m stepping into the ring.”

Edis looks at me like I’m crazy, so I snap my fingers and one of my men comes out from the changing room with gloves for me. I turn to face Mikonos. He doesn’t have to say anything because his eyes speak volumes. He doesn’t disagree with my method because he knows sometimes you have to fight it out. I shrug out of my blazer and remove my heels. Mikonos secures the gloves for me and I pad over to the ring. I climb up the stairs like the lady that I am and slip inside.

“What are you doing, Ainslee? I’m not going to do this with you,” Oran says.

He makes the mistake of giving me his back. “Mistake number one,” Edis says and before either man can get out of the ring, I run towards Oran and jump on his back.

I wrap my arm around his neck and my legs around his waist. For a second, he doesn’t move. He doesn’t want to hurt me, I know. Edis comes behind me, grabbing me and pulls me back down. I can see from the corner of my eye why he let me go so fast, my men are getting closer. “You don’t want to pick up my phone call, you don’t want to hear me out. You don’t even want to look at me!” I yell.

Oran turns to face me with unfiltered anger. “Shouldn’t I give you the same courtesy you gave me?” *Petty.*

“That’s petty and a low-blow and you know it.” I square up as Oran puts his gloves up.

I don’t think he’s trying to fight me. I think he’s just trying to make me go away. I move in on him and he blocks my first hit. He tries to swing low for a less impactful hit but I block it. I counteract by sneaking a punch in on his ribs. A very precise hit that will hurt more than it leaves a bruise. Oran’s eyes widen. He wasn’t expecting that I knew my shit. I’m the Don, of course I know shit. “You cut your hair? Why?”

“You didn’t come home, why?” I ask, taking a petty page out of his book.

“Real mature, Ainslee,” he retorts.

“Enough talking,” Edis says.

“I was simply answering his question since one of us has to act like an adult.”

Oran glares at me. “We’re going down that route, are we?” He chuckles mirthlessly. “Alright, let’s settle this like adults then.”

Oran and I box, avoiding each other’s faces, well on his part more than mine since I’d have to jump up to hit his face. I’m not really in the mood for that. “Break,” Edis yells and we both back up. We’re breathing hard, sweaty, and still upset. Him more than me but I’m getting there. “You’re better than I thought, who taught you?” Edis asks me.

I look at him. “My father.”

Edis whistles and nods. “Well, hit the showers. Seems like you have work to do.”

I pull on the Velcro with my teeth to remove the first glove, then the other. I slam them down on the ring floor. “Don’t give me orders. We clear?”

Edis looks like he wants to say something but then he looks past me and I know Mikonos has just entered the ring. Edis rolls his eyes. “We need to go, Ainslee. Go shower, one of the men is bringing you a change of clothes.”

I’m listening to them, I swear I am, but I can’t take my eyes off Oran. I know he’s still pissed at me but I need him to understand that what I’m doing right now is just as important as loving him. Oran cocks his brow at me and tilts his head as if trying to read me. I know that I’ve already shown something most Dons don’t show, I’m scared. Not about taking over, but more about losing myself in this world. He’s my lighthouse. I’d swim to him just so that I could survive the raging sea.

“Ainslee...” Mikonos calls my name again. I turn away from Oran before I cry. I get out of the ring and make my way towards the private showers.

I pass a confused looking Jagger but he stops me with a hand over my shoulder. “I’m sorry about your father, any news yet?”

Not looking at him is helping me right now. I shake my head. “No, nothing yet. Thank you for asking.” I clear my throat but it doesn’t seem to be working because it’s like I’ve stepped into the emotions pile today. I shouldn’t have come in, I should’ve looked at Oran through the feed and left.

Trying to walk away is futile because Jagger turns me around to face him. “What’s wrong? Ainslee?” The softness in his voice makes me break down. I cover my face, trying to block him or anyone else from seeing the tears. “Don’t cry. Damn it, Ains.” Jagger pulls me into his arms and his hug is comforting.

“I’m scared...” are the only words I let escape from my lips when it comes to my dad. I slip out of Jagger’s hold and he lets me go. I wipe at my tears and he helps me.

“Hey, you know that we’re all here for you, right? You don’t have to be alone while whatever the fuck this all is, is happening. We’re all your friends, even the guy that’s out there fuming because he’s worried about his wife even though she basically told him to not come home,” Jagger slides that in.

I chuckle and shove him a little. “You just needed to sneak that in, didn’t you?”

Jagger shrugs. “I mean, yeah, you hurt his feelings, even if he doesn’t say it. He was home last night.”

My eyes widen. “He was?”

“Yeah, look, he doesn’t know anything about the Bishops’ life, Ains. You need to explain it to him. He’s worried about you most of all. He didn’t tell me why, but he is. So talk to him.”

I take into consideration what Jagger is saying. “Yeah, I’ll talk to him. I promise.”

Jagger smiles. “Good, because you don’t want me to snatch my best friend back from you since you’re not treating him like the King that he should be treated as.”

“King?” I repeat and laugh.

“Yeah,” he answers. “Also, next time we need to be in the ring because that was a pretty good

fight even though you both were holding back.”

I smirk. “Jagger, you don’t want me to get in there with you, I’ll annihilate you for shits and giggles.”

There’s that dangerous glint in Jagger’s eyes. “Another bet?” he asks.

“Always.” Jagger turns to walk out of the private area. “Jagger?”

“Yeah?”

“If I’ve never said it before, thank you for everything.”

Jagger smirks and it makes me realize that we could’ve been really good friends, this whole time, we, or rather I, wasted time not gaining a good friend. “Thank me by sucking my best friend’s dick.” He winks at me and walks away.

A smile spreads across my face as I enter the showering area. I remove my clothes and secure my hair up so that it doesn’t get wet. I shower away my worry, my sadness, and the anxiety that’s building over being a Don. My mind snaps back to reality when I feel someone else’s presence. I pivot on my heel and it’s a miracle that I don’t bust my ass. It’s a very naked Oran who steps into the shower. “Jesus, Oran! Don’t sneak up on me like that.”

He gives me a half smirk. “You were taking forever so I’m saving both of us time.”

“I...” I want to say something but there’s nothing that comes out. This is the opportunity to say something, anything really. Like the fact that I’m sorry or that there is more than one shower in here, but nothing. I just stare at him as he sidesteps me and gets under the water.

We could be talking right now but it’s Oran and he’s naked. “If you’re done, you can go since you’re busy. Your clothes have been left for you in the changing area,” Oran practically dismisses me.

I shut my eyes. Instead of moving towards getting out of the shower, I move closer to Oran and wrap my arms around his midsection. Oran doesn’t push me away so I lift, balancing on the tips of my toes as my hand reaches for his dick. I wrap my hand around him and caress him like a lover should. Oran doesn’t say anything but I pick up on his hardening flesh that he’s into this just as much as I’m into it. Oran places his hand over mine and my heart beats so fast, but he doesn’t do what I think he’ll do. Instead, he closes his hand over mine. I plant kisses on his back, letting him know how much I miss him. I plant another kiss on his working bicep and Oran groans. He takes my hand away from his dick and turns to face me. He lifts me up and I wrap my legs around his waist. “Don’t ever feel like you can’t come to me, understand?” he says, but I don’t get a chance to answer as he slips inside of me. I shudder as I throw my head back forgetting that I didn’t want to wet my hair. Nothing matters right now, just my husband and I. Only us.

WHEN I GET HOME, I don’t search for Oran. I’ve gotten updates from Mikonos through the day but right now, I just... I can’t do it. I feel so alone. So empty. After seeing my dad and Markos, I’m

drained for the day.

I get ready for bed, Showering and doing my nightly routine. I slip into bed with nothing but my panties on. I dial Oran again but the phone goes to voicemail. He had a lot of catching up to do at work so I get it, but I miss him. I grab Oran's pillow and hold it to me. It smells like him. I drift off to sleep but then I wake up when I feel Oran's arm wrap around my waist as he pulls me close.

"I missed you today and I'm sorry that we haven't had time for me to explain everything."

Oran doesn't say anything and I shut my eyes, happy that he's at least holding me.

"I missed you too. I had a lot of shit to catch up with, but let me say this. Don't shut me out, baby. I don't like the look in your eyes or rather what it does to you. I know you've come a long way, love. But you're keeping things from me, letting me know last, and even avoiding facing your feelings. That's bullshit, babe. I'm not having that kind of marriage, Bug. I don't like it. I don't want what either of our parents had as a marriage example. Do you get what I'm saying?"

I nod. "Yeah," my voice cracks and I clear my throat. "I don't want what they had either. I don't just want to try, I want to do better. I will, okay? I just need to figure things out."

Oran kisses my shoulder and turns me into his arms. "I'm sorry about what you're going through with your dad. I wish I could do something, but all we can do is wait. I stayed back a little bit after you left just to sit with him and Markos."

I cup his face in my hands. "Yeah?" I ask him sweetly.

"Yeah, they're family too, let me worry about them with you. Plus, I kinda like them."

I lean in and kiss him hard. "Thank you, my love. They kinda like you too." I snuggle into his arms.

I nod. "I wish we could stay like this forever."

Oran snorts. "You'd be spoiled."

I kiss his neck. "Yeah, but it would be the one place I feel safe and comfortable."

"Buttering me up, aren't you?" Oran teases.

"A little," I admit.

Oran laughs and kisses my temple. "Get some sleep, baby. We'll talk in the morning."

"I love you," I say.

"I love you too, Bug."

MY WIFE IS DISAPPEARING... Wait, no, that sounds harsh. My wife is losing herself in ‘the life’. There’s no balance right now. It’s been months, and each time Ainslee goes to see her father, she loses a bit of herself. From her hair color going back to brown to it never being down. I don’t like the woman that comes back to me because she’s like a ghost. She tries to fake it but I notice. She’ll ask me about my day, ask me how work was and all the normal things, but at night she doesn’t come to me. She sleeps on the edge of the bed as if she’s afraid that she’ll taint me somehow.

With Elmer being gone and me becoming part of the Founders meetings, I completely forgot about my wife taking over temporarily and what it means. Ainslee walks into the Founders meeting in an all-black pant suit. She looks fucking gorgeous, but it feels like I haven’t seen her in days. She’s in and out of the house lately. I just want five minutes with my wife. I sigh as Ainslee sits across from me at the round table. “Gentlemen,” she greets us and Dondi.

Jagger’s eyes widen. He leans towards me. “Is this how she’s been?”

I sharply nod, not able to take my eyes off my wife. “So, you can show up to things on time huh?” I sneer.

Ainslee looks up from the table. “This is part of what I have to do.”

I glare at her and she stares right back at me.

Dondi clears his throat, “Ainslee, you know you didn’t have to be here. We know with everything going on, we could’ve given the information to your husband.”

“Is it because I’m a woman that you don’t want me here?” Ainslee says coldly.

Dondi looks at her. “Ainslee, that’s not how it goes and you know it. That’s not fair,” he says in a fatherly tone. Dondi cares about her and it makes me wonder how close Andres and Dondi are.

Ainslee looks up at him. “I’m sorry, you’re right. I just have a lot on my mind.”

Dondi gives her a sad smile. I open my mouth to say something and Dondi clears his throat, beginning the meetings.

After the business part of the meeting is over, we play poker. I watch Ainslee as she concentrates on her deck. She lifts her glass and one of the staff that serves us brings her another glass of the bourbon she’s drinking. When did she start drinking that? I watch her hard and I know she knows I’m

staring. Jagger elbows me. “You’ll drill a hole in her head.”

“I don’t give a fuck. She better look at me soon, or else.”

“Or else what?” Ainslee finally looks up at me. There is this eerie look in her eyes. A sadness so profound, yet she masks it before I can mention it. “Maybe you and Jagger should fold and go home,” Ainslee says.

I look at Dondi. “So, I have a Founder’s question.”

“Go ahead.”

“Hypothetically speaking, if I dragged another Founder’s member out of here by throwing her over my shoulder, would that be considered treason?”

Dondi shakes his head. “It is treason. This is neutral ground.”

“I see,” I say and look at Ainslee again.

Jagger leans in. “You can always change the locks. Hmm, better yet, have Wyn look over your marriage contract and see if you can get a new wife if your current one is broken or stops working.”

Ainslee reacts so fast, placing a gun on the table. She looks up at Dondi. “Tell Karessa she’s two minutes away from becoming a widow,” she grits out through her teeth.

“Jagger...” Dondi warns.

Jagger snickers. “This is neutral ground, right?”

“I might go pay Wyn a visit and ask just that.” I shrug my shoulders.

Ainslee slowly turns to face me. She smirks. “I’ll shoot the girl, then I’ll shoot Jagger for suggesting it, and finally, I’ll torture you and shoot you.”

Dondi slams his card on the table. “Ainslee, a word.” He stands and heads out the door.

Ainslee glares at me with hurt in her eyes and she follows him out the door.

Five minutes later, Ainslee comes back into the room with bloodshot eyes and I know she’s been crying. I forget everything else. I stand. “Why are you crying?” I ask, then I look at Dondi, “Why is she crying?”

Ainslee comes to the table and grabs her gun, placing it in the small of her back. “I’m alright. Jagger, Oran, I... I apologize for my behavior. If you will please excuse me.”

I follow Ainslee out of the room and as soon as the door slams shut, I grab her wrist, leading her towards the private bathroom. Once we get inside there I don’t bother with the lights, I can see her just fine. I wrap my hand around her throat and lift her up. Ainslee whimpers. “This isn’t neutral ground anymore, sweetie.”

The lust in her eyes is so palpable, I give in. I kiss her hard and Ainslee kisses me back, holding me close like her life depends on it. Neither of us are thinking as we rip at each other’s clothing. I set her down, pulling her pants down once I’ve unbuttoned them. Ainslee frees me from my pants and I lift her up again. I slip inside her, feeling like I’ve been starved of this. Ainslee’s fingers find their way into my hair and she kisses me as I fuck her up against the wall. This isn’t us making love or anything. It’s straight up fucking all the anger out, the hurt, the frustrations. All of it, I fuck out of my

system and make sure to release inside of her as she comes undone as well.

We're intertwined in a way that, no matter what, we're always going to want us. Want this. This can't be the end, it just can't.

AFTER THAT SESSION in the bathroom, Ainslee went back to being her distant, cold self. Something has to give. This is not it. It's not us. I sigh heavily as I look at the menu.

"You okay?" Karessa asks me as I sit with her and Jagger at the restaurant. Ainslee is late, again.

"Hmm?" I look up from the menu. "Yeah, yeah I'm alright. You guys okay?" I ask.

Jagger tilts his head. He stares at me but says nothing.

"So, tell us about your new project, how's that going? Long hours ahead in the office?" Karessa asks.

I know she's trying to have a civil conversation and she's trying to distract me. Before I can answer her, Ainslee finally shows up. "Sorry, guys. Something came up. Did you guys already order?"

"Yeah, we did," Jagger says.

"Oh, okay! Let me just flag the waiter down then." We watch her as she flags the waiter down and puts in her order.

Ainslee finishes with that and turns to me. She gives me a quick peck on the lips and sits back. She doesn't even realize that I didn't kiss her back. "So, Karessa, what's been going on? I haven't caught up with you in a while. How's your sisters and parents doing?"

Karessa smiles. "They're good. My sisters miss you around, and so do I, but we understand. How's everyone holding up on your end?"

Ainslee shrugs. "Things are... okay, I guess. Just worried about dad. Markos woke up and went back to his life, but dad is still in a coma three months later. It's stressful, but I just got word from one of his doctors that he's getting better everyday. It's just up to him to wake up. So... any day now."

Karessa gives her a smile and Jagger looks at her like he wants to hug her. I know he cares about her and he knows how attached she is to her father, even though the way she grew up wasn't ideal.

Ainslee's food arrives and she looks away from everyone. I know she can feel us watching her, and she's completely ignoring it. She slowly eats, or rather, picks at her food. She drinks her water. "Are you guys hot?" she asks.

Ainslee removes her blazer and rolls her shoulders. She fans her face and I take a good look at her. Why is she sweating like this all of a sudden? "Why are you so hot?" I ask.

"Maybe I just need a second, you know? I'm going to go to the bathroom. Excuse me." Ainslee stands up and stumbles.

We all get up from the table but she puts her hand up. "It's just me being clumsy guys." Ainslee

chuckles for what seems to be the first time in awhile. She stands straight and she looks at me, “Oran? Why is the room spinning?” I quickly move towards her, catching her right before she hits the floor.

Fuck.

PREGNANT. **Almost lost the fetus. Fourteen weeks.** That’s all that keeps replaying in my head. How many times do we have to be in the damn hospital because this woman of mine doesn’t fucking pay attention to shit? I don’t want to call her reckless.

The plus side is that nothing is wrong with her heart and our fetus is okay. Ainslee just needs to sleep. She fainted because she’s exhausted and every little thing will wipe her out because she’s pregnant. Sitting here, driving us home is the only reason why I’m trying to remain calm. When we get inside the house, I slam the door shut and Ainslee jumps. I say nothing to her as I walk away. I don’t want to lose my shit, but I’m so close.

Ainslee comes into our bedroom a little while after. “We keep doing this all wrong. I feel like it’s all wrong,” she says softly.

I glare up at her from my position sitting on the bed. “No, we aren’t doing anything wrong, **YOU ARE!** What the fuck, Ainslee? **WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK?** Do you not understand what the hell just happened?”

“I do understand, okay? Why wouldn’t I understand? I’m not incapable of processing information. I’m not an idiot,” she says.

“I didn’t call you an idiot so don’t put words in my mouth. I’m just saying, you’re so fucking gone in the head these days. Like, I really do understand what’s going on with your dad and how you’re technically in charge, but you need to find a fucking balance. Obviously, you have no idea what that’s all about because you show up late to everything. You don’t even make it to a lot of the shit we want to do. Get your priorities in check! Look what just happened to you!”

Ainslee’s brows furrow. “Don’t yell at me Oran, I am **NOT** your child. I am your wife!”

“Oh really? Well act like it!” She takes a step back like I slapped her or something. “Don’t be dramatic.” I scowl.

Ainslee laughs but there’s no joy coming out of it. “Fuck you. You may not think I’m balancing shit, but I am. **YOU ARE** my number one priority and I do everything to make sure no one targets you or does anything to you. Don’t patronize me for doing what I was born to do. I never had a choice and I accept that. Even if I had one, I’d choose to protect you. So, **DON’T.**”

“I don’t need you to protect me, Ainslee. I need you to be here. I don’t need you to choose between anyone because that would be stupid. Even if you were to try and choose, I want you to know something, the fetus that you are carrying isn’t a fucking Bishops,” I say, standing up. I place my hand on my chest. “It’s a Hale and I’m that baby’s father. Don’t fuck with my child, Ainslee,” I warn. “You

put this baby in danger just because you were being ridiculously stupid with the things that you were doing. You put yourself in danger! How do we even see eye to eye with this? You don't even fucking care!"

Ainslee looks at me like I just called her a monster. She shuts her eyes and when she opens them again, her eyes are blank. There's no expression left in them. She doesn't say anything, she walks out, shutting the door behind her. I walk to the door and I want to follow her out but I don't. I just stand there. I hear her steps and I know where she's going, the pantry. I open the door and follow her there but I don't go inside. Instead, I sit outside and I shut my eyes, trying not to lose my mind or composure. What breaks me is the second Ainslee starts to sob. My anger is getting the best of me right now and I don't want to go in there. I want her to understand that she broke the both of us right now. It's not entirely her fault, but right now I'm just trying to process.

"Hey, Karessa," I hear her softly speaking, "sorry to bother you this late but can you come pick me up? Don't tell Jagger why, just tell him I need a drive. I just... I need a friend right now."

I stand, closing myself off to her because once again, she doesn't see that crying in front of me or crying to me would be better than hiding. I love my wife but I don't like her very much right now.

AINSLEE

I stand outside waiting for Karessa in the clothes that I've changed into. Karessa pulls up and I get in the car. She takes one look at me. "Sweats?"

I chuckle. "Yeah. It's one of those times."

"You okay?"

I shrug. "I don't know. I just... Can you drop me off at the hospital?"

"You sure you're okay?" Karessa asks.

"Yeah, I just want to be with my dad, that's all."

"Okay, you know you can talk to me, right? And can I say something?" Karessa asks.

I shrug. "Yeah, sure."

Karessa turns the engine off. She takes my hand in hers. "I'm sorry about what you just went through. I can just imagine the pain that you're in and I know that you've told me about not wanting to fuck up this marriage of yours because you seriously love Oran. I know you do. You and him almost lost something precious. You need to go inside and be with him. Comfort him and let him comfort you."

"He doesn't want me here. You should've seen how disappointed he looked. I don't blame him at all. I know I was being reckless and I wasn't seeing things because I had a one-track mind. You don't understand how much this hurts, Ressa. I just feel like a complete failure. I was just protecting everyone that I care about."

"Ainslee... What do you mean by that? Protecting us how?"

“I can’t say it all but you guys need to know that if you take away the Bishops’ protection in Founder’s, then our enemies will come after you guys. It’s too late for me to pretend like I don’t care about you all. I just have to do what I need to do.”

“You can’t possibly deal with all that yourself, Ainslee. That’s a huge burden. You have to be open with us, we can take care of ourselves too. We’re grown as hell.”

I nod. “I know.”

“You still want to get out of here?” Karessa asks.

I look at the front door. “Yeah... just for a bit.”

Karessa starts up the car and it just feels wrong. I look in the side view mirror and I can’t leave. “Wait...” She stops the car and I look at her. “I think I should go back in.”

“I think so too,” she says. “Call me when you wake up?”

I nod. I get out of the car and sigh, making my way to the front door. I turn the knob and before I can push, I get pulled in with the knob. Oran is standing there on the other side of the door with nothing but sweats on.

“I can’t leave.”

“Please, don’t leave.”

We both say it at the same time.

“It hurts, Oran. It really hurts.”

Oran pulls me into his arms and shuts the door. “I know, Bug. I know. I’m sorry.”

I wrap my arms around his body. “I’m sorry too. I’m really sorry, Oran.”

LAYING on the bed with Oran, I don’t want to let go of him. I feel like if he lets me go, I’ll just float away. I love this man and it hurts me that I hurt him. I don’t want to ever hurt him and I didn’t even know about the baby, but now my mind can’t go anywhere else.

“We can’t ever do what we did today,” Oran says. I let him continue as I tuck my head underneath his chin. “We don’t walk out on each other. I don’t give a fuck what it is. The house is big enough for us to go cool off somewhere here, but we’re not building this family like that.”

I nod. “Okay. I want a good family, Oran, but I’m scared. I’m terrified,” I say.

“Of what?” he says. “Being parents? We’ve got this,” he reassures me.

I say nothing as I stay close to him. There’s nothing more to say. My mind is flooded with so much and I just need to sleep. I shut my eyes, not even thinking about anything else except the fact that I’m going to be a mother now...the one thing that scares me more than anything else in the world.

WHILE THE NEWS of having a baby usually takes some time to get used to, Ainslee has been acting off. It's been two weeks now and I would've thought she would be flaunting her growing belly, but she has refused to.

Ainslee hasn't so much as stepped a foot outside to get some fresh air. At first, she couldn't stay home and now she won't leave. After work, I come home and I find her sitting out on the patio, staring at the beach. "Ains?" I call her name when I stand at the threshold.

She looks up at me. "Hey, you home already?" I see the bags under her eyes, the worry in their reflection. There's something going on there and if I have to drag her ass to a therapist, I will. I haven't gotten my wife back. If anything, I think I've lost her even more. Ainslee stands and comes over to me. I lean low and she plants a chaste kiss on my lips.

"Are you hungry? I can make you something quick to eat since my day sort of passed me by. Sorry babe." Ainslee busies herself in the kitchen.

I walk around and grab her wrist. She stops what she's doing. She turns to face me and I take her in. "Look at me, Ainslee. What is it? Talk to me."

Ainslee avoids eye contact. "It's nothing. I'm okay."

She tugs on her shirt pulling it lower. I take her in, lately all she's been wearing is loose clothing and this style does not fit my wife at all. I've been noticing that I rub her belly but she doesn't do that. "Look at me, please," I say harshly, yet quietly.

Ainslee slowly looks up at me. There it is. She can't hide the worry, the sadness, or the pain she's suffering from. "I'm looking."

I shake my head. "No, no you're not. Talk to me, Ains. Come on, Bug?" I plead with her and the nickname makes her crack.

"I'm scared, Oran. Terrified that I'm going to be a bad mother," she whispers. "How can I be any better when that woman was all that I had? How do I know her thoughts and the way things worked with her are not embedded in my mind? I don't want to ever hurt anyone. I don't want to hurt my child." Tears drop out of her eyes. "I'm so scared, Oran. I want to love this baby but I don't know if I can. What am I going to do?"

I release a deep breath of relief. I move in closer and cup Ainslee's cheeks. "Babe, you will be a great mother. You will love our children because, uh, we're having more than one, but honey, come on, you're such a great person, how can you not be a great mom? There are so many qualities you possess that I've never seen that woman who called herself your mother have. You're nothing like her. You're more like your father. Sounds weird to say but he loves you, Ainslee. He chose his child over his wife and believed her without hesitation. Do you know how many parents choose the other over their kids? That man, despite being as emotionless as he is, raised a daughter who loves life; when you smile, your entire face radiates, it glows. You are a selfless woman and I know that our daughter will have a kickass mom to model after. So no, don't doubt yourself, just don't, and if ever you do, you come to me and I'll remind you of how great of a mother you are."

Ainslee's hands wrap around my wrists. "You mean that?" she asks.

I lean in and place my forehead on hers. I shut my eyes. "I mean every word."

"I love you," Ainslee says to me.

"I love you," I respond.

"Why do you think it'll be a girl? You said daughter," Ainslee asks.

"Because knowing you, you'll give me a daughter so I can be driven crazy with the two of you," I tease her.

Ainslee laughs. "If it's a girl, I want to name her Aurora."

I shake my head. "Her middle name cannot be Jagger. We have to incorporate it in the first name. We had a bet back in middle school, don't ask."

Ainslee snickers. "Seriously?" She sighs. "Okay, how about Aurora-Jagger?"

I think about it. "Aurora-Jagger Hale. Rory Hale," I repeat.

Ainslee kisses me quickly, then lets go. "What if it's a boy?"

"It's a girl," I say, opening my eyes to look at her. She's smiling at me.

Ainslee rolls her eyes and I lift her up, placing her on the counter. I sit on the stool and pull the baggy shirt up. I rub her small belly that's much more apparent now than it was a couple weeks ago. I lean in and I kiss her protruding belly. "Hi Rory, it's dad. I'm sorry in advance at how much your mom and I are going to love you. We're going to love you so damned much. You won't be like us, we'll make sure to give you us both. We promise," I say, leaning in again.

"We promise, A.J.," Ainslee says as her hand joins one of mine on her belly and the other goes in my hair.

"Who the fuck is A.J.?" I ask.

"Aurora-Jagger, duh," Ainslee states.

"My daughter will not be called A.J.," I say.

Ainslee laughs. "We'll see about that, Mr. Hale."

"We really will."

I CAN HARDLY SIT RIGHT as I wait for Mikonos to come over. He's been out of town for the week. Mikonos walks through the front door and I run over to him. I pull him in for a hug. I can tell he's surprised by his silence.

"Uh... you okay?" he asks. I know he's been worried about me but he doesn't want to make me crack.

I don't let him go but I do look up at him. I smile wide and nod. "I'm more than okay. I missed you," I say to him.

Mikonos smiles wide. "I missed you too. I can tell you want to tell me something, so go ahead."

"I want to let you go for this, but at the same time, I don't want to. So, I know that typically there's the whole godmother and godfather shit, but I don't want that. Oran and I have decided to do it differently, we want our A.J. to have the chance to meet her two godfathers. Will you be there for her?" I ask him.

There's one secret that no one besides me knows about Mikonos. He loves kids. Mikonos cups my face in his hands. "You want me...to be the baby's godfather? Me?" he asks.

I nod. "You would love this baby as if it were your own, just like how you loved me as if I were your blood. You're the first man that isn't blood who loved me and accepted me for me. Orion, it would mean the world to me if you could be in my child's life for the rest of our lives. What do you say?"

Mikonos leans in and plants a kiss on my forehead. I shut my eyes. "You are more than blood, Ains. It's not past tense when it comes to me loving you, okay? You know I've got you. Because this baby is from you, I'll love her just as much or I can try to. Wait... how do you know it's a girl?"

"Oran swears it is." I roll my eyes. "Her name will be Aurora-Jagger Hale."

Mikonos shuts his eyes and I know what it is. I didn't tell Oran whose name that was and for a good reason. I wanted Mikonos to tell him. "After my mama?" Mikonos asks me.

I nod, trying not to tear up. Fucking hormones. "Yeah and I didn't tell Oran where the name came from. I want it to be you when you're ready."

"*Poulaki mou...*" Mikonos calls me a nickname I haven't heard since the first time he met me. *His little bird*. "For you, I'll tell him. I like him for you. He's a little rough around the edges, but I don't want to kill him everyday. I'll still curse him out on a daily basis because he's earned it though." Mikonos smirks.

I hug him tight. "Thank you. I love you," I say to him.

"I love you too, *poulaki mou*."

"One more thing... the head of the family. I'm not made for it, Ry, you are."

He pulls me out of the hug. "What? It's your birthright," he says to me.

I smile at him, shaking my head. "It may be my birthright, but Ry, you were born to lead. This

family, our papa, he needs you. I don't have the balance, Orion. I get too lost. I don't want to lose my husband and child in the process. I can't be papa. I just can't. But you, you're stronger than us both. You don't bow to the world, the world bows to you. It moves in your direction, not the other way around. Papa has raised you for this. Everything he did, he knows. Ry, he knows."

Mikonos stays silent then and I can see the little boy that I first met. The one that I haven't seen in years. "I can't do this without you, Ains. Not like this."

"Orion Krios Moralis." Mikonos glares at me for the use of his middle name. "You know what that middle name means, who it came from. A Titan. Your mother seemed to know what to name you. This is your path, it's in your name. You're a ruler and a strong-ass pillar for this entire family. I know you've got this. I know you have balance and I know that this isn't my birthright, it's yours. I'll be there, every step of the way. I may not be the Don, but I'll be your right hand woman. Your Consigliere. Except this one shoots first and asks questions later. I've got you," I say.

"Be my *comare* and I'll do it," Mikonos asks me.

He wants me to be, for lack of a better word, the godmother or the female boss, right by his side. I smile at him. "You don't know what you're asking but hell yeah, soulmate."

"Fuck," Mikonos says and this one means he's agreeing. He pulls me to him in a tight hug. "My soulmate," Mikonos repeats.

The thing is, I know my husband should be my soulmate, but I don't think that's what will ever happen for either Mikonos or me. Soulmates doesn't always mean we have to have erotic love or anything, it just means that I'd go to great lengths for him. He's right, we don't need to be blood, he is more than blood to me. I couldn't have a world without him and I'm glad my husband understands that. That's all I need. Finding people to love is easy, but finding your soulmate is a dime a dozen.

WHEN I GET HOME from work, the music is playing loudly in the house. Ainslee is in the kitchen, humming and dancing to Maroon 5's Moves Like Jagger and I quickly pull my phone out, video-calling Jagger. The second he picks up, I flip the camera to her and the amusement is clear on his face as she dances in her white velvety short-shorts and a t-shirt while cooking. I forgot that my girl cannot sing. Lord, she sounds like she'd put a fucking screeching walrus to shame. I try not to laugh but it's so hard. I signal Jagger that I'm hanging up. I record her as she continues. She does this little shimmy thing, shaking her ass, and she turns to the side, walking to the pantry.

Once she comes back out, she's rubbing her belly. She stops and looks right at me. She glares at me, narrowing her eyes. "Babe," she says.

"Yeeeeeesss?" I answer, knowing I sound guilty as hell.

"Are you recording me? Stop doing that," she whines.

I snicker. "But it's so much fun. I see why you do it." Ainslee starts to walk towards me and I slip right by her. "Slow as fuck," I taunt her.

"Oran...Delete it," she states.

I laugh. "Is that my word you're stealing now? I'm going to take a page out of your book." I take a breath as the island separates us. "No."

Ainslee's determined face is so apparent and when she goes left, I go right. We continue this chase for a bit and then I can tell she gets breathless. "Baaaaaabe!" she cries out.

I laugh even harder. "See how frustrating it is when someone doesn't do what you ask? You snooze, you lose, baby." I shrug.

Or—."

"Your food's burning," I cut her off.

Ainslee looks at whatever she was doing and runs over to the stove. "Fuck! My empanadas!" She cries real tears.

My eyes widen and I freeze on the spot. "What did I do? Baby..."

"It's not you!" She continues to cry.

"Uhh..." then it clicks. Her hormones. I don't know why, but I laugh so hard. "I'm sorry for

laughing,” I offer after I’ve calmed.

She glares at me but offers a small smile. She wipes her tears. I come around to her and hug her. “Too tight,” she complains.

“Shut up and look after your food, Tinker Bell.”

I let Ainslee go and she looks at me. “Tinker Bell?”

I nod. “Small, little-ass fairy. You remind me of her when she gets upset.”

“Whatever.” Ainslee rolls her eyes, trying to hide her smile. “My brothers are going to be here soon and these are their favorites, well, dad’s favorite but, you know...”

I kiss her head and place my chin on top of it. “Are they ruined?” I ask.

Ainslee snickers. “No. They’re good.”

“Great. I missed you today,” I confess. “Shit, I’ve missed you for months now.”

Ainslee moves her head back and kisses my chin. “I missed you even more. It’ll never happen again. How was your day?” she asks me.

“Good. How was yours?” I ask her.

“It was okay. I filmed a video today.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I wanted to announce that I was back and that I had a great surprise,” Ainslee answers.

“You uploaded it yet?” I ask.

“No, not yet. Can you watch it for me and tell me if you like it?” she asks me.

I’m honored that she would ask me to do so. “I’ll do you one better, how about you film it again and this time, we announce it together?”

Ainslee halfway turns to look at me. “You’d do that with me?”

I nod. “I’d do it for you.”

Ainslee smiles as she goes back to what she’s doing. I reach out for an empanada that’s already done and Ainslee swats my hand. I swat her ass cheek as payback and grab an empanada anyway.

“I’m going to freshen up. Be right back.”

AINSLEE

When the doorbell rings, I skip over and open it. My brothers are standing there in their typical all-black attires. I smile hard because I know Markos is the second in command for Mikonos. “You guys...” I say and pull them into a hug.

“Hi, little one,” Markos says and kisses the top of my head. “Thank you for inviting us over.”

I snicker and get out of his hold. “Shut up,” I say.

Mikonos and Markos pass the foyer and meet Oran in the kitchen. “What’s up guys?” Oran greets them.

“Hi, I’m Orion Moralis, it’s nice to finally meet the man who our little bird chose over ‘the life’.

Thank you.”

“She what?” Oran whispers. Oran looks at me.

“I know you didn’t ask me and I know you would have supported me in anything, but I wanted to do this. I wanted to choose you and Rory.” Oran is speechless and I can tell he wants to say something, but I don’t think he can put it into words right now. I smile at him and take his hand, kissing the back of it. “When you’re ready, we’ll talk.”

Oran clears his throat. He nods.

Markos smirks, distracting Oran. “And I’m Phoenix Moralis, her second older brother. It’s nice to finally have a brother-in-law with common sense.”

Oran stares at them. “Are you guys going by your middle names? Or?”

I kiss his hand again. “No, baby. They’re finally letting you in. They trust you and you’re our family now, so you should know their real identities. Meet Orion and Phoenix.”

“Wow...” Oran says. He doesn’t speak for a second and then he says it again, “Wow.”

AFTER DINNER, Markos says he has something to show us that he found while getting rid of my mom’s things. “I think this is worth keeping.” He smiles. “I was able to get it uploaded to the cloud.”

He casts it on the smart TV and it starts to play. I smile instantly when I spot myself in a hot pink suit with a tie too big for me.

“Ains... question time!” I hear ten-year-old Mikonos say. He still had an accent back then.

“Okay, shoot! What’s the question?” I say with the halo of curls all over my face.

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

“I want to be like papa.”

“You can’t do that! That’s a boy’s job!” ten-year-old Markos yells out and comes in the frame.

I fold my arms and pout. “Can too! Watch!”

I must’ve been 7 at the time. I remember that outfit but not this conversation. “What about when you gotta marry somebody?”

I scrunch up my face. “I don’t gotta married nobody.”

“Marry, not married,” Mikonos corrects me.

“I don’t care!” I give him a death glare.

“Who do you think Papa is going to pick for you?” Mikonos asks.

“I get to pick ‘cause I’m gonna be in charge,” I say with confidence.

Markos snickers. “She’s gonna pick Oran Hale,” he says it mockingly.

My little face turns red. Am I blushing? “No, I’m not!” I yell.

“You like Oran Hale?” Mikonos asks.

I breathe hard, trying not to cry. “No,” I whisper.

“She does! I saw her practicing in the mirror!” Markos yells loudly.

I shove him and we start fighting. “Take it back!” I yell at him as I pull his hair.

He subdues me and then he gets on top, holding me down. “I’ll let you go when you tell us the truth.”

Little me is frustrated and I break in less than a minute. “Fine. It’s true!”

“Uh...course it is!” Markos says.

Mikonos leaves the camera on the floor and you see Mikonos kick Markos off me. “Don’t be mean. She can like him.”

“Eww! He’s old!” Markos says.

“He’s fourteen! I can grow up and married him!” I scream out and then we hear my mother calling for me. The fear in my young eyes is so palpable, it almost ruins the moment, but then my eyes soften as I lay on the floor. “I’m gonna married Oran Hale when I’m older,” I say, clearly in love with the Founder’s kids grump.

Oran has a huge smile on his face when I look at him. “I knew you targeted me for a reason.”

I kick my foot out and kick his thigh. “Hush.”

Oran laughs and attacks me with a kiss. I hear a disgusted sound from Markos. Mikonos announces he’s going to make a drink. Oran pulls away. “Look at you always fighting to married me,” he teases.

“Shut up.” I smile. “And married you, I did.” I wrap my arms around his neck and I kiss him hard.

“I didn’t come here for this!” I hear Markos yell from the kitchen. I laugh, not breaking the kiss.

ANDRES

THE RHYTHM and beginning of Foreigner's I Want to Know What Love Is, begins playing and it makes me angry, who the hell is playing this damned song...

It transports me to another time in my life. A time when I let everything go. Senior Prom, I walked in alone and didn't care that I was no longer with Michelle. I didn't care anymore. I let her go sophomore year when my father passed and I became the Don of the Bishops family. Mama doesn't like who I've become, but fuck it. When I walk in, the kids look at me, but they don't dare comment on the fact that I have men walking in behind me. Some are a bit older and others are my age. I don't need some old-ass man trying to give me advice when my father has trained me since the day that I was born for this. I look over at Dondi and some girl that I don't recognize. Dondi tips me his red cup that's probably filled with the spiked punch. I'm going to miss the fucker. I'm not going anywhere, but I know that my time to be a kid is done. I turn my gaze on Elmer, he and I were friends since we learned how to walk, but something snapped in the guy. It wasn't anything good and after papa died, he acted like me being invited to the head of the family table made me better than him. I've never acted better than anyone but now, fuck it, I don't care. He thinks I'm trying to take the girl he pined over, Natasha, but I'm not trying to take someone who wants me. Natasha has wanted me since the day she met me and that was back in middle school.

Everyone gets quiet as they watch me and I look at Michelle, who is now with Arthur. Her and I could've made it work, but we both know how that would've ended. I sigh as I roll my eyes at everyone. I walk over to the table that no one but Karter is sitting at. She looks all alone and I'll give her something she's never had; the opportunity to talk to her crush. I sit down and Karter widens her eyes. I know she thinks I never saw the sad puppy dog eyes when I ended up with the girl that used to bully her, Michelle. My boys sit at the empty seats and everything seems to go back to normal except Karter. She stares at me, wide-eyed. She looks cute. Her purple eyeshadow that matches her dress goes well with her darker toffee skin tone and it brought out her light brown eyes. She got her hair straightened instead of its normal puff. It looks cute. "You clean up nice, Karter with a K," I tease her.

She pushes her glasses back. "Th- thank you, Andy." She smiles.

She's the only one I allow to call me Andy, no one else. "Want a drink?" I ask her.

She nods. I don't bother getting up as I pull the silver flask out of the inside of my suit jacket. Karter takes it and chugs. I laugh as I take some too. I guess I can stay a bit.

KARTER and I are tipsy as shit and somehow, her freaky side has shown up. Karter pulls me into the janitor's closet. She's not too short, so it's easy for my 6'2" self to grab her and kiss her. One thing leads to another and I slip inside of her, fucking her up against the wall like nothing else matters to that stupid-ass song I Want to Know What Love Is in the background. Karter throws her head back as I lose myself in this moment, not even caring that we didn't use a condom. It doesn't matter. Fuck. Her nails scratching me all over, leaving me wanting more and, fuck, I want more. More until she fucking disappears.

After we're done, I help Karter clean up and we laugh. We sit back on the dirty floor and just talk.

"I never thought I'd have sex with Andres Bishops." She laughs hard.

I laugh with her. "Never thought Karter Greene would let me take her virginity in the janitor's closet."

She laughs, then snorts. "You've made prom the best night of my life, Andy. Thank you."

"Of course."

She reaches over, taking my hand in hers. "One day Andy, you are going to find someone who sees beyond all this like I did. Someone who loves you for you and makes you remember the kid that you lost on the way."

I lift her hand and kiss it. "Thank you, Karter with a K. It's not for me, but hey, I can at least love my kid when I have one."

Karter smiles and lays her head on my shoulder. "Yeah... you want a boy or a girl?"

"I want a little girl so that I could love her and teach her that even if it's a man's world, she can conquer it all."

Karter laughs. "Only Andy. Hmm name her Ainslee, like with an A."

"Will do. And if ever you have a boy, name him Esra with an S. I like that name."

"Got it." We laugh. "If we have the opposite, then switch?" she asks.

"Yep!" I kiss the top of her head. I ended up spending more time with her; kissing, talking, and fucking.

Karter Greene moved to Fairhope for school and married a guy named David Fairhope. It was a whirlwind love for them. Two years later, Karter Greene died in a car accident, but her husband and a baby, a daughter named Esra Fairhope, survived. I set up a trust fund in her name and gave her more money than she could ever imagine. Her dad couldn't touch it, even if he is a damned

Fairhope.

“Love has finally found you, Andres Bishops...” I hear Karter saying. “Wake up, Andy...”

My eyes snap open. Why am I thinking about her and why the hell did I wake up on her command? I hear machines beeping and see the white ceiling. Am I in the hospital? “Why the hell am I here?” I force myself to talk. My voice is hoarse and my throat hurts like hell.

“Mr. Bishops? Are you awake?” A dark toffee-toned doctor stands over me. The color of her scrubs burn my eyes so fucking pink under her white lab. “I’m Dr. Err... probably shouldn’t tell you my name cause I’m not supposed to be in here, so let me just go get your doctor.” Her big brown eyes look terrified. She looks young. The hell, is she playing dress up in here? Before she turns, I see her name on her name tag, Remington -Remy- Monroe. She runs out before I can say a word.

Does she know who I am? What the fuck was she doing in my damn room and what am I doing here?

AINSLEE

Oran grumbles again as we watch Titanic. “Jack is a fucking idiot,” he says.

I snicker. “Yeah? Tell me how?” I say as I dip my Oreo in peanut butter.

Oran’s thumb softly glides back and forth over my lower legs. “Well, okay, so he wins a fucking ticket to get on this damn ship, right?”

“Right...”

“So the kid wants adventure, that’s fine, but after that, why the fuck would he fall for Rose, then at the end give it all up like that?” he asks, scratching the light scruff.

I snicker. “Love?” I say.

Oran scoffs. “More like...he’s never gotten pussy before. Kid probably thought it was rib-eye steak pussy. You know, the marinated kind that just tastes so good once it’s cooked.”

“Are you hungry? ‘Cause that’s all I hear coming out of your mouth.”

Oran shrugs. “Maybe. Should we order something? What do you want?”

“Artichoke and pineapple pizza.”

“That is a monstrosity. Why would you murder pizza like that?” Oran asks as he types away on his phone.

“You can get your half differently,” I suggest.

Oran smirks, not looking up. “My half? Baby, I’m ordering a whole pizza for myself.”

“Get me a small pizza then. And a medium for you?” I ask.

“No. I’m getting an X-tra large. Meat special,” Oran says and I can tell he already ordered from his smile.

I switch the show to The Witcher. I mean I’ve seen it, but my love for Henry Cavill runs deep. Not even five minutes in, Oran grumbles, “You’re drooling.”

“No, I'm not,” I laugh. “It's just... I used to play the games with Mikos and now, this is just amazing.”

“I'm confused,” he says.

“Three timelines dude, keep up. Geralt's, Yennifer's, and Ciri's.”

“Whatever. This dude is going to get the pizza.” When Oran comes back with the pizza, I stand up and snatch my box. I sniff the box, almost cumming from the smell alone. “So, all I have to do is give you pizza to watch you cum in your shorts?” Oran teases.

I laugh and I do a dance. “This is how I dance for pizza, baby... do it with me, Rory.” I place a hand over my growing belly and rub it. “Mommy's got some pizza, mommy's got some pizza. Daddy's looking horny, but he's gonna end up with blue balls,” I sing.

Oran chuckles and slaps my ass hard. “Mommy better act right before she gets spanked tonight,” he teases.

I groan. “Harder than the last time?”

Oran gives me a look and licks his lips. He sits back on the couch, placing the pizza boxes on the coffee table. “Come, tell me more about this obsession of yours with this English motherfucker. He's ugly, by the way.”

I laugh hard as I sit. “You favor him, by the way.”

“Are you calling me ugly?” Oran teases.

“Nope. You said that all by yourself, Mr. Hale.”

“Whatever, asshole.”

I laugh hard. After, we fall into a comfortable silence, watching the Witcher with the typical questions from Oran. I'm determined to binge-watch like a crazy person but after the third episode, my phone rings. It's Mikonos. I pick up. “Hey.”

“Hey, papa is awake. He's conscious,” Mikonos says and I sit up.

I take a deep breath. “We're on our way.” I hang up. I look at Oran with tears in my eyes.

“What is it, baby?” Oran asks me.

I blink. “It's dad. He's awake,” I cry out. “My dad is awake.”

Oran scoots closer and pulls me into his arms. He kisses the side of my head. “Let's go, tinker Bell. Let's go see your dad.”

I STOP RIGHT OUTSIDE of my dad's hospital room. Oran slips his hand into mine. “It's okay, baby, come on, I'll be here the entire time,” he says.

I look up at him. “Okay. Thank you, babe.”

Oran leans down and kisses me quickly. I open the hospital room and my dad is sitting up with Mikonos and Markos by his side. My dad looks at me, taking me in. He smiles wide, a smile I haven't

seen in forever. I smile back at him. It reminds me of one of the few times he came home and I ran up to him, hugging him. He caught me in his arms and I felt his love. I should've never doubted his love. Never should've.

"You don't want to hug your dear old dad?" my dad says.

I smile wide and walk over to him. I hug my dad tight and he hugs me back. "I missed you, dad. Please don't ever scare me like this again, Papi. I love you. I really love you with all my heart." I feel so free saying it.

"I love you too, little lady, and I see you have some news to tell me," he says.

"I'm pregnant?"

My dad laughs. "I can see that. Congratulations. I'm happy to be a grandfather. I've been begging these two *pendejos* to give me some grandkids."

I laugh. "Guess I'm the first."

"You are, baby, and I'm so proud of you. If I've never said it before, I'm saying it now."

I pull out of the hug and I look at my dad, "Even though I didn't become the right person for the job when you were unavailable?" I say.

"Darling, I don't care about none of that, you did the right thing. That is what I raised you to see. To see what you can and can't do. You knew who needed to do what and you appointed the right man for the job." He caresses my face. "You are my greatest pride, joy, and accomplishment. There's nothing in this world that you could do that would make me think less of you."

"Dad..." I hug him tight. "I love you."

"I love you too."

After my dad lets me go, he looks at Oran. Oran stretches his hand out and my dad shakes his hand then pulls him close, giving him a hug. "This is me welcoming you to our family. I won't hug you again, but it's the way in."

Oran hugs him back. I give them a moment. "Guys, I'm going to get some tea, you need anything?" I ask them. "Daddy?"

"Yes?" Both Oran and my dad answer.

I turn to look at Oran like he's out of his fucking mind. My dad looks at Oran and all Oran does is shrug his shoulders. I blink. "Really?" I ask.

"I'll have a coffee, black," Oran says and sits down like he didn't just answer to daddy. This guy.

IT'S BEEN a crazy month since my father-in-law woke up and now, it's odd, but seeing Andres more makes me understand what a father is like. It's a weird thing to experience, but I appreciate it. Andres hasn't gone back to being the Don yet, so he spends time with Ainslee, both of us, and now, just with me. He took me fishing, which I thought would be boring as shit but sitting back, talking, and just being able to relish in the things life has given me, it made me feel content. Andres trusts me enough to tell me some things that a Don truly has to do.

Today, my father-in-law has taken me out to the gun range and now we're sitting in an empty coffee shop. It's fully renovated and it looks so well put together, but I don't see a single customer. "Heard you and my daughter went through a rough moment?"

I nod. "Yeah, but we're doing okay now. I'm sorry she gave up being the Don."

Andres smiles, shaking his head. "No, don't be. She needed to choose. Some of us have to choose. Ainslee is like me in so many ways. I don't have balance, I never have, and that's why I went deep into the life. I became a Don at sixteen."

My eyes widen. That's a young age to be responsible for keeping people safe in this country.

Andres continues, "Life is full of opportunities that you can take if only you're willing to jump, but sometimes you have to duck. I taught my daughter to jump at opportunities but as you know, her mother taught her to hide. She's the sweetest person I've ever known because through everything, she still loves me and now, she loves you. Now you two are going to have a baby."

I nod. The talk of being a father doesn't scare me per se, but it's what comes with it. "How did you know you'd be a good father?" I ask.

"I didn't. No father ever knows, we just do. Trust me, you won't be perfect and you won't ever think you're perfect, but your child will always see you as that, especially if you are there for them." Andres takes a sip of his coffee and he looks at me. "Don't be scared, because you won't be like Elmer. There was once good in him. You know, we were friends from childhood until high school. Your grandfather shaped him into the man that you saw. He wasn't always so obsessed with things being his, but like I told you, we have choices and sometimes we choose to fuck up."

"Wow, I always thought he was born a fuck-up," I say.

Andres chuckles. “He might as well have been born one. He was fucked from birth, but it doesn’t mean he couldn’t have stopped and changed once he had you in his life. You deserved more and better.”

“Thank you.” I don’t know what to even say. No one has ever said that to me, that I deserved a better father.

We sit in silence and then Andres breaks that. “So, what do you think of the real estate around this establishment? Like this entire street?”

“Including this coffee shop?”

“Yeah.”

“I think you’d get your money tripled if you put a store or something near the coffee shop.”

Andres nods. “Mmm, okay, well, I’m glad you like it. It’s my gift to you to congratulate you on being a father. I know you have your company and everything, but sometimes, having something outside of the Founder’s name and Island, gives your child, or children, the chance to know they don’t have to limit themselves to one place in life. They can soar.”

“Thank you, I appreciate this.” I scratch my light scruff. Ainslee likes it, so I keep it. “Can I call you dad? Is that too weird?”

Andres shakes his head and smiles wide. “You can call me dad, son. I gain another son, so for me, it’s perfect. I’ll do my best by you too.”

I smile at that. Andres stands and so do I. He pulls me into a hug. One that the little twelve-year-old boy who was lost and confused when he first stepped foot here with his mom never got. He deserved a better father, a better life. Not just for him, but for his mom too.

“It’s been a long time coming with this hug,” I say and Andres chuckles.

“You’re right. Now, come on, let’s bring you back to your wife, she’s texted me about twenty times wondering when I’ll bring you back. She thinks I shot you and buried you already. No faith in me whatsoever.”

I laugh, shaking my head. “My wife loves me a lot. Sometimes, I think if I ever go on a trip, she’s going to hide herself in my suitcase.”

Andres shakes his head, trying not to laugh. “She’s small enough to fit too. That daughter of mine is special.”

“Yes, sir.”

We walk out of the coffee shop and head back to the car. It’s odd that I’m with Andres Bishops, my father-in-law, and I get it now. I feel untouchable. Mikonos is hanging back by the Escalade. “When did you get here and aren’t you supposed to be busy?” I ask him.

“Your wife doesn’t respect my authority, obviously. She wanted me to tell you that the baby kicked.” He rolls his eyes. “I’ve got better shit to do.”

I laugh. “Well guys, that’s my cue. I gotta go see about my baby.”

I smile as I head off towards my car. Shit, I’m going to need a different car than my Maserati.

LAST CHAPTER

A FEW MONTHS LATER

AINSLEE

ORAN'S CHILD needs to come out of me. We refused to see the results until the baby is born, then we'll do a baby shower then too. Karessa's mom tells me that if I want this baby out, I need to do more walking and some light exercise. I decided to make it a YouTube video since Oran encouraged me to share some personal things with my viewers. The first time I did it, I shared my story of getting physically abused by my mother and I even told others who shared their stories that someone will always be there to listen. They are not alone. We are not alone.

I sigh as I stand in the living room with some weird-ass video making me do hip-thrusts. I look at my camera, pouting. "Guys, this is weird, isn't it?" I laugh as the music changes and I decide to get into it. I know Oran is going to give me the side-eye for my choice of a sports bra and gym shorts but honestly, I couldn't bother with anything else. My hair has grown out again and I'm debating cutting it again. Willow Smith's song Wait a Minute comes on and I smile. "See, now this song, I can do the hip thrusts to."

I place my hands on my waist, moving back and forth first, then in circular motion. Oran decides to walk back in the house from walking our husky, Bumblebee, that I got him last month. She's still a baby. "What the hell are you doing?" he asks, trying to stifle a laugh.

I turn to face him, still doing the moves. "I was told this will get your baby out of me."

Oran loses it when I double up on the thrusts. He throws his head back, laughing hard. I love that I can make him laugh. He's so beautiful when he does. It's like he's free from all worries and that's how I want him to be.

"I don't appreciate being laughed at, sir. You think you can do better?"

"Worst hip thrusts ever," he comments. He walks down the hall a little, then he faces me knowing the camera can't capture this. He places his hands on his waist and copies what I was doing. He even adds a bit of shoulders and then wiggles his eyebrows at me. I laugh so hard that I feel the moment I

pee on myself. My eyes widen as I stop and look down, but it's not pee... Holy shit.

“Babeeee!” I say, not sure why it comes out as a panic when I’m excited.

“Is this like a false alarm or...” Oran says.

I glare at him as the pain shoots through me. Shit, contractions. “It’s time,” I announce and giggle after the contraction goes away. “Finally! Yes! Yes!” I exclaim as I walk towards the room to change.

“I guess we don’t even need Bee because you’ll pee all over the floors,” he teases.

“I swear...if I wasn’t having your baby right now...” I don’t even bother finishing my sentence. I kiss my teeth and smile at him. I go to the room and change.

AFTER FOUR HOURS, our baby girl came into the world. Aurora-Jagger Hale. She cried for everyone in the hospital to hear her and the second they put her in Oran’s arms he was in love. I held her for a bit but I was tired. Apparently, I overexerted myself too much.

When I come to, Oran is quietly talking to everyone while they wait for me to wake up. “Hi guys.” I wave.

Karessa is the first one by my side. “Ainslee!” She hugs me. “She’s so beautiful. Rory is gorgeous.”

“It’s Mick, actually,” Jagger interrupts.

“Wait, what?” I say, trying to understand.

“Like Mick Jagger? Did they drop you on the head in there?” he jokes.

I smirk. “You did that all on your own, jackass.”

“You drop a baby one time...” he says.

I chuckle. I look at my dad as he coos over the baby that I’m sure Oran has held hostage in his arms. I shake my head but can’t help the smile on my face. My dad winks at me. Markos wiggles his brows and when I look at Mikonos, he tells me with no words that he’ll love his goddaughter with his life. I smile at him and he smiles back. He looks at Aurora-Jagger lovingly and finally I look at the man of my dreams. He’s looking at me with such adoration and admiration in his eyes. He walks over to me with the baby in his arms. “You ready to meet her again?”

I nod, sitting up a little bit. Oran slowly hands me my daughter. I look at her. She’s swaddled tightly like a little burrito. She has her eyes shut, sleeping peacefully. I can’t help but know that I will do my best for her. Anything I can give her, I will. “Babe, look at our precious little bald baby,” I say to Oran.

He lightly laughs. He sits on the bed near my legs. “Mom always told me I was born without a single hair on my head, but she’ll grow into that baldness. Cute little self. She looks like you, you know?”

“Yeah?” I say, looking up at him.

He nods. “She has your big-ass Dumbo ears.”

Everyone in the room laughs along with me. I roll my eyes. “You’re annoying.” When I look down, Aurora-Jagger opens her eyes. I’m in love. She has our gray eye color with her own little flecks of brownish-green. She looks like Oran. Spitting image and I don’t even hate it. I love her even more. “I love you, Rory. I love you so much.”

Aurora-Jagger gives me a smile with her little reddened face and she shuts her eyes again, going back to sleep. Oran scoots closer and places his forehead on mine. “We’re parents, Ains... can you believe it?”

I shake my head “No, I can’t, but I love it. I love her and I love you so much, Oran. Thank you.”

“For what?” he whispers.

“For loving me enough to care for me. You don’t know how much you mean to me,” I say.

Oran smiles. “But I do, and that’s why you mean even more to me. I love you, Ainslee Hale.”

“I love you even more, Oran Hale. My pawn.” I wink at him. Oran smirks as he pulls me for a kiss. A tender one. One that reminds me of me walking into his office the first time, checking for our chemistry. He’ll always have me.

EPILOGUE

ORAN

“ONLY A HALE WOULD BE HALF an hour late,” Xerxes, Jagger’s son, says.

“She gets it from her mother, don’t look at me,” I say to him.

“I heard that!” Ainslee yells as she fixes something in the kitchen.

“I’m ready! I’m coming down the hall. Don’t over exaggerate!” Rory yells out. We wait for her in the living room and Ainslee gets her camera ready.

As my daughter comes down the hall, I think about when she was no more than five or six years old and she was scared of her own shadow.

I heard the little pitter-patter of feet enter my room. Ainslee isn’t here because she signed up for the twins, Andres, who we call Andy or Papi sometimes, and Bethany’s—Annie—’s camping trip. Two days without my wife is enough and if she’s not back early morning, I’m going to have to punish her.

“Daddy...Daddy,” Rory whispers. “You sleeping?” I pretend to so she can go back to sleep, but Rory climbs into my bed and I know she’s looking at me.

I open one eye, turning my head to look at her. She’s staring at me and I open my other eye. “Kid...You have school in the morning. What’s wrong?”

“There’s a big monster in there.” she whispers. She shakes her head and I can see she’s about to cry. She looks like Ainslee when she does that. Her curly, light brown hair is all over the place and I know Ainslee is going to kill me in the morning for not properly braiding it down.

“I’ll protect you.” I turn my body this time to face her and she scoots close into my arms.

“You promise to always protect me, daddy?”

“With everything I have, princess. Now sleep. We have an early morning tomorrow.” I kiss the top of her head and she snuggles into my arms because for her, they’ll never close.

“They grow up so fast, don’t they, big guy?” Andy says.

I side-eye him. “Don’t you have homework, Papi?”

He sips his little canned drink. “I did it already. Can I go hang out with the boys tonight, dad? Please?”

“By boys, you mean you’re going to a fucking party. I’m not stupid. I was once sixteen. Take your

twin, Annie.”

Andy grumbles, looking like a mixture of Ainslee and I. His eyes are less gray and browner, but it’s still there. He runs his hand through his shoulder length hair, looking like a typical jock. “Fine!” Andy is getting close to my height, two inches until 6’4 and towering over his sisters.

“If you take any of my classics, I’ll knock your little ass out. Stay away from my cars and your mama’s push gifts. All her cars are off limits. Also, no drinking and driving. Don’t play with me.”

“He only wants to go to the party because Karter is going to be there,” Rory says. Why am I not surprised that Andy would be interested in Mikonos’ daughter? But good luck to him because Mikonos is going to put him through hell before he lets him talk to her. I shake my head, finding it amusing. Yes, he’s my son, but it’s hilarious.

I look at my beautiful daughter with her hair straightened. Although I love her hair in its natural curls, I do love how her facial features are more pronounced. I see Ainslee’s nose, my brow and its ability to just cock up when it feels like it, but this one didn’t even make it past five feet. My poor baby.

“You look beautiful, princess,” I say to her after Ainslee is done gushing over her.

Rory walks up to me and hugs me tight. “Thank you, daddy.”

“Aww, group hug!” Andy announces. Annie and Ainslee join in and even Bee joins the hug. Xerxes comes in and joins the hug right behind Rory. I narrow my eyes. He’s too much like his dad.

Xerxes is a mixture of Karessa and Jagger. Sometimes, I see the sweetness of Karessa, but lately I’m seeing more of Jagger. Luckily, they have other kids they can try again with. This one is Jagger through and through. He even smirks like him.

We get out of the hug. “You ready to go, Jagger?” Xerxes says.

“Watch your slick-ass mouth, boy,” Jagger says from the couch. He glares at Xerxes like he knows how much more he’ll be tried.

Xerxes smirks. “I didn’t tell anyone to name her that but you know what, Aurora works too.” He winks at Jagger and my best friend actually laughs, shaking his head while he sits back with Karessa as they look at something on their phone.

“Let’s go, idiot,” Rory says as she says her goodbyes to us. “We need to set some rules for this dance. I had no choice but to go with you,” she says.

Xerxes laughs. “I love it when you tell me what to do, Aurora. You know I have a thing for older women, right?” I hear a smack from the foyer and none of us bother to check. Xerxes laughs. “You know I’m going to enjoy fucking up your entire life for that. I love it when a woman knows what I like and you’re just so damned cute. Bite-size and all. Let’s go, future Mrs. Hanlon.”

“Over my dead body, little boy,” Rory answers.

“I’ll chase you until we’re on the same page and then we’ll see who’s little,” Xerxes says and the door shuts.

I shudder, this is weird as fuck. I look at Jagger and he smirks. “Finally, there’s going to be a

Jagger and Oran relationship. Oran Hanlon.”

I roll my eyes, laughing. I need a drink. “Daddy, how do I look?” Bethany asks from behind me.

“Your skirt is too short. Go change.” I don’t even look at her.

“Dad!” she stomps her foot.

“Andy, if she stomps her foot again, you’ll both stay home,” I say turning to face them.

Andy grabs his little sister and starts to walk out of the house. “We’re going to be back a little late. We’re only taking the Range! Bye mom!”

“Bye baby,” Ainslee says, distracted by the movie Jagger has found.

I grab my drink and join them on the couch. “Should I call Mr. Wong’s?” I ask them.

“Hell yeah!” we all say.

Ainslee cuddles into my arms as we relax and it’s surreal that we all started as something else but now, us four, we’re still here. We’re all happy, in love, and we’re like one big family. Life is great.

Not all arrangements are bad, some have an expiration date, some spoil, but others, like ours, end in bliss because we chose happiness and love over bitterness and suffering.

THE END