

SLICK AS SIDES

a novel

Chanse Lowell

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SLICK AS IDES

Chanse Lowell

Mayhem Erotica Publishing

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CONTENT WARNING — This story contains scenes of an explicit, erotic

nature and is intended for adults, 18+. Story includes bondage, dirty talk with crude language, dubious consent, and graphic consensual sex. Characters portrayed are 18 or older and of a sound mind.

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Chapter 1

Ides

“Are you there yet?” I ask Riot.

His breath scrapes across his phone as he runs, making me cringe away from the awful noise.

“Almost.” There’s a sound like he’s tripping on something. “Why did this moron have to change the location at the last minute? They know L.A. traffic is brutal.”

I laugh. “They all do this—make us jump through hoops. You know this.”

He huffs. “Yeah, I do, and I also know you were supposed to join me this time. You promised, Ides.”

I wipe my face with my shaking hands. “I know, and I’ll be ready next time. I swear I’ll make a personal appearance.”

“This one’s really important. They’re paying double—more than any fee you’ve ever collected for a personal venture before.”

“I *know*.” I groan and roll my neck. “You don’t have to keep reminding me.” I rub my hands on my sleeves. Great. It’s dirty. Now I’ll have to wash this hoodie.

“Are you going to listen in and watch this one? I can set it up no problem.” He pauses—everything goes silent.

Is he lost?

There’s movement again a moment

later, and I sigh in relief.

“Not necessary. I trust you.” I stare at my sleeve, trying to ignore the fact I was stupid and got it dirty.

“No you don’t.” He chuckles. “You always say that, but I know you find a way to monitor all business transactions whether I’m aware of how you’re doing it or not.”

“How else do you think I test out my gadgets?” I grin, staring at my desk now instead of the soiled fabric I’m wearing. “Sorry if it bothers you. I’ll try to tell you directly after. How’s that?”

“Fucked up as usual, but I’ll take it.” He huffs and a door opens. “Almost there. Are you going to get your supplies after this meeting?”

“Yes, *Riot*. I *am* going to get them myself. I’ve at least worked up to that point.” I reach for my homemade sanitizer and barely squeak out a drop so I don’t use too much. It’s getting low—unbearably so.

“You sure you’re ready for that? You sound like you’re hyperventilating,” he says.

I wheeze and rub the concoction into my hands thoroughly, then inhale deeply. “I’m *fine*.”

“Just wait. I’ll get you what you need after this meeting. It shouldn’t take long. They only want to go over the specs,” he says, sounding a little on edge.

“No, no. Take it easy. Let me know

what they want afterward, and then go home. Enjoy yourself for once, instead of worrying about me.” I close my eyes and ignore the tightness in my temples and my long hair falling forward over my shoulders.

“I love worrying about you, and don’t you dare say it’s because my job requires me to. I do it because I care about you.”

I squirm in my seat, and my gut tightens, but not in a good way. Guilt dots my back with sweat.

“Riot . . .” I warn. “Don’t go there. We aren’t having this conversation. It’s not gonna happen.”

“I know.” He exhales in a burst. “Hire someone then, will ya? You need

a personal assistant if you're not gonna let me get you what you need anymore." He goes silent for a moment.

"I don't need an assistant. They can't be trusted, but you're my clos—"

"Hey, gotta go. He's staring at me."

The call ends, and I flip on my newest invention. *Riot Gear*, I've dubbed it.

I've got his watch tagged. He doesn't know it of course.

"You are entirely too predictable, my friend." He always wears that old good luck watch when he goes to business meetings for me, and he continually clasps his hands and sets them on the table so I can see the person on his right.

Yeah, because you gave it to him the first Christmas you hired him—that's why he wears the damn thing.

Another round of sweat inducing guilt hits me. I swallow and lean forward to get a better look on my monitor at the guy doing business with us today.

“Mr. Thayer, you're late,” the man says, his jaw tight.

The slight man in a gray suit, stays seated, doesn't offer to shake hands and sets his cool dark eyes on Riot.

“Sorry, but the parking lot was a mess. They're doing construction out there,” Riot responds.

“No excuses, please. It's a waste of time. Let's get started,” the man says.

“By all means, Mr. Harden.”

Harden pulls out some paperwork and sets it on the table.

“This is not what we agreed to.” Riot’s voice is tense. “I can’t sign off on this, and I think you know why.”

“What’s the problem? Just a few minor tweaks.” Harden grins.

“Yes, a few very *illegal* tweaks. I’m sorry”—Riot stands up—“but we’ll have to decline. You’ll have to take your business elsewhere.”

“But the prototype is already complete, yes?” Harden scratches his chin and smirks. “What will you do with something built specifically for my client? No one else is going to want this contraption.”

“They sure as hell will.” Riot takes a step back, and the chair scrapes on the floor when he moves it. “We have so many clients dying for any invention Ides comes up with, we never lack for buyers.”

“C’mon, cross your arms over your chest or something,” I tell my monitor. I can’t see a damn thing anymore. Riot’s hands must be in his pockets.

“Well, I’m sorry to hear you lack vision. My employer is willing to double what we’ve already offered you.”

“A million?” Riot’s voice cracks.

“Pfft! He’s lying,” I say, then grab my phone to dial him up.

“No. Ides doesn’t sell out.” Riot’s

footfalls are heavy.

Is he leaving? Good.

I set the phone down.

“Mr. Thayer?”

“Yeah?” There’s a shift of movement, and then the camera feed is back on again.

Riot shakes hands with him.

“Perhaps you can arrange a personal meeting for this Ides with me so I can amend what they’re unwilling to work with on this,” Harden says. His teeth clack at the end, and it almost looks like he’s sneering.

“I doubt they’d be willing to do that.” Riot heads to the door.

“Set it up. I’ll make it worth their while. And of course, you’re welcome

to tag along, since I'm sure you want to make sure it's all legal and follows the company's parameters."

Harden waltzes up to him and hands him a business card.

"I already have your information." Riot takes it anyway.

"Yes, but this isn't *my* information. It's my boss's. Call the number on the back, and he'll let you know how to proceed from here." Harden nods and moves past Riot, exiting the room.

"Shit," Riot says under his breath when he's alone. "I know you heard that, Ides. Call me now!"

I pick up the phone and dial him up. "You okay?" I ask the second he accepts the call.

“You can’t do this one. Walk away. We don’t need this asshole and his millions.” Riot kicks something, and I chuckle. “Turn your damn camera off. I’m not kidding.”

“Okay, okay. Just calm down. Come on over, and we’ll go over his proposal. We can figure this out.”

“No! Dammit, Dena. Jesus Christ—can’t you feel how dangerous this is? That man”—he exhales in a rush—“he’s out to get you. I can tell he’s up to something. It’s a trap. That’s why he wants to meet you.”

“Well, it’s a good thing you didn’t just say my actual name when he barely left, isn’t it?” I sit back in my chair, my chest tight. “Get over here, and don’t

even think about pretending to lose the document or the business card he gave you. This could really save my ass. You know I need this money. No more worrying.”

“Bullshit.” He pushes the door open, and it makes a whooshing sound.

I finally turn the camera off.

“It’s not bullshit. You know I can’t use my own funds. Conflict of interest. But the company needs th—”

“All right!” he nearly shouts. “Stop lecturing me. I’m getting inside my car, and I’ll meet you soon. You have to drop it off at the point they’ve specified in a week. That’s what they’re instructing if you want full payment.”

“Thank you. I love ya, and don’t go

gettin' all mushy on me, because you know I don't mean it like that," I clarify.

"Yeah, I know." He grumbles something unintelligible, then hangs up.

I pull up the plans and already start making adjustments. I think I know where the client's head is at, and for some reason, I really like this challenge.

* * *

Riot listens to all of my big talk about how we can make this work. He keeps running his hands over his cropped, blond hair and blinking his dark brown eyes at me like I'm insane and have lost a few microchips.

He watches me, appearing aloof, as

I remove the Riot Gear from his watch.

“I still don’t like it.” He grimaces and points at the problem area on the specs as soon as I’m done with my task.

I hand his watch back to him, and he pockets it instead of putting it back on.

He brushes the business card aside in the next breath so he can point at the plans again without it getting in the way.

“I know, but you don’t have to like it. You only have to defend it if they try to screw us on this. I can’t get sued over this.” I hand him a soda.

He shakes his hand.

“Still trying to lose weight.” He stares at it with longing, though, and then he pats his flat belly. He’s still trying his

damnedest to form what used to be flab, into six-pack abs.

I push the can out of sight so I'm not tempting him. "Oh, sorry. I guess I forgot." I fight off a grin.

"You did not. You suck at lying. This is your way of saying sorry for stressing me out," he says, smiling back, but clearly trying to look mad.

"And you suck at being angry with me."

"That's because for some piss-ass reason I think you know what you're doing." He pouts over the specs, his eyes roving over it once more.

"It's all sound. This will work, and it's not that you think I know what I'm doing. It's because I'm your friend, and

you're mine. We need each other."

Out of nowhere, his hands reach out, and he hugs me.

I bite back the scream, building in my throat and manage to shrug out of his hold. "All right now, let's not get carried away. Cooties and all that, you know."

He laughs. "Did you get your supplies ordered online?"

"No. I told you already—I'm going to get them myself. I'll walk into a store and—"

He pushes off the desk, stands up and waves. "Good luck with that. Call me when you're stuck in the doorway. I'll come with a gallon of bleach and some gloves."

“Shut up. I’m not that bad.”

“Pssst!” He snorts and rolls his eyes. “Yeah, okay. See you tomorrow?”

“Nope. I’ll be fine. Don’t need you. Have fun. Go on a date.” I eye him and smile.

“That will happen when you’re able to go fill up your car with gas on your own.”

I flip him off, pursing my lips, my brows scrunched together while pretending to glare, and he leaves, chuckling.

I listen to him lock up and then go over the paperwork once more.

It’s not exactly what they asked for, but it’s better, so they can’t complain.

It’ll do what they want it to.

Guilt surrounds my throat and closes it off.

What if they . . .

What if this is going to be used on people?

I blink and shove the paperwork aside.

No one's that despicable.

I get up, put my second hoodie for the day into the washing machine and set it to soak on a timer with extra detergent.

Riot touched me.

Why? Why would he take that chance?

"I should fire his ass for that," I mumble as I close the lid on the washing machine.

I wander back to my desk, and the

minute I log into my favorite chat group, I see that name “Vapor,” and I’m tingling and breathless right away.

God, he’s so hot with the shit he gets up to. He knows exactly what to do to get me going.

Vapor: You there, Ides?

The monitor blinks at me with his private message just for me.

“Yeah, I am, you slimy bastard.” I grin and type out a different reply though. **I d e s : What’s up? Invent anything today?**

Vapor: Yep. Invented a way into your wet panties. Wanna come over and check it out, make sure it works correctly?

I bark a deep, biting laugh. “Uh, no.

Not happening.” Ides: Sure. I’ll be right over . . .

Vapor: See, I knew you liked me.

Ides: Like is not an issue. It’s an issue of trust.

Vapor: You can trust me. Have I done anything to warrant anything else?

Ides: Yeah, you have.

Vapor: Such as?

Ides: You seem to know too much about me. How is that possible? No one knows who I am.

Vapor: Did my research, sweetheart. You’re all over the web, whether you know it or not. I know your signature when I see it, woman.

Ides: Right there—the fact you even know my gender is disconcerting.

Vapor: I've been tracking you down for months now. Do you know how hard it was to get into this elite hacker chat group? I swear they patted down my balls and made me turn my head and cough before they'd even let me in. Do they think I'll hunt you down?

Ides: Would you? I swallow, and my pussy throbs. God, I wish he would.

Vapor: For you? I might. I want you, and I think you know I touch myself while I fantasize about you. Can't you tell I'm doing it right now?

“Pervert,” I whisper and grin wider.

Vapor: I've got a fucking hard-on about a mile long for you. I swear I practically squirt on my screen each time I chat with you. Want me to film it next time and send it to you? All I'll need is your email address, hon.

Ides: Nice try. I'm not on here to get hit on or for free porn.

Vapor: Then why are you on here? It's obvious you like me, or you wouldn't keep replying when I IM your hot ass. There's no one like you, and someday I'll convince you to meet with me. You'll have a great time, I promise. Oh, and so will your computer. I expect you to film me with your laptop when I've got your nipples

in between my teeth.

“Uh, okay.” My nipples tighten even though the room is its standard seventy-eight degrees. And what the hell is my stomach doing? It feels like some kind of merengue to a shitty *Dirty Dancing* theme song. **Ides: What am I supposed to say to this?**

Vapor: Any fucking thing you wish. But what I'd really like to hear is you cream yourself thinking about me, too. C'mon, Ides, give it up. At least tell me I turn you on. I'm dying over here.

Ides: Okay, fine. I get a little keyed up over you.

Vapor: How long does it take? Am I breaking records, or what?

Ides: You already know my boyfriend broke up with me two months ago and what a mess that was. Only one other guy has ever really done it for me, and he's long gone. Haven't seen him since I was a teen, so, yes, I guess you're breaking records for me. But that's nothing to brag about. I don't have a social life to speak of.

Vapor: Really? Why? You're so fucking smart and hot, you could have any guy you want.

My cheeks heat, and my chest flames with a stirring emotion I can't and won't name. **Ides:** You asked why I'm on here? This is the one place I'm not a freak. I can be me, and the

people here get me, especially you. Or so I thought.

Vapor: What's that supposed to mean—so you thought? I get you, woman. I get you so much, I ache for you. Can you at least tell me what you look like so I don't have to rely on my fucking pitiful imagination?

Ides: That's all you're gonna ask? Afraid? You're not gonna go the typical creepy route and ask what color undies I'm wearing first and my cup size? ;D

Vapor: Nope. I already know what color they are. And cup size? Doesn't matter to me as long as you don't look like a dude and have a pair

of tits that require a bra.

Ides: Bullshit. How could you possibly know the color?

Vapor: Please! A woman like you? You wear black, simple panties, and a matching black cotton bra that you look beautiful in. Simple, yet elegant and smart, like you.

Shit. I sit and stare, my eyes widening with each passing second.

Vapor: Well? Am I right?

I log off immediately, stand up, and pull off my black jeans and undies, head to the laundry room, toss them into the churning washer since they're wet on the crotch for him, and I feel dirty now.

He knows. How does he know me so well?

I've only been talking to him for a month. We've never discussed the color of my clothing or underwear before.

I add a little more detergent to the wash, close the lid and head to the shower.

As much as I want to get off, I have to wash. I have to get clean, the bastard.

No more chatting with him, and no more fantasizing about him.

After soaping up twice in the shower, and refusing to masturbate, I dress in my jammies, all black of course, and grab my laptop.

The second I'm on, I can't resist.

I log in, and there it is. A big fat note from Vapor, simply hovering before my eyes.

He's logged off, but I still worry he'll return since it usually doesn't take him long to figure out I'm online and available to chat.

I read the message quickly—

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to piss you off. I'm crazy about you. You've gotta know I think about you constantly and die all day long, searching for anything about you online I can find. I count down the hours until you'll get on that shitty chat group and possibly respond to me. I've never met anyone like you, and although it sounds trite, it's true. Hopefully I haven't scared you off so bad you'll stay away. I promise I'll cut this shit out if you want me to. I just

couldn't help myself. I wasn't joking about how hard you make me. Say one word, Ides, and I'll do anything you say, anything to know you better. And I hope one day maybe I can at least hear your voice if nothing else. Skype is free, you know. We don't have to do a web chat if you don't want to—though, I have no idea what you're afraid of. I can't imagine you being anything other than gorgeous, because it really doesn't matter what you look like. I want you for you—for who you are. How many guys have said that to you? It doesn't sound like there have been many based on the facts you've shared with me. Please, don't cut me

off. Talk to me—we can work this out.
Vapor.

That's when I turn my damned laptop off for the night, refuse to cry over this guy I pretend I barely know, and I get in bed, trying desperately to sleep. Only it doesn't come.

I'm antsy, so turned-on, everything aches and throbs from my belly button to my thighs. And my breasts feel like they've swollen, too, and all from his damn words.

Eventually, after a few hours of trying unsuccessfully to sleep, a new invention hammers its way into my brain. So I roll out of bed in the middle of the night and head to my office, working out the details.

I can forget he exists, and I can go on with my life.

My life that includes my office, Riot—currently driving me insane—and my work. These are all I need.

I glare at my near-empty container of hand sanitizer.

“Fuck you,” I tell it. I knock it over, then immediately right it when panic seizes up my lungs, and then I squirt a little dab into my palm.

I’m fine. Don’t need to chat with Vapor at all. He’s fucked me up, and it’s not happening again.

I rub the ache away, by rubbing the cleanser into my skin.

Chapter 2

Blip, blip, blip.

Stupid light!

Yellow. The worst color ever.

Warnings. Those suck big round
sweaty ass.

Why am I doing this?

My heart pounds as I turn into the
gas station.

I've put it off for a week. I can do
this.

“Uuuhhhhaaaaahhhh,” I release a
tight, dizzying breath.

My knuckles pop as my grip on the
wheel doubles in intensity.

Every time I consider what I'll be
doing in a few moments, my vision

almost blurs.

My heart is driving its way out of my chest and into my stomach.

Sweat dots my brow.

After passing by two other gas stations too busy for my liking, I pull into the Chevron on the corner ahead of me.

I sigh. “This one’ll have to do.”

My breath catches as I slow the vehicle down and take in my surroundings.

There’s a car on each end—two total, and I can use the standard guys’ bathroom rules while fueling up my car. I stay in the middle stall with as much empty space between us as possible and don’t look at anything but my task at

hand.

My shoulders round and hunch forward as I coast the car to a stop.

Why didn't I get an assistant like Riot suggested?

I roll my neck. My shoulders are tight and achy.

"Stupid know-it-all," I mutter to myself.

Riot's words echo in my head and put my stomach in such a knot it feels like there's a Chinese finger-trap inside, and my guts are trying to break free of the death grip hold it has on them. I'm a step away from screaming, and with my heart slamming about inside my chest, it makes it hard to concentrate.

I stir in my seat and huff a little at

my arrogance in thinking I can handle these things myself.

I scan the grocery store gas station once more before opening the door and cautiously stepping out.

The second my hand grips the door, it's shaking. Fingering the outline of my cell phone in my jeans pocket helps calm me.

Maybe I should get back in my car and log in on that chat group. I haven't been on it in a week. Will Vapor talk to me again if I apologize and accept his?

Technology—my friend. It's the only thing I have left since I cut all ties with Vapor like an absolute idiot.

I grip the edge of my phone through my pocket once more and square my

shoulders. I can do this. I don't need him or anyone else.

I will do this, I chant to myself.

Riot's wrong. I'm ready. *I will do this, I will do this, I will do this.*

And I start to handle this task of fueling my car until a feeling of dread drapes itself across the back of my shoulders and has the hairs pricking at the edge of my neck.

I blink hard. Everything around me feels off—all of it.

The environment puts me on edge even though it's devoid of people.

In the amount of time I've been standing here, the other two cars have left.

My mind goes through everything I

could have forgotten—the reason I most likely feel off-center.

Did I leave the doors unlocked at home?

Impossible. The chip inside you does it automatically.

I reach up and grip the back of my neck, swiping my thumb across the spot where the chip's implanted—the chip *he* inspired that night I couldn't sleep after I decided he was too dangerous for me.

Then what?

I'm forgetting something—I know I am.

You're forgetting your lungs. Breathe!

“Ugh! It's just gas, that's all.” I smack my thigh with my hand that was

fondling my phone like an old lover.

I've been doing that too much lately. It's because of him. I know it.

I can't stop thinking about him, and my body won't let me forget how worked up he makes me from a few simple words, whether they're intended to be flirtatious or not.

Another deep breath, and I can do this.

I snort at myself and squeeze the back of my neck.

I'm fine. My chip's in place.

So, why do I get the sense I'm being watched?

I get back in the car for a moment and put my precautions in place. Never know what can happen in an unguarded

moment.

I remove my stereo's face. That goes in my backpack, along with the cord for my iPhone. Pretty soon I'll have the stereo to the car rigged to my chip along with the rest of the car.

My twisting gut sets me in motion, and I put on the false stereo front and then hook in the decoy cord.

I'm quick and make sure my movements are small so if I really am being watched, no one will realize what I'm doing.

Should I grab my model in back?

I hesitate, but then talk myself out of it.

It's just gas! This isn't war. Takes five minutes tops if you'd stop

hesitating!

My heart pounds in my chest like I'm running a marathon, and my palms start to sweat.

I slip the backpack on as I step outside into the cool night air.

Right as I turn around to shut the car door, I'm greeted by a loiterer.

Probably homeless.

I huff to myself.

Only he doesn't look like any vagrant I've ever seen before. He's too attractive to be a social pariah.

But then, looks can be deceiving. I know this.

I squint. Do I know him? Looks familiar . . .

My mouth goes dry as my eyes

roam across his gorgeous face, and his hazel eyes sparkle at me with a hint of mischief.

I remember eyes that looked like that from years ago . . .

He smiles, and my throat constricts.

My mind goes blank, and I want to look away, but I can't.

“Um, excuse me, pretty lady, could you spare some change? My bike just got stolen, and I need to get something to eat,” he says, his voice a raspy, hypnotic tenor.

He grins even wider—all whites and perfection.

Do homeless people have a dental plan I'm unaware of? Because his teeth are shinier than mine, and I'm fixated

with having a clean oral space.

My eyes narrow.

I want to ask him to empty out his pockets so I can see what brand of toothbrush and floss he uses, along with his choice of toothpaste. If he's homeless, he'd have to keep them on his person.

If I can get my teeth that dazzling white, maybe people will like me and talk to me because I can finally stop obsessing over my breath being minty-fresh and clean. And maybe Vapor would . . .

That's not why people avoid you . . . You stopped talking to him, not the other way around.

Shut up!

I gulp, and search for words.

Nothing comes to me.

Shocking.

He throws me even further into a state of fogginess when he dazzles me by tossing his brown hair out of the way of his hypnotic eyes. There's a scattering of amber around the pupil that bleeds out into a bright green rim, captivating me and making me forget I'm a mute imbecile, gawking at him.

"I . . . Uh . . ." I shift about, unsure of where to look and what to say.

He asked me something, didn't he?

He looks like he's three months overdue for a haircut, which makes sense for a homeless person, but on him . . . whoa! He should keep it this way—

shorter on the sides and longer on top and in front, where it keeps falling over his eyes. It's got that bad-boy feel about it.

He'd make a nice wallpaper for my laptop, even in his stained, torn, faded jeans and rumpled tee shirt.

Where the hell did that thought come from?

I stare down at my shoe. He's too pretty to look at. He's confusing me.

I really need to talk to Vapor so I can get my shit back together. It's ridiculous to be this turned-on by some loser off the street I don't even know. I've been in a funk ever since I dropped him.

He coughs, and I step back.

I grip my backpack strap on my shoulder with a tight fist and fight off a repulsive shiver. Not attractive anymore!

“Caaahaagh!” he wheezes out another racking cough.

And fuck no! He’s coughing in my direction.

Germs!

I tuck my hands in my pockets, fumbling to find my hand sanitizer, but it’s not there.

Oh shit. That’s why I came here in the first place, not because I needed gas, initially. Needed more supplies to kill germs. But I was driving around for over an hour to find a store with an adequate parking lot to fit my criteria, and my fuel

got low because of it.

This is bad. Get in your car and go!

He clears his throat, and a nasty wave of nausea hits me.

He's diseased! And he's standing less than three feet away.

Goose bumps drive their way through my skin into my bloodstream, making my blood turn to ice.

I cross my arms over my chest.

"So, do you? Have a few bucks to spare?" he asks, breaking me out of my trance-like headspace.

"Uhm . . . n-no. I don't ever carry cash on m-me," I stammer, self-conscious and backing away.

Why does he have to look so good?

I don't enjoy staring at vagrants. They creep me out.

When I dare to glance up, his grin spreads like watercolors on a moist paper, taking over his whole facial canvas and officially becoming the most breathtaking thing I've ever seen, creating the sexiest chin dimple ever.

Run! Now! Don't forget that pretty is covered in germs!

My insides clench, and bile threatens to make an appearance.

I rub my arms to give me a moment to think and get rid of the chills.

It doesn't work. The sound of his breathing makes my heart hammer harder.

“Awww, c'mon. You're telling me

you don't even have a few loose quarters in your purse you can spare?" He leans toward me.

What the fluffy fuck? Is he flirting with me?

No, wait . . .

Is he heckling me?

See! Told ya you look like a fool. Of course he's gonna make you think he's attracted to you so he can get what he wants. He's attracted to your car, not you! Men love flashy, expensive sports-type cars, and he thinks you're loaded because of what you're driving.

Money.

Does it always have to be about money?

My eyes flash down to the asphalt.

This is all I'm good for when it comes to men—trying to steal my ideas, take my money or find a way to use me to build their own business and power.

I'm no longer sucked in by his model-worthy body or smile. Who cares that his biceps and forearms flex with the smallest movement? Not me.

I'm stone.

Or maybe Formica.

I like that stuff. It's inexpensive, sturdy, and looks nice. Not to mention it's non-porous.

Yes, that's it. I'm Formica, and you, buddy, are just a hot diseased piece of gorgeous man-meat.

A lump forms in my throat at the thought of rotting, diseased flesh.

Shit. Zombies! I hate those guys! They're the harbinger of all things unsanitary!

I blink and force my mind to think about a nice hot shower awaiting me when I get home with plenty of soap and cleansers.

"I can't talk about this. I have things to do," I say, looking at him briefly, then diverting my eyes away.

He lurches forward when I'm about to open the gas tank flap, and I yelp.

His hands are on me!

He *touches* my arm.

Germs, germs, germs! Oh God, no!

I jump at the contact and scramble away from him.

He's dangerous! He's not afraid

to touch you!

I shrink into myself—pull up the hood on my sweatshirt.

Grab the gun out of your backpack. Tell him to back off!

No! That'll require you take your eyes off him, and now you can't even afford to blink. He might try to do something else to you.

“Hey, hey . . . relax. I'm not gonna hurt you,” he says, throwing his hands up in surrender right away.

“Don't do that—don't t-t-touch me.” My voice shakes so hard I struggle to breathe, and my tongue feels heavy, yet slushy. A bead of sweat rolls down my neck, even though it's kind of a brisk night. My diaphragm spasms

uncontrollably.

Instinct kicks in, and I scan his entire body for any identifying marks in case he commits a crime.

Good Lord . . . he's like me. No tattoos—pale, flawless skin and no pock marks, scars or freckles.

He's the perfect specimen of a test-tube baby if ever I've seen one.

Or maybe he's just sheltered like I am.

Does he stay indoors all the time, too?

No wait. He's homeless. He's outside all the time.

Wait a minute . . .

I back away even more, hoping he'll leave on his own, based on how

uncomfortable he's making me.

Maybe I could run if he doesn't leave?

But then . . . I have my model in the backseat. It's my prototype, so I can't leave it behind. It's due to be dropped off tonight. An hour from now, it has to be in the designated spot.

"I'm begging you, lady. You've got this expensive car, and I'm really hungry. You honestly don't have a few bucks you can spare? I'd pump your gas for you in exchange. Those things are covered in germs and hideous diseases, and a pretty woman like you doesn't need to dirty her hands up on something as filthy as that." He motions his head toward the pump, sending his bangs out

of his eyes again. Then he has the audacity to reach for a handshake.

He swallows hard and must realize his mistake when I grimace because he abruptly shoves his hand in his pocket and his shoulders hunch up in a sheepish way.

“Too late—you already touched me without my permission,” I blurt.

My face heats for a moment when I realize how crazy I sound.

“I’m really sorry about that. I didn’t mean anything by it.” He smiles and almost looks proud of himself.

What the hell?

I duck my head, and realize this is all wrong.

Everything about it is fucked up.

My door is open—he's standing right inside it, next to my seat. How the hell did I let this happen? He almost had me walking in circles around my car with the way he keeps prowling toward me.

There are no keys inside though, since it's all rigged to my chip, but still . . . he could easily slip inside my car and cover the seat with his homeless bacteria.

Oh. Shit!

No, no, no!

His hand reaches out, and he leans into the side of my car, resting his palm on the headrest.

I wince and gasp for air.

This has never happened to me

before. Nobody has touched this seat but me! And certainly not where my head will be as I'm driving.

I grind my heel into the road and my teeth right into my jaw. Gas. I need to fill up the tank on my car so I can get out of here.

I can get hand sanitizer ingredients somewhere else.

“Hey, look, I can see I'm making you uptight, and I wouldn't be asking if I wasn't desperate. Please, gorgeous? Those stunning blue eyes are the home of a kind soul—I can see it,” he coos.

Okay, now he's overdoing it. I'm not this dense.

I glare at him. My knees are still wobbly, and my breath is shallow, but I

can think through it enough to see he's not what he says he is.

He's a liar.

Doesn't matter how hot he is and how good he smells, if he's trying to deceive me then he's my enemy. My head goes foggy, and my eyes glaze over as I take a deep whiff.

Wow. That's nice.

No. This is wrong. I need to be more assertive, that's all. He'll leave me alone.

"I said *no*. I don't have any cash, and I don't have a purse inside my car. I don't carry one!" I say in a rush of adrenaline.

"All right, all right, I gotcha," he says, and departs with a playful wink.

I stand rigid. My feet are roots, burrowed into the asphalt. I can't move.

“What was that?” I barely blink, and I'm still a little dazed by his intoxicating scent even though he finally left.

He hops a half wall about ten feet away and heads for the bus stop another five feet ahead of him.

I can't stop staring after him.

Wait. Something's . . . this is worse than before. I can figure this out . . .

He's good-looking, and most definitely smells like somebody who showers and takes personal hygiene seriously . . . *Hey!* He did not smell like a man who's living on the streets. And how can he ride the bus if he doesn't

have any money?

He was wearing cologne, and his breath was minty fresh. Not to mention, he smelled extremely clean. I know—I'm an expert on being clean.

Was he . . . ?

He is a liar!

Those stains on his clothes and holes were fabricated. He's a con artist, probably hired by Hillcourt Corporation.

He knows you've got the prototype in the back of the car.

Just a glimpse of it could be all he is after. Shit! Did he see it?

I cup my hands on the window and peak in back through the darkened windows to make sure it's still there.

It is, and I sigh, letting my spine loosen a bit.

What was I thinking? He couldn't have seen through my windows, tinted with resiliency flare shield. He wouldn't have been able to see a dang thing unless he craned his neck around my seat, which he didn't do.

You're safe.

I allow a breath to invade my lungs, and I square my shoulders.

Pump gas, and get out of here. You can get your hand sanitizing ingredients tomorrow.

Drop off the model tomorrow as well. This is too much for you. Let them decrease the amount they pay you.

A hiss of breath escapes me, and I

resemble a leaking balloon.

My fingers fidget for a moment, and then I manage to uproot my heels and move to the gas flap.

In a bundle of nerves, I open it, unscrew the gas cap, and turn to the gas payment machine thingy. I squint.

My head can't even remember the names of everyday machines right now. I roll my eyes at myself.

This is ridiculous. Who cares what this machine's called?

I try to calm my trembling fingers as I turn to the gas pump. A moment later, I've got the nozzle in place, and I push down the latch so I don't have to keep touching the handle of it. The numbers whiz by as it fills up my car.

My head focuses on a project I've got back home—a new invention. As soon as I get into my office, I'll be relaxed, and everything'll be fine again. No Vapor in my head. No homeless guy hounding me. No gas fumes to breathe in or grocery store to make my blood blast through my heart at an alarming rate.

My eyes clench closed, and I take another tight breath, hoping it will soothe my addled brain. A few more minutes, then I can leave.

Next thing I know, my car is rocketing off, and out of the parking lot—the gas spraying out of the nozzle onto the asphalt.

I turn and scream, “You can’t do this!”

Chapter 3

My legs turn into powerful pistons as I run at maximum speed after my car, and when I hop over the same wall the distracting man did, I realize he's gone.

Where did he go?

Is he the culprit behind the wheel?

Son of a bitch! This is unbelievable!

I make a mental checklist of his attributes. His eyes and hair are easy to recall. The rest of his build? Not as easy, and I like precision. I think he's about six foot two or thereabouts, and size eleven shoes, approximate weight one-hundred-eighty.

He's toned, but not bulky—kind of

a runner's physique.

Nice hands despite their touching me without my permission. They seemed oddly familiar, too.

And you know exactly what he smells like.

My left eye twitches, and my hands ball into fists. I can get my car back. And I can get back at him for daring to take something belonging to me.

Not to mention I can smell him one more time. That should be nice.

My car disappears, like him, as it rounds a corner. I grimace as I watch it go.

There's enough adrenaline in me I can continue to chase after him, and I can even shoot at him, but I kind of like that

car.

The other one isn't as nice.

But then I inherited the other one.

Fucking, ruddy, monkey balls!

My prototype!

What if he's got it in his hands right now?

I gasp, heaving in great volumes of air, but it doesn't help.

Oh great. He's got me so angry I'm reverting to old curse words I made up in high school with my electronics mixed-wire-nerds.

I yank my backpack off, take a seat on the bus-stop bench, trying to ignore the creepy-crawly, germy feeling, sliding up my spine.

Before the next bus arrives, I

grapple with my phone, tuning it into my car's specific frequency and make sure to turn the light down so people won't be frightened when they see me spying on the thief inside my car.

I'll have my vehicle back before the night's over.

The sound of a rumbling bus approaching does little to relieve me of the helpless, treacherous heebie-jeebies, skyrocketing through my system. I'm surrounded by microscopic raw germs and sewage traces.

My skin crawls, and I push the thoughts aside of babies sitting on this seat in nothing but soiled diapers, partially toothless people who smoke with stained teeth, and worst of all,

people failing to thoroughly wash their hands after using the toilet.

Without any forethought, I'm up and off the bench—my backpack secured as I pace and hover over my phone, still uploading my links.

I type in the final code to get live, video-feed from my false, stereo-face in my car.

“Who's that?” I whisper to myself, completely enveloped in my task.

I barely register the bus heading my way.

I zoom in so I can get a better look at the punk that thought my car was free for the taking.

And then I hear it. The same voice that spoke to me and rattled my insides

so thoroughly, is chatting with somebody in my car.

I knew it! I knew he did it!

I pull some earbuds out of my backpack and hook it up to my phone, then slip the ends into my ears.

“I told you I could do it. Pay up,” the gorgeous conman says from the passenger’s seat of my car.

“I have to admit . . . that was pretty slick,” the driver responds.

The driver looks formidable in size. His barrel chest and linebacker shoulders make me think twice about going after my car.

But I have a firearm, and I know how to keep a safe distance so they can’t hit me, should they have their own guns.

That's my car—the first one I chose and bought.

I slip into a rant with a few choice curse words.

Thankfully there's no one around to hear me.

I cringe at the sound of the bus, squeaking to a stop in front of me.

Without turning my phone off, I slip inside the disgusting bus doors and pay the fee without making eye contact or giving any kind of recognition to the bus driver. He probably doesn't even realize I didn't take my earbuds out while paying.

I kind of smirk, thinking about how I have cash on me, enough to pay for bus fare until the end of this century but

didn't give any of it to the man now joy-riding around in my car.

The conman was lied to. How ironic is that?

The bus driver seems distracted by the other people on the bus as I tuck away my wad of cash.

I find a seat at the front, getting as much distance as I can from the loud, obnoxious group of teenagers at the back.

I turn up the volume on my phone to hear what the perpetrators in my car are conversing about.

"I know. Now will you admit I'm as slick as Ides?" the fake homeless guy says.

"No, Vapor, you conceited

bastard.” The big man snorts.

I gasp and all heat leaves my body.

Vapor?

H e *found* me? And he’s that asshole in my car? He’s out to get me!

Shit, shit, shit! Tears line up at the edge of my eyes, threatening to march across my face like traitor soldiers.

I thought he liked me. I thought he sincerely wanted me.

I’ll fucking piss on his ashes after I burn him alive for this.

I blink hard and take a few gulping breaths to combat the stupid tears still forming.

“I won’t say it, so quit pestering me. No one’s as good as that guy. Face it . . . you’ll always be in his shadow,” the

burly driver says, chuckling.

“Whatever.” Vapor waves his friend off. “You’re jealous, and you always have been. No one’s as slick as I am. I lifted her car out from under her nose—the rich snob. She wouldn’t even give me a quarter, and you know she’s loaded with a car like this. Driving around in her Veyron, acting like she’s penniless. What a bitch.”

I remotely shift the view of the camera in the car, so I can stare at Vapor, instead of the intimidating behemoth of a man behind the wheel.

Oh God. I can’t stop a few stray tears from strolling down my face. Nor can I stop staring at Vapor and his beautiful face. Why does he have to be

this hot and this awful that he's destroyed me this way?

Why did he have to make me care about him by lying to me online and pretending to be interested?

“Well, if I remember it correctly, I'm the one that actually drove off with it. You did your thespian part well, but I had to execute the actual heist,” his friend brags.

“Shut it. I did all the work. Your part was easy. No thinking required,” Vapor says. “I did all the research on this one as usual, and *I* pulled it off. And stop trying to use big words. You sound ridiculous.”

Vapor reaches for my stereo, and I'm actually grinning now.

“I’ve got you, stupid bastard,” I murmur, sniffing away the tears still hanging out in my eyes as if they actually belong there. “Keep touching my shit, and see what happens to you.”

Vapor fiddles with the stereo, but nothing happens.

He can’t turn it on, but for a moment he’s too caught up in his bravado to realize it’s not working.

“I’m not called Fingers for nothin’,” the driver says.

“You like to think so anyway.” Vapor snorts, and then he growls, “What is wrong with this stereo?”

“Did you plug in the iPhone?” Fingers asks.

“Yes, you moron, I’m not as stupid

as you. If you'd paid attention, you'd have noticed I put it in as soon as you opened the car door. I had it in place before my ass was in the seat," Vapor huffs, his face contorting in confusion.

The douche deserves this.

"Dammit—what the fuck is wrong with this thing?" Vapor makes a face as he keeps pressing buttons.

I'm actually chuckling a little at this point, even though I'm a mess inside. A few people stare at me.

I duck my head and try to be a little more discreet about my voyeuristic activities since I realize I'm coming off as a complete psycho.

"God, this sucks!" Vapor says, throwing his hands up in the air. "Now

we'll have to put in a new stereo system, and I wanted this car changed out and sold tonight."

Fingers laughs. "*I'll* keep it. This has gotta be the most amazing car we've ever lifted."

"We can't keep it, asshole. It's too risky. Stop trying to think before you blow the last of the few brain cells you have left in that head."

I snort a laugh.

From my periphery, I can just make out the bus driver, giving me incredulous looks. He most likely thinks I'm insane, snickering to myself one moment, and ready to burst into tears in the next.

I shift in my seat, angling away from him a little more.

The bus makes its scheduled path block after block, and I wait for it to take me to them.

Tracing them is easy. I have Vapor's DNA from the gene capture on my faux stereo face. I know their faces, their code names, and the cord they did not remove from my stereo, has a tracking device inside it, so I know exactly where they're going.

And if that wasn't the best part—he actually plugged his iPhone into my trap.

As they continue to talk about how fabulous they are, my iPhone sucks the information out of his, like juice from a straw. A small side window on my screen rifles through his information—phone contacts, emails, music, videos,

photos, and a few browsers he left open online. A few of them have information on me, or my codename of Ides.

Seems he's got quite a sizable bank account, and a penchant for BDSM porn. He must not be too horrible a criminal if he's amassed this kind of wealth, but still . . . not as slick as he thinks he is—the cocky jackass.

“Okay, let's see here,” I mumble to myself, and bite my lip as I traipse through his personal information, ignoring the pangs ripping through my chest over how he's betrayed me and wasn't who he pretended to be at all. *Twice.*

His name is Nick Reid.

Wait . . . Those eyes, that name,

Nick . . .

You're imagining things. That was a long time ago—ten years, and what are the odds?

I blink hard and go back to my information in the palm of my hand. There's a pit that's settled in my stomach, making it difficult to concentrate, but I don't care. I can do this. I can figure him out, and be a step ahead of him.

Let's see . . . his friend is . . . well, at least Westin Crane, aka Fingers, is smart enough to keep his friend's identity secret on his iPhone, which they've now hooked up to my stereo since they probably think Nick's is broken—failing to work with my sound

system.

I stifle a triumphant giggle. Here, Nick's been razzing his friend about being an idiot, and Nick's phone was the one that gave me all the crucial information I needed.

The bus pulls up and lets me off a block away from where they parked my car.

My skin is crawling again. I've touched filthy things. Maybe I should stop and get some waterless sanitizer after all? It will only take a few minutes.

I glance around and notice this is a pretty seedy neighborhood, so my legs start pushing me forward—taking me toward them without my permission.

“You got it?” I can hear them say

from my phone. They're outside my car. There are scraping sounds and stiff plastic being maneuvered about.

Shit! No! They're about to change my vehicle's exterior. And any minute now, they'll realize where the model is and take it.

Wait a minute. They don't work for

...

They can't, or they'd have taken it by now. Or at least they would have searched for it.

I burst into a sprint and ignore my internal battle waging over germs versus wanting to right a wrong. For once, the germs lose. I'll take back what's mine and kick Vapor's hot-ass.

I rush down the block while

simultaneously watching my phone in horror.

The camera view changes at my command, but it's limited.

They really are outside my car, preparing it for a quick paint job.

Fuckers! I like black.

I really, *really* like black.

Yes, like my panties and bra. So the jerk was right. I don't give a fuck right now. All I care about is getting my car back, along with the prototype, and shoving a rod through Vapor's prostate so walking will be a truly enjoyable event for him over the next ten years.

My stride lengthens, and my pace quickens.

If they make it some hideous color

like banana-yellow or fire-engine-red, I won't hesitate to shoot their kneecaps off.

That'll make walking even more fun.

They'll deserve it if they do something that idiotic.

Before I arrive at the body shop, barely visible behind a trash-heap of a pawn shop in front of it, I wrangle out my handgun.

I swallow hard, step up to the gate and shove it open.

They're so amateur they don't even have an alarm system in place. I roll my eyes.

The hinges squeak a little from past rain and rust, but they can't possibly

hear it. Not with how busy and loud they're being.

I burst through the front door and don't even bother to shout.

A bullet flies out of the gun as I squeeze the trigger.

It hits the hubcap hanging on the wall behind Nick, or should I say, Vapor—the fucker that wounded me more than I thought possible.

A trace of bile reaches the back of my throat, and against all my instincts, I swallow it down and keep a straight face.

His reflexes make him collapse to the floor in a panic.

“That’s my car,” I snarl.

“What the fuck?” Westin, or Fat

Fingers as I now call him, mutters, as he drops what he's doing.

He was a second away from painting the bumper.

I aim the gun at him next. "What color did you choose?" I ask, baiting him. My hand is steady, while inside I'm shaking.

I'm a computer hacker, an inventor—not this. Not the monster Dad turned into. I want peace—a place where guns are unnecessary.

I'm against criminal activity, though. Well, unless it involves doing something a little shady for an invention, sitting in the backseat of my car, worth a million.

"Metallic purple," Westin answers,

his voice cracking.

“I don’t mind purple, actually, so the choice isn’t bad, but black is better. So if you don’t mind stepping away from my car.” My voice is calm. My eye twitches, but I’m far away enough I doubt they can see it.

My gun is still level when I let another bullet rip past his head into the hanging pegboard covered in tools behind him.

Tools to change my car!

My face scrunches, and my gut clenches over what they were about to take away—one of the few things I enjoy in my drab life.

“You might want to move a little faster. I had an ocular procedure last

week so my aim might be a little off.” I smile.

He skulks away, and I spot Nick, trying to be oh so vapor-like, placing something under the carriage.

“Get that tracer off my car!” I jerk my head toward the spot he was just touching.

Nick stands up and glares at me.

When I glance at the shelf next to me, there’s some hand sanitizer there. I take a squirt and pass the gun from hand-to-hand as I freshen up my skin.

“Look, lady . . .” he huffs and narrows his eyes “. . . I don’t know who you think you are, but you’re not a superhero here.” He’s even more spectacular to look at when he’s seething

at me. My heart flutters, and my lips part as my mouth goes wet. “We have a job to do, and you’re only slowing us down.”

I laugh. “This is a *job*? Oh, forgive me . . . I thought it was a hobby, since you’re never going to be as slick as Ides,” I repeat what they said in the car, smirking.

His eyes go wide, followed by his whole body slouching forward.

“How the hell did you know what we said?” His mouth makes an O shape when I grin hard at him, and it’s almost as impressive as the saucer shape of his wide eyes.

“Oh, I know a lot of things . . .” I smile wider, and then the humiliation

really begins when my eidetic memory kicks in. “Nick Reid, who lives at 2259 Madison Rd, Los Angeles, California.” I quirk a brow, mocking him. “That’s a pretty expensive neighborhood you live in. I love gated communities, but they’re so nineties, wouldn’t you agree?”

They gape at me silently.

“Must be a hefty mortgage, but then you’re not solely responsible, now are you, *Nick*?” I spit his name as harshly as the bullets I’d let loose from my weapon moments ago.

“How can you know all of this?” Nick asks.

I smile broadly, enough he can probably count most of my white teeth. Not as white as his, but still . . . They’re

in good shape.

“This is impossible,” Westin adds.

I move toward my car.

“Even now, as I stand here, your fingerprints are downloaded on my phone. Thanks for making sure to touch my car stereo—so brilliant of you.” I snicker. “My database I have at home is searching for a police file on you both. When it’s done, it’ll shoot it back to me, and I’ll know even more.” I look at Nick. “By the way, you probably shouldn’t be pulling up your bank account on your cell when you’ve stolen my car and have your phone hooked into my wiring. You don’t mess with this bitch.” I take one hand off the gun handle, glance down at my phone for a

second, and it comes up empty. “Oh, too bad, you’ve never served jail time before. I’ll have to remedy that for you, but it appears your roommate, sharing the title of the home with you, a Mr. Jason Michaels, has served two years for petty theft.”

Westin gasps.

“Well, *helllllllloooooo*, Jason,” I say, as a picture of Vapor’s roommate pops up on my phone. I make a face like he’s pretty decent to look at.

He’s got brown hair, looks like he’s kind of short with a thin build and beady, dark eyes.

A moment later, and I’ll know more about who he is, too.

“You know, for a crook with two-

point-nine-million dollars in your bank account—that I’d diversify if I was you—I would think you could train your accomplice here to hone his skills. He needs a better poker face, but then you’re the one with the ‘thespian’ skills, aren’t you, Nick?”

I circle around the car, and they give a wide berth, moving away from me in the opposite direction, looking nervous like I’ll shoot them if they don’t orbit around my vehicle, keeping the appropriate distance from me.

“Move all of this plastic off my car—all of the tape, too.” I motion with the gun for them to move closer to my car before I take my vehicle back.

“Who the hell are you, lady?”

Westin asks, sounding in awe.

“Just call me Shadow, because you never saw me. You never touched my car—I’ll need to sanitize and detail now, thanks to you bozos—it’s gonna take a good week to complete.” I growl low in my belly. “And you never talked to me.”

“Who. The. Hell. *Are. You?*” Nick’s face turns red, and his hands set on his hips.

“Man, she’s gotta be . . .” Westin trails off.

I smirk. Well, well, well . . . Westin’s smarter than I originally thought, and definitely more so than Nick believes him to be. He knows Ide’s work when he sees it.

“You can quit pretending you don’t know who I am,” I tell Nick.

“Knock it off,” Nick tells Westin. “Ides is not her. This woman has no clue what she’s doing.” He rolls his eyes.

I shrug.

“Nobody knows what Ides looks like—no one’s ever seen the person. You’re the only one I know who even thinks it’s a woman and not some dude,” Westin says, ripping the plastic off.

It sounds like they’ve had this argument before.

“Careful!” I say, worried he’s going to mess up my pristine paint job. I’ve only driven this car a little more than two dozen times. The mileage is low, along with the normal damage from

use.

“Think about it . . .” Westin goes back to his line of thinking, continuing to clear off my car. “Only Ides could do all this. No one else has this kind of technology. What she’s done is unreal. It has Ide’s signature all over it.”

A grin spreads across my face.

“Stop it!” Nick yells. “This bitch is lying! She’s making shit up as she goes!” He grips his head like he’s trying to keep it from spinning off. “She’s not Ides!”

Does he honestly not know who I am? Is this all a coincidence?

Well fuck. He’s still an asshole, but I back up to create some distance.

He’s got me all turned-on when I know I shouldn’t be.

How was I to know he'd be this hot when I was talking to him online a week ago?

I prepare to leave but stop myself.

What the hell . . . I can spare a few minutes to watch the show.

Chapter 4

Vapor continues to throw a fit and insist I'm not Ides.

I chuckle inside over his insecurities. The man's got a temper. He really is cute.

The last of the plastic drops to the floor, along with the ball of tape Westin wadded up. When he's finished he backs away.

"Step away from my car, Son," I tell Nick. "I don't want to run you over—blood is the worst to clean up." I lean over and pump another glob of sanitizer into my hand and liberally spread it back and forth between my hands again. Just the thought of blood.

Fuck . . . So yucky!

He groans and remains stuck in his spot.

“*Son?*” He glares. “I’m sure I’m older than you. You barely look twenty.”

“I’m twenty-four, actually,” I correct him with a wink, reminding him he did that to me earlier, and it was equally annoying then.

“You have to admit though, she’s one of us,” Westin tells him.

“I don’t know what she is . . .” Nick shakes his head “. . . other than psychotic. She’s some kind of a freak, that’s what she is.”

“Better a freak than a petty criminal, a panhandler straight from the school of William Shatner’s over-acting

one-oh-one.” My hands visibly shake.

Westin laughs.

And Nick . . . well, his jaw flexes. His teeth look like they’re grinding, and it’s such a shame since he has such straight, nice white teeth. A heartbeat later, and a vein throbs at his right temple.

He groans even louder with a frustrated, strangled sound, and I circle them again.

“Get over in front of the hanging tool board, and place both palms flat on it. Don’t look back,” I say.

They both drag their feet, with aggravation detailed all over their body language.

It’s pretty obvious, they’re not

really afraid anymore, but they clearly know they've been beaten.

I laugh, watching them get into position.

Nick of course disobeys me with his eyes. His hands are in place, but his head is craning around to see me.

Oh God. Does he like the way I look? An electric charge hums through me and takes over my pussy, making it difficult to walk with a steady movement. All the flirty things he'd said to me online drift through my mind, making me breathe a little harder.

I wrench the tracker off my car he placed on the underside, pretending to be completely unaffected by his presence, though I can barely take my

eyes off him. Nick growls like a dog when I lob it at his head.

His hand snatches it out of the air before it hits him, and he slips it into his pocket.

I try to inhale deeply, but he's too far away to get a whiff of him.

Damn. I was hoping for one last sniff.

My insides clench deliciously, and another wave of heat passes through my thighs when I think about those hands on me, and his scent in my nostrils.

Absentmindedly, I rub a smudge off my door handle from one of their fingerprints.

He chokes on a cough. When I look over at him, his eyes are wide.

“Yeah, I’ve just erased some evidence of you having my car in your possession. So what? I’m not gonna file a police report. I was joking earlier. You’re too stupid to be in jail. You’d be gagged and butt-fucked before lights-out during your first twenty-four hours staying there.” I rub the spot once more to make sure I erased it completely. “Paco, the weed-prince of cell block Z, likes pretty, and you’d fit the bill for him a little too nicely. With a derriere like *that*? Pffft! No way he’d let your ass get away.”

Once I have this car back home, they won’t be able to do anything—Vapor and Fingers won’t be able to find me again. I’ll make sure of it.

A moment later, a vision of his extra fine-looking hand on my arm, invades my mind, and instead of my usual reaction of revulsion, my heart flutters.

I mask my sudden panting with a fake cough.

He glowers at me.

What? Does he think I'm making fun of his cough from earlier?

Who cares what he thinks or that he touched me? It doesn't make a difference. I can't be with this man. Dating criminals is what Dad does, not me.

I look away, preparing to leave and never see him again.

Right before I step into my car, he

calls out, “Ides!”

It sounds remarkably close—like he’s only a step or two behind me.

And foolish me—I reflexively respond to my name, turning to look at him.

His lips are latched to mine in the blink of an eye. He kisses me with a fierceness that takes my breath away.

A liquid fire courses through my throat and lands straight in my pussy.

I groan—my body screaming at me to grip onto him and never let go.

Never!

I gasp.

Shove him off! Germs! Germs!

Horrid, fucking germs!

But I . . . I hesitate, and his hands

clamp onto my upper arms.

My eyes grow large.

Touch! Not again . . .

I jump back. He does the same in response.

“Dena . . . is that *you*?” he asks, his brows scrunched together.

How the hell did he figure that out? How can he know who I really am? Was this all fake, and he really knew who I was all along?

Fuck—I can’t be here!

My cheeks flame in utter mortification—I’m smarter than *this*.

I fire off a few rounds close to his right foot as additional warning to stay away. Then I quickly drop into my car and race out of there, breathless and a

sweating mess.

“Good going, you idiot, you might as well have told the guy you live two blocks away from him, and you’d love to spend some more time with your lips on his!” I shout at myself, slamming my palms into the steering wheel.

Goddammit. I actually liked Vapor. A lot.

Fucking moron. How could I have fallen for his act?

I press down harder on the gas. My lips throb from that fiery kiss.

I can’t get home fast enough.

He kisses even better than I could’ve imagined.

And was that . . . ?

No, he can’t be. I don’t know that

tool back there other than online. I'm imagining things—it's not the same guy.

I make the mistake of looking in my rear-view mirror. Nick's outside. He's staring at me in amazement as I flee.

And the vision of him watching me leave makes me feel . . . *off*.

I grip the wheel tighter and breathe in and out with deep, calming breaths.

I *really* don't like that guy. Not anymore.

Fucking stupid, freaking-out body!

I clamp my thighs closed. They're leaking in the middle for him.

Great. Now I'm going to have to wash these same jeans and panties the moment I get home—the ones he got me wet in a week ago when I decided he

had no place in my head anymore.

Bastard. Kissing me? Who does that after stealing someone's car and getting caught?

“Aaaahhhhh!” I scream and stretch my neck, continuing to drive as fast as I can.

At a stop light, I rip my hoodie off and chuck it in the backseat. I had to get his germs off me—couldn't wait until I was back in my garage.

Within moments, I'm back home, tucked up safe in my car, hidden away in my own, personal, bat cave.

I almost roll off the seat once I have the door open.

What now?

I'm too exhausted to scrub my car

down.

I head inside and find a way to get a few more drops out of the last of my homemade sanitizer.

My feet shuffle around, heavy and uncooperative as I head to my office.

I plunk down in my seat and stare at my newest ideas I'm working on, but my eyes shift away, and I'm anything but interested in working.

How? How did I wind up caring about what he thought about me?

He thinks I'm repellent.

But he kissed you . . .

I fight off a shiver, and look for my sweater, but for some asinine reason, it's not resting on the back of my chair as usual.

When I pause and think about it . . . I'm not cold. And my sweater's in the dryer. I had to wash it after I sneezed.

And I've still gotta get out of these dampened undies and pants.

I get up, preparing to strip down—feeling grimy and obnoxiously dirty.

I kick off my Doc Martens and yank off my socks. My black jeans fall to the floor, and I have my black tee shirt off a moment later. My panties follow. I fling it all on top of my pants.

My bra is the only thing remaining. Well, it's the only thing still clean, even if he did make me sweat a little. I don't have boob sweat, and I'm sensible about not wasting detergent and water, so it stays on.

I lean over and reach into the bottom drawer of my desk. After Vapor kept making me ooze for him, I started keeping a backup pair of panties in my desk.

I slip them on, then stare at my pile of laundry that somehow all landed under the desk, and I realize that for the first time in my life I'm being messy, and I don't give a fuck.

I stand there, staring and blinking for several minutes, trying to take in everything that happened tonight.

"I don't care," I tell myself. "He's a douche. I really don't care about him or this fucking mess."

I kick the pile of clothes I've made.
Why should I care about any of it? I

was almost violated.

Somehow, I still can't move though. I'm caught up, staring and simply breathing. I'm numb and stuck in place.

I finally walk back to my bedroom with my head tipped down.

My body wants to crash on me, and when I'm within falling distance of my mattress, I allow myself to land face-first into the fluffy comforter I secretly love with all its purple ruffles and flowery patterns.

"Well, fuck, you don't waste time getting naked for me," a familiar voice lilt.

"Ahhhhhhh!" I scream, and before I can jump off the bed, strong arms grip mine behind me, and I'm cuffed to the

top of my black, iron headboard.

“Oh, yeah, I’m gonna have fun with you,” Nick says with a shifty smile.

“Let me go, you nasty fucker, and I won’t send you straight to prison for this,” I howl. “I wasn’t kidding. They’ll rape you first thing because you’re so damn pretty. Doesn’t hurt you have a tight ass, too. Makes it easier on their thrusting muscles, and makes their dicks happy, too. You’re an inmate’s wet dream . . .” *And mine . . .*

He nudges my leg with his wrist. “Let’s talk some more about my ass and how much you like it.” He rubs his jaw. “Or maybe . . . Just maybe, we should talk about how I outsmarted you, breaking into your impenetrable fortress.

Rumor is, not only are you invincible, and no one knows who you are, but you're also supposed to have the most secure home in the US. Not very secure from where I'm standing." He chuckles and paces at my side, brushing up against the side of the bed as he goes. "Wasn't too hard to find you."

My eyes follow him, and I gulp, my stupid mouth, watering again.

God, does he have to be so hot and smell this good? In a subtle way, I lean toward him and take a deep whiff.

If I die from his germs being breathed on me, at least I'll have smelled something awesome first. I fight off a satisfied grin.

"Black is overrated. You'd look

really good in some other colors like green, or even red. It would bring out the intense, electric blue in your eyes, though I do love the black bra and panties. I was right about the color. How smart am *I*?” He leans over, his head disappearing, and when he comes back up, he places a red, silky blindfold on my torso.

I try to angle my head up to see what he’s going to do next.

He rests his hand on the bed, an inch away from my leg. I scoot away from him.

“Too close for your liking?” he taunts.

I swallow and keep my eyes opened—focused on him.

“Not much for chatting right now, huh?” He removes his hand and inches toward my upper body. “Well, maybe if I take away some of your other senses you’ll be more likely to talk to me.”

I shake my head the second he picks up the blindfold and brings it toward my eyes.

“No, please, God, no!”

“Yes, please, God, yes,” he mocks me, smirking.

He slips it over my eyes, and a moment later, I hear the unmistakable sound of a cap on a bottle being flipped open.

“What is that?” I ask, my head lifting higher, my body perking up.

“I don’t want your germs,” he says.

“It’s hand sanitizer, since I’m definitely gonna have to touch you.”

A soft, pleading whimper chokes its way out of my chest. He’s messing with me. How does he know so much about me? “Please don’t.”

“Have no choice, now do I? You refused to talk to me,” he replies. “Seems to be a recurring pattern with you. I say something that makes you squirm a little, and you cut me off. That’s a fucking pattern I want to stop immediately.”

“I can make your life miserable if you do this. It’s not too late for you. Think about it. You can let me go and leave without a trace. I won’t report you,” I say, my voice breaking. “You

already know I wasn't going to turn you in for stealing my car."

"Oh, I know you can destroy me if you want to. I'm all too aware of what you did to your dad." He chuckles and his hand tickles up my leg.

"Oh, shit!" My eyes close beneath the blindfold. He's close enough his scent is seizing control of my brain, and his touch has my body on fire. I already need another fresh pair of undies.

"You really don't like thieves—and I get that. He was sponging off the top, but that's not my style. When I steal something from you, you'll know it—like your pussy. When I take that, it's not gonna be a surprise or a secret." His hand glides up my thigh, and when he

gets to my panties his fingers rim the bottom edge and get dangerously close to my moistened pussy. “By the way, I always thought it was really dumb for a father to do something like that. But not as stupid as you, keeping his handcuffs you used to restrain him when he attacked you.” He tsks, and my heart goes cold.

“How can you know all this? I had those records sealed,” I cry, pulling at my wrists, the metal biting into my flesh.

“You’re not the only one that can hack into records.”

“But why would you follow *my* records?”

His hand settles right above my pubic bone, and the tip of what feels like

his thumb, works little circles right above my panty's waistline.

“You really don't remember me, do you?” He exhales like he's disgusted with me. “Jesus—apparently the girl I considered my best friend from so long ago didn't feel the same in return.” His voice breaks.

“What're you talking about?” My head shifts in his direction, and my neck is sore from holding my head up, so I finally rest it back on my pillow. “I barely met you a little over a month ago online.” *It's. Not. Him,* my mind screams at me. *It's not that kid from high school!*

It can't be him . . . It just can't be! Christ, is it?

My heart pounds at the thought that it could be *him*.

I squirm, my panties even wetter now. *Nick . . . Touch me more. A little lower.*

“God, Dena. I looked for you. For years—I was trying to find you. You disappeared when you were fourteen, and this was all the information I could find on you. I missed you like crazy while you were away from me.”

“Who. The. Hell. Are. You? And why do you think I should know you?” I say through gritted teeth, my heart pounding.

“Well, fuuuuuck,” he groans. He shifts off the bed, the heat of his hand now leaving a cold, icy-feeling in place

over my undies, and my heart drops.

“What the hell is happening?” I yank at my hands again, but once more, I’m unable to break free.

“Fan-fucking-tastic,” he says. “Here, I thought you’d know as soon as I kissed you.” His breath is suddenly fanning out over my lips, and a flame shoots through my body, making my fingers and toes flex.

Soft lips mold into mine, and hands drive into my hair, fisting at the scalp.

“Do you fucking remember me *now*?” he growls into my mouth, then kisses me again more fiercely, before I can answer him.

My mouth drops open, and his tongue delves inside.

And that's when it hits me. It's impossible—but it *is* him.

His flavor assaults me.

When he pulls away, I moan, “Nick—I, God . . . It's *you*! Holy shit!”

“Finally. Thank God,” he breathes, stroking my cheeks with a softness that makes me damn near shiver from head to toe. “Remember me now, gorgeous? God, you've become so insanely beautiful, I can barely stand to think I was missing this for all these years—seeing you.”

I can almost feel his eyes roaming hungrily all over my body. Dear God, that's hot!

“You were my first kiss . . .” And my first huge crush.

And the first and last reason I need to change my panties from getting too slippery. I hated that back then, too. Never could keep dry around him.

He chuckles. “You were mine, too.” His fingers drift over my jaw gently.

“I was?” My voice cracks and goes hoarse.

“Why is that so shocking? You think I was kissing a lot of girls back then? Fuck, my voice hadn’t even dropped at that point.”

“Uh, ‘cause you’re two years older than I am and you’re gorgeous. Always have been, but I didn’t remember your hair being this dark. Did you dye it or something?” My lips press together as I

recall a skinny boy, with his voice barely starting to lower and sandy-blond hair, kissing me at a party after we'd both been drinking. Then I remember something else disturbing, and I gasp. "You're the reason . . ."

"The *reason*?"

"One of the reasons I'm paranoid about germs. You vomited all of over my feet right after you kissed me." I squirm from the memory.

"First of all"—some weight shifts on the bed, making me dip to my right—"you kissed *me*. And second of all—if I'm the reason you're too scared to face a single virus"—I snort at his choice of computer terminology, and he smacks my leg—"then you're to blame for me

becoming a hacker, and the reason I started stealing.”

“Oh, no . . . You can’t blame me for those fucked up things.”

The weight shifts once more, and his lips tickle at my ear. “Can’t I? I first hacked into computers to find you, and I stole information for the exact same reason . . .” His teeth nip at my ear. “I wanted you then, and I want you even more now. Do you know how long I’ve fantasized about touching you?” His fingers drift over the side of my right breast and down my ribs. “How long I’ve been dying to fuck you? A ten-year-boner isn’t funny. I put Viagra to shame.”

I shudder for a moment, but not because of the thought of bacteria, but

because I like it. I like it a whole hell of a lot—the idea of him doing any damned thing he wants to me. Along with him having an unending hard-on.

“And now that I have you, and know what you changed your name to—”

I gasp louder this time. “Goddammit, I changed it for a reason! You can’t let anyone know.”

“Who would I tell, Dena Blaaaaack?” he drones.

“Fuck, you’re doing this on purpose,” I whimper, struggling once more to tear my hands free.

My wrists are getting raw.

“Doing what? And how fucked up is it that you changed your name all because it’s your favorite color?” His

fingers move up my body and start over at the hollow of my throat, then walk their way down my center, toward my navel.

Something wet drags up my ribs.

I jerk away from it, from the ticklish, sensation that makes my skin do funny things.

“I just like the color black. What’s the big deal?”

“I like black, too . . . Mmm . . . A lot,” he purrs. My black bra straps are toyed with on my shoulders, and he snaps them, making them smack my skin.

“H-how did you get in here?”

“*Where? In here?*” he asks and then cups my groin.

“Jesus!” I yelp, and then whimper

with a dying moan as my body begins to levitate off the bed, my back arching like the damned Lucky Charm's rainbow I study on my cereal box every morning. "P-please. Mooore . . ."

Cool metal slips across my skin between my panties and my heated flesh. I exhale, and he's cut through the cotton fabric at my right hip and then at my left, and he snatches it off my body. "The tighter, the better, I always say. I'm good at disappearing in cramped, warm places."

My thighs slam together, and another pathetic, wallowing moan rips out of my chest.

"But you know all about tight, cramped, warm places, don't you,

Dena?”

“Mmm . . . I . . . I-I d-dooooon’t know what you m-mean.” I can barely form a sentence he’s got me so turned-on.

His fingers wrap around my knees and part them slowly, but so powerfully, there’s no way I can stop him. “Oh, don’t lie to me. Tell me, or I’ll stop.”

“Okay, dammit. W-what do you want to know?” My breath catches in my throat as my mind goes blank.

“When you made a move on me so long ago . . . You and I were in a closet, and you pretended to be scared, until you had me backed up against the corner, where I couldn’t escape. That’s when you kissed me. I had nowhere to go, no

means of escape, and I knew you did it on purpose.”

“That wasn’t a question, and I didn’t do th—”

“Oh, but you did, you naughty girl,” he says, and then something warm, wet and stiff, rims my slit, making my legs shake and my heart pound so hard, I can barely hear what he’s saying anymore. “You wanted me to do more than kiss you, even back then, didn’t you? You wanted my cock. You still do.” His voice is gruff and so sexy I can barely keep still.

“Yes, I mean n-no, I was a kiiid.” My legs shamelessly roll open, splaying my body to him. If that isn’t enough, my breasts jut forward, equally as

obnoxious.

I can't see, so I have no idea if he's grossed out by my pubic hairs. I don't wax or shave down there. Women have it wrong. Those hairs keep things cleaner and more sanitary—keeps the germs away from the vagina. If I take them away, I could get a UTI, or some other hideous infection.

I bite my lip and try desperately to see out the bottom of the blindfold, but there's no way to see past it. It's like a huge, fucking blast-shield over my face.

“You're a pervert, that's what you are. I saw some of the porn you had opened on your phone. Naked women tied up”—and hairless, unlike me—“and men ejaculating all over them.” I want to

say his come would be full of germs, but it's not true. I found out a long time ago there are antibacterial and antifungal properties in semen. I had to know because I wanted to give my ex-boyfriend, Tyson, a blowjob. Unfortunately, he stole one of my biggest ideas yet and took off before I ever got a chance to put my tongue on him down there.

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you? Mmm . . . Yes, such a fucking tease—keeping these handcuffs in your nightstand drawer, right next to your bed, just waiting for me to come and use them on you.” He’s moving, shifting around on the bed.

The unmistakable sound of a zipper

coming down has my breath caught in my throat and my fingernails digging into my palms. My head jerks toward him again.

“You wouldn’t,” I say, my voice low and scratchy, all the while my legs roll open as wide as they can, and I’m wetter than I’ve ever been in my life. *Please do, Vapor. Please! God, I’ve been dying to have you for weeks now.*

More movement. I may come from sheer anticipation.

Or from the scent of him.

Both are killing me and have made me forget to breathe.

My head goes fuzzy.

Chapter 5

“Wouldn’t I? You’re on the pill. I saw the opened packet in your drawer next to your cuffs. Besides, I don’t sleep around—never have, never will. I’m clean. And I know you’re not a sleazy whore or a drug addict.” He yanks on my bindings. “Oh, fuck. You need to quit yanking like that.” In the next moment something soft is wrapped around my wrists, shoved in between my now raw flesh and the metal. “If you keep still, you’ll be glad you did. You’re gonna enjoy this almost as much I will.”

I exhale and buck my hips, my legs flailing out.

He smacks my outer thigh, closest

to him.

“Snuuuuuuuhhhhhhhuhh,” he inhales deeply, and my pubic hairs move with his large, sweeping breath.

“Fuck!” I whisper. He likes my curls. He just fucking inhaled them like they smelled better than cinnamon rolls baking in the oven. “Oh my God . . . More, please, Nick . . .” *Please, pretend I’m tasty like cinnamon rolls . . .*

Does he like cinnamon rolls? What if he thinks they’re disgusting? But that’s silly. Nothing smells or tastes better than them, except him of course.

“Yeah, I love them, too, but no . . . You definitely smell and taste”—*liiiiick*—“better, sweetheart. Way better than me. Though, a little

cinnamon might be nice on those nipples right about now. I think I'd really enjoy that. God, you're sexy as fuck. I knew you would be. And I was dying to see and talk to you. Now here I am. Dream come true."

Oh, God, I said that out loud about goddamn cinnamon rolls? My face heats, and my pussy convulses. He thinks I smell and taste better. He's wrong, but —

Riiiiiiip.

The next thing I know, my bra has been shredded off me, most likely by the same metal implement that took away my panties.

Is he using a knife to dismantle my wardrobe? Is that safe? Did he clean it

properly first? Knives can harbor a lot of germs.

“Do you know how fucking long I searched for you—and dreamed about this moment? The moment I could kiss you, and taste you and devour every inch of you?” he growls.

A hot, wet line drags up my leg, and then I realize he’s hovering over me, and his damp tip is moistening my body with his pre-come.

“Wouldn’t want to leave behind any germs, now would we?” he taunts, and something even wetter than before, retraces the path his tip left behind on my body. His tongue? He lapped at his pre-come—removed it from my body?

Oh sweet Jesus, that’s insanely hot.

I think I say some more gibberish, begging him to touch me again, maybe I ask him to fuck me somewhere in there? I can't think straight, so who the hell knows what I've said.

His fingers caress my inner thighs, and something wet works its way from my knee up to the edge of my outer labia.

“Oh God, yes!” I rasp, sounding like the biggest whore ever. It's his mouth, and I know it because it's now settled on my left nipple. Holy shit, that feels amazing! It flicks, it stabs and sucks, and I can only mewl like a cat in heat. “More, oh, fucking hell, that's goooood.”

“I know you like it rough. You fisted my shirt and pulled my hair when

we were only kids and you were about to ram your tongue down my throat when that closet door opened,” he says.

“My leg,” I pant—my words barely coming out since I’m so breathless.

“Your what?” His hands land on my legs and it feels like he’s inspecting for wounds while twisting and turning them.

“N-no.” I waver in my speech, my tongue heavy and uncooperative and way too wet. “I wrapped my leg around your hip, and you had to push me off when we got caught.”

“Oh, fuck, yeah, I forgot about that.” He laughs. His warm palms slide up my legs once more and massage right at the dip of my inner thighs. “Such a

naughty one—trying to get laid. I probably would've knocked you up right then. God, I bet you left that night all wet and slippery—with that greedy little cunt of yours.” Warm hands run all over my body. “Does your tight, pink cunt want me now?”

My stomach tightens each time his hands move lower. “Yesss,” I answer.

His tongue parts my pussy lips, and he simultaneously pinches my left nipple.

I'm a groaning, sweating mess, my body rippling off the bed.

“Oh . . . Please . . . God, Nick, I c-can't—”

His mouth stops, and a wisp of cool air blows over my embarrassingly wet

labia. "Please, what? Hmm?" I hear his jaw snap shut, and his breathing goes harsh. His hand drags off my breast and then clamps down on my thigh, yanking me open even wider. "You wanna know what you do to me? What you've always done to me?"

"Oh Christ!" I whimper as the initial brush of his cock up against my entrance makes my pussy convulse.

"Say you thought of me, too. That you wanted me every day, and you were going mad not knowing where I was." His tip slips in and out, maddeningly, unhurriedly, and I am nothing but tendons and muscles, tightly coiled as a shriek wafts out of me. "Tell me something, or I'll stop. And you don't want me to stop,

do you?”

“No, Jesus, God, no!” I cry out with a raspy voice. “Yes, I thought of you—I t-tried—”

“Then tell me,” he insists, his fingers digging into my thighs, and his fucking tease of a cock head, still barely licking at my hole.

“Okay, I did—I looked for you, too, at first, but you moved as well. It was too painful though, so I had to stop. I threw myself at you back then—like you said—in that closet. And I knew you didn’t like me. I made you vomit—you thought I was that heinous. No boys liked me then, and it’s no different now. You tolerated me,” I blurt, and then my chest caves in. I’m a torrent of tears, and

gasping nightmares and fears. “But I want you . . . So much.”

“Shhhh . . . It’s okay, Dena.” My hands are freed, and I’m flung around his body. He kisses my hair, then all over my face as he pulls the mask off, and his eyes are tormented as well. “I couldn’t ever stop thinking about you, beautiful woman. Finally, after searching so long, I convinced myself you were dead, and now to find out—” His neck snaps to the side, and he tucks his head under my chin, holding himself to my chest as he rocks back and forth with me molded around him.

I stroke his back and the nape of his neck. “I’m sorry. Oh, God, so sorry . . .”

“Don’t be,” he says, muffled by my

flesh he has gripped tightly up against his face. “You’re here with me now. That’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

I sigh and lean back ‘til I’m laying down, taking him with me. There are soft, penitent kisses, rising up my neck, and hands massaging into my breasts, along with a chanting from him, that sounds similar to, “I found you—you’re mine. I found you. God, I finally found you. Searched so long.”

I kiss him wherever I can until his lips grow more urgent, and he finds a way to clasp my hands in his, stretch them out on the pillow above my head.

This time, when his mouth descends on mine, I can barely breathe—he overwhelms me.

My legs wrap around his waist, and he runs his length over my slickened clit, causing dirty, wired moans to rip out of me.

“God, that’s fucking beautiful. Almost as gorgeous as you,” he says, nipping at my ear, his tongue flicking at the bottom. “I wanna see more of that. A whole lot more. Better than any fantasizing could ever be.”

“I never thought you’d ever want me,” I confess. “I do remember you, but you’re different . . .”

“You are, too. Even better than I’d remembered—so crazy beautiful I can barely stand it. And my fucking God—you’re Ides.” He groans, and his head tips back, exposing his straining neck to

me. “I’ve been obsessed with two women, and when I found out they were one in the same? I can’t tell you what that did to me.”

I can feel what it does to him now. He’s harder than the metal I use for a lot of my inventions.

“Never letting go of you,” he says, voice choppy with his erratic breathing.

I use the tip of my tongue to trace along his jugular, loving the feel of his hammering pulse on my mouth.

“Gotta have you—feel how hard you make me—how much I die to be with you.” His hips jut forward, burying himself inside me in one swift move.

“Ahhhhhh fuuuuuck!” I say through my teeth, gripping his hands tight and

tilting my head to the side, nuzzling into his muscular forearm.

“Jesus—fucking Ides, it’s you—I can’t believe it.” His hips move way too slowly. “I’m finally making love to you—inside that slick, tight cunt, and it feels better than anything ever could.” He moans, then kisses my chest.

“Pl-pluuuuheeeez move faster,” I say, voice breaking and body trying to bend in half, simply to sink him deeper inside me, and hopefully get him to increase his pace.

He bites up the column of my neck, taking whiffs of me as he goes. “No. I’m gonna savor every fucking moment—memorize it. Fuck, I shoulda recorded this.” He shakes his head a little, his lips

brushing over my throat.

“I need faster. Harder . . . Or I’ll break.” The words stick to the back of my throat like his cock, stuck at my entrance once more.

His thrusts speed up, but they’re shallow, unsatisfying. “You’re gonna kill me—stop fucking teasing.” I clamp my fingers down so hard on his, I hope it hurts. My eyes blaze at him.

“Look at the way you think you can control this.” He stops altogether, and a shrill, feral sound, tears out of my throat and my eyes slide up in my tipped back head. “I’ve heard about Ides and *her* control issues. But you’re just a woman—a fucked woman, stuck under me, and I’m telling you—I was jealous. I wanted

to be you. Be the top dog every hacker everywhere talks about.”

“No one’s gonna ever know you did this to me—that we fucked like wild animals.” I bite the edge of his forearm.

He laughs, and it’s dark and unsettling, and fuck—it impossibly turns me on even more.

“I don’t care if anyone knows. *I’ll* know. I’ll wake up every goddamn day and know you burn for me. That you begged for my cock to be stuffed and rammed inside you so you could come all over it because it’s all you want, isn’t it?” He inches inside me at an agonizing pace until he can go no further.

“Iiiiiyyyyyahhhhh!” I grunt with my whole insides tightening, my head turned

away from him. I can't look at his heartbreakingly gorgeous face. I don't deserve to have him saying he wants me—that he looked for me and sounding like he's dying inside as he buries himself deep. I'm just me—*Dena*, the computer nerd with no social skills or game to speak of. “Fuck! Yes, okay—I want you so bad it aches deep inside me—in places I didn't know existed. And they frighten me when they clench up for you.” Tears roll down my cheeks. “Is that what you want to hear? That I've loved you for so long, I had to shove it out of my brain so I wouldn't go crazier than I already am? And then when I met Vapor online, I was obsessed with him, too. He knew exactly what to say and do

to turn me on and get inside my head! I was dying to fuck you at that point, too.”

“Finally! Jesus—woman, take me to my knees,” he groans, his voice gritty and rough edged. He lets go of one hand, only to put both of my wrists in one of his palms. His hand clamps down over them, keeping them secure. His free hand grips under my chin, and he forces me to look at him.

“I love you. Every day . . . every hour, and I’ll be damned if I don’t take what’s fucking mine this instant. So, when I say I love you, and my cock’s enveloped by your wet cunt, I expect you to come. Do you understand?”

“Oh, gaaaawd,” I say in a sandpaper whisper, and my pussy

clenches down in response.

His eyes—they speak the truth. He really does have a claim on my body and soul, and he's trying to take my heart, too. How will I survive?

“That’s better . . .” He keeps hold of my face with a rough grip while he kisses me delicately, and the contrast between the two—God, I fight off an agonized moan. His thick cock, sliding in and out of my very wet hole, has my eyes heavy and my heart pounding, making it even harder to keep from panting out his name—giving him the satisfaction to know that he *does* in fact own every bit of me. Always has—since the day I met him.

“Shit, you feel too good to be real.

You're so tight—all for me.” He kisses my nose, slides his forehead across mine and wears this look, like all his concentration is on me and he can't believe he's finally with me this way.

His motions are quick, deep, and oh so fucking good, I want more. I do want to orgasm with his dick inside me, but I've never done it merely from penetration.

“I know you want me to come on you, but I . . . It's not that simple,” I tell him.

“You don't think I know how to make you come? Goddammit, woman, I won't be leaving here tonight until you've creamed my cock hard.” He lets go of my jaw, his mouth latches onto

mine and his tongue invades my mouth while my thoughts center completely on everything he's doing to me—the slight twinge of pain in my wrists from those damned cuffs I'd been wearing. The tingle in my clit as his pubic bone presses into it when he angles his hips really far back before driving into me once more. The way he stares in my eyes, like he really means it—like I'm the whole world to him.

His free hand roams down my body, pinching here and there as he goes, and it isn't until he's high up on my inner thigh, pinching there, and he's back to shallow pumping with his amazing dick, that I about explode into orgasm.

“Fuck, Jesus, God!” I yelp.

“That’s a lot of religion for our first time. Wanna try that again? I wanna hear my name somewhere in there.” He pulls out completely, pinches my clit, and I scream, my back arching as round as it will go.

I drop to the bed, my shoulder blades almost touching each other, and I fight for air.

“Nope—still not getting it right. Call my name, or I won’t let you come—and I can tell you’re really fucking close. Now, show me how much you want me,” he insists. “Make my ears ring. It better sound like a goddamn prayer, too.”

He pinches again, and this time, he rolls it, and God, I have no idea what I say, but I think his name is there

somewhere inside, along with his fingers now inside me, probing and touching spots that make me shout obscenities even louder.

“The neighbors can’t hear you, Dena. Not loud enough. I need more. I need it all—give me your fucking come—give me your fucking cunt—soak my hand.” His teeth scrape across my collar bone. “It’s the only way I’ll be satisfied.”

He’s everywhere, and I’m still unable to grab at him with my hands, since he has them tightly secured.

Swwwiiiiip . . .

Swwwwiiiiip . . .

Swwwwiiiiip . . .

“Oh. My. God.” I writhe and

squirm at the sounds of his hand, plunging into a very wet cunt, supplied by me, and it makes me try to get away. I'm restless. I'm frustrated. I want to come—I do, but I don't really know how to do it this way.

“Fuck, I c-c-can't dooo this,” I cry out, my hips pulling away from him. “Tyson t-told me. He said I was a lousy lay, and that I had no idea how to pleasure a man, even when there wasn't much to it. He could get hard easily, but then I never knew what to do to keep him that way. I suck at this.” That's why I was trying to figure out how to perform oral on him. And thusly, became obsessed with a fresh, clean as possible, oral cavity. I didn't want to give him my

germs. There are certain things I didn't want to share with him.

But fuck . . . With Nick? I want to share everything.

And I don't even know why.

Tyson wanted me to participate, but I just couldn't. I'd shut down. I'd get shy. I wasn't good at dirty talking or stroking his ego, or even loving on his tiny dick for that matter.

But here, Nick's directing it all. He isn't asking me to do anything but respond to what he's doing to me, and I'm almost shutting down.

"Don't you dare talk about that fucker right now. Just listen to *me*—you're *mine*. I know what you need, and *I* control your body. No one else can get

you off but me. And you'll come because I'm telling you to, understand?" He bites between my hip bone and my belly button.

"Y-yessss," I say on a nearly breathless exhale.

"And when I say you're mine, you believe it."

I nod, and my lower lip juts out, tears gathering at the corners of my eyes.

"You're so fucking sexy—I can barely keep from coming all over you." He moves back up my body and kisses my lips softly. "Covering you with my milky semen. You'd look even better with it all over your tits."

"Really?" I ask when he ends the kiss, my voice going up an octave. "You

want to do that to me? I make you feel out of control?”

He groans. “I’m barely holding on, woman.” He slaps my pussy, and a smile explodes out of me. “Such a dirty slut for me. You like it rough—just like me. Next time I’m bringing my ropes, and I’m definitely recording that shit.”

“If you can find a way to breach my security after I tighten it up,” I quip, suddenly feeling brave.

“Oh, now that’s the kinda nasty talk I need.” He crawls over me until he’s kneeling, straddling me and his tip circles my clit.

His face looms above me while he leans over, still keeping my hands immobile above my head.

I close my eyes and breathe hard, soaking up the sensations of what he's doing to me.

"Tell me what you'll do to try to keep me out, Ides," he purrs.

"I'll . . ." It's hard to concentrate on speaking. I lick my lips and blow out. "I'll make sure your fingerprints are scanned in, so my computer grid knows to look for you."

He leans over and licks at my neck. I automatically turn it, and realize he's nibbling where my chip is.

There's an odd buzzing sensation at that spot, and my head is foggy—floating. I keep my eyes closed as I almost drift away.

"And *then* . . . ?" he coos.

I take a deep breath and try to clear my head of what he's doing to my clit. "And then I'll make sure I also have video footage of you here in my room, so the computer knows to look for your build, your height . . ." I trail off as he deliberately abrades my skin at the same location in my neck where the chip is—he does it with the stubble on his chin.

"And what else? Tell me more—you've got me so fucking hard for you and your dirty talk. God, I'm already leaking and about to blow any second." He sucks at my neck and really hits my clit hard with his dick.

"I . . . Well, I . . . Uhhhhh," I ramble, sucking in a tight gust of air.

His hand shoves up into my hair,

and angles my head as far away from him as possible. There's a sting at my neck, a jerking sensation, and then he's sucking really hard in that spot. It tingles, it throbs, and there's something sticky swiping over it now.

"You won't get in," I say, squeezing my eyes shut tight.

His lips make a popping sound. "You think so, huh?"

He slips his cock back inside me, fucking me so hard the bed's creaking.

All I can do is hold on to my own hands, clasping them together and cry out for more.

His tongue makes this odd clicking sound, and then he swallows hard.

My eyes fly open. His free hand is

over his lips, and it moves away. The odd movement looks like he had something in his mouth and just removed it.

He shoves that hand into the rumpled up bedspread, where I can't see it.

My eyes roam over his face for some clue as to what that was about.

He chuckles, and right when I'm about to ask him what's so funny, he leans down, his mouth hovering above mine. "You're gonna come now because I can't fucking wait any longer."

He kisses me, deep and rough, and that one hand—the one he was hiding—wraps around my waist, pulling my pussy up tighter into him. I ram my hips

up to meet him with his powerful surge into me.

He releases my wrists, and with that hand that's now free, he reaches down, handling my clit roughly. Right when I think I'll die, he sucks my tongue hard into his mouth, and something sharp and metallic slices the edge of my tongue.

My chip!

When I chase it with my tongue, he pulls away. "It's mine—just like your come," he growls. He wipes his mouth with his palm, and then he swallows it down.

Fuck! My eyes double in size, they're so wide.

He slams himself inside me,

pinches my clit so hard, I can't breathe, yet I manage an incoherent scream. "Nicholaaaaaas, fuuuuuck!"

"Yes, fuck, yes! Oh, Ch-christ, Denaaaa," he moans and convulses above me at the same time I do. His eyes burn into me with his green and brown, hazel, erotic fire.

He spurts inside me and gasps for air. His thrusts grow sloppy as he comes. I keep making this high pitched, closed off, throaty sound as my orgasm finishes crashing through me.

A moment later, a huge mess of both our fluids roll onto my inner thighs and down my crack.

I want to wiggle away, get something to sanitize myself, until he

says, “Computer, lock the door.”

“Fuck. Me.” I freeze.

The doors lock. He laughs low and deep in the back of his throat.

“Not bad for a first time, but I think we can both do better.” He smirks.

“I hate you.” My heart rate still thrums heavy and makes my pussy throb while he maintains his position inside me.

“No, you love me. And I’m yours. I have your chip and your heart.” He smiles with a lazy, pleased grin.

I look away, my body heating once more from that goddamn look he gives me. “God . . . I’m gonna need a lot of fresh hand sanitizer with you around . . .”

“No fucking doubt. You’ll need to bathe in it with me around. And I’ll be filming that shit, too.” That lopsided grin about kills me, because I think I like him more than I should.

Chapter 6

Vapor

I stand, and Dena stares at me.

“You’re leaving?” she asks, her voice flying higher than my dick, pointed straight up again.

After kissing and stroking her for close to an hour after we both had mind-blowing orgasms, I can’t take it any longer.

“Well, seeing as how you didn’t remember who I was when I kissed you earlier tonight.” I pretend to be hurt by her lack of memory.

“You fucker—you changed your name, too, from Nick *Matthews*,” she

says. “What kind of stupid, made-up name is Reid, anyway? It’s so boring. No wonder I couldn’t find you either.”

“Just following your lead.”

“Puhlease!” She rolls her eyes and clucks her tongue. “I went from Winters to Black. At least my change was an improvement.”

“Most successful thieves don’t go around sharing their fingerprints, DNA and identity,” I remind her.

“Yet you just came inside me, you stupid bastard.” She smirks.

“Yeah, and you wiped my fingerprints off your car. I’d say that makes us about on par in terms of being stupid for each other.” I run my fingers through my sweat dampened hair.

God, she has me so worked up again. Just *looking* at her is a hard-on.

I wave goodbye.

“You really are leaving? God, this was pathetic as far as dates go. You didn’t even buy me dinner, and I’m starved.” She glances at my dick, then averts her eyes, blushing a little.

“Yeah, I’m *going*. I’d better, before I take this further. Your dirty mouth and whorish looks are making me leak.” And I’ve got a chip I need to deal with, along with a few other items.

“Fine. Lock the front door on the way out, junior,” she says.

I chuckle. “Yes, ma’am. Anything else I should do on my way out?”

“Fuck yourself. How about that,”

she says, flipping me off.

Her tits bounce when she shoves her finger in the air.

I stare at them and twitch. “Why should I when I have easy access now with you?” I rub my stomach. “I’ll be back when I can’t keep away.”

She keeps her bird at attention, pointed at me. “You really are an asshole.”

“You have quite a way with words, Ides. No wonder you stay out of the public eye.” I lean over, pat her foot, and she promptly jerks it away. “I’ll see you again soon. And you need to get back on that chat group. I miss our little talks.” I flutter my lashes at her. “Next time, though, send me a goddamn pic of

you in your sexy black panties and bra. It'll be a good way for you to get back at me for being such an asshole, and then I can shoot my come all over my screen and send you a picture back. There's nothing more torturous than seeing you almost naked and sexy as fuck without being able to touch you." I groan, imagining what kind of naked photos she might send to give me navy-blue-balls.

"No, you fucking won't be back here. This was a one-time slipup. I already told you"—she exhales in a rush—"I'll be tightening up security. You won't be getting back in, and I won't be back on that chat group or sending you dick."

"God, woman—no more dirty talk.

Foreplay's over. My dick can't take much more." I grab my clothes, her panties and bra I dismantled off her body, and leave the room before I jump her again.

I roam out to her garage and pull the chip out of my pocket. A laugh bubbles up out of my throat when I recall the way she looked when she thought I'd swallowed it. How insane does she think I am? And how stupid would *that* be? I hate vomiting. She should know that. Plus, those motherfuckers are sharp on the edges, and I'm not about to slice up my throat to get a chip back up so I can be in and out of her house at will.

I love her, but, fuck, I'm not deranged.

I palm it, slip my phone out and hook it right into the wiring. Within a second, I've dialed up her car.

I throw my clothes on and jump inside with her panties and bra scraps shoved in my pocket. "Garage open," I say.

It predictably retracts, and I drive off without looking back.

"See ya soon," I murmur and smile.

She really is a sexy little bitch. Much sexier than I'd remembered. I'll probably be back much quicker than I'd like. How can I stay away from her?

Instead of driving the car to the shop, I bring it to Westin's.

When I pull up in his driveway, he texts me, asking what's going on.

Open the garage now, fucker.
I've got the car. That's my reply. It's all he gets.

The door raises. Once I'm inside, I turn the car off and open the car door, then get out.

"Holy fuck! How'd you get this?" he asks.

"Well, after I spoke to her, she willingly gave it to me." I grin.

"She did not. I mean, I had to copy the frequency of her chip so I could hot-wire her car that quickly. The temporary connection would be broken by now, and with what she went through to get her car back, there's no way she just gave it to you." He stares at me like he's looking at a ghost. "Holy shit. You

fucked her, didn't you? Goddamn." He chokes on his breath and cracks a crooked smile.

"Get that fucking smug look off your face. I said I talked to her, and that's all you need to know. And I got this car without having to hot-wire it." I tip my chin at the car as I step out.

"Well, fuck . . ." His eyes are wide. He licks his lips as he stares at the car.

"Do whatever you want with it. I don't need the money on this one, but I get any of her belongings that are in the vehicle." I step to the back door, open it and grab the prize along with a black hoodie she left behind.

"What the hell is that?"

"Nothing important. I had it in my

pocket earlier and set it in the backseat before taking her car for a spin.” I shove what looks like a remote into my pocket. Then I walk over to the large garbage can and dump her sweatshirt inside. Don’t need that article of clothing of hers when I have much better ones in my pocket.

“Whatever, dude. I don’t wanna know what the fuck is going on with you anyway, and you know I hate it when you lie to me like you did just now.” He rolls his shoulders and almost salivates over the car, running his fingers over the hood.

“Hold on,” I say, and drift to the license plate in the back. I remove the second tracker I placed there earlier—

the one she was unaware of. I show it to him and smirk. “Stupid bitch didn’t have any clue of how I found her.” A pang of guilt ripples through me that I have to say shit like this to cover up what’s really going on, but I can’t slip. I just can’t.

“How many of those did you put on her car?”

“Three. She got the first one, the second one I think fell off, but this one stayed right where I put it.” I kiss it and shove it in my other pocket.

Damn, I probably look like a shoplifter with all this shit shoved in my pants, pockets bulging.

He bursts out laughing. “You two were fucking made for each other.”

“Now will you say it?”

“Nope,” he says, popping his P. “She’s still slicker than you, and you know it.”

“Fuck. You. And. Her.”

“I’m thinking you already fucked *her*, but I’m not available—sorry,” he says, snickering. “I’m sure she could arrange something for you with that Paco dude in prison she seems so fond of.”

I groan and roll my eyes. Why do I put up with him and his stupidity?

“Any color but purple. She likes that shit.” I pat the back window and smile, ignoring the rest of his inane rambling about Ides and inmates. She’s not pals with dickheels like that. She was just talking shit—that’s what she’s

always done with me when she's flirting.

“Why does it matter what she thinks? It's not like she's ever gonna see it again.” He eyes me like I'm holding out on him.

I shrug. We both know she'll find this car and get it back. The new owner'll have one of hell of a shock when that little girl comes and takes it from them.

I step inside his house and straight away make myself something to eat while I listen for the sounds of him in his garage, already stripping down the car of any identifying marks that say it was hers.

After I've had a beer, devoured my

food and sat down on his couch, I rifle through her chip on my phone.

“Nice,” I say. I’ve tapped into her security cameras and she’s still in bed naked.

Appears to be touching herself with her eyes closed, and she’s saying something.

I turn the volume up, wishing I had a way to record this.

“Oh God . . . Oh my fucking God,” she moans.

“Shit,” I say under my breath, sounding hoarse. I don’t think I’ll be able to wait until I’d originally planned before breaking back in.

She’s got something I need—well, her pussy, too—but dammit, this is

fucking hot.

She pulls out a vibrator from her side table drawer, clicks it on, and instead of predictably rubbing it across her clit, licks it and then runs it over her nipples until they're really hard and prominent.

Her breathing goes ragged, and she makes these amazing, gasping sounds like she's choking on my cock as I shove it in her mouth.

“Oh, you naughty girl—trying to kill me.” I zoom in on her face. Yes, her face—because, fuck, she looks about ready to come. And she has the most amazing orgasm expression and sounds I've ever seen and heard.

I could seriously get addicted to

watching this kind of porn of her regularly.

“Nick—fuuuck—I know you’re watching.” She groans. Her eyes open, and she stares at one of the cameras like she’s looking straight at me.

“Fucking bitch,” I say, chuckling. God, she’s too much.

“Do I have your attention now? You missed a few spots on me.” She points at her tits, rubs the vibrator all over them some more, and her eyelids go heavy. “Mmm . . . I’m wet, but not because of you.”

I laugh harder with my head tipped back for a second.

“What else?” I ask her, knowing she can’t hear me, but I can’t stop myself

from saying that shit out loud.

“That mouth is dirty. I know it is, but my cunt isn’t.” She leans over, pulls out a dildo from her drawer, inserts it in her pussy, pumps it a few times, then removes it.

The tip goes straight to her mouth and hovers an inch away from her lips. “Should I lick it? Would you like that? It’s clean. No germs. I can taste it and tell you how clean my juices are . . . You’d like that, wouldn’t you? Would it make you drip again? Oh God, wait.” She sits up “Your come is still inside me. Supposedly semen’s clean, too, but how do I know you haven’t had your pathetic dick in every slut around town? How do I know you haven’t fucked

every thief with ovaries in this state? You expect me to trust you just because you tell me you don't sleep around and never have?" She drops the dildo, stands up on the bed, glares and flips me off with both fingers. A second later, she's jumping on the bed, shaking her head like a wild woman. "Fuck you. Yeah, you have my chip. It's gonna take me five minutes to deactivate it, you son of a bitch. So suck on that and taste the sweaty balls of defeat, you miserable fucker."

She jumps off the bed, runs through the house naked, and before she can sit her ass down in her office chair, I'm copying codes from the chip into a Dropbox account I have online.

The faster I go, the heavier I breathe. I sound like an obscene caller.

“Tell your friend, Fat Fingers, I said hello, and I’m still better than you,” she says, smiling and seated at her computer desk in her office. Two minutes later, she gets up, crawls onto the desk, rubs her right nipple over a camera lens and then pretends to lick it. “Bye, bye, Vapor. Find some other online bitch to get you off.”

She jumps back down, and the screen goes dead. The chip’s deactivated.

“Fuck, I love this woman.” My dick agrees as it hardens further. I slide my phone back into my pocket.

Westin steps inside with silver

spray paint in patches on his arms. His brow wrinkles when he looks over at me. “God, you’ve got it bad. Go get her, man.”

“Tonight. I want her asleep before I go back in there.”

“How’re ya gettin’ in?” His shoulders sag, and he looks tired while he wears a lazy grin. He loves prepping cars for the resale.

“The rocket. Already lowered it down her chimney today before I broke in,” I tell him.

I sprawl out on his couch—ready to take a nap.

“No shit? That piece of junk actually worked?” He goes to the fridge and pulls out a beer.

“I told you it would,” I say when he rejoins me.

He pops open the tab and takes a swig. “It looked like a stupid old rock.”

“It’s not a rock, but that’s the point. No one’s going to notice a harmless little rock-like item at the bottom of their fireplace. It glitches out her security system whenever I put in the proper code with my phone.”

He smiles and stares at the floor like there’s a joke going on in his head. “Every perv’s dream,” he says, swiping the sweat off his brow. “How long is the window?”

“Less than two minutes, so I have to pick the locks fast.” I yawn and stretch out for a second.

“Damn . . .”

“Damn is right. It almost took me that long to get through all six of her locks.” I fold my arms over my chest. Why does he keep it so fucking cold in here? “You got a blanket?”

“I’m not your fucking maid. *I* live here, and I just help you lift cars, that’s as far as it goes.” He leans back and takes another sip of his beer.

“Yeah, about that . . .” I blow out, considering how to frame this wording best. “I’m out of that business now. This was my last car heist.”

“Since when?” he asks, his voice rising.

“Since now.”

“Going all straight and pansy-assed

because of Ides?”

“No. *Dena* would never ask me to stop, and I would never do it for that reason.” I toe my boots off and they slip over the edge of the couch, then land with a thud.

“Then why?” His brow wrinkles.

“I don’t need the money.”

“Neither do I.” He wipes the back of his hand over his sweaty forehead again.

Is he fucking kidding me? I keep waiting for a penguin to spring out from behind the couch. I can practically see my breath, it’s that cold in here—and he’s *sweating*?

“Then why the fuck are you still doing it?” I ask him.

“Why not? I love it. The rush—the adrenaline—the heat of it. I love every goddamn second of it. It’s worth it—all of it.”

I sigh. “Not to me it isn’t. I’m getting too old to do this anymore. And I’ve moved on to other things.” I flip my wrist at his laptop.

“Oh, I get it now. You wanna be her. You’ve always wanted that, and now that you’ve actually met Ides—”

“Dena,” I correct him.

“What-the-fuck-ever.” He groans. “You can’t stand it to know she’s not wasting her time on anything other than her fucked up inventions.”

“I thought you loved the shit she comes up with. You’re her biggest fan,”

I tease.

“Fuck you. I know genius when I see it, but I don’t want to be her. I’ve got standards.” He chugs the rest of his beer and then wipes his mouth with the same back of his hand that he used to smear the sweat off his head with.

I smirk. She’s a germophobe. This shit would tear her up. God, I’d love to watch her reactions with simple things like a pet shedding on her shoes or even bringing her to the grocery store and watch her freak out at people touching the produce she’s about to buy.

Or better yet—me, actually ejaculating all over her like I’m dying to do.

“Standards? Like what? The girl

has to have size C cups or larger?" I huff a laugh.

"Yeah, there is *that*, and she's barely got anything up top, but that's not what I'm talkin' about," he answers.

"Then what? Please fucking get to a goddamn point before she hacks into the Pentagon and shoots a death laser at me and fries off my balls." I roll my eyes. He has no idea this woman hides a nice set of tits under her black, baggy hoodies.

"I'm talking about what I steal. I take cars—those are easily replaced. So the owner's wheels are gone—boo fucking hoo. You start messing with this bitch, and I guarantee you'll be stealing her ideas, just like her dick of a father

did.” He stares at me like he’s her big brother, giving me the lecture about how if I touch her—though, it’s admittedly too late for that—he’ll castrate me and then give me a lobotomy. “And don’t even pretend like you believe what the rest of the public does—that he was merely skimming off the top of her accounts.”

“I’m not gonna pretend anything, and I’m not gonna steal her ideas either. I don’t need them.” I turn over on my side and snuggle into his couch.

“God, her dad was the biggest douche ever. Stealing her invention ideas before they were completed and selling them to the highest bidders. No wonder she set him up and had him taken

away to jail,” he says, sounding pissed. “She’s gonna do that to you, too.”

“I already said I won’t take a fucking thing of hers, so knock this shit off,” I bark back.

“You already did, ya lying sack. I know that remote gizmo you took from her car was *not* yours. You don’t come up with stuff like that. It’s not your thing.” His eyes move to the bulge in my pocket.

“Fuck you and your know-it-all attitude. You don’t know what I mess with on my own. I don’t share that shit with you.” My back heats, and my chest tightens.

“Jason tells me what you guys get up to, and most of it doesn’t interest me,

but this”—once more he eyes the gadget stuffed in my pocket—“you know that shit’s hardcore and worth a fucking ton if she came after us with a gun.”

“Whatever.” I close my eyes and tune him out.

A few seconds later, his foot hits the couch, rocking me so hard I almost roll off.

“Cut it out!” My eyes fly open.

“I’m not kidding, man. This is serious. She’s going to come after you. She couldn’t have wanted her car back that badly she’d risk her life for it. She’s smarter than that, and she’s worth millions. She could easily replace that car. *This*,” he points at my pocket and keeps lecturing, “is what she was after.

You better give it back before she really sends every goddamn FBI agent that ever lived after you. She won't be as nice to you as she was to her dad. She's not related to you."

I smile. "You really think she'd do that? She got rid of my fingerprint on her car I left there on purpose, hoping that bitch would find the car and then try to find *me*."

"You sleazy motherfucker!" He steps back and looks at me like I'm an ogre, his eyes wide. His shoulders hunch up. "You set this whole thing up. You knew that was her all along."

I sit up and rub the back of my neck. "What're you talking about?" I swing my legs around so I'm facing him, then I

stare at the ground and blink slowly.

“This is the girl you had a massive crush on in high school you’ve told me about multiple times, isn’t it? You finally found her, and instead of telling me what was really going on, you acted like this was a random carjacking.” He snorts and shakes his head.

“I didn’t know,” I mumble.

“What’s that? Couldn’t hear you lie through your teeth—which you’re lucky I haven’t kicked out of your lying sack-of-shit-face.” He walks away, but before he leaves, I clear my throat.

“I’m sorry.” I sigh.

“Yeah, I’ll bet you are. And, yeah—I’m done working with you, too, dickhead.”

He slams the door that leads into the garage. I pull my shoes back on and heave my ass up off his couch.

“God, that was fun.” I drag my body over to his fridge, dig my keys out of the coffee can he stashes on top and then slip out his back door. In the next moment, I look back without saying goodbye, take my motorcycle I store here when we’re running weekend car heists, and take off down the road.

I sigh and wonder how the hell I botched that all up so badly with Westin. Jason’s going to have my ass, if and when, I ever go home.

I know another home where I’ll be more welcome, and she’s got a comfy warm bed . . . And maybe she’s still

naked.

Chapter 7

Ides

“That asshole should’ve been a doctor,” I tell Riot over speaker phone.

“Why would you say that?”

“Because he sliced my neck open with the precision of a robot in less time than it takes me to blink, and then put some kind of clear, sticky tape over the wound that dried within seconds. I think it has some kind of super glue on it or some shit,” I answer.

“Well, super glue’s what hospitals use in place of stitches nowadays, unless they absolutely have to use sutures, then —”

“Christ! Is that sanitary?” I gulp.

“It is.” He sounds like he’s fighting off a laugh.

“I hope so. I don’t want to have to scrub that spot. It stings like a fucking viper bite.”

“Don’t you mean Vapor bite?” He chuckles this time.

“Why do I keep you around? I do *not* need a court jester,” I say, pulling out the rubbing alcohol and paper towels.

I head out to my car, only to find it missing. “Son of a bitch!” I yell.

“Calm down! What now?”

“He stole my car, and my fucking prototype! Sue that motherfucking ball-less shit right now!”

“I’m your lawyer, but I—”

“Now. N. O. W. Not next week, now!” I slump down on my buffed, sparkly garage floor.

It’s more slippery than my shower wall.

“I’ll get the process going, but you’re already due in court this week,” he reminds me.

I set the phone next to me, laying it on top of the paper towels. “What for?” I bang the back of my head into the wall repeatedly.

“For that prototype you’ve now lost possession of. They contacted me last night.”

“Why? This was a private drafted up deal with—”

“I know, I know,” he huffs. “But you know this stuff happens. You missed the drop off, and now they’re citing all sorts of broken laws on this one just like we worried they might.”

“Cover it for me. We already went over this before I made the changes.” I roll my eyes. So typical that the bastards that drafted it up and asked for all sorts of illegal shit on it are now taking me to court over it. I stop hitting my head and rest my arms on my knees, then take a few deep breaths. My feet start to slip a little on the shiny, smooth surface.

He pauses. “You know I would if I could, but this time they’re demanding the CEO of the company, and that’s you.”

“Uuuungaaaawd! I can’t take it—you know I’ll flip out if I have to step in there. Criminals pass through that place. And what are the chances a criminal actually ever washes his hands after he takes a trip to the little boys room?”

“Wear gloves. You’ll be fine.”

“You better bring over all the ingredients for me to make my hand sanitizer. I wasn’t able to get them,” I admit, my throat closing up on me as I think about entering a store for anything other than groceries.

He laughs. “That sounds like you actually want me to come over—almost like a date.”

I close my eyes. He flirts. Boy, does he fucking ever. “We’ve discussed

this before. I'm not interested, and I've told you this a million times—I don't date. I don't act like a girl. I just need my shit so I can be prepared and not have an episode."

"You haven't had an episode in over two years."

"And the last time I did was . . ." I trail off.

"Oh . . . I wasn't thinking . . ."

"Yeah—my dad's last lawsuit in court. The bailiff grabbed my arm when I started shouting, and he'd just licked his fingers after he ate a fucking sandwich. It was revolting."

"Yeah, but you didn't have to try and shove his nose up into his brain. That was overkill, hon." He chuckles

again.

“Whatever you want to call it—the man was a Neanderthal and probably uses his palm in place of toilet paper when he soils himself. I about died that day,” I say, my voice cracking at the end.

“I know. I had to carry you to your car.”

I can hear the satisfaction and a little bit of a seductive tone in his voice.

“Don’t remind me.” I try to push my butt closer to the wall since I’m slowly sliding away from it.

“Hey, Dena . . .”

“Yeah?”

“We’re friends, right?”

I shift away from my phone. The tone of his voice—it makes my head

ache and my chest pound as my limbs go cold.

“Yeah. We’ve been friends for a long time.” He’s my only friend, but I don’t tell him that because he’s my lawyer, and I pay him to handle shit he shouldn’t have to, but he does it because . . . Well, dammit—I know he does it because he’s interested in me. “And as your friend, are you ever going to let me help you with your marketing? Because you honestly suck at it, and it bugs the shit out of me. You’re smart. Your inventions are incredible.”

“Not as good as yours,” he says. “You don’t even market at all. People just clamor for your stuff—it’s that amazing.”

“Some of yours are right up there, and I *did* market my inventions in the beginning. We can get you there—you’ll see. They just need a little more—”

“*You*,” he interjects, filling in the end of my statement for me.

“I was going to say a little more of the Chad Thayer mark, and then they’ll be ready.”

“I hacked into your computer,” he blurts, the thought seemingly coming out of nowhere.

“I know.”

“Yesterday,” he continues with his admission.

“I *know*.”

“How?”

“Because I monitor everything you

do. You've always known I have issues. I have to make sure you're not stealing from me." And he didn't see anything on my hard drive I didn't want him to. It was fine.

The line goes quiet, and then there's the sound of wheels squeaking from his office chair.

"You don't trust me?" His voice breaks.

"I trust you more than anybody. I don't trust *God* or any of the monkeys he turned into humans. It has nothing to do with *you*. I'm a sick freak—you know this."

"You're not a freak," he says with a slight whiny edge to his voice.

I get up, grab the rubbing alcohol

and the paper towel and start cleaning the door knob leading into the house since I don't have a car to detail and sterilize.

I snort. “*Yeah?* What do you call a woman that was once thrown up on then spiraled out of control by turning into a certifiable hermit with extreme mysophobia?”

“I call her brilliant, and at least that title has a nice ring to it,” he offers.

“I'd rather be the typical, fat gamer-chick that complains about her cankles and uses pink tanks in her games to destroy men's egos halfway across the world,” I say. The knob squeaks as I buff it to a ridiculous shine. I stare at my arm. “I mean, shit, I'm not even cool enough

to get over my fear of germs to get a tattoo. How pitiful is that?”

When I'm done cleaning the knob, I lean over, grab my phone and step inside the house and find the next door knob to antagonize.

“Being fat's no joke,” he says, his voice tight like he's speaking through a clenched jaw.

“I never said it was.”

“It took me over a year to lose all that weight.”

“And you look great. All your time at the gym has paid off.” I sigh. “I wasn't referring to you anyway.” I scrub harder on the shiny metal. “Look, you know I'm awful at holding any kind of real conversations . . .”

“You’re fine. It’s me. I just get . . . sensitive sometimes.”

“You’re not sensitive. You put up with all my brusqueness and all my quirks. I love that about you.”

“You said *love*.” He sounds all breathless.

“Okay, hanging up now—talk to you again later. Get me out of the court hearing if you can.”

“Can’t do it.”

“Bye, Riot. Have a fun day and do an extra set of crunches just for me—curse my name while you do it.” I end the call and make my way through the house for the next hour, polishing each knob in my house until I can’t take the smell of the alcohol’s fumes any longer.

Damn, I need more rubbing alcohol . . . I'll make sure Riot gets a lot more than the usual amount with my supplies.

* * *

I stir from a dead sleep as something warm slaps softly up against my cheek.

“Go away,” I mumble and turn over.

“Why should I?”

I gasp, and right before I can sit up and do anything at all, ropes are twisted around my wrists, and I'm once again secured to my iron headboard.

“Shit! *You* again? I thought I wiped your germs off the island,” I huff.

“Lights,” he says, and somehow,

they turn on.

“I deactivated that chip.” My breath hitches.

“I know. I reactivated it. Good, right? C’mon, you can tell me. *Who’s a good little Vapor?*” he asks, using a baby-talk voice.

“You know, I’d flip you off, but some asshole’s too afraid of me to let me have the use of my fingers.”

He chuckles and rubs his hand over his dick, sticking out of his pants—tall, proud and bare.

It is very impressive, but I’d never tell *him* that. He’d probably do something hideous like make a five foot marble statue of it and place it in my front yard for all to see.

Birds might nest there. Ewwww!

“Nice wardrobe—what’re you supposed to be, a thief, or something?” He’s dressed all in black, and fuck, he looks tastier than my Lucky Charms.

“No. I’m supposed to be the man you want to suck off.” He climbs onto the bed, straddles me, and when I’m about to knee the back of his balls, he ducks to the side. “Uh, uh, uh . . . I have enough rope to tie those ankles down as well.”

I glare at him.

“Now, lesson number one.” He climbs back over me and tips my chin up. “Balls—go here.” He drags a finger across my right palm. “Dick—here.” He runs his finger across my lips. “Eyes—

here.” He points at my eyes and then his. “Questions?”

“Unless you’ve got the most elastic nuts on the planet, I don’t see how I’m supposed to hold them and cup them and whisper sweet nothings to them with my fingertips while they’re tied up over here above my head.” My eyes jerk up to my hands.

“I’ll release you, if you do something to earn it first.”

I groan, and it comes straight out of the pit of my stomach. “What now? You break into my house, because obviously, the Oprah rerun tonight was boring as shit, and expect me to do something for *you*? You’re nuttier than I am.”

“No fucking doubt.” He licks his

lips and starts pulling my pajama pants off.

“I thought I was using my mouth on you,” I remind him.

“I like to keep my options open. As a criminal, I have to be flexible.”

“That’ll be a big bonus to you when you’re in prison and Paco needs you to be his bitch after his afternoon siesta,” I say. “It’s great that you’re practicing since I’ll have you behind bars within a month.”

He laughs, but it’s hard and biting in sound.

“Why don’t I practice on you right now? I’ll be Paco, and you be my nasty bitch, since I know you’re good at it,” he says through his teeth. “And I’m not

averse to anal. Not at all.” His eyes twinkle with mischief, the twisted fucker.

“What the fuck did I ever do to you? Piss on your sombrero?” My fingers flex. “Overheat your tamale?”

“Something like that.” He slides my pants the rest of the way off, and smirks when he sees I lack panties.

“Wash day,” I say, deadpan.

“I’ll bring my laundry over later, and we can do a load together—you know, conserve water since there’s a drought.”

“Listen, just ‘cause you can’t get a pussy wet around here, does *not* mean the rest of us are experiencing droughts.” I sigh like I’m bored.

“Oh, yeah? And how many dicks does this lovely, tight little pussy entertain?” He sprawls out over my legs, effectively trapping them and swirls the tip of his pinky finger around through my pubes like he’s doodling there and spreading the hairs out in an artistic pattern. “The last time we spoke online, you made it pretty clear you didn’t have a social life, so I’m assuming that includes cocks around this area.”

“I entertain enough that I don’t feel like I have to break into someone’s house and tie them up.” I yawn.

He pulls out his phone and smiles.

“Take a picture,” I say, then stick out my tongue.

He does it and grins so wide, I

think I'm blinded by that much gleaming whiteness.

Lord, he's so happy and gorgeous, I stupidly say, "Take another one."

This time I tip my head back and mock a "come face."

He snorts and takes another one.

Only Nick could ever get me to do stupid shit like this. I don't know how he does it, but it's apparently a big problem I probably need some medication for.

Tomorrow . . .

He takes a picture of one of his hands on my right breast next.

"You know I'll find a way to erase those, don't you?" I stare at his phone.

"Yeah, I'm sure you will, but the thrill of you trying to hack into my phone

has me harder than the bars on your bed,” he says, breath heavy and filled with desire.

My eyes shift to him and go heavy at the way he’s looking at me.

He bites his lower lip so hard, it’s the most erotic, damned dirty thing I’ve ever seen. My God, those teeth—fucking heaven and earth.

“Back to your earlier accusation . . .” He slides a hand up my right thigh. “I don’t have to break into homes and tie women up either, but someone’s been a naughty girl and needs to be punished. That’s why I’m here tonight.”

“Why? Because I turned my chip off and said I’d up the security?” My brows pop up.

“No, because you touched what was mine today to get my attention. You got it. I’m here. You wanted more, and I’m gonna provide it.”

“What is your problem, really? Chip envy? Too many mojitos at lunch today with your Fat Finger friend? Did he decide he was straight after all?” I grin. “Maybe he’ll help you practice for prison. I bet he would. He seems like the desperate type with all that shit he was saying in my car after you stole it. You know what they say about a big dude with a big mouth . . .”

“Such a mouth on *you*, I’m sure you know all about it even if you are a tiny little thing. And I know it’s gotta be good for something other than spouting

shit, and since it likes being so dirty . . .” He slides up my body, and before I know it, he’s got his hands boxed around my ears and somehow, he’s got my head tipped back in such a way, it forces my jaw to drop open.

“Suck it. Suck it, and I’ll tell you a little bedtime story I think you’ll like.” God, that voice of his has my toes curling.

I whisper a, “Fuck you!” right as the meatus passes over my lips and lands on my tongue.

I want to gag and scream, “Germs!” but I can’t. And really, for some odd reason, I really don’t want to.

My tongue wraps around the shaft, and as his head pushes in, my insides

relax in a way I rarely experience.

Just like when he had sex with me last time—my fears are almost completely obliterated.

I'm doing what I would consider the most disgusting of deeds in terms of bacteria, viruses, and God knows what else, but I can't stop.

I pull at the ropes on my wrists, and he moans as I suck forcefully at the ridges of his head when he retreats.

“God, that's good,” he says, shifting his weight so he's really jamming it straight into my mouth. “Knew that dirty mouth would fucking love my cock. You're gorgeous, sweetheart—just. Like. This.”

I whimper and shift as well, but I

rock from side to side, trying to get closer.

“Listen to my story because I’m only sharing it once.” He slides with ease—slippery inside my watering mouth.

The taste isn’t really pleasant—he’s no Lucky Charm’s—but there’s something about the tanginess, and pungent flavor of him, I adore.

And I’m doing it. I’m really giving a man fellatio, and I’m not awful at it like I feared.

He seems to like it. He’s still hard, and he’s made a few sounds of approval.

I flex my right hand, hoping he’ll release it, since I actually do want to cup his balls and feel the weight of it in my

hands.

“There was this girl—this brilliant girl, two years younger than me, and other guys liked her as much as I did, but she intimidated them, so she thought none of them could stand her when they’d back off.”

My eyes light up. He’s talking about me?

“Mmffffuubba taaamaa gah,” I say.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full—fucking rude.” He smacks my cheek, but it’s so light and playful, it makes me smile and want to do it again.

“I didn’t let that get in the way though. I studied with her after school, got to know her, and she was as beautiful as she was smart, but she liked

some other jackass. Well, now you and I know she didn't really like him. She used that poor prick to tease the boy she really had feelings for—*me*. And all the while, I was pining away for her. Well, I got her drunk at a party, really fucking drunk. And in the process, I wasn't paying attention to how much I was drinking either, but I was still in control, so it still seemed like everything was going well. She even started flirting and acting like she was horny for me."

I inhale through my nose, and his curly hairs actually tickle my nostrils. My face scrunches up.

He pulls out for a second. "You okay?"

"Itchy nose." I scrunch it up.

It's absurd, but he scratches it for me, and after I thank him, he plunges his cock back inside my mouth like this is all commonplace.

I giggle around his girth and don't care if it's rude to laugh with a mouthful.

“Where was I? Oh yeah. The best part—she pretends to be playing games with me, something stupid like Truth or Dare, and dares me to get in a closet with her. I of course can't back down now. I'd be a pussy if I did. So, I go into that closet, even if the dark does scare me. She touches me, she whispers something cute in my ear, and before I know it—*wham!* She's got me up against the wall.” He pushes his dick really deep to the back of my throat, and my

uvula does not like it at all. It protests, and I gag a little. Instead of pulling out, he pushes deeper. “I’m nervous, so nervous in that closet that I’m nauseous, but she kisses me, and it’s so good, I come in my pants. To make matters worse, that dickhead she’s been crushing on, opens that closet, sees the wet spot on my poor boy’s pants and says something about it—about both my lack of money and lack of control. My stomach lurches, and I vomit all over the place, including on her feet.”

His dick makes short, punishing jabs into my throat.

I shake my head, telling him I didn’t know. I never knew he came in his pants. How could I have?

“She refuses to look at me at school from that day on. I try to talk to her several times, even though I’m scared to death to face her after I humiliated myself that way, and instead, I see her talk to *him* more and more.”

I shake my head harder.

No, no! That was so long ago. He’s punishing me for this now?

“But that doesn’t matter, right? That girl doesn’t exist any longer,” he says.

I blink and nod.

He cups under my chin. “Well, that’s not fucking true, now, is it?”

I try to swallow, but he’s still pistoning in and out of my mouth like a fucking freight train crashing through a tunnel.

“Oh, no, she’s still that girl. She shuts me out, says she’ll tighten security to try and keep me out, then she calls some jerk-off, asshat, named Riot. And he’s interested in my girl. Yes, he is.” He grunts. “And that pisses me off. You called him, didn’t you?”

I shake my head, and he slaps my arm a little harder this time than he did my cheek. It doesn’t hurt, and he’s obviously playing some game so it’s harmless, but I’m not sure what to do in response, so I simply stare in his eyes.

“Don’t you dare,” he hisses.

I stiffen, but keep sucking.

“She tells him she’s going to do nice things for him and even invites him over—to bring her some shitty

ingredients to keep her hands clean, when she knows I'd gladly bring her that stuff."

He means he'd steal it for me and break in to give it to me.

My eyes water, and my throat constricts, yet I like the idea of him constantly trying to break in and get at me. My body thrums with an electric energy, and my pussy clenches for a moment.

"She even tells him gym workouts are working for him. Is he hot?" he asks with a husky, low tone. He strokes my cheeks and pumps his dick in my mouth faster, reckless even. "You said *love* to him—that you loved how he puts up with all your neuroses. What about me? What

about what *I* love? I fucking told you already that I love you. Has he?”

I shake my head and choke on my stuttering inhale.

His shift from talking about me in third person to first almost frightens me. My gut tightens.

“*T h a t sensitive* shithead—calls himself sensitive,” he mumbles, “trying to move in on my girl after I’ve looked for you for ten years and finally found you. God, that fucker’s delusional if he thinks I’ll let him snake his way in between us.” His abs flex as his hips tilt, and he picks up the pace even more. “Well, he can’t fucking have you. You’re mine! This shit is *mine*!”

I nod and swallow a little.

He grunts louder than a moment ago and with a breathless sound, dying off at the end.

“Mmanama pfuuda,” I mutter.

He smacks my cheek again lightly, then caresses them and slides his hands into my hair, his eyes soft and following his hands.

“But we both know you don’t want him. You’re just teasing that dick—stringing him along so he’ll do your bidding just like you did so long ago when we were kids. Well that stops now. You want *me*. You want *this*. And his shriveled up cock doesn’t taste this good, does it?” He halts his hips, and his tip hits the dangling piece of flesh at the back of my throat.

I try to swallow once more, but this time, nothing happens. Saliva pools at the back of my throat, almost drowning me.

He pulls out. “Answer me honestly, and I’ll untie that hand, and you can finish me off—make it up to me for cheating on me with that fucking lawyer.”

I swallow. “I don’t want him,” I whimper. “I never have. I’ve made it abundantly clear—Riot knows I’m not interested.”

He wraps his fingers loosely around my throat and leans in good and close. “That’s not what I asked you. Does. His. Cock. Taste. This. Good?” He reaches down, swipes his fingertip

across the flaring tip of his dick and smears his pre-come across my upper lip. “Does he?”

“How the fuck should I know? It grosses me out to even consider being near enough for him to breathe on me,” I say, gritting through my teeth. “I’ve never touched him on my own, on purpose.”

His fingers drift menacingly up and down my throat, barely touching me. “Nor will you ever. These lips belong to me. These hands”—he wrangles my right hand free and then makes sure the left is still secure—“do what *I* say. They touch my cock, stroke my balls, and when I tell them to, they hit the right keys and tell me what I want to know.”

“This sounds like some perverted form of blackmail,” I tell him, glaring.

“No. Never blackmail. But you’ll share with me because I own you, and you’ll want to give me everything before long.” He groans. “I’ve wanted you for so long, you’re not getting away.”

I snort a laugh. “I must’ve missed the class required for doormat one-on-one. Christ, Nick.”

“You did. And that’s why I started with lesson one tonight. Sucking it like a girl trying to redeem herself after talking to another man when she refused me access to her bedroom.” He sniffs at my lips and then licks the remnants he smeared of himself onto me. “And you know I need this shit—that I need *you*.

You want me to beg to fuck you, is that it? That's why you make me practically tear your fucking hinges off your doors to get to you? Stop trying to keep me out. Do that to *him*, not me!"

He stretches his neck, and I frown.

"Ready for lesson two? How to be a gracious host, and be waiting in your bed for me naked? I don't want you wearing clothes to sleep."

"Yet, here you are, in my bedroom—fully clothed. And he's never broken into my home, not once."

He smirks, and it's lopsided and devious, like him. "That's because I'm smarter than that fat fuck. And I'm not gonna wait around for you to unlock that pussy for me. I take it because I know

how.”

“You know how to steal, and he’s not fat, you insensitive prick.”

“Suck me now. I don’t wanna hear another word about that slippery bastard, selling you out.” He jerks his body up and shoves his dick back inside my mouth.

I close my eyes, hum and caress his warm, palatable skin with my tongue, savoring the texture, the glide of him and most of all, the unique flavor that is growing on me more and more.

He grabs my hand and wraps it around his balls. I’ve never done this before, so I have no idea what feels good. I tug a little and roll his testicles around like they’re Chinese stress balls.

After a few seconds, he's moaning like he's dying.

He leans over, presses his hands into my shoulders, really pushing the weight of his body into me, and giving him some kind of psycho leverage so his dick goes deep, without making me gag.

It's like he's bypassing my gag trigger, and making it easier on me.

I breathe deeper, too, which makes no sense since my lungs should be compacted in this position.

Goddammit, he's a genius.

I stroke the skin behind his balls, and almost make my way to his crack when suddenly his legs tighten and almost try to get as far away from me as possible.

Is he . . . ?

Oh, God, he is.

“Fucking shit . . . You—God, I can’t . . . Why do you . . . Fuck! I’m gonna . . . I love how you feel on my dick . . . Jesus, Dena. Swallow it, sweetheart, swallow all my come,” he says, his voice thready and low. “God, please . . . Take it all down, gorgeous girl. I can’t stand it if you don’t. Won’t survive . . .”

My chest warms, and I feel like I’m about to orgasm from his words and the look on his face. God, my pussy’s throbbing, and out of nowhere, I’m wet as could possibly be.

The way he called me sweetheart, and begged me to take something as

personal as his come inside my mouth and down my throat, has my heart pounding like crazy and my body begging for more. And I'm obsessed with having a clean mouth, so this reaction from me makes no sense.

A moment later, hot spurts infiltrate my oral cavity.

He grips the back of my head and almost hugs me to his crotch.

It's hard to breathe now, so I yank on his balls to get him to back off.

"Ahhhh fuck! You *are* my nasty slut, yes! God, yes!" His head snaps away, and his back arches wildly, yet his dick stays tight in my mouth.

His cock hits the furthest reaches of my throat, and I hack and cough to keep

from gagging ‘til I puke.

He lets his hands go, and I almost spit him out.

When he’s free, I’m struck with an overwhelming urge—an odd sensation comes over me. I swish his come around in my mouth like it’s mouthwash. I like the way it feels, and I figure it’s antibacterial. I gargle a little bit of it for a second, swallow it down, and when I look at him, his eyes are so dark, so full of fire, I stop breathing.

He grabs my shoulders and says, “Fuck. *You* are kinkier than I ever thought possible. Let’s do that again . . .”

“Can I at least get my oxygen levels up first? My CO₂’s are off.”

He laughs and then abruptly hugs

me.

“Sweetheart, you’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me since my voice dropped.” He shifts his hips into me, settling his weight between my thighs.

“Since your balls dropped, too, and I know that’s recent. Like, about five minutes ago . . . When I yanked them into the right spot for you.”

He collapses onto me, shoves me deeper into the bed, and kisses me so hard, with so much force, I’m thinking he didn’t hear that bit about me needing some air.

He has me at an awkward angle, and I’m able to slip my left hand out of the ropes, so I yank on his hair, and he

growls, then bites my bottom lip.

Because apparently, that's what dickhead thieves do after they've been sucked off.

Chapter 8

Vapor

Dena sleeps like she's dead.

I can't sleep at all.

I've fucked her mouth, fucked her pussy more than once, and I want more.

Her ass is calling out to me. Hell . . . every damn inch of her calls out to me.

Dammit . . . Does her skin have to be so fucking soft, glowing and pale?

Her warm breath pelts my chest, and before I lose control and fuck her again while she's asleep, since I already did that once and it woke her, I move away from her so I can go search for what I need.

The real reason I came back here.

I get up, grab my clothes and manage to tie her wrists to the headboard again so if she wakes up while I'm searching, she can't interrupt me.

Her house is so clean I can't keep from touching everything, just to be an obnoxious ass.

It'll give her something to do tomorrow. She can clean up all my DNA and maybe gross out over the bile threatening at the back of her throat while she does it.

I grab the bag I left by her front door and empty the contents out on her counter.

They should be the ingredients she

needs to make her own hand sanitizer. I'm not a total asshole.

I do care that she's comfortable, even when I'm jamming my dick down her throat.

I only do what she loves, and goddammit, those moans of pleasure that emanate out of her while she's sucking me off . . .

Not helping. You're already hard as fuck and need to get a job done. Stop dwelling on the image of her mouth on you.

I shuffle into her office, log on with the temporary password Jason gave me and rifle through her prototype notes for what I took from her.

I'm still not sure what this thing

does.

I copy all her notes into my Dropbox account Jason's monitoring. He'll promptly empty it and encrypt all the files so she can't find them in our stuff, should she hack into our shit to try and get it back.

When I'm done, I dig through her desk drawers and can't find it.

"Shit! He's gonna kill me," I hiss through my teeth.

I search through the rest of her office. It isn't here.

I wind my way back to her bedroom and search for it there, too. She sleeps through it all. I know her video cameras are catching me looking for it, but I don't give a fuck.

“Where the hell is it?” I whisper in a huff, my hands resting on my hips.

I move out to her kitchen and search that area as well.

Her living room?

I look in every damn crack and crevice, but it’s not here.

Riot! She gave it to that bastard! I know it!

Fuck. I don’t want to break into his house.

Maybe Jason can do it. But the boss won’t like that. He specifically said I had to get this one myself—this job is mine.

I roam back to her room, grab my pocketknife out of my pocket, and leave it on her chest.

The coldness of the knife finally wakes her up.

Her head snaps up and she groans when she sees she's tied up again.

“Sorry, sweetheart, but you know I can't resist, and you sleep like you've been drugged. Has anyone ever told you that before?” I rest my palm on her ankle. She lets me—leaves her leg in place.

My brow arches up. *Progress.*

My insides heat. She's not pulling away from me like she usually does from my casual touches after I've wasted her body with rough, animalistic sex. Or at least the way she does once she thinks we're done with the post-coital cuddling, and she gets sick of me telling

her over and over how beautiful she is—how amazing and wonderful she’s always been. And how she’s special—better than any woman I’ve ever known. And how I can’t wait to make love to her again.

I look down at my hand on her leg briefly, then shift my eyes back to her face.

She keeps her eyes on mine.

I smile.

She doesn’t.

“No, asshole. No one’s ever said that to me because normal men don’t tie me up when I’m out of it, and they know I’m not drugged. Only you’re sick enough to do it.”

“Only *I’m* privileged enough,” I

correct her.

“Only you’re fucked up enough with a glandular problem the size of your head. You really should buy yourself an extra-large sombrero to fit that overly large cranium of yours so I can piss on it. That way you’ll really have a reason to be mad at me.” She exhales, her eyes darkening. “I really don’t know what your problem is, but you need to get a fucking grip.”

I cup myself. “Like this? You wanna grip it for me—make sure I’m doing it properly?” I slide my palm up and down the outline of my hard-on.

“No thanks. I’m gonna go back to sleep.”

“Suit yourself. Cut yourself free

when you wake up. I'm leaving now." I motion to the knife on her chest.

"Shit. You really are a dick of epic proportions, you know that, right?"

"I do," I lilt, lean over and kiss her pubic mound, then smirk. "Catch you later, Ides. Thanks for dinner. It was awesome."

She growls and snaps her jaw closed.

I didn't eat anything other than her, but she doesn't need to know that.

My laughter carries as I exit her place.

* * *

A few days later, I'm headed to the

courthouse.

Jason chewed my ass out all morning, whining about how I was running him ragged.

I only shrugged in response. I needed this—needed *her*.

He doesn't know what it's like, being painfully erect all the time for a woman that pretends to hate me—only serving to make me want her even more desperately.

“You ready?” I ask my boss.

He holds up a finger as he punches something into his phone with his other hand.

Always doing something.

I roll my eyes and lean my shoulder up against the wall.

“I’m always ready. Are *you*?” he asks finally, when he’s finished.

He stands up and even though I’m taller, he still dwarfs me somehow, his presence threatening.

“Yes, sir,” I say, blinking hard.

“About damn time—you’ve had your head up your ass all week,” the boss says.

“Have not,” I mutter and lead him into the courtroom.

“I don’t like smelling shit in your hair. It’s nauseating.” He chuckles at his poor joke.

I ignore his comment, and fight off an eye roll. The bastard’s in rare form today—Lord help me keep my shoe out of *his* ass.

We find our spot, and I want to ask him how he pushed this hearing through so quickly, but there's no point. With his money and connections, there's no telling what he can do or get ahold of.

“And did you ever go back and find it?” He gives me a look of disgust as his first course—dished up with a side of a disappointing groan.

I know what he's referring to. “No. She's moved it somewhere else. I think her lawyer has it.”

“Then fucking get it already,” he growls and takes his seat at the front table. Another glare. Seems he's in a good mood after all.

This should be a pleasant excursion.

I slip into the chair next to his, drum my fingers on the table.

“Get your papers out—at least look like you know what you’re doing.” He leans toward me to deliver his message, then sits back.

“I *do* know what I’m doing.” I open my briefcase and shuffle my papers about, then spread them on the table. I don’t need them. I know this case better than he does. “I’ve been doing this for years.”

Shhhweeeeeek!

The door behind us swings open with a squeak, and in strides Dena, in a light blue dress that buttons down the entire length of her. God, she’s a wet dream at night in her bed, and a demon

during the day, wearing that dress.

She's wearing black heeled boots and matching colored gloves.

I smirk when she gasps the moment she spots me.

Just for kicks, I straighten my black tie, calling attention to it.

Her eyes rake over me, and she rolls her eyes.

My smile burns into my facial features.

I knew she'd like it.

"Why'd you dress like you're going to a funeral?" the boss whispers next to me.

"It's all for her—I know what I'm doing." My eyes keep following her, and my mouth waters. Fuck, I'd give anything

to inhale her naughty scent right this instant. She always smells like sex and sin, wrapped up in my come.

She gives me one more fleeting glance before looking away.

I let my eyes move over my wardrobe for a second, taking in my purple shirt and the rest of the black clothing I put on, knowing she appreciates the gesture deep down inside.

I hope she's wet already and dying to be fucked by me.

Riot walks in a few minutes later, and Dena's shoulders melt about two inches with her relieved sigh.

My hands clench into fists.

He better keep his distance from

her.

If he so much as fucking breathes on her . . . She hates that shit from him. She told me, and I'm not okay with him flirting with my girl.

“Relax,” the boss tells me.

I take a deep breath, hold it and shift toward the front of the room, loosening my jaw and my clenching fists.

Riot sets his bag down on the floor between them.

Judge Clarence enters the room, and I try to keep a neutral expression.

The boss owns this man—like he owns everyone else, including me.

Well, at least, he likes to think he does.

The judge takes a seat, gets

comfortable, and a few seconds later I hear the door open behind us again, but I keep my eyes forward. I know who it is —Jason.

“Mr. Thayer, Mr. Reid, let’s get started. I’d like to hear from the plaintiff first,” the judge says.

I stand up, and slip my hands in my pockets. “My client here, representing Shilling Corporation, has a complaint about Ides Notions Inc.’s newest creation.”

“The transaction wasn’t even completed, Your Honor,” Riot interjects.

“That’s as it should be,” I say, glaring at him over my shoulder.

“This is absurd. This prototype was specifically commissioned by your

client through a private deal.” Riot rests his hand on the table, and her gloved hand settles next to his.

My eyes run over her face, and she stares at me impassively, then leans toward Riot and whispers something to him—her eyes on me the entire time.

Goddammit—this woman’s making me aroused, the dirty bitch.

I take a deep breath and turn back to the judge. “The paperwork clearly stipulated that no other company, individual, family or friend, should know about it, and she shared it with me.” I pull my briefcase up on the desk and take out the remote I removed from her vehicle.

“Her car was stolen, with that

prototype in it,” Riot says. He stands up. “May I ask how you got ahold of it?” He tries to stare me down and look intimidating.

It only makes me smile. My shoulders relax as I stare back.

“It was given to me by the police officer that found her car, stripped bare of any identifying marks as her vehicle. He called me because he found my fingerprint on her car,” I say with a casual lean against the table my boss is sitting at.

The judge’s brows toss up on his forehead, looking more like the peak on a roof than a part of his face that’s supposed to be there. “This sounds very odd, Mr. Reid. You better have a good

explanation on why your fingerprint was on her car. Do you know the defendant?"

I clear my throat, move away from the table and straighten out my suit coat. "I saw her at a gas station that night and asked her for some change so I could pay for bus fare home, since my motorcycle had just been stolen in that parking lot." I smirk and glance over at her.

Her face is paler than usual, but other than that, she shows no sign of emotions.

"I see . . ." The judge pauses and asks, "And did you get your bike back?"

"Yes," I answer. "It seems the same culprits that stole my bike, stole her car. It was two thugs. They ditched my bike

and her car a few miles down the road from where they were stolen. The police are still looking for these perpetrators.”

He blinks and leans back in his chair, appearing to be deep in thought.

I hand him the manufactured police reports my boss bought, submitting it as evidence.

“I hope you’ve returned her vehicle to her,” the judge says, looking them over, nodding and then setting the papers aside.

“You know as well as I do the cops have impounded it. They’ll contact her soon, I’m sure.” I take a breath and continue, “But back to the matter at hand.”

“Yes, I’ve read the lawsuit.” The

judge exhales and clicks his tongue. “I’m really not seeing what the problem is—why the plaintiff is even here.”

My boss yawns and stretches next to me. I stifle a laugh. “When my client here had his analysts take a close look at her prototype, it was alarming.”

“Enlighten me sometime in this century, Mr. Reid, or I’m going to rule in favor right now of the defendant,” the judge tells me.

Dena chuckles softly.

I step back over to the table and lean the backs of my thighs against it.

“Sir, this thing is a weapon,” I say, my voice flat.

“Is not!” Riot blurts.

“Shhh . . .” The judge glares at him.

“Mr. Thayer, you’re supposed to be familiar with the rules of court—act like it.” The judge clears his throat, then takes a breath.

Riot leans toward Dena and whispers something to her, and then she touches him. With her gloved hand, but shit, my teeth grind as I watch the small, innocent gesture.

She’s. Fucking. Touching. Him!

She said she wouldn’t ever do that shit! Not on purpose—those were her words.

My head pounds as blood rushes in my ears.

I cough to give myself a second to center myself and to wipe my expression clean. When I’ve gotten control of

myself, I go back to my explanation, “It’s a chip to be inserted into a pet for tracking purposes.”

The judge stares at me as though he thinks this is ridiculous.

“And this remote,” I say, walking it up to the judge for further inspection, “is the problem.”

“Why? I’m still not seeing it,” the judge asks.

“If I push this button right here . . .” I point at the green one in the middle “. . . it activates the chip. Sounds innocuous, right? Well, not really. If I push this red one with the P on it, well, then it sends an impulse directly into the brain and forces the animal to come back to the owner. The chip in the remote matches

the DNA frequency and impulse wave in the animal, and if the animal can't for some reason return to the owner, if they're injured or caught by someone else, the chip will automatically, within two minutes, tell the owner the exact whereabouts of the animal."

"What does the P stand for? I don't remember seeing that defined in the lawsuit," the judge says.

Riot sits taller. "The P stands for parietal lobe. That button interrupts sensory information the brain distinguishes, focusing the pet where the owner needs them to go so they can't be distracted by anything else."

Her eyes are steady on the judge, and she's completely at ease.

Damn her. I'm struggling being this close to her when I'm unable to touch her the way I'm dying to.

The judge looks over at Riot. "Does it work? Has it been tested yet?"

He nods. "It has, Your Honor. We've actually had it tested on my very own pet. It's safe, though, there're no—"

"I wasn't finished," I interrupt. "I think you can see the implications here if someone, somewhere, was to use this on say—a human. We all know there are still slave traders all over the world that would be only too happy to get their hands on something like this," I say, my voice going low and somber.

My eyes flick back over to Dena. She's grimacing and once more

whispering something in Riot's ear.

“And what was the actual contract for?” the judge asks.

“It was supposed to give the data to a security system where authorities would be the only ones to get this information, not the actual owner. This way, there would be no way this would fall into the hands of criminal organizations and be used to their advantage,” I explain.

The judge nods, picks up a pen and nibbles on the end while he sits, looking like he's mulling something over.

When I sit down and look over at her once more, she's green, looking sickened by the pen in the judge's mouth.

“Mr. Thayer, present your

defendant's case.” There's a little drool on the judge's chin. He promptly wipes it off with his sleeve.

She gasps softly and has to turn her head away from him.

I watch her gloves come off and her hands frantically search through Riot's bag he's brought. She pulls out a small container and rubs something on her hands. I assume it's hand sanitizer, but who knows with Ides.

“Your Honor, the contract was vague about who was supposed to receive the information on the whereabouts of the chipped pet, and the contract has been revised since its original draft.” He passes the judge the agreement. “My client here, representing

her company, has made it clear to me that they were only acting in the best interests of Shilling Corporation, giving them maximum control of the information the chip will provide. There was a clause in the paperwork that she was to have full creative control since this was a private deal, where she alone was creating and manufacturing—it wasn't done through her company. This is genius work, and it's not Ides Notions Inc.'s responsibility to keep this out of the hands of anyone else other than Shilling Corporation. This lawsuit is a waste of everyone's time. Ides Notions Inc. isn't even going to be using any of the proceeds made off this invention and most of it's going to charity." Riot takes

a deep breath and when he looks at her, the adoration is clear as fuck, and I'm grinding my teeth once more until my jaw throbs.

"Remind me which charity the money's going to," the judge says.

"It's a homeless shelter for teens that have either been abandoned or run away." The pride on Riot's face is killing me, because she's beaming at this douche.

I shoot a quick text to Jason to look it up as soon as Riot mentions the name.

A second later, Jason's sent me a text that reads, **That's where she went after her dad went to prison.**

Pangs of sadness rifle through me, wishing she'd turned to me when all that

shit happened so long ago.

“I thought it was going toward a new campaign for protection of minors with parents that have guns in the home,” the judge says.

“Well, yes, a portion is going toward the research Ides Notions Inc. is currently involved in. But less than one percent of the income derived will go toward that. It’s for a new DNA typing for guns, to ensure that a family member cannot inadvertently or purposefully pull a trigger on someone with matching DNA. ”

The judge’s jaw pops open.

Mine does, too.

Holy shit, this woman is astounding. I know she’s the one heading

this up. Who else would be this clever and inventive?

The judge's brow furrows. "Why would Ides Notions Inc. be involved in that? It doesn't seem like their usual M. O."

"The CEO here"—Riot motions to her—"was involved in a previous situation as a minor, where a family member assaulted and pulled a gun on her. They fired and missed, thankfully, but she's been drafting this project up for years. It's finally been approved through the proper channels and authorities, but the stipulation was it had to be funded through grants and donations."

The judge nods.

The boss next to me snaps his fingers, and when I turn toward him, he points at his watch, telling me to wrap this thing up.

“Your Honor, this is all fascinating, but it’s beside the point. It doesn’t matter what Ides Notions Inc. intends to do with the funds. The problem here is how this weapon works, and what to do about it.”

“Are you proposing it be destroyed?” the judge asks, his brows popping up.

His right eye twitches, and I can tell he’s fallen under her spell—the magnificence and brilliance that is Ides.

I fail to answer.

The judge searches out my boss, and there’s a look that transpires

between them.

“Let’s take a fifteen minute break, and then we’ll reconvene. I’ll most likely have a decision by then,” the judge says, then dismisses us.

I look over at her, sitting all serene and beautiful as fuck, and I’m even harder now. The thought that she hasn’t said a thing out loud during the hearing to defend herself, hasn’t been even remotely riled, pisses me off, but also makes me want to bite into her tits while I’m fucking her into the wall.

God, she really is a demon, sent to destroy my entire ego.

I motion to Jason at the back to get me her new phone number, along with her fucking pansy-assed lawyer’s.

I step out of the room, and less than a minute later, I've got Riot's new number.

Asshole changed it when she told him I'd hacked his phone, and that was how I knew about their conversation. Fuck, it still gives me lockjaw when I think about the shit she said to him—complimenting his loser-ass.

She mostly calls me an asshole, smiling, and while I'm fucking her raw, but still . . . I want her mouth saying nice things to me—not him.

She was right, though, that I'd gone through his phone, not hers—and I'll do it again, repeatedly if it means being a step ahead of him and his slippery, used-car salesmen feet.

Before I figure out where I want to go for this break, I send a quick text to him. **If you touch her again . . .**

A deep growl vibrates low, in the back of my throat.

The bathroom's at the end of the hall, and there aren't very many people nearby, so I step inside and lock the door.

Before I've even thought this through, my zipper's down, my hand's on my cock, and when I look at my phone, Jason's already gotten her phone number up on my screen for me.

I dial her up.

"Hello . . . ?" Her soft voice makes my dick bob.

"Mmm . . . Ahhhhh Ahhhhh . .

.” I stroke long and slow.

“Look, whoever this is, I’m hanging up,” she huffs.

“Don’t . . .” I manage to say through gritted teeth. “Please.” I yank it harder, and I know she can hear my quick jerking hand with my dick sliding in it.

“Oh. My. God. You *are* a sick bastard,” she says, her voice going soft and trembling.

I smile and tighten my grip on my shaft.

Stroke . . . Stroke . . . Stroke.

“Ahhhhh . . . Mmm—oohhhh,” I pant, imaging her hand doing this to me. “You feel good, sweetheart. So good. Wish I had my laptop in front of me so I could speak to you while I watch the

video I took of you being fucked by me—legs spread wider than humanly possible. Fuck, you're gorgeous."

"I'll be deleting those from your files today," she says, breathing heavy.

"Those pictures—God, they're my favorite wallpapers." I lick my bottom lip and bite it, *hard*, through a wicked grin.

Her breath catches, then goes shallow, and I can tell I'm turning her on.

"Do you look at those often?"

"Fuck—you know I do. All the. Damn. Time. Can't get enough of looking at you with your cunt on display, my dick all over you. It's art, baby. Fucking sexy as hell."

“Shhhiit,” she whispers, and there’s movement on her end. It sounds rough, like she’s just shoved herself up against a wall—probably hiding so no one will see her reactions. “Why are you doing this to me?” Her hushed, low, husky breath makes my balls tighten.

“Mmmnnnnuuuugh,” I grunt, and fuck, I’m really close.

I shove my pants down lower, so I don’t get any come on them.

“Gaaawd.” She pants harder.

“Ahhhh . . . Fuuuuuuuck, Ides—you have me so crazy for you,” I moan and my breathing gets obscenely loud, crescendos, and I’m right fucking there, leaking, and she’s calling me an asshole.

That’s right, baby . . . My nasty

woman likes the sound of me about to climax.

“Jeeeesus, Vapor.” She sounds hoarse like I’ve just fucked her throat raw.

And then I’m undone, convulsing, weaving around in this small space, drunk off the sound of her saying my name like that.

I lean over the toilet and my come spurts all over the place, landing on the seat, on the walls, and very little in the actual bowl.

“Oooohhhhh, hohhh, hohhh, hohhh.” I choke on my breath, trying to catch it.

“Fuck you!” she growls.

“Thanks. Yeah, tonight, sweetheart, we will. Wait up for me. Be naked in

your bed—save me some time,” I say, and hang up. Ropes will definitely be required.

When I get back to the courtroom after cleaning myself up, I’m more relaxed and ready to face her.

I smile at her. She flips me off under the table and scowls at me.

Well, God, she wants it bad if she’s doing that.

I nod as if to the beat of a song, and I almost strut on my way over to her. My erection’s finally gone, so I don’t look like such a prick. This also means I need to keep the flirting to a minimum so I can keep from getting aroused again.

“Was it good for you?” *Nope. That’s not the plan, Nick. Shut the fuck*

up now. I rub my chest.

She glowers and looks away, keeping silent. My eyes rake over her body, and instead of unbuttoning a few on her dress to taunt me, she's done the opposite, looking almost frail and virginal, with her dress all modest and blue like the innocent sky, and fastened up to her neck.

Fuck. She's killing me. This is worse. I'll be imagining tearing those buttons off with my teeth now, just to get at her, and release her inner slut.

"I always say a break can be a nice thing. Wouldn't you agree, Riot?" I ask her lawyer.

His brows shove together, and then his head suddenly snaps toward her

pouting figure, turned away from us.

He shoots me a death glare, and I chuckle.

It's pretty obvious he thinks I fucked her during the fifteen minutes we were away.

God, I should be so lucky.

I step back over to my side of the room. Jason grins, and the judge returns, taking a seat.

The pen lands right back on his lips while he swivels his chair a little.

"This is what I see," he begins. "This is indeed a weapon, and I rule in favor of the plaintiff. They have all rights to this invention, and as such, the deal is null and void. The defendant is to receive half the payment originally

agreed to since Ides Notions Inc. overshot the mark, taking no thought on how this new invention could be a menace to society.”

Dena stands up but remains quiet.

The judge motions for me to step forward, and he hands me back the implement.

“I hope Shilling Corporation has experts that can dismantle this thing and make it safer so I don’t have to be faced with another lawsuit down the road on this contraption and deal with the ramifications of reckless inventions.”

“They do.” I nod. They have Jason and me. We can do whatever the fuck we want to this thing. “It’ll be taken care of.”

The judge dismisses us, and before I catch her out in the parking lot, she's gone, and Riot's disappeared as well.

"Keep your dick in your pants, Son," the boss says, chuckling as he passes me up to get to his Ferrari 599.

I laugh. Not because he looks kind of childish in that thing, but because she had a more expensive car than his with her Bugatti Veyron EB, Westin and I stole. And, fuck, did she ever look amazing in that thing, but she'd look even better with me inside her, riding her in the backseat of it.

* * *

Once it's dark, I park her car in her

driveway and chuckle as I imagine her facial expression when she finds it in the morning—safe and *silver*.

I slip out of the car and try to get into her house my usual way, but it's not working.

I call up Jason.

“She’s made a new chip,” he answers.

“Fuck, how did she have time for that?”

“Who the hell knows? She’s Ides—that’s what she does. Oh, and just so you know, this one is better—stronger. It overrides all of the old chip’s commands, so yours is useless.” He sniffs.

“It’s not useless. I’ll find a way to

work around this.” I end the call.

I head to her backyard and find her bedroom window, then rap on it like some twisted, teenaged pervert, trying to sneak into his girlfriend’s room late at night.

There’s no answer, of course, but I get a new call.

Oh fucking hell . . .

I answer it, and all at once I know it’s her as a feminine breath washes through the phone line.

“Ahhhhh, uuuhhhh . . . Uh-uhhhh . . . Ahhhhh,” she sighs and breathes hard.

I throb—I breathe almost as hard as her while the obscene call escalates into gasping moans.

“Oh God.” Her breaths are jagged

and choppy.

A few grunts and the sound of fabric being rustled makes my cock twitch and harden to granite.

Swiiipap, swiipap, swiiipap.

The unmistakable sound of a very wet pussy being assaulted by fingers or a dildo, tortures me.

I pull myself up onto her window ledge, and though I can't see all the way in her bedroom, I can see the mattress shaking.

Click. Bzzzzz . . .

Shit. She's got a vibrator out now?

“Oooohhhh, I'm coming, Jaaaaason,” she cries out.

Then . . . Dirty girl falls apart, she goes all breathy and high pitched, and

like a fucking kid, I almost come in my pants.

“Fuck,” I groan.

I hear a distinct smack on her wall inside her bedroom, and then she sighs like it’s the best sex she’s ever had.

“I’ll find a way in,” I call out.

She laughs.

And that’s when I climb up her damn wall, and circle her chimney.

Fucking cunt’s begging for my dick.

I’ll have it. And if she says that stupid name, Jason, again, I’ll gag her and then kick my roommate’s ass, all because she’s using his name to get to me.

Yeah, I’ll gag her until she remembers whose name should be

falling off those cock-sucking lips.

Vapor—thicker than the air she breathes, and deeper inside her body than anyone's ever been.

Chapter 9

Ides

He's on my roof.

I yawn, then call up Riot.

“What's he doing *now*?” he answers the call, sounding half-dead.

“He's trying to break in, unsuccessfully.” My gut tightens at the thought of letting Nick in and what he might do to me when he's this worked up into a frenzy. What sinfully delicious things he might do and document by *filming*. That man is kinky as hell.

My pussy swears that's the case as well, as I change my underwear again.

Just having him prowling around

out there is doing some fucked up things to me.

My breasts are painful, and my nipples are so tight and rubbing on my bra—it's maddening. Is there no relief?

"This isn't a game," he tells me.

"I know, but it is to him."

He sighs. "He broke into my home today."

"Why didn't you call the cops?" I ask, getting up and bringing my sex toys to the bathroom.

I drop them in a bowl of cleaning fluids, and then wash my hands while I tuck the phone between my ear and shoulder.

"*What*—like you did? You didn't even tell that judge today he was the

jackass who stole your car,” he reminds me.

“Why would that’ve mattered? The car, while I’m pissed he took it, doesn’t matter. It’s a distraction. It’s not what he’s after.”

“I know that, but why would he even admit to all that today?” His tone is sharper than it has ever been.

“To rub it in our faces,” I reply, listening for sounds of Nick on my roof.

I walk back into my room and slip into some comfortable clothes.

Black. Safe. Predictable, and what I need with him pawing and scratching around out there like a wild animal. My very own predator, trying to find a way in.

Good Lord, he's tenacious, and my will's slipping . . . Almost gone.

The exact reason I called Riot—to unknowingly talk me out of allowing Vapor inside my bedroom, and handing him my handcuffs with a smile and a new insult.

He's lucky I know it's him, or my chip would've already sent the police here.

Police that I can trust—not the crooked ones that have helped my father.

When I'm dressed, I head into my office.

“Well, what did he take from your house?” I ask.

“Nothing as far as I can tell. I'm not entirely sure what he's after.” I hear a

scratching sound, but this time it's from Riot, and I roll my eyes.

"I'll let you go," I say.

"Why?"

"I'm not stupid. I know what you're doing, and I've already had to deal with that today from another man," I complain.

"Oh, God, are you serious? He jacked off on the phone while he was talking to you?"

"See—now this is so wrong. You're my lawyer *and* my friend—why are *you* whacking it while I'm talking to you?"

"I-I'm not," he stammers.

"You *are*. Goodbye. I'll talk to you tomorrow, and next time you leave all

my supplies to make my hand sanitizer, can you leave it in the garage instead of on the kitchen counter?" I request, swapping the phone to my other ear for a moment as I peer out my window and watch the rope slip up the side of my roof. I chuckle.

Nick's ludicrous at times. This isn't Mount Everest. It's a basic roof.

"I didn't bring your supplies inside. I couldn't get in. You switched the codes to the locks. I still have them sitting in my car. I meant to give them to you today after the hearing, but you left so quick because you were so upset that I couldn't," he responds.

Shit. Nick left me the stuff I needed?

Why would he do that?

He hates my neuroses.

Did he piss in the ingredients or something?

I squint and watch the last of the dangling rope disappear.

“Oh, great,” I mutter. “It’s fine. Don’t worry about my supplies. Just hold on to them in case I need them in the future. But before I go . . . Why didn’t you tell me he was the plaintiff’s attorney before I got to court?”

He exhales. “I didn’t know it was him. Jesus, Ides. The paperwork said Stromman, Leibers and Johnston—Attorneys at Law. How was I supposed to know he’d be the one representing that asshole?”

“Who was the man sitting next to him?”

“His name’s Stephen Reid,” he answers.

I gasp. That dickhead! That was his father? And he changed his last name, too?

What the hell? Is the entire family on some kind of experimental medication gone wrong?

They need their own reality show.

“What? What’s wrong, Dena? Why’d you make that sound? Did he break in through a window? Is Vapor in your house right now?”

I rub my eyes with the heel of my left hand. “No, and he won’t get in, but I gotta go. Thanks for everything. You’re

an amazing friend, and a terrific lawyer.”

“In case you forgot—we lost today,” he says, his tone flat and lifeless.

“It doesn’t matter. You got me through it, and I thought I was gonna lose it when the judge started orally fixating on his pen. Yick!”

He chuckles.

“All right, talk to you tomorrow,” I say, and end the call.

There’s a banging sound on the roof, and I ignore it.

I step into my office, plunk myself down in my chair, and once I start looking at the security tapes from Riot’s house today, my fingers and toes tingle, then go numb.

“Son of a bitch!” I yell, jumping out of my chair. “You fucking loser!”

I unlock, then run out my back door and shout, “Get your ass down here, now!”

Nick saunters out from behind the corner of the house.

I slap his face the second he’s near me.

“Feel better?” he asks, rubbing the spot.

I do it again. “Now I do.”

His eyes go wide and he smiles, but barely—and the fucker’s looking kind of high off it.

“Wh-who’s on my roof?” I ask, breathless.

“Not me,” he says with an amused

shrug, his right brow curved upward like his lopsided grin.

“What the fuck are you doing to me?” My fingers flex.

“Well, I’d like to be *fucking* you—but you already know that,” he says, his steps smooth and his smile growing ever wider.

He walks inside my house, and I race after him.

“You took it!” I punch him in the back repeatedly.

He spins around and hugs me. “I had to. I’m sorry.”

“That doesn’t make it okay!”

His arms tighten around me. “You left it in an unsafe place. I didn’t have a choice.”

“It’s mine, and I want it back!”

“You’ll have to take it, then, because it’s mine now, and I have no intention of returning it to that idiot, Riot.” He grimaces.

My jaw snaps shut. “What the fuck is your problem? Why do you keep harassing me? Is it really that hard to find germophobe computer hackers that are inventors? There’s gotta be millions of us around.” I push off his chest and make my way out of his arms.

“I haven’t even *begun* to harass you, lady.”

There’s a loud thunk outside, and I turn around and scream when the man that stole my car with him eons ago, steps inside.

“You got this?” Westin asks.

Nick nods.

“Good. Catch ya later, Ides,” Westin says, winking and leaving me standing there, gaping.

He shuts the door, and I say, “Lock down.”

All the doors bolt shut.

Nick laughs. “Locking me in? My, Ms. Black, that can only mean one thing—you want me here, you dirty girl. You want a good, hard fucking, since your toys didn’t satisfy you.”

“They did their job just great,” I say, backing away from him.

I’m glad I’m clothed, but he looks at me, licking his lips, like he can see straight through the fabric on my body.

“Now, about that blow job you told me today you’d be giving me,” he says.

I blink and swallow. “Is there an award being handed out for asshole-thief-of-the-year? Because you’re on the list of candidates.”

He smirks, swallows down a rough, biting laugh and replies, “And you’re on the list for hottest bitches, giving lawyers an unending boner. Fuck, you were torturing me today, looking that fucking edible and innocent. You’re lucky all I did was call up your ass and jack off in the bathroom. I’m not made of stone—especially not when it comes to you.” He stretches his neck like he’s been strung out all day.

Before I can position myself

strategically and get the hell away from him, he lunges forward, and I'm caged up against the breakfast bar.

"What do you want? You already stole it," I say, barely blinking and breathing shallow.

His eyes go really dark and get heavy. "I haven't uncovered its secrets yet, and I haven't uncovered yours either." He leans in, drags his nose up my jugular and inhales, making the filthiest sound imaginable.

My legs jerk as my pussy tingles.

"Do it again," he says.

"Do what? I didn't do anything but try to slap and hit you, but it didn't do a damned thing to you." I lean away from him, but it only makes my legs open

wide, making me look like a wanton hussy.

And I'm sitting on a clean counter, but I know there are unseen germs here. Where's my black light?

I should disinfect this immediately and ohhhhh gaaaaawd!

He bites my right breast, and then sucks hard through my shirt. My nipple tightens and so do my thighs—around his waist.

“Make those sounds you made on the phone. You were really fucking loud, like an animal. How could you do that when I'm not touching you?” He nips his way up my chest until he's at my jaw, then he grips it with one hand, and in a flash, he's kissing me hard, forcing his

tongue into my mouth.

I wobble for a second, almost falling off the side of the counter, but his other hand braces me and then pushes me flat, so my back's on the *Formica* countertop.

"I'm not eating breakfast here ever again," I tell him.

"That's right—because I'll be the one eating you out here." He chuckles darkly.

I want to scream, "Dirty, filthy germs!" when he pulls my pants down and his tongue drifts up my thigh, but I know my issues with germs won't stop him.

It didn't last time. In fact, it kind of incited him into a manic frenzy, and it

was the hottest thing ever—the way he responded to me and my quirks.

And I really want him to continue.

“You’re gonna shave this shit off for me.” His hands move through my pubic hairs.

“Fuck no!” I shriek with my back jettisoning off the countertop. “It keeps harmful bacteria out of my vagina.”

“And getting rid of this mess . . .” he looks down at my pubes “. . . has been proven to lower the incidence of crabs.”

“You have crabs?” I squeak and try to scramble away, but he grabs me and pins me in place.

“No, I don’t have fucking crabs, I’m just saying . . .”

I grimace and shudder. *Crabs*. He has them. And now I probably do, too.

“Look, goddammit, I just don’t want shitty hairs getting in my way. I plan to eat you out—*often*. And I want this gone.” He eyes me like he’s serious about this.

“Shitty hairs?” My face drops. “I shower daily—*twice* daily, in fact. More when you’re around, in case you saw Paco earlier in the day or our Fat Fingers friend.” My voice cracks. He thinks I’m disgusting and dirty. No wonder he calls me a dirty bitch sometimes. I sniff back tears.

“Yyyyyyaaaah!” he groans and stretches his head back. “Fuck!”

I flinch. Is he going to hit me?

Dad made a sound like that before he went psycho on me, and I've already slapped and hit Nick just a few moments ago. I started it and didn't even think about the fact I didn't actually know if he'd hit me back. I close my eyes, drop my head and brace myself for the onslaught.

I've been hit before, lots of times. I can take a beating.

"Christ, Dena, what're you . . ." he trails off, and then soft fingers drift over my shoulders, then thread into my hair. "He really hurt you, didn't he? God, I'd love to tear your father's head off."

"Why?" I sniff. My eyes are moist, but I won't cry. I can't. Not when a man's watching.

“Because of what he did to you—what Riot said today at court. Your Dad shot at you?”

“Yeah.” My spine stiffens at his touch. He pities me? That’s why he’s here? I turn my head away from him and stare at the wall, unseeing.

“My Lord, you were a kid. Why didn’t you come to me for help?”

“You were a kid, too. What could you have done? Drawn me a recreation with crayons? I didn’t really want to document it with free art—my fridge isn’t into hanging shit on it like that.” I frown and my eyes sting with tears, trying to escape. Why does this fluid hurt so much when it makes its presence known? Is there some sort of acid in

there? Have I bleached too much in my lifetime, and it's an accumulated toxin in my system, only releasing itself in the form of my tears? Will it destroy crabs on contact?

I cringe as my eyes continue to hurt.

He exhales with a loud, grating sound. "Plenty, my father has tons of connections, and he would've—"

I turn to him, my eyes filled with anguish and my lips quivering. "He would've *what*? Killed my dad? You think I want that? I love him, even if he despises me. I've only ever wanted my dad to be happy, and to stop. He didn't know what he was doing."

"Jesus, you think he didn't know stealing your ideas and selling them off

was wrong? Is he mentally imbalanced?" His jaw flexes.

"No, I meant . . ." I look away again, unable to say the words.

"Tell me, sweetheart," he says with the softest, sweetest tones ever, but I can't listen. "Oh, please tell me—let me in . . ."

Nick can't be trusted. I can't share this. "There's nothing to tell . . ."

"All right, have it your way." He nuzzles into the side of my hair, his lips planting kisses everywhere. His hands shake as they slowly caress me, and almost painstakingly prepare my body to burn for him.

"I don't want anything from you," I whimper as he drags my shirt off. Not if

this is a pity fuck. No way. I don't do those. They're more frightening than crabs.

“Yes, you do, Ides. You want this as much as I do, otherwise you never would've called me back and touched yourself.” Christ, his voice is smoother than silk.

“I . . . I don't know what I was thinking—it just seemed like you deserved it,” I reply, the lie evident in my quivering voice.

My body trembles as his fingers roam delicately across the cups of my bra, and his eyes follow his touch, making him that much more irresistible.

“Why do you fight me? You need this.” He leans into me with every other

word, his back arching. “You deserve unspeakable pleasure, and I want to give it to you without any reservation—no questions asked. I want to give you any fucking thing you desire—more than you can possibly understand. I want to be here for you. Be the person you rely on. Be your fantasy come true, like you are for me.” He grunts as he nips at my skin with his warm, moist lips.

It’s like his words are fucking me.

God, how does he do this to me? Make me moan like I’m dying for it—for *him*.

“I . . . I hit you—just now,” I remind him.

“I know. You can do that when you need to. It’s okay. Hit me again right

now if it'll make you feel better. Anything for you, love.” His hands keep slipping over me like satin. “Get it all out. Use my body to burn away your frustrations. I want you to.”

“I don't like you, but that's not an excuse. I shouldn't have—God, I'm sorry—I shouldn't've done that. I'm really sorry,” I say, barely above a whisper, and my eyes trace down his torso and land on his straining erection.

“No, you don't like me sometimes. I get it. I'm a pain in the ass, and I know this, so I forgive you. It's all okay. But you crave this”—his hips tilt into me, and his tip hits my clit—“crave *me*. I can give you what you want, and I know you feel this. What we have, there's no way

to turn away from it. Not when it's so hot and needy in our blood."

I shift my hips into him without even considering what a hypocrite I am. I just need to *feel* . . .

"What do you want, sweetheart? You can tell me," he says, sliding his nose up my neck and parting his lips over my jaw. His breath on my skin makes my vision blur and my heart pound. "I'll give it to you—I swear I will."

"I want . . ."

"Yesss . . . Tell me."

"I wanna feel safe, with m-men," I stutter.

"You're safe with me, Dena—*always*." He rests his forehead on my

cheek for a moment, then his hands place themselves on my ribs, almost cupping right under my breasts. His grip is light, but keeps me in place. “Protecting you is everything to me. I swear you’re safe here now in my arms.”

“I’m not.”

“You are. Tell me how you feel right now.” His breathing picks up a little.

“When you’re holding me, yes, I feel safe.” I nod a little. Safer than I’ve ever felt in my life, but it’s pointless.

He lifts his head and looks in my eyes. “You like me—admit it.”

“I . . .” *I love you . . .*

“Say it. Tell me how you feel.” His hazel eyes shimmer at me, and there’s a

look of hope there that shatters me inside.

“I can’t stop thinking about you,” I admit, and my face heats.

“And it’s more than sex,” he breathes.

“I don’t know—I don’t know what this is,” I answer, my chest almost collapsing inside me. My shoulders roll forward, and I sag like a ragdoll.

He lifts me off the counter, sets me down and holds me in his arms, gently against his chest, rocking me a little with hip sways.

“What did he do to you, baby? Please tell me. You’re breaking my heart.” He uses the most unsettling, tender tone that it makes me collapse

into him and break into sobs.

“I gave him all of it,” I whimper.
He strokes my hair down my back.
“Gave him all of what?”

“My money. What he stole. I gave it all back. That’s how I met Chad. I needed a lawyer to set up a fund for my dad so when he gets out of p-prison, he can have what he wanted so desperately.” My eyes burn as the tears are shed in gushing rivers.

Nick pulls back and looks me in the eye. “Riot set that up for you?”

I nod, bite my lip and snot rolls down to my mouth.

He uses the hem of his shirt to wipe it off my face, and my insides melt at the sight of him caring for me. Of him

ignoring how many germs he's now wearing on his clothes—all of them *mine*. And he's not rushing to the wash to clean them off. He's still holding me, caressing, like the rest of the world doesn't resist. As if there's only me and nothing else.

My heart can't take it. The way it swells and enlarges to the point of pain, has me breathless.

Does he know what he does to me when he leaves me supplies so I can make my damned hand sanitizer? When he wipes my runny nose so I'm not freaking out over the germs gushing down my face? When he holds me after he ravages me and says such touching, sweet things to me?

I can't take it—any of it. My body's not built to withstand this type of onslaught from a sexual being like him.

I stutter on a gasping breath as he leans in and whispers, "You can't trust Riot."

"I can too."

"No, Dena, you can't. He's crooked." His nostrils flare.

"How would you know?"

"A criminal can always smell another one."

I rip myself out of his arms and back away a few steps. "Is that what you call a straight lawyer like him—a criminal?" My voice goes up.

"Fuck, he's slept with you, hasn't he?" His jaw clenches and his fists ball

up tight. “That motherfucking dickhead.”

“No.” My eyes narrow. “I’m not interested in him that way. Never have been. I already told you all this.”

“But you touched him today, and I practically have to fucking—” He cuts himself off and stretches his neck to the side, looking away from me.

“I think you should leave.” He disarms me too much. I can barely think around him.

“I’m not going anywhere.” His head jerks back toward me, his pupils dilate and there’s this dangerous, predatory look in his eyes. “You want me, and I can’t live through the night without having you.”

“If this is just about fucking me,

then—”

“Shut up,” he says, prowling after me.

“I’m not your fuckhole you can dick around with anytime you want.” My shoulders push back.

“Then what are you to me? What do you think you mean to me?”

I blink and give him a blank stare. “I don’t know. You lie to me all the time.”

“I’ve never lied to you,” he replies.

“Psssht!” I throw my hands up and they land on his chest—he’s in front of me that quickly. “This is all some twisted game to you. You’re a liar and a thief.”

“Okay, even if you don’t believe

I've never lied to you before—”

“My car,” I throw it in his face. “I should’ve shot you when I had the chance.” I cringe. I should be slapping the shit out of him again right now, but I can’t. I don’t want to be like my father. I won’t. I already feel like absolute shit for pounding on Nick’s back like that and slapping his face twice.

He gives that knowing smile. He’s all too aware I’m not violent, and that was completely unlike me to go after my car and him like that with my gun. It was clearly a moment of insanity. And just now—I was out of control—yes, with my girlie slaps and toddler fist poundings. But I wasn’t really hitting him hard. It was sheer frustration coming

out of me. Nothing more.

I could never truly hurt Nick. I'd never be able to live with myself if I did that.

“Okay, after the car—yes, that’s a given—I haven’t lied to you. I’ve omitted or left facts out you don’t need to know, but other than that.” He shrugs.

My hands slip down his chest and drift to his abs.

“Please, let me be with you tonight. I’ve missed you like crazy, my beautiful girl,” he says, his eyes going dark again, but filled with so much longing and honesty, I drop my arms.

Without using my words, I slip my bra off and remove my panties—he’s already got them wet anyway, so they

were due for a change. “Don’t tell me you love me,” I warn, my eyes turned to slits. I can’t listen to false words like that, meant to lull me into a sated, safe place that truly doesn’t exist. I’ve lived too much of my life in places like that. Never again.

“If it’s the truth, why shouldn’t I say it?” He peers into my eyes with an empathetic look in place.

“You want me to feel safe?”

He nods, and my damn stomach somersaults. Maybe he really does love me.

“Then don’t fucking say that shit to me,” I say through my teeth.

“No promises, sweetheart, unless you’re going to swear you won’t ever

touch that nasty fleabag, Riot, again.” He inhales next to my ear, and I fight off shivers.

“I was wearing gloves—that’s the only reason it happened,” I explain.

“Why did you need to touch him at all?” He goes rigid. “Why can’t I kill him over it?”

“You can’t because he’s my friend, and I did it because I was ready to bolt out the door. The judge was gnawing on a pen, you wore my favorite colors to taunt me, and I was horny as fuck for you in that suit and with your damned commanding presence, taking over the room—*there*. Happy now?” My mouth jerks into a tight line.

“So you touched some other

prick?”

“It was his hand, Nick! My God, you’d think I fucked him on the table right in front of—”

His lips slam down on mine, he picks me up, and I automatically lock my legs around his waist.

He carries me into my bedroom, slips off his shoes and socks along the way, then he tosses me onto the bed.

His clothes are stripped off in a matter of seconds, and then he’s got his tongue on my clit, lapping at it.

“Shit, you’re so wet from before, and you taste so damn good,” he moans.

Heat rushes up my thighs.

“God, you’re such a bastard—making me want you.” I close my eyes

and fist the bedspread beneath me.

“Don’t resist. Stop fighting this. We can be together,” he says between sucks and nips at my vulva. “We can do this.”

“Stop stealing shit, then,” I say.

“Stop inventing stuff I have to steal.”

“I want my car back, asshole.” I throw my head back and release a tiny groan. He feels amazing already, his hands and his mouth. I want this more than he does—though, he puts on a better show. He might be playing me. In fact, he has to be. Why else would he be interested in me? I’m no prize.

“Okay.”

“Fuck you.” I bite my cheeks, then a hiss escapes out of me as his soft tongue

presses inside me and his nose digs into my clit.

“Finally—permission,” he groans and heaves his body up, then thrusts inside me, taking my breath away. “God—feels like forever since I’ve been inside you.”

“You fucked me last night. Alzheimer’s might be something you want to look into.” I grip his shoulders as he lunges forward, pushing himself as deep as he can go. “’Cause I sure as fuck can’t forget the shit you were doing to me last night.”

“Promise? I want you sore as you hobble out of bed tomorrow. I want you to remember me with each tiny step as you shuffle along with a walker.” He

grins. “Alzheimer's for me, but a cane for you, grandma. It's only fair.”

I giggle. “A cane can be used as a weapon against you.”

“Don't I fucking know it. I hope you fail to figure out it can also be used to do all sorts of kinky shit in bed.” His brows dance.

“Christ, you feel incredible,” I blurt when he hits a particularly juicy spot inside me.

“Too fucking long. I can't take it. I want you all the damn time.” He dips down and kisses me, and it's gentle, but urgent. “Can't stop obsessing about you.”

When he breaks away, my head lolls from side to side.

His words . . . Shit. I feel the same way, but I . . .

“Feel good? What do you need?” he asks, his voice soft. “I want you dying to have me, to have more. But, fuck, you feel so amazing, wrapped around me like this. I may come soon. So, tell me what you need.”

He holds his breath for a second, and then there’s this dying moan emanating out of him, and my pussy clenches hard around him.

“God, yessss,” he says.

“Stop it,” I whimper, choking on my plea.

“Stop what? You don’t want this?”

He tries to withdraw, and my hand flies down between us, gripping his

cock, and guiding it back inside. “No, please, God, don’t stop!”

“What do you want, then?”

“Just take me—like you always do. Take me like you can’t control yourself,” I say in a rush, and I can’t believe I’ve just told him that.

“Like this?” He grips my hair, bites into my neck, and then shoves himself so forcefully inside me it makes me slide up the bed a few inches.

“Oh fuck!” My back arches, and I clamp my fingers into his ass.

“God, you love this rough.” He throws my hands off him, grips my ankles and shoves them up on his shoulders.

He places a pillow behind me, and

then backs me up to the headboard.

“Now, I’m gonna fucking love you, because that’s what I do. I can’t stop myself. And you don’t get to tell me I can’t say it. That shit’s just wrong, Dena, and you know it.”

I shake my head to tell him to stop—no talk of love, but he’s back inside me, and he’s deep, and long and hard, and I can’t think or breathe, and oh God .

..

He grips the iron headboard, and drives into me, his dick commanding my body.

“I love you, and I’ll say it because it’s true, and I hate what your dad did to you, and I hate him for treating you that way. But I love you more than anything. I

adore every fucking thing about you, including the way germs piss you off.”

Tears roll down my cheeks once more. Why do I always have to be crying around him? I don't want to show him how weak he makes me. And this stinging sensation in my tear ducts sucks monkey scrotum.

“Stop,” I say, my voice hoarse with emotion.

I grip into his neck, to push him away.

He slows down, and his pounding thrusts melt into what can only be described as pure love making.

His kisses turn into whispery, powdery, affectionate touches. His eyes soften and tear up. “You mean

everything to me. I won't stop because I want you to feel how much I love you—how much I worship you. I'll do anything for you. Anything at all, my beautiful, brilliant woman. I want you to be happy all the time, and I'll destroy anything that gets in the way of you smiling at me.”

My chest constricts and tears spill freely. Goddammit, the burn in my eyes is unbearable. Seriously, it's almost as hideous as the faces I'm sure I'm making as I continually sob. “You can't say that.”

“But I have to because I can't contain it. You're so gorgeous and amazing, and I love everything about you. I want you to be mine, and no one

else's. I honestly can't share you. It kills me to do it."

"You're a thief," I say, my hands shaking as they try to shut him up. I try to cover his mouth, but he nips at my fingers, sucks and kisses at them, and it's so damn erotic, I shake with want.

"Is that why you can't love me? Or does it even really matter what I do?" His eyes well up even more.

I shut my eyes, and try to drown out his words with thoughts of my dad screaming at me, aiming his gun at my stupid face.

"You're mine, sweetheart, and I'll take care of you. Let me in . . ." His lips whisper things at my ears, about how he wants a life with me, if I'll only say it—

tell him I love him, too. “Share your pain, your heartache with me. I’ll take it all away. I’ll make you forget about it all.”

His fingers slide down my breasts, and he’s at my clit, circling with a soft tenderness I can barely comprehend.

“I w-want to love you.” I inhale, in jagged, spurts, unable to take him in deep enough. “But I can’t.” My heart clenches tight at my hideous words. *You’ll destroy me, Nick, if I let you in .*

..

“You will . . .” he breathes at my neck, his lips softly devouring my skin as his hands skillfully, and gently, lavish affection on me “. . . you will . . .”

I fall apart in his arms, coming and

gushing all over him, while mindlessly cooing something about how he makes me feel alive inside. And even if I can't say the words, tell him what he wants to hear, my body says it for me . . .

I'm yours. I love you. I want this so much that pain and fear almost cripples me at the thought of this not being real or ending, but I'll try. For you—I'll try as hard as I can to make you endlessly happy, too.

Chapter 10

Vapor

I returned her Veyron, and yet she's been driving her other car—the one I call trash heap.

It's obviously some kind of sentimental tank of a car, otherwise, why would she drive that old black Camaro around?

The damned thing is falling apart and so rusted, my trackers barely stick to it.

She's locked me out again, and she keeps changing phones, so I can't get to her.

Fuck—I'm crawling the walls,

trying to get back inside.

I've sent her gifts—art. And I didn't steal them. I purchased them like any sensible lawyer would do.

It's not my fault she found out I was a thief before she found out I was a lawyer. She wasn't supposed to ever see me that day I stole her car, but she was so beautiful, I couldn't stop myself from saying something to her before we took it, and I'd been dying to see her after talking to her online for a month.

Why is she doing this to me?

I got through to her. She broke down in my arms as I made love to her two weeks ago.

*Yeah, asshole—you broke her.
That's why she's evading you.*

“Is it working yet?” I hover over Jason.

“No, goddammit, and quit asking me that. You’re driving me nuts,” he says, keeping his head tucked down as he works feverishly at the chip. “If you want it fixed so badly, why don’t you try?”

“I have. I’ve gone through it over and over, but she’s got me so fucking . . . God, what a bitch—doing this to me.” I grip the back of my neck.

“I’m surprised she hasn’t broken in here and taken back what you stole from her,” he says, continuing to tinker.

“She knows I wouldn’t keep it here, just like she wasn’t keeping it at her place.” I circle around him once more.

“Stop the fucking pacing. You’re making me nervous. Go get a beer or somethin’.”

“I can’t drink. She doesn’t do that shit—she wouldn’t want me to,” I say, gripping the edge of the table now instead of my body, still moving in on his space.

“The things you know about her without actually spending any time with her other than stealing her stuff and fucking her . . . Well, it’s disturbing.” He stretches his back for a moment.

I chuckle. “She’s probably watching me, too.”

“Don’t flatter yourself. A genius like her is not going to waste time using surveillance on your pathetic ass. She

knows what you're doing without watching."

"Not you, too," I groan. "Westin won't shut up about her ever since he met her. He was dying to help me break into her place, so I let him clown around on her roof while I waited for her to come out."

"I heard it worked." He chuckles.

"Of course it did," I huff.

"No, I mean your rocket or rock, or whatever the hell you called that thing. Didn't it work for a while?"

"Pffft!" I blow out. "Nope. It never worked. I just told him that."

"Why'd you lie?" He looks up at me briefly, then goes back to picking apart the chip. It's useless, and I know it.

With the advancements she's made on her new chip, this one's dinosaur technology.

“Because he doesn't need to know all my secrets. And besides—he's a bigger gossip than any bitch you've ever met. He's probably already spread it around that I have this awesome way of breaking into any place with that thing.”

Jason snickers louder, his back shaking. “He's not as gullible as you think he is.”

“Whatever.” I stand up tall, let go of the table and pace again.

“Why don't you just forget about breaking in? Sabotage her some other way. Work on that remote you stole. Figure out how to get the impulse from

that chip to her brain, and make her come to you.”

“Fuuuuck.” I run my hands down my face. “Why didn’t I think of that?”

“Because all the blood’s in your dick—hard to think with no fluid in the brain. You’ve been that way a while now. Your twenty-six-year-old ass is acting like a thirteen-year-old with his first boner. I haven’t seen you work on any of your own inventions anymore. All you care about is what *she*’s doing.” He watches me from the corner of his eye.

I sigh. “You want me to say it, too?” I cross my arms over my chest.

“No. I don’t give a fuck about your pissing contest with her.”

“I’m better than she is at this game

and at inventing new technology.” My heart hurts. All of me hurts—for her.

“The mark to beat is five-hundred grand,” he reminds me.

“I know!” I say, my voice raising.

“Get it together, man, before your dad comes after your ass and straightens you out.”

“He already knows I’m psychotic about her.” I stare at the chip. It has to fucking work!

“And he hasn’t stopped you?” He sets his tools down and shoves the small metal piece at me.

“No. How’s he going to rein me in? And, besides, just because he’s the boss, and he’s my own blood, doesn’t mean he owns me. I do what I want.” I will the

chip to spring to life, but of course nothing happens.

He grins. “Yeah, good luck with that. Better give him some blood thinners, ‘cause I can see you’re about to give him a heart attack.”

“Fuck you.” I grab the chip and head to the living room.

I take a seat at the couch, and set it on the coffee table.

He walks in after me a few minutes later as I sit, staring at the remote and chip, laying side-by-side.

“Swallow it.”

“What?” I ask, my head tipping back as I look up at him, wide-eyed.

“You heard me. You know how to regurgitate stuff. You’ve done it before

when you've stolen other small valuables," he says.

"Yeah, but they didn't have knife blades on the sides that could cut my larynx open on the way back up." My right eye twitches and my throat constricts, recalling how much that hurt every fucking time I did it.

"*Diamonds* have sharp edges."

I look at him like he's lost his damn IQ from working on this chip too long. "They do, but it's not the same."

"What're you afraid of?"

"That I'll actually prove I can do this, and that I *am* better than her," I say, my head dropping.

"Why's that a bad thing? Is it really a competition?" He shifts away from me.

“No. She doesn’t treat me that way, I just . . .”

“Your dad, right?” I can feel him shaking his head at me like I’m a pathetic waste of a man.

A moment later he sets his hand on my shoulder.

I don’t have to answer. He’s right, and he knows it.

“Swallow it. I’ll help you figure this remote out. Once we’ve got it situated, we can refashion the chip, make it smaller, and you can make sure she gets it back inside her body.”

“How’m I gonna do that?” My voice breaks. I’ve never sounded more pitiful in my life. Well, if I discount the times I’ve already begged her to let me

fucking hold and touch her, and get my dick inside her. Woman makes me insane for her.

“I’m sure you’ll think of a way.” He picks up the chip and slips it into my palm.

“You know this has to be insanely fast, right? If it gets down in my stomach, we’re fucked.”

“I think I already know how to fix the remote. Just get it trapped in your throat—*keep* it there—and we’ll prove it works in less than two minutes.” He smiles and looks confident.

I nod and toss that fucker in my mouth.

He has the remote dismantled and working in one minute and thirty-four

seconds.

But only because I helped him when the edges started feeling like they were shredding my throat apart on the inside.

Nothing like the thought of a trip to a hospital to make my genius kick in.

* * *

“Jerry Smith,” I say, checking in.

“He’ll be right out. Take a seat over there,” the prison guard tells me.

I’m still surprised he approved me as a visitor when he has no idea who I am. I guess he’s so hard-up for anyone at all to see him it doesn’t matter much to him who they are.

I sit at a table with my chip in my pocket. It was cleared through the warden after he questioned me extensively about it. I showed him all the permits I'd forged, along with the paperwork and signed documents he needed to see.

I sit and breathe deep, going over in my head what I can possibly say to this monster that shot at Dena, obviously beat her more than once and stole her money along with her ideas. He makes my dad seem like a saint with the wings and golden loop above his head.

"Fucking thief," I mutter, cursing her father.

A pang of guilt sweeps through me, since I've stolen from her, too, but I'm

not selling it or lying to her about it, making her believe I'm something I'm not. And I didn't do it on my own. It wasn't my choice to make.

A woman across the room smiles at me, and though she's attractive and her tits are piled up under her chin in her revealing, tight shirt, I'm not interested.

I turn away and keep my eyes on the entrance.

Several minutes later, the man I've seen dozens of pictures of, have read and heard about, comes strolling in the door in his prison-issued garb.

He stares at me, and those eyes, though they're the same color and shape as Dena's—they hold none of the warmth, intelligence and heart hers do.

Automatically I have the desire to kick his nuts into his throat so he'll choke on them and die right before my eyes.

He glares at me.

That instinct shifts into an overwhelming urge to jab something in his eyes so he can never gaze on his wonderful daughter ever again. He doesn't deserve to see her. It overwhelms me until I can barely breathe, and I have to grip my legs to keep from attacking him and telling him what a worthless piece of shit he is.

He deserves to be behind these bars.

"Who're you?" Gregory asks when he sits down.

The guard asks if I want him to stay

directly next to us, and I say no.

He takes up a spot near the door where he can still keep an eye on us but can't hear our conversation.

"My name's Nick Reid, and I'm in love with your daughter."

"P-hah!" he snorts and slaps the table, smiling at me like I'm joking.

"I'm serious. I love her more than anything." My pulse races, and my legs threaten to carry me out of here—he's *that* upsetting to me because he's emotionally damaged the one person I truly care about more than anything.

"Then why are you here to see me? Shouldn't you be out, worshiping her?"

"That's exactly why I'm here," I say.

His face drops.

“She sent you after me?” His voice is tight—almost as much as his jaw.

“No. She doesn’t know I’m here, and I’m not going to tell her I visited you. I came to bring you something and offer you a deal in exchange for something.” I grin.

“Not interested,” he says, and motions for the guard.

“Not even if I was to tell you your daughter has placed a trust in your name, in the amount of five-million dollars, and I’m willing to double it if you do this thing for me?”

He puts up a hand to tell the guard to go back to where he was.

“I’m listening,” Gregory says.

“She loves you. She’s hurting, and she’s grieving for the father she wishes she had. I can’t stand to see her in pain like this. I want you to write to her, ask her to visit. And when she gets here, you’re to tell her you love her, even if your black heart is incapable of doing such a thing.”

He frowns. “I *do* love her.”

I clear my throat with a scraping cough. It’s still raw from sort of swallowing this chip. “Odd way of showing it. Why haven’t you ever contacted her if you do?”

“You think I didn’t want to?” He smacks the table again, leans toward me, and I can almost see his hackles raised. “I didn’t think she wanted anything to do

with me after what I did to her, and I was too ashamed to look her in the eyes.”

I cross my left ankle over my right leg. “Well, you’re gonna get over it real fast, and I’ll make sure you can access that money anytime you want to. She set it up so you’d gain access the day after your release.”

“Why would she have done this to begin with?” he asks, shaking his head in disbelief.

“She figured if you wanted it so badly, it wasn’t worth keeping it away from you.”

“I guess.” He hunches his shoulders.

“So my friend, Jason Michaels—

he's in charge of the account now."

"Jason?" he asks like he knows him.

"Yeah."

"Michaels?"

"Yeah," I repeat, my brow creasing.

"He's a good man," he replies.

"You know him?"

"Yeah, he served two years and helped me get ahold of a few items I needed." He blinks and shifts in his seat. "How is he?"

"He's fine," I say, my tone harsh. "I don't wanna talk about him, though."

"Fine—whatta ya wanna talk about then? It seems like you've already laid it all out for me." He looks away and rolls

his eyes.

“You’re going to give her this chip. Tell her it’s your way of saying sorry, and you can say you stole it from her a long time ago and want to give it back.”

“Why would I do that?” He scratches his right arm and picks at a scab that’s old, brown and crusty.

I want to gag for Ides. She’d be almost puking if she saw this.

“Because if you don’t, then that money will never be yours.” I shift my eyes to his.

He barks a laugh. “Whatever the fuck happened to you wasn’t a small thing. Let me guess . . . Mom dropped you off on the side of the road and never came back?” He chuckles. “Or maybe

she put a helmet on your head when you were an infant, and it was too tight, cutting off the circulation. Either way—couldn't've been good, pal.”

“Nope. Worse. I kissed a girl and fell in love with her. And then her deranged father ruined her life and she was taken away from me because of it. My family moved not long after, making it even more difficult.”

He shifts away from me.

“Not a day goes by I don't want to exact revenge and suck the life out of him, but I can't because for some inexplicable reason, she still loves the lousy fucker. I searched for her for years, and finally found her. Now, listen up, you decrepit old fart—she needs to

swallow this thing. If you don't wanna go with this story I made up of how you got this chip, then put it in some food and give it to her that way, but you have to make sure she ingests it or I might forget all about how she likes the fact you're still breathing, since I doubt you're worth using up the oxygen on this planet."

His eyes go wide and his breath catches. "How'm I supposed to do that?"

"I don't fucking care how—just do it." I push myself up to standing and hope to God that Paco guy, Ides likes to tease me about, actually exists, resides here and that he loves old men in orange suits with a penchant for harming his daughter. "And I'll know the second she

swallows it. If you try to give it to someone else, I'll know that as well. It's encrypted to her DNA."

I pat him on the shoulder and give him a patronizing smile.

"Who the hell did you say you were?"

"Vapor, because I'm gone before you even realize I was here," I say and then saunter out of the room.

* * *

Three more damn weeks pass by without hearing from her or seeing her, and my remote sits idle, collecting dust.

I've got to figure out a way to see her, but she's become even more of a

recluse as of late.

“Hi, Vapor,” Riot says, walking into the room as I sit on his couch, his gun on the coffee table in front of me.

“Enjoying yourself?”

“Where is she?”

“Jesus, not this again. She doesn’t want to see you.” He whistles out a huff and sets his keys down on the table, then sits in the seat across from me.

“She does want to see me—she just doesn’t realize it yet,” I retort.

“Will you listen to yourself? You sound like a stalker or serial killer or some shit.” He grips the back of his neck. “Stop this. You have to stop. It’s creepy as hell and not good for your prostate—it’ll make your dick fall off.”

“No, *you* have to stop! You never told me Jason knew her father,” I say, pointing at him, stabbing my finger in the air with each word.

“Look—you asked me to reach out to her and take care of her. I’ve done that.” His eyes turn dark and are filled with turmoil.

“I did not. I didn’t know it was her until . . .”

“Well, your father did, then, and I figured if he planted me into her life, he’d have told you. I thought you knew.” He exhales with a grating sound. “I love her, man. I’m not gonna let you hurt her.”

“It’s too late for that. And if you ever say you have feelings for her again, you’ll be scraping my boot print off the

inside of your esophagus. She's mine!" I growl.

"You scared her, and I can see why. You think she wants to be around a criminal that threatens people, steals her stuff and acts like she's his sexual slave?"

His shoulders are practically wired up to his ears. I can barely see the prick's neck. Oh well, I guess I don't have to see it when I crush my fingers around his throat.

"She's sensitive and skittish, and damned near scared of everything around her—including *you*." He scowls.

"Shit, I . . . What exactly did she tell you about me?" My face goes cold as it drains of blood. She told him all

this—that I've scared her with my aggressive sexual appetite?

"You tell me. I know you monitor every little thing she does." He leans forward, his elbows resting on his knees. "She's not amused by your infantile antics."

I stare at him, unblinking.

"No one is. It's sickening." He brushes some lint off his pants, or pretends to.

"Well, I'm going out of my fucking mind. I need to see her!"

"I don't care. I'm not doing this for you or your father anymore. I don't care if you pay me three times as much as she does. I work for her now. I'm loyal to *her*. She's sweet, and vulnerable, and

smarter than anyone I've ever known. It means a lot to me that she trusts me—now, get out. She's going to see this anyway, since she has surveillance on my place.” His eyes cut to what must be a hidden camera in the room.

I smile. “I know she does.”

“You sick mother fucker! That's why you're here? You knew she'd see this and be so enraged she'd come after you?” His voice breaks like a pimply teenager.

I smirk.

“I hope she does worse to you than she did to her father. You disgust me.” He grips the cushion on his couch.

“C'mon. You know she won't. She's in love with me. She could've

turned me in so many times already, and she hasn't," I say, taunting him.

"Leave."

I look up at where his camera is, or where he was looking, and give her an air kiss. "I'll thank you to keep your fucking hands off my girl. If you don't —"

"You'll what?" He pauses and glares at me, his eyes tortured beyond words. "Besides, I've never touched her no matter how much I've wanted to. If there's ever any contact, it's because she's initiated it. She's shy, but you wouldn't know it since you force yourself on her every chance you get." A guilty look swims in his eyes.

He's lying? Or not telling me all of

it?

A knot slips down my throat and chokes at my stomach, making me a little sick.

“Just keep away.” I echo my earlier warning.

“I’m sure you’ve already made certain that happens simply by being here,” he replies and then flips me off.

“And next time, if I need to break into your house to steal something she gives you, at least try to hide it better. Any fucker could’ve come in here, broken into your safe and taken it. This isn’t a joke.” My eyes narrow at him.

“*No*—but *you are*,” he says, fists clenching the seat beneath him.

I grab my remote, glide out his front

door and look through my phone messages like I've got all the time in the world. With my back leaning up against his wall next to his front door, I imagine her on her way over, to scream at me until her face turns red.

She stays away, and I wait for nothing, hanging out far too long in front of his place.

It's fine.

Eventually, she'll find me.

She can't stay away. Not possible.

I take my time, wandering around the city, hitting a bar on the way home, finally having a drink, even though I know it'll piss her off.

Good. I like seeing her all frothy at the mouth with her eyes blazing at me. It

makes her horny as fuck, and that cunt goes super snug as I shove my dick inside her. Not to mention she finally says what she thinks and how she feels about me when she gets mad.

My mind drifts on the way home. Most of my thoughts center on how Dad's really fucked this all up by keeping these things from me.

I'm done with him.

I'm done with Jason.

I'll let my roommate continue to think I'm in the dark and have him keep control over the fund for Gregory Winters, but that's it.

He's not messing with any of my inventions or Ides anymore.

Fucking Ides. God, I miss her so

bad, my entire body is breaking down for her, and I die inside over wanting to at least hear her voice.

When I get home, Jason's gone, and though I'm on guard, I don't fucking care he's out.

He could be giving my dad a blow job, and I wouldn't give a fuck.

I thought I knew him and Dad, but apparently not.

They mean shit to me.

I lock my door, and I grab the razor in my side table drawer. In a moment, I've got my suture tape ready I invented for her, and I've cleaned the area where it'll go. I make a small nick with the blade in my inner arm, beneath my elbow. The pain is bearable when I

breathe in and out real slow and try not to think about it. I set the chip in place and then tape it back up.

Now I'm chipped. She can find me some day if she wants to.

"Lights out," I tell the chip to test it, making sure I rigged it correctly to my specifications for my house and hers.

The lights blink off.

Oh, how I want her to find me.

I want her to *know* me . . .

God, I hurt.

Riot's fucking hideous words drift through my mind, and I fall asleep, with images of her cowering away from me and crying in a corner as I try to approach her.

It's been two weeks since I confronted Riot, and still nothing from her or him.

He's gone.

I've been told he's left, and I can barely breathe when I consider her fleeing and disappearing as well. It's been seven weeks of hell already without her.

I'm tempted to go visit her father again, but Jason assures me Gregory has sent her the letter.

Do I believe him?

I'm not sure, but I'm running out of options.

I still can't break into her place, so

I've taken to following her around any time she leaves her home, which isn't very often.

Today's her grocery shopping day, and now with Riot out of her life, she has to run all these errands herself.

I park closer than usual, needing to be near her.

It's risky, but I don't give a fuck. I need this.

She grabs a cart, rushes toward the entrance, her eyes darting around, her shoulders hunched and her hood up, covering her long dark hair.

She's spooked by every little thing, and this time, I follow her inside, taking the chance she'll catch me, rather than sitting out in the parking lot, merely

watching her get in and out of her car.

With shifting eyes, she creeps along the produce section, grabbing the things she needs. Every so often, she pulls out her sanitizer and cleans her hands off.

I smile at the way she frowns when somebody touches a piece of fruit and sets it back down.

She fights off a shiver and roams around, grabbing some more ingredients for what looks to be a massive salad.

When she's done here, she heads down the aisles one at a time. I keep a distance, but she probably knows she's being followed.

I wait for her to ask an employee to send security to keep at her side, but she doesn't.

She goes to pay for her food, and I follow her out, still maintaining a distance.

I wonder if she's a vegan. She didn't buy any dairy or meat.

Another mystery about her I want to unravel.

I head over to my motorcycle as she disappears, but right before she exits the parking lot, I swear she pauses and looks over her shoulder and glances at me.

My heart freezes, but then she leaves.

I tip my head back and a growl rips out of my chest.

Why? Why won't she come to me?

She felt our connection. I know she

did.

Is Riot correct? Am I a psycho stalker?

I don't want to hurt her though. I just want her to be happy, so I'm maintaining my distance, but I can't seem to let go.

Fuck. What's my problem?

I sit on my motorcycle, and stare, unseeing at the asphalt.

What now? What am I supposed to do? She clearly doesn't want anything to do with me.

I have no idea how long I sit and brood, but after a certain amount of time, I look up, and there she is, walking back inside the grocery store.

What the fuck is this about?

I stroll right back in, and this time she's buying meat and dairy.

I smirk and release a laugh of adoration. Too fucking cute, this woman.

Once more, I stay back—cautious and wary she might call the cops on me. Not that I couldn't lose them if I wanted to, but still . . .

I just want to watch her for as long as possible since this is all I have.

She pays for her groceries, and this time, she's got a different color cloth grocery bags she's using that she brought from home.

I try to remember the last ones—I wasn't paying that close of attention.

Green. Oh, I get it.

I chuckle deep in my belly.

Green for produce.

Now red, for bloody meat.

God, she's sick. I love it.

And why the ever-loving fuck did she make two separate trips? Was it because she knew she was being watched before?

If that's the case, wouldn't she be too spooked to come back again?

She smears some sanitizer on her hands, pays for her goods and leaves.

All at once, adrenaline rushes through me as I realize she's about to be out of my life again for an extended period of time.

She's in her car, buckled up, and my gut clenches so hard, I'm almost crippled by it. A second later I step in

front of her car and slam my hands on the hood.

She stares at me through the windshield, gawking.

I stare back, unblinking and silent, only conveying with my expression how I feel.

I miss you.

I want you.

I die inside for you.

Why can't you love me?

I love you more than anything . . .

Stop hurting me this way!

My palms make a hideous noise as I slide them off her hood, then I slowly step away and head back over to my bike.

Her car sits idle, and I can feel her

eyes on me as I drive off, leaving a piece of my soul there with her.

She can keep it.

I don't need it anymore.

She can stuff it in her red, bloody meat bag.

Chapter 11

Ides

Seven weeks ago . . .

“But what does it do?” Mr. Reid asks.

“Well, seeing as how you had it stolen, I figured you already knew.” I wipe the sweat off the back of my neck.

My knees are locked, and my breathing is shallow. He stands entirely too close, and I can barely think about why I’m here.

He gives me a knowing look, as if he can tell I’m a bundle of nervous energy and scared to death of him.

“Why do you hate me?” I blurt.

“I don’t. I’ve never disliked you, but you’re not good enough for my son. He deserves better.” He strokes my device. “Now, tell me what this does.”

“First tell me why I can’t see him anymore,” I demand.

He blinks and offers a serpentine smile. “Do you know who you’re talking to?”

“Y-yes, sir. But I don’t see why you sent him after me only to later tell me if I came near him again or allowed him to be around me, you’d kill me.” I gulp and shift away from him.

His eyes light up. “I wanted to teach him a lesson.”

“What l-lesson?” Damn my vocal cords. Will they stop shaking and making

me stutter?

“That I own him. He does what I say, and if I tell him to steal from the girl he’s been pining over for most of his life, then he’ll do it. If I tell him you’re nothing, then he better damn well believe me. And if I tell him to sue your ass and turn you into a beggar, then he’s going to do a hell of a fine job of it. Now . . .” He reaches out and tucks a strand of loose hair behind my ear, and bile tickles at the back of my throat as my stomach clenches. “Tell me what this fucking thing does before I have my associate, Westin here, remove your thumb nails.”

My eyes twitch and water. “Okay. No need to break out your clubs. We’re

all civilized here, I h-hope.”

“Yeah, you can hope the moon’s made of fucking cheese, too, but it’s not gonna get you anywhere. I don’t have time to waste. Now tell me.”

I pull the back apart on the apparatus and show him what he wants. It’s small and lime green—looks similar to a thumb drive, but it has a few buttons on it.

I take a deep breath and start showing him what it does. “Okay, this is what you do.”

His eyes follow my fingers as I pull the console closer.

“Go on,” he says.

“You point this end of the slimboy at any gaming device and it configures

the chip inside so when you bring it home and plug it into the fatboy console, it'll download all the games that were played on that gaming device previously. It also mimics all the components inside. So, say I wanted a Nintendo Wii but my mom said no, I already have an Xbox, I could use this thing at my friend's house and copy any type of gaming equipment they have. It's a game hoarder, and it's compatible with all current equipment. It was going to go for fifty bucks per slimboy stick. The fatboy was supposed to go for twice that."

"That's impressive," he says with a throaty hum.

I step away. "Yeah, well, I'm practical. I like to game, but I don't want

to have fifteen different consoles and a million games scattered all over my place. Helps me keep up with technology without breaking my wallet every month.”

“You realize there are other applications that could be used for this as well,” he muses.

I shrug, knowing inside that’s exactly why he forced Vapor to get it for him. “That’s your fucking problem, since you’ve stolen it and taken over. I wash my hands of this project now.”

He smiles and removes it from my fingers.

My hand shrinks away from him, and I instinctively rub my palm down my pants, like he’s covered in slimy germs.

“You should see a doctor about that,” he says, glancing over at my now flexing hand.

“And you should see a doctor about your kleptomania and egotistical tendencies. I’m sure there’s some medication for both. Maybe one for allowing your son to breathe as well.” I turn away from him. “Fix *that*.”

I cup my mouth when I realize Westin’s armed and standing directly behind me, ready to do this man’s bidding.

“I can see why my son’s so infatuated with you.”

My hand slips off my mouth, and I turn back to him. “We just fucked a few times—that’s all. He’s nothing to me,

and I'm sure he's already forgotten about me . . .” For once in my goddamn life, I lie and keep a straight face.

I have to.

Protect Nick from this evil man . .

“She’s not aware he’s following her around. He hasn’t forgotten about her,” Westin pipes in.

I shoot him a death glare.

“Look, Stephen, I just don’t want him to get hurt. That’s all I ask. I’ll even skip town if I have your word you won’t hurt Nick.” I swallow a grapefruit sized lump of guilt, and chills race down my back at the prospect of never seeing Nick again. My shoulders bunch up around my ears, and my head tips back a

little.

I'm sure I look like a turtle, pulling its neck into its shell.

I wish. I wish I could hide from this scary fucker, but there's nowhere to go.

Nick said his father had connections, and he was telling the truth.

"No, you'll stay. He needs this hard lesson. You need to be in sight but just out of reach." He grins and pets the console like it's his evil pet cat.

My face falls and my throat goes dry. "Why?" I croak.

"Because I want him to grow up, and you need to quit asking questions and being a nosy bitch," he says.

He towers over me, glaring, and I cower away.

“I’ll stay away from him,” I whisper.

“Good. Now leave. I don’t want you coming here ever again. I allowed it this once because I needed you to show me how this thing worked, but other than that . . .” Stephen turns away to leave.

“Does Nick even know you stole it from him?” I ask and then bite my tongue, trying to shut my big fat mouth.

“No. He’ll probably think you took it back.” He shrugs. “He was already pissed you didn’t have it, and that you’d entrusted it to your lawyer friend. His bitching that day . . . *Jesus*—gave me a migraine.”

“But won’t that defeat the purpose of what you just told me? If he thinks I

took it, he'll try to get it back, and how am I supposed to keep him away?"

He flies at me, and grips me by the shoulders. Every tiny inch of me shrinks away from him. "You know how. You've been jerking him around all this time, allowing him to break your defenses, but you and I both know, you've been deliberately holding back. Tighten up your home security. No more of these childish games. Either you keep him out, or *I* will." His murderous look has my arms breaking out in goose bumps.

When he releases his grip on me, I gasp and slump over, my hands wrapping around the spots he touched me.

It tingles and almost feels like he burned me.

He's out the door, and Westin is suddenly at my side, holding me up by supporting me with an arm around my shoulders.

"You okay, Ides?"

"Don't call me that," I mutter and lean into him.

Wetness spews out of my eyes, and my tummy drops and clenches as I try to take in some air.

"He won't hurt you . . . I won't let him," Westin reassures me as he gives me a side hug.

"Yes, but what about Nick?"

He exhales and keeps his thoughts to himself.

Fuck. That's what I thought . . .

* * *

Present day . . .

I step back inside my house, and Riot's curved around his laptop, working on something.

"Hey," I say and shuffle into the kitchen.

"You okay? You look like shit," he says, now staring at me, his eyes wide.

"Had a little run-in with Nick today in the grocery store parking lot." I blow out a puff of air through my pursed lips. "I don't know how I can keep him safe if he keeps following me around. That

tenacious son of a bitch just won't give up. I don't understand him. There's nothing special about me."

He pushes his laptop off his legs and springs up from the couch.

"That's *it*—I'm not gonna let you go out anymore. You'll stay home, and I'll get whatever you need." He hovers over me. "You're not safe out there with that lunatic stalking you. Who knows what he's capable of as a low, disgusting thief."

He opens his arms with a look of hope that I'll let him hug and comfort me.

I can't. I won't.

It feels wrong. I'd feel like I was betraying Nick. Westin hugging me was

one thing . . . But *this*? No way. Being hugged by Riot once without my permission was enough for me.

“You’re not supposed to exist,” I remind him. “You were supposed to have disappeared. I can’t hug an invisible man.”

I open the fridge, grab two sodas and hand him one.

“I’m here to protect you. I told those fuckers I wasn’t working for them anymore. I’m sure they’ve figured out I’m here by now,” he says. He pushes his soda aside like he always does.

“How would they? I took the grid down around my house. They can’t hack into any of my security no matter what they do. And you haven’t left since I

snuck you in here. Your car's gone. How'll they know?" I flip the tab off the soda can, scrub the top down, then open it with my own special opener. I pour mine into a pre-approved glass.

Once I've taken a few sips, my nerves have reduced some, enough so I can breathe again.

My head pounds and my legs tremble under me.

"Sit down. Let's figure out how we can protect him." He wears a slight grimace on his face.

"Thanks, Riot, but I'm not going to drag you into this any further than I already have."

I walk over to the couch and fall into the seat.

When my feet go up on the coffee table, his eyes go wide and he wears a crooked grin.

“Well, I want to help somehow.” He leans over and removes my shoes for me.

“Thank you. And don’t you dare sanitize this table for me tomorrow since I put my feet here,” I say, smirking.

He chuckles. “You know me so well.”

“Only because you know *me* so well.” I take another sip.

“I can’t help it, Dena. You know how I feel about you.” He drops to his knees next to me, and his eyes go soft. “I’d do anything for you. I’d never hurt you like he has. *Never.*”

I blink and my heart slips into my spleen. “God, I shouldn’t have brought you here—*I’m hurting you*, and I don’t want that. I don’t mean to. You’re too good a person to be treated this way. I mean, you already gave up your beloved dog to come live here in my home for the time being.” I groan and tip my head back with my eyes closed for a second, then drop it back down to look at him.

He has no idea I did this for Nick, not him. I knew if Riot lived here in my home, even if just for a little while, I wouldn’t allow Nick to break my home’s defenses so he could get at me. Riot was the only protection I needed from myself.

“No, no, it’s not like that,” he says,

inching toward me, and his hand goes to the arm rest on the couch, very close to touching me.

I look at his hand and shift away from him. “I know how you feel, I do—but I’m sorry, I just don’t feel the same way.”

“Maybe in time, you will . . .” His eyes mist.

“No, Riot. I don’t think so. I’ve had a few boyfriends over the years, and it was cruel of me to be with any of them because I knew I couldn’t love them. I’ve only ever loved Nick,” I explain, my voice soft. “No one else has ever done it for me but him. Even when I was talking to him online and didn’t know it was him—there was this charge I got

from him. I feel safe with him, and no one else makes me feel that way. I can't explain it, but it's there. It's always there, and it takes over my entire body and mind."

I scoot away from him.

"That's because you never let yourself try. You'd be safer with me, and I wouldn't push you into it. I'd be patient. Hell, I'd wait a million years for you to feel even a fraction of what I feel for you." He blinks and tears gather at the corners of his eyes.

I have to look away.

"Maybe we should . . ."

"Yes, Dena, fuck—let's try," he says, voice eager and high pitched.

He must think he's completing my

thought for me.

“Maybe we should stop talking about this. I’m tired, and I don’t want to hurt you any more than I already have. I’m thinking we need to find you somewhere else safe to be for a little while at least.” I stand up, and he follows me toward my room.

I turn and brace myself with a hand on the wall. My head drops, and I look up at him through my lashes, trying to hide my facial expressions. I feel like absolute shit.

“I can’t love you—because my entire heart, body and soul belong to someone else, and I won’t take them back because I don’t fucking want to,” I say so quiet, he leans forward to hear

me.

His face drops.

I turn around, head into my room, and say, “Lock down room.”

The locks do their job, and before I can think, I’ve told the chip to open my window, and I’m climbing out.

I have to see him. Even if it’s just from a distance . . .

* * *

I sit on Nick’s bed, inhaling his scent.

I can do it if I want. I already turned off his security scanners.

His dad won’t know I was here.
Neither will Nick.

He's gone.

So is Jason.

I unlock Nick's computer, infiltrate his hard drive and then break into his father's surveillance system.

Nick's not there in his dad's home either.

I find Nick's notes for the chip he's inserted in his arm.

God, watching the video footage of him doing that, had me freaking out.

Doing it himself? What the fuck was he thinking?

I pull out my hand sanitizer and wipe down his side table for him.

He never cleaned it thoroughly after performing that procedure on himself.

When I'm done, I lie down on his

bed and stretch out.

What if I fall asleep and let him find me here?

I slip the slimboy two into the slot on the side of his laptop and download all his secrets.

Yes, Stephen, I know the slimboy can do a lot more than what I intended it for. I'm not an idiot. I know exactly what it can mean, and I've already beaten you to it.

I flip him off wherever he is as I continue to siphon his son's information.

*Rrrrrrruuuuuugggaaah . . .
Rrrrrrruuuuuuggggaaaahhh . . .*

The unmistakable sound of Nick's motorcycle rumbles into his garage.

The slimboy slurps up the last juicy

remnants, and my spine stiffens. I have to leave.

He can't see me here.

I've put him in danger.

I pull the slimboy out, shove it in my pocket, put his laptop back where I found it, and as I'm climbing back out the window, the way I came in, a hand lands on my ankle, yanking.

I turn, and with apologetic eyes, kick Nick's hand off me.

He sucks in a gasp of air. "No! *Stay!* God, don't go!"

I quickly climb out, and I run as fast as my legs can carry me.

I've run and saved him. I barely did it without killing myself over it, but I managed to keep him safe.

I drive home, tuck myself back up in my room and the rest of the night I go through all of his information on my laptop.

Oh, fuck.

“Nick . . . You can’t do this!” I bite my lip and fight off the impending tears.

* * *

“What’s this?” Tyson, my ex-boyfriend, asks me the following morning.

His auburn hair is slicked back, and his blue eyes twinkle at me.

He rolls his broad shoulders back, and for once looks comfortable with his lanky height.

“It’s what you stole forever ago,” I

say, sighing and rolling my shoulders. My back's cramping up. How long does he expect me to stand here? I'm already annoyed I had to go to such lengths to find him.

“No shit? You completed it after all this time?”

I narrow my eyes at him. “Have I ever once left a project unfinished? You know my OCD stupid-ass can't let anything go, not even Nick. I found him.”

“No way! You found that prick? How?”

I laugh, and when I snort, his brows knit together and the left side of his lips quirk up. “I've never seen you like this before. You're damn near giddy.”

“Yeah, I know. He does that to

me.” I wipe the drool off the corner of my mouth with my sleeve. “I’ve got a sickness, remember.”

“Fuck! You really are in love. You just touched your saliva and didn’t freak out. What the hell, Ides?”

“Look—I found you, I found him. That’s all you need to know . . .” I point at my invention on the table in front of us.

“Nuh uh, I paid for this costly metal and for the research to go into this, so tell me. How’d you find him?” He crosses his arms over his chest.

“You can’t tell anyone.” I brace myself on the edge of the table.

“Why?”

“Let’s just say, he thinks he found

me first, and I don't want to bruise his delicate ego. He goes nuts when he thinks he's lost," I say, smiling over memories of how he goes ballistic. "I knew it was him, and I made sure to be where he could contact me online." My hands go numb and my chest heats. I suck at lying, but Ty appears to believe me so far. I kept searching for Nick, but never knew he'd found me until that day he stole my car and kissed me before I drove it back home. I was in denial then, and almost still am now. I can't believe Nick's this close to where I am, and he loves me.

"Oh I see." He smirks. "Won't touch you afterward if he thinks he's lost?"

“Psht! No! He fucks me harder than ever—like a wild fucking animal,” I blurt. I laugh and cover my mouth.

He shoves me, and I brush at the spot he touched me right away.

“Well, I see some things don’t change then, do they? Still a germophobe?”

“When you’re around? Always.” I grin. “You need to get reacquainted with soap, Ty. It’s good for you.”

“So, tell me how you found him,” he repeats, ignoring my teasing.

“It was pretty easy once I started looking into all my competitors. Only two companies were constantly trying to steal my inventions—Hillcourt and Schilling Corporation. And Schilling

had made the stupidest deal with me ever to make a basic pet finder chip with remote. They were paying way too much for it. I, of course, made it much better than what they commissioned me for. I did it on purpose—I knew Nick had to be in their company at some level since I found his father was the head of operations. At first I wasn't sure if it was him since they both changed their last name to Reid, but when I hacked into his father's computer, descrambled the hell out of it, I found records of Nick being at the top of the company and his father's personal lawyer—stupid bastard. His dad's so cocky now he thinks he owns half the country. He has no idea I've basically liquidated

portions of my company to pay triple what he has for their loyalty. Most of the people that work for him can't stand that slimy shithead anyway. Once I figured out Nick was there somewhere, I made a prototype and started carrying it around with me all the time so I could look really paranoid."

"You *are* paranoid," he says with a tight smile.

"I know, but more so, ya know?"

He nods.

"I started going places in my car again in hopes he'd try to track me down out in public, and he did. I was surprised how he took it from me—he's smart. Smarter than any man I've ever met, and, Jesus, he really gets me going." I fight

off a wave of arousal, thrumming and pulsing in my veins.

“Anything else you did, you crazy bat-shit genius?”

“Yeah, I paid his roommate to make sure that his dad zeroed in on me and told Nick to get the prototype for him. Not only is his dad arrogant, he’s greedy and cheap as hell. I knew he’d try to stiff me. I gave him a broken prototype.” I shrug.

He laughs. “How’d you swing that?”

“Well, it wasn’t broken exactly, but the chip had a glitch in it. I figured if anyone tried to use it, I could push the proper buttons and it would dissolve the connections in a matter of minutes so it

would stop working. Needed some kind of failsafe,” I say.

He slaps his palms on the table, chuckling.

“All right, I’m getting a boner here and too jealous to stand this close to you. Tell me what this new invention does. When I stole it four months ago, I had no idea why this one was such an obsession with you, so I figured it had to be really important.”

I swipe at my bangs, touching my forehead. Could they get out of my way please? I hate it when they touch my skin if I’m even the tiniest bit hot. Plus, it reminds me of how Nick’s constantly flinging his hair out of his eyes. He looks so fucking hot when he does that, I have

a hard time not staring.

“This is the cobra,” I say.

“And?”

“And it has two purposes. It’s a mini-snake for plumbing,” I begin.

He smiles and his crooked teeth glare at me. I have to look away.

They’re kind of yellow, too.
Ewww!

Vapor’s are so straight and the prettiest white ever. How does he make them so shiny? I really need to ask him about it. Maybe when he’s fucking me. He likes answering me when he’s deep inside. Well, sometimes. Depends on his mood and how much I’m responding to his passion.

He clears his throat and gives me

an amused look.

“Haven’t you figured it out yet?” I place a hand on my hip.

“No—I’m not the genius here, you are.” He strokes his hand along the thin, coiled metal piece.

“There are villi that pop out like tiny legs and they’re razor sharp. They can cut through any clog in seconds, and it has no limits how deep it can go.” I bite the corner of my lip as I smile really hard. This is my favorite part.

“So, you’re getting into plumbing now? I mean, I know you’re gonna save the world from sewage and germs one molecule at a time, but this has got to be expensive as fuck. Who’s gonna be able to afford this?”

“Actually, it’s not that expensive at all,” I say, breathless.

“How is this possible? The metal alone to build this thing was well over three grand.” He clicks his tongue at the end, then pushes off the table and starts to walk away. “Unless you’re gonna tell me what this really does, then I’m leaving.”

“Okay, see ya,” I say, packing it back up into my backpack.

“You’re such a bitch, you know that, right?” He chuckles and turns back around.

“Yeah, I know—Vapor likes to call me that all the time, only when *he* says it . . .” My chest heats and my legs tingle with wicked desire.

“Fuck, I don’t wanna hear this,” he groans and tips his head back while shoving his hands in his pockets.

“All you’ve gotta do is find a way to get this into Schilling Corporation’s hands. I’d do it myself, but this one I want completely anonymous. I don’t want his men—yes, even the ones I’ve bought allegiance from—to know about it. This is a very dangerous weapon.”

His eyes shoot up and widen significantly. “Are people going to get hurt?”

“C’mon! You know me. I don’t hurt anyone physically. He’s gonna get hit in the wallet and a few other choice places. There should be some good tears involved.” I clasp my hands together.

“But no permanent damage.”

He sighs and his shoulders sag. “Fine. You know, I thought when I ditched you forever ago, I’d never see you again, but here you are, back again like a lovely, itchy rash. You really should figure out how to stop rubbing me the wrong way.”

“Ty, you’re the one with skin issues, not me,” I say, stepping away from him. “And you’re the one that invested in my company and decided to supply us with the metals we needed. That was all you, buddy.”

I pull the cobra out, and set it back on the table.

“I figured that was how you found me. And, by the way, they’re called

freckles—a lot of people have them—they’re not skin issues.”

“They’re called repellent, and I could barely stand to look at them. I don’t know why I ever thought I could give you head,” I say, grimacing.

He laughs. “What’s this now? You were gonna give me . . . ?”

I jerk my head away. “No, I didn’t say that. Well, I . . . Never mind.” My cheeks heat, and I wave, then leave the room before I say anything else stupid.

He has the cobra. He can figure this out without me. I can’t be near those skin spots. They scare me.

They’re the gateway to zombies. No other explanation for frightening skin like that.

Chapter 12

Vapor

“What the hell is this?” I ask, staring at some freaking metallic thing climbing down the kitchen sink.

“This, Son, is the future,” Dad says, gloating.

“Looks creepy as hell,” I say, rubbing my chin. A chill rips down my spine. “Where’d you steal this one?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” he says, chuckling. He slaps me on the back.

“Do you have to do anything to get it to work?”

“Nope. It does it all by itself. I just

wanna make sure it works completely before we tear it apart and duplicate it for resale,” he says, leaning over the sink.

“What if it ruins the pipes? You don’t honestly trust this is going to do anything *good*?”

“Oh ye of so little faith and such a big fucking mouth.” He slaps me upside the head.

I growl. “Whatever. You’ll be the one paying to get all new plumbing put in.” I walk away, rubbing the spot on my head he smacked.

What a douche.

I’m sick of him stealing shit he could easily pay for.

What’s the point? It’s not even fun

anymore.

“Hey, man, he wants you back in ten for a meeting,” Jason hollers at me as I stride over to my bike.

I flip him off and drive off.

“He’s gonna cut you off!” he shouts.

I keep my finger up in case he didn’t see it. In case his vision is locked on my dad’s ass.

Bastard can get his nose a little browner—he’ll figure out how to get that shit up his nostrils, he’s so glued to my dad’s crack.

I’m done with that.

I ride over to the outer gate of Ide’s fortress.

My fingers shake as I pull my phone out.

I dial the numbers, but she's changed them once more.

“Shit! Quit being a bitch and let me in.” I scowl at her gate.

I shove my phone back in my pocket and push my bike behind one of her thick hedges. My God, I have to smirk. Reminds me of her pubes—so thick and formidable.

I hop the gate and right away her alarm starts tripping. My chip deactivates it with her special DNA coding. She lets me get so far, only to tease the shit out of me.

Why do this to me? Why does she tempt me this way?

I stroll up to her back French doors, press my nose up against the glass and

fog up the pane.

“Iiiiiides . . . Let me the fuck in. I need you,” I holler with a crack in my voice.

No response. I bang on the glass, rattling it.

It won’t break. I’ve tried it before.

I shuffle toward her office window. It’s high up so I have to prop myself up with a lounge chair from her deck.

I wobble for a second, but then it steadies.

She’s at her desk, half dressed in an oversized shirt, and fuck . . . It’s *mine*.

I left that one behind. Her shoulder peeks out at the corner, and I can see long, creamy thighs beneath it. Is she completely naked underneath?

I've been carrying around her panties and bra I shredded forever ago. I keep them in my pockets. She can have them back if she's that desperate for underwear.

I smirk. Like she'd ever wear something that was damaged.

I strain to see, and I lick the glass because, fuck, if I won't do anything I can to get my tongue as close to her as possible. At this point, I practically hold conversations with her destroyed under things I touch frequently.

She bops around with earbuds in so she can't hear me.

What kind of music is she listening to?

A moment later, she sings and it

sounds like Peewee Herman if he was being drowned. I cringe and chuckle.

Fuck, that's awful. Shut up, Ides. Please!

She stretches out a long piece of really shiny metal, coats it with a thin black brush. The metal sparkles and a moment later, looks dry again. She whistles like she's appraising her work.

Her tiny fingers place some kind of microchip or something similar to that on the end of it.

Wait . . . Is that the same thing Dad just put down his drains?

My eyes squint, and I try to get a better look. The metal curls in on itself and the chair beneath me tips.

I barely catch myself before I land

on my ass.

Before I can think clearly, I'm scaling her roof.

If Santa can do it, fuck, I can, too.

I strip down to my black boxer briefs up on her roof, and holler down her chimney.

"I'm coming for you, woman. You're mine! I own that ass," I yell, cupping around my mouth.

I stare down into the blackness, and then sit on the edge of the brickwork.

Would I really fit? Fuck if I know.

I slide a leg inside, and right away, I realize she's gotta have traps in there. No way would she make it this easy.

I sigh heavy and with a grating, rattling sound.

There has to be a fucking way inside besides sending nukes on her place.

I pace on her roof and grip the back of my neck as my feet fling out with each sloppy step.

Think . . . What would she do if she was dying to get to me?

That's it!

I stare at her skylights. Too easy, and I'd probably fall and break my balls off in the process.

Instead of putting my clothes back on, I chuck them off her roof onto her patio.

Yeah, it's raining Vapor's clothes. What of it?

I hope she sees and panics. She

deserves it.

I head over to my bike, get out a few of my tools I stash on it and move to her garage key pad.

Before I do anything at all, I call her up one more time—using one of her old numbers she ditched.

“Hello?”

“Fuck! You’re talking to me now?”

“Who is this?” a soft voice, definitely not Ides, replies.

“How’d you get her phone?” I huff.

“Oh, it’s you. She told me you’d keep calling this number. She was right. How many times are you gonna—”

“Fuck you, nasty, rotten bitch. I need her,” I say and end the call.

I pull a wire out of my wallet, hook

it into her garage keypad, and I press my palm down over all the numbers at once.

A clicking sound breaks through the quiet, and a second later, there's a whirring sound, drowning everything else out.

I slide my phone up next to the wire, hook it into the headphones portal and my phone lights up.

A combination starts to go crazy on my screen.

Can't be this easy. No way.

One . . .

Yeah, okay. Give me more.

Three . . .

Baby, you know you want me to get in there . . .

Five . . .

One more number, and I'm in.

Zero . . .

*Click, rickah, rickah, rickah,
rickah . . .*

The door starts to raise, and I unhook my phone, drop and roll inside before the garage starts to close up again now that the connection's lost.

I feel like Indiana Jones slipping under a closing cave wall like that.

My body moves fast, and it's because of her buffed, shiny garage floor.

I swear it's ten times shinier than the last time I saw it.

What's she been doing, and how the hell does she have time to sterilize everything so thoroughly?

I lick the ground before pushing up to sitting.

I'm gonna grind into her dripping pussy out here someday, just to piss her off. Should be fun.

Maybe right now, actually.

I get up, walk over to the door to her house, and of course it's locked.

Like an idiot, I set my phone down and knock on the door.

Schhhhwip!

"What the hell do you want?" A gun is pointed in my face, and the door is wide open.

"I just wanna talk to her," I say, out of breath, my hands up in the air.

"She doesn't want to see you anymore. I'm here to protect her, and

protect her I will. She's locked up in her cave right now anyway and can't be disturbed," he says.

"Riot, c'mon, man. You know I won't hurt her." I breathe hard. Just being this much closer to her has me hard as hell.

"Yeah, you'll just fuck her until she can't think straight anymore. She's been working feverishly since she's locked you out. She's been doing some of her best work ever," he snarls.

"Yeah, and you'll tell my dad all about it, won't you?"

"No. I don't report to him anymore." His eye closest to me twitches.

He's lying.

“Who, then? Rich?”

His eyes twitch more, and his lips part for a second. “I don’t report to anyone at all. I protect her from the scumbags like you that want a piece of pussy with no regard to her pure genius capabilities.” The gun shakes in his hands.

I lunge forward and yell “Boo!” in his face.

He drops the gun, I stomp on his hand when he reaches for it, and then I knee him in the neck, pinning him up against the wall that way, cutting off his voice in the process.

There’s a telephone with a real live cord. I laugh every time I see that damn thing.

I take it, rip it out of the wall and twist the cord around his arms, binding him.

He tries to yell, but I punch him in the face and then drag his ass into the garage with me. I make sure the door isn't locked before allowing it to close so I can get back in.

When he's flopping around on the shiny floor, I smirk. Yeah, I'll fuck her right next to him. He can watch. Should be even more fun than I anticipated. Better than recording it.

"Bye, bye, Chad," I say, stepping back into her house. "Make sure to dirty up her floor out here by pissing yourself. She'll love that. Should give her something to clean up later today."

He's shrieking like a girl. She won't hear it. I'll fuck her in her office before she does so she won't freak out and say I can't have her.

She won't know until I'm ready for dessert.

I look down at my boxer briefs, drop them in the hallway and when I get to her office, it's locked like he's said.

After a few seconds of grabbing tools out of her kitchen, I've taken the hinges off, and like a punk, I remove the entire door.

She stands up out of her chair, gaping, her hands clasped over her belly when she startles and realizes her door's gone, and I'm standing right the fuck there, naked and hard for her. Her eyes

go wide, and then she yanks out her earbuds, letting them fall to the floor.

“Nice,” I say, my eyes raking up and down that lithe little body. “No panties. You *were* waiting for me—fucking tease.”

“How did you . . . Did Riot leave?”

“I told him I needed a good hour before he returned,” I say, shrugging.

I prowl after her, moving with my head tipped forward and teeth bared.

Her mouth drops open, and a flush creeps up her neck.

“Is there any way I could want you more or be harder than this?” I point at my dick without looking at it. I know it’s weeping for her.

“I . . . Vapor, please . . . I’m busy.

I'm working," she says, shrugging away from me, rubbing her chin on her exposed shoulder. "And I simply can't stop right now. There's no way."

"I don't give a fuck if you're in the middle of birthing a calf."

"Ewww! Nick! Don't say that—it would mean you're a bull, and while you're very well endowed, I'm not into bestiality. Think of that vile manure smell!"

"Shut it, woman. You're gonna suck me—make up for missed time together. I want it hard, I want it ugly, I want my face to contort in pain, the suction's so damn unworldly."

She licks her lips. "First, let me—"

"No!" I take three more steps, and

I'm before her, gripping her arms, my mouth on her. "Sssssfuuuuucking good. You taste like Heaven and Hell and everything in between. You taste like the woman I'm gonna fuck right now to make everything all right again."

I reach behind her knee, cup it roughly, and I've swiped her leg out from under her.

She's on the ground, and I'm on top of her, pushing her shirt up—my old shirt she decided to work in.

"You're wearing it—you kept something of mine," I growl, biting her belly.

"You have my hoodie," she reminds me.

"I threw that shit out. It's not like I

could do anything with that black bag of a shirt,” I say, sucking, licking and biting harder. Flesh. I want it. My mouth craves a deeper taste.

“You mean you don’t masturbate on it every night and hold satanic rituals in my honor?” She laughs, and her tummy shakes.

“Nope—I reserved that for your torn up panties and bra. Now that was worth preserving.” I smirk and lick my lips.

“I hope they burn on accident when you get them near a candle. Cotton’s flammable.”

“You think this is funny?” I tickle my fingers down her pussy. “You think I don’t break every night I don’t have you

wrapped around me? My dick can't take it—my heart even less so. I need you, Ides. Stop fighting me. Stop breaking me. Fuck me now.”

She moans, and her eyes slide up in her head. “Shit, I need to . . .”

“No. Nothing else matters. I want your come on my hands, your tits in my face—and if I don't get it, I can't guarantee I won't kidnap you and take you away. There's not much I won't do to have you.” I glide up her body. “You really don't wanna push me on this. I'm serious—I'll take you away from this shitty place.”

“You could try,” she says, giggling. She grips my shoulders.

“Woman, don't test me. I'm ready

to snap, and it's not gonna be pretty."

"But *you* are . . ." Her fingers drift through my bangs and her eyes follow her hands. "So pretty, Nick. I could look at you all day long. I've found pictures of you that I've put on each of my new phones so I can remember . . ."

I tip my chin up and kiss the corner of her hand. "Oh yeah? Tell me, baby—remember what?"

"How you look at me and the way your husky voice grazes over my skin when you say my name while you come. It raises goose bumps on my skin, and instead of scrubbing it away, I actually try to smell it. It's like you're kind of embedded in my skin. There's this faint trace." She holds her forearm up to my

nostrils. “Take a whiff.”

I grin, and when I inhale, she suddenly rams her knee up behind my balls, flips me over, and there are goddamn cuffs around the legs of her desk that are now hooked to my wrists.

“Hey, that’s my move,” I say, grunting from the echo of pain in my sack.

She didn’t really hurt me bad—mostly just shocked the hell out of me, but still . . . She’s not playing fair with my boys.

“*Was* your move. Riot told me you’d go to extreme measures. Now sit like a good boy while I finish this up. It’s time sensitive, and then I’ll suck you off however you want,” she says, a

twinkle in her eyes.

I *cannot* believe this.

She sits down in her chair, puts one of the legs between my head and arm.

Every few seconds, she leans over and coos, “So sexy. I may not be into bestiality, but you look good down there like a loyal pet. And I haven’t even gotten you neutered yet.” She snickers.

“I need my boys, so that’s never a funny joke. And right now they’re pissed at you for manhandling them with your knee like that. It’s time you kissed and made up with them.”

“It’s *funny* when I’ve got you at my mercy.” She moves her toes closer to me and strokes my ribs with the pad of her foot. “And you’re a hoot when you’re

acting all hurt and pouting.”

I stare at her like she’s truly fucked up right now.

She types away on her keyboard and fiddles with the metallic thing from earlier.

“Dare I ask why my dad has one of those down his kitchen drain while you’re here fucking around with another one?”

“No, you daren’t.” She smirks when she uses that silly term at the end. “I can’t answer what’s going on anyway. Just know I’ve got it under control, and I’m not the one that gave it to him.”

“Then who did?”

“The person responsible,” she supplies, voice disinterested.

“Responsible for what?”

“For stopping me months ago.”

“Are you okay, Ides? Seriously, are you that hard-up you can’t think straight? I’m still fully erect even after your Charlie’s Angel’s move on me. Get down here, gorgeous, and fuck me all you want. Have an orgasm or four. I don’t fucking care, just get down here now!” I yank at my restraints, but they’re not budging.

She caresses the length of my cock with her toes.

“Not yet. I told you—time sensitive. I’ll get to you very soon, I promise.”

“Fucking douche-bag Riot. This is his fault,” I say, stretching my neck up to

see.

She pushes my head back down, shoves a finger in my mouth.

“Since you seem to be orally fixated today, I’ll give you something to do. I’m done on the keyboard right now anyway.”

A few mouse clicks, a few grating sighs from her that sound like she’s in pain, and then she kicks her chair away.

She straddles me but hovers her pussy high enough I can’t reach it.

“Please, Dena, don’t . . . I can’t fucking wait. I’m dying to have you. Do you know how crazy you make me? Broken laws and endangering myself mean nothing to me when it comes to being with you.”

“Patience, and it’ll all go away. I’ve got a plan.”

“So do I, and it involves a lot of come and you screaming my name,” I say, nipping at her arm.

She strokes my cheek.

“I’ll get ready for you, and then I’ll be right back.” She stands up, grabs her item off the desk and heads out of the room.

“Ungah!” I howl.

She’ll hear Riot. She’ll leave me here to rot and save him. That’s what she’ll do.

A few moments later, I hear the door to the garage open.

Fuck.

I’m naked and cuffed.

I wriggle and try to get out of this predicament, but she cuffed me real tight.

“This was not what I had in mind from my sexy girl,” I say, grinding my teeth.

I flop back and forth.

“You’re so mean to him,” she says, standing in the doorless entry with shorts on now. I glare at her covered pussy.

“He deserved it, the prick.”

“I sent him away. He’s traumatized, thanks to you.” She smiles.

“That’s always the plan.” I kick my legs.

“You don’t deserve to be sucked, you naughty boy.” She sashays over to me, bends over and strokes my cock

with the lightest of touches.

“Please . . . Ides, you don’t wanna mess with me. I can’t take it—fucking ride me already!” I snap my jaws at her.

“Now, why should I do that? How many times have you tied me down and made *me* beg? What about you begging me to—”

“Don’t be a bitch. Be my beautiful—the woman I know and love so much. I’ll beg for anything you want as long as you let me inside you,” I breathe.

“Tsh,” she hisses through her teeth.

She leans over, lifts her shirt and dangles her tits right above my face.

“Riot thinks you’re dangerous,” she says.

“Riot’s a dickless geek that can’t

figure out what to do with you. But I know exactly what to do with that greedy, lush cunt. I'll stroke it, make it gush for me and water until I can drink from you."

"I think I'll let you prove it with one hand. If you can get me off with one hand only, then I'll release you, and you can have whatever you want."

"Whatever I want?" My brow arches.

"Whatever you want, for as long as you want in a twenty-four hour period." Her head wobbles, and she bites over her lip, hitting the flesh below it.

"You're up to something." I glare at her.

"I want you to be up in me, but you

have to follow my rules. I need to have my way tonight since you rudely interrupted my work.” A brief flash of brilliant light hits her eyes.

What the hell is going on here? She’s doing something, and it’s so wicked, I’m leaking again.

“Yes, dammit. Do it now. Release my right hand,” I say with a hint of a whimper.

“I get to decide, and I say you’re ambidextrous enough. You get your left,” she replies. She gets up and grabs the key, releases my left hand, and right away, I’m palming her tit and breathing hard. In the next second, I’m shoving her shorts off, tearing at the fabric with my clumsy hand.

“Fuck! Love these tits. All I need now is that juicy cunt of yours.” I tilt my torso up and lick her nipple.

She cups my jaw and then kisses me, but it’s tentative.

“Did I hurt you?” I tug at her nipple, baring my teeth at her. “Want me to show you how rough it can get since you’re impairing me with one hand, my horny little girl?”

“You can try to break me, but it’s not gonna happen. I don’t break, Vapor. It’s impossible. I’m beyond that now.” She straddles me, her hips elevated enough I can smell her arousal.

Fucking bite my balls off—this is gonna be harder than I thought.

She finally allows me to get my left

index and middle finger inside her pussy.

There's something in there—the sexy bitch.

Chapter 13

Ides

I wiggle my ass over his abs and rub my pussy on him.

He felt it. I know he did.

Oh please let this work.

“Let me put my mouth on you. It’ll be easier to get you off with my tongue involved,” he says, his eyes pleading with me.

“Not yet. I want your finger on my clit while I make you harder. I’ll be telling you when you can come, and I need to read your body as best I can.” I wiggle on top of him once more.

He groans and wipes his hand over

his slightly sweaty face. Already, he's worked up and his chest is flushed.

I lean over, lick his left nipple, bite a few strands of chest hair and scissor my teeth on it, tugging a little.

He grunts and shifts his hips up.

"Like that?" I ask.

"You know I do—read my body, sweetheart, and *you* tell *me*."

"I think you do like it—and more than you should." I grip the back of his head, yank on his hair at the roots. I rest my forehead on his. "You really need to listen to me very carefully." There's only one chance to get this right . . . I inhale and wash my exhale over his lips. He moistens his bottom lip afterward.

"Tell me what to do so I can have

you,” he says, voice husky. He grips my hip with his one hand.

“I’m gonna let you play with my asshole, my clit, but no finger penetration in either of my holes. I’m gonna tell you exactly when I want you to come, okay?” My voice shakes.

I clamp my hand over his chest and dig into the muscles there. My Lord he’s hard everywhere.

“I can do whatever you want, if you tell me I can fuck you afterward however *I* want.”

“Yes, Nick, you can fuck me when I’m in a coma and half-dead. I won’t stop you, and you can even tie me up if you want.” I drag my palms down his chest, sit up and turn around, leaning

over so my ass is up by his face.

A tongue darts out and wets my crack.

“Fuck! No way! Too many germs!”
I squeal and jump a little.

“You never said . . .” He chuckles.

I smack his thigh. “Be a good Vapor or no fucking for you.”

“Jesus, so bitchy. Get-off already so you can calm the hell down, woman.”
He sticks his tongue out, reaching for my cheek.

“No mouth at all!”

“You better be quick then because if it’s in my face like that, I wanna taste it.” He smacks the lower half of my cheek.

“I’ll take that under advisement,

Romeo. So damn romantic—wants to lick my asshole,” I mutter.

“Yes, I do. And suck on it, make it gape, shove my tongue up there and see if you’ve got toys hidden up there, too. You’re teasing me, and I’m hard as fuck for you. Not right . . .”

“Ewwww, no! I won’t ever put anything up there, not even an enema is okay. One. Way. Street. It’s a freeway exit ramp only! Traffic violations and deaths occur when you go the wrong way.”

He laughs so hard, he almost shakes me off him.

I lean over and suck his cock in, and he shuts up instantly.

“Oh, shit . . . Ides, you know I

haven't had your mouth on me in forever . . . That feels so good, I may have to lick you back."

I suck him harder so he'll forget about wanting to taste me down there.

"Fuck . . . Deep—real deep, sweetheart. Make me remember why I can't live without you," he groans, and his hips rock up into me, shoving his dick further into my throat.

I sputter and gag for a moment, then clip my fingers around the base of his dick so he can't ram it in so far.

He chokes on a curse, and I can feel his head thrashing from side to side on the ground behind me.

"I'm almost ready for you to come," I say.

He reaches out and squeezes the tip of my clit with his thumb and forefinger. His fingers bunch it, flatten and engorge it.

I moan and sway to his rhythm while I yank his cock to the same beat.

When I'm wet enough for what I need, I turn around real quick, push the button inside me, and the vibration starts.

I slam my pussy down on his cock and start the countdown.

“Sweetheart, you have to the count of ten to come. You have to do it—or no playing with my ass tonight,” I say, my voice soft but urgent. I lean over, kiss him and push my tongue in for a second.

When I release his mouth, he

mutters something about being ready to come already, and why wait?

I cover his mouth with my hand. His eyes go wide, and I say, “Four . . . Five . . . Six . . .”

He nods, and his dick feels firmer and longer as he angles his hips up even harder.

“Oh shit . . . I’m gonna, not yet, Nick . . . Two more goddamn seconds. If I come, it’ll be ruined—I know you’ll . . .”

He bites my fingers over his mouth.

I yelp and time’s up. The vibrations inside me double in time.

“Now, Nick! Come in my cunt—this dirty girl needs it!” I yell with a hoarse, dying moan.

I convulse on top of him, come so hard, I'm not sure if he's doing it, too. I'm too incoherent to care, and besides, my window's already closed.

When the raging waves stop star-bursting inside me, I am holding my breath and opening my eyes to peek at him.

He's lax beneath me, catching his breath, and somehow he's out of both cuffs. How the hell did he get free?

"Did you . . . c-come?" I ask, not bothering to question him on his Houdini act. What's the point? He probably won't answer me anyway on how he performs feats of magic skill and wonder.

He looks down at his dick. "You

tell me, Miss ‘I’m gonna read your body.’”

How the hell should I know? He still feels rigid to me.

I pull up, and tighten my kegel muscles to try and contain each precious drop.

“I have no idea what this shit is you’re up to, and I don’t wanna fucking know.” He rubs his eyes, sits up and cups my breasts. “I only know I’m gonna fuck you again right now—*my* way. No more of this pansy girlie, ‘I’m counting down as your balls drop’ shit. I’m not Times Square on New Year’s Eve. Quit being a nutball and get back on top of me.”

“Three seconds,” I say, and I get up

and run.

A few moments later, and he's crashing down the hall after me.

I lock myself into my bathroom.

"Let me *in* . . ."

"Hooohhhhh," I exhale in a rush of adrenaline.

That taunting, menacing tone of his is doing things to me.

I pull the shell out of my drenched vagina, wrap it in the container and climb up on the toilet seat. A second later, and I've locked it into the secondary medicine cabinet I have hidden in the edge of the skylight.

"I swear to God, Ides, I've lost my patience . . ."

"Why? You had an orgasm. I

thought you were supposed to roll over and go to sleep after,” I tease. “You’re breaking the rules in the man book. They put men in a whole new category when they do that.”

“When have I ever gone to sleep after? Holy fuck—you’d think you’ve never been in bed with me and my insatiable dick. That was the appetizer. Fuck, it was more like cocktails since you were in charge. I’m not even halfway done with you. Get your sexy ass out here now, and I promise I won’t lick it much.”

“Promise not to lick it at all, and I’ll come out.” My arms break out in chills as I get down off the toilet seat.

He wants to lick me . . . *there*?

Dirty.

Why do I love the sound of that even though it's revolting? Maybe anal wouldn't be so bad?

What? No! You're insane! That would kill you!

I open the door with a blank expression. He glares at me. I slink past him like nothing out of the ordinary just happened.

"I fucking hate waiting for this," he says, shoving me against the wall right next to the door jamb. His finger dips into my fluid soaked vulva. He rubs in tiny, maddening circles. "I dream about touching this pussy all the time. But the dreams are never nearly as intoxicating as the real thing. Because it's missing

the smell, the sound of your breath, breaking like waves over rocks when I move right to this soft, sensitive spot. Fuck . . . You like that.”

My breath catches and then wheezes past my barely parted lips.

He’s right. There’s this one, strange little spot the size of a pea, lower than my clit, right in the crease of the folds. There’s no one that’s ever found it except him.

“What’ll happen when my tongue’s there? Huh? You gonna squirt it? You gonna make me drink that shit up to prove how much I crave you? ‘Cause I fucking will. I’ll drink everything you give me.”

I shake my head with my shoulders

glued up against the wall. When he's like this—in my face and in my emotional space this way, I can't think or shed a moment's worth of useless breath. If I breathe, it's only to make obscene sounds he laps up and savors on his tongue.

He drops to his knees and his hands part my labia wide.

“Stay still. If you don't, I'm shoving your ass onto the garage floor, and I'll fuck you there—it won't be comfortable,” he warns.

“But my car parks there, and shoes and shit from the street get on the—”

“Shut up—eating you now,” he says, then his tongue extends, and I moan before he ever roams his pink velvet

tongue over *that* spot.

The more he circles around it and breathes on it, the more my legs weaken.

My knees shake, and I try to stay still, but suddenly, I wobble, and he's popped up, picked me up, thrown me over his shoulder and he smacks my ass.

"You were told," he says, chuckling darkly.

He opens the garage door a few moments later, slips me onto the ground, and as I scramble and slide on the seemingly pristine floor, he's grabbed the telephone cord he'd wrapped around Riot and now has it around my wrists.

I gawk at his speed. He has my wrists somehow fastened to my ankles, and I'm spread open like a banquet feast.

“You failed to stay still before—now don’t let me down. *This* time, I want you loud as possible. I want you louder than Riot was when he was out here, shitting himself silly.” He pushes my thighs even further apart.

The muscles tighten and protest for a moment, but then I relax into it with a low, deep exhale.

“That’s it, sweetheart. Feel me as I taste you. Enjoy it, because I fucking do.” His tongue comes back out to play, and he drags it over that spot, drills the tip of his hot tongue into it, then bites at it as best he can, sucking hard afterward.

I squeal with pleasure—on the edge of orgasm so fast, it’s got me dizzy.

“I’m not gonna tell you when to

come. I don't fucking care anymore," he says, and *slaaaaam!* His dick's inside me, making me clench at the invasion.

I try to claw at something, at anything, but there's nothing to grab onto with my wrists lashed to my ankles. My teeth anchor into my lower lip and slide across it.

"You know why I don't care?"

"Mmmnnnhhh," I groan my answer.

"I don't care, because unlike you, I know I can't stop you. You can't help it—you want this dick more than you want to blink, breathe and beat that fucking beautiful, sensitive heart of yours. You can't control when you go off, and neither can I. Oh, I like to pretend I can but shiiiiit!" He rolls his neck and his

shoulders. His biceps flex with the movement.

I cinch down on my insides for him, making it more irresistible to him, and to me as well.

It's snug. I can barely breathe. I hold it as tight as I can and don't let go for anything. My practice with toys has paid off so far.

His pupils dilate, he growls low in his belly, and hisses, "That's the shit I want. Tight—so tight, I might lose circulation in my dick. That's the fucking woman I own. That's my pussy. Cream me, Dena. Wet me down so I'm baptized by your come."

He smiles for a second, but it's fleeting.

I moan when he bites below my jaw and then drags his tongue in a flat line down to my breast.

“Fuck, that’s right . . . You’ve missed this as much as I have. You left an in for me—you wanted me to prove I could break in again on my own, and I did it. I’ll always come for you. I’ll tear this fortress down brick-by-brick with my bare hands if I have to.”

I whimper, and my heart overflows with so many emotions, that suddenly, I’m gasping, and my vision blurs.

I’m coming. I’m falling apart, and I could never stop it. He’s right.

“Ohhhhh gawwwwd, it’s you, Nick! You’re fucking me! Love you!” I cry out.

“Mine—my body I own—my girl I love. All mine!” he says through gritted teeth, and then he convulses all around me, clutching me to his chest as his climax swells and overwhelms him.

His arms slide up over my shoulders, and he clutches my head in an almost protective way.

I sigh and inhale his heady scent. If only I could be surrounded by it always. Soon. I’ll find a way . . .

This will all go away, and he’ll always be mine.

We’ll be together.

“I needed that. Thank you for being a rat-bastard and breaking in through my garage,” I say, grinning. “And my office door. Worth it.” I hum in contentment.

“Fucking A it was, and you’re never keeping me out again.”

He releases me from my bindings. I smile and sigh.

His bones creak as he gets up and then helps me to my feet.

He brings me back to my bed, settles in, then motions for me to lie on top of him.

I love the way he fans my hair out over his chest and absorbs every breath I take.

“I love having your heart beating over mine. It makes me finally able to accept this—that we really are made for this type of all-consuming love.” His voice is smooth and lazy.

“It’s always been this way for me,”

I say through a yawn. “I never felt okay in my skin until you touched me. That’s why I made the first move in high school. I knew you never would, and I couldn’t allow that. I would’ve died if I never got to touch you.” Guilt should be hitting me right about now, after all the things I’ve done to him, all the ways I’ve taken advantage of him, but he’s sated, and so am I. There’s simply peace and the sound of our even breathing.

“I don’t know why I always have to scale fucking Mount Everest to get to you. It’s exhausting, but I do it. You’re worth every second of it.” His fingers work to spread each individual strand of my hair over his broad, sexy chest. “And you looked even more scrumptious than

ever when I saw you through your office window, when I almost broke my neck outside your house. Stop putting me in danger like that. I might lose a limb or an important appendage of mine we both can't live without."

"It's all very complicated," I say through a sigh.

He kisses my hair, his breath is choppy and it seems like he's struggling to say something important.

"What's wrong, Nick? You don't usually hesitate to say anything," I say softly. My fingers trace over his abs. I kiss his chest.

"I love having you all to myself. I just wanna enjoy it. Let me do this. I need to breathe you in completely."

I stop talking and let him touch me all over in slow, tender ways.

His breathing deepens, and there's this unspoken tension in the air now.

Is he afraid he's going to lose me?

Did he figure out what I was doing, and he thinks I'm worse than crazy—I'm psychotic?

I swallow the urge to ask him if he'll forgive me for the stupid things I do.

Would he let me explain? Could I tell him I did it for us so we could move forward?

He inhales, and it's loud and pained sounding. His chest rises and *me* with it.

“You sure you're okay?” I whisper.

“I’m tired of all this. Fuck all these stupid stumbling blocks. I just want to be with you, and I’m a lawyer, so I know it’s not a crime. Why does it have to be like wading through red tape all the damn time, huh?” His hands keep moving at a slow, methodical pace. “I can’t take being away from you anymore. That shit’s not working for me. We can’t keep doing this.”

“Everything’ll work out, but right now, everyone wants to get to my company—take my ideas. I can’t let them do that, even if I don’t care.” I sigh.

His fingers go motionless, and they settle on my back. “What do you mean you don’t care?”

“If they get taken, it’s fine. They’re

usually in draft mode and mediocre at that point.” I try to shrug unsuccessfully. It’s hard to do when horizontal and draped over a masculine, hard chest. I don’t mind trying, though.

“So, if I steal your shit, you don’t care.”

“I didn’t say that exactly,” I correct him. “I said it’s fine that it’s gone. They’re just ideas, but I get upset when I realize you’re selling yourself short. You wouldn’t steal it if you thought you could come up with something better.”

He stiffens beneath me. “Are you kidding me right now?”

He rolls me off him, gets up and starts pacing.

“You’re serious?” His face

contorts with some intense emotion, and I about die at the thought I've hurt him.

I nod and my brow scrunches. "Why, what's wrong?" What did I do?

"Un-fucking-believable." He points at me for a second, then before I know it, he's out the door.

Five minutes later as I'm lying in bed, covers over my chest, fisting the sheets and about to burst into tears, I realize what I've said.

And fuck, I know why it stung so bad.

I can fix this.

A few deep breaths, then I get up and put his shirt back on I was wearing earlier. I remove the keypad to my garage so he can't get in again and drag

my aching body back into my office.

I smirk at the door leaning up against the wall, mocking me and reminding me of the dirty things he did to me out in my garage.

“Naughty boy,” I say.

I pull up my file I have on him, rummage through the subset folders and find what I need.

This is the one. This is why I can barely breathe around him. He’s stunning in his brilliance, and now he’s going to see it, too.

He’ll know I was first to spot what this was. It’s hardcore shit, and I love that he’s so bold, so unafraid to take on something this dangerous.

“Mister, you’re gonna find out what

it's like to get your ass handed to you after your ideas are stolen," I say to the air, faintly scented of sex and him.

The best combination ever.

Its aphrodisiac qualities make my brain whir, and a million ideas barrage my mind, so I set to work right away and don't stop until I'm near dead. I owe him this much.

I pick up my phone and dial the number I've been dreading. "Well, now you want my help?"

"Shut up. Just wait for my instructions. It's time. He needs to be involved, and I want this done quietly and as fast as possible. No media if we can avoid it, and, John . . . I don't want Riot to know this time." My chest

tightens so much I swear my ribs are bruising.

“Whoa. These are some serious decisions. I thought you were joking at the last meeting,” he says.

“Do I have a sense of humor you’re aware of?” I tease.

“Not when you’re working, and since your brain never shuts down, I’d have to say no, you don’t.”

“Bye, John. Prepare the paperwork. I’ve got an amazing trick up my sleeve this time, and it’s not even one of my own,” I reply.

“Can’t wait.”

“I’m sure you can’t.” I hang up and get back to work, smiling the entire time.

Hopefully this will more than make

up for the things I managed to say wrong. And I pray John, my second lawyer, keeps his mouth shut. Riot's been busy lately, and I don't approve.

Chapter 14

Vapor

“What the hell camped up your crack and rotted there?”

“I’ll shower later,” I say, hauling in the bag of shit I need.

“Seriously, man, you not only reek, but you act like you’re carrying Ripley’s dead alien baby inside you. What. Happened?” Jason pulls his laptop off his thighs and sets it aside.

“Nothing I wanna tell you about,” I grumble.

I unload the groceries and in a covert way, shuffle aside the things I don’t want him to know about.

“C’mon. I won’t tell him,” he presses.

“Like hell you won’t.” I slap the counter with my palms. “He asks and you cave every damn time. There’s no way I’ll ever tell you anything that’s important to me again.”

“Jeezus, I told you before, I was protecting you, not ratting you out. There’s a difference.” He pinches the bridge of his nose and scrunches up his forehead.

“You prove you’re on my side by finding out what she’s up to. Riot’s not talking anymore even though we know he’s staying with her now. He won’t tell Dad a fucking thing, and he’s avoiding me as well. And I . . .” Dammit. It’s

been a week since I've seen her, and this time is worse than before. I can't fucking take it!

"She locked you out again?" His eyes soften.

"No. I mean, yeah, she did, but it doesn't matter. I don't want back in, not after I found out what she's made of." I put away the last few groceries, grab a shot glass and fill it up with the first bottle I find.

"Drinking again? I thought you'd stopped?"

"Can you fucking mind your own business for five minutes? You're almost as bad as Westin—all nosy and up in my shit all the time. I'm *fine*. *She's* fine. End of conversation. Yes, I'm thirsty.

Christ, can't a man have a drink without it making the news?"

"The only news I thought you'd want to know about is what your dad's doing with that plumbing gadget now," he replies.

"Oh, great—what now? Does that asshole ever stop getting into mischief? I mean, how many thrones does he have to own and conquer before he's satisfied? Enough already. He's richer than anyone has a right to be." I grip my nails into my thighs. It hurts, and I'm glad. I deserve it for ever trusting my father to be honest with me.

"He's got it down our pipes right now. He said it's like this miracle machine, and he wants to make sure it

wasn't just his plumbing that it worked on," he says, pointing to the bathroom.

"Oh fuck, no! She made that monstrosity! Who knows what the hell it's doing right now down there!" I rush to the bathroom, and the tail end of something silver whips down the shower drain.

"Fabulous. I ain't showering in there any longer." He scowls at the drain.

"I thought you knew where he'd put it," I say, turning to face him.

"Put it? He set it on the ground and said he'd be back in a half hour. He pushed some button that turned it on, and it lit up for a second, but it stayed in the spot he set it. I was messin' with you

when I said it was already in the drains. I wanted to see what you'd do when you realized she was a part of this. I didn't know you were already aware of her involvement," he says, his face losing color.

"Does he know . . . D-does he know she's behind it?" I crane my neck to look down the drain, but I can't see a damned thing.

It's hopeless.

"Nah. As far as he knows, some guy named T. Baker made it. Or at least he patented the metal for it," he answers.

"This isn't gonna be good. When he figures it out, all hells gonna burst through our pipes and then he's going to kill us for not telling him."

“So, we won’t tell him we ever knew. How would he find out?” He grins.

I quirk a brow at him. “Really?”

“I swear on my cock and balls. May they fall off if I’m lying. I won’t tell him—I can’t.” He blinks.

My eyes narrow at him. Who the fuck does he think he’s kidding?

“Okay, I believe you,” I say through my clenched teeth.

There’s no way I trust him. I need to find a new place to live. I can’t be here anymore, and I’ll fuck a dead dog before I move in with Westin. He’s been driving me insane lately, working my last nerve into a pinched, tight, fuckfest of shooting pains, tearing down my back.

I want to live with her. I want to wake to her breath on my cheek and my hand on her crotch as I inhale the scent of her glorious hair.

I'm a sentimental bastard, but the things she said . . .

It's obvious we're not nearly as in sync as I thought.

She doesn't give a shit about what I steal because she thinks I'm an idiot, and I can never come up with anything worthwhile on my own. So fuck it. I'll drown my brain in alcohol until it decides to try and work again.

"Fifteen until the meeting, and this one you have to attend if you don't want your dad coming after you like he did last time," Jason reminds me.

My shoulders hunch up, and my head drops forward. “Shit . . .”

“You’ll be there. I said I won’t tell, and I swear that’s true, but I won’t cover for you right now since there’s no reason you can’t be there. I don’t do lazy-son-dealing-with-uptight-dad. That’s beyond my scope as a roommate and friend.”

I growl and step away from him. *Oh, but you do, I’ll-tell-your-dad-any-shit-he-wants-to-know-to-put-your-girl-in-danger. That’s okay with you?*

I drag myself back to my room, grab my leather jacket, put it on and get back on my bike.

The drive to Dad’s place makes me edgier than ever.

Last time he came after her was

when I'd missed that last meeting, broke into her place, roughed up Riot and then fucked her in her garage. I was already broken in half when I intercepted Dad on his way to her place.

Some stupid excuse worked on him to stop him from heading the rest of the way to her home.

He believed me that I was just out for a ride to clear my head.

Jason's right—my excuse won't work again.

When I pull up in Dad's driveway, he exits the garage and glowers. "Helmet, Son. Is it so hard to follow the rules of safety?"

"Is it so hard to stop stealing her ideas and come up with your own shit,

you patronizing son of a bitch?”

He chuckles, and I shove my hands in my pockets.

“Get off that fucking stupid bike and come inside. I wanna talk to you before the meeting,” he says, waving me in.

I turn the bike off, swing my leg around, set the kickstand down and follow him inside like an enormous, pitiful tool.

He opens the door to his office, and the second he breathes my direction and says her name, I’m flipping him off.

“Charming as always.” He smirks. “Please, set aside the trite angry white guy routine, and listen to me for a few seconds.”

“Why should I? You don’t give a shit that she’s my life.”

“Your *life*? You haven’t been following her around for the last week,” he says, leaning forward. “Seems to me you’re over her this time.”

“Been fucking busy,” I say through a tight jaw.

“Too busy you’re loafing around your house and sleeping all day? I’ve been over there several times. Either you’re so hammered you have to crash hard, or you’re avoiding something having to do with her. This isn’t normal for you. I’m worried about it,” he says, studying me.

He works his way over to his desk and leans his ass up against the outer

edge of it. He crosses one ankle over the other and scrutinizes me even more.

I sigh and roll my eyes. Does he have a fucking point to make? Why does he give a shit what I do as long as I keep away from her? Wasn't that what made him act like a fucking attack dog before?

"The minute you stop being narcissistic, you're weak, and that's what she's done to you." He wears a curious expression on his face. "Look at you—take a breath, and you can't ignore the way she's demolished what's left of your integrity and confidence."

"What I do is none of your business. I'm working, only not on your shit. I'm done working with you." I cross my left ankle on top of my right knee.

“*For* me, not *with* me. You were never a partner—you didn’t earn that status, and right now, you’re on a steady decline. I don’t see you taking over the business for many, many more years to come.” He points at me and makes this sneering sound with his mouth slightly open and the tip of his tongue hitting the roof of his mouth.

“Fuck your shitty business full of lies and thievery. If there’s one thing you did on your own, I’d like to see it,” I say, my jaw so tight, my temples throb. “I did everything for you. Your fingers never lifted, you lazy bastard. So as far as I’m concerned, there’s nothing to inherit or earn because none of it’s legitimately yours.”

He's on me so fast, his fist in my face, I barely had time to see it coming.

“You will straighten your appearance in the next ten minutes. I'll start the meeting late for you so you can shower, shave and put on some clean clothes. If you ever disrespect me and all I represent ever again, you'll find your ass hunted to the ends of the earth, and you won't even have the benefit of her pussy around. I'll kill her before you can blink!” He stands up straight. “This isn't something you get to walk away from. It's blood—it's mine, it's yours. We take responsibility for our own, and you're of my flesh and bone. He who gaveth you life, can taketh it away. It's scripture, you ass. Now get out of my

office.”

“Mom hated you just like I do, and right now, in her grave, she’s choking curses out at you and what a miserable fucker you turned out to be.” I stand, flip him off once more and glide through the door.

I march straight into the conference room, prop my boots up on the table and wait for him to saunter in with his parade of loser lackeys.

Oh wait . . .

I get up, head to the kitchen, grab myself a large glass of vodka, go back to my perch and sit and drink, waiting for him to rule his kingdom from his lofty, dark cloud in the sky.

Several minutes later, most of

Dad's minions file in, with him taking up the rear.

I suppress a groan when he enters, buckling his belt in place and wiping off a lipstick mark from his chin.

One of his dyed-hags trolls past me and sits on my left.

She's smothered in Dad's cologne, and she has a deviant smile flashing at me.

Does she think I care if he had a quick, meaningless fuck with her? Does it make her special or stand out?

There's dozens more in this room he's probably been wetting his dick in all week long.

I don't give a shit. It's not the way I rule my life, and any of them that think

I'll take after him have a lot more to figure out before they can even consider looking my direction.

Ides is it for me. They can be shapelier, easier on the eyes, and even say the things every man wants to hear, but none of it's real. Dena is as real as it gets, and so fucking brilliant, she could tell them what their nail polish is made of and then figure out a way to fuel their car with it.

God, I'm getting stiff just thinking about her.

Why doesn't she crave me like an animal the way I do her? Why can't she see how utterly crazy I am for her? That I'd do anything to make her happy and worship her until I die? I want her

blissfully and painful aware of how much she misses me every second I'm not in her presence since that's what she does to me.

I pull at a loose thread, poking out of my frayed jeans at the hem while I keep my leg up on the table, bent at the knee.

Dad gives me an amused look and then there's a glint in his eyes with the thrill of possible future pain or humiliation he's planning for me.

Do I give a fuck? Not really. He can try all he wants to damage me, but only Dena can really do that since I don't care what he thinks anymore.

I yawn with an obscene moan.

The woman to my side, the one

that's freshly fucked but still trying to get my attention, gasps when I lift my arms up to stretch. I'm sure she got a whiff of my BO.

I chuckle. "That's all man," I tell her, patting my abs. "Enjoy it, honey. It's the smell of masculinity."

"That's all stench and a day of grueling scrubbing with two bars of soap," she murmurs, then holds her breath.

She looks away.

Good. I smile and wave at Dad.

He glares at me and gets started.

"As you're all aware, we've got a big problem in our ranks—someone's stealing from our production line," he begins.

I burst into a rolling, barking laugh. “Someone’s stealing—well, shit, that’s unethical and *so* wrong!”

He slams his fists on the table. “It stops today. We started the assembly of the weasel,” he says.

“What the hell is that?” I ask, tapping my boot on the table.

“It’s what I shoved down the drains at your house, so you could discover its secrets for me.” The cleft in his chin deepens with his glower.

“The weasel? What kind of stupid name is that?” I yawn again.

“A weasel eats snakes, and it’s sneaky. You don’t even know this thing is in your plumbing, fixing years’ worth of problems and clogs. It’s a clever

invention, and we'll sell millions of them." His jaw snaps shut at the end.

"If you're already producing them, then why does it matter if someone stole one?" I cock my head at him. If this was Ides that it had been stolen from, she'd have moved on already without losing a second of peace.

"When you're done acting like a condescending toddler, you'll realize why this is a problem. They stole the plans for the vital piece and all the corresponding parts. It doesn't work without this portion. So right now, we have pieces of junk that go to nothing."

I whistle, "Ffffffoooooohhhh!" I let it fade. "Brutal. What are we supposed to do about it?"

“Catch the thief, and whoever hands them over to me along with the plans, even if the parts are gone, will not only get a generous bonus, but they’ll take on a position as my assistant over the next year and learn how to handle this business. If this person impresses me, they may have the opportunity to be signed on as a partner.”

Another loud yawn by me. Does he honestly think this little maneuver of his is going to hurt my feelings? So what if she’s trying to replace me as the prince of his empire. “Sounds good, pops. We done yet?”

“Nicholas is obviously spent since he’s gone beyond his expenditures in terms of manners today.” He waves me

out the door.

I bow and make a grand exit.

Someone wolf whistles as I disappear.

I get on my bike and leave in a rush before Dad can try to get his hooks back in me again.

Like a pathetic creepy stalker, I wind up at Dena's again, but this time I just sit outside the gate and stare with longing.

The keypad's gone from the garage.

I need a grappling hook so I can get through those skylights. I'm willing to do the whole FBI agent doing espionage and covert work.

Then her words come back to haunt me, and I recall how blasé she was

about me and my ideas for inventions.

I don't want to merely be her lover and a joke to her.

I want more. I want all. I want her respect.

And I'd do anything to have it.

That pussy is mine, yes, but what good is that if there's no heart and especially no mind attached? She said she won't break anymore. Why am I the only one falling apart?

I drive off and once home, lock myself in my room.

Jason will be back soon, and he can report back to Dad whatever he wants.

I flip open my laptop, make the next step on my favorite invention—my most ambitious one yet.

It's probably never going to be plausible—never going to actually work, but it means a lot to me. It controls my destiny and sends the message to the assholes of the world that they can't run this planet with tyranny. There are enough dickheads like Dad running around, and they need to be stopped.

I put in my flash drive—wipe all my files off my hard drive just in case.

I'm sure Dad monitors this shit, but he probably hasn't figured out what this little box does yet that I've created in my schematics.

It's small, it's black, it's ballsy like Dena. It represents her to the core—and symbolizes the way I want to fuck up this world I now live in.

When I'm done with my newest additions to my box of shadows, I lie down, grip my cock and pull up my video I have of her touching herself from weeks ago.

So beautiful, and so powerful.

“Love me—be my bitch,” I groan as I unzip and pull it out.

I stroke over the swollen head, watch the bead dew up and collect at the tip.

“Lick it off for me, sweetheart,” I say, imagining her tongue slipping over it and enjoying my taste. “Ignore the germs, and savor the taste of my come. It's all for you.”

I tug at the tip several times in quick jerks.

Her voice is in my head, her little moans slicing through my resolve to stay away from her.

She doesn't want me.

If she did, she would . . . *Fuck, she was honest, asshole. She never lies. She told you what she thought about you, it doesn't mean she doesn't care or want you.*

I can't fault her for saying exactly what she thinks about me.

I call her my bitch, my dirty girl, and I'm sure she hates all of it. I talk about her pussy being mine, her cunt waiting for my dick and mine alone.

I keep yanking it, but I'm getting nowhere. This boiling mad heat inside me grows, but there's only pain and

frustration. I want her hand on me. Her mouth, not my shitty fingers roughly manipulating my dick into coming.

“Aaaaaaagh!” I groan, pull my hand off and sit up, grabbing shit off my nightstand and chucking it across the room.

I strip out of my clothes and scream, “Deeeeenaaaaa! Stop hurting me like this!”

I pick up my laptop, smash it into the wall, and when it’s in pieces, I drop to my knees and pull out my flash drive.

One idea left. I’ve just obliterated the rest. If I was Ides, would I care?

Nope.

The fact is, I’m not her. I care desperately, and there’s a reason I can’t

take being away from her.

I have to see her.

I'll try harder, and I'll turn this invention into something groundbreaking she can be proud of.

I'll be worthy of her if it kills me, and if it kills my dad, too.

She's worth it.

Chapter 15

Ides

I don't trust Ty. I haven't heard back from him yet, and the cobra hasn't been activated either. Besides, Nick's already pulling dangerous maneuvers I can't allow.

I take a deep breath, and before I sit down, I sanitize the seat with a wipe and then slather it in hand sanitizer.

I dry it off with the towel I brought along. When I'm done, I put it back in my backpack that was checked at the front desk.

My heart races when I finally sit down.

Already I'm clutching at the seams of my pants and wishing I could flee.

A breeze wafts in, and I bite the edge of my tongue.

Two men approach me, and one of them is the dark man from my past I wish I'd never known . . .

The one in the orange takes a seat across from me.

"Dad," I say as a mirror image of my eyes stare at me.

"Dena, I . . . I wasn't sure you got my letters," he says, blinking back at me, his face pale and his voice soft.

His hands stretch out on the table before me.

"I got them, and I'm here. I know you hate me, but I had to come," I tell

him.

He holds his breath and then exhales in a rush. "I don't hate you at all. God, Jesus, I . . . I was a shitty father to you, and I regret that every single day. How was I ever supposed to face you after I tried to kill you?"

"You and I both know if you'd wanted to kill me, you would've. Your bullet missed me on purpose." I lean back in my chair to create a little bit of distance.

"Well, you know I do have good aim, but I was . . . Hell, I don't know what I was. I just knew the cops were coming, and it was your fault."

"Yeah, it was my fault I called them, but it was your fault you were

stealing my ideas and selling them off. Wasn't it enough I was already allowing you to skim off the top?"

"You knew?" His eyes grow large.

"Of course I knew. I monitored my money and yours." I cross my arms over my chest and look away. This feels like a monumental mistake. I shouldn't have come.

Just as I'm about to push up off my chair and leave, he turns one hand over and there's a chip sitting in his cupped palm.

"What's this?" I lean forward, dropping my arms to my sides.

"It's a chip. I made it for you. It'll keep you safe," he says, and his eyes lie.

"Bullshit. You didn't make this."

My fingers flex, and my chest flares with vehemence.

He chuckles and swipes his other hand over his face. “Okay, I didn’t make it, but it’ll keep you safe, regardless.”

“From whom?”

He settles his weight onto the edge of his seat. “From a very bad man that wants to hurt you, and I’d really like to help, but since I’m stuck in here, this is the best I can do.”

“From whom?” I repeat.

“Jesus, Dena, I can’t tell you that. It’ll only put you in more danger,” he says, then smacks his lips closed for a second. “Will you just take it?”

“I’ve got pepper spray and a bottle of sanitizer. What more could I want?”

My nostrils flare.

“Pepper spray is great when a stray dog is chasing you down the street. These people not only bark, they bite, and when they do, you won’t be able to recover. Please . . .” His eyes tear up. “I can’t lose you. And this is the only way I know how to redeem myself and say sorry.”

“I don’t need you to say sorry, I just need you to be my dad,” I say, my voice wavering, thick with emotion.

“Please, take it.” He shoves his palm toward me.

“No.”

“Fuck Nick, then. I’ll flush this thing he made down my toilet after I piss on it!” he says through his teeth.

Nick?

In a flash, I've got it in my hand, and I've swallowed it down.

His eyes go wide, and he gasps.

I stand up and *swwwwwwaaaack!* I slap him so hard his neck makes this creaking sound when his head whips back.

“Fuck you! Don't you ever say his name or speak to him again!” I smack him once more and leave before I say something stupid like I hope he rots in his cell or before a guard comes after me.

As I drive off, I wonder why in the fuck I even came here.

I knew Nick visited him. Just wanted to see for myself.

I saw it in Nick's files, the letter he composed that my dad obviously transcribed into his own handwriting and sent to me.

Bastard, Gregory!

Tears race down my cheeks, and once I'm home, I'm restless.

Riot's been avoiding me in my home ever since I sent him away the day Nick tore my door off my home office.

I step inside and find Riot on the couch, his hands clasped together and resting on his lap.

"You saw your dad, didn't you? You only get that devastated look in your eyes when you've been around him." He studies my face.

"Yeah, I did," I say, sounding out of

breath.

“Why?”

“He had contact with Nick. I want to protect them both.” I shuffle past him to get to the kitchen. I’m thirsty as hell.

“I don’t get you—both of these men have done nothing but hurt you, yet you push me away, when all I’ve done is tried to love you and treat you well. I mean, goddamn, Nick assaulted me, and you forgave him and even had sex with him right after. I should be pissed as hell at you, but for some stupid reason, I’m not. I can’t ever be angry with you.”

I double over, clutch my knees and take in a long, winded breath. “I think we need to get you out of here. You’re not safe.”

“Ides! I’m fucking talking to you about us!” he yells.

“There *is* no *us*! How many times do I have to tell you this?” I holler back.

“There would be if you’d stop this!”

I grab his leather jacket, slung over the back of the chair next to me and throw it at him. “Put this on. We’re leaving. We can’t stay here. We can talk about this in the car!”

He’s motionless, and his jaw pops open. “This place is a fortress. There’s no possible way Nick can get in anymore. Why the hell would we leave?”

“Because I swallowed a goddamn chip Nick made, and who fucking knows

what it's going to do! I don't want you getting hurt because of this." I choke on several sobs until he's off the couch, and he's pulled me into his arms.

I beat at his chest, pushing him away. "No! No! I won't!"

"Dena, c'mon. I'm not gonna do anything," he says, his voice low and soft.

"I can't . . . I love him, and I can't live without him anymore. I want him to find me. I want to run out in the street and scream until he takes me away from this." I fist his shirt and tuck my head into him so he can't see the anguished faces I'm making.

"Okay . . . We'll go wherever you want."

He pets my hair.

“We’ll go to San Diego. I have a few friends there, and then we need to split from each other. I need to go into serious hiding, and I’ll be moving around a lot. I think this is the best way,” I ramble.

Snot drips down my upper lip, and I snort a laugh. Nick would’ve taken care of that for me if he was here, but he’s not.

And now he won’t ever find me. Riot has no idea how to care for me and deal with all my shit I carry on my shoulders.

“I’ll go have my stomach pumped first, and then we’ll leave.” I sniff.

“We need to get that chip out of you

now,” he says.

“I know. Urgent Care?” I ask.

“No, I can get it out of you,” he replies.

“I’m not going to force myself to puke.” I pull away.

His arms stay extended, his hands resembling claws.

I shudder at the thought I allowed him touch me.

Not only could he be covered in germs, but he’s not Nick, and I simply can’t bear it.

I need my Vapor.

I need his touch, his voice in my ear.

I need Riot gone.

“Don’t do this . . .” His face drops

as I back away. “I want to help.”

“Are you going to hurt me to get this thing out?”

“No. Well, I don’t know if it’ll hurt, but there’s something I’ve been working on, and oddly enough, I think it’ll do what we need it to.” He grins sheepishly.

“What is it?”

“Let me show you,” he says, leading me over to his workstation of sorts.

I’ve relegated a section of the living room over to him so he could work in peace.

I never pry, but if he wants to show me something, I’m happy to see it and give feedback.

“It’s kind of a mini, metal detector,” he says, smiling wider, beaming at me. “I created it so . . .”

“So if I walk into your shop with my slimboy, you know I’ve got it in my pocket,” I say, filling in the end of his sentence.

He blinks and nods, but his head barely moves.

“Sorry . . . I’m not trying to undermine you, but it’s . . . Well, it’s about supply and demand in the business.”

I take a deep breath. “It’s fine. I do get it. No hurt feelings here.” I stare at the small metal object, no bigger than a bottle cap.

“It’s attracted to microchips and

microprocessors, and it's even got a magnetic pull on it. I can strengthen the intensity so it can make the chip inside you come back up."

"That sounds incredibly painful." I grimace.

His head snaps back, and he gives me an incredulous look. "And *what*? Getting your stomach pumped is going to be a picnic on a wonderful spring day? That shit's gonna hurt just as badly. You shouldn't have swallowed it." He hands me his piece. "For all you know the thing's poisoned as well."

"Give me a break. Why would it be poisoned?" I throw my hands up for a moment and then let them fall. I get back to the point—"What's it called?"

“It’s called the Ides of Time.” He snickers.

I laugh and swipe it out of his hand. “Get a new name, you silly man, ‘cause even I know that’s kinda morbid.”

He covers his mouth as he chuckles and takes a seat.

“Okay, settle it over your stomach, and it should probably be object-to-skin.”

“You’re just trying to get me naked,” I say, quirking a brow at him.

“Maybe.” He shrugs with an arrogant grin.

“Fix the intensity of the pull, then I’ll turn around and slip it inside my shirt.” I jerk my chin at his equipment.

He bites his lip at the corner and

tries to hide his smile.

“You’re really enjoying this, aren’t you?” I chuckle.

“Maybe,” he repeats.

His belly bounces with a silent laugh.

“Fucker—I need this out,” I say, kicking the couch next to his leg.

“All right, all right. Patience . . .” He types in a few commands a moment later and tells me it’s ready.

I turn around, put it under my shirt, and it’s the oddest sensation to feel this tugging inside my gut. Even stranger is the pull on the Ides of Time as I move it in a northerly direction. It’s like playing with a Ouija board—like some unseen specter is directing it.

A few seconds later, I'm choking the microchip back up. And as soon as it's out, I gag out a, "Oh, fuck! That's gross!"

I go running through the house with a glob of mucous on my hand, surrounding a chip.

I drop it in the sink as I proceed to vomit right next to it.

Riot's hand juts, out and he snatches the chip up.

"Don't take it!" I screech through bouts of throwing up so forcefully, I can barely breathe.

"I'm just cleaning it up," he says, voice filled with innocence and shock at my territorialism about it.

He stays at my side, does as he said

he would, and then sets it on the counter next to me.

I proceed to bark out orders, and he follows them implicitly.

After brushing my teeth twice, using mouthwash and then a vinegar rinse, I can stop gagging and retching.

“Thank you,” I manage to whimper as I head to my room with the chip inside my fist.

“You’re welcome.” He smiles, but it’s tight, and he looks lost.

Well, shitty monkey balls. I can’t deal with that look, so I lock myself up in my room.

It’s gonna be a long night as I unravel the contents of this chip.

I’ve already been trying to figure

out how I'll move his other mind-bending invention into the public's eye.

And I thought my brain never ceased going a hundred-miles an hour. His creations are much more detailed and involved and so thoughtful it takes my breath away.

Mine are kids toys compared to his.

This chip though . . . What can he want with this?

* * *

"You look like you've had an all-nighter in hell," Ty says, smiling.

"Shut up. You have no idea what I've been through the last few days. That man has a mind unrivaled by . . . Well, I

don't know. My brain's mush at this point. I've been trying to break into its secrets, but he's got this sucker so tied shut, it's damn near impossible." I yawn and rub my sore eyes.

"Take a break. You deserve it. Stephen's been pissing and whining about the weasel and how it just can't break the cobra. So, you've done it."

"I've done part of it," I correct him. "It's not over yet. I've cut through his defenses, but I'm not ready for my actual plan of attack yet. Riot's been psycho lately. I need to get rid of him."

"Kick him out," he says, staring at me like this is a simple math equation.

"I can't do that. He's too domesticated now. He won't survive in

the wild.” I take a deep, chest aching breath. “Besides, I owe him, even if he has fucked me over several times. He’s done more good than bad, and I’m not going to ignore the things that should be honored. He’s a good guy at heart, just a little misguided at times. I’m planning on taking him to San Diego and dropping him off there. Can you help me out?”

He flashes those teeth at me, and I want to barf immediately. God, lasers can’t cut through that yellow coating on his teeth. He should keep them permanently hidden behind those lips of his. They’re big enough.

“Of course I can. My ex-girlfriend lives there, and she’s got tons of hacker friends in the area. What’re you looking

for?”

I shrug my left shoulder, all energy drained from my body. “A woman in the scene. She needs to be smart, cute, funny. Riot needs a companion.”

“Since when are you into the dating service?”

“I’m not, but he’s not gonna let me go unless he has someone else. He thinks he’s in love with me. After working for me for almost a year, I’ve somehow made him a little screwed up in the head, too.” I slump against the wall and yawn.

“Everyone’s in love with you. They can’t help it. You’re the unattainable. Why do you think Vapor’s so hot on your ass all the time? Men love a challenge. The minute you give him everything,

he'll walk away. I guarantee it. He doesn't really love you. How can he?"

"Gee, thanks, Ty. You inspire me to reach epic heights with this pep talk of yours." My eyes narrow at him and go moist on me.

"I'm only telling you what you need to hear. I'm not gonna kiss your ass like everyone else does. You're brilliant. That's not something I'll dispute, but you're not very lovable. I tried. There's no way to get through to you. Once a person's been hurt as much as you have, there's no coming back from that. Your abandonment and trust issues will never go away, and you mask them with your germophobia."

"Yeah, great. Just set this thing up

for me. I need Riot happy and out of the way so he doesn't get hurt." I turn to leave. "And, Ty?"

"Yeah?" He gives me a curious look.

"You're wrong. Vapor's broken me every fucking time, and there's no wall to speak of when he simply looks at me. It takes a man who understands a deep well of pain to get inside my walls, and you couldn't ever be that for me. It's not because I didn't want to love you. It's because you couldn't honestly understand or love me back." I dip my head and walk away.

There's no way he'll ever get it. But I do now. I need Vapor more than ever.

He lets me breathe.

Chapter 16

Vapor

“Holy shit! She’s done it!” I jump and snag at the remote.

She swallowed the chip.

Finally. Thank God!

I’ve been following her around on my bike, but now she can come back to me.

I’m sick of seeing her in sporadic spurts and from too many fucking feet away. I don’t care anymore that she bruised my ego with her harsh assessment of me and my shitty inventions.

I pace my room as I wait for the

device to send the impulse to her brain.

The button's been pushed, and I'm dying to have her at my door.

But fuck.

Jason's here.

I don't want him anywhere near her.

So I grab the remote, shove it in my pocket, then grab a bag and start packing.

I'll hole up in a hotel somewhere.

I'll want her all to myself. There's gonna be a lot of loud fucking involved, and I don't want him thinking she's being slaughtered when she'll really just be orgasming as many times as she can.

My hands shake and drop things as I try to hurry and ram my shit into a

duffel bag.

When I'm all packed and ready to go, I simply wave at Jason and tell him, "Later, man."

"Hey, your dad's on his way." He glances at my hand on the strap.

"Good for him," I reply.

"He's pissed. You better stick around." He motions with his chin at my bag slung over my right shoulder.

"I don't give a fuck if he's shitting lightning bolts, I'm leaving." I pull the bag tighter into my body.

"He knows . . ."

"Knows what?" I groan and roll my eyes, stretching my neck.

"He knows you've been following her again."

“*And?*” I motion with my hand for him to hurry up and tell me whatever it is he has to say.

“And, he already told you to keep away from her. What do you think you’re doing, following her all the time again? I mean, shit, she’s just buying groceries. What’s so great about watching her shop? You want her to get killed over this?”

“Fuck you, and your fucking stupid big mouth. Why’d you tell him last time anyway? Jealous? I thought you said you were going to prove you were loyal to me. I have yet to see any proof of that.”

“No, man. You know I don’t care about your love life, and I’ve been working my ass off for you, trying to

figure out what she's up to, but it's damn near impossible." He shoves his book aside he had propped open on his lap. Looks like some type of manual. "I made sure that remote was working with the chip, right? Why would I do that if I was still on your dad's side?"

"Yeah, you did, but—"

"But what? I don't want you to get hurt over this girl. You've been my friend for so long, you're like a brother to me." His eyes go wide.

"Then why are you telling me to stay right now? I can protect her." I drop my bag off my shoulder and into my hand.

"Because I don't have a death wish. Your dad owns me. I owe him, pure and

simple. He saved my life, and now I have to repay him. I'd like to do that by saving his son as well. Stay. This won't end well if you go."

"That's bullshit," I say through my clenched teeth. "You don't owe him anymore, and he pays you anyway, so that clearly signifies he thinks you've repaid your debt. I'm leaving, and there's shit you can do about it."

"Look—I was half-dead when your dad took me in. I was such a junkie, stealing petty shit to pay for my habit—and nobody else would give me a job when I got out of prison. Your dad was right there. Gave me a place to stay, food to eat and a job with a purpose. You stepped in and helped me out so I

didn't feel like a worthless shit. Just slow down. I'll help you. We can figure this out. Your dad has to think everything's okay."

"Pssst! Fucking *job*—that's what you call this? You're his lackey, and nothing more. He's using your ass just like he does everyone else." I drop my bag to the floor and take three steps toward him, stalking with my teeth bared. "He. Doesn't. Give. A. Shit. About. You. Or. Anyone. Else." I point at him. "You think he even cares about me? I realized after he told me to keep away from Dena, that he was heartless. No one that loves their son would do that. I'm crazy about her—she's everything to me. I'm done being a thief

for him and running his little circuits. He can fuck off and find some other idiot to do his evil bidding, ‘cause I’m done.” I march back over to my bag and pick it back up. “You’re like a brother to me, too, so I hope you can find a way to get away from that twisted evil fuck I used to call Dad.”

Rap, rap, rap, rap.

I freeze.

“It’s him,” Jason says.

No shit. My shoulders drop and my head falls forward.

And then an icy rake spears its way down my spine. Oh God, no!

Dena might come here.

I pressed that goddamn button, and my father’s here.

“Buy me some time!” I say over my shoulder and race to my room with the remote clutched tightly in my hands.

I squeeze it tight as I try to reverse whatever I did to tell her to come here.

But I don’t know how.

I never thought I’d want to send her away.

“Oh, God, oh Jesus, fuck!” I mutter, hitting buttons and hoping I’m doing something right.

“Nick . . .” Jason calls through my door.

“A minute, please!” I shout.

Rap, rap, rap.

“Fucking give me a minute, I said!” I yell louder.

“Son, you better open this goddamn

door right now or she's gonna get a bullet," Dad says. "I'm tired of these little games you're playing. I've already warned you once. This is the last time I'll be lenient with you."

My jaw clenches tight, my eyes slide up in my head and I close my eyes while my head drops back.

I tuck the remote into my pocket and pray to God she won't arrive when he's here.

My feet glide over to the door on their own, because I'll be damned if I told them to do that.

My hands follow suit and open the door.

"Whatta ya want?" I snap.

"To see my disobedient son," he

says, standing tall and looking bullet-proof.

“For what?” I lean into the door, keeping it open.

“To tell you this stops now. She’s gone. She’s left, and she’s not coming back, and if you go after her, you’re no longer my son. I’ll have no control over what my men do to you. You’ll be considered an enemy, and they don’t take kindly to anyone against our organization.”

“Jesus, Dad, you act like you’re the mafia ringleader or something.”

He blinks and smiles. “Call it whatever the fuck you wish—just stay here. You’re not to get involved with her and her little problems.”

I curse under my breath and swallow the massive lump in my throat.

“And just to make sure you realize I’m serious—she’s with *him*.” He crosses his arms over his chest and stretches his neck from side to side.

“Westin?” My eyes narrow and my neck slants away from him as I give him a look of disgust.

“No, Westin’s to watch you, since I know he has a personal vendetta against you.”

“Then who’s she with?” I yell, spit flying out of my mouth and spraying the air.

“Riot, that punk who’s in love with her, *that’s* who. He’s been guarding her like he’s her little lost puppy. It’s kind of

cute in a ridiculous sort of way.” He chuckles and almost bounces out of the hallway.

The front door shuts, and he’s gone.

I slide down to the ground, and my head pounds like I’ve had a knife jammed into it.

Why would she leave?

Did *he* do this?

What is his problem with us being together?

“He’s gone,” Jason calls out.

“Yeah, thanks,” I say, my tone biting.

Think, Nick . . . Where would she go?

The remote!

Maybe if I leave, she’ll follow like

I originally thought.

Before I can dwell on how fucked up my dad is, and how I hope he chokes on his meal tonight and dies, I'm on my bike, my bag stowed away, and for some strange reason, I'm headed to San Diego.

I need to be far away from that man and his sick regime.

The remote vibrates in my pocket, but I can't stop where I am now to see what it's doing.

I keep driving, heading out of L.A.

When I finally stop to get some gas and fuel up, I check the remote and there's some scrambled message I can't decipher on the small screen.

"What the hell does this mean?" I rub my jaw and squint my eyes, hoping

it'll come to me, and I'll figure it out.

Nothing makes sense.

Not without her.

I drive for the next hour to get there
with one single thought in my head . . .

I'll find her.

She'll be there, waiting for me.

It almost blinds me, making it
difficult to drive.

My eyes sting, and my hands ache
from gripping the handlebars for this
long.

But when I arrive in San Diego, this
odd peace settles over me.

She's here—I can *feel* it.

In my bones, in my blood—I know
I'll have her again.

I pull into the parking lot of the San

Diego Marriott Hotel, looking completely grimy and disheveled.

As I walk inside and start trying to check in, the desk clerk looks me over and wrinkles his nose.

“You sure you’re in the right place?” he asks.

“Yeah, I’m sure,” I say, my voice tight and raspy from dehydration. “Just give me a room already.”

I pull out a wad of cash and shove it at him.

“A back room okay? The view’s lousy, but it’s the best I can do on last minute notice. We’ve got a few seminars here this weekend,” he says. “There’s a lot going on right now, so we’re pretty booked up.”

“Like what? Mary Kay’s launch of pimple pure foundation?” I snort in aggravation.

“No, nothing like that—smaller companies. But we’re also damn near full to capacity because of Comic Con,” he says.

“Oh, Jesus,” I grunt and look away. “Yeah, it’s fine. Give me the key.”

He hands it to me after several moments of chatting with me, fumbling around behind the desk as he tries to find the right room for me and then almost flinches like he thinks I’m gonna deck him.

I chuckle, swing my bag further back behind me and walk off.

Dena, please be here . . .

I saunter to the elevator, ride it up to the third floor, and shove my way into my door, then drop my bag on the floor.

The second I fall into bed, I'm out.

"Get away from her," I shout.

Riot is over her limp body, sprawled out on her bed.

Blood drips down his fingers as he keeps cutting into her.

"No! I'll kill you!" I launch myself at him and knock out of his hand something metal, thin and the length of my index finger.

It lands on her belly, and I shriek in horror when I realize what it is.

A mini cobra, and it slithers inside her body and worms its way into her veins.

She sputters and gags and blood oozes out of her nostrils.

“No! You’ve killed her, you sick fuck!” I slam my boot into his face and take her in my arms. Every part of my body shakes as I try to figure out what the hell to do to save her.

Riot moans, “I was helping her, you idiot. Your dad chipped her. It was a descrambler so he couldn’t find her. I’ve been keeping her safe from him and you!” He spits and his own blood from his busted lip lands on my boot.

I ignore it. “Ides, wake up, sweetheart. Tell me you’re okay. Tell me what to do so I can get this hideous monstrous thing out of you!”

I shake her shoulders, and she

grunts, then her eyelashes flutter, but her eyes remain closed.

“Please, God! Help me!”

Her lips part. She exhales, and with a whisper says, “You can’t do anything. Let me go . . .”

I jackknife in bed, drenched in a cold sweat and gasp for air, clutching at my gut.

It felt so real, the adrenaline is still pumping through my frightened veins. Fucking stupid nightmare.

I let my head fall back, breathe deep and let the images drain out of my mind.

A few moment later, realizing I probably won’t be able to get back to sleep even though I’m tired as hell, I

grab my new laptop out of my bag with shaking hands and get back to work on my invention.

It's almost ready. She'll probably hate it, but it's the best I can do.

I type with furious speed. My contacts are still unsecured, but I'm hopeful they'll all come through for me when the time arrives.

With the remote at my side, still displaying some gibberish message on the screen, I relax into my spot.

I can do this. I can make this thing work.

My eyes dart to my phone to check the time.

It's been two hours since I've arrived. I've probably got at least a few

more hours to go before she arrives here if I'm wrong and she was indeed back in L.A. when I arrived.

I get in two more hours of work before my eyes grow heavy again, and my brain's exhausted.

When I lay down this time, my mind's drained.

No nightmares when I drift off. Just black. All black, like her clothes and her name. She renders my mind useless, and I love it.

Chapter 17

Ides

One day earlier...

“We have to go,” I tell myself. I snuck out and talked to Ty a few hours ago while Riot was gone, gathering supplies. Everything’s already set up. So why won’t my hands stop scrubbing the Formica and sink?

“I’m all done,” Riot calls out.

He’s finished detailing the coffee table I’d set my feet on ages ago when we’d had one of our little talks—the one job I’d told him not to do when my feet were parked there. But I couldn’t say no

once he offered to clean it again. It was honestly grossing me out so much I could barely look at it or stand within three feet of the dang thing.

I can barely see, my vision blurring from lack of sleep, but I keep cleaning.

“I’m almost done as well,” I say, my knuckles raw from scrubbing repeatedly in the same spot.

I run the black light over it once more. It’s better, but there’re still germs on my Formica. I suppose it’s not the end of the world since we’re leaving anyway, but fuck. I don’t like this.

I fight off a shiver, and it feels like tiny microscopic ants are marching across my spine.

“Go finish packing, and I’ll get this

done for you,” he says, stepping up behind me.

I hand him the cleaning supplies and head back to my room.

The bag’s open. I toss in the cuffs, the ropes Nick left behind, along with a blindfold and gag I’ve purchased. I may need to use these on Riot if he becomes difficult and tries to stay with me once we get there.

I pack up my laptop along with a few of my inventions I’m working on I don’t want to lose track of.

My face scrunches as I place the chip I’d puked up, in my pocket and head out.

A pang of longing hits me, almost crippling me. My body bends forward at

the waist, and I set my hands on the edge of the bed as I gasp for air.

I was with Nick in this bed. He unhinged me multiple times. No one else can do that to me.

What if this doesn't work? What if he's given up on me and no longer wants me?

I pat the chip in my pocket and cringe. This is it. Time to go.

One more pat of the chip, and I can't seem to move.

I should implant it in my body.

I like the idea of Nick being able to read my body's signals somehow. Jesus, that's insanely hot.

I grab my remote I've created over the last few weeks. The antidote to what

Nick took from me.

Retrieve this, my love . . .

I hit the button and gloat to myself.

He'll have no idea what's hit him.

He'll be with me soon enough.

"Okay, I'm ready," I shout to Riot.

When I walk out to the kitchen, he smiles, puts away the cleaning supplies, and like I've shown him, he goes through the kitchen, shutting everything down that has to be manually handled.

"Power down," I tell the chip inside me, and the house does as I ask.

"I'm ready now, too." He grabs a soda, raises it to me in celebration and pops it open, taking a healthy swig. "God, that tastes amazing!" He groans, smiling like he's sugar-buzzed. He

finishes it off quickly in several large gulps, tosses the can in the recycling, then joins me at my side as I head out to the garage.

“You’re gonna take *this* one?” he asks me as I set my bag in my car Nick had stolen over two months ago. The silver eyesore.

“Yep.”

“Why?”

“I have my reasons.” My chest heats as I near the car.

His brow creases, and he offers a half shrug, stuffs his bag in the back next to mine and gets in.

“You sure you’ve got everything you need?” he asks.

“I’m sure. I won’t ever have to

come back to this place if I don't want to." I blink and try to clear my mind of all the memories of Nick naked, here in my home and garage, hacking through my mental walls and defenses.

I start the engine, open the garage door and we drive off.

And I don't care if anybody sees Riot's with me.

Let them know.

I'll have Riot in hiding again in a few hours, and then I'll cease to exist.

I won't matter, so neither will he.

"You seem awfully calm, considering we're executing our own public death," he tells me, eyes on my hands.

"We're not faking our deaths—

we're just morphing into new identities, that's all."

"That's *all*?" His voice breaks. "Really? We're gonna part ways, I won't have any clue what you're changing your name to and you'll forget all about me." His hand smacks on his thigh and he stares out the side window.

"I won't forget about you. I'll be keeping tabs," I say, my voice sounding more irritated than I want it to.

He's hurting, and I sound like he's a burden. That's not what he is to me. I just don't know how to do this—to let him know I care without sounding like I'm leading him on.

"Goodie." He huffs.

"You're my best friend, and you

have been for a long time now. I don't have anyone else but you that I confide in. Of course I won't ever forget about you." My voice is softer this time. I reach out and touch his hand even though my skin is crawling when I do it, and my mind is vomiting up all the reasons this is repellent.

He startles and when he turns his head to look at me, there's a melding of emotions swimming in his eyes—sorrow, regret, love, hope, and friendship.

"It hurts and heals to hear that, and I don't know what to say." His eyes go soft and then heavy.

"I'm sorry." I take a breath, then hold his hand. "I wanna be there for you,

since you've meant so much to me, but I don't want to hurt you any more than I already have."

He smiles in an understanding way. "You're not. This *does* help."

"Good. I'm glad." I pull onto the freeway on-ramp, and divert my attention for a moment. "Let's talk about how we're going to handle this when we get there." I suck my lips in as a car behind me gets closer than I'm comfortable with.

Is this person tailing me?

I swallow the scruffy, dry lump in my throat and a second later, it's back when the lights on the car behind us flash at me.

The car speeds around me, and I'm

flipped off.

“Jeez,” I groan. “Impatient prick.”

“What a jerk,” he agrees.

I shake my head and go back to my original thoughts. “Okay, so at the hotel we’ll probably be on separate floors, but it should be fine.”

My phone vibrates in my pocket. I’m sure it’s a text.

About time. I contacted him yesterday . . .

“We’ll meet up at the *Walking Dead* panel at Comic Con.”

He chuckles. “I still can’t believe you were able to get tickets at the last minute. But zombies? You’re scared to death of them.”

I sigh. “Oh, Riot, Riot, *Riot* . . .

Lest you forget, I have connections and a fuck-load of money I don't do anything with other than amass it and put it right back into my company for research on my inventions. It wasn't hard." I blow out a puff of air. "And zombies aren't a concern. I'm armed heavily with very potent sanitizer. I won't taste good since I've got cleansers oozing out of my pores."

He chuckles. "Nothing's ever hard for you." He squeezes my hand. "Must be nice."

Except Nick . . . He's very difficult.

"Wouldn't know. I struggle with everything, but this"—I give one more squeeze of his hand—"you and me as friends—that's easy. I can *do* this."

He smiles but his eyes frown at me.

“It’ll be all right. You’ll see. I’ll make sure you’re happy and well taken care of.” I remove my hand and relax back into my seat.

It’s gonna be a long-ass drive if he’s going to be all mopey.

I turn on some music.

He hums.

I wish this was over already.

* * *

Two hours ago . . .

“Jason, where the hell are you?” I grip my phone tight to my ear.

“I called you hours ago. Don’t get

all snippy with me. I've been here getting it done for you. God, he better quit being such an asshole after this. If this doesn't prove to him he's like a brother to me, then I don't know what will." He taps on some keys on the other end of the phone.

"Everyone's ready then?"

"Yeah. I said I'd handle it, and I have." He snorts.

"When did he leave? Is he okay?" I pace in the bathroom, locked away, even though I'm on my own.

"Uh . . ." There's some movement and a few more key strokes. "He left about two hours ago. He should be arriving soon. I don't know which hotel he'll pick though. He's about as

predictable as a parachuting gorilla—and those fuckers hurt if they land on you.”

I laugh. “I usually like monkeys rather than gorillas. They’re smaller.”

“And I give a fuck because . . . ?”

I laugh harder. “You’re such a dick.” I sit on the floor since the toilet seat is off limits until I’ve scrubbed that thing down. “I’m not worried. The chip will make him come here. Just make sure the front desk sends him to the correct room, all right?”

“Yeah, yeah, boss. I got it. Stop worrying. Jesus, I thought he was a pain in my ass, always hovering and micromanaging. You’re a hundred times worse.” He ends the call.

“Fuck you, and your little dog, too. Toto’s hotdog meat, pal.” I shove my phone in my pocket.

When my head stops racing as it goes over all the details, I get out my kit and start sanitizing the shower and toilet.

After I’m done, I take a long, hot soaking shower and get ready. It’s silly, but I want to look nice for this event.

He probably won’t notice since I’m sure I’ll still look like I wandered in off the street, but at least I can smell nice.

I apply some light makeup and even blow dry, then straighten my hair. Rarely have I used these items, but I can manage.

I pull on my sexiest pair of jeans I own, some new shoes I picked up a few

days ago and even go so far as to put on a purple blouse for him. A little color won't kill me, and I want to stand out a little so he'll notice me if it comes down to him being in the crowd.

When I'm presentable, I call up my other accomplice.

"Get his door open, please. I need to get in there."

"Sure. I'll be right over." His deep voice fades, and the line goes dead.

I sit on the edge of the bed and take several deep breaths.

How much longer 'til he's here? I can barely stand it—this waiting's killing me.

A few moments later, I head over to what will be his room. I set the supplies

in place and make sure they're hidden from view.

I leave as quickly as possible so my scent won't linger. He can't know I was here, or this will be over before it's started.

When I get back to my room, I go back to handling his invention.

I search the Internet for signs he's working on it, but he's abandoned all his Dropbox accounts, and according to my sources, he hasn't been online in weeks.

Has he given up on all his wonderful ideas?

A part of me dies inside over thinking he might doubt his genius, but another part hopes he *has* dropped it for a while so I can do this thing for him.

I want this for him more than he can possible know.

A few more hours and invention “White Flag” will be complete.

A few more hours and operation “Ides can sleep” will be underway, too.

Thank God. I can’t wait for both of them.

My eyes can’t go much longer.

“Ides, open up. It’s me—Riot.”

There’s a faint knocking at my door.

I hide my laptop away and answer it.

“Come on in,” I say, stepping aside.

“That animal, Jason, shanked me in my room. Take a look at this!” He extends his left forearm, and there’s a

scratch there.

“I can barely see it. You sure it was Jason and not your allergies acting up to the detergents they use on your linens in your room?” I squint and examine it.

“Not funny!” He drops his arm and his lower lip juts out.

“I told him to handle this, so he is.” I turn away and head over to the window, watching for some sign—anything to say Nick’s on his way or is arriving right now.

“He took my phone, my laptop, all of my personal electronic devices. I’m dead without them. You know this! Call him up and get them back,” he says, keeping his distance.

“You won’t need them. We’re

going to go get throw-away phones right now. As soon as you're away from this place, you can have whatever you like."

"I want my old stuff back," he says, voice cold and low.

"Not happening." I turn around and cross my arms over my chest, staring him in the eye. "It's too dangerous. Besides, he's probably already disintegrated them. They don't exist, and neither does Chad Thayer or Riot. You'll have a new identity. A new life—a much better one."

He keeps pouting, and his face reddens. "Fuck you. This isn't okay!"

"You're welcome." I march toward him. "Take my hand. I'll only offer it once. Take it, and we'll start this new

journey together. It'll be worth it in the end."

He sucks his lips in and stares at the door, past me. "I didn't want it to be this way. It's not too late. We can go back." His voice is distant and eerie sounding.

I pull the door open. "No one wants it to be this way, but it's the best I can do. I shouldn't've ever let you be a part of my life. I knew that then, and I know that now. This is my fault, and for that, I'm sorry. I'm fixing this now. No more pain. You run this once, and then you're free."

"Free of you?" His eyes water, and his lips twitch.

"Yes."

“No.” He grabs my hand.

“Yes, Riot. It has to be this way.” I remove my hand from his.

He leans forward for a kiss, but I jump away from him. “It has to be this way because of him, not because of you or me. This is Nick’s fault, not yours. We were fine until he came along. We can be fine again without him,” he says with a slight emotional hitch in his voice.

“Not gonna happen. I wasn’t fine then, just good at covering it up. I’ve missed him since I was fourteen and had to leave. I searched and searched, finally finding him. It wasn’t until he came back I felt okay again. There was nothing fine about me. With him, I will be. And

you'll be better without me, too."

A tear streaks down his cheek, and my chest caves in on me. "Don't cry. Please. I can't take it."

"How am I supposed to pretend I don't love you and that it's not ripping me apart inside to leave you? I can't just walk away. You can't ask that of me."

"I have to," I say, stepping out into the hallway. "All I can do is take these first few steps with you. Where you go afterward is entirely up to you, as long as it doesn't coincide with my path."

"I hate this," he murmurs.

"I know you do. And I'll say sorry again, because I am." I lead the way down the hall.

His steps are slow, but they're

happening, so I can't complain.

“You'll be better soon, I swear.”

He huffs. “That's not a promise anyone can make, least of all you.”

I place a hand over my heart so it'll quit trying to leave me since I'm harming my dear friend.

When we get in the elevator, he corners me and puts both hands next to my head. “I love you, Ides.”

“Don't.” I shake my head and look down.

“I love you. Listen to me for once. You love me, too. I can feel it. Maybe it's not overwhelming for you like it is for me, but it's there.” He steps closer and his hips move side to side.

“It's not there and never was. I

don't feel anything more for you than I would a cousin or a brother. That's not going to change over time," I say, using a gentle tone. "You have to back away from me. You know I can't stand people being in my space, and I don't want to hurt you."

"When you realize how bad that man is and how much he's damaged you, I'll be waiting, and I'll hold you until the day we both die. I won't ever let go."

I duck under his arm and push the button for the ground floor again.

When the bell dings and the doors slide open, there's Nick, looking worn out and eyes sagging as he faces the hotel concierge at the check-in counter.

My heart squeezes so tight my

vision blurs for a moment. *Nick! I'm here!*

This wasn't how I'd intended for this to happen, but if he sees us, it's fine. I'll deal with it.

I step out of the elevator car and Riot follows after me.

He seems oblivious to Nick's presence, which I can barely fathom since every cell in my body is on hyper-alert around that man.

Nick speaks with the hotel employee and we pass by undetected as we exit out of the building.

"When we get our new phones and I'm supposed to be someone else, that doesn't mean I turn into some man that doesn't know and love you," Riot says at

my side. “I won’t ever stop being here for you.”

“I know you want to, but things have changed even if you won’t.” I walk faster.

Thank heavens there’s a cell phone store half a block away within walking distance.

He’s making my heart hurt so badly I might not make it much longer.

Chapter 18

Vapor

“Shhh . . .” A soft hand covers my mouth, waking me after falling asleep for the second time.

I jerk around, and as I try to kick away whoever’s next to me, their body follows along with me.

And the next thing I know, I’m cuffed to the headboard, a gag’s around my mouth and I’m blindfolded.

I couldn’t see who it was, since it’s dark.

But they’re breathing hard.

I yank at my wrists, but I’m not going anywhere.

“Listen,” they whisper.

I’m not even sure if this is a guy or not. They’re dressed all in black and my vision was blurry.

I kick my legs, bang my back into the headboard, thrash and try to be as noisy as possible.

They grab my legs one at a time, and ropes now surround my ankles and stretch me out so I can no longer be loud with my body, flailing around.

I choke on my anger, and scream as loud as I can, but it’s muffled and comes out a garbled mess of gibberish.

My head slams back and forth.

“Shhhh . . .” They touch me. It’s light and seems hesitant even though they’re wearing gloves.

I go rigid and stop moving around so violently.

The hand checks my cuffs, but for what I'm not sure.

It seems like they're ensuring they're not biting into my flesh and doing damage.

"It's for your own good," they whisper.

I whimper a dying moan.

Is it her?

I can't tell.

And then *click* . . .

A door closes, and fuck! I'm alone.
Left like this until who knows when?

Until the cleaning crew finds me tomorrow in the late morning hours?

The remote's still in my pocket. I

can feel it up against me.

If it was Dena, wouldn't she have taken it with her?

Christ! I'm so fucked.

For an interminable amount of time, I drift in and out of sleep since I can't do anything else.

My arms are numb, and my feet try to move every few seconds to keep me aware, but what's the point?

Cliiiiick.

The door opens, and I'm shaking now.

What if this is one of Dad's men, messing with me?

What if they tied me up to make me piss myself before they off me?

And what if they go after Dena

since I disobeyed him?

My cuffs are released, and before I punch a fucker in the face, or try to, since I can't see, my wrists are bound together with some kind of rope.

My ankles are released next and I'm heaved over some big guy's shoulder.

"Fuck, he's heavy," the guy whispers with a groan.

"Shhh . . ." the same voice from before says.

I go limp and desperately try to see out of the bottom of the blindfold, but they've used one that's thick and solid—I can't see a fucking thing.

"Where do you want him?" the guy carrying me asks. He's using some

creepy Batman scratchy voice. It's disturbing.

He shifts his weight, turns, and the ambient temperature of the room changes.

I think I'm in the hallway now, but I can't tell.

There's a metallic scratching sound, and then another door opens.

A few steps, and I'm dropped onto another bed.

I'm spread out on the mattress again, and as I fight and kick, hands try to soothe me before securing me into place.

Only this time, I'm face down.

I whimper as my hair's pulled and something cool and metal is poked into

the back of my neck.

Cliiiick, cliiiick, clllliiiiick!

Shit! Is it a gun they're cocking?

Then they do the same thing to my inner arm.

Why would they do this?

Something sharp slices into my arm. I grunt and sob at the pain.

A second later, something warm and stinging, is placed over the wound.

Sticky, oozy, crud rolls down my arm.

My legs tense and my spine turns into a rod.

I close my eyes and tears leak out.

I can't even beg for my life since I'm gagged.

Oh, please, don't hurt Dena . . .

My heart pounds and feels wrenched open when suddenly, they release my hair and the metallic object disappears.

The next thing I know . . . the remote has been slipped out of my pocket.

Oh fuck! A door shuts.

They're gone.

They'll find her.

She's dead!

Why did I come here?

The center of my body flops around like a speared fish.

I choke on the racking sobs I emit, until something sharp pinches the back of my neck, and I slip into unconsciousness, where maybe I can find her once more.

* * *

Ides

“God, where are you?” I say to myself, under my breath. I can’t be out here for long.

Is he dressed like a zombie? I can’t freaking find him!

I wade through the sea of people, awaiting the panel.

I ignore all the dirty looks people give me as I make my way toward the front and avoid all the sickening zombie people dressed in rags and drenched in fake blood. It makes me nauseous when I get near them.

I approach the head of the pack of bodies. That's where Stormy said she'd be, so I can at least find her.

"Hey," I say, imagining yanking on her ponytail like a close female friend would do when I spot the back of her head.

Ty sent me a picture, and I hope she looks even prettier in person.

She turns around and knows better than to give me a hug, but I do receive a giant smile.

Wow—she's beautiful. He was right.

She has almost violet colored eyes, straight black hair in a sleek bob, and a very full mouth with a trim figure. Never would've guessed she's a computer nerd

that hangs out at home with her laptop.

“How was your drive over?” she asks.

“It was good. Riot was pouting some, but it was all right.”

It’s hard to hear her with all of the fans screaming as the cast of the show is about to come out.

This is why I chose this place.

This is why it works. We’re moving around. It’s loud—it’s chaotic.

No one can track our conversations here, and I have no technology on me, other than the new phone and the chip.

And I just bought the phone an hour and a half ago at a random shop with Riot. I’ve barely touched the thing.

“Is he here?” she asks.

“He should be. I’m lookin’ for him,” I answer. “He seems to be hiding amidst all the zombie lovers.”

She smiles wider. “He sounds really cool.”

I grin. I’ve been talking him up to her for the last few days—knowing he needed to find another woman with the same talents and interests as me. He needs to get laid.

According to Ty, she’s always a horny pervert with the same hobbies as him.

“Show me again,” she says.

“I can’t. I don’t have that phone on me,” I tell her. “But you already know he’s good looking.”

“Mmm . . . I really like blonds, and

you said he has dark brown eyes, right?”

When I’m about to answer her, I look over her shoulder and Riot’s at the edge of the crowd, scowling at me.

“There he is—over there,” I say, keeping my hand down low and pointing at him. “C’mon. I’ll introduce you.”

She stays in her spot and gives me a look like she needs a minute. “And what if I can’t stand him?”

“Then you drop him off at the pre-approved location. He can get to a new place to hide after that, but really . . .” I pause and puff out my cheeks “. . . it’s just temporary. I only need you to put him up for a week.”

She nods and then follows me through the crowd. He looks scared to

death and green, like he's about to vomit.

When we get close enough, I smile and call him over, "Riot—I've got someone for you to meet."

"Great," he mumbles.

"This is one of my few trustworthy friends, Stormy," I tell him. A rush of guilt sweeps through me. I barely know her, but Ty trusts her, so I do. I don't have a choice.

"What's your real name?" he asks her.

"Linda," she replies. Her eyes rake over him, he grins like a big ol' dork and she blushes when his eyes hone in on her breasts—much larger than mine and definitely more exposed.

“You’ll be leaving and staying with her for a week until the next driver can pick you up. They’ll keep taking you north to Oregon. There’s a secured place for you there.” I pull the phone out of my pocket. “This is brand new. I know you already picked one out at the store, but I want you to have this one, too. It has my number programmed in it. So we’ll only use these two phones to call each other for emergencies. Otherwise they aren’t touched. It has a tracking device in it. Keep it on you at all times until you get to the destination.”

He nods, but his eyes remain on Stormy.

I chuckle low and quiet. “Stormy, this guy’s a liar, uh, I mean a *lawyer*”—I

grin—"and they're known to be the biggest crooks on the face of the planet, so never take your eyes off him."

She turns to me and looks at me like I'm insane. "Then why do you trust him?"

"I don't. I always have my eyes on him. Ask him—I monitored his computer and his house," I reply.

He barks a laugh. "Yeah, she was hoping to see me naked."

"Yeah, I'll bet," Stormy says under her breath, sounding attracted to him.

"Okay, I've gotta get back to my room. Some unfinished business," I say and slide out of the way.

When I turn around at the last second, before leaving this crazy room,

they're already chatting away and he's smiling so big, I think he's probably broken a crucial facial muscle required for drinking and tongue control.

"Bye," I say to them, even though I know they can't hear me.

He'll be just fine.

I glide over to the elevator and whistle on the way up.

This went better than expected.

Riot can have a good time at Comic Con, he can get to know a beautiful and slightly eccentric woman that's as big a hacker as he is, and I can escape into the night without him even realizing it.

I sigh when I get to my room, smile and check to make sure the door's still locked.

It is.

I scratch at it, and a moment later, it's opened.

"Hey," I say, no longer trying to hide my voice through a scratchy-whisper. "How is he?" I peek over at Nick's sleeping form on the bed.

"He's fine," Westin answers, letting me in.

"Why didn't you untie him after I left?" I ask, eyes narrowed at him.

"Call it payback for this bastard screwing up my car lifting operations," he says, smiling. "He was due for a kick in the ass."

"Aw, you know you didn't really need to keep doing that. After what I paid you to watch out for him, you didn't

need to steal anymore cars,” I say, and step around him.

“That’s true, but there’s no fun in following his stupid-ass around. Especially not when his only move is to follow *you*,” he says, laughing. “Besides, if I’d stopped lifting cars, he would’ve known something was up with me. God, I’m so sick of following him while he follows *you*. So fucking boring! Thank God that’s over now.”

“Yeah, but it was fun for me to hear about it after the fact.” I walk over to Nick and sit down next to him.

He’s sleeping more soundly than I’ve ever seen him.

“Poor baby,” I say quietly.

Westin laughs harder.

“Shhhh.” I glare at him.

“Going to my room right about now seems like a good idea,” he says, motioning to me.

I touch Nick’s cheek and run my fingers through his hair. Such a beautiful, sensitive, smart man. Dear Lord, I could stare at him all night even though I really need to get some sleep before I drop.

“You remember the plan?” I ask Westin.

“Yep. I’ll see ya in the morning, boss,” he says and disappears out the door.

Before I untie Nick, I get up and make sure the chip I put in the back of his neck is working.

It tells me he’s asleep, heart rate,

respiration, and blood pressure. His location is also specified.

I smile and strip down to my bra and panties.

Black. He likes black almost as much as I do. I'd already changed out of my purple top earlier, chickening out. I just couldn't do it. Couldn't pull off purple. Most colors hate me.

I turn off the majority of the lights in the room, make sure the door's locked and then head over to his hands first.

Each knot that slips through my fingers and unwinds makes my heart feel lighter.

We're free.

He doesn't know it yet, but we're on our way.

His hands flop onto the bed, and red flags start to pop up in my mind.

Should he be this lax?

I'm the heavy sleeper, not him.

I hurry and finish untying his legs, take off the blindfold and gag, and when he's still out of it, I pick up my phone and dial Westin.

"Hiya, miss me already? Or did he need his ass wiped?" He chuckles.

"What did you give him? He's not rousing," I ask.

"*Rousing?* Around you? Not possible. That fucker's always horny just thinking about ya." More laughter.

"I'm serious—he looks half-dead. Did you give him something to put him out?"

“It was only a little bit. He kept trying to scream and struggle, and I was worried someone would hear. Plus, you know I can’t stand the thought of anyone getting hurt,” he explains.

“What the fuck did you do?” My voice goes up in pitch and yet it goes quieter.

“I gave him the good stuff,” he says.

“Are you shitting me? You gave him date rape drugs?”

“Hey, he told me he’s fucked you a few times while you were sleeping. Time to return the favor, right?”

“Shit, Westin. He has to be hard for me to even be able to do something like that, and I don’t know how I’m gonna get that when he’s zonked out.”

He chokes on something—sounds like he's drinking some fluid. "Shit, woman, you don't know men very well, do you? Some stroking, some sucking, and it won't matter if he's in a coma. His dick won't know he's out of it."

"You really are sick," I say.

"Just keep it down. I wanna get some sleep before I have to deal with him tomorrow and hauling his whiny-ass around."

"Night," I say, clipped and hurried, then hang up.

Bastard. Why did he do this?

I told him how to handle it. I told him specifically to untie him, tell him what was going on, and then Nick would be fine.

Did he listen? No.

Shit. What if he doesn't follow the plan tomorrow?

Nick moans, and it's low and sounds pained.

I can't take advantage of him when he's drugged out of his mind.

What the hell do I do now?

I turn him onto his side, try to prop some pillows next to him so he won't inadvertently fall off the bed, and then I snuggle into his side and try to sleep.

Only, I can't. He's here. He's with me, and as usual, he smells like *my* kind of drug.

"I love you—you don't know that yet because you haven't heard me say it to you, but you will. I'll say it so often,

you'll get sick of it," I say, stroking his chest.

He's fully clothed with the exception of his bare feet.

I'm surprised Westin had the courtesy to take his shoes off for him.

I nuzzle into him, take a big fat inhalation and wrap my arms around him.

"We'll be together after tomorrow. I promise. We'll have to run, but we'll be together, until I finish up my newest invention. Then he can't hurt us." I yawn and stretch, and before I can tell him anymore of the plan, I'm asleep—warm and safe. And Nick's a part of my life once more.

Chapter 19

Ides

“Ides, wake up!” Westin’s voice calls out to me.

The bed shakes.

I blink and roll onto my back.

“What?” I groan and wait for my eyes to focus.

“I got word from Jason. They’re on their way. His dad found out,” he reports.

“Fucking hell. Do you think Jason told him?”

“I don’t know, but I believe him when he says Stephen’s on his way.” His eyes shift to the door.

I blink hard, run my palm down Nick's chest and say, "Okay—take him. He's still out of it. I'll shower and get ready to face them."

"That wasn't the plan," Westin says, his eyes scrunching in concern. "You can't handle him."

"He won't see me," I say, pushing up to sitting. I brush my hair off my face with my hands and yawn. "They're following the chip Nick made for me that I swallowed. His dad must've figured out how to reconfigure the remote. I'll keep it with me here in the room, and when they're on their way up, I'll slip out."

"How're you gonna know when they're near?" he asks.

“Jason has connections.”

“If he just sold you out, then doesn’t it stand to reason he’s still working for Stephen, and you didn’t quite pay him enough to buy his loyalty?”

I nod and ignore how nauseous I am at the thought Jason may have turned on us. I was hoping it wouldn’t go this way. “I’m sure he’ll do exactly that, but I have a trick up my sleeve in the form of a girlfriend of his.”

“Whatever—*women!*” He tosses his hands up in the air.

“You only need to worry about how to get Nick downstairs without anyone asking questions about why you’ve got a half-dead guy, hanging over your shoulder.” I drag my hand through

Nick's hair once more. Lord, he's so beautiful and perfect.

And I can't stop touching him.

"Jesus, woman, I'm not gonna carry him around everywhere. What do you take me for, a pack-mule?" He points to the wheelchair by the door. "He looked awful when he arrived on his bike, and nobody's gonna think anything of it when I wheel his ass out."

"Fine. Sounds good. I'll take the bike when I go, so leave me his key for it." I motion to the door.

I stand up and stretch a little more.

"Sounds good." He claps his hands and pops his neck.

"Now, please," I say.

"Bossy, bossy, bitch."

I chuckle, and he grabs Nick's keys, takes off the one I need and tosses it at me.

Of course I miss catching it, thanks to the jitters crawling through me.

He dies laughing, curled over on himself.

"It wasn't that funny," I grumble.

"Yeah, it was. The great Ides can't even catch a damn key when it's tossed at her from five feet away." He keeps hooting to himself.

"Ha, ha." I tuck it in my pocket. "So fucking hilarious, I'm sure it'll make it on the net."

"Okay, I'll have it online within twenty-four hours. I've got stuff to do, lady. I'm busy, so stop delaying me, and

you'll just have to wait and watch it later." He turns to Nick. "Ups-a-daisy, lazy-ass." He drags Nick off the bed, then pulls him over to the chair. I manage to race behind him and hold the chair steady as he sets Nick in it.

"Hey, before I go, how did you find out who Jason's girlfriend was? I've known Jason for a long time, and he's a tight-lipped mother fucker. He's never said anything to me about a girlfriend at all."

I grin. "Well, Stephen keeps tabs on all his employees."

"No fuck? You hacked into the big boss's computer?"

I nod and grin wider. "It wasn't hard. Been doing it for weeks. Stephen

has no clue what he's doing and has a false sense of security because his guys lie to his face about their abilities to keep him protected.”

“I suck. I never could've done that.”

I laugh and my fingers are in Nick's hair once more. “Jason doesn't talk about her for a reason, so don't take it personal. She's dangerous. She runs with some pretty hardcore crowds, and her thing is breaking into military databases.”

He blinks and his jaw opens wide. “Fuck . . .”

“Yeah. All I had to do was find her, tell her who I was, and well, she'd heard of Ides before, so she was thrilled

to do me a favor. I paid her, of course, just in case.”

“Of course.” He takes the brakes off on the wheelchair and turns Nick around.

I grab Nick’s bag off the dresser, hand it to Westin and I kiss Nick’s forehead before he’s wheeled away.

The second he’s out of sight and out of the hallway, a tight, shrill sound wafts out of my chest.

He’s gone.

Again.

Fucking hate it when that happens.

I collapse on the floor and am suddenly a sobbing, womanly, germy mess.

This floor is disgusting.

I don't care how often they shampoo it—they should rip it out and burn it.

People do sick things on hotel bedroom floors, and I wanted to do something to get the bed all tangled and germ-ridden with Nick, but I had no choice.

My favorite man in the whole world was unavailable.

Like a crazed monkey, I crawl into the bathroom, find my way into the shower and get ready for my day.

This has to work.

Once I'm done—dressed and have my stuff packed back up, I set the chip on top of the dresser in the middle with a paper under it with two simple words.

EAT ME.

* * *

When I'm back in Nick's room where we first kidnapped him, I pull out my remote and press the green button.

Green is go.

Green is come.

Green is you're trapped, motherfucker, and you won't get near us again.

I pick up my phone and call Lexi—Jason's girlfriend.

She's already helped me before, taking my old phones and answering when Nick would call up, and then she'd tell me each time afterward. I always

felt bad when he called her names. For someone as hardened as she is, I was always shocked it pissed her off that he called her a filthy whoring bitch.

“You there?” she asks, answering my call.

“Yeah. You?”

“Yeah, and he’s here, too. Wanna talk to him?” she asks.

I exhale through my nostrils, and it’s a whiny, unpleasant sound. “Sure.”

“Kay—hold on a sec,” she replies and there’s a shifting of the phone.

I can’t believe this.

I can’t believe this worked.

“Dena?” he asks.

“Yeah, Dad, I’m here, and he’s on his way. You out and safe?”

“Yeah, thanks to you.” He laughs and it’s an exhilarated, triumphant sound. “I’m so sorry for everything. I never meant for you to get dragged into all my dealings.”

“Well, it wasn’t just you. This prick named Stephen, your long lost best friend and secret enemy, was trying to take over your business. Everything you sold, one of his associates bought, and he’s the one that screwed you over, not me. The FBI was already watching you, so if I hadn’t trapped you when I did, turns out he would’ve and you would’ve gone to a much higher security-prison,” I tell him. And he probably would’ve gotten a much longer sentence, too.

“I can’t believe you were able to

get me out,” he says.

“It’s legal,” I remind him.

“So you say—sounded made up if you ask me.” His voice is tight.

“I don’t care what you think, as long as you do one thing for me, and it also means all that money will be yours tomorrow,” I remind him. “My lawyer John will be contacting you soon.”

“What happened to Jason? I thought he was the one handling the account?”

I sigh, and bunch my fist at my side. “Turns out he had some ideas of his own on how to handle the funds. He and my previous lawyer, Riot, were trying to put in a little loophole to funnel that money for you, back into my company without my knowing it. I wasn’t real thrilled

about their plan. It's your money. I don't want it. Just take care of yourself, and enjoy your life." I pause and inhale. "I think it goes without saying, you might not want to share this with his girlfriend, accompanying you right now. And make sure you destroy and throw away this phone as soon as this call ends."

He sighs, now, too, but when he does it, the fucker sounds thrilled and happy beyond belief. Almost like he's catching some fresh air. I'm sure he is, but I'm not entirely certain I want to experience this with him over the phone. "You have no idea what this means to me, and don't you worry—I'll stop him. Stephen won't know what hit him."

"He's on his way now, the chip's

here and it's ready." I rub my eyes with my free hand. Why do I feel so exhausted already? And why hadn't I taken care of Stephen before now? I was in his house weeks ago. I could've done this then, but I was unprepared when he had some of his dudes come and force me to get in his car.

"This'll work. Don't even stress about it for a second," he says.

"I'll stop worrying once it's over. Take him down, Dad, and then you disappear. I don't ever wanna see you or him again." I end the call with my nerves shooting straight into my brain, giving me a migraine.

A few minutes later, Lexi texts me to tell me my father's crying.

Fuck. I can't think about that now.

I sit on the bed, restless inside, and about to crawl the walls like some lunatic superhero—not the cool kind like Spiderman. He was smart. And at least he knew about germs on walls and always wore gloves.

He made cool webs, too.

Well, I make my own webs, and Stephen's about to step into mine.

A half hour later, I hear the door open in the next room over, and I know it's him when I hear a clear, aggravated, "Awwww fuck!"

Smaaaaash!

He's thrown something, or broken something.

And then that's right—he touches it.

“Bingo,” I whisper and my eyes light up, my eyebrows dance on my head, and I’m singing some kind of dorky song I make up on the spot, about, “Bitch, I just smacked you down!”

I text Lexi. **Got it?**

She replies right away, **Got his DNA and then some. He spit on it and touched it.**

One of the things about Stephen? He’s been very careful to always keep his hands clean.

Well, his computer wasn’t totally spotless.

He kept detailed records of all the items he bought that my father stole from me, and detailed records of everything my father ever did that was illegal.

The micro-trackers I planted in that chip, hoping he'd smash it, are now being inhaled by him and anyone that's with him.

It's in the air. When he runs and I turn his records in, I'll be able to track this asshole down.

Fucker's mine. Or my dad's. I don't care how they choose to destroy each other, as long as Nick and I are now out of it.

They're mafia-like wars don't concern me.

I wait for them to leave, text Westin to make sure he and Nick are well on their way, and then I'm out the door, checking us both out of our rooms.

Nick's motorcycle is easy to spot.

I get on, and shit, I suck at driving this monstrosity.

I wobble down the road for a few minutes as I get the hang of driving Nick's mountainous bike.

I've driven crotch rockets, but not crotch bombs. This thing's massive and a beast to handle.

Once I'm outside of San Diego, I've caught on, and I'm able to sell his bike, upgrade it with cash for a new one and pay them off to seal up the record of sale so no one will ever know I'm the one that bought it.

* * *

"I can't do this," Riot whines in the

phone as I pick at my dinner later that night.

“I told you to only call for emergencies.”

“It *is* an emergency.” He sniffles.

“What’s going on?” I toss my napkin down next to my plate. I’ve lost my appetite.

“She’s got some other guy here. I think it’s her boyfriend. What’m I supposed to do? I don’t want to hang around and get in the way. What if they go back to her room and I have to listen to them having sex?”

I laugh. “Are you shitting me? She’s really into you, and she’s single. She doesn’t have a boyfriend.”

“Well, there’s a really good

looking guy here and he's definitely checking her out. She looks like she's interested in him, too. Forget it. I'm out of here. I'm going back to your place in L.A." His voice is shaky, kind of like my stomach at this point.

"Put. Her. On. The. Phone. I'll fix this," I say through my teeth.

He makes a grunting noise, and I can tell it's just about killing him to do this and face her.

"Hey, Ides," Stormy answers a moment later.

"Hey, what's going on? He thinks he's in the way," I tell her.

"He's not. I was making sure he was comfortable. This is my dealer."

"Dealer? Hold on—Riot's not a

druggie.” I motion for the waitress to bring me the check. “He doesn’t even drink soda. Well, except right before we left my place, but that’s not normal for him.”

“No, silly, not drugs. I’m talking about cutting-edge shit. I could tell he was missing his electronics, so I was hooking him up with some newer gear.” She chuckles and then whispers, “I really like him. I want him to feel the same about me.”

I laugh. “Damn, you’re both trying too hard. Just kiss him and get it over with. Then he’ll quit wondering. You don’t have to buy him anything. He’s fine. He gets fidgety when he’s into a woman.”

“Here,” she says her voice far from the phone. “I want you to have this, Riot. I got this for you. That’s why he was here.”

There’s some muffled curse in the background and then the unmistakable sounds of kissing.

The phone clatters on their end.

I hang up and sigh.

I’m tempted to throw the phone out since I doubt he’ll need it from this point on, but instead I pocket it just in case.

I switch phones and call up Westin once more.

“He’s driving me nuts. How much longer ‘til you get here?” Westin answers.

“Soon. I had to take care of a few

things. I've gotta get Ty squared away, so I'll make one more stop, and then I'll be there. I'm also calling you to make sure my dad's okay. Has Lexi reported back to you like I asked her to?" I couldn't stand to hear any more about my dad's tears. It was too confusing and yanking my heart around, so I turned it over to Westin to deal with.

"She did, and he's fine. I talked to him as well. Just get over here. I'm not kidding." Nick yells some profanities in the background, and Westin chuckles. "You hearing this asshole? Get over here or there won't be a wall still in place. He's already busted a chair. He's fucking pissed. I've been hiding out on the deck. Fucker's got a temper on him."

“Don’t worry. He wouldn’t ever hurt you.” I smile.

“Yeah, yeah, easy for you to say when you’re miles away and carry around his favorite pair of boobs. I don’t have anything to offer him other than my fist, and I don’t like using them unless I absolutely have to.”

I laugh. “You’ve probably got twenty pounds of muscle on him. You’re huge, Westin. What’re you worried about?”

“I’m not ready to slit someone’s throat like a raging lunatic like he is. Plus, I may be huge, but I’m a pacifist in a lot of ways. I don’t like causing people pain. You already know what a wimp I am.”

I laugh harder. “Yes, I sure do.”

I pull out my wallet, grab some cash and put it in the billfold for the waitress, along with a generous tip.

“No fistfights. I want his face as pretty as it was when I saw him several hours ago.” I move out to my new vehicle. “Stay away from him and wait it out.”

“Ah shit. He’s breaking more stuff. Gotta go.”

The line goes dead, and I take off a moment later down the road, smiling wider than ever.

Love me some passionate Vapor.

One more stop, and then he’s mine.

I pull up in front of the lingerie shop twenty minutes later, and I can

barely blink since it seems surreal I'm about to step inside and buy something other than black cotton panties with matching bra. I can't think about how more than one woman might put her crotch on the same pair of panties when trying a pair on.

Chills of disgust race up and down my spine, like rollers with spikes, hitting nerves as they go. Fuck. So creepy!

The second I'm inside, a stiff cool breeze hits me and my arms break out in goose bumps.

I can do this . . . I can do this for *him*.

No, I can't!

I turn around to leave, but a voice calls out, "Oh, no you don't! Get in

here.”

There is a moment I think they might physically contact me, but I’m able to sidestep them. “Okay, I’ll do it. Just don’t touch me—either one of you.”

“Good thinking because if you try to leave again, I’ll have to manhandle you.” He grins.

“Ty, you can go now.” I frown.

“No way. I’m staying.” He smirks when I turn to him.

“You’ve already set this up, so I don’t need you anymore.” I glare at him and the woman standing behind him.

“This is my sister—Lora. Say hi,” he tells me, his right brow quirked up.

“Hi, Lora. Can I kick him out the door now? We used to date, so this is

really awkward. I don't want him here while I'm buying lingerie I'll be wearing for someone else."

"Jesus, Ty, that's low. Get lost. You're not allowed to be here now that I know all this." She pushes him out the front door as he sputters and tries to protest.

She locks him out, waves, and a moment of relief hits me until she picks up something lacy and pink.

"Uh, I may need a toilet because my meal may not stay down," I say, my stomach turning into a swamp of bile.

She looks me over. "Black's slimming, hon, but you'd look so soft and sweet in pink. Men love how feminine it is."

“I might look breakable in pink, and I’d feel like an idiot.”

She holds it out to me. “You never know. Try it on, and don’t think about how you feel. Think about what he wants from you.”

“Just to be clear—we’re not talking about Ty, right?”

“Hell no! He drives me nuts. He’s always messing with people. It’s time he quits being so immature.” She chuckles, points to the dressing room, and I’m off with something pink. “I know not to touch you, and I’ve cleaned the first dressing room to your specifications, so you can feel as comfortable as possible. I’m also only handing you pieces that I just pulled out of their packaging, so no

one else has touched them in the store. Get moving.”

What the fuck has happened to me?

What has Nick done to me that I’m reduced to *this? Lingerie shopping*. The words reek of lunacy.

My head swims as I shut the door to the dressing room, and I break out into a sweat as I strip myself of all I know.

Lord, please help me figure out how to even think pink and girly and seductive.

I may need to take up drinking after this . . .

Maybe a pink, fizzy, fruity, girly drink might help. At least my crotch won’t be involved with that.

Chapter 20

Vapor

“Why am I in Aspen with your pansy-ass?” I ask Westin, rubbing at my temples.

I just threw his bag at him, and I’m still breathing hard. The prick deserved it, since he won’t tell me what’s going on.

“Take it easy, you’re still getting over what happened to you,” he says, eyes wide and backing away from me.

“What happened to me then? Are you gonna finally fucking tell me?” I push my bangs off my sweaty forehead.

“I can’t. Not yet. It’s orders.” He

puts his palms in front of his chest. “But you’re safe, so stop freaking out.”

I don’t remember drinking, but I sure as shit feel hungover. My energy’s sapped today, and I can’t seem to stop flying into a rage.

Where the hell is she? Why am I here?

Questions pound in my head along with the pressure from exerting myself as I threw shit at *his* head moments ago.

“Tell me something—*anything*.” My throat aches as I try to calm my breathing down.

“I brought you here—I already told you, Dena’s gonna meet you, and I’ll leave as soon as she arrives. Then you two can make clown-hacker babies or

whatever it is you plan to do with her now that you've gone all good-guy and don't steal shit anymore." He smiles.

"Whatever," I say. He's shitting me. Gotta be.

His phone vibrates and he answers it. "Hiya."

I roll my eyes and sip my coffee. My hand shakes as I wrap my hands around the mug.

"No way! You sold his fucking bike? He's gonna kill you. Maybe you should take the scenic route to give him some time to cool down."

I spit my coffee out. I'm in his face and rip the phone out of his hand. "You did *what?*"

"I can explain," she says, her voice

all sexy and silky as fuck.

I turn away from Westin, and I'm pacing right away. I'm half hard already just off her voice.

"And I've got a surprise for you to hopefully cushion the blow," she says, voice shaky.

"Explain why you're there, and I'm here. Why aren't you with me?" I almost yell.

"Calm down, baby. I can explain everything. Sit down, grab something to drink, and I'll tell you what's going on, since I'm sure Westin's already fucked it up."

I head out to the deck for some privacy so Westin won't listen to my conversation, but the fucker follows me

out with my coffee in his hands. He places it on the table and then takes up a spot far from me, against the deck railing.

“He has royally fucked it up like you wouldn’t believe. I hate being here with him. He likes the cold at night and in the early morning, and he won’t fucking turn the heat on. Every time I put it on, he turns it off. The dude’s a polar bear in disguise.” I nod even though she can’t see it.

“Drink your coffee,” she says. “It’ll warm you up.”

“Coffee? How’d you . . . ?” My head whips around from side to side. We’re out on the back patio of a secluded rental cabin.

“Yeah, your coffee, and why are you barefoot out here? Animals piss all over these decks. The germs!”

I chuckle. “What else am I already doing that’s pissing you off and turning you on?”

“Well, you do look rather edible in those black jeans, but then that’s not fair. You know I’m partial to that color.” I can hear the smirk in her voice.

“Oh, you nasty girl, you always know just what to say.” I chuckle, lean back into the chair and take a drink. “I’d touch myself, but no telling what Westin might do. See how fucked up this situation is? You’re away from me and taunting me. Not nice.”

Where is she? If she sees me, does

that mean I can possibly find her if I look hard enough? Or does she have some kind of hidden camera on me as usual.

That woman's very voyeuristic.

"What if I say I'm trying very *hard* to be nice? I'm so sorry, sweetheart, but I have to tell you this—your father's dying."

"Wh-what?" I choke on my drink, spraying it once more.

"Well, he's hurt pretty badly. He's in the hospital," she says, voice faint and sympathetic. "I'm so sorry, Nick . . . And I had to sell your bike so he couldn't find us, but I didn't know my dad would do what he did so quickly . . ." She sniffs hard. Jesus, is she crying?

"Where. Are. You? I need to see

you right now,” I say, gripping the edge of the table in front of me. “Please fucking tell me you’re nearby, or I swear to God I’ll—”

Cliiick.

The phone line goes dead, and when I turn around, the door opens. She steps out, looking sad and disheveled.

Westin goes inside, leaving us alone.

“I’m sorry. Do you hate me?” Tears stream down her cheeks.

“God, no!” I say, launching myself at her. “I mean, I’m shocked this happened to him, but still . . . I’m just glad to have you here with me.”

I tackle her to the ground. She winds her body around me and shakes as

she sobs.

Before long, I'm crying, too. "Tell me what happened."

"I broke into your dad's computer, and I found out that your father and mine had a long standing feud. They were jealous of each other, and it seems they had rival criminal rings going on. They were both thieves and trying to make a name for themselves. They were both into technology as well, so when I showed some aptitude for inventing crazy stuff, my dad pushed me really hard, and then when he tried to claim them as his own, and I got in the way, well, he felt he had no choice but to steal my shit and sell them as his own. What he didn't know was your father's people

were buying my ideas and giving them to your father.”

I rub my left temple and then hug her so tight, my ribs ache. But then, it feels like Westin was kicking the shit out of me while I was unconscious.

“Were they keeping us apart because of their issues with each other?” I ask.

“Yeah, I think so. It’s not entirely clear, but my dad certainly does not like you.” She shivers for a moment.

“Fuck, you’re out here in this stupid chilly morning air with just a hoodie on, and your hands are ice cold.” I grip her hands between mine and blow some heated breaths onto them.

She smiles. “Thanks.”

“Welcome. Anything to make you all nice and toasty warm.” I kiss her fingertips and give her that look. The one that says, I want to have my lips in other places—other places that may not be cold, but I don’t give a fuck what temperature they are.

“My head hurts. Will you kiss that, too?”

I chuckle and kiss the top of her head. “I could tell when I went and visited him he hated me. He got all weird when I said my first name. Makes sense now.”

“Your dad was less than pleased when he made me pay him a visit as well. It was so odd. He forced me to go there, but yet it was obvious he couldn’t

stand being anywhere near me. I wasn't sure what to do, so I just did whatever he said."

"Well, it's a good thing my mom isn't in the picture," I say. "She'd have messed his shit up. She was always really sweet, and never put up with his crazy mood-swings. It's one of the things I remember well about her."

"What happened to your mother? You probably told me before in high school, but I'm sorry, I can't remember what you said." She kisses the underside of my jaw and then caresses it.

"She died in a car accident when I was really little." I stare in her mesmerizing, shocking electric blue eyes. God, I love how expressive they

are when she's looking back at me this way.

She blinks twice, her face drops and my stomach knots a little.

"Mine, too," she says, voice soft. "And then my dad had this girlfriend he was crazy about for a few years, and she suddenly disappeared. I never knew what happened to her." She scans her eyes over my chest, then back to my face like she can't believe I'm touching her again and we're finally together. "I know I didn't ever share this shit with you back in high school. I didn't tell anyone about my mom. I didn't want them pitying me. I'm sorry I didn't confide in you like I should've."

"It's fine. I could tell it was a

sensitive topic for you.” I run my hands through her hair. “Wait, you said he had a girlfriend for a while he was really into? No shit? Mine did, too. What did she look like?” I gaze at her beautiful face and kiss her softly.

“She had shoulder-length auburn hair, green eyes, and . . .” she trails off, her eyes going wide. “What was his girlfriend’s name? Do you remember?”

“Libby,” I answer.

“Libby *Hodgekins*?” She swallows hard. “Fuck! How’s this possible?”

“Did you know her well?” I ask, sitting up straighter, my heart pounding.

“Yeah, she was great and came around all the time. I loved her to death.”

“Christ!” I squirm in my spot.

“Oh. My. God!” we both manage to say in unison.

“She wasn’t . . .” Her eyes go wide. “Do you think she was pregnant and left because she didn’t know who the father was, or something?”

“No.” I shake my head. “I bet they told her to choose, and knowing my dad, he chased her down.”

Her brows all but fuse together. “Why do you think she’d choose my dad over yours? My dad was just a security guard, and he didn’t make much money. Well . . .” she pauses “. . . *legitimate* money. I have no idea how much money he was truly stockpiling behind the scenes, since I was too young at that

point to really monitor all his financial activities when he started up his electronics business to market my stuff. I managed to keep tabs on both our money once I got into high school but she wasn't around anymore at that point. One of the people that worked for him actually showed me how to do that. It's how I found out Dad was stealing from me."

"God, he's the biggest sleaze ever, the way he treated you." My jaw flexes. "She wouldn't have chosen my dad though. He has a horrendous temper, and he's a nasty pervert." I stick out my tongue like I bit into something foul.

"Into ropes?" she teases, running her fingers across my jaw. "And licking

his woman's crack?"

"Fuck no! He's not that creative. He's into threesomes and orgies and shit. I heard about the parties he went to when he'd send me to Nana's for the weekend. That's when I started looking for girls that were nice—innocent and pure. And that's how I eventually found and fell in love with you." I kiss her eyelids, and she makes this soft, pleasurable sound that travels directly to my dick. "Can we stop talking about them now?"

"We can, but I wasn't done. My dad's in the hospital, too. They both got run off the highway."

"Shit. Did they crash into each other?" I shift her to straddling me, then I

cup her cheeks and stare into her beautiful soulful eyes again.

“No. It happened at separate times and on separate freeways. I think they had another enemy I’m unaware of,” she says, eyes soft and empathetic.

I smile. “I don’t care anymore. They got what they deserved.”

“I thought you had a decent relationship with your dad. You defended him in court against me,” she reminds me.

I chuckle. “I did that for *you*. I did it to see if you loved me or not. If you had turned me in then I would’ve known it was over. But you didn’t.”

I give her a light kiss, but as soon as my mouth leave hers I realize it’s not

enough and drag my tongue across her lips. She tastes so fucking good—need more.

I pull at the hem of her shirt and then drag it over her head.

She blushes right away.

“Holy shit. Pink.” I gawk at her breasts. “Goddamn.” My mouth waters. “*Lace.*”

“Yeah. For you.” She blushes darker. “I wanted to be more feminine for you.”

“Hell yeah, it’s for me. I love it! No other fucker’s gonna see this.” I run my hands over her cups. The lace feels incredible on my palms. I groan, and my belly heats.

She smiles at me and then pulls my

shirt free.

Her palms, now a little warmer, settle on my chest and she bites her lip at me. “You didn’t wear something pink for *me*?”

“That’s for chain gang inmates in Arizona, and I didn’t get thrown in jail yet.” I laugh.

She smirks. “Thank God for that.”

“So, you didn’t turn me in at court. You could’ve made sure they transferred me to the desert and put pink underwear on me. Why didn’t you do it? Do you love me?” I dip my head down to get a better look in her eyes.

“You’re right. It wasn’t because I was afraid of what Paco might do to you behind bars. I didn’t turn you in because

I *do* love you. More than you can possible know.” She places her palm over my heart.

“Fuck.” My eyes slide up in my head and I moan, “Say that again.”

“I love you, Nick . . . Vapor . . . man I’ll fuck every day until I die, and I will eat you, tied in ropes, and I will fuck you in the shower, and I will suck on you until—”

“Okay, this was all really hot until it turned into *Green Eggs and Ham*, BDSM edition.” I cup her breasts and nip at her lower lip.

“What? I was trying to be creative,” she says, shrugging.

Her tits bounce in my hand, and I laugh.

Until her eyes turn dark and her lids are half closed, and then I make some kind of raspy guttural sound.

I yank her down to lying flat. “You wearing pink is creative enough. I don’t need you to overdo it and break something.” I rub myself all over her.

“Animal’s piss here,” she reminds me, glancing at the deck.

“And Nick comes here in his girl—no exceptions, so you can shut up now.”

“You’ll bathe me after in hand sanitizer,” she warns.

“I’ll hose you down with rubbing alcohol if it means you’ll let me fuck you now—no more waiting.” I bare my teeth at her and growl like an animal.

She giggles, and it makes my cock

knock into her hip bone.

I slide down lower, line my body up with hers and consider where else she might be wearing pink.

All at once, I can't take it anymore.

"I can't . . . I can't get it," I say, trying to rip the rest of her clothes off, but my hands are shaking so bad, I can't do it. "God, let there be little pink panties in here."

I bite at her, break my damn zipper on my own jeans and struggle to lower them enough so I can get at her.

She has to help me after she gets her own pants off, and she's making these breathy, sexy sounds that are so amazing I almost come when her hands brush up against my dick when she

releases me from the confines of my clothes.

“Slow down . . . Ah . . . Easy, Nick . . . Goddamn, easy, *easy* . . . Wait a . . . Will you just—oohhh shit!” she says while I rip at her bra, breaking the straps off, and then I have her tits in my mouth while I’m already ramming my dick in her with her panties merely yanked off and shoved aside out of view. “You didn’t see them. They were pink and tiny, you silly bastard.” She laughs in broken gasps.

“No more . . . I can’t wait this long . . . Don’t ever do this to me again!” I grit my teeth and slam into her. “Thank you for the gift, but I can’t stop and admire them when I need to be fucking

you!”

I bite her neck, her tits and grip her so hard by the hips, I know there are already bruise marks forming.

“Slow down, you fucker—you’re going to end it before I even get started,” she says, pulling my hair, the laughter gone.

As if that’ll make me stop.

“Can’t. Don’t care . . . Have to fuck harder.” My neck strains and my dick plunges ahead recklessly. “I’ll hit your ass next if you don’t . . . Ahhhhh God . . . I’m gonna . . . Don’t do that,” I warn her as she grabs my ass and bites under my ear really hard. “Fucking woman . . . Gonna make me . . .”

“Slow . . . I said easy . . . I bruise

like a peach.” She bites me harder. “Slow it down, junior.”

“Fuck! God, I missed you.” I thrust harder. “Nothing like you . . . Feel so fucking good on my dick . . . Can’t stop . . . You feel this . . . I know you do. Tell me . . .” I rip my neck away from her lips, suck her tongue into my mouth and angle myself higher above her so I can gain better leverage with my hips.

She reaches down and strokes her clit at the speed she wants.

Whatever. I’m sure she’s getting some good friction from my jeans, barely below my dick and balls. I’ll make sure she comes over and over later. She’ll have more than enough attention and tenderness. She’ll have so

much she'll beg me to leave her be.

She moans and sighs and her breath hitches. Her abs flex. She breaks the kiss, and tendons stand out in her neck as her head tips back.

I'm sure I resemble some goddamn wildcat, fucking his caught prize without consent, but I don't give a fuck. She's mine. She's under me. Will fuck her how I want—how I have to. There's no choice. None.

She moans with a strangled cry, and her eyes close tight as she all but rips the hair out at the nape of my neck. My mouth is back on her—breaths pounding into hers.

I release her mouth and get in her face. “Tell me you want me . . . fucking

you all the time . . . Tell me you love my cock! God, Jesus, woman . . . Tell me you were dying like I was . . . to be with me.” I stare into her eyes, and grip her chin. I pant hard and give her a harsh, penetrating look. It’s hard to breathe and speak.

There’s a hail storm of emotions in her eyes. “I love you, Nick. And I couldn’t live without you. I tried . . . I made sure my remote worked and the chip inside you was calling you to me, and it brought you to San Diego.”

My eyes go wide. “I thought you swallowed your old chip I reconfigured, and I pushed the button on that pet remote, and made *you* come to *me*?” I blink hard and swallow, still fucking her

like a maniac.

She smiles and strokes my cheek.
“It doesn’t matter.”

My frenzy kicks up another notch, and I fling her ankles up on my shoulders, grab her tits and jam myself so hard inside her, I can barely inhale.

“Fuck . . . Don’t know what you’re doing to me, my dirty bitch . . . Gotta have this . . . Gotta have you.” I sweat and shake, about to explode inside her.
“Seven fucking weeks . . . Of not touching you . . . Of not having this . . . I hate you for that. That’s what mattered. That’s what counts. Taking you away from me, that’s what this is all about.”

She pretends to glare at me, and I speed up the pace to damn near

supersonic. “Easy . . .” she almost whispers. “God, I’m . . . I wanna come with you.” She grips her thighs, pushing them together. “You better . . . slow it the fuck down or I’m gonna . . .”

“Oh, shit . . . So tight . . . I can’t last . . . Jesus . . . Too good, and you’re . . . Fuck, you want me. My beautiful girl wants me.”

She nods and bites her lip through a mischievous smile.

“Gonna fuck you all night, woman . . . When you sleep, when you eat . . . You won’t get away again,” I warn.

“I love it, and I love you,” she says, breathless. “I like the idea of . . . Oh, Christ!” She moans and her back arches off the ground because I’ve angled my

hips up in such a way, I know I'm hitting the jackpot.

"You like that? You want more?" I taunt. "Good . . . You fucking kill me. So damn gorgeous and brilliant. Can't think straight without you."

"Ohhhh . . . more, yes, *more* . . . I . . . Nick . . . squirting's really dirty . . . but I'm gonna . . ." She makes a dying, whimpering sound at the back of her throat.

"Oh shit! . . . You're gonna . . . God, yes . . . squirt on me, sweetheart . . . be a nasty slut . . . I wanna . . . *C-cooommmme!*" I grunt and strain, and it's too much, the idea of her squirting on me.

And then I bite her ankle, fling her

legs off me, and she's doing it. Goddammit, she's squirting all over me, and I come undone.

“Ahhhh . . . Fuck, so hot!” I say through my clenched jaw, my eyes heavy and locked on her gushing pussy.

I come so hard, yet I manage to reach down with my hand and catch spurts of her juices flying out of her.

Once I have some, I'm licking my palm and staring into her eyes, burning for her.

“That's disgusting . . . It might be pee—and I—” She cuts herself off as I shove one of my fingers in her mouth. Her eyes go wide, and then she cries out. A second later, she's convulsing, gasping for air and clawing at my chest

as she finds her orgasm.

And it's long, and hard, and dirtier than she is, and I fucking love it.

Her lips wrap around my finger, and she bites me.

“That's it, come on me, dirty girl . . . You squirt more, and I'll lick it all up, even if it lands on this pissed on deck,” I say in her face through my clenched teeth.

I yank my finger out of her mouth and hiss at the pain of her teeth, scraping. She growls at me. I pinch her titties, and she milks my cock, finishing off my orgasm. It's hard to breathe, and I was barely able to say that twisted shit to her, but I had to. She's worth it.

“Ahhhhh God, you're trying to kill

me for fucking with our dads,” she says, her arms flopping to her sides.

I shove her legs apart, pull out and lick at her pussy, sucking up all the juices she fountained out of her cunt.

Tastes good. Tastes like her. And *me*.

Best.

Cocktail.

Ever!

Her hips buck at me and her sensitive clit makes her shake as I suckle and lap at her. “I keep trying to tell you—that might be piss. No one knows what a woman squirts—and if you think I’ll kiss you after you’ve—”

I cut that stupid shit off and lunge at her, shoving my tongue in her mouth.

“Taste it . . . Tastes good,” I tell her between breathless, spine-melting kisses.

She groans and pulls my hair again.

God, I love it when she does that, so I growl hard and bite her bottom lip.

“It’s not piss . . . It’s you, being my nasty bitch,” I say. “God, you’re sexier than any fucking woman ever.”

“Christ—why do I love it when you say that sick shit to me and call me a dirty bitch?”

“Because that’s what you are—my bitch. I own you now . . .” I smirk.

She reaches down and yanks at my pubes.

“Ow!” I say, pretending to be hurt.

“Big baby . . .” She rolls her eyes.

“And I want you to know—this is how much I missed you—I went online, did some research, and taught myself how to squirt for you. I practiced a ton. It’s exactly like urinating. I press down and I —”

“Shut up—I don’t wanna know what you’re doing. Just do it every time, and I’ll worship you every goddamn day of my life.” I press my forehead against hers, trapping her on the ground.

I *am* an animal. I’m almost head-butting her, telling her to release what might be piss and I’ll lick it up.

“But the unsanitariness of it—you have to know, if you’re gonna keep putting your mouth down there,” she says, her voice breaking a little.

“Get rid of that goddamn hair like I told you, and it’ll be a faster, easier clean-up for me, but I’m not gonna let your pussy geyser go to waste, regardless of what you do. I’m slurping that shit up.” I lick my lips.

“Those hairs protect me from getting infections,” she says, rolling her eyes at me.

I slide my forehead across hers. “And I told you, it lowers incidences of crabs. It’s good for you to whack those hairs off at ground level. They’re weeds, getting in the way of my garden. And I need to sow some wild oats.”

She giggles. “You’re such an asshole, and so stupid sometimes.” She pauses and grows serious. “Uh, I have to

tell you something.”

“Tell me whatever you want.” I’m damn near giddy after being inside her again. I wondered if I’d ever be able to do that again with her.

“You remember that time I had something inside my vagina? When you broke into my office in my home?”

“What did you *do*?” I blink and stop breathing.

“Well, I wanted to make sure you didn’t have any STDs. I got your semen tested.”

“They use blood and urine to test for that shit, not semen.” I rub my face. “Why’d you do that anyway? You could’ve just asked me for some proof, since clearly you didn’t believe me

when I told you I was clean.”

“I know, I should’ve, but I didn’t want to be afraid of anything anymore. And I didn’t know if you’d lie to me or forge some papers, so I went ahead and did it. I got myself tested, too, and I didn’t know how to ask you for a urine sample, so I did this instead. I also wanted to make sure we’re compatible, and we are. Sorry. I hope you’re not mad.” She covers her eyes with her hands.

I pry them off. “It’s fine. Just tell me next time what you’re worried about.”

“Okay, I will, but there’s more.”

“What else?” I grin at her.

“I had it go off like a timer, the

vibrator, so I could feel where my G-spot was and so I could learn where to focus when I squirted. I wanted to feel what it would be like when you were thrusting inside me. It helped. I was able to practice after that, but I was too embarrassed to tell you.” She bites her cheeks and sucks in some air.

“It’s fine. You did it for us, you did this for me. If it taught you to squirt, then fucking God, do whatever you need.”

“I also wanted a DNA sample, so I was being tricky. We only had a few seconds to come so the ball inside me could capture it and seal it shut when the timer went off. Seriously,” she pauses and stares at me with fear in her eyes, “you don’t hate me?”

“Sweetheart, talk to me in the future. That’s all I ask. I’m not mad—a little frustrated you’re doing shit behind my back because it means you don’t trust me—but hopefully I can gain your trust over time and this type of thing won’t happen again.” I give her a stern look. “It’s not gonna happen again, is it?”

“No, Nick. It won’t. I do trust you now, more than anyone. So much I have some other things I want to share with you. But they’re all good, and I’m not ready to do it now. Can we do it later?”

I nod and hug her tight.

“Sounds like you’ve been feeling guilty. How about some anal to make it up to me?” I smirk.

“I’m not into butt-fucking,” she

says, then yawns and stretches. “You know this. I feel bad, but not *that* bad about what I did.”

“You’re into it now. Anal’s just become your new favorite hobby.”

“Am not. Think of how repellent those germs are. Defecation isn’t a laughing matter,” she says, narrowing her eyes at me.

She tries to sit up, but my knee goes on her belly, and I pin her in place.

“You’re telling me you won’t let me fuck your beautiful ass. Are you trying to wound me?” I peer into her eyes.

She chokes on a laugh and her chest lifts a little with each chuckle. “Not having anal sex is not gonna kill you.”

“It sure will. I’ve gotta have you —*all* of you, and if I don’t get my way . . .”

“You’ll *what*? Invent a chip that sends impulse waves to my ass, telling it to open up and say ahhhh?” She shakes her head and sighs like I’m a hilarious joke.

“That’s not a bad idea. Let’s get started on that model. God, can you imagine the millions I’ll make on that chip? I’ll call it the sex chip. It’ll have a nudity button, where the woman has to strip down wherever she is. It’ll have a cocksucking button, so she puckers up and sucks that dick harder and deeper than she ever thought possible. It’ll have a—”

“I only make positive inventions—you know—things that actually help humanity,” she says and caresses my knee, now digging into her.

“Oh, shit, sorry!” I remove it and kiss her chest.

“Yeah, I’m sure you’re torn up over it and you’ll have a chip that apologizes for you, too.” She slides up to sitting, and I straddle her thighs.

“I’m not kidding, Ides. We can do this. We can invent shit together and make millions.”

She blinks and goes silent.

“What? What’s wrong? You don’t trust me to work with you on your stuff?” My heart yanks to the side and is replaced with a dead weight when her

face goes stony. “That’s it—you don’t trust me. And we just said . . .”

I move off her and stand up, pacing right away.

“No, I . . .”

“You what? I can fuck you until you walk all bow-legged like John Wayne, and you can squirt all over me even if it grosses you out because of possible piss germs, but you won’t share a moment of your genius with me?” My fist flies out, and I punch the wall.

“You think I’m a genius?” she whispers, her eyes wide and her mouth forming in an O.

“You know you’re a genius—stop fucking with me,” I say, throwing my hands up in the air.

I turn around, pick up the deck chair and chuck it out into the goddamn wilderness.

“Unfuckingbelievable.” I turn to her, my eyes slits and my breathing harsh. “Do you know what you mean to me? I haven’t stolen a fucking thing since I took that remote from you. I knew you didn’t approve, so I stopped. Plus, I was really doing it because I worked for my dad. I even cut back on drinking—all for you. I’d give you all my best ideas and swallow my planet-sized ego so you could improve on them, and *you*?”

She winces.

“You won’t even share a damn idea with me.” I turn away from her. The stinging at the back of my eyes is

unbearable.

I run my hands through my hair and choke back the names I wanna call my pussy-self.

A moment later, a soft, warm mouth is landing on the back of my shoulder.

“You done with your rant so I can speak now? Sounds like I need to share what else I want to give you.”

I turn to her and grip her arms. “Why? Why can’t you love me like I do you? Why can’t you see you’re everything to me?”

She smiles and it’s soft and warm and genuine, and fuck, I think I love her even more now, even if she’s about to kick the shit out of me even harder than she has before in the past.

She places a finger over my lips.

“I love that you’re such a douche-bag sometimes—stealing shit. But you’re right—I don’t want you to do that anymore, except . . .” I blink and try to nod, but she keeps going “. . . except in the case that we might need to protect ourselves or steal stuff back that someone else takes from us.” She bites the corner of her lip and her smile grows wider.

“Ussss?” I hiss between her fingers.

“That’s right. I already filed to change the name of my company to Vaporides Inc.”

“Holy shit,” I whimper, her finger muffling me.

“Shut up. I’m not done,” she says, her eyes all sparkly and girlie and shit. I kiss her finger—want to suck it and bite it, like she did to me.

“Our first project—is to dismantle your dad’s business. Knowing him, he won’t die, and we’ll need to take him down. I have the codes for a prototype he was building. I wanted your DNA when I took that sample in case I wasn’t able to get ahold of his. I got it, though.”

Her fingers slide down my chin, then over my Adam’s apple, across my sternum and straight down to my cock. My body ripples with pleasure under her soft, unhurried touch.

“You put your chip in me back at the hotel in San Diego, didn’t you?”

“I did.” She smiles. “I want you to have full access to everything I do. You can walk right into Vaporides Inc. and do whatever you like.”

“God, I love you,” I say.

“I know. You *better* love me, since I let you fuck me in dirt and grime. I’m sure I’m swimming in untold of diseases that have yet to be discovered.”

“I love it when you talk dirty like that.” I grab her into my arms and pinch her ass.

She squirms and says, “Don’t you wanna know what the prototype is for?”

I kiss her neck and my hands grip her ass. “Mmm . . . No, but I’m sure you’ll tell me anyway.”

My entire body pulses around her,

and I'm rocking into her, my chest curling around her as I taste the muck and shit she professes is clinging to her body from my disgusting way of fucking her out in the open—out in the wild.

“He took my biggest idea—the one Tyson ran off with—my ex,” she begins.

I pull away and glower at her. “I don't ever wanna hear about another man you've ever touched. Not Riot, not —”

“But don't you wanna hear about what I found out about Tyson?”

“No! Especially not him. You were gonna suck his dick, if I remember correctly.”

She nods her head and smiles. “But I didn't get to.”

“Thanks be to Jesus and all his millions of microchips,” I say.

“You’ll want to know this, I guarantee it.” She pushes at my chest to get away.

I grip her tighter and suck at the curve of her neck.

“Okay, so I’ll skip the stuff about Tyson, since this big ol’ baby can’t handle it, but your dad stole my slimboy and was rigging it up to suck up security codes. It meant he’d be able to break into any place at all he pleased.”

I pull away enough so I can look her in the eye. “No shit? He found a way to make the rocket work?”

“The *rocket*?” Her face pinches, and her eyes are filled with doubt.

“Yeah.” I chuckle. “I was trying to make this rock-like object that could be tossed down a chimney and disrupt security systems. I had Westin fooled for a while that it worked on your place. It didn’t. Jason was helping me get in.”

She smacks my chest. “You jerk—breaking in uninvited all the time. You nearly gave me a heart-attack each time, and your dad told me he was gonna kill me if I didn’t find a way to keep you out permanently.”

“What a dick.” I sway her back and forth.

“Yeah, he’s a big dick. I think yours is bigger though.” She grins wider.

“Promise? Don’t be a dirty bitch if you’re not gonna back that shit up.”

“Promise,” she says, crossing her heart then sucking on that very finger that just swore.

“Prove it,” I say, and I shove her onto to her knees. “Open wide and say ahhh.”

She not only drops her mouth open, but she reaches back, grabs my ass, and slams me forward into her mouth.

“That’s my dirty bitch,” I moan, and she has me harder than fuck in no time at all.

Chapter 21

“Got it,” I say, starting the engine.

Westin hops on his bike and follows behind me.

We part ways at the intersection, and a few hours later, we're at our new location.

“What color do you want it?” he asks as I roll into the garage and park.

“She doesn't like silver, so none of that. Go with basic black and maybe some purple streaks on the sides?” I grin and stare at the car.

He smiles and salutes.

“I'll be back in a few hours. I need to take care of something else.” I get in her Veyron she'd let Riot borrow after

their parting in San Diego, then I disappear down the road.

When I finally get home later in the day, Dena's napping.

She looks beautiful and so peaceful, but I need to fuck her.

I strip down and yank it for a second as I watch over her sleeping form.

Before I get going, I reach over to the nightstand, squirt some homemade lube onto my hand and slick my cock up.

She's got little purple panties on. Too bad I'll have to break them.

I crawl up on the bed, cut them off with my knife and before she inhales, I'm inside her.

"Shit . . . You feel good," I moan,

gripping her hips and riding her hard.

“Nick, what’re you . . .” She glances down between our legs to find me fucking her.

“Yeah, I missed you . . . God, you’re so tight when you’re half-asleep,” I say, humming low in my chest at all the sensations she creates inside me. Just looking at her makes my body vibrate with energy. “So fucking snug, and insanely perfect.”

“Did you get my message?” she asks and rubs the sleep out of her eyes.

“Yeah, I heard it, nasty girl. Making me hard like that—not right.” I thrust harder. “You’re so beautiful right now—all flushed already from me, even though I’ve barely started fucking you. You feel

how hard you made me?”

“You deserved to be tortured like that, you ass. I heard what you were doing. Westin told me.” She flips me off and bites her lip like she wants to bite me.

“He’s such a tattle tale.” I chuckle. “You knew I’d eventually steal my bike back. I love that bike.”

“You could’ve bought it back,” she says, and then she breaks into a caterwaul as I pinch her clit.

“I could buy you anything you want, but I had to do this . . .”

“Why?” she manages to choke out between breathless, heaving sighs.

“To show you I’ve still got bigger balls than you.” I spread her legs real

wide, and she flinches for a second, telling me I'm pushing her muscles too far. I let them inch back up, but only enough so it's not hurting her.

I lean over her chest, and her nipples brush against me.

"Guess who had my bike? And don't say it—I know you're already aware—but that asshole wasn't going to sell it back to me," I say, nipping at her jaw. "He's been trying to find you, the ugly shit."

"Tyson . . . ? How . . . is . . . he?" she cries out with each harsh slam of my cock into her.

"He's a fucking loser, that's how he is. He doesn't have you, and I do, and he can't have anything that's mine." I dig

my fingers into her as I hold her legs in place.

“He’s an investor in the metals we use for our . . . Oh God . . . Don’t stop . . . Shit, Vapor . . . That’s it, this bitch wants . . . Oh, god, ohgodohgodoh gaaaaawd!” She claws at my dick, feels it slick and sliding in and out of her, touching with her fingertips, almost worshiping our bodies joining together.

She’ll be sanitizing her hands like crazy later because of this.

“Whose pussy is this? And who has the only cock you’ll ever suck for the rest of your life?” I grip my fingers deeper into her thighs.

“It’s all yours—*yours*.” Her back bows off the bed.

“Damn fucking straight it is. We’re not taking shit from him. I don’t want his money funding anything you do.” I hold my breath for a second to fend off my orgasm. It’s too soon. She’s not there yet.

She nods, and her eyes close—a look of pure ecstasy on her face.

I pound into her, and we both go silent—no more words, only heated looks, groans of pleasure and her gushing all over me as I make her come hard.

I kiss gently and lick at all the places I was too rough with her. Over time, I keep thinking I’ll be less crazed for her, but if anything, I seem to need her more and am constantly ravenous for

her.

Everything about her makes me crazy for her.

So crazy I just had an entire conversation with her while I fucked her, because damn if I was gonna wait ‘til later.

Both were pressing and needed to be dealt with.

My hands caress her and as my heart rate slows, so do my words.

“Dena . . . I love you . . . Was I too rough?” God, my heart stops and most likely won’t start up again until she tells me it was fine—that she’s okay.

She chuckles and places her hand over her heart, then exhales with a dopey grin on her face. “When do you ever ask

me that?"

"I always ask that at some point. It might be an hour later, but I don't really wanna hurt you." I kiss the corner of her mouth.

She still wears a lazy smile.

"It was perfect. You were talking *waaaay* too much, you lippy bastard, but it was fine." She pants and tries to catch her breath.

I check her body over to make sure, even if she says it was all right. "Sometimes I wonder why you put up with my caveman shit."

She blinks and cups my jaw, dragging me back up her body. "Because I love your caveman shit. No one goes primal like you do. It makes me feel

safe, because then I know you love me and only me, and you'll do anything to keep me happy."

I smile and kiss her, because, yes, I do have that shit down.

"Okay, so change of subject," she says, her eyelashes fluttering for a second and her expression goes blank. "I want to talk to you about something else . . ."

"Oh God, no. That prick blabbed again, didn't he? Uuuungh!" I run my left hand through my hair. Really need to get this shit cut—it's too long.

"He did." She walks her hands up my chest. "What're you thinking? We've only been back together for a month."

"Five weeks and two days. And

before that we talked online for a month, and before that, I obsessed over you for years in high school. This isn't a brand new relationship. Only the fucking's new." I stare at her and convey with my eyes she better not start acting like we're strangers again. I hate it when she does that shit.

"Does it matter? You know what I mean. We have to keep running and moving around until we figure out what to do about our dads and any other enemies they have that might be pursuing us." She exhales and her chest rounds, making her breasts look extra perky. "Hillcourt's been after me for years. I'm sure they haven't given up."

I play with one of her nipples and

refuse to look at her.

“Jesus—are you pouting?” She runs her finger across my bottom lip.

“Maybe a little.” My heart clenches and throbs. “Why shouldn’t I?”

“Well, if you can’t even discuss this with me like an adult, then there’s your answer.” Her fingers drift through my chest hairs.

I play with her other nipple now and fixate on it. “He shouldn’t have told you that shit.”

“Westin can’t keep anything to himself—you know that. So, if you’re going to tell him something as private as that, then you should expect it’ll get back to me.” She blows across my chest hairs, making them prickle and tingle.

I move up to kneeling over her and still keep my eyes on her tits, since she's probably frowning or glaring at me. "Please? I really want this—be a good little woman and give it to me."

"No, Nick—*Jesus*." Her hands smack on my abs. "You know this would amp up my neuroses and anxiety level so bad, I'd probably stop functioning."

"I'd help with everything the—"

"I don't care if you hire nannies and wet-nurses. Do you know how much babies vomit and poop and pee? It's a germ-fest disaster of epic proportions. I can't have children. I'd scrub them with iodine solution until there was nothing left of them but bones, and I'd probably bleach those, too." She smacks her

palms once more on my heated skin. “And will you please look me in the eye?”

My bottom lip juts out even further and here it comes.

“Oh fuck . . .” she whispers.

“Yes . . . That’s what we do—a *lot*—and we should make a kid.” Tears stream down my cheeks. “I love you—and this is what people do when they’re crazy in love—they make new people out of that love because their heart’s too big to contain in one body.”

Her eyes soften. “I can’t . . .”

“Or won’t?”

“Won’t. Even if I could get over all my issues, which I probably can’t, our life isn’t conducive to having a family.

We're on the run. We're not stable, and we . . .” She bucks her hips up into my ass. “I don't want to be stuck with kids right now. I love that you can throw me down at a moment's notice and fuck my brains out. It's shit like that—makes me feel alive and gets me out of my fucked up head. I'm not ready to give that up.”

“Pregnancy is nine months,” I remind her.

She rolls her eyes. “No.”

“Please? God, think about it at least. Just don't say no.” I settle my body back down over hers and kiss her lips softly. “You'd be an amazing mom, and I'd be a kick-ass dad. We should be a family.”

She stares at me with a far off look

and says, “We have time. We can revisit this later when people aren’t after us, trying to steal our ideas and kill us. We’re still looking into Rich Hillcourt. We need to keep an eye on him.”

No one’s succeeded at any of those things yet.

“Paranoid,” I whisper, and she smacks my chest. I laugh for a second, and it feels better, but I’m still breaking inside over the idea she doesn’t want to make babies with me. I love kids.

“Think of the dirty diapers and the smell . . .”

“Think of the amazing sex we’ll keep having and how it’ll result in something beautiful and perfect like you.” I roll her on top of me. She shakes

her head and smirks at me like she thinks I'm adorable. "Well, at least ride me to make me feel better, woman. It's the least you can do."

"The least I can do is get up and go sanitize. I already feel dirty with all this baby-diaper talk."

I reach up and fondle her tits.

Nice view, mama. I want them leaking with tittie juice . . .

I lick my lips and let her get me hard again, take me inside, then let me come once more. Need to get her off those damned pills.

* * *

"Hey, babe, I'm heading over to

Vaporides,” I say, out of breath. Fuck, I love that name. Can’t get enough of saying it.

“Stop name dropping.” Dena looks up at me from scrubbing the kitchen sink. “I’ll come, too. I’ve got some stuff to take care of there.”

“Westin’s waiting. I’ll just meet you there,” I say, anxious to go.

“Just wait. Give me a minute.” She huffs through her nostrils as she scrubs that fucker like it’s coated with the black plague.

“Okay, fine, but I’m warning you now, I’m about to head in there and show them who’s boss.” I smirk.

“Would I expect anything else from you? And besides”—she blows some

loose hair out of her eyes—“you *are* the boss. They already know that, and our employees will treat you with respect.”

“They’ve never actually met me though. They’ve only spoken to me on the phone and through emails.” I tap my toe.

“I’m coming, I’m coming,” she says through her teeth, then she finally puts down the goddamn scrub brush, puts her cleaning supplies away and washes her arms like she’s going to perform open heart surgery next.

“Woman, you’re clean. Let’s go.” I point at the door.

Westin comes barging in. “Come on—women are circling your Veyron like vultures. They see me inside, and they

need dick. I'm not about to give in to them." He chuckles. "My new girlfriend, blondie, won't let me do her if I give in like that."

I chuckle. "At least she's sticking around in your igloo with you. What temperature do you keep it at night? Forty-five? If you want her to roam around naked, you can't go below seventy-eight—trust me. Dena won't—ow!" Something is chunked at my head.

When it bounces off the floor, I look down and find one of my shoes I'd failed to put away.

I turn to her. "We're not having this discussion with Mr. Blabber mouth here. He'll post it on the web." She pretends to glare while she's giving me a close-

lipped smile.

She puts her shoes on, brushes her teeth, because she always does that before she goes anywhere, and Westin follows us out.

When we step inside the company door fifteen minutes later, my chip activates inside me. I get into any door I choose without having to wear a badge and swipe it through the security scanners like the rest of our grunt employees.

And everywhere I turn, someone's smiling, greeting me as "Hi, Mr. Vapor."

I eye my woman. "Mr. Vapor? Who told them to call me that?"

She giggles, covering her mouth as she does, then she tosses her arms

around me and kisses me with a freedom I've never seen from her in public before. "I did. I thought you'd like it—being the big man and all. They're showing respect—see? I do listen."

"Shit, woman, I'll fuck you right now and show them exactly who has the biggest balls here—so stop tempting me with your smart-ass mouth and hot body." I kiss her, and hold her tight. "This place is like you—it turns me on."

She whispers in my ear, "I thought you'd like it. This place always reminded me of that guy Vapor I talked to online. He was edgy, smart, fearless. It inspired me to give my creative engineers more freedoms."

I kiss her with a hungry growl, grab

her hand and we prowl around. Well, *I'm* prowling—*she's* giving me the grand tour, and when I'm not staring at her ass, then I'm generally impressed with the place and the people she's hired.

When we get to the final destination, I about lose it. I can barely breathe. “This is what I almost prevented you from doing by allowing my asshole dad to not pay you properly for the pet chipping device?”

I stare at the guns on the table, all of them unloaded of course, and all being tested for DNA sequencing.

She picks up a GLOCK at the end of the table. “Yeah—this is my biggest dream of all—to end domestic violence

in some way or another. If my dad's gun had been typed with his DNA, he wouldn't have even been able to dislodge a bullet in my direction." She smiles and her throat bobs as she swallows down all the thick emotions.

"Why the fuck don't we try this on us? With your own personal gun you carry around in your backpack? Let's do it now. Let me rig it up for you, and we'll test it out."

"I am not going to aim and shoot at you," she squawks as she sets the gun down.

"Yes, you are. We'll do something simple, like, shit, I don't know, I'll take off my shirt, we'll hang it up like those practice papers you shoot with, and

we'll see if the gun will allow you to do it or not."

She nods a tiny bit, but it's enough that I launch myself at her, and kiss her so hard and so fiercely, that she melts right into me, and kisses me back with equal enthusiasm.

"You think this will work?" she asks when I finally stop shoving my tongue down her throat.

"I know it will."

"Hey, you guys are so unprofessional," Westin says, approaching us, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, it's you." I roll my eyes back, grinning all the while. "I thought you'd left already."

"Nah, I wanted see what kind of

shit you two have going on here. I'm sure it's bad-ass." Westin looks at the guns and damn near salivates "No way. This is you, Ides?"

He drags his fingers over the gun she was just handling moments ago. "Yeah," she replies.

"I heard about your dad going psycho—was this the gun? It is, isn't it?" He stares at it, unblinking with his mouth popped open.

"It's my job to prevent something like this from happening to others if I can." She steps closer to him. "And this gun, I was hoping would be the first one to fix it—so while it's not a fancy firearm, and it's old, it means something to me, because you're right—it was the

gun my dad fired at me. And it's what made me realize sometimes money means more to people than blood relations, or even love."

"I'm working on this now. I'll get it working," I say, picking it up.

I study the piece. It's in good shape. Not that I'm an expert, but I've been around Dad's weapons, and he made sure I knew how to handle one and could shoot well, since he had aspirations to be some kind of mafia king.

She smiles at me, hugs me once more, and then dismisses herself to see to some other company matters.

I'm left with Westin, and after tinkering for hours, only stopping to get something to eat, we've brainstormed

and found an easier way to get this thing to do what she wanted. We've also changed some things a little. Not only will the gun fail to shoot at someone with the same DNA, but the owner can also put in the DNA of anyone they choose, so the gun will be blocked from harming that individual. We've given it a broader range.

Hopefully she won't be pissed I've made these modifications, along with the way it's thwarted.

She wanted to use the laser in the weapon to disrupt the weapon's mechanics. We found something simpler.

Westin helps me configure it so my DNA enters the gun from a saliva sample, being touched to the chip at the

base of the handle.

When I aim at my shoe I've taken off, and pull the trigger, the safety locking pin drops into place and jams up the gun completely, so they can't even keep hitting the trigger. I like this idea better, so if the gun decides it doesn't recognize the DNA of the other person, and loses its intuitive programming, they can't get around it and shoot the damned thing.

We've also made sure it's set so that if it recognizes some of the person's DNA, but it's less than a certain percentage, it will still fire. So, if a perpetrator manages to stab the person and get the victim's blood on them, the gun will still be able to shoot the

attacker.

“Hey, Mr. Vapor, is there anything I can get you before I go?” one of my employees asks me.

I look up at him. “Can you tell me what other ideas have been tried on these weapons real quick before you go? That’s all I need right now—information.”

He grins and settles his hand on the table. “We were originally working with the internal trigger lock, but it was unreliable. I have to say though, I didn’t think the laser sighting was the way to go. Not all weapons have one of those.”

I smile at him. “How long have you worked on this particular project?”

“For the last six months non-stop,

sir.” He gives me a hopeful look like he’d love to join Westin and me.

“Are you staying or going? We could use your help.” I point at the chair on the other side of me.

“Staying,” he says, his eyes impassive, but his smile bright.

“She’s gonna kill us for messin’ with her shit,” Westin tells me.

“She’s gonna let me fucking do this, because I’ll let some asshole tear me to shreds if I don’t protect my woman and make her feel like she accomplished something this helpful.” I pass the gun to Westin. “Aim it at my shoe. See what happens.”

Since his DNA isn’t coded into the gun, I wonder if it’ll work.

But when he aims it, the pin dislodges right away, and he can't fire it.

"Fuck. It's already working," the dude across from me says.

"Fucking A it is," I say, nodding.

I take the gun back, kick Westin's boot. "Take your damn boat off your foot. I'm gonna see if it works if I shoot at your shit."

"No. I like these shoes," Westin says, backing away.

"Here—you can use mine," our new helper says.

"What's your name?"

"My real name? Or the name Ides lets me use around here." He casts his eyes around. Is he looking for her? Is he interested?

“She’s into letting all sorts of shit fly around here, and I’m cool with that,” I start, “but you get this shit straight—she’s mine.”

His eyes go wide. “No, I didn’t mean . . .”

Westin bursts into a howling laugh. “Always jealous!”

“I’m sorry, I . . .” The guy across from me shakes his head, and looks mortified that I thought he was hot for Ides.

“Name?”

“Brigand,” he says. “But my real name is—”

“That *is* your real name as far as I’m concerned.” I smack Westin’s arm. “This here is Fingers. And you can drop

the Mr. for me. Just call me Vapor, and we're all good."

I nod, and he does the same in return.

"All right, Brigand. Your shoe's about to get drilled. You ready?"

He sets the shoe out so I can hit it and covers his ears.

Pap!

Pap! Pap!

The gun works fine for me.

Westin shoves me from behind.

"You owe this guy a new shoe, fucker. Or else you need to give him a raise."

"Definitely getting a raise, if you stay here a few more hours, and help me do the same to Ide's personal hand gun. I want that fucking thing ready to go so

when we get home, she knows she won't ever have to worry I'd turn on her and use her own gun against her." I touch the rifle next to me. "Ready to pull what might be an all-nighter?" I glance at Brigand.

He smiles wider, his teeth a white crescent sliver.

"Sounds like he's in." Westin chuckles.

"What about you? Stayin'?"

"It's too hot in here. I need a fan or something. What is this, a sweatshop?" Westin laughs and slaps the table.

"Seriously? If you touch this damn pistol with your tongue on the metal parts, I'm betting to God, your fucking tongue will be glued to that thing. It's

arctic in here. I couldn't get a hard-on if I wanted to." And just as I say that, Ides approaches us, hands me her backpack with her weapon inside and gives me a heated look.

"How's it going?" She gazes over the table, then her eyes land on Brigand. "These two assholes treating you okay?"

He nods, swallows and looks intimidated as hell by her.

"You tell me if they start acting like a bunch of idiots." She motions for him to give her his phone he had set on the table at some point. He gives it to her, and at my astonishment, she plugs in her phone number. "You call me the minute they act up, and I'll come back here and kick both their asses. And I won't do it

by turning their shoes into Swiss cheese.” She hands him back his phone, and then she digs out a wad of cash from her pocket and gives him some. “Buy yourself a new pair.”

“B-but I-I don’t—”

“Brigand . . .” Her right brow slants up, and she looks devilish and sexy as fuck. “I insist. When I make a mess, I fix it. When the man I love tears your shoes to shreds because he’s a jealous ass, I pay for you to get a new pair, because I can.” She sticks out her tongue at me. “Just promise me you’ll buy yourself a new pair.”

“Can I upgrade?” Brigand’s voice cracks.

“No,” I say, while she

simultaneously says, “Yes.”

“Well, damn. I’m working *here* from now on. Fuck the body shop.” Westin’s barking laugh rings in the air again.

“You’re hired if you can figure out how get my woman here to give me her saliva right now so I can type her handgun,” I say.

She gives me a look that says, “Are you challenging me?” Then she takes my palm in hers, and spits in my hand. “Good enough? Or do you need more? Just say the word. Only I won’t stick around. Fucking too many germs in spit.” She fights off a slight shiver.

“Fuck. You better turn the AC down in here,” I warn. “You’re making

me excited, gorgeous.”

Brigand looks away. Are we embarrassing him?

“Doesn’t take much, Mr. Vapor. Just keep it tucked in your pants. I haven’t approved nudity on the work floor yet.” She grins and then saunters away.

And I swear, I’m harder than the steel on these guns, sitting next to me, no matter how many ice crystals are about to form on my eyelashes with how freezing it is in here.

“We got this. We’ll have her gun ready to go in no time.” Westin claps my back, and some of her spit drips off the side of my hand.

I glower at him, and then tell him to

get back to work, in my most brutal boss tone I possess.

Mostly he laughs and calls me a pussy, but over the next three hours, we get her gun typed.

I place my phone on the stand and step back.

I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one that has some saliva on this thing. It should have her skin oils on it along with her fingerprints. Her hands have been all over it today, watching the latest video footage I took of us fucking in the garage. Safety off, I point the gun at my phone, but the trigger won't budge.

I need another test subject. Can't stop now.

Before Westin can protest, I've

grabbed his keys up from the table he set them down on, wiped them off with my shirt, licked them and set them down on the stand. When I aim at them, the same thing happens.

“Shouldn’t it have shot off a round? It doesn’t have my DNA programmed in.” Westin shifts in his seat.

“I set it to recognize the prominent DNA. I wiped off some of yours and slathered it in mine. The percentage of it being mine was greater than yours, so it froze up. It works.” I stare and grin at his keys.

“Goddamn,” Brigand says, almost breathless.

“Perfect.” I grin like a fucking lunatic, because that’s what I am.

A fucking lunatic with a disabled weapon, and a woman that's really gonna want to ride me hard tonight.

Chapter 22

Vapor

“Good Lord, how did you come up with this?” I stare at the cobra. “This is crazy genius.” I blink and my mouth drops open.

“Well, I . . . Uh, I wanted to get rid of clogs in the drain but didn’t want plumbers in my home with their cracks hanging out, sweating in my bathroom, so I, yeah . . .” she trails off and turns a shade of pink that reminds me of my favorite pair of her undies.

“So, let me get this straight. This thing went down the drain in my home and my dad’s.”

“Yes.” She blinks and smiles harder.

“And then you had it cut through the wiring for his Internet, plant a virus inside his home network and then you even did a scan of his entire home for other electronics.” I breathe hard. Can I have a bigger hard-on for this woman? I stroke her invention.

“Guilty. I know where every electronic device is in his house, who’s using it, what it does and how often it’s used. And I can shut down his Internet access at any time along with his phone line.”

I turn my head toward her. “And how do you keep it from infecting the neighbors’ lines?”

She rocks back into her seat and tucks her hands between her hair and her neck, then lifts her hair up. “The virus can take orders so it only infects whatever area I tell it to. I programmed it to be large enough to hit his main house, his garage and guest house in the back. It even covers most of his backyard. Should do what we need it to.” Her cheeks grow a brighter pink.

“Making you hot—all this talk?” I smirk.

“No. What makes me hot is you, salivating over my metal contraption here.” She fans and fluffs her hair for an air flow.

“So, how are you going to be putting Rich out of business? He doesn’t

have a cobra in his possession.” I reach out and stroke it again, studying all the parts of this thing.

“He doesn’t have to. Your dad’s company gave him their weasel, which is a pale imitation of the cobra, but I was able to get one of my guys in there to change it. Rich didn’t bring it home like I’d hoped he would, but he brought it to the corporation. He put it in their stockroom there. Jason’s girlfriend, Lexi, is in there now, as a new hire. She’s tweaking it, and it should do what we want fairly soon.” She bats her lashes at me and purses her lips, but it’s innocent and hell, I’m harder now.

I stroke her thigh. “And what else are your dirty little guys doing for you?”

“Well, don’t be mad, ‘kay? But I wanted to help you, too, so I filed for a patent for your invention White Flag.”

“My what?” I chuckle and give her a look like she’s overdone it on the happy pills today.

She opens up her laptop she had set off to the side and logs onto some website I’ve never seen before. “This is how we really take Rich down.”

I wrap an arm around her waist and she types in a code with a few numbers.

Ten people are logged on.

Chafe: We’re ready. Just say the word.

Totesmway: We’ve recruited more. It’s good to go, Ides.

I turn to her with my mouth hanging

open. “Sweetheart, what did you do?”
My eyes go big.

“You were aiming for military, waving the white flag so everyone would surrender. I wanted you to think about starting smaller, testing it out, then growing it outward. So right now we’ve got people set up to monitor big companies like your father’s. They look for glitches in the system, get inside and red flag any illegal activity they pick up on. It’s a monitoring system. We use the slimboy to break into their codes.”

I blink and breathe so loud there’s a whistling sound in my throat. “You did this? You took my box of shadows and did *this*?” It’s definitely illegal, the shit she’s talking about, but I’m not sure if I

care at this point. This is so hot.

“Sorry, hon. I just wanted to help you and show you it had other potentials. I was so impressed, but what you were going after was a little scary. I want us to be able to hide what we’re doing, and this was so bold, we would’ve always been running. You said you want kids—well, let’s take your dad’s company’s apart, get rid of Rich, maintain a smaller operation for now, and then we can see where it goes.” She fans her face with her hand for a moment. “I’m really sorry if I overstepped my bounds here. I did it because I love you. And my Lord—this invention of yours made me so hot, I had to change my undies twice.”

I grip her upper arms and make sure

we both have eye contact. My heart swells just having this open moment with her. “Just answer me this—it’s all I need to know—did you think it would work?”

She blinks and nods.

“I’m not talking about what you’ve done with it. I’m talking about what I did solo before you tweaked it. Did you think it would work?” I peer into her bright blue eyes, searching—pleading for the truth and praying she really does believe in me.

“It does work, Nick. It’s ingenious. I could never think this global and big.” She beams at me. “It. Blew. My. Mind.”

“Really?” I check for any facial expression that would suggest she’s

exaggerating so she won't hurt my feelings.

“Really, honey. You put your blood, sweat and tears into this one, and I could see your personality, your ultimate goal that is always there in everything you do, but never to this magnitude.”

“And what is my *goal*?” My head wobbles. It feels big and overinflated from the things she's saying.

“Your overwhelming need to be accepted for *you* and seeing that justice occurs. Isn't that why you're truly drawn to me? Because I love you for who you are, unlike your father who tries to fit you into a mold. You see the way he wields his power in a negative way, and

you can't stand it." She exhales, and her cheeks color with passion. Her stance shifts until she's tall and proud. "I watched you in court. Remember I told you I was turned-on?"

"Yeah." I lick my lips and my head drops forward a little, but I keep my eyes on her.

"What I saw was this man, fighting to break out, break free from his father's unjust ideals. Shit, I . . ." Her eyes water, and she gets choked up. "What I'm trying to say is I saw this brilliant man, keeping his emotions in check because he had to, but beneath was a deep well of passion, pain, love and a sense of wanting things to be fair. You were subtle about it, but you commanded

that room without hurting anyone. It was amazing. Your father thought he got what he wanted. I got what I wanted, and Riot, well, he didn't realize it, but he got what he wanted, too."

I can't stand it. "C'mere. I need you in my arms." I take a seat on the couch and pull her down into my lap. "I have no idea where you come up with all this stuff, but I love your take on things. It puts me in a very flattering light—one I'm afraid I don't deserve." I nuzzle my nose into her hair and take deep breaths.

"What don't you get, that you think you don't deserve it?"

"How in the hell did Riot get what he wanted?" I stroke down her back. "I'm glad you think that, since I know

he's your friend and you don't want to hurt him, but I was anything but helpful to him." Another deep whiff, and my head buzzes with the scent of her.

"Do you know what he said to me after we left the court room?"

"No. I wanted to follow you, monitor you somehow, but I was dealing with my jerkoff of a father," I answer.

"Riot said you did that all for me as a show." She curls around my body, hangs onto my shoulders. "I slapped his face, and I left. It was after that, he got bolder, started fighting for me, and it forced us both to face the ugly truth. I didn't want him, and I had to not only tell him more emphatically, but I had to show him. He watched me helping you

in my home as I went after this project. He watched me sneaking out just to see you from afar. You're not the only one that was following the other."

I open my mouth to speak, but she covers my mouth with her finger.

"Do you know how often I leave my house?"

I nod and smile under her finger.

"Yes, I suppose you do. It was a really big deal for me to do that, and he knew it. He saw how much I wanted you, so he got more desperate."

She runs her finger over my bottom lip, and I lick it.

She keeps explaining to me what happened. "I don't think I would've ever been able to make the tough choice to

take him out of my life if you hadn't done that in court. There wasn't a place in my life for two lawyers, two computer geniuses, and two men that love me. It wasn't even a choice anymore. It's in my bones—you are in my every breath.”

I relax into her. “Okay,” I mumble through her hand.

She lets go. “Excuse me? Did my asshole just turn all lovable on me?”

“Yeah, he fucking did. Get used to it.” Warmth spreads through my body and radiates outward in the look I give as I smile at her. “I love you, and I can't believe you see all this in me. I still can't believe all of that is here, but if you say so, then I guess I'll have to think about it.”

She kisses the tip of my nose. “It’s there. Get used to it.”

A rumbling chuckle settles deep in my chest. “So damn cute.”

“So, we’ll continue on with what I’ve done with it? We don’t have to.” She bites her lip and looks apprehensive, her brows closing in on each other, her eyes slanting inward.

“No. Get rid of it. We don’t need this. We don’t need to worry about my dad. He’s already on the run and you have the capability to track him. His company’s going to fall apart on its own, and if they ask me to run it, then I’ll say yes and take it apart piece by piece on my own. I don’t want you involved in all of this.”

She gasps and covers her mouth. “Oh, God! I ruined this for you. I’m so sorry.”

“No, noooo,” I say, my voice soft and low. I caress her cheeks with the pads of my thumbs. “You recognized it for what it was—a *weapon*. You don’t create weapons. I want peace like you do.” I peel her out of her shirt slowly as I keep talking. A kiss is placed above her left breast, then I drift my fingers over the spot to wipe it away.

“I’ve created weapons. The slimboy. The pet tracker. Why are you saying this? It breaks my heart to realize I’ve sabotaged you without meaning to.” Her eyes well up even more. “Don’t do this.” Her eyes drift down away from my

face.

“Dena, you didn’t do anything. I just realized”—I kiss the corner of her mouth—“all I wanted was your stamp of approval. I wanted to prove I could do this, but I knew I probably wouldn’t be able to ever follow through with it. I had this big idea to have thousands of people keyed in with me, all ready to shut down the military if a war seemed imminent. They’d have owned various codes to get in there and cripple the system. It was the ultimate rocket, only I didn’t need a chimney to do it. I only needed my dad’s connections, and that’s what I was tracking down. I recently found it, but I was hesitating. I knew you wouldn’t like it, so I couldn’t do it.”

She takes in a small gasp and looks at me like she's unsure about what I'm saying.

"I can't have kids in good conscience, knowing someday I'll have to tell them I was involved with heavy shit like that." I frown.

"Can I ask who your connection was?"

"Jason and Lexi. She has parents high up in the military, and he's got connections as well. With their abilities they were able to hack into her parents' computers and get me what I needed. It's cocky as hell, so arrogant I couldn't stand myself when I thought about how I was playing God. I disliked how they thought it was their right to pick on

others, but who am I to say they're wrong? I don't want that power." Tears drift down her cheeks, but she's smiling. I whisper them away with my delicate kisses. "It's okay. I don't need this. I still wasn't even sure if we could trust Jason anyway. You didn't ever figure out if he turned on us in San Diego and told my dad what was going on. We don't need the cobras either. Get them back from everyone who has one. We'll keep the information, keep tabs on them, but we don't need to hurt anyone."

"I need *you*," she whispers and wraps her body completely around mine.

She undresses me with care and tenderness—kisses me until I can't breathe. My heart pounds as she says the

sweetest things I've ever heard, and we make love with a gentleness I didn't know either of us possessed.

* * *

I shoot her a quick text. **Thinking of you, cutie. You looked gorgeous this morning when I got out of bed. Made it hard to leave. Love you.**

“Are you ready, Mr. Reid?” the woman in the pants suit asks me.

Her severe bun in her hair looks painful. She's so opposite from my woman it's almost hard to look at her.

“Yes, ma'am, I am.” I follow after her as she takes off.

Her heels click down the hallway,

and I'm led into a room with the largest private vaults available.

The briefcase in my arms is heavy, but more so because I know what kind of dangerous objects I'm carrying around.

She has her key, and I have mine. The codes have been set. We open the safe deposit box simultaneously, and she pulls the empty box onto the table for me.

A grand bow from her and she leaves the room, giving me privacy.

I take a deep breath. After going through all the security biometrics here, I've come up with a few more ideas for Dena's invention for gun safety to improve the design even more.

I empty my briefcase of the cobra,

the weasel, fatboy, slim boy, and even the thumb drives with both of our more dangerous invention ideas on it. No one will see this except us because we've encrypted all the files with a very temperamental virus that will infect everything if someone other than her or me opens it.

I set the box back in place, make sure it's locked up and head back out to the front.

When I hand over the key and turn around—there he is.

“Dad,” I say, holding my breath the second he approaches me.

“The company,” he starts, drifting off.

“Fuck the company,” I reply under

my breath as I meet him step for step. “I don’t want it.”

“You don’t have a choice. You caused this. When you make a mess, you clean up after yourself. It’s what adults do.” He gives me that gaze that says he’ll rip my chest open if I go against him.

“Like you did, huh, Dad?” I rock back on my heels, then side to side as I get comfortable. “You went after Dena’s father, after *her* repeatedly, like a snake, hiding what you truly were. You no doubt stole the same woman he did, Libby, and always have to win. Did you kill her?”

“How dare you!” His nose almost touches mine as he snarls in my face. “I

loved that woman more than anything.”

“Then what the hell happened to her?” My gut twists as possible responses from him flit through my mind.

“She left, and it wasn’t for the reasons you think.” He looks around to make sure no one’s listening.

“Did she figure out you’re the devil in a suit?”

“No, Son, she figured out she wanted more. She left us both for Rich Hillcourt. You wonder why he’s after you and your girl? Because he knows I’m trying to free her. He’s the monster, not me. He’s turned her life into a living hell. He beats her. He’s destroyed her. And I made sure Gregory Winters, Dena’s dad, was put away because

instead of trying to break her free, he broke into their home, shot several men, and he tried to shoot her as well. I managed to pin that motherfucker down, haul his ass out of there and make sure the Feds went after his ass so he couldn't hurt her again. I'm protecting her."

My eyes widen, and I back up a step. "You're joking."

"Afraid not." His eyes mist, and I've never seen his face contort in pain ever, but right now he's nothing but a skeleton covered in agonizing pain. "That man was a jealous, maniac with a violent streak. He told me when I forced him to leave he planned to gun her down along with Rich and myself. He wanted

all of us dead. He was going to take over everything I had worked so hard for. I worked my ass off to destroy his business—take away his power. I did it for *her*. I thought maybe I could buy her freedom, and now there's no way I can do that with what your girlfriend's done.” He pauses, hugs me with a surprising lurch, turns and says, “I love you, Nicholas. If you love Dena, hold onto her tight, and don't let anyone destroy what you have. I told her the rest, so she knows. I only ever wanted to keep you from ruining your life for a woman like I did, but it seems I was wrong about her. Protect her and keep her safe whatever you do. I wish you both the best.”

He leaves in the next beat, and I'm left standing there gaping.

I find a seat and sit, replaying each psychotic word he shared.

This can't be right.

When the pressure has built up to the highest it can go, I get up and leave, racing home to my girl on my bike.

What will she say when I tell her all this? How the hell can I come up with the words to explain this nightmare to her? And what did Dad mean he'd told her the rest? Was he talking about Dena?

I pause before I open the door to our home, my thoughts exploding in my head. She was supposed to be monitoring Dad while I was there,

watching out for him and activity from his guys. Why hadn't she warned me he was coming to meet me? Shouldn't we have run? He could've had a gun on him—could've killed me. How do I know he was telling the truth with all that craziness he told me?

I storm inside, pulling at the back of my neck with my hands when I stop right as I enter the living room.

Sitting on the couch next to Ides, who's crying so hard she's almost shrieking, is Jason, Lexi, and some other woman I've never met before.

“What the hell's going on?” In the two seconds it takes Dena to lift her head and crack before my eyes, I've gone from raging inside at her for not

giving me a warning about my dad, to falling apart as well.

I race over to her, drop to my knees and hug her, stroking the back of her head. “It’s all going to be okay—whatever’s wrong, it’ll be okay.”

She hugs me tight, buries her head in my neck on the left side. “No, it’s not okay.”

She curls away from me and reaches for a manila file on the coffee table. “Look at this.”

A chill of dread slices through my spine like the newfound silence in the air, and I pick it up, then gape at the first page.

Each sheaf of paper gets worse. There are so many documents here about

her father and his past activities that scream out “Vile, evil man!” I don’t even know what to say or do.

“Jason, tell him what you told me,” Ides says, throwing him a look of utter despair.

“I’m sorry, Nick, I promised your dad a long time ago I’d never tell you all this, no matter how much I wanted to. It was the only way.” He drops his head and sighs. “But now he’s released me. He wants you to know.”

My fingers go numb and my toes follow soon after. “What weren’t you supposed to say?”

I drop to my ass on the ground and stare at him, afraid to blink or let an errant thought get in the way of what he

might have to share with me.

“You already know I was in prison and knew Gregory,” he begins.

Dena shifts toward me and wraps me up in a hug from behind. She kisses the side of my face softly as he continues on.

“Well, at one point, he admitted to me what he’d done before in the past. Years ago, he’d killed his wife by paying some psycho to create a car crash.” He shakes his head and glances at me, then his eyes turn glassy. “It was fucked up, all the details he had. I knew he wasn’t lying because of it. I wrote it all down and tracked down your father, sent him a letter to explain to him what I’d learned. Only that wasn’t all Gregory

told me. He had this fixation with your dad and knew he'd been having a relationship with this woman, Libby, for years. *Sooo . . .* a long time ago, before Gregory landed in prison, he'd decided he would steal her away. He'd already had Stephen's wife killed and his own, too, directly after, and both almost in the same exact way. Not to mention it was by the same hired psycho. Again, he knew way too much of the finer details for it to be made up."

I lean back into Dena, and she hugs me tight once more. My fingers stroke her calves and ankles, touch her anywhere I can for something to ground me to reality. This can't be real.

"I'm sorry, but I wrote to your dad

and told him all this, too. I guess he decided to keep it to himself. Gregory was already in prison for attacking Libby and some of Rich's people." He sighs low and heavy, his shoulders bobbing with the action. "This is why he helped me once I was free. I'd helped him first. All this time, I was trying to protect you from unnecessary pain, and basically your dad was, too. There wasn't really a good reason to tell either of you all this, but now, he figures you need to know. Dena didn't put her dad in prison—Stephen did." He takes a deep breath. "He's left town. He knows you can track him, but he won't be back."

"And what about Libby? What about Rich, the man that's ruined her life

all because she got too greedy?” I grip Dena’s ankles. She strokes my back and leans in and kisses my ear.

Her lips linger, and she whispers, “We’ll take that asshole down. We’re the only ones that can.”

Jason nods even though he couldn’t possibly have heard what she just said.

“We have a plan,” Jason begins, then signals to the women beside him, both still silent and sitting stoic at his side, “and Lexi here is gonna help us. Stormy’s in, too.”

Chapter 23

Ides

Four weeks later . . .

I stare at the psychotic conversation on my phone screen. Is he crazy?

Vapor: Yeah, I'm up for the job. You know I'm always hard.

Fingers: Yeah, he is. You should see this asshole. He can't ever keep his hands off her. It's sick. My girlfriend dropped me for that very reason. She said I was a creep.

Riot: Can we talk about something else, please?

Vapor: As usual—jealous.

Fingers: I get plenty of ass. The women can't get enough of me, especially when Ides lends me her car. Besides, I'm not the one obsessed with making babies.

I hack into their conversation and join in. **Ides: Vapor, you got this? Are you concentrating on what we're actually here for?**

Vapor: Bitch, yes, I've got this. I shouldn't have ever agreed.

I roll my eyes. He bought this outfit off an actual homeless person, but I insisted on washing it several times before wearing it for this. I did make sure to sweat in it while cleaning today so it wouldn't smell so strongly of bleach.

Riot: Ides, you OK with him calling you this?

Ides: Lol. This is tame for my fave asshole.

Stormy: Should I tell them what you call me in the throws, Riot?

Riot: No!

I snort and fight off a loud, obnoxious laugh.

I glance over at them all scattered around the area.

Fuck, Vapor looks hot—his hair all a mess, wearing all black. I wanna have sex with him right now.

Why am I so horny? *Focus, Ides . . . He'll be here soon . . .*

Fingers: God, you should see the woman Rich has. She's hot. Blonde,

tall, all legs and big tits. Exactly my type. I wanted to bang her in my shop yesterday as she eye-fucked me into speechlessness. And you know that never happens to me. I always have something to say.

Vapor: Tell me you weren't distracted. You did remove the security system on his car, right?

Fingers: Yes, you snotty bastard. I got the job done. Quit treating me like a child and get to work making your own.

Vapor: Talk to my girlfriend. She's the one being difficult. I'm up for that job every damn day.

Ides: I'm not squeezing out

anyone's brats until I at least have a ring on my finger.

Vapor: Damn, woman. That's all you're holding out for? Why didn't you say? I'll buy you the biggest fucking diamond on the planet. It'll make your fingers drag on the ground.

Ides: Not funny. Do you know how many germs are on the ground? Plus, then I'd look like a monkey, and you know how I feel about them. Think about how awful this is. People spit and piss on the ground. It's disgusting. Animals drag their ass on the ground to itch their crack. And where do you think people get ringworm from? Fuck!

I break out my hand sanitizer and

squirt a little dab into my hands. An antiseptic won't get rid of this creepy-crawly feeling, though. So disgusting!

I shudder as I stand in place.

"Here ya go," some nice old man says as he exits the grocery store and gives me a buck.

I pocket it and smile big.

"Thank you, sir. God bless," I say and nod at him.

Ides: *snort* Some old man thought I really was a vagrant. See? I can do this.

Vapor: Stop changing the subject. Let me knock you up.

Ides: We have a job to do. Concentrate.

Vapor: I do have a job to do. Get

back over here, and I'll get the job done now. I already threw out your pills this morning. No more of this horse shit. I want a snot-nosed baby.

Ides: We can discuss this later.

Riot: Where is Rich anyway? Shouldn't he be here by now? Or is he busy trying to kill the dads of some other hacker couple?

Fingers: Anyone with a stupid name like Dick can't be bothered to keep to a schedule. How he manages to run Hillcourt Corp. is a mystery, between all his killings and shit.

Ides: Westin, you know that man's almost as OCD as I am, and he doesn't go by Dick, or Richard. He

prefers Rich. He comes to this gas station every Friday night at 8. He'll be here soon. We were early.

Fingers: I hope he has Lisa, the blonde, with him. I can give her a ride home.

Ides: You're not fucking our enemy's mistress. She's not into mechanics that own a body shop.

Fingers: Hey, I'm a whole lot more than a tool. I know how to drill shit and clean out her tubes.

Ides: Vapor, please go hit this Neanderthal over the head for me. And while you're at it, remind him to shut up tonight so we don't mess this up.

Vapor: It'll cost ya . . .

Ides: It won't cost me a baby.

Vapor: I get to decide, not you, honey.

I bite back a chuckle. He's all talk. We've discussed this, and he's just being a big old whiny baby—talking smack with his friends. God, I love this man, even when he's being an ass.

He probably already realizes I'm a step ahead of him anyway and prepared for his antics—exactly why he's being so cocky right now.

I've hurt him, and I need to stroke his ego to make it better.

Riot: Keep it in your pants, boss.

Ides: But he thinks better when he's pantless. ;D

Riot: Keeping my head turned away from Vapor at all times now. God, TMI, Ides. Way too much!

While I stifle a roaring laugh, in comes Rich, and he pulls up to the same pump he does every weekend.

He gets out and my legs shake as I approach him.

“He killed Dad, he killed Dad,” I chant over and over under my breath.

Last week I got the call from the hospital—Dad didn’t make it.

Ever since we found out who caused his death, it’s all I can think about. It’s what drives me to be here right now.

I cringe when I think about the fact that if Nick’s dad hadn’t left the hospital

against the doctor's medical advice, he would've probably died of mysterious causes as well.

“Excuse me, sir?” I clear my throat.

He startles and his face pales.

Shit. Nick was worried he'd recognize me.

I told him there was no way. Was I wrong?

“Yes?” Rich's sickeningly high pitched voice asks.

I try not to stare at his long greasy gray hair, all pulled back into a ponytail. It does *not* go well with his very expensive, tailored suit.

“I've been out of work for weeks, and I just had my bicycle stolen. Is there any way you can lend me some change

so I can grab something to eat?” I hook my thumb over my shoulder in the direction of the store, trying to keep my fidgeting down.

I try not to watch Nick coming up from behind the vehicle. He has his phone out like he’s checking messages.

Yes, baby. Unlock the passenger door with the codes I gave you . . .

I clear my throat, then cough, just as Rich is about to turn around to get his fuel. “Please? I’m really hungry, and I haven’t eaten at all today.”

“I can see that—you’re awfully homely and skinny. Here,” Rich says, digging in his pants to retrieve his wallet.

He pulls out a five.

A five?

My left eye twitches. This man has obscene amounts of money.

“Is there any way you have a little more to give than that? This would barely buy me a loaf of bread and peanut butter. Some jelly might be nice to go with my sandwich,” I say, fluttering my lashes a little.

Nick makes a face at me like I’m overdoing it. He gives the universal “cut it” sign, by slashing at his throat with his hand.

“A drink might be nice as well to go with said sandwich,” I add.

Rich barks a stuttering laugh, then replies, “Oh, I see . . . So you expect *me* to pay for your alcoholism?”

“N-no, sir. I don’t drink. It’s a vile habit. If you have a Breathalyzer, you can test me. I swear—I don’t drink.”

Nick puts a hand on a hip and gives me an even stronger look of disapproval—his lips pursed, his brow creased. Fuck, that’s hot. My thighs tingle just glancing at him.

“How is it an intelligent, well-spoken lady such as you has been reduced to panhandling?” Rich thumbs through his wallet and pulls out a twenty, handing it to me.

I smile and respond with a nod. “Thank you, sir, and the only thing I can say is I’ve had a lot of bad luck lately. My father recently died, and it was just after I got him back from being in jail.” I

curtsy and fight the urge to flip off Nick.

I turn and start walking away.

Nick's on his way in. He'll handle the rest.

I peek back over my shoulder for a second, and when Rich turns to pump gas, the car zips off.

I whirl back around and stand gaping at Rich, pretending I'm as shocked as he is.

"You . . . Did you see what just happened? Who took my car?" Rich gasps.

"No, I was looking the other way—headed inside the store," I say with wide doe-eyes.

He points at me and rushes toward me, leaning forward. "You did this! You

cost me my favorite car!” he snarls and rips the cash out of my hands.

“Asshole!” I snap and take off running.

When I make it to the rendezvous spot a block and a half down, in a quiet neighborhood, Nick’s waiting for me.

The door’s open, and I slip inside.

“That was a little too much,” he says, smiling at me.

“Hey, I got it done. I told you I had this,” I say, brushing my hair back over my shoulder.

He leans over and devours my lips with a hungry kiss.

“Home,” I say, pointing at the road.

He smirks with a lopsided grin, and I pinch the side of his thigh.

A sigh leaks out of him.

“You were really sexy back there,”

I say, my fingers drifting through the hair above his ear.

He drives like he’s got all the time in the world to get Rich’s stolen car back to our newly secured fortress.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” I grip his hair at the roots.

“I really wanted to have sex with you, and you know how much grocery store parking lots freak me out in terms of unsanitary conditions.”

He smiles, nods and has this elated look in his eyes. “Good. I’m glad to hear that. It’s going to make this much easier.”

My eyes narrow. “What’re you up

to now?”

He doesn't answer but wears a smug, devious expression.

I hug him and slip my right hand into his right jeans pocket. Hmm . . .

I grab something small and odd in there, remove my hand a few seconds later, then tuck it away in a safe spot when he's not looking.

“Are you going to tell me what you're up to?” I ask again.

“Nothing you need to worry about,” he finally responds.

A few minutes later, we're pulling into the garage and once the door's closed, he pulls me into the backseat and slips something metallic out from under the seat.

Click, click.

“What the hell, Nick? You brought my cuffs?”

He nods and sucks in his bottom lip, moistening it. When he lets it go with a pop, I’m trying to bite him.

My hands are bound to the death grip in the backseat above my head.

Why? What’s he trying to pull?

“Okay, you have two choices,” he begins.

“You’re not going to get me pregnant in Rich’s car,” I answer immediately.

“Stop trying to guess—you suck at it.” He chuckles. “Now, my dirty bitch has two choices like I was saying before I was interrupted.” He pulls out of his

pocket, what I thought was one of our remotes. It's an electric beard trimmer he uses for his sideburns. "Would you rather squirt all over his upholstery back here or have me shave those dirty, germ-infested pubes for you?" He wiggles his eyebrows.

"Neither. This is absolutely hideous to even think about!" I say, my voice going up about two octaves, and in this enclosed space, it sounds shaky and weak, though it's loud.

"Not a choice. If you decide to give me what you call your piss, then I'll lick it all off these leather seats afterward. And you'll be released so you can go inside, grab the black light and come back out to do a better job of cleaning it

off. If you choose to be shorn"—he chuckles at his silly word, shorn—"then I'll come back out here and vacuum them up, but you know it'll be hard to get them all. I might miss some, and then your DNA will be in here for forensic scientists to find and future car thieves as well." Once more with the wiggly, flirty brows.

"This is sick!" I tip my head back and rest it on the car door. For some stupid reason I'm grinning like an imbecile.

His creativity for lunacy like this is astounding—and God love him, I can't help but want him more for it.

He pulls off his shirt and stuffs it behind my back. "For cushioning," he

explains.

“Yeah, ‘cause you’re all sorts of gentlemanly right now.” I snort, then chuckle, shaking my head.

“Damn right, I am. Now, which shall it be, my sexy girl?” He wears a lopsided smirk. It makes my stomach flip.

Bzzzzzzzzzz . . .

He turns on the clippers, and I cringe.

“Okay, geyser-pussy—put that fucking horrendous thing away!” I tip my chin at the implement of torture.

“You *sure*? You’d look awesome with a bald pussy, and I’d reward you other ways if you did this little thing for me. If you choose the slip-and-slide

option, I've got something else I'll be doing to you at the end, and you can't fight me on it."

"Jesus—when do you have time to think up shit like this? I thought you said *I* was a slave driver, planning this heist, making the necessary preparations."

His head wobbles from side-to-side and he shrugs. "Just don't sleep much now that you're in my bed every night. So, choose, and make it quick."

I huff. "I choose the fluid route. Hairs are staying—get used to them. Cavemen like hairy women."

He laughs and pulls out his pocket knife and cuts my shirt off.

"Hey, you paid top dollar for this apparel," I say, laughing.

“Yeah, and that homeless woman is probably buying herself ten more outfits just like it with how much cash I gave her.”

“Next time find someone dressed in darker colors. Why would a homeless person ever wear a white tee shirt? It’s just so . . .”

“Stupid?” he asks, then slices through the tattered up jeans.

“Enjoying yourself?” I taunt by jutting my breasts out.

“Immensely, now shut up. This takes concentration.” His tongue hangs out the side of his mouth while he smiles like a dork.

He pulls the shreds of my clothing away, snaps a picture with his phone,

then licks his way up my right thigh to my right breast and bites through the bra.

His next move is to cut that offensive piece of underclothing off.

I scowl.

“I love this bra, you shithead.” I tuck my head to my chest to see what the damage looks like to it. “This is my only white one.” Why am I still smiling? This is so ridiculous.

He smirks. “White’s overrated.” A kiss is planted in the middle of my breasts and then he pulls away. “Okay, now you’re gonna get the encore before I fuck you and make you gush. This can’t wait if you’re gonna insult me before I fuck you.”

“No, no! Sorry, sorry, sorry!” I say

through tight lips and laughter as he yanks my shoes and socks off. I try to wiggle away from him, but I can't escape.

He knows I can't stand being barefoot anywhere other than on my own pristine hardwood floors that I know are safe and disease-free.

“Yes, woman. You earned it.”

And then *pop!*

“Oh shit no!”

His hot mouth envelops me as he sucks on my toes one at a time, staring me in the eye the entire time.

“Think of how many germs are invading your mouth right now!” I squeal, laughing even harder.

He slips a finger inside my panties he has yet to remove, and yanks at one of

my curls.

His lips slide off my big toe and he says, “Oh, I forgot to tell you—not only am I a nasty pervy dick, but I *love* germs. I use your toothbrush every morning and night!”

And that’s when I scream so loud, the car actually sways.

He rocks it harder a moment later though when he tears my panties off and slams himself inside me.

“Viruses . . . Amoebas . . . Bacteria . . . I love all of it.” He licks the seam of my lips.

I grimace for a second, and then that smile is back in place, even though this is vile and beyond nasty. When I try to turn my head away, he grips my jaw.

“Say you want me.” His eyes burn into me.

I shake my head, fighting off giggles.

“Say you’re mine.” He licks his own lips.

Another head shake. He grips a little tighter.

I go from feeling loopy, to insanely turned-on by the tone of his voice.

“Then at least marry me, woman.” He rubs his face for a moment and his mouth with his hand, then grinds his teeth.

He gags for a second, then produces a ring between his teeth with a black diamond.

“Oh, shit, that’s so gross—”

“That’s a yes,” he says.

I nod, and as he shoves his dick in as far as it can go while he simultaneously puts the ring on my finger. “I knew this was what you were waiting for. Now you’ll have my baby?”

I laugh, my abs sore from cracking up so hard over the last few minutes. “If you’re into test-tube babies, then sure.”

He growls, grabs my tits hard and bares his teeth at me. “No. Old fashioned way. I’m putting this kid in you with my dirty dick, and this dirty bitch is going to birth it screaming, pooping and peeing like all good girls do.”

He spends the next few seconds with his fingers inside me, torturing my

G-spot, making it swell.

I whimper, and he pushes his cock back inside me.

When I can tell he's about to come, I bare down, squirting like I said I would for him.

He moans low and deep, and his eyes roll back into his head.

"My gorgeous girl . . . Feels so right! God!" He shakes, falls apart and instead of coming inside me, he pulls out and jacks off all over the seat, adding his secretions to mine.

A black light isn't going to be enough.

"We're giving this car to Riot as a parting gift," he says once he's caught his breath, "since we took your Veyron

away from him.”

He takes a long slow lick.

And as his tongue's extended, swiping at the seat, I dance my toe up into his wet mouth.

“I love you, and if you ever try to shave me again, I won't ever have anal with you, or have your kid,” I say, gasping for air. My heart is racing from everything he just did to me. “Now, get me out of this sickening, stolen vehicle and fuck me properly—give me your come, sweetheart.”

“Say that again.” His eyes light up.

“I said, get your fucking shit together, Vapor. Fuck me on a preauthorized, steam cleaned mattress.”

His eyes go wide and he stops

breathing.

“Oh, yeah, and I got the birth control shot last week . . .”

His head drops, and I cough and sputter for a moment as I slip the key to the cuffs out of my mouth and chuckle.

Didn't see me steal that from your pockets, did you, caveman?

“You're not the only one that's mastered the gag reflex. I've been practicing that, too. Ever since you stole my chip out of my neck, I knew I had to be on par with you.”

“At least I've mastered you and your mouth.” He bites the key, removes it from me and right when I think he's going to unlock me, he does the unthinkable.

He drops the key into the pool of our filth, grabs a handful of our combined fluids from the seat and smears them all over my chest.

“Here’s to germs and come and babies.”

I smile. “Here’s to being a thief like my man.”

“You know what I really want to hear—say it.” His shoulders round as he tries to sit up straight, but the space won’t accommodate his height.

“I can’t believe you’re asking this of me.” I can’t stop smiling either—my jaw is actually starting to ache.

“Say it,” he repeats with a glint in his eye and a twisted smile in place. “I’m not letting you go ‘til you do.”

“Fine, you fucker—but only for this one night. And if anyone asks, I’m denying I ever said it.” I look him in the eyes.

“You’re stalling, gorgeous,” he says, grinning harder.

“Because I thought I’d warn you first—tomorrow I’m taking Rich down so your gloating won’t last long . . .” I stare at him, waiting for a reaction. There’s no discernible change in his facial expression.

“Yeah, that’s great. Now say it,” he huffs, rolling his eyes.

I lean in and kiss him, then take a deep breath. “You, sir, are a dirty son of a bitch, and in this moment, you’re slicker than Ides.”

“Thank God. Now I can release you and take your ass back inside. I’ll show you why I’m slicker.” He drags his finger over the remaining drip at the slit of his cock, and gives me a wicked grin.

My phone vibrates in my pocket. He pulls it out and answers, “Hey, you got Libby?”

I lean in to listen to the call.

It’s faint, but I can make out a few words here and there . . . Something about how she leaped across the room to get to Westin and how the blonde woman, Lisa, Rich’s mistress, was amazing at helping him out.

“No shit? He was beating Lisa, too?”

“Yep, and blondie’s with me now,”

Westin says so loud I can hear it without any problem.

Nick goes ahead and puts it on speaker phone so I can hear the rest of what they're saying.

"Okay, so this means Rich is on his way right now to get his car back? He's tracked us down?" Nick gives me a look of utter satisfaction.

"Yep, and it bought me the perfect amount of time so I could get in here and retrieve Libby, leave behind the package and get the hell out. It should time out in twenty minutes," he says.

"The weasel better work," Nick replies.

"It will," I answer for both of them.

"Get out now. He should be there

soon. Time your weasel as well, and I'll see you later at the rendezvous. Great working with ya again, man."

"You, too, Fingers. You did a great job. The best I've ever seen from you." Nick smiles at me, and my chest expands as I almost float away.

"No one's gonna get hurt, right?" I check with him again for the tenth time.

"Not a soul." He leans in and kisses my temple, hugs me real quick and then let's go.

He hands me back my phone, takes me inside and sets the weasel up by the drains, punches in the codes and takes my hand, dragging me out of our home so quick, all our belongings and furniture are a blur as we exit.

Moments later we're on his motorcycle, wearing helmets and whipping down the road.

It isn't until we hear a massive explosion down the block that he stops and pulls over.

"Holy shit! That was Rich's place, wasn't it?" I grip him tight around his leather jacket.

He rips out his buzzing phone from his pocket and then looks back up at the flames licking the sky and creating black angry swirls of smoke.

"No—it was Hillcourt Corporation—he lives a block away."

"How can you tell?" I ask.

He passes me his phone, and on the screen there's a picture of the building in

flames and a text message from Jason
—**Had no choice. I won't go back.**

That's when Nick drives us back to our place as fast as we can go. And no matter how much I scream for him to stop and turn around, he won't listen. The bike throttles harder, and it's not Nick driving the bike anymore, it's another man entirely.

The lawyer that can't stand to allow a bad guy to get away and was tortured for years by being forced to do anything his dad told him to. Forced to be a criminal, rather than someone that creates magnificent inventions the world can marvel at.

Justice can be a bitch, even dirtier than I am—one that can't be stopped no

matter what. No matter how much I wish it would.

I hold him tight—since it's all I can do.

Chapter 24

Nick

I stare but see only the black asphalt beneath the wheels of my bike.

Dena keeps screaming at me to stop, but I won't. I can't.

We've built a life together over the last few months in L.A. We knew there'd be moments we'd have to run, but this is too much. This seems too permanent. We came back home without fear because we were prepared. We have items we treasure.

We have memories.

We. Have. A. Life. *Here!*

I'll be damned if I'll let Rich

Hillcourt take any of those things from me.

Not after what he did to my father and the woman he loved.

Each second that passes, I see my Dena's face as she's beaten and tortured, treated like shit until she doesn't know who she is anymore.

I imagine being in Dad's place.

Hell, it's too easy to imagine, since her own father abused her years ago.

We're similar as father and son. More than I ever knew—we're the same to the core. We did it all for a woman we love beyond reason.

We did our best, and even used crooked means to help and save her—the woman of our dreams.

Libby was selfish, choosing money and someone with a higher station than Dad.

My Dena will never do that, and I love her all the more for her integrity.

I grip the handle bars tight and shout, "I won't risk you."

I pull over on the side of the road, hand her the gun from her backpack and tell her to wait here.

"No, Nick. You can't do this. Who knows what that man will do to you when you see him? He might be more deranged than my father was. I mean, my dad never beat or tortured anyone."

"Didn't he? Isn't that what he basically did to you but on a less noticeable scale? I know you don't want

to reminisce and share the details with me, but I know he hit you, and more than once. I can tell by the things you've said, the way you act sometimes. He terrorized you." A fire rains in my brain, consuming all thoughts but one—justice.

She claps her hand on my wrist and encircles it with her slender little fingers. "Don't do this. We can get another place—start over. We knew we might have to run again someday. It isn't worth it."

"If I let him go now, how long will we have to keep running? Will we ever be able to have kids?" I place my free hand on top of hers and squeeze it. Not to remove her grip, but to soothe her. "If I let him go, who's to say he won't go

after my father and do unspeakable things to him?”

“Stephen Reid can handle himself. He has connections and people to help him. Why else do you think Jason did that? He had to be acting under your dad’s orders.” She cups my jaw with her other hand. “Listen to me, sweetheart—we need to walk away. We’re weakened. Our defenses are low. What’s the number one rule for hackers everywhere?”

“Don’t get caught and leave no trace,” I regurgitate, my vision going hazy as I allow my brain to numb.

“Exactly. If we go back there, or you do, or anyone else—Rich has us. We’ll have been sloppy and unprepared.

It means he has the upper hand. We were already walking away from our place moments ago. Let's do that now—together.” She leans in and kisses one cheek, then the other, followed by both my eyes and then my nose and lips. “Please, I’m begging you, sweetheart. Let’s live another day. Let’s be together and make love. Rich gets his car. He probably torches our place down. So what? We’ll have each other, and isn’t that what your dad was seeking with Libby? To be with her at all costs? To keep her safe?” Another gentle kiss to my lips. “I love you, and it doesn’t matter where I am as long as I’m with you—then I’m safe and happy.”

I clasp her to my chest and

whimper, “I hate that he’s breathing!”

“I know, baby, I know.” She rocks me back and forth.

When she lets go, her eyes are filled with frustration as well, and creased at the corners with worry, but there’s also a glimmer of hope and love, and that’s what I hang onto as I drive us away into the unknown—into the black, scary night, where at least we’ll be together.

* * *

I wake drenched in sweat and pull Dena into my chest, then wrap my arms around her waist.

She continues to sleep. It never

wakes her when I do this unless I purposefully jostle her awake.

I breathe into her hair, taste the skin of her neck and still, nothing can make this hole in my chest go away.

It's all gone. All of it.

Two weeks ago our house burst into flames, somehow our security box was tampered with in the bank and someone took everything inside it. Our security measure we'd put in place, failed—even the temperamental virus that was supposed to infect everything we'd locked up, rendering them useless.

In my gut, I know . . . It's not over.

We've hidden, we've run, and I have the shitty name of Aiden Barrows. What the fuck?

I'm sleeping next to Sarah Williams, not Dena Black.

My stomach knots as I consider how I can change this.

Today we up and move on somewhere else. Maybe a new state.

I hum into her shoulder and kiss it, and before I know what I'm doing, I seek her out for warmth and comfort and a place for my hard dick.

I grind my length into her ass.

Those skimpy red panties have a dry spot on them—didn't do my job adequately last night.

“Shouldn't be wearing those,” I murmur as I slip them down her legs.

She stirs, moans and is still limp.

“Please, sweetheart, I need you.” I

reach up inside her tee shirt—*my* tee shirt she's wearing—and I cup her breasts, then squeeze them.

“Mmm . . . Sleeping, Aiden.”

I flip her over. “What the fuck did you just call me?” I ask through a tight jaw and blurring vision.

“Sorry . . . Just trying to ingrain it into my brain so I don't slip and call you Nick. I have to get used to it.”

“No, you fucking don't. Not at *home* when we're alone together,” I say, ripping her shirt off, and struggling to get it past her heavy, tired limbs.

Her eyes stay closed.

“Christ—we don't even have a home anymore,” I say and my stomach drops. It's sickening she has to deal with

this shit. We can't even go very far since we still have a company to run.

“What’s wrong?” She blinks in the low light and looks more edible than ever. “You haven’t called me a bitch in two weeks, ever since . . .”

“It’s not because of that.” I drop my shoulders and climb over her, then take her right nipple between my lips and flick my tongue over it.

Her fingers brush through my blond cropped hair.

“I don’t want you to dye your hair again,” I tell her between kisses, licks and nibbles. “No lighter than this, and I don’t want you messing with the length either.” I grip the back of her neck to bring her mouth to mine.

She moans as the kiss grows heavy and urgent.

When I release her, she sighs. “Tell me what’s going on with you. I’m worried. You’ve been really quiet lately.”

“You don’t deserve this—any of it. How am I any better than your father? I’ve got you running, hiding who you are, instead of being in your own sanctuary where you can create. You haven’t been able to touch any of your inventions since our place was destroyed. We can’t keep hopping from state to state. It needs to stop, so I contacted my dad yesterday.”

She sits up. “You what?” She grips my shoulders. “No! He’s dangerous!”

“I know he is, and that’s why we need him. I think he’s the one that broke into our safe deposit box and stole our shit. I figured he was going after Rich. He confirmed to me yesterday that I was right about all this.”

“How the hell did you get ahold of him?” She scrubs her eyes with the backs of her hands and then her arms flop at her side.

“Actually, it wasn’t too hard. I went to his house yesterday, and he left me an encoded message in my old bedroom with a phone number, so I called it.” I smile. “I’m not leaving L.A. again. We’re staying here. No more of this pansy-ass running away. I asked him if we could move into his place, and he

said yes. It's secure. I put in for a few upgrades, and they're all happening today."

"God, Nick. How are we supposed to stay hidden there? Rich will expect this." She huffs with an exhausted, disgusted sound, then throws her legs over the edge of the bed. She gets up and moves to the bathroom.

"Think about it at least. I want you to be able to create, be an artist like you crave. Westin will help guard us whenever we go out, and we already know we can trust him, besides . . ."

She stops and turns back to look at me. At this angle, her tits look amazing, so I stroke my bare cock as I stare at her.

"Besides . . . ?" She arches a brow

at me.

“Dad’s tracked down Jason. We think he’s played us all. He has to be working for Rich.”

She grips the door. Does she need support? “Why would he blow up Hillcourt Corporation and our home if he worked for Rich?”

“Because he’s trying to confuse the authorities and us. If he was with us, he wouldn’t have blown either of those up. He’s Rich’s inside man. How else was Hillcourt tracking us both so well? You’re not the only one that has had Hillcourt steal your inventions over the last year. They took a few of mine as well.”

She drops her head. “Such as?”

“What? You don’t know which of their inventions were actually mine?” I toss a hand over my heart but keep stroking with the other hand. “I’m hurt by that, Ides. You don’t know my handiwork when you see it?”

“I’m not playing this game with you right now—too tired to do the ‘guess which pervy invention is Vapor’s.’” She steps the rest of the way into the bathroom, shuts the door and does her business.

I lay back, stare at the ceiling and stroke it harder.

When she rejoins me a few minutes later, she’s rubbing sanitizer into her hands.

“Soap wasn’t enough for you?” I

press my lips together and watch her every move.

“Not hotel soap—no. They use crappy ingredients, and it wreaks havoc on my nice skin. It dries me out, and I hate that.”

She moves right in front of me and keeps working it into her skin.

I take her hand and rub it in for her, pulling her down onto the bed in the process. “Oh, but your ingredients don’t dry your skin out?” I tease, smirking.

“I used the soap, so don’t act like I didn’t. And you know I put stuff in my sanitizer so my skin stays silky smooth just the way you like it.” She leans over and slumps into my chest. “What are we gonna do? This doesn’t seem like the

right answer—to stay at your dad’s place.” She’s in a ball in my lap but her head is tipped back, searching my face. “It’s just so creepy there. It’s the place he intimidated me, in his office. I can’t work in there.”

“We’re gonna remodel, and for now, we’ll stay in my old room. Nothing creepy in there except some pervy ropes and cuffs.”

She snorts a laugh. “That’s very comforting since it sounds all too familiar.”

“If I call you bitch again will you try it out for a week? Give me that much.” I kiss the top of her head.

“No, I’ll do it because you think it’s the right thing to do, and I trust you. I

think we need to move Riot and Stormy in there as well, though.”

“Fuck, woman, how many rooms do you think this place has? I already told Dad I’d take care of Libby and she could live in the guest house. He’s scared to death she’s not being protected enough from Rich.”

Her head pops up, and her eyes flood with unadulterated fear. “What the fuck? You weren’t going to share that with me?” She smacks her palm on my chest. “How are we ever going to be safe now with the one piece of meat Rich wants, hanging out in front of our fortress, dangling there like an enticement he can’t possibly resist? Are we begging him to aim a bullet between

our eyes?”

I pull her up so she's straddling me, and then I lower her down, close to my length. "Ride me, and I'll tell you how this is going to go . . ."

"Why won't you talk to me about anything important unless you're inside me?" she argues, but slips onto my length anyway.

"Fofoohhhh," I exhale with a grunt. "That's it, sweetheart. God, you feel so slick and tight. I'm glad you stopped making me wear those shitty condoms. Makes my job easier when I get back inside that pussy when you've been sleeping." I bite back the word "bitch," and growl instead. God, it's dying to come out, but I won't. I can't do that to

her.

“Only because you’re still an asshole and won’t let me clean up afterward. I suppose I should kiss your ass for allowing me to wear my dental floss, rainbow colored panties?” She flutters her eyelashes at me on purpose and then pinches my nipples. “I liked the condoms. It contains the mess better. It’s not like you gave it a real chance anyway. You only did it for a week.”

“A week of *hell* . . .”

She pinches my nipples harder this time.

“God, girl, I bruise like a peach—careful with my chest,” I joke, then pull her down to me, removing her hands off my chest.

“I really do bruise like a peach. Stop making fun of me.” She smiles with a devious look, bites my lower lip and sucks it into her mouth with a loud groan.

I quicken my thrusts and grip her ass, holding her down so I can control the speed and depth.

“Fuck, I love how tight you get when I hold you down like this. Do it, girl. Squirt.”

“No way.” She shakes her head.

I smack her ass. “Do it! I need it. Soak me.”

“No.”

I smack her ass twice more. “Why not?”

“I told you why last night. I don’t

want to do that in a hotel. I can't stand the thought of some poor maid having to clean up what might be piss. You know they don't have time to shampoo mattresses. It's repulsive to think of someone else lying on this bed tonight." She grimaces.

"Oh, those poor unsuspecting douchebags, lying in your come. Poor them. Boo fucking hoo." I pretend to cry.

She laughs, sits up and rides me as hard as she can, considering I'm still holding her ass cheeks pretty tight.

"Squirt hard, and we can renegotiate Dad's place." I grin so wide it makes my tongue move and forces a swallow.

"If I squirt, I'm putting down two

towels under us first,” she offers.

“Not happening, Dena.” I release my right hand and stroke her very naked pussy.

“It’s tender, careful,” she says.

“Shit, thank God you let me finally shave you down there. Next week we’ll wax it instead.” I stare at her bald pussy as best I can in the diminished lighting.

“Fuck no!” She tries to jump off me. “Ewwww! Someone else touching me down there? Hell. Fucking. No!”

“That’s it, honey, curse. You know it makes me harder.” I grip her by the arms, roll her under me and push my way back inside. “I’ll wax you myself. I’ll tie you down.”

“You forgot the bitch part.” She

blinks and stares at me like there's some answer hidden there.

"Jesus," I sigh, "will you stop with that? I'm fucking you senseless here."

"You're the one that's senseless. Why won't you call me that anymore?"

"Aaaaagh!" I groan, pump harder and grind my teeth.

She grips my ass and squeezes hard. "Tell me? Please? It kills me you're keeping this from me." Her voice is shaky and thick with emotion. "I feel like you're pushing me away."

I pull out and roll off her, sitting on the edge of the bed, gripping my head. "Good Lord, woman, why are you nagging about this? *Pushing* you away? Are you serious?" I gaze at her over my

shoulder. “I’ve been in your cunt three times in the last twenty-four hours. How is that pushing you away?”

She scoots over to me, presses her chest into my back, holds me with one arm and reaches around, then strokes me with her other hand. “You know what I mean. Something’s eating you up, and it isn’t me.”

“I’d like it to be. If you’d use your mouth on me instead, though, you wouldn’t be saying this shit to me.” I watch her hand move over me. She’s got a good rhythm going. I jut my hips up and flex into her hand each time she hits the tip. “Shiiiiit, woman, feels so good.” I drop my head back onto her shoulder.

“Call me paranoid, but I think you

stopped saying it because of Libby,” she says in my ear, then kisses it.

“So what if it is?” The words linger in the air, thick and heavy like my panting breaths.

“Why does she change anything between us?” She strokes my chest with her hand, and it’s erotic and sweet and everything I want.

“Almost there . . . Keep going,” I say with a thick rasp, then reach back and grope her thighs.

“I love I can do this for you, make you feel good, but it’s not enough. I want all of you, Nick. I came to you and let you inside. I don’t have any secrets from you anymore. I want the same from you. Can you give me everything,

sweetheart?” She shoves her tongue in my ear, and her hands are all over me, pumping me quick and dirty.

Within seconds I’m spurting on my abs, on her hand and landing a million kisses all over her a second later when I pin her back down on the bed.

“I love you,” I say. “So much.” My favorite sexy bitch.

“I know.”

“The right response is, ‘I know, asshole.’” I smirk.

“Why would I call you that?”

“Because you love it, and because that’s who I am.”

She blinks and her expression drops. “But I’m not your bitch anymore because I’m no longer a pain in your ass,

worrying about germs, refusing to squirt when you want me to or have your kid? How has that changed? I know you want to call me that name. I see it in your eyes. You grit your teeth, growl and then hold it in. Sometimes you even bite me like you're dying inside to break out of this prison you've put yourself in."

"Fine," I huff. "It's because I don't ever want you to feel abused like Libby was. I'm exactly like my dad, and I realize that now, but I don't want to be. I want you, I want us, and I want to be my own man, not that dick I grew up with. He never said he was doing all that shit because he was so psychotically in love he couldn't stand it. He never said he was trying to find a way to save her and

make her well again. All I knew was I'd been a disappointment from day one, never did shit his way and that he owned my ass."

She kisses me, and it's kind and soft and full of pity.

I break away. "Not like that, Dena. I don't ever want you to do that to me again." I turn my back on her.

She strokes it with her petite hands, and they're still moist from jerking me off. It's probably killing her to know they aren't clean, but she ignores it. For me.

God, my heart pounds for her and beats her name into every inch of my body.

"Not like *what*? Not like I care that

you're hurt and projecting?" She smothers the back of my top shoulder with velvet kisses. "You've never hurt me. Not once, and if you ever tried, you know I'd find a way to leave. Libby is not me. You are not Rich or Stephen. You are my favorite asshole. You turn me on, you invent the most amazing stuff I've ever seen, and I love you because you're not afraid to come unleashed and call me names because you want to tear into me. It's not offensive to me. I love it, and God"—she tosses herself around me so she's looking at my face—"I miss it. I miss *you*."

"Why in the fuck would you miss being called a dirty bitch? You hate that shit."

“Because you love it,” she tosses my words back at me. “So I do, too. It’s *us*. It’s who we are together, and you know I don’t really hate it. I just like pretending it annoys me—makes it more fun. Gets you all amped up.”

I lean over, kiss her forehead and sigh. “You’re right. I’m sorry, I . . . God, it makes me crazy to know my dad was suffering like that, and I was making his life harder. I didn’t know. I didn’t . . .”

“I know . . . And it’s not your fault you didn’t understand what he was doing.” She holds me, rocks me like a small child, and in the quiet of our hotel room, I sob in her arms.

Chapter 25

Two days later . . .

“Uh, Libby. Hi, I’m Nick,” I say, extending my hand to shake. She ignores it and stares at me with a blank expression.

“Hi,” she says, voice devoid of emotion.

“I was told my dad worked this all out—that you’re to stay at his place with my fiancé and me.”

She nods and stands still as a statue in the doorway of the hotel room she’s been staying in.

“There will be guards constantly at the house, and Dena and I will be in and

out all the time, so any time you need anything just ask anyone around, okay?"

She blinks, but that's it. Is she breathing?

"Do you have some luggage I can take for you?" I ask.

She steps aside and motions at her tiny bag. It looks more like a large woman's purse. That's it? That's all she has?

Her features are very pretty, so I can see why Dad's infatuated with her, but even if she has nice auburn hair and big green eyes, she's like talking to a tree. I know she's alive, but she's just *there* . . . Not giving off any emotion.

I take her bag, she checks out of the hotel, and when we get to the car, Dena

steps out. “Hi, Libby. I don’t know if you remember me, but I’m—”

“I know who you both are,” Libby finally responds. “You were wonderful children. I’m glad to see you found each other.”

Again, no expression on her face. She could be reading the *New York Times* with the way she’s speaking so woodenly.

The car ride isn’t much better. Dena and I sit in the front. Libby sits in the back with Westin, who we brought along as a body guard of sorts.

Mostly he’s chatting with her—well, really *at* her—nonstop. It makes the ride a little more bearable to have him there, keeping the uncomfortable

silence at bay.

Dena gives me several sad looks in regard to Libby. The poor woman is so shattered inside I wonder if she'll ever be the vibrant woman again I remember from so long ago.

I remember her laugh that carried through the house, and how much Libby liked to cook. Damn, she made the best lasagna ever, and she even made me these yummy blueberry shakes from time to time.

Westin helps her out of the car once we park, and we give her a tour of the house.

Her eyes betray nothing.

I show her the guest house in back where she'll be staying. "Is any of this

familiar at all?" I ask.

"No. There have been some extensive remodels," Libby answers. "But it's fine. I like to keep to myself anyway."

"Well, you're welcome to use the pool and Jacuzzi anytime, and feel free to enter the main house for anything, even if it's just to hang out and raid the fridge," I offer.

Dena loops her arm in mine and gives Libby a kind smile. "We'd love to have you join us for breakfast and dinner if you'd like."

I smile. "Definitely. Dad has a huge table, and it's kind of weird when it's just Dena and I sitting there by ourselves. Join us."

Libby nods, and then she's gone inside her new home.

I stand there, blinking, and wondering if we'll ever see her come out again.

Not that I blame her. I expected her to be jumpy about little noises and being near two men she didn't know, but she was more ghost-like than anything, as if she was barely there in front of us. Even her movements look numb.

Poor woman.

We'll provide her safety, but I don't know what else we can give her to bring her back to life.

* * *

A month later . . .

In the middle of the night, Dena wakes me up.

“Did you hear that?” She grips my arm.

“It’s just Libby.” I pull her into my chest with one arm. “Go back to sleep. You know she won’t want to be around us.”

“Why does she keep coming into the main house then? She has her own place out back, and she hasn’t said a single word to either of us since we’ve brought her here. She keeps to herself. Having her inside the house at night creeps me out.” She yawns and strokes my bare chest.

“She’s all by herself out there. She’s not used to it, and she might not ever be. She sleeps on the couch because she knows there are always people walking around in Dad’s place and bodyguards and shit. It’s not a big deal.” I caress her hair and her naked back. “Thank you for leaving the shirt off tonight, by the way.”

“You didn’t give me a choice, asshole,” she reminds me with a chuckle. She snuggles into me and wraps a leg around mine.

“What—you mean my getting in your face and tearing that fucker into cleaning rags scared you off from grabbing another piece of clothing to put on?”

“I’m not letting you wax me even if you think your impressive skill at ripping up clothes might convince me otherwise. We’ve been discussing this for a few weeks now.” She strokes lower on my chest and walks her way down to my abs. “I let you shave me once, and that was enough for me.”

“C’mon. We’ve been here for a month now. Everything’s safe, we can go back to being nasty with each other.”

“We never stopped, hon. You’re a fucking lunatic, making me bend over on my work surface and getting inside me when I’m in the middle of working,” she says, chuckling some more.

“Bitch, you love it. You beg for my come to drip down your leg while

you're working. Helps you to focus on germs—on more important shit like when you're shot wears off, how you'll let me knock you up." I squeeze her with one arm.

She breathes out a pulsing giggle. "God, you're insatiable *and* stubborn as hell."

"Stephen!" Libby screams at the top of her lungs.

Dena slams up to sitting. "Shit! He's here?"

I grab her and pull her back down. "No, he's not fucking here. She's having another one of her nightmares."

"She doesn't yell your dad's name—she yells Rich's, and then she goes into hysterical fits of crying." She

struggles out of my arms. “I’m gonna go check on her.”

“No, you fucking won’t. Stay here. I’ll go see if she needs anything.” I get up, put on some sweatpants without bothering to find some boxers, and then drag on a dirty tee shirt I wore a day or two ago.

“What if he really is here?”

“What if the boogie man and a dingo eats my baby? He’s not here, woman. Calm down and stay here. Go back to sleep if you want, but stop worrying.” I grab her bottle of sanitizer and hand it to her before I take off since I still haven’t let her get up and wash her hands. “No showers while I’m gone. I want that pussy staying slick for me with

my come from earlier.”

She groans and gets a squirt on her hand.

I exit our room, shut the door behind me and roam out to the great room.

Libby’s shaking by the fireplace, turned toward the wall and sobbing.

“Libby, what’s wr—” I freeze.

A man, clearly not my father, is standing a few feet behind her with a knife, pointed menacingly in her direction. “I told you he’d come if you screamed loud enough, stupid bitch.”

“Rich,” I say, my voice drifting off in the night air.

He stares at her back, and that’s when I see it—slits across her shirt,

seeping blood.

“You cut her?” I hiss through my teeth. My fists crack as they ball up tight at my sides. I stand taller, breathe harder and my vision is clearer than ever.

“Deserved it, the little whore—fucking you and every other goddamn dick in this place.” Rich snaps his jaws at her and approaches her, but before he can get close enough to touch her with that knife he must’ve cleaned because that fucker’s gleaming, I launch myself at him.

He slashes at me from an awkward angle since I’ve already pinned one of his arms behind his back.

I knee him in the balls, and Libby screeches for me to stop. “Don’t—I’ll

go with him! Stop, Nick! He'll kill you!"

"Westin—get your ass in here!" I howl.

Swip, swip, swip!

His knife keeps coming at me.

"This bitch is mine and so are this house and your company! I created your empire! I taught your father everything he knows!" Rich says.

I jab him in the ribs with my fist, and it jerks him around enough he's able to stab his knife in the air.

My reflexes are quick enough I manage to dodge it. He's a little slow since I obviously impaired his nuts when I kned him there.

He breathes hard, his movements are spastic, but he's stronger than he

looks.

I'm not a huge guy, but I'm bigger than he is, yet he keeps slipping out of my grip.

"Rope, Libby!" I snap my head up and stare at my bag in the corner I dropped there last night. "In my pack!"

She stands there, trembling and weeping, looking absolutely terrified. "I can't," she whimpers.

"You can—don't listen to this asshole—get it!" I roll my weight into his back, shove his chest down into the ground and when she moves, I look up to see Westin barreling into the room with Ides right behind him.

They're both armed.

"Fucking cunt! Get off me!" Rich

roars, and then *slaaaaaash!*

Fire rips through my right thigh, and it sears my entire leg.

“Ahhhhhhh! Shit!” My grip slackens, and he pushes me off him.

I clutch my leg, spurting blood, and a rope is tossed in front of me.

Westin approaches with slow, methodical steps. “Drop the knife, Dick.”

Ides grins. Westin never calls Hillcourt Rich. He says it’s not fitting. So, Dick it is for him.

“You won’t shoot. You’re nothing but a weak, college boy that dropped out because he lacked the discipline to study and earn his way into the working world, where men matter.” Rich stands

up, pulls a handkerchief out of his pants pocket and brushes the blood from his knife onto it.

“Who the fuck wears dress pants to his own funeral?” Ides asks Rich.

He lunges at Westin, standing in front of her, stabs him in the side and he manages to knock him down.

The next thing I know, Rich is behind her, his knife point up against her back, and he snarls, “Shoot Nick.”

Westin makes this awful piercing sound, then he’s knocked unconscious when Rich kicks him hard in the head.

“No.” Her nostrils flare and her pupils dilate while she stares at me with her posture rigid.

“I said shoot that fucker in the face,

or I'll do it for you! At least you can make sure his death is quick and painless," Rich tells her, his lips a mere inch from her ear. He pokes the knife harder in her back to make his point.

My insides already feel like he's gutted me, they're clamping down violently as I sit here impotent to help her.

In a flash, Rich grabs the gun Dena's holding, wrapping his fingers over hers, and aims at me, but the gun doesn't go off.

Just like I knew it wouldn't.

That's her gun Westin and I fucked around with. It has my DNA in it, hers, Libby's, Westins, and any of the other body guards in the house we deal with

regularly.

But, it doesn't have Rich's.

He lets go of the gun and her hand, then he grips his knife tight and gets ready to slice her open. She spins, points the gun at his chest, and *pap, pap!*

She shoots.

He collapses to the floor, a few feet away from Westin. She aims at Rich again, and this time, she shoots him in the leg, in precisely the same spot he stabbed me.

He cries out in pain for a few moments, then Rich goes silent and motionless.

I'm bleeding like crazy, and my vision's blurring, so I grab the rope I'd intended to use on him and tie it around

my leg.

“Libby, grab the phone over there.” I point at the side table next to the couch where she normally sleeps. “Dial 911. Tell them there’s been an intruder, and he’s been killed.”

Pop, pop!

Two more shots ring through the air, and when my eyes snap in the direction of the gunshots, presumably Rich’s man, someone he must’ve had outside waiting for him, falls hard to the floor with a screaming *thuuuud!*

There are retreating footsteps. Someone’s running?

And a second later, we hear a car screaming down the road, away from Dad’s home.

How did I not hear any of them enter the house? How did they even get in with all our security?

“Ides, you . . . shot him!” I stare at her in wonder. “Are you okay?”

Her shoulders roll forward. “I’m fine.” She walks over to me like she’s made of stone, devoid of all emotion. “I thought he was going to kill you, and no one’s taking you from me,” she says, focused entirely on me. She drops to her knees and starts assessing my wound.

“Yes, hi, we’ve had a break in by three men. One escaped, and two of them have been shot. I think he’s . . . Oh, God, I think they’re dead. Yes . . .” Libby pauses on the phone “. . . please hurry. The owner of the home’s been stabbed,

too, and his body guard has been as well, so we need an ambulance right away.” She rambles off the address and the other pertinent information they need.

I grab Dena’s hand. “Tell me you’re really all right, because there’s no way you can be good with having shot them.”

A few of our body guards are in the room now, freaking out.

Most of them attend to Westin’s knife wound. They check to make sure the rest of us are okay as well.

They search for a pulse on Westin first out of the bodies lying on the floor, covered in blood. He’s still alive, but out of it.

Both Rich and his accomplice

aren't breathing, and there's no pulse, they report to me.

"Dead," one of our men says, voice flat.

I look at Dena with my eyes big and my heart filled with some elation I've never felt before. "Fuck, we're free!"

The guard checks Rich's pockets, and when he rifles through his wallet, he whispers a few profanities. "You need to see this, Nick."

He hands me whatever he's been looking at, and there in this man's wallet is a picture of my mother and father, embracing, Rich standing next to them, smiling at them. Or more precisely, he's beaming at my father.

"This is some seriously fucked up

shit,” Dena says under her breath. “What the hell is going on?”

I struggle up to sitting and my shoulders slump forward. “Yeah, orgies and shit. My dad was into fucking around like that.”

“That’s how I met them,” Libby says from behind, her voice timid and breaking. “We would all swing—participate all together sometimes. I had a big crush on Stephen, but he was married. Rich and I were single.”

“And how did my father fit into this?” Dena approaches Libby.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you this before, but I figured you were probably already disgusted by me. I’m not proud of myself.” Libby shrinks in on herself

as she wraps her arms around her torso, tucks her chin to her chest and sniffs as she silently keens.

Dena moves a little closer to Libby, managing to fight her phobias and pats Libby's back.

Libby swings her head toward Dena and says, "It was a big old mess. We thought we could handle it, but we were naive. I was obsessed with Stephen. He thought it might be better if we maybe brought more people in, so he told your dad about it. Gregory was . . ."

"He fell in love with you," Dena fills in the sentence for her.

"No, he didn't like me. He couldn't stand touching me. It was Stephen. We all wanted him, including Gregory, but

Stephen was confused. He loved his wife, but he loved me, too. I didn't know what to do."

"My God . . ." Dena stares at her with soft eyes. "You poor woman."

"It turned ugly, and the next thing I knew both your mothers were dead, and I was the only one left. I thought Rich could protect me. I sought him out for help. I thought I was next. Gregory went nuts. If *I* was obsessed with Stephen, *he* was something else entirely."

"Thank God you're okay now," I say, my leg throbbing, so I loosen the rope some. I don't want to cut off circulation, just slow down the bleeding.

"But I'm not." Libby turns to me. "Rich beat me to get to Stephen. He

turned out to be every bit as scary and violent as Gregory. And now . . . I . . .” She collapses into the couch behind her and hides her face as she cries with the unmistakable sounds of someone completely heartbroken and shattered.

Dena sits next to her, hugs her, comforts her, and all I can do is lie here bleeding, watching on. And I can’t tell who this is more difficult for—Dena, because she’s purposefully touching someone on her own she barely knows, or Libby, clearly uncomfortable with being touched in a positive way, and even more so, being comforted by someone that actually gives a fuck about how she feels.

We stay that way, frozen in our

places until the ambulances and police arrive, making it all seem like a surreal nightmare.

I had no idea I was surrounded by people that were way more fucked up than I was.

Guilt sweeps through me. I won't be a selfish prick like that ever again. I'll pay attention to the people I love and protect them from heartache like this.

* * *

Six months later . . . Las Vegas

“Get over here, sexy bitch. I have to have you.” I pull Dena onto my lap as I sit behind her.

“How’s your leg?”

“Good. Stop asking me that. You know it doesn’t bother me when I’m fucking you, woman.” I smack her ass—pull at her waistband. “Why the hell are you wearing so many damn clothes? Strip.”

“Not again. I’ve got a presentation to make in two hours. It has to be perfect. We can fuck afterward.” She doesn’t even look at me.

“A quickie, that’s it. You know it’ll relax you so you’re not all tense and worried about germs.”

She stands back up. “It means I’ll need another shower, and then I’ll really be stressed about being late.”

“I’m coming this time,” I say. “I

wanna be there when you're all beautiful and shit in front of all those fuck-wits."

"Awesome. I'd love to have you there." She's distracted so there's no inflection in her voice at all.

I lean forward and grope her ass. "This sexy butt needs to take a breather."

"No time." She scratches her chin on her shoulder, blows out with a winded sound and goes back to shining the cobra two.

"It's ready. Jesus, woman. Give that damn thing a break." I snatch at her and pull her back into my lap.

"Your dad's in the area. Do you think he'll be there?"

"Probably, since Libby's coming along." I shrug and brush my fingers

across her tits, forcing her nipples to protrude.

“If he shows up, will you try to talk to him?” She turns a bit in my lap so she’s facing me a little more.

“I have no fucking clue. I’m not really as mad at him as I was before, but I just wish he would’ve told me all this when he tried to confess before he ran. We were alone in that bank. If he was gonna confess, he shoulda fucking done it completely.” I kiss her lips, and all the tenseness in her shoulders melts away. “The only thing I know today is you’ve got this. You’ll kill it and kick all their asses, even Riot’s. Good luck!”

“You should be presenting this one. This is your baby.”

“We’ve discussed this. I’m only there for support. It’s your turn to do this. And my leg,” I grab it all dramatically and pretend it’s aching real bad, “I just can’t do it. Too sore today.”

“It is not.” She smacks my arm. “You’re doing this to help me get over my fears, aren’t you?”

“Who *me*?” I smack my lips at her.

“Yes, you, asshole. Who else would I be talking about?”

She kisses me, holds me and I let go of her with a whine. “I wanted to fuck.”

“Yes, you’re breathing, so, yes, you want to fuck.” She stands up and straightens her black shirt. “Maybe I should change. The rest of the women

presenting will probably be in skirts and heels and nice blouses.”

“The rest of them can eat shit, because they suck monkey balls compared to you. Wear what you’ve got on. I like it. It’s you, and you’re comfortable, so you’ll be able to relax better.” I pinch her ass.

She pretends to glare at me.

I chuckle.

“I’m coming in, and I’m not closing my eyes, so you better tuck your dick away,” Westin calls out as he enters the work room, his eyes wide open and peering in our direction, of course.

At least he was honest.

“We’re ready,” she says.

“Ides, you shouldn’t have dressed

up for the occasion,” he teases.

“Fuck you—she looks hot in her black, tight jeans. She’ll rock this place.” I grab for my cane and get up, following her out of the room, grabbing the one item she forgot.

The ride in the car is filled with snorting laughter as we all morph into leet speak and into our online personas.

When we step inside the bustling conference center twenty minutes later, Fingers calls out, “Ides in the house, yo!”

The entire room goes silent, and they all watch her as she heads to the front table and registers herself.

She takes entirely too long as each of the guys at the table chats her up, and

act like a bunch of simpering fangirls as they fawn all over her.

I step up behind her, my walk smooth and without my cane, since I left it in the car on purpose.

My arms wrap possessively around her middle. “This woman’s not used to this kind of attention, so you guys better watch yourself.” I kiss her cheek and rock her back and forth from behind. “I know it’s hard, but try to keep your hands off her. She doesn’t like being touched.” I squeeze her and hold her tight to my chest all to prove two points.

A: that I’m an asshole.

B: that only I can touch her. No one else.

She pats my hands. “I’m fine. I

shake hands, so it's fine." She gives me a funny look like I'm being ridiculous.

"Just trying to help," I offer.

"Yes, I can see that." She kisses me and turns around in my arms.

Clearly, she's oblivious to how everyone around her is still gaping over the fact this might actually be a prank. Ides is still a recluse and never attends these conventions.

The men behind the table are already chattering back there, talking about her. The gossip in the room will probably spread like wildfire.

She wanders away from me a moment later, mingling a little, but very selective over who she'll talk to.

The bag of her inventions is slung

over her shoulder.

I smirk as I finger the one I brought along in my pocket.

A moment later, I step over to the table, register myself and her invention she “accidentally” left behind. I also register a surprise guest who should be here in the next half hour or so.

“Hey, Vapor! How are ya? Haven’t seen you here in a while.” An old acquaintance of mine claps me on the back.

I swallow hard when I realize I’ve forgotten her name, and my eyes go wide because for the love of God, her tits are in my face, hanging out of her skintight, bright pink dress.

What the fuck, lady?

She flirts with me, and when I glance over at Ides to see how she's doing, she's staring at me, looking sallow and disturbed by what she's seeing.

“Will you excuse me?” I say absentmindedly, not even sparing a glance at this bimbo in front of me.

I don't even know what the hell she was talking about—some gibberish about how she's presenting someone big today.

Who the fuck cares?

“Hey, sweetheart, you okay?” I brush Ide's hair over her shoulder. She left it down today.

God, she's sexy as hell, all confident and smelling like some

flowery erotic sex kitten.

“Did she let you lick the boob sweat off her? I’ve heard she’s got a lot of it, with a rack like that.” Ides glares at me.

“No, but she did offer to let me use her lubrication on my hand so I could get off in the bathroom, ‘cause damn, girl, you are making me horny as fuck. You look so good, and you smell even better.” I enfold her in my arms and pepper her with lazy open mouthed kisses.

She softly moans in my ear and then stiffens. “Careful, I’ve been really queasy today, and you know how much I abhor vomiting.”

I chuckle and take her hand, moving

her over to her corner booth where she's supposed to be until it's her turn to present.

She takes her seat behind the table, spreads out her inventions and beams at me. "I can't believe I'm doing this."

"Believe it, sweetheart. I'm sure they'll be lining up, dying to talk to you and soak up your genius." I lean into the table and go on, "But, fuck, if anyone touches you, they'll leave here minus a sex organ or two. You're mine."

I take a spot a few feet away in one of the audience chairs, glancing at the door every few minutes.

Wouldn't it be great if Elvis walked in? I love Las Vegas.

Her booth is swamped a moment

later, mostly by men, but a few women as well.

Out of the corner of my eye, I continually scan the place.

And there he is.

In the back of the room.

Dad's staring, but not at me.

Westin and Libby are sitting at the back of the room, chatting.

I turn, look directly at my dad and his gaze shifts to me.

Without warning, he waves at me and flashes a smile I've never seen on that man before. Has he always had that many teeth?

I grin back and flip him off. "Asshole," I mouth.

"Fucker," he mouths back, laughing

silently.

A moment later, my guest I was waiting for enters the room. He sees me and finds an inconspicuous spot to wait.

My eyes shift back to Dad. I watch with morbid curiosity as he approaches Libby, but when it looks like she's about to turn his way, he ducks out of the room.

"Pussy," I say under my breath, grinning.

When I turn my attention back to Ides, some dude is looming over her, leering at her tits, and she's sitting at an awkward angle, creating as much space between them as possible.

I get up, glide over to her side and pat the dude on the shoulder. "There's a big line here. Two minutes, and then

you're done."

"Fuck you. You're not in charge of this booth." He smirks at her.

"Okay, times up," Ides says, standing up. She extends her left hand to shake his, wiggling her ring finger so he can see the big black shiny diamond engagement ring I put there. He grips it with both hands, pulls her fingers up to his lips.

Before he can kiss them, or her ring, I yank her hand free. "Thanks for stopping by."

I shove him away.

He glowers at me, then skulks away.

I pass her some hand sanitizer from her bag, but she waves me off.

Well, well, well. I wear a lopsided grin and a wonky brow as I move away from her like a dork.

Apparently her balls have gotten bigger than mine, because she's handling this like she's used to being a celebrity and having fans fall all over her.

And the germs seem to have left the building, like that fucker I told to back off.

Now, where the hell is Elvis? I need him here to make this moment complete. Oh, yes, and the announcer, too.

“Elvis—all germs and fuckheads—have left the building . . .”

I grin. Fucking Las Vegas—and fucking Ides. I love the combination.

They make me damn near giddy.

* * *

“Any more questions?” Ides asks the audience, beaming at them from the stage in front of them.

They’re drooling on their laps, and I’m so erect, I probably look like I’m ready to hang some damn Ides flag for her own country off the end of my personal pole—since she deserves to rule half this fucking planet.

I slouch in my chair and ogle her freely.

She’s been confident, sexy, charming, poised and well-spoken, during her entire time on stage. They’re

all dazzled by her—especially me.

My insides are rushing with heat, all at the thought of how I'll devour that tight ass of hers after this is over. After my guest and I have done what we came to do.

God, she kills me with how hot she is.

She tells them once more how honored she is to be here, and she exits the stage.

Right as I'm getting up out of my seat to go congratulate her backstage and cop a feel, that giant set of boobs with a blonde mountain of hair on top, wrapped in pink, gets on stage and announces, "We're thrilled Ides made an appearance today, but even more so her

partner, Vapor, who has attended as well.” She stares straight at me. “We’d like to turn the time over to him now, so he can share some of his newest inventions.”

I turn around and jerk my head at my guest, motioning for him to get in place. He discreetly exits the room.

I gulp, my nuts burrow up into my body and I manage to get up on stage without face-planting since my leg is unpredictable at times, especially when going up steps.

She hugs me, and I stiffen.

But when the mic’s in my hands, I go right into my dream speech—the one I’ve always fantasized about giving with my girl around. “Let’s face it—there’s

no good way to follow someone as delicious and phenomenal as Ides, so I won't bore you with my latest gadgets, but I will share another of hers with you."

I hear a sharp gasp to my right off stage. It's gotta be my girl.

I pull it out of my pocket.

"I'm sure some of you have already heard rumors of the fatboy and slimboy."

A few hushed voices hover over the crowd.

The room doubled with people when Ides was up here, and now it seems even more filled to capacity.

"The truth is, she's not planning to market it. She's not planning to release it at all, but I was hoping to share some of

her genius with you today.” I exhale and tell myself in my mind I can do this, it’ll be okay.

“No!” she whispers from the side.

I glance over at her, and she’s got her hands over her mouth, but I can tell she’s glowing with pride and shock.

A wink is tossed her way, then I head back into my spiel. “What I’m showing you today is the slimboy. I left the fatboy at home, since I figured she’d notice if I took that along.”

Someone in the crowd shouts, “Why won’t she sell it?”

“Because some assholes in this world like to take her inventions and turn them into something negative. They’d turn this into a weapon, but it’s

not meant that way,” I explain.

“What does it do?” the same voice calls out.

I wave him down and shush the crowd that’s all riled up now. “Calm down, I’m getting there. First, I want to share with you how her fascinating mind works.” I lick my lips and step closer to the edge of the stage, peering out across the crowd, looking for my dad. He’s not at the back anymore, but when I look for Libby, I choke on my breath. He’s sitting right next to her, and he’s damn near floating off his seat as he beams at me.

“You see,” I continue, standing straighter, chest puffed out, “she’s not perfect.”

“What?” someone blurts.

The crowd laughs.

“Let me rephrase that—she has quirks and imperfections like we all do, but she’s perfect for me. I’ve known her for many years. She started out as my best friend, quickly turned into my love interest and then I was fixated on finding her, because I lost her. But she couldn’t hide her brilliance from me. She invents things to make her life more bearable since she has some phobias that try to slow her down, but they never stop her. I noticed her inventions over the years and knew it had to be this wonderful girl I’d met in high school.” I pause and drop my head.

Someone in the audience makes a snide comment. I ignore it.

“The truth is, she’ll always be better than me, and better than most of you. There’s no competition.” I raise my head and speak with a firm voice. “I’ll never be as slick as Ides, but that’s okay. I don’t have to be. I just have to love her and everything she creates.” I hold the stick up. “This toy here she made for herself is so cutting edge, my balls wanna make love to it. Hell, I’d sleep with this damn thing if she’d let me.” They all crack up. “No joke. It’s sick how cool this thing is.”

I explain in nauseating detail over the next few minutes about all of the incredible features of this ingenious device.

Someone groans, “Sell it to us,

Ides!”

“Hey, now. C’mon. Not everything’s for sale, especially not her integrity.” She wanders out on the stage toward me and stops at my right. I drop to my left knee, dig into my other pocket and say so loud everyone can hear without the aid of a mic, “Ides, will you do this pathetic ass a favor—he has a problem. He loves you desperately. Will you marry me right now in front of all these people?” I pull out of my pocket the wedding band for her, and she smiles real big.

She swipes a tear away and says, “Yes,” as clear as I’ve ever heard.

I stand up, motion for my guest to join us on stage, since he was waiting in

the wings on the other side.

He steps out, I put the ring back in my pocket and we sign the marriage license real quick. In front of all these people, a James Dean look-alike proceeds to marry us.

She grins, and I about come in my pants like I did as a punk-ass kid in a closet so many years ago with her, because I'm so fucking excited, I can't stand it.

People snap pictures as the quick, impromptu ceremony progresses.

We both say the lines we're fed, and I finally put the wedding ring on her finger. I kiss her when it's over, pick her up and twirl her around.

When I'm done, she turns a slight

shade of green. “Oh God!”

“You okay?” I whisper.

“You may not be as slick as I am, but you’re very potent.” She turns us away from the crowd and mouths, “I’m pregnant.” She motions toward her belly.

I pick her up, kiss her, and as the crowd erupts in cheers, I take her backstage without even telling them I’m done and thanking them for being our wedding guests.

“Are you sure?” I caress her belly.

She pulls her own stick out of her pocket. “Uh, the pee stick says so.” She hands it to me and blurts, “I sanitized the outside of it, so it’s safe. I wanted to surprise you after I was done presenting today, but it seems like you surprised me

first.” She beams at me, her eyes welling up. “I love you!”

I laugh so hard my gut shakes.

“Fuck, and I thought my wedding gift when we got home was going to blow you away. This is way fucking better!”

“What is it?” Her face lights up.

“A golden lion tamarin monkey.”

Holy shit, she grips me hard by the back of the neck and kisses me roughly. When she lets go she bares her teeth at me. “No monkeys. A kid is enough. Get rid of it.”

“Only if you jack me off right here, right now.”

She cups my cock, yanks at the base, then says, “Didn’t you hear, bitch?”

This is my world. I'm the one that gets off here, not you."

And then she casually walks away, holding the slimboy in her hand, taunting me with it like the proverbial carrot.

Woman has moves, and fuck, I'm aching bad for her—as usual.

"You're slick, bitch, I'll give you that."

She flips me off and keeps walking. Is she searching for her new father-in-law out in the audience? God, I hope so.

Her head cranes over her shoulder before she exits the door to go back out into the conference hall. "Slicker than you, Vapor, but not by much. I won't tell them how you choose to use my slimboy. I don't think they'd like to know you've

turned it into my favorite vibrator.”

She blows me a kiss, and I chase after her, fighting to get my toy back. And my balls.

Fuck, I may never reattach them, not with someone as slick as her always manhandling them, and I’m not really sure if I want them back now that I’ve gotten inside her skin and created our own little baby Vapor. That was the slickest trick of all—earning her trust and becoming a family . . .

And I don’t regret one minute of it. Never will.

More Works from this Author

**Slick as Ides* continues on Valentine's Day, 2014 with the sequel, *Catching Vapor*. Check out the author's blog for upcoming news and teasers*

Current novels:

Sleeves (scifi erotica)

Kel isn't at all the animal locked in a cage that he appears to be. Secrets keep him there, hidden from those who hunt him. But what does a man do when he needs physical contact to survive, but can't stand the burning pain that comes with another's touch? He's found a way

to get a small fraction of his needs met at the nightclub, Sleeves. What happens when he lets in an unknown woman with a healing hand? Casey can see past the vulgar mouth to the affection-starved man hiding inside. When she does, all hell breaks loose, and the past finds him. Will he be able to avoid the agency, or will they add Casey to their twisted experiments? She entered the cage with him, and now it seems there's no way out.

Coming October 18, 2013

Knots (contemporary BDSM)

Jeanie's life has been turned upside down. She's lost her husband at an early

age and with him, her way. An offer from a man she's avoided, a man that was her husband's best friend, may be the only thing that can bring light back into her life. Mark isn't like most men. His dominant nature helps him see a different side of Jeanie—a submissive woman with a deep capacity to love and please a man. But having a relationship with him so soon after her husband's death causes strife with her in-laws—the only family she knows. Can Mark set her free, or will she walk away, missing out on the chance for an all-encompassing love?

Coming November 22, 2013

***SHROAG* 50** (scifi and historical

erotica)

Symptoms of time travel are never fun—ask Guy Moore. He just returned, and now he's being thrown back in time. His assignment? To impregnate Anne Boleyn. As an agent of SHROAG, he's completed more assignments than any other agent, and is ready to retire. Too bad Elizabeth I needs to be born to preserve history, and his DNA is the only one to do it. How will Guy seduce Anne, the woman who kept Henry VIII at arm's length for over seven years? And how will he keep from falling for her in his efforts?

Coming Winter 2013

See Rick Run (contemporary BDSM)

Rick's a professor, teaching Deviance and Social Control. Lacy's his student. He's hot, she's smart. A little experiment in a BDSM chat room after the semester ends starts a race to figure out which dick he is. He's not the boring middle-aged man that his students think he is, and Lacy is determined to find him. She might have to flog him for making her crazy for him, but that's only if she can catch him. Rick's got skills, and hiding who he is, that's one of them.

Pearl on Cherry (historical BDSM erotica)

Clarissa Stone never thought she had a chance to make it on stage, but a strike in

1907 at the music hall opens up a door, and Clarissa races to it. The path isn't easy, and especially not after catching the eye of William Berling Ferrismore III. Money and power have gone to his head and he uses that to his advantage—sating his sexual appetite with the women on stage. Clarissa won't be caught so easy, but William doesn't play by the rules. How can she prove her worth as an actress with his defaming ways?

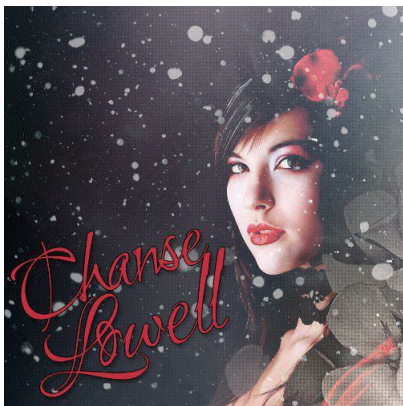
Coming Spring 2014

Scrapping Tin (scifi erotica)

Combat isn't easy, sacrifices are made. When Allie wakes up in a hospital after

an attack and being shot, she's shocked by the doctor overseeing her. He's too good to be true, and maybe he is. Tins look just like humans, after all, and are the dregs of society. Is Mitch Seaward more robot than man, or is he really that perfect? Allie's father, a military commander, seems to have something up his sleeve. With Mitch, she dives in to uncover the truth, but will she be able to handle the heartache of the truth?

Author Bio:



Chanse Lowell grew up in the desert southwest and still lives there with her husband, children, and pet cactus. She's addicted to three things—reading erotica, writing erotica and sandwiches with a side of erotica to aid with digestion. She grew up watching

programs with science fiction and historical fiction themes, and is determined she can combine her three favorite genres, creating a new breed of novel with scifi, historical and smut sandwiched in the middle.

The last thing she ever thought she'd do was pursue her dream to be a writer since her family tends to keep her busy. When she was introduced to fan fiction, she realized she wanted to see more science fiction and historical fiction to fill in the gap with lots of naughtiness thrown in, of course. Her true passion is creating her own worlds from scratch, letting her imagination go and take her to another place.

Having recently entered the BDSM lifestyle and discovering she's a submissive herself has opened her eyes to how few stories there are exploring the softer side of the lifestyle. She enjoys chatting online with others with similar kinky interests and has advisers in the lifestyle that help make sure her stories remain true and don't veer off into outer space. Although aliens probably enjoy kink, too, since they like to dress in rubber fetish-wear while traveling. At least that's her argument for why her new genre she's created is valid.

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