



— FIRST —  
IMPRESSIONS

BOOK 1 OF THE FATED WINGS SERIES

C.R. JANE

# First Impressions

The Fated Wings Series Book 1

C. R. Jane

First Impressions by C. R. Jane

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## **Dedications and Acknowledgments**

For S and H, who are my whole world.

For S.T., C, and D who are my constant cheerleaders and always believe in me.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

*When I sound the fairy call,  
Gather here in silent meeting,  
Chin to knee on the orchard wall,  
Cooled with dew and cherries eating.  
Merry, merry, Take a cherry,  
Mine are sounder, Mine are rounder,  
Mine are sweeter, For the eater,  
When the dews fall. And you'll be fairies all.*

-Robert Graves," Cherry-Time," Fairies and Fusiliers, 1918

*Fairies were real once...*

-the Lore of Fairies and Fairy Land

*Be careful who you trust,  
the devil was once an angel.*

-Ziad K. Abdelnour

## **Prologue**

(Damon)

I'm lonely even though I'm surrounded by people. The three of us have walked the world since what seems like the beginning of time, cursed to stay here and atone for our sins. We've been kings, war heroes, gladiators, musicians, and actors. We've reigned the hearts of men, and then faded from their minds when it was time to start anew. I didn't want to fade away this time. I was always on the search for this thing that was missing, something I couldn't name but felt incomprehensibly, almost like a hole in my heart that needed to be filled. Just as in other times we were gods in this century, worshipped by everyone, and I couldn't deny that anyone observing from the outside would believe I had been more than blessed. I had everything I wanted, nothing was out of reach. Only I knew I was actually cursed. I found myself on my balcony most nights, brooding into the darkness, wondering what I was missing and if I would ever find it. I yearned to feel complete. I was tired of this emptiness.

## Chapter 1

(Eva)

I sat up with a groan when the fighting became so loud it roused me from a deep sleep. What had I been dreaming about again? I'd had the same dream for weeks now and although I tried to write down my dream as soon as I awoke, the dreams always slipped away from me. A brief picture of the most gorgeous faces I had ever seen flashed through my mind and then quickly disappeared. Waking up every morning after such beautiful dreams had begun to feel like my heart was breaking every day. Strange.

Mr. and Mrs. Anderson were always screaming at one another. I guess it was better than when they screamed at me, but their words nonetheless pounded into my head giving me headaches and wishing I didn't have such good hearing. I crept softly from the army cot I used for a bed, to the bucket of water in the corner of the room. I needed to use the bathroom, but I didn't want them to know I was up. That would only make the screaming get worse. As I washed my face I glanced at the dusty, cracked piece of glass I had found in one of the attic chests. I looked pale. I guess that was to be expected when I hadn't been allowed out in the sun for months.

When the neighbor boy had seen me through a crack in the fence, and Mr. Anderson had caught him trying to talk to me while I was helping with the gardening, that was all it took to get me restricted to my attic room for what felt like the hundredth time. The only outside breeze I had felt in months came from the small round window on the far wall. It was too high for me to properly see out of it, but I had figured out how to wrench it open with a broken broom handle and now at least I could get some airflow in my room. The rest of the room was dusty and dim, filled with old trunks and forgotten, broken things. I felt that at this point I belonged here. For I too was a forgotten and broken thing.

A sharp crash from down below startled me from my musings and I accidently sent my water basin flying to the ground. There was a sudden silence from down below and then I heard steady footsteps start to ascend the stairs to my room. I shuddered. I didn't know

who was worse. Mrs. Anderson with her cruel comments, her cursing, and her fists, or Mr. Anderson with his leering looks and his hands that lingered too long along my body. When I attempted to push him away, Mr. Anderson's attempts at sensual strokes were replaced by the crack of his palm or fist against my face. They both considered themselves very religious and were convinced that the so-called "feelings" I seemed to invoke in every male (and sometimes female) that I came into contact with meant that I had come from the devil. They felt that it was their duty to drive the devil out of me whether it was by their words or their fists. When the "feelings" supposedly spread to Mr. Anderson, and he claimed that I must have cursed him because he couldn't get rid of them, Mrs. Anderson decided that I needed to be locked in the attic for extended periods of time. I had been up here off and on since I was 14.

I couldn't remember my parents, but assumed I had them at one point. I could remember a feeling of being loved, a feeling that my life had once been more than loneliness and broken dreams. I remember getting to go to school with other children who laughed with me, instead of at me. I could remember affection and warmth. I had once even had friends. I had once been happy. Something had happened to my memory and although I could remember that feeling of being loved, my only clear memories began when the tall, thin, beak nosed woman, Ms. Rankis, had picked me up from school, and told me that I needed to go with her. I had spent the next seven years in and out of foster homes until finally arriving with the Andersons. It had been a long 4 years since then. I came back to reality when the wooden door to the attic crashed open. It was Mrs. Anderson.

Amelia Anderson was a miserable looking woman. She was about an inch taller than me (I think I am around 5'8), but outweighed me by what seemed like at least two hundred pounds. Her forehead glistened with sweat from having to come up the stairs, and her frizzing, graying, black hair was pulled back half-hazardly into a messy mound on top of her head. She was still in her nightgown, a shapeless grey sack that showed too much of her abundant cleavage. I suppose she wore such things to attempt to feel sexier, but it was a grotesque sight to me. "Feeling lazy this morning, are you?", she griped at me. That was one of her common complaints against me, that I was lazy. I wasn't sure what exactly I was supposed to be doing that would make me unlazy since I was only allowed out of the attic room to use the restroom and bathe, but obviously I couldn't say that to her.

She yanked my arm forward and pushed me down the first set of stairs. I hurried into the outdated, faded blue wallpapered bathroom to use the restroom and brush my teeth. I knew I only had 5 minutes to get ready for the day before she would be back in to haul me up to the attic. I peered into the mirror above the sink as I washed my hands. I would do anything to get rid of the picture staring back at me. I didn't know if I was pretty or not, I just knew that something about me inspired bad things to always happen.

Mrs. Anderson had tried to chop my long blonde hair off before, but I had always strangely woken up the next morning with it back to its original length. She had also burned my arms and chest with a lighter, which although horrendously painful, never actually left a lasting mark. At first her inability to permanently maim me had inspired her to beat me to within an inch of my life out of anger, but eventually she saw my "ability" as a way for her to do whatever she wanted to me without fearing anyone would find out.

The Andersons were careful not to draw blood with their abuse however. My medical records listed that I had a mild case of hemophilia. I suppose it was before they had seen my records, or maybe they were just testing to see if it was true, but Mrs. Anderson had stabbed me in the arm in a fit of rage one of my first weeks with them. I had fainted right away, more from the shock of the stab wound than the blood loss, so I wasn't sure how bad it had actually gotten. All I knew was that I woke up on my cot in the attic, my arm wrapped in bandages. The Andersons never spoke of the incident, but they did from that time on make sure to never make me bleed again.

I suppose I should have been dead from at least a hundred of the things they had put me through, but somehow my body healed itself and I had held on. This didn't fill me with relief however. There wasn't a day that went by that I didn't wish I was dead. I had long ago given up on the hope that a white knight, or anyone for that matter, would arrive to save me from my torment.

The bathroom door was thrown open just then. I guess my five minutes were up. I was once again yanked upstairs to the attic. I waited for what was sure to be another onslaught of pain but she surprised me when she sat down on a chest by the door with a huff. "The Reverend Darby is stopping by for lunch today with his wife," she said. I didn't know where she was going with this. "Unfortunately this means that you will have to come down for lunch as

well. Reverend Darby has specifically asked that you attend,” she snarled. I was surprised at this. The Andersons kept questions about their “foster child” to a minimum by telling people that I had severe developmental disabilities, and couldn’t be let out of the house. They used me as a way to garner praise and sympathy from their cohorts who were so amazed that the Andersons were so selfless in helping out such a troubled youth.

I had been with them since I was 13 and I could count the number of times I had been taken somewhere on both hands. While dining with the minister who inspired such fervent religious ferocity in Mr. and Mrs. Anderson should have filled me with dread, I couldn’t help but feel elated at the

thought of getting to go downstairs and maybe see out the window. It was spring now, I’m sure the gardens around the house would be blooming. Mrs. Anderson was known around town for her immaculate gardens. She used to have me help her before the neighbor boy incident, and getting the chance to bask in the flowers around me had always energized my spirits. Now she hired someone to help her since I wasn’t allowed into the yard. “They are coming at 12:00 sharp. “Make sure you are dressed appropriately. If anything goes wrong I’ll beat you so badly that not even the devil will be able to heal you for days this time,” she added with a nasty grin. With that, she waddled out the door, slamming it behind her. I heard the sharp click of the lock before her footsteps sounded down the stairs again.

I glanced at the rickety, scratched table next to my army cot. I had an old clock on the table that saved me from going mad. At least I could count down the hours before I could finally go to sleep and dream everyday. It was 10:30, I had an hour and a half before she would be back. I shook off the temptation to go back to sleep. I needed to get ready and do some of my homework for the week. Although I wasn’t allowed to go to a traditional school, the Andersons had at least kept up with my studies by enrolling me in a stay at home program that was paid for by the state. I had tested out of high school over a year earlier, at 16, and now had started college classes. The work was dull but at least gave me something to do to pass the time. I walked to my closet, again quietly (at this point it was habit), and looked at the offerings.

There were three shapeless dresses hanging neatly up. All three covered everything from my neck to my ankles, and looked like something a

polygamist woman would wear. I had snuck a magazine upstairs that I had grabbed from the trash the last time I had been downstairs and I knew that these dresses were definitely not any type of style that I would have wanted to be seen in if I ever got to go outside again. But Mrs. Anderson insisted I wear them. She thought it would help distract from “the devil” inside of me apparently.

I grabbed a blue checkered printed one, and slipped it on. It hung loosely on my body with the exception of my chest. Although I hadn't seen much to compare for a long time, I believed that I had larger than average breasts. At least Mr. Anderson's wandering gaze always seemed to focus on them and they looked somewhat larger than the ones I saw on the models in the magazines I poached from Mrs. Anderson's castoffs. I smoothed the front of the dress down and went to sit on my cot and start my homework. My stomach grumbled. In the excitement of the Reverend's visit, Mrs. Anderson had evidently decided I didn't need to eat breakfast. Lunch couldn't come soon enough.



## Chapter 2

At 11:55 I once again heard heavy footsteps on the stairs. The lock clicked and the door lurched open. This time it was Mr. Anderson. I shivered involuntarily. His eyes slowly meandered up and down my body, lingering on my chest for a moment per usual before flashing to my face. Caleb Anderson was a thin, balding man. He and Mrs. Anderson made quite the pair as she was at least twice his size. He had rust colored hair that he combed back in an attempt to hide the ever widening bald patch that was taking over his head. His eyes were a watery blue and he was prone to keeping a small patch of hair right under his bottom lip, along with a thin mustache. He was dressed up today, evidently wanting to impress the Reverend. His neatly pressed shirt was already showing wet patches under his arms however, and I knew once he got closer I would smell the cloying scent of his drugstore cologne mixed with the oniony scent of his sweat. It never ceased to make me gag. "Get over here girl," he ordered with a foul grin.

Neither he nor Mrs. Anderson took very good care of their teeth and the stained crookedness of their smiles inspired me to brush my teeth multiple times a day for fear my teeth ended up like theirs. I slowly stepped forward through the door. As I walked past he caressed my rear and I hurried to get down the stairs. Before I could make it he caught me by my waist and leaned into my ear. "Are you trying to punish me by pretending you don't want me," he whispered cruelly. I couldn't help the tremors that started down my body. Nothing made me feel dirtier than having to put up with Mr. Anderson.

I wrenched my body away from his without answering, and ran down the stairs. Mrs. Anderson gave me an inquiring glance as I stepped into the kitchen but quickly looked away when she saw me shaking. She knew what her husband did to me but never said a word. I knew it affected her though because the days I had to interact with Mr. Anderson were always followed by harsher beatings from her. "Come over here and help me set the table," she ordered. I quickly went to the cabinet and began to pull out dishes. "Not those," she snapped angrily, "the ones in the china cabinet." My, my, this was a fancy occasion. As far as I knew Mrs. Anderson never pulled out the china

except when her children visited for Christmas. All of the Anderson's kids had been out of the house when the Andersons had agreed to foster me, and Mrs. Anderson made sure I had very limited interaction with them anytime they were visiting.

As I finished setting the table, the doorbell rang. Mrs. Anderson stopped fiddling with a pot on the stove and ran her hands down the front of her ill fitting, brown and cream striped dress. She gave me a warning glance as she walked into the next room to answer the door. I heard Mr. Anderson greeting someone, and a deep baritone voice answering. As they exchanged greetings by the door I glanced around the kitchen. There was a stack of mail that had been thrown into the trashcan. I softly walked over to the trashcan to see if Mrs. Anderson had thrown away any magazines that I could steal.

As I pushed the first piece of junk mail to the side, my name flashed before me on the letter underneath. My name was on a thick white envelope and I could tell it hadn't been opened. Looking hurriedly around to make sure that the Andersons weren't nearby yet, I pulled the envelope out of the pile to take a closer look. It was from Rothmore College. What could they be sending me things for? I hadn't had much experience in the world, but even I knew from listening to a college recruiter that had done a lecture through my home-school program that Rothmore College was one of the most elite, if not the most elite, colleges in the country.

One of my teachers had encouraged me to try and apply but I had brushed her assertions aside by explaining I had no plans to go to college beyond the online classes I was taking. Of course I wanted to go to school, but I hadn't been able to think of a single way to escape from the Anderson's home. I also knew that there was no way that they would ever agree to pay for schooling not paid for by the state, especially not a school as expensive as Rothmore. When I heard a group of footsteps coming closer I grabbed the envelope and stuffed it down the top of my dress, thankful for the first time that it fit so large. I pulled my hair in front of my shoulders so that it flowed down the front of my dress to hopefully help stop any lines from the envelope from showing.

"You'll have to excuse our ward Reverend," I heard Mrs. Anderson say simperingly. "I'm sure you have heard that she is troubled. Please don't expect her to be great company. I still am not sure why you wanted her present," she added. The Reverend most likely caught the end of my eye roll at Mrs. Anderson's statement as he stepped through the entryway, but he

didn't make a comment. Instead he stopped abruptly and stared at me. His mouth gaping open in what looked like shock. His cheeks slightly reddened and his eyes seemed to expand on his face. "Is this her?", he wheezed out. Reverend Darby was a tall, imposing man that looked like although he had once been handsome, a life of luxury had led him to let himself go to seed. He was a tall man, with greying temples, and a belly that pooched out over his belted, expertly tailored suit bottoms.

The Reverend still hadn't moved or taken his eyes off me, and it wasn't until his wife cleared her throat behind him that he reddened even more and averted his eyes. Mr. Anderson had watched the interaction and was clearly not pleased. "Please come sit down Reverend. This is Eva, but as we said before, she will have little to add to the conversation." This was one of the things I hated the most about my life. Beyond being lonely, any interaction I did have with others was tempered by the hateful and untrue things the Andersons spewed about me.

Despite Mr. Anderson's comment, the Reverend leaped towards me to shake my hand. "It's such a pleasure to meet you," he said still staring at me uncomfortably. "It's nice to meet you as well," I answered politely. I saw Mrs. Anderson clench her hands out of the corner of my eye, and I quickly pulled my hand out of his and walked quickly to the table to sit down. Although I could tell Mrs. Anderson wanted to order me to help move the dishes to the table, I saw her purse her lips tightly and begin to grab the dishes herself.

Lunch passed slowly with the Reverend and Mr. Anderson frequently staring at me with strange expressions on their faces. The Reverend attempted several times to ask me questions but Mr. or Mrs. Anderson were always quick to answer for me and cut off the conversation. Although I had been eager to get out of the attic and look at the sunshine, I hadn't even glanced outside yet because I was so eager to know what was in the letter. I hadn't applied to any colleges and although I supposed the letter could have just been a general information packet, since I never received mail (or at least to my knowledge never received mail), I was still eager to return to the attic and look through the contents.

I looked up hurriedly when I heard my name. "Eva would be an excellent addition to our youth program," the Reverend was explaining to the

Andersons. He quickly spoke over their objections with a strange glimmer in his eye as he turned to me and asked, "Wouldn't you want to become involved in the Work, Eva." Something about his look sent a shiver down my spine. I saw his pious looking wife glance over at him with a worried look. Somehow I knew that getting involved in the youth program was not something I wanted to do, even if it gave me a chance to get out of the house.

I smiled politely but did not answer. Mrs. Anderson quickly made an excuse of how busy I would be in therapy and my classes for troubled teenagers, and the conversation steered to another topic. I could still feel his eyes on me however, and the room quickly became too warm. This is how it often was when I met others. They stared at me until I wondered what I possibly could have on my face to inspire such looks. I was grateful when lunch was over and Mrs. Anderson attempted to hurry the Reverend and his wife out the door.

Before leaving he grabbed my hand and slowly brought it to my lips. "It was a pleasure Eva, I will see you again soon," he said softly, before swiftly leaving the room with his wife trailing after him. I let out a deep breath and hurried to bring the dishes to the sink so I could return to the attic and open the letter. What seemed like hours later I was once again brought up to the attic by Mrs. Anderson. I waited until I heard the lock click, and the footsteps once again go down the stairs, before pulling the letter out excitedly. What could it be?



### Chapter 3

I slowly ripped the top of the envelope, trying not to make too loud of a sound just in case one of the Andersons were somewhere close attempting to listen. My hands shook a little as I pulled out the first page and read the first few sentences:

*Dear Eva,*

*It is with great pleasure that we write to inform you that you have been accepted for admission into Rothmore College. On behalf of the faculty and staff at Rothmore, I congratulate you on this accomplishment and welcome you to the Rothmore family....*

I stared at the paper in disbelief. How did this happen? I know I didn't apply, and according to that recruiter, getting into Rothmore College was near impossible. I certainly hadn't been able to do any extra curriculars like my peers, and I hadn't ever dared to hope that my homeschool grades and resume could ever match up to other people applying to other schools, let alone a school like Rothmore. I pulled out the next document which was a thick pamphlet with information about the school.

As I turned the first page I paused at the most gorgeous face I had ever seen. Golden skin and wild black hair. The face staring back at me from the page looked like it had been carved by the gods. Piercing green eyes with thick black eyelashes stared out at me. He had an exquisite Roman nose, and full lips that were upturned into a smirk as if he was perpetually laughing at the world around him. A small label next to his face stated that his name was Damon Pierce. I stared at the page, awestruck for what seemed like forever, until I finally shook my head and turned the page. No wonder they had put Damon on the first page, even I, with the most limited experience with the opposite sex ever, could recognize that he was perhaps the most beautiful man on the planet.

As I skimmed through the pages looking through the glossy photos

highlighting a campus that looked like it came straight from a movie, my thoughts stayed with Damon. If only...I reached the end of pamphlet before setting it down and staring at the dusty attic walls around me. Rothmore College was hours away in New York City, not to mention it cost \$70,000 a year. Before today I hadn't even contemplated being actually able to get out of the house, let alone go to a school or New York City. I stopped myself from daydreaming and looked at the last paper in the envelope.

*Eva,*

*We are delighted to inform you that you have been awarded the Rothmore Exemplary Scholar Scholarship for the 2017-2018 school year. As a recipient of this prestigious award you will receive tuition, fees, housing, and books for the school year provided that you maintain a 3.7 grade point average both semesters...*

I couldn't believe it. A dream had literally fallen into my lap. I didn't care how I got in, or how they found out about me. I could have another life. I quickly pulled out the first page again and saw that school would begin September 1<sup>st</sup> with freshman orientation the last two weeks of August. A glance at the free real estate calendar the Andersons had given me, after a teacher in my homeschool program had mentioned to Mrs. Anderson that I needed to have access to the dates for assignments, told me it was April 29<sup>th</sup>. School would begin in less than four months. Four months to figure out how to escape, how to get to New York City, and how to start a new life. It would take all of that time to do it.

Footsteps on the stairs had me throwing the papers under my army cot and sitting down quickly over my tattered quilt. The door was thrown open, and I tried not to look like I was hiding something as Mr. and Mrs. Anderson stepped through the door. "That was quite the performance you put on in front of the Reverend, Eva. Did you think we wouldn't notice the looks you were trying to give him? You just can't help but let the devil out can you girl?" snarled Mrs. Anderson. "Four more months" was the last thought I had before Mr. Anderson's fist made contact with my jaw and the world faded into black.



## Chapter 4

My eyes opened up groggily as I struggled to bring my surroundings into focus. It took me a second to remember what had happened. Mr. Anderson's fist flashed into my memory. My jaw felt like it had been broken. I was nervous to look at myself in a mirror. It must have been a hard hit to knock me out. A wave of depression flowed over me until I remembered my letter. Rothmore College! My escape! But how was I going to pull it off? The Andersons had left me on the floor after I was knocked out. I gingerly pulled myself into a sitting position and crawled over to the corner where my broken mirror sat. I pulled the mirror up to my face and grimaced. The whole left side of my face was black and blue, swollen, and sensitive to any touch. I hoped the bruises would at least last a few days before my freak healing abilities kicked in so that they would be more hesitant to hurt me. I needed my wits about me in order to plan my escape, and being regularly knocked out was certainly not going to help with that.

The first thing I needed to do was figure out my money situation. Even with a full scholarship I would need money to get to New York City. I also would need to buy at least a couple of new clothes. There was no way I was starting my new life in the pilgrim dresses that the Andersons had provided me with. I had no way to earn money as I wasn't let out of the house, so I was going to have to steal it. Usually the thought of doing something like that would fill me with disgust but after years of enduring the Anderson's abuse, and knowing they had been pocketing money from the state all of these years that was meant for me, I felt like in this case it wouldn't be stealing as much as it would be taking what was owed to me.

I knew that Mrs. Anderson hung her purse by the garage door whenever she came back from running errands. Luckily for me Mr. and Mrs. Anderson were both highly suspicious of credit card and banks, believing that the government was always waiting in the wings to take their "hard-earned" money. Because of that, I had heard them discussing with visitors the fact that they always kept stacks of cash with them, and the rest hidden in various places around the house. Maybe if I just took a small amount every week they wouldn't notice

anything was missing. I had learned to pick the lock to my door a few years before when I realized that feeding me wasn't a high priority for the Andersons. I knew what steps creaked, and what floorboards in the kitchen to avoid. It would just be about the timing. Mrs. Anderson tended to be a night owl, staying up late to read in bed, and Mr. Anderson was an early riser, getting up around 5:30am to get ready for his job as a plant manager. I would have to make sure that I waited long enough before venturing downstairs.

And so it began. The next time the Andersons let me use the computer for school work I accepted my offer to Rothmore College, and then quickly deleted the history so they couldn't trace my steps. I had put in a fake address for Rothmore to send anything. I didn't want to push my luck that the Andersons would continue to throw away my mail without reading it. I figured I could pick up any forms I needed when I got there. At night I would wait until at least 3:00 am to jimmy the lock and creep downstairs. I got lucky a few nights, and Mr. Anderson had left his wallet on the counter as well, exhausted after a day at work.

I started small, just taking \$3-\$5 at a time from both her purse, and his wallet. The night before I left I would take more. I couldn't access the bus route on the computer because they had everything blocked but sites they deemed educational, but I guessed I would need at least \$100 for tickets. I would need sheets for my bed and toiletries as well since the Andersons gave me nothing but a bar of soap to wash myself with.

I counted my money every night and felt a rush of excitement as my stash began to grow without them finding out. Mrs. Anderson had started to look at me funny however, as if she could smell the renewed hope I now had. She would come upstairs at random times and throw open the door to try and catch me doing something. Luckily there was no way for her to mask her footsteps up the stairs no matter how hard she tried, as she weighed far too much to be light on her feet, and I could hide things quickly before she got to the door.

The next obstacle would be figuring out when to leave. Technically I wasn't 18 until September, and I knew that if I didn't escape the first time I wouldn't make it out again. The problem I had encountered in the past was the alarm system. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson set it every time they left and I had never been able to catch the password. I had tried to escape many times my first year with them and they had upgraded the system since then to alert

them more quickly. Neighbors, the Andersons, and even the police had caught me every time I had escaped, and the beatings afterwards were not something I would ever forget. It had always been difficult for me to hide myself from the notice of others. But this time I would have to get away, there was no option for failure. I would somehow need to slip out before they left and set the alarm, or went to bed and set the alarm so that I would have some time to get far away before they noticed my absence. I would then need to find a way to get away fast and hide when they inevitably came looking for me.

Another issue of concern was Reverend Darby. I had heard his voice many times floating up the stairs and although the Andersons never mentioned his visits, I found it strange that he would visit so regularly after never visiting before. If there was anything to be grateful for in Mr. Anderson's fascination with me, and Mrs. Anderson's hatred of me, it was that it gave them reason to do everything they could to keep me away from the Reverend. I still couldn't forget that look in his eye, the way he had held onto my hand, and the worried look that his wife had given him when he was talking to me. I did not want anything to do with Reverend Darby.

When I wasn't scheming about how to get away, or dreaming about my new life, I was thinking about Damon Pierce. I would stare at his picture dreamily and wonder what he was like. I had never been one for flights of fancy, I hadn't seen the point. But Damon sparked something in me. The pamphlet gave no details about him and I was too scared to bring it up during my online home school classes to see if anyone had heard of him. No-one ever talked about anything but classwork, and it was impossible to form any relationships when I wasn't allowed to access the computer or phone except for class. We also couldn't see each-other, and it was nerve wracking for me to speak up to a group of people I couldn't really identify beyond their voices. I knew the chances of someone like Damon ever paying attention to me was zero, but it certainly was delightful dreaming otherwise. For all I knew, he was just a model they had used in the pamphlet to attract prospective candidates but for some reason I thought he was probably more.

The weeks passed quickly. I lived in fear that my secret would be discovered. My plan had hit a snag when I had heard the Andersons arguing over money that they had noticed was missing. I had started restricting my nightly visits downstairs to make sure they didn't catch on that it was me. I

didn't think they suspected me yet as they didn't know that I could trip my lock, but I didn't want to arouse any further suspicion by too much of their money disappearing at once. This obviously meant that I was going to have less money than I wanted or needed but I couldn't afford any mistakes.

After a long hot summer filled with the usual screaming, beatings, unwanted touches...combined with my silent visits downstairs to take money, my nerves were fried. I had to give myself daily pep talks to convince myself my plan to escape would actually work. I had wanted to leave earlier than I had planned, but there hadn't been a good time. Mrs. Anderson had started to stay home more and had taken to sleeping with her door cracked. It was almost like she knew that I was planning something.

Finally, I couldn't delay it any longer. Orientation would start in a week and I didn't know how long it would take to get to New York on the bus. I had arrived at the Anderson's house by bus when I was 13, and had held on to the memory of how to get to the local bus stop. I just hoped nothing had changed, and that a bus driver would tell me how to get to the main station where the Greyhound buses were. I had my meager belongings ready to go at a moment's notice. I had stolen a sweatshirt and shorts from Mr. Anderson's closet. By tying the sweatshirt, and pinning the shorts with some safety pins I had found in one of the attic trunks, I would look a little more normal than if I was wearing one of my dresses. Hopefully when the Andersons started looking for me they would give the description of a girl wearing a dress and it would buy me a little bit of time. I had put one of the dresses into my bag so they would think I was wearing it.

It was the Tuesday before orientation when I got my break. Mr. Anderson was working late and I overheard Mrs. Anderson on the phone with someone loudly complaining about how she had a migraine and was going to take something and go to bed. I waited an hour after I heard Mrs. Anderson go into her room before beginning to gather my things. No one would be up to check on me until Mr. Anderson arrived home and I had to pray that whatever Mrs. Anderson had taken for her migraine had knocked her out cold since she had left her door cracked. I put my pillow under the blankets so that if they looked in on me it would trick them for a second into thinking I was asleep. Gathering my courage and holding my breath, I tripped the lock on the door with a pin, and silently made my way downstairs.

I hovered by Mrs. Anderson's bedroom trying to listen, but all I could hear were her deep snores. I continued to creep to the main level and stopped by her purse by the garage entrance before making my escape. She only had \$60 in her purse, and I grabbed it all figuring they would know soon enough who was taking their money anyways after they found me gone. Instead of going through the garage I went out the back door, then crept along the side of the house along the bushes and flower gardens. Just as I was about to walk out in front of the house, headlights flashed around the corner, headed for the driveway. I didn't recognize the car but knew that anyone visiting was sure to wake up Mrs. Anderson.

I stayed hidden beside the house and watched the car carefully. It was Reverend Darby. He looked somewhat desperate for some reason, and I watched as he roughly knocked on the door and rang the doorbell several times. When no one answered he ran a frantic hand through his hair and looked up to the top of the house. I wasn't sure what he was looking for but I didn't have long to wonder as he suddenly turned and walked quickly back to his car before peeling away.

I knew that the loud knocks and doorbell had most likely roused Mrs. Anderson even if she hadn't answered the door, and I just prayed she wouldn't think to check on me. I began to lightly jog away from the house, attempting to stay in the foliage along the road. Even with the pins, Mr. Anderson's clothes were way too large on me and I had to hold on to the shorts with one hand as I moved along the road. It was at least a twenty-minute jog to the bus stop according to my foggy memory, so I hurried along as best I could holding my pants and my possessions.

To my surprise and relief, a bus was just pulling in as I arrived at the stop. I didn't know if it went to the main bus station but figured it was better to get on than wait around for the right one. Unfortunately, it wasn't the right bus, and I had to get on two more before I arrived at the main station. The entire time I looked frantically out the window waiting for someone to appear to come get me, muttering silent prayers to a God I didn't believe in that something would go my way for once.

It wasn't until I had my ticket for New York City in hand, and was sitting on the bus as it pulled onto the main highway, that I let myself relax. I had done everything I could to cover my tracks, and all I could hope for was that they would never find me.

There had been a camera at the ticket stand, and although I tried my

best to keep my head down, I was sure that it had caught me on it. I just hoped that the ticket lady wouldn't remember me enough to tell anyone if she were asked about me, and that no one would care to expend a great deal of effort going after a 17-year-old foster girl about to age out of the system in a month. I had taken a seat in the very back on a row where no one was sitting and although I planned on not falling asleep, the swaying of the bus, along with my relief at being on the bus, soon lulled me to sleep.

## Chapter 5

I awoke with a start when I felt the bus come to a stop. Keeping my hood up I cautiously peeked over my seat to see what was going on. We had pulled into a bus station, but I wasn't sure where we were since I had been sleeping. People were filing off the bus and I decided it would be a good time to get off and use the restroom. I had stolen a jar of peanut butter and a loaf of bread from the Anderson's pantry but I was terribly thirsty. After everyone who seemed to be getting off had left, I walked to the front of the bus, keeping my head down. The air felt sticky when I got off after having gotten used to the air conditioning on the bus. I must have been sleeping for awhile since the sign said we were in Indianapolis and I had gotten on the bus in Springfield, Illinois. I used the restroom and went to the snack shop to get a bottle of water. I would refill it at water fountains for the rest of the trip to save money.

As I stood in line I peeked around. It felt like eyes were watching me. There was a homeless man wearing tattered, decaying clothes that looked like he hadn't eaten in a month sleeping on the ground on the opposite corner of the train station. A few other people were milling around but no one seemed to be staring at me. I still felt eyes though. I shivered before stepping up to the window and getting my bottle of water. The attendant looked to be around my age and he stared at me intently as I placed my order. He was around my height with side swept brown hair the color of mud and a pale complexion like he too had been kept in an attic for months on end.

He stared at me even after I placed my order. I shifted uncomfortably, "My bus is going to leave soon, do you think I could have my water?" I asked him quietly after a moment. He shook his head as if he had been in a daze and walked backwards to the cooler to get the water, still staring at me. When he came back to the counter he handed me the water and a candy bar. "I didn't order the candy bar," I told him. "It's on me," he said with that same dazed grin he had worn our entire conversation. "I can pay," I said, sliding my money through the window. "Take it gorgeous," he said, grinning. I awkwardly thanked him and backed away from the counter. As I turned to leave he yelled out, "Any way I can have your number?" I looked over my

shoulder thinking he surely couldn't be talking to me. As I looked back I saw him again staring at me with an expectant look. I smiled softly and rushed away, I would try not to get off the bus very often. The last thing I wanted was to call attention to myself just in case the Andersons came looking for me.

I kept my head down as I got back in the bus and rushed to my row in the back. I curled up and leaned my head against the window, daydreaming about Rothmore College. Occasionally, or more often than I would ever admit, Damon Pierce's face would cross my mind. I wondered if I would get to meet him. I fell asleep again and dreamed about the new life waiting for me in New York City.

## Chapter 6

The hours passed slowly. The bus stopped often and I hesitated to get off unless I needed to switch buses after what had happened at the Indianapolis station. My back and legs were cramping up from sitting down for so long. I fell asleep often to pass the time. After what seemed like forever, and a million bus switches, the bus finally pulled into Port Authority in New York City. I trembled in anticipation. I couldn't believe I had actually made it. A part of me had believed that this was too good to be true, that I would wake up and be back in the attic with Mrs. Anderson screaming at me. I was nervous to walk around such a big city after a few years of barely seeing the light of day. Prior to coming to stay with the Andersons I had lived with a foster family that lived on the outskirts of Chicago. I had spent my days running around the city with some of my foster siblings and had become accustomed to a big city. My time with them had ended when the police arrived at the house and it was discovered that the Reeds were operating a meth kitchen in the basement. Now I felt socially inept and afraid of what was waiting for me. Mentally chastising myself, I gathered my bag and got off the bus. I looked around the station. It was enormous, and there were so many people. I walked out the doors and stared in awe at the buildings around me. Chicago had seemed so large at that time, but looking at the city around me it couldn't compare. The air was humid but I welcomed it after the chill of the bus. My ears filled with loud honking and yelling from the throngs bustling around me, and there was something to look at everywhere. I had never seen so many people in my life. Looking down at my oversized sweatshirt and Mr. Anderson's baggy shorts, I felt embarrassed. I needed to find a store and get a few things before I got to campus.

A kind lady inside had told me where to go to reach the subway and I was glad to get the exercise after being cooped up. I had pulled my hood down when I got outside but soon pulled it back up after I noticed stares coming from all directions. They must be looking at my clothes I thought to myself before putting my head down and walking faster. Once I got to the subway station I decided to take it to Times Square. I was exhausted by the trip and needed to go check into my

dorm room, but I needed to see Times Square first. In one of my foster homes my foster sister had a print of Times Square that she had hanging on the wall. I would lay awake at night staring at the print illuminated by the moonlight streaming in from the window and dream about escaping and going there. Well I had escaped, and now I was going there! I was hoping there would also be some shops. The weird looks had continued and I didn't know how much more I could take before losing my nerve and going to hide in a restroom or something. I followed the rush of people into one of the subway trains and held on. The subway smelled like sweat and dirt and all of us were packed into the car like sardines. I loved it.

Walking up the stairs and seeing Times Square made me tear up. People swarmed around me hurrying on their way but I had stopped in my tracks. It was glorious. There were lights and billboards everywhere advertising everything under the sun. Music was playing, some songs I recognized from before the Andersons, but others were new and exciting. Street performers were dressed up in different colorful costumes, and tourists were taking pictures with them and immediately getting hustled by others. Stores were everywhere, and I suddenly wished I could just bottle the moment so that I would never forget what I was feeling. The sense that I was exactly where I had always meant to be. It was exhilarating. There was a feeling of energy that flowed around me, waking me up, and making me feel like I could conquer everything.

I spotted a Forever 21 and hurried over to it. As I walked in my jaw dropped, I hadn't been to a store in so long but even with the stores I had been in before my "imprisonment", none of them had ever been this large. I didn't know where to start. An employee hustled over to me as I continued to gape at my surroundings.

She was tiny, shorter than me by several inches, with strawberry blond hair that was cut into a pixie cut, and bright spring green eyes. She had a lot of energy and reminded me somewhat of a cute elf. "Oh my gosh you are gorgeous, but what are you wearing?" she exclaimed. I grimaced and pulled at my sweatshirt. "Well that's what I came here for," I replied, trying to smile politely. "Well come on, we have shopping to do," she stated excitedly, pulling me by my bag to a rack. "You're about a size 2 or 4 aren't you?" she asked. I shrugged. I honestly wasn't sure. My clothing that I had been given by the Andersons were always too big, and they also never gave me much to eat. Thus my clothing never fit better because I never gained

weight.

The little elf was grabbing tons of clothes from the racks and stuffing them into my arms. I shifted uncomfortably. I could only afford a few pieces and was definitely going to disappoint her if she worked off commission when I didn't buy very much. After what seemed like an hour and a million clothes later she shuffled me into a fitting room and told me to try everything on and show her my favorites. Everything looked way better than anything I had worn for years but I tried to pick out reasonable pieces. I tried on a pair of jeans and a pair of shorts and couldn't help but squeal when I looked in the mirror. It felt so good to try on a pair of clothes that fit! My friendly shopper had picked out a few basic tops, including some v-necks and camisoles, and I set those aside to buy along with the jeans and shorts. She had also picked out some dressier tops. I selected a black top with ruffles and added it to the pile. My eyes fell upon a white bandage dress. I knew I shouldn't even try it on because it was impractical and I didn't have any money, but I wanted it. I hadn't had anything pretty in so long.

I pulled it over my head and pulled my arms through the sleeves. The dress came up high on my chest and came about mid thigh on my legs. The back was where it got fun however. The back dipped to right above my butt and showcased a lot of skin. I could imagine the shocked look on the Anderson's faces if they had ever seen me wear such a thing. I could wear my hair up in a flirty pony tail with a pair of black heels like I had seen in the magazines. I loved it. I took it off, placed it in the yes pile, and quickly exited before I saw anything else. The employee was waiting for me outside of the fitting room and jumped excitedly when she saw my pile. "I knew you would love that white dress," she exclaimed. I smiled at her. It was nice to meet someone who seemed genuinely pleasant after being around such cruel people for the past few years.

After grabbing a pair of flats, some flip flops, a bra, and a few pairs of underwear, I was ready to check out. I started to feel hot as the numbers on the register continued to rise. My heart sank when I saw the total. I really couldn't afford this. But once again the strangest thing happened. Elizabeth (I had finally gotten the pixie employee's name), took the dress price off the register and rang it up separately. "Think of this as a welcome to New York gift," she said with a wink. "I can't take that," I replied, stunned. "I'm putting it in the bag and you're leaving with it. No-one could do justice to this dress like you could," she said with a grin. I found myself getting a bit

choked up by her kindness. I thanked her profusely and walked out the door smiling to myself. New York was already shaping up to be the best experience of my life. I had changed into the shorts and one of my v-necks before leaving the store. It was time to head to Rothmore...and possibly Damon Pierce.

## Chapter 7

A few subway stops later I had arrived. I stood outside the gates that led to Rothmore College and trembled with anticipation. Huge brick walls surrounded the outside of the college. The walls were a rusty red and had dark green ivy growing all over them. Giant black iron gates were at the entrance and I saw other students going in and out with what looked like their parents. They were loaded down with bags and boxes and I once again felt self-conscious as I looked down at my one bag/suitcase and the Forever 21 bag I had added to it. Bracing myself, I walked through the gates and immediately forgot about my concerns. The campus was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen and looked even better than the pictures that had been on the catalog.

A large green grass covered area stretched before me that I recognized as “The Green” that the information packet had mentioned. White colonial style buildings with tall pillars surrounded the green area. Some of the buildings were all white with black shutters, while others had the same red brick as the outside wall. Students of all ages were basking in the sunlight on the green. Some were throwing Frisbees back and forth; others were reading on blankets. It looked like something out of a movie. I walked along the grey stone path that surrounded the outside of the green towards a building labeled Administration. I was hoping that was where I could get my dorm key and get checked in for school. As I walked I once again noticed everyone staring at me as I walked past. Seriously, what was everyone’s problem!? Feeling self-conscious for the millionth time this trip, I sped up my walk and hurried inside the Administration building.

As I walked in I noticed a line to my left leading up to a counter labeled check-in. I got behind a tall skinny boy whose ears turned bright red after he turned and looked at me over his shoulder. He immediately turned back around, but his ears stayed pink. I listened with a smile to the conversations happening around me. Girls were gossiping about parties they had been to the night before. Guys were discussing whether the football team was going to win the championship again this year. I heard Damon

Pierce mentioned a few times but couldn't hear the whole conversation. Football was mentioned again so maybe he was on the team? I felt like a stalker since so many of my thoughts had been about him since seeing his picture. I laughed to myself. I was sure that Damon Pierce took up the thoughts of many girls, and probably guys as well.

No-one spoke to me but I was fine with that. It felt so good just to be around people and feel like I was apart of something after being alone for so long. When it was finally my turn, I approached the counter. A large heavy set woman wearing severe black cat eye glasses glared down at me. "Name," she asked sharply. "Eva Taylor," I replied. "Identification please," she answered, peering down at a list in front of her. I pulled out my birth certificate to give to her, a document that gave me no further information on my past as both parent spaces had been left blank. The Andersons had of course never let me get my driver's license or even a permit so this was all I had. "You have been assigned a single room in Draper Hall," she said, just as sharply as before. "Not sure how you managed that as a freshman. Don't think that mommy and daddy will be able to help you out with anything else here," she said nastily. "Rothmore College prides itself on being the best because its students are the best, not because they have money," she continued.

I had been trying to be nice despite her rudeness, but I had reached my limit. "I happen to be an orphan actually. If you don't know what that means, it means I don't have a mommy and daddy. And I can definitely tell you I don't have money either. If your little paper doesn't tell you, I received a scholarship to go here and that's probably why I have a single room. Thank you though for your oh so helpful advice," I finished. I heard tittering behind me as other students heard our conversation. Her cheeks had turned a dark red at this point and she kept her eyes down, avoiding eye contact with me. Without apologizing she handed me a map of the campus, my room key, and an orientation schedule. I had many more questions I needed to ask, but decided to find the answers to them somewhere else rather than deal with this wench. I walked away from the counter with my head held high, excited to have actually stuck up for myself for once, and ready to finally go and see my room.



## Chapter 8

I walked into my dorm room and immediately got tears in my eyes. Ugh, what was wrong with me. When had I become so emotional? I had already cried more on this trip than I had probably cried in my whole life. Realistically I knew the room was nothing special. It had the typical cinder block white walls, the twin bed, a desk, a dresser, and a closet, all things that probably could be found in every dorm room in America. But it was all mine. I wasn't going to have to worry about someone barging into my room, or being locked in against my will. I wouldn't be woken up by punches or screaming. It was in a word, glorious.

I immediately started hanging up the few shirts I had bought and the white dress the cute girl had given me. Luckily there were hangers provided in the closet since I had almost nothing with me to help put together a dorm room. I put my one pair of jeans, and my underwear and bras in the dresser, and was basically done settling in. I needed new sheets for my bed since all I had were the rags that had been on my attic army cot, but it would have to wait until I had money coming in. I was going to have to start a job hunt the next day. I was hoping that I could get hired on as a hostess or a waitress somewhere close. I needed money desperately but it would have to wait until tomorrow. The exhaustion of coming down from the adrenalin rush of escaping from the Anderson's house, traveling by bus for hours on end, and finally seeing New York City hit me all at once. I threw my worn blankets on my bed and laid face down without bothering to change or wash my face. I immediately drifted off, feeling safe for the first time in a very long time.

I woke up groggily who knows how many hours later, forgetting for a second where I was. A feeling of desolation hit me as I worried for a second that everything had been a dream and I was actually still in the attic. A quick look around

me reassured me though and I was able to lay back down and calm down. There was bright light coming in from the window. I must have slept through the afternoon and the night. I decided to go take a quick shower before I set out to job hunt. I grabbed my towel and the little bottles of soap, shampoo, and conditioner I had grabbed at a convenience store before getting to

campus, and opened the door.

After locking my door, I spun around and ran straight into someone's naked chest. Someone's hard naked chest. I blushed, afraid to look up. "Are you okay?" the stranger asked with a hint of a southern accent. I finally dared to look up, passing faded blue sweatpants, then a set of yummy six pack abs, followed by a chiseled chest, until my eyes landed on the smirking face of the stranger. He was super attractive, definitely not as attractive as Damon Pierce, but who was? He had sun streaked blonde hair that was on the longer side, and twinkling brown eyes. Although he had a smirk on his face when I had first looked up, his expression had now changed to one of someone in astonishment. Maybe I had hit him harder than I thought? "I'm so sorry, I didn't hear you behind me," I replied, smiling softly. He cleared his throat before answering, "I think you running into me might be the best thing that's ever happened to me," he responded with a wink. I blushed. I definitely hadn't flirted in a very long time, in all honesty maybe I never had. I decided to excuse myself and finish finding the restroom. As I turned to go he laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Wait, I've never seen you before, what is your name?" he asked. "Eva," I replied. "Eva Taylor." "Well Eva Taylor, my name is Eric. I'll be a junior this year. I'm assuming you're a freshman?" he asked. "Yes, I just got here last night," I replied. "Do you need help looking around campus..." he began, before a door opened up behind him. A pretty girl with long red hair, long thin legs, and pale skin stepped out wearing nothing but a cream sheet wrapped around her. "Are you coming back to bed Eric?" she asked, trying to be seductive. How awkward. He was in the hallway flirting with me and he had clearly been with her all night. While his head was turned looking at the redhead to answer her I took the opportunity to hurry down the hallway and finally take my shower.

After taking the first shower in four years where I wasn't being timed, I put my towel around me and opened the door, peeking through the crack to see if anyone was in the hallway. Seeing that the coast was clear I stepped out and headed to my room. Once back in my room I got changed into the black blouse I had purchased, which I hoped was job hunting appropriate, my one pair of jeans, and my black flats. I combed my hair out and then left it to air dry. It would dry in loose waves and wouldn't need me to do anything with it to look presentable. Taking one last look around the room in satisfaction, I

headed out to start my job search.

## Chapter 9

A wave of humidity hit me as I stepped out of the dorm room. August in New York City was still hot and sticky, but I loved it. Walking down the steps I heard my name called. It was Eric. He was jogging quickly towards me. Stopping in front of me he ran a hand through the back of his hair and bashfully said, "Sorry about earlier, Laura is a..friend...I was just visiting." I smirked at him, hopefully with a look that asked if he thought I was stupid, and started walking down the path towards the entrance gates. "It's no problem," I said over my shoulder. "Have you had breakfast yet?" he asked hopefully, hustling to catch up to me. I stopped. I suddenly remembered I hadn't eaten since I had a peanut butter sandwich yesterday morning. My stomach chose that moment to embarrassingly voice its protest. "I take that as a no?" he said with a laugh. "Can I take you to my favorite café down the street?" I thought for a moment. I wasn't interested in dating, especially with someone who would flirt with one girl while outside the door of another girl's room whom he had just finished sleeping with, but I was interested in making friends. I also didn't know if my food card was activated yet to work in the dining halls since orientation didn't start for two more days. "That would be lovely," I finally replied. "Awesome," he said, shaking his fist in what looked like an adorable kind of fist pump. I smothered my grin with a hand and waited for him to lead the way.

A five-minute walk off campus landed us at a charming café. I hadn't been to an actual restaurant even before I lived with the Andersons since the foster family before that could barely afford their rent, let alone taking us out to eat. We were seated by a very attentive waiter on the patio under a large yellow and black striped umbrella. "What can I get you to drink," he asked, staring at me with a strange smile. "Umm", I looked at Eric, not knowing what to order. "The mocha lattes are really good here, and the orange juice is fresh squeezed," he answered helpfully with a smile. "I'll get those," I replied to the waiter. "Sounds good," he said, turning to hurry off. "Dude, are you going to get my order," Eric asked the waiter, annoyed. Red-faced, the waiter turned around, "Of course, sorry about that," he responded.

After taking Eric's order he once again hurried off, looking back at me once more and almost running into another waiter. Reddening further, he turned around again and walked around the corner out of sight. I turned my attention back to Eric, "Thank you for taking me to breakfast, this place is amazing," I told him. His eyes softened. "It's my pleasure Eva, I come to this place all the time," he said sweetly. "You need to try their French toast. It comes with sweet butter and a caramel syrup, it's what they are known for," he exclaimed. I had been perusing the menu but I quickly closed it, that sounded wonderful. Mrs. Anderson had given me oatmeal or corn flakes when she did bother to give me breakfast, and I was pretty sure I would never want to eat either ever again. "I definitely want that," I said grinning.

Over the most amazing food I had ever tasted, Eric attempted to ask me questions. I didn't want to talk about my past so I tried to turn the questions back to him. He told me he had grown up in South Carolina (thus the reason for the twang I heard occasionally). He had moved to Massachusetts to attend boarding school in his freshman year of high school. His dad owned a lumber company, but was an avid football fan, and had wanted him to play in college desperately. Since Rothmore was the best, that was where he had to go. His prep school had been one of the top high school football programs in the country so transitioning to Rothmore had been easy. "I love it here," he told me after eating the last bite of his French toast.

Seeming to realize I had kept him talking about himself the whole meal he asked, "What were your plans today before I kidnapped you for breakfast?" "Finding a job," I replied, looking around at the café. "I wonder if they are hiring here."

"Why do you want a job," he asked, looking bewildered. I flushed. What was the right way to tell someone most likely extremely rich, that you were dirt poor I wondered? Probably noticing how uncomfortable I looked he quickly attempted to cover up his question. "You would kill it anywhere but you should get a job at Moxie," he replied. "It's the 'it' restaurant of the moment, and very pricey, which should mean good tips. My dad's an investor in it, I'm sure I could get you hired there," he stated confidently. "You would do that for me?" I asked, feeling a rush of hope and excitement. He smiled, looking off, and muttering something that sounded suspiciously like, "You have no idea what I would do for you." At that moment the waiter stopped by, for what seemed like the millionth time of the meal. "We're ready for the check," Eric stated, definitely annoyed at the waiter by this point. "It's on the house,"

the waiter replied, at the same time slipping a folded piece of paper beside my hand. "Call me," he winked, rushing off after hearing a growl come from Eric's direction. I unfolded the note. In neat block letters was the name Sam, followed by a number. Eric snatched it out of my hand and put it in his pocket before standing up and grabbing my hand. "That guy was a creep," he said angrily. "I'm going to complain." "Oh please don't," I said anxiously. "It was such a nice meal, let's just leave." Staring at me for a moment, he tugged my hand and began to walk down the sidewalk. "Come-on, let's go to Moxie and get you that job," he said. I grinned and began to walk along beside him.

## **Chapter 10**

**(Damon)**

With one last pump I let myself go, groaning with how good it felt. Opening my eyes I glanced down at the girl underneath me who looked quite satisfied with herself. I quickly pulled out and rolled off of her, sitting up on the side of the bed, and sliding my feet to the ground. I ran a hand over my face and through my hair before pulling the condom off and throwing it in the trashcan. A hand with long red fingernails slid down over my shoulder and scratched down my chest. I shrugged it off and stood up, hurrying to pull on my sweatpants. Why did I do this to myself? Sleeping with Selena was like sleeping with a viper. Pretty to look at, but comes with a vicious bite. She had been wanting me to make it official since I had been sleeping with her off and on for the past year, and hadn't gotten the hint when I left with other girls right in front of her that it wasn't going to happen. Selena was a good fuck, but left me hating myself every time I got with her. I needed to be done. There was definitely no future, not unless I wanted to be miserable for the conceivable decades ahead. I turned around to face the bed. "This is done," I said brusquely.

Sticking her lips out in what she thought was an attractive pout she replied, "Damon, why would you say such a silly thing? We're so good together." I threw up a little in my mouth as I stared down at her. She had had the sheet pulled up to cover her breasts but had dropped it with that last comment. Probably trying to lure me in with her oversized fake breasts. It had worked in the past. She had long shiny black hair and hazel eyes. I had always thought she was hot, definitely even comparable to the movie actresses and models I had my choice to fuck. Staring at her now though she looked ugly. Ever since I had started dreaming of the girl, it was impossible for me to even get aroused unless I imagined her the whole time I was fucking. I turned to go, frustrated. There's no way this girl even existed, yet my thoughts were filled with her every second. I was obsessed with a dream. If she was real, I could just imagine how disgusted she would be seeing me right now. "See ya," I muttered over my shoulder without

answering her back. “Damon, come back here,” she bawked, sounding a bit panicked. I left, throwing the door closed behind me without another look back. Nothing was going to be good enough if I couldn’t get rid of these dreams. Nevertheless, even if the girl wasn’t real, it felt good to be done with Selena.

I hurried outside her dorm, pulling my hat down low in an attempt to hide from eager fans, or paparazzi. It was a fact of life that they would be lurking somewhere. I was Damon Pierce. Star prodigy quarterback. I had broken every high school record when I “suddenly” transferred into Belmont High for my senior year of high school. I had been recruited by every college in the country, ultimately picking Rothmore College as I had loved living in New York City through the decades. Mason had followed me, deciding it would be the base for his band. He was currently on a world tour but would be back in town in a few weeks in time for the annual football banquet and the first game of the year. Beckham was currently in France, filming a movie, but had decided to be based in LA for the time being so he could be close to the Hollywood scene. During the summers I would usually go stay with him and shoot a movie in between training for the upcoming season. I was a shoo-in (of course) for the NFL, but doing a movie or two a year was fun.

I texted my driver, Shelton, to come pick me up. I didn’t live on campus. Mason and I lived in a penthouse across from Central Park. It gave me separation from the hordes of fans and the groupies that were always trying to get into my pants. I heard my name yelled by a high pitched voice, just as Shelton pulled up to the curb in my black Bentley. “Perfect timing,” I told him with a grin as I slid in before he could get out to open my door. “Hurry home.” “A short visit sir,” he asked with a question, looking back at me through the rear view window. Shelton had been with us since he was a young man and was more like family than anything else. Although getting up there in years, there was no one that I trusted more than him besides Mason and Beckham. He knew more of my secrets than I cared to think about. I rolled my eyes. “We won’t be “visiting”, anymore,” I replied.

Shelton quieted, giving me a somewhat searching look, before returning his gaze to the street in front of him. We were silent the rest of the way home. I had a call with a radio station in an hour, and then had practice this evening. What I needed to distract myself from the dream girl was a night out. As soon as Mason came back we would hit the clubs hard. I could

always party with some of my teammates but the godlike reverence they often gave me got old after awhile, and it was just too easy to get all the girls when I was with them. At least it was a competition whenever I was out with Mason and Beckham. Girls just couldn't decide which of us was their favorite. With this thought I exited the car with a grin and took the elevator up to the penthouse apartment. Walking into our apartment I couldn't help but think to myself that I didn't have a lot to complain about. Dream girl or not, life was pretty good.

## **Chapter 11**

**(Eva)**

As he promised, Eric had gotten me a job as a waitress at Moxie. His dad must have held a lot of sway because they hired me on the spot. I felt out of place at Moxie. It was very posh, with dark navy blue walls and gold accents, and I could tell it catered towards the elite. I had told the manager, a short round man with rosy cheeks, that I had no experience but he had brushed my concerns aside. I would start training that very night with their most experienced waiter. “Are you excited?” Eric asked. “You know you don’t have to get a job, I could help you with whatever you need.” I blushed, I had known this guy for a few short hours and he was offering to give me money? “You are very sweet but I’ve always wanted a job, and I want to be self sufficient. Plus, you shouldn’t be offering money to perfect strangers. Didn’t your parents teach you that,” I told him with a wink, trying to soften my tone.

He grabbed my hand and brought it to his lips. For some reason I immediately wanted to pull it away. I forced myself to hold still as he gave it a gentle kiss. I wanted Eric to be my friend, but he definitely seemed to want more. “I think I deserve your number after this morning, don’t you?” he asked with a grin, finally letting go of my hand. I laughed uneasily, “I actually don’t have a cell phone.” He looked at me incredulously. “How is that possible?” “The people I stayed with didn’t allow them,” I whispered reluctantly. “The people? Not your parents?” he pressed. “I would rather not talk about it,” I said more forcefully as I started to walk back to the college.

Thankfully he got the hint and changed the topic. I could tell by his pressing questions about my plans for the day that he wanted to spend the day with me, at least until he had football practice, but I really wanted to be left alone so I could go to the library. I hadn’t had the freedom to go on a computer for anything not school related since before the Andersons, and I was desperate to try and catch up with things so I didn’t look like a fool when talking to other people.

People were bound to catch on to the fact that something was wrong

with me if I never knew any pop culture references or current events. Feigning tiredness and wanting to rest before my shift that night, I finally got him to reluctantly leave by agreeing to have breakfast with him the next day. Waving goodbye I slipped into my dorm, bypassing the red head in the hallway that shot me an evil look, and then slipped out the back door of the dorm to head to the library.

Slipping into the library I couldn't help but be amazed. There were floors upon floors filled with books and computers. There was a café, classrooms, and inside study rooms as well. I found a secluded corner behind a row of books that had a computer, and started surfing the web. I looked up the latest news stories, sports scores, and more details about Moxie. After reviewing things for a few hours I finally typed in the name I had been wondering about for months...Damon Pierce. Immediately the search engine pulled up thousands of hits. Who was this guy? What college student had this amount of coverage? Clicking on the first link, I scrolled through a Wikipedia page filled to the brim. Reading through it, it appeared that Damon Pierce was some kind of sports star, but not just any sports star, possibly the most famous sports star alive. Although just a sophomore he had already broken every high school and college record there was. In addition to his accolades on the field, it looked like he also had starred in some films, did modeling, and occasionally helped out with a band named The Riot. Going back to the main search page I perused some other sites. There were hundreds of fan sites dedicated to him and I couldn't help but flush hotly at some of the pictures his fans had posted. He really was the most gorgeous man I had ever seen.

Clicking through some other images, I stopped. In this picture he was with two other men. Both had the same otherworldly beauty and it was beyond my comprehension how there could be three men that looked like that in the world.

Standing beside Damon with his head thrown back laughing, was a man around the same height. He had longer dark brown hair that was pulled back in a bun. He was tan with the most piercing blue eyes that I had ever seen. They were the color of sapphires. Like Damon, he also had lush black eyelashes that would be the envy of any girl, and the yummiest kissable lips. I could see a tattoo peeking out the top of his shirt. It almost looked like some sort of wing. He was wearing layers of necklaces and rings on almost all of his fingers and there was a piercing in one of his eyebrows. He was stunning.

The man smiling next to him in the picture looked like a prince out of

a fairy tale. He had tousled golden hair that was sun streaked, and eyes the color of a picture I had seen of the Caribbean Ocean. He was also tan, but whereas the man next to him was wearing a vest and ripped jeans, the golden god was wearing a fitted tuxedo that looked like it had been made for him. All three would render anyone awestruck. Looking at the caption of the picture it listed the brunette's name as Mason Shaw, and the golden god's name as Beckham Stone. I could have spent hours looking at pictures of them, but I had suddenly noticed how late it had gotten. I only had forty-five minutes to prepare for my shift and get over to Moxie. I reluctantly clicked out of the browser and hurried back to my dorm to get ready.

## Chapter 12

The manager I had spoken to at Moxie, David, had told me they would provide me with a uniform. I was grateful for that as I had so little clothing I was sure I wouldn't have what they wanted me to wear. Hurrying into Moxie five minutes before my shift was to start, David was waiting by the door, looking as if he had been looking out the window for someone. "You're here," he exclaimed, looking strangely relieved. "Of course I am," I replied. "I'm so grateful for this opportunity, I wouldn't miss it." He hurried me along to the back of the restaurant, handing me a stack of clothes along the way. "I'm going to have you helping with the front tables tonight with Henry," he stated. "Change into these, I just guessed your size." I thanked him and went to change. The uniform consisted of a sleeveless black pencil dress with a white apron. I felt silly wearing it, since it resembled a French maid costume I had seen in books, but I wasn't in a position to argue. I had worn my black flats thankfully. The uniform would look better in heels but the flats would be more comfortable while I was working. I exited the changing room and headed to where David was waiting for me.

David stood there staring at me, and then shook his head a little before motioning for me to follow him. Walking behind him he led me to a table where a thin, mousy looking boy around my age was waiting. "This is Henry," David explained. Henry looked nervous. He had thick black hair that fell across his face and he was wearing horn rimmed glasses. "Henry is one of our best servers and will have you trained in no time," he explained. Pulling me aside, David continued, "Now I want you to let me know if you have any trouble, ok. I want you to have the best possible experience here." His hand lingered on my shoulder for longer than I was comfortable with, and after a minute David seemed to realize that he had been massaging my shoulder. Reddening, he excused himself and hurried away, shooting me a look behind him as he walked.

"Thank you so much for your help Henry," I said. He stayed looking at the ground as he mumbled, "It's no problem. I'm sure people will love you." Henry refused to make eye contact with me for the next hour but showed me how to use the register, where the trays and drink machines were,

and the proper way to set down drinks and plates on the table. We also went over the menu and specials. I hadn't heard of half of the dishes as Moxie specialized in French cuisine, but Henry was very patient with me until I could pronounce everything correctly. There was a lot more that I needed to learn but it was a good start for my first shift. People started to arrive at 6. I could see limos, sports cars, and other fancy looking vehicles pulling up and letting their passengers out. Women adorned in jewels, and men dressed up in their best suits walked into the doors and were seated. It continued to get more crowded until there were tons of people waiting to get seats.

Serving was fun. Henry was sweet to work with and was patient with me as we went along. The people were interesting. I noticed that many of the women gave me horrible looks. We kept getting called back to tables for inconsequential things, almost like they just wanted to chat with us. I tried to stay in the background and let Henry do the talking, but I was inevitably pulled into every conversation. I began to get embarrassed as I realized the men were all flirting with me, right in front of their dates. Henry began to get a smile on his face as he picked up the bills after the guests had left. There were stacks of bills on the tables along with phone numbers. I couldn't stop blushing but was awestruck at the tips. I had never seen so much cash.

I would be able to get new sheets and some things for my dorm room right away. David came over after we had been working awhile and asked if there was any way we could get our tables out faster. "We have a wait an hour long of people requesting you two as servers," he said anxiously staring at me. Henry chuckled at this. "You do mean requesting her right?" he said, finally looking at me for the first time in the face. David smiled but didn't reply. "Just try to move your tables out faster alright," he said, hurrying away when the sound of glass breaking echoed through the restaurant. "You have no idea do you?" Henry stated with a small smile. "What do you mean?" I asked. He shook his head at me without saying anything else and walked to a table that was waving at us.

The next two hours flew by as we finished up. I was tired, but felt exhilarated. Henry handed me a stack of bills. "I feel like everything should go to you," he laughed, "but I'm going to be selfish and keep half." "Your crazy, you did most of the work," I replied. I didn't count the money in front of him. I didn't want him to see how desperate I was for it. "When do you work next," he asked. "I have two more days of training starting tomorrow

and then I'm off for a few days before I start on my own," I replied. "Hopefully I get to train you tomorrow as well," he said. I was grateful that he had warmed up to me as the night went on. Maybe we could become friends. Waving goodbye and slipping out before David could corner me for the hundredth time to talk about nothing, I stepped out into the night. Moxie and the college was in a good area so I didn't think I should be worried walking back to campus alone despite the fact that it was so late. The street was still bustling despite the late hour. I got the sensation once again of eyes staring at me but when I looked around I didn't see anyone in particular paying attention to me. Shivering, I hurried back to campus. After I arrived back in my room I eagerly counted my money. \$700. I couldn't believe it. I squealed loudly and did a dance. Tomorrow I was going shopping.

## **Chapter 13**

I had been in my new home for three days now and orientation was set to start tomorrow. I had eaten breakfast with Eric both mornings at his request. He was an interesting and witty companion, and I had enjoyed the places he had chosen to take me to. Inevitably he would want to do more, and the first day I had felt obligated to at least spend another hour with him walking around campus before making my excuses to leave. I had purchased a bed set for my room along with a new lamp, some workout clothes, and a few more tops. I felt like the luckiest girl in the world with my new things. My comforter was white and I had gotten an assortment of colorful pillows in pastel colors to further brighten it up. Eric had shown up to Moxie the second night I worked with two of his football teammates. His first companion, Jared, was huge, at least 6'5, with a belly that resembled Santa Clause. He was an offensive lineman and kept me laughing the whole time Henry and I served the table with his outrageous over the top flirting and one-liners. Derek, Eric's other teammate, was quiet and watchful. He had sandy blonde hair and dark, almost black eyes. He didn't contribute much but seemed to watch me closely. Eric seemed unhappy with the attention I got from other tables and from his teammates and rushed through dinner, leaving after I promised him I would eat breakfast with him the following day as well. Henry and I again received tons of tips, and Henry continued to relax around me, even joking around some.

It was finally the first day of orientation and I was elated. That morning, Eric had been waiting outside of my dorm again to take me to breakfast after which I had gone to the first introductory session. Hearing about all of the classes and activities I could participate in had me so excited. I had no idea what I wanted to study. I was interested in so many things. One good thing about home schooling was that it gave me a lot of freedom to study things that were interesting to me instead of having to focus on strict guidelines like a normal school. I didn't know how I would possibly decide what to major in now that I had to choose. I was walking along the green looking at the course guide when I heard a shout. Looking around, a football appeared out of nowhere, hitting me in my

forehead, and knocking me down to the ground. A crowd had gathered around me as I sat up and rubbed my head, trying to shake myself out of my stupor. "Eva!" I heard a familiar voice. Glancing up I saw Eric rushing towards me. "I'm fine," I stated softly, beginning to get a headache. Suddenly, a deep voice that I didn't recognize, but that gave me chills (the good kind), caught my attention. I turned around to look for the source of the voice. The face that I had obsessed with for months filled my vision. It was Damon Pierce.

## Chapter 14

### **(Damon)**

After the Selena incident I had stayed holed up for a few days in my penthouse, not venturing out unless I had a modeling shoot or football practice. I had finally decided to go socialize and throw the football with some of my teammates on the green after their text messages wouldn't stop. The weather was still warm and it was the perfect day to be outside. I was tossing the football with Eric, an asshole on my team who thought that his daddy's money meant he was better than everyone else. He was the best wide receiver on the team however so I tried to play nice. Eric was bragging about a girl per usual as we went back and forth. "I'm telling you, she's the hottest girl I've ever seen," he boasted.

His voice lowered as he continued. "I can't think around her, and I can't think of anything but her since I met her." For once he seemed almost serious. Eric was as much of an asshole as I was to women and his sudden devotion to this girl was dubious at best. "How come I haven't seen this girl around?" I said with a cocky grin designed to piss him off. "She's new Damon, and I've already called dibs so back the hell off," he stated, trying to act nonchalant but definitely getting riled up. I smirked, not responding. He knew that if I set my eyes on a girl he had no chance. Suddenly something caught his attention, and the football went soaring over my head. "Nice throw" I called out, wondering what could have distracted him that badly. I turned around when I heard a soft "Umph", and noticed a girl had fallen to the ground with the football by her.

Yikes, I muttered to myself and jogged over. I noticed that a bunch of guys were jogging ahead of me. This was weird because there were tons of hot girls at Rothmore. With the exception of Selena, one girl doesn't usually get that much attention because there are plenty to go around. I heard Eric call out "Eva" as I got closer to the girl. This must be the girl he was talking about. Pushing through the small crowd that had gathered I looked down and started to ask if she was alright...and promptly lost my breath and any train of thought. It was

her, the goddess that had been haunting my dreams for the last few months. Her blonde hair was streaked with gold, falling almost to her waist. Her skin was alabaster and perfect. I could tell she wasn't wearing any makeup, yet even with my advanced vision I couldn't see a single imperfection on her face. She was now staring at me, and I could see her eye color was also otherworldly. It was a blue-ish purple color that was almost the color of an amethyst. She had long black eyelashes, a perfect nose, and full pink lips that were just begging to be touched. Strangely, she also seemed to have a slight gold glow about her. I wondered if others noticed it? I had never seen another creature on the earth as exquisite, and I was positive that whatever she was, she wasn't human. I had to have her.

## **Chapter 15**

**(Eva)**

Finally seeing Damon Pierce in person had made me lose my breath. He was even more striking than in the pictures. He was staring at me intensely and I could feel my cheeks flushing. It should be a sin for someone to exist that was that good looking. Suddenly, I looked away. Damon Pierce would not be good for me. All my life I had been used and abused by both men and women. Someone like Damon was bound to hurt me more than all the others because I could tell I would care more. I needed to stay as far away from him as possible. I turned back around to face Eric and allowed him to help me stand up. The crowd was still gathered around me and I immediately felt embarrassed to have fallen to the ground in front of them when I noticed how large it had gotten. Eric smoothed my hair behind my ear. "Are you okay? I don't know how I lost control of the ball like that," he said worriedly. "I'm fine," I replied with a small smile. "I just wasn't paying attention." I could feel Damon's piercing stare on my back. Eric looked up at something over my shoulder, and then put his arm possessively around me. "Let's get out of here," he said. "Why don't I take you to the movies?" I really didn't want to go to the movies with Eric, but I hadn't actually ever been to the theatres, and I wanted to get away from the intensity of Damon so I agreed to go.

"Aren't you going to introduce me to your friend?" said the same smooth and deep voice I had heard earlier. Eric looked annoyed. "Of course," he said reluctantly. "Eva, this is Damon, our team captain. Damon, this is Eva." I hesitantly turned around. He had reached out a hand to me. I held out my hand. "It's nice to meet you." I said. Like Eric had done, Damon brought my hand to his mouth and kissed it softly. But while Eric's touch had made me uncomfortable, Damon's touch had the opposite effect. I felt actual sparks go up my arm from where he had kissed me. I looked at Damon surprised and wondering if he had felt anything. His eyes had gotten wider, but other than that he showed no sign that he was affected. "It's a pleasure Eva," he replied. "I'm sorry that this

idiot decided he couldn't throw the ball today. But I'm not sorry that it led me to meeting you," he said with a wink. I slowly pulled my hand away and backed up a step towards Eric. I smiled and turned to go. Once again he stopped me from leaving by speaking once again. "What movie are you going to?" Eric stopped walking and turned around. "Not sure yet but we have to go if we are going to fit it in before practice," he said, sounding annoyed. "Why don't the rest of us come along?" Damon asked, looking amused. He obviously could tell that the last thing Eric would want was for him to come along with us. The group of guys who had been crowded around where I fell, looked liked they also played some kind of sport as they were all huge and looked to be in good shape, all came closer, looking like they wanted to come with us. Eric had no choice but to agree. He kept his arm around me possessively as we walked and I had to gently pry myself away from him. Although I wanted Damon to stay away from me, I didn't want to give the impression to anyone that I was anything other than friends with Eric.

Even though I felt self conscious being surrounded by the enormous men around me, I couldn't help but be eager when we got to the theatre. The air smelled like butter and I headed to the counter to get some popcorn while the others decided what movie we were going to. They had tried to ask my opinion, but I had told them that I would be happy to see anything. I didn't explain that I had never been to the theater, or that I hadn't seen a movie in several years. I felt socially awkward enough without pointing out things like that. I felt a tingling presence behind me in line and knew Damon had followed. "What do you want to get," he asked silkily. "The biggest tub of popcorn they sell," I replied with a laugh. "A girl after my own heart," he said smiling. "Do you want a soda too." He asked as we stepped up to the counter. The poor employee at the concession counter didn't know what had hit her. When Damon smiled at her she almost appeared to faint. I couldn't blame her. Him smiling was like getting everything you had ever wished for in life. It turned his stunning face into something even more godlike. I felt myself swoon. "Could we please have your XL tub of popcorn, extra butter, two cokes, and...What candy do you want?" he asked me. "I can pay for myself," I said shyly. "What candy do you want?" he asked, ignoring my comment. "Sour patch kids," I said giggling. I had actually giggled. "Get a grip on yourself," I mentally chastised myself.

Once the concession girl had recovered enough to gather our food and

ask for Damon's autograph, the rest of the guys showed up. Eric looked angry. "Eva, why didn't you wait for me? I would have bought you whatever you wanted," he said belligerently. Damon stepped protectively in front of me. "Relax man, I paid for her," he told Eric. Trying to defuse the tension I stepped from around Damon. "What movie did everyone pick?" I asked with a smile. Eric grabbed my hand and pulled me towards him. "We got tickets for Captain America," another guy answered. I once again pulled myself from Eric's grip and walked towards the ticket stand. "How much do I owe you," I asked. A chorus of voices answered that I didn't owe anything. I tried to smile sweetly at them and walked into the theater.

Damon had managed to sit by me with Eric on my other side. Damon passed me the bucket of popcorn and I dug in. I was pretty sure that movie theater popcorn was my new favorite food. As the movie started I leaned forward excitedly. I could feel eyes on me but I didn't care if I looked stupid. During the movie Eric had moved his hand right above my knee. I moved away uncomfortably. I really didn't want him to try and make a move in the middle of the movie around so many other people, or to even make a move at all. He seemed to get the hint. Damon was a sweetheart and made sure I had a steady supply of popcorn and my Sour Patch Kids throughout the movie. He whispered corny jokes to me about certain parts of the movie and laughed at all the same parts as I did. As we exited the theater after the show I was bouncing slightly. I had loved it. I overheard one of the other guys asking Damon what one of the actors was like in real life. Of course Damon would know the actors. I remember reading that he did Hollywood movies himself. He was of course way better looking than anyone that had been in the movie, and I was sure that his movies did well as I couldn't imagine any girl or even guy not wanting to see him on a big screen.

Once we got back to campus everyone continued to hover around me chatting among themselves and asking me questions. After a while, Damon seemed to give them a look, and they reluctantly said goodbye and wandered off. All that was left was Damon and Eric. Both were glaring at each other and not budging. Not wanting to be alone with either of them, I said goodbye and attempted to hurry off. I heard Eric swear and then he hustled up to me.

"Can I see you for breakfast again tomorrow?" he asked. I wasn't ready to potentially lose my only friend on campus so I reluctantly agreed. He once again grabbed my hand but this time pulled me into a long hug, kissing the top of my head. I finally pulled away and began walking again to

my dorm. I heard footsteps behind me and knew that Damon had followed us. “Eva, wait,” he called out. I stopped and reluctantly turned around to face him. He was just so beautiful. And it sucked that he had been so sweet and charming at the theater. It would be much better for me if he was a jerk. “I would like to see you again, preferably as soon as possible,” he said smiling. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” I answered. “Why?” he asked, puzzled. “Well, you’re Damon Pierce,” I answered. “And I don’t think that you would be good for me.” He looked at me thoughtfully. “You’re oblivious aren’t you,” he asked. “I should be thinking the same thing. I don’t think there’s a guy on this planet who would be good enough for you Eva Taylor.” I didn’t know

what to say to that. It had been ingrained in me that I was a horrible person, undeserving of being loved, and I didn’t see how I could compare in any way to him. “Just give me a chance,” he asked softly. Staring into his eyes I was tempted to give in. However, I mentally reminded myself of the need to stay away from guys like him and shook my head no. Without another word I ran into my dorm, leaving a shocked Damon Pierce standing behind me. I opened up my dorm door and locked it behind me. Leaning against it, I cursed my actions. I had to be the biggest idiot ever to have said no to him. Feeling depressed I got into bed and tried to fall asleep. I was restless. My mind churning with the events of the day. It was hours before I finally relaxed enough to fall asleep.

*That night I dreamed. I was walking in a strange land, a land that fulfilled all definitions of what paradise would be like if it were real. A land that seemed strangely familiar to my heart. There were rolling green hills as far as the eye could see, dotted with an abundance of trees laden with various kinds of fruit and flowers. Gurgling streams flowed here and there, flowers in colors I couldn’t even describe blooming up all around me. Music was everywhere, tickling my senses and wrapping me up in its haunting melody. The air smelled sweet and fresh, untainted and so different from real life. I meandered slowly along one of the streams for awhile, admiring the colors and enjoying the warm breeze that teased my hair. I sat down underneath a tree, closing my eyes for a moment in relaxation. When I opened my eyes I gasped in shock. The landscape now resembled the pits of hell. The air was dark and foreboding, filled with the scent of sulfur and ash. I could taste the smoke in the air. Trees had been replaced by burning piles of rubble and my soul mourned the destruction of the paradise I had just now discovered.*

*Instead of music, screams filled the air, sending shivers down my spine. I heard something behind me, turned around...*

I sat up in my bed, my body drenched in sweat, and a feeling of unease enveloping me. My dream stayed just out of my grasp, feeling both familiar and out of reach at the same time. Eventually any recollection of it disappeared for good. It was hours before I was able to fall asleep again.

## **Chapter 16**

**(Damon)**

I stood outside Eva's dorm for several minutes, hoping that she would change her mind and come back out. What had she meant by "I wouldn't be good for her"? I wish I knew more about her. She obviously had walls up that were going to take some time to tear down. I pulled my hat out of my pocket and once again pulled it down low over my eyes, hustling away so that Shelton could pull up the car. I was lost in thought while we drove back to the penthouse, thinking of Eva and how I could have more time with her.

My teammates had wanted to go out after practice but I had declined. I felt forlorn. Eva had given me a taste, and the taste was quickly growing into an obsession. I stood outside on my balcony later that night, drinking my favorite scotch. It burned as it went down my throat. I thought about what she had said, about how she didn't think she was good enough for me. I knew she wouldn't think that after she got to know me. Unwelcome thoughts of another time, and another girl, floated across my memory. I hadn't thought about Camilla in ages. The guilt was always there though, laying just below the surface, rising up at inopportune times to waylay my thoughts. What I had done, what I continued to do, could never be atoned. I lived my life running from my memories, doing everything I could to forget, gorging myself in an excess of sex, alcohol, and every other manner of sin to get through it.

Wanting to shake off my dark thoughts, and get away from the temptation of the liquor in my hand and in the next room always held, I decided that I needed to stretch my wings. Making the decision, I set my drink down on the ledge, and took off my shirt. Stepping up on the balcony I sprang out into the night, my sprawling wings outstretched. It felt freeing to fly.

One of the few things I had to complain about was the need to hide my true nature. The night was the only time I could truly be myself. I wonder what Eva would think of this me if she knew. I had never even thought for a moment about telling a woman what I really was, they

were all too temporary for that. But I could already tell Eva was unlike anyone else I had encountered. The energy that I felt pass between us when we had touched, my dreams, and that golden glow...she was different as well. She hopefully wouldn't be frightened when I got up the nerve to tell her. And if I was being honest with myself, the scariest part of me for Eva wouldn't be my wings, it would be my heart.

I found myself flying to campus. If any humans saw me I would just look like a shadow in this form so I wasn't worried about anyone seeing me. Eva's room was on the first floor of the dorm, so I hovered outside of it, hoping she would make an appearance. Her room was dark however and after a moment I knew she had most likely gone to sleep. Soaring away I resolved that I would win her over, no matter what I had to do.

## **Chapter 17**

**(Eva)**

The next morning I got up bright and early. I wanted to go for a run before Eric arrived for breakfast. I had been able to get some tennis shoes and some new workout gear with my tips. It was the first time in my life that I had proper running gear. Before the Andersons, I had loved to go running. I would run around Chicago for hours, looking at all the sights. I was hoping that I would eventually be able to do the same in New York after I got back into shape. Stepping outside the dorm I leaned against the railing, starting to stretch. “Good morning Eva,” I heard the sexiest voice on earth say.

Turning around I stared right into the glittering, emerald colored eyes of Damon. “What are you doing here?” I asked suspiciously. “I was just on my morning run when I saw you,” he said smiling. “Want to join me?” he asked. No, I did not want to join Damon on his run. For one thing he was most likely in the best shape of anyone on the earth and I didn’t want to make a fool of myself, and for another thing, spending more time with him would chip at my already depleted resolve to stay away from him. Unfortunately, my time with the Andersons had ingrained in me that I needed to be polite at all times. “I’ll run with you, but you are going to be disappointed,” I said reluctantly. “I haven’t been on a run in a long time.” “I don’t need to go super hard anyway because I have practice this afternoon,” he said charmingly.

Reluctantly I walked over to where he was standing, and turned to start jogging. I expected to get tired quickly but my body surprised me when I continued to feel energized throughout the run. We had headed out into the city. I was following slightly behind Damon so that he could lead us since I didn’t know the area well. Eventually however I began to run faster, soon running side by side with Damon, and then pulling ahead. I felt a flood of energy hit me and I felt like I could have run forever in that moment.

I saw him begin to run faster out of the corner of my eye. We began to move at a breakneck pace, swerving in and out of bystanders on the street. We kept this pace for what seemed like hours until finally we arrived at what

appeared to be Central Park. I slowed to a walk, looking around in awe. When I turned, Damon was looking at me in wonder. “Do you realize how far we just ran?” he asked. I didn’t have a clue. “We ran 9 miles,” he said. “And you aren’t even breathing hard.” I realized he was right. I wasn’t breathing hard...I wasn’t even sweating. How strange. Three years in an attic should have made me unable to run down the block. I looked at him and noticed that he also wasn’t sweating or breathing hard. Even if he was in perfect shape, he too should have had some kind of accelerated breathing. I didn’t know what to say, and didn’t want to call further attention to the weirdness so I just smiled at him.

“I’ve always dreamed of going to Central Park,” I told him soaking in the sunlight drifting through the leafy trees. He kindly pretended not to notice my change in the conversation and walked over to a nearby coffee stand. “How do you take your coffee,” he asked. “As sweet as I can get it,” I said with a laugh. “Just surprise me because the only actual coffee I have tried was a mocha latte.” “You’ve only tried coffee once?” he asked with a surprised laugh. I blushed and nodded. “Alright, well this coffee stand will not do then,” he said, still handing the vendor a bill despite not having ordered anything. He grabbed my hand and started to march away. “Where are we going?” I said, once again giggling despite my admonishment to myself to be cool. “Introducing you to good coffee,” he said with a wink while calling a cab.

Ten minutes later I found myself in a charming coffee shop that also doubled as a bookstore. New and used books lined the shelves, and I savored the delicious mix of coffee and worn paper in the air. “I’ve been coming to this place since I arrived in New York. It doesn’t look like much, but there isn’t a better coffee in the whole city,” he explained, looking happy to be bringing me here. We went up to the counter. A friendly looking woman who looked to be in her late 60s was manning the counter. She had red hair that was streaked with gray, rosy cheeks, and a winning smile. “Damon,” she exclaimed. “Who is this angel you’ve brought with you today?” “This is Eva,” Damon announced with a smile. “She is a coffee novice so I thought I would take her to get the best coffee in town. Eva, this is Leslie. She’s run this coffee shop for 30 years. I’ve asked her to marry me several times, but she always tells me she’s too old for me,” he added with a wink. Leslie’s rosy cheeks got even rosier. “Ahh, this one is quite the charmer,” she said grinning. “This boy is too sweet to flirt with a woman my age.” Damon just

grinned. This was obviously a conversation they had frequently. “What kind of coffee do you like Eva,” she asked. “I like sweet things,” I said with a laugh. “Sweet things huh?” “Let me see what I can do,” she replied.

Damon and I watched as she began to mess with fancy silver machines on the back counter. A few minutes later she had presented me with a tall cup filled to the brim with a foamy gold liquid that had a leaf etched into the top of it. Damon and Leslie were both watching me as I brought it to my mouth and took a sip. Immediately I was overcome with a mixture of deliciousness. I could taste vanilla and caramel, with just a hint of coffee. It tasted heavenly. Leslie chuckled while watching me. “It’s called a caramel macchiato,” she said. “I have a few special things I add to it of course, so you won’t find a better one in the city.”

“It’s wonderful,” I told her honestly. She handed Damon his order and he passed her a large bill. “Damon, you know your money isn’t good here,” she said smiling. “She always makes me play this game,” he told me, winking once more. The man needed to stop winking, it was heating up parts of me that I was trying to ignore. Slipping the bill (a large bill) into the tip jar, he took my hand and pulled me out the door. “It was nice meeting you Eva,” Leslie called after us, beaming. I waved in reply, continuing to sip my drink.

Damon was smiling behind his cup. Ughh, why did he have to be so perfect. He had tipped the vendor in the park for no reason, and he frequented hole in the wall coffee shops where he flirted with sweet older ladies. He was going to break through my walls rather fast if he kept this up. Damon continued to hold my hand as we strolled down the sidewalk. His thumb was brushing the inside of my hand, sending tingles up my arm. We walked in comfortable silence for awhile, just looking at the sights around us. “Can I run with you again tomorrow,” he asked me suddenly. I couldn’t say no, nor did I want to say no after the amazing morning I had just experienced. “I would like that,” I replied timidly. Grinning, he squeezed my hand and we continued our walk back to campus, sipping our drinks and chatting back and forth about random topics.

As we approached my dorm I saw Eric sitting on the steps. I had totally forgotten that I was supposed to eat breakfast with Eric and was at least an hour late. He was scowling as we approached. Realizing that Damon was still holding my hand I hurried and pulled it away. “Eva,” Eric exclaimed. “I’ve been waiting for over an hour.” “I’m so sorry, I went on a

run and it ended up taking longer than it was supposed to,” I said sheepishly. “Yes, I’m sure that’s what happened,” he said sarcastically, glaring at Damon. Damon was smirking and seemed to be enjoying Eric’s frustration. I turned to Damon. “Thank you for this morning,” I said softly. He took my hand and brushed his lips against it. “Can’t wait until tomorrow,” he replied with another annoying wink. “See you at practice,” he called to Eric as he strode off, garnering stares and whispers from other students as he left.

“I’m afraid that I don’t have time for breakfast now, I have orientation activities starting soon and I need to shower,” I said with a frown. I could tell Eric was angry and annoyed and was trying to hide it. “That’s alright, maybe I can meet you later today for lunch?” he asked hopefully. “Sure,” I agreed, not wanting to upset him further. He smiled stiffly, and kissed my cheek before walking away. What a morning.

## **Chapter 18**

The next few days passed in similar fashion. Damon would be waiting outside for me to go running. We would run for several miles, talking about anything and everything while we ran. He would take me to get coffee at Leslie's and then we would either grab breakfast or just chat for another hour while we walked back to campus. I would then go to orientation activities and meet Eric for lunch. I had also continued to work at Moxie's and was able to start putting together a little savings. On one of our runs we had passed by the football field while the cheerleading team was practicing. I watched them somewhat longingly as we ran past as they pulled off complicated flips. I had never had the opportunity to be apart of a team and I remembered loving to do cartwheels and flips when I was younger. We had made it back to campus and were stretching when Damon asked, "Why don't you try out for the cheerleading team?" I looked at him puzzled. "One, I've never done cheerleading and wouldn't know how to do any of the flips, and two, haven't they already chosen their team and started practice?" He shrugged my last point aside, "We could make it happen if you really wanted to do it," he said nonchalantly. "Why don't you give some of the flips a try? I saw you watching them as we ran by."

He had to be kidding. Doing cartwheels when you were ten was one thing, but now he wanted me to try to do a backflip or one of the other crazy flips I had seen those girls doing? I would probably break my back. Plus, I was pretty sure I had read that Rothmore had one of the top cheerleading programs in the nation, and I didn't feel like embarrassing myself in the first week of school. "Just try it," he said, staring at me intensely. We were behind my dorm, in a secluded area so Damon wouldn't get mobbed by adoring fans as we stretched. I wondered if I could do it. After all, my ability to run forever without feeling a thing defied explanation. Maybe it would extend to other things as well.

Backing up against the building I started to run, launching myself in the air...and promptly fell on my face. Damon didn't try and stop his laughter as he leaned over where I lay on the grass. "I don't think you did it right," he said with a smile.

I wanted to retort back but I had momentarily lost my breath. Standing there in the sunlight, the wind tousling his hair, his eyes sparkling, he was so breathtaking it hurt. He looked lighter than normal, as if the invisible burden on his shoulders had been temporarily lifted. He noticed that I had grown quiet and his eyes filled with heat as we stared at one another. It had been hard to ignore the energy that constantly passed between us. As we had spent more time together he had begun to touch me more and my body had begun to live for our contact.

Damon held out his hand to help me up. He slid me up his body and held me in his arms. This was the first time we had been this close and I felt like I was going to hyperventilate. "Close your eyes," he whispered. "Picture the girls' movements in your head. Imagine your body replicating the movements." I felt him step away from me and gently push me forward. All of a sudden I realized I was flying through the air. Before I knew it I had executed a set of flips that I had watched the girls do in a particularly complicated routine. I turned around towards Damon, shocked. He had a shocked look in his face as well that quickly turned smug. "Told you that you could do it," he said, smirking. "Practice those moves a little bit more and you will be ready for the team." Squealing I backed up, and for the next hour proceeded to do flips that I was pretty sure only the most experienced cheerleaders could do. I pushed back the troublesome thoughts that had crept into the back of my mind regarding this new set of abilities. I was going to enjoy this moment.

## **Chapter 19**

Damon had somehow managed to get me a try out for the next morning in front of the cheerleading coach. I say “somehow”, but I was pretty sure there wasn’t a person on campus who ever said no to Damon Pierce. I was nervous as I pulled on my cheerleading shorts and a loose tee, and then pulled my hair into a pony tail. After thinking about it more and more I suddenly desperately wanted the chance to be apart of a team since the Andersons had made sure that I didn’t get a chance to have the normal high school experience. Damon was waiting outside for me. “I need to get you a cell phone,” he said almost growling. “I want to be able to talk to you all the time.” My heart started to do flips. Damon Pierce wanted to talk to me all the time! I talked myself down and just smiled at him. I did want to get a cell phone and actually could afford it now because of my tips from Moxie, I just hadn’t gotten around to it. Maybe I could do it later today after my tryout.

Damon interrupted my musings by handing me a coffee I hadn’t noticed he had been holding. It was from Leslie’s shop. I swooned. He got sweeter every day. I closed my eyes and let out a little moan as soon as the coffee hit my tongue, licking my lips to make sure and get every last drop. I was getting addicted. When I opened my eyes I saw that Damon was staring at my lips, looking pained. He quickly grabbed my hand and pulled me forward towards the practice field where I was meeting the cheerleading coach. Coach Ryan was an intimidating woman. Although she was shorter than me she was quite a bit stockier, and had so many muscles I was pretty sure she had to spend every second working out. She looked annoyed as she watched us approach her.

I had made sure to pull my hand away from Damon’s before we got to the field. I had expected her not to be happy with the tryout as I was sure that Damon had thrown his weight around to get me it. Her look got testier as we got closer and she looked me up and down. “Let’s get this over with,” she said exasperatedly. “I promised her a tryout, but I didn’t promise her a spot on the team,” she threw out at Damon. I tried to smile politely and stood in front of her.

“Alright, we will start simple. Show me a back handspring,” she ordered. Luckily I had looked up the name of the flips I had seen the girls doing so that I could actually know what I was being asked to do during the tryout. Taking a step forward I mentally pictured watching the movement in my head. Once again I felt my body execute a perfect back handspring. Relaxing a little I opened my eyes and looked at Coach Ryan. She looked less annoyed but I could tell that I would need to do a lot more to impress her in any way. “Do a round off back handspring double full now,” she said watching me closely. Once again I envisioned the movement in my mind and executed her orders perfectly. For the next half hour, I did flip after flip until I didn’t even have to think before moving.

I knew some of the flips she had asked me to perform were very advanced, perhaps more advanced than most, if not all, of the cheerleaders on the team could do and I wondered what she thought about my ability to complete them. Finally, she called me towards her. Her frustration was gone and instead her face was filled with excitement. “Where on earth did you cheer before here, and why didn’t you apply for scholarships and try out earlier?” she asked. I looked at Damon, who was standing there looking so proud of me it made me want to cry. He spoke for me. “Eva is coming from a difficult home situation and didn’t have much support for her skills,” he said smoothly. I looked at him sharply. I hadn’t told him much about my upbringing, but I guess a lot of my quirks and inadequate social skills must make it obvious that I had a troubled past. “I’m sorry to say that I’ve already given out my scholarship spots,” she said warily. “Will that be a problem.” “I have a full ride for academics,” I answered softly. “Does this mean that I’ve made the team?” I asked. “Made the team? I’m pretty sure I’ve never seen someone as talented as you,” she exclaimed. “I can’t imagine not winning Nationals with you on the team. You are good to start today correct? You will have a lot to catch up on to learn the cheers and performances for football season. I’m sure you know that the first game is next week,” she said. I looked at Damon. I hadn’t known that it started next week and immediately felt selfish. Damon kept me talking so much about myself I hadn’t had the chance to ask him about football at all. He just smiled at me beautifully, not seeming to care at all that I hadn’t known.

Coach Ryan turned to look at Damon. “I guess I owe you an apology,” she said. “You weren’t just trying to get a girlfriend on the team so she

could travel with you to games.” I blushed. “Um, I’m not Damon’s girlfriend,” I said shakily. “Not for lack of trying,” Damon answered with a grin. My mouth opened to gape at him. I didn’t know what to say to that. Coach Ryan looked between us and then decided to move on. “Practice starts at 4:30 sharp,” she ordered. “You can pick up your uniform at the clubhouse beforehand.” I tried to remain silent as I squealed internally. She began to walk away, stopping briefly and threw over her shoulder, “We’re happy to have you on board Eva,” before turning and walking away again. Damon swept me up in a hug. “I knew you could do it.” In that moment I wanted to kiss him so badly. Quickly stepping away after he set me down I began to walk back to campus, eager to get away from him before I embarrassed myself. I couldn’t believe how much my life had changed in just a few short weeks. It was like someone had found a checklist of everything I had missed out on in life and was determined to give it all to me.

## **Chapter 20**

I was nervous as I approached the field where I could see girls stretching. The practice uniforms were very form fitting and didn't cover a lot of skin. I tried to pull down the shorts to make them longer but ended up just showing more of my stomach since the top was nothing more than a glorified sports bra. Some of the girls straightened up from stretching and stared at me as I approached. I responded with a small smile and wave. I had never been around a large group of girls before and in fact hadn't had much luck with girls ever liking me for some reason. I started stretching on the edge of the field. I didn't want to introduce myself before Coach Ryan arrived to explain the situation to the team. A leggy, raven haired girl arrived on the field at the same time as Coach Ryan. She had what looked like very fake, very large breasts, a dark tan, and hazel eyes. She was beautiful. She immediately noticed me and called out nastily, "What the hell are you doing here?" I guess her beauty was definitely only skin deep. Coach Ryan glared at the girl. "Selena, this is Eva Taylor. She will be joining us on the team, and I think you all will be very pleased with the addition," she said.

"Are you kidding me?" spit out the girl who I assumed was named Selena. "We've already learned all of the routines for the season. She is going to make us look like idiots." Her voice was starting to wear on me so I stepped forward when Coach Ryan called for me. "Eva, why don't you show the team some of the flips we ended with during your tryout." I took a deep breath and stepped into an open area. I pictured all of the flips and gave a little sigh of relief when my body immediately began to execute them perfectly. I could hear some of the girls ooing and ahing and felt more confident as I continued. Finally I stopped, putting my hand on my hip, and giving Selena a look. At this point she was glaring at me but she had stopped complaining. The girls crowded around me, introducing themselves, and congratulating me on joining the team. I smiled at all of them and began to relax.

We were practicing a half time performance for the first game when the football team began to run out on the field. A lot of the girls had stopped what they were doing to watch. A few of the girls were blocking my view so

I couldn't see what the football team was doing. I stepped to the side of the girls so I could see the field. As I did so a receiver who had been running my direction to catch a pass looked up at me and all of a sudden tripped and fell on the ground. A few players jogged over to where he had fallen to give him a hard time. He gestured to them, pointing our direction. The players looked over and stood staring. It seemed like they were staring right at me. Eric ran over to them and started chewing them out. I wondered if it was always like this when the two teams practiced near each other. Eric ran over to me. "How come you didn't tell me you were going to be on the cheerleading team," he asked grumpily.

"I didn't want to say anything just in case I didn't make the team?" I answered quickly. Eric had been becoming a problem. He wanted to hang out every second and was quickly becoming pushier when I couldn't or didn't want to. I had started hiding the fact that I ever saw Damon because it seemed to set him off. He would either get really quiet, or he would get really belligerent. Neither were fun to deal with. "Is there a reason that the team has to dress like sluts?" he asked nastily. "The whole team is staring at you." I didn't know what to say to that. I could admit that our uniforms were a bit small, but I didn't think that qualified us as looking like sluts. I really wanted to be done with Eric.

Not wanting to start anything I turned around and started to walk away. He grabbed my arm roughly. "Eva, I'm sorry. I just hate how everyone is always looking at you." I began to reply but the football coach blew his whistle and yelled at Eric. Eric looked at me forlornly and backpedaled away. I turned back around towards the team and noticed many of the girls staring at me jealously. I hadn't noticed, but the red head from my dorm was on the team. She was shooting daggers at me with her eyes. It didn't look like I was going to be making a lot of friends on the team if the look on her face was any indication.



## Chapter 21

I soon learned that Selena, the dark haired witch, was the team captain. As we ended practice the girls gathered around her. Selena stood in the middle with a clipboard and began to make announcements. "Don't forget ladies that next Friday is the football banquet. Do not get super drunk and embarrass our squad. Remember Mary from two years ago. In case any of you have forgotten, or are new, let me just remind you that getting double teamed in the middle of the after party would count as embarrassing the squad," she said with a smirk. I choked on the water I had been drinking. What kind of party were they talking about? "Also, don't forget that my father got us amazing seats for 'The Riot' concert on Saturday night. We will be all getting ready to go together starting at 5 and then my daddy has cars that will be picking us up." Scanning down the clipboard she continued, "I think that's everything, you're all dismissed." Focusing her attention on me she snapped, "New girl, you're responsible for picking up all of the equipment and putting it away."

Not wanting to start any trouble I started gathering up water bottles, pom-poms, and other various items to go back in the team's supply closet. Leaning down to pick something up I felt someone leaning over me. Looking up I saw it was Eric's redhead. "Listen little bitch, if you want to survive on this team I suggest you fall in line," she said. "Eric's mine and if you know what's good for you, you'll stay away." I stared at her in disgust. "Eric is just a friend, but even if he wasn't, I'm not the kind of girl that you can threaten," I snapped back at her. I glared at her, holding her eyes until she looked away. Giving me one last evil look she huffed and walked away. Maybe cheerleading was not such a good idea after all I groaned to myself.

I bent to pick up more things and again felt someone approaching. "Look, I'm not putting up with anymore shit," I cursed, standing up quickly. It was Damon. He looked amused. "Rough practice baby?" he said softly. I melted. It was the first time he had called me baby, and it was one of the best things I had ever heard. "You could say that," I said wryly. He put his arm around me and pulled me towards him. He had obviously just gotten out of the shower. His hair was

still wet and slicked back and he smelled like a mix of cinnamon and sandalwood. His skin was sun-kissed, making his green eyes stand out even more. I couldn't help sighing as I leaned into him. "Can I take you to dinner to make up for forcing you onto the team," he asked sweetly. My walls were being crushed to pieces. It was impossible to maintain distance from him when everything he did or said was so caring and perfect. "I would like that," I answered. He kissed my forehead. "I'll walk you to your dorm to grab your stuff and then we can leave." As we walked he grabbed my hand.

The lines were becoming so blurred. It definitely felt like we had passed the friend zone, but I hadn't ever really had a guy friend before, not to mention a boyfriend. Maybe this was what nice guys did? As we walked out the gate I saw Eric waiting for me. He gave me a cold stare like I had betrayed him, then turned and walked away. I couldn't muster up the effort to call after him. Everything he was doing was pushing me away. Damon saw Eric but chose to say nothing. I appreciated that he wasn't trying to question me on it. I knew they had some sort of rivalry going on, but it was obvious that Damon was much better at the game than Eric was.

## Chapter 22

After changing in the bathroom into a pair of silky black shorts and a white lacey blouse I had picked up at a boutique I had found near campus, I walked back into my room where Damon was waiting for me. He was looking around my room with interest, it was his first time coming inside. I had bought a few black and white prints of cities I wanted to visit for my walls and had strung twinkly lights around the top of the room. Damon had brought me some bright pink flowers after he had caught me staring at them when we passed a flower shop on one of our runs. I had put them in a colorful, little glass vase on my desk. My room was simple but I loved that it was mine and that I had bought the decorations myself. "I like your room," he remarked, seeming genuine. I blushed. I was sure he was used to luxury I couldn't comprehend and that my room looked like a little kid's room. "I like it too," I answered. He smirked at me. I was obviously being awkward again.

"Where are we going to eat?" I asked him. "It's a surprise," he answered, grabbing my hand again as we walked outside. There were a lot of students walking around campus, heading to dinner I presumed. I had grabbed a few meals at the dining halls but since I didn't have anyone to sit with, and it seemed like I got a lot of stares, I had started to grab dinner to go so I could eat by myself in my room. The food was a lot better than anything I was used to. When we got to the gates of the college, Damon's driver, Shelton was waiting with a gorgeous black car that I presumed was super expensive. Damon had refused to tell me the name of it knowing I would look it up and probably freak out over the price. I had met Shelton a few days before when Damon had wanted to take me to a lunch that was across town. He was such a sweetheart. Shelton rushed to open the door for us as we approached the car. "Good evening, Eva," he said. "Such a pleasure to see you again." "What about me old man," said Damon, laughing. Shelton winked at him, "I'm sorry, but you just aren't as pretty as this little lady here and I've begun to not even notice you when she's around." Damon laughed. "I can't argue with that. There isn't anyone as pretty as our girl," Damon said. Did he just say "our girl"? I chose to ignore the statement. I wish I had some idea about relationships so that I knew what to say or do.

Damon took me to a sushi restaurant. He pointed out several celebrities that were eating there as well and laughed at me when I hadn't heard of any of them. I had never tried sushi before but since Damon seemed to order the entire menu I had a lot to choose from. The wait staff fawned over us continually. They brought complimentary champagne over, not bothering to check my ID. It was also my first time trying champagne and I quickly decided that it wouldn't be the last. By the time we left the restaurant I was slightly tipsy and had let go of my inhibitions enough to lean against Damon and feel comfortable holding his hand. We stood outside the restaurant, waiting for Shelton. "Will you come back to my place to watch a movie," Damon asked. "I promise to be on my best behavior," he said, grinning when he saw my hesitance. I didn't want the evening to end. It had been so perfect. "Ok, I would like that," I answered shyly. He picked me up and swung me around, pulling me close. "Thank you," he said fervently.

After a short car ride in which we talked about the different sushi we had tried with Shelton, he pulled into a parking garage that was full of shiny, expensive looking cars, trucks, and motorcycles. "These cars are amazing," I stated, staring in amazement at the vehicles. "Your neighbors have quite the taste in vehicles." Shelton began to say something but Damon quickly cut him off steering me over to the elevator. Shelton got off the elevator, telling us to let him know when I needed a ride home.

We rode up a few more floors. As the elevator opened I gasped in amazement. I knew Damon was wealthy, but this kind of wealth was beyond my comprehension. Damon's apartment was huge and I assumed it had to take up the whole floor. The floors were made of black marble flecked with silver and the walls were a bright white. The elevators led out into a huge room where a few black leather couches were strewn elegantly around an enormous flat screen tv on the wall. I could see a few pool tables and a bar in a room beyond the living room. A gourmet kitchen with black cabinets and white stone countertops extended off to my right. There was an island and a bar where black leather barstools sat. The appliances all looked like something from a space age.

The living room had floor to ceiling windows where I could see out to Central Park. I could see more rooms down various hallways. I turned to look at Damon. "This is the most incredible place I've ever seen," I gushed. "You like it?" he asked almost shyly, searching my face. "I love it, I can't believe you get to live here," I exclaimed. "I want you to feel comfortable here," he

said. "I hope that you will spend a lot of time here," he said seriously. I didn't know what to say to that. Damn my awkwardness. He grabbed my hand, pulling me towards one of the couches. There was a glass coffee table in front of the couches. It was filled with an assortment of drinks, snacks, and candy that I assumed someone had set out in preparation for us to arrive. "What movie do you want to watch," he asked. "You pick," I quickly told him. I hadn't had a chance to look up movies I wanted to see yet, and didn't want to see his look when he found out that I hadn't really ever seen any movies beyond the one we had seen in the theatres a few days ago. "We can watch my buddy Beckham's newest one," he said, grabbing a remote and scanning through what looked like thousands of movies. I wonder if he meant Beckham Stone. I didn't want to mention that I had been stalking his pictures and had seen him with his friends. Finding the movie he wanted he grabbed a blanket and placed it over us, pulling me in close to him. I didn't see how it was possible for me to be able to concentrate on the movie being this close to him.

Turns out it wasn't hard to concentrate on the movie. Beckham Stone was stunning. He rivaled Damon in hotness for sure. He resembled what I imagined the Greek god Apollo, the sun god, would have looked like if he had been real. He had blonde hair that was filled with golden highlights, and bright blue eyes that reminded me of the clear blue water I had seen in pictures of famous beaches. His skin was golden and he had gleaming white teeth that regularly showed themselves when he flashed his dreamy smile. I began to overheat, my mind wandering into what it would be like to have both Damon and Beckham in the same room...or both touching me. I realized quickly that Beckham Stone wasn't just a pretty face. He also was an amazing actor. I found myself tearing up multiple times, much to Damon's amusement, at various parts of the movie. I even clapped a little when it ended, so overcome by how remarkable the movie had been. We decided to put on another movie, unfortunately this one not featuring Beckham. Halfway through the movie I felt myself nod off. Drifting into dreamland I snuggled into Damon's shoulder, feeling the safest I had ever felt.



## **Chapter 23**

**(Damon)**

It was official, I was in hell. But the most unbelievable hell possible. Somehow Eva had ended up turned towards me, her head nestled in my neck, and her leg shoved between mine. I was rock hard and struggling to control myself from moving against her. “Dead puppies, naked 90 year olds, vampires,” I chanted to myself, trying to calm down. The last thing I wanted to do was make her uncomfortable and disrupt how far I had come with her. I could tell Eva was very inexperienced by how she blushed when I even brushed against her hand. Something I didn’t know how was possible seeing as she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. Everywhere we went people went crazy over her. This was mostly exhibited with them stopping whatever they were doing and staring at her in shocked awe, but it also meant that people did whatever they could to get close to her, to talk to her, and to try and either get her number or give her their number. She didn’t seem to notice her effect on people, or at least thought it was for some other reason. The last few weeks I had hired a security company to keep people away when we were out. They were good at blending into the crowds so that Eva didn’t know what was going on. I had gotten tired of snatching up phone numbers when she wasn’t looking, and Shelton was too old to keep having to keep people from approaching her.

Eva sighed in her sleep and snuggled deeper into my neck, her breath soft on my skin. Fuck....I wanted to take it to the next level with her, which in this case meant kissing. I had never gone so slow or made such an effort with a girl. In fact, I couldn’t really remember ever having made an effort at all in my very long life. My plan seemed to be working to get her to lower her defenses though, so it was worth it.

I had been following her for weeks, watching her habits and deciding when to show up at opportune times. I had been hovering around her dorm that first morning when she stepped out to run, and had been wearing workout clothes just in case she had asked questions of what I was doing there. It had worked out better than I had dreamed since now we ran

together every morning. Since then I had continued to follow her. She made sure to limit our time to runs in the morning and occasional lunches and dinners in an effort to keep her distance, and it wasn't enough for me. She was addictive and the more that I got a taste of her, the more I wanted. I was her stalker. She was never out of my mind and even when I managed to sleep she haunted my dreams even more than she had before when I didn't know who she was.

In my long existence I had never had a wet dream, I hadn't even known it was possible for me to have a wet dream. But since I had met her giving myself multiple hand jobs a day had done nothing from preventing me from having a wet dream every night. I would have been embarrassed if it had been about any other girl, but I imagined that she would have that effect on any guy. I hadn't been tempted in the least to mess around with anyone else since I had started spending time with Eva. Selena had been blowing up my phone, not understanding that we were really done. After seeing Eva it felt like I had woken from a trance and now could see how foul every other girl was. Eva was a blessing and a curse.

It was time for me to put my next plan into motion. She would hate me if she ever found out what I was going to do, but I didn't want her sleeping in that dorm anymore. I wanted her sleeping here, in my apartment, dependent on me and forced to spend more time with me. I owned the school at this point. I was planning on telling administration and housing that they needed to kick her out of her dorm and say that there had been a mistake and not only did her scholarship not cover housing, but that there was a shortage of housing and they didn't have a place for her. I told myself it was for her protection as well. She garnered obsession wherever she went. I would know since I was one of those obsessed.

I knew Eric had been becoming more and more desperate since she had been starting to separate herself from him. Based on the amount of guys that now hung out in places she frequented, I knew he wasn't the only one. I didn't want anything and anyone to distract Eva from being with me and this was the only way I could see what I wanted actually happening. In the back of my mind, I acknowledged that all of those things were excuses for the selfishness that was actually guiding my actions. But I had long ago accepted that about myself. Going over my plan made me finally relax, secure in the knowledge that no one would be able to take her away from me. I drifted off to sleep with the sweet smell of cherry blossoms and vanilla, and

quintessential Eva filling my nose, the usual night terrors that haunted my sleep staying at bay for the first time in a very long time.

## Chapter 24

(Eva)

I woke up suddenly the next morning, not knowing where I was at first. I was alone on the couch. I had a soft blanket wrapped around me and a pillow under my head. Remembering where I was, I sat up and stretched. I must have slept hard to not notice Damon getting up, that wasn't like me. I guess I had fallen asleep during the movie. I tried to remember if I had done anything embarrassing but all I could remember was being snuggled up to him watching the movie. Looking around I tried to see if Damon was nearby. I could smell coffee going and something baking in the oven as well. As I moved to get off the couch I saw a handwritten note on the coffee table.

*Eva, I had to run to team lift this morning and you looked so beautiful and peaceful sleeping there I didn't want to wake you up. Last night was one of the best nights of my life, I can't wait to do it again. I left you a surprise on the kitchen counter. You have to accept it or you'll break my heart.*

*-Damon*

I reread the note several times, going over every possible meaning in my head. He thought last night was one of the best nights of his life? It had definitely been one of mine. Stretching my arms, I stood up to walk over to the kitchen and see what he had left me. I noticed there was a covered dish with a cup of coffee from Leslie's on the counter. Thinking that was the present, I walked over to it to start eating.

As I reached for the coffee I saw a white iPhone box laying on the counter with a note on it with my name. He had bought me a freaking phone. I did a happy dance and went to open it up. Inside there was a gorgeous rose gold colored phone in a marble case. It was the most amazing present I had ever gotten. I hadn't wanted to accept a phone when Eric offered, but for some reason it felt different with Damon. "Probably because you're falling love with him," a snarky voice said in my

subconscious. I wasn't going to admit that to myself yet. I picked up the phone and turned it on. Damon had put his number in it along with several other numbers he had labeled 'Garage Code', 'Elevator Code', etc. Had he really given me the passwords to his whole apartment? That had to be good, right?

Setting the phone down I lifted the lid to the covered dish and saw French toast and eggs with a side of berries underneath it. It smelled heavenly. I began to eat, playing with my phone and looking at all of the apps he had downloaded on it while I did. I decided to text Damon. "Thank you for my phone. It's the most amazing present I've ever been given," I texted him. A few seconds later he sent a response. "It was my pleasure. Now I can call you whenever I want," he wrote. Before I could respond he sent another text. "Are you still at my house? If so, you should stay all day. I'll be home soon and we can spend the day together." I was about to respond yes when I remembered that the concert was this afternoon and evening. Looking at my phone I realized I only had two hours before I had to go and meet the team to get ready together. I texted him about the concert and he sent a frowny face. "Text me," he wrote. Smiling to myself I finished eating and went downstairs where Shelton was waiting to take me back to campus.

## Chapter 25

Despite my amazing night with Damon I was still very eager for the concert tonight. Even if Selena was going to be there, I had never been to a concert and everyone couldn't stop talking about how amazing The Riot was live. For the first time in my life I was going out with a group of girls. As Selena had ordered at practice, we were all getting ready together. I felt shy as everyone chattered excitedly around me. Girls were changing, doing each other's hair, and fixing their makeup. I had decided to wear my white bandage dress for the concert. It was really the only thing that I had that was dressy and everyone seemed to be going all out for the night. I had bought some mascara at a drugstore and was trying to apply it carefully when one of the girls stepped up behind me. "I kind of hate you right now," she said smiling. "What do you mean," I asked. "You have got to be the most stunning girl I have ever seen, you don't even need that mascara!" she answered. I blushed. I thought she was beautiful herself. She had shoulder length strawberry blonde hair that she was wearing pin straight. Her eyes were a bright spring green and she had a button nose with a smattering of freckles. She was wearing a black halter-top with tight leather leggings and knee high boots.

"I'm Lexi," she said with a grin. "I didn't get a chance to say hello to you during practice, but you were amazing out there. Selena has got to be shitting herself now that she has competition." I didn't know what to say. I had never had a girlfriend and I was sure my social ineptness would scare her away. I ended up just smiling at her and laughing self-consciously. She didn't seem to notice my awkwardness however. Instead she picked up a curling iron and began to curl my hair. It felt strange having a possible girlfriend who I could do things like get ready with. As she curled my hair she chattered away. "Just wait until you see the lead singer of The Riot," she exclaimed. "He gives Damon Pierce a run for his money. Of course he and Damon are best friends and Damon sometimes sings in the band with him. Just imagining them side by side... holy hotness," she said fanning herself. I laughed. I couldn't imagine someone even coming close to Damon's level of gorgeousness. Lexi finished my hair and I gaped at the mirror. I had never

had the chance to truly dress up and I hardly recognized myself. I had curls falling softly down my back. My mascara had made my unusually colored eyes pop and Lexi had even lined them with a little bit of eyeliner to make them stand out even more. Lexi had lent me a light pink lipstick. I still felt like me, but like a much prettier version of myself. I smiled at Lexi through the mirror.

Just then Selena called out that it was time to go and we loaded into cars. Lexi and I made sure to get in a car away from Selena and Eric's bitchy red head (I kept forgetting her name). The cars Selena had mentioned turned out to be limos. The girls chattered and giggled to each other and someone had popped open a bottle of champagne and was handing out glasses of it to everyone. Loud music was banging through the speakers and the atmosphere felt frenzied with excitement and energy. I slowly sipped my champagne as I listened to Lexi talk to the other girls. The girls we were riding with seemed much nicer than Selena and her crew.

The ones sitting next to us introduced themselves. There was Kacey, a stunning petite brunette with hazel eyes, Lauren, an auburn headed girl with dark green eyes, and Marin, a tall, leggy girl with bleach blonde hair and chocolate colored eyes. All three girls were super sweet and made sure to include me in their conversation. They were of course going on and on about Mason and The Riot and how he was friends with Damon and Beckham Stone. I didn't let on that I knew Damon and leaned closer to listen. "I would literally let him do anything to me," yelled Lauren, sloshing her champagne a bit in her excitement." "So would I," squeaked Kacey. "Maybe Selena has surprise backstage passes and we can get close to him," said Marin. All three girls stopped and pondered that scenario for a second. "Ahh, either way this is going to be a night to remember ladies," cried Lexi, bringing us all together for a toast. I laid back in the seat and stared out the window as the city passed by. By the end of the ride I was laughing along with the girls, feeling like I belonged on the team for the first time.



## **Chapter 26**

### **(Mason)**

I grunted as my orgasm passed over me and I emptied myself into the redhead's mouth. I was pleasantly surprised that she had the mouth of a Hoover vacuum. It had been an excellent blowjob. She pulled back, swallowing obviously in what I'm sure she thought was a sexy way. Security had done a good job of picking her out as she was checking in for the concert. She had bright green eyes and smooth skin with a sprinkle of freckles, and her rosy lips lined in red lipstick had looked great wrapped around my cock. She probably wouldn't have been half bad to keep around for a day or so, but Courtney would be arriving later tonight so she had to go.

Now was the time I hated. I tried to be nice, I would always make sure my staff sent girls I hooked up with away with some better tickets than they had come in with. Plus, they would always have a story to tell of how they gave a blowjob to Mason, the lead singer of The Riot. They still always left pissed off though. Somehow they always deluded themselves when I said hello to them that they were going to be the girl to turn my head and make me break up with my sexy actress girlfriend, Courtney Rayne.

Courtney was smart and looked the other way at my hookups on my tour. Some of my past girlfriends had tried to follow me on tour so I wouldn't stray and quickly got the boot. I couldn't think of anyone but Damon and Beckham who I could deal with for long periods of time. Courtney had a career and was satisfied with being able to call me her boyfriend and warm my bed when I let her. I thought she still got a pretty good deal getting to attend events with me and being seen on my arm. Getting with me had elevated her career way beyond where it was when I met her. Last year she had even been nominated for an Oscar. Plus, she was a pretty good fuck and was up for anything I wanted. The after concert sex tonight would be hot. I needed to ask my manager what time she was coming in to make sure a car was there to pick her up. She might be okay with me fucking other girls on the road but she definitely expected my attention when she was in town.

Zippering my tight leather pants up I looked down at the red head. She was still on her knees, now looking up at me expectantly. I ran a hand through my too long hair. "Sorry babe but I have to go get ready for the concert now," I told her, shrugging my shoulders. "Can I stay back here and keep you company until the show?" she asked, still trying to be seductive. I motioned for security to come up to us. "Unfortunately, I just don't have time for that. Marvin here will walk you to your new seats. I made sure to upgrade you," I added. She stared at me in disbelief, her cheeks growing red in anger. "That's seriously it," she whined. I shrugged my shoulders again. What did she expect? Finally realizing I was serious she stood up and brushed off her knees. Deciding to try and save face, she began to follow Marvin down the hallway, calling out over her shoulder as she walked away, "Let me know if you change your mind after the show...you know where I'm sitting." I'm sure Marvin could get himself a blowjob as well if he promised her a free t-shirt or something. I knew my staff frequently took advantage of my dejected castoffs to get some action.

I threw my hair back in a bun as I walked down the opposite hallway to where the rest of my band was as well as my manager. As I walked into the huge room my manager, a tall, suited jack-ass named Kevin, walked up to me. "How was the red head," he asked, grinning dirtily. He had seen security bringing her in I guess. I rolled my eyes at him and walked over to where my band was sitting. He knew better than to ask me about things like that. My drummer, Lane, nodded his head at me as I approached. "You ready for the show boss," he asked lazily. Judging by his bloodshot eyes he was already high as fuck. I had learned early on that he actually played better high because his nerves weren't as bad so I never bothered him about it. "I'm ready. Are we on in five?" I asked. Danny, my bass guitarist nodded as he stood up from the couch where he had been sitting. Danny's fingers were tapping out a tune feverishly on his leg. He probably could have benefited from getting high with Lane. I grabbed a bottle of water and rolled my shoulders back.

I always loved performing on my home turf. Usually Damon would come to my New York shows and he would join me on stage for a few songs and then hit the clubs afterwards, but since it was the beginning of football season he couldn't make it until my show on Tuesday. It was going to be a busy weekend. After tonight's show I would fly out tomorrow to attend the Grammy's in L.A. and then would have to immediately turn around and fly

back to perform on Tuesday. Tour management had really fucked it up by scheduling my New York shows during the Grammys. I wasn't looking forward to having to fly back and forth across the country so many times. Taking a deep breath and pushing my schedule out of my mind I took a swig from my water bottle before setting it down and walking towards the entrance to the stage where the opening band was finishing up. It was show time.

## Chapter 27

We had done a stadium tour this time around. Of course by industry standards it was crazy that we were selling out stadiums only a few years after starting, but obviously it wasn't a surprise to me since I knew exactly why my voice drew the crowds so well. One of my gifts was that my voice had a siren type quality to it and people couldn't get enough of it. No matter where I was in time or in the world, I had always managed to gain instant intense notoriety with my singing. The whole rockstar thing definitely was shaping up to be one of my favorite of those times though. Having the ability to easily travel everywhere and get laid all over the world instead of having to stay in one place was fucking amazing. I stepped out on the stage and the crowd went wild. Metlife was insane tonight and I soaked in the energy. There were around eighty thousand people there and their excitement pulsed through me. Damon, Beckham, and I were all alike. We loved being the center of the attention and the adulation of crowds made us thrive. I stepped up to the mic. "How are we fucking doing tonight New York City?" I yelled into the mic. The answering roar of the crowd made me grin. I looked back at my band. They nodded at me signaling they were ready and Lane began to beat out the opening notes of one of our many hits.

We were a few hits in before I saw her. I hadn't looked at the seats in front of me since I knew I would have to start slapping their hands at some point in the show. I heard loud shrieking coming from in front of me and I looked down. I had been told that the daughter of a record executive was going to be at the show tonight with a bunch of her friends so I knew the shrieking was most likely coming from them. As I looked down at the first few rows I saw Selena, Damon's occasional fuck buddy. She was hot, but was such an annoying bitch. Whenever Damon wasn't giving her attention she would try to climb in bed with Beckham or I. I think Beck had slept with her once when he was really drunk and she had basically climbed on his dick, but no amount of alcohol could make me forget what a cunt she was. I quickly looked away from her when she shot me a come hither stare and began looking down the aisle at the girls she had brought with her. I noticed a glow coming from farther down and looked for the source. As soon as I saw

her I lost all train of thought. I stopped singing and couldn't even seem to remember where I was. She was a literal goddess. I had never seen something so exquisite in my entire life. Helen of Troy would have looked like a fucking pimply face school girl next to this creature. (I would know, I had slept with her a few times). She had smooth perfect skin, long golden hair that was hanging almost down to her ass in ringlets. Her lips were begging to be kissed, and her eyes...fuck her eyes were gorgeous. Purple tinted, they reminded me of an amethyst, or a crystal. My chest got tight. I wanted to stop the show and go get her and lock her away so that no one could take her away from me. I came back to reality suddenly and realized my band was still playing. Danny was singing, trying to cover up the fact that I had dropped off singing in the middle of the song. I quickly jumped in but couldn't take my eyes off of her. I didn't know how I was going to get through the show. I was terrified she was going to disappear and I would never see her again.

I turned around and grabbed my water bottle, trying to gather my composure. My mind was racing and I was having trouble remembering what song was next. My bandmates were sending me questioning glances. I was freaking them out by losing my composure. I never let anything faze me. I turned around and determinedly stared the opposite direction from the goddess in front of me. I managed to get through one song before I had to get my fill and see her again. She was staring up at me, a smile lighting up her face. Turning around again I walked up closer to where Lane was drumming. "Let's cover Making Damn Sure next," I told them. They looked at me questioningly, but Danny started up the beat, quickly followed by Lane. I turned around and stared right at the girl, belting the Taking Back Sunday lyrics. None of my songs were enough to capture my immediate obsession but this one at least came a little close.

I just want to break you down so badly  
I trip over everything you say  
I just wanna break you down so badly  
In the worst way...

I'm gonna make damn sure  
That you can't ever leave  
No you won't ever get too far from me  
You won't ever get too far from me...

I crooned the lyrics into the mike, staring at the girl intently. I wanted to make sure she knew this song was for her. Her friend, a cute red head (not the blowjob one thankfully), elbowed her and giggled something in her ear. The beauty flushed while holding my gaze and I nearly lost where I was in the song again. Everyone within eye view of the girl was staring at her. Guys and girls were trying to press closer to her but she seemed oblivious to it. She was bouncing slightly to the song as I continued to sing, drawing my attention to her ample, perfect breasts. She was wearing a white dress that clung to her every curve. I had never seen anything so enchanting in my whole life.

My mind raced, trying to think of how I was going to get this girl backstage at the end of the show. Suddenly I realized who the record executive's daughter was, it was Selena. She was always trying to brag about it whenever she was around Damon and I, as if I gave a shit who her dad was. But I had totally forgotten. It would come in handy now though. I could have Kevin invite Selena and her friends backstage to give them special treatment as a favor to her dad. It appeared that the goddess was with Selena's group so she would then come as well.

My blood started to heat with anticipation. At the end of the song I turned and slipped my phone out of my pocket, texting Kevin the plan. I remembered right then that Courtney was on her way into town. I followed up my first text with another text instructing him to text her it was over and to go to her own place tonight. I had never given her a key so at least I didn't have to worry about her being at my place. I couldn't even fathom touching Courtney after I had seen this girl. I finished sending the texts, slipped my phone into my pocket, and took a sip of my water bottle. I now wanted to get through this concert as fast as possible so my plan could be put into place. I turned around and squared my shoulders, determined to finish strong and hopefully impress this girl. It was going to be a long next hour.



## Chapter 28

(Eva)

The lead singer, who I now knew was Mason, had seemed to be staring at me for most of the show. I had never been to a concert before and wondered if they were all like this. Mason's voice had a raw, desperate edge to it that seemed to speak to my soul. His singing ranged from soft crooning into the microphone to rough gritty belting as he went through different songs. I was enchanted. The crowd was pushing in on me but I didn't care. I never wanted him to stop singing. I didn't know much current music besides ones that had come up on my internet searches but I did know the Taking Back Sunday cover that the band played from before my time with the Andersons. I sang along as Mason purred the lyrics, changing the song and making it his own. His dark brown hair had pieces coming loose from the bun it had been pulled back in, and his indigo eyes seemed to pierce right through me. I noticed a flash of metal in his mouth when he sang and figured he had some sort of piercing. It was sexy.

It felt like he was singing the lyrics to me. I looked around me. The girls around me all seemed to have the same idea and I immediately felt stupid. Of course he wasn't looking at me. There was literally thousands upon thousands of people here. There's no way he would notice me. The band took a small break after the song. I saw a bouncer approach Selena, leaning in and whispering in her ear. She lit up with whatever he had to say and accepted some badges that he handed to her. The bouncer bounded away and Selena began to pass the badges down the line. When they got to me I read the inscription on them. They were backstage passes. I wasn't exactly sure what that entailed but I was assuming that it was another hookup from Selena's father who was some kind of record executive. Maybe we would be meeting the band? At that moment music started playing again and

my attention snapped back to Mason. He was electrifying. It was impossible to concentrate on anything else when he opened his mouth to sing. I began to bounce up and down to the beat. So far my first concert had been an epic experience.

After another hour of songs in which I seemed to like each one more than the one before the band finished and walked off stage. The bouncer came back over in front of Selena and lifted the rope that separated the crowd from the very front of the stage. Selena scooted under the rope, motioning the rest of us to follow. One by one we went under the rope, passing the bouncer on our way to the side of the stage. When it was my turn the thick rope ended up hitting me in the top of the head as I passed underneath it.

“I’m so fucking sorry,” the bouncer gasped out. I glanced up at him puzzled. He looked like he was having trouble breathing. “It’s fine,” I answered, smiling politely. He looked relieved and placed his hand on the small of my back, escorting me forward. “We are heading right down this hallway,” he told me as we went around the side of the stage, his hand still hovering uncomfortably on my back.

I began to walk faster, hoping he would get the hint that I did not want to be touched. He hastily removed his hand but sped up with me to keep pace. He kept sneaking glances at me. I wasn’t sure what to think. The girls were waiting impatiently up ahead for us. Selena glared at me as we approached the group. “Eva, my father is doing us a favor,” she snapped. “The least you could do is stay with the group.” I blushed but said nothing. I was quickly learning that Selena took every chance to cause trouble and I wasn’t going

to let her attitude ruin this experience for me. The bouncer stepped in front of me and scowled at Selena. “The band is this way if you’re done bitchin,” he barked. Selena had the decency to look a little embarrassed but she still huffed and turned away. The bouncer opened up the door the girls had been waiting in front of and we entered a large room.

The room was bustling with people running around. There were scantily clad girls spread all around. Some dancing to the music that was blaring from speakers, others sitting on the couch draped over members of the band. The band, with the exception of Mason,

were sprawled all over a large circular sectional. One of the guys, the drummer, was already smoking what smelled strongly of marijuana, his eyelids lazily hooded while a rail thin brunette seemed to be trying to give him a lap dance. I looked around to see if Mason was somewhere in the room but didn't see him. I followed Lexi to the side of the room where a long table spread with every kind of food imaginable was placed along the wall.

We perused the offerings, filling our plates with a mixture of chips and dip, sweets, and even a few sushi rolls. "This is the life," giggled Lexi. She was already a little tipsy. She and Lauren had continued to drink throughout the concert, passing a silver flask back and forth. I was still slightly feeling the champagne and hadn't wanted to risk furthering my buzz and not being able to enjoy the concert so I had declined their offers to share. I nodded in agreement, digging into my plate. I turned around to grab one of the diet cokes located in a large silver tub along with every other soft drink imaginable to man. Just then the girls began to squeal and the volume of the room

erupted. I spun around to see what had caused such a stir. It was Mason.

He walked in with a gaggle of people around him ranging from a man in a stiff suit, to barely dressed girls who were trying to hang all over him. He brushed them off and walked over to Selena, offering his hand when she tried to hug him. I felt a rush of weird satisfaction that he hadn't immediately fallen all over her. Selena was gushing about the concert and he started to glance around the room while she talked, almost like he was looking for someone. Suddenly he stopped, and once again I got the feeling that he was staring right at me. But surely it was someone else right? Mason cut Selena off and began to walk towards me. His eyes were smoldering and penetrating and I began to feel lightheaded. Not because he was a famous rockstar but because the same feeling that I got whenever I was around Damon was rushing over me. The feeling that this person was going to be important to me. Mason continued his approach, coming right up to me. He was tall. Not as tall as Damon but he still hovered far above my 5'8 frame.

"Hi", he said, smiling sinfully. I was slightly at a loss for

words but managed to choke out a hi to him in return. “What’s your name gorgeous,” he asked. Up close his eyes were even more unique, the blue more like the color of a twilight sky, the blue flecked with gold sparkles like stars in the sky. This guy was swoon worthy. “Eva,” I answered, preparing to turn away assuming he would be done with the conversation. Instead, he stroked the side of my arm. “Don’t you want to know my name?” he asked cockily. “Seeing that I just watched you perform for three hours I think I know your name,” I laughed at him.

“Just making sure,” he said smiling. “You don’t seem to want to stick around and usually people who know who I am don’t have that reaction.” I wasn’t sure what to say to that. All of a sudden a red finger-nailed hand stroked around the front of Mason’s stomach, startling him. “What the fuck,” he exclaimed. “Mason,” a voice purred. Immediately I recognized Selena’s voice.

Mason rolled his eyes exasperatedly. “Hey Selena, enjoying the after party?” he asked, looking like he was forcing himself to be polite. “I’m not enjoying the fact that you are ignoring me,” she whined at him. Mason didn’t bother to apologize. “I’m a little busy Selena, maybe we can chat later,” he answered. Just then Selena noticed me. Her face immediately flushed with annoyance but she bit her tongue. It didn’t seem like she wanted to act like her usual self around Mason.

Mason turned his attention back to me. “Would you and the girls like to go out with us tonight,” he asked. “I want to talk to you more and this room is a little too crowded for my liking,” he explained. Lexi, who had been standing next to me watching our little interlude immediately grabbed my arm and piped in excitedly, “Of course we would!” Mason smiled indulgently at Lexi and then grabbed my hand, yelling to the room, “Let’s head out.” I found myself being held closely next to Mason’s side, unable to really move anywhere. The tingles that I felt when I had locked eyes on him intensified a thousand fold now that he was touching me. My thoughts immediately went to Damon. I wondered what he was doing and what he would think about this situation. We hadn’t talked about what we were or even kissed but I felt a sense of unease. We had

seemed to cross a line the night before and now I was having similar feelings for someone else. Just then Lexi began to chat my ear off and I was distracted from my musings.

## **Chapter 29**

**(Mason)**

I was officially the world's biggest idiot. "What's your name gorgeous?" That had to be the lamest pickup line in all of history. My stomach felt like it was up in my throat. I was worried my palms were sweating in her hand. I had grabbed her hand at the end of our very short conversation and now didn't want to let go for fear of her walking away from me. I'm sure she thought it was weird that I was touching her after just meeting her. My heart was beating furiously and my skin was tingling where we were connected. She was even more incredible up close. Her voice had this sexy earthy quality and my cock had hardened just by her saying her name. At least I actually did have decent plans to take her out to. I had told Kevin to book a fun night out thinking Courtney would be meeting us so all the reservations were set.

Man I was a dick. I suppose I should have had some sort of semblance of regret or guilt about how easily I had disposed of Courtney, but this girl holding my hand made it hard to even think about anything else. How could any other girl on the planet mean anything to me when she existed. I had never believed in love at first sight or anything like that but this feeling I was currently experiencing felt otherworldly, nothing like I could ever have comprehended feeling. I felt obsessed, enthralled, like I was under a spell. Was she some kind of witch?

There were limos waiting around the corner. I pulled her to the one in front and made a gesture to the other band members who were with the other girls to go in the other ones. I wanted time alone with her. I still didn't let go of her hand when we got into the limo. Instead I found myself stroking her palm. She was sitting stiffly next to me, eyes wandering all over the car, looking at anything but me. "Do you feel this," I asked. She looked at me. "Feel what," she asked. "This

connection,” I answered, not knowing how to adequately describe it. She blushed. She did feel it! “Where do you live right now,” I asked. “I’m a freshman at Rothmore College,” she answered. Damon’s school? Shit. There was no way he didn’t know about her. My question was why he would let her out of his sight. “How do you like it so far?” I asked, wincing inwardly at my lame attempts at small talk, but continuing to try and make her more comfortable. This question seemed to do the trick.

“I love it,” she exclaimed. “Everything about it, and New York City, is the best thing I have ever experienced.” “I agree...at least about the New York City part,” I interjected. “I’ve only been on that campus for a few football games, but my buddy seems to like it.” I didn’t mention Damon’s name just in case she did know him. “My home base is in New York,” I continued. I’ve been on tour but I call here home during my off times.” She seemed to be relaxing and proceeded to ask about my tour. “Are you a fan,” I asked. “I am now,” she said looking a bit embarrassed. “I honestly had never heard any of your songs before tonight,” she said.

Was she for real? My suspicions were up. Where had she been living before this? I don’t think I had met anyone that didn’t know about me or profess to be a huge fan of my music. “Where are you from?” I asked. She looked away, beginning to nervously play with her hair. “Here and there,” she answered, pulling on her hair harder. I grabbed her hand with the one not holding hers. “You don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to,” I told her gently. She smiled at me. “I’m a bit of a private person,” she answered. I turned my questioning to other topics, asking her about her likes and dislikes, and what she had done in the city so far.

The more she talked, the more I was entranced. I didn’t even notice when the limo stopped in front of our destination, one of New York’s most exclusive clubs, ‘Covet.’ The driver opened the door, grabbing my attention. “We’re here sir,” he said politely, opening the door wider so we could get out. He had drove around to the side entrance. I’m sure the rest of my bandmates would choose to use the front door so the paparazzi could get their pictures, and the whole club could know they were arriving, but I didn’t want to draw

attention to myself tonight. A part of me worried that as soon as Eva was captured in a photo with me she would be taken from me. She was too gorgeous for the world not to want to know everything about her as soon as they saw her. My thoughts strayed to the Grammy's. I was supposed to be taking Courtney, but obviously that would not be happening now.

I wondered about taking Eva. If I didn't take her I wouldn't take anyone else but taking her down the red carpet with me at the Grammy's would definitely go against this feeling I was having that I wanted to hide her. She smiled at me as I held out my hand to help her out of the limo. I was momentarily stunned and had to turn around to try and hide the effect she had on the front of my pants. A bouncer dressed in black from head to toe was waiting at the side entrance to escort us in. As we walked towards the door I could hear the music beating from within. We stepped inside, my eyes taking a moment to adjust to the dimness.

The manager of the club, a thin balding man wearing what I could tell was a very expensive suit was waiting for us. "Mr. Shaw, we're so happy that you decided to join us tonight," he simpered. Looking around me he noticed Eva and his eyes widened. "And what is your name Miss?" he asked, salivating as he said it. I pulled her closer to me. "Are you here to take us upstairs?" I asked brusquely before she could say anything. Getting the message that I didn't want him asking her questions he gestured up a flight of stairs.

"This way Mr. Shaw. Everything should be as you requested," he added. I was worried for a second. I hadn't requested anything and I hoped our idiot manager Kevin hadn't set up something too tacky thinking that Courtney was going to be with me. Courtney always wanted the most outrageous and expensive thing that a venue offered if she was with me. I had hated that about her.

Eva was looking around in awe as we walked up to the VIP area. Covet only used black and gold in their décor and the VIP platform was actually suspended above the dance floor and featured a see-through floor and enclosed glass walls. Those dancing on the floor could not see into the VIP area but the VIP guests could see everything from both the floor and the walls. A winding staircase led

down to the dance area on one side of the platform and tables and couches took up the rest of the space. If you wanted more privacy, drapes could be called down with a push of a button to surround your table or wherever you were sitting. I had been here many times but seeing Eva's expression made me observe the area more than usual, trying to see it through her eyes. The manager led us to a table that was already surrounded by gauzy fabric. Several buckets with champagne and various other liquors were placed around the enormous table, and food trays with everything you could think of were set by them.

"Does everything look ok sir," the manager asked nervously. "It looks amazing," Eva blurted out, reddening immediately afterwards. The manager flushed in return and gave her a huge smile. I'm sure

he was going to head straight to his office to jack off after this. "Please let me know if there is anything else you want...or need," he told her, ignoring me. "Here's a card with my personal number so you can reach me at any time," he continued, handing her a gold embossed business card. I gave him a look and pulled Eva into the veiled space, having her go into the bench seat first so I could be between her and whatever idiots chose to visit us at the table next. The area was already quite crowded. I had seen a few Giants football players, some movie stars, and one of the pitchers from the Yankees as we had come in. I poured some champagne for Eva and myself and started to help myself to some of the food, hoping she would feel comfortable and do the same.

She continued to relax more with me as we ate. I was excited for her to see the karaoke once it started. One of the unique things about Covet was that it featured a karaoke segment every night. But the performers were never bad. They usually were up and coming singers or bands, and even established performers frequently dropped by and sang a song or two while visiting the club. I told Eva it would be starting soon and her face lit up. I wondered if she could sing. They usually only let known singers up on the stage but I knew the manager would do anything for me, and also Eva by how he acted towards her.

I heard a roar from down below as the DJ announced that the

rest of my band, along with Eva's cheerleading squad, had arrived at the club. Soon they were coming up the stairs where Selena quickly spotted me and came over. "Mason, you left without me," she said with a pout. Selena was becoming more and more of a pain in my ass. I assumed that Damon had kicked her to the curb and that's why she had set her sights on me. I'm sure if Beck was here she would be all over his dick as well. She sat as close to me on the bench as she could, curling her hands around my arm. I noticed that the group of Giants players were avidly staring at Eva. I wondered if I could somehow pass Selena on them. I had no problem being rude towards Selena normally but I sensed that it would create problems for Eva if I went too far. I nodded my head to a guy I recognized as the quarterback of the team. He had been to my New York City shows many times and was a fan of the band. He eagerly headed over, not taking his eyes off Eva. He moved to slide in next to her, I coughed loudly and nodded towards Selena. He looked disappointed and sat next to Selena. Selena was at least smart enough to see that she wasn't going to get anywhere with me and immediately turned her attention to the new arrival.

I immediately turned my attention back to Eva. She was watching the situation develop warily. "Selena dates/hooks up with my friend Damon," I explained. "Beck and I call her the black widow. I'm sure you've noticed that she's an awful bitch." Eva looked sick at my statement. "Everything okay?" I asked. "Everything's fine," she said too quickly. I wanted to pursue it more but I could tell Eva didn't want to talk about whatever I had said to upset her. I picked up my glass of bourbon and motioned towards Eva's champagne glass, tapping it in a toast. "I'm so glad you're here with me Eva," I said. She smiled at me and touched my arm. "I never imagined my life could be like this," she said seriously. "I'm having so much fun!"



## Chapter 30

(Eva)

Damon was dating Selena. I was crushed. I couldn't believe that he could like her. She was one of the most awful people I had ever met. Why had he acted like he was interested in me if he was dating her? I had actually fallen for it. I felt sick inside but determined to pay attention to the gorgeous man next to me and enjoy the night. I could think about Damon tomorrow. My stomach felt sick despite my resolution to have a good time. I drank some deep sips of my champagne to settle my nerves. It was the most delicious kind I had tried so far. The DJ made an announcement just then that the karaoke performances were going to begin.

I turned to Mason, my mind made up. "Do you think they will let me sing?" I asked. "Are you a singer?" he asked surprised. "I'm not sure if I'm good or not but I want to sing," I told him. And I did want to sing. I felt upset and used and I needed a distraction. Damon pressed a button on the table that I hadn't noticed. Immediately a leggy platinum blonde waitress wearing almost nothing showed up to the table. "Can I help you with something Mr. Shaw," she asked, batting her eyelashes. "Tell your manager that he's going to have a new singer in the lineup," he said, gesturing to me. The waitress flicked her eyes at me, a frown passing over her face before she quickly covered it with a fake smile. "Of course, sir," she said, walking quickly away.

"Are you sure you want to do this," Mason asked. "I'm sure," I answered nervously. "What are you going to sing?" he asked. That was the question. I didn't know very many up to date songs since I hadn't been allowed to listen to music at the Anderson's house. There was one song that I had heard on my first day in the city though that I knew well enough to sing since it was on the radio constantly. "I think I'm going to sing "Issues" by Julia Michaels," I said after a moment. Mason's eyes lit up. "That's a fucking awesome song," he exclaimed. Just then the manager came hurrying to the table. "You want to sing Eva?" he asked me. "I'll put you up after the

next singer if you're ready," he said.

Mason moved off the bench so I could get out. Selena had dragged the guy who had come to the table off somewhere with her so it had just been him and I at the table for awhile. Mason held out his hand and I grabbed it as we followed the manager down the stairs to where the stage was. A singer I recognized as someone famous was stepping on the stage. I began to get panicky. What the heck had I been thinking? I hadn't even been able to sing in the shower since Mrs. Anderson would have barged in after hearing me and beat me to within an inch of my life if I had. I was probably awful and was going to embarrass not only myself but also Mason if anyone knew he was with me. He would probably leave and act like he didn't know me after this. Just then Mason smiled at me encouragingly. I took a deep breath. I was in a new city, starting a new life. I might as well take a chance. I didn't know almost any of these people except for my team and most of them hated me already anyway. The singer on stage finished up her performance and walked off stage, the crowd screaming and cheering at her as she left. I squeezed Mason's hand and then let go, walking up the stage.

## **Chapter 31**

### **Mason**

As Eva walked away from us to the stage the manager turned to me. “Can she sing?” he asked. “I mean with looks like that no one will care either way, but I am curious.” “No idea,” I answered, shrugging and inexplicably nervous like I was the one performing right now. People were starting to notice Eva up on the stage even though she hadn’t been announced yet and the crowd was growing quiet. The music started. Eva opened her mouth. For what felt like the millionth time that night I lost my breath. Eva’s voice was the most exquisite thing I had ever heard. Her voice weaved around the room, seeming to cast a spell on the club as she sang. You could have heard a pin drop in the club with how quiet everyone was. I hung on every word she sang. It was reaching deep inside of me, sparking pieces of memories that hung just out of my grasp. Her skin glowed under the light, her hair cascading down her back and framing her lovely face. Her eyes closed for parts of the song as she put her heart into the lyrics. I could have heard her sing forever and never wanted it to stop.

I wished at that moment that I had never brought her here. I was sure there were agents and other bigwigs here tonight that would be desperate to scoop her up. I didn’t know if she had wanted an inauspicious start to college. From what little she had told me she had been in and out of foster homes and hadn’t had a great life. I wasn’t ready to share her with the world and singing in a club like Covet meant that there was no way she would stay a secret. I was brought back from my troubled thoughts when Eva sang her last notes.

There was an immense silence until the crowd started roaring. There were tears streaming down the crowd’s faces as they clamored for her to sing more. Eva was looking around nervously. She caught my eye, silently inquiring what she should do. I walked up the stage

and the crowd got impossibly louder. Wrapping my arm around her waist I whispered in her ear, “You were magnificent, love. Do you want to sing one song with me before you get off the stage?” “I don’t know very many new songs,” she whispered back. “Do you know any Adele,” I asked. Her eyes lit up. “I do know some of her songs,” she said animatedly. “Alright, let’s sing ‘Someone Like You’ I said. Just follow my lead.” She nodded sweetly. The music started and I began to sing, Eva joining in for the chorus. I stared into her eyes wanting to live in this moment forever. “Never mind I’ll find someone like you,” she sang with me.

Her eyes held some unknown emotion as she stared back at me, the crowded club forgotten. I had grabbed both of her hands and drew her closer to me during the song. We stopped singing and I pulled her into me, crashing my lips into hers. She didn’t respond at first and then slowly opened her mouth, beginning to move her lips against mine. The world disappeared around us as our lips moved together. My tongue slowly sliding into hers, licking her mouth. She tasted like champagne and chocolate. She was the most delicious thing I had ever tasted. I could have lived and died in the kiss. Eva pulled away suddenly, remembering the crowd. I pulled her off the stage, desperate to continue. People were clamoring for our attention, begging for us to sing more, but all I could think about was getting Eva back to the penthouse I shared with Damon and continuing the kiss and hopefully more.

I pulled Eva through the front doors of the club, forgetting everything in my haste to get away from the crowds. As soon as we exited the club a million lights flashed before our eyes. Photographers had heard the band was here tonight and had surrounded the entrance in droves. My limo driver was pushing through the crowd trying to get to us to lead us to the limo. I looked down at Eva who I had encircled in my arms protectively, trying to block her from the cameras. She looked terrified. At that moment Eva broke away from me. “I have to go,” she yelled over her shoulder, pushing her way through the photographers. The cameras closed in after her, preventing me from being able to follow her.

When I lost sight of Eva, I pushed my way through the crowd into the limo, wondering if I could catch her by car. I was an idiot.

Why in the world had I taken us out of the front entrance? The last thing I wanted was for Eva to be freaked out by the attention I got. Attention was higher than normal since the band had been on a world tour the past few months. But the truth was that there were constantly eyes on Damon, Beckham, and I. There wasn't a lot of times where we could be out in public without cameras appearing or fans clamoring for our attention. We had always enjoyed it, basking in the attention. But with Eva in my life now, I didn't want that anymore. I knew the cameras would turn towards her and I felt a possessive rage rush through me at the thought of sharing her with the world. I urged the driver to drive the way I had seen Eva go, desperate to make everything okay with her and make sure she was alright.

## **Chapter 32**

### **Damon**

It had been a long damn day. I'd had weight lifting, a football press conference, and then practice this evening. Normally I wouldn't mind it with the season starting the following week, but after how amazing last night had been, I was desperate to see Eva again. I had been distracted for the first time ever at practice, wondering what she was doing. I had texted her all day, wanting to see her in between everything, and she hadn't responded. She had told me that she had a cheerleading activity tonight but not what the activity was, and I was anxious that she still hadn't responded. I felt like a junkie going without his fix, going so long without seeing her.

I was obsessed, consumed, fixated. I needed her. I turned the key to my penthouse door and walked inside. A trail of clothes was on the floor leading to the hallway where my bedroom was. Maybe Eva had grabbed one of the spare keys this morning before she left and she had come back to surprise me. This seemed out of character for her as I hadn't even gotten up the nerve to kiss her yet, but I still had a lot to learn about Eva. Maybe she wasn't as innocent as she appeared. I walked down the hallway, less hesitant at this thought. I opened the door to my bedroom and abruptly groaned. Selena was laying ass naked on my bed. Her legs were splayed open and she was touching herself groaning loudly. I was furious. I had never slept with her at my place, and she had just been invited here on the few occasions Mason and I had thrown some parties whenever he was in town. She must have grabbed a key one of those times.

"What are you doing here Selena," I ground out. "Damon, I've been so lonely without you. I don't know why you're doing this to us," she moaned out, as she continued to touch herself. I idly wondered to myself how quickly I could order a new bed because I didn't want Eva anywhere near where Selena's naked ass had been. "Get up. Don't make me drag you out of here." She still didn't move.

I grabbed the sheet she was on top of and yanked it off the bed, sending her flying as well. She looked up at me from the floor, shocked. "Why are you acting like this?" she cried. "Get out," I roared. I walked out my bedroom and into the living room, hoping she would get the hint. Selena appeared, still naked. She got down on her hands and knees and started crawling towards me on all fours. I looked at her horrified. In the past I had been amused by her antics and eventually turned on enough to fuck her. Right now I was disgusted.

Just then I heard a gasp. Eva was standing in the doorway looking at me shocked. Suddenly I realized how this looked. Selena was literally on her knees, naked, in front of me. Eva ran back out the door. "Fuck," I yelled, turning to run after her. Catching up to her I grabbed her arm. "Eva wait, slow down. It's not what it looked like," I told her imploringly. "I just need to get home," she answered. "I was with the team at a concert, and there was a kiss, and I just thought..." she trailed off. "What kiss," I asked her, suddenly furious. "It obviously doesn't matter. I was being stupid," she said to me sadly. "Selena got a key to my apartment and came in without me knowing Eva," I said. "I would never have invited her here after I've been hanging out with you." "I just can't believe you were ever with her to begin with," she answered. "She's one of the most horrible people I have ever met."

I didn't know what to say to that.

The truth was I had never been a great person. Lust had been one of the things to get me into my current mess to begin with and mistakes like Selena were riddled throughout my past. "I'll talk to you later," she said, not waiting for me to say anything. I would give her space and then go after her I decided. Once she thought about this she would remember the time we had been spending together and not be upset. I still had the next part of my plan to implement as well. "At least let Shelton take you home if you won't talk to me," I begged her. At that moment Selena slid out the door, now fully clothed. She kissed me on the cheek as she slid by. "It was fun as usual lover boy," she told me with a smirk. I closed my eyes. This was looking worse by the second.

Eva had tears in her eyes at this point and I wanted to rip out

my eyes in frustration at the sight. She pulled away from me and ran down the hall. I immediately pulled out my phone to dial Shelton to be waiting downstairs for her. Then after grabbing a bottle of the first liquor bottle I saw on the bar, I slid down the wall until I was sitting on the ground, needing the taste to drown out the desperation that laid heavy on my tongue. What a disaster of a night.

## **Chapter 33**

### **Mason**

It was late when I arrived at the penthouse I shared with Damon. The hallway leading from our private elevator was darkened and I was wary when I saw a shadowed figure sitting against the wall. As I got closer I saw that it was Damon. “Damon?” I asked questioningly. He looked up. His eyes were bloodshot already, and he was holding a tumbler of what smelled like scotch in his hand. He must have had several since it was so hard for us to get drunk. Not that he didn’t give it his best effort more often than not. It was a good thing that we weren’t normal, since any regular person would have been unable to function with how much he drank most days. He ignored my questioning tone and stood up, sliding up the wall unsteadily to do so. “Welcome home brother,” he called over his shoulder as he wandered back inside our place. What the fuck was wrong with him tonight? Not that I could judge, I felt like doing my best to get shit faced myself. But Damon had major demons, as ironic as it was for me to say that about someone whose name literally meant demon.

I would normally try to go talk him off whatever ledge he was standing on, but I didn’t have the energy tonight. Highlight reels of the night and my time spent with Eva cycled through my head, distracting me from whatever issues Damon was dealing with. It made me sick that I didn’t know how to contact her. I had driven into the college campus and attempted to look for her but hadn’t seen her.

I was so desperate that I was willing to reach out to Selena to try and get her information. Although knowing Selena she would probably try to jump me and then give me the wrong information so maybe that would be pointless. I had just gotten to the entryway when I heard the elevator ding. I stopped and looked back expectantly. I wasn’t sure who would have access to our private elevator that would be showing up this late. Maybe a new hookup of

Damon's? The elevator doors opened and my stomach dropped.

I guess it said a lot for me that I had totally forgotten about breaking up with my girlfriend through a text message sent by my manager tonight. Courtney walked out of the elevator and stared at me, one hand on her hip. Courtney was widely considered to be a gorgeous woman. She had platinum blonde hair that she sometimes streaked with different bright colors depending on her mood, a huge fake rack, doe like brown eyes, and legs that went on for days. Right now however she looked like a wreck. Her makeup was smeared all over her face like she had been crying, and her hair was in a greasy, messy bun.

"Court, what are you doing here?" I asked stupidly. She immediately burst into tears. I didn't know what to do. In the two years we had been together I had seen her do a lot of things, but crying wasn't one of them. "You had Kevin send me a fucking text message to break up with me," she cried. I took a step back unconsciously. I wasn't expecting this reaction. "Courtney, you knew this was never a serious thing," I said insensitively. "You know I've always fucked anyone I wanted."

She looked down at the ground and her bawling got louder. At this point I was pissed. Courtney knew exactly how our "relationship" worked. I had never gotten the impression that she was emotionally invested in the idea of us, and I knew that this reaction was more focused on the publicity and opportunities she would lose from not being my "girlfriend" anymore, than it was from losing us. "I'm in love with you, you idiot," she cried suddenly. I didn't know what to say to that. I had felt affection for Courtney at times, when she let her barriers down she was actually pleasant and interesting to be around, but none of those emotions had come close to love. "Court," I said hesitantly. "Please Mason...whatever it is we can fix it," she went on. "I can travel with you, I can do whatever you want, just don't do this to us." My face must have shown what I was feeling because she hurried on. "Did you meet someone else?" she cried. "Because I'm willing to make it work if you have. Mason, please don't do this," she ended softly. I felt like a prick.

Maybe I had totally missed what was going on. "Court, I'm sorry for how I chose to end this, but I just can't be with you

anymore. You're a great person (I lied through my teeth), but I'm ready to move onto something real. You and I weren't real and if you think about it you will realize that. I want you to have someone who worships you, and that's not me."

She stared at me for a while before she burst into a new round of sobs. "I'm not going to let you do this to us Mason," she said in a frenzied tone. "I'll make you come back to me. You aren't thinking clearly." She seemed to have decided something because her crying abruptly stopped and she got a determined look on her face.

I looked worriedly after her as she turned and stalked back to the elevator and disappeared behind the doors. I rubbed my hand down my face, suddenly exhausted. Drinking until I was wasted was looking more and more appealing. We had some elvish wine stashed somewhere that could usually do the trick. I had hoped Courtney wouldn't be a problem. All I could hope was that after I found Eva and hopefully convinced her to start something with me that Courtney wouldn't show up. I finally walked back into the penthouse. Damon was passed out on the couch, the tumbler of scotch spilled beneath him on the floor.

Shaking my head I walked over to the bar and looked at what was out. The bottle of elvish wine sat with the top uncorked. Evidently Damon had started in on that before the scotch. That would explain his current comatose state. I went to grab it but then decided to just go to bed. I wanted to be up early to start the search for Eva and that would give me a nasty hangover.



## **Chapter 34**

### **Eva**

After running away from both Mason and Damon I found myself in the back of the car with Shelton driving me back to campus. “Everything okay Eva?” he asked concerned. I couldn’t answer without crying so I said nothing and continued to sniff softly. “Whatever the idiot boys did, they didn’t mean it,” he said wisely. I looked up at him, surprised he had mentioned boys and not just Damon. He smiled at me through the rear view mirror. “I was the driver for another of the limos tonight and I saw you with him as you got into his,” he explained. “Mason and Damon are roommates,” I said horrified. “Well yes,” he answered. “I thought you knew.” “I knew they were friends, but not that they were that close,” I said. I sank back into the leather of the seat pulling at the ends of my hair in what was becoming a nervous habit. I had kissed Damon’s roommate. I was the world’s worst person.

I stopped for a moment suddenly and thought about the two men. At least at this point I had no idea who I liked better. I had spent a lot more time with Damon but my night with Mason had been unbelievable. I had wanted to kiss him. I had wanted to do more. Despite my lack of experience, he had made my body heat, made me crave something I didn’t know how to describe. My thoughts bounced back to Damon. Damon held so much gentleness and sweetness in such a freaking hot package. Over the past few weeks he had constantly surprised me with how considerate he was, how he remembered everything about me that I ever told him.

I still couldn’t believe about tonight though. I believed him that he hadn’t hooked up with Selena but seeing him with her, and knowing they had a past made me want to puke. I didn’t know if I could ever erase the image of her kneeling in front of him naked with her hands on him. I couldn’t deny that a part of me, a huge part of me, had wished that was me on my knees in front of him.

My musings came to a stop when Shelton pulled up in front of my dorm. “Is there anything else I can do for you Eva,” he gently asked. “Thank you Shelton, but I’ll be fine.” “Chin up my dear,” he responded with a wink. “If there is anyone that could have those boys whipped into shape it would be you.” I blushed and thanked him for the ride before walking away.

Shelton drove off and I began to walk to the entrance of my dorm. As I walked, a shiver went down my spine. It felt like someone was watching me. I looked around. The campus was shrouded in shadows. It was late, or early depending on how you looked at it. At least four in the morning. Long past the time when most people were wondering in from a night of partying on Frat Row. I hurried my steps, scanned my card in the sensor, and threw the door closed behind me as I went inside. When I got into my room I let out a deep breath, mentally chastising myself for being such a scaredy cat. I changed into cheerleading shorts and a spaghetti strap top, threw my hair into a messy bun, and climbed into my covers hoping to fall asleep quickly and calm my restless mind.

*That night I dreamed. I was walking in the strange, lovely land again. This time my mind recognizing it as somewhere I had definitely been before. The same pleasing melody was floating through the air once again and I found myself humming along with it in familiarity. I knelt beside one of the streams, cupping the water in my hand, and purring in delight at its sweet taste. I heard footsteps behind me and turned around surprised to see a beautiful little girl staring back at me. The child had golden hair that matched my own and I saw the same lavender tinted eyes on her face as I saw on my own when I looked in a mirror. She was silent and seemed content to just watch me. After a moment, she reached out her hand to grab my own. As our fingertips touched, the landscape once again transformed into the nightmare I had seen before. The air seemed even darker and more ominous than the last time I had been there, and the ash in the air was all encompassing, making it almost impossible to breathe. The child’s serene look from before had changed to one of fear. She turned to me and began to speak...*

I woke up, out of breath, my hands in front of me as if they

were reaching for something. I searched my thoughts, desperate to recapture the dream I knew I had just had. Like before, the dream stayed out of reach, and I laid back down on my bed despondently. It was again a few hours before I could fall asleep again.

## Chapter 35

I wasn't surprised when my phone showed that it was almost eleven when I finally woke up. I had been exhausted after such an action packed, emotion filled night. I was surprised however by the 20 missed calls and text messages that were waiting for me on my phone. I hadn't noticed that it was on silent. A lot of the calls were either from Damon or Eric, but there were a few from a number I didn't know. I ignored all of the messages. I didn't want to deal with Eric on a good day, let alone a day that followed a night like last night.

My thumb hovered over Damon's name. I wanted to call him, to tell him that I forgave him, but something held me back. Maybe it was the familiar way that Selena touched him, or the look of shock on his face when he noticed me in the doorway as she was knelt in front of him. I just wasn't ready yet to deal with him. I got up and decided to go for a run. I knew it would remind me of Damon since he had become my running partner but I needed the outlet for the nervous energy that was thrumming through me.

As I walked out the back door in my workout clothes a figure stepped out of the shadows. I jumped in surprise. Mason peeked out from beneath a hooded sweatshirt that he had pulled almost over his eyes. "Eva," he said, saying my name like it was a prayer. "How did you find me?" I asked stupidly. "Rockstar remember," he said, with a cocky smile that sent a surge of lust down my body. "I wasn't going to let you get away," he continued. "Come with me somewhere private so we can talk?" I wasn't sure that was a good idea. The whole point of me ignoring all of Damon's calls was to think everything over...by myself.

Being alone with Mason and Damon was maddening and all encompassing. It was impossible to think straight when they were around me. I must have been a masochist though because I couldn't say no. I wouldn't have been able to say no if it was Damon instead of Mason standing here either. He must have seen my decision in my

eyes, because he grabbed my hand and started walking to the road where I saw a gorgeous gunmetal grey convertible parked by the curb. He led me to the car and opened the door. “Where are we going?” I asked. “I want to show you New York,” he replied. “Don’t ask any more questions, it’s a surprise,” he said with a wink.

We drove in a comfortable silence for awhile until we arrived near the edge of the city, where it met the Hudson. I got out of the car and looked around in surprise. We were surrounded by cargo ships and freight buildings. “Is this what you wanted to show me?” I asked. “Shhh,” he answered, taking my hand and pulling me forward.

We walked around one of the cargo buildings and I immediately stopped in shock. A large black helicopter was waiting for us on a pad located right on the edge of the concrete dock. A man who I assumed was the pilot by the headset he had around his neck, was standing in front of the helicopter talking to an older man dressed in navy coveralls. They both stopped talking when they noticed us. The pilot greeted us with a smile and walked towards us. “Mr. Shaw, it’s a pleasure to have you with us today,” he called as he walked closer, reaching to shake Mason’s hand. His eyes drifted to me. Mason pulled me into his body proprietarily. “This is Eva,” he said stiffly, obviously not liking the way the pilot’s eyes were drifting up and down my body. “I’m Len Morgan,” he said with a smile, reaching out to shake my hand. Allowing our hands to touch for a second, Mason then pulled me past Len to the helicopter. “We’re flying on that,” I said shakily. “I told you I was going to show you the city,” he said with a smirk. I stopped and pulled on his sweatshirt. “I’ve never flown before,” I told him softly. “You’ve never flown in a helicopter,” he asked, still grinning. “I’ve never flown at all,” I told him, still whispering for some reason. He looked shocked for a second, and then pulled me into his arms. “If you don’t want to do this love you don’t have to, but its going to be amazing. You can hold my hand the whole time.” I melted at his use of the word ‘love’. No one important in my life had ever had a sweet word for me and now Damon and Mason threw them at me all the time. “I want to do it,” I said, getting more excited now after getting his reassurance. “Come on,” he said, smiling widely again and pulling me into the helicopter.

Once we were inside he helped me buckle up the harness and put my headphones on so we could hear the pilot and talk back and forth. After shaking hands with the man in the coveralls who Mason has told me was his private mechanic, the pilot started up the helicopter and soon we were rising in the air. My stomach dropped as we got higher and higher but I soon forgot my fear as I stared in awe at the view of New York City I was getting. Len maneuvered the helicopter down the coast, pointing out sites along the way. Mason explained that some parts of the city we wouldn't be able to fly over but that we would get as close as we could to some of the main sites.

An hour passed quickly as both Mason and Len pointed out famous landmarks around the city. My eyes would tear up from time to time as we went along. I couldn't believe that I was in a helicopter above New York City, sitting with one of the most gorgeous men I had ever seen. I realized as Len turned the helicopter back that Mason had been holding my hand the whole time. I blushed when he looked at me at that moment, looking away from his gaze awkwardly.

Once we landed Mason helped me unbuckle and then assisted me out of the helicopter, pulling me into his arms and sliding me down his body as he helped me down. A rush of heat pulsed down my body, puddling into my core, and Mason's eyes darkened with a look I hadn't seen before. We stared at each other for a second before Mason seemed to shake himself out of it. He smiled at me before pulling me towards the car. "Thank you Len," I called out behind me as I was pulled along. Len had of course been checking out my butt as Mason pulled me away and chuckled when he saw that he had been caught.

Once we were in the car and out of sight of the helicopter and Len, Mason pulled off to the side next to one of the cargo buildings. "Eva, I know this is sudden, but I really want you to be my date to the Grammy's tonight." My mouth opened in shock. That was about the last thing I could have ever imagined him saying to me. "I can't go to the Grammy's," I said, now panicking because I saw that he was serious. "Why not," he asked. "You will be hundred times more gorgeous than anyone there I guarantee it." "You barely know me," I said, stating the obvious. "You can't just take a stranger as your date

to the Grammy's. I could be a serial killer," I said firmly. He was smiling that gorgeous smirk of his at this point. "Are you a serial killer?" he asked, pretending to be serious. "Well of course not, but that's not the point," I answered him, still believing that he had lost his mind.

Mason got out of the car, walked around to my side, and opened my door. He got down on his knees and asked dramatically, "Eva Taylor, are you really going to make me embarrass myself by going to the Grammy's alone? Please take pity on my poor pathetic self and be my date tonight." I was laughing hysterically at this point. Mason, in all of his

rockstar badassness glory, was on his knees in front of me, acting like a complete lunatic. I looked at my phone. "It's already 1:00pm and I don't have any clothes with me," I said, pointing out the obvious. "How are we even going to make it in time?" "Leave that to me!" he said excitedly, getting off his knees and surprising me with a quick kiss before closing my door and jogging back to the driver's side. He looked so excited as he started the car and grabbed my hand, peeling out of the dock area.

Faster than I thought possible we had arrived outside the city at what Mason explained to me was a private airport that the band frequently flew in and out of when they were visiting New York. A large jet was waiting for us. It had a giant The Riot logo painted on the side. As we walked into the plane I suddenly realized once again how just out of my league I was with these men. The interior was a mix of cream and black. There were groups of six large comfy chairs with tables in between them. A few black leather sofas were near the back of the plane and there were large flat screen televisions everywhere playing various shows. Mason still hadn't let go of my hand from holding it in the plane. He had stopped and was staring at me expectantly, as if he were waiting for my opinion. "You know this is amazing right," I said smiling. He seemed almost relieved by my answer and pulled me to one of the couches.

More snacks than I had ever seen were laid out on a table by the couches, and Mason started pushing food towards me. A smiling woman dressed in a professional all black skirt suit came up to us and asked if we needed anything to drink. I noticed she couldn't take her

eyes off Mason and she was staring at him hungrily. Mason didn't look at her and requested two waters. "Do you want anything else," he asked me. "I'm good with water," I answered. "Thanks." The woman continued to stand there expectantly until Mason told her gruffly that was all he needed. At that point she glared at me as if seeing me for the first time and stalked off. Mason cleared his throat and launched into a story about his first time going to the Grammy's. It was obvious that he had some kind of history with the flight attendant. I smiled and settled back into the couch to listen to his story. It was cute that he was so flustered.

As Mason continued with this story my thoughts drifted to Damon. A flash of guilt went through me. I had left him on such bad terms and here I was flying across the country with his roommate. I was a terrible person. I wanted to come clean to Mason but didn't know how to explain my relationship with Damon. We hadn't even kissed and had never ventured very far from anything that could be construed as more than friends. Except for the night before I met Mason I mused, remembering how right his arms had felt. Mason's touch brought me back to his story, along with the sudden movement of the plane. "Did I lose you?" Mason asked me with a grin. "Sorry" I said bashfully, pushing my thoughts about Damon out of my mind and vowing I would think about it later on and give my full attention to Mason for the rest of the trip.

As the plane began to takeoff I looked out the window and watched the city get smaller and smaller behind us. Mason pulled me into his arms and put on a movie. The humming of the engines, the lack of sleep from the night before, and the warmth of Mason's arms around me soon had me slipping into a deep sleep.

## Chapter 36

Mason gently woke me up as the plane began its descent. “I can’t believe I slept the whole way,” I exclaimed, sad I had missed my first trip on a plane. “You obviously needed the sleep,” he said sweetly, stroking my hair. “It gave me a chance to pen some new songs.” The way he was looking at me gave me the distinct impression that those songs had been about me. I broke his gaze and sat up, straightening my clothes. I realized I was still wearing my workout clothes. Hopefully Mason was right about taking care of getting me clothes. As the plane taxied down, the flight attendant appeared again. I wondered if she had come back to talk to Mason after I had fallen asleep. Her sullen expression seemed to suggest she had not.

I followed Mason down the steps to the tarmac where a limo was waiting for us. The air was gorgeous and balmy as we walked to the car. Since we had flown to LA with only a few hours to spare before the show, Mason had arranged for us to stay at a hotel close to the venue instead of going to the house he used when he was in California recording. I barely had a chance to glance around at the palm trees before we were rushed into the limo by a few strangers, and Kevin, who Mason had referred to as his “handlers” for the night.

Mason had arranged for his stylists to come by the hotel and help me get ready for the show. They were waiting for us as we walked into a hotel suite that looked like it was the size of Damon and Mason’s New York penthouse. We walked through room after room filled with gorgeously appointed cream and gold furnishings. Mason didn’t look impressed and I wondered what his life must be like to not be amazed at so much opulence. My stomach was in knots as

Mason introduced me to the two stylists that were waiting for us in one of the bedrooms.

Dez was an outgoing, vivacious man who by the looks he had

been throwing at Mason, was definitely more interested in men than he was in my barely clothed body that he was currently sharply scrutinizing. His cocoa complexion was perfect and rivaled any woman's I had ever seen. He was wearing bright green pants with a paisley pink shirt which he somehow managed to pull off perfectly. The other stylist, Darla, was an immensely tall woman with vibrant red hair that was styled into an outrageous Mohawk. Looking at the two of them I felt dubious that I would like anything they had to offer but Mason said he always used them for award shows in L.A., and I definitely was not an expert in fashion, so I was quietly cooperating.

Dez looked like he was about to have a seizure or an orgasm, I couldn't be sure. "I swear," he said in an exaggerated voice. "It is the oddest feeling to be attracted to you when I have never wanted to bone a girl in my life." I flushed embarrassingly and Darla and Dez both laughed at me. Dez winked at me. "Not to worry my darling. Impressive though your powers of seduction seem to be, I will endeavor to stay strong. Now go try this on before I change my mind," he said, shoving a silky blue dress into my arms, and pushing me towards the hotel suite's enormous bathroom.

I walked into a bathroom that was three times the size of my dorm room. There was a tub in the center of the room that looked like it could hold ten people. A shower was off to the side, filled with so many nozzles that I wasn't sure I would be able to figure them out to actually get water running. A long gold full length mirror leaned on one of the walls. The blue dress fell around my curves as I slipped it on. It was a one shoulder strap design and fell quite low over my breasts before cinching in tighter around the waist. Gossamer fabric fell to my ankles. It was lovely. Dez and Darla came abruptly waltzing in and examined me for a moment in silence. "It's gorgeous but we can do better," said Dez affirmatively.

Dez returned to the bathroom with an ebony dress that was covered in crystals that sparkled in the bathroom lighting. I pulled on the dress and inwardly squealed with delight. The straps of the dress hung off both shoulders. It had a waist that tied like a corset in the back and a bottom that clung to my body until it reached the floor. It was stunning. Looking in the mirror I barely recognized myself. The black offset my gold hair perfectly and made my lavender eyes pop.

Dez was jumping up and down at this point while Darla simply had a small smile on her face. "This is the one," yelled Dez with a fist pump. We heard a knock on the door. Dez opened it just enough to pop his head out and talk to someone. I heard the deep timbre of Mason's voice which erupted in laughter at something Dez said. Dez stepped back and shut the door again. "I told Mason he wasn't allowed to see you until you were all the way done getting ready," he explained.

Darla began to tie the corset strings in the back while Dez pulled out various heels and accessories from a suitcase I hadn't noticed they had brought in with them. Another knock sounded on the door and this time Dez let in a gorgeous Asian woman with large hazel almond shaped eyes and shiny black hair that was cut expertly in a bob around her chin. Her eyes went wide when she saw me. "Please tell me that she's the one I'm getting ready," she said excitedly. Dez put an arm around her shoulder and they both just stared at me. "She's a life-size Barbie doll, isn't she?" he commented. "This is Rey," Dez introduced the newcomer. "She's going to be doing your hair and makeup for the show." While Darla finished pulling and tucking on various portions of my dress Rey began to pull out various creams and containers out of a large bag.

She got up close to my face and just stared at me. "This is a first," she said. "But I don't think I'm even going to use foundation on you. I literally don't think you even have pores. Your face is so perfect, you bitch." I blushed at her examination but said nothing as she didn't seem to be waiting for a response. She began to apply various powders to my face, making me purse my lips at times, other times making me look up or down while she applied things to my eyes. I had never been allowed to wear makeup while at the Andersons and I didn't know the first thing for what any of the things she was applying did besides mascara. "Mascara is almost too much on you," she said. "I've never seen such long, thick, and dark eyelashes on a blonde before. Do you dye your hair or something?" "If she dyes her hair than her hair dresser should be running the country," Dez replied. "Look at her hair Rey, there is no way to do this with color." Rey pulled a lock of my hair into her fingers and

examined it. “Makes you want to cut a piece off and sell it doesn’t it,” Rey replied. I jerked back at her statement. “Juuust kidding,” she said airily with a grin.

Rey must have finished on my makeup because she began to wrap my hair around a curling iron that had been heating up on the counter. After another fifteen or so minutes she, Dez, and Darla stepped back and examined me. “We thought our careers were made when Mason hired us,” Darla said. “Every celebrity on the planet will want to use us after they see her,” she exclaimed eagerly. Rey turned me around to face the mirror. I gasped when I saw the girl staring back at me. Rey had made my eyes smoky and my lips perfectly pink. The image staring back at me looked haunted and ethereal, like a princess from another realm that was hiding secrets.

My hair fell in waves of gold down my back with just a bit more curl than it had naturally. Everything perfectly complimented my dress. Dez knelt in front of me with a pair of black heels with red bottoms for me to put on while Darla fastened some black crystal earrings into my ears. I was grateful that my ear piercings hadn’t grown in during the 4 years I wasn’t allowed to wear earrings. Dez stood up and started bouncing. “I cannot wait until Mason sees her.” “Maybe he will start ravaging her in front of us and I’ll finally get to see more of that gorgeous man’s body than just his chest,” he announced theatrically. I grinned at him and then allowed him to help me to the door. “Mason,” he called. “She’s ready.”

Mason was waiting in the large living room that we had passed through when we first entered in the suite. He was sitting at a large grand piano and playing a song softly. He turned around on the bench...and promptly fell off. A laugh burst out of me. One thing about Mason and Damon was that they both were extremely elegant in everything they did. I hadn’t seen either of them so much as trip during my time with them so to see Mason brushing off his knees with an extremely embarrassed look on his face, and hearing the stylists shocked gasps, this was definitely out of the ordinary.

“That bad?” I asked jokingly. Mason stood up, with that same heated look he had given me on the plane and marched towards me. He pulled me into his body and attacked my mouth. Kissing me so

passionately and aggressively that I lost my breath. Pulling away from me he too seemed out of breath. “You are the most stunning creation I’ve ever seen,” he said fervently. “The whole world is going to want every piece of you they can get after tonight,” he said almost sadly. “Are you sure you are ready for this?” I didn’t really understand what he meant. I didn’t know why anyone would want to know anything about me except for why Mason was taking a nobody to the Grammy’s with him. I gently kissed him on the cheek.

“Thank you for bringing me and making me feel like a princess,” I whispered in his ear. He pulled me into his embrace for another second before stepping back, grabbing my hand, and walking to the door. He began to walk fast as I had realized he was habit to do. I pulled on his arm and he stopped, looking at me questioningly. I turned around and looked at Dez, Darla, and Rey. “Thank you so much,” I said to them meaningfully. “You have made me feel so beautiful.” All three looked a bit teary-eyed at that moment and just waved us forward as Mason pulled me out the door, into an elevator, and out a side door where the limo was once again waiting for us. This time to whisk us to the Grammys.

## Chapter 37

The crowd roared when Kevin opened the door and stepped out. Mason looked at me. “Are you ready for this?” he asked. I nodded, panicky excitement shooting through me. He was absolutely dazzling. He was dressed in a sharp black, very fitted suit made out of shiny material, with a black dress shirt underneath, and no tie. His hair was pulled back in a loose bun with some strands already out framing his face. I wanted him. He stepped out and straightened his jacket, the crowd going absolutely nuts at this point. He reached out his hand and smiled down at me. I took a deep breath, reached out to grasp his hand, and stepped out of the limo. The once hyper crowd went almost silent. Mason was looking at me with something akin to awe...and another emotion I couldn't quite identify.

The red carpet was long as the throngs of people screamed his name, seemingly recovered from the weird silence they had fallen into when Mason had pulled me from the limo. Mason had to give interviews with various journalists as we walked down the carpet. He kept me behind him when he talked to the reporters, telling them firmly that he wouldn't be answering questions about me tonight. I was nervous but tried to keep a smile on my face like his handlers had instructed me. Mason squeezed my hand reassuringly as we walked along. Various musicians and stars would frequently stop us as we walked, giving Mason hugs and asking about me. Mason introduced me to some, and others he simply ignored. I idly wondered what made him introduce me to some and not others.

We had just stepped inside the building and were grabbing some drinks at a bar set up to the side of the room when someone called Mason's name. He turned around seeming to recognize the voice right away. I had ventured a few people away from Mason and had to peek around to see who it was. The tingly feeling returned, stronger than ever.

Walking up to Mason was the third man I had seen when I was first looking up Damon, Beckham Stone. He was ten times more

gorgeous than he had appeared in the movie I had watched at Damon's, looking every inch the Hollywood movie star with his golden skin and hair and his eyes the color of the sky. He was accompanied by a stunning brunette wearing a magenta fitted dress that clung to her curves, showcased her generous breasts, and flared out at her ankles.

I immediately felt a surprising rush of jealousy flow through me at seeing her arm clasped in his. "Beckham my man," answered an excited Mason, clapping him on the shoulder and pulling him in for a side hug. "How are you Vanessa?" Mason asked coolly to Beckham's date. Beckham went to answer Mason when all of a sudden his eyes caught mine. He froze, staring at me with an inscrutable expression. He suddenly dropped the brunette's arm and strode towards me, pausing in front of me. He reached out a shaking hand to my face, his eyes glistening with emotion. "My queen," he whispered. The world went black as I fainted.

**TO BE CONTINUED...**

## **Author's Note**

Do you ever makeup stories to help yourself fall asleep? I do. After I read my first Reverse Harem novel, this story began. It involves a few years worth of my brain circulating the same story over and over. Every night my mind would go over the same scenes, perfecting them in my brain before I could move to the next part. I would fall asleep when the scene was over. I'm actually really relieved to have it down on paper so my brain can move onto something else! I'm planning on this book being part of a complete series and I'm so excited for you to find out what happens to Eva and her men next!

If you like it, please feel free to leave a review on Amazon to give me further motivation to keep the story going. Reviews are the lifeblood of authors.

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