



# ANGUISHED

A CRIMSON ELITE NOVEL

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

T. L. SMITH

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**T. L. SMITH**

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Cover – RBA

Photographer- Wagner LA

Edited – Swish Editing

Edited – Contagious Edits

# CONTENTS

Blurb

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

TEXT TO BE NOTIFIED OF THE NEXT RELEASE

CONCEITED

Also By T.L Smith

## **BLURB**

It wasn't meant to be this way—she shouldn't have fallen for my brother and left me for him. But she did. And now I'm left to pick up the pieces of my shattered, broken heart. And to top it off, they want me to come to their wedding. Do they think I'm a pushover? Do they think of me as a joke?

The old saying stands true, 'why have enemies when you can have family.'

I understand it now, better than I ever have in my life.

There's one unexpected surprise though, Storm. She blew in just like one and makes the pain diminish. She's exactly as her name describes her—she is a storm. A beautiful and powerful one.

But not all things are meant to last. Like a storm that wreaks havoc, some things cause anguish, and in my life she may very well be one of them.

**M**y head hangs low as I listen to them speak as if it doesn't affect me. My ex-girlfriend, the one I wanted to marry, is now sitting across from me. But she isn't here in my family home with me, no. She smiles at my mother as she taps her shoulder then looks over at me. I cringe because she caught me staring when I try my hardest not to let her get to me. The problem is she's deep within my skin, and I can't replace her. No matter how hard I try.

"Echo," my mother says.

I look up at her and see pity in her eyes. It's one of the reasons I avoid days like this and prefer to spend time at Creed's mother's house. There I don't feel scrutinized, looked upon with worry or hurt. Here, I get every damn feeling and then more. It hurts, but mostly it pisses me off. I drink my beer in one long swig before standing, not caring what my mother wants to say. Guaranteed it will be something I don't want to listen to, anyway. It was my fault. I should have paid more attention. How did I not see it coming? Shaking my head, I open the fridge. Their voices become louder like it reverberates through my mind. My name being whispered on their lips like they don't realize I can hear them. Well, I fucking can that's for sure.

"He just doesn't know any better. I mean, what is it that he even does?"

They don't know because they have never cared to ask. They know I work, and that's the extent of their knowledge. Assholes, the lot of them. Shutting the fridge, instead, I reach for my father's top-shelf whiskey, I pull it down not even taking the trouble to grab a glass. I intend to drink as much as humanly possible to drown out their voices if I have to be here tonight, which

believe me is the last place I want to be.

“He’ll come around.”

I snort at that comment. Come around! Like a hole in my fucking head will I *come around*.

Shoot me now.

Taking another long swig, I put the bottle back just before my father walks into the room. He looks to me then walks over opening the cabinet to see what I was doing.

“Really, Echo? That whiskey is aged. Couldn’t you have stuck with something that doesn’t cost me the price of my car?”

I snort back at him reaching for another beer from the fridge before making my way out to the dungeon in fucking hell. All eyes fall on me.

My father walks up behind me. “He was drinking my damn whiskey this time. Going to have to start locking shit away when he’s here.”

My eyes look up to find her watching me. There’s shame in her eyes. Did I always drink this much? Maybe not. But she’s one of the reasons I do now.

I raise my beer bottle to her, her eyes go wide before I take another drink.

“Echo, we do need to talk.”

I shake my head. I don’t want to talk. Fuck that! All they ever say to me when I’m here is shit like... ‘Echo, you drink too much,’ ‘Echo, can’t you see reason,’ ‘Echo, it was bound to happen.’ For fuck’s sake that shit makes me drink—*more*. Just once I’d like them on my side, raising their glasses to me.

Fuck them.

Fuck them all.

“Echo.” This time she says my name, it falls away from her lips like honey, and I think back to how she used to scream my name when I fucked her in every room and the way she would cry for more.

*Does she cry at him for more?* I doubt it.

Shaking my head, I rid those evil thoughts from my brain. Instead, I mutter words that make everyone go silent, “Last time you said my name like that I had you up against the wall with my cock buried deep inside you.”

My brother Mike stands abruptly from the table pushing it with his legs as he does. I smirk knowing I’ve finally made him angry. His composed facade is busted—he isn’t as straight and narrow as they think he is. Looking up at him he stops, shakes his head, blinks a few times then sits back down. I watch as her now wide eyes turn to him, and she rests her hand on his shoulder to calm him down.

Perfect. Happy. Fucking couple.

Assholes.

Even if I still love her, I can see her for what she is, an asshole.

His jaw clenches hard, and my mother's hand touches his shoulder to reassure him that I, of course, was in the wrong as usual. I start laughing at the absurdity of the situation because if you think about it long enough, it is quite ridiculous. Whose fucking life does this kind of shit happen to? It must only be in the movies because this is crazy, totally fucking crazy.

"You need to stop this, Echo. You should know better," my mother warns.

I shake my head at her.

"You need to stop picking *him* all the time, I'm your son, too." Her eyes go wide at my words as my father says my name in a stern voice, "Echo." His eyebrows are lowered and drawn together so hard they are forming a V over his nose, and the intense stare is enough for me to pay attention. "Maybe if you acted your damn age..." He pauses for a second and slams his hand on the table. "Your brother works, he's built a good life for himself, and doesn't drink until he can't see straight."

I look across at my straight and narrow brother, the one that's holding my ex-girlfriend's hand right now on the table across from me like it shouldn't affect me. *Again*.

Assholes.

"I work." They all look at me. "I own my own fucking business. Does he?" I raise an eyebrow, while they all just stare at me with blank expressions. "And do you want to know something else as well? I'm fucking rich. Richer than this asshole will ever be in his shit lawyer job." I stand, my vision's blurry while everyone watches me. "Stop inviting me to this shit-show. Especially, considering you're making it perfectly clear you don't fucking want me here," I say mostly to my mother who guilts me into coming and then proceeds to put me down. Why I put myself through it all, I have no fucking idea.

"You're a real piece of work, aren't you?" my brother says sitting proudly in his spot at the table.

"I guess I am. Ask Selena... she should know. She fucked me almost every day for years straight, couldn't get enough of me. Is she the same with you? Do you make her toes curl and her voice high pitched? Because believe me, brother, I sure as shit know how to."



Selena lets go of his hand placing it in her lap as she looks down.

He spins to watch her then back to me. “But look where she ended up, brother. Look whose bed she climbs into every night. It isn’t yours, is it? You’re a drunk, you piece of shit.”

The love that emanates from this family sometimes even blindsides me, honestly. Jesus! What family speaks to each other the way we do. No one, that’s fucking who.

That’s why I don’t feel bad when I suddenly fly over the table. His chair pushes backward, and I catch his neck in my hands and squeeze until we’re both on the floor. I sit on him and sneer as I watch him turn blue.

“Oh my God,” Selena screams.

“Get off of him, *now*.” My mother tugs at my shoulder to pull me loose, but I stay still and taunt him until he starts to lose consciousness.

I hear the cock of a gun, then the tip of it hits the back of my head.

Fuck!

“Now, son.” I let go, slowly getting up as my father puts away his gun.

Selena drops to his side as I smile with disdain down at him.

“Don’t expect me to be this nice next time. This is your last warning.”

“Get out of my house, and don’t ever come back,” my mother says angrily as she points to the front door.

I reach for my beer, grabbing the neck and tip it to her as I walk backward. “Gladly. Have a nice fucking life with your perfect fucking son.”

“Get the fuck out,” my father says while shaking his head at me.

I don’t have to be told again. So, I make my way to the front door of my family home where I grew up but was always treated like an outsider. One where I was never appreciated like I should have been. One where my perfect fucking brother is treated like royalty.

No. I had Selena, and that was all I needed for a long time. Her and my three non-blood brothers who are there for me more than anyone in this world. They see him for the asshole he is, and when my brother attempted to be friends with my group, it never worked.

But, I guess he ended up winning anyway.

Because he got what mattered most to me—the girl.

He got her and rubs it in my face every chance he gets.

Again, I can’t stress the word asshole enough.

“How did it go?” Falcon asks the minute I get into my car, his voice booming through the speakers.

“As well you could imagine.”

“Shit,” he curses. “That bad?”

“I ended up having a gun pointed at my head. So what do you think?” Pulling away, I flip the house off and hope I never see it again or the people inside it.

“Want me to sic Creed onto them? I mean he does have a pregnant wife and all, but I’m sure he’s itching to lay down some bad shit on someone.” He laughs.

“I heard that you dick. I’m not your fucking lap dog you can order to sic on people,” Creed says to him who’s clearly sitting next to him listening in on the conversation.

“I won’t be seeing them again anytime soon. So no. I got it handled.”

“Echo,” a sweet angelic voice comes through the line. “I’m sorry.” I almost let my body drop at those words and think of the mess I created. Almost.

“Thanks, El.” I hang up my cell and wish I found a love like Creed and El have. That my love didn’t run off with my brother the first chance she fucking got.

Pulling up at the closest bar, I get out running my fingers through my hair and decide to drink myself to sleep. Let’s face it, it’s probably my best option today.

Fuck Christmas! What a shit-show that was.

## O ne Year Ago...

SELENA'S COMPLAINING, again. Why? I can't even remember for the life of me. I should probably try to remember. I mean I care, don't I? Her face is scrunched up in anger, she's clearly pissed at something I've done. I scratch my head in confusion. Fuck! What did I do?

"You just don't care anymore. Do you? Is that it?"

I step closer to her. Her pulse is fast as I touch her wrist, I can feel it steadily beating on my fingers. I run my fingers back and forth until she starts to calm, but her eyebrows are still scrunched.

"I care. You know I care." Stepping up close to Selena, I linger so close to her lips, knowing I'm going to claim her and make them mine as I've done over the last five years. Calming her is one of my many talents, among other things which I plan to do very soon.

"Don't do it." She looks at my lips then back to me.

"Do what?" I ask breathing her in.

"I'm trying to have a serious conversation here, Echo. Don't ruin it."

"Ruin it?" I mutter looking at her lips then back to her eyes—her very green eyes. "Only improve it, baby." Before I let her utter another word, I close the distance which is separating us and kiss her, my lips touch hers, and within seconds her body relaxes fully. I knew it would make her relax just as I know her. My hands leave her wrists and envelop her body lifting her as she

wraps her legs around my waist.

“We can’t,” she states as I enter the bedroom, the one we share together. I don’t listen to her excuses as I lay her down and start kissing her neck. Pulling open her dress, I kiss my favorite parts of her. It’s very fucking hard to decide when you love someone like I love Selena—with all that I am.

“Tell me to stop.”

She opens her mouth but before she can say another word my mouth is on her clit, and in reaction, her legs spread wider as I keep her panties pushed to the side. I make her squirm and taste what I always love to taste. Her hands find my blond hair that seriously needs a cut as she roams her hands through it, pulling it slightly then just before she comes she pulls me to her and slams her own lips to mine. I kick my jeans off then reaching between us I slide in—it’s easy, just like breathing. Something we’ve done multiple times and something I plan on doing for the rest of my life with her.

She is it.

I knew it from the moment I met her.

Selena moans loudly, her heels digging into my ass while I hold her hands above her head. She keeps her eyes closed tightly as she starts screaming my name from her lips.

The sound is like ecstasy, and I don’t stop. Not when I feel her loosen her grip, not even when she starts to come a second time. Her hands are now in her hair pulling at it trying to control her onslaught of emotions hitting her like a fire truck. As her pussy starts to squeeze around my cock for the second time I come, laying on her chest as we both try to catch our breaths.

Looking up at her, she smiles and shakes her head.

“You just can’t help yourself, can you?”

I almost laugh. Almost.

“You’re mine, are you not?” Rolling off her and to my side, I watch Selena pull her dress up over her chest and sit up, she looks back at me her green eyes haunted with something I can’t make out.

“We need to talk, Echo.”

Touching her back I tickle my fingers up and down as I wait for her to speak.

“Echo...” She doesn’t have a chance to finish as my cell starts ringing and Darby’s name flashes up. Holding up a finger to her, I listen as he asks me to come in immediately. Standing, I lean down to kiss her, but she shakes her head at me.

“Come on, baby, I’ll be back.”

Her eyes narrow. “What is it that you do exactly, Echo? After all these years you’ve never really told me?”

“We own a private establishment, you know this.”

Her hands cross over her chest. “Do you ever plan to tell me what you do in there?” I scratch the top of my head unsure of how to answer her. “You’re trying to come up with a lie right now, aren’t you?”

I shake my head at her crazy words. “Of course not, it’s just very elite for a reason, baby.”

She stands, doing up her dress. “Don’t baby me, you asshole. I’m leaving.”

“Okay. Want me to grab something for dinner tonight?”

She walks to our closet, pulls out a bag and starts throwing her shit in it. “I’ve found someone else, Echo. Someone who can give me his all. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about today. But, of course, you get distracted easily as usual.” She keeps packing, then stops and looks up when I don’t answer her. Selena’s words try to process through my brain as if I didn’t hear them correctly.

“You’re fucking someone else?”

Selena groans loudly, standing up with bag in hand. “Of course, that’s all you hear. I’m leaving you, Echo. And I’m not coming back this time. I can’t.”

She’s left me before. But she’s always come back the next day once she’s cooled down, but seeing someone else hasn’t happened before. She pulls the bag up her shoulder, and it takes me a moment longer to realize what she’s saying.

“You can’t do that to me. To us.”

She scoffs at my words while she reaches for her cell and places it in her pocket. “I’ve already done it, Echo. See, you’re not listening again. It goes in one ear and out the other. I don’t love you anymore, I love someone else.” Her hands are flying around, but the words coming from her mouth don’t make sense. I look at the bed which shows evidence of our sex. How the fuck can she say that after what we’ve just done?

“You don’t love me anymore?” Pinning her with my stare, I will her to tell me the truth.

She looks at the floor then back to me. Conviction in her eyes. “I want more. You aren’t more for me, Echo.”

I can feel the knife she's just placed in my heart twist, and it twists so fucking hard.

"You want to leave me?" I say the words more to myself, but she answers them anyway.

"I am... *leaving you*. Not want. I *am*, Echo. I'm sorry. I know this isn't easy. But when you really think about it and move on, you'll see that you don't love me the way you think you do. You just don't." My hands reach for her, gripping her arms tightly. Her eyes go wide as if she's afraid. But I would never hurt her, so I remove my hands but stay in front of her.

"Don't tell me how I love or who. I love you, Selena. I have from the moment I met you. Don't twist this to make yourself feel better by finding someone else."

She steps back as if I've slapped her. "I was hoping we could end this on good terms, Echo. I want to be friends. Because I do love you."

"Friends," I grunt at her, then point to the door. "Leave my house."

"See, was it ever ours? Your house. You don't do that to people you love. This was meant to be a partnership, Echo." She walks past to leave me forever.

"I hope to never see you again, Selena. I really fucking do."

She smiles a sinister smile before she walks out shutting the door behind her.

I drink myself to sleep that night. And the next, and the next.

**Y**ep, it's my last time. I swear it is. I shake my head as I laugh at the show, the one that suckers me in every time I'm bored out of my brain. Which seems to happen a lot lately, work and no friends do that to you.

Yes, I have no friends.

That's because I know no one in this goddamn city, and left everyone I love back home. I'm being a grown-up, doing grown-up things and standing on my own two feet with no one around me to tell me how proud they are. Is it smart? Possibly not. But I did it anyway. My job's demanding, and when it isn't, I don't want to do much anyway. I'm surrounded by women and very few men all day. Being the boss though, doesn't work well with mingling with my staff. I prefer for them to see me in the light I show them, not this girl who likes to sit in her non-fashion pajamas and eat popcorn mixed with chocolate all night watching some stupid comedy.

I groan loudly when my cell starts binging, alerting me to more emails. Even though I say I won't work when I'm home, I do every time. Get suckered in, and work until I pass out then get up, get dressed and do it all over again.

How interesting am I?

Full on, I know.

Not.

I need a new life. I was hoping by now I would have at least met a few people to socialize with. It's been three months and not once have I gone out by myself in this city.

It also doesn't help that I'm one of the youngest in my office and effectively their boss which I know more than a few are not happy about. Many of them tried out for my job, but I worked damn hard to get where I am today and even if I get snotty comments or looks behind my back—because they think my age is a factor in how I do my job—I won't let it affect me.

I'm damn good at it.

Have been since I was sixteen when I first took on a job at a fashion magazine.

Now, I'm Chief Editor at one of the best and well-known magazines worldwide. My age helps me keep up to date with all the things my generation wants. Plus, my experience helps me know the business. I see it as a win-win. Others think that I shouldn't be in the position I'm in. My cell starts ringing and I know straight away it's Melissa, as I have a set ringtone for her.

"I want this conversation to start off with... Mel, you won't believe the piece of ass I hit last night. Actually, he's still in bed with me, and I'll say... give me all the details. So, give me all the details?"

"Harry isn't a fine piece of ass," I say laughing at her words.

"Oh my God, every time I call you're watching that ridiculous movie. Enough already." I can hear music in the background.

"Where are you?"

"Roger's Bar," she answers like I should know. I probably should. Roger's is the local bar where we used to go until close to every weekend. Oh, how my life has changed. "He's here, too, with her wrapped around his waist."

I pull the cell away and take a deep breath. Fuck him, and his wandering dick. "I don't care."

This time Mel stays silent. One thing you need to know about Mel is she's never silent.

"You do! And your life seems to be sucking up there. How about I come up next weekend, and we can paint the town pink?" I smile despite hearing what he's doing with another woman not even two months after me being gone. Asshole. Being with someone most of your teenage and adult life doesn't mean shit. I was with Matthew since I was fifteen, little did I know until a few months ago he liked to stick his dick in places that weren't me.

So this new start came at the perfect time. I wouldn't have to watch him chasing after other women and kissing up on them. I could start afresh.



“Yes! Yes! Yes! How many more yeses do you need?” I say sitting up pausing my movie.

“No more *When Harry Met Sally* all week, Storm.”

I poke my tongue out, but I know she can’t see me. “I wasn’t really watching it.”

She scoffs at me. “You’re lying, but that’s okay. Have your *When Harry Met Sally* shit now, but be prepared to not put it on at all next weekend.”

“I’ve only watched it once this week.”

“Lies, but that’s okay. I can handle that one lie.”

She’s right, I’ve watched it every day this week.

My life really does suck.

“Maybe it wasn’t so smart to start over,” I say putting my fingers to my mouth biting on my fingernail as I lay back on my couch.

“Please, it’s a great thing. You’re starting over. So many people dream about doing that, and here you are actually doing it. Stormi, you got this, babe. I’ll be there next week and we can explore together.” I trust her words and hope to God I can survive because the last thing I want to do is go home.

THE WEEK WENT SUPER SLOW, but also super-fast. It was a nightmare and a blessing all in one to finally see Friday roll around. I needed to leave this office and see my best friend. Desperately.

“Plans for the weekend?” Vicki asks me as my cell starts ringing and Mel’s ringtone blasts through the office. I quickly place it on silent as all eyes fall to me from her booty-shaking song and smile a fake smile. Vicki, in the whole time I’ve been here, not once has she been nice to me. She’s one of the editors and ten years older than me. I’m sure she wanted my job, hell, she possibly even applied for it. Who knows?

“Yes, actually. You?”

She smiles and looks at the ring on her finger. “Yes. My husband is surprising me with something. I can’t wait. It’s so good to go home to someone who loves you, you know?”

I nod my head and keep my fake smile plastered on my face. “Have a good weekend.”

Vicki nods while looking at the rock on her finger as I walk past her out

the door. The minute the cold air hits me, I breathe in the fresh air and call out the nearest cab, so I can get home. Mel should be on her way by now as she messaged me she was driving and wasn't too far away. Tonight she wants to go out, and I'm all for it. After the week I've had at work and faking smiles I'm so over it. To not have to force a smile this weekend will be good.

Mel's wearing her favorite color as the cab comes to a stop out the front of my house—pink dress with pink heels. She waves like a crazy lady as I slide out and she almost tackles me to the ground when she reaches me. I have to try and not fall back, so I don't land on my ass in or even possibly ruining my new designer shoes that cost the price of one week's rent around this city. Not happening.

"I hope you're ready? I brought all my good dresses, and I'm ready to dance all night." She lets me go and spins on the spot.

"I'm not wearing pink," I tell her while picking up my bag which fell to the floor when she hugged me so tightly I almost fell over. Getting to my door, I open it then help her with her bags because she never leaves her house with just one. Melissa's over the top, but I love that about her dearly. It's who she is.

"Please, you can't clash with me. No. You can wear black like you usually do, just please break it up with some color." I laugh at her full explanation about what I can and can't wear. We chose the same field of work—fashion. Except she's into designing. But we both equally love our work and where we're headed in the fashion industry.

"How long am I going to have to wait? I don't want to wait forever. I desperately need a drink and to discuss how I may or may not have punched Matthew in the honkey donks." I stop walking into my room at her words and turn to face her, my hands gripping the wall.

"You did not?" I ask. However, she nods her head in confirmation.

"Get dressed quickly if you want to know."

"That's not fair," I whine. Running into my room, tearing off my clothes and getting changed, I throw my hair up in a messy bun pulling loose curly strands free, and placing on some rose gold hoops. When I come back out slipping on my heels, Mel's already at the door knowing I don't pussyfoot around and she smiles.

"I knew I could make you move fast. So where to?" We start walking because I chose an area to live that's close to the restaurants and nightlife.

"Now, tell me why you punched him in his baby making balls." She

giggles as we cross the street.

“He was trying to get with Maddy. Can you believe him? Like I would let that happen.”

“Oh my God.” Maddy’s Mel’s little sister, she’s just turned eighteen.

“Yep, God, believe it. The minute I saw it I knew what he was trying, so I walked straight up to him and punched him where he deserved it,” she says laughing.

We sit at the local Thai restaurant to eat before we go out. I order a watermelon margarita and instantly decide it’s my new favorite drink. Mel, on the other hand, orders a bottle of wine and doesn’t share.

“I sometimes miss it, you know?”

She shakes her head at me as the first course of the food comes out.

“No, you don’t. You’re just bored. Once you meet people, it’ll be different.”

I shrug. Maybe.

“It’s been one year, Echo. Seriously...” I cringe at his words. Falcon wouldn’t know love if it slapped him in the fucking face. “It’s time to move on. Obviously, she has.”

*Fuck her.*

“Fuck you,” I reply in answer. Why did I come back from the beach, who fucking knows? I should have stayed and given up on this life, but it’s like a sinkhole you can’t get fucking out of. Luckily, I love it.

“I can make it better. I know Creed’s on the straight and narrow, but I can always put him onto her. He could be fast. You wouldn’t even have to know he killed her.”

“He’s going to kill you if you keep that shit up.”

Falcon flips me off as he walks away. Elicea walks in with my mail. She passes it to me not saying a word then she walks out. Shit! Did she just hear everything we said? Yeah, she probably did. Creed and she have been doing well together, and I don’t want to fuck it up. He needs normal, and she’s his normal. Just took him a while to see it.

“We can hear you two fighting. You know that, right?” Darby says as he walks in shutting the door behind him. “Especially when you don’t shut the fucking door. You know she’s pregnant? She doesn’t need to listen to you two fight over who Creed’s going to kill next.”

Fuck! I cringe at his words. He’s right. If we brought that baby on early due to stress, we would be the next ones dead without a shadow of a doubt.

“What the fuck.” The shiny fucking envelope falls from my hand that I’ve just opened, and the invitation tucked inside also spins slowly on the wind to

the floor. And now I want to light every fucking thing on fire.

The door opens, and Elicea and Falcon stand there waiting to see what's happened. My foot meets my desk as I kick it, then I turn and punch the wall. Hard. My knuckles start to bleed, but it does nothing for this feeling that's taken root inside me.

*Did I mean absolutely nothing?* What the fuck is this shit. How could she even do this to me? Who does that to someone they once said they loved?

"Oh shit."

I turn, taking in deep breaths and notice Darby reading the very bright invitation. He shakes his head as Falcon tears it from his hand.

"Do you want me to call, Creed?" Elicea asks. She's the only calm one in the room, it's because she doesn't know much. Not really. Only bits and pieces. She doesn't know how it feels to have your heart torn from your chest and then put back together piece by piece all by yourself.

"Probably should just leave, El," Darby tells her. She nods her head as she backs out of the room, shutting the door behind her.

"We can drink on it! Burn it, then drink some more," Falcon says making that sparkly piece of shit invitation disappear.

"Yes, we can drink," Darby says. We both look at him. He shrugs. "I fucking need one, but you need it more."

"How could she?" I ask, my fists clenching hard. I want to punch the fucking wall again but this time I want to destroy it.

"Let's go, now," Falcon says changing the subject.

"Then him..." I take a huge breath in and continue, "... he's my fucking brother. How could he?"

They both don't speak. Honesty, what can they say? None of the boys ever liked my brother. More than on one occasion Falcon has ended up in fists fights with him.

"Should we tell Creed?" Darby asks.

"No. He doesn't leave her alone for long periods of time. You should know this. He will only come if she comes. And to be honest, we're going out to drink and hopefully find Echo a fuck."

Darby nods his head then walks out leaving the door open.

"Can I beat him up again, for old time's sake?" Falcon jokes, although I know he's serious.

"No."

IT'S BUSY, women are standing around us in circles as we sit in the private booth. Falcon has a woman on either side of him, both women are clutching his waist and holding his ass. Darby sits opposite me with a drink in his hand listening to the owner of the club dribble a whole lot of shit about his business. Darby's well known in the nightclub business, he's helped some become what they are today with his great advice. Word spreads fast when someone offers to assist you to make your business better. He has his reasons for doing it, though. If business boomed in places near ours, it would attract a higher clientele coming to look for women. With their business booming ours tripled.

"None of these?" Falcon asks pushing a woman with blonde hair toward me. I don't even bother smiling at her as I turn away, but she sits beside me placing her hand on my leg. I get up not wanting her touching me in places where Selena used to touch me when she wanted something.

"I'm going to the bar."

Falcon laughs at me. We don't need to go to the bar, the bar comes to us, but I want out of this nightmare. It wasn't what I was expecting. The women are easy and caked with make-up with breasts so fake I could bounce a ball off of each one. Selena was like that, though. I once loved her fake breasts as much as I loved her. Fuck! I even gave her the money for them when she complained about not being able to afford it.

Ordering shots seems to be the best option right now. The quickest way to get fucked up is to drink as much as humanly possible in a short time. So, I order almost the fucking bottle and line the shots up. A woman beside me knocks one from my hand spilling it all over my white dress shirt. I drink the remaining amount quickly before I turn to face her. She's looking at my tray, not me when I see her. Her mouth moves making my eyes follow each curve of her lips.

"That's a whole lot of drinks for one person." That's when she lifts her eyes to look at me. Brown as the dirt but with specs of green and blue littered through them.

"I planned to drink every last one of them but you lost me one."

She looks away then calls the bartender over, ordering me another one. I watch in fascination as she orders almost another bottle, the same as what I just did.

“It’s expensive,” I say watching her purely intrigued by the way her eyebrows raise and her lips thin.

“I can afford it.”

I grunt at her and turn back to my drinks while she pushes one over my way. “To make up for your drink, enjoy blondie.” She picks up the tray and walks away. Despite my situation, I smirk and turn to see where she went. She’s easy to spot, her hair is as red as fire, and she stands out amongst all the women who surround her. Even the one who’s dressed in bright pink.

“Who was that?” The bartender looks to where she’s standing then shrugs his shoulders. Maybe she’s exactly what I need to get me out of my funk. Maybe she can make me forget just for one night. It’s only one night, I want. Slamming down a few more shots, I don’t take my eyes off her as I watch her hips sway to the music. Her smile is bright as she yells to her friend while they drink. I used to have fun, have that kind of smile once. Not anymore. It was stolen and I’m searching to get it back.

Looking past her, I see the boys stuck in the booth. Well, the only person who looks like he doesn’t want to be there is Darby. He’s looking everywhere but at the woman standing directly in front of him. I thought about saving him and telling him he can go, but fuck it, he never has a life because all he does is work. When was the last time he even got laid? Who fucking knows?

Her hands are up above her head, and she’s swaying them with her hips. Licking my lips, I wonder how they would move when she’s riding me fucking hard. Would she be soft and slow, or hard and fast?

My feet start pulling me toward her before I can even think of talking myself out of it. I stand directly behind her, watching her and hoping she backs up just a little, so she pushes herself onto me. Her friend sees me before the red-haired dancing beauty does. She smiles and with one hand pushes her friend back, so she lands at my front. My hands wrap around her hips to steady her, as her heel steps on my toes. I cringe but don’t let the words I want to say leave my mouth.

She turns fast, so I’m not touching her. Her hands fly to her mouth, and when she sees me, she drops them as a small smile creeps up on her face. Her eyes roam me over up and down before she stops at me.

“Blondie.”

“Red,” I say back to her not hiding the smile sitting on my lips.

“I would apologize but I have a feeling she did it intentionally.” She turns

back to her friend, says something, before she looks back to me. “You want something, blondie?” she asks in a way that should be illegal. It drips from her lips as if she’s ready to let me have my way with her. It’s an invitation and one I’m gladly going to take.

“You, red, what do you say? Let me have you?”

Her long, black eyelashes fall across her cheeks as she looks down, then open wide as she looks up to me. She takes one step closer, so her heels are now toe to toe with mine. This woman is something else, and I want to explore that something else.

“You’ll have to kiss me first... if you suck we can’t do this. Do you think you’re a good kisser?”

She’s challenging me.

I love a good challenge.

Challenge accepted.

One hand swoops around her waist pulling her close, so she’s flush with me. She smells like cinnamon and I’m dying to taste her red, cherry lips to see if she tastes as good as she smells. But instead, I drop my head to her neck, kissing her softly so I can taste her skin. She hums under my lips and I feel the vibration, it’s an even bigger challenge now.

I don’t mean to do it, it’s not something I’ve done since I was a teenager, but I have the sudden urge to mark her. Sucking on her lower neck, I know it’s going to leave evidence of me on her, and she will remember me even if she lies and says our kiss did nothing for her. With a lick of my tongue, I move upward, her lips are parted and she’s stopped humming. Nothing leaves her mouth as I bite her bottom lip taking it into my mouth. She doesn’t move from where I hold her, I don’t even feel her breathe. And in one swift moment, I lift my lips to match hers and take hers with me. She opens, so I don’t have to fight it. Our tongues dance as if they know each other. We taste each other like old lovers who have been found. And we hold onto each other as if we’re looking for a new beginning.

When I pull away, she nods her head. And that’s all I need to know. I grip her hand in mine and pull her with me.



**T**he man can kiss, fuck can he kiss. I'm lost. Beyond lost when his mouth's suffocating mine in every good way possible. I try to distract myself from his lips on my neck and hum to tell myself I don't want what this gorgeous man's offering me. Men like him don't go for a woman like me. He looks like he's just walked off the set of a movie that only employs models, and I know models because I deal with them. This man's no model even though he could rival the best of them. He's all man, I felt that when he pushed himself on me.

His hand pulls mine but he doesn't take me out the front door where I thought he might, I look back as he pulls me through the crowd to see Mel waving at me with a smile. I smile back because I'm more than happy to take my mind off of work with this fine specimen. He looks back his eyes travel the length of me, and I feel... dare I say, intoxicated. Like I'm this man's greatest treasure. His looks do that as if he's ready to eat me up and have his way with me. I'm ready for it. Fuck! I hope he doesn't suck.

I watch as he looks up to the private area, nods his head then turns back to where he's heading. I glance up to see two men watching us with women surrounding them. Looking away fast, I don't like their eyes on me knowing what we're going to do. Judging me. I've never had a one night stand, but who better to start it with than this beautiful man in front of me. Fuck, he really is beautiful.

"Where?" I ask as he pulls me through a black door, shuts it and only one small light shines down on us. He locks the door as I look around. There's only one small love seat in the room and nothing else. It's bare.

“Lift your dress,” he says it in a demanding way. His hand drops from mine leaving me standing at the door wondering. Taking a deep breath, I do as he says, by hiking my dress up and watch as he bites on his lip. “You’ve been dancing all night with nothing under your dress.”

I don’t like to wear underwear. Ever. Bras are optional, but I hate them.

“Fuck me,” he curses and steps forward. His warm hand lands on my ass. He does something I don’t expect, he drops to his knees and kisses me right there. My hands fall back as he slides his finger between my lips and plays with my clit then inserts one finger. He kisses me between my legs like he kisses my lips, with passion and everything he is. His tongue is warm as it slides up and down, one hand on my ass the other inside of me. His tongue starts in circles around my clit and a loud moan leaves my mouth. I’m thankful for the music that’s blasting on the other side of the door behind me. I can feel the vibration of the bass through my hands as I grasp the door handle and the other palm lays flat on it.

I didn’t see my night going like this—with a man on his knees between my legs showing me what heaven feels like. My eyes go blurry, and I feel myself start to tighten around his fingers when he stops disappearing from me. When I manage to open my eyes he’s standing in front of me his cock pulled out and he’s sliding on a rubber. I’m glad one of us is thinking because I sure as shit aren’t.

When his eyes lift to mine, I can see the hunger and want written all over them. But there’s something else there as well. I shake my head not wanting to care. This is meant to be a one night stand, not one where I develop feelings.

Hands grip me as I grasp him. Effortlessly, he lifts me so I fall onto him, clinging to him. Looking at him he smirks as he slides into me and I close my eyes when he’s fully inside me.

Fuck! I should have one night stands more often, because if they’re all like this, what have I been doing all my life with one man who didn’t even fully stay with me. Stupid. Love’s for the weak. I don’t want to be that person anymore.

Sex with no connections, that’s what I need.

He bounces me on his dick. Who the fuck does that? I thought that was only in songs, but nope, he’s fucking bouncing me on his dick, and what a bounce too. It hits that spot, and I automatically grip his shirt wrinkling it under my fingers as my nails dig in. He leans in and bites my neck, as he

slams my back against the door. His hands lift and slide under my arms as he pins me to the wall and lifts backward. He continues to fuck me like I've never been fucked before in my life. I close my eyes as he slams into me and pray the orgasm that's building can hold off a little longer. It feels too good, way too fucking good.

"Red," he says, my eyes spring open and he's watching me greedily. "Leave them open."

I do as he commands not arguing with him. I argue with everyone, but for some reason, the reasoning part of me that screams to do the opposite does nothing and sits dormant at his request. Like she knows he's about to give me what I want. What I've wanted for a long time. And just as I move forward, he holds me still, pushes into me hard and I leave my eyes open as I come. His eyes don't leave mine, and I wonder what I look like right now. Is my red hair a mess falling over my face, I can feel it has come out of its bun on my head and dangles down my back. Is my eyeshadow smeared over my face?

Then I realize, I don't really care.

Because what he's doing to me right now far outweighs how I look. Even if how I look is a big part of who I am and what I do. I like that he makes me not care about that. I bet it's because I'll never see him again, so that part of me which would usually care doesn't. I love it.

I see it in his eyes when he comes, I feel it as well. And I know without a doubt, he will be a man I won't easily forget. I'll compare this blond man to every other man that touches me from this moment on. And that's okay because we all have someone in our mind for that. Before it was Matthew, now it's blondie. Whose name I really don't care to know. I want to keep him in my head just the way I see him now. Disheveled and fucked. And he looks damn good. He pulls out placing me carefully on the floor. I find the heels I kicked off, and slide them on as I stand pulling my dress back down.

He's pulling the rubber from his cock before he tucks it back into his pants when he looks up at me. He's smiling, so I smile back and open the door, but as I do his hand captures mine before I leave. "What's your name?"

It's a simple question, maybe one that should have been asked before we fucked. I smile pulling my hand free and walking off. He doesn't follow because he's still trying to finish dressing. I may have torn a few buttons from his shirt just to see his chest earlier, and I smile as I reach Mel who automatically starts pulling me to the door.

The minute the cold air assaults me, and we get into a cab she drills me.

And my smile doesn't drop.

"Who was that? Tell me he was good? Was he the best? Oh my God, you had sex. Where though? Tell me?" She grabs my arm and squeezes it.

"In a small room and Mel..." she looks at me with big eyes, "... he was a ten."

She fans herself.

"A ten? We've never had a ten. I mean you didn't even class Matthew as ten, and you loved him." She's right, I didn't.

"He was more than a ten, trust me, Mel. Men like him aren't made, they're dreamt about. And that's where he will stay in my dreams."

She places a hand up to my face. "Are you telling me you met your ten, and you didn't get his number? Tell me you got his name at least?" Her hand drops from my face as the car slows down arriving at my house. I pay the driver who's watching us and get out.

"A ten, Stormi. You got his name? Please, tell me you got his name?"

As we enter the house, I laugh and know she will flip her shit when I tell her I didn't.

"I didn't." Her eyes go wide and she walks back out the door pulling me with her. "What are you doing?" I ask pulling my hand back while she starts waving down another cab.

"We're going back to get his information, you silly girl. You don't let a ten walk away from you."

A cab driver slows down and I wave him off, walking back to my house.

"No, Mel, he'll stay 'blondie' to me. The way he should be."

"You're insane. You know that, right?"

"A man shouldn't be that perfect. He's bound to have some major skeletons. I want to stay clear of them. Keep him perfect in my head."

She shakes her head at me. "You've lost it, I'm going to check you into the looney bin. You need to go visit, and stay there until you realize how stupid you sound right now." She walks away then mutters, "A fucking ten." I laugh at her as I walk to the bathroom.

That's when I see it and scream. *What the fuck.*

There are two large hickeys on my neck. Two. Not small either. Concealer won't cover them. Two fucking dark hickeys each the size of a golf ball.

"Oh my God, you look like a hooker," Mel says then pokes her tongue out at me before she walks away. Reaching for the toothpaste, I place a little

on each of them. It's an old trick my mother once told me to do when I was a teenager, and a boyfriend would do that. Stripping my dress down, I go to catch my cards and stop when only one falls out.

*Where the fuck is my ID?*

I walk out and backtrace my steps, then panic starts to set in. *Where the fuck is my ID?* The last time I remember seeing it was before I paid for my drinks at the bar next to blondie. Now, I don't know where it is. It could have fallen out when I was slammed against the door but I don't remember shit.

"What are you doing?" Mel asks as I pick up my heels like it could magically be stowed in them.

"Do you have my ID?" She pauses then starts laughing. "Mel, do you have my ID?" Her laughter doesn't stop.

"You dropped it, didn't you? He now has your ID, I bet you."

"Fuck off," I say flipping her off and walking into my bathroom lifting the mat and not finding it there either. Fuck! The last thing I want to do is to have to get a new ID. I don't have time during the work week to do that. I'm too busy.

I try to not think about the fact if he has it or not. If he does, he now knows where I live and my name. The two things I didn't want him to know.

She wouldn't even tell me her name. She left as if I was about to trap her and I probably would have. I didn't want to let her go just yet, I was more than happy to keep her trapped in the room with me for as long as humanly possible. Fuck! I would have gone again even knowing I didn't have another rubber in my pocket. There were other things we could have done, especially with that sweet mouth of hers. What I wouldn't give to have that wrapped around my cock. My buttons are broken and I don't even fucking care right now. She's gone. I watched as she went straight to her friend then disappeared. I almost chased her down until I noticed what she dropped on the floor.

Storm Hale.

It even has her address on it, her age, and her picture. The dirtier part of me is happy to have a visual to go home with, to pull my cock off to while looking at her picture. The other part smiles sinisterly knowing I can find her from now on. And there isn't anything she can do about it.

Walking up to where Falcon is sitting he's in a lip lock with a woman while his other hand fingers one of the other girls. I sit down next to Darby who's pulling a face of disgust like this is the last place he wants to be. It probably is.

"You're smiling." He notices as he watches me.

"I am."

"The redhead," he says looking around.

"She left." He nods his head sitting stiffly in his seat. "Do you want to go, D?" He looks to Falcon then back to me.

“Fuck, yes.” I laugh at him and stand, we don’t even bother saying goodbye to Falcon he won’t even fucking notice us leaving.

“That’s the sole reason Creed does the women, he’s the only one with control,” Darby says shaking his head at Falcon.

“I could do what he does,” I argue, he looks at me as we reach his car opening the door.

“No, you couldn’t. Creed doesn’t get attached. You get attached.”

“Creed is attached,” I state referring to Elicea.

“That’s different, you know it.”

I do, he’s right. Creed wouldn’t let a woman worm their way in to get more money or suck up to him to fuck us over. He’s like a block of fucking ice almost impossible to defrost. That’s why we were so surprised to see Elicea stick to him like fire.

“Fine, your right. But I want it on record I could pick women for the club and not get attached.” He scoffs at me and starts to drive. “When was the last time you were with a woman, Darby?” He shakes his head at me.

“That’s none of your fucking business.”

“Why? Why do you want to be so secretive?”

I turn to him and he grips the wheel tight. “I’m not secretive, I just don’t blab like you bitches do.”

“What bitches? I’m not a bitch,” I say pretending to be insulated.

“You and Falcon,” he states.

“Python is your favorite, isn’t he?” I say teasing him. He doesn’t answer as he pulls up to mine. A house I once shared with *her*. It’s the last place I want to be.

“Take me to Ma’s.” He knows whose place that is. Ma is the mother I wish I had. Creed is one lucky prick to have a mother like her. She makes me feel welcome, and I enjoy being there. Especially, when I don’t have anywhere else to go.

“Do you want to come to mine?”

I look up at him shocked. He never lets us come to his. He’s much like Creed in that way.

“Ma is probably sleeping, best to not wake her.”

I nod my head. Then look back up at the house I bought with her. It’s time to sell it, even if I do love it. She’s in every aspect of it, and everywhere I step or touch I’m reminded of her. It’s too fucking much.

WAKING up in Darby's spare room isn't something I've ever done before. I knew his place would be like a showroom, but I didn't think it would be to this extent. It feels like you can look but not touch. The floors are white. The table, which I'm guessing is an office is white, no pictures hang, and nothing that makes it feel homey is in here. Careful to not touch anything because I would hate to leave a stain on it I get up. He told me he has a cleaner come every week. Why? Fucked if I know. It's not like he's here to dirty it. He basically lives at the fucking office. Walking into his kitchen, he's seated at his bench with a cook on the other side making him waffles. I can smell them as I rub my eyes wondering if what I'm seeing is real.

"Does she make your lunches as well?" I ask sitting next to him. The woman who's cooking doesn't pay me any attention, but Darby looks at me as if to tell me to shut up.

"That will be all, Wanda."

She places a plate in front of me as she disappears. Leaving us both sitting at his counter eating breakfast in the quiet. He lives in an apartment, a fucking penthouse apartment, high above the city which overlooks office buildings with their secrets contained inside their gleaming blacked out windows.

How have we all been friends for so long, and I've never seen this place is beyond me?

"Maybe I should buy in this building," I say looking around.

"I'd prefer if you didn't." I almost choke on my food. "Hurry up. I have to get to the office." He gets up placing his plate in the sink then he takes his seat again drinking his coffee waiting for me to finish.

"You're not as cold as him, but you're as closed off as him," I say. He knows who I'm talking about automatically. We don't have many other friends. It's been the four of us as a team for as long as I can remember. Some days are better than others. But when you work day and night with someone, you get to know all their traits. We sure as shit all know each other's, including what ticks each of us off the most.

"If you're finished assessing me for the day, some of us have to work."

"I have work," I say grunting at him, then pointing my fork with the waffle still on the end. "It's with you, remember? Dickhead."

"Do you? Because this last year you've been extremely absent, and we've



been picking up after you.”

Damn him, his words are true. I haven’t been involved as much as I should have been. But it still isn’t good to hear.

“I’m here now.”

He stands, steps forward placing his coffee down. “Are you really, Echo? Are you really? Because I sure as shit am sick of doing two jobs.”

“I’m back. Can’t you see me? I’m fucking back. So enough of this shit, D. Just tell me what you want me to do and I’ll do it.”

He places both hands on the counter. “Your job.” Then he walks off, leaving me with a plate full of waffles staring after him. Have I really been that fucking bad?

Ringling Creed, he answers on the first call. I hear Darby in the other room as Creed says my name. “Echo, what do you want?”

“Good morning to you, too, sunshine,” he says nothing as he waits for me. “Have I been that bad with business for the last year?” He stays silent, and I pull the cell away to look at it to make sure the call is still connected. “Creed?”

“Yeah, you’ve been shit,” he replies, and I know he won’t lie to me. I look up just as Darby walks back in, he stops waiting and listening.

“Darby’s on my ass about it.” Darby crosses his arms over his chest as he listens to me speak to Creed.

“I’m amazed he hasn’t sold your part of the business, actually.”

“He doesn’t have the right.”

Creed scoffs then hangs up on me. I look up at a watching Darby.

“I do have the right, but lucky for you I’m not an asshole to those who I call my brothers.” He walks off again. His small dig doesn’t go unnoticed. I already know how much of an asshole my brother is, and that he doesn’t give two shits if I live or die. My friends, on the other hand, they fucking care. I grab the ID that’s securely located in my pocket and smile.

Maybe everything won’t be so bad, after all.

**M**elissa left and I feel lonely again, my week drags at work and it's only Wednesday. Mel departed on Monday morning, and I tried my hardest to have her to move in and stay here with me. But she won't. She loves where she lives and she doesn't intend moving, which sucks for me.

I'm on the cell to a very high profile fashion designer for his next launch when Vicki walks in holding a large arrangement of flowers. It's a mixture of lilies, roses, baby's breath—actually it has so many different kinds of flowers in it. She smiles as she places it on my desk. I cover the cell and ask her who they're for.

“Yours! It's addressed to you.”

“I have to go, I'll call you back later to discuss which pieces would work best. Okay. Thanks.” I hang up as she walks out of the room, shutting the door as she leaves. Touching the flowers, I try to find a card. Once I spot it I reach for it and see my name on the front. Tearing it open, I have to read it twice.

*RED...*

*I'm resourceful, among other things.*

*Meet me again.*

*Friday night. A restaurant called Sherlock.*

*Wear only a cape.*

*Your blond, who makes you scream (from the closet).*

I SHAKE MY HEAD. No way. Then I remember my ID, he has my ID. This is how he found me. I immediately search the restaurant he's speaking about and find it's not too far from the bar we went to that night. I put the card in my wallet and get back to work.

THURSDAY.

It happens again. I'm on the cell and Vicki walks in holding another arrangement of flowers. This one full of every red colored flower you can think of. It's quite beautiful actually. I've never seen anything like it.

As she places it on my desk, she stands there not leaving just smiling at me. "You're seeing someone?" Vicki looks to the flowers then back to me.

"No," I answer, wondering why she's still standing there. We don't talk. Hardly ever. She always turns her nose up at me like she's better than me.

"Oh, so you have a secret admirer. That's interesting." She turns then leaves.

I pull open the card with my name scribbled on the front.

*ARE YOU READY FOR ME, Red?*

*I'm ready for you.*

*You're a welcome distraction.*

*Tomorrow.*

IT ALMOST SOUNDS LIKE A PROMISE, that if I do meet him he'll give me what I want. And I could really go for another round with him. But I shouldn't. No way I should. It's bad. You don't go for a man who's your ten. It's bound to fuck up. Tens are made in fairy tales. Nines, are if you're lucky. And believe me, I'm not lucky. And eights are what you attempt to marry. Blondie is a ten, and he scares me to death, so I have to stay away.

But one more time couldn't hurt... could it?

FRIDAY.

My office smells of flowers, if I didn't love the smell I would be fucked off. But the look on Vicki's face as she carries another arrangement of flowers in for the day, tells me she's less than impressed with the fact that she has to bring them into me.

"No man does this. Are you sending them to yourself? You can tell me? I'll win the bet then, and I'll halve it with you." I look past her to see most of the women in the office looking, waiting and watching. I cross my hands over my chest as she puts them down.

"You have some nerve to come in here and speak to me that way."

Vicki opens her mouth then closes it. She wasn't expecting me to talk to her like that. I'm her fucking boss, so no more being nice.

"If you continue to be disrespectful I'll write you up. I'll only give you one warning, Vicki. Please remember I'm your boss."

She nods her head and walks out, not looking back as she passes me and closes my door behind her.

Walking over to the flowers, I find the card tearing it open, excited to see what it reads.

RED.

*Spread those legs, because I can't wait for a second longer.*

I READ HIS CARD, then read it again. A knock at my door makes me turn around. I'm ready to tell Vicki to go away when I see who's standing there. Everyone and I mean everyone in the office is staring. Fuck! I'm even staring and I've seen him before. He doesn't say a word as he lifts his arm and I'm glued to every move, as it swipes through his hair pushing it back from his eyes. Those blue eyes that read 'fuck me' loud and clear.

"You're..." I can't form the words even though they're on the tip of my tongue.

"I'm here, and I hope you're ready. I'm starving." He walks in brushes past me, his hand touching mine before he walks to my desk. He touches the flowers then turns that mega-watt smile to me. "You've been receiving my

flowers.”

I nod, not knowing what else to do. I turn away from him and see everyone on this floor still watching.

“I guess spreading your legs is out of the question considering your office is made of glass.” My mouth drops open at his words, and I quickly shut the door so no one can hear what he’s saying.

“Are you going to speak, or do you only do that when I’m between your legs.”

“I think it’s unfair that you seem to know my name, and I don’t know yours,” I say standing taller getting over the fact that he looks even better in daylight. Fuck.

“You want to know my name?” I nod my head and he steps closer to me. “It will cost you.”

“What?” I ask to which the smile on his face turns into a mischievous smirk.

“A kiss.”

“A kiss...” I mutter, then look back at him. “That seems very unfair.”

He shakes his head and steps even closer to me. “I don’t see unfairness in it, at all.” His hand reaches up and touches my arm with light feathery strokes. “I see the advantage.” He’s so close to me now if I leaned in just an inch I could touch my lips to his.

“I’m at work,” I say stepping away from him. I’m afraid of what I’ll let him do.

“I’ll wait.” He steps around me and sits on my white couch near my office door.

“You’re going to wait here?” I ask him.

He nods and pulls out his cell as he looks over at me. “I can work while I wait. I know you’re worth waiting for, Red.”

Vicki steps inside my office without knocking. She stops when she notices the man on the couch and visibly pauses. It takes her longer than I like for her to look away at me.

“You have a conference call in room 207.” She grips the handle and looks back at him. “And you are?” she asks in a sweeter voice than she’s ever given me.

He looks past her at me. “I’m here for her.” He nods his head to me then looks back at her.

“Are you sending the flowers?”

He smiles as he nods his head. She curses then walks out.

“I wish you wouldn’t have told her that.” I pick up my notes for my next meeting as I go to follow her out, but I pause stopping to gaze at how good he looks sitting in my office. “You can leave as well.” He just smirks as I walk off. I have no doubt he isn’t going anywhere. He seems to be a man that gets what he wants.

HE’S SITTING EXACTLY where I left him when I come back, so I take a deep breath when I open the door seeing Vicki sitting across from him laughing at something he says. She stands when she sees me and instantly walks out and I shut the door behind her.

“So you’re a boss.” He nods his head. “I see it,” he says as his eyes roam me.

“If you aren’t going to tell me your name, I think it’s best you leave.” His foot taps as he shakes his head.

“It doesn’t work like that, and your very friendly staff member just told me you finish work now anyway. So, what will it be Red? Kiss here or in private? Because we both know how worked up you get.” I hate he knows that about me. But I also remember the way he tastes and the way he made me feel like I was someone’s ten as well.

“You can walk me out.” He stands as I collect my things including my coffee then he offers me his arm. A lot of the staff have already left, and there’s only a few left in the building. Vicki being one of them is watching us with intent.

“What did you say to her?” I ask as we get to the elevator.

Pushing the button, he turns to face her then looks sideways at me. “She wanted to know who I was to you.”

Of course, she did.

“What did you say?”

“Don’t worry, I knew what kind of person she is the minute she walked in after you left. All I simply told her was I was here to fuck you.” The coffee I put to my lips splutters everywhere all down my beautiful white blouse. I wipe at it as the doors open, and he places his hand on the small of my back pushing me in.

I look up to see him smiling at me.

“You didn’t, did you?”

His head drops to the side, his blond hair falling with him. “What if I did? That’s the reason I’m here. A proposition of sorts.” His hand doesn’t leave my back as we reach the bottom and get out, he nods to the bar across the street and I let him guide me over.

“Proposition?” I ask. He holds up a finger and walks off, I watch his ass without shame as he does. It’s one thing I didn’t get to see up close when he was inside me, I wished I had at the time and remember thinking that his ass was probably fine as fine could be. He turns, and I notice that he’s watching me watch him. I look away as he comes back with two glasses of wine.

“I want to fuck you...” he pauses, “... regularly.” I’m glad I didn’t put the drink to my mouth when he said that, it would have sprayed all over him.

“And you think I’d agree to this? Do woman actually agree to this stuff?” I ask looking around.

He shrugs his shoulders and sits in his seat. “You know I can make you come. So, I don’t see the issue.”

Oh God, he’s right, he was... magical. I would never tell him that though, his ego may be too big for me to handle.

“What’s your name?”

He holds up a finger shaking it from side to side before he leans forward, his elbows resting on the table. “A kiss for a name.”

My eyes roll at his words. “You’re sitting across from me, asking me to fuck you, but you won’t tell me your name.” I laugh. “You’re serious, aren’t you?”

“Like a heartbeat,” he replies waiting. “Just kiss my fucking lips already, and tell me you agree.”

I look around, a few women are staring, but for the most part people can’t hear what we’re discussing. I lean forward, my lips whispering against his. He doesn’t let me make it a soft kiss, he leans in across the table and our lips touch, hard, as he opens his mouth tasting me before I pull away.

“Echo,” he says and it takes me a minute to come down and realize he’s just told me his name.

“Your name is Echo?”

He nods in confirmation while bringing his drink to his lips. “Now, when can we fuck?”

She looks at me like I just asked her to cut her arm off, I didn't. I merely want to fuck her. There's a difference. A big difference.

"Red—"

She holds up her hand stopping me from speaking, I sit and wait for her to reply. "You have some balls, you know that?"

I look down at my balls then back up to her with a smirk. "I know, they come waxed and everything."

She tries to fight the smile spreading on her face and I smile enough for both of us. I like her. She's the first woman to make me forget about... Selena. And I like that she does that because believe me, I've tried to forget about her several times with several other women.

None worked.

Until Red.

"If I agree to this, there'd be no other contact. The only contact we would have would be sex?" I nod my head, it's what I want. "Because I can't take on anyone new. I don't want anyone new. Fun I can do, but I will have some ground rules."

"I'm listening." I wait for her to speak.

"I don't want to know about you."

I raise an eyebrow at her request. "Explain," I say.

"I don't want pillow talk. If you fuck anyone else, I would appreciate it if you use protection."

"I always use protection, you're aware of that," I say remembering the way she watched with heated eyes last time I rolled the condom on.



“Good. No showing up unannounced either like you did today. I need to know in advance.”

“You’re a businesswoman,” I say stating her work. She’s high up for someone so young, she must have worked hard to get where she is. I like that about her.

“Yes. So, do you agree?”

“Basically, you want my cock and not my mouth,” I ask with a smirk knowing full well she wants my mouth too.

She surprises me though when she leans on the table. “I want your mouth, blondie, just not the words that will possibly come from it.”

“I can deal with that. No talk. How about you come back to mine so we can practice?”

She laughs at my words then looks at her watch before she looks back up to me. “How far away do you live?”

I smile as I stand taking her hand knowing full well I’m about to have her.

SHE DOESN’T LOOK AROUND at all, her eyes don’t wander and she’s true to her words she doesn’t ask me questions. Not even when she sees a photo of Selena and I dressed up with me holding her around the waist. She undoes her skirt dropping it to the floor then does the same with her blouse. I start to foam at the mouth with the fishnet stockings held up by a garter on her legs, to her lacy black bra that covers her perfect breasts.

I’ve never wanted someone so fucking bad that my cock is straining in my trousers begging to be released.

“On my knees?”

I nod my head at her request and she steps up close to me, almost at eye level, but shorter without her heels on and runs her hands down the front of me before she drops to the floor doing so on her knees as she requested. She pulls at my trousers and they slide off, my cock being set free. She leans forward, the tip of her tongue running circles around it before she puts as much as possible in her mouth and starts sucking.

Her other hand grabs my balls and she applies the perfect amount of pressure before she starts moving faster, sucking even harder with a swirl of

her tongue on the tip of my cock. I grip her red hair which comes undone from the up-do she had in place, and I grip it hard with both hands as I fuck her face. Just before I come, I push her back and she lands on her ass.

She smiles as she wipes her mouth looking up at me. "Is that all?" she teases.

I kick my trousers off and tear my shirt over my shoulders before I get on the same level as her on my floor. Hovering over her, she spreads her legs wider making room for me while she stays on her elbows not lying down.

Her lips are so close to mine when she speaks, "Are you going to fuck me now, blonde?"

I push her legs wider apart with my hips and position myself at her entrance. She gasps, but I don't push in on her she just stays gazing at me waiting.

"Red, I plan to fuck you. I plan to do nothing else but that for the rest of the night."

"Do it then," she challenges.

I push down on her. She gasps as I go slow taking in all that she has before I stop and wait. She opens her eyes then I start to move. I like to see her watching me. I like the way her eyes heat as she does so. It's fucking maddening. She meets me thrust for thrust lifting her hips to meet mine before she clings herself to me, wrapping her arms around my neck as I lay her back. Putting both hands on my wooden flooring, she stays on me and take everything I can get from her. Her nails dig into my neck, but I don't stop her and bend down to her neck kissing it, while I continue to move in and out of her perfect fucking pussy. Then I suck, she drops her head to the floor leaving my neck before she slaps my face, hard.

I smile down at her, and fuck her harder, slamming my hips into her. Her hands reach between us, and she grips my hips as her legs wrap around tighter. I can feel her tightening around me and know I won't last long with the way she feels. It feels way too fucking good and I don't want it to end.

Her arms drop, and her head goes back with her back arching as her hands spread out on the wooden floor. It's fucking magnificent to watch. She's coming undone right below me, and it doesn't take me long to follow her. Rolling off of her, I lay on the floor next to her.

"You deserved that," she states as she touches my face.

"I liked it," I say smiling at her.

"Of course, you did. But next time you give me a hickey, I'll dick punch

you,” she says as she starts to stand looking around for her clothes, she picks them up and starts dressing.

“Where are you going?”

She looks down at me. “Home.”

“No round two?”

She shakes her head at me while doing up her blouse. “Some of us have lives. Work.” She looks around again and stops when she notices a photograph. I know which one, so I wait for her to say something.

“You aren’t married are you?”

I shake my head. “Single as fuck.”

She nods happy with my answer then pulls her skirt up. I reach for her purse and quickly grab her cell while she puts on her heels, and ring myself from it, so I have her number.

“What are you doing?” she asks.

“You have my number now, and I have yours. Call me if you need to fuck... to let off some steam.” I wink at her as she reaches down taking it off of me.

“I’ll be sure to do that,” she says going to walk out the door.

“You don’t sound so sure...”

She looks back, her red hair fanning her beautiful face as she smiles before she shuts the door behind her.

“I did it... again,” I say as I pull open the door to my house.  
“Did what?” Mel asks out of breath.  
“Him. I did him.... again.”

She’s quiet for a moment before she starts laughing, loudly.

“Oh God, he has your ID.” She works it out. “And what, he came to you and you couldn’t help yourself?” she asks egging me on to explain what happened. I tell her about the flowers then his offer.

“I think it could work, no strings, just fun.” Reaching for my orange juice, I sit down at the table waiting to hear what she thinks. I need to shower, and then possibly watch more of *When Harry Met Sally*. Okay, I shouldn’t watch that again but I’ll be watching something.

“I want to be on your team, but I don’t think that would work...” she pauses.

“Why? We did it, it was fun. I totally got my shit and left straight after,” I say remembering seeing photos of him with another woman all over his house. I don’t want to ask him, but I do need to know if he’s married. Married men are not something I want to do. Even if they look as good as blondie. Then the way he told me no, there was hurt there, but I didn’t want to know. It isn’t how this is going to work.

“He’s your number ten, Stormi. Number ten. You’re fucked,” she whispers.

“I know, but maybe I’ll drop him down a few. He does like to talk.”

“If you drop him down then he’s marriage material. So you’re even more fucked.”

I groan loudly. “Why can’t he be a seven?” I ask. They are a man who’s good looking but you know you won’t marry, or you do because it was the right fit at the time.

“Just, well, you could put it off for as long as possible. I mean you enjoy sleeping with him, right? Just run after every fuck.” She giggles.

“I can do that.”

“Don’t linger, for anything.”

“No lingering,” I say, nodding my head.

“That means no sex at yours because you can’t run.”

*Oh shit, I didn’t think of that.*

“We didn’t even make it to his room.”

“Fuck, he really is your ten, isn’t he?”

I nod my head biting my lip. “He totally fucking is.”

We say our goodbyes not long after, and just before I go to sleep after my shower, a message appears on my cell.

It’s a picture from blondie. How do I know you ask? Because I know what his dick looks like and he just sent me a picture of it. With the caption.

‘Tomorrow’ winky face.

I stare at it longer than I should—he has a nice looking dick. And most of the time unwanted dick pics are annoying, but this one not so much.

HE’S ASKING for pics of me. I don’t reply, but I’m slowly giving in to what he’s asking for. He wants me again, today. And I really don’t want to say no to him because I know what he can give, and what else do I have to do today. Sweet fuck all that’s what. When another picture comes through, I’m up and getting ready in a dress I can easily pull off when I get to him. No time for speaking or fondling. Grabbing my keys, I message him telling him I’m on my way. He replies straight away with a photograph of him lying in a bed naked. ‘Waiting’ is the caption.

It takes me ten minutes to arrive at his place—he doesn’t live far away—and when I do the nerves kick in and my hands get sweaty. *Is this a smart thing to do?* I’ve been going over it in my head since last night, and have talked myself out of it on more than one occasion. But I’m a grown ass woman now, so I shouldn’t feel bad about sleeping with him. We’re both

consenting adults wanting to have fun. No one is getting hurt, at least that's what I tell myself as I hold the door handle of my car telling myself to get out.

When my cell starts ringing, I jump and press answer through my car without looking at who it is.

"If I must, I will come out there and get you. Except, I don't think the neighbors would appreciate a naked man carrying a woman in." I laugh as I look at his house.

"I was trying to talk myself out of it," I say honestly.

Echo chuckles then the front door opens. He's naked and standing there with no shame whatsoever as he watches me. "I don't care who sees me, but you might if I'm carrying you tearing your clothes off on the front lawn. It's obvious we don't get far the minute we touch. So, what will it be, Red? Do I come out?"

*Damn it! He's right. The minute we touch, I'm so fucked.*

"I'm getting out."

He steps out through the door, and I know if I wait too long he'll come the rest of the way and grab me. Hanging up as I walk along the path he waits patiently. My eyes try their hardest to look up and roam his perfect body. When my heels hit the last stair to the porch, I force myself to look up at him. He's hard as a rock, not just his body his cock too as he steps inside holding the door open for me to enter.

"I was prepared to come and get you."

I smile. My eyes tracking every part of him, unashamed, I can't help myself. "I see you're prepared anyway."

He waves me in, and I step inside not looking around this time. "Always, seems to be the way with you."

I get high from his words. They make me feel powerful that this man gets weak from merely the thought of me. I turn as I hear him shut the door. The string that's wrapped around my dress, holding it together, I pull, so it goes lose then falls to the floor pooling at my feet.

"I was hoping to make it the bedroom this time." I step closer now completely naked to join him. His hand hovers at my side not touching me as he looks me over, while I wait patiently listening to each heartbeat that pounds hard in my chest for his hand to touch me, screaming it in my head. Both hands grip my waist then in one swift movement he lifts me up, and I wrap myself around him as he starts to move but not to the bedroom. No. He

carries me to the kitchen, sitting my ass on the bench before his hands disappear from my body as he walks to the fridge. I wait for him to turn around and when he does he has a bottle of cream in his hands and a broad grin on his face.

“I decided I need dessert,” he says shaking the bottle.

I lay back spreading my legs just a bit. “Did you?” I ask with a soft smile. He makes me feel like a sex vixen. I’ve never felt so empowered and wanted in all my life than when I’m with him.

He squirts some cream onto his hand as he steps back to me then that hand rubs over my belly up to my breasts as he peaks one nipple with his fingers. “You see, I’m a starved man. And I know the only way to cure me is to have you... night and day.”

I laugh at his words and instantly shut up when he squeezes the bottle right over my pussy. Not moving as the cold liquid touches me, it instantly starts melting all over me. When I finally feel it drip between my legs and onto the counter, he watches in fascination before he bends over going straight for the cream, and in one long lick he eats it up as well as me.

“You must be starving...” I say when he lifts and starts licking up my belly and to my breasts where the rest of cream has melted on my body. He licks me clean with his fingers playing at my entrance as I succumb to his will, knowing I shouldn’t push him because he’ll give me what I want. Our desires are matched, and we both know exactly what each other wants.

I want him.

Just as badly as he wants me.

It’s empowering.

“Oh, you have no idea.” As he pulls my ass across the counter to the edge and closer to him his cell starts ringing, and loudly too. He tenses at the ringtone, looks to it then back to me. I smile knowing he won’t walk away as I can feel him at my entrance, I move a mere fraction, and his hand swipes at his cell as it starts ringing again making it drop to the floor. I hear the smash but it doesn’t seem to bother him the way it would me, he just smiles and pulls me so he slides in. My head drops back when our bodies connect, and I feel the creamy stickiness all over me. *I’ll need to shower before I leave*, I think.

“Snap out of it, Red. Or, I won’t give you what I want.”

I smile at his words as he pulls me flush with him.

“How did you know I wasn’t here?”

He pushes inside me, a small gasp leaves my mouth, but he stills. “You were thinking. This thing between us doesn’t require any thinking.”

“What does it require?” I ask thrusting just a little to make him move. He smiles and my heart stutters—stupid fluttered heart.

“It requires you and me, and a lot of fucking. But definitely no thinking.”

“No thinking,” I say then look down between us. “Are you going to fuck me now? Or do you plan to move your cock into my pussy permanently.”

He starts to move, slow and steady, and my eyes do that thing where they want to shut but I keep them open because I like to watch him.

“I like the idea of being buried in you permanently, don’t you?” he asks as he pulls my hands away from his body and pins them to the counter, covering them with his own as his thrusts increase. His eyes go darker, and I can feel the building, to that one place he likes to take me. The place that makes everything in my world perfect for even if only for just a second.

“No...” I say between heavy breaths. “No, I don’t. Just on occasions. You’re too...” heavy breathing leaves my mouth, “... much.”

Echo smiles at my words like they’re the best thing he’s heard. He lifts his hands away from mine, but my hands are glued to the counter anyway, as his hands grip my hips pushing me back and forth my ass sliding on the bench while I try to lift to meet him thrust to thrust. He grips my hair pulling it free from its tie, then I drop it back looking at the ceiling as his cell starts again. Neither one of us stops. We’re too close to the finish line, to that ultimate place of pleasure I know is about to hit me at any second.

“Red,” he says as he bites my nipple, hard. A small yelp leaves my mouth as I come. He comes right along with me then he pulls my hair back and bites my neck. I want to slap him again to let him know not to mark me, that we aren’t teenagers, but when he thrusts the last few times, I like the feel of him claiming me, marking me, as if I’m special to him.

“Blondie,” I say his face lands between my boobs, and he hovers there taking deep breaths. I touch my neck knowing he’s left a mark, one I will have to deal with on Monday when I go back to work. But right now I want to go home and sleep, and possibly even dream of him.

“Red, just a second longer.” I run my fingers through his hair loving the length and the feel of it.

He’s my perfect ten.

And he’s making this harder.

I freeze up and push him away. He lifts, pulling out of me and smiling as



he does then he stops when his cell starts again. Reaching for it, I hear the shrill of a woman, so I grab my things when he turns away. Stepping out of the kitchen, I sneak out by myself.

**S**torm's sneaky, I'll give her that. But I'm glad she didn't stay. It could have been bad, especially since I smashed up half my kitchen at Selena's words. The cheek of her. The fucking nerve of her. And him. He wants to rub it in my face even more. I can't stand them and one day I might get over it, but today isn't that day. Fuck! It wasn't when I saw them for the first time together either.

NINE MONTHS AGO...

YOU'D THINK he would stop inviting me to shit. Fuck, I have. But every once in a while when he wants to rub something in, he invites me. And like a damn sucker I go. Every. Fucking. Time. He is family, after all.

"Don't do it! Why would you go?" Falcon asks as I finish up a security check, getting ready to leave to see Mike, my brother.

"I haven't seen him in six months. I guess I can handle once a year, don't you think?"

"Fucking never, if you ask me."

I laugh and realize it's the first time I've laughed in a month since Selena left me. She hasn't answered my calls and has been completely ignoring me. I haven't seen her once in that time. Straightening up, I leave and go to his condo. It's a celebration he said for his promotion at work. He's a lawyer, and not a bad one either, from what I've heard. Fucked if I know or care.

Pulling up out the front of his condo, I notice my parents' car as I get out. There are a few faces I don't recognize as they all start to walk inside. A few stop and stare, others do a double take. I push my hair back from my face as I make my way up his stairs and into his house. *Now is the time to tell you we're twins, right?* That we look almost identical apart from our hair and build—Mike's haircut is shorter, and he has a smaller physique than me. I take pride in my appearance, inside and out, where Mike only cares for the outside. As long as his mask is firmly on for the world, he's fine. Only few can see deep enough to tell that we're completely different people.

"Echo," my mother's voice rings happily, but when I spot her, I can tell it's also fake. She's putting on an appearance. Most people can't help but stare. Obviously, he hasn't told anyone he even has a brother. Well, the feeling is absolutely mutual. "I'm so glad you could make it, but I honestly didn't think you would."

I look around trying to spot Mike. I didn't come to stay long—a simple congrats and appearance are more than he fucking deserves.

"I was invited. Is it so hard to believe I wouldn't come?"

She looks everywhere but at me. I can tell she's nervous, my mother's hardly ever nervous. "You must promise me your best behavior tonight, Echo. This night is important, so don't do anything stupid."

Hello, my real mother just showed up. Yep, this is the woman I know. The one who warns me to not be stupid and fuck everyone's shit up. The one who thinks I can't possibly be as good as Mike, the prodigal child. I'm used to it though, so I pat her shoulder as she looks up at me.

"Best behavior, Mom, don't worry. I wouldn't ruin your perfect son's night."

She doesn't say a word as I walk away looking for Mike. I spot my father talking to someone. Dad's dressed in a suit. He is also a lawyer, so he's exactly like Mike in every aspect. Sometimes I see myself in him, only every now and then when he lets his guard down, never around Mother, though. He nods his head at me, a worrisome look adorns his face as he turns his attention elsewhere.

That's when I see Mike, dressed much like he always is. Walking over to him, there's a woman's hand on his shoulder. I can't quite see her because the man standing in front of my brother is blocking my view. He spots me, his posture straightens, and he looks at me with hard flinty eyes. Then a slow smirk creeps up over his face as I get closer and I see who's touching him,

holding his shoulder as if he's hers, while she looks at him longingly as if she loves him. That stare was once reserved for me. *What a lie she must live.* She can't love us both, so she's lying to one of us, and I doubt it's me considering she was with me for many years.

When she sees me the smile on her face instantly disappears, and she drops her hand from Mike's shoulder. He notices too and looks at her touching her waist. As I take a step toward her, I remember what my mother said. I look over my shoulder to see Mother watching me, waiting for me to react. She knows I'll lose my shit, but I don't think she warned me to protect me, it was to protect him.

"This is new..." I say looking at both of them.

My brother excuses himself from his friends and walks to me pulling Selena with him. She comes, but her eyes look to the floor unable to make eye contact with me.

"It isn't actually, but I'm sure you knew that."

"I didn't." I glance at Selena waiting for her to look up, and when she doesn't, I say her name, "Selena."

"I tried telling you." Those eyes, the same ones I love, don't look at me with love anymore. They look at me as if I'm a stranger and she doesn't want to be near me.

"You didn't. But I see you've obviously downgraded to fucking my brother."

She gasps loudly, and Mike looks around to see who heard me. A few people did, but I don't really care, it's not as if he fucking cared when he decided to fuck her.

"Tell me, how long?"

"Now isn't the place, Echo," she says looking around. The room's gone silent, but I wait knowing he will tell me. He can't resist rubbing everything I don't have in my face.

"Four months."

Bubbling out of nowhere, I start laughing, and it won't stop. I regard her then chuckle again shaking my head.

"That's why you always came home so desperately wanting me. Wasn't my brother fulfilling your needs sexually, Selena? You couldn't say no to how I fucked you could you because I can fuck, and I'm guessing my brother here only likes it one way... doggy. That's the kind of man he is." She doesn't say a word because I know it's true.

“She wasn’t with you,” Mike replies.

*So, she lied to both of us.*

Waiting for her to speak, I search her face. She doesn’t say anything, so I look at my brother and smirk.

“She was, four weeks ago. I fucked her on the floor then in the bed. She screamed my fucking name so loud that she couldn’t control the scratches she left down my back.” Glancing at her, I watch her face turn beet red so I continue, “And every day before that. Tell me, Selena... are you being fulfilled? Or do you want one last ride on the Echo train?”

“Fuck off, Echo. Leave my house.” Now, he’s angry. I see she kept that little cherry of information to herself as well.

“Tell me, Mike... what’s it like having my seconds. It seems all your good at is going after what’s mine.”

“Echo Brown, you need to leave, *now*.” My father’s hand touches my shoulder and I shake him off.

“You had such trouble finding your own that you went after what’s mine.”

Mike’s face is scrunched, eyes wide, and his nostrils are flaring so broad I could drive a steam train up them. Yep, he’s more than angry.

“If you must know, she came to me.”

“Is this true, Selena?”

She looks up now, her eyes not set on the floor any longer. “You stopped caring. You stopped seeing me, Echo.” I laugh at her lies. “You did,” she reiterates and then continues, “I became a fixture in your life. You never loved me. Not the way I loved you. It’s hard to love someone so much and not get the same in return.” Mike squeezes her. “Now, I have that. Our love is equal. Mike loves me, I love him.”

“And I’m sure you’re both fucking ecstatically happy. Even by the fact that you’re both lying assholes wanting to destroy a person you’re both meant to love.”

“Echo... leave, now.” This time it’s my mother.

I turn to face her. Mother’s face is stern, but it doesn’t bother me. I’m furious at her too. “You’re just as bad as him! Your golden child is a fucking dick.” I walk away reaching for a bottle of bourbon as I leave.

“Echo.” My feet hit the bottom step as I turn around to see Selena at the top of the steps. “I didn’t want to hurt you, but you must see the truth in this. You didn’t love me the way you should have.”

I take a few steps up, so I'm on the same level as her. I move in close, so our lips are almost touching. "I loved you, Selena. It was all on you. You decided to break my heart."

A tear leaves her eye and gently rolls down her cheek. "You don't love me. You think you do because I was your first relationship. But you must know, Echo, you don't love me. I certainly wasn't your first thought morning and night, I was generally your last. Many times you forget I was home waiting for you, and that's okay because I loved you anyway." She licks her lips making my eyes track her movements.

"Him..." I say shaking my head. "You really know how to punch me in the guts without touching me, don't you? What sort of punishment are you serving on me just because I missed a few dinners, forgot a few things? The penalty you conjured is to fuck my brother?"

Selena shakes her head. "He loves me, Echo. I know this was the worst choice, ever. But he does. I need someone to love me and to see me. You never saw *me*... really. Tell me, Echo, what's my mother's name? My favorite color? These are things you should know considering we were together for years."

"I know how to make you come, what more do you want from me?"

She takes a step away. "You know how to fuck, Echo, but that's all."

Mike's behind her now, but Selena doesn't know that as she continues, "You know how to touch all those spots that takes people years to learn. Is that what you want to hear Echo? Will that make you feel better about this situation? To know you're the only man who's made me come in such a way that it took me years to leave you... to leave that kind of pleasure behind."

I smirk.

"Selena," Mike says, his face now showing something entirely different to what I've ever seen before. Hurt. I watch as he slowly blinks, while something resembling pain filters over his body. He loves her. The way he reaches for her but is reluctant to do so proves it.

"I'm sorry, Echo. But we hurt him, too."

I cackle at her words. "Hurt," I scoff.

"You need to leave, now, brother. Fuck off. *Now*."

"What do you plan to do? I'll fucking knock you out."

He looks past her to me.

"Please Echo, leave." I hear the cry, the pain in her voice.

"You two deserve each other." I flip them off as I walk away.

I hear his voice raise then hers in reply.  
And I smile a sad fucking smile as I drive off.

Echo's consistent, I like that about him. Every day without fail he messages me. Some days I don't reply, but when I'm weak like right now, I do. I give in, and send him a photograph of my boobs.

He rings, I didn't expect that response.

"Vicki, can you please leave and get photography to add pink to the shoot next week." She nods as I watch my cell vibrating on my desk. Vicki hasn't been annoying this week, and dare I say everyone in the office has been nicer. I'm even starting to like some of the people I work with, especially Tracey from accounts.

"Blondie."

"Red... fuck! Talk about making a man hot." I smile at his words. "I miss that pink pussy and that long red hair that was made for me to pull."

"Should I... come over for a visit?" I'm about to finish up anyway. And I can't think of anywhere else I want to be.

"Fuck yes! Yes. Meet me in twenty?"

"I'll bring dessert this time."

He whistles loudly as I hang up my cell, reaching for the chocolate I brought earlier this week. I place it in my bag spraying myself with some perfume and quickly changing my panties to fresh ones before I leave.

"You're leaving?" Tracey comes to my door, her short blonde hair wisps over her face as she stands there with a bottle of wine in her hand.

"I was..." I point to the door. "What's that for?" I ask indicating at the bottle.

She smiles. "Well, I figured you could use it, and to celebrate closing the



best fashion campaign of this century.”

I did, and I worked extremely fucking hard to have them to choose our magazine. I look at my cell then back to Tracey, knowing I won't be seeing him now. My heart skips a beat of disappointment at that thought.

“That would be great. Should we start here or somewhere else?”

She pops open the bottle, walking in with two glasses in her hand. “Here. Then let's go and eat tacos, then drink some more.”

I smile. “I like the sound of that.”

We polish the bottle off, and Echo rings several times. I end up sending him a text message telling him we have to reschedule, and he sends a sad face emoji. I swear, I've never met a man who sends more emoji than him.

“So, are you single?” Tracey asks as we reach the taco place.

“Yes, are you?”

“No, but my girlfriend is away right now, so I'm lonely as fuck.” I wasn't aware she had one, so it comes as a surprise. “You aren't really single, are you?” My cell beeps, I look down to see his name flashing. “I heard about the god who came into your office, I think everyone's still talking about him.” She laughs.

“He... well, he's just...” I don't know what to say to that, so I stumble over my words.

“A booty call?” she asks finishing my sentence.

“Kind of. Well, yes, I guess he is.”

“If I didn't bat for the other team I may ask for more information. But you're lucky I do.” My cell starts ringing, I look at it and notice his name. “Answer it, it's fine.” I do so because I want to know what he wants.

“If I ask you something, I don't want it to change what we have.”

“Okay.”

“What color panties are you wearing?” I laugh then pull the cell away and hang up.

“You're glowing, you sure you don't have something more going on with him?”

I shake my head. “No. We agreed, just sex. No feelings involved.”

“I doubt that very much.”

“So, where should we go drinking?” I ask finishing up my taco.

She leans in and whispers to me, “I have this one place I know of, it's very secretive. Can you keep a secret?” I nod my head unsure of what she means. “It's not far from here, but you must keep it a secret.”

“I promise.”

“Okay, let’s go.”

“ARE you sure we’re at the right place? I mean you aren’t here to off me or something, are you?” She giggles at my nervousness, but I’m damn serious. I don’t want to die.

“Don’t be silly. If I wanted to kill you, I would have drugged your drink and taken you to the nearest water, put you on a boat and thrown you off. Let the sharks have you.”

*Jesus! She’s thought it out—how to kill someone.* I’m stunned at her words, but I look around anyway.

“Leave your bag in the car, trust me you won’t need it. Oh, and maybe lose the coat.”

I do as she says basically because I’m afraid she might actually knock me off. To be honest, I’m still reeling from her previous words, so I say, “You’ve given a lot of thought to killing people.”

She laughs. “Wait till you meet my brother then you’ll understand why.” She grips my hand and pulls me through a door. Red curtains assault my sight as I push them aside. What I see at first doesn’t fully register. It can’t. *How is this even possible?*

Tracey lets go of my hand and I can feel her staring, but I can’t think to look at her as I frantically look everywhere. So much is going on that my brain’s having trouble processing it all. Girls are flying around suspended from the ceiling on Lycra. Dancers are on stage in barely anything but some small pieces of skimpy material showing all their assets as they dance with a full face of make-up as a clown.

“What is this place?”

She laughs then pulls me to the stage. I look up amazed as one of the girls lowers herself from the Lycra in front of me, smiles, then winds herself back up.

“Tracey, why the fuck are you here.”

I spin on my toes to that voice. A man is standing in place and he’s looking at Tracey as if he wants to throw her out.

“I’m allowed.”

He leans in close and hisses at her, “No you aren’t. Darby’s going to be pissed if he finds out.” It’s then he notices me. “And you brought a friend, too. Are you stupid?” She turns away from him back to the stage, so I hold out my hand to him.

“I’m Storm, nice to meet you. You must be Tracey’s brother?”

He glances to it then back at me before he looks to Tracey. “Your girlfriends aren’t allowed in here,” he says to her.

When she answers him, she doesn’t look at him. “She’s my boss, dick.”

He visibly changes right in front of my eyes. Gone is the arrogance and in its place is a smile which could melt many panties off the women in here. But luckily for me, my panties are torn off by only one man right now. And I’m happy to stay in that place for a little longer until we decide to move on. Might as well play with my ten until I’m over him. Even if this guy looks like a solid nine, the only problem with that is he knows it.

“Well, hello there, and who might you be?”

Tracey looks at me and rolls her eyes. I can’t help but laugh at her.

“She has someone. Someone who makes her smile too bright for your charming words to work,” she mutters hitting him across the head. “Storm this Falcon, my idiotic brother.”

I smile at him, turning back to the stage to get lost gazing at the girl, who’s still above me twirling so easily it’s as if it’s how she walks.

“See, not interested. Now, fuck off,” Tracey mutters next to me.

“Storm, isn’t it? How about I show you around?”

I firmly shake my head staying next to Tracey. “I’m good thanks.”

A hand touches my shoulder. “Are you sure, I have much to show.”

“What the fuck are you doing down here, loser. You’re meant to be up with Creed before he leaves.”

*That voice—I freeze on the spot.*

“I’m trying to get this beautiful lady to talk to me.”

I don’t turn around, because I physically can’t. I’m frozen to the spot. He’s right there, within touching distance. And this isn’t how it works. The only time we’re meant to see each other is for sex. This isn’t what we discussed.

“Red...”

My back straightens, even more, I don’t know how but it does.

“Do you plan to turn around and show me that pretty face?” I do as he says, and when I do my heart skips a beat because the smile on his face is

panty melting. "I knew it was you." He leans down kisses my lips fast and it shocks me because that's something you do with the person you're with. We aren't like that.

"Blondie," I say when he stands and a look passes over his face like he realized what he's just done. Falcon, Tracey's brother, stands next to Echo smirking while looking back and forth.

"You're here, at my work."

I have trouble believing what he's just said.

"You work here?" I ask shocked. I don't know what he does, but feel it's unfair that he knows so much about me and I don't know fuck all about him.

"This is my place, Red, I own it." I look at him in astonishment.

Falcon bumps him then looks at me. "We own it."

I look at Falcon then back to Echo. "Nice."

He nods his head. "This place isn't open to the public, Red. I hope Tracey explained to you that the need to not speak of this place is very high."

Tracey's hand touches mine. "She knows, I've told her already. Plus, Storm's a boss herself, so she knows when to keep quiet." Tracey pulls me toward the stage, but Echo comes up next to me, his hand brushes mine. Tracey looks at him and it's then she realizes who he is. "Oh my God, he's it... the office guy?"

"She speaks of me?" he asks happily next to me.

"No," I answer.

"No. The office was a buzz about you. She didn't even bring it up."

"Red, that hurts. Hurts real bad." His finger touches the palm of my hand. "Let me show you something." I look to Tracey who nods and looks back to the stage. When he pulls me away fully, placing his hand in mine, wrapping it around and pulling me, I look around. That's when I notice what's around me and not just the stage. Woman are having sex, with men. I pause.

"What the fuck...."

His breath comes near my ear. "Welcome to Crimson Elite, Red. I think you'll be a perfect fit." He then pushes me into a room, his hands covering my body as I hit a bed then his lips are on mine so fast that he doesn't give me time to think. I get lost in him, and just as he hikes up my skirt and inserts a finger, I realize where I am.

My hands push him back. His loss hurts, I want him on me. I want him back, the warmth and everything he brings with it when he touches me. My favorite part is that he makes my heart flutter before it takes off in a gallop so

hard that it makes me jump.

“I’m not one of these girls.” My eyes scan this place again before they come back to him. I don’t want to be watched by other people in my most personal moment. His hand touches my face, not the one that was in me that one’s still touching my thigh.

“You would never be, and if you don’t want me we don’t have too.”

Heart meet Echo.

Your perfect ten.

But if you fall for him, I swear I will tear you out with my bare hands.

“Can you do it with my clothes on?”

“Challenge accepted.” His hand skirts up my skirt and reaches me. He pushes a finger inside and touches my clit after pulling my panties to one side, rubbing it gently before his lips come back to touch mine.

My hands reach for his trousers so I can feel him through them, rubbing him as I bite his lip while he pushes himself on me. Undoing his zipper, his cock comes free and I know I want it. No matter where we are, I want it. Echo releases me and I feel his loss straight away. He lifts me so my back hits the glass, I’m thankful he doesn’t pull my skirt up as I wrap my legs around him.

“Red...” I kiss him again, I don’t want to talk. Why must we talk? “Tomorrow, too?” He pauses waiting for an answer.

“Yes, now shut up and fuck me.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

And he does, against the wall, pulling my hair and biting my neck more than likely leaving another mark.

The problem is that I’m not worried about those marks anymore, it’s the one on my heart that troubles me the most.

He’s leaving an impression.

And he’s a ten...

This was doomed from the beginning.

She has me in a daze, not even Selena could put me in a daze. Her. Red. She stupefies me, but more than that I enjoy it. I look down at the invitation that's still sitting on my desk, the one that asks me to attend *their* wedding—my brother and ex-lover. It's too sparkly, too pristine, too white, and too pure for them. I'm sure he's had a hand in making them. Reaching for my cell, I call my brother. I'm surprised when he answers considering I almost killed him last time I saw him.

"Echo," he says my name with amusement and a whole load of disdain.

"I want to bring a date."

He doesn't speak at first as I wait for him to tell me, no. Let's face it, I was only invited out of spite he never really intended nor wanted me to come.

"A date?"

"Yes, Mike, a date. Do you even know what that is without stealing someone's girlfriend?"

"Yes, you can bring a date, Echo..." He pauses. "I didn't think you'd come."

I shake my head. Honestly, I want to tear into him. "You only get to see two people, who are meant to love you but also destroyed you, get married once I guess. I also want to be there to witness when it all comes crashing down."

"You're an ass you know that, right?"

"I know." I hang up on him. Then I call my Red. She doesn't answer, so I send her a picture instead. Knowing full well I'll see her tonight. Because I made her tell me she would.

I PULL the door open before she even reaches it, her heels click on the pavement as her eyes find mine. I want to have her every which way and then some more, but first I have to ask her to come with me. Going to that wedding by myself was never my intention. But if Storm is standing next to me I know I'll be thinking of every which way I can fuck her, she's the perfect distraction.

"Prompt, I like it..."

Her brown eyes find mine at my words, her lip quirks up as she brushes past me into the house. A bottle of champagne is ready on the counter, she looks to it then back to me not making a move to touch it at all.

"Why the foreplay? That isn't something we need." She's talking about me not ravishing her the minute she entered my place, and seeing the kitchen counter with a bottle of champagne ready for her.

"I need to ask you something..."

Her eyes go wide, she reaches for her coat and pulls it open revealing red lacy lingerie underneath. "How about another time when I don't need you..." she reaches between her legs and her hand touches her pussy, "... here," she says in the most sexed up fucking voice ever.

"If you agree to be my date."

Those brown eyes which were full of lust a moment ago have now vanished. Her hand leaves her beautiful pussy as she pulls the coat around to cover herself. "You want to talk about a date, and not fuck?"

I shake my head while walking around and reaching for the bottle of champagne pouring her a glass. "I plan to drink this from your tits soon, but before I do, I need you to agree to be my date."

"But not a real date? Right?" Her nervousness makes me smile.

"No. Just pretend you're infatuated by me, and I'll do the same. That's all I ask."

"Then you'll fuck me?"

Stepping back around to her, my hands pull open her coat as my fingers touch her nipple through her lace and pinch it. "You doubt my need for you?"

Storm moans and it's like music to my ears.

"When is this fake date?" she manages to ask.

"Next weekend. It's a wedding."

She goes to speak but my mouth covers hers as I pull her to me. Her

mouth opens and she kisses me back, just for a second before I feel her push on my shoulders, her mouth leaving mine. The air I was breathing is all for her, now it's not.

"A wedding." Her voice rises in pitch as her eyes bulge, she turns away then back to me.

Reaching for her again to try to calm her, my hands touch her softly, gripping her hip to still her.

"Whose wedding, Echo?" She uses my real name—she never calls me that.

"Does it matter?" My hand digs into hips tighter.

Storm's eyes flick to my hand still on her hip then back to me. A slight head nod is all I get before she speaks. "It does matter. Whose wedding?"

"My brother's."

She breathes a sigh of relief I watch her visibly relax. "You aren't close to him, is that right?"

I smirk at her words, her hands come back to me the tension she was holding now gone.

"What makes you say that?"

She shrugs, its soft, sexy. And everything that is her. My lips make their way to her neck, leaving soft kisses in its trail.

"Tracey said her brother is like your brother, that you're all family." Her breathing is thick now as she pushes herself closer to me. My cock hard is straining in my pants at the feel of her so near to me.

"She's right, my family is my work. But I have to go."

She nods her head as I go back to continue kissing her neck. The coat drops from her shoulders and crumples on the floor as her hands pull my shirt off my arms and it falls to the floor also. She doesn't waste any time before she pulls at my trousers, moaning as she pushes my head away with her neck then bites my lips as I come up in front of her. The minute they are off, I reach for her around her sweet fucking ass. Picking her up, so she's in my arms, and carry her back to the counter where I planned to have her anyway.

"Blondie..." She pulls my head back, and just before she says another word both our heads turn toward the door when there's a loud bang. Then again. I ignore it going back to her. Whoever it is will go away when they realize I'm not answering. But before my lips reach hers, the knock comes again making her head turn and my lips reach her jawline instead.

She goes to sit up, pushing me with her. "You should get it," she whispers



trying to get down.

I pin her to the counter trapping her in with my hands. “No, they’ll leave.” The smile is beautiful as it touches her eyes.

“Maybe they will.” Her movement is slow, but what follows next is not.

“Echo...”

Storm pauses, then pushes me away from her, jumps from the bench, and reaches for her coat pulling it on straight away.

“I can hear you in there, Echo.”

“Red...”

She shakes her head. “Who’s that?” She looks to the door.

Fuck! I know exactly who’s behind it. *My ex.*

“Selena.”

She shoves her hair out of her eyes, her cheeks visibly flushed. I watch as she attempts to walk to the front door, the same one Selena’s standing at. My hand reaches for hers and pulls her back, her eyes go wide in surprise.

“It would be best if you left out the back.”

Storm’s hand pull free and they cross her chest. She stands a little taller when she speaks and her tone is sharp. “You want to sneak me out the back?” She’s making it sound worse than it is. Her hands don’t leave from her chest as she watches me.

“Yes, not because I’m ashamed.” Her eyes bulge. “No. Because I know she will never shut up.”

She turns and walks straight to the door, pulling it open before I can, and does not look back as she walks out. Shutting the door and reaching for my trousers, I pull them up before I take a deep breath then yank the front door open.

Selena stands there, her hand lifting to run through her hair as she pushes it out of the way. “Your guest has left then I take it?”

I hate that. I hate that she knows what I just did. Walking inside, I leave her at the door hating myself for what I’ve done. Selena should have been the one I made leave, not Storm.

“What do you want, Selena?” Not looking her way is my best bet right now because despite what this woman has done to me, she will always remain my first love. And she damn well knows it.

“Mike called, said you want to come now. And you want to bring a date?” She’s asking me straight up, but I choose to not answer by shrugging my shoulders. I shouldn’t be answering to her anymore, the only person I felt

needed to know is my brother and I've already spoken with him. "I hope it isn't the trash you just had in here."

My spine stiffens at her words. If she only knew. Storm has more class than she has in her pinkie toe.

"Echo..."

I turn fast, we both do. Selena's standing on the opposite side of the counter, the very same one I just had Storm on, who's now standing at my front door with her jacket slightly open. There's not enough to reveal what she has underneath, but there's enough to tease me knowing what is under there. Storm's brown eyes land on Selena. She doesn't straighten her posture like Selena does, in fact, she doesn't even seem threatened by her. Where Selena, on the other hand, has her hands crossed over her chest and is watching her with intent.

"I forgot my cell."

I look at the counter and see it sitting there.

Picking it up I walk to her, but before I reach her, Selena does. "And you are?"

She has no right. No, fucking right. And I'm about to tell her that until Storm does it for me.

"Oh, me? I'm the one fucking Echo here. And from what he says, he's never had it better." Storm reaches up kisses my cheek then walks off to her car. I watch her with a smile I didn't even know I was wearing until she's gone.

"She looks like a hooker. You hire people now for sex?"

I want to laugh at her because if I wanted to do that, I'd just go to work. Plenty there for me to choose from.

"You need to leave."

She shakes her head. "Don't bring a date to my wedding, that wouldn't be right."

The laughter that leaves me starts from the bottom of my belly. It really does. *Who the fuck does she think she is?*

"You're laughing, but I'm serious, Echo."

I manage to stand and wipe the tears away from my eyes. "Oh, you have some nerve. You mean to the wedding of my brother, who's marrying my whore of an ex?"

Her mouth falls open as she lifts her palm slamming it across my face. "You deserved that, you asshole." She turns and walks to my door, her hand

gripping the handle as she gets to it. “Don’t bring her Echo, just don’t.”

“You don’t get to tell me what to do anymore, Selena. You lost that right.”

She slams the door after she walks out.

I'm not really sure how I'm meant to feel right now. Jaded? Impassive? Blasé? Fucked if I know. I've managed to avoid him for the rest of the weekend, and now it's a new week, and I'm still feeling the aftereffects of being shafted. That's what this is—I was shafted for a woman, who he claims he isn't with. He told me he was single, that's the whole reason I agreed to our thing, whatever that is. Plus, he's perfection, with his cock, his tongue, his hands...

"Storm." My toe kicks my desk, and I yelp out loudly. Tracey starts to giggle as she walks in. "I knew you were lost in thought, I just couldn't resist." Reaching down, I rub my toe before I slide my heels back on my feet. I like to kick them off when I'm at my desk, wearing heels all day isn't that great on the feet. But they sure as shit look pretty. "How's you and lover boy going? Falcon said, he hasn't been his mopey self since he's been seeing you?"

I sit up straighter in my chair and try to not let her words affect me. "He was mopey?"

She nods her head. "Yep, his ex did a number on him badly. He was with her for years." She hands me the information I'm not sure I really want to know, because it makes me feel somehow more invested. That's the last thing I want to be.

"I think I may have met her..." I say, then change the subject. "Your brother's interesting."

She laughs loudly. "You could say that, he's a whore."

"Sex sure is fun, can't blame him," I answer truthfully. If it's with the

right person that is.

“Oh, I know, I mean we both get it from somewhere, he just doesn’t know how to shut up.” I nod my head at her words unsure of what to say. My mind has been so stuck on Echo and what I should do—walk away, tell him it’s over—I have no idea. I mean he did keep me out of whatever was about to happen, that was part of the plan, right? Our only interest in each other was sex. So, I shouldn’t be hurt, but he had just asked me to go to his brother’s wedding, so I was confused. Very much so.

“How well do you know him?” I ask cutting her off from what she’s about to say.

“Echo?” she asks. I nod my head. “Better than most I would guess. We all went to the same school. We grew up together. Even if the boys are very secretive they weren’t mean to me.” She stops as I look at my cell which is beeping with a message from him. “Are you having feelings for him, Storm?” I look up and shake my head.

“I don’t. No. What we have is just fun, it’s how I want it to stay.”

“You aren’t committed to each other? So, he could call you right now, call it off with what you have and go back to his ex, and you’d be okay with that?” I cringe at her words and the way that woman looked at me like I was a lower class than her. I’m not.

“I’d be fine. I mean I would miss the sex. But what we have is nothing emotional.”

“Good to know, Red.” I look up, my heart missing a beat as Echo stands at my door. I kick my desk again this time but thankful my heels are on as I stand.

Tracey walks past him touching his shoulder as she goes. “Don’t be an ass.” She winks at me then closes the door, leaving us both in my office staring at each other unsure of what to say or do. His eyes leave me for a second before they come back.

“I see you’ve been getting my messages.” I look at my cell on my desk. “It’s not broken then?” His hands are in his pockets, his mouth is in a thin line. *What does he have to be unhappy about?*

“I was working out what to reply to you.” It’s the truth.

“You don’t want to see me anymore?” he asks stepping closer. I smell him. And I know when he’s near me I won’t tell him no. I can do this. I can fuck and have a fling relationship with no emotions. *Lies*. So, I keep telling myself.

“I do.”

His hand touches my arm, his fingers trace inside my wrist before he clasps it with his. “So you’ll come with me, won’t you?”

“I won’t be your hidden secret. The one who has to run out the back door when your ex comes over.”

“Noted.” Echo nods his head then his lips touch mine as his hand grips my arm. If he could take my breath away with each touch of his lips, he would do just that. Just as our lips touch a knock on the door is heard and I pull away, but I can’t go far because he still has hold of me. My heart rate doesn’t slow and my lips feel like something’s missing. The knock comes again.

“Should you get that... or they can wait?”

My words are lost, but I manage to walk to the door in answer pulling it open carefully. I see Vicki standing there. Her eyes scan me, from my lips to my eyes then past my shoulder as she straightens her posture.

“Vicki,” I manage to finally say.

She doesn’t look back to me when she answers, “Your two o’clock is in the conference room. We are waiting for you.”

“She’ll be right there, Vicki.”

“She will be?” Vicki asks finally looking to me.

I nod my head to her and shut the door before she can say anything else. Turning around my back hits the door as I assess him. His beautiful blond hair swoops flawlessly like he ran the perfect brush through and sprayed it to keep it there when I know full well he didn’t. He’s lucky like that to have the most incredible hair. His trousers are dark blue matching his blue tie which is paired with his white shirt. He always looks like he’s ready for business.

“I’ll give you the rest of the week, but the wedding is this weekend.”

“You still want me to go with you?” I ask him.

He takes one step closer my hands stay on the door behind me knowing I don’t have time and have to leave. I can’t be late. I’m never late. It’s how I got where I am today.

“Only you. But a word of warning, you will be meeting my parents.”

“I need to go.” Just as I turn to pull the door open with sweaty hands, it gets pushed closed and his body heat is directly behind me now.

“That scared you, didn’t it?”

“What will you refer to me as?”

“What would you like?” he asks, my face still facing the door.

I shake my head unsure of what I should say.

“My girlfriend. Or would that scare you?” he states.

“That will do. It’s answer enough without too much detail,” I manage to speak.

Echo laughs near my ear. “I can hear the boss part of you come out right then.”

“I have a meeting.” I pull the door again, but this time he doesn’t stop me from leaving. Looking back as I walk away, he’s now standing at the door watching my ass, and I can’t help the smirk that sits on my lips.

“SO YOU TWO ARE REALLY A THING?” Vicki asks. She’s been... better. But she’s still Vicki. Our meeting has finished and despite me being late it went great.

“I don’t want to label it.”

“I would if I had him. That man is not human, I swear.” I laugh because I almost believe her words. Almost. “He’s still in your office, did you know that?”

It’s been well over an hour. I didn’t think he would stay. I hate that when she tells me, my heart rate jumps a beat. My feet halt when I see a few women standing at my office door, all their postures are straight, fingers brushing through their hair.

“Told you, label it. The hyenas are out and want your man’s blood.” She laughs as she walks away. I manage to step over. The girls don’t even hear me, but he sees me I know he does.

“Work, girls.” They all stop, turn, and leave my office, so I can see him clearly again. His tie’s gone and the top two buttons are undone. “You shouldn’t be mingling with my employees.”

“I only want to mingle with one.”

“You need to leave, I have work to finish.”

Echo goes to touch me but I look around indicating that he shouldn’t. People will see. I’m the boss.

“I’ll give you until the wedding, I’ll message you the details.” I nod my head, unable to say any more words. He reaches for his discarded tie then steps past me to go through the door. “Then I plan to fuck you every which

way till Sunday.”

My thighs draw together at his words while my eyes shoot to the floor and he chuckles as he walks out



**T**oday is the day, what a fucking day, too. The sun is bright and the clouds are gone, it's the perfect day for a wedding. The wedding from fucking hell that is. Why the fuck did I agree to go to this? I'll never fucking know.

"Are you sure you should be going?" Falcon fixes his tie as he watches me fidgeting with mine.

"Possibly not." A smirk touches my lips, but I'm fucking going.

He nods his head a look of unease on his face. "And you're bringing the redhead? You sure that's a good idea, especially if you like her. After today, she could possibly not like you at all."

*Shit. I didn't think of that.*

Letting go of my tie I stand taller, but before I can back out of it, her message comes through telling me she's ready to be picked up. On time. Perfect.

"And not only that she'll be meeting your ex—"

"She has," I state.

Falcon holds his hand up, shakes his head in disbelief. "Say what. She's met the evil queen and still wants to go with you?"

This time I fidget so much more than before. I'm almost ready to tear the tie off of my neck. "She doesn't know it's Selena getting married, she only knows it's my brother's wedding."

Falcon's hand holds up to my face, then he laughs, belly laughs so loudly I'm sure everyone within a very short distance can hear him. "You're fucking with me, right? You didn't tell her your brother's marrying your ex?"

Pulling the tie off, I'm sick of it. Fuck it. I clutch it in my hands and slide it into my pocket. "It never came up."

"Oh, this is classic, like truly. You do know she's a redhead, right? Like she will flip her shit on you and possibly even cut you?" His laughter dies, but the smirk on his face never leaves. "I mean I'm happy to find you in pieces at the bottom of a river, but did you stop to think it wasn't the best way to break it to her as Selena walks down the aisle?"

"That's how she's going to find out," I state. Reaching for the bottle of whiskey, I think how lucky I am that I'm not fucking driving.

"And let's not forget about your parents, I mean..." he scratches his chin still smirking, "... they are assholes."

I laugh, that's a massive understatement.

"She can find that out herself as well. I don't plan to stay long anyway."

"So, why are you going exactly?"

That's the real question, isn't it? I don't even know if I can answer it correctly. A part of me wants to go just to say I saw it then laugh as it dissolves. Because it's bound to. Then another part can't believe that my brother or even the woman I used to love would do that to me. What did I ever do that was so bad to deserve this kind of treatment? I shrug my shoulders and grab my coat.

"You could come hunting with me, we need new clients."

I shake my head.

Falcon loves that shit. He loves to assess people and surprise them with him knowing more. He delves into their history before he will actually meet them. Surprise attack to make sure they want it, then when he's satisfied they are a right fit, he goes out and invites them. Usually, by that time they know they're a candidate. Sometimes not.

"I've already said I'm going, and I'm already a disappointment. So let's not give them something else to complain about."

"You're far from a disappointment. You are, by far, a better man than Mike. They just can't see past their rose covered glasses. Idiots." I smile at his words and walk out. The driver is already waiting for me out the front. I didn't want to drive to this event because I know for a fact, I'll need to drink if it gets that way around my family. Texting Red I tell her I'm on my way and she replies with a winky face.

When we pull up out the front she's already waiting, in a dress I'm sure is going to out-do the bride. The dress is lavender and stops just short of her

knees. The black sky-high heels she has on match. Her red hair is tied up in a tight bun on top of her head. Getting out before she can reach the door, I do what I've been missing all week, grab her ass and take her lips. She doesn't fight or question me on it, she merely kisses me back like she's missed the same thing as much as I have. When we finally break apart her hand lays softly on my shoulder as she smiles.

"I see you missed me," she says in a sneaky suspicious way like it's a joke hidden within the truth. She may be right.

"I've missed a lot of things, one of them is your lips." She smiles as I open the door for her.

"So, this isn't a date, right?" she asks looking up as she slides into the car.

"No."

She sighs in relief at my words. The look that passes on her face, the contempt in knowing this isn't a date doesn't sit well with me. Would I be that bad to date? I mean she likes me, that's obvious, or she wouldn't let me near her. But am I that bad a man for her to date? Getting in the car I place my hand on her leg, she smiles up at me.

"We have to stop at one more place." She nods her head.

Pulling up at Creed's I get out of the car shutting the door. Elicea comes to the door looks me up and down and smiles.

"I heard you're going to a wedding." Elicea is too fucking sweet for Creed, way too fucking sweet. She looks past me into the car and I know she sees Storm by the way her eyes pinch together in confusion. She looks back at me. "And taking a date?"

Creed walks out, his hand goes straight to the side of Elicea's pregnant belly holding her hip. "You want me to take the security for how long?" Creed asks getting straight to the point.

"Bring her out. It's rude to leave her sitting there," Elicea says before I can finish.

"Go, and meet her, I have to go." Looking back to Creed. "Just for two nights. D knows already." He nods his head and Elicea places her hand on my shoulder, as I start walking back to the car with her next to me. Red opens her door and steps out with a smile and her hand outstretched already.

"Hi, I'm Storm."

Elicea smiles big at her name. "I'm Elicea." She turns back and points to Creed. "Creed's other half. It's so nice to meet you. You've really made him smile lately."

Red looks to me then back to Elicea.

“We have to go, I’ll stop by tomorrow if I can.” I lean in and kiss her cheek then offer a wave to Creed who stands on the front porch waiting for Elicea to return.

“She seems lovely.”

“She is.” My hand covers hers as we start to drive, I’m trying to work out how exactly how I’m going to tell her because I really don’t want her sucker punching me in the balls, or even possibly worse not seeing me again. So far she’s been everything I need at this time. She came unexpected, and that’s more than a pleasant surprise for me.

“You work with him?” she asks breaking me from my thoughts. “You seem, off,” she says in a way that makes me fully turn to look at her. Her voice is uneven, her hand in mine is fidgeting.

“I’m not close to my family.”

Her hand relaxes. “Oh, I didn’t know. Sorry.”

I didn’t ask for her sympathy, yet she gives it anyway.

“Don’t be sorry, I have my boys. They’re closer to family than mine will ever be,” I tell her the truth.

“That guy back there?”

“I grew up with him. Creed.” She nods her head. Before I can say another word, the car comes to a stop out the front of the church. My mother used to tell me if I walked into one the house would burn down. What a liar she is.

“We can sit, a little while longer if you need?”

I shake my head, it’s best to get this day over with. When I turn to look at her, my nerves cease to exist, and I know exactly why I want this to hurry up—so I can take her with me to my home and tie her to my bed and keep her there for as long as I want.

Turning back, I see her—my mother. She’s standing next to my father as she speaks to him, possibly on the lookout for when I arrive.

“Is that them?” Her voice shocks me out of my staring. I open the door, step out and grab her hand. She slides across getting out with me. When I shut the door, it’s then that they both turn to look at me. My mother stands with her hands crossed over her chest as my father has his hands on his belt watching us. “They’re intense,” she whispers.

“They are.” I laugh at her nervousness.

“Do we like them, or not?” she whispers as we step closer, her hand squeezing my forearm.

“Best behavior.”

She giggles softly as we reach them.

“Something funny?” my mother asks in her best ‘my shit don’t stink’ voice.

“Mother, Father... this is Storm.”

Storm offers her hand but neither take it, so she lets it fall to her side.

“You brought a date? The cheek of you, Echo,” my mother says.

Storm stiffens next to me.

“I think I have every right to,” I argue back.

“Maybe I should...” Storm goes to pull away, but I hold onto her arm not letting her escape.

“Oh, trust me, you aren’t going anywhere.”

Storm nods her head and looks to the ground.

“What is it you do, Storm?” My father asks, his voice is judgmental, but she chooses to not acknowledge it as she answers.

“Oh, I run Sass Fashion. I’m the Chief Editor.”

Both sets of eyes go wide.

“And your dating, Echo?” my mother says.

Storm looks to me, her beautiful brown eyes glimmer with proudness. “Yes. What Echo does sure outweighs what I do. He’s very successful.” I didn’t need her to say that, but I’m thankful all the same. The only people in my life who tell me I’m okay is my non-brothers, and even then we are guys. We don’t say it enough to each other. My blood brother, on the other hand, decides he finds it in my best interests to fuck and marry my first love.

“I’m sure that’s what he says,” my mother snidely remarks.

“I’ve been there, it’s a very well thought out business. One of the most elite in all the country, so I’ve heard and I have quite a few high contacts.” They both turn to look at me, a new look on their face that I haven’t seen before. Did it really take the words of a complete stranger for them to believe that what I do, I can be good at? They’ve never even cared to ask before.

My brother walks out, dressed in a suit. Nothing unusual. He walks up to us. His eyes land on Storm and he introduces himself before I can even do so. “You must be his new flavor of the month. I’m Mike, the better brother.”

If it weren’t his wedding day, I would punch the prick in the throat then straight in his fucking perfect jaw.

Storm laughs as she smiles, squeezing my arm to stop me from saying anything stupid. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. And congrats, I can’t wait to see

the beautiful bride.” All eyes fall to me, all except Storm who’s clueless, which makes me feel like an ass.

“Oh, you don’t know?”

This time I squeeze her arm to keep her in place as my brother’s words start to fall from his mouth.

“Know what?”

“I think you may have met her, actually.” Mike looks to me, a gleam forming in his eye. “Or, was that another woman at your house when my fiancée came over?”

Storm tries to pull away from my hand but I keep hold of her.

Mike turns and walks back inside when he’s called by the minister.

Fuck.

No way, no family is that shit. Not possible. But I know he isn't lying by the grip Echo has on my arm right now like he knows I want to run in the other direction. His brother walks off and his parents smile at me and only me, then they follow their son inside.

"You didn't tell me," I manage to say.

He shakes his head and everyone starts going inside. "Let's get this over with." He sighs in relief, I'm not going to let his brother win. Mike thought he could, I saw the smugness play on his face when he told me what he did. Like it would make me run for the hills. It still might, but right now I can be the only person in this place that likes Echo because it sure as shit shows that no one in his family does. They all think of him as a dropkick. Which he's anything but.

"Thank you."

I shrug. What I want to say isn't the right time to be spoken. He has enough shit to deal with from his family, today isn't the day.

He takes a seat at the back. I don't argue or even bother asking why he doesn't sit up front with the rest of his family. His foot starts bouncing up and down on the spot, and it's one of the first times I've seen this side of him. Nervous. Anxious. Apprehensive. And maybe even a little distressed. The music starts while I watch him staring straight ahead, but then he reluctantly turns to see where it's coming from. To see her walk past me. I feel her as she approaches but don't care to turn to see her. My eyes are solely trained on him and his reaction.

"Is she beautiful?" I ask him, he nods but doesn't look back at me. "Do

you wish it was you?”

This time his eyes find me. Everyone goes silent, and I hear in the background a wedding playing out. Do I care, though? No.

“No. I don’t think so.” His answer’s unsure, and that doesn’t sit well with me.

“How did she break your heart, Echo? How?”

He leans in close, so only I can hear him. No one near us is paying us any attention anyway. “She fucked my brother,” he replies with such venom.

“Did you really love her?”

His eyes leave mine as they flick to the front of the room then back to me. “Maybe. She was all I knew.”

We sit in silence staring at each other, neither of us paying any attention to the wedding. The way his eyes search mine doesn’t bode well for me. He’s trying to look deeper to find what I don’t even know.

“We’re a pair, aren’t we?” I ask him

He doesn’t answer just continues to stare with those beautiful blue eyes.

“I think we should end it after this I will play the perfect dutiful girlfriend until the wedding finishes. Then that’s it. It’s time. We’ve had our fun.”

“Have we, though?” he finally replies.

We both turn to the front when everyone starts cheering, and he pulls me to stand and starts clapping as they walk down the aisle. She glances my way as she passes then her eyes land on Echo, surprise sits there, but she covers it when she hears the click of the cameras.

They look so much alike, yet so different—Echo and his brother. I wonder why they don’t like each other. It can’t be just because one was favored over the other.

“You look so alike,” I state as people start to walk out after the bride and groom.

“That would be because we’re twins.”

My mouth falls open as I turn to look at him. “You both should be close.” Turning to face him full on, he’s already watching me. “Why aren’t you?”

He shrugs then grabs my hand in his. “We still have a reception to attend. This should be fun.”

His mother and father are waiting out by the front of the door for us when we leave. We are the last two out the door. I saw the way people stared at him as they walked past. Or the slight whispers of his name as well. His mother offers me a small smile before she starts walking with the both of us



following not far behind her.

“I would like you and Storm to sit at our table,” his mother says. She doesn’t give us room to say no.

We make our way into the reception area—which is a large white marquee out the back of the church—which is filled with beautiful floral decorations. The scent as you walk inside almost knocks you off your feet. There are tables set up with white tablecloths and pink placemats. Massive bouquets of flowers decorate the middle of every table. Small glittery lighting hangs in strands from the ceiling. Behind the bride and groom’s table is a sheer curtain, with fairy lights trailing across and down. Everything is in pink and white, it’s quite beautiful.

Echo reaches for a drink, his mother tsks at him.

“We all know how you get on that stuff, best you stay sober today.”

He tsks back at her. “Lucky I’m a grown ass man that doesn’t have to listen to his mother anymore, aren’t I?” He picks it up as we follow her while she’s constantly shaking her head to the table.

“I don’t want you making a scene,” she says quietly looking around to make sure no one is around to hear her. Echo’s father says nothing, he doesn’t even look Echo’s way as he pulls out his seat and sits straight down on it.

“I want best behavior, just for your mother.”

I slide my hand on his leg under the table to try to calm him. It stops bouncing when I do, and he takes a drink of his beer. We sit in silence as we wait for the couple to come in. When they do, everyone stands but Echo, who continues to drink his beer quietly.

When we all sit I notice Echo’s beer bottle is empty, and he’s staring at it like it’s going to magically refill itself. Leaning over so only he can hear my words, “Why did we even come? You didn’t have to come to this you know?”

He turns, and as he does our noses collide, our mouths so close to one another. I have to pull back first, so I don’t try to kiss him. So those eyes that hold a storm right now don’t torment me by trying to make his pain go away.

He holds so much anguish inside him, it’s so evident in his eyes. Why didn’t I see it before? Was I blind to it? Blind to him? I had to be.

“I don’t even know...” he trails off and I know he’s speaking the truth. He seems to have forgotten why he even came. “Maybe it was a mixture of things, or maybe it was just to finally put an end to what feelings I had for

her.”

His words sting.

It isn't something you want to hear come out of someone you like, that they're still clearly in love with someone else. Brushing it off, I smile turning back to his parents who are watching us, for how long I don't even know.

“How did you meet Echo, Storm?” his father asks tapping his fingers on the table as he assesses me waiting for an answer. I smile remembering how we met. I was taking chances that night, something I would never have normally done when I let him kiss me. And look where that led us, to me sitting next to him while he pines for another woman who just married his brother. Now, I'm sitting across from his parents who clearly favor the other son than the great one in front of them. And to make matters worse, Echo's fears that he isn't good enough would have been validated when his ex-went left him for his own brother, and his twin no less.

It's like it's my own private soap opera playing out in front of me, one I didn't want to watch let alone be invited to guest star in. Because when I look at it now knowing the details, we aren't going anywhere. It's fun. It's been fun. But I don't need this. I don't want to be playing second fiddle to anyone, let alone his ex. I want to be first and only first. That's what every woman should want. Even if he's my perfect ten, he loses half a point for simply being unavailable.

“At a bar,” I tell his father honestly.

He shakes his head. “I would say that surprises me, but it doesn't.” His father's fingers stop tapping as he sits back not wanting to know anymore.

“You do know he's very successful, right? Echo's one of the most successful people I know.” My words earlier about how great his business is are not a lie. I had heard whispers, but when I saw it with my own eyes and some of the clientele there, I knew it would be one of the biggest and closely guarded secret businesses in the country.

“So you have mentioned, but he doesn't seem to show it to us,” his mother says.

“Oh, I'm meant to flash my wealth around like Mike does, am I?” Echo shakes his head.

“You drink... *those*,” my mother says pointing at the beer.

*I don't understand what they mean.*

“Because it's not a thousand dollar bottle of whiskey, I'm what? Poor?”

She shrugs her shoulders. A waiter walks around with a tray of drinks,

Echo reaches for the beer. Looks to it then back to his parents. "Seems Mike is serving the poor drinks tonight." He scoffs. Then starts drinking again. I reach for a glass of champagne and plan to have many more if I have to sit here and listen to this shit all night. *Who the fuck cares what he drinks or how much it costs?* It's fucking alcohol and it all does the same job. Gets you fucked up. Which is where I need to be right now.

"I'm sure he's only supplied them because he knew you were coming," his father chimes in.

I want to tell them how superficial they are, but instead, I sit back smiling and pretending I actually want to be here when I want to be anywhere else but here.

"So, are you two serious, or is Selena right. Is it just a fling?"

I choke on my drink and everyone looks at me. How they don't see the issue in his ex taking notes on who Echo is with baffles me.

"You're taking advice on my relationships from my ex? Oh, that's classic."

"Your brother's wife, thank you," his mother chimes in correcting him.

"Oh, sorry, did I forget to mention that Mike has my seconds and that I was fucking your new favorite daughter-in-law for the last few years."

Fucking everyone goes silent.

Selena walks over in her beautiful white dress, her smile is forced as she comes to stand directly next to Echo, who doesn't look up to her at all. Her eyes fall to me then to the top of Echo's head.

"I'm glad you could make it. It made your brother happy you came and didn't cause a scene."

Echo doesn't say a word as he lifts his drink and starts drinking again.

Her judging eyes fall to me, and I know she remembers me from his house. "And you are?"

I stand because one thing I learned in life is to never be lower than someone who thinks their shit doesn't stink. You hold the power so show it. "I'm with Echo. Storm. Lovely to meet you, I'm sure. Congrats on your wedding."

She smiles and bares her teeth.

"Storm here is the Editor in Chief at Sass Magazine. That's the one you love, right?" Echo's mother says.

"Oh, you like my magazine?"

She shakes her head. "I've read it a few times."

“You bought a copy every month. The best inspiration you said,” his mother says, clearly not catching on. Echo does though, because he starts belly laughing and stops when I place my hand on his shoulder.

“It was lovely to meet you,” I say sitting.

“Echo, can we talk?” Echo ignores her. She’s persistent though, and taps him on the shoulder. He sighs as he looks up to her. His body’s stiff. I remove my hand from him and go back to my glass of champagne drinking it all in one go.

“Just briefly, please? It is my day.”

He stands pushing his chair back harshly and follows her out, not once does he look back at me, leaving me sitting here while his parents stare at me.

**H**er white dress is perfect, it's exactly how I imagined she'd look when the time came for us to get married. What a joke that was because now I can't picture it at all. I can only see her kissing my brother as they say their vows—how much she loves him and for so long. It's a stab in the fucking gut.

*Who the fuck does that to someone they love, or claim to love?*

She turns back once to look at me to make sure I'm still following her before she opens a door letting me in following her inside. She shuts it behind me. She bundles her dress in her hands as she watches me. "I asked you not to come."

I shrug my shoulders, my hands in my pockets while I wait for the real reason we're standing here.

"I'm glad you did, though. It made me see things for the first time." I have no fucking idea what she's talking about, so I choose not to answer. "You loved me in your own way. I see that now."

I blanch at her. *How the fuck did she just see that?*

"I told you all the time we were together that I loved you."

She shakes her head. "You didn't. It was maybe once or twice a month if I was lucky."

"You've lost it. Why the fuck am I back here?"

"Because I was stupid, and I didn't really think—"

"No comment," I cut in.

She shakes her head holding tight to her wedding dress. "I still love you, Echo."

My world stops.

*What the actual fuck.*

Now, right now, she chooses to have *this* conversation.

On her wedding day to my brother of all people.

“You have some nerve, you know that, right?” My hands fall from my pockets as I brush my hair back.

“Just listen all right—”

“No. You just married my fucking brother and broke my fucking heart in doing so.”

She steps forward, the dress dropping from her hand as she reaches for me. I take a step back not letting her hands touch me. I don’t want her touch when we all, only a mere few minutes ago, saw her kiss my brother at the altar.

“I know, and I’m sorry, Echo. I’m so sorry. He was there when you weren’t. It kind of just happened. He offered me things you didn’t, and he looks so much like you. I know you don’t see it but you’re both so much alike.”

“You’re not really helping your case here, Selena, whatever the fuck that’s meant to be.”

“I made a mistake.” She steps closer again, her lips within reach.

“You want to leave him, already?”

She shakes her head. “No. I do love him. He gives me what you couldn’t, but he also can’t give me what you did. I miss our passion, I miss your lips. No one can make me forget about the world like you can, Echo. It’s your gift.” She reaches up and it happens in such slow motion that I don’t react. I can’t really believe it’s about to happen. It can’t happen, not right now. And as her lips hit mine, I don’t move. My body becomes like a stalk, frozen in place by her touch. It’s because she’s the fucking ice queen of playing with hearts.

Her lips don’t belong on mine. She moves them, her hands touching my side as my hands dangle to my sides. What the actual fuck! Usually, her kisses make me want to tear her clothes off, but right now I want her away from me, and don’t fucking know why she thinks this a good idea. We aren’t meant to be, I see that now. She’s broken, more so than me. At first, I thought it was me, that maybe I was incapable of love. That somehow, I pushed her away to go to him. I didn’t. She’s the one with the issue. It’s Selena that wants to keep her cake and eat it too. Well, I won’t be her side piece of

fucking cake, I'm not that stupid.

"Oh my God."

Words. Words that don't belong to the person whose lips are on me right now make me push her off. When I turn, Red's standing there, her hand to her mouth as she looks at me with pain in her eyes. Her hand slowly drops and my brother steps from around her with a look of pure unadulterated murder in his eyes. My first instinct is to tell Red it means nothing, that it's stupid. Then I realize I didn't actually fucking do it. Selena did, and when I look back at her she doesn't have her usual smug look on her face. My brother, on the other hand, has a look I haven't seen before. There's no smugness at all.

Red pushes past my brother and disappears before I can say a word. Going after her, I'm stopped when my brother's hand touches my shoulder. Looking at him, I can now see the anger and it's not directed at his whore of a wife it's solely on me.

"You're trash. I knew I shouldn't have let you come." His fist connects with my face. Selena gasps behind me as I shake it off, with blood in my mouth I look up at him.

"That was your only shot because you're hurt, but the next one I won't fucking hold back." His eyebrows are scrunched and he tries again, but this time I'm ready for it and duck before his fists hit me. Instead, it lands on the door smashing a hole through it. Grabbing his hands, I swivel and lock his hands behind his back, as I lean in close and whisper in his ear, "Next time look. I didn't touch her. Never want to. Your wife kissed me. Think about it Mike, think about what you actually saw and you'll know I'm not lying." I push him free and in the room with his whore of a wife shutting the door which now has a hole in it.

"You couldn't help yourself, could you?" Turning to my mother's venomous voice, I look past her hoping to see a glimpse of red hair. But I already know she's more than likely gone.

"Me?" I ask shaking my head.

My father's eyes zoom in on the door with the hole. "It was his day, Echo, his fucking day. You couldn't behave yourself for one day?"

"Oh, I did. None of that was my fault."

My mother rolls her eyes.

That's it! I can't stand to be here any longer with people who think so fucking less of me.

“That’s it, I’m done. Well and truly fucking done. You have one son now because I can’t keep doing this. I don’t want to keep doing this. Creed’s mother is more of a mother to me than you have ever been.” I look at my father. “And you, if the sun shines so far up his ass, fucking take a ride behind it. I don’t have time for this shit anymore.” Turning, I walk off to hopefully fucking find Red, and I’m hoping she won’t fucking hate me too.

“Echo Brown you get back here, right now.”

I flip my mother the middle finger and keep on fucking walking, out of this fucking toxic family, never to return again.

SHE DOESN’T ANSWER, I didn’t think she would. And she isn’t home. Or she’s doing a very good job at hiding and ignoring me. My driver was gone when I left the wedding, and I had to call Creed to come and get me. He’s been driving me around for a while hoping I can find her. Hoping somehow I can make things right, and take things back to where they were. Our normal. Even if the possibility of that happening is slim, I have to try. I want to try.

“Why do you care? You said she was just a fling. Someone to help you forget and give you what you need?” Falcon asks through the cell. Creed stays silent driving to the club. I’ve looked everywhere, even went to her work which is closed today hoping she’d be there.

“Because I like what we have. What does it fucking matter?”

“Exactly. What does it matter? Find someone else and leave the woman alone.” Before I can say anything back, Creed ends the call.

“He doesn’t fucking understand.” We come to a stop out the front of the club. It’s just before clients start to arrive, so all our girls are here and Johnny’s behind the bar.

The music isn’t on and all the boys are inside. Darby’s waiting for me to walk in.

“You weren’t meant to be in, but I knew you would be.” He pulls out a few bottles of whiskey and places the glasses on the table, while Falcon steps in sitting down too. Creed stands at the door not interested but is here for support in his own way.

“You don’t want to lecture me?” I ask surprised. Falcon gets straight to pouring the drinks as he sits back with his glass to his lips while I look at



Darby.

“I’m sure you had your reasons, but why do you think you never told Selena what you do? We think it’s because you didn’t trust her.”

*Maybe Darby’s right.*

“And, you haven’t tried to escape to the beach at all lately,” Falcon chimes in. I love the fucking beach. I like to surf it helps me forget. Everything.

“All we’re saying is maybe the red-haired woman is good for you.” Creed scoffs at Darby’s words. We all turn to look at him. He shakes his head and walks out not saying a word.

“I’m pretty sure that ship has sailed. Especially after what just happened.”

Darby shrugs and Falcon for a change stays quiet.

“You know what Selena is, now be thankful you dodged that bullet,” Creed says walking back in with another bottle in his hand.

And that’s how I spend the rest of the night. Fucked up in my office with those around me who really fucking care.

Clean break, it's better for both of us. At least that's what I tell myself as I sit on my old green couch while my mother proceeds to tell me all about my ex Matthew, and how many times she's seen him, and how many times he's asked about me. Kill me now. She never saw the flaws in that man but I sure as shit did, and thankfully before it wasn't too late. Otherwise, I would have never left this place and stayed just like everyone else in it.

"You should go and see him while you're in town, I hear he's still single," Mom says as she carries in a tray of tea. I hate tea, but I love the smell of it because it reminds me of her. She starts to pour us each a cup knowing full well I won't drink it, but continues anyway.

"I'm fine, Mom."

She shakes her head. "You're living in the city by yourself, it has me worried." I smile and cover her hand with mine. She only wants what's best for me even if it's not what I want.

A knock comes on the door. I know who it is and so does Mom without even saying it. "You already told her you were here?" I nod my head, of course, I did. I tell Melissa everything. Sometimes that annoys my mother, actually, more often than not it annoys her. "And I suppose you plan to go out?" I smile. She looks me over, I'm still in the dress I had on for the wedding. "But you plan to stay the night, right?"

"Yes, Mom." She pats my head before she walks off.

Melissa walks in without anyone getting the door for her. When she sees me, and what I'm wearing, she stops and looks me up and down. "What the

actual fuck.”

I nod my head. She already knows what’s happened, I told Melissa when I called her. Repeating what she said probably isn’t the best idea.

“You didn’t tell me you looked like this. That man is crazy to walk away from you.” I don’t reply, it’s not something I want to talk or even think about right now. “Well, how about you come out with Howard and me.” When I stand she shakes her head. “Not wearing that. We are going to Roger’s after all, and that bar doesn’t deserve a dress like that.”

She’s right. Going upstairs to my old room, I find some jeans and shirt and throw them on before heading out. Howard offers me a big cuddle as I get to the car. He and Mel have been together forever. He’s good for her. They have one of the best relationships I’ve ever seen. And he’s for sure her ten.

“I feel I should pre-warn you before we get there, Matthew will be there.” I look to Mel who just rolls her eyes as she climbs in the car.

“Who fucking cares,” Mel says ending that conversation.

They hold hands on the drive while he gives her secretive looks. I’ve seen it all before, but never really paid so much attention. Maybe it’s because I just saw my date kissing someone else when he took me somewhere I had no place being. Or, maybe it’s just because I’m jealous that I haven’t found what they have.

As soon as we arrive, I practically jump from the car. Walking inside, not waiting for them, I step over to the bar and start ordering as many shots as I think my belly can handle.

“I didn’t think. I’m sorry.”

I detest that she knows why I’m upset, and I hate that I’m making her apologize.

“I sent him home.”

I look past her and don’t see Howard. Reaching for her cell, I press his number and he answers straight away.

“Get inside, your woman’s being silly.”

“Are you sure?” If I was a crier, I would break down in tears. They care, and right now I know I’m in the best place for me. “Yes. Now come and drink with us like we used to.” Hanging it up, I pass Mel’s cell back as Howard walks in. Handing him a drink he takes it then kisses Mel on the neck before he drinks it.

“Oh, fuck off asshat, before I kick you in the balls again,” Mel says

looking behind me.

“I just wanted to say hi. No need for hostility, Mel. Howard you should learn to control her better.” Howard straightens and I don’t have to turn around to know Matthew is now backing away. Howard may be pussy-whipped as some like to say, but his love for Mel knows no bounds that’s for sure. When I do finally turn around, I see Matthew standing in the corner with his friends as they drink and play pool.

“I plan for you to roll me out of here,” I say to Mel as I down another drink.

She laughs. “Howard will help,” she says clinking our drinks together.

“STORMI, Stormi, you need to wake up. Your mother thinks you’re dead.” Mel’s pushing me and I feel like death. Death I tell you. *What the fuck happened?* I don’t remember. Turning my head to the side and squinting through one half-opened eye, I see her sitting on the edge of the bed, she’s all smiles and I want to know how. Didn’t we drink the same amount? *Why does my head hurt so much?*

“What happened?”

“Oh, you weren’t lying. Howard and I practically had to roll your ass out of there last night.” She giggles sitting up straighter. Her laugh hurts my ears, so I close my eyes again. She hits me making everything ache. “If I were you, I would get up fast and maybe brush your teeth, you smell like something died.”

“Go away.” I turn away pulling the covers up.

“You called him last night. Do you remember?” I stay quiet trying to remember, and when it comes back to me, I almost want to die.

“*YOU’RE AN ASSHOLE. AN ASSHOLE.*”

*Mel tries to take my cell off me, but I won’t give it to her. “Who does that to their date? Assholes do,” I slur into the cell.*

“Red, where are you?”

“*And what a fucking stupid name. Call me by my own name, you asshole.*”

*Mel walks off shaking her head, and I try to follow her, but I miss my step and hit the gravel floor.*

*"Fuck, I'm bleeding. Now, I have blood all over me. Asshole."*

*"Storm, where the fuck are you?"*

*"Oh, now you want to use my real name, asshole. How about you go fuck yourself, and your skank of an ex. Who does that to someone? Kiss someone else on their wedding day. Assholes that's who. You two deserve each other."*

*"Fuck Storm, you're bleeding," Howard says as he reaches for me.*

*"You don't have to carry me."*

*"Yes, I fucking do..."*

*I forgot I had the cell to my ear as Howard walks with me over his shoulder.*

*"Storm, last chance where are you?"*

*"Bye, asshole."*

"OH MY GOD, tell me I didn't." My head wants to explode, but that memory makes me want to bury myself.

"You did, and he's downstairs talking to your mother right now."

"You're lying. I didn't tell him where I was," I say sitting up. She passes me some water, and I take a sip of it watching the door.

"Oh, you did, and it was funny. Howard had trouble getting the cell off you."

Pulling the blankets away, I realize I have no pants on. "Where the fuck are my pants?"

She giggles again. "You bruised my poor Howard. He will never look at you the same way again."

Fuck my life. I tore my clothes off the minute he put me down for bed, and I did so with him and Mel still in the room.

"I'm going to owe him so big for this."

She nods her head smiling in agreement. "Maybe just more visits."

I nod agreeing.

She stands to open the bedroom door. "Now, I'm off to thank my hunk of a man for all his help, with my mouth wrapped around his cock." She salutes me as she walks out. When I think she's gone her head pops around the corner. "Your mother is showing him pictures of Matthew." Then she disappears.

I jump from the bed and run downstairs to my mother, who's sitting next to Echo, drinking tea? No photographs in hand at all. Mel giggles even more as she walks out the door with Howard behind her.

"Thanks, Howard." He nods and smiles as they leave.

"Storm, put on some clothes," my mother screeches. I look down at my G-string and shrug. He's seen it all before, nothing new there.

"Can you give us a few minutes, Mom?"

She nods and stands walking out the back door. I wait for the click before I open my mouth. "You need to leave."

He shakes his head as his eyes trail over me. "We need to talk, and I don't want to leave until we do."

"You need to leave, now. I don't want to talk. Especially not today." He steps forward his hand lifts and touches my hip. I try taking a step back, but he follows me when I do. "Now, Echo."

"You stink." My eyes go wide at his words. Those aren't the words I was expecting. But he's right, I do really stink. My breath is probably terrible. "But I'd still kiss you anyway." He goes to move forward, I turn so he can't touch my lips.

"Oh, fuck no, you need to leave." Getting out of his grasp, he shakes his head.

"When are you coming back?" he asks sliding his hands into his pockets.

"It's none of your business, Echo. Now, please leave."

His jaw clenches. "I didn't want this, you have to know that?"

"It doesn't matter what you want, we were a fling, Echo. Nothing more. Why make this more complicated than it has to be?" His hand runs through his hair, and I watch as the muscles in his arms bulge. Then I remember the way he fucks me and how all his muscles bulge in the most perfect way.

"You're right, I won't bother you again." He turns and walks out.

And the minute the door shuts behind him my heart aches, hurts with pure pain. I'm not sure I even understand why. Crawling my way back up the stairs, I reach my bed creeping into it. My cell is lying on it, and on the screen is a photo of Echo and he's smiling. The ache doesn't leave my heart, not when I fall asleep and not even when I wake up later that day. It sits there like a snake waiting to constrict its prey. And unfortunately that prey today is me.

“**M**aybe she’s right? Maybe you should forget about her and move on,” Elicea says as she rubs her big belly.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to do all week.” Getting over someone is easier said than damn well done.

“The boys were saying you haven’t wanted to escape lately. That usually, you run away to the beach.” Creed’s listening I know he is, he’s never too far from Elicea. He had a call and walked off leaving us sitting to talk.

“I don’t want to escape, not yet anyway.”

She leans forward and touches my knee. “I know you’re worried about her, but have you thought about talking to your brother? He was hurt in this as well.” She sits back. “I know some of the story, but he’s still your brother.”

“Elicea,” Creed says as he walks back in.

She raises her hands in surrender.

“Did you at least tell him he’s been calling trying to get hold of him?”

That’s news to me. I look at Creed who’s already looking at me.

“Is it true?”

He sits down, his eyes on Elicea and her belly as he answers me, “Yes, he’s called.”

“What did he want?”

Creed looks up to me. “You.” Looking at my cell, I don’t see one missed call from him. Surely he has my number. “You never gave anyone your new number last year after you smashed your old cell phone, remember.”

Oh, shit. That’s right. Only the boys and Red have the number.

“He’s only going to blame me, it’s what he’s good at.”

Elicea leans forward, Creed places his hand on her leg to stop her from getting up. “Maybe you should just call. If my brother were here, I would call him.” Tears start falling from her eyes, and I’m taken aback as to why. She gets up and excuses herself as she leaves.

“Her brother died, he was also her twin.”

*Oh, that explains why she’s pushy about it.*

“Do you think I should call him? You know what an ass he is. I mean he took Selena from me. That’s like me taking Elicea from you.” His nostrils flare at my words. “Not that I would and you know that, but who does that to someone they call family.”

Creed looks back over his shoulder to where Elicea disappeared then back to me. “I would bury you so no one could find you if you did that.”

I laugh because it’s true. He passes me a piece of paper. “Your choice. But if you need help hiding the body...” a huge grin forms on his face, “... call me.” He gets up walking away more than likely to go to Elicea.

Those two were made for each other.

I’ve never once seen him care about someone the way he cares for her.

“I DIDN’T THINK you’d call.” Mike’s voice is strained on the other end of the phone line.

“You’ve been trying to reach me, so here I am.”

“Is that all you have to say to me? No sorry. Nothing?” He harrumphs through the cell.

“I did nothing wrong, Mike. Maybe you should be asking your wife for the apology.” Walking back and forth in my house, I can smell Red from the last time she was here. I shouldn’t have driven to see her, but she has this way of making me not see straight when it comes to her. Especially, when I heard another man’s voice, it was too soon. We hadn’t ended it, she couldn’t end it over something I didn’t do.

“You didn’t do it? Are you joking, you deny what I saw with my own eyes?”

I have to remember he is hurting too, just like I was from the same evil bitch when she left me for him.



“And you would have seen the fact that I, in no way, kissed her back.”

“Is it your goal in life to ruin me?” he asks with such anger.

“You’ve lost it, fucking lost it. That’s what this bitch has done to you. She’s playing you just like she played me. But she got out of you what she couldn’t get out of me, a damn ring.”

“Fuck you.”

“Tell me... did you make her sign a prenup?”

“No.”

I laugh. “Good luck to you then.”

“Echo....” He goes quiet. I can only hear him breathing on the other end. “I loved her, and believe it or not I love you, too.” He hangs up, ending the call. I look at it unsure of what to say or even what to feel after that. It’s the first time in over twenty years my brother has acknowledged I am more than just the scum of the family. I can’t exactly remember when we stopped liking each other, but when we did I found new people, my friends, who have been with me throughout everything. That’s what I call a true family.

Opening up my last messages Storm’s name appears, and I know right then and there I want her back in my life. Red is someone who was put in my life at the perfect time and isn’t someone who’s after me for what I can give her. Or what I have. I like that the most about her, that she’s successful in what she does and gives everything her all. I can see it in the way she works and the way she fucks. Because she can fuck, and just thinking about it makes me want her right now. Now, I just have to work out how to get her back, because I have a feeling we’ve passed the sex only rule. I did that when I asked her to come to the wedding. I’m not sure if I did it intentionally, but I knew I wanted her there with me if I had to go through that pain. And I was right, she is the girl I want. It just sucks balls how it ended.

Fuck.

My.

Life.

“I don’t know if I should kiss you or punch you,” Mel says sitting next to me. I have to go back home, missing one day of work is bad enough I can’t miss any more.

“Neither,” I comment pushing her back, so she lays on the bed as I finish getting my shit together.

She’s looking up the ceiling when she answers, “He’s your ten. So what? Sometimes he likes to kiss his ex, who he may be in love with. So what? You said the sex is great.” She laughs.

“You did not just say that.”

She sits up, all sarcasm is gone from her face. “He did come all this way to talk to you about it. Maybe it was a mistake? We all have them.” She shrugs.

“You’re on his side now?” I ask now more confused than ever. Rubbing my head, I can’t make out what’s happening.

“No, what he did was a dick move, but did you actually let him explain? Because from what you said the ex is a real piece of work and maybe you should hear him out?”

I close my bag and pull it from the bed. “I don’t want that, Mel. I don’t want complicated. I want easy. I deserve easy.”

She scoffs loudly at me as she gets up from the bed straightening her skirt. “If I had easy with Howard we wouldn’t be together. Did I tell you I second-guessed us a few years ago?” Her hand goes to her hip. “I kissed someone else and he saw me, but because he loves me, he wanted to hear why. And guess what, that night I knew he was it. I knew he was my forever.

No man knocks someone else out after kissing their girlfriend then walks back to her and asks her why with hurt written all over his face. He gave me the benefit of the doubt. He loves me, and I knew right then and there that I would do everything in my power to prove to him that he was it. Which took a while considering I broke our trust.”

“You didn’t tell me that.”

She looks away as I lay my hand on her shoulder. “It was just... I didn’t know if I wanted to spend my life with only one person. But I do know now. He never doubted us. It was only me. He knew I was it, and it took me a while to reach him, but I’m there now. And never plan on leaving.”

Wrapping my arms around her, I hug her tight. “You two are perfect for each other. He calms your crazy.”

She laughs as I pull away wiping her tears.

“He does, doesn’t he?” We both nod in agreement. “Howard likes Echo, by the way.”

“He met him?” I didn’t know that. I figured he came straight here.

“Yep, he took the cell from you and told him your address.”

“He wanted to explain. Explain what?” I shake my head as I start walking out the door.

“You should still hear what he has to say, at least. I’ve never seen you get completely fucked up over a guy before. Not even Matthew, and you were with him for years.”

“If I let him explain, it will lead to one thing, sex. It’s what we’re good at.”

She fans her face as we walk down the stairs. “I would let that man ride me... you know... if I wasn’t engaged.”

My suitcase drops from my hand. Turning fast, Mel shows me her hand that’s already stretched out.

“You’re engaged, and you didn’t tell me the minute it happened?”

Her ring has small diamonds wrapped around a pearl. It’s stunning and so Mel.

“I did. Why do you think I’m here, woman?”

“Oh my God, it just happened and you let me go on and on about myself?”

She shrugs as we both look down at her ring again. “You and Howard are the most important people in my life. Your problems are just as important as my engagement.”

“I really do love you, you know?”

She nods her head with a smile on her face. “I know.”

“When is it going to be your turn? You know I want grandbabies before I die.” My mother appears at the bottom of the stairs holding my discarded suitcase.

“Matthew and I are never going to happen, Mother,” I say stepping down, reaching out I take my bag from her.

“What about that new guy? I quite liked him. He’s easy on the eyes as well.”

I cringe and cover my eyes. “You did not just say that to me.”

“Oh, she did, and she’s right. He’s your perfect ten.”

“I have to go. I have to go home to get ready for work tomorrow,” I say turning to them. “Mel, send me all the details. Dates and ideas. We’re planning a wedding.” She nods her head excitedly. “Mom, I love you and promise I won’t wait as long to visit.” I kiss her cheek and she holds my face.

“Maybe I can even come see where you live?”

I’m taken aback by her words. My mother’s a creature of habit, she doesn’t like to change scenery, she stays in one place and has never left.

“I would love that.”

“YOU SHOULD COME, PLEASE COME,” Tracey begs me.

We’ve just finished work, and I have to wash my clothes which are still sitting in my bag. That designer dress is going to be ruined. It’s so perfect.

“I have so much work to do.”

“It’s just a small party, nothing too extravagant. We have some big news,” she says excitedly.

“I can only stay for an hour or so, is that okay?”

“Of course, I would like you there. I like you and hope you consider me a friend.”

“I do.”

“Great! Here’s my address. Be there in one hour, okay?”

“Sure, I’ll go home and change first.”

She skips off as I walk to my car. Maybe my day won’t be such so terrible after all. Being hungover and working all day, is not what I had

planned. *Why does it take longer the older I get to get over the effects of alcohol.* I felt seedy all day.

HER HOUSE IS BEAUTIFUL, it reminds me of a small country cottage in the suburbs. The house is white with a large porch. Well, large compared to the size of the house. There are many cars parked out the front—I thought she said this was going to be a small thing. I count at least fifteen cars. The bottle of wine in my hand won't make a difference there are that many people.

“Didn’t think I’d be seeing you again.” My hand pauses before it knocks on the door. To the left of me, Tracey’s brother is sitting in a white rocking chair with his cell in hand.

“Is Tracey home?” He smiles and I know he’s trouble, not just from what Tracey says about him either. It’s all in that smile he holds. It’s mischievous.

“She is, but I’m not sure you want to go in just yet, maybe you should wait?”

Knocking on the door despite his words I smile at him. He sits back, his leg lifting to sit on his other knee as he watches me with that smile still etched on his face.

“You’re here. Thanks so much for coming.” Tracey pulls me in, and the last bit I see of Tracey’s brother, Falcon, is his devilish smile.

“I brought wine.” Tracey takes it from me and pulls me through the house. Stopping at a few people to introduce me before she gets to a woman who’s smiling so brightly.

“This is Jordan, my wife. We are going to be parents.” I’m sure my eyes bulge, but I manage to a smile anyway.

“Congrats guys, that’s amazing.” Tracey kisses Jordan on the cheek and they look back up at me.

“Falcon only just told me. I’m sorry about what happened, Storm.” I give her a puzzled look. “About you and Echo. Falcon tells me everything, and I mentioned you were coming, so—” I wave her off.

“It’s fine.”

“The thing is—”

“Storm.” My heart rate picks up, I know that voice, I know it very well. I know it from the way it leaves his mouth in breathily whispers when he’s

inside of me, to how he calls me when he wants me.

“I tried to tell you, but—”

I cut her off. “It’s fine.” I turn to Echo. Who makes me pause with what I was about to say just by looking at him. He’s someone you think looks better in your head until you’re in front of him. Then you realize you could never really do the picture in your head justice because in real life he’s certainly a ten. “Nice to see you again, Echo.”

His eyebrows scrunch at my words. “Is it, Storm?”

“Look, we’re just going to go...” I see them leave but don’t turn to face them.

“Of course, it is, Echo. How are you?” I say in my best acting voice, when inside I’m screaming.

“I would be even better if I could touch you. Have you thought about that, Storm, about the way I touch you.” I’m trying really hard to not pant at his words. The way his lips move when he says it, or the way his eyes track me up and down like he knows perfectly every inch of my body. Which he does.

“We ended it, or did you forget? When your lips touched someone else. That was part of our deal, remember? To only be with each other while we needed each other. You broke that, but I’m happy to be friends. Would you like that?”

He doesn’t falter when he speaks, “I see you’re bringing out your boss attitude. But the thing is, Red, I’m already a boss. So, it doesn’t work on me the way it would intimidate others.” I didn’t realize I was coming across that way until he says it. He clasps my hand with his and pulls me from the main room until we are out the back. No one is here but us, and the sun is starting to set. “Do you want to hear what happened, or just keep making assumptions?” he asks me.

“I really don’t need to know. I saw all I needed to... from the way you got up when she asked and walked off without a backward glance... honestly, that was all I needed to know. That’s why I went after you because I knew what was happening, I just wanted to see it with my own two eyes.” I go to turn to walk away from him, but he traps me again with his hand on my wrist.

“Tell me, did I look at her the way I look at you?” He lets go of my wrist and his hands come to my face as his baby blue eyes stare at me. It happens in slow motion as he leans forward bringing his lips to mine—I’m helpless to stop him from doing it. I want his lips as much as I want to hate him, and that’s a lot. Hating him isn’t something I think I’ll be good at. Despite the

situation being warranted. So, I do nothing, not a damn thing when his lips slam on mine.

The lure of him is pure fucking magic. It's how you want your forever to taste, but he isn't that, though. So, I give in, my hands reach up and cling to his shirt, clutching it with both hands and gripping on for dear life as I kiss him back. Our mouths open, and somehow I pull him closer, like the air that licks at a fire, making it burn even brighter. He makes me burn hotter with each and every touch. That's why I know it's impossible to keep on seeing him, feelings are there and I want them to go away, not increase with each touch. What started out as a fling isn't going to end in one. It would have ended in me being broken, more so than my first, and that scares me most of all. What this man could do to me is not something I want, when I can tell it isn't the same for him.

So, I take his kiss, I fucking take it one last time, knowing that it's our last time.

Our goodbye.

It has to be, for my heart at least.

Storm tastes like everything I want. Her breath is heavy as I try to steal every last breath from her. Her hands are tight as they squeeze my sides unable to move or let go when I know she is fighting to do so. Taking hold of her hips harder, she moans when I push myself onto her so she can feel exactly what she does to me. Why? What we have must go on, and not end due to some stupid thing I didn't have control over or for that matter even do. But maybe she's right. I didn't think when I got up and followed Selena to the room, I didn't even question it. She was all I'd known for so long and no other women were ever in the picture. I don't cheat, it's not who I am. So, for Storm to even think I would do that to her fucks with me in so many ways more so than one.

"Storm," Tracey calls her name.

She pulls away from me breaking our kiss—her lips are pink, and she's pink around her mouth also. She tries to wipe it off, but all she does is smudge her lipstick even more. Her brown eyes find mine and hurt is there. Plus, confusion like she can't believe what she just did.

"I need to go." She doesn't give me a chance to stop her before she runs up the stairs straight to Tracey, who looks down to me and shakes her head before they go inside.

"That was hot," Falcon says stepping around from the side.

I shake my head at him. "What the fuck are you doing?"

He puts his hands up in the air. "I was simply hiding from my sister when I happened to step around the back to see you trying to molest that poor girl." His hand goes to his heart as he shakes his head.



“Shouldn’t you be playing the father role?”

His face scrunches while his fist ball up tight. “Fuck you,” he sneers.

“Go and be daddy.”

He jumps at me landing his fist into my stomach making me double over. While I’m bent, I run at him, and we both land on the ground his back slamming hard when we go down. He pushes at me and manages to hit me in my jaw knocking me off of him, but not succeeding in making me bleed.

“What the fuck,” a girl’s voice comes over, then hands are on me pulling me back. Falcon tries to run at me then stops when Jordan steps in the middle.

Falcon is the father, something not many people know. He didn’t fuck Jordan, though he offered to do that. He gave his sister his sperm, so she and her girlfriend can have a baby, and they are hoping to fall pregnant soon. He loves Tracey, I envy what they have because I’ve never had that with my brother and we are twins. Yet, he has that with Tracey, and there’s a few years difference between them.

“Explain to me what’s going on?” Soft hands touch me and I know it’s her. She wipes at my face, and I capture her hand with mine, then start walking away.

“Keep your mouth shut, Echo,” Falcon yells after me. I flip him off and open my passenger door letting her in. She hesitates.

“Just a quick drive.” Storm nods and reluctantly gets in. She sits there with her hands in her lap as I pull away. Not driving far, I stop at an empty park and turn to face her. Storm doesn’t look up, her eyes stay focused on whatever is in front of her. “Are you planning on ignoring me?”

She turns to me. “What did you fight about just then?”

I shake my head. “We should talk about what happened.”

Storm shakes her head now. “No. Tell me what happened with you and Falcon.”

“I teased him, pushed him too far.”

“You seem to push most people too far,” she comments quietly.

“Have I pushed you too far?”

Storm’sH eyes are dark when she looks at me. “I shouldn’t be here with you. This isn’t us staying away from each other.”

My hand moves on its own, I don’t have a say in what it does. It grips her face and pulls her to me. While the other undoes her seatbelt freeing her, so she can be near me.

“What are you doing.” Storm doesn’t ask a question it’s more of a statement.

“Just go with it.”

And she does. Storm doesn’t speak again as I pull her over, so she’s now on my lap in the car. Pulling her down so her pussy hits me, I can feel her riding my cock is fucking magical. She bites my mouth as she kisses me and moans into it. Her nails dig into my shoulders, but she doesn’t stop, not even when I reach between us pulling up her skirt higher and tearing her panties so nothing’s there. “Storm.” Her head lifts and she reaches between us for my zipper, her hands wrap around my cock freeing it as she looks up. If I didn’t know any better I’d say hate sits in the back of her eyes packed with lust, pure fucking lust. Storm sits up bringing her breasts which are still covered by her shirt to my face, and I bite through it knowing exactly where her nipple is. She moans as she drops, positioning herself on my cock.

Our eyes lock and I know I could taste and fuck her for the rest of my life. Would I ever get sick of her? I don’t think so. I got sick of Selena on many occasions where I needed to get away. Not once have I felt that way with Storm.

She lowers herself so slow, watching me.

“Never again,” she says, but I want to argue with her. Tell her no, but she stops as if she’s waiting for me to say it. When I don’t say a word, she pushed down all the way until I’m fully seated inside her. She pauses, takes a deep breath then leans forward and wraps her arms around my shoulders making our bodies flush as she starts rocking back and forth.

This is the place between heaven and hell. That sweet ecstasy everyone craves, but can only dream of. That’s what it’s like knowing I have her right now, but soon I won’t. Soon she won’t even be mine.

“I didn’t kiss Selena.”

She doesn’t stop, not even from the words that leave my mouth. She keeps going up and down, her hands choking my neck with her vice grip.

“I didn’t kiss her, Storm. I didn’t kiss her.”

She lessons her grip, then leans back and kisses me all the while never stopping her movements. I grip her ass, holding it tight, lifting her up and down as she continues to rock back and forth. I can feel her tighten around me and know she’s about to come. Just as I go to tell her again, she kisses me before I can utter the words. Her lips land on mine stealing whatever words that were about to leave and she replaces it with her tongue. She bites my lip

then rocks faster, holding my lip between her teeth, and only releases it when she's almost there. She clenches and clenches, I rock her faster, our lips now touching but not moving. The minute she comes her head lands in the crook of my neck. Her breathing heavy and my cock still inside her. She goes to move after she catches her breath, but I grab hold of her ass pinning her to me not letting her leave.

"I didn't—"

She slaps me.

"I don't care. Stop telling me. I. Don't. Care." She pulls herself off of me, and gets back in her seat while trying to pull her skirt down. Her hands are crossed over her chest as she stares straight ahead not looking my way.

"Storm..."

"Take me back, I have to go."

"We need to talk."

She turns to me, a stray tear in her eye. "No, we don't. Take me fucking back to my car, or I will get out of this car and start walking." Her teeth grinding on one another, her eyes unblinking. I do as she says and start driving. When we pull up at the house, she jumps from the car quickly. I go to follow her, but Falcon grabs hold of my arm.

"Sor—"

I punch him and chase after her. She stops, looks back, and shakes her head before she gets in the car and drives off.

"Fucking hell."

"What the actual fuck. You just hit me, you asshole." Falcon stands next to me, rubbing his jaw. "This one I didn't even deserve."

"Oh, I'm sure you deserved it, somehow," his sister comments laughing. Then she crosses her hands over her chest as she looks to me. "So, you're the reason she missed work?" I shrug, I have no idea. "I think you need to give her space. She isn't like Selena, she doesn't like to be the center of attention."

I scratch my jaw. She's right. I'm used to having to make it right straight away. Maybe she needs time.

"One week," I say.

Tracey laughs. "Let's aim for two at least."

"Fuck."

"You can do it," Falcon says laying his hand on my shoulder, then sucker punches me in the gut. "You deserved that, asshole," he says as he walks away.

*Time?*  
Fuck.

**S**<sup>torm</sup> A wedding, I'm helping plan a wedding. It's so exciting. It helps me forget about everything else that's going wrong in my life right now. Echo's kept his distance, and I have only felt like calling him over twenty times, so that's a plus. It could be worse. Maybe.

"I don't know. Don't you think it's too soon?" Mel asks from behind the curtain. My leg bounces with excitement as I wait for her. She came up to spend the weekend with me and to try on dresses which I insisted on.

"No way. He would have married you years ago if he had his way." She smiles as she steps out. "Oh my God, Mel. It's beautiful. You are beautiful." My hands cover my mouth because the dress fits her perfectly. The lace runs up her back with soft white buttons and there's like a train of lace all the way down which stands out behind her.

"Is it too soon to say this is it, if it's the only one I've tried on?"

My head starts shaking. "No. If this is it. It's it."

She nods as she stares in the mirror. "Are you going to bring a date?" I shrug. "You could bring him, you know. I know you tried the no strings attached thing but that didn't work. You obviously care for him, even if you want to say you don't."

"It just got more complicated than I wanted."

"You can't expect to sleep with someone for weeks and weeks and not form some kind of bond, Storm." Her hands brush down the dress. "I'm getting it, and you're bringing a date." She walks off before I can even say anything. She's getting married in a month. They both don't want anything

big, only those who have been there through their relationship, and family. It's about time they finally got married. I'm amazed it didn't happen earlier, to be honest. Looking down at my cell, I notice I have a missed call from work, then a message to follow it.

"Mel, you be okay getting back to mine? I have to head into work to sort a few things out?"

"Yes. Grab a bottle of wine on your way back. I'll need one to sort out this seating chart," she yells back.

"REALLY? Vicki, why is she wearing pink?" The model stops doing up her dress and pauses at my words.

"You said pink." Walking to the wardrobe, I tear the peach colored dress I had picked out and hand to the model who nods and rushes off to get changed.

"If you can't follow orders—"

Her hands shoot up in the air. "I think the pink looks better." She shrugs.

"It doesn't. It's softer colors we want, Vicki. Soft. Not bright. So next time you go your own way on one of my orders, maybe you can also hand in your keys." The office assistant runs up to me handing me a note before she disappears.

"In my office," I murmur reading the note while walking away. I have no meetings scheduled today, so I'm unsure of why someone would be in there waiting for me. Opening my office door my heart beats, hard. His blond hair is right there sitting on one of my chairs. He shouldn't be here. Why is he here? And then he turns around, and my heart falls to the floor. I'm not even sure how I feel about this.

"Mike, a pleasure to see you." He nods and offers me his hand. Taking it, I shake. "I would say this is unexpected, but your visit is in no way expected, so I'm unsure why you're here?" He looks tired, very fucking tired. Not the man I met the week before at his very own wedding. He appeared happy, almost up-himself that day. The man in front of me now looks nothing like that man. This one looks like his favorite balloon was popped, and he was laughed at when he cried about it.

"They said you weren't here today, but then someone saw you. So... here

I am.”

“Here you are?” I say walking around him and sitting in my seat.

He sits, his body slumping in the chair.

“You’re too good for him, you know that, right?” I’m unsure of what to say to those words. “Just like she was, or so I thought she was.” His head shakes. They look so much alike, except Mike appears more stressed, older almost, more lines in his face. Where Echo’s more carefree. Even in the way they hold themselves is completely different.

“Why are you here, Mike? Sorry to be rude. But we don’t know each other.”

He nods his head. “He’s been ignoring me, not answering my calls. I need to...” he pulls at his hair, “... I need to talk to him. You are my best bet for that to happen.”

“I don’t know how I am.” He pins me with his eyes, where his are blue like Echo’s they aren’t as sky blue in color as his.

“Because I saw the way he looked at you, he never looked at Selena like that.”

I sit back confused by his words. “What do you want me to do exactly?”

His teeth grind as he looks around then back to me. “Call him, please.” I nod my head. Even if I don’t want to talk to Echo, his brother is clearly hurting and wants something. Reaching for my cell, I pull up his number despite myself having memorized it.

“You aren’t going to hurt him, are you?” I ask just to be safe.

He shakes his head. “If anyone were going to get hurt, it would be me. So don’t even worry about him.” He waves me off. My heart starts beating hard again when the cell rings, I can hear it thump loudly as it echoes through my chest.

“Red...”

I shake my head. “Storm,” I correct him.

He’s silent. “Storm,” he says.

Looking up Mike’s watching me, waiting. “I need you to meet me somewhere. Can you do that?”

“I can come now.”

I name the coffee house across the street from my work.

“Thanks for calling, Storm.”

I end the call and don’t say a word. The cell is in my hand as I wait for the beating of my heart to finally slow.

“You’ll have to come. Please?”

“I’ll wait until he arrives, then I’m going.” He stands walking to the door, holding it open for me. When I pass him, I don’t feel the same way as I do when I pass Echo. No heart palpitations or feeling dizzy.

“Thank you for this.” I nod my head as we continue, it doesn’t take long until we reach the coffee house. I don’t bother ordering anything because I plan to leave as soon as Echo arrives.

“I have to ask...” Mike’s already watching me. “Why do you hate him so much?” He laughs, but it’s dry and hollow.

“I don’t hate him, I envy him.” My eyes go wide in disbelief. He looks around before he continues again, “He had it all... great friends, the girl, the business, the dream.”

“You have a career, the girl.”

He scoffs. “The girl who loved him first.”

“Why her, though? You could have fallen in love with anyone. Why her?”

He starts playing with the sugar dispenser in front of him, pouring it on the table then drawing in it. “I didn’t plan on loving her. She was there, all the time. Then she kissed me. I’d been so busy with work, trying to earn partnership in the firm that I forgot to have a life outside of it. So, when she kissed me, she made me realize that fact. Made me see *her*.”

“Seems like she played you both.”

He nods. “I love her, though.”

“Your brother does, too,” I say more to myself.

“He used to, but that love outgrew him ages ago. That’s one of the reasons she started coming to me. She thought that since we don’t talk I’d know him best. We are twins after all. But the thing is, I don’t know anything about him. Echo’s his own demon, and only a few can crack him. Those boys and now you.”

“What about your parents? Why are they so mean to him?” He looks around, and I almost forgot for a second that we’re waiting on Echo. Thankfully he hasn’t arrived yet.

“I can’t explain that, other than he just doesn’t do what they want of him. I did. So, I stayed in their good graces. Echo did his own thing at every turn which pissed them off more and more.” His cell starts ringing loudly, we both look to it and her face comes up on the screen. He turns it over and silences it.



“How are you... two?”

“If you’re wondering if I’ve forgiven her, the answer is no. I don’t know what to do. That’s why I want to hear what Echo has to say, but he’s making it fucking hard to see him.”

“I’m sorry,” I say as I reach over covering his hand with mine.

He shrugs. “I’m sorry you were pulled into this.” A chill runs up my spine and I know he’s behind me, I retract my hand placing it in my lap as I reach for my purse and start to stand.

Turning slowly, he isn’t watching me his eyes are firmly on his brother. “You’re trying for seconds now?”

My eyes bulge. *Seconds*. “You’re a real asshole you know that?” Walking off, I can hear him coming after me, but I don’t bother turning back until he catches up and stops right in front of me.

“Why are you with my brother, Storm?”

“He wanted to see you.”

Gosh, he looks so good. So fucking good. His black shirt clings to him, and I know exactly what’s underneath it.

“So, he went to you for that? Tell me, did you fuck him, too? I mean I wouldn’t be surprised considering Selena did.”

Nope.

No, he did not go there.

I open my mouth to say something, but nothing seems to leave. No words want to even reply to what he’s just said. Pulling out my keys, I go straight for my car and get in driving off. He doesn’t follow me. Thank God for that. Because I may have run over him twice for good measure.

Asshole.

He's waiting out the front, he knew I'd come back for him. He's leaning against the wall of the coffee house when I reach him. I want to tear his head off, make him understand that he can't do that to me. The minute I arrived I saw him sitting across from her, her hand on his as she probably listened to him spin some shit about how heartbroken he is, and how hard done by he is. When in reality, Mike's the one that gets everything.

"Take a breather." My hands close around his throat as I pin him to the wall. People gasp around us and I hear the rustle of chairs and feet but I just don't care.

"You think you can keep chasing after what's mine?" He tries to laugh, so I squeeze his throat tighter. I lean in close, so I'm right near his ear. "I have the means to end you, Mike. Make you disappear so no one will ever find you. Do you know that?"

He doesn't reply to my words, but I know he understands them. I release his throat and take a step back, turning and walking away from the front of the shop. I know he'll follow because he came here to see me, and he won't leave until he's said what he needs to say. I walk far enough away then turn to see him. Mike's standing behind me waiting for me to stop.

"Are you done?" He stretches his neck out as he stands opposite me.

"Nowhere near done, if I had my way you wouldn't even exist," I seethe trying to keep my hands at my side and not back on his throat.

"I didn't come to steal her if that's what you think." He cracks his neck.

"I don't think you can steal her, Mike. I just don't want you near her

without me around. It's as simple as that."

"You kissed my wife... my fucking wife," he says turning the conversation to what he's really here to talk about.

My cell starts ringing loudly, so I silence it in my pocket.

"I didn't kiss her, for fuck's sake. She kissed me, you fucking idiot." He doesn't say a thing at my words, it's one of the first times I've ever seen him quiet. Ever. "Now tell me what the fuck you thought you were doing bringing her into this? Storm has nothing to do with it."

He laughs. "She does. I knew you were ignoring me like you've done all your life. You love her. I saw it in your eyes when she left after we found you. Hurt. You never had that with Selena because you never really loved her."

"Who the fuck are you to tell me who I love?"

He looks around then back to me sliding his hands into his pockets. "Why do you hate me so fucking much? It can't just be because I fell in love with Selena. It has to be more than that."

*The nerve of him, the fucking nerve.*

"It's you who thinks yourself as better than me. It's you who's a mummy and daddy's boy. It's you who has his head shoved so far up his own asshole that he can't see straight." Having no idea why the fuck I'm still standing here talking to him I start to walk away.

"I loved her, Echo. I fucking loved her, and *you* broke that. You broke it," he yells after me.

"You broke that by getting with a whore, not me. *I never kissed her back.*" I feel like a damn broken record. When I get in my car, I finally look back at him, he hasn't moved from the side of the street, he's simply staring at the ground.

A thought crosses my mind about going to him, but I don't care.

I shouldn't care.

He's never cared.

"YOU SHOULD BLOW OFF SOME STEAM."

I nod. Scratching my head. What the actual fuck is wrong with me? Why is she all I can think about right now?

“No shit.” I shake my head at Creed.

He smiles, and he never smiles, so I know whatever he’s thinking isn’t going to be good.

“I have some work to do. You want to come? I might even let you hit someone.”

I stand from the chair, Elicea’s sleeping as we sit in his living room doing fuck all.

“Let’s go and smash some fucking heads in.”

“Will you shut up, you dick.” He shakes his head and disappears for a few minutes then comes back out with his jacket on. He’s wearing all black as we make our way to his car. “No names. Actually, just don’t speak, okay?” I nod.

Not speaking as he starts to drive, waiting is all I can do. I don’t do this stuff with him, Darby or sometimes very rarely he’ll take Falcon. But it’s mainly Darby and Creed who do the dirty work. And the only reason I think Darby goes is to make sure Creed doesn’t do anything he shouldn’t be doing.

“Where’s D?”

“He had to work. You were around so you can come.” He doesn’t finish that sentence with the fact that Darby more than likely told him to take me because he doesn’t want him by himself when doing this shit. Especially since he’s been trying to be good, for Elicea.

We come to a stop out front of a place much like our place of business. I watch as Creed slides his gun into the front of his black jeans then he gets out. Following him, he doesn’t knock. He pushes the door open, and we are met with the same music we play at Crimson Elite. Actually, almost everything in here looks like it’s a direct knock-off of Crimson Elite.

Creed walks straight past the guards who step out to stop him, but he points a gun in their face stopping them from touching him as we continue up. The rush of power, the adrenaline is strong. I can understand why he loves to do this so much. Why Darby gives the task to him. I think if Falcon had this power we’d be out of business. It would go straight to his head and he’d never stop. Creed, on the other hand, he doesn’t care for approval. Intimidation—he has it already without doing anything in return.

We come to a stop at the front of an office, his gun goes back into his jeans as his knuckles rap on the door. He turns to me, his eyes darker than their usual whiskey color as his lip turns up when the doors open. We both spin around to the man. It’s someone we don’t know which surprises me. I

know nearly everyone as I do the security checks, and this man I definitely don't know.

"It was only a matter of time before you paid me a visit, I guess."

Creed nods as he walks into the office. The man steps aside as I follow him in close behind. He goes to leave the door open, but I shut it anyway.

"I would ask who you are, but I'm going to be honest, I don't really care," Creed says as he takes a seat in what appears to be the man's wing backed chair behind his large wooden desk.

"You must be Creed. I've heard about you."

"We would love to say the same, but we have no idea who you are."

The man looks back to me, then to Creed. "She said you were the scariest, that I should expect a visit from you once you found out." He stops where he is in the middle of the room. Creed stays seated, his feet now up on the man's desk as he watches him. I stay by the door, so he can't run.

"So, you were aware then, that this..." I say looking around, "... shouldn't be."

The man looks to me then back to Creed. "I'm aware, but you don't own the town."

"Who told you about me?"

Creed puts his feet down and leans over the desk. "Sabrina."

Creed's lip twitches and he shakes his head. "You must be the asshole then?"

The guy smiles. "So you've heard of me, too?"

Creed stands and without a second thought shoots. It seems to happen in slow motion and if I weren't watching him, I would have missed it. The guy yells and falls to the floor holding his shoulder.

"Oh, I've heard of you all right. You like to beat on a woman." Creed walks around and kicks the guy in the ribs as he haunches over holding his shoulder.

"Oh, Sabrina who used to work for us?" I ask Creed, to which he nods his head. "This is her ex?"

"Boyfriend," Creed corrects. The guy manages to fall to his back while he holds his shoulder crying out in pain still. "You want a turn?" Creed asks me. I shake my head and Creed shrugs. "He likes to hit a woman, gets a damn kick from it." Creed leans down. "Don't you? I remember Sabrina coming in with black eyes, you fucker."

Stepping forward, I lean down and hit him straight in the face. It feels

good. Almost like it's taking the stress from me. Something I've wanted to do to my brother, punch his fucking head in. Creed steps away and sits on the man's desk while he waits for the guy to get up, but it takes him a while to do so. And when he does, he doesn't look straight up at him, he keeps his eyes downcast to the floor, his hand holding his arm which is bleeding.

"Derek." The door opens and a small blonde woman steps in wearing lingerie. She pauses when she sees him then looks up at Creed. Shutting the door behind her, and locking her in with us, I know who she is. And that's not just based on the bruises covering her body, it's because she used to work for us.

"Sabrina, what a pleasure it is to see you again." She looks to me, worry in her eyes at my words, then turns her head fast to Creed.

"I didn't..." She shuts up when Derek grunts at her. Her head dropping.

"Sabrina, I'm going to leave. And I'm going to with one warning... to close this shit down. If I were you, I'd make sure he does. Because when I come back to visit, I won't be so friendly. Do you understand?" Sabrina doesn't say anything just looks to Derek. Creed walks up, lifts his hand and digs his fingers into the hole that's in Derek's arm. He screams, loud. Then Creed drops his arm. "You *will* shut it down."

"I'll have police here, you don't own everything."

Creed laughs, shakes his head, and leans in. "But, I do. The police won't care, you'll come to realize that. You think you're the first the person to have tried this? You're wrong. Tomorrow this time the bullet will meet right between your eyes." Creed walks off and I follow him.

I hear Derek screaming at Sabrina before their door shuts. He won't listen, he's one of those assholes who think they're entitled to things that aren't theirs, and they don't have to work for it. Creed lifts his gun and shoots the sound system making everyone run. I laugh when we're the last two standing in here then we walk out.

"Think we could take that gun and see my brother?" I ask, jokingly. Or maybe not.

"No. Sort your own shit out," he says as we get into the car.

"Maybe, just let me play with it then?" He turns his dark eyes on me. And I know him, that without saying a word the answer is no. He was right though, this really helped. I'm not as angry now, and can see that I really fucked up with Storm. Majorly.

Comparing me to her is the lowest of the low. I'm nothing like that woman, nor would I ever do what she has done. Not in a million years. Not even if my heart was on the line. I have morals and hurting someone only to gain my own happiness is not something I believe is right or just. So yes, I lashed out at him. He deserved it.

When I got back to Mel, I didn't tell her what had happened. There was no point. She was here and excited about her wedding planning, the last thing she needed was a running commentary on my drama with Echo. It baffles me how it's gotten to the point it's at now. I'm not even sure how that happened considering we were just meant to be having fun. Maybe the downfall was when I accepted to go with him when I should have said no, and kept all of our personal life out of it. Maybe then, we wouldn't be in the position we're in now. One where my heart hurts and anger sits evident every time I think of him.

He tried calling. Mel even started to notice I wasn't accepting his calls. I could see the questions in her eyes, but she was smart enough to not ask. Thank God.

"You have someone requesting to speak to you at reception. But they aren't scheduled in your calendar. What would you like me to do?" Vicki asks with her iPad in hand. She's been better this week, not as bitchy and is actually listening to me. I do have the means to fire her, but I have withheld hoping she'll change since she's been with the company for so long.

"It's not..." I don't say the words, she knows though.

"No. It's a woman."

I nod my head and shut down my computer as I walk out the front to see who it is. It can't be Mel as she left yesterday to go home. And I don't know that many people outside of where I work, so I'm interested to see who could be asking for me.

"Hey, I want to see how you are later? Maybe an early dinner?" Tracey stops me with her hand on my arm. I simply nod my head in answer. I won't be telling her everything, some things are better left unsaid.

"Great, I'll come grab you soon." She walks away as I continue to reception.

When I arrive, she sees me before I see her. "Hi, Storm." Damn! I wish I'd been paying better attention because I would have turned the other way, instead of walking directly to her.

"Selena, why are you here?"

She looks around then back to me, her Gucci bag sits high on her shoulder matched with her brand clothing which I know is real thanks to my job. Her eyes rake me up and down before she fakes a smile. "Is there somewhere private we can talk?"

"Follow me." I hear the click of her heels as she follows me to my office. Tracey spots us, her eyes going wide. As I step into my office, there's a large bouquet of flowers sitting on the desk. Walking to it, I open the card and Echo's name is the first thing I see. I don't bother reading it as I close the card throwing it in the trash.

"Echo never sends flowers. So, who's the lucky guy?"

Choosing to answer her is something I don't want to do. She's a viper, give her a little she'll take a lot. I've seen girls like her in action my whole life. Ones who think they're better but in reality, they're broken and wanting someone to fix them. That would be why she left Echo, even if she loved him. He didn't fix her.

"You haven't answered as to why you're here." I sit in my chair as she looks around then sits as well, her legs cross as she places her bag on the floor then those seedy eyes look back up at me.

"Mike told me he saw you." I nod my head, I have nothing to hide. "Are you trying for him as well?" she asks in the most serious tone as if that's something normal to do.

*What the fuck is wrong with this woman?*

"You're insane, right?" I ask confused.

She doesn't answer just stays in the exact same position with her hands in



her lap.

“Who would do that? Go for one brother then the next?” I can’t help myself. Hell! Maybe she does love Mike more, who am I to judge. But she’s now sitting in my office, where she came to me, and is asking me these crazy notions as if I would be that thoughtless to do that to Echo after she did.

“You’re judging me, I can see it.”

“I’m sure you can hear it, too,” I reply in a voice that’s more sarcasm than anything else.

“You can’t help who you love, I happen to love both.”

I lean forward, my elbows hitting my desk as I speak to her. “You don’t, sweetheart. You wouldn’t have kissed the other man if you truly loved only one. Because you knew it would break both their hearts.”

“You think you know better, don’t you? That you’re so self-righteous. You aren’t. You’ll just be another notch on his bedpost when he’s done with you, too.”

“How about you take the flowers when you leave, Selena? Seeing as he never bought you any. He’s bought me more than enough.”

She stands to reach for her Gucci bag and looks to the flowers. I reach into the trash grabbing the card opening it to show her Echo’s name before I throw it back in the can.

“Take them. Maybe you can think he sent them to you. Since you like to believe you’re God’s gift to these two men and their feelings don’t seem to matter to you.” Her eyes zoom in on the flowers, and for a moment I think she’s about to take them. Instead, she pushes them to the side and they fall to my floor. She smiles as she looks at me in triumph. What a fool she is.

“Selena’s back to her old tricks again I see?” Tracey says opening the door and stepping in. Selena spins facing her. Tracey has her hands crossed over her chest ready for whatever Selena’s about to say.

“You... I guess you like her, right?” Selena laughs at her own words.

“I do, actually. You see she isn’t a tramp, and she doesn’t lie. Two things you’re very good at.”

Selena straightens to full height.

“You were only allowed around them for pity, did you know that? They never liked you.” Tracey laughs at her words. “You do know you never really knew what he did for a reason, right? You can’t be trusted. So, it makes you wonder if he ever really loved you considering he wouldn’t tell you what he actually did. But do you know that Storm knows? She knew pretty early on.”

Selena looks back at me. I didn't know that she wasn't aware of what he did for a living. *What did she think he did to make money?*

"He doesn't want you, he wants me. You should know... that's all I came to tell you. He'll always want me." She pushes past Tracey as she makes her way out. I sit back on my chair wondering why the fuck I agreed to let her in, in the first place. That bitch has no one but multiple screws loose.

"I told him, just letting you know," Tracey says holding the door ready to walk out.

"You didn't?" I groan. I don't want to see him, not after the words he spoke to me on the weekend.

"I did, sorry. But he asked to let him know if you ever needed him."

I stand to reach for my purse. "I don't need him. Ever. We're going to have to miss dinner, Tracey. I have to go."

"You can't escape him forever, you know."

I smile when I look back at her. "Oh, but I can." I take the stairs knowing full well Selena would have taken the elevator. When I get to the doors, I see her standing out the front of the building. And I see him too. He's shaking his head at her firmly. Selena's hand lifts and she's trying to touch him on his arm. Echo shakes her off not letting her touch him.

Looking for an escape I can't see one, the only way out is past them both. And the last place I want to be is in the same vicinity as them. They've made my life more complicated than it needs to be. I was getting by watching my movies before they came along and ruined everything. Now my life is a total mess, plus my head. He's done things to me that a man like him who's tied up with someone else shouldn't be able to do. It's unfair. I should have asked for a dating history check before I let him kiss me. Damn it! That was the moment I knew there was no going back.

He lifts his eyes, anger in them as he speaks to her until they reach me. I'm standing still unaware of what I should be doing. I didn't expect him to have arrived so quickly. I was hoping to escape without sighting him. My luck isn't that great lately. Seems I'm always being put in shit positions and places I don't want to be.

Selena looks back noticing he's stopped talking and sees me as well. Her hand lifts to his face and turns it back to look at her. That's all I can stand to watch, looking for my closest escape I find the bathroom and lock myself in there. Hoping and praying that when I can finally leave he's gone.

"Tracey, you made this happen. You need to come down and make them

disappear,” I say into the cell.

“Storm, where are you?”

“I’m in the bathroom. Hurry up.”

She giggles. “Are you hiding?”

“Tracey... they’re both are standing out the front. Make them leave. Now.” I hang up and sit on the toilet. The door is knocked on and few times and I ignore it hoping whoever it is will go away. Then it happens again. And I know it’s him before he even utters my name from those sinful lips.

“Storm, why are you hiding in the bathroom?”

I open my cell sending a text to Tracey to hurry up. I’m not answering him, he needs to go away so I can go home. Where it’s safe.

“Storm...”

Looking up to the ceiling I try to stop the tears that want to fall. The ones that scream about the fact that I’m lying to myself, and that the feelings I have for this man are purely manifested in my head when really they’re sitting evident in my heart. Like a fucking tornado wanting to blow through the rest of me to wake me up and realize this is it, it’s the love I never had with Matthew. That the feelings I have for Echo can’t be blown away a second longer. Even though no matter how hard I try I can’t make them disappear.

“Storm, I will break this door down. People are starting to stare. Not that I care, but I figure you might.”

He’s right, it’s my place of work.

Then my cell dings and Tracey tells me she’s here. I try to listen to what they say while keeping my head held high to stop the tears, until a softer knock raps on the door.

“He’s gone. Sorry, Storm.”

Wiping at my face, I pull the door open and find Tracey standing there.

“Thank you,” I say walking away.

I plan to go home and watch a shit load of *When Harry Met Sally*.

She has serious issues, this much I know for sure. Tracey calling to let me know Selena was there is not something I was expecting. And why the fuck do they all feel the need to go to her? My brother, now Selena. Storm clearly wants nothing to do with it until they bring her into it. Just before I arrive at the doors to her building I notice Selena walking out, sunglasses covering her eyes as she struts with her head held high. She should be looking at the ground after what she's done.

"You get a kick out of torturing me, right? It's the only explanation I can come up with," I say. Selena stops walking and turns to face me. Her hand goes to touch my shoulder, but I brush her off.

"I'm going to leave him, for you."

"You're insane," I reply while shaking my head at her crazy words.

"I thought you'd be happy. This way, you can stop playing with the redhead woman and come back to what you know you want."

Shaking my head firmly, I clench my fists at her stupidity. "I never loved you." It falls from my lips like I've drank truth serum. "I think I was fixated on you because you were all I knew."

Her sunglasses are now on top of her head as she looks to the ground scanning, then back to me. "You don't believe that you love me, Echo?" She goes to touch me again, but I push her hand away.

"I don't, I really don't. You can go and try to win my brother back. But be aware, I will tell him exactly what you just did here, and whatever you come to say to Storm as well. He likes her you see. Respects her. Something you have completely lost. Now, please do us all a favor, and fuck off." I look

past her to see Storm standing in the lobby area of her building. When she notices my stare, she quickly starts walking away. I watch her disappear into the ladies bathroom. Just as I try to go after her, Selena stops me with her hand on my shoulder.

“You love me, Echo. I’ll give you one more chance, it’s the least I can do.”

I throw her hand off me as I scoff while ignoring her words, and head straight for the woman I do want. She doesn’t answer when I knock—I know it’s because she’s hiding from me in there. I don’t blame her, I was an asshole. A big fucking asshole at that.

Tracey walks in and says, “You should leave, give her more time.”

My hands run through my hair. “I have given her time, more than enough. I didn’t cause this.”

Tracey shakes her head as I look to the closed door.

“You did cause this, now just go.”

I do as she says.

Clearly, Storm wants space and somehow, someway, I have to respect that. Even if it kills me inside to give her that space she craves.

“YOU’RE ALWAYS in a relationship issue, have you noticed that?” Falcon points out as we sit at Darby’s house drinking. We come here at least once a month to just unwind. We aren’t inside his main house, but in a space where he throws parties, and we drink until we can no longer see straight.

“Fuck you,” I throw to him.

“Think about it, at least every week you had an issue with that bitch. Now, you’re still having issues with that bitch even after she left you.” Darby nods but doesn’t say anything. Creed watches his cell.

“I’m not with her.”

“You’re a love addict. That’s what you are,” Falcon says standing, declaring it as if he’s just come up with the word.

“Sit down,” Creed groans.

Falcon does so and looks at me. “You are, though. You crave love. Even if it’s from the wrong woman. It explains why you stayed with that bitch.”

“I thought I loved her. You wouldn’t know what that’s like.” Drinking

my beer, he shakes his head at me.

“I don’t need to know, I see it in you enough to turn me off for life.”

“Once you find it though, I’m sure it’s worth it.” We all look at Creed, who isn’t paying us any attention as he continues to stare at his cell.

“She isn’t going to have the baby tonight. Put it down,” Darby tells him.

Finally, he looks up at all of us watching him. “It’s worth it,” is all he says then checks his cell again.

“And what... you think this redhead chick, who doesn’t even want to talk to you, is it?”

I shrug. I don’t really know, all I know is that I want to be around her. All the time. And I don’t get sick of her, which is an even bigger fact for me. I don’t want breaks from Storm, not like I needed with Selena.

“Have you ever liked a girl for more than one night?” I ask him back. Falcon doesn’t do relationships, he’s the exact opposite of me. That’s why we always give each other shit on the topic, one loves harder than the other. Actually, the other doesn’t at all.

“None have kept my interest for longer than one night, you should know that.” He used to try to sleep with our girls until we put a stop to it. The girls who work for us are a no-go, no matter what. Falcon, other than us, is only close to one girl. That’s his sister. “So what do you plan to do, love addict?” he asks me taking the subject away from him. He’s good at that.

“Get her back.”

“I have a feeling she isn’t going to be as easy as Selena.” Darby laughs at Falcon’s words. “You do know Selena tried with all of us, right? We didn’t want to tell you, but figured now you should know considering you’re over her, right?”

*What the fuck! I didn’t know that.*

Creed looks up again from his cell and I ask him, “She tried it on you?”

He nods his head and I know that Falcon’s words are true.

“Thank fuck you never told the bitch what we really did, hey?”

“Why the fuck didn’t you tell me?”

They all stare at me.

“You believed you loved the crazy bitch. Who are we to tell you otherwise?”

“So, what about Storm then?”

Falcon smirks. “Oh, I tried to insert myself in her. That one may be a keeper. Or she’s blind. Either or, I’m going to leave that up to you.”

Of course, he tried on with her. He's only human and she's only one of the most beautiful women on this fucking planet.

"I really like her," I murmur.

"We know," they all say in unison.

"She's better for you though, you used to miss work all the time. With her you don't, and even when you thought you might, you let us know. With Selena, you always needed to escape. With Storm, it's like you're too afraid to escape," Darby says.

"I never looked at it like that." It's true though, I haven't gone to the beach once since I've been with Storm, and I looked forward to seeing her every chance I could get. "Giving her space is fucking hard."

They don't say anything, the quiet ticks on and Creed stands, runs to the door not even bothering closing it as he leaves.

"Baby?" Falcon asks.

We all shrug having no idea. He'll let us know when he knows.

"Can you believe his ass is going to have a baby?" Falcon laughs.

"Hello." The cell goes to my ear without even looking at the caller.

"Echo." My mother's voice comes through on the other end of the cell. "We've been trying to call you, Storm gave me your number. You need to come to the hospital."

"Why?"

"It's your brother. Please, just come."

Falcon throws keys at me. "Take my car."

I do, running out the door the same way Creed did moments before. Unsure of what I'm about to face.

SELENA IS the first person I see when I reach the waiting room in the emergency department. My parents are sitting next to her holding hands.

"What's going on? What's wrong with Mike?"

Selena falls onto my chest, crying loudly as she clings to my shirt. My father stands to leave, my mother sitting on the seat not moving.

"One of your brother's clients shot him."

My legs become shaky. I didn't expect that—my brother getting hurt. Not in this way, not like that.

“Is he alive?”

My father nods and taps my shoulder for his form of comfort. “He’s in surgery. We’re waiting to hear more.”

“And what’s she doing here?”

Selena lifts her head from my chest and looks up at me her tears instantly gone. “He’s my husband, Echo.”

“You could have fooled me,” I say remembering her words. Selena doesn’t love anyone but herself. That much is evident.

“Son, just leave it for now.”

I do as my family says. Not for her, though. No. Mike will still be hearing about what she said to me soon enough.

“I don’t think you should be here,” Selena says as she wipes at her fake tears.

I lean down to her. “Lucky for you I don’t care what you say.”

Sitting next to my mother, she lays her head on my shoulder and something in me moves. Not once in the last ten years has my mother showed me affection. Not once. It’s always been directed at Mike. I run my hand through her hair and she breaks out in a sob so loud it’s painful to witness.

“We really like Storm, son. She’s lovely.” My mother lifts her head nodding.

“How can you talk about her at a time like this?” Selena yells.

“It helps to stop us think the worst. And Selena, if you’re going to be jealous, please take it elsewhere,” my mother says wiping tears from her face.

“I like her, too.”

My mother taps my shoulder before she cries again.

“We didn’t mean to ring Storm. We couldn’t get hold of you,” my father says stroking my mother’s back trying to comforting her.

“It’s fine. I’m sure she didn’t mind.”

Storm walks around the corner, her long red hair is down and there’s a look of sadness on her face.

“You need to leave, now,” Selena says pointing to the door behind Storm.

Storm goes to turn, but I call her name, “Storm,” making her stop. “Please, stay.”

She nods and sits next to me, her hand falls into mine. My mother touches her briefly as a thank you as she walks past her.

“I wasn’t sure, but I wanted to be here.”

“Thank you.”



She nods and offers a weak smile.

I t's the right thing to do, or so I keep telling myself. To come and be here for him. His parents called, and I knew he'd need someone who was on his side. From what I saw, and have been told briefly by Echo, his parents are never on his side.

His hand squeezes mine as we all wait patiently. Selena's death glaring me as I sit close to Echo. I don't know how she can even care right now when her husband's in the hospital. *What the fuck is wrong with her?*

"Let me go get us some coffees." I go to stand, but Echo doesn't remove his hand from mine or let me go.

"No, don't go."

I nod sitting down, his head falls onto my shoulder and when I look up Selena's burning holes into me from across the room.

"You should leave, now," she stays standing.

"Sit down, Selena," Echo says not moving away from me. His hand stays gripped in mine not letting me move that either. "You're about to cause a scene that doesn't need to be done here because you're jealous. Get over yourself."

She stamps her foot down like a toddler and I stop myself from shaking my head at her childish ways. "You can't have her here. She doesn't belong."

Echo straightens in his seat, his back lifting from the chair as he sits up. I grip his hand to stop him from moving forward.

"Sit. Down. Selena. Storm is more than welcome," Echo's father says making Selena's eye twitch as she looks from them to us.

"Sit your ass down, girl."

She turns and sees all three men behind her, Echo relaxes at the sight of them. I only know one, and have seen the other once. Falcon, Tracey's brother, walks over and kisses Echo's mother on the cheek and shakes his father's hand. They all do the same as they come and take a seat near us.

"Storm." Falcon nods to me, I smile as his eyes drift to Echo's hand still in mine.

"Thanks for coming."

I'm guessing he didn't ask them to come, but they did anyway.

"Creed..." Echo nods to a man that has hair so dark it matches his eyes, "... this is Storm." Creed does nothing as he sits down.

"Any news on the baby?" The guy named Creed looks up then shakes his head.

"Darby, this is Storm." Darby offers me his hand and shakes it before he returns to a seat near the other two. Darby looks like a man of power like he has this and every situation under control.

"It's nice to meet you," I say in a small voice.

"Why are they here?" Selena asks crossing her arms over each other.

"What's up your ass?" Falcon questions leaning over to her.

"Fuck off," she spits at him. He smiles and sits back in his seat as he winks at me. I smile because now it's him who she's annoyed with and not me. Which makes me happy to not have her attention anymore.

Echo's hot breath tickles my ear as he leans in close. "We still need to talk." I nod because yes we do, just not here. His lips touch the spot directly below my ear and he kisses it softly as he squeezes my hand. That's unfair, so unfair. If this wasn't the situation we were in right now, I can guarantee his lips would not be touching me, well, not so fast anyway.

My resolve for him dies each and every time. My cell dings and I reach for it and pull it out of my pocket with my free hand.

**How's your number ten going, he win you back yet?**

"WHO'S NUMBER TEN?" Echo's voice whispers in my ear as he clearly, with no shame reads over my shoulder. I slide the cell into my pocket not even bothering to reply.

“No one,” I say shaking my head.

He lifts his, so he can see me clearly. “Who’s number ten?”

I open my mouth to tell him it’s him, when suddenly his parents stand and Selena does too. Echo lets go of my hand as he goes to stand next to his parents, his hand touching his mother’s shoulder as they listen to whatever the doctor has to say. Looking away, I gaze over at the three guys sitting in front of me, all of which are staring at me. My smile is weak as I look at them. *What water do they drink here to make all these men so fucking good looking?*

“Have you known Echo for a long time?” Falcon jumps over to where Echo was sitting next to me and places his hand at the back of my chair before he answers, “School friend. So, forever.” I nod looking back at Echo who’s staring at me then back to the doctor.

“Did you know Mike well, as well?” Only Falcon answers as the other two remain quiet. Creed is currently attached to his cell and only looking up when he needs to.

“You could say that. We know him better than most,” Falcon answers tapping the back of my chair. He leans in close, not as close as Echo gets, but close enough that only those right near me will hear. “Now Selena, on the other hand, we’ve known her just as long and not one good word should be spoken about her. If I were you, I would watch that one.”

I nod my head, I’ve already worked that fact out for myself.

The family walk over. Echo’s looking down as he reaches us. Falcon moves to let him take his seat. His hand slides into mine making my hand feel even smaller compared to his large one. My thumb runs on the outside softly, as I stare waiting to see what the news is, and wondering how hands can be so attractive. *Is that even possible?*

“Tell me, what did they say?” This time it’s not Falcon who asks, it’s Darby who leans forward in his seat. Looking up Echo’s watching me as I stroke his hand, so it takes him a moment to answer him.

“They’re taking him into recovery. They got the bullet out and everything looks good. He’ll have to stay in here for a few days to make sure he’s okay.” Everyone breathes a sigh of relief at his words. I even pull my hand out of his and envelop him in a hug. He pulls me tight to him, his face in my hair as he leans in breathing me in.

“Stay with me tonight.”

I want to tell him no. That it’s not something we should be doing. We

need clear heads before we jump into things again. I need to work out if this is what I even want. If I can put up with everything that comes with being with him.

Will I be worth it?

Will he be worth it?

I'm getting older. I want those things that women my age don't want—marriage, family, and even the career for now but will happily give up for my children. We still have a long way to go—I don't even know if we work. *How can we be so broken yet somehow want to stick to each other like glue?*

Glue doesn't hold everything together, it's a BandAid that covers the real problems. I want to sew it back together with all our pieces magically intertwined.

It will take a long time for us to reach that point, and that's even if I want to.

"You're about to say, no. Please. Just be with me."

Eyes are still on me, I can feel them burning through me. Selena has a smug smile on her face as she watches me fight what I already know is going to win, and his friends are watching as well. I almost feel pressured, but that's silly it's not what he's doing at all.

His hand slips back into mine as I nod my head.

"Nothing else, Echo, not yet." He nods as he stands keeping our hands intertwined.

"You'll call if you hear anything else?" he asks looking at his parents who both nod.

"Thank you for coming, Storm. It was nice to see you again."

I lean down and cuddle his mother, who taps my back before I pull away.

"I'll come back tomorrow with Echo. Is there anything you'd like me to bring?"

I can feel Echo's eyes on me, but I don't dare turn to look at him.

"No, sweetheart, we're fine."

Behind us, I feel all the boys and know they're going to walk out with us.

"You aren't welcome here," Selena says as we turn to leave. I choose to ignore her, she doesn't get a say. It's his parents who are hurting the most.

"Selena, if you choose to continue speaking to Storm the way you do, I'll throw your ass out myself," Echo says as we walk past her. She gasps but doesn't say another word as laughter filters from behind me.

"That bitch has no respect. Hopefully, Mike wakes up and kicks her ass to

the curb.”

I turn to see all three smiling at Echo’s words.

“Mike loves her.”

Echo shakes his head. “He doesn’t, he’s just lost in her. She isn’t worth his love.”

All five of us step into the elevator, it’s a tough job being surrounded by men who could make any woman’s panties fly off with just a single look. Echo pulls me so my back is to his front with his arms around my waist. I don’t hold his hands just stand still unsure of what to do. He clearly needs the comfort and I’m trying to give it to him, even though my insides are conflicted right now.

“So... you two a thing?” Falcon asks.

I stand still looking at the floor then to the doors, hoping they will open soon, so I can escape.

“Not yet.”

His answer shocks me. I look up at him and see him smiling at me. He’s cocky. I like that about him.

“Maybe you should work on changing that, or other people might try to interfere,” Falcon says. I look away from Echo’s blue eyes to see Creed hit the back of Falcon’s head hard while shaking his head. No one else says anything until the doors open and we all walk out.

“Echo...” We all stop just before we get to the doors. Turning around Selena is there, her head turned down before she looks up to us slowly. “Can we, talk?”

“Unbelievable,” Darby mutters.

“No one likes desperate, Selena. It never looks good on anyone, least of all you,” Falcon says before he turns, walking out with the rest following him. I start to move as well, but Echo holds me, so I have to stay.

“You loved me, do you remember that?”

This is awkward.

So fucking awkward.

I shouldn’t be here listening to this.

“You see... that’s the problem. I never really did.”

Her eyes go wide at his words. “I made a mistake, Echo.”

“Many, so I’m told.”

Her eyes lift to me then to where his hand is still on me before they go back to him. “You think you love her? You’re a fool. She doesn’t love you. I

know love, and she doesn't have it for you." She spins on her heels turning away.

"I've never met someone who's so full of drama in my life," I mutter, looking up at him. "And you put up with it for years. Honestly, you need a medal."

I smile, trying to take the seriousness of what Selena just confessed to Echo, that he loves me out of the equation. He strokes my face softly, leans down, kisses my lips as we turn to leave not answering me. I think he knows what I'm doing.

She goes to sit in the car as I say goodbye to the guys. They all wait until she's in before they speak.

Falcon, of course, being the first. "You picked a normal woman. How does it feel not to deal with crazy anymore?" He laughs looking back to Selena who's still standing by the door like a fool watching us.

"Your turn next," I say to Darby.

He shakes his head and walks off, Creed following him. Handing Falcon the keys, he nods his head to the car where Storm is seated before he also walks off. He looks back once. "Make sure you hit that, she's way to fine for your stanky ass."

I flip him the bird as I walk to the car. Storm has the car started and ready when I get in. She starts driving in the direction of my house without me saying a word.

"Do you have clothes?"

She looks in her backseat then nods her head. "I haven't unpacked yet from seeing Mel."

"Thank you, Storm." She nods indicating when she turns. "You didn't have to come."

"I know." She won't look at me as she drives.

"So why did you?"

Her hands grip the steering wheel harder. "Because it was the right thing to do."

"That's not why. Why did you really come?"

She licks her lips as we get closer to my house. "You didn't have anyone



else.” She’s right, not in that family. She knows how they treat me and wants to be the one that’s there for me.

“Are you regretting it now? Coming, I mean?”

She shrugs her shoulders then pulls up in my driveway before she looks to me.

“Will you make me regret it, Echo?”

I firmly shake my head. “No, I promise.”

“Okay, then.” She gets out when I do, so I reach into the back seat grabbing her bag as we make our way to the front.

“You have to tell me though, it’s been eating at me. Who’s ten?”

I watch as she cringes, then shakes her head. “It’s nothing, just something silly between friends.”

“It sounded like a guy.” Opening the door, I block her way from going inside. “I need to know who ten is?”

“It’s you, you’re my ten. Now, just leave it.”

I didn’t expect to hear those words. “What do you mean, ‘I’m your ten’?”

Her eyes close and reopen with a heavy sigh. “A ten is someone who’s your dream guy. A seven is someone you settle for. A five is someone you sleep with. You getting my drift here?”

“So, what does a ten usually have? You know... best looking?”

“Yes, Echo, you are the most attractive man I’ve ever seen. You are my ten. Though, you are losing notches each and every day with your issues. Issues I never wanted to be signed up to. I wanted fun with you, but I get more than complicated.”

“I see....” She walks in already knowing her way around the place and heads straight to the kitchen grabbing a water. “So, no sex?” I ask in the hope she’ll help me forget. Everything. She’s good at that. Becoming my main focus when it’s only us.

The water spits from her mouth all over the bench. “Do you want me to leave?” I shake my head. “No, Echo, no sex.” She looks around the room. “Maybe it’s best I sleep on the sofa then?”

“No,” I say stepping closer to her. “Don’t. I’ll behave. I need to feel you close, at least for tonight.” She nods then we both walk silently to my room. I start removing my clothes, I have to take a shower I’ve been in these same ones all day, and I need to be clean. Hospitals always make me feel dirty, which is funny considering they’re meant to be the cleanest places.

Tearing the rest of them off, I step into the shower. I don’t even bother

shutting the door, I have no shame and she's already seen everything I have to offer. So, no point in hiding. Just as I'm about to turn the water off, the tap starts running and I push the curtain back to see her standing at the sink brushing her teeth. I don't think I ever once saw Selena brush hers, because in her words 'it's disgusting.'

"I like having you here."

She nods, rinses out her mouth, as I wrap the towel around me and follow her back to the room. "It's just for tonight."

I bite my lip from saying something I know she might not want to hear, that I don't want her to go, and I want her to stay. I'm afraid if I say those words she might run the other way, when tonight I need to keep her right where she is, which is climbing into my bed.

I pull on some briefs and hop in behind her. Storm's on her cell flicking through as I wrap my hands around her waist and pull her to me. She comes over without a fight.

"I like your brother," she says pulling me from the world where I was about to get lost and hopefully never leave.

I push her hair back from her face so I can see her better.

"That usually isn't a positive thing for me."

She giggles but I'm serious.

"I don't like him in the way I like you, Echo. I like him as a person. I think you two just haven't seen things right, maybe for some time now. All I'm saying is I like him and I hope he makes a speedy recovery, and when he does, maybe you can talk to him and sort out some of the issues."

I go to kiss her cheek, then stop and just run my finger on her neck as I keep her to me.

"I'm not sure I can let you go," I mumble while falling asleep.

"It's not up to you," she replies.

SHE'S GONE when I wake. I can still smell Storm, but there's no sign of her. Just as I sit up, she walks in holding two coffees with a smile that surely can't be reserved for me.

"Why are you smiling?" I reach for her, she shakes her head offering me the coffee, which I take then drink some before I place it down next to me.

“Good news, your brother’s awake.” She sits on the bed in only a shirt and panties. If my cock wasn’t hard just from merely smelling her, it’s fucking rock hard now from looking at her. Hate to see what would happen if she touched me.

“You spoke to my parents?”

She nods. It surprises me how fast and well they get along. I can see it in her, though. The way she attracts people, it’s just the way she is. Her cell starts ringing and I see her friend Mel’s name pop up, so I reach for her phone answering it. Her eyes go wide like she can’t believe I just did that.

“Red’s number ten at your service.”

“Echo,” she says.

“Does Red have many more number tens out there I should be aware of?”

Mel laughs. “No, unfortunately not.”

“Oh, come on, Mel, you know you want us to work out. I can tell.”

“How about you come to the wedding, you can convince me there?” I look up at Storm who’s shaking her head. “I would love to. What do you need for a gift?”

“Nothing. Ask Storm for the details and tell her to ring me back when you aren’t around.” She’s straight to the point, so I laugh as she hangs up.

“She wants you to ring her back when I’m not around.”

“Sounds about right,” she mutters. I reach for her now, not being able to not touch her a second longer. She yelps when I pull her to me, her back hitting the bed as I lean over the top covering her body but not touching her. Her hands stay in-between us as I look down directly into her eyes. “Echo.”

“Storm,” I say eyeing her lips. Her lips aren’t your usual pink, they’re darker with hints of red and when they aren’t angry at me and pinched to a thin line, they’re full and blaze with color. Like right now. I can tell she’s resisting biting her bottom lip, in case I take it from her.

“This is dangerous.”

“Doesn’t that make it so much more fun?” I ask, her hands touch my exposed chest just barely but enough for me to break out in goosebumps all over. Her eyes closing as she looks between us, her fingers brushing me like she wants to dance with fire, but first wants to test the flames to see if it will burn. I plan to burn. Burn her so deep she never forgets who I am, so my mark will forever be stained on her for any other man who dares come near her. “Mine.” It’s simple and it wasn’t meant to leave my lips. It was in my head but now it’s out there floating around between us. Her eyes shoot up to

mine, her eyelashes so long that the closer I get the faster they start to flutter.

“I’m not yours, Echo, I’m mine.”

I want to argue with her, scream at her that she’s wrong. I don’t, instead, I go ever so slowly so I can touch her, just be as close as possible before our day actually starts, and I don’t get this chance again of having her here with me. Just us. It’s almost as sweet as what heaven would be like, of that I’m sure.

Her eyes flick to my lips then back to my eyes. Fast. She isn’t sure what she wants to do, fight me or kiss me. I can see the fight in her eyes, the determination to say no, but the resilience to say yes. It’s interesting, and only making me harder as I keep looking at her.

“Just for a few more hours, pretend with me,” I ask her, needing it, wanting it. She sighs heavily, her breath touching my lips, she smells like coffee.

“You take, and take...”

She’s right, I do. Of just her, though. “Only you, I’ll take all of you if you’ll let me.”

“Then what’s left for me, Echo? What’s left for me?”

Leaning down ever so softly my lips caresses hers. “Me.”

Her fingers move and her hands go to my side so I can drop, being careful to not put all my weight on her, I do so with another soft kiss. She doesn’t stop me or tell me no, this time she opens her mouth to kiss me back.

Lovers that weren’t meant to be.

My brother laughed at me the first time I ever told him I was in love. Love to me is such a fun thing, something most people want and some never achieve.

I thought I had it with Selena.

I was wrong.

Maybe all those years ago when he spoke those words they never really sunk in, until now. ‘You don’t love her. You love the idea of being in love with her. She isn’t your girl.’ He was right then. It just took me a while to work it out and find someone who doesn’t use me, who likes me for just being me. A lovesick fool. I haven’t told her yet, but I’m head over heels falling for a redhead with a sharp personality, who keeps me on my toes and doesn’t make me feel less than I am. I’m with a woman, now I just have to make her love me.

It should be easy. I can see it in her eyes, how she falls for me every

second. She's strong though, lucky for her I'm resilient.

**H**is lips touch mine and he steals my breath away with the seriousness of his kiss. It's like he's kissing me for the first time in a long time like he has to remember how I taste and store it in his memory. No other body part moves just one hand that's touching my chin ever so lightly while his lips massage mine like they were woven out of gold just for him. I part them, he takes that invitation and his tongue slides in. I can feel every inch of him beneath me, even if he doesn't move he still very apparent to every part of my body. He tastes like coffee and sin. How can I get sucked in every time when I tell myself I won't, that I'm done. The head wants one thing the heart wants another, and he's taking advantage of that without my consent.

"Red." He lifts and his hand comes between us. He pulls at my shirt and lifts it, so my breasts come into view, his mouth descends onto my nipple until his lips cover it as he sucks hard. My hands lift and thread through his perfectly styled blond hair. He reaches for it, pulling away and pinning it to the side of me, so I can't move as he starts to grind, leaving me helpless while his body plays musical sex instruments on me. His mouth on my breast, going from one to another while I can feel him, every inch of him, the only thing separating us is the very thin pieces of fabric between us as he grinds on me. Hitting that perfect sweet spot only he can hit.

"Echo," I scream his name, it comes fast and unexpected. It hits me like I didn't expect it to. My eyes squeeze tight and when I open them again, he's up removing his briefs kicking them off before he comes back down pulling my panties off fast. He smirks as he comes down pulling my legs, so my

body slides to the end of the bed where he is. He lifts my legs over his shoulders and grips my hip with one hand, as his other touches my breast again squeezing before I feel him at my entrance.

“Tell me, Red, tell me how you want me to fuck you?” He teases me, his cock at my entrance, I feel him there and I’m pulsating all over ready with excitement for what I know he can give me. My lips squeeze together in a thin line, not wanting to speak but he enters me slowly, just the tip before he pulls out and teases me again. “You’re going to have to use those words, pretty girl,” he teases me again, then not going in just playing at my entrance.

“Fuck me, Echo. Now.” He lifts a hand to his head and salutes me.

“At your command, Red.” And he does just that. He isn’t slow with it, he slams straight into me, watching for every move as he does so. Each thrust, his eyes stay on me even when I can no longer keep mine open. When I reopen after squeezing them so tightly from the orgasm that’s building he stays watching me. His hands play with my breasts then one skims down to touch my clit, playing it with his magical hands. My back starts to arch, and his hand is at my mouth, his fingers at my lips, as he slides one in for me to suck. Not once does he stop thrusting into me, punishing my pussy like it’s his and always will be, to do so with it as he pleases. I moan loudly as I lift up.

“Slap me.”

He stops and looks at me with shock, then smirks. He pushes once, stops then while my ass is lifted, from my legs being up around his neck he slaps my ass, hard. I can feel the sting from it and smile at him as I lift up to touch his face. My legs stay locked around him, my body now bent in half letting him have all of me.

His lips are brief but persistent as they touch mine kissing me before I fall back on the bed. He grips both legs, lifting them from his neck and holds them up, using me as his own pole, holding them and slamming into me. Each thrust he drives deeper and deeper until I can’t take it any longer and my body gives. I shake and close my eyes, my teeth clench hard as the orgasm wracks through my body. He thrusts a few more times before he places my legs on either side of him and then he lays on me. His head between my breasts as we both try to catch our breath.

“This doesn’t mean we’re fixed, you know that, right?”

He nods not saying a word.

There’s a knocking sound on the door and I jump. Echo doesn’t move

from the spot he's comfortable in, so I push at him and he just laughs.

"They'll go away. I'm happy where I am, thank you."

I push him again until he has to move to the side, I get up and quickly find some clothes, getting dressed as the knocking becomes louder. I turn to look at him and see him already staring.

"Does anyone have keys?" I ask, hoping no one can simply walk in.

"Nope. I changed the locks." Oh, he changed them so Selena wouldn't have keys. I nod and walk out going straight to the door and pulling it open. His mother stands there smiling at me.

"Hi," I utter unsure of what to say. "Echo's in his room. Do you want me to get him?" She looks behind me and I do too—Echo's standing there in a pair of basketball shorts as he leans on the wall watching us.

"Mother."

I step aside and she walks in, her eyes look everywhere before she looks at her son.

"I thought it was time."

He raises an eyebrow looks to me then back to her. "You thought it was time to finally see where I live?"

*Shit, really?*

"Yes, I'm trying. It's hard."

"We all deserve a second chance, I guess."

I glance up as he says it, and know he's talking to me, but I have to look to confirm it. Shaking my head at his words in disbelief, I walk past them and straight to his room so I can grab my things. I hear them talking and I'm thankful it's civil and not hostile like it was last time. Grabbing my bag I walk out, Echo stops speaking and looks to me.

"You don't live here?" his mother asks me. First her eyes look to the bag in my hand then I look at it then back to Echo before her.

"No, I have my own place." She nods her head. "I'll see you later? Give Mike my best wishes." I wave a hand to them and head toward the door. I close it and start to walk down the steps, but he's behind me, reaching for my bag taking it from my shoulder. "We need to talk."

I nod, we do. But we always seem to end up in the same position. *Sex.*

"Maybe, but in public."

He smirks knowing what I'm thinking. "You don't trust me?" I look at his front door and see it's closed. Smart, don't want his mother hearing us.

"I don't know the answer to that yet. So, don't ask me that question," I



say honestly.

He looks to the ground then back up to me. "Public. Okay, where do you want to meet? Please don't make me wait." I hear honesty in his response. He's done with waiting, he wants answers. So do I, it just isn't as easy as I thought it would be. He makes me battle with my feelings. I'm so fucking conflicted. Being with him fucks with my head because when I am, I know I want him, that's obvious and he knows it. I'm clearly very much attracted to the man, more so than any other person in history of men I've met. Attraction isn't everything though, Echo needs to be more and he still might be in love with someone else. I have to be someone's first, always. It's what I deserve.

"I have a bit of work I need to catch up on. How about we meet at the hospital then we can go from there. Maybe dinner?"

He nods excited and reaches forward, his hand touching my hip.

"Mom's never been here. Never once wanted to come to mine. Always Mike. I think you're part of the reason Mom's here." I hear the happiness in his voice at his words. We might, at times, not like who we are related to but they are family, and we love them no less.

"I'm happy, she seems to be trying."

Echo nods looking down, and when he looks back up at me, his hand squeezes just a little tighter on my hip as he stares at me. "You make all things better." He says it with such truth, I can feel he means it. "I'm going to go before I drag you back in that house and have my way with you again." I nod smiling at his words. That isn't something I wouldn't mind. He taps my nose. "Naughty girl," he says before he walks off.

His mother's watching us now from the open door, and I offer her a small wave before I slide in my car and drive off.

Automatically, I call Mel. She answers straight away with,

"You told him he was your ten?" she yells through the cell.

"No, you did, in that text."

"Oh, that explains it. He's got a big head now, doesn't he? Bet he thinks he can have you whenever he wants."

"He just did." I giggle.

"You're such a sucker for a blond with a big cock," she jokes.

"Ha-ha."

"Don't ha-ha me, you gave in when you said you wouldn't." She's right. "But soon you'll be in love and we'll be planning your wedding."

"No. Don't jump ten feet ahead when we haven't lifted one foot."

“You will though, it’s just a matter of time for you to get there. I’m pretty sure he is.”

I don’t reply to her words because I really don’t know what to say to that.

“You invited him to your wedding. What if I don’t want to work it out with him?” I’m not even paying attention to where I’m driving. Somehow though, I’m almost home.

“You can un-invite him, but I don’t see that happening. Plus, it’s the perfect time for him to meet everyone. Be prepared for the girls to swoon.”

“Do you think I should just give it a go?” She goes quiet. Mel’s never quiet, and I hate that I can’t see her face right now to see what she’s thinking. She’s a very expressive person in her facial features and I know how to read her easily. “Mel.”

“Yeah, yeah I’m here.”

Then she goes silent again. “Mel, answer me.”

“Yes, I think you should. That’s because I can see you care for him more than you let on. And he isn’t Matthew. Remember that when you look at him.”

“Easier said than done.”

“Just don’t put up your walls. He’s your ten for a reason. Let him show you that reason.”

“When did you become so wise?”

I hear Howard yell her name in the background.

“The minute I became a wifey. You know, we know *all* the shit.”

“You’re not a wifey, yet.” I laugh as I pull up at my house.

“But I will be...” She hangs up with a giggle without finishing her sentence. And I couldn’t be happier for her.

I want that same happiness and maybe Echo can give it to me.

When Mom leaves, I'm almost speechless. My mother was in my home and not once did she put me down or say anything bad about me. It was a first that's for sure.

Walking into the hospital to see my brother, I notice Selena sitting out the front in the waiting area. She looks up when she notices me, hope is evident in her eyes until I walk straight past ignoring her. I really wonder now what I felt for her. How did I get so lost in thinking I was in love with her? Whatever it was it wasn't love.

Mike's laying down, his television is off when I open his door. He's staring at the food in front of him not moving. He looks up when I enter, surprise filters through his face as I walk in closing the door.

"Didn't think you cared if I lived or died," he harrumphs, clearly still pissed from the other day at the coffee house.

"I care." He doesn't say anything merely turns back to look at his food. "Your wife is sitting outside." I walk closer sitting next to him. He goes to move then his face scrunches up in pain. "Don't move. Do you want me to get her?"

He shakes his head. "No." His breathing starts to even out before he turns his head to the side so he can look at me. "I'm divorcing her."

"You love her."

He rolls his eyes. "What the fuck is that anymore? You thought you loved her, too."

"True. Selena gives out fake love so we will give what she wants in return."

His eyes thin as he looks at me. "You don't love her anymore. So, why did you kiss her?"

"I never kissed her, she kissed me. Big difference."

He looks at the ceiling away from me. "I figured as much, I just needed to hear it from you."

"You believe me, over her?"

He doesn't look back at me when he answers, "One thing you aren't is a liar, Echo. You never have been."

"I'm sorry, you know... for bringing her into our life." I stand to look at the time, Storm will be here soon.

"So am I. So am I," he mumbles. Clearly not just hurting from his physical pain. "Tell her to come in, will you?"

I nod my head. "I'll come back if that's what you want?"

He nods once not looking back at me as I walk out. Storm's there already waiting for me. Selena's standing opposite to Storm death-staring her. Walking up to Storm, I slide my arm around her waist and pull her to me then touch her lips with mine, before I pull back to see Selena blowing smoke from her ears while she glares at us.

"Mike wants to see you." She stomps off like a child. The minute she's gone, Storm pulls away from me anger written on her face.

"Did you do that just then to make her mad?"

*Shit.*

"No," I answer truthfully.

Her hand clasps the strap of her bag. "Are you sure, because that's what it seemed to me you just did."

Grabbing her face so she can't move from me or even look away. "I don't see her. I haven't for a long time. You're at fault for that." Then I lean in and kiss her again, just because I can.

STORM SITS across from me at a restaurant we frequent with the guys. Darby's a fussy ass and only eats the finest foods. It's the best place to bring her as it gives you privacy in a public forum. Best of both worlds for the both of us. She pushes at her drink, her hands just moving the glass around.

"So?" I ask.

She looks up her head shaking. "You just asked me to be your girlfriend. Is that not something we do when we are teenagers, not adults?"

It's true, I did. I want to start afresh. The only way I know how to do it that is to ask her to be mine. And not in the macho way which I know will scare her, like me kidnapping her and locking her in my bedroom. She probably wouldn't take too kindly to that.

"So what do you say?"

"Do you love her?" she asks lifting the wine glass to her lips, her eyes stay trained on me.

"No," I answer as clear and concise as possible.

"Do you want to be with her?"

"No," I answer again as clear and concise as possible.

"Am I meant to just take your word for it? You could be lying, then in a few months' time when I don't want to go back you could miss her, want her," she says as she places her wine on the table.

"That will never happen. It's you only that I want. It's you that I need. Just say, yes."

"If I agree to be your..." she coughs, "... girlfriend." I nod smiling. "What does that mean?"

"I'm trying real hard here not to rush this, to not fuck this up. You fit in everywhere like you're perfect for me. I don't quite understand it, but I get it. You were made for me." She doesn't say a word. "You're also my ten. That has to count for something."

She smiles at that. "I won't be anyone's second best, or second choice. I want to be first."

I reach over, taking her hand in mine. "Oh, fuck me, you're more than my first choice, you're my dream choice, my only choice." She giggles. "Plus, my mother likes you. And she never likes anyone when it comes to me."

"She's trying."

I nod agreeing. That she is.

We eat and for the rest of the night we small talk. Storm tells me about how she got to where she is today in business and it makes me proud. She earned her spot and works hard for it. I've never been with someone who's so career focused. The only person I know like that's like her is Darby. If we didn't have Darby, I'm not sure where we would be in business. Definitely not where we are today, that's for sure.

"Your friends are... interesting," she says as we stand. She's asking me

exactly what I do for the club and I tell her.

“So you ran a check on me?” she asks.

“I did, and yes they are.”

“Creed’s... quiet.”

I laugh at her words. “Creed doesn’t like people. Don’t take it personally.”

She nods as we walk out. Turning her around as the cold air hits our skin, she smiles.

“It’s a first date, Echo. Do you think you should be touching me like this?” she asks in a teasing voice but doesn’t pull herself away either.

“What, like this?” My hand drops between our bodies and I touch her pussy. She laughs and brushes my hand away. “I don’t think I can let you go tonight.”

She groans and lays her head on my shoulder. “You don’t get a choice.” She laughs pulling away and starts to walk off only looking back once as she gets to her car.

“Not even a kiss?”

She shakes her head. “We never stop at a one kiss.”

Damn it, she’s right. I was hoping she would forget about that. She smiles the whole way until I can no longer see her, and now I have a set of blue balls.

## SECOND DATE...

Storm’s dressed in red, it makes me smile more than I thought it would.

She made me wait almost a full week to see her again, and I agreed because I want her to know that I would wait as long as it takes. I would do what she needed, so all my past fuck-ups and her thinking she wasn’t it for me, would prove her wrong. But it was hard, so fucking hard to not see her, even touch her.

Storm’s put me on restrictions, and I hope tonight she will break them. Even if she doesn’t, I’m at least going to try for a kiss, I need those lips on mine.

“Are you sure I can be here?”

I nod. Opening the door, the girls are all here, but they aren’t dressed how

they usually are. We do this once a year, a gala for our existing clients so they can meet other girls who they're usually assigned to. I asked Storm to come, it may have not been the best idea, but it's where I spend all my time. I want her to know it as well.

"You lot are low key geniuses." She laughs looking around. I keep my hand on her lower back not wanting to let her go. Creed, Falcon and Darby are standing at the bar talking to Johnny when I walk in. They all look in our direction as we walk closer to them.

"I see you brought a guest." Darby nods to Storm. Usually, we aren't meant to bring anyone, but I want her to know everything there is about me. Not hiding anything from her, like I did with Selena.

"We're stopping by before our dinner," I answer. Falcon takes her hand, kissing it, making her blush. "Knock it off." He does these things to us to rile us up, more so he likes to rile up Creed as he takes longer to bite.

"I'm just complimenting the most beautiful woman in this room. Lord knows why she's standing next to you." I see her smile at his words, which makes me happy, so I ignore his remark and show her around. She's careful to not step into any rooms, even when I take her upstairs to my office.

"You don't want to come in?" She shakes her head. Then I pull the cloth away from the table showing her my plans.

"We're having dinner here?"

I nod as she finally walks in. My office is nothing fancy, just a desk and a sofa. Which has been removed to place the extra table and chairs in for tonight? "Pizza."

She smiles. Her hand touches her heat. "You know the way to my heart, after all," she gushes before she sits down.

"Does that mean you'll come back to mine tonight?"

She takes a bite of the pizza and shakes her head. "No. Don't you know the rules?"

"Rules?" I ask confused.

"It's the third date that's meant to be the winner, but it has to be good."

Game on.

THIRD DATE...

She made me wait another week. Which I actually needed for what I wanted to do. This date will be the best date she's ever been on. Of that, I'm sure.

Tonight she has on jeans and a white shirt as she waits for me out the front of her house. Her bag is over her shoulder, and she smiles brightly when she sees me. I like being the reason it's there, that I put that smile on her face. But I like it even more when she screams my name.

I'm just about to get out of the car when she pulls the door open not letting me get it for her.

"I'm excited, big expectations here." She claps her hands in front of her. "But why do I have to wear something comfortable, I mean wouldn't this be harder to get off than a dress." She winks.

*Fuck, she's right.*

Now my mind is stuck there.

In the gutter. And now I'm thinking of all the ways to remove her jeans, fast.

Closing my eyes and looking away is my only option. I try not to speak on the drive, basically because my cock is straining in my trousers, and I don't want to hear her say my name, which I think I might explode if she does.

"Where...." Storm looks around when we pull off on the dirt road. Her hands cling to her seatbelt as if she's afraid. She stays quiet the closer we get. When the car comes to a stop, I flash my lights twice and turn to watch her.

Her face is blank until the first light comes on, then the next, until it's completely lit up. The old theme park that closed down years ago is owned by the property Darby bought a few years ago.

She turns with a smile so big. "What's this?"

"Do you like it?"

Storm nods turning back. "Can we go in?"

I get out and go and open her car door. Most of the rides don't work due to safety reasons, but a few do. The merry-go-round is one. She claps her hands together when we get to it, then she climbs on the horse. I don't want to go on any other, so I climb on the back behind her, wrapping my hands around her waist and breathing her in. Tonight she smells like vanilla, and it takes everything in me not to taste her.

"You outdid yourself tonight, blondie," she jokes.

The operator comes over and passes us two glasses of champagne.



She squeals in excitement. “You didn’t need this, I would have slept with you anyway,” she says as the ride starts.

Now, I just want this date to end so I can take her back to mine.

**H**e upped his game, better than anyone else. He opened a theme park for me. *Who the hell does that?* I guess Echo does that. The older guy who turns on a few rides offers us some fairy-floss as we get off the merry-go-round again. “You really upped your game.” Just before I can put the fairy floss in my mouth Echo licks it from my finger.

“I had to secure my chance.”

I laugh because it’s funny, and he really didn’t need to. I would have gone home with him anyway. That was one of the reasons I suggested he pick me up this time. The other times I had to drive, my willpower not being that strong.

“Oh, you did. Maybe you might even get a bonus.”

Echo pulls some money out of his pocket and hands it to the guy, who’s been turning the rides on. “A bonus you say?”

I nod as we get back to the car. It’s dark out here, the bright lights from the park are being turned off slowly. Stepping behind him, he turns around with scrunched up eyebrows until my hand lays on his chest and I push him back so his ass hits the front of his car.

“Red.”

My fingers make work of his belt pulling it off and flinging it to the ground. He goes silent as he watches me. I drop on my knees in front of him as I pull his cock free. His hand goes straight to my hair gripping it, while one of my hands touches his balls, and the other the base of his cock. I lick the tip. He bucks at me not speaking, letting me do what I want. So, I lick again, this time as if I’m kissing his mouth, my tongue making circles around

his tip, his hand clenching hard in my hair. I take him all in as far as I can without making myself vomit.

“Red. Fuck.”

I like to make him dizzy for me. It’s a bonus him wanting me so bad. Not even Matthew wanted me this bad. I like the way he wants me. It’s powerful, and no woman should hold this much power over a man.

My head continues to bob up and down as my other hand massages his balls. I feel them tighten just before he comes. Swallowing, I stand up wiping off my mouth followed by the dirt from my knees.

I yelp as he picks me up, throws me on the hood of the car and reaches for my jeans.

“You’re a bad girl. Let’s hope Ian doesn’t walk out this way, or he’ll get a show.” He laughs referring to the guy who helped us with the rides today. He removes my jeans fast, faster than I could have gotten them off myself that’s for sure, and spreads my legs wide on the bonnet of his car. Looking up, I see the night sky. It’s dark with only a few stars to be seen scattered across the blackness of the heavens.

His mouth touches me and I jump in surprise, his tongue makes its way around my clit, then he slides two fingers straight in. I’m already wet and eager for him. Hearing the way he moaned my name earlier did it for me. So, this is just the icing on the cake and I know I won’t last long.

Circles then he bites. Circles then he bites. It’s a small nip, but it sends shock waves through my system. The fourth time he does it then licks from his fingers straight back up, I’m convulsing on the hood of his car. He goes to go back for more, but I close my legs, my clit too sensitive to touch, so he kisses his way up until he reaches me.

“Move in with me.”

I laugh at him, and when he doesn’t say anything, I look at him watching me. “No.”

“How many more dates until you agree to that one?”

“At least ten.”

“Okay perfect. We are at three now. Only seven more to go.”

I laugh at his honesty and the fact that he has no shame.

Moving in, that’s a big step. And it’s not one I want to rush into.

Just because our first three dates have been amazing it isn’t always an indication for the rest.

“I can see you overthinking it.” He taps my nose then pulls my jeans up

my legs, helping me dress as he assists me to stand. “Just go with it.”  
“Easier said than done.” I laugh at him.

He’s TAKEN me on two more dates since our third date, and I can honestly say it only gets better and better. I’m not even sure how that’s possible and I’m waiting for something to go wrong, something to fuck up. We seem to fit so perfectly now, we aren’t pretending all we want is just sex.

Standing at the end of the aisle, I look back to see him sitting with my mother, his eyes on me as we listen to Mel and Howard getting married.

Today is our sixth date, and even if it’s my best friend’s wedding, it’s better than any. He’s met my mother before, but not with me consenting. She likes him, more so than Matthew. Echo’s charming, that’s for sure.

I turn back when they are pronounced man and wife—they kiss like lovers who finally have their happy ending. It makes me smile.

Stepping down the aisle, Echo stands and winds his hand in mine as we walk together to the reception.

“I think your mother likes me more than you.”

I turn back to my mother following us, there’s a smile so broad on her face I think it would be hard to wipe off given the circumstances.

“Maybe she can move in with you, instead of me.”

He stops, making my mother run into the back of us.

“Mom, I’m sorry,” I say.

“It was my fault, Ethel. It was my fault, I was startled by something Storm said.”

My mother nods and pats Echo’s shoulder as she walks past him. He holds me back until we’re the last left in the church, and waits for the door to shut before he speaks and let’s go of my hand. “You’re agreeing to move in?”

“Who said that?” I play with him, his eyebrows scrunch as his lips thin while shaking his head. He grabs hold of my hand again and starts to move, I hold him back, and when he turns to look back at me, I smile. “Yes. Trial basis. I don’t want to get rid of my place yet.”

“If I could bend you over and fuck you right here I would, but I might be sent to hell.” He leans in and kisses my lips, his hands covering my face taking me all. When he pulls back, I smile.

“You’re fine with that? With me keeping my place?”

He nods as we start to walk out. “I’m just following you, in you I trust. Obviously, my way I would have you there already and tied to my bed. Baby steps and all that shit.” He laughs.

“You’re kind of perfect, do you know that?”

“You’re mine, do you know that?”

I do, I so do.

And I couldn’t be happier.

Who knew a bit of swoon and I could fall. Hard. That’s what’s happened. Him and me, we work and we work well.

“Ethel, would you mind taking this? I just have to talk to your daughter for a few minutes?” He passes my mother my bag which she gladly accepts with a smile. He pulls me until we enter a room that’s clearly labeled for the cleaners and slams the door shut.

“What are you doing?”

His hands slide up my thighs, and I know straight away what he’s doing so my hands reach for him.

“I feel like you want to tell me something, but you’re covering it with your hands.”

He nods, still not saying anything as he lifts me and slides straight in. It’s quick, hard, fast. Everything I want right now.

“Echo, tell me.”

He leans in and bites my neck, at first I think he’s going to suck and leave me with hickeys again, but then he licks me before he pulls away. My hands grip his shoulders as he holds my ass lifting me up and down slamming me onto him.

“I love you,” I gasp, not just from his words but from the orgasm that rips through me. My nails dig in as I pull back to try and see him. His eyes are closed and his face is, raw. Like all his emotions are set out in front of me. When he opens them, he still holds onto me not letting me go and his eyes are waiting, ready for what’s to come. Like he’s prepared for anything bad or good.

“Is that all?” I ask him not letting go.

“No, I want to marry you. Like today. But I know I should wait, so I’m going wait.”

I push him back so I can get down, pulling my dress over my legs and checking my hair, I wait to speak. Making sure he’s finished. When I look

back, hopelessness is written all over him. Turning, I reach for the door opening it and looking back once before I walk out.

“I love you, too, blondie. I just wanted the time to be right. It’s finally right.”

He smiles so broadly, his perfect white teeth showing before I shut the door going back to join the wedding. The minute I walk in Mel shakes her head at me. “You totally just had sex at my wedding.”

“I totally did.”

Hands slide around my waist as Mel leans in and kisses my cheek before she walks off.

“You love me?” Echo asks for confirmation.

“I wouldn’t agree to move in otherwise.”

“Too soon for marriage?” he asks in my ear.

“Yes. At least, give me a few months to settle.” I laugh at his eagerness.

“I’ll start counting,” he jokes, but I also know it’s not a joke and he’s deadly serious.

Turning to kiss Echo one last time before I have to go and give my speech, I look up at him. And I know right then and there he’s my ten.

My forever ten.

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KEEP READING FOR A GLIMPSE INTO CONCEITED - FALCON'S STORY.

## CONCEITED

Ariel

I would like to say we were old lovers. That once upon a time he was my everything, and I was his, but that would be a lie. He may have been mine, but I wasn't his. I was his sister's annoying little friend who he didn't even know was in love with him.

Years later, after seeing him again for the first time, nothing has changed. Except now he notices me, and I will do everything in my power to avoid him. Because, Falcon is the most conceited man on this planet, and because when he looks at me with steel eyes, my heart still misses a beat.

Falcon

I get what I want, and I'm not denied what I want either. It's my charm. It's hard to say no to something you never knew you desired until I'm standing in front of you. That's not just who I am, it's what I do. I give men everything they ever wanted.

Most people would go to great lengths to be near me. Yet, my sweet Ariel, I can't even get to stay in the same room as me. Maybe it's because I told her I would be the best lay of her life—that has to be it—and once I'm finished with her she's avoiding being disappointed for the rest of her life.

It couldn't possibly be anything else, because let's face it, I'm perfect.



## Chapter 1

### Falcon

I was made for this life, I know it. Each and every time I step into an establishment. I compare it to my own, our club, Crimson Elite—one of the most notorious exclusive sex clubs in the world. To even gain entry, you have to be approved by me. If you're a man that is. A woman, well, that's all Creed's job. Thank fuck. I think if I had to recruit women we wouldn't get far, I adore them way too much. I especially like the way they taste. Not once have I had a woman that tasted nasty, each and every one is sweet and delectable and I relish their taste.

The men stare, the women linger, it's part of the job. They have ideas about who I am. Where I come from. But none really know the truth unless they have been. And I'm very picky in my selections, we don't hold the title Elite for no reason.

Hands touch my hip, soft, delicate hands, and I know instantly it's a woman. I stop liking the way they feel, it's been two days since I've had my fill of a woman, and that's two days too long. So hands on me is almost the perfect sin. Turning, big blue eyes stare back at me. I know those eyes. But how?

She smiles as her hands don't leave my body and start crawling up the front of my chest until she reaches my collar and leans in. "I knew you would be back, too much fun last time."

Shit! I've fucked her before.

I never go back for seconds, unless those seconds are all that's left, or they were at least memorable. This one, I don't remember. Fuck!

Lifting my hand, I touch her chin. "Not tonight, sweetheart."

Her nose scrunches, and she makes this weird sound in the back of her throat. It's then I remember her. I was fucking her from behind when she started making animal noises. If she thought it was a turn on, she's so wrong. The pig sounds were the last straw, and I had to ask her to leave. I had work, and it was my excuse.

"You told me you'd call."

I know that's a lie. Not once have I told a woman I would call them. Not once, unless it's my sister. Even then I try to not call her.

My finger brushes against her chin. "I didn't. I never call. Goodnight."

Her mouth opens in shock as I walk away.

Moving across the room, I notice the man I'm here to see tonight. He's roped off in an exclusive part of the club. Girls dance around the outside hoping to gain his attention. He's famous—too famous to be here where he can be seen. But he has tastes, very particular ones. You see it's my job to know exactly what kind of tastes the men have, and what makes them tick.

The minute I'm let into the roped off area his eyes land on me. His friend leans over, whispers something into his ear before he stands and offers me his hand.

"I didn't think it was true?"

I raise my eyebrows at his question. "What?"

He leans in close. "The club... is it true?"

I smile and lean back taking a seat opposite him but not answering. So far he's passed all our security checks, and his history check has met our standards, but some people can be squeaky clean if they have the money to ensure they look that way. We know he has the money, which is why I'm here. To make sure he isn't a bad egg because no one wants to crack open something that smelly.

He sits opposite me, his hands in his lap as he stays leaning forward like I might tell him some dirty little secret. "You came alone?" he asks looking around.

The night depends on who's available, but usually, I do come alone.

I nod my head, smiling and nodding to the waitress for a drink. She already knows what I want and brings it over straight away.

"Should we go somewhere private to talk?"

He's uneasy. I bet he hasn't had to work for anything in his life for a long time. He has the looks, there's no doubt about that. He's in his prime, mid-thirties, and he's at the peak of his career. All directors want to work with him. Yet, here he sits his leg bouncing with nerves as he waits to see if I will give him what he wants, what he really wants, that he won't share with the public. I'm sure every woman he's been with he's had to pay off because of his particular tastes. And most of them, in some way, end with him being tied and something stuck up his ass.

I don't judge, each to their own. I've seen all kinds of fetishes in my job. Some even give me ideas to try myself. I don't just fuck a woman, I seduce her with my lips, lust for her with my hips, and take her with my cock. I've never had a woman complain, never had a woman who's said no. Once they

taste me, they're ruined. I smile at the thought and rub my cock.

Fuck! I need to get laid.

"No, here's fine."

He sits back and tries to stop his knee from bouncing, I look around the club and smile.

"Tell me, if you could pick any woman in here to take home tonight, who would you pick?"

His lips form a thin line as he stares at me. "Is this a joke?"

I shake my head, waiting for him to answer. He looks away, glancing back at me once before he looks again. His eyes flirt with the room before they stop and land on one woman. He looks back at me with a smile on his face. I follow his line of sight and see a girl with raven black hair cascading down her back, straight as a ruler, with a black dress so short I want to see what's underneath it.

"Her... I want her."

I now know his taste. He sits back and one of his men walk over to the woman. I turn to look back at him, but now he isn't watching me he's watching the woman.

"Sir."

His bodyguard's voice comes from behind me and by the way he stands up from his seat, I know she's also here. He moves his feet from side to side, slides one hand in his pockets, and offers the woman his hand. I don't look at her. I need to see the way he interacts, how he treats a woman. Violence is acceptable, but only if she consents to his hard limits at my club. We only have two women who cater to hard limits, so I need to make sure his only fetishes are what happens to him not the other party.

He says something to her, and I don't hear a word as I put my drink to my mouth watching his actions, you can tell a lot by the way someone moves. Are there fists closed? Are his hands open? The look on his face, is it curiosity or intrigue? Studying people is something I'm good at. I don't need someone to speak for me to know them, I merely need to watch them.

His eyes flash to me when the raven black-haired beauty stands in front of me blocking my view. His hands touch her hip and she straightens in her stance. I finish my drink and stand, he steps to the side, forgetting the black-haired beauty already as he looks at me with eager eyes.

"You'll be in contact, right?"

I tap his shoulder, he tenses under my fingers. "You'll see."

As I turn to walk off, the girl with the black hair spins around. “You...” she spits.

I smile, she doesn’t. Looking behind her, he doesn’t touch her again. Instead, he steps back as she crosses her hands over her chest pushing her perfect breasts up on full display. She clicks her fingers in front of my face, she rolls her eyes then walks off, leaving me smiling standing where I am.

“You know her?”

I look at the famous actor who wants what I have—to get him into my club. “Don’t go after her again.”

He nods his head not even contemplating arguing with me. Turning, I see her hair in the crowd of people—she’s making her way to the door. People make way for me as I go after her, and as soon as I step outside the door I see her. She’s on her cell, her heel up against the wall as she types fast. “Fuck off, Falcon.”

“But Ariel, haven’t you missed me?”

She pulls a packet of smokes from between her breasts and lights one, then proceeds to blow the smoke my way. She knows I fucking hate smoking, so she’s doing it on purpose so I go away.

“No, you ruined my opportunity, you ass.” Taking the cigarette from her lips, I throw it on the ground and crush it with my foot as I lean against the wall with her.

“You wanted to do a story on him?” I don’t have to look at her to know she’s rolling her eyes.

A black car pulls up, the window is wound down, and a man I don’t recognize sits in the driver seat.

Ariel pushes off the wall, walks to the car, and before she gets in she turns back to me. “You’re still an asshole, Falcon.” She smiles as she gets in, her legs tanned to perfection.

“And you still want me,” I call out.

She shakes her head and leans over to kiss the man sitting next to her, when she looks back to me her lipstick is smudged and she’s smiling.

“Why would I want an asshole and a manwhore when I can have someone who isn’t those things?” She pulls her belt around her and snaps it closed.

I lean down so I can see her face clearly. “Because you know I will be the best fuck of your life.”

She laughs as the car drives off. I shake my head and stand up.

That fucking woman.  
I hate her.  
But I want to fuck her.  
But I hate her.  
Especially her smart ass mouth.  
Which should be wrapped around my cock.  
Fuck!

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