

*Who are you?
After no harm*

The Puck Secret

A FAIRFIELD J. NOVEL

G.N. WRIGHT

THE PUCK SECRET

A FAIRFIELD U NOVEL

G.N. WRIGHT

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For all my Booktok Babes that fell in love with Hockey

A LITTLE NOTE FROM ME TO YOU

Welcome to the world of G.N. Wright!

If you are new to me then thank you so much for taking a chance on one of my books. I hope you enjoy & stay awhile!

If you are already a reader of mine then thank you so much for coming back - I hope you enjoy my venture into the lighter (but still spicy) side of romance as we move from black to grey!

The Puck Secret is the first book in the Fairfield U Series.

It is a standalone and can be read and enjoyed alone.

Please note this book contains explicit sexual scenes, alcohol, drug, and medication use, suicide ideation, anxiety and panic attacks, parental affair, parental abandonment, parental illness (cancer), and forced marriage (not with MMC). Please proceed with caution.

Oh and don't miss out of the little bonus scene at the end to get a preview of what is coming next in this world!

PLAYLIST

Cruel Summer - Taylor Swift
like that - Bea Miller
Bad at Love - Halsey
Only Angel - Harry Styles
Badass - NEFFEX
Bad Things - MGK & Camila Cabello
Lady, Touch Yourself - Nikki Idol
Middle of the Night - Loveless
I'm a Sucker for a Liar in a Red Dress - Adam Jensen
Bad Idea - Ariana Grande
11 minutes - Yungblud, Halsey, Travis Barker
Sweet Little Lies - Bulow
Dangerous State of Mind- Chri\$tian Gates\$
Tell Me How - Paramore
Temporary Bliss - The Cab
Lie - NF
Before You Go - Lewis Capaldi
There You Are - Zayn
Can't Forget You - My Darkest Days
Everything I Wanted - Billie Eilish
All Over You - The Spill Canvas
Without You - Breaking Benjamin
What's it Like - You Me At Six
It's Not Over - Daughtry

8 Letters - Why Don't We
Beautiful Way - You Me At Six
Heavenly - Broadside

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1

M A D D I E

CHAMPAGNE PROBLEMS

Do you ever wonder what it would be like to just die? To just end your life and not have to endure the fallout of anything anymore? There would be no more hiding under your covers every morning to prolong another day, no more smiling until your face hurts while you pretend to be perfect, and no more pressure weighing down on your chest until you feel like you might explode. You would just be free.

Now it's not like I'm sitting here with a razor to my wrist ready to meet my maker or anything, but sometimes I wonder if life would be easier if I just didn't live anymore. If I just disappeared and everyone forgot the name Madeline Peters ever existed.

That feeling is never more prominent than when I am forced to endure one of my father's stupid political parties, and pretend like we are a perfect, happy family. It's all champagne, fake smiles, and bullshit, and I'm not being dramatic when I say I'd rather die than be here. To make matters worse, they gave my brother Josh a free pass tonight. He's their golden boy, the talented and well-known hockey player who can do no wrong. So, not only am I here alone, I am also missing out on the game he is playing right now because of

patriarchal sexism and parental favoritism. I don't think I can roll my eyes any harder, especially not when I am forcing a smile so hard that my cheeks hurt.

Looking in from the outside, everything in my life is perfect. My parents are high school sweethearts that fell in love in their senior year. They went to college together, and then got married, and were blessed with my brother and I. *Their words, not mine.* Then my dad had a successful career in politics that eventually led him to being the Mayor of Fairfield. My mom is the perfect, charitable housewife, smiling all pretty on his arm. They have stayed by one another's side through everything, and that includes him fucking his secretary behind my mother's back a few years ago. An embellishment that is now conveniently swept under our immaculate rug and never to be discussed again.

Watching them now you'd never know that my mother spent months crying in their bedroom afterwards, to the point where she barely even left the house. Then one day everything was just back to normal, and she acted like we didn't all see the little pill she popped every day just to keep her smile intact. I'm no stranger to meds myself, I take them daily to curb my anxiety, but I never understood why she never just left him.

Instead, I watch as she tosses back her golden head of hair, so similar to my own, and laughs that high-pitched fake laugh that my father insists he fell in love with first. No doubt he is telling one of his perfected stories of their great love, while everyone pretends the scandal of his affair is completely forgotten, but I know they all remember, just like I do.

I snort at their bullshit production of marriage to the public, grabbing another glass of champagne from a passing tray and tossing it back. I do it just in time to see my father do his signature dip down to graze his lips against my mother's cheek. It makes for a lovely show, but that's all it is, a show. A frozen image of utter fabrication to showcase to everyone around us how we are better than them.

Spoiler alert - we're not.

We are buried under so many secrets and lies that I can't remember what it feels like to not be drowning anymore. Everyday is a constant battle against the current to remain upright and on top. One flaw, one mistake, and it will all come tumbling down. My dad still thinks his blue blood, weighty check-book, and mayoral status can buy his way out of anything, and he hasn't been proven wrong yet. It makes me sick, but still I smile and pretend, and pray

that one day I can escape the same fate as theirs.

That impending fate catches my attention in the corner of my eye, as I watch my newly appointed boyfriend Bradley Thorne look around the party to ensure no one is watching him, before he sneaks off around the side of the house with one of the event's staff members. If I wasn't already internally rolling my eyes, I would do it again. *Stupid, fucking Brad*. Why are men always more trouble than sense? No wonder my father thought he was the perfect choice for me.

I don't know why I follow him, I know what I'm going to see, but still I slowly stalk around the edge of the party until I reach the quiet path he just disappeared down, grabbing an open bottle of champagne from a table as I pass. I swallow some of the overpriced bubbles into my mouth as I guide myself down the unlit trail, and wonder if making a scene is even worth it. It's not like I give a shit about what he does, *or* who he fucks.

Their muffled groans of half-assed pleasure greet me first, and when I see Brad's bare white ass thrusting in the bushes I almost laugh. *God what a fucking asshole*. Seriously, fucking the help behind my back is low, even for the likes of him. He is your typical 'comes from money' type, born with a silver spoon in his mouth, a stick up his ass, and a sense of superiority that can only come from everyone bowing down to his every whim.

I should have listened to my brother Josh, he's always right, even when I don't want him to be. He warned me about Brad and his reputation, but Josh didn't understand that I only allowed his capture of me because I knew it was what my parents wanted. They kept bringing him around, and talking about how we run in the same social circles and have the same life goals, to the point where I was almost drowning in their expectations. It's laughable that they think they know what my life goals are when they barely pay me any attention in the first place, but I know the role I am forced to play.

When Brad finally asked me on a date I only accepted to be polite, and to keep my parents happy. Now it's two months later and I am stuck in a cycle I don't know how to break. It's all dinner parties and coffee dates with the only purpose being for us to be seen together. I haven't touched him beyond a swift kiss, which is probably why he is here now fulfilling his needs with the staff, and god knows who else he can get his hands on. Not that I care, if his attention is elsewhere then it prevents it from being on me, and that suits me just fine.

Josh doesn't get it because he doesn't have to. Like I said, he's the golden

boy, the talented hockey player, and most importantly a male. He will never understand the pressures and expectations of being a female in this family, this society, this world. So, I smile and listen to my parents' demands, thinking it will help me, but now look where that has got me. I scoff a laugh to myself as I tip back more of the ridiculously expensive bottle of champagne into my willing mouth. The bubbles exploding on the back of my tongue, just the way I like. Even the fucking champagne is perfect.

Why couldn't he just keep his dick in his fucking pants?

It's not that I care, but really how hard is it to offer someone basic respect? Not able to bear another second of this facade, I turn without even making a sound and head inside to try and make my escape. I have shown my face enough for tonight. I cut through crowds of people left and right until I make it through the back patio doors, across the kitchen, and to the edge of the long, wide hallway. Escape is just within my grasp and the weight from my chest is finally starting to lift.

"Madeline, a word," my father's shrill command cuts through me, stopping me in my tracks, and when I turn towards him he nods his head towards his office.

I groan inwardly, but plaster another fake smile on my face like I'm not having the worst night of my fucking life, and obediently follow after him.

My father's office is a reflection of him: clean, cold, archaic, it suits him. He isn't a bad father, just an old fashioned one. I have to fight him at every turn, and with Josh around most of the time to have my back it makes things easier, but as the door slams closed behind me I can't help but notice how alone we are. He heads to stand behind his desk and gestures for me to take a seat in front of him, like this is nothing more than a business meeting. *Which to him, it is.* Again, I follow his silent orders and sit down and wait. He takes his time in pouring himself a whiskey, before he eventually takes a seat and looks directly at me.

"I've worked hard to get our family where we are, Madeline, for you, your brother, your mom. Everything I do is to keep our family at the top." It's a speech I've heard a thousand times before, but still I smile and nod along as he continues. "But sometimes what I do isn't enough. Sometimes I need to lean on other people, to expand our business and open the door to new opportunities." He is starting to lose me slightly, but my practiced smile remains intact. "I guess I am just wondering how far is too far."

That last bit is said more to himself than me, but I lean forward and reach

my hand across his desk to place it on top of his. A loving gesture not usually shared between us. “Just trust your gut, Dad.” I repeat the words that Josh always says to me, and my dad smiles, but it doesn’t quite touch his eyes.

“You’ve been spending too much time with your brother,” he sighs, before pulling his hand from under mine, standing, and turning towards the window as he adds in a detached tone, “At Christmas we will announce your engagement to Bradley Thorne.”

I jolt back as if I have been slapped in the face, as I replay his words again in my head. Surely I must have misheard him? “I’m sorry, what?” I manage to stutter out in disbelief, he can’t be serious. “You want me to get engaged to Brad, the guy I just caught fucking a waitress in a bush?” My voice raises in decibels, and my father flinches at my curse and crass statement, no doubt internally scolding me for it, but he doesn’t seem to match my outrage.

His face remains impassive as he focuses his stare back on me. “His father is one of the most successful business tycoons in the state, and his son is set to take over one day. He needs a good woman on his arm.”

“So take him to the damn cattle market and let him have his pick,” I interrupt, outrage fueling my tongue as I push out of my chair. “You can’t for one-second think that I would actually agree to this, did you miss the part where I said I just caught him fucking someone else?”

My father lets out an annoyed huff as he ignores me once more. “This isn’t up for negotiation, Madeline, you will get engaged to Bradley this Christmas, or I will pull your tuition from Fairfield U.”

Everything around me freezes as I absorb his threat, because that’s what it is, a threat. He is threatening to pull the one bit of freedom I have in my life, and for what? Business? I almost laugh, but nothing about this is funny, especially not as I feel tears burning at the back of my eyes. Which is laughable because I never even wanted to go to Fairfield U in the first place, I wanted to move away, explore the world, live my life, but my parents decided it wasn’t in the cards for me. I thought if I just did what they asked and got my degree then I would finally be free, but I guess I was wrong.

My options are simple, I don’t have any. My parents have warned me so many times in the past few years that there have been enough black marks against our name, and that I’m not to add to them. So now my only role is destined to be on the arm of someone just like my father. I guess you could say that Bradley Thorne is the perfect choice then, because my father couldn’t

keep his dick in his pants either.

There is nothing else I can do or say, so I don't feel any guilt or regret as I turn and storm from his office, leaving him shouting my name after me. I have to get out of here, the pressure on my chest is building again even worse than before, and I feel like the walls are closing in on me. The smile has long left my face and I need to disappear before anyone sees me. Heading back towards the throws of the party there are people lingering everywhere, and for a moment I am suspended in time as I try to decide what to do.

It's at that moment that Brad finds me, "There's my girl." I almost gag at his words, as the reminder of his bare ass and my dad's ultimatum mix together as one. Thank fuck I never slept with him.

His hand reaches out to graze against mine, and the thought of not making a scene from earlier flies out of the window as I rip myself from his grip. "Don't fucking touch me!"

He pulls back as if I maimed him, and a look of annoyance flashes across his eyes as he looks around the room at the few people close to us. "Now now, Darling, remember where we are, and what your job is."

I almost sneer, no need to ask if he is aware of the deal our fathers have struck up. He's a guy, of course he was included in it. They probably even asked him if my vacant womb for hire was good enough to bear his future brood. Fuck him, and our fathers. I shake my head as I push past him. "Go back to fucking your waitress, Brad, I'm leaving."

Abandoning him, I push through the people loitering by the door, who are quite clearly hanging around watching the show, and step out into the fresh air and take a deep inhale. Brad follows after me, and when he grabs at my arm a second time, I have to rip myself away from him once again. Only this time it sends my phone clattering to the ground, shattering it completely.

"Fucking christ," I mutter under my breath, leaning down to pick up my destroyed device. When I rise, Brad is still watching me, but I can't do this right now, I don't know if I can do this at all, so again I turn to leave.

His grip this time will most likely leave a bruise as he spins me towards him and spits through his teeth, "You better learn to behave or I'll..." he's interrupted before his full threat can land.

"Everything okay here, Miss Peters?" My bodyguard Julian asks, and I hear his footsteps moving towards us, as Brad's grip loosens instantly.

I keep my eyes on my soon to be fiancé as I respond to him. "Everything's fine, Julian, Brad was just seeing me out, I'm ready to go

home now please.” I don’t bother waiting to see if Brad disagrees, just turn on my heel and brush past Julian and head for our car.

It doesn’t take Julian long to match my pace and beat me to the door in time to open it for me, pulling the shattered phone from my hand as he does. I don’t even bother arguing with him, he has been with me long enough that I am comfortable just remaining silent. I get into the car, and when the door is slammed shut behind me I take my first real breath since leaving my father’s office.

Engaged.

I still can’t believe it, even as I flop back into the leather seats and replay the last hour in my head. I always knew my father did whatever it took to keep our family under a shiny spotlight, but I never thought he’d stoop this low. I guess I don’t know him as well as I thought I did.

The drive home calms me a little, and I appreciate Julian taking the long way down by the lake so I have some time to think. I take silent pleasure in the view as we cut through campus, go past the row of houses that all the sports teams live in, Josh included, and head towards my condo on the other side of the lake. Their house is the last of the official Campus housing and he shares one of the hockey houses with his buddies. I love that I get to live so close to him, especially given he is no doubt going to be drafted by the NHL next year, it’s our last chance to spend some quality time together.

By the time we pull up in front of the house, I spy my night shift guard Hector, waiting outside for me. My dad hired him and Julian right out of retirement from the military to watch over me. I find it ridiculous to even have guards, but they are both decent men and I find it easy to get along with them. Plus, we have an agreement that unless the outing is ‘official’ they just blend into the background of my life and stay out of my way. It works for them and it works for me, and half the time I forget they are even there.

Julian opens my door and greets Hector with a silent nod, no doubt waiting for me to disappear so he can brief him on my night. That assumption is basically proven when Hector holds out a box containing a brand new phone. If I had the energy, I would probably crack one of my usual jokes about how much they gossip, but not tonight.

Instead, I take the box wordlessly, nodding my thanks as I make my way up to the silent house. My roommate and best friend Hallie has gone to visit her parents for the weekend, and won’t be back until Sunday. We are usually quite independent of one another during the week, but after the shit show of

my night I can't help but wish she was here to vent to. When I unlock the door, I say goodnight to both men watching me and shut them and the rest of the world on the other side of it, locking it immediately. I flick on a few lights as I go, tossing my bag to the floor, and kicking off my heels as I head to the kitchen to grab a drink.

Once I have a much preferred bottle of beer in hand, I throw myself down onto the sofa and sigh in relief.

Freedom. For now at least.

A scoff leaves me before I can stop it, and I lean up to grab the brand new boxed phone that Hector gave me. I rip it out of the packaging and curse my father for having the means for the guards to just so easily replace it for me, but that doesn't stop me from turning it on and immediately navigating to a new text thread.

Balancing it in one hand as I take another deep slug from my drink, I input my best friend's number, and type out only a slightly melodramatic message before firing it off to her. Hallie is used to my theatrics by now, it's what has kept her by my side since the third grade. She will have an answer to my problems, she just has to deal with my bullshit first. Laughing to myself, I finish off the bottle in my hand and lie back on the sofa while I wait for her reply.

Everything looks better once you've talked shit with your best friend, I'm sure this will be no different.

2

NOVA

BAD BLOWJOBS

The bass of the music thrums through the walls as the warm, wet lips around my cock suck me into their willing mouth. There is probably a line forming outside the bathroom given it's the only one downstairs in the house, but right now I don't give a fuck, not until I blow my load down Brianna's throat and release some of this postgame tension. Honestly, I could have given the whole party scene a miss tonight. I'm tired from our first game of the season, but the rest of the Flyers were in the mood to party after bagging our first win. As Captain I have to make sure the team is happy, so here we are.

I fist my hand into the puck bunny's hair and thrust myself into her throat making her gag, but it's still not enough. Brianna is one of the better lays out of the usual girls, but she has too many ideals in her head to take things any further than casual. It's been a while since I have gone all the way with her because she kept getting too clingy, but I thought a blowjob from her was easier than patrolling for another girl.

Usually fucking her face is enough to clear my mind, but something about tonight just feels off, and she knows it too. Her exaggerated moans around

my shaft are proof of that. She is putting on an unnecessary performance for someone whose mouth is filled with cock, but I just keep my focus on the feel of her tongue against my shaft. Noticing my lack of enthusiasm, she presses her hands into my abs, stroking them like it might affect me and make me come faster.

Spoiler alert - it won't.

Pushing her hands off me, I rise to my full height from where I was leaning on the counter, and take over completely. Gripping both sides of her face to keep her still as I fuck her mouth hard and fast, relishing in the spit that drips from the corner of it, and the water spilling from her eyes. This, this is what I needed, a mindless release. Something to make me forget about my mom's latest diagnosis and all the other shit going on in my life. Right now, the only thing that matters is that I won my first game as Captain, and that I am about to come down a pretty girl's throat.

My cock slides along her tongue and with every moan she lets free it vibrates around my shaft. I feel that familiar tingle at the base of my spine and my dick begins to throb. Several more thrusts later and my cock explodes in her mouth, unleashing my cum down her throat. *Fucking finally.*

Stepping back as soon as I am finished, I let my cock fall from her mouth and tuck myself away, ignoring her completely as she struggles to keep my load in her mouth and scramble to her feet. I turn to wash my hands in the sink, internally rolling my eyes at how greasy they are from all the product in her hair. I pray she just leaves without another word, but just as I finish scrubbing them, I feel her arms curl around my waist. I huff, taking a deep breath to not lose my temper at her. She knows the rules, no touching once I'm done. She knows how much I hate it, but still every single time she tries. Pushing her off me for the second time tonight, I step away from her and move to dry my hands.

"Really, Nova? Are we still doing this? You can fuck my mouth but I can't touch you?" Her tone is whiny and annoying, but after two years of her hanging around me and the team I am more than used to it.

"You know the rules, B," I remind her with a shrug, which does nothing but piss her off more.

"Seriously?" she asks, staring pointedly at me, and when I still don't say anything she scoffs and turns to leave. "God, you're such a fucking asshole, Nova!" I don't bother reminding her that she is already fully aware of that fact, and yet still chooses to suck my cock, I'm not that much of an asshole.

Okay, maybe I am, but I choose silence over anything else, as she moves towards the door and rips it open revealing Josh fucking Peters. She is too pissed off at me to care about his presence, and just pushes past him completely and disappears back to the party.

My teammate turns to me and sneers, "You know you don't have to fuck all the puck bunnies right?" I'd probably find his disgust ironic and funny since he has also fucked Brianna here and there, but there is no common ground I will ever find between me and the team's fucking golden boy.

I paint my usual sarcastic smile on my face as I approach him and reply, "Well I didn't see your sister anywhere tonight, Peters, so I had to settle." It's a well known fact that Josh declared a no touching rule on his little sister the second she arrived here, which is hilarious to me because I don't think anyone could get close to Princess Peters with that stick so far up her pampered ass.

"Watch your fucking mouth when you talk about her," he warns, and I laugh, enjoying getting a rise out of the usually cool and collected Josh Peters.

"Where is Princess Peters tonight, Joshy?" I move towards him and take pleasure in towering over him as much as I do. The hatred between us is real and always will be, but it's been turned up a notch since he was overlooked as Captain and it went to me. I guess daddy's check book can't buy him everything.

He eyes me with pure contempt as he spits, "None of your goddamn business!"

A huffed laugh leaves me as I shake my head, and decide to play on this shit between us. "Hmmm, let me guess." I make a show of tapping my chin as if I am really thinking about it. "I bet she's at that big business party your daddy is throwing right? What's the fundraiser for this time? New wheels for his fucking Rolls?"

"Fuck off, Darkmore!"

Knowing I have more than hit my target with him, I smile as I purr, "With pleasure." I push past him with more force than necessary, but as usual the golden boy knows better than to fuck with me. In fact, the only time he ever even says shit back to me is if it concerns his sister, and I only do that to piss him off.

There is no love lost between the Peters family and mine, not since the esteemed and pompous Mayor Hugo Peters decided to fuck his secretary on

the side, which just so happened to be my mom. I was around enough to see the bullshit fake love he fed her, from the flowers and love notes, to the secret weekends away. My mom fell for him hard and fast, worshipping the ground he fucking walked on, especially considering my dad was a piece of shit that left her when I was a baby, so he could continue his dream of going pro.

He has since moved on and married some twenty-five-year old, while my mom was left up to her eyeballs in debt with a kid to raise. My dad tries to call me every now and then to talk about hockey since his own career has washed up, but I've no interest in building a relationship with him. It was bad enough watching my mom struggle after he left, I don't need to add bringing him around again to her life. I've helped her where I can since I have been old enough, and we would have been fine if Hugo Peters kept his fucking hands to himself.

When everything blew up in the Mayor's face he made a choice to stay with his wife, leaving my mom jobless, and unable to afford the rent on our house. That left us sharing a one bedroom apartment until I graduated high school and got my scholarship to FU. My mom was alone and unhappy, stuck in a dead end diner job, while he rode off into the sunset with his wife by his side, and his public image barely tarnished. It's amazing what those green bills can do for people. It's been a few years since all that happened, but you don't forget that shit easily. Especially when his kids are just as stuck up and conceited as him, and in my face all the time as a reminder.

I'm stuck sharing not just a college but a team with Josh fucking Peters, and even though Coach tries not to sub us onto the ice at the same time, knowing our history, it's still hard to put up with him and his shit. I'm just lucky his sister isn't around as much as he is. The two of them together are like carbon copies of their parents, with their fake smiles and stuck-up attitudes. They act like life is perfect and there are no problems in the world, when really they just hide behind their daddy's money, nothing ever hitting them. It's fucking bullshit.

Shaking off the memories of the past and the Peters family, I push through the writhing bodies in the living room until I make it to the kitchen, and find my best friend and teammate, Archer Gray. He is throwing daggers at everyone in his vicinity, and I almost smile when I see him. He's as dark and fucked-up as I am, and has been by my side since we both started here our freshman year. He plays on the same line as I do and we make a wicked team out on the ice, and an even better one off it, especially with the ladies.

When he spies my sour expression he cocks a brow at me. “Done so soon, Darkmore? I thought you had more stamina than that.” He probably knows me better than anyone in this place, and he’s the only one who knows about my mom. It’s rare to find good and honest people these days, but despite his reputation, Archer Gray is one of the best.

“Fuck off, Gray, and pass me a beer, trust me I need it.” The bastard just chuckles, but pulls a cold one from the ice bucket by the island and tosses it my way.

Moving to stand beside him, I join him in surveying the rest of the party. Our spot in the open plan kitchen gives us a perfect view of all of the living room, and the double patio doors that lead out onto the back deck. It’s pretty packed in here tonight considering this was a last minute, post-game invite, but I’m not surprised. Our house always seems to be the main spot for when there is a team party, despite there being multiple other hockey houses on our row.

My phone vibrates in my back pocket, but I’m in no rush to check it. I know my mom is working her shift at the diner tonight, plus I already spoke to her after the game so it won’t be her. Anyone else can wait. I take a few sips of beer, watching everyone lose themselves in the music and alcohol pumping through them, and finally I feel myself relax for the first time since I stepped off the ice earlier.

Hockey is in my blood, whether I like admitting that or not, and I never feel more at peace than when I step out onto that frosted rink with a puck at my feet. When Coach called me into his office a couple of weeks ago and handed me that captain patch, I swear I felt my eyes burn. I had to swallow down the lump in my throat as he shook my hand and told me I earned it. It was the proof I needed to know how good I am, to know that despite people like Josh Peters and his fucking money, I can still make something of myself.

I finish off the rest of my beer and when I spy Brianna giving me the stink eye from across the room with her friends, I know it’s time to call it a night. Tossing my bottle into the recycling bin in the corner, I pat Archer on the shoulder and bid him a goodnight.

“I’m off to bed,” I say, and he nods with a smirk, having already spied Brianna himself. He has been there too, so he knows exactly what she can get like, and tonight, or maybe even just this year, I can’t be bothered dealing with it. She isn’t that good a lay, and I need to keep my head in the game.

His stare flicks from her to me before he responds, “How about some real

cardio in the morning?”

His question makes me smile, because we pretty much go for a run together every single morning before we hit the gym, and that’s usually before classes even start. Sometimes a few other members of the team tag along if they can drag their asses out of bed, but most of the time it’s just the two of us. I follow his stare back to Brianna, but she’s now talking to our other teammate Daemon Forbes, and I notice Archer’s frown, but I don’t bother asking him what’s up. If he wanted to tell me he would.

“Sure man, sounds good.” I give him a nod before I retreat towards the stairs and make my way to my room, ignoring the multiple couples making out along the way.

When I get there, I make sure to lock my door behind me, before I reach for the back of my shirt and pull it off from over my head. Moving towards my bed, I empty my pockets onto my nightstand before unbuckling my jeans and switching them out for shorts, before I lie down. As soon as my back hits my headboard, my phone lights up and I am reminded of the message I ignored earlier. Huffing at whoever it is, I reach over and grab it, opening a new thread from a number I don’t recognise.

Unknown: Do you ever feel so lonely and unseen that you feel like you might die?

Damn, that’s a can of worms no one should ever open, and I wonder what kind of person sent such a message. Are they as fucked up in the head as I feel? Unlikely, I doubt anyone is that messed up. I tap out a quick response and then toss my phone back to the bed, leaning back to close my eyes.

Usually after a game I spend this time going over my plays in my head, working out what I could have done better, and thinking of ways to improve my shot at being drafted by the NHL. It’s part of my game day ritual, but just as with the theme of tonight, it doesn’t seem to be working, and worse, my thoughts stray back to the question in the text and how accurate their words are.

My name is well known across campus, and people from all across town come to my games to see me play, but none of them really know me, see who I am without my stick. Even in an arena full of people I know what it’s like to feel completely nothing, to feel as if not a single person cares about who I am when I rip that number nineteen jersey off my back. I think about all the games, all the fans, all the bunnies, and worse, all my fucking problems, and I

wonder if the stranger is right. Can you feel so lonely and unseen that you feel like you might die?

3

MADDIE

SWIFT STALKERS

I'm mildly intoxicated by the time my phone vibrates on the table with a reply, and I laugh at whatever Hallie will have responded before I even move to pick it up. My best friend is the moon to my sun. She has been there for every meltdown I've ever had, every boy I've ever kissed, and every fight with my parents. I know she can talk me back from almost any ledge, but I'm honestly not sure how even she will be able to come up with a solution for my current predicament.

Sighing loudly, as I continue to sing along to Taylor Swift like every other basic bitch out there, I blindly reach for my phone to read her message. When I swipe up on the home screen I make a mental note to restore my phone from backup in the morning, because I still don't have her number saved, but when I open her message I frown.

Unknown: That's a little grim. Who is this? I think you have the wrong number.

I scoff, wrong number my ass, she should know it's me, but when I read

back over the number I realize whoever sent the message is right. That isn't Hallie's number, I put two of the digits the wrong way around and sent the message to a total stranger. *Fuck.*

Pushing up into a seated position I start to panic. I just sent my innermost secret thoughts and manic meltdown to a complete stranger, hell they could be a serial killer for all I know. They could be watching me right now and waiting for an in so they can sneak into my house and murder me. Wait, no, that's ridiculous, I have just been listening to too many murder podcasts and I'm letting my drunken mind run away with itself. It's fine, this is fine. It's just a simple case of a wrong number.

I quickly type out a reply and hit send.

Maddie: OMG! I'm sorry, you're right, wrong number!

And because I am a people pleaser and can't help but be riddled with panic and anxiety, I quickly fire off another.

Maddie: Sorry again! Enjoy your night.

I watch the text bubbles pop up and disappear a few times before they stop completely, and I breathe a sigh of relief. See, totally fine. I place my phone back on the table and grab another drink from the kitchen, starting my personal Swifty karaoke session all over again, as I head back to the sofa. When I see the phone light up again I freeze. *They responded.*

Telling myself it's still fine, I get comfy back on the sofa with my phone and drink, and open the message expecting just a simple 'no worries' or 'not a problem', but the words lift from the phone as if they are being spoken directly into my soul.

Unknown: Some days I feel so lonely that even in a crowd of people I feel like nobody truly knows me

I know that feeling, it's how I feel pretty much every second of every day. Yes, I'm surrounded by people constantly, but how many of them really know me? The real me, and not just the one I am forced to portray because of my family name. This person might be a stranger, but it's like they understand me better than any person I do know. So, I ask them the question I ask myself daily.

Maddie: Are you worth truly knowing?

When I hit send I get a sinking feeling in my chest, because I know they probably won't respond and this little moment of shared understanding will pass, but then my phone lights up in my hand and I almost laugh out loud at the response.

Unknown: Definitely not

The smile on my face is so genuine I doubt my father would even recognize it, just like the honesty this stranger just shared. It's something I can admire.

Maddie: At least you're honest, that's a rare trait these days

Thoughts about my cheating father and my now cheating future fiancé enter my mind and I shake my head. If only they knew what honesty was. When the phone lights up again, I smile.

Unknown: Ain't that the truth. Some people wouldn't know honesty if it bit them in the ass!

I think I like this stranger. They are dark and twisty just like the me underneath the mask, and I want them to know how much I appreciate their candor right now.

Maddie: Have you got room for another truth?

It's probably ridiculous to want to share secrets with someone I don't even know, but sometimes that's easier than the people who think they know us most, right? Their reply only cements that feeling.

Unknown: For you Grim? Sure, why not.

I smile at the nickname they have given me. It suits me, not that anyone other than them would know that. I hope they know how true my next message to them really is.

Maddie: I just smiled my first real smile in weeks because of you, so thank you

They will probably find that a weird thing to say, and might not even respond, but I just feel like they had to know that in a world full of gray, today they added a little bit of color.

When my phone lights up again, I feel a warm feeling spread through me. At least someone is listening to me today.

Unknown: Who are you?

I'm not surprised by their question, it is kind of weird to talk to someone without so much as exchanging names, but I kind of like the anonymity of it all.

Maddie: Just a lonely girl who should check numbers twice before I text them

A little bit of an insight to who I am, that will hopefully placate them enough until our interaction ends.

Unknown: A girl huh? Are you hot?

I bark a laugh before I can stop myself, I guess I'm talking to a boy, because I doubt a girl would say that. Not unless they play for the same team, which I'm not sure I can say is my thing, but I'd never say never. I'll try anything once. I fire off another message and take another sip of my drink.

Maddie: I guess I don't need to ask if you're a guy 😏 That was such a dude's response!

When his response comes through rapidly, my cheeks hurt from the smiling, my body not entirely used to the feeling.

Unknown: You're definitely hot! I can tell 💧

Texting now I know he's a guy kind of feels like flirting. It's light and playful, and definitely improves the mood of my shitty night. I feel daring as I tap out another message, this whole thing so unlike me, but it seems after my shit show of a night, I can't help myself.

Maddie: And you're a charmer!

Bradley hasn't charmed me once in the couple of months we have been

forced to date, so it's nice to know that somewhere, out in the world, there are guys who can make a girl smile. I quickly save his number under a new contact as another message pops up.

The Lonely Charm: What's your name?

It would be easy to respond with an answer, and if this guy lives in town, it wouldn't be hard for him to know who I am, but enough people already know who I am. Or who they think I am. I have no interest in adding another person to that list.

Maddie: No names, just conversation.

This is just for tonight after all, just one wrong number conversation and then we will go back to living our separate, unknown lives tomorrow.

The Lonely Charm: A little mystery, I like that in a girl. How about just your age then?

Another laugh leaves me because he's right, when I got his message my first thought was serial killer. Now I could be here flirting with someone who could be anywhere between twelve and ninety.

Maddie: I just turned 20 a few weeks ago, what about you?

I start immediately praying that I haven't been sharing my secrets with someone who isn't even old enough to drive, and I practically break my finger swiping open the next message in the thread.

The Lonely Charm: How convenient Grim, I'm also 20, nearly 21 😏

I roll my eyes at his playfulness, but I can't deny the relief I feel when he confirms his age. Maybe he's lying, maybe it's a coincidence, but I don't see why he wouldn't be honest, that's what this whole conversation is about.

Maddie: And a charmer like you wouldn't lie to me right?

Regret churns in my stomach when I hit send on that question, but I guess it's instilled in me to believe the worst in people. That way they can't let you down. His response is instant.

The Lonely Charm: Never ever Grim! I promise

I stare at the words for longer than necessary, but I can't remember a time when someone has just offered me such a simple promise. My own father can't even be honest with me, but some stranger I don't even know offers it without pause, it leaves a sick taste in my mouth.

Maddie: You shouldn't make promises you can't keep

My fingers hover over the send button for a little while, and by the time I hit it a full ten minutes have passed. I watch my phone closely, waiting for it to light up, but it doesn't, and when it plunges itself back into darkness, I can't help but feel lonely and empty all over again.

Just like every other night.

#4

NOVA

PRINCESS PETERS

A pounding on my door startles me awake, and I lift my head half way off my pillow, squinting at the light pouring into my window. Fuck, I don't even remember falling asleep last night. The clock on my nightstand reads 6.07am, and I flop my head back down and groan. I am usually up and ready to tackle another day of working towards my goal, but right now my head feels like a truck ran over it.

"Don't make me break down the door, Darkmore!" Archer's muffled voice grunts from the other side, his fist pounding against the wood for a second time. It can't possibly be time for our morning run already, I feel like I just closed my eyes. But when he pounds a third time, I know I have to get up before the fucker breaks down the door. *It wouldn't be the first time.*

"Alright, alright, keep your dick in your pants, I'm coming!" I roll onto my back and feel my phone dig into my side. I must have left it there when I fell asleep.

When I open it, it's still on the text thread with the mystery girl from last night. What a weird interaction that was, but still I smile as I save her number under the name 'Grim' and close it out to fire off a message to my mom.

Once that's done I jump out of bed and grab some workout clothes, before heading into the bathroom to brush my teeth.

Five minutes later I'm dressed and downstairs, gratefully accepting my usual protein shake from Archer. He's holding his own ice cold shake against his temples, with his eyes closed as if in pain.

"You okay over there, Gray?" He looks worse than I feel, and I didn't even drink that much, so I study him closely as I wait for his response.

There's a few seconds of silence before he sighs and looks at me. "I had a foursome with Brianna, Georgia, and Reign last night," he complains, and I choke on a sip of my shake as it slides down my throat. "I literally just had to throw the girls out."

Swallowing down the shake as I envision how that worked out between him and our teammate Alexander Reign, and the only words I can find to reply are, "Ah, I see." I smirk, and he flips me off, closing his eyes again and shaking his head.

To any red-blooded straight male that would sound like the perfect night. Hooking up with two sexy puck bunnies desperate for hockey dick, but those men don't know Brianna and Georgia. Both of them are stage five clingers who have been trying to lock down a pawn since freshman year. How they managed to get in the pants of two of my teammates at the same time, I'll never know.

Brianna probably had it in her head that it would piss me off if she got with them, after having my dick in her mouth, but I just feel sorry for the poor fuckers. They will hound the two of them for weeks after this and he knows it. I've fucked both girls, multiple times, most of the team have, but I have been keeping my distance since the start of summer on purpose. Last night was just a temporary lapse in judgment where I needed to blow off some steam, it won't happen again.

Letting out another groan, Archer opens his eyes and downs the rest of his shake. "Let's just go before I throw up."

I shake my head, following after him as he leaves the kitchen. "I'm sure you enjoyed yourself, buddy," I muse, patting him on the back. "Foursomes are always fun."

He cuts me a scathing look, "Don't mess with me today, Nova, not when I had the devil on my dick last night, I need a calm and serene morning to try and claw my way back." I laugh as he storms away from me, before following after him and heading out the door.

Running with him is fun and something we started pretty much as soon as we met. He kept running the same route as me before I eventually took pity on the fucker and invited him along. We keep pace with one another easily, and he's happy to put on his headphones and be in the zone just like I am. It makes him the perfect workout buddy.

I try to clear my mind when we set off, letting my eyes scan our surroundings as I keep my breathing in check. Fairfield is one of those picturesque towns where you just presume everything is perfect because of how nice it is. Yet no one ever bothers looking beneath the surface and seeing any real problems. Most people love it here, but I for one can't wait to escape it.

We run our usual route, which takes us around the perimeter of the main campus and across the middle of town towards the lake. As always, we stop there for a couple of minutes to catch our breath and stretch out our muscles quickly, and I don't know why but I find myself looking out across the empty water, and thinking of the mystery girl from last night. As weird as the interaction was I can't deny it didn't bring a smile to my face. Just the honesty and simple conversation was such a change from what I'm used to, especially from women.

With her in my mind, I can't help myself, I take my phone out and snap a picture of the view and fire it off to her with a message. She probably won't respond, she was most likely just being polite last night, just like I was, but there is this feeling in my gut that she needs to believe that not all the world is terrible. Hell, maybe I need to believe that too, but for whatever reason I feel better after sending the message.

I notice Archer watching me with wonder in his eyes, but I don't give anything away. We are close friends, I tell him almost everything, but some things are just for me, and this feels like one of them. He knows if he asked I would tell him, just like he would me, but he also respects me enough not to ask. Putting my phone back in my pocket, I nod to say I am ready and off we go on the rest of our run.

By the time we make it back to the house it's almost time for practice. I rush to my room to grab my training bag and then head out towards the gym with the rest of the house. Coach Locke is already there when we arrive, shouting orders to some of the new starters, as I make my way into the changing rooms to suit up. A few of the other guys are still hanging around getting changed and most of them greet me with a smile.

Alexander Reign is another one of my roommates, along with Jacob Harper, and Archer, all of them my housemates. Then you have Daemon Forbes, Levi Jones, Landon Cooper, and of course Josh Peters who I ignore completely. We've played on the same team for a couple of years now and we are both more than comfortable in ignoring each other unless necessary. He knows what he did, or at least what his father did, and neither of us have any interest in trying to work things out.

It was just sheer bad luck that the only scholarship I was eligible for was for Fairfield University, where I knew the Mayor was forcing both his children to go. I would have loved to have left town and never thought about them again, but that would have meant leaving my mom too. It's not the ideal college situation, but I make it work.

The team all take our time getting into our gear before we head out onto the ice to warm up. It's Saturday morning so practice is usually pretty brutal, but today Coach decides we need to go over last night's plays that didn't work in our favor. Doesn't matter that we won and that our score was almost double the other team's, he expects nothing short of perfection.

He splits us up and we play them against each other until we are getting them right, or until Coach yells at us enough, and then we switch up positions and start again. By the time practice is coming to an end I am sweating through my base layer and desperate to hit the showers. Most of the other guys skate off the ice first and head to clean up, but I stay behind and practice a few more trick shots, and much to my dismay, by the time I am done, it's only Peters and I left on the ice.

I plan to stay longer, just on principle, and maybe a little to piss him off, but I decide just to fuck with him instead as I skate towards the sides. "You should stay a little longer, Joshy, you could do with the practice."

His scoffed laugh tells me I hit my intended target with him. "Oh yeah? Is that an order Captain?" he spits the word captain like it's dirty, but we both know it's not. It's a title he coveted for two years and it's safe to say everyone was shocked, him and I included, when it was passed to me instead of him.

He can say that as a taunt as much as he wants though, but I still know it kills him inside. "It's whatever you want it to be, 22." I toss his jersey number at his feet, as I reach the sides and notice we are no longer alone.

I spy Madeline Peters waiting for her brother in the stands, looking as prim and proper as always, and as usual acting like I don't exist. It's not out

of the ordinary for her to be here. She tries to make it to at least one practice a month, and never misses a game, except for last night that is. She is everything you would expect from an adulterous Mayor's daughter, aquamarine blue eyes, golden blond hair, expensive preppy wardrobe, and not forgetting her satanic personality. The ultimate 'daddy's little princess' if you ever saw one. When we lock eyes she looks me up and down with contempt, and I swear she physically recoils from me.

Plastering a smile as fake as her on my face, I step off the ice towards where she is seated. "Oh look it's the other half of the Mayor's wonder duo," I spit with a smirk, knowing how much they both hate being cast in their father's shadow. It's a cheap and easy shot, and not one to waste an opportunity to piss Josh off, I also loudly add, "Looking good today, Princess Peters."

Her lips curl as I address her and I watch as she rises and dusts off her clothes, as if just being in my presence makes her feel dirty. "Wish I could say the same, Darkmore, but you know I don't like to lie." She delivers her words with the same sickly sweet smile I see plastered across the press, and I mildly wonder if she even knows how to really smile, and I don't mean this bullshit one she has perfected. She keeps her eyes on mine as she stalks down the stands towards me.

Shaking off those thoughts, I grin, leaning in close to her as I hear her brother skate towards us. "Nah, that's just your daddy's trait, right?" I make a point of looking her up and down, my height now towering over her as our eyes meet again. "Let me know when you get tired of being his perfect little princess, I'm sure I could lend a hand in tarnishing his good name." I ensure my words have a sarcastic drawl to them as I pull back and add with a wink, "Or a stick."

There is about two-seconds of shock before she takes a full step away from me, as Josh finally makes his way off the ice, but before her brother can jump in and fight her battle she smiles again. "God, that was desperate, even for you." She returns my look up and down before she laughs. "Do those puck bunnies actually fall for that bullshit?"

It's the first time I have ever heard her curse, and despite her attempt at an insult I chuckle, because breaking her cool is almost as easy as her brother's. Speaking of which, Josh pushes past me to stand next to her, eyeing me as he asks, "Everything okay, Maddie?"

Her focus is still on me, but his words break the bubble as she turns to

look at him, and it's only then I see that real smile she was hiding before. "Everything's good, just wanted to see if you fancied going for lunch?" the she-devil asks, and I know he is going to agree before he even opens his mouth. It's no secret that his one weak spot is his little sister.

"Sure, let me just shower and get changed first." I feel his eyes glaring at me, but I keep my focus on his sister just to fuck with him even further. "You coming, Darkmore?"

I lick my lips as I shrug. "I don't know, ask your sister." A blush immediately creeps up her neck and I crack my own, loosening the muscles there as I enjoy torturing them both.

"Nova, I swear to god," Josh starts, taking a step back towards me, but I cut him off with a glare.

"Relax, Peters." I roll my eyes dramatically. "You know your daddy's cum spawn isn't my type anyway." Her shocked gasp and his curse is the last thing I hear as I stalk away from them and leave them both behind.

I hear a scuffle before Maddie mutters under her breath, "Leave it, Josh, he's an asshole."

The smile on my face widens, until I reach my locker and check my phone, seeing no reply from the new mystery girl or my mother, and suddenly it disappears. I head to the showers no longer feeling the high from earlier, and just wanting to wash this morning off and try and enjoy the rest of my day.

5

M A D D I E

TONSIL TACOS

Nova Darkmore is an asshole. I swear there is a special place in hell for people like him. That cocky and arrogant sort of prick who thinks he is god's gift to women, yet has the personality of a damn goldfish. I honestly don't understand what half of Fairfield U's female population sees in him. I mean, sure he's attractive with all that dark inky, black hair and broody green eyes, and of course he towers over me at around 6 ft 3, and is ridiculously cut from playing hockey, but did you miss the part where I said he was an asshole?

I stare after him until he disappears, and then I turn back to Josh and force my face back into a smile. "So lunch?"

Josh continues to stare at the now empty door that leads into the locker room until he sighs, "Yeah, that would be great, Mads, just give me ten minutes." He doesn't wait for me to respond, just rushes off into the changing rooms and I head outside to bring my car around front.

When I pull up I notice a new message I had missed earlier because my battery was dead, after I forgot to plug in my new phone last night. I quickly rectified that when I left the house this morning, putting it on charge in my

car, and now the backup is finished I notice the unread text.
I can't keep the surprise off my face when I unlock it and read.

The Lonely Charm: Maybe we aren't lonely.

The Lonely Charm: Maybe we are just alone and peaceful

Image attached

The words give me something to think about, but it's the image that captures my immediate attention. It's a picture of a lake, but not just any lake, it's a lake I recognize almost instantly. It's the lake that runs right by the back of my house. I take a walk along it almost every night. Butterflies start to swirl through my stomach that I now know this wonderful stranger lives in Fairfield. Is it fate?

No, wait, maybe it really is a stalker?

No, Maddie, we are not being neurotic today, I tell myself, trying my best to calm my anxiety, but it doesn't seem to work. Did I remember to take my meds this morning? I read the message again, and despite my worries I can't help but take comfort in his words. Do I feel lonely? I don't know. I like spending time alone, I love Josh and Hallie, and most of the time my parents, but there is nothing I enjoy more than being able to kick my feet up and relax with a good murder documentary. But so does every other girl, that doesn't make me special, it doesn't make me lonely. It could mean I have a stalker though.

I quickly fire off a reply.

Maddie: Are you a stalker as well as a charmer?

The message changes to read almost instantly, as if he was waiting for my response, which doesn't do my stalker theory any favors, but still I smile in anticipation when the little typing bubbles appear.

The Lonely Charm: I accept the role as charmer, but I have yet to make it to stalker territory. Care to elaborate?

His response makes me smile more than it should, and I bite my lip as I look around the lot to see if my brother is coming yet. No luck, the only person I spy is Nova, head buried in his phone with a smile. I bet he's never been lonely a day in his life, he's probably texting one of those puck bunnies of his right now. Rolling my eyes I focus back on my text message and tap

out another response.

Maddie: That picture you sent is of Lake Spring, it runs right by my house.

Again he reads it almost as soon as it's sent, and straight away bubbles appear and disappear a few times, before a message finally comes through.

The Lonely Charm: Interesting, so that must mean you go to FU then?

The question about school throws me a little, but before I can respond my passenger side door opens and Josh climbs inside. "So where are we going?" He heaves his bag into the back seat with a huff, and then looks at me expectantly.

I know how exhausted he is after games and practice, so I focus on him with a smile. "Tacos on fifth?" I ask, suggesting his favorite place, making his face light up.

He leans over and ruffles my hair, kissing my head as he says, "You know you're my favorite sister, right?"

I roll my eyes, turning my engine on and getting ready to leave "I'm your only sister, douchebag," I remind him, but he just shrugs as we move on our way.

The drive to the restaurant is mainly filled with Josh telling me about last night's game, and what I missed, and asking if his favorite sister enjoyed dad's party. Again, I roll my eyes listening to him, letting him go on with himself until we are at the restaurant and settled in a booth waiting for our order.

While he continues to talk about some fight that broke out last night, I pull out my phone and reply to my maybe stalker.

Maddie: If you are a stalker you should already know that, but for the sake of our truth pact - yes I go to FU.

Josh distracts my attention with a question, "So how was the party really?" I take a deep breath, thankful for the few second reprieve as the waitress brings our order.

I want to tell him the truth, but I'm not sure he could handle it or understand it. Yes, we grew up in the same house with the same parents, but we did not have the same childhood as I'm sure most siblings can relate. I

know if I told him what our dad said that he would have my back, but at the same time he would also try to defend him, it's what he does. Josh always tries to see the best in people, it's one of the many reasons I love him, but right now I can't take it.

So instead I smile, reaching for my food. "The party was fine, you know how they are. Too much champagne and not enough people our age." He eyes me coolly as if he can pick up on my lie, so I quickly add, "I got cornered by creepy old guy again, he tried to grope me. Wanted to know if I was twenty-one yet so he could make me wife number seven." I take a sip of my drink and force a laugh. "Luckily, Mom saved me before I could give him an answer and he could get a handful."

Josh shakes his head. "Only you would call the CEO of a fortune 500 company a creepy old guy."

I shrug as my phone vibrates in my lap and I look down at it as I respond to him. "What? It's true. I don't care how big his bank account is, consent costs nothing, Josh."

The Lonely Charm: Truth pact? Wow sounds serious, we should shake on that. Tell me which house by the lake is yours and I'll drop by. Or do I have to knock on every door and ask for the hot girl?

My words trail off as I read the message and smile, but with Josh still watching me he catches it. "Who are you texting? And did you get a new phone?" He reaches over the table to grab it, but I snatch it back before it can touch his hand.

"Yes, I dropped mine and it cracked, and I'm texting Hals, she is coming home early." The lie is quick and almost true. I did talk to Hallie earlier, and she told me her parents are driving her nuts and that she is already on the way home.

Maddie: You're ridiculous & most definitely a stalker!

I reply to the message and focus back on my brother, reaching for one of my delicious pork tacos and shoving it into my mouth. The flavors burst on my tongue, and I almost groan as the waitress comes back to top off our drinks, or should I say flirt with my brother? She's been by four times since we were seated and he announced that his sister would have an iced tea. I swear he lives in a fantasy world where we aren't the Mayor's children, and

pretty much everyone knows that. Not to mention that pretty much half the town watches him play at his home games.

The Lonely Charm: ☺ Relax Grim, I go to FU too and run by that Lake almost every morning. Should I start doing it shirtless so you can watch?

Growing up with a brother means you learn quickly to deal with the opposite sex and their bullshit. Josh has played hockey for most of his life, which means I've been around hockey teams most of my life. You get used to their sort of banter and the stuff that goes along with it.

It's why I know how to hit a man exactly where it hurts... his ego

Maddie: I doubt there is much to see so no thanks!

Going back to my taco I take another huge bite as another message comes through. Josh is still flirting with the waitress so I slide open the message to find a new picture waiting.

Then I choke on my taco.

The Lonely Charm: Oh yeah?

Image attached

Hot.

Shirtless.

Abs.

So many fucking abs.

Fuck.

Are guy thirst traps a thing? Because if so, I definitely just got one. The taco continues to be lodged in my throat as Josh jumps up to pat me on the back, and I choke it down as I whip my phone out of sight, knocking my drink over in the process.

Josh jumps back with a curse, "Fucking hell, Maddie, what is with you today?" The waitress is quick to grab the spill with a cloth stuck in her apron, and I am still trying to catch my breath so I can apologize.

A few more coughs and I ignore my heated cheeks as I rush out my words. "Oh my god, I am so sorry, really sorry, I'm such a klutz." I grab some napkins and begin helping her clean up, but I can still feel Josh's concerned stare burning into me.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Mads?” He hardly ever calls me that, so I know he is worried about me, and a part of me wants to pour my secrets out to him, but this isn’t his burden, it’s mine.

So instead of telling him the truth I end up blurting out, “Yeah I’m fine, dick pic!”

Oh my fucking god why did I just say that to my brother?

“Jesus, Maddie,” he groans, and I see the waitress hide her smile as she retreats with the soaking wet cloth.

“Hallie,” I quickly add in an attempt to defend myself. “Hallie forwarded it to me, some guy she’s seeing,” I quickly continue on with my lie, making a mental note to clue Hals in on it later.

Josh rolls his eyes as he mutters under his breath, “Of course she did.”

Now it’s my turn to roll my eyes. It doesn’t matter that Hallie has been my best friend since we were nine, Josh has never liked her. We’ve had sleepovers, family vacations, dinner parties, years of time spent together and the two of them still don’t see eye to eye. Hallie tries, or at least she used to, now she just likes to annoy him at any given opportunity.

After my embarrassing outburst, I keep my phone firmly hidden in my bag so I can finish my lunch, and I absolutely don’t think about the six pack burning its way into my brain, and instead focus on my brother. The rest of our lunch is uneventful after my little post shirtless reaction, and Josh forgets all about it when the waitress slides him her number.



AN HOUR later I am dropping him off outside of his house, and even though I have told him a million times that I am fine and nothing is wrong, he lingers as he opens his door to get out. “There’s a party at mine tonight,” he starts, and I look at him as if to say yeah and? “Why don’t you come, have some fun?”

He must think my life is a DEFCON 1 if he is inviting me to one of his parties. He gave me strict orders Freshman year to stay away from his friends, and I’ve had no trouble following that rule. Hockey players are not my type, but still I find myself mulling over the idea when I normally wouldn’t, because it would be nice to get out and have some fun, especially after last night.

I bite my lip as I ask, “Can I bring Hallie?” I know it’s a big ask, especially to him, but to my surprise he nods.

“Sure, fine, whatever,” he grumbles almost reluctantly, and I have to roll my eyes again. “Just keep her out of my face, Maddie.”

“She’s my best friend, Josh, not a monster, what is your problem with her?” It’s ridiculous how much he fights me when it comes to her, she is practically a member of our family at this point.

“Keep her out of my face and I won’t have a problem,” he snaps, before taking a deep breath. “I’ll just see you tonight, okay?”

He doesn’t give me a chance to respond, just slams the door as I toss a wave and maybe a middle finger to his back before I start to drive away. My weekend might have started out shit but things are looking up, and who knows what tonight will bring. Maybe it will even be fun. There’s only one way to find out I guess, but first I have to work on persuading Hallie to go with me.

6

M A D D I E

SAD BRAD

A few hours later I am sitting in the living room on the sofa, freshly showered and shaved after giving my hair a conditioning mask, and even painting my nails. I laid out a few outfit choices on my bed for Hallie to help me pick from when she gets home, and I plan on blowing out my hair into loose waves and leaving it down. I've already popped open a bottle of champagne to give my sorrows a buzz, and I'm not ashamed to admit that I have looked at the shirtless picture on my phone no less than fifteen times since I received it earlier. Which is how my best friend finds me, lurking over it once again like I am the one who is a stalker.

She leans her arms on the sofa behind me, surprising me as she looks over my shoulder at my phone. "Damn, Wendy! Who is that fine specimen of a man?"

I smile, not just at her voice, but also at the nickname she gave me when we were kids. After playing pranks on her endlessly and her always calling him childish, she nicknamed Josh, Peter Pan, hence I became Wendy. It's silly and ridiculous, but that's what happens when you have been friends since you were nine. Hallie is beautiful, smart, and funny, and her take on the

world gives me something to smile about every day. We fit together like two puzzle pieces always meant to find one another. She's my soul sister and I would die for her, just like I know she would for me.

Living together is a dream, and it's the only good thing to ever come from my dad's affair. Our house was a guilt present from him, and as reluctant as I was to accept it and forgive him, which I still haven't, being able to live off-campus with my best friend was definitely worth him thinking I did. Plus, Hallie's parents moved out of town after we graduated high school, so it was the only way we could truly stay together.

Hallie has autism, and moving to a new town and going from high school to college would have been a huge adjustment for her, one she told me she wasn't ready to make. So being able to not only go to the same college together, but also share a house, is the best present either one of us could have ever wished for. It not only meant an easier transition for her, because she had me to lean on, but also allowed us to avoid freshman dorms and having to deal with so many other people. That would have been hard for her and her sensory needs, but also would have sent my anxiety into a spiral, so it was a win-win for the both of us. This house is our safe haven and a place we can truly call home.

It's not often I ever get to surprise her, my life is so usually predictable that I take great pleasure in leaning back on the sofa to look up at her and say, "I have a charming new stalker."

Her eyebrows raise, and she circles around to come and sit next to me. Thankfully, she is used to my personal brand of sarcasm after years of friendship, so she doesn't take me too seriously. Grabbing the phone from my hand, she inspects the shirtless selfie almost clinically before scrolling up to read through the rest of the messages. "Oh a stalker, I see," she smirks while still reading, her eyes widening with each one. "Wrong number, is that like a ploy of yours?" she asks in all seriousness, and I smile at her.

"No, dork," I say, snatching the phone from her. "It really was a wrong number, I was trying to text you."

She looks at me as if to say yeah sure, so I quickly give her the rundown of everything that has happened since last night much to her dismay. She jumps in to ask questions when she needs to, always a stickler for making sure she has all of the information, but I appreciate that it's just what she needs to process it all, and lord knows I could do with all the help I can get right now.

By the time I'm done she just stares at me dumbfounded and speechless until she finally blurts, "Your dad thinks you're gonna marry Brad? Sad Brad with the tiny brain?"

I choke for the second time today, only this time it's at her bold summary of the situation. I mean she isn't wrong, and I love her for it. When I don't say anything in response she bursts out laughing, like holding her stomach with tears coming out of her eyes laughing. I have to hit her with a pillow to get her to stop and take a breath.

"This is serious, Hals. What the hell am I going to do?" I flop my head onto the back of the sofa and Hallie places hers on mine, and I take comfort in her presence. She doesn't really do physical touch, but I'm one of the very few exceptions, to which she will never understand how grateful I am for it.

"Well, not marry Brad, that's for sure," she scoffs in disgust, and I already feel better for just telling her and having her in this with me. Best friends really are the best medicine.

We both sit in silence for a few minutes, pondering my life drama until I can barely stand it. I jump to my feet, wiggling my now dry nails and turn around to face her. "You and I are going to a party tonight."

Her eyes look up at me with shock in them, just like I knew they would. "A party?" she asks in confusion. "What party?" One of the many things that makes us such good friends is that we both usually avoid the party scene. Too many people, too much noise, too much drama, it's not for us. We are more the karaoke bar, taco tuesdays, movie margarita night kind of best friends.

Most of the time if we go out anywhere, it's because Hallie secured us an invitation to something she feels comfortable with. I usually only get to invite her to boring family stuff that she is used to attending from back when we were growing up, so I know she is intrigued.

"Josh invited me to a party at his house, he said I need to get out more." I shrug like it's no big deal, and thankfully she doesn't question my brother's interest in my social life, but I don't miss the way her eyes lighten at the mention of my brother's name.

"Wait, we're going to a hockey party?" There is some reservation in her voice, but if I'm not mistaken, there is also an edge of excitement, and to my surprise, when I nod she squeals.

Jumping off the sofa she crushes me in a tight hug that takes me by surprise. "Oh my god I'm so excited!" When she pulls back I smile at her, but she just rushes past me. "Well, come on, what are we waiting for, we need to

get ready and make plans. Like what are we gonna wear? Are we walking there? What time are we coming home? Are we drinking? How many people do you think will be there?"

All of her questions have me smiling as I trail after her, and when I don't respond she pauses, eyeing me with a knowing look. "Okay, we can talk more about Sad Brad and your stalker tomorrow, but tonight let's just have some fun, deal?"

I guess I can't argue with that. I nod, following her upstairs, leading her to my bedroom to let her appraise the outfits already waiting on my bed. She waits while I try on a few different options, before we settle on a satin blue dress that compliments my hair and eyes. Then we head to her room and do the same thing there, until she picks out one of her favorite black dresses. By the time we are done, both our rooms look like a clothes explosion took place, but that's tomorrow's problem to worry about. I head back to the kitchen and grab us both a drink, before moving back to my room to finish getting ready.

By the time I have my hair done and my makeup almost complete, I have a small buzz going on, and I am actually starting to look forward the party. I'm sitting in my satin robe, adding some finishing touches to my eyes, when I hear my phone chime from where it sits on my dresser, indicating that I have a new message. I'd like to pretend that I don't almost break a leg rushing over to see who it's from, but that would be a big, dirty lie.

The Lonely Charm: Did my body offend you Grim?

Yes, I think instantly, but there is no way I am telling him that. To be honest I am surprised he sent another message considering I have basically ghosted him all day, but I can't be mad about his double texting. In fact, I hate how charming I find him, and his stupid abs, but the smile on my face can't be denied. Although I'm not quite sure how to tell him that his thirst trap made me choke on my taco. Screw it, this started because of a truth so why stop now.

Maddie: I may or may not have choked on a taco 🌮

I smile as I hit send, finding myself hilarious as I take my phone back to my vanity, so I can sit down and take another sip of my drink. I watch the bubbles appear to show he is typing, and when the ding of a new message

sounds out, I'm not ashamed to admit it is quickly becoming an addictive sound since last night.

The Lonely Charm: Is that a euphemism?

Maddie: Unfortunately not

The Lonely Charm: Then I think I like you Grim

My smile fades, because I know if he met me in real life he wouldn't say that. I'm not the type of girl someone like him would want. Yes, I guess I consider myself to be beautiful, and that's not being big-headed, it's just a fact, but that's all people ever see. It's the blond hair, the blue eyes, the boobs that most men spend all their time talking to, it's all they see. Beauty and my last name. A last name that could change to something even more obnoxious if my father gets his own way.

Before I can decide whether I am going to reply and keep this ridiculous text chain going, another message comes through from him.

The Lonely Charm: And don't worry, that picture was a freebie.
You can use it to choke on your taco anytime 😊

A freebie, I scoff at his blatant audacity, whether he has the abs to back it up or not, his attitude definitely needs taking down a peg or two. My eyes flick up to my reflection in the mirror, my hair is perfectly waved and although I'm not dressed yet, I am sitting in a matching set of white lace underwear that is only covered by my silk robe.

An idea starts to form in my head, and I quickly glance towards the door to make sure Hallie is still in her room, before I look back at my phone. Taking a deep breath, I slip open my robe to show off my upper torso, and then I open the camera app on my phone and angle it above me, so it's just focused below my neck. I arch my back and pose to show off my toned stomach and breasts, letting the image cut off before it dips down to my panties, and the flash creates the perfect filter to hide any obvious things that would indicate it was me.

Not that anyone would be able to recognize me. I have never sent a picture like this before, and I don't know why I'm doing it now. There is just something freeing and fun about this whole situation, and when I feel like the walls of my life are going to be closing in on me, I can't think of a better distraction.

I fire off the message before I can change my mind and then turn off my phone like the chicken I am, downing the rest of my drink just as Hallie appears. She is already dressed, so I make quick work of doing the same. Finishing my makeup and slipping into my dress, grabbing some heels and jewelry on the way out of my room. Hallie passes me a shot of tequila which I down without pause, and when I just shrug as she stares at me, it makes her smile.

“Tonight is going to be fun!” she squeals!

#7

NOVA

DEBTS PAID

I'm exhausted after last night's game, and my workout and practice this morning, but I still let Archer and the others drag me out anyway. The party is already in full swing at one of the other hockey houses, but I can't seem to pull my attention away from my phone. My mystery girl is proving to be more interesting than I thought, even after she ghosted me for half the day. I probably should have left it there, but I couldn't resist sending one more message, and was surprised she even responded.

I am enjoying teasing her, but when another message comes through and I look down at my phone, I choke on my drink and end up spitting it all over Archer.

He jumps away from me. "What the fuck man!" he curses, wiping off his shirt, but my eyes remain focused on the image and words in front of me.

Grim: One thing you should know about me, Charmer... I always pay my debts!

Image attached

A pair of lace covered tits stare back at me, and I have to bite back the groan that rises in my throat. They're fucking perfect, round and perky, and tanned against the white fabric encasing them. I want them to be in front of me, so I can dip down and smash my face into them like pillows I would gladly let suffocate me. I mean, all tits are pretty great, but these ones are fucking fantastic.

My complete ignoring of Archer brings him back over to my side like a damn puppy dog, and he curses again, "Fuck, who do those beauties belong to?"

Our other teammate Reign also joins us, flicking his stare down to my phone. "None of the puck bunnies I know," he says casually. "Trust me I've checked." Alexander Reign is the definition of a ladies man. He could charm his way into any girl's bed, and well, he pretty much has. It also doesn't hurt that his dad is some tech billionaire and his mom is a fucking British supermodel which has given him an endless supply of money and half an accent. To make matters worse, I've seen him in the shower. That fucker is blessed in every part of his life.

Yet still, I grunt, snatching the phone from both of their views, a primal protectiveness stirring within me. "None of your goddamn business." I don't want to smile about the fact that neither of them recognize the mystery girl, but it definitely makes me feel something.

"Ooo a little touchy there, Darkmore, don't tell me the captain of puck pussy has finally found himself a girl." My best friend teases with a smile, loving that for once he is getting a reaction out of me.

"Yeah Arch, your mom sends her regards," I snap back, and he flips me off, laughing until our other teammate Daemon Forbes enters.

Archer and Daemon are kind of like Josh and I, it's a well known fact they hate each other, but no one knows the reason why. I asked Archer once and he told me to mind my own business, so I did. They don't let it interfere with the team so it's a non-issue. Hell, we are standing in Josh and Daemon's house right now enjoying this party, but still there is always this lingering tension between them, and I can never figure out why.

Thankfully Reign steps in and relieves the tension. "Well, I hope you get to stick your dick between them man, they're fucking beautiful." I'm torn between punching him in the throat and agreeing with him, because he's right, they are phenomenal tits, but I opt for just acting casual.

"Whatever man, just keep your eyes off my fucking phone," I demand,

and the fucker smirks, flicking his eyes towards Archer as if to say get a load of this guy.

I swear living with the two of them will drive me fucking crazy one day, the only sane roommate I have is Jake, and the fucker isn't even here tonight, he's with his girlfriend. Thankfully, one of Reign's favorite bunnies enters the house, and he plucks up two fresh beers off of the counter, and disappears in her direction. Archer also strikes up a conversation with one of our teammates Landon, so I am left to focus back on my phone.

Fuck. How do I even respond to a picture like that? I mean, sending her a shirtless selfie was probably a dick move, but I know what I'm working with, and when she tried to tease me earlier I wanted to shut her up. Now I'm the one who is speechless. I inspect the picture closely, looking for anything that might clue me in to who she is, but her head is completely cut off, and the flash is too bright to detect much else.

Looking around at the girls here I wonder if I have ever seen her at a party like this, or maybe even hooked up with her. Nah, impossible, I would definitely remember tits like that. I know we agreed on no names, but right now I want nothing more than to find her and bury myself in them.

I take one last look at those glorious mounds before firing off a reply, and reluctantly slipping my phone into my back pocket before I start looking like a creeper. Archer collars me, asking for a game of pool which I gladly accept, and we head down to the den to have some fun. I'm a couple of games in and a few beers deep, after a few of the guys from the team have joined us, when I get my second surprise of the night.

Madeline Peters strolls down the stairs with a bottle of beer in her hand and her eyes assessing everything. I don't know what's more shocking, her presence here, or the fact she is dressed in a tight-fitted little dress, throwing back a beer while laughing at something her friend whispers in her ear. I can't remember her friend's name, Hayley or Holly, or something like that. We shared a class together her freshman year, but she pretty much kept to herself. It's rare to see either of them at a party. Mostly because Josh never invites her, so I can't help but wonder what the hell she is doing here.

It's bad enough I have to share my team with her brother, I don't want to share my fucking party space with her. Not that any of the other guys here give a fuck, half of them are already eyeing her, and I can't help but roll my own as they fall for her facade of bullshit. You only have to look a little deeper to find the bitch within, and know it's not worth fucking her, no

matter how hot she is.

My curiosity gets the better of me though, as I line up and take my next shot. “Yo, what is Peter’s little sister doing here, I thought he doesn’t let her come to these things?” Archer follows my line of sight, but it’s one of Josh’s best friends, Levi, that answers my question.

“She’s twenty now,” he shrugs. “I guess he can’t really tell her what to do anymore.” He shrugs again like it’s no big deal, but still I see him eye her with interest that I’m sure Josh wouldn’t appreciate. I don’t bother pointing out that, regardless of her age he can’t tell her what to do anyway, but I just keep my mouth shut as I sink the ball I was aiming for.

Speak of the devil though and they shall appear. As Archer lines up to take his turn, I watch as Josh appears, pulling his sister in for a hug and totally ignoring the friend at her side. I find that strange, because I’m pretty sure I heard somewhere that those two have been friends forever, it’s pretty rude of him to just ignore her like that. Whatever, it’s none of my business I guess, but whatever Josh is saying to Madeline has her frowning. I hide a laugh in my drink as I think about some part of their perfect lives falling apart. Karma really is taking its time catching up with them.

Josh gestures something else, and she rolls her eyes stepping away from him. He moves to grab her, but then her friend cuts him a look and he freezes, locked in her stare. The girl eventually wins out because he turns and leaves back the way he came, while her and Maddie head right in this direction.

When Maddie’s eyes lock with mine her scowl deepens even more. “What the fuck are you staring at, Darkmore?” Her tone is cruel, just like always when she talks to me, and I can’t help but feel that excitement curl inside of me as she addresses me with such anger, and the second curse word I have heard from her today.

I hear Archer choke back a laugh, but I ignore him, giving her my most charming smile. “Just wondering why you’re dressed like such a slut, Princess, you almost look like one of the bunnies.”

A few curses sound out around me, probably at my audacity given not just who her brother is, but her father as well, but she knows I don’t give a fuck about either. I do see her best friend’s eyes flare in surprise as her gaze flicks between the two of us, but Maddie doesn’t even flinch. Instead she continues to erase the distance between us until she is leaning against the table opposite me, hands spread out on either side of her.

“I guess from you I’ll take that as a compliment, Captain,” she purrs,

tipping back some of the beer into her waiting mouth before she adds, “We all know bunnies are your favorite animal right?” Her smirk is wicked as she watches me, and I feel the weight of everyone else’s stare as they wait for my response.

I lick my lips, still completely thrown off at how she looks tonight, as she takes another drink and I watch her throat bob, before I clear my own and reply, “Oh yeah, and what’s yours?”

Her smirk widens as she moves around the table with an elegance only she could manage, before she reaches me and grabs the cue straight from my hand. Bending over, she lines it up to take a shot, potting a ball perfectly, before she rises back to her full height and looks me up and down in distaste. “Well, it certainly isn’t dogs.”

She doesn’t bother waiting for a response, just slams the pool cue onto the table and heads back towards her best friend, who is still frozen to her original spot, mouth hanging open. When Maddie reaches her, it pulls her from her stupor and she flicks her gaze back to her and says something I can’t hear, but Maddie nods, flicking her stare back to mine and cocking an eyebrow. Still, I say nothing, and the two of them retreat into the corner where a group of girls are dancing, taking up a spot next to a speaker.

“God she is so fucking hot,” Reign complains, as if it physically pains him to look at her, as he takes up the now empty spot in front of me.

“Yeah like the fucking devil,” I mutter under my breath, as Levi reminds him that she is off limits to us all, but given the way his eyes still track her, he should maybe take his own advice.

I line up my next shot after she successfully potted my last one, and pot the final two balls one after the other, leaving me on the black. When I pot that too, Archer curses, tosses his cue on top of the table, and moving to grab another beer. I reach for mine, taking another swig, and let my eyes involuntarily move back over to the spawn of satan in the corner.

There are plenty of bunnies here tonight, but my focus is still caught between the fantastic tits on my phone, and Josh fucking Peters’ little sister, who moves like the music was made for her. *Fuck*. Why are the bitchy ones always so hot? I shouldn’t be thinking that, and if I am then I’ve definitely had too much to drink. I finish the beer in my hand, shuffle into my jacket, and then move through the party to head back upstairs.

The rest of the house is just as packed as the den, and I immediately start navigating my way outside for some fresh air. I head to the corner of the deck

where it's quietest, most people choosing to congregate at the back of the house where there is a hot tub. *Fucking Peters and his daddy's money*. Not that I don't have my own walking ATM living in my house in the form of Alexander Reign, but even a self proclaimed nepo baby like him has some class. The entire Peters family doesn't seem to share an inch of it between them.

In an attempt to distract myself, I pull my phone out to see if the mystery girl has responded to my text, but there is nothing. Sighing, I put my phone away, refusing to look at the tits again, at least until I am home and in bed alone and can truly appreciate them. Then I lean on the rail and look up to the sky. I'm not sure how long I stand there, but it's long enough to witness Princess Peters storming out of the house with some preppy jock right on her tail. I can't remember his name, but I have seen him around the FU campus before, I'm pretty sure he plays for the football team.

"Madeline, stop walking away from me," he demands, and I lean over the rail to get a better view of the no doubt incoming drama.

"Oh fuck off, Brad, what are you even doing here?" She stops walking and turns towards him, utter disgust lacing her eyes, as she demands an answer from him. Amusement flares inside of me knowing it isn't just me that she acts like a giant cunt towards.

"Me?" he scoffs. "You're the one dressed like a slut and dancing like you are giving it away for free." She flinches at his words, and she looks nothing like the confident girl who was just calling me out in the den in front of everyone.

In fact, this is the first time I have ever seen her look like she isn't in control of something. She always has that air of ease to her, like this is her world and everyone else is just living in it, it's one of the main things that pisses me off about her, but looking at her now it isn't there. In its place is a small persona of someone I don't even recognise.

"You've got some nerve to call me a slut." Her tone is quiet and lethal, but I feel the words as if they were meant for me.

If I'm not mistaken she looks as if she is about to cry, but she turns too quickly for me to notice, giving him her back again. He reaches out though and snatches up her wrist, hauling her towards him. She pulls it away quickly, but it's too late. I am already moving towards them as she shouts back at him, "I told you not to fucking touch me!"

The dick ignores her, reaching for her again, and the anger inside of me

rears its ugly head. Maddie's eyes flare in surprise as I approach, but still I don't miss the small step she takes towards me and away from him.

I use the space to grab him by the back of the shirt and slam him against a nearby tree as I spit, "I'm pretty sure the lady said not to touch her."

The prick looks me up and down, before flicking his gaze to her and then back to me. "Yeah, and what the fuck are you gonna do about it, Darkmore?" Ah so the meathead knows who I am. Good, that will make this simpler.

I take a slow measured step towards him, crushing my arm against his neck, narrowing my dark stare as I reply, "Touch her again and find out."

The warning is clear in my tone, and I flex my fists in preparation for his next move. Truthfully, I'd love nothing more than teaching a prick like this a lesson. I'm used to taking plenty of hits on the ice, fighting with him would be a walk in the fucking park.

Thankfully he seems to take me seriously, looking to Maddie again before scoffing under his breath, "It's not even fucking worth it." I let him push me off as he takes a step back shaking his head, watching us before he points at Maddie. "Remember the deal, darling." Then he turns away and heads back inside leaving the two of us alone.

As soon as he disappears I turn towards Maddie and watch as the tension in her body releases, her shoulders dropping completely. She must feel my stare on her because her gaze meets mine, and for once I see a hint of vulnerability in it, before she quickly takes a deep breath. "You didn't have to jump in like that, I had it handled."

Of course she doesn't just say thank you, and I scoff at her assessment of the situation. "Yeah, it really looked like you had it handled, Princess."

She ignores my statement completely. "What are you even doing out here anyway? Are you following me or something?"

God, could this girl be anymore self centered? She is actually infuriating. First, she can't even say thank you for me helping her out, and now she thinks I am some kind of creeper. "In your fucking dreams," I sneer, looking at her with nothing but disgust. "I am not following you."

She grunts a laugh, turning to walk away from me, but in the opposite direction of the party as she yells over her shoulder, "I dream about a lot of things, Nova Darkmore, but you are not one of them."

I stare at her retreating form for a few seconds, and then I jog after her until I can catch up with her. "Where the hell are you going?"

Her head snaps towards mine and she looks at me pointedly. "I thought

you said you weren't following me." I mean, I guess I am now, but I don't say anything, just stare at her until she adds, "I'm going home, what does it look like?" She holds her arms out to gesture to the street and the walking, as she starts to storm away even faster so I am left trailing behind her. I rush to keep up as she continues. "I don't want to be anywhere near sad Brad and his bullshit," she starts babbling, but then stops so suddenly that I almost smack right into the back of her. "Oh fuck, Hallie!"

She whirls around and finds me less than an inch from her and scowls at me. "You're still following me!"

I take a step back, putting some space between us as I look down at her. "I know we don't exactly like each other," I start, and she glares at me because that's putting it lightly. Still I ignore her and continue, "but I'm not about to let you walk home alone in the dark, Maddie. What kind of prick do you think I am?"

She has the nerve to arch her brow as if to say do you really want me to answer that, and I can't help but smirk as I answer her unspoken thoughts. "Yeah, don't answer that, let's just go."

I put my hand out to guide her in the direction she was already heading, but she takes a step back. "I can't, I have to go back, I left Hallie and she will be worried."

We've already walked a little bit away from the house in her outburst, and I'm already freezing my balls off and don't fancy going back. So, I take out my phone to call Arch. "It's fine, I will get one of the guys to walk her home so you don't have to go back and see sad Brad." She doesn't smile at the nickname she used a minute ago like I thought she would, and instead I see worry form in her eyes.

"No, they can't, what if they touch her," she sounds panicked, and I look at her in confusion.

"Touch her? Fucking hell, Mads, what kind of guys do you think I'm friends with?" The nickname slips off my tongue as if we are old friends, and I internally scold myself, but thankfully she doesn't seem to pick up on it.

"No, not like that," she quickly rushes out. "Eurgh, she just doesn't like being touched okay, just tell him not to invade her space."

Nodding as I let the phone ring to let her know I understand, I wait until Archer picks up. The music is loud in the background, but I quickly explain the situation and just like I knew he would, he agrees before disconnecting the call. Not even thirty-seconds pass before a text comes through.

“Archer has her.” I turn the phone so Maddie can read the message, but still her teeth sink into her bottom lip as if she doesn’t believe me. “Gray is the best guy I have ever known, he would never do anything to hurt a girl,” I add softly.

Her eyes bore into mine like she is searching for a lie, until she eventually nods and I hold my hand out again to gesture in the direction she was already going. A couple of seconds pass before she finally gives in and turns to continue on her way. I’m not sure how I expected this night to turn out, but it definitely didn’t involve being friendly with a member of the fucking Peters family.

What the hell is happening to me?

8

M A D D I E

F I S H G U T S

H ell must have frozen over because there is no other explanation as to why Nova Darkmore is walking me home right now. I am replaying the last twenty minutes in my head, and no matter how many times I go over it, I still cannot work out how we got here. We have interacted more today than we have in the two years we have gone to college together, and I for one find it really fucking weird. He hasn't exactly made a secret of his hatred towards me and my family, yet now here we are walking alone in the world's most awkward silence.

I keep looking over my shoulder in the hopes that Hallie and her chaperone catch up with us, but there is no such luck. I don't even have my phone on me to text her, after she made me leave it at home in an attempt to forget about Brad and my charming stalker, and well, look how well that turned out. Not only did Brad show up and ruin my night, but now I have a new uncharming stalker to deal with.

My eyes dart over to Nova, and I study him closely as he keeps a firm check on our surroundings as we walk. I guess I should feel grateful he was feeling such a gentleman this evening, that is after saying I looked like a slut

of course, which for some reason didn't sting as much as when Brad said it. Either way, it's nice having him here to make sure I make it home okay. I wasn't exactly thinking when I decided to storm away from the party, alone, in the middle of the night without a phone! It has to be almost midnight and even though I know Hector will be lurking around somewhere watching me, it feels nice to have someone by my side in case anything happens.

I'd die before I ever admitted that to this cocky asshole though. Some secrets you take straight to the grave.

The silence between us might be the loudest sound in the world, and I don't think hatred has ever been so pungent in the air before. Normally I am comfortable in silence, my therapist says it's because I have learnt to ignore the things in my life I can't control, and only keep my focus on the things that I can, but after seeing Brad again I don't feel in control of anything. Nova must be picking up on the tension because now he keeps looking at me as if I am going to explode.

I thought he would be better at handling tension given his chosen sport, but after five minutes he finally breaks. "Do you want to talk about it?"

A groan rumbles up the back of my throat, but I manage to bite it back as I respond, "Talk about what?"

He scoffs a laugh, shaking his head as if wondering why he is even here, well me and you both buddy. "You and that douchebag back there?" His assessment of Brad is scarily accurate, but I'm not gonna tell him that.

"No," I snap. "I absolutely do not want to talk about it." Where the hell would I even start? Like, oh by the way mortal enemy number one, that douche back there is actually my boyfriend, even though I don't like him and caught him fucking a waitress. Oh and he is going to become my fiancé because my daddy said so. Yeah, I'm sure that would go down great.

Apparently my refusal isn't loud enough though because he keeps going. "Is he your boyfriend or something?"

A humorless laugh escapes me before I can stop it, as I mutter under my breath, "Yeah, or something." A cold wind blows past us, and considering my outfit, I can't help the shudder that wracks through my body.

Nova sees it and without saying anything, pulls off his hockey jacket and passes it to me. I start to protest but he shuts me down instantly. "Just put on the fucking jacket, Maddie," he sighs in exasperation, as if he is as tired with tonight's bullshit as I am.

I take it wordlessly, unsure of how to even act in this new weird scenario

where we aren't at each other's throats, and push my arms through the sleeves, letting the material drown me. My nose is instantly assaulted by his masculine, spicy scent. It's intense and intoxicating, and could probably become addictive, and suddenly I am feeling hot all over, and not just from the jacket. Christ, am I that starved of affection that I am willing to bask in it even from an asshole like him?

No wonder I am happy texting a stranger that could be a stalker, clearly I have issues. I know that, and I definitely won't be discussing this with my therapist at our next session. She'd probably tell me this isn't exactly what she meant when she told me to enjoy new experiences.

Unable to bear the silence for a second longer, I speak the first words that come to mind. "I didn't know you were such a gentleman," I choke out past the smell, in an attempt to escape the burning feeling now stroking over my skin in the presence of him.

"Nope," he pops the p. "My mom just raised me right, is all." The mention of his mom throws a bucket of ice over me, and the silent tension from earlier comes hurtling towards us, but still I try my best to escape it.

"How is she?" I ask quietly. "Your mom I mean." It's a simple question, but apparently the answer is non-negotiable.

"I'm not talking about my fucking mom with you, Maddie," he snaps, and the angry tone of his voice shuts me down completely.

Okay then I guess that's the end of that.

I can understand his reservations, given our family history, but my question was truly genuine. I spent a lot of time getting to know Diana Darkmore when I was younger, she was my dad's secretary for almost five years. Hell, most days I spoke to her more than either of my parents. She was a nice woman, a kind woman, and when my dad fired her, it wasn't just her heart he broke, but mine too.

Diana always took the time to get to know me, to talk to me, and to learn things about me. She knew my favorite color was green, and that I prefer Chinese food over anything else. She would help me with my math homework whenever my dad would get stuck in a meeting, and always reminded him to not forget mine and Josh's birthdays. I'm not sure how such an amazing woman birthed the spawn of satan beside me, but hey what do I know. It was nice just having an adult in my life that took an interest in me, just for me, and not for what I could do for their perfect family image.

The rest of the walk back to my house is silent with Nova letting me lead

the way, and his stare continuing to keep a lookout. By the time we make it to my street the coldness has well and truly settled between us both, that I actually think jumping in the lake would give me less of a chill. I might even be desperate enough to do just that if it wasn't so dark that you can't even see it.

When we finally reach near my house I practically sprint towards it as I loudly announce, "Well this is me."

I turn towards Nova and see his eyes look over my house in distaste. I'm sure I can probably guess what he is thinking, but I don't bother calling him out on it. Instead, I shuffle out of his jacket, noting Hector as he pulls up across the street. I knew he would be around somewhere. I pass the jacket back to Nova and he accepts it without a word, and I instantly feel the chill.

When the silence starts to turn awkward again, I just nod and turn, walking up to my door and unlocking it. As I open it and go to slip inside, I notice Nova is only just leaving now he knows that I am safe, and I can't stop myself from calling out his name.

"Nova!" One word, his name, not cursed like normal, and he freezes, turning to look over his shoulder and suddenly my mouth feels dry as I force out, "Thank you." He looks at me confused before I add, "For walking me home, I really appreciate it."

He nods before he sighs, "It was no big deal." I open my mouth to tell him it was, but he beats me to it. "Goodnight, Maddie."

Those two words cut me off dead as I stare after him, and all I can think is that he doesn't realize it was the nicest thing someone has done for me in a long time. How pathetic is that?

Shaking my head, I shut the door behind me and immediately rush upstairs to grab my phone so I can call Hallie. It's not that I don't trust Nova, or his friends, but I am still worried about my friend and I need to check on her. I quickly turn it back on and before I can open my thread with her, another message immediately comes through. It's from a few hours ago and it's only now that I remember the image I sent to my maybe stalker, and the fact I turned my phone off before he could respond.

The Lonely Charm: Send me another picture like that and I am going to knock on every door in this damn town until I find you.

Heat instantly spreads through my body at the threat, and I don't think I can remember a time I have ever felt so wanted, and it's not like I haven't

been with guys before. I had a couple of boyfriends in high school, dated a little when I first got here, but all of them used me in the same way my dad does. As a pawn to be wielded for their own personal gain, no one has ever just appreciated me for me.

It was always a ploy to get close to me so they could get in with my dad or with Josh, they never just wanted me. I thought I had dealt with it, the feeling of rejection and loneliness, and as that feeling of not being good enough starts to crawl up my throat, I struggle to remember my coping techniques. I try the deep breathing, and the mantras I recite in my head, but it doesn't work, but then my eyes flick back down to the message in my hand and I read it again and again.

Every door in this damn town until I find you.

Every door in this damn town until I find you.

Every door in this damn town until I find you.

I read them until my eyes blur and I can no longer see them, and when I take a deep breath I notice my heart rate has returned to normal and I can actually breathe easily again. It worked, it actually worked. I'd laugh if I didn't feel so much like I wanted to cry. That overwhelming feeling of sadness needs to stop, I can't handle it. So I push it aside and exit the text thread to look for Hallie's name.

When I press on her name to call her, it rings for two-seconds and then is cut off. What the hell? I do it again, and the same thing happens. Anxiety curls in my gut as I rush downstairs to head outside, but as I reach the bottom of the steps I hear muffled laughter. The front door slides open and I spy Hallie with Archer Gray, laughing at some story he is telling, and I can do nothing but stand there and stare at them.

"Then what did you do?" Hallie asks excitedly.

Archer shrugs. "I did what anyone would do, I busted down the door and threw the bucket of fish guts on him."

Hallie cackles instantly, holding her stomach as if she can barely breathe as she responds, "Oh my god, no you didn't," she gasps in between laughs.

"Of course I did, that fucker started it and he messed with my hair, Sanders," he exclaims dramatically using her last name, and I'm not sure what I am witnessing here, but Hallie never really talks to guys, or anyone for that matter.

Archer finally notices me and offers me a mock salute. "Special delivery for, baby Peters." He's drunk, that much is obvious, but still I appreciate him

for walking Hallie home.

I don't know him that well, he's closer to Nova than he is my brother, so of the few hockey players I have gotten to know from the Flyers, he isn't really one of them. "Thanks, Gray," I reply with a smile and nod, turning my attention to my best friend. "You all good, Hals?"

"I'm great," she smiles, and I can tell by her expression she means it, and I find my gaze straying back over to the hockey player still shadowing our doorstep, as Hallie also turns back to him. "Thanks for walking me home, Arch, you're a gem."

My eyes bug out of my head, but he doesn't seem to notice as he focuses on my best friend. "Anytime, Sanders, and don't forget about the game next week." He winks before nodding at me and adding, "Goodnight ladies."

Hallie watches him leave, before she shuts the door and slumps her back against it. "Well, that was an interesting night, Sad Brad and Notorious Nova, ey?" She wiggles her brows at me and I storm towards her.

"Oh hell no, we are totally starting with you," I demand, grabbing her by the hand and leading her into the kitchen. "Debrief now!"

I reach into the freezer and pull out a tub of ice cream while she grabs two spoons, and then we sit side by side on the breakfast bar and dig in. We each eat a few spoonfuls before she opens her mouth to speak, but I cut her off, "Not a chance," I scold. "You are totally going first."

She laughs with a sigh, "There is nothing to tell, Wendy, Archer came up to me, explained the situation and walked me home, that's all."

Reaching for another scoop of ice cream, I snatch the tub away. "That's all my ass, you two were acting like the best of friends out there."

She shrugs. "He's in my econ class. He might seem all dark and moody, but that's just a front, he's really a nice guy." Her words seem genuine enough, but still I can't help but poke at the obvious.

"And super hot," I say with a smirk, but all she does is roll her eyes as if she has barely noticed, which is bullshit. Every girl on this damn campus has noticed.

I almost fell off my chair the first time I went to one of Josh's practices to see him in action. I swore it must have been a rule that they all had to be over 6ft tall and sexy to earn a spot on the team. I had to hold my drool in for the entire game, and I barely paid any attention to my brother. Hell, even the Darkmore devil himself didn't go unnoticed. He's just as attractive as the rest of them, if not more, it's just his asshole personality that lets him down.

Hallie interrupts my thoughts before I dig deeper into that last one “Trust me when I tell you I am not his type,” she smiles a secret smile to herself, but I don’t push her on it, my mind is clouding enough with my own secrets.

Now I’m not naive, I know everyone has secrets of their own, scars they don’t want to show to anybody, but that’s the problem. The only way to truly know someone is to discover their scars, yet nobody ever wants to rip off the bandages and let the other person see them bleed. So you either end up alone and miserable, or worse, not alone and with someone who is incapable of healing you.

I think back to the message on my phone and I can’t help but feel the need to taunt the mystery man who seems to understand me more than any man I have ever met. My real world might be going to shit, but that doesn’t mean I can’t indulge in a little fantasy, and my lonely charmer is the perfect candidate.

#9

NOVA

HANDS ON HAROLD

The next couple of weeks follow a very similar routine. I go to class, play hockey, spend time with my mom, and go to parties, oh and text Grim. I can never forget about that. We have somehow gone from texting a few times a week to a few times a day, which given I still don't know her real name or who she could possibly be, is kind of fucked up. Archer thinks I'm crazy, but Reign said he would also keep texting someone with tits as good as hers. I guess they are both right.

Today is Sunday and as usual, I am over at my mom's place having breakfast. She is currently at the stove making bacon and pancakes after she refused my help for the tenth time this morning. Her latest appointment confirmed our fears, the cancer is spreading. The doctors say they can operate, and with that and chemo it should be fine, but still I felt the word like he punched me in the gut. My mom is all I have, I don't know what I would do if I lost her.

Forcing that thought from my mind, I focus back on my phone, and the latest message Grim has sent me in response to the first one I sent her this morning. It was a shirtless picture of me running down by the lake near her

house. Granted it was 6am when I sent it, so of course she was sleeping, but who doesn't want to wake up to that?

Grim: Morning coffee and I spy no sexy shirtless guys. Sigh!
What a shame!

image attached

Her response makes me laugh, and I feel my mom glance over her shoulder at me, but I can't help but stare at the image of the lake on my phone. Grim is sitting on a deck with her feet up on the rail, holding up a giant mug of coffee in front of her phone. I can see the long length of her toned legs, and her perfectly manicured toes, as she shows off my running spot to me. The lake is huge so there is no way I could work out which house is hers from the image and she knows it. I tap out a quick reply and hit send.

Nova: Glad to see you finally admit that you think I'm sexy. It's about time you got the memo!

Grim: The only memo I got was about how huge your ego is!!!

Nova: You'll be glad to know it's not the only huge thing about me 😏

Grim: 😏 That was douche-y even for you!

I snort at that, and again feel my mom's eyes watching me as she starts serving up our breakfast. I quickly grab us both some juice and sit back down to tap out another reply.

Nova: And yet still you like me, sounds like the problem is with you.

Grim: I'll be sure to tell my therapist about it!

She always makes jokes about her therapy, and I can't help but find it endearing at how she casually jokes about herself. Dark humor and all that, but still I tease her.

Nova: You should fire your therapist and come and see me instead, I bet I could work out your problems real good, loosen up those muscles.

Grim: It's okay I have Harold for that!

Harold? Who the fuck is Harold? Jealousy curls inside of me which I know is ridiculous, I don't even know what this girl looks like, but still I feel like she is mine.

Nova: Harold sounds like an asshole. Where does he live? I'd like to meet him, you know for complete non-jealousy related murder

I toss the phone on the table just as my mom brings my breakfast over and I take it gratefully. "Thanks, Mom."

"You're welcome baby." She slides into the seat facing me, eyes still on me as she adds, "So who's the girl?"

"Girl?" I ask, acting confused. "What girl?" Just as I say that, my phone lights up again on the table in between us, and she smirks as I shove a mouthful of pancakes into my mouth.

Reaching out to pick up my phone and read the message was a mistake.

Grim: Harold lives with me

image attached

I choke on my pancake as I take in the long, sleek, blue dildo now filling up my screen. My mom looks at me and I slam down my phone so quick I'm not sure how I don't break the fucking screen. I swear my cheeks are burning as she eyes me with amusement, and I do the only thing I can do in that moment, I purge my secret to my mom.

"I don't know who she is. It was a wrong number text that turned into getting to know each other without names, and now it's been a couple of weeks and we text everyday," I say the words without taking a single breath, and by the time I am done she is still staring at me, smirking.

"Oh how mysterious, is she pretty?" Her eyes are sparkling with interest and I don't think before I respond, "Her tits are."

She promptly hits me with a kitchen towel. "Manners at the table, Nova. Jesus, I taught you better than that." I hold up my hands in mock surrender, but I can still see the smile tugging at the corner of her mouth.

"Sorry! I just haven't seen her face, we agreed to this whole anonymity thing and just started talking. I didn't expect it to go past that first night, but I guess we just hit it off." I try to explain it all in a way that sounds causal, but it sounds like bullshit even to my own ears. I have come to look forward to those messages from Grim everyday.

“Oh, so you like her,” my mom squeals. “My baby is growing up and falling in love!” She starts to get all misty-eyed and I have to burst her bubble quickly before she gets too carried away.

“Woah woah, no falling in love, just friends, calm down.” How crazy does she think I am? I’m not gonna fall in love with someone I don’t even know.

She just picks up her glass and takes a sip of her juice as she mutters, “If you say so.”

We continue on with our breakfast, but when my phone lights up again she smirks at me, and moves to take her now empty plate to the sink.

Grim: Don’t tell me the way to get rid of you all along has been to scare you away with Harold!

I smirk. This fucking girl, I swear she enjoys pissing me off.

Nova: In your dreams, Grim! Harold better watch his back because I am coming for his girl!

Grim: Oh Charmer, you couldn’t handle me the way Harold does

Nova: Oh yeah? We will see about that

Grim: Don’t tell me that’s a threat

Nova: No baby

Nova: That’s a promise!

There is no response to my last message, but it doesn’t surprise me. Grim likes flirting with me. Hell, she likes me flirting with her, but anytime I get close to this fantasy becoming a reality she shuts down. At first I thought it was her way of blowing me off, but now I know her a little better, I understand that she needs coaxing into things a little more. She might not even know my name yet, but I know one day I’ll be making her scream it.

I spend the rest of the morning hanging around with my mom and fixing a couple of things around the apartment for her. When she finally relents and slips off for a nap, I spend a couple of hours doing all of her laundry, cleaning up, and making a few dinners that she can eat throughout the week. I also make a note to grab her some groceries before the next time I come over, because she is running low and is too proud to ask.

She would never admit to needing anything but I have eyes, I know how hard she is finding it to keep up at work, and is worrying about how she is going to pay for her treatment. It's why I did the one thing I thought I'd never do, I called my dad. I haven't asked him for anything, ever. I never needed to, my mom always managed, and when I got accepted into Fairfield on a scholarship I thought I was set. I didn't factor in the costs of living and partying, so when I was a couple of months into freshman year and my dad sent me a bank account that he topped up every month, I quietly accepted it. Hell, he had enough guilt to pay off that I wasn't going to stop him, but this is different.

When I called him and invited him to my game this week, I could tell he was surprised. He didn't even notice how I could barely choke out the words. He just said some bullshit I barely heard, and that he would see me there. I already regret making the call, I don't want to see him, I don't want to ask for his help, but I have no other choice.

By the time my mom wakes up it's pushing into the late afternoon, and I need to get home and study. When she sees that I have taken care of everything that was on her afternoon to-do list, she smiles.

"What did I do to deserve such a good boy like you, huh?" She makes her way to the freezer and pulls out a couple of lasagnas, passing them to me. "For you and the boys, lord knows you need a good home-cooked meal."

Now it's my turn to smile, "Thanks Mom." I drop a kiss to the top of her head as she leads me towards the door. "I'll drop by on your day off after class okay?"

She nods, pulling me in for a quick hug. "I'll look forward to it, honey."

I always feel guilty, leaving her behind in that tiny apartment to go back to the giant house that has far too much room for four college guys, but she doesn't seem to mind it. In fact, she never complained once, even when we first moved there and had to share the small space, she just said it suited her and got on with it.

The walk back to campus is quicker than normal with all the tension from my day building up, and I feel my fingers itching to text Grim again in an attempt to calm myself down, but I can't push her. She will come back to me later when she is ready, and like a fucking simp I will be waiting. What the fuck is happening to me?

1 0

M A D D I E

FAMILY FALLOUT

Sundays are my least favorite day of the week, because every Sunday both Josh and I are required to attend family dinner at the Mayoral mansion. And I know what you are thinking, family dinner probably sounds sweet, right? All of us getting together and spending time with one another over a nice hot meal. Yeah that would be nice, except this isn't that. In fact, the meal prepared by the chefs and served by servants is about the only thing I look forward to, because at least the food is good.

The rest is hell.

My parents barely talk to one another when there is no audience to fool, and my grandma just sits getting drunk on what she calls cheap wine. Most of the time is spent focused on Josh, as he desperately tries to keep everyone charmed with his stories from the week, and as usual my dad hangs off his every word. He has barely said two words to me since I entered, and it's been the same song and dance between us for the past few weeks, ever since I walked out of his office after his ultimatum about Brad.

I'm not sure what he expected, but with the way he keeps looking at me, I am sure he is waiting for an apology. He will be waiting a long time if he

thinks he is going to get one, and as Josh continues to tell them about the trick shot he pulled off in his last game, I pull out my phone under the table and read back over the messages from this morning.

If you would have told me a few weeks ago, that the best part of my day now would be messages from a handsome stranger whose face I have never seen, I would have laughed, but here we are. I pretty much start off every day with a text to my Charmer, and fall asleep to his words at night. I'm not sure when it went from casual to addictive, but it's like I am high on the feeling each one of his messages gives me.

I still haven't responded to the last message he sent after I showed off Harold, and I smirk at how bold I was in sending that picture. Flirting with him is fun, but that's all it can ever be. I haven't forgotten about the deal looming over my head, and there is no point dragging someone I could potentially like into that situation, and I do like him, more than I should. I know I shouldn't, and I know it's stupid, but with every message I fall further down this crazy hole with him, and right now it's the only thing getting me through the day.

The distraction of my phone catches my mom's attention as she purrs, "And what about you, Madeline?" Her question cuts Josh off mid-sentence, and he glances at me from across the table as I take a deep breath.

"What about me, Mom?" I smile sweetly, as I return her question, and she eyes me coolly.

"Your father tells me that you and Bradley Thorne are to be engaged." She drops the bomb in the middle of the table as if she doesn't expect it to detonate, but it goes off with a perfected calculation, claiming its intended casualties.

"What the fuck?" Josh curses, looking between me and my mom before adding, "She's not marrying that tool, he's a jackass who isn't good enough for anyone, let alone her."

My brother's words flow through me, spreading warmth through my chest. At least someone in this family gives a shit about me, even if it's pointless by now. I can't stop my eyes from flicking over to my father who is already watching me expectantly, waiting for me to correct the situation.

I clear my throat and attempt to clear the air. "Actually, Josh, Brad and I have been really good lately, an engagement to him wouldn't be the end of the world, he comes from a good family." The words taste like ash on my tongue, and how I manage to say them with a smile is a miracle. I sound like

a different person, like my mother, and of course my brother sees right through me.

He looks at me like I have grown an extra head, because he knows how I feel about Brad, and there is nothing but confusion on his face right now. I can feel my dad's threat from the other week hanging around my neck like a noose, so I ensure my mask stays intact and I pretend that Brad is Prince fucking Charming. That I actually don't detest him, and that an engagement to him wouldn't be the end of the fucking world.

"Your sister is right, the Thorne's are a good family, she needs to lock him down before it's too late and he finds someone better." My mother's words are as tactless as always, and I have to catch myself before I roll my eyes.

"She is barely even twenty," Josh spits out in disgust, and I watch as the truth starts settling in his mind, as he stares between our parents before shifting his gaze back to mine.

My smile is weak, but when he slumps back in his chair in defeat, I know he realizes there is something deeper going on here. I know I will have to come clean to him at some point, but this ridiculous forced dinner isn't the time or place.

Of course my mom doesn't notice him backing down and just responds to his statement. "I was already engaged to your father at that age," she purrs, and I fight the urge to say yeah and look where that got you. "Madeline needs to get a move on and lock the Thorne boy down."

This time instead of refuting her, it's my grandma that chuckles as she tops off yet another glass of wine. "Are you that impatient with your husband? Because if so, it's no wonder he fucked his secretary."

"That's enough!" My father's voice booms down from the head of the table, and I put down my fork and use my napkin to dab the side of my mouth. "Madeline and I have discussed this matter in private and it has been decided, we will announce the engagement at Christmas."

His words settle over the table and push us all into silence for the rest of the meal. I can feel Josh's stare on me repeatedly, but I make a point of not looking at him until we have eaten dessert and the plates are being cleared. My mother excuses herself first, grabbing a bottle of liquor on the way out as my father sighs. He is the next to leave, quoting business phone calls as he storms away to his office. Grandma is already sleeping in her chair, so I slip out without a word, Josh right on my heels.

If I thought I would get away without his interrogation I was wrong, because as soon as we make it outside, he is grabbing my arm and pushing me towards the garage where our cars are. When we reach it, he spins me around and demands, “Explain.”

I sigh, “It’s fine, Josh, I swear.”

“Fine?” he repeats with a huff, “Nothing is fine about you agreeing to marry Bradley fucking Thorne, the guy is a fucking creep, Madeline.”

I can’t even disagree with him on that one, not with memories of him fucking the waitress and grabbing my arm still so fresh in my mind. Josh is staring at me like he can see right through me, and he is one of the only people I can trust in this world. I can’t lie to him anymore. “If I don’t marry him, dad is going to cut me off.”

Shock flares in his eyes, and he stumbles back a step as the reality of the situation drops between us. He knows as well as I do what that would mean. I’m not the only one in this family being pressed on to receive our father’s approval. Josh gets a little more freedom thanks to his skill at hockey, but he is under just as much pressure as I am. He knows if I don’t do this, that I wouldn’t be able to afford FU. I wouldn’t have anywhere to live, my car would be gone. I’d be forced to drop out of college and find a job to support myself, and given that our dad has an in with most businesses in town, I expect that would be a hard thing to find.

He sighs, stepping forward and pulling me in for a bone crushing hug, that I can’t help but sink into. “It will be fine, Mads, we will think of something, I promise.”

His words don’t bring me any comfort, yet still when he pulls away I force a small smile to my lips and nod. “I have to go, Hallie is waiting for me,” I lie, just because I know I need to get away from here before I fall apart. “Call you later?” I add, so he doesn’t feel like I am just blowing him off, and he nods.

I fight back my tears and move around my car to get inside, smiling more and offering him a little wave of my hand as I pull out of the long driveway. When he finally disappears from my rearview mirror I let myself break. The drive back to my house is silent, as tears fall down my cheeks and I feel myself spiraling out of control, as countless thoughts assault my mind.

What if I just drove out of town and left?

What if I crashed the car and hurt myself?

What if I used the car to run Brad over?

All viable options, and when I pull up back in front of my own house I wonder if I should let any of them win, especially the one that involves Brad getting acquainted with my fender. Shaking the image from my head, I grab my purse and climb out of the car and head inside, nodding my head to Julian who has just pulled up behind me. He's ex-military. Maybe I can hire him to take out Brad for me, that would be fun.

When I get inside I notice the house is quiet, and I am a little disappointed that Hallie isn't here. But when I pull out my phone I find a message from her that I missed during dinner, that said she is heading to the library to study. She loves the library, so I reply with a couple of heart emojis so I don't distract her into coming home because of my family drama, and then I head upstairs and throw myself onto my bed.

I'm not sure how long I lay there, but it's long enough to make me feel like my life is falling apart, and instead of reaching for my journal and writing about my day like my therapist tells me to, I reach for my phone instead.

Maddie: Do you think your dick is good enough to erase a dinner from hell?

To my delight his reply is almost instant, and as soon as I read it I feel the pressure on my chest releasing.

The Lonely Charm: I'll conduct a survey and get back to you.
Bad day?

Maddie: You have no idea.

The Lonely Charm: Wanna tell me about it?

Maddie: Not really

The Lonely Charm: Fair enough, how about a distraction instead?

Maddie: Sure why not

The Lonely Charm: Are you alone?

The question throws me a little, and that pesky part of my brain that always reminds me that this guy could be a stalker perks up completely, but still I respond.

Maddie: Yes I'm alone...

The Lonely Charm: And where's Harold?

My cheeks heat at his words, and I feel a thrill buzz inside of me at where this exchange could be leading. We haven't ever gone past some light flirting, our messages are usually just getting to know each other without knowing each other. I mean yeah, there have been some shirtless pics on his side, and that one flirty picture I sent that first weekend, but nothing more. I guess I started this by showing him Harold, but I just wanted to throw him off his game. Which is proving impossible, it's why I call him Charmer.

Well, if he wants to play games, I can play them too.

I quickly get up and lock my bedroom door, before moving back over to my bed and grabbing Harold from my top drawer, settling myself back down on top of my sheets. I take a deep breath before I wrap my free hand around the toy and hold it up to snap a picture.

Maddie: Harold is always here with me

image attached

The anticipation of watching those typing bubbles appear and disappear is exhilarating.

The Lonely Charm: And do you two feel like playing a game?

I can't help but laugh as I read those words. Not just at him being playful, but the fact he is also playing along with me and the fact I named my damn dildo Harold. Hallie always makes fun of me for it, but nope, my lonely charm not only accepts it, but he wants to play with us. *This is going to be fun.*

Maddie: I'm not really one for following rules Charmer

The Lonely Charm: Good, because I want you to break them with me baby

Maddie: Then you better send me another picture of those abs!

This is dangerous territory we are moving into, and there won't be any going back. Once we cross this line, it's done, we won't be able to return to how things are now. Usually something like that would scare me, but all I can

feel is arousal dousing my entire body, as I reach beneath my skirt and shimmy my panties off and toss them aside. I'm doing this with or without him.

The Lonely Charm: *image attached*

Fuck me. It doesn't matter that I have seen them multiple times, or that I have several images of them saved to a secret folder in my phone. Every damn time I look at them I almost choke on my tongue. Nobody should be that perfect. Every damn ridge of his body is refined and muscular, and mix that with the few pieces of dark ink that is marred across his skin, he looks like a fucking god. *A god I want to lick.*

This picture is unlike the others though, because he is quite clearly fresh from the shower, with water droplets still glistening on his skin. There is a towel wrapped low around his waist, very low, and he is holding up the phone so the picture is taken from above. My eyes can't help but track the line of hair that leads down into the towel, and they also don't miss the thick outline of his cock bulging out from behind the fabric. Fuck he's big, and I imagine what it would be like to rip that towel away and feast my eyes on the rest of him.

The Lonely Charm: Ready to play with me baby?

Maddie: Yes please

The Lonely Charm: Already begging? I knew you were a good girl, Grim. Now put Harold where I wish I was.

His words make me light up inside, and damn I will beg all he wants if he keeps talking to me like that. I wonder what he would sound like if he was here calling me a good girl in my ear. I bite my lip as I squeeze my thighs together, already more than desperate to feel myself get off, but if he is going to play then so am I. I take Harold and position him at my mouth, resting him seductively against my tongue as I snap a close up picture.

Then I pull off my top and drag him down in between my tits and snap another, before pushing him down between my legs and taking one final image. When I am happy with all three of them and that you can't tell who I am from them, I send them off.

Maddie: And is that my mouth, tits, or pussy, Charmer?

image attached

image attached

image attached

I don't wait for his reply to come through. I switch on the toy and let the vibrations drag over my pussy, as I use my own juices to get him nice and ready. When the tip brushes against my clit, I let out a little whimper, already feeling so needy to come as it pulses through me.

The Lonely Charm: Fucking hell Grim, The things I want to do to you! I'm hard as fuck!

image attached

The picture this time is of him clearly lying in bed, but instead of a towel covering his dick, it's his hand, his fingers seductively curled around his thick length. His hand is fisted at the base and I imagine it's my hand instead of his, as I slide the toy inside me and gasp. My mind can't help but think about this sex god at home in bed, fucking his hand to my pictures, and soft moans start to pour from my mouth as I fuck the toy in and out of me.

Maddie: Stroke it nice and hard for me

I have never sexted in my life, and I'm not sure where the courage to do it now is coming from, but he just makes me feel so alive, and I don't even know his name.

When my phone lights up again I find a video instead of a picture and when I press play I groan out loud. It's a short clip of him jerking his hand up and down his cock, only stopping to curl it around his tip at the end of every stroke. God his cock is beautiful, it's long and smooth, and I move the toy harder inside of me to match the timing of his hand.

I know he won't expect anything back but I am desperate to have him going as crazy as I am. So I focus the camera between my open thighs and let it record the toy dipping in and out of me as I gasp and moan at the sensation of it. I even turn the settings up a notch so its vibrations reach both in and out of my pussy, not missing my clit as I writhe in pleasure. My fingers are shaking as I hit send and he watches it instantly.

The Lonely Charm: I'm gonna cum to the sound of your moans and the sight of your tight little cunt baby

His words are filthy and erotic, and my hand fucks the toy even faster. I feel my entire body tingling as I get closer to release. I watch the video he sent on repeat, soaking my hand, and Harold, until they are both so slippery I can barely control them. Yet I keep fucking myself harder, imagining it's him, imagining he is here on top of me, fucking me into the mattress.

The Lonely Charm: I bet you'd scream so pretty for me while I fucked your pretty pussy nice and deep.

The Lonely Charm: You'd beg me to stop but you wouldn't mean it

The Lonely Charm: You want my cock slamming deep inside of you while you scream my name

The Lonely Charm: And you will scream it Grim

The Lonely Charm: You'll scream it so loud that everyone in this town will know you're mine.

I'm gone. I fall over the edge with a scream, and I press down the voice record button on my phone and capture every sinful second until I am completely spent and breathless. When I release it and I see it start to play instantly, the thrill of it all continues to wrack my entire body as I picture him listening to it.

Not even a minute passes before another video comes through and when his own masculine groan floats through my speakers, I want to come again as I see him fall apart. He fucks his hand in quick, rough strokes until jets of cum spurt from the end and coat his hand and stomach in a display of pure sex. If I was there I'd lick him clean and ask him if he wanted to go again, and I feel no remorse as I save both videos into my private folder for another time with Harold.

Maddie: That was an interesting distraction Charmer

The Lonely Charm: I just came harder than I ever have before, and all you have to say is that it was an interesting distraction?

Maddie: Don't tell me I put a dent in that huge ego of yours

The Lonely Charm: You wish baby

Maddie: You better go get another shower since I'm not there to clean you up

The Lonely Charm: Fucking hell! Every damn door Grim! Say the word and I will hunt you down and put Harold out of business

The rest of my day isn't so bad afterall.

1 1

M A D D I E

B L O O D Y B I N

The rest of the week passes by and I now get to start my day with a hot shirtless picture of my stranger running, and end it falling apart around Harold, as my Charmer sends me filthy messages that would make a whore blush. It's been days since we crossed the line from flirty exchanges to virtual fucking, and it has never felt so good to give into temptation before. The rest of my life is ordered and planned to perfection, from the classes I was pushed into taking, and the fiancé lined up for me like stock. So being able to have this one piece of freedom feels worth the risk.

My father has been calling me non-stop to try and arrange a dinner with the Thorne family, to which I keep putting off, and Josh has been at the house almost daily to check on me. They are completely suffocating to the point that the stolen texts I can exchange with my mystery stalker have now become a lifeline I don't ever want to let go of. Thankfully I have managed to evade my father's wishes all week, and have placated Josh by promising him I wouldn't miss his game tonight.

After roping Hallie in, which wasn't hard considering her new budding friendship with Archer Gray, that she swears is nothing but platonic, I'm sure

it will be a good night. We even manage to snag some seats right at the front near the penalty box, so we are gonna have the best view of the game. We gossip and catch up while we wait for the game to begin, but as soon as those lights start flashing and the players hit the ice, my focus remains on the rink.

I spot Josh the second he hits the ice, the number twenty-two clear across his back, and as always I am ready to cheer for him. I usually spend every game sitting on the edge of my seat, preparing for every hit he takes from the opposing team and pretending they don't physically hurt me. It's not easy to watch your flesh and blood be slammed into boards for the sake of a game, no matter how many years I have been watching it.

Scanning my eyes around the ice though they land on another number, a number I tell myself I haven't been wondering about. His number nineteen jersey is probably the most recognisable one in the arena tonight. It's no secret Nova Darkmore is set to be first draft pick next year. His talent alone is undeniable, and I know Josh was pissed that he was given captain instead of him, not that he would ever admit that out loud. I haven't spoken to Nova since the night he walked me home, something I am still reeling from given the strain of our existence with one another.

I found the hatred easy to endure, I even felt deserving of it. I know that what my father did didn't just hurt Diana, it hurt Nova too. They lost a lot from the impact of the affair, while my family survived unscathed. I was happy to take his verbal assaults and be ready to whip back with my own, but after that night a couple of weeks ago I found myself conflicted. He didn't have to step in between Brad and I, and he certainly didn't have to make sure I got home safe. So why did he?

That question has plagued me daily and now as I watch him move around the ice like it's his home, I can't help but wonder what changed and why? He's always been quiet and broody, flashy with the girls on campus sure, but he keeps himself wrapped in a tight circle that I doubt anyone could penetrate. *I wonder if anyone has ever even tried?*

"Why are you watching Nova Darkmore like you want to crawl inside of him?" Hallie interrupts my thoughts. "Or maybe have him crawl inside of you?" she adds with a wink, as I turn towards her.

"I'm not," I quickly lie, but I can tell she doesn't believe me. Thankfully she doesn't push me on it. Her own eyes are occupied by the players on the ice as she gets lost in their warm up routines.

Hockey games are the only activity like this that Hallie actually enjoys. I

think dragging her along to most of Josh's games when we were kids left her with no choice but to be comfortable with them, and I love having someone with me cheering for Josh. We have pretty much been his cheerleaders since he started taking hockey seriously as a hobby. I know he would never admit it out loud, but I know he loves us being here.

The game starts and I get lost in a sea of players, watching the puck fly from one to the other as they battle against one another for the upper hand. Josh is smooth on the ice, a natural talent from the second he stepped on it when we were kids, but the lethal duo that dominates is Nova and Archer. The two of them are so in sync with one another you would think they were damn telepathic. Watching them is thrilling, and I don't bother trying to stop. I know I shouldn't be curious about him, but I swear I can see a change in him.

He skates towards the glass I am sitting behind, and just as he is about to fly past us, someone from the other team slams him into it at full force. I flinch at the impact, and it's definitely going to earn them a spot in the sin bin, but it's the rage in Nova's eyes that burns into me. He looks up, our eyes locking for just a fraction of a second, before he spins and throws himself at the guy, raining punches down on him until all hell breaks loose around him.

Fights are as common as goals at these matches, but being this close I can't help but hold my breath, especially as Josh and his best friend Levi join the brawl. Yet still my focus waivers to Nova, and I don't breathe until the refs tear them all apart and I see him pulling back, reaching up to wipe a spot of blood from his lip. He is instantly sent off for starting a fight, and as the game resumes my eyes flick back over to him as he sits in the sin bin stewing.

As if he can feel my stare on him, he cocks his head to the side and catches me watching him. When I don't turn away, a smirk curls at the corner of his mouth, before he blows me a bloody kiss and turns his focus back to the game. Blushing from the inside out, I clear my throat and follow his lead, forcing my eyes back to ice.

The rest of the game is tense, with both teams at each other's throat for what happened in the first part of the game. There are a couple more smaller scuffles, but nothing too serious, and by the time the clock runs down, the Flyers manage to scrape by with another win.

Hallie has already made arrangements to meet Archer after the game. There is an after party at his house that I have reluctantly agreed to go to, but

I need to check in with Josh first. We wait near the entrance of the arena and I text Josh to let him know that I am outside, as I wait with Hallie for Archer to come out.

“So there is nothing going on with you and Archer Gray?” I ask her the same question I have now asked a million times in the last couple of weeks, and she laughs.

“How many times do I have to tell you that I am not his type?” She is exasperated at having to constantly tell me this, but they keep spending time together, and Hallie rarely spends time with anyone, so of course I am curious.

“Hals, please,” I roll my eyes. “You are everyone’s type.” A man would have to be blind to not find her attractive. Her hair is dark and perfectly curled, making her green eyes pop against her naturally tanned skin. Mix that with her curves and amazing rack, she turns heads everywhere we go, whether she believes that or not. Another thought occurs to me as I ask, “Is he your type?” Maybe she is playing the long game, and he might not be interested now, but maybe she is hoping that will change.

She scoffs, as she finally snaps, “He’s not the one I like.” As soon as the words slip out of her mouth I can tell she regrets them. She looks like she wants to snatch them back from thin air and shove them back down her throat. It’s the only reason I don’t push her on them, and before I can say anything else the doors to the arena swing open.

Archer appears with his housemates Alexander and Jake, and I hate that I notice that the only notable person missing from their usual foursome is Nova. A few of the other guys from the team have already left, there are only a couple more, and Josh and Nova still haven’t emerged yet.

“Sanders!” Archer yells, jumping towards Hallie and wrapping an arm around her shoulders. Surprisingly she doesn’t cringe under his touch, and it’s as if she has barely noticed the contact. *Interesting*. “Are you ready to celebrate with us?”

She smiles up at him, cheerfully nodding before they turn to me. “What about you, baby Peters, are you coming?” Alexander Reign asks suggestively, and I roll my eyes. Josh warned me away from all the guys on his team, but there was a special warning against Reign. He is the biggest player on campus, and everyone knows it.

“Not if you’re involved,” I reply sweetly, and Archer and Jake both laugh. “You guys go ahead, I’m waiting for Josh.”

Hallie pulls out of Archer's touch and closes the distance between us. "Are you sure you're okay if I leave?"

I'm already nodding. "Of course, Hals, Josh and I will be right behind you." She smiles at my assurance, pulling me in for a hug briefly before she starts to back away.

"Text me when you arrive and I'll grab you a drink, okay Wendy?" She winks, turning away as I nod, and trails towards Archer's car with the others on her heel.

Once they have gone, the rest of the car park starts to quietly filter out, and I half wonder what the hell is taking Josh so long. The game ended over half an hour ago and I am still waiting. Growing impatient and cold, I open the door and head back inside the arena to track him down. The hallways are empty as I go in search of the locker room, and when I round the corner I find the last person I wanted to see.

Nova is locked in conversation with an older man who looks to be in his late forties. They are too far down the corridor for me to hear what they are saying, but it looks heated. After a few seconds, Nova shakes his head and pushes past the man, starting to head towards me. He doesn't seem to notice me approaching as he dips back into the locker room, as the other man turns and disappears.

When I reach the door he went through, I hesitate, and before I can make a decision about whether to go inside, the door flings open and Nova reappears with his bag tossed over his shoulder. He startles slightly when he sees me, before the anger on his face turns into a wicked smirk.

"If you're that desperate to see my cock, Princess, all you had to do was ask. Waiting outside locker rooms is trashy, even for you." His words have their usual bite to them, and for some reason it settles the tension in my stomach that has been rising since the night he walked me home.

"Get over yourself, Darkmore, I'm looking for Josh," I snap back in response, falling seamlessly into our usual routine that we have perfected over the last couple of years.

Nova looks like he couldn't give a damn what I want or who I'm looking for as he snarls, "Peters is gone already, I'm the last one here."

I blanch back, my mouth opening and closing with nothing coming out. Gone? How is he gone? I texted him and told him I would wait for him after the game. I pull my phone from my bag and groan when I see I have no service, and sure enough my message never went through. I curse internally,

groaning at the fact that I passed up a ride with Hallie and the others to wait, and now I am stranded alone. Well, not alone, but I doubt Nova is going to feel gentlemanly for a second time this month.

“Okay, okay, thanks.” I turn without waiting for a response, before I halt and turn back to him. “Are you okay?” I don’t know why I ask him that, he just seems more tense than usual, and I wonder if he has anyone to talk to about it.

“Why wouldn’t I be okay?” His frame towers over me as he bounces my question back to me, and I can’t help but fidget under his stare.

I shrug. “I don’t know, it was a rough game.” I can still see the trace of blood on his lips from where he took a hit in the fight earlier.

He moves towards me and I can’t help but take a step back as he begins to tower over me. “Why the fuck are you talking to me?”

“Excuse me?” Confusion laces my tone as he pushes me against the wall, forcing my head to fall back so I can look up at him, and making my bag drop to the floor. His presence is toxic as he leers down at me.

“You heard me,” he spits. “You know I can’t stand you or your fucking family, so go and throw yourself at someone else.” I almost scoff. *The audacity of this asshole.*

He moves to take a step back, but before he can create any distance between us a rage bubbles up inside of me, and I snap, pushing him back with as much force as I can manage. “Throw myself at you? I ask if you are okay and you think I am throwing myself at you?” I shake my head in disbelief. “God, are you that fucking starved of non-sexual attention that you can’t remember what it looks like anymore?” I lean down and grab my bag off the floor, before searing him with one final look. “Seriously, Nova, get the fuck over yourself.”

I storm from the building before he can even attempt to respond or catch up with me, and it’s that quiet anger that pushes me into a power walk half way across campus, until I reach that prick’s house and head inside in search of Hallie.

When she sees me her eyes light up as she squeals, “Here she is!” I can tell she has already had a couple of drinks, but she immediately grabs a shot glass and a bottle of tequila and starts pouring one for me. *What an angel.*

Archer and Alex cheer her on as she holds out the shot for me, but when I reach her, I ignore it completely, snatching the bottle from her hand instead. I toss my head back and pour the liquid straight down my throat, relishing in

the burn as it slides down, until I have cleared at least three gulps. That should make me feel better.

“Fuck, Wendy, are you alright?” I hear concern in Hallie’s tone, but instead of saying I was abandoned by my brother and verbally assaulted by his douche of a teammate, I just smile.

“I am now.” I hold the bottle up in silent cheers, and knock back another gulp until I can feel the warmth start to spread throughout my body.

My eyes flick across the room as Nova enters the house, ignoring everyone and walking straight upstairs, and at the same time I spy Brad flirting with a girl in the corner. I scoff a laugh, taking another drink, and smile up at Alexander Reign as he pulls me into their group and starts telling some story about a threesome he had. Booze and boys, I can’t think of a better combination to cheer me up.

Fuck my family, fuck Brad, and fuck Nova Darkmore.

I spend the next couple of hours drinking, dancing, and having fun. I make a point of ignoring Brad and his hoard of girls, and Josh never bothers to show up to the party at all, so for once I feel free. We are all on the back deck and I watch in amusement from my spot leaning against the rail, as Archer tries and fails to make Hallie good at beer pong. Watching them in my drunken haze I think I finally get it, the friendship between them. He looks at her in a protective way, not a possessive way, like he has taken her under his wing. It’s nice.

We’ve spent the night all getting to know each other better, and I feel bitter for Josh always warning me away from this scene. Why does he get to have this and I don’t? Don’t I deserve to have fun too? As that question enters my mind, I spy Brad dragging a girl from the house into the garden.

I scoff drunkenly, as I yell his own words back at him. “Remember the deal, darling,” I drawl sarcastically. He looks over his shoulder, and I see an evil tint in his eye as he drags the girl towards him and sticks his tongue down her throat.

I almost gag at the sight, but it’s his cocky smirk that pushes me over the edge. He thinks he is the only one who can play around with this stupid arrangement and get away with it. He’s so much like my father that it makes me sick, and when I turn and spy Alexander Reign heading inside, an idea forms in my head.

Oh Brad Darling, two can play that game, and I always play to win, and it’s time to bag myself a teammate.

1 2

NOVA

PUCK PROPOSAL

The whiskey bottle in my hand does nothing to improve my mood, and I have been drinking from it for almost two hours. I am more than half buzzed, and all I can see is my father's smug fucking face as he lectured me about fighting during a game. I don't know what's worse, that he actually thought he had the right to, or that his words affected me this much. I don't know why I let him get to me, and I wish I had never even called him, but I don't have another choice.

I didn't bring up my mother tonight, and he didn't bother to ask how she was, he just jumped straight into the only thing that connects us, hockey. He watched my whole game with a couple of his buddies, no doubt bragging about the talent of his only son following in his footsteps. Then I was forced to listen to how he would have done it, and the things I apparently need to work on. It's clear the man doesn't know one thing about being a father, yet he rounded up the night by inviting me to a family dinner with his wife, so I guess I get the joy of enduring some more of his attention soon.

When I take another sip and it does nothing to dull the anger inside of me, I get off the bed and discard it on my dresser. I think about heading down to

the party currently going on and losing myself in the music and people, but that will probably make me feel even worse. The last thing I need right now is another night of empty partying. Plus I changed into shorts and a tank top as soon as I got into my room, and I have no desire to get dressed and indulge people.

As if that thought conjures someone, my door rattles like someone is trying to get in and I scowl. Most people at these parties know that my room is off limits unless I have invited them in, so who the fuck is trying to get in my door? I storm towards it, unlocking it, and throwing it open to find a pair of eyes staring up at me in drunken confusion.

“I’m getting really sick of opening doors and finding you on the other side of them, Princess,” I sigh, rubbing my hand down my jaw in exhaustion.

Maddie Peters stares up at me with her head cocked to the side like she is assessing me. “Oh, it’s you.” Her stare looks back down the hallway as if she wasn’t expecting to find me, which is dumb considering she is the one knocking on my bedroom door.

I open my mouth to ask her what the hell she is doing, but she beats me to it. “Oh, fuck it.” She throws herself towards me, pushing us both back into my room until she can shut the door behind us and lean against it.

Again I try to speak, but she holds her hand up and silences me. “Just be quiet for a second.”

Her stare travels up and down the length of my body while she quietly inspects me, and I can’t do anything but return the favor. I can tell from the glazed look in her eyes, that aren’t lined in anger for a change, that she is a little drunk. Her hair is messy as if she has been running her hands through it, and she is wearing tight fitted pants that mold to her curves, and a corset-type looking top thing that pushes her tits together in a glorious way.

These are things I definitely should not be focused on, and instead I try to focus on the crazy girl who has barged in my room. “Did you just come here to glare at me?” I ask, completely bewildered by her presence in my room, and I’ve had a lot of fucking girls in here. None of them that I hate the way I do her.

Every other time I always knew what they were here for, but this is not one of those times. Maddie continues to stare at me, chewing her bottom lip as if she is at war with herself, before she finally straightens her shoulders and announces, “No, I came here to suck your dick.”

I almost choke on my tongue as her words roll over me, and worse, she is

already reaching for my shorts. I've had plenty of girls throw themselves at me before, but they are the last words I ever expected to come out of *her* mouth. She drops to her knees, grabbing at me again until I manage to grip her hands between mine and hold them against me.

My hold on her makes her freeze, as she looks up at me from beneath her lashes. "What's the matter, Darkmore, not in the mood to play with me?" Her tone is light and teasing, and nothing like the way she usually speaks to me, but given how I normally speak to her, who can blame her.

Her palm flattens against my stomach as she challenges me with her stare, and it's something in that stare that has me asking, "I can't play if I don't know the rules." I don't even know why I say that, but I am intoxicated by the sight of her sitting at my feet begging to taste me. If only her father and brother could see her now.

She smiles as she drags her hand slowly down towards my shaft, teasing me above the fabric of my shorts as she purrs, "The rules are simple, there are none." She finds my cock that is standing at half mast and squeezes it gently, coaxing him to life as she takes in my expression. "What? Are you saying you don't want this? That you don't want to punish my mouth, not even a little bit?"

Punish her mouth, fuck, I want to punish a lot more than that. The thought burns through me like fire as I think about her, and her family, and suddenly the thought of silencing her with my cock sounds like a dream come true. I slide my grip from where it still holds her hand, so it moves up her arm towards her neck, pushing it through her hair and gripping it until I can tilt her head back. She smiles beneath my rough touch, and I can feel my cock aching to come out and play.

"No rules," I repeat, not really looking for an answer as I use my free hand to push down my shorts to free my cock. "Then you better open your mouth and suck, Princess."

I'm surprised by how quick she is to follow my demands, as her mouth drops open. I'm even more surprised at how fast she leans forward and sucks me between her lips. I hiss as her mouth closes around my crown, and my fingers flex involuntarily as my length thickens against her tongue. Fuck her mouth feels like heaven, all warm, wet, and inviting, and all I want to do is plunge my cock deep down her throat.

She pulls back, letting her tongue dart out and tease my tip, as it flicks across my head in feather light licks that do nothing but enrage me. I grip her

hair harder in my hands in warning, but she doesn't stop, just keeps flicking little teasing licks across my crown, as she stares up at me with an amused, aroused grin on her face. She's enjoying this, the thought is thrilling and taunting, and I'm about to make sure she never forgets coming here to beg me.

I use my hold on her to rip her head backwards and enjoy the pained gasp that slips from her throat as I demand, "Quit playing with me and suck my cock like a good little slut." I shove my dick past her lips before she can even respond, and the feel of her teeth scraping against my shaft, and her tongue flattening against my underside, have my balls drawing up in response.

My thrusts are slow at first, gentle, as I savor the feeling of her warm, wet mouth around me, and fuck does it feel good, but it isn't enough. Not after the shit night I had at the game and with my father. As if reading my mind, she pulls back and swirls her tongue around my head once more, before widening her mouth and stretching it around my length to push me to the back of her throat.

I have to bite back the groan that crawls up my own, as her eyes lock with mine and I praise her, "Fuck you look good with my cock in your mouth, Princess." Her head bobs back and forth greedily, her eyes never leaving mine until I can't take another second.

Slowly I roll my hips, thrusting harder into her mouth, and god do I need to fuck it. Most girls can't handle it, but when I snap my hips a little rougher, Maddie moans around my cock in response. Damn, who knew daddy's little princess would like it rough. I bring my other hand up to push through her hair, reaching for the back of her head to angle myself deeper. Yet before I can even get there, her hands reach up and grab onto my hips, pulling my cock further into her mouth.

I hit the back of her throat and another moan slips from her lips, and I swear I almost die and go straight to heaven, or in her case, hell. Her tongue caresses my shaft, as she pulls all the way back and swirls it around my tip, while she brings her hand up to fist my base. She works them both in tandem, touching me, tasting me, taunting me. Jerking me until I can feel myself hurtling towards my release quicker than ever before.

"Maddie," I plead her name, and she rewards me by closing her mouth around me once more and sucking hard. Fuck this girl is going to be the death of me, which makes a nice change from me wanting to kill her.

I slump forward, pressing the palms of my hands against the back of the

door, and start fucking her mouth rough and hard, exactly as I need, and she takes every single slam of my hips with ease and silently begs for more.

“Fuck yes, Princess, just like that, your throat feels fucking perfect.” Groaning, I praise her, watching as her head bobs back and forth on my cock as she swallows me deep, and when I hit the back of her throat and she tightens, I am fucking gone.

My release bursts from me with a pleased groan, as I shoot my cum down the back of her throat, my hand moving back down to clutch her hair as she swallows me down without pause, accepting my cum greedily. Before I can even catch my breath, she pushes me away from her and rises to her feet. She looks aroused, and admittedly a little horrified, but my gaze snags on her tongue as it dips out and licks up an escaped drop of my cum from her lip.

The sight is fucking maddening, as I think about dragging her towards me and tasting my release right from her mouth, and then tossing her on my bed and putting her in every position I can fucking think of. I take a step forward, about to do just that when she darts away.

“Okay, well thanks,” she mumbles, turning to rip the door open to leave, and I snap back into action.

Thanks? She is thanking me for sucking my dick. Confusion plagues me as I reach out and grab her by the arm and pull her back into me. She gasps, her skin coming alive with goosebumps where we connect, but I keep my sole focus on her eyes as I ask, “What the hell was that?”

The usual look of disdain I am more acquainted with returns to her face, as she rips her arm from beneath my touch. “That was a fuck you,” she declares, fire burning in her stare, and I can’t help but smile.

“It certainly didn’t feel like that, Princess.” I don’t want to tell her how it felt. How fucking good her mouth was wrapped around my dick, and how the image of her on her knees for me will be burned into my brain for eternity.

As if she can read every thought running through my mind she smirks. “Who said it was for you.” She turns, whipping her hair into my face as she storms away from me, and all I can do is stare after her, with my dick wondering if she is ever coming back.

When I turn back towards my door, I find my best friend watching me with a smug smile. “Oh you do like to play with fire, Darkmore,” Archer teases with a shake of his head.

I open my mouth to tell him it’s not what it looks like, or to explain, but I come up empty on both accounts, and instead go for giving him the finger as

I storm back into my room and slam the door. My heart is still racing from the high the devil's daughter just delivered, and I scrape my hands through my hair as I try to catch my breath.

What the fuck just happened? And why do I want it to happen again?

1 3

M A D D I E

PUCK SLUT

I t's official, drunk me is a raging slut! I've barely slept since I ran away from the party last night, even with all the tequila I drank, because every time I closed my eyes all I could see was me telling Nova Darkmore I was going to suck his dick. Like those words actually came out of my mouth, and I said them to Nova freaking Darkmore! What the hell is wrong with me?

I mean, I am not entirely crazy. I was in search of a dick I could suck so I could feel the satisfaction of saying a silent fuck you to Bradley Thorne, but I did not expect that dick to be attached to the person who hates me most in the world. I went in search of Alexander Reign, the campus playboy, and the perfect candidate for a little secret oral payback. I would have sucked his dick, rocked his world, and then threatened that if he ever told anyone that I would kick said dick straight off his damn body, but none of that happened.

Instead I knocked on the wrong damn door, and when it opened and I found dark and broody Mr Darkmore, I didn't back away. My drunken whore alter ego took one look at him and thought, yes this is the dick we are going to be sucking tonight. I mean, it's not like he didn't look good, even in my hatred I can appreciate how fucking hot he is. I just can't appreciate what an

utter asshole he is. But did slutty drunk Maddie care about that? No, she dropped to her knees like it was her fucking job and gobbled his broody dick right up.

What the hell am I going to do? I can never leave my house again, certainly never face Nova again, and fuck, if Josh finds out it will be World War Three. This is a disaster, and tequila has officially ruined my life. I roll onto my side and groan, as the thumping in my head pounds against my skull even harder as another reminder of how awful my night was, and let myself stew. My thoughts cloud together, flashes of the whole night blending as one, but one clear image sticks out everytime.

Fuck you look good with my cock in your mouth, Princess.

Those words were like molten lava in my veins, as I looked up at him, and god the way he said my name like it was his only salvation. I don't think anyone has ever spoken to me like that before, and I didn't realize how much I would enjoy it.

Fuck yes, Princess, just like that, your throat feels fucking perfect.

His praise, his tight hold on my hair, the look in his eyes as his stare remained locked with mine, fuck it was so erotic. I'm not ashamed to admit my thong was drenched at the feel of his cock on my tongue, and his words in my ears. That was probably the hottest thing I have ever done, but what is going to happen now?

Nova hates me, he hates my family even more, and now we share a dirty little secret. One I'm sure he will be quick to exploit, and I have no way to stop him. I could try, but all it would do is give him more ammunition to ruin me. I already begged to suck his cock, I'm not going to add to that by begging him not to tell anyone. Besides, we barely cross paths unless it's at one of Josh's games, so I just need to lay low, stay out of his way and pray he forgets all about me. I'm sure with the amount of girls he goes through that the name Maddie Peters isn't even a blip on his radar. Everything will be fine.

My phone vibrates and any turmoil I was feeling about last night instantly disappears, as a message from my charmer rolls in. He is the only one who ever messages me this early. It's Sunday, but that never stops him. I reach out and snatch my phone off the nightstand, ready to leer at my daily shirtless picture, and am only mildly disappointed when I see it's just a message, no picture.

The Lonely Charm: You awake yet Grim?

Maddie: Awake and having a heart attack. Did you finally suffocate under that giant ego?

The Lonely Charm: Never! Why do you ask?

Maddie: No abs, just words...

It feels nice to mess with him and go into our daily routine of talking and flirting with one another. I see the bubbles appear and disappear a few times, and I know he must be trying to work out what I mean, and I can't help the grin that spreads across my face at the next message.

The Lonely Charm: I knew you had a crush on me, Grim!

Maddie: You wish 😊 you're the one stalking me remember?

The Lonely Charm: Until the end of the earth if I have to...

Those words flow through me like a promise and I find myself blushing as I read them over and over. He does this everyday, pushes at my limits and I let it happen, enjoying the empty oaths he leaves in my inbox. I shouldn't rely on them so much to make my day. I shouldn't spur him on when I know I am already promised to another, but I can't resist the simple push and pull between us. Is it possible to have feelings for someone you have never met?

Pushing that thought aside, one because it's crazy, and two because it's not something I can ever fully explore, I roll onto my stomach and lean up to write another message.

Maddie: Am I seeing the damn abs or not?

The Lonely Charm: Damn someone is grouchy this morning, is Harold not doing his job?

I almost scoff at his message, and obsession with my damn sex toy, and I would if it didn't delight me, but thoughts of Harold just conjure up forbidden images of last night. I physically shake my head to try and chase them away as I angrily tap out another text.

Maddie: Harold is not the man bothering me today

The Lonely Charmer: So there is a man, good to know

Shit, I probably shouldn't have said that, he is going to think I am taken, which in hindsight I am. I doubt my father or my future fiancé would approve of our little texting situationship. At that thought, another image of last night flows through me, and I feel satisfaction at fucking over my intended.

Maddie: It's not like that trust me

The Lonely Charm: What's it like?

Maddie: Hate filled with a thousand hell-fires!!!

The Lonely Charm: Sounds kinky

Maddie: No, there is nothing kinky about it! Just hate! HATE
HATE HATE!!!!

The Lonely Charm: Damn do I need to find this dude and save him from your wrath?

Maddie: You would probably get along with him, his ego rivals yours!

I smile as I compare them because I am right, and I swear a requirement of being that hot means you have to also be a cocky asshole. Something they both have in common. I don't know how the hockey team makes it through the day, the coach must go insane dealing with them all together. I wonder if my Charmer plays any sports? We made a deal during the first week after we found out we both go to FU, that until we are ready we won't talk about what classes we take or anything like that. Little does he know I will never be ready to reveal who I am, all it will do is ruin everything.

With that thought in my mind, I can no longer sit still and sulk. I toss the covers aside, grab my robe, and head downstairs to make a coffee. It's barely 7am, so the sun isn't even fully up yet, which means when I am ready, I will still be able to watch the sunrise on the back deck. I make myself a quick cup, and then another and put it into a disposable cup and head out front.

Hector is in his car, eyes sharp, meaning he spots me instantly, rolling down the window with a smile as I bring him his usual cup of morning coffee.

"You're too good to me, Maddie, my wife is gonna start getting jealous," he jokes, as he takes the coffee from my hand.

I roll my eyes. "Please, Hector, if your wife brings me those meatballs again, I'm gonna steal her right out from under you." Hector's wife, Neeve, is

an angel sent from the gods. Hector brings me home-cooked meals made by her at least three times a week, and I swear it's the only decent food I enjoy these days.

"I'll fight you for her," he quips at my back, as I retreat into the house, and I hear his laugh when I shrug as if to say bring it.

Locking the door behind me, I head to the back of the house and slide open the patio door quietly, slipping out into the dawn and closing it behind me. I take my usual seat in the comfy chair in the corner, and bring my feet up to rest on the little porch deck that surrounds the house. The lake is still this early in the morning, not tainted by anyone sailing, no ripples from children feeding the ducks. It's just peaceful.

I pull my phone from my pocket and see another message waiting for me, ignoring the flutters it causes in my stomach.

The Lonely Charm: I doubt I would get along with anyone who covets your attention Grim, I want you all to myself.

His words turn those flutters into full on tornadoes as I imagine him having me. God what it would be like to have those abs hovering above me as he pounded into me. Would he be soft? Gentle? Or would he be rough and hard? I think I would enjoy both, especially with him. My imagination starts to run wild with possibilities, and when my phone vibrates again I almost drop my coffee all over me.

The Lonely Charm: Like someone smart once told me - always pay your debts.

image attached

Those glorious abs shine up brightly from my screen, and the picture is so close that I can see every defined muscle in his torso, including the defined v shape that dips down into his shorts. Now my thoughts turn to his cock, one I have a video of safely tucked away in my phone, that I know I will definitely be revisiting with Harold later, especially after last night.

It's that thought that makes me think of Nova again, and his cock. I can barely remember looking at it. No, instead I was too busy shoving it down my throat like I was going for the deep-throat championships. I feel myself blush for the hundredth time this morning, as I choke down a swill of coffee to try and calm my now rapidly beating heart rate. God why do I get myself into these situations?

I put my phone away and vow to stop flirting with my Charmer and stop things from going any further than they already are. It's not fair to him or me, and I don't want to make him think there is a possibility of more when there isn't. Christmas is only a couple months away, and unless a miracle happens, I will become engaged to Brad and be forced to stand by his side like a dutiful fiancée.

I also vow to avoid hockey players with dicks I have eagerly sucked.

I take another sip of my coffee and smile to myself and my new vows, they should definitely keep me out of trouble.

1 4

NOVA

HOLY WATER

The sweat pours off me as I deadlift the bar in front of me. I am on my fourth set, and I can feel my arms straining as I lower it to the floor for the final time. I'm spent, yet still there is this unrestrained energy burning off of me. It's been there the last few days, and I'm finding it hard to shake it off. I would put it down to the confrontation with my dad, but every time I try and think about that, another image clouds my mind.

Madeline Peters on her goddamn knees.

Five days, five fucking days, and I can still see it so perfectly it's as if she is in front of me. Feel the smooth length of her hair gripped into my palms, feel the wet warmth of her tongue as it scrapes against my shaft, and feel the tightening of her perfect little throat around my length. I fucking hate her, but the image of her sucking my cock like her life depended on it is imprinted into my brain and it won't go away. Fuck, I can feel myself getting hard again at just the thoughts, and I have to grab my towel so I can conceal my fucking boner from the rest of the gym.

Unfortunately for me, my best friend never misses a thing. "Looking a little tense there, Darkmore." I turn to find Archer smiling at me from where

he rests on his weight machine.

“Get fucked, Gray!” I call out, flipping him off at the same time.

The bastard has not left me alone since he saw Maddie leaving my bedroom, and has since painted a number of filthy visuals in an attempt to try and get me to tell him what happened. I didn’t confirm or deny anything, but every scenario just dug deeper under my skin as I thought about them being true. If I had to guess, I would have said someone like her was timid, tame, vanilla for lack of a better word, but the way she swallowed my cock made me rethink everything.

I still fucking hate her, but now all I want to do is force her to her knees and watch her choke on my dick again. Punish her throat for every sin her father ever committed, and let her take my cum as a reward. It’s both maddening and intriguing, and completely throwing me off my fucking game.

Then there is Grim, my little text affair who could turn into so much more, if she would just give up this anonymous facade she has forced us to hide behind. She would be the perfect distraction to make me forget about what would ultimately be my downfall. We speak constantly, every day, and most nights I fuck my fist so hard to images of her that I am surprised the fucker hasn’t fallen off. The only night we didn’t talk is the night I spent with Maddie, which just makes me feel like a piece of shit. I don’t owe anything to Grim, we haven’t set any parameters in this weird situation, but I can’t help but feel like I should tell her about what happened. Or at least ask her what the fuck is going on with us.

Deciding that I am done with my workout, too distracted to go on anyway, I head into the showers, thankful my hard-on has now disappeared. I make quick work of rinsing off so I can be sure I make it to class on time, and move to get dressed for the day. Archer follows soon after, and given we have the same first class, we wait for one another so we can leave the gym together.

As we push through the doors we spot a couple of bunnies lingering around, which is normal behavior for them, but it’s one particular bunny that has me groaning inward as she moves towards us.

“Hello boys,” Brianna purrs, biting her lip seductively like she thinks it actually makes her look good. God why the fuck did I let her near me again? She is staring at me intensely, like she could devour my soul or some shit, as she waits for me to answer.

Thankfully Archer takes the lead. “What do you want, Brianna?”

I see her eyes flicker a little in annoyance as she finally moves her stare from me to him, but she hides it quickly, dipping her hand into her bag and pulling out two envelopes. “Just wanted to give these to you personally.” She hands the envelopes out to us, Archer taking his without pause, but I just stare at the remaining one in her hand.

“What is it?” I ask, not wanting any part in this conversation, or whatever the fuck is in the envelope. I should have kept my distance from her, and I won’t be making that same mistake again this season.

Her eyes flick to mine again, sparkling in delight as I finally address her, and I watch as she subtly pushes her chest out towards me. “It’s an invite for my birthday party, I’m turning twenty-one.” She winks at the end of the sentence, as if there is some private joke hidden there or something.

I ignore her desperate attempts for attention and force a smile as I say, “I can’t make it.”

A frown lines her face as she holds the envelope out to me again. “You don’t even know when it is yet,” she snaps in slight irritation, and I hear Archer smother a laugh beside me.

“Enlighten me,” I seethe through gritted teeth, my patience wearing thin, especially when I spy a flash of familiar blond hair across the quad from us. *Hair I have had wrapped up in my fists.*

Brianna flicks her own hair, not even picking up on my anger, as she launches into the tale of her birthday party of which I am no longer focused on, not that I gave a fuck anyway. No, instead my attention is on the little temptress who barged into my room, dropped to her knees, and let me fuck her throat so beautifully. I watch as she laughs at something her friend says, tossing her golden head of hair back so effortlessly that all I can think about is gripping hold of it again. She wouldn’t be smiling then, no instead she’d be at my mercy, begging once more until I gave in to this new found need inside of me.

“So you’ll be there tomorrow night?” Brianna’s voice interrupts my thoughts and I find myself nodding, until I hear her words again in my mind.

“Wait, tomorrow night?” For once I have something to thank my father for. “I can’t tomorrow night, I have family dinner plans and they can’t be rearranged.” My dad was adamant on having dinner with his wife and I at some fancy bullshit restaurant in town so we can talk. I have been dreading it all week, but now I am grateful to have a decent excuse to bail on this party.

“That’s too bad,” Brianna mewls, stepping forward, where she puts her hand on my chest and leans up to add in a whisper, “But you could always come by after.” Her touch makes my skin crawl when I don’t have alcohol in my veins to dull my bad choices, and it’s an effort to keep my face intact as she pulls back and steps away.

We both watch her leave with a tight smile, before I feel my body deflate from the forced interaction. “Fuck I need to stay away from her,” I curse, and Archer chuckles. “What you laughing at, Gray, your dick has been there too.”

He rolls his eyes. “Please, that girl wants one hockey dick only and it’s attached to you.” I shrug off his statement and let my stare float back across the quad where Maddie and her friend are still lingering, as we continue to walk in their direction. Archer must finally notice them too because as we get near he mutters, “Speaking of things attached to your dick,” before loudly shouting, “Good morning, ladies!”

They both turn at the sound of his voice and I see Maddie and her friend both smile, until Maddie spots me and then her smile instantly drops. This is the first time I have laid eyes on her since she thanked me for sucking my dick, and ran from my room like her ass was on fire. I’m not exactly sure how she is going to react.

Her friend, whose name I now remember as Hallie, reaches out and accepts a hug from Archer, and when he moves on to do the same to Maddie I feel my spine involuntary stiffen. Why the fuck is he touching her? And more importantly, why the fuck do I care? Her wary eyes are still on mine, as if she is waiting for me to out our dirty little secret right here in the quad, and when Archer pulls back I notice a bandage on her hand.

“What happened to your hand, Princess, did jerking off every guy on campus suddenly become too much?” The words are juvenile, a baseless taunt, but it feels good to slip back into familiar territory with her.

She assesses me coolly before she finally responds, “Not that it’s any of your business, but I burnt my hand.” I can practically feel the anger pouring off of her as I smirk.

“What, did someone finally splash some holy water on you?” I ask, my smile turning sweet and innocent, as if I could ever be such a thing.

Her stare hardens, that fire burning even brighter, and I can’t help but let my eyes drag over her. She’s wearing some preppy fucking outfit that consists of a fitted shirt and some pleated skirt with pumps, and I can’t stop my brain from imagining tearing it off her until every inch of her was bared

to me. Anger now courses down my own spine, as I push to suppress that image and new found lust I have for the princess of the Peters family.

“Please go and bother someone else, Nova!” she drawls, and I wonder what she would sound like if she moaned that name with my hands around her throat as I pounded into her from above.

That image spurs me into action and before I can stop myself, I am moving forward and gripping her forearm. “No can do, Princess, you and I need to talk.” I don’t wait for her protests, or those of her little friend, I just drag her with me until we are around the side of the building, and more importantly, alone.

As soon as we are out of sight she rips herself from my grip. “What the hell is wrong with you?” She pushes away from me and darts her eyes around to see if anyone just saw us. When her stare comes back to mine, it’s furious, and I have to bite back my new found smile for her.

“You’re what’s wrong with me right now, Princess.” I close the distance between us, and press her back against the wall until she has to tip her head to look up at me. Her eyes shine from beneath her lashes, and all I can think about is how she looked on her knees with those same eyes staring up at me.

Can you despise someone and lust after them at the same time?

“I thought maybe we should talk about the other night,” I purr. “You know when you barged into my room and begged to put my cock down this pretty little throat.” My hand reaches up to cup her neck and I let my thumb trail across her pulse point slowly.

“Absolutely not,” she snaps, her lips trembling slightly, and she gasps as my hold on her neck tightens. “I was drunk and it was a mistake, and trust me it won’t ever happen again.” Her words are husky, and I don’t miss the way her thighs press together. *She’s enjoying this.* The thought sends a thrill down my spine.

I lean forward and her eyes widen like she is scared I might kiss her. I thought she knew me better than that. I don’t want to kiss her, but I do want to play with her. “Come on now, Peters,” I whisper, my breath ghosting along her ear. “We both know how much you liked being my little slut.” I let my tongue trace the tip of her ear, and it’s as if I electrocuted her.

Her body flinches in my hold, and her hands fly up to try and push me away, but I don’t back down. “In your dreams, Darkmore, I don’t like anything about you,” she spits, pushing against my hold, but all I do is grip her tighter.

“Lie to me all you want, Princess, but I can feel your pulse against my fingers.” I squeeze her throat, pressing against that spot on her neck that tells me her heart is beating rapidly in her chest. “Or do you need another taste of me on your tongue to remind yourself of what it was like?”

Images of me pushing her to her knees right here flood my brain, and I feel my cock harden beneath my jeans as I remember the wet heat of her mouth. Fuck it was good, so fucking good that I am practically vibrating with the need to do it again and again.

My hand tightens even more around her neck, and she has to gasp out her next words between panted breaths. “Let me go or I’ll scream.”

Adrenaline pulses through me at her warning, and all I can do is smile as I dare, “Go ahead, Princess, I’d love nothing more than to hear you scream for me.”

Before she can answer or decide whether she really wants to scream, I hear the scuffle of footsteps heading in our direction, and I push away from her so fast that she almost stumbles from where I had her against the wall. By the time her friend comes into view I am four clear paces away from her with a smile on my face.

“Everything okay?” Hallie asks, Archer just a step behind her, and both their eyes flick between the two of us in question. They can feel it too, this shift between us that is dangerous, but oh so tempting.

Maddie keeps her eyes on mine until I smile and she finally snaps out of her stupor. “Everything’s fine, let’s go.” She walks away from me, grabbing Hallie by the arm and pulling her along as they disappear from sight.

Archer watches them leave before he turns to me and smiles. “There is nothing quite like a bit of hate sex to make life more interesting, right?”

I don’t bother answering him, just follow his lead as we continue on to class, and I pretend that I can’t still smell the sweet scent of the Mayor’s daughter clinging to me like an unspoken promise of something more. Madeline Peters has always been a thorn in my side, but now it’s something else, something new. I can’t get her father back for what he did to my mom, but maybe I can take some of that anger out on his little princess. She is clearly a worthy opponent and more than aware of the game.

And besides, who knew playing with her would be so much fun?

1 5

M A D D I E

WHITE LIES

My cheeks are aflame as I dash away from Nova and his dirty mouth, shock and embarrassment burning through my veins. My heart is pounding against my rib cage as I storm across the quad, with Hallie's arm gripped too tight in my hand. My throat is dry as if I haven't had a drink in days, but really it's the effects of his words stealing my breath. God, the things he was saying were filthy and erotic, and I can feel the evidence of them against my now damp lace panties.

We both know how much you liked being my little slut.

I would be lying if I said I hadn't tried to block out my memories of that night, but it isn't because of how much I fucked up by pushing myself into his room when I knocked on the wrong door. No, it's because I can still feel the tight grip he had on my hair, and the illicit feeling that pulsed through my body as he moaned my name. No one has ever treated me like that before, roughly fucked my mouth and both praised and degraded me. Hell, the word slut now sounds affectionate when it falls from his lips, it's both depraved and insulting, and I like it more than I should. I am well and truly fucked.

"Okay, are you going to tell me what the hell is going on?" Hallie tugs on

the hold I have on her, and pulls up to a stop near the building our next class is in.

I look at her and open my mouth to say something, but nothing comes out. What can I say? Where do I even start? She knows the history between Nova and I, between our families, she knew how much my dad's affair broke me, and my mom. She is the one person who knows everything, the one who tried to be there for Josh in the aftermath of it all. She's my best friend, I tell her everything, so why can't I find the words to tell her this?

"Something happened," I start with hesitation, trying to figure out the best way to explain it. "Something happened with Nova, and I'm not sure what to do," I add, and I see her frown as she tries to work out what I mean, which causes my anxiety to spike as I fall into a ramble. "On Saturday when I was drunk, I went in search of Alexander Reign so I could do stuff with him to get back at Brad, but instead I knocked on Nova's door. He answered and instead of turning around and leaving, I pushed inside and ate his... baguette."

Hallie stares at me dumbfounded, as she no doubt replays my ramble on repeat in her head. I watch as her mouth opens and closes a few times before she finally whispers, "You ate his baguette?"

I sigh, "Really, Hals, all those words and that's what you focus on." I start moving towards the door so we can get to class before we are late, and she quickly follows.

"It kinda seems like the most important part." She shrugs, holding her hands up in defense before she adds, "And eating his baguette is a euphemism, for sucking his dick, right?"

Those words are said as we pull open the door and come face to face with Daemon Forbes, his eyes narrowing as she says the word dick. Daemon plays on the team with my brother, they even live in the same house, but there is just something about him that has always put me on edge. An underlying darkness that clings to him like a second skin. There are a ton of rumors about him, and his childhood. However, when I asked Josh he shut me down completely, and told me we should know what it's like to be judged for our parents' mistakes. I didn't ask again after that.

Despite my thoughts, Daemon steps to the side and holds the door open, allowing us to pass. He maneuvers his body so there is no chance we accidentally touch him, something I wouldn't notice if I wasn't so aware of Hallie being similar, and doesn't say a word to either of us as we enter. Hallie is too busy blushing from him overhearing our conversation to say anything,

but when I look over my shoulder I find Daemon still standing there quietly watching. For once I think I see what Josh sees, someone broken and bleeding, but when he catches me staring, that signature scowl I am used to returns, and he stalks away, letting the door slam closed behind him.

“Oh my god,” Hallie whispers, placing her hand on her red cheek as she laughs. “That was so embarrassing!”

I shake my head, laughing with her. “Let’s just get to class, we can continue this conversation at home later.” Not giving her any chance to object, I drag her once more and make our way into class, and I pretend that I don’t think about Nova Darkmore once for the rest of the day.

Little white lies are okay right?



THE NEXT DAY I start my day the same as always, with a torso selfie from my Charmer, something I now look forward to every day. He isn’t shirtless in today’s picture, much to my dismay, but he is still wearing a fitted workout shirt that shows off his defined muscles.

The Lonely Charm: Good morning

image attached

Maddie: It was going to be but then you deprived me of those abs I love so much!

The Lonely Charm: Don’t flirt with me Grim, it gets me hard

Maddie: Everything gets you hard!

The Lonely Charm: Not true, apparently it’s just girls who are mean to me

Maddie: I am never mean to you!

The Lonely Charm: Who said I was talking about you? 😏

I know he means the last message as a joke, but a stab of pain hits me in the chest when I think about the conversation we had last night. He told me that he got with a girl last weekend, something that shouldn’t bother me, but when he told me he felt a little guilty about it, I laughed it off. Told him we are just anonymous friends who flirt sometimes, that it’s nothing serious, but

both were a vicious lie. I like him far more than I should, but there isn't a damn thing I can do about it. That girl he got with is real, has a name and face that he is familiar with, and obviously likes him to some degree for them to fool around with one another. She can give him something I can't, so it might hurt me in the process, but it's time I start drawing lines in the sand, keeping us firmly in the friend zone no matter how hard he tries to push us out of it.

The Lonely Charm: And woman please! You have been mean to me every day since we started talking!

Maddie: If you are talking about me pointing out your giant ego, that isn't being mean, it's just stating facts!

The Lonely Charm: I'm talking about you refusing to even give me your name or agree to meet me in person.

Maddie: You know I can't do that

The Lonely Charm: Why? What are you so afraid of?

Everything.

I'm afraid that he won't like me as much as he does now. Or worse, will like me too much and I will have to break his heart as well as my own. I'm afraid he knows me already and will be disappointed in my real identity, or use it to his advantage like most other people do. I'm afraid that this crush I have on him when we haven't even met will turn into something so real, that I will never escape the regret of not being able to fall in love with him.

Maddie: It's just better if we stay friends

Maddie: In fact I need you to make me a promise

The Lonely Charm: Anything for you Grim

Maddie: No falling in love with me

The Lonely Charm: That would be hard to complete without even knowing your real name

Maddie: Just promise me

The Lonely Charm: Okay I promise

After things turned a little too serious in my text messages, I spend the rest of the day kind of zoned out, especially when I know I am heading out

the door to meet my parents and the Thorne's at a restaurant uptown. The dinner is meant for us to all spend some time together after my dad lectured me about not being seen out with Bradley on campus. I guess I could have told him we were seen together at two parties, one where he called me a slut, but I doubt he would be interested in that story.

So instead of spending a girls night in with Hallie, I am dressed in a cream corset top, with a black silk skirt, and heeled pumps as Julian leads me towards the car. The restaurant isn't too far of a drive, but the nervous anxiety churning in my stomach makes me want to fling open the door and dive head first into oncoming traffic. Practical? *No*. Rational? *Absolutely not*. Still a better alternative than dinner? *One hundred percent*.

By the time we make it to the restaurant I am practically hyperventilating, and when I spy my father waiting outside for me, it makes me feel even worse. Julian pulls up in front of the restaurant and rushes around the car to open my door. I gratefully thank him, ignoring the few people that call out hello to my dad as I close the distance between us.

"Dad," I say by way of greeting, no other words capable of escaping my mouth right now, as I lean up and kiss his cheek.

His eyes trail over my outfit before he huffs, "You're late." He turns without waiting for a response, and holds the door open wide for me to enter, where I find my mom, and the Thorne's waiting for us. Mr and Mrs Thorne are talking to one another with their heads close together, and Bradley has his eyes on his phone, it's only my mom that notices our arrival.

"Oh there you are." She leans in close, air kissing both my cheeks before she steps back, and appraises me just like my dad did. "You look wonderful, darling. Bradley, doesn't she look wonderful?"

I couldn't feel more like a damn show pony as she prods my intended for an answer, and when he snaps his attention away from his phone, I instantly wish he hadn't. "What? Oh yeah, sure, she looks nice." *Nice*. I almost scoff a laugh. All the words in the dictionary and the only one my future husband can come up with is nice? God help our children.

"Shall we?" my father interrupts, holding his hand out to gesture towards where the hostess is waiting to seat us.

We are led to the best table in the house, my father expecting nothing less, and my cheeks hurt from the smile I am forced to keep in place as we greet the people around us. Unsurprisingly I am directed into a spot right beside Brad, who looks about as happy as I do to be here, and we all take our

seats. The waitress rushes off to bring over the wine menu, and we are left in an awkward silence that doesn't exactly set the tone for a good night.

It doesn't take me long to zone out, offering smiles and nods when I need to as their conversation picks up, and we pretend we are all just one big happy family. It's not exactly hard, I have been doing this every week for the last few years, the addition of the Thorne family changes nothing.

Instead I subtly cast my eyes around the restaurant, taking in its usual clientele. Nothing surprising in their presence, it's the same people all the time. Yet when my attention snags on a familiar hulking frame with dark hair, I feel my eyes widen. Nova Darkmore is here. He's here in this restaurant. I pray he doesn't see us, and thankfully he seems too lost in conversation with his dinner guests to notice me staring. He's with a man and a young woman, and I can't help but wonder who they both are.

I spend most of the dinner playing my part and pretending that my eyes don't keep flicking over to the hockey player whose cock I have had in my mouth. It isn't until my dad says the words spring wedding that I zone back in and almost choke on my drink.

"Spring wedding?" I interrupt, sparkling water dripping down my chin no doubt, as I look at him in disbelief.

He looks annoyed, which isn't surprising, he hates being interrupted, but still he sighs and answers me like I am nothing but a petulant child. "Yes, a spring wedding," he snaps. "It follows on nicely from a Christmas engagement, don't you think?"

His question is rhetorical, he doesn't actually want me to answer that, and given the lump now in my throat, I don't think I am capable anyway. I swallow thickly, before pasting a smile across my face and nodding in agreement. *Ever the dutiful daughter*. I half wonder why they didn't invite Josh, but now I understand why. They know he would step in and try to disagree with them, and they don't want anything derailing their plans.

With my mind swimming, I push the chair back and stand on shaky legs, as I excuse myself from the table. "I am just going to head to the ladies' room," I announce, not waiting for a response, as I turn and calmly walk away, putting one foot in front of the other until I can make my escape.

I bypass the ladies' room completely, and head down a dark corridor that I know leads to the back of this place. I push out of the staff entrance and gasp for air. My lungs are screaming at me, but no matter how many breaths I take, I can't seem to make it stop. It's as if the world is spinning around me,

and all I can do is drop down and hug my knees, and wait for it to pass.
God I don't think this night could get any worse.

1 6

NOVA

DADDY DEAREST

Dinner is unbearable, just like I knew it would be. My dad made a show of signing a few autographs when we got here, and his wife has spent the last hour trying to play footsie with me under the table. I've had to remind myself several times of the reason I am here, of the work I need to put in pretending I give a shit about him at all.

"You really need to work on your game, son. Drafts aren't far off, and if you want to follow in your old man's footsteps you need to work a bit harder." His voice grates on me as Clarissa, his wife, drags her foot up my leg once more. Her actions and his words force me from the table as I stand abruptly.

"Excuse me for a moment." I don't even explain where I am going, not even sure myself, but I head in the direction of the back of the restaurant in the hopes I can escape for a few minutes before having to suffer some more.

When I reach the back hallway I notice there are doors leading to the bathrooms, but also a door that looks to lead outside, perfect. I push through it harshly and it swings open fully, banging on the wall as I storm out, before slamming shut behind me.

I inhale a deep breath, just as someone lets out a startled curse, “Jesus fucking Christ.”

My eyes snap to the left, where I find the last person I ever expected to see tonight. Maddie looks up at me with a dash of fear in her stare as she scrambles to stand up straight. I’m confused by her reaction at first, but then I realize how it must have looked and sounded as I stormed out here and let the door swing and slam. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you.”

She rises on shaky legs, hand clutching at her chest, yet still she keeps her guard up as she says, “You didn’t scare me.” I just nod at her response and move closer to the chain fence surrounding us, as I try to take some deep breaths and calm myself down. I can still feel her stare on me so I’m not surprised when she asks, “Are you okay?”

I almost laugh, because there has got to be some kind of fucked up karma that one of the people I hate is asking me how I am. I turn so I can face where she stands by the door, arms clutching her elbows as she battles against the cool weather in her outfit. She looks gorgeous, dressed up all fancy for what no doubt is a lovely family dinner she gets to enjoy, unlike mine.

My eyes move to the floor in front of me as I admit, “Yeah, my dad could just give yours a run for his money, that’s all.” I don’t know why I say that, why I let myself be so honest with her, but a part of me just knows that it will stay right here in this alley between the two of us.

I’m surprised she even listens. Even more surprised when she takes a step towards me. “I thought your dad wasn’t involved in your life?” I snap my stare back to her and find her still watching me warily, nothing but curiosity staining her face, but when she sees my confusion she adds with a shrug, “Your mom and I used to talk a lot.” She says it so casually, like it’s nothing, like she hasn’t just exploded my brain with her admission.

“Talk about what?” I know she knew my mom, it would be hard not to considering how long she worked for Maddie’s dad, but I didn’t know they ever talked, that they were even close enough to talk.

Maddie smiles as if recalling the memories of her, and I find myself fascinated in whatever she has to say next. “About everything, but mostly you. Nothing was more important to her. You’re lucky you have such an amazing parent in your corner trust me, you don’t ever want to take that for granted.” Her face turns solemn at her words, and I find myself wanting to reach out to comfort her.

“I won’t.” Two words in response and her smile returns, and even though

I know I shouldn't, I can't help but step forward and add, "Look, Maddie, about Saturday."

Her spine immediately straightens as she sighs, "You just had to ruin it." I almost smile at her exasperation, just because of the fact I am so much more familiar with it, but we need to move forward.

"We should talk about what happened." I tell myself it's because I want to clear the air, but that's a lie. The air between us has always been dirty, and I want nothing more than to make it dirtier.

"Nope, I am not doing this." I don't miss the blush creeping up her neck as she turns to bolt, but I move faster than her, grabbing her elbow to put a halt to her escape.

"Hey, you came looking for me, not the other way around, Princess." I drop her elbow and hold my hands up in mock surrender. "No need to be embarrassed," I add with a shrug. That blush on her face turns to anger as she stares at me in disbelief.

"Embarrassed?" she scoffs a laugh, shaking her head. "First of all, I will never be embarrassed about any sexual decision I make, this is my body and I will do whatever the fuck I want with it." She steps towards me, eyes filled with wrath as she pokes her finger into my chest, and I can't help but grin. "Second of all, I wasn't even looking for you, Darkmore, so get over yourself please."

My enjoyment over her outrage lasts only seconds when her second point hits home. "What?" I stutter, the smile dropping from my face instantly.

"I was looking for Reign, but I found you instead." Anger and jealousy swarm together inside of me like a perfect storm, and I feel nothing but fury as I bite back at her.

"Wow, and you were just willing to drop to your knees for any one of us. I knew you were a slut, but I never pegged you for a bunny." The words are a cheap shot and completely untrue, but this new found need for her is overriding my other emotions.

Her eyes harden and I swear I see a little hurt behind them, but I can't be sure. "Go to hell, Darkmore!"

I reach up and curl an escaped hair around her ear, as I lean forward and whisper, "Only if you join me, Princess."

She slaps my hand away and takes a step back. "Why do you even care? You got to get off, not me. The scales were tipped in your favor, so I'm sure your giant ego can get over it."

Without waiting for a response she turns on her heels and storms back inside, leaving me staring after her. Those words repeat in my mind and I move before I can really think about it, stalking after her until I can grab her once more. Ignoring her shocked gasp, I drag her into one of the bathrooms and close the door behind us, locking us on the inside.

“What the hell is your problem?” she huffs, as I put her down against the door, and she attempts to straighten herself back up, casting a look of pure contempt at me.

I drop to my knees and her eyes go wide as I reach up her skirt and cup the back of her legs. “Well, I wouldn’t want you to think I’m selfish now.” I keep my stare on hers, as she freezes and lets me drag my hands slowly up her thighs, giving her every opportunity to say no, to push me off, but when I reach the lace of her underwear, I feel on top of the world.

“Nova,” she gasps out my name like a panicked plea. “What are you doing?” Her face is a mix of confusion and lust as she stares down at me, and I have never felt more fucking powerful on my knees before.

My fingers grip her panties softly, as I ignore her question and drag them down her legs. When I reach her ankles and she leans forward to hold onto my shoulders to step out of them, my heart threatens to burst from my chest. Fuck. The anticipation is rippling through me like a bomb waiting to go off, like any sudden movements might end it all, but the way she is looking at me right now, I would gladly explode a thousand times over.

The slide of my hands back up her legs causes goosebumps to spread across her skin, and I want to drag my tongue along every single one of them. To taste every inch of her body until she is begging me to stop. When I pull up the hem of her skirt she gasps, but I can barely breathe, let alone take notice of it, as I bare her pussy to me. Fuck, she is absolutely perfect. I lean forward and inhale her scent until nothing else exists around me, and when another breathy gasp slips past her mouth, my restraint snaps.

She moans loudly at the first flick of my tongue, and I smile against her skin as I look up at her and our eyes collide. Fuck I want those sounds, I want every single one of them, but we can’t risk being caught. “If you want me to make this pussy mine then you better stay quiet for me, Princess. As much as I want to hear you scream for me, this isn’t the place to do it.” My fingers caress her lips, and she rolls her hips against me seeking more friction as I curse. “You’re so fucking wet for me already, aren’t you?”

My tongue reaches out again, slowly running along the full length of her

slit, lapping up her juices. Every drag across her folds adds to my addiction to her, and I spread her lips open and dive in. “Nova, please,” she begs, and words have never sounded so sweet coming from her lips before.

A thud sounds out, and I look up to see her head tilted back against the door where she has her eyes closed. I part her lips and gently bite her clit until it snaps back forward. “Eyes on me when I have my mouth on your cunt, Princess.”

I let my tongue glide up her slit again and she gasps, her entire body tensing as she moans, “Oh, God.” I lick her up and down slowly, dragging my tongue over every inch of her pussy, before dipping inside to tease her clit. I latch on to it, sucking it hard into my mouth and groaning at the sweet taste of her. I tug it between my teeth, licking and biting until I am lost in her.

Her pussy throbs as I feel her getting wetter and wetter. Gripping one of her thighs and lifting it over my shoulder, I open her up even more for me, and go at her even faster and harder than before. I am so fucking greedy for her I can barely breathe, just feasting on her until she cries out for me. “Nova, fuck, please,” she pleads and I smile against her pussy.

“Do you like seeing me on my knees for you, Princess?” I swirl my tongue around her clit lazily, dipping down towards her hole as my hand comes around her ass to grip it tightly. *So fucking perfect.*

Another groan tears from her throat, despite her trying to push them down, and when she sees the smug smile on my face she pushes her hands into my hair and pulls tightly, making me hiss. “Not as much as you like seeing me on mine.”

Her hands being on me elicits a strange reaction, and I push into her touch as her words light me up inside. “No truer words have ever been spoken,” I purr, letting my breath ghost against her cunt, as I spread her open even more for me.

Then I dive in even deeper than before, attacking her clit with my tongue and lashing against it at lightning speed, until she is gasping and shaking against me. I push my mouth further down, relishing in the pain her grip in my hair causes, as I penetrate her hole with my tongue and start fucking her sweet cunt. Her fingers dig into my skull, holding me to her as I feel her entire body start to contract against me.

When she reaches the edge and I pull back, she almost screams in frustration as my thumb starts to slowly rub over her clit. “Nova,” she groans, pushing her hips forward to try and create more friction.

“Are you going to beg, Princess?” I tease, licking her taste from my lips as I try to restrain myself from going back for more.

“God, I fucking hate you,” she pants, her chest rising and falling in rapid movements as she tries to catch her breath.

“That’s okay,” I say with a smile. “You can still hate me and come on my face at the same time.” Moving in again, I start to taste and tease her once more, letting one of my fingers slide inside her cunt and rejoicing in the feel of it tightening around me. “I’m gonna make this pretty little pussy come all over my tongue.”

Whatever she was about to say is cut off with a moan, as I dive back in and feast on her like she is my last goddamn meal. Madeline Peters might be the daughter of the devil, but right now, as she writhes against my fingers and tongue, she is nothing but a perfect fucking angel.

1 7

M A D D I E

BATHROOM BANGING

I 'm in a bathroom with Nova Darkmore. I'm in a bathroom with Nova Darkmore while he tongue fucks my pussy like he might die without making me come. I am writhing above him as his tight grip on my hip keeps me locked in place, and his fingers and tongue fuck and suck me until I am barely containing my screams. His tongue flicks and swirls around my clit, hitting the perfect spot every time, as his finger slowly drags in and out of my hole.

He keeps up a relentless rhythm of his tongue against my sensitive nub, and his finger fucking me so good that I feel like I might pass out from the pleasure. When he adds a second finger, stretching me out, I can't bite back my moan as my hips roll against him desperate for more. Fuck I am so close that I feel like I might die if I don't come soon.

He can feel my desperation, my need to come. I know it, because his fingers pick up their pace, speeding up as he slams them inside of me over and over. I am so turned on I can barely remember to breathe, and when his fingers slide over that sweet spot inside of me, I can't hold back. I scream, biting my lip hard to try and contain it, as I push myself into him harder and

faster, just so desperate to find my end.

I can feel his smile against my skin as he groans into me, “Ride my tongue, Mads, take what you need.” I nod frantically at his words, as I ride his fingers without restraint, pushing his tongue tighter against me as he licks me into submission.

There is no hate, no feud, no words filled with malice, there is just passion, lust, fucking pure chaotic need for one another. It doesn’t matter that it didn’t make sense, no, the only thing that matters right now is the feeling of him against me, and when his tongue dips down to join his fingers, I arch my back almost stumbling against the door. No one has ever put their tongue inside of me before, not in the few clumsy oral experiences I have had, but Nova is feasting on me like he is on death row and I am his final meal.

I feel the orgasm barrel towards me as he switches between rough thrusts of his tongue inside of me, and hard flicks against my clit, and all I can do is ride the wave of him. When he feels my body start to shake, he releases the hand he has on my hip and reaches down to pull my other thigh around his head. Now the only thing keeping me upright is where my legs rest wrapped around his shoulders, and the angle pushes his tongue and hand even deeper.

“Nova, yes, please, right there, don’t stop.” Words pour from my mouth as I chase the high of my impending orgasm, and it feels like I have never needed anything more.

Our eyes lock on one another as he grunts against me in despair, “Come on my fucking tongue, Madeline, I need to feel this greedy little cunt squeezing my fingers so fucking hard.”

His words are my undoing as I explode around him, his movements not faltering for a second, even when he curses below me. No, he keeps up with my release, prolonging it with relentless thrusts until I am spent and breathless against him. My entire body convulsing as it comes down from the high he just gave me. When my legs slip from his shoulders, he lets them fall, but quickly grips my hip to keep me upright.

My mouth opens to say something, what, I don’t know, but he beats me to it. “Don’t say a fucking word.” His hands fumble with his belt until he can release his cock, and then he takes the hand that is covered in my release and wraps it around his shaft.

I watch in fascination as he strokes himself rapidly, grunting and groaning as he fucks his fist into his cum-covered hand. My throat aching for the taste of him, as his other hand tightens on my hip and he curses my name.

“Fuck, Maddie, you taste so fucking perfect.” He licks his lips as he keeps up his thrusting, until he throws his head back and moans.

Cum shoots from his cock, painting the floor between us, until he is spent and breathless as me, our stares locked on one another. He is the one to break it first, head dropping forward to lean against me as he catches his breath, and I don’t know why, but my hands reach out and stroke into his hair. Just like before, he pushes into my touch like he is seeking more, and suddenly the moment feels more intimate than it should.

Fear licks up my spine and I blurt out, “I should really be getting back.” I both feel and hear his sigh, and instant regret floods my system.

When he pushes away from me I feel the cold instantly, and I can tell when he rises back to his feet, silently tucking himself away, that the sex-fueled moment of passion between us is gone. Yet still my knees almost give out when he sinks his fingers into his mouth and licks both our releases from his hand, until I feel utterly empty inside.

“Always knew you’d taste so fucking sweet, Princess,” he says with a wink, and I know the cocky and typical Nova is back.

I rush to fix my skirt back into place, noticing that my lace panties are now missing from the floor and when I look at him, he cocks his brow at me, daring me to ask for them back. I refuse to give him the satisfaction, and when I smile I see his eyes shine with what looks like pride.

“I guess we’re even now, Darkmore,” I purr with a satisfied smile, and without waiting for a response, I unlock the door and check outside to make sure it’s clear.

When I see that no one is around, I open it fully to take a step out, but a gentle touch on my elbow keeps me in place as Nova crowds into my back. His hands skating up my arms, and the goosebumps from before return as he brings his mouth to my ear. “If it isn’t already obvious, you look absolutely irresistible tonight, Madeline Peters.”

My mouth drops open at his compliment, as he pushes past me and walks away without looking back. I count to thirty before I follow after him, breathing deeply to try and calm my heartbeat as I stumble back to my table on shaky legs. When I drop back into my seat beside Brad he is watching me closely, and I stare right back at him with a knowing smile on my face. Especially when his own lacking words about my appearance float back to my mind. I reach out and take a sip of water, and hope my stare portrays what I am thinking. *Fuck you Brad.*

“Are you okay, darling? You look a little flushed.” My mother’s voice cuts into my thoughts from across the table, and I feign a sorrowful smile.

“Yeah I was feeling a little sick,” I start, turning my stare back to Brad. “I am feeling refreshed now though.”

My mom nods, accepting my answer without pause and returning back to her conversation, but Brad keeps his stare on mine. I let my gaze flick past him to Nova for barely a second, but he catches it, and when Nova looks up at the same time with a smile, I watch fury stain Brad’s eyes. I see the moment he works it out, when the pieces fall into place with him, and he sees the moment I silently say fuck you to him. I was invited into this game with him without permission, but that doesn’t mean I won’t play to win. When Brad turns back to me I know he senses the change between us, but someone has to lose, and I can’t let it be me. Not if I am going to survive some bullshit marriage to him.

The rest of the dinner passes without incident, and when we all move to leave, I can feel Nova’s stare on us, on me. It feels forbidden and wrong, yet I find myself making sure I swing my hips just a little as I bypass his eye-line. My focus on him means I don’t feel Brad next to me until it’s too late. When he grabs me by the door, you could mistake it for affection, but as his fingers dig into my arm, I know what it really is, wrath.

Nova is watching us closely now, anger and confusion swirling in him, as Brad leans in close and softly spits, “Stay the fuck away from Nova Darkmore, Madeline, I won’t have a hockey whore for a wife.”

I almost scoff at his misogyny and double standards, as I make sure not to cower from him. “Don’t worry, darling,” I say with a smile, tossing his past affections at him. “Just because I know how good his cock feels in my throat doesn’t mean we don’t still hate each other. Our daddy’s investment is still safe.” I dig my nails into his skin as I pull his hand from my arm with a smile.

Just because I have been backed into this marriage without a say doesn’t mean I will back down to him. If he is getting me as a wife then he will get the true me, not the perfect version of me that my father thinks he has molded. Fuck men and their patriarchal bullshit.

By the time I get home the high from my orgasm has well and truly drained, which isn’t surprising, all the time I spend with my parents is sucked directly from my soul. Yet still I can’t wrap my mind around what the hell happened between Nova and I. It was one thing to suck his dick when I was

drunk at a party, but this was completely different. We were both completely sober for one, and two, it was the best fucking orgasm another person has ever given me, but it can't happen again.

I thought we hated one another? No wait, we still hate each other, that hasn't changed, has it? I'm not sure anymore. How many orgasms does it take to cancel out someone's hatred? Or was the orgasm that good just because he hates me? He wasn't soft or gentle, he didn't ask permission, or demand anything in return. He just took from that which I gladly gave, and didn't stop until I was begging and pleading to come for him.

It was forbidden and filthy, yet thinking of it has my thighs rubbing together, my release still stained there as evidence of our illicit bathroom affair. I don't regret it and that's the problem, I know I should. The hatred between us was easy to navigate, yet now there is this tension that was never there before, or at least I never noticed it. I don't know how to navigate this new course we are on, and worse, I'm not sure I want to try.

I move to take a quick shower and get ready for bed, and by the time I climb between the sheets I am exhausted from all of the evening's events. I close my eyes and pretend I don't fall asleep to the image of Nova's face clamped between my thighs.

1 8

M A D D I E

PUBLIC CLAIMING

I spend the next couple weeks avoiding Nova and his damn tongue as much as physically possible. Now if you put a gun to my head then I would not be ashamed to admit that, but will I admit it to my best friend? Absolutely not. I have made all sorts of excuses possible to avoid parties, take different routes to class, and even skip some of Josh's games. Now I'm not proud of it, but there is no way I can be sure that something won't happen with Nova if I see him again.

His dark brooding eyes and rough hands haunt my dreams almost every night, and even daily dates with Harold do nothing but make me miss his touch. I am both disgusted and delighted by my need for him, and Hallie has been nothing but unhelpful, constantly asking me questions about our two run-ins. She was absolutely delighted by the bathroom tale, and thought me politely thanking him for sucking his dick was the highlight of her year.

The only light in the dark right now is my Charmer, he still sends me messages daily, although all of his running selfies now include a shirt unfortunately. We have developed a firm friendship that still trails along the line of flirting and a little sexting, but I do my best to keep him at arm's

length where I can. Things are complicated enough.

The Lonely Charm: You know every time I eat tacos I think about you

Maddie: Think about me or think about me choking on a taco?

The Lonely Charm: Do I really need to answer that Grim?

Maddie: I guess not, I know you well enough to know your answer by now Charmer

The Lonely Charm: You know me better than most people

I wish I could deny that it wasn't the same for me, but it's been over two months since we have been talking to one another. I feel closer to him every day, and I know if I gave in to him and let us explore this, that it would probably be great, but I won't do that when I know it has an expiration date.

Maddie: So none of your friends know how much you suck huh?

The Lonely Charm: I'm more interested in whether you suck 😏

Maddie: 😏 Only for good boys

The Lonely Charm: Oh I would be so fucking good for you Grim

The front door slams shut, and I know Hallie is home and will be about to chew my ass out for not being dressed yet. She has ignored every single one of my bullshit made up excuses this week, and forced me to cave into going to the Flyers game tonight. I would have tried to get out of it again, but she went to Josh, and now he has been asking me why I skipped so many games, so I was left with only one option.

Maddie: Guess I'll have to wait and see. I gotta run, my roommate is dragging me out for some fun and I need to get ready

The Lonely Charm: Don't worry you are saved by the bell, I've got to go anyway. I'll talk to you later and you can tell me again what a good boy I am

Maddie: In your dreams

The Lonely Charm: Every damn night Grim

“Oh my god, why aren’t you ready yet?” I roll my eyes before I even turn around, but when I do Hallie is eyeing me expectantly.

“Relax, Hals, I just need to throw on some clothes.” I gesture to my hair and makeup, which despite my reservations about going tonight, is already done.

She still keeps a scold on her face, but I see her shoulders drop in relief. “Well, hurry up and get ready, I want to be there early.” I smile, putting my phone away and slipping off the stool as I head towards her.

Hallie has come out of her shell a bit more lately, and I’m not naive, I know it’s because of Archer. Before him, she had the same circle of friends she always had, including me and Josh. She made a couple more freshman year, and apart from a few people she speaks to from class, she usually keeps to herself. It’s just how she is, but since striking up a friendship with the flirty hockey player she seems lighter.

It’s nice to see her let someone else in, to open up to someone and have the respect she deserves from them. It’s also nice for someone to get to know her and realise how amazing she is. Josh has questioned me about their friendship, he seems pissed about it, but I know he just doesn’t want me or Hallie getting involved with anyone off the team. That makes me think about the fact that I am going to see Nova tonight, but hopefully I will just be able to blend easily into the crowd.

Dropping a kiss to Hallie’s cheek, I brush past her and head upstairs to get ready, it’s only a home game so I don’t need anything fancy. I grab one of Josh’s spare Hockey shirts he gave me, our name Peters across the back, and pair it with black ripped jeans, and boots. I throw a jacket on top of it so I’m not cold in the rink, and with my makeup done, and my hair down in loose curls, I look nice enough for a Friday night game.

When I head back downstairs to Hallie, she is texting on her phone, her fingers flying across the screen quickly, but when she hears me coming she quickly puts it away.

“Who are you texting?” I ask, knowing her well enough to see a secret as clear as day on her face.

“Oh, it’s just Archer, he was asking if I am coming to the game, that’s all.” Her voice goes up at the end, which usually indicates she is lying, and when she avoids my eye contact, I know she is hiding something. “Come on, Wendy, let’s go and have some fun.”

Deciding not to drink, I drive us over to the arena, and I force Hallie to

stop for food in an attempt to delay us, but by the time we get to the game, we are still early. Hallie smiles as if that's exactly what she wanted, and much to my dismay, we manage to snag seats near the front again. Instead of being excited like she clearly is, I feel a nervous energy burning through my veins as we wait for the stadium to fill up and the game to start.

By the time the players start coming out onto the ice to warm up, I am a wreck, picking at the skin on my fingers to try and curb my anxiety at the thought of seeing him. When he finally hits the ice, I spy him almost immediately, now more familiar with his frame than I ever was before, and I can't help but stare as he moves into his pregame routine. I watch him as he glides effortlessly along the ice, skating and spinning with ease, like nothing else in the world matters to him at this moment. It's nothing I haven't seen before, I've been watching Josh skate since we were kids, but there is just something different about watching Nova.

Josh is the first to spot us, catching my eye as he skates around the rink, and then circling back to wave at us. As we wave back I feel eyes on me, and when I flick my stare to the left I find Nova watching us, watching me. I swear I can see his smug smile from here, and I wish I could say it didn't affect me. I wish I could say I still can't feel the ghost of it against my most intimate body part, but that would make me a filthy little liar.

I can barely tear my eyes away from him, and by the time the game is getting ready to start, I can feel myself consumed by him. When he steps up to the middle for the face-off, I see a calm settle over him, like being on the ice is part of him like nothing else is. He is focused, prepared, lethal, and when the game starts he wastes no time in dominating the ice and the players. All of the Flyers are great players, they make a good team, but just watching Nova you can see why he was chosen for Captain, why the coach picked him to lead. He was born for this game, made for that title, and he wears it with pride.

The first period of the game runs smoothly, there are no goals scored, and surprisingly no fights started either. In the second there are three goals in quick succession, one from Nova, one from Archer, and one from the opposing team. In the final period I am more focused on my brother, when Josh is on the ice there always tends to be more fights, just for the simple fact of who he is. Everyone always seems to want to get one up on the Mayor's son. They know who he is, who I am, and it makes him an easy target for baseless insults.

I guess this game is no different, because I can see one of the players hounding him around the ice. It's clear he keeps shouting something at him. I can't hear the words over the crowd, but I can see the way Josh's shoulders keep tensing under every word. When he skates close by me with the player on his heels we lock eyes and I give him a reassuring nod. The other player notices and I see his smirk, nothing like the one Nova gave me earlier, and I flip him off without regret. The next words that he directs to Josh, he does so while keeping his eyes on me and biting his lip. I see fury in my brother's eyes, but it doesn't get time to fester before another player is slamming into the guy in unrestrained fury.

The number nineteen is easily recognizable across his back, as Nova forces him to the ground and jumps on top of him. More players join the fray as Archer intercepts someone about to jump on Nova's back, and Josh slams into another guy. By the time the refs tear them all apart, they are all a little bloody and bruised, but given Nova started it, he is the only one sent into the penalty box. He gets five minutes in the sin bin and with only four minutes left on the clock, the other team are left with a power play to try and dominate us.

I watch him stalk off the ice, flicking my eyes back to Josh, who is also staring after Nova until he turns his attention back to me. He doesn't move until the game resumes, and I can't help but feel a sense of responsibility as I try and work out what the hell just happened. "What was that all about?"

My question is meant more for myself, but Hallie answers me anyway. "I think Nova Darkmore just claimed you." Her face is nothing but delighted as she makes that statement, and I feel the need to punch her.

"Please, we don't even like each other," I scoff, the lie tasting sour in my mouth.

Hallie rolls her eyes, "Whatever you say, Wendy." She shrugs. "Besides, you don't have to like him to angry fuck him"

I almost choke on my tongue when my innocent best friend throws down that gauntlet, as I watch her eyes dance across the guys still on the ice. "Who are you and what have you done with my best friend?" I tease, but she just rolls her eyes again and keeps her focus on the game.

My focus should also be on the game, on whether we can keep our lead, but my eyes stray to the box where Nova is already watching me. I get déjà vu from the last time I saw him there, but this time there is no playful smile, or flirting taunt. No, instead there is nothing but pure possession burning in

his gaze as he stares at me. I feel it crawl over my skin like a disease I should want to escape from, but the searing intensity does nothing but make me squirm. He sees it, I know he sees it, because that possession turns to lust as his eyes darken and we get lost in each other.

There is no crowd, no game, no hate. Just us and our fucked up little game that I'm not even sure I know how to play anymore. Yet still my attention remains on him until the seconds on the clock run down, and the buzzer echoes around the arena. We won the game, but I think I might have lost something else in the process, and I'm not sure how to get it back, or if I even want to.

1 9

N O V A

G O L D E N B O Y

Madeline Peters is the bane of my fucking existence. I hate her, I fucking despise her, and that was never a problem. Yet now, not only do I hate her, but I know what she tastes like. I know what her tongue feels like gliding along my cock, what her pussy feels like clenching against my fingers, and I know that hate fucking her into oblivion is inevitable. I know all of that, yet when I heard that fucking piece of shit Warriors player saying he would fuck her like the slut she is to Josh, I saw red.

I don't even know what happened. One minute I was skating past them, eyes focused on the puck and the game, and the next I was on top of him, his blood pouring beneath my fists as I fucked him up. There has always been this need inside of me when it comes to her, but it was the need to taunt her, degrade her, humiliate her, hate her, now it's something entirely different. Now I want grip my hands in her hair and watch her choke on my cock again, tongue fuck her cunt until she moans my name. Fuck, all I can think about is that tight little pussy bouncing on my dick and clenching around it like she did my knuckles. Dirty, filthy, forbidden thoughts that have no right being in my mind, yet I can't erase them, nor can I erase her taste from my tongue.

The shower water scalds my body as I wash the blood and sweat from my skin. The rest of the guys are laughing and joking around me, rejoicing in another win, and I am proud of them, but I can't join them right now when my inner turmoil is sending me into a spiral. That and the fact Josh fucking Peters hasn't stopped glaring at me since we skated off the ice. He's being more annoying than usual, and I am two-seconds away from asking him what his fucking problem is.

Coach already called me out on the way in here about fighting again, and I apologized *again*, promised it won't happen in future. We both know it's bullshit, but he always has my back, he's one of the only people I can count on to always be straight with me. The rest of the guys patted me on the back for fucking up the other guy's face, he had to be sent off after our spat, but none of them knew what made me snap.

None of them except him.

Josh is still fucking staring at me, even after I finish my shower, get dry and start getting dressed. I can feel his eyes on me, watching me, assessing me, looking for a weak spot he is never going to find. I don't have one, yet still he searches for it, waiting for a reaction that I am not in the mood to give him.

When a few of the other guys start to clear out and I am packing my bag, his silence finally breaks. "What the hell was that?" his tone is filled with loathing, and I feel the attention around us shift as the few remaining players halt their movements.

Archer is beside me on the left, and Reign is to my right, Josh is on the other side of the bench in the center, and Daemon Forbes still lingers on the corner. All four of them have their eyes on me, watching, waiting. I finish tossing my stuff into my bag, not faltering under his question, as I place my skates on the top and zip it up.

When I finally turn to face him I know this is only going to end one way, so I don't bother with any pleasantries or excuses. "How about you tell me what the hell that was, Peters?" I spit, the anger from before spiraling back through my veins. "You just gonna let some punk mouth off about your sister?"

Archer curses under his breath as he finally realizes what happened out on the ice, but Josh remains completely composed, he is his father's son after all. "I don't see why not, I let you do it, don't I?"

I almost scoff, not wanting to remind him how he always fucking cuts in

when I mouth off to her, but I guess we are past that now. “You really are just like your fucking father,” I seethe, knowing the impact that it will have against him.

I feel Archer and Reign brace at my sides, and watch as a smirk curves at the corner of Daemon’s mouth, they know what’s coming. “What did you just say to me?” Josh takes a step forward, squaring his shoulders as he questions me.

“You heard me, your Daddy doesn’t know how to respect the women he loves either, does he?” His jaw tightens beneath my words, and I can’t help but smirk. He can’t refute my words, they’re true. The mayor cheated on his wife, deserted his mistress, and I never see him with his daughter unless it’s a photo op, so I’d love for Josh to show me something different.

“I’m going to fucking kill you,” he seethes, his chest rising rapidly, as his own temper that he keeps locked down takes over.

My smile gets even wider as I flex my fists in preparation. “Oh, I would love to see you try, Golden Boy.”

I don’t know who moves first, me or him, but suddenly we are one, as his fist smashes into my jaw, and my hands slam him into his locker. Someone tries to pull me away, but I shove them off and head butt Josh as he tries to move towards me. He busts my lip, and I black his eye, and by the time her voice cuts through the carnage, we are both once again bruised and bleeding.

“Stop, please,” Maddie pleads, and I feel her come up beside me causing my attention to flick to her and falter, just for a second.

His punch comes so fast that it pushes me back, yet before I can retaliate, she comes between us. “Nova, please.” She looks up at me with tears in her eyes for her precious brother, but her words cut me to the bone. The heat of her palm sears into my chest and I press against it, yearning for more. She holds my stare for a few seconds until she finally feels that I am done.

When I look back at Josh he is still furious, as Maddie’s friend, Hallie, attempts to check his bleeding eyebrow, but he pushes her away. When he stalks away, Maddie drops her touch to move after him, but Hallie holds up her hand to stop her. She looks between the two of us before she whispers, “It’s okay, I’ll go.”

We watch them leave, and Daemon slowly follows after her, until it’s just me, Maddie, Archer, and Reign left. When she looks back at me I see both sorrow and anger on her face, and I try to ignore the stab of disappointment that slashes into my gut. Instead, I keep my gaze hard as I turn my head to the

side and spit the blood gathering in my mouth to the floor.

“Are you okay?” she asks gently, genuine concern in her tone as she reaches out to prod a bruise on my face.

I hiss through my teeth, not flinching from her touch, as her eyes continue to search mine. “Do you even care?” I ask, not caring that I am being a prick, even if doing so doesn’t satisfy me the way it used to. I want something else now, something different.

“More than I should,” she whispers, her words meant only for herself, but I hear them anyway. They entrap me, luring me into her in a way I know I shouldn’t be tempted by, but all I can think about is her taste. The feel of her on my tongue, what she would look like beneath me.

It isn’t until Archer clears his throat that I realize how long we have been silently staring at one another. “Well, I hate to break up whatever kind of foreplay this is, but we should go before Coach comes back.” Both of our attention snaps to him, and the moment between us passes.

I grab my bag and we all turn to leave as Maddie asks, “Do you guys need a ride home?” Her voice doesn’t hold the same confidence as usual, and I know she is just waiting for me to say no.

Before I can say anything, Archer slings an arm around her neck and smiles at me as he says, “We would love a ride home, baby Peters.” She nods under his hold and then we all make our way to the parking lot.

Maddie pulls out her phone on the way, no doubt sending a text to check in with her brother or Hallie, and when we reach her car, I almost roll my eyes at how nice it is. Archer reaches for the front passenger door, but I grab him and slam him against the back door, and the fucker smirks as if he was purposely testing me and I failed. I flip him off as he slips into the back, and I open the door to take a seat in the front next to Maddie.

There is a silent tension as she starts the car and backs out of the space, and even though we took a while in the changing rooms there is still a line of traffic waiting to get out of the lot. She turns on the radio, and then Archer sticks his head through the middle of the seats like a damn puppy to ask, “What are you doing for Halloween, Maddie?”

I groan out loud, and she looks between the two of us confused, before she turns to him and shrugs. “I don’t really have any plans. Hals and I usually do like a scary movie marathon, but we haven’t discussed this year yet.” She looks back to me, and then Reign, before she asks, “Why, what are you guys doing?”

Archer smiles wide. “Well, I am glad you asked. See, it’s my boy’s birthday here, and I’m throwing him a party, costumes mandatory of course, are you down?”

I know she won’t come, I know she will refuse him, but the fact he is even inviting her has me fuming on the inside. He knows that something is happening between us, he told me so himself, but I haven’t told him anything, he is just going off what he saw when she left my room. Yet when she turns to me, I can’t help but think she looks disappointed that I didn’t invite her myself. It’s like we communicate silently as I pray she doesn’t come, not if she doesn’t want this thing between us to get even messier, and when I see her stare harden I know I’m well and truly fucked.

She shakes her head. “Of course the devil is born on Halloween,” she muses, and I can’t help but smile.

“And do you want to come to hell with me, Princess?” The question is a loaded one. She knows what it means, and so do I. Then when I watch a blush creep up her neck, I have to stop myself from mounting her right here in the car in front of my boys. Not that they’d care, I’m sure they’d enjoy it. I know I would.

I keep my stare on her as she licks her lips, and then turns back to Archer. “I’ll be there.”

2 0

M A D D I E

T H E N D I E

I'm pretty sure all four of us ignore the mounting tension in the car as I give the guys a ride home. Hallie responded to my text while we were stuck in traffic at the parking lot. She said Josh is fine, pissed off but fine, which I guess is nothing new for him, and that she will see me at home later. Her text does nothing to calm my nerves, especially not when I can feel the reason for my current predicament burning a hole into the side of my head with his stare.

I thought I knew Nova, or at least knew him enough to understand him and his hatred for me, but that's not the Nova I am dealing with anymore. This Nova is different. Still harsh and dark, but now there is an edge of something else, something I can't quite decipher. I know things have changed between us, and I know it's my fault. I started this that night I made a drunken mistake. Or at least that's what I keep telling myself. The night at the restaurant wasn't the same. Neither one of us were drunk, we were perfectly capable of making sound decisions, and still somehow he ended up with his head between my legs while I writhed against his tongue until I came.

By the time we pull up outside their house, I know Archer and Alexander

must both be aware something is up, it has been far too quiet. Still they move to slip out of the car silently, while Nova remains put. Yet it doesn't stop Archer from leaning back down into the open doorway with a smirk. "Don't take too long or the windows will steam up."

I can't help but smile as heat floods my cheeks, but it's Nova who curses him out against the slamming of the door. "You're a fucking asshole, Gray!"

When the door closes us both in, that tension from before burns even hotter, I can feel it so I know he can too. I turn to look at him and find him already staring at me, just like he was earlier tonight. My eyes scan his face, taking in the cuts and bruises and trying to work out which were left by my brother, and which were from the fight with the other team.

"What happened tonight?" I ask, not sure if I even want the answer, but my mind can't stop thinking about how that guy was looking at me before Nova slammed into him. "Why did you attack that guy in the game?"

I see a little surprise flare in his eyes at my question, I'm sure he thought I was going to ask about why he was fighting with my brother, but if what I think happened in the game is true, then I already know the answer. His eyes search mine, waiting for me to let it go before he finally sighs, "Does it even matter?"

"I think it does." My words are out before he has barely even finished talking, but this is important to me. Things are changing so quickly that I can barely keep up, and I need answers, whether I like them or not.

Nova shrugs, attempting to keep a casual stance on the situation as he admits, "The guy was talking shit about you." His words hold a vicious bite, and I can tell if the guy was in front of him now he would go right back to pounding his face into the floor of the ice, consequences be damned.

"You mean the way you talk shit about me?" I smirk a little as I ask him that, but he has to see the irony of the situation we are in.

"It's not the same," he snaps, his anger churning beneath his skin once more before he quietly adds, "At least not anymore."

His lip is badly busted from both of the fights, and a little speckle of blood creeps out as he talks. My hand moves before I can stop it, swiping along his bottom lip to wipe away the red spill. His eyes darken once more at my actions, and before I can move my thumb away, his tongue peaks out and licks his lips, caressing my thumb in the process and I gasp, but when I try to move my hand, he reaches up to keep it in place.

"What's happening here, Nova?" I whisper, scared to ask the question

any louder, and even more scared for the answer. This is wrong, getting involved with him given our history will not end well, but with the heat of his skin under my palm, I can't find it in myself to care.

When he reaches out to grab my other hand and pulls it onto his groin for me to feel his cock straining hard against his pants, I let out another gasp that doesn't sound like me at all. My fingers move on instinct, the remnants of what I know he likes from our first sexual encounter still lingering in my mind, and I squeeze him hard. "Fuck Maddie," he huffs, eyes blown out in lust as he watches me carefully. "I don't know what is happening here, but I do know if I don't give in to this need to kiss you, then I might die."

It's only then that I realize despite the things we have done, we have never actually kissed. Not on the mouth at least, and suddenly I feel vulnerable and exposed, as my father's threats plunge to the front of my mind. So, I force a smile to my face as I say, "Then die."

A flash of something crosses his face but it's gone in an instant, replaced by a cocky smirk as he drops both my hands and leans in close. I tilt my head to the side in a panic that he might actually try and kiss me, and this time I feel his smile against my neck as he brings his mouth to my ears. "I'll see you at my party, Princess, be a good girl and wear something slutty for me."

By the time I turn back to him, he is already climbing from the car and slamming the door without another word. I can't help but feel like I just made a mistake with him, like waving a red flag in front of a bull and now I must wait for him to charge, but I had to shut this down. There is no universe where I can just mess around with someone like Nova, and it's an even crazier one that he wants to mess around with someone like me. We are complete opposites and the hatred has burned bright between us for years, so why does it feel like something else now?

I spend the drive back to my house in a spiral, and when I park my car and find Bradley Thorne waiting in my driveway, I groan out loud as my night goes from bad to worse. He is leaning against one of my porch pillars, and when I climb from my car I watch his displeased gaze trail over my outfit. I guess jeans and a hockey jersey aren't the look of the future Mrs Thorne. I almost gag at the thought, but paste my sweetest smile in place as I move towards him.

"To what do I owe this displeasure?" I muse, pushing past him to try to get to my door. The lights are off inside which means Hallie isn't home yet, and considering I am finding Brad here, I am kind of glad she isn't.

“Don’t start with your fucking games, Madeline,” he snaps, gripping my arm and turning me towards him. “Where the fuck have you been?”

Confusion clouds my mind as I try to pull from his grip, but his fingers only tighten. “I was at Josh’s hockey game,” I say through gritted teeth, still pulling against his hold to no avail. “What the hell is your problem?” I’m not sure why he cares about my whereabouts so much, we have barely been on a few dates before my father told me about our situation. It’s not like I have ghosted him, and he seemed quite happy to be doing his own thing.

“My problem is, I don’t think you know how you need to behave.” He uses his hold on me to pull me in even closer until our bodies are pressed together, and fear starts to lick at the bottom of my spine as I smell the alcohol on his breath.

I open my mouth to ask if he has been drinking when Hector appears silently behind him, pressing a gun into his shoulder blade as he says calmly, “Let go of her arm.” Brad’s eyes widen as he feels the hard steel being pushed against his body, and his fingers loosen instantly. “That’s a good boy,” Hector mocks, before turning his stare on me. “Go inside and lock the door, Miss Peters.”

My hands shake a little as I nod and walk backwards away from them, Brad still watching me closely with an unfinished look in his eye, as Hector pulls him away. It takes three tries for me to unlock the door, and when I shut it behind me and lock it, I let the tears fall from my eyes. How did my night turn out like this?

I force my unsteady legs into the kitchen and reach into the cupboard for a bottle of tequila, pulling off the cap and taking a deep swill. I cringe a little at the harsh taste on my clean palette, but when I feel the warmth down my throat, I take another long drink. By the time Hallie makes it home I have drunk half the bottle and sunk myself onto the kitchen floor, which is where she finds me.

“Hector told me what happened,” is all she says, before slinking down to the floor beside me and holding her hand out for the bottle.

God bless best friends and their pure hearts.

We spend the next hour on the floor drinking and laughing, until my sad and scared tears are nowhere to be found. When I finally make it to bed half-drunk, I fall asleep to thoughts of a pair of dark, brooding eyes, and wondering what the hell I am going to wear to a halloween party.



FOR THE NEXT week I throw myself into classes and my usual routine. I feel Julian and Hector in my presence more than usual, but for once I am truly grateful for it. I don't see Brad at all, and I guess Hector's warning really must have sunk in. I wonder what he must have said to him? Thankfully I don't have to think too hard, Hallie keeps me distracted with homework dates in the library, and shopping for our costumes for the party, and by the time the weekend comes around, I have almost completely forgotten what happened last week.

The party is tonight and I am looking forward to it, despite whatever tension still lingers between Nova and I. I just have to get through a family dinner first. I haven't spoken to my dad at all this week, choosing to ignore his calls, which seems to be the norm these past two months, but I know Hector will have filled him in on what happened. I wonder if he actually cares?

The dinner is as awkward and mundane as expected, even Josh doesn't attempt to fill the silence with any pleasantries. And after my mom asked about his game and my father commented on the fight he joined in on, it shut down any other conversations we might have had. Thankfully, the silence makes the time go quicker, and the courses are all brought out promptly until we manage to make it to dessert. I eat quickly, forcing the food into my mouth and pretending that everything is okay, until I can escape.

Once the plates are clear, I push my chair back and stand, but before I can try to excuse myself, my father beats me to it. "Madeline, I'd like a word in my office please." My spine straightens as he stalks from the table without giving me a chance to refuse.

I feel Josh's stare on me, as I tighten my smile and move to follow after our father. It feels like the last time he brought me here and told me what my fate was to be. One I haven't been able to evade since, and I can't help but pray this is about to be my salvation. When I enter, he stalks around his desk and gestures for me to take a seat, and I do, reluctantly, biting my lip to keep my nerves at bay. I wait for him to pour an after dinner drink, before he takes a seat in his chair and looks at me.

"Hector told me what happened," he starts, and I see a flicker of emotion in his eyes, as his hands tighten around his glass before he takes a sip. "I have spoken with Thorne's father and he has assured me it won't happen again."

Tears build up at the back of my eyes as his words wash over me, and I can't hold back my scoff, "Would you even care if it did?" Seriously? Brad waits for me late one night to do god knows what if Hector hadn't stopped him, and what? My daddy talked to his daddy and now it's all going to be okay.

"Madeline," my dad warns in a no nonsense tone of voice, and I snap.

"No, dad, this is fucking bullshit and you know it. Is that really the kind of guy you want me to marry?" I stare at him as I ask that question, and when his silence holds firm I nod. "Okay, good talk."

I stand and walk out, not bothering to wait for another word from him. They clearly don't mean anything anyway, and he doesn't care what I say, so there is no reason to stay. The tears are seconds from falling as I rip open the door and stalk from the room, almost bumping right into Josh in the process, who was clearly listening in on the conversation. I stare up at him and he opens his mouth to say something, but I don't wait around to hear it.

I'm done with anyone with the last name Peters today.

I drive back home and dive straight into getting ready for tonight. First by showering and shaving every inch of my body, then lathering it in moisturizer, before moving to the kitchen to make a batch of margaritas for Hallie and I. When my phone chimes, I smile as I read the name, and open up a message that has me heating up.

The Lonely Charm: Happy Halloween Grim

image attached

He has sent a shirtless picture, which have been few and far between lately, that looks as if he is also fresh from the shower and I have to bite my lip as I take in his toned body. God he is fucking delicious. Not really in a state to send my own flirty thirst trap back, I snap a shot of my jug of freshly made cocktails and fire it off in return.

Maddie: Happy Halloween to you too Stalker

image attached

The Lonely Charm: Looks like you are setting up for a good night

Maddie: I am, I'm going to a party

The Lonely Charm: Well what a coincidence, so am I

Maddie: See, I knew you were a stalker!

The Lonely Charm: Maybe I'll see you there?

Maddie: Maybe you will

The Lonely Charm: I'll be the one looking fly

Maddie: I'll just search for the guy whose friends are carrying
his giant ego

The Lonely Charm: Don't forget about my giant dick

My smile and blush are instant, as always with him, and I spend the next hour getting ready with butterflies in my stomach. Now I have two men that I am anxious about seeing tonight. *How fun for me.* I think it's time for more alcohol.

2 1

NOVA

BIRTHDAY BOY

After spending most of the day with my mom, celebrating and looking through old photos and stuff, I wasn't at the house to rein the guys in.

So by the time I get home the place looks like a freaking haunted mansion. As usual, Alexander Reign has gone overboard, not used to anyone ever telling him no. Not that I can blame them, and I guess my own birthday party is no different. I should have known that him and Archer teaming up would be a bad idea, and when I got home and asked Jake about it, he just shrugged and said there was nothing he could do.

I just shook my head and headed straight to my room to get ready. My costume is simple and probably a little overplayed, but it was Archer's idea. He is the Goose to my Maverick. I am wearing a white tank, green flying jacket, black jeans and boots, and black aviators. Like I said, simple. I'm not really one for Halloween parties, which is saying something considering how many of them I have attended on my birthday each year, but it is what it is.

As the house starts to thump with the bass of the music, I make my way downstairs to join the fun. There are cobwebs everywhere, smoke machines both upstairs and down to create a kind of foggy atmosphere, and ghoulish

decorations falling off every surface. I have to hand it to the boys, the place looks sick. They have even rented some light machines that make the house look more like a club, and I'll be surprised if we don't get a noise complaint at some point tonight.

Not bothering to worry about that, I head straight for the kitchen to grab myself a drink, which is where I find my three housemates waiting for me, along with most of the guys from the team. "There's the man of the hour!" Reign booms, swinging an arm around my neck and pulling me in close to ruffle my hair with his hand.

Pushing him off with a laugh, I rise to find Archer smiling wide, holding a glass of champagne out to me. "Champagne, really?" I question him, taking the glass, knowing full well that he remembers the last time I drank champagne I fell into a bush in the yard and slept there all night.

"Of course champagne," he smiles, holding his glass up for a toast. "Tonight is the last Halloween we will all spend together, some of us won't be here next year." His words are sobering, as I look around at some of the guys and see similar expressions on their faces as I am sure is on mine.

I hold my glass up in the air as I say, "Arch is right, we are together now, and even though we will move onto bigger and better things one day, we deserve to celebrate the good times now." A few of them begin to nod, holding their glasses up to match my own.

"To the birthday boy," Reign says with a smile. "The best damn Captain the Fairfield Flyers have ever seen," and the crowd of guys around us cheer in agreement. I feel a ball of emotion crawl up in the back of my throat, and I push it down before I embarrass myself. Bottoms up I guess.

The next hour or so passes in a blur of drinks, guests, and birthday wishes from an array of Halloween themed party goers. By the time I have gone around the room once I am already exhausted, and before I can escape back to the kitchen to top up my drink, I am accosted by a pack of bunnies with Brianna at the center. She is dressed as some kind of witch I think, and I smile because of how fitting I find it.

"Well, aren't you wearing the perfect costume," I tease, and she preens under the attention, my joke obviously lost on her.

She leans in and purrs, "Maybe later I can show you my magic." I cringe slightly at her words, did she really just hear herself say that? But before I can respond, a new arrival demands my attention.

When I said before that Madeline Peters is the bane of my existence, I

wasn't ready for her in her Halloween costume. She looks devilishly perfect, and like every fucking wet dream I will ever have again, as she steps through the door and into my house. Her outfit consists of some kind of fluttering red dress that reaches her mid thigh, that she has paired with matching knee-high boots, and red horns. She looks every bit the devil I always imagined her to be, except now I don't want to punish her, I want to possess her.

Ignoring Brianna and the bunnies completely, I watch as Maddie and her friend Hallie look around the room casually, until they spot Reign and Archer as familiar faces in the kitchen and make their way over there. They all exchange hugs, and I grind my jaw when Gray and Reign put their hands on her, before they move away to grab both girls a drink. Not able to keep myself away from her any longer, I stalk away from the girls, leaving Brianna mid-sentence until I reach the kitchen.

Maddie is leaning against the island laughing and chatting with Archer and Reign, as a few of the other guys from the team pretend they aren't drooling over her. Which I can't say I blame them, from this angle her ass looks fucking glorious, but if one of them touches her, I'll rip off their fucking hands. My two friends eye me like they can read every thought in my mind, and that only pisses me off more, as I eye the rest of the team and hopefully convey with my look that they need to back off.

Why the fuck did I not invite Josh to come tonight? It seems the team needs a reminder about the hands off rule for his little sister.

Hallie spots me first and hides a knowing smirk in her cup, as I lean onto the island next to her friend without her noticing my arrival. "Looking a little slutty tonight, Princess, I dig it." I ensure my words are loud enough for the rest of the kitchen to hear, in an attempt to keep up this hatred-filled ruse between us.

The princess-turned-devil cocks her head to the side and appraises me with glossy eyes. "Isn't that what you begged me for, nineteen, to dress slutty for your birthday?" Oh it seems my princess is a little drunk and mouthy tonight, she is going to be even more fun than usual. I watch as her eyes drag over my body and I do the same in return, mapping every inch of skin she has on display that I want to trace with my tongue.

"It's a very nice outfit, that's for sure." I smirk as I lean down and add in a whisper, "If you were mine, I'd fuck you right here in front of all of them so they know exactly who you belong to."

Goosebumps rise along her exposed skin as she turns her body fully into

mine, trailing her hand up my torso. “Oh yeah, would you pin me down and leave marks that won’t disappear?” Her fingers scrape against my chest as her words wash over me, and I have to swallow down the groan in my throat, especially under the watchful eyes of the team.

“If that’s what you want, Princess.” My words seem casual, but I see her eyes harden. She understands the challenge, the audience, and instead of backing down she just smirks.

“No, but it’s what you want,” she purrs, using her hand on me to push me back. “What a shame you can’t have it.”

She tries to slip away, but I grab her hand and halt her in place. “You should know by now that I usually take what I want, even if I shouldn’t have it.” There is a dangerous edge to my words now, a new game she is creating between us, and like a moth to a flame, all I want to do is play.

“Fuck you, Darkmore.” Oh so I’m back to Darkmore now. I can’t hide my smirk as she rips away from my touch as if I have burned her.

“Be careful what you wish for, Princess,” I warn, relishing in the cold, dark look she offers me before she turns and stalks away from me, her little friend quick to follow.

I keep my eyes on her as someone comes around the island to stand beside me, and I only know it’s my best friend when he talks. “You really are fucked,” he says, sipping his beer with his eyes on the girls, as they begin to dance and sway with one another.

“Yep,” I sigh in agreement, not taking my eyes off my new prize.

Archer watches for a few more seconds before he slaps me on the back, “Bring her to the den when you’re ready, I have a surprise for you.” When I turn to look at him in question he just shrugs. “It’s your birthday, you get whatever you want.”

I flick my eyes back to Maddie and smile. The only thing I want is her, and as I watch her body move to the beat of the music, I know exactly how I am going to get her. Game on Princess, and I never play to lose.

2 2

M A D D I E

TRUTH OR DARE

Our eyes are locked as I watch Archer say something to Nova and he nods, then the next thing I know he is stalking towards me like a predator going after his prey. I am out of my league with him. I know it, and he knows it, and now he is going to tear me apart to prove a point. I'm not sure if it's for some misplaced hate, or fucked up lust, but either way I am ready.

When he reaches me I brace myself, but all he does is slide into the space behind me and pull my body flush against his. My back hitting his chest as we begin swaying together, grinding to the music as smoke rises up around us. I press into him as one of his hands comes around to rest on my stomach, holding me there, as the other grips tightly around my hip. My neck is slick with sweat and I swear I feel his tongue glide along my skin and I shudder.

The movement pushes me into him further, and then I feel something long and hard against my ass that almost makes me stumble. Nova's grip keeps me in place as we continue to move, but I can't help but rub against him to try to feel what I just felt again. There is no way that can be what I think it is. All we are doing is dancing.

Yet when I grind back into him again he growls in my ear, “Keep rubbing on my dick like that and we are both gonna have a problem, Princess.” His teeth latch onto my ear, and a gasped moan slips out that is thankfully lost to the sound of the music, but of course he still hears it.

The hand on my hip slides down, until it skates along the back of one of my thighs and starts to move under the fabric of my dress. My eyes flash widely around to see if anyone is watching us, but no one is paying us any attention, and the smoke is hiding most of our bodies in the dark corner we are dancing in. Hallie has also conveniently disappeared.

I brace myself as his hand reaches the curve of my cheek, and he halts before spreading it wide and coming up empty. “Princess,” he spits the term like it truly offends him as he leans in even closer. “Did you come to my birthday party without wearing any panties?”

A thrill runs through me as I tip my head back against his shoulder and we lock eyes, his pupils wide in anticipation of my answer. I shrug as casually as I can manage, feeling a lot bolder than usual thanks to the alcohol running through my veins as I say, “I didn’t have time to buy you a present.”

He keeps his eyes on mine, as that exploring hand slides between my cheeks and dips down towards my pussy, finding it damp and needy before he has even touched it. “Maddie,” he curses, so silent I barely hear it, as his other hand on my stomach grips me even more possessively. “Fuck, Princess, you’re so wet for me already,” he growls, and I whimper as his fingers push forward and swirl around my clit oh so slowly.

The lack of friction is maddening, and I grind my hips more, so desperate to come for him already that I might get on my knees and beg. Which I’m sure he would enjoy, but he doesn’t make me. He takes my cue and starts moving his fingers harder and faster, flicking against my sensitive nub in the exact spot I need him as he pushes me towards the edge.

Two of his fingers rub vigorously at my clit as he places his thumb up against my back hole, and I shudder against him. No one has ever touched me there, yet right now, I would let him do anything to me. I am his to possess as he pleases, and he knows it.

“You like this, don’t you, Princess?” he whispers against my neck, dragging his tongue across the pulse point at the juncture of my throat. “You like being treated like my little slut, where anyone could look over and watch us, could see what I am doing to you.” I wish his words weren’t true, but the throbbing slickness between my thighs is all either of us needs to know the

real answer.

I don't respond, too ashamed to admit how I don't just like this, I love it, I need it. It's freeing, a feeling I rarely have anymore and right here with him, I am completely addicted. He presses his fingers against me harder, punishing my body with his touch, forcing me closer and closer to its peak, and when one of his fingers sinks inside of me I moan, loud and reckless, not caring if anyone hears.

The sound has him spinning me around until I am pressed against the wall, and then he is slipping back inside me with another finger, stretching me open. His palm is now grinding against my clit and I swirl my hips against it, rocking my body until I fall apart against him. My pussy clenches around him as he continues to pump his hand with rough thrusts, until I am boneless and breathless. Our eyes are burning into one another, a thousand words dying on my tongue as his stare rips me apart. No one has ever looked at me the way he is looking and me, and it's almost too much. Too much and yet somehow it will never be enough.

Before I can say anything, he tips his head to the side as if he could sense eyes on us, and he finds Archer waiting for his attention. All he does is nod his head and Nova smiles looking back at me, before he pulls his fingers from my pussy and brings them to his mouth. He sinks them past his lips and sucks them clean with a groan, his eyes never leaving mine, and I am completely mesmerized.

Once he has finished he pushes back from me and makes sure my dress is right before he says, "It's time to go, Princess." He doesn't wait for me to respond, just starts pulling me through the crowd of people that I just orgasmed in the middle of, and all I can do is follow.

"Where are we going?" I pant, still spiraling from my release as I stumble to keep up with him, but he doesn't stop until we reach the door that leads down to the den in the basement.

Confusion fills my stare, but all he does is turn towards me and smile. "It's a birthday party, Princess, and it's time to play some games."

He opens the door and gestures for me to enter, and when I step inside and begin descending the stairs I realize how dark it is. It's also quiet, and when I reach the bottom I only find a few of the other guys from the team sitting around a small table. There is some booze in the middle of it, a couple of joints, and a few lines of cocaine which makes my eyes instantly snap to Nova as he comes up behind me.

He is watching me carefully as he crowds into my back, and I take some comfort in his presence as I eye the other people in the room. Of course there is Nova's best friend Archer, who is sitting beside Hallie on the sofa, then there is Alexander Reign, Jacob Harper, a girl I presume to be his girlfriend, and to my surprise, Daemon Forbes. I drag my gaze across all five of them, stopping slightly on Hallie, until she subtly nods to reassure me that she is okay, and I can see by Archer's friendly arm around her that she is being looked after.

Reign and Harper are both sitting on another sofa, whereas Daemon is slinked back into a chair, smoking a joint as he stares at where Hallie and Archer are touching. I'm not sure what the hell is going on, or what is about to happen, but I don't stop Nova as he pushes me further into the room, his cock still hard against my ass. He directs us into an empty armchair, which he lets me slide into first before he takes up a spot on the side.

When no one says anything, I clear my throat and ask, "So what are we playing?"

Archer exchanges a look with Nova before he announces, "The game is truth or dare." The tension in my shoulders relaxes a little, but then Nova's fingers, the same fingers he just had inside of me, start to dance along my collarbone.

Hallie looks at me as if to ask what the fuck, but honestly, I have no idea what is going on here either, so I just shrug, leaning forward to grab a beer off the table as the game begins. The guys kick off with Jacob first choosing dare, and being forced to send a dick pic to one of his professors. Then, Hallie pulls off her bra from under her costume when Alexander dares her to lose a piece of clothing, much to his dismay when he realizes how easily it backfired.

By the time we make it around to us, my nerves are pulsing beneath my skin as Archer asks Nova with a smile, "Truth or dare, birthday boy."

I feel his stare flick down to me, before his words lick at my skin as he responds, "Dare, of course."

Alexander and Archer share a look and a whisper over Hallie, and I see her eyes widen before Archer pulls back and replies, "I dare you to take a drink from baby Peters' body."

My own eyes flare in surprise, and his innuendo isn't lost on me as the tension in my body returns at the thought of them all watching us together. It's not like we weren't doing something similar upstairs, but there was a

level of darkness that blanketed us. Down here there isn't. I wish I could say the tension was actually anxiety but it's not, it's anticipation. When I look up at Nova he is watching me, and I know the moment he sees it, the want in me, the need I have for him to take control in something as simple as this.

I expect him to lean in and kiss me, drop to his knees maybe and stick his head between my thighs again. Lord knows I want him to, but instead he leans forward and grabs a bottle of whiskey and a straw from the table beside us. When he moves back to me he pushes me in silent demand until I slump further into the chair. I obey him instantly, letting my head drop to the back of the chair and slightly part my lips in preparation, the same thought running through both of our heads no doubt.

As he realizes I understand his intentions he whispers, "You're really gonna let me drink it from your mouth?" He almost looks surprised, and I can't help but smirk as I quip back, "I've had worse things in it."

A curse slips from his lips before his hand cups my cheek in an almost affectionate manner. Then he slides it down to my neck and pushes my chin back with his thumb as his fingers tighten around my throat. "Open your mouth you little brat," he demands, and I ensure to do it nice and slow, letting my tongue slide out onto my lips so there is plenty of room for him to pour the drink into.

The whiskey spills across my lips, some slipping down my throat onto his hand, as I force some of it to remain in my mouth for him to take. "Don't swallow," he warns, pulling the bottle away from me and leaning forward to dip the straw past my lips.

I'm fully aware of every set of eyes in the room as he sips through the straw and transfers some of the whiskey from my mouth to his own. "Now you can swallow." Again, I comply immediately, and his hand remains around my neck as I let the liquid travel down my throat.

"Jesus that was fucking hot," Alexander mumbles under his breath, and the blush that spreads up my neck threatens to burn me alive, as we both slowly pull apart from one another.

There is nothing I want more than to fuck him right here, right now, with all of our friends watching, and it's that thought that makes me spiral. I need to get out of here, I can't do this, I can't be consumed by Nova, we are too blinded. This hatred had been building for years, sizzling between us like an inferno ready to explode, and now we've both stepped into the fire we have no choice but to perish.

My eyes flash to Hallie, and she nods as if giving the okay for me to bolt, and then I am on my feet and moving without another word, pushing myself towards the bottom of the stairs so I can escape, but of course I don't get far. Nova is on me within a second, bending down to grip my thighs and tossing me over his shoulder in one smooth scoop.

The guys cheer as we storm across the room, and he kicks open a door that leads to a utility room, and doesn't put me down until he slams the door closed behind us. When I slide down his body I feel every ridge of every one of his muscles, including the long hard one between his legs, until we are both panting and staring at one another.

"I don't remember saying you could run from me, Princess?" His hand reaches between my thighs and he rips up my dress and palms my bare cunt. "This pussy doesn't feel like it wants to run away from me."

I hiss as he circles my clit, spitting my words at him in disgusted lust, "God I fucking hate you." And I do, I hate how perfect his rough fingers feel against my smooth skin. How every touch from him makes me feel alive, and how I know that no one else has ever made me feel like this before.

All he does is grin. "Then you are really gonna hate my dick." He drags me away from the door, spinning me around and pushing me forward, until we are both facing a mirror. He pushes the hair from my shoulder aside and drags his tongue along my skin, until I am near trembling with anticipation, and only then does he pull back and start to unfasten his jeans.

I know when he grabs himself because he curses beneath his own touch, probably as desperate as I am to feel more as he lines himself up behind me. Our eyes meet again in the mirror as he commands me with a husky tone, "Hold on to the sink, Princess, this is going to be rough." He doesn't even wait to see if I am ready, just slams into me hard, the force rocking me forward into the marble of the sink. His fingers dig into the skin of my hips to keep me in place as my pussy clamps down around him.

His cock is big, and the stretch of him inside of me burns in a way I can't describe. It's new and powerful, and so deep in me that I can barely find where I end and he begins. It's a fine line between pleasure and pain, and I have to hold my breath to keep myself from crying out.

"God, you feel fucking perfect," he growls, his hold on me tightening to an almost brutal point, that I know I will wear his mark on my skin tomorrow. He pulls out of me in an agonizingly slow pace, before thrusting back into me roughly. "So fucking wet and tight for me."

“Nova, please,” I beg, so desperate for more, of what I’m not sure, but I know he can give it to me, and it’s as if my pleading is the undoing of his restraint. He snaps, pulling back and slamming his hips into me again, only this time he doesn’t stop. It isn’t slow, or gentle, it’s fast, rough, messy, brutal, as the sounds of our skin slapping together echo around us in a sexual symphony. His grip on me is desperate as he drives into me with no other thought in his mind except fucking me.

His hand reaches up and grips my hair, pulling me back towards him as our stares collide in the mirror once more. His eyes are darker than I’ve ever seen them, and his jaw is tight as he pounds into me at a relentless pace. His breath is hot against the back of my neck as he watches me take every inch of him with ease. I can see the hate and the lust at war on his face, and he has never looked more perfect.

His movements aren’t casual or playful, they’re demanding, possessive, adamant in the way he tries to own me, and I know in this instant that he will be my downfall. There will be no coming back from the claim that Nova Darkmore has just staked on me, and with his cock pumping inside of me, I don’t even want to try.

2 3

N O V A

FREE REIGN

I've fucked hundreds of girls, all in a variety of ways, and not one of them has felt as good as the Mayor's daughter. They say heaven is a place on earth, but what they meant to say was heaven is inside Madeline Peters' cunt, as I pound my hard as fuck cock into it. Fuck she feels amazing, and with one hand on her hip, and the other fisted in her hair, I could die right now and go to hell happy, but only if she were to join me.

I thought this thing between us was casual, that I just needed to fuck her and move on, but there is nothing casual about how my cock feels inside of her. One fuck won't be enough, just like one taste wasn't enough. This is more than payback or lust, this is something I can't even describe. I've had a taste of perfection and now all I want to do is feast on it.

Our eyes lock on one another in the mirror and I see the lust in hers, the pleasure she is riding, and when she arches her back and pushes me even deeper, I curse, "Fuck, Princess, you take my cock like it was made for you." I can feel every inch of my dick being claimed by her, as I slide in and out. So fucking wet, so fucking tight, so fucking perfect.

Everything about her is digging deep beneath my skin like little black

vines, festering and growing beneath the surface, and poisoning me with her temptation. At this moment I don't just hate her, I hate that I can't get enough of her. I hate the way her skin looks tinted pink from pleasure, the way her eyes watch me take her, the way her teeth sink into her bottom lip to try and contain her moans. I hate the way my cock feels sinking into her soaking wet heat, and the way it's the best thing I have ever fucking felt wrapped around it. And most of all, I hate how I don't hate her at all.

Gripping my hands tighter, I pull her onto my cock even harder and she meets me thrust for thrust as she moans, "Oh God, please, more."

"God huh?" I smile, leaning forward and dragging my tongue along her neck as I whisper, "Does that mean you worship me now?"

She tries to roll her eyes at me, but I catch her in the mirror, thrusting inside of her even harder, turning the eye roll into eyes rolling into the back of her head, as she tries to manage the pleasure my dick is giving her. Her wet heat wraps around me, and it takes every bit of self control I have to not explode inside of her.

I pull her head to the side and drag my tongue up her neck again, tasting the slick sweat of her skin, so sweet and fucking salty that I wish I could taste it forever. It reminds me of the taste of her pussy, of her thighs clamping down harshly around my head. And I can't stop myself from sinking my teeth into the juncture of her neck and biting down hard. She shudders, sending a jolt straight to my cock, as my lips massage the skin that I know will bruise, and the thought of her wearing a mark from me has me rutting into her even more.

So fucking tight.

I drive into her, thrusting my hips again and again, pounding her harder and faster until her whimpers echo throughout the room. I reach around and pull her top down, letting her tits spill out so I can watch them bounce in the mirror as I slam inside of her, burying my cock deeper every time. They're plump and round, with perfect little nipples that I want to take into my mouth and suck on until she begs me to stop.

This isn't enough, a quick fuck with her bent over in front of me taking me hard and fast. No, I need more, want more. I need her laid out in my bed like my own personal feast, while I lick and taste every inch of her until she is writhing and moaning beneath me. I need her against the shower wall with her legs wrapped around me, while our wet bodies smack together. I need her on top of me, sinking down on every inch of my cock until she is full. No,

this isn't enough.

Will it ever be enough?

Her soft whimpers turn to loud moans that I know the others will be able to hear, and all it does is spur me on. "That's it, Princess, let them all know how good my cock feels inside of you." I push her further down, feeling her clench around my cock, squeezing me like a vice. God if only she could see how fucking perfect she looks from my angle, thrust up against the counter with her clothes all bunched up because I was in too much of a rush to take them all the way off. She has driven me wild with need all night, and now I have had a taste of the forbidden, I just want more.

My whole body tightens as all my blood rushes to my groin, that familiar heat starting to build in my cock. "Fuck, Mads," I groan, her name barely slipping from my mouth, as my hands fist her hips even harder. I was coming, but not before I made her come again. I release one of my hands from her hip and find her pussy, pressing firmly against her swollen clit and rubbing it roughly until her body starts to shake. "Come on, Princess, come on my dick."

"Oh, Nova, fuck, yes!" Pushing her ass into me, she closes her eyes as she descends over the edge into madness, trembling as I push into her harder and harder. "I'm coming!" She explodes around me, and I choke on my breath as I press her face down into the marble countertop, and pound into her as hard as I can, rattling the shelves around us with the force of my thrusts.

"Fuck yes you are, you're squeezing my cock so fucking tight," I grit through my teeth, holding on by a thread as her pussy spasms around me. "Fuck, Mads, so fucking good for me!"

"Nova, please," she begs, desperate for me to end this pleasure-filled torture between us, and possession like I have never known flows through me at the sound of my name falling from her lips until I am gone.

"That's it, say my name, tell me whose cock is inside you," I demand, slamming into her again and again until I feel myself go off. I pull out of her, and stroke my cock once before jets of cum spurt from the end of my dick and shoot all over her ass until she is covered in me.

God that was so fucking hot.

It's only then I realize that this is the first time I have ever fucked without a condom, and panic floods my system, which she must detect because she quietly murmurs, "It's okay, I'm on the shot and I'm clean."

Nodding at her words, I quip back, “Me too.”

Ignoring the fact she is smeared in my release, I collapse against her, struggling to catch my breath, as a haze like I have never known overcomes me. Every muscle in my body is loose and relaxed, yet still screaming out for more of what she just gave me. Of what I just gave her. I try to catch my breath, but when I pull up, bringing her body with me, and our gazes catch in the mirror, all I can think is how much I want to go again. Her eyes are glazed and unfocused after what we just did, and her cheeks are flushed to perfection. She bites her lip as we stare at one another, and I can see the shade of her tough persona sliding back into place now we are no longer connected.

Before she can move, I grip her hip to keep her in place, and lean over to pull a fresh cloth from the shelf, turning on the tap to dampen it with warm water. Then I pull back and gently wipe my release off her ass, as much as it pains me to do so, and when she is clean, I pull down her dress as she fixes the top. When she turns around there is barely an inch of space between our lips, and all I want to do is capture them between my own. I reach up to curl an escaped hair around her ear, but her eyes drop to the floor so I pull back.

“This can’t happen again,” she whispers, almost like she is too ashamed to look at me, and before she can say anything else, I take a step away from her.

I should have known, should have expected this. Why the fuck would someone like Madeline Peters ever want me for more than this? Clearly she didn’t feel what I just felt, and all that does is bring back my resentment for her more than ever. I need to remind myself, and my fucking cock, that we can’t stand her.

I want her, but I can’t have her.

I want her, but she doesn’t want me.

That reminder is enough to have my own usual taunts sliding back out as I grin at her. “If I would have known your pussy was that good, I’d have snatched it up years ago, Princess.”

Her own eyes harden at my words, that familiar sparkle returning to them as she snaps, “Like I’d ever put myself through that misery again.” She pushes past me before the lie has barely fallen from her tongue, and rips open the door as I follow, but then falters as she sees that only Reign remains.

“You two sounded like you were having fun in there,” he purrs, wiggling his eyebrows, as he brings a joint up to his mouth and inhales deeply, before

blowing the smoke back out. "I'm hard as fuck listening to you both."

I feel Maddie's spine straighten at his brazen comments, and jealousy curls inside my gut, but I have to remind myself she isn't mine, she doesn't want to be. Yet before I can cut in and defuse the tension, Maddie storms towards him and steals the joint right from his hand, taking a seat on the sofa across from him. As I walk towards her, my eyes tracking her every move, she inhales the joint in and out, before cocking her head at Reign.

"I know you aren't familiar with making a girl come, Alexander, but I'm sure you know what it sounds like." His name on her lips slices through me, as I slide into the spot beside her, snatching the joint from her just to stop myself from touching her.

Reign laughs, shaking his head as I pass the joint back to him, and he takes a drag before saying, "I like this one, she's smart, you should keep her."

Again I feel her tense beside me, but all I do is grab the bottle of whiskey from the table and smile. "I would try, but like you said, she's smart."

Ignoring our conversation completely, Maddie cuts in and asks again, "Where did everyone go?"

We can all still hear the party raging upstairs, but our little downstairs hang has dissipated quickly. Reign sighs, "I dared Hallie to kiss Archer, which she did, but then it got awkward so she left, but she told me to tell you she's fine. Archer left with Jake and his girlfriend to take her home. And Daemon..." he starts, clearly not sure what to say. "Daemon got annoyed and left, I'm not really sure why." He takes another drag of the joint in his hand, before he stubs it out on the table and leans back to watch us. "Clearly we didn't have as much fun as the two of you," he smirks, taking a sip of his drink, his drunken eyes flicking between the both of us.

I can hear the teasing tone in his voice, the flirty under edge to it. It's typical Reign, but where I expect Maddie to back down and blush again, instead she spurs him on. "Then maybe I'll invite you next time instead," Maddie purrs, and my knuckles turn white from how tight I grip the bottle in my hand.

"Careful," I warn quietly. This isn't a game she wants to play with me, but instead of ignoring my warning, she turns to me and smiles. Suddenly all I can think about is the fact that the night she came to my room and sucked me off, she was looking for him, not me.

I keep my eyes locked on hers in silent caution, but when the smirk stays on her lips, I decide it's time to play another game. I take another sip of

whiskey and then I reach down and grab Maddie by the waist and drag her into my lap. She yelps a little as I do it, but when she tries to wiggle away, I lean up and whisper in her ear. "Are you trying to escape or turn me on again?"

My question has her freezing where she is, her resistance failing her as she tries to decide her next move, but I move my focus back to Reign, who is now staring at the point where Maddie and I are joined. I bring the bottle up to her mouth and when she turns to look down at me, I communicate with my eyes for her to take a drink. She is going to need it.

"Truth or dare, Princess?" I ask smiling, knowing she won't back down, not when she missed her turn earlier.

"Truth," she answers instantly, just like I knew she would. My predictable little princess, but little does she know this is a game I am desperate to win, especially when the prize is her.

"Why don't you tell *Alexander* here about our first sexual encounter?" Her cheeks heat as she realizes what I am referring to, but then I see the determination in her eyes as she keeps her stare on mine.

"I asked him politely if I could suck his dick," she says, not dropping my gaze, and I hear Reign chuckle as he watches us.

Nodding my head while taking another drink, I can't help but tease her. "Cute recollection of events, Princess, now tell him who you were really looking for that night."

I see a flicker of uncertainty flash across her stare, and when I just keep my smirk in place she huffs and flicks her head back to Reign. "I was originally looking for you because given your reputation, I thought you'd be an easy target."

I smirk, seeing the flush of red now starting to burn up her chest as I take one final drink. "Did you hear that Reign?" I ask, tossing the now empty bottle of whiskey to the floor, and bringing my palms to slide up Maddie's thighs. "The first night my girl put her mouth on me, she was actually looking for you."

Turning my head towards him I can see he looks intrigued, clearly unsure of what game I am trying to play as he responds, "Well she looks pretty happy with where she ended up, Nineteen."

"Mmm, she does, doesn't she?" I bring my gaze back to hers, and almost drown in the look of restrained lust now burning in her stare. She doesn't know what the game is, but she is desperate to play. Just like on the dance

floor upstairs, I see her, I know her limits, and how she wants them to be pushed. I slide the hands on her thighs higher until one of them can completely cover her pussy as I whisper, “Why don’t you show him what I do to you?”

I feel her hesitation, she doesn’t want to give me this, she doesn’t want to need this, but I am quickly learning everything there is to know about the Mayor’s daughter. Only a few seconds tick by before she is spreading her thighs over mine, and if it wasn’t for my hand, Reign would be able to see her cunt completely. A cunt that now belongs to me, whether she wants to admit that or not.

Madeline Peters might be in denial, but I’m not, and it’s time to push her to the point of no return.

2 4

M A D D I E

YOU RULES

Heat floods my body as my swollen pussy pulses against Nova's hand. I know he can feel it, I mean fuck, I can smell my arousal from here.

Mix that with the touch of his fingers, and Alexander's eyes focused solely on what his hand covers, I feel like I am about to combust. I have never done anything like this in my life. Hell, until an hour ago, I had never even had casual sex before. It had always been with a guy I was dating, or someone I pretended to like to appease my parents, but Nova pushes every boundary I have, yet I can't help but think with this new game he is pushing his own even more.

I felt the possessive press of his hands against my skin, saw the look of desperation in his eyes as he fucked me. I felt it in the bathroom, that spark between us, it's like we both took that hatred we had for one another and turned it into something completely different. Loathing him turned to lusting for him, especially as every inch of his cock sunk inside of me. With him, I'm not the Mayor's daughter, or Thorne's future fiancée, I'm not even Josh's little sister, I am just me, and right now I am his.

His fingers flex against my pussy as he brings his mouth up to my ear.

“Truth or dare, Princess?” Nova asks again, and I squirm against his hand as wetness begins to pool between my thighs.

Alexander’s eyes are burning into my flesh, noting every hitch in my breath, and every tremble in my body. I know he’s enjoying this, the same way I am, but how far is this really going to go? I press down into Nova’s body and feel the steel of his cock once again, hard against my ass as I bite back a moan. I know what he wants, what he needs, more than I should, and I don’t feel any regret as I whisper the word, “Dare.”

“Good girl,” he breathes, his hand tightening against my pussy as his middle finger presses against my clit. “I dare you to suck Reign’s cock right here in front of me.”

Alexander curses under his breath at the offer, but his eyes are on his teammate’s, not mine, as they silently communicate with one another, and I don’t even have to look at the two of them to understand. This isn’t about sharing, or having fun, it’s about Nova showing us all who I belong to. About him knowing what I need without me having to ask for it. He wants to teach me that he can give me what I want, and right now, just for tonight, I will happily let him believe he can.

No other words are spoken as Alexander leans forward and places down his drink, before slowly rising to his feet as he decides to play. I watch in fascination as he walks around the table until he is a few inches away from us. Nova remains silent at my back as I stare up at his friend, and just as I open my mouth to say something, Nova’s free hand closes around my throat and pulls me back against him.

“Don’t look at him,” he commands, pushing my face back down to focus on his groin, before squeezing my neck gently and coaxing me towards his teammate. “Come on, Princess, show him what that mouth can do, he’s who you wanted after all, right?”

His hand between my legs releases me, only to smack down hard against me, forcing a moan from my lips, before he slips the middle finger between my pussy and starts to massage my clit. Every fiber in my body starts to heat as he works me with his fingers, and with his grip still around my throat, I reach out with shaky hands and start to undo Alexander’s jeans.

I can feel as he starts to harden beneath my trembling fingers, and when I reach into his boxers to pull him out, he goes rock solid in my hand as I stroke him gently. Nova moves his fingers in time with mine, and when he applies more pressure to my clit I can’t help but cry out again, pressing more

into his hold on me.

“Oh god,” I pant, licking my lips as I watch a bead of pre-cum appear at the tip of Alexander’s cock. My brain brings the memory of Nova’s dick against my tongue to the front of my mind, and suddenly I can’t wait to compare. Alexander is just as big as Nova, maybe a little longer, but definitely just as thick, and I almost laugh to myself. No wonder these two constantly have a bunny on their arms, yet here they are about to be undone by little old me.

Nova drags his mouth up and down my neck, teasing me with his tongue, before he pulls my lobe between his teeth. “No point praying now Princess, god doesn’t answer dirty little sluts.” Oh I am going straight to hell, because those words send a jolt of electricity through me, and the only thing I can do to stop it, is lean forward and lick to the head of Alexander’s cock, cleaning up the bead gathered there, and relishing in both their groans.

Alexander steps forward a little, the anticipation of all of this making him needy, and I open my mouth to allow him to slide inside, but before he can get any closer, Nova stops him with a firm hand on his stomach as he warns, “Come inside her mouth, and I will fucking kill you.”

That shouldn’t send a thrill down my spine, but it does, and as the tip of Alexander’s dick slips past my lips, I feel Nova’s grip on my pussy tighten to an almost painful point. I feel more alive than ever before as I suck the head of his cock into my mouth, before pulling back and swirling my tongue around it, in the exact same way I did with Nova.

I can feel Nova watching every move I make, as his fingers start to slide through my own wetness while I moan around Alexander’s cock. I might have another man’s dick in my mouth, but there is no doubt in my mind right now which one of them I belong to. His touch is firm and possessive, playing me like a fiddle as I writhe in his lap, desperate to feel him inside of me again.

His mouth drags along the exposed skin of my neck and shoulder, teasing and tasting me with every swipe of his tongue, before coming back to my ear. “Does he taste as good as I do?”

If my mouth weren’t filled I would tell him no, that despite them being similar, there is no comparison, but all his words do are push me to take his friend deeper, sucking him desperately to the back of my throat as I let my head bob back and forth. Alexander brings his hands up to grip my hair, but then they instantly drop when he hears Nova’s warning. “No fucking

touching, Reign.”

My whole body shudders at his demand, his words wrapping around me as his jealousy takes hold. I want more of it, I want to push him, break him, fucking tear him apart like he is doing to me. I moan around Alexander’s length, sucking him and licking him with enthusiasm until he groans out loud, “Her fucking mouth, Darkmore, it’s unreal.”

Nova’s grip on my pussy and throat tightens, holding me against him as he replies to him, “It’s the second best thing I have ever been inside.” The hand between my thighs dips down, and he slides his middle finger inside of me, as his palm starts to grind against my clit, and I choke around Alexander making them both curse.

He thrusts to the back of my throat and spit spills down my chin as I widen my mouth to accommodate his length. Nova continues to fuck me with his hand as I grind down onto him, and Alexander snaps his hips faster and faster as he crawls closer to release. I moan again, vibrating around him as Nova smacks his hand against my pussy even harder, as he chokes me with the other.

The three of us move together as one, yet all of us know that only one person is in charge right now. Nova is all hard at my back, his touch on me possessive and firm, and I have never felt better or more desired in my life. He wants this, he wants me, and right now he owns me enough to make me do this for him. I grind into his hand letting his fingers fuck me, as I desperately buck against him like he didn’t just fuck me in the bathroom. He drives me wild with need, and another moan slips free as I close my eyes and swirl my tongue along the underside of his teammate’s cock.

Alexander is as gone as I am, his hands dropping to my shoulders for support, which Nova must deem a safe place because he doesn’t call him out for it, and all his touch does is push me tighter against his captain. I buck, and grind, and moan between them, desperate to fall apart again, and when Alexander starts to fuck my mouth even harder, tears spill down my face as I gag.

He pulls back slightly, but it’s Nova that grips my hair and pushes me back onto his dick, until my nose is almost against his groin and I gag again. “Mmmm,” Nova grunts, tongue flicking against my ear. “Does your daddy know what you do with that mouth?”

My instinct is to swallow to answer him, but with a mouth full of his friend’s cock it’s impossible, and my action pushes Alexander to the edge.

“Fuck, I’m gonna come,” he cries, starting to pull away, but it’s Nova’s grip on my hair that drags my mouth from his cock, as his other hand fucks me even harder.

“Come on her tits,” he demands roughly, his fingers making a wet slapping sound as they slam into me, both of our eyes locked on Alexander as he drags his hand frantically up and down his length, and it’s the sight of him pumping his long, firm cock that has me clamping down around Nova. “That’s it, Princess, cover my fingers in your cum like a little slut, while he covers your tits in his.”

I throw my head back and groan, my orgasm ripping from my body with a scream, as Alexander grunts, ropes of cum shooting from his dick and painting my chest white until we are both panting and breathless.

“Fuck me,” he gasps, his hand still slowly stroking himself as he stares down at the mess he made on my skin.

Nova’s hand still pumps into me gently, sending shivers through my entire body as he tips his chin at his friend. “You had your fun, now fuck off.”

Alexander smiles, rolling his eyes at Nova, but still tucks himself away and turns to leave without another word. I have barely caught my breath before Nova turns me in his lap, his eyes dropping to the release across my chest. Anger and jealousy burn in his stare as he brings his thumb up to rub his teammates cum into my skin, before he curses beneath his breath. Then he is on his feet and carrying us towards the stairs with his hands around my ass.

“What the hell are you doing?” I panic, arms flailing as I hang onto his neck as he begins to ascend the stairs back to the party.

“We are going to my bed,” he grunts, kicking open the door as music starts to thump around us. I feel people’s eyes on us, but Nova doesn’t seem to care, he is on a mission to get us to his room, and all I can do is hang on.

“I’m not staying with you, I barely even know you!” My response is weak, and full of shit, so much so that he laughs. We have known each other for years, but this is different, yet still he ignores me as he storms up to his room.

When we reach his door, he looks at me with fire in his stare as he says, “I’ve had my cock inside of your cunt and your mouth, I think that constitutes as knowing you.” He kicks the door shut behind us, cutting off the bass of the music and the rest of the party, locking the two of us inside together.

My heart thunders hard in my chest as we look at one another, and I can’t

seem to drop his stare. It's intense and demanding. "If those are the rules I better round up the rest of your harem," I respond breathily, and his eyes darken as he walks us towards his bed.

"Those are only the rules for you," he says, dropping me to my feet, and reaching down to start dragging my dress down my shoulders. He groans at the sight of my tits, and doesn't stop until the dress is pooled at my feet.

"I thought you only liked to break the rules?" I ask, teasing him in an attempt to control my anxiety, and the fucker smirks as he pushes me down to sit on the edge of his bed.

"What do you think I'm doing, Princess, I'm about to bang the Mayor's daughter in my bed, if that isn't breaking a rule, I don't know what is." He drops to his knees as he shucks off his jacket, and then he is unzipping his jeans and dragging his cock through the wetness between my thighs.

I groan, tipping my head back as I push against him and ask, "And letting your friend come on my tits? Was that another rule?" I hear his growl against my neck, as he drops his head to my shoulder and thrusts inside of me without warning.

"That," he grits out. "Was a test." He fucks me hard and deep, cutting off any other words from my mouth that aren't moans of his name, as I hold onto his shoulders and let him own me.

His hands and mouth are everywhere, and when he drops his lips down my neck and across my chest, I groan out loud as he cleans off his teammate's release from my skin without a care. His movements are fast and erratic like he can't get enough, like he is trying to lose himself inside of me, and when I feel myself crest towards another orgasm, I grip his face and force his stare to mine, getting lost in his eyes.

We watch each other as he fucks me until I fall apart, clutching his arms as I moan out his name, and I swear it's like it flips a switch inside of him. I come around his cock and then his rough thrusts turn into slow rolling grinds of his hips, filling me so completely that I can feel myself falling down a hole I won't be able to escape from.

When he comes this time, it's with my arms around his neck, and his forehead pressed against mine, as he groans out my name. Our lips are so close they are almost touching, and I can feel his heart beating against my chest in time with my own. His breath is warm against my mouth as he whispers, "Remember who you belong to now, Princess."

I don't say a word as he lifts us up, and moves us until I am laying back

against one of his pillows. Then he pulls out of me and retreats to the bathroom, returning with a warm wet cloth, and cleaning me up once more before he tosses it aside and loses his jeans, leaving him in just a tank and his boxers. The last thing I remember before falling asleep is him turning off the light and climbing in bed behind me, with the bass of the party still thumping deep beneath us. We crossed a line tonight, one we can't uncross, and one I want to cross again and again tomorrow.

2 5

M A D D I E

BLUE AND BLACK

A pounding in my head wakes me and as I rouse from a deep sleep, a looming heat engulfing my entire body from top to bottom. *What the hell?* My eyes flick open and scan the unfamiliar room in confusion, until I feel the palm of a hand tighten against my lower stomach, and then it all comes rushing back. *Fuck.* I'm at Nova's house, in Nova's bed, after letting him fuck me. *Twice.* Fuck this is bad, so so bad. I need to get out of here.

My eyes scan the room again, noting the details I didn't take in last night, or the first night I came here, both times too drunk and horny to notice. It's clean for a guy's room, not what I expect when I think about college hockey players. There is a door in the corner that I presume leads to an ensuite, a dresser by the door, a closet on the other side, and then a desk and bookcase along the wall opposite the bed. A mirror stands in the corner, and I can see our reflection in it as we remain cocooned in his bed.

I'm still shocked that he insisted I stay here, and even more shocked that he seems to be a cuddler. Who would have thought? I roll onto my back and study him in the morning light. He is still wearing the same tank top and

shorts he went to sleep in, and his hair is all messed up against the pillow. He looks peaceful, calm, nothing like the usual Nova that I deal with on a daily basis, and I almost smile at the comparison. I wonder how many people have seen him like this? It's that thought that sobers me up, as I think about how many girls he must have had in here. *Gross.*

I slowly slide his hand off my stomach and roll to the edge of the bed as silently as humanly possible, careful not to wake him. I'm still naked from last night, and in the harsh light of the morning, I feel worse than just my hangover. I can't believe I had sex with him, and not just that, but I sucked Alexander's cock. What the hell was I thinking? How am I ever going to face either of them again? And god what the hell am I going to do if Josh finds out? He will kill me, and them. This is such a fucking mess.

Reaching down, I retrieve my discarded costume from the floor, trying not to remember how his hands ripped it off my body, and shimmy it back on as quietly as I can manage. I look around for my shoes before finding them at the foot of the bed, then pick them up and move towards the door.

"Really? Not even a good morning blow job before you try and run from me?" His voice is rough and a little grizzly as it cuts through the silence of the room, and it freezes me in place.

My entire body turns to jelly as I turn around to face him. Gone is the calm and peaceful sleeping Nova, and in his place is the cocky and charming Nova I am used to. His muscular arms are now hugging his pillow, as his eyes drag over my skin from head to toe, a knowing smirk pulling on the corner of his mouth. A smirk that says I've seen you naked. My mouth is completely dry and empty of any words in the English dictionary. I have no clue how to act or what to say to him, so instead, I remain silent, praying he makes this easy on me.

"Wow, if I knew the way to finally shut you up was to fuck you, I'd have done it years ago, Princess." His smirk turns into a full on grin, and all it does is remind me of how damn attractive he is. I mentally high five myself for the hot sex we had last night, but still I can't find a single word to say to him. He shakes his head with a sigh, the grin falling from his mouth as he no doubt takes my silence for regret. "Come on, I'll take you home." He sits up, rolling out his shoulders and moving to leave the bed in search of clothes in order to do just that, when I stop him.

"It's okay," I whisper, clearing my dry throat and finally finding something to say. "I have a ride." Hector or Julian will be waiting outside for

me, depending on who is on shift right now, and I see Nova's stare darkening, so I quickly add, "My guard, he will be waiting outside for me." I already feel bad for making them wait outside all night for me, the longer I take the worse that feeling gets.

Nova shakes his head, that smirk curving back around his lips. "Of course he is, Princess." He rolls his eyes, but still gets out of bed, and I try to ignore how good he looks as he reaches down and grabs something from one of his drawers. "Here," he adds, tossing the thing in his hand to me. I almost drop my shoes when I rush to catch it before it falls, and it's only when I have it in my hands that I notice it's one of his jerseys.

I look at him in confusion. "What's this for?" Even I can hear the panic in my voice as I worry about this being some token of our new found situation, but he has to know last night was a one time thing. Okay maybe it was a three time thing if you count the other two interactions we had, but it can't happen again.

Nova doesn't seem to share my panic as he leans back against his dresser, watching me closely. "Well, as much as I enjoy looking at your tits, I'm not sure I want everyone else seeing them." He nods towards my dress, reminding me how risky my costume was for his birthday, and the fact I'm not wearing anything underneath.

Hesitating for only a second, I nod in thanks, and slip the jersey on over my head, ignoring the assault of his masculine scent as it engulfs me once more, just like last night. Now I am left awkwardly staring at him without another word to say, before I nod my head again and slip out of his room quietly. Thankfully the hallway is empty, and I release a deep breath as I move towards the stairs and get closer to my escape.

I make it all the way to the bottom before I smack right into Alexander. Heat drowns me from head to toe as we lock eyes, but before embarrassment and regret can claim me, I note the dark bruising under his swollen stare, and the small cut to his lip. "Oh my god, Alexander, are you okay? What happened to your face?"

His own eyes assess me, like he was expecting to find marks on my own skin, and I know the moment he sees something when his eyes lock on my neck. I reach up to the side of my throat and sure enough the skin feels bruised and tender, but his eyes remain cold and detached. "Don't ask stupid questions, Peters, it's beneath you."

I can't help but blanch back from his words, and when I focus more

closely on his face, I watch as his stare rises above my head, settling behind me. I flick my eyes up, following his stare, and find Nova watching us at the top of the stairs. I drop my eyes down to his hands and it's only now that I notice the red marks across his knuckles.

Turning back to Alexander, I whisper, "Nova did that to you?" I don't know why I ask the question when the answer is already right in my face, but I just need the confirmation.

Alexander nods, his eyes never leaving his teammates. "I deserved it," he shrugs, finally letting his stare drop back to mine as he adds, "I touched something that belongs to him." He pushes past me and moves towards the kitchen, where I find Archer and Jake watching me with knowing smiles on their faces.

It's only then that I feel Nova's presence against my back, and their smiles only widen. Even Alexander hides a smirk behind his coffee mug as all three of them stare at us. "Good Morning, Madeliene," Archer coos playfully. "Fancy seeing you here so early in the morning, I didn't know my best friend allowed sleepovers in his bed."

The blush creeps up my neck, but I hold my voice firm and confident as I toss back, "And how do you know I didn't just get here, Gray?" My words are bolder than I feel, and all they do is make his grin even wider.

"Oh yeah? Then how about you take that jersey off and let me see what's underneath." He nods towards my clothes and the blush on my face burns even hotter. "Come on, give us a flash of what has Darkmore so pussy-whipped."

"That's enough!" Nova booms. "One more word and I will axe your favorite part from your body," he adds, snapping at his best friend with nothing but hostility. I don't have time to be shocked though because his hand finds the bottom of my back, and he steers me towards the front door, saving me from the showdown with his teammates.

"Goodbye, Madeline," all three of them sing-song to our backs, and I nod my head over my shoulder at them, as I let Nova push me to the front of the house.

When we get there he drops his hand and I instantly feel the coldness his lack of touch leaves behind. I turn around and open my mouth to say something, anything, but he shakes his head. "Go, Princess," he sighs, leaning around me to unlock the door and opening it at my back. "Go before I make you stay," he adds, and somehow that threat holds more promise than

anything he has ever said to me.

I turn to leave, and then halt, turning back to him and leaning up to press a soft kiss to the side of his mouth. I don't know why I do it, and it's clear neither does he because his eyes widen in shock, and all I can do is whisper, "Goodbye, Nova." I let my eyes drop to the floor, and then I run from the house without looking back like a coward.

Hector is the one waiting for me, and when he spies me coming, he jumps from the front seat and opens the back door for me. His eyes take in the jersey and no doubt the name on it, but he remains silent as he closes me inside. I don't look at the house as we leave, and I am grateful that Hector keeps the silence going as we make the quiet drive back to my house.

When we get there, I lean forward and give a gentle squeeze to his shoulder in thanks, and slip out without so much as one word, hauling my ass up the path to my house. Unlocking the door, I can already hear the *Hamilton* soundtrack drifting out from the kitchen, and I know Hallie is already up and waiting for me.

I walk inside silently, listening to her belt out the words to '*Wait For It*' until I spy her whisking eggs. It isn't until she turns to grab some juice from the fridge that she finally spots me. "Hairy fucking balls," she yelps, her hand flying to her chest as I startle her. She grabs her phone and turns down the music. "Hell, Wendy, you gave me a damn heart attack," she scolds, going back to pouring herself some juice.

"I had sex with Nova Darkmore," I blurt out, and she freezes. "Twice," I add with a weak smile, and she laughs.

"Oh I know, we all heard," she fans herself, as she takes a sip of her juice, before pouring one for me and passing it over. "So," she draws out slowly. "How was it?"

"Infuriatingly amazing," I sigh, taking a drink from my glass as I take a seat at the island. "It was so fucking good, Hals, like mind-blowingly good, the best orgasms I have ever had."

Her eyebrows raise as she returns to whisking her eggs. "Orgasms?" she questions. "As in plural?" I nod, and she smiles. "Damn, go Mr Darkmore."

I launch into a tale of what happened, from him dragging me into that utility room to now, including everything with Alexander both last night and this morning, and by the time I am done, breakfast is ready and her mouth is hanging open in shock.

"He hit him? That's insane, it was his dare." I shrug, shoveling some of

the delicious food into my mouth, as I try not to think about Nova's reasonings behind it. They don't matter anyway, they can't, and as if reading my mind, Hallie adds, "So what happens with you two now?"

Almost choking on the eggs she made, my eyes snap to hers. "Nothing happens now, Hals, last night was just a one time thing. Now Nova and I will go back to ignoring each other." She doesn't look convinced by my words, and I hate to admit that I am even less convinced, but there is no other option.

It doesn't matter that the sex was amazing and better than anything I could have ever imagined, it's over now. Nova is Josh's teammate, they hate each other, and we have all our fucked up family history, and not to mention Brad. It would never work between us, so a great one night stand is all it will ever be.

It won't ever happen again.

2 6

N O V A

LIBRARY LEARNING

My bed still smells like her. *Four days.* Four fucking days and my goddamn sheets are still stained with the scent of Madeline Peters.

It's both insufferable and intoxicating, as I battle with the memories of the night we spent together. I know I could just wash them, rid myself of the torture and move on, but every time I go to do it, something stops me. I know I should do it, erase the reminder of her and forget she even exists, but if I close my eyes I can still taste her on my tongue, feel her skin against mine, and hear the breathy way she moans my name.

I haven't seen her since she did the walk of shame out of here on Sunday morning, and that's not for my lack of trying. My eyes search the campus for her high and low every day, but every time I get so much as a glimpse of her, she darts away from me. She probably thinks it's better that way, out of sight out of mind and all that, but every second away from her just intensifies my need. I want her. I know that I shouldn't, that my temptation for her is a mistake, but I don't care. I'm not done with Madeline Peters, she just doesn't know it yet.

I'm getting ready for practice with thoughts of her clouding my brain,

when the other girl in my life slams to the front of my mind with the simple ding of a new message. I know who the text is going to be from before I even move across my room to grab my phone, but it doesn't make me feel any less guilty. She knows I hooked up with someone, I didn't want to lie to her, and regardless of our truth pact, I'm sure she has secrets she is keeping from me, but it doesn't make me feel any better about our situation.

Grim: Tell me you're having a better day than I am?

Nova: With an ego as big as you describe, of course I'm having a better day than you are!

Grim: ☺ haha very funny!

Nova: Everything okay?

Our texts have died down in their frequency, with a lot less flirting, but we still talk every day, and I care about her more than I should for someone I don't actually know. What happened with Maddie was amazing, but I couldn't stop myself from feeling like I betrayed Grim in some way. Which is stupid, there isn't anything between us, she has made that more than clear, yet I can't help but feel good every time I talk to her. She makes it easy, simple, everything that Madeline Peters isn't.

Grim: I'm being forced into another dinner with my family

Nova: You know some people actually enjoy spending time with the people they are related to

Grim: That's because they aren't in my family

Nova: They can't be that bad, they did make you after all

This isn't the first time she has alluded to not getting along with her family. I get the feeling they pressurize her a lot and she just goes along with it to appease them. I know she has an older brother who she gets along with, and I have wondered a few times if I maybe know him from FU, not that she would ever tell me that. Grim is very strict about keeping our friendship behind the invisible line she put between us. Yet I know she gets along with him, just as she knows about how much I love my mom. I've yet to delve into my estranged relationship with my father. I don't even know what I would say about that, but it's nice to unload on someone without judgment.

Grim: Don't try and charm me right now I'm trying to be grumpy!

Nova: Maybe you need to take Harold for a ride to cheer you up a bit 🐱

Grim: I hate how you always make me smile

My own smile is instant, and that pang of regret smacks me right in the center of my chest. Not only because of how easily she can make me smile, but because of the fact I can also make her smile. It makes it hard not to pursue her harder, and I never imagined I would have this kind of emotional connection with someone, especially not when I now have a physical connection with someone else.

Nova: Anything for you Grim

Those four words don't get a response. Too much for her to handle as usual, and I try to swallow the bitter feeling now in my throat as I toss my phone aside and get ready for practice. I even ignore Archer and Jake's jibes at me as we walk onto campus towards the sports center. Reign is silent at our side as the tension from the weekend still bubbles between us, despite me working it out on his face. I shouldn't have hit him, I know that, I am the one who dared Maddie to put her mouth on him, but a jealousy like I have never known took over and all I could do was make him pay. To my surprise, none of the other guys know about what happened between the three of us in that basement, and I can't help but respect him for that. I don't want anyone, not even him, thinking of her in that way. She belongs to me now, and going forward, the only person her mouth is touching is me.

The two hour practice flies by, my thoughts torn between Grim and Maddie as I fly across the ice trying to keep my focus on the puck. My game is sloppy at best, and I know I need to get my head back in it before Coach picks up on it. I can even feel Archer's stare on me as we skate off the ice and head back towards the locker room, but I ignore him completely and strip off for a much needed shower. I wash quickly and quietly, hoping the hot spray will wash away the shit show I just performed on the ice, but by the time I am done I still don't feel any better.

That mood only sours when Josh fucking Peters pins me with a smirk. "Looking a little rusty out there today, Cap," he drawls, pulling his shirt back on over his head, and leaning on his locker to stare at me.

“We all have our off days, Peters, you should recognize that since you have them almost every game,” I snap back, and I hear Reign’s chuckle beneath his breath beside me, shaking his head at my petty comeback.

“You should focus more on the sport and less on those whores you enjoy so much, then we might actually make it to the Frozen Four next year.” There is nothing but contempt dripping from his tone, and all I can see is his father, as I dry off my body and step into my boxers and jeans before turning around to face him.

“Speaking of whores, how is your sister?” I ask with a smile, pulling my shirt from my bag harder than necessary at my own baseless taunt. Thinking of her like that now, and making a joke of it, leaves a sour taste in my mouth, but I ensure my face remains clear.

Josh’s face however, turns red with rage. “You stay the fuck away from her!”

I shrug my shoulders as casually as I can manage, ensuring I brace myself in preparation, as the rest of the team’s focus now moves to us. “I’ll try man, but I sure like it when she moans my name.” When he slams me into my locker a thrill runs through me, especially as I get to return the punch to the jaw he gave me during our last fight. Blood flies from his mouth as I grapple him to the floor, but before we can get into it, Coach storms out of his office.

“Darkmore! Peters! That’s enough!” his voice booms out at the same time other members of our team pull me off the top of Josh, and he rolls to the side to spit blood onto the floor.

“This isn’t fucking over,” he mutters under his breath, and I laugh as I respond, “That’s the same thing I’m gonna tell your sister.”

Coach reaches us, looking at us both with nothing but disappointment, as he helps Josh to his feet while shaking his head. “You two make me want to retire early,” he complains, before turning his focus to me. “My office, Darkmore, right now.”

Fuck.

I ignore Josh’s smug, bloody smirk as I follow Coach back to his office, and he orders me to shut the door behind me and take a seat. I inhale a deep breath, preparing myself for the verbal lashing I am about to get, but all he does is take a seat and stare at me silently.

I’m not sure how much time passes, but it feels like forever before he sighs, “I don’t understand you, Nova,” he starts, rubbing his chin with his hand. “You’re a fantastic player, one of the best I’ve ever seen, let alone had

the pleasure of coaching, but you are your own worst enemy.” I swallow down the dryness forming in my throat, trying to act like his words don’t affect me, but it’s not everyday I get such praise from someone I admire so much. “I’m not going to tell you again to stay away from Peters, I know you have issues off the ice, nothing I say is going to change that, but when you step into my locker room, with my team, you put it the fuck away, understand?”

“Yes, Sir,” I nod, itching to get out of here.

He stares at me silently again as I wait to be dismissed, but instead of doing just that, he adds, “I spoke with your father.”

I blanch back, shock and anger burning through me rapidly as I repeat his words back to him. “You spoke with my father?” He nods, but it does nothing to appease me.

“He has pulled some strings and there are some scouts coming to the games over the next few weeks,” he explains, but my mind is too clouded with outrage at my dad stepping over this line and calling my coach. “I know he isn’t exactly father of the year, but he cares about your future, just like I do. I want you to keep your head down and in the game, forget about everything else, okay?” I nod again, unable to say anything in return, and for once he accepts my silence as he sees me off with a wave of his hand. “Good, then get out of here.”

Moving on autopilot, I leave his office, grateful that most of the locker room is now empty, and pack up the rest of my gear. Then I high tail it out of there before anyone can stop me. I have an assignment I need to finish, and the thought of heading back to the house and being collared by my teammates asking what Coach wanted makes me pause outside. Should I go home and get it over with, or head to the library and finish my assignment there and pray they have forgotten by the time I get home? Feeling a pull in that direction, the library wins out, and I move in the opposite way to where I know my friends will have gone, and try to forget all the shit now weighing on my shoulders.

When I push into the library, I take solace in the silence that welcomes me. It’s well into early evening now, and thankfully the place is mostly quiet. My eyes scan the room looking for somewhere to set up, when they land on the last person I expected to find here. She is sitting with her back to me, but I would know those blond locks of hair anywhere, especially when I have had them wrapped around my fist. Maddie is sitting on the upper level at a table

by herself, and my assignment is instantly forgotten as I make my way towards her.

A couple of bunnies with Brianna at the center try to capture my attention as I stride towards her. "Hey Nova!" B calls out, and I take delight in the way Maddie's spine snaps straight at the sound of my name. I ignore Brianna and her crew completely, bypassing them and jogging up the stairs towards the Mayor's daughter.

"Princess Peters," I purr, throwing myself into the chair beside her and invading her personal space completely. "You don't call, you don't write, I'm starting to think you regret that delicious birthday present you gave me."

Her head cocks to the side, her eyes glaring at me as she scoffs, "I'm sure you'll survive, we all know your huge ego can handle it." Her words remind me of Grim, but I push thoughts of her to the side and focus on the girl in front of me.

I lean in even closer and bring my mouth to her ear, dropping my voice to a whisper, "And I know you can handle the other huge part of me."

Goosebumps break out along her neck as she shivers, snapping herself away from me instantly, and rising from her chair. "What do you want, Darkmore?" she asks over her shoulder, moving into the stacks to look for a book, and like the lost fucking puppy I am becoming, I follow after her.

"Oh there are so many things I want, Princess," I say with a smirk, pausing behind her as she reaches up to the top shelf to try and grab the book she is looking for. When we both realize it's out of her reach, I crowd into her back and grab it for her, bringing my mouth to her ear again as I cage her in on either side. "Most of them with you."

I feel her entire body sigh, as she turns around in my embrace and flicks her eyes up to meet mine. "What happened on your birthday was a..."

I cut her off. "If you say mistake, I will fuck that word right out of your mouth," I warn, her scent wrapping around me like a vine.

"Darkmore," she snaps loudly, looking around to see if anyone heard, but I'm not stupid. I tracked our surroundings as she unknowingly led us into a nice quiet, secluded area.

"That wasn't the name you were screaming the other night," I whisper, pressing myself into her and pushing her body against the stacks until it molds with mine.

"Nova, please," she pleads with panic in her tone, her head falling back against one of the shelves in an attempt to escape me, yet she isn't trying, not

really. I can feel the rapid rise and fall of her chest against my own, can see the widening of her eyes in anticipation as her pupils dilate, and my eyes track the heavy pulse in her neck. She wants this as much as I do.

“Now that’s more like it,” I smirk, dropping the book I retrieved for her to the floor at her feet, and dragging my hands up the side of her body.

“We can’t do this, Nova.” Her hands brace against my chest, but she doesn’t push me away or try to stop me, and I’m too lost in the sound of my name on her lips to do anything else.

“You weren’t saying that when my cock was buried inside your cunt the other night, Princess. In fact I think I recall it being something along the lines of, Oh god please more.” I drop my head down and drag my tongue up her exposed throat, just so desperate for another taste of her that I can’t help myself. When she lets out a gasp, I swear I feel the sound of it in my cock, this need for her driving me insane in a way I can’t seem to escape.

When I pull back, my eyes drag down her entire body, taking in the silk blouse covering her chest, and the blush skirt around her waist. It’s the same kind of preppy outfit she always wears, and where I would usually find them ridiculous, now I can’t stop fantasizing about them. My hands drop to her hips and I hold her in place as I slide my leg between her thighs and pull her against me. “You can either give it to me, or I can take it from you, the choice is yours.”

She scoffs as if she is disgusted, yet she spreads her legs for me anyway, pushing herself onto my thigh until she gasps. “You only want to fuck me because you hate my brother and my father is the Mayor.” She doesn’t add on the silent, and because of what he did to my mom, but I hear it anyway.

I almost laugh at her assessment of our situation. She has no fucking idea. “Do you think I give a fuck about who your daddy is when I know what the inside of your cunt feels like?” I ask, pushing my thigh against her pussy and moving her hips until she starts grinding against me. A little moan slips past her lips without permission, and I smirk as I bring my hand up and brush my thumb across them. “When I know what my name sounds like when it’s being moaned from these lips.” I drop my hand down and curl it around her neck, squeezing lightly as she continues to rub herself against me desperately. “When I know how my cock feels down this pretty little throat.”

She moans again, her hands coming up to fist the center of my shirt. “You’re disgusting,” she gasps out, her eyes going dark with lust.

This time I do laugh. “Is that why you’re dripping down your thighs for

me, Princess? Because I'm so disgusting." My other hand trails along the edge of her skirt, before I push it up her thigh and find the evidence my words already suggested. I groan, dropping my forehead to hers as my fingers trace the fabric of her underwear. "You're fucking drenched for me, Madeline." Her name sounds like a plea instead of the curse it once was, and when she rolls her hips against my hand, silently begging for more, I am a goner.

I pull back and fumble to tear open my jeans and release my aching cock, rock solid from just the tease of her. I release her throat and dip down to lift her up until she wraps her legs around me without me even having to ask. God I am becoming fucking obsessed with her. That thought only intensifies when she reaches between us and pulls aside her underwear so I can slide my cock up and down her slit freely.

"Nova," she begs, squeezing her legs around me even tighter as she glances down at where we aren't joined yet, but I am once again caught up by the sound of my name.

"Look at me, Madeline," I demand, desperate for her eyes to be on mine, and she rewards me instantly. Then I keep my stare on hers as I slowly sink inside of her. Fuck, the feeling of her wrapping around me is indescribable, and I have to bite my tongue to keep myself from groaning too loud. "Fuck," I hiss, moving my hands to her hips to grip them tight. "You feel so fucking perfect," I praise, slowly pulling out and then sliding back inside of her like we have all the time in the world.

"Nova, please," she almost cries, her eyes pleading with me to give her more. I give her a few slow thrusts, slowly working my way inside of her, letting her adjust to my length. I can already feel the slide of her wet heat along my shaft and I have to bite the inside of my cheek to keep myself from coming. She's so deliciously hot and wet that there is no way I am going to last, not here, not like this where anyone could come across us.

That thought only spurs me on and when she gasps again, her hands curling around my neck to hold on to me, there is no holding me back. I thrust deeper, burying myself to the hilt only to pull out and do it again and again, pushing myself even further every time. This girl, the one I forced myself to hate, has somehow become my new obsession, the one I find myself seeking every second of every day. Her pussy is clenching me tight, my cock slamming inside of her, owning her, giving her everything I have got until I am barely holding on.

“Maddie,” I grit through my teeth, her legs locking around me even tighter at the sound of her name. “I need you to come,” I almost beg, desperate to feel her clench around me before I empty myself inside of her. My hands on her hips grip her even harder, pulling her against me even closer until there isn’t any space left between us.

I can feel the rapid rise and fall of her chest as she gasps and moans against me, rolling her hips to meet my every thrust. “Nova,” she whispers, my name sounding like a prayer. “You feel so good inside of me.”

I drop my forehead to hers, our panted breaths mixing together as one as we stare at one another. The tension from practice, from my conversation with Coach, has suddenly gone. I can breathe easy again, and it’s all because of her, because of the way my name sounds so perfect falling from her lips.

“Come with me,” I demand, my heart racing and with her eyes on mine, I can no longer hold on. “Baby, please.” The words are barely out of my mouth before I feel her coming around my cock, clenching and tightening in a way that has her sucking me even deeper inside of her. I can’t hold on, releasing a deep groan, I jerk against her, coming hard as she rides out her own orgasm against me until we are both breathless.

When I slump against her, I feel her body sag in my hold, my grip on her hips the only thing keeping her upright. I bury my head into her neck, inhaling her sweet scent deeply as I will for my rapid heart rate to return to normal. Her hands push up into my hair, stroking through the strands slowly, offering me comfort in a way I thought I would never find. It almost feels too good to be true, and when I pull back and she smiles, I feel my heart tighten in my chest.

I’m not sure what she sees in my eyes but she frowns a little, her hands still brushing through my hair gently. “Are you okay?” she asks, and I fucking hate how unsure her voice sounds that I can’t help but blurt out the truth.

“Just some shit with my dad, practice and coach...” I trail off, shaking my head, and she nods as if she understands completely. In a way I guess she does, she is probably the one person who understands more than anyone what it’s like to live in your parents’ shadow.

“Well, I hope you feel better now,” she teases with a soft playful smirk and I smile in return.

“Being buried in your pussy always makes me feel better, Princess.” My hands flex around her hips again, possessive in their nature. I know we have

to move, that I have already more than pushed my luck with her here, but everything inside of me is screaming at me to stay.

She rolls her eyes. “So disgusting.” Her hands drop from my hair to my chest and she gently presses against it.

Reluctantly I pull out of her, quickly adjusting her underwear back into place, and the thought of my release being pressed against her until she gets home and cleans me off satisfies me more than it should. “Only for you it seems,” I quip back, and she eyes me with confusion, and the next question slips out of my mouth before I can even think about it. “Come to the game next week?” I don’t know why I invite her, I’m pretty sure she will already be there because of Josh anyway, but when her eyes soften and she nods gently, something inside of my chest settles like never before.

Archer was right, I am so fucked.

2 7

M A D D I E

C R A V I N G Y O U

My mouth is dry and my thighs wet, as Nova leads me back out of the stacks with my retrieved book in hand. He pulls out my chair forcing me to take a seat, before he takes a spot opposite me silently. Then he pulls out his own books and begins to study as I stare at him wordlessly, not sure of how we got here. We fucked again, and it's as if every time I let him inside my body, a piece of him slips inside my heart, and that's the problem. I can't do this with him, I can't do this with anyone, and yet, for the first time ever, I really *really* want to.

I watch him for a few minutes, and apart from a few little knowing smirks pulling at the corner of his mouth every time he glances up and catches me staring, he remains focused on his work. That's the only thing that allows me to return to my own, and unlike before I feel completely at ease as I go back to writing my essay from earlier.

By the time I am finished, two hours have gone by, and when I look up I find most of the library has emptied out, and Nova is now watching me quietly, his own books already closed. He is looking at me as if watching me study is the most fascinating thing in the entire world to him, like he wants to

rip me apart and know every one of my secrets, and I feel that familiar buzz of anxiety beneath the surface of my skin.

“What are you staring at, Darkmore?” I attempt for my voice to sound casual and like the usual way I address him, but even I can hear the breathiness to it and I curse internally at myself.

“Just picturing my cock between those perfect tits,” he drawls, that usual signature smirk perfectly in place on his lips, and the blush to my cheeks is instant.

How the fuck did we get here?

I pack up my books with a huff, trying and failing to keep my own smile at bay before I quip, “Well stop it, this thing between us isn’t happening.”

Nova rolls his eyes, taking my bag from me as I stand and slinging it over his own shoulder, leaving me no choice but to follow him as he moves to leave. “Whatever you say, Princess.” I feel eyes on us from the few people still lingering around, as I follow Nova outside. I am grateful to spot Julian waiting by the curb to give me a ride home, and as if on instinct, Nova eyes him coolly with a little nod of his head. “I’ll be seeing you, Peters,” is all he adds, giving me my bag back, before turning on his heels and stalking off into the night.

I’m not ashamed to admit my gaze lingers on him until he disappears, and when I approach Julian, he eyes me with a knowing stare, but remains silent as he opens the door for me to climb inside. I try to focus my thoughts as he drives us across town, but all I can think about is the feel of Nova’s eyes on me, both in and out of the stacks. I already know I am in too deep with him, but the problem is, I don’t want to find a way out, even when I know I should.

Fuck. I’m in so much trouble.



THE NEXT FEW days pass in a blur of classes and an unbearable family dinner with the Thorne’s, and I feel like the walls are truly closing in on me. My only solace seems to be the brooding hockey player with the knowing eyes and the rough hands. I haven’t spoken to Nova since we left the library the other night, but I have seen him in passing a few times, and every time his eyes burn across every inch of my skin like he is imagining undressing me.

The way he looks at me makes me feel alive, makes me feel wanted, makes me feel worth more than just becoming someone's wife. Nova looks at me and sees Maddie, the real one. Gone is the disgust of being the Mayor's daughter, and in its place is the dirty little secret we both now share.

Then there is my Charmer, the mysterious stranger who has also dug his way into my heart, much to my dismay. I'm on the way to the lunch hall to meet Hallie when I check my phone for the hundredth time today, only to find there is still no new message from him. Our texts have been few and far between the last few days, and I can't help but feel our connection is finally breaking down, especially since we have both alluded to other people being in our lives. I knew it would happen, I knew it was inevitable, but what I didn't know is how attached I had become to his virtual presence in my life.

I try to remind myself that this is for the best, that I can't be getting attached to anyone, not when my engagement is going to be announced next month. But it doesn't help my mood, and I can't stop myself from sending him another message even when I know I shouldn't.

Maddie: I miss your giant ego!

When I finally make it to the dining hall, I practically throw myself into the chair beside my best friend, making her yelp. "Oh my god, Wendy, don't sneak up on me like that, you almost gave me a heart attack." Too upset to actually respond, I reach over and steal half of her sandwich from her tray, and I feel her eyeing me with worry. "What's wrong?" When I still don't answer her, she sighs, sliding over a piece of cake from her lunch tray too.

"Thank you," I reluctantly grumble under my breath, slowly finishing off the food I stole, as I let my eyes move around the hall.

Josh is sitting at the usual hockey tables with his teammates, which much to my surprise includes Nova. Okay, so they are sitting at opposite ends of the table, but still, with the hatred between them I find it hard to see them close together. Of course they are all surrounded by their usual pack of puck bunnies, and I try not to let jealousy churn inside my gut as one of them strokes her hand across number nineteen's shoulder.

My brother is the first to spot me, waving in our direction, causing a few of his friends to turn our way too. By the time Nova notices me, the girl at his side has too, and the scowl she offers me causes me to drop my head, but before I can turn my attention back to Hallie, that voice that whispered filthy things in my ear, booms across the cafeteria.

“Looking good today, Princess Peters! Why don’t you come over here and sit on my lap?” Nova’s tone is casual and taunting, the one I am most used to, and when my eyes meet his, he is wearing that new knowing smirk of his.

I have to suppress the blush I can feel creeping up my neck as I shove my middle finger in the air. “Get fucked, Nineteen!” I curse back, flipping him off and making his teammates laugh.

“Only if you’re the one offering, Princess,” he tosses back, and I swear the girl at his side looks like she is about to combust, as does my brother.

“Nova, I swear,” Josh starts, rising to his feet, and to my surprise, Daemon is the one to stand up next to him, placing a firm hand on his shoulder and whispering something into his ear. Nova doesn’t bother watching their exchange, his eyes staying fixed on me, and this time when I drop my head it’s because I can’t hide the blush.

This is bad. Worse than bad, and I have no idea what to do. Turning my attention to my best friend, I exhale a deep breath. “I’m in trouble, Hals,” I sigh, twisting my body to look at her fully. “I’m going to admit something, just once, and then I never want to talk about it again, okay?”

She is already smirking at me, as if she can read every thought in my mind, and as my best friend she probably can. I just need to say the words once and then smash them back down into my body and forget I ever did. I take a deep breath before I whisper, “I like him.”

Hallie nods, that insufferable smirk still in place. “Like who?” she asks innocently. “Your stalker turned Charmer, or the sexy hockey player whose baguette you ate.” I groan at her response, to which she only smiles harder.

“Both,” I admit, more to myself than to her, before I hastily add, “But this is the last time we are ever talking about it.”

Her smile is still in place as she nods, before I watch it disappear, and a look of hatred take its place. “Well, that’s good because speaking of trouble,” she grunts, eyes lifting over my head with a look of disdain, and I barely even get a chance to turn around before a firm grip finds my arm.

“A word, darling,” Brad spits through his teeth, pulling me to my feet and across the hall towards the doors. I feel eyes watching us from every angle, but my attention snaps to one person in particular, and I don’t miss the anger and confusion now marking his features.

Brad doesn’t stop until we are outside of the cafeteria and away from prying eyes, and when he finally does, I can already feel the bruise his grip

will leave behind. His temper tantrums are something I have become familiar with in the last month. It's always constant snide remarks under his breath every time our father's backs are turned, but this is different. This is like the night of the party all over again, like him marking his territory and making sure everyone knows I'm his. He doesn't care that the announcement hasn't been made, the decision was enough for him. He thinks I belong to him now.

"What the hell is your problem now?" I spit, pulling myself from his hold and spinning around to look at him. He looks angry, hell, in fact, he looks downright pissed, but I don't care, because so am I.

"My problem seems to be my whore of a fiancée," he snaps, pushing me against the wall and enclosing me in. "It appears she doesn't know how to behave to ensure people know who she belongs to." His hand reaches up to curl an escaped hair around my ear, his own blond locks tousled on his head in an obnoxious way only he could manage. His words don't affect me, but his proximity does.

I bat his hand away with a flick of my own. "I'm not your fiancée yet, so how about you refrain from pissing on me until my hand is shackled with your goddamn ring," I seethe, pushing against him until he is forced to take a step back.

Brad doesn't relent, running a hand through his hair as his stare bores into mine, looking slightly unhinged. "If you don't start behaving yourself, Madeline, I'll..."

A familiarly lethal tone cuts him off, "Be careful how you finish that fucking sentence, Thorne." Both our heads snap towards Josh, who is watching Brad with a cool arrogance that only my brother could possess, and as always, I am grateful for his presence.

"This is between me and my fiancée," Brad responds coolly, clawing back some of his relaxed demeanor as if everything is fine.

"Well, like my sister just said, she isn't wearing your ring yet, so do us both a favor and fuck off." His tone remains casual, unaffected even, but I can see the vein along his neck pulsing, that underlying wrath he always carries, burning just beneath the surface waiting to come out and play. And thankfully, Brad sees it too.

He looks between the two of us with a sigh as he walks backward a few steps. "I'll be seeing you, darling," is all he responds before turning on his heels and storming away.

Josh and I both watch him leave, before my brother closes the distance

between us and tips my chin towards him. "You okay, kid?" I roll my eyes at that, straightening my shoulders as much as I can manage.

"Of course I am, I can handle Bradley Thorne," I say with as much confidence as I can muster, because it's becoming clear to me that I can't, and worse, in little over a month I *will* be wearing his ring.

"You shouldn't have to fucking handle him," Josh spits, his anger towards our father coming out at me instead. "You shouldn't have to be anywhere fucking near him." I don't bother arguing with him, he's right, I know it and he knows it, but unfortunately for me, my father doesn't seem to care.

"Well, there isn't much I can do about it, is there," I sigh, exhausted from the day already, and an afternoon of classes still to attend. I don't exactly have the time to weigh up the options I don't have, or a way to overcome them.

"No, but maybe there is something I can do," Josh mutters under his breath, and before I can ask what he means, he turns the opposite way from where he came and leaves. "I'll catch you later, Mads, there is somewhere I need to be."

Shaking my head in disbelief, I watch after him for a few seconds, before I take a deep breath to calm myself and head back towards the cafeteria, only to stop when I am greeted with another familiar face. Nova is leaning on the door that leads into the dining hall, watching me silently. I'm not sure how long he has been standing there for, but from the look on his face, I would guess it's long enough to have seen the majority of what just occurred.

I close the distance between us, but before I can open my mouth to say anything, Nova beats me to it. "Your boyfriend's a real dick, Princess." His tone is sharp, but nowhere near as playful as usual, and if I'm not mistaken, I would say he sounds jealous. I ignore the wicked thrill that gives me and keep my face impassive.

"He's not my boyfriend," I reply weakly, mostly because I can't think of anything else to say, and Nova just laughs.

"Right, or something, I remember," he shakes his head, throwing the words I said to him about Brad that night he walked me home back in my face. "He's not even your type," he adds in an accusing tone.

"You don't know what my type is," I snap, a little too quickly, and it only makes him take a step closer to me, erasing more of the distance left between us.

“Pass me a mirror, Princess, and I’ll show you.” That flirty smirk returns to his face, but when I don’t respond, he softens, adding quietly, “Does he know how much I like you?”

Tears burn at the back of my eyes at how casually he admits that, especially after everything that has happened between us and our families. I want to take his words and wrap them around me, beg him to say them to me again and again, but that will only make things worse, so I swallow the lump in my throat and toss them back at him.

“Please, you don’t like me, you just take some insane pleasure in fucking the Mayor’s daughter as some messed up way at getting back at him.” It’s similar to what I said to him in the library, playing on our past to push him away, but in truth, it isn’t our past that makes me say it. My words pull on an insecurity deep inside of me, a hard thing to beat when you are constantly only seen one way.

“Oh yeah?” Nova asks, stalking towards me. “Is that what you think, Princess?” His hand reaches out and latches onto the belt on my pants, tugging me until I fall against his chest. “Then tell me why every time I look at you I feel like an addict desperate for their next fix,” he whispers, his mouth almost against my own. “That I feel like I am drowning but then I see you and I can finally breathe. I literally crave everything about you, Madeline Peters.”

One of his hands flattens against the base of my spine, and the other cups my cheek, tilting my head until our eyes are connected. I thought I had my heart locked up and hidden away, strong against anything that might come its way, but every word he just said was like a sharpened knife against my defenses. Hacking away at them until the only thing that exists is him. I want to kiss him, to claim him and take him as my own, but who I end up with isn’t my choice, not if I want my degree, my future. I can’t do this, but as I look up into his eyes, I know I feel the same way he does, even if I can’t say it out loud.

So, instead of saying what I really want to say, I bring my own hands up and push gently on his chest. “You need to stop, someone is going to see us together.” The truth is that’s the least of my worries, but it’s better than admitting my actual truth.

Nova just smirks even wider, his smile so bright it physically pains me to look at it, especially when I am the reason. “Princess, I don’t give a fuck who sees. I will march you back in there and bend you over the table and fuck you

in front of every single one of them, including your precious not boyfriend, just to show them all who you really belong to.”

My thighs tighten at his words, and thankfully before I have to answer him, the doors to the cafeteria burst open, and Archer, Alexander, and Hallie all appear, the latter holding my bag, and her eyes traveling over me in a panic.

“There’s my favorite hard-on inducing couple,” Archer jokes, tossing us both a wink, and I don’t even have the energy to refute him.

“Are you coming to class?” Hallie jumps in, offering me a much needed out, but still I can’t seem to keep my gaze from straying back to Nova.

“Yeah, Maddie, are you coming?” he asks, his real smile gone and only a small tug of his lips at the corner of his mouth remaining.

“Yes, I’m coming,” I reply, before shaking my head from the daze he seems to put me in. “I mean, I’m going.” This time I don’t have to push him, his hands drop away from me, and I take a step out of his embrace and move towards my best friend.

“We should get to class too,” Alexander adds, looking between his two teammates and purposely avoiding my gaze.

Hallie thankfully takes pity on me and ends the conversation with all three of them. “Okay, see you later,” she drags out, leading me away like a damn toddler, until we are far enough away from them that they can no longer hear us. “I’m gonna need you to tell me everything! What the hell happened?” she demands, and when we round the corner and come to a stop, I feel like I can finally breathe again.

My eyes meet hers, and she is looking at me expectantly, waiting for an answer. What the hell happened? Her question runs through my mind along with a million of my own until all I can respond is, “Honestly, Hals, I have no idea.”

2 8

N O V A

M O M O R M I L F

All three of us watch both girls leave until there is a silent tension brewing between all of us. Alexander and I are still working through some issues from that night, all of which I am man enough to admit were my fault, but that doesn't mean I am going to apologize. The fucker has had his dick in my girl's mouth, as far as I'm concerned he needed that black eye, I don't care how fucking hot it was. Archer of course is oblivious to any of it. Pretty much the whole team knows I roughed Reign up a little, but none of them know why.

Which brings me to the girl at the root of it all.

Madeline fucking Peters.

My teammate's sister, the Mayor's daughter, the girl I grew to despise, now the bane of my very fucking existence. It used to be that the only thing I would think of is hockey: watching it, playing it, obsessing over it, but now there is her. Taking up space in my mind, and worse, in my heart, and instead of falling at my feet like every other fucking girl I throw my attention at, she acts like all she wants to do is escape it. I know she wants me as much as I want her, but it's like she is constantly pulling away from me, and until now I

have been blind to the reason why.

“What do either of you know about Bradley Thorne?” I ask, turning my focus back to the guys, and I see Archer frown. He is probably wondering why I am asking about one of the football jocks, but I need to know more about him. For complete non-murder related reasons.

“His dad is some rich, business tycoon, big on the football scene, never misses a game, and donates big to the Dean,” Alexander cuts in, and it’s the first time he has truly looked me in the eye since the night in the basement. “Brad is a QB for the team, a solid player, but a total daddy’s boy. He’s set to take over the business one day after a mildly successful football career, and getting someone to pump out a few heirs for him.” He recites the words like he has heard them multiple times, and I have no idea where.

Archer and I both stare at him in confusion, until Arch curses, “How the fuck do you know all that, Reign? Is this some British MI5 bullshit?” he jokes, always trying to find a way to bring up Reign’s heritage on his mom’s side.

Reign rolls his eyes but shrugs, a smirk pulling at the corner of his mouth as he flicks his stare between the two of us. “Daddy Thorne’s second wife is really chatty when satisfied.”

My mouth drops open, but again Archer beats me to it. “You dirty little motherfucker!” He jumps on him, pulling him into a headlock and rubbing his knuckles across his scalp. “You better stay the fuck away from my mom,” he adds, laughing at this new found information.

“I mean, it’s not technically his mom,” I cut in, trying and failing to help Reign out. He said second wife, and I know Alexander has a dog of a reputation, but I’m guessing Mr Thorne’s second wife is more arm candy than anything else, but Archer is quick to look my way.

“Don’t make me bring Diana into this, Nova, you know how much I love me some Mrs Darkmore,” he teases with a wink, and I have to refrain from punching the fucker. Ever since he met her, he has always joked about finding her hot, and I’ve had to stop myself from taking it out on his face.

“Don’t fucking talk about my mom, you prick!” I say in warning. “And it’s Miss not Mrs,” I add, words spitted through my teeth as I try to remain calm.

“Not in my dreams it isn’t,” he replies, wagging his eyebrows at me. “Oh yes, Archer, that’s it, right there, baby, you sure know how to use that hockey stick,” he moans, while mimicking fucking someone. “Fuck yeah, Mrs

Darkmore, squeeze my stick nice and tight,” he adds with a groan.

I move on instinct, ready to lay him right here, best friend status be damned, but Reign stops me with a hand to the chest, cutting a scathing look at my best friend. “There is something seriously fucking wrong with you, Gray.”

Archer just smiles even wider. “Then maybe Mrs Darkmore can punish me for being bad,” he adds with a wink, licking his lips suggestively as he stares at me. *Motherfucker*.

“Oh bloody hell,” Alexander curses beneath his breath. “It’s your funeral,” he adds with a shrug, releasing his hold on me.

I take a step forward immediately, flinging my arm out to grab him, but he just laughs, dancing away from me into a run, and bouncing towards class. “Remind me how the fuck he became my best friend again,” I grumble to Reign, both of us watching Archer run away like a toddler on a mission, and Reign laughs.

“From what I remember, I don’t think he gave you much of a choice, pretty sure it was love at first sight,” Reign recalls, remembering how Archer glued himself to our sides during our first week on the team. “Not that I can blame him,” he adds jokingly, flexing out his arms.

“Yeah, right,” I roll my eyes. “He’s a needy little prick, and you’re a big-headed prick, how the fuck did I end up with both of you,” I muse out loud, moving to walk the way Archer escaped.

“By just being a prick?” Reign says with a smile, falling in step beside me. “For what it’s worth, I don’t think baby Peters has anything with Bradley Thorne, not that I’ve heard anyway,” he adds in a more serious tone, and when I look at him, I can see he is treading warily as he speaks.

“Baby Peters, really?” I ask, cocking my brow at him. “You’ve had your dick in her mouth and you’re still gonna call her baby Peters?” He almost chokes on his breath at my statement, but when he sees that I am smirking, he relaxes a little.

“Yeah, well, your fist in my face was enough to erase that memory.” He flexes out his jaw as if remembering that night. Not that I believe him, I think even on my deathbed I will remember that night.

If I’m being honest with myself, I’m not really sure why I hit him, the game was my idea after all. I’m the one who made the dare, I’m the one who pushed them both to the edge, and I’m the one who loved every second of it. I guess I just didn’t realize how deep beneath my skin the Mayor’s daughter

had dug herself. Madeline Peters has a hold on me like no one ever has. Everyone looks at her and sees what she wants them to see, the Mayor's daughter, the perfect sister, the pristine student. They see her as good, honest, pliable, unattainable. Yet when I look at her now, I see the most fascinating thing in the world. She is strong, fierce, and of course completely and utterly fuckable, but it's more than that. She is the fire to my ice, and where I used to avoid the flames, now all I want to do is burn.

I move my focus back to Reign and I can see the regret in his eyes, the mark he thinks he placed on his friendship, and how much he means it when he says it's erased from his memory. "Good to know," I finally respond, mostly because I can't think of anything else to say to make it better.

Reign clearly takes that as an opening, because he opens his mouth and starts again. "Listen, Nova, if I would have known..."

"It's fine, Reign." My hand flies up and cuts him off. "I didn't fucking know until it was too late, so I don't expect you to, and besides it was hot as fuck," I shrug, acting like I am not torn up inside between jealousy and the memory of how erotic it was to force her mouth onto him.

"Yeah it was," he laughs, bumping my shoulder with his as we arrive at the building for our next class. "So, we're good?"

I nod. "Yeah man, we're good." He smiles, reaching out to open the door for me, but I pause when just over the threshold. "But touch her again and I will kill you."

He smiles with the shake of his head. "No problem, Cap."



THE REST of the afternoon passes in a blur, my mind solely focused on the one girl I can't seem to have, who is now the one I want more than anyone else. I also think about Grim and the last message sitting on my phone that I still haven't responded to. Again, if I am being honest with myself, I feel something for her, which is fucked up when we don't even know each other. Except that we do know each other. I might not know her name or what she looks like, but I do know her.

I know she likes to drink her coffee on the back deck of her house looking out onto the lake every morning. I know she doesn't get along with her family, but she still loves them and spends time with them, and I definitely

know what she keeps in the drawer of her nightstand. So, does it really matter that I don't know her name? Not to me, which just leaves me feeling guilty for what I have going on with Madeline, which if you asked her, would be nothing, but to me? I know it could be something. So where the fuck do I go from here? To the girl I don't know, or the girl I now know all too well.

Without any idea of how to answer that, I settle for the woman who birthed me instead, making my way over to her apartment as soon as my last class finishes. I use my spare key to unlock the door, and call out to her as I enter. "Hey mom!"

"In here, Sweetheart," she shouts back, and I follow her voice through to the kitchen. "I'm just meal prepping some stuff for the week ahead."

Of course I find her standing over the stove, mixing something just like always, and I lean down and drop a kiss to the back of her head. "Smells good in here," I compliment, stealing a piece of chicken from the plate on the side, and she immediately bats my hand away.

"And it will taste good when it's ready," she scolds, mixing whatever is in the pot a few more times, before turning down the heat, and wiping her hands.

When she finally turns around to face me, I have to swallow the chicken with a lump in my throat. She doesn't look good, a lot paler and slimmer than the last time I saw her, which was just the other day, and it's like a knife to my heart. She's getting worse, getting sicker, and there is nothing I can do to stop it. I've been putting off speaking to my dad, but I don't think I can do it any longer, I need his help.

My mom just smiles, acting as if everything is perfectly fine, just like she always does, and I envy her inner strength. She has always been able to work well under pressure, never breaking under the weight of it, no matter how heavy it gets, and I couldn't be more grateful for growing up with someone so amazing. When she takes a seat across the table from me, I force a smile to my face and pretend that everything is okay, for her sake at least.

"How's my favorite son today?" she asks with a smile of her own, and I refrain from rolling my eyes.

"I'm your only son, and I'm fine," I grumble in response, still feeling my mood from earlier, and itching to see the one person I know could take it all away.

"Just fine, huh? You must still be having girl trouble," she muses, bringing a huge mug of green tea to her lips, and staring at me from over the

rim.

“I am not having girl trouble,” I lie far too quickly, and all she does is continue to stare at me, waiting for me to expand, but I don’t.

“Okay, if you say so,” she drags out, before adding, “What about the girl from your phone?” Her eyes are pleading at me for details, and I know her wish is for me to find a nice girl before I go pro. Someone who likes me for me and not how good I am at playing a game.

Once again flipping from thoughts of Maddie to Grim, I can’t do anything but groan. “It’s complicated,” I admit, not really sure how else to describe it. She could be asking about both of them and my answer would be the same.

To my surprise, my mom laughs. “Still won’t tell you her name, huh?” I can tell she not only finds that funny, but also endearing. I know if she knew Grim she would get along with her, and that’s part of the problem, that I know that and still don’t know her name.

Then once again we come back to Maddie, she knows her name. Hell, she knows more than her name from what I understand, and I bet despite what her dad did to her, that my mom has a soft spot for the daughter of the devil. They’re both similar in different ways, both strong, and fierce, would do anything for the ones they love, which is both a strength and a weakness sometimes. It’s what drew me to her, getting to see a side of her that I’m sure she doesn’t show to anyone, and all I want to do is pick her apart and uncover all of her secrets.

Thankfully my mom must see something on my face when I don’t respond, because she jumps out of her chair and heads back to the stove. “Nothing that a home-cooked meal won’t fix,” she says breezily, and for once I am thankful she doesn’t push me for anything more.

We spend the next hour cooking and catching up, both of us pretending that she is completely fine, and it isn’t until she tells me that she is tired that I move to leave. I don’t linger, I can’t, because the sight of her like this is killing me. Instead, I make quick and quiet work of cleaning up the kitchen, and then slip out into the night without another word.

By the time I make it back to my house I am beyond exhausted, and I ignore the guys all playing video games in the living room and head straight up to my room, pulling my phone out as I go. My fingers feel heavy as they fly across the screen, shooting off a message to my dad that we need to meet up and talk. Once it’s sent, it’s like a weight is lifted off my chest. That feeling only lasts a second though, because when I exit out of his message

thread, I spy the unread message still sitting there from Grim.

Grim: I miss your giant ego!

I smile as I read them because I know she means them, that she really does miss me. We have become a part of one another's lives these past few months, and not talking to her every day is killing me. Yet carrying on with this facade of texting without names is getting a little ridiculous, and I don't think I can do it anymore. Especially not with all the things that have happened between Maddie and I. Our most recent encounter definitely included, so I decide it's time to be honest.

Nova: Sorry Grim, I got caught up at the library.

Not technically a lie and her response is almost instant.

Grim: You were just at the library? Like the campus library?

I type my response out slowly, and I can see her own typing bubbles coming and going, but if I don't do this now then I never will, and I hope we can remain friends, and friends tell each other the truth.

Nova: I was with the girl I mentioned to you before and I don't think it's casual with us anymore, or at least it's not for me.

Her typing stops and I see my message change to read instantly, and I wait for her typing bubbles to reappear but they don't. I can't help myself, my fingers fly across the screen again, typing as fast as I can to get her to understand.

Nova: I like you, I do, but I can't do this anymore. This other girl, I mean, I know her name, Grim, I know her, and I don't care that her dad fucked over my mom or that I play on the same team as her brother. None of that matters anymore, I just want her.

When I send that one I feel like a weight has been lifted off my chest at my admission, not just to Grim, but to myself. I want her. I want Madeline Peters, and I want her for more than just sex. I mean don't get me wrong, the sex is fucking amazing, but so is she. Smart, witty, sexy as hell, and knows how to give just as much shit as she can take. She's fucking perfect.

I keep my eyes on my phone, waiting for Grim to respond, but those typing bubbles don't start up again. I wait five minutes and then ten, and when I realize she isn't coming back, I send one final message.

Nova: I'll miss you, Grim.

2 9

M A D D I E

CAPTAIN CHARMER

Nova Darkmore is my Charmer. That is the only thought that has been circulating my brain for the last two days. That the Captain of the hockey team, the very team my brother plays on, and once my nemesis, is the Charmer behind sending me all those messages, and what did I do when I found out? I bailed.

He isn't a stranger, or a stalker, he isn't a serial killer, or even someone I don't know. It's just him. The one whose touch sets me alight, and the one whose hands make me burn for him and him alone. He knows what I taste like, and even worse what my secrets are. It's him, Nova, since that very first night, it has always been him.

I read his confession that was practically a love letter for someone like him, and then I ignored it, but what choice did I have? I already knew I was in too deep with the savior inside my phone who made me smile everyday, and that only got worse with the cocky hockey player hanging around me. The fact that they're the same person? A disaster of gigantic proportions.

Of course it sounds perfect, that the sweet, charming and funny guy inside my phone also turns out to be the sexy, hot, and dominating guy on the

ice, but it's not. Not because I find him any less charming or sexy, but because he is both, because he *is* in fact perfect. You'd think it would be a story we would tell our future grandchildren on the porch of our pretty house someday, but that's impossible when I am weeks away from being engaged to another man.

It might have only been two days since his revelation, but I am feeling his absence more than I'd like to admit. Hallie has been busy writing a paper, Josh has been practicing for his game tomorrow, and without the messages from my number one stalker, life feels pretty quiet. It's mainly just me going to class, studying in the library, coming home, and going to sleep. Even Harold has been abandoned in my top drawer, not holding the same allure he once did.

Now to make matters worse, I am being forced to endure yet another dinner with my father and future husband. Just thinking that word in my head makes me want to throw up. Or maybe shove the fork I am using to play with my dull salad into the side of my neck, praying they let me bleed out on the table. It would be a better option than having to listen to him kiss my father's ass and talk about me like I am a piece of meat he can't wait to devour.

"My father is letting me handle the Landon deal in the new year," Brad drones on like he has done for the last hour. "He wants me to be more active in the company, he thinks I'm ready, and having some decent arm candy won't hurt with all those Landon fuckers," he winks at my dad, and despite my dad nodding knowingly, I still spot the slight grimace pulling at the corner of his mouth. Of course, Brad doesn't. Common sense could knock him right in the face and he still wouldn't notice. "You know how it is, Mr Peters, your wife is still hot for an older woman, I bet that helps you out, and I haven't forgotten about your taste in extracurriculars." Another wink, as if they are sharing some completely tactless inside joke, and this time my father looks ready to combust.

Thankfully Brad stands, knocking into my shoulder and forcing my body forward, as he excuses himself from the table. Both my father and I watch him leave in silence, before I turn my focus to him and cock my eyebrow. "Isn't my future husband just so charming," I drawl, ensuring every ounce of sarcasm I can manage finds its way into my words. Somehow the fact that Nova is the one behind the texts has made my reality all that much worse to bear.

My father can't honestly think this is a good match. Brad and I have

nothing in common, and I don't know how I will ever survive a marriage with him. There has to be a way out of this, and not just because I want a chance with a certain number nineteen wearing hockey player.

"Don't start, Madeline," my father almost begs, as if he is as tired of this ruse as I am, and I use this opening to plead my case one last time.

"There must be someone else, Dad" I start, lowering my voice so the people surrounding us can't hear. "And I mean, quite literally anyone else. I know you have expectations of me, an obligation you expect me to fulfill, and I will, but there has to be someone else." I'm begging now, but I don't care. Bradley Thorne cannot be the future that was meant for me. Not that I ever thought that future would be Nova Darkmore, and I know it won't be, but surely my father can find me a better match, or at least a kinder one.

Silence stretches between us, his eyes softening ever so slightly, and for once I think I am finally getting through to him, that he is looking at me, and hearing me, but then his Mayoral mask slips back into place. "Madeline," he clears his throat, straightening his shoulders. "The deal is already done, so you'll just have to make the best of it," he adds quietly.

Tears sting at the back of my eyes, but after years of practice, the smile stretches across my mouth naturally, and I swallow the lump forming in my throat. "I'm going to Josh's game in Crystal Valley tomorrow," I start, changing the subject completely to safer, more neutral grounds for both of our sakes. "Hallie and I are driving out together to watch him play." I can already see the refusal bubbling up in my father's throat, the need to deny me, to keep me on that tight leash. One that feels even tighter with Brad around, so I rush to add, "Kind of like our last little trip before the engagement."

That last part gives him pause, and I keep my perfect smile in place as he studies me closely, looking for a sign of deceit. He won't find one, he doesn't know me well enough, and I have been playing his games for far longer than he realizes. I'm his daughter after all, and eventually he smiles, the one I used to love so much when I was a little girl, one that does nothing for me now I know how fake it is. "Okay, that sounds fine," he finally relents, just as Brad returns to the table.

"Smile, darling," he purrs, draping his arm around my shoulder as he takes his seat, and I have to suppress my shudder. "There are people watching," he adds in a rough whisper, nothing like the one I have recently come to enjoy, and I grit my teeth in response. My smile doesn't falter

though.

I'd love nothing more than to rip the arm he is using to touch me, clean off his body, and beat him to death with it, but as my eyes flick across the restaurant I realize he's right. There are multiple people watching us, of course they are pretending they aren't, but as with every time I go out with my father, they are. It doesn't bother me, in fact I am used to it, but when I notice one person sitting along the back wall alone, their gaze more scrutinizing than anything else, a sickening feeling hits me. *Reporter.*

"The press are here," I grumble beneath my breath, only loud enough for my father and fake asshole boyfriend to hear, and when neither of them react, I huff a laugh. They don't react because they already know. They probably even set it up, and this required dinner makes so much more sense now, especially when Brad lets his arm linger across my back.

This whole thing was a set up. Of course it was. I'm so fucking stupid. This isn't about spending time with my father, or getting to know Brad. No, this is purely about us being seen together, so that when the time comes for my engagement to be announced, there is photographic evidence of our courtship. I should have known, my father is nothing if not strategic, and of course he wants to make sure his investment in us is worth it. It would almost be laughable if it weren't so fucking archaic and ridiculous. Not that I bother voicing that, it would be wasted on their ears.

Instead, I lean into Brad's heavy and disgusting touch on me, giving both him and my father my complete attention. If this is going to be my life I need to start playing the part, and as I sit there trying not to think how much I wish his touch belonged to someone else, I can't help but think the noose feels tighter than ever.

The rest of the dinner is mostly painless, excluding Brad's overly affectionate touch that is borderline sleazy, and my father's approving stare lapping it all up as if it is totally real. As if I didn't just beg for it to be anyone else in the world. By the time the plates are cleared and the check is being signed, I feel freedom in sight once more, and I couldn't be more desperate for a reprieve.

We move through the restaurant towards the exit together, and I make sure to smile pointedly at the reporter still lingering at their table. Showing every bit of restraint I have by not flipping them off. My father barely offers me a goodbye as he excuses himself to go back to the office. It's almost 9 o'clock, I doubt he has any work left, and knowing what he likes to do in his

spare time, I grimace as I watch him go. Brad lingers, and I mildly panic at the thought of this night going on any longer, but thankfully he only stays long enough to tell me to show off more of my great rack at the next dinner. *Pig.*

Needing to loosen some of this tension now lingering in my body, I motion to Julian that I am going to walk for a while, and he climbs back in the car to follow me along. It would be kinder of me to just go home, but I don't need him being witness to the turmoil going on inside of me right now, so I turn and start making my way towards home on foot.

I'm not sure how long I walk for, my mind is too distracted by the life I am going to soon be living, and by the time I make it to the market by the lake near my house, I know there is only one solution. There is a great little Chinese takeout place a few shops in that I absolutely adore, and after the dull dinner with the even duller company, I need something with a little spice to it. I cut through the people, smiling at the same woman that is always behind the counter, and quickly placing my usual order. I hand over some bills and stand off to the side to wait, knocking into another patron as I do so.

"Oh my god, I am so sorry," I start, turning around to see who I attacked with my body, and shock floods me when I find familiar eyes, only they lack the brooding I am used to.

Diana Darkmore stares at me, eyes wide, and mouth speechless as she clutches her own little hoard of Chinese food to her chest. I don't know why I am so surprised to find her here, she is the sole reason I even know about this place, many late night dinners scored from here in the past. It's just I have been coming here for almost two years alone and not once have I encountered her. In fact, I haven't seen her since before my dad fired her and the press dragged her name through the mud for my father's sordid affair with her.

"Maddie Darling," she says by way of greeting, a name she has called me a thousand times, and one I haven't heard in far too many years. She smiles, some of her surprise subsiding as she takes me in, her eyes trailing over me and taking in the changes. I was barely a teen the last time she truly saw me, so I have definitely grown up in recent years. "Wow, look at you, you're a woman," she gasps, emotion shining in her eyes, a sad smile across her mouth. "How are you?"

I return her smile, the warmth of hers so familiar and safe that I feel like I want to cry. Diana was a vital part of my life. With parents like mine, and a brother mostly occupied by hockey, having someone like her around was like

having a safe haven to escape into. She always looked after me, asked me questions about my day, helped me with homework, teased me about my crushes. Everything a real mother should do, I briefly think, and the tears threatening to spill start to sting. She hasn't changed at all, sure she looks a little older herself, and she looks as if she has lost some weight, but apart from that she is still the same Diana.

"I'm good, Mrs Darkmore, how are you?" My manners overtake my personality, pushing me away from the emotion threatening to spill right here in the middle of the market, and she pops the bag of food onto her hip and glares at me. "Sorry, Diana, I'm doing okay thanks, how are you?" I add in a rushed ramble, feeling nervous for some reason, and she just laughs.

"Oh, Maddie, you haven't changed a bit, have you dear?" Just as she asks that the server calls my name, my order ready, and I excuse myself for a second to grab it. When I return she glances down at the bags we are both holding. "I was just gonna head home and eat alone, but I would love some company." She gestures to a nearby empty table under a small patio area, and I bite my lip nervously as she waits for me to answer.

In truth, I would love to have dinner and catch up with her for old times' sake, hell, just to see how she is, and catch up, but I feel a little weird, and for once the problem isn't my father. *It's her son*. The one who just threw away months of texts with me so he could be with the other me, the one he doesn't realize he already knows so well.

Despite that I can't turn her down, not when it's been so long, I've missed her. Which is why I find myself saying, "Sure, I would love to have dinner with you." I hold my hand out to the table she gestured, letting her take a seat first, before I sit down across from her.

"So, how are you really?" she questions with a knowing smile. "How's your brother? I've seen him play a few times, he's doing amazing."

Choosing the easier answer, I focus on my brother. "Josh is great, dominating and focused as always." I roll my eyes playfully, she knows how great my relationship is with him. "He will be getting drafted next year, I'm going to miss him so much when he leaves." She looks at me knowingly, seeing right through my attempt to avoid her question about myself, but before she can push me on it, I quickly add, "How's Nova?"

I don't know why I ask, it's a stupid question, an even stupider notion to actually care, especially now I know what I know, but it's been days since I have talked to him in any capacity and I have to know. Yet when her

knowing smile morphs into confusion I mentally curse. “I didn’t realize you two knew one another,” she says slowly, and I curse myself again. Of course she thinks we don’t know each other. Until a few weeks ago we hated one another, or at least I thought we did, that shouldn’t have changed. *Stupid stupid Maddie.*

“We don’t,” I say too quickly, the two words not even sounding believable to my own ears, and I scold myself. “Not really anyway,” I add with a shrug. “I mean, he plays on the team with Josh, I see him around at parties and stuff.” I aim for my words to be casual, but I may as well be wearing a sign across my head that reads ‘I screwed your son’.

Diana watches me closely for a few seconds, no doubt searching my words for the lie they are, but thankfully she doesn’t seem to pick up on anything. “He’s doing well, he’s a good boy, always looking after me and making sure I’m okay. He cooks dinners with me, and helps me clean up. I struck gold with him” Her eyes go a little misty as she talks about him, and I am fascinated by her insight on him. Nothing like the cocky, alpha hole hockey player he portrays around campus, but I suppose given what I know now, that I was already aware of that.

You could stop most people in town and ask their thoughts on him and they’d all have something to say. He’s like my brother, thanks to hockey, everyone knows who he is, but their answers would all be the same. They would say what a great hockey player he is, how he will for sure be drafted into the NHL, and that he is one of the greats in the making. And they’d be right, he is, he will, but hearing someone talk about him as a person, about what he is like without a stick in his hand, it’s refreshing.

My mind rushes back over every text he ever sent, knowing most of them by heart considering I have reread them a hundred times in the last couple of days, and considering I can’t exactly agree with her, or add to her insight by telling her he gives great head. So, I say the only thing I can say without repercussion. “He’s a great hockey player.” Five words that sound so ridiculous that even I laugh a little as I say them, and it feels like Diana is seeing right through me, just like she always did, but she doesn’t call me out on it.

Instead, we spend the next hour catching up on the last few years. She asks me about the rest of my school years, how college is going, about the boy I had a crush on when I was thirteen, whose name she still remembers, and the yearly vacation we still take to the Hamptons every Summer, and the

Bahamas every winter. She also catches me up on what she has been doing since leaving her position in my father's office, and the guilt I feel is unmatched. I know it's not my fault, but my father is the reason she lost everything, and the fact she isn't holding it against me the same way her son once did is a miracle.

By the time we finish dinner and finally part ways, we have exchanged numbers and agreed to not go so long without talking again. Any tension I had from my earlier dinner has disappeared, along with the lingering guilt I had in relation to Nova's mom, and my night actually turned out okay. I let Julian drive me the rest of the way home, greeting Hector on my way inside with a smile as they swap shifts, and when I head upstairs to shower, I feel lighter than I have in weeks.

I know the number of days until I lose my freedom is getting dangerously low, and I also know the rope around my neck will be so tight soon that I won't be able to breathe. But right now I still have my freedom, and I plan to enjoy it one last time, afterall, I have a hockey game to look forward to.

3 0

M A D D I E

PUCK PRICK

I t's game day, and when Hallie and I pull into the parking lot of the hotel that the team is staying at, I can feel the anticipation of seeing Nova burning through me. I woke up this morning feeling reckless, and wild, and it was with that notion in mind that I dressed in some of the sexiest underwear I own, before tossing on one of Josh's jerseys, some tight jeans, and my heeled boots. I feel good, and I plan to find Nova after the game and have him make me feel even better, just one last time.

"Archer said he would room with me to give you guys the whole night together," Hallie cuts into my thoughts, her fingers firing across the keyboard of her phone as she talks. "I'm cool with it if you are."

Climbing out of the car and moving to pull our bags from it, my neck almost snaps because I turn around to look at her that fast, "What? I'm not spending the night in his room, Hals," I screech in outrage, as if we haven't already spent the night in his bed together, but that was different. That was before I knew who he was, it can't happen again. "This is strictly a friends with benefits situation," I confirm, before adding, "No, an enemies with benefits situation, actually. There will be no room sharing or sleepovers." We

have to go back to the way things were before all of this, but even I can hear the lies in my voice, and my best friend just laughs.

“Again, you mean?” Hallie muses, popping her hip out to the side as she glares at me knowingly. “There will be no sleepovers again, because if my memory recalls, you already spent the night at Casa Darkmore.” Her smug smile is insufferable, and before I can call her out, I see my brother barreling towards us with a smile on his face.

“You made it,” he hollers, causing Hallie’s spine to stiffen, as he approaches us from behind. Of course, he tries to ignore her completely as he strides past her and pulls me into a hug. “I’m so glad you’re here, Mads.”

His words are bittersweet. I have never been to one of his away games before, and I feel guilty instantly. I mean, yes, of course I am excited and happy to watch my brother play, but if I am being honest, he’s not the reason I’m here. I’m here because Nova asked me to come, because in a rare vulnerable moment, he invited me and I couldn’t say no. A common theme occurring anytime he is around lately, but it makes me feel like shit for lying to my brother.

“Maddie, did you know I’m invisible now,” Hallie drawls sarcastically, as my brother ignores her presence completely. “I wonder what I can do with my new found magic.”

Now it’s Josh’s turn to stiffen, and I prepare for the bitterness and disdain between them just like always, as he pulls away and looks blankly at my best friend. “Sorry, Tink, I guess it’s easy to forget you’re here considering you haven’t grown since you were twelve.” I see Hallie’s eyes widen at the use of her old nickname, one neither of us has heard in years, and all I can do is stare.

“Not everyone can take steroids, Joshua, sorry it’s so lonely at the top,” she snaps back in a fluster, clearly feeling unnerved by him, and still I remain silent watching them. *What the hell is going on?*

My brother laughs, reaching out to ruffle her hair like he always used to when she was a child, as he leans in close to her with a smile. “Don’t worry about me, Tink, I’m never lonely for long,” he replies with a wink and a smirk, and she pushes him away with a shove.

“God, you’re so annoying!” she huffs, straightening out her hair from his light assault, and grabbing her bag from the car to place it on the floor with mine.

Josh doesn’t skip a beat, reaching down to grab them both, and slamming

the trunk of the car shut for us as he goes. Then turning to walk inside of the hotel, but not before he tosses over his shoulder, "Trust me, Sanders, the feeling is mutual."

The two of us watch him leave, before Hallie grumbles, "Well, that was a fun start to our game day road trip."

I can't help but laugh, looping her arm in mine and dragging her with me to follow my brother inside. She might have said it sarcastically, but I know she enjoys the back and forth banter with him. She may as well be our middle child at this point, and as I pull her inside, I look forward to what the rest of the day may bring. Go Flyers and all that.

After checking in, we grab a quick coffee with Josh before he has to rush off to the stadium, and then Hallie and I spend the next hour getting ready for the night ahead. By the time we make it to the stadium ourselves, it is already bursting with fans for both teams, and I wait until Hallie is settled into our front row seats, right next to the flyers area, before slipping away.

It doesn't matter that this isn't our stadium. I have practically grown up in these places alongside Josh, and I know what it takes to slip past everyone and hunt down the changing rooms, yet they aren't my destination. No, I am heading down to the players' tunnel tonight, slipping myself out of sight just in time for the guys to start storming by me as they make their way to the ice.

Just like I knew he would be, Josh is one of the first to exit from the changing rooms, and I have to press myself into the wall I am hiding against to make sure he doesn't see me. Harper, Jones, and Cooper are quick to follow, along with most of the team. Then I spy Daemon Forbes, and to my surprise, Archer is right behind him, followed by Alexander, and the player I am actually looking for.

Already dressed in all of his gear, Nova looks every bit the Captain he is, and butterflies wreak havoc in my stomach as I think about the text he sent that wasn't really meant for me. *I just want her*. That's what he said, that he didn't care about what my dad did to his mom, that my brother is on the team, he said none of it mattered. He just wants me, the real me, the one he doesn't even realize how well he truly knows. No one has ever just wanted me before, and I wish I could have, that he could have me, but that's not our fate, it was never going to be.

I wait for the rest of the players to pass, until Nova is almost walking right by me, before I take a deep breath. This is it, all we have is tonight. "I hope you are planning on winning tonight, Captain," I purr, his head instantly

whipping round to find me. "I didn't come all this way to watch you lose." When his eyes land on mine, a sinful smile spreads across his face, and his huge body turns towards me.

"From where I'm standing, it looks like I already won." He drags his stare across my body, fixating on the Flyers jersey with a satisfied smile, before dragging it down my jean clad thighs and back up again. "You stalking me, Princess?"

I snort a laugh. "Please, just because you weren't on your knees at the time, doesn't mean you didn't practically beg me to come."

Those brooding eyes darken at my words, flicking over his shoulders as the rest of his team starts to disappear, but he doesn't move. Instead he leans above me, placing his arm against the wall by my head and leaning down, bringing our mouths close together. "I will gladly get on my knees and beg you to come," he breathes, pressing the stick in his hand between my thighs and thrusting it up against me. "You know how much I love to hear you scream my name."

A gasp slips out before I can stop it, and I am seconds away from begging him to take me right here, but this definitely isn't the time or the place. Yet still I press against the hard lines of his body as I whisper, "Maybe it will be you screaming my name, while I ride you." I almost can't believe those words just left my mouth, but when Nova drops his forehead to mine and groans, I light up inside just seeing the effect I have on him.

Only for tonight.

"If you wanna see my dick again, Princess, all you have to do is ask," he grits through his teeth, the cheers from the crowd getting louder, letting us both know our time is almost up.

"I'd rather choke on my own tongue." I press against his stick one more time, before bringing my hands up and shoving him in the chest to push him away from me. Our cat and mouse game of hatred is still swirling between us, and I am beginning to love the chase, especially now that it has to come to an end.

Of course he helps me out, taking a few steps back as the Coach starts to scream for him to hurry his ass up. "But choking on my dick is so much more fun." His words are paired with a wink, as he continues to walk away from me, and all I want to do is grab him by his jersey and not let go.

Instead, I push off the wall myself, ready to slip back to my seat to enjoy the game when I reply, "You'll have to make me, Darkmore."

He throws his head back and groans, before coming back with a smirk that almost brings me to my knees right here. “Oh you’d like that, wouldn’t you, Princess?” I don’t bother answering him, almost getting too far away for this conversation to remain private. So I just shrug, turning to leave without another word. I barely make it around the corner before I am being grabbed and dragged backwards, slamming into a hard chest. His gloved hand finds my throat as his mouth meets my ear. “I recall giving you a jersey with my name and number on it, Madeline, so fucking wear it. I don’t want to see another name on your back again, not even your own.” He pairs his threat with a hard bite to the lobe of my ear in warning, forcing another gasp from me, before he releases me. When I turn to look at him, he is storming away in the other direction without looking back.

Excitement and lust burn through my veins, and I have to steady myself with a hand on the wall as I attempt to catch my breath, barely aware of my surroundings as I stumble my way back to my seat. By the time I reach Hallie she is already screaming, as the players fly around the ice, and stretch to warm up. I spot the number nineteen on instinct, and as I watch him stretch out his thighs towards the floor, I can’t help but think how much trouble I am in with him, and how much I like it.

Just one more night.

I watch their entire warm-up and then once the game starts, my eyes track him as he skates around the ice, only failing the few times my brother skates by, slamming the glass in a high five as he passes. Their entire team is on fire tonight, but number nineteen is in a world of his own. Two goals under his belt, and it’s as if he is having the game of his life. The other team can barely keep up, and there isn’t a doubt in my mind that this game belongs to the Flyers tonight.

Just watching him gets me hot, and every time his eyes find mine, I swear I can feel him stripping me bare. It’s why I feel no shame when I lean over to Hallie and yell in her ear, “Okay maybe one more sleepover won’t hurt.” I don’t take my eyes off Nova, and you would think he could hear me from the way he is looking at me, and when he smirks at me yet again, I squirm in my seat.

I watch the game with rapt attention, another goal flying into the net, and more fights breaking out that I can keep up with. Of course one of them includes the captain I am pretending I’m not cheering for, but by the time the clock runs down, FU wins. I feel exhilarated as Hallie and I wait for the

crowds to die down a bit, before I show her the way to sneak down to the changing rooms so we can wait for my brother.

We wait at the end of the hallway this time, more towards the exit considering there are multiple hockey players leaving and taking up space, and when we spot the first friendly face, Hallie goes on a mission. I watch as she pulls Archer aside, talking to him quickly and quietly, before he nods his head and they pass something over to one another. Then Archer is the first to pass me to leave, smirking at me with a knowing wink, tipping his head as he passes. When I turn back towards Hallie she is already moving towards me.

“Room secured,” she starts with a smile. “I got his room key!” she adds in an excited tone, just as members from the opposing team start to exit their own changing room, cutting her off.

“How about I give you the key to my room, baby,” one of the guys cuts in, putting his arm around her waist and pulling her against him.

I’m already storming towards him before he has even finished his sentence, but before I can say anything, he is being dragged away from her and slammed against the wall opposite. “Don’t fucking touch her, prick!” Nova curses, shoving him hard with a hand around his throat.

His friend moves to step in, when Josh appears out of nowhere and covers Nova’s back, at the same time he pulls Hallie in behind him. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Josh warns, his tone low and lethal, and before his friend can make a decision, both Daemon and Alexander appear, taking in the scene before them and standing tall at their back without question.

“Leave, while you can still fucking walk, let alone hold a stick,” Nova threatens, squeezing the guys throat even tighter, before letting him drop to gasp for air.

The two of them don’t even think about it, just turn around and hurry off towards the exit without another word, and as soon as they are out of sight, my brother turns to Hallie. “You okay, Tink?”

My panicked and shocked eyes find hers just as she nods, fluffing out the dress she is wearing with shaky hands. “Yeah, I’m okay.” In truth, she does look okay, besides being a little shaken, my brother on the other hand looks ready to burst with rage.

His gaze snaps to mine. “Come on, I’ll walk you guys back to the hotel.” He doesn’t wait for me to respond, just hauls his bag up onto his shoulder, and guides Hallie towards the exit.

My feet however remain rooted to the spot as I move my eyes to Nova.

There isn't much I can say when my brother is within hearing range, so I settle on the only question I can ask freely without raising too much suspicion. "Why did you do that?"

Nova is watching my brother and Hallie closely, as if he is dissecting them, before he turns to me and shrugs. "You told me she doesn't like people touching her," he says, as if it's the most normal thing in the world, and I am rendered speechless. My gaze flicks between him, and my brother and Hals, who have stopped to wait for me, and I know they both heard what he just said.

He remembered. The night he walked me home I told him that Hallie doesn't like people touching her. I didn't tell him why, or get into it any further, but he remembered. He didn't care what the reason was, or ask me why, he just saw something that he knew would make her uncomfortable and he reacted. My heart threatens to explode inside of my chest as I nod at his explanation, my body free falling into the tornado that is Nova Darkmore.

"Thank you," I all but whisper, the words barely coming out, then I am turning on my heels and fleeing before I do something stupid like kiss him in front of them all.

When I reach Josh and Hallie, my brother's eyes are assessing Nova with a darkening expression, but Hallie just grabs my arm and pushes me outside, slipping the swapped hotel room key from Archer into my hand. "He definitely deserves his baguette eaten for that," she leans over and whispers with a smile, and I choke out a surprised laugh.

Yes, yes he does.

3 1

NOVA

HOTEL HAVOC

I have no idea what just happened. One minute I was in Coach's office listening to him tell me what a good game I had, and that there were scouts in the stands watching, and the next, I had my hand around that guy's throat. I wasn't lying to Maddie. I did see that guy with his hands on her best friend, and I remember what she told me about her not liking to be touched, but mostly, it was pure jealousy at the thought of him or his friend doing the same to her. My head is so completely fucked, but I know one thing more than any other. I need to make Madeline Peters mine.

Reign nudges my shoulder, knocking me out of the trance she left me in. "You okay, Cap?" I watch her leave with her brother, feeling nothing but the need to claim her, possess her, fucking shout that she is mine, until she is completely out of sight.

I tear my stare away from the now empty exit and look towards my teammate as I reply, "Not even a little bit, Reign."

My teammate's face is knowing as I reach down to pick up my discarded bag from the floor, and slowly start to make my way outside. The hotel is only across the street, and I make a quick detour to the gift shop to pick up a

little something for my mom, like I always do when I play out of town. It's a little ritual of ours, only this time it reminds me that my dad still hasn't called me back. I pull my phone out and shoot off yet another message to him, and then I make my way through the hotel. The lobby is filled with people and it takes forever to get up to my room, and by the time I do, all I feel like doing is collapsing onto my bed.

Music is already playing on the other side of my hotel room door, and as I swipe my key I shake my head at my best friend. Never one to enjoy a little downtime. "Arch, where the hell did you disappear to man?" I ask, slamming the door behind me and moving deeper into the room, only to stop dead in my tracks as I find my bed occupied.

Except it isn't my best friend waiting for me. No, it's the Mayor's daughter, who is sitting in nothing but a Flyer's jersey at the end of my bed. The one who has done nothing but tempt me and defy me, the one who is going to become mine in every way and she doesn't even know it yet.

I dump my bag on the floor instantly, my hungry gaze trailing over every inch of exposed skin she has on display, as she silently watches me in return. "How did you get in my room, Princess?" I ask, pulling at the tie around my neck to loosen it, her eyes tracking my every move.

"I can be persuasive when I want to be," she purrs, and I laugh, of that I have no doubt. She has had me in a fucking chokehold for weeks now.

I start to unbutton my shirt, taking a few steps closer as I nod my head to her own. "I told you I didn't wanna see you in that fucking jersey again. I'm not joking Maddie, you wear my number or no one's." I don't know when this need to claim her started, but I want everyone to know exactly who she belongs to.

A smirk curls at the corner of her mouth as she slowly starts to rise to her feet. "I didn't know you were the possessive type," she muses. *Yeah, me neither princess.*

"Only with things that belong to me," I grunt back, mesmerized by the long length of her bare legs, and the need to have them wrapped around me.

"And do I?" she asks almost innocently. "Belong to you that is?" Her question is paired with the turn of her body, as she reaches up to hold the waves of her hair to reveal the number nineteen spread across her back, my name right above it.

Fuck.

She is wearing my jersey, the bottom of it flowing down to her mid thigh.

I've seen her in dresses shorter, I mean fuck, her halloween outfit almost brought me to my knees, but this. Her, here, my jersey, my fucking name across her back, I am so done for.

I erase the distance between us in three quick strides, crowding into her back and curling my arms around her stomach as I press myself against her. "You're wearing my jersey, Princess," I grumble into her ear as our eyes lock in the mirror in front of us. "You know what that means don't you?" My hands splay out flat as I dig my hardening cock into her ass to show her what she is doing to me. She shakes her head slowly, her stare never leaving mine as she presses back against it, making me groan. "It means you're mine now, baby," I grit through my teeth. "It means from now on you only wear my fucking jersey, sleep in my fucking bed, and scream my fucking name." I curse every word into the side of her neck, dragging my lips and tongue up the column of her throat, just so desperate for a taste of her.

"I'm yours," she gasps, almost as if she is saying something else silently, before she adds, "I'm here right now, so what are you going to do to me, Darkmore?"

I smirk as I let my teeth sink into the juncture of her neck, almost lost to the sarcastic drawl of her voice. "Keep that attitude up, Princess, you know how much I love that mouth." Before she can even respond, I spin her in my hold and place my hands on her shoulders. "Now be a good girl and kneel for me." I don't wait for her to answer, I just push her down to the floor until she is kneeling at my feet and waiting for instruction.

Then I continue to take off the rest of my shirt, pulling the tank off afterwards, and watching as her eyes trail across the black ink on my torso as she sees it for the first time. This is going to be different than the other times we have spent together. This isn't a quick fumble in the bathroom, or a rushed fuck in the library, this is me claiming her, touching and tasting every inch of her body until she is begging me to stop. This is me making her mine.

My hands undo my belt and pants, shoving them down my legs with my boxers and leaving me completely bare to her, my cock already hard and standing to attention. Her eyes drop down to it as she absent-mindedly licks her lips in preparation. I grip myself, tightening my fist around the base of my cock and pumping it a few times as I reach out with my other hand and cup the back of her neck.

"Stick your tongue out for me, Princess." She obeys instantly and I feel my cock jump in my hands as she does. "*Fuckkk*," I drag out slowly, pushing

myself against her waiting tongue. "I forgot what a good girl you are for me." I press my cock deeper into her mouth, but with defiant eyes she just watches me, and when I pull back she smirks.

"You told me to stick out my tongue, you didn't tell me to suck," she shrugs innocently, as if my hard glistening cock isn't ready to fuck her mouth hard, her eyes watching me with anticipation.

"Such a smart fucking mouth, Princess." I shake my head, gripping her neck even tighter in my hand. "Let's try again shall we?" I ask, swiping some of the pre-cum from my cock and smudging it against her lips before dropping my hand down to her throat. "Open your mouth and suck so I can fuck this pretty little throat."

She opens her mouth, and before she can decide whether it is to respond or obey, I shove my cock past her lips to silence her. Her eyes widen a little, but I feel the sharp intake of breath through her nose as she hollows out her cheeks to accommodate me. Fuck, I forgot how warm and wet her mouth feels wrapped around my dick, and I can't help but tighten my hold as it slides into her hair.

I pull out slowly, dragging against her tongue before she swirls it around my tip, eyes fixed on mine as she teases me. Holding my stare she rubs her tongue along the underside of my shaft, before sucking the head into her mouth and making me gasp as her hand grips my base. I let her repeat this motion over and over until I can't take it anymore. I bat her hand away and slowly thrust back into her mouth until I hit the back of her throat, holding myself there for a couple of seconds until tears gather in her eyes.

Then my hips start to move, bucking in and out of her mouth faster and faster, shoving my cock deeper, and relishing in every gag and moan that slips out around my thick length. My cock is long and she takes every inch of it beautifully, not that I'm surprised after that night in my room and how she handled Reign, a thought that only makes me fuck her pretty mouth even harder. Watching her with him was both erotic and infuriating, and as if she knows where my mind has gone, she places her hands on my torso, pulling me back in.

The heat of her palms against my bare skin, the tightness of her throat around my cock, the alluring stare of her eyes as she watches me fuck her mouth, all of it undoes me completely. I feel my abs clench beneath her touch as my orgasm barrels towards me, my spine tingling in anticipation. I move both my hands to grip her hair, titling her neck even more as I thrust even

faster into her waiting mouth. My eyes flick to the mirror behind us, watching her head bob back and forth on my dick eagerly, my jersey moving with her. Fuck she looks good with my name and number on her back.

My eyes remain fixed on it, my hands tightening even more in her hair, until I am shooting hot spurts of cum down her throat with a loud groan. I hold myself there ensuring she swallows every drop, until I pull back and fall down onto the bed to calm my racing heart.

Once I finally drag my eyes from the mirror I move my focus back to her, just in time to see her lick some of my cum from her lips back into her mouth. *Fuck, she is perfect.* I hold out my hand to help her to her feet, then grip the edge of my jersey and drag her towards me as I slip down off the edge of the bed to the floor. “My turn, baby.”

She almost stumbles as I grip one of her thighs and lift it, placing her knee on the bed beside my head, opening her up to me. When my hands drag along her skin and push beneath my jersey I find nothing. She is completely bare beneath it and I can’t help but groan. I position her so her other leg is on the outside of mine, and then I drop my head back against the mattress and pull her pussy against my lips.

“I just fucked your face, Princess,” I purr, nipping and licking my way up her slit, before using my thumb to part her lips and dip my tongue inside to find her clit. “Now it’s your turn to fuck mine,” I order, and I expect a little hold back, a little refusal, but as my tongue flicks against her clit again, Maddie puts one hand on top of my head and rolls her hips against my mouth seeking more. That’s all it takes, that one move and I turn fucking feral for her.

Reaching around her, I grip her ass and pull her against me, sinking my tongue between her pretty wet lips and teasing her clit with the tip of my tongue. “You taste so fucking sweet baby,” I praise, swirling my tongue desperately around her clit, and digging my fingers deeper into her ass cheeks.

“Nova, please,” she moans, pushing her pussy harder against my mouth, swiveling her hips against my eager tongue.

“Please, what Princess?” I tease, licking her too slowly, letting my warm breath coat her cunt until her moans turn into groans. “Please tongue fuck this pretty little pussy until you come all over my face?” I ask with another slow, measured lick of my tongue. “Please feast on this cunt until it is dripping down my chin?” I flick her clit before sucking it hard into my mouth.

“Yes,” she gasps, throwing her head back and shoving her clit harder into me. “God yes, please, Nova.”

My name being moaned from her lips has me moving my hold to her thighs, gripping her even tighter, and pushing them apart until she is almost fully kneeling on the bed straddling my face. Then I lick her like I am completely starved, and for her I am. Her clit swells beneath my tongue as I suck it into my mouth and swirl the tight little bud with the tip of it again and again, relishing in every gasp and moan it elicits from her own mouth as she slams her pussy onto my face.

My cock is already hard again for her, no doubt glistening at the tip, desperate to be inside of her again, but my focus remains on her. She is dripping all over my face and it still isn't enough. I have been obsessed with the taste of her ever since that night in the restaurant, where I dropped to my knees and buried myself between these perfect thighs for the first time. I am addicted to the sounds she makes when I bury my tongue deep inside her, and mesmerized by the way she throws her head back and writhes against my face.

“Nova, yes, right there, don't fucking stop.” Her pleas turn into another moan as I move one of my hands and sink two fingers deep inside her, stretching her out for me. I keep my tongue on her clit, flicking against it until I can feel it pulsing beneath my lips, mixed with the push and pull of my fingers in and out of her hole. Faster and faster, my mouth devouring her clit while my fingers roughly fuck her, until she is trembling above me.

I feel the familiar tightening of her pussy, letting me know she is about to explode, and I suck her clit hard one last time as I continue to slam my fingers inside her, pushing her over the edge with a scream. “That's it, baby, come on my tongue and let me drink you down.” I feel her pulse against my tongue, strangling my fingers inside her, as I taste every last drop of her cum, licking every inch of her pussy until she is almost clean.

Once I am done her legs give out and she drops down into my lap, a sweaty satisfied mess, but we are nowhere near done yet. Wrapping my arms around her, I scoop her up and stand, sitting us on the middle of the bed, her jersey clad back still facing that damn mirror, and then I lean back on my hands and order, “Put me inside you, baby.”

3 2

M A D D I E

RAUNCHY RITUALS

His gravelly command travels straight down to my pussy, which is still pulsing from the orgasm he just ripped from me. *Put me inside you, baby.* Fuck. Have I ever had an offer so tempting in my life? His eyes are intense as they watch me, as they wait for me to obey him, and I will obey him. I will do anything he wants just to keep him looking at me like that. Like he knows me, like he owns me, like I am the only girl in the goddamn world that he could ever want.

Just for tonight.

That thought has me leaning up to wrap my arms around his neck, never breaking his stare as I rock myself against him, the thick head of his cock brushing against my swollen clit. “Don’t tease me, Mads,” he whispers against my lips, still not quite kissing them, and it only makes me want him more. I pin my legs around his waist and reach my hand down between us to grip his hard shaft making him groan. “Do it baby, let me inside you,” he begs, pushing into my hold on him.

This Nova isn’t the one I know. He isn’t cocky or confident, he is obsessive and needy, completely desperate to have me, and I him, and I wish

we could stay here forever. I wish that this could be it for us, that we could have this every day because I know this feeling isn't fleeting. This isn't a silly crush on my brother's teammate, this is raw and real, and when I inevitably have to let it go I know it will hurt.

Panting against his lips, I place the head of his hard cock at my hole, titling my body towards him to give him better access, before slowly starting to slide down his length. "Fuck," I gasp, closing my eyes as his cock begins to stretch me out, making me ride the line between pleasure and pain. "Your cock feels so good," I grit through my teeth, gasping as he sinks deeper, inch by inch.

This isn't like when we fucked on his birthday, this isn't even like when he took me against the stacks in the library, this is more. This is intimate, our bodies pressed together without a bit of space between them, his name across my back as he slides inside me.

"If you start with that smart mouth of yours, this will be over a lot faster than I want it to be," he groans almost painfully, one of his hands slipping beneath his jersey and splaying across the small of my back.

Mine then move to loop around his neck again, toying with the hair there as I sink down almost to the hilt and gasp at how full I feel. "I thought you liked my smart mouth," I breathe, rising back up a little before sinking back down, but Nova doesn't answer. His teeth are gritted as if he is holding himself back, his hips slowly moving against mine as he starts to build up a rhythm between us. "What about my pussy, do you like that?" I ask, gasping as he thrusts up into me a little harder.

"I fucking love your smart mouth," he grunts, finally answering me, pairing his words with another hard thrust of his hips. "And I fucking adore your pussy, baby, especially when it's wrapped around me." Another snap of his hips and my gasps turn into moans. I am so wet that I can feel myself dripping down his length as he slides in deeper with every thrust, yet still I need more.

His cock is big and thick, making me burn in a delicious way, and I can already feel that familiar pulsing ache as the heat of pleasure grows even stronger between us. I want more, I need more, and I know he can give it to me.

"Harder," I beg, my fingers digging into his scalp and pulling on his hair. "Please, Nova, fuck me harder." He groans against my lips, still not kissing me, as rough hands move to grab my hips. Digging his fingers into my skin,

he begins to move me up and down at a faster tempo, building that rhythm even more until I am moaning at every snap of his hips. "Yes, that's it," I praise, rolling my body against his and every one of his thrusts.

"Not enough," he growls, tightening his hold on my hips and I pray he leaves his mark so I can remember this tomorrow. "Push it a little deeper for me, Mads," he orders, trying to drag me onto his cock even harder.

"I can't," I protest, already feeling the burn from the stretch of him, but he ignores my refusal.

"Take it all, now!" he spits through his teeth, and the low wrath-infused tone of his voice gets me even wetter than before, sliding him all the way in on every thrust. "That's it, such a good girl for me," he groans, leaning up to thrust into me ever faster.

"Nova, I feel so fucking full," I whine, rolling my body into his and feeling myself rush towards another edge.

One of his hands finds my throat, holding me firmly in place, while the other digs into the skin of my hip, his eyes flicking between me and the mirror behind us. "I really need you to come all over me, Mads," he pleads, bouncing me harder on his cock as my moans fill the hotel room. My pussy starts to constrict around him, squeezing him tight as my body begins to shake. "That's it, Princess, you're so fucking good for me. I need this pretty little pussy to come all over me." He doesn't relent on the punishing pace with which he is thrusting inside of me, and I can feel myself soaking every inch of his dick as he fucks me.

I am trembling against him, desperate to keep feeling him like this, never wanting this high between us to end. "Come for me, Princess, please, I need you to come while riding my cock." His words are my undoing as I turn blind with lust, my hips bucking against him wildly as I ride his dick as hard as I can. "You're so fucking perfect," he groans, his hand angling my head to look at him, and locking me in place against him.

Every thrust of my hips pushes him deeper inside of me, my clit rubbing furiously against his groin. The tension between us snaps, wrapping around me like a vine until I am ready to break, and the orgasm bursts out of me before I can even stop it. "Yes, yes, right there, yes!"

I come, hard, gripping his hair in my fingers and riding the wave of pleasure until I am shaking and sweating against him. That doesn't stop him though, no, Nova doesn't relent on his merciless pace. His grip remains firm on my throat and hip as he fucks me from below, groaning at every snap of

his hips and yet still coming back for more.

“You’re so fucking tight, Mads.” He pushes apart from me and admires the view of his cock sliding inside of me with long controlled strokes. A rush of heat floods my insides, my pussy fluttering against him once more, and when I tighten again, he bunches the jersey in his fists and rips it over my head so he can finally admire my tits. “So fucking perfect,” he snaps, reaching up and squeezing one of them, rolling my nipple between his fingers.

Another orgasm is already building, his body feeling incredible beneath me, sculpted and skilled, and oh so fucking beautiful. “Nova,” I plead his name, so close to falling apart again that I can barely breathe.

“That’s it baby,” his raspy voice praises me once more, and my entire body heats under his touch and words. His fingers continue to pinch and squeeze my nipple, before calloused fingertips skim their way back up to my throat, circling it once more. “Come all over me, Maddie, I need one more,” he pleads.

His cock finds that spot inside of me, stroking along the front wall of my pussy and making my entire body spasm. I grip his shoulders, grinding against him and meeting his every thrust as I begin to come again. “Yes, Nova, you feel so good, I’m coming,” I whimper, holding onto him with every bit of strength I can muster and letting the pleasure take control of me.

“Maddie,” he groans my name like a prayer, and then I am falling apart above him, his fingers choking me so tight that he cuts off my scream. His hips snapping at a brutal pace, fucking me through my orgasm until my body goes limp above him. Then he is following me over the edge, his cock slamming into me one final time before he comes with a long drawn out groan, cursing my name once more.

Then he falls back, dropping down to the bed completely and taking me with him until we are sprawled out in the middle of the it, both of us panting and sweating. His cock is still half hard inside of me, his cum dripping down his shaft, and when I lean up on my arms to look at him, his eyes are light and relaxed. He stares at me with a smug, satisfied grin, his hands roaming up and down my spine, stroking my skin beneath his fingers.

“Best post game ritual ever,” he muses, and I can’t help but smile, moving to stroke back some of his fallen hair from his forehead. “I could get used to this,” he adds, his words hitting me right in the gut.

“Nova, I need to tell...” I start, but am instantly cut off with hard bangs

against the hotel room door.

“Now you’ve stopped fucking, hurry up and get dressed, we are going out drinking!” Archer yells through the door, and Nova’s light and happy smile as he shakes his head at his best friend’s voice threatens to break my heart inside of my chest.

I know I should tell him the truth, that he should know that there isn’t just sex between us, but secrets too, but what’s the point? We can’t be more than this, no matter how much I wish we could be. Grim and Charmer, Maddie and Nova, it doesn’t matter what name I call us, it will all end just the same. So, like the coward I am, I dismount from him and move towards the bathroom and force that usual practiced smile to my face. “Looks like we are going out,” I say with a grin, praying that he doesn’t see past it. “I’m just gonna grab a quick shower.”

Nova doesn’t even get a chance to respond before I am rushing into the bathroom and slamming the door behind me. Tonight has already been amazing, and going out with friends sounds great, but that brings my tryst with the Captain of FU to an end. We can’t be more than this, no matter how much we both want it, *need it*, it just can’t happen. So as I climb into the shower I let the tears fall and tuck away the memories of tonight into the back of my mind to keep forever.

3 3

NOVA

GRIM DISCOVERIES

I'm not sure what happened between the hot as fuck sex we had up in my hotel room, to getting to the bar with the rest of the team, but Maddie is acting weird as fuck. I understand she might not be ready to tell everyone about us, especially given how her brother feels about me, but surely that's not enough to account for her total change in attitude? Any other time I would think maybe I had imagined the connection between us, but I know I haven't, I felt the spark there. I also felt how tight and wet her pussy was when I made her come three times.

We have been in this neon, sports type bar for about two hours, most of the team and the few people who traveled for the game taking over the entire place, and the Mayor's daughter has barely given me a second glance. You'd think we didn't even know one another, let alone that she was screaming for me to fuck her harder not that long ago. She is on the other side of the bar with her best friend and Josh, yet that hasn't stopped her eyes from flicking over here on multiple occasions.

To make matters worse, Brianna and a couple of her friends also made the trip, and have not left my side since the moment we walked in. They are

all being obnoxious and loud, and looking at her now I don't know why I ever went there. Sure, she's pretty, but that's it, there is nothing else to her, and now I've had a taste of true substance, I can't ever go back.

That doesn't mean she isn't still trying and when her arms curl around my neck for the third time, I feel like screaming. "Nova, sure knows how to throw a party, do you remember that night in your basement?" Her tone is loud and seductive, forcing me to try and remember a night I have no memory of.

There is only one night I remember in that room, and when my eyes move across the room to find the only girl to ever keep my interest, meeting her furious stare, I can't help but smirk. Maddie watches me closely, her stare dropping to the girl's hands I haven't removed yet, then she whispers something to her friend, before excusing herself from the table and heading in this direction.

I instantly brush off the puck whore's touch, as I reply, "No, I don't remember that." My tone is probably a little harsh, but I only have eyes for one girl these days, and it isn't her.

Brianna stomps her foot a little, oblivious to my attention being captured by another as she goes on. "Of course you remember the basement, it was that 4th of July party last Summer." She keeps talking, adding in more details, but I tune her out as Maddie approaches, flicking her stare around the table of people I am sitting with.

"Trust me, Brianna, there is only one night I remember in that basement, and you weren't there." I hold Maddie's stare, before flicking it to Reign who hides his knowing smile in his beer, not daring to look at the girl in question.

"You don't have to be rude, Nova," Brianna snaps, embarrassment clear in her tone as a few of her so-called friends laugh. Like I haven't fucked all of them, and also forgotten every single one of those nights too.

I open my mouth to respond, my eyes still on the Mayor's daughter, but before I can say anything, she cuts in. "And you don't have to be a puck whore, but here we are." Her tone is completely sweet, matched with that signature fake smile of hers, making a few of the guys around me curse and laugh beneath their breath.

Now it's my turn to hide my smile, picking up my bottle of beer and draining the rest of it, and before Brianna can open her mouth to respond, Josh appears behind his sister. "Everything okay, Mads?" His voice is full of authority, his eyes accusing every one of us of some sort of crime against his

sister as he stares us all down.

The fake smile drops into a more natural one as Brianna gets up from the table and storms away, her little friends following after her almost instantly as Maddie turns back to her brother. "All good here," she replies with that smile she saves for him and him alone.

That smile cuts through me as I see how easy it is for them, how close their bond is. And even after everything we have been through, I still feel like I am on the outside begging to get in.

Josh nods, smiling at some of the guys around me as he says, "We're starting a game of poker if any of you want to join." He nods his head back to the table where Hallie is still seated, and a few of the guys jump to their feet in agreement, and when he turns and nods his head, Maddie lingers until they have gone.

Only Archer and I remain as Maddie cuts me with her stare. "You know there are easier ways to get an STD," she snaps, the jealousy in her voice so clear that it makes me giddy.

"I haven't touched anyone else in months," I reply as calmly as possible, and I feel Archer's head snap in my direction at my words, as I rise to my feet and lean in closer to her. "But if you wanna claim me, Princess, then go right ahead." I bring our lips until they are almost touching, making her snap away from me so quickly she nearly stumbles. "Yeah, that's what I thought," I laugh, leaning against the table as I shake my empty bottle at Arch to see if he wants another drink.

"You're disgusting," Maddie grits through her teeth, turning on her heel and storming away back to her brother and the others, her insult only making me laugh.

"You're so fucked," Archer says with a laugh of his own, watching me watch her, and I can't help but smile again.

"Isn't she beautiful when she's mad," I say, finally breaking my stare and turning to my best friend, who only now looks in her direction.

"She sure looks good walking away from you," he teases, smacking me in the shoulder and pulling me towards the bar to grab another drink. "Who'd have thought, my best friend has got his first crush," he jokes, ordering two more beers as I let my eyes flick back to her.

"I don't have a crush on Madeline Peters," I reply, rolling my eyes, not because it isn't true, but because crush isn't a strong enough word for what I feel when I look at her.

“Well, that’s good,” Levi, Josh’s best friend and our teammate, cuts in. “I mean, besides the fact Josh would kill you for trying to mack on his little sister,” he jokes, like I haven’t seen him staring at her in the same way. His greedy little eyes are on her now, trailing over skin that not even three hours ago was pressed against my own. Fury burns beneath my skin as I flex my fists to stop myself from using them on his face. “She’s spoken for,” he adds, cutting right through my wrath.

“Spoken for?” Archer asks, looking at me with worry as I remain shocked into silence, as my mind moves back to the only guy he could be talking about. Clearly he doesn’t mean me.

“Yeah, my dad called before the game, we just got invited to her engagement party in a few weeks, looks like she and Thorne will be tying the knot, I’m sure you guys have seen them together round campus.” He is saying the words so casually, like he isn’t shocked by them, and I don’t know why I am. I mean, it’s not like I haven’t seen her around with that football douche, but surely he must be mistaken.

Engaged. No, she can’t be, I don’t believe him, she would have told me. Ignoring him completely, I grab my fresh bottle of beer off the bar and move towards where she is now locked in a game of poker with Josh and some other guys from the team. I watch her every move, not taking my eyes off her, even when her brother keeps giving me questioning looks. No, my sole focus is her, game after game, and win after win. She thrashes every single one of them, which only makes me smile with pride. No, there is no way in hell she is getting engaged, not after everything that has happened between us.

When she throws down another winning hand, Josh and the others groan. “Alright, sis, you can stop now, I get it, this is payback for the last time we played.” he complains, tossing his own useless hand on the table.

“Yeah, baby Peters, you’re killing him,” one of the other guys adds with a chuckle, but Maddie just shrugs.

Her eyes are light and free as she reaches over and drags the money she won from him towards her. “One thing you should know about me, Josh, I always pay my debts.”

Words.

Simple meaningless words.

Words that slice right through me so completely, that I almost choke on the beer sliding down my throat, because it isn’t the first time I’ve heard

them, or should I say *read them*. Eyes still on the satanic siren in front of me, I reach into my pocket and fish out my phone. It takes me a few minutes of scrolling but then I find it. The picture of tits and the menacing words that were sent with them.

I always pay my debts.

That's what she said to me, her, *Grim*, the girl who shared all her secrets with me, it's her. It has to be, and as I think that so many things about her messages finally make more sense. The complaining about her family, the pulling away from me, the ending it after I brought up the library. She's the one. The one standing in front of me with her head thrown back as she laughs at her brother's response. A brother I despise, just like her, except I don't hate her anymore.

No, instead I... *nope not going there.*

A rage like I have never known flies through me, and I can barely breathe as I stumble around the table right towards her. She doesn't notice me until I am right upon her, and when I grab her and start dragging her from the room her face is completely startled.

"Nova, what the hell are you doing?" Her eyes are wide and panicked as she turns back to the people I just dragged her from, her brother included, all of them watching us with confusion, but I don't give a fuck about any of them right now.

In fact, I ignore her completely, unable to listen to her pleas when endless thoughts and feelings go to war against one another inside of me. I don't stop until we reach the alleyway behind the bar, pushing through the staff entrance and letting the door close behind us. I drag her a little deeper still, not stopping until I can push her against a bare brick wall.

When I finally release her she pulls her arm away from me and curses, "What the fuck, Nova?"

I can't speak, I can't even breathe, as her betrayal threatens to swallow me whole. I pull the phone in my hand back up and scroll until I find Grim's number. *Her number.*

No, it can't be, but as her eyes go wide when she no doubt realizes what I am doing, I feel my spine stiffen. "Nova, wait," she begs, but then the sound of her ringtone piercing through the night air, pierces my heart as well.

"Answer the phone," I say as calmly as I can manage, ignoring the tears starting to gather in her eyes.

"Nova, please, I can explain," she whispers, her hands trembling as she

pulls the phone from her bag to stare at it.

“Answer the fucking phone, Madeline,” I snap, and she jumps, her stare colliding with mine as she finally accepts the call and our phones connect.

Still needing confirmation, I snatch the phone from her hand, and sure enough I see my number under the nickname she chose for me. No, it can’t be. This isn’t happening, but as I see the knowing look in her eyes, I know everything we had was a lie.

It really is her.

“All this time,” I ask in disbelief. “All this time it was you.”

“Nova, I...” she starts, but I cut her off, slamming my lips to hers and tasting the poisonous lies straight from her tongue.

I don’t want to hear anymore lies, so I kiss her. I kiss her with everything I have, and then I kiss her some more. My mouth claiming her, owning her, erasing every word of deceit until there is nothing between us but this. Then I pull back and push up the dress she changed into, my hands ripping the lace thong straight from her body, the fabric coming apart easily in my rage.

“Nova,” she tries again, my name on her lips now sounding like nothing but deception. I can’t bear it, can’t hear her sweet tone whisper my name into the night.

“Don’t say a fucking word to me right now, Madeline,” I command, too lost in her games of shadows to even think straight, as I fumble to undo my belt and jeans.

When I free my cock it’s already hard and leaking, not caught up to her disloyalty yet, and I press her harder against the wall, ignoring her gasp of pain as I run my dick up and down her slit, coating it in her juices. Then I use one hand to lift one of her thighs, and the other to collar her throat, gripping them both hard as I line my cock up with her entrance, and slam inside without warning. Another gasp slips past her lying lips, but the lust and anger is my only focus, fucking her with hard, deep thrusts, forcing her ass to scrape against the brick with every stroke.

“No names,” I spit in disgust. “That’s what you said right? No fucking names.” I shake my head in disbelief, how fucking stupid was I that I let this happen. I let her take my hatred for her and turn it into something else, something real, or something I thought was real.

Her hands curl around my shoulders, holding onto me for support as I take everything out on her body, her wet heat wrapping around me like heaven, except now I know better. She is the daughter of the devil after all.

God, I bet they had a good fucking laugh about this, first my mom, and now me.

My hand tightens around her throat, bringing us closer, and she uses her arms to drag my mouth back down to hers, pulling me in for another kiss, but it's too much. She's everywhere, and has been all this time.

"Nova," she moans, her eyes clashing with mine, imploring me to listen to her, inviting me to get lost in the ocean that is her stare, but I won't do it, not again.

Instead, I pull out of her, spin her around, and shove her down with a hand in the middle of her shoulder blades, as I toss her against some stacked crates next to the wall. Her ass is filled with red marks from the brick wall, some black flecks of dirt also staining her creamy skin, but it's the fingerprint bruises on her hips that captures my attention. Marks I left there, marks that I thought meant she was mine, that I was hers.

So fucking stupid.

I line my cock back up with her entrance and enter with a hard thrust once more, ignoring the moan she allows to slip out and instead focusing on the tightening of her cunt. My hands digging into the angry, red scrapes and forcing them to bleed. Just like I knew she would, she writhes, but not in pain, no, she fucking loves this, loves that I know what her body needs. I bet her fiancé hasn't got a fucking clue how his girl likes to be fucked.

"You love being fucked like my little whore don't you, Princess?" I tease, the pads of my fingers dancing in her blood as I slam my hips against her roughly. "Look at you, letting me bend you over in this filthy alley because you're so desperate for my cock," I add in a mix of disgust and carnal need.

"Oh god," she moans, pushing back against me, taking everything I have got and always begging for more, but god won't help her now.

I keep one hand on her hip and allow the other to press between her ass and thumb against her back hole, teasing it roughly and making her moan even louder, while admiring the red tint to her asscheeks. I like seeing her blood there, hearing her throaty gasps as she begs for more. I want her to feel it all, I want her to feel and remember all of the pain she caused me.

Buckling beneath me I know she is desperate to come, and I almost want to keep it from her, stop her from getting any sort of pleasure thanks to me, but I need this. I need her cunt soaked and desperate for me, swollen and begging for more. It's why I use the hand pressed against her back hole, to reach up and grab her hair, lifting her from the crates completely.

“Touch yourself,” I demand. “I want your cunt strangling my cock until my cum is dripping out of it.”

“Oh fuck,” she moans, arching her back further into me and reaching down to play with her clit. Her hand roughly swirls between her thighs, and from the way she instantly spasms around me, I can tell she is close.

“That’s it, Princess, show me how much you like being my whore.” Another flutter of her cunt at my words and I can feel my own orgasm drawing closer.

“Nova,” she cries, writhing her hips against my cock and her hand, desperate for her release. “I’m gonna come,” she adds, rocking harder and faster.

My own pace picks up and I spin us, pressing her cheek against the wall and snapping my hips in deep, long strokes until she is falling apart around me. “Yes, yes, right there, right there, please,” she pleads, choking me with her pussy as she falls over the edge.

“Fuck, Princess,” I curse, quick to follow, as my own orgasm shoots from my cock and I empty my release inside of her with a final few thrusts of my cock. Pulling us away from the wall and leaning us back onto the crate while she catches her breath. I don’t miss a beat as I lean down and bring my lips to her ear. “Does your fiancé know how much you like being filled with my cum?”

Her entire body freezes, her limbs stiffening as I pull back and let my cock fall from her cunt, stepping away from her and tucking myself back in so I can fasten my jeans. I watch as she pushes herself upright on shaky legs and slowly turns around to stare at me. Running my hands through my hair, I hold her stare as she frantically pulls at the hem of her dress to cover herself, ignoring my cum dripping down her leg.

“Nova, I can explain,” she starts, taking a step towards me, but I take a step back, holding the distance I have created between us. If I’m not mistaken a flash of hurt enters her eyes, but she stops moving. “Please, if you would just let me tell you everything.”

I hold my hand up to cut her off. “You’re Grim,” I say matter of factly. “You’re the one who has been sending me messages and talking to me the last couple of months?” I ask, although it’s not really a question. She opens her mouth to respond and before she can try spin a tale of her own, I add, “Yes, or fucking no, Madeline.”

My harsh tone startles her into closing her mouth and nodding slowly,

more tears gathering in those traitorous eyes as she drops them down to the floor. “Was this all just one big joke to you?” I start again. “Make the guy you hate fucking fall for you, and then have a good laugh about it with your future husband.” Her gaze snaps back to mine at my words, like she is searching my gaze to see if they are real.

“Nova, this thing with Brad and I, I can explain, I swear.” She erases the space between us, reaching up to pull me close, her touch making my skin burn as I harshly push her away.

“Your words don’t mean anything to me, Madeline, not anymore. I thought we had something, fuck,” I laugh. “I thought we had something twice, you, fucking Grim, god I’m so stupid. To think I thought the puck bunnies were selfish whores,” I shake my head with another humorless laugh.

“That’s not fair,” she winces, folding up arms to fight away the bitter cold now lying between us.

This time when I look at her, all I see is the Mayor’s daughter. There is no Maddie, no Grim, just his fucking daughter, and all their fucking lies. I know she sees it, the moment my eyes turn from hurt to disgust, I see it in the way she braces her shoulders as I open my mouth. “I guess the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, huh?”

She recoils as if I physically hit her, one of those tears finally making its way to her cheek before she dashes it away. “Fuck you, Nova,” she spits back bitterly.

“I already did, Princess, and I’ve had better.” The lie leaves my tongue just as the door we came through bangs open and ricochets off the wall, her brother’s furious eyes darting around the alley until they land on us.

I see the second he spots his sister’s crying face, her best friend just behind him, her own face laced with concern as he curses, “What the fuck is going on?” I almost laugh at how protective he is over her, maybe if I had someone protecting me I wouldn’t be in this mess.

Maddie doesn’t answer him, she doesn’t even spare him a glance, her eyes still locked on mine as I stare at her one final time. When Josh reaches us, he looks between us both, no doubt noticing his sister’s disheveled state before turning his focus to me. “Nova, what the fuck did you do?”

Of course he thinks this was my doing, that I hurt his precious sister, he doesn’t care that it’s my heart aching inside my chest. I want to scream that it was her, that it was their fucking family, but instead I just sigh with nothing but regret. “I did nothing, but it’s okay, I’m done here.”

I don't wait for either of them to respond, pushing past my teammate and heading back inside where I find Archer waiting for me. He takes one look at my face and nods, following me as I cut through the bar and head back out to the street out front. I don't know where I'm going, or what I'm doing, but I do know one thing...

I need more alcohol.

3 4

M A D D I E

FADING FAST

Who knew three words could tear apart my world so thoroughly? That words and only words could cause this type of internal damage? Most people think of three words and think of good things, happy things, beautiful, life changing things, but they are not the three words that just obliterated me. *I'm done here.* That's what he said, that he was done, that we are done, and instead of feeling accepting that our ruse is finally up, all I feel is fractured.

All three of us watch him leave, until Josh turns his focus back to me, his gaze roaming over my body and no doubt noting the evidence of what just occurred before he got here. "Mads, what happened, what did he do?" he asks, restrained rage tinting his tone as he gently touches my arm like I am nothing but a kicked puppy. Right now I feel like one.

"Nothing," I whisper, my voice cracking slightly in emotion. "He didn't do anything, it's what I did." Shock and disbelief are wrecking me from the inside out as I try to make sense of how we got here. How did everything spiral out of control so quickly?

Hallie steps into the alley, coming to my brother's side as the two of them

share a look, before his gaze comes back to mine. “Maddie, what did you do?”

This time when I look at him, I see the fear, the panic of whatever I am about to tell him going to war in his mind as he stares at me. All of his warnings, all of his carefully laid plans that he drilled into me when I came here, now nothing but wasted conversations as I finally admit, “I fell for him.”

Josh blinks, his eyes going wide at my admission as his head snaps to Hallie as if searching for confirmation. Her gaze drops to the floor, not wanting to look him in the eye as he realizes she already knew. Of course she knew, she probably knew before I did, she has been teasing me about him for weeks. So many times I told her it was fun, that it meant nothing, that we were just hooking up, so why do I feel like he just ripped out my heart and took it with him as he left?

Fuck this is bad, so bad. I can’t be here, not anymore. I don’t want to see his teammates, his friends, *our friends*. I don’t want to be a part of a life I’m not allowed to have, to tease myself with what could have been. I shouldn’t even be here in the first place. I never come to Josh’s games when he is away, a fact he is now realizing as he stares at me with knowing eyes.

“You came for him?” he asks, and he isn’t even mad, just solemn and assessing as he tries to work out how we got here. I nod, and his face softens as he moves towards me and pulls me in for a hug. “It’s okay, Mads, it will all be okay I promise.”

I wish I could believe him, wish his words could affect me as much as the ones his Captain just said, but I can’t because they don’t. *Make the guy you hate fucking fall for you*. Did I ever hate him? Like truly hate him, or was I just so caught up in our game of witty barbs that I continued to play the role he forced upon me.

Make the guy you hate fucking fall for you.

Fall for you.

Fall for you.

Fall for you.

The words run through my mind over and over, the betrayed look in his eyes as he said them now imprinted in my brain forever. If only he would have listened to me, heard me out, but what would I have said? Did I know he was the one behind the messages before tonight? Yes, I did. Am I due to be engaged in a few short weeks to someone else? Yes, I am. He has every

right to feel like I betrayed him because I did. I fucked up and now I have to pay the price for my own mistakes. I should be happy, this is what I wanted, one last night before I left him behind. I can't have him, I never could, so why instead of being relieved it's finally over, do I feel like I am dying inside?

"I need to leave," I mumble into Josh's chest, before pulling back and swiping at the moisture beneath my eyes. "I'm going back to the hotel, I need to sleep off tonight." Not exactly a lie, but the truth is, I don't want to see Nova again. I don't want to look him in the eye and try to placate him with another lie.

He was right, we are done here.

Josh heads back inside to find my coat and then he walks Hallie and I back to our room, the silence between us all so loud that I can practically taste it on my tongue. Thankfully once we say goodnight and head inside, Hallie understands that I don't want to talk about it, letting me take the bathroom first without question.

When I look in the mirror I don't even recognize myself. I'm not Maddie, I'm not even Grim, I am nothing but a liar. My chest aches, a pain which only intensifies when I rip off my dress over my head and find the marks he left behind branded into my skin and soul, and for the second time tonight, I let the shower wash away my tears.

By the time Hallie climbs into bed, I already have the lights turned off and my head buried beneath the covers, praying that when I wake up, it will all just be a bad dream. Yet minutes turn into hours and sleep never claims me. Instead, I open my phone, scrolling through the text thread that once made me smile until my cheeks hurt.

The Lonely Charm: A girl huh? Are you hot?

The Lonely Charm: Did my body offend you Grim?

The Lonely Charm: Then I think I like you Grim

Text after text where he comforted me, complimented me, was just there for me, and was even honest with me. He didn't know the girl he was telling me about was me. Hell, never in a million years did I imagine it would be, and it just makes it hurt even worse. That the Charmer who flirted with me through the phone, is the same one who claimed me in real life. Yet I don't know why I'm surprised, I remember telling him that I thought they would

get along, why was I so blinded to them being the same person?

I reread every message, dissecting every word until I am cutting myself up on the inside. It isn't until Hallie clears her throat that I realize how long I have been sulking in my sheets. "Are you coming out of hiding anytime today?" she asks, her voice muffled by the blankets still over my head.

"It's only 6am," I grumble in my defense, and she laughs, climbing from her own bed and moving towards mine.

"Yeah and you've been overthinking in there for hours now, it's time to face the music, Wendy." She pairs her words with whipping the duvet off my entire body, bringing me face to face with her chipper smile.

"I hate you!" I snap, which only makes her smile wider, as she plonks herself down beside me.

"No, you don't," she teases, but then her smile turns solemn as she flicks her eyes over me. "Are you okay?"

Tears gather in my eyes for the millionth time as I shake my head. "No," I whisper, my voice cracking. "I hurt him, Hals, like I really hurt him." Even as I say those words out loud I can hear the disbelief in my tone.

"I know, babe." She swipes away one of my tears as more continue to fall, and I think if she wasn't here with me I would fall apart completely.

"Is it okay if we go home?" I ask, pleading with my stare. "I know we had a whole day planned, but," she cuts me off with a soft touch on my arm.

"Of course we can, I'll break my plans anytime for you, you should know that by now," she gently scolds me with a smile, jumping to her feet. "Let's pack up our stuff and get on the road."

She starts to move away to do just that, when I grab her by the hand and pull her in for a hug. "I love you, Hals," I whisper into her hair, and I feel her body stiffen at the affection but she soon relaxes into it, bringing her own arms around me.

"I love you too, babe."

We spend the next thirty minutes whipping round the room after one another, grabbing showers, getting dressed, and packing our bags. By the time we are ready to go it is getting closer to 7am, and I am conscious about getting out of here before any of the team wakes up. A thought that is doused in panic when there is a sharp knock at the door.

I look at Hallie a little startled but she just holds up her hand. "It's okay I will sort it," she says calmly, moving towards the door. I step towards the bathroom out of sight, but when she opens the door and sighs, I relax a little.

“Good morning, Joshua,” she drags out slowly. “What can I do for you at this unpleasant hour?”

If I could see him, I could almost bet my brother is rolling his eyes at my best friend. “Let me in, Tink, I need to see her,” he pleads softly, and even if I didn’t want to see him, I know his tone would melt my best friend, which is evident by the way her shoulders drop and she steps aside. “Thanks, Hallie Bear,” he adds absent-mindedly to her, before locking his eyes on mine. “There she is,” he smiles.

“What are you doing here, Josh, it’s not even 7am,” I say by way of greeting, and there’s that roll of his eyes I expected.

“I’m coming home with you guys. I talked to Coach last night and cleared it with him.” His stare drops to the already packed bags at my feet as if to prove his own point before he smiles smugly.

“How did you know we would be going home?” Hallie asks, and he rolls his eyes again, taking a seat on the end of her bed and flexing out his arms to lean on them as he cocks a brow at her.

“Do you honestly think I don’t know either of you well enough by now?” He shakes his head. “You guys are like Thing 1 and Thing 2, inseparable and predictable since the second you met.”

Hallie and I share a guilty look, knowing we can’t dispute him, so instead, I focus on his other statement about talking to Coach and coming home with us. “What about the guys, the team?”

His smirk softens as he reaches out to hold my hand in his. “What about them, Mads? You’re my sister.”

I share another look with Hallie as I fight back more tears, before clearing my throat. “Okay then, well let’s get out of here shall we.”

We move to grab our bags but of course Josh bats us away, grabbing them all himself, and we head to check out. While Josh loads the car, I grab some drinks and snacks for the road, and then we are on our way without setting eyes on anybody else from FU.

The drive back home is mostly silent for me, choosing to sit in the back and listen to my brother and best friend bicker back and forth until I tune them out completely. I should be glad we’re going home, especially after everything that happened last night, but knowing that I won’t get another text from my Charmer, or another secret smile from my new favorite hockey player, just makes it seem colder somehow. That and the fact that my engagement is only a few weeks away, and the last bit of freedom I was

holding onto is now gone forever.

That thought only heightens when Hallie pulls up in front of our house, finding the driveway already occupied. Brad is leaning against the hood of his car, phone in hand, watching us arrive with a serious look on his face.

“Oh fuck no,” Josh curses. “Not this shit again.” He moves to exit the car first, but I grab him by the shoulder and stop him.

“It’s okay, Josh, I can handle it.” I force that practiced smile to my face, and my brother eyes me skeptically.

His stare is dark and full of warning as it flicks between me and my soon to be fiancé. “You’re not handling anything, that guy is a fucking tool.”

“That guy,” I snap, my patience now wearing thin as the lack of sleep from last night catches up to me. “Is going to be my husband, so just stay out of it, please,” I sigh, pushing out of the back seat and slamming the door closed behind me, praying they both stay in the car.

Brad eyes me coolly, taking in my withered state with a tight, even smile as he drawls, “I’ve been calling you.”

I try to keep my face passive and casual as I respond, “My phone is off.” I shrug, and keep walking until we are only a few steps apart.

“Why?” he grits, his own mask of fake pleasantries slipping a little.

“Because I didn’t want to be reached,” I lie, which technically is not that much of a lie because I probably wouldn’t have answered his call today of all days anyway, but mostly it was so I didn’t reread the messages from Nova again. All night long was enough.

Brad studies me closely, not that he knows me well enough to know if something is truly wrong, but he is still perceptive, and my red swollen eyes are a dead giveaway. “Is there something going on that I should know about?” he questions me, standing up tall off the hood of his car and towering over me.

He is smaller than Nova, and all his height does is remind me that he isn’t him, the one that I will forever be forced to remember as the one that got away. Or I guess I should call him the one I forced away. This is all my fault after all. Thoughts of him threaten to crush me once more, those tears from last night stinging at the back of my eyes yet again, as I force myself to swallow thickly. “No, there is nothing going on, not anymore.”

I’m done here.

I almost crumble under the weight of his stare until he finally nods. “Good, let’s keep it that way.” He steps a little closer again, and I hear my

brother get out of the car followed quickly by my best friend, as Brad lowers his voice bringing his mouth close to my ear. "It's time to put away the hockey shirts and come and watch some real men play, darling." When he straightens up he smiles wider. "We have a meeting with a party planner next weekend to make all the final arrangements, I will pick you up at 6 on Friday, be ready."

He is already climbing back into his car by the time my brother reaches us, and I swear the look in his eye is like one I've never seen before as he stares down Thorne until he backs out of the driveway and leaves. When he looks back to me, his stare still doesn't soften. "Are you okay?"

I almost laugh, of course I'm not okay, but still I smile as I look at him. "Of course I am, I'm always okay." The lie tastes more sour than usual as I force it past my lips, and Josh looks like he doesn't buy it for a second, but I don't stick around to find out.

Moving towards the house, I unlock the door and head straight upstairs, not saying a word to either of them before I lock myself in my room and let the tears fall again. When I turn my phone on, I don't bother stopping on any missed calls from Brad, instead my fingers start tapping until I reach Nova's number under the name I gave him, and hover there as I choke back a sob. I want to call him, I want to call him and tell him I'm sorry, that I made a mistake, that I never should have done any of it, but what use would that be?

Like he said... *I'm done here.*

So, I put down my phone and cry myself to sleep instead.

3 5

N O V A

WHISKEY PROMISES

The whiskey tastes bitter on my tongue as I swallow it down, praying that this will be the night that it finally makes me forget about her. That it will erase the taste of her on my tongue, and the imprint of her on my heart. I highly doubt it will work, considering I have been half-drunk for the entirety of the last week in the same attempt, but hey, try and try again.

I'm not sure how I got here. How I went from not caring about any girl I ever hooked up with, to being completely and utterly infatuated by the Mayor's daughter. I never wanted this, to be consumed by someone else, to give them power over me. To love me, or worse, hurt me. I saw what happened when my dad left my mom, and when the Mayor left her too. She fell apart, her life obliterated just because they didn't choose her, and I vowed I would never let it happen to me. Yet here I am anyway, heartbroken, drunk, and alone.

I wish I could say I didn't care, that when I walked away from Maddie last week that it didn't affect me, that I haven't thought about her since, but that would be a lie. She hurt me, yes, and I hurt her too, but that's not the problem. The problem is that I *care* that I hurt her. I shouldn't care, I don't

want to care, but ever since the night she dropped to her knees for me, something inside of me changed when it comes to Madeline Peters. It's like I now have this deep rooted need for her. Like she has poisoned me with affection, and now the very essence of her has wrapped itself around my soul.

Where once there were vicious barbs and vile taunts, now lies wicked wonder and bruised lips. Except now it's gone. The wicked wonder turned into lovely lies, and bruised lips turned into a scarred soul. That affection is now bitter and cold, and the image of her on her knees is tainted with her arguing with the man who will get to keep her. A man I thought I was saving her from that night I walked her home, when what I should have done is walked away and saved myself, because then none of this would be happening.

When the door flies open and heavy footsteps descend against the hardwood floors, I startle a little, pulled from my longing and desperate thoughts to find the eyes of my roommates. Reign and Harper share a worried look as my best friend steps forward and looks at me with an annoyed glare.

"You missed practice," he draws out slowly, before lowering his voice and adding, "again." My best friend comes to a stop right in front of me, his gaze softening slightly as our eyes collide. "Coach is pissed." I shrug, pretending his words don't affect me. I hate knowing I am disappointing Coach and letting down my team, but right now I need to just not exist.

"From the looks of things, so is he," Reign cuts in, moving further into the living room and assessing the mess around the spot I haven't moved from in days. When he reaches me, he smiles tightly, he knows all too well what I lost, he had a taste of it himself. Ignoring the heated anger now burning in my stare at just the thought, he asks, "Do you want a cup of tea?"

Harper laughs, the half-British side of Reign always causing us amusement as Archer curses, "Of course he doesn't want a cup of fucking tea, Alexander, he is heartbroken."

Reign nods, clearing off some of the trash from the coffee table and plonking his huge frame down on it. "I know, but drinking alone is just sad."

Archer remains standing, too disgusted to touch anything as Harper unhelpfully adds, "Plus the smell in here is getting pretty ripe."

I scoff, "Feel free to all fuck off at anytime." I move to tip back more of the whiskey before I realize the bottle in my hand is now empty. I toss it to the floor and flex my fingers in search of another.

"Look, Nova," Archer exhales. "I know you really like her, but this needs

to stop now before-" I cut him off.

"I more than like her, Arch," I admit out loud for the first time, and the silence that follows threatens to swallow me whole. I know it's more, I knew it that night when the floor was ripped out from under me by her lies. When I watched her phone ring and her delicate, traitorous hands answered it. When I sunk inside her and felt nothing but fear and regret. If I am truly honest with myself I knew it before then, before I even really had her, and I know it even more now that I've lost her.

"Well, shit," my best friend eventually sighs in defeat.

"Yeah," I add, in a forced whisper, ignoring the heavy glares from all three of them as my eyes begin to search for some more booze, snatching an unopened bottle from the table beside Reign.

Before I can open it, Archer cuts in again. "Reign's right, drinking alone is sad." He grabs the bottle from my hand and I think he is about to join me in my pity party, but all he does is survey the rest of the room slowly. "Harper, you take out all the trash, Reign, you vacuum and rinse out whatever that stain is, and I will straighten him out." He nods his head towards me, before dipping down and dragging me up from the sofa in one swoop. "Come on, time to shower and get changed so we can all go out drinking together."

For the first time in a week I smile. I knew I picked the right best friend.

Not even an hour later and I am showered, freshly dressed, and settled in a booth at one of the popular sports bars just off campus. I'm nursing my third Old Fashioned and pointedly ignoring every girl that looks in my direction. I'm done with women.

Archer is by my side, still on his first beer, and Reign is on the dance floor entertaining some bunnies. Harper ditched us for his longtime girlfriend yet again, and I pretend that it doesn't leave a swirl of jealousy in the pit of my stomach.

Poor, lucky, unfortunate bastard.

My head is pounding, and the dark amber cocktail doesn't do anything but make my already pounding head hurt even more. It seems alcohol has lost the ability to numb all my pain. What kind of bullshit is that? I thought the more you drank the easier it is to forget, yet I feel empty and full of pain at the same time.

Like I said, bullshit.

Archer is practically burning a hole in the side of my head as he continues to stare at me, waiting for me to say something. I know he wants me to tell

him what happened with Maddie, but I still can't bring myself to say it all out loud to him. Not that it stops him from trying.

"So, are we going to talk about the elephant in the room, or are you gonna keep pretending I'm not here?" I hide my smirk in my drink, knowing he is the only person who can ever call me on my shit. And he's right, I have been pretending he's not here, not that his unwavering stare is helping.

"There's nothing to talk about," I grumble, keeping my gaze on the room in front of us, still ignoring the lingering glances from a group of girls at the next table.

Archer scoffs, slamming his beer to the table after taking a deep pull from it. "Bullshit, you have been moping around about Princess Peters all damn week."

"Don't fucking call her that!" I snap, my eyes blazing into his, as I finally address him head on.

All he does is smirk, enjoying the rise he just pulled from me so easily. "Should I call her your girl instead?"

My stare hardens, making his smirk even wider. "She's not my fucking girl," I grit through my teeth, "She's, she's..." I trail off, coming up empty on how I can even finish that sentence, but Arch stays on my back anyway.

"Smart, gorgeous, funny, out of your league? Take your pick, Nineteen." He ticks each one off on his fingers like an obnoxious asshole, keeping his smile in place.

"She's a liar." I finally finish my sentence with, because it's the truth, and it's as much as I am willing to share with him right now.

My response is enough to silence him and I return my glare back to the bar around us, finishing off my drink, and signaling to the waitress for another. Archer doesn't linger any longer, sliding from the booth and heading over to join Reign, leaving me all alone once more.

It doesn't last though, and I suppress a groan as I reach into my pocket as my phone starts to vibrate. I've already ignored several calls from my mom this week, softening her only with some half-assed messages to let her know I'm okay. Which we both know is total crap. Then there was a couple from my dad, following up on messages I sent him last week, but I am in no mood to talk to him right now, even though I know I need to. But as I pull the phone into my palm I see neither of their names. In fact, I see the last name I ever expected to grace my phone again, especially after how we left things.

Grim.

I haven't got around to changing her name in my phone yet, and right now I wish I would have blocked her already. Because the slice of pain that cuts through me as her name lights up my phone almost kills me. What the hell is she doing? Why is she calling? I told her we were done, I thought my message was clear, so why the fuck is she calling me? I don't bother finding out, rejecting the call and sending it to voicemail before she can change my mind and lie to me some more.

It's been a week since it ended, what could she possibly have to say now? Maybe she hasn't been satisfied by her future husband and she is looking for another fuck. Well, fuck that, she hurt me, which I didn't even think was possible when it came to the female race. Why the fuck didn't I just stick to the bunnies, just mindless fucking and desperate attempts to lock me down which would be rejected every time, life would have been easier.

My heart is racing, fresh anger and treachery consuming my every thought, which is only heightened when I get a notification for a new voicemail. *She left a voicemail.* What does it say? Sorry I didn't tell you I had a boyfriend? Sorry I fucked you and fucked you over? Sorry I decided to slum it like my dad did with your mom? Her choices are endless really, and they force me from my seat as I head to the bar, ignoring the waitress with my fresh drink.

I order a round of shots and then start downing all six of them before the bartender has even finished pouring. One after the other until I become comfortably numb, and then I take the Old Fashioned from the waitress and drink that too. This is what I need, to drink until I can pass out, and forget all about the Mayor's daughter and her wicked tongue.

Pushing off from the bar, I fumble to throw a few bills down to leave a tip, brushing into a guy by accident as I turn to leave.

"Watch it dick," he grunts, shoving back against me and making me stumble.

"What did you just call me?" I find my feet and stare the asshole down, clenching my fists in anticipation. If alcohol isn't working, maybe I can turn to another vice I enjoy.

"You heard me," the piece of shit grunts, showing off to his friend beside him. "Watch where the fuck you're going." I decide at this instant that he isn't worth it, shaking my head and turning to leave once more, but then he adds beneath his breath, "Hockey scum." And I smile as I crack my neck.

"You're gonna regret that," I warn, my fist already flying before he can

even register my words.

What's a little blood to add to my already bleeding heart?

3 6

M A D D I E

PRETTY PANIC

I 'm trying to focus on everything the woman in front of me is saying. Trying to pay attention to the color swatches in her hand, and the dozens of floral arrangements on the table beside us, but all I can think about is *him*. Not the man beside me who is set to become my husband, Not the one I am sitting here and planning an engagement party with.

My engagement party.

If only my life were that simple.

No, instead I am thinking about the one with dark eyes and rough hands, the one who can be both callous and demanding, but also passionate and gentle. The one who is the last person I ever thought would make me fall, and the one who stepped back before he could catch me.

Except that isn't right, he didn't step back, I pushed him, violently, volatily, and oh so viciously. I pushed him so hard he went over the edge with me, tumbling into my downfall with no one to save him, but how could I save him? I can't even save myself.

My brother's words from earlier this week are playing on a loop in my head. "*You're not fucking marrying Bradley Thorne, Maddie, if it's the last*

thing I ever do.” He stormed out without another word, and I wanted to believe him, I wanted to believe him so badly it hurt, but now here I sit, with my future husband clutching my fingers tightly between his own.

I’m trapped, slowly suffocating under the pressure of what is expected of me, of what is demanded of me. Josh has been my anchor this last week, keeping me away from our parents and making excuses for why I’m not around. He has been over at the house every day, only slipping from my side to go to class, practice, and take multiple secret phone calls that I don’t have the energy to enquire about.

No, all my energy is needed here, on pretending I am excited to become Mrs Bradley Thorne. I’m smiling so hard it’s hurting my cheeks, and my fingers are going white between his grasp. The pain is a welcome reminder that I can still feel something, anything, and I nod frequently as the woman talks to make it look like I’m paying attention.

It’s all going relatively well until she starts talking about the fact that the engagement party and wedding are going to be so close together.

“There is so much to do, so much to plan, and with so little time,” she says, a tiny pair of pretentious glasses that she clearly doesn’t even need perched on the end of her nose. “Any reason for the rush, or are we harboring a secret love child?” she laughs at her own joke, as my entire body freezes at her casually tossed out humor.

Of course Brad quickly charms her with his sickly smile. “No, I haven’t had a chance to knock her up yet.” His thumb brushes the top of my hand as if this is some inside joke between us, but it’s that last word of his that trips me up.

Yet.

He hasn’t knocked me up yet, but he will. He is going to become my fiancé, and then eventually my husband. He will be the father of my children, and the man who comes home to me every day, even if he spent it like my father used to by fucking his secretary. The entire picture of my impending life steals the breath from my lungs.

I can’t breathe.

This is how it will be, him answering for me while I smile prettily and pliantly beside him. Forgetting my own passions and wants, and replacing them with his. And for what? To keep my father happy, to keep my place at FU, is that even worth it? Is it even what I want anymore?

I can’t breathe.

We will live together, his ring will be a shackle on my dainty finger, and my children will be his. Entrapped by him and this life forever.

I can't breathe.

I abruptly stand, almost stumbling in the heels I knew I would have to wear to placate him, as the two of them snap their gaze towards me. "Excuse me for a moment," I choke out on a labored breath. "I'm just going to use the restroom." I don't wait for a response from either of them, striding from the room on shaky legs as my breaths come quicker and quicker. I make it to a supply closet before I break down completely, gasping for air, trying to desperately fill my lungs.

I'm having a panic attack, something I have been prone to for years but they magically, dramatically increased when I finally moved out of my parents house for college. The irony of the connection of the two isn't lost on me, yet still the attack on my body is so full on I can barely remain upright. My hands are trembling, red marks from how tight Brad held them still lingering, as I reach into my purse to find my phone. I don't know why I do it, I'm not thinking straight clearly, but I bring his number up anyway, and click call before I can change my mind.

I need to talk to Nova, I need to hear his voice. I have to talk to him, to explain what happened, to tell him that this whole thing isn't what he thinks. Just one call, just one explanation, and maybe this mountain of guilt that has been sitting on my chest since he walked away from me last week can lessen. It's all too much, all of this here, and everything with him. I'm losing my mind and there is only one of them I can change for the better. Maybe I will be able to breathe again if I can just explain that I didn't lie to him.

The phone rings, once, twice, three times, and then it cuts off, and my heart breaks all over again when I realize he has rejected my call, sending me straight to voicemail.

I'm done here.

The last words he spoke to me echo in my mind as I take a deep breath and say what I need to, what I should have said last week. Each word feeling like a release in my soul, allowing me to inhale with every one until my heart is no longer pounding inside my chest. When I end the call, I let my tears fall. This is it, this is goodbye. I allow myself a few more minutes of pain and regret, before I take another deep breath and find a bathroom to freshen up.

By the time I make it back to Brad and the party planner, they have picked out a color theme, flowers, and decorations, all of which I smile and

nod at without even looking. My chest feels tight but I make it through the rest of the meeting, agreeing to meet with her again on the night of the party to help oversee everything. That is what my life will consist of going forward, a pretty planner with the purpose of pleasing my husband. *Just like my mother.*

We say our goodbyes, and as Brad leads me outside he curves his arm around my back, dropping it low so it covers the top of my ass. I have to hide my shiver, acting as if the November chill is responsible, and not just the feel of his skin on mine. But apparently I don't pretend as well as I thought.

"You'll have to do better than that next week, darling, especially when we will have an audience." He leads me to where Julian is idling by the car waiting to take me home. "Maybe we should practice in private first," he adds in a flirty tone, pulling my body against his, and gripping my ass fully.

Choking back a gag, I fist my hands in his shirt, taking the disgusting slam of his lips against my own. I allow his invasion for a couple of seconds before I push him off with a firm shove. "Ever heard of consent?" I ask, sarcastically, wiping his saliva from my mouth, as I ignore the pain of him erasing the last kiss I had with Nova.

Brad scoffs a laugh as I stride towards Julian, who promptly opens the door for me, keeping his gaze firmly on my date. "I won't need consent when you become my wife," Brad calls out to my back, and I watch the brow of my guard strain in fury.

Yeah, he's a fucking pig I know. Lucky me.

"And people wonder why wives kill their husbands" I reply sweetly, keeping my forced smile in place, as I climb into the back seat of the car. Brad steps forward, but his response is cut off by Julian slamming the door and encasing me inside the car before he can say anything else.

There is a quick exchange of words between the two of them that causes my future fiancé to pale a little, but then he straightens his shoulders and says something that makes Julian laugh. No other words are shared as Julian opens his own door and climbs inside, locking them promptly, before quickly starting the engine and pulling out into the traffic.

"Everything okay?" I ask, leaning to catch his gaze in the mirror.

Julian's eyes flick to mine for longer than they should considering he is driving, before he smiles softly. "It will be soon." His tone is ominous, and I want to ask what he means by that, but he shifts his eyes back to the road and it makes me feel like I don't want the answer.

Instead I focus on my phone, ignoring the stab of pain when I think about Nova rejecting my call, and searching for my brother's name instead. I'm surprised to find I don't have messages from him, he hasn't left me alone all week, and when his phone goes straight to voicemail, the theme of the day apparently, my brow furrows in confusion.

"Have you spoken to my brother?" I break the silence, questioning Julian. "Do you know if he is waiting at the house?"

Julian finds my questioning stare once more, flicking it to and from the road before he clears his throat and responds, "Not as far as I know, Maddie." Then he promptly turns his eyes back to the road, effectively ending any further conversation.

I shake off the weird vibe I am getting from him and turn my attention to the passing town as we head home. When we arrive, I'm not surprised to find Hector waiting for us, we are a little late for their shift swap and as we pull up outside the house, he moves to open the door for me, smirking as Julian curses at him.

"Evening, Maddie," he coos, holding out a food container for me. "A treat from the wife, she said if you even think about sharing it with me that she will castrate me."

For the first time in hours my smile is real as I take the container and open it to inspect it. "Banana bread," I guess out loud, from the look and the smell, and Hector confirms with a nod. "Your favorite," I muse, enjoying how Neeve likes to torture her husband.

Another nod as he sheepishly admits, "I skipped out on dinner with the in-laws." I smirk even wider, knowing that if they are anything like mine that I can't even blame him.

Taking pity on him I reply, "Don't worry, I'll save you a slice for your morning coffee."

"Hey what about me," Julian cuts in, and I have to roll my eyes, the two of them are such overgrown children,

"I'll save you some too," I say, shaking my head as I bid them both a goodnight and move towards my door. When I turn to wave they both seem to be having a quiet, heated conversation, and my confusion from earlier comes back full force. So much so that I can't help but call out, "Hector, have you seen my brother?"

Both of their heads snap towards me as he snaps back far too quickly, "Nope." And before I can say anything else he adds, "Night, Maddie."

When I enter the house it's dark as I expected. Hallie is having dinner with her family and won't be home until late, and even with Hector outside, I make sure the porch light is on for her. Then I head upstairs to strip off my clothes and take a much needed shower, the water not hot enough to erase the touch of my future fiancé. Once I am done I head into my room to get changed, not letting my eyes linger on the jersey still slung over the back of my chair as I reach for one of Josh's. The number twenty-two doesn't feel as familiar as it once did, not now that I've had the weight of the number nineteen against me.

I should probably give Nova's jersey back to him, or at least throw it out. I am just torturing myself by leaving it there, but I can't seem to bring myself to do it yet. Grabbing my phone and turning on my *Harry Styles* playlist to cheer me up, I reach for my Kindle and throw myself into someone's fictional love life to try and appease my own. I have barely gotten a few chapters in when the music cuts off and my phone starts ringing.

Reaching to grab it, I frown at the unfamiliar number flashing across my screen. I don't give my number out to strangers, with one obvious exception, so I have no idea who could be calling me. I think about ignoring it, not caring about whoever is on the other end, and then I think about the voicemail I left earlier. Maybe it's him. I accept the call faster than I'd like to admit and my ears are instantly assaulted by muffled music and shouting.

"Hello?" I say, the word sounding like a question, as I wait for the person on the other end of the line to speak.

"Princess Peters?" a familiar voice all but shouts, and I pull the phone from my ear to check the number again.

"Archer?" I ask, recognising his voice but still not being completely sure it's him. We don't exactly talk, not really anyway, despite how close he has become to Hallie. He's Nova's friend, not mine.

"Yeah, look I'm sorry to call but I need your help," he starts, before moving away from the phone and yelling, "Alexander, for the love of god keep him away from that prick before we all end up in jail."

I can barely hear Reign's response, but I am already sitting up in bed in a panic. "Archer, what happened? Is everything okay?"

There is a long pause and I check the phone again to make sure the connection is okay, even though I can still hear the dull beat of the music, before he finally sighs, "I'm not sure, can you come pick us up?"

A beam of hope pulses deep inside of my chest at his question, as I barely

whisper, “Us?” I know who he means, he knows I know, but still I need the confirmation.

I swear I can feel Archer nodding before he replies, “Yeah, I think you’re the only one who will be able to calm him down.” I don’t need him to say anything else, I don’t even bother asking him any questions, I am already out of bed and shoving my feet into some leggings and boots.

“Text me the address,” I command, disconnecting the call and striding down the stairs, bypassing my coat as I grab my car keys.

When I open my front door and head outside, Hector is already alert, winding the window down, but before he can ask me anything I just hold up my keys and point to my car, signaling him to follow me. His engine is on before I can even start my own, and he pulls out onto the road behind me as I input the address Archer sent me after I ended the call into my navigation system.

The drive to the bar isn’t far, but the ride over feels like it takes forever, and when I reach my destination and spy who I am looking for, I don’t even properly park the car. I just pull up in the middle of the road and dart out of my door, rushing over to where Archer and Reign are trying, and failing, to keep Nova in place.

“Just let me go find him and I’ll wipe that fucking smirk off his face all over again,” he curses, eyes wildly scanning the street in the opposite direction to me. Yet still I spy the blackening beneath his eye, and the slight cut to his lip. His knuckles are the worst, swollen, angry, and red, and from the looks of things he has had more than a few drinks. He can barely keep himself upright.

“You already did man,” Reign starts, looking all too exhausted by their night, as he holds up his friend to stop him from slumping to the floor. “He was bleeding so much you’re lucky he didn’t need an ambulance.”

His Captain scoffs and before he can respond, Archer spots me and looks a little too relieved by my presence. “Finally, what the hell took you so long?”

I frown, looking down at my phone to check something before I reply, “It’s been nine minutes since you called.” Is he serious right now? This bar is ten minutes from my place and I made it here so fast I’m surprised I didn’t get pulled over for speeding.

Nova swings his head around at the sound of my voice, his stare drinking me in before he looks at Archer with an accusatory stare. “Really, you called

my girl?” he sneers, the term of endearment not sounding affectionate in the slightest, and I pretend it doesn’t sting.

“I thought you said she wasn’t your girl,” Archer snaps back, raising his brows at him and it’s clear they have been talking about me, but Nova remains silent. “That’s what I thought,” Archer adds. “Now shut up and get your ass in her car.”

Before he can refuse his best friend, Reign steps up, pulling Nova with him and they both start moving him towards me. I rush to open the back door for them, stepping aside so Alexander can shove his Captain inside without protest. When he looks at me in thanks, Nova snaps, “Don’t fucking look at her, Reign, what did I tell you.”

Alexander sighs, averting his gaze back to his friend and I shut them both inside. When I turn to Archer, he is watching me closely in wonder, staring at me so hard like he expects all of my secrets to appear on my skin for him to read. Ignoring his intense glare I gesture to my car. “Are you coming or not?” Slowly he nods, rounding the other side of the vehicle and climbing inside himself.

You could cut the tension in the car with a knife, and when my gaze collides with Nova’s in the mirror, my heart begins to race.

This is not how I expected my night to end.

3 7

M A D D I E

CHEATING CHOICES

The drive back to their house is short and familiar, and I can't help but think about the night I drove them home after their game a couple of months ago. How things have changed. That night he wanted to kiss me and I refused him, even though I wanted to. Well, I guess things haven't changed that much. That night his friends invited me to his birthday. There was tension then, but tonight is different. This isn't sexual or playful, it's silent and savage. Nobody speaks a word until I pull up outside of their house and kill the engine. It's only when I turn around that I realize Nova is half-asleep on Alexander's shoulder.

Archer climbs out first, slamming his door purposely behind him and making Nova startle awake fully. He looks a little dazed as he glances around the car, smiling when he sees me which causes my heart to ache. Alexander joins Archer, the two of them trying and failing to help him from the car because he shoves them away, nearly falling to the ground in the process. When he almost stumbles again and still refuses their help, I follow suit, climbing from the car and moving to help him.

I hesitate slightly before putting my arm around his waist, making him

startle at the contact. When our eyes collide I feel that connection between us, one forged in anonymous texts and explored in passionate trysts. One I know could change my entire life, if only we could let it. I know he feels it too, I feel it in the weight of his stare, and I half-expect him to shove me away too. I can tell he is thinking about it, about what I'm doing here, why I'm helping him, and I wonder if he has listened to the voicemail I left earlier.

"You didn't answer the phone," I whisper, unable to keep the words in any longer, and not caring that both Archer and Alexander are watching us.

"You didn't tell me the truth," he snaps back, his words feeling like a knife in my gut, yet he slings his arm across my shoulder at the same time, pulling me closer into his side like he can't bear for there to be any space between us.

I try to ignore the familiar weight of his body against mine, the husky scent of his cologne, and the warmth of his breath as it fans my cheek while he stares down at me. I feel suffocated for the second time today, but this time it's welcome. I want to get lost in him, to run away with him, for it to be him and only him, but instead I put one foot in front of the other and start to lead him inside.

Archer comes up on his other side, slowly testing the waters before taking his other arm and helping me move him. Nova is too busy staring at me to even notice, and I ignore the fluttering of the butterflies inside my stomach as Alexander moves ahead of us and unlocks the door. Between the three of us we manage to get him to the sofa in the living room, dropping his huge frame onto it with a few grunts. His two friends immediately abandon us, taking a few steps back as Nova looks up at me.

His gaze is intense, burning into me like he wants to eat me whole. Then it drops down to my outfit, and his fingers pull at the hem of my shirt with a smile. Then just as I expect, it quickly fades when he turns me around and spies the number twenty-two across the back. "I thought I told you I didn't want to see you in this jersey again," he grumbles, letting his eyes close a little.

Lowering myself to my knees beside him and ignoring the obvious overhearing from his roommates, I brush my hand through his hair. "I didn't think you'd want me to wear yours again," I admit out loud, but not adding that I slept in it for two nights this week, before tossing it on my chair like he would know I was pining for him.

He leans into my touch, turning onto his side and reaching out to pull me

closer to him. "My girl should always wear my jersey," he whispers, and I have to fight back the tears now gathering in my eyes. He's so open, so vulnerable, and I let him think he could be mine, that I could be his, all the while knowing I ultimately belonged to someone else.

I hurt him, the display in front of me is proof enough of that, and I can't stop myself from pulling his bloody fist into my hand and entwining our fingers, using my other to keep brushing through his hair. "I thought you said I wasn't your girl," is the only thing I can think to say, my voice cracking with emotion as I repeat Archer's words from earlier.

Nova laughs, like what I just said was the stupidest thing he'd ever heard, as he pulls me in close until he is practically embracing me. "You were mine the moment you knocked on the wrong door, Princess" he starts, burying his face into my hair and inhaling deeply. Goosebumps arise on my neck, my skin reacting to his proximity as I close my eyes and pretend his words are true.

"Why did you have to hurt me?" he adds, and I swear I feel my heart break inside my chest all over again, as his words obliterate me for the second time this week.

Knowing any response would be pointless, I remain silent, keeping his hand clasped in mine, and running my fingers through his hair until his eyes completely close and his breathing evens out. Archer and Alexander eventually disappear from sight, and I'm not sure how long I sit here, silently watching him sleep, but it's enough to make my ass go numb. Yet still I linger, admiring the way his dark lashes fan the top of his cheeks, and brushing my fingers against the stubble across his jawline.

Nova Darkmore is truly beautiful. I have always known that, even when I thought he was an arrogant, cocky asshole parading around in his manwhore ways. He has always been easy on the eye, but now when I look at him I don't just see that. I don't just see the Captain of FU who has a puck bunny reputation, I see everything underneath. His commitment to hockey, his love for his team, the friendships he has cultivated for himself, and the way he always goes after what he wants, no matter what stands in his way.

If he was my impending fate, the one I was intended for, I'm not sure I would have fought my father quite as hard as I did. I'd have still fought of course, the whole notion of arranged marriage is total archaic bullshit to me, but if I knew I was getting a good man, an honest man, maybe things would be different. It's that thought that finally pulls me away from him, that has

me gently dropping his hand, even as he tries to hold onto it in his sleep, and leaning down to press a gentle kiss to his cheek.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, wishing he was conscious enough to hear me, but knowing this is the only way I could truly admit it to his face. “For everything.”

With one last longing look at the future I want, I rise to my feet and leave him behind. I hope to slip out of the house quietly, but as I move towards the front door, I find Archer sitting at the bottom of the stairs waiting for me. He’s close enough to hear anything that was said between Nova and I, and from the weight of his stare I know he has a million questions, but he only settles on one. “Was it real?”

I don’t think Nova will have told him what truly happened between us, and I don’t know Archer all that well, but I can tell he loves his best friend and hates to see him like this. “I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t,” is all I say, which is the truth. I didn’t think twice about coming to his aid when Archer called me a couple of hours ago. I didn’t think about my father or Brad, I just knew Nova needed me and I was there.

That’s what love is right? Whether I want to admit that to myself or not. It’s being there for someone no matter what. It’s easing their pain even if it increases your own, and it’s walking away from them even when your heart is breaking, because you know it’s what is best.

“If I had a choice, there would be no choice, it would be him.” My admission lingers in the silence between us, and whether he knows or not, he nods knowingly, rising to his feet and walking me to the door.

“Will you be okay getting home?” he asks, so like his best friend that it makes me smile, Hallie did say he was a good person, and I nod in response.

“My guard followed me here, I’ll be fine,” I tell him, stepping out into the late night, letting the cold air wrap around me in an attempt to cool the heat left behind by his captain. Before he can say anything else, or worse, ask me to stay until Nova wakes up, I quickly add on, “Goodbye, Archer.”

I’m sure it isn’t lost on him that I said goodbye and not goodnight, I imagine we won’t cross paths much after this, and as I spin on my heels and head back to my car, I pretend that the person I have come to care about most isn’t inside the house behind me as I walk away. *Just like he did.*

I barely remember getting home and falling asleep, Nova’s lingering touch and warm breath as he called me his girl assaulting my every thought, and when Hallie bursts into my room the next morning like she is doing an

FBI raid, I burrow deeper into my covers as I curse her out.

“Knocking is a societal norm, Hals,” I tell her, my voice muffled through my duvet, but it’s not enough to deter her.

“So is showering,” she says, wrinkling her nose in disgust as she whips off my covers. “You smell like a brewery.”

Scoffing at her assessment, I rip my covers back from her hand as I snap, “Yeah, well I had an interesting night.”

Not deterred by my apparent smell, she jumps up to sit on my bed with a knowing smirk on her face. “Well, you’re about to have an even more interesting morning.” She tosses a newspaper into my lap, and I glance down in confusion, noting it’s actually two; one from FU, and one from the local news company. Both with similar headlines.

I read them once, twice, three times. No, that can’t be right, but as my eyes read them for a fourth time, I feel a beacon of hope flutter inside my chest. Hope is a dangerous thing, it can make people think things they never thought possible, want things they didn’t think they could have, and need things to be so true that they’d rather die than have them not be.

*A Shaved Thorne in Business Tycoon’s Side as Football Star
Son Is Exposed for CHEATING!*

The article is about my fiancé, and it isn’t just about him, it’s tearing him apart piece by piece, explaining his exploits for the game he apparently loves. My eyes can’t stop scanning, word after word, that hope inside me growing with every one as they detail every aspect of his scandal from an inside source.

Has my father seen this? He can’t have known about this, he wouldn’t have made the deal with Brad’s father if he did, because if it’s one thing the Mayor of Fairfield hates, it’s bad press, and my intended just got the worst bit I can imagine.

Could this be the thing that finally sets me free?

3 8

NOVA

THORNED REVELATIONS

There is a truck ramming into the side of my head, there has to be. That's the only way to explain the pounding inside of my skull. I flicker my eyes open and register three things all at once. Firstly, I'm not in my room. It looks like I've spent another night this week passed out on the sofa. Secondly, my mouth feels like the pits of the Sahara desert. And lastly, I can smell the scent of Maddie all around me. Don't ask me how I know it's her, I just do. Everything about her is now ingrained in me, hence the drinking. Her lingering presence has me shooting up into a sitting position, looking around wildly for any trace of her. Ignoring the hammering inside my head, and trying to find my perfect, little liar. When I come up empty, I frown.

What the hell happened last night?

I remember seeing her, or at least I think I do. I remember being here drinking, and then at the bar, more drinking, there may have been some fighting too, and then there was her. I was in her car and she was here, at least I think that's what happened, I just can't be sure. The only thing I am sure of right now is that clearly I drank more than I can easily handle. My head feels like it might implode, and the dryness in my throat is about to be

treated to my vomit. I force a deep inhale through my nose and out through my mouth, in an attempt to try and force my nausea back down.

Spying my phone on the table I reach out to grab it, hoping it might bring back some of my memories. It's almost 9am which means I have missed another workout with Archer, he is going to be pissed. Sighing, I unlock my phone and scroll through the notifications, ignoring most of them until I spy one for a new voicemail. When I click on it I see Maddie's name, well Grim, and blinking at me is a new voicemail from. She called me. Not just that, but she left a voicemail too. What does it say?

I know I shouldn't do it, that I shouldn't listen to whatever she has to say and torture myself some more, but I'm just so sure she was here. I have images of her running her hands through my hair and telling me she was sorry.

Did I dream that?

Or did that really happen, was she really here, and is she really sorry? I'm pulling up the voicemail before I can change my mind, and only a few seconds pass before I hear her shaky voice.

"Shit, you didn't answer," she starts, and it sounds like she is out of breath. *"I guess I can't blame you,"* she adds, inhaling heavily. *"But god do I wish I could hear your voice right now."* Her tone is so sincere and if I'm not mistaken, it sounds like she might be crying. Why is she crying?

"I'm at this stupid meeting and I just... well it doesn't really matter anymore I guess." Another trembling breath slips past her lips, and I close my eyes as I imagine how she must have been feeling when she left this message. Why didn't I just answer?

"I'm sorry Nova, for everything, I really am." Her voice sounds the same as it did when she said it to me last night, or at least I think it does. The words just feeling so familiar. *"I'm sorry I didn't tell you the truth when I had the chance, and I am sorry for being a coward and not coming after you when you walked away."* Her voice breaks further with each word, and every one is like a shard of glass to my heart. She sounds so broken, so defeated, so crushed, and the pain I have been trying to numb all week comes back in full force.

"The truth is, if I had a choice it would be you," she cries, her breath evening out a little as it turns into a little laugh. *"Well, if I am being honest, I didn't exactly choose you. There was no choice at all."* I smile at the way she says that, at the memories it evokes of her battling me at every turn. *"You*

consumed me from the second you got close and I knew it was wrong, but I didn't have the power to stop it." I can tell she means every word, and my heart breaks all over again, especially when she quietly adds, *"And I didn't want to."*

There is a long pause, the line filled with just the sound of her quick, soft, pants of breath, before she adds, *"The truth is I have to get married to keep my place at FU."* Her words have my eyes snapping open. What the fuck does she mean, she has to get married? *"It's not what I want, he's not what I want, and now I am being forced into this thing for real, I'm wondering if my future at FU is even worth it."*

Forced? She is being forced? What the fuck is going on? Who the fuck is forcing her? Is it him? That piece of shit Thorne? Just wait until I get my fucking hands on him. Fury burns up inside of me but her delicate, shaky voice just keeps going.

"I guess it's too late to find out. I just wanted you... no, I needed you to know. If I had a choice, I would choose you, every single time."

Those words slice right through me, especially when I think about the brutal way I fucked her behind the bar before I left her. Did I make a mistake? Should I have given her time to explain herself? Clearly there is something more going on here, and I need to find out what.

"I just thought you should know the truth so hopefully one day you can stop hating me." Truth? What's the truth? And I couldn't hate her if I tried, and trust me, I've fucking tried.

"Goodbye Nova."

The call cuts off and I am left reeling. What the fuck? What the hell does she mean she doesn't have a choice? I can't comprehend the words I just heard, and before I can hit the button to play it again, Archer is bursting through the front door with Reign and Harper on his heels.

"Nova," his voice booms, eyes cutting right to the sofa where I presume he left me, before he storms towards me. "Get up, you need to see this."

He tosses a pile of newspapers at me before I can even move, and though my eyes flick down to take them in, I still can't think straight. My mind is lost with her, in her words, dissecting every one as I try to come up with answers. I don't even read the headline, just look back to my best friend as I ask, "Was Maddie here last night?"

Archer drops to the table in front of me, and it's only then that I notice the mess I have been stewing in all week has been cleaned away. "Yes, I called

her, she was here, but that's not what's important right now," he starts, pointing to the papers in my lap.

What does he mean it's not important? It's the only thing that matters right now, I need to find out what's going on. "She called me," I say, ignoring him once more. "She left me a voicemail, I don't know what it means, well, maybe I do..." I trail off, and Archer huffs.

"Read the fucking paper, bro, something's happened." He nods to the paper again, and when Harper and Reign both move to join him, I feel a swell of panic in my stomach as I look down to read what he gave me.

*A Shaved Thorne in Business Tycoon's Side as Football Star
Son Is Exposed for CHEATING!*

The headline doesn't make sense to me, so I drop my eyes to take in the rest of the article, scanning the words quickly and once again ignoring the pounding in my head. It's an article about point shaving, specifically about the star of the Fairfield U football team, and Maddie's intended, Bradley Thorne, and how he has been exposed for cheating. The NCAA have already been notified and ramifications for those involved and the school are still pending.

Fuck.

I knew the guy Maddie was with was a piece of shit, just from the couple of interactions I have had with him, or more specifically the ones she had with him in front of me, but this is another level entirely. He's going to be tossed off the team for sure, probably even from the school entirely, and who knows what fines or legal trouble he could be in. The NCAA doesn't mess around when it comes to this kind of stuff. The rest of the team will be lucky if they are even allowed to the playoffs next year after this.

Yet I don't give a fuck about him, or the team, no, my only focus is on whatever he is doing to Maddie. I'm not even finished taking the information in when Reign chimes in with, "That's not all."

I snap my eyes to his, the haze from my hangover still out in full force, but I push it aside. "What else?" I demand, trying to piece together how this and Maddie's phone call could be connected, what it all means.

"We saw Levi Jones in the gym," Reign sighs, referring to Josh Peters' best friend and our teammate, and confusion as to where he is going with this takes over, as he glances at Archer, the two having a silent conversation with

just their eyes.

“Just tell me what it is,” I snap, knowing there is nothing they could tell me right now that is worse than what I am imagining in my head.

“Jones was with Josh all weekend, they’re the ones who exposed Thorne,” Archer says slowly, and I am waiting for the other shoe to drop when he pauses trying to gauge my reaction. Okay, so her brother put him on the chopping block, I guess he saw what a massive dick he was, just like I did. I don’t see what that has to do with me.

When I don’t say anything in response, Harper steps in. “Levi said Josh’s dad was behind this engagement bullshit with baby Peters, that he threatened her place at FU to get her on board with his plan. Some bullshit business deal he had going on,” he shrugs, like his words aren’t imploding my whole world.

Her dad did this?

“That’s why Josh went after Thorne, so he could get him out of the picture,” Reign cuts in. “So he could ruin his prospects and prevent Maddie from being forced into marrying him.”

Engagement. Threatened. Business. Forced.

Word after word that only fuels the anger rising up inside of me. She didn’t betray me, she didn’t lie to me, not truly anyway. When I asked her about Thorne, she said there was something, I didn’t question it further. Hell, in her goddamn messages before I even knew who she was, she made me promise not to fall in love with her, because she knew. She knew an *engagement* was coming for her, that she had been *threatened* and *forced* into it, and for what? *Business*?

Hugo Peters, esteemed Mayor of Fairfield, not only a piece of shit husband, but apparently a piece of shit father too. I should have known. Should have looked harder for the truth, listened more to the words she didn’t say, and relied on her actions towards me instead. Yes, she was pushing me away, but at the same time she was holding on for dear life, pouring her entire being into me before she lost herself forever. And what did I do? I walked away.

I have to see her. I need to go to her now and tell her I’m sorry. That I don’t care what her dad says, that she isn’t marrying Thorne or any other fucking prick he picks out for her because she belongs to me. She has belonged to me since the night she knocked on my door and pushed her way into my room. I didn’t know it then, but she pushed her way into my heart

too.

“I need to see her,” I exclaim as I stand, pushing past them and looking for my shoes and jacket.

“Shouldn’t you shower first,” Jake says hesitantly, looking at me with a frown. Shower? Is he fucking serious? Does he not realize how badly I fucked up?

Before I can say anything, my phone starts ringing from the sofa and I pause. It’s her, it has to be her, she must have heard from her brother about what he did to Thorne, and now she is coming back to me. She wants to make this right. I dive for my phone, not even looking at the caller ID before I swipe up.

“Maddie?” I rush out her name in panicked hope, praying she will forgive me.

A short silence greets me, my hope only growing before a firm voice asks, “Am I speaking with Nova Darkmore?”

I frown, pulling the phone away from my ear to check the number, but it just says, ‘unknown caller’. I bring it back to my ear as I respond, “This is he.”

“Mr Darkmore, this is Jennifer, I’m calling from Fairfield Medical Center. It’s about your mother, Diana Darkmore.” More words follow, and as I listen to what she has to say, every other thought in my mind just melts away.

3 9

M A D D I E

BEST BEST FRIENDS

There are so many articles in front of me that I'm not really sure where to keep my focus. Hallie has spread out the newspapers across the coffee table, set up her laptop to show the college forum, and is scrolling through social media posts on her phone and reading the comments aloud. She is in full Thorne take down mode, while I sit quietly on the sofa not really sure what to do with myself. I haven't heard anything from my father yet, and Josh's phone is off, and until I talk to either of them, I can't be sure this is over.

I mean I know my father, I remember how things were when his affair with Diana was exposed. I remember the reporters, the articles, the scathing comments, he barely remained in office. Vultures he called them, yet he hasn't hesitated in using them to his advantage since then, spinning tales of affairs forgotten, and happy families united together. It's bullshit, and if I know him like I think I do, I know that waking up to all of this will change everything. Or at least I hope it will.

My intended is no longer the upcoming star of the football team set to take over his father's business. In fact, I'd be certain his father is about ready

to blow a gasket for all the bad press his son is about to bring to his company. It's been no secret that Brad's dad has been prepping him to take over one day, he bragged himself about the deals he was going to land in the new year. I bet he isn't bragging now, not that I care about him. I hope the NCAA throws the book at him, and if FU has any sense they will toss him out on his ass.

No, my only focus is on what this means for me, for the deal my father made with his, and for the third time this morning, I reluctantly dial my father's number. It rings and rings, and I know he will be within hearing shot of it, yet for the third time this morning, he rejects my call.

Fuck.

"Still no answer?" Hallie asks, not looking up from her phone, still a little smirk permanently etched at the corner of her mouth since the second she saw the news. I think she hates Brad more than I do.

"No," I sigh in response. "And I'm not sure if that's a good or a bad sign." There has to be a reason he's ignoring my calls, but is it because he is doing damage control for his deal, or because he is already searching for Brad's replacement? I'm not sure I like the idea of either.

"Relax, Wendy, everything is going to work out, I just know it." She finally glances up from her phone giving me her full attention. "Have you tried Josh again?"

Just as she says that, my phone rings in my hand, my brother's name across the screen and I look at her suspiciously. "That's him now."

"Speak of the devil and he shall appear," she smiles, holding her hands up in a surrender.

I take one of the cushions from behind me and toss it at her head as I answer his call. "Hello."

"Mads, it's me," he starts, like this isn't the 21st century and caller ID isn't a thing. Of course I know it's him.

"Yeah I know, where the hell have you been, I've been trying to call you for like two hours, what the hell is going on?" All morning, ever since Hallie burst in my room, the only thing I could think about is Josh's words from this week.

You're not fucking marrying Bradley Thorne, if it's the last thing I ever do.

"Josh, what happened?" I ask again, his silence stretching out between us. "What did you do?"

He sighs, “I did what needed to be done, what I should have done the second I found out dad was forcing you into marrying that prick.” Hallie and I share a look, her ears peak as she listens in on our conversation while picking at the skin around her fingers absentmindedly. “Look, I can explain everything, I’ll be there soon, okay?” Now it’s my turn to sigh, too anxious and tired to want to wait for the full explanation of what he did, and what all of this means. “Okay, Mads?”

“Fine,” I relent, shaking my head at Hallie in annoyance. “I’ll see you soon.” I hang up the phone before he can say anything in response, too panicked and stressed to talk anymore, and when my phone instantly starts ringing again, I groan, answering the phone on the first ring. “I said okay, Josh!” I snap.

“Maddie,” a voice that is now becoming all too familiar says, and Hallie frowns in confusion, which I’m sure mirrors the expression on my own face. “It’s Archer.” I have barely thought about what happened last night with everything that is going on this morning, so to have him calling me again has my spine snapping straight for the second time in twenty-four hours.

“What happened, is he okay?” That same panic I felt when he called last night comes tumbling back, as I wonder what troubling situation Nova could have gotten himself into now.

“Nova’s fine,” he says hesitantly, sort of like he doesn’t really mean it, or believe it, before he quietly adds, “It’s his mom.”

I blink back trying to compute what he is saying. “His mom? Diana? What happened, is she okay?” I mean of course she is okay, I just saw her, we had dinner together, we caught up, we had fun, she has to be okay.

“She’s in the hospital,” he mutters quietly into the speaker, like he is trying to hide what he is saying. “I know I shouldn’t be calling you again, but I think you should come.”

Just like last night, I am already up and searching for my shoes. I’m still in the clothes I went out in last night, but I don’t care. Something has happened to Diana and I need to get to Nova and make sure they are both okay. I don’t care what is going on with me, what Brad’s exposé means for me. No, the only thing I care about is Nova.

“I’m on my way,” I tell him, ending the call and frantically searching for wherever I dumped my keys when I got home last night.

“Josh is on his way over,” is all Hallie says as she watches me search, even though I know she knows I have to go.

“I know but,” I pause, not really sure what to say, as tears start to gather in my eyes. Please don’t be bad. “I have to make sure he is okay,” I gasp out. “Just occupy Josh until I get back.”

“Occupy him?” she scoffs in disgust, “He’s not a dog.” Her nose wrinkles as if she is imagining him as such, but I can barely concentrate on anything she is saying as I finally locate my keys and slide into my shoes.

“Just use that charm he loves so much to keep him distracted until I get back,” I mutter, grabbing my bag, purse, and jacket and stalking towards the door.

“Okay but don’t blame me if you come home to your brother bleeding on the floor at my feet,” she calls out to my back, and I almost smile at the image.

“He should be so lucky,” I call back to her, before slamming the door behind me and rushing to my car. For the second time in less than twenty-four hours, one of my guards is quick to follow as I pull off the drive and navigate my way to Fairfield Hospital.

The whole way there I can barely focus, both hoping for the best and preparing for the worst, and by the time I am storming through the halls of the hospital, I am so worked up that I can barely breathe. Which only gets worse when my phone rings in my hand yet again, and I look down and see my father’s name. Rejecting the call immediately, I find the waiting room that Archer texted me about, and push through the doors, happy to find him waiting.

When he sees me, he smiles sadly, rising to his feet to greet me. “I’m sorry about this,” he starts, but I cut him off as I throw myself at his chest and pull him into a hug.

“Thank you for calling,” I say, muffled into his chest, and after a couple of seconds of frozen shock, his arms engulf me into a warm and steady embrace.

“I didn’t know what else to do, he was in a bad way,” he grumbles into my hair, the panic for his best friend and his mom clearly evident. I pull back as he continues, “I knew Diana was sick, but I didn’t know how bad, he didn’t tell me.”

“Where is he?” is all I say in response, I don’t ask what is wrong with Diana. If Nova wanted me to know, I would, and if he wants to tell me he can, but my focus is on him right now and what he needs.

“He went back to her when we got here, I haven’t seen him since, but I

couldn't bring myself to leave, not without knowing if they are okay." I nod, understanding him completely, I can't even begin to imagine if this was Hallie and her mom, how hard it would be.

So instead, I pull his hand into mine and force that perfectly practiced smile to my face. "Everything is going to be fine, we'll just wait here for news together."

With that he nods, and we both take a seat in the waiting room side by side, and I silently pray that what I just said was true. My phone rings again, and when I spy my father's name for a second time, I shut my phone off without a second thought. I have no interest in whatever he has to say, not now, not here, and not again. If I am realizing anything right now, it's that life is short and we need to grab every bit of happiness we can.

I just hope it's not too late.

#40

NOVA

FALLING FAST

Nothing but guilt consumes me as I sit at my mom's bedside and look down at her unconscious form, sleeping off her procedure. The cancer is attacking her chest, and it caused fluid to build up into one of her lungs until it collapsed. She became breathless at work and it got so bad she passed out, they had to rush her here in an ambulance. Tears are gathering in my eyes for the hundredth time today, and all I can do is reach out and hold her hand in mine and pray that this isn't the end.

There's a tube still in her lung to help drain the fluid, and all I can think about is all the things I should have said to her every time I ignored her calls this last week. She called me every day because she knew something was wrong with me, and rather than just talk it out with her, I took the easy route and avoided her. Now I may not ever have the chance to have those conversations with her. What if she doesn't get better? What if she only gets worse and all my chances with her have run out? I don't care that I am an adult, I will still always need my mom.

Just as I have that thought the door to her hospital room opens, and when I glance up I meet the regretful eyes of my father. I'm not surprised to see

him here. I called him on my way over, finally told him everything, yet for some reason I didn't expect him to actually show up. His eyes flick over me first, as if he is checking if I'm okay, before they slowly move over to my mom. When they reach her he looks as if he is going to break. I remain still and silent as he moves to her bedside and slips his hand into hers, the one I'm not holding.

He doesn't say a word at first, just watches her, eyes zoned in on the rise and fall on her chest, watching her every breath. "I still remember the first time I asked your mom on a date," he starts, eyes far away as if he is still there in that moment. "She refused me of course, she was far too good for me and she knew it, she didn't care about my reputation or hockey, she was just so effortlessly her." He shakes his head, forcing the memory from his mind as he takes a deep breath. "I stopped by billing on my way here, all previous medical bills have been paid, and they have my details on file for all future ones."

"You didn't have to do that," I start, feeling both sick and grateful of his actions, despite knowing that is the exact thing I was going to beg him for. I open my mouth to say something else, but he reaches across the bed and grips the hand I have in hers.

"I've failed you, Nova, so many times I've failed you." He glances back to my mom and shakes his head, holding back tears of his own. "I have so many regrets, but most of all I regret not staying around for you, for not being here when you needed me." He squeezes my hand tightly before letting go and clearing his throat. "So this is the least I can do for you, for both of you."

After that we both sit in the comfort of each other's silence, watching, waiting, wondering. Hours tick by, an array of nurses and doctors coming by to talk to us, explain more about what happened, and what the next steps are, and all the while we just wait for her to wake up.

By the time the sun sets, my dad is so sick of my stomach growling and me refusing his offers of food, he snaps, "Will you please go grab a sandwich or something, or at least a cup of coffee."

I go to refuse him once more, when my stomach rumbles again and I internally groan. Not wanting to leave her for too long I barely mutter my acceptance, "Fine, I'll get coffee."

When I step outside her room I'm kind of turned around. I didn't exactly familiarize myself with the layout when I got here. So all I can do is follow the corridor down towards the waiting rooms and pray I come across a coffee

machine. What I don't expect to come across is my best friend, especially not with Maddie asleep on his shoulder. Archer drove me here hours ago, I didn't expect him to stay, but what I expected even less was her presence here.

Forgetting all about the coffee, I stride towards Archer, and when he flicks his stare up from his phone to me, I look between her and him with nothing but confusion, and he smiles softly. "I called her, she's been here for hours, wouldn't stop talking and fidgeting, I'm glad she finally fell asleep." He shifts, obviously having not moved for a while, and the movement causes her to startle awake, making Archer sigh.

"What happened, is he okay?" she frantically asks, looking at my best friend first before she finally notices me standing there, staring at her. "Nova," she gasps, her voice breathless, and all I want to do is wrap my arms around her. "Is Diana okay?" Her questions make me love her more than I know I already do, just seeing the care and hope in her eyes, always thinking about everyone but herself.

"My mom is fine, stable for now at least," I start, still confused by her presence. "Maddie, what are you doing here?" My words come out harsher than intended, but this whole day is just one big fuck up.

"I just," she glances at Archer nervously, who clears his throat and rises to his feet.

"I'll hunt you down some decent coffee, brother," he exclaims, squeezing my shoulder as he passes. "Glad Momma D is doing okay for now," he adds, with a solemn smile.

We both watch him leave, my eyes returning to her, taking in her clearly sleepy, disheveled state, yet she still looks perfect. When she turns back to me, I can tell she is nervous as she takes a deep breath, "I just had to see you, I had to know you were okay."

Okay? She wants to know if I'm okay? I almost laugh, of course I'm not okay, but not for the reason she thinks. "No, I'm not okay," I snap, and she blanches back a little at my outrage.

"Of course you're not okay," she whispers, lowering her eyes and shaking her head. "I shouldn't have come, I'm sorry," she moves to leave, reaching for her discarded bag on the floor, when I grab her by the elbow and haul her against me.

"I'm not okay because my mom has cancer and I don't know if she is going to get better." Her eyes soften, complete understanding flowing through her as she opens her mouth to speak, but I'm not done so I cut her

off. "I'm not okay because you haven't been with me, I'm not okay because you lied to me." She tries to step back but I don't let her go. I did that once, and I refuse to do it again. I bring my hands up to cup her face, tipping her chin back to make sure she is paying complete attention to me as I say my next words. "And I'm not okay because you made me fall for you and then you let me walk away."

This time her eyes widen, complete shock and awe crossing her stare as our gazes remain locked. Yet still I don't push her because I know her, whether it's as Maddie or as Grim, I know her. She needs to hear this, she needs the words to flow through her entirely until they register, and everything else between us might have been rushed, but I won't rush this. It's too big, too important, and I don't care that I promised her I wouldn't, I fell in love with her so completely that she is just going to have to accept it.

"Ever since the day I first met you, I have loved taunting you. Loved the way you took every barb and came back with one of your own. I've loved the way you never cared about my status and always just gave me shit, and now, well, I know I broke my promise, Princess, but I just love you." A weight releases off my chest at my admission, and I know I need to get back to my mom, but right now I just need to hear her say the words that I hope she feels.

A tear forms on her lashes as she whispers, "You really fell for me?" It isn't just a question, it sounds more like a crazy statement she can't quite believe if anything, but I get it. No one has ever just chosen her for her. She has been used for her last name, to get to her brother, and for her father's business, but I don't care about any of that. All I care about is her.

I drop my head to hers, our lips almost touching, as my thumb swipes the tear that falls to her cheek. "So fucking far, baby," I admit, answering her statement. "Now this is where you say it back," I add, praying that she feels the same and my heart isn't about to break all over again.

"Nova," she whispers, and fear like no other grips me from the inside out until she smiles. "I knew you would catch me, Charmer."

My heart explodes in my chest at her words, but still I have to hear her say it. "So you love me?" I ask with a smirk.

"I love you," she confirms with gasp. "Of course I love you, never him. I called you, I left you a voicemail, I tried to explain," she rushes all the words out at once.

"Sshh, I know, I know, it doesn't matter now," I tell her, my lips on hers before she can even take another breath, my arms pulling her against me like

I will never let her go.

I don't care about her father, or her supposed fucking fiancé, no, the only thing that matters is that she is mine, and no one is going to take her away from me again.

4 1

M A D D I E

S H O W E R S P I R A L S

My fingers are held tightly between his, like he is afraid that if he lets go that I might disappear, but what he doesn't know is I'm the one who is afraid. Afraid this isn't real, afraid he'll change his mind, afraid my father won't allow it, but most of all I'm afraid of how far I've fallen for Nova Darkmore. I'm still not sure how we got here. How cocky comebacks and brutal barbs turned into a need so strong that my heart skips a beat every time he looks at me. Which is constantly, his eyes find me every few seconds like he is also checking if this thing between us is real.

After he told me he loved me, we waited for Archer to return with coffee, who then said his goodbyes with a knowing smile on his face, before Nova led me back to his mom's hospital room where we have remained ever since. He even introduced me to his father, who was waiting by Diana's bedside with a solemn look on his face, and I could tell it was hard for him to be there. To be around her, around his son. I know they have had their issues, but sometimes tragedy can bring people closer together, and I hope they can eventually find their way through this.

It's late now, the sun almost completely disappeared from the sky, and

yet still my hand remains firmly in his. The weight of his stare is so beautifully heavy that I feel I might crumble beneath it. His dad left a little while ago, but still we sit in silence, which is why as soon as Diana starts to rouse, Nova is on his feet within seconds and back by her side.

“Mom?” he says in a panic, sliding his hand into hers and holding it against him. “Mom, it’s okay, everything’s fine, you’re in the hospital,” he tries to reassure her, reaching above her bed to press the call button to alert a nurse.

Diana’s eyes are wide, scanning around the room to check out her surroundings, until they land on me and stop. She frowns a little at first, and I panic about whether I should stay or go. This is quite a personal moment, and yes we know each other, but I doubt she wants me here for this. So I rise to my feet and walk towards her bed to head for the door, but before I can pass, her voice stops me in my tracks.

”Maddie Darling,” she whispers, and unsure what to say or do, Nova and I both look between each other, until a soft smile spreads across her face. She turns to her son with a knowing look as she says a little louder, “I knew there was a girl.”

Nova chokes out a relieved laugh, looking up at the ceiling to try and rein in his emotions before he drops into the chair beside her bed and grins at her. “She’s not just a girl, mom, she’s *the* girl.” A blush rapidly burns my cheeks as Nova gestures for me to join him, and when I reach his side, he uses his free hand to curl around my back and keep me close.

His mom looks like she couldn’t be happier at this moment, and for a second my heart threatens to burst in my chest. This is what it’s like to have a kind and loving parent behind you, it must be so nice to have that all the time, and I find it hard to bear as I think about my own parents no doubt waiting for me to return home to talk to them.

Before any of us can say anything else, doctors and nurses descend into the room and create chaos as they run tests and check Diana’s vitals. Nova and I wait patiently outside, and they soon give her the all clear out of the danger zone for now. They are going to be keeping her in for at least a few days while they come up with a treatment plan to try and help her, but there is nothing more we or they can do at this moment. With that, we are advised that visiting hours are over and to return tomorrow.

Nova says a quick goodbye to his mom and then I lead him out to the parking lot where I left my car to give him a ride home. Once again the drive

to his house is silent, but his hand remains firmly around mine until we pull up and I cut off the engine. Nova doesn't even look at me as he slides out of the car and rounds the front of it, coming to my side, before opening the door and looking at me expectantly.

When I don't move, he cocks an eyebrow at me. "I know you don't think I am letting you go home right now, Princess," he says, that sexy yet insufferable smirk curving up at the edge of his mouth. "If you think for one-second that you aren't spending the night in my bed you are sadly mistaken. Now get out of the car, or I will drag you out, the choice is yours."

I almost laugh, as if I have a choice. Like I told him, I didn't choose him, I fell head first into his chaos and haven't wanted out for even a second. It's why I don't move, because I know I don't have to, his words will ring true, and when he sees that I remain still, his smirk gets even wider. "Oh, so my girl wants to play," he mutters, swiping his tongue across his bottom lip. "Then let's fucking go, Princess."

Nova leans his whole frame into the doorway of my car, his hands gripping my hips and dragging me towards him as if I weigh nothing, and when I realize how serious he actually is, I panic. "Nova," I gasp. "I'll walk, it's fine, I was just kidding." He can't carry me, not all the way to his room anyway, that's just ridiculous. Yet ridiculous is apparently his middle name, because when he pulls me from my car and slams the door behind me, he tosses my body over his shoulder as if I don't weigh a thing. "Nova, I'm too heavy for this!" I yelp, jostling against his giant body of muscle as we move.

A hard smack lands across my ass, which is right by his face, as he laughs, "Oh please, Princess Peters, I lift more than double your body weight everyday." And as if to prove his point, he strides us both all the way up to his room without breaking a sweat, but he doesn't stop there. He leads us right into his ensuite, before putting me down, slowly letting my body slide along every ridge of his.

When I am finally on my feet again, he is towering over me, watching, waiting, just taking in every moment between us as if he doesn't think they're real. "Nova," I sigh, needing to know it's real myself. "Kiss me," I beg. "Please."

He leans in, almost instinctively, until his eyes drop to my clothes, and then his lips bypass my mouth and head straight for my ear. "Lose the other man's jersey and I'll think about it."

My smile is instant, goosebumps breaking out along my skin at just the

feel of his breath on my neck. He doesn't care that the jersey belongs to my brother, it isn't his, and that's all that matters. So, slowly I reach under my jersey and slide my leggings and underwear off first, then when my bottom half is bare, I grip the edge of the jersey between my fingertips. Toying with it, lifting it just an inch, in the hopes of driving him wild. Yet Nova doesn't rush me, he just watches me, and I feel like my heart might completely stop just from the power of his stare, his pupils darkening with anticipation as he watches me undress.

"Are you teasing me, Princess?" he asks, a wicked smile curving along his mouth, as his fingers join mine at the hem of my shirt.

"That depends," I breathe, shivering beneath just the lightest of his touches, as the pads of his fingers brush against my skin. "Is it working?"

He sighs, dropping his forehead to meet mine. "Oh, baby, it's been working since the second you knocked on my door and begged to suck my cock."

I scoff, "I did not beg." I most definitely did. I'm a dirty, little liar, and if he just reached between my legs right now, he would discover how close I am to begging him again.

"Is that right?" he asks, gripping the shirt in his hands and ripping it off over my head, stopping so my hands are banded tight inside of it. "See, I definitely remember some begging." He pushes me until my back meets the door, and then he is pressing me into it. "Something about no rules, and me punishing you," he adds, trailing kisses down my neck until he meets the juncture of my throat, where he gently bites and sucks until I know I bear his mark.

"Nope," I gasp, arching my neck to give him better access. "I don't remember any of that." It's a lie, a dirty, dirty lie. I know it, he knows it, but this is just the game we like to play with one another.

He kisses me, a rough press of his lips against my own as he drops the jersey to the floor. "Then I guess I'll just have to remind you." *Kiss.* "Today." *Kiss.* "Tomorrow." *Kiss.* "And every day after that." *Kiss.*

This time when he goes to pull away, I don't let him, sealing my lips to his and pushing my hands into his hair and pulling tight. He groans into my mouth, and I let my own lips part so I can tangle my tongue with his. We kiss until we are breathless, until my thighs are damp with my arousal, and then still we kiss some more. By the time he pulls away, his eyes are so intense they almost bring me to my knees.

“I love you, you truly know that right?” he asks, reaching back and pulling his shirt off over his head, moving for his jeans. Mesmerized at the sight of him, of him stripping for me, looking at me like I am his entire world, and how casually he admits his feelings for me, all I can do is nod. “Good,” he grunts, leaning into his shower and switching it on, before moving back to me. “Because I’m about to fuck you like I hate you.”

He is lifting me off the ground before I can even respond, and I have no choice but to wrap my legs around him, his hands finding my hips, and his cock nestling within the warm, wet heat between my thighs. When we step beneath the spray of the shower he drags my mouth to his and kisses me brutally, digging his fingertips into the skin around my waist so hard it makes me gasp, his tongue slipping into my mouth once more.

We crash into the shower wall, my back meeting wet, slippery tile as he positions himself, and we both groan as he thrusts inside of me without pause. My hands grip his shoulders and I hold on tight as his cock slides in and out of me deep and fast, his hips snapping furiously between my spread thighs, and stealing the breath from my throat as I moan his name.

“Nova,” I cry. “You feel so good.” My pussy clenches around him, already so close to coming that if he weren’t holding me up, I would be on the floor begging for more.

“Fuck,” he groans, his tongue licking up the droplets of water that spill down my tits as I cry out his name. “Such a perfect fucking pussy, Madeline,” he grits through his teeth, his thrusts never faltering. “So tight and wet, and so fucking mine.” His fingers find my throat, wrapping around the base of my neck obsessively, as his thrusts inside of me start to slow, teasing me with every roll of his hips.

The fire that’s burning deep in the pits of my stomach, pushing me towards the edge of relief, starts to fall away. Shaking my head, I urge him not to stop. “More, Nova, please, I need more.”

“That’s it, Princess, good girl” he groans, lashing his tongue against my puckered nipple. “Beg me, plead with me to make this desperate little cunt all mine.” He pairs his last word with his teeth sinking into my tight bud, sucking and pulling until I am writhing against him and desperate to come.

“It’s already yours,” I tell him, making his eyes snap up to mine. “All yours, Nova,” I add, clenching around him, as his cock thrusts deep inside of me.

His forehead drops to mine, our stares locked as he picks up the pace and

starts to fuck me harder and harder. “So fucking beautiful,” he murmurs against my lips, capturing them in a kiss so blistering that I feel like my entire body is on fire in his hold. Flames lick at every inch of my skin, every part of me teetering on the edge of explosion as his fingers tighten around my throat, cutting off my air.

“Oh god,” I whimper, my words muffled within his hold, and the smile he gives me I wish I could lock away forever. He’s mine, Nova Darkmore is mine, he’s here, with me, coming undone, for me. The thought has me spiraling, falling off the edge so fast and deep that I’m pretty sure I wake the entire house up with my screams. “I’m coming, Nova, I’m coming.”

And I was, my pussy was clamped around his cock and with every snap of his hips, his groin smacked against my clit in the most perfect way until I was breaking apart completely. “Fuck,” he curses on a long groan, snapping his hips even faster. “Baby, slow down or I am going to come.”

I don’t listen, I can’t, I am too far gone, too lost in the tornado that is Nova Darkmore and the fact that he is mine, that he loves me. “Oh god,” I cry out again, my entire body trembling in his arms, as his cock continues to find that perfect spot with every thrust.

Then he becomes a savage, squeezing my throat and fucking my pussy until he is falling over the edge with me on a long groan. Pumping his hips into me until his cum is spilling deep inside of me, claiming me as his and only his.

The shower continues to pound down onto us, covering our bodies and washing away the sins we now share, but all I can do is look at him, watch him catch his breath and come back to me. Then he is kissing me again, softer this time, our lips moving as one as his half-hard cock slowly pumps in and out of me, spreading his cum down my thighs.

“I love you, Maddie,” he sighs against my mouth, wrapping me around him tighter, if that’s even possible, and I smile.

“I love you too, Nova.”

We let our admission hang in the air, and then he silently slips out of me and proceeds to soap up his hands and wash every inch of my body, before I return the favor on him. Once we have rinsed off, he steps out of the shower first, grabbing a towel and turning towards me. “I will leave you some fresh clothes to sleep in on the bed, I just need to go update Arch on my mom.”

I’m smiling so hard my cheeks hurt at how he can go from powerful and brutal, to soft and kind in a matter of seconds. Fucking me, owning me, and

then checking in on his friend and caring for me. I watch him leave and then stay in the shower a couple of minutes longer, letting the warm heat engulf me until my skin is pruned.

When I step out and wrap a towel around me, returning to his room, the only thing I find tossed on his bed is one of his jerseys. I look around for something else, but come up empty. There is only his jersey. *His jersey and nothing else.* The smile returns to my face as I dry myself off and shake my head at him. Of course he only left his jersey.

By the time he returns, he is holding up two sandwiches and two bottles of water, and his eyes instantly drink me in as I sit with my legs crossed in the middle of his bed wearing only his jersey. With his eyes still on me as he stalks across the room and joins me, I pull at the hem of the jersey and say, “You said clothes.”

All he does is shrug. “You don’t need anything else,” is all he replies, and when I don’t say anything he adds with a smirk, “My girl always wears my jersey.”

Stealing any response from me, I just smile, taking the sandwich and water from him and thanking him, as I power on my phone and quickly shoot off a message to Hallie letting her know where I am. I promptly ignore all the other messages that start pouring in from both her, Josh, and then of course my parents, and then I quickly turn it back off again.

By the time Nova is turning off the light, the weight of everything that has happened today truly hits me, and I feel afraid to even let him close to me. Not that Nova lets it deter him, when I roll onto my side away from him, all he does is wrap his arm around my stomach and pull me against him, curving his body around mine.

In his hold I don’t feel so afraid, in fact, I feel anything but. I feel safe, I feel wanted, I feel free. I feel completely and utterly like myself. And that’s the last thing I remember before I fall asleep in his arms, just like it was always meant to be.

4 2

M A D D I E

D A D D Y I S S U E S

Heat engulfs me and it takes a few seconds for me to remember where I am, and to remember what happened yesterday. I'm at Nova's, in his bed, in his arms. He loves me, like I love him, and maybe by some miracle we will be able to make this thing between us work. I'm not sure what repercussions Brad will face, or what my father will want to do about them, but right now I am in heaven and I won't let anyone ruin that.

I shift in Nova's hold, making him stir, and barely a moment passes before he sleepily grumbles, "If you try to leave without saying goodbye again, I'm will fuck you so hard that you won't even be able to walk."

His delicious threat makes me shiver, even with the heat of his bare skin against me, and it makes him pull me in even closer as he buries his nose into my hair and inhales. "As tempting as that sounds," I start with a smile. "I was hoping for some food before we go back to fucking."

That has his attention, his head rising from where it's buried in my neck as his eyes slowly blink open. "Are you hungry, baby? What do you need?" There isn't a sexual edge to his words, he is completely serious, but as his morning erection presses against my hip, I can't help but feel my other

appetite wake up.

“Now that you mention it, maybe fucking until I can’t walk should take precedence.” I turn in his hold, pressing myself against him in search of friction and he laughs.

“My girl is horny in the mornings, I will have to remember that,” he replies with a cheeky smile, but to my dismay, he rolls his body off of mine and moves towards the end of the bed.

“Where are you going?” I grumble, annoyed that he isn’t already ravishing me.

He laughs again. “To get my girl some food,” he shrugs causally, as if he has no idea the effect he has on me. “Are you coming?” he asks, turning towards me as he tosses me a pair of his boxer shorts that apparently he didn’t have on hand last night.

“Clearly not,” I grumble under my breath, taking the shorts from him and slipping them on, and all he does is laugh at my bad mood.

When I try to stomp away from him to head downstairs, he catches me, pressing me forward into his bedroom door and bringing his mouth to my ear, as his hand slips beneath the boxers I am wearing, and cupping my entire pussy. “Don’t worry, Princess, after you’ve eaten and refueled, it will be my turn.” He swipes his fingers up and down my slit, making my entire body come alive as he coats them in my juices. Again to my dismay he pulls away far too quickly, and when I turn to flip him off, he is sinking his coated fingers into his mouth. “And trust me when I say, I am completely famished.”

The blush lights me up from the inside out, making him laugh, as he spins me around once more and leads us downstairs to the kitchen. To my surprise, the rest of the house is already awake. Archer and Alexander are both drinking coffee at the breakfast bar, and Jake is sitting on the sofa with his girlfriend. All of them look our way as we enter, and from the shit-eating grin across Archer’s face, I’m sure he already gave them a play by play of our reunion.

“Good morning, love birds,” he sing-songs, eyeing us both with a cocky smirk. “Sounds like you had quite the catch up.”

My blush deepens, especially as I catch Alexander’s stare, which he diverts immediately. I wonder if it will ever not be awkward between us? When I turn back to Nova and find him completely focused on him, I guess it won’t be any time soon. “Knock it off,” he warns his best friend, moving to make us both a cup of coffee, which I gratefully accept.

“You’re the one I heard knocking it off, Captain,” he replies with a smirk. “Oh god, Captain, yes please, Captain, right there, Captain,” he moans, humping Alexander’s leg with disturbingly accurate thrusts.

“I always knew I was your type,” is all their goalie replies, still avoiding my gaze, making Archer roll his eyes.

“You wish, Alexander, you were just the closest thing to me.” He pushes away from him and moves back to his chair. “I’d have done it to baby Peters here if I didn’t think Nova would gut me with a fork.” He gestures towards me and I feel Nova bristle at my side. He’s gonna have to get used to these kinds of jabs from his teammates if we are going to make it anywhere, otherwise they will eat him alive.

I know boys like this, I grew up with boys like this, and they make their jokes and share some playful banter, but they can be easily handled.

Before Nova can say anything, I step in. “Oh please, Archer, like you could handle all the inches I’ve heard Alexander is packing.” I make sure to keep my focus on him, and not let it travel to the two others now staring at me slack-jawed. I’m sure they both remember how well I handled it. “You might have to do some jaw workouts first,” I add sweetly with a smile.

Archer groans, “No, not you too, Mads.” He looks betrayed which I am finding amusing, especially as he gives me puppy dog eyes. “Come on, fess up, all the dick jokes can’t just be about Reign, you have to have heard what I’ve got going on too.”

This time my own smile turns wicked as I joke, “Oh, I don’t feel comfortable discussing other people’s shortcomings, there are ladies present.” The other three guys, and Jake’s girlfriend all crack up, especially as Archer’s jaw drops at my statement and I add, “Oh yes, keep up that kind of practice and you’ll be able to satisfy Alexander in no time.”

Another round of laughs as Archer points at his best friend. “You caught yourself a wicked little thing,” he grumbles, just as the doorbell rings and he stomps off to answer it.

Nova spins me around and presses me into the kitchen island. “He’s right, you are a wicked little thing aren’t you.” It’s not a question, especially not one I could answer when I feel his thick length hardening between us.

“Yes,” I breathe, turning delirious with need for him as I add, “You better watch out, I bite.”

His gaze darkens. “Oh, I am counting on it, Princess.” His lips lower to mine but before he can capture them, a throat loudly clears beside us.

We both turn our heads at the same time to find Josh staring at us, an impassive stare covering his face. “Maddie, can I borrow you for a moment please?” His tone is clipped and I can tell how hard it is for him to be here, and I instantly feel bad for not responding to his messages and turning off my phone.

Slipping from Nova’s hold, and ignoring my brother’s stare as it takes in my clothes, or lack of, I gesture for him to follow me back outside, and to my surprise Nova follows. Once we get there, my brother looks between the two of us, and before any kind of showdown can occur I cut in, “Whatever you need to say, you can say in front of him.”

Josh sighs, looking so tired and vulnerable in this moment that fear grips me entirely. “We need to go and see Dad,” he starts, and before I can refute he adds, “now.”

Nova stiffens beside me, but I slip my hand in his as I keep my focus on my brother. “Okay, I just need to go home and get dressed.”

As I say that, he holds out a bag towards me. “I got Hallie to pack you some fresh clothes,” he says with another sigh. “You know what she is like so there are about seven outfits in there.” That makes me smile, and I take the bag from him, thanking him.

No other words are said as I slip back inside and head up to Nova’s room to get dressed. He doesn’t say anything either, just watches me get ready while also pulling on his own clothes at the same time. When I move to leave he holds out his hand and asks, “Ready?” When I frown he smiles, “You didn’t really think I was letting you go without me, did you?”

A feeling like I have never experienced floods my insides. He’s coming with me. I’ve never had anyone have my back outside of Hallie and my brother, and this is so new to me that I’m not even sure how to react. Nova crosses the room and pulls me into his arms. “It’s you and me now, Princess.” All at once the love I have for him blooms even more and I just nod, letting him lead me back outside to my brother.

Nova and I take my car, following Josh to our parents’ estate, and I can tell the closer we get, the more on guard Nova becomes. Yet still, just like last night, his hand remains entwined with mine. By the time we are pulling up it’s almost lunch time, and I am nervous for whatever awaits me inside.

Their housekeeper answers the door and advises us that our father is waiting in his office. I can tell from the tone of her voice that the mood awaiting us isn’t good, but it’s now or never. Tightening Nova’s hand in

mine, we follow Josh down the long, elegant hallway until we reach my father's haven.

When we push inside, my father's eyes rise from whatever he is working on, and there isn't even a hint of surprise that flashes across his stare as he takes in Nova by my side. We wait in silence as he finishes what he is doing, before he looks at me and sighs, "Your brother said you were busy." He's angry, that much I can tell, but still I keep my head up high.

"I had things that needed my attention," I reply smoothly, not letting him get to me, not with Nova and my brother by my side. "Plus I thought you would be busy handling your situation."

A smirk pulls at the corner of his mouth and for a second I think he might be proud of me for standing up for myself, but he quickly covers it. "The situation is handled, and as I can see you have already found yourself a new match that I suppose I can deem worthy enough." I almost scoff at his words, and Nova is crushing my fingers between his, no doubt biting his tongue so hard he can probably taste blood. "Thankfully your brother has more of a keen interest in keeping our family name in-tact, and he has stepped in to take your place."

That instantly shatters the armor I wrapped around myself before coming in here, as my head snaps towards my brother. "Stepped in? What does that mean?" I ask, looking at my brother with nothing but confusion, but he keeps his gaze locked on our father.

"I will do my duty," is all he replies boredly, looking as if he would rather be anywhere else but here, yet I know my brother better than that. He may be standing in a casual manner, but his spine is snapped straight. His words may be laced in disinterest, but his jaw is locked. *What the hell is going on?*

With my brother ignoring my existence, I look back to my father, who looks gleeful to give me my answer. "Joshua here has agreed to further the family business by marrying someone of my choice," my father beams, and I feel as if all the air has been emptied from the room.

"What?" I gasp in shock. "No, please," I start, but Joshua finally snaps.

"Enough, Maddie, it's already done."

My mouth snaps shut, and Nova's thumb starts to rub small gentle circles across the top of my hand in an attempt to soothe me, as my body goes to war against itself. My breathing comes in quick pants, as I fight with the feeling of relief of being able to be with Nova, and regret of forcing my brother to take my place.

Whatever words are exchanged next go right over my head, and the next thing I know, Nova is leading us back outside with Josh hot on our heels. It isn't until we are almost back at our cars that I snap. "You did this, didn't you? You got rid of Brad and offered yourself up on a platter."

His eyes flick to Nova's, clearly not wanting to have this conversation in front of him, but it's too late for that. "I was never going to let you marry Bradley Thorne, Maddie. Not him or anyone else that you didn't choose." His words are gentle, laced with the only kind of family love I have ever known.

"Why? Why did you have to save me?" I ask, tears forming in my eyes in both happiness and sadness, and my brother's tough facade breaks as he steps towards me.

"Because you love him, Maddie," he starts, not even looking in Nova's direction as he refers to him. "And because you're my sister and I love you too. I'd do anything for you, you know that."

The tears spill onto my cheeks as I sniff, "And I'd let you, but not this."

My brother smiles. "I'll be fine, Mads. I'm not like you, I don't let myself feel things as mundane as love," he jokes, pulling me in for a hug and wiping away my tears. When he pulls back there is a sparkle in his eye that tells me he really is okay with this. "I'll take my pick from a list of rich hot girls and make one of them my wife. I mean, how hard can it be to fake it with someone?" he shrugs like it's nothing at all, but little does he know, they will become his famous last words.

Nova and I watch him climb back into his car and drive away, and before I can say anything, Nova is pushing me into the side of my car and claiming my mouth as his. He kisses me until I run out of breath, and when he pulls back I feel eyes watching us from inside the house, but I know he doesn't care.

"How about my girl lets me take her out to eat, and then lets me eat her out?" he asks with a smirk, walking me around to the drivers side of my car and opening my door for me.

I roll my eyes. "You're disgusting," I scoff playfully, and he smiles.

"If I'm so disgusting, why are you clenching your thighs for me, baby?" he asks, leaning in to drop his mouth to my ear. "Don't worry, you can wrap them around my head later." Then he is pulling back and slamming my door closed.

Fuck it feels good to be his girl.

#EPILOGUE

NOVA

HAPPY EVER AFTER

My gaze is torn between the puck and my girl. *My girl*. Just getting to say that makes me hard as fuck every time, especially when I look over to the seats behind the team box and find her there watching me, biting her lip and waiting to see if I will make the shot. Does she even know me? Of course I'll make the shot. Not only will I score here, I will take her home and then score there. The thought makes my cock jump and I nod my head at my girl just before I send the puck flying.

Having her here, wearing my jersey, and never missing my games, makes playing a whole lot more fun. Just knowing she is watching me, cheering for me, supporting me, it's all I could ever want. It makes having to deal with her family a little easier to handle, and Bradley Thorne is almost a distant memory from both us and the FU football team.

Maddie and I made it official, which was kind of pointless after admitting our feelings, and have been pretty inseparable ever since. The only time we truly spend part is for class, practice, and games, and even then, most of the time she is on the sidelines waiting for me. That thought makes the rest of the game fly by with ease.

FU wins 3-0 and by the time we all make it back to the changing rooms, the adrenaline is pumping through me. I don't bother heading for the showers, just start ripping off my gear and changing into my clothes.

"Aren't you hitting the showers?" Reign asks, and I look at him with a knowing smirk.

"Nah, I'll let my girl get me a little dirtier first," I say with a wink, and he shakes his head. Our friendship is well and truly back to normal now that Maddie is completely mine.

"For fuck sake, Darkmore," Josh groans as he passes me, catching my statement. "Please glance around your surroundings before you talk about my fucking sister."

Archer and Reign both laugh as my best friend cuts in, "Don't be uptight, Peters, that's your sister's job for the Cap." He smacks his hands against my shoulders, enjoying getting to Peters, but I pull him.

"Easy now," I warn, making sure they all toe the line when it comes to my girl, even my best friend, but Josh still looks furious, grabbing his things from his locker, slamming it, and then heading to the showers. Boy better pick a wife soon, because he sure as shit needs to get his dick wet.

Leaving the rest of those fuck-wits behind, I quickly get changed, shove my stuff into my bag, only pausing at the ping of my phone.

Grim: I'm getting lonely waiting for you Charmer

Grim: Maybe I will have to find another player to occupy me

I read the words and smirk.

This fucking girl.

I don't even reply, just march from the changing rooms so I can go in search of my girl. Things have been good with us so far, great actually, and with my mom doing better and responding well to treatment, and my dad coming around more often, everything is looking up.

I don't even make it three steps outside before her breathy voice hits my ear. "Hey Charmer, got room for another truth?" she asks, and I turn to find her leaning on the wall outside the rooms, her eyes dripping with lust.

I stalk towards her, pressing her into the wall and stealing a kiss from her lips before I pull back and whisper, "For you, baby? Always."

She smiles, always enjoying when I bring up the messages we shared as what we thought were strangers, as she leans up and brings her mouth to my ear. "Watching you play gets me so wet," she mumbles, her breath hot

against my neck, and I groan.

“Oh, Princess, you haven’t seen me play anything yet.” Before she can respond, I dip down, picking her up and tossing her over my shoulder in a way I know she loves but would never admit. “Now let’s go home, I think it’s high time I met Harold.” I slap her ass, hard, making her squeal.

As I carry her out to the car, we pass a group of bunnies who are waiting for all the other players to leave. I can’t believe I used to think bouncing between all of them was something to be proud of.

Now I’ve bagged the best kept secret I ever had.

THE END.

B O N U S

J O S H

D A D D Y D E A L S

I hate my father's office, it's cold, and miserable, just like him. Yet what's worse is he knows I hate it, it's why every time we have something to discuss, he always makes me meet him here. It's a power move, one that allows him to think he is in control, but the truth is, his games don't matter to me. They never did, I let him rule with his iron fist, and went along with whatever bullshit he demanded because I knew I would soon be free. I was happy to keep doing that, but then he involved my sister.

There was no way on this earth I was going to stand by and allow him to force her into marrying some piece of shit just because he was friends with his father. Thankfully it was easier to dig up some dirt on her intended and flush his reputation down the toilet, but I knew it wouldn't be enough. It's the only reason I am here, because I know what I have to do next.

It's another twenty minutes before he finally deigns to show up, citing overrun meetings as his excuse. Yet I don't miss the lipstick on his collar, rolling my eyes at his sloppiness. I honestly don't know how he ever got elected as Mayor. As he rounds his desk, he loosens his already astray tie, and searches through some papers on his desk until he finds what he is

looking for.

“You cost me a lot of money by ruining the Thorne deal,” he snaps, leaning over and placing a stack of sheets in front of me. I don’t even let my eyes drop, keeping my focus on him as I wait for him to continue. He doesn’t have concrete proof that it was me who foiled his plans, but he knows I did it, and it’s that knowledge that has me smirking. “Not that it matters now, I know you’ll do your duty.” He leans over again and taps on the list in front of me. I still don’t look at it.

“I will do what’s required,” I start, measuring my words slowly. “But you will keep up your end of the deal and leave Madeline alone. You won’t insert yourself in her relationship, you won’t mess with her tuition or place at FU, and you won’t disrupt her life in any way. Do you understand?” I hold his stare, not letting the smile that crosses his mouth affect me. I’m not the little boy he used to be able to scare away with just the boom of his voice. I’m a man now, and I will do what I need to in order to protect my sister.

“You should consider following my footsteps into politics, son, you’d make quite the show.” I don’t take his false praise for anything other than what it is, and his smile drops when he realizes his words no longer have an effect on me. “You have my word that I will not interfere with your sister’s life in any way, the Darkmore boy is an acceptable enough choice given his trajectory. As long as you do your duty, I will stay away from them.”

I am already on my feet and grabbing the list from his desk before he has even uttered his last word. “Consider it done.”

Now I really do try and make it outside before I let my eyes drop to the list, I do, but I’ve never been good at delayed gratification, and with my future at stake, my restraint breaks. I’m not surprised to find the usual hoard of socialites, and businessmen’s daughters, but as my eyes scan to the bottom of the page, I almost stumble at the last name on there, coming to a complete stop.

No, that can’t be right, it must be a typo, a misprint, but as I read her name once, twice, three times, I have to force myself to face my father again.

“Hallie’s name is on here?” My words come out as more of a question than I’d like, and my father lifts his eyes from his computer to me, but he remains silent waiting for more. “Hallie Rose Sanders, as in Maddie’s best friend.”

My father shrugs. “Yes, and? She comes from a good, wealthy family, her father runs a respectful, successful business, and Hallie is a nice, good

girl.” He returns his focus back to his screen as he adds in a mumble, “Lord knows you’ve done worse.”

I know his words are dismissing me, and too shocked to say anything else, I turn on my heel and storm my way out of there, not stopping until I am behind the wheel of my car. Only then do I let my eyes drop to the list again, ignoring every other name on there and dropping down to *hers*.

Hallie Rose Sanders, my sister's best friend, and the girl who has gotten under my skin since she was nine and I was ten. I wonder what she would make of her name being on such a list, the thought is laughable. She would be the worst choice I could ever make. But then again, what if she wasn't?

No, wait, this is perfect. Hallie knows all about what was going on with Maddie being forced into an engagement, and she knows I'm the one who ultimately saved her. If I just explained the situation, then surely she would agree to helping me just long enough to see Maddie and I graduate and get out from under our father's thumb.

Yes, this is perfect. Why tie myself to a real wife when I can tie myself to a fake one?

It's time to ask my sister's best friend for a favor.

AFTERWORD

Thank you for reading The Puck Secret

Are you ready for more yet?

Josh and Hallie's story is up next!

The Puck Decoy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Rebels,

Are you still with me? Or are you mad at me for straying away from dark romance? Or are we thankful that I finally dived into something more light and fun? Like I didn't even kill anyone, can you believe it?

Well, not yet anyway... 🙄

These characters took over my brain and let me become obsessed with them when I was laid up with a broken leg, and keeping them a secret for months was so freaking hard. I am so happy to finally share them with you, and I hope you love them as much as I do.

First I would like to shout out all my readers, from those of you who took a chance on me as a brand new baby author, all the way to the ones who are just finding me now, and everyone in between. I love you, all of you, like every single one of you! I love talking with you, meeting you, reading your reviews, watching your Tik Toks, and being tagged in your gorgeous edits.

If it wasn't for you guys then I wouldn't be getting to do what I love every single day and I will forever be grateful for that.

To my husband and daughter, thank you for your grace and patience with every release, for always hyping me up, and for mostly keeping me sane. I love you both so much.

To my amazing PA Heather, you save my ass on every release and you know it! Thanks for being on this crazy ride with me.

To Duchess, you know you are my number one crazy hoe and your very brutal honesty always helps me find my way. Consider this your official announcement that Daemon is all yours!

To Sam, just thank you for being you and letting me dump my words on you literally all the time. I know I annoy your ass daily but you love me so it's all good. I adore you all the way to Canada and back!

To Dean, thank you for always fitting my work into your work! And let's just always presume I mean clenching and not cleaning!

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All my love,
Gabby

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DEADLY GAMES AT BSU (co write)x

1. *All Bets Are Off*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

G.N. Wright is a self published author of dark and contemporary romance. She lives in England with her husband and daughter. When she isn't writing she can be found reading, listening to music, and spending time with her family.

She enjoys a good social stalking so be sure to check out all of her links below!

