

*a Fitties*

ENGAGEMENT

JAXSON KIDMAN

# A FILTHY ENGAGEMENT

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A FILTHY LINE NOVEL

JAXSON KIDMAN

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## A FILTHY ENGAGEMENT

FILTHY LINE - DEX

*Barista by day.*  
*Engaged to the baddest rock star in the world by night.*

*Well, fake engaged.*  
I mean, what's one more lie, right?

To be fair, it was Dex's idea.

In trouble one too many times...  
Now he needs me to make him look tame.

Trust me, there is no taming this wild hunk.  
He's built from muscle, music, and a thirst for women.  
He can do whatever he wants.  
Just as long as holds up his end of this crazy lie.

The engagement ring on my finger is just for show.  
But now these feelings between us...  
Well, maybe he'll end up with another love ballad to play when this  
ends.

We were supposed to play pretend.  
*But there's no pretending between the sheets.*

*And now I'm looking at Dex questioning what's fake and real...*

## DEX

“My ass is going to get fired for this, man.”  
“Why?” I asked as I took the ticket and the pen through the jail cell bars.

They were an ugly yellow color, and the walls were the same with the paint chipped. Definitely not a scary kind of jail. Then again, it was a holding cell. And the dude in the next cell sat on a bench all alone, crying like a baby. He had his hands in his face, talking about his wife leaving him.

I looked at the ticket and shook my head.

Funny enough it wasn't the first time I was autographing a ticket.

And not signing the ticket because I was accepting a ticket or admitting any sort of guilt.

This was for a fan.

“Love you guys so much,” Officer Rocsen said. “Saw you on your first tour. Fuck, even before that. The little shit clubs on the strip, man. I was there. Long hair, screaming the lyrics...”

I lifted my eyes. “You cut your hair, huh?”

“Had to.”

“Fucking society.”

“It's called a *fucking paycheck*.”

“I respect that then,” I said.

I wrote on the ticket and handed it back through the bars.

Officer Rocsen grabbed the ticket and looked around to make sure he wasn't going to get busted.

"You'd get in trouble for this?" I asked.

"Fuck yeah," he said. "Last year someone took a selfie with a celebrity who got picked up on a DUI and got canned."

"You better hide that ticket," I said.

"Are you going to say something?"

"Fuck no, brother," I said. "We're good. But, hey, what's with the crier over here?"

"Oh, that guy," Officer Rocsen said. "He was in a park, on a slide, getting... *serviced*..."

"Paid for?" I asked.

Officer Rocsen nodded.

"Damn," I said. "Did you let him finish at least?"

"I didn't make the arrest."

"The way he's crying... not a chance he finished. Damn."

"That's on him," Officer Rocsen said. "Now he's complaining about his wife leaving him. She won't come bail him out."

"See... this is why marriage and love and relationships... it's all bullshit."

"Not unless you find the right one."

"The right one?" I asked. "Give me a break. There's so many *right ones* out there."

"You're a rock star, man, it's easy for you. You could get married every night if you wanted to."

"Then I pop a load and realize it's just another beautiful woman," I said. "And we look deep into each other's eyes and know exactly what just happened. And as her heart is racing, whispering *I fucking love you, Dex... have your fucking babies*... I gently slide my left foot toward her and guide her ass out of the bed." I snapped my fingers. "That... is love."

"That is rock star love."

"It's the only kind I know."

The guy next to me let out another crying whine. Then he fell to his knees and slammed his fists on the floor.

"I love you, Winnie. I can't lose you. You've been distant. It meant nothing..."

"Fuck," I said. "I can't be in here much longer."

"Nothing I can do, man," Officer Rocsen said.

"Of course there is," I said. "You just don't want to risk your ass. Except for an autograph."

"I take this home to my lady and she's going to lose her mind," Officer Rocsen said. "We met after one of your concerts. She was getting sick in a trash can outside the venue. I thought she was drunk but it was food poisoning."

"You wild son of a bitch," I said with a smile. "You were going for the cheap fuck after a show... the drunk whore messed up..." I clapped my hands. "Good for you."

Officer Rocsen laughed. "That's fucked up. And you're saying that to a cop?"

"I'm already behind bars, bro," I said.

"True."

"So what did you do when you found out she had food poisoning?"

"Got her home and left my number on her nightstand."

"Nice guy."

"Checked on her the next morning."

"Even nicer."

"She was feeling a little better and wanted to take a shower. I went to start the shower for her and next thing I knew... we were in the shower together."

"Filthy," I said with a wink.

Officer Rocsen laughed. "Christ. I can't believe that I'm talking to Dex from Filthy Line about this shit right now. Meg is going to flip her lid."

"Give her a call. Get her up on the screen."

"Oh, man, I wish..."

Officer Rocsen looked around, thinking about it.

A heavy door slammed and the boom echoed for a second.

Someone yelled *'Where is that fucking piece of shit now?'*

I clicked my tongue and grabbed the jail cell bars.

I smiled.

*"Well, there's my ride out of here..."*

---

TOBY LOOKED ROUGH.

Like he had been woken up in the middle of the night to come bust out an asshole rock star from jail.

*Wait...*

"A fucking bar fight?" Toby asked.

"Did Dicky call you?"

"Of course he did. He said you got jumped."

"So it wasn't my fault. I was waiting for *Destiny*..."

"Destiny?" Toby asked. "What are you... a fucking hippy now?"

"No," I said. "*Destiny*... the woman at the bar. Fake name. Real tits. I was waiting for her to--"

"Save it," Toby said. He looked at Officer Rocsen. "He's leaving. And if you try any fucking bullshit with paperwork and legalities, I'll fucking have you writing tickets down at the beach for bicycles illegally chained to fucking benches."

"Hey," I said to Toby. "Rocsen is my buddy. Leave him alone."

I put my fist out and Officer Rocsen hit it.

"Oh, fuck," Toby said. "Did he pay your bail?"

"Ah, Toby, come on," I said. "How about I buy you a lady for the night?" I winked at Officer Rocsen. "Hey, still got the one this guy was fooling around with?"

"Fuck, man, you're crazy," Officer Rocsen said with a laugh.

"Let's get the fuck out of here," Toby said. "Smells like piss in here."

"I had to go," I said. "Sorry."

Toby looked down at my dick bulge in my jeans.

"Eyes up here, perv," I said.

"Fuck you," Toby yelled. "You didn't piss yourself."

I slapped Toby's back. "This guy is something, huh?"

"Get me the fuck out of here," Toby said.

"Wait a second," I said. I looked over my shoulder at the crybaby. He was back on the bench, looking at his hands, talking to himself. "Pay his bail too."

"What?" Toby asked. "What the fuck is this?"

"Pay the bail for that guy," I said.

"Are you fucking kidding?" Toby asked. "You're not some vigilante here, Dex."

I looked at Officer Rocsen. "Get the paperwork together. Get him out of here. Let him get home to his wife and see where it goes. Can't

imagine it's good for either of them to be thinking about this shit all night."

"Dex," Toby said. "What the fuck are you doing?"

I leaned toward Officer Rocsen. "Get the wife on the phone too. To be fair, it was a business thing, right? And as long as he didn't look her in the eyes while she was earning her cash... who cares?"

"Ohmygod," Toby said with a sigh. He rubbed his forehead.

I walked by Toby and saw myself out of the police station.

Outside, I took a deep breath of the fresh air that stunk of freedom.

I walked down the steps and paused.

I thought about *Destiny*.

The one that got away.

What if I fell in love with her?

What if I married her?

What if we had ten kids and I taught them how to play guitar?

What if we vacationed around the world on Filthy Line royalty checks?

I laughed.

Like that shit would ever happen.

I would have met *Destiny* in the bathroom and she would have watched the reflection of me behind her, making damn sure she would never forget me. I would have been nice enough to write my name on her lower back. A washable autograph...

"Dex? Filthy Line Dex?"

I turned my head and saw two couples walking by the police station.

Each couple holding hands.

The curly haired blondie with the tall douche looking guy was the one who recognized me.

"Hey you," I said. "Why are you holding his hand and not mine?"

"Because she's engaged," the tall douche guy said.

"He's joking," his fiancée said.

"It's really him," the other guy said. "Holy shit. Can we get a picture?"

"Sure," I said.

The other guy took out a phone and I stood between the two couples.

My right hand touched the lower back of the other girl. But my left hand... that one gently traveled down the curly haired blondie's body. As I crept down to her ass, her fiancé's hand was already there, cupping her sweet little ass.

The picture was taken and I looked at the protective soon-to-be husband and gave him a nod.

He wasn't impressed.

But he should have been.

It would have taken me five minutes tops to have the curly blondie wearing nothing but her engagement ring. Fuck... right in a jail cell too. Why not? It would never turn into love. At least not the kind she had with the tall douche who put the ring on her finger.

"I love your music so much," the curly haired blondie said to me.

"Thanks," I said. "I love you right back."

"We have to get going," the tall douche fiancé said.

"Enjoy the rest of your night," I said. "Don't end up here."

"Hey, why are you here?" the other guy asked.

"You know Sab, right?" I asked.

"Of course. Drummer. Is he in there?"

"He tried fucking a pineapple," I said. "I guess it's illegal to fuck fruit?"

"That's disgusting," the tall douche said.

"I agree," I said.

I winked at the curly haired blondie and they walked away.

The tall douche moved his hand away from the curly blondie.

So I watched her ass rock back and forth.

And I wrote a new Filthy Line song as I became hypnotized by her.

The song was called *Get That Ass Back Here, Babe, We Have Business and By Business I Mean I'm Going to Fuck You Until You Forget Your Name...*

I touched my jaw and it fucking hurt still.

So in one night, I lost *Destiny*, I lost the curly hair blondie, I got bailed out of jail by Toby, and helped some guy who bought some love that didn't work out.

You'd think that would be enough for one person.

Shit... it wasn't even two in the morning.

*I was just getting fucking started.*

---

I SWUNG THE BEER BOTTLE WITH MY RIGHT HAND WHILE MY LEFT HAND was up *Destiny's* shirt, my thumb sliding back and forth over the nipple ring she had promised me was there. The teasing and flirting was taking its toll on everyone in the situation. Not only did the little bar feel good against my thumb, the taste was still on my tongue.

Which was why I had to swing the beer bottle.

I thought the diamond ring on her finger was just for show.

Decoration.

I guess I should have known it was an actual engagement ring.

*What the fuck was it tonight with marriage, love, engagement, tits, and me being so fucking horny?*

The beer bottle shattered against the guy's head before I could answer the question.

He dropped to the floor, holding his head.

Two other guys came toward me.

I looked at *Destiny* and winked.

"It's been fun, but I need my hand back."

"Okay, Dex," she said.

Her name wasn't *Destiny* but I needed the night to be full circle to feel right.

I didn't belong in the bar I was in.

And now taking on a bunch of guys at once... really stupid.

*Destiny* tended to her bloody man on the floor, slapping him across the face, telling him he did this because she didn't want to go out. And that she knew he had been flirting with someone named Erin and that he had slept with someone named Tina last month while she was out of town taking care of her great aunt after her stroke.

*See? What the fuck good is love... it's nothing but problems...*

I hit one of the guys clean on the jaw and dropped him.

The sight of that made the second guy pause. He showed his hands and backed away.

I did the same, showing a sign of peace.

And I needed to *peace the fuck out* of the bar.

I turned and walked right into a cop.

"Shit," I said. "You're like ants at a picnic, huh? Everywhere I go, you're there."

"Turn around, asshole," the cop said.

I turned and he grabbed my hands.

"Listen to me, I've already been arrested tonight," I said.

"Lucky you," the cop said.

Just like that, cuffs were back on my wrists.

The cop turned me around and curled his lip. "I know who you are. You're fucked now. I don't play celebrity bullshit games, Dax."

"It's Dex," I said. "With an e."

"Okay... *Dax*."

"Tough guy," I said.

"Hope it was worth it," the cop said.

I ran everything through my head.

I'd have to call Toby again.

He was probably just falling back to sleep too.

Damn...

I walked out of the bar on my own, hands behind my back.

There were people outside, and when they saw me, here came the phones.

Cameras and videos.

*Shit. Shit. Shit.*

The cop laughed like a prick.

"I really hope it was worth it," he said.

Which meant he was just jealous of my life.

And to be honest... to answer his question...

*Getting tongue tied up with a nipple ring was, and always would be, worth it.*

## Candice

**W**hat would you do if I just showed up?

I stared at the screen on my phone in silence.

*Throw up a few times? Change my name? Fake my own death...*

My thumbs hung over the screen, wondering what I could possibly say. Other than the truth. But the truth probably would set forward a visit that nobody wanted.

Fine, it was me who didn't want the visit.

Or even the texts.

Another text buzzed into my hand.

**I miss you**

That's when I put my phone down on the desk in the office and moved to the front of *Moon Bliss Cafe*. There wasn't enough time in the world to explain how much I hated the name. Or the fact that I wore a black apron with the name embroidered on it. Or the fact that my name was spelled *Candy* instead of *Candice*. Which always prompted me to correct whoever said my name wrong, which then prompted me to tell the story of how and why that happened.

Truthfully, I wanted to say that Gregor was a useless piece of shit who couldn't manage to put a cookie on a plate without spilling the cookie or dropping the plate, but I kept that *big ol'* smile on my face

that everyone loved and joked that the name was spelled wrong by error and I just decided to run with it.

The most common response to that?

*Well, you have a great heart, attitude, and a big smile for it!*

Growing up being teased that I was more mouth than face really left me feeling... *whatever*.

"Hey, there she is," Betty said as she worked behind the counter. "Were you doing managerial duties back there or just checking your DMs?"

I walked to the register and looked out to the tables. There were only two empty.

Which was good.

*Why? Why is it so good, Candice? Why does that matter to you?*

The logical part of my brain that demanded a sense of normalcy said it was good to be busy... because it meant a job. Gregor had all but thrown the keys to the place at me, knowing my previous business ownership would only help both of us grow the business for the cafe. (Which I had done...) Being busy also meant not sitting around wasting time doing dumb things like worrying about the past. I wasn't like Betty. She was young and loved to get paid to do nothing. She loved the days when it rained hard enough to keep people away. She loved to lean over the counter looking forward, scrolling through her phone.

And she hated when I made her do work even when there was no work.

Because there was always work.

*Until the place closes up for good, right? Work right up until you have to leave the key on the counter and leave...*

I cleared my throat and wiped the counter next to the register.

I checked the food case and then checked the food list in the back.

Everything was in order.

Perfectly organized.

Betty was working until close. Misti was coming in so I could leave and attempt something that resembled a life.

Just another day of cruising forward in what was supposed to be my *bridge plan*.

At least that's what Cali called it.

My sister had no problem welcoming me to live at her house after *life happened*. Her price was said to be nothing but the love and

care for her sister. That was a lie though. Her price was words. Lots and lots of words. The genes she had gotten from our parents made her smart, pretty, able to talk for days, but too afraid to take action. Settling into marriage with a doctor gave her comfort and allowed her to pursue her life's work of telling others what to do.

Me... my genes told me to act first, worry later. And that worry then came in the form of making everything look perfect because as long as shit was organized and looked good, nobody would know how fucking crazy I felt.

I walked through the cafe and felt my eyes looking for problems. I needed to find something to fix. A cobweb that would make someone feel gross being in the cafe. Or a table that was just a little bit wobbly. Or a light bulb ever-so-slightly buzzing, whining for a change.

At the front window, I told myself to stop and stare out the window for a second.

*How fucking perfect can this weather get?*

I asked myself that more times than I could ever really admit.

Clear blue sky.

Gentle breeze playing with the palm trees.

Knowing that if I opened the door, I'd get smacked with a comforting warmth and the smell of the city. Sometimes I told myself I could smell the beach too, but I doubt that ever really happened.

I took a deep breath and smiled.

Some days were okay. Some days were better than okay.

Some days were...

*"Fucker!"*

I turned and heard a loud *slam* on the floor.

Betty appeared at the register, holding her hand.

"I burned my fucking hand," she cried out.

I hurried through the cafe, smiling and nodding to everyone who wasn't wearing earbuds and heard what Betty said.

She had such a nice name and was far from what the name suggested.

*Don't worry, Betty, Candice was coming to the rescue... as always.*

---

I RAN HER HAND UNDER COLD WATER AS SHE DANCED ON HER TOES.

"What did you burn it on?" I asked.

"A fucking flaming log," Betty said.

I looked at her. "Was it steam? Did you touch something?"

"I don't remember," she said.

"It happened thirty seconds ago."

"I was dropped as a baby," Betty said. "My parents were the worst."

I shook my head.

I pulled her hand from the water and gently patted it with a soft towel.

Betty hissed and groaned and cursed.

"You shouldn't have said what you did in front of customers," I said.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Are you going to fire me now? Since you're the big, *bad manager*..."

"I'm not the manager," I said.

"You do everything a manager does. Except get paid for it."

I squeezed Betty's hand.

"*Aaahhh!*" she screamed. "What the fuck?"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," a voice chimed in.

Betty and I both put our heads back.

*Fucking Gregor.*

He came from the back of the cafe, eyes down on his phone screen. When he stopped walking, the cloud of his cologne kept going. It was like a scary movie where a fog or mist overtakes a town.

Betty cringed at the first whiff of whatever the hell Gregor thought smelled good.

Then again, this was Gregor. He probably wasn't worried about smelling good over smelling powerful. Rich. Successful. The kind of guy that grew up without a bad day and when he became an adult and turned into a douchebag, his parents bought him a building. Complete with five businesses and five apartments on the second floor. And all he had to do was not let it burn to the ground.

His life was pretend.

*And what's yours, Candice?*

"What's with the language, ladies?" Gregor asked without looking up from his phone.

I looked at Betty and she frowned.

Then she mouthed *porn* to me.

That made me cringe.

I doubted that was what Gregor was watching. But you never knew with him.

There was a slim chance that he was actually doing something productive.

He finally put his phone away and stared at Betty and I.

Gregor was tall and lanky. Like his arms could reach down to his ankles. He had black hair that was slicked back and obviously dyed. I wasn't sure if he had a *real hair* color or was just facing getting gray hair early in life, but he got his hair dyed at least once a week.

He wore a suit jacket with a *v* neck t-shirt. Kind of like he wanted to be some cool, edgy, techy guy. He would change the way he talked, walked, the food he ate, and the stuff he drank. There was a time when he considered banning coffee. From a cafe.

Some days I wondered if I should have let him do it.

See what would happen to business.

But that was Gregor.

The day I showed up to ask for a job, he was working and he hated it. He took his own apron off and threw it at me. There was no interview and I'd been working there ever since.

But anyway...

Gregor pointed to Betty's hand. Then he pointed to the front of the cafe.

He loved to try and talk with hand signals.

"What?" I asked him.

"Who's watching the front?" he asked.

"There's cameras in the office," I said.

"Who's in the office?"

"Nobody," I said.

"So nobody is out front, or in the office... why don't I just throw a few fucking thousand dollars into the air and let people take it?" Gregor asked.

"Throw it my way," Betty said.

"Get out front!" Gregor yelled.

He had a really good yelling voice but nothing to back it up with. The phrase *all bark, no bite* should have been tattooed on his forehead.

Betty pulled away from me.

"Wait a second," I said. "She's burned. She might need medical attention."

"You looked at her," Gregor said to me.

"I'm not a doctor," I said.

"Candice..."

"No doctors," Betty said. "I'm fine. Just stings a little."

"You need ice on it," I said.

"See?" Gregor asked. "You know what you're doing, Candice. Perfect."

"Can she get a bandage at least?" I asked. "To wrap it up?"

"Do we have bandages?" Gregor asked.

"Yes," I said. "There's a first aid kit in the office."

Gregor clapped his hands together. "Perfect! Problem solved. Amazing. Well done. Betty, head to the office and get a bandage. Candice, let's get out front and make sure the register isn't cleaned out."

*Fucking. Dick.*

Betty and I went our separate ways.

Out front it was... *calm*.

As expected.

The same guitar laced indie music playing from the speakers overhead.

The same people sitting on their laptops.

Nobody opened the register and stole the money.

Nobody even so much as took a napkin.

*Maybe.*

"What's the month looking like?" Gregor asked.

He did this thing where he would snap his fingers and clap his hands when he talked about money.

It drove me nuts.

"It's a normal month, Gregor."

"Orders all okay?"

"Yes."

"Inventory spot on?"

"You know I'm just a barista here..."

"Of course," he said. "But you're the best of the best."

"Flattery doesn't work without money," I said.

"Since when are you greedy? Don't you love the entire process of this? I thought this was what you wanted?"

I opened my mouth and Gregor's phone beeped.  
He held his finger up and took a phone call.  
I turned my attention to the front of the cafe because the bell above the door jingled.  
What walked into *Moon Bliss* cafe was trouble.  
The words *sex, hot, fuck, damn, gorgeous* all went through my mind too.  
But as I stared at him and felt my lips shiver, that one word stuck out the most.  
*Trouble.*

---

I SWALLOWED HARD AND TOOK A DEEP BREATH THROUGH MY NOSE.

Every now and again someone *famous* would stroll through the door. I never played into the celebrity thing though. They were just people. Looking for some coffee or something to eat. And if anything, it was cool they chose this cafe because it was low key and I wanted to keep it that way.

But this...

"Candy, huh?" he asked with his smoldering dark blue eyes and scruffy jaw.

His hair was a greasy mess and he smelled like old whiskey and fresh soap.

He was tall and lean, the veins in his arms running down to his hands. His hands were big and strong. When he made fists and put them to the counter, the few rings on his fingers *clinked* against the counter.

In a black t-shirt that was probably a size too big on purpose, showing off an undershirt, everything about him oozed trouble. *And sex.*

*Just admit it, Candice... he is... sex...*

I made myself smile.

"Candy?" I asked.

Without hesitation, he lifted his right hand and with his pointer finger, he touched my chest. I stiffened and almost jumped back. *But I didn't.* I stood there and slowly looked down and watched as he traced the name *Candy* with his finger.

Just above my left breast.

Any other asshole in the world would have been bleeding by then.

But I was frozen with this guy.

At the *y* in *Candy* he pulled his finger away and touched his own lips.

And he kissed his own finger.

Such a pompous, dick move...

*It got to me.*

"Can... I mean... it's not Candy."

"I may not have been a star student, but I know how to read," he said. "Especially when a pretty girl like you writes something on their tit."

Heat and color hit my cheeks.

*Not so subtle, huh?*

I forced another smile. "I'm saying that's not my name. It was a mistake. My name is Candice."

"Candice," he said. "I like that better."

"Good to know," I said. "What can I get you?"

"Well, sweetie, that's a loaded question..."

"Sweetie? Really?"

He grinned at me. "Candice. Candy. Sweet. Sweetie. Problem with that?"

The initial shock of hotness was finally washing off of me.

My nostrils flared.

I looked down at his right hand, back on the counter.

I made a fist and slammed it down to his hand.

"There," I said.

"Damn," he said as he took his hands off the counter. "I need that hand, sweetie."

"For what? Huh? To touch some other woman's chest? And don't call me sweetie. Asshole."

My eyes moved left to right.

Everyone was staring.

Not at us.

But at him.

He flexed his hand and put his hands back to the counter. "I need my hands to play guitar, *Candice*. Why don't you change this hippy,

indie bullshit stuff you call music to a radio station. I'm sure you'll hear me."

"Oh yeah? Why's that?" I asked, trying to be coy.

"Fucking hell," Gregor said. "Listen, Tim, I gotta call you back."

I turned my head and Gregor came running toward the register.

He literally knocked me out of the way and put his hand out.

"Dex," he said. "Fucking Dex. In my place here. Holy fuck, man. This is epic. This is the shit. This is fucking wild. Can I get a selfie? Fuck. No. How about a pic with you in here? Can I put it on the wall?"

I rubbed my shoulder and watched as Gregor oozed all over Dex.

"I couldn't find..." Betty was suddenly next to me and she didn't finish her sentence. "Whoa. Is that Dex?"

"Yeah, it's Dex," I said. "What's the big fucking deal?"

Betty smiled... a rarity.

And she walked to stand with Gregor at the counter.

It was the closest Gregor and Betty had ever been.

As they rambled on to Dex, he moved his eyes and looked at me.

And he winked.

I walked to the back of the cafe and rolled my eyes.

*Some rock star walks into the cafe and I'm supposed to... what... fall in love?*

Dex

I signed a napkin, stood for a couple pictures, and waited for Toby to show up. He was doing this on purpose. Sending me into this bullshit situation where I was going to be tackled for attention.

Except...

*Sweetie* behind the counter.

Her dirty blonde hair pulled back in a messy bun like she just didn't give a damn about herself. A powder blue long sleeve shirt, the sleeves pushed up, the black apron over that with the wrong name above her left breast.

Whether she was damaged or just down on herself, that worked for me two hundred times over.

But... there was one little problem.

*Her eyes.*

I made a career of staring in people's eyes.

Standing on stage in front of tens of thousands of fans... show after fucking show... seeing the Filthy Line shirts, hoodies, cut up shirts made into slutty tank tops... or those who took their shirts off because, face it, it was nicer to look at some tits than the name of my band.

*Right?*

I wasn't in the mood for coffee but I took the free one Betty gave to me.

I nodded, thanked her, and then sat down at an open table.

Everyone around me tried to do the casual stare thing. Pretending they were working or whatever but in reality they were looking at me. That always amazed me. What did they think was going to happen? That I was going to choke on my drink? My food? Did they think I was going to cry or pass out or... what?

There was a second that I pictured myself standing up and pissing on the table.

But that meant *Sweetie* would have to clean it up.

That would get her over to the table though...

I hadn't seen her since she slid her way into the back of the cafe.

Trying to hide from me.

I looked around and finally made my move.

I sighed and shook my head.

*Being a rock star is such a tough life...*

I stood up on the table and whistled.

Everyone looked at me.

Except one woman.

She was lost in typing something.

Earbuds in her ears.

I jumped off the table and walked up behind her.

I pulled the earbuds out of her ears.

"I need your attention, sweetie," I whispered. "Okay?"

She turned and looked at me and gasped.

I walked back to the table and jumped up on it again.

"Now that I have your attention," I called out, "let me introduce myself. I'm Dex. I play guitar for Filthy Line. You know that. If you read what's written about me... it's true. I just got arrested two times in one night. Thank you very much. If you want to get into stats, I can tell you my height, weight, the size of my... shoes..." Everyone laughed. "And the size of my dick."

They all stopped laughing.

"Too far?" I asked. "Damn. Sorry. I'm going to stand up on this table until *Candy* comes out here. Hope you don't mind. I can make this very uncomfortable though. There is nothing I won't say or do. Anyone want to join me on this table? We can break it together. How about you, sweetie?"

I pointed to the woman that I took the earbuds out of her ears.  
Her jaw dropped.

She shut her laptop and hurried to pack everything up.

"Don't leave me," I said. "I can't live without you..." I looked to the next woman. "What about you? You can just stand there and I'll open my jeans..."

I turned my head and saw Candice looking at me.

With disgust.

Perfect and beautiful disgust.

I pointed to her. "There she is. I need her over here or else I'm going to keep going..."

I pointed down to the bulge in my jeans.

Two other people stood up and walked out of the cafe.

The guy who wouldn't stop talking - *Greg? Grey? Gregory? Gregon...?* - went up to Candice and touched her arm. He whispered something to her and the look of disgust became hate.

I knew he told her to get me off the table.

*So how are we going to do that, sweetie? Should I have you take your shirt off? Or maybe make you wear nothing but your apron?*

Candice disappeared into the back of the cafe for a few seconds.

Then she came rushing toward me.

Carrying a towel.

I laughed.

Was she going to swat me with the towel?

*Get the fuck out of...*

At the table, Candice dropped the towel and showed me a big knife.

A really big knife.

"Get down now," she whispered.

"You wouldn't stab the biggest rock star in the world, would you, sweetie?"

She got even closer to me and moved the tip of the knife right to my balls.

No, it wasn't the first time a pretty girl had a knife to my dick and (or) balls.

But I was on a table and she had the position to cause some damage.

"Get off the fucking table," she whispered.

"Fine," I said. "All you had to do was ask."

I jumped off the table.

Candice picked up the knife and hid it under the towel.

When she turned, I touched her arm.

"Wait," I said.

"What?" Candice growled.

"I needed you."

"For what?"

I looked at the table and grinned. "My table is dirty. It looks like someone was walking on it."

Candice's face looked so beautiful and disgusted.

Instead of wiping the table, she spit on it.

She walked away.

I nodded.

*Now that's a woman worth more than just one night.*

---

"I'M NOT REALLY ALL THAT BAD," I SAID. "I JUST LIKE TO HAVE FUN."

Toby lifted his phone off the table and within two seconds he had a picture of me standing on the table, making a lewd gesture to my dick.

I shook my head.

"I don't know about that, Toby," I said.

"It was right here!" Toby yelled.

He slapped the table, drawing the attention of the last two people in the cafe.

They looked for a quick second and then went back to their laptops.

"This indie shit music rotted my brain," I said. "I don't remember a thing."

"Do we have to sit through this?"

I looked across the table to the pencil neck in a tie. Everything perfectly groomed on one, while the other guy looked like he belonged in an old school porn video. What the fuck was it with these lawyers who loved the feathered hair or bushy 'staches and shit? This guy looked fucking terrible.

"Fuck you," I said to the lawyers.

Toby leaned over the table and looked at me. "Dex. They're here to save your ass. Okay? SLECK RECORDS wants to pull out."

I laughed.

"What's so funny?" Toby asked.

The perfectly groomed pencil neck said, "I believe it's because you said *pull out*. Meaning, right before ejaculation, you pull--"

"I know what that is," Toby said. "Thank you, Franklin."

"Franklin?" I asked.

"Franklin and Barry," Toby said.

"Where's the third one?" I asked. "You know... it's usually three names for a law firm..."

"They're not a law firm," Toby said. "They're on retainer by the record company. And they're here to talk about what you did."

"Which is what?"

"You were arrested twice in the same night, Dex," Barry said. He had a stern voice. "you were bailed out of two different police stations within hours of one another. Charges are pending. And with the record you have..."

Franklin reached out. "It's nothing we can't handle."

"Good," I said. "I fucking love this. Get it done, boys."

I started to stand but Toby sat me back down. "It's not that easy."

"Fuck," I said.

"Fuck," Toby said.

"You fucked up," Franklin said. "And we love fuck ups. They're our favorite. But..."

"Always a but," I said.

"Can I get you gentlemen anything else?" a sweet voice chimed in. It was like a breath of heaven as I turned my head, knowing it was Candice.

"We're perfect," Toby said. "And thank you for letting us sit here and talk. And I again apologize about earlier. If there's any business that was lost..."

"I'll pay for it," I said. "I'll stuff the register. You don't mind one dollar bills covered in glitter, right, sweetie?"

"Christ, Dex," Toby said as he looked up at the ceiling.

Barry and Franklin were stone faced.

Candice stared at me. "You know it's only cool if you're giving those one dollar bills out. Not keeping them. Not putting your own glitter on them. And what kind of man has glitter?"

"A rock star," I said.

"And what do you need glitter for?" Candice asked.

"No," Toby said.

He lowered his head to the table and hit it on purpose three times.

I grinned. "Well, sweetie, I like to cover my balls in glitter. That way after the show I can play a game called *disco balls*..."

Candice shook her head and walked away, her face bright red.

"What the hell are you trying to do?" Toby asked.

"I think we need to have an even more serious talk," Barry said.

"Like what?" I asked.

"You need to figure something out, Dex."

"Barry, wait," Franklin said.

"No," Barry said. "This guy is laughing in our faces."

"They all do," Franklin said.

"There's four more of him," Toby said. "Buckle up."

"I'll keep it simple," Barry said. "You need to do something, Dex. What? I'm not sure. But something. You need to take the attention off of this crazy side of yours. Without it, we can't do our job. I'm not going to stand representing you while you're acting like this."

"That's a decent point," Franklin said.

"So what do I do? Build a park for kids? Donate to a school or something? Clean trash off the highway?"

"That's where you're headed with these charges piling up, Dex," Toby said.

"Fuck that," I said. "We've got songs to record. Shows to play."

"Not at this rate," Franklin said.

I stood up.

"Fuck this," I said.

"Dex, just listen," Toby said.

I walked away from the table and left the cafe.

I climbed onto my motorcycle and made the fucker growl. I throttled it, making her scream as loud as I wanted to make Candice scream.

Then I took off, getting the fuck away from Toby, lawyers, and whatever bullshit charges that were waiting for me.

*My only regret was not stealing a kiss from Candice.*

---

IT HAD BEEN MY IDEA TO RENT THE WAREHOUSE AND TURN IT INTO A rehearsal spot for the band. Jamming at each other's houses had its ups and downs, but there was nothing like having a real space. We filled it with a shit ton of instruments, recording equipment, plenty of couches, and we got some really cool lights installed on the ceiling so the annoying buzz of the fluorescent lights didn't drive us too crazy.

I probably spent more time there than the others.

It was a home away from home.

It took me back to the earlier days, before the fame. All the shit places we would find to practice and live in. Waking up in some room in some house, trying to find some clothes and maybe a couple slices of pizza to swipe before darting out only to have the midday sun punch me so hard in the face it was almost impossible to open my eyes.

And all we wanted was more.

More of everything.

The hunger and the greed were the lifeblood of the band and the music. And anyone who wanted to stand in the way ended up flat on their ass.

Including these legal issues.

*SLECK RECORDS* wanted the band, signed the band, and they'd been a pain in the ass since day one. First they rode the hell out of Nash over his tabloid reputation. And now it was my turn. Except I was facing charges. Charges meant lawyers, court, judges, talking, defending, convincing, listening... fuck, I'd end up having to wear nice clothes to face it all too.

"Fuck," I whispered as I punched in the code to the rehearsal space.

I swore it was the most desolate building on earth.

It looked like some steel container you'd see on a dock.

And you'd never know what was inside unless you... well, were invited inside.

I opened the door to find the rest of the band waiting for me.

Jay and Reed strumming acoustic guitars. Reed's bass stood next to him on a stand, waiting her turn. Sab looked passed out on one of

the couches, his right arm over his face, his left foot on the floor.

And Nash sat on a table and stared right at me.

He looked pissed.

But then he smiled.

"How was your night?" he asked me as he slid off the table.

I walked right by them and went to my guitar. I flicked the power button on the amp and sat down as I strummed the guitar. The tone was clean, deep, with a good chunk of reverb to keep the sound bouncing. I climbed my fingers up the neck of the guitar and bent a note as far as I could before answering Nash's question.

"They set me up," I said.

"Who did?" Sab asked as he spoke from the couch without moving his arm off his face.

"Those fucking assholes," I said. "I was at Dicky's. Minding my own business. Besides *Destiny*..."

"*Destiny*?" Reed asked. "Never mind. Sorry I said that."

"Not what you think," I said. Then I puckered my lips. "Shit. It is what you think. Just a fake name thing. I was sitting there while she went to the bathroom and then these guys jumped me. They set it up so the cops would be there as I fought back. Cops took me in."

"That was one of two," Nash said.

"The second one... I was just giving *Destiny* the attention her man wasn't."

"Wait a second," Sab said as he finally sat up. "You met two women named *Destiny* in the same night?"

"Shit, that's *destiny* for sure then," Reed said.

"No," I said. "I called the second one *Destiny*. To complete the night. Couldn't stop thinking about her, so I replaced her."

"That's messed up," Nash said. "Even for us. That's serial killer thinking."

"Nobody died," I said. "Except my hard dick. You know how long it's been-"

"Did you talk to the lawyers?" Reed asked.

"You knew about that?" I threw back at him.

"Toby told us he was meeting with you," Nash said. "Then he slipped it in at the last second. We would have been there for you, Dex."

"What did they say?" Sab asked.

"I may have caused a scene," I said. "Used some language. Walked out."

"Fuck," Nash said. "If the charges hold up..."

"We don't get charged," I said. I stood up. "We're fucking rock stars, Nash. We're Filthy Line. We don't get charged. We don't get into real trouble. We don't go to jail. Come on..."

"Can I say something here?" Jay asked.

"Sure," I said. "Can't wait to hear your opinion on this."

"Someone is fucking with me," he said.

We all looked at him.

"Fucking with you how?" I asked.

"There's a story going around that I fucked a pineapple," Jay said.

"You did what?" Reed asked.

I started to laugh. "Shit... that's a crazy story..."

"How did we go from Dex ending up in jail to Jay fucking a pineapple?" Nash asked.

"Rock stars," Sab said.

"Let's just play something here," I said. "Let's write something fucking awesome."

I stepped on my distortion pedal and let my guitar growl.

I stood there and the growl sound turned into screeching feedback.

Jay walked to his guitar.

Sab got behind his drum kit.

Reed traded his acoustic guitar for his bass.

And Nash stood at the microphone.

I started to play a riff I had been messing with for a little while. It was sloppy and catchy. *Kind of like me...*

Sab started to step on his hi-hat pedal, finding the pace of the riff.

He added in some drums and it started to sound like a song.

I turned to face Jay and it took him all of five seconds to pick up what I was playing. He mimicked the riff a few times and then started to play something on his own. Which gave the song a true sound. A good sound. That Filthy Line sound.

Reed started slamming on his bass and that filled in the gaps, where the drums and guitars couldn't fill.

And just like that... we had the beginning of a new song.

Nash looked around at us, feeling the song, and then he waved at us to stop playing.

"That's good," he said.

"Can't just play that for four minutes," Reed said.

"Then write a fucking riff," I said.

"I'll get something," Jay said.

"Let me work on the beat too," Sab said. "Can we throw that down on a track quick?"

"Yeah, no problem," Nash said. "This is good. We needed this. Maybe we can get this done, recorded, and throw it to Toby to throw to SLECK to release as a surprise to our fans. Take the heat off things."

Nash looked at me.

Since when did getting arrested become such a bad thing?

"We need a name for the new tune," Reed said.

I grinned at Nash and nodded.

"What?" he asked.

"Let's call the new song... *Destiny*."

## Candice

**C***hateau de Cali.*

I snorted to myself as I stepped from the fake, custom wood deck down to the even more custom stone pathway. Not that I was in any place to ever judge anyone on their life, but I wondered why people with money spent a lot of money to sometimes make it look like they had no money.

The stone walkway to and through the rose garden was made up of ugly, uneven stones. The path wasn't straight. Parts were overgrown - on purpose.

Designed to give it some kind of *look*.

*Dr. Keith* did some traveling in Europe before medical school and he decided he wanted this kind of stone pathway and garden when he finally settled down. And by settling down, that meant meeting my sister, falling madly in love with her, and that was that. She pushed him through med school and now Keith was a pretty famous ortho surgeon, often being the guy dealing with pro athletes.

I reaped the benefits of his strange love for the rose garden.

Nobody walked through it.

It was just for show, something to talk about.

I sipped a cup of coffee and quite honestly wished it was a real drink.

Gregor made Betty go to a store to find a frame and then pick up the copy of the picture of him and Dex. He wanted it right on the wall next to the register. I wasn't a fan of that but it wasn't my business, right?

The only thing I could hope for was that seeing Dex on the wall in a frame would maybe keep him away from the cafe.

Watching the way he was around people was more than upsetting.

It was gross.

He was a total douche of the worst kind. Thinking the world revolved around himself with no care for anyone else.

Not to mention the fact that he was at the cafe to meet with his lawyers.

*Lawyers...*

And if they didn't think I wasn't listening, *oh well*.

I may have hated the whole famous thing but if they were going to sit there in the cafe I worked at and talk about legal stuff, I wanted to hear.

I refused to even think about looking Dex up online either. No way I was going to dive head first into the nonsense of gossip.

So I sipped my coffee and walked toward the rose garden.

I felt *snooty* calling it the rose garden, but Keith had a sign made that said so.

And that wasn't a lie either.

A fucking wood plank hanging crooked off a pole that said *rose garden*. Along with the date he and Cali met, got married, and the day Carter was born.

My little nephew, who was the spitting image of me as a kid, which was kind of weird. Well, it wasn't weird, not until one night when Cali had too much wine and tried to make a joke that came off as too true and crude about me and Keith sleeping together behind her back.

Everyone laughed it off, but is sure as hell made it so much more uncomfortable living in the basement of their massive house, always wondering if my sister actually thought that was real for a second.

I looked at the sign to the rose garden and started to laugh.

This wasn't me.

This wasn't where I was supposed to be living.

At all.

I missed my old place.

My little apartment on the third floor that smelled like chicken broth and burning garlic. All the little quirks that made it home and made it mine...

"Didn't know you were home."

I turned my head and chased away anything that felt like tears and plastered a smile on my face.

Cali had a good heart, but if you cried near her, she would find a way to explain why it was your fault. It was done out of love and most of the time she was right, but what about someone just being there in silence while you felt like shit for a second?

"Surprise," I said.

"Did you get fired?" Cali asked, cringing.

"No," I said, fake cringing back at her.

She was in a red, checkered pattern shirt - *not flannel* - and had a basket hanging off her arm that matched. Along with a pair of shears in her hand. And gloves that matched the basket.

I pointed.

"I'm going to cut some flowers," she said. "Make my own arrangement for the dining room table."

"Well then," I said. "Welcome to the rose garden."

Cali pointed the shears at me. "Don't be a bitch about it."

"I'm not. You know how I feel about flowers," I said with pain in my heart.

"I know," Cali said. "And how long are you going to stand there and not actually enjoy the garden? I told you the place is yours. I meant it. Everything is yours."

*Except your husband, right? Ohhh... burn...*

"I appreciate it," I said. "The basement is fine."

"Carter wants to have another sleepover," Cali said. "He loves the idea of sleeping over Aunt Candice's and then just walking upstairs in the morning to be home."

I laughed. "He's something. You're in trouble with that kid."

"Why?" Cali asked, frowning with her classic defensive face.

She would have made a kickass lawyer if she didn't bail on law school to be with Keith. That was the biggest and most rebellious thing she had ever done in her life. And I was so proud of her for it. Even if she never did anything risky like that ever again.

"Carter has the brains of Keith," I said. "And your attitude. That's deadly."

"That just means he'll be able to take care of himself."

"Oh, he will."

Cali moved toward me, the shears still pointed at me. "You're upset."

"No."

"Yes."

"About what?"

"That fucker that owns that cafe," Cali said.

My eyes went wide. "Not a fan of Gregor?"

"Not the way he treats my sister. Then again, my sister should just stand up for herself, kick the guy in the balls, and leave."

"What have you been drinking today?" I asked. "You're fired up. And now you're going to cut some flowers for fun."

"Don't turn this on me. What did he do now?"

"It actually has nothing to do with Gregor," I said.

"Then what is it?"

"Can't I just have a *blah* day?"

"You've had a lot of them lately," Cali said.

"Cali, I'm not in the mood."

"Fine," she said. "Do what you want. Whatever works."

As Cali walked by me, giving me her guilt laced attitude, I put my head back and sighed.

"Trent texted me today," I said. "A bunch of times. That's all."

Cali nodded. She pursed her lips. Looked at me. Looked away. Looked at me again.

"I know," I said. "You asked. I told you. I know."

*I'm not talking about the rock star that showed up and fucked up my day... or the fact that I can't get him out of my mind.*

"Not to bring up another sore subject... but Clark..."

"Oh, Cali," I said. "Why did you do that?"

"What?"

"You set me up on a date?"

"I talked about you. Bragged about you. That's all. He's a nice guy. Perfect for you."

"What makes someone perfect for me?"

"Why do you have to be so self-righteous?" Cali asked. "You hate that your life is so flawed yet you embrace the flaws. You love them."

You secretly love everything wrong."

I swallowed hard. My right hand twitched as I considered slapping Cali. It sucked now that we were adults and she had a husband and a kid that me slapping her would be such a bad thing.

"I'm sorry," Cali said. "I've had a long day too. But you said you would go out with him. One date. Not even a date. Just dinner. What's the problem? If you don't take a chance..."

"You're telling me to take a chance," I said with a laugh.

"Fine. You're right. I opened my mouth. I stuck my foot in there too. I got caught up in a moment... I was with Keith and Clark was there and I had this vision of the four of us together. I messed up, Candice. There? Happy now?"

"Actually I am," I said. "And for that, I will go on your pity date."

"Pity date?"

"Yeah. It's a pity date. I'm going to show up. I'm going to talk, laugh, order something expensive, and then leave before the check comes."

"Candice..."

"No," I said. "That's how this goes. That way I can say I went out with Clark, okay? Then everyone can complain about me. How bad I am and all of that."

Cali sighed. "You can't just give it a chance?"

"I said I'd go. Okay?"

"I'll give him a call," Cali said. "And then I'll text you his number." Cali took two steps and paused. "You know this Trent thing isn't going to end well, right?"

"Yeah, I know," I said.

"I'm torn on it, Candice."

"Well, good thing it wasn't your heart broken into pieces," I said.

"I didn't mean it like that."

"Yes you did," I said. "Go enjoy your rose garden, Cali. It's really a beautiful thing."

I looked down at the coffee, which had to have been cold by then. I pictured Dex standing on that table, ready to drop his jeans. It didn't make sense how one day could be so fucking crazy. *Then again, all it took was one day to change everything in your life.*

---

I WENT OVER THE PURCHASE ORDERS THEN MADE SURE BOTH BETTY AND Misti were getting everything organized for tomorrow morning already.

It had been a slowish kind of day, but that wasn't always a bad thing.

Being caught up wasn't good enough.

I liked to be ahead of things.

As I walked to the counter, I saw the picture of Dex and Gregor on the wall.

I shook my head and kept myself distracted.

Betty stepped up next to me. "Want me to make your day shitty?"

"Try me," I said.

"Customer just called to tell me the women's toilet is clogged."

"Called you...?"

"Yeah," Betty said. "She must have done something and then got embarrassed and left."

I looked at the bathroom door and shut my eyes and sighed. "Okay."

"I'm not going in there," Betty said. "Not with Misti here. I have seniority over her."

"I'm not sending Misti into the bathroom," I said. "She'll end up staring at herself for hours in the mirror."

"Trying to figure out why there's two of her," Betty said with a laugh.

I smiled. "That's terrible."

"That's true," Betty said.

"Let me just call Otto."

Otto lived in one of the apartments above the building and he took care of all the maintenance... and emergencies. He would never come take care of a toilet for anyone but me. Nobody else was allowed to call him personally but me. If there was one thing in my life I learned it was that everyone had a purpose. And I hated the idea that Otto got treated as *just the maintenance guy*. Without him, the building wouldn't function.

He picked up on the third ring with a his gruffy, aged voice.

"'ello?" Otto yelled into the phone.

"Otto, it's Candice."

"Well, hey there! I take it you're not calling me for a hot date?"

"Well... you can have a hot date with the bathroom issue down here."

Otto laughed. "Have you tried unplugging it and plugging it back in?"

"Of course I did," I said, smiling. "Still won't work."

"I'll be right down, Candice," he said. "Don't let anyone else touch anything in there."

"Otto, you're the best ever," I said.

"You mean that?"

"Definitely. Three sugars, no cream, and a blueberry muffin to go?"

"You're trying to get to my heart through my stomach, aren't you?"

"I'm smarter than I look," I said.

"You're as pretty as you are smart too, Candice. I'll be right down."

Otto never said goodbye.

The call would just end.

I rang up the coffee and muffin because *god forbid* Gregor gave something away to someone like Otto for free.

It was the least I could do for bothering him in the middle of the day.

Otto showed up ten minutes later and had the toilet fixed in even less time.

When he was done, he strutted to the counter with his work belt filled with tools around him, waddling with a limp on his left leg that he swore didn't exist. He smiled with his bushy mustache and his thick eyebrows lifted when he smiled. If you asked him his age he'd tell you he was once only twenty-one. Gregor told me he was in his seventies. But Otto didn't look a day over fifty.

His fingers were thick, calloused, cracked, and had that forever dirty look to them because he had worked with his hands all of his life.

"All fixed?" I asked.

"Of course," he said.

"Here you go," I said, pointing to the coffee and muffin.

Otto reached for money and I stopped him.

"Candice..."

"Otto..."

"I don't take handouts."

"I didn't hand it to you," I said. "I slid it to you."

He growled at me.

"Are you going to write this up?" I asked him.

"No," he said.

"And why not?"

"Because *you know who* will get mad that you didn't do the work yourself."

"Otto..."

"Candice," he said. He swiped the bag with the muffin off the counter. Then he took the coffee and sipped it. "Perfect. As always."

"Thank you, Otto."

"That's all I need to hear."

Otto waddled to the door.

He opened it and I felt like smiling.

But that went away.

Really fast too.

Otto held the door for someone.

*Dex was back again.*

---

"DON'T PULL A KNIFE ON ME AGAIN, SWEETIE," HE SAID. "I'M JUST HERE for another meeting."

I kept the counter between us.

"You can sit anywhere. I'll have someone take care of you."

"Really? Someone is going to take care of me right here? You know, that usually costs a lot..."

My nostrils flared. "Someone will bring you something to drink. Or eat. Whatever."

"Has to be you, sweetie."

"Why?"

"You're not starstruck."

"I don't care what you want."

"I'm meeting lawyers again," Dex said.

"Good for you. I assume you got yourself into trouble."

"Trouble sort of finds me."

"That's the dumbest thing to say, ever."

"Is it though? What about if I said the sky was purple and elephants had necks like giraffes? That seems dumb."

I sighed. "What do you want?"

"Not sure yet, sweetie. I have to impress these lawyers though. And Toby. He manages the band."

"I'm so impressed right now," I said.

Dex backed away from the counter. "I think I have something up my sleeve. Just make sure you come to the table. I promise if you do that, I won't make a scene. I won't chase anyone out. I won't ask anyone to flash me, including you. And I swear on my life I won't reference my dick once."

"Fine. Deal."

Dex winked and walked to a table.

A minute later in walked the same three people from the day before.

Toby and the two lawyers.

This time, Dex seemed a little calmer. More welcoming. More...

"Why the fuck am I watching this?" I whispered to myself.

I went back to being busy for a minute until I had to go to the table.

When I got there, the tension was intense.

Dex reached for my hand and squeezed it. "Get these guys anything they want, Candice. Okay?"

I pulled my hand away.

*Was he being nice?*

This wasn't a real restaurant, so it was two coffees and one tea.

They were all deep in conversation as I brought their drinks to the table.

Dex reached for my hand again.

I tried to pull it away but he rubbed his thumb down the middle of my palm. The chills it sent through me...

I didn't realize the tips of my toes could get chills.

And I did not like nor want my body to react like that.

It made me freeze in place.

"So I need to make a bold statement," Dex said. "Right?"

"Right," Toby said.

Dex stood up.

He stood next to me.

He then moved his hand and interlocked his fingers to mine.

When I tried to pull away, he squeezed tighter.

"How about this for a bold statement," Dex said with a grin.

He looked at me and winked.

Then he addressed Toby and the lawyers.

*"Candice and I have been secretly engaged... and it's time to tell the world about our love story."*

Dex

Not only did she rip her hand away from mine, she wiped her hand on her apron and then took a swing at me. Her aim was way off and instead of slapping me across the face, she hit Toby upside the head with a half closed fist.

Toby fell to his left, crashing into Barry.

Candice gasped, covered her mouth, and looked ready to cry.

"That's actually not the worst proposal I've ever had," I said to Franklin.

"I'm so sorry," Candice said to Toby. "I'm... he..."

Toby waved to Candice. "It's fine. You have a hell of a hit there, Candice. Maybe grab me some ice?"

"Of course," she said.

She looked at me and scowled before running away.

"See you soon, sweetie," I yelled to her. I laughed. "She's fucking wild, huh?"

"This is insane," Barry said. "Have you lost your mind, Dex?"

"What?" I asked. "You wanted a statement, there it is."

"That's not a statement," Barry said.

"Actually, it is," Franklin said. "It could work."

"What?" Barry and Toby asked at the same time.

We all turned our heads and watched as Candice came rushing back to the table.

"I am so sorry about that," she said to Toby.

"It's fine," Toby said. "A lot of people want to hit Dex. Even me."

"Don't be so worried, sweetie," I said to Candice. "You're protected now. With me, nothing bad can ever happen to you."

Barry scoffed.

I reached for the knot on Candice's apron and tugged at it.

She grabbed my arm and dug her nails hard into my skin.

"Don't," she said.

"She's so serious at work," I said. "I love that about her."

Candice stepped back. "I don't know what this is... but it's never going to happen."

"We can't get into another fight," I said. "I might end up doing something crazy again."

"That's on you," she said to me. "Not me. You. I'm sending someone else out here to take care of you. And if you do something else, I'm calling the police. I don't care if you're here with lawyers." She looked at Barry and Franklin. "You two should know that anything he says is bullshit anyway."

She spun around and her dirty blonde hair danced behind her.

I smiled, appreciating her hair... but mostly her ass.

That thing just moved left to right... left to right...

If that was how she walked when she was pissed at me then our engagement was going to be filled with a lot of fights.

*Not to mention how good angry sex was...*

Toby snapped his fingers a few times. "Dex. New plan. You tried. Time to talk real for a second."

"Which is throw yourself into an apology tour," Barry said. "Hit every radio station, TV show, magazine... social media influencer... we line it up and you take the hard questions and tout sobriety."

I laughed. "Sobriety?"

"It's the only way out of this," Barry said.

"I like the fake engagement better," I said.

"She doesn't," Toby said, pointing toward the counter.

"She's just confused," I said.

"She hates you," Barry said.

"Well, it doesn't have to be her," Franklin said. "I mean, it could be anyone. Right? The idea works."

"Listen to this guy, Toby," I said.

"How does it work?" Toby asked.

"Dex is the hot, bad boy rock star," Franklin said. "He's wanted... in more than one way. So imagine he pops out in the public eye with a pretty girl on his arm, wearing a diamond ring. Everyone will lose their minds over it. And from there Dex just spills the story."

"We can have Olivia write it," I said. "Look what she did with Nash. Saving the band's ass."

"What is there to write?" Toby asked. "The questions... they'll see through it."

"Not a chance," I said. "Candice and I had been together for a while. We kept it secret because of my life. The way the rock star life really is. I can paint the dark picture of drugs and booze, but go beyond it. The fans. The cameras. The gossip. I never wanted her swallowed up in that. So we kept everything hidden. The recent situations... it was because of that. Unable to hold my fiancée's hand outside. Take her to dinner. Go get a drink like a normal couple."

"In other words, deflect," Barry said.

"In a really heartfelt way," Franklin said.

Toby rubbed his jaw. He held the ice to the side of his head. "But it's not going to happen with the one who hit me."

"That's fine," Franklin said. "We can work that out easily. There's a million women waiting for Dex."

I turned my head and saw Candice in the walkway to the back of the cafe.

When she saw me looking at her, she stepped out of sight.

"Nah," I said. "It's her or nobody."

"Dex, look at me," Toby said.

I looked at him.

He lowered the ice from his head. "This idea is fucking crazy in itself. But it actually makes a little bit of sense. So I'll run with it for the moment. There is no way in hell you're going to play games here though. You're not going to pick and choose and-"

I reached out and poked Toby in the side of the head where Candice had hit him.

He moved his head and groaned in pain.

I stood up.

"Give me one day," I said. "If I don't have Candice saying she's engaged to me, then you can pick someone else for me."

"It's your ass on the line here, Dex," Barry said.  
"That's right," I said. "Now let me work my magic."  
"To be fair, your *magic* got you into this position," Franklin said.  
I looked at Toby.  
It was my warning look.  
Franklin wasn't my fucking friend. Neither was Barry.  
It was time for everyone to leave.  
Toby took the hint.  
"Gentlemen," he said. "Let's leave Dex to his own mind. We can figure this out."  
"This is a mistake," Barry said.  
I grabbed the edge of the table and lifted it.  
Two coffees and one tea spilled all over Barry and Franklin.  
The drinks had cooled enough so they didn't burn them.  
*Too bad.*  
"Fuck, Dex," Toby said to me.  
I didn't say a word.  
Barry and Franklin stood and backed up, coffee and tea dripping from their clothes. I put the table down and reached for a napkin holder from the table behind me. I threw it at Barry.  
"Clean yourself up," I said.  
"You're going to go to jail," Barry said.  
"That's enough," Toby said.  
He hurried to get Barry and Franklin out of the cafe.  
I turned my head again and saw Candice pointing to me.  
Two girls started to walk toward the table.  
One was familiar, one wasn't.  
I wasn't in the mood for the autograph nice guy bullshit routine.  
I put a few big bills on the table to cover the coffee, tea, cleanup, and tip, and then I walked to the front of the cafe.  
As I opened the door, I knew Candice was looking at me.  
I turned and lifted my left hand and gently tapped my ring finger.  
*Candice lifted her left hand and gave me the middle finger.*

---

YOU ARE MY DESTINY,

*Everything I try to please,  
Only one bringing me to my knees,  
Walk all night because I can't sleep*

I STOPPED PLAYING AND FOLDED MY ARMS.

The song kept going until Reed saw me and then he stopped playing.

Then Sab.

Jay was still jamming.

Nash held a notebook in his hand.

"YOU ARE MY DEST..."

He looked at me and stopped.

"What the fuck?" Nash asked.

"You're really writing that?" I asked.

"It's a perfect song," Nash said. "I love destiny. It fits the band."

"And it'll tie into your bullshit," Jay said.

"You know, Jay, I saw a pineapple at a little fruit stand on the way over here... need a date tonight?"

"Fuck you, Dex," Jay said.

Sab laughed from behind the drum kit. "We should get shirts with pineapples on them."

"With a little hole in the middle," Reed said.

"A little hole?" Jay said. "Fuck you guys. You want to shit on me for some rumor about me fucking a piece of fruit? Good. But don't even call into question the size of the hole needed for me to--"

"We wanted to take this to the studio," Nash said, staring at me, pretending like nobody was there. "What the fuck is the problem?"

"I got stuck with the lawyers again today," I said. "I have an idea up my sleeve. It's fucking crazy. They know it. I got one of the lawyers to buy into it. And that helped Toby."

"What's the plan?" Reed asked.

"I'm engaged," I said.

"What?" Sab asked. "Engaged? To be married?"

"It's a good story," I said. I eyed Nash. "Might need Olivia."

"Not a chance in hell," Nash said. "You're not using her for that."

"What's the problem then?" Jay asked. "You fake an engagement. Big deal."

"Yeah, you're right," I said. "I'm just thinking about what happened. Those fucking assholes set me up. Had me jumped. They know we own this city and the stage and the fans."

"Maybe you need a drink and a woman," Sab said.

"He's engaged," Reed said. "He has to be good. No cheating."

"Fuck, that's the worst thing I've heard all day," I said.

"Can we just play this song?" Nash asked. "Throw it over to Toby to hear. He can take it to SLECK as a demo. They'll calm down when they hear it. Then you can find your fake fiancée, parade her around for a little while, and then come to terms with a mutual breakup."

"Fuck, isn't this life the best?" Jay asked.

"Beats fucking a pineapple," I said.

Jay opened his mouth and I cut him off by playing the opening riff to the destiny song.

We ran through the entire song filled with Nash's cool, catchy, maybe a little corny lyrics about destiny. For some, destiny was love and forever. For Filthy Line, destiny was loud music, good booze, and wild sex.

We finished the song and Nash called Toby.

Sab poured all of us two shots each.

They went down smooth.

I snuck outside and used my phone to get a ride.

I was going to go to the strip club and kick back and unwind.

*Would a fiancé do that?*

"Ah, shit," I said.

I couldn't go to the strip club unless I had my fiancée with me.

Which meant... change of plans.

*I had to go find my fiancée first.*

---

I HAD THE DRIVER STOP AT THE CORNER AND TOLD HIM TO KEEP HIS ASS right there until I came back. He gave me a two finger wave and a smile. Only because he was making a ton of money by the hour and by the mile. In his mind he was hoping I'd come back three hours

later, drunk and high, with two women, and then have them put on a show in the backseat of the car while we drove to Tijuana and back.

*Fuck you, my man...*

This was the tamest ride I ever needed in my life.

Which in itself was fucking wild.

I walked along the sidewalk toward the cafe.

The lights inside were all turned off except the ones behind the counter. Those four bulbs buzzing and burning, showing off the name and logo of the business, along with the clean counter and glass case.

I stood near the door, looking between the text on the glass of the name and the hours.

All the chairs were flipped up on the tables.

My eyes followed the glistening trail of wetness on the floor and I spotted Candice on the far side of the wall. A mop in one hand, her other hand sliding a frame left to right as she tried to center it.

I watched carefully and knew Franklin was right. That goddamn lawyer. My idea was smart, his process was smart. There were plenty who would sign up to wear a diamond ring, hang off my arm, and smile for the cameras to help ease the hammer ready to be swung at my ass.

But I wanted Candice to do it.

I had no idea why either.

But when something was locked in my mind...

I gently knocked on the door.

Candice quickly turned and her eyes started to tell her story.

It came down to her eyes.

She leaned the mop against a table and walked to the door.

When she realized it was me, she stopped and shook her head.

She pointed to her wrist and mouthed *'We're closed!'*

I pointed down and mouthed *'I'm open!'*

Candice shook her head again and walked away.

I grabbed the handle and pulled.

*Locked.*

I curled my lip.

I knocked on the door again.

Candice showed me her middle finger and I stared at her ass swaying back and forth as she walked back to the mop. She grabbed

it, spun around and looked at me again.

I moved from the door to the window.

And we just stared at each other.

So I did the proper thing... I dropped to one knee. I held my right hand out as though I had a ring to give her.

She laughed.

*She fucking laughed.*

But she didn't open the door.

She picked up the mop and started to walk to the back of the cafe.

Not before pausing to take the picture of me and the owner of the cafe off the wall.

She held it out, then dropped it, letting the frame shatter on the floor.

With a shoulder shrug and that amazing ass of hers, she disappeared into the back of the cafe.

I stayed there on one knee for a little bit longer.

Thinking.

My lips tingling for a little more whiskey.

*And a lot more of Candice.*

## Candice

**H**ope you sleep and dream well my love ;)

I read the text message and hurried to put my phone on the nightstand and rolled all the way to the other side of the bed. It was way too big of a bed for one person and I wasn't sure if my sister purposely did that as a way to remind me that I was single. Her subliminal mind games to get me to feel alone and find a way to move on or something.

I pulled the covers up over my head like that was going to hide me.

I was already hidden.

Just not from my phone.

Unless I didn't answer it.

That then gave the appearance that I was hidden. Or gone.

The phone buzzed again.

I groaned and told myself not to look at the phone.

It didn't matter...

I turned and reached for the phone.

**Miss you with all of my heart. And I know you're reading these texts.**

Now that pissed me off.

It was one thing to text me and act like you were part of my life still. But to just sit there and assume I was reading those texts with... what? An open heart? A heavy heart? With care? Love?

My fingers went to work.

And with every word I typed I kept seeing Dex standing outside the cafe. Like how much of a total dick could you be to me? Bad enough I had to close up the cafe because Misti had no problem announcing to everyone that she was getting waxed because her *bush was turning into a beast*. All I had wanted to do was clean up the cafe, leave, and be done with the day. The last person I expected or wanted to see was fucking Dex from Filthy Line standing outside the cafe. As I stood there with a mop in my hand. Feeling... I didn't even know what.

Then he had the nerve to get on one knee.

He was dead serious about this fake engagement thing.

*What an asshole.*

Either that or he was making fun of me. Just messing with me. Showing off his rock star status while I was busy mopping the dirty floors of a cafe.

So... yeah... *still an asshole.*

Except now, my fingers were hard at work dealing with a different kind of asshole.

*Trent.*

**Not sure why you keep texting me, Trent. But you can stop. What's done is done. I made that clear to you. Leave me the hell alone.**

It wasn't poetic and a long book of me cutting into him and all of his flaws.

But it was at least to the point, right?

The problem with Trent... it was like feeding a stray animal. Do it once and it won't leave you alone.

**Good to hear from you finally ;)**

That made me laugh.

He was still as arrogant as the day I met him.

And no matter what he did that was wrong, he had a way to twist it to make it right. The worst of it... he was just so damn believable all the time. Which was my fault. My flaw in believing everything he said and did.

**Don't get quiet on me now, Candice.**

My fingers touched the screen again.  
There was a lot I could type to him.  
But I kept it classy.  
A middle finger emoji.  
And if he decided to text me again, I'd do the same thing.  
I'd just keep replying with the same middle finger until he decided to leave me the hell alone.  
I messed up though.  
Trent wasn't a stray animal.  
He was a rat. A mouse. Vermin that had a way to sneak into a house and make it home no matter what you did.  
My phone started to ring.  
*Trent.*  
I curled my lip and did something really stupid.  
*I answered the fucking call.*

---

THE ENTIRE BASEMENT WASN'T MINE.

It was just a section of it.  
That section was about the same size as my old apartment. Just without any walls and rooms. It was like living in a loft apartment. In the basement of your sister's house.  
No big deal, right?  
On the opposite end of the basement there was a door to go outside. It took you to the side of the house. There were three large steps and then you were outside.  
That's where I ran to, wearing nothing but a really long flannel over a tight tank top.  
Because I decided to talk to Trent.  
*So. Stupid. Candice.*  
I wanted a win for the day or night.  
"Are you going to talk to me or what?" Trent asked.  
"I'm going outside."  
"Oh. So you're somewhere secret? You don't want someone to know we're talking?"  
"Who do you think you are, Trent? After everything that happened..."

"I know what happened, Candice," he said. "And you left. You just disappeared. I'm not sure how things were done when you were growing up, but where I come from--"

"Stay where you come from then," I said. "Stop texting me. Don't call me."

"You read the texts."

"So, I don't have a notification on my phone, Trent. It has nothing to do with us."

"Right... *us*. So there is an *us*..."

I shut my eyes and sighed.

The same rage and sense of hurt hit me as it always did.

I wanted to blame everyone for everything.

I opened my mouth and then stopped.

There was no use in blaming him.

What would that get me?

*Nothing.*

I swallowed hard.

I needed to make a bold statement.

Which meant my mind was thinking of someone else...

"There's a lot we have to figure out, Candice," Trent said. "I'm not trying to harass you. I'm just being honest. You know me. I need the beginning, the middle, and the end. If there is an end. And there always has to be an end."

"I'll never be with you, Trent," I said. "I have someone new."

"Someone new?"

"Trent..." I looked at my left hand. I cringed. "I'm engaged."

"Engaged?" Trent said.

I heard the disappointment in his voice.

"Yeah," I said. "I met someone. And things... it's not your business, Trent. I've tried to be patient. Ignore you. But you can't keep doing this. It's not fair to me or him."

"Him?"

"Dex," I said. My stomach did a front flip. "He's the... uh... he's one of the guitarists in Filthy Line."

"You're kidding me," Trent said. "A musician?"

"Yeah. It's been kind of quiet but word has been getting out. I don't like the idea of my picture being taken but whatever. We met at the cafe I work at. Things just happened. Okay?"

"So that's it then?" Trent asked. "You just... you're just done?"

"I've tried to explain it so many times," I said. Emotion tickled inside my chest. *There was once a time I told this man I loved him... and I did mean it... maybe nothing in the forever kind of way, but...* "I tried so hard, Trent."

"Yeah, okay," he said. "You figure out your happy life now, Candice. But I won't forget what you did to me. What you took from me. What you took from us."

"You know, if all this is a lie and about money, then fuck you," I said. "You can't imagine what my life is like."

"Seems like it's pretty good, Candice," he said. "Engaged to some famous musician. Great. Can't wait to hear about him fucking fifty other women or you getting so hooked on drugs you'll be in rehab texting me how sorry you are."

The call ended right there.

I held my phone out and curled my lip.

Believe me, the easiest thing would have been to change my number. That would have gotten rid of Trent for a while. Maybe forever.

I had my reasons to keep the same number though.

Which now sent me spiraling down a long tunnel of lies.

*Which meant I had to ask Dex to ask me to marry him again...*

---

*DO YOU THINK HE'S GOING TO SHOW UP AGAIN?*

That question ruined my entire morning.

And every time that stupid, little bell above the door jingled, I tried to keep my attention on the door without anyone realizing how eager I was. I just needed to see if what Dex was offering was true. Because we both could benefit from it.

He needed a squeaky clean rock star image.

I needed Trent to see me engaged so he'd leave me alone for good.

Everything in between, both Dex and I never needed to know. We were going to use each other and I was completely fine with that.

Well... not *use* in the sense that Dex was used to.

That was going to totally suck for him.

I could and have done without *a certain kind of attention* but Dex was screwed.

And there was no cheating allowed.

*Am I really writing rules for a fake engagement to a rock star?*

I hung my head and exhaled so hard, two invoices danced from the desk to the floor.

"Of course," I said.

I dropped to my knees and climbed under the desk.

They were invoices that needed to be paid and filed. Last thing I needed was a lecture from Gregor on how important invoices were. The fucking guy watched some accounting videos online one night when he decided to skip his bitchy mixed drinks that were more sugar than booze and then started to run around the cafe like he was an accountant.

I grabbed one invoice and reached for the other.

As my hand gripped the flimsy yellow paper, I heard a whistle.

That cliché, catcalling whistle.

"Now that's a sight I can get used to, sweetie."

I jumped back and picked up my head way too early.

I slammed the top of my head so hard, I bit down on my tongue and tasted blood.

I fell back to the floor and my eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, shit, Candice..."

I blinked fast and watched as Dex...

*Dex?*

He rushed into the office and dropped to one knee in front of me.

For a quick second the curtain of asshole rock star dropped and I saw... *him*.

Beyond the crazy good looks and crazy sexy eyes, Dex looked worried about me.

But believe me, it was just for a second.

He held up two fingers. "Can you see these?"

"Yes," I said.

"I can make them disappear and make you see real stars, sweetie."

I swatted at his hand and reached for the desk.

As I stood up, the top of my head throbbed in pain.

My tongue hurt too.

"Fuck," I whispered.

I slammed my right hand on the desk, leaving the crumbled invoices where they belonged.

"Hey, you might have a concussion," Dex said.

I turned my head and looked at him. "I wish. Then I could forget about you."

"Doubt a concussion would do that."

"Then I'll hit my head harder next time."

"You can definitely get back on your knees with your ass up in the air again," Dex said. "Did I catch the lacy lines of dark red panties too?"

Well, my face matched the color of my panties.

"What in the hell are you doing back here?" I asked. "This is for employees only."

"I asked where you were and Betty told me," Dex said.

"And she just let you back here?"

"She didn't stop me."

"Get out of here," I said.

"You sure about that, sweetie?" Dex asked.

I rubbed my cheek. "Get out."

"What's wrong with your cheek?"

"Nothing. I bit my tongue."

"Hope you're not poisonous."

I sighed. "Really..."

"Let me see," Dex said.

His left hand touched my chin. Shivers crawled through my body like need and regret slamming head first together.

"I'm not showing you my tongue," I said.

"I'll show you mine first," he said.

Dex stuck his tongue out and lifted his left eyebrow.

He curled the tip of his tongue and made a very slow and sensual motion.

My face refused to go back to its normal tone.

"Your turn," Dex said after putting his tongue away.

I rolled my eyes and stuck out my tongue.

"Damn," Dex said. "It's bleeding for sure."

"I can taste it. I know."

"Want me to kiss it?"

"Kiss my tongue?" I asked, with my tongue hanging out of my mouth.

*What the hell am I really doing right now?*

I moved away from Dex to collect my thoughts and myself.

"Get out of here, Dex," I said. "Go back out front. I can get fired for having you back here."

"Promise me you'll come talk to me," he said.

I turned my head. "Yeah. Fine. I promise."

Dex winked and slipped out of the office.

The taste of my own blood wasn't pleasant. Nor was the fact that I had given Dex all of my ass to look at, plus what color and kind of panties I was wearing.

*If I was really the manager, I would have fired Betty right then and there.*

---

IT WAS THE SAME GROUP OF GUYS AND DEX.

I had all the names this time though.

Toby, Barry, and Franklin.

And nobody looked impressed to be there.

And everyone was looking right at me.

Like I was supposed to do or say something.

*Which I was.*

They were waiting to see if I was going to go along with the pretend engagement thing.

I opened my mouth and closed it.

Then I opened it again.

"She's getting there," Dex said. "She hit her head a few minutes ago. Scary. Thought she was going to pass out in my arms. But I have that effect on women."

"Go fuck yourself, Dex," I said to him.

"Christ," Toby said. "Why did we even pretend this was a good idea?"

"I have a list of names we can call," Franklin said. "Check them out, go through an interview process, it'll be fine."

Dex side eyed me.

Then he smirked.

Nothing I said or did seemed to bother him.

I crouched down and put my mouth near his ear.

"I think I just screwed you," I whispered. "And I don't feel all that dirty."

My phone buzzed in my pocket.

I took three steps from the table and saw the text from Trent.

**Prove it. I can't stop thinking about it.**

I held my phone out and opened the camera. I bit my lip and took a selfie of me with Dex behind me.

I sent it to Trent.

But Trent wasn't going to stop.

I turned and looked at Dex again.

Franklin showed him a picture on his phone.

"Her tits are fake," Dex said.

"So what?" Toby asked.

"Hey... I like a good set of fake tits as much as any guy... but if I'm marrying those fake tits, I need to make sure they have a good grip."

"It's fake," Toby growled.

Jealousy stirred in me hearing Dex talk about another woman...

"Shit," I whispered.

Trent replied to my picture.

**I'll win you back. Or I'll find out if you're lying. Either way, I'll see you soon.**

I jumped toward the table.

"I'll do it," I said.

All four looked at me.

Everyone but Dex looked shocked.

"What's that?" Toby asked.

"I'll do it," I said. "I'll play this game. Sure. Why not? Just as long as I get my say in some things."

"Knew you'd come around, sweetie," Dex said.

He touched my hip and I slapped his hand away.

"We'll have to work on that," he said.

"You're sure about this?" Franklin asked me.

I nodded.

Toby slowly stood up.

And he had one question for me.

*"Just how hard did you hit your head?"*

Dex

The table was quiet.  
Really fucking quiet.  
Toby stared at Candice.  
I turned sideways in my chair and leaned against the wall.  
*I had won.*  
Like I knew I would.  
And it was going to be perfect.  
Nash had already thrown a fucking diamond ring on Olivia's finger. The world went crazy over that announcement.  
And now it was my turn.  
Except Candice and I had the perfect love story.  
Hidden. Secret. Fun. Flirty.  
No choice but to come forward because of how intrusive the world was to us.  
And that intrusion would lead to our eventual breakup.  
She'd be taken care of during and after the breakup though.  
I put my left hand out and said, "Come here, sweetie. Sit on my lap. Let's give these lawyers a show."  
"Why would I sit on your lap?" Candice asked me. "So we could *talk about the first thing that pops up?*"  
Toby sucked in a breath.

"Are you sure about this, Dex?" Franklin asked. "There are other options here."

"I'm sorry, am I invisible?" Candice asked Franklin. "You want him to fake this with some plastic bottle tits and nose cunt?"

Barry started to cough.

"Fuck me," I said as I marveled at Candice. "Look at this side of you... I'm getting fucking stiff just listening. Keep going. I bet by the time you make Franklin cry I'll come."

"Why don't we really think this through?" Toby asked.

"What's there to think about?" Candice asked. "It's win-win. Dex gets what he wants. The cafe will be busy. I'm sure you'll offer me some kind of compensation, right? And I want free tickets to any upcoming shows. Unlimited tickets. And passes."

"To sell on the side?" Barry asked.

"Fuck you, bush face," Candice said.

I made a fist with my right hand and bit it. "She's killing me here, guys. I can feel my dick swelling... my heartbeat in my cock beating her name..."

Barry and Franklin looked at Toby.

"This..." Toby shook his head. "Fuck it."

"Fuck it," I said.

"Fuck it," Candice said.

I grabbed her apron and pulled.

She fell onto my lap and let out a gasping breath as she put her hands to my shoulders.

She straddled me three seconds longer than I thought she would.

And there was no way in hell she didn't feel that all that *big* talk about my dick wasn't true.

She didn't jump back off of me either.

She slid back.

Like she wanted to feel it.

And that's when the tables turned for a second.

Like she was in control of me...

Candice stepped away from the table, her face flushed but not red like her panties.

"Fuck, Dex," Toby said.

"What?" I asked, coming back to reality.

"You're... uh..." Toby tried to hide his mouth. "You're pitching a tent."

I looked down and shrugged. "Yeah? So?"

Toby rubbed his forehead and turned toward Candice again.

Before he could open his mouth and ask her to reconsider, my surprise showed up.

The rest of the band walked into the cafe.

I heard a squeal and saw Betty behind the counter, eyes wide like she was going to pass out.

"What the hell is this?" Toby asked.

"Just my best friends coming to congratulate me," I said.

I stood up and Candice stared daggers at me. "What if I said no?"

I reached out and touched her chin. "*You were never going to say no to me, sweetie.*"

---

"DOES THIS MEAN YOU'RE FINALLY GOING TO GET LAID?" JAY ASKED AS he slapped my back.

"Wonder if they have a pineapple here, Jay," I said.

He shook his head. "That's old, Dex. That shit has to stop."

"What now?" Toby asked.

"You didn't hear the story about our guy here banging a pineapple?" Sab asked.

"What?" Candice asked.

I touched her lower back. "I'll tell you later, sweetie. What do you say we bail out of here and go celebrate together?"

Candice wasn't starstruck at all.

She casually touched my chest and pushed herself away. "Sorry, Dex, I have better things to do."

"This is going to be a disaster," Barry said.

"Do you at least shave *down there*?" Reed asked Barry. "I mean, who wants to crawl that kind of shrubbery for a dick?"

"A hungry chick," Sab said.

"He probably gives women rug burn," Reed said.

"Depends on how long he can last," Jay said. "It really comes down to math."

"Like an equation," Jay said.

"Yeah," I said. "*Time fucking times the length of the curls between his legs, minus the speed of the thrusts... carry the one... add a five...*"

"I'm sorry about this, Barry," Toby said. "They're not going to stop either."

"Which means we should leave," Franklin said.

"I'll be in touch in a little bit," Toby said. "They're headed to the studio right now."

"I guess I have to work too, sweetie," I said to Candice.

"How will I survive without you?" she asked.

"Oh, fuck, you and Liv are going to love each other," Nash said.

"I'm good with that," Reed said. "Let the two fiancées have it out together on the tour bus..."

I grabbed Reed's shirt and pulled him toward me. "Let's get something clear, Reed. You ever talk about my girl like that again, I'll break your jaw."

Reed curled his lip and shoved himself away from me. "Fuck off. It's all fake."

"Hey," Toby said. "Can't say that out loud." He looked around. "Okay?"

I put my hand out for Candice to take. "Okay?" I whispered to her.

She put her hand into mine.

I lifted her hand to my mouth and kissed it.

"See you soon," I said. "I'll get in touch with all the details. And from there... it's engagement bliss."

"How the fuck is there no whiskey here right now?" Nash asked.

"Excuse me?" Reed asked. "Who the fuck do you think I am?"

Reed pulled out a flask and put it on the table.

"Get us some cups, sweetie?" I asked Candice.

"I've got them!" a voice yelled.

Betty damn near dove over the counter with a stack of coffee mugs.

"Drinking whiskey from a coffee mug," Toby said.

"What else would you put in a coffee mug?" Reed asked.

"Come on, let's do this," Nash said. "Then we have to get to the studio before Toby's panties get all twisted."

"What color are they?" I asked, looking toward Candice. Her face turned red. "Are they dark red?"

"Why the hell would you ask Toby about his panties?" Jay asked.

"No reason," I said.

"I'm not wearing panties," Toby said.

"I'm not wearing anything," I said. "Want to see?"

"Here he goes again," Sab said. "Always has to show off his dick."

"What?" Candice asked.

"Oh, yeah, sweetie, that's a thing I do," I said. "Don't worry though... it's only your lips I want there. Unless we're on the road. Rockstar code. Got it?"

"Fuck that," Candice said. "You want some other whore wearing your ring to save your ass... go find her."

"She's horrible," Sab said.

"She's the best," I said.

Betty put the coffee mugs on the table and looked around at all of us.

I leaned down toward her. "Don't worry, Betty, we're going to sign everything you want us to. Okay?"

"Wow," she whispered.

Reed opened the flask and poured the five of us a drink.

Candice had to pull Betty away.

"Here's to Dex," Nash said. "May his engagement be long enough to ease his pain and short enough so his balls fill up like water balloons."

"Cheers," Sab said.

"Fucking good stuff," Reed said.

"Good luck," Jay said.

I was the last to clank my mug to theirs.

I threw the cup back and drank the fire tasting whiskey.

As I smacked my lips together I looked back and saw Candice staring at me.

We could fake the engagement thing.

That was easy.

But if she thought I wasn't going to make my move on her...

*She was in for the greatest surprise of her life.*

---

WE RAN THROUGH THE SONG TWICE IN THE STUDIO BEFORE LAYING DOWN the tracks. That meant playing the song all together and then going

back and picking apart the tracks one by one to figure out what sounded good and what didn't.

That first recording though, we let Toby use to ease the minds of the powers at *SLECK*. They were forever worried about one of us getting into serious trouble or killed. But they failed to realize that attention was good. After what they saw with Nash and Olivia, how much worse could it get?

*Hold my beer...*

I sat on the edge of a leather chair and stared at my feet.

I shut my eyes and listened to the song.

When Jay kicked into his solo, I reached for the soundboard and killed the song.

"What the fuck?" Jay asked. "That's my solo."

"It's not good," I said.

"Fuck you, it's good."

"Listen to me, man," I said. "We climb up the bridge and then it busts into the solo. That's solid. But let's do something different."

"Like what?" Jay asked.

I stood up and grabbed my beer and walked into the room where our guitars were.

I sat down on my amp and played a few riffs.

The bridge was so good. A beautiful climbing riff, along with the bass and drums, knowing that something was going to happen. What Jay played was good, but it didn't fit.

"Hey, Nash," I yelled. "Run it back and kill Jay's guitar."

Jay stood with his arms folded.

The song played through the speakers.

I picked up with the bridge and when the solo came, I hit a note and slowly bent it, letting the guitar scream for a few seconds before sliding halfway down the neck and playing what Jay did an octave lower.

Only for a few seconds though.

I stopped and Nash killed the song.

Jay strutted by me, lip curled, and he grabbed his guitar.

"Play it again, Nash," Jay said.

The song kicked up again and Jay worked his magic.

When he played that one note and bent it, it was fucking out of this world. It was like getting high. My ears felt like they were ready to explode as he bent the note so high.

He moved down the neck and played another part of the solo that was far better than what I came up with.

As he played, I counted the beats with my foot and on the eighth, I bent the note he did to kick off the solo. What it did was give the solo even more depth. The catchy riff. The perfect solo from Jay. And then this haunting note bend that made the song almost a little bit sad.

Which fit the lyrics perfect.

Nash wrote the song as destiny waiting but then leaving by the end.

The solo ended and Nash cut the sound.

I stood up and faced Jay.

Two guitarists.

"Thoughts?" I asked.

"I'll mess with it," he said.

I grinned.

That meant he liked it.

"Ready?" I asked.

"For what?" he asked.

I played a quick riff. Just fucking around with an *A minor pentatonic* scale. The fucking basis of all rock n' roll music.

Jay played the same riff back.

I played another.

He played it back.

And then we both exploded into riffs and solos, leaving the studio shaking with the furious sound that made up Filthy Line.

Ten minutes later, Nash was in the vocal booth listening to his track while Reed strummed an acoustic guitar and Sab smoked *something good*. He put his head back and made O's of the smoke.

I walked into the hallway and Toby was shaking his phone.

"What did I do now?" I asked.

"Nothing. *SLECK* loves the tune. Nicely done. I like the name too. They actually laughed at it. Tying it to your recent legal issues."

"The legal issues are still a problem?"

"Of course they are, Dex. It's serious. The lawyers will do their job. You do yours."

"Meaning parade Candice around and tell our story."

"I think you're wrong with this," Toby said.

"How so?"

"She's going to get hurt," Toby said. "She has no idea what she's doing. Franklin was right. We could have vetted the right person for this."

"Fuck yourself, Toby," I said. "She'll sign the *NDA* and whatever else we need."

"She wants money."

"We all do."

"The band's okay with that?"

"The shit we've done to each other?" I asked with a laugh. "Come on. You're looking for a problem now."

"Am I though?" Toby asked. "She's tough, Dex. Or at least she pretends to be tough. There's another side there."

"Why do you think I chose her? I always love the complicated kind of relationship."

"When have you ever had a relationship?"

"All the time," I said. "Think about the *line whores* on the gate, wanting to come backstage. I never choose one of those. I pick the pretty girl right in the middle of the crowd. The one getting bumped around all night as she screams the words back to me."

"Fuck. That's your version of love?"

"Afraid so."

"And you think you can be engaged?"

"Of course I can."

"Dex, you don't even have her number."

That was a good point.

I stepped toward Toby and put my hand to his shoulder. "Sucks to be you then."

"Why?"

"You need to track her down. Get me her number. Address. All her info."

"Sure. I'll just walk right into the cafe and-"

"Nah," I said. "Let's have some fun."

"Dex, your time to have fun is over," Toby said.

He moved my hand away and left the studio.

I stood in the hallway alone and listened to Reed pluck at his acoustic guitar.

I looked at my hand and started to laugh.

Candice was mine... for a little while.

Except for one small thing.

*I still needed to slide a ring on her pretty finger.*

## Candice

I looked at myself in the mirror.

*You can do this. It's a simple date. It's a bullshit date. Just show up. Talk. Laugh. Who knows, maybe the guy is actually nice. Clark. That's a nice name, right? It's a solid name. The name of a man. And he never needs to know about Dex. Nobody needs to know about Dex. Well... at least not yet. Once we get the details worked out, I can talk to Cali... and say what? How the fuck am I going to tell my sister about Dex?*

I shut my eyes.

Going from one lie to another like a frog jumping across lily pads in a pond.

It was my life and it was messy. There was no escaping that sometimes. My sister had taken a little bit of a straight, clean path. She wrote things down, planned events out, and did her best to never let things move to the left or the right.

Even when it came to having a child, she knew right when she was going to get pregnant.

And that was okay.

That was Cali.

I was Candice.

I was going to play along with this engagement thing with Dex for a little while.

Big deal.  
He'd clean up his image.  
I'd get Trent off my back.  
Maybe I'd catch a Filthy Line show or two.  
And all would be right with the world.  
*Hell, maybe when things work out again, Candice, you can have the band help open your new shop.*  
I shut my eyes and chased that thought away.  
*My shop? Really?*  
I sighed and grabbed the lipstick off the bathroom sink.  
I hated lipstick.  
I never wore it.  
But for tonight... Clark was going to get the *pity date* version of Candice.  
I wasn't even sure what that meant.  
After I smacked my lips together a few times, I shook my head.  
Lipstick was not my thing.  
I reached for the toilet paper when a thunder boom hit the bathroom door.  
I ripped open the door and had to look down.  
"Carter," I said.  
"I have to poop," he said.  
"There's fifteen bathrooms in this house," I said.  
"Yours was closest," he said.  
"You're going to come down here and stink up my room?"  
"Yes, I am."  
"You're lucky I like you, kid," I said.  
I walked out of the bathroom.  
"Hey, Aunt Candice..."  
"Hey, Carter," I said.  
"What's on your lips?"  
"Lipstick."  
"Weird."  
He shut the door.  
I sighed.  
*Weird was one way to put it.*

---

CLARK WAS AN INCH SHORTER THAN ME.

Not that it should have mattered. But it was the first thing that I noticed about him.

It made the night a lot messier.

He was a good looking guy by any normal standard. Which was good.

I had no idea what to expect.

He wore a suit but skipped the tie and had the first three buttons undone on the almost velvet, purple looking shirt he wore under the suit jacket.

When we spotted each other, he pointed with both pointer fingers and winked at me.

*Ohgodpleaseno...*

I did the same thing back and then realized anything I did was going to be taken as flirting.

*Whatever.*

All I needed to do was have the date and move on in life.

Because once the story broke about Dex and I being engaged, all of this would seem like nothing. Nobody was going to give a damn about a date with Clark when it came to a guy like Dex.

Without asking what I liked to drink, Clark brought me a glass of the same thing he was drinking.

"It's a perfect red," he said to me. "It'll go with our dinner and help take the edge off all of this. I hate dating."

"Hello to you too then," I said.

"If we skip formalities, there's no pressure," he said. "I know your name. You know mine. Our table is behind you. The menu is limited. The drinks aren't. And if you want or need to leave at any time, don't fake a phone call. Just stand up and go."

"Wow," I said. "I did not expect this from you."

"Why? Because I look a certain way? Or did your sister build me up too much?"

"So you know how to read Cali?"

"It's what I do, Candice," Clark said.

"You're not a doctor?"

"So you didn't even bother to ask one question about me?"

"I like the element of surprise," I said.

Clark inched toward me. His hand was then on my waist. "Then we're in for a great night. I have a room here too."

"Oh?" I asked.

*Of course we'd meet at a fancy hotel bar for a dinner and he'd have a room reserved. Should I just turn around and bend over the table now or what?*

"Not what you think," he said. "I've had a long week. So there's two choices. I either go up there alone or with you. Again, no pressure."

"You just say what you want, huh?"

"No formalities," Clark said.

"I think you're full of it," I said. "You're trying to impress me by being edgy and cool. I'm not a teenager."

"But you used to like edgy and cool, huh?"

"Who didn't?"

Clark inched even closer.

I stepped back and went to the table.

There was a sense of *ick* to him.

He jumped to my chair and pulled it out for me.

"Thanks," I said.

"Always."

Clark spun around the table and gracefully sat down. "So, Cali probably told me way too much about you. I won't divulge unless you want me to."

"Why don't you tell me about yourself," I said. "Balance the scales here."

"You were expecting a doctor," Clark said. "Far from it. I'm in marketing."

"That's cool."

*Cool? Are you a teenager? Shit.*

"Yeah, sure," he said. "Want to know how I know Dr. Keith?"

"Sure."

"Ripped my knee apart on a golf course," Clark said. "Freak accident. And I had been working on a marketing campaign for the arena. Got to know some of management and they hooked me up with Dr. Keith. Kind of strange to be operated on in the same place as famous athletes. I was way out of my element. But he and I struck up a few conversations. Went to a few games together. He's big into basketball. I usually take clients there to woo them over."

"Sounds like fun," I said. "No basketball tonight?"

"For us?" Clark asked.

I nodded.

He took out his phone. "One phone call and I'll have you court side."

I put my hand up. "Just kidding. Sports isn't my thing."

"You have the body for anything though, Candice."

*Woowooo... does that ever work for you?*

"Right. Thanks."

Clark folded his hands and leaned against the table. "Let's finish these drinks, order two more each, eat, and see where the elevator takes us."

I thought about his offer.

To just stand up and leave.

I felt my feet pressing against the floor.

That's when my phone buzzed with a text message.

My damn sister.

**Please just give him a chance. He's nervous to meet you. I promised I wouldn't say anything. Love you. Be safe.**

"Is that your fake text for an emergency?" Clark asked.

"Nope. Just Cali. Checking on me."

"Making sure I'm not doing anything bad to you?"

Clark grinned at me.

He was a douche. But I had some time to kill.

And I was hungry.

And he was a distraction.

Plus, this was a game for him.

And I already knew the outcome.

*Or at least I thought I did.*

---

THE DRINKS WERE GOOD. DINNER WAS BETTER.

Clark moved away from the table to lift his left leg over his right. That cool, casual, tough business guy look.

"You haven't said much about yourself," he said.

"You said Cali told you everything."

"I'm sure it wasn't everything. Mostly you were in between careers. Jobs. Businesses. Whatever you want to call it."

"Ah, right. She's ashamed that her sister is living in her basement. And that I work as a barista."

"She said you managed the place."

"What do you call someone who manages the place without a raise?"

Clark nodded. "That's not right."

"It's life."

"You should stand up for yourself."

"Right."

Clark rubbed his jaw. "Sorry. I don't have a leg to stand on with your personal life. I'm sure you'd do something if you felt the need."

"Exactly."

This conversation was running out of gas.

And if this was Clark's game then he was secretly hoping the drinks had me wanting to join him in his room.

"So... marketing," I said.

"Sell shit to people they don't know they need," he said. "I've always been a talker, so it works. I used to get in trouble all the time in school for talking."

"Chatty Clark," I said.

"That's a good one. I went to law school and decided to do nothing with it."

"Why go then?"

"Maybe I was forced. Or felt forced. What made you want to own your own business?"

I swallowed hard.

*Goddamn you, Cali. Why do you have to tell everyone everything about me?*

I shrugged my shoulders. "I didn't like to listen when I was a kid. So I wanted to be my own boss."

Clark laughed. "That's a great reason to start a business."

Clark played with his empty glass and looked around the restaurant and the bar.

*This is where he says it...*

"So, Candice," he said. "I'm just going..."

Clark's stare moved from me to something else.

I turned my head and held my breath.

"Well, look at that," Clark said. "They seem to be popular, don't they? Not really dressed for this kind of place."

"Nope," I said as my heart sank.  
*Filthy Line was here.*

---

WHEN DEX STEPPED UP TO THE TABLE, HE LOOKED BETWEEN CLARK AND I.

"Can I help you?" Clark asked.

"Actually you can," Dex said. "Is this a date?"

"Dex," I said.

Clark furrowed his eyebrows. "It's a date. Why is it your business?"

"She's engaged to me," Dex said.

Heat rushed to my cheeks.

I looked to the bar and the rest of the band sat on barstools, facing us.

Enjoying the scene.

"Excuse me?" Clark asked. "Engaged? What is this... a fucking joke?"

Dex grabbed Clark by his suit jacket and picked him up to his feet.

"Dex, don't," I warned.

"Who the hell do you think you are, buddy?" Clark asked.

"Nobody ever makes a move on my fiancée," Dex said.

He threw Clark down to his chair.

Clark jumped right back up and started to swing.

"Shit," I whispered.

Dex clocked Clark in the jaw before Clark could punch him.

Clark stumbled back and fell over his chair and crashed to the floor.

I stood up and covered my mouth.

Dex then climbed up on the table.

He looked down at me and offered his hand.

"No," I said.

"No choice, sweetie."

"What are you doing here?"

"I told you I'd see you later with the details."

"I thought that meant a call or something," I said.

"Hey, you're in the hot seat here," he said. "What are you doing out on a date? We're supposed to be engaged."

"It was... nothing..."

Dex wiggled his fingers.

"Hurry up, Candice," someone yelled.

I turned my head and saw Jay standing with his phone out.

Sab touched the corners of his eyes. "This is so fucking sweet... I can't take it..."

"Don't be a pussy, man," Reed said.

"Shut up," Nash said. "We need to get this recorded."

I looked around the restaurant and it was a bunch of suit and tie people looking horrified at the sight of five wild rock stars there...

Dex was still on the table as I gave him my hand and climbed up on the table too.

It wobbled for a second.

He put his hand to my lower back and moved down to my ass.

I elbowed him away.

"Okay, just checking," he said. "Making sure you're not for purple shirt asshole here."

I looked to the floor and Clark sat there, wiping blood from his mouth.

"I'm not worried about paperwork, sweetie," Dex said. "We just need to make it right."

"What does that mean?" I asked.

Dex reached for his pinky and wrestled a lizard and skull ring off his finger.

Then he took my left hand and slid the ring down my ring finger.

My heart raced inside my chest.

Jay was recording it.

"There," Dex said as he looked at me.

"Fuck," I whispered.

Dex lowered his mouth to my ear. "For the record, you don't need the lipstick."

I felt like I was going to melt.

And then for good measure - as if we needed it - Dex moved his lips to mine and kissed me like it was our final goodbye.

His tongue brushed against my bottom lip and I pulled away.

The table started to tilt and Dex swept me up into his arms and jumped off the table as it tipped over for good.

I let out a cry as his feet hit the ground.

I threw my arms around his neck.

My eyes met with his again.

"I'll always catch you if you fall, sweetie," he whispered. "You're my fiancée now. It's my job."

My lips quivered...

And a night that was supposed to end with me hugging Clark and going home disgusted with myself ended up a little bit differently.

I was still disgusted with myself.

*But I was carried out of the restaurant in the arms of a fucking rock star.*

Dex

Her lips had my mind spinning as I carried her to the black SUV waiting outside the overpriced hotel.

The band actually wasn't allowed in that hotel anymore after a *certain incident* two years ago that involved a flat screen TV and a bucket of chicken wing bones.

*Don't ask.*

I put Candice on her feet and touched her face with both of my hands.

Around us, people were gathering. Talking, calling my name, cheering for the band as the rest of Filthy Line left the hotel restaurant too. There was no flash of a camera or a shutter sound, but you could bet your last fucking dollar cameras were taking pictures and videos.

"No turning back, sweetie," I whispered to Candice.

"Then make it worth my while," she said.

She gasped after she said that as though she regretted it.

Knowing her flirting and bad attitude with me was only going to get her fine ass into even more trouble.

I pulled her toward me and brushed my lips to hers.

Then I nibbled at her bottom lip and curled my lip as I did so.

*Fuck, this would make a hell of an album cover, huh?*

Candice grabbed my wrist with her left hand and pulled.

I then took her left hand and nodded to the ring.

"Ready to smile for the cameras yet?" I asked her.

She shook her head. "I drove here."

"And we need to talk."

"I'm driving myself home, Dex."

"Not until you tell me why you were with another man."

Candice turned her head.

The crowd was getting bigger by the second.

Nash held out someone's phone and took a selfie with that person. Reed and Jay were signing autographs. And Sab... *crazy fucker*... he was on one knee in front of a woman as she pulled her pants down, showing off her left hip. He signed her hip and then kissed above it.

The woman put her head back and laughed.

This fancy ass hotel was now the subject of our filth.

*Our horrible, disgusting, badass rock star filth...*

I loved every second of it.

But not as much as I loved every second with Candice.

I grabbed her waist and pulled her against me.

"I want the story behind tonight, sweetie," I said. "And I want to know what's hidden behind those eyes."

"Is that so?" Candice asked.

*"Dex! Dex! Can I come for a ride tonight too?"*

I looked to the crowd and interlocked my fingers with Candice's hand. I held our hands up and waved.

"Sorry," I called out. "Lawyers keep telling me to stay out of trouble. I have to go soft here."

There was a chorus of *boos* that made me laugh.

"Pussy!" Jay yelled.

I looked at Candice. "Give me a second, sweetie."

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing."

Candice pulled at me. "You have to stay out of trouble. Remember?"

I leaned down and kissed her cheek. "Look at how much you care already. This is going to work out. Remember something though... all the other women... they don't mean anything compared to you. And it's all for show."

The look of disgust on her face was priceless.  
I walked into the crowd of *line whores* and asked someone for lipstick.  
I put my hand out and had fifty tubes of lipstick in my hand.  
When I noticed the green color, that was my choice.  
I walked to the glass doors of the fancy hotel restaurant and popped the top on the lipstick.  
Then I went to work.  
I wasn't an artist... but...  
*SPREAD THE FILTH*  
I dropped the lipstick, turned and walked away.  
Everyone cheered me on. Everyone grabbed for me.  
Pulling at my hands, arms, my shirt. The loopholes in my jeans.  
A few not to shy hands reaching between my legs.  
But my eyes were locked on Candice.  
She could have walked away to her car and took off.  
But she didn't.  
*Which meant she wanted all of the craziness that was about to be her life.*

---

"WHERE'S THE REST OF THE BAND?" CANDICE ASKED.  
"This is just us," I said. "They have another ride. Nothing to worry about, sweetie."  
"I hate that name."  
"You do?"  
"Yeah. I'm not going to respond to it."  
"We can talk about that. I mean your apron at work says *Candy*. Want me to call you that?"  
"No," she said. "I hate that too."  
"Okay... candy... is sweet. You don't like sweetie though." I rubbed my jaw with a sly grin. So we can go with sweet."  
"Sweet?"  
"Well... how about *sweetheart*?"  
"Pass," she said.  
"*Sweet thing*..."  
"Try again, Dex."

I laughed. "*Sweet ass.*"

"Seriously?"

I leaned forward, sitting across from her in the back of the SUV. The vehicle was all custom done for the band. The soft, neon green lights lit the floor while a set of dim, white lights were above us. There was plenty to drink... *and more...* if requested...

Behind me was an all-black window that was soundproof too.

"*Sweet...*" I lifted my eyebrow.

"What? What else can you possibly say, Dex?"

"*Sweet Lips...*"

"That's not all that bad," Candice said.

I put my hand to her legs and smiled bigger. "I'm not talking about the lips I've kissed, Candice. I'm talking about the ones I haven't kissed. Yet."

Candice pushed my hand away. "You're gross."

"Oh, there's nothing gross about that. You know that."

"Do you have to ruin everything?"

"Do you?"

"I didn't ruin anything," she said.

"You were on a date with someone... *sweetie...*"

Candice crunched up her nose with anger. "Fine. That's the nickname then."

"Look at that," I said. "We just had our first fight and came to an agreement. You know what that means, right?"

"What?" she asked.

"Sex."

Candice gasped. Her face brightened to red. "What?"

"Makeup sex. It's the whole point of fighting."

"What do you think this is?"

"Hey, I've got needs, sweetie."

"And you've got two hands."

"And I've got about a million women who would drop to their knees in a second."

"Not in jail," Candice said.

Like she was going to fuck with me about my legal troubles.

I nodded.

She wanted to make this into... what?

I leaned toward her again and put my hands to the seat. "Come kiss me at least."

"Why?"

"We need to make sure it looks real. I'm very affectionate."

"If this is all pretend, then pretend you're not affectionate."

"Not going to happen," I said. "We're going to sell this so hard... so... *hard*..."

"Dex..."

"I'll just keep saying filthy things until you come kiss me."

"Whatever."

"Filthy things about your curvy ass. The way it hugs those jeans when you're at work. Or how I fantasize about you wearing nothing but that apron. My *Candy*... so sweet and filthy... or how I picture grabbing you by those *meant to grab* hips. Sit you on a table right in the middle of the cafe. Drop to my knees before you. Flip that apron up and watch as you part your legs, peeling that sweet slit open for me with two of your fingers... gently using your middle finger to rub your-"

Candice attacked me with a kiss.

Her hands grabbed my shoulders and her lips pressed tight to mine.

I growled in my throat.

She pulled away.

"Happy?"

"What the fuck was that?" I asked. "That's not a kiss, sweetie. Not an *I can't wait to marry you* kiss... this is..."

I gently parted Candice's lips with my tongue, taking my time, letting her take a second to realize what was happening. Our tongues touched and I felt hers shiver. I closed my mouth and pulled away, giving her a chance to look at me. Not even for a second though. This wasn't some romantic bullshit moment. I slipped my hand to the back of her head and kissed her again.

Faster. Hotter. Turning my head. Her head turning too.

She kissed me back with the same wildness that I kissed her with. Meaning I was already starting to crack the code that made Candice who she was. So much held back and so much forced to be seen. To create a narrative that I wasn't sure who actually cared about it or who bought into it.

Shit, even for me... this was about the skull and lizard ring on her finger.

About getting some good vibes and press for once in my life.

But until then...

My left hand touched her leg.

Her muscles jumped and tightened.

I flickered my tongue to hers one last time and inched away. I kissed her bottom lip and then down to her chin. Candice put her head back and sighed.

*Regret? Relief?*

It was all the same to me.

My lips took their time placing each well designed kiss down her neck to the top of her shirt. For a woman on a date, she definitely didn't show off her goods. Which told me the date was probably bullshit anyway. That locked into my mind a little. Why would someone like Candice go out on a date she didn't want to? After all, she had no problem standing up to me. Or the lawyers from *SLECK*. She had no problem deciding on her terms to be engaged to me.

But a date...

I kissed her neck like I was a vampire in a cheesy movie. My lips as wide as they could go, latched to her, sucking hard enough to get her attention but not enough to leave a mark.

It was enough to make her groan and push me away.

I slid my right hand away from her neck and left that hand up in the air.

My left hand though eased along her leg.

And just as I cut my path down to her inner thigh, Candice grabbed my wrist.

"Say it," I whispered.

"Say what?" she asked.

"Tell me *no*. Tell me to stop. Tell me you don't want this."

Candice licked her bottom lip.

Then she gently bit it.

*Come on... say it... I know you won't...*

She opened her mouth.

Her grip tightened on my wrist and then let go.

I slowly start to lower my right hand from the air back toward her.

I touched her side and leaned closer again.

*The SUV door opened.*

---

"DID I INTERRUPT?" TOBY ASKED AS HE SLAMMED THE DOOR.

"Thanks for showing up," I said through gritted teeth.

Candice hurried to swat my hands away and slid across the seat. She turned and put her feet up. Hiding in a corner. Protecting herself.

Funny part was... she wasn't protecting herself from me.

She was protecting herself from herself.

I side eyed her and grinned.

*This was going to be fucking fun.*

"Please tell me it's not true," Toby said.

"What now?" I asked.

"That you showed up to the hotel bar and punched someone? And then went outside and wrote *spread the filth* in green lipstick on the door?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I was hurt. Jealous."

"Of what?" Toby asked.

"Candice was cheating on me."

"Excuse me?" Toby asked. His eyes moved to her. "Cheating? What does that mean?"

"It was nothing," Candice said. "I was on a date..."

"You said you were going to be engaged to Dex," Toby said. He reached into his suit jacket and took out papers. "I have papers for you to sign. This isn't some joke. This isn't a game. Do you not understand the impact this has on all of us? Including yourself. You're throwing yourself into the spotlight now. There is no dating. Or flirting. Or whatever the hell else you're used to right now."

"Toby," I said. "Breathe."

"I'm not going to breathe. She hasn't even been doing this for a full day and she's out on a goddamn date with someone."

"Toby," I said again.

"Don't give me any shit right now, Dex. Franklin and I could have done this the right way. Gotten the right person for this thing. This isn't about you personally. It's the same thing I told Nash... it's everyone's time. And my time. Goddammit. My time. For once..."

"Toby," I said as my last warning.

"Now, what if someone took pictures?" Toby asked. "She's out on a date and you show up and knock the guy on his ass... am I living in a different fucking reality here or what?"

I balled up my left hand and had no choice but to get Toby to stop talking.

Before I could swing at Toby, he opened his mouth to keep going. And Candice hit him.

It was a strange hit... her hand open like she was going to slap him, but then she decided to punch him. Only she never closed her hand. So she brought her palm down on his nose and mouth.

That shut Toby up.

Candice moved back to her seat but then got out of the SUV.

I looked at Toby and curled my lip.

He touched his nose and blinked away tears.

"Fucking asshole," I said to Toby.

I got out of the SUV, expecting to find Candice running down the street, calling for a ride back to her car at the hotel.

She just stood there on the sidewalk, hugging herself, holding back her emotions.

"Hey, sweetie," I said.

"Maybe he's right," she said. "What the hell am I doing here? I'm going to pretend to be engaged to you? For what? So I could sign some papers and be told what to do? I don't want your money. I don't want anything."

"Then why'd you say you'd do it?"

"Because I make fast decisions in life," she said. "Okay? That's what my sister would tell you. And me. I make fast decisions."

I nodded. "Don't mind Toby. Sometimes he needs a good hit to the mouth to remember who he is."

"Whatever, Dex. I'm leaving."

"Not without a goodbye kiss."

Candice pulled the skull and lizard ring off her ring finger. "This was so stupid..."

She put her hand out.

I cupped my hand over her hand and shook my head. "Of course it's stupid. It's fucking crazy. It's the rock star life, sweetie. And whatever has you chained to the cafe... take a chance and enjoy something different. And whatever your sister thinks about you, who the fuck cares?"

"Dex, I live in her basement," Candice said. "I'm not..."

She stopped talking.

"You're not what?"

"Just... nothing," she said. "This is dumb. Take the ring."

"I'm not taking the ring," I said. "You said you were going to do this. So do it. Have some fun. We just need to act happy. Flirty. Enjoy each other's company. But no dating."

"Does that go for you too?" Candice asked.

"Ah, sweetie, I'm a rock star," I said. "If I don't fuck other women, then they'll know something is wrong."

Candice ripped her hand back and curled her lip. "And then I'll tell everyone the truth. That you're full of shit."

"Let's do it," I said. "See who cracks first."

"And you just don't care," she said. "Your career... the band... you could go to jail."

"Just shows how much I need you, sweetie."

Her phone beeped and she quickly looked at it.

She blinked fast and looked scared. Not sad. But scared.

She put her phone away and looked at me again.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"Just my sister," she said.

*Oh yeah?*

The SUV door opened and Toby slumped his way out.

"I'm sorry about that," he said. "I got too heated. It's just that the situation..."

"Forget about it," Candice said.

"Forget about what?" Toby asked.

"This," I said. I swiped the papers from Toby's hand. "We don't need this."

"What?" Toby asked. "Dex..."

"Fuck the lawyers and their goddamn paperwork all the time," I said. "This is between me and Candice. An agreement. And I know she can fuck me anytime she wants."

"This is a bad idea," Toby said.

"Do you want her to hit you again?" I asked.

"Dex..."

I coughed and spit on the papers and crumpled them up.

I slammed them against Toby's chest. "Get back into your car and go the fuck home."

Toby peeled the papers from his chest. "You do whatever you want, Dex."

Toby walked around the SUV and was gone.

I stepped toward Candice. "Let me drive you back to your car, sweetie."

I turned and she lunged at me, grabbing my hand. "Dex..."

"What?"

"I won't fuck you over," she said. "I'll sign the papers for this. I just... the way he was blaming me..."

"I told you. Toby is an asshole. Don't worry about it. You did the right thing hitting him. You're not the first person to hit him."

"Let me sign the papers then."

"Fuck the papers, Candice. This is between us."

"Why?"

"Because I fucking want it," I said.

I shook her away and opened the door to the SUV.

She got inside and I knocked on the window, telling the driver to drive.

We were only a short distance from the hotel.

I wasn't planning on stealing Candice just yet.

We rode back to the hotel in silence.

The SUV stopped in the parking lot.

Candice put her left hand out, showing me the ring was back on her finger.

"So let me get this straight, sweetie... we had our first fight... and we had our second fight where you took the ring off... and now you're just walking away..."

"That's right, Dex," Candice said. "Remember what you said. I can fuck you anytime I want."

I smiled big. "Yes, you can..."

She sighed. "I didn't mean... whatever. Goodnight."

She opened the door and I grabbed her arm.

When she looked back at me, I winked.

I moved toward her and my left hand slid around the other side of her body.

I pulled her close and we kissed the way I would kiss my fiancée goodnight if I had a real one and planned on doing all that marriage bullshit.

I wasn't Nash though.

He was the one who was going to get married for real.

Not me.

I was just kissing a beautiful woman goodnight.

*Even if I felt anger and regret that she was going to sleep alone tonight.*

## Candice

**I** slept way too good.  
 And I woke up in way too good of a mood.  
 I told myself it was only because I had a day off from the cafe.  
 Even though the place was on my mind.  
 Which sucked.

I couldn't stop thinking about it all the time. That deep urge to run a business again. To control everything from beginning to end. To greet customers, make them happy, deal with suppliers and vendors... even through all the bad stuff that happened...

*I miss it. I miss it all.*

I rolled to my side and grabbed my phone.  
 My usual *first thing in the morning* routine.  
 There was a text message waiting for me.  
**Sleeping in, sweetie?**  
 I sat up and gasped.  
*Dex? How...*  
 I swallowed hard.  
**Who is this?**  
 Dex replied right away.  
**Your fiancé, Candice. Missing you in my bed right now.**  
 I shook my head.

**I was never in your bed, Dex.**

I leaned forward and put my phone on the bed and picked at my nails.

**That's something we need to work on. For the relationship. Right?**

I used one finger to text him back.

**Whatever. What do you want?**

I needed to pee.

I threw the covers off my body and took my phone (and Dex) into the bathroom with me. Of course all I could think about was his reaction if he knew what I was doing while we were texting. It would probably turn him on.

"Fucking rock stars," I whispered.

Dex texted me back.

**I want to taste your morning breath on my lips. And I want to taste plenty of the rest of you. I need to see you today. We have an interview.**

I was mid pee and froze up.

"What?" I whispered.

And I texted him that.

**What????**

Dex replied with a wink emoji first.

Then a text.

**We have to talk about our relationship, sweetie. It's with someone we trust. Just need you there with me.**

I sat on the toilet, still frozen, shaking my head.

**Dex... I can't do that... I thought it was just some pictures...**

That's what I wanted. Some pictures. So Trent would see them and back the hell off for good. That was the plan. But to talk about this...

Another text popped up.

**It was all in the paperwork you didn't sign. ;)**

I put my head back and sighed.

I put my phone down and took a calming breath so I could finish going pee.

After I washed my hands, I took my phone (and Dex) back to my bed.

**You there, sweetie?**

I didn't know what to say.

**I'll talk to you in a bit. I have to go. Bye.**

Like that was going to do something.

I walked toward the basement steps to go upstairs.

I had to compose myself.

Make everything seem like it was okay.

Even though...

I looked up the stairs.

Dex sent me another text.

**See you soon, sweet lips ;)**

I groaned.

I had no choice but to accept *sweetie* as my nickname.

Dex knew how to get what he wanted.

And it went well beyond his good looks.

I groaned a second time, needing coffee to clear my mind.

Kissing Dex was *something*.

It left its mark on me. That was for sure. It's probably why I slept so good too. And that alone - even admitting it just to myself - was really sad. Just making out with some hot guy for a few minutes was enough to help me sleep.

*Imagine if and when you two...*

"Nope," I said.

I hurried up the stairs and went into the kitchen.

The smell of coffee made me smile.

*The look on my sister's face as she sat at the counter did not.*

---

"Is THIS A JOKE?" CALI ASKED.

"What?"

She put her gigantic phone down and spun it around on the granite counter.

Right there on the screen, zoomed in, was a picture of Dex and I.

From last night outside the hotel.

Dex looking like a badass prick. The crowd of Filthy Line fans yelling and reaching for him and the rest of the band. The picture cut off at Nash and Reed.

"What?" I asked again.

"What?" Cali asked. "This is what you did last night?"

"What did I do?"

"This," Cali said. "You're... and then Clark..."

Cali started to stammer.

I looked down at the phone again.

I realized what had her so flustered.

It was the headline on the trashy site that tracked down celebrities.

*BAD BOY DEX SETTling WITH AN UNKNOWN PRINCESS?  
ROCK ROYALTY OR A ROAD GOING STRAIGHT TO HELL?*

I swallowed hard and read the beginning of the article.

*We can get to the part where he wrote 'spread the filth' on the window to the hotel where Filthy Line had been previously banned from. But before that... can we talk about how Dex went from arrested and threatened with jail time to being engaged to some unknown woman with big, doe eyes and nothing but innocence gushing from her cheap clothes?*

I scoffed. "Bitch."

"Candice..."

I lifted my eyes to my sister. "What?"

"Stop saying what!" Cali yelled.

She slapped the counter and then turned her head.

"I'm sorry," I said. "You're not... I'm an adult here."

"An adult, huh? Why does this lady think you're engaged to... what the hell is that?"

Cali pointed to my hand.

I never took the ring off from the night before.

The lizard and skull ring just sat there on my finger.

Like a glaring reminder of the night before. And what I had done with Dex. And what I was planning on doing with Dex.

But it made me smile.

The night had been crazy. But it was a fun kind of crazy.

The mundane of Clark trying to use his cheap moves on me replaced by the wildness of Dex as he showed up, punched Clark, stood on a table, and made me join him.

"Candice?"

I nodded. "That's, uh, that's an engagement ring, Cali. Okay?"

"Excuse me?" Cali asked as she stood up.

Keith walked into the kitchen, a newspaper under his arm, eyes down on his phone screen.

"Good morning, ladies," he said.

"You heard what I said," I said to Cali.  
"Say it again then," Cali said.  
Keith's eyes slowly started to go wide.  
I lifted my left hand and showed off the rock star's ring.  
*"I'm engaged to a rock star."*

---

KEITH SPUN AROUND ON HIS HEELS AND CALI JUMPED TOWARD HIM.

*Sorry, Keith.*

"Can you believe this?" Cali asked her husband.

"I don't want to be involved," Keith said. "I have to go soon."

"There's nothing for anyone to be involved with," I said. "This is my life. My business."

"This is my house," Cali said.

"And you're not my mother!" I yelled.

Which sent pain through my chest.

I looked down at Cali's phone again and shook my head.

I pushed her phone across the counter.

"Forget about it," I said.

I walked to the basement.

"Don't walk away, Candice," Cali said. "This isn't over."

"Cali, let her go," Keith said.

"Don't tell me what to do!" Cali yelled. "That's my little sister. She's not going to fucking ruin her life a second time because of a guy!"

I nodded as I hurried down the basement steps.

*There it is. The real attack.*

I looked around the basement.

This wasn't home.

This wasn't even an apartment.

It was a room.

And I was... just there.

I grabbed a change of clothes and rushed to the bathroom to make sure my hair wasn't a complete mess.

And then I snuck out the back door of the basement like a rebellious teenager.

How fitting though, right?

Being a rebel for rock 'n' roll and a badass rock star who was no good for me.

Of course, Cali was in the driveway waiting for me.

Like the mother who knew how to be two steps ahead.

Like the mother we never had.

The one who showed up that one time and then left again for good.

*Why do you think I haven't changed my number, Cali? What if she calls? I gave her that number. I would have changed that number in a second after Trent... but what if...*

"Leaving?" Cali asked.

"I'm going to get coffee," I said. "And breakfast. In peace."

"Can you put yourself in my shoes for a second, Candice?"

"No," I said. "It's not your business."

"You're in my basement."

"He's not there," I said. "It's not even..." I shook my head. "You wouldn't understand."

"I wouldn't? My sister doesn't even tell me she's, what, dating a famous musician? And now she's engaged?"

"It was fast."

"Oh, that's what I want to hear."

"So what? You're going to judge me because I didn't have the storybook marriage like you and Keith? I'm so sorry I didn't go to college like you, Cali. Okay? I didn't go to college and have it all figured out. I didn't have every breath, meal, pee break, and orgasm figured out."

Cali's face turned red. "Wow."

"I don't have to explain myself to you. Or anyone. And what are you doing reading those gossip sites anyway? Isn't that below you?"

Cali stepped away from my car. "Right. Go do what you want, Candice."

I walked to my car and stopped with the door slightly open.

"What do you want me to say?" I asked. "Look at how you judge me. You'd have never believed me if I came and talked to you about Dex."

I was selling this thing hard, *but* there was truth to it.

"I love you," Cali said. "I worry about you. I don't want you hurt."

"I've been hurt. And I'm sorry I ended up in your basement. I get it. I don't belong here. So give me a chance to figure it out."

"And how is getting engaged going to make that happen?" Cali asked. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Why not?"

"Are you marrying this guy... or engaged to him... for money?"

I laughed. "There it is. The quick scheme, right? You want me to be Mom. That's what this is. You see me as her."

Cali opened her arms. "What am I supposed to think or do here? Yesterday you're just my sister. You're Candice. Working at that stupid cafe for that little shithead. And now this morning you're all over the internet. You're famous. And nobody even knows your name."

My face burned hot.

*All over the internet...*

I didn't say a word to Cali.

"And, yeah, I read the gossip stuff," Cali admitted. "I have my own things, you know? I'm allowed to. It's not always easy to be married to Keith. His schedule is crazy. And Carter is a handful. So don't go judging me by the size of my house and how green my grass is or what kind of car I drive."

"That's the thing, Cali," I said. "I don't. You judge yourself. And others. Because you think you're being judged." I shut the car door and moved around my car. "You were so right about things in my life, okay? I'll give you that much. But what if..." I shook my head. "If you want me to move out, just say the word. I'll move out. I'll figure it out. I didn't expect to meet Dex."

Which was totally true.

Not in a million years would I have expected one of the guitarists from Filthy Line to show up at the cafe and set his eyes on me.

And with everything with Trent...

*I can't even tell you about that, Cali. Because you'll tell me it's my fault. Or you'll tell me to just change my number. Which I can't do. Okay? I just can't fucking do it.*

"And that's it?" Cali asked. "You just have this..."

Cali turned her head.

I looked where she was looking.

*A black SUV came to a stop, blocking the driveway.*

---

DEX STEPPED OUT OF THE BACK OF THE SUV WEARING THE SAME JEANS as the night before. But a different t-shirt. His sunglasses covered his eyes but I could still feel the wildness pouring from him. He had a coffee in each hand and strutted up the driveway like he owned the place.

He oozed rock 'n' roll.

Even in the swagger of his walk.

Knowing he was filthy and sexy at the same time.

My entire body burned.

Head to toe.

"Dex," I said.

"Morning, sweetie," he said.

"What are you doing here?"

"Told you I'd see you soon. We have a press conference today."

"Press?" Cali asked. "Just who..."

Dex put the coffees on the roof of my car.

He took off his sunglasses and tossed them to the roof of the car too.

He walked up to Cali and grabbed her right hand with both of his hands.

"Fucking hell, you are beautiful," he said to Cali.

I curled my lip.

*Jealousy?*

Cali pulled her hand away. "Excuse me?"

"Candice never told me her mother was a knockout."

I turned to hide my laugh.

"I'm not her mother," Cali said. "I'm her sister."

"Older sister though, right?" Dex asked.

*Ohmygod, he has no filter... and no care...*

"Get the hell off my property," Cali said. "I don't care who you think you are. I'll call the police on you."

"Let's not do that," Dex said with a laugh. "Right, Candice?"

"Yeah," I said. "I guess I have to go."

"This is for real?" Cali asked.

Dex put his sunglasses back on and swiped the coffees off the roof of my car.

He handed me one and I slightly grinned at him.  
I could feel him winking at me through the sunglasses.  
The heat that went through my body...

I looked back at Cali and shrugged my shoulders. "Have to tell the world about our love story."

"Fucking right we do, sweetie," Dex said.

He smacked my ass and squeezed it until I jumped to my toes.

I wanted to punch him in the mouth but it would have blown our cover.

He put his hand around my waist and walked me down the driveway.

*It was the first time in years I actually felt alive.*

## Dex

I bought the house sight unseen, because why the fuck not? It was the rock star thing to do. We were somewhere outside of Vegas when Toby called to tell us the checks had hit our banks. What a fucking ride that was... Bill had us flying through the desert and we told him to stop and turn around. We needed to go back to Vegas for one more night. Bill knew his ass was on the line if he listened to us.

He listened to us.

We tore apart Vegas, but surprisingly enough only Jay and Sab got arrested that night.

Whatever... point being, on the actual ride out of Vegas, I started looking for a house. Found this circle house and bought it.

And that's what it was.

A giant circle.

Well, a cylinder, because of the second and third story.

It had the appeal of a secret lab or something you'd see in a movie. Or maybe police headquarters.

Bright white sandwiched between the all black, super-tinted windows.

Without the tint, the west coast sun would have torn through the place all damn day long.

I lived up on a hill, not because of my financial status, but because when life pissed me off, I could stand on the balcony outside the master bedroom, turn around, and drop my jeans. And tell the rest of the rich assholes up there - and the rest of the city - to kiss my filthy, rock star ass.

*And believe me, I did that all the fucking time.*

The surrounding parts of the house I kept calm and cool. Meaning a shit ton of landscaping. To make it look nice. And to keep my privacy. Bad enough I had gotten used to at least one or two people standing outside the big gates at the end of the driveway, I didn't want anyone getting close to the house without an invitation.

I reached for Candice's hand and grinned when she let me interlock my fingers to hers.

We drove up the driveway and I pointed to the window.

"You can put the window down, sweetie," I said. "Get a feel for your house."

"Oh, so I live here now?"

"You've lived here for a while," I said. "Remember? You've been sneaking around. Engaged to this fucking wild man."

Candice took her hand away from mine and put the window down.

She let out a gasp and a smile moved along her face.

My eyes saw what she was seeing.

The landscaping of the property.

That shit meant nothing much to me. Trees, bushes, shrubs, flowers, rocks, stone, whatever else was there. I mean, shit, it looked nice, but was it gasp worthy? Fuck no.

Gasp worthy was... *Candice*.

My eyes shifted and I studied her.

Her hair was forever messy but in a put together kind of way. Seeing her from the side was just special to me. I mentally traced the line of her face. Her nose was a little bit pointy, in a way that was meant for kissing while I was burying myself inside of her. Letting her know that there was no need to regret what we had. And then her lips. They weren't pouty and fake. And they were thin and delicious. They were perfect. Lips that could spout nasty words one second, and lips that could kiss the filth out of my mouth a second later.

I moved in my seat, feeling myself thickening as I started to tell myself stories of all the things I wanted to do with Candice.

"I can feel you staring at me," she said.

"I've never seen someone get so horny over grass before," I said.

Candice looked at me with disgust. "Really?"

"What? I bet you're ready to put some *morning dew* out there."

"Good to know I can't even look out the window without you writing some kind of narrative about it."

I leaned across the seat and slipped my arm around her shoulder. "You can do anything you want, sweetie. But that look on your face... I know that look. That means something to you."

"And let me guess, you want to know all about me?"

"I'm the opposite, Candice."

"Meaning what?"

The SUV came to a stop. "I want to get to know your body first. Then I'll see if I care about your mind and heart."

She shook her head.

I touched her chin. "Think about it, sweetie. After I'm done fucking you and you're a puddle of pleasure from my touch, what's there to hold back in life?"

Her cheeks flushed red and I put my nose to hers.

Her perfect, little, pointy nose.

I laughed.

And as I pulled away, I saw her lips move.

She had been expecting a kiss from me.

*Well, well, well, Candy Candice... just how bad do you really want this and why?*

---

WE HELD HANDS AS WE WALKED THROUGH *THE GREAT ROOM*.

I had no idea what the fuck any of the rooms were called.

They were all versions of a living room if you asked me.

I led the way as a girl named Celia walked with us, a bag over her shoulder, big framed glasses on her face (probably wearing them for fun), and her phone in her hand as she recorded us talking.

Of course the room I chose to walk through was the one with my Filthy Line memorabilia.

The albums framed on the wall.

The original concert shirts from our first tour.

Handwritten notes and lyrics.

There was even a framed address on a napkin, which was our first real show as a band. From some dump of a pizza place where we ate and ditched because we had no money.

"Now, before the police come to get me again," I said to Celia as I pointed to the napkin. "I went back to that place a year later and paid for the food, plus a generous tip. The idea of rock n' roll is about survival. It's about finding your voice and sticking to it."

Celia nodded.

She smiled.

"Dex..."

"She's pissed that you're avoiding the important stuff," Candice said. She hugged my arm. "Don't waste her time, my dear."

"My dear?" Dex asked me. "You don't have to be shy. You can tell her what you call me."

"Oh?" Candice asked, her face turning red again.

"What does she call you?" Celia asked.

"*Thunder Cock*," I said.

"What?" Candice yelled.

"I bring the thunder," I said. "Or you can call me *Lightning Jizz*..."

"Dex, stop it," Candice said.

"Wow," Celia said.

"Actually, Candice never calls me anything," I said. "When I get inside her, she's speechless."

"Okay," Celia said. "I was more or less wondering when you're not screwing each other."

"When is that?" I asked with a laugh.

I felt the anger pouring from Candice.

I stopped walking and moved my hand to Candice's hip and pulled her close for a hug.

"Seriously though, she's the fucking best," I said. "She doesn't call me anything. I'm usually too busy annoying her for something nice to be said about me. It's my thing though. I have to annoy her. Just to remind her..."

"You may not know this about your favorite, badass rock star here," Candice said, "but he's very clingy. And very worried about me leaving him."

"Hey, hey, hey," I said. "We're not running that."

"No worries, Dex," Celia said. "I'll send over the story before it hits the world. You know that."

I looked at Candice and smiled.

She could play the game too.

She could say anything about me.

"You two look happy," Celia said. "I mean... it must be nice to not hide anymore."

"I don't mind the house," Candice said, looking around. "There's always something to do."

"But to sneak out of here and work as a barista?" Celia asked. "What a fascinating story. To go to that length..."

"I think what you're trying to say, Celia, is that we'd do anything for each other," I said. "And, look, the shit I've done... yeah, it's crazy. But imagine playing a show and not being able to see your girl out there in the crowd. Or see her backstage. Or when you get backstage and it's the party of a lifetime and you feel empty inside. Not from the fans or the music or the band... but because I miss her." I looked at Candice again. "It's like I've missed you my entire life."

Candice swallowed hard. She opened her mouth to speak.

I lowered my mouth down to hers, not really giving a damn about what she wanted to say.

I kissed her wildly in front of Celia.

Nice and sloppy too, just to be sure her phone picked up the sound.

Candice pushed me away and laughed in a way that told me she was soaking wet. I mean so wet that I felt like telling Celia to go outside for a few minutes so I could fall to my knees and have a taste of Candice for myself.

I was thirsty. *For her.*

My dick twisted in my jeans and I had to adjust myself.

Celia's eyes widened as big as her fake glasses.

I shrugged. "What can I say. She makes me fucking hard."

"Shit, Dex," Candice said.

"No, it's fine," Celia said. "I wasn't expecting roses and chocolates and a love story here."

I looked down at Candice again and winked.

"Let's work our way outside and have a drink," I said. "Then we can finish this up."

"Perfect," Celia said. "I'm more or less just looking for how it all happened. How does a barista meet and fall in love with a rock star? How does a rock star fall for a barista when he has women at his disposal? And why the secrecy for so long? And why now... why tell the truth now?"

"Great questions," I said.

I guided the way into the actual living room.

There were pillars in the middle of the floor. Along with a fireplace that was made to fuck in front of. I caught Candice looking and it made me smile.

"I mean, the story isn't all that great," I said. "I needed some coffee after a long night. And I met Candice. She didn't treat me like I was a rock star. She was actually rude to me."

"Well, when you consider him being hungover, snot dripping out of his nose," Candice said.

"Oh yeah?" Celia asked.

"No," I said.

"Oh yeah," Candice said. "Vomit on his shirt. He looked ready to cry. I thought he was homeless or something."

I curled my lip at Candice.

Then I grinned again.

*Maybe it was time for our next surprise.*

---

OUTSIDE, THE SUN WAS SHINING BEAUTIFULLY BRIGHT. THE BACKYARD was totally secluded thanks to more landscaping. Which worked out because my pool always had some action in it. At the far end there was a hot tub and there sat three beautiful women, sipping fruity drinks, each on their cell phone, probably already sending out fifty selfies on social media.

Candice didn't seem very happy with that.

But that wasn't the entire surprise.

There were two other women in my pool.

They both popped up out of the water and climbed up the steps.

*Topless.*

Candice let out a gasp and dug her nails into my arm.

"Well then," Celia said.

"Don't mind them," I said. I whistled. "Where are your tops?"

"You bought them to come off, remember?" Bethany said.

I laughed. "You're not supposed to say that. I'm supposed to be the good boy now."

"Hardly," Ana said.

Candice dug her nails even harder.

I looked down at her. "You know Bethany and Ana. Old friends."

"This is interesting," Celia said. "Topless women in the pool of an engaged rock star."

"To be fair, they are strippers," I said. "It's their nature. And they're really good people. How about you move your eyes from her tits and show some respect?"

Celia put a hand up. "I'm just taking it all in."

"For twenty bucks, Ana will really show you what *taking it all in* means," I whispered to Celia.

Now I had her flustered.

Bethany and Ana stood there, perfect and topless.

Shit, we all had slipped so much money into the string thong of those two it wasn't even funny. They worked at *The Down* and Filthy Line had a, well, *filthy* reputation there.

"You're a fucking asshole," Candice whispered to me.

"Just playing the part," I whispered back to her. I looked at Celia. "So what else did you want to know?"

"Uh... right." She cleared her throat. "So you two met. I'm not sure how much detail you want to go into..."

"None," I said. "Our love was kind of fast and wild. And the secrecy was hot as fuck in the beginning. Right, sweetie?"

Candice was staring at Bethany's well placed tits. She named her tits Reed and Jay because they paid for them. Ana was all natural and well known for her shape and size. But I didn't see what Candice and Celia saw. Which made me wonder if I was just a good person or maybe a little soft.

*Well, I was never soft...*

"Candice?" Celia asked.

Candice snapped her gaze from *tit city* and grinned. "Right."

I whistled again and nodded to Bethany and Ana.

They walked right toward us.

"So it was all hot and fun and secret," Celia said. "Which I completely understand. I'm putting this timeline together now... this

was around the time Nash was having his own legal troubles, right?"

"Yeah, I think," I said.

Bethany and Ana stood inches from Candice.

I pulled Candice close to me again and kissed the top of her head.

"I fucking love our life," I said to Candice.

"So good to see you again," Bethany said to Candice.

"Ugh, I wish I had your body," Ana said. "You should totally be naked right now."

"I agree," I said.

Candice looked right at Celia.

*Here's your chance to blow it all up, sweetie.*

"See what I deal with here?" Candice asked.

"This doesn't bother you?" Celia asked, pouncing on the chance to break Candice a little.

"I've seen plenty of boobs in my life," Candice said.

"But strippers? The reputation at the strip club? Doesn't that..."

Candice lifted her left hand and showed off the ring. "They do half the work for me. Less foreplay. More time to myself when he comes and passes out right after."

"Damn," I said.

She was good.

She was really fucking good.

*She was... just... fuck...*

## Candice

Oh, the words were there. They were on the tip of my tongue. And I had to keep pushing them back and wait for the right time to explode.

Bethany and Ana finally covered up their fucking boobs.

They put towels around their bodies and walked to the hot tub.

I gave Dex an evil glare.

*Strippers too?*

He knew what I was thinking and he nodded.

He put his lips to my ear. "But right now I only want to fuck you."

"You couldn't afford me," I said.

Which only made Dex smile.

And it made me feel...

"How about a drink?" Dex offered.

"I can't," Celia said. "Other than soda."

"Done," Dex said.

Of course he had a little hut looking thing near the pool.

His own damn bar next to his giant pool outside of his giant house.

The best part was how clean the house was.

It just smelled of *him*.

Not that filthy side of Dex, but that rough, clean, manly smell. Like fresh soap and a mix of cedar and sandalwood.

There was a line Dex walked between real, fake, what people thought of him, and the truth. Not that I was one to think anything, but at least I wasn't in the media spotlight.

I sat on a barstool and Dex went behind the bar.

He poured me a small glass of whiskey.

He got Celia a soda.

And then he stood there with the bottle of whiskey and drank from it.

I sipped the whiskey and it was powerful.

But it was good.

It was needed.

My argument with Cali was still playing through my mind.

And the fact that this engagement thing was picking up steam.

"So can I ask about the proposal?" Celia asked.

"No," Dex said. "Keep to the story. Look, there came a time... maybe after seeing Nash and Olivia... I wanted that too. Like, fuck, they're out there doing their thing. And I'm here..."

"Just hiding," I said.

"And who made that decision to stop hiding and come forward?" Celia asked.

"I think Dex actually cares about me," I said. "Shocker, I know. The lifestyle is crazy. And I get to show up to my job and do my thing... normalcy."

"Not anymore. You're everywhere, Candice."

"Well, after him getting arrested twice..."

"And that's my fault," Dex said. "Put that in there. I'm not blaming anyone but me. The pressure of hiding just made me break a little."

"I can imagine," Celia said. "So now what? When's the wedding?"

I reached for Candice. "There's no timeline. And knowing us, we'll just wake up one morning and go get married."

"What about the band?" Celia asked.

"I'll shoot them a text," Dex said. "Shit, maybe we'll get married at *The Down*. I think Bethany can perform marriages."

I felt rage and jealousy surge through me.

I looked at Celia. "Every girl's dream, right?"

"Married to a rock star?" Celia asked. "Getting married by a stripper? I mean... that's the life..."

"Ana can be the flower girl," Dex said. "I'll even pay her extra to put her clothes on."

*You. Fucking. Asshole.*

"Maybe I'll walk down the aisle naked," I said.

"I'm ready to get married right now," Dex said.

"You two are fucking adorable," Celia said. She stopped recording on her phone. "I mean it. This is remarkable. I thought I was walking into a load of shit. Honestly."

"What kind of shit?" I asked.

"Oh, please. Dex is arrested and suddenly engaged? I was waiting to see the price tag hanging off of you, Candice. And I know the way Toby works. Plus, those fuckers over at *SLECK*... they'll do anything to protect their assets..."

"I'm not an asset," Dex said.

"Yes, you are, Dex."

Dex put the whiskey bottle down. "We're not an asset, Celia. That's what makes us different. *SLECK* doesn't own us. We own them."

"Fair enough," Celia said.

I took note in my head of how Dex reacted to things.

It was interesting to see the man showing from behind the rock star.

That he could feel things other than his dick getting hard.

*But remember, Candice, his dick getting hard was because of you...*

Heat hit my cheeks but I casually reminded myself that it was Dex. He could probably get hard looking at a puddle of water because his filthy rock star mind would somehow turn it into sex.

*Puddle of water... oozing... dripping... like the sweet lips between my legs...*

I looked down at my glass of whiskey and let out a silent breath.

Either Dex was rubbing off on me or...

I hurried to drink the rest of the whiskey.

Without asking, Dex poured me another. Then he took a big gulp from the bottle for himself.

"I think I have what I need," Celia said. "I'll make it good for both of you. I hope nobody drives you too crazy, Candice."

"If I can handle Dex, I can handle anything," I said.

Like someone was feeding me lines.

"She's the fucking greatest," Dex said.

"She's something," Celia said. "I'd lose my mind if I came home to my fiancé had strippers in our pool."

I smiled.

"What else do you have, Celia?" Dex asked.

"New music?"

"Writing songs every single day," Dex said. "New single will be out soon."

"Shows?"

"Tour is done but we're working on a few local things. You never know what could pop up."

"Perfect," Celia said. "Now... I have to ask just to clear the air and say I did so... besides the personal legal issues... there's been rumblings about the long lost sixth member..."

"Get out," Dex said. His face dropped. "Get the fuck out of my house right now."

"Dex," I said.

I reached for his hand and he swatted me away.

He grabbed the bottle of whiskey and chugged again.

Then he pointed with the bottle. "I said get the fuck out of here, Celia."

She stood up and nodded. "Got it."

"Wait a second," I said. "This is crazy."

"It's okay," Celia said. She looked nervous. "I'll show myself out."

"Stay the fuck away from us," Dex said. "I swear on my life... you ever say that again and... just fuck off."

Celia hurried toward the house.

I stood there and looked around.

"Dex?" I asked.

He drank more whiskey and then slammed the bottle to the ground.

It shattered and I jumped.

He looked at me and shook his head.

"What was that?" I asked.

He pointed at me. "Nothing. Don't ask."

"I thought I was your fiancée," I said.

"Some things aren't allowed," he said.

Dex walked from behind the bar and away.  
He ran his hands through his hair and stood at the edge of the pool.  
I touched the glass of whiskey and debated my next move.  
The rock star had emotion. Real emotion. Like he was an actual human.  
I looked down at the whiskey and sighed.  
"Here we go," I whispered.  
*I put the glass to my lips and drank it all in one shot.*

---

"DEX."  
"Not now, sweetie."  
"Dex."  
"Don't fucking say a word," he growled.  
He wouldn't turn around and look at me.  
I had this sudden urge to lift my shirt. Because he wasn't going to turn around. Then I could tease him and say I...  
*What are you doing, Candice?*  
The whiskey made my mind feel things.  
I shook my head.  
"Dex," I said again in a deep voice.  
"I'm not fucking joking," he said.  
"Neither am I," I said.  
I slammed my hands to his back and watched him stumble forward into the pool.  
He kicked and punched at the air like he could stop himself from hitting the water.  
I covered my mouth when I realized what I had done.  
Dex went into the water and jumped up. He dove for the side of the pool and climbed out in two seconds.  
"What the fuck is wrong with you?" he yelled at me.  
I swung my hand and slapped him across the face. "What the fuck is wrong with you? Strippers? Are you fucking kidding me? I'm not some cheap fucking whore, Dex."  
"They're friends," he said.  
"They were naked!"

"They weren't naked," he said. "They were wearing bottoms."

"That's naked!" I screamed. "And then the other ones..."

I looked at the hot tub.

"It was a test," he said.

My eyes locked onto his.

*God his eyes are so dark and mysterious and gorgeous...*

It was the whiskey talking.

Water dripping from his hair, his nose, his chin, his shirt clinging tightly to his perfect body.

Him getting soaked was punishment to myself.

*Fuck.*

"Strippers," I growled. "No."

"Part of the life, sweetie."

"Not part of the engagement."

"Tough."

"Tough?" I asked. I held up my left hand. "Tough on you. I'll take this ring off and tell everyone the truth."

Dex stepped toward me. "Try me. Then you'll become part of a bigger scandal. You're mine now, Candice. Don't be so jealous. Bethany and Ana are old friends. That's all. And they sure as fuck took to you. Why not have a little fun in life?"

I swung my hand again and he stopped me.

He pulled me toward him, his wet clothes touching my dry clothes.

"I fucking hate you, Dex," I said. "You could have told me they were here. I didn't know what to do."

"You did perfect. Fucking driving me crazy the entire time."

"Strippers though?"

"Quit being jealous, sweetie."

I pushed away from him and walked back to the bar.

Dex followed me.

I grabbed my empty whiskey glass and spun around.

"Fill this up," I ordered Dex.

He grabbed the glass out of my hand and threw it.

A couple seconds later it hit the ground and shattered.

His hands touched my face and he kissed me.

I pulled away.

He lowered his hands to my sides and pulled me against him.

"Don't get me wet," I said.

"Too late, sweetie," he said.

The whiskey in my head trickled down to my face. And that whiskey then trickled down to my...

"Fuck," I whispered.

Dex kissed me again.

He was fast, hot, wild, and in a way, he was exactly what I needed in my life right then. Fuck the engagement thing. Fuck his legal issues. Fuck my situation with Trent.

This was about the moment and the need in that moment.

His hands slid around to my ass and he picked me up as he kissed me.

He walked me so I bumped into the bar and he drove himself against me hard.

*And everything was hard.*

His lips traveled from my lips to my neck without kissing me.

I looked around.

We were outside.

Right in the open.

Well, not in the open but... you know... outside...

"Fuck, sweetie," he growled against my neck. "We're crossing the line right now."

"I know, Dex," I said.

He lifted his gaze to my eyes.

There were a few seconds of me taking deep breaths.

Then I turned around.

I looked at the wall of booze behind his bar.

His body touched mine.

His wet clothes from me pushing him into the pool started to soak me.

*But I was already wet... and he knew it...*

I bit my lips as his hands touched my hips.

I looked down and watched as his hands moved toward the button on my jeans. His rock star fingers... the rings... tearing at my jeans with force.

His left hand sliding under my shirt and moving up, a rock star's hand spreading his fingers wide against my stomach.

I didn't have time to attempt to catch my breath because his right hand slipped down the front of my panties.

My legs shivered and toes curled as his middle finger was like a fucking missile. And the target was my clit. The tip of his finger hooked against my body and I drove my hips forward, groaning, forgetting I was outside.

I grabbed the edge of the bar and pushed myself back against him.

The pool water seeped through the second I jumped away.

But Dex's grip...

"*Ohgod,*" I managed to say before losing all words.

He added another finger to the fun and pulled at my body, sending my core into a threatening spasm. I felt like I was going to explode.

And Dex suddenly let up.

He knew what he was doing and that he was in control.

*Fuck... fuck... fuck...*

He moved his hand down to my inner thigh, his fingers shooting out of the side of my panties. Gripping my thigh so I'd jump at the tickling, pleasurable feeling attacking me.

His left hand decided to move up, sliding over my bra. Before I could say a word, his fingers curled and pulled, exposing my left breast. Still under my shirt though. *But...*

Each of his fingertips took their turn sliding along my nipple, making me jump, shiver, tighten...

"*Ahhhh,*" was all that came out.

Dex's right hand moved back up and between my legs. Two fingers against my tender slit, knowing I was more than ready for him. *And not just his rock star fingers either.*

He pressed and teased, making circles against me, leaving me bending my legs, begging for him to take me.

With his other hand at my breast, he made a fist and I watched the large bulge from inside the top of my shirt move.

And then I felt the metal of his rings against my nipple.

I put my head back and gasped for a breath.

Every muscle in me tightened in fear of pain but there was none.

Dex had a masterful way of moving...

Each metal ring touching me...

I turned my head and he plunged his fingers into my body.

My head collapsed back to his wet shirt, against his hard chest.

I shut my eyes and felt my body moving with his touch.

His left hand kneading my breast, sending signals between my legs screaming *Look! Someone knows what to do up here!* as his fingers moved, twisting and turning, flirting with my clit long enough to make me groan.

Leaving me on the edge, ready to beg him to just finish me off.

*Please, Dex, fucking please... just...*

He brushed his lips on my neck and when he nibbled at my skin, I reached the edge of the cliff. My hips jerked forward and slammed back against his body.

Dex grunted and put his lips to my ear. "That's a good fiancée... now let it all go, sweetie. Give me what I've been craving since the second I saw you."

I whimpered and an explosion of fireworks went off in my stomach.

I didn't know what to do with my hands so I just reached for the bar again.

As I held tight, my body let go.

The warm rushes of pleasure went through my entire body.

And Dex played a deadly game with his fingers. Taking long strokes, curling his fingers, sliding up to my clit, then back down. Slowing by the second too... fucking guiding me from pleasure to reality...

When his left hand released its hold on my breast, he flickered his middle finger to my nipple for one last little bit of teasing fun.

He moved away from me and spun me around.

I couldn't stand straight.

I reached back for the bar and leaned against it.

My shirt was a mess.

My breast still hanging from my bra under my shirt.

My jeans undone.

And this fucking crazy, hot rock star staring at me.

Without a word, Dex put his two fingers that were inside me to his lips and kissed them.

My face burned red hot.

*He's filthy...*

Then Dex licked his lips and nodded. "It's the life, sweetie. Booze, drugs, naked women. All around. All the time." He licked his lips again. "But as long as I get my fill where I want it, there's nothing to worry about."

I couldn't stop blinking.  
I didn't know what to say.  
Or do.

So I didn't move.

Dex closed in on me.

His lips touched my cheek and I shut my eyes.

"I need to go get changed, sweetie," he said. "Because some wild, beautiful woman tossed me into the pool."

Dex walked away.

It took me a few breaths to finally move on my own.

I looked around.

Then I looked down at myself.

*How far was I going to go with Dex and this crazy thing?*

Dex

Celia's story was fucking perfect.

Between that and the video the guys posted with me on the table taking Candice's hand, we were in full swing.

I opened the door to the cafe and saw my fiancée behind the counter.

She had papers spread apart and didn't realize I had walked in.

When I got to the counter, I scooped up the papers and took them.

"Dex!" Candice yelled. "What the fuck?"

"What is this?" I asked.

"My job."

"Paperwork?"

"Ordering. Inventory. A real job..."

"You sure about that?"

"Wow," she said. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

"Candice!" a voice yelled.

Gregor rushed from the back with a nasty look on his face.

Up until he saw me.

Then he calmed right down.

"Dex! What's up, man?"

"I need to steal her," I said. "You know we're engaged, right?"

"Yeah," Gregor said. "Blew my mind away. Can't believe you kept it a secret."

"So let's talk for a second," I said. "Come here, my man."

I waved Gregor around the counter and put my arm around him.

"This is so cool," he said.

"Yeah it is," I said. I slammed the papers off his chest. "You own the place, right?"

Gregor nodded.

Everything about him was fake. Pretty rich boy fake.

"Well, you don't own it, I bet. Your parents do. This is your puppy."

"Okay..."

"She's not doing this anymore, man," I said. "Paperwork? You paying her for this?"

"Dex..."

"Gregor," I said. I turned and pushed the papers to his chest and drove him back against the wall.

"Dex!" Candice yelled.

"We're just talking," I said. Behind me I heard the door open and knew it was the rest of the band. "Right, Gregor? Just talking?"

"Yeah," he said.

"My boys are here," I said. "You like Filthy Line, right?"

"Fuck yeah, man. You guys are the best. Like... ever..."

"Front row. Next show. Got it?"

"For me?"

"Of course," I said. "You're a reasonable guy. And I know you wouldn't take advantage of my fiancée. By making her do this shit work when she's not getting paid for it."

Gregor took the papers and nodded. "Right. Yeah. It's cool. She just... she likes it, you know? Reminds her of her own business. I'm just helping out."

I looked at Candice.

*Your own business?*

"Gregor, move along," I said as I shoved him.

"Hey, where the fuck is Toby?" Reed asked.

"I thought we were meeting here," Jay said.

"Can we just do this at *The Down*?" Sab asked.

"Dex," Nash said.

I couldn't take my eyes off of Candice.

Gregor said something to her and she walked around the counter.

She closed in on me and I opened my arms for a hug.

The door opened once again and I heard Toby's voice.

"This is working out perfect, guys," Toby said. "I have all the faith..."

"Come to kiss me, sweetie?" I asked Candice.

*She swung and slapped me across the face.*

---

"DON'T FUCKING DO THAT," SHE YELLED AT ME. "EVER. THIS IS MY JOB. Don't act like some fucking macho guy. I can handle myself, Dex."

"Working out perfect?" Barry asked.

I rubbed my cheek and nodded to Toby and the lawyers.

"We're happy to be together," I said.

Candice took off her apron and balled it up. "I got the rest of the day off."

"Perfect," Dex said. "Come hang then. After this shit meeting, we're setting up for a show."

"Tonight?" Candice asked.

"A surprise gig," Nash said. "We're going to play the new song."

"Fucking social media," Jay said.

"Right?" Sab said. "One second you're fucking a pineapple and the next you're playing a show."

"I swear on my life if you assholes do anything with a pineapple tonight I will leave the band," Jay said.

"Go solo," Reed said.

Nash snapped his fingers. "*Jay and the Pineapples... one night only...*"

I laughed. "*Small hole, big sound...*"

"Can we cut it with the fruit fucking for a second?" Toby asked.

"Ah, party pooper is here," Sab said. "I love talking fruit fucking."

"Then go fuck something yourself," Jay said. "Get one of those little oranges and stick it up your ass."

"Sorry you have to hear this, sweetie," I said to Candice.

"If I do that, I'll just bend over and shoot it at you, Jay," Sab said.

Sab turned and bent over and grabbed his ass.

I looked at the lawyers and shook my head. "And you're all so worried about me, right?"

"Maybe not so much anymore," Franklin said.

"Yeah?" I asked.

"The story is helping your case," he said.

"There's sympathy for you," Toby said. "How or why, I don't know."

"It's Candice," Reed said. "Look at her. She's delicious."

"Hey," I said, pointing to Reed. "Dick in your pants and eyes somewhere else."

"Oh, protective of his fiancée," Jay said.

"Fake fiancée," Sab said. "She's still up for grabs when this thing is done."

"Why don't you all go shove some watermelons up your ass?" Candice asked. "When is this done... soon?"

"Not yet," Franklin said. "The plan is to keep *SLECK* happy first, of course. And then we make the legal shit go away. Or calm down. Or fade. You know, rock star level status."

"So it's the norm?" Candice asked. "Kind of like going home to your pool and finding strippers naked in it?"

"They weren't naked," I said.

"Oh, fuck, Dex," Toby said.

"What?" I asked. "I had to keep it real. Celia was sniffing hard."

"She was," Candice said. "She was looking for a hole in the story big time."

"Which is why Bethany and Ana were there," I said to Candice.

"Ah, *B Girl* was there?" Jay asked with a smile. "How's her mother?"

"I didn't get to ask," I said. "Candice chased her away."

"I did not," Candice said. "It was just..."

"Oh, she's just too cute," Reed said. "A couple of topless chicks have her this scattered?"

"Fuck off, Reed," I said.

"Hey, hey, hey," Toby said. "This is actually working. It's helping all of us right now. So just let it play out. It'll be part of the story when this ends. The life ends the engagement. Right?"

I looked at Candice.

She swallowed hard. "Yeah. Right."

I didn't like or understand the feeling that sank inside me when she said that. Admitting that this was going to end.

"So what else do you need from me?" I asked Toby and the lawyers.

"Just wanted to go over the notes," Barry said. "Review the case. The files."

"I don't have time for that," I said.

"Dex," Toby said.

"That's your job," I said to Toby. "I've got my fiancée. That's all I need in my life."

I grabbed Candice's hand and walked toward the door.

I knew how it looked.

Like I was really falling for her or some dumb shit.

*But... you know... whatever.*

---

I POURED MYSELF A DRINK AND SAT CLOSE TO CANDICE IN THE BACK OF the SUV. It seemed this part of the life had grown on her. Which was a big part of it. Forever driving around in SUV's with the windows blacked out so nobody knew who it was. Usually the band cruised together. And usually we drank everything in sight and trashed the hell out of the backseat to give Toby a bigger headache.

I missed the tour bus. I missed the road. And I missed Bill.

The best damn driver we ever had.

And I knew Bill missed the road too. It was the one thing that kept him sane.

We took good care of Bill, at least financially, but fucking demons didn't care about money. In fact, demons liked to spend money. All of it.

"Have a drink, sweetie," I said to Candice.

She shook her head.

She was still pissed at me for doing what I did to Gregor on her behalf.

I put my hand to hers and squeezed.

She didn't make a move or a sound.

That left me with no choice.

I put the whiskey glass to my lips and threw it back.

There was probably one thing better tasting than that whiskey...  
I put the glass down and slid from the seat to the floor.

It always seemed like I was on one knee in front of Candice. How fucking fitting for our current situation, huh?

She looked down at me and gasped. "Dex... what in the hell are you doing?"

I put my hands to her legs and inched up... her black pants... tight against her body... showing all those crazy curves of hers...

Fucking shit, I'd buy all the coffee in that cafe to hang around and stare at her.

Candice touched my wrists. "What are you doing?"

"Breaking you open," I said.

"Dex..."

"You can be pissed at me, sweetie," I whispered. "As much as you want. That asshole walks all over you. And nobody walks all over you. I won't ever allow it. You're my girl, Candice. Someone walks all over you and I step on their face. Got it?"

She swallowed hard. "Thanks. But I can handle it myself."

"Except you don't," I said. "Are you punishing yourself for something?"

Candice scowled. "Is that part of the fake engagement?"

I moved my hands up to her hips and curled my fingers around the edges of her pants. I tugged once and Candice gasped again.

She didn't lift her ass off the seat, but that was okay.

I just moved forward. Toward her. My right hand releasing its hold on her pants and sliding her shirt up just enough to expose bare skin. That's where my lips sought their comfort for the moment.

When I kissed her lower belly, Candice melted into the seat and slid forward.

"Dex... the windows..."

"Are all fucking tinted," I growled. "Nobody can see you. Or hear you, sweetie."

"This is fucking crazy. You're supposed to be playing a show or something, right?"

"Then you better relax and enjoy the ride," I said.

"I can't just come while under pressure," she said.

I grinned at her. "Let's find out if that's true."

Candice shut her eyes and bit her lip.

My right hand moved her shirt up a little bit more. I kissed her belly button for fun and inched down again. I bit at her pants pulling and shaking my head like a wild dog with a piece of meat.

"You're going to tell me everything, sweetie," I said without looking up at her. "You're going to trust me."

"Why..." Candice let out a deep breath. "Why does it matter?"

My right hand moved down to the top of her pants and I gently pulled. I took her dark purple panties too and saw the smooth skin that led where my tongue craved to dance.

As I moved my left hand around to her back, she lifted herself off the seat.

*So you are a little filthy like me, huh, sweetie?*

I looked up at her and the way she stared down at me... *fuck me...*

I pulled and thirsted for her more than I thirsted for whiskey.

Candice moved her right hand. First, she touched her own stomach. Her hand twitching and nervous. Then she took her hand off her stomach and reached for me. My hair. Fingers still shaking. But wanting to grab my hair.

I growled in the depths of my throat.

I came forward again and flicked my tongue against her soft, warm mound.

Her grip tightened around my hair.

*Then people started banging on every window of the SUV.*

---

I REACHED FOR THE BUTTON AND PUT THE WINDOW DOWN AN INCH TO see Reed's face staring at me. I looked to the back window and saw Jay and Sab with their faces against the glass. And at the other window there was Nash.

"What are you doing?" Reed asked.

Candice kicked her feet at me, hitting me in the stomach and the balls.

She turned and tried to curl up in a ball of embarrassment.

"I'm going to fucking kill you," I said to Reed.

"In the back of the SUV?" Reed asked, shaking his head. "You know we can see in there, right?"

"What?" Candice yelled.

The other door opened and Nash gave a wave. "Hey, Dex, this isn't the one with the total blacked out windows."

"What the hell do I care?" I asked.

Candice looked at me, eyes wide.

"Where are we?" she asked Nash.

"Our jam room," Nash said. "Liv is here. She's dying to meet you."

"Get me out of here," she said.

Nash offered his hand and helped her out of the SUV.

I opened the door where Reed was and I tried to hit him with it.

I hurried around the back to find Jay and Sab clapping.

"Put it away," I said. "I didn't even get to kiss her. You fucking assholes."

Candice stood outside our rehearsal pad, hugging herself.

I crept up on her and grinned as I stood next to her.

"Don't say a thing," she said.

"When the moment hits you, right?"

"The only thing hitting you will be my fist."

"Live a little, sweetie," I said. "I don't know what happened in your past but don't let it ruin today and tomorrow."

She looked at me. "Am I really hearing this from the guy who needs to fake an engagement to stay out of jail?"

"At least I live life to the fullest."

"Fuck you, Dex."

I touched her arm. "And you want to. You want to live life to the fullest. And you want me to fuck you. Don't lie to yourself, sweetie. You want my tongue dancing between your legs. You want to scream my name as you come. You want to watch me pull away from your sweet fucking body and watch me lick my lips so I get every last taste of you."

Candice knocked my arm away. "I need to go home and shower. I'm not going anywhere like this."

"Soaking wet?"

"I was at work. Remember? Some people have real jobs, Dex. Not this party life that you have."

I nodded. "Right. I'll have someone take you home then."

"You mean take me to my car," she said. "Because I can drive myself home."

"And then someone will pick you up. Bring you to the gig. Right?"

She curled her lip. "Fine."

"I love you, my pretty fiancée," I teased.

"It was a flower shop, Dex."

"What? A flower shop?"

"I owned my own flower shop," she said. "That probably sounds weird, I know. A flower shop. Where the fuck does that come from, right? But that's what it was. I found a corner shop and I insisted on making it work. Of all businesses to run. It was just..."

Candice laughed and turned her head.

*Ah, fuck, sweetie, are you going to cry?*

I reached for her hand and she lifted that hand to her face.

She cleared her throat. "It just didn't work out, Dex. That's life. I lost everything and had to move into Cali's basement. Her biggest fear was always her little sister becoming a burden on her. And that fear came true. So look at me. And I keep telling myself I'm figuring it out. That's why I took the first job I could find. That's why I feel grateful and guilty that I have the job. Okay?"

Candice walked away from me.

Nash came out of the rehearsal space with Liv.

His arm around her, pulling her close, kissing her, trying to bite her, making her laugh. She grabbed his shirt and they started to playfully push and wrestle only to end up kissing over and over.

I curled my lip and went after Candice one more time.

I didn't grab for her arm or try to turn her around.

Instead, I touched her hips.

My hands fit so perfectly to the curves of her body.

*Goddammit, Dex, this isn't...*

"Fucking failure hurts, sweetie," I whispered. "But it doesn't fucking define you. I've failed a lot in my life. My first band got kicked off stage for sucking so much. Even when Filthy Line started playing gigs, it was bad. I've had songs go bust. I've had relationships go bad..."

Candice snorted. "Relationships? Did you run out of one dollar bills?"

I grinned. "I don't think you're a failure, sweetie. At least not when you're in my arms. Or my tongue is tasting your skin."

Candice turned her head and looked up at me. It was the most honest look I'd ever seen her give me. "Does everything you say have to go back to sex?"

She wanted honesty... so I gave it to her.

*"Always, sweetie."*

## Candice

“Don’t worry, I’m not like any of them.”

I looked at Olivia and smiled. “That’s good.”

“So... engaged... huh?”

I showed her my hand. “Yup.”

Olivia showed me her hand. With a real diamond ring. “Me too.”

“Nash, right?”

“Nash... yeah.” She rolled her eyes. “I had to write stories to make him not seem like such a total asshole.”

“Those must have been good stories,” I said. “Some real fiction.”

“You have no idea.”

“I can’t believe I got sucked into this, Olivia,” I said.

“First off, call me Liv,” she said. “Second, you wanted to get sucked into this. It’s always a choice. And the life just comes with it. I can tell you something but you have to swear to keep your mouth shut.”

“Okay,” I said.

Liv grinned at me.

We sat next to each other in the same SUV I had been in with Dex. In fact, Liv was sitting where I had been sitting. When Dex decided to...

*Why did the band have to ruin that? Dex was going to go down on me. A rock star. A real rock star.*

"What you're doing is working," Liv said. "With Dex."

"Oh?"

"I don't think any of them will ever be calm. It's something in their blood. That wildness they need like a drug. But when you're around or involved in the conversation, it's like he's almost in a trance."

"Playing his part," I said. "There's a lot riding on this thing."

"If you say so. How much is he paying you?"

I shook my head. "Nothing."

"Which bears the question, why are you doing this for free?"

I looked forward.

Liv laughed. "It's okay, Candice. Even if it's an escape from reality, that's cool too. I won't lie to anyone, I used Nash to get a book deal."

"You did?"

"That's right. I played the game and I got what I wanted. I didn't exactly think I'd fall for him, so that was just extra. Maybe at the end of the day we're all trying to get something out of each other and life."

"And what about us? This. What are you trying to get out of me, Liv?"

"Someone to talk to," she said. "Not many people can understand what it's like. I heard about the strippers in the pool."

"And the hot tub," I said.

"Right. Just wait for the show tonight."

"Why?"

"It seems women get allergic to their bras when Filthy Line is playing," Liv said.

"Great. More boobs. Just what I need to see."

"As long as Dex wants to plant his lips on yours, who cares?"

I laughed. "That's not happening."

*He just touched me there... and touched me somewhere else... and then wanted to kiss...*

"Good for you then," Liv said. "But I hope you're around. These guys are something special."

"Hey, can I ask you something now?"

"Sure."

"When that lady was interviewing Dex, she brought up the sixth member of the band... and Dex lost his mind."

Liv touched my hand. "Everyone has a past, Candice. Even the baddest of rock stars. Some things aren't my place to talk about. And some things I don't even know about. But you have a phone. I'm sure you're smart enough to look it up."

"Right. Of course." My brain scrambled to change the subject and kill time. "Uh... so the wedding. That sounds amazing."

"Well, it's just an engagement for now," Liv said. "I'm in no rush. Neither is Nash."

"Right. And you trust him?"

"Do I have a reason not to?"

"I didn't mean it like that... but..."

"You can't stop picturing the strippers. Or knowing that Dex has been in some wild positions."

"And I shouldn't even care," I said. "But it just..."

"Makes you a little jealous," Liv said. "In some messed up way, it's just part of their life. There was a time when some of those strippers and others helped the band. If you really get into the history of Filthy Line you'll see it. To them it's not just fake boobs and glitter. In a way, it's their version of church. Their family."

"So you're going to suggest I look past the mostly naked women and find their hearts?"

"That's up to you," Liv said. "And as far as trust goes, you're either all in or out all-together. There's no halfway or portion of it. So, yeah, your heart is on the line each and every day you're with him. But when he hugs you or touches you and if you feel that crazy fire inside your body, you know it's real."

The SUV came to a stop behind the cafe.

"Thanks for the ride," I said.

"Hope to see you tonight," Liv said. "And thanks for pretending to be engaged to Dex. They were going to ask me to spin some stories and Nash got pissed."

"It'll all be over soon enough, right?"

"If you say so," Liv said with a wink.

I got out of the SUV and hurried to my car.

I sat behind the wheel and felt my heart racing.

Not pounding out of fear. Not steady out of clear thinking.

But racing.

Like the wild kind of racing.  
*Fucking Dex left me breathless even when he wasn't near me.*

---

AFTER A LONG, HOT SHOWER, I WIPED THE MIRROR WITH MY HAND AND looked down at my towel. Already feeling stupid for what I was going to do, I opened the towel and moved to my tip toes so I could get a good look at my chest.

*They're there... right?*

There was nothing wrong with my chest.

*I guess...*

I mean compared to Bethany's chest, which was filled with enough plastic to consider her chest a recycling facility, I didn't have much to offer.

But at least what I had was real.

Except Dex didn't do real.

I wasn't even real to him.

The ring on my finger wasn't real.

The words we said to that woman interviewing us...

I shut my eyes.

*It's not supposed to be real. Ever.*

Kissing and enjoying him all over me was real in the sense of him touching and tasting. Even my heart racing, pounding, the way I reacted. Sure, that was real. But anything else lingering... nope. Not real. And it never could be.

I dropped the towel and hurried to get dressed.

When I left the bathroom and went to my part of the basement, my sister was sitting on the edge of the bed.

Holding her phone in her hand.

The *mom look* tore through me.

I almost had the urge to lie to her about where I was going tonight.

"What?" I asked.

"I read the story," she said.

"Really? You're looking me up now?"

"Yeah, I am," Cali said. "My little sister went from quiet barista to a rock star's fiancée in one night. What do you think that does to

someone like me?"

"Drives you nuts," I said. "Because it doesn't fit your plan."

"That's right," she said.

"What do you want me to say, Cali?" I showed her my left hand. "This isn't a diamond ring. I know that. Guess what? Maybe I don't want a diamond ring. I'm not you."

"Tell me this has nothing to do with Trent."

"What?"

Cali stood up. "I should have been there for you more. That was a nasty thing you two went through. It wasn't just the relationship."

"What are you getting at?"

"Did you do this to spite him?" Cali asked.

"Yeah. I'm faking an engagement to Dex to get back at Trent," I said.

*That's the exact truth, Cali.*

"Come on, Candice," Cali said. "I didn't say that. I know you'd never do that. You're looking for a win in life. Looking for adventure. I get that. You've always been like that. But sometimes..."

"What?"

"Sometimes you don't know how to let go."

"Yeah?"

"Candice. Our mother is gone. She left a long time ago. Okay? She took off. She never tried to get in touch with us. Ever. Not once. And it just so happened one day you casually bumped into her. I know she took your number. What did she do? She promised to call. She never called. How many years ago was that? You won't change your number because of that. You tied Trent so hard to your business that you lost both. And you can't let it go. So now... this..." She showed me her phone. "I mean, this is... I don't even know what to say."

"That's the thing, Cali. You don't have to say anything. This is what I want. And what if it doesn't work out? Huh? Are you going to be ashamed of me then? Because I'm not like you, right? Because if I have a failed engagement compared to your perfect life... then what?"

Cali slipped her phone into her back pocket and came toward me. She touched my face. "I took care of you when nobody else did. So maybe I feel closer to you than you think I need to be. This is crazy. Whatever you're doing right now is crazy."

"It's my-"

"Keep the crazy out of my house."

With that said, Cali left the basement.

And that was Cali... showing that quick glimmer of maybe offering her heart only to rip it away and leave me feeling worthless.

Then again, was Cali wrong?

I looked at the ring again.

The lizard and the skull.

It probably had zero meaning. Just some cliché thing you'd expect when it came to a rock star.

But that's good.

I needed the reminder of cliché.

I needed the reminder of the fakeness.

*I needed to remind myself that this was going to end sooner or later.*

---

"THIS IS WHERE THEY HAD THEIR FIRST ALBUM RELEASE SHOW," TOBY yelled into my ear. "Sold the fucker out then. And now. One fucking post on social media and we have the fucking police outside."

"Police?" I asked.

I instantly thought about Dex.

Toby laughed. "Not enough room for everyone. The streets are flooded with Filthy Line fans. I'm going to get my ass chewed out for this one."

"Dex isn't in trouble?" I yelled to Toby.

"He's always in trouble," Toby said.

Someone touched his shoulder and Toby walked away.

I stood next to the stage, not very hidden because the venue was so small.

It was a club.

A rock club.

The stage was low to the ground. The speakers that hung overhead looked ready to fall at any second. The place was dirty and loud. It just oozed the sense and smell of rock music.

People were crammed together, the crowd gently swaying left to right as everyone wanted to get closer to the stage.

The scene made my heart race.

I felt someone touch my hand.

It was Liv.

"Hey!" she yelled. "Ready?"

"I guess so," I called out. "I'm almost nervous here."

"It's a crazy feeling," Liv said. "You'll get-"

The lights went out and Liv had to stop talking because the crowd went crazy.

The screams went through my ears and down my body.

It was painful but I didn't cover my ears.

A flashlight flickered near me and I looked to the light shining on the floor.

That's when I saw the band.

*Filthy Line.*

And it made me feel jumpy.

Like I was a fan at a concert.

Sab was first, twirling a drumstick.

Then came Jay and Reed, with their guitar and bass.

Nash walked up to Liv and kissed her on the cheek.

And then I saw Dex.

His guitar around his back.

I felt him looking at me even though I couldn't see his eyes.

The band went on stage but Dex came to me.

His hand slid along my face to the back of my neck and he pulled me toward him. I felt myself caught up in the wild moment and I jumped to my toes so I could kiss him.

We made out for a few seconds and the crowd got louder as they realized most of the band was on stage.

Dex pulled away and moved his guitar around to the front of his body.

I watched him do something to the guitar and then he played a note and the sound boomed through the speakers.

It was so heavy and rumbling, my chest vibrated.

I touched myself, over my heart.

The rest of the band started to play.

I looked out at the crowd of people.

Everyone was jumping and screaming for Filthy Line.

"Anyone feel like partying?" Nash's voice came through the speakers.

That made the crowd even louder.

Sab played a little drum solo.  
Jay hit a loud, screaming note.  
Reed and Dex just kept jamming together.  
Nash leaned forward to the crowd and smiled.  
It made me smile.  
He knew how to do it. He knew how to be the real rock star front man.  
He put his mouth back to the microphone. "Yeah, good. We feel like fucking partying too. Where are my *Line Whores* at?"  
There was a screeching cry from the crowd.  
I had an understanding of what the words *Line Whores* meant.  
They were groupies.  
Women who went to Filthy Line concerts in the hopes of ending up back stage, legs open, fulfilling some kind of wild fantasy.  
Dex looked at me but he didn't smile. He didn't wink. He just played his guitar.  
Taunting me. Teasing me. Tempting me.  
I lifted my left hand and pointed to the ring that was our engagement ring.  
Then I lowered all my fingers except the middle one.  
The band kicked into a song and I lowered my hand and started to bob my head.  
They were good.  
Of course they were good.  
*They were fucking rock stars.*

---

IT WAS AN HOUR OF LOUD MUSIC, LOUDER SCREAMS, AND IT ALL CAME together with them playing their new song.

*Destiny.*

Another catchy song that had Nash reaching into the crowd, leaving women fighting each other to touch his hand. I wondered if that bothered Liv, but she was probably used to it. After all she told me as long as Nash came home to her and fucked her, what did it matter?

Jay and Reed on the other hand were a little different.

They picked out who they wanted and security guards helped those women over the gate and took them backstage. They hurried past me, cheering and jumping up and down.

All so they could fool around with a rock star.

Liv slid her hand into my mine and pulled me away from the stage.

"We'll go back first," Liv yelled to me.

The back of the club had black painted stone walls. The main room was filled with concert posters. There was a bar set up in the back and as long as we were part of the band, the drinks were free. There was a hallway that led to a set of metal steps. Along that hallway and up the steps there were rooms. When I asked Liv what the rooms were for, she grinned and told me to use my imagination.

I already knew.

A place for the band to party. For management to party. Of course there was room for storage. Sound equipment and lights. But more than anything, the rooms were for booze, drugs, and *Line Whores*.

I helped myself to a drink and when the music stopped, I waited for the band.

They all came to the back, sweaty, smiling, but without Dex.

As Jay passed me by, I touched his greasy shoulder. "Jay. Where's Dex?"

Jay looked at me. "Not sure. I have someone waiting for me. Important meeting."

He slipped away and took off his guitar, just dropping it to the floor.

Reed walked by with a wink and he kissed the air.

Nash went for Liv and she put her hand out.

"Go shower," she said. "You smell like sweat and cheap women."

"Jealous," Nash said.

"Where's Dex?" I asked Nash.

He looked at me. "With Sab."

"Where?"

Nash nodded up.

Part of me felt out of place being backstage with Dex. What Liv and Nash had was real.

I was just part of a fake narrative.

There for pictures and to make everyone believe Dex and I were engaged.

But he was upstairs...

I started to walk.

I grabbed the metal railing and hurried up the metal stairs.

The second floor was almost like a loft. Definitely cleaner and cozier than the dirty first floor of the club.

There was a gathering of people.

The only person I recognized was Toby. He had a drink in his hand and was laughing with some guy in a suit.

I moved toward the doors and shook my head.

This was impossible, right?

No fucking way Dex would be this stupid.

I opened the first two doors and there was nothing.

There was one more door on this side of the upstairs.

I heard a giggling sound as my hand turned the knob.

I wished to everything I believed in it was going to be Sab in there. With some fucking woman. Ready to live out a dream for one night.

I opened the door and some blonde turned her head and looked right at me.

"Occupied," she said.

My eyes moved to the right.

*And up popped Dex... a grin on his face that threatened to destroy my heart.*

Dex

I set her up.  
 For the fuck of it.  
 Sab had his little slice of life to take for the night.  
 I had no desire for anything or anyone but Candice.  
 But of course I wanted to see her reaction.  
 I was autographing the *Line Whore's* chest when Candice opened the door.  
 Her bra was still on so no big deal, right?  
 When I stood up and looked at Candice, I grinned.  
 "Hey, sweetie," I said.  
 Candice just stood there.  
 "You can have your turn next," the *Line Whore* said.  
 In my mind I pictured Candice yelling. Freaking out a little. Maybe crying. Maybe she'd attack me. Or just leave the club and find herself a ride home.  
 I did not expect...  
 "*Cunt.*"  
 That was the one word that came out of her mouth.  
 And before the *Line Whore* could say a word, Candice charged after her.

She took a handful of the *Line Whore's* hair and threw her to the floor.

Candice kicked the *Line Whore* a few times before I grabbed her and pulled her away.

"Holy shit," I said.

Candice turned and swung at me.

She clipped my lip and I tasted blood right away.

The *Line Whore* got back to her feet and Candice attacked again.

More handfuls of hair as she drove the *Line Whore* toward the door. She slammed the *Line Whore* off the door.

"Oops, I forgot to open it first," Candice said.

I smiled.

*I'm falling in love with her right now...*

Candice opened the door and tossed the *Line Whore* out.

"He's fucking engaged, you stupid cunt," Candice yelled. "Go find another dick to ride for a night."

She slammed the door and turned and looked at me.

"I was just giving her an autograph, sweetie," I said.

"Fuck you, Dex," Candice yelled. "You want to play this game? For real? You just disappear from the stage and leave me backstage alone? After all those women were screaming for you? Maybe I'm not like Liv, okay? I'm not used to this. I'm..."

"You missed me, huh?" I asked.

"This isn't going to work anymore. This was never going to work."

I moved closer to Candice.

I reached for the door and turned the lock.

"What in the hell are you doing?" she asked me.

*"I'm going to finish what I started from before."*

---

I PULLED HER AGAINST ME AND SHE PUNCHED ME IN THE CHEST.

I stepped back.

She looked at the door.

Then at me.

"Signing an autograph?"

"That's it, sweetie," I said. "Can't help where they ask me to sign."

"Fucking asshole."

"Look at how wild you are right now," I said. "Just shows what this really means to you."

"Means to me?"

Candice shook her head. Then she laughed.

She stepped toward me and grabbed my shirt.

I was covered in sweat from the show. I smelled like a filthy drunk.

But I knew it was everything Candice wanted and needed.

I wanted to test her. To push her. To let her know it was okay to feel things again and to take a chance again in life.

Even if I was destined to be another sense of failure in her book.

But for the moment...

"Backstage with a rock star," she whispered.

"Welcome to the madness, fiancée," I said.

I grabbed her ass and picked her up.

We stared at each other.

"I didn't fuck her," I whispered. "Not even close. Want to know a secret?"

"What?" Candice asked with an annoyance that only made me harder.

"I didn't even want to fuck her."

"Now that's a lie, Dex."

I thought about it. "Okay... fine. A little white lie."

"Put me down right now," Candice said.

I turned and walked her to the leather couch that was made for only one thing.

And it wasn't sitting.

I put her down but didn't pull away.

"I swear," I whispered with my lips near hers.

"Swear what?"

"I thought about fucking her," I said. "Because I think about fucking everyone. But I didn't fuck her. Because of you."

"Because of our story," she said.

I looked Candice dead in the eyes.

I shook my head.

*Okay, that's enough fucking talking.*

As I moved down to the couch, I lifted her shirt like I did in the back of the SUV. My tongue touched the same spots as before. My fingers opened the stubborn button on her jeans. And my hands went for the kill, taking both her jeans and panties down in one swoop. I didn't have time to play any pillow games.

Plus, there weren't any pillows on the couch.

Candice put her right hand to her forehead and her left hand grabbed the top of the couch.

"This is fucking crazy," she whispered.

"Yes it is, sweetie," I said.

I dipped my lips down to hers, feeling the sweet warmth pouring from her even sweeter body.

Candice shivered and put her knees together.

I grinned at the sight of her slit.

Worried about what the rock star was going to do to her. Worried I was going to ruin her from ever feeling pleasure from another man for the rest of her life.

And that was all part of the risk.

And the fun.

I grabbed the back of her left ankle and pulled her shoe off and tossed it to the floor. That allowed me to slide her jeans and panties down to her ankles and sneak her left foot out.

Which allowed her to open her legs for me.

I placed my hands on the couch and kissed just above her left knee.

And I made a line of kisses. Some sweet. Some soft. Some with tongue. Some with teeth. The full array of what my mouth wanted to do to her.

Candice slowly parted her legs, her right foot on the floor, sliding away from the couch.

I dipped to her inner thigh and used the tip of my tongue to draw one last line up to her pussy. My lips met hers for a second time, but this time I was staying for a little while. The touch of honey to my whiskey stained lips was more than any drug they could give me to keep me awake all night.

My hands made their move, clamping to her hips.

My mind raced with all the fun I could have, but there was an urge that overtook all the fun.

*I need her to come. Right now. I need her to lose herself for me. This has to go beyond some fucking ring on her finger.*

I wasn't sure where the words were coming from.

It sure as fuck wasn't from my cock.

My cock wanted to play.

And I was pretty sure my heart wanted something else.

The tip of my tongue found Candice's clit and her hips lifted off the couch.

"Oh, Dex," she groaned.

I pulled at her hips, bringing her tighter to my mouth. My mouth latching onto her body, my tongue racing left to right.

That made her gasp for air.

Because she was used to feeling someone moving up and down.

That was good... but left to right, sweetie, that was the spot...

I felt her inching closer to the end and I convinced myself to pause.

I brought my lips together and suckled her soft bud, pulling away until she cried with a moan.

My lips popped free and I licked them for good measure, vowing to never forget her honey taste.

And I went back for more.

Pressing my tongue harder, moving faster.

Inside my jeans, my cock twisted and throbbed, sending signals that this wasn't a one person finishing kind of night.

I broke my kiss to her tender lips to whisper *fuck* knowing I was getting into trouble here.

But I couldn't stop.

I had Candice resting on the edge of climax.

And with just a few more flicks against her, her left hand smacked the back of my head as she fought to pull my hair. She started to pull me away but then wanted more. Pressing me tighter against her body.

*That's right, sweetie, don't be afraid to enjoy it...*

"Dex..."

As though it was her dying breath.

Candice put her head back and arched her back, giving herself to me.

The warmth spread across my mouth. Her seal had been broken. Her pleasure was all mine to savor and drink.

My left hand moved from her hip and I grabbed between my legs.

There were different types of hardness and I was at the one where there was no turning back.

I unzipped my jeans and pulled my cock free, stroking it just once before releasing my own hold.

I moved my mouth from Candice's slit and kissed to her belly button and stopped.

I put my right leg to the couch and hovered over her, my throbbing dick pointed right at her.

She looked down at me and gasped. Then she looked at me, her cheeks bright red, and she bit her lip.

And she fucking nodded.

*She wants me to fuck her. Right here on this leather couch in the upstairs backroom of a club. Like a true Line Whore.*

I gritted my teeth and shook my head.

I hated myself in that moment.

So I grabbed her right hand and guided her to my body.

Her hand gripped what she could and I grabbed the couch and lowered my mouth down to her neck.

She smelled like soap and not some cheap perfume.

There wasn't glitter and hairspray everywhere.

She was a real woman.

A real fucking woman.

Stroking my cock root to tip with enough speed that with some practice she could probably play a guitar solo...

My head spun out of control like I had a bad mix of booze and drugs. Like I could tell myself to jump out of a fucking window and that I wouldn't get hurt.

Fuck... when I got like that, Jay and Reed would have to lock my ass in the hotel bathroom so I could go fucking wild until I passed out.

But there was no stopping this.

I kissed Candice's neck and moved over her shirt. I went down to her breasts, over her shirt and pressed my nose against her as hard as I could. She groaned and lifted her chest for me. My right hand grabbed her shirt and pulled it up over her bra. Her tits poured out of the top of her bra. I kissed and nibbled and she stroked me harder.

I looked down and watched her hand moving against me.

I was ready to fucking explode and I gritted my teeth.

It was too soon if you asked me... but fucking hell...

*Candice... Candy... sweetie... my fiancée...*

She knew what she was doing.

I moved my eyes to hers and saw the deepest sense of lust I ever saw before.

When I kissed her, she gasped.

The taste of her body on my lips... now on her lips...

She kissed me back and my left hand pulled at the couch cushion like I was going to rip the fucking thing to pieces.

I grunted into her mouth and felt myself let go.

My own warm rush between us, rushing from my body to her hand to her belly.

I stopped kissing her so I could hiss like a pissed off snake. And so I could watch the mess she was making me make.

It felt fucking endless.

The seconds ticking like minutes as her hand began to move slower and slower. Until she finally pulled away, the evidence of her wild side clinging to her hands and all over her stomach.

I stood up from the couch and tucked myself away, still throbbing with the definite hint at rounds two, three, and four coming very soon.

I walked to the table against the wall, grabbed a jacket and tossed it to Candice.

"Thanks," she said with a smile that I swore could make the worst fucking day of my life suddenly good.

I moved toward the couch again as she cleaned herself up from me.

"Want to know something fucking crazy, sweetie?" I asked.

"This entire night?" Candice asked. She tossed the jacket to the floor. "I can't believe... that you... and me..."

I reached out and touched her face. "Trust me, Candice, I'm going to fuck you tonight."

Her face turned redder. "Oh?"

"Just not here. Not this room."

"Then where, Dex?"

"My fucking bed," I said. "You're coming home with me tonight. Okay?"

Candice nodded.

I leaned in and kissed her forehead.

I stood up and grabbed her hand to get her to her feet.

We walked to the door, hand in hand, and I unlocked the door.

When I opened it, Toby was coming toward us with some guy in a suit.

"Hey," Toby said and pointed to me. He said something to the guy and the guy stopped. Toby jogged toward me. "Working on something big here, Dex. Promotional shit."

"That's what you're best at, Toby," I said.

"Getting out of here for a little more of a business setting," Toby said. "Just need to get my suit jacket."

I looked at Candice and her eyes went wide.

I leaned toward her. "That's what I wanted to tell you, sweetie. This room is Toby's. And that jacket..."

"Where the fuck... how did it get on the floor?" Toby asked himself. A second later I heard him yell. "What the fuck is all over my suit jacket?"

I kept my hand held tight to Candice and got us both out of there.

*I just hoped Toby didn't give his suit jacket the old sniff or lick test.*

---

THE SECOND THE DOOR OPENED TO GET OUTSIDE, THE SMALL CROWD cheered for us.

Nash and Liv were hand in hand, rushing to their SUV.

Reed climbed up on the hood of the SUV and opened his arms.

That only got everyone more excited.

I slipped my arm around Candice's waist. "We have our own ride."

"You're not going to sign anything?" she asked.

"Can't, sweetie," I said. "You start one and it turns into all night. We just have to get the fuck out of here. We'll have security toss them all the new song."

"We love you Candice!" someone shouted.

Now that caught my attention.

I turned and saw two women waving at Candice and I.

"You're so fucking pretty, Candice!" one of the women yelled.

"Yes she is," I said. "And she's all fucking mine."

"I'm jealous!" the other woman yelled. "Will you sign my shirt?"

"What?" Candice asked.

I walked over to the two women. I grabbed the marker out of the first woman's hand and hurried to sign her shirt. The other woman turned and pointed to her shoulder.

I signed her shoulder and then said, "Don't ever yell for my girl again. Got it? She's always off limits."

Back by Candice, I grabbed her tighter.

My heart lifted into my throat a little.

That moment felt a little too real. To have Filthy Line fans cheering for her. Wanting an autograph. That look on her face too, because it wasn't always the easiest thing to handle. At least for me it was my job and I had booze and other substances to balance shit out if it got to be too much.

Candice was just...

I wasn't even sure what she was.

She was just doing this thing with me.

For what? For fun?

There hadn't been any mention of money or anything else.

We got into the SUV and it took off.

Plenty of fans cheered and chanted with the band's name or their favorite member's name.

Candice and I looked at each other.

I winked. "*Line Whores*."

"And they don't mind being called that?"

"Nope," I said. "That's the truth of music. Create something so important the surrounding story becomes part of it. No matter how bad it is."

"You know, you never talked about why you got arrested. Twice in one night? Is that what happened?"

"You know, when I'm not around and you start searching my name online... that's a little weird for me."

Candice blushed. "Then give me something, Dex."

"Oh, I can give you plenty."

"Not that."

"You better not be done for the night, sweetie," I warned.

"We'll see," she said.

I grinned. "Okay. You're not going to like this, Candice. I got arrested twice because of women. Sort of. I went to a favorite dive of mine to blow off some steam. I was working on a woman named *Destiny*."

"Like the new song?" she asked.

"They thought of that, not me," I said. "*Destiny* was a fake name. She went to the bathroom and then I got jumped."

"By her boyfriend?"

I laughed. "No. Guys tied to *Raunchy Recks*."

"The band?"

I nodded. "I'm sure you've read about it. Don't play cute, sweetie."

She swallowed hard. "Sorry, Dex. Right. You two hate each other."

"Same old shit. They caught me off guard. Had the cops show up just as I was about to fight back. They set me up. I got out of that easily though. The second time was a little trickier. I was in another bar--"

"No strip club?" Candice cut in.

I reached and touched her cheek. "The strip club is where I go when I'm happy. I haven't been there in a little while. They're going to be worried about me. How about a detour?"

"How about you tell everyone the truth about this engagement?"

"Ouch," I whispered. "Long story short, sweetie, I set my eyes on a new *Destiny* and her boyfriend didn't like it. I was feeling jumpy from what happened earlier so I might have broken a glass over the guy's head."

"Dex," Candice said. "So I'm here with you all because of women?"

"What else could get me into trouble?" I asked.

Candice sighed. "I should have known."

"Now... *my little flower*... what's with the flower business?"

"Oh, so we're exchanging stories now?"

"We have a few minutes to kill before I get you home and let my cock do all the talking. Again."

"Poor Toby, huh?"

"Screw Toby," I said. "You owned a flower shop?"

"It was crazy," Candice said. "Okay? I kind of wanted to do everything opposite to my sister just to prove her wrong. She was

older, smarter, prettier, and she had a map of her life that was intense. And it all worked out. There was a bad part of me that wanted her to fuck up along the way. But she didn't. She met Keith. Of course he's a pretty popular doctor. He operates on all the athletes around here. They have the perfect house, perfect son, perfect everything."

"That's not jealousy, is it?" I asked.

"Honestly, no. She just..."

"She wanted you to be like her."

"Yeah. I guess. There was this flower shop on the corner. I always liked going in there to talk to Maria. She owned it. And... I don't know. Things just happened. I had a chance to buy it from her."

Candice looked nervous. Fumbling and nervous.

I inched closer to her. "It's okay, sweetie. I just want to know things about you."

"Why?" she asked, looking into my eyes.

I got even closer to her.

What a question that was.

Why... why... why...

I touched her face again and gently kissed her perfect lips.

*"Because I'm just killing time until I get to fuck you."*

## Candice

It was only the second time I was at his house, but it felt more comfortable than Cali's house. And Dex was right. Any free second I had without him around I was looking him up online. There were so many stories and articles written about the band. There were fan pages created to debunk what they felt were untrue stories. But when it came to certain things... *legal things*... there was no way to say it wasn't true.

*Right?*

Like with Raunchy Recks.

Their rival band.

Some of the stories went back to when they were maybe friends. Of course rock stars being rock stars it was all about who could fuck the other person's girlfriend. And then it became a sense of backstabbing to see who could get their record deal first. And then it became who will be the biggest band in the world.

As big as Filthy Line was, Raunchy Recks was right in line.

It was like the fans loved both bands, which surprised me. I figured the loyal *Line Whores* would have hated anyone that hated Filthy Line.

Besides that stuff, there was the elusive sixth man in the band. I couldn't get the story straight if a guy named Mitchy was an original

member or not. It seemed like the band did a lot to cover up his name and keep him quiet. But it was clear something bad had happened, Mitchy was tossed out, and his life's goal was to sue the band over and over.

To me, if I was that rich and that powerful, why not just throw the guy some money and make him go away for good?

All my research came in between the texts from Trent too.

He'd seen the images and read the stories of Dex and I. The fake truth that Dex needed to get out of trouble was the same fake truth I needed to keep Trent at bay. Which worked in the sense of him not wanting to get back together... but not in the sense for him to leave me alone.

So maybe Cali was right and it was time to just change my number and let everything go...

Those were the thoughts that raced through my head as Dex held my hand and led the way upstairs. His house had that total cliché *grand staircase* in it. And again, it was just so clean. Like it was completely unused.

I wondered if he even wanted to live in a place like this.

His bedroom door looked like a dungeon door.

I shook my head when I saw it.

"What?" Dex asked. "What did you think you'd find up here, sweetie?"

I stared at him as he grinned. He grabbed the giant O that was the door handle, and pushed the door open.

He moved.

My feet didn't.

The moment caught up to me.

This was supposed to be a fake engagement routine. We were supposed to be seen in public together. Pictures, interviews, all that crap. And nothing else.

I could give him backstage at the show.

Fine.

I caught him with a *Line Whore* and attacked the bitch.

But after...

*Why did you attack that woman? Even if he was kissing her or touching her... why did it matter? It's not your reputation at stake. It's not your ass that's going to be thrown into jail.*

"Sweetie?" Dex asked.

I blinked.

*What am I doing here?*

My mind flashed to the images of Dex... picking me up. Taking me to that leather couch. The way I felt. His tongue racing down my body. His tongue between my legs. My hand touching his...

My heart started to race again.

This wasn't part of the engagement.

This was something else.

I wanted to be pissed.

At Dex and myself.

Because... *was I a Line Whore now?*

That didn't make sense.

Dex asked questions about me. He wanted to know about me.

So what did that mean?

As Dex closed in on me, he swept me off my feet, picking me up.

Just like he did that night at the hotel restaurant.

*Oh, fuck, this is going to end with us getting hurt for real, isn't it?*

---

THE ROOM SCREAMED *ROCK STAR*.

The centerpiece was the bed. *Obviously.*

By far the biggest bed I had ever seen in my life.

And everything on the bed was black.

The walls were almost bare, the ceilings a mile high, skylights everywhere, along with giant windows on each side of the main walls. My guess it was so you could see the sun come up and watch it set.

One corner of the room was dedicated to music. There was a black piano with the top open. Acoustic and electric guitars hung perfectly on the walls. And a few dim lights that shined down on all the instruments.

No matter how many times my eyes tried to look around for more details, Dex kept my attention on him.

His lips kissed my bare shoulder as I looked down at my shirt on the floor.

I shut my eyes for a breath and felt his teeth bite the strap of my bra and pull.

I reached back to unsnap my bra as his hands touched my stomach and moved up.

He made me shiver. Everywhere. Good and bad shivers too.

The good being the pleasure I felt when his rock star hands moved over my bare breasts. Handfuls for him, an aching feeling that moved between my legs, needing him.

And those were the bad shivers.

That sense of *need*.

*Want* was one thing. *Want* was craving... and you could survive without *want*.

But this feeling of *need*...

Dex inched down and flicked his tongue to my collarbone as he slid my bra from my body.

His hands then grabbed my waist and he pushed me down to the bed.

As he started to hover over me, I grabbed his shirt and shook my head.

"Now," I ordered.

"Yes, fiancée," he whispered.

The smell of dried sweat from the show should have been unappetizing.

But it was Dex.

The smell of dried sweat made me picture him on stage, playing guitar, knowing there were thousands - *millions* - of women who wanted to be in my position.

Again... that shouldn't have been a turn on for me.

*What have I become?*

Dex tossed his shirt across the room and before it hit the floor, he managed to open his jeans and drop those down to his ankles.

I learned something else about the crazy rock star... *he wore nothing under his jeans*.

He was already thick, hard, making my hand tingle, wanting to have him again.

I slid back on his massive bed and touched my pants.

Dex jumped at the bed and was almost on top of me.

"No, sweetie," he said. "It's my job. Grab the sheets and bite your lip."

There was a part of me that hated when he talked like a dickhead like that. But there was a bigger part that loved it.

Dex dipped his head down to my chest. I arched my back, giving him my chest. His right hand moved up my body with speed and cupped my left breast with enough force that I had to put my hand over his hand. His mouth eased over my right breast, thirsting for me, the tip of his tongue moving in any and all directions against my nipple.

When he thrust his hips, I felt the steel warmth of his cock slide against my stomach, pinned between us.

I shuddered and bit my lip, that wild feeling of need taking full control once again.

Dex moved down my body with big, wet kisses. Purposely opening his mouth wide. Purposely sucking at my skin so it made noise.

Leaving me ready to explode before anything even really began.

He continued to kiss my body as he opened my pants (*for the second time tonight*) and he ripped my pants and panties off me so hard and fast, I had to grip the sheets even tighter.

I moved back on the bed, putting myself right in the middle. It was like an ocean of bed. And I was helpless. And Dex was the hungry shark.

*But don't forget... I was ready to be bitten too...*

Dex moved over my body with a calmness that only added to his wildness. Which didn't make sense, but it was true. He balanced with his left hand flat to the bed, keeping the lower half of his body against mine. I felt *him... all of him...* pressing against my inner thigh, teasing me as he moved his hips, guiding his cock to my slit. Resting so perfectly there, leaving me throbbing, my body almost shaking, demanding he take me.

His right hand slid up my body again and he cupped my breast. But only for a moment as he released his grip and went up to my face. His thumb stroked my cheek and he grinned.

"Dex..."

That was the only word I had in my mind.

My heart pounded with the needed warning that whatever was happening with this moment, it couldn't be anything real. Other than the pleasure.

*Give me all the pleasure, Dex.*

It was like Dex could read my mind.

His hand left my face and disappeared between our bodies.

He dipped his mouth down to mine for a kiss, a taste, and then he stayed there, our lips almost touching.

The swell of pressure between my legs made me suck in a breath. I tried to relax but there was no relaxing. Not with a guy like Dex. A rock star. Someone famous. His body built for this. The smell of the sweat on his skin. It was all so much to take in at once...

*Speaking of taking it in all at once...*

I groaned into Dex's mouth as he gave himself to me.

Taking my body and pleasure for his own.

Moving at such a slow, deadly pace, I quickly hooked my ankles around his body and pulled at him for more.

I put my head back and was desperate for a breath.

Dex slid his lips from my neck down to my chest, kissing me again.

His right hand moved between the bed and my back. Pulling at the small curve of my back, arching me just enough to send a whole other sensation throughout my body.

When Dex let out a groan himself, spreading his hot, wild, rock star breath across my chest, I was done for.

My hands grabbed his back and I looked at him.

I dug my nails into his back.

And Dex started to take me some more. Pulling his body back and thrusting forward. Starting slow. Soft. Gentle. Caring. But each one getting harder. Better.

*Fucking. Better.*

I lifted my head to kiss Dex.

But he moved just enough so I couldn't get to his mouth.

I ended up kissing his shoulder. And then biting his shoulder.

As he moved faster, the rush of pleasure between my legs grew more and more uncontrollable.

My right hand moved up to his hair and I pulled as I felt myself climaxing.

My toes curled tight enough that the muscles in the back of my legs started to ping and ache.

I gasped for breaths over and over as Dex didn't slow down.

I pulled at his back tighter and he slipped both of his hands behind my back and began to lift me.

Hugging me tight, fucking like he was playing a fast Filthy Line song.

And before the pleasure had a chance to ease up, another round began to attack my body. It was a *back to back* sensation I'd never felt before. My body tingling everywhere as Dex showed me what it was like to be in love with a rock star.

Dex's tongue flirted with my neck up to my ear.

"Hold on tight, sweetie," he whispered.

When he rolled to his side, he took me with him, his strong arms refusing to let me go.

He moved to his back and now I was the one on top.

My hands spread flat to his chest and I leaned forward, letting him continue to thrust his wild body at me. My hips then began to move, taking control, moving exactly the way I craved. *The way I needed.*

Dex's hands cupped my breasts and his mouth came forward again, taking turns kissing and teasing me.

I put my head back and moved like I had never moved before.

And Dex matched every thrust and grind of my hips.

If I lowered down and held, he fucked up and moved me. If I lifted myself and waited a fraction of a second too long, he thrust and made my body come down with his.

Together, over and over, all the way to me feeling that same rush of pleasure again.

I bit my lip and felt my arms starting to shake as my body crested.

It was suddenly like I had no feeling in my legs.

I started to collapse onto Dex and he moved his hands to my body and pulled me down. Our mouths finally collided together. I kissed him once and then groaned for a few seconds and then kissed him again.

His hands took comfort at my hips as he rocked me back and forth, leaving me so full I never wanted it to end.

But I also knew it was going to end.

*So much was going to end...*

I shut my eyes and kept kissing him.

His cock thickened and I told myself to get ready...

But there was never any sense of ready with Dex.

His grip tightened against my hips.

As he drove me against him, I moved as fast as I could, wanting him. Wanting *it*.

*I needed to feel...*

Dex growled deep in his throat and that's when I felt *it*.

I gasped for a breath and it happened again.

*As he came, I came one more time.*

---

MY MIND WANTED TO BE FLIRTY.

*I fell asleep in the arms of a rock star. Naked. Both of us. Naked. His body against mine. The smell of his skin. Knowing who he was. The rock star. The wild rock star. Arrested. In trouble. The women. The strippers. Drugs. Rock 'n' roll. The crazy lifestyle. And it was his arms around me all fucking night.*

That helped me sleep with a smile on my face.

The reality was that it was Dex.

Dex had his arms around me all night. Dex pulled me against his warm body and kept me there. Dex's left hand touched just below my breast, which was more damn teasing than if he played with my breasts all night.

And when I woke up and could no longer feel Dex against me, I sat up and looked around.

I realized I was alone.

Which brought back the rock star thing again.

Of course he'd wake up and bolt, right?

He got what he wanted from me.

So why not wake up, dart out of the house, and... what?

What happened next?

Was someone going to find me and escort me out of the house? Give me a ride home? Leave me to take a shower and wonder if what happened was real or not?

My clothes were on the floor.

Dex's weren't.

I climbed to the edge of the bed and wrapped the top cover around me.

I walked to the instruments and stared at them.

The piano. The guitars.

I cut my right hand from the blanket and touched one of the keys.

I knew nothing about music.

I swallowed hard, really trying hard not to let my heart get the best of me.

"Morning, sweetie."

I turned and saw Dex in the bedroom.

Bringing me coffee.

"Dex."

He walked to the piano and put the coffees down.

Then he sat down on the piano bench and put his hands to the keys. Without looking, thinking, *whatevering*, he just started to play. I recognized the song as a Filthy Line song.

Five seconds later he stopped.

He grabbed the blanket on my body and grinned.

"I need coffee first," I said.

He laughed. "I bet I can get your heart jumping faster than the coffee."

*I know you can, Dex. But what I'm thinking and feeling...*

I sipped the coffee and it was really good. Better than the cafe.

"Shit," I whispered. "The cafe..."

"I took care of it, sweetie," Dex said.

"What?"

"I called Gregor. Told my man you were under the weather. He said not a problem. He said to rest up and eat some chicken soup."

"Dex..."

He stood up and touched my face. "I'm not controlling your life, Candice. Just giving you a breather. That's all. I'll toss Gregor some tickets and passes and he'll be like a pig in shit. Nothing to worry about."

Dex leaned down and kissed me.

And not just a good morning kiss. Like a little peck on my lips.

This was a...

*Gooooood mooorrrnnnniiinnngggg* kind of kiss.

Kissing me so hard my knees started to bend.

Dex broke the kiss before I passed out and he walked away.

"Get dressed and come downstairs, sweetie. Breakfast is waiting. Then I have to meet up with the band and talk new tunes, new shows, and all that bullshit. Toby and his sticky jacket want me to meet with the lawyers too."

I drank half the cup of coffee then got dressed in last night's clothes.

I almost wished I had clothes at Dex's.

*Yikes.*

I took my coffee mug and found my way downstairs.

It seemed like a good day.

I didn't have to work.

Gregor wasn't pissed.

Dex got to do his rock star stuff.

And the legal stuff... hopefully that was going away soon too.

Things were going to work out just fine.

And maybe Dex was actually a normal person.

In some sense.

I smiled as I stepped into the kitchen.

The smile was gone a second later.

"Hey, Candice," Bethany said as she stood wearing oven mitts. Nothing but oven mitts. "Do you like your eggs scrambled or sunny side up?"

My eyes had to look at her boobs for a second.

I turned my head and saw Ana and two other women, topless, sitting at the breakfast table in the kitchen.

Then there was Dex.

Leaning against a wall, grinning at me.

"You have strippers cooking you breakfast?" I asked him.

"Bethany went to culinary school and is an amazing cook," he said.

I felt my nostrils flaring.

But Dex was so cool.

He pushed from the wall and touched my face again.

"She's cooking for all of us, sweetie," Dex said.

"Fuck you," I whispered.

Dex put his lips to my ear. "You know, I like your tits better. You should just get topless too. Ease the tension."

I shut my eyes and swallowed hard.

I wanted to knee him in the balls.

"I'm just making scrambled for everyone then," the topless *stripper-slash-cook* announced.

I should have just walked out of the house.

Instead, I turned and moved to the counter and helped myself to a seat.

I looked at Bethany... all of her.

And I smiled.

I pointed to her.

"I like your eyes," I said.

She started to laugh and looked at Dex.

"I think you've met your match, Dex," she said.

I looked back at Dex and lifted my left eyebrow.

He stared at me with the worst look I could have ever imagined from him.

A look like he liked... *loved*... me.

He nodded.

*"Yeah, I've met my fucking match..."*

Dex

“Where are we going?”

“I have to meet the lawyers,” I said.

“Not at the cafe.”

“Why not?”

“You called me in sick.”

“So?”

“I’m not fucking sick, Dex,” she said. “You’re going to get me fired.”

“Shit,” I said. “Sorry. I’ve never had a job in my life.”

“Of course not.”

Candice rolled her eyes.

Her phone buzzed and I saw the way her face dropped when she looked at the screen.

It wasn’t my business to pry into her personal life. Or to look at her phone.

She hurried to turn the screen off and tucked the phone away.

The SUV stopped outside the cafe.

“I have to go in,” I said. “I need you there too, sweetie.”

“Whatever,” Candice said.

She opened her door and jumped out.

By the time I got out of the SUV and walked around to meet up with Candice, she was looking at her phone again.

And she hurried to put it away when she saw me.

When we got into the cafe, Gregor and Betty were working.

Betty's eyes lit up when she saw me.

Gregor pointed to Candice.

I looked at Candice and grinned.

She pretended to cough and said, "I'm so sick right now."

Gregor came rushing toward us.

I balled up a fist, ready to knock his punk ass out if he got mouthy.

"I feel bad for dragging her out here," I said.

Gregor opened his mouth. Then shut it. Then opened it again.

"Careful with the words," I said to him.

"Otto is here," Gregor said. "There was a problem with one of the ovens. I had to call him."

"That's good," Candice said.

Gregor was annoyed.

I slapped his shoulder. "Get everyone something to eat and drink. On me. Whatever they want. Just ask." I reached into my pocket and handed him a few big bills. "Here. That'll cover everything. Get to it, Gregor."

When he turned, I slapped his ass.

Candice gasped.

"Shit, Dex," Toby said.

"What?" I asked. "He's doing good. And he doesn't mind, right?"

Gregor didn't answer.

He walked away.

I looked at Candice again and winked.

She finally smiled.

Life was good.

I pulled a chair out for Candice and then spun one around for myself.

From the corner of my eye I saw Gregor taking orders from everyone in the cafe.

"What's going on?" I asked Barry and Franklin.

"Well, *SLECK* feels confident," Toby said.

"I didn't ask you, Toby."

"But I'm telling you," Toby said. "The show was awesome. The song is a hit. *SLECK* wants more. A song every week..."

"I'm not forcing shit out," I said. "I'm not writing cookie cutter bullshit to throw up some streaming apps just for people to listen. The songs have to count."

"Then make them count," Toby said.

I pointed to Toby. "Go find another band. Maybe a boy band, Toby."

Toby curled his lip.

I reached for him and wiped his shoulder. "Thought I saw something on your jacket. Looked a little sticky."

Candice elbowed me.

"Mind if we talk now?" Franklin asked.

I showed my hands. "Have at it."

"The first arrest is a wash," Barry said. "The guy at the bar had a strong story. Now if we had the two guys that hit you first..."

"Raunchy Recks," Candice said.

"Wait a second, sweetie," I said. "We don't handle it that way."

"The band rivalry," Barry said.

"We don't talk about it," I said. "Fuck that. No."

"Well, it doesn't matter," Franklin said. "If we had them it would help the other case... but fine. So the first arrest, forget about it. It was a minor scuffle. Nothing was damaged."

"The second one," Barry said.

"You had to hit him over the head with glass?" Toby asked.

"There were three of them coming toward me," I said. "Okay? Three. And when I hit the first guy, I stopped. I'll fight that to my grave."

"Well, the good news is that the people involved don't want anything to do with you," Barry said. "The engagement has definitely helped. We feel that if it were to go anywhere near a judge and jury, we could win."

"Perfect," I said.

"Just keep it up," Franklin said. "Having Candice at the show was great. We heard there was a situation with her and a fan... you know, normally that would drive me crazy, but it works. There were pictures of her outside with you, Dex. The fans know her by name. They actually like her a lot."

"How can you not love Candice?" I asked.

"So what's the point here?" Candice asked.

"We feel confident in everything," Barry said.

"Just one suggestion," Toby said.

I felt the tension.

"Fuck," I whispered.

"It's not bad," Franklin said. "But we need to think strategy."

"Best case, things work out," Barry said. "You and Candice end your engagement and life goes on."

"Worst case?" I asked. "Am I marrying her?"

"What?" Candice asked.

"No," Franklin said. "Worst case is if we feel like we're going to lose this, then we need a bad breakup. Public. Messy. And it can't be Dex's wrongdoing."

I looked at Candice.

Her face turned slightly red. "So I have to hurt the rock star?"

"Yes," Barry said. "Something as simple as dumping him. And then giving your story. How hard it's been..."

"How the life caught up to you," Franklin said. "The arrest. The charges. You just need to leave."

"The ultimate sympathy card," Toby said.

Candice stood up and walked toward the door.

I stood up and looked down at Toby.

"She okay?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said. "Just a lot at once with this."

"And you're sure she wants nothing out of it?" Franklin asked.

"Careful with that," Barry said.

I ditched the table to check on my pretend fiancée.

Candice was outside in the late morning sun, hugging herself.

"You okay, sweetie?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"You're lying to me."

"It doesn't matter, Dex."

"It does to me. Your phone's been buzzing and you're in a mood."

She looked at me with an evil look. "You care now?"

"I've always cared."

"I'm trying to understand what's happening," she said. "Last night... I got so caught up in it all. And then this morning there was

a small sense of normalcy. But that was taken when a topless woman made me eggs for breakfast..."

"Who doesn't like that?" I asked.

"And now this?" she asked, nodding toward the cafe. "I have to dump you and do an interview?"

"That's the worst case. That won't happen."

"Yeah... but..."

*But what, sweetie? What are you thinking and feeling right now? What's really happening here?*

The door to the cafe opened and out strutted an old man carrying a toolbox.

"Otto," Candice said.

"Hey, there you are," Otto said. "Missed you. Never thought I'd see the day where Gregor works."

"That's because of this guy," Candice said to me.

I stuck my hand out. "Nice to meet you."

"Ah, my hands are filthy," Otto said.

"I'm filthy," I said with a wink.

Otto laughed and shook my hand.

"So you're the one who stole my girl, huh?" Otto asked.

"Guilty as charged," I said. "Couldn't help myself."

"Too bad," Otto said. He looked at Candice. "We could have been happy together."

Now normally I would have knocked someone out talking that way to Candice, but this guy was amazing.

"Forgive me," Candice said.

"How can I stay mad at that face?" Otto asked. "Well, I'll leave you two at it. Remember something... time isn't real. It does not exist. It never has and never will. It's just about now. And now will be gone. And gone will be for good. And for good will hurt. And the hurt will be your new now. And that cycle just keeps going. So take the now and... and fucking enjoy it."

Otto laughed as he waved his hand and walked away.

I looked at Candice again.

The moment between us passed.

I reached for her face and stroked her cheeks. "Don't worry about anything."

"Because it's all made up," she said. "Even right now. You're touching my face because people inside the cafe are taking pictures."

*Truthfully, sweetie, I didn't even consider that. I just wanted to touch you.*

"I don't really give a--"

"My sister texted me," Candice said. "Dr. Keith had an emergency to tend to. And she has some plans for some legal conference. She likes to pretend she's a lawyer and important. Meaning she asked me to watch Carter. And since she doesn't charge me rent..."

"Sweetie, go be with your nephew," I said. "You can bring him by the rehearsal place or the studio... but I can't guarantee everyone will be fully clothed..."

Her nostrils flared. "I hate the way that makes me feel."

"I know," I said. "But go. The SUV will take you home. I'll see you later though."

"Okay," she said. "And... Dex... I'm sorry..."

"What the hell are you sorry about?"

"Walking out like I did," she said. "I just keep getting caught up in this."

"Me too, sweetie."

I put my mouth to hers and we kissed.

She tasted like something I had wanted for a long time.

My thumbs stroked her cheeks.

She grabbed my shirt.

The kiss lasted way longer than a simple goodbye kiss should have.

Candice broke the kiss, bit her bottom lip, touched my chest, and walked to the SUV.

I watched her get into the backseat and watched the vehicle drive her away.

Someone walked up to me and asked for an autograph and a picture.

I signed a piece of notebook paper and grinned for the selfie.

My eyes looked to the road again and Candice was long gone.

I looked at my hand to where my ring was missing from.

I shut my eyes and demanded my mind replay an old night that involved both Bethany and Ana bouncing their beautiful tits in my face.

But all I saw was Candice.

I couldn't stop seeing her.

Even with my eyes open... I was thinking about her...

*Fuck, Dex, are you falling in love with her?*

---

I SAT ON THE EDGE OF A LEATHER CHAIR AND STRUMMED AN ACOUSTIC guitar.

Across from me, Jay and Reed had acoustic guitars too.

We were just fucking around. Killing time. Trying to come up with something to play.

"Hey, get Nash and Sab in here," Reed said. "I have an idea."

We had the studio to ourselves.

Which is how I liked it.

Depending on who we worked with in the studio, things could be fun and smooth or it could turn into a fight. I wasn't above throwing someone out of the studio. And I meant that literally. Even some of the highest paid guys in the studio were tossed on their ass for suggesting something that went against what Filthy Line believed in.

Nash and Sab came into the dark and cramped room.

"What are we doing?" Sab asked. "Let's hit *The Down* and get fucked up."

"That's a good idea," Reed said. "Before that... acoustics. Let's do something crazy."

"You want five guitars on one song?" I asked.

"That's right," Reed said. "We just harmonize the shit out of it. Nash takes lead vocals and we write a chorus so fucking catchy, everyone will be singing it in their sleep. And the five of us sing it too."

"A softy song, huh?" Jay asked.

"How about this?" I asked. I cleared my throat and strummed a few chords.

*A minor to F to C to G...*

Basic.

But... the lyrics and message are what count.

I cleared my throat and strummed the chords.

And I sang...

*"There she was, spinning on a dime. I chased my own soul, for a second of her time. My hands touch, the taste is so sweet. I don't stand a chance,*

*bringing me to my knees. I take the knife, to find my soul. I need her now, I cut the hole..."*

I stopped playing and looked around.

I strummed one last chord and yelled, *"I fucked a pineapple!"*

Everyone but Jay started to laugh.

*"Fuck you, man,"* Jay said.

*"I fucked a pineapple and it felt so good!"* I yelled. *"And then I ate the fucking thing for vitamins!"*

I stopped playing, stood up, and took a bow.

Jay started to strum his guitar. *"Okay, let's do it..."*

*"Do what?"* I asked.

Jay cleared his throat. *"I'm pretending to find love, without throwing down bills. I have to work to get her naked, which gives me the chills. I think I'm just faking it, but I feel more than I let on. I'll be arrested and in jail for good, before the next dawn. And if I think for a second this chick actually digs me..."*

Jay stopped playing and cupped his hands to his mouth.

And he yelled, *"She doesn't fucking love you, Dex! And she never fucking will!"*

I threw my guitar down and jumped at Jay.

I tackled him over his chair and we went down to the floor. My elbow broke through the body of his guitar as we tried to get enough room to punch each other.

*"Don't ever talk about Candice again, asshole,"* I growled.

*"What's wrong, Dex? You don't think we see it?"* Jay asked.

Nash grabbed my shoulder and pulled me from Jay.

Reed then got in my path, allowing Jay to get to his feet.

*"Man, look at my fucking guitar,"* Jay said. *"Fuck."*

*"I'll buy you a new one,"* I said. I stuck my hand into my pocket and threw money on the floor. *"There."*

*"You know what you can't buy?"* Jay asked. *"Candice's ass."*

I jumped for Jay and Nash pushed me back.

*"Jay, shut the fuck up,"* Sab said. *"Shit. It's a joke."*

*"Yeah, I'm just joking too,"* Jay said.

He looked at me.

He was pissed.

I nodded.

*Okay. No more pineapple jokes. I get it.*

*"Well there's the start to a good song,"* Reed said.

"Come on, let's get this going," Nash said.

"I need a drink," I said. "The whole bottle."

"I second that," Jay said.

"I'm not sharing a bottle with you," I said. "I don't like the taste of pineapple."

"Yeah? I'd love to share a bottle with you and see if I can get a taste of Candice's sweet pussy."

"Have at it," I said. "The only taste you'll ever get."

"Shit, Dex," Nash said. "Are you serious with that?"

"With what?" I asked.

"You got her for real?"

"Like you're one to talk," I said.

"I'll fucking fight you next," Nash said.

"Ring the bell," Reed said.

"Fuck this," Sab said. "I'm going to *The Down*."

"Hold up," Jay said. "Not to add to the bullshit here but we should talk about Mitchy."

My stomach burned with rage.

The last thing I wanted to talk about was fucking Mitchy.

"We're good then," I said. "This was a waste of my time."

"We got shit done, Dex," Nash said. "Relax. It's almost midnight."

"That's when we're supposed to come alive," Reed said.

"That's why we need to go to *The Down*," Sab said.

"We need to figure out Mitchy," Jay said. "The easiest thing is to just throw him a little cash and walk away."

"A little?" Nash asked. "Come on, Jay..."

"It won't be a little," Reed said.

"Then fine," Jay said. "Make it a lot. Who the fuck cares anymore? We're good for it."

"Good for what?" I asked. "For that guy to just demand money from us? Why? Did he write anything we've been working on?"

"Dex...", Sab said.

Jay stared me down. "No. Keep going, Dex."

"There's nothing to talk about here," I said.

"Do you have any sense of logic?" Jay asked. "The amount of time and money we're going to spend on this..."

"Fuck," Nash said.

"That's a valid point," Reed threw in. "What do you think? A quick mil and he goes away?"

"He'd have to sign something," Sab said.

"No," I said.

They all looked at me.

Nash moved toward me.

"I said no," I said. "What are you going to do? Give him a million dollars? For what? He'd be dead in a week."

"Fuck you, Dex," Jay said.

"You don't like the truth," I said.

"You're one to talk," Jay said. "Because the stories won't stop. But you've got your own story to manage, don't you?"

"Take it easy, Jay," Sab said.

"Okay, everyone get a ride home," Nash said. "*The broken acoustic session* is over."

Reed snapped his fingers. "That's a good album title."

"Yeah, it is," Sab said. "Shit... *SLECK* wants tunes, right? We hit them with a double. Loud and crazy. Then acoustic and slow."

"Yeah, let's get right on that," Jay said. "Right now. What do you say, Dex?"

I had nothing else to say.

I wasn't paying Mitchy off.

As I walked out of the studio, I looked around the parking lot.

It was empty except for the rides that were there for the band. It wasn't all that long ago when it was our own rides. And we'd just do whatever we wanted. But *SLECK* insisted on us having constant ride availability. So we didn't do something stupid like cruise the streets while lit up.

Which made sense.

But that still didn't mean I wasn't going to make stupid decisions.

I got into the back of my SUV.

The driver asked the cliché question of where I was going.

*I was in the mood for trouble.*

## Candice

**I**t wasn't all that bad sitting on the couch watching Carter slowly fall asleep. I told him we were breaking all the rules for the night and he loved it. There was no time limit on junk food and no time limit on TV watching.

I was far from anything that looked like a mother, but when Carter passed out before nine, it made me wonder if all the rules Cali had really mattered or not.

I carried Carter to his sports themed bed and shook my head.

He was cute as anything.

The sports stuff I didn't get.

The kid hated sports.

But Dr. Keith insisted on Carter following everything sports related.

All I could do was silently promise to be the cool aunt.

Let him push the limits but never let him get hurt.

I managed to get out of his room without waking him.

Then I spent the next hour pacing the house, wanting to talk to Dex. Wanting to hear his voice. Wanting him to touch me.

Something was happening and we needed to talk about it.

Because if I was making this stuff up in my mind then it was time to end it. Time for me to walk away, break his heart, tell one last fake

story, and then be done with it all.

In the end, what I wanted to have happen really didn't.

Trent still wanted to know how I was. He insisted that I was just acting out. And in a way it was like he and Cali were on the same page. Maybe they were right, but I didn't want their version of right.

I wasn't even sure what version of right was... *right*.

Cali came home just before ten.

She was a little tipsy from too much wine and waved her hand at me saying Dr. Keith would figure it all out. Because he always figured everything out.

It was actually kind of fun to put my sister to bed.

To convince her to go upstairs and get tucked into bed.

Like she was an overtired toddler but it was damn funny to watch.

I tucked her in like I did Carter and kissed her forehead as I laughed.

She grabbed my hand and whispered, "Do you love him?"

"Cali... what are you talking about?"

"I mean, if you really love him..."

Her eyes shut and it was goodnight for her.

That's when I went down into my little corner of the house in the basement.

I got as comfortable as I could in my bed but all I could do was think.

I did sleep a little, right up until my phone woke me up.

With text after text after text... after text...

It was one in the morning when I looked at the screen.

I saw Dex's name.

*And he was waiting outside Cali's house for me.*

---

I SNUCK DEX DOWN INTO THE BASEMENT WITH MY FACE RED HOT.

Last thing I needed was Cali to catch him sneaking over.

Like I was a teenager or something, right? Because I had no home. Because I was just crashing in my sister's big house because I lost everything when I lost my business.

But it didn't matter.

I had to get Dex into the basement.

Thankfully the wine kept Cali sleeping peacefully.

"Down into the dungeon, sweetie," Dex said.

I heard the way his voice extended words.

*Drunk. Sort of drunk. Definitely drinking.*

"What the hell are you doing here?" I asked him as I kept my hand locked to his and kept moving toward my part of the basement.

"I'm spending the night, Candice."

I froze and turned. "What?"

"I sent my ride away," he said. "It's just you and me."

"This isn't my house," I said. "You can't..." Something caught my attention. "Come here right now."

I pulled Dex again.

Toward my bed, yes, but also toward the light.

"Fuck yeah, sweetie," he said. "Throw me to your bed. Have your way with me."

I looked at his face. I touched his cheek and wiped my fingers across it.

*Glitter.*

I frowned. "Did you get drunk at a strip club?"

"I started to get drunk in the studio," he said. "Then I fought Jay. Broke his guitar. Left when they wanted to talk about Mitchy. I wanted to go find trouble. So, yeah, I hit the strip club..."

I swung my hand and slapped his face. "And then you come here? For what? Didn't have enough money for one of them to finish you off?"

Dex grabbed my hips and I gasped. "No, Candice. It wasn't that at all. I stood there and watched. And I... I couldn't believe it. I wanted to be here with you. I'd rather be here with you. I'm feeling pain right now, sweetie, and I don't want to bury my face in some expensive tits listening to my own music smashing through speakers."

I swallowed hard. "Dex..."

"I just want to be here with you. And have you all to myself. That'll make it go away."

Dex made a move and kissed me.

He pulled away.

I had a second to breathe. To think.

Because this was wrong... this was going to...

I slapped his face again.

Then I grabbed his shirt and moved to my toes.

"How in the fuck do you do this to me?" I whispered as I kissed him.

Dex didn't respond.

He didn't need to respond.

Instead, we tore at each other's clothes.

I wasn't even sure how it all happened as fast as it did. I wasn't sure if I took my shirt off myself or if he did. Our hands grabbed, arms flailed, and then his body was against mine. He stood naked while I wore nothing but panties. His hands cupped my ass as my hands clung to the thick muscles in his back.

Dex dipped his mouth down to mine for another kiss that was just...

It wasn't the way you kissed someone if you were being fake.

This wasn't fake.

And even if his kisses tasted like whiskey...

Dex brushed his lips to my ear. "I'm not drunk, sweetie. Believe me. I'm thinking fucking clear and know right where I want to be."

I pulled at him and fell back to the bed.

Dex had lifted me so I didn't actually fall.

He placed me down on the bed, his body hovering over mine.

His right hand wasted no time moving down the front of my panties, his fingers taking a dip in what he made me feel. With heavy swirls and each of his fingers grazing my clit, my hips were already shaking, aching for more of him.

After one more perfect kiss, I put my head back and shut my eyes.

Dex kissed slowly down my chest, moving from one side of my chest to the other, paying attention to all of me. The flicker of his tongue to my nipples matched the way the tip of his middle finger moved against my clit. The pleasure matched up and met in the depths of my stomach, leaving me already exploding.

*And I didn't care one bit.*

He kissed back up to my neck and his hand eased from between my legs so he could guide my panties off my body. He then lowered his body down to mine, resting himself against me.

I opened my eyes and saw Dex staring at me.

We met halfway for a kiss.  
Our tongues wrestled but when Dex thrust forward, I stopped moving.  
I lost my breath and my mind all in one movement.  
His left hand swept behind my head, holding me steady so we could keep kissing.  
His right hand held my hip, driving me down to the bed.  
And the way he moved...  
I gasped into his mouth as I came after just a few thrusts.  
But that was perfectly okay.  
Dex knew to keep going.  
One wasn't enough.  
He was spoiling me.  
*He was ruining me.*

---

AT SOME POINT I WAS LOST IN A DREAM WHERE IT WAS JUST DEX AND I on a stage. A big stage. With a Filthy Line banner above our heads. Every seat was empty though. It was just us. Naked on that stage. Teasing each other. Until he finally took me...

I swallowed and sighed as my eyes opened.  
Between my legs...  
I felt movement under the covers and let out another sigh.  
My left hand touched Dex's forearm.  
I felt his muscles flexing as he touched me.  
*Was there any better way to be woken up?*  
Dex's lips pressed against the back of my shoulder. "It's okay, sweetie. I just need to feel you."  
I moved my hand from his arm to his body. I slipped it between our bodies and my fingertips grazed his cock.  
Dex pressed his body against mine.  
His left hand moved from my clit to my inner thigh.  
He opened my legs and guided himself to me again.  
I bit at my pillow and reached for my phone.  
It was almost four in the morning.  
And he woke me up just to fuck me.

We were as silent as we could be as he gently thrust in and out of me.

Just our breaths and grunts.

When I came, I whimpered into the pillow.

And when he came, he thrust, held, and latched his mouth to the back of my neck, grunting with each pulse of his body.

I had no idea how I fell back to sleep after that, but I did.

My mind took me right back to that same dream I was having before.

I never thought my dreams and reality could be so fucking good.

That dream took me until the morning to live through.

This endless concert of just Dex and I on that empty stage. Doing whatever we wanted to each other. Dex playing guitar for me. Dex telling me he loved me.

It was just...

My eyes opened and the first thing I did was lift the blanket to see if Dex's hand was between my legs.

It wasn't.

Dex wasn't even in the bed.

I sat up and felt my heart sink.

If Dex wasn't here... then... where...

I never moved so fast in my life.

I was still putting my shirt on when I was already halfway up the stairs.

As I slammed against the basement door, it swung open and smashed against the wall where the garage was. I cringed, knowing how much *Dr. Keith* hated when Carter let doors slam off the walls like that.

When I turned the corner, my heels slid on the perfectly, shiny wood floors.

I saw Cali, Keith, and Carter sitting at the breakfast table.

(Yes, they had different tables for different meals.)

And then...

"Morning, sweetie."

Dex stood behind the kitchen island, with an array of breakfast foods in front of him.

"Dex made us breakfast," Keith said.

My jaw dropped.

*I must still be dreaming.*

---

DEX HANDED ME A MUG OF COFFEE AND KISSED MY CHEEK.

"How'd you sleep, sweetie?" he whispered to me.

My cheeks turned red and I looked right at Cali.

She was annoyed. But she was being calm and cordial. Probably only because I had dirt on her. The perfect wife coming home tipsy from too much wine.

"I couldn't sleep," Dex said. "Been a while since I woke up in a basement."

*Ohgod...*

"Is that so?" Cali asked.

"Yeah," Dex said. "The old days before the band was signed. Now I've got a view that would take your breath away. Right, Candice?"

"Yes," I blurted out. I cleared my throat. "His house is... it's round. Very round."

"Strange looking but cool," Dex said.

"So, uh, Dex, you guys jam out a lot?" Keith asked.

He made the motion for an air guitar and I looked at Cali again.

She looked at her husband with disgust.

Poor Carter covered his face.

"We jam all the time," Dex said. "Have to play to write, you know?"

"How does that work?" Keith asked. "I've always been amazed by it. I played some tunes back in my day."

"You did?" I asked.

"You did?" Cali asked.

"Summer camp," Keith said. "I played the violin."

"Dad, stop talking," Carter said.

"What?" Keith asked.

"He's from Filthy Line," Carter said.

"I don't like that word, Carter," Cali said. "And how do you know..."

Carter stood up on his chair. This amazing, ready to be defiant, almost ten year old. "Because I like their music. A lot. I listen to it all the time. And because I hate sports. I hate them all. I know Daddy

fixes up athletes when they're hurt, but I don't like sports. I want to play guitar. Like Dex does. I like Filthy Line."

My eyes went wide.

Cali put her fork down. "Carter..."

"Don't stand on the chair, son," Keith said.

"Hold up, little man," Dex said. "Your dad gets to cut people open with a knife."

Cali gasped. "There goes my appetite."

"Just hear me out," Dex said. "That's pretty badass."

Cali slapped the table.

"Dex," I whispered. "The language."

"What did I say?" he asked with a grin. He walked to the table and looked down at Carter. Carter was in awe. "Your dad is pretty cool, little man. Seriously."

"See?" Keith asked. "I'm pretty cool. Even the rock star says so."

"Dad," Carter said.

"Music is good too," Dex said, looking at Cali. "Don't be afraid of it. Maybe the little man doesn't want to take part in the family gig, and that's okay. Right?"

"I'm going to see myself out," Cali said. "I have a busy day today."

"Need something for that headache of yours?" I asked.

"How did you know she had a headache?" Keith asked.

Cali stared daggers at me.

"I can always tell what my sister is thinking," I said.

"And I wish I knew what my sister was actually doing," Cali said before storming out of the kitchen.

Dex shrugged his shoulders and looked at Keith. "Women, right?"

"Women," Keith said.

"Yeah, women," Carter said.

"What do you know about women?" I asked him.

"Kelly likes me," Carter said. "She tells everyone she's going to marry me."

"Is she pretty?" Dex asked.

"What? No. Gross."

"Ah, come on, little man," Dex said. He crouched down at the table to be eye level with Carter. "Don't be shy about it. I think your aunt is the prettiest girl I've ever met in my life."

I swallowed hard.

I looked at Keith.

Then I looked away.

"You're marrying her, that's why," Carter said. "I'm not marrying Kelly."

"Nobody said you had to."

"Uh, Cali wouldn't approve of this," Keith said.

"Got it," Dex said. "So what's it like for you, Dr. Keith? You fix those rich athletes up, huh?"

"That's right," he said. "It has its moments. Always nice to see them back to health."

"Until they get hurt again," Dex said.

"Job security," Keith said and laughed.

I'd never really heard Keith laugh before.

He was *man crushing* on Dex.

"You and the little man should come to a show," Dex said.

"Yes!" Carter yelled. He looked at me. "Aunt Candice, you are the coolest ever. This is so much cooler than eating cookies last night after eight."

"What's that now?" Keith asked.

"Nothing," I said.

"Wait a second," Carter said. He stood up and pushed his chair back. "You're marrying my aunt. That means you're going to be my uncle."

"I guess so," Dex said. "I'll be your rock star uncle."

"Whoa," Carter said.

Dex stood up. "Tell you what, little man. You have a phone or something?"

"Yeah..."

"You pick out whatever guitar you want. Send it to your aunt. I'll have it here by tomorrow for you."

"Oh, Dex...", Keith said. "That's, uh..."

"Dr. Keith," Dex said. "Really?"

Keith sighed. "Yeah, sure, fine. Okay."

Carter jumped at Keith and hugged him.

I looked at the food. "You didn't cook this, Dex."

"Nope," he said. "I ordered it. Had it delivered. That a problem?"

I looked at him and moved to my toes to kiss his cheek.

*I was just thankful there were no topless strippers serving the food in my sister's kitchen.*

---

CALI FLIPPED THE PAGE IN A MAGAZINE SO HARD IT RIPPED.

"You can hate him," I said.

"And you can love him."

"I'm sorry he's here," I said. "It was unexpected. After you fell asleep last night, he--"

"The drunk sister, right?" Cali asked.

I sat down on the metal chair next to her outside in the morning sun.

"I don't know what this is, Cali," I said. "Maybe I never thanked you for what you did when we were kids. If so, I'm sorry. You were more of a mother to me than she was. And you're right. I need to just give up and change my number. That's my problem though. Just like with the flower shop. Trent. This thing with Dex..."

"Just tell me it's not real," Cali said. "It's all for show, right?"

I looked at my hand.

I had a chance for honesty with my sister.

A real chance.

And I went with the truth...

"It's real to me," I said. "Maybe not the kind of real you think or want for me, but it is real. He's..."

"I don't get it," Cali said. "Does he know everything about you?"

"What does that matter?"

"Exactly. And there's no way you know everything about him. Yet you two are going to get married?"

"Not today," I said with a smile.

"I'm not laughing."

"Then maybe it's time for me to move out. I've stayed long enough. I'm just in the way."

"If that's what you want," Cali said. "I'd love to hear your plan though. Just move in with the rock star? Then what? How long until you find him sleeping with another woman? Or you find him half dead on the floor of an overdose?"

"You read too much of that gossip trash, Cali," I said.

She looked at me. "I've read everything about that band. And they are terrible. Even if half the stories are fake, the other half are just... disgusting."

"I'm sorry I let you down, Cali," I said. "You always wanted me to marry Trent, right? The handsome business guy that was going to save your sister. I think I forced myself to fall in love with him to please you. And look how that turned out."

"You walked away," Cali said. "You had a chance and you walked away. Don't blame me for that."

I curled my lip. "I hope Carter plays guitar. And I hope he grows his hair long. I hope he gets earrings. I hope he writes a song that makes him famous. And you know what? I hope Keith starts listening to Filthy Line."

Cali turned her head.

That was the end of the conversation.

I was going to lose my sister over this stuff.

Over a fake engagement.

And I was okay with it.

*Fuck, Dex, you better be worth all of this.*

## Dex

We all sat around in the rehearsal space with our acoustic guitars and whiskey.

It was the middle of the day and we were in the middle of a song.

The concept for hitting the world with two releases was a good idea. And *SLECK* wanted it.

Of course they wanted it.

They knew what it would make them.

And us.

Nash stood up and motioned for Reed and Sab to follow him.

They purposely left Jay and I alone, each on a leather couch, each holding a guitar.

"You break this one and I'll break your hands," Jay said.

"Then don't talk about shit we don't need to talk about," I said.

We were in silence again.

I started to strum the new song. Working through a few parts, knowing parts were missing from it. Shit, it could have worked as a basic three chord kind of song, but I wanted a bigger sound. A much bigger sound. I pictured the songs like this... the five of us on stage in front of twenty thousand fans. And we're each holding an acoustic guitar. The sound we needed...

Jay whistled to me. "Keep going with that."

I played the same chords again.

Jay started to mess with a riff, moving up a few octaves for sound.

He kept going with that, playing notes that matched Nash's vocals.

We both stopped at the same time...

We both nodded.

I reached for my whiskey glass.

He reached for his.

We lifted them at the same time and nodded again.

We drank to one another. We drank to fucking Mitchy. We drank to Candice.

And that was that.

I looked over my shoulder and nodded to Nash.

He, Reed, and Sab came back over and we worked on the new song again.

Five acoustic guitars. Five parts. All together making a huge sound.

Nash sang and we threw in our own vocals in the background.

Trying to piece it all together.

*YOU CAME AROUND,*

*To take all this pain,*

*You left yourself behind,*

*You played the perfect game.*

*I couldn't look away,*

*You made me feel blind.*

*I still don't know where I am,*

*And it's wasting all my time.*

THEY WEREN'T THE BEST LYRICS IN THE WORLD BUT THEY WERE CATCHY. The kind of song you'd sing in your car. The kind of song that would come back to us at a concert.

We'd turn the houselights on, kill the fancy lighting, and just be with the crowd for a little bit.

It took us another hour to consider the song finished in the sense of jamming out.

We all looked at each other and knew it was time for the studio.

Of course Sab wanted to hit *The Down* first.

I laughed it off and put my guitar down and walked to the door and went outside for a breath.

Nash followed me.

Always up my ass with something.

"Glad you and Jay talked," he said.

"We didn't talk."

"You worked it out."

"Nothing is ever worked out."

"For the record you're both right and wrong," Nash said.

I looked at him. "Fuck Mitchy."

"I agree."

"And you know what? Fuck Raunchy Recks too."

"It makes for a good story," Nash said. "We'll battle them on the road."

"I hope I see Neo or Ven in a bar... so I can fucking knock them out."

"In time," Nash said. He punched my arm. "That's a good song we have."

"Every song is good."

"It's about Candice," Nash said. "I can see it. Feel it."

"And what's that mean, Nash?"

"You've never been in love, have you?" he asked with a laugh.

"You know the ring I gave her?"

"Yeah."

"You remember that?"

"Yeah."

"Old man Rourke," I said. "Telling us how shitty we were. Demanding we learn the theory of music before we could play."

"I know, Dex," Nash said. "We left the studio because of him. And you stole that ring out of his bag. And wore it hoping you'd see him and he'd see it."

"For all I know that ring meant shit to him," I said.

"But now it has meaning, doesn't it?"

"You have your own engagement to celebrate," I said. "And a wedding to plan. Don't worry about me, Nash."

"You're my brother," he said. "And this entire thing has been crazy. Of all of us... you could fake an engagement. Except I completely forget that somewhere inside your chest there's a heart. That's why the music means so much to you. That's why being on the road soothes you. That's why this shit with Mitchy gets to you. And it's why you haven't blown this thing up with Candice yet."

"Yeah, well, we'll see about that," I said. "I have to go meet up with Toby and the lawyers again today."

"You know you're not getting into trouble here," Nash said. "Filthy Line doesn't do time behind bars. At least not unless it's an overnight thing."

The door opened behind Nash and the rest of the band came out.

That was just as another SUV pulled up.

The backdoor opened and out stepped Toby.

"Should we talk here or go for a ride?"

"Barry and Franklin in there?" I asked.

"Yeah," Toby said.

"Riding around with you fuckers will kill me," I said.

"I'll get more whiskey," Nash said to me.

I watched as Barry and Franklin climbed out of the back of the SUV.

I needed more than a glass of whiskey.

*I needed Candice.*

---

WE SAT AROUND A TABLE THAT WOBBLED.

We could afford anything we fucking wanted but this table... this old, shitty card table was the one where we sat, got drunk and high, and wrote our first single. Toby managed to keep the table for us and we cherished the damn thing.

The rest of the guys were scattered around, talking, playing guitars, *doing whatever*.

Toby folded his hands.

Then he grinned.

"What?" I asked.

"You're all set," Barry said.

"Meaning?"

"It's all gone," Toby said. "The first arrest is a wash. The second one is there but nothing's happening. There's a fine that I took care of."

"And on behalf of yourself, Filthy Line, and *SLECK* you're sorry and won't do it again," Franklin said.

"It was easy," Barry said. "Shocked me. But this whole thing worked. The sympathy from the fans really pushed it over the top."

"You and Candice were a hit," Toby said. "It was perfect. She was real. You're a rock star."

"And now you can do what you want," Franklin said. "Just as long as you don't get arrested again."

"Even if he did..." Toby shrugged.

"I don't want to hear that," Barry said.

"Well, he does have a point," Franklin said. "We could throw the same story. The business and life tore them apart."

"We'll save it for the strip club stories," Toby said. "That's where he'll be going when this is over. Right, Dex?"

Toby smiled big at me.

I stood up.

I slammed the folding chair shut.

I swung it through the air like you'd see on some wrestling show.

Toby fell out of his chair as I threw mine.

If he hadn't moved, he would have taken the chair to his face.

The chair smashed into a collection of bottles.

They all shattered.

I walked out of the rehearsal space again.

This time nobody followed me.

I took out my phone and looked at Candice's name on my screen.

All of our texts.

I guess it was time for her to go, right? And she didn't have to fake it. She wouldn't have to tell her story. It would just be... over.

*Over.*

I walked to the SUV and opened the back.

"Mr. Toby..."

The driver looked at me and closed his mouth.

I found a small bottle of whiskey and made it my best friend.

My thoughts ran fast and ran deep.

Toby finally emerged from the building.

He knew better than to push at me when I was pissed.

"I'm not sure what you wanted to hear there," he said. "Or hear now. So I'll choose a more neutral way of talking, Dex. Your ass isn't going to jail. You don't need to fake anything you don't want to fake. And I was just fucking around with you in there. I need you out of trouble. *SLECK* wants more songs. And we're talking tour dates too."

I finished off the small bottle of whiskey and smashed it at Toby's feet.

"Sounds good, Dex," Toby said.

He turned and walked to the door.

He opened it and paused.

When he looked back at me, he was smiling.

"You fucking stupid rock star," he said. "You fell in love. You fucking fell in love. And now you don't know what to do. You can't just slip a twenty into her thong and tell her to leave. And you can't just kick her out of your bed because you secretly want her to stay."

"Candice doesn't wear thongs," I said.

"Good to know, Dex."

Toby went inside and I curled my lip.

I needed to...

*You need to go fuck someone. Right now, Dex. End this now. Ana will be a play thing for a little while. She knows the deal. She wants it anyway. A simple fucking call...*

I looked at my phone and the screen lit up.

A text message came through from a number I didn't know.

*Dex. It's Cali. Candice's sister. We need to talk. Meet me at the cafe please.*

---

AGAIN, I WASN'T DRUNK.

But I wasn't sober either.

All I wrote back to Cali was **OK** and left it at that.

I had Toby's driver take me to the cafe.

I needed to see what this next round of bullshit was going to be.

Was she going to try and convince me to dump her sister? Maybe it was time for this snotty bitch to realize the truth. That Candice and I had been faking it all along.

Cali stood outside the cafe, clutching her purse like I was going to steal it from her.

I made sure to bring another little bottle of whiskey with me so I could get through this.

"You showed," she said.

"I did," I said. "Now what? Are you going to try to lecture me on life? I'm not some puppet, Cali. I know you're used to controlling everyone in your little bubble..."

"This isn't about me or you," she said.

"It's about Candice. You don't approve of me. Or our arrangement."

"How could I approve?" Cali asked. "And me being here is going to end up ruining my relationship with her. But I have to be here. I have to do this."

"Do what?"

"Tell you the truth."

I laughed. "I can tell you some truth too, Cali. Save it."

I turned away.

"She's in love with someone else, Dex," Cali said.

I stopped and curled my lip.

"Did she tell you about her business?" Cali asked.

"She did," I said.

"Did she tell you about Trent?"

I spun around. "What the fuck is this?"

"Or why she's in my basement?"

"This is what you want to do, Cali? Talk about her past?"

"Past?" Cali asked. "Trent still texts her. They never broke up. She just left."

"Left..."

"He helped her with the business. He was a part of it. There was money involved. Then feelings. I warned her of everything but she didn't listen. She never listens to me. And I don't want to do this, Dex. I swear I don't. But I can't let her marry you out of spite. And that's what it is. She's with you to get Trent off her back. And what happens with you? You're going to be real? True? Faithful?"

"You get to decide what kind of relationship she has then?" I asked.

"My sister is not going to be stuck with some rock star and a bunch of drunk whores," Cali said.

"Right. You can see the future."

"You're drunk right now, Dex. It's the middle of the day."

"She loved Trent?" I asked.

*No, Dex, no... don't do that... it's the whiskey talking... it's not you...*

"She did," Cali said calmly. "The business started to fail. And Candice just curled up. She let it crumble and thought she was going to lose Trent too. So when the business failed, she took off, just thinking it was over with Trent. But it never was. She never faced him. And he never gave up on her. I told him to give her some distance. And time. Which he has done. But he's been in contact with her."

"She could just change her number," I said.

Cali laughed. "And you don't know why she hasn't done that, huh? Unbelievable. You know, you're a rock star. You want to throw some shitty ring on a pretty girl's finger and marry her? That's your life. You know you can leave her, throw her some cash, and make her go away forever. But that pretty girl is my sister. She's the only family I have, Dex. Our mother never took care of us. I took care of Candice. And just when I thought I had everything set up for both of us, that woman came out of nowhere and gave Candice hope. Candice gave our mother her phone number... and that was years ago..."

"That's why she won't change her number," I said.

"She grabs onto hope sometimes to her own detriment," Cali said. "Just like this thing... you're wild and free. You're the bad she's fought off. And I get it. It's appealing. You're the opposite of the risk it was with Trent."

"And I'm the stepping stone," I said.

I drank the rest of what was in the small bottle of whiskey and dropped it to the ground.

"I'm sorry, Dex," Cali said. "I don't like you but I don't want to hurt you. I mean, I don't even know how you feel about my sister. How you honestly feel."

I backed up to the SUV. "You want the truth, Cali? I love her. I fucking love her. I love everything about her. And I love everything about her life. Including you."

"Dex..."

I put my finger to my lips and shook my head.

I didn't want to hear another word from Cali's lips.

Back in the SUV, I grabbed another small whiskey bottle.

I stared at my phone for a little while as the driver just cruised around town like I told him to do.

I wanted to text Candice.

Fuck that.

I wanted to call her.

Tell her I loved her. Tell her this crazy fucking idea of mine turned into real love.

But she loved someone else.

And this was just pretend all along.

I didn't call Candice.

Instead I called Toby.

"Dex, where are you with my driver?" Toby asked. "I have a meeting with-"

"Shut the fuck up, Toby," I said.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

I drank more of the whiskey and knew I had to make this right.

*"Toby, I need you to track someone down..."*

## Candice

I hadn't heard from Dex for an entire day. Before real panic could settle in and hang around, Toby called me. I didn't know his number but at that point, any number that called I would have answered.

"Are you alone?" Toby asked.

"Yeah," I said. "Why? Where's Dex? Is he okay?"

"You might want to sit down. Or better yet, get ready to go out."

"Go out?"

"You have a date."

"A date. Right. With Dex?"

"No," Toby said. "I'm sorry, Candice."

"Sorry for what?"

"Look, everything is taken care of now."

I curled my lip. Toby was talking like some mob guy, wanting to say something but not wanting to say something at the same time.

"What are you talking about, Toby?"

"Everything with Dex worked out," Toby said. "Everything's going away now. He's good."

"He's good. Right."

"You know, what you did was really amazing, Candice. It worked. You really saved him. And honestly, the rest of the band.

And me. This thing is bigger than life sometimes."

"Toby, I don't care about that stuff," I said. "Why are you calling me? Where's Dex?"

"He wanted me to call you. To make the arrangements. For your date."

"My date..."

"The ending, Candice," Toby said.

I ended the call.

I hung up on Toby and threw my phone to the bed.

Tears filled my eyes.

*The ending?*

I looked at my left hand.

*There was always an ending. That's how this was supposed to go.*

The tears were fought back into my body and I grabbed my phone off the bed.

I tried to call Dex but he didn't answer.

So I had to send him a text.

**Face me so I can give you your ring back. Tell me to my face what's happening.**

My hands shook as I stared at the screen.

It became blurry from the tears pushing back at me.

One tear fell and hit the screen.

I swiped my thumb across the tear.

Dex sent me a text.

**Be outside in 5**

I covered my mouth and started to cry.

I sucked in a breath.

I needed to calm down.

"Aunt Candice?"

I froze.

I wiped my cheeks.

When I turned, I smiled at Carter.

"Hey..."

"Are you crying?"

"No," I said. "Stubbed my toe on my nightstand. Hurts like a bitch."

Carter giggled. "Can I show you something?"

"Sure," I said.

Carter had his tablet in his hand and showed me the screen. "Do you think this guitar is cool?"

My heart ached. "Yeah."

"Will you send it to Dex? Like he said..."

I didn't want his heart to feel like mine did.

"Yeah, I'll send it to him," I said.

I took a picture of his screen with my phone.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Carter asked.

"Yeah," I lied. "That damn nightstand."

Carter walked up the steps.

I went out the basement door and walked around the house.

I didn't want to see anyone.

Except Dex.

And there he was.

Big time rock star in the black SUV.

The vehicle stopped in the middle of the street and the back window lowered.

Dex looked like hell.

Sad. Lonely. Drunk.

"Toby called me," I said. I touched the ring on my left hand and wrestled it off. "You couldn't even call me?"

I threw the ring into the backseat.

"You'll get yours from me soon," he said.

"What the hell does that mean, Dex?"

"All the truths, sweetie," he said. "It makes sense now. You never wanted anything out of this. You were just there. You didn't fear the interview. The pictures. It's like you wanted it that way. You wanted to be seen with me. You wanted to be... heard..."

"Dex, whatever you did have arranged, I'm not doing it," I said. "Open the door. I'll come with you. So we can talk about everything. I'm... I'm..."

*I'm in love with you.*

Dex winked at me. "Hey, it all worked out. We got what we both wanted. I was going to let you keep that ring though. A little memory of a crazy time. I'm going to text you an address. You should be there. It's my gift to you, sweetie. The truth. Please don't run from the truth. Don't let one failure dictate your entire life. Promise me that."

"I'm not promising anyone a thing," I said.

"If you don't show up later..." Dex shook his head. "Whatever. It's your life, Candice. Just don't ever feel worthless. And not beautiful. You took a wild rock star's life and fucking changed it. That takes strength."

Dex leaned forward and knocked on the window separating him and the driver.

The SUV pulled away.

A text came through a few seconds later.

With an address.

Where he wanted me to show up.

I shook my head.

Then another text came from Dex.

*You and Trent deserve this second chance, sweetie.*

---

I GRABBED CALI'S PHONE OUT OF HER HAND AND WANTED TO BREAK IT. But then I realized that would hurt Carter too. If there was an emergency or something and Cali didn't have a phone...

"Trent?" I asked.

Cali stiffened. "What?"

"You did this."

"You were going to marry him. And he didn't know about you."

"Screw you, Cali," I said.

"No," she said. "You listen to me. I'm sorry."

"You're sorry?"

"You're my little sister. I didn't know... what did you do?"

We were both ready to cry.

I wanted to hit her.

But I wanted to hug her too.

"Okay... it was fake. Okay, Cali? It was all fake."

"Fake?"

"Dex wanted to stay out of jail. I needed to show Trent I didn't love him anymore."

"What?"

"And you fucking ruined it!" I yelled.

"Candice..."

"You told Dex about Trent. That was my job to do. My job."

"You said it was fake..."

"It was fake," I said. "Then it turned into something else for me. I fell in love with Dex. Real love. Not your kind of love, Cali. But my kind of love. Don't I deserve that?"

Cali lowered her head. "Oh... shit..."

"Shit? That's it? You told Dex about Trent and he called him."

"What?"

"He called Trent. Tracked him down. Set up a date for me and him. I have to go see Trent now."

"I didn't mean for it... I just..."

"You wanted to control the story," I said. "Like you always fucking do. You can't just stay away. Just stay out of my life."

Cali started to cry. "I'm sorry. I saw it with *her*. You were too young to see it. She would ruin relationships out of fear. And every time I thought we were going to be a family she did it again. And again."

"I'm not *her*..."

"You lost the business and just left everything behind."

"Because I needed to. Trent wasn't good for me. Or the business. He was..." I swallowed hard. "He used the business for other things. I don't understand the terms but he used my business to make himself look good. And he tied my business to some of his stuff and when that fell through, so did my business."

"Candice, I didn't know."

"Of course you didn't," I said. "You never let me talk about it. You just jump in and judge. Now look what you did."

"I'll call him..."

"Who?"

"Dex."

"How do..."

*You went through my phone. Got his number. Called or texted him to meet. And he did. And you told him about Trent. And then he tracked down Trent...*

I moved toward Cali and hugged her.

She stiffened again.

"You're the only family I have," I whispered. "I'm moving out of your house. And you have to stay the fuck out of my life."

I broke the hug and Cali grabbed my arms. "You really love him?"

"Yeah," I said. "And I don't need a diamond ring. And a house on a quiet street. And three guest rooms and a finished basement..."

"You don't need my life," Cali said. "I see that now."

"You fucking suck," I said. "You're my sister. I love you. We'll get through this. We'll laugh about it... maybe. But you fucking suck. You don't even know everything about your own husband. Or your son. He wants to play guitar? Let him. And you... sit there and think you're high and mighty but secretly reading trashy, gossip sites. Figure yourself out, Cali. I know who I am. Don't fuck with that."

I walked out of the kitchen and I heard Cali chasing after me.

She grabbed my arm and turned me around to hug me.

"Did Trent really do that to you?" she asked.

"Yes. And he made it seem that he could come after me personally. So I left. I wasn't sure what it meant..."

"He'll never do that," Cali said. "Keith knows lawyers. Dex has lawyers."

"This is personal," I said.

"What are you going to do?"

I swallowed hard. *"Give both Dex and Trent exactly what they want from me."*

---

AS I WALKED TOWARD THE RESTAURANT THERE WERE PEOPLE TAKING MY picture.

Just regular looking men and women.

They wore their cameras like weapons, slinging the cameras forward and taking picture after picture as I opened the door.

Of course it was a fancy and romantic restaurant.

And of course Trent sat at the window.

This was what Toby meant by *the ending*.

It was me meeting another man for dinner. To pump up the Filthy Line drama. And to... what? Make me look like a whore? Like I was cheating on Dex? Or maybe it was my chance to have a say. To tell everyone that Dex and I were done because of the paparazzi and the stories and all the stuff on social media.

Trent looked the same as always.

He wore nice pants and nice sweaters and had the exact same hair. That meant he would get his hair cut twice a week. Not a lie either. That way he could keep the same look. The appearance was just that. Appearance. Everything he said and did was some sort of manipulation on some other deal he was working on.

There were moments though when he was real.

When I had a bad day and started to cry. And he plucked a rose from the flower shop I owned and gave it to me to make me smile. When he told me about some of the deals he had that went really bad. That realness made us connect. But that was the only real connection we had.

And I figured that out after meeting Dex.

Everything I did with Trent was wrong.

"Look at you," Trent said. "I can't believe this is happening."

"Why are you here?" I asked him.

"What? I got a call from your fiancé. He told me everything."

"Oh yeah? What did he tell you?"

"He said you were still in love with me," Trent said. "Which we already knew, Candice. I give the guy credit. A big shot like him admitting what he did. That's pretty amazing. You can tell he cares for you. He could have just bought his way into your heart but he didn't. Hell, I might become a rock 'n' roll fan now. How about that?"

Trent moved toward me, arms open, like nothing happened between us.

Like I didn't get a letter and a call that my building was being foreclosed on and that my business was so far in debt I was just as fucked as the building. Or that Trent screwed me over by tying everything to his deals... and that he was able to walk away without getting hurt even though I was losing my business. I had no choice but to walk away. To get away from him. To run to Cali. Because she was my big sister. And even in this situation she did mean well.

But...

*But...*

It was my life.

From the corner of my eye I saw the people with their cameras outside the windows.

And with Trent just a handful of inches from touching me, I made a fist and swung.

I hit him in the cheek.  
Which didn't do much of anything.  
Other than wake his ass up.

He stepped back and touched his face. "What in the hell?"

"Get the fuck out of here, Trent," I said. "We were never anything real. And we never will be."

"What?"

"You think you can scare me? Here's how this works now... everyone out there taking our picture? They're looking for a story. They thought it was going to be me breaking off my engagement to Dex for you. That's not going to happen. What's going to happen is this... if you fuck with me ever again I'll tell them the truth about you. You fucking scumbag. And if you think for a second you can come near me with lawyers... personally or whatever... I'll have my rock star fiancé come after you with his lawyers. And believe me, Trent, you don't want to know the shit Dex has done and gotten out of because of his lawyers."

Trent was shocked. Rubbing his cheek. Shocked.

"Candice..."

"Talking. Texting. If you even think my name, I will destroy you, Trent. So don't fuck with me, my fiancé, or these asshole paparazzi, because I will tell whatever story I want and everyone will believe me over you."

From our left, a tall, young man approached carrying what looked like a cherry cheesecake. One hand behind his back, balancing the cake with his other hand as it sat so peacefully on a round tray.

"Got you your favorite dessert," Trent said. "Thought we were celebrating..."

"We are celebrating," I said.

I took the tray from the waiter and didn't hesitate for a second as I threw it at Trent.

It was like right out of a movie... the cheesecake smashing against his jackass face.

The cherries dripped all over his face and clothes.

"And for the record... fuck cherry cheesecakes. Give me something with chocolate."

I showed Trent my middle finger and walked away.

Even then, the moron had the nerve to keep talking to me.

"Where are you going now?" he asked.  
I looked back at him as he wiped dessert off his face.  
I swallowed hard.  
I knew what I wanted.  
*"I'm going to where I belong right now... a strip club."*

Dex

Bethany sat on the arm of the giant leather chair, her legs across to the other side. Her legs were like a table to me as I helped myself to another drink. She sat wearing nothing but a black pair of panties with the Filthy Line logo in a very important spot.

"How many of those are you going to drink?" she asked.

"All of them."

"I'm going to have to call Toby, Dex."

"Go ahead. I don't give a fuck."

"Or I'll just call Nash."

"Hey, B, call anyone you want," I said. "I'm staying in here so I don't start a fight."

"Who are you going to fight?"

"How about that asshole that tried giving you a wedgie?"

Bethany swung her legs off the chair. She inched down to my lap and hugged me. Her perfectly positioned paid for tits were like two warm, glittery pillows for my face.

*And it did nothing to or for me.*

I hated my cock.

Bethany hugged me like she cared. "I told you that you had met your match. And she's gone and ripped you apart, Dex."

"But I still have you, right?"

Bethany looked down at me. "You owe me for all this time in here."

"You didn't do anything."

"Oh, I did plenty," she said. "Sitting here listening to you talk. I'd rather deal with the wedgie guy than this bullshit."

"Wow," I said.

She slithered off me and stood up. "Also for the record, you're an idiot. But that's a whole other conversation."

"We can have that one later. Go get me another drink. And make it quick or else I won't tip you."

"Fuck yourself, Dex," Bethany said.

She walked out of the private room and I curled my lip.

The dark purple velvet room was all mine. Like it always was. Shit, the things we did in this room...

I shook my head.

It would all go away soon enough.

Time always moved forward and this too would chase itself away.

Truthfully I didn't need Bethany. Or Ana.

I needed *Destiny*. A no name beauty that would share the sheets with me for a night and then disappear. Rinse and repeat until the memory of Candice was gone.

Better yet... I needed the road.

I grabbed my phone.

I needed to call Toby and tell him to get fucking moving on that.

A tour bus. The road. Unlimited booze. *Other stuff*. New women in each city.

I saw the curtain open from the corner of my eye as I found Toby's texts.

"You better have a fucking drink for me," I said.

"I have something."

I dropped my phone and looked forward.

*Candice was here.*

---

THE CURTAIN OPENED AGAIN AND IN WALKED BETHANY AND ANA.

One on each side of Candice.

"What the hell is this?" I asked. I curled my lip again. "Don't bother me unless you're naked." I reached into my pocket and took out money. I put it on the table next to me. "Come here, Bethany and Ana. You can take care of me."

They both folded their arms.

Candice stepped forward.

I laughed. "What the fuck is this supposed to be?"

Without a word, Bethany and Ana left the room.

Candice stood in front of me and stared down.

"You going to get naked or what?" I asked.

"You're in love with me," she said. "You actually love me, Dex."

"Fuck that. I don't."

"Yes, you do. You tracked down Trent for me. You let my sister get into your heart and you got all twisted up because of me."

"You're out of your damn mind, sweetie," I said. "We did our thing. I'm out of jail. You're free to do what you want."

Candice nodded. She looked over her shoulder for a second and then grabbed the bottom of her shirt.

My hands tightened to the arms of the chair.

She lifted her shirt and took it off, throwing it to the floor.

"Tell me you love me, Dex," she said.

I laughed. "Is this a game now?"

She unbuttoned her jeans. And she leaned forward and pushed them down her legs.

My cock was back alive again.

Twisting and throbbing inside my jeans.

I gritted my teeth. "Why don't you tell me you love me, sweetie... we both know you fell for me..."

Candice stepped out of her shoes and her jeans. "That's right, Dex. I fell in love with you. Just like you fell in love with me. Right?"

"What else do you have for me? Keep telling stories."

When she reached back and unsnapped her bra, I looked to my left.

My whiskey glass was empty.

I needed a drink.

This was fucking crazy...

Her bra hit the floor and Candice stood in front of me, topless.

Those perfect tits of hers. The right size for my hands.

My mouth watered.

"You've got everything wrong, Dex," she said. "What you know. What you think you know. And I'm not leaving until I have your... *full attention...*"

I curled my lip even higher. "This is what you want to be, sweetie?"

Her hands slid down the sides of her thighs and off came her panties.

She was bent forward when she looked at me with her eyes devouring my entire fucking soul.

"I love you, Dex," she whispered. "And I know what I want."

I jumped up from the chair and moved toward Candice.

My hands had plenty of places to touch but I cupped her face.

"Are you fucking serious right now?" I growled. "Of course I fucking love you, sweetie. From the second I saw you in the cafe... I could have had anyone play that fake game with me. And it would have been easier. But I wanted you. I craved you. I needed you. And I knew you had a story that I had to hear."

"Told you so... I knew you loved me."

I put my mouth to hers and her hands touched between my legs.

She unzipped my jeans and I stepped back and sat back down in the chair.

Candice was then on top of me.

Our eyes locked tight together as she hovered over me.

"It was all a lie," she whispered.

"What?"

"What Cali told you. I never wanted that. And what you did... for me..."

My hands grabbed her ass and pulled her down.

*No more fucking talking, sweetie.*

---

WE ENDED UP ON THE FLOOR.

I wasn't even sure how it happened.

The only time Candice left my arms was to get dressed.

I sat with my back to the big chair and held her.

We listened to the sound of the music pounding out in the main part of the strip club.

I laughed.

She shook her head.

"So we finally had that make up sex, huh?" I asked.

"I guess so," she said. "In a fucking strip club."

"You must really love me," I said.

She looked back at me. "I really do. And everything that happened..."

"Don't worry about it."

"Dex, I used you."

"I used you too, sweetie."

"I didn't want any money because I wanted Trent to go away. I thought if he saw me engaged he would believe it and stay away."

"And you never loved him?"

"Not like the way I love you," she said to me. "I'll tell you the whole story someday. But we don't have to worry about him."

"You sure?"

"I punched him in the face and then threw a cherry cheesecake in his face."

"Damn," I said. "Hope I never piss you off."

"Dex, you always piss me off."

"But you don't hit me."

"I need to work on that then."

I held her tighter. I looked around the room. "How much do I owe you?"

"What?"

"For the striptease and... you know... the other part."

"How about your life?" she asked.

I grabbed her left hand and hated that it was bare.

I took the same lizard and skull ring I had already given her once and slid it back on her finger.

"Dex..."

"We're not engaged, sweetie," I said. "Just together."

"Just together," she said.

Candice moved away from me and turned to face me, on her knees.

I reached for her face and she touched my shoulders.

We leaned toward each other and kissed.

"This is fucking crazy, Dex," she whispered.

"It's all I can give you," I said.

She looked at her left hand. "Just together..."

I swiped my thumb across her chin. "Hey. I can't wait to know everything about you. And I can't wait to piss your sister off some more with the guitar for the little man. And I can't wait to find a way to make it up to her. And I can't wait for the first time we have a big family dinner and all of Filthy Line is sitting around their dinner table."

Candice grinned. "Look at you planning things out. You really fell in love hard, Dex."

"Hardest fall I've ever had. And I once fell out of a three story motel in New Mexico."

"What?" Candice yelled.

I laughed. "Shit, sweetie, you have a lot to learn about me."

"I guess it's good I have the rest of my life to figure it all out."

"But we're not engaged," I said.

"Just together," she said.

I brushed my lips to hers and smiled.

The curtain opened behind her and in walked Bethany and Ana.

"Oh, how sweet," Bethany said.

She bounced up and down in more than one way.

Candice looked back.

Then came the rest of the band.

"Fuck, it smells like sex in here," Jay said.

"Almost as sweet as a pineapple," I said.

"What the fuck is this?" Reed asked. "You don't come in here to make out with your fiancée. What a waste of a room."

"Come on," Sab said to Reed. "I'll buy you a lap dance. You're grumpy today."

Nash looked at me and nodded.

I nodded back.

My eyes met with Candice's again.

She smirked.

"What?"

"Rock stars and strippers, huh?"

I smiled back at her. *"What can I say, sweetie... it's just who I am..."*

## Candice

We didn't need a holiday to make it happen.  
And even though I had moved out of Cali's house, I was still nervous having all of Filthy Line in her house.

Considering, for starters, it was three motorcycles and two black SUVs that pulled up to the curb and into the driveway, making every neighbor and their brother look out their window to see what the hell was going on at Dr. Keith's house.

When Keith opened the front door to the house wearing an all-black t-shirt and jeans, my jaw almost hit the porch.

*He's trying to look cool for Dex.*

"There's the doctor," Dex said, shaking Keith's hand.

Right behind Keith came Carter.

He was in khakis and a nice polo shirt, obviously dressed by Cali. She would now and forever fight the urge and path of rock 'n' roll for her only son. Which was going to be one hell of a battle to see. Especially with Filthy Line in his life.

Carter's face turned bright red as he stared at the band.

"Is this the kid?" Reed asked.

"Yeah," Dex said.

"He's coming for your job, Jay," Nash said.

Jay crouched down to be eye level with Carter. "Is that so? You think you can handle it?"

Carter started to shake his head.

"Carter," Dex said. "If you ever need Jay to leave you alone, just say one word."

"Pus-" Reed started to say but Sab elbowed him to shut him up.

"Pineapple," Sab said. "Just say that."

Without missing a beat, Carter curled his lip at Jay and said, "Pineapple."

Jay stood up and nodded.

"Badass kid," he said.

Cali stepped up to the open doorway next.

"Sisters," Jay said. "Nice."

Cali looked a little flustered.

She looked at me.

Our eyes talked for hours in a few seconds.

She didn't like this. She wasn't sure of Dex. But she loved me. And she was trying to figure this all out for me.

"Come on in," Cali said. "Make yourself at home."

"Careful with that," Dex said. "Stick to your rules. You don't want rock stars like us making ourselves at home."

Dex winked at Cali and her face brightened with a red tone.

Jay stepped forward and stared right at my sister. "*So... how happy are you in your marriage?*"

---

NASH HAD A SENSE OF CALMNESS AND HE MADE SURE REED WAS ON TOP of Jay when Jay got way too close to the line. Flirting with Cali was one thing. Cali could laugh it off. So could Keith.

But as we walked down the basement steps, I hung back and waited for Jay.

I grabbed his shirt and pinned him against the wall.

"Oh, right here?" he whispered. "Aren't you worried Dex will hear you screaming my name?"

"Listen to me," I said. "Keith is a doctor. He'll gut you and dispose of your body and nobody will miss you."

"Protecting your sister?"

"Something like that."

"Only the best ass and pussy gets this kind of protection," Jay said. "Now I'm even more intrigued."

"I swear on my life, Jay..."

"Hey, sweetie, you okay?" Dex asked from down the stairs.

"She's trying to kiss me, Dex," Jay said.

I pushed away from him and hurried down stairs.

What was once my old room was now a music room for Carter.

The guitar set up Dex had sent over really had no choice but to be put in the basement.

"When I first started, I didn't have this shit," Jay said.

"Language," Cali said to Jay.

"Come make my mouth clean then," he said.

Reed put an arm around Jay.

I heard him whisper something about breaking his neck.

"Fire it up, little man," Dex said.

Carter shook his head. "I suck."

"Carter," Keith said.

"No way you suck," Dex said.

"I'll help the kid out," Jay said.

He pushed away from Reed and walked to the guitar. He sat on a bench and turned on the amp and started to play.

Jay was such an asshole but he was so damn good at guitar.

His fingers flew up and down the guitar and then he handed it to Carter.

The feedback squealed as Carter shook his head.

Dex dropped to one knee next to Carter and whispered something.

Carter took the guitar and stood there, looking scared to death.

When he played a chord, the band erupted in cheers.

"Come on, man," Nash said. "Play!"

Carter smiled and hit another chord. Then another... and then...

He started to play.

"That's our song," Sab said. "Holy shit."

Cali opened her mouth to yell at Sab but it was no use.

Sab hurried to the bench and started to play the drumbeat with his hands.

Nash then cupped his hands to his mouth and started to sing the lyrics.

And just like that, my nephew was a rock star.  
Jamming with Filthy Line in the basement of his house.  
He could only play the one part but they played and sang for a good ten minutes.

I nudged at Cali. "Not so bad, right?"

She looked at me. "You're happy."

"Crazy happy."

I was technically still a barista at the cafe. But Gregor hated real work and was finally going to hand me the keys to the place to do what I wanted with it. I wasn't sure what that meant yet and I didn't really care. I mean, after all, I probably didn't need to work. My full time job was Dex.

The song finally ended and Cali stepped in. "Time to eat."

"Is it now?" Jay asked.

Reed grabbed Jay again and Keith led the way to the steps.

"Keep it cool up there," Nash said to Sab.

"What did I do?" Sab asked.

"Everyone has to stay clothed at the dinner table," Nash said.

Carter took his guitar off and Cali messed with his hair, shaking her head.

"Hey, little man," Dex said. "No more Carter with a C. You're a rock star now. You're Carter with a K."

"Let's go upstairs," Cali said.

"Thanks for having us, Cali," Dex said.

My sister paused and looked at Dex. "Anything gets ruined, broken, damaged, or stolen, I'm coming for your ass."

"Deal," Dex said.

They went up the stairs and I made one step when Dex grabbed my hand.

"Hey, sweetie."

"Hey," I said.

"This is where your bed used to be."

"Yup."

Dex grinned at me.

My face warmed up. "Really?"

"You know something crazy is going to happen up there, right?" Dex asked.

"Oh, I know. I already plan on having Carter go eat in his room or something."

"That's good," Dex said.

I tried to take a step but Dex stopped me again.

I laughed. "What are you doing?"

He pulled me against him and picked me up.

I gasped a second before he kissed me.

Then he walked us into the bathroom and kicked the door shut behind him.

I heard the click of the lock and he sat me on the bathroom sink.

"Dex..."

"Your sister is never going to actually like me," he said. "So I might as well give her plenty of reasons to keep hating me."

He kissed my neck and I put my head back.

His fingers played with the button on my jeans and I bit my lip.

Upstairs I heard laughter.

Then it was followed by a scared yell from Cali.

"Damn," Dex said.

"What?" I asked, trying to keep my breathing steady.

"Something happened," he said. "My guess is Jay did something with a piece of food to tease your sister."

"There's no pineapple up there," I said.

Dex laughed. "Ah, I fucking love you, Candice."

"Yeah, I fucking love you too, Dex."

Our eyes flirted for another second.

Then his hands pulled at my jeans and panties.

*Dex had other ways of telling me he loved me too.*

## EPILOGUE

Reed

I slipped my hand into her hand and pulled her toward me. "We go out the back, babe."

"What? Why?"

"I'm not walking out the front door. I don't do that. I have a ride waiting for us."

"Really? Where are we going?"

Her big blue eyes and bouncy strawberry blonde hair were the things one night stands were made of. I could taste the sense of innocence coming from her. The way she sat there all night sipping her drinks, that flirty tongue of hers playing with the thin, red straw.

*You have no idea where this is going, babe...*

I touched her chin. "We can go anywhere you want."

"Paris?"

"I'll call a private jet right now."

She giggled. "You're crazy, Reed."

"Am I?"

Her face turned serious. "You mean... for real..."

"I can do anything the fuck I want," I said. "You just need to decide what you want. And what kind of fun you're going to have getting it."

She told me her name was Kelly and I had no reason not to believe her. She already knew who I was. And I hoped to everything she knew what tonight meant.

Which was... *nothing*.

*Paris? Really? You want to go to a big tower, babe? I'll drop my jeans right here and break this table in half...*

Kelly put her drink down and leaned toward me. Her tongue touched my neck.

I pulled her closer and kneaded my left hand into her ass on the outside of her pants.

"Let's get out of here," she whispered.

"That's the plan."

Five minutes later we were in the back of the SUV.

She was on top of me.

Grinding her hips like my cock was going to spurt gold.

My hands slapped at her ass and I picked her up and put her on the seat next to me.

She was on her knees and I looked at her.

"We can skip Paris," she teased.

"Already planned on it," I said. "But there's still hours to kill then regret."

"How far is the drive?"

"As long as I want it to be, babe."

Her right hand touched the bulge in my jeans.

I put my head back and sighed.

Kelly found a way to keep her mouth busy while I found a way to kill some time.

Plus, it was good to get this first one out of the way.

My right hand crept down her back and traced the line of her pants. Then I found out she was wearing a thong.

The SUV came to a stop but Kelly didn't stop.

I looked down at her head bobbing up and down between my legs.

I put my head back again and shut my eyes.

Then I heard singing.

A group of voices singing.

They were on the corner... four of them.

But there was one that caught my attention.

I sat up a little and Kelly groaned with her mouth full of me.

I looked out the window but couldn't see much other than dark silhouettes.

When I put the window down a little, I heard the voices even louder.

The window was down just enough for me to see.

Kelly groaned again and I felt my legs tighten. I was about to blow and I wasn't even focused on it.

My eyes were elsewhere.

Kelly popped her mouth off me and let out a groan. "Yes, Reed, yes..."

"Hey, shut up," I said to her.

Her mouth lowered again and the SUV started to move.

I turned my head and heard *that voice* again.

And that's when I saw *her*.

The closest thing I ever had to falling in love once before in my life.

The woman who almost got to my heart.

The woman who I kicked off our tour bus in the middle of nowhere.

Because me finding love wasn't allowed to happen.

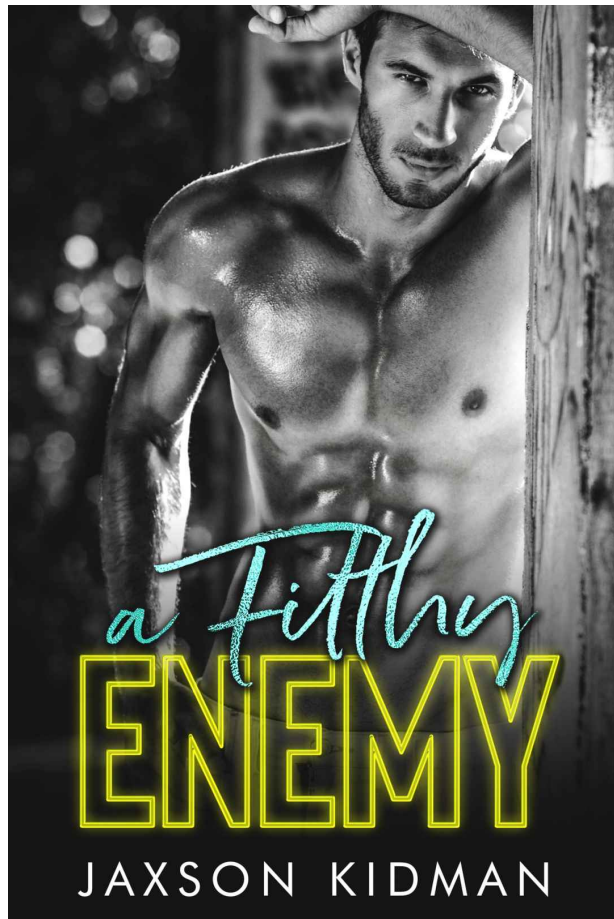
I tried to turn some more but lost sight...

I grunted and felt myself finishing into Kelly's mouth.

I shut my eyes...

*... and pictured Abby...*

MEET REED



He literally left me on the side of the road.

Tossed from his tour bus because he was a bad boy rock star.

And I was just some chick who could sing.

That's only reason one of a million why I hate Reed.

I get it though - he's hot, plays bass with those long fingers that  
leave you wondering what else they could do...  
But he's evil.

And with each chart topping song and album and worldwide tour  
he's raking it in while I'm left singing in a female barber shop  
quartet trying to make ends meet.

Then the call of my life comes in.  
I'm booked for real studio time.  
I show up... and I'm supposed to sing backing vocals for Filthy Line.

Which means I'm in the f\*ckin studio with Reed.

Mr. cocky rocky kiss my ass thinks he can smooth his way with me...  
think again.

I'm not some groupie.  
I'm trying to make a name for myself.  
Yet he won't leave me alone.  
Forget about the smoldering look in his eyes.  
Forget about what he does when he finds out what I do for a living.

This rock star is on my tail and next thing I know my greatest enemy  
wants me between the sheets.

Hey, maybe this can work out... or maybe I'll finally get a chance to  
give him a taste of his own medicine...

# FILTHY LINE

## FREE PREVIEW

*Reed*

I checked my phone and grinned.

The *Line Whore* bought me a glass of whiskey and I told her to dim the lights.

There were neon lights across the ceiling... and all I needed was some good music to really set the tone.

I threw the glass of whiskey back and took a big gulp.

Dangerous eyes stared at me.

She moved forward and cupped between my legs and kissed my neck.

She opened my jeans and her hand slid down to fight with the steel anaconda that most would call *an amazing cock*.

My eyes stared at the door.

"Come on," I whispered.

"You can come on me anywhere you want," the *Line Whore* whispered.

Before I can say anything else, she disappeared from view.

Which was good.

I wasn't here to talk.

She was here to use her mouth.

Simple as that.

She pulled my jeans down enough that my cock sprung free.

Her mouth latched to the full tip and I took a breath.

I also took another drink of whiskey.

She was good.

Really good actually.

Her lips and tongue knew exactly what to do and how to do it.

In fact, she was the type that if I gave a time limit, she could probably make me explode within that time.

That's a good thing to be able to do.

Especially when I was due to be on stage in a few minutes.

Her right hand tried to grip the root of my cock and her left hand moved around to my ass. She dug her nails into my ass cheek and pulled.

*She wants me to fuck her mouth.*

I groaned and gave her what she wanted.

The door finally opened.

Abby stepped inside the room and froze.

She looked at me.

Then at the *Line Whore* on her knees before me.

"You texted me to come see this?" Abby asked.

"Oops," I said.

I expected Abby to storm out of the room and never want to talk to me again.

That was the fun in this.

The push and pull.

She wanted to sing? She wanted a taste of fame?

Then she was going to have to deal with me.

I put my right hand to the *Line Whore's* head and thrust forward.

She groaned.

I drank more whiskey.

Abby stared.

She swallowed hard.

She looked hurt.

Or maybe she was jealous and wanted to be on her knees before me.

*Wouldn't have been the first time...*

"What did you really want?" Abby asked.

"Just to see you before I come," I said.

My cock thickened and I was seconds away from explosion.

Abby shook her head.

Then she left the room, with the door wide open.

Jay and Sab walked by, paused, stepped back, and smiled at me.

I shut my eyes and lost my load.  
Thinking of Abby.  
*Fuck, I think I love her.*

---

*(Reed's book will be available on 7.1.20 BUT if you're reading this before that date, it's available for pre-order... if you're reading this after that date, it's LIVE right now! Just go to [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and type in "JAXSON KIDMAN A FILTHY ENEMY" right now!)*

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