

HARD LEX

A Billionaire Romance

NIGHT OF THE KINGS SERIES

SHAYNE FORD

HARD LEX

A NIGHT OF THE KINGS NOVEL

SHAYNE FORD

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CONTENTS

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Also by Shayne Ford](#)

[About the Author](#)

D^{AHLIA}

WHO IS LEX HARRINGTON?

I FLIP the card several times, hoping I can find the secret answer. The rectangular piece of paper stares back at me. Red with embossed, golden letters.

This is not his regular business card which begs more questions I have no answers for.

I sink into the bathtub, the warm water, and fragrant foam rising to my chin.

There is no last name on his card, and it goes without saying that this is not his work email address. He's simply Lex, a generic email address hosted by an encrypted service pops from below his name.

Seemingly, Lex Harrington is full of secrets. What can I say? I'm not the one to judge. Of all people, I should be the first one to keep my mouth shut.

Still, this whole story brings reality into a sharper focus and all those pesky questions that remain unanswered.

I gulp half of the wine, set the glass on the porcelain edge, and go back to staring at his card.

Who is Lex Harrington?

That would be my first question.

Who is behind the man who's always in control, permanently analyzing, and deciding, making sure everything goes by his plan? What makes Lex Harrington tick, if anything? What makes him weak and vulnerable?

So far there's nothing I can point to.

What drives him?

That's a better question.

He likes money— there's no doubt about that, and he certainly enjoys his power, but he's not shackled by it. And if he is, he doesn't show it.

He had fun tonight, and he didn't even fuck me, not that he didn't want to. And yet, he had a grand old time watching me squirm and lose control and fall for him.

He knew what I was going through.

Hiding how badly he was affecting me was truly pointless. He knows me in and out— even the secret version of myself, and way better than I know him.

How stupid of me to say I'd know everything about him. Better than he knows himself. How childish of me to even think that.

So, now that he has acquainted himself with my alter ego, I wonder who does he really like? He wouldn't touch the office girl, would he? He sure wants to see more of the naughty girl. I can't tell that. Besides, he made it clear.

Hmm... A bittersweet smile tugs at my lips.

I know he also likes me. The real me.

Dahlia.

Does that make him a cheater?

Strangely it does. Because he doesn't know. And then, it doesn't make him a cheater. Because everything is nothing but a lie.

It sure makes me a cheater. Of the worse kind. If he discovers my little trick, there may be no place for me to hide from his wrath.

I flip the card one more time.

LEX.

Has he given cards like this to the other girls?

I don't like that answer, so I push that thought away and shift gears.

So, now what? What should I do?

The sane part of me tells me to forget about *Silver*, lap dancing for money, and in particular Lex Harrington.

Keeping a low-profile at work and not stirring the pot in any way, shape, or form, would be highly advisable.

Sheila Lane should be back in the office by the end of next week. If I'm lucky, I'd probably be transferred to another department by next Monday. If I'm not, chances are I'd be kicked out in the street. Either way, I'd be out of his sight within days.

Chances are, he's not going to be in the office much. Once things settle down, there's little possibility I'd blow my cover.

It all sounds good—in theory, and yet it's not plausible.

I gulp the other half of my drink, pain nestling in the pit of my stomach as the truth begins to surface.

If I'm honest.... Really, truly honest... Tonight was one of the hottest nights of my life, on par with the first one, which also belonged to him.

Sure, I can blame it on all sorts of things, but it would be nothing but a lie.

The truth is, I have a hard time saying no to him. And who can blame me?

Warmed up from the wine, I slacken in the tub and pin my gaze to the card.

"*Lex Harrington*. What is your secret?" I murmur, staring blankly at his card.

"How can I do this thing with you without getting burned? Or lose my job? Or risk getting caught? Huh?"

A noise coming from the entrance draws my eyes to the door.

"Elsa? Is that you?"

She shushes someone before she lets out a muffled giggle, and then I hear the door closing.

"Where are you?" she asks, waltzing down the corridor.

"Bathroom," I say, craning my neck out, and training my eyes on her.

"Where were you?" I ask as she enters the room.

She gives me a mysterious smile.

"Out."

I check the time on my phone.

"It's almost midnight."

"I met a friend," she says, grinning while evading my eyes.

I wonder when we have become such liars. Our parents were always straightforward people. We've never heard them lying, or catch them having secrets—to put it elegantly.

"Have you made up with Jordan?" I ask, concerned.

She looks at me, her hand waving.

"No, no. No fucking way," she says.

She leans against the sink and crosses her arms over her chest.

"What's the problem with Jordan?"

"He's a jerk."

"Meaning?"

She shrugs.

"He doesn't do stuff the way you want it?" I ask.

"Yeah, that too..."

"What do you want him to do Elsa?"

"For one, to leave me alone. I want to work and not have someone watch over my shoulder all the time."

I look at her for a moment.

"You don't love him."

Her smile fades away. She sways her head side to side, and as she glances away, I see the glint of tears in her eyes.

"Then why did you hook up with him?"

She shifts her gaze to me again, and I see the sadness in her eyes. I let out a quiet sigh. It's useless to split hairs now. The past is the past.

"How old is he?"

"Twenty three."

"He's young."

"I'm twenty," she says as if that's a winning argument.

"Thank you for reminding me."

She chuckles softly.

"So how was it?" she asks, shifting the conversation.

I glance at her.

"Tonight. At *Silver*," she says.

"Good," I mutter.

"Tasha said you forgot your money again," she says.

"Shit. The money..." I mumble, and for some stupid reason, I begin to laugh.

She grins.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Nothing. Perhaps this is a sign I'm not fit for this job. If I can't even remember to collect my money."

"That, or maybe you had too much fun," she says.

I search her eyes for a moment.

"Have you?" I ask. "When you worked there?"

Her lips curve into a naughty smile.

"Yeah... occasionally. You?" she asks, a sly grin beaming in her eyes.

"Me? I only worked two nights."

"Tasha said it was the same client."

"That's because he was the one who had all the fun," I say, lying through my teeth, barely stifling a smile.



DAHLIA

MONDAY MORNING FINDS ME BAFFLED, no different than Friday evening left me.

I wake up earlier than usual and spend twice as much time in front of the mirror. I whip up a toned down look again, my office version completely different than the girl who got him hard.

Based on what he said last week, there's little chance he'd be in the office today.

Fashioning a navy business suit comprised of a pencil skirt and tailored jacket, hair styled in my signature bun, I walk into the office fifteen minutes to nine.

A moment later, the receptionist knocks on the door.

"Yes," I say, raising my eyes.

She looks at me from the doorway.

"What is it?"

She takes a few steps inside, careful not to make a noise.

"Alexander Harrington is in his office," she says quietly.

My mouth falls open, my heart spasming in my chest.

"Okay," I say, breathless.

"He said he wanted to see you as soon as you arrived."

"Did he say why?"

She shakes her head.

Of course, he didn't.

"What time did he come in?"

"Seven thirty."

Hmm... Someone couldn't sleep.

"Okay. Thank you," I say as she pulls away.

I spend a couple of minutes smoothing my skirt and going over possible scenarios on why would he want me in his office.

Getting fired is the first thought that pops into my head. What can I say? I'm an optimist by nature.

But why would he fire me? Friday disobedience?

Phone clutched in my fist, I make the trip to his office.

I get ready to knock and freeze, a bad feeling washing over me. This can't be good. Why would he ask the receptionist to give me the message?

Taking a long breath, I rap on the door.

"Come in," he says, his voice emotionless.

Regardless, the smooth sound of it warms me up instantly.

I step in, close the door, and stop not far from it. He raises his gaze from his phone and takes me in.

Unreadable. I sense him cold.

Shit.

He motions to the chair across from his desk, and I slide in that direction, a moment later quietly slipping into the plush seat.

"You asked for me," I say with a soft, submissive voice.

It earns me a questioning look.

He takes a hard look at me this time, and I'd like nothing better than to hide under my chair.

"Why didn't you answer my calls on Friday?" he asks, no humor in his voice.

Icicles form on my face.

"If I remember correctly, Sir, you were the one who didn't answer my calls."

"*Personal* calls," he says, keen to clarify.

My breath gets stuck in my throat.

Where is he going with this?

His sparkling eyes remind me of two frosted forget-me-nots caught in the brunt of an unexpected winter. His lips are stripped of

any smile.

"My calls were work related," he says.

I eat my words. Clearly, he's setting me up.

"Okay," I mutter.

"From now on, you take my calls no matter where you are or who you're with. Understood?"

"Yes, Sir," I say, holding his gaze.

"Good. Now go back to work," he says curtly.

I stand up, his eyes going back to the phone screen. I stall for a moment, my eyes falling at the base of his neck where my nails have marked him.

He flicks his eyes up, quickly registering my gaze.

"Why are you still here, Ms. Fox?" he asks with a nasty voice.

Pursing my lips, I crush a smile and a curse.

Is he playing games with me? 'Cause if he's not, he's such an ass.

"Yes?" he says gruffly, quirked an eyebrow.

Lifting my hand, I motion with my finger in the direction of his neckline.

"You have a cat, Sir?"

He looks at me as if I've grown a second head. His phone plops on his desk as he waits for me to elaborate.

"I'm just asking, 'cause I love cats. They are so funny... and, um... good companions and I know some men... don't quite like them—"

"Get out, Ms. Fox," he barks, tearing his eyes away from me, grabbing his cell phone again.

Managing to keep my composure, I push back a snicker and twirl away.

Swiftly, I enter my office, but I no longer feel like laughing.

What the hell just happened?

He can't be that pissy because of the way I behaved last Friday. He wanted to make a point. Fine, I got it, but he didn't need to be that nasty.

Perhaps his blue balls talked, although I wouldn't bet my money on that. He's a man with resources. I'm sure someone took care of that.

Could he be a little ruffled up because the masked girl didn't call? Hmm... I never thought about that. I sink into my chair and rifle through my purse, fishing out the card.

As much as I've decided against it, here I am again. Pondering. What if I contact him? What do I have to lose? It means nothing. And I can pull away anytime I want.

I spend the next few minutes or so, signing up for a new email address that comes with a chat service.

Obviously, I can't call his cell phone, and I can't use the company's computer either. So, I use my phone to create the new email account. And just to make it interesting, I choose the same service he uses, which also provides encrypted transmission for a nominal monthly fee.

Feeling creative, I choose *Bondage Girl* as my username. I'm sure he'll know who this is.

Voices travel down the hallway. I wonder if he's already leaving. The noise fades away, and my focus shifts back to my phone.

Now, that's a good reason to get fired, I muse as I type away.

Bondage Girl: You know who this is. Is your offer still standing?

My finger hovers over the screen for a moment as I go back and forth for the umpteenth time before I finally send it.

Smoothly, I set my phone on my desk and start working. I have a hard time concentrating on my work as I'm impatiently waiting.

A few moments pass by.

The sound of his voice echoes on the hallway, throwing me into a spiral of panic. My heart pounds madly in my chest as at any moment I expect him to push the door open.

Instead, he goes right by it. I jolt out of my chair, sprint to the door and crack it open, keen to hear the instructions he relays to the receptionist.

He's leaving. For the... *day*?

It's not even ten o'clock.

Pain spins inside my stomach. Why do I care?

Quietly, I close the door, stroll back to my desk, slump into my chair, and pretend I'm working again.

I barely slacken into my seat, when an alert pops on my phone screen.

Bondage Girl has just received her first message.

Lex: Yes. How do I call you?

With trembling hands, I sweep the phone from the desk and rush to the bathroom. I lock myself in, my eyes on the small patch of light.

Bondage Girl: You like a good mystery?

His answer comes almost instantaneously.

Lex: I might.

Bondage Girl: That's not an answer.

Lex: I do.

Blue balls work. I smile.

Bondage Girl: First condition. I will be your secret. I need complete privacy.

Lex: Noted.

Me: You can call me Secret Girl or Bondage Girl or anything else that you fancy.

Lex: When do I see you?

Hmm.

Me: When you're ready.

That was cocky and unwarranted. He's gonna smell I'm a rookie.

Lex: Is that your sense of humor?

Shit. Let's pretend I didn't mess this one up.

Me: Back to business. I'll wear my mask at all times, or you'll be blindfolded. And I don't like to talk much.

Lex: I figured that one out.

Me: Also the rooms have to be dimly lit. The place cannot be in a hotel, or in any other public place. I will provide a clean bill of health, and I expect the same from you. We'll meet only in the evening, and never outside that room. We will not socialize. Take it or leave it.

I send my last message and wait, my pulse racing. Is this too much for him? Is he curious enough?

Lex: Done.

A smile climbs up my face. And then another message arrives.

Lex: One condition, baby. I fuck you any way I want.

My smile falls from my lips. What exactly does it mean?

The seconds slip by. How do I answer this?

What if he's testing me? Should I ask clarifying questions? If I do, I'll reek of amateurism. Without pondering much, I type back the answer.

Me: Done.

Lex: Clear your Thursday evening. Instructions to follow.

I unlock the bathroom door, walk into my office, and crash into my chair.

I might have just found the shortcut to hell.

L^{EX}

LIFE JUST GOT INTERESTING AGAIN.

I wonder if *Secret Girl* has any fucking idea what she got herself into. I bet she doesn't, but curiosity got the best of her. That's not to say I'm not curious as well.

Oh, yeah baby, anytime a woman stirs me up that badly and makes me guess, I'm her man. Not in the way she thinks, but I still am.

And that goes for sweet Miss Fox as well. She's playing with the wrong man, and I wonder if she got the message that I'm in charge, not her.

I finish up texting Sexton, and spin around, pulling away from the elevator and heading back inside. The receptionist lifts her gaze and parts her lips ready to greet me again.

I give her a smile that makes her blush and press my index on my lips to keep her quiet.

Instinctively, she clamps her hand over her mouth and grins to me as if we share a secret.

I turn right and enter the corridor, heading to Dahlia's office. The phone beeps in my hand, flashing an alert.

I stop in front of Miss Fox's office and swipe my phone screen with my thumb.

What is it *Bondage Girl*? You can't possibly change your mind already, can you?

I pull her message up.

Bondage Girl: One last thing. Money is not part of the deal. You DON'T pay me, and that's non-negotiable.

My eyebrows lift, a smile creasing my lips. Sure baby, whatever you say.

Me: Fine by me.

I press *Send* a second before I enter Dahlia's office. Her phone beeps at the same time, and within a split second her eyes shoot a glance at me, her lips part with surprise, and her phone becomes airborne and lands in the middle of the room.

Before I can erase the space and reach down to pick it up, she almost becomes airborne too and showing unusual skill and flexibility snatches it off the floor right before me.

Resuming a standing position, she stares at me, her eyes so wide they could pop off her face.

"Miss Fox?" I say calmly while she's panting and puffing like a steam-machine. "What's going on?" I ask, eyeing the phone she's palming as if she's stolen it.

"Nothing," she breathes out, panicked.

I can see the drops of sweat glistening on her brow.

"You're back," she says, half of her lungs pushing out with her breath.

I shove my hands into my pockets.

"I guess, I'm allowed to be back whenever I please. Isn't it so, Miss Fox?"

She nods, still unable to regain her composure.

"What were you doing anyway?" I ask, pulling away from her and pivoting toward her desk when I hear a long exhale behind my back.

Was that a sigh?

I flick my eyes to her.

Distracted, she bites her lip.

"Yes?"

"Your expense reports."

"Weren't they supposed to be done last Friday?"

She looks at me, frozen.

"Miss Fox?"

"Yes. They were."

"And you could've finished them on time had you not left early on Friday."

A blush spreads across her face before the color shifts, and her cheeks turn white.

Revelation washes over her eyes.

"Is that what this is?" she says, mustering enough courage to stand her ground.

"What are you talking about?" I ask, barely pushing my grin back.

She straightens and squares her shoulders, a smile glinting in her eyes.

"Are you still pissed off because of Friday?" she says, and twirls around, giving me a perfect view of her rear.

She sways her hips and walks around her desk before she sinks into her chair, and locks her eyes with mine.

"I'm not pissed, Ms. Fox. I'm concerned that your private business might get in the way of your work. We don't want your performance to suffer," I say, fucking with her. Majorly. "My expense reports are the perfect example," I say.

"You only know of them, because you came back."

"I *come* any time I want," I say, barely keeping my face straight.

Biting the inside of my cheek, I try to keep myself from laughing. Something must've spilled in my eyes tells me the small smile rolling on her lips.

"What's so funny, Miss Fox?"

"You," she says with a soft voice, and all of a sudden I feel warm inside. "I'm not going to argue the fact that you can *come* whenever you want. You sure know better than me," she says, a mischievous smile flashing in her eyes.

I tilt an eyebrow up while raking my teeth across my lip, trying to look remotely interested in what she has to say.

Her eyes move to my mouth.

"So what's your point, Miss Fox?"

"My point is that I do my job well, and you wouldn't have anything to complain about, had I not failed to answer your calls on Friday. But I've only done it because you ignored me..." she says, her voice gaining strength and volume.

"I'm not running my day according to your schedule, Ms. Fox," I say, set to drive her crazy.

Her eyebrows knit in a frown.

"You were working out."

"And that's my prerogative."

Her teeth grit with frustration.

"Besides, I called you back," I say.

She looks at me, her eyes throwing flames.

"Only because I dropped that lawyer's name, who by the way, coincidentally, or not, has received an assignment that kept him chained to his desk in his office for the entire weekend," she says.

"He should be happy he still has a job instead of whining and trying to stir sympathy in your noble heart. It's called work, Miss Fox. It has nothing to do with me. The man has to earn his living. Just because he couldn't take you out on a date and blamed it on his work, it's not my fault."

She studies me as I purse my lips, crushing a smirk, and having a great time messing with her.

She leans back in her chair and folds her arms across her chest.

"You're *fucking* with me, Mr. Harrington," she says bluntly, extra emphasis going on the word, and I can see she chose it on purpose to throw me off.

"I am?"

I smile wolfishly.

"Yeah... you are. And you fucked up that poor guy too."

"I didn't. It's his job."

She waves me off.

"Was that him?" I ask, and her eyes lock mine.

I motion to her phone.

"Is that why you threw your phone across the room?" I press.

"I didn't. It fell from my hand because you startled me."

"Yet at the same time you received some sort of a message," I say, smiling mischievously.

"People do receive messages... the same way people work out and can't answer their phone," she says, getting back at me.

"It may be, but not many people throw their phones across the room when they get caught... unless, of course, it's a special message."

I slant my gaze down, and she snatches her cell phone and shoves it into a drawer.

I was fucking right.

Smiling, I turn around and head to the door.

"Okay, Miss Fox. I'll let you get back to work. Your friend, Mr. Mako, just got himself two more weeks on that work assignment."

A few moments of silence pass by, and just as I open the door, I hear her voice.

"It wasn't him," she says.

I turn around and gaze at her, my hand curled around the door-knob.

"It wasn't?" I ask, intrigued. "Then who was it?"

So, it was a man. At least, she admits to that.

"It's not your business."

I let the door drop closed, and saunter back to her. Propping my hands on her desk, I lean to her.

Her eyes go back and forth, a baffled expression on her face.

"Last time I checked, this office and your time, belonged to me," I say calm and smiling. "So, it is my business. You can do whatever the hell you want, just not on my dime. Are we clear?"

"Are you saying I can't have a boyfriend as long as I work for you?" she says, a soft smile glinting in her eyes.

I nod slowly.

"That's exactly what I'm saying."

"You can't expect me to do that," she says teasingly.

"I can. And I do."

"Really?"

"Yeah... really," I say, my gaze dipping to her mouth. "It has nothing to do with you. It's about work," I say, realizing I can't stretch it much longer.

So, I pull my hands off her desk and stride to the door. Her footsteps rush after me. She slides herself between me and the wall, presses her back against the door and shuts it close.

Her eyes dive into mine. We stay like that for a few moments before she drags her gaze down my neck and to the outline of my chest.

"What is that?" she asks, referring for the second time today at the scratches on my skin.

She brings her fingers to my neckline and smoothly flicks another button open. Her gaze sets on my chest as her hand traces the ragged lines.

"Who did this to you?"

"No one."

"Why do you lie?"

"Why do you care?"

She lets out a soft huff.

"If I let you mess with my private life I need to know it's for a good reason."

"What would be a good reason for you?" I ask, a sly smile rolling on my lips.

She drinks in my eyes.

"A bit more than only fucking with me for the sake of it," she says, her fingers brushing my bare chest.

A rush of blood pulls between my legs. My cock gets heavy, my muscles tense.

"I have to leave now, Ms. Fox... if you allow me," I mutter, sporting a full erection in my pants.

"Sure, Mr. Harrington," she says, stepping to the side and opening the door for me.

Her gaze drifts down, and I rush out of her sight.

"I'll have your expense reports ready to sign off on them," she throws at me, a smile in her voice.

"No hurry," I toss back at her, heading straight for the exit.



DAHLIA

MY EYES STAY on his broad shoulders perfectly outlined by his blue shirt, my gaze dipping a couple of times to his hard butt.

He runs his fingers through his blonde hair combing all back as he vanishes in the elevator.

I may need a defibrillator and an oxygen tank.

What was that?

Scratch that.

How will I survive this?

Three days from now, I'll be spending an entire evening with this man. I will not last a second.

Wilted, I peel myself away from the door, walk to my desk and plop into the chair.

I move my eyes back to the computer screen, bits and pieces of the conversation we just had coming back to me. He was in a glaringly good mood, and he was set to drive me crazy, and I wonder why.

He just made arrangements to meet with a stranger. And as far as he knows that stranger is not me.

I try to focus on my work again. As I go over his expenses, something pops out. He hasn't booked the hotel room, these past two weekends. It may be happenstance. Or perhaps, not. The hotel, as it turns out, is located only a block away from *Silver*.

The day draws to an end slowly, the time barely crawling. He doesn't return to the office, and he doesn't show up the next few days.

He doesn't contact the *Bondage Girl* either.

I wait patiently, per his instructions, and also, not to give him more power than he already has, I force myself not to contact him again.

As Thursday comes to an end, I find myself at home, with a bowl of popcorn in my lap, by myself, and watching a movie. By eight o'clock, I'm convinced he changed his mind.

The phone rings.

Elsa is staying at her friend's place tonight. At least, she called to let me know. That's a huge progress. This new friend is not Tasha, and I can tell it's not Jordan either.

Judging by the rush she experiences when her phone rings, I imagine it's another man.

Around nine, the phone lights up again.

I pause the movie, slide my finger over the screen, and instantly jerk upright.

Lex: A car waits for you in front of Silver. You have one hour.

I glance at the time. One hour? It takes thirty minutes to get to Silver when the traffic is light.

Ugh!

Well, the car will have to wait.

I manage to get ready within thirty minutes. I call a cab, and a half hour later I arrive at *Silver*. It's a busy night with cars waiting in line, and groups of people entering the establishment, very few walking away from it.

I look around. There are several cars waiting.

I pull my phone out when a hand grips my elbow.

"Miss?"

I turn around. A buffed up man motions to a black car pulled on the side. I stall.

"I'm taking you to Mr. Alexander," he says, and my heart jolts back in its place.

It takes us about thirty minutes to drive away from that busy side of the town and enter the quiet streets of a residential area. The car comes to a smooth stop in front of a large piece of land, a gate guarding the place.

The driver opens the door for me. I climb out and look up and down the street, no other house or person in sight.

"That's it?" I ask as he walks away from me.

He glances at me.

"He's waiting for you inside," the man says and without another word, steps inside the car, and pulls away.

The phone flashes. I check the screen and pull the message up.

Lex: 4378.

He doesn't like to talk much either. I look around, pull my black lace mask on, let my hair down and shake my head a few times, my tresses rolling down my back.

Running my fingers through my hair, I fluff it up.

My heels click against the pavement, the sound drifting, echoing at the other end of the street.

I wanted private. He delivered private. A gust of wind blows through the leaves, making them rustle. Trembling, I rush to the gate, punch the number in and wait for it to slide open.

A paved road takes me to a big house.

Per my request, the place is dimly lit. The main door is cracked open. The house is big. Impressive. The windows, large and lined with darkness. A trail of candlelights shows me to a couple of steps.

I push the door open. A large foyer sprawls into a living room. Rows of candles cast a soft glow over the dark walls, white curtains,

and lavish furniture.

Music drips in my ears. Soft and mellow, the kind of tune that makes you want to roll on a cool sheet, naked and with a man on top of you.

A door must be open somewhere, judging by the breeze curling around my legs. I locate the door in question in the next room. It opens to a large patio that overlooks a custom-made pool.

This must be his home.

Slowly I turn around and peel my trench off. I let it drop on a chair, and *then I see him*.

Leaning against the doorway, one hand tucked in his pocket, the other holding his glass. He's dressed up as if he was out. The light in the background sets off his silhouette. His eyes sparkle in the dimness.

He studies me in silence, the same way a hunter examines his prey, but without the angst. Calm, he knows the outcome.

His gaze drifts down, taking in the short, illusion black lace tunic with straps of satin and metallic buckles, the high-end fashion version of a bondage dress. Then, he registers the matching stilettos.

Satisfied, he smiles.

Slow, measured strides bring him to me. Smoothly, he stops in front of me. We lock eyes, and I feel my pulse throbbing in my neck. I barely breathe when he slides his hand beneath my hair and curls his fingers around my neck.

Leaning to me, he tilts his head, his lips trailing my jawline.

A swarm of tingles spreads across my chest.

He takes a deep breath, inhaling my scent, and places a soft kiss on my cheek. Another rush of tingles tumbles down, setting a storm between my legs.

"You smell nice," he murmurs in my ear, and goosebumps form on my shoulders.

His thumb slowly rubs the side of my neck, the reverberations of his touch swirling deep inside my belly.

He sets his glass on the table and brings his mouth close to mine. Simply breathing on my lips while stroking my skin, he sets my body ablaze.

Hot and tense, I bring my hand to his chest. He smiles against my lips, fueling the burning need between my legs.

He teases me. I know.

His lips part and so are mine as my hands palm his hard, round pecs through his shirt. His arm goes around me, burying me into his chest. His scent and warmth wrap around me, intoxicating me.

My lips tingle, eager to get a taste of him.

He plays with me a few moments more, and then he flicks his tongue and meets mine. One last breath leaves my lungs before our lips connect, instantly burning as we melt into each other.

Oh... my... God.

Fire burns through me. His touch is soft and tender, quickly becoming passionate and hungry. I can't believe a man can kiss that way. My nails sink into his chest as he turns my body into a tornado of lust.

Trembling, I growl with pleasure.

He deepens the kiss, and I followed his lead, getting a good taste of him. His strokes, and his heat mixed with the aroma of liquor and his perfume. The way he *claims* me.

He's not teasing me anymore. He gives me what I want, and I reward him with exactly what he needs. I lock his lips as if he is my lifeline, the only way I can survive.

My hemline goes up with his hand before my panties go down, yanked by his fingers.

I'm sure there was some plan on how this would unfold. I'm not sure that plan is still standing.

My hands flick his belt open, and slink inside his pants, my hand sheathing his hard, heavy cock. He stirs and hardens, even more, spurring more wetness in my core.

There's not much time to do anything else as he hooks his hands beneath my butt, lifts me and sets me on the table.

My panties fall off as he nudges my legs open, and runs his hand between my thighs. He curls his hands around my hips, pulls me to the edge, presses his rock hard crown against my entrance and plunges into me.

Groaning, I fall back as he drapes my legs over his arms and rams into me again. I shudder all around him. He rolls his hips, the pace and force of his thrusts killing me with pleasure.

My teeth rip the flesh of my lips as I fight crying his name out. I'm burning between my legs while washing him with my arousal, my legs locked around him. He pounds me deep and hard, his fingers digging into my thighs.

It's not pretty, and it's different than everything I thought I'd find. It's feral and intense. Tingles run up my spine, my nipples hardening, my hair standing up at the back of my neck as my thighs begin to tense and my body stiffens. A rush of throbbing pleasure breaks through me.

His hips rock harder, his full cock slamming into me without restraint.

Arching my body, I take his pounding, swept away by the first orgasm on a cock in my entire life. My body seems to break apart as he rails me hard and fast. The climax shakes me hard, making my heart explode, and every bit of flesh throb.

He pulls out of me and shoots on me and over my dress. Mouth open, I gape and gasp and stare at him. My core still clenching...

Still wanting him.

He closes his eyes for a moment, his chest heaving, his cock still heavy in his hand. He finally catches up his breath.

"The car is waiting for you outside," he says after a few more moments while calm, he fixes his fly.

Shock and surprise fall over me.

What?

I'd love to shout at him, but I can't use my voice, and I wonder if he does it on purpose because he knows I won't speak.

Slowly I pull my legs together and slide the G-string up my thighs, my dress drenched in his cum.

Without a word, he leaves the room. Shaking, I find my way around the room, pick up my trench and shrug it on.

I can't believe him. But then again, what was I hoping for?

Well, for one, not to feel that damn good, and then, not to toss me out while leaving me hooked, and still craving him. My body is still going through the aftershocks, that unquenched need buried in my core, making me clench my thighs.

Fuck him.

I grab my small purse and find my way outside. The car waits for me in front of the gate. A different driver.

I direct him to *Silver*, and call a cab on my way there.

One hour later, I enter my apartment, draw myself a bath and sink into the water, almost crying.

D

AHLIA

FRIDAY MORNING DRAGS IN, finding me wrapped in mixed feelings. I couldn't sleep much last night, and now I'm staring at a ghost in the mirror.

From a hanger, I pick up a pastel dress, slide it on, and zip it up. I pull my hair back, lift it and tie it in a chignon.

One hour later, I enter my office and soon after I bury myself in work. Hiding behind the computer, I sip tea while typing reports.

Soon, the phone starts ringing like crazy. Surprisingly, I manage not to make any gaffes.

Half an hour later, the door opens, and the receptionist barges in.

"Lex Harrington wants you to get the boardroom ready."

My eyes pop wide.

"What? Why? Why didn't he call me?"

She shrugs.

"The phone must have been busy," she says, pointing at the blinking lines.

"What's the meeting for?"

"The Board of Directors."

"It was supposed to be next week."

She shrugs again, and in all fairness, she makes more sense than I do. They have their meeting whenever they see fit, but Friday?

Anyway. I drop it.

"What time?"

"One hour from now. James Sexton and Edward Preston are coming too."

"Okay," I say with a faint voice.

She closes the door, and I crash into the chair.

You have to pull yourself together, Dahlia, barks the voice inside my head.

I know that. What I don't know is how I am supposed to do that.

I should start with my face.

I push out of my chair, enter the bathroom and start inspecting my appearance. Dark shadows circle my eyes, the makeup not doing a good job at covering them. I pinch my cheeks, trying to bring some color to my skin. The light blue dress makes my face look even paler.

Not a good choice, Dahlia.

Annoyed, I leave the bathroom, slip out of my office and rush to the boardroom. I get the place ready. Forty minutes later, people start coming in.

Most of the directors are in the room when James Sexton and Ed Preston walk in. I crane my neck out and swivel my head, waiting for Lex Harrington to show up.

I catch James Sexton glancing at me a couple of times, and I suddenly feel as if I'm about to faint.

Smoothly, I slip out of the boardroom and sneak outside. Busy trying to close the door without making a noise, I don't even hear the footsteps behind me.

I spin around and crash into Lex's chest.

The scream leaving my throat propels all the way to the other end of the corridor where Sales Executives shift their heads in my direction.

My back falls into the wall as I take a step backward.

"Sir..." I mumble, completely caught off guard.

He purses his lips and X-rays me with his blue gaze. I feel my insides tearing under its sharp edge.

Hard to say, but I think I caught the light of a smile flickering in his gaze.

"Miss Fox," he says sternly. "Is everything ready?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Where are you going?" he asks, his gaze sliding down on me.

"Uh... Nowhere. I was getting some fresh air."

"Why? Is the AC broken in the boardroom?" he sneers.

"No, it's not," I say, suddenly irritated.

As if I need his mockery right now.

"You need to take the rest of the day off?" he asks, a smirk sliding onto his face. "You look like you need it," he adds.

This time a crooked smile tilts his lips, and my eyes and focus get lost in that snapshot of his face.

I suddenly feel cornered.

"No, I'm fine. It was, um, a bit unexpected... That's all. I didn't think you'd be back, but everything is fine."

"Good," he says. "Then get back inside."

He swings the door open, giving me no other choice but to walk ahead of him. I slip into a chair while he strides to the front, and within moments starts to speak.

As the meeting commences, his voice fills the room, and my mind begins to wander. Absently, I take notes, my eyes skimming the men and women at the table, and then gluing to him.

His words become a soft hum in the background as my eyes rove over him, drinking him in, and studying him.

Only hours ago, his body had mine, and those blue eyes sparkled with lust for me while his hands were molded on my thighs, and his cum spilled all over me.

The memory spurs a flutter in my chest, sets a tension in my belly, and sends a shiver through my body.

I only hear my name called out the second time around. Perhaps the third. It's actually James Sexton's voice calling me the fourth time when I jolt back to reality.

"Are you okay, Miss Fox?"

That's Lex.

My gaze lifts to his eyes, and I drown into them for a moment.

"Yes. I need to step outside for a moment."

"Sure," he says, his gaze pinned on me as I slide to the door.

Once outside, I walk straight to the office.

Ten minutes later, voices roll on the hallway, and within moments the door opens.

"I'll be right there," Lex says to someone on the corridor before he closes the door and strides to me.

"What's going on?" he asks straight.

"What do you mean?" I mutter.

"You don't look good," he says. "Are you sick or something?"

"No... Yes. I mean, not sick, sick. It's one of those weird days.... I'm sorry. I shouldn't say that."

I go on and on, mumbling, making no sense, and rendering the situation even worse.

I sigh.

"I'm fine. I really am," I mutter while having a meltdown in front of him.

He throws me a puzzled look before he spins around and vanishes out the door.



DAHLIA

"HEY. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?"

"Nothing," I say, grabbing a bowl of fruit.

Elsa's eyes follow me as I sink into a chair.

"Going out?" I ask, dragging my gaze down on her.

She wears a new pair of jeans and a cute baby doll top that sets off her chest.

She smiles.

"I don't know. I might. You?"

"Why are you smiling?" I ask.

"Nothing."

I start chewing. I know her better than that.

"Tell me."

Her face beams with another grin.

"I got my period," she says.

"What??"

She nods several times, and I leap out of the chair and hug her and kiss her.

"Oh, damn it, Elsa... I hope you learned your lesson."

"I did," she says as I slide back into my chair.

"So who is he?" I ask, picking a slice of peach from the bowl.

She looks at me.

"The man you're going out with?"

"A friend," she says red to her hairline. "What about you? Going somewhere?" she says, trying to shift my attention away from her.

"No," I say pointing at my robe. "I, um...." I pause, hesitant, and look at her. "Did you talk to mom?"

Her smile falls from her lips.

"No."

"You have to tell her that you're back," I say.

"No, I don't," she says, her eyes darkening.

"You have no reason to hide, Elsa."

"I'm not hiding. It's just that I'm not proud of myself. I'll tell her. I promise. Just not now. I want to get to a better place before I face her."

A pang of desperation threads through her voice, and I wonder when we—the Fox sisters, have gotten so good at entangling ourselves in stories like this.

"Let me figure out my life first," she says, her eyes turning misty.

She's been doing everything to please me lately. She cleans, cooks, and keeps the house in order. The extra money that I made these couple of weeks went to her stash as I promised.

"You're not working today?" she asks with a quiet voice.

"Mark didn't call me," I say, "And Tasha doesn't seem to know much about tonight either."

"You said you had the same client these two times?"

"Yes."

"And everything went well?"

"Yes," I mutter.

More than well, I should add. So well, I'm a mess right now, filled with secrets, and about to fuck up my job. I'm one stupid move away from revealing my cover up.

"There's still time," I say, glancing at the phone.

"I don't think so. If they haven't called already, they probably booked girls for tonight, and they're not gonna call," she says as her phone starts ringing.

She slides her finger across the screen, a small smile curling her lips.

"Hey," she says softly.

It is a man. I knew it.

She walks out of the room, and I hear her talking for a few more moments before her words become a quiet hum.

My screen lights up as well, flashing a notification. My heart skips a few beats as I read the message.

Lex: Hello Secret Girl. Are you up for tonight?

My insides start to spin.

Me: What do you have in mind?

Lex: More of the same... and something different... We'll see. You love secrets, so let me surprise you.

I ponder for a moment, and then my fingers start to type, having a mind of their own.

Me: Okay.

Lex: I'll pick you up in front of Silver at ten o'clock. Look out for a black Ferrari.

Me: You pick me up?

Lex: Get here safe.

I toss the phone on the bed, at the same moment Elsa entering the room.

"Who was that?"

"No one. Some text message from work. What's going on?" I ask as she pulls on her jacket. "Going out again?"

She nods.

"Anything, I should worry about?" I ask.

"No. Everything is fine."

The doorbell rings, her eyebrows tilting with surprise.

"What the fuck?" she blurts out angrily as she darts to the corridor.

Uh-oh. That doesn't sound good.

I follow her closely.

"Who's that?" I ask as she gets ready to open the door.

"I told him not to come upstairs," she says, swinging the door open without looking through the peephole.

She freezes, and more surprise washes over her face.

"Jordan? What are you doing here?"

Jordan??

She pushes the chest of a man away, walks outside and shuts the door behind her. Tiptoeing, I get close to the door and try to eavesdrop.

It turns out I don't need to.

Her voice echoes through the hallway.

"I told you already. Put it to rest. It's not your fucking business."

He barks back at her, and I can only assume he says that *it is his business*.

The exchange goes back and forth for a few more moments, and then I hear him say.

"It's Connor, isn't it?" Fury bleeds in his voice. "I'm gonna kill that motherfucker."

"Jordan?? It's not him," she barks, her words met with silence.

I'm sure Jordan already rushes down the stairs, eager to confront that Connor guy.

She opens the door, grabs her phone and her set of keys.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't have time right now," she tosses at me before she vanishes out the door.

Okay... Back to my problems.

I spent a few minutes in my walk-in closet, and after a brief deliberation I pull out a red dress and a black lingerie set. I put everything on and hop on red heels before I start examining myself in the mirror.

It's a simple, form fitting, round neckline dress, with a deep cleavage and a long zipper running up my back. I tuck the red mask in my purse, snatch my cell phone and call a cab.

A few minutes after ten, we pull in front of *Silver*. The place is even more crowded than last night. I step out of the cab and glance around, scanning the parking lot for his car.

I spot Lex's ride tucked in the VIP area.

Hurriedly, I hide behind a concrete column, put my mask on, and rush to his car. The door slides open, and I slip in.

"Well, hello... hello. You've made it," he says, glancing at me.

He sports a black shirt that fits tight on his torso and black pants. His eyes shine brightly like a slice of the summer sky.

He studies me as if he'd like to know more about what hides behind the curtain of hair and the piece of fabric covering my eyes.

"You're late," he says, with a stern voice.

I look at him and say nothing.

He smiles, amused.

He knows I won't talk. And gets a kick out of it.

"So, you like mysteries, *Secret Girl*."

I nod.

"Good, 'cause I have one for you."

He pulls a blindfold from his pocket, rolls it on top of my mask and ties it at the back of my hair, drowning me into complete darkness.

"That's perfect," he murmurs in my ear, his breath brushing my face, his hand touching my thigh.

Startled, I pull my knees together.

He clicks his tongue.

"Nah-uh," he murmurs in my ear again, his lips grazing my earlobe this time.

My skin responds to him with tingles and goosebumps while my nipples harden inside my dress.

"Don't be afraid, *Secret Girl*. You're going to like it, I promise you," he says softly, and I almost lose my breath.

Running his fingers up my thigh, he rides the dress up and slides his hand between my legs.

I tense. He goes up. I tense some more and arch.

He touches me. Softly. Fire courses through my veins. I can smell his scent, and feel his body heat, and I can almost envision his smile.

The sheer fabric of my panties dampens the second he gently presses his fingertips against my folds. His thumb traces my slit, parting my folds, and with a slow motion, circles my clit.

A gasp rolls off my lips.

"You like it?" he asks quietly, his breath fanning over my lips, his hand parting my thighs even more.

I shift in my seat and slightly roll my hips to meet his touch.

"I knew you would..." he says quietly, his knuckles rubbing my folds before his fingers stroke my clit again.

My thighs part, even more, my panties getting wet beneath his touch. He smoothly tugs the panties to the side, and slide his fingers onto my bare, swollen flesh.

I groan and grab his thigh.

"Mmm-hmm, I fucking knew it..." he mutters, his breath searing my lips, his free hand collaring my neck.

I breathe faster, my blood ramming through my veins at a different speed.

He blows softly on my neck to cool me off, yet all I get is more heat. From his body, and his grip, and then the slow motion of his

fingers, sliding toward my entrance.

He stops, and I gasp half of my lungs out.

"Oh...."

I clip my voice just on time.

"You fucking want it badly," he mutters as I sink my nails into his thigh and start rocking my hips. His thumb strokes my clit as his fingers tease my entrance and I'm about to scream. More wetness soaks his fingers.

His mouth hovers over mine. I feel his hot breath and the heat streaming from his body, and yet he denies me his touch.

Biting my lip, I quietly growl.

I bet he smiles.

I can almost feel his lips on mine as he slowly slides his fingers into me.

I arch against him, quietly moaning.

"You're so fucking wet, *Secret Girl*," he purrs against my lips, the rush I get from his touch making me shake and sweat.

"You want to come...?" he asks quietly, a smile weaving in his voice.

Another growl leaves my lips as I rock my hips again, grinding against his fingers.

"How much you want it? Hmm...? Show me... *Secret Girl*."

The wave of pleasure rises in my body, and without much shame, I slide my palm between his legs and cup his bulge.

His rock hard cock strains against my hand. He shifts in his seat and opens his legs even more.

Without a second thought, I open his fly, close my fist around his erection and smoothly, run my hand down.

I do it again, crazed by the need to touch him, and washed with lust for him.

"Please..." I whisper, no longer able to withhold the words.

A soft laughter comes my way.

"Please what *Secret Girl*?"

He gently tips my face to him.

"You want me to kiss you?" he quietly says against my lips.

"Yes," I whisper again, and then I part my lips for him.

Our tongues touch and entangle in a slow, sensual stroke, pleasure spilling in my blood as his warm touch burns my mouth.

We kiss in a trance, lips and tongues rolling as one, his fingers rubbing me as I squeeze and stroke his throbbing shaft.

He thrusts his fingers deeper and starts kissing me harder as I quickly start scaling up. Hard as steel, his cock pulses in my fist.

Thighs open, I suck on his tongue and stroke him harder, the heat rising in me like a storm.

"Fucking yes..." he says with a hoarse voice, his thumb strumming my clit fast.

My core clenches and pulses around his fingers, my body shaking out of control while hot pre-cum smears my fingers and my scream bursts out in the air.

Taking my mouth again, he muffles the sound. Wave after wave of pleasure sweeps through me.

It takes a few long moments before my body begins to slacken, and his hands peel off me, my fingers tearing away from his groin.

Trembling, I push back in my seat and slowly bring my knees together as I try to catch my breath.

A metallic noise precedes the roaring of the engine.

I let out a long exhale.

I can't believe my boss just fingered me to my orgasm, in front of a posh gentlemen's club.

D^{AHLIA}

THE WINDOW SLIDES DOWN, and the warm breath of a calm summer evening pushes in, the breeze rolling across my face, drifting down my body.

My senses awaken to my surroundings, registering every detail with heightened intensity, my eyes still covered with the blindfold.

Soon, the town remains behind, the air rolling feeling cooler. It smells like trees as we ride through a patch of forest.

He stays quiet, and for a moment I try to imagine how would this story unfold if it were more than this. If besides the thrill and the adventure, I'd get to know him. And he'd know who I am.

Would he like me then?

Would he let me know the real him?

I tilt my head to the side so he can't see me and let a smile brush my lips.

The irony of it all is that now I know him less than before. He's like a house with many chambers and secret doors. The more I pull open and the more rooms I walk in, the more I get lost.

In the beginning, he was the skeptic man who almost didn't want to let me work for him, and then he was the intrigued man who has taken some interest in some random dancer.

Later on, he turned into a man full of secrets. And I became one of them. And now, he's a mystery to me.

The loud noise of car engines revving up, music, and voices, alerts me we have entered a heavily populated area. The car takes a few turns— through a crowded parking lot I suspect, and then shifts to a different area, where silence reigns supreme.

The sound of his roaring Ferrari bounces against the walls. We're inside a covered parking most likely.

Smoothly, the car comes to a stop, the engine going silent as he switches the ignition off.

A whoosh and the muffled sound of a door closing, tell me he slipped out of the car. The door opens on my side, his hand finding mine.

I shift in my seat, my heels touching the pavement first as I rise and freeze, waiting to walk with him. He is only inches away from me. I can sense his body heat. He doesn't move.

I make the slightest move and bump into him, and then I realize he's been watching me.

I wish I could see him and read his expression. The blindfold blocks my sight completely. I can't tell if it's dark around me or not.

What is he looking at?

His hand traces the side of my neck, and my heart starts squirming, panic slamming through me.

My pulse shoots through the roof, and my hands get cold with sweat.

I freeze.

His fingers travel across my jawline and gently follow the contour of my lips no longer concealed by lipstick. And then his thumb trails the ridge of my nose. His fingers explore my face, tracing my brow and temple, creeping across my cheekbone.

My knees start to give in.

I latch my hands onto him. His arms snake around my body, one closing around my waist, the other draping over my back and shoulders.

Wrapped in the warmth of his body I start to pant. His lips press gently on my cheek, so tender I could die. And then he slowly murmurs in my ear.

"What are you afraid of?"

A shudder goes through me as my insides start to crumble.

"Hmm?" he asks softly, his fingers strumming my face. "You still don't want to talk," he says, a smile lining his voice. "One day you will *Secret Girl*..." he adds, amused.

I begin to quiver.

It all feels like a game I'm no longer winning.

His hand slides down and grabs mine as he pivots away from me and guides me to walk with him.

Fingers laced, we enter a room, the clicking sound of my heels telling me I walk on tiles or marble.

His arm wraps around my waist as we step into an elevator.

A muffled hiss signals that the doors pulled close. It's a smooth ride that ends a few floors up. He takes my hand again and walks me out. My heels sink into a rug. And then my heels tap that marble floor again.

He pushes a door open, and we turn left. Somewhere in the background, the door pulls shut. His strides slow down, and so do mine. He takes the purse from my hand and nudges me to an armchair.

Slowly, I lower myself and brush the velvet of my seat with my hand. I feel a whoosh of air, and then his touch. His hand goes in my hair, brushing it all back before he leans to me and slowly murmurs in my ear.

"Don't fear."

His voice is soft and tender.

Regardless, I tense in anticipation.

It doesn't take long before I hear two clicks, and cuffs lock around my wrists pinning my arms to the armchair. Instinctively, I pull. The chair rattles.

"Stay still, *Secret Girl*. You're gonna like it."

He pivots in front of me, and then I feel his fingers on my knees.

"Open," he says softly, yet demanding.

I part my legs, cool air sweeping my inner thighs.

A quiver falls through me as he remains quiet, and I wonder whether he stares at me or not.

A few more moments pass by before I feel his hands running up my thighs, crumpling my dress in my lap. The air licks the strap of lace between my legs.

I feel exposed, and then a thrill rushes through me.

His fingers hook inside the straps as he slowly peels the panties down and rips them. He pulls them off and starts caressing my ankle

with his fingers. A moment later he runs his hands up my calfs. I hear more clicks as he locks my ankles.

Biting words back, I take a long breath.

"Good," he says, a smile tingling his voice.

His footsteps echo away from me. I hear a door opening and closing, and for a few minutes, I'm alone in the room, my legs spread open, and my flesh tingling between my thighs.

Air drifts by me as a door opens again, and muffled steps near me.

Silent, he lowers himself between my legs.

No longer able to push the words back, I whisper his name. I'm not sure if he heard me or not.

His fingers trace my legs, brushing my calfs, and knees, and then slide up onto my thighs. His breath trails my thighs too, and my legs begin to shake.

He places a soft kiss on my inner thigh, and I feel a rush between my legs.

He kisses the other thigh, and a soft shudder falls through me. He does it a couple of times more and then his breath blows softly over my wet entrance and my folds, and then my clit.

Oh, my...

I jerk, the shackles cutting into my skin. I want to call his name again. Instead, I push it back and groan.

He slowly parts my lower lips and starts to breathe over my clit, every puff of air teasing my flesh, igniting electric storms beneath my skin.

The wetness keeps rolling enhancing the sensation. I'd like nothing more than to roll my hips and feel his mouth against my flesh.

He blows softly again, and tingles crawl up my spine. My back arches as my shoulders pull back. He pushes my dress up, even more, sets two fingers on my lower lips, smoothly parting them, and gives me a long, hot, wet stroke with his tongue, trailing from my entrance to the hood of my clit.

A scream shoots out of my throat followed by a groan, and I hear him quietly laughing.

He does it again, with more pressure this time, and the pull tightens in my belly. His tongue swirls, circling my clit before he captures it between his lips and starts kissing it, open mouth hot and wet, his tongue stroking me, loving me, like I'd never been loved before.

Blowing heat over me, he drowns me in pleasure. My body tenses, crying for relief. Restrained, I pull my legs and arms, rattling the chair.

He presses his tongue flat between my folds, and slowly drags it over my clit, and then he starts to suck on my flesh, raising the pressure to an addictive high, fueling my need for him, driving me crazy.

I jerk and shake in my chair, tilting my hips up, wanting more, hooked and hungry for his mouth. My chest rocks with shallow breaths, small whimpers falling from my lips.

It all goes up and fast and as I near the peak, I start to breathe his name out quietly, desperately, and then I realize how close I am to reveal myself.

He pulls away from me, just as I teeter on the cusp, and I arch and spasm, growling in my throat.

The sound of an unfastening buckle pierces the silence, and then his hand slides at the back of my head, guiding me forward, his hand turning into a fist, holding my hair back. I sense the warmth of his body inches away from me, my nostrils flaring, enticed by the scent of his arousal.

I can't wait to have him feed me his cock.



LEX

TENSE AGAINST MY HAND, breathing shallowly, she arches her spine and cranes her neck forward. Her legs spread wide, her body trembling while her eyes remained covered.

She's starved, but that's something I already knew. She makes my blood simmer. And that's a nice surprise.

Small sounds simmer in her throat. Ragged breaths, a soft whimpering, and moans.

She tugs away from my grip, hurting herself as she tries to get close to me. I pull my cock out and her nostrils flare. She licks her lips, and I feel a rush of pleasure in my groin. The chair rattles from her jerking as I slowly guide her head to me.

The closer she gets, the harder she breathes. Her open mouth and glistening lips make my cock twitch.

"Perfect..." I mutter. "Now take it, baby," I say.

Her lips touch my shaft, her mouth molding on my cock, hot and wet and lustful.

She closes her mouth around me, and I slowly drive my cock between her lips until I hit her throat. A growl crawls up her chest.

I slowly pull back and sense the pressure of her lips as she sucks me, famished. Then I go back in, shuddering with pleasure.

Fuck, she moans again. And again. Every time I thrust, her body becomes tenser, and her groans grow louder. My gaze dips as she starts to roll her hips, finding her rhythm. I push. And she rocks her hips again, and I can smell her wet arousal.

Intoxicating, fucking up my brain. I push deeper and move faster, and she responds, sucking me harder.

That's fucking it.

Her tongue swirls around my shaft, her lips getting swollen as she runs them up and down on me. My cock could burst in her mouth any moment now, every stroke of her tongue making me hotter and hotter.

She starts to writhes as she teeters on the edge, her sucking getting intense. Hot, wet and filled with need. There's no way she'll get more relief from me other than this, so she better take it.

And she does.

Her head goes down on me as she fills her mouth as much as she can, pressing her lips and tongue on me, sucking ravenously.

She gets closer to her high and wants me deeper. Opening her beautiful mouth, she lets me fuck her face. Her chest explodes with fast breaths, and her body stiffens, a string of moans and groans and growls rushing out.

My pace increases as my balls tighten. The tide of pleasure starts crashing through her just as I reach my climax. Her voice morphs, going through all the ranges.

Her mouth feels tight around my cock as I harden my muscles, speed up and shoot my load.

Something between a growl and a curse comes out of her throat. She shakes and moans and keeps rolling her hips, still looking for relief.

A moment later, I pull away, my cum spraying over her chest. And then I hear her voice.

"Fuck..."

She rattles her chair as I walk away.

I exit the bathroom a few minutes later and find her slumped into her chair, still panting and trembling. I unshackle her and lift her up, her arms twining behind my neck as her lips press against my skin. She holds onto me tightly, her breasts crushed against my chest, her body burning.

I lay her on my bed and undress her. I leave on her garters and her heels. Her breasts perk up under my touch, her nipples puckering.

On her back, hair splayed on the pillow, she reaches out to me. Her hand brushes my face, her fingers sliding across my lips. I roll on top of her, a content sigh escaping her lips.

She spreads her legs under me, her hand tracing down my body, cuffing my cock and stroking me. The more she does it, the hotter she becomes.

My eyes stay on her lips as she tenderly runs her fist up and down on me. She flicks the tip of her tongue out and licks her lip. I bite mine. Watching her.

Slowly I run my hands between her legs. Her flesh is hot and swollen, dripping with arousal. Her knees spike up as she opens, even more, inviting me inside her.

Running my lips up her neck, I slowly enter her. Her body shudders with pleasure.

"That's right *Secret Girl*," I murmur against her lips, thrusting into her.

She arches against me, her body caught on fire.

"So, what are your secrets... Beautiful Girl?" I ask quietly, and she moves against me.

I smile and roll my hips again. She clenches around my cock.

"That's hardly a secret, baby. I've never seen anyone so hungry for cock. What makes you burn so hard? Hmm?" I mutter as I run my lips across her cheek.

She breathes hard against my lips.

"Were you always this way?"

She sways her head side to side.

"What makes you so hungry, then?"

I grab the back of her hair and root myself deep into her. She squeals, and goosebumps cover my arms.

Burying her under my body, I drive myself back into her, every time I fill her up, a growl of pleasure resonating in her throat.

"You didn't know it can feel like that..."

She shakes her head again, her body trembling beneath mine. Hooking her nails into my back, she pushes up and arches against me to feel my chest. I drape my arm around her and hold her tight against me.

Her lips tremble beneath mine.

"Why do you feel this way?" I breathe into her, and she starts to quiver, her lips brushing mine.

I start to kiss her, deep and slowly and she melts in my arms, moaning. Her skin burns, her core drenched in her arousal, her walls pulsing rhythmically as I drive my hard shaft into her.

She clings to me with all she has. Wrapped in that blazing fire, riding that high as I start to pound her.

She stiffens beneath me, her center milking me as she's about to hit that peak.

I break the kiss, grab her hair and pull her face up.

"Tell me!" I bark with a harsh voice.

"It's you," she growls through gasps, as she hits the point of no return and I no longer hold it back.

A storm of heat barrels through us. Her legs wrap tightly around my hips. Deep inside her body, I shake with pleasure, rolling my shaft in her heat, feeling her throbbing.

Biting my shoulder, she screams, pulverizing in my hands, completely lost.

As we slow down, her body slackens, and my arms close around her. I start to kiss her hair, her breaths rolling hot and ragged over my face.

"Tell me, beautiful girl, why do you have to hide?" I ask softly as I stroke her hair.

Slowly, I remove the blindfold. Her eyes sparkle behind her mask.

"You still can't talk?" I ask, and she shakes her head slowly, tears glinting in her eyes.

A small smile pushes to my lips.

"Are you sure?"

She sways her head again, on the cusp of crying.

"Okay, then," I say with a different voice and tear away from her.

She jerks upright, and looks at me stunned, holding her words back.

I pick up my phone and clothes and make a call.

"The car is already downstairs," I say after a few moments with a frosted voice. "You can leave whenever you want."

Without another word, I swish into the bathroom. Ten minutes later, I walk into the bedroom.

She's gone.

Sheila Lane called.

She'll be back by the end of the week. Alexander Harrington called the receptionist and left a message for me.

He'll stop by later on, and then he'll fly away. He wants me to make arrangements for a hotel in Vegas.

He could've called me or texted me or emailed me, yet for some reason, he didn't want to. As of lately, he no longer communicates with me.

The possible explanations coming to my mind make my stomach twist. It feels as if I'm about to get dumped and sacked all in one, which is not an outlandish possibility.

To top it off, I look like crap. The makeup won't do it and being back in the office doesn't do it either. The uncertainty floating in the air puts holes in my stomach.

This last weekend was a nightmare.

The ending of my night with him started it all.

The time we spent together broke me, but when he practically threw me out, I almost lost it.

It turned out that the place he had taken me to was a posh suite in one of Sexton International Towers. Styled in black and white, the bedroom featured walls of glass, dim lights and a lavish bed draped in satin.

I ran out of that place with tears stuck in my throat. I was in no better shape when I got home.

I know what he wanted from me. Had I admitted who I was he would've hated me, and the result would've been the same.

As expected, Lex hasn't contacted the *Secret Girl* again.

I have a hunch he's not going to do it anytime soon.

I spent the weekend alone, surrounded by silence and secrets, the place I worked so hard to put myself in. Elsa was out. Mom called. I felt bad I had to hide from her Elsa's secrets too.

Sighing, I look out the window.

It's been a few weeks since all this started. In the beginning, I thought I found a way— a path to making an independent living, and becoming a responsible adult for the first time in my life, and yet all I found was chaos.

I work, uninterrupted, for the next two hours. Close to noon, the phone rings.

"Elsa?"

"Hey," she says a bit rushed, panting.

"Where are you?"

"In the building," she says, sounding as if she was running. "At your work."

I hear the sound of the elevator doors opening in the background.

"What are you doing at my work?" I ask, a bad feeling hovering over me.

"May I borrow your car?" she asks without giving me an answer.

I pause.

"Yes," I finally say, a bit leery. "Why do you need my car? What happened?"

"Nothing," she says. "I'm here," she says curtly and hangs up.

A moment later, she enters my office.

"You want to grab something to eat?" I ask, checking the time. "It's almost noon."

"No. I'm fine."

She wears jeans and a plaid cotton shirt. She looks as if she hasn't slept the entire night, yet her eyes shine brightly, her face glowing. I show her to the chair sitting next to the door.

She takes a seat.

"You want water or something?"

"Water is good."

"So, are you going to tell me or not?"

I hand her a bottle of water and then take a seat behind my desk. Nervous, I take a sip of coffee.

"I had a fight," she finally says.

"Who did you fight with?"

"My friend," she mumbles.

She couldn't be more elusive.

"Not Jordan."

"Nah-uh."

My eyebrows tilt up, shooting her a questioning look.

"Who is he?"

And is he better than Jordan? That's the question that burns my lips.

"Some guy."

"What guy, Elsa?"

"Someone."

She presses her lips together and scrunches up her nose.

I have no doubt she's not going to tell me.

"Listen... I know you don't want to talk, and I understand your reasons, but you can't run away from this kind of stuff Elsa."

Silent, she looks at me. Thank God, dad is not here to see us, and mom doesn't know much. We are a complete disaster.

A familiar voice travels across the corridor, making my chest flutter and my pulse explode in my wrists.

Panicked, I look at the door as the sound travels closer.

"Who's that?" she asked nonchalantly, sprawled in her chair, just as the door opens and I jump out of my seat.

Sporting a slim fit, dark suit and silver tie, Lex shows up in the doorway. My mouth literally drops. I almost want to ask, what's the occasion, when his cold blue gaze travels to me and sinks into my eyes.

For a moment, the universe hits pause and time freezes.

His face glows, freshly shaven, his elegant features shining through. Chiseled cheekbones, well-defined jawline, a fuller lower lip, and then his eyes washed with light.

The suit jacket fits his shoulders perfectly. Tall, he fills the doorway.

"Yes?" I manage to say.

"Have you made the arrangements?" he says, as my eyes roam over his silver tie shimmering against his white shirt.

There's a lag in my response, so he steps inside and catches sight of Elsa. A different expression slides onto his face.

Surprise.

Recognition?

Pleasant surprise??

My heart hits the floor.

"Hey," he says softly, the tenderness flashing in his voice, hitting me hard.

A smile lights up her face.

"Hey," she says, and I'm about to lose it.

Dumbstruck, I watch Elsa rising to her feet, twining her arms around his neck, and kissing him on his cheek.

What the hell? Have I slipped into a different universe?

"How are things with you?" he asks, affable, and my mouth drops open even more, my eyes popping wide.

"I'm good," Elsa says, her cheeks scarlet.

"I'm glad to hear that," he says, suddenly in a great disposition.

He glances at me briefly.

"It was nice seeing you again," he says to her, and then he throws me a cold look and a few words on his way out.

"Let me know when you know the answer," he says.

Answer? What answer?

What is wrong with him?

The doors close behind his back. I look at Elsa livid.

"How come you know Lex Harrington?"

"Is that his name?" she asks, amused.

I erase the distance between us.

"This is not a joke," I say, dead serious.

"I just know him," she says, grinning mysteriously.

I can't tell whether her intention is to drive me crazy or to hide something from me.

Whatever it is, the ground slips from under my feet.

I grab her shoulder.

"Tell me for fuck's sake," I growl under my breath, and her smile fades away.

"I danced for him."

"You what??"

Suddenly I feel as if the air was plucked out of my lungs. I pull away from her, fanning myself. I drink water, my lips still dry.

"When was that?"

She rolls her eyes.

"When I was working. He was one of my regulars."

"Regulars??"

"Yes. He used to come on Fridays."

Suddenly the Friday hotel charges on his account begin to add up.

I get close to her again. I give her a pointed look.

"Have you slept with him?" I ask.

Suddenly, she pulls a five-year-old expression onto her face, the one she used to have for my mom when she'd eaten something she wasn't supposed to.

"Why is that your business?" she says.

I'm about to scream.

"This is serious. Elsa. Please tell me you didn't sleep with him."

Suddenly she leaps up and stretches her hand out.

"May I have your car keys please?"

"I need an answer," I say, with a menacing voice.

"We'll talk home. I'll pick you up," she says. "If you don't want to give me your car, fine. I'll take a cab."

Ugh!!

Stubborn little brat!

Without a word, I turn around, fish my keys out from my purse and toss it in her hand.

Barely breathing, I watch her walk out the door.

I pick up Lex's schedule from my desk and dash to his office.

"Yes," he says after I knock on his door the first time.

I walk in.

Elbows resting on the desk, eyes trained on his phone, he doesn't make the slightest gesture to acknowledge me.

"Lex?" I mutter, my voice soft.

He glances at me, his eyes searing me briefly.

"What is it, Miss Fox?"

He can't be doing this to me. He can be coming into my office, kiss my sister as if we're family and then give me this bullshit.

"How come you know my sister?"

A soft smile curls his lips.

He tosses the phone on his desk and raises his gaze.

"What kind of question is that, Miss Fox?"

"Please answer my question."

He purses his lips, weighing me briefly.

"I had no idea she's your sister. I'm sure she can answer your question."

"How well do you know her?" I ask, anger barreling through my voice.

He pushes out of his chair and strides to me.

The closer he gets, the harder I start to quiver. He stops in front of me and brushes a strand of hair away from my face.

"Don't drag me into your family drama, Miss Fox. You have no right to question me."

"She's my sister."

"And she is an adult. I'm sure she has her reasons to withhold that information."

I look at him, my lips trembling with fury.

"Anything else you'd like to know?" he asks, a smirk stretching across his lips. "How was your weekend?" he casually throws at me.

His gaze drags down on me, his lips pursing as he takes inventory of my gray shift dress and matching shoes.

"I gather not so good," he says.

This is the worst time to play games with me as my hand itches to slap him.

Tension sets in my jaw.

"What is your problem, Lex?" I ask, almost growling.

A smile barely touches his lips, flashing faintly in his eyes. He studies me for a moment.

"My problem? I don't have a problem, Miss Fox. What about you?" he asks, shoving his hands into his pockets.

His shirt stretches across his hard chest.

I fail right there as my eyes glue to his pecs.

"Good. If you don't have one, I need to know if you made the arrangements for London."

"Yes."

"I hope you made it for two people."

"Excuse me?"

Is it me or he crushes a smile?

"You said, you're going there for business meetings."

"I am."

"Is Edward Preston going with you?"

"What does that have to do with anything?"

He pauses. I stay silent,

"No, he's not," he finally says.

"Who else is coming with you?"

A playful grin creases his lips.

"That's not your business. I just need accommodations for two people."

"Is it a man?" I press further, stubborn like a dog who found a bone.

He tilts his head to the side, his eyes laughing.

"No. It's a woman. Satisfied now?"

I'm so far from satisfied he has no idea.

"Is there anything I need to know about her? Food and lodging preferences."

"Sure. She doesn't like to show her face in public and doesn't talk much, so make sure her privacy is a top priority. I want her fully protected," he says, and I'm pretty sure he pushes back his laughter.

My knees slacken.

His eyes drill mine. Unable to hold his gaze, I look down.

"So when do you leave?"

"I'll call you tonight and let you know," he says. "Anything else?" he asks with a dismissive voice.

"Yes," I say, shifting my gaze back to him.

His eyebrows tilt up.

"Sheila Lane comes back on Friday."

"And?"

"And I was wondering if I have a job come Monday morning."

He purses his lips and looks at me with smiling eyes.

"I don't know. It depends. If you don't, you can always freelance."

"What do you mean?"

"Find something else..."

"Seriously now."

"Seriously... We'll figure something out next week when I come back."

"Okay," I say with a soft voice.

For a few moments, I search his eyes looking for something different.

"Why do you have to behave like that?"

"Like what, sweetheart?"

"As if your mad."

"I'm not mad. Do I look mad?"

He smiles charmingly. Of course, I don't buy it, but I'm out of ideas how to make him stop.

"Fine, whatever..." I say, waiving him off, and tearing away from him.

"By the way, Miss Lane comes back on Wednesday, so make sure you clear your desk by then," he says.

I spin around as if bitten by a snake. His gaze lifts off my ass.

"What?"

"Don't worry. You'll get paid through the end of the month," he says calm, and I clench my teeth, barely withholding myself from bursting out.

D

AHLIA

I HAVE no idea how the rest of the day goes by.

He leaves a couple of hours later, and Elsa picks me up after five.

We drive back in silence, and as soon as we enter the apartment, I dash into the bathroom. Minutes later I peel off my clothes and scream into a towel.

The door opens, just as I sink into a tub filled with warm water and foam.

"Are you okay?" she says, leaning against the sink.

"No, I'm not," I say, aggravated.

"What happened?" she asks.

I run my hand over my face before I glance at her.

"What happened? Everything happened," I snap.

"What do you mean?"

I start shaking my head, tears welling up in my eyes.

"You know... You think it was hard for you," I say after a few moments. "Losing daddy, having to face mom's tears and the emptiness in our house. You thought I had it so much better. Or her. But we hadn't. We just chose not to act out. The way you did. She didn't run away as you did, and despite the fact that selling the house was an option, she didn't even consider to move away. That very space reminded her of him, and as painful as it was, she couldn't let go of it."

I, on the other hand, had to go on with my life as well. It wasn't easy," I say, wiping tears from my face. "And as hard as it was, you made everything even harder. Every time the phone rang late at night, we thought something bad had happened to you. For a while, I thought you had a good reason to act that way, but now I don't. You're no longer fifteen, Elsa. You hadn't acted that way, not even when you were a teenager. You are a grown up woman now. You can't behave the way you do. You can't have it both ways. You can't act irresponsible and mess with everybody else's lives."

"I don't want to."

"I don't care whether you want it or not. Stop behaving like a teenager. There's a reason why I asked you if you slept with Lex Harrington."

"I didn't know it was Lex Harrington."

I shoot my hand up.

"That's not the point. I asked you something. I know what's been going on at Silver. Perhaps not with every client and maybe not every night, but no man gets his cock hard so he can drag it home along with a set of blue balls."

"I told you there were other women for that..."

"Stop spinning it, Elsa. I'm not a kid. I was there. Remember? Because my genius sister said it would be a good way of making money. And it was. Two nights. And now, here I am, about to lose my real job, and go back to live with mom."

"I haven't slept with clients," she says, serious this time.

"So how come you and Lex Harrington got so friendly?"

"I danced for him a couple of times, and we had fun, but he was never interested in me. Not in that way, anyway. Besides, the word was he was having someone else. Someone, he fucked in a hotel room nearby. A girl said there could've been two women, but nobody knew for sure. We didn't even know his name. We all knew him as Alexander."

I let out a sigh.

"Is that a good enough answer for you?" she asks, and I nod.

A few moments of silence slip by.

"Why are you so stressed out?" she asks, suddenly concerned.

I lean back against the tub, slowly running a hand over my face and rubbing my forehead.

"I'm not," I say and pause for a moment. "I know why Jordan was angry with you," I mutter softly, trying to shift the topic, not looking at her. "He thought you slept with someone else and that's how you got pregnant. Who was the other man?" I ask and glance up at her.

She slants her gaze down and remains silent.

"Elsa?"

"His name is Connor," she says softly.

"Who's Connor?"

"Jordan's younger brother."

I pull upright.

"What? What do you mean by younger? Jordan is like what? Twenty something?"

"Twenty three. His brother is nineteen."

My eyes pop wide.

"For fuck's sake, Elsa... Are they living under the same roof?"

"No."

"What's he doing? School? Work?"

"Work, here and there. He'll go to school next year."

"What kind of work?"

"Computer stuff."

"Did you tell him you thought he got you pregnant?"

She nods.

"Yes."

"How did he react?"

She shrugs.

"Neither good or bad."

I roll my eyes.

"Jesus, Elsa..."

"He doesn't like Jordan much."

"Oh. And that makes things better how?"

"No, I'm not saying that, but—"

"Was he sleeping with you out of revenge?"

"No," she says confidently. "I don't think so," she continues, hesitant.

I throw my hands up in the air.

I let out a long exhale, rise to my feet and run a towel over my body.

"Okay. This is what you'll do. First, you call mom. It doesn't have to be tonight, but sometime this week. And then, you clarify this thing with Jordan. You have to clean up this mess. He needs to know what's going on, and you have to face the consequences, whatever they are. And then, you have to have a serious conversation with his brother. "

I step out of the tub and shrug into a robe.

Irked, I walk past her and head into the kitchen. She follows me.

"What about you? What are you going to do if you lose your job?"

"Look for another one, I guess."

"How is he as a boss?" she asks.

I swiftly turn my back to her, pretending I'm looking for a mug in the cupboard. I linger a few more moments before I snatch a cup and spin to her.

"You mean Lex Harrington?" I ask, buying myself some time.

She nods as she takes a seat at the table.

"You want tea?"

"No," she says.

I fill the tea kettle with water and set it on the stove.

"He's an asshole."

"Is he?" she asks, slightly amused.

"Yes, he fucking is. He wasn't like that in the beginning, but lately, he's a pain in the ass."

"He must have a reason," she says, a smile lining her voice. I shoot her a glare. "No seriously. Maybe, he likes you."

"I doubt."

"He was never nasty with me."

"Happenstance."

"And not to other girls either. He was always nice, and they all wanted to fuck him."

"Oh, that warms up my heart."

"No, seriously. Maybe he's teasing you."

"Yeah, if this is his idea of teasing me I'd rather not be teased by him."

"Have you tried to talk to him?"

"He doesn't want to talk to me. He's fucking with me, and then he throws all sorts of crap at me."

"It sounds like he's testing you."

"Testing me? Why?"

The water starts to boil. I turn the stove off and bring the teapot to the table. I pour the water into the cup over a tea bag.

Smoothly, I slide into my chair.

"I don't know why he's testing you. But he probably is," she says.

"As if you know him."

"I know him a little bit."

"You met him in a strip club. Of course, he was nice. But this is different. It's work."

"Things will be okay. You'll see," she says.

For a moment, I wish I could wipe my memory clean and be clueless like her.

She leaves around nine o'clock, and I find myself flipping the phone, checking my messages every other minute.

Without much thinking, I start typing.

Me: Are you up for tonight?

I press send and set the phone on the table. A few minutes pass by. I instantly regret it.

That was a stupid, not to say a dangerous idea.

The phone beeps. I pick it up, slide my finger across the screen and read.

Lex: Yeah... What do you have in mind Secret Girl?

Me: You pick the place. I come to you. You wear a blindfold.

I send the message and wait. My pulse starts racing as the minutes tick by without an answer.

Ten minutes later, the reply arrives. An address, and a number. Nothing else.

I stare blankly at the screen. Pondering. I shouldn't go. And yet, I know I will because I can't resist.

In a daze, I walk in the closet, pick up a short, skintight dress, throw it straight on my naked body and step into a pair of high heels shoes. I brush my hair and put eyeliner on. In a rush, I call the cab and wrap myself in my trench.

Twenty minutes later, I slide into the cab, and after thirty more minutes, we enter the busy downtown.

"Are you sure this is the correct address?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Ten minutes later he drops me off in front of a hotel. I look around, trying to orient myself and it doesn't take long before I realize... He summoned me to the hotel where he brings his fuck dates.

Damn it.



LEX

"NO, YOU DIDN'T," Ed says.

"Yes, I fucking did," I say, smiling slyly.

"Why didn't you say something?"

"I just told you, Preston. Stop busting my balls. I'm not sixteen. I don't ask for updates on your cock mileage."

He laughs wolfishly.

"What's going on?" James asks, sliding into his seat.

"Lex got the hot dancer down for business," Ed says.

James' eyes shift to me.

"He booked her while you were gone," Ed mutters.

"She called," I say.

"Whatever...They have this little game going on. Blindfolds, secret meetings, encrypted messages. It's serious shit," Ed says, smiling, his eyes dropping to his phone.

"Look who's fucking talking. You don't even know what your sex goddess looks like?"

"Yeah, I do."

He raises his eyes and gets a glimpse of my cocked eyebrow.

"Partly," he murmurs.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I saw her eyes."

He motions to James.

"She has dark hair and green eyes like Sexton."

"Why am I part of this conversation?" James says, and gulps scotch.

"Just because it looks good on him, doesn't mean it looks good on her as well."

"Fuck you, Lex," he says, chuckling. "Like I care. She has a smoking hot body, and gets me hard with her pictures and dirty talking. When I'm done chatting with her, off I go to have a good time somewhere else."

"The wonders of the Internet," I murmur. "Maybe we should get together one day," I say and wink at him. "You, me, and our girls," I mutter, studying him from behind my glass.

"Let me think about it," he says, grinning wolfishly.

I finish off my drink and set the glass on the table.

"Okay, then... I gotta go now," I say, pushing out of my chair, sliding by James.

"Where are you going?" he asks, looking at me from behind a cloud of smoke.

"I have to take care of some business," I say, smirking.

Ed waves me off, annoyed.

"Go fuck yourself, Lex," Ed hurls my way.

James smiles slyly.

I tear away from our table, exit Red's and get in my car. The evening is quiet, warm and windy, a silent lightning flashing in the distance. As the road takes me to the next town, the homes become sparse, and the meadows darker.

Half an hour later, I roll downtown and after a few more minutes, I pull the car into private parking and enter the hotel. The concierge girl greets me with a soft nod as I veer right and take the stairs to the upper level.

It's a boutique hotel with several business suites, not the usual tourist rooms. The place has built a reputation offering privacy and top services to a handful of clients.

I enter the place and take a turn to the bedroom.

The patio doors are open, the sheer drapes flowing in the wind. From a drawer, I pull out a dark blindfold that's usually reserved for her.

I pour myself a drink, take a good swig, walk to the patio doors, and look in the distance. The wind has picked up, moving the storm closer. Thunders rumble up the hills.

This is the kind of weather I like.

A sound comes from the entrance as the door opens. I set my glass on the table, and cover my eyes with the blindfold. She closes the door, her heels trailing from the hallway to the bedroom.

Hands stuffed in my pockets, I wait for her, facing the patio.

"All good, Secret Girl?"

A soft rustle comes my way as she pulls near me. My nostrils flare as I inhale her fragrance.

"You smell good," I say, the image of blooming jasmine and orange peel coming to my mind.

She shifts closer, and I turn to her. I can visualize her in my mind. She stands right in front of me. I can sense her heat. Intoxicating like the night outside, simmering like the storm.

I touch her face. She doesn't wear a mask. My fingers go over her smooth skin, learning her features, touching her fine nose, and full lips, brushing the line of her thick silky lashes.

I feel her breath beneath my fingertips. Soft, and warm. Rushed. And then a soft quiver in her lips. I brush them with my thumb.

They're smooth as satin, and slightly parted. I sweep her lower lip again and touch her tongue. A smile rolls on my lips as she wraps her mouth around my thumb.

She gives me a slow, wet, tender stroke. Blood swirls in my groin, making my cock twitch.

I peel my fingers away from her face and slide my hand down to her neck, trailing to the round neckline of her dress.

"You're hungry again, aren't you..." I murmur as her fingers start tracing my shirt, smoothly popping my buttons open.

She drapes it off my shoulders, and runs her palms across my chest and then my abs. She takes her time, the small space between us vanishing slowly.

Her lips press on my chest as her hand slides between my legs. She runs her palm over my bulge, brushing the length of my hard-on as she swirls her tongue against my pecs.

She licks and bites my nipples, all the while rubbing my erection through my pants.

She breathes faster and gets hotter, her skin blazing against mine.

Deftly, she unfastens my buckle and slides her hand inside my pants. She keeps kissing my chest while cuffing my shaft and stroking me real good. I'm hot and pulsing in her hand.

I lower myself to the chair armrest as she wedges herself between my legs and kneels in front of me. Her head goes right between my thighs, her hands pulling my cock out, her mouth breathing hot over my dick.

She spares no inch.

Holding me with both hands, she starts licking my entire length, rolling her tongue, pressing it against my hardness, and swirling it around my crown.

I slide a hand into her hair. She gently sucks on my balls while stroking me with her hand, and then shifts. Her hand cups my balls as her lips wrap around my girth.

She moves her head, and I tilt my hips, filling her mouth.

"That's fucking good..." I rumble with a hoarse voice.

The more she sucks me, the hungrier she becomes. She moans around my cock, and I have to clench my ass to stop myself from coming.

She pulls up to her feet, her tits coming to my mouth. The fabric cries under my fingers as I pull her neckline down and free her breasts.

Her bare mounds press against my lips. I grab one and knead it harshly, her nipple hardening between my teeth. Her body arches, her hips pushing close to me, and then I smell her scent.

I slide my hand between her legs and ride her dress up until I meet her flesh.

A firestorm sweeps my cock.

"You came to me like that?" I purr.

A hammer stirs between my legs as I run my fingers through her folds and rub her clit.

She stays silent. She's also wet like fuck.

"You did, didn't you...?" I mutter, my hands going up again.

I rip the dress off her, drape my arms around her and rise. Her legs lock around me as I take a couple of steps and crash with her on my bed.

My back hits the pillow as her hands go down my legs, peeling my pants off me. She crawls up on me and then hovers over me, and I catch her and roll with her, burying her under me.

I part her legs and slowly enter her.

She quietly growls.

"You've been missing this, haven't you?" I say against her lips, thrusting into her. "It's not easy, is it? You wish you could pull away, and yet you can't, so you keep coming back."

Her arms twine around my neck as I fuck her slowly, going deep into her every time.

We roll again, and now we face each other, propped on our sides. She hitches her leg on my hip while I grab her ass and pull her against me. Every thrust makes her moan against my lips.

Her muscles harden, her hand clutching on my ass as well. I sweep the crease between her butt cheeks, slowly rubbing.

Muffled words float in her mouth.

"Oh, I forgot..." I say, amused. "You can't talk."

Her hips roll against me, and I barely suppress my need to pound her harder.

"Oh, yes... That's fucking perfect," I say, as I feel the tingles sweeping my cock and her walls clamping on me, her butt starting to clench too.

Intense heat coils in my groin burning through my shaft. She stiffens, and now I pound her, the climax crashing hard through both of us.

Her grip slackens on me, her hand going up my back, her hot lips buried in my skin, trailing my neck. She kisses me, loving me, and then she whispers in my ear.

"I have to go now."

A moment later, gone she is.

D

AHLIA

WEDNESDAY COMES FAST.

Nervous, I enter my office, waiting to see Sheila Lane any minute or Lex Harrington or both. Christine checks on me. As always, she's confident things will work out.

My boss shows up around ten.

His blue eyes wrap me in a playful gaze which is somewhat unusual for this time of day.

"In my office," he says curtly.

I follow him closely, both cruising through the corridor, my eyes often slipping to his butt.

He fashions black suit pants, a narrow fancy belt, and a blue shirt that borrows color from his eyes. No tie this time.

He swings the door open and lets me walk ahead of him, his gaze quickly sweeping my dress.

Since today is my last day of work, I picked a tailored, dark chocolate dress, which closely follows my silhouette and tapers at my waist, setting off every curve and line of my body.

"You look good... Dahlia," he says with a soft voice, his lips curving into a warm smile.

Why do I smell a trap?

Regardless, my bones start melting. How can he do that to me? Was he playing some sort of a game all this time?

He runs cold and hot, harsh and soft, brutally invasive in my private life, and then annoyingly distant.

He shows me to a chair before he walks around his desk, and sinks into his seat.

"So... Are you ready to move on?" he tosses at me, checking his phone.

I don't like the sound of that.

"Yes..." I say hesitantly. "What do you mean by moving on?"

He slides his finger over the screen and starts typing. Briefly, he glances at me.

Amused.

It is a trap.

"Nothing."

He sets his phone on the table and rests his elbows on his desk.

"There may be a position for you as an Account Executive in the Sales Department. You have to go through a few weeks of training first. But until then, I need a personal assistant, so if you're interested..." he says, his voice trailing off.

I'm quite positive he pushes back a grin.

"What do you need it for?" I ask, raising an eyebrow.

He flashes a lopsided smile that makes my insides flutter.

"As you already know, I'm a busy man, and there are things I need to delegate. Plus you're intimately familiar with my business, so you're extremely valuable to me," he says, talking like an ass.

"Sure. What do you have in mind?" I say, sneering a bit.

"You travel with me to London."

My eyebrows flick up.

"I do?"

"You have a passport?"

"Yes."

"Good. We leave tomorrow morning. My driver will pick you up."

He runs his eyes down on me.

"You need business attire as well as something formal. We'll attend a few meetings and parties."

I ponder. His eyes drill me.

"What is it?" he asks.

"What about your female companion. You said there would be someone else."

"Change of plans."

He pauses for a moment.

"All right?" he mutters.

"Yes. When do we come back?"

"Sunday evening."

We share a stare for a few moments. I can't read anything in his eyes.

"Good," he says with a different voice. "You can go now. I have stuff to do," he says dismissively.

I collect my tablet and my phone, rise to my feet and walk toward the door. The skin on my back gets hot from his eyes.

I swing the door open, and just as I step outside, my phone beeps. I freeze, my eyes falling on the alert notifying me of a new text message.

A thought spears through my head as I sense his stare on me. I flick my head up and glance over my shoulder. My eyes lock with his.

A mysterious smile clings to his lips. He looks at me, palming his phone.

A bad feeling falls through me.

Heart racing, I shut the door and dart to my office. As soon as I enter the room, I close the door behind me, swipe the phone screen and check the text.

A message from Lex to the *Bondage girl* stares at me. *Empty*. There are no words. Only a question mark.

I'm about to pass out.

It was a trap by all means.



DAHLIA

WE ARRIVE in London Thursday afternoon after a pleasant flight on his private jet.

By pleasant, I mean his charming company, the gourmet food, enough space to stretch my legs, and a stunning view.

Nothing in his behavior gives him away.

We spend hours discussing books, politics, and art. He seems in a good mood. In no way, he leads me to believe that he knows about my other life.

But I'm no fool.

I'm hardly at ease. Every gesture he makes and every word he says gets analyzed several times.

I'm sure he knows I am *her* and *she* is me. He must know. That's why he sent that message. It was a test. A confirmation rather.

What am I saying? He sent it on purpose, so *I know he is aware I'm lying*.

And yet he makes no move. He's probably waiting for me to make one first, and that's the biggest trap of all.

I do my best to calm my nerves, and behave as normal as I can, considering how close I am to him. He's no longer fucking with me, yet he's not terribly warm either.

Most of the time he addresses me with his business-like voice. On the few occasions, he calls me Dahlia he uses a softer voice. Only to forget about me a moment later.

Damn him.

A car takes us to the hotel.

He occupies a luxurious suite in one of the most expensive hotels in London while I get settled in a room a few floors down.

The first event we are set to attend is a dinner with possible future business partners and their wives.

I pick a simple strapless, cobalt-blue, satin dress, and beaded stilettos. A subtle layer of makeup enhances my features.

I brush my hair, pull it all back and style it in a tousled bun. I clip on sparkling, dangling earrings, and glance in the mirror one last time before I grab my purse and phone.

I call him. Instead of getting an answer from him, I hear a knock on the door.

"Coming."

Rushed, I spray perfume on my wrists and neck and dash to the door.

He doesn't wear a jacket, only a sleek, fitted dark garnet shirt, and black pants. A belt sets off his trim waist.

My eyes linger on his belt long enough to prompt him to smile.
“Ready?” he asks, cocking an eyebrow as I still in the doorway.
“Yes.”

I close the door. Side by side, we walk to the elevator. We ride down in silence, his eyes on his phone, my gaze on his hands.

The doors peel open at the first floor. I wait for him to signal which way he wants to go.

Casually, he wraps an arm around my shoulders and guides me to a hallway that takes us to the other side of the hotel. Moments later, we reach a large terrace with lush plants, subtle lights, and round tables.

The hostess leads us to a private booth.

Gallantly, he pulls the chair out for me and orders drinks. Within moments, our guests arrive.

Two couples. The men are older than Lex, the women, slightly younger than their husbands.

I’m introduced by Lex by my name, and not my job position. The women are friendly and well-versed in international living. Soon we engage in conversations about London, travel and summer vacations on French Riviera as if I ever had one.

The men discuss business, and from what I glean, the plan is to set European quarters for Sexton International.

A few minutes after ten o’clock, they say goodbye to us, and just as I furtively check the time on my phone, a group of men and women slip by us.

A female voice scratches my ears.

“Lex?! Lex Harrington?”

Surprise beams in her voice.

I flick my eyes in her direction, swiftly scanning her.

She’s thin, blonde, has a tiny waist and legs up to her neck. The men in her group pull to a halt as well, recognizing Lex.

He rises to his feet and shakes hands with them, the women warmly kissing him on his cheeks.

The blonde has absolutely no problem lending his lips to him. I roll my eyes. He catches sight of it and smiles.

They all exchange pleasantries and just when they seem to head to the door, and I’m about to sigh with relief, they come up with the marvelous idea for us to join them.

Lex has no problem with that, and since I'm in no position to say no, they insist on dragging us out of the hotel and a few blocks down the street into a fancy club.

I quickly learn that the men had done business with Lex while the women, well, they seem to be friends of sorts.

The blonde glues to Lex like a rash, and I quickly find myself left out of their group.

They're a different crowd than the people we had dinner with. After a few more drinks, they are in the mood to dance, and it comes as no surprise that the blonde woman who sports a skimpy pink dress, begins tugging at Lex's hand.

Perched on a bar stool not far from me, he seems in no mood to join her on the dance floor.

Unfazed, she comes up with a solution to the problem. Lasciviously, she starts to sway her hips and arch her back, dry humping the air in front of him.

The alcohol flushing through her blood doesn't help at all, her motions screaming for attention. He enjoys the show— I think. There's no expression on his face telling me that.

A new tune comes on, and instead of doing her waving routine, she pulls closer to him, and lodges herself between his legs. My stomach does a spin and pushes up my throat.

His elbows prop back against the bar, his drink dangling from his hand.

She leans forward, pressing her chest against his, and whispers something in his ear.

He lingers too long not to be suspicious, and that's when I see her hand. The place is dimly lit, and yet I see it clearly. She slides it up his thigh before she smoothly runs it to his groin.

A sudden cough bursts out in my chest.

He flicks his gaze in my direction.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

The blonde swings her eyes to me as well.

"Uh-huh," I say, still coughing.

I slip off my chair, straighten my back, and set my glass on the counter.

"I'm leaving," I say curtly, evading his eyes. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Without another word, I spin around and dash to the door. The evening hits me with a wave of warm air and a smell of damp pavement and grilled food coming from a nearby restaurant.

"Dahlia?"

His voice echoes right behind me, but I'm in no mood to talk or wait, so I pick up the pace and soon I almost run. His footsteps rush behind me.

I slip inside the hotel and dart to the elevator. He catches up with me when the doors begin to slide.

He flicks his hand inside, making them stop and pull back slightly.

He steps inside.

"What's your problem, Dahlia?"

I pivot to him, fire shooting from my eyes.

"What's my problem?" I shout.

"Yeah..." he throws at me, unfazed.

My eyes dip.

"I don't have a problem," I say, pointing at his crotch. "You have a fucking problem in your pants. A problem the blonde woman at the bar could've taken care of easily."

He bites his lip, laughter spilling in his eyes.

"You think it's funny?" I bark.

He nods, amused, his nose creasing with a naughty grin.

"Why did you have to drag me all the way across the ocean so I can see women tugging at your pants?"

"I needed your comprehensive skills in my business, Miss Fox. That's why. I thought you wanted this job. No?" he asks, terribly entertained, but I can't taste his humor.

He takes a step in my direction, and my back hits the wall.

I hold my head high and counter his gaze. His eyes bore into mine.

"I did want this job or any job for that matter, but I didn't think it's gonna be a living hell."

"Why is that, Miss Fox?" he asks, tilting his head down to me.

I get distracted by his lips.

The elevator doors open on my floor. He hits the button for his level, and the doors shut smoothly.

My heart flips, beating randomly.

"Why is your life a leaving hell?"

My focus shifts to his mouth again, focusing on his lips as they curl into a smirk.

"*You* make it a living hell. And *you* made it that way right from the beginning. You went from being good and attentive to me to being a total ass."

"Well, you kinda volunteered for it, Miss Fox."

The doors pull open, and he tears away from me.

"What do you mean?" I shout, rushing after him.

He swipes his card and pushes the suite door open. I enter a large room. The place looks amazing, but I have no time for sightseeing. He suddenly steers left, heading to the bedroom.

Before I can follow him inside, he slams the door in my face.

I push it open, fuming.

"What do you mean?"

He spins to me.

"You know what I fucking mean," he says, angry.

"No, I don't," I toss at him boldly.

He erases the last sliver a space between us, and leans to me, so menacing I find myself, bending backward to stay away from him.

"You knew it the first night you lap danced for me."

My blood freezes. His eyes go sinisterly cold.

A wicked grin slips to his lips.

"Oh. You thought I didn't know?"

No, I didn't think so. Not from the very beginning. How could he possibly know?

"Who told you?" I mutter, horrified.

I can't fucking believe him. He acted out all this time, playing this game, and tormenting me so that he can have fun?

"Nobody told me. You really think I'm stupid?"

"No, no... I didn't say that," I say, fumbling for words. "But how could you possibly know?"

"I asked you if you had a sister and you said yes. You danced like her, and you reminded me of my secretary, and just because you didn't talk or didn't show your hair and eyes, didn't mean I didn't know. And then, there was something else. I haven't picked up a woman to fuck at Silver in a very long time. I wasn't interested. But with you, it was different. You were dying to fuck. You were wet before you slid your knees on either side of me and started to roll your hips above my crotch. And you got me harder than anyone else had

in a very long time, so I knew it's not a matter of chance. I figured out it's more than that. It wasn't hard."

"Why did you let me embarrass myself all this time?"

Smiling, he sways his head.

"You didn't embarrass yourself. You loved it, and I did too. I didn't want to fuck the girl from the office, the one who was intimidated by me. I wanted you to feel comfortable with me, and it turns out that being someone else for a couple of hours worked out well. For both of us."

"That's another way of saying that you don't like me without my mask."

He clicks his tongue.

"No. I think *you* don't like yourself without the mask. You must've felt free for the first time in your life. Being that empowered, dirty woman with no past and no future and no one to judge her."

"Even so, it didn't stop you from being an asshole all this time."

His eyes glint with a smile.

"I thought you'd grow a pair and come clean."

"And say what? Hey, Lex, I know you're my boss, and technically you just hired me, but I want you to know I got you hard last night under a false pretense, and now I can't stop thinking about you, and I'm craving you between my legs and in my mouth all the time."

He laughs softly.

"Yeah... That would've been a good start," he says, studying my face, and my reaction. And my face, now burning with a blush. "You can't even talk about it, can you?"

I lock eyes with him for a moment, examining him as well.

"I need to go," I say, tearing away from him.

"Perfect," he says, checking the time on his phone. "We can ride the elevator down together."

"Where are you going?"

He laughs in my face.

"That's not your business."

"Is that blonde?"

"Maybe. Why do you care anyway?"

"I don't."

"Fine. Then let's get going."

I throw him a glance, and he gazes at me, his eyes unreadable.

I spin around and head to the door, his footsteps right behind me. We take the elevator down. Two levels. The doors pull open. Hesitant, I glance at him. Hands tucked in his pants, he looks at me with hooded eyes. No word on his lips.

"Ugh!" I growl and dash outside.

I throw a last glance over my shoulder and catch sight of his blue eyes sinking so deep in me, I feel a flutter in my belly.

I push the door to my room open, kick off my shoes, peel off the dress and crash onto the bed.

Every moment that ticks by, makes my gut twist.

I grab the phone and do the last thing that I should do.

Bondage Girl: Are you up for it tonight?

I wait. One minute becomes five, and my hope turns to ashes. He's not gonna play this game. It's not fun for him anymore, now that I'm out in the open.

After five more minutes, I leap up the bead and head to the bathroom. My phone beeps.

I practically dive for it.

Lex: Yes.

Bondage Girl: I'll be at that bar in fifteen minutes. Wait in the front in your car. You take me outside the city. No one wears blindfolds. Still... I'm not gonna talk much.

Lex: Fine by me. Make sure you don't wear underwear.

I smile.

Bondage Girl: Done.

D

AHLIA

I THROW the phone on the bed, take a quick shower, and pick a dress off a hanger. It's a black and white and hugs me tightly.

I slip in my shoes and vanish out the door. The night is still warm and the air humid as if it's getting ready to rain.

It takes me less than five minutes to arrive at that bar. His car is right at the front. A black Ferrari, identical to the one he has at home.

The door lifts up, and I slip inside. He throws me a side look, a crooked smile curling his lips.

"I like the outfit," he mutters and peels his gaze away from me as he spins the car around.

Smiling, he runs a hand through his hair, brushing a few stray bangs away. I almost forget to breathe as I take him in.

All these weeks, I knew it but never fully realized it how caught I am in him. As if he reads my mind, he throws me a quick glance, smiling mysteriously.

"What are you looking at Dahlia?"

"Nothing."

I look out the window, and muse for a few moments.

"How could you fuck me all this time and then give me all that shit at work?" I ask.

"You made it easy for me, baby."

"And you had no problem at all?"

"Why would I? It wasn't me who was caught between these two worlds."

"I wasn't..." I wave him off. "Never mind."

"So you're a trained dancer?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"Why lap dancing?"

"Why business?"

"Hmm... Practical, Miss Fox?"

"I needed the money," I said with an even voice, and remain silent.

"You're good at what you do," he says after a few moments, serious.

He glances in my direction, and we lock eyes for a moment.

"Are you making fun of me?"

"No. You're good at what you do, in the office and outside."

"You mean business and lap dancing."

"Yes. The only problem is that you get disheartened easily." He pauses for a moment. "You lack confidence, and that's the only thing that pulls you back. You shouldn't fear you'll lose your job."

"Yet I could lose my job. Especially now."

He chuckles softly.

"And why's that?"

"Fucking an employee is akin to marriage and sex. One kills the other."

He grins.

"You think I'd find you less attractive because you work for me? Or that I'd kick you to the curb when I had enough of you?"

"Both."

"Good thinking, *Bondage Girl*. You want me to fire you ahead of time so that we delight ourselves in carnal pleasure?"

"No. I can't afford to lose my job," I burst out.

He glances at me.

"Confidence, baby. Even if you lose your job, there's someone out there smart enough to realize how good you are."

"Are we talking about jobs?"

He laughs wolfishly.

"Yes, we are."

Soon we leave the city behind and drive through rolling hills, and old villages, following a snaking, empty road.

It's past midnight.

Lights are sprinkled here and there, but for the most part, it's only us, the field and the starry sky.

He takes a side road and stops the car next to a group of trees. A large field sprawls in front of us. He turns the engine off.

I look up at the sky, a path of cold lights shining brightly above us. A chorus of frogs and crickets fills the air.

He glances up as well. I study him as silence falls over us.

"I love star gazing," I say, shifting my eyes to the sky. "Wish upon a star..." I say quietly after a while as I take in the immensity stretching beyond our immediate universe. "What would a man like you possibly want, Lex? You seem to have everything..." I say with a mellow voice, suddenly in a pensive mood.

I give him a side glance.

He smiles softly, yet he doesn't look at me.

"What's everything baby? I have money and power, but everything else is relative. Nothing is mine. Things come and go. I'm a mere spectator. Sometimes not even that because I'm too busy to waste time, reflecting on life. Everything stays with me for a fleeting moment, and as I get busy making plans, it slowly pulls away. That's the essence of life. You only see it and appreciate it when it's gone."

He pauses for a moment, a sad smile crawling up his face.

"There are things not even someone like me can have," he says, sort of like a conclusion, and then he glances at me. "What about you? What would a girl like you want?"

"To be happy."

"Happy?" he says, surprised. "You're not happy now?"

"No, no.... I am. I want to have a happy life."

"What's happiness for you?"

I shrug.

"That's the problem. I don't know how to define it. If I knew, I'd probably find a way to get it."

"What are you missing right now?"

I smile, suddenly sad.

"Many things. My father who died a few years back. My friends who moved away. My sister who grew up and is no longer the girl she used to be. Sometimes I miss a place I've only seen in my mind.

A quiet place. A place of love, and laughter. Perhaps of music. Of lights and dimness. Peaceful like the sky above us." Tilting my chin up, I point at the sparkling stars. A few moments pass by as we both take in the pulsing lights. "A full life... That's what happiness is. I think," I murmur.

He stays quiet.

"You said things had pulled away from you. What things?" I ask.

I swing my eyes to him.

Smiling, he keeps gazing at the stars.

"My father when I was very young. My innocence, when I was very young as well," he says with humor, yet sadness lines his voice.

"Innocence?"

"Yes. I learned too much too fast. And I experienced too many things I shouldn't have. Not that early anyway. That's how I lost a certain taste for life. I no longer saw pleasure in the little things, or wanted them."

He looks back at the sky.

"Remember when I said I'd know everything about you?" I say.

A soft chuckle falls from his lips.

"Yeah..."

"You know how many times it dawned on me it was one of the most ridiculous things to say?"

"It probably was," he says nonchalantly.

More silence slips by.

"What else have you lost?"

"Things I've never had," he says.

"Like what?"

He just shakes his head, a hunch telling me he won't answer.

In the distance, a flash of lightning spears a fork into the sky.

"Have you ever been in love?" I ask.

He tilts his lips with a smile.

"Hmm... I don't know. I guess I was."

"What happened?" I ask, my heart slowly sinking.

"I fell for the wrong woman. You?" he tosses at me, quickly shifting the focus to me.

"I've never been in love. Why was she the wrong woman? She didn't love you?" I ask, stubbornly bringing the topic back.

"She was not meant for me..." he says, suddenly nostalgic. "She would've probably loved me, but she couldn't be mine."

"You still miss her?"

"Do you still miss your dad?" he says, glancing at me, leaving me no other choice but to admit.

"I guess, I do..."

"That's what happens. Things you no longer have, hold more power over you than the things you have."

He studies me for a moment.

"How come you didn't fall for anyone?"

I shrug.

"I guess I didn't meet the right person."

"You didn't try much though," he says.

"What makes you say that?"

A knowing smile curves his lips.

Smiling, I wave him off.

"Never mind," I say, my cheeks burning. "Yeah, I probably didn't."

A rumbling thunder rips the sky not far from us. The wind picks up quickly, unsettling the trees. He barely rolls the windows up when the rain starts rapping, squalls of wind hitting the car.

He starts shifting the key into the ignition.

I bring my hand to his.

"Let's wait."

He glances at me, his eyes glinting in the dimness.

"Okay," he mutters and turns the music on instead, a soft jazz tune drifting through the speakers.

"This is my favorite," I say, pleasantly surprised.

He gives me a questioning look.

"*Almost blue* is one of my favorite songs," I say as the sound of the piano and the trumpet mingle in a melodious cry. "That's what I was talking about... Listen," I say as the tune smoothly rolls. "Can you hear it? The sadness, and regret. The things you cannot have or change or simply cannot bring back... The ones that pull away from you," I mutter, my own voice drowning in nostalgia. "That's what I was talking about. Happiness is anything but that," I murmur.

"And yet, you can't have one without the other," he says softly.

"Why would you say that?"

"I used to think like you," he says. "I always wanted the good things. Never the bad ones. When you are very young— I was a teenager at the time, you think that's how life works. Have it all. One

flavor. And just feast. That's not how it works. Sorrow helps you see and feel and taste life and makes the happiness you talk about sweet and precious. That's why you can't have one without the other."

"Are *you* happy?" I ask.

He looks away for a moment, staring blankly through the wet darkness outside.

"Yes. I think I am," he finally says.

"But not all the time," I mutter, and he swivels his head to me.

"Maybe. But there's no good reason why I shouldn't be all the time."

We share silence for a moment, his gaze tearing away from me.

"Who was that blonde?"

He smiles, distracted.

"Someone from the past. Nothing of consequence."

"And yet you would've been with her right now, had I not send you that message."

He lifts his gaze to me and gives me a playful grin.

"You don't know that."

"Was that a test?" I ask, caught in his game. "Like everything else..."

"Maybe."

"What are you testing me for?"

He weighs his words for a few moments before he answers.

"Everything."

A sly smile drapes over his lips.

"You're quite new at this game," he says.

"Am I?" I ask, grinning.

"Mmm-hmm."

"Why does it have to be a game?"

"Because people are rarely honest, especially when they are attracted to someone else."

Hmm.

"You do that often?"

His lips part into a lopsided smile.

"What?"

"Testing women?"

He slowly shakes his head.

"No. Most of them are easy to read."

"I wasn't?"

"You were. But there were parts you didn't even know you had so I couldn't read them."

Silence rises a wall around us as the sound of rapping rain fades away.

Shifting his eyes away from me, he lowers the windows. A smell of hay and wet dirt fills my nostrils.

The bolts of lightning travel away from us.

"It's late," he says with a quiet voice as if a random thought or emotion affects him. "We have to go back," he says with a colder voice, and a hole forms in my heart reminding me that every time I get close to him, he pulls away.

"Okay," I say.

I shift in my seat and look out the window. Darkness rolls across the field, faint lights pulsing in the distance.

The engine rumbles while the car slowly rolls to the main road as we head back. We reach a crossroads, a sign pointing left to London.

He steers right.

"Where are we going?"

"You'll see."

Minutes pass by before the lights of another village cast a glow on the wet road. A picturesque sight with cozy cottages and a century old castle and facades unfurls around us.

The streets are empty, the lights pale, shining here and there at the windows. Soon, we reach a wooded area, and he takes a left, seemingly knowing where we're going.

The road takes us to a meadow and a small house sunk into the darkness.

He pulls the car to a stop in the middle of nowhere.

"Let's go," he says.

"Whose house is this?"

"A friend."

Careful not to break a heel, I step out of his car and follow him. A big cherry tree sits in front of the cottage. He strides in front of me when a gust of wind shakes the branches and the leaves, throwing a bucket of water on me.

"Oh, shit..." I say, my wet dress clinging to my body, damp strands of hair gluing to my face.

He stops and spins around.

"You okay?"

Drops of water roll down my cheeks. He laughs.

"It's not funny," I say, smiling, and just to prove my point I reach up, grab a branch and pull it down.

A curtain of water falls on him too, soaking his shirt.

He gives me a warning look.

"You're gonna pay dearly for this..." he says, grinning.

"Oh, I'm shaking," I say wiggling my fingers at him. "I forgot what an ass you can be."

He slaps his hands on his hips, the outline of his pecs visible through his wet shirt.

"Did you just called me an asshole?"

"Yeah, I did," I say, laughing.

"I'm your fucking boss," he says.

"Prove it," I say daringly.

He erases the space between us, yanks my body off the ground and throws me over his shoulder.

"Fuck, no..." I say, laughing and kicking and squirming.

My hemline travels up high, and then some more, snagged by his hand.

"No. Lex, no."

Unfazed, he cups my bare ass, and my skin tingles beneath his touch.

"Please don't do that..." I say, upside down, chuckling as his hand goes straight between my legs.

He sinks his teeth in the swell of my butt and bites me hard.

I yelp.

A moment later, he stops in front of the door. He fishes a key from a secret nook and unlocks it.

"Whose place is this?" I croak.

He finally sets me on my feet. My dress is wet. So is his shirt.

I look around. A large foyer sprawls in front of us, dark tiles lining the floors.

"I told you. A friend's."

"What friend?" I ask suspiciously.

"You don't know her," he says cockily.

"Her?"

"Yeah, baby... There were women before you," he says, smiling teasingly.

"Do you bring women here often?"

"No. Never. You're the first one."

"Why would I believe you?"

"You're free to believe whatever you want."

"Where is she?"

"Overseas."

"We are overseas," I say, smiling.

"Hong Kong."

"Is she gonna get mad?"

"Nope," he says, unbuttoning his shirt and peeling it off.

His torso glistens in the dim light. My gaze licks his wide shoulders, and cut muscles, floating a bit longer over his washboard abs.

"Follow me when you're done ogling me."

I'm watching him stride across the room.

"Are you coming?" he says, glancing at me over his shoulder.

I pull my shoes off, and barefoot saunter across the room. He holds the door open for me as I squeeze by. A small hallway takes us to a bedroom. Not far from it, there's a bathroom with a shower.

He lets me go in first.

Minutes pass by, the water rolling down my skin when I hear the door opening.

My heart thuds in my chest.

D

AHLIA

SO MANY TIMES I imagined this first moment with him... The *real* first moment with him.

I thought I knew everything about him and how this would unfold, but now I realize— one more time, that I know nothing.

He enters without knocking, a towel wrapped around his waist, a smile brushing his eyes. I turn the water off and let my gaze drift down on him, sweeping his pecs and the birthmarks on his neck and shoulder.

My eyes get caught into his well-carved V pointing to his groin. I drag my gaze up, finally sinking my gaze into his hypnotic eyes.

A smile curls his lips as he silently observes me.

Holding my gaze, he closes the space between us. I take a step back, my shoulders meeting the cold wall of the shower.

"Hey," he says softly, his eyes warm with a smile.

"Hey..." I murmur, completely swept under his spell.

Smoothly, he runs his fingers across my shoulder and cuffs my neck.

"You okay?" he asks, his thumb slowly caressing my skin.

"Yes," I mutter, already lost.

His fingers trail up my neck as he slowly slides his lips onto mine. Pleasure flows through me. I float with it.

He barely touches me, and yet I feel him deep inside me.

He breaks the kiss and reads my eyes, his hand resting on my neck. A soft shiver runs through me, the words failing to express the way he makes me feel.

As if he knows how badly he affects me, he comes to me again, his fingers tracing the edge of my towel, peeling it off.

Without tearing his gaze away from me, he tenderly cups my breasts, his fingers playing with my nipples.

"Lex..." I breathe out.

Smiling, he starts to kiss me.

It's like the gentlest wind brushing your skin and the softest sunlight warming you up. It's everything I thought it'd be.

Slowly and softly, his lips love mine before he takes me harder, pouring passion in his kiss. A secret algorithm guides his lips, getting me primed for him.

Breathing shallowly, I wind my arms around his neck and pull him into me. His hips crash against my belly as he grinds his full, hard cock into me. I slide my hand between us, flick his towel open and wrap my hand around his shaft.

He groans inside my mouth, and I almost come. Cupping the underside of his erection I run my hand up and down on him, stroking his hardness.

He moans again and twitches in my hand and then he slowly rolls his hips and thrusts against my fist.

My center tingles. My mouth waters too.

Tearing his lips away, he watches me with bedroom eyes as I cup his balls with my free hand and start to passionately stroke him, polishing his rock hard crown.

His eyes get heavy.

His lips start parting, moist and swollen. His hands brace against the wall on either side of me. He leans closer, his body closing in on me until there's almost nothing else to breathe but him.

He lowers his mouth again, hungry for mine, the moment we connect, our tongues tangling in a fiery kiss. My belly flutters with need as I feel him deep inside me as if he just entered me.

He deepens his kiss, and I stroke him harder, sucking on his tongue, desperate for relief.

"Fuck..." he murmurs as he senses me tensing, and I drive his pleasure high.

Flushed, he grabs the back of my hair and presses his body against me, his cock grinding into me, his lips tormenting me again.

Smoothly, he lifts my thigh, and tilts my hips, slowly sliding into me. I gasp and almost lose my breath, sucking on his tongue even harder. He stirs inside me as my core clamps on his shaft.

Every roll of hips, fills me to the brim, bringing me closer to the edge. Caught in the throngs of pleasure, I grip his neck with force and mark his skin.

He gently bites my lip as he fills me up, over and over again, stretching me, making me so hot and wet.

He stills, burning inside me, panting against my mouth. My whole body vibrates, hungry for his touch.

"You feel good," I murmur, quivering in his arms.

"You too, baby," he purrs, sweeping my lips with the tip of his tongue, teasing me, and playing with me.

I lock his lips.

"You're so fucking famished," he says, sinking his teeth into my lip again.

"And you're no better either..." I say tauntingly.

He smiles cockily as he gives me a quick glance, and then he pulls out and nudges me around to face the wall.

His hands latch onto my hips.

"That's fucking good," he murmurs.

By the sound of his voice, I can tell he dipped his gaze.

I push my bottom out, and his palm sweeps my ass.

"Now, be a fucking good girl for me," he says, tracing the crease between my butt cheeks with his heavy cock.

He sweeps my buttock, and I jerk, my back hitting his chest.

A soft laughter rolls off his lips.

"Stay still, baby... We'll get to that some other time," he says with a husky voice.

He grabs my ass with one hand, positions his erection with the other, and presses the tip against my entrance.

I welcome him again, my walls clenching as he slides into me, thick and hot and wet.

"Relax..." he rasps as I jerk against him.

Slowly, he pushes into me.

My nails scratch the tiles as he goes all the way in, and buries himself deep inside me, iron hard and throbbing.

I'm all soaked with my arousal, my center warm and tingly.

"You're good," he says as he feels me milking him.

His voice clues me in he's looking down again.

Holding my butt with both hands, he drives his cock into me hard. I yelp and gasp and arch some more.

He stills, and leans to me, his breath trailing my shoulder, his teeth grazing my skin. Pressed on me, he pounds again, almost breaking me.

"Fuck..."

My voice sounds feral.

"Mmm-hmm," he murmurs close to my ear.

Sliding a hand between my legs, he slowly starts to stroke my clit.

More wetness trickles on his shaft.

"Yeah... baby. Who knew?" he mutters, a smile lining his voice.

Expertly, he keeps strumming the sensitive flesh while slamming into me.

My chest crushes against the tiles, my legs quickly getting unstable. His hot breath sears my neck as moans creep up my throat.

"You like it..." he says.

It's not a question really, but I nod.

I do fucking like it. More than I care to admit.

My body jerks with each thrust as he keeps pounding me with his hard cock.

I start to tense and shake, and then he smoothly shifts his lips away. Grabbing a fistful of my hair, he grips my waist and pulls my locks back, making me arch even more.

Planting my palms on the wall, I curve the way he wants me. Swiftly, he picks up the pace and starts hammering me. Our moans blend into our heavy breaths, echoing in the room.

Pleasure soars through us.

His grunts roll in my ears as he unleashes a pounding force and pushes me to my high. With me, he comes, his warm load filling my core.

Slowly, we scale down, my center still tingling and throbbing.

My hair slips free from his fist as my body starts to slacken. Pressing his chest against my back, he kisses my hair.

"You just passed another test," he says with a light tone, a smile threading through his voice.



LEX

NAKED, she follows me into the kitchen.

Her hair drapes over her shoulders, her face glowing with a soft smile. I pull a couple of glasses from a cupboard and uncork a bottle of wine. The ruby liquid licks the glasses as I pour it in.

I hand her a drink while furtively running my gaze over her perky chest, flat stomach and nipped waist. For a moment I get side-tracked as I take in her tight curves and the soft flesh between her legs.

I flick my gaze up.

She tilts her head to the side and gives me a questioning look.

She caught me.

Grinning, I raise my glass.

"For our weekend in the countryside," I say.

She lifts her glass as well, studying me from behind the glass.

We both take a sip, her cheeks instantly getting flushed.

"Not used to drinking, huh?"

She shakes her head and takes another swig. Mesmerized, I watch the tip of her tongue, sliding across her lips.

Blood starts to pump again between my legs. Her eyes dip to my hand as I slight brush my bulge through the soft fabric of my sweat-pants.

Her nipples harden.

She sets the glass on the side and hops on the wooden table. Legs parted.

Great minds think alike.

Lifting an eyebrow, I slowly part my lips and curl them into a smile.

"That's my girl..." I say, sliding my glass to the side as well.

Sitting on the edge, she props herself back on her hands and opens her legs wide.

I can't even crush my wolfish smile.

I'm fairly sure no one taught her that in college.

Taking a small step, I lodge myself between her thighs. She straightens her back and slinks her hands inside my pants, slowly sliding them down to my hips.

My cock springs free.

She runs one hand up and down my length, the other tenderly stroking my balls. That wasn't in the curriculum either.

Curling an arm around her waist, I lean closer to her.

She tips her face up.

"Keep doing that baby..." I murmur against her lips.

The scent and taste of wine spill between us as she starts nibbling on my lips. Teasing me, she gets me iron hard.

"You're a tough nut to crack, Lex Harrington," she mutters softly.

"Why would you say that?" I ask, smiling slyly.

"There are so many things I want to know about you. Now even more than before."

"What is it that you want to know?" I say quietly.

She locks my eyes for a few moment sinking her gaze deep.

A bittersweet smile tugs at her lips. Her fingers splay on my chest.

"For one, I'd like to know if you have a... *heart*?"

Her gaze drops to my lips, her voice lined with sadness. I take in her beautiful face.

"What makes you think I don't?"

"Everything," she says, her fist sliding up my cock, slowly stroking me with a slight twisting motion.

She smiles, her cheeks turning red with a blush, and yet melancholy flashes in her eyes.

"Why is it so important to you?"

A shadow rushes across her face as if I stepped on pain.

I feel her hurt.

"It's not," she says with a colder voice.

Fucking great.

"I do have a heart..." I say, my hand sliding through her hair, brushing the column of her neck, and cupping her face.

"Then, why—"

Her words get buried in the softness of my kiss, her hand stalling on my erection as I, unhurriedly and tenderly, let her see my heart.

It's the least that I can do.

She moans softly in my arms, and I break the kiss and look at her.

Her eyes shine with a newfound light.

"Is that better?" I ask, gently brushing a strand of hair away from her face.

She nods softly, her eyes glistening with emotion and I feel a chain locking around my heart.

She's so beautiful and vulnerable... So easy to crush. And she is so mine.

I feel her so close to me and open... And I don't think she knows how good she is.

She dips her gaze to my lips, giving me that hungry look again... as if she wants to feed herself again. I kiss her again, her body quickly warming up against mine. Soon my blood starts boiling.

She wraps her free arm around my torso as I pull her into me. My balls press against her crotch, my cock sliding through her lower lips, rubbing her clit.

She keeps caressing my hard flesh while her tongue dances with mine. Her eyes close, and her back arches as she slips in a trance.

She's so fucking hot.

She leans back again, and props on her hands, her legs wrapping around me as I hover over her.

A tremble shakes her thighs, her moans rolling in my mouth.

She lifts her legs as I pull away slightly only to drive my hard-on into her. She shudders with pleasure. I bring her to me, filling her to the brim. Over and over again. The shudder intensifies as her hot center starts pulsing around me.

"That's how you fucking do it..." I growl, almost tipping her over the edge.

Hands clutched onto my neck, and eyes swimming with arousal, she parts her lips voicing a crying moan.

"Fuck..." she mouths, her eyes going blank, a faint smile setting on her lips.

Her rush fuels my pleasure as she starts to come. We fall into each other, wild and hungry, feasting as if we do it for the first time.

Dahlia

I WAKE up in bed with Lex Harrington.

Let me say that again.

Lex Harrington is in my bed.

Butt naked, face buried in a pillow, lying flat on his stomach. Faint light filters through the drapes, rolling over his muscular back and ass.

His tousled blonde hair covers the back of his neck.

The bed is wide, the mattress soft, stocked with pillows and a warm cover, fitting perfectly into the cottage style decor.

It's a welcoming home, which seems not to be inhabited. In perfect order, nonetheless.

I wonder if there's coffee in the kitchen. I slip off the bed and stroll across the hallway to the other end of the house.

In the cupboard, I find a sealed bag of coffee. I set the coffee maker and wait, my gaze swinging to the window. A small pond stretches in front of the house.

A few moments later, I pour freshly brewed coffee into a mug and start walking toward the bedroom. The sound of a key turning in the lock makes me freeze.

I set the cup on the kitchen counter, swivel my head toward the entrance and dash away, not fast enough though, and a blonde

woman shoots me a surprised glance from the doorway.

Her gaze swings to my naked butt.

Frantic, I cover my ass with my hands, sprint away, burst into the bedroom, and jump into the bed.

"Lex??"

I shake his shoulder while trying to keep my voice silent.

He quietly growls but doesn't turn to me.

"Yes..." he mumbles in the pillow.

"There's a woman in the kitchen," I breathe out.

"A woman?" he asked unfazed.

"Yes," I say under my breath.

"It's her house..." he says, calm.

And sleepy.

Leisurely, he covers his naked ass.

"Hello there..."

The woman's voice echoes in the doorway.

Her eyes land on me first. Swiftly, I slip under the sheet and glue to him, elbowing him at the same time.

He rolls to his back and props himself up, his eyes barely open.

His morning erection stirs up as well, pushing the sheet. Helpful, I palm his cock, pushing it down.

Quiet laughter simmers in his chest.

Unfazed, he looks at the woman, who doesn't seem to be catching on. Or maybe she did, and she doesn't show it.

"I thought you come back on Sunday," he says, cocking an eyebrow, ignoring my meltdown and taking in the woman.

Her face brightens with a smile.

"I thought so too, but they made last minute changes," she says as I flick my eyes back and forth between them, his shaft searing my hand, and twitching beneath my palm.

I glance at him.

He must do it on purpose.

"How's London?" she asks him.

"Good."

The woman's eyes turn to me. I tug the sheet up to my chin.

Maybe someone cares to fill me in.

She takes a step toward the bed and stretches her hand out.

I offer mine. The free one.

"He does it intentionally to annoy you," she says, and for a moment I freeze, my blood drawing from my face.

What is she talking about? Is she...? No. It can't be that. She notices my baffled expression.

"He wants you to believe I'm some fling to make you jealous," she adds. "Hi. My name is Jolie. I'm his cousin."

I shake hands with her, and then I glare at him.

"Why would you let me freak out?" I ask.

They share a chuckle.

She spins around.

"Okay, I let you two love birds catching up. I'm in my room, unpacking."

She walks out, and I slap him on his chest.

"Your face was fucking priceless," he says, burying me under him.

His eyes start to clear as he focuses his gaze on me.

"How can you freak out so easily?" he asks softly, caressing my face.

"I'm not."

"You're still trembling."

I run my hands up his body, sweeping his butt and back. My eyelids go down slowly as I feel his full erection pressed against my clit. My gaze dips to his lips.

"I'm not," I mutter, getting hotter by the second.

"Yes, you fucking are..." he says quietly while grinding into me.

I lock my legs around him.

"We can't be doing this now..." I say slowly, my voice sounding as if I'm high.

He grins and nods, his hand grabbing my ass.

"Yes, we fucking can..." he mutters, filling me to the brim.



DAHLIA

IT TURNS OUT, Jolie who's twenty-nine and very much into women, works as a stylist for a high-end fashion firm and travels all over Europe.

Despite catching me butt naked in her kitchen, she turns out to be extremely hospitable and friendly with me.

An hour later, we all walk into a small Bed and Breakfast nearby and have a traditional breakfast.

We spend the day together, and early afternoon, Lex and I drive back to London.

The trip back or perhaps the rainy weather shifts his mood, and by the time we get back he becomes taciturn, for the most part staying deepened into his thoughts, paying little attention to me.

The moment we enter the hotel, he excuses himself and vanishes inside his suite, tossing at me that he needs to make some calls.

Torn, I retreat to my room.

For an hour or so, I sit on the bed and absently check messages on my phone, my mind spinning waywardly.

He sends me a quick message around seven o'clock with instructions for the evening, and I finally peel myself off the bed and walk into the bathroom.

Forty minutes later, I stroll out of my hotel room and head to his suite, clad in a red dress with a deep plunging neckline, and matching heels.

I knock once.

"Come in," he says with his business voice.

I walk in.

The doors to the terrace are open, the wind playing with the curtains.

Phone glued to his ear, he fastens his cufflinks, evading my eyes. Panic seeps into my blood.

I halt next to the door and wait for him. Furtively, I study him.

He has an elegance I've rarely seen in men. The clothing falls smoothly on him. The crisp, white shirt outlines his hard torso, muscular arms and flat stomach, the brightness of the fabric setting off his smooth, clean shaven face and sparkling eyes. His pants fit him in a way that makes me clench my thighs.

The man is hot, but that's not it. You can easily get caught in him, and he can play with you and burn you down with as little as a smile.

He gives me a side glance and slides his gaze down on me. On cue, my knees turn weak. Discreetly, I lean against the wall. As I stand here, observing him, it finally dawns on me what kind of shit I got myself into.

He is the man I work for. The man who hopefully will give me a permanent job once we go back.

He's also the man who's gonna fuck me a few more times. And I can't say no to him. I don't want to. I want him as much as he wants me, and there's no way I can say no to him.

Or myself.

He's not my boyfriend. And he's not my lover. He is the man I'm hopelessly attracted to. The man who knows me inside out. The man who plays with me and fucks with me and when it's all said and done, he'd probably crush everything that's good inside me.

He owns my heart. Whether he knows it or not. Whether he wants it or not. And that alone tells me in how much trouble I am.

"Ready?"

His voice thunders across the room bringing reality back into focus. He's no longer on his phone, and he finished working on his cufflinks.

His gaze stays on me as he shrugs his jacket on. That's all I need to feel my legs shaking again. This is what he does best. And he does it every single time I slip away from him or falter or question something related to him.

He picks me up and brings me back to him.

With a gaze, a smile, or a smoldering look. Sometimes by trashing my suitors. He doesn't care what are the means through which he accomplishes what he wants.

The moment he senses I'm crumbling inside he throws me a lifeline, something—anything, a bone to chew on or a shred of hope to cling to.

And yet, he never cares to stay with me, or fully be with me. Because he never wants to give me much. That's why he always pulls back.

And then, there's something else.

Once in a while, I sense him losing focus. Perhaps his interest.

Who knows? I wish I knew.

"Red suits you well," he says deadpan.

I flick an eyebrow up, no smile.

"You too," I say, pointing with my chin in his direction. "Not in red. Generally speaking," I say, cold.

He smiles.

"You okay?"

As if he cares.

"Yes. You?" I ask, and he gives me a wolfish laughter that vibrates through my bones.

He might be the end of me.

"Let's go," he says, his eyes narrowing with an amused smile.

I may not know much about this man, but one thing is sure. For whatever reason, he is set to torment me.

Gallantly, he motions me to the exit door. Reluctantly, I walk ahead of him. I know he set his eyes on me. I feel their heat rolling down my back and butt.

"How late are we staying?" I ask, spinning around fast.

I catch him. He doesn't flinch.

Slowly, he lifts his gaze from below my waist.

"How long it takes, Ms. Fox. You have other plans?" he asks, in a mood to fuck with me.

"Am I allowed to?" I ask, playing his game.

"Sure. You can do whatever you want Ms. Fox. I will not impose on your freedom," he says, serious this time, and instantly, I regret my question.

I slip into the elevator and keep my mouth shut all the way down to the first floor.

We walk across the lobby, quite a few people turning heads as we walk by. Ready, his car is parked in front of the hotel. He motions me to his Ferrari.

Silently, I climb in.

I manage to lock my seatbelt on my own this time.

He gives me a side glance as he shoves the key into the ignition.

"Are you pouting for some reason?"

"No, I'm not," I say sternly. "What do you need me for tonight?"

Silence meets my words. I have no other choice but glance at him.

He finishes giving me a slow once over and briefly locks my eyes before he looks away as he steers left.

"Yes?" I insist.

"You worked for me long enough. I'm sure you can figure it out on your own," he says dryly, no humor in his voice.

This goes from bad to worse.

Sullen, I turn my gaze away from him and glance out the window. The car swishes down the street, the streetlights flying by. I can't believe that less than twenty-four hours ago, he was holding me in his arms and made love to me as if he cared.

A half hour later, we pull in front of an elegant venue, a valet greeting us promptly as we slip out of his ride. Luxurious cars and limos slowly crawl to the front. People step out of the cars, strolling to the entrance.

We don't even take a few steps on the stairs, and he's already approached by two men who recognize him.

We have to stop.

Minutes later, we enter the ballroom brimming with lights. More than a hundred guests are here tonight, their voices drowning the sound of live music.

He makes the rounds, and I follow him. He meets a lot of people he had done business with. Some of them are business partners prospects.

We take seats at a table where a few other couples sit. Two chairs remain empty, but not for long. Close to ten o'clock an elegant woman accompanied by a handsome man fill those seats too.

She slides next to Lex, the handsome man accompanying her—who I quickly learn is her assistant, sits at her right.

Unlike me, he doesn't have a crush on his boss. It doesn't take long before I realize that men notice him more often than women, and the attraction seemingly is mutual.

Lex and the woman begin to talk about their business affairs, their conversation stretching for a few good minutes.

I listen to them attentively.

The woman, a statuesque brunette with dark eyes, flawless skin and plump lips runs a Marketing and Advertising Agency.

Very much interested in landing a new account, she makes a tempting proposal to Lex. The woman is not only beautiful but also smart. And conniving if I'm truthful.

He's affable with her, listening to her intently. Their talk is all business, and I don't sense anything else going on. But if there were, she's in a completely different league than me.

I can't say she doesn't like him because she does. There's no wedding ring on her finger, and she seems to be at least a decade older

than him, but age doesn't play a role when beauty, brains, and money are involved.

His eyes glint with respect for her, and even a shred of admiration.

Something rubs me the wrong way.

A new song comes on, and he invites her to dance. Flushed to her hairline, she accepts. He holds his hand out for her as she pushes out of her chair.

My blood slugs through my veins as my eyes follow their silhouettes all the way to the dance floor where they get swallowed by the crowd.

My chest feels heavy.

I keep my gaze on them, every bit of that image charring my brain.

I feel bad. Physically bad. I run a trembling hand over my brow and swallow hard.

His arm curls around her waist, his billion dollar smile flashing on his lips. Her eyes gleam with pleasure.

He leans toward her and whispers something in her ear. I crush a curse between my lips.

Tossing her head back, she lets out a melodious laughter that sets off her perfect lips and grin. Her hair bounces down her back, her chest moving as she laughs. Her body arches in his embrace.

This is flirting at its best, and the woman seems to be a master. She's so far from the blonde who tugged at his dick the other night.

She is a seasoned, sultry woman who can have any man she wants if she puts her mind to it.

"Do you want to dance?"

The voice pulls me out of my misery.

I flick my head to the side.

"Hi. My name is Nicholas," says the man who works for the temptress.

We connect hands.

"Hi. I'm Dahlia."

"She never cares to make the introductions," he says, and I chuckle softly out of politeness if nothing else. "Dance?"

He tilts an eyebrow, his face finally coming into focus.

"Yeah... Sure."

He rises to his feet, takes my hand and leads me to the dance floor. Slowly, we spin, not far from where Lex, and the goddess twirl, embraced.

Nicholas, a brown-haired man not much older than me proves to be a seasoned dancer. His arm drapes around my waist as he gently leads me.

"How long have you been working for Lex Harrington?" he asks.

"A few weeks. Why?" I ask suspiciously.

He glances at me and smiles.

"How long have you been in love with him?"

My blood drains from my face. I can't even muster a grin.

"About the same time," I admit.

We share a quiet chuckle that helps me to relax.

"Are you good at reading people or I am so obvious?"

He purses his lips, a smile spilling in his eyes.

"Both, but..." he says as my grin falls from my lips, "you may not be obvious to the casual bystander, but you sure are to him."

"Shit," I murmur.

"It's not necessarily something bad," he says as we twirl to a different corner. "I think he likes you too."

"He also likes your boss, it seems. Probably more than he likes me," I mutter, swinging my gaze across the room, just in time to catch sight of the woman singsonging another melodious thrill.

"That comes with the territory," he says, but this is not exactly what I wanted to hear. "Men like him never fall without a battle," he says, shooting a glance in Lex's direction as well. "And there's always a long line of contenders. But life with a man like him can be extra sweet if you learn his secrets and know how to make him yours."

What is he talking about?

I can't figure out Lex one minute from another, let alone his deep-seated secrets.

"Battle? Contenders? Do I look like a queen with an army?" I ask, smiling.

He laughs softly.

"A lot is going for you, sweetheart."

I laugh as if he just shared a good joke.

"What if I don't know how to use what I have."

"I think you do, but the man is not an easy ride, and you look like the kind who easily gets lost."

I look at him, intrigued.

"Your heart is already his," he says as we connected eyes briefly. "But you already knew that."

"Do you know him?" I ask.

"We met a couple of times before."

"Is he always that friendly with your boss?"

"Uh-huh. But that doesn't mean a thing."

"She likes him."

"He's not the only man she likes, and he figured her out quickly. He's pretty much like her. People playing this kind of game at that level usually stay away from each other. There's no fun, no chase. They know the tricks. The outcome. And what's worse, they know there's no prize waiting for them at the end."

"What do you mean?"

"These are not the kind of people who give away their hearts. They like to play. A lot. But not to get caught in the game. He could easily fuck her," he says bluntly. "But at the end of the day, she'd go her way and so would he."

He pauses while I ponder.

"In other words, they need clueless people like me?"

He smiles.

"I wouldn't say clueless."

"Ignorant."

He laughs.

"Give it whatever name you wish. What you have is exactly what attracts him to you."

I stay quiet for a moment.

"You know why clueless people are fun?" he asks.

I smile.

"No."

"They're unpredictable. That's what makes them such a good chase. And sometimes that's exactly what blindsides a man like him and makes him fall when he expects the least. It's the nature's way of getting back at them."

I study his face for a moment. He makes sense. Yes, he does, but...

"Clueless people are also easy targets," I say.

“That’s true. But someone like him would never pick a woman just for the sake of it. Someone he wouldn’t like. That’s why I said he likes you, but it’s certainly up to you how you play your card.”

I swing my eyes back to Lex and the seductress. He tightens his arm around her. I suddenly feel disheartened.

“How would you play your card if you were me?” I murmur.

D^{AHLIA}

NICHOLAS' gaze lingers on Lex.

It doesn't take a genius to realize he finds him extremely attractive as well.

He shifts his eyes back to me. I look at him full of hope.

"Why do you think he finds you attractive?" he asks.

"Besides being clueless and unpredictable?"

"Uh-huh. And aside from the fact that you are beautiful," he says casually, a warm smile filling his eyes.

"I don't know if he really likes me. Sometimes he does. But sometimes it feels as if he doesn't."

"What does he do when he *doesn't* like you?"

"He makes my life a living hell."

"He totally likes you," he says.

I grin.

"You think?"

"Yes."

"And yet he's hugging your boss right now."

"As I said before, my boss is not a mystery to him."

"How am I a mystery to him?"

"Do you know everything about yourself?"

I shake my head.

"Probably not."

"Yeah...That's exactly why you intrigue him. In a way, you're like an unwritten book," he says. "He can't predict how you'd react to him. Trust me when I say this, he's seen everything. He knows women. He doesn't have a problem getting what he wants, and he doesn't have to settle for less than what he truly likes."

The tune comes to an end.

He walks me back to the table while Lex and his dance partner stride across the room and stop at a different table in the opposite corner.

I turn to Nicholas, who brings his drink to his lips.

"What do you think he likes?"

He studies me for a moment as he sips his wine.

"He likes a woman who can take him by surprise. Someone who can keep him guessing. A woman who knows how to claim him. He gets hard all right, but the man also has a brain. He loves power and to conquer, but he also likes to be enslaved by it."

My shoulders slump.

"Well if that's the case, the battle is lost. There's not much left to conquer," I mutter.

He tilts his head to the side, searching my eyes for a moment. His lips curl into a slow grin.

"Sex is only a part of it, sweetheart. And If he fucked you more than once, he's already hooked."

I wish he were right. But there are so many things, Nicholas doesn't know about him.

And some of them, I don't even know.

"So... You didn't tell me what you'd do if you were me," I say.

"I'd forced him out of his game. I'd push his buttons. I'd dig deep into his emotions."

I swing my eyes at him. He looks at me in silence.

"It's risky."

"And yet, it's stimulating. I bet he'd love it."

"That's like saying to get better at the game he's already mastering."

He laughs softly.

"Yeah... Something like that."

"What else?" I ask hurriedly as Lex and Nicholas' boss stride across the room.

He trains his eyes on Lex and ponders for a moment.

"I'd fuck his brains out," he says, without tearing his gaze away from Lex.

Passion threads through his voice, and then I realize. He'd do it literally.

Smiling, he looks at me.

"That's how you get him."



DAHLIA

"EVERYTHING GOOD?" Lex asks as he walks up on Nicholas and me sharing a moment of silence.

He pulls a chair out for his companion.

"Yes," I throw at him, averting my eyes.

The woman runs her eyes on both of us. I quickly move away from Nicholas.

Lex, the publicist and the men we met the first night in London start talking business not far from me.

Nicholas finds a couple of friends and migrates to a different table. People start to mingle and move around.

A hand lands on my shoulder as a slow tune starts drifting through the air again.

"Do you want to dance?" asks a thick, honey-like voice.

I look up and over my shoulder.

From the nearby table, Nicholas catches sight of the man and me. Furtively, he motions me to go.

Not even in his thirties, the man fashions a tuxedo and a perfect smile not to mention arresting, good looks.

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice Lex's stare, and then I remember Nicholas words.

A grin slides promptly onto my face.

"Sure."

He holds his hand out for me as I rise to my feet and gingerly clasp his fingers. Back arched, hair tumbling down, bottom push out

I strut at his side.

Smiling ear to ear, I sashay all the way to the middle of the dance floor, hoping that the heat I feel on my back is Lex's stare.

The man wraps me in his embrace as we start to dance. Through some miracle, I manage to calm down my heart, and soon, I start enjoying his company.

Ashton Blackmore is the owner of a luxury hotel chain in Europe. His name sounded familiar. He throws a compliment or two my way, and I begin to like him.

Forcing myself not to gaze in Lex's direction, I focus solely on him.

It works.

I start to care less about Lex and more about the dark haired stranger who smoothly twirls with me on the dance floor.

It helps that Ashton Blackmore keeps me entertained with his witty humor and relaxed attitude. Soon, we're flirting, and I laugh at every joke he says.

As the dance come to an end, he invites me to the terrace.

"Let me grab my clutch."

He's waiting for me patiently as I sneak back to the table and furtively collect my purse from my chair. Just as I spin around, I catch Lex's eyes, or should I say, a sight of his glare.

Before he can say anything—it's so obvious that he wants to express his opinion, I pull away.

On my way to the terrace, I secretly wave at Nicholas. He gives me a wink and a thumbs up.

We barely make it to the patio, and my phone starts buzzing. Ashton Blackmore glances at me as I ignore it for the second time.

"You need to take that?" he says, a smile creasing his arched lips.

"Nah-uh," I say, grinning back at him.

"Okay. I'll get something to drink. What do you want?"

"I'm good," I say, leaning against the handrail.

He turns around and walks away.

I pull the clutch open and fumble for my phone.

Two missed calls from Lex. A text message lights up my screen as I get ready to shove my phone back into my purse.

Lex: What are you doing?

There's no emoji out there for how pissed he must be.

I drop my phone in my purse when a thought surfaces in my head. I pull it back out.

Me: Good. You?

A few moments pass by, and as I try to power it off, the screen lights up again.

Lex: Which part of the question didn't you understand?

Oh, my fingers can't type the reply fast enough.

Me: I can ask you the same thing.

I flip my clutch open and toss my phone inside.

"Everything okay?" asks Ashton as he nears me with one drink in each hand.

"I brought you something anyway," he says and hands me a glass of white wine.

A fine layer of mist covers the delicate glass.

"It's good. Try it," he says, smiling.

I dip my lips into the golden liquid.

An aroma of sweet grapes explodes in my mouth.

"Mmm... It's really good."

The phone vibrates again.

Startled, I almost spill my drink on my dress.

"Is there something wrong with your phone?" he asks, his lips curling into a knowing smile as he lifts his glass to his mouth.

"You'd think so..." I say jokingly, and he lets out a soft chuckle.

"Maybe you should put a stop to it," he says, giving me a flirting smile, and I start to *really* like him.

"Yeah, maybe," I say, my cheeks burning from the wine, and him.

Grinning, I lock Ashton's eyes, and just when I start reading something interesting in his eyes, my smile falls from my lips.

Lex strides across the terrace, his eyes slicing me. My blood drains from my body.

"It's not that easy to put a stop to it..." I murmur, my voice trailing off.

His eyes could easily kill me.

Ashton Blackmore glances casually over his shoulder just as Lex pulls to a short stop next to us.

"Miss Fox, may I have a word with you?" he says with a menacing voice.

"Everything okay?" Ashton Blackmore intervenes.

A moment of silence falls between us.

They glance at me.

"Ashton," I say, sounding intimate with him as if we woke up in the same bed. "This is my boss, Alexander Harrington." I turn to Lex who sears me with his gaze. "Mr. Harrington," I say, extremely business-like, "this is my friend Ashton Blackmore, the owner of Blackmore Hotels. I'm sure you've heard about him."

Biting his lip, Lex makes an effort to act civil.

They shake hands, and quickly delve into a business-related conversation as I sip the rest of my wine and ping pong my eyes back and forth between them, watching them with interest as if they're ticking devices ready to go off.

Tension sets in Lex's jaw as he makes every effort to speak cordially. Ashton Blackmore, hardly a newbie at this game, gets a kick out of it.

"If you don't mind, I need my assistant for the rest of the evening," he says to Ashton, who watches us from above the rim of his glass.

"Sure," he says, not buying it one bit.

"Miss Fox?" Lex mutters.

He motions to the exit as I collect my clutch taking my sweet time. Something tells me he'd like nothing better than yank me up on his shoulder and carry me out like the angry caveman he is right now.

I say goodbye to Ashton who winks at me as if he knows what's going on, and smiling, I rush ahead of Lex.

He catches up with me and grabs my elbow.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Excuse me?" I pull my arm out of his lock, glaring at him. "This is a party, isn't it?"

"And you're paid to be here with me. Have you forgotten?"

"And here I am," I say, raising my voice.

He pulls me to the side.

"You're not supposed to flirt while you're doing your job," he says, dead serious.

My eyes dart back and forth as I study his expression.

"How can you even make such a claim? You couldn't possibly know if I was flirting or not. You weren't even in the same room with me. And even if I were? What's your problem?"

"The problem is that it reflects poorly on me. This may be a private event, but business is its sole purpose."

I purse my lips.

"Mmm... Really? Was dancing and flirting with Catherine Walker business?"

He looks at me, thunderstruck.

Without another word, I turn around and pull away, his footsteps following me shortly.

I push through a set of doors and walk into a large foyer filled with people.

I pick up the pace and sneak behind a group of guests, slipping out the building faster than him.

"Dahlia?"

He thunders my name—not many times has he said it lately. His voice rips through the air, making a few men and women turn their heads.

I don't have time to jump into the cab as his footsteps follow me closely.

I take a swift turn, veering down the empty street. I pick up the pace, almost running.

He sprints after me and catches me just as I take another turn and enter a dark, deserted alley.

He grabs me harshly.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" he says, panting, his hand curling around my neck, his body crashing with mine into the wall.

I prop my hands against his chest and try to push him away without much success. He grabs my hair and pins me with his hips, his free hand clutching my chin.

His eyes blaze at me.

"What the hell are you doing, Dahlia?"

I look at him, spiteful.

"I can ask you the same thing, Lex. What do you think you're doing? Clearly, you have a hard time to figure out what I am to you. You think I'm some kind of a toy? Something you can play with and drop it before you pick it up again when you remember or when someone else wants to take a look at it. Is that it? What makes you think you can fuck me and then forget about me and then fuck me

again? Huh? You think I'm some empty shell that only has a hot spot between her legs and no brain or heart? Is that it?"

His eyes glint cold as a muscle starts ticking in his jaw.

His grip slackens on me. I yank his hand off my neck and push him away. He takes a step back and slides his hands into his pockets.

Silent, he looks at me.

"Nothing to say, huh?" I say.

I almost taste my tears in my mouth. His reaction is not what I thought it would be. Nicholas was so fucking wrong. Or perhaps not, but what he thought Lex had for me is nowhere to be found.

I push off the wall and straighten, my vision blurry with tears.

My shoulders slump as I pull away from him.

I walk by him, and he doesn't say a single thing, he's gaze following me in silence.

"Go fuck yourself, Lex. And the woman who can't wait to have you between her legs. Business my fucking ass..."

He pivots after me, his hand brushing my shoulder, and I spin as fast as my voice shoots from my throat.

"Live me alone!!" I growl, my voice broken with tears and woven with anger.

My heels clink-clank all the way to the end of the alley. I hear his footsteps right behind me. Once I'm on the sidewalk again, I hail a cab.

One stops in front of me in a shrill of tearing tires.

"Dahlia?"

His voice gets cut off as I slam the door shut.

"Where to, Miss?" the driver asks as he pulls away.

After asking the man's advice on London's clubs, half an hour later, I find myself not far from the hotel, in front of a dark building with strings of colorful lights hanging from the frame of glass doors.

I push inside.

The crowd moves like a giant body, following the rhythm of electronic dance music.

The throbbing lights are blinding, the sound deafening. Nobody seems to care. Sliding along a wall, I pull somewhere in the back, in an adjacent room, and near the bar. People drink and make out. At least the noise is not that loud.

Perfect.

I've never been to such a place in my life, and tonight is not the best moment to start being adventurous.

I manage to find a place at the bar and order a drink. I pay as soon as I get my glass. Just in case, I need to leave in a hurry.

Drink in hand, I retreat in a corner, and hop onto a bar stool, taking in the crazed crowd. They're dancing, waving their arms and bodies.

It doesn't take long before two males attach to me, and things get quickly uncomfortable. The alcohol glints in their eyes, and I'm already looking for the exit.

My hotel room is not where I want to be right now, but I have no choice.

I tear away from the men, yet one of them insists on accompanying me outside. I pick up the pace. So does he, and by the time I step outside, his hand is curled around my shoulder.

"Take your hand off me," I bark.

He starts to laugh.

It may be funny to him but not to me, and before I can make it back and signal to a bouncer, a man lifts my stalker off my arm and throws him to the ground.

"What the fuck is your fucking problem, man?" says the man, pulling off the sidewalk.

For a moment he thinks about charging at Lex, and then he meets his eyes, and spins away, mumbling.

"Have her. I didn't want her anyway..." the man says, pouting.

"Get in the car!" Lex barks at me.

I pull away from him as well, click-clacking toward the hotel.

He paces after me and grabs my arm.

I turn to him, my finger poking at his chest.

"Stop talking to me like this," I say.

We clash gazes for a moment, emotion glinting briefly in his eyes.

"Get in the car," he says with a softer voice.

I look at him, surprised.

"Why was that so fucking hard?" I ask.

I peel his hand off me and walk back to his car. The black Ferrari swallows us, and soon we pull away.

"I don't want to go back to the party or at the hotel."

He glances at me.

"What's wrong with the hotel?"

"Your personality shifts when you enter that suite."

"Really? What's wrong with that personality?"

A smile threads through his voice.

"Let me rephrase it. You turn into an asshole."

"Oh, I see..." he says. "You're not exactly a peach either."

"What can I say? You're an inspiration to me."

"So what's the deal with Blackmore?"

I whip my head at him.

"Are you really asking me that?"

He bites his lip to stifle a retort.

"Mmm-hmm."

"Well. I'll tell you what's the deal with him when you care to share your business with Madame Catherine Walker."

"She worked for me in the past."

"I bet she did," I say sourly.

"And she'll probably handle our business if we open a branch here, but you should already know that. That's why I'm paying you. Are you jealous?"

"Nope. You?"

"No."

"Then why are you asking me about Blackmore?"

The car pulls to a stop as we wait to enter in a club's parking lot.

"The man has a reputation," he says, looking at me.

My eyebrows tilt up with surprise.

"And?"

"And you wouldn't want to have your heart crushed," he says, his voice so innocent and his expression so perfectly genuine, I start to laugh.

"Are you doing this on purpose?"

"What?" he says, barely suppressing a smile.

"Fucking with me?"

"It's the truth," he says seriously, our eyes locking for a moment.

"If you're so damn concerned with me and my heart, then you should look at yourself first. You have way more power over me than he does," I say as we slide into a parking spot.

Without waiting for his comment, I collect my purse and step out.

"Wait," he says as I already pull away.

He erases the space between us and takes my hand, our fingers lacing together, his warmth taking me by surprise.

Dumbstruck, I look at him.

He leans to me and murmurs, "I don't want anyone to break your heart, Dahlia," he murmurs. "Myself included."

Without another word, he tears his gaze away from my eyes and walks me into the bar.

D^{AHLIA}

It's a posh club with black walls, silver mirrors, faint lights, large round booths and smooth music in the background.

The hostess wears a flowing chiffon gown and statement jewelry. Her hairdo is reminiscent of an ancient Greek goddess.

The whole place looks like a temple of lust. People are clustered in small groups, couples sharing private booths.

"What is this?" I murmur.

The hostess greets us with a small smile, addressing him by his first name which irks me right from the get-go.

"Good evening Mr. Alexander."

Something rings familiar, and then it dawns on me where I've heard this before.

Elsa and the girls from Silver know him as Mr. Alexander.

I glance around looking for the dancers. There are none, at least not in the main room.

We follow the hostess who leads us through a small corridor, past a few chambers to the door of a private room.

She pushes it open.

I glance at him as they both wait for me to walk in. He motions me to the large plush couch. I set my clutch to the side and sink into the velvety seat.

The hostess locks his eyes briefly. He orders a bottle of wine and slides next to me. I pin my gaze on him and wait for some sort of explanation.

Smiling, he averts his eyes. He sets his phone on the table and shrugs out of his suit jacket.

His shirt is open at the neckline.

My eyes stay on him as he unbuttons his cuffs and rolls them up.

He finally swings his eyes to me.

"You look like you have a lot of questions. Go ahead."

"Why are we here?" I ask.

A smile curls his lips.

"To talk."

"Why here?"

"You said you didn't like the hotel."

"I said I don't like *you* when we're there."

"That's why we're here," he says, his eyes flicking to the door.

A server as beautiful and put together as the hostess enters the room and sets the bottle of wine and two glasses on the table in front of us.

She floats away, smoothly disappearing as the door closes behind her with a soft sound.

"I'm listening," he says as he pours wine into the glasses, evading my eyes.

"What's this place?"

A secret smile drapes on his lips.

"What is it?" I ask, intrigued.

"It's a club," he says, placing the glass in my hand and locking my eyes.

He clinks my glass and brings his drink to his lips.

"Taste it. It's good," he mutters and takes a swig.

I do the same and lick my lips. It's really good. I take a second sip.

"A place like, um... what? *Silver*? Or *Red's*?"

"Something like that."

"You've been here before," I say.

He looks down at his glass, smiling at a private thought.

"The place is mine," he finally says and takes another sip of his wine.

I watch him in silence as he runs the tip of his tongue across his bottom lip. Suddenly I feel like tasting that wine on lips.

"Are you planning on moving here?" I ask.

"I don't know. I may," he says and glances at me.

I barely suppress my impulse to run my hand through his hair and brush a stray strand away from his eyes.

"Why are you asking?"

I shrug at first, and then I drink more wine. Warmth spills through my body, helping me relax.

"I'll miss you if you do," I say with a soft voice, not looking at him, perfectly aware that it's the wine talking.

He chuckles softly.

"Was that your plan? To bring me here, give me wine and make me spill out the words I'd never say otherwise?" I ask.

He empties his glass.

"I wouldn't call it a plan?"

"An expectation then?" I ask, amused.

"Yeah... Probably."

"May I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"You said you might have been in love at one time. Perhaps with the wrong woman..."

He nods.

"Okay. But what happened with those women who fell for you? I'm sure there were a few."

A smile slowly curls his lips.

"There weren't that many."

I throw him an incredulous look.

"You can't possibly say that to me."

He nods again.

"Yes, I can. I didn't say women weren't attracted to me. They were and are," he says tossing me a glance that makes me hot. "But I didn't mess with them. There was never enough time for that."

I set my glass on the table and look at him attentively.

"How come?"

"I picked a certain kind of woman, and never let them close to me."

"What if despite the precautions, they fell for you anyway. What happened then?"

"I gave them reasons not to love me," he says, serious, shifting his eyes away from me.

My mouth falls open.

I gasp in disbelief.

"Oh, my God! That's what you've been doing to me too."

He watches me intently as I grapple with my newfound wisdom.

"Good and bad. Hot and cold. You played with me, making sure I didn't get attached to you."

He doesn't say anything, and the more I think about it, the more convinced I am that I'm right.

My warm, playful disposition goes right out the window, swept away by anger.

"How can you be such an arrogant asshole?" I ask, the alcohol cranking up my boldness a notch or two.

Unfazed, he looks at me. My eyes get misty with tears.

"I'm not," he says softly.

"Oh, yes. I think you are. First of all what makes you think I'm falling for you?"

That swiftly puts a smile on his face. I completely dislike it.

"Okay. Never mind," I say, grabbing the clutch and leaping up to my feet.

My move was perhaps too fast. As I shoot up, the floor suddenly feels unstable, and the room begins to spin with me.

I slide back into my seat and grab his arm.

"You okay?" he asks.

"Yes..." I say softly. "It's the wine."

He cups my hand and shifts his body to me. Wrapping his arms around me, he pulls me into his chest. My hand goes up on his back, and my tears fall on his shirt as I press my cheek against his shoulder.

Slowly, he strokes my hair.

"Stop thinking so damn much Dahlia, and let's find out what this is. Okay?" he mutters with a quiet voice.

His words flow through me faster than the alcohol. I flick my eyes to him.

He looks straight into my eyes and as many times before I have this feeling that he's entering me.

"Okay?" he asks again.

"Yes," I murmur.

Slowly, he runs his thumb across my jawline as I slightly part my lips. The emotion in his eyes makes my heart spin in my chest.

"Good," he mutters before he presses his lips against mine and shifts my whole universe on its axis.

I slide my hand up on his chest and let a moan roll off my lips the very moment we begin to kiss.

I'm completely drunk. And drunk on him.

His taste, the lingering aroma of the wine, the dim lights and his touch make my blood explode. It runs faster, churning heat I drown in.

Warm, I respond to him, biting his lip slightly, and tangling my tongue with his, breathing into him. The pleasure grows inside me, woven with my lust for him.

I lean to him, hungry for his kiss. It doesn't take long, and his hand slips between my legs. In a daze, I part my thighs, relishing his smooth touch.

His fingers roll up, a moment later brushing my wet flesh through the sheer fabric of my panties.

Quickly, I get hot and throbbing.

"Lex..." I murmur, slipping my hand inside his shirt.

"Yeah, baby," he purrs with a throaty voice.

He locks my mouth again, his fingers slinking inside my panties, his touch making me tremble with pleasure.

I arch and press my breasts against his chest as he curls his fingers and slowly thrust them into me.

"Fuck..." I murmur against his lips, my body shaking in anticipation, my hand already on his belt.

A muffled growl vibrates in my throat as he starts circling my clit with his thumb. My entrance tightens around his fingers. Sliding them in and out, he stirs my wet arousal, igniting a fire in my core.

Palming his groin, I flick his fly open and slip my hand inside his pants. His shaft burns against my palm. Moaning with delight, I close my fingers around him.

He's hard and pulsing, and I'm almost coming.

"Maybe... we... should go back to the hotel," I murmur, high on him.

"Uh-huh... We will," he mutters against my lips, stroking me slowly while thrusting his fingers deeper.

"Lex..."

I squeeze his cock with one hand, desperately clutching his neck with the other.

He watches me with hooded eyes as I quickly lose control. My surroundings become a blur, my body drawing so much pleasure from his touch.

I rub his shaft harder.

"Let's go," he says, his gaze burning through me, his lips arching into a smile.

He closes his fly and slides my dress down before he grabs my hand and pulls me up. I follow him in a trance.

He pushes through the door, and then takes a right instead of left, and leads me out the building through the back exit.

The summer evening falls around us, the hot air sticking to my skin, making me even hotter.

The parking lot behind the building is dark and empty. I spot his car not far from us.

I pull to a swift stop. He swings his gaze to me.

"I want you here," I say.

His eyes gleam with a faint smile.

I drop the clutch to the ground, his arms curling around me as my hands frame his face.

Our mouths collide as we crash into each other, my back pressing against the wall.

He lifts the hemline of my dress while swiftly unbuckling his belt. The moment I feel him inside me can't come fast enough.

He yanks me up on his arms, my legs open, my panties ripped, barely dangling from my thigh, and holding me against his body, he harshly enters me.

"Damn it... Lex," I growl.

He's hot. Unstoppable.

He thrusts hard and deep, making every part of me shudder.

"Don't stop," I mumble.

The more he hammers me, the more I need him.

His biceps flex as he holds me against his thrusts. I rip his shirt open to feel his chest against mine while he drives his cock into me, over and over again.

Grabbing my butt, he starts slamming into me, breaking my body, clipping my breaths, making my blood ram ferociously through my veins.

His bare chest crashes against mine with every shove, his eyes turning into liquid fire. The ghost of a smile curls his lips as he locks his gaze with mine, and takes me all the way.

"Lex..." I moan, losing my breath.

In a trance, I start to shudder.

L^{EX}

HER HANDS CLUTCH MY NECK, her eyelids slowly sliding down as she begins to shake, staring blankly. Her lips tremble, her voice modulating into beautiful moans, her soft, warm core molding around me, washing me with her arousal, spasming around me, and pushing me to my own high.

Locking my arms around her, I rail her without holding much back, holding her onto that high until her voice morphs into a muffled panting and the quiet calling of my name.

She almost starts to cry as we push together through that mind-blowing, intense peak of pleasure.

As we slow down, she slackens in my arms, and starts kissing my neck and chest, completely swept away by the way she feels.

Still hot and hungry, she makes it so easy to get hard for her again.

I start to kiss her, and slowly, we fall into each other, as famished as before. After a few more moments, I let her down easy, and close my pants.

She looks around, lost. Her hair is a mess, and her lips are wet and swollen, her eyes looking like a stormy cloud.

I pick up her purse and hand it to her and then I do my best to straighten her dress.

Dazed, she smiles at me.

"Let's get you to the hotel," I say, taking her hand, and lacing my fingers through hers.

Slowly, I walk her to my car.

The doors pull up, and we slip in.

She looks at me, a mysterious smile sitting on her face. Grinning, I give her a double take.

That 'just fucked' look on her face makes me want to pound her again.

Smiling, I steer the car away.

Twenty minutes later, we enter the hotel. I drape my jacket over her shoulders, and we walk across the lobby, hand in hand.

"Where are we going?" she asks as we go past her floor.

I curl my arm around her shoulders.

"You'll see."

The doors slide open, and we walk out of the elevator.

Moments later, we enter my suite.

Windows and doors are open—the way I left them, drapes flowing in the wind.

A soft light slithers in from outside.

I tear away from her.

"Don't turn the lights on," she says walking to the window, peering outside.

"I won't," I say.

"It's beautiful," she murmurs, looking at the lights glimmering in the distance.

I put some music on, the soft sound of a trumpet filling the room.

She turns to me, her eyes glinting with a smile.

"How do you...? Is that for me?" she asks incredulously as her favorite tune, a slow, nostalgic song starts drifting through the air. "You can't possibly say you just stumbled onto this."

"I didn't. It's for you..." I say, observing her reaction.

A warm smile creases her lips.

"You knew you'd bring me here?"

I grin slyly.

"Yeah, sort of..."

I pull away from her.

On my way to the bathroom, I peel off my shirt and toss it on a chair.

I let the water fill the tub as I lit a few candles. From the bar, I bring another bottle of wine and two glasses.

I turn the water off, a few drops still dripping.

The sound of falling water mixes with the soft music as I set the glasses and the bottle on the side of the tub and walk back into the living room.

The moment I swagger in, her dress falls off, landing on the floor. Holding my gaze, she steps out of it. Wearing only heels and a sultry smile, she struts to me.

Hmm.

Biting my lip to push back a lopsided grin, I take in her perky ass and naughty tits, promptly getting a rush through my cock.

Smiling, she catches the slow motion of my palm sweeping my hard length through my pants. She gives me come-hither look as she sashays toward me, eyes locked with mine.

My gaze slides down on her, sweeping her full chest and smoothly arched hips. A curtain of hair drapes over her shoulders, her lips curling into a sexy grin.

She stops in front of me, pushes up on her toes, twines her arms around my neck, and, virtually naked, glues to me.

"I don't know how you plan on *not breaking* my heart, Lex. This sure isn't it," she says smiling, yet a bit of sadness seeps into her voice.

"I don't plan *on breaking* your heart either," I murmur against her lips, running my palms down her back, cupping her rear.

"But?" she says softly.

I lean closer and murmur in her ear.

"It might not be in my control," I say, sounding so damn serious. "Either way..." I say, recovering swiftly. "This is not something we can figure out tonight."

She pulls away slightly so that she can read my eyes.

I hold her gaze and quickly notice the disappointment on her face.

Softly, I brush a lock of hair away from her face.

"I can't promise you something that I don't know if it's meant to happen. On the other hand, I can't say it won't happen. What I want right now is to let me love you. Tonight. And maybe tomorrow. And when we go back. I don't want to lie to you or myself. But I don't want to push you away either. There are things I don't know right

now, and perhaps there are things you don't know as well. We both have to find those answers on our own. Make sense?"

She nods softly, her eyes glistening with emotion and tears. Smiling, I brush one away.

"What I just said is not a bad thing."

"I know..." she says.

"Then why are you crying?"

She smiles.

"Precisely because it's not a bad thing," she says, and purses her lips, fighting back more emotion.

And more tears.

I tighten my arms around her body as she buries her face into my chest.



DAHLIA

THE NIGHT BREEZE sweeps the living room and the bathroom, bringing in a scent of flowers.

The long drapes puff in the wind, the candle lights struggling to stay alive. The bathtub water is warm, and the foam smells like roses and jasmine.

The soft piano and nostalgic trumpet still fill the air with a melodious, sad tune. Dipped into the water, we listen to the music, surrounded by the dim lights, indulging in the aroma of the wine lingering on our lips.

We talk and flirt and read each other eyes, and while I drink him in, I realize how much I lost of me to him.

He pours another glass of wine for me. And one for him. We clink the glasses.

"For this beautiful night," I say, rushing to speak before he has the chance to say something.

He slowly nods.

We lock eyes as we tilt our glasses back. He sets his drink on the side, and then he takes mine from my hand. Shifting his position, he

turns to me and wraps an arm around my shoulders.

I crash into his chest.

His skin is smooth, his muscles hard. Running a hand through his hair, he brushes it all back, his silver-blue eyes glinting in the dimness.

His fingers slowly tip my chin up as he tenderly starts to kiss me. I splay my fingers on his chest, breathing through him.

Smoothly, he tears his lips away from mine, a slow grin curving his lips.

He cups my face. I lean against his touch.

"How come no one loved you before, beautiful girl?" he asks, his voice so deep and sultry I get a flutter in my chest.

I part my lips, but cannot speak.

"Hmm?" he purrs as he caresses my face.

"I don't know," I murmur.

Busy to soak in his beautiful eyes, I don't give his question much thought. "I didn't meet the right man, I guess."

"Hmm..." he says, amused. "What is it your kind of man?"

His hand slides down my neck, my focus centering on his touch.

"Someone who knows women..." I mutter, captivated by his smile. "Someone who'd give it the slightest thought. And perhaps, someone willing to go beneath the surface of a woman and touch her heart... There aren't that many, you know?"

I lift my gaze and lock his eyes, his grin slowly fading away.

"You think I may be the man for you?" he asks softly.

I shrug.

"I don't know..."

And then, I smile.

"I wish I knew, but the closer I get to you, and the more time I spend with you, the less I know you," I say.

He breathes out a quiet chuckle.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"I don't know if you're my man... But one thing I know, you are that kind of man."

"And yet?"

"Something's holding you back," I say. "And I hope it's not me."

"It's not you," he says seriously.

My heart warms up, but at the same time fills with sorrow.

He must've noticed the shift in my expression because he kisses me again. "Doing this to me really makes things harder," I say as he breaks the kiss.

A beautiful grin lights up his eyes.

"I know..."

He ponders for a moment.

"But if there's one thing I can tell you, it's not to be afraid. Have a little faith. All right?" he says.

I nod, although I'm not convinced that's the answer.

"How come no one has loved you before?" I say, turning the tables on him. "I mean... Besides you pushing them away. Sometimes you can't control these things," I argue.

His eyes darken for a moment.

"Same. They weren't the right kind of women for me."

He pauses, and I muse over something.

"But that was your choice."

He laughs, giving me a playful smile.

"Yeah, it was."

I pin him with my gaze, and he pushes back his grin.

"I guess, you're right," he says, stroking my hair. "I was the one who set the tone."

"Why?"

"I guess it wasn't the time for something else."

"Is it now?"

"It may be," he says, slowly stroking the side of my neck.

"Is that what happened to James Sexton?" I ask.

A shadow flits across his face, killing the light in his eyes.

He stays silent.

"He is your best friend, isn't he?"

He nods.

"He has quite a reputation, you know..." I say.

He tilts his head down, smiling again.

"Yeah, I know..."

"And you're not far behind him. If in fact, you are... *behind him*," I say.

Grinning, he bites his lip and shakes his head.

"Yeah, you can say that."

"Same goes for Ed Preston," I say, encouraged by the change of expression on his face.

He lets out a soft chuckle.

"Yes... You're right."

"So what pulled James Sexton off the market?"

He locks my gaze.

"He fell in love," he says, and his smile withers away.

D^{AHLIA}

HIS EYES DARKEN EVEN MORE, and it feels as if I stare at a big, dark crevice in his heart.

"Why is it bad?" I ask.

"Who said it was bad?" he says, trying to plaster a smile over that darkness.

I slowly stroke the side of his face. He feels cold beneath my touch.

"Your eyes."

"No, no... It wasn't bad," he says, sounding as if he's lying.

"Isn't he happy?"

He shifts his eyes away from me, and for a moment stares blankly at the water.

"He's very happy," he mutters, a sad smile clinging to his lips.

"Aren't you happy, then?"

He lifts his gaze.

"No, no. I am," he says, and for the second time, I have this strange sensation that he's hiding something.

My smile dies out on my lips, and concern flashes in his gaze.

"I am. I really am," he says with more conviction. "I lost him in a way, but that's normal. I knew it would happen at one point or another. It's not something I am dwelling on."

"Then, what is it, Lex?" I ask seriously, and suddenly he becomes guarded, and his eyes become unreadable.

He doesn't give an answer, and I immediately regret my question and pull away from him.

His hand collars my neck, stopping me.

I cup his hand and lock his eyes. He looks straight at me, tormenting me with his spellbinding gaze.

"There's nothing Dahlia," he says with a quiet voice, yet something doesn't feel right. "Why is it so important to you?" he asks.

There's truly no answer to his question.

Why is it? I don't know. What answer can I give him? It has nothing to do with James Sexton or his love life.

It's my stubbornness and eagerness to decipher his secrets. The mystery called Lex Harrington.

I guess that's why it affects me so much.

With every question he leaves unanswered, I know less, and feel more about him, growing suspicious at the same time because of the turmoil I sense inside him.

Why do I have to walk around his heart?

As if it's wounded or wrapped in ice or shrouded in a dark cloud.

"It's not important," I say dryly, although it is.

The fact that he denies me the answer to a banal question that shouldn't mean much to him as well makes me cold inside.

A small smile warms up his gaze, and my temperature starts rising again.

This is a lost battle.

"Don't lie to me, baby," he says so softly, his breath rolling on my lips, spurring tingles down my body.

He lowers his hand and cups one breast, my nipple puckering.

"I'm not lying," I murmur, losing my frustration and focus fast.

He brushes my lips, and for a moment, I lose my breath.

"Yes, you do..."

He captures my lips in a soft, brief kiss, and then he pulls away and looks at me.

"Why is James Sexton so important to you?" he murmurs, a smile flashing in his voice.

"Are you setting me up for one of your traps?" I ask, smiling this time.

He looks at me, a playful grin lighting up his face. He's trying to distract me.

"It's not about James Sexton, and you know it," I say.

He arches an eyebrow, a knowing smile flickering in his eyes.

"Then?"

"Then nothing. Put it to rest. I'm no longer interested," I say.

He slowly shakes his head.

Mesmerized, I glue my eyes to his bottom lip as he slowly scrapes it with his teeth.

"You want to know more about me?" he asks, grinning slyly.

I break my stare and evade his eyes.

"Yeah... It crossed my mind. But now forget it. You can keep your secrets."

His chest rocks with laughter.

"By that you mean... *shove them...*"

I chuckle.

"Yeah, something like that."

He snakes his arm around me and nudges me to him again. I straddle his lap and loop my arms around his neck as he pulls me into his embrace.

His smile fades away and so does mine.

He ponders for a moment as his eyes search mine.

"I told you I don't have all the answers, Dahlia... I'd rather not say something to you that later on proves not to be true. I know it's not the greatest thing to offer, but I want to be honest with you. All right?"

I nod.

What can I say?

Honesty is precious when it comes from any man, especially someone like him, but for some reason, his honesty hurts me. But with him, it's never only pain. It's always pain and pleasure.

Holding my eyes, he slowly smiles, running his fingers along my jawline, and his thumb across my parted lips before he starts to kiss me.

I'm so smitten.

His lips capture mine, his tongue pressing against mine, his touch reverberating between my legs. A moan rolls into our kiss as I tightly wrap my hands around his neck, longing for more of his lips.

He gives me more, tangling his tongue with mine and goose-bumps dot my skin.

I lock my legs around him while he lifts my butt, and lets me slide slowly onto his full, hard cock. My core begins to pulse, and I can't let go of his lips.

His fingers splay over my rear, gently guiding my butt as I start to roll my hips and ride his cock.

Groaning softly in his mouth, I keep rolling my tongue, sucking on his, and biting his lips.

It doesn't take long, and the pain and questions completely vanish as I start getting high on pleasure.

"Oh, Lex..." I moan.

He takes my mouth again, my body getting swept away by the pleasure pouring from his kiss. Hooking my fingers into his muscular neck, I keep rolling my core up and down his length.

The moment he senses me getting closer, he tightens his arm around my waist and tilts his hips, a growl vibrating in my throat.

He rolls his hips, giving me the last nudge and setting a firestorm between my legs.

"Lex..."

I hold onto him and start moving faster, tasting that amazing high.

Eyes half-closed, lips parted, he drinks me in, holding back his own pleasure until I come.

Chest still heaving, I finally get my focus back, and a slow smile crawls up my lips.

Grinning, he rises with me in his arms, his lips brushing my cheek as he murmurs.

"Now it's the time to fuck you for real."



DAHLIA

HIS BACK ARCHES as he pushes his hips forward, and every inch of hard flesh slams into my core.

"Fuck," I mutter, by arms coiling around his neck, my legs wrapping around his waist, my center clenching.

He props my back against the wall and thrusts hard, a swirl of pleasure sweeping through my center.

He does it again, and I toss my head back.

Watching him with heavy eyes, I drag my nails down his neck as he plunges into me.

He fucks me and kisses me, crushing me against the wall, my legs locked around him.

I roll my hips, and then he keeps me still and rams into me.

"Fuck Lex..." I murmur again, a flutter rushing through my belly.

His fingers thread through the back of my hair as he rolls his hips, filling me over and over again, hard as steel.

We lock eyes, and it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

His intense gaze crashes through me. Blue-gray, tinged with fire, carrying the mysterious light of a smile. Softly curling, his lips draw my eyes.

A knowing grin slides across his lips, and I feel it burning through my veins. It makes the flesh between my thighs wet and hot as my it throbs around him.

He really has me.

The pleasure keeps rising and coursing through me, tensing my body, speeding up my breathing. Spellbinding, his eyes stay locked with mine while his hot breath becomes mine.

His muscles harden and flex, his hips crashing into mine.

Hot and tense, I start panting, and then he stops for a moment, and tenderly brushes my lips with his.

"Don't fuck with me..." I say between short, ragged breaths, and he rams into me, pinning me against the wall.

"Good?"

"Fuck, yes..." I mutter, my eyelids lead heavy, my skin melting off my bones.

He faintly smiles before he locks me against him and falls into me over and over again, my body becoming one with his. I close my eyes and lose myself, riding that pleasure with him.

It's only moments later when I finally plug myself back to the reality. He moves with me again, this time carrying me into the shower. An hour later he lays me on the bed.

As the night turns into a day, we find ourselves lying next to each other. The sheets are soft and smell fresh, the breath of wind bringing the floral incense from outside.

"I love summer," I say, glancing at the terrace.

The sheer drapes puff and dance, catching the light from the patio.

"What else do you like?" he asks, his fingers playing in my hair, stroking me softly.

I roll to my side, run my thigh up on his legs and look at him.

"As much as I know I can't have you I really like you."

His arm curls around my back, his elbow tucked beneath his head.

"What makes you think you can't have me?" he asks so softly, I barely make out his words.

Slowly, I run my finger across his chest.

"You've never been anyone's, Lex... Why would it be me?"

"Why wouldn't it be you?"

I laugh. And then I smile, suddenly saddened.

"You don't need me, Lex. You have everything you want."

His gaze slides away from me as he runs his hand through his hair.

"You don't know that."

His eyes come back to me.

"I really don't need to. It's only logical."

He brushes the side of my face with his fingers and then places a soft kiss on my lips.

Our eyes stay connected after he smoothly breaks the kiss.

"You like to play..." I mutter. "You find pleasure in tormenting me." His lips purse slightly, a soft smile reaching his eyes. "And you know why?"

He slowly shakes his head, amused.

"Because there's something you need to hide," I say, and his grin starts to fade away.

I've always suspected it. But now... He just confirmed it.

"Why?" I ask.

"Why what?" he tosses at me, slightly irritated.

"Why do you play with me?"

"I'm not," he says, serious.

I want to believe him.

"But you do. Whatever makes you pull away from me can crush me, and you know it. That's why you go back and forth all the time. That's why you play this game with me. But the thing is, I don't like games."

He smiles.

"Oh, I think you do..."

"Not this kind."

"There's no game."

He's serious again.

I'm not getting anywhere with this.

"What do you hide?"

"I'm not hiding anything, Dahlia."

"Yes. I think you do. Not from me, perhaps, but surely there's something you don't want to admit to yourself."

"There's nothing... Nothing that has anything to do with you," he says, a warm smile brushing his lips.

"Then why do I feel it?"

He leans to me, his lips touching mine as he murmurs.

"Because you got too close to me. That's why..."

"I like being close to you..." I say, my lips tracing his, my thoughts spreading wings, and spilling out, the words voicing them.

"Then don't let anything else ruin it for you."

"I'm afraid..." I murmur.

"You shouldn't be. I told you I don't want to hurt you..."

"But—"

His lips lock mine, his hand cupping my rear pulling me into him. My words fall back at the bottom of my throat.

He's not going to make it easy. Not one bit. And he's not going to stop until he makes me crash and burn.

The moment I feel his naked body against mine, my thoughts go away, and my mind shuts down as if it's magic. I no longer fear or care or have the slightest question for him.

He knows that. He does that. He tries to buy some time. I know he does. Because he needs me... No, no. Scratch that. He doesn't need me. He *wants me*... perhaps to fill that hole he has, buried deep in his heart.

He slides his palm down my back, tenderness flowing through his touch and kiss and lips. My body gets hot from his as he churns heat like a volcano.

All that frosted shell is gone, layer upon layer peeling off him, revealing a warm man who makes me addicted to him.

He makes it impossible to escape whether he wants me to be his or not, whether he'd want me later on or not. Whether he needs me or not. The feeling is so powerful and overwhelming there's no way I can pull back.

Not that I want to.

I let myself be swept away, shrouded in his warmth, and it's the best feeling in the world. He loves me like no one else.

It's art or love, or perhaps it's simply luck.

I let him do it.

Responding to him with all my heart, whether this is the end of something or only the beginning.

L^{EX}

It's early afternoon when I hear a soft buzzing on the nightstand, and I crack an eye open.

Back turned to me, bare ass pressed against my thigh, she lies next to me, her hair splayed over the pillow.

My phone hums again. I stretch my hand out and snatch it from the nightstand.

She slowly turns to me.

Her eyes peel open, the afternoon light sparkling in them.

"Hey," I say on my phone as I drink in her soft smile.

She slides her hand onto my chest while I cup the back of her hair. Her tits press against me.

"What the fuck are you doing, man? I called several times. Isn't it like four o'clock out there?"

"It fucking is, Ed. Why the fuck are you busting my balls?" I say, my voice hoarse, giving half of the story away.

He starts laughing at the other end, and knowing him and his big mouth, I switch my phone from one ear to the other.

Still holding Dahlia's gaze, I softly stroke her hair.

"Are you buried in pussy up to your eyeballs?" he says. I smile, trying to distract her. "What do you want, Ed?" I ask curtly, and he gets the cue fast.

Yet, he can't refrain from chuckling a bit more.

"Oh, excuse me. Are you fucking your work wife?"

"Ed?"

"Lex?"

"Are you fucking bored, man?" I say, laughing. "What's your fucking problem? Isn't there someone close to you to fuck with?"

"I miss you man," he says, a noise of traffic coming from the background.

"I've only been gone for a few days. I'm thinking about moving here," I say, winking at Dahlia.

She pulls up, propping herself on her elbow.

Her tits move with her, and my hand slides down from her hair and cup one of them. Her nipple hardens under my touch, her cheeks flushing with blood.

"You're not serious, are you?"

I shift my eyes away from Dahlia.

"I might get serious about it if you keep fucking with me."

"And what am I supposed to do?"

"Fuck with one of your pets," I say, running a hand through my hair and slowly rubbing my eyes.

A soft kiss on my chest makes me flick my eyes open.

Her hair brushes my pecs as she starts kissing me slowly. Tension sets in my body, and heat runs through my blood as she gently rolls her hand down on me.

"It's not the same," he says.

"Huh?" I mumble completely distracted as she plants kisses down my body all the way to my groin.

Blood pools in my shaft, my hard-on twitching up and to her mouth.

"Fucking with my pets."

I slide my fingers through the back of her hair, her lips already molding on the chiseled crown.

"Your pets... Yeah. About that..." I say with a raspy voice, removed from the conversation.

Her head goes down as I tilt my hips up and slide my cock deep into her mouth. The hot moisture of her tongue spreads across my hardness.

"What do you want, Ed?" I ask, my voice catching.

A pause comes from the other end.

"Is she sucking you?"

There's no way she heard him, yet she flicks her gaze up at me and smiles around my cock. Her eyes get hazy as her fist keeps running up and down my length.

"She is, isn't she?" he asks, this time with a quiet voice. "Fucking jerk."

"What's your problem, Ed?" I ask silently as she peels her gaze away from mine and focuses solely on my dick.

"No fucking problem," he says, chuckling. "Sexton's got a big announcement coming up," he finally says, and my ears perk up.

She must have sensed the twitch in my body, 'cause she swings her gaze back at me.

"Business?" I ask, serious this time.

"It's a big party, so probably not."

Dahlia's eyebrows flick up. I try to relax and smile.

She earnestly starts to suck me.

"Anyway. That's all I wanted to say."

"Why in so many words, Ed?" I say, and he bursts into laughter.

"I told you I missed you."

"You're just bored," I say, tilting my hips up again, hitting the back of her throat.

She starts to moan, her mouth clamping on my cock as she swirls her tongue around my flesh.

"Fuck. I'm getting hard," he mumbles in my ear, and I hang up the phone.

I toss it on the bed, and arch my body, lifting my hips and thrusting.

She starts to bob her head faster.

"Fuck, Dahlia..." I mutter as she fills her mouth with me, her lips burning my shaft.

Her fist tightens around my girth, the other hand cupping my balls.

"Baby..." I growl with a raspy voice.

One glance she throws at me, and I get a glimpse of her eyes. That's all I need.

Holding her head against me, I shudder, cum filling her mouth.



DAHLIA

"NO WAY... ARE YOU SERIOUS?" Chris blurts out, half of the people in the restaurant glancing at us.

I shush her, laughing.

"You fuck Lex Harrington?" she says under her breath this time.

She straightens her back as the server nears our table and slides the plates in front of us.

The man smoothly pulls away, and she leans closer to me.

"No fucking way," she says incredulously.

Silently, I nod.

"So how is he?" she asks and then quickly shakes her head. "No, no. Scratch that. He can only be better than the rumors. Is he?"

"I have no words to describe it. He's different than anything I could've possibly imagined," I say.

"Are you gonna see him again?"

I pause and shrug.

"Probably. Our affair is kinda, um... fluid."

"Meaning?"

"Anything is possible. Good or bad."

"Oh," she says, a bit disappointed.

"Yeah."

"Well, enjoy it while it lasts."

"That's exactly what I'm doing."

"How was London?" she asks.

A secret smile tugs at my lips.

She takes a bite of her food. I lower my eyes to my plate.

"Mmm... That good?" she says, a grin tinging her voice.

I flick my gaze up, my cheeks burning.

"It was good," I say.

She does a double take, studying my eyes.

"You pay attention, girl. He can easily crush your heart."

I start laughing.

"Too late for that."

She chuckles as well.

"Did he say something about you two?"

"Not much," I say, my smile flatlining.

"Maybe he doesn't know what he wants."

"No, no. He knows what he wants, and he is open about it. It's just that every other minute he wants something else."

She laughs. I smile.

"What about your new job?" she asks.

She sets her fork down and sips wine.

"I start next Monday."

"That's great."

"Yes... I think so," I say, mixed emotions coursing through me.

We split an hour later in front of the restaurant, and close to nine o'clock, I enter my place.

A text message lights up my phone five minutes later.

Lex: I'll pick you up in an hour.

I smile.

Bondage Girl: Why didn't you call?

Lex: Keeping things interesting. No longer up for stuff, Bondage Girl?

Bondage Girl: It depends.

Lex: On what?

Bondage Girl: Which one of you I meet tonight?

Lex: Haha. Which one of me do you want to meet?

Bondage Girl: It depends.

Lex: On what?

Bondage Girl: Which one of you doesn't hurt me.

The phone goes silent.

Five minutes pass by. I send another message.

Bondage Girl: Gave up on me already?

A minute later, I get my response.

Lex: Being busy.

My stomach shrinks.

He's lying. Why is he lying?

Another message comes right after.

Lex: Get ready. Will talk later.

My phone drops from my hand, a strange sensation hovering over me.

L^{EX}

I TOSS the phone on the table.

“Problems in paradise?”

“Mind your own dick, Preston,” I say, glancing away.

“What’s your fucking problem? You just came back from a cock sucking European tour, man.”

I flick my eyes to him.

He gets a glimpse of my face and shoots his hand up.

“Okay... All right. Damn it. Why are you so wired up?”

“I’m not,” I bark.

He huffs.

“Clearly,” he says, shifting his eyes to his phone.

“I’m not,” I say with a smoother voice, raking my hand through my hair.

I motion to one of the girls for a drink.

He tilted down, he whips his gaze at me and studies me.

“What’s the problem, Lex?” he asks with a serious voice.

I take a long breath.

“There is no problem,” I say, shifting my eyes away from him.

“Was she no good?”

“She’s good,” I say curtly.

A few moments of silence slip by.

I get my drink and gulp half of it.

He shoots me another glance.

"She loves you... You know that," he says.

By the time I try to lock his eyes, he pins his gaze to his phone screen and starts typing away.

As always.

"How do you know?" I ask.

"Is that even a question?" he murmurs, pretending he's writing something extremely important. "You know that."

"Yeah. I do. My question is how the hell did *you* figure out? Based on what? Glances in the office."

"Aside from the sex marathon?"

I wave him off.

He powers off the phone and sets it on the table.

"Seriously, now..." he says, no trace of a smile on his face. "It's not the sex and not the glances. She puts up with you, and you're willing to give her more than you've given to any other woman before her, except Rain perhaps."

He pauses, forcing me to lift my gaze.

We lock eyes.

"You're not still thinking about her."

"No, I'm not," I say, no inflection in my voice.

"I hope you're not. Because if you are, you're shooting yourself in the foot."

"I know all that. You don't have to remind me."

"I'm not. I'm just watching out for you."

"No need to."

He pauses again. I bring the glass to my lips, toss it back and empty it this time.

"What are you afraid Lex?" he asks with a softer voice.

I look at him and ponder for a moment.

I wish I knew the answer to his question.

"I'm not."

He shifts his eyes away from me and gazes down at his hands, streaming disagreement. For some reason, he's not keen to challenge me.

"I don't want to fuck her up. That's all," I say.

He swings his gaze to me.

"She matters to me," I say. "That's why I don't want to fuck her up. But there's a chance I might do just that," I add and stay silent for a few moments before I look away again. "You know what kind of woman she is?" I say quietly as I run my fingers up and down on the empty glass, staring blankly.

I shoot him a glance. He nods, silent.

"That's why is so easy to crush her," I say.

"What makes you think you'd do that?"

I straighten and lean back against the red velvet sofa.

"I don't want to. Trust me. But I might. She's all in, whether she knows it or not. She let me have her heart the first time I kissed her. I don't think she planned it that way, but it's in her blood. She doesn't know how to be with a man any other way. Sure, we played all sorts of games and she never said anything to me, but I know. And the fact that I like her so much makes things so much worse."

"Why's that?"

"I have no idea how far I can go with her and if in fact, I can take her where she wants to be."

"Sexton said the same thing, and look at him now."

I move my eyes away from him.

"It was different for him," I say.

"How? He screwed up over and over again, and then he ended up with Rain."

I smile bitterly.

"You think he didn't know?" he says.

We connect eyes again before he continues.

"I think he knew right from the get go what she was to him. He knew she was the end of him —the end of his life as he knew it, and the beginning of something new. That's why he fought so hard. Against fate, her and himself. He fought harder than you. That's why he fucked up so many times. But in the end, it was all the same. He couldn't escape his fate. No matter how much he tried or how hard he fucked up Rain. And he did..."

"I'm not Sexton."

"Exactly. You have less to be afraid of. And Dahlia is not Rain. I don't see her sway that far out there— the way Rain did, so I don't know why you're so afraid."

I search his eyes for a few moments, a slow grin creasing my lips.

"When did you get so smart, Preston?"

He flashes a playful smile.

"Get over yourself. I always was."

He picks up the phone again.

"How's the little Goddess business going?" I ask, tilting my chin up, pointing to his cell phone.

"Good," he says stretching a cunning smile. "Why are you asking?"

"If you're so smart how come you didn't figure her out?"

He flicks his eye up, a smug smile on his lips. He barely pushes his chuckle back.

"Who says I didn't figure her out?"

Quirking my lips, I grill him with my gaze.

"How long it's been? Weeks?"

He looks back at the screen.

"Mmm-hmm."

"Anything new?"

"Same," he says secretively.

"You showed her something?"

"Maybe."

I chuckle.

"What about her?"

He glances at me. His nose creases with a smirk.

"Hasn't she run out of body parts? Is there anything she hasn't shown you?"

"Yeah."

I clasp my fingers beneath my chin.

"Face?"

"Mmm-Hmm."

"I wonder why."

"She hasn't seen my face either."

I laugh softly.

"I wonder why," I say again.

"Why's that?" he asks cleverly.

"For someone smart like you, this is a real dumb question. If you show your face, she could recognize you and then she'd know you're fucking loaded."

He smiles cunningly and stays quiet.

"Oh... That's what this is," I say, washed with revelation. "That's why you didn't rail her yet."

"Why's that Lex?" he asks, playing stupid.

He flicks his eyes to me.

I tilt an eyebrow and smile at him.

"You're intrigued by her, and yet you know that if you blow your cover, this little thing with her may go straight to hell."

"Maybe..." he says, smiling to himself.

"So, is she a gold digger?"

"I have no fucking idea. She might be."

"So fucking what? Why do you care anyway? It's not as if you want to marry her."

Silence comes from him.

I ponder for a moment.

"Wait. You want her to fall for you without knowing about your money... Isn't it so, Preston?"

His eyes meet mine, a grin flashing in his gaze.

"Fucking dog. When have you become so sneaky?"

He opens his mouth.

"You always were," I say before he has the chance to say something.

"You're afraid your money might rig the game?"

He nods.

"Something like that."

"She must be quite a piece."

He lets out a soft chuckle.

"She is."

I pick my phone and car keys from the table and push out of my seat.

"Where are you going?"

It's my turn to grin mysteriously.

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

He smiles.

"Fucking?"

"You get redundant, Preston."

"What about the party?"

"I'll stop by later," I throw to him over my shoulder.

"Are you bringing her with you?" he tosses back at me, laughing.

Lifting my middle finger, I pull away.

D

AHLIA

I CHOOSE A SLEEVELESS, chiffon white dress, with flared bottom and fitted waist, a plunging neckline and sophisticated draping at the top.

Wide golden tone bracelets close around my wrists. Matching earrings with beautiful emerald stones dangle from my earlobes.

My hair falls down my back in soft natural waves. High heels sandals with silk ribbons tie around my ankles. I toss a last glance in the mirror before I grab the small satin emerald clutch and pick up my phone from the kitchen counter.

"Damn..." Elsa exclaims as she enters the apartment.

Her eyes widen with surprise.

"Where are you going?" she asks running her gaze up and down on me.

"A business function."

"Uh-huh," she mutters softly as she takes in my shoes. "It's Friday evening. What does business function stand for exactly?"

"There's, um... some kind of party I am going to."

"With Lex?" she asks casually.

"Yes. With Lex Harrington."

"Is he about to propose?"

Smiling, I wave her off.

"Why can't you keep your mouth shut?" I say.
She takes a step back and looks at me appreciatively.
"You look great. I've never seen you dressed like that."
"I wanted to try something different."
"You look..."
I glance at her.
"How?"
"I don't know. In love...?" she says, locking my eyes.
A soft grin curves my lips.
"Even your smile."
"It's nothing. It's a posh party. Some private event at James Sexton house. That's all."
"You said it's a business function."
"A lot of business partners will be there."
"And you're going there as...?"
I shrug.
"I don't know. Personal assistant, I guess."
"You don't look like one. Why would he need his PA there?"
I smile.
"You can ask him when you meet him."
"Ha ha... Very funny."
"What about you?"
She kicks her shoes off.
"I wanted to go out, but now that you're leaving, I'll call Connor and invite him here, if you don't mind."
She tilts her eyebrows up, waiting for my response.
"Okay. Just make sure his crazy brother doesn't stop by too."
"He's in New York."
"Good."
My phone vibrates in my hand.
"I have to go," I say, rushing to the entrance.
"Have fun!" she says and locks the door behind me.
Moments later, I step out the elevator, my gaze quickly drawn to the black Ferrari waiting for me in the front of the building.
Carefully strutting on my heels, I erase the space and slip inside.
The scent of his perfume envelopes me.
His eyes glint as he takes me in.
"Hey," I say, sounding a bit nervous.
"Hey," he says quietly, his gaze dragging up my legs.

Leaning to me, he kisses me on my cheek. Slowly, I take him in.

Clad in a tuxedo, his hair combed back, his blue eyes sparkling like gems, he looks like a million bucks. His eyes meet mine as I struggle to push back a smile.

"This must be some event, huh?" I ask, trying to sound casual about it and not jittery as I feel.

"It always is with Sexton," he says with a voice that makes me soft inside.

He glances at me again.

"You look beautiful," he says, and although he makes an effort to conceal it, I read genuine surprise in his eyes. "Let me do it," he says as I fumble with my seat belt.

He shifts in his seat so that he can help me, and I swiftly pull my trembling hands away.

"You okay?" he asks as he makes sure the seat belts sits flat across my lap.

"Uh-huh," I mumble, evading his eyes.

"Look at me, Dahlia," he says with a soft voice.

Slowly, I swivel my head. He cups my cheek, his eyes sinking deep into mine.

"Why are you so nervous?"

I look at him, spellbound. I don't know what it is. His hypnotic eyes or tender touch? Or perhaps his scent?

Whatever it is, I start melting in my seat.

"I'm not nervous," I murmur, shaken to my core.

"You haven't gone out much?"

"It's not that," I say softly.

"Then what is it?"

He searches my eyes for a moment. I'm so overwhelmed by emotions, tears well up in my eyes.

I try to smile and hide them, but it's too late. His fingers splay on my cheek, his thumb gently brushing my skin. A bittersweet grin curves his lips, and now I really feel like crying.

I've gone so far out there, falling for this man.

He reads my eyes. He knows it. Of course, he does. There's no way I can hide it. His hand cradles my face as he slowly leans toward me.

His lips touch mine in a soft, tender kiss, and it's like life courses through my blood again. He smoothly tears away and smiles.

"Let's get going. We're already late," he says, starting the ignition.



DAHLIA

THE WINDOWS ARE OPEN, the summer evening pushing in the scent of wild roses, and new leaves pulsing with life mixed with the incense of the earth.

Despite being late, he doesn't rush. He lets the car roll slowly through the fabric of the night.

As we near Sexton's property, the homes become scarce, and for a few good minutes, we drive through clusters of trees and meadows.

Lights cast a glow toward the sky as we take a turn, and a different view presents to us. We follow a gravel road to the beautiful estate.

We are by no means the only guests arriving late. Limos keep coming. He drives around the house and pulls the car to a stop next to the back entrance. A valet promptly greets us.

He turns off the engine and glances at me. I collect my evening bag, getting ready to step out.

He climbs out first, walks around and helps me out. His arm snakes around my waist, helping me to keep my balance.

"Look who's finally here," says a voice I instantly recognize.

Ed Preston gazes at us from the top of the stairs.

"Finally," he says, holding the door open for us.

His gaze goes down on me as I walk past him.

"Mmm... You look good, Miss Fox," he says, and I turn around to thank him.

Lex's hand lands on Ed's shoulder, his eyes tasing him with a glare.

"Take it easy," Ed says, laughing. "I was just paying her a compliment."

Lex smiles faintly, keeping his eyes on me. My heart swells.

"Let's go. The man talks to the crowd just about now," Ed says, and we enter the house.

A large corridor sprawls in front of us, a massive stairwell snaking its way to the upper level. Spacious rooms line the hallway.

A sound of soft music and humming of voices comes from the other side of the house. We make it to that room just as James Sexton announces his engagement with Rain Morgan.

We all halt for a moment, clamor filling the air.

"I'll be fucking damned," Lex mutters. "You knew Preston?"

I shift my eyes to Ed Preston who thrusts his hands into his pockets and looks across the room at James Sexton and the blonde woman at his side.

Lex's eyes glue to them as well.

"He kept it a secret, but I had a suspicion."

"Is that Eve?" Edward asks, his voice filled with surprise, and I can only imagine he refers to the brunette with blue eyes who's also standing next to James Sexton.

"Yeah..." Lex, says softly. "They just came back from Italy," he says, and I feel completely left out.

"I'll be damned," Edward mutters. "It's over, man," he says to Lex, who rests his hand on the back of my neck and slowly nudges me to follow Edward.

We cut our way through groups of people until we make it to the main table. The men shake hands, the congratulations flowing as I get introduced to Eve and Rain.

About the same age as me, they're extremely friendly. People keep coming to our group, and soon, I get separated from Lex and pushed to the side.

With not much else to do, my eyes go to the happy couple, furtively observing them.

There's a reason James Sexton has a reputation.

Women morph into blushing teenagers as soon as he graces them with his attention, and yet he only has eyes for the beautiful blonde at his side.

Edward Preston makes himself busy with Eve, throwing her flirting smiles as the beautiful brunette showers him with attention as well.

She wears a shimmering, dark blue dress that sets off her eyes. A layer of faint bronze gives her skin a beautiful sheen.

Rain is even more beautiful than I imagined. Stories have been circulating at my workplace about her rocky love story with the man who's now her future husband.

Most of the tales were hearsay in my opinion. Regardless how much truth they bore, one thing is for sure. She is strikingly beautiful. And he is dangerously hot.

I get a glimpse of him next to Lex, not far from them standing Ed. These three men can burn the house down.

Handsome and rich. That's a deadly combination.

Lex's eyes glint with a grin, which makes my heart flutter. Women stop to greet him as well, and my stomach ties in knots.

I shift my gaze back to Rain, looking for answers.

What's her secret?

It can't be only her beauty. This whole house is filled with gorgeous women. Younger, older, a lot of them rich like them. How has she captured his heart? That's what I really like to know.

I let my gaze float over her as if the answer to my question lies in the details of her dress.

She wears a beaded black chiffon dress, fluid on her sexy body. The back neckline opens her evening gown down to her waist. A mane of blonde hair cascades down her back.

She has a softness in her eyes and sweetness in her features that's hard to resist.

James's constantly locking her eyes, and for the second time this evening I almost want to cry.

What... the... fuck?

I shift my gaze to Lex and catch him staring at Rain as well. I have to take a step to the side to let a couple of people pass by and then I glue my gaze to him again.

My heart starts beating faster.

I do a double take. He can't peel his eyes off Rain. It's not so much that he looks at her but *how* he looks at her.

Something breaks inside me.

I sweep a champagne flute from a server's tray and walk outside. By the time I enter the terrace, my glass is already empty.

I toss it on a table, find a spot near the door from where I can keep my eyes on them and lean against the handrail, my arms crossed over my chest.

A woman steps closer to me, a glass dangling from her hand as well.

"Who managed to piss you off?" the woman says, stopping next to me.

Her brown hair is long and fluffed up, a friendly smile sitting on her pretty face.

"No one."

"It doesn't look like no one to me," she says following the direction of my gaze as Lex and James move to the side where Rain and Eve flank Ed.

"I'm Daria Morgan by the way," the woman says, stretching her hand out.

We connect hands before she fishes a cigarette out of her purse, lights it up and takes a drag.

Silent, she lets the smoke out. We both trained our eyes on the people inside.

"I don't know any other woman who could've gotten away with what she did..." she says after a few moments. I briefly glance at her. "And still get married to James Sexton," she adds.

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"Once upon a time, his beautiful wife was nothing but an innocent girl who wanted a special man. Someone like no other. She found the man. And he is the ultimate prize. But besides that, he has two best friends—the two men at his side. They are as handsome and as wealthy as he is. The rumor is, they all wanted her," she says, and my heart sinks.

She smiles as if she relives the memory.

"And one of them had her... Besides her future husband," she murmurs and takes another drag off her cigarette.

"Although if I am to believe the rumors it was way more than that," she says and slowly shakes her head. "You never know... You just never know," she mutters, flashing a bitter smile.

"What's *way more than that*?" I ask with a broken voice.

She looks at me, smiling.

"The Night of the Kings, sweetheart... As the story goes, they all had her one night on a remote island. And one of the kings might've lost his heart because of her. Aside from her future husband," she says, just as her phone rings.

She fishes it out of her purse and takes the call. Smoothly, she spins away while mouthing a goodbye to me.



DAHLIA

MOMENTS LATER, the woman is gone, and my mouth is still open. Despite the warm evening outside, my skin is frosted.

I sneak inside.

Pressing my back against the wall, I clutch my bag and phone, the air barely flowing into my lungs.

The woman's words float in my head.

The Kings... having her... and losing their hearts... over her. My mouth opens and closes a few times, my lips trembling as my blood barely crawls through my veins.

Dumbstruck, I take them in.

The woman.

Them.

James.

And then Lex.

His eyes always concealed something. Even now. I can tell. His gaze shifts quickly from James to the crowd and then back to James and... *Rain*.

Ed's back is turned to me as he keeps talking to Eve. A mellow tune comes on, and he invites her to dance. Hand in hand they walk away and start twirling not far from me.

I take a few steps in their direction and hide in a darker corner.

Edward Preston is the usual flirt-self while preying on Eve. She doesn't mind at all.

One of the bodyguards approaches Sexton and whispers something in his ear. He quickly strides away.

Lex and Rain fill my view.

And then I feel it in my gut, a visceral reaction coursing through me as I absorb the truth. It feels like a giant hand smacking me upside the head.

My nails sink into the wall behind my back as I see Lex erasing the space and curling his arm around Rain, taking her to the dance floor.

The whole Universe starts cracking.

What the fuck?

I may have whispered that out loud. Luckily, there's no one nearby to hear me.

It can't be, I tell myself, but eyes don't lie. Besides, I feel it in my heart.

He no longer conceals what he was trying to hide so hard a few moments ago. It's right there in his eyes.

Something I never got to see. Something I never knew he had in him.

Something I always questioned.

Because he never showed it to me.

He presses her into his chest, and my knees almost give in. She smiles at him as they lock eyes, and all I see is her affection for him.

Their bond.

And as innocent as it is right now, it's real. And it's more than friendship. It's chemistry. They care for each other. The warmth in her gaze tells me everything about their past. The sultry look in his eyes gives the answers to my questions.

And now I know.

She is the woman he can never have.

The only one he ever loved.

TO BE CONTINUED.

END OF HARD LEX (Night of the Kings #5)

THIS IS the second Book of Lex's story. The last book and conclusion of this tale will be published shortly.

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Shayne Ford writes epic novels. Her stories feature hot-blooded men and adventurous, soulful women. She likes to write Series that are epic, layered, character-driven, have a dash of mystery and a lot of depth. She writes what she likes to read, and people who share her taste, devour her books. Her stories are not the typical romance, nor are they formulaic or fit a mold.

She likes her lead men hot, smart, and honest.

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