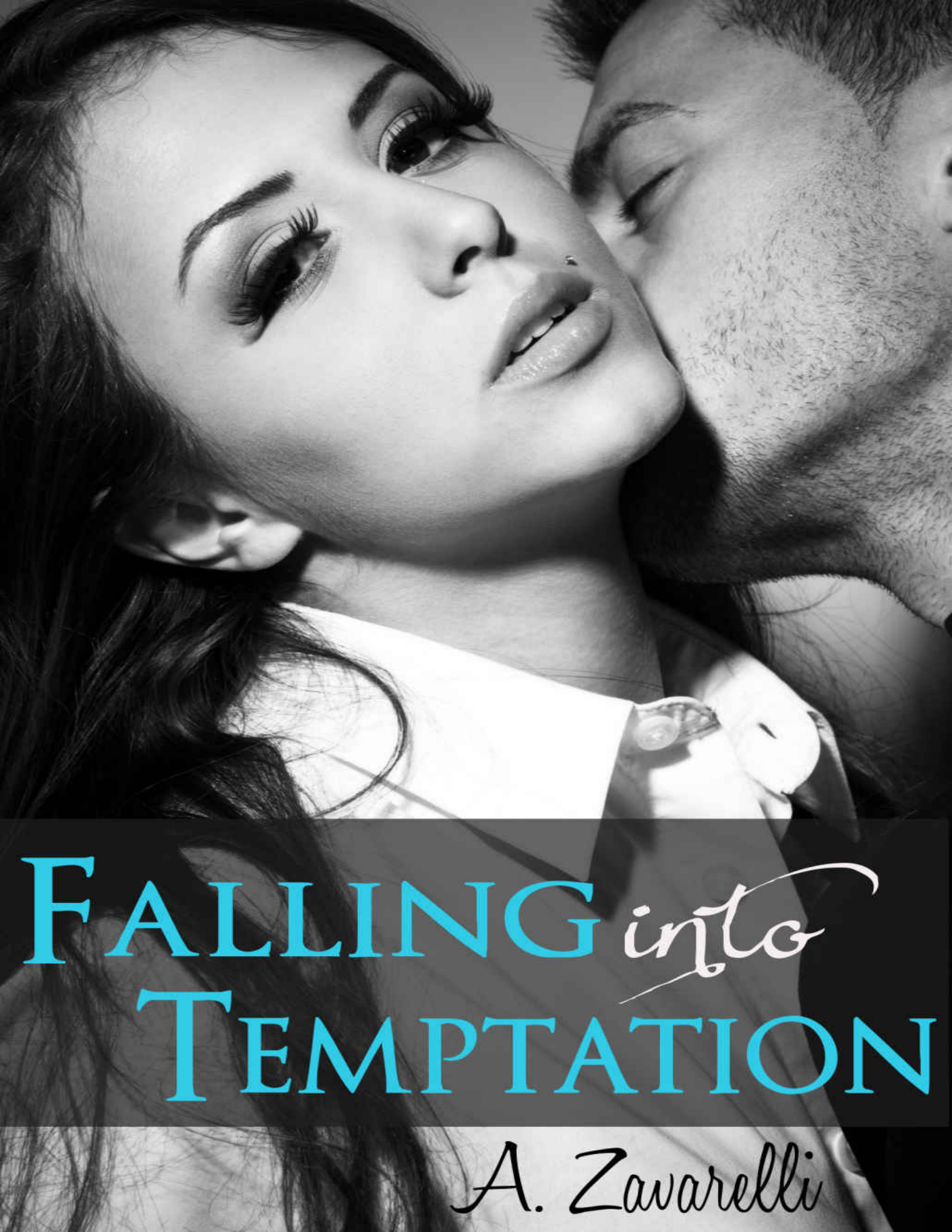




FALLING *into* TEMPTATION

A. Zavarelli

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Chapter One

Victoria

Frozen on the street corner, paralyzing fear snakes through my body, effectively seizing all the air from my lungs. I'm in the middle of the Concrete Jungle, but I may as well be a deer in the woods. *Hunted*.

It's the same feeling I always get when I see a woman who resembles my tormentor. Cars are rushing by, horns blaring, people pushing past me. But it's all drowned out while I try to steady my breath and focus on the figure across the street.

My heart feels like a jackhammer in my chest as I try to make out the woman's facial features. She's wearing a hat and sunglasses, but she's looking right at me. At least I think she is. *But why?*

We're at a standoff. I know I should run, but my body refuses to move. I'm so tired of running. So tired of this scenario. Could it really be her? Has she managed to find me in a city amongst millions of other people? I don't know, but I can't take that chance.

I begin making a mental list to gather up my belongings, find Alanna, and leave the city within the hour. But just as I turn to run, a man approaches the mystery woman and kisses her on the cheek.

I'm transfixed by this turn of events and can't force myself to look away. The woman removes her sunglasses, and an overwhelming sense of relief floods over me. *It isn't her*. I sprint off in the other direction, relieved and embarrassed at the same time. It looks like I will live to see another day after all.

My real name is Victoria Colletti although I go by the alias Victoria Kelly now. I'm not a spy, or a CIA agent, or anything that exciting, although I often wish that were the case. I'm just your run of the mill twenty-four-year old, except I happen to be on the run in New York City.

Before that, it was a long list of other big cities, and the occasional small secluded town where I thought I could hide.

But everywhere I go, there's always the same scenario. The same almost daily battle of seeing someone who resembles *her*, the woman I can never escape. Fear controls my life if you could even call it that. I've been on the run for so many years now I don't think I'll ever have any semblance of a normal life. Whenever I've tried to settle down in one place and finally get comfortable, the close calls become real. The woman standing on the other side of the street has turned out to be real in some cities. And I've learned my lesson from those close encounters, never settling in one place longer than three months now.

This is what my life has become. I used to run because I was afraid for myself. But somewhere along the line, my feelings evolved, and I stopped caring about my fate. I run now, simply because I don't want her to hurt any more of the people that I love. Anyone who is just an innocent bystander in all of this. It's happened once before, and I swore to myself I will never let it happen again.

My time on the run has been full of hard lessons and bitter pills. I feel like a coward for letting her win, but I don't know any other way. I'm weak and filled with self-hatred. I'm not ashamed to admit that because it's painfully obvious.

I always feel like I'm split in half. There is the shy, timid me who craves love and acceptance. And then there is the reckless part of me, like a willful teenager crying out for attention- the one who will do almost anything to get it. These days, more often than not, my shy and timid side is making an appearance, and it feels good to finally leave reckless me behind.

Chapter Two

Gabriel

“Fuck!”

My eyes sweep the streets while I check my watch for the fifth time in under a minute.

I’m already late for this meeting with my father, and Paul is stuck in traffic somewhere. But Richard Maddox doesn’t give a shit about afternoon traffic reports. No, my tardiness will have no viable excuse. Yet, on some deep level, it will please him. Because it will only serve to prove that he’s right about me.

While my mother is pushing her agenda for me to take over the company, I think Richard Maddox would love to see me fail. And though I have my own suspicions about it, it’s not something I ever plan on addressing. Because that’s what we do in the Maddox family. We get together and drink and eat, and talk about the finer things in life, but never our real problems. Because that would be beneath us.

And though I have no desire to take over this company, it still bothers me to know that Richard sees me as a threat. I think I’ve been more than accommodating in giving into the unspoken terms of this deal. He wants me to be the bad guy, so I am. I take that role, and I wear it well. The whole world thinks I’m one giant fucking asshole.

It’s what’s expected of me. To show up whenever I feel like it. Not to take anything seriously. Because I’m heir to the Maddox throne. The one that all of New York has their eye on.

But today, this meeting.... it's actually important to me, though I'd never admit that out loud. Because there will be investors in that room. Investors I have every intention of impressing later on. But I'm not off to a good start this morning. And when I arrive late, only to be greeted by one of Richard's disapproving looks, it isn't going to bode well for me. He won't hesitate to give me the same stale lecture about getting my life together. My father and I seem to have wildly conflicting ideas of what that actually means.

I have my own plans, plans that nobody approves of. It seems like the whole world can only ever see me as one thing. The haughty rich bastard of the Maddox family. Everybody seems to have their own ideas about me, but almost all of them are far from the truth. I don't want the Maddox name or the throne that comes with it. And I refuse to accept that it's my only choice in life. I've earned my own money through investments and the military, and I live a somewhat modest lifestyle. I still work for my father to appease him, but I'm working on building my own company. And Mrs. Caroline Maddox is none too pleased about it.

For a brief moment, I think that maybe they are all right about me. Maybe it's a joke to think I could ever do anything else with my life. Maybe I shouldn't bother showing up at all. I could just take the rest of the day off, get a nice bottle of whiskey and call Anya. Yes, Anya... always so eager to please. I could fuck her senseless for the rest of the day as long as I don't have to listen to her talk. Maybe if I duct taped her mouth.... I wonder if she would go for that? Of course she would. Because she's trying to get her claws into me. She will do anything I ask.

I really need to find someone new to fuck. Someone not so... boring. I need a challenge. Like that model from the gallery last week. What was her name? Brittany or Bethany... something like that.

As I lift my head to check the traffic once more, I'm hit by a flurry of dark hair, ripped jeans and a red jacket. I stumble back a step, momentarily knocked off balance, and all the paperwork in my hands flutters down around me.

"God dammit!" I growl. *This is just what I need right now.*

I cast an irritated glance at the petite figure on the ground in front of me. She's scurrying to collect her own belongings, with no apparent concern for my own. She hasn't even bothered to acknowledge me, or offer up an apology. I can barely see her face under the unruly tangles of long dark hair, and that only irritates me further. She's panting hard, her fingers trembling from what seems like fear. For a moment, an unwelcome pang of sympathy hits me in the gut, but I don't let it show. I'm already late, and I don't have time for this bullshit.

I step closer, brushing out my now rumpled suit. Still, she refuses to look up or acknowledge me. So I clear my throat and tap my foot impatiently. *That ought to get her fucking attention.*

Nope, still nothing. I try to reign in the anger brewing inside of me as I stare at the haphazard figure on the ground. She is petite and short, in other words not my type at all. Still, my dick jumps to attention as I scan the curves of her slim figure. My dick doesn't seem to be particularly picky today.

And yet, she seems content to just keep ignoring me. Does she even realize who I am? I can't remember the last time someone was this rude to me. Even if people don't like me, they always pretend to my face. It comes with the name. But not this chick.

I fight the unwelcome image of taking her over my knee right here in the street for pissing me off. Slapping the shit out of that sweet little ass of hers. I wonder what this rude girl would think of that....

I shake my head and try to shrug off the errant thought. The last thing I need is another Chandra Freestone on my hands.

Fuck. That. Shit.

"Would you mind giving me back my documents?" I bark.

Finally, my voice seems to elicit a response from her as her gaze meets mine for the first time. And she has the audacity to look angry at me. She's actually scowling at me.

Normally, that kind of insolence would have sent me over the edge, especially after this morning's events. But I'm distracted by the pair of eyes

staring back at me. They are a dark amber color with flecks of light honey all around them. I've never seen anything like them before, and it's unexpected. Her creamy white skin is flawless, contrasting starkly to her dark mahogany hair. Her cheeks are flushed, and she's clenching her jaw in annoyance.

But, oh those lips. They are tinted with a bright cherry red lipstick that matches her ankle length red leather boots. My eyes travel down her body greedily, taking in the soft curves under the fishnets and ripped jean shorts. She looks both sweet and wild at the same time. My cock hardens painfully and I fight the urge to adjust myself.

In a moment of extraordinary bravery, the girl shoves the papers into my chest as she glares up at me. "Here asshole, now get lost!"

I stumble back a moment, disbelief washing over me. And I have no idea why but I'm grinning back at her. This temperamental, wild creature in front of me who has the nerve to put me in my place. She's staring back at me, just as bewildered as I am about the stupid grin on my face. As I reach down to retrieve the papers pressed against my chest, I purposely brush my hand against hers. Her skin is soft, just like I expected, and I can only imagine how well it would do beneath my flogger.

But I can see that she's getting ready to leave, and I have to engage her somehow. I have to know more about her.

"Excuse me," I say. "But how am I the asshole here? What have I done to warrant that response?"

My mocking laughter only makes her more determined. "Well, let's see..." She cocks her hand on her hip as she rises to her feet. "You're standing there like you think you own the damn place, tapping your foot at me while you treat me like I'm an idiot. A gentleman might have offered to actually help instead of worrying about getting his expensive suit dirty."

My jaw clenches at her response. *Of course, that's how she would see me.*

"Well, technically speaking," I say coolly, "this is my building you almost took me out in front of. So forgive me for not feeling obliged to help

when I, in fact, did nothing wrong.”

“Oh, please.” She rolls her eyes dramatically. “Spare me the bullshit. I know exactly who you are and I’m not impressed. You can forget about me pandering to your ego if that’s what you expect. I don’t give a shit what your last name is, your manners suck. And on that note, I have already taken up too much of your precious time, so you can leave now.”

I laugh because it can’t be helped. There is something about this woman’s hostility that turns me on.

Nobody- especially women- ever talk to me that way. And I find it oddly refreshing. She’s intriguing and exciting in a way I haven’t felt in a long time. In an attempt to save face with her, I bend down and help her retrieve the rest of her parcels. Her mouth almost falls open in astonishment.

Paul the driver emerges from the black sedan at the curb, surprising me. I didn’t even see him pull up. He clears his throat nervously before speaking.

“I apologize, sir, for running late. I can take you now.”

I wave him off without speaking, much to his relief. I was probably a complete dick to him on the phone earlier whether I meant it or not. Maybe my manners really do suck.

“You were right before,” I say. “I forgot my manners. I should have helped you. It’s New York, and it’s not often you meet people who aren’t inherently rude. But I can see now you obviously aren’t from here, and I apologize for being an asshole... in your terms.”

She tries to hide the small smile from her mouth. “Well, that’s a roundabout way of making an apology, but I’ll take it. Anyway, I should have been paying better attention, so I guess I should apologize as well. I’m sorry I ran into you, and that now I’ve apparently made you late as well. Um, so anyway... have a good day.”

She turns to leave, and I can’t help myself. I need to get her name. I reach for her elbow, effectively stopping her as she turns back to face me.

“I said I was sorry that I was an asshole.” My eyes travel her body once more. “Not that you ran into me.”

She doesn’t respond. She just stands there looking nervous as if she might run at any moment.

“So where are you from anyway?” I ask. “I can’t place your dialect.”

Panic sweeps across her face and she shakes her head. “Uh, trust me it’s not anywhere you would know. Look I’m really sorry for interrupting your day and I’m running late myself, so I really have to go. Have a nice day, Mr. Maddox.” She pulls back and turns to walk away. But when she reaches the end of the block, she glances back over her shoulder and smiles at me.

I feel even more frustrated as I climb into the back of the waiting sedan. I lost all track of time talking to her, and I didn’t even manage to get a name. I must be really off my game today because I can’t recall that ever happening before.

By noon, I’m back to the confines of my office. As expected, my father was a huge dick to me. I don’t know why I even bothered showing up at all.

To top it all off, I can’t get the woman from earlier out of my head. After this morning, my sexual frustrations are at an all-time high. *I need a good fuck*. I scroll absent mindedly through my contacts, contemplating my options. But after a few minutes I set the phone back on the desk in frustration. There are plenty of women I could call, but none of them sound appealing. I’ve grown bored with all the high society princess types, and even worse are the up and coming gold diggers. Yes, they are all eager to please, but it always comes at a cost.

I take a sip of coffee, staring out the window at the busy streets below. My mind wanders back to *her*, the woman who practically crash

landed at my feet. The woman who royally fucked any chance I had of salvaging my meeting. But for some reason, it doesn't bother me.

There was something about her that sent all of the blood straight to my cock. Maybe it was that sweet voice of hers swearing at me. *Yes, that had definitely done it alright.* Or perhaps it was the fact that I couldn't quite picture her reaction to me taking her roughly. Would she like it? I have no fucking clue... and more importantly, why do I give a shit?

But that damned red lipstick. When I saw those plush red lips for the first time, I had an overwhelming urge to fuck that mouth of hers. To punish her harsh words with my cock. Yes, I think I would like that very much. I just have to wonder what this woman's price would be. Because everyone has a price. It's something I've learned the hard way.

I'm known for my scandalous affairs, the gossip columns always painting me as a cold hearted bastard. But it never stops the women from falling all over themselves trying to get my attention. When women look at me, they either see one of two things, a cushy life as a trophy wife or a publicity boost for their career.

I realized a long time ago that a determined woman will do just about anything to get what she wants. I may have been naive for a little while, but that phase didn't last long. I was thinking with my heart then, and not my dick. But now, my dick always gets what it wants. And if a woman isn't willing to provide that, then she is of no use to me. Pure and simple. I always have the upper hand and I'm always in control.

The women I date may not like it, but they sure as hell never say otherwise. They let me whip them and spank them and fuck them brutally all while moaning my name like I'm a God. It's all fake of course... their eagerness to submit to me. But the amount of fucks I give are exactly zero. I get off on seeing them kneel before me, doing whatever I ask. It's the one place in my life I have control, and I won't be relinquishing that any time soon.

It's not that I hate women because I don't. There's nothing better than the feeling of a beautiful woman in your hands and in your bed. I just despise the fact that over the years I've come to find out they are all the

same. I find their groveling attempts to please me annoying, even though it's exactly what I want. Call me fucked up if you will, but that's me in a nutshell.

Years of being fed to the vultures made me this way. And I can't help it if I enjoy the monster I've become. In fact, I don't just enjoy it. I revel in it. I want to be the monster that terrifies them. The sex is better when they hate me because there's no hiding that in the moment. And once I've established that parameter- made them bare their souls to me under the weight of my cock inside them- then I can be done with their bullshit.

Because I tolerate bullshit from no one these days. And that's why I was so surprised this morning by little miss attitude. She knew who I was and genuinely didn't seem to give a fuck. She spoke to me with disdain. It usually took at least a brutal hour of fucking before it ever got to that stage. And I have to admit, she has my attention.

Although I despise my weakness for what I'm about to do, I can't stop myself. I reach for the desk phone and hit the intercom. "Margie can you put me through to Allan Ricketts, I need a background check."

"Sure thing, Mr. Maddox."

A moment later the phone rings through.

"Allan Ricketts speaking, what can I do for you?"

The voice on the other end of the line sounds especially annoying right now. I hate using this detective, but he's the best, so I keep my personal opinions out of it.

"Allan, it's Gabriel Maddox. I need you to run a background check for me, but this one might take a little more work than usual."

I often use Allan's services to dig up dirt on someone when I need it, namely women who are trying to blackmail me in some way. I don't like doing it, but it's the dirty business of the world I live in. And Allan being the sleazy man that he is, does not disappoint.

"Okay," Allan replies curiously. "Lay it on me. What do we have?"

“I ran into a woman on the street this morning. I don’t know her name. But she works for the On The Run Courier Company. Her physical description reads as short, approximately 5’3”, brown hair, Caucasian. She was wearing ripped jean shorts and a red jacket. I need you to track down all of her info for me, anything you can get, and send it to me ASAP.”

Allan mumbles to himself as he takes down the notes, repeating everything at a snail’s fucking pace. “Okay, I think I got it.”

“One more thing,” I remember suddenly. “She seemed to be running from something, or someone maybe. She came from the Deli on the corner heading West and ran into me in front of Maddox Corp. Can you try pulling some of the security footage around that area? I’d like to know if we can find out what she was running from.”

“Sure thing,” Allan replies cheerfully. Too cheerfully. He knows he can expect a big commission on this one, and I’m sure that’s why his day just got a whole lot brighter.

Chapter Three

Victoria

Four days have passed since I met Gabriel Maddox, and I still can't believe it. Of all the men I could have crashed into in this city, it had to be him. The twenty-seven-year old heir to the Maddox Hotel Chain. For some reason, his face is always plastered in magazines and people consider him a big celebrity. I suspect it has more to do with his good looks than anything else. I don't actually read the articles about him because they've never particularly interested me. People like the Maddox family might as well live on another planet because we've got nothing in common.

Work has been slow this week with only a few deliveries from the courier company, and nothing from the temp pool I'm signed up with. I try to keep myself busy by taking photos around the city, but I can't seem to focus on anything. Since Gabriel touched my hand, I've pathetically found myself day dreaming about him. They are harmless fantasies, of course, but I can't understand why I'm having them. I find the man completely appalling. He is arrogant and rude and exactly the kind of guy reckless me would go for. And I'm trying to keep her under wraps. Shows how pathetic I am, a little male attention and I want to throw myself at the guy. *So much for not reverting back to my old ways.*

I would be lying if I said I didn't think he was attractive. The man is sexy as hell, but the fact that he knows it definitely detracts from that. He looks at everyone as if they are a bug to be squashed beneath his polished shoe. Then again, it could have just been my angle from the ground.

He looked intimidating all the way up there although I suppose that's what he was going for. He stood before me like the perfect male specimen. Tall and virile with a lean muscular build, filling out his impeccably tailored suit with ease. His dark brown hair had been gelled into a style that leaned just on the edge of wild. But when he started running his hand through it, things really started to get crazy. It only made me think of what his hair would look like after sex, which wasn't a good thought to have in that moment of weakness.

But what really got me were those eyes of his. I'm such a sucker for a bad boy with nice eyes. And he had them in spades. They seemed to change before me from icy blue to stormy gray. And I couldn't help but think that his photographs in the magazines hadn't done him justice. Or maybe I just never really paid that much attention before. I guess I can see why all the women go gaga for him.

Still, all the good looks in the world can't make up for his shitty attitude. I giggle as I recall the way I talked to him that day. I don't know what came over me. Maybe it was the adrenaline, or maybe he just really pissed me off, but either way I think he was as surprised by my outburst as I was. He just stood there, towering over me like he was King of New York. Looking at me like he wanted to rip my clothes off right there in the street. Or maybe that was just my imagination because the thought is ridiculous.

I am so not his type. From the little I've seen in the pictures, I've gathered as much. But still, I can't dismiss the fact that he had that look in his eyes. It's something I learned a long time ago, how to tell when a man wanted you. It might not sound like rocket science, but there are a lot less obvious clues than people might realize. And when you base your entire self-worth off a man's affections, those things become important. Of course, that was reckless me.

I'm proud to say I've come a long way from my self-destructive ways. It helps that my best friend Alanna is always here to guide me too. She doesn't tolerate any of my bullshit and has no problem telling me when I'm doing something stupid. With her help, I've gone two years without dating anyone.

I used it as time to try to sort my own problems out, and figure out what it is I really like. And I've grown much stronger for it. I'm done being the desperate girl I was before. But now, my self-imposed man detox is getting a little old. Especially as I watch Alanna go on yet another date while I sit home with a tub of Ben and Jerrys.

I wish I could be more carefree and unemotional with men like Alanna is. She knows how to have fun without getting attached. She's like one of those gypsy free spirited types who can go on a couple of dates with a guy, have a good time and leave without regret or feelings getting in her way. Of course, that's the way she has to live because of our lifestyle, but Alanna doesn't seem to mind.

I'm the total opposite. I'm usually shy and awkward around men and have a tendency to be too passive. Alanna says I'm a classic people pleaser. Unless I'm provoked, and then I'm a force to be reckoned with. My father always used to tell me I inherited a fiery Italian temper from my mother, and I suppose it's true.

For as long as I can remember, my relationships have been emotional train wrecks. I had a somewhat unsettling fascination for bad boys. I suppose it has something to do with my past, but I don't really want to analyze why. I always let myself get emotionally invested too fast, even when I know it's a recipe for disaster. Alanna often jokes that I'm a masochist, but I wonder to an extent if that might be true.

I set my ice cream container on the coffee table and ease back onto the couch, wanting to rest my eyes for just a few moments. I'm surprised how tired I am.

The last thing I remember is drifting off into a blissful dream of Gabriel touching my hand softly like he did the other day.

And then I'm awoken by soft laughter above me. I half open my eyes to see Alanna hovering over me, grinning like the Cheshire cat. Her long brown hair is casually braided over her shoulder, her green eyes bright with amusement.

She looks happier than I've seen her in a long time, and I wonder if it's New York, or something else. She may look like your average twenty-

six-year old, but she is far from it. Behind the relaxed and happy face she shows the world, Alanna's scars run deep. Though she's come a long way, it's always refreshing to see her looking so... alive. A vast difference from the first time I ever met her.

"What's so funny?" I cover my eyes to block out the light.

She just giggles and shakes her head. "I think the better question is what exactly were you dreaming about?"

I sit up on the couch to make room for Alanna, my face flushing with embarrassment. "Oh God, what was I saying?"

"Well, I only caught the last few bits and pieces, but something along the lines of how beautiful you think he is. So tell me..." She flutters her eyelashes dramatically. "Is this another dream about Gabriel, the sex God extraordinaire?"

"Oh, geez." I curl my knees into my chest. "I was dreaming about him again. What the hell is wrong with me? It's been way too long."

Alanna smiles playfully. "I find it rather amusing actually, and so much better than watching you have your usual nightmares. This is nice for a change. I think it's a sign... there's only one way for you to get it out of your system."

"And what exactly is that?"

"You should go straight to that big fancy building of his, storm into his office, and fuck him relentlessly right on his desk."

"Jesus, Alanna, you can be so crude sometimes." I laugh. "What happened to you looking out for me huh?"

"I am looking out for you." She winks. "You've come a long way. And I think this is a good time to ease yourself back into it. Just remember to keep it casual."

"I'm not even his type," I protest. "And I don't want to think about it anymore. I just need to get out of this apartment because I'm going crazy with boredom. I was hoping tomorrow night my super popular BFF might be able to actually book me into her schedule for some girl time."

“Of course my darling, anything for you.” Alanna grins. “So what part of town shall we tear up tomorrow?”

“I’ll leave that up to you, you always know where all the hot guys hang out.” I stand up and stretch my tired muscles. “But for now I’m dragging my ass back to bed, so I can get to the courier office first thing tomorrow.”

“Always so motivated.” Alanna chuckles. “Go to bed and get some rest because you’re going to need it for tomorrow night.”

I plod down the hall to my room, collapsing onto the single mattress on the floor and curling into the blankets around me.

The next morning I’m woken by the annoying sound of my cell phone. I reach to the nightstand beside me, knocking some of the contents to the floor as I fumble for it in the dark. I check the screen and frown when I realize it’s only six-thirty.

“Hello?” I whisper groggily.

“Victoria!” Marvin’s voice booms through the speaker. “Where the hell have you been? I tried calling you five times last night, you never got back to me.”

I roll my eyes at my overly dramatic boss from the courier service. “Jesus, Marvin do you even know what time it is? You never call me this early. I fell asleep early last night and I must not have heard you call.”

“Well, I don’t care what you were doing last night, all I care about is that you’re here at 7:30 sharp. I have an important delivery I need you to make this morning.”

“Alright fine, 7:30 got it. See you then.”

I shut the phone and crawl out of bed. It’s unusual for Marvin to call so early, and even stranger that he demand I make a delivery. We have

about ten couriers fighting for work, so I don't really get it. I wonder what could possibly be so important.

I make my way to the bathroom and go through the motions of having a shower and brushing my teeth while still half asleep. I apply a few dabs of mascara and my usual Red lipstick- the small amount of makeup I do wear on a daily basis. By the time I've dried my long hair and run my fingers through it to tame my wild curls, I realize I have five minutes before I have to leave.

I dart back to my room, throwing on a pair of skillfully shredded leggings, my Cherry Red Doc Marten boots, and matching red leather jacket. This is one of my usual work outfits because my boss doesn't care what I wear, so long as I get the parcel there on time. I developed my own sort of style when I finally got away from Eleanore, and its one thing I refuse to bend on.

Even though I used to worry that my clothing would make me stand out, I came to realize that people actually look at me less. Nobody wants to make eye contact with the weird grunge style girl, and that suits me just fine.

My clothing is a mix of comfortable yet practical at the same time. I like to have lightweight clothing while I do deliveries since I'm usually running all over the city. I grab my keys, my iPod, and my messenger bag and rush out the door.

When I arrive at the courier office exactly one minute ahead of schedule, my boss still manages to shoot me an exasperated look. He reaches under the desk and pulls out a parcel before handing it over to me. "Here's the address, now you need to get going right away to make sure you get there on time."

I take a look at the address and a sudden spark of familiarity shoots through me. When I glance at the name on the top, I shove the parcel back towards my boss like its poison. "Nuh- uh, I'm not doing it, you'll need to find someone else." I cross my arms stubbornly and wait for the blowback.

Marvin's face twists pleadingly. "You have to do it, Victoria, there is no one else. This client paid a large sum of money for this service, and you

get seventy percent of the cut. He was very specific about that. And besides he asked for you personally. It has to be you or else the deal is off.”

“Oh, you have got to be kidding me!”

Why the hell would he ask for me? The part of me that wants to be flattered is largely overshadowed by my annoyance. I planned on keeping him a part of my fantasy world, not the real one.

“I’m not a prostitute Marvin, he can’t order me specifically. This is a courier service, how could you even agree to that?”

Marvin shakes his head seriously at my insinuation. “Look, Victoria, it’s not all that unusual with high profile clients to ask for someone specific. They only trust certain people to get the job done and I guess you were it. Trust me I tried to get him to let me send someone else because you haven’t even been here long enough to do a job like this one. With this kind of commission, it’s ludicrous really, but he insisted. And I had no choice but to accept. If you don’t do this job it could ruin my business reputation. You have no idea how powerful that family’s word is.”

I roll my eyes and snatch back the parcel. “Fine Marvin, I’ll do it. Only because I need this job and I don’t want this prick ruining your business over me. But you owe me big time!” I turn on my heel and stomp out the door. As it closes I hear Marvin yell a thank you behind me in his New Jersey accent.

Chapter Four

Victoria

I linger in front of the impressive Maddox Corp building with exactly five minutes to spare. I want to spite this infuriating man and bring his documents two minutes late just to waste his time. But against my better judgment, and out of desperation for one of the only jobs I've got here, I step inside.

The inside of the building is all glass and marble, furnished with modern designs. People are milling about in expensive business attire, and I feel totally out of place. I'm coming to regret my decision to feel uninhibited in my clothing choices this morning, especially now that I have to face Gabriel. He's probably going to think I dressed like this to lure him in. The thought never even occurred to me before, but now it's consuming me.

Maybe it's the fact I have no idea what his reasons for doing this are. There is no way he could be interested in me. And how the hell did he know where I worked? That's a little freaky. But it's too late to turn back now, so with a deep breath I make my way to the front desk to check in. The woman sitting behind it is dressed to perfection with a flawless black skirt suit and not a hair out of place in her tidy bun. I roll my eyes as I walk away from the desk with my visitor's pass in hand, making my way to the elevators.

After a long two minute wait, I crowd into one of the lifts with eight others. It looks like I'm going to be late after all. After stopping at several floors, and more people coming and going, I finally make it to the top of the

building. I am precisely five minutes late when I step out the doors and am confronted by one Gabriel Maddox with a scowl on his face.

“You’re late,” he growls, crossing his arms across his broad chest. When I look up into his eyes it’s as if I’m staring into a stormy ocean of blue. I wasn’t able to discern their exact coloring the other day, but today they are unmistakable. He definitely has that angry tough guy thing going for him.

“Oops, sorry,” I smirk unapologetically. This man is way too easy to rile up, and if anyone should be pissy here, it should definitely be me.

Gabriel grabs my arm and leads me past his secretary, who makes sure to give my clothing ensemble a disapproving glance. He stomps down a short hallway and flings open the door to his office. I yank my arm free of him as he motions for me to sit down in the chair opposite his desk. I do as I’m asked, because quite frankly the look on his face tells me he is not to be trifled with right now. I try to look unimpressed at the sight of the massive office around me and the view of the city beneath, but I’m not sure if I’m succeeding. Because it is impressive.

I expect him to walk around the desk and sit in his office chair, but he surprises me by positioning himself in front of me and sitting on the edge of the desk. He leans forward until his face is a mere few inches from mine. His jaw is clenched tight and I can’t help but stare at the light stubble along the edges, wondering if it’s as soft as it looks.

“I don’t like being made to wait,” he snaps, his minty breath skating over my skin.

“That’s funny,” I retort. “Because I don’t like being woken up at 6:30 am to do your personal bidding.”

At this point, I’m too fired up to care about my damn job. I refuse to bend on this just to please this man. His ego is infuriating. I don’t care how hot he is, I’m not taking this bullshit from anyone. Once again, he appears to be stunned into silence by my response. And I’m certain by the look on his face that it’s something he’s not accustomed to.

His eyes travel the length of my body, a feral gleam taking over them. And that's when I realize he is blatantly checking me out. I feel the muscles deep within my belly clenching at the thought. This glorious, angry man in front of me actually wants me. He looks animalistic, wild with desire. I briefly entertain the thought of what he would be like in bed. I imagine he'd like the rough angry kind of sex since I can't see him being the sensitive type.

Arrogant or not, the man is too fucking beautiful for words. His dark brown hair is clean cut and perfectly styled to make his features stand out. Like his eyes. The ones that swing from gray to blue in an instant. Today, and at this moment, they are crystal blue. He's wearing black suit pants, a black vest, and a crisp white shirt underneath. His sleeves are rolled up and as he leans in closer, I can see the muscles flexing across his arms. Yeah, he definitely works out.

I know I should pull back, but I don't want to give him the satisfaction of backing down. The sexual tension between us is unlike anything I've ever experienced before, and I'm not sure why. This is so not my type of guy. Angry, stomping around all the time, arrogant... okay, maybe he is sort of my type I guess. I mean my track record with men isn't the best.

His face relaxes as he leans closer, hovering an inch from my lips. I freeze and inhale slow, shallow breaths as I try to get a grip. A small part of me is begging for him to kiss me. I don't know why since not even a moment ago I was so angry with him and wanted nothing more than to leave. He closes his eyes and draws in a long breath.

"God you smell amazing," he murmurs, grabbing my hand and bringing it to his lips as he kisses it. My pulse goes frantic at the slight touch. Oh, he's good alright. I have to give him that. I'm sure he's probably done this a thousand times. "What perfume is that?"

"Um," I squeak. "It's actually sunscreen. Coconut."

"Sunscreen?" he asks incredulously.

"Yeah, you know... gotta' protect the skin and all that jazz." God, what am I even talking about?

“Hmm...”

He reaches his hand down to trail a finger along the flesh that peeks through my ripped leggings. Everything inside of me twists with desire.

“You look so fucking sexy in these,” he rasps. “So wild and rebellious. And don’t even get me started on those red boots. What I would do to you with those on.”

Did he really just say that, or am I imagining things? I can’t move, or speak. I’m paralyzed by what he’s doing to me with just his words.

He leans forward to whisper into the shell of my ear. “I want you, Victoria. I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you since you ran into me on the street the other day.”

I pull back a little, daring to look into his eyes. They are full of hunger, and I can only hope my own eyes aren’t betraying my desire too. He places both of his large hands on my knees, gripping them possessively as he takes back the space between us.

“Tell me you want me too.”

I want to, oh God do I want to. Every fiber of my being is screaming out for him. I want to tell him to take me right here, right now. But in the back of my mind, my logical self is reminding me he does this all the time. This is what he’s famous for. He probably has some strange preoccupation with slumming it with the average gals every once in a while.

And I know that if I’m having this hard of a time refusing him now, I would never be able to refuse him in the future. I’ve come too far from allowing myself to be used by my last boyfriend, if you could even call him that, and I won’t go back now. I don’t know much about Gabriel Maddox, but from what I do know he’s a serial womanizer. And I need another heart break like I need a bullet to the head.

Somehow I manage to compose myself enough to pull away from him as I look into his eyes.

“I um... I can’t do this,” I whisper. “I’m sorry, but you don’t even know me.”

I have no idea why I'm apologizing, but it just slips out. I'm always apologizing when I shouldn't. That's the people pleaser in me.

He pulls back abruptly as I rise on legs that feel like Jello. His face is suddenly impassive, and I can't tell what he's thinking. Just like that he's able to hide his emotions, and in that moment I know I've made the right choice. He runs his hand back through his hair and exhales an exasperated sigh.

"So let me get to know you then, Victoria," he states simply, as though that should be the solution to my argument.

"I'm sorry, but that's not possible." I turn to go. I don't even sound convincing to myself, so I don't know how I expect him to accept my response. I feel like he knows too much already, information I haven't even given him... my name, my work, who knows what else. Then realization sinks in. I whip around, trying to hide the panic in my voice. "How did you find me?"

He smiles at my sudden change of tack and then looks at me quizzically for a moment before answering. "It wasn't that difficult, Victoria. The name of the company you work for was on the parcels you dropped the other day. I called them and gave your physical description, requesting you personally. Your boss freely gave me your first name. I see no harm in that, do you?"

I furrow my brows, not quite believing how stupid I had been. I make a mental note to be more careful with my information from now on. I take a deep breath, steeling myself as I turn on my heel and continue for the door. Just as I reach for the handle he speaks again, stopping me in my tracks.

"Tell me, Victoria, who is it that you're running from?"

I can't bear to face him, because I'm not sure where this is going, and I don't have a very good poker face. "Excuse me?"

"Please don't insult my intelligence by feigning ignorance," he growls.

Suddenly he's behind me, whipping me around to face him. He keeps hold of my shoulders as he searches the depths of my eyes for answers. And for some reason, I feel like he can see right through me. I squeeze my eyes shut, taking a deep breath. His cologne wafts up as I do, and I go a little weaker in the knees. He smells exotic. *Delicious*. Hints of Bergamot and Sandalwood. *Earthy*. *Woody*. *Spicy*. I savor the smell, allowing it to linger on me before I speak again. This is how I will remember him.

I shake my head, trying to hold onto my wavering resolution. "I don't know what you're talking about," I whisper. How the hell does this man know so much about me?

He reaches down and pulls a loose strand of hair from my face, searching my eyes once more. "The other day, when I met you, you were clearly running from someone or something. You looked panicked. I should have asked you about it then, and I apologize that I didn't."

I pause, fantasizing for a moment that I could actually tell him. Unload all of my secrets to someone other than Alanna. That he would take me in his arms and comfort me and tell me everything is going to be okay. That's what I want more than anything, but I know it's unrealistic and foolish and not even remotely a possibility. So I muster all the conviction I can find to speak. "I was running late. That's all, Gabriel. All of these parcels have deadlines, and I was in a hurry to get them delivered on time. Now I'm sorry, but I really have to go."

He releases me regretfully as I turn to leave. "This conversation isn't over," he calls after me. "Not by a long shot."

And I roll my eyes because somehow I know it's true.

Chapter Five

Gabriel

Sitting in my home office, I muddle through the little information Allan Ricketts gave me on Victoria for the thousandth time. After going through the background check on this mystery woman, my curiosity still hasn't been satisfied. Allan wasn't able to find much since she's apparently using a fake name and only works cash in hand jobs. She has no social media accounts, no internet references, nothing.

After this morning's rejection, I'm all out of ideas, and I feel like I'm going crazy. I need to be inside of her... at least once.

I've never had to throw myself at a woman before. Hell, they practically line up, begging me to take them to bed. *So why does it have to be her?* There is just something off about her and I can't figure out what it is. Allan showed me the surveillance video and it doesn't make any sense. She was looking across the street at another woman as if she had seen a ghost. And then she ran. But the other woman didn't seem to recognize her or even care. The mystery surrounding her only intensifies my desire to see her again. For some strange reason, I find myself worrying about her. It's not an emotion I particularly like because it reminds me of Parker.

I know I should just cut my losses and run. There's always someone willing to do what I want. *But... they won't be her.* I want to see her bound and trembling before me while I fuck her senseless. Covering her in my come, marking her as mine... *mine?* Where the fuck did that come from? No, not mine. I will fuck her, but only once. And then I can put this shit behind me.

Victoria

It's Wednesday morning, and after yesterday's delivery, I'm relieved to see the Temp office calling me finally. Hopefully, they'll have a project to keep me distracted for a couple days and keep my mind off Gabriel. That man has bad idea written all over him. And yet I can't stop thinking about him anyways. I roll my eyes at my naivety as I pick up the phone.

"Victoria, hi it's Julie from the temp pool. Hey listen, I don't know what your plans are for the rest of the week, but we just got a high priority request for an administration assistant. Can you do it?"

"Definitely!" I reply a little too enthusiastically.

"Okay, great. I will email you the details. They need someone to start this morning at nine. Is that going to be alright?"

"No problem."

I hang up the phone and hug myself. This is exactly what I need. I've been signed up with the temp pool since I moved here but hardly ever get assignments. It's a smaller business, and luckily they let me work as an independent contractor so I'm able to keep my tracks covered.

As I open my closet, I pull out the only business like clothes I have, and the only clothing I actually took the time to hang up. I lay them on the bed and sort through them carefully. I end up choosing a black sleeveless blouse with cherries on it, along with a red pencil skirt.

Then I scramble to my lingerie selection to find what I like to call my secret weapon. I don't know why but I've always had an affinity for racy lingerie. If it's black and lacy, chances are I own it. There's something about wearing these things beneath my normal clothing that makes me feel confident like I can take on the world. I end up choosing a garter belt and sheer black nylons along with my thong and demi-bra.

I pull my hair up into a neat bun which is by no means an easy feat. After putting on my makeup, I rustle through my nightstand for my sleek black reading glasses. I hate wearing them because it makes me feel like a librarian, but clear vision is a necessity for a job like this. I complete my outfit with some black Mary Jane pumps and a black cardigan before heading out the door.

As I emerge from the subway, studying the address intently, I get a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach. I realize this building is eerily close to Maddox Corp. My first instinct is that Gabriel had something to do with this, but then I shake it off as ridiculous. It's not the same address, it's just nearby. As I draw closer, my heart begins to beat a little faster in my chest. And then I freeze. The building isn't just close. It's directly across from Maddox Corp.

Why is this happening? What could the universe possibly be trying to tell me by running into him repeatedly? Something is just not right about this. *It's too weird.* But, I've already accepted the job, and if I back out now the temp pool will never call me again. I take a deep breath and somehow persuade my feet into action once more.

Once inside, I approach the front desk nervously, giving the secretary my details. She types my name into the computer and then gives me a strange look. I fidget with my hair, checking for strays. *Why is she looking at me like that?*

"Okay, Miss Kelly," she says. "You need to go to the nineteenth floor. They are doing some construction up there right now, so I'm afraid it's a bit of a mess. But just walk down the hallway and you'll see the door labeled Phillip Berger. You can go right in. Mr. Berger isn't here this week, so it will just be you. Feel free to make use of his office to suit your needs. There will be instructions awaiting you on his desk."

"Okay, thank you," I mumble as I step away, feeling relieved to be away from her intense scrutiny. I walk across the shiny black floor to join the throngs of people waiting for elevators. When I'm able to squeeze into one of the lifts, I wait nervously as it climbs to the nineteenth floor.

When I step out, there are tarps and dust and tools everywhere. And it's loud... really loud. The secretary wasn't kidding when she said this place was under construction. Some of the laborers stop to give me appreciative glances, and I scurry down the hall quickly. I feel like a piece of meat being dangled in front of a lion's den.

I open the large wooden door with Phillip Berger's name imprinted on it. It's a nice office, much nicer than I've ever worked in before. It's large with an open floor, tall glass windows overlooking the city, and a grand oak desk in the center. Off to the side is a black leather couch, and I can't help but feel a small glimmer of excitement when I see the collection of books next to it. I walk to the wall and pull out a leather bound copy of *Catcher in the Rye*. It smells deliciously old and intoxicating as I open it. One day, I hope to own some books like this.

My happiness continues at seeing that the office has its own private restroom. That means not having to venture through the sea of over appreciative construction workers outside to use the bathroom.

I walk behind the desk and set down my purse, sinking into the plush leather chair. *I could totally get used to this.* I scoop up the typed instructions from the desk, reading them carefully. It seems pretty straightforward. Responding to mail, booking meetings for Mr. Berger's return, and answering the phone. I idly wonder how much time this will actually take up because it doesn't seem like much.

I boot up the computer in front of me, carefully typing in the password the secretary gave me. After I log into Mr. Berger's email account, I go to work responding to the awaiting emails. By the time I glance up at the clock, it's almost noon. I've already managed to respond to all the emails, book the requested meetings, and the phone hasn't rang once. I sink at the thought of how mind-numbingly boring the rest of this day is going to be.

A knock at the door startles me. Ugh, I really hope that isn't one of the guys from outside. Putting on my best professional tone, I smile.

"Come in, please."

I sit up straight in the chair, not knowing what to expect. Then the door swings open, and all the color drains from my face. Gabriel Maddox is strolling into the office. Of course, it's Gabriel. Why wouldn't it be?

He has a heart-stopping smile on his face, no doubt in response to my gaping mouth. He's wearing a perfectly tailored gray suit, one that somehow manages to make him look larger than I thought. He looks good. Better than I remember, but somehow I know I was trying to suppress that little detail. He moves lithely across the room, sitting down gracefully on the black leather sofa. Even the way he moves is sexy. A vision of him moving like that in bed flashes through my mind quickly before I make it disappear. I stand up and walk around the desk, clearing my throat in a desperate attempt to show my annoyance.

"I should have known this had your name written all over it," I say dryly.

His eyes flit appreciatively over my body. He has that look again. The one that could literally melt me with its intensity.

"You look positively sinful in that dress, Victoria," he murmurs huskily. "And don't even get me started on what those glasses are doing to me."

I feel my face flush. How can he talk to me like this? He is so blunt. Obviously, he's a man who is used to getting what he wants. *Well, not this time.*

I cross my arms and give him a disinterested glance. "What do you want, Gabriel? Are you just going to keep hiring me for pointless projects to satisfy your bizarre infatuation with me?" I choke on the words as they come out of my mouth. *I did not mean for them to sound so.... arrogant.*

He laughs at my candor. "Why do you find it odd that I should be infatuated with you, Victoria?"

"Because..." I place my hands firmly on my hips. "I'm sure you have all sorts of women falling at your feet. It's quite obvious to me that you've never heard the word no in your life. So why me? Is it the thrill of

the chase? Because I can tell you that no matter what, it's still only going to end one way."

"And what way is that, Victoria?" he replies salaciously. "With me inside you?"

"Um," I gulp. *Yes, please.* I shake my head. What the hell am I doing? Why does his talking to me that way turn me on? I need to get him out of here, quick.

"You know, for such a beautiful woman, you seem to have no idea of your effect on men."

I ignore his last comment, trying to hold my ground. "I could just quit."

"And disappoint Mr. Berger?" he asks playfully. "How do you even know that I had anything to do with this job? Perhaps it was just sheer coincidence that you were hired to work here, directly across from my building. And perhaps it was just a coincidence that my office happens to be one floor up from this one, and I just happened to notice you."

I gasp as I spin around and look up. *Oh my God.* I can see his office from here. Why didn't I see it before? That means he could see me this morning... in all of my book sniffing glory and everything.

"That is so..."

"Convenient?" he lifts his brow.

"I was thinking more along the lines of creepy." I laugh jokingly.

His mouth draws into a hard line as he stands up and stalks across the room. He stops within an inch of my body, the heat radiating from him nearly melting my core. *Good God this man can be intimidating.* But I refuse to back down. I can do this. I can totally do this.

"I want you, Victoria," he says brusquely. "Against my own will. So just tell me what I have to do to make it happen, then we can stop all these games."

Against his own will? What the hell is that supposed to mean?

I feel a shiver run down my spine as he leans in closer, his hot breath caressing my skin. *I want him to* But I can't. This is a bad idea, all around. I have to stay strong. I close my eyes and catch the intoxicating scent of his cologne. *Sweet and spicy* God the man smells even better than I remember.

"I... I.. Gabriel, it's just," I try to formulate a sentence. But the heady scent of his cologne and his close proximity are making it impossible to think.

And then abruptly he steps back, much to my disappointment. I was kind of enjoying our little standoff.

He runs an exasperated hand through his hair and sighs. His face is unreadable, but it appears as though he has changed his mind.

"Perhaps you are right, Victoria," he says. "You should really stay away from me, I wouldn't be good for you."

He turns and leaves, slamming the door behind him. My shoulders slump and I don't know why, but I feel a sharp stab of pain at his words. Isn't this what I wanted? Exactly what I said I wanted? So why does it feel as though all my dreams have been ripped away?

I shake my head and sit back down at my desk. For the rest of the afternoon, I stare blankly at the computer screen, willing the email to register something, anything to distract me for a moment. But it never does. Every once in a while I glance back over my shoulder and peek into Gabriel's office across the street. It's empty and remains that way even when I leave at five.

Chapter Six

Victoria

The next morning, I ponder as to whether I should even go back to this job. It isn't as if I need the money that badly. I have a lot saved up so far, so what's one job? Still, I can't shake yesterday's events, and a small part of me wants to see Gabriel again. Even if it is from the safe confines of my office window.

I'm not feeling nearly as confident today, so I throw on a simple Navy blue skirt, Nautical striped shirt, and yellow cardigan. I pair it with some brown leather flats and a matching belt. I tame my hair into a bun, though not nearly as neat as the day before, and put on some makeup. I'm out the door by eight sharp.

After stepping out of the elevator, I'm greeted once again by the sea of construction workers. Even they don't find me nearly as appealing today it seems. I walk down the hall, opening up Mr. Berger's lonely office once more. As I walk towards the desk, my heart skips a beat as I glance out the window and see Gabriel sitting in his office. He's on the phone, apparently engrossed in conversation. I want him to look up, to notice me, but he doesn't.

Throughout the afternoon, I steal glances at him, but he never looks my way. And then at noon, a tall beautiful blonde woman appears in his office. She sits on his desk, laughing flirtatiously and touching his arm at every opportunity. She is practically throwing herself at him, and my heart sinks. Now that is probably more his type.

Well, this is what you wanted, I chide myself.

This should be a blessing in disguise. I am so not even close to being in his league. He was only in it for the sex, anyway. As soon as he fucked me, it would have been all over. But why should it matter? It's not like I'm looking for a relationship anyway. And I will never look like tall, blonde legs McGee over there.

That evening on the way home, I stop at the supermarket and grab a tub of Ben and Jerry's Half Baked. All I want to do is sit on the couch, eat junk food, and watch Gilmore Girls with Alanna. But as per usual, she's already on her way to another date when I get home.

After I eat my ice cream and drink half a bottle of wine, which incidentally turns out to be a horrid combination, I take a long hot shower. I think of Gabriel, and it makes me angry. *Why can't I get him out of my head?* I want him to want me again. But why? It can't lead anywhere. I try to convince myself for a moment that I can just do casual with him. It's been two years, surely I've learned my lesson by now. I know it's a big fat lie, but it's a nice thought while it lasts.

I climb into bed a little after eight, feeling even more pathetic that I'm going to sleep so early.

The next morning I wake even angrier. I dreamt of him all night. *Damn this man for getting under my skin.* At the risk of looking like a complete idiot, I need to prove a point. I'm pretty sure this is the reckless side of me coming out again, but I don't give a damn. I spend extra time tousling my hair into perfect curls before pinning it up loosely. I do my eyes up in a smoky shadow and put on extra red lipstick. And then I slither into a silky black lace pencil dress that borders on just inappropriate enough to possibly get fired.

I slip into my pink leopard print stilettos and glance at myself satisfactorily in the mirror. Hell, what does it matter what I wear anyway? I'm alone on my floor with the exception of the construction workers.

I go to work with renewed determination. As I walk down the long hall of the nineteenth floor, the men stop to stare at me, unlike yesterday. It gives me a bit of my confidence back. When I enter the office, I see Gabriel across the way, sitting at his desk.

He seems engrossed in some paperwork and I'm not sure if he's seen me until his head shoots up. A small smile of satisfaction creeps across my face. I make a show of walking around the desk, pulling the loose pins from my hair and allowing it to cascade down my back. I sit down in the plush leather chair and kick my leopard print stilettos up onto the polished wood as I lean back. I pick up a book and begin to read.

A few moments later, the desk phone rings, startling me. I assumed that since I hadn't gotten a phone call in the last two days that everyone was aware of Mr. Berger's absence. I pick it up nervously.

"Phillip Berger's office. This is Victoria speaking, how may..." I'm cut off by the brusque voice on the other end.

"Are you trying to get my attention?"

Holy shit.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I reply nonchalantly.

"Victoria," he snarls, "this isn't funny. There are construction workers there. I don't want them seeing you like that."

"What does it matter to you?" I reply bitterly. "If you can have lanky blonde women swooning over you all day, then I don't see the harm in me setting a little fire under a few construction workers."

He laughs softly, his tone relaxing. "Victoria, are you actually jealous?"

"What? No!" I try my best to hide my pathetic denial. *Of course, I'm jealous.*

"The lanky blonde was in my office for no more than twenty minutes, not all day. And yes she is after me, but I'm not interested in her."

"Oh," I mutter. "It doesn't matter, none of my business. You can fuck who you like."

“Well, in that case...” His voice grows husky. “I’d like to fuck you.”

“Um...” *What can I possibly say?*

And then I hear the click of the phone. I whirl around in my chair to see Gabriel storming out of his office. What is he doing?

Ten minutes later, he strolls through my door, locking it behind him. I stand up, shocked and immobile as he stalks towards me. He stops a few inches short of me, his eyes roving over every inch of my skin.

My own eyes do a slow perusal of his body, of his black suit with the crisp white dress shirt. I never thought I would find a man in a suit attractive, but there is just something about Gabriel Maddox that appeals to my animalistic nature. I want to tear those fancy clothes off of him. I want to see his powerful body naked beneath my tremulous hands.

He steps closer to me so that his chest is at my eye level, and I still can’t look up at him. I’m afraid that one more glance in his direction and he will own me.

He grips my chin in his hands, forcing my gaze to his. He looks ravenous, but I can tell he’s holding back. Because underneath that hunger is a hint of confusion.

“Why won’t you look at me, Victoria?” he demands.

“I am looking at you,” I rasp.

“Tell me...” He trails a thumb absently over my bottom lip. “What is it about me that you are so afraid of?”

“I’m not afraid of you,” I whisper.

“Is it my cock?” he grabs my hand, moving it to the rock hard bulge in his pants. “Are you afraid you might actually like it?”

His voice is mocking and confusing, and I can do nothing but stare at my palm that is now stroking that rock hard bulge in his pants. I don’t even seem to have control of my own limbs anymore. And the next time I look up at him, his eyes are half closed, his fists clenching at his sides. And I realize just how much I’m affecting him in this moment. It makes me feel

powerful. Reckless me is in full swing as I grip him harder through the soft material, rubbing him against my palm.

And then his strong thick hands are on my body, crushing me to his chest as his lips crash down on mine possessively. He tastes like mint and possession and fire, and I can do nothing but melt into his touch. I part my lips, giving him full access to my mouth. He groans in approval, his tongue exploring mine.

Then he pulls away, staring down at me in confusion again. But it only lasts a moment. The room is a blur of motion as he pulls me down onto the couch. Before I can even recover my equilibrium, he flips me over so that I'm splayed across his lap like a naughty child.

I feel so exposed, and I have no idea what to expect next. My stomach clenches with a sudden ache for something I can't quite comprehend. His hand inches the material of my dress up over my hips, and I hear him groan as he fingers the black lace thong against my skin. He slides the material down slowly, stopping once it's just below my butt cheeks. He caresses my ass, grabbing handfuls of my flesh with his strong warm hands.

"That is a mighty fine ass you have, Miss Kelly." His voice is thick, raspy, and sexy as hell. And it's because of me. I still can't seem to wrap my head around that part.

He pulls my legs apart, stroking over my arousal with the gentlest of touches. If he's waiting for a protest from me, he isn't going to get it. I'm too far gone at this point. Swallowed up by the sexual tornado that is Gabriel Maddox.

He pushes two fingers inside of me, igniting a fire inside my belly.

"Fuck," he grunts. "You're so wet for me, Victoria. And I haven't even gotten started yet."

I can't even feel embarrassed because it's true. I'm needy, panting, writhing at his touch. I have never experienced anything like it before, and I'm afraid I might combust if he takes it away now.

“You have been very frustrating,” he says, his voice lowering an octave. “Leading me on, toying with me. I don’t like it, Victoria. That’s not how this works.”

His fingers continue to slide in and out of my sensitive flesh, teasing me with promises of pleasure I’ll never have.

“Do you want to know how this works, Victoria?”

“Yes,” I pant against his thigh.

I can almost hear him smiling as he leans down to whisper in my ear. “You do what I want, when I want, how I want. Understand?”

Holy Fuck. Why does that sound so... *erotic*? I know it shouldn’t. Feminists everywhere would be completely disgusted with me. But I’d be lying if I said I didn’t enjoy the dominant tone in his voice. He isn’t holding me down, so I could run right now if I wanted to. But I don’t. *I really, really don’t.*

“I asked you a question, Victoria.” His hand caresses my ass, a little rougher now. And then he pulls away. I arch up instinctively, craving his touch once more.

His hand collides with my ass unexpectedly, and I jump a little at the shock of it. *Did he just spank me?*

“That’s for leading me on,” he growls.

What the fuck? I really should do something at this point. Probably get up and slap him, but I just can’t will my body to move. Something about this is turning me on in the strangest way.

Another hard slap collides on my other cheek. It stings, but I don’t jump this time. I won’t give him the satisfaction. What the hell is he doing to me?

“That is for your smart fucking mouth,” he growls again.

And another slap. “That’s for teasing me.”

And two more hard slaps. I lose track of whatever my indiscretions are, lost in the rhythm of his hands on me.

It doesn't really hurt at this point. In fact, I still can't comprehend what I'm doing here, allowing this to continue. But some sick, depraved part of me is enjoying this. It feels... hot. And I am hot... burning for his touch.

"Are you going to answer me, Miss Kelly?" he grunts. "Or shall I keep going?"

"Yes," I pant.

"Yes, what?"

"I understand."

Holy shit. What did I just agree to? I don't even know. All I know is that my aching core won't be satisfied until he's filled me with his cock.

"Good girl." He strokes my thigh with his free hand. "So very obedient. I have to admit, I thought it would take more on my part."

His fingers are still sliding in and out of me, his thumb toying with my clit. I feel like there are a zillion little fireflies buzzing around inside of me. I want to beg him to keep going... to keep making me feel this way, even if I can't get my release. He's brought me closer than any man before him.

He picks me up, carrying me to the desk with my legs wrapped around him. When he sets me down, my butt is on the edge of the desk, my legs splayed open for his attention. And suddenly, my insecurity threatens to take me hostage. He just stands there, staring at me as his hands move over my body. For a moment, his face is blank, and I bite my lip nervously.

He runs his fingers over the thin lace thong once more, sending tremors through my entire body. And then with one swift movement, he rips it away. His face is savage as he yanks down the top of my dress, my breasts springing free.

"Fuck," he hisses, feeling the weight of both breasts in his hands. "I knew you'd be all natural."

I don't even know what to say to that. I don't have time to give it much thought before his hot mouth engulfs one of my nipples.

“So soft,” he murmurs between nips.

Oh. My. God.

Then he does something really unexpected. He lifts me again and carries me around the back of the desk. He stands me up, half-naked with my palms up against the glass windows overlooking the city. I’m about to protest when his hands find my breasts, his hips jutting his erection against my ass. I glance nervously at the building across the way. Can anyone see us? As the sensations of his hot mouth kissing my neck take over, I stop caring. Maybe I secretly like the idea of all of New York watching while Gabriel Maddox fucks me.

I hear him unzipping his pants behind me with one hand, and then the rip of foil from a condom. A moment later, his thick cock is pulsing between the cheeks of my ass, slowly descending to my aching center. I watch his reflection in the glass, his eyes scorching as he slides over the wetness that greets him. His touch becomes rougher as he spreads my legs further apart, arching my ass into him. He grips my shoulder tight as he begins to tease the head of his cock against my folds.

“I have thought about fucking you in every possible way,” he grunts. “And now I want all of New York to see it.”

I moan at his words, desperately wanting him inside of me. I arch back against him and in one swift movement, he pushes into me, stretching me. I gasp from the shock of pain that sears through me and he stills, letting my body adjust to his size.

“Shhh,” he whispers as he kisses the back of my neck. “It’s okay. Just give it a minute. You’re really fucking tight.”

I nod and let my body relax around him. It doesn’t take long before I’m urging him to move. His hands are everywhere, stroking up and down my spine, my neck, my breasts... my wetness pooling around his hard cock. He starts to move inside of me, gripping my hip forcefully to hold me in place. The combination of pleasure and pain is exquisite. His lips caress my shoulder as he pulls back and slams into me. I can’t help the feral moan that escapes my chest. It’s been so long since I was touched by a man and never did it feel like this.

“You like that?” he grunts, thrusting his hips harder.

“Yes,” I gasp, my breath fogging up the window in front of me.

His fingers move between my thighs, and he stills inside of me for a moment as he feels how drenched I am for him. And then his eyes are boring into the back of my head. I can’t tell what he’s thinking as I watch his reflection in the window, but soon enough it doesn’t matter.

He starts pounding into me with unrelenting thrusts, heaving my body forward with every slap of his flesh against mine. My insides quiver around him as he continues to palm my breasts in his hands. I have never felt anything like the combination of his rough fucking and gentle caresses. The pressure is building deep within me and I can’t hold back my moans.

It’s the first time I’ve had a cock inside of me that I can actually feel that edge. The one I so willingly want to dive off of. And I think I might scream if I don’t get this release. I want him to be the first person other than myself to make me come, and somehow I’m certain he won’t disappoint me. His lips move to my neck, sucking the delicate skin as his thumb finds my clit.

“Give it to me, Victoria.”

And I do. I give him everything as I let out a guttural scream, clenching around his engorged cock. The tremors seem to go on forever as he continues to thrust inside of me, milking his own release with a long deep growl.

And then we both collapse forward, pressed against the glass for all of New York to see in our just fucked glory. Both our breaths are ragged and neither of us speaks as we come down from the high. And then like a gust of cold air he pulls out of me, leaving me feeling empty at the loss.

I push against the glass to steady myself as I watch his reflection walk into the bathroom without a word. And this is the only thing that can dampen my high. I just came my brains out on his cock, a huge hurdle for me, and suddenly I feel like a whore. Because just like that, it’s over. Like a business transaction.

I sit down on the couch and try to smooth out and reassemble my clothing, using that to distract me. I'm still smoothing out imaginary wrinkles in my skirt when I hear him walk back out. I can feel his eyes on me, his presence sucking all the air from the room as he hovers over me.

"Victoria," he says gruffly. "Look at me."

I do. I don't know why, but I can't resist that commanding voice, even though I suddenly feel like yesterday's garbage. He looks just as put together as when he arrived, his face calm and impassive.

I roll my eyes. *I knew this was coming... stupid... stupid... stupid!*

He reaches down almost hesitantly, stroking my cheek with his thumb. "You really are quite beautiful."

I close my eyes, soaking up his affection if only for a moment. Inside, I know it isn't real. He probably says this to all the women after he fucks them, making it easier on his own conscious when he strolls out the door, never to be seen again.

I want to change the subject, to save myself from this embarrassment. "I can't believe you spanked me," I say, trying my best to sound affronted.

The corners of his mouth curve into a slow smile. "Well, you didn't stop me. Did you not enjoy it?"

I look away. *There is no way I'm answering that.*

"I'm afraid I have a business trip today," he says quickly. "I'm leaving in an hour and won't be back until Saturday. But I'd like to see you again."

I laugh sarcastically. "You don't have to do this, Gabriel. Pretend like we're going to see each other again. I know what this was."

"And what exactly is that, Victoria?" he bites out.

"Um, well I just assumed... I mean men like you don't usually..."

"Don't make assumptions about me," he snaps. "Because you'd be wrong. Regardless of what you might hear, I don't just use women. It's

usually the other way around. And when I say I want to see you again, I mean it.”

“Okay,” I whisper. *Geez, what crawled up his ass?* Women using him? I don’t understand how that’s even possible.

“I will be in touch,” he says, his tone softening. And, just like that, he’s out the door.

I sit back, reveling in the aftermath of Gabriel Maddox. This man is so confusing. As much as I want to, I refuse to hold my breath on seeing him again. I figure he probably got whatever it was that attracted him to me out of his system now.

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Chapter Seven

Victoria

Saturday night finally rolls around, and as expected, I haven't heard anything from Gabriel. I'm trying hard not to care. I stare at my reflection in the mirror, doing my best to coax my hair into behaving. All I want to do is go out with Alanna, get drunk, and find some semblance of my shattered self-esteem.

"Ugh," I mumble in frustration as I give up on my wild curls. I pucker up my lips and coat them with some fresh Crimson lipstick, deciding that will have to do.

Outfitted in one of my favorite mini dresses with a simple black bodice and a tutu skirt, I look like a punk ballerina. I've paired the dress with some fishnets and my favorite combat boots. One last spritz of perfume and I'm ready to join Alanna in the living room.

She lets out her loudest wolf whistle. "Get it girl! Look at you! Hot damn, you really are on the prowl tonight."

"You have no idea," I mumble.

I've already filled Alanna in on the Gabriel incident earlier this week, and Alanna was hell bent on cheering me up tonight.

"So are we ready?" I ask.

"Hell yes! We are going to have so much fun tonight, just you wait and see."

As we walk to dinner, Alanna fills me in on the evening's agenda. We are meeting up with her friend Trevor from work for a bite, then hitting

up some club he managed to get us into.

When we arrive at the restaurant- an upscale locale aptly named Posh- Trevor is already waiting outside. He kisses both of us on the cheeks and showers us with compliments as we walk inside. He made reservations earlier, so we don't have to wait long to be seated. By the time I finish my meal of seared chicken and asparagus, I've washed it down with three Vodka Cranberry Spritzers, and I'm feeling pretty good. Trevor is flirting with me and Alanna shamelessly, which he always does.

When we finally arrive at Club HQ, I feel a little uncomfortable with the line out the door. When I shoot Alanna a look of uncertainty, Trevor reassures me with a kiss on the cheek.

"Don't worry baby, I've got the golden tickets!" he waves them in the air as the bouncer pulls back the velvet ropes, allowing us to walk right through.

Trevor escorts us to a white table in the back with a reserved sign. Within a minute of sitting down, a waitress appears in a form fitting white mini dress to take our drink order. I decide to stay with the Vodka and Cranberry Spritzers, even though I know I'm going to pay for it tomorrow morning.

When the waitress returns with our drinks several minutes later, her demeanor is noticeably chillier. She sets the drinks down on the table and pauses for a moment to give me the once over.

"Drinks are on the house," she snaps, flipping her hair over her shoulder as she sashays back across the room.

"What the hell crawled up her ass?" Alanna laughs.

Trevor leans in and pinches my cheek. "Don't worry baby, she's just jealous of this face. I mean God who wouldn't be?"

We all bust up laughing and pick up our drinks for a toast.

Thirty minutes and three drinks later, I'm feeling relaxed and carefree as I agree to dance with Trevor and Alanna. I hate dancing because I'm not very good at it, but I'm also just drunk enough not to care. Trevor pulls both of us to the floor, dancing in time to the pulsing rhythm. I'm a

little nervous at first, but after a few minutes my body is finding its own movements in response to the music.

Soon Alanna finds another male dance partner to grind on and it's just me and Trevor. I feel completely uninhibited by the fact I don't have to worry if he's attracted to me or if I'm doing it right. My hands travel up and down my body as I dip and grind into Trevor behind me. My eyes are closed and all I can hear are the lyrics of *Scream* by Usher. I like this song. It makes me feel sexy and as though I have some semblance of knowledge to what I'm doing. Then I feel a warm hand grasp my shoulder from behind, and a deep familiar pull of a voice that stops me in my tracks.

"May I cut in?" his tone is stiff, and I get the impression he isn't really asking so much as demanding.

I glance at Trevor in panic, but he just winks conspiratorially and sashays over to another single girl on the dance floor. I feel a lump in my throat as I gather the courage to turn and face my new dance partner. I don't need to look to know who it is. I could pick that rich, sultry voice anywhere. But before I can turn around he leans closer, his breath hot in my ear.

"Victoria."

"Gabriel." I turn into him, peering up into his stormy blue eyes. *How did he even find me here?* Probably the same way he figured out where I worked. I don't even want to know.

I'm surprised to see him in a black tee shirt and blue jeans, looking hot as hell.

"That dress..." His eyes rake me from head to toe. "My little gothic princess. I'd like to bend you over and fuck you in that dress."

"Stalking me again?" I try to sound casual, but my voice comes out shaky.

"My father owns this club, Victoria. I came in to resolve an issue with the management, and low and behold, there you were." He gestures in Trevor's direction with annoyance. "Dancing with some other guy."

I can't help but laugh emphatically at his ridiculous statement. "Trevor is gay, Gabriel."

He looks momentarily confused and then lets out a relieved sigh as he strokes my cheek with his thumb. I savor the warmth and gentleness of his touch, craving more.

"Well, that's a relief." His tone is harsh and accusatory. "Because I didn't like it. At all."

I open my eyes and pull his hand from my face. "You don't own me, Gabriel. You barely know me. I can dance with whomever I feel like."

He smiles down at me and places his hand on my neck, stroking the sensitive flesh. Desire pools deep within my belly, and it takes everything I have not to throw myself at him right now.

"You're right," he smirks at my willing response to his touch. "I don't own you, but I would like to."

I pull back again, this time filled with real anger. "What the hell does that even mean? I'm not a possession. Nobody will ever own me."

This time Gabriel grabs my hips and pulls me closer to him as he moves against me in an overtly sexual way. He brushes my hair back over my shoulders, his lips moving against my ear as he kisses me softly.

"Oh, I think I would have to disagree," he whispers. "I think you would like to be owned by me. Knowing that you are mine to do with as I please. I have a feeling, that if you gave me the chance, you would like it very much."

Holy crap. How does he make that sound so hot? He just told me he wants to own me, and I can barely contain my giddy enthusiasm. I can't find the words to reply, so I do the only thing I can and keep dancing.

I swivel my hips, pressing my back into his broad chest, snaking my arms up and around his neck. He growls into my ear with satisfaction as his hands travel over my hips and pull my ass into his groin. His erection digs into me, making me ache between my legs.

When I glance over, Alanna and Trevor are gaping with their mouths open. Reckless me just doesn't care. She keeps on dancing, reveling in the feel of his body against mine. And then without warning, he whips me back around to face him, plunging his lips to mine. I part my lips in invitation and he accepts greedily. The kiss is brutal and possessive, leaving my lips swollen and wet when he pulls away.

He stops dancing and holds me at a distance with a pained expression on his face. "Victoria, I have to stop now, or I'm going to fuck you right here on the dance floor and I don't care who's watching."

I don't know if it's the alcohol, but I want this and don't give a damn about the consequences right now. I playfully pull him back to me. I'm enjoying the fact that he can't have me but wants me so desperately.

"So, fuck me then," I challenge. He wraps his arms around me and groans into my ear before nipping at my neck. "I will. But not tonight, and not like this."

He pulls away again, leaving my sexual frustration at an all-time high. He kisses me on the cheek before leaning into my ear. "You already belong to me, you just don't know it yet." And with that he turns and walks away, disappearing into the crowd behind me.

It's only now that I see the horror on the faces of women all around me. And worst of all is the waitress from earlier. *If looks could kill...*

Is this why? Because she wants Gabriel to herself? Of course. It all makes sense now. He's a hot commodity, and apparently I'm in the way. I can't help but shoot her a little smirk. But in all honesty, I don't get it either. Why, when he has his choice of women, does he want me?

Within a minute Alanna and Trevor descend upon me, their excitement palpable.

"Oh my God, was that Gabriel?" she asks.

"Yes, Alanna."

"The entire club was staring at the two of you. It was so weird!"

"I know." I roll my eyes.

“And look at you smiling like the cat that got the cream!” Alanna continues, “He is so fucking hot. You have to tell us everything on the ride home.”

I nod in agreement and then turn my attention to a woman who is approaching me. She has her cell phone in her hand, and it looks like she’s trying to take a picture. I quickly cover my face and grab Alanna’s hand, darting for the door in a panic.

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Chapter Eight

Gabriel

Sitting at my desk, I rummage through the news alerts that popped up online overnight. Speculation is rife about who this new mystery woman is. Article after article with pictures of me in the club, dancing with Victoria, and one shot of her with her face in her hands, presumably after I left. My anger is about to boil over. I can't believe I was so stupid, losing myself in her like that. Out in public, no less. It makes me look weak... an easy target. Because if one woman can make me lose it, then that means others can too.

But that isn't what bothers me the most. I keep worrying about what Victoria will think of all this. She doesn't look happy in those photos, running away from the vultures. She was already skittish before, and now this. The only saving grace is that none of the photos show her face.

I knew when I saw her in that club I should have just turned around and walked back out. I'd already told myself I was only going to indulge in her once, promises be damned. I don't even know what I was thinking telling her I'd like to see her again. I don't 'see' women, I fuck them. Pure and simple. But when she walked into that club, everything changed.

The way she was dancing, and that fucking dress.... I couldn't take my eyes off her. It was a pull too strong to resist. I needed to feel my hands on her again, to let every man who might even think about fucking her know who she belonged to. And she ate it up.

I had never, in all of the women I've been with, seen a woman respond that way to my touch. Sure they tried faking it with their shitty

acting skills thinking I would be none the wiser. But they didn't like my rough hands or my harsh words. They were high society princesses, wanting to be treated as such.

But not her. She was different. She soaked up everything I had to give her, and there was no fucking way she was faking that. It made me wonder why. For the first time in a long time, I felt a twinge of guilt for what I was doing. For what I liked. Because I didn't want to take advantage of someone who was vulnerable. And it was clear, this girl wanted to be vulnerable to me. But I'd had a taste of her, and it wasn't nearly enough.

I tried to get her off my mind, even resorting to calling up Anya. But when she came over and started on her mind numbing tangent about how hard she was working to lose five pounds, all hope was lost. I politely tried to get rid of her, but even she knew something was up. She told me she'd never seen me so high strung before and offered to help me relax. When I rejected her, she left in a fit of rage.

Even as I jacked off in the shower tonight, my thoughts went back to Victoria. It's getting fucking ridiculous. And I know what needs to be done. I'm sure once I show her what I want to do to her, she won't have me anyway. So I need to get it over with.

I reach for my phone and hit the speed-dial. It's now or never.

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Chapter Nine

Victoria

The sound of someone banging on the front door wakes me with a jolt.

I roll over and groan, tangled up in my dress from last night with a throbbing head. I can hear Alanna talking with someone for a moment, and then the door shutting. A moment later she appears in my bedroom door with a gold box in her hands and a big smile on her face.

“Delivery for Miss Kelly,” she belts out her best English accent. “Courtesy of Mr. Maddox.”

“It’s way too early for this,” I mutter, flopping back onto my pillow.

Alanna sits down beside me and nudges me with the box until I give in. I open it carefully, removing a white card with a note written on it.

Victoria,

I hope you slept well and dreamt only of me.

I want to see you today.

Call me.

Gabriel

His phone number is written on the back of the card in the same perfect penmanship. I set the card down and proceed to look beneath the tissue paper. Inside is an arrangement of the most beautiful chocolate covered strawberries I’ve ever seen, no doubt from some fancy

confectionary company. Alanna grins as she helps herself to a strawberry and brings it to her mouth seductively.

“Ooh, Victoria this is food porn.”

I shut the box and set it down beside me, picking up the card to read it again. This situation is getting out of control, but I can't help myself. I want to see him again too. I want to feel his hands on my body again. I can't stop thinking about him. I know this is probably the same way he always lures women in, with these cliché notes and boxes of chocolates designed to make them feel special. But I don't care, I want him anyway.

“You have to see him again, Toto.” Alanna interrupts my far away thoughts. “I have to live vicariously through you because I'm dying to know how this plays out.”

I chuckle at the dreamy look on her face and grab a strawberry for myself. “I don't know. I want to, but I don't know if I should. He seems like bad news.”

Alanna just shrugs and continues munching on the chocolate covered fruit. “So what if he's a major player, you're only in it for some casual fun, remember? And I think he would be good for you. I've never seen you so wild and free like you were last night.”

I have to admit, she has a point. I just got done telling myself the other night that I needed something like this.

“Maybe you're right, it could be kind of perfect. Since I know there's no possibility of wanting more with him because he won't want more, it will help me keep my emotions in check. We can just hook up a couple times.”

“Yes!” Alanna nods enthusiastically. “That's exactly right. I'm so glad we got that settled, because I have something to tell you, and you can't freak out.”

“Oh God,” I mutter. “What now?”

“Well, don't forget what you just said, you're still going to see him, even after I tell you this, and I'm not letting you back out. There was no harm done, and we just need to be a little more careful...”

“What are you talking about?” I snap. Alanna has a knack for dragging out the inevitable and I hate it when she doesn’t just come right out with it.

“Don’t get angry, and don’t panic,” she says reassuringly. “I’ve been up early checking the internet, and there are some photos...”

Oh no. This can’t be happening.

“No, it’s okay,” she says quickly. “None of them show your face, I promise. I looked through every single article. They are dark and blurry and trust me it could be anybody in those photos. There is no way she’ll ever know it’s you.”

My relief is swallowed by my guilt as I think about how close I came to revealing us. “God, I can’t believe how stupid I was. You’re right, I need to be more careful.”

“So you’ll still go see him?” she asks with a hopeful expression. God love her, the woman is like an infectious ray of sunshine.

“Yes, Alanna.” I grin. “I’ll go see him. I’ll wear a hat and glasses or something.”

“Good plan,” she says, reaching into the box for another strawberry.

An hour later, I’m freshly showered and feeling slightly better as I prepare to see Gabriel again. True to his domineering nature, he demanded that I be picked up by his personal driver. I argued with him about it at first, but ultimately I ended up relenting. I have a feeling that might be a common occurrence with us.

Now I have thirty minutes to get ready, and I have no idea what to wear. I sort through my lingerie, trying not to pick anything too racy. I don’t want Gabriel to think I’m handing myself to him on a silver platter. Because I’m using him just as much as he is using me. Or at least that’s what I tell myself.

I end up settling on a black bra and thong set with little pink bows. Simple, cute, and straightforward. That’s the easy part because now I have

to pick out actual clothing. At first I feel like nothing in my closet is good enough for the likes of Gabriel Maddox. But then I remind myself that I don't really care what he thinks, this is just sex. I throw on a black slashed tank top with lace underneath and a jean mini skirt, paired with some short studded boots.

For once my hair cooperates, and I actually like what I see. By the time I finish applying my signature lipstick and mascara, I have exactly two minutes to get downstairs in time to be picked up.

When I walk into the living room, Alanna is busy munching away at the chocolate covered strawberries again. "Oh great," she says. "You're going to go get laid, and I'm just sitting here getting fat courtesy of your hot new man."

"Finally, a reversal of roles!" I grin and self-consciously smooth my skirt down. "So do I look alright?"

"Like sex on legs, baby. You're a knockout, as always. He's going to be eating out of the palm of your hand."

I smile gratefully because Alanna would never tell me I looked good if I really didn't. "Okay, well I better get going then, wouldn't want to be late and upset Mr. Testy again."

"Have fun!" Alanna calls after me as I step out the door.

Downstairs, the driver is waiting in front of the black sedan. He's wearing a black suit and hat, holding my door open for me. He introduces himself as Paul, and I recognize him from the first day I crashed into Gabriel.

The ride to Gabriel's Apartment is surprisingly quick for the city, only about twenty minutes. I guess it's probably practical to live so close to his workplace. His apartment is, as I imagined, in another high rise building. Paul the driver escorts me to the elevator and punches in the code for me before gracefully exiting the lift and leaving me to ascend on my own.

A couple minutes later, the doors open into a hallway and I walk to his door. I take a deep breath, knocking quietly. A moment later Gabriel appears, looking sexy as hell. He seems relaxed with a white V-neck tee and loose black pants. Part of my dirty imagination wonders how quickly those clothes could come off.

Once I'm inside, he pulls me into his arms without hesitation, smashing my lips to his. His hands clasp my cheeks as he gives me a hungry and passionate kiss, leaving me gasping for air by the time he pulls away. He takes a step back with a bewildered look on his face as if even he is surprised by his overly warm greeting towards me.

He holds me at arm's length, examining my body from head to toe.

"God, Victoria," he groans. "You and these outfits, they are so fucking sexy."

I break eye contact, feeling shy under his appraisal. I can't tell if he's being genuine or just trying to lay it on thick, but either way I'm definitely not used to men talking to me like that. He must sense my withdrawal, because he gently cups my chin, pulling my gaze back toward him. Today, in the bright light of the apartment, his eyes are a gentle shade of pale blue. It amazes me how someone so menacing can have the most beautiful eyes.

Gabriel grabs my hand and leads me to the kitchen, motioning for me to sit at the breakfast bar. He goes to the fridge, giving me the first chance to take in his apartment. It's moderately sized, and much less grand than I imagined it would be. I half expected to see a butler walking around a mansion this morning when I envisioned it.

Everything is black. Black leather couches, black walls, and shiny black floors. In the living room, I notice all the furnishings seem to have sharp edges. I can't really see how any of it could be comfortable. There are no family photos, and the only artwork that hangs is a few large printed photos of cityscapes.

On the opposite wall, there is floor to ceiling glass which showcases an outdoor balcony with a private spa overlooking the city below. It's the only detail of the apartment I really like. The space just seems so sterile and

cold, like an office building rather than a home. I wonder idly if this reflects Gabriel's personality as well. On the outside, he does seem somewhat cold, but I know on at least a couple of occasions I've seen a glimpse of another side to him.

But I, better than anyone, should know not to judge a book by its cover. There are probably a whole lot of reasons Gabriel is the way he is, and it isn't my place to make assumptions. Still, a small part of me hopes that I will see more of his real personality... the one he hides away from the world.

Gabriel interrupts my thoughts when he reappears with two Mimosas, setting one on the breakfast bar in front of me. "A little hair of the dog."

I take a small sip first, unsure if more alcohol is what I really want after this morning. But the taste is light and surprisingly refreshing, and I find it to be exactly what I need. He watches me approvingly as I drink, leaving his own drink untouched.

"You want me, Victoria," he states in a matter of fact tone, getting straight down to business.

"Excuse me?" I shoot him a look of annoyance. *What a cocky bastard.*

"Well, it's true, you wouldn't be here if you didn't. There's no need for either of us to play coy. I want you too, very much, and I will make no show of hiding it."

"Glad to see your ego is still in check," I retort sarcastically.

I take another long pull of my cool drink, feeling like I'm going to need it for this conversation. I really shouldn't be surprised by his attitude anymore. Yep, this apartment is definitely a reflection of his personality.

"The thing is," he continues. "I want to be clear what this is between us. I fuck, and that's it. You said the other day that I could have my pick of women, and it's true. If you want sweet words and pillow talk after, then you've come to the wrong place."

I can't believe he just said that. *Is this his pathetic attempt to win me over? By telling me he could get any woman he wanted?* I'm already stewing up something venomous in reply, but he interrupts me before I can even open my mouth.

"I've never had to have this conversation with anyone before." He runs an anxious hand through his hair. "The women I date, they are usually well aware of what I expect beforehand. But I just feel it's important that I'm honest with you upfront, giving you the chance to run now if you want." His voice becomes strained, and he actually looks nervous. "But, I really don't want you to run."

I still can't get over his earlier comment, and although it may be childish, I decide to have a jab at him anyway. Consequences be damned.

"Well," I snap, "if you have your pick of women, then why don't you just fuck them and save yourself the trouble."

"Victoria, please, just hear me out. I want you. I can't tell you in any other way than I already have. It's that simple. But after you hear what I have to say, you may not want me."

I swallow the lump in my throat. Okay, I need to focus. What exactly is he trying to tell me?

"Well, just lay it all out for me then," I reply as calmly as my voice allows me to. "I'm not a damn child, Gabriel. Just tell me whatever it is. I'm sure I can handle it."

"You've had a small taste of me. But I want there to be more." His voice is filled with longing, and somewhere deep inside of me my own muscles seem to respond.

"First, I want to be clear," he says distantly. "When you're with me, I'm in control Victoria, not you. I need you to understand that. There is no other way. I will be rough with you, and I will do what I please until you tell me to stop. And once you tell me to stop, this thing between us ends... for good. Understand?"

I can't help it. The sick, twisted part of me is enthralled by what he's telling me. He wants to control me. To dominate me. And all I can think

about is him standing over me naked, bossing me around. I can feel my face flushing at the very idea of it, my panties soaking with sudden arousal. The demons that live deep inside of me are rearing their ugly heads, screaming let's totally do this! Meanwhile, logical me is shaking her head, asking how I always manage to get myself into these messes.

“Okay, I get it... the whole Dom-sub thing.” I shrug casually. “But just so you know, I won't tell you to stop if you piss me off. I'll just punch you.”

His eyes light up as he chuckles softly at my outburst. “You are so fiery, Victoria, I love that.”

I can't keep my lips from tipping up again, hard as try. This man makes me smile even when I'm trying to be serious.

“Well, we'll see won't we?” he grins playfully. “Now back to my point before. We are both in understanding this isn't a romantic relationship. But in the interest of keeping things safe, it would be a mutually exclusive sexual relationship. Would you agree to that?”

“This is so weird,” I mutter under my breath. “Why can't you just talk normal to me? Say you don't want me to fuck anyone else. Yeah, I get it. I don't just throw myself at anything that moves if that's what you're thinking.”

He furrows his brow and clenches his jaw. “I never said or implied that, Victoria. I just wanted to be in agreement on this. It works both ways.”

I cross my arms and nod petulantly. I've never had sex before that took so much work beforehand. Granted, no other man ever made me feel the way Gabriel has, and perhaps that's why I'm tolerating this bullshit.

“Yeah alright, got it.”

He stops for a moment, running his large fingers over his chin while he ponders something.

“The other day when I spanked you, did you enjoy it?”

“I'm not.... why are you asking me that?” God, I sound so flustered. I shouldn't be embarrassed about this, clearly he likes it too.

He smiles one of those big, heart-stopping smiles of his. At the moment, I have half a mind to scrap this conversation and just throw myself across the breakfast bar at him. But he speaks before I have the chance.

“I know it’s a lot to take in,” he whispers. “But this is what I enjoy, Victoria. And I want to do this with you. I know it might be a little strange to someone like you...”

“To someone like me?” I stare at him in disbelief. “You’re telling me this isn’t strange to anyone else?”

“I don’t know. If it is, they’ve never said so.”

“So women always just let you do whatever you want to them?” I scoff.

“Of course they do.” He laughs bitterly. “Because they have their eye on the prize. It’s amazing what one will do when the determination is there.”

Is he actually insinuating that I’m a gold digger? *That’s it.* “Well, I’m sorry, but I’m not that kind of woman. And I don’t have my eye on anything. I don’t even know why I came here, this is ridiculous!”

I jump off the bar stool and head for the front door. Before I even reach the end of the living area, he grabs my elbow, gently halting me. When I look up into his eyes, they are full of anguish.

“I’m sorry, Victoria. I shouldn’t have said that. I wasn’t referring to you in any way. Please don’t go... I don’t want you to.”

Something about the wounded puppy dog look on his face melts me a little. I don’t want to go either. I want to stay. I want him. *God, what is wrong with me?* He just told me he wants to dominate me, and even though it sounds hot to me, his definition could be something else entirely.

“I... I’m not sure,” I say quietly. “I don’t know if this is a good idea.”

He leans in a little closer, grabbing my hips. “I think it’s a very good idea. Just give me a chance, I have a feeling that you might actually like it.”

I glance down at my hands, feeling as though I'm walking on a tightrope. I know that if I leave now, there will be no more Gabriel Maddox. And something inside of me hates that thought. But then there's my self-preservation, telling me that's probably for the best.

"I could fuck you right now," he whispers. "To show you just how much I want you, in case you've forgotten."

I melt into him as he pulls me into his arms and runs his fingers along the bare skin of my shoulder. My breath grows shorter with each stroke. His engorged cock is pressing against my belly, and all I can think of is how much I want to feel his skin on mine, his scent all over me.

He leans closer, sweeping his scorching hot lips against my ear as he whispers, "Do you want me?"

"Yes," I breathe.

His hand cups my breast, rubbing it gently for a moment before he pulls it free from my tank top. He dips his head and brings my nipple to his mouth, sucking slowly, deliciously. I groan as I wrap my hand around the nape of his neck, fully prepared to let him take me. And then he pulls away, studying me intently.

"So, then beg me," he says impassively.

What the hell? I stare up at him in shock.

His fingers move nimbly to my other breast, yanking it free as he twists my nipple between his thumb and forefinger. His other hand snakes up beneath my skirt, heading straight for my soaking wet center.

"Well?" he asks. "Shall I just torture you all day like this? Or do you want me?"

I try my best to scowl at him. "I do but..."

"So then beg me," he says simply, not nearly as affected as I am right now. "Tell me how much you want me."

He pulls my skirt up around my hips, pushing his palm between my legs. His fingers move languidly inside my panties before dipping two of them inside of me. He moves them around in a torturous rhythm, eliciting a

deep moan from within me. And then he brings them to his mouth and sucks on them, tasting me on his lips.

“So delicious.”

I can't take anymore.

“Please,” I whimper.

A slow smile of satisfaction creeps across his face. “Please, what?”

“Please fuck me!” I groan. “I want you inside of me, please, Gabriel.”

His lips crash into mine... hard. He sucks and kisses me violently as his passion overtakes him. When he pulls away, my lips are swollen and bruised, but content.

“Now was that so hard?” he smirks. “Two minutes of me touching you and I had you yielding already. You submitted to me then, did exactly as I requested. Do you think it would really be so difficult to see yourself doing the same thing over and over again?”

My body goes limp in his arms. *He's right.* But I don't care. All I care about right now is that he isn't touching me. His skilled fingers doing things to me I've only ever dreamed about. His engorged cock filling me, stretching me, owning me.

“I thought we were going to...” I whisper.

His thumb reaches down to caress my cheek.

“Does that mean you're willing to try this?” he coaxes.

“Yes.” My shoulders sag. “For now.”

I can't believe this. He's right. *I'm eating out of the palm of his hand already.*

He flashes me a victorious smile, and I roll my eyes. He grabs my hand and leads me through the living area and down the hall, stopping in front of one of the doors.

“Just so you know,” he says. “You don't have to stay if you don't like any of this. If you tell me to stop, I will stop.”

I glance over at the door, thinking about what he isn't saying. That if I stop him, we are done.

He takes my hand and leads me through the door in silence. I try hard to steel my nerves. *Do I really want this?* He looks back at me with those beautiful blue eyes as though he wants to make sure I'm still here. Yes, I want this. I can just try it once. If I don't like it, I can go. Then at least my curiosity will have been satisfied and this ridiculous thing between us will be over. *But then again, what if I do actually like it?*

Some feral part deep inside of me has always liked rough sex. Rough men. Men that treated me like crap. How is this going to be any different?

I glance around the room. It's a bedroom, but I get the feeling it definitely isn't his. It has a large bed, a couple odd sized chairs and tables, and one apothecary style cabinet in the corner. No clothing, no personal items. Everything is black. There are no blankets on the bed, only a set of crisp black sheets. If I thought the apartment was cold, I was sorely mistaken. This room is colder than any I've ever been in. Completely devoid of any emotion or comfort.

"Take off your clothes."

Gabriel's tone is commanding, startling me out of my line of thought. I move on autopilot, watching him nervously as I start to undress. My hands are shaking as I drop my skirt and tank top on the floor, leaving me in nothing but the bra and thong. I can't make eye contact as I shimmy out of the rest, feeling overly exposed here in this stark room. I know I'm slim, but I'm also short and curvy, something he's not used to.

Before I even get a chance to see his expression he pulls me into a chaste kiss. His lips suck on mine, reigniting my desire with gusto. His expert hands fondle my breast, and I can't help the noises that escape me.

When he pulls away, his expression is hard.

"Now kneel on the floor and spread your legs. I want to see that beautiful pussy."

Holy shit. Is he fucking serious? He just wants me to lay down and spread it all out for him?

I shake my head before I can even think about what I'm doing, my arms instinctively wrapping around my body.

"I don't believe that was a request," he barks. "Now one more time, Victoria. Do as I say, or I will spank you. Do you understand?"

Oh my God. He looks absolutely primal as he gazes down at me, fire blazing behind those blue eyes. And what he just said ignited something else deeper inside of me. Why does him threatening to spank me make me feel so savage? I like it, and even worse, I think I actually want it.

"So, then spank me," I challenge him.

For the briefest of moments, I think he looks surprised by my candor. But before I can get a good read on him, he flings me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, carrying me across the room. He splays me out across a small bench, lying me face down on top of it. I can hear him undoing his belt buckle, and I'm momentarily confused. Then he climbs on top of me, straddling my back as he strokes my ass. *Ok, so now he's got me trapped.* This is a little different to last time.

"I'm going to teach you how to obey me, and then you can choose. But either way is fine with me because I promise you I enjoy it more when you misbehave."

His voice is deeper now, his tone a little bit chillier. And even though I'm trembling inside, I refuse to let him see it. His hands caress each curve of my butt softly for a few moments as his breathing grows deeper. He withdraws, and all I can feel is the cold air of the room on my naked flesh.

And then it hits me. Thwack! His belt collides with my ass, lighting me on fire. I grunt at the burning pain, but before I have time to decide if it's too much, he smacks me again. And again. And again.

I refuse to give him the satisfaction of letting him feel my trepidation. I lay perfectly still, waiting for each blow. And when they come, I do not cry out. And then eventually, the pain simply turns to

warmth, followed by a rush of endorphins inside my body. I squeeze my legs together tightly, embarrassed at how wet I am for this man that is belting me. And then I feel his soft warm hands stroking my tender backside.

“Good girl,” he coos softly in my ear. “Now let’s try this again.”

He picks me up and carries me to a small soft rug on the floor, allowing me to stand. His lips find their way to my breast, his hand sliding between my legs with zero resistance. He dips his finger inside of me and I groan. I’m totally at his mercy as he slides his finger back and forth while he caresses my nipple with his tongue. My hips start pulsing towards him, silently begging for more.

“You are so responsive,” he grunts. “I can’t believe how wet you are for me already.”

He stops his sensual assault on my body to take a step back and look at me. And I mean really look at me. His eyes seem to be burning my naked body into his brain, but he’s giving nothing away. I can’t tell if he likes what he sees, and I’ve never felt so exposed. My natural inclination is to cover my breasts with my hands and to cross my legs. Because I haven’t even seen him naked yet.

He shakes his head and uncrosses my arms. “No, Victoria. I want to see all of you.” He draws lazy strokes down my waist and over my hip. “I love these beautiful curves, so soft and feminine. Don’t ever cover yourself up in front of me, do you understand?”

I nod sheepishly, and his hand slithers up into my hair, grabbing a handful before giving it a tug.

“I asked you a question,” he says. “And I expect an answer. Do you understand, Victoria?”

“Yes, Gabriel,” I whisper.

He actually groans when I say his name. He presses his hard erection against my belly, letting me feel how turned on he is. The fact that I’ve given him that much pleasure simply by saying his name makes my insides twist with desire.

“Good girl,” he says gruffly. “Now do as I asked and lay yourself out for me.”

I don’t hesitate this time. I sink to the floor, not lost on the irony that it’s the same position he found me in on the sidewalk. I told myself then that I refused to kneel before him, and now here I am... kneeling before him. Still as I glance up at his beautiful features, I don’t care. I think that face could be very hazardous to my health because I have every suspicion I will do whatever he asks. Completely his for the taking.

“Don’t look at me,” he scolds softly. “That’s something else you will have to learn.”

I glance down at the floor as he ambles around me slowly, examining me, like a shark circling its prey. And then he stops behind me where I can no longer see him. I feel him kneel down behind me and he grabs both of my arms, gently pulling my wrists behind me. He wraps something around them, which feels like his belt. Glad to know it has multiple uses. I probably should feel more panic than I do, but I’m excited. I have no idea what he’s going to do with me.

“Remember,” he says softly, seeming to sense my hesitation, “you can always say stop. But only if you mean it.”

I gulp. “Okay.”

“Okay, what?” he scolds me again.

Oh, for fucks sake. Just fuck me already. “Okay, Gabriel,” I emphasize the word to appease him.

“Very good,” he says. And then a soft black cloth emerges in front of my eyes as he knots it around the back of my head.

“This will teach you not to look at me for now,” he says. “Now lean forward so that your face is against the floor, but keep your ass in the air and spread your legs.”

Oh my God, he has got to be joking. I don’t want to be in such a vulnerable position in front of him, so exposed. He can see everything if I do that. I hesitate for a few moments, and then feel his hand tugging my hair, easing my head to the floor.

“Don’t make me wait,” he growls.

I reluctantly push my ass into the air and spread my legs. Thank God I waxed everything. The air is cool against my sensitive flesh as I lay there, waiting.

“Good, Victoria. You look lovely like that.” He dips one of his fingers inside me. “You have nothing to be ashamed of.”

I clench my eyes shut even though I’m blindfolded. *This is embarrassing.* I’m not used to this kind of intimacy, and I have no idea why I’m giving it to him.

And then I feel it. His palm, tapping me down there. It isn’t inside me, but rather right above my entrance. Right over my swollen, sensitive flesh. It’s soft at first, a light teasing tap, and then he increases the pressure gradually. It feels strange, like a slight bite of pain mixed with pleasure, and the feelings it evokes are intense. I moan as he increases again, harder and faster. I can’t move my hands, and my hips seem to be rocking of their own accord.

“Don’t move,” he says firmly. “I want you still. I’m going to make you come, and I want you to feel all of it.”

Oh, sweet mother of all. He sounds so sure of himself. But I’m not. I can’t tell if I’m going to explode or cry from the intensity. I try to remain still as the taps turn into slaps. Hard, fast slaps that send pulsing sensations throughout my entire body. My stomach is beginning to ache, everything in my body tense as the feelings take over me. And then, all at once, a scream tears from deep inside of me as he releases waves of pleasure throughout my body.

I collapse onto the ground, breathless and unable to hold myself up a second longer. There’s moisture running down my legs, but I don’t care. I’m too shocked by what just happened to be uncomfortable. I’m flying high on Gabriel, and the things this man can do to me. He’s brought pleasure to a place that had once only known pain. He made me feel unashamed for something which I had only ever felt embarrassed about.

I lay there for several moments in complete silence, trying to catch my breath. The next thing I feel is Gabriel scooping me up into his arms and carrying me across the room. He stops at the foot of the bed, laying the top half of my body across it, leaving my legs dangling over the end. His hand caresses the tender flesh between my legs again, and I jerk at the contact.

“God, Victoria, you are so fucking wet.” His voice is husky and feral, ripe with need.

“Mmmm...” is all I can manage. I’m still dizzy and seeing stars from the intense orgasm.

I hear the sound of foil right before his erection presses against me. He nudges inside of me slowly, pressing his hand into my lower back as he fills me. Every inch that he pushes deeper sends my nerves into overdrive, my body begging for more.

He moves in and out in soft teasing strokes at first, savoring the feel of me around him. But then his instincts take over, and he loses himself in the need for his pleasure. He starts pumping hard and fast, keeping his hand on my back to hold me in place. He’s taking no prisoners, and as he promised he’s fucking me roughly.

His pace quickens again and I can feel his balls slapping against me as he thrusts, the tightness building inside me. I’m exhausted and sore, but my body craves this. My stomach is clenching, tightening, aching in anticipation. He slides one of his hands up into my hair, grabbing a handful as he pumps into me furiously. The pleasure mingled with the slight pain is enough to send me over the edge, and I come violently around his hard cock.

Before the tremors inside of me have even subsided, Gabriel grunts loudly behind me, both his hands digging into my hips. His cock pulses inside of me as he releases, an animalistic sound wrenching from his chest. And then he collapses on top of me.

I can hardly breathe, but I don’t care. I love the feeling of his warm, naked body on top of mine. After a few more blissful moments, Gabriel pulls out of me and drags me up onto the bed completely. I lay there panting

and dazed as he undoes the belt and the blindfold. I can't speak or move, and I'm glad when he lays down next to me in silence.

⋮

Chapter Ten

Victoria

Two hours later, I roll over and groggily realize my mistake. I fell asleep. Gabriel looks uncomfortable with the whole situation as he sits in a chair next to the bed, typing on his computer. As I rub my sleepy eyes, the awkwardness threatens to swallow me whole. This was just supposed to be sex, and I fell asleep in his apartment.

“I didn’t want you to wake up and not know where you were,” he says gently.

“Right... sorry.”

“It’s okay.” He shrugs. “I’m sure I exhausted you.”

I sit up and belatedly come to the conclusion that I’m still naked. Embarrassment washes over me as Gabriel watches me, his expression indecipherable. I still can’t believe I was sleeping in front of him completely naked, no doubt drooling too.

“You did exhaust me,” I say, unable to think of anything else.

“Did you enjoy it?” he asks tentatively.

“I did.”

My cheeks burn as he continues to scrutinize me, like he’s watching me for some sort of false reaction or something.

“So does that mean you’ll do it again?” he asks.

“Yes.” I give him a soft smile. “I’d like that.”

He pushes his computer aside and stands, approaching me slowly. He's dressed again, and part of me saddens at the thought. I still haven't actually had a chance to look at him naked, and I wonder if I ever will.

He pauses at the side of the bed, the longing in his eyes now clear, but he doesn't make any moves. *Is he waiting for me to tell him it's okay?* Because I thought I just had.

I don't wait or try to overanalyze it anymore. I climb towards the edge of the bed, sitting up on my knees in front of him and pulling him into a kiss. It's a moment of bravery, and I'm not entirely sure he will like it, but he groans with pleasure as soon as my lips touch his. I fist my hands into his hair and pull him down onto me, his erection pressing against me.

"Aren't you sore?" he asks hesitantly.

"I'm very sore." I nod. "But I still want you."

He closes his eyes and presses his forehead to mine, savoring my words. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, please, Gabriel. I want this."

He contemplates it for another moment before tugging his shirt over his head and leaving me in stunned silence. The sight that greets me is so unexpected, I can do nothing but stare at him like a loon. His upper arms and chest are covered in beautiful pieces of ink that I had no idea were lurking beneath his clothing. Intricately woven black roses surround a pair of wings and a patch of script with the name Parker. The artist did an amazing job of bringing the emotion of the piece to life, and I realize immediately it's a memorial.

I want to ask him about it, but Gabriel stiffens as I inspect it, and I tear my gaze away to his abs instead. Hard and muscular with that perfect sexy V-shape, he has a small trail of hair leading down to his waistband. My fingers trail over it absently, and he seems to relax beneath my touch.

He mounts the bed and lowers himself onto me, his lips meeting mine in a feverish kiss. I reach down and tug at his waist band, letting his erection spring free as I gather it into my palm. My hand moves up and down his thick shaft, testing my limits. I know I'm pushing my luck, but he

hasn't outright stopped me, and his entire body has slackened with my touch. But all too soon, he gains back what little control he may have lost in the moment.

"Victoria," he whispers. "Lay on your back."

I pout and do as he says, watching him roll on a condom.

"I'm going to fuck you now," he smirks.

It's an offer too good to refuse.

He fucks me, as promised, but not quite as rough as before, and this time with no bondage. By the time it's all over, I really am exhausted. I can hardly move, and I'm surprised when he takes me into his arms, holding me against his chest. He smells so good, and now I smell like him too... just like I wanted. His skin is warm and comforting against my cheek, and before I know it, my eyes are growing heavy again. I force myself to sit up.

"I should probably go."

He looks up at me, his face soft and relaxed. "Are you sure?" he pauses for a moment before adding, "you don't have to. You could sleep in here for a while if you're tired."

Without him, I assume. "No, it's okay. My roommate's probably waiting for me anyway. And I don't want to keep you from anything."

He doesn't respond, so I think I'm right in my assumption. I stand up and quickly reassemble myself, picking up my clothes and dressing.

Gabriel ambles over to me, surprising me by taking me in his arms and kissing me again. The kiss is soft and surprisingly gentle.

"I could find something to eat if you're hungry," he offers.

"That's alright." I smile. "Alanna is probably waiting for me to eat dinner."

He frowns, looking almost disappointed. But he recovers quickly as he walks me to the door.

"Alanna is your roommate."

I'm not sure if he's asking or stating. By now, I have no idea what kind of information he has on me, and quite frankly it's a bit worrying. Because if he can get his hands on that kind of information, then surely almost anyone can.

"Yes, she is. Roommate, slash pain in the ass, slash best friend," I reply jokingly.

Gabriel doesn't smile at my joke. He seems to be distant again.

"So, do you know how long you want to keep this thing going between us?" he asks in a business-like tone.

"Um, I'm not sure."

"Well, I don't want it to get complicated," he says. "So what do you say, maybe three months and then we can go from there?"

Geez, his mood shifted so suddenly. Is he pissed at me? Or is this just how he treats his fuck buddies? Does he think I'm going to get too overly emotional, and that's why he's asking? If that's the case, I know how to stop that thought process right here.

"I'm leaving in two months, Gabriel. So I guess it will be either before or until then."

My words actually seem to shock him, and the muscle in his jaw starts ticking.

"When were you planning on telling me that?"

"Um, I just did?"

He runs a hand through his hair and sighs. "We'll talk about this later then." He kisses me chastely on the lips before sending me out the door.

I can't help feeling a little wounded myself at the manner in which I'm being dismissed. I know he offered for me to stay, and then offered me food, but then he just switched off like he didn't mean any of it. Mere formalities. I hate that he's so hot and cold all the time. And he didn't even tell me when we'd see each other again. I shiver as I step out into the cool evening air of New York City, knowing I've really stepped in it this time.

Chapter Eleven

Victoria

I arrive back at my apartment, courtesy of a taxi. Paul was waiting downstairs at Gabriel's apartment by the time I got to the bottom which only added to my annoyance. The thought of him being on standby for me, waiting to leave, was more than a little strange. I told him I would get my own way home, and he looked none too happy about it. Presumably due to the prospect of facing Gabriel's irritation.

I have some serious thinking to do about this whole situation. I feel deflated as I climb the steps to my door, hoping Alanna can help make some sense of all of this. She always knows just what to do in these types of situations, and that's one of the reasons why I love her so much. But as I suspect after walking into an empty apartment, I find a note stating she's on another date. I don't bother making anything to eat and opt for a hot shower and bed instead.

The next day I sleep in late and don't bother checking with the courier company for work. As I pad down the hallway, I find Alanna hunkered down on the couch watching tv. She smiles when I walk in and then frowns when she reads the expression on my face.

"What happened, babe? You were asleep so early last night. Did everything go alright?"

I pour myself some coffee and make my way to the couch, kicking my fuzzy slippers onto the rickety coffee table. "Well, it didn't exactly go to plan, I'll put it that way. And I definitely need your advice on this one. But first I want to order some food, I'm starving."

“Okay doll, anything you want, I’m yours for the day.” She walks to the fridge and grabs some takeout menus. “What do you feel like? Indian, Chinese, Pizza?”

Nothing really sounds that appetizing, even though I’m starving. “I don’t know, surprise me.”

Alanna sets out to find her cell phone and order the food. She comes back ten minutes later to find me sprawled out on the couch, staring up at the ceiling blankly.

“Okay, food’s on its way. Now tell me what the hell happened because I can’t take the suspense of knowing why you look...” She motions at my lifeless body with her hand. “Like that. It isn’t like you, and I’m worried.”

I pull myself together and sit up. “Well, you don’t need to be worried, I’m fine I swear. I’m just confused and probably being dramatic. God, I don’t even know where to begin, Alanna. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before.”

She furrows her eyebrows with concern and takes a seat beside me. “What happened? Did he hurt you?”

I smile at her protective instincts and shake my head. “No, it was nothing like that.”

I purposely leave out the little detail of him spanking me, because even though it did hurt a little, I enjoyed it, and it would just be embarrassing if I told her about it.

“Oh, well then color me confused. What happened then?”

I can’t look her in the eye. We talk about sex all the time, but it’s mainly Alanna’s sex life since I don’t have one. But this is different, and it feels more than a little awkward. “I uh... I don’t know exactly how to say this.”

“Oh c’mon!” she urges. “Don’t be embarrassed around me. You can tell me anything. We have no secrets, remember?”

I sigh, knowing that she's right. She's the one person I trust with my life. And given our background, there's good reason for that.

When I met Alanna, it was during my first year of being on the run. I was crashing in a homeless shelter in Texas when she came in bloodied and bruised. She had been beaten to a pulp by her husband, who just so happened to be a cop. She was scared and had nowhere to go and was afraid she would have to return to her husband or die trying to get away.

We became fast friends, deciding to go on the run together. We learned through trial and error how to stay under the radar. We would only stay in places that took cash and fake names and only worked under the table type jobs. After a while, we realized that the big cities were easier to hide in, with lots of crappy places to stay that didn't mind turning a blind eye for a bit of cash.

But it didn't take long for me to realize that Alanna had more problems than just an abusive husband after her. She was addicted to pain-killers as well. I found her in our motel room one night passed out with the empty bottles surrounding her. She was unresponsive, and I had to take a big risk by taking her to the hospital. I gave the hospital a fake name and paid in cash for the visit. Luckily Alanna pulled through, but everything changed after that night.

I had to give her an ultimatum. If she wanted to stick together, she had to give up the drugs, and we could have no secrets between us. She pleaded with me to stay with her, and I did. For the next month, we stayed locked up in a cheap motel room while she detoxed. I was there for her every step of the way. And during that time, our friendship changed. From that day on, we became more like sisters.

I glance at the woman sitting across from me now and smile. I would have never believed that the vibrant, beautiful, bubbly creature that she is would have ever been depressed in her life. Or taken any kind of shit from a man. She's a changed woman now, and I couldn't be prouder of how far she's come.

She clears her throat and smirks at me. "What are you smiling about over there in la-la land? You've been out of it for like five minutes!"

I grin, and grab her hand, squeezing it reassuringly.

“Just something you said. I was thinking about the early days of us on the run together. How did I ever get so lucky to meet you?”

She leans in and hugs me tight. “Are you kidding me, Toto? I’m the lucky one. You are the best thing that ever happened to me. Literally a blessing from heaven above. You saved my life, and I can’t imagine being without you either.”

“Remember how stupid we were back then?” I laugh. “Trying to hide in small towns and trying to come up with fake names all the time. It was so much harder when we had no idea what we were doing. We are like pros now.”

She bursts out laughing right along with me. “Yeah, we were pretty dumb back then.”

We sit back on the couch and relax for a minute before she changes the subject back. I knew it was only a matter of time.

“Seriously Toto, you and I have been through so much together. You can tell me anything, and I will never ever judge you or make you feel bad for it. I am so not that person, you should know that.”

I nod and clasp my hands nervously in my lap. “I know.”

“So, please will you tell me what happened with you and Gabriel today?” she asks.

“Yes, Alanna.” I sigh. “But you should know this is really awkward for me. You know how I get when I try to talk about sex.”

“Okay.” She scrunches her face, trying her best to suppress her smile.

“So Gabriel has a little bit of a kinky side.”

Her eyes widen with sudden interest. “Well, honestly, I’d be kind of surprised if he didn’t. He’s rich, and those people are notorious for being kinky bastards. So what exactly is he into?”

“Um....” I shift nervously in my seat. “Well, he likes to... uh... dominate, I guess.” I whisper as if that will somehow compensate for the embarrassment.

Alanna shakes violently with laughter and slaps her hand on her thigh for good measure. I scowl at her. After her minute-long fit of uproarious laughter, she breathes a huge sigh of relief. “Is that all? So he told you he wants to dominate you?”

“Yes!” I state firmly, panic flashing across my face. “And I actually let him.”

“You had me thinking the worst. So you actually tried it? Did you like it?” As soon as the words are out of her mouth, her brow furrows with new realization. “Oh.... geez I am such an idiot. I didn’t even think. Of course, it would be scary for you, babe. I’m so sorry. Are you okay?”

“No, no, it’s okay. I’m okay. He didn’t hurt me, and I wasn’t scared at all. To my surprise, I actually... um, kind of liked it.”

“Well, I am so relieved.” She smiles softly. “But did you kind of like it, or did you really like it? Because right now your face is bright red.”

“Okay, maybe I liked it a lot,” I say sheepishly. “But I don’t know if I want to keep doing this. He is so weird. One minute he’s all hot and sweet, and the next he’s ice cold. I felt weird just leaving afterwards.”

“Well, I hate to point out the obvious, but that’s how casual sex goes. You don’t really stick around.”

“I know,” I groan. “I just... I don’t know.”

“Well, has he treated you badly?” Alanna asks, concern etching her face.

“No, nothing like that,” I reassure her. “He was good, really good. But I just don’t know how to keep my distance, from getting too attached I mean. I don’t want to feel rejected every time I have to leave his apartment.”

“Ah, Victoria, I know it’s hard. I can’t make up your mind for you, sweetie,” she says gently. “All I can do is tell you what I think. You have to

decide if it's something you want to try. I don't know this guy, he could be great, but I just want you to be careful. I don't want you going back down the same path as before with men. Letting them treat you like shit. It's one thing to dominate you in the bedroom, but he better treat you like a princess everywhere else."

I sink back into the couch, trying to digest her words.

"As for the emotional stuff," Alanna continues, "sometimes you can't shut it off. You are just such a caring person. But you also need to make sure that whatever guy you give your love to is actually worthy of it. I don't want you to put yourself in another situation that could be traumatic for you in any way. After that whole ordeal with that fucker Chris, I don't ever want to see you with someone like that again."

I glance up at her, noticing her open disdain as she mentions my ex-boyfriend. Well, I don't know if I could even call him that. He was the guy I was madly in love with for years. He was more or less the man who used me for sex whenever one of us was passing through. He definitely didn't love me, and it took me a lot of heartbreak to finally accept it.

"Chris wasn't a bad guy, he just had problems. Anyway, I've moved on from that. Why do you think Gabriel would be like him?" I ask nervously.

Alanna gives me a sympathetic smile and reaches for my hand. "I don't. Honestly, I don't even know the guy. I'm just trying to look out for you. So are you sure you liked what you tried today and weren't just doing it to appease him?"

"No, it definitely wasn't like that." I shake my head. "I mean, it's kind of weird, but I like the way he talks to me. So blunt and open about what he wants. Even though he infuriates me sometimes, it's kind of hot when he talks to me that way. But at the same time it kind of feels wrong. I mean, I don't know I just feel torn."

"Toto, being dominated isn't wrong if you enjoy it. It's nothing like what you went through, I promise you that. It took me a long time to realize that too. As long as it's with the right person, and they know what they're doing. But you have to be able to trust that person, and to relinquish control.

Some women really like it, and some couldn't wrap their heads around it if they tried. I personally love it when I find a man who takes control... in the bedroom, I mean."

"I'm so lucky to have such a sexually adventurous friend." I tease. "I mean who else would I turn to with these kinds of questions?"

Alanna laughs in response. "I know right?"

"Well, I guess I have a lot of thinking to do tonight. But I don't think you have to worry about Gabriel. He doesn't seem like the typical assholes I attract, just a kinky one."

"And mega rich," she adds. "And hot to boot."

I roll my eyes, and Alanna takes it in stride.

"Listen, Toto, if you want to try it with him, just remember you don't ever have to do anything you don't want to."

"I know. But I'm still in shock that I'm just now finding out that you like to be dominated." I smirk. "I have all sorts of crazy images running through my head now, images I never wanted to see."

"You would say that." She giggles. "Maybe I'm a little fucked up in the head too, but I enjoy it."

I relax back into the couch for a moment, lost in thought when the doorbell rings. Alanna pays the delivery man and then lays out an impressive carb-laden spread of Chinese comfort food. I spend the day in my pajamas watching Gilmore Girls and then watch as Alanna happily skips off to another date later that evening.

I haven't heard anything from Gabriel, and I know I shouldn't be, but I'm disappointed. I try to remind myself over and over this is supposed to be casual. But at this point, I honestly don't know if I can do that. Not with him anyway.

I have an important decision to make, and I decide that I need to do some research of my own. I need a better understanding of what kind of man Gabriel is. I sit down on my bed and fire up my laptop, taking a nervous breath as I type his name into Google. For the next forty-five

minutes, I mill through gossip blogs, photos, and news articles. By the end, I'm exhausted, both physically and emotionally. Looking at the women he's dated in the past- famous models and actresses- I feel even worse than before.

In my heart, I know I can't do this. I'm already feeling too emotionally invested. It shouldn't be this complicated just to have sex. And I know if I go through with it, somehow I'll end up getting hurt.

While my mind is clear and focused, I grab my phone and punch in his number. I fumble with the keys as I type out the message.

I'm sorry, but I can't meet you again.

Victoria x

Before I lose my nerve, I hit send. Then I shut off my phone and take a hot shower. I climb into bed, not even caring that it's only 7:00 pm. I want sleep and comfort, and to wake up and put all of this behind me tomorrow.

⋮

Chapter Twelve

Victoria

I wake to the sound of my door creaking open and the light shining in my face. I rub my eyes wearily as I try to make out the figure looming over me.

“Victoria, it’s me.”

There’s no mistaking the sound of that voice. Deep and rich and sexy as hell. *Gabriel*. At first I think I might be dreaming, so I smile. But then panic sets in. I sit up in bed anxiously, not sure what I should do. *He’s in my apartment, in my fucking bedroom*. And here I am half naked and no makeup on.

He proceeds slowly to the mattress on the floor and sits down as gracefully as he can. He looks different. As my eyes adjust, I realize he’s wearing a leather motorcycle jacket and his hair is all windswept and wild.

“What are you doing here?” I ask nervously.

“Alanna let me in,” he replies shortly, glancing around the dimly lit room.

“Jesus, this can’t be where you really live.” He looks down at my mattress with disapproval. “You don’t even have a fucking bed! And don’t get me started on how scary this apartment is.”

His words are enough to bring my inner bitch out of hiding. “Did you just come here to judge my interior decorating skills?”

“This isn’t funny, Victoria.” He stares at me with concern. “This place isn’t safe. It’s very seedy, and I don’t like that two women are living

here alone, namely you.”

“Look, I can take care of myself okay. And so can Alanna, we take care of each other. And I do have a bed, you’re sitting on it.”

“A mattress doesn’t make a bed. Tell me why you’re living here. Surely there are better places than this around. Is it an issue of money?”

“No, don’t be ridiculous.” I can’t help but sound offended. “I have money, plenty of money. I just choose not to spend it on flash apartments or furnishing a place that is only temporary.”

He leans closer to me, tucking a loose hair behind my ear, and sending shivers down my spine. I need to get a grip. How can one little touch affect me so much?

I smell the leather of his coat mixed with mint on his breath and I sigh at the pure delight of it. I just assumed he wore suits most of the time, like in all of his photos and at work. But he comes here dressed like this and it just screams bad boy. For some twisted reason, it only makes me want him even more.

“Why did you send me that text?” he asks.

Crap. Here it is. The reason for his being here in the middle of the night.

I look down at my clasped hands in my lap. It was so much easier to be strong when he was safely out of my bubble. But here he is all hot and delicious, expecting me to explain logic to him. “I... I just can’t. It’s too complicated.”

He cups my chin and brings my attention back to his face. “Explain it to me then.”

His voice is soft and gentle as he makes a request that to him seems so simple. But how can I possibly tell him I’m afraid of getting attached? I barely know him. It would sound ridiculous.

“I don’t know.” I shrug. “You are just so all over the place. I don’t know if I’m right for you, I mean for what you want. I’m not anything like the women you usually...”

A small smile creeps across his lips as he stops me. “No, you aren’t,” he says simply. “That’s why I like you.”

I’m glad in the moment for the dim light in the room because I’m blushing like crazy.

“As for yesterday,” he continues, “I’m sorry if I seemed crass when you were leaving. You took me by surprise. And then you told me you were leaving the city soon. But why?”

His tone is gentle, and if I didn’t know any better he seems genuinely disappointed at the news that I’m leaving. I feel a small pain in my own chest at the thought. I like it here. I like him.

“I have to leave, and I can’t tell you why. It’s just, it’s complicated. I’m sorry.”

His brow furrows, and he remains silent for a few moments as he traces his fingers along his chin, deep in thought. “Alright, then I’ve changed my mind,” he says softly.

He leans in and kisses my cheek, taking me by surprise. Then he pulls me closer, caressing my neck with his lips. He inhales as he presses his nose into my skin, a low growl escaping him. “I want you. I know you want me too, Victoria. Let me stay with you tonight. No agreements, no control. Just remember what it’s like with me before you say no.”

I drink in his words, and the fire his touch leaves behind burns me intensely. I want him that much is true. But I still can’t understand why he wants me.

“Why me, Gabriel? I’m sure you have beautiful women who aren’t nearly as much trouble on speed dial, willing to give themselves over to you at a moment’s notice.”

His hands thread through my hair, stroking it softly. “Victoria, you are the most beautiful woman I’ve ever laid eyes on. And that is not a line. There is just something about you... I have to have you. But only if you want this too. If you let me stay with you tonight, and you still haven’t changed your mind by the morning, I will never bother you again.”

I can't help but smile shyly at his words. It could be bullshit, but he seems genuine. And he's right. I feel the electricity between us, and I want it just as badly as he does. I might regret my decision in the morning, but in the moment my mind is made up.

I glance up at him and run my fingers through his hair as I bring his lips to mine. A moan rumbles from his chest as he kisses me deeply, passionately. His arms wrap around me and he caresses my back, teasing me with his touch. His hands slide the soft fabric of my tank top up, moving to rub my bare breasts beneath his palms.

The fire spreads through my body and I let out a moan induced by his rapturous touch. With my encouragement, his hot mouth unleashes upon my nipple, sucking and licking eagerly. I arch back to give him full access as desire pools hot and wet between my legs.

"You are so beautiful," he murmurs against me.

I sit up on my knees in front of him, reaching through his leather jacket to pull it off his shoulders. I want nothing more than to undress him. To feel his skin against mine. He helps me pull off his jacket, revealing the tight black shirt beneath it. I reach for his waist, sliding my hands gingerly up beneath the shirt as I pull it from his head. My lips move to the warm expanse of his chest, showering him with little kisses. His smell is intoxicating. *Totally fucking erotic.* He strokes my hair as I inhale him greedily, reaching for the button of his pants.

He grasps my hand and stops me. "Not yet, angel."

His fingers move to my hips, trailing along the waistband of my shorts and sending currents straight between my legs. And then he tugs them down in one swift movement. I'm completely naked and at his mercy, again. He lays me down on the bed while he leans over me, trailing kisses all over my body. And then he's *there*. I try not to squirm as he pulls my legs apart and situates himself between them. I'm open and exposed in front of him as he rubs his hand along my opening, grumbling in delight.

"Do you feel this, Victoria? How wet you are? You're so responsive to me."

Before I can respond, his mouth is on me. He licks and sucks and groans as he buries his face deep inside of me. I stroke his head appreciatively with my hand as I jerk against him. The tension in my body skyrockets, desperate to explode.

“Come for me, Victoria,” he commands.

His words are my undoing. Tides of pleasure course through my body, making me thrash violently until all of the sensations pass over me. My head is dizzy, and my body lifeless as I lay there trying to recover from the erotic storm that is Gabriel. From the corner of my eye, I can see him unzipping his pants, and the sound of foil ripping as he rolls a condom over his wide girth.

And then he’s upon me, between my legs. He kisses me gently on the lips as he spreads me further apart to accommodate his large body. I can taste myself on him and it’s strangely enticing.

He positions himself at my entrance, gently stroking up and down, teasing my sensitive flesh. He pulls my hand to his erection, closing my fingers around him.

“I want you to put me inside of you,” he rasps. “I need to know this is what you want.”

I stroke his hard cock in my hand and the words leave my mouth before I can think about them. “I’ve never wanted anything more in my life.”

I nudge his cock against my wet center, inching him slowly inside. He relaxes his body against me, sinking into me as he devours my mouth.

“God you’re so fucking tight,” he growls. “Always so tight. So perfect.”

I’m barely coherent as his thrusts become quicker, harder. His flesh is slapping against me as my insides tighten for the second time. And without warning I let out a long cry as I tremble around him. He arches back and slams into me twice more before collapsing, growling like a wild bear as he empties himself.

Chapter Thirteen

Gabriel

My hands itch to touch Victoria as I watch her sleep in the early light of day. She looks at peace as the morning sun kisses her skin, surrounding her with an ethereal glow. It only serves to remind me how pure she is, and how fucked up I am to want her.

The whole situation is out of character for me, and for a moment, panic rears its head like an ugly little beast. I don't get attached and I'm not about to start now. A small part of me is tempted to be a complete dick and just get up and leave, making her hate me, and effectively ending this uncomfortable situation for good.

But even for me that is low. Especially when I came here last night to stop her from doing exactly that. As much as I don't want to admit it, I don't want her to hate me. She isn't like the others, and I actually care what she thinks of me. Dangerous ground to be on.

I glance around the sparse bedroom and shake my head in disapproval. I still can't believe she's living in this shit hole. There's definitely something she isn't telling me. I watched the surveillance videos the detective sent me and was glad to see she hadn't been in any real danger before she crashed into me on the street that day. But whoever she was staring at had definitely spooked her. And I want to know why.

She doesn't even have a dresser. Only one large suitcase filled with clothes. It isn't even unpacked, which is even more bizarre. She already told me she didn't intend on staying here more than a couple months, but why hasn't she unpacked?

On the dresser beside me is a stack of classic novels. But what stands out is the well-worn copy of *Pride and Prejudice*. *Typical*. Women seem to love that crap, and I never understood why.

Her walls are mostly bare except for a few small prints. Upon closer inspection, I realize they are candid shots of cityscapes, animals, and small children playing in a park. I find them quite fascinating. The photography seems to capture pure and simple emotions in the subjects, and I wonder if she took them.

Victoria stirs beside me, mumbling incoherently in her sleep. As she rolls, I catch a glimpse of the soft curve of her bare shoulder. I stare at the small tattoo I first noticed the other day. It's some sort of script I don't recognize. Hebrew, maybe.

There is something about that black ink on her creamy white skin I find incredibly sexy. I run my fingers over it, tracing each gentle swoop and curve. And I decide that I need to know what it translates to. I grab my phone and snap a picture of it, sending it off in a quick text.

Victoria

The rising sun creeps through the curtain, spilling across my face. Before I can open my eyes, I feel his warm body surrounding me. His hand gently caressing my shoulder, his scent everywhere on my sheets.

I turn my head and look up into a sea of blue. In the early light of morning, he looks different. His hair is tousled and wild, reminding me of his alter ego. I trail my fingers across his arm, over his tattoos. They are in the perfect location so that they can be hidden away by his daily business suits, or even the black tee shirt he wore last night. I can't help but wonder at his vastly different personality types. Businessman by day, bad boy at night. I like them both, but it makes me wonder which side he leans towards more. Which is his true nature?

My thoughts wander to the night before, how sensual and caring he was with me. I wonder idly if he will be that same way again, or if it was a once off. Either way, I know there's no ending it now. I will just have to tread carefully.

He shifts beneath me, pulling me against him. I nuzzle into his chest, inhaling his scent unashamedly.

"Good morning." His voice is sleepy and sexy, wrapping around me like a warm blanket.

I smile up at him shyly. "Good morning."

He picks up the copy of *Pride and Prejudice* from my nightstand, and my face flushes with embarrassment.

"I should have known you were a romantic at heart," he murmurs softly. "Sonnets and emotional conversations, that sort of thing. Is that why you won't give me a chance?"

I seize the book from his hands, shoving it down between the mattress and the wall. "I'm not a romantic, it's just a classic which I happen to enjoy. That is all. I'm a realist, and I'm perfectly in control of my emotions. My decision last night was based on logic, nothing else." My voice is just a little too high pitched for my own liking. *Even I don't believe me.*

"You are too generous to trifle with me," he begins in a mimicked English accent. "If your feelings are still what they were, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject forever."

Holy crap. My mouth drops open, and I can't seem to shut it again.

"How did you... I mean, but..." I'm stuttering. Completely dumbfounded.

He rolls his eyes and laughs. "Angelina loved it."

My face drops at his words. *Who the hell is Angelina?*

"My sister," he clarifies. "I used to read it to her at night. I thought I made an exceptional Mr. Darcy."

“Oh,” I mumble. “Well, you do actually. I’m quite impressed.”

He smiles down at me questioningly. “But you didn’t answer the question, Elizabeth. Have you given any more thought to our arrangement since last night?”

Oh. Two can play at this game...

“Mr. Darcy,” I begin my attempt at a proper ladylike English accent. “I am a very selfish creature; and, for the sake of giving relief to my own feelings, care not how much I may be wounding yours.”

I smile in satisfaction at my own joke, but its short lived. His mouth is drawn into a hard line, and he doesn’t seem amused at all.

“Sorry,” I mutter. “It was a joke.”

“One that I didn’t find particularly funny,” he says dryly. “Victoria, I want you. How can I make it any more clear? I want you to agree to seeing me.”

“Seeing you?” I scoff. “I wouldn’t call you fucking me whenever you feel like it, seeing you. Shouldn’t we just call a spade a spade?”

His brows knit together as he frowns at me. “Victoria, it’s not like that. I’m here aren’t I? Talking to you now. Yes, it will be a mostly sexual relationship, but I thought you said you weren’t looking for anything else, anyway?”

Well, he does have me there. Except, it isn’t exactly true. I would love to have more. But I can’t. This is the life I’m forced to accept. Short term glories. It doesn’t matter if I know there can never be more, my heart will still inevitably get crushed by this beautiful man. I don’t know if the thrill in the short term will outweigh the consequences in the end. But I know that while he’s here in my bed, I can’t deny that I still want him.

“Yes,” I say resolutely before I can change my mind again. “I want to fuck... with you.”

He chuckles and squeezes me in his arms, kissing the crown of my hair softly. “You have no idea how happy that makes me.”

Without warning, he rolls me beneath him and moves on top of me. His mouth kisses soft trails from my neck down to my breast. And the same familiar sensations I felt before are pulling inside of me, longing pooling between my legs.

His rigid erection digs into my hip as he assaults my breasts with his tongue. I arch into him, begging for more as my hand grips his cock. I caress his velvet skin hungrily with my palm and he lets out a deep satisfying groan.

He pulls away long enough to roll a fresh condom down the length of his cock. And then he's on me, inside of me, thrusting wildly. I moan in my lust induced ecstasy, and it spurs him on, harder, faster. I shatter around him in record time and he follows, growling into my ear as he trembles inside of me.

After a few moments to catch our breath he rolls off of me, bringing the palm of my hand to his lips in a gentle kiss.

He strokes my hair, and we lay in silence for what seems like an eternity. There is something off in his voice when he speaks again.

"This isn't my usual thing, but I like it with you."

I look up at his eyes thoughtfully, noticing the storm has returned. His facial features aren't as relaxed now, and I can feel him distancing himself from me already. It's a feeling I know all too well.

"It won't always be like this you know," he says. "I feel it's only fair to warn you of that. I'm not a romantic type of guy. Don't get me wrong, I thoroughly enjoyed having you this way. But I still have needs, and I won't deny that, for anyone."

I ignore the harshness of his tone. "So what will it be like, Gabriel? You tell me how our arrangement will work. Don't hold back any of the gory details on my account."

He shrugs. "I will tell you when to come to me, what to wear, and I expect you to do it with no questions asked. So long as it doesn't interfere with your work hours, of course."

He eyes me wearily, almost like he's expecting me to say no. Like he wants me to say no. And I don't know what to make of that, but for a moment, I think he might be trying to push me away.

"I'm not a pizza," I counter, deciding to give him an out if he wants one. "I don't just come when you order me to, Gabriel. You can have me when it's mutually agreed on, or not at all."

For some reason, he seems relieved by my words. "Well, we'll see about that, Victoria."

I roll my eyes at his assumption that I'm so predictable. Even if I am, he doesn't have to be so damn cocky about it.

"I want to discuss some boundaries," he states gruffly.

"Okaaaaaaay." I groan, hating that business-like tone of his.

"Is there anything, sexually, that you refuse to do?"

"Um..." I pause. I hadn't even thought about these things. Last night I thought I would never see him again. "I don't know."

He reaches down and caresses my cheek, his gentle side returning. "It's okay, we'll get there. We can try things together, and if you don't like it, all you have to do is say stop."

And then we're over my subconscious supplies. I glance at my twisted fingers in my lap. I like both sides of Gabriel, but a part of me wants to tell him to stop being gentle with me... to only fuck me roughly and use me for his pleasure. But it has nothing to do with the sex and everything to do with my heart.

"I want you to stop coddling me," I say. "Whatever you want to dish out... whatever you normally do, just do that to me. Don't worry whether or not I can handle it. Just don't be nice to me."

He stares at me in disbelief, and if I didn't know any better, he actually looks hurt.

"Well which is it, Victoria?" he snaps. "You just got done telling me you aren't a pizza. But now it sounds like you want to be my fuck toy. Is

that it? You come when I want, do what I want, and we just ignore the niceties?”

“Yes,” I grate. *Because that’s what I am.*

“Fine.” His eyes are eyes cold and deadly calm. “Now just a couple more things. I’ve made an appointment for you today. I need you on birth control. This is non-negotiable.”

“Um, you cannot be serious.”

“I’m totally serious,” he replies coolly. “I want to be able to fuck you any time or anywhere I want. That is the whole point of having a plaything, is it not?”

I know he’s trying to piss me off, but it isn’t working. Because he doesn’t realize how fucked up I am or how sexy it is when he calls me his fucktoy or his plaything.

“Fine,” I relent. “Just leave me the details.”

Gabriel grins like he can’t help himself, and I grin back too. And that’s when I know, this man is going to be the destruction of me.

To be continued....

Thank you so much for reading part one of Victoria and Gabriel's story. If you enjoyed it, please consider leaving an honest review on Amazon or Goodreads. Or if you'd like to email me directly, you can do so at ashleighzaverelli@gmail.com

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Ready for more of Gabriel and Victoria's story?
Here's a special teaser for [Falling into Exposure](#)

***** “Very good Victoria. You have pleased me immensely.”
He strokes the naked flesh along my collarbone and lifts my chin to meet his gaze. And then my eyes dart to the large bulge inside of his gray sweatpants. Every muscle inside of me clenches with desire. He seems to be able to read my thoughts as he moves his hip forward, rubbing his erection against my cheek through the material of his pants.

“Do you see this?” he grips his thickness through the fabric. “This is what you do to me.”

I melt at his words. *Maybe he does find me sexy.* I can't remember ever feeling so pleased with myself. But then his voice shifts again, growing colder.

“Now that you know how this works, I expect you to come straight to this room. Do not wait for me. You will kneel here like you are right now and await my instructions. Do you understand?”

I start to nod and then think better of it. “Yes, I understand.”

“Yes, what?” he growls.

I flinch at his bitter tone. “Yes, Gabriel.”

He soothes the sting of his coldness by slipping his hand between my legs and stroking my wet folds. He plays with me casually in light teasing strokes, pushing in and out like he has all day. It doesn't matter how he touches me, it always gets me there. Every single time. It's only Gabriel that can do this to me. No one else.

I feel the pressure building within me, higher and higher. I'm ready to burst when he stops and pulls away suddenly.

"Tsk tsk."

What? No don't go.... He swiftly removes the metal bar from between my ankles. I can hear the soft padding of his feet as he walks in front of me and then unclasps my wrists.

"Let me make one thing clear." He leans down to whisper in my ear. "You are here, to please me."

I want to punch him. I'm sure he's getting a real kick out of this. Seeing me lapping up his attention, bringing me to the brink of pleasure and then stopping.

"Sit up, on your knees."

I do as he asks, even though I'm silently cursing him inside.

He bends down and reaches for my hand, bringing it up to his hard cock.

"Stroke me," he murmurs.

I move my palm up and down his soft, velvety flesh, growing needier with every stroke. It feels enormous in my small hand, and it's deliciously erotic. He groans with pleasure, and I desperately wish I could see his face. To see what I do to him. I want to give him more, give him everything. And without thinking, I bring his cock to my lips, needing to taste him.

He freezes as I take him inside of me, sucking him hungrily. I know this might result in a punishment, but I don't care. I need this. I want to show him how much I want to please him. He says nothing for a few moments and I think I can feel him relaxing beneath me. But I'm wrong.

He wraps his hand around the black pearl necklace at my throat, using it to pull my mouth into him.

"You want to suck my cock?" he growls. "Then you will, Victoria."

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