

BASHing Trinity

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STORYPDF

Complete English text · US Letter reading edition

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About this edition

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Chapter Prologue

Annoy

BASH

I am so annoyed with the art teacher who didn't appreciate my watercolor painting. I hop out of the car without thanking my driver.

Sprinting inside the house with my backpack tightly grasp, I stomp my feet to our expansive living room. I was practicing the same concept last night over and over again until it looked satisfactory.

I admit I'm so bad at art, but it hurts my ego because I'm excellent at every subject. I can play the piano, cello, violin, and guitar with my eyes closed. I can solve math in just one look at the problem, but art? Ugh! I grimace at the thought of it.

I stop to halt when I notice mom and one of her best friends are laughing together. Their voices are echoing in the living room.

They abruptly stop when they notice me.

I roll my eyes. Mom's beautiful face lights up and smiles at me. Aunt Zoey, the redhead does the same. I smile timidly back at her.

I'm not in a mood to deal with them, especially mom. I'm already eleven years old, she still pecks me on my lips and pinches my face in front of everyone—it's annoying. Who do girls like a mama's boy?

"Hey, mom. Aunt Zoey." I play cool because everyone knows that I'm a good boy of the King and Hughes.

I stride to the carpeted staircase, slinging my backpack over my shoulder. I almost bump into Kiara, whose standing in the middle of the stairs. Her right hand is gripping the rails, and the other is on her sketchpad, pressing against her chest.

"Bash!" she shrieks in surprise.

Her green eyes are big and grow even bigger. Her curly or more or like ringlet red lacks is like she has jammed her finger to the electrical outlet—so messy. She reminds me of Nerida. She has freckles all over her face, and she's too skinny. She's Aunt Zoey and Uncle Logan's daughter—our family friends. Kiara's parents both work in our company.

"What are you doing here, goldfish?" I narrow my eyes, asking her annoyingly.

Her lips quiver. She doesn't like the nickname I give her, but I like to annoy Kiara.

"You're a bully, Bash." She murmurs and doesn't meet my gaze as she grips her sketchpad to her chest. She didn't meet my gaze.

"Well, you look like goldfish, Trinity," I say mockingly.

"I'm not a fish, and my name is Kiara," she says softly with a shaky voice. I know she's going to cry.

"Whatever Kiara or Trinity! You still look like a goldfish. You have orange hair with big eyes," I say, demonstrating how big her eyes are. "And what's in that sketchpad of yours?" I quickly snatch from her grip. "As if you knew how to draw," I grunt as I flip through pages.

She tries her best to snatch it back from me, but I'm way taller than her. In the end, she stops when she struggles to reach for my hand that I raise in the air.

"Give that to me, Bash, please?" Kiara starts crying, eyes filling with tears. She twists her fingers, sliding down herself at the railings of the stairs.

"Oh, sorry, Trinity, but this is now mine, and I know there's nothing worth looking in here." I continue flipping each page. My eyes widen of what I see. "You did all these, Trinity?" I can't believe she can actually sketch like these. "Or your mom did these? Don't lie to me. You don't know how to draw, goldfish." I laugh out loud, but deep inside, I feel something unfamiliar. She's good at something I don't, and I'm jealous of her.

"I did all that. Please, give that back to me," Kiara says between sniffing and twisting fingers.

I almost chuckle as I see a drawing of a boy in Manga surrounded by hearts. I look at her for seconds. With a mischievous grin, I point to the sketch of a boy. "And who's this?"

She looks at me, wiping her tears on her cheeks. "That's you."

Chapter 1

Home

BASH

The chilly air wraps my skin as soon as I step out of my family's private jet. I inhale deeply the smell of New York City—the city that never sleeps.

Welcome Back, Bash!

It's good to be back!

The skyline buildings, the noises, the lights, and the New Yorkers—I miss all of them. I get inside of the black Rolls Royce of my Grandpa Mike. My stomach churns at the thought of being back.

When I think I get myself prepared for this, but I am wrong, and the anxiousness starts crawling in my skin. Now that I'm here, I want to go back to London and stay there for the rest of my entire life.

But I promised my family that once I finished college, I will be back—that's one of the two reasons why I'm here.

"Welcome back, Sir Bash!" The family driver of early forties greets me with courtesy; he turns to me and nods from the driver seat. "I'm Edmund Russell. Your driver, Mr. Hughes." He extends his hand, and I immediately grip it for a handshake.

"Thank you, Edmund. Please, call me Bash if you would like to stay as my driver."

"Sure, Bash," he says with hesitant, "when your family is not around," he adds with a salute.

I chuckle. "Good. Now, let's head home."

"Yes, sir," he replies with enthusiasm.

I glance at him one more time before I smile. I can't help but amaze at the astounding city lights of array colors as we pass by, the colossal skyline buildings that stand tall from afar, the neon lights that flicker in different colors, and billboards flash with advertisements that blur through the car window.

My emotions start to swirl in my belly. There's something about New York that you can't find in any place in the world. It's maybe because I still consider this my home?

New Yorkers are still busy even at this past midnight hour. Indeed this city never sleeps. The yellow cabs and the chaotic traffic remind me that I'm finally back in New York.

"Bash, your parents directed me to send you to your Penthouse, but first, I will drive you to Hughes's mansion." His deep voice bashes me out from my thoughts.

"Sure. Like you can say no to my dad."

He chuckles, "That's actually from Mrs. Hughes. Your mom, Bash."

I roll my eyes. "Of course. Her baby boy is back."

In my twenty-one years, she treats me like a nine-year-old boy. I can't blame her, though. I'm her only son, and she almost died giving birth to me. She got into complications during the labor that resulted in her not getting pregnant again. Her doctors had to remove her uterus.

"Let's go then. I had a long flight, Edmund. I hope we won't stay long."

"Sure," he responses shortly.

I lean my head back when Edmund plays a 90's song. I can't help but hum as the song plays softly above my head.

"Bash, are you sure you know how to braid?" Trinity asks, looking up at me. She's sitting on the floor in her room while I'm on her pink bed. I start separating her tangled curly red hair into two sections, then twist up the second section, and secure it with a hair clip.

"You don't trust me, Tri? I watched it many times on YouTube. So you don't have to worry. Lizzy won't let me try it on her hair though," I say, separating the first section into three sections, then twist it and cross it as it is shown on the video.

She lets her arms drape on my thighs. "I trust you, Bash. But make sure you do it fast. You still have to help me choose my dress for the Prom." She tilts her head to look at me.

I push her head down. "Stay still if you want me to finish this fast." I try to be focused on what I am doing.

"Ouch. Easy there, tiger!" She whines, hitting me on my leg.

I laugh. "It was not strong, goldfish," I say between laughs. I do the first braid perfectly. "Look at this, Tri. It's perfect!" She looks at her braided hair.

Her face lights up. Her eyes glimmer as she looks at me. "It's perfect, Bash. Thanks!" she chirps, hugging my right leg.

I've been sitting patiently in the dress boutique for almost thirty minutes. Trinity has chosen three dresses she likes. I cross my legs and tap my fingers on my knee. I forget to bring my AirPods with me, so I have to hum some songs in my head.

Trinity emerges from the fitting room, wearing a baby blue ankle-length dress.

She smiles at me. "What do you think of this?"

I look at her without expression on my face. I shake my head.

"But it's blue." Her shoulders slump.

"Trinity, I'm not color-blind," I snap, rolling my eyes.

"But we like blue," she insists.

I take a deep breath.

Since I figured out Trinity can draw, I bribed her to help me draw and sketch. Since then, we started to get along. But I couldn't help myself not to annoy and bully her sometimes. Okay, maybe most of the time. She cried and hid away from me for days until I apologized. I needed her to help me with my art classes. I'd rather choose her to help me than the art tutor that my parents paid. I can say, I enjoy having her around.

"It's plain, Trinity. Try something colorful. You have nice skin color, your hair, and your eyes."

She glares. "I thought you hate my hair and my freckles, and my skin is translucent."

I laugh on my seat as the sales lady approaches us. "I said pale, and I did not say translucent. Ms. Jenna, can you please help my girlfriend here." I stand up and wrap my arm around Trinity's exposed shoulder. She ends up elbowing me.

"Choose a perfect dress for her?"

The sales lady's face lights up like she has some idea. "I know what's perfect for her. She got a beautiful skin with redhead and green eyes." Ms. Jenna scans the dress one by one until she stops and grabs the black, red, and green dress.

"Put these on. The size fits for you, dear."

Trinity and I go to the same school from grade school to high school, and we become best friends. Sometimes, I think of her as a lesbian because she never dates anyone. Unlike me, I dated some girls, but I broke up with them when they started to be mean to Trinity, and she got into trouble because of me.

“Stay away from Bash, Ugly Kiara. If you don’t want me to ruin your pathetic life!” That’s my girlfriend, Alesha yelling at Trinity in the gym during their P.E class. I just finish practicing football when I decide to talk to Trinity to teach her Calculus. I cross my arms over my chest as I watch them intently.

“You tell your boyfriend to stay away from me. Not the other way around!” Trinity responds. Her face turns red with anger. She tells me she doesn’t like Alesha since I started dating her month ago.

“He will tell you, ugly! He’s just waiting for the right time. That’s why I’m telling you now. Do you even have a date for prom? I bet nobody asks you yet, right?” Alesha pokes Trinity on her shoulder.

“I don’t go to that lousy dance or prom. That’s for brainless cheerleaders who want to lose their virginity with drunk horny boys!”

My lips curve to smile. I can’t help but chuckle.

“You’re just jealous because Bash chooses me over his loser of a maid!” Alesha yells again. Students are already circling while Trinity and Alesha are in the center.

My jaw clenches. That’s a lie. First, I didn’t ask Alesha to be my Prom date, and Trinity is my best friend and not my maid. I sprint toward them and push two students to give me away. Alesha’s eyes widen when she notices my presence. Trinity doesn’t look at me in the eye, but I can see the pain in those green orbs.

She walks away out of the crowd, but I manage to catch her arm and grip it tightly.

“Let go of me!” She struggles to loosen my grip and starts crying. My heart just breaks for my best friend.

“Let her go, Bash.” I hear Alesha’s whining voice at my back.

“Stay away from me, Alesha, and stay away from Trinity! If I see you near her again, you will lose your cheerleading team!”

“Let’s get out of here.”

“We’re here, Bash,” Edmund announces after opening the car door for me.

Nothing changed on this mansion. The last time I stepped in here was three years ago. It’s just me who gets three years older—I gained some muscles, become mature, and more focused in life.

I get inside the mansion where I grew up with my sister, Lizzy. A sweet scent, a hint of mixed perfume, and alcohol assaulted my nose.

“SURPRISE!” I almost jump at the voices and the flickering of lights in the crowded living room.

My hand quickly on my frantic chest. “I could die right now with a heart attack.” I rolled my eyes.

“Welcome home, baby boy!” Mom literally sprints towards me, and I meet her halfway with a huge hug.

“I missed you too, mom,” I say, kissing her cheek.

“Son, good to see you back home.” Dad deep husky voice, one of the strong traits that I got from him. After hugging him, I move to my beautiful sister Elizabeth Catherine, and she’s two years older than me.

“Hello, sweet little brother,” she sings with the brightest smile on her face.

“Missed me, Lizzy?” I hug her tight, lifting her from the floor, causing her to shriek. “You weight nothing, Lizzy. Are you even eating?”

She rolls her eyes as soon as we break our welcome embrace. Everyone comes to welcome me, except for the one person that I longed to see for these whole tormenting three years.

I scan the crowd, but I can’t find her beautiful face. I take a long deep breath and swallow hard, pushing back the thought of what I am afraid of finding out.

I feel disappointed.

Lizzy wraps her arm around my waist and whispers in my ear, “she didn’t come.”

I nod, pressing my lips hard into a thin line. Lizzy knows all my secrets. My body suddenly drains out of energy while everyone is enjoying my come back. I take the champagne glass Lizzy offers for the toast when I hear the familiar voice from my back.

“Sorry, guys. I’m late!”

Chapter 2

Expectation

BASH

My head snaps to Lizzy's boyfriend, Dean. I don't like him so much, but who am I to judge, and he seems to make my sister happy. But if he ever hurts my sister, I won't hesitate to break his face.

Dean marches to my direction. As a golden boy, I give him a smile that I mastered since I was a kid.

"Good to see you again, man." I extend my hand, and he grips it tightly with a manly hug.

"Welcome back, Bash."

"Thanks, Dean. So, how's the new lawyer?"

His face lights up. Honestly, he's perfect for my sister. He gets the look that can be the future senator, a built like a soccer player, and a brain that could pass laws for the country's future.

"Thanks for asking, Bash. Just got a case yesterday. A company files a lawsuit against your dad's company. I shouldn't be discussing this with you, but I know Liz is filling you somehow. It's not a big deal. Your company will surely win this case. It's nonsense. They're wasting their money and time." He seems so confident about what he does for a living. Being graduated as magna cum laude at Harvard Law School, he has the privilege. "So, are you going to start your masters here?" he asks.

I take a breath. "That's the plan. Mom won't let me go back again. Dad wants me to start working with him. So, I guess I don't have an escape plan this time."

Lizzy marches in. She grabs Dean's head and kisses him like I'm not around. I'm not used to seeing my sister locking lip with her boyfriend.

I fake a cough.

"What? Can't I kiss my boyfriend?" she asks mischievously.

I roll my eyes that makes Dean chuckle and lick his lips. "It's really not my business, but that's my sister who just kissed in front of me. Gross." I wrinkle my nose.

"I think I need to set you up for a date." Her eyes glint.

I shake my head. "Not happening, Lizzy. I didn't come back to date."

She rolls her eyes. "You're no fun. You can't just lock up yourself in your penthouse after your classes and your training in the company."

“Lizzy, I’ll date when I want to, and don’t worry, I just came out from a relationship.”

She snorts. “I told you I don’t like that slag.”

I groan. “Liz, stop it, and we’re over.” I throw her a warning look.

She shrugs. “Fine.”

She doesn’t like Dana at all. I dated Dana for a year, but Lizzy never even talked to her or said hi. I can’t blame my sister though, Dana and I may be dated, but it didn’t get into a point of going into a deeper relationship. The sex is good, but the longer we were together, the sex was just like part of the routines every night. She didn’t even mention coming here with me. So our relationship ended up in London.

“Mom, I got to get going. It’s almost six in the morning.” I yawn as I rub mom’s back.

She is sitting on the barstool while I’m still standing in front of her.

“Can I come and see you?” she asks, running her fingers on my black hair that I got from dad.

I laugh. “Of course. I know you’ve got my penthouse keys. You don’t have to ask me, you know.”

She looks at my gray eyes longer, which makes me feel uneasy.

“What?” I stare back at her beautiful green one.

“Are you happy to be back?”

I nod, releasing a sigh. I can’t help but run my fingers through my hair. My heart still is broken, and I don’t know how to fix it. The scars are still fresh, a constant reminder that I had never moved on.

“Bash, did you expect her to be here tonight?”

I look away, shrugging my shoulders. I take a deep breath when my eyes start to sting. I bite my lip and nod slowly. “I didn’t expect her to be here, but I was hoping that maybe, she would be here.” My voice is low, but Mom can feel my emotion in those words.

Mom holds my hands and squeezed them. “You two need to talk. You both need a closure.”

I shake my head. “Got to go, mom. Where’s dad?”

“Here, son.” Dad raises his hand. He’s sitting with Lizzy and Dean.

I get in the car waiting for me after bidding goodbye to my family. Edmund quickly closes the door after me and runs towards the driver's seat. He starts the engine without a word when he notices the expression on my face.

He plays another song. This time it's from Lifehouse.

I glare and give him a what-the-fuck-look? He only gives me an innocent look.

The penthouse is on the fifty-eighth floor. It has a two-floor with a triple-height living room with the views of the most iconic skyscrapers. Its perks with a humongous copper brown kitchen, a balcony, floor wine cellar, built-in Hi-tech appliances, and floor to ceiling glass windows.

Mom sent me pictures if I like the interior designs, but these are nothing but boring black and white for me now.

"Thanks, Edmund. I can take it from here," I thank him, grabbing my two traveling bags with my Bottega Veneta messenger bag. I throw myself to the couch. Exhaustion starts to take over me.

"Did you talk to your mom about coming with me to college?" I ask Trinity whose lying on her abdomen with her elbows propped on the mattress. She's scribbling something on her sketchpad, biting her lip in concentration while I'm lying down on my bed with my arms under my head.

"Not yet, but as long as I received my acceptance letter, they can't say anything."

I sit on the bed and cross my arms over my chest. A small smile spread across my face as I look at what Trinity has been scribbling for almost twenty minutes. She's having fun sketching my face.

"We already talked about this many times, Tri. Why aren't you listening to me?" I am annoyed with her excuses every time I mentioned this topic.

"Bash, I said I'm coming to college with you. Meaning, whether Mom and Dad agree on my plan or not, I'm still coming with you. Who can say no to a free house and free food?" she responds, grinning at me, showing her perfect teeth.

I grin back. "I will talk to your mom and dad, Trinity."

She hits me with her sketchpad, and she accidentally hits me there.

My hands quickly cup my throbbing crotch as I curl into a ball. I feel the most painful pain I've ever felt in my entire life, and my forehead starts to sweat.

I can't form a word other than groan and whine from pain.

"Bash, oh, my god! I'm so sorry. I don't mean to hit you hard on your balls." She rubs my head down to my back.

I blow some breaths before I speak. "Are you trying to kill me, Kiara Trinity?" I yell at the top of my lungs. "That hurts like hell. I don't wanna be infertile, you ugly, goldfish!" I gritted between groans.

She is still rubbing her hands on me. "I said sorry, Bash. You don't have to be a bully. I really don't mean to hit you on your balls." Trinity tries to hide her laughter, but there's still a hint of it in her voice.

"Stop saying balls, Virgin Mary. And stop rubbing my back! It won't ease the pain. You know where did you hit me, Nerida! Goldfish! Stick?" I take her hand off of me.

The pain lessens a little bit after a few deep breaths. I glance at her. She's hugging her sketchpad and about to cry. I can see her lips quivering even if she's biting her bottom lip to control it. Jeez, why does she have to cry every time I upset her? She's so sensitive.

"Sorry, I shouldn't have said that," I apologize, but she doesn't say anything anymore. She's going to hide from me again.

"Should I rub your balls instead?" she asks with hesitation, wiping the tears fell from her eyes.

I move closer to her and pull her into a hug. I kiss the side of her head and rub her arms while she shakes to cry. "I said, I'm sorry. It hurts, and I know you don't mean it, Tri. You don't have to rub my balls." I chuckle at my last words. "You're not gonna hide from me, are you?"

"You can live without me, Bash. You will find new friends. You will have a girlfriend who will not be bothered by our friendship." What the hell is she talking about?

"What do you mean, Trinity?" I pull away and look at her intently. She sniffs as she wipes her tears with the back of her hand.

Why do I feel like she just played me? We applied to the same college together. We planned all of these together, and now I feel like she'll leave me hanging. Alone. She doesn't reply, and it makes me furious. She continues crying and looking down while twisting her fingers.

"Trinity, answer me for Pete's sake!" I can't help but raise my voice.

She startles in her seat and sobs more.

"You didn't apply, did you? You have no plan on coming abroad with me?" I push.

Still, she doesn't say a word, neither shake her head or nod.

"You lied to be, Trinity! You tricked me!" I blink when my eyes start to sting and blur. I breathe heavily as I feel like I'm losing my temper. "When are you going to tell me about this? Before the flight? Did you even tell your parents? You didn't, did you?"

She just continues crying, and it pisses me off. "You hurt me, Trinity. You hurt me!"

"I just don't want to bother you, Bash. I'm only a burden to you and your life. You can't even find a serious girlfriend because of me."

I laugh sarcastically. "Did I ever complain, Trinity? I chose you over girls because you are more important to me than them. They just want me because I am a Hughes, not because I am Bash like who I am to you." My voice cracks in the end. Jesus, I never cry in front of anyone but my family, but here I am, crying over Trinity.

"You can go and study abroad while we still are best friends."

I laugh again, mocking the word best friend. "Best friend? No best friend ever lies. No best friend betrayed her best friend, and no best friend will leave her best friend alone!"

She cries even more, and I want to hug her so badly, but my anger is taking over me.

"Bash, I'm sorry, okay? We can still—"

I cut her off. "What? That we can still skype? Facetime? Chat? Twit?" I laugh, "No way! No effing way! I don't wanna be your best friend anymore, Kiara!" I stand up from my bed with my hands on my hips. "Get out of my room, out of my house, and I don't wanna see your ugly face again!" I swallow hard after those words left my mouth.

My heart crashes in my chest because I don't mean what I say. Trinity drags herself out of my bed, takes the sketchpad, leaves me alone in my bed, in my room, and my house.

I wipe my tears and walk to my bathroom. I am washing my face when I hear a soft knock on my door. "I'm sleeping, get away from me!" I yell and walk back to my empty bed after wiping my face. The face of my sister emerges from the half-opened door.

"I said I'm sleeping, Lizzy!"

My phone buzzes from my pocket. I fish out lazily and groan when I see the screen. It's a text from my sister.

LIZZY: Baby bash, meeting tom at Hughes building 9 am sharp.

BASH: Stop calling me baby! Can't I have a day off?

LIZZY: Grumpy! No way! It's time to meet the new CFO.

BASH: And who is that?

LIZZY: YOU, idiot!

I groan.

BASH: Impossible!

LIZZY: Ask dad

BASH: I need some sleep now

LIZZY: See you tomorrow, baby bash!

I wear a white-crisp shirt, a dark charcoal gray suit, and a dark metallic gray tie and match it with black shoes. I use cufflinks with my initials. I look at my reflection at the wall-size mirror, and I run my fingers through my hair one more time.

I grab the keys that I left at the coffee table yesterday. Then I head to the private elevator. After punching some keys, it slides open. I reach the parking area with my driver waiting for me.

“Morning, boss!” he greets me cheerfully with a smile.

“Morning, Edmund,” I greet back and get in the car.

“To the office, right, Bash?”

I raise my brows. “Don’t play 90’s music, and how did you know?”

“Ms. Hughes sent me an email of your schedule.”

I groan. “Of course, she did.”

“We will stop at the coffee shop for your coffee, then we can head to the Hughes Tower immediately,” he explains.

“For a driver, you talk too much early in the morning,” I tell him, looking out the window.

“Play some music.”

“Sir?”

“Edmund?”

“Bash?”

“Yeah?”

“Right away, boss!”

I’m definitely loving the company of my driver.

I head to Dad’s office right away after saying hi to his PA, Elle.

Nothing has changed in his office, except for the additional family photo and my recent picture taken during my graduation.

“Morning, son. Don’t I get a hug?” Dad’s merry voice snaps my head at him.

“Morning, Dad.” I march to his desk when he stands up and puts down the phone receiver.

“Why I’m here so early? Shouldn’t I start first my masters, then train with you, but from what I heard from Lizzy yesterday, I’ll be starting right away.” I take a seat, facing him.

“I will explain that at the meeting,” Dad simply says, glancing at the wristwatch given by mom. “In twenty minutes. Would you like to see your office first?” he asks, buttoning his suit.

I nod, stand up, and button my suit too.

“Elle will show you your office just down to the left. You can use the stairs. And son?”

I stop and look at him. “Yeah?”

“Be nice to your new Assistant.”

Chapter 3

Surprise

BASH

I feel the instant coldness of the stainless door handle on my office as I push it open. As I enter, I feel a sudden unsettling in the pit of my stomach when a familiar flowery-scent hits my nostrils.

A gasp from has my head snap, and my eyes are transfixed on the woman in front of me. Everything stops. My surrounding blurs. The beating of my heart races. My eyes widen in shock, and I am surprised that my jaw still attached to my head.

I'm not expecting to see her here in this building, let alone in my office. I wasn't thinking about her when Dad told me to be nice to my assistant. What's this supposed to mean?

I shut my gaping mouth close and cough awkwardly. "Trinity." Her name comes out a whisper, and it feels foreign in my ears.

She blinks many times before she clears her throat. She smiles at me—a tight smile; just a plain smile; a forceful one. "Mr. Hughes, good Morning, and welcome to your new office," she greets with courtesy. Mr. Hughes? "I hope the interior fits your liking, but we can still request and change—"

I raise my sweaty hand for her to stop. My heart beats faster than before. My lungs expand further, that my ribcage can crack any moment, and it makes me difficult to breathe.

I look at her for seconds, and she meets my gaze then breaks it quickly.

"You didn't come to the party my family threw out two days ago," I said almost silently.

She grabs some files on top of my desk with the iPad on top. She hugs them to her chest gracefully and says casually, "I sent Lizzy a message that I couldn't come. So, as you know, I'm your new assistant; temporarily, and my office is just adjacent to yours," she puts a little emphasis on the temporarily while pointing at the door on my left.

Her stares give me shiver; her green eyes are shooting an icy glare on me.

She changed a lot. Her hair is cut short just above her shoulders. The color is still the same, though. Her face still has freckles, but they're lesser, maybe from the makeup she applies on. Her lips are still full, painted with red lipstick.

She taps on her iPad. "You have a meeting in less than ten minutes."

I take a deep breath. “Trinity, just leave the meeting for a while, can you?” I move closer to her because I badly want to pull her into a hug and feel her warm welcome.

She swallows hard. “Okay, you’re the boss. I placed all the paper works that left by Mr. Peter Williams.” She gestures to the file on top of my desk.

“I’m not interested in that either.” I snap. “What happened to you, Trinity?”

She looks taken aback. “What happened to me?” she asks back, pointing her finger to herself.

“Nothing bad happened to me, Mr. Hughes. If you don’t want me as your temporary assistant, by all means, please, just ask the HR for my replacement,” she adds sternly.

“That’s not what I mean.” Why is she acting like she doesn’t know me? “Stop calling me Mr. Hughes. You’re my best friend for God’s sake—”

“Were,” she cuts me off. “Ex-best friend, Mr. Hughes. You are my boss now, so only it’s proper to address you as—”

“I am your boss, so do as I say,” I tell her in an authoritative tone.

“Sure.” She looks down at the empty chair in front of my desk.

She places back down the file she took a while ago and smoothens her dark blue pencil cut skirt that ends just above her knees. She wears a white blouse with a dark blue blazer. She looks beautiful, elegant, and very professional.

“I came to see you before my flight to the U.K, but you were not there. You went to your grandparents in Boston.”

She doesn’t say anything. I guess she’s listening.

I continue, “I wanted to apologize that day and take back our friendship, Trinity, but you didn’t even answer my calls nor replied to my messages.”

“It doesn’t matter. That was four years ago,” she says coolly.

I snort. “That’s it? I mean, you just wasted our friendship for years with just one mistake I made, and you made mistakes too, Trinity.”

“I don’t want to be your friend, Bash, Can’t you understand that? Your friends, classmates, and girlfriends thought I was just your slave. I’m a dog under your leash. Your personal maid!”

“Did I listen to them even once? How many times did I fight for you against them? How many times did I choose you against my girlfriends? How many times did I defend you against those freaking losers, Trinity? How many times?” My voice fills in the room. Before I came, I did not

exactly expect to fight early in the morning. It ruins my mood to have an early argument with anyone.

"I don't care. I have friends now. I'm sure you made friends with Brits." She doesn't look affected. She's so cold that makes me shiver.

"You're such an immature."

"You're an asshole!"

I narrow my gaze on her. "Watch your tone and your language when you're in my office, Trinity. I'm still your boss."

"My apology, Mr. Hughes," she says silently.

"Don't I get a welcome back hug?" I ask, hoping she gives in now that we finally talk about the elephant in the room.

She rolls her eyes. "That's inappropriate. Meeting in less than four minutes, Mr. Seb Hughes will introduce you as the new CFO."

I grab the iPad from her hand and scroll it down what she jotted down. I stop with brows furrow to the second note. "Dinner with Luke; to discuss the engagement?" I read it slowly, and I almost drop the iPad from my hand.

My heart just crashes in my chest. "You're engaged?" I grab her hand a bit stronger, and there you go. The fucking engagement ring on her finger.

My life is doomed!

I stare at her as I try to process what I just find out, but she doesn't meet my gaze anymore. She just looks down at the iPad that I toss down the chair.

I sprint towards the door and slamming it behind me. I almost collide with Lizzy when I walk my way to the conference room.

"Bash, we are about to start in less than two minutes. Get inside and take a seat."

I shove my hand in my pocket and look at the monolithic view of the building outside, ignoring Lizzy's voice.

Pressing my lips into a thin line and slumping my shoulders in defeat, I swallow hard the lump in my throat. I lose Trinity forever.

What's the point of coming back?

I don't answer my sister.

“Bash, you okay?” she asks with a worried tone of a sister like she used to when we were just kids. I feel a hand rubbing my back.

I look down at her five-foot-eight inches framed. I shake my head.

“I will never be okay, Lizzy.”

“You will be, Bash. You will be, and you should be. It’s never been too late,” she says and walks away leaving me alone with these glass windows.

The meeting went well as I expect, and I can’t help but steal glances at Trinity whose busy writing something on the notepad. I find out that she didn’t follow her dreams to be an architect, instead she chose to study business management.

She must have studied hard to pass them because she hated numbers in every way possible. I walk out of the conference door after talking with Dad for a few minutes.

“Leaving already?” I Look at Dean, marching towards me.

I give him a smile and a nod. “Yeah, first day, and still having a jet-lagged. I think I’m excused, right?”

He laughs. “Bash, you owned 15% of this company, and your family owns this. You can work your fat ass at the yacht in the middle of the Caribbean, nobody cares.”

I shake my head in amusement. “Like my dad would agree.”

“I’m always free for a good talk, Bash. Just call me.” He pats my shoulder.

“I keep that in mind, Thanks, Dean. You’re not bad, after all.”

“I know you don’t like me, or maybe you don’t trust me for your sister, but I can’t blame you to be an overprotective brother over her, but man, I love her with all my life, and I don’t care if you are against us or not, and it’s not that you are gonna stop me from loving Liz.”

“Got to go before we fall in love with each other.”

He laughs again. “You will be fine. It’s not too late, Bash.”

Remind me to strangle my big sister.

“Bash, I think we should go home now. You’ve wasted, man.” Edmund grips my arms as he guides me out of the bar.

I've been drinking my ass, and I get into a challenge with the girls on tequila shots. I'm lightweight. Maybe that's why the alcohol kicks in quickly.

"I can still handle some shots, Edmund boy," I slur.

"Shut up, drunk-ass. I'll lose my job because of you, baby bash."

I punch his arm. "Stop calling me baby Bash, or I will light your ass on fire."

He chuckles. My half-opened eyes flutter close as soon as I get in the car.

"Night, Edmund!"

"Just shut up!" He barks out from the front seat. Then I hear the music play in the speaker.

My hundred pounds of eyes force to open when I hear the doorbell rings repeatedly. My head is pounding with headaches when I abruptly sit on the edge of my bed.

I rub my throbbing temples. Whoever on that door should make sure he has a good reason bombarding into my penthouse. I'm sure it's my family. They are the only one who has passed to be here without interfering the security.

I swallow the two tablets placed on my nightstand and gulp the still cold water in the glass. I feel relief as the water runs down to my dry and achy throat.

I lick my dry lips as I walk with a lazy pace to my living room toward the door, still rubbing my heavy eyes. I hear the doorbell goes off again.

"Coming. Damn it!"

I press some keys to unlock and squeeze the doorknob to open.

"Can't you be a little patient?" My voice is still groggy. I leave the door open and walk away without bother looking whoever on the door. I still when I hear a gasp at my back. I turn only to see Trinity looks shocked with her hands on her mouth.

I stand frozen in my place like I just turn into an ice statue. I remember I am not wearing a shirt, and I'm only on my pants from yesterday. She doesn't move a muscle, but she keeps on staring at me without blinking.

I clear my throat. "Trinity, please, come in, and close the door behind you. I'll just put a shirt on." I walk away from standing still Trinity.

"Oh, my God."

“Have a seat, Trinity. Be down in a bit.”

I wash my face with cold water when I feel stings on my back. I stretch my arms wider, and it pricks my skin as if I get a sunburn. I reach my hand to touch my back where it hurts a lot. My eyes widen when the vague of events from last night comes flashing back at me like cold water.

“Fuck! What the hell have I done?” I turn to let my back face the mirror. My eyes grow wide when I see what’s on my back.

A fucking tattoo!

Chapter 4

Sucks!

TRINITY

My life sucks!

Let me tell you a brief story of my life. To start, my name is supposed to be Kiera Trinity Mallory, but the registrar might have cross-eyed or drunk. Now my name is officially registered as Kiara Trinity.

Number one. I am the only child of Zoey and Logan Mallory. I always dream of having a sibling, but I didn't get a chance to have either a brother or a sister. I felt jealous every time I saw my friends with their brothers.

Two. I have a frizzy red curly hair that looks like orange in the sun and like instant Chinese noodles. I always got bullied when I was a kid because of my hair. No matter how mom tried fixing it with a hundred hair clips, it wouldn't just stick together. I got plenty of freckles all over my face. I'm sure you know how my face looks like.

My eyes are maybe my best asset—they're green like a tropical forest, but many girls have green eyes too. Dad loves me so much he calls them emerald. My lips? Just ordinary. Okay, maybe red and full because I have pale skin that makes them stand out?

I'm not tall neither short—just an average, I guess. I lack in the chest size, but I don't have to use the push-up bra that women are using these days to show off cleavage.

So much about my physical appearance. Well, one thing I suck at? Numbers. Who loves numbers, anyway? I hate it because it just gives me a terrible headache at the end of the class.

Thank God, I passed and graduated from college with a Business Management major in Finance. Well, I have to shift my love of Art to Finance to prove that I can still function and solve numbers without his help.

Don't raise your brows because I have good eyebrows that my friends envy me for that. Thank God, they're not red.

I was one of the luckiest students to get a full scholarship sponsored by Hughes Industries. Though my parents work with them until now, I do believe that I still deserve the Scholarship program.

Another suck—my best friend since grades school hates me to death. He broke my heart, and I cried for months. Not only because he hates me, but because he's my crush since I learned how to walk. Funny, right?

I never had a boyfriend until my senior year in college. Well, that was a year ago. I met Oli, and we clicked right away like jigsaw puzzles until he asked me out.

Everything was perfect—we laughed, we fought, we reconciled, we made love, and he was so perfect. He was caring, loving, and thoughtful until he proposed. Did I say yes? Of course, I loved him, and he was my first boyfriend and everything, but he was not my first kiss.

But like I said before, life sucks! I found out that he was suffering from leukemia. No matter how I cried my eyes out every day and night, nothing is going to change the fact that he is dying.

Oli died six months ago when we were about to set a date for our wedding. See? Fate is just playing with me. Don't get me wrong, I don't hate my life.

I've got great parents and great best friends. I love them so much. But my life is about to be doomed when I heard a month ago that Mr. Peter Williams is retiring. I've been working with him as his assistance since I started my internship, and I'm about to get a real position at the finance department at Hughes Industries.

"K! Sorry, I'm late." My head snaps to the brunette of five foot eight inches gorgeous woman wearing a light pink Dior dress, blue Louboutin stilettos with her blue Manolo Blahnik clutch bag. I stand from the chair to meet her.

"It's just like two minutes and twenty seconds, Lizzy," I say after our girly kisses. Did I mention who Lizzy is? The heiress of Hughes. Well, she's the boss's daughter. She runs the marketing and advertising department and my ex-best friend's big sister.

"Where's Saph?" she asks, sitting across the table.

I notice her driver/bodyguard always on full alert like one of the Men in Black agents.

"She texted me half hour ago. She said she's on her way."

Lizzy chuckles. "Maybe she fought with her twin again. I heard from uncle Phoenix that Xandry doesn't like Matt."

"Oh, I don't like him too, but who am I to judge. Saph likes him, though." I sip the caramel Frappuccino that I ordered while waiting for Lizzy to arrive.

"I don't think Saph is serious with him. You know her. She has a thing with bad boys, and he isn't one of those," Lizzy replies, then she looks at me as if she wants to say something.

“What?” I ask.

“You know he’s coming back, right?” I freeze in my seat. I feel my surrounding is suddenly getting smaller. I feel claustrophobic, and I shiver as if I just soak into a tub full of ice water. I nod slowly.

“I’m sorry, K,” she says sincerely, reaching out for my hand.

“It’s okay. I can handle him as I did before,” I tell her as I toy with my engagement ring. I never take this off even Oli was long gone. It reminds me of him.

“That was three years ago, K.”

“four years ago, Lizzy,” I correct her.

“But you will work with him eight hours a day. Five days a week.”

“And?” I ask.

“You’re both kids at that time, and it’s been years since the last time you two see each other,” she pushes.

“What’s your point? And we’re not kids this time, Lizzy. We’re both adults.”

“When was the last time you check his social media account?” she asks with scrutinizing looks.

“Almost four years ago,” I answer slowly with hesitant in my voice. “After he left. Why?” I never checked anything has to do with him after that. I know his password, but I never tried even to check if he changed it or not.

“See? That’s what I mean,” she says before sipping her green tea.

“He still hates me, and I’m sure he will make my life in living hell. Ms. Mallory, make my coffee, bring my dry clean, send this, do this, arrange dinner with, fax this, do my presentation, oh, did my whore call? Go fetch my dog, feed ducks, get me a copy of Jack Reacher’s first edition. Oh, Ms. Mallory, did I tell you—”

Lizzy laughs until she turns red while holding her flat stomach as I mimick her brother’s voice.

“He might have changed his accent into a bloody Brit.”

“Meh, he’s still the same annoying Bash, but I love him, you know? I hope he’ll break up with that bitch Dana before he comes back. I don’t like her for my brother.”

My heart has been stabbed like a thousand times every time she mentioned that name.

I hate the letter D. Ugh!

"It's all my fault that he hates me, Lizzy, and I can't blame him if he will torture me at work," I say guiltily. I've cried to sleep when he literally threw me out of his life that night. I was beyond broken.

"I don't think he is that immature to mix the misunderstanding you had before with work. He's grown up, K."

"I don't think he's even pleased to see me. Does he know that I'll be his temporary assistant?"

She shakes her head.

I sent a text message to Lizzy that I couldn't make it to the welcome party because I had to visit Oli for our 1st anniversary. I know it sounds lame because I went in the morning and the party was not until almost midnight. But to be honest, I'm not ready to face him. I still feel guilty until now.

I look at the mirror one last time. I close my eyes and take a deep breath. I'm bracing myself to whatever Bash is going to throw against me as soon as he figures out that I'll be working with him for eight hours every day for weekdays. I've been practicing my speech since yesterday after arranging his schedule.

I get out of the ladies' room while wiping my sweaty palms on my skirt. I'm breathing deeply like every ten seconds.

What's wrong with me?

Pretend like he is your new boss who is an arrogant prick who hates women, K.

A text from Lizzy.

LIZZY: He's in the elevator now.

Crap!

After a few minutes, I'm done arranging the file, and that's when the door swings open. When I think I am ready to face him again, it's total bullshit. I'm never going to be ready. Ever.

Relax. Just play cool.

No, I can't!

Oh, boy! He isn't the young Bash, my best friend once for years. He's changed a lot! I should have followed what Lizzy has told me. To check out his social media or likely, to stalk him so that I won't be swooning in front of him and front of my effing boss.

Bash Hughes is hotter than the molten lava and like an effing sun in summer!

Our gazes meet. There's a surprising look in his gray eyes.

Doesn't he suppose to know that I'm his personal maid now?

He calls my name, Trinity. He's the only one who calls me by that name, and if I'm being honest, I really miss it. I miss that coming from his mouth. I miss his voice. I have to blink many times to push the thought out of my head.

I greet him, but to call him by that name, it feels like I just swallow a fish. And I hate fish. It's nasty.

He's beautiful brows furrow.

I continue, "I hope the interior fits your liking, but we can still request and change—"

He raises hands to stop me from babbling like an idiot, showing me his long fingers.

My heart pounds in my chest. I feel my face heat when our gazes meet again. I have to break it because Bash is hypnotizing me with those gray orbs that I once took a closer look at.

My lips dry instantly.

"You didn't come to the party my family threw out for me two days ago," he says in a low voice.

Is he expecting me to be there? Wow!

I grab some files on top of his desk that I placed them perfectly. I grab the iPad where I saved all his appointment and my notes. I'm not supposed to do that, but I can't just fidget in front of him or gawk at him for the rest of the day. I hug them to my chest to somehow calm my racing heartbeat.

"I sent Lizzy a message that I couldn't come," I reply nonchalantly, then I continue to avoid stuttering, "So, as you know, I'm your new assistant; temporarily, and my office is just adjacent to yours." I point at the door to his left. I look at him like he's my man-whoring boss who cheated on his girlfriends.

I tap on his schedule on my iPad—it's company property.

"You have a meeting in less than ten minutes." I look at his schedule and read it to him like a normal assistant-boss conversation.

"Trinity, just leave the meeting for a while, can you?"

I swallow hard when he moves closer to me. I feel everything around me disappears, and the tension between us radiates.

"Okay, you're the boss. I placed all the paper works that left by Mr. Peter Williams," I agree.

"I'm not interested in that either," he snaps.

I almost collapse. Oh, lord, please? Give me some magic to turn into an ant or at least a portal to transport me to the other world.

“What happened to you, Trinity?” he asks, looking at me intensely. I can’t help but amaze at how he looks so handsome right now.

“What happened to me?” I ask back, pointing at myself. “Nothing bad happened to me, Mr. Hughes. If you don’t want me as your assistant, by all means, please, just ask the HR for my replacement,” I answer with a firm voice.

Thank God! I don’t stutter like I always when I get nervous.

“That’s not what I mean,” he says. I act like I’m not affected; it hurts though, and I want to die right now.

“Stop calling me Mr. Hughes. You’re my best friend.”

“Were. Ex-best friend, Mr. Hughes. You are my boss, so it’s only proper to address you as—” I answer quickly, but he interjects.

“I am your boss, so do as I say.” He sounds intimidating.

Crap! He’s angry.

“Sure,” I answer, defeated. I look down at the empty chair in front of me. I place down the file that I took as my shield.

“I came to see you before my flight to the U.K, but you were not there. You went to your grandparents in Boston.” He starts talking, and I can’t help but listen to his deep baritone voice—his sexy voice. I miss it.

“I wanted to apologize that day and take back our friendship, Trinity, but you didn’t even answer my calls nor replied to my messages,” he continues.

“It doesn’t matter. That was four years ago.” I continue my facade.

He snorts. “That’s it? I mean, you just wasted our friendship for years with just one mistake I made, and you made mistakes too, Trinity.”

I face him. The last time I checked, he was the one who yelled at me and pushed me away from his life. “I don’t want to be your friend, Bash, Can’t you understand that? Your friends, classmates, and girlfriends thought I was just your slave. I’m a dog under your leash. Your personal maid!” Boss or not, I don’t care.

I could lose the job that I love, but he keeps pushing me like it was my mistakes alone.

“Did I listen to them even once? How many times did I fight for you against them? How many times did I choose you against my girlfriends? How many times did I defend you against those freaking losers, Trinity? How many times?” His voice makes me want to sink into the floor.

“I don’t care. I have friends now. I’m sure you made friends with Brits.” And you have a Brit girlfriend.

“You’re such an immature!” he snaps.

“You’re an asshole!” Oops! I shouldn’t have said that.

“Watch your tone and your language when you’re in my office, Trinity. I’m still your boss.” Crap! He sounds angrier. And just his voice almost makes me jump. He did really change a lot. He’s more intimidating, more mature, and hotter. I don’t mean that last word.

“My apology, Mr. Hughes,” I say silently by force.

“Don’t I get a welcome back hug?” he asks with a soft voice this time. My head almost snaps as I look up at him.

Bipolar!

This man is unbelievable.

“That’s inappropriate. Meeting in less than four minutes, Mr. Seb Hughes will introduce you as the new CFO.” I didn’t realize he moves closer to me and grabs the iPad from my hand forcefully.

“Dinner with Luke; to discuss the engagement?” He taps it and reads slowly. He almost drops it to the floor before he throws it to the empty chair that serves our gap. I watch his jaw clench and breathe so deep before he walks away without a single word. The last thing I hear is the slamming of the door behind him.

Chapter 5

Sleepless

TRINITY

“What am I doing?” I ask myself in the mirror.

Last night I kept turning in bed for some reason that I didn’t even know. That was the first night that I didn’t think of Oli since he passed away. All I could think of was the gorgeous gray-eyed who ran away from his office and didn’t come back after the meeting.

What’s his problem anyway?

I play with my engagement ring on my finger while I’m humming the song on my phone. My officemates are already rushing to get in the cramming elevator. Some say hi, greets a good morning, and some think that I’m invisible. I know exactly what they talk about, so I keep my volume on my headset louder even it’s already deafening my ears.

Enough thinking of Bash! You had all that last night! I’m sure he isn’t doing the same.

I start my routine as soon as I get into my office. Still no signs of Bash. It’s almost nine in the morning when I check the time on my laptop.

“Wow! Very impressive for the second day. The most punctual Hughes in the History of Hughes!” I slump my ass back to my chair dramatically.

“Well, thank you, sweetheart.”

I jerk in my seat and compose myself when I meet the gray-eyed old version of him.

“S-sorry. Um, good morning, Mr. Hughes!” I say and raise from my seat as the heat creeps on my cheeks. I am sure he knows who I am talking about.

“Kiara, Bash won’t be here. His driver just informed me that Bash is still in bed and not feeling well. I guess he has jet lag. I will let him work from his home, or he can take off for the rest of the week,” he says politely. He is the best father to Lizzy and Bash. Though he’s very strict as boss while at work, but he’s nothing like when he’s out of his building.

“So, he won’t be here today?” I ask, and my voice sounds disappointed. Jeez!

He chuckles. “I need him to sign some papers, and you have to go to his penthouse. I need the documents at the end of the day.” He pauses and fishes out something in his pants pocket. “Take this key if he will not open for you, and I will write down the passcode on his security system.”

I take the key from his hand, unsure. My brows meet as I look up at him. He's smiling at me, and I can't help but smile back and nod in understanding.

I meet Bash's driver, Edmund at the lobby. He helps me up to the penthouse, then he goes down when I'm already at the front door of Bash luxurious den.

I press the doorbell; Daddy Seb said if he won't open for me, then that's the time I will use the key and the passcode.

I start tapping my black high heels on the floor patiently, a gift from Lizzy when we went shopping two weeks ago. That's one of the perks of having a best friend and the daughter of the Billionaire, always having gifts.

I press again, no answer.

I roll my eyes and press it repeatedly. Jeez, is he deaf? Is he really not feeling well? Did he happen to eat peanut butter or strawberries?

I know he has allergies to them.

Before I can press again, I hear him from the other side saying he's coming. I stand straight and hug my file manager tightly to my chest and take deep breaths.

My heart starts thundering in my chest. The shiny dark wooden door unlocks and swings open.

Wow! If he looks hotter than the molten lava, now half-naked Bash looks hotter than hell. How does it even possible? His black bedhead hair looks good even it shouldn't. He looks tired, though. With half-closed eyes, he rubs his face with his long fingers.

"Can't you be a little patient?" he comments with his sleepy voice. He opens the door wider for me and walks away without looking back. I want to inspect his body, but he's already leaving me standing glued in front of his door.

He ignores me. Great!

What are you expecting, Kiara?

A gasp escapes my lips as he turns his back on me, and I am sure he hears it because he stops and freezes. He turns around and looks at me with my hand already on my mouth. My green eyes widen, and I can't say anything like I lose all my thoughts.

"Trinity, please, come in, and close the door behind you. I'll just put a shirt on," he says after clearing his throat. He walks away again while I'm still standing frozen.

I blink many times and swallow hard before I get my voice back. "Oh, my God."

"Have a seat, Trinity. Be down a bit," he says as he walks away.

From his torso to his back are muscles-ripped, and they look sexier when he moves. He must work out a lot to gain that. He took care of himself while he was away. Unlike me, I have a lazy ass to even run on a treadmill, but my body never gained weight since I was a kid.

Finally, I am able to move when his back is finally out of my sight. I walk toward his enormous and modern living room. I place down the folder on the coffee table that I've been gripping tightly against my chest. I sit down and rest my back on his expensive couch.

I let my eyes wander around. I'm used to seeing a luxurious home since I'm close to his family. The living room has a black brick wall decorated with modern and stylish furniture with enormous floor to ceiling glass windows. Raindrop's inspired chandelier is hanging at the double high ceiling room.

I hear footsteps get closer, so I am quickly on feet as I draw a deep breath to face my gorgeous boss.

"Morning, Trinity!" He smiles that makes a school girl daydream, showing his dimples and straight pearly white teeth as you've seen on toothpaste commercials.

"Good morning, Mr. Hughes. Your dad sent me here for you to sign some documents that he needs to be at his desk at the end of the day." I bend down to grab the folder from the coffee table.

He slumps his body down to his couch with a loud whoosh. He rubs his temples with fingers, then he releases a sigh, tapping the space between us. I stand still with furrowed brows, glaring at him. He stops rubbing his temples when he notices me not moving.

"Tri, I have a terrible headache. Can we talk later about what Dad told you?" He's feeling close to me, huh? Tri, my ass.

I have a terrible and horrible heart. It beats faster like I run three miles on a treadmill.

"Why do you have my name tattooed on your back?" I ask out of curiosity, but more likely an interrogation.

He sits straight, and he is on his feet in a second. "Follow me. I need caffeine," he says, but it sounds like a command.

He saunters away. I groan, kicking off my high heels when I saw him barefooted. "Mr. Hughes!" I yell as I follow him like a puppy.

He stops abruptly, so I halt to stop to avoid bumping into him.

"Call me Mr. Hughes again—"

“Or what?” I cut him off.

“Trinity,” he warns.

“You didn’t answer me.”

“Bash,” he responds.

“What?”

“You didn’t answer me, Bash,” Rephrasing, I emphasize his name. I pout and follow him to his copper colored-wall kitchen. “Why didn’t you go to work?” I ask while he’s busy filling up the coffee machine.

He has a perfect and muscular athletic body. He was physically fit before he left, but now he looks more mature, muscle-ripped, and hotter than every woman daydreams of taking him into their beds.

Shitty brain!

He doesn’t answer me. Instead, he opens the wall-mounted fridge, taking a transparent plastic container. He opens the microwave, placing two croissants inside, then he closes and presses the screen to set the timer.

“Take a seat, Tri,” that’s all he says, and I feel annoyed.

I do what he said. He ignores my questions then I will ignore his. He places a plate with pastries, a mug of black coffee, and another mug in front of me with cream. I am kind of touched that he still remembers what I like.

“I put sugar on that,” he says.

I lift my eyes to look at him, and it’s a mistake because he’s staring at me. He raises his brow like asking me.

I shake my head, grab the steaming mug, and sip it silently. It tastes like what I really like.

“I was drunk last night when I got this tattoo. I can’t remember what happened. It’s vague, but I remember something that I got into some tequila shots challenge.”

I don’t look at him.

He sips his coffee. “I was surprised to see it in the mirror when I went up to grab a shirt,” he adds.

Why do I feel it isn’t awkward talking with him?

"Don't worry. I will ask for an appointment for cosmetic surgeons. Maybe they can remove it while it still fresh."

I look at him and nod.

"I will work here today. I don't have the strength to go to the office."

"Okay."

"It means you stay here too. I have an office here from the door to the left."

"I know."

"Where is he?" all of a sudden, he asks.

My brows furrow. "Who?"

"Luke." He looks at my fingers. "Your fiancé."

My eyes widen before I burst out laughing. "Luke? My fiancé?"

He looks confused, and looks hurt?

"Luke is not my fiancé, Bash. I'm not marrying a gay." I press my lips together to contain my smile.

"Then, who is your fiancé?" he asks.

My smile fades. "Luke is my gay roommate since college, and he's engaged to Ryker."

I feel like I just drained all my energy. I can't believe he doesn't know what happened to my fiancé. I guess Lizzy didn't mention anything to him about me.

My shoulders droop. "My fiancé died six months ago," I say slowly.

His eyes widen in shock. He swallows hard and blinks rapidly. "I'm so sorry, Tri. I've no idea."

"Of course, you don't. Why would you even care about my misery when you are living the life that you deserve in a foreign country?"

"Of course, I care, Tri," he says, sounding sympathetic.

"Like you are."

"Tri," he says, grabbing my left hand, causing me to gasp. He does too, but he doesn't let go. Instead, he tightens the grip. The heat from the contact spreads through my toes that I curl unbeknownst.

My heart swells, which makes my breathing catch. I pull my hand, but Bash manages to tighten it even more.

I look at our hands slowly up to his taut arm, to his chest that is breathing heavily, to the throat that swallows, to his red slightly parted lips, to his straight nose, and to his gorgeous and mesmerizing gray eyes that are looking straight back at my green ones.

We look at each other for as long as I can take his gaze. He never breaks it until I surrender. I feel his thumb moving and gently caressing my knuckles. I almost moan at the sensation of the caress he is giving me. I can't help but grip his hand back tighter as if I'll fall from the stool if I let it go.

"Trinity."

My breath holds in my lungs.

"I'm here now." I can feel the concern in his tone, but what I can hear is the longingness so thick. His voice turns huskier and deeper.

I pull my hand abruptly when he loosens it a bit.

"Let's get back to work," I announce before I stand, taking my coffee with me. I walk back to the couch.

His office is bigger than my room and cozier than his main office. With dark wooden walls, his mahogany desk is placed at the center with nothing but only his laptop on top. From my left are the two opposites shelves of hardback books. From his back are the cabinets and drawers where he probably places some files.

One long brown L-shaped leather couch and a brown chair are at its left side, and a small liquor cabinet aligning the couch. What catches my attention is the sketched of his face that I still remember he stole it from me, and now it's framed and mounted on the wall just above the couch.

"Is that the sketch that you stole from me?" My heart melts.

How does he even keep this for so long?

He smirks. "Seat on the couch, Trinity, and give me the papers that Dad wants me to sign. Anything important for my schedule today?"

I offer a folder that has documents in it.

"You don't have an appointment for today. Your dad said you can take the rest of this week as your off if you want to, or you can work from here. As you wish."

He looks at me. "Really?"

I nod. "Ask your dad to confirm."

"That's not how to answer your boss, goldfish," he says casually.

I stay still.

"It still affects you, Tri."

"That's not right to bully your assistant, Mr. Hughes!" I say firmly before I walk toward the couch.

He only chuckles.

I sit on the couch, frowning. Why my life has to be this sucks? What I did that God has to punish me since birth?

"Trinity?"

My head snaps.

"I mean it."

"About what?"

"That I'm here now."

"I don't need you."

He rises from his chair and walks to my direction, taking a seat beside me. My heart can combust in my chest as he leans closer to me, wrapping his strong arms around me. He plants his chin on top of my head.

I can feel his body press against mine. I can smell his masculine cologne scent.

I can't help myself not to wrap my hands on his arm as I press it closer to me. I close my eyes and feel him and just listen to his breathing and heartbeat at this moment. I'm sure he can hear how my heart is beating too fast. For him.

"I need you, Trinity," he says, kissing the top of my head. I don't let him go because I know that I need him too.

Chapter 6

Position

BASH

“Why didn’t you tell me that her fiancé died? I could have avoided asking her about him, Lizzy.”

She sighs from the other line. I couldn’t sleep after what I just found out about her relationship. It breaks my heart to see her in such pain, and I can’t do anything to help her.

“Bash, she needs you. She may laugh, jokes around, or pushes you away, but she suffered a lot losing her fiancé. She needs the Bash that she used to know. She needs her best friend,” Lizzy says softly, convincing me.

“She doesn’t need me, Lizzy. You can’t push her on me if she doesn’t want me, and I can’t force what we had to be back to normal. All she needs is to accept her loss and move on. She has you as a friend.” The frown deepens on my forehead. Honestly, I don’t want to be just her friend anymore. I want to be wanted. I want to be someone she needs, not because she was my best friend.

“You didn’t get it, Bash.”

“Tell me then, Lizzy.” I close my eyes.

“You can bring back the old Trinity. Haven’t you notice? She is trying to be strong, but it doesn’t feel right because she is fooling herself. Deep inside, she is broken. You broke her, and then, she’s broken again when her fiancé died.” Lizzy blames me. I know it, and a part of me, I blamed myself too.

“I didn’t break her, Lizzy.” I ignore the pang inside my chest and the fact that she shoves into my face.

“Do tell, Bash. Aren’t you broken too?” she asks, demanding an answer.

“Just drop it, Lizzy. My case is different. It’s not like that,” I clarify awkwardly.

“What is your case then? And how it isn’t like that? You jumped into conclusions, and then you didn’t come to visit again for over three years, and you avoided anything about her. You always walked away when we were talking about her. Tell me, baby brother.” She sounds pissed. She has the right to because she cares a lot about Trinity. They became best friends while I’m gone.

I don’t know what to tell her because I know she’s right. I didn’t come to spend a vacation for three years after what I saw on my first visit. Since then, I stayed in London and let my family come to

visit me. I never asked anyone about her or even checked her on social media. I didn't realize how much I was hurt when I saw her that night.

"Whatever, Lizzy, and I didn't call you to lecture on me. I remember asking you why didn't you tell me," I retort.

"Bash, didn't I mention you that you avoided anything has to with her?"

I slump myself to the couch, defeated. I can't fight with Lizzy.

"Remember I told you that it isn't too late? It isn't, is it? Now, it's time for you to be a better friend or better be more than a friend." She starts giggling.

"Lizzy, it's not the right time for that."

"Oh, really? So, when will it be?" she asks, sounding hopeful.

"She doesn't even trust me, and I don't even know how to befriend her." I don't even know what to do or how to start. Trinity seems so close to me—she's a grasp away, but her heart and mind are so far.

"Yay! My baby brother needs his big sis's help. Leave it to me, baby Bash."

"Whatever." I roll my eyes with that annoying nickname.

"Morning," I greet her with enthusiasm.

I didn't sleep well last night. I kept turning in bed after my phone call with my sister. I don't know how to get back the old Trinity, but I want her back pretty bad, and I will accept anything she can offer even if it's just an acquaintance or an officemate for as long as I can talk to her every day. I know it sounds desperate, but I need her help too.

But seeing her today is worth a sleepless night. She's already in her office, hustling on the keyboard, and her green eyes are focused on the screen. She turns her swivel chair when she hears me.

She's wearing a cream-colored blouse with ruffles in front and a dark red knee-length skirt and white four inches high heels. Her hair curled messily. I guess the red lipstick is her signature because she looks gorgeous.

"Good morning, Boss." She rises from her seat, pulling down her skirt, then smoothens it. She smiles tightly without showing her perfect teeth. But she looks better today compares to our last encounter in this office.

Trinity is jaw-droppingly beautiful.

"You're here early." I check my watch. It's twenty-five minutes after eight.

"I'm always here before the eight-thirty, boss. Our reporting time is eight-thirty while boss like you is nine sharp," she says, picking up the iPad, tapping her red-manicured finger on the screen.

"What's with the boss thing, Trinity? I thought we already agreed about it in our first meeting."

"I have a good memory, Hughes," she answers with a hint of a smile on her lips.

"Good because I have a good memory too." I finally break into a smile.

She smiles back at me. "Okay, then. Can I get you a coffee or something? We have the coolest high-tech coffee machine here in your building."

I grab the iPad from her grasp. "I know my calendar for today, Tri. You already sent me an email last night about my schedule unless you made some changes." I put down the iPad back on her desk.

She's still standing like a runway model. I grab her left hand, and she freezes. "We'll go out to buy coffee," I tell her, but she doesn't move.

I look at her, and she's looking at me with slightly wide eyes. She blinks and licks her lips. I can't help but look down at her full red lips when a pink color starts to bloom on her cheeks.

Shit!

"Um, I can go and buy if you don't like the coffee in the building, or we can just ask your driver to buy for us," she suggests with uncertainty.

"Trinity, I could've bought for us if I wanted to, but I want to walk with you to buy coffee."

She rolls her eyes. "You know, I don't do that kind of thing."

"I know. Now move your lazy ass, and you're coming with me."

She's still not moving as she tries to slip her hand from my grip. Her features change instantly from the sweet Trinity to a distant one.

"Trinity, you can lower your guards down now, and you don't have to put up walls between us. It's just me. and I'm not gonna hurt you."

"Hurt me? You hurt me once, Bash, and if I let you in into my life again, there's a possibility that you can hurt me again. I just celebrated my first anniversary with my fiancé, and I have to celebrate it alone in his grave instead of doing it in the restaurant with him or in our hotel room."

I loosen the grip. My face falls, and my heart hurts. She pulls her hand quickly as soon as she gets the chance.

She walks past me. "Let's go. I still have work to do."

Following her, she strides out of my office to my dad's private elevator. She gestures her hand. I slide the key card that's exclusive only for my family.

"I'm not gonna hurt you intentionally, Trinity."

She gets in the elevator and mutters under her breath, "I wish."

We both silently standing side by side as the lift shuts close in front of us. I can sense the tension in the small gap between us. The only things I can hear are my breathing and the whirring of the elevator as it brings us down. I can smell the flowery fragrance of her perfume—that's how close we are, but the distance seems so miles away.

"You look beautiful today, Trinity." I glance down at her beside me.

"Thanks."

My lips curve to smile. "Don't you think you wear taller high heels?"

Her head snaps, glaring up at me with a cocked brow. "I love my shoes, and what's with the judgment, Mr. All-perfect?" She's gorgeously sassy.

"I'm not judging you, Tri, but we will walk down the street. Your feet might hurt, you know," I chuckle.

"Making fun of me already, huh? Just so you know, I wear high heels just right."

"I'm not making fun of you, in fact, I think I should pass a regulation in banning you on wearing high heels," I say, without breaking eye contact.

Her face turns pink, and her lips slightly parted. Tempting. And there's a part of me that notices her. I can just push her against this elevator wall and kiss her lips until swollen, but I value the little trust she's giving me. If there is any.

"Don't flirt with me. You are my boss, and we're best friends."

My heart thumps in my chest. A full grin spreads in my lips. "It only takes a single flirt to prove, huh, Trinity?"

Her face lights up and smiles at me. A lovely smile. she bumps her elbows on my arm. "Shut up, Bash!" God, how I missed this.

I let her out first as soon as the elevator slides open.

Following her to the glass revolving door out of Hughes Building, I press my hand on her back to let her moves closer to me since it's still rush hour, and we can't help to bump with people in suits,

rushing against the time. The honking of vehicles and the smell of fumes are everywhere as we are getting far from the building.

“Tri, are you sure it’s okay for you to walk? I’m worried about your feet.” I notice my driver Edmund following us.

Her legs look sexier and longer on those heels. I guess, I just like women wearing high heels.

“Oh, just now you are worried when we are near the shop?” she gives me an odd look.

I can clearly see her green irises. She coated some mascara on her lashes, although they’re thick enough not to notice them.

“You don’t want me to carry you, Tri. I’ve no problem carrying you piggyback though,” I joke.

“You did that before, remember? When we sneaked out to watch Maroon 5 concert?”

I laugh. “How will I forget when you wore that tiny purple dress to impress Adam Lavine. What were you thinking? We’re going to a concert, not to a nightclub.”

She laughs.

God! I always love her laugh. So rich and free, and it always makes my heart flutter.

“Then my car broke down. We can’t find a taxi, and our phones were shut off.”

I cut her off. “Because you consumed our phone batteries just to take video and photos of them.”

She laughs boisterously and grips my arm. “Then my feet hurt like hell. I had blisters. Oh, my god! That didn’t happen again.”

“At least you got a best friend to carry you.”

“Oh, and you almost punch that beggar when he said, “Yo! Watta ass there, folks!” she mimics the beggar’s voice.

I laugh with her.

We decided to take our coffee and blueberry muffins to the office. My phone vibrates in my pocket when we are halfway back to the building.

“Dad, good morning,” I answer cheerfully.

“Is that you that I see walking down the street?” Dad asks over the phone with a hint of a tease.

I let my eyes scan the crowd, but I can’t find him anywhere.

“Maybe? Maybe not?” I reply with a smirk.

"I think I just saw you, son, with a redhead beside you, laughing."

I bite my lip to hide my smile. "A redhead? I'm with Trinity, but her hair is orange."

Dad laughs as I look down at Trinity with creased brows. I wink at her, causing her to blush. I mouth her cute, and she rolls her eyes.

"You seem to get along now, son. Can I give her a proper position now? You know she's just your temporary assistant, right?"

I stomach rolls. My smile fades instantly. "Dad, can we talk about it later. I'll come to your office whenever you're free," I say profoundly.

"She needs a position, Bash. She worked hard since her internship. Don't be selfish. She deserves this position that she worked hard to earn it. You can still see each other outside the work," Dad says with an authoritative tone.

"Dad, please? Let me get to my office. Give me three minutes of your time, please."

"Bash, I can't let the position empty for long. She is needed there. I won't let that happen for your own self-interest."

I know Dad very well. He's ruthless and strict when it comes to work and business.

"What's the position?"

"Financial Analyst."

My eyes grow a little bigger. "Dad, I'll be in your office in less than five minutes." I look at my wristwatch as I enter the elevator.

Dad hangs up the phone call. He can't put her in that position. She just graduated with less experience. She may be my best friend, will be on my team, under my wings, but I need someone who is more experienced than her.

Oh, is that really what you want, or you want her all to yourself?

"Is everything okay?"

I blink off the jumbled thoughts in my head. She's still carrying a bag of our muffins while I have our coffee.

"Yeah. Everything is alright, beautiful."

"Stop saying like that every time we are in the elevator."

"Do you think I will only say that if we are in the elevator, Trinity?"

“Answer that, Bash,” she snaps.

“You know that was not the first time I said you are beautiful. You must have forgotten it already.”

“Lizzy’s eighteen birthday,” she responds.

“Nope. Your eighth birthday. You were wearing a tinker bell costume.”

Her eyes grow wide as if it finally clicks together.

“You can’t remember that, can you?”

She shakes her head.

We enter my office, and I put down our coffee on my desk. She places a bag beside our coffee.

“Sit down, Tri. I’ll be back.”

“Where are you going?”

“To see dad.”

I stride my way upstairs to dad’s office when Elle said he’s expecting me. I push his office door open without knocking.

My jaw drops with my eyes almost pop out from each socket.

“Fuck me.”

Chapter 7

Awkward

BASH

“Fuck!” Dad curses.

I turn around quickly when I realize what they’re doing.

Heat creeps in my cheeks with embarrassment. I can’t believe I’ve just witnessed what Dad and Mom are doing in his office. It isn’t easy to be in this awkward situation. I grip the door handle when I hear my mom giggle.

“Bash, I’m sorry. We shouldn’t be doing it here,” Mom says, laughing.

I stay still.

“We’re not having sex, Bash. You can turn around now,” Dad says who finds everything is okay after their son just caught them almost having sex.

I face them slowly just to make sure they are both dressed because when I entered moments ago, mom’s dress zipped down from her back, and dad’s shirt unbuttoned while they were making out on the desk.

“Can’t you at least lock the door before you start eating each other’s face? Or at least tell me not to come?” I ask annoyingly and amused at the same time.

I can’t believe them doing that with an unlocked door, but I am happy that they’re still in love.

I know they love each other very much. I never hear them fight about a third party involved.

I hope to have a married life like them when I settle down.

“Is that how you call it now, baby Bash? Eating each other’s face?” Mom asks, recoating her lipstick while dad is fixing his tie.

I walk towards them, kissing mom on her cheek and hugging Dad.

“Whatever. Thank god, I’m the one who entered. Or this is not the first time someone caught the both of you doing something here?” I ask, scrutinizing their reactions.

Mom smiles sheepishly.

“Oh, Jesus. Don’t answer that,” I say, raising a hand in surrender.

“Bash, I will let Kiara start her proper job next week. No arguments,” Dad imposes.

“Dad, don’t you think it’s too early for her? She doesn’t have any experience in her new position,” I resist.

“She has proven herself, son. Don’t you think you’re too selfish?” Dad argues.

I know I don’t have the right, and I will end up following his order.

“I’m not selfish, Dad,” I say defensively. “But I want an experienced employee on my team. She’s a fresh grad.”

“So do you,” Dad points out.

“That’s the point. I need a well-experienced because I am an inexperienced too,” I insist.

“You will learn, Bash. And so as she. She graduated cum laude from an exclusive university. Give her a chance, and I trust and believe in her,” Dad says adamantly.

“Why so soon?”

“Why not?”

“Dad.”

“Bash, listen to me, son. You can still talk to her, date her. She’s only a floor away.” I blink repeatedly. I can’t believe Dad is okay with me dating his employee.

“That’s not what I mean,” I say awkwardly.

“Then why are you against my decisions? I already arranged for your masters. You two will go together on Thursdays and Fridays both for your masters. Mondays thru Wednesdays, you both will be at work.”

My mouth hangs open. I sit on the empty chair like I lose my strength.

“Baby Bash, don’t you agree with your dad’s plan?” Mom is squeezing my hand.

I look at her, and I see her green eyes full of concern.

“You will thank me later, son,” Dad says and sits back on his chair.

I manage to nod with a small smile, though deep inside, I am against all of these. I’m a grown man, and I wish he waits for me to do it myself. I am capable of deciding what’s right for me. But too late for that, he plans everything ahead of me.

I walk lazily back to my office. Why this has to happen to me? How can I last for so long when she’s with me every day? Dad thinks that’s what I want? If I follow my heart, that’s exactly what I want,

and there's no way I can run away from this. I just start our friendship, and I'm going to end up ruining it again.

"Bash, you okay?" Trinity asks cautiously.

I feel a hand on my arm. Even in my shirt and suit on, I can still feel the warm touch on me like skin to skin. Everything starts to be difficult, and just being with Trinity in this office is torture for me already.

"Did you have your coffee?" I ask her as I sit down.

"No. I'm waiting for you."

I look at her; her eyes glimmer. She takes a seat in front of my desk and looks at me with furrowed brows.

"You shouldn't have waited."

"Do you want hot coffee?"

I don't want hot coffee. You're way hotter, that I can burn myself just by your touch.

I shake my head. I can't talk because it might slip what's in my head right now. I grab the muffin she offers. Our fingers touch. Shit. Why do I feel this way? I take a bite without looking at her.

"What's going on with you, Bash? Looks like you just lost millions."

"You'll be replaced," I simply say.

Her hands drop down her lap with the muffin still in her hand. Her jaw drops, and her shoulders just droop.

"Tri, you're not fired," I tell her slowly.

"Then why am I being replaced?" she asks quickly.

"Because you deserve a position."

She's quicker on her feet and grins with excitement filling in her wide eyes. What I am not expecting is, she dances.

Christ! She looks pretty even she's like eight years old who just receives a new doll.

"Aren't you gonna ask your position?" I ask, and I can't help but smile at her. I am happy for her, truly.

"I don't care as long as I'm not gonna map the floor, Fourth," she replies and moves beside me as she wraps her arms around my neck. She presses her face on me like how she did it many times before.

I freeze in my seat. That's the first time Trinity calls me fourth since I came back. My heart is pounding hard. I felt like this before, but this time, it's a million times stronger.

I can smell her. Her warm body awakens my unconscious senses.

"Thank you, Bash!" she chirps.

"Thank dad, Tri. Don't thank me," I whisper.

She unhooks her arms around me and takes a few steps away. "You don't sound happy about your dad's decisions, do you, Bash?"

My stomach churns sickly. "Like I can stop Dad, Tri," I reply, annoyed.

"I'm not taking your position, am I? And you know that's impossible. Then, are you not happy for me?"

"That's not it, Tri," I say with scattered thoughts.

"Then what's the problem? Do you want me to be your assistant for so long?" Trinity demands, sounding pissed.

"Of course not." I glare at her.

"Then what's wrong?" Panic invades her voice.

"You will be the new financial analyst," I sigh.

"Really?" She seems so surprised, but I can see that she's pleased to hear that. That must be her dream position that's why she worked hard to prove herself that she belongs to the company.

"Yes," I confirm silently.

"Wait. I'll be part of the financial department team? Yes!" She's so excited, and I nod glumly. "Don't you want me to be a part of it?" Her smile fades from her beautiful face.

"It's not like that, Trinity." My belly flips over. Jesus, I am going to ruin her moments.

"But why I feel it's like that, Bash. Is it because I'm a new grad, and I don't have much experience? But I have proven myself. I graduated with honor. I dedicated and spent most of my time as an intern just to be a part of this."

I take a deep breath, and she looks hurt, and now it's killing me. "Tri."

She raises her hand, shaking her head. An awkward silence hangs between us. "I will not take that position anymore. If you want a well experienced, I understand," she says quietly.

I feel a pang on my chest.

"And I resign," She adds.

"Trinity, you will not resign," I say fiercely.

"I just did, Mr. Hughes!" She moves away to her office adjacent to mine.

I quickly follow her, grabbing her arm to stop her. "You are not fired, Trinity. I am not accepting your resignation. Technically, I am still your boss, and you will do as I say."

She pulls her arm from my grasp. "I am not working for you anymore. Expect my resignation on your desk tomorrow." She faces me with fierce.

She's definitely not the Trinity that cowers. She's now the strongest woman I've ever met, and I'm so proud of what she becomes. I'm not surprised why Dad chose her to be on my team. She has proven herself, indeed.

"You will not do that!"

She enters her office, ignoring me, and I am still following her.

"Stop! Just stop, Trinity!" My breathing catches. I am more pissed and terrified of losing her at the same time.

She stops abruptly. "What?"

"That's not what I mean."

"I don't care, Mr. Hughes."

"Say that again." I hiss.

She faces me. Her eyes filled with anger. "Or what?"

Jesus! This woman is infuriatingly sexy when she's mad. Her hands are on her hips, glaring at me.

I want to grab her head and kiss her like crazy. My eyes fall to her succulent lips, and she suddenly blinks and swallows hard when she notices where my eyes transfixed at.

"Don't test me, Trinity. I might do something that you might not like," I say calmly despite the rage is boiling in my veins.

"You just did," she replies. Anger flashes across her beautiful face, and I hate the feeling that I just make her angry.

"I just got you back, Tri," I say with a hint of pain in my voice.

"Forget it!" She yells.

"Don't shout at me!" I demand respect. I am still her boss and her best friend.

She grabs her bag, tosses her phone inside, and walks past me.

"Where do you think you're going?" I ask quickly. Panic grows in the pit of my stomach.

She doesn't answer me and just walks away.

"Trinity!" The last thing I hear is the door slamming a moment later.

"Fuck!" My fist hits the wall before I even realize it. What have I done?

My heart aches than the pain on my knuckles. I bump my forehead against the wall in Trinity's office.

I'm going to lose her again.

I take a deep breath to calm my nerves, but it does not work that way. I need to talk to her.

My phone vibrates, diverting my attention. It's Lizzy.

"What do you-- what?"

"What did you do, Sebastian Hughes, IV?" My sister's angry voice is deafening my ear.

"What did I do?" I ask back, still pissed off.

"I just received a text from K, Bash. Explain to me why she texted me this; I need a recommendation letter from Uncle Seb. Explain, or I swear to God you will not get our help this time."

I bite my lip while shaking my head. "I-I don't know, Lizzy," I say, defeated.

I walk out of her office, looking back once again before closing the door behind me.

"What do you mean you don't know?" she's still yelling into my ear.

"Lizzy, calm the freaking down! You are damaging my eardrum."

I hear a beep. When I check my phone screen, she just hangs up on me. Seconds later, my office door swings open.

Dad walks in first. Mom follows, and then my sister.

I sit on my desk, cross my arms over my chest, and prepare myself for the inevitable. I'm ruining everything I started. I know it.

"Talk!" Dad's deep voice startles me.

I look down. What should I say anyway? I am guilty as fuck.

"What did you do, Bash?" My sister's angry voice has me scratched my head.

"It just happened so fast, okay? She didn't give me a chance to explain." I take a shaky breath. Everything really happens so fast that even my family is turning against me. I can't blame them. They love Trinity like their blood.

"Get out of this office and solve your problem, Sebastian! I don't wanna lose a good employee because of your personal issue!"

I look at Dad. He looks angrier than ever. He's glaring at me, and that never happened before.

"Baby, didn't daddy told you that you would thank him later? You should've listened to him." Mom walks closer to me and rubs my arms. She kisses my cheek and whispers, "She will go to see her fiancé."

I nod slowly.

"I'm so disappointed with you, brother," Lizzy continues.

"I know. I know, and you can stop now." I grab my keys on my desk, stomping my feet closer to them.

"Wish me luck." I grit my teeth.

I have hope, and there's a part of me believes in a fairytale. When I left back to the U.K, the pain I felt that night was worse, and the cut was so deep than the day I left four years ago.

Damn! I'm so fucking emotional when it comes to her, but I will do everything to take her back to my team no matter how much pain I will endure, and no matter how hard I should try. I won't give her up this time.

"Are you sure this is her apartment?" I ask Edmund before stepping out of the car.

I button my suit and look up at her apartment building. The six-story brownstone apartment building looks decent and in a safe neighborhood.

"Yes, Bash. Follow me," he says.

"I am your boss, Edmund," I remind him.

"I know, but as a precaution, I have to check first the area to know that you are safe in the place like this," he answers with courtesy.

I know he's just doing my job. and I shouldn't just throw my anger on him. "Fine."

Earlier, I received a text from Lizzy that Trinity came back to her apartment from visiting her fiancé.

Lizzy advised me not to text or call Trinity, and that's what I'm doing. I am such an idiot, and I made her angry again.

"Bash, I have to lie to the guard that you are Ms. Mallory's new boyfriend." He smiles and winks at me.

I roll my eyes. "Thanks, I guess."

My heart thunders in my chest when I reach her apartment door. I have to take a few deep breaths to calm my heartbeat.

"Just relax, boss."

I scowl at him. "Why won't you go to the car and wait there? I can't see any danger here. Go back, and listen to your crappy music."

"I'm just trying to help, you know." He looks amused.

"Well, you are not helping. You are annoying me."

"Fine, but if she punches your face, don't call for help." He grins.

"Get the fuck down to the car, and wait for me there, Edmund."

"Fine, fine. Just knock already," he says as he marches away, but his eyes are still on me, and I know he won't go far.

"Get your ass away from here," I growl.

The door unlocks, and I glued in my place. When the door swings wide, that's when I see a sweaty and half-naked man at her door.

Who the fuck is this guy? A lot of images flash in my head, and most of them are inappropriate.

My nose flares. "Who are you?"

Chapter 8

Rejection

TRINITY

I felt insignificant. That's what I felt earlier, but who am I to fight? When the head doesn't want me, then so be it. I worked hard to be a part of the company, but my hardship and experience are all gone to waste. I guess I just don't belong there.

There's a little regret on the part of my brain. If I only follow my passion as an artist or an architect, I won't be here alone jobless in the middle of these graves.

My heels dip in the soft green grass as I saunter toward Oli. I always came here when I missed him. Being with him, I find it comforting.

I wrap my arms around myself when the wind blows my hair. I slow my pace when I'm a few steps closer to Oli. The flowers I placed on the granite plate last week are still here, and they start withering.

Placing another grasp of white calla and stargazer, I set aside the old one. I wipe away the withered petals that fell on the plate. I trace my fingers where Oli's name is engraved while feeling the pang inside my chest.

"Hey, Oli. How are you? Missed me, huh?" I sit down on the grass and lean my palm to support my weight. I tuck my hair behind my ear as I blow a breath.

"Guess what Oli? Remember my best friend that I told you? Well, he's back, and he's still mean, but he looks different though. More mature, I guess, but he's still a bully." I chuckle when I remember Bash called me goldfish.

"He doesn't want me in finance, though. It's sad, isn't it? I guess I should start sending resumes and start job hunting. I'm sure Mom and Dad won't be pleased with what I did. I kinda quit, eh." I blow the strand of hair away from my face.

"I just quit the job that I worked hard for years." I look down at his name, hoping he will tell me not to give up. My tears are running down my nose. I wipe them away with a sniff.

"I missed you so much Oli." I sigh. "I wish you're here to comfort me, you know. I'm so lost without you. I don't know what to do anymore. I thought I'm so strong, but I know I'm not. I'm still the weak Kiara and never changed. I'm still the coward, the weakling, and a loser." I lift my eyes and stare far for as long as my sight can reach.

"Take me Oli, I need to be with you," I tell him slowly as I look back down.

"I'll be here soon. I love you so much, Oli."

I fish out the keys from my red Selena Grace coach bag. It's from my best friend Lizzy because I can't afford to have one.

I need a good rest before I start job hunting. I unlock the door open only to freeze in my place. "Jesus Christ!"

I cover my eyes with my bag, and I can still hear shuffles and clinking of the belt. My face heats with embarrassment.

"K, what are you doing here?" Luke is still panting.

"Since when are you doing that on the couch, Luke?" I groan, and I still can't see their faces.

"Poor innocent eyes, K. We're decent now." Ryker sounds amused.

I lower my bag slowly with half-closed eyes just to make sure they have clothes on. Placing my hands on my hips, I glare at them. "Aren't you two supposed to do that in your room? Do we need to disinfect that couch?" I love them both, and they never cross the line. We both respect everyone's privacy, but I don't know what to think after what I just witnessed.

"K, we're not having sex," Luke answers, rolling his eyes.

"Yet, but if I didn't show up in like ten seconds, you might ruin the couch or worse, I need to call the sperm exterminator for the that!"

"We always did that in my room." Ryker doesn't say anything as he sits down opposite of Luke.

"But that's not what I just saw a moment ago."

Ryker chuckles. I scowl at him because they still think it's funny.

"We're about to go there. I swear. Why are you here early? To catch us?"

My stomach churns. "I resigned. Clean your mess, and Ryker put your shirt on. No walking half-naked in this apartment."

"Got to get another shirt."

I raise my brows, and I see a hint of a smile on his face.

"Oh, god! Gross." I wrinkle my nose.

"Like you never did that." Luke laughs.

"Did what?" I raise my voice a little bit. Okay, I did raise my voice.

"Blow a dick, duh."

My eyes widen. My mouth gapes. Unbelievable.

Ryker's rich laugh is echoing in our living room.

"Not funny, Ryker! Go take Luke's shirt, please?" I beg because I can't take any more of this conversation. I just cried at Oli's grave, and now I am talking about sex with my friends. It's not that I'm inexperienced, but I had only sex with one man.

"His shirt is too small for me, K."

Luke is a half foot shorter than Ryker with a runway model frame, unlike Ryker, he's bulkier and taller, but they're of the same age.

"Ugh! I should get inside my room." I stomp past them to the hallway. My room is at the opposite end of our apartment.

We've been here in this apartment since our senior year in college, and it's the closest to the Hughes Building, but right now, it's useless no matter how close it is. It has three bedrooms and two baths, a spacious living room, a small kitchen, and a small balcony.

"You didn't answer my question, K? Why are you here so early?"

I stop. "I told you I resigned. Clean your mess, guys!" I yell and walk to my room.

I change to my blue cotton short shorts and a white t-shirt with a glittery kitten printed in front. I head out to our kitchen after washing away the stain of tears on my face. I stop to halt when I hear Ryker is yelling in our living room. I can't quite understand what it is about, but why are they fighting? Not just a moment ago, they're BJ-ing on the couch.

My brows furrow when I hear another familiar voice, and it's not Luke. It's Bash. How did he know my apartment? Did he come for me or he's lost? I faster my pace to the living room when I see him, his driver is already in between Bash and Ryker with wide arms to stop the two from exchanging blows. They both look pissed.

"What the hell is going on here? I just left to change for a few minutes, and now you're all about to rip everyone to shred!"

Pissed Bash blinks and swallows when he sees me yelling. Edmund let go of his arms on Ryker and Bash. Ryker is still half-naked with a flushed face while Luke seems amused as he crosses his arms over his chest. .

Ryker coughs. "This asshole was asking about Trinity. He pushed me off the door when I didn't allow him to get inside," he explains while glaring at Bash.

Bash jaw clenches.

"Ms. Mallory, I apologize for the sudden interruption," Edmund says politely.

"It's alright, Edmund. Mr. Hughes, care to explain what are you doing here in my apartment? The last time we talked, I already have no business with you, your office, and your company," I say as I cross my arms over my chest.

He looks taken aback.

"Oh! So, you are the Bash Bash!" Luke chirps.

I clear my throat. Seriously Luke?

"Trinity, I am here to apologize for my actions. I admit I judged you, and I shouldn't have done that. You proved that you deserve to be part of the company, so who am I to judge you when I wasn't there to see your work. My apology, Trinity," he says with pride.

My jaw almost drops. Wow! Did he just apologize? What happened to the arrogant prick Bash I knew?

Luke is giggling with his hand on his mouth to suppress his voice.

"I would like to see you on Monday at your new office," he adds with a tight smile.

"Wait, this douchebag fired you? That's why you're here early?" Ryker roars.

My eyes fix on him.

"Watch your language, asshole!" Bash snarls.

Edmund is back on full alert.

"Ryker, Bash, enough! Luke, take Ryker to your room, and I need to talk with Bash, alone."

Instead of answering me, he grins and walks toward Ryker who is still glaring at Bash. Bash is doing the same. Luke holds Ryker's hand, dragging him away from Bash.

"Bash, I'll be outside. Don't do—" Edmund says.

"I know, I know. I don't need your daddy role here," Bash grits his teeth.

Edmund walks away after giving me a tight smile. I nod, smiling back at him.

"Let's talk in my room," I say before I walk toward my room. I hear his footsteps following me.

“What’s wrong in the living room?” he asks, may be out of curiosity/

I stop and face him. “I’m not gonna rape you, boss.” I look at him from head to toe.

He looks deliciously hot. Then he smiles.

Jeez, Bash! I just met my fiancé not hours ago.

“Let’s head to the kitchen then,” I suggest.

“What’s wrong with your room?” he asks, but this time, there’s a glint in his eyes.

I lead him to the kitchen without answering his question.

“Coffee?” I offer. “I’ve got a Java coffee, and I think I have pastries here.” I open the cupboard where I stock the coffee canister and grab two coffee mugs. I press the button to start brewing after filling them with coffee granules and water.

“Just a coffee for me, Tri. Thanks.”

I face him. He’s leaning on the kitchen island. “I arrived earlier when I saw the two busy with themselves on the couch, that’s why I suggested for us to talk far from there.” Heat creeps on my face. I notice Bash jaw clenches.

“No need to be violent, Bash. They’re good people, and you don’t have the right to treat them like how you did a while ago.”

“I’m sorry. Don’t they have a room?” Bash asks silently.

“Let’s not talk about them. What changed your mind?” I ask, searching an answer from his gorgeous face.

“Dad just dropped the bomb. I wasn’t ready to hear that from him. I asked him for a month before I let you work in your office, but he disagreed.” I already knew the answers when his dad called me while I was on my way to visit Oli.

“Do you want me to be your temporary assistant for a while?”

He looks at my eyes then shrugs.

“What does it mean?”

“You seemed so excited. So I can’t hold you for too long. Dad surely requests for an assistant position from the HR as of now.” He chuckles.

“So, that guy?”

I roll my eyes. “Yes. The fiancé.”

He nods and seems to relax.

I pour us two mugs of coffee, then I put a spoonful of creamer and a little sugar on my mug. I give him his coffee. I know he used to drink black. He starts sipping his coffee while I'm just holding a hot steaming mug in my hand. I look at his beautiful face.

Why do I have to have such a perfect best friend that I can't even daydream about? We're best friends, but we're from two different worlds. He's like the white while I am black. He's the fire and I am the ice. He is gorgeous and I am insecure. I am in love with him, and he is not.

"Tri, what's with that look?" his voice brings me out from my thoughts.

"Huh?" I ask, blinking.

"I ask you why are you looking at me like that?"

"Like what?"

"You look sad?" he says with uncertainty.

Because I am.

"Did you visit him?" he asks with hesitation.

I nod slowly. "Yup. I went to visit him every time I felt alone and sad. But I also visited him when I am happy." I smile at the thought of Oli, but there's a twist in the pit of my belly.

Why do I feel like I'm not supposed to share this with Bash?

When we were still in high school, I felt so jealous of all the girls he dated. Sometimes I cried at night when he couldn't see me because he went on a date. I felt my heart crashed a thousand times when I saw him kissing another girl, but he never kissed me on my lips even once.

I shrug and sigh. I feel a thumb on my cheek.

I jar back from my thoughts.

"Don't cry, Tri. I am here, and I will never go away from you again," he says while wiping my tears that fall unknowingly.

I grab his hand and press it against my face while I shut my eyes close. I nod curtly, kissing the palm of his hand.

His lips slightly parted when I open my eyes. Our gazes meet. I feel like I'm hypnotized by his stare. I can see yearning and care in those gray orbs. I feel safe with his palm on my face; his thumb caresses my bottom lip. Butterflies start to spread wildly in my stomach that I have never felt it in a long time. My body ignites, and Bash never breaks his gaze on me.

The doorbell goes off, and his hand is gone.

Chapter 9

Frustration

BASH

I am frustrated. That's what I exactly feel right now. I walk away from Trinity, frustrated.

The moment her door closed behind me, I felt I was helpless. I release an exasperating sigh. Running my fingers on my hair, I walk away without looking back because once I look back, I know myself I will knock again, and this time I'll grab her head and press her against the door and kiss her to release all my frustrations away.

I meet Edmund waiting for me at the parking lot wearing a goofy smile, but he doesn't say anything. A song by Collective Soul is playing when I enter the car.

"Shut off this fucking song, Edmund!" I fasten my seatbelt. Our gazes meet at the rearview mirror. He changes the song to a pop song saying something like I'm without your kisses. I'll be needing stitches. I roll my eyes.

"Seriously, Bash. What's the scowl for? I thought you and Miss Mallory had talked?" he asks while driving out of the parking lot.

A song by Papa Roach blares through the speaker.

"I don't think it's any of your business, Edmund. Don't stick your nose to my personal business. You're too old to be nosy." I look out the window.

The weather starts getting cold, but that doesn't stop the people from walking their dogs as we pass along the residential area. The leaves start to pile under the trees at the sidewalk.

I visited places with my family and grandparents. We took pictures, but it didn't get into me to even take a closer look at my surroundings. I've seen beautiful places. I've met beautiful people, but none really got my attention. I have never been an observant like this, and it makes me chuckle.

I shake my head for my amusement. Perhaps I have only an eye to one person?

I went out with friends like a normal college boy, dated girls, but I had only one serious girlfriend, and now I have none.

Stripping off my clothes, I walk to my bathroom to take a cold shower. My skin shivers as soon as the water drops on my bare skin. I ignore how cold it is. I squeeze my eyes shut when my mind lingers on to a certain redhead, and I'm instantly hard.

Shit! I'm not supposed to think of her like this—of fantasizing her. I shouldn't be a boner, but when I think of Trinity, my heart thunders on my chest as well.

I walk down the stairs to my kitchen to grab something to eat when my doorbell goes off. My hair still slightly dumps, and I just toss my shirt on my shoulder. That must be Lizzy because she left a message for me asking how did my meeting with Trinity go.

Before I reach the door, it already swings open. Mom and Dad with Lizzy walk like they own my penthouse.

"What if I'm walking naked around here?" I ask, walking closer to them.

Mom's smile widens and squeezes me into a hug. "I've seen you naked, Baby Bash."

"When I was a baby, and now I'm a grown man, Mom. And stop calling me baby," I demand.

"You're still our baby, Bash. And stop scowling every time your mom calls you," Dad says.

I move to Lizzy who's busy with a phone call. I kiss her on her cheek.

"Why are you here, guys?" I walk to the living room and put my shirt on.

"Wow! When did you get a tattoo?" Mom's surprised voice makes me stop.

Shit! I'm in trouble. Nobody saw this except Trinity and Edmund, and now my family.

"And you have K's name tattooed on your back, baby Bash," Lizzy says with a wicked smile on her face.

"I was drunk when I got this, and I can barely remember what happened that night. So whatever in your head, Lizzy, don't go there," I reply flatly because I know her. She won't stop until I admit that I was drunk because of Trinity.

"It looks good on you, although, I don't see you as a tattooed guy. It looks cool, though," Dad agrees, slapping my back.

"What can you say, baby?" Dad asks mom, slipping his hand around my mom's waist. She smiles at him, kissing him on his lips.

Jeez! These two, even in front of their children. I cough, and Lizzy giggles. I cock my brow on Lizzy.

"You've never been in love if you find that gross, Bash." Lizzy grabs my arm, squeezing it.

I roll my eyes. “Whatever.”

“So, how did the meeting go?” Mom asks after we settle on the couch.

I sit beside Lizzy. She leans her head on my shoulder.

“She’ll be back.” I shrug.

Mom and Dad give me a look that they’re waiting for more.

“What?” My brows raise quizzically.

“That’s it?” Dad asks.

“Yeah,” I reply, and my parents are exchanging looks.

“We want details, Bash,” Lizzy demands, elbowing my side.

I roll my eyes. “What details? She agreed to work with us. That’s it. There was a guy when I went there, I thought—” I stop talking when somehow I get their attention.

I raise my brows. “Is that really why you’re all here? Wanna know the gory detail?” I stare at them one by one. “Unbelievable. What’s with all of you and Trinity?”

“Then who is that guy?” My sister ignores me. Instead, she asks back.

“Whatever you guys are thinking, stop it now. Nothing is going on between me and Trinity. We’re best friends.” Really? nothing is really going on?

“I know, and we’re not doing anything. We’re here just to know if you were able to convince Kiara to come back,” Dad says dismissively.

I’m not convinced, though, and I can feel that there’s a hidden agenda in all of these, or am I just overthinking?

“I know you and K are just best friends because the last time I checked, K was asked out by Ranjiv,” Lizzy responds, picking up her phone on her purse.

My chest constricts. My jaw clenches. I feel the blood rushing through my veins. “Who the fuck is Ranjiv?” I feel my parents’ gazes on me.

“Language,” Dad scolds.

Lizzy doesn’t answer my question. She’s busy tapping on her iPhone’s screen.

“Sorry,” I say silently, but I’m cursing under my breath.

Lizzy flashes her phone screen on my face, showing the photo of Trinity and a man who looks like an Indian wearing a black suit and tie.

He's maybe in mid-twenties with shiny black hair, deep-seated eyes, and olive skin—typical Indian look. But what makes my blood boils is his arm is wrapped around Trinity's exposed shoulder. She's wearing a black strapless ankle-length gown. Her hair is fixed up into a stylish bun. They're both smiling brightly.

"Who's that bloody wanker, Lizzy?" I ask, demanding an answer.

She raises her well-trimmed brows and gives me a why-do-you-care looked. "It's not that Trinity needs your permission if she wants to start dating, Bash." She sits straight, crossing her arms over her chest and faces my parents. "You don't sound American anymore."

"That's not an answer to my question, Lizzy. Trinity is your best friend too. I'm sure you two share everything, especially when it comes to guys," I demand answers, and I am beyond pissed.

"It's about time for Kiara to move on, Bash. If that guy treats her well, then let her date him," Mom says softly.

"So, they're dating?" I ask slowly, but I sound disappointed. Panic grows in the pit of my belly. I'm afraid to hear the answer because I know I'm not going to like it.

This is what you got for leaving her alone for four years! If you just told her how you felt she might be with you until now, you, damnarse! I mentally berate myself. My brows meet, and I have nod glumly, though my heart doesn't agree with my brain.

I sit on the stool at the Night Stalker club own by Pyke's parents. He's my second cousin from Dad. A mid-twenties with a fake blonde guy is serving another customer three seats apart from me. Then he comes to me to get my drinks. He has a lip ring, nose ring, and brow ring, and has tattoos all over his forearms. It looks good on him though, then I remember my tattoo on my back.

"What can I getcha, Bash?"

My brows arch. How does he know me?

"How did you know my name?" I ask, my brows raise quizzically.

"I'm the one who inked your back. You might not remember me because you were wasted, and you collared me to ink you," he explains. "I'm Kyland, by the way." He extends his hand.

I grip it for a handshake. "Thanks! You did a great job," I say sincerely.

He smiles, nodding. "Lucky girl," he says after placing a cold beer bottle for me.

"Lucky girl?" I ask.

"Trinity?"

My mouth gapes. Someone's tap my shoulder before I can answer Kyland.

I glance over my shoulder. "Xandry!" I stand up from my stool, giving Xandry a brotherly hug with a clap on his shoulder. Xandry is uncle Phoenix and Aunt Sam's son. He's a few months older than me and works at his dad's businesses.

"You came alone?" he asks, sitting on the empty stool beside me. He leans his left elbow on the bar counter while his blue eyes scan the crowded full of women. He's a legs spreader, that's how his twin Saphoera named him.

When I left for the U.K, I know Xandry was a playboy, but overprotective when it comes to his twin sister Saphoera. They share the same shades of blonde hair, blue eye, same facial features. Although Saphoera is a foot shorter to Xandry's six feet and three inches tall, I'm an inch taller than him.

"Yup. Dean is with his family, and Pyke is busy upstairs. Our parents still there in the VIP lounge. The girls are having girls' night at Lizzy's apartment," I answer.

He looks at me like he wants to say something, but he sips his beer instead. My eyes fix to his bruised knuckles.

"What happens to your knuckles, Xandry?" I ask though I know the answer already.

He chuckles, putting the beer down. "I beat that guy's face to a pulp." He smiles with pride.

I shake my head in amusement. He's so overprotective of Saph, but Saph loves to annoy and provoke Xandry.

"Poor guy," I say slowly.

"He deserves that, Bash. I warned Saph to stay away from that ass, but she didn't listen, and I know Saph, she's not serious about dating him. Then I found out that asshole has another girlfriend. So when I got a chance to corner him, I punched his face in front of his girlfriend. Good for him. I'm sure they broke up already," he explains and looks satisfied with what he did.

My stomach churns when I remember that Ranjiv dude is wrapping his arm around Trinity's shoulder. I grab my beer and drink all the content in a gulp.

"Slow down, Bash." I hear Xandry's voice.

I shrug my shoulder helplessly. “Go pick up that girl, Xandry. I notice that girl in skimpy red dress keeps staring at you.” I move closer to him while gesturing my head to the blonde woman in a skimpy dress. I know Xandry will not leave this place without a woman in his arms.

“You notice her?” He smirks.

I nod, smiling. “I thought she’s into you?”

“Not interested. I have somewhere else to go.”

“Sure, man.” He nods, still wearing a smirk on his face.

I blow a breath after pressing Trinity’s doorbell. I told Edmund to go home and not to wait for me. He was adamant to wait and sleep in the car, but after threatening his job, he finally agreed.

I press again when I didn’t hear a sound of footsteps towards the door. I feel my heartbeats skip a bit. What if she’s already sleeping? Or what if she won’t let me in and shoo me away? What if? I stiffen when I hear the door unlock.

“Bash?” Trinity’s sleepy voice makes me blink. She opens the door wider while rubbing her right eye with the back of her finger. Her bedhead proves that she’s already sleeping. She’s only wearing a gray baggy shirt with her college logo printed on it. Her long legs are on full view with her bare feet, and deep red painted toenails.

“Coming or not?” she asks, and that almost startles me from checking her out.

I swallow when my eyes land again on her now very prominent braless tits. Even with her shirts on, I can see the little buds react, perhaps from the cold weather.

“Um, you don’t mind?” I barely recognize my own voice, and Thank God, she’s able to distract my thoughts, and that makes my gaze shifts up to her beautiful makeup-free face.

She smiles. “You shouldn’t have come here if you care or if I mind or not.” She grabs my hand, causing the electricity to rush through my entire body. There is something powerful and pulls us closer together, that binds us—the intensity of our connection.

I feel hot, and my cock is on full alert. I can’t help but grip her soft and warm hand in return. I’m afraid this strange feeling will disappear with her hand. I follow her inside, and she closes the door behind us.

Her apartment is dark, only the streetlight that illuminates through her windows into her living room that provides us light and won’t cause us to bump each other. My hand is still linked with

hers as we walk through the narrow hallway that separates the living room and maybe her bedroom. It's dead silence that I can hear my own breathing and my own racing heartbeat.

I pull her hand back that makes her stop to halt and almost bump her body into me. It's almost dark in here, but I can see the surprised look on her face as she stares up at me. Her breathing warms my neck at how close we are. I release her hand, cup her face, making her gasp.

"Trinity," I whisper with a hint of frustration. She's about to say something, and that's the moment I want. It gives me a chance for my lips to press against hers.

Jesus! Her lips are so soft, and it feels impossibly real. She grips my arms in surprise, perhaps. I move my lips slowly, tentatively, and chastely. I release my left hand from her face placing it at the back of her head while bending down to have my full access.

She tastes so sweet, and if this is how Trinity tastes like, then she's so addicting and mind-blowing. Why did I wait for so long to kiss her if she tastes like this? If I only knew.

I place my free hand on her back to let her body press against me. This kiss is overwhelming. My cells awaken, my muscles clench, my cock throbs, and my body heat radiates to her. My heartbeat never slows down, in fact, it's beating wildly that might break my ribcage. I feel her body press against mine, and she pushes herself further. And damn, she's kissing me back, and it encourages me to deepen the kiss.

I find myself pressing her against the wall that causes something hanging on it to shake. I stroke my tongue between her lips, and she opens to me freely which gives my way to slip my tongue into her mouth. She just tastes sweeter and better, and I want more.

There is something inside me that stir, that I haven't felt anything like this before. Desire?
Longing? Love?

All of the above.

Chapter 10

Silent Treatment

BASH

It's been two days since the last time I heard from Trinity.

She's been ignoring my calls and messages. My thought scattered. I've never been restless and anxious for the whole weekend. My sleep is deprived because of that kiss.

"Who are you?" My eyes narrow to the thirty-ish curvy woman with curly hair and bronze skin in front of me. She tries to open the door for me, and she has a folder in her hand.

"Good morning, Mr. Hughes. I'm Lindsey White. Your new PA," she says, following me.

I slump my back dramatically into my chair, my hands clasped under my chin. The woman doesn't walk in front of me, but she keeps staring at me inquisitively.

"Are you just gonna stare at me all day or you're gonna do your job?" I'm being an ass, but I am not in a mood to exchange pleasantries.

She clears her throat. "I just talked with Ms. Kiara Mallory about—"

I raise my hand to stop her. Just someone mentioning her name makes my heartbeat skips. I need to talk to that woman. Why is she ignoring me?

We pull each other, gasping for air. I lean my forehead against hers, and she's panting too. Her hand is still on me, gripping the sleeves of my shirt. I plant a kiss on her forehead, and that's when she pushes me away, giving us space.

The silence between us is driving me insane, and it freaks the hell out of me. I'm afraid of what's going to come out of her mouth, and it's nerve-racking as hell.

I release my hands on her as I lean against the wall.

"Trinity," I whisper but more like I am begging.

"What we just did is not acceptable, Bash. We should—"

I press my finger on her lips.

"We shouldn't kiss?" I ask while my other hand is blindly searching for the light switch.

She crosses her arms over her chest but stays on her place and leans against the wall. This time she doesn't look up at me anymore.

"Yeah. We're best friends, Bash. I don't want things to get awkward between us." She bites her swollen lip that I can see clearly after the light flicks open above us. Her face flushed. I guess we feel the same towards that mind-blowing kiss.

"It won't be awkward, Trinity. Trust me, and I never regret kissing you. That was amazing, and if I know it feels that way I should have kissed you a long time ago," I say from the deepest of my fluttering heart.

My heart is still beating uncontrollably and my cock is still on full alert.

She instantly looks up at me when I touch her arm. "Don't say like that, Bash."

I blink, and I feel my heart crashes. "Trinity, I mean every word I said." I cup her face again and press my lips on her.

She gasps on our pressed-lips. I move my lips, coaxing her to kiss me back. I moan when she presses her body against me.

Jesus! I could just stand in this hallway if I can kiss Trinity and feels like these. It's so fucking amazing!

She moans when I deepen the kiss—that's the most beautiful melody that ever reaches my ears.

"Bash, Bash, stop!" She pushes me away. I admire her self-control because I know she's just as turned on as me.

"I think you should go home. It was a mistake that I let you in. You're half-drunk, Bash."

I stand straight crossing my arms over my chest. I chuckle and smirk. "Do you always allow a drunk person to kiss you?" I regret that I ask because now she's shooting me a glare.

"You are the first person I've ever kissed after my fiancé died. Thanks for shoving that into my face," she responds angrily.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean it like that, but I'm not drunk, Tri. I will surely remember this when I wake up in the morning, and I don't even know if I fall to sleep when I go to bed. I will probably think about our kiss repeatedly," I tell her honestly. "I want to kiss you again, and I want—"

"Just stop. I'm engaged!"

"To a fucking dead, Trinity!"

Fuck! I don't mean to shout it out loud, and she just flinches. I feel like an ass shouting at her. I'm so fucking this up.

"J-just g-go, Bash, please?" she begs, her eyes filled with tears.

I move closer to her, but she moves a step back, so I stop. "I don't mean what I said.

"You always don't mean it. I doubt that you like kissing me. Please. just go," Trinity says, wiping her tears with her hand.

"I mean it, Trinity, please, hear me out?" I plead.

"Please, what?" I want to tell her how I feel, but she's already pushing me away.

"Let me stay, and I can't go home. I let Edmund leave before coming here up, and it's almost morning. I won't kiss you again, I promise. Not tonight, at least."

"Not tonight? You mean you're planning on kissing me again?" she asks with an accusing tone. Her wet eyes are filled with so many emotions, mostly hurt and sadness.

"If you will let me, yes," I reply sincerely.

"We can't just kiss."

I sigh helplessly before I nod in understanding. I fish out my phone in my pocket, searching for an Uber app on my phone.

"What are you doing?" She asks, cautiously.

"What do you think?" I ask back, focusing my eyes on the screen of my phone.

My stomach twists sickly. This is not how I want this night to end. I was dreaming of sleeping with Trinity in my arms while I'm on my way here, that was why I let Edmund go home. Maybe I am a little bit optimistic. We did sleep together many times in the same bed, and I was able to control my urge and needs, and I'm sure I can do it again.

"You can stay. I don't want your family will rip me apart if they'll find out I let you go home alone." Her voice is filled with guilt even though she doesn't have to feel that way.

I shake my head. "No. I'm going home." I walk away from her while I'm still filling the info on the app.

Trinity grabs my free hand before I can go far. I look over my shoulder, and she just shrugs it off. I face her, wrapping my arms around her. She hugs me back.

"It's okay, Trinity. I can go home safely. I will call you as soon as I get into my penthouse."

She shakes her head on my chest. "We slept together before in the same bed, and nothing happened between us. I still trust you." She looks up at me.

I sigh in relief.

“That’s all. Thanks, everyone,” Dad announces after the long hour of meeting regarding the expansion of Hughes Industry to East Asia.

Everyone gathers their things and rises from their seat, including me.

I zoned out a couple of times, and my mind kept taunting me with that mind-blowing kiss.

I really should talk to her. I need to see her. I need her.

“Bash, what’s wrong, son?” Dad’s voice catches back my attention.

I raise my brows. “Nothing’s wrong, Dad.”

Shit!

“Bash, you can’t just zone out like that during the meeting. I need your mind and your heart focus on what we are discussing. Leave your baggage at that door as soon as you enter this room. Do you understand me?” Dad says firmly as he points his finger to the conference room’s door.

He’s right, and I should’ve focused next time, and soon, I will take over his seat on me, and I can’t just disappoint him.

“Bash, don’t disappoint me again. I let you study abroad for our businesses, and you will be the CEO soon. I’ve been in your position once. I worked hard for our company when your grandfather let me take over his seat. I did everything to prove to him that I’m not a disappointment, and I’m not just a manwhore. I worked hard every day and night. Now, look at me, and I proved to Dad that I deserve to be here.”

I swallow hard. I know Dad when it comes to business. He is ruthless, ambitious, focus, and determined.

“Lizzy will be taking over the King Hotel Chains and restaurants, and you will take over the Hughes Industries. Your mom agreed with my decisions, that’s why she didn’t want to merge the Hughes’ and King’s businesses. Lizzy agreed on this idea, and now she’s working hard to learn. This is your future, son.”

I nod as guilt twists in my belly. I purse my lips together because I don’t know what to say anymore. I’m running out of words.

“Follow me in my office,” Dad finally says. I can only mutter a word okay.

I sit in an empty seat in front of dad’s. Dad is still on the phone with Mr. Shin from South Korea. His son is a friend of mine. We both studied in the U.K.

I rub my starting to throb temples. I’m not overthinking about what my father said earlier. In fact, I’m not thinking about it at all.

I'm thinking about the redhead woman who's taunting me every second.

My head snaps to the door when it opens. My eyes widen instantly, and I feel my mouth gape. Just the one I've been looking for.

My headache is gone in milliseconds. I sit straight while my eyes follow every step Trinity does.

Her white and red stripes dress fits perfectly on her figure, and she's wearing red high heels this time. Jesus! This woman is killing me.

Her hair is still the same messily-curled. Seriously, I don't know what they called it, but she looks sexy as hell.

"Hello, Mr. Hughes." She's very professional even Dad insists to call him uncle even at work, but Trinity is Trinity, and she doesn't want special treatment. Dad smiles at her before he gestures an empty seat across mine. She walks toward me like she owns the floor.

Dang woman!

"No hi for me?" I ask in a low tone. Our eyes meet—her eyes are filled with joy.

"Hi, Bash," she says awkwardly.

"Tri, are you ignoring me?" I ask right away, looking at her beautiful face that I missed for two horrible days, and she even looks surprised.

"You didn't answer my call, didn't call me back. No text, no email, no voicemail at all. Why are you doing this?" I demand an answer.

"I was busy," she answers shortly.

I snort. "Seriously? You're avoiding me and ignored me because you thought whatever happened between us that night would just be awkward."

"Bash," she whispers.

"If you will not talk to me like how we talked before, I swear to God I will tell your friends and your date that we kissed." I know it's unfair, but so as she.

Her green eyes grow wide as saucers. Her face turns red as she purses her lips into a thin line.

Dad is done talking on the phone.

He moves closer to us and sits on his chair. "So, now that you two are here let me start," Dad says.

I don't know what is this all about, but I feel anxious hell.

“Kiara, as you’ve heard we are expanding our company worldwide, and this time, our next target is East Asia. I need a team to go to Seoul to close the deal. I’m supposed to go there with Abby, but since you, two are still learning, and I guess I have the perfect candidates.” Dad pauses, looking at us--at our reactions.

My brows raise.

“I have decided that the two of you will be the best candidates to go to South Korea,” Dad affirms.

My heart beats faster. When I look at Trinity, she looks pale and shock. I guess she doesn’t see that coming.

“Don’t you like the news?” Dad asks while waiting for our words.

“Why us? And why me and Trinity?” I ask out of curiosity. If I have to spend some time alone with Trinity, then I am going to accept it.

“It’s your first deal, Bash. Although, the deal is done and all you have to do is see the site personally, meet the Korean team, and sign the contract, and you too need to explore that country before you will start the classes. They’re great people with a rich culture and history. What do you think, son?” He has a wicked grin on his face when he notices Trinity is looking down at her fingers, frowning.

I shake my head slowly. Jesus, he set this up, and he knows that we can’t say no.

I hear Trinity clear her throat. “I think Bash needs a well-experienced partner, Mr. Hughes. We’re both your new employees—”

Dad raises his hand. “You will say no to me, Kiara, and that’s part of your job to follow my order. So all you have to do is pack your things and the jet taking you to South Korea,” Dad says firmly, rises from his chair, and buttons his suit before he faces the glass window.

I glance at Trinity.

“You two can go now,” Dad dismisses us.

I follow Trinity outside Dad’s office. She strides that leaves me a little far behind.

I sprint to catch her pace. “Tri, wait!”

She ignores me like she can’t hear me. God, this woman is so stubborn!

“Trinity! Just stop!” My breathing catches with anger. I hold her arm before she can go far from me again. “Why are you doing this, Trinity? Why are you avoiding me?” I sound so desperate, but I don’t care.

It hurts when she's acting like I don't even exist, and I can't let her just get mad at me without knowing why she's doing this to me. I need at least to know the reason and say it into my face. I've never been so desperate in my life, especially when it comes to women.

"Do you want to go to Korea with me?" I ask again when she still doesn't answer my questions.

She leans herself on the wall. "Do you want me to come with you?" She looks at me in the eyes.

She looks hurt and I don't know why? It's killing me to see her hurting. I can't help but run the back of my finger on her smooth face. She stills, and thank God, this place is empty. Dad's PA is maybe on her break.

"I would love you to come with me, Tri," I whisper, leaning my forehead on hers.

She gasps at our nearness, and my heart starts pounding in my chest. I press my nose over hers. She stays still and doesn't push me away and neither pulls me closer.

I press my lips on hers. She sighs as I move my lips, smirking, and that's when I hear a clearing of a throat near us. We both stiffen and pull ourselves away like a deer caught in the headlights.

Chapter 11

Embarrassment

TRINITY

A heat creeps on my cheeks when Bash pulls himself away from me.

I'm sure my lipstick smears over my lips. I bite my lower lip to avoid trembling. What was I thinking kissing Bash again? And this time in the office building.

It never occurs to me to have a relationship with my boss or worst my best friend. But it always been a part of my dreams to get his attention.

Does he even want to start a relationship with me? And is there anything he wants more than just those kisses?

God! I'm in so much trouble. I tilt my chin up to see Lizzy's grinning at me. My brows furrow with confusion.

"Well, aren't you two lovely?" Lizzy chirps.

My jaw almost drops. I feel a possessive hand on my waist that makes me stiffen, though I know whose hand belongs to.

This is so awkward.

His sister just caught us kissing in the hallway.

"Do you want something, Lizzy?" Bash asks. I can't even feel or hear any regrets in his voice.

Lizzy giggles crossing her arms over her chest as she glances at us with satisfaction. "You two need to do that inside the office and not here in front of dad's office."

"It's not what you think, Lizzy." I move closer to her and try to explain, but I have nothing in my freezing brain right now. I sigh helplessly.

"Oh, K. I don't need your explanation. In fact, thank God, you two finally figure it out. What took you two so long to finally realize that you two belong together?" she gushes with full of enthusiasm.

"Lizzy, enough of that," Bash stops his sister, grabs my hand, and walks away from her.

"K, well talk later!" Lizzy yells as I follow Bash's quick pace.

“Okay!”

“Bash, stop!” I pull off my hand back from his grip.

He stops and glances at me. I squeeze my eyes shut as I take a deep breath to calm my racking nerves and slow down my frantic heartbeat. I open my eyes and try to focus on what should I say and not how my heart is beating.

“We can’t do that again, Bash. That was a terrible mistake to let you kiss me and kiss you back. It has to stop.” I feel bad because I love how we kissed, and it’s a dream comes true that he finally kissed me.

I’ve been dreaming all these years, and technically, I’m single right now, but I don’t know why I am having these feelings that I should not be glad about it. Perhaps, we’re friends, he’s my boss, my best friend’s brother, and I value the friendship I have with him, with his sister and with his family.

If I have to continue doing this, I have to put everything at risk; my family connection with Hughes and his mom is Mom’s best friend.

I’ve been avoiding him this weekend because I have to choose our friendship over my feelings and over how much I love the kisses we shared. It kept me wide awake these past two nights.

The two kisses that we shared were the best kisses I’ve ever had.

“Trinity, please? You’ve been avoiding me this weekend.” Bash’s voice pulls me out of my deep thoughts.

“We can’t do that again,” I remind him again, press my lips together, and look at him on his beautiful eyes.

I need to be straight with him but it’s killing me deep inside because this is not what my heart says.

I love him so much since I found out I have a heart. Even I was with Oli I never forgot Bash no matter how I’ve been broken because of him.

I should be celebrating that we finally back together and somehow, he finally sees me. But it doesn’t feel right.

“Is that what your heart speaks Trinity?” I know he’s not pleased with my decision clenching his jaw.

All I can do is nod.

“I want you to say it,” he says quickly.

I bite my lip because I feel it starts to tremble. My eyes sting, but I try hard to control not to cry in front of him.

I take another deep breath. "Yes, that's what I want," I say it looking straight into his eyes.

He breaths shakily. His face turns red and his nose is flaring with anger. "You're a terrible liar, Trinity. Don't you dare lie to me again? I've known you since we started to walk, and I know how you feel about me."

I shake my head repeatedly to tell him he is wrong. "You don't know anything about me anymore. We've been away for years and things had changed between us. I'm not the old Trinity that you knew. I'm not the weak and coward Trinity that you used to bully. And I don't know anything about you too, Bash. We're both different people now."

He has no idea that I'm still the old Trinity by heart, the old Trinity who is crazy over him, who looked up the sky every night in my bedroom window, wishing that Bash would notice me and he would smile at me and kiss me. I did that every night before I went to sleep. I believe that there were stars that fell every night, but I couldn't just see them. So I did that because I read in some books that it would make your dream comes true.

"Is it because of him?" There's a hesitation in his voice as if he's ashamed.

"He won't come back, Bash. I accepted that fact already, and I can't just live in my past. He won't be happy if I keep on sulking because of his death."

He presses his lips into a thin line as he shakes his head. "He's not what I'm talking about, Trinity."

My brow cocks. "Then who?"

He groans and looks pissed. "That Indian guy."

I'm beyond confused. "Indian guy?"

"Yes, Trinity. What's his name? Banshee, Shanvi, Rashid?"

I burst into a laugh. I instantly cover my mouth when I realize my voice echoes in the entire hallway. I scan around to see if anyone is watching us.

"You mean Ranjiv? And what about him?" I ask, still laughing at him.

He shoots me a glare. Jesus, he looks hotter when he's glaring. He doesn't look amused, though.

"Lizzy told me that that guy asked you out." He throws his words annoyingly.

I laugh again, then bite my bottom lip. I feel suddenly self-conscious when his gaze falls to my lip.

I clear my throat. "I will desiccate your sister's ovaries. She's playing with us because Ranjiv didn't ask me out, and she knows it. She will pay for this." I groan and start walking away from him, but he won't just let me go. He grabs my hand before I can get far from him.

I look down at our hands then up at his beautiful face.

"So, it's not true, huh?" he seems to find it hard to believe that I am not dating Ranjiv.

I shake my head before I hear footsteps approaching, and speaking of the devil.

"K, thank God I found you here!" Ranjiv's strong Indian accent catches my attention.

"You're looking for me?" I pull my hand from Bash's grip.

"I called you, but you didn't pick up. So I decided to look for you instead," Ranjiv responds, arching his thick brows at me.

I know what he's trying to say. Bash fakes a cough.

"Oh, sorry, Mr. Hughes, I'm—"

"I know who you are," Bash snaps.

I shoot him a glare.

"Oh, okay." Ranjiv nods and looks embarrassed before he faces me. "Can I have a minute with you?" he asks politely.

"No," Bash interjects with a stern voice.

"Bash." I groan.

"Does he need to talk with you alone?"

"This is work-related, Mr. Hughes," Ranjiv answers politely.

"Good, then you can tell her in front of me. Wait, which department are you in?"

"Information Technology consultant, Mr. Hughes," he replies delightedly.

Bash's eyes widen like he has an idea that pops out in his brain.

"Ranjiv, I need you in my office before four," he says dismissively, "Tri, we're not done talking." Bash kisses the side of my head and winks before he left.

I just watch him walk away while I'm glued in my place, shock at his gesture.

"What was that all about?" It's Ranjiv. I look at him with his dark eyes wide and mouth slightly open.

“You wanna tell me something, Ranjiv?”

We both went to the same university. He’s one of the brilliant students who got lucky with a full scholarship sponsored by Hughes Industries. He came from India four years ago, and now he works as ITC, and he brought his family to New York with him.

“Ms. Hughes told me that you needed me, so when I called up, and you didn’t pick up, I came to find you.”

I roll my eyes. “Seriously, Lizzy?”

“What is going on with you and Bash Hughes?” he asks cautiously with a small smile on his lips. Then his gaze falls to my lips.

Shit! Does my lipstick really smear around my lips? I should buy a waterproof one.

I mentally hit myself. What am I thinking? That we’ll kiss again.

“We used to be best friends.”

He raises his brow like he never believes me. “Is that all? Used to be best friends? And now, you’re more than best friends?”

I hit his arm, making him laugh. “We’re still best friend, Ranjiv. Now, shoo, and go back to work.”

He laughs as he walks backward. “I guess, K is finally back into life and back out there, ready to mingle.”

“I’m not dead, Ranjiv,” I retort.

“Physically, yes, but heartily?”

I raise my hand and shoo him away. “Oh, please. Go, go, go!”

“See you around, K!”

I noisily sip my peach iced tea with a straw to annoy Lizzy. There’s still a devilish smile on her face, and it’s really annoying. I wear a scowl and try my best to ignore her.

“Hey, guys!” Saph’s sweet voice comes from my back. She kisses my cheek from behind then moves to Lizzy to do the same thing.

“When will you be a minute earlier than us, Saphoera Hannahbelle?” Lizzy asks.

Saph never appeared a minute earlier than us. She took too much time curling her blonde hair.

"You know me better, so don't expect me to come early," Saph answers, taking a seat beside Lizzy, and now I'm facing the two Goddesses in front of me.

"So, is it true? And since when did you two hooked up?" Saph is grinning.

I almost spit the iced tea on their faces. My eyes pop out in surprise. We always share secrets, and I guess Lizzy filled her in already.

This is so embarrassing, and I feel my forehead starts sweating.

What the hell?

"Hooked up?" I ask with a surprised tone.

"Yes," Saph answers cheerfully.

"Me, hooking up?" I ask you again.

"Yep. You and Bash." She giggles.

I glare at Lizzy. "We never slept together, and sorry to disappoint both of you."

"Oh, so, you two are couples now? That's what you're trying to say?" Lizzy asks this time.

"Lizzy, whatever you saw earlier was a mistake, and it won't happen again. I can't risk my friendship with you, my family relationship with yours, my job, and my friendship with Bash. I already made it clear to him after you left," I answer even if I feel being stabbed thousand times right through my chest. I can see the dismay on their faces.

"Really? Don't you feel anything towards Bash? I mean even a little bit?"

My brain suddenly freezes. My mouth opens, but no words come out. I have to shut it close again.

"That's what I thought," Lizzy says quickly and sighs in relief.

"K, that's not real love if you won't risk something worth. I can see the tensions between you too. Bash is my brother, and I love him so much. I don't wanna see you or him confused as you two try to ignore or control your feelings. Take a risk for once, K. It's worth a try. If it doesn't work, then you really don't belong to each other. You can move on. But trust me, I can see the way you two look at each other. I see myself in you, and that's how I exactly look at Dean." She reaches out for my hands.

"K, our families are friends, and nothing's gonna break our ties. Whatever happens to the two of you will never affect us, to our friendships. I will still love you and treat you like a sister. Nothing's gonna change that, but if you will not even try, K, trust me, you will never be happy, and you will regret that for the rest of your life. Do you want that?"

I look at her, shaking my head. Finally, I understand what she's been doing since Bash came back from London.

"You loved Bash since we were kids, K. Everyone knew that. It's not a secret, and Bash loves you, always and forever. He may be so dumb not to figure that out soon because he's an ass—a dumbass, arrogant bully before, but look at him now, he still sees you," Saph says.

I can't say anything, and all I do is just look down at our hands clasping together.

"He loves you since then, K," Lizzy adds.

"I doubt it, Lizzy." I look at her.

"You'll find it out very soon." A familiar voice from my back startles me.

Chapter 12

South Korea

TRINITY

I place the two suitcases on my bed when I notice Saph is flipping pages of my floral printed diary that I wrote when I was in high school. I haven't seen that diary since I started dating Oli.

"Saph, where did you get that?"

Saph is lying on her stomach, propping her elbows with her eyes fixed on my diary on her hands.

When I ask her to give it to me, but she doesn't even look at me. Instead, she continues reading and flipping pages as if she's so hooked up reading a romance novel.

"Saph, ever heard of privacy? It's a diary for a reason. Hand me that thing and help me pack. May I remind you the reasons why you're here," I called her earlier to help me pack my things. My hand is still hanging in the air.

"Saph, put that thing down, and I have a flight to catch tonight!" I yell at her, and that catches her attention.

She grins instead of getting annoyed. "That much, huh?" She finally talks and starts to drag herself off my bed.

"What that much do you mean?" I scowl at her.

She stands up and saunters in my direction. "That you like Bash that much. You sketched him, wrote poems, doodled his name--"

"Whoa! I didn't write poems for him, and I'm not a poetic type," I say defensively. I open my two doors closet and start taking my clothes that are worth for travel.

Thanks to my two best friends who have good taste in fashion. I quickly pull my clothes and fold them that would fit in my suitcases. I ignore Saph who's still babbling about how I love Bash.

I'm excited to see South Korea for the first time, and I did my research about the country too. I start listening to BTS even I don't understand most of their lyrics.

I also feel nervous that I'm spending a week with Bash even though we'll be staying in two separate rooms. What if he'll bring women? How should I react? Do I have to pretend that I don't care? Should I just ignore them?

Of course, you should, Trinity, otherwise, you'll look like a fool.

I want to believe what they told me in the café three days ago, and that gives me hope a little. What if Bash really cares? What if he's just looking for a hookup? Then he will start dating again?

"Aunt Abby, good to see you here." I rise from my seat to hug her.

She's always been kind to me and treats me like her real daughter, besides that she's my mom's best friend.

"So, are you excited about the trip?" She takes a seat to my left.

I smile brightly. "Kinda. I've never been to Asia, so I expect to have culture shock, but I will do my research," I tell her honestly.

"You will enjoy your stay there, K. I've been there many times, and if Sebastian didn't suggest that the two of you should go this time, I'm going to join him for another trip. They have great places to visit, a very rich culture and great history. They have these traditional clothes that I wore. I still have the pictures."

I notice my two best friends are listening to Aunt Abby.

"Thanks for giving me a chance, and I would surely enjoy my stay there."

"Oh, K. You will enjoy it, and you don't have to call or chat with us every day. We can wait until you come back," Lizzy says with a grin.

"Thanks, Lizzy, but I still have a job to do there," I tell her, causing her eyes to roll.

"Your only job is to accompany Bash to the meeting and be pretty, and it won't take time. You will only meet the Korean team, see the site with them, and close the deal. It won't take even a day, then the rest of your stay will be for yours and Bash to enjoy," Aunt Abby explains the plan.

Why do I feel that all of them are pushing me to be with Bash?

"Then why do we have to stay there for the whole week?" I inquire.

"Why not? You have to at least, see some places there, taste their food, and meet Korean guys. Oh, Bash has a friend there. And he's hot," Saph butts in.

"I'm not going there to meet guys, Saph. I'll be there for business purposes only."

"Oh, yeah. I completely understand because Bash will punch all the guys if they will lay a finger on you," Lizzy affirms.

My face heats. I notice Aunt Abby smiles at me.

"He won't do that," I say quietly.

"Oh, K. He will because that kiss tells us something," Lizzy replies.

My mouth hangs open, making them giggle.

"Oh, my God! Did you tell your mom, too?" I ask Lizzy.

She raises her brow. "And what's wrong with that? I'm happy that my baby brother finally found the courage that he should've done that years ago."

I might have turned into a tomato right now, and I think I'm sweating even this place is cold.

"Just take care of my baby, K," Aunt Abby says.

"He has Mr. Russell to look after him, Aunt Abby," I respond.

She laughs, covering her mouth with the table napkin. "That's not what I mean, K. He's capable of protecting himself if that's what you mean, and he's been very responsible since he was in the U.K. What I mean to say is take care of Bash," she emphasizes the take care part.

I nod in agreement.

"He cares about you, K. Don't ever doubt that."

I ignore Bash's offer to play a board game. After excusing myself from him, I get inside the master suite of their private jet. I sleep throughout the fourteen hours flight after our dinner together.

He told me that we will be meeting his friend as soon as we settled in at the King hotel in Seoul.

I feel hands nudging my shoulders, and hit those hands blindly while I groan irritably. I pull up the blanket to cover my head. My lids still feel heavy to even get up.

"Tri, you have to get up now. You've been sleeping the entire flight, and we're landing in less than an hour." Bash's concern voice fills my ears.

"Go away, Bash. Come back five minutes before we land."

"Trinity, don't wanna freshen up yourself? C'mon, you can continue sleeping in the hotel," he says, pulling off the blanket from my head.

I open my eyes slowly to see the most beautiful smiling face, looking down at me. I can't help but smile back.

"Get out now. Give me some time to freshen up." I sit up lazily.

He moves away from the bed. "Tri, I'll make a coffee for you..." He trails off, stopping at the door.

"You mean, the flight attendant will make coffee for me." I nod while running my fingers through my tangled hair away from my forehead.

It only takes half an hour's drive from the Incheon International Airport to the King Hotel. We are approached by the hotel manager name Jin Seok, wearing a suit and tie with a scarf around his neck and staff to gather our things.

Edmund is on full alert, scanning the hotel lobby. I carry my small bag with me while Bash has his messenger bag with Edmund.

"Annyeonghaseyo!" Greets the staff.

"Welcome back, Mr. Hughes!" he says with a thick Korean accent.

Bash smiles brightly and talks with Mr. Jin in Hangul, and I don't even have any idea what they're talking about. Bash glances at me while he's busy talking.

Some young women staff can't help but giggle, and I feel something uneasy in the pit of my stomach. They're attractive with black straight and shiny hair, fair skin complexion, and dark-colored eyes.

I felt like this when I was in high school when Bash was busy entertaining other girls.

"Is there anything else, Mr. Hughes?"

"That won't be necessary, Seok. We can take from here," Bash says dismissively as we enter the elevator. They all bow at us, showing respect as part of their custom. Bash does the same, and so as Edmund. I follow them too.

"They're amazing people, Bash," I say with enthusiasm.

He looks at me through his shoulder with a smile. "You'll like them, and ask me to come back here."

I roll my eyes.

"They're pretty too," I add.

"You're prettier," he says, looking at me in the eye, and I feel a heat blooms in my face.

He chuckles.

"Not funny," I mutter.

The elevator door slides open. Bash holds my hand as he gets out of the elevator.

"You can go, and find your room, Edmund," he says, dismissing his bodyguard. We enter the huge two shiny dark wood doors after he presses codes and sliding the keycard. My eyes widen. It's actually a penthouse with Korean interior designs from wall to ceiling, paintings, and furniture.

“Wow! This is way too different from your penthouse in New York, Bash,” I say as I turn around slowly to appreciate the beauty of art around me.

“Glad you like it. Are you hungry?” he asks, taking off his coat. I walk closer to him to help him take off.

The weather is a little bit chilly as I did my research. The winter here will start in November.

“Thanks, Tri. I’ll call the room service, and I’ll let you taste some Korean food.”

“Okay. I should go and take a shower. Where are our things?” I scan to check the living room. I see nothing.

“They’re in our room already,” he answers while kicking off his shoes before he sits down on the maroon couch, and stretches his long legs.

My brows meet. “Where is my room?” I inquire, standing in front of him.

“Our room, Tri. There are only two rooms here. The other one is for Xandry. So, you’ll be staying with me.”

My eyes widen. “I’ll just take a hotel room, Bash,” I protest.

He sits straight, facing me. “You will not, Tri. We slept in one bed before many times that I could count, and I heard no complaints from you.”

I feel taken aback. My heart thunders because this time is different. We already shared kisses.

“It’s not like that, Bash.”

“Then what it is, Trinity?” He searches an answer on my face.

I can’t tell him why as I feel my mouth locked up.

“Is it because we kissed?”

My face burns.

“You’re blushing, Trinity,” he teases me with a smile on his face.

I glare at him before I walk away to search for the room. I can’t believe we’ll share a bed. Just being near him is torture and heaven at the same time. How will I survive a week with him? He’s been different than the last four years. He’s gorgeous, pure muscles, he smells good, too, and since I tasted a piece of him, and I now want more.

“Umm... I love this. What do you call this again?” I ask as I chew a piece of vegetable in my mouth.

We sit on the floor with a square low table just above our knees.

“That’s kimchi. Don’t you think that’s too spicy? You might have stomach upset, Tri.”

I shove another into my mouth. I shake my head. “I used to eat spicy food. We used to eat in an Indian Restaurant near the college. Ranjiv introduced them to me, and I love them, especially the porota and mutton curry. They’re delicious.” I stop talking when Bash puts down his chopsticks and looks pissed. Did I do something wrong?

“What’s wrong? Don’t you like the food?” I ask with creased brows.

“Do you like him?” he asks firmly.

“Ranjiv? Yeah,” I answer almost immediately.

He stands up abruptly, walking away from our table without a word.

“Bash!” I am quicker on my feet to follow him.

He sprints away, and the next thing I hear is the slamming of the door.

I sit on the couch, frowning of what had just happened earlier. I just lost my appetite.

Wait, he asked if I like Ranjiv and I answered yes, and oh, shit! Did he think that I like Ranjiv like I really like Ranjiv more than a friend? I shake my head, grinning. I want to giggle pretty bad. Is he really jealous of him?

I need to explain that that’s not what I mean. I stand from the couch when I hear the doorbell rings. Is Bash expecting visitors?

Chapter 13

A Visitor

TRINITY

I open the door wider after checking in the peephole. I think he's Bash's Korean friend Alex. A man of twenty-year-old something, around six-footer fair complexion with a black shiny straight hair just above his shoulder. He looks attractive with a dark color set of eyes. He's also fashionable like he just came from a runway fashion show.

He smirks when he notices me checking him out.

I clear my throat. "Can I help you?"

The smirk still on his face. "You must be the redhead Trinity?" He asks with a slight British accent, but his Asian root is still there.

My eyes widen. "How did you know my name?" I ask inquisitively while we are still in the door.

"So, it's you then. I'm Alexander Shin. A friend of Bash," he says, holding out his hand.

I shake it immediately. "Oh, please, come inside. Bash is still in his room." I step back.

"Is he still giving you a hard time?"

I narrow my eyes at him when he seems to know a lot about me. "Did he always gossiped around about my life, Alexander?"

He chuckles, shaking his head. "He's not wrong, after all."

"What does it suppose to mean?"

"You even look beautiful, Trinity. Your picture did not do justice." He walks toward the couch as if he used to be here.

"Wait here. I'll call Bash." I leave him even if Alex is still calling my name.

"I called Bash on my way here, but he didn't answer. Why don't you wear your coat and we have a place to go to?" He's also bossy like Bash.

I cross my arms over my chest. "What makes you think that I'll go with you? I don't even know you." I raise my brows while inspecting him from head to toe. He looks like a trustworthy guy, and besides, he's a friend of Bash.

“Bash will know that you’re with me, and trust me, I’m way dead before I can even touch you.”

We enter a pub bungalow style with a beach-themed bar with deck chairs, and the floor covered with sand. There’s a lot of local people here. I also see some foreigners enjoying the out of tune man singing a Korean song on a videoke machine.

Alex managed to convince me to take me here instead of a nightclub. He said that this is the best place for foreigners rather than going to the same nightclub back in New York.

We sit in an empty table for four, and I’m facing the man singing a karaoke. Everyone yells when he hits the high notes. Alex stands up to applaud the man. I can’t help but smile.

“What would you like to drink, Trinity?”

“I don’t know. Surprise me.”

I’m already on my second bottle of Soju--a clear alcoholic drink of Korean. I feel the alcohol kicks in faster than I expect.

Alex is a funny guy compared to Bash. He even sings some Korean songs on the videoke that I don’t even understand a word.

“God! Alex, you can actually sing. You have a great voice over there.” I give him a high five when he comes back to our seat.

He bows at me, and I can’t help but laugh at him.

“You’re drunk, Trinity. I think it’s our cue to leave,” he says, looking amused.

“Nah! I’m not drunk. I still want another judo,”

He barks out into laugh while shaking his head. “It’s Soju and not judo. We don’t do judo here. It’s Taek won do for Korean,” he says word by word.

“Whatever. It still sounds the same.” I wave my hand to drop it.

He moves closer to me to grabbing hand.

“I’m not ready to go, Alex. I still wanna go up and sing as you did,” I protest even I can feel my body heat, and my eyes are burning hot. I know I’m already drunk.

“Bash will kick my shin, Trinity.” He drags me toward the door after paying our table.

“You are Shin, and he won’t kick you,” I insist, but I have no choice not to follow his pace.

“Can you walk? Our car is a bit far from here,” he asks with concern in his eyes.

I nod lazily.

The weather is a little bit chilly. I shove my free hand in my jacket pocket. I inhale deeply as the icy wind blows my face. I notice couples walking hand in hand in the busy streets of Seoul. They're shorter than Americans, but they're pretty, and they have a great fashion statement.

South Korea is one of the fastest developing countries in the world. Ranking 7th the world's largest economy and has high-speed internet. They have famous cellphone brands, electronics, and car manufacturers, and of course, their music and movie industries are well-known throughout Asia. And they start to influence Europe and America as well.

"Are you alright, Trinity?"

I jerk my head to look at Alex. I smile timidly after licking my dry lips. "I'm okay. Thanks for asking. So, tell me about yourself. Who is Alex Shin?"

"I'm the only son of Shin Dung Woo. I'm just like Bash, soon take over my dad's company, but right now, I'm based in the Philippines. I manage our hotels there. I was broken-hearted once, but now I'm engaged. Bash still doesn't have an idea about it. I study abroad with him. We're classmates since freshman until senior year. I know him very well."

By means, he knows Bash very well, which includes his secrets. I listen to him intently.

We stop at his car. Alex is a very good man. He even holds the door for me.

"He always mentioned you to me, Trinity. That's how I know who you are."

My mouth hangs open as I get inside without a word. His phone rings while I'm latching my seatbelt.

"Man, she's fine, and we're coming back now. We just had a few drinks."

My head jerks to his side. That must be Bash he's talking to.

"Yeah, yeah. Calm down, will you?" Alex says with the phone pressed into his ear.

"Fine, and what the hell are you doing in your room leaving Trinity alone like a lost puppy? You wanker! You are better than that." I can see the amusement in his face.

"We're on our way. Don't! Bash, just stay here, and I'm taking her to the hotel right now."

I can feel Bash is pissed right now. Crap!

The way Alex talks to him over the phone, I know he's yelling from the other line. Alex breathes deeply, and his jaw clenches.

I feel guilty for coming with Alex. They're fighting because of me. I should remind myself of the reason why I am here.

"Fifteen minutes top. I'm driving and put down that bloody phone, Bash. It's not that I'm not gonna shag her for bloody sake!" Alex shouts/

I almost startle in my seat. My stomach twisted sickly.

"Jeez, mate! Calm the bloody down, and it's just a bloody name!" Alex groan. What exactly are they fighting?

"Fine!"

I shit on my seat and touch Alex's arm that's holding the phone. "Let me talk to him, Alex."

"No." He huffed a breath. "He's furious because you came with me. I mean, I invited you without telling him first."

My brow raises. "It's not that I need his permission when I want to go out with someone, Alex, and besides, he walked out on me while we're having dinner."

"As if he will listen to that. I know him, and he'll never accept his own mistakes," Alex replies.

"I know, asshole!" He's still berating over the phone. "We're on our way. Bye!" Alex tosses his phone to the backseat. Then he laughs.

I give him a disapproving glare.

"He's gonna break or worse burn the entire hotel if he won't see you in like ten minutes." He's still laughing even he has foreseen the worse scenario.

"What's wrong with him? He walked out from me, and I went out without you, and now, he's pissed off?"

"He's Bash and will always be Bash."

"So, you know Dana, right?" I ask cautiously.

"Yeah. They dated for a year, and I really don't approve of their relationship. It's not that Bash needed my approval, but I found that woman difficult. She wanted Bash alone to herself. Thank God, he never listened, and I knew they wouldn't last. I can't see why Bash dated her in the first place if his heart belongs to someone else," he explains, then he looks at me.

The way Alex looks at me, it makes my heart thunder in my chest.

Does his heart belong to someone else? To whom?

Alex presses his lips into a thin line. He doesn't say anything anymore. The effect of alcohol on my system suddenly vanish. I wonder to whom his heart belongs. I swallow the acid that burning in my throat. I doubt it was me, and I will never hope for that.

Lizzy's words are like a slap on my face. I don't think Bash's heart belongs to me because if it's true, he should have made a move years ago. Bash just stopped visiting every year. He didn't call, sent me a message, or even email me. He cut anything.

I guess he really belongs to someone else. I breathe deeply to hold the tears from falling.

"Kiara, you've been silent. What's wrong?" Alex's hand and voice jar me out from my thoughts. Now he's calling me Kiara.

"I'm good. Thanks for taking me out tonight, Alex." I smile at him tightly.

He nods then parks his car in front of the King Hotel. The concierge catches the car key that Alex tosses. I walk with him to the lift silently.

"Don't mind him even he's pissed. I know you can handle him, and you know him well, Kiara. He's still the same Bash you used to know," he reminds me while we are riding the lift.

"Why are you calling me Kiara now and not Trinity?" I ask, and he grins sheepishly.

"What?" I ask, demanding an answer.

"He warned me not to call you Trinity."

I roll my eyes. "That's my name, and he has no right to warn everyone not to call me by many names."

The elevator door slides open. My eyes widen, and I freeze in my place. The pissed Bash is narrowing his eyes on us in front of the elevator door. He is clenching his jaw hard, and his hands shoved into his pocket jeans.

"Get inside our penthouse, Trinity!" He commands.

Our? I blink and raise my brow. "You're a jerk! You can't just ask me what to do, and I'm not your slave! I can do whatever I want during my free time."

His face turns red with anger. I can feel the tension in the air, but I don't care. He's so rude in front of his friend.

"Kiara, just go. It's okay, and we'll just talk. Thanks for coming with me tonight. I had a great time," Alex says with a small smile on his lips.

I can feel the tension between him and Bash. I am afraid that they will exchange blows. I move closer to Alex to hug him. Alex stiffens, but he hugs me back immediately. I hear a groan beside me, and I know it's Bash, but I don't give a damn right now, and I can hug whoever I want.

"I had a great time, Alex. We can do it again, yeah? Before I'll fly back." I smile sincerely.

"Stop copying my accent," he chuckles, making my smile widen.

"Are you two done flirting in front of me?" Bash angrier voice startles me a bit. I shoot him a glare and walk away, waving at Alex.

I stand in front of the door watching the two bicker. Thank God, they look calm. I walk inside when I notice them seem far from punching one other's face.

I change into simple Pj after taking a shower. Bash still doesn't show up in our room. Maybe he's busy calling his family. I already left messages to Lizzy and Saph and sent voice messages to Mom and Dad.

I look at the empty king-size bed covered with a white cotton blanket. How will I sleep when his with me by my side with all these tensions between us? This is going to be the longest week of my life.

I shrug helplessly as I shut my eyes close. Hands wrap around my waist from my back makes me stiffen. I smell Bash's cologne and aftershave. I guess he takes a shower down. He plants his chin on my shoulder, pressing his face on my exposed neck, then inhaling my scent. I shiver with the slight touch of his nose against my skin.

I squeeze my eyes to control my erratic heartbeat, but I fail miserably when he starts kissing the side of my jaw to the length of my neck and nibbling my earlobe. I moan helplessly. My legs wobble, and I can't help but grip his arm that wraps around my waist for support. I bite my lips stronger that can draw blood.

"Bash," I hear my voice pleads.

For a split second, I'm now facing him. How does it happen? I don't know. The last thing I know, his lips are already pressed against mine.

Chapter 14

Feelings

BASH

I know being with Trinity is going to be amazing, and while my mouth is moving in sync with hers. Her hands travel from the lower of my back, pushing my shirt up. I shiver as her fingers touching softly against my skin.

As I suck her bottom lip, she claws her fingernails on my back. The sensation sends through my cock, and I'm already hard as steel.

I can kiss all night if she let me. I pull my lips away from her lips, tracing small kisses on her chin.

"Trinity, please, don't make me stop?" I beg when I start kissing her neck.

She arches her head back, giving me access. "Did I say anything?" Her voice is huskier, pulling my shirt off my head.

I lean my elbows caging her in as I look at her with heavy lids, flushed face, and swollen lips with a tousled hair. "I like kissing you."

"You've already said that," she whispers back.

"I want more than this, Trinity." Confessing is not easy, but I take all the courage that I should have done it years ago.

She opens her eyes, and our gazes meet. "If you'll continue kissing me, you won't kiss anyone."

"And neither you."

"Okay," she agrees.

"I can kiss you anywhere and anytime I want."

"I want to keep this from everyone, and it will end what we have here."

My brows furrow. "Why?" I ask, confused, and panic streaks on me.

"I'm not ready to tell everyone, Bash, and this, whatever is this will only last here. For a week," she says firmly.

I breathe through my nose. "Okay, but you're not allowed to date and meet another guy without my permission. Even we're back in New York." I don't agree with the idea of what we start here will only end the moment we get back.

It means we only have six more days to be together, but I have no choice but to take whatever she can offer.

Her brow raises. "Will you do the same thing?"

I feel my shoulders sag. "Of course, we're exclusive, here," I say with dismay in my voice, but I able to quirk my lips into a smile. My heart crashes in my chest, but I have to respect her decisions.

"But we're not dating, just kiss partners."

I roll my eyes. "There is no such thing as kiss partners, Trinity, and since we have six days together, I want more than just kissing you." I move my face closer to give her another wet kiss, and she kisses me immediately.

I feel her hands on my chest, traveling down my abs, making my muscles contract to her touch. My cock jerks in my jeans, and I can't help but grind onto her core.

"I think you should take off your shirt, too, yeah?"

She giggles. I help her do it, and in just a second, she's only on her skin tone lacy bra. I've never seen her on her bra, but she looks so beautiful right now.

"You're still a little too overdressed," I complain.

I slip my hand under her back to unclasp her bra, and I did it instantly. I pull out slowly while looking at her into her eyes to let her stop me, but she doesn't protest. I'm literally drooling, and her breasts are just gorgeous as her with her little pink buds begging for my attention. I cup her left tit, and it just perfect n my palm. It's firm and warm.

Moving my head down while looking at her, she grips a handful of my hair, then pushes my head down. Without hesitation, I cup her tit with my mouth. She moans, arching her chest on me, and I suck her sweet tit, flickering my tongue on her nipple.

"Oh, god, Bash." Her raspy voice encourages me more.

I do the same to her other tit while I pinch her other nipple with my fingers, then I run my tongue in the valley of her tits from up down her flat abdomen.

She squirms underme, gasping and curling her toes. A soft moan slips her mouth. I run my tongue in a circular motion on her belly button, leaving kisses on her exposed abdomen, and that's when I notice my name tattooed on her left hip.

"Tri, when did you get this?" I ask, tracing my fingers on the ink. I lift my head when she doesn't reply. She's biting her lower lip again.

"Nevermind, I will ask you later." I continue kissing her down to her pubic bone. I'm a little bit annoyed with her PJ bottom.

Trinity sits abruptly, reaching the drawer in the nightstand. I look at her, raising my brows quizzically.

"Trinity, that can't wait later, and I still need to taste you."

She shakes her head. "We can do that later if you want more than a kiss, then let's do it my way." She's a little bit bossy.

I groan. I guess I have to make a little adjustment to get what I want. "Fine. Now lie down, and you're still fully dressed."

She does as I say, slipping her fingers on the waistband of PJ bottom.

"Too eager. Can't wait for me to do that?"

A smile spreads across her lips. I move closer to help her pull the thing off. She looks magnificent stark naked. Why did I not do this before? I should've been her first in everything, but I chickened out and thought she would turn me down. Instead, I dated girls to make her jealous.

I unbutton the fly of my jeans, pushing it all the way down with my boxers. Her beautiful green eyes widen with slightly parted lips.

Smirking, I arch a brow as I crawl back to bed and settle between her legs.

"I need a little help here, Tri," I say, gesturing her for the rubber."

She tears the foil pack with her teeth eagerly, and she looks hot doing that.

My heart doubles the beat, and my body vibrates with the anticipation that I can finally make love with her. It's a dream come true to me. I've been dreaming about this for as long as I learn about sex.

She rolls the rubber easily to my full mast hard cock. I hiss when her fingers touch my skin. Her tongue slightly slips on her parted lips, and I wonder how does it feel when her mouth wraps around my cock, and my buddy down there jerks at the thought of it.

"Are you just gonna stare at me? Because I can fall asleep right now."

I blink, pushing the thought to the back of my head. I lean down to capture her lips and kiss her with urgency, wet, and passionately. My cock is already pressed against her warm wet core.

She responds to my kiss immediately, wrapping her legs around my waist, pushing herself into me. I moan at the sensation of my cock rubbing against her slit, and Trinity moans too.

“Please, Bash?” She pleads between our kisses.

Cupping the back of her head with my left hand, I run my free hand to her neck, chest, and her tit, kneading them one by one. I move down to her flat stomach until I found what I’m looking for.

I run my fingers on her folds, stroking slightly, and she’s dripping wet. A guttural sound skips my throat. Slipping my two fingers in her warm tight inner walls, she responds, pushing her hips into my fingers. Trinity lets out a helpless cry.

Jesus! I’m gonna come with just my fingers in her warm pussy.

“Bash, please, now please?”

I will never let her beg, and I will never disappoint her. I pull my fingers out, shoving them into my mouth while I’m staring at her. Her pupils dilated with her mouth hangs open.

“You’re sweeter than I thought, Trinity. I really wanted to taste you, but I will do that later, and that’s a promise.” I position my cock in her core again, thrusting in her slowly.

I feel her warm and tight pussy stretch to welcome me. I bite my lip to stop growling with her warmth, and the sensation that I wondered how did it feel to be inside her. Now I have the answer.

She feels so good to be true. I’ve never felt so good like this before. I am dazed, and I arch my head back uncontrollably. She claws my back—her fingers dig into my skin. Surprisingly, it’s sweet and painful torture.

“Trinity!” I manage to say her name in a rough murmur. I still don’t move and only take this incredible feeling in. “What the hell I was doing over these years? I should—”

She grabs my head and kisses me furiously, shoves her tongue into my mouth, and tightens her legs around me.

I start to thrust my cock deep in her, and she follows me with a little thrust while moaning in my mouth.

“Christ!” I grunt into her mouth. “So good.”

We move together perfectly. Sweat forms on my skin. The room fills with our moans, grunts, and slaps of our skin together.

I feel her inner muscles tighten around my cock, gripping me. She tosses her head back, and I know she’s closer to come. I kiss her passionately like I only live at this moment.

“Fourth!” She gasps, clutching my arms tighter as she shudders underneath me.

After a single thrust, I succumb to my own earth-shattering orgasm. My body still pressed against hers, and my head falls to the crook of her neck. I can smell her scent as I grasp for air.

“Tri?” I ask when she doesn’t say a word while my thumb is caressing her cheek. I feel her hand on my hand, planting it on her lips, kissing each finger.

I wake up earlier than her. She slept immediately last night after our amazing sex. I manage to run for an hour on the treadmill. After sending an email to Dad’s office and make a few calls to my family, I call for room service. Trinity will be up soon, and we’re going to meet the team today.

I take a quick shower using the bathroom down. I know Trinity, she’s going to use the bathroom up, and I’m so tempted to share a shower with her.

I know I should share it with her, but maybe not today because we have an important appointment waiting for us.

After wearing my white crisp shirt with my cufflinks and a dark blue suit matching a dark platinum blue tie, I put shoes on. I look at myself in the mirror after running my fingers on my lacks.

“Good morning, Tri!” A smile spreads across my lips instantly when I see her walking towards the living room. She smiles shyly at me, but her eyes are flooded with excitement. Grabbing her head, I kiss her luscious lips, and she grabs my suit for support. She’s kissing me back like we’re doing it for a long time.

“Morning,” she replies, seemingly surprised.

I kiss her lips one last time and wrapping my arms around her waist. “I think you need to reapply your lipstick.” I smirk while I run my thumb on the slightly smeared lipstick on her lips.

“That’s waterproof.” Our gazes meet.

“Oh, yeah? But not kiss-proof.” I chuckle.

She pulls away and walks towards the couch, then she stops. “What’s this, Bash?” She notices the suitcases beside the couch.

“We’re not coming back after our meeting. I pack our things. After the meeting wraps up, we have some places to go to.” It feels normal for us to talk. No awkward moment and my words just come out naturally.

“Where are you taking me, then?”

I grin. “It’s a surprise.”

Chapter 15

Furious

BASH

Dad played me well. Who would have thought that my old man has a roguish side? What is he trying to imply?

He closed the deal last month before I even came back from the U.K, and nobody mentioned this to me. I flew over here for nothing. We just tossed over a fucking Champagne.

I look like a fool in front of the Korean team. It's all my fault. I agreed with Dad about the documents. I should've checked it before the flight. I just trusted that old man, and I thought he wouldn't play with me like this.

Lesson learned.

I stomp my feet to the car waiting for us. Trinity doesn't say anything when she notices me scowling. I feel her hand on my thigh, gripping it. My idiot of a cock stirs. Squeezing my eyes shut, I release a deep breath to calm my nerves.

Edmund remains silent at the passenger seat while the Korean driver pulls the car out of the parking lot. He's instructed where to take us after the meeting—the inept meeting.

"Bash, your dad is on the phone," My head jerks to the front seat where Edmund is holding out the phone to me. I clench my jaw with annoyance. I grab it from him.

"Are you trying to bash me now, Dad? It wasn't enough that you embarrassed me in front of those Koreans?" I ask, and I'm still pissed.

He sighs. "Bash, you have to learn not just to follow orders without checking the contract. I may be your father, and you trusted me, but you have to think that sometimes the people you love the most turn out to be the people you should trust the least." Yeah, I keep that in mind.

"What does suppose to mean? Are all these just a test to you? I'm hundreds of miles away from you, old man!" I curse under my breath.

"Yeah, consider that a test, son," he answers almost immediately.

"Then I failed, did I?" I ask, groaning.

"That's not the point why you're there," he answers, but I can hear the amusement in his voice.

“Seriously, though, what am I doing here, dad?” I want a reasonable answer.

“It’s for you to find out. You can answer that when you come back. Good luck son, and enjoy your week.” Before I can answer, the line goes off. I groan louder, raking my fingers through my hair.

“I guess that didn’t go well with your dad,” Trinity’s soft voice makes me calm a bit.

I look at her beside me. Our eyes meet, my frown suddenly vanishes when I see her smiling at me. I can’t help but lean my head to kiss her forehead.

“Everything is fine, Trinity. Nothing to worry about,” I reassure her. Everything is perfectly fine, especially when she’s with me right now for the whole week.

The two hours ride is worth it when we pass by the old village. This place is so different from the city of Seoul. The houses are very traditional compared to the high-colossal buildings back in the city.

Some folks are wearing the traditional clothes the hanbok. I can’t help but be amazed.

The car moves up to the slightly elevated area like a small hill where I can see a hanok from a distance. That must be Alex’s house.

We stop at the stoned-walled gate with clay made roof surrounded by plants with autumn leaves.

The gate swings open, Alex approaches us with a grin on his face.

He’s annoying, but he’s like a brother to me. He accommodates us with his old home. This is where we are going to stay for the rest of the week.

I hop out from the black SUV to greet him.

“Annyonghaseyo, Bash, Kiara.” He approaches us and bows in front of us, making me snort.

“Jaljinaess-eoyo, Kiara?” He asks, kissing Trinity on her cheek. Trinity smile politely then bows just like he did. I chuckle, following him inside his home.

There is a huge ground made of gravels, with a small pond, a small pine tree at the center. One-story three houses in a U shape made of the stone foundation, with a huge porch each.

We enter the first house on our left side with glossy dark oak flooring and two feet tall banisters. All walls are covered with hanji papers made from mulberry trees.

I notice Trinity’s eyes fill with amazement. I take my shoes off as it’s a custom here in Korea. Trinity does the same. Edmund wanders outside the house with our driver.

"I prepare a room for both you. This may be a hanok, but we have electricity, appliances, and Internet here. But I doubt if you have time to browse the net," Alex says with a glint in his eyes.

"This is the dining area." He slides a thin door. There is a small table in the corner with a tiny vase on top, a green plant blooming with small pink flowers. The dining table is placed at the center with four flat cushions on each side.

The maru flooring is glossier than on the porch. It has a small square chandelier hung from the ceiling, a small table with tea sets on top, and a dark-colored wood cabinet with a bronze drawer handle on the left side.

"This is beautiful, Alex," Trinity says with eyes still wandering around. She sits cautiously on one of the flat square cushions as if testing it.

"Then you should marry a traditional Korean guy, Kiara," Alex says.

My head snaps to Alex on my left side, glaring at him. "Stop flirting with her. You're getting married for fuck sake," I say annoyingly.

I can't imagine Trinity marrying a Korean guy then lives here. Truth, I can't imagine her marrying at all. Alex grins like he just gets his answers.

"The kitchen is on the left side. You don't have to go outside. There's a hall that connects from here to the kitchen. The bedroom is on the right side, but I warn you, there's no bed, and it just a mattress made of pure cotton." He laughs slightly, and I know what does he means. I nod in agreement.

Alex was broken-hearted and slept with girls back in the U.K. Now that he's getting married just to win full custody of his niece. I doubt if he's marrying her just to fight for custody. I know him well. I bet he likes that girl because it's not Alex who is going to just tie up to a girl, and he should've done that after his brother passed away if he just wanted full custody.

"All floors are equipped with ondol and maru as part of hanok," Alex continues.

Trinity lifts her chin to look at Alex. "What's ondol?" she asks with curiosity.

"Ondol is an underflooring heating system since Korea has a winter season," I answer.

"Oh, so it's like a fireplace?" she asks, her face lights up.

"Yeah, but the main source of the heat in this place is from the outside. There are horizontal flue pipes as a passageway of the heat beneath the flooring. Unlike the fireplace in the U.S, its placed inside the home with a chimney," Alex explains.

Trinity nods and looks amused. "It's cool, Alex."

After our little tour of all the houses. Alex, Edmund, and the driver left us and went back to the city, leaving me and Trinity alone here in the Hanok. He says to contact him if there is an emergency. He has a Hyundai sedan left in the parking area of the house if we want to tour around.

We both sit on the front porch, just taking this moment in. I never imagined this day would happen. Remind me to give Dad a hug and Mom a huge kiss on her cheek.

This time, I will prove to Trinity that I'm not the bully Bash she used to know and that I'm all grown up. I'll show her how I felt for her all these years.

"What's with the silence, Bash? You seem in deep thoughts," she asks.

I turn to face her. She's sitting on my left side. "This place is peaceful. I'm just glad that you agreed with me coming here." I stare at her eyes. I want her to feel that I'm utterly happy that she's with me.

"You didn't actually ask me to come here with you, but I'm glad that you take me here. I love this place. So, no need to scowl against your dad's ideas." She smiles.

She's just so beautiful, she melts my heart.

I hold her hand on top of the tea table, plants it to my lips, and kiss each finger. "Yeah, I should thank him big for that."

She clears her throat. Panic grows in the pit of my belly as I feel that she's about to say something.

"About last night. Um." I scan her face to see her reaction.

"I um, I enjoyed it, and um. I loved it," she seems unsure what to say.

My lips spread to a full grin. I move my head closer to her face, pressing my lips against hers. She sighs—a sigh of relief. I move my lips slowly, chastely until she starts kissing me back.

She grips handfuls of my hair as she deepens the kiss. A small moan slips her mouth when I suck her bottom lip. and my hands are grabbing her ass.

She moves closer to me until she straddles on my lap. I slip my tongue freely into her mouth, tasting her again. I want to taste every inch of her, and that's my plan.

We both are panting when we break the kiss.

"Are you hungry?" I plant kisses on the freckles on her face, especially on the bridge of her nose. She wrinkles her nose

"What? Don't tell me you ticklish, Tri?"

She giggles. “Nobody kisses me there, Bash. I thought that was hideous?”

I crease my brows. “Hideous? Your freckles are beautiful, Trinity. They look good on your face. It’s not you without them. I love these hideous freckles,” I tell her truthfully.

“When did you get a tattoo, Tri?” I look at her eyes while my fingers are tracing the tattoo on her left hip.

Her shoulders droop. Her mood changes slightly.

“Tri, I’m not mad if you think like that. In fact, I’m glad you had my name inked on your body.” I kiss her lips again.

“I did that before your first vacation, I thought of showing that to you, but you went back to the U.K immediately.”

My stomach lurches. “Trinity, I went back because—” I swallow hard, trying to compose my thoughts.

Taking a deep breath, I start, “I saw you kissing someone on your front door. I thought I shouldn’t bother you anymore, now that you already have a boyfriend.” My heart ached that night. I thought my heart crashed.

“Bash, can’t that wait after dinner?” Mom yells upstairs when she sees me running out from the living room to the front door.

I stop, turning to face mom. I raise the gift bag I bought for Trinity. “I need to give this to her. I might stay there and have dinner with Trinity. I’m sure she’s at home. It’s weekend, mom.”

I see mom sigh, then she nods. “Thanks, mom. I love you!”

The car stops at the opposite side of Trinity’s home. I feel nervous all of a sudden. It’s been a year since what happened between us. My heart flutters, and my hands start sweating. I blow a huge breath to control my excitement and my nervousness.

I can do it!

I grip the door handle of the car after I tell the driver not to bother. He stays in the driver seat silently, then a blue car parks in front of Trinity’s house.

I stay still when I see the doors open simultaneously. A guy around my age and Trinity get out of the car. Trinity is wearing a blue dress; her straight red hair falls below her shoulders. Why did she straighten her hair?

They walk together, then stops at the front door. The yellow light makes Trinity's hair look striking. The guy wearing a white button-down cups Trinity's face and kisses her on her lips. My body slumps back to the seat. I don't notice the gift bag falls from my hand.

My eyes water, but I blink them not to fall. I bite my lower lip that's already trembling uncontrollably.

"Let's go back home," I instruct the driver with my shaky voice.

"What do you mean?" She furrows her brows.

"I went to visit you, Trinity. I thought I want to apologize, but it's hurt like hell to see you kissing someone else." I look down at her red lips.

"I didn't kiss him, Bash. We didn't go out on a date. We had girls' night, and I was a little tipsy. He volunteered to drive me home. So I agreed since we knew each other already," she explains.

"Who's that guy?" I demand.

"He's the one who tattooed me," she answers with a low tone.

"What his fucking name?"

She almost startles on my lap, eyes wide. "Kyland Wright."

My eyes widen. "That fucking Kyland Wright?"

"Do you know him?" she asks.

"I'm sorry, I shouted." I lower my voice a little bit.

"He's the one who tattooed me, Trinity, and he's the bartender at the Night Stalker," I say calmly.

"I know."

"He will pay for what he did that night!"

Chapter 16

Pretentious

TRINITY

Bash and I went to the small market down the village. It feels good to walk with him hand and hand, pushing the thoughts back about how limited our time here, then we're going back to how we're used to be—I'm back to Kiara Mallory, and he will be the Bash Hughes, the CFO.

It was fun to pretend as his wife while we were on the market. The people in this area are very conservative, so we pretended to be on a honeymoon from the U.S. I don't even know what he said to the old woman. He embraced me tightly and kissed my forehead while they were so engrossed with what they were talking about.

"Trinity, penny for the thoughts? You've been gripping my hand." Bash's voice pulls me out of my thoughts. We're still walking up in the gravelly road up to the hill.

"What did you two talk about earlier?" I inquire, but more likely I am being nosy.

Bash looks amused. "You've been thinking about that all this time?"

"Well, duh! I don't know what you two were talking about. Don't you think you should at least tell me?"

We stop in front of the hanok gate.

"Why so curious about it? It's nothing." He laughs, and I'm not convinced. I know there's something that piques my interest.

I shrug in defeat. Why make it a big deal anyway? And whatever they talked about, I know it's nothing important, right?

We enter the gate, and I feel a sudden twist in the pit of my stomach.

"Tri, stop scowling."

I walk past him, but he manages to grab my hand before I can go far.

"I need to get inside, Bash. I have to wash my feet, and they're soiled," I tell him, but even me, I can hear the disappointment in my voice.

He lets go of my hand, but he grabs my head instead and presses his mouth to mine. Bash kisses me hard, eager, and needy. The plastic bag on my hand falls to the ground. He kissed me many times,

but this one is a whole new different level. I can't help but clench his shirt to hold on to when he deepens the kiss, slipping his tongue into my mouth, exploring.

I feel him hard pressed against my lower abdomen, and I can't help but press myself snugly against him. He releases his hands to cup my bottom, kneading them. I wrap my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist. I feel we're moving. Bash carries me inside the hanok, leaving the plastic bag behind.

I help him pull off his shirt and unbutton his jeans while his hands busy exploring my body. He cups my face again when we're both naked. This time, he's kissing slowly, gently as he brushes his lips on mine, taking his time. There is something inside me rises--excitement, and a little noise skips from my throat.

"Bash, please?" I find my voice pleading. He kisses me down to my neck, and I can't help but grip a handful of his hair.

"I'm so tempted to press you against this wall, but this bloody wall is as thin as a paper," he says in his huskier voice. He guides me to lie down flat on the floor without bothering to spread the mattress. I feel the cold Maru on my back.

He moves away from me to grab his jeans.

"You have a condom in your pocket jeans even we're just going to market?"

He chuckles, tearing the foil pack with his teeth. "I thought a thousand times of taking you anywhere I can, Trinity," he admits, crawling back on top of me.

I spread my thighs wider to accommodate him. Biting my lip, he sinks into me slowly as soon as he rubs the crown on my wet core.

"God, I don't think I can get enough of you," he says, pressing his body on me. I wrap my legs around his waist to push him deeper, and he starts moving. He follows his rhythm, kisses me occasionally on my lips, my nose, my jaw, and my neck while I'm clawing his back.

It's rough sex, but I love every second of it, and I love the fact that it's with Bash.

A pressure already builds in me, and my inner walls clench his length. Arching my back, I moan louder while Bash is busy pounding me harder. We grunt and pant as we're both almost over the edge.

"Come now, Trinity," he orders, clenching his jaw as he tries to hold his own orgasm. He slows down his thrust, but it's rougher and intense, hitting me where I most sensitive, and I feel my eyes roll back.

"Bash!" I don't realize I just scream his name.

Bash grunts my name before he falls on top of me. We're both catching our breaths and slick with our sweats.

This has been one of the best days of my life. I'm happy and depressed at the same time because I know it has an expiration date.

We eat Bulgogi and some fresh green salad after our sex. We spend and catch some fresh air on the porch with our sujo. I remember how many wishes I made every time I looked up the stars.

We're both sitting on the cold concrete stairs when I hear him sigh while looking up at the night sky silently. Wrapping my arms around his left arm, I lean my head on his shoulder. This week we're just both an ordinary guy and girl who enjoy each other's company, and I don't want to overthink after this week.

"Remember when we were at my parent's beach house?" He kisses the top of my head.

I nod without looking at him and chuckle. "You stole my shells. You always love to steal something from me, Bash."

He laughs. "Oh, yeah?"

I hit his arm playfully. "Oh, yeah. That's why I wondered, I piled many shells, and they're not increasing. I searched that seashore, and I am sure I got plenty of them, but they're decreasing instead." I stare at him, and he's now grinning at me.

You're so bully!" I push him a little bit stronger, and he almost lost his balance. Good thing he has a quick reflex, and he's able to grab me.

Panic streaks through me. "Sorry, I push you hard."

He sits straight, bumping me with his body. "I still have one thing I wanna steal from you, Trinity," he mutters under his breath, and he sounds serious.

My brows raise. "And what's that, Bash? I don't think I still have something in me is worth stealing for."

He scans my face with a hint of sadness on his face. Instead of saying it that I know he has something in his head, he holds it instead. He plants a kiss on my nose, then he looks up at the stars again.

I want him to steal my heart, but I'm more willing to give it to him wholeheartedly because, after all these years, I realized that it was his, since like forever.

Now that we have intimate moments together, I'm sure that my heart belongs to him. But it scares the hell out of me because I know I'll never have his heart in return, and it's not that I'm expecting, but it just hurt like hell. How am I going to take it when he starts dating or sleeping around again?

I don't know what the hell I put myself into. This situation I am in right now will wreck me in the end. I gamble not only my feelings and my body, but also my heart, my life, and my relationship with the people who care for us.

I didn't realize my tears fall from my eyes only when I find myself sniffing.

Bash stiffens beside me. "Trinity, what's wrong? Why the hell are you crying?"

I wipe my tears away before I sit straight and face him. I give him a tight smile. "I haven't talked to mom and dad." He knows I am lying.

He snorts. "Do you think I believe you?"

I'm caught of guard.

"You just talked to them this morning. Whatever you're thinking right now, stop it," I can see the concerned look in his eyes, and I am going to ruin this moment if I won't pull myself together.

"I'm not thinking anything, Bash. We're a hundred miles away from our family," I say a little defensively.

He chuckles. "We did this before. Not far like this, but we went outside the state after our graduation in high school, and you've never been emotional. I know you well, Tri, and don't you dare lie to me."

He's right, and I'm always happy and safe when I'm with him. My parents trusted him so much, and they love him like a son even after what happened between us.

"I'm not lying to you." I stand up, walking down to the ground.

He looks pissed and rises from his seat too. "Do tell, Trinity. Why are you crying?"

I swallow the lump forming in my throat.

"Huh? Why are you crying? Don't you think it's easy for me to see you cry? For fucking sake, Trinity."

My eyes widen.

"Or is it about what's going on between us? Do you feel guilty about it?"

I shake my head. I open my mouth to say something, but he doesn't let me. He grabs my head and kisses me hard like a punishment, and he only stops to allow me to gasp for air.

"Don't you dare feel guilty, Trinity. What we are doing isn't a mistake. Your fiancé is dead months ago, I'm not happy to hear that you lost him, but you have to move on. We're two consenting adults. We love what we're doing, right?"

I pull myself away from him and steps backward.

"For fucking sake, say something!"

I startle at his voice. "Can you lower your voice down!" I start yelling.

"Then say something! Why the hell are you crying?" He looks furious. He's breathing heavily with his hands on his hips.

"Forget about it!" I fight back, striding to the concrete stairs. I remove my slippers that we bought from the market. I know he's following me. I stop in front of the fridge and grab a bottle of water. I feel a little relaxed when the cold water runs down my throat, but my heart is still pounding in my chest.

"You can't just ignore me." He calms down a bit. His voice is barely audible.

"You can't just force me to say something."

"Just answer me one question, Trinity."

I face him as I pressed my palms against the kitchen island. "What's the one question, Bash?"

"Do you want to stop this, what we started when we get back?" He looks hurt, but I can't risk my heart when all he wanted is to clear the tension between us. He never mentioned a relationship. All he wanted is to kiss me and have sex with me.

I nod glumly. "Yes," I whisper and look at him. I finally let go of a breath that I hold for long. My heart breaks because that's not what I want. I've been wanting more than just a friend with him, but that's all that he can give, and he's already generous of that.

"You're lying again."

"I'm not lying, Bash, and that's all I want." I glare at him before I walk away, hoping he believe what I said.

"I know you well, and I know you're lying to me. That's why you are walking away again." Bash follows me.

I stop, and we almost bump each other. "What do you want, Bash?"

"Be mine," he answers almost immediately.

My eyes grow bigger, and I snort. "Are you seriously insane?" I ask, seemingly surprised by my question.

"Yes, Trinity."

I shake my head. "No. That's not what you want. Now, who's lying?"

"Why not? Don't you like me?" He seems affected by my answer. His lips quiver. I know Bash is not used to accepting rejection, and I just did.

I'm not sure what he's after, though. I want more than just sex with him. "I like you, Bash. A lot, so much, and that's the problem."

His brows furrow in confusion. "I can't see any problem with liking me because I like you, too, Trinity."

I swallow hard. Hearing Bash admits that he likes me makes my heart flutter. "You just like the sex, Bash and--"

"I like you more than just sex, and you know that," he says in a shaky voice.

I shake my head again. "Yeah, and you're saying that when I'm vulnerable. Don't you think it's too unfair for me?" I look at him directly into his sad eyes.

"Just let me show you that I mean it, Trinity," He almost pleads.

"Bash."

He raises his hands for me to stop. "Fine, let's do it your way. Is this what you want? A week with me? Great!" That's it, he walks away from me. I stand still glued in my own place, utterly shocked.

Chapter 17

Rejection

BASH

Damn if it doesn't hurt being rejected. Being rejected by someone you love and you thought she has feelings for you. I feel so embarrassed, and I need to run away from her. I can't even face her.

I sit on a stone plate in front of a small pond. The wind is chilly, but I don't want to get inside the house, yet. I'm still upset. I frown and look down the water, and I see my reflection--a very sad Bash. I also see the crescent silver moon. I place my hand on my chin, leaning my elbows on my knees. I lift my chin up and just amazed at the night sky with uncountable twinkling stars above me.

I always think about her whenever I saw the sky full of stars. That's how fascinated I am with Trinity. Those freckles on her face are like stars twinkling on her face.

She's also like the sky--she seems near, yet she's so far. But even the sky is still reachable, right? I'm not losing hope, especially now that we shared precious moments.

"Bash!" My big sister squeals over the phone.

"Hey, Lizzy. Am I disturbing you?" I ask with uncertainty.

"Baby Bash, you sound so miserable. What's wrong?"

I sigh deeply, looking down the small pond again. "She doesn't want me, Lizzy. I thought she has feelings for me, but I was so wrong." I can't help but run my fingers through my hair out of frustration. My stomach twists at the thought of Trinity doesn't feel the same towards me.

"You're not wrong, Bash. K loves you."

My heartbeat skips a bit at Lizzy's words. I hope she's right, but I know that Trinity still loves her dead fiance.

I frown again. "Maybe she loves me, Lizzy, but nothing more than just a friend. I thought she has feelings for me. The way she looks at me, it seems there. The way she kisses me, the way we made--" I stop abruptly.

Lizzy squeals. "W-what? Say that again?"

I have to pull the phone away from my ear. I wince. Is Lizzy going to damage my eardrum?

“Bash!” I can still hear the faintest squeals of my sister even if the phone is away from my ear.

Lizzy knows my secrets. She’s the one who encourages me to make a move, and it’s been years that I kept my feelings from Trinity. Now that I man up that’s the time Trinity turns me down. My shoulders sag at the thought of it.

“Bash, are you still there? Young man, answer me, or I will come and let you talk to me face to face.”

I roll my eyes. “You don’t have to threaten me, Lizzy, and I’m way bigger and taller than you.” I snort and amused at her threat.

“So, what had gone wrong, Baby Bash?” She sounds serious again.

“I told her I want her to be my girlfriend.” My heart aches. I want Mom’s hug at this moment. I’ve never been felt so alone and helpless.

“Then what did she say?”

I purse my lips, sighing deeply. I open my mouth, but Lizzy cut me off.

“Did she say she’s not ready?”

I shake my head even it’s impossible for her to see me. “No, Lizzy. She said no.” I close my eyes shut, rubbing my face.

“Oh, Bash. I’m so sorry to hear that. Did she even tell you why?”

“No, Lizzy. And neither did I ask why. It’s cleared to me that I’m only her friend. Nothing more.”

“Bash, it’s not too late, and don’t lose hope. She must be shocked or surprised, or maybe you should wait until both of you come back. At that time, she can think clearly without sex involved.” She sighs.

“I will not give up on her, Lizzy. Not now, now that we shared something special. The sex was beyond amazing. I never felt like that before with anyone.” I hear Lizzy giggles.

I know it sounds awkward to tell my sister about my sex life, especially sex with our best friend, but I’m not ashamed because I love Trinity so much.

“I know it would be amazing, Bash. I knew it! I knew it!”

I chuckle. I know she’s maybe jumping for joy.

“Then what’s wrong?”

“I ask her to be mine,” I answer quickly.

The line goes silent. I check my phone screen, but it's not disconnected. "Lizzy? Are you still there?"

She groans louder and roars. "What did you just say, Sebastian Hughes IV?"

"I said be mine?" I answer, seem doubtful. "Why?"

"And why did you effing say that? Can't you even say properly, would you be my girlfriend? Or I wanna take you out on a proper date? Ugh! I want to strangle you right now."

"What's wrong—"

"Do you want her to be your pet, a belonging, or a thing, Bash? It's your Trinity we're talking about, dumbass!"

My brow furrows. "What do you mean by a pet, a thing, Lizzy?"

"Well, she's not an animal, or your property, idiot!"

I can feel her rolling her eyes. "I can't understand you, Lizzy!" I snap, and I'm getting annoyed.

"Because you're a dumb, baby brother!" she answers almost immediately.

"Talk to me, Lizzy. I need your help, pretty freaking bad."

"Apologize and tell her that you don't mean like that, and you want her to be your girlfriend. She's not an animal to you to be your pet, does she? or a thing for you to own, Bash, and she's my best friend. Snd if she's hurt you're hurting me too. Be a man, and act like a man, get that?"

"Yeah, I got it," I blow a breath.

What's wrong with be mine? Like, be mine? Be my girlfriend. Women are so annoying and weird. Sometimes.

The weather is getting chilly outside. I get inside the hanok. The floor squeaks every time I take a step. I walk directly to our bedroom. Only the lamp from the small nightstand gives light to the room.

Trinity is already sleeping facing her side. Shrugging all my clothes off to the floor, I leave just a pair of boxers. I lie down slowly beside her to avoid waking her up. I know she's grumpy when she wakes up without getting enough sleep.

I slip myself inside the blanket we're sharing, then I flick the lights off. She stirs, and I stiffen. I'm afraid that she might kick me out of the room for good, and I don't want to sleep outside alone while she's just a wall away.

"Bash, is that you?" she asks in a groggy voice.

"Nope. I'm a bogeyman." I bite my lower lip to hold my laugh.

She seems calm, or maybe she forgot what happened in the kitchen for a while. She turns to face me, draping her arm on my abdomen, then she snuggles her head under my arm. I slip my arm under her head for her to move closer to me.

"Wow. A smelling good bogeyman." She sniffs me.

I chuckle. "Well, it's your lucky night that you found a good smelling bogeyman, and it will only last before the sun rises in the morning."

"I'll take a little time I have before the sun will rise." She opens her eyes, lifting her gaze to me. She runs her fingertips on my neck to the back of my head, grabs my head closer to her, then she presses her lips against mine.

No more words. It's enough, and her actions say it all. I kiss her back immediately, sighing while our mouths move in sync. I shift myself to be on top of her. I'm instantly hard as I press against her thin pajama bottom. She grinds into me, and I can't help but grind back. My body vibrates, heats, and feels alive as we deepen our kiss into a wild, frenzy, and exploring.

I slide her shirt up. In an instant, she's bare-chested. She helps to slip off her PJ bottom before she slips her hand in my boxers. I shiver, and my muscles clench when she wraps her warm and soft hand on my hard and needy shaft.

"Tri, enough of that foreplay. I'm not so fun of it right now," I say, groaning when she grips it a little tighter.

"Now, who's eager?" She chuckles.

"Fine. It's me, and now stop teasing me. I want to be inside you, like right now." I say, thrusting my cock in her pussy. "Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!"

I am almost faint at the sensation. She's warm, slick, and wet. I throw my head back, and my eyes roll back while my mouth forms an O shape.

"Christ! So fucking good!" I lower my body and presses against hers. I kiss her passionately until we are running out of breath.

"Bash, move," she commands.

"Who's on top will lead," I answer quickly.

She rolls her eyes and glares at me. "Then I want on top."

Grinning, I wrap her tiny body with my arms and roll over for her to be on top. I will do everything to satisfy her, to make her happy, and to be with her.

"Now, do the deeds," I smirk. "Don't bite your lip. That's too hot, and I want you to come before I do," I warn while cupping and kneading her sweet tits.

"Morning!" Her smiling face fades and replaces with a blushed and wide eyes. I chuckle at her reaction.

"Don't you own a pair of jeans, Bash?" She asks while her eyes focus on my crotch.

"Then eyes up here, Trinity." I laugh.

She shakes her head, and I move closer to kiss her lips. "Where's my morning kiss, Tri?"

"Oh, shut up. And you just have it right now." She doesn't look at me and just engaged herself whisking eggs in the bowl.

"I'm the one who gave that to you and be a little generous to do the same thing."

She stops, looking at me to scan my face. "What's with the quirky mood in the morning? It's not I don't like it but—" she asks with a hint of amusement in her face.

"I want to apologize for snapping at you yesterday," I say slowly, and I'm suddenly feeling nervous. I hope Trinity will accept it.

"You already apologized last night," she replies casually, continues whisking.

My lips spread to a full grin. "So, are we good?"

"Aren't we?"

"I guess we are."

After breakfast, we both talked to our parents. Alex called that they're coming to Seoul for their Honeymoon. At least we can meet them once before our flight back to New York.

"Lizzy!" I say with full of excitement.

"I see now that the two of you made up," she answers cheerfully.

"Yep." I smile.

"Good. I'm happy for you, Bash. Don't mess this up. You're lucky if she gave you another chance."

"We're not really officially together, Lizzy, but I'm working on it," I say with a little dismay.

"What do you mean you're not officially together?"

"We're good, and I'm gonna ask her tonight. I'm planning to make dinner for us. Do you think it's a good idea?" I ask with hesitation.

"I think that's a good idea, Bash. You don't have excuses anymore. Just do it the right way."

"That's what I'm gonna do, Lizzy. How's Dean?"

"He's with Dad. I miss Mom and Dad. I was with Dean this weekend, so I missed our dinner. and since you're out of the country, Mom excused me for that."

"So, now you're using me to be excused for a family dinner?"

She laughs. "No, silly. But we'll have a family get together as soon as you and K are back. In the meantime, enjoy your stay there. I think you two need to explore each other a little bit. And it's been four years. Both of you have changed a lot."

"Jeez, Lizzy. Get your mind outta the gutter."

"Don't tell me you two didn't have makeup sex last night?" I can hear her teasing voice.

I roll my eyes, but I feel alive and free. "Oh, yeah?"

"I don't need a gory detail from you, Baby Bash, because I want K to tell me the full details."

"Lizzy, leave her alone, and I don't want to make things feel awkward between you and her and between me and Trinity."

"Why is that?" she asks.

My stomach twists. What if she won't agree to be my girlfriend? What if she will definitely end everything here? What if?

"That's because I'm sleeping with our best friend, Lizzy."

"Is that it? Is that all? What else did you tell her?"

Chapter 18

Be Mine

TRINITY

I wouldn't be surprised if Lizzy knows everything. I would be surprised if she doesn't have any ideas about what happened to us here. My face burns because we have a few days left before everything is over, and that terrifies me.

Be mine. That's what I don't understand, or maybe I understand a little bit. Would he be mine too? I overreacted, I know it because I don't expect him to say that and my stupid mind says no while my heart is beating wildly out of joy. But it's too late before I even realized what does it mean.

"What did you just say, Bash? Who are you talking to?" I demand an answer.

We agreed not to tell everyone about what happened between us this whole weekend. I just don't want things to get awkward between us.

He sighs deeply. "Tri, let me explain."

"Answer the damn question!" I demand it again.

His shoulders droop, ending the call and slipping both hands into his jeans pockets. "I was talking to Lizzy, okay. I—"

I raise my hand for him to stop, and his mouth slacks. I walk away, and I don't want to hear answers anymore. It's been clear that I can't trust him. Whatever his reasons for telling his sister, I don't want to know, and he just broke our deal. Simple things he can't keep secrets what more a complicated one.

I was planning on talking to him to accept the offer to be with him or whatever the Be Mine means to him. I love him to death, so much it hurts, but he just broke my trust.

I was going to apologize for yelling at him. I was planning on kissing him under the moonlight, but it's not going to happen anymore.

I sit on the stool of the modern kitchen of his friend's house. This is the only part of the house that has been renovated with modern design. I drink the cold bottled water I took from the fridge. Every time I feel upset, I always drink water instead of getting drunk.

I hear footsteps approaching and I know who's that without bothering looking. We're the only two persons left in this hanok.

“Trinity, please give me a chance to explain—”

I hold my hand up to stop him over again. I shift my body to face him. He looks so sad, and it breaks my heart to see him like this.

“C’ mere,” I tell him quietly.

He walks slowly but cautiously.

I raise my hands up to touch his broad chest. I spread my knees for him to get closer to me. Wrapping my arms around his waist, I press my chest on his well-defined abs. I plant a kiss on his chest, then I press my ear against his chest, inhaling his scent--it’s a mix of him and his cologne.

His heart is beating fast. I close my eyes to just listen to it. I feel his arms wrapping around me, hugging me tightly. I hear him sigh, placing his chin on top of my head.

“I love you, Trinity.”

I feel lightheaded. My eyes blurry and dump with tears. I don’t even realize that my body is shaking. I burst into cry. Either Bash means he loves me as a friend, I really don’t care right now. Hearing him says he loves is enough. Bash won’t just say if he doesn’t mean it. I know him well.

He hugs me tighter, even more, shushing me to stop crying. I sob, and I even hiccup. He says some sweet nothings. The last thing I heard those words when Dad was shot and admitted to the hospital. I’ve cried to sleep at night, and I was thankful Bash was there to make me sleep.

“I love you, Trinity, and I mean it. I love you as my best friend.”

I stiffen, and my heart stops. My breathing holds in my lungs, and my world vanishes.

“I love you more than that too. I love you since I learned how to love other than my family, and I didn’t realize that I love more than I’ve ever loved anyone. I was broken, too when I pushed you away, but I was so stubborn until it was already too late. I love you so much, Trinity.”

I release my breath slowly and make sure that I heard it right. I pull myself away from him, then I slowly lift my chin to look up at him. I meet the most beautiful gray eyes that sparkle with happiness. He smiles down at me, and a little smile enough for me to know that he means every word he said.

Without a word, I grab his head and kiss his lips with all my heart and soul. I kiss him as I missed years of our lives away from each other. He kisses me back as our lives depend on it. I press myself into him, but it’s not enough.

I moan when he slips his tongue easily into my mouth. I grab his ass to press against me while he makes himself busy touching my back, sliding his hands up until my shirt flies above my head. That's the only chance I can gasp for air. In an instant, his lips are back on mine.

"Wait." He pauses, and I slip off his shirt in second, then we start kissing again. His hands travel down from my bottom up to my waist, then to my exposed skin. He unlatches my bra while I'm busy with my own exploration until I reach the fly of his jeans.

"Wrap your legs around me," he says between pants, and I do without hesitation. In seconds, I'm sitting on top of the kitchen island.

"Are you sure we're gonna do it here?" I ask with a doubt.

"This is the best place." He smirks.

"But—"

"No more but. Now, lie down."

I stop.

"Tri, lie down," he commands.

I open my mouth, but I run out of words, or maybe my brain is processing something different. All I do is follow his order. In seconds, I'm naked on top of the cold granite kitchen Island.

"Sorry, mate." I hear him mutter under his breath.

"What?" I ask, raising my head to look at him, but my head falls back to the granite, and it almost hurts. His mouth is on my wet core.

"Oh, God!" I grunt in surprise, gripping both edges of the kitchen island.

"Your saying?"

"Nothing!"

He laughs in amusement as he grips my hips tightly to stop me from squirming. My toe curls and my hips thrust against his mouth and wanting for more. He continues eating me until my inner muscles clench, thrusting his tongue inside me.

I bite my bottom lip harder to avoid screaming. I shudder, rolling my eyes back, panting while releasing my intense orgasm.

I feel a hand slipping underneath me while I am still feeling like jelly. Without a single word, Bash carries me inside our room. He starts kissing me all over again, and I can even taste myself in him. We make love over and over again until I run out of energy and fall asleep in his arms.

I wake up and feel thirsty. Every muscle in my body aches, but instead of complaining, my lips spread to a smile.

Bash's arm drapes around my waist. I move away slowly. I lift my head when my eyes find the alarm clock on top of the small nightstand. It's still early to get up. I grab a robe, put it on, and tiptoe away to avoid waking him up.

After drinking almost the entire content of one liter bottled water, I tap my fingers on the countertop, and I suddenly remember that I have to call Lizzy. I walk and stop in front of the visiting room. I slide the door slowly, and I sit on one of the cushions then grab my phone. The battery is drained. Great. Why can't I even buy a decent phone? This phone is three years old already.

Crap!

I open Bash's MacBook Air placed beside my phone. I'll just send Lizzy an email and call her when we wake up later. Am I invading Bash's privacy? I second thought of using it. What if I'll see something that I might not like?

I take a deep breath then press the power on. Password protected. Of course, Trinity. What would you expect?

I type his name with his birthday; wrong. My name and my birthday; wrong. I roll my eyes. Did I expect that? I giggle. I type 123456, and it works. I cover my mouth, laughing silently.

"Seriously, Bash?" I say under my breath.

I click the Safari browser to avoid scanning his email. My eyes widen to see that he used this browser to open his email, but what shocked me most is the content of the email. My hands cover my mouth instantly. My tears fall down my face like a stream.

I can't believe I just believe in him. He fooled me, and worse, I fooled myself to trust him. He betrayed me.

I stand up with wobbled knees. I almost fall back on my butt. I shake my head repeatedly, still finding it hard to wrap my head around it.

I tiptoe to the other room, grab my suitcases, and zip them open. I pull out all of my clothes and toss them into the suitcases messily.

I'm still crying. I zip them close with blurry eyes then carry them out to the front porch.

I wash my face to remove the stain of tears. Then I tie my hair into a high bun. I shrug off the robe and wear a shirt and jeans before I slip on my flats.

After loading my bags on the car compartment, I start the car after securing my seatbelt and drive away without looking back at the hanok. This is supposed to be the best part of my life, but it ended too soon.

So, that was his plan? He can just say it in front of my face without grabbing me all the way here and fuck me to get what he wants. He lied to me and used me. I was such a fool to believe that he feels something for me.

When will you learn not to trust him again, huh, Trinity?

He always comes to me when I'm so vulnerable, and when I can't say no. He is my weakness, and he used it. He played me well.

Kudos, Sebastian Hughes IV! Kudos!

I buy a ticket back to the States as soon as I arrive at Incheon International Airport. Thank God, there is a flight that will depart in less than six hours. I think I still have a little luck left in my life.

But I'm not going back to New York this time.

As always, a part of me likes to sleep throughout the flight even the babies cry their lungs out loud. Only this time, nobody wakes me up to make a coffee for me, and no smile and kisses and what's depressing is, there's no Bash.

I swallow the lump forming in my throat. My stomach lurches. I remember how Bash said he loves me, in every touched of his lips, of his skin on me, in every thrust he made, in every breath, and in every smile.

I wipe my tears and sniff.

I need to hail a cab in the Logan International Airport when I arrived. My phone is still uncharged. My parents don't have any idea that I'm coming, and I prepare myself for their interrogation. I know my parents won't let it go until they're satisfied with my answers. As an HR and a former agent, that's what they used to do.

I'm already pushing a cart when someone calls my name.

Crap! I stop, groan, and curse under my breath.

Chapter 19

Stop

TRINITY

I turn my head to a man around my age in a charcoal grey suit. I know exactly who he is, but the question is, what he wants from me? This man has the face of a magazine cover model with jet black hair, piercing blue eyes, chiseled jaw with a five o'clock shadow.

He smiles as he saunters towards me with his hands in his pants pockets.

"I thought it was you," he says like we've known each other.

My brows creased. "Excuse me?" I ask seemingly surprised with my own question.

"Kiara Mallory, right? I'm Sean." His confident smile widens, and he looks good closer.

Screw that looks!

"Yeah, and what can I do for you, Mr. Rexwell?" I know him, his company, and he's just like Bash, the future CEO of Rexwell; the biggest and number one rival of Hughes Industries.

"Do you always speak like that to the people who want nothing but being nice to you?" He seems amused by my talk.

I release an exasperating breath. "Look, Sean. I'm kinda in a hurry right now, and I'm sorry for being rude to you, but I really have to go." I offer him a timid smile and start pushing my cart out of the sliding door of the airport.

"Wait, Kiara!"

I groan louder and stop to face him again, raising my brows without a word.

"Do you have someone waiting for you here?"

I'm almost taken aback by his question.

My heart is still crashing in my chest. I remember why I'm here in Boston. I shake my head and push my cart again.

"Good. My car is already in the parking area," he says like we're close friends.

I stop when he helps me pushing my cart. "What are you doing?" I ask harshly, glaring at him.

His mouth gapes and looks embarrassed. He clears his throat. "Let me send you since no one is waiting to fetch you. That's all."

"No, thank you, Sean. I can manage from here," I grab his arm to release from the cart handle.

"I don't bite, Kiara. I know how you're close to the Hughes and King, but I'm not talking about business here with you. and I have no other intentions than just be friends with you."

I snort. "Why now, Sean? And why do I have to believe you? And how did you know me?"

"Let me prove then."

I bark out laughing that makes some people around stop and look at our direction. "We can't be friends, and I don't know if I can even believe what you've just said."

"Try me for you to find out."

I take a breath. "Look, Sean. Whatever you have in your mind right now, it's not happening. I know you have this ulterior motive in you. You won't just come to me without something behind all these." I walk away from him, pushing my cart faster as I can.

"Is it because of Bash?" I hear him ask, making me stop to halt. I purse my lips harder to avoid crying in front of this man.

I shake my head.

"Then just let me send you home, Kiara."

I blow my breath out of annoyance. "Fine, but because I don't have a cab, and I can't call my parents. My phone is dead."

His smile looks genuine, but it can be deceiving.

We sit in the backseat of his white Rolls Royce sedan after his driver places my two suitcases at the compartment.

I shouldn't be here in Boston., and I should be with Bash right now if he didn't fool me. How can I go back to New York when I don't have anything left in there? I don't think I can ever face my friends again.

"So, where did you travel?" Sean asks. His deep baritone voice pulls me out of my thoughts.

I shift my gaze from the window to Sean. I breathe deeply, and his scents assault my nostril. He smells of musk and mint.

"I just came from Seoul," I say casually and hope he won't pry.

“Hmm, South Korea. What were you doing there all by yourself?”

Damn it if he isn't nosy.

“I went for a business trip,” I answer shortly.

He nods. His lips curve into a smile.

“I'm not going there if that's what you're thinking. I know how to keep my words with no business talks.”

I roll my eyes. “Good. Because you're not gonna get another answer after that.”

He laughs out loud. I forget the thought of Bash for a while, but my stomach twists sickly when we're near my parents' house. They don't have any idea why I am here.

“I'm serious, Kiara.”

My head snaps to his direction. He's looking at the window and watching the familiar surrounding of parents' neighborhoods.

My dad is from Boston but my mom is from New York. After they got married, Dad had moved to New York for good. When the Hughes Industries planned to open an office branch in Boston, Mom suggested to Dad to move in here, then Dad got his job at White Security Agency.

“Serious about what, Sean?”

“I wanna be your friend.” He scans my face.

I chuckle. “Since when the notorious Sean Rexwell is running out of friends?” I ask him sarcastically.

“I still have friends, but I want to count you in.”

I roll my eyes and wince internally at the thought of being his friend. I guess my loyalty still lies with Hughes. “You know I'm not from here, right? I'm only here to visit my parents.”

“I visit New York on a regular basis, Kiara. Why do your parents don't fetch you if they know you're visiting?”

“Why do you ask too much?” I ask a little bit aggressively.

“Hey. Calm down. I'm just asking,” H's a little bit alarm.

“I swear it's none of my business. I'm just glad that I saw you there at the airport.” He fishes something from his jacket pocket.

"I'll be here for the whole week. Call me if you need anything, and I'd love to tour you around." He holds out his business card.

I chuckle. "I can't believe the famous playboy still has a business card in his suit."

He laughs again, shaking his head in amusement. "You're funny, you know that."

My face falls as I remember why I'm here.

"I'm sorry if I trigger something, Kiara."

I shake my head. "You didn't do anything, Sean. Thank you so much for sending me home."

He nods, smiling. "My pleasure, and don't forget to call, okay? I will not get out, and I'm afraid your parents won't be pleased to see me here," he says, half-laughing.

I smile tightly at him before I get out of the car. His driver is already placing my suitcases in front of my parents' house door.

My mom opens for me, and she doesn't look surprised at all. This is not good.

"Hey, mom. No hug for your little girl?" I ask half-guilty.

"Shouldn't you be in Korea right now, K?" She asks, opening the door wider for me to get in.

I saunter to get inside without bothering the things I left in front of the door.

My lips start trembling, and I can't say a word anymore. My tears fall like a stream. My body shakes, and I just burst out crying.

"Oh, sweetheart. I'm so sorry, K." Mom's sweet words make me cry even more.

I hug her tighter, grabbing her shirt on her back.

"I'm so sorry. It's alright, sweetheart. Couples always get into a fight."

My body freezes, and I gasp. My heart crashes in my ribcage.

I pull myself away from mom, wipe the tears off my face, and blink the blurry from my eyes.

"What do you know, mom?"

She takes a deep breath, placing her hands on her tiny hips. I got my slender body from mom, and of course, my hair.

"Bash called here like every minute, and he sounds so miserable, K. How could you leave him alone there?"

My mouth hangs. Is she defending him now? Of course, she is and always.

"You don't know anything, mom! H-he--" My shoulders shake, and I can't even think of what he did to me, to my career. Bash is always selfish.

"He knows that you saw the email he sent to his dad, K. And you should've asked him and not jump to conclusions. You're always impulsive, and it always ended pretty bad. Now he's like crazy searching for a private jet to charter, and with the typhoon in Asia is approaching, he can't find even an empty leg," Mom explains.

"Then he should've told me before he fired me, mom. But what he did is so cruel, and I thought he cares for me. He fooled me. He played me!" I raise my voice a little bit.

"And that's what you think? That he fired you? Did you even read the email, K? You accused him! He sent me a copy to prove that you might not understand what you saw, K! And Oh, my God! He actually confessed!" My mom laughs her ass out in front of me with a little exaggeration.

I wipe my tears. "Well, I'm not going to New York. I'm staying here, mom," I stubbornly reply.

"You will go back there. That's where you belong, and I don't wanna discuss this with you. Your dad is furious with what you did. Be thankful your dad is at his office right now." She shoots me a glare.

"Can I stay here for a while?" I ask with uncertainty.

"Sure, and when did I kick my daughter's out?" Finally, she gives me a quick hug. "Seriously, K. Talk to Bash, and what happened with your phone? It might explode with his calls and messages. Bash is making me crazy these few hours," Mom says, laughing.

"He's on his flight back. I heard from your dad that they were able to find him a charter jet, but he was thinking to get a commercial flight, and it's way bigger than the jet they found for him, but I've no idea after that."

I nod glumly.

"He's coming to get you," Mom walks away.

"W-what?" My eyes grow wide.

She laughs as she walks to our dining room.

I quicken my pace to follow her. "Mom! What do you mean he's coming to get me?" My heart is frantic. I'm not ready to face him.

"He knows your flight and that you're not going back to New York," she replies casually.

"And how did he know?"

“Your dad works is to what? Now don’t ask too many questions. You and Bash are driving me insane.”

“Dad told him?” I groan louder. I can’t believe Dad.

“Yes, sweetheart.”

I walk away back to the living room, frowning. I slump my exhausted body to the plush couch and blow a breath with frustration.

I can’t escape, can I?

I grab the TV remote control on the coffee table, press the power button on, and stretch my lower limbs that have been numb for the entire fourteen-hour flight.

The News flash from the global news station, making me queasy. All of a sudden, Bash’s face flashes on the TV screen. My heart stops, and my breathing holds in my lungs.

“A confirmation from the South Korean Aviation Authority that the private jet chartered by an Elite, Businessman and Hughes Industries heir Bash Hughes has crashed not far from the Incheon International Airport less than an hour ago. The cause of the unfortunate event is still unclear--”

My world stops.

“Mom!”

Chapter 20

Bad News

BASH

When the captain announces that we're departing soon, I finally able to breathe, but my heart is still crashing inside me. I can't believe Trinity left me behind.

Trinity is always impulsive. I just wish she confronted me first before she decided drastically. I thought last night was perfect—beyond imaginable, and I thought, I've proven something to her. Clearly, her anger took over her.

It was my fault, I admit it. I shouldn't have decided it by myself, but I was just thinking about her. It may sound selfish, but I really did it for her own good.

"For fuck sake, Bash! Calm down! It's not the end of the world, and we can still find her. I'll find her."
Edmund's angry tone makes me angrier.

The hanok completely wrecked. Alex will kick my ass, but I don't have time to think about his rant right now, and I will deal with it later to fix my mess.

I've never been angrier in my entire life than today, even when I found out she was not coming with me to study abroad.

"How? Tell me, Edmund? Does she even want to be found? Does she know anyone in this country?" I yell back out of frustration, and I feel so helpless.

"She went to the airport, Bash. She's a smart woman to wander around."

"I know, she is," I mutter under my breath.

"What really happened between you two, Bash? You never contacted me. So, I thought everything went well," he asks with a fatherly tone.

I glare at him. "Why would I tell you, you nosy buffer?"

"Because I wanna help, dumbass!"

"Stop! Stop making me angrier than I already am, Edmund!" I yell again, but this former Marine corps never budges and not even flinch.

"I can see that," he says coolly with a smirk on his face.

I didn't answer again because I know I screwed up. So fucking screwed!

He helps me pack my things up silently. Actually, he does most of it. I can't even think and see straight.

"Call someone to fix these up." I finally talk and gesture to the wreck I made earlier.

"Worry about these later, Bash. Just relax, and take it easy."

My head snaps. "Relax? How can I fucking relax when I don't know where Trinity is? She doesn't speak Hangul, and what if she will trust someone, then they're going to hurt her? For fuck sake, how can I even breathe when I know she's not safe?" I want to cry out loud. I shake my head and lean my back against the wall. Squeezing my eyes shut, I try to take deep breaths.

There is nothing left sane in me. I stomp out of the hanok towards the black sedan. I look at the place one last time. This should've been the best place for us. We made one of our best memories in here.

"She took the car, and I'm sure she drove all the way to the airport."

I nod at Edmund as I carry my things.

"Just a piece of advice, Bash."

"I don't need any!" I snap.

He chuckles. Seriously, this man is making me more insane than Trinity did. "Fine, we got chartered jet, but I don't feel that thing will fly us back safe. They're older than my grandma."

Wow! And he can even joke around. Unbelievable.

"Find us anything, Edmund. Contact somebody, even a cargo or a fighter jet. I don't fucking care!" I say through gritted teeth.

"I think that's your job, young man. Since you don't have an assistant, I think you should do it by yourself." He snorts.

I narrow my eyes at him. He starts the ignition of the car. "You're unbelievable!"

"And you are unbelievable!" he responds after pulling away from the curb. "Bash, don't worry, she's in the airport taking a flight to Boston."

My head turns quickly to his side. "And you fucking know about it all this time?"

He raises his brow. "Oh, yeah?" Edmund replies, waggling his brows to annoy me.

I should have hired a more serious driver and a bodyguard. I don't even need one actually, but Dad is Dad. He's always been paranoid when it comes to our safety. An overprotective father is an understatement.

"I contacted the agency and boom! Her fight departed hours ago, and you might still be snoring when she left."

I woke up almost midday.

That's how I slept soundly after our amazing sex last night. We can't just keep our hands off of each other, and that was one of the best nights I've ever had.

My shoulders sag and say in dismay, "She'll go to her parents."

"You should learn to respect women's feelings, Bash."

"Do you think I don't respect Trinity?" I ask in disbelief.

"You do respect her, but I doubt if you ever consider her feelings."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said, defending myself.

"Then, don't decide for them."

"For them?"

"It's my job to keep you safe, and I knew many things about you."

I clench my jaw, and I don't want to hear any of this. "Whatever! But I'm glad Tri decided to go to Boston," I say dismissively.

I've been calling her mom like every ten minutes. I even sent her a copy of the email I sent to Dad's office. I talked to her Dad, too, and that man just kept on laughing at me.

"Hey, you've been silent." Edmund nudges my elbow.

"Because I don't wanna hear your annoying advice."

"But I know you took them well."

I shake my head. He places the headset on his ears and starts watching the 90's movie on the aircraft screen.

I tap my fingers on my lap. I feel nervous, and my mind is always with her at the same time. Edmund drives smoothly while listening to the Country song on the radio. What's with this man and his music? A frustrated singer? I chuckle, and that gets his attention.

"It will take forty-five minutes to get to Mallory's house. That's why I need some music." I guess he figures out why I chuckle.

"I didn't say anything, Edmund. Just get me the hell out of here, and I want to see Trinity." Seriously, the airport road is cramming. The honking of vehicles irritates me, and my temples start aching.

"I think there is an accident ahead, Bash. Calm your horses down," he says, and that confirms when I hear an ambulance siren.

"Seriously? When I'm in a hurry?" I retort. My eyes scan the lines of vehicles around us.

"We're already in Boston. Safe and sound," he retorts back.

I groan when my phone vibrates in my jeans pocket. "Mom, w-what?" My eyes widen, and I think my world just stops. She just continues crying, and I can't understand a word. "Mom, mom, mom, please..." I rub my face with my free hand. "I swear, I didn't understand anything. Just calm down." My brows furrow. Why the hell is she crying?

"Son, I-I thought I lose you. We thought we lose you, baby. My baby... Oh, god. Thank god, you're alive." I can hear her sobbing and a faint voice of Dad and Lizzy in the background.

"What do you mean you thought you lose me, mom? You'll not gonna lose me, and please stop crying." My heart bleeds for her, and I hate seeing or listening to her cry.

"Son, it's your dad. We thought you flew with the chartered jet, Bash. Haven't you heard the news yet? When did you land? Or are you still in Seoul? And where is Edmund?" Dad sounds terrified.

"Dad, we flew by commercial flight. Edmund suggested that the chartered jet is older than his grandma. We landed minutes ago safe and sound, and now we're stuck in traffic at the airport road. What news, dad?" I ask curiously.

"The chartered jet crashed a few minutes after the take-off. According to the initial report of the aviation police, it caused by engine trouble. Thank God, you're okay, son. Your mom almost collapsed when she heard the news. Talk to your sister."

"Fuck." My hand flew to my head, gripping my hair tighter. I can't believe what I've just heard.

"Hey, baby Bash. You almost killed us here." I hear Lizzy's voice, and she sounds crying too.

"Well, bad news because I'm still alive, big sis," I respond half-laughing. I hear her laugh too.

"You! Silly, silly boy, please come home, and I wanna hug you. We almost lose you, brother," she says, sniffing.

"Oh, stop the drama already, and I wanna hug you all too. Tell everyone that I'm alive and let the PR people clear the news. Shit! Shit! Shit! Fuck!" I curse out even my family is listening. "It's all over the news?" I ask quickly. Panic strikes me like lightning.

"Yes, and your name was on the manifest, and stop swearing, young man!" Dad angry voice pierces over the phone.

"My apology. I need to call Trinity. She might have watched the news. Call you later guys, love you!" I hang up and dial her number.

"Fuck! Just fuck!" I groan louder. Edmund turns the local radio on. I hear my name over the local news repeatedly mentioned by the radio announcer.

"Turn off that fucking radio! Why did they lie that I'm dead? Didn't they check that my name was on the commercial flight, too?" I can hear my heavy breathing and my frantic heartbeat. "Can't we even fucking move from here?" I grit my teeth stronger.

"Bash, have a little mercy. Think about the family of the injured person in that accident. And we're lucky that we're still alive."

My mouth gapes. I'm such an insensitive jerk sometimes. "I'm sorry. I can't contact Trinity. Her phone is still closed." I slump my back to the seat in frustration. Why does my life have to be this way?

"Call her home number, her mom, or her dad and tell them you're still alive. I know how you feel, man."

My brow raises. "Oh, you do now?" I ask sarcastically.

"Yeah," he answers quietly, taking a huge breath. "My family. My wife was six months pregnant. My little girl was still two and a half years at that time when I was deployed. We were ambushed by the bandits. Half of my brothers were dead on the spot. I was wounded too. Do you know how I felt at that time? I wanted to fucking help, but I, myself, couldn't do anything because I was wounded too, and I couldn't even help myself. That's the reason why I always listen to music. Because that horrific day is still haunting me. Music makes me calm a little bit."

I feel guilty so fucking much. I swallow hard the bitter taste that rises in my throat. "I'm sorry, Edmund. I never thought of that."

He grips my shoulder. "It's alright, Bash. Sometimes you're an ass, but I know you're not like some rich kids out there. You're far better than them."

I nod and unable to form a word. The vehicles start moving, and the traffic lessens a bit. I feel relieved.

Edmund parks the car in front of Mallory's two-story red brick house. A dark blue car parked in front. I think that's her mom's. I hop out immediately after Edmund kills the engine. The silence is deafening around the neighborhood, and I don't hear anything even a single cricket.

It's fifteen minutes past three in the morning according to the time on my wristwatch. I walk to the front and knock harder. My heart has never been calm even a bit, and all I want is to see, feel, and tell Trinity how lucky I am to be alive.

Please, God help me.

Chapter 21

Confessions

BASH

The door swings open. My eyes land to the redhead old version of Trinity. She looks stressed, but she sees me. Her eyes widen, and her contorted face lights up like a girl staring at the Christmas tree.

Aunt Zoey launches herself to me and hugs me tightly. I always call her aunt even we aren't blood-related since Trinity and I grew up together.

"Thank God you're safe! No one answered my calls when I tried to ask if the news was true," she says after pulling herself away. She wipes her tears on her face then gives me a peck on my cheek. "Please come in, Bash." She opens the door wider.

I hear Edmund greet Aunt Zoey from my back.

"Where is Trinity?" I immediately ask when I let my eyes scan the entire living room. Panic swims in the pit of my stomach when I can't find her.

"Trinity!" I start shouting while I quicken my pace to search for her. I don't wait for her mother to answer my question.

I feel my world is swinging when I can't still find her. I walk to the kitchen where she always there drinking water when she was upset. Nothing really changed to this very same kitchen where we used to spend while waiting for the chocolate chip cookies to bake.

I always came here with Trinity during winter break after visiting my grandparents. This house served as a vacation home for her since her parents were still staying in New York until Trinity started her high school.

Her parents moved back here when Dad finally agreed to let them work at the Boston branch. I press my hands to the beige colored countertop. We have so many memories here, mostly happy ones.

"Bash!" My body freezes when I hear a familiar voice—a voice that makes me feel love, that makes my heartbeat goes frantic, and the voice that screams and moans my name.

I swallow hard and slowly turns myself to face her, but before I can finally face Trinity, I'm smashed and stumble back due to the strong impact of her body against me.

I feel alive again. Honestly, it feels like all the exhaustions, frustrations, tensions, and aches vanish like a strong blow of wind. I finally breathe freely without a squeezing pain in every breath I take.

Her cry pulls me back out of thoughts. I don't even notice her body clings on me like a cling wrap, her legs wrap around my waist, her face pressed against my shoulder, and her arms wrapped tightly around my neck.

My arms already wrapped around her tiny body. She sounds like crying for a long time--she's not only sobbing with a hiccup, but she's also mumbling something foreign to me.

"Hush, Trinity. Stop crying already," I say to make her calm, but she cries even more. I rub her back then run my fingers on her messy red hair.

"Baby, stop crying. I'm here now, please?"

She shakes her head on my shoulder. I look around, but I can't see anyone. "Tri, are you crying because you thought I'm dead? Or are you crying because you feel guilty for leaving me alone there in South Korea?" I ask with a teasing tone.

She tightens her wrap on my neck.

I move near the countertop. "Tri, please say something?" I place her little ass on the countertop, then she loosens herself around me. I look at her, and she looks so messy with uncombed hair, tears running down her face, puffy eyes, and red nose, but what catches my attention is her red lips.

I swipe away the hair that falls on her face. She doesn't say anything yet, just gripping my shirt with her both hands like holding her life into it, but she's still crying.

I wipe her tears with my thumbs, and I can't wait any longer. I plant a kiss on her forehead after cupping her face. I move closer, leaning my forehead against hers, inhaling the smell of Trinity that I missed for almost a day.

This day is worse than hell, but I finally release the breath that I hold for so long. I press my lips on hers, kissing her harder, and it feels like years of being apart from her. I rake my fingers through her hair as I hold her head to deepen my kiss.

She kisses me back—kisses me harder, as if she lets me feel everything; the longingness, the fear of losing me, the love she has for me, the regrets, and her apology. She doesn't have to say a word. I love her so much to keep my anger for her. It's all gone.

"Don't leave me again, Tri. What if I did die in that tragic crash? What would you do?" I ask, panting and tracing sweet kisses on her lips, eyes nose, forehead, cheeks, and back to her lips again.

"I'm so sorry," she answers with a shaky voice.

"I know," I reply almost immediately.

"You do?" she asks, and finally looks at me in the eye. There's still a hint of despair but mostly flood with happiness.

I nod slowly and smile. "The launch says it all, and that kisses too."

She smiles timidly, cups my face with her cold and trembling hands. She caresses my cheeks with her thumbs. "Can I ask something?"

Nodding, I smile. "Of course, Tri." I feel suddenly nervous about her question. What if I won't like it?

"The offer, does it still stand?" She looks at me in the eye.

My brows furrow. "The offer?" I pretend I don't know what she's talking about.

"Yeah," she replies quietly.

"Which offer?" I ask again, raising my brows quizzically.

"Tri, I really have no idea what you're asking. Maybe because I've been in hell these past hours, and my brain still foggy."

She feels nervous, biting her lip. "Um, because we agreed on a, um." She blows a breath that makes the strand of her hair flies away from her face.

A smirk spreads from my lips. "Oh, a week in Korea? Is that what you're asking?" I ask, and she looks seemingly surprised.

"Well, we're not in Korea anymore, so," I look at her reaction, and she looks disappointed. "That, it ended there too," I continue slowly, and that's when I notice a hint of light pink blossoms on her cheeks.

Is she embarrassed? She nods slowly with dismay plastered all over her face.

"You said you want a week. Just a week and the deal is off when we're back from South Korea, or did I understand it wrong?" I continue playing dumb.

"Yeah, you're right." She bites her bottom lip.

I nod in agreement.

What the hell is she thinking? That I'll let her go after giving my soul to her? After telling her how I feel, does she really think it's easy to confess how I feel for her all these years? Sometimes she's just so dumb.

“Aren’t you going to ask about the email?”

She shakes her head, and that’s when her tears roll down her cheeks.

Jesus! “Don’t cry, please?” I beg as I wipe her tears.

“Am I always like this? I always ended up broken? I never get what I wanted.” She pauses, sniffs, and plays with her fingers while looking down at her hands on her lap.

Shit! She’s killing me.

“I never get your attention since we’re kids. I always wanted to draw and paint, but when you left, I stopped because I thought what was the point when my only inspiration was gone too. I also wanted to prove to myself that I could solve numbers without you.”

I stand still at what she’s revealing in front of me.

“Now, it’s too late, and I’m never going to have you,” she finishes with a shrug.

“You know what I felt when I called you, and you’re nowhere to find? I thought my world stop, and I couldn’t function. I felt the world fell apart. I lost my strength like I lost everything, and you are my strength, Trinity.” I pause, breathing deeply. “The last thing I know is I’m already in my flight back because I need to see you. I need to explain why, and that I need you in my life. It’s not easy to open your soul to someone who you thought she loves you back. It’s not easy, but I’ve never lost hope when it comes to you. It’s been years, Trinity, that I never made a move. After all, I thought you don’t like me because I was dating girls, and I’m a bully. So, I just love you by looking at you, and loving my best friend was already hard. I dated because I wanted you to notice me and tell me to stop dating and date you instead. Then, you left me alone. I thought we could go to college together and that was my plan because I was planning to ask you on a date now that we were both eighteen at that time and if we were far from our parents, we could live our lives together and started together as a couple.”

She listens carefully, and I can see the shock on her face.

“I always love you, even if you would never love me back. Nothing’s gonna change that. You will always be my first love and my only love, Trinity.” I take a deep breath when my eyes sting and blur. “If I died last night, I would regret that forever for not telling you, but half of it was I’m glad that I love you until the day I die, and you are the last person I think of.”

She shakes to cry, and this time I feel a tear falls from my eye. She sees it, and she looks even surprised. She throws herself to me. “I love you, Bash, even how many times you made me cry every night, even how many times you bashed me, I still love you.”

“God.” I release a sigh—a sigh of contentment and relief.

I feel so exhausted after our confessions. After breakfast, Aunt Zoey prepared for us. I excused myself to take a rest. Edmund already arranged for the hotel. It was not a problem because the King Hotel is one of the five-star hotels here in Boston. Her dad came to join our breakfast since he was busy with a new case, and he didn't share much because of the confidentiality of classified my ass as he called it.

I yawn for the third time while Edmund is busy sharing his funny moments back at South Korea during he's so-called Bash's breakdown at the hanok. The Mallorys are very much entertained by his presence, I must say.

I roll my tired eyes when he mentions I kissed Trinity's shirt that she might forget to slip in her bag because that's not true.

"Bash, you can stay here, and we still have a room for you." I hear Aunt Zoey says.

"I've cost you enough trouble already." I shake my head and answer politely.

She rolls her eyes. "You're always welcome to give us troubles."

I laugh at her. "Well, you're the first person who wants me to give you troubles."

Trinity grabs my hand and stands up. "Get up, and you need to freshen up," She says, sniffing me.

My brows furrow. "I don't smell bad, do I?"

Uncle Logan groans. "Let Bash take a rest, but this is not a five-star suite. No room service and the walls aren't too thick."

My face burns. "My parents taught me well," I retort with amusement as I walk away with Trinity.

"I didn't say anything!" Her dad yells when we are both near the stairs.

After taking a shower and changing into sweatpants and plain blue shirt, I sit on the bed in the room that Mallory's offered me.

I walk toward Trinity's room. The very same room where we almost kissed years ago. That was the first time I can't anymore hold my feelings toward her, and maybe missing her for a week during our Christmas vacation did that.

"Tri?" I knock softly.

"No sex in my house, Hughes!" I hear her dad's voice instead. I groan, facing him who's ready to go to work.

"I'm not gonna do that here, Mallory," I say to emphasize the here part.

He smirks, shaking his head. "I think she's in the shower. I bet her door is open," he replies, walking down the stairs.

I open the door slowly, and it squeaks a little. Her room has changed—the color from bed to the small walk-in closet and those sketches of me are not on the walls anymore.

I sit on the small chair of her white dresser, and that's when I notice a black rectangular card is on top of it. I grab the business card scribed with golden sans letters. My blood boils when my eyes scan the name written in bold.

SEAN FUCKING REXWELL

Chapter 22

Anger

BASH

I walk out of her bedroom, taking the business card with me. I know Trinity is still in the shower, but I can't wait for her to be done.

Anger rises through my head. Why does she have a business card of that motherfucker? Sean Rexwell is not only my number one enemy but our business rival too.

Blowing a shaky breath, I stomp down the stairs after changing into a white button-down shirt and pants. I notice Edmund is already waiting for me in the living room. The card is crumpled in my fist.

"I thought you need a rest, Bash." He catches my arm before I can walk out the door.

"I don't need a rest," I say dismissively.

"Well, I need a rest."

I narrow my eyes at him. "You don't need any. We won't stay out long. I just need to meet someone."

He shakes his head, giving me disapproval looked. "I don't think I like your plan, boy."

"Don't dare to disagree with me, Edmund, and don't call me a boy, or I will let you know who the boy really is!" I raise my voice at him even he doesn't have to do anything with my anger.

He doesn't look affected in any way. "Where are you going?"

My hand hangs in the air when I hear Trinity's voice. I groan internally.

I turn around to face her. "I thought you're getting rest, Tri." I smile and walk to meet her halfway.

She wraps her arms around my waist, resting her head on my chest. I plant my chin on top of her head. She smells good—a hint of mint and fruity.

"You can join with us. If you want to."

She lifts her chin to look at me. "I thought you two have an important person to meet," she says with a little pout, and I think she looks cute.

"Nothing's more important than to be with you. I was just thinking of going out for a while." I'm not good at lying, and it makes me feel guilty doing it to her.

"You still have strength left? I guess I need a little rest. I'll stay, but be here before dinner, okay?"

I nod, looking down at her lips. I lower my head closer to her, capturing her lips that taste minty. She kisses me back instantly, and I can kiss her for hours, but I must keep my word to her dad, and I can't just disrespect him in his own house.

I pull my lips a little just to reply here. "I'll be here before dinner. I love you."

"I love you too. Now, go. Edmund is already waiting. He might think we have a quickie at the back of this door."

I grin. "That's an interesting suggestion."

She lightly slaps my arm. "I'm not suggesting."

"Okay, but I might take a suite so that we can stay there."

"No way. I miss my parents." She shoots me a glare.

I chuckle. "But you're not gonna stay here 24/7, right? I need you too, Tri."

She grabs the doorknob, opening the door wider. "Take care, Baby Bash."

I can't help but shake my head. "You're kicking me out."

She pushes me back out of the door. "I want you to come back early, silly," she replies, laughing.

"Tri, you'll be here alone. Don't go anywhere until I come back."

"Just go, Bash, and I need to get some sleep." She starts yawning.

"Bye, Tri,"

"Sir, I told you we have regulations to follow, and we can't just let you get in there without an appointment."

I stride my way to the elevator of Rexwell Building, ignoring the petite receptionist.

She told me minutes ago that I don't have an appointment, but I don't care, and I need to talk to that arse. Whatever his grudge against me, he shouldn't have included Trinity to whatever he is planning.

His secretary approaches as soon as I enter the 19th floor where he used this whole floor as his office.

“What can I do for you, Mr.?” She uses her seductive voice that does not affect me. I’ve met people like her, and I’m used to women that batted their lashes and show off their cleavage on me.

“It’s Hughes. Where is Rexwell?” I answer with a deep and intimating tone. She looks she can pee in her very tight mini skirt now that I’m a Hughes in Rexwell building.

“Um, Mr. Hughes?”

I can see that she doesn’t expect me to be here. “Any problem with me being here? I don’t think they made a regulation banning Hughes to visit their properties, or did I miss that memo?” I ask sarcastically, slipping my hands into my pockets.

“Um, no sir, but Mr. Rexwell is not around at this moment. He didn’t mention where he went, but I guess he’s on his way to return a friend’s belonging that is left in his car.”

My eyes widen. I turn away from her quickly, pressing the elevator button.

“Miss?” I face her again, and she looks surprised.

“Yes?”

“He should fire you for sharing such information like that. If he ever does, send a resume to my office. And thank you!” I enter the elevator.

Her mouth hangs open and doesn’t blink until the door slides close between us.

I sigh in exasperation as we ride back to Mallory’s. What is he trying to play? Uncertainties fill in my brain. Sean has always been my number one enemy since high school. He used to sleep around with anyone wearing a skirt until he failed to sleep with the girl I dated.

He couldn’t accept failure. I dated Willa after my break up with Alesha. She’s kinda shy and a nerd but she wasn’t a virgin at that time. Willa turned him down and dated me instead.

We slept together until one day she just didn’t show up, and I didn’t know what happened to her. I heard her dad’s work was transferred to another state.

Edmund huffs in disapproval when I shoot him a glare. Sean’s Rolls Royce parked in front of Trinity’s house.

I open the door stronger, causing it to slam against the wall. My jaw clenches, and I hope I won’t see anything that can cause me trouble.

Walking inside instinctively, I stop to halt when I hear Trinity's laugh.

My nose flares in anger.

Sean is sitting cozily in a single sofa, crossing his legs together with a smile on his face. Trinity is sitting across him.

He looks the same, only a prominent line on his forehead. He looks mature a little bit than the picture I saw on the TV and in the magazine.

He looks surprised to see me walking toward him. His smile fades, but he's shooting me an amused glance.

"Bash, good to see you, man." He's on his feet, and Trinity stands up too.

"What are you up to, Rexwell?" I ask flatly.

He laughs out with a harsh tone. The tone that he used to do when he wanted to annoy me years ago. "I'm just returning Kiara's phone that she left in my car yesterday."

My chest tightens. Sean smiles, showing me that he gets on my nerves.

"Trinity, did you have your phone back?" I turn to her.

She looks a little tense, but she's able to give me a nod.

Then I turn back to Sean who still has a devilish smirk on his face. "Now that you did what you came here for, you may now leave," I say sternly. I shove my hands into my pockets as I don't want him to see how I'm shaking out of anger.

"Well, why don't you join our conversation with Kiara. We're kinda engrossed before you showed up." He sits down again and crosses his legs over.

My eyes narrow. "What do you exactly want from her, Rexwell?" I can't control my anger anymore, and my voice raises a little bit. "You will not just show up without ulterior motives. You won't waste your precious time if you don't have a benefit over it."

"Oh, is that what you always do? Not wasting your precious time if you don't have a benefit? Of course, a businessman like you, Bash."

"Just get out—"

"Or you do what?" He cuts off.

"Just get the fuck out of this house, Rexwell! And stay the fuck away from my girlfriend!"

Trinity yelps in her place, and I feel terrible for scaring her.

"I never thought you and Kiara are in a relationship. I thought someone like her is not your type." He seems unaffected.

"Someone like me?" Trinity's voice catches my attention.

"Don't you dare listen to him. He is using you to get into me, Tri." My blood boils, and it resonates in my voice.

"I have so many things that I can use against you if I wanted you to fall, Hughes. Kiara never mentioned yesterday that she and you are in a relationship."

"Sean—"

"Trinity, you didn't owe him any explanations," I cut in.

Sean chuckles. "I thought you're actually dead." He starts walking toward me, then stops to glance at Trinity. "Good to see you again, Trinity. My number is already saved in your phonebook." He walks and stops when he's a few inches closer. "We're far from done, Hughes. I thought I succeeded in killing you in that jet."

And that's when I see red. All the anger I've reserved for this man boils to the surface. The last thing I know is my knuckles hurt like hell, and I might have broken my fist.

Trinity yells my name as she wraps her arms around my waist to stop me from throwing another punch on Sean again. He's still on the floor when his driver and Edmund enter the house. His driver a little younger than Edmund helps him get up, but he jerks him off, shooting the man a glare.

He wipes the blood off his mouth after getting into his feet. "I will sue you, Hughes."

I don't say a word when I feel Trinity's shaky hands gripping my front shirt.

"That won't stop there, Hughes. That's only the beginning," he finishes, slamming the door behind him.

Chapter 23

Secrets

BASH

We flew back to New York yesterday after the news has cleared off. If what Sean said was true, then he made his revenge against me to the whole new level. Or he said that out of his anger?

Trinity stayed silent since that encounter. I can see the guilt in her eyes even though I never blame her.

“Tri, you’ve been silent since yesterday. If you think that I’m mad at you, don’t you even think about it. What happened yesterday has already happened.” She came with me yesterday.

I don’t want her to go alone to her apartment. If I can only convince her to stay with me, I’m going to do that. But maybe we have to apply the baby steps kind of shit first.

“He threatened you, Bash.” She looks at me through the wall-sized mirror in front of us. Her eyes are full of concern.

“Baby, it’s not new. He’d been doing that since we were in high school, remember?”

She nods slowly. “Yeah, because of that girl you dated, but he’d never harmed you the way he did this time.”

“I doubt if he paid someone to sabotage the engine. How did he even know that we were in Korea, Tri?” I ask, furrowing my brows.

I was thinking the same question over and over again last night. How does he know that Trinity was on that flight? How does he know that I chartered that jet?

“Bash?” I jar out of my thoughts when Trinity jerks my arm.

“Bash, we really need to go. We’ll be late for dinner. Aunt Abby will think that we’re ditching them.” She scans my face to see what’s bothering me.

I never answered her when she asked me about what Sean has whispered to me back in her home. I don’t want her to worry about me. She will feel guiltier.

“Yeah. They think we are still in bed, probably you’re moaning against my ear.” I move closer, whispering in her ear.

She shivers when I nibble her earlobe, follows by a gasp slips from her mouth.

Chuckling, I pull myself back before I can do something that will make us late. Trinity smells so good, and if we're not in a hurry, I can just pull her dress up and take her from behind. My cock is already on full alert.

Voices of my family and friends from our living room warm my heart. I'm so thankful that I didn't get in that jet, but I feel bad for the family of the pilot and the crew.

My family sent condolences to the family of the victims, and we are also planning full scholarships to the children and jobs of their family members.

"Look who finally showed up!" Lizzy literally runs toward us, giving me a huge hug. "I'm so happy you're here, Baby Bash." Her voice cracks at the end.

"Don't, Lizzy. I don't wanna make this an emotional night for us," I said half-joking.

She pulls away from me, fake-wiping her tears. I shake my head of an amusement. "Hey, K!" Lizzy jumps to hug Trinity who's in a full grin.

"I need a whole night with you, alone," Lizzy announces, pointing her finger to Trinity with a glint in her eyes. Trinity's mouth forms an O shape of surprise.

Everyone comes to welcome us—Mom and dad, the twins; Xandry and Saph, Dean and Pyke.

"So, how're the honeymooners?" Pyke starts with a devilish grin.

I snort. "Honeymooners? We went there for a business trip, asshole."

He laughs at my remark. Trinity is busy talking with her best friends on a couch in front of us. "Oh, c'mon, Bash. So, you two are now a couple? You finally have the guts to tell her, huh?" Pyke asks with a tease.

"Shut up. You can't pry me to open up," I say, slapping Pyke on his thigh, and he jerks and laughs at me, and that catch girls' attention.

My eyes meet Trinity's. She smiles at me that makes my heart skip a bit. Why do I feel like I just fall in love with a teenager?

"You didn't answer me, Bash? I can't believe you have to travel through Asia with her to declare your undying love to your darling Trinity," Pyke insists.

"Will you stop it? It's annoying," I say with a groan.

"So, what happened why you didn't come back together?" He asks again, making me roll my eyes.

“Bash, leave him alone. I wanna know why did you punch Sean?” Xandry gets my attention. Dean never says a word, just watching and laughing at us.

“He met Trinity at the airport. I doubt if that was a coincidence. I bet he planned all that to get my attention. But how does he know that Trinity is on that plane back to the U.S?” My mind filled with questions. What if he really meant what he said?

“Did you tell all these to your parents?” he asks with a concerned tone. I shake my head, but panic is growing fast in the pit of my belly.

“I think you should tell your parents, Bash. Did you know that Andrew Tennings escaped from the mental hospital?” Xandry asks.

My eyes widen. I can feel the pulse throbbing in my neck. “What do you mean?” I ask quickly, scanning his face if he’s joking or lying, but I can’t find any. He looks serious than ever.

“He escaped two days before your flight back to Boston. Your dad asked a team to search for him. I’m sure he is hiding somewhere.”

Hair from my nape rises. I swallow hard. “I need to talk to dad,” I stand up abruptly.

I heard about what that psychopath did to my mom. It’s been almost twenty-four years since he has been locked up behind bars then they moved him to a mental hospital when he tended to be suicidal.

My dad kept an eye on him and paid someone in the cell to stop him from killing himself. I don’t know why dad cares. Then he has his doctor and nurses on close watch all these years. How does he escape? I don’t know.

“Bash, where are you going?” Lizzy asks, looking confused.

“To see dad,” I answer quickly, winking at Trinity. A hint of pink blossoms on her cheeks, then someone whistles.

“Where are your manners, Saph?” Xandry scolds his sister.

“Shut up, brother!” Saph snaps at Xandry.

“You two stop fighting. I’ll be right back,” I tell them quickly.

I knock on dad’s office door. I can hear from the front door that Mom and Dad are in intense conversation.

“Dad, open up, please?” I knock again, and that’s when they both go silent.

The door unlocks. Dad's face comes to view who looks flushed. "What do you want, Bash? We are—"

"Busy keeping secrets from us? Or am I the only one left unaware?" I ask, and I know it sounds harsh, but for fuck sake, I'm already an adult, and I can handle things pretty well.

"What secrets are you talking about?" Dad asks sternly.

I get inside his office. The smell of alcohol is thick in the air.

"Bash, what do you want?" Dad asks again. Mom stays silent, but I can see the tension in the air is so thick.

"What are you two fighting about?" I take a seat in front of Mom.

"Be respectful, Sebastian. It's not right to stick your nose to something that it isn't your business." Dad sounds angrier, which he is not like this unless he's under stress.

"If it concerns about my family, then I'm not just gonna shut up, and it is my right to know. Both of you never fight about business, and I bet it's my concerns too if it's about our company," I reply.

Mom hasn't said a word.

"You have nothing to worry about, Sebastian, and everything is under control," Dad says dismissively. He pours a shot of whiskey, then drains the content to his mouth, making me wince.

"Is it about Tennings?" I ask slowly, but I never miss Mom's reaction, and the glass freezes in the air in Dad's gasp.

"How did you know all of these?" Mom finally talks with a bit of a shaky voice.

"Xandry thought I already knew. Does Lizzy know about this?"

Dad moves to take a sit on his chair, squeezing his eyes shut, then he rubs his face with both hands before he nods.

"Aren't I suppose to know too?"

"Bash, you just came back from Asia, and we almost lost you. We're planning on telling everything," Mom answers when Dad seems to find it hard to form a word.

"When? And why the two of you are so obsessed with this man?"

"He's a very dangerous man, Bash. He's a psychopath. He promised himself that he would take his revenge once he escaped, and I knew he planned all of these." Dad looks terribly affected.

"He can't get near us, Dad. We have tight security."

"Tell me how does he escape?" Dad asks quickly, shrugs, and slumps his back to the chair.

I blink because that's the billion-dollar question. "How?" Suddenly, my throat dries, and I am tempted to gulp his whiskey.

"He killed the nurse at the mental hospital. I have to keep that story away from the media because if that news comes out, our family would be involved in that mess he made."

I nod helplessly.

"Now, he's nowhere to find," Dad adds.

I feel Mom's hand squeezing my knee. "Is that what Uncle Logan is busy with?"

"Yes. He's the one who found about his escape."

I release a huge breath. I thought this night is going to be a happy one, but it seems it didn't go as I wanted it to be.

"You need to stay in New York. I will double the security, Bash. For you and your sister. Trinity will stay with you. I know that man will use anyone closer to our family, and I can't let him hurt any of you. Do you understand, Sebastian?"

I look at Dad, and he looks under stressed. Lines in his forehead are prominent. "Yes, dad. I understand."

I still have so many questions left, but I doubt if they answer me honestly.

Why do I feel like this whatever is going on has a huge impact on me? Am I just a paranoid? Or my parents are hiding skeletons in their closets?

Chapter 24

Tensions

BASH

It's been days since dad tightens the security. No report from those guys dad hired to watch out Tennings' whereabouts.

With all the tensions about our safety, there is still something great happening, and that is my relationship with Trinity. She's the best woman I can ever ask for, and I can say that she's a keeper—she's a God gift and always so sweet and thoughtful. Of course, there's a part of her that's annoying, but what's more annoying is that I love it, and I love everything about her, especially the flaws she never tries to hide.

Trinity complains about everything I offer, not that she doesn't like it, but she argues first before accepting it.

We're back to work after our long discussions about that email, and I failed convincing her to take a two weeks break to travel to France for a seminar. I thought she would be glad, but she wasn't.

She's really something but that something makes me fall for her even more.

"I said I'm not going!" She shoots me a disapproving glare.

"Tri, this is your chance, and it's just an eight-days seminar for French Art," I'm trying very hard to convince her, she doesn't seem to budge.

"I told you, Bash. I quit drawing. I don't sketch, and I stopped painting ages ago. I don't even doodle anymore." Her face falls.

I lean back on the headboard, running my fingers over her hair. I feel guilty, and I somehow one of the reasons why she stopped her enthusiasm for art.

"Baby, that's why I'm trying to convince you. I know how you love it. I feel guilty that you stopped doing what you love, Tri." I look down at her.

She shakes her head. "I don't think I can even hold a pencil anymore or a paintbrush, Bash."

"Tri, once you're an artist, you will always be an artist, and I believe in you and your talent. Please, don't give up? That's too worth to waste."

She shrugs. "I made my decision, and I'm going back to work."

I groan, sliding my back to align with her in our bed. I won't give up that easily, Trinity, and you know me too well. If I did wait for you over these years, I will do it again.

My office door swings open. An annoying smile of Ranjiv comes to view.

"Come in, and lock the door behind you."

"We're not gonna make out in your office, are we?" he jokes, trying to imitate Trinity's walk.

I stand up and sit on my desk. "I will just spank your ass till red and raw." I laugh. "You sucks at imitating her."

"Why am I here? You sound so serious over the phone," he asks.

I fish out Trinity's phone. I bought a new phone for her, and that's the only thing she's happy about it.

Ranjiv takes the phone from my hand, inspecting it from side to side. "What's this?" he asks, furrowing his brows.

"A phone? What do you think is that?" I ask back.

"I know, I know," he answers, fake-flipping his imaginary long hair.

Rolling my eyes, I glare. "What are you doing?"

He laughs. "That's how we talk." He looks at me. "With K."

"Well, that's annoying, so stop it."

"Seriously, Bash, what this? I know this is K's phone."

I clear my throat. "Yeah, that's Trinity's phone, but I bought her a new model. This phone still works, and I want you to check on something."

He looks confused as he stares at me. "Something like what? Illegal?"

"Rexwell had that. He might steal it from her." I pause. "On purpose."

"And?"

"He might put something, bug it. I don't know. You're the expert on that thing. Figure it out." I scowl, scratching my head.

"Aren't you too paranoid?"

"I feel queasy when I think about Rexwell," I tell him honestly. I don't know why I bother explaining, but he needs to know to find something odd in that phone.

"You can ask an expert on this, Bash."

I groan. "Are you gonna help me or not?"

"Like I can say no to you," he says, slipping the phone into his pocket.

"Good. Now get out!"

His eyes widen, but there is a smile on his face. "Huh?"

"I need that now, go," I say, waving my hand to kick him out. "Work!"

"If I'll get in trouble because of this," he says, pointing his finger at me. "I will spice your ass till red and raw!" He walks out, slamming the door behind him.

The door opens again, and my brows arch.

"I'm glad for both of you! Vishnu!" it was Ranjiv again.

"Get out!" I yell, waving the paper on my hand to shoo him away.

"Whoa!"

My chin tilts, and it was not Ranjiv anymore.

"Oh, hey, Trinity." My face lights up. I close our gap after I place the paper down my desk.

"What brings my lovely girlfriend here?" I cup her face and not wait for her to answer. I press my lips against hers, kissing her desperately till I feel relief.

She licks her lips and says seductively "I see, you miss me."

"Don't tease me when we're at the office. I miss you so fucking much." I kiss her lips soundly.

"I'm coming with you tonight."

I hug her tighter. "You should because I missed you like crazy."

I was surprised how did I sleep last night. I kept on turning on the bed. She asked if she could stay a night at her apartment to fix her things. I returned to my penthouse after sending her, and I missed her immediately. If I was not so lazy to get up, I might have driven back to her apartment and stayed there instead.

"That's only a night." She sighs.

"The longest night."

"I'll make it up to you."

“Yeah. You definitely should.”

“Gotta get back to work. I don’t want a warning from my boss.” Pulling herself away, she stops when she reaches the door. “My hot boss.” She then winks.

“Stop it, or I will press you against that door, naked until you’re sweaty and panting.”

She bites her bottom lip, teasing me, and color blossoms on her face and my cock comes to life, jerking in my pants.

Shit!

“Later, baby!” Then she’s gone in second.

Fuck!

“Baby, I’ll be home in an hour. Just got a call from dad,” I explain over the phone.

“Hmm.” That’s all she says?

“Trinity, stop that.” I hear her giggle.

“Bash, I’m in a bathtub with bubbles all over my naked body. I have red wine, and it feels so good.”

“Fuck, Tri. Don’t make me imagine things. I’ll be back as soon as I’m done meeting with dad.”

“Ugh. You’ll miss the best part,” she teases.

“Trust me, Tri. I won’t miss a thing.” My pants tighten, and it feels uncomfortable.

“Later, baby bash.”

“I love you, Trinity.”

“Tell me that later.”

“I will tell you that later too.”

“I love you too. Bye.”

I stop to a halt when I hear my mom’s voice. Are they fighting? My heart thunders when I hear my names.

“He’s my son, Sebastian!” Mom seems crying. Of course, I am, but there’s a lot of questions reeling in my brain right now.

“He’s my son, too, Abbygail!” Dad’s angry voice booms, and he’s yelling at Mom.

My heart sinks. “Then please don’t tell him. He’s still like my own Abbygail. Please, I’m begging you.”

Gasping, I cover my mouth. What are they talking about? Even though I know exactly what are they fighting about, I try hard to deny what I just heard from them. This can’t be.

My eyes filled with tears, and that’s when the door swings open. Colors drain from Dad’s and Mom’s faces, and they look like they’ve seen a ghost.

I am their ghost.

“Bash, baby.” Mom marches to me, but I step backward without a word. I shake my head, and that’s when I feel wet on my face.

“Bash, let us—”

“Explain! Now is the fucking time.” My voice cracks. “That I’m not yours? That I’m a bastard!” I blink my blurry eyes to see the reactions on their faces.

“You cheated on Dad, Mom?” I face and yell at her, making Mom startle.

“Don’t you fucking dare shout at your mom, Sebastian!” Dad’s voice booms in the entire house. In my twenty-one years, I have never been scared of Dad. Only tonight. But he’s not my dad.

Mom shakes to cry, her hands cupping her face. I feel so disgusted at her and myself. I was made out of a mistake.

“She never cheated on me. Your mom will never do that!”

“Then tell me what I just heard! That he’s still like my own? Or are you referring to someone else?”

Dad looks shocked. He’s not expecting me to find out the truth about me.

“Tell me. Fucking tell me! I’m not a Hughes, am I? You only groomed me to be one of yours. Who am I then? A bastard?” My heart breaks and shatters into a billion pieces that after all these years, I am not their blood.

And after all these years, I’m not a Hughes? Why am I even have his name? I don’t fucking belong to them, to this family, to their world.

I don’t even know where I belong. I’m so fucking lost!

“Bash, wait!” Mom begs, but she’s not my mom if she didn’t cheat on Dad. I mean Sebastian.

Who are my parents?

“Sebastian! Get back in here!” Dad calls me.

I ignore them as I run out of their home.

I don't belong here.

I don't belong with them.

I don't belong in their world.

"Bash! Bash! Stop! Stop!" Edmund shouts outside the car, slamming his fists against the window to stop me.

I drive away without caring for the people behind me. They lied! They fucking lied! The twenty-one years of life are all but lies, built with lies?

I'm a lie.

I get inside the Night Stalker, pushing the huge bouncers out of my way. My eyes narrow when I see the familiar face—Kyland Wright smiling at me.

"Give me a fucking bottle!" I demand.

"Hey, man. Calm down."

I grab his front shirt until his face is an inch closer to mine. "You have unfinished business with me, Wright! Now give me that fucking bottle, or I will smash that in your fucking head!"

He nods and looks confused. He grabs a bottle and hands it to me after I release his shirt.

"We're not done, Wright! I'll come back to let you pay your debt!" I yell, raising the bottle he gave me.

I walk out without looking back. I go to the back of the nightclub building where most of the employees park their cars and enter from the back door.

I stride my way up till I reach the rooftop. I twist the lid and pour the content into my mouth. It burns the back of my throat, but I don't give a damn. I want to forget what happened earlier, and don't want to feel the pain in my chest.

I sit on the ledge, inhaling the smell of the city as the chilly wind hugs my skin. The city lights look like eyes judging me. My eyes waters, thinking of what happened earlier.

"God, who am I?" I ask, looking up at the night sky. I sniff, wiping off the tears from my face.

I hear a squeak from the rusty metal door where I entered, and it swings open, making my head snaps to the dark surface.

I stand up quickly when an old man emerges. He's wearing a white shirt with a brown coat and dark brown pants. He looks not far from the fifties, and he looks familiar, but I can't quite point out where I last saw him.

"Hello, son."

Chapter 25

Shocked

BASH

My eyes bulge, and my pulse races the moment I recognize him. I can feel the sound of my heartbeat thrashes in my ears in terror.

I'm still glued in my place, and I am unable to move a muscle even if I want to. My jaw locked up even if I want to scream for help. Everything just freezes.

He slips his right hand inside his coat. The only thing that comes in my mind is maybe he's pulling out his gun. Is he going to kill me now? My parent's words flash right into my face.

He's a psychopath!

"Bash, I'm not gonna hurt you." His deep voice makes me blink and bring me back to reality.

I'm in front of a fucking murderer for fuck sake, yet I can't do anything. He's blocking the only exit I know unless I jump from the rooftop. And there's no way I will survive, or maybe I end up with a couple of broken bones.

When panic strikes me, I raise my hand and drop the half-empty bottle to the floor.

"Don't come closer to me, Mr. Tennings, or I will call the cops!" I warn him. I know it doesn't affect him because my voice is trembling.

"I need to tell you something, Bash," he says in a calm but firm tone as if he's running out of time to convince me to believe him.

"I'm not gonna listen to your lies, Mr. Tennings. I've heard enough lies for tonight!" I shout at him. This time my voice is a little bit louder.

He looks hurt, but it's gone in a second. He knows how to mask his feelings. He's a real psychopath. He saunters in my direction cautiously.

I'm still standing in my place, and I can't step back because I'm already at the edge.

"Bash, listen to me, and I don't have much time. The people are on their way over here looking for me." He takes a deep breath and he stops when he's a yard closer to me. "Bash, I'm not—"

I gasp when a hissing sound passes through the air.

There's a moment of deafening silence, and my heart stops.

My eyes grow wide when Mr. Tennings' hand grasps quickly on his left chest. Blood starts to ooze from his hand, then he falls slowly to the floor with his face fills with horror.

"Tennings!" I quickly kneel in front of him, shrugging off my suit jacket, and forms it into a ball and presses it against his bleeding chest.

"Don't dare die, you fucking old mutt!" I yell at him. I don't know why I can't let him die when the fact is he's a bad man.

His face grows paler, and I know he's not going to make it. I fish out my phone, but I feel a hand places on top of my hand that I pressed against his chest.

I look down at him, and he shakes his head. "I need to call 911."

He shakes his head again. I can't do anything but swallow hard. I want to shout out loud out of frustration. Never in my life, I watched people die, especially like how it happened to him.

"T-take." He swallows blood that slips from his mouth. "T-take it." He swallows again and coughs. Blood spits out from his mouth.

"For fuck sake, Tennings!"

His hand slowly tap the floor. My brows furrow in confusion. What the fuck is he telling me?

"T-take my journal."

My eyes widen. I quickly search for a pocket of his coat. I find a phone and a notebook that is folded into two.

I watch his head drops to the side, then he stops breathing, but blood continues oozing from his mouth. His blue eyes turn glassy, indicating his death. I just stare at him in horror, and I forget my own life that whoever shot him, I might be the next target.

The door slams open that has me startle. My head snaps to see Edmund and my new bodyguard name Derek come rushing towards me when they see me in front of the dead man.

"We need to get you out of here, Bash!" Edmund says, grabbing my arm. They're now on full alert.

"Now, Bash!"

I jerk my arm off from him. "I could have long dead if they targeted me, asshole!" I snarl at him. I realize I might be right. I sniff and wipe my tears that unknowingly fell. I don't know that I cried for that old man who put my mom's life in danger.

Derek is busy scanning the area as he presses his phone to his ear. He is probably calling for my family or an ambulance.

"I need you to get up, Bash. He's dead, and I need you safe, please?" he says with full concern.

I swipe Tennings' face to close his eyes then grab my bloodstained jacket with me. I look down at him again on more time and walk away.

I ignore the hug from my family, though, it's killing me deep inside. They raised me and gave me the life that anyone could've asked for.

Mom and Lizzy are sobbing and hugging me tighter, but I feel nothing but betrayal. I love them so much more than my life, but I'm so hurt that they have to hide something about me.

My whole life is a fucking lie!

"Bash!" Trinity launches herself on me. "Bash, I was so worried about you. How? What happened?" She scans my bloody shirt, and I'm still gripping the bloodstained jacket with me.

She hugs me again before she scans the crowded Night Stalker parking lot full of vehicles, police cars, my family cars, nosy people, and an ambulance.

They did check me up before my family arrived just to see that I'm perfectly okay to go.

"Let's go, Trinity. Can you drive us back?" I ask.

She nods repeatedly. "Of course. Where is Edmund?"

I shake my head. "Drive us to your apartment, Tri," I answer slowly.

She looks confused, but I can't explain it to her right now. I am still shocked by what happened to Mr. Tennings, and the fact that my life is full of lies.

She doesn't know anything yet, I guess. "You are safer with them, Bash," she says with concern.

"Trinity, I'm so fucking tired. I need a rest, and if you can't fucking drive me home, then I'll just take a hotel room."

She startles, and I blink in shock. I just dumped all my anger and frustration on her.

"I'm sorry, Tri." I pull her closer and squeeze her into a hug.

"It's okay, Bash. I'm so sorry you have to witness that horrifying death."

I release her after kissing the top of her head. "Let's go, baby, please?"

She nods. "We'll just say goodbye to your family,"

I shake my head. "No. Let's go now." I grab her hand to follow me.

We ride to her apartment in silence. Trinity doesn't pry me anymore, but I know she has a lot of questions.

"Holy shit! It's true!" Luke's eyes widen when he sees me. He clears his throat when nobody speaks. "Man, I'm sorry."

I nod slowly before I follow Trinity to her room. She opens her room quickly. I enter her bathroom without a single word.

I feel all the strength drain from my body. I can't even speak. I drop my jacket to the floor, then I strip all my clothes off.

The warm water slightly massages my skin and makes my tense muscles relax a bit. I wrap the towel tightly around my waist and step out of the shower room after I feel calm.

"Trinity!" I shout out loud when I notice the jacket and my clothes are nowhere to be found.

"Bash, are you okay?" She comes, rushing to the bathroom door with a horrified look.

"Where are my fucking clothes here?" I glare and point down to the now empty floor.

She rolls her eyes. "I thought—"

"Where are they, Trinity?" I demand.

"Bash, they're dirty and soaked with blood. I place them in a plastic bag."

"Don't put it anywhere. I need them," I say, walking out of the bathroom.

"Um, Bash."

"Yeah," I respond without looking back at her.

"Your family calls me like thousand times already. They're worried hell."

"They're not my family." I snap, but the truth, I'm so hurt, and I don't know what to do, how to accept that I am not a Hughes.

A sharp breath escapes her lips. "What's wrong with you?" she asks with teary eyes.

"What's wrong with me?" I point at myself. "I just found out that I'm not Bash Hughes! My parents and my family lied about my entire life. They created me to be Bash, where in fact, I am not. Then I just witnessed a man died in front of me! And I can't even fucking help him! I literally let him die all by himself. Helpless!" I shrug after telling her who still looks shocked to talk.

Why am I throwing my anger to Trinity? She's nothing but trying to understand my situation.

Jesus, I'm such an idiot! A fucking idiot!

I trust Trinity, and she's the only person I have left. I literally have nothing, and I am nothing—no name, no home, no family, no money, and no more job. Everything I have is not mine—it's for Bash Hughes IV.

"Where did you get these?" I ask, pointing at the clothes on top of the bed.

"Edmund came minutes ago bringing you some clothes," she answers with uncertainty.

"Thanks."

"Bash?"

"Don't Tri. Not now," I said, stopping her.

"Okay," she responds, then she starts walking out.

"Baby, please, let's get some sleep?"

She turns to face me with her eyes full of despair. I feel guilty for doing that to her.

She smiles tightly. "Do you want to eat something?"

I shake my head. "Let me change into something." I cup her face and kiss her lips, and she kisses me back. I slip my tongue immediately, and my hand grabs her head to deepen the kiss, and that's when she moans.

My free hand starts to explore, grab, and knead her ass. Then I trail my hand to her expose lower abdomen, cupping her what's between her thighs. I slip my hand from the waistband of her yoga pants. My fingers find her smooth and wet folds, and I push two fingers inside. She instantly presses herself into my fingers, moaning while my fingers stroking into her roughly, following her movements.

I stop abruptly, pulling away from her. What the hell am I thinking?

"Why did you stop?" She looks disappointed.

"I'm sorry, Tri. I can't-do this," I say slowly.

"Do what, Bash?" she asks almost immediately. "Are you breaking up with me?"

Panic hit me hard. "No no no!" I say, shaking my head repeatedly.

She shrugs, releasing a sigh.

"I'm sorry. I mean it sounds terrible, but I just mistreated you minutes ago, and now I'm about to fuck you. I can't just do that. I love you so much, Tri. I feel horrible, and I'm so in damn lost with what happened tonight."

“Bash, you don’t have to explain, and I’m willing to do that with you if it will help you release the tensions and pain out of you.”

I shake my head. “I’m not gonna use you, and that’s not the answer I want, Tri.”

She nods. “You know that I love you so much, Bash, and I’m here to help.”

I nod. “Just go change to something and come to bed with me.” I kiss her lips.

She smiles at me, but it doesn’t reach her eyes. I get in her bed, pulling her blanket under my chest. I lie on my side with my arm under my head.

My mind goes back to the jacket and the journal of Tennings.

Why he let me keep his journal?

What’s written on it? Why was it so important to him? Why did he come to me?

Why me?

Does he know about my real parents?

Chapter 26

Real Family

TRINITY

I wake up at the muffled voices from my apartment's living room. Bash is still sleeping soundly in my bed. I feel so bad for him, but I can't change the fact of what he just revealed to me last night.

His family loves him, no doubt about that. My heart breaks for him and for his family who loves him unconditionally.

"Sorry, sweetheart. Did we wake you up?" Aunt Abby stands up, pulling me into a hug. I doubt if she even sleeps. She looks so stressed with a puffy face. I guess she cries all night.

I squeeze her into a hug, giving her a smile that I can do best. I can feel her pain because I love Bash so much. "No, Aunt Abby. He's still sleeping."

"I'm sorry for the trouble, K," Uncle Seb looks so affected. The looks on his face say that he'd been up all night—sad eyes and his hair looks like he'd been running his fingers a thousand times, but he manages to give me a tight smile.

I can't help but hug him back. "He'll be okay, uncle. Everything will be okay." I rub his arms, hoping they can share a portion of their pain with me.

He nods slowly, sighing. "I know, I know, K. Thanks so much for being here with him. I don't know what to do without you by his side. I can't thank you enough."

I chuckle. "You thank me already, Uncle." I move to Lizzy who's still sniffing in Dean's arms. My heart aches for them. Never a thousand years I thought of this would happen to this family. They were perfect and love everyone.

"Lizzy, he'll come around. He's safe here, and he was just shocked. He loves you all. Just give him time to process. You know him, he has a huge heart." I pull her into a hug, rubbing her back. "It's okay, Lizzy."

"I can't believe he almost die there, K. It's twice now that his life has been in great danger."

"I know, Lizzy, and it's killing me too. Every time I thought of it, I thought I just stabbed my heart," I admit, wiping my tears away from my face.

"What the fuck is going on here?" I freeze when I hear Bash is shouting at my back.

I pull away from Lizzy and turn around to face him. He still looks handsome even if he's angrier than ever. I notice Aunt Abby's shoulders start to shake.

"Bash, lower down your voice, please?" I say calmly as I walk towards him.

"What the hell are these liars doing in here?" He narrows his eyes at me. His mom cries louder.

My eyes start to water again. "Bash, that's not nice to treat your family this way." I remain calm, and I try my best not to yell back because he's being disrespectful.

"They're not my family, Trinity!"

My eyes widen. I can't take it anymore, and I need to do something. "Bash, you are in my apartment, and you should respect me and the people that I invited in!"

"Really, Trinity? How much did they pay you to let them in? How much did they pay you to turn your side on me?" he just mocks me. I know he's hurting, but I am hurt that he thinks I'm swinging my price tag on his face.

"They didn't pay me a penny, Bash! They are your family! No matter how you treated them, they're still here for you because they love you. They care for you! Can't you see it? No matter what happened to you, they will never turn their back against you!"

He looks guilty and in pain. He blinks and swallows hard. "They're not my real family, Trinity. They lied."

"They may have lied, but they raised you well. They treated you like their own blood, and they gave you everything!" I move closer to him. "They did what they thought was good for you, Bash," I add.

"K, that's enough." Uncle Seb cuts in. "Bash, we never lied to you."

"Oh? Do tell, Mr. Hughes? Who am I? Who are my real parents?" Bash asks his dad sarcastically, and I want to slap his mouth, but I can still feel the brokenness in his voice. Bash is so hurt, and I want to comfort him.

"We are your real parents, Bash. We are your family," his dad answers.

Bash barks out laughing sarcastically. "I just heard you, old man. Just tell me who the fuck am I, and I'll give you everything you gave me. Everything, including my share in your company. I don't need them all. I'd rather sleep in the street than taking that's not mine."

Uncle Seb shakes his head. His eyes fill with tears that threaten to fall.

"I was raped." Aunt Abby chokes, making everyone gasps, and Bash looks horrified. "He raped me," Aunt Abby adds.

Uncle Bash looks down, hugging his wife from her back. Lizzy's hands over her mouth look horrified as well. Dean looks shocked too. I never thought that no one knew about this even Lizzy.

My gaze glued to Aunt Abby, and I feel the tears running down from my eyes. I move closer to hug Bash because he's shaking, and I know he's crying too. Just like everyone around.

"Who did that to you, Mom?" Bash voice breaks at the end, but I'm so thankful that he's able to call her mom again.

"Drew managed to do his first escaped. He came to me that night in our home. I just put Lizzy to sleep when I went back to our room. Your dad was in Boston at that time for an annual visit. I was supposed to be with your dad, but Lizzy was catching flu, so I stayed instead. The window was broken, and that was how Drew got in. He hid in our closet. I locked the room's door that was when he emerged from behind," Aunt Abby pauses.

I feel a hand on my mouth to stop me from shouting, and a cold sharp pointing at my side, making me freeze, and I know exactly what it is; a knife.

"I'm not gonna hurt you, Mackenzie," he whispers in my ear, making me shiver in fear.

"Promise me that you won't shout once I remove my hand from you. Promise me, Mackenzie," he says firmly.

All I did is to nod in agreement. I remember my phone on the nightstand, and the monitor of our security system is there too.

He releases his hands on me slowly, and I manage to face him. "How did you escape, Drew?" I ask quietly.

"I pretended to be sick. I mean to be crazy. When they transported me to the Mental Facility, I was able to escape from there," He explains. He looks thin but cleanly shaved, and he doesn't look hurt too.

"Mackenzie, I need your help. I can't stay there. They're hurting me. Mackenzie, please?" he begs.

My eyes scan his face, and he looks like telling the truth.

"How can I help you, Drew? You killed that woman in Boston, and you killed many. I was even surprised that they didn't sentence you yet. How can you even escape with all the security around you?" I ask while walking near to our bedroom.

"I didn't do that, Mackenzie, I swear—"

I face him, raising my hand. "Don't swear, Drew. You admitted, and you plead guilty!" I raise my voice a little bit.

"I don't have a choice" He raises his voice, making me jump. "I'm sorry," he whispers.

My heart is pounding on my chest. My breathing catches. Please, don't make me blackout with this man around.

"You need to go before anyone notices the broken window, Andrew."

"I disarmed your security system," he says calmly.

"Of course, you did." I shrug and grab the monitor of the alarm system, and that's when he grabs it from me. I startle at his sudden change of mood.

"You're still a stubborn, Mackenzie!" He grabs me from my arms and pushes me back against the wall. I almost stumble down with the impact.

I start to shake, and all I think at this moment is Lizzy and Sebastian. If he is going to kill me, my daughter will grow without a mom.

"He hit me, then I didn't know what happened next. I blacked out, Bash. When I woke up, I was already in bed naked, and I know I was violated because—"

Bash pulls away from me to run to his mom and hug her tightly. "I'm so sorry, Mom. I'm so sorry." Bash apologizes repeatedly. I hug myself, thanking God internally.

"I never thought you are made from that horrible night," his mom continues.

"I don't want a DNA test, Bash because I know you're my son," Uncle Seb explains.

"I went to visit Drew when I was pregnant with you. He admitted what he did to me."

Bash groans louder.

"I don't care, Bash. You are my son, can't you see? you look exactly like me. Your eyes, your hair--"

"Dad, I want to know if I'm really your son."

His dad shakes his head. "No, Bash. Please don't do it?"

"But why?"

"Because I can feel that you're mine."

Andrew Tennings is sent to his grave. Hughes prepared a proper burial service for him. After what he did to Aunt Abby, he was still forgiven by the Hughes family.

There were no reports of whoever shot him, but the investigations still ongoing. As I've heard from Bash, Hughes hired a PI to do that too.

Bash went back to his penthouse after the burial service yesterday, and I stayed at my apartment for a while.

“How’s Bash holding up, K?” Luke asks, interrupting my thoughts.

“He’s doing well. I suggested taking a vacation.”

“And what the hell are you doing here?” he asks with what-the-hell-looked.

“It’s my apartment, and I’m staying here.”

“God, you’re so dumb, K!” he says annoyingly.

“How did I become so dumb?”

“You should be with Bash, K. He needs you, or is it okay if he needs someone else?”

My face flushed. I can’t even think of Bash with someone else. “Fine!”

I enter his penthouse and place the keycard on the coffee table. He didn’t reply to my message I sent before coming over.

I hear faint voices from the kitchen. It’s Bash, and the other one is Ranjiv because of his Indian accent.

“This app was uploaded to her phone the same day your flight to South Korea, Bash, and I’m certain about it. I searched the app all over the internet, and I didn’t find any match,” Ranjiv explains.

“Then how did it get to her phone?” Asks Bash.

“I said it was uploaded. The rest, I really don’t know,” Ranjiv answers.

“Ranjiv, what’s that app for?”

Ranjiv clears his throat. “Not good.”

“What do you mean by not good, Ranjiv?”

“It’s a tracker.”

Bash snorts. “Everyone has that on their phones. They can just place a microdot if they wanted to track K.”

“Oh yeah? You can track her phone even if it’s turned off? Even no cell site? Try to see it. It’s like a GPS that the military uses today. That app is a tracker, 99.9% accurate with 24/7 recorder.”

My hand covers my mouth.

Oh, My God!

“Recorded and transferred to the person who tracked K. Without calling her phone or turning on her location setting.”

“Is that why Trinity complains her phone battery drained quite fast?” Bash asks instantly.

“Probably,” Ranjiv answers.

My phone? Is that why Bash bought me a new one to get my old phone? Did he plan for this?

“Is that why Rexwell found her at the airport?” Bash asks again.

“I don’t know because I can’t trace the location of the tracker.”

“Fuck!”

“We’re not sure if this is a work of Rexwell, Bash. You can’t just accuse someone of stalking K.”

“I’ll prove it that he asked someone to trace Trinity’s location. He wanted me dead, Ranjiv. He said that to my face!”

Chapter 27

Silence

BASH

I can still remember the hissing sound of the bullet passed through the air, and that terrifying sound pierces my ears, then there's that moment of silence that is more horrifying.

I despise silence these days. It's deafening, and now all I can hear is the ticking of the clock on the wall.

Ranjiv left my place about half an hour ago. Trinity hasn't said a word until now. I know she heard everything that I was talking about with Ranjiv. She's just looking at the copper-colored wall in my kitchen, and she's so drowned in her own thoughts.

"Tri, please say something. I know you heard everything we talked about earlier." I lean my elbows on the countertop, and she reaches out for my hands, squeezes them, then lifts her chin to give me a tight smile. I bring her hands to my lips, kissing them.

"I was worried hell about you, Trinity."

She shakes her head. "I was worried hell about you, Bash. Your life has been in danger twice in a row now. Why didn't you tell me that he threatened you like that?"

"There is nothing to worry about it, Tri," I reassure her as I caress each knuckle of her hands. "That was only an empty threat."

"Don't you think you should tell your parents about it?"

I shake my head as I round to her side. "Nothing to worry about it, Tri. It's not a big deal, and they already have a lot to worry about."

"But Bash," she presses.

"Tri, please?" I cup her face, kissing her on her lips. "I was jealous, too," I admit, making her smile.

"I can't see you, a hot piece of Bash is getting jealous. Do you feel threatened?" she teases.

I kiss her lips instead, yanking her shirt off over her head. She wraps her arms around my neck instantly. I skillfully undo the clasp of her bra with my hand while the other is freely exploring her exposed skin.

She shivers with my touch. I feel her nipples pucker under the cold air-conditioning. Finally, a moan slips from her lips when I have her nipple in my mouth.

“Take me to your room, Bash. Now!”

I pause, looking up at her, amused. “Our room.”

“Take me to our room, Bash. Now!”

I grin. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Wrap your legs around my waist, baby.”

I place her slowly on the bed as I rake my eyes on her half-naked body. I unbutton her jeans, then pull them off her legs. It annoys me that her jeans are so tight like her second skin.

“Don’t wear this thing again, Tri,” I order.

“Says who’s still fully dressed,” she chuckles.

“Shut up, Tri. That’s not funny while I’m struggling here to take this off of you. I want your voice only for your moans and screams my name while I pound on you so deep and hard.” I quickly shrug my clothes off and drop them on the floor. I crawl to the bed on top of her.

“Confident as always,” she says.

“You know me too well, baby. Now, are you ready to scream?” I ask, smirking.

“Let’s then find out.”

My lips spread to a smile when I slip off my arms under her head. Trinity is sleeping soundly. When I say soundly, it’s because she’s slightly snoring after our intense orgasms.

I head down to my office. My mind flies back to Tennings’ journal. I sit down after taking the journal where I placed it in my safe.

I am curious to know what’s so important, and why he had it with him. I’m dying to know, but I feel nervous at the same time.

I blow a breath after a moment of hesitation. I flip it open. There is a date written on the top left of the first page. It’s written in bold letters. He had good penmanship for a psychopath.

I start reading the first line until I’m so lost about what’s written in there. It feels like I’ve been brought in to his life. Like I am him while reading it. I can feel his suffering and pain through his words.

If what was written here is true, then he suffered a lot more than just a prisoner throughout his sentence. He was tortured many times, raped and drugged. When he couldn't take any more, he pretended to be mentally ill, and that's when they transferred him to the mental facility, and he was still violated.

No wonder he came to my mom for help. If I remember correctly, he did mention that he had no choice. If he was forced to do such horrible things, since when? And the question is, who forced him?

Is this the same person who ordered to torture, rape, and drug him? That person must be powerful to manipulate the act.

I feel terribly bad for him. After what he did to Mom, I still pity him, maybe because he was a victim too.

My phone vibrates on top of the desk.

"Mom, is everything alright?"

"Baby Bash, your dad found out what you did." Mom sighs.

"What I did?" I ask, confused. My mind is still in the journal. I'm sure mom doesn't know about what happened to Tennings while he was locked up.

"Your dad found out that you sent your jacket for a test, Bash. You know whatever the result is, dad still loves you, right?"

Shit!

I breathe through my nose and answer truthfully, "I'm so sorry, Mom, but I just want to know the truth."

"I know, baby. How are you holding up?"

I look down, playing with the journal on my hand. "I'm good, and if you think of convincing me to see a shrink, please, don't waste your time. I'm good as new. I'm not suffering from any flashback, and I'm stronger as a horse."

She laughs out loud, making me chuckle. "I know, and I can see that. How's K?"

I roll my eyes. "Stop playing matchmaker, Mom. I should give you credit, though, for a job well done."

She laughs again. "I know, right?"

"I think it runs in the blood," I remember Mom told us that my grandma wanted to setup Mom and Dad for a date, but unfortunately, she died with cancer but she was able to write down on her will to let dad marry mom.

"Lizzy is worried about you, baby. I think you should call your sister."

"Hmm. She worried too—" My eyes fix to the page that I unknowingly flip.

Beware of FOX.

My brow furrows.

Beware of fox?

"Bash, are you still there?"

I feel hands wrap around my waist. "Yup, I'm with you."

The naughty Trinity slips her hand inside the waistband of my sweatpants. She grips my cock and strokes it teasingly. I'm hard in an instant. I have to bite my lip to hold the moan that's about to slip from my lips.

Shit!

This woman is the death of me. I can feel her grinning at my back and telling me that she just does a great job in teasing me.

"Am I disturbing you, Bash?" Mom's voice interrupts my thoughts.

"M-mom, I um," I stutter, and Mom laughs. I know she gets the reason why I'm currently preoccupied.

Shit!

"You could've said so, baby," she says, laughing.

I groan internally. My face heats with embarrassment, and I know Mom is not born yesterday.

"M-mom." Shit.

"Have fun, son." Great! Mom just found out that I'm about to have sex.

Before I can answer, I hear the line cuts off. I groan louder, taking Trinity's hand out of my sweatpants and turn around to face her.

Without a warning, I yank her from the floor and place her instantly on top of my desk and grip her hands on both sides.

“You wanna play a game?” I position my hard cock between her thighs, and I can feel her warm core, and I can see it in her eyes that she’s damn turn on as mine.

“Yes, Mr. Hughes.”

I nod slowly and smirk. “Wanna play a boss-assistant game?”

She shakes her head. “I want a master-slave instead.”

I grin, releasing her hands. I stand up in front of her. Pushing down my sweatpants to my feet, she sits straight and eyes my hard cock. Her pupils dilate, and she darts her tongue to wet her lips in anticipation.

“Suck me, slave. Hard, and take me all in.”

She swallows hard, eyes fill with excitement.

“Suck or I will punish you!” I command, and she startles.

Shit! Did I scare her?

“I’m sorry, Tri,” I mutter.

She barks out laughing, slapping my chest playfully. She drags herself down and kneels in front of me, causing my breath to hold in anticipation.

“You sucks at role-playing, master,” she says seductively. “A slave is supposed to be terrified.”

Before I can reply, her mouth is already wrapped around my cock.

I jerk out of control and hiss as she clamps my cock with her mouth. “Fuck!”

My head jerks back. My jaw drops as she takes me all in, teasing the head with her tongue.

This woman is definitely the death of me.

“God, Trinity. It feels so fucking good!”

And fuck, if she’s not the hottest thing I’ve ever seen as she blows my mind with her mouth.

I received the DNA result about an hour ago and called my parents, Lizzy, and Trinity into my office.

I look at the white envelop on top of the desk once again.

The door swings open. My family marches inside with my girlfriend. I stand up to welcome them with a warm smile. I want them to know that whatever in that result I, I'm still the same Bash they know.

"Bash, whatever is on that report, I just want you to know that I'm still your big sister, and you will always be my baby Bash." Lizzy kisses my cheek.

"Son, you know I'm against at what you did, but since you wanna find out the truth, then it's your right. But whatever in that result, you are still my son by flesh and by blood, get that?" Dad squeezes me into a hug.

"Thanks, Dad." I look at mom.

She manages to give me a sweet smile like she always does. Trinity smiles at me before she mouths I love you.

I grab the envelop and start to open it. I blow a breath and take the paper with my trembling hands.

I flip the result open. The laboratory logo printed in red color appears on top. The anticipation is killing me, and I can even hear my own heartbeat.

I unfold and open it wider. My eyes widen when I read the result. I make sure I read it correctly, and I run my gaze on that line one more time.

While my family is waiting for me, I'm still frozen into ice.

Chapter 28

Halloween-y

TRINITY

The clock seems to stop ticking, and everyone is anticipating the result to see. Though whatever the result is, I know it won't affect how much they love Bash. But Bash needs to find out the truth.

The expression on his face changes--he looks shocked. Is this what I think it is? I suddenly feel an ache inside my chest.

His mom calls him. I can't move, and it seems that everything is in slow motion.

Then he laughs out loud, his voice echoes in the entire office. He rushes to his mom, yanks her up, and spins her in the air. Finally, Lizzy and Uncle Seb release a huge sigh of relief.

He hugs her mom tightly. "Mom, I love you much, and after all that you've been through you still nurture me and love me unconditionally. You're the best mother in the world." A tear fall from his eye when he releases his mom, then he moves to his dad and hugs him.

"I'm sorry if doubted you as my dad, and the reasons why I did this because." He takes a deep breath. "Honestly, I was so hurt when I heard you talking to Mom, and I want to prove that I am your blood and that I deserve the name you gave me."

It's the happiest moment for this family. I wipe my tears away when I see Lizzy shake to cry.

"I never doubted you even a moment that you're my real brother, Bash. When I found out what happened to Mom, I really wanted to help and prove to the whole world that you're my brother. When I heard that your life in danger, I felt like the world is falling apart. I love you so much, baby brother. Stop giving us a heart attack already, and I don't wanna die young. I still want to have children," Lizzy chuckle in the end.

"Are you saying you're pregnant?" Bash asks a little harshly.

"Whoa! I just told you to stop giving us a heart attack and look at what you just did?" Lizzy hits her brother on his arm.

"I'm sorry. Are you pregnant, Lizzy?" he asks again.

Lizzy rolls her eyes. "No, Bash, but we talked about having family and all that stuff. Don't tell me you and K never talked about your future?" Lizzy's words are making me freeze.

I can feel their gazes on me, but Bash doesn't look surprised, he's grinning at me. He never mentioned having family in the future. He never told me about moving in with him, but he invited me to sleep in his penthouse, and we've just dated for like less than a month. What's the rush anyway?

Though we know each other long enough, I like to think of having a good conversation about our future than making a wild guess. Does he even want to go further?

"Then what are you waiting for? For another millennium?" Lizzy talks with exaggeration.

"Shut up, Lizzy. We're taking it slow," Bash defends himself.

"Taking it slow? You've waited for eight years, and you still want to take it slow?" Lizzy presses.

"Drop it. And we need to celebrate," Bash says dismissively.

"You'll regret it, and I want my children to have playmates," Lizzy retorts.

"Enough of that, Lizzy," Uncle Seb finally talks.

"Whatever, Dad. You should talk to your son."

"Hello, people. Am I some kind of an invisible right now?" I wave my hands.

"You've never been an invisible, Tri." Bash comes to me, kissing my forehead.

"Congratulations! You're officially a Hughes!" I roll my eyes.

"We'll play a game later," he whispers.

"What game?" I pretend I don't know what he's talking about.

"Simon says," he answers.

I bark out laughing. "Very original."

He laughs with me, too. "Do you prefer Bash says, instead?"

"I think of doctor and nurse, instead,"

He shakes his head. "Doctor-patient?"

"Nah."

"Master-slave is better."

"You two stop with your innuendos while we're around. Respect the elders. Ever heard of that?"

Lizzy cuts in.

"No, Lizzy. I think it's our cue to leave. This is a soundproof right, babe? Just like your office?" Aunt Abby asks her husband. Bash and Lizzy look at their parents with wide eyes.

Hughes throws a great party for Bash. They invited their close family friends, and of course, our friends are here.

The wide lawn of King's mansion is decorated with hundreds of pumpkin-shaped lanterns. It's is an early Halloween party. There are pumpkins scatter around the place with artificial spider webs, plastic human skeletons, masks, and of course, an artificial smoke.

Even food is very Halloween-y in skull shapes, bones, and fangs. The drinks are green, red, and black.

I wear the DC character supervillain Harley Quinn costume with wigs because Bash did not agree to dye my hair while Bash wears a Daredevil costume with a masked horn head.

"Shouldn't you two wear at least a match costume?" Ryker asks. I think he's Edward Cullen tonight with a thick foundation to look pale and red contact lens.

"Ryker!" I launch myself to hug him.

He laughs. "Easy there, Harley. Our last encounter wasn't pleasant. You don't wanna make this party a real Halloween, do you?"

"Ryker, thanks for coming," Bash says.

"Thanks for inviting me, man." They shake hands with a manly hug. "This is really cool," Ryker adds, glancing at the well-decorated place.

"Thanks. That's mom's ideas. Enjoy yourself. Where's Luke?" Bash asks.

"He's with the guys. I'm actually going to use a restroom."

"It's on the left. That's the nearest."

"Thanks." Ryker walks away.

I can't help but sways to the music played by the DJ. It's a remix of the song of Thirty Seconds to Mars, a very Halloween-y remix.

"Stop swaying your ass on me, Tri. Your skirt is too short," he chuckles.

"But Lizzy said it would look good on me."

"It is, and that's the problem. I could grab you to the nearest tree if it wouldn't hold on long enough."

"What wouldn't hold on long enough? Jeez, you're always raunchy!" I say half-laughing.

"Raunchy?" He laughs, then he moves closer to me. "But you love it when I'm raunchy," he whispers, and that makes me giggle.

"Hey, you two stop flirting. Come here already." It's Xandry calling us. I wave my hand towards them. They're in the table with a fake skull on top.

"Hey, guys! That's a nice costume you have there, Pyke. The Flash, huh?" He looks good with the costume.

"Thanks, K. And you look hot in, Harley."

"Stop flirting with my Harley, Pyke," Bash butts in.

"How about me, K?" Saph asks, wearing a wonder woman costumes with complete accessories from her head to toe.

"Like we didn't buy that together, but you look hot dressed up."

"Good evening, Everyone!" My head snaps to where the voice comes from. Lizzy is on the stage with a microphone. The DJ lowers the volume, allowing Lizzy to talk.

She's Maleficent, "We'll play a little game, and everyone should participate. We placed a lot of glow in the dark small pumpkins everywhere on this lawn. Only in this area, not inside the house. It has a small piece of paper inside, and the prizes are written on it, but some of them are empty." She pouts.

Everyone laughs. "But we have to close all the lights for the little pumpkins to glow. So, is everyone really to search for the amazing pumpkins?"

We yell with excitement.

"Ready? The moment the lights turn off, the search will start, and once the lights turn on, it means the searching ends, got it?"

Everyone says yes in unison.

"I have other plans, baby," Bash whispers.

I elbow him. "Shut up. I want to join the search for the magic pumpkins."

He looks amused. This is my first Halloween since he came back, and I want to enjoy this night.

"Fine. I won't join you. I will be here waiting for you at the table. Hust bring us pumpkins, okay? Have fun."

I nod, then the lights turn off, and now its pitch black. Bash kisses my lips before he lets me go.

My eyes finally adjust in the dark. The trees are painted with glow in the dark. This looks cool just like in the movie Avatar, only a little bit darker.

I walk towards the nearest big pumpkin with artificial vines surrounding it. I pick up the first pumpkin, but it's empty.

A few minutes later, I notice everyone is having pumpkins in their hands. I walk far to where they hadn't search yet.

I reach the tree near the concrete wall. It's dark in here, and I feel goosebumps crawling in my skin. Maybe it's because of the weather, and I wear a little skimpy dress. I see another one, but before I can grab it, someone has it, making me groan louder.

"Give that to me. I saw that first!" I say through gritted teeth, offering my hand to hand the pumpkin to me.

"Not so fast, Kiara."

My head jerks up to see a man in a hood. "What are you doing here, Sean?" I ask as I recognize his voice. I can't see quite clearly because he is wearing an Arrow costume with a cloak and mask. He has a bow sling across his chest as well.

"I come here to talk to you," he says in almost a whisper.

I scan the place, and we're far from everyone. I suddenly remember how he threatened Bash. "I don't think we have left to discuss, Sean." I walk away from him.

He grabs my arm a little tighter before I can walk far.

"Let go of me!" I warn him, but he keeps ahold of me.

"Do you love him, Kiara?" he asks.

"Yes," I answer immediately.

"Then you should value his life," he says casually.

"What does suppose to mean?" I quickly ask. My stomach twists sickly. "Do you think I don't know that you were the reason why the jet crashed down?"

"Honestly, I didn't do that, Kiara. I just told him out of anger," he says in a tense tone.

“Then what do you mean by what you just said to me?” I demand.

“He has something that belongs to someone else.”

I laugh at his absurdity. “You sound like in a movie, Sean. Try a little more convincing.”

“Don’t make a noise, Trinity. I’m serious. Do you think I would be here if it’s not serious?” He says in between hisses.

“Don’t call me that!” I warn him. “Then you should go, and tell him that.”

“I can’t get inside. He warned everyone.”

“Ask for an appointment at his office.” I roll my eyes.

“I’m being watched, Kiara. Are you even listening?”

“What do you mean?” This time, I feel he’s not joking anymore.

“We don’t have much time. I need a book that Bash has. If he will not hand it to me, either I’ll die first or him.”

My eyes widen. My heart nearly stops. “You can’t joke something like that, Sean.”

“Steal it from him and hand it to me. I will contact you.” He hands me the pumpkin, then he’s gone.

The lights turn on, indicating the game is over, but I’m still glued and terrified at what I just found out.

Chapter 29

Odd

BASH

Something is off. After the party everyone seems can't stop talking about the game. I guess they like Lizzy's idea, and what they like most is the grand prize Lizzy gave. A 1k gift certificate Luke found.

Trinity got only one pumpkin, and the prize is not bad, but she's been silent, and I don't think that's the reason.

"I can't believe Lizzy added a box of condoms as a prize," Pyke scoffs.

"You've got a good supply, I guess," Dean teases. He laughs, giving Dean a high-five.

"Lucky Luke," I announce. Luke grins and looks satisfied.

"I hate my best friend right now. She should've told where she placed the lucky pumpkin." Saph pouts.

"That would be unfair, don't you think?" Xandry snorts that end up Saph slapping her brother's thigh.

He jerks. "Whoa! Easy there twinnie. You might hit the wrong area," he says with a scowl on his face.

"I don't think I wouldn't miss the hit if I wanted to, dear twin. I know exactly where your crotch is, and it's between your thighs," she replies, rolling her eyes.

"Stop talking about crotches. What do you have, K?" Ryker asks, sitting down between Luke's thigh.

"Huh?" she asks back and looks jarred like she's not even listening.

"I was asking if what do you have?" Ryker rephrases.

She looks up at me from where she's sitting down the carpet in the living room. "Oh, this," she raises her hand with a keychain in her hand.

"Oh, wow! It's beautiful. Can I have that?" Kyland asks. My brows furrow. There is a part of me that still wants to punch him.

"No way. I found it, and it's almost taken away from me." She pulls her hand away with a keychain of a fox head.

Fox? A shiver almost runs down my spine.

"A fox?" I ask her.

"Yup."

"Can I see it, Tri?" I ask.

She hands it to me immediately. It's a fox head with red eyes made of like metal or maybe silver and a little heavier than how it looks.

"Beautiful, baby," I say. She smiles timidly.

"Why do you want the fox, Kyland?" I ask sternly.

"Calm down, man. There is this legend about the fox," he starts, but it was cut short by Pyke's groan.

"You just got a tattoo of a fox. Now you want a keychain? It's just a keychain, and you can buy it even in the street vendor," Pyke says to his bartender.

"Enough of that fox talks," My sister joins us. "I didn't just buy that from the street vendor, idiot!" She passes by Pyke hitting him in the head.

"Ouch! That's not funny," Pyke rubs the area where my sister hit him.

Everyone laughs, and he looks at Dean, but Dean just shrugs off.

"You just insulted my prize, you idiot." Trinity glares at him.

"I'd love to get a tattoo, Kyland. Can you do it for me?"

I freeze with I just heard coming from Trinity.

"Sure, come to my shop," he announces merrily.

"Not a fucking chance," I retort. Pairs of eyes are on me.

"Why not?" Trinity asks with furrowed brows.

"You're not getting another tattoo, Trinity," I say a little harshly.

"And why not?" She looks offended.

"Because I said so, Kiara Trinity!"

She looks shocked and hurt. I just call her by her full name, and I can't even remember when was the last time I called her that.

"It's her choice man. That's her decisions and her body," Kyland speaks.

"Fuck off, Kyland! And I'm not done with you yet." I glare at him.

"What's with that? You said that to me before. What did I do to you? I can't remember I did something against you."

Everyone goes silent.

"Bash found out that you kissed K three years ago, and he promised to make you pay for it," Saph answers flatly.

Kyland laughs--a belly laughs and stops when I stand up.

Trinity holds my hand. "You two stop! That was a long time ago. You're both so childish," Trinity chides us.

"Childish?" Kyland and I ask in unison. I slump my back to the couch.

She just shrugs.

"Yeah. Whatever happened in the past, it's in the past." Xandry rolls his eyes.

I shoot daggers at him. I can't believe he just said that. He's always been supporting me, but right now he just turns his back on me. He raises his hands to surrender when I am about to say something.

"I think that's enough. Xandry is right, Bash. You have Kiara now, and what's the point of keeping grudges? That does not matter anymore. What matters is the present, and the future," Lizzy says.

"I better go," Trinity stands up.

"Tri, where are you going?" I ask quickly, confused.

"Home, duh!"

"Yeah. Let's call it a night. A morning actually," Dean agrees.

I was able to convince Trinity to come with me tonight, and I'm dying to ask why she seems acting weird tonight after the game. Something is bothering her, and I can't let this night go.

"What's going on in that head of yours, Tri?"

She stiffens in my arms. "Nothing. I'm just tired, and I need some sleep," she answers, giving me her back.

"Just right after the game, baby. Something is bothering you."

She blows a breath. "Can we talk about this in the morning?"

"Is it because of what Lizzy asked about in my office?" That's the only thing that I can think of that can make her think twice about our relationship.

I'm just doing the baby steps, but I'm dying to ask her to move in with me. I want her to be with me not just for months but for years, and hopefully, we can get married and build our family.

I love Trinity so much, and I will do everything to be with her. If she wants to get married early, it would be great. Although we haven't talked about it, of course, I'm already thinking about our future together.

"Baby, if--"

"I just said I want to get some sleep." She groans.

"I'm sorry."

She doesn't reply.

"I'm sorry for calling you earlier," I say, hugging her tighter.

"It's okay. That's my name anyway."

"You've been cold to me, Trinity."

"You're annoying."

"I know."

She giggles. Did she just do that? "Night, Bash."

"Night, Trinity." I close my eyes after kissing her head.

I wake up with an empty bed. Trinity must wake up early in the morning, and that's another weird. I'm not used to waking up without her by my side. I used to wake up earlier than her since she doesn't go to a gym or for a run.

I walk down to the kitchen, and I was expecting to hear a greeting from Trinity, but she's not around. I feel sudden dismay.

"Trinity?" Nobody answers until I find a note on top of the kitchen island.

Bash,

I'll be right back. I love you.

Trinity

"Seriously, Tri. Can't you wait until I wake up?" I talk to myself. I'm childish sometimes, but it's boring without Trinity to annoy.

If she is trying to escape talking with me about what we left last night, then she's wrong. I might let that go today but not later and tomorrow and after tomorrow.

My phone vibrates, and I know it's from Dad asking me to play tennis with him, and I suck at that game that's why I don't like to come along with him.

A message from an unknown number pops on my phone screen. I feel a sudden emptiness inside me, and I can feel it doesn't sound good.

Thanks, Hughes. I owe you my life.

Who the hell is this?

I dial Edmund. "Bash, what can I do for you, man?"

"Prepare the car. We're going somewhere."

"Sure, anything else?"

"Did you happen to notice Trinity left the penthouse?" I ask with hesitation. He might think I'm a possessive asshole that I won't allow Trinity to be with her friends.

"Yep. She left not less than two hours ago. Do you want me to follow her?"

"Nah. Thanks."

He doesn't have to because I already did. It doesn't mean that I don't trust Trinity. After what happened to me last week, I think it is better to be cautious than sorry.

I walk to my office quickly. My eyes widen when I notice my office door is unlocked. I never came here last night, and I never forget to close the door. Ever.

Panic grows in the pit of my stomach. I push the door wider that causes it to slam against the wall.

I scan my office, and it looks nothing is touched except the frame of the sketch done by Trinity.

That's not how I left yesterday. I move closer and pull the frame away where my safe is placed.

"Fuck!" My blood boils.

My safe is open, but everything is in the right places except for the journal. It's gone. I slam the door stronger. I can't fucking believe she knows about it.

How could she betray my trust? What does she want from it?

I press the answer button when my phone vibrates.

"I want both of you. Now!"

Chapter 30

Fox

BASH

My rage is still over the edge. I can't even think straight. No one else came and out of my penthouse, only Trinity. So, this is all the silence and odd behavior are all about? How did she even know?

I never tell anyone about that journal. I have never gone through the pages of it, and worse, I don't have any copy of it.

What gives her interest in that?

I hear Edmund's voice from the doorway since I keep my office door open.

"I'm in here!" I yell from my desk where I use to lean on. I feel like I lost all my strength.

Edmund and Derek almost in the same sizes, but Derek is a lot younger than him, and he's in mid-thirties.

"What's wrong, Bash?" Derek speaks.

"Have you seen the feeds?" I am referring to the video footage.

Edmund raises his brow. "Video feeds? Yes. Nothing's off in your parking area, elevator, and outside your penthouse. Why did you ask?"

I clench my jaw. I want to keep this a secret, but they need to know to do their job. "Someone's interested in the journal," I tell them, but they don't have any idea what I'm talking about.

Derek brows furrowed. "Who? What journal?"

I breathe deeply. "Someone sent me a text, thanked me, and said I owe you my life."

"You mean, someone gets inside your penthouse?" Edmund is in full alert, walking out of my office.

"Edmund, it's Trinity," I say flatly.

Edmund walks in, looking more confused. "What's in that journal? Why does it matter to you and Ms. Mallory?"

"Why Ms. Mallory is interested in it?" Derek asks. "Let me see the number who sent you a text."

I hand my phone to Edmund.

He takes a glance and answers quickly. "It's Sean Rexwell."

"What?" My blood boils. How the fuck did he get my number? What is he thanking for? Then it hits me hard.

"Fuck! Follow me." I grab my coat and my keys before walk out of my office.

"Where are we going?" Derek asks, following me out. "What's going on between you two and Rexwell, Bash?"

I get inside the elevator and ignore Edmund's questions.

"Don't tell me we are going to Rexwell, Bash. I don't think it's a good idea. The last time you two met, it didn't end well," Edmund reminds when he didn't get an answer from me.

"Trinity gave the journal to him. I don't even know how did she know my combination."

"Maybe she took the journal, but I doubt she's stupid enough to betray you and hand it to him, Bash. This is a trap. He wants to get your attention, he wants to see you, and whatever he has in his mind right now. I know it's not gonna be good." Edmund has a point but I still need to know why Trinity took it and what is the connection of that journal to Rexwell.

"There is only one way to find out, Edmund, and whether you like it or not, I'm going to see that asshole!" I walk out of the elevator.

"You didn't answer me what's in that journal," Edmund insists.

I stop and face him. "I thought you know everything about me."

"Stop being sarcastic, Bash. We are here to protect you. Our job is to keep you safe, and our job depends on your life." I know he's worried about his job, and he's also worried about me.

Derek hasn't said a word.

"Then drive me to that asshole," I push, walking away from them to unlock the car.

"I'll drive you there, but you have to stay in the car until the area is safe."

Edmund pulls the car out of my private parking area.

"If it's my time to die even inside my penthouse, I will still die. No one can stop death," I reply dismissively.

"What are you gonna do? Confront him? Beat him? Take the journal back if Trinity handed it to him?" Derek finally talks, but he better stay quiet because I don't want to answer their questions.

"We should have a plan, Bash."

Time is ticking, I don't care what's in that journal, but I want to keep Trinity away from trouble and away from Rexwell. He placed that tracker on Trinity's phone on purpose.

Trinity is in trouble because of me.

I fish out my phone and dial Ranjiv's number.

"Bash, what a surprise? Though I know you want something from me, and I know—" I cut his long blah blah blah short.

"Track Trinity's phone," I say my purpose, and he groans in response.

"Seriously? Can't you track her all by yourself? Can't she even stay away from you for a minut?"

"Just do what I say!" I yell over the phone. Trinity is in danger, and he has the time to joke around?

Bad timing.

"Whoa! Okay, okay."

I squeeze my eyes shut. "Just do it, Ranjiv. I need you to stay on your laptop and watch over Trinity's phone. Her life is in danger. Can you do that for me?" I say it in a more calm tone.

"Sure, sure," he answers right away.

"Good. Thanks."

"If Trinity is in danger, Bash, I think I should inform your dad." Edmund glances at the rearview mirror.

"Don't!" I throw him a disapproving glare.

"This is where the people get killed, because of the impulsiveness, wrong decisions, and wrong move," Derek says slowly.

"I'm not gonna get killed. I just want to talk to Rexwell. We may not be in good terms, but we never tried to kill each other."

"Yet," Edmund adds.

I check when my phone vibrates. We're almost near the Rexwell building where Sean's lair is on the top floor.

"Ranjiv, anything?" I answer.

"This may sound odd but—"

"Just say it, and nothing is odd right now," I respond.

“Okay. Her phone is not moving, and it says it’s in the cemetery?” he answers with hesitation.

“There are many cemeteries here, Ranjiv. Be more specific.”

“I know where it is. It’s at Mr. Tennings’ grave,” Edmund answers.

“Where?” I ask Ranjiv.

“East cemetery.”

“Stay there.” I hang up. “You’re right, Edmund.”

He drives us to the main road, and I think we’re heading to the East Cemetery.

My stomach flips at the thought of Trinity is with Rexwell. It will kill me if Rexwell hurts her.

Why does she connive with that asshole? What does Rexwell want from that journal? But did really Trinity give the journal to Rexwell? I don’t even know what Rexwell was thanking me for; about the journal or maybe not. So many questions forming in my brain right now, but there is only one way to figure out; to see Rexwell.

Edmund parks the car nearest at Tennings’ grave. I notice the black sedan parked a few yards from us. It’s now confirmed that Rexwell is indeed here, and Trinity is with him.

I blow a shaky breath, closing the door of the car behind me.

“Don’t make any stupid move, Bash,” Edmund warns me.

“I’m not stupid.”

After a few steps, Trinity and Rexwell come to view. They’re standing side by side but not close enough for their skin to touch.

Three men in black suits and shades just like Edmund and Derek are wearing. They have earpieces, and I’m sure they’re armed.

Trinity’s eyes widen, and the color drains from her face when she notices me walking towards them.

“What a surprise to see you both here,” I say sarcastic enough to clench Rexwell’s jaw.

“I thought he doesn’t know you’re here,” Rexwell says to Trinity through gritted teeth.

“He doesn’t,” Trinity snaps. She looks tense, sad, and terrified.

“Bash, make it fast, and we need to go. I feel off, and I don’t even like a bit to be here.” Derek on full alert, scanning the area like hawk eyes.

Of course, what's good right here? If we're not surrounded by the dead.

"You shouldn't be here, Bash," Trinity says, her lips tremble.

I feel my eyes sting. What is she up to? Why do I feel that this meeting is not going to do any good for us?

She took something from me, but I can't get to be mad at her. She's with the man I dislike most, but I can't make myself hate her.

"You shouldn't be here too, Trinity. You shouldn't be here with Rexwell," I reply.

Rexwell snorts. "Yeah? Like I have a choice."

"This is not what it looks like, Bash," she says.

"But it does seem to me, Trinity." I walk closer, and she raises her hands to stop me.

She doesn't move though, and my eyes widen. I've never been confused in my entire life than today. I'm hurt, and my heart is broken.

"What the fuck is going on?" I stop walking and glare at them.

"Bash, just go and trust me, please?" Trinity's tears fall down on her cheeks.

"Trust you? Just tell me, what's going on then I'll go." I almost beg to her as I look at Trinity in the eye.

"Bash!" Edmund calls my name from my back.

I turn my head, and that's when I see men coming. Five men, the other four, I know they're working for the man in the center.

I know they're European, probably from France because I know exactly who's that man of late forties in the center.

Xavier Oscar François

One of the richest men in France, who owns one of the biggest sea and air cargo companies in Europe, but he happens to be one of the most dangerous people and allegedly accused of being involved in gun smuggling.

"Bash Hughes, good to see you in person, and in such circumstances like this."

Fuck!

How did Trinity get involved with these people?

My stomach flips. I have to swallow back the bitter taste on my throat. “What brought you here, Mr. Xavier?” I ask, shaking the hand he offers.

He grips my hand tightly. “I have business with Mr. Rexwell and Ms. Mallory,” he answers with his deep baritone voice with a fake smile on his face—a smile that shakes and shivers me with fear, but I can see that he is not expecting me to be here.

Now I know what he wants from them, but what he wants from that journal? He walks away from me to face Rexwell and Trinity.

My heart thuds with fear. I’ve never been scared in my entire life. We could’ve all die in here when everyone makes a wrong move. He has four men; taller and bulkier and looks dangerous. I only have two. Rexwell has three.

I can sense the tensions in the air. Everyone is on full alert like an eagle about to claw its prey.

“Bash, don’t move,” Edmund whispers.

No matter how much I want to move, I can’t, because I feel my legs wobble with fear. I’m beyond terrified. I close my eyes and take a deep breath to calm myself.

When I open my eyes, I notice Rexwell hands the journal to François. My nose flares, and my jaw clenches.

“Don’t,” Edmund hisses. He may have noticed my reactions.

Francois waves his hand to his men after flipping the journal open. I think he just wants to assure that he has the right journal.

There is nothing worth wasting time on that journal unless I missed the important part. It’s all but Tennings’ confessions, and he didn’t even mention any names, but I remember the words he scribbled.

François is long gone before I can process. Everyone sighs deeply in relief when I hear the wheels screeching on the asphalt, indicating that they’re gone.

Beware of the Fox? These four words are keep playing on my mind even Francois is long gone.

Fox?

FOX

Fuck!

François Oscar Xavier.

François Oscar Xavier is the Fox .

Chapter 31

Risk

BASH

It's almost eleven in the morning when I check the time on my wristwatch. Everyone seems to relax a little.

"Trinity, let's go," I almost plead, and I don't care what happened earlier. I want to get out of this place as fast as I can, away from Rexwell.

She walks to my direction as she looks at Rexwell. I feel a pang inside my chest, and m I guess she's trying to say something to Rexwell with that look.

Rexwell looks back at her, then he meets my gaze. "Bash—"

I raise my hand. I don't want to fight with Rexwell again and not in this place. I'm beyond pissed, but I don't care about his shit.

"You've done enough, Rexwell. You put my girlfriend's life in jeopardy. I'll let it go this time because I was here when that happened, but you'll not gonna drag her to your mess again or whatever you are dealing with that goddamn man!" I wish I can punch him with eye contact. I can't believe he's so selfish to drag a woman to save his ass.

He purses her lips into a thin line and nods slowly.

He takes a deeper breath. "I know, I know, Bash. But you've warned everyone, and I can't get close to you." Guilt crosses his face. "I ask your number from Trinity."

"Don't fucking call her Trinity!" I shout at him.

He looks shocked. "Okay!" He agrees, raising his hand.

"Bash, let me explain." Trinity's voice is a little bit shaky because she'd seen me angry as soon as I arrived.

"You have nothing to explain, Trinity. Let's go." I tell her harshly and walk away, but I don't hear footsteps following me.

I stop and turn around only to see Trinity is hugging Rexwell. I shake my head in disbelief, and I just can't believe them doing that in front of me, but I'd rather not to think them hugging behind my back as well.

My chest tightens. I take a deep breath and I walk away as fast as I can. I shove my hands in my pockets because I might lose my shit and punch Rexwell again.

I'm always a jealous person, but I'm not greedy. It will kill me if Trinity likes Rexwell, but if she chooses him, then I have to let her go.

"Bash!" I hear her seem to catch her breath behind my back, and her footsteps seem she's running.

"Bash!" She calls me again.

I stop to halt to face her. "What?" Even myself, I can hear the pain in my own voice.

"Bash." She pulls me into a hug, tighter, presses herself into me, and bursts into tears. "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, and I don't wanna put your life in danger again. I-I'm sorry, Bash. If I had to do it behind your back."

I can't help but hug her back as tight as she does. I run my fingers through her hair and kiss the top of her head. "Hush, Tri. Please, don't cry." That's all I can say. It breaks my heart to see like this. I realize that she's here because of that journal and because of me.

"It's not what you think it is, Bash," she speaks again.

"I know, Baby. I know."

"No, Bash. It's about Sean." I groan and pull away from our embrace.

"What about him, Trinity? Do you like him that much that you have to risk your goddamn life to be with him?" I ask through gritted teeth, narrowing my eyes on her.

I need to know this, and once and for all, I want to end this agony inside me. It's better to put this to an end for at once than knowing Trinity liking someone else.

Her teary eyes grow wider, her lips slightly parted. Her grips on my arms loosen as she stares at me in disbelief. I notice that we have an audience—an audience that I wish I can punch him till his eyes burst out from his fucking head. I want to break his skull pretty bad, my fists shake in anger.

"Why are you saying like that?" She asks with a shaky and cracked voice.

"Shouldn't you be the one answering that?" I ask back, ignoring Rexwell at her back.

"I stole the journal because I couldn't think of putting your life in danger again. I know it was wrong to steal that book from you, but I have no choice. You and Sean are being watched. He's not the one who uploaded that app to my phone. He was only involved with all of this because." She pauses, looking at Rexwell, then he nods at Trinity. "He's Mr. Tenning's son."

I laugh, mocking at them. "What? Is this some kind of a joke? What other lies you fed to my girlfriend, Rexwell?" I look at Rexwell. He purses his lips into a thin line, then he shakes his head to confirm that Trinity is not joking.

"That's the truth, Hughes," He answers slowly, seemingly ashamed that he's the son of who put others' blood on his hands.

"What's the fucking truth?" I ask, focusing my attention on Rexwell.

"Andrew Tennings was my dad. My real father. Mom worked as a psychiatric nurse at the mental facility where Tennings was confined. Since he wasn't really crazy at that time, they had an affair that led mom on getting pregnant." He stops, looking at me.

I listen intently when his story seems believable. But why Tennings gave the book to me?

"He was transferred back to prison but Mom continued her visit until she told him that she was pregnant. Mom knew everything what happened to him in and out of prison. They killed my mom after I was born, and that's how I got adopted by Brad Rexwell."

"Then why did he give the journal to me?"

"I was in Boston when that happened."

"You didn't even come to his burial!"

"I was being watched, Hughes. They wanted the journal that I didn't have," he explains.

"How did you know all these?" I ask in disbelief.

"My adopted mother told me when I turned eighteen, and I was able to visit him discreetly to prison. He told me once that he loved your mom, and he did something bad to her," he says, shrugging.

"Is that why you hated my guts?" I ask.

He laughs a little. "Your family locked him up."

"Your father raped my mom! And he confessed!" I yell, and I am beyond furious right now.

"You know that he didn't kill someone! He was forced!"

"Stop! Stop!" Trinity comes in between, pushing us away when we are about to get into each other's throat.

"Guys, we need to leave," Derek says.

"Just give us a minute," Trinity answers him. Derek nods, walking away to give us some privacy.

"Will you two stop? You're both grown up. At least be civil with each other," Trinity scolds us like we're both children.

I relax a bit.

"We can talk about these over a coffee, maybe?" Rexwell asks with a smirk.

"Seriously? Did you just asked me out for a coffee, Rexwell?" I ask back in surprise.

He rolls her eyes. Did he just really do that? "I'm asking you for a dinner date too."

"You're being sarcastic, Sean."

He looks amused at wat Trinity just said.

"How about tonight at Night Stalker?" Trinity asks him.

"What's tonight, Trinity?" I ask.

"Sure. See you there," Sean answers immediately.

"See you there too, Hughes!" he slaps my back before he finally walks away.

"Did you just invite him, Trinity?" I can't fucking believe it.

"I think you two need to forget the past, Bash. Move on. He's not what you think he is." She looks at me and squeezes my hand tightly.

"Oh, really? He just let you stole the journal."

"It was my choice, Bash."

"He just put your life in danger, Trinity."

"It was my choice too."

"You're unbelievable!" I can't believe she just defended him.

"You're just jealous," she murmurs.

"Jealous? Do you think this is all about jealousy to you? Do you even know who that man is?" I glare at her. "Your parents will kill me if they find this out."

"Sean told me everything about that man while we're on our way," she says guiltily.

"And yet you still risk your life." I snap.

"I will do everything for you, Bash. Even if it will take my life away from me as long as I have the assurance that you will be safe. I will do it, and I will do the same thing I did an hour ago over again. That's how much I love you." Her tears roll down her cheeks.

I feel bad for the way I treated her earlier. I was just damn jealous, and she kept all of these away from me.

"That's reckless and selfless! I didn't ask you to do that, Trinity. Don't ever do something like that behind my back again. Do you understand me?"

"You don't have to ask en, Bash. That's what I wanted to do. I chose it, and I made that decision. Sean forced me to stay in the car but I refused. I don't trust him if he would give it to him, and I wanted that to be over. I've been guilty of keeping all these away from you. It's killing me." She wipes her tears away.

I bite my bottom lip. She just risked her life for me. "You're so stubborn, you know." I pulled her into my arms.

"We were being watched earlier, Bash. That's why I don't want you to move closer to us."

I shake my head, and I can't believe it. I squeeze my eyes shut and take a deep breath. "Let's go home, and I want to punish you there."

We arrive back to my penthouse silently. Edmund and Derek let go of us when we get inside the elevator safe and sound.

The elevator slides close, leaving just the two of us alone. I look at the camera installed inside the elevator. I fish out my phone from my pocket and send a quick message to Edmund. I slip my phone back into my pocket and look down at Trinity. "Kiara Trinity."

She snaps her head at me. I cup her face immediately and devour her lips with a wet and urgent kiss.

She whimpers when I push her against the elevator wall.

Her lips move against mine. I quickly find her pants' button, unbuttoning them while she's also busy unbuttoning mine. We push our pants down simultaneously, and she grabs my already hard cock, stroking it slowly, teasing me.

"Fuck, Tri," I groan quietly and grab her sweet ass. She wraps her legs around my waist instantly, and I'm all inside her warm and slick pussy.

I pull my lips from her, kiss her jaw and neck, and bite her earlobe.

"Please, Bash," she says with a broken whimper.

"Please, what, Trinity?" I say quietly in a mocking tone.

"Stop being an asshole right now! Stop bashing me!"

My eyes widened in amusement. "Say it again, and I will give you whatever you want."

She looks hurt. "If you want to punish me by doing this, this is not gonna work!" She loosens her legs around my waist.

Shit! This woman is hotter than hell when she's pissed, but she's about to push me away.

Panic strikes through me. I push her a little bit harder against the wall. I'm still inside her, and I can feel her dripping wet.

"Baby, I'm not punishing you by not making you come. I love you, Trinity. You just risked your life for me, and I can never repay you for that. You're the strongest woman I know, but don't ever do that again just to save my life. I'm supposed to be the one protecting you and not the other way around," I say slowly. "I would rather be in danger than you. If something bad happened to you there, I'd rather die than watched you suffer. Do you understand me?"

She nods slowly, kissing my lips.

"Do you want to continue this?"

"What? Fucking me in the elevator?" She arches a brow.

and looks up. Just now she realizes that there's a camera inside the elevator. "Oh, Shit! Shit!" She squirms against me and looks horrified while I am amused at her reaction. "Bash, the camera!"

"Do you really think I will let them watch us while I'm making you come?" I kiss her again, not waiting for her to answer.

I start moving, thrusting deeper inside her until she moans and mumbles something I can't even understand. My legs wobble, and our breathing catches as we both let go of our overwhelming orgasms.

Chapter 32

Perfect

TRINITY

I enter the Night Stalker with Bash gripping my hand. I had to bribe him to come with me. As always, this club is jam-packed.

This club has been closed for weeks due to the incident that happened with Mr. Tennings.

“Over here!” My eyes fix to where the voice comes from. Our friends occupy the two L-shape black leather couches, facing each other at the left corner of the Bar.

“Thank God! I thought the two of you are going to bail us,” Lizzy says, rises from her seat, and gives us both a hug.

“I was planning to, but Trinity bribed me that I couldn’t say no.”

His sister waves her hand to dismiss him. “I don’t wanna know.”

Everyone chuckles. Bash takes a seat at the end corner of the couch, pulling me to sit on his lap.

Sean walks in, scanning the place.

“Sean!” I yell at the top of my lungs. He grins when he sees me as he comes towards us.

Everyone curses, certainly not impressed with Sean’s presence.

I face them before Sean gets closer. “Be nice to him,” I warn them. “I’ll explain later.”

“You look gorgeous tonight, Kiara,” he says with a smile.

He sounds sincere, though, and not the cocky Sean I met before. He seems friendly without a glint of mischief in his eyes.

“Thanks! At least you complimented me, unlike the other over there.” I point my thumb to Bash.

“Who’s the other over there?” Bash’s voice almost startles me, and he asks when he’s already beside me. I purse my lips to hide my smile.

“Good to see you again, I guess?” He offers his hand to Sean. I elbow him. “Be nice. Let me remind you about our deal, Sebastian.”

Sean laughs. “You made a deal with the devil?” He must have heard what I’ve said.

They shake hands. "Everyone, you know already Sean, and I guess no need an introduction. Rexwell, my friends, and they're my family too." Bash gestures to the couples of eyes pinned at him as they scrutinize the sincerity of his friendship.

Everyone remains silent, though, and nobody moved.

I notice Sean nods slowly. His lips curve into a sad smile. He may be intimidating in business, but tonight. He seems out of place.

"Hi, Rexwell." Saph stands up, extending her hand. Sean grips her hands immediately and smiles at her.

"Hi." Then I notice something--they just stare at each other as if they are just love-struck. Their hands are still gripped for too long.

I hear someone clears a throat, and I know who exactly he is-- it's Xandry, and that's when they break each other's eye contact.

Everyone greets Sean, behaving well even just to be civil with him. I can't help but notice the exchange glances between Sean and Saph. Saph and Xandry didn't go to the same school as I, Bash, and Sean together. Sean studies college abroad too. They don't have chances to meet, especially since Rexwell is a business rival.

Sean becomes comfortable around us, and he joins their conversation, and they seem to enjoy his company.

"We will win, man!" Pyke yells from the end corner.

"I bet, one-hundred dollars. My team wins!" Kyland joins us since his shift is over.

"One-hundred for me. I bet for Pyke." Sean places Benjamin on the table. Everyone roars, and I look at Bash who's smiling in amusement.

"How about you?" I ask him.

"I used to watch soccer, Baby."

I roll my eyes. "Just choose your bet," I bump him on his shoulder.

"Fifty on Kyland!" Saph waves her fifty dollar bills after she gives a quick look at Sean then she throws the bills on the table.

"Okay, fifty for Pyke." I toss my fifty down the table.

"Thanks, Trinity!" Pyke yells.

I giggle with Lizzy while Bash groans.

"Me and Dean for Kyland." Lizzy places her bet.

"Seriously, cousin?" Pyke pouts.

"Last year, your team lost," Dean tells Pyke.

"Yeah, but we will win this time," Pyke retorts.

"Good luck with that, Pyke!" Dean barks.

"Free tattoos, man! One hundred dollars for me," Kyland tells Bash, wagging his brows.

"But I have to bet my one hundred dollars?" Bash asks, laughing.

"C'mon, Bash," Sean encourages him to throw his money.

"Tattoos." Kyland sings.

"I'm not getting another tattoo," Bash says.

"You've got a tattoo?" Sean asks him, seemingly surprised.

"Yep." He smirks.

"I did that," Kyland says proudly, raising his hand.

"I'd love to get one," Sean says sounds excited.

"Sure. I'm at the shop every day in the afternoon," Kyland says.

"I'd love too." I raise my hand.

"Trinity," Bash groans, pinching my exposed thigh.

"Let her do, Bash," Lizzy speaks to her brother.

He shrugs in defeat. "Where do you want, baby?"

I grin. "It's a surprise."

"Not close to here and here." Bash points to my cleavage and in between my thighs.

My friends bark out laughing, and I never notice they're actually watching us talk.

The whole two months were perfect.

I had FaceTime with my parents yesterday morning, had girls bonding in the afternoon, and dinner date with Bash. We went home then made love over and over again.

Now, it's Monday morning, and we are both back to work. If he didn't wake me up earlier, I may be still be snoring in our bed. Our bed as he called it.

"Trinity, meet me in the lobby for lunch, okay?" Bash kisses my lips then licks his lips with my smeared lip-gloss.

"Oh, don't pout, and just reapply them. I told you to use a kiss proofed lipstick." He smirks and moves his head closer.

"You had enough last night and this morning, and not in here in the public elevator of the office building." I place my thumb on his lips, wiping the stained of my lip-gloss. He slips his tongue that grazes against my thumb.

It was erotically sweet, and I have to press my thighs together because I know he's teasing me. I don't notice I'm biting my lower lip until his eyes are fixed on my lips.

"No banging in the office building," Uncle Seb says quietly that makes us pull apart.

"Dad!" Bash almost yelps in surprise.

My face burns, but Bash doesn't seem to care even his dad just caught us.

"Good morning, Son, Kiara."

"Good morning, Uncle."

"I'm going up. Go with your dad, Bash," I suggest.

"No, I'm coming with you," he replies, waving at his dad. "See you later, Dad!"

When the door closes in front of us, he grabs my face and kisses me, roughly at first, then teases me and caressing my bottom lip with his tongue when I'm still shocked to respond.

He bites my lower lip, growls in my mouth, and deepens the kiss while his hands are fisting my hair. He presses his body against mine, and I finally kiss him back just the way he likes. My tongue caresses his as wrapping my arms around his neck.

I moan when I feel his bulge pressed against my lower abdomen.

We pull away together, panting. "I love you, Trinity." His breathing warms my face. The way he says those, they struck me like a bolt of lightning, awakening every sense in my body, and my heart hammers wildly in my chest.

"I love you too, Bash," I say slowly as our foreheads press together.

"Marry me," he says in almost a whisper while looking directly into my eyes.

His gaze meets mine.

My jaw drops, but before I can answer, the elevator doors open.

Pairs of eyes are pin on us, one pop the confetti into us that causes me to yelp. I see balloons in red and white colors. Everyone claps their hands and some yelling congratulations.

“What’s going on here?” I ask, still in shock. I look at Bash who’s grinning at them, wiping off the confetti on his suit.

“I was a little bit carried away from the kiss,” he tells them.

“Oh I, my God! Thank you, guys.” That’s all I can say. Bash faces me, squeezing my hands.

“In this very same elevator where I made you cry many times when we’re just kids. In this very elevator where I wanted to kiss you pretty bad just months ago, and in this very same elevator, I wanted to let these people know how much I love you, how much I wanted our relationship to step to the next level.” He pauses, and Ranjiv offers him, and I know what it is.

I am still speechless, and my eyes start to blur with unshed tears.

Bash kneels in front of me without breaking eye contact, and my tears finally fall. “To the redhead that I used to bully and to the freckliest face that I’m madly in love with, Kiara Trinity, will you marry me?”

All I can do is a nod.

Hughes gives us a break for a few hours to celebrate. I never thought that Bash planned all these since after that talked with his family in his office, he said he wanted to take it slow.

I feel like he was forced to do it, but deep inside me, I’m more than happy.

“I’m happy for you, Kiara.” Sean is here too, and he gets along with Bash pretty well. They met every weekend since then.

The Hughes family likes him already. He met Aunt Abby and apologized on behalf of his biological dad.

“Thank you, Sean. I see it now. Bash told you all about these, and you didn’t even mention to me.” I pull from a hug.

“He wanted to surprise you. I’m happy for you, but if you two break up, I’m here.”

“What did you just say?” Bash asks from my back.

Sean laughs out loud. “Just messing with you, man.”

"Like I am threatened." He kisses the side of my head.

"Confident much, huh?" he scoffs.

"Pretty much. If you won't shut up, I might throw you to that building." Bash points at the Rexwell Tower with a letter R that's very visible from the Hughes Building. "See that?"

Sean laughs again. "Maybe we should build extensions from here to there," he suggests.

"Or maybe I will just bring a cannonball to the rooftop and throw you to your building," Bash retorts.

"Oh, man, that's a good idea if Kiara will be the last to be thrown. I will catch her with open arms."

I hit Sean's arm. "I'm here, you know."

"Ouch." He fakes a wince.

"I think you should go before, I will hit you with my heels."

He looks down at my new red high heels. "Hmm. They're effing hot."

"Effing?" I glare.

He shrugs. Bash smiles at Sean instead of going possessive on me.

Then it hit me. "Oh, my God! I thought he bought this with Lizzy," I look at Sean.

He shakes his head.

"Since when did you two enjoy shopping for women's clothing?" I ask, and now my hands are on my hips.

"I can't say no, you know. I made a deal with your devil of a boyfriend," he answers.

"Fiancée," Bash corrects.

"Whatever."

"What deal?" I ask out of curiosity.

"Nah. I don't share." Sean shrugs.

"Tell me that, later," I say to Bash, but I notice his eyes transfixed to somewhere, and his face turns pale.

My brows furrow as I follow where his eyes are fixed, and that's when I notice a beautiful platinum blonde woman marching towards us, and my gaze lands to her abdomen.

“Hello, love. Fancy meeting you again.”

Chapter 33

Walk Out

TRINITY

“Hello, love. Fancy meeting you again.” The woman calls Bash as if they know very well.

What catches my attention is her thick English Londoner. My officemates look at her like she’s a supermodel. Well, she can be a supermodel if the baby bump is not visible.

“Dana?” Bash knows her, of course. His voice explains that he’s surprised to see her, and he looks terribly shocked.

Dana? The Dana? His ex? And pregnant? If I have to guess, I think she’s in her second trimester. Bash came back just the last three months.

Dana throws herself to Bash, hugging him tightly like everyone around is invisible. Bash still looks shocked with his brows furrowed. He looks at her from head to toe then back to her face then to her belly.

I swallow hard, and my eyes instantly fill with tears. I wish I can control my emotion, but when I feel sad and upset, my eyes always the first to respond. My gaze meets Sean’s, and he looks shocked too. I can feel the sympathy in his gaze towards mine while Bash forgets about me.

They’re busy catching up like we don’t even exist As if only the two of them in this room, on this floor, and in this building.

The Trinity is back to be a wallflower that no one noticed.

I feel my tears fall to my cheeks. I can’t take this anymore. I’ve just celebrated my engagement, and now he has someone got pregnant.

My last engagement didn’t go well. Now, it didn’t go well as well.

What curse do I have?

My high-heels create sounds on the entire floor, but Bash doesn’t even notice me that I’m already leaving.

Instead of going to the elevator where he proposed hours ago, I use the stairs to avoid bumping into someone.

“Kiara!” I startle when I hear Sean calls my name.

“Kiara, wait!”

I continue walking down the stairs, ignoring Sean.

We’re still on the 12th floor, and I’m already catching my breath. Blame to my lazy ass for not even stepping on a treadmill and for refusing to join Bash to run.

“Kiara, wait! Stop!”

I stop, shaking into a cry. I cup my face with my hands to suppress my sob. I don’t want to create another scene. I feel arms wrap around my body, and I cry into Sean’s chest.

“Hush, Kiara. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure that out, but I think you two should talk.”

“Thanks for stating the obvious, but I don’t need it right now, Sean.”

He’s rubbing my back. “Don’t jump to conclusions again, Kiara.”

I freeze. “What do you mean again?” I ask as I stare at him. I know I look like a mess, and my mascara smeared, but I don’t care.

“Remember how we met at the airport? Bash told me about that. Let him explain, Kiara. That man is madly in love with you,” he says with full of sincerity in his voice.

“You just told me that it doesn’t take a rocket scientist.”

He chuckles. “I know but it doesn’t mean it’s his. She shouldn’t have waited for long to tell Bash. Why now?”

“Please, I need to go. I need to be somewhere, and I can’t take this. I just get engaged, and now I found out my fiancé has knocked up someone else.”

“I just told you not to jump to conclusions.”

“Bye, Sean.” I release his arms, step back, and start walking down the stairs.

“Kiara, let me help you get out of here.”

“I don’t need you, Sean!” I yell out but he doesn’t seem to listen.

He grabs my arms. “You will collapse before you’ll reach the 8th floor with your condition, sweetheart,” he says, wrapping his arm around my shoulders.

“Why are you doing this? Why are you helping me?” I look up at him.

“That’s what friends do, Kiara. Did you forget already? How did you save my life? I owe you one, and you are the reason why I have real friends. You are the reason why my father has forgiven.

Instead of being frenemies with Hughes and King, I have real friends now. I owe you big time, and I don't even know how to replay you."

Sean brings me to his home. He said that nobody knows this place except his dad and his security, but he makes sure that no one will share that information.

I wash my face with cold water, and my eyes ache from crying. He even let me cry on his shoulder during our flight to his home. We flew by Rexwell's helo.

"Kiara, Bash keeps calling me. I think he saw the video in the parking lot. I lied and told him that I dropped you at your apartment."

I nod while patting my face dry. "I can't thank you enough."

He smiles at me—a smile of sympathy.

"I don't need your pity-look, Sean." I place the towel on top of the dresser.

"Who says I pity you? Did you forget what I said? That I'm here when you two broke up?" He smirks.

"You sonofabitch! Did you call that skank to my engagement party?" I push him hard and he hits his back against the walk-in closet. "How could you, you asshole? How could you? I shouldn't have trusted you. I want to get out of this freaking house! I want to go back home, Rexwell!" I yell my anger out loud while I'm hitting him anywhere I can.

"Do you feel better now?" he suddenly asks with furrowed brows, but he doesn't look angry. "How do you feel, Kiara?" he asks again, and this time he looks serious.

I can see him clenching his jaw, scrutinizing me.

"You know I value my friendship with Bash, and I will never do that to hurt him, to hurt you. Right now, that man is driving everyone crazy, looking for you. The whole security team of Hughes and King is searching for you. If he knows that I am keeping you here, boom! He will not trust me again. Do you understand what I put myself into?" He doesn't break eye contact with me.

I nod slowly.

"I never met that woman, if that's what you're thinking."

"Change into something. I place you a t-shirt and sweatpants, but I know it's big for you so, I place boxers too. Maybe that will fit. Meet me in the dining room." He then walks away.

What was I thinking? I feel guilty for accusing him. He helped me in getting away from that building, and I didn't even think twice that he risked his friendship with Bash just to help me.

I walk out of the room where I'm going to spend the night alone. I pull off the engagement ring from my finger. I can't wear that while my relationship with Bash is unclear. I can't let him marry me if he gets someone impregnated.

"Hi, Sean. I'm sorry about earlier," I say quietly, twisting my fingers at my back.

"It's alright, Kiara. Let's have dinner." He pulls an empty chair at his right side.

We have dinner in silence. He must have noticed that I don't touch much of my food. It makes me queasy, and my mind always comes back to what happened earlier. My eyes sting every time I think about Bash and that pregnant woman.

After our dinner, I carry a glass of red wine into his house's back porch. The evening is so peaceful even though I can't see many stars and even the moon is in its waxing crescent.

I drink the remaining wine in my glass.

"I didn't bring you here to get drunk." I don't even notice Sean comes in. He sits beside me on the sofa.

"Then you shouldn't let me drink," I say sarcastically. I feel drained from crying, from thinking, and from my unsettling emotions.

"Everything will be okay, Kiara. I told you not to—"

"Jump to conclusions, and you've said that like ten times already," I cut him off.

"Have you watched the news lately?" he asks, and my head snaps to his side.

Sean is crossing his leg over the other. He looks handsome like before with five o'clock shadow. I guess that's his signature look.

"Don't look at me like you admire me. I still value my friendship with your fiancé." He smirks again.

"You're so full of yourself!" I snort. It still hurts to hear the word fiancé.

"He loves you, Kiara. He never stopped babbling something about you every time we met. He'd been planning on how he's going to propose to you. Sometimes he's so pussy-whipped. No, actually, he is pussy-whipped all the time. He frowned a lot every time when you didn't reply to his messages, and it's annoying. He was with us, but his mind is with you." He chuckles, wrapping his arms around my shoulders to pull himself closer to me.

"I like you since before, Kiara, but he never gave me a chance. That's how he dated the girl I wanted to date since he didn't let me get closed to you. He wanted to teach me lessons, and that girl just disappears out of the blue."

My eyes widen with his confessions. "You like me since before?" I ask with disbelief.

He nods, laughing. "He warned me many times to stay away from you. I even asked someone to let Kyland send you home that night because I found out that he came back from the U.K to make a move on you. He told everyone to watch over you; Xandry, Pyke, Dean, and your best friends. But I don't know why he didn't stop your ex. I mean your late ex-fiancé."

I can't believe he did that. Bash never told me about this before. He told me he loves me since before, but he never mentioned it since he went to college.

"How did you know all of these?" I ask out of curiosity. At least I know something about Bash's true feelings for me. I don't think Sean will lie to me when I am this vulnerable.

"You never notice why nobody asked you out on a date? Did anybody ask you to dance and even the fucking prom? He beat everyone and warned everyone he knew who has planned on asking you out." He barks out to laugh.

"I can't believe you two are so dumb. Bash doesn't have an idea that you love him since then, and his eyes almost pop out when Xandry told him that you are just waiting for him to ask you out. His jaw dropped literally. He looked like just lost a million dollars. We laughed our ass out loud."

I hit his arm, glaring. "Why the hell are you all talking about me?"

"Because he asked us what do you like. What is the romantic way of proposing you, some shit like that." He grins sheepishly. "It's late already, sweetheart. I think we call this a night. You need some rest."

I nod, kissing him on his cheek. "Thanks for sharing."

He nods, and I walk away from the porch heading to the room where I'm gonna sleep alone tonight.

I feel something heavy draped around my waist and warm breath tickling on my exposed neck.

Chapter 34

Drunk & Depressed

TRINITY

Last night, Sean told me about our high school days before I went to my room, and I'm not that drunk to forget what happened last night. I know this isn't Sean beside me because I know how it feels when Bash is around.

He has my heart, but how about that pregnant woman? What is he doing here with me?

I can also feel my ring on my finger, which I can't remember I put it back on. He must have seen it on top of the dresser where I left.

Bash stirs, pulling me closer into him. I can even feel his morning wood pressed against my butt. His arm tightens around my waist because he knows that I'm already awake.

"Morning, drunkass." His voice makes me shiver. Something down there awakens at his presence, and he kisses my shoulder. "No good morning back for your fiancé, Trinity?" he asks when I haven't said anything.

I swallow the lump forming in my throat. "What are you doing here, Bash?" I know he wants to talk to me, but I'm not ready for any bad news today.

"Where would I be if not with you, Tri?" he answers like nothing happened yesterday. He runs his nose on my back--the typical Bash when he wakes up in the morning.

"Baby, can you at least give me a good morning kiss or just turn and look at me? I wanna see your eyes." He tries to turn me to face him, but I stay still.

"We need a serious talk, Trinity," now he demands. His voice is firm.

A tear suddenly falls at the corner of my eye. "I know, Bash, but I'm not ready for that."

"And you'd rather run like your ass on fire yesterday, leaving me alone with my family and with our employees? Mom and Dad were not happy about it. Lizzy was bugging me until I came here last night. By the way, Uncle Phoenix and Aunt Sam sent their congratulations."

I breathe deeply, trying to control my sob.

"You should try minimizing your impulsiveness, Trinity. That's not good, and you're very judgmental. I know the reason why you ran away. I've been in hell searching for you. Thank God someone saw you with Rexwell."

A loud bang at the door startled me. "I know you two are awake. No makeup sex in my house, Hughes!" Sean yells outside the door.

"Fuck off!" Bash yells back.

"Breakfast is ready!"

"Alright. Just give us a minute!"

"Baby, get up, and I still need my good morning kiss." He loosens his arms around me, and I feel the bed shifts.

"Do you need painkillers?"

"No." My voice finally cracks.

He mutters shit. "Baby, is it about my ex?" he asks, and sound pissed. "You're killing me for treating me this way, Trinity. I should've been making love with you last night because that's our first night as an engaged couple. But you judged me instead!"

I sit abruptly, which makes me wince in pain. "Shouldn't you be with her? With the mother of your child?" I didn't even know I have a hangover.

He snorts. "Oh, yeah?" He laughs sarcastically. "You still don't trust me, do you?"

I can't form a word.

"I see." He nods slowly before walks away to the door, slams it behind him, leaving me in the room on my own.

I wrap my arms around me and starts to cry. Does it have to be me? I shouldn't have accepted his proposal. Every time I got engaged, my fiancé left me.

I feel the bed shifts, and I don't have to check who it is. "K," My head jerks up to that voice, and I thought it's Sean.

I launch myself to Lizzy, pulling her into a hug. I need someone like her, my best friend. I feel her hands rubbing my back. "Stop crying, you're wasting your tears, you know."

I pull myself away from her.

"Bash is right. You should try to control your impulsiveness and your temper. You two are alike, and he's an impulsive too."

"I know, he's mad at me."

"Of course, he is. You left him yesterday because you thought Bash and Dana are having a baby. They broke up five months before Bash came back. I think your math has improved, and I don't have to calculate it for you."

My eyes never leave her. I close my gaping mouth.

She arches her brow. "So, did you really trust my brother, K? I love him so much, and I don't wanna see him getting hurt. I love you too, but please, take care of his heart. He may be Bash, but he has a soft heart, and he may be a man, but he has feelings," she says, squeezing my hands.

I nod and can't anymore form a word.

I get out of my room after making myself look like a human.

The house is dead silent when I walk down the living room.

"Ms. Mallory?" I turn my head to see Sean's driver.

"Um, hi, good morning." I rub my palm on my jeans.

He gives me a polite smile. "Good morning."

My head snaps to Sean, walking down the stairs. "Where is Bash?"

"They left about twenty minutes ago," he says casually.

"They left?" I ask in disbelief.

"Yeah. I'll send you home after your breakfast."

"Why did he leave me here?" My eyes fill with tears again.

Sean blows a breath. "He has a business trip, and has to fly to London tonight."

My eyes widen. "Business trip? To London?" I can't remember him having a business trip to London. I know he has no business trips this month, and how did I miss it?

He shrugs. "That's what he said."

"I don't want my breakfast anymore. Can you send me to his penthouse?" I walk to the door without waiting for him to reply. The helo is already waiting for us.

My stomach lurches. "I should have eaten something," I complain when I get out of the helo.

"We can stop at the restaurant," Sean suggests.

I shake my head. "No. I want to see Bash before he leaves."

"Sure. Whatever you want, Kiara."

"Thanks, Sean."

He chuckles. "Anything for the redhead."

"That's not nice." I hit him on his thigh.

He laughs. "Seriously, Kiara. Be nice to Bash. That poor man loves you like you're his air."

I look at him intently. "I love him more than he loves me, Sean."

"Good to know."

I get in his penthouse while Sean is following me inside. "Bash!" I call his name when I can't hear anything.

"Sean, did he mention to you what time his flight is? He should still be here if his flight is tonight."

"Call him, Kiara."

I'm such a moron. Why didn't I think of that before coming over here? Maybe because I was busy sulking. I dial his number, but he doesn't pick up until it goes his voicemail. I dial again, and he still not answering. My face falls when I realize he's ignoring me.

"I guess he doesn't want to talk to me," I say in dismay.

"Just relax. He will be back next week."

"Next week?" My eyes widen.

"I said relax, Kiara."

"What will I do for a week?"

He shakes his head. "Don't you have work? Don't you have friends? I can't believe that if you're in love, everything around you doesn't matter anymore."

I think I am not just thinking straight. Good thing, Sean is here. "Stop it. I'll call Lizzy."

I dial Lizzy, Saph, and Xandry, but no one picks up. "What happened to these people? Nobody wanna talk to me anymore? Are they ignoring me like Bash?"

"Can you drive me to the airport? Oh, don't bother, I'll drive myself." I pick my clutch bag, tossing my phone inside.

"I can drive you, Kiara. But maybe he changes his flight since he left there early."

“Sean, I wanna talk to Bash, please?”

“Stubborn.”

“Have you been in love?” I ask him.

“Don’t ever ask me about that. Let’s go.”

Sean closes the door behind me after I clutch my seatbelt. He’s not happy with me driving to the airport. We fight for minutes and tries to convince me to better stay at the penthouse.

“Call me, okay?” I wave my hand and drive away from the parking lot.

The traffic is annoying, and I still feel queasy. I check out my phone and nobody calls me back. My service is not disconnected, and how everyone is busy all at a time?

“Hello, this is Kiara Mallory. Can I ask Bash’s schedule for today?”

“Ms. Mallory, Mr. Hughes is on a week vacation. Didn’t he mention it to you?” The voice of his assistant faints in the other line. My hand grips my phone tightly out of anger. My nose is flaring.

He lied. He lied to me. How could he lie to me?

“Ms. Mallory, are you still there?”

“Thank you.” I hang up the call as I lean my forehead to the steering wheel. As emotional as I am, I cry again.

I guess I know now the reason why he has to go to London, not for the business trip. My stomach lurches, and I open my driver’s door and empty my stomach, but nothing comes out.

Cars honk at my back. The vehicles move, and I’m already causing traffics.

My life sucks!

Chapter 35

Luke's Advice

TRINITY

Loving so much it hurts, being lied to hurts a lot. But I can feel everything we shared these last three months was real. How could he do this to me?

What should I do now? I've no place to go. I finally decided to move in with Bash last month when he's been bugging me that I should stay with him for good just a week before I moved in. I gave my apartment to Luke and Ryker, and now I'm homeless.

"Tri, I was thinking this many times. I think we should stay together."

My fork freezes in my mouth. The dessert is delicious, and I can't get enough of it.

"What can you say?" He looks at me across the table.

I pull the fork out of my mouth and swallow the panna cotta. It melts in my mouth, and the aroma of rum fills in my nose. But I'm I almost choked at Bash' words, not the dessert I'm devouring.

"Come again?" I'm such a stupid like I didn't comprehend what he said.

"I said I want you to move in with me," he says slowly, his eyes sparkles. His smile widens, reaches for my hand, and caresses each knuckle.

"Please, say yes?" How can I say no when he's looking at me like I'm his most precious gem in the world.

"Yes, I'd love to."

He grins. "Thank you, Tri. I'll send a service to fix your things."

"Wait, when?"

"Now."

My mouth gapes.

"Yes. Now, baby."

"Why such in a hurry?"

"Do you have some things you want to take care of yourself?"

I shake my head.

"One more thing."

I instantly look at him. "Yeah?"

"How's your appointment yesterday?"

I breathe deeply, leaning my back to the chair. "It's fine." I know he's not convinced. The way he looks at me, he knows something is not right.

"Trinity, tell me, please?" He reaches for my hand again, squeezing them.

"I have an inverted uterus," I say quietly.

"Meaning?" there is a panic in his voice and his looks too.

I shrug.

"Do we need to see another doctor?"

I shake my head.

"Baby, I need more details about that. I should've come with you." He sounds disappointed.

After explaining and discussing with him for about thirty minutes, he finally nods, but his brows are still creasing. "But we can still have a baby, right?"

I feel my mouth dries instantly. I never thought of Bash asking that sooner.

"Yeah. We still have a chance, but there—"

"But there is a possible complication during labor. I get that, Trinity." He swallows and looks sad.

"I wanted to have a baby, Tri, but I can still wait until you're ready, and if it scares you during labor, I would understand. I'm glad you're not having pain during sex."

I smile at him timidly.

"K, what are you doing here?" Luke's eyes widen when he notices me in front of his door. He opens it wider for me.

Shrugging, I look down, unable to voice out my answer.

"Holy shit! Come in, Tri."

I wrap my arms around him, hugging him. I close my eyes, bursting into a cry.

"Shit, K! I'm sorry." Luke pats my back. I pull myself away from him.

"Can I stay here for a while?" I ask, wiping my tears away.

"Of course. You don't have to knock, you know. You will always be a part of this apartment." He doesn't seem surprised to see me knocking on his door, and I wonder why.

"Do you know what happened?" I walk towards the couch, and that's when I hear him sigh behind my back.

"Yeah. I was surprised. Bash doesn't seem to be that kind of man, you know."

My head snaps to his direction. "What do you mean?" I ask quickly.

"It's trending on Twitter. Haven't you see it yet?"

My brows meet. "What's in there, Luke?"

"Never mind. Forget about it. That's not real. It was Photoshop, and you know how technology can do and damage people's image." Luke waves his hand, then takes a seat on the arm of the couch.

I grab my phone and scan the app before I can press the app, Luke snatches it from me.

My eyes narrow. "Give my phone back to me, Luke!" I stand up when he walks away.

"You will not check out this trash. It was my mistake to tell you. I thought you came here because of that," he says, slipping my phone into his jeans pocket.

"Is it about Dana?" My hand is still in the air, waiting for him to hand me my phone back. He remains calm, but he doesn't confirm nor deny either.

"It is about her and Bash, isn't it? That they're having a baby? That they'll spend a week together in London?"

"You shouldn't believe in that shit, Kiara. You're better than that." Luke looks pissed. "You look like shit right now. Go to your room and get some rest. We'll talk about this later."

Shaking my head, I wipe my tears again. "I don't think I can sleep until you tell me about that tweet, Luke."

"Just drop it. And you should trust Bash and not jumping into conclusions. That's not how a relationship works, Kiara. If you love him that long then you should have patience and trust him longer than that."

"There are no such things as a perfect relationship, but at least be a better partner. Trust him, communicate with him, and listen to him. Every lover doesn't just evolve on sex alone or pillow talk, or hugs and kisses. You two have been far for too long. Both of you changed a lot, met new people, involved with other people, learned things, and yet your heart still before for each other."

I sigh deeply.

Luke is right, we may love each other, and everything went so fast, and suddenly we moved in and get engaged. We do have learned each other's differences, though we're still the same Bash and Trinity, things around us have changed; our lives, we grew up, and become better persons.

Am I a better person?

"Are you listening, K?" I nodded, looking down at my hands, toying my engagement ring on my finger.

"Good. Now go take a rest, and we'll talk later."

I nod again, get up from my seat, and walk away from him.

"One more thing."

I pause when Luke speaks again.

"Trust me, K. Bash will never do something to hurt you. He loves you larger than his life."

I nod and give him a sad smile.

A warm shower calms my tensed muscles. I try to erase all the thoughts of Bash and Dana. I think of the good memories I had with Bash. It might not be too late for me to be a better lover for Bash. Even if it's too late, I've never regretted showing him how much I love him.

I'm even thankful that he gave me a chance to be with him. These past three months are like heaven on earth for me. Bash has been good with me. He never missed a day without telling me how much he loves me and how much he cares. He's been a great lover, a thoughtful best friend, and an understanding boyfriend.

I close my eyes and hope to get a good sleep.

Chapter 36

Wind Chime

BASH

It's been three days since the last time I saw Trinity. I made a decision that I hope it was for our own good. I want her to realize that I love her, and I never lied to her.

It was torture not to hear anything from her. I even cancel my business trip to the U.K. After sending Dana and her husband to the airport, I came here to my family's beach house where I supposed to surprise Trinity after our engagement party. That was my plan, but she ruined it.

I already planned a week's vacation. I was planning to spend it with her, but damn it! Everything went wrong.

She doesn't trust me even a bit.

I missed her so much, though. Not a single day I didn't think about her. More guilt flashes through me, and I should've talked to her, but I was taken over by my anger, pain, and disappointment.

Teaching her lessons maybe will make her think before judging. Maybe we only lack in communication? We've been apart for four years, we changed, and we grew up into two different individuals. We let other people entered our lives, but my love for Trinity has never been gone throughout those years.

When we get back together, it's like a reawakening my feelings, my senses, and what has been asleep for a long time—my heart. It has always been for her--beats for Trinity.

The salty wind blows the wind chime that I hang above the porch. It's been here for three years. It's beautiful, and it reminds me of her. Everything reminds me of her.

Christ, I missed her like crazy!

I made everyone promise not to contact her. I want her to contact me first before she can gather information from everyone. But she didn't call me again, only three days ago, then she stopped. I wonder if she really cares about me like how she showed me before everything fell apart.

The vibration coming from my phone brings me back from my deep agony.

"Dad." I rub my aching temples. I haven't been in my self lately. I haven't had enough sleep too, but I manage to avoid alcohol numb my feelings.

"How are you, son?" Dad asks. I can feel that something more than just a question. He knew not to bother calling me this early morning.

Panic settles in the pit of my stomach. "You know the answer to that, Dad. Just tell me already."

"What makes you think I have something to tell you?" Dad loves to irritate me. He wasn't happy to hear my plan.

"Dad, please? I already have a lot on my plate right now. You're aware of what I've been going through with my relationship. Trinity stops calling me." I rub the back of my neck, and I feel a lot guiltier.

"She resigned."

"What? How? When? Why?" I curse under my breath.

"I think you should come back. Three days is enough. When I had a misunderstanding with your mom, I wouldn't last an hour," he says with a laugh. "Try to solve your problem. It's not even that huge, but you both are so stubborn to have a good talk. You're both adults and plan to build a family. Things like this need to be settled before you both tie in marriage, Bash." Dad's voice seems calm and full of concern in every word he delivers.

"What should I do?" I ask because I'm so damn clueless about what to do right now.

"Just come here, Bash. We need to plan."

"Plan?" I'm more confused.

"Son, Ranjiv received this letter two days ago. The same day she traveled out of the country."

My world falls apart. I feel everything around me spins.

"What the fuck Edmund and Derek were doing that day? Why I haven't heard anything from them? Fuck this life, Dad!" I yell at the top of my lungs, but it's not enough, and my anger is slowly consuming me.

"Bash, calm down! Get yourself ready. They're on their way to pick you up." He sighs. "One more thing. Don't blame anyone. This is your fucking idea in the first place. Since day one, I'm not on board with this idea of yours!" The line cut off.

The old man just hangs up on me, and he's pissed off as fuck. I want to hit my head against the wall, but it won't solve my mess. Why I'm so dumb not to notice why she stops calling me?

Fuck!

I dial Ranjiv, and he picks up immediately.

“Bash, what can I—”

“Cut that shit, Ranjiv! Where is Trinity?” There is a long silence. “Fuck! Ranjiv, answer me or I swear to God you will go back to India empty-handed.”

“U-um, Bash. I-I d-don’t know, man,” he stutters, and I know he’s lying.

“How did you hand the resignation if you don’t fucking know shit?”

“She called me to meet in the coffee shop, and she gave it to me to give that either to you or to your dad. That’s it. I asked why, but she didn’t say much other than she wants to start a new life.”

My brows meet and my heart crashes. “What do you mean she wants to start a new life?”

“She has planned to go somewhere, and I noticed her carrying two travel bags, but before I could ask, she stopped me. That’s all I know, I swear.”

I blow a shaky breath. “Where’s her phone?”

“It’s in her apartment. Try asking her roommate.”

“Thanks.”

I hear knocks on my door, and I know that’s Edmund and Derek. They’re both distant and expecting my rant, but I want my energy somewhere else and not on their fucking asses.

“You know the reasons why you’re here, right?” I walk away from them.

“I contact Mr. Shin, but he didn’t answer. I left a message if Ms. Mallory made contact with him or not. I can’t think of possible places where it has a significance to her,” Edmund explains.

“She visited her ex-fiancé two days ago. She called her parents on the same day.” Derek hands me her phone. The phone that I gave to her. She left it, and maybe she found out that I placed a tracker on her phone.

I wave my hand and say, “Charge this. Maybe she used this to book her flights.”

“We checked that already. I think she purchased her ticket at the airport.”

My shoulders droop. I can’t help but shake my head in disappointment and amusement at the same time. She knew what she was doing.

“Sneaky little thing,” I mutter. “Did you ask anyone from any airline or aviation authority where she could travel? Domestic and international flights have manifest.”

“We contacted her dad. She could go to France.”

I stop to a halt. Yeah. It’s possible.

We drive back to my penthouse silently. “Baby Bash, Oh, God. Are you okay, baby?” Mom pulls me into a warm hug.

“Never been better. My fiancée just left for France without me, Mom.”

“Stop being sarcastic, Bash.” Mom slaps my arm playfully. “Let’s go to the airport.”

I blink. Mom makes her way to the door. “Are you coming or not?” Mom asks when she doesn’t notice me following her. “We already arranged your flight when Russell said that Kiara would possibly travel to France. Don’t mess up again, Bash. I want grandchildren.” Mom leaves me rooted in my place as I try to wrap my head around what she just said.

The captain announces that we’re leaving in thirty minutes. I latch my seatbelt and get ready for taking off. I can’t thank enough my family for arranging everything I need.

They found out that Trinity checked in at one of the King’s hotels in Paris two days ago. Of course, Mom is Mom. She prepared my things before I even arrived. My parents have a penthouse suite at that hotel, and that’s where I’m going to stay.

Someone nudges my arm, and I jolt to a sitting position. Edmund’s face comes to view. “Wake up, sleepyhead. We just landed.”

I can’t believe I slept for almost eight hours throughout the flight. I called Mom earlier that we arrived here safe and sound. I share a meal with Edmund and Derek earlier as soon as we arrived at the hotel. I take a shower and change to comfortable clothes for the weather in Paris.

“Ready to meet your Juliet, Romeo?” Derek cracks a joke.

I narrow my eyes on him. “I don’t wanna end in a disaster, dumbass.”

“Bash, Mr. Shin left a message. He was sorry to not able to call you back sooner. He was having a family problem. His daughter got into an accident.”

“Is she okay?” I know that the custody hearing was on hold. I haven’t heard much about Alex lately.

“Yeah. She’s been released from the hospital. I sent your regards.”

I nod. “Thanks, Edmund.”

“That’s the best thing you’ve ever said so far.”

My eyes narrow. “Am I this terrible?”

“Nah. You’re the best,” Edmund remarks.

“So, where are we going exactly?” I know they have an idea where Trinity might be touring around.

“To the street in Marché de la Création Bastille. It’s an art and crafts market.”

“Are you sure she will be there?”

“You should’ve known your fiancée well, Bash,” Derek answers.

“Well, she stops that long time ago,” I banter.

“If you are sad, and something that reminds you of her—a thing or something has a significance to her, what is it?”

I look at him intently. “Stop psychoanalyzing me.”

“It’s not psychoanalyzing. It’s common sense,” Derek retorts.

“

Whatever.” I roll my eyes because he has a point. Why I haven’t thought of that? I guess I’m lacking common sense. “I just want to see Trinity.”

“You will see her, man.”

After almost thirty minutes, he parks the car in the secured parking lot.

“We have to walk from the parking area,” Derek says. “It will take ten minutes to be there.”

“Even ten hours. I just wanna see her,” I admit.

The two idiots high five, while I’m stuck between them. I just roll my eyes.

The street market comes into view. From vendors to tourists, some painters are busy with their canvases with their models are right in front of them. Some are just busy checking out the products.

This place is amazing for those who love art. There are drawings, sculptures, paintings, jewelry, clothing, hats, photography, and even ceramics. I’m busy scanning the place when someone hit my arm.

“Yeah?” I look at Derek.

He points his finger to his left, not so far from us.

My heart hammers in my chest, making me hard to catch my breath.

Trinity just hands the painting she did to the couple, maybe newlyweds. I feel a stab on my chest. The man offers her bills, but she pushes his hand back. It swells my heart. The couple hugs her and maybe thanking her, then they wave goodbye.

“What are you waiting for?” Edmund nudges my arm.

I saunter towards her, but she hasn’t noticed me yet. She places another blank canvass to her easel. I take a deep breath when she’s almost an arm’s reach, yet I can’t touch her.

I clear my throat. “Five euros for painting?” My voice shakes, making her freeze.

She quickly recognizes it was me.

“Ten euros?”

“Fifteen?”

Shit!

“A dinner date?”

“How about a cruise trip for two?”

Shit!

She turns her head slowly into me.

“I do for free.”

Chapter 37

Painting

TRINITY

Experts said when someone is depressed, he should involve himself with aspiring things and makes time for the things that makes him feels better.

I spent every day in this street market since I arrived here in Paris. The entire city has a lot to offer, but art makes me feel better—it gives me a little happiness and diverts me from my sorrows.

I found time to visit some historic places; museums, restaurants, and of course, art galleries.

I remember Bash told me that once you're an artist, you will always be an artist. When I grab the paintbrush, start mixing colors on my palette, and brush my canvass, it feels like I did this for years and have never stopped.

When Bash gave me a set of art supplies on my sixteenth birthday, I started to paint since then. I still love to sketch, though, when I didn't want to get messy with paints.

It feels natural for me. This is what I love doing after all. Either sketching or painting with watercolor, oil but mostly with acrylics because it dries quickly.

I just did a painting for the lovely couple. I can see how happy they were while I painted them. It shows in their eyes, and I feel a pang in my chest when Bash visits my thoughts. I wish he's here with me in this beautiful city.

They offer me money as their payment, but I can't take it. Seeing them happy and contented with what I did is enough payment for me.

I place another empty canvass to my easel. I want to start painting before the sunset when I hear a familiar voice behind me. My heart leaps, and I freeze in my place.

What is he doing here? Is this a coincidence? Isn't he supposed to be in London?

I swallow before I face him. "I do it for free," I answer though it comes out a whisper but enough for him to hear.

His red lips spread to a smile—a smile that I've seen a thousand times, a smile that swells my heart.

"Good, then. Let's start. Where should I sit or stand?" he asks with enthusiasm.

Why is it so easy for him to act as if nothing happened between us? Does this mean he doesn't care about me anymore? Or his way of torturing me?

"U-um, j-just sit on that stool," I stutter, pointing my trembling finger to the empty stool where the couple used before him.

He carries the stool closer to where I set the easel. His smile never left his face, and his eyes twinkle. Even I don't have to look at him, I know and I can feel that his gaze never leaves me.

My heartbeat never calms down. I blow a breath before I squeeze paint tubes on the palette and ignore his scrutinizing gaze, watching every move I make.

"Um, how do you like? A whole body, a half-length portrait?" I don't know why I even ask.

"Up to you," he replies and smiles, showing me his dimples.

"Um, could you fix your coat? Let your scarf in a little bit, and collar out." I gesture to his neck.

"I need a little help in here, please?" he asks, raising his brow.

What's with him, his smile, and all these?

I rise from my seat, place my things on the stool, and move closer to him. Before my hands reach his collar, he wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me closer to him.

A squeal slips from my lips. "Bash!"

He releases his hands around me and grabs my head. "Enough of this painter-model play role." He crushes his lips against mine, kisses me hungrily, punishes me in every move of his lips, and slips his tongue into my mouth—a French kiss in France. My fingers grip his hair for support.

A moan slips from my throat, and I hear an applaud around us. I pull myself away when I realize we are in a public place. I bite my lip as heat creeps on my cheeks.

"Thanks, everyone!" Bash waves his hands as if he enjoys the attention he gets. Then he looks at me. "Will you marry me tonight?"

My lips parted. Is he freaking kidding me? I swallow hard. "W-why tonight? W-why s-such in a rush?" I'm overwhelmed, and I can't even process. Is this some kind of joke?

"I want to marry you here, Trinity. It's our chance. We can get married again when we're back in New York. I promise you with my life, I'll give you the wedding you like, just tell me how you like it. I will make everything possible," he says, his eyes sparkling with happiness and full of promises.

"How can we get married tonight? I think we have to get a license from the French government, and we should at least stay here for a month before they will approve it."

"You worry too much. It's been taken care of, baby."

"How?" I ask, my hands still are on his head. I completely forget my heartaches and my sorrows. Am I really considering this?

"Money. So, are you gonna marry me tonight?"

"How about the—um?" I ask cautiously.

"Dana? My ex? Married to her childhood sweetheart, and they're having a baby?" he answers, looking amused.

"Don't we have to go to City Hall to get married?" I inquire.

"You ask too much. Are you gonna marry me or not?" His eyes narrowed.

"Is it legal?"

He rolls his eyes. "Of course, it is."

I don't want to know how Bash made everything possible, or he planned for this too? We're going to get married at the Bateaux Parisiens River Cruise he rented throughout the night.

What shocked me most is our guests, I was expecting we only have witnessed and an officiant to marry us.

"Surprise!"

I jump and indeed surprised.

Pairs of eyes are looking at me, at us. From my parents to Bash's parents, Uncle Phoenix and Aunt Sam, Uncle Paul, and Aunt Sandy; Pyke, his brother, and his parents. Lizzy and Dean, Saph and Xandry, Kyland, and of course, Sean, Ranjiv, and the couple Luke and Ryker.

"What are you doing here, guys?" I ask and still flabbergasted.

"Well, we are invited, duh!" Luke answers.

"Invited?" My brows meet.

"Who can say no to a free round trip to Paris by first-class jet, free five-star hotel accommodation," Ranjiv answers.

"A week and free tour around Paris. Maybe I can bang a Parisian," Kyland says with a laugh.

"Don't we get a warm welcome?" Dad asks, and I stride my way to him and pull him into a hug.

"I missed you, Dad."

"I missed you too, sweetheart."

"Hello, K," Lizzy says, grinning sheepishly.

"You ignored me!" I point my finger to Lizzy, glaring at her, but she doesn't seem affected, "You!" To Saph who's arching her brow, "You!" to Xandry, who just gives me a flat look.

"Are you done?" Xandry asks.

"Done with what?"

"Have you learned?" he asks again, making me frown.

"Enough of that! I don't want to get bailed on my wedding night," Bash cuts off.

"Then get out from here!" Aunt Abby snaps. "Guys, get out and go to the other suite. I need some time with my daughter-in-law," she announces.

"But mom," Bash interjects.

"Okay, then you're getting married next month," his mom says, placing her hands on his waist.

"No fucking way! I'm getting married tonight!" he disagrees.

"Then, out! Now!" His mom waves her hand. "Shoo!" Then she looks at the guys who laugh at pissed Bash.

"Boys, shoo! Out! Out! Including you." Finally, she points at her husband, "You." To my dad. "And you!" To Uncle Phoenix.

The guys groan but start walking toward the door.

"See you later, baby?" Bash moves closer to me. "Be my wife and don't run again. I love you." He cups my face and gives me a soft kiss.

I wear a wedding gown made by the famous French designer while the girls wear red dresses. I found out Mom and Aunt Abby rushed all these to plan the wedding just right when they knew I accepted the Bash proposal.

"Sweetheart, you know I love you, and no matter what happens, you will always be my girl," Dad says, kissing my forehead.

"Don't cry, sweetie. You look gorgeous tonight." Mom hugs me. "Finally, your dream will come true. I'm so happy for you. I love you, sweetie. Be happy, and remember that you're one of the luckiest girls. Bash loves you since before, and he will always love your imperfection. That's what

makes him fall for you over and over again. I love you, K.” Mom wipes a single tear fall from my eye. “I just said not to cry.” We both giggle.

My fingers touch the tulip pendant with a ruby stone, Aunt Abby gave me as her wedding gift.

Aunt Abby walks inside and asks, “K, are you ready?”

I take a deep breath before I nod.

“Logan, take your daughter. The ceremony is about to start,” Aunt Abby says, making my heart pound in my chest.

The ceremony takes place on the rooftop of the cruise decorated by lantern string lights, my favorite flowers—lilies, red roses, and red tulips. At the end of the deck is a small stage with a wall of flowers and a wind chime?

Bash is wearing a black tuxedo, and the guys are wearing a white one, and our officiant is with a black cassock.

Bash accepts my hand from Dad. As we stand in front of the priest, he starts the ceremony by giving a short sermon about how the marriage is blessed by God.

My heart suddenly thuds loudly in my chest.

“I repeat, do you accept, Sebastian Christopher Hughes, IV to be—”

I feel Bash hands squeeze my hands, and I blink and swallow hard.

“Yes, I do,” I quickly answer, and Bash sighs loudly. Everyone sighs too.

I’m a little bit overwhelmed. I find it rush, but I never regret being here standing in front of everyone with Bash, soon-to-be-my husband. I’m gonna marry this man in front of me sooner or later but now its the time.

After we exchange I do’s and vows, the officiant finally pronounces us husband and wife.

I can’t express my happiness that I’m finally married to the man of my dreams. I love Bash more than my life. We get married like how I dreamt of; here in Paris on the cruise. He made my dreams come true.

Our lips press together, and loud applause from my family and friends erupts.

“I love you, my beautiful wife.” Bash’s merry voice makes me open my eyes.

“I love you too, gorgeous husband,” I say before my lids flutter close.

Chapter 38

Baby on Board

BASH

I catch my wife's unconscious body before she falls straight to the floor. She just turns pale then her eyes flutter close.

Everyone gasps and starts to panic. I hold her into my arms when everyone comes surrounding us. "Move away. Give her some air!" I yell while my wife is still in my arms.

"Do we have a doctor or a medical expert around?" Mom's voice fills in the air.

"She will be okay, Mom. Just calm down. You will be the next to collapse if you won't calm down."

Trinity's parents come closer. "She'll be alright. I need to bring her to the suite," I tell them while they're clutching each other's arms.

I'm not worried. Trinity doesn't complain about anything weird. She's maybe a little bit overwhelmed, and I know she has a steady heartbeat because I can feel her warm breath on my neck.

When I walk out of the reception area, I hear their footsteps get close. I can't blame them, though, and they're just worried about Trinity's condition.

"She's fine, guys, I need to put her down, and she needs to take a rest. We will be right back as soon as she wakes up."

"No making out until the party is over!" Sean shouts.

"Go away. Drink your ass to oblivion!" I yell back.

I place Trinity down on the bed of one of the suites I find. I sit beside her on the bed and thank god, the color of her face returns.

She slightly stirs when I run my thumb on her cheek. So, what I saw in our bathroom was hers, but she didn't tell me about it. I hold her hand, run my thumb on her wedding band, and press it to my lips.

"Trinity, wake up, baby. We have guests waiting for us." I move closer to her, kissing her on her forehead.

I release a sigh of contentment. She's finally my wife. I'm finally married to the woman that I've been in love with for so long. My lips curve into a smile with the thought of Trinity is finally my wife.

I chuckle, and my emotion start to overwhelm me, and I am getting weepy. "I can't still believe that you're my wife now, Kiara Trinity Hughes. Remember when I pushed you when I tried teaching you how to ride a bicycle? You ended up having a sprained wrist. I feel guilty at that time. I cried lying on mom's lap because I was the reason why you ended up in the hospital with a bandage around your wrist for a week." I breathe deeply. "I just don't want you to learn, Tri. I know it sounds selfish, but once you learn, you won't ride with me anymore, and you will ride on your own."

"I told you that the rink might crack and melt, I lied, and you know that, but you didn't pry. You thought that you have a phobia. I'm the worse best friend you've ever had. I was afraid that someone might ask you out if he sees you ice skating. I like girls who know how to skate. Remember when we watched frozen? You like Emma while I like Elsa." I glance down at her. I've never thought I'm capable of loving someone so much that I can't breathe without her.

"I made sure I won't hear anything about you while I was in the U.K. Because I might end up rushing back to the States when I heard something I might not like. I pushed you out of my life because I was so hurt, Trinity. I knew I'm in love with you back then. It's killing me, but I never forgot you ever since. I succeeded in scaring anyone who got near you, and it was a jerk move. I just can't see you with someone else."

"It's Anna, Bash, and I know, Sean told me." I freeze in my seat when I hear Trinity's weak voice answer me.

"You've been listening to me all this time?" I ask with a laugh.

"What happened?" she asks, trying to sit down.

"Easy, baby." I take the cold bottle of water on the nightstand.

I hand it to her after squeezing the lid open.

She is finally able to sit comfortably and leans her back against the headboard. "We get married, right?"

I can hear the panic in her voice. Her green eyes slightly widen.

"Yeah. We kissed before you blackout. Are you okay? How are you feeling?" I kiss her lips.

"Never been better. I remember feeling lightheaded then my visions blurred." She looks at me as if trying to remember what happened earlier.

“Do you feel something weird?” I smirk.

She looks confused. “Like what?”

“Like what I found in our bathroom?” I grin.

She looks more confused then suddenly her eyes widen. “Oh, that. Yeah. I mean, what did you find exactly?” She tries to take it out from me.

“Are you pregnant, Trinity?”

Her shoulders droop, blowing a breath. “Maybe?”

I burst into a laugh. “Maybe? You haven’t seen any doctors yet?”

“I’m not rich like—” Her hands instantly cover her mouth.

“What’s wrong, baby?”

She looks like she has just seen a ghost. “Oh, my god! We didn’t sign a prenup!”

“For what?”

“You’re rich, Bash!”

“Just now you know?”

“Are you insulting me?”

“Does it look like an insult to you?”

“Bash, be serious!”

“I am dead serious, Tri.”

“Then why didn’t you remind me to sign?”

“To sign what?”

“A prenup, Bash.”

“For what?”

“Ugh!” She groans, gripping her hair.

I roll my eyes. “You’re not gonna marry me if you didn’t forget to sign?”

“I don’t know,” she says with a disapproving glare.

“What I have is yours now, Trinity.”

"I only need you."

"I'm all yours, baby. C'mere."

She drags herself, and I let her sit on my lap.

"I love you so much, baby. We need money to live, to pay bills, to buy food, to provide our needs, our necessities, to raise our children. You should stay at home if you're pregnant. I don't want to stress you out."

Her eyes narrow on me. "I'm not gonna bored my ass out at home."

"Okay, okay, calm down and control your temper. It can affect our baby. We'll see a doctor. If the doctor will advise you to stay at home, you will follow that, okay?" I cock my brow.

"Okay, but if the doctor says I'm allowed to work, then no more arguments."

"Fine."

"So, you're pregnant, right?"

She looks at me seriously without breaking eye contact.

"We've been discussing all these for these past minutes, and you're still gonna ask me that?"

"Are you gonna be grumpy throughout your pregnancy, Trinity?"

"Are you complaining now, Sebastian? I can stay at my apartment throughout my pregnancy until I give birth."

"You're not serious, are you?"

"Of course, I am!"

"Not gonna happen, Trinity. That's my child you're talking about."

"What child?" Mom's voice makes us stop.

"Mom, can't you even knock?"

Mom walks closer to us. "Oh, dear. Am I gonna be a grandma?"

Trinity and I can't say a word.

"Oh, my God! Babe, Sebastian?" Mom just calls my Dad. Great.

"Mom, what do you think you're doing?"

"Calling your dad."

"But why?"

"I won!" Mom says enthusiastically at Dad.

"No. You didn't," Dad says.

"Holy shit! Did you bet on my wife?"

Trinity stands up, hugging mom.

"It's not even confirmed yet."

I thought my parents are the only ones who bet for Trinity being pregnant, but I was fucking wrong. All my family and friends bet on it.

Instead of getting mad at what they just did. I'm overwhelmed at their excitement over Trinity, and I'm going to be a father soon.

We will be spending the whole week in Greece. Trinity is excited because she'd never been there before. We are going to spend this night here in the Bateaux then fly to Greece in the morning.

"Do you wanna take a rest now?" I ask after everyone share their funny speeches on us. Trinity has her dinner too. She must be so famished that's why she collapsed. The medical team on the boat checked her already, and thanked, God, everything is fine.

"I'm not tired," she answers, grabbing the glass of champagne, and I manage to snatch it from her.

"I told you, not a chance, Trinity. Not until the doctor will say in front of me that you can take a sip. You heard what Dad said, right? He didn't allow Mom to drink any alcoholic beverages when she was pregnant."

Trinity rolls her eyes.

I push her juice to her front.

"I think I better go to sleep before I hit you with my shoes." She stands up, scowling at me.

"I should throw all your shoes out of the house. I don't wanna end up with bruises. They might think I'm a battered husband."

"I will throw you out of the house if you will ever try, Bash. You will sleep on the street."

"Wow! The two of you will be a very happy couple," Sean says, waggling his brows on us.

"Shut up!" Trinity and I yell in unison.

Chapter 39

Baby Daddy

TRINITY

The sonographer presses the transducer on my exposed tummy. Bash squeezes my hand stronger unbeknownst while his eyes pinned to the monitor.

“What does it say? Is everything okay? She’s pregnant, right? Is it a twin? When will we gonna find out the gender of our baby or babies?” He has been babbling since we came to our appointment.

The sonographer stops and looks at smiling Bash. “Mr. Hughes, I know you’re excited to find out just like any other soon to be a dad. Just relax, and Dr. Lee will answer all your questions.”

Bash releases a deep sigh.

“And you’ve been squeezing my hand, Bash. Relax, I should be the one feeling nervous because I’m the one here having a baby inside my tummy.”

“I’m not nervous. I’m just excited. I agreed with you to get a check-up here and not in Paris or Greece or Italy.” Bash scratches his head. He only stops when Dr. Lee walks inside the ultrasound room.

We drive back to the office. The doctor said that I’m okay to work as contradicts to what Bash wanted. I’m only seven weeks pregnant and stay at home all the time will bore the hell out of me.

“Bash, you can’t lock me up at home. I have to work,” I speak.

He’s been rubbing his chin since we arrived, and by the looks of it, he’s planning something in his head. He doesn’t like the doctor’s advice.

“I just don’t want you stressing-out, Trinity.” He steals a glance at me.

“I’m not gonna let the stress eat me alive, and besides, I started yoga classes.”

“I don’t like that yoga thing.”

“Seriously, you’re being overprotective. It’s nonsense, Bash. I’m gonna be okay, and we’re gonna be okay,” I say, rubbing my still flat abdomen and rise from my seat. “I should go back to work. See you later, boss.” I walk closer to him, leaning over to kiss him on his cheek.

He turns, cups my face, and kisses my lips. “Thank you for giving me a baby, Trinity.”

“We did this together, and you’ve said that one-hundred and eight times already.” I kiss him back.

"I will say it every day." He kisses me again.

"Thanks for being a supportive husband."

"My pleasure."

"I should really go. I love you."

"I love you."

"So, the doctor said there are no precautions?" Aunt Abby asks.

She knows that I have retroverted uterus, and there is a myth that, in some cases like me, I would have difficulty in getting pregnant.

According to studies that five percent of women who gave birth had suffered from severe blood loss or bleeding.

"No, Aunt Abby. Everything is fine. I'm healthy and the baby too." I smile at her.

"Don't you feel something, K?"

I shake my head.

"I was like you when I gave birth to Bash. My uterus was damaged, and they had to remove it, not that I'm scaring you, but just be careful. I'm glad to hear that you're okay," she says.

"I don't feel anything weird so far, unlike last week, I felt lightheaded, but since I started the prenatal vitamins, I feel good as new."

"Wow, good for you. You'll just feel horny because of those hormones." She laughs.

I look at Bash at my left side, and he groans with color blossoms on his cheeks.

"What? It's normal to talk about sex, and besides, both of you are married."

His mom banters.

Giggling, I look at her again. "Really, pregnancy makes me horny?" I laugh.

"Curious much, Tri?" Bash asks, "I'll see if that's true."

His mom laughs with me. "Well, we should throw a party."

"Mom, maybe later when her pregnancy grows."

"It's okay, Bash. At least we can relax later. We can go shopping and choose baby clothes, mittens, beanies, cribs and we have to prepare a room for her. I want to see my parents too."

"Her?" He arches his brow.

"I can feel it."

"I bet it's a boy."

"Oh?" I feel disappointed.

"Yeah. Regarding the shopping, Trinity. I told you, we will ask someone to shop and redecorate the room for our baby. Don't stress too much. About your parents, they can always come anytime," Bash says.

My face falls.

"K, you have to understand that it's in their blood. Being overprotective and taking all the responsibility. Bash has money. If you want to shop, you can do it online. Why stressed-out yourself when you can have everything in a click?"

I smile timidly at his mom. She gives me a sympathetic nod.

"I give her a card, but she didn't even touch it." Bash tells his mom.

"Then you're lucky that you marry a good woman. What If you marry someone who loves to throw a party, shopping, drains the money you earned with her friends in the Caribbean or the bar or the Fifth avenue, Milan, London, Italy, Germany, France, and whatnot?"

I freeze in my seat. I don't know how to react, listening to their conversation.

"But mom, I work hard for her. I'm away from her to earn money so that she can enjoy shopping for herself."

"Don't worry, Bash. Tomorrow, I'll buy jewelry worth your penthouse, a sports car, clothes that could make a boutique and shoes that could break the Guinness book of records," I say sarcastically.

He grins instead of getting upset. "Really, baby? You'll do that?"

I roll my eyes. His mom smiles and looks amused.

"You should pamper your wife, Bash. Don't wait till she goes shopping by herself. Buy everything for her instead."

He points his finger to his mom. "That 'll do. Thanks for the advice, mom!" He leans closer to me to kiss my head.

I wake up at the pain on my lower abdomen. I check the clock on the nightstand, and it's 3:34 AM.

I press my hand where it aches most and I slowly stand up and walk to the bathroom.

The pain is bearable. We both slept without having sex. Bash was upset when he offers his iPad to me, and I pushed it back because I'm not in a mood to scan baby clothes online. He finally said to ask someone to shop for me, but I disagreed with that idea.

I wash my hands and pat it dry after emptying my bladder. I started to feel some symptoms Aunt Abby told me during her first trimester. She used to pee a lot.

I slip under the blanket slowly to avoid waking up my husband, but it was too late. He places his hand on my abdomen, touching my skin. A sweet shiver crawls down my spine.

"Hmm, horny?" he teases me with his groggy voice, and I can hear a smile in it.

"Or are you?" I ask back, moving closer to him.

He flicks the lamp open. "I'm always horny with it comes to you, Tri. Can't get enough of you." He leans closer to me, and I can feel his warm breathing on my face. His eyes glimmered with lust, and manhood proves it.

"Make love to me." I feel comfortable voicing out my needs to him.

"Yes, ma'am." In an instant, he's kissing me like crazy. His hands are already stripping down my panties. My hands are busy pushing his boxer down, pumping his now hard and satiny cock.

He succeeds yanking off my nighties in a flash. He's on top of me, presses, and teases my sensitive spot with his shaft. My head arches back.

"Sensitive?" he whispers.

"Very." I whimper underneath. "Move please."

He sinks inside me slowly, and I can feel his length inside my warm and slick walls. I bite my lip for the sensation. It's overwhelming.

He stops moving yet but my body already shudders under him.

He moves slowly, groaning.

"Oh, God!"

His thrusts turn faster and harder. In and out, hitting my most sensitive part.

I grip his ass to press against me, but it's not enough.

“Bash, don’t stop!” I feel I’m on the verge of my orgasm.

“I won’t Tri,” he says pressing his thumb on my sensitive spot, and I whimper under him.

“Bash,” I moan, holding his arms tighter as if my life depends on it. My muscles clench, and I can’t hold anymore.

I let go.

I come undone so hard.

He thrusts into me harder until he falls on top of me, breathing harder, and dripping with sweat.

“Are you okay? Was it too much?”

“I’m good, and it was perfect,” I answer, running my fingers on his back.

My hands grip tighter on my lower abdomen. when the cramps are nearly unbearable. Sweats start to form on my forehead, and I curl into a ball to hold the pain.

“Oh, God! Please, help me!” I yell at the top of my lungs and tap the bed for Bash, but his side is empty.

“Bash! Help!” The pain is getting worse. I feel a warm liquid running between my thighs, making my breathing stops.

My hand quickly touches my soaking panties like it has its own brain.

I feel a chill crawl down my skin when I realize what it is.

Blood.

Chapter 40

Clueless

BASH

I wake up when Trinity whines beside me. I'm sure she had a bad dream, which is weird because since we sleep together, she never wakes me up because of a nightmare.

I rub my half-opened eyes and sit up on our bed.

I nudge her shoulder slowly, but she doesn't budge, her whine gets stronger.

"Trinity, wake up, baby," I say as I continue nudging her shoulders.

She jolts awake, throwing the blanket away. Her eyes widen, and her face fills with shock.

Trinity spreads her legs wider, even in my half-awake brain, my cock stirs. She's only wearing deep red nighties and thin panties with bedhead, but she's still beautiful to me. Then I notice she's patting her panties.

"Baby, what are you doing?" I ask out of curiosity.

She sighs and looks at me.

"You had a bad dream, that's why I wake you up." I kiss the top of her head.

"Yeah. I had a bad dream, and it was weird," she says with worry in her voice.

"Lie down, baby. Let's get some sleep. It's still early. Do you want me to get you water?" I ask as I lie down, patting her pillow to let her lie down.

"No. I'm fine. Sorry for waking you up," she answers, moving closer to me. She lies down on my shoulder, and I can still feel the worry in eyes,

"It's alright, Tri," I say, kissing her on her nose.

"Night, baby," she says.

"Now, it's the first time you called me baby, or was it supposed for our baby?" I joke.

"Hmm. I've been calling you baby in my dreams," she says quietly.

"I love that. From now on, you should always call me baby."

"Don't you know that I love you since before?" she asks, lifting her chin to look at me in the eye.

"I knew you love me as your best friend but nothing more than that," I tell her honestly.

"You're dumb, Hughes." She hits my exposed chest playfully.

"You're dumber, Mrs. Hughes." I pinch her nose.

"You're the dumbest! I've been in love with you since I've learned how to walk."

"You're worst than the dumbest! Because I've been in love with you since you were born."

"That's impossible. You're only four months older than me."

"Well, that's because we were born to be together."

"Seriously, though, we were both clueless back then. How didn't we realize we're both in love before? How did I miss those clues? That you love me?" she asks.

"Because we were blinded by our love? I mean, we argued, I bullied you, bashed you, hurt you, I almost broke your arm. I bruised your knees and your elbows, and--"

"You bruised my heart too," she cuts in.

"Yeah, and I apologized for that. Let me make it up to you, Tri. I want you to notice me at that time, like notice me as a guy, not as your friend. I didn't realize that I made that hard for you. I even hurt you."

"Yeah, you scared guys too," she adds.

I laugh. "Guilty as charged." I raise my right hand.

"You sketched me because you love me, right?" I ask.

"Ego, Bash."

"Oh, C'mon. Admit it, and we are already married."

"I did it because I love doing it. What's with the wind chime?" Her brow raises.

"That's what I stole from you. I let someone do it for me three years ago. I supposed to bring you to the beach house where you found those shells. But I saw you and Wright were kissing," I say with a little sadness in my voice.

She sighs.

"Then I found out he kissed you because Sean paid someone asking him to offer you to send home."

"Forget out that, Bash. It's been three years. What's important is we are back together, we are married, and we're having a baby. We start building our own family."

"But we could be together at that time."

"Oh, yeah? Then I ended up pregnant before I finish college. Everything happens for a reason, Bash. Maybe our future changed when we met that night."

"You're right. Maybe we still ended up together though, but things changed, and I might not feel and experience what I experienced with you these past few months. Those were the best experiences of my life. We may have a few ups and downs. but we managed to be here together."

I'm one of the happiest men alive to be with a woman I love. I will never change a thing. Everything I have right now is enough for me. I can't ask for more.

I kiss her lips. "You're the best thing that ever happened to me, you and our baby are the best things I've ever had."

"You're the best basher."

"Really?"

"Hmm. But seriously, you should stop right now. I've had enough," she jokes, raising a hand to surrender.

"Fine. If you'll behave and learn not to judge me."

"I promise."

"Good," I say, then I capture her lips and kiss her with passion. I cup her in between her thighs and press my finger on the spot where she's sensitive. I can feel her warm and wet already.

Slipping my hand inside her panties, I push my finger inside her, thrusting in and out. Her hand grips my arms tighter, throwing her head back.

"You want more?" I'm already hard, pressed against her thigh.

"Please?" Her voice turns raspy.

"How?"

"I don't know. Just don't stop," she answers, slightly panting. I strip her panties down to her thighs and legs until I slip it down to her toes.

"Bend your knees, spread your thighs wider," I command.

She does as I say.

"Do you want me to eat you, Trinity?"

She looks down on me where I drag her at the edge of our bed. I kneel on the floor, and my head is a few inches closer to her pussy. I can smell her arousal, and her folds are glistening. I lick my lips of anticipation. Her toes curl as I run my fingers on her inner thighs.

"I need an answer, wife," I say patiently, but my cock is impatient, throbbing, and wanting attention.

"Please, no more role play." I look at her who's looking at the ceiling and biting her bottom lip.

I spread her wet folds skillfully, slipping a finger inside, and she moans. I move closer to her widely spread thighs, and she's dripping wet as I thrust my finger in and out of her warm pussy.

"You're horny, baby," I tease.

"Bash, please."

"Say it."

"Stop it."

"So you want me to stop?"

"Stop teasing me, and just fuck me with your tongue!" She growls.

"That's what I only want to hear from you." I laugh in the end.

Running my tongue from her opening up to her pulsating clit, she moans louder, and squirms, but I'm gripping her thighs firmly to stay still. I move my tongue in a circular motion over her clit, and her muscles start to quiver.

"Oh, god! Yes!"

Sucking her clit, I push my tongue inside and thrust in and out. Her juice drips, her hips buck against my mouth, her hand grips my hair tighter as she pushes me to her pussy, asking for more.

I did what she wants. I love her so much not to give what she demands.

I kiss her, suck, and fuck with my tongue.

She runs out of her words until she just moans, writhes, whines, and whimpers while I'm eating her as I promised.

Her inner walls clench around my tongue, and her juices are all around my mouth, dripping down to my chin, and it doesn't stop me from making her come.

"Oh, baby!"

My other hand grips my shaft, stroking it simultaneously as I follow the movement of my mouth.

It's painful not to be inside her, but patience is a virtue.

"Oh, Bash!" she shudders, pants, and her knees wobble.

"I'm not done, and don't sleep on me," I say, shrugging off my boxers. I stroke my cock and move closer to her exposed pussy.

"I know," she replies slowly.

"Now, you're getting greedy."

"Just shut up already," she says shakily. "Let me return the favor."

"Some other time. I want to be inside you now." I thrust my cock inside her as soon as I found the right position.

"Fuck!"

I freeze, and my heart skips. "Are you okay? I'm sorry. I'll stop." I pull out my cock.

She barks into a laugh, and her body shakes.

I grab her legs and let them wrap around my waist, and I hit her thighs playfully.

"You deserve to be punished! You made me worried, and you just cursed."

"Oh, shut up, and just fuck me."

"I'll do it! I'll fuck you hard." I thrust into her harder, and deeper. "Rough!" I pull out. "And raw!" I feel I'm sinking balls deep inside her again, and her legs wrap tighter around my waist.

"Great ass," she whispers. Her hands find my ass cheeks kneading them.

"Come for me, baby," I say as I'm trying to hold my impending orgasm. I find her clit, press my thumb, and move it in a circular motion while I'm thrusting faster into her.

I look at her, and she's biting her bottom lip while her eyes are liquid pools of love and desire. She's so fucking beautiful, and she just takes my fucking breath away.

"You're so fucking beautiful, Trinity."

Chapter 41

Father and the Piggybank

BASH

It's been ten hours since I brought Trinity to Maternity and Children Specialist Hospital, but her cervix only dilates from three centimeters to five centimeters. Trinity is still so stubborn when the contractions kick in, she stops walking and complains of pain instead.

I'm already on my fourth cup of coffee. I'm done reading the book I brought with me. I walked ten times more compared to her just to encourage her to walk more.

She's wearing a blue hospital gown, and her hair is tied in a messy bun, and her hands are on her hips for support.

I sigh helplessly. "Baby, if you follow what your doctor has told you to do, our baby would be in distressed, and you don't want that to happen, do you?" I ask when she sits back on an empty bench outside her room.

I'm so glad she didn't suffer too much throughout her pregnancy. I let her stop from her job when she's on her last trimester. She complains of having edema on her feet, but the doctor said it was normal.

She informed the doctor not to tell us the gender of our baby until her last appointment. I tried convincing her because we have to buy some baby supplies that Trinity wants to match for our baby's gender.

"I'm tired, Bash. I need to lie down." She stands up and walks towards her room with her hands on her hips. Sometimes I have to control my laugh when I'm seeing her walking like a sumo wrestler or this hyperlordosis as what her doctor calls it.

"Trinity, you have to walk. We've been here for almost ten hours now."

She stops and faces me. "I should be the one complaining. I've been suffering from this pain for almost ten hours now!" she yells, mimicking me.

"I know, baby, but think about our baby. It could put our baby in danger if you won't cooperate." I move closer to her and rub her arms, trying to calm her down.

"Don't you know that the baby will poop inside your tummy?" I ask.

She rolls her eyes and groans in irritation. "I should throw all those books and write complaints against those authors who brainwashed you."

"Those authors did not brainwash me, baby. It's the fact, and it's called meconium stain." My parents told me to read books since Trinity doesn't like to read.

She paints and sketches while listening to some classical music. I bought for her safer paints that won't affect our unborn child.

"Whatever, Bash. I want this baby to get out of me already. I suffer too much," she drawls, her hands instantly on her abdomen. "Oh God!" she yells at the top of her lungs.

"Baby, are you okay?" I ask quickly.

I hold Trinity to support her when I notice her water leaks from her gown. Her water breaks.

"Dr. Lee? Nurse? I think my wife is ready!"

Her grips tighten on my arms. I feel cold clammy, and I feel that I might collapse. I squeeze my eyes shut and pray that I hope I won't collapse until Trinity will go into labor.

"Baby, don't you dare pass out on me!" She yells.

"I won't baby." Although I'm near to pass out, I look at her grimacing face. I hear steps rushing towards us. Thank, God. Dr. Lee and her team arrived.

"You're going into labor now, sweetheart. Your water just broke."

The nurse let Trinity sit down in her wheelchair and push her.

"Wait!" I call.

"You'll be safe, baby. I'm here waiting for you and our baby, okay? I love you so much, Trinity." I kiss her lips.

She's already wincing from the pain. I wish I can take her pain and let me feel it instead of her, but that's the beauty of a woman, to carry a child in her womb and bear God's blessing. I watch her as she gets inside her room.

"She will be okay, son." Dad pats my back.

"Thanks for coming, guys," I say as they come one by one to pull into a hug.

They've been here in the hospital since Lizzy received my text. They're staying in the private room where Trinity should stay after her delivery.

"I can't wait to be an aunt," Lizzy says. They postponed their wedding for Trinity's sake because my wife doesn't want to wear a maternity dress during Lizzy and Dean's wedding since she will be the maid of honor.

"I can't wait to be a father, Lizzy." I pull her into my arms.

"You'll be a great dad."

"Baby Bash, you should take a rest for a while. I will call you when the baby is born," Mom says.

"No way. I want to be the first to hold my baby," I disagree. "I'm gonna be a dad, can you stop calling me baby Bash now?"

"Not a chance, baby. Like you can even see blood. You almost collapse when her water broke." Mom is laughing.

"Not funny. What if Trinity needs me?"

"She won't. She's in good hands, Bash. Her parents will be here in the morning," says Dad.

It's been half an hour when I notice an anesthetist wearing a green scrub suit strides toward us. My heart thuds loudly in my chest when he pulls down his mask as he gets closer.

"Is she okay?" Dad asks.

My tongue locks in my mouth.

"Mr. Hughes, your wife develops a complication, and we need—" My head spins, and my world just turns upside down.

My breathing stops, and I just stare at the doctor, and I can't hear a single word or even process what he said.

I feel hands tapping on my shoulder. I try to open my eyes slowly and blink many times to adjust the lights in the white ceiling, and that's when it hits me.

"Where is my wife?" I sit abruptly on the bed. A woman wearing a white uniform yelps in surprise.

"Calm down." The soft voice of my wife, making my heart flutters.

"Tri?" I ask softly, getting up from the bed and drag myself closer to where she is lying. She still looks pale but she still looks beautiful.

She smiles. "Where is the promise that you'll be waiting for me?" She asks teasingly.

I sit down on her bed then pull her into a hug. "I'm sorry, baby I'm sorry." I pull her into a tight hug and press my nose into the crook of her neck to inhale her scent deeply. I kiss her on her forehead, her cheeks, her nose, and lips.

"How are you feeling? are you okay?"

She nods and smiles at me.

"How long did I pass out?"

"Four hours."

"Four fucking hours?" I yell.

Trinity hits my arm, and that's when I hear a small cry.

My eyes widen.

"Did you just swear, Bash?" Trinity hisses. "Fifty dollars, Bash for his piggy bank. His fund for his sports car." She says, offering her hand.

My lips spread to a grin when I see a small crib on Trinity's left side.

"Jesus Christ!"

"Hush,"

"Sorry," I mouth.

I stop in front of my baby's crib, and I didn't notice my tears fall from my eyes until my face is already wet. I sniff and wipe my tears away.

Trinity offers me a sanitizer and my brows furrow. "I thought you might want to carry him," she says.

I take the sanitizer and rubs my hands till it dries.

"Don't be afraid," Trinity encourages me.

My baby is still wrapped in a blue blanket. His head is covered with a blue beanie. My hands tremble when I pick him up. I feel so overwhelmed that my wife and son are healthy. I'm still trying to process the thought that I'm already a dad. I'm caught between overwhelmed and terrified.

Overwhelmed by being a dad and terrified of how to be a good dad.

"I'm sorry, baby. I missed the part that I should be the one to see you first," I whisper as I kiss his head.

"You are so adorable," I say as run the back of my finger on his cheek.

"You don't know how much you make your dad happy for having you in my life, in our lives. I love you so much, son. You and your mom are my life." I kiss him again. He stirs then he slightly open his eyes.

"Holy!"

"Bash."

"Sorry."

"Remove his beanie," Trinity says.

I remove his beanie slowly then I look back at her. She tries to hold her laugh and that makes her wince.

"You okay?"

She nods.

"He got your hair," I say, grinning.

"Hey, guys. Can we see baby Fifth now?" Lizzy emerges from the door with my parents, Trinity's parents, and my friends.

"Wait, you all haven't seen my son yet?" I ask, glancing at them one by one.

"No, son. No matter how we wanted to see him but you wanted to see him first, but don't do it again. You scare the hell out of us, and we will see your baby whether you haven't seen yet or not in the second time around." Dad says.

I can't contain my happiness of the thought that I'm having another baby. I hand baby Fifth to mom.

"Thanks for keeping my wife and son safe while I passed out." I hug dad.

"Oh, my god! He opens his eyes!" Lizzy jumps in excitement.

"Really?" I ask, walking to Mom carrying my son.

"Oh, his eyes," Mom looks surprised.

"What is it?" I ask in confusion.

"His eyes have a different color?"

"Oh," Lizzy seconded.

"It will change but sometimes it will be permanent," My wife answers.

"You've noticed them too?" Lizzy asks Trinity.

"Yup."

"Wow, that's cool."

"He will make women cry." Uncle Logan speaks.

"He's going to bully women," Dad retorts.

"He's going to be a playboy," says Aunt Zoey.

"I'm not a playboy," I say defensively.

"Your dad was," Mom answers.

"Oh dear, a bully and a playboy. I have to change his fund from a sports car to condoms," says my wife.

Chapter Epilogue

TRINITY

Who says there is no such thing as perfect? It's been six years of a perfect life, and what can I possibly ask for more?

It feels like yesterday when I marry my hot and gorgeous husband, and now I have three beautiful kids who enjoy playing at the park.

"Baby!"

I turn my head to see Bash making his way towards my direction with our twins on both hands. He just comes from the airport, and he's still wearing his dark blue suit perfectly tailored for him.

"Hey, you're early." I rise from my seat and walk to meet him halfway.

He pulls me into a big hug. My kids' arms are wrap around his legs.

"I miss you terribly, Trinity," he whispers in my ear.

I giggle. "It's been only eight hours, silly." I break the hug.

"But I was miles away from you. You didn't miss me, did you?"

He went to Boston to visit his branch since he's been the President and the CEO of the Hughes Industries for four years.

I, on the other hand, is a full-time mother since Baby Fifth was born. Bash didn't allow me to go back to work. I agreed because I want to spend my time with my son and my husband.

"Oh, stop being a whipped. I always miss you, and we talked over the phone. It's not like we haven't done this before." I playfully slap his arm.

He chuckles. "I wanted to kiss you so badly here, and when I say kiss I mean to kiss you from head to toe," Bash says.

Our two and a half years old identical twins run away after Bash kissing them both on their cheeks and start playing again with their stuff toys.

"I know, silly."

"Shit!" Bash exclaims. I look where Bash's eyes fixed on.

I notice Fifth in front of a little girl around his age with dark brown hair wearing a pink dress. My son is licking ice cream on his hand while the little girl is crying.

"Did Fifth take that ice cream from that girl?" Bash asks.

"Irene, don't go," Bash tells Fifth's babysitter. Irene stays, sitting on the bench near us.

"It's just ice cream, and my dad can buy you a house full of ice cream!" Fifth yells at the girl.

"But that's mine." The girl sobs, pointing at the ice cream on Fifth's grasp

"This is not even yummy," Fifth retorts.

"Bash."

"I know what you're thinking, Trinity." I can feel the smile in his voice. My eyes still pin to Fifth and that poor little girl.

"What am I thinking?"

"You know it, Trinity."

"I don't know what you're talking about, husband." My eyes widen when Fifth throws the remaining ice cream to the grass, then he walks away, leaving the girl alone crying.

"See that, baby? Another bully in the family," Bash says, laughing.

"That's not even funny!" I hit him on his thigh.

He laughs out loud. "It runs in the family, I guess."

I look at him sternly. His brow cocks.

He leans closer. "I love my son and my two girls, no matter how they become. I love you too, Trinity. Larger than my life." He kisses my lips.

"Dad, Mom, stop kissing in the park." Fifth's voice pulls us apart.

"Stop making girl's cry, Fifth," Bash says to his son, pulls him closer, and kisses the top of Fifth's head.

Fifth just grins sheepishly. "She's pretty."

Bash and I exchange a look.

"Let's head home," Bash announces. My two girls come running towards us.

"Did you two enjoy your playtime?" Bash asks Rain and Shine.

They jump. "Yes! Yes!"

I look at Bash who's happily watching our twin babble to Fifth about how they enjoyed playing with the other kids.

"Really, Dad?" They ask in unison with full of excitement.

"What did I miss?" I ask Bash.

"It's a surprise!" our kids yell.

FIFTH

I roll my eyes when Mrs. Carlos announces for another class activity. I know she just wanted to excuse herself from teaching today because she's lazy as her fatass, though she has a good reputation with the school admin.

A new transferee drags an empty chair slumping her ass down dramatically to the chair.

"Fifth Hughes, how unfortunate for you to be my partner?"

Her remarks widen my eyes, but by the tone of her voice, she's amused. No one approaches me that way.

I look at her hand, tapping the pen on her armchair.

She has her own fashion sense. Her wrist is full of bracelets made of beads and leathers. What catches my attention are the neon wristbands arranged in a rainbow.

She's wearing blue loose jeans with holes on both knees. I'm sure she did those holes on her own. Her plaid shirt is too big for her slim frame with a few buttons open, showing off her white shirt with SpongeBob winking printed in front.

"Are you scrutinizing my fashion sense, Fifth?"

My eyes snap at her face. Her voice is so smooth and sweet. "Why aren't you wearing a proper uniform?"

"Venice."

"Huh?"

"My name is Venice Lewis." She smiles, showing off her dimples. She's cute.

"Oh."

Venice is wearing thick black-rimmed glasses. Her chocolate brown hair is braided into two. She has a straight nose, and her lips are pink and no hint of lipstick or lip gloss.

I take back what I said earlier. She's beautiful.

"Are you just gonna check me out?" she asks with a playful tone.

I narrow my eyes on her, but before I can say my remarks, she clears her throat.

"Let's start, shall we?" She flips her book pages open.

Venice talks most of the time, and her voice is soulful like music to my ears, and she smells good too. I can't even process what she said.

The next thing I know is the ringing of a bell.

"We'll continue this tomorrow." She rises from the chair, tossing her book and pen into her backpack, then walks away without giving me a second look.

Well, that's a first.

"Why won't you just ask her out?" My driver, Reiss asks.

"I don't ask girls out."

"Then what are we doing here, stalking a girl?"

"Hush. You answer it already," I say when I notice Venice hop out from the passenger's door, but I can't see the driver.

She walks right straight to the small supermarket. She's the complete opposite of Venice in our class today. Why does she have to hide from those baggy clothes?

She wears a white sleeveless crop top, black short shorts, and ankle boots. No more glasses and no more braids. She has a pair of long toned-leg.

"Wait here," I tell Reiss, but I know he won't listen.

Dad won't allow me to go alone by myself. It's annoying though.

I stride inside the supermarket and I find her immediately through a few customers.

She's pushing a cart while I'm following her discreetly. She picks some dairy products, beverages, before she moves to the snack section.

She saunters to the toiletries section and picks up hair products.

“That’s creepy, you know,” she says, laughing at me.

I feel a heat crept on my cheeks. This is so embarrassing, and she just notices me following her.

“You might need this one too.” I pick a tampon.

She barks into a laugh, picks the pack of pads I offer, and tosses it to the cart.

Shit! Did I really offer her that?

“What are you doing here, Fifth?” She stops and looks at me intensely.

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Holy Mary mother of Christ! She’s unbelievably gorgeous, and her big blue eyes are almost purple surrounded with thick long lashes.

My heart pounds harder in my chest when our gazes meet. It feels so different without the glasses.

I feel like I just open my soul to her. Her eyes are compelling and spellbinding me closer to her.

“Why, Venice?”

The end