Teasing Phoenix

Gia Hunter

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Introduction

Teasing Phoenix (Suit & Tie Series 2)

By

Gia Hunter

Blurb:

Sam Anderson has been cautious over men. Things have changed when a cocky and relentless businessman Phoenix Williams comes to the picture and treats her like a princess. Like most relationships, there's always ups and downs.

Their relationship is tested by their past—the past that brings them closer and the same past can change their lives forever.

Tags: Billionaire, Playboy, Betrayal, Romance, CEO

Genre: Contemporary Romance, Modern Romance, Billionaire Romance

PART I - Teasing Phoenix

Chapter 1

SAM

Mom looks at my direction and smiles when she notices me approaching. “Morning sweetie, I didn’t hear you came home last night. I must be in a deep sleep when you arrived,” Mom says, pouring coffee into my mug.

“I’m sorry, mom. It was Amy’s birthday party last night. I couldn’t come home early because I carpooled with Maya and Garrett.” I take my plate of pancakes, scrambled eggs, and two strips of bacon she offers.

She hands me a cup of coffee. “You didn’t mention to me about going to a birthday party, sweetie. You also forgot to send me a message.” She looks at me with her famous worried look.

I sit on the stool of our small kitchen counter and start sipping my coffee. “Yeah, you worry too much. Did forget I’m twenty-one and not a twelve anymore? Don’t you have duty tonight?” I munch my breakfast quickly. I only have twenty minutes to get to the coffee shop where I work as a part-time waitress.

“I have. I’ll be here in the morning. We can have a movie marathon.” Mom’s duty at the general hospital as an ER nurse makes it difficult for us to catch up every day.

I roll my eyes. “Yeah. We can have a movie marathon while you’re snoring on the couch.”

Mom works hard to let me go to college. She took all the responsibility since Dad died in a car accident when I was fifteen. Mom didn’t even date anyone and just focused on her work and me.

Dad worked as a bank clerk in a local bank in town. He was the best father I could ever wish for, but unfortunately, he was taken away from me by a tragic car accident. His car hit the tree when he was trying to avoid hitting someone who crossed the road—he was confirmed dead on arrival.

“You, silly, you always chose a boring movie, all they did were killing each other. Who will enjoy watching that kind of movie? It’s too violent for me.”

I roll my eyes again, stand up, and take the empty plate and mug with me to the kitchen sink. I love action movies while Mom loves drama.

“Your choice of movie is more boring, mom. If not dying of cancer, a husband cheated on her. So dramatic. I won’t waste my tears for sappy movies like that.”

She laughs and shakes her head—Mom is funny. She’s not only my mother but also my best friend.

I go up to my bathroom to brush my teeth, re-coat my mascara, and wipe more lip gloss.

I grab my purse and my keys from the couch. “Got to go, Mom. Get some sleep, and I’ll see you tomorrow morning. I love you.” I peck her cheek.

I pull my car 2014 Ford to the driveway—Mom’s birthday gift for me two years ago.

Ten minutes later, I’m already in the coffee shop. I notice many customers—most of them are college students, football players, and a few couples busy chatting with each other. Suddenly, I feel a twist in my stomach.

“Sam, get your ass in here and wear your apron. We have customers to serve.” Daniel “Big D” Chase, who manages the coffee shop for five years now. A six-foot-tall and bulky standing in front of my locker wearing a scowl on his face.

“Good morning to you, too, Big D. Why so grumpy early in the morning?”

He is like a big brother to us, but, of course, he’s still strict when it comes to our job.

I grab my apron from my locker and wear it. Our coffee shop is the biggest coffee shop in the area, and it’s open seven days a week.

“The new owner will come to check the shop. I can be demoted or replaced by someone else, or worse lose my job.” He shrugs. Worry is palpable in his deep gravely voice.

My brows furrowed. “Why would you lose your job? You’ve been good at it. He’ll not be going to replace you, and I’ll kick his ass if he’ll demote you, Big D.” I playfully punch his huge bicep, but he doesn’t even flinch.

I’ve heard the buying of this shop, but I don’t know who’s the new owner. I don’t really care for as long as I have a job and get paid.

“You don’t have any idea who the owner is. He’s ruthless and heartless. He bought some establishments here; restaurant, night club, coffee shop, and a house on the Hillside. He already started changing management and fired staff.”

I purse my lips while listening to him. He must be very rich if he bought establishments and a house at the same time.

“He got a huge share when his father died. He and his brother got equal shares of the assets. He moved here from New York since his father died, but his brother stayed in New York and managed his own business there. I heard that’s where their mother stayed when their parents divorced. He is related to Hughes.”

I cross my arms over my chest. “Wow! You seem to hear a lot of gossips lately, Big D.” I fix my hair and walk with him inside.

“People talked around, Sam. I couldn’t help but listened especially when my only job was at stake.”

I feel bad about him. I grab his huge arms and squeeze them. “I’m sorry, Big D. I wish I can help, but if your job is in jeopardy, I am sure my part-time as well. I need to get to work.”

He nods, and I move to the counter and check all the supplies.

The door chimes and my work starts when a college couple gets inside and sits at the left corner of the shop.

Thirty minutes before my shift ends, I take a seat for a few minutes since only a few customers left. All their orders are served and supplies are refilled.

Something wicked in Amy and Maya’s smile as they walk in my direction.

“Did you know that the new owner is hot?” Amy giggles. She’s my close friend, dated a bunch of guys, but as she said, nothing serious. They just want to have sex with her and grab her D cup size. Well, I can’t blame them because Amy is a gorgeous blonde with blue eyes. She’s sassy and sometimes blunt. Okay, maybe most of the time, but she has a good heart.

I still don’t show interest.

She hits arms to get my attention. “Did you not hear me, Sam? I said Mr. Williams is hot.” She shakes me and widens her eyes.

I raise my eyebrows. “So? I don’t care if he’s hot or cold. Our jobs here are over once he changes the management. Big D is worried as hell that he might be demoted or replaced, and all you have in mind is he’s hot?”

Amy flinches because I know she needs this job.

“How did you know that he’s gonna change the management?” Maya asks. Her brown eyes widened in surprise.

“Big D told me earlier. Well, not sure yet, but people talked and gossiped around. The owner changed the management in his other establishments though.”

When my shift ends, I punch out and leave immediately. I send Mom a message. Amy has a plan for tonight, so I’ll be alone since Maya of course, will be with her fiancé.

***

I reheat the dinner Mom left for me and eat, then I take a shower and change to PJs.

I grab my book on my study table that still half unread, get in my bed, and tuck myself in. I flip the page where I Left with a bookmark. Before I can start reading the first line, my phone rings.

I roll my eyes to see the screen—it's my ex, Tyler.

I press the answer icon. "Ty, 'sup?" I answer casually, then at the music blaring—he must be at the frat party like always.

"Sam, I can't drive home. My dad will kick my ass if he'll know I'm driving while I'm drunk. Can you come and pick me up?"

Jesus, he's such an idiot!

Why I even bother answering his call? I broke up with him because he's an idiot, a cheater, and an egotistical jerk.

"Call your friend Ty or your girlfriend to drive you home. I'm in bed already and ready to sleep." I emphasize the girlfriend, who he cheated on me a year ago.

"Sam, please. You know we're not like that anymore. My friends are already drunk." Of course, they're all drunk.

"Ugh! Send me the address. You won't call me next time, Tyler. I'm not your DD."

"Thanks, Sam, I owe you." Owe you my ass.

"Be there. Bye." I get up in bed and change my clothes.

I'm in front of the Frat house after twenty minutes. The music is still blaring from the house. I dial his number and he immediately picks up and says he's on his way out.

"Hey, Sam. Thank you for coming!"

I don't answer, instead, I walk to the driver seat. He gets inside the passenger seat, and none of us start to talk while I drive silently. Until we're halfway to his home—where I lost my virginity to him.

"You're still mad at me, aren't you, Sam?" He leans his head back to the seat and rubs his temples.

I release a huge breath. "That was a long time ago Ty. I moved on and I already forgave you." I focus my eyes on the road.

"I'm really sorry, Sam. It was just a one-time thing. She's not like you—she seduced me, and I was half drunk. When you broke up with me, I dated her for a free fuck. I missed you though." He sounds sincere, but he still cheated on me.

I stop the car in front of his house and wait for him to get out, but he doesn't move.

I look at him and furrow my brows. “Why are you—”

Before I can continue, he grabs my head and crushes his lips on mine. I’m still dumbstruck to react.

He kisses me hungrily, wet, and with pure rage. I can still taste the beer on his lips. I like how he kissed me before, but now I feel nothing but disgust.

I push him away, but he doesn’t budge. I push him again, instead of letting me go, Ty cups and kneads my left breast.

This is wrong!

I slap him, and that’s when he stops kissing me. He narrows his eyes at me with full of anger. He kisses me again and bites my lower lip—a taste of sweet and metallic floods my mouth.

I push him again.

This time, he pulls himself away. “What the fuck, Sam? Are you fucking anyone already?” he asks with pure anger in his voice.

I don’t realize tears are already falling from my eyes. I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand and that’s when I see the blood from his bite.

“Get out of my car, Tyler!” I yell at him. “Before I’ll call the cops and complain you of harassment.” My voice cracks in the end.

“You’re not going to do that, Samantha. You know my dad is a lawyer. You’ll just lose your case and will be humiliated in the end. I already fucked you, why can’t I fuck you again, huh?”

I push him on his chest. “Get out of my car Tyler! I should never go there to pick you up and drive you home. You trick me, asshole. Get out of my freaking car!”

He opens the passenger door and gets out. “My offer still stands, Samantha.” He slams the door shut that makes me startle on my seat.

I drive away still crying from what he did to me. I was so stupid and didn’t think before going to pick him up. I don’t realize I’m not driving my way home.

Slowing down, I check my surroundings—I’m in front of the building that has a gym logo. The parking area is almost empty aside from the three cars are parked.

I stay for a while since I’m not blocking the driveway. I check my phone—no one call and gets out of the car.

The evening breeze touches my skin, making me shiver. I lean against the hood of my car and wrap my arms around me. My tears dry, but I’m still sniffing.

“Are you okay, miss?” A deep husky voice asks behind me that makes me jump.

My hand flies to my chest and turn to the voice from my back. My eyes widen. My jaw drops. Everything around me disappears, leaving just me and the man in front of me.

Chapter 2

PHOENIX

I had no plan on coming back to this place again after what happened in my life years ago, but after almost six years, here I am. I'm back. In fact, I even bought establishments and a house. I can't stand staying at our old house—it only reminds of a tormenting past.

I was surprised to hear from my father's lawyer that I was included in his Last Will. After what I did to him, he still considered me as a Williams. There's still a part of me that still hated him for what he did to Mom, to my family, and to me. Hate is a strong word, but it did change my life.

After working for my brother's company for four years, I started my own business for three months now. When I bought the new house in Hillside, I know I will be staying here for a long time.

I bought three establishments and made a few changes; from staffing, interior, foods, menus, and supplies. I'm surprised by the profits for three months. I guess I made the right decisions after all.

When I check my watch, it was time to go to the gym to release the tension in my muscles. I haven't fucked anyone since I moved in here. I'm surprised at myself that I'm able to last this long without jerking myself off.

When I was in New York, I always get laid when going to a bar. There was always a willing woman for a one-night stand. I don't like relationships since my college girlfriend for two years cheated on me to a hockey player. I guess she wanted a puck. I played football in college for three years until I injured my shoulder and lost my chance for NFL drafting.

The gym isn't far from my house and the traffic here is not so bad, unlike in New York. I'm also planning on buying this one if the owner is interested in selling.

"Phoenix, are your ass ready to get kicked?"

I look and grin at Garrett already wears his gym gear. "Kick my ass? Or I'll kick yours?"

Since I stopped playing football, I buried myself in kickboxing out of frustrations—it did help me a lot, but I never competed. I had already injured AC joint, and I'm not gonna add another injury to myself.

"Let's start, shall we? Don't you need a warm-up, Phoenix?" He smiles and helps me wrap the bandage around my hands.

Then I shake my head.

“Let’s start then,” he says, and I position myself.

He’s a kickboxing trainer. I’ve known him since we were just kids, and he never left this town. Now, he’s engaged to his girlfriend, Maya.

After a few tackles, punches, and kicks, I’m already sweating and catching my breath. My muscles ached, and I’m drained, but he doesn’t look exhausted at all.

He chuckles when I raise my hands up to give up.

“Fine, you just kicked my ass. You must be taking steroids. How come you’re not drained?”

He laughs. “Phoenix, you may be doing this for years, but this isn’t your job, and I do this for a living. But I’m impressed, you’re really good, man.”

“Thanks.”

“So, how’re your businesses? Are you planning on buying this one, too?” He motions his finger around.

“I’m interested in this place actually.” I remove my bandages.

“Good for you, man. Are you seeing someone?”

I look at him, creasing my brows. “Not interested. I have businesses to run, not looking for someone to ride on.”

He laughs. “Still brokenhearted Phoenix, I see. You never moved on.”

I shrug. “I moved on already since she cheated on me, but I never found someone worth my time.”

He pats my back. “Okay, then. We can grab a drink sometimes. How about dinner at our apartment? I’ll invite some friends so you can meet them.”

“Of course, just let me know. And I wanna meet who made you a pussy-whipped.”

“She would love to meet you.”

“Thanks for tonight, Garrett!”

After taking a shower, I change to a shirt and faded jeans. I head down to the parking area that only a few cars left. I place my gym bag inside the trunk and lock it.

When I walk towards the driver seat, I notice someone leaning against the car who looks like crying. As I walk closer that’s when I take a good look. It’s a woman.

“Are you okay, miss?”

She jumps.

When she turns to look at me— Shit! She's really crying.

Fuck!

She's beautiful. Her blonde hair looks messy while staring at me with wide blue eyes. Jesus, those eyes!

Pain and surprise glint in those innocent blue eyes. Her nose is small but cute. She has high cheekbones.

Fuck me!

With her red full lips hanging open, a small cut with a trace of blood on her swollen lower lip catches my attention.

I want to touch and kiss those lips, but I want to kill someone who hurt her as well. I don't notice my hands are already forming into fists.

She blinks many times, then clears her throat. "Um, yeah, I'm okay. Just lost my way while I'm uh, upset." She smiles timidly.

"You look hurt. Your lips are swollen and there is a cut and still bleeding." I point my finger to her lips.

She touches it with her finger and looks at it. "Yeah, my asshole of an ex kissed me and bit my lip."

My blood boils in my body, and I clench my jaw harder that my teeth will break at any moment.

Releasing a huge breath from my nose, it makes me calm a bit. I want to know who her ex is and punch him on the face till his eyes pop out from his head.

"No wonder he's your ex. How did he even become your boyfriend in the first place if he doesn't know how to treat a woman like you? Don't you want to file a complaint?" I look at her with sympathy.

Suddenly, the memory of how my father hurt my mom flashes back in my head.

She shrugs. "He called me from a frat party to pick him up and send him home because he's drunk and can't drive anymore. So, because I'm stupid, I fell for his please and drove him home. He didn't go out of my car, instead, he kissed me. When I pushed him away, he kissed me again and bit my lip. I threatened him that I would call the cops, but he said his dad is a lawyer."

When she crosses her arms against her chest, it makes me suck a breath because she has the gorgeous tits I've ever seen with a little cleavage is peeking out from her two unbuttoned shirts. She looks younger and a foot shorter than me.

I walk closer and sit beside her at the hood of her car. "He's really an asshole. I see you have bad tastes in men."

She laughs.

Jesus, my cock jerks inside my jeans.

I look at her when she sits beside me. I smell citrus with vanilla, maybe her shampoo, and she smells good.

"So, you come to this gym, huh?" she says, glancing at the building.

When she arches her neck, my mind instantly activates dirty thoughts. I want to run my tongue to the length of her neck, bite her earlobe, suck her jaw, and graze my teeth all the way down to her collarbone.

Shit! This is the result of being celibate for months.

She looks at me, maybe she notices me eye-fucking her.

I swallow and blink. "Yeah, two months ago." I realize I don't even introduce myself. "I'm Phoenix, by the way." I extend my hand.

She bursts out laughing and wrinkles her nose. "Phoenix? Is that even a real name?"

I chuckle. "Yeah, Phoenix is really my name. Do you want proof? I can show you my ID."

She shakes her head, then she shakes my hand firmly.

Her hand is so warm and soft, and it sends electricity to my entire body. My heartbeat races and my blood rushes through my veins, causing me to feel hot all of a sudden, and she gasps.

I look at her in the eyes—they're wide with shock to the intensity of our touch. She licks her lips and breaks her gaze, then quickly pulls her hand back.

"Your mother is very clever in choosing your name," she says merrily while clasping her hands together.

She doesn't look at me anymore, and it tightens my chest. I feel disappointed. What the fuck is going on with me?

"Yeah, and guess what's my brother's?"

She stares at me and smiles. Holy fuck! The smile.

“Um, eagle?”

I shake my head

“Owl.”

I shake my head again, and she joins to laugh with me.

Jesus, this woman makes my heart flutter. Flutter? Oh shit! This never happened for a long long time, and now, I’m freaking out.

“Falcon, sparrow, raven.”

I laugh more.

“Pigeon, dove, quail, penguin.”

“Baby, you’re terrible at guessing game. It’s—”

She holds my hand innocently.

Fuck! My cock hardens just from her simple touch.

“Wait, um, uh... peacock, robin, mallard, kiwi? Um, a hawk?”

My smile widens, I nod.

“Wait, his name is Hawk?” She seems can’t believe she guesses it right.

She stands up and jumps up for joy. She’s not just gorgeous, she’s also funny. I can’t remember having fun like this for a long time and just having a conversation with a woman without hitting to get laid.

“Yeah, his name is Hawk.”

She sits beside me again and faces me with excitement in her eyes. “Is your mom’s name from a bird, too?”

“No. My mom’s Annabelle. Dad was Archibald.”

Her mouth turns into O shape. Shit! She’ll find out who I am. Fuck! Dad was known in this place.

“Oh, then your mom should give you a name that starts with letter A.” She taps her finger on her chin. Then suddenly, she stands up. “Oh, sorry, Phoenix, I really should go. I forgot I’ve been out for too long. Thank you for your time! Bye, Phoenix.”

She walks to the driver's door, then waves. She's leaving, she doesn't even give me her name. Her headlights are on, and I have no choice but to stand up and wave back goodbye.

She gives me one last smile, and I rub the back of my neck when all I see is her car leaving.

I go back to my car feeling defeated. I sit there longer until I turn on the ignition like a hopeless. I'll find you and make you mine. I drive myself all the way home. My mind lingers again to my mysterious girl.

I'll not stop until I find her.

My home phone rings. That must be Mom or Hawk.

Before I can say hello, the voice of my brother echoes in my ear. "Phoenix, how's life? Never heard from you since last week. Enjoying some pussies there already, and you forget to call your handsome brother?"

I snort, "I never forget you, big brother, but I'm sick of listening and looking at the ugliest face on the planet. I hate to break it to you, but I haven't enjoyed a single pussy here. I met someone in the parking lot though, but because she's so gorgeous, I forgot to ask her name."

He barks into laughter. Something funny, big brother? He'd been like this since he found his woman and get married two years ago. They couldn't keep their hands off of each other even when I was around, and it annoyed the hell out of m, but I love them both.

"Really? What happened to my playboy of a brother? Since you went back, you forget how to get laid. I can't believe you last that long, brother? What happened to the dick of yours? Turning into a pussy already? It must be so hard for you, or do you develop an early erectile dysfunction?"

I roll my eyes at his absurdity because earlier it's still perfectly fine, but he's still laughing. "Just shut up and tell me why are you calling me, Hawk?"

He sighs, "It's nothing, Phoenix. Just checking up on you, and I know how you hate that place. You can come back here anytime. You're paying people to do their jobs, brother. Or are you not coming back because of the girl from the parking lot?" There is something in his voice that makes me smile. Excitement?

"Just shut up, douché. How am I even going to find her without her name?" I feel a twist in my stomach as I cower my body into my couch.

"Trust me, Phoenix, if you both mean for each other, your path will cross again. If you feel something toward her, that feelings will lead you to her."

I smile alone, feeling a slight of hope. "Yeah, you're right pussy-whipped. Thanks for the advice, Dr. Phil!" I take a deep breath and wish our path will cross again.

“You’re welcome, dimwit. Got to go and make my wife come.”

“Jesus, do you really have to tell me?”

He chuckles, “Jealous? That I have a lifetime supply of pussy?” I can hear the amusement in his voice.

“Jeez, Hawk. Say hi to Izzy for me, will you?”

“Sure. Take care, okay? You know you can always come back. Love you, bro.”

“I’ll let you know soon. Thanks! Love you too, bro. Bye.”

Chapter 3 SAM

My smile won't just wipe away from my face after talking to Phoenix. A unique name to a gorgeous God-looking guy. Just his face, women will spread their legs for him. He's also funny. His deep husky voice makes him sexier.

My jaw just drops when I look at him—his disheveled brown hair looks freshly showered. Those thick eyebrows and wicked gray eyes surrounded by thick eyelashes gleam in the moonlights. And my God, those full red lips, and not to mention the bulging biceps that make my fingers itch.

I can even see the hint of his pack abs through his shirts. I'm sure the V down there was drool-worthy.

I can't even believe I actually told him about what happened earlier with Tyler. How he laughed so much at my failure of guessing his brother's name, and those laughs—he makes my heart beat faster.

But I'm sure I'm not going to see him again. Well, there's nothing wrong with daydreaming, right?

I'm sure he won't remember me after tonight. But God, just his touch alone, it makes my body alive. My blood rushes through my veins and makes my heart flutter erratically.

I had to leave him before I was going to lose my mind.

There are those feelings that make me stay and talk to him all night and feel his body against mine. I shake my head.

I'm a relationship type of person, and I can see that he doesn't do that.

My chest tightens. The stupid hormone. I was just harassed by my ex and now I'm thinking of another man. Not good!

When I get back to bed, my mind lingered to those beautiful tantalizing gray eyes again.

This is for not having sex for a year.

I groan and close my eyes, hoping to get a good sleep.

***

Monday comes. I sigh helplessly as my mind is still preoccupied with Phoenix.

Why can't I just forget him? I need to get laid, but I don't even know how to flirt.

"Earth to Sam. Where is your mind flying?" Maya nudges me from her seat.

"Just didn't have enough coffee this morning. How's Garrett?" Her fiancé is a kickboxing trainer. Wait! That can be the same gym where he works, right?

"We're having dinner with his friend on Saturday. Join us with Amy." Her fiancé is very sweet, and it makes me sad that no one does to me the way he does to Maya.

"I'll let you know if I can come. Thanks for inviting me though."

Amy approaches our seats, smiling with her signature red lips. "Hey girls! How're your weekends?"

"Hi! Mine was boring. I can see that your weekend seemed pretty colorful."

She blushes, and I exchange a look with Maya.

"Come on. Who was the lucky guy that got a chance to grab those boobies?" Maya teases her that makes us giggle.

"He's here in college. He was good in bed, and not to mention how huge he is. Oh, my God! He gave me the best orgasms," she whispers, making us both laugh at her.

"How huge, Amy? And really, orgasms? Did you spend your night with him?" I curiously ask.

At least she always gets laid. Maybe I should try sometimes. A one-night stand is not that bad, right?

"Huge, Sam." Her eyes were glossy. "I didn't spend the night with him. We just had sex in his apartment, then after a few rounds, I left as soon as he fell asleep. It's been a year, Sam. You should try clearing your cobwebs already.

I cower on my seat. Thank, God! I am saved by our professor who just arrived. She can't anymore torture me with preaches about my lonely inactive sex life.

Classes end. We walk together to the parking area because we have the same shift in the coffee shop today.

"I actually met someone last Saturday. He's—"

Before I can continue, Amy grabs my arm. "Wait, you get laid Saturday night? Why I don't even know you went on a date."

I roll my eyes. "I didn't go on a date and I definitely did not get laid. Jeez, I just met him after sending Tyler home."

Her eyes widen because I haven't told her about the incident.

She glares at me. "You sent Tyler home? Are you insane? Why are you still talking to that jerk after what he did to you?"

I sigh in defeat—I know I can't let this topic go if I won't tell her and Maya. "He was drunk, so he called me and asked a favor. Then he kissed me in front of his home."

They ew in unison.

"Is that how you get that cut on your lip? He forced you?" Maya asks, giving me her sympathy looked. "Don't ever talk to him again, I'll let Garrett break his face."

"No need to be violent, okay? I'm fine."

We reach our cars, but Amy isn't done—she grabs my arm again.

"What?" I snap.

"Not so fast, sweetie. Tell me about the hot dude."

I roll my eyes and groan. "Nothing to tell. The new owner will kick us outside his shop if we will be late for our work." I open my car, get inside, and close the door.

She's not nearly over—Amy knocks on my window. "We're not done talking, missy."

I chuckle because I know I can't escape. I have to tell her, but not today.

***

When I reach my locker, they're already on their aprons, and I wear mine and grab my pen.

"Seriously, Sam, tell us the hot dude." Maya blocks my way and smiles.

"There's nothing to tell, really. We didn't kiss or hump. We just talked." I fixed the tie of my hair.

"Oh, you really won't budge, will you?" Amy says while fixing her hair.

"Just drop it, girls. We have work to do," I say dismissively.

"Your life is so boring. I need to set you on a blind date with Garrett's friend. I haven't met him yet. He's new in town, and I'm sure he's hot. His name—" Before Maya can continue, Big D emerges to our locker.

"Time to work, girls. No more gossiping, Mr. Williams will be here shortly," he says and leaves.

The shop is very crowded today. I can't even sit to rest my feet, and there's still no sign of Mr. Williams.

Suddenly, I feel an empty feeling in the pit of my stomach. "Are you sure he will come today?" And I don't know why I even ask Amy.

"No idea, girl. I'll only care if he will give me orgasms. I heard he's a playboy and doesn't date. Alex Williams is a drool-worthy businessman."

I narrow my eyes. "Really, Amy? All you have in your mind is sex? How about that college boy has huge?"

She cuts in, "What about him? It's only a one-time thing. I want to taste that hot piece of a man named Alex."

I give her a disgusting look, but instead of getting offended, she just laughs at me.

I carry the cappuccino the guy at the corner ordered. I am still carrying another cup of coffee and an order of éclair when the door chimes.

I get distracted to look who's coming when I hear Amy calling my name. I look at her and raise my eyebrow to ask what she wants. She doesn't say anything, but the sudden stiffening of her posture and look on her face tells me likewise.

I ignore her and walk to give the order on my hand when suddenly, I bump myself into something that makes the tray of coffee and éclair fall from my hand to the floor. The content of the cup spills to my hand and to something, or rather to the person I bump into.

A deep husky voice curses. My thoughts scattered. Everyone in the coffee shop gasps and says oh and oh my God. A flush of adrenaline tingles through my body, and I immediately grab my apron and clean the spill on a person's dark blue shirt and dark jeans.

"OhmiGod! OhmiGod! I'm so sorry! I didn't notice you're on my way. I'm so sorry. I don't mean to burn you with coffee. Oh, my God! I have never been clumsy like this," I continue babbling. "Mr. Williams will fire me this instant."

All I can say is sorry while wiping away the stain from the person—a man. I noticed the V when I try to wipe away the coffee.

Jesus his V! He stiffens when my skin accidentally touches his lower abdomen, and I can see now the noticeable bulge on his pants.

I feel the effect when my fingers touch to his skin—it awakens the senses in my entire body. I stop and stand up straight from my bending posture and look at the man standing in front of me.

"I'm so—" My eyes nearly pop out from each socket to see the man that I just bumped into.

My mouth hangs open, and I think my jaw just dropped to the floor.

Suddenly, I feel breathless as if every air in my body has been sucked out from me forcibly.
"P-phoenix?"

Then everything halts when Big D's angry voice behind me is calling my name.

Shit!

"Sam, what have you done?" He grabs my arm and forces me to face him.

I flinch. "I'm so sorry, Big D. I didn't see him coming when I was carrying the order to the table. I'm so sorry."

It doesn't stop there.

"Are you trying to burn him with coffee, Samantha? Do you really want to end my job and yours by burning Mr. Williams with coffee?" His voice stern echoes in the entire place.

"Mr. Williams?" My eyes widen again.

Wait.

"Yes, he is Mr. Williams. He owns this shop, who you just burned with coffee. Now apologize properly, Samantha. Maybe he'll change his mind, and he won't fire you." He looks intense—his face is red and his feature hardens.

I face the man whose name is Mr. Williams.

"That won't be necessary, Daniel. It was an accident. She's right, she didn't notice me, and it was my fault. I should have given her way," Mr. Williams says or Phoenix or whoever his name is.

"It's not acceptable, Mr. Williams. We don't just throw hot coffee to customers or anyone who comes here. That's why this shop is well known not only for the menu we served but also for the good services we offered to the customers."

I look down at my trembling hands as I feel so embarrassed to the man in front of me and to all the customers whose eyes are on me now, including my friends and other staff.

"Drop it, Chase. She already apologized to me more than once. It was an accident. Let me decide to fire her or not. She did an accident because of me," he says with his intimidating voice.

The place goes silent that you can hear the drop of a needle. I look at him, and he's staring at me. With its intensity.

I swallow hard when the next thing happens unexpectedly. He smiles.

"Hello, Samantha! Good to see you again!"

Chapter 4

PHOENIX

I yawn, rub my eyes with the back of my thumb, then close my laptop after reading the email from the manager of the coffee shop I recently bought.

I can't help but think about the parking lot girl—her eyes, her laugh, and the way she jumped when she finally guessed the right name. It just...she makes me smile. I know one day, there's a possibility of crossing our path again. This town is not that big, but the question is when?

I wake up just when my alarm goes off. After my breakfast, I shower, then I wear a shirt and jeans to look more casual. I will check first the restaurant since the night club will open at night.

It's almost eleven when I get out of the restaurant, and everything is under control.

I answer the call from Mom when I get inside the car. "Mom, how are you? Did you take your meds on time?"

"Oh, honey, I'm good. Don't worry about me. How about you? How's your business?" She sounds relaxed.

After the divorce, Mom was diagnosed with Acute coronary syndrome. She's on regular meds, diet, and monthly appointments.

"I'm doing great, and business is good. Aren't you planning on coming to see me?"

She doesn't like this place after the divorce had been finalized. She never remarries. Unlike dad, who met women and having a fair share of mistresses.

"You know the reason why, but since your dad passed away, I might think of revisiting that place. So much about me, I heard from Hawk that you met someone. Tell me about her, honey."

I slump my head back against the seat. I'll kick his ass. "I didn't meet anyone, mom. It was just a short conversation. I shouldn't have mentioned it to him."

Mom laughs. I never introduce any woman to her—even my college girlfriend.

"Well, you know Hawk. He'll tell me everything about you. You really should date and get married, honey. I'm not getting any younger anymore. I want to see my grandchildren before I'll die."

I don't like the idea of dying. Dad just passed away a few months ago. I love my mother so much, and I will do everything if I can just extend her life.

"No more talking about dying. Why not ask Hawk for grandchildren? He has a wife, and I can't just impregnate any woman you know that." I sigh. This conversation is getting nowhere.

"Oh, honey, I'm not worried about Hawk. His life is stable. You, on the other hand, have everything except a woman to warm your bed at night. I don't like the idea of you just banging around, Alexander Phoenix. It's time to move on and date, and have a girlfriend."

I groan, "Seriously? Is this really the reason why you're calling me? To lecture me about banging women. Christ, mom! if I meet someone I like, I'll let you know. I want you to be proud of me and be happy for me." I run my fingers through my hair in frustration.

"You know that I'm proud of you, and I'm happy with your business, but you can't stop me from worrying about your future—like when are you going to settle down and have a family." I can hear the disappointment in her voice, but I can't blame her though because life is too short, and even my father died at only sixty.

"Can you give me a break? I'm not forty. I'm twenty-six, and I still have so much time to meet and date someone." Yeah, contrary to what I have in mind, but it's the only way to stop my mother from dragging me to this issue.

"That's what I'm worried about. I would die first before you would date and have a girlfriend. Just like what you said, you're only twenty-six and you still have so much time."

Honestly, I'm getting pissed. I bite my lower lip. Suddenly, I remember the parking lot girl. Jesus!

"Mom, I'm already late. I really have to go to see the shop. We'll talk about this next time. Take care, okay?"

"We're far from done, Alexander Phoenix. I love you." I can still feel her disappointment, and it fucking hurts.

"I love you, too. Bye, Mom."

I feel guilty. I always did everything she wanted me to do except this relationship thing. My parents didn't have a good marriage and ended up divorced. I don't want to be like them when I settle down.

I broke my heart once, and I don't like breaking it again.

I drive my car to the coffee shop where my next visit is. I'm already late. I am surprised to see the parking lot that I almost don't have a space to park my car.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee, cinnamon, vanilla, and sugar wafting in the entire place as I enter. The tables are almost full, and the waitstaff is busy. Nobody notices me yet, which is good!

I walk to the aisle only to be surprised to the woman in a black apron—her hair tied in a neat bun, makeup-free face, and a hint of lip gloss on her healing lips. Jane Doe is wearing a light pink shirt, skinny jeans, and flats.

The woman that I thought about frequently has a tray on her hand with a cup of coffee and a pastry.

Fuck!

She's working in my coffee shop and doesn't have any idea about me?

She hasn't noticed me yet.

A woman with bigger tits calls a name Sam. Then she stops and looks at her.

Okay, so, Jane Doe's name is Sam. Beautiful. She ignores the big tits woman and walks toward my direction, and the tray hits me.

Hot!

Fuck!

The content spills on my shirt down to my jeans. Hot coffee. Shit!

I might be getting a first-degree burn. The sound of the tray, cup, and saucer echoes in the entire place that catches everyone's attention. She's babbling and says something that Mr. Williams will fire her while she's rubbing her apron to my wet shirt.

Shit! I stiffen when her fingers touch my lower abdomen, and my traitor cock is happily reacting to her innocent touch. Shit again! She notices my bulging pants. I clench my jaw, grit my teeth, and breathe deeply to calm myself. What the hell is she doing to me?

When the manager Daniel Chase comes rushing to us, she stops cleaning, then she looks at me wearing a shock looked on her face. She's more beautiful in broad daylight—her gorgeous blue eyes glimmer with pain and worry.

I want to kiss away those worries and pain away. Daniel is pissed at her, but I'm more pissed when he grabs her tiny arm to face him, causing her to flinch.

My nose is flaring, and I want to punch him. Samantha was just harassed by her ex, and now he's hurting her. Even as big as he is, I can surely knock him down if he won't leave her alone.

"I'm fine, that didn't do me any harm. Let's talk in your office, Daniel."

He nods in agreement.

“Go clean up, Samantha,” I tell her a little Bossier, then I face Daniel again. “Ask someone to clean this mess.”

He looks at Sam.

“Not her. She has to change her apron,” I order and look at her again who still looks terrified. “I’ll talk to you later, Samantha.”

I like her name on my tongue—it rolls delicately like honey. I smile at her to assure that I’m not angry.

When she nods, I follow Daniel to his office.

He lets me sit on the chair in front of his desk.

“How long she’s been working here?” I don’t know why I even ask, but he looks surprised by my question.

“Two years. She’s one of the hard-working waitresses, but she’s only working as a part-time though because she’s still in college with some girls who also work here.”

I nod glumly. “Do you always grab them by the arm when they did mistakes or just Samantha?”

His eyes widen, looks alarmed. “O-of course not, Mr. Williams. She’s like a sister to me, and it was her first time to get into an accident with a customer. I apologize for my behavior earlier.”

I cut in, “Don’t apologize to me, Chase. Apologize to Samantha. She looks terrified back there, and it’s not good to scare someone in front of the customers, is it?”

He nods. “You’re right, and I will, Mr. Williams.”

“Good. Now tell me about this coffee shop.”

After almost an hour, we wrap-up the meeting. Daniel Chase is actually good at what he’s doing even though my blood is still boiling to what he did to Samantha. He does his job seriously.

I get out of his office and scan the place. Samantha is nowhere to be found.

“Where is Samantha?” I ask the waitress with big tits.

She smiles at me. “Mr. Williams, she went through the back of exit. Her shift is over thirty minutes ago.”

Her apron has the name Amy on it. “Wait a sec. Did she go home?” The panic in my voice is obvious, making Amy chuckles.

“Not yet. Her ex came and wanted to talk to her.”

I narrow my eyes. “And you let her go there alone to talk to her jerk of an ex?”

Shit! Did I just burst out my anger on her? Poor Amy.

“Um, she insisted on talking to him alone. She said she can handle him.”

I groan. “Where?”

She points to the kitchen.

I stride inside the kitchen and see the exit sign. I pull the door open, and there they are, in an intense conversation, and I want to break every bone in his body. One more touch on her again, he will regret the day he’s born. I hear footsteps coming, and it’s her friend, Amy.

Then I see red when he grabs Samantha’s arm.

My rage takes over—I stride to them and push him away from her. His eyes widen in shock to see what I just did.

Sam gasps beside me.

I grab his shirt. “This is the last time you ever going to touch her! You, motherfucker hurt her more than once, and I wouldn’t dare do that if I were you. If I ever see you get near her, or I heard that you talk to her again, I will fucking find you and kill you myself!” My fist is already trembling and wanting to punch him, and it takes all my courage to control myself for the sake of Samantha. “Did you understand me?”

“Y-yes.”

I don’t release his shirt, yet. “Apologize!”

He hesitates, and I grab his shirt stronger that might rip off from his body.

“I-m s-sorry, Sam.”

I push him and let him stumble to the ground.

“Get the hell away from my property before I will break your worthless bone!” I grit my teeth and face Sam, who’s still in shock, wrapping her arms around her body.

I take a huge breath to calm my nerves. “Come here, Samantha. Let’s get inside.” I offer my hand.

She grabs my hand firmly. Shit! Just her simple touch makes me feel alive. I ignore Daniel and Amy at the door. I glance at Sam who has not said a word.

“You okay, Samantha?” I’m worried about her because I have seen this kind of scenario, and I don’t like men hurting women in general.

“Yeah, I’ll live. Thank you by the way.” She smiles at me tightly.

She tries pulling her hand when she notices we are not alone, but I tighten the grip—I’m not ready to let her go. She looks confused, and the two exchange a look as well.

I face Daniel. “If that asshole will show up here again, either as a customer or wanna talk to Samantha, let me know. I don’t want him coming near her again.”

I look at Amy. “Even at school. Amy. Call me when that jerk gets near her.”

She gives me a wide smile and winks at me. “Got it, boss.”

“Are you going home now, Samantha?” I look at her. Our hands still intertwined.

“Yeah, it’s been a very long day. Can I have my hand now, Mr. Williams.” With the emphasis of Mr. Williams.

I bark into laughter. “Not a chance. I still have to send you to your car.” I shrug, causing Amy and Daniel to laugh with me.

“I got to get inside. Mr. Williams,” Daniel said.

“Thank you, Daniel.”

I smile at Samantha when she suddenly glares at me. “Just trying to be a gentleman.”

“You said your name is Phoenix, but they said it’s Alex Williams. You lied to me.”

“Is that why you’re upset? Only a few people call me by Phoenix. Those are my family and my old friends. My name is Alexander Phoenix Archibald Henry Williams.”

“Wow! Your mother was having fun giving you that long name, isn’t she?”

“I think so. Hawk is Albert Hawk.”

She shakes her head with amusement.

“Now it’s time for you to introduce yourself. We’ve met twice, but you haven’t told me your name. Don’t you think it’s unfair.”

She rolls her eyes. Jesus, she’s so beautiful. “You know my name, it’s Samantha. Friends call me Sam.”

A new girl joins us. “Sam’s life has been boring for a year now, but her name is Samantha Lorraine Anderson. Don’t kill me, Sam.”

“Samantha Lorraine. Beautiful. Suits you well.”

“Ugh. I need to get my bag. Now, can I have my hand back?”

“Fine, but I will still send you to the parking lot.”

“So, he must be the hot one you met last Saturday.” Amy looks at her and bumps her arm on Sam’s, causing her to blush as red as a tomato.

“Uh-huh! So, you told her about how we met?” I tease.

“Both of you, please, leave me alone!”

That makes us laugh more, then she rushes inside the kitchen.

“So, Phoenix, do you like my friend?” Amy crosses her arms over her chest and raises her eyebrows.

“Is it too obvious?” I raise a brow.

She gives me a high-five. “I like you already.”

Chapter 5 SAM

I can't believe Phoenix is Alex Williams who owns the coffee shop where I work, and I almost burned him. I thought I lost my job, but I'm grateful that he saved me from my ex.

I'm so humiliated that he even held my hand in front of my friends. What will they think about me now? That I am flirting with the owner to keep my job?

Every time our skin touches, I always feel something—the tingle is always there, and I don't want to let go of his hand—it just feels good to have someone holding my hand—someone like him because I feel that I can trust him—I feel safe in his arms.

"Care to explain what just happened over there?"

I ignore Big D, instead, I take my soiled apron and put it inside my bag to wash it later.

"Have you known him before, Sam? He's our boss. He's rich and playboy. I don't want you getting hurt again."

My face heats because he's right at some point. "I know now he's our boss. I also know he's rich, but I never met him before. Just last Saturday. I don't even know he's Mr. Williams, who owns this shop."

He looks genuinely concerned, but he doesn't have to tell me, and Phoenix just saved my ass and nothing more.

"I'm not blind, Sam. I saw the way he looked at you. He was even pissed when I grabbed your arm after you spilled coffee on him. Haven't you noticed? He even threatened your ex."

I shrug. "Then why are you still telling me all of these if I can't change the idea in your head? What have you just witnessed doesn't mean anything to him or to me? Maybe he doesn't like a woman being harassed by a jerk," I say sarcastically. "Got to go home, Big D. I'm sure your job is safe now."

I pat his arm and head out from the locker room. I almost bump to Phoenix again.

He approaches me with all his glory. He's smirking. God, he's so perfectly beautiful in every way. "Ready, beautiful?"

Jeez! Does he really have to do that? My heart won't back to a regular beating when he's around.

"You don't have to send me to the parking lot, Mr. Williams. It's not even far. My ex is far long gone. Judging by the look on his face a while ago, he had no plan on coming back. Thank you for

saving me over there! And I apologize for spilling coffee on your shirt." I can still see the stained on his shirt and jeans, so I walk past him.

"Samantha, are you avoiding me because you found out I own this?" He follows me outside the shop.

"No, Mr. Williams. I'm grateful for not firing me, but it's not right in the eyes of those people who saw us a while ago after the accident I did on you, then we were holding hands together in my work premises while you're the boss of my boss." I continue walking, but he grabs my hand. Again, my breathing holds.

"Samantha, just wait! Stop walking, please." His beautiful eyebrows creases as I face him.

"Stop calling me Mr. Williams. Just call me Phoenix. I'm sorry, I thought we are friends. There's nothing wrong with holding your hand in front of them unless you have a boyfriend who can kick my ass, or you're ashamed of me." He shrugs and sighs, seemingly disappointed.

"Phoenix, I'm not ashamed of you, and I can't remember you being my friend. Since when? I thought you just saved my ass from my ex because I work for you, and I am so thankful you did that."

He breathes hard, looking pissed. "You don't wanna be my friend? Or is it about what Chase has told you in the locker room?"

My face burns. I swallow hard. He overheard our conversation with Big D. "You eavesdropped our conversation there?"

"Not intentional. I went there to get you, then I heard you talking with Chase. I see, he warned you to stay away from me, and that's what you're doing right now. Don't you have a mind on your own to decide, Samantha? Do you just listen to those who whisper on you?"

I glare at him. He may be the owner, but he doesn't have the right to insult me. "He doesn't have to warn me to stay away from you. We're not in a relationship in the first place, and we're not friends, besides, after this, we may not meet again. I really have to go, Phoenix. Thank you again."

I leave him alone, and I can't face him again. I'm so ashamed of what Big D has told me, and he overheard everything. Thank, God he doesn't follow me anymore.

***

I drive home feeling drained, and I feel sad at the same time. If he's not my boss we can be friends, but he's also a distraction. This attraction I have for him will just break my heart. I can't afford to have a broken heart again. He's playboy and rich. He can sleep around, and I don't do such things like that.

I arrive home to find my mom already leaving. “Oh, sweetie, what’s wrong? Who upset my girl? Who’s shin should I kick?”

I drop my bag on the couch and cower myself. “No one, Mom. It’s just…it’s been a long day. Just tired, and the shop has been busy throughout my shift. I need to sleep.”

“Okay, sweetie. Go, get some rest. Whatever is bothering you, everything will be alright. I love you so much, Sam, and I can’t stand seeing you so upset, and I know it has nothing to do with your work. I had psychology classes, remember that.” She kisses my cheek and looks at me one more time.

“Night, Sam. Lock the door, okay?”

I nod and hug her. “Okay, Mom. Take care. Love you.”

My phone buzzes.

Ugh!

Amy: I can’t believe you know hot Alex Phoenix Williams.

I roll my eyes.

Sam: We just talked, Amy. Nothing that interests you.

Amy: Sam, everything about him is interesting. Come on, spill it.

Jesus, she won’t just let it go.

Sam: Haven’t you heard him? He didn’t even know my name. It was just five minutes of talking.

Amy: A lot of things happen in five minutes, dear. I can have an orgasm in 30 sec. You’re killing me here.

Ugh! I hate her right now.

Sam: Sorry to disappoint you, Amy, but we didn’t even kiss. Now, drop it because I’m going to sleep.

Amy: But you want to kiss him, don’t you? You know, those lips can do a lot of things.

My God! Is she always think about sex all the time?

Sam: I don’t think like that, Amy. Now, please? Got to go.

Amy: So, you won’t mind if I’ll sleep with him?

Is she really going to sleep with Phoenix? So? But to think my friend is enjoying with Phoenix makes my chest tight.

Amy: See? You like him you, stupid girl. Admit it! He just saved your ass from your psycho ex. He even threatened Tyler and warned us to tell him if your ex will show his ass again. I'm happy for you, friend. You'll finally get laid. You need to wax down there. I'm sure he will happy to go down on you.

Oh, my God! She's insane! I can't help but roll my eyes. But thinking of Phoenix going down there on me, makes me squirm and press my thighs together. Crap!

Sam: Night, Amy!

I close my phone. I don't want her to talk about sex anymore. Sex doesn't solve the world's problems or even my own. It just leads me into trouble.

I take a shower and change into PJs. I'm so exhausted. My lids feel heavy after putting my head on my pillow.

Weekdays passed like a blur. I told Maya, I would be joining with Amy for dinner. Amy finally stopped teasing me when I didn't care to answer her questions.

I choose a red dress that my mom gave me last Christmas. I pair with my silver high heels sandals. I apply some mascara, a little dash of blush on, and pink lip gloss.

I go down when I hear knocks on the door after grabbing my purse and keys.

"Wow! You look hot, Sam. You'll gonna have an orgasm tonight with Garrett's friend." Amy is wearing a black dress with red high heels. She looks beautiful with her curves in the right places. Just her chest size alone, men will drool over them.

"Stop talking about orgasms already and behave while we're there. And I'm not getting an orgasm tonight. You can have whoever Garrett's friend is."

We arrive in front of the apartment. I was here once during Maya's engagement party.

We get in the elevator, and I press Maya's floor number.

"You never see Phoenix again?" Does she really have to mention him when I'm trying to forget he exists?

"Why would I see him?" I snort.

She chuckles, "Sam, you both like each other, why fight against your feelings? Why are you making it complicated?"

“First, he owns the shop—he’s our boss. Secondly, he didn’t come to see me, so why would I see him? Thirdly, we don’t like each other, so just drop it. It’s been a week, and I didn’t hear anything from him anymore.” I squeeze my eyes shut. I missed him every day—his smile, his hand, and his laugh.

Crap!

“He’ll come around, Sam, trust me. He likes you, and he admitted it to me. Maybe you say something that hurt his ego.”

I glare. “Hurt his ego? I didn’t say anything. I just said, he can’t hold my hand in front of all of you, and we’re not friends.”

Her eyes grow big. “Did you just say that to him? Are you insane? Of course, it hurts his feelings. He said to me that he likes you, and you don’t even wanna be his friend? You lucky bitch! Someone like Phoenix won’t even ask for a fuck. Women will spread their legs to get into his pants! You, on the other hand, someone like him admitted that he likes you and wants to be your friend, of course, it’s a big deal that you rejected him.”

I feel bad, yeah. Why I didn’t even think of that? Now, maybe it’s too late. His offer of friendship doesn’t stand anymore. The ship has sailed.

Amy knocks on Maya’s door. The door swings open only to see Phoenix in all his hot glory.

My heart rate raced while staring at him in awe. He’s wearing a white button-down shirt, sleeves rolled up his elbows and dark gray pants. His hair is disheveled that makes him look yummier.

“What are you doing here, Phoenix?” I am a little bit excited to ask, but I am disappointed because he doesn’t say anything and doesn’t even react like the way he saw me before.

He just looks at me, then to Amy without expressions on his face. “Garrett invited me. Come inside. They’re both waiting.”

My chest tightens.

The Phoenix I knew a week ago suddenly change into a cold-hearted man. I just lost a chance of becoming his friend. I want to run away from this place, and I’m so embarrassed like he doesn’t even know me.

“Wow, he seems cold,” Amy mumbles.

I don’t say a word because she also notices it. I grab Amy’s hand and squeeze it. Maya emerges from the kitchen with Garrett.

“Hey, thank you both of you for coming. I don’t have any idea that Garrett’s friend is actually Phoenix. So, no need introduction, I guess,” Maya says, clasping her hands together while Garrett’s hand is on her waist.

“Yeah, thanks for having us here for dinner.” That’s all I can say because the way Phoenix welcomes us isn’t very welcoming at all, and all I want to do is to be invisible right now.

“Have a seat, girls. The food is almost ready. I’m glad to have both of you here again.” Garrett hugs both of us.

“My pleasure Garrett,” Amy says as we sit on the couch in front of Phoenix.

Phoenix remains silent like we don’t even exist. His eyes are focusing on the TV with a live football game.

God, please kill me now. I actually hate being ignored.

“So, Phoenix, how did you meet Garrett?” Amy starts the conversation.

He gives Amy a stoic look. “I’ve known him since we were kids. I moved to New York after college, but he stays here. When I came back three months ago, I found him in the Gym. That’s how we met again. I’ve no idea Maya is actually his fiancée.”

Maya calls from the dining area to tell that dinner is ready. I sit beside Amy while Phoenix and Maya sit in front of me while Garrett is at Maya’s left side.

“I’m glad my friend here is back. I actually missed this idiot. He just ran away without even telling me he’s moving to New York to be with his brother,” Garrett starts a light conversation and my nerves settle a little bit. The food is delicious.

“Huh! Like you really missed me. I thought you would be happy when I’m gone. You can have all the ladies by yourself,” Phoenix says and smirks. Good Lord in heaven, he looks delicious than the food I’m eating.

“Really? Thank, God! Garrett here changed.” Her cheeks are glowing. “You, Phoenix, I’m sure still the same,” Maya retorts that makes Garrett chuckles.

“Oh, you have no idea. Excuse me, girls, but why bothers a complicated relationship if there’s an easy lay,” he snorts.

Ouch! It hurts, but he’s right. I suddenly lost my appetite.

“Well, if you haven’t met the right one for you, I’m sure you can say the same, but when I met Maya, everything changed, and you’re willing to change for her. You’ll be happy and contented of just being with her,” Garrett explains and gives Maya a peck on her cheek.

“You’re whipped, Garrett. I don’t think I’ll be able to meet the right one for me. I broke my heart once, and I don’t think I wanna break it again. Once is enough,” he says dismissively.

“I know it’s hard for you, Phoenix. If you give up because of some stupid bitch who broke your heart, I can say that she didn’t deserve you, but it only means someone out there deserves you better,” Amy retorts causing everyone to silent.

She continues, “Like Sam here, her boyfriend cheated on her a year ago, now, she finally moves on. Her jerk ex wanted her back because maybe he finally realized that he deserved someone like Sam.”

My body turns cold. I’m glaring at her right now, but she just gives me a smile.

“I’m sorry about that, Sam. I’m sure you deserve better than him. Don’t ever take that jerk back.” Maya gives me a tight smile.

“Why are we talking about my ex right now? I actually took him back.”

Maya and Amy’s mouth fall open. Garrett sags against his chair. Phoenix clenches his jaw. His nose flares and drops his cutlery that clatters against his plate, then he takes a deep breath.

“Excuse me.” He stands up causing the chair to screech.

The door slams shut causing us to startle.

Chapter 6

PHOENIX

My blood boiled when I heard she took him back. Why she has to take him back? That asshole doesn't deserve someone like her—she's too good for him.

He hurt her once—cheated on her, and he'll do it again. Cheaters don't change—that's their nature. Was that the reason why she denied my friendship? Did he threaten her that day?

I had to excuse myself from them, otherwise, they'll see the dark side of me, and I, myself don't like this part of me.

I get outside of the apartment to release my anger, and I want to punch every surface here. But before I can do that, I hear the door opens, then footsteps follow.

Can this be her? I'm not ready to face her after ignoring her earlier.

"Phoenix, are you okay?"

Thank, God it's Maya.

"I just need some air. I'll be there in a minute." I can't even face Maya. I'm so ashamed about how I reacted. I'm sure everybody noticed that what Samantha said affected me so much.

"I can't feel there is any air in here, Phoenix. Is it because of what Sam has said? You provoked her, but I don't think it's true though because I never saw Tyler talked to her again even at school. And I was with Sam all the time."

I close my eyes and breathe deeply.

"Why would she lie? And I never provoked her," I almost snort because I might have. "She doesn't want me to be her friend."

I feel a little relieved if what she says is true.

"Can you two just stay friends? For how long?"

I actually don't know how to answer. I open my mouth, but my brain doesn't seem to work. So, I close my mouth again.

"That's what I thought. If you'll just play with her feelings, it's better this way."

I really want to strangle Maya right now. “Better? What’s better when he’s going to hurt her? I don’t want her back with that asshole! She can date anyone, but not him again.” I feel like an asshole more than her ex because I am so frustrated and hopeless.

“Then, go and tell her that. Are you sure she can date anyone? You don’t mind it at all?” She raises her brows in a challenge.

I glare at her.

“You must really like her, but you ignored her for a week,” Maya retorts.

“Do you think it’s easy for me? She doesn’t like me, even as friends. It’s also better this way because if she’ll stay closer to me—” I stop. “Never mind. Anyway, it’s too late. Whether she’s telling the truth or not, it’s I’m sure doesn’t matter anymore. I am sure she knows what she’s doing. Let’s get inside.” I motion my hand to give her a way to get back inside.

Everyone eats in silence. I steal glances at her few times, but she never looks at my direction. But God, she doesn’t look beautiful in red dress—it makes her eyes stand out, and those sinful lips—I don’t think she has any idea how gorgeous she is. I can see more cleavage every time she moves her arms. Shit! I have such a shitty mind.

I’m glad her boyfriend cheated on her, otherwise, she’s not sitting in front of me right now.

My cock is begging too much attention lately, and it doesn’t get the needs it wants anymore.

I glance at her once again, she must have felt my gaze on her because she looks at me—she looks surprised to see me. I feel like a fool—like a boy in front of his crush.

Jesus, I feel desperate. I drop my gaze because I really want to hit my head on the wall for ignoring her, and I want to take back those words I said earlier—it doesn’t make me like a sane person—it makes me look like a moron.

But the way she looked at me when they arrived, I think she also likes me, but she’s just trying to fight her feelings. I can’t blame her though because she’s just broken as I am—we’re both aware of how painful it is to be cheated.

We move to the living room after the uneventful dinner.

Garrett talks about our old days. We laughed at how we pranked girls in high school that resulted in a one-week suspension. My dad was so mad at me when the school head informed him about our behavior.

“I can’t believe you both did that,” Amy responds.

“It was Hawk’s idea actually. He was angry when that girl turned him down,” Garrett defends himself.

“Whatever. It’s not funny. You all were bullies.” Maya pursed her lips.

Garrett gives her a kiss on her cheek. Samantha remains silent while playing her wine glass.

“How about you, Sam? Did you ever prank anyone?”

Her eyes find mine, then she looks at Garrett who asks her.

“No, why would I do that? Only people who seek attention will do that.”

Garrett laughs, feeling guilty. “You’re right, Sam. Hawk wanted attention from that girl named Vicky. I think that was her name,” Garrett says in agreement.

“Excuse me, guys. Can I use your bathroom, Maya?” Amy asks and stands up with Maya, then they walk out of the living room.

“Can I get you another beer, Phoen?” Garrett asks next and stands up before I can answer.

“Nah. Thanks, but, I’m driving.” That remains just the two of us. This is my only chance to talk to her. This has been a torture to me of not talking to her. Suddenly, she shifts in her chair. The tension between us suddenly thickens.

“Did you really take him back, Samantha?”

She looks at me instantly. “And how is it your business?”

I flinch. It fucking hurts. My heart stops momentarily to her answer.

“Not my business, but if he values his life, he’s not going to do another mistake by getting near to you again. So, I don’t think it’s true. Why did you have to lie?”

She narrows her eyes at me. “What makes you think he’ll listen to you?”

“And what makes you think he’ll not listen to me?

“Then why does it bother you?”

My mouth gapes because I’m not ready to give her my answer.

“Why don’t you want me to be your friend, Samantha?” I lower my voice.

“Why would you want to be my friend, Phoenix?” Jesus! she’s so stubborn and smart-ass.

“Why not? What’s wrong with being your friend?”

“Why are you insisting to be my friend? I’m sure you have lots of friends; men and women from your social circle.”

My eyebrows creased. “What do you mean by from my social circle?”

“Well, you’re rich, You have this club for rich people, and I don’t belong there.”

I shake my head. “Seriously, Samantha, just tell me a little bit more convincing on why you don’t wanna be my friend. Is it because Daniel told you that I’m a playboy, and I will end up hurt you? I’ve been hurt once, I know the feeling until now. I will never hurt you intentionally. We’ll just be friends, nothing more unless you want something more.” I raise my eyebrow and smirk.

“What? You’re overconfident!” She laughs at the end.

I extend my hand for a handshake. “So, friends?”

Her face breaks into a beautiful smile. Suddenly, the room lits up. The tension vanishes into the thin air.

Then shakes my hand. “Friends.”

Baby steps, Samantha. Baby steps.

“Well, that was easy,” Garrett says with a beer bottle on his hand.

“You, asshole, you’re eavesdropping.” I glare at him.

He just chuckles and looks amused. “Nothing to eavesdrop, idiot. Both of you need to get hurt first before you realize that it actually does.”

“You’re unbelievable.” I shake my head.

After an hour, Samantha and Amy say their goodbyes to Garrett and Maya, and that’s my cue to go home as well. After their hugs and kisses with Maya, we leave together in one elevator.

“Are the two of you always this speechless all the time?” Amy breaks the silence.

“Are you drunk to drive, Amy?”

“Nope.” Amy’s eyes are gleaming with mischief.

“Good. I’ll drive her home.”

“Thank you for the offer, Phoenix, but I’ll go with Amy,” Samantha protests.

“Oh, no, Sam. You go with Phoenix. I’ll drive home directly,” Amy says, and I can see the shock looked on Samantha’s face.

“You have no choice but to come with me, Samantha,” I chuckle.

“I really hate you right now. Why are you doing this?” she asks Amy in a whisper, but I can still hear her.

“I want you to get laid. Now, don’t argue with me because it won’t change my mind.”

I smile when I see a flush creeps across her cheeks.

“I’m not getting laid. Are you crazy? I will never come with you again, and I make sure to drive next time,” she hisses against Amy.

“I can hear both of you, you know.”

“It’s intentional for you to hear.” She glares at me.

I laugh. “Really? So, you’re not sleeping with me, huh?” I arch my brow. “Ever?”

Her ears turn red, and she punches me on my arm.

“You’ll break your bone, baby. Don’t do that again.”

She laughs and punches me again. “Did you just insult my punch? I’ll enroll with Garrett, and let him teach me how to punch.” She forms her hand into a fist.

“I can teach you for free. Now, come with me and let Amy go.” I grab her hand, and I’m glad she doesn’t hesitate. The moment our hands intertwined, I sigh deeply in relief.

“Bye, guys. Good luck!” Amy waves and gets inside her car.

“What was that for?” Samantha asks.

“What?”

“You sighed.”

I smile. “That we’re okay.” I let her sit in my passenger seat and close the door after her. As soon as I get into my seat, I fasten my seat belt and she does the same.

“Did you really take him back?”

She shakes her head and rolls her eyes. “I’m not that stupid.”

Thank, God!

“Good to know. You look gorgeous by the way.”

“Thank you! You’re not bad yourself. Are we really friends now?” She smiles.

“Changing your mind already?”

“Nope, but I actually missed you.”

I look at her in dazed. Did she just say that? A fluttery feeling settles in my stomach.

“Please, concentrate on the road. I don’t want another accident,” she says.

A lump forms in my throat that I have to grip the steering wheel stronger than necessary.

“You okay?”

I steal a glance at her. “Yeah, I’m fine. Where’s your address?”

“How’s college, Samantha?” I give her a tight smile. I press the screen of the GPS that will lead me to her house.

“Still college,” she answers dryly.

I chuckle, “Am I this boring?”

She chuckles too and stares at me this time. “You’re far from boring, Alexander Phoenix.”

“Are you twenty-one? Come to my club tomorrow night. Bring some friends with you. I also invited Garrett and Maya.”

“You really don’t know Maya before dinner?” she asks me.

“Nope. She’s not from here. So, I never met her before. Are you coming or not?”

She wrinkles her nose with a little smile on her face—she really has to distract me from driving.

“Do you really have to be bossy when inviting someone?” she asks while raising a brow.

“Because you’re trying to ignore my invitation.”

“I’m not trying to ignore it. I’m just thinking if I wanna come or not.” She looks outside the window. At least she’s honest.

“Let me know then. Take my number and text me or call me or email me, or whatever your way to give to reach out to me.” I pick my phone from my pocket then hand it to her.

“God, you’re so bossy. Oh, your phone has no password.” She’s tapping on the screen.

“Why would I put a password when I don’t have my nude photos in there?”

“Maybe women’s nude photos then?” She grins.

I laugh. “Why would I keep photos of nude women on my phone, Samantha?”

"And why not? Aren't most men like to keep nude photos of women on your phone?" She's something.

I shake my head with amusement. "Well, I'm not most men, Samantha, and I don't need their pictures. I can get laid whenever I want, so I don't want nude photos to jerk off." Fuck! I sound like shit.

"I don't mean it like that. I'm not judging you. I'm just teasing you. I'm sorry." She hands me back my phone.

When my finger grazes hers, my body tingles. I actually need to get laid to get rid of these sexual frustrations inside me.

"Don't apologize. I'm just teasing you too. So, you never had a boyfriend after that douche?"

She crosses her arms over her chest. "Nope, and not interested in having one."

"Not offering, beautiful."

She narrows her eyes and scowls at me. "And who said that I'm proposing?"

I bark into a loud laugh. "I like teasing you, Samantha. You're so funny."

Jesus, she's even beautiful when she's scowling.

So bad we arrive at her home. I still want to tease her more. I feel alive when I'm with her, and I even forget everything about my problems every time I see her smile.

"Thanks for the ride, Phoenix! I'll let you know if I can come to your club."

I want to beg her to come, but hopefully, she will say yes.

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" I tease her again.

She rolls her eyes. "You can come in."

"Just kidding, sweetheart. Good night, Samantha," I say and lean closer to her face simultaneously. She stiffens in her seat.

Then I realize what I just did. I have to pull back before I can do something stupid and throw what I have just started with her. I can't afford to let her run away from me again.

"I'm sorry, I'm not supposed to do that."

She swallows hard, then she opens the door without uttering a word.

Shit! I didn't even open the door for her.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

“Wait, Samantha, let—”

She cuts in, “No need. Jeez! We didn’t go out on a date. You’re just driving me home. Night, Phoenix!”

She gets out of my car, then closes the door after her, leaving me just to watch her as she walks to her front porch. She then unlocks her door and waves at me.

I manage to wave back and sigh as I am so disappointed with myself. How did I become so stupid? Just a simple thing I can’t even do it right.

She closes the door, leaving me all alone.

Way to go, dude.

You almost kissed her, asshole. Almost.

Chapter 7

SAM

Phoenix almost kissed me! Yeah, almost. I was anticipating when he leaned closer, but before it happened, he pulled back.

I'm actually a little bit disappointed. Well, we shouldn't, right? Who kisses a friend anyway?

He always smells good—a scent of mint and musk, probably his cologne or his aftershave.

Something feels different in his touch—it feels good, soothing, and igniting—like I want to cocoon in his arms.

I'm glad we became friends though because I really missed him. I even admitted it.

Going to his club is maybe a good idea. I can meet someone to get rid of whatever feelings I have for Phoenix. It's insane how I know a little about him, and just met him recently, yet I feel the strong pull toward him.

I might take Amy's advice to get laid—my spell has been dried a long time ago, and she's right—it's time to clear away the cobwebs because I will die waiting if I will expect that Phoenix is the right man for me—we're just friends.

SAM: Hi, it's me, Samantha. I was thinking about going to your club tonight. I'll bring Amy with me.

I press send.

PHOENIX: Samantha, I'm glad you finally decide. Bring Amy with you. Can't wait to see you tonight.

SAM: See you later.

PHOENIX: Later, beautiful.

Before I can dial Amy, another message from Phoenix pops.

PHOENIX: By the way, I'm not flirting with you. Friends don't flirt, do they?

I roll my eyes. I can't help but smile.

SAM: I don't know you're flirting until you said so. Maybe I'm just a dumb or I don't know what flirting means at all.

PHOENIX: You better don't know how to flirt or the meaning it. I hate to say this, but you can't flirt with any man tonight.

I shake my head. This man is something.

SAM: And why is that?

PHOENIX: Because you will be stuck with me all night.

SAM: Seriously, Phoenix, your overprotectiveness is annoying, but don't worry I have no plan on flirting with anyone tonight. Your presence, your highness is entertaining enough for me.

PHOENIX: I'll try scaring some asshole who will try to hit on my new beautiful friend tonight. It will be an honor to entertain you, princess.

I bark out laughing.

"What's going on there, sweetie?" Carp! My mom overheard me.

"Um, nothing mom. Just some stupid joke from Twitter," I yell, then bite my lower lip to contain my laugh.

"Whatever, sweetie. If it's a boy, I need to meet him, right, Sam?"

"Mom, just a friend, and no boy."

She peeks her head into my bedroom. "Tell me about him, sweetie?"

I roll my eyes. "Mom, stop psychoanalyzing me because it's not funny. Anyway, I'm going to the bar with friends tonight."

She gets inside and sits on my bed. "If I didn't overhear you, you don't have a plan of telling me you're going, Sam."

"Mom, I'm twenty-one and not a child anymore. After graduation, I have to live out and find a new apartment, and I want you to go out on a date and enjoy your life, Mom. Don't drown yourself with work." I squeeze her hand, smiling.

"I want you to stay here for as long as you want, sweetie. This is your home, and it's too big for just the two of us, but if you'll find a job far that is from here, then you can rent an apartment. I don't want you to spend all your savings on an apartment if you have a home to stay that is near to your job."

"I know mom. Thank you."

"Aren't you going to tell me about that person who made you laugh? Go out on a date sweetie, and it's been a year. You have to let go of the pain and let your heart heal, and move on."

"I moved on. I just didn't meet someone that I wanna go out with. I'll let you know if I'm going out on a date."

She smiles genuinely and kisses my forehead, then leave.

I notice three messages from Phoenix

PHOENIX: Princess Sam, you there?

PHOENIX: You don't like being called Princess?

PHOENIX: Fine, Samantha, ignore me. Gtg anyway. Have work to do. See you later, Princess. Sorry, Samantha.

I grin like a fool. I can't remember the last time I smile alone like this.

"Hey, girl! spill it." I can feel the excitement on Amy's voice over the phone.

"What to spill, Amy?"

She giggles, "Oh, about you and Hot Phoenix!"

I roll my eyes.

Before I can answer, she cut me off, "I can feel your eyes rolling, missy, but I don't care. Now, spill it! Is he huge? Did he go down on you? How many times did you come? Oh, is he good with tongue?"

"Stop! Stop! Stop! Why are you asking me these? Nothing happened, Amy. We're just friends. Jeez! I can't believe you actually think I had sex with Phoenix."

She sighs, "Really? Nothing happens?" Her disappointment is palpable. "Ugh! I don't know how are we even friends. You bored the hell out of me! I thought you get laid last night, Samantha Lorraine, but still, it's not too late you know, friends can have benefits, right?"

"Seriously, Amy, I'm not sleeping with Phoenix, and he's not going to sleep with me. He just almost kissed me, then he changed his mind. Maybe, he doesn't like me like I thought he was."

She shrieks, irritating my eardrum, "What? What? Oh, my God! He almost kissed you? Then why didn't you kiss him?"

"Are you even listening to me? I said he changed his mind. He pulled back before our lips met. It means he doesn't like to kiss me." I let out a deep sigh.

"He wants to kiss you, silly. He just values your friendship. You gave him a chance to be as friends, so he held back because he doesn't want to ruin it by just a kiss."

Okay, maybe.

“I don’t know, whatever.” I shrug.

“You seem disappointed, missy. If someone like Hot Phoenix tried to kiss me, I already grab his head and kiss him senseless.” She laughs boisterously.

“Oh, my God! You always think about kiss, orgasms, and sex all the time, Amy. I feel bad actually because I thought he doesn’t wanna kiss me, but then I remember we’re just friends.”

“Don’t feel bad, my dear, he is just trying to be a gentleman.” Gentleman my ass. “So, why did you call if you don’t have deets to spill?” Oh, I almost forgot.

“Phoenix invited us to his club tonight.”

She yells over the phone, and I can’t even understand why she’s yelling. Jesus, this woman may be a screamer in bed.

Erase that thought, Sam.

“Really? Oh, my God! What are you going to wear? Wear something sexy, but not slutty. You still have that black strapless dress you have, right? Wear it, Sam, and curl your hair, apply smoky eyeshadow, and red lipstick, okay? Oh! Don’t forget to wear your red high heels.” She’s even giggling.

Amy has great tastes in fashion. She’s always updated about trends.

“Fine, now shut up because you’re damaging my eardrum. I’ll drive this time. No arguments.”

“Oh, no, missy, I’ll drive. I’ll pick you up tonight. Bye.” She hangs up on me.

I slump my head back against my pillow.

I show, shave my legs, brush my teeth, floss them then, apply some lotion, and dry my hair. I wear the dress Amy asked me about, and apply makeup just the way she told me to.

I check the time—it’s five minutes before her arrival. I check myself again in the mirror—I look presentable, and not too slutty. I rub my sweaty palms over my dress and take a deep breath.

I pick up my compact powder, red lipstick, my phone, and keys, then toss them into my purse that matches my shoes. I spray a little perfume, then get out of my room. A few minutes later, the doorbell rings. I hurry up to the door, but t my shock it’s not Amy who’s in my doorstep.

It’s Phoenix with wide eyes, checking up on me from head to toe. He’s wearing a dark blue button-down shirt and dark pants.

“What are you doing here, Phoenix? I was expecting Amy and not you.”

He furrows his brows, swallows, and licks his lips.

My mind goes back to my conversation with Amy if he's good with his tongue. Crap! Bad influence Amy.

He blinks. "Um, yeah. Sorry to disappoint you, Princess, but she called me about thirty minutes ago that she couldn't come. She had a flat tire and would take a cab to the club."

I raise an eyebrow. "And she didn't even bother to call me? And she actually has your number. I'm the one who suggested to drive, but she said she would come to pick me up."

He slips his hands on his pants pocket, looking nervous. "She took it from Maya. Garrett has my number."

"And she didn't ask your number from me? What's wrong with her?" My stomach sinks. I feel cheated.

"Princess, are we discussing this all night, or are you coming with me? If you want to discuss this, then at least invite me in. I can't stand here all night long."

I shrug. "Do I have a choice? I'm actually ready, so let's head out." I walk outside and close the door behind me.

"Are you mad because she called me to come to drive you to the club? We will meet there eventually, Samantha." He opens the door for me, once I get inside, he closes it, then quickly gets in the driver seat and pulls toward the road.

"I'm not mad, Phoenix. I just don't want to bother you coming over here if she just let me know. I can drive myself there." I take a deep breath.

"It's no biggie, Princess. In fact, I'm on my way there. It's just good timing, I guess. By the way, you look stunning, Samantha." He steals a glance at my side and smiles.

"You look handsome yourself, your highness." My address makes him chuckle, then shakes his head with amusement while I feel like my face heat when he complimented me.

"We're back to your highness, I see." He smirks.

Jesus, I'm melting here. "Then stop calling me princess, Phoenix."

"Why not? You're my princess. It suits you."

I roll my eyes and pick from my purse when my phone buzzes. It's Amy.

"Really, Amy? Is this your plan on setting up Phoenix to pick me up?"

She giggles, "Works well, isn't it?"

I groan that makes Phoenix chuckles, “This isn’t funny. I really hate you right now. Next time, I will not tell you anything, so that you can’t set me up.”

“Oh, come on, your hot Phoenix is glad to drive you to the club. I don’t have a flat tire. I lied. By the way, I’m on my way. See you there!” she gushed.

“I know! Your excuses are so lame because I’ve known you for so long if you have something in your mind, Amy. I know you’ll call me first or ask his number from me, and not from Maya, so I figured it out. You’re crazy!”

“I know, smart-ass. And I also know that hot Phoenix didn’t buy it, and maybe he got the idea what’s my plan, but he’s willing to pick you up. So, it’s still successful. Gotta thank me later, Sam.”

“Stop doing this to me, Amy, and stop calling him Hot Phoenix!” Phoenix barks out laughing, and I shoot him a glare.

“Oh, now, who’s jealous?”

“I’m not jealous! We’re just friends, now, shut up! Bye.”

“Bye, Sam, You’ll get laid tonight!”

I groan then hang up.

“She calls me hot Phoenix?”

I can see the amusement in his eyes. “Not funny!”

I cross my arms on my chest that made my breast pushes up a little bit. I uncross them and release a huge breath. I’m so annoyed. I notice Phoenix is clenching his jaw.

“Are jealous when someone calls me Hot Phoenix, Samantha?” He licks his lips and grins.

“Why would I be jealous? It’s not that I own you or you’re my boyfriend. They can call you anything they want.”

He hmm, unconvinced with my answer. “Aren’t you too defensive, princess?”

“Tease much, your highness?” That makes him laugh out loud.

“I really like teasing you, and you even look beautiful when you’re annoyed.”

“Are you going to annoy me all night, King Alexander Phoenix?”

He laughs even more, then shakes his head. God, I love his laugh. His eyes glimmer inside the small space of his car.

“It’s part of the plan.”

“I shouldn’t come with you.”

He touches his chest. “Ouch! You just broke my heart.”

“Glad I did.”

“You’re glad, but I’m not, and I’ll never break your heart, princess, because it’s worse than breaking mine.”

I freeze, and I feel my heart flutters. Why does he have to say something that affects me like this? True or not, it still gives me butterflies in my stomach.

“It’s a line from a song, Samantha.”

Crap!

“Of course, it is. I’m just trying to remember that line.” My voice weakens.

What am I even thinking that he means it? I’m so stupid. I should remind my brain constantly that we’re just friends.

Chapter 8

PHOENIX

Surprisingly, I'm still not jumping on her, grabbing her head, kissing her senseless, and thrusting my tongue into her mouth. Last night was already torture—after sending her home, I went to my club and sat there for a while when a woman flirted with me. She was beautiful with a fuck-able body, but she wasn't Samantha, and my cock didn't even show interest.

If it happened before I met Samantha, I already brought her to a hotel room and fucked her senseless, but since I met my princess, any woman wanting my attention, it seems like they don't exist anymore.

Now, she's sitting beside me with a tiny dress that shows off her cleavage. My cock instantly throbs in my pants—it's a little bit uncomfortable especially when she laughs freely. My shitty brain imagines her moans, her whines, her grunt every time I thrust inside her sweet tightness—it's actually uncomfortable.

The sweet scent of her perfume fills my nostrils, making me more aroused. The more she's annoyed, the hotter she looks, and it doesn't help me to calm my cock down.

I know what her friend was up to, but I'm happy to pick up Samantha if I can spend a few minutes alone with her.

We reach the club after my cock tortures me for long years. I park my car in the employees' parking area. After closing the engine, I instantly open my door and run to her side, but she already helps herself out.

"Don't you want me to be a gentleman for you, princess?" I offer my hand, and she instantly grabs it, and my traitor cock jerks inside.

I grunt inwardly.

"You really don't have to do that. I already bother you by picking me up," she says, giving me a tight smile.

Closing the door behind me, we walk toward the employees' entrance. Our hands still intertwined. Lucky for me, it doesn't seem to bother her.

"We'll tell Amy when we get to our table." I squeeze her hand, and she looks up to me and nods.

It's been a long time since I hold a woman's hand that I actually care. Fuck! I don't even realize that I already care for Samantha, and I almost chuckle because it doesn't bother me at all.

We reach the VIP section, and the music is not too loud from the sound system, and I also like privacy.

The strobe lights, the new theme, the smell of liquors and boozes, and the people dancing, drinking, and chatting give a perfect mood of a nightclub.

Since most of the employees are aware of my arrival, a waiter approaches us almost immediately.

"Wanna drink now, princess? Or should we call Amy and Garrett first? I think they're here," I ask.

She's already sitting on the black leather couch comfortably, eyes wandering around the lounge. "We'll let them know first, but I'd like sparkling water first, please."

I nod and tell the waiter of our drinks which is whiskey neat for me. While she's typing a message on her phone to Amy, I dial Garrett.

"We're here, asshole. Where are you?" I can hear the same music playing over the phone.

"Talk to any staff or a bartender and tell them to take you to the VIP lounge. Is Amy with you?"

"Yeah, she's here with us," Garrett answers.

"Good." I hang up the call.

A few minutes later, they arrive.

"Hi, Sam! You look hot!" Amy says with a huge smile on her face.

Samantha rolls her eyes.

"Hello to you, too, hot Phoenix. Thanks for inviting me! This is better than the last time I was here. You changed a lot to this place."

I give her a smile. "Thanks, Amy! I did change a few, mostly interior. The name remains the same.

"Yeah, man. This is way cooler—the theme is chic and exquisite." Garrett and Maya sit on a loveseat across us.

"Guys, you may order drinks. Whatever you want, no limits. It's on the house," I say with pride.

"Sam, same for you?" Maya asks her.

"Yup, thanks! Phoenix, thank you."

I face her. "You're welcome, princess. You can drink whatever you want. I'll be your DD for tonight," I tell her, and Amy giggles that makes Samantha groan.

"Just stop it, Amy, and I'm still pissed at you."

We drink and chat until Maya clears her throat.

“Guys, we finalized the date.” Her smile spread over her face while clasping her hands together. “It’s two months from now.”

The girls giggle.

“Congrats, man! You’re getting married.” I hug Garrett and tap his back.

“I’m getting married, Phoen. Hope you’ll be next.”

“I don’t think it will be too soon,” I say, shrugging.

“Oh, hot Phoenix, use the remaining charms you to good use.” Amy winks, then she looks at Sam who’s still glaring at her.

“What’s wrong, Sam?” Maya doesn’t know what Amy did to Sam earlier.

Amy grabs her hand. “I’ll fill you in. Just leave her alone, and she will thank me sooner if not later, trust me,” she giggles.

“She just lied to me and to Phoenix that she had a flat tire, then called him to pick me up.” She sips her Appletini.

“Oh, that’s great! At least Phoenix can drive you home when you’ll get your ass drunk tonight,” Maya says and almost jumps in her seat with excitement.

What just happened?

“Let’s have a toast. To Garrett and Maya.” I raise my glass in the air then everyone follows and sips their drinks.

I sigh when I remember Mom and Hawk. I’m glad I took their advice. Being far from them is not a bad idea because I find new friends here.

I stand up and grab Samantha’s hand. My gesture surprises her.

I smile. “Let’s go dance, princess. Aren’t you guys coming?”

Sam doesn’t hesitate, and they stand up and follow me to the dance floor, except Amy who gestures to sit on the barstool instead.

“Show me your moves, princess,” I whisper to her ear, and it’s a wrong move when she shivers—the moment I inhale her scent, I don’t want to stay away from her—her smell alone tingles my skin.

I grab her waist closer to me, and we start moving and follow the rhythm of the music. She places her hands on my chest. I can feel the thundering of my heartbeat against her palm. My mouth dries instantly, and I have to lick my lips so often.

She looks flushed—maybe she feels the same way. Her eyes glimmer. Then she closes her eyes and takes a deep breath.

When she reopens, my breathing stops. My stupid cock is instantly hard as a rock. I can see her eyes are flooding with lust, or maybe it's the effect of the alcohol she drunk.

When she sways her hips, I fearlessly press my hips into her as we remain our gazes lock. Samantha gasps when she feels my erection. When her lips part, I'm so tempted to cover them with mine.

Fuck! This is harder to control than I ever thought.

Her move is bold, yet calculated—she presses her breasts into my chest, and I can feel the erratic of our heartbeats merging together. Our body heats have turned into a wildfire.

I move my head to the side of her head, and she moves her hands on my shoulders, tightening the grip.

We both sway together until the next song starts to play. She feels so good in my arms—we perfectly fit together.

Her smell is intoxicating my brain. Our heat is drawn me into oblivion. She presses her entire body into me, and everything surrounds me disappears, and all I want is to keep it this way.

I squeeze my eyes shut, take a deep breath, then pull my head away. I look down at her beautiful face, her eyes still closed. As she opens slowly, she's as turned on as me.

This friendship thing is fucking killing me.

"Are you okay?"

She barely smiles and nods. "I think we should go back. I'm drained."

I nod then grab her hand to follow me.

"Can you show me where the restroom is?" she asks me by whispering to my ear. I have to bite my lip to stop grunting because the thought of me and her inside the bathroom sweating and panting after we both come and satiated is fucking crazy.

"Of course, the VIP has its own restroom."

I let her get inside the restroom and lean my head against the wall outside to calm my nerves. I blow a few breaths to relax my hard-on. It's still on half-mast when she opens the door and finds me in that position.

When our gazes meet, her brows meet together. "You okay?"

"I'm more than okay." I smile at her and almost breathless.

We order another drink. Amy is nowhere to be found, or she finds someone to chat with. Garrett and Maya still on the dance floor that leaves just the two of us again.

"How long did you dated that asshole?"

"A year. Then he cheated on me by sleeping with his friend's sister, who also happened to be my friend."

Jesus! He's a complete dick.

She adds, "He said he was half drunk. Half or not, he still cheated on me. He didn't even apologize. How about you? Who broke your heart?" She looks directly into my eyes.

"My college girlfriend for two years. She cheated on me to a hockey player." I look at her who's seriously listening, then she grabs her drink.

"Wow! She's really a bitch. Then you never had girlfriends after that?"

I shake my head.

"That bad, huh?" She arches her brow, smirking. She just smirked at me.

"It's not that bad, princess, but I was frustrated with my injury, then my family problems. When I moved to New York, I didn't have time to date. After I graduated, I worked my ass off at Hawk's company."

She smiles. "I wouldn't have met you if you're dating anyone though. Maybe you're still in New York until now. With her."

I laugh. "I'm glad you broke up with your ex, and still not dating, otherwise, you're not sitting beside me right now."

She holds my hand and squeezes it. "I'm glad I gave our friendship a chance."

"I'm also glad, princess." I squeeze it back. You have no fucking idea.

The realization hits me that she's already on her third, and she probably won't remember this conversation tomorrow. I lost track of time and so drawn staring at her like a lovesick puppy.

“Princess, are you sure you still want to drink? Maybe that’s enough for you.”

Her lids are already heavy and barely open. “I’m not drunk, Phoenix.”

Garrett and Maya are back in their seats.

“Oh, no! How many drinks she has?” Maya asks me in a worried tone.

“Three, I think. Why?”

She shakes her head, then chuckles, “She’ll sleep soon.”

“I’m not gonna sleep, Maya,” she slurs, looking flushed and drowsy.

“Amy is not coming back with us. She left with someone,” Maya smiles.

“Same old Amy.” Sam rubs her temple with her fingers and leans back on the couch.

“I think you should send her home, Phoen before she passes out here,” Garrett advises, looking at drunk Samantha once again. “She’s too drunk. Sam never drinks too much.”

“Oh, come on. I’m here, you know. I can still have another. I’m not that drunk. And I have a hot DD,” she says, slurring her words, then smile lazily.

“Oh, dear, Sam. You’re still not drunk in that state?” Maya laughs.

She waves her hand. “I’m just a little tipsy. Isss oooll.”

“Tipsy my ass. Send her home, man. Why did you let her drink too much?” Garrett laughs.

“She asked. I don’t know she’s a lightweight.” I stand up, grabbing her hand. “Come on, princess. Let’s call it a night and go home.”

She stands up and almost stumbles.

“Whoa! Sam, easy there,” Garrett yelps in surprise.

I quickly hold her on her waist. “Got you.” I let her arm wrap around my shoulder. Maya gives me her purse. We slowly head to the hallway.

“You can carry me you know. I’m not gonna protest and puke on you,” she says with a slurred voice.

“Really, princess? Well, you’re actually a good girl when you’re drunk,” I chuckle.

“I’m always a good girl even not drunk, Phoenisssss.” Okay, that sounds terribly wrong.

I shake my head in amusement. “Oh, yeah? You never argued with me. And when I asked you, you never asked me back, and you never get easily annoyed you smart-ass.”

She just answers me with a hmm.

“I’ll better carry you before you stumble to the floor.” I carry her bridal style. She weighs nothing. She leans her head on my chest, and I kiss the top of her head out of control.

Shit!

We reach my car. It’s difficult to fish out my key in my pocket. I have to let her stand. I unlock my car then place her into her seat and lock the door behind her. I drive immediately before she falls to sleep in my car.

“Samantha, are you okay there?” I ask, side-glancing at her.

“I’m okay, Phoenix. Why are you calling me Samantha? I thought we’re friends now.” She’s already sleepy, drunk, and probably doesn’t know what’s talking, but I need to keep her awake.

“I like calling you Samantha than Sam, princess.” I don’t know why I even bother telling her. She won’t probably remember this when she wakes up with a hangover tomorrow.

“I like if you call me princess. My dad called me sweetie and also my mom. My ex used to call me babe. My friends call me Sam or Sammy.”

I glance at her and smile, making my heart melt. “You are really a good girl when you’re drunk, princess. Now. you even agree with me calling you princess. You’re my stubborn princess Samantha.”

“And you’re a hot Tease Phoenix.”

I laugh. “How hot tease princess?”

She doesn’t answer.

“Princess?” I squeeze her hand.

Shit! She falls asleep. How am I going to send her home like this? Maybe her mom is not at home again. I look at her again—she’s still beautiful even she’s sleeping, I wonder if how fascinating she is when she comes and screams my name.

I groan. Bad cock.

I look at her one last time and drive my way home.

Chapter 9

SAM

My head is hammering a thousand times. I open my eyes slowly only to see the unfamiliar surrounding. The smell on the room seems familiar to me though—it's like one of my favorite scents in the world.

Panic settles in the pit of my belly. This isn't my room. Where am? Did I go with someone?

I quickly check the king-size bed. It's covered with a dark sheet that matches the blanket where I am neatly tucked in. It's definitely a man's bed, but the other side is empty.

I'm alone.

Before I can sit up from the bed, my stomach twists sickly. I run into the nearest door, hoping it's the bathroom. I flip up the cover of the toilet bowl and empty my stomach.

Scanning the surrounding, I find a toilet paper and wipe my mouth. I flash them and rinse my mouth with the water. I look at myself in the mirror—a smeared makeup still on my face with my messy bedhead. I'm wearing a gray T-shirt with NYU logo that looks huge on me and boxer shorts.

The door creaks open, causing me to startle.

"Who's in there?" I ask quickly.

"Princess?" Phoenix?

I sigh deeply in relief.

Am I at his house? He knocks the bathroom door.

"Princess, are you okay in there? Take a pain reliever from the medicine cabinet. I know your head is killing you right now with a hangover. Come down when you're done. Breakfast is ready."

How did I end up with him? Did we? Did he? Unknowingly, I squeeze my thighs.

After washing my face with cold water. I found a new toothbrush, squeeze a good amount of toothpaste, then brush my teeth. I grab a bottle of painkiller, take two tablets with me, and go back to his room. I find my dress neatly folded and my purse on the nightstand and my high heels on the carpeted floor.

I walk through the hallway until I find the staircase. His house is huge, modernized with cozy furniture. I wander around, but I can't find him anywhere.

“Phoenix, where are you?” I don’t even know how to look for him, and my headache is killing me.

He emerges a few feet from me with a shirt, sweatpants, and barefooted, and he looks homie and yummier.

I walk toward him, and he beams at me, and the thing I never expect is he kisses my forehead.

“Good morning, princess! How’s your sleep?” He seems so lively in the morning. Then he grabs my hand, but I pull it back—I need to know what happened last night.

He stops then looks at me.

Did we sleep together?

“Princess, if you think I took advantage of my drunk little princess Samantha last night, you’re wrong. I’m not an asshole to sleep with a drunk woman.”

How can he read me so easily? I nod slowly, ashamed that I think so low of him.

“Do you really think that low of me, Samantha?” he adds. See? He just read my mind.

“How did I end up in your shirts and boxers?”

“Wow! Samantha is back. No good morning and back into questioning, I see,” he says flatly.

“I’m sorry. Good morning, Phoenix. My head is killing me though. I need water to swallow these tablets,” I say with a firm smile.

We reach his enormous kitchen.

“Take a seat. I’ll get you water. Pancakes, scrambled eggs, bacon, sliced fruits sound good for you? Coffee or juice?” he asks while busy preparing the food on the table.

I sit in one of the empty chairs. After he hands me the bottled water, I pop two tablets into my mouth and swallow them with a gulp of water.

“That’s too much already, Phoenix. Thank you, by the way. Coffee for me.” I follow his moves with my eyes until my gaze lands to his firm ass that looks gorgeous on his sweatpants.

“Are you checking out my ass now?”

I stiffen, blinking rapidly. Guilty! When I lift my gaze, he’s already smirking at me. I must be as red as a tomato right now.

“You’re cocky in the morning, King of cockiness,” I say sarcastically.

He laughs. God, his laugh. I can’t help but smile back.

"It's okay, Samantha. I won't charge you. How'd you like your coffee?" He's still beaming at me—it affects me so much that I have to press my thighs together.

"Stop making fun of me, Phoenix. I'm grumpy in the morning. Now, please feed me because I have to go home." I scowl at him, but it only makes him laugh some more.

He hands me my coffee. I sip from the steaming mug and almost spit it out from my mouth.

I grimace. "Eww, where is the sugar, Phoenix? I don't drink coffee without sugar because it tastes like mud."

He barks out laughing. "I asked you, but you didn't tell me you like to drink with sugar, Samantha. So, I assumed you drink it black and bitter." He hands me the sugar with a glimmer of mischief in his eyes.

"You assumed. You really like to prank, aren't you? Now, tell me how did I end up in your house? In your bed." I put a spoonful of sugar into the mug, stir, smell, and sip it—it's heaven.

"You don't wanna know, princess." The glint in his eyes shines brightly like a star in the night sky. And there's also a devilish grin on his face.

Crap! Did I say or do something embarrassing? I start eating my breakfast. It's so good. This human being can actually make breakfast.

"I wanna know. Did you actually cook this? It's yummy. Can I come over every morning for breakfast?" I ask with my cunning smile.

"You can stay here if you want. At least I have someone to annoy every morning. I can cook, princess, not only breakfast. I love food. Haven't you noticed? I bought a restaurant, a night club, and a coffee shop. Drink coffee in the morning, eat lunch in the restaurant, have fun at night," he grins.

"Your devil!" I snap.

"How did I become a devil? Last night, I was a pure angel. I probably had a halo above my head. I helped your drunk ass to get home, carried you all the way to my bed, undressed and changed you to sleep comfortably, then I slept with the beautiful woman beside me in my bed, and that was torture, by the way. Now, I serve you breakfast." He smiles, cocking his brow.

"Why you didn't bring me home instead? So that you don't have to take care of me and feed me? You undressed me and changed me into your shirt and boxers. Did you actually sleep beside me last night?" I demand.

"Why sounds so disappointed, princess? That you found the bed empty and that you were alone? How can I send you home when I don't even know if your mom is at home? You're drunk and slept in my car before we reach to your house."

I feel guilty. I've never been so careless like this.

"Oh, you said you like it if when I call you princess." His smile widens.

My face heats more. "What else did I say?" I focus my gaze on him.

"That you said you have a hot DD."

I put down my fork, cover my face with my hands, and shake my head.

"And you said I'm a hot tease," he adds.

Oh, my God! I'm going home.

He laughs at my reactions.

"I didn't say those things. Tell me you're kidding, Phoenix." I glare at him.

He shrugs. "I wish I can say that."

I dramatically slump my back to the chair. "I swear I won't drink again." Then I restart eating.

"You can drink as you like for as long as I'm with you or you trust someone with you. I can be your DD all the time, and your secret is safe with me." He winks. "Don't worry I was not a peeping tom last night. I swear I just changed you into my shirt." He raises his hand up.

"Thank you."

After we're done with breakfast, I help him clean up the table and wander around his kitchen while he places the dishes into the dishwasher. He tours me around his house, and we end up at his patio.

"It's very relaxing here. I can stay at this space all day long and be a nerd," I say as I sit down, stretching my legs.

"Let me adopt you, and you can move in here anytime."

I look up to him who's leaning down against the parapet.

"You're insane. I'm not moving in here with you. I can't afford the rent."

"Did I mention about payment? I need a company like you, Samantha. Just don't bring men over." He looks serious, but I must be drunk.

"Am I still drunk? Can you pinch me, please?"

He pinches me on my cheeks like a baby.

“Ow! Ouch! You did just pinch me?”

“You said to pinch you. You’re cute, and you’re my princess, remember? So, I can pinch you whenever I want.”

Cute? I roll my eyes. “Stop it. I should go home.” I stand up, but he holds my arm.

He looks me in the eyes. “Let’s have lunch together. I’ll send you home to shower and change, then I’ll pick you up at noon.”

“Do I smell that bad?” I raise my arms and sniff.

“Silly.” He pushes my arms down.

“Okay, I’ll go change into my dress.”

“Don’t change. Use my shirt—that’s longer than your dress, and use my flip-flops,” he suggests.

When I arrive home, Mom is still sleeping.

Thank, God! No interrogation.

I shower and change into a pink knitted crop top and blue ripped jeans. I’m wearing my ankle boots when my phone buzzes.

PHOENIX: On my way, princess.

SAM: Waiting

PHOENIX: Aren’t we a little excited?

SAM: Cocky much?

PHOENIX: Not much, just a hot tease

SAM: I was drunk. Now, forget about that. Get your ass in here before I change my mind.

PHOENIX: A drunk man’s words are a sober man’s thoughts. Later Princess

SAM: I’m a woman. Later

My doorbell rings ten minutes later. I run down after grabbing all my things and toss them into my clutch bag. I open the door to the gorgeous gray eyes on the planet. His sweetest smile can melt the iceberg in the Atlantic ocean.

“Ready?” He offers his arm.

I happily hook my hand around it. “Let’s go.”

He drives us to his restaurant—a combination of Italian, French, and American cuisine. We sit on the booth near the wall-sized window.

A late-twenties waiter approaches us immediately. “Good Afternoon, Mr. Williams, ma’am! May I take your order, please?” he says with courtesy.

“Good afternoon! Just bring us our refreshments first,” Phoenix answers. “We’ll order later.”

When the waiter leaves, he asks me, “What do you want to eat?”

I peek from the menu to look at him. “What would you suggest, restaurateur?”

“Would you mind if I choose for us?” He smiles back.

“Not at all.”

The waiter comes back with our drinks.

“This place is great, Phoenix. I’ve never been here before.” I look around. I can only afford to eat here on a special occasion, though I went to another restaurant, a little cheaper than Phoenix owns.

The place is beautiful with a monochrome dining room and a cozy minibar. This costs a fortune. He must be very rich that he can afford three establishments and a house that huge.

“Thank you. Got a good deal with this one. My father co-owned this place. When he died, he left this for me, I just bought the half when I gave the co-owner a good deal,” he explains.

“You’re really rich, don’t you? If you can afford three establishments and house at the same time.”

He shrugs. “My dad was. He just left me a hefty of assets. It’s just money, Samantha. I’m still the same old Phoenix you met at the parking lot.”

“Are you planning on going back to New York?” I ask and sip my lemonade. I actually don’t want him to go just yet. I don’t know why I bother asking—it tightens my chest.

I enjoy his company, and he never judges me even I work at his coffee shop. He’s actually a down to earth person compared to what I heard from Big D.

“Not anytime soon. I maybe visit my mom and brother, but I’ll still come back. Don’t you want me here, beautiful?” he asks instinctively.

Quite the opposite Phoenix.

“Why wouldn’t I want you here when I have free food, free rides, free drinks, and a free house?” I lift my chin and grin.

He laughs. “Now, I know why you befriended me. Good to know Princess.” He nods with a wicked smile. “At least I have used to you.”

I laugh. “Yeah, you’re very useful. What other free services you can offer to me, Phoenix?” Jeez! What’s wrong with me?

He grins and winks. “Are you sure you wanna know, Samantha?”

My eyes widen. Why do I feel like there’s something naughty idea spinning in her head right now? “No. Just keep it to yourself.”

His shoulders shake as he laughs at me.

“Hush. You’re attracting an audience,” I whisper.

“As I if care. This is mine, and I’ do as I pleased.” He wipes his tears from his eyes.

“You really making fun of me.” I pout.

“Oh, come on. Don’t pout or I’ll pinch your face again. Are you sure you don’t wanna know, Samantha?”

I narrow my eyes at him instead of answering.

“Fine. I’ll drop it.” He’s still smiling, making me roll my eyes.

We order, and the waiter brings our food a few minutes later.

Before I can start to eat, my stomach grumbles when I see the food on the table.

“You’re hungry. Why did you not tell me? We could have ordered and eaten immediately.” He looks sad and guilty.

“I’m just trying to act like a woman. Let’s eat. Bon appetité!” I said cheerfully.

My fork freezes in the air when I hear someone calls Alexander. I look up at the voice who’s now standing beside our table. A tall blonde, with a body, should be on the cover of men’s magazine, beautiful hazel eyes, high cheekbones, and well coated red lips. She wears a turquoise dress that fit like her second skin.

I look at Phoenix who’s looking flushed, glaring, and clenching his jaw. Who is this woman that makes Phoenix so angry?

“What are you doing here, Gabrielle?” He grits his teeth.

I put my fork down. The woman or Gabrielle smiles widen. Phoenix stands up from his chair, still glaring with his hands on his waist.

Gabrielle launches herself into him and gives him a huge hug. “Good to see you again, Alex!” Then she kisses his cheek.

My blood boils, and I clench my teeth so hard until it feels painful. I stand up from my chair that causes it to screech.

He unwraps Gabrielle’s arms on him and steps back. “I can’t say the same way, Gabrielle,” he says flatly.

“But, Alex.” Her face falls.

“You can leave now because I have a delicious meal to share with my girlfriend.”

Chapter 10 PHOENIX

The perfect lunch that I'm sharing with Samantha has turned into a disaster when my bitch of an ex appears to our booth. We're just about to start our lunch when we're interrupted.

She fucking jumps into me hugs me and kisses me as if nothing happened before.

Why she has to come here to all the restaurants in this place? Or did she hear the news that this belongs to me and tries to catch up for old-time sake?

"What? Do you really think I believe that you start dating?" she asks with her bitchy voice and pouts.

Samantha clears her throat that gets Gabrielle's attention. "Phoenix, mind introducing me to your old friend?" Sam gestures her hand to Gabrielle.

Please.

please.

Please, just play along.

"Princess, this is Gabrielle. Gabrielle, meets my girlfriend, Samantha."

Sam offers her hand, but of course, Gabrielle ignores her. Samantha has to pull her hand back.

"You can't fool me, Alex. You won't date like her. Who's she? Your secretary? How did you even two meet? Which clubs? Huh! I know."

"Like me? What about me? Oh, I see," Samantha chuckles with all her sarcasm and points her finger to Gabrielle. "I heard a lot about you, Gabrielle. You must be the ex who cheated on him and chose to be a puck bunny instead. Well, sorry to burst your bubble shortly, lady. Can you leave us alone now? We have a lovely meal to share." Sam crosses her arms patiently that makes Gabrielle's face flush with anger.

"Do you think he will keep you? You're wrong, missy. He will throw you like trash once he's—"

Sam cut in, "Like how you threw him when you're done? He shouldn't have asked me to move in with him this morning when he's near done with me."

Gabrielle gasps and looks angrier.

I chuckle, "Now, leave us before I will call the security. I think you're done here, Gabrielle."

"We're not done, Alex," she warns me and pokes her finger on my chest before he walks away.

When we sit back to our table, I release a huge breath.

“Did I just ruin your appetite? I’m so sorry, Samantha. I really don’t have any idea she’s here and will approach us. We can leave and find another restaurant if you like,” I say apologetically.

She chuckles and rolls her eyes, “She’s beautiful though, but it felt good to annoy her.” She picks up her fork.

“Don’t get fooled by her look. She’s a heartless human being inside and out.” My anger doesn’t dissipate yet. “Thank you for saving my ass from her.”

“I guess we’re now even. That’s what friends are for, Phoenix.” She reaches out for my hand and squeezes it, and I squeeze it back and give her a tight smile—it feels good to hold her hand again.

“I still owe you a big one. Let’s eat, princess before our food gets cold.”

We start eating in silence. After a few minutes, I look at her.

“I can’t believe you actually mentioned the moving in thing to her,” I chuckle and shake my head.

“Yeah, sorry about that. I was a little bit carried away. I can pretend to be your girlfriend when she’ll come around again. I’ll save your ass for as long as you want. I know the feelings of being cheated.”

I look at her with sympathy. “I guess we have something in common after all, Princess.”

“I actually hate her. She had the gut to hug you, kiss you, and say good to see you again, Alex,” she mimics Gabrielle’s voice.

I laugh. “Are you jealous, Samantha? You can always hug and kiss me anytime you want. I’m always here.” I gesture my arms. “I’m just right here, waiting for you.”

“Why would I get jealous? You don’t like her, so she’s not a threat to me,” she says with pride, and my mouth falls open.

It takes a few moments for me to form words. “Uh-huh! So, if I’ll flirt with another woman with you around, you’ll consider her threat?”

She looks at me expressionlessly. “It’s alright, Phoenix. I can also flirt with a hot bloke.” She lifts her chin, raises her eyebrow with her fake English accent.

“I’ll kick every hot bloke around who will hit on you. Do you know that my grandparents from my father's side are from England? And may I remind you, love, that you’re my girlfriend?” I say with my still perfect English accent.

She wrinkles her nose. “Yeah, I kinda noticed the names. Not very American-ly, and fake girlfriend, Phoenix, soon to be an ex-fake girlfriend, if you’ll flirt with another woman. Whether I am around or not.”

I laugh. “You’re possessive of me. I like that. Just so you know, I’m all fakingly yours.” I wink.

She barks out laughing that causes everyone to glance at us. She cowers herself on the chair that makes me chuckle.

Jesus, this woman is the death of me. I can’t remember I enjoy this so much having lunch with a woman in the restaurant.

My heart beats erratically with joy.

“Don’t do that again, Phoenix. I might choke myself next time or spit something to your face.” She’s still controlling her laughter.

“I want to make you laugh. That’s one of my goals as your fake boyfriend. You can spit anything you want on my face if in return I can make you laugh. I know how to perform Heimlich maneuver, so don’t worry, and I’m heartily participating mouth to mouth resuscitation if Heimlich won’t work out.”

Her smile fades and clears her throat. “Oh, let me die instead. You always have something to say, aren’t you?”

“And is it bad?” I am curious about her answer.

“Nope, you’re just so nice.”

“Is that freaking you out? Because it also freaks the hell out of me.”

She giggles, “Which line of songs that came from?”

I groan, “You always love to ruin my moment.”

“And you always love to annoy me,” she retorts.

“And you look lovely when annoyed, and you love to be annoyed.”

“Huh! Who looks lovely and who loves to be annoyed?” She scowls.

“You.”

“Me?” She points at herself.

“Yeah, if not, you’re already running away from me.”

She pouts then beams. “Yeah, why am I still here? You’re an annoyingly hot tease!”

I laugh out loud while she's trying to control her laughter that turns her face red.

"You just admitted that I'm a hot tease. An annoyingly hot tease."

She shakes her head. "I need a restroom, you, Alexander Phoenix, King of Cocky."

"Restroom is on the left."

"Oh, I'll find my way there. Thank you."

"My pleasure, princess."

My phone rings. "Hawk, 'sup, brother?"

"You've been busy lately. Did you check my message?"

I furrow my brows. "What message?"

"Oh, I've heard your ex is back in town and willing to offer her pussy when she finds out you're loaded."

"Yeah. She was here earlier actually. She approached me while I was having lunch with Samantha."

Hawk stops me, "And who's Samantha? Don't tell me you found the parking lot girl?"

Fuck! I just blurted out. Now, Mom is going to annoy me with a billion-dollar question.

"Phoenix, who's Samantha?"

I groan, "The parking lot girl. Now, shut up because she's in the restroom."

"Tell me about her, brother. So, that's what made you busy, huh? You even ignored my message. Thank, God, you finally get laid after a hell of un-fucked months! I thought you turned into pussy," he whistles.

"I haven't get laid, asshole. We're just friends. I thought you're just going to tell me about Gabrielle. Now, stop asking about princess."

Fuck. Me. Did I just say that? Damn it!

"Wow! Did you call her princess? So, she's really the one, you, pussy-whipped. Mom will dance under the moonlight." His laugh pierces my eardrum. "Did you tell her, or I'll do the honor?"

"What in the we're not dating you didn't get, Hawk?" I growl.

"I know you well, brother. Baby steps and you don't wanna scare her away, but do you think I forgot when you find her, you will call her your princess." He can't just forget what I said a long time ago.

“Just shut up, Hawk! That was a long time ago. We’re still kids.”

“Yeah, but you still call her princess.”

I groan, “Christ! Fine. I call her princess, happy?”

“Yeah, very happy. When am I going to meet her?”

“I don’t know, She doesn’t even like me. It’s frustrating.” I rake my hair with my fingers.

“Who doesn’t like you?” I stiffen when Sam asks from my back.

Shit!

“She heard you, isn’t she? This is getting interesting.” Hawk is still laughing over the phone.

“Got to go.” I hang up then look at her.

“I’m sorry, I haven’t noticed you coming. That was Hawk.”

“Who doesn’t like my fake boyfriend?” she asks with a devilish grin.

“You, fake girlfriend.” I point at her.

“Me? How can I be your fake girlfriend if I don’t like you.” She flips her blonde hair over her shoulder.

I shake my head. “Fine. You like me, and I like you, too.”

“I like you more.”

“I know.”

“ Jeez, cocky much.”

“Denying?”

“Narcissistic.”

“Yeah, because I like you so much, Samantha Lorraine.”

She laughs at me. Fuck me! If I am serious, she’s joking. Great, Samantha!

“Let’s head out, hot tease.”

We leave the restaurant both smiling. I’m still not ready to bring her home. So, I drive out of the parking lot.

“I don’t wanna send you home yet, princess.”

“Then don’t. What do you have in mind?” she asks.

“How about we go to the park and feed some ducks.” I grin, and she smiles in agreement.

Jesus, she’s so beautiful.

“Really? We’ll feed ducks in the park?” she scoffs.

“Then, what would you suggest us to do?”

“We’re going to the park, Phoenix. I can’t just see you feeding ducks.”

“Why not?”

“Maybe you should be golfing with the old riches men or smoking cigar, or maybe chatting about stocks market with your club co-members.” She shrugs.

“I’ll be bored to death, princess. I don’t do that. I’ll sleep in my seat after five minutes,” I say and glance at her.

“So, you talked to Hawk.”

Please, don’t pry.

“Hmm, he’s an annoying ass.”

“He misses you. Are you two close with each other?”

“Yup, we’re closer than twins. He’s three years older than me.”

“How about you? don’t you have siblings?”

She shakes her head. “I don’t have. Mom has no plan remarrying after Dad died. She drowned herself with work.”

I nod. “I’m sorry about your dad, Samantha. Where does she work?”

“I’m sorry about your dad, too. Mom’s work at General Hospital as an ER nurse.”

“Thank you. We’re not closed.” I pause. “With Dad.” My chest tightens.

“I was closer to Dad. You can say I’m daddy’s girl.” She looks sad.

I squeeze her hand. “You must miss him a lot, Samantha. I hated my father. We never talked before he died. I was surprised that he included me in his Will. He divided his assets equally between me and Hawk.”

I caress her knuckles with my thumb. Jesus, she feels good.

I release my hand from her before I can do something I might regret later.

“I’m not gonna ask what happened between you and your father, but he must love you if he still divided his assets.” She looks at me.

I shook my head and narrow my eyes to the road. Every time I remember what happened that day, I hate him more. “I doubt that, Samantha. He was the reason why I moved away from here.”

We sit on an empty bench. The wind blows dried leaves that fell from the trees. I smell the fresh air.

Families spread blankets, laugh together, chat, and children are playing and some are walking with their pets, and couples are making out and giggling.

“Aren’t we going to feed ducks?” She looks at me with a mischievous smile.

“Excited, I see.” I love about her is that she’s a carefree woman and she’s not hard to please. “We’ll feed ducks, don’t worry,” I reassure her.

“My dad died when I was fifteen. A day after my birthday. He was talking to Mom’s on the phone that night that he had a surprise when he came home. He always gave me a book every month, on his payday since I was eight, then it suddenly stopped.” She sniffs, and I wrap my arms around her and let her lean on me. I rub her arm and kiss her head. My heart squeezes inside my chest.

“I’m sorry, princess.” I promise you will have a book every month just like the way your dad did. I want her to be happy.

“It’s okay. Life is too short to focus on our losses, I still have a mom. I just reminisce about my memories with dad.” That struck me hard right into my heart.

“Let’s feed some ducks now.”

She chuckles, “Oh, yeah? You made me cry, and you can’t just cheer me up by feeding some ducks.”

“Okay, how about ice cream then?”

I buy ice cream for us, and she likes it in a cone. We sit back on our bench. For the love of God, Samantha! Way to make my cock throb in my pants. The way she licks the ice cream makes my brain spins dirty thoughts.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Sure?”

I groan, “Finish your ice cream before it melts.”

She chuckles as of she just guessed what I have in my mind.

Chapter 11 SAM

“Spill it, woman. I can see it that you had an eventful weekend,” Maya teases me as we walk together to our management class.

“I can’t escape from this, can I?” I’m actually excited to tell her, but nothing really eventful than I had lunch with Phoenix that almost ruined by his ex.

“Nope. I’m not Amy, so you don’t have to tell me every detail.” She bumps her arm into me.

“We had lunch, then went to the park to eat ice cream and feed the ducks. So, there’s nothing really much to tell,” I tell her the short version, of course, without the sleeping in his house and the encounter with Phoenix’s ex.

“That’s it? What about when you get drunk and he sent you home?” she asks, wearing a wicked smile.

“I slept in his car.”

She laughs. “I knew you would sleep in his car, then?”

“Then he took me home,” I say slowly. “To his home.”

“What? Really? Oh, my God!” Her eyes widen and she shrieks. “I lied. Now, I actually want every detail.”

“What details?” We abruptly stop when we hear Amy’s voice, and she’s approaching us. We act as if nothing is going on.

“I’m actually searching online for her wedding dress.” Oh, thank God. It sounds believable.

Maya nods and plays cool. “I ask her to search online for me. I don’t want to spend too much money. So, I thought maybe she would find some discounted wedding dress.”

Amy looks at me then to Maya. “Oh, okay. I might be able to help you, you know.”

“I know, Amy, but you’re busy with your sex-athon during the weekend, so I thought, I ask Sam instead,” Maya explains.

“So, tell me about this weekend. Who blew your mind with orgasms, Amy?” She rolls her eyes at me, then shrugs. “We almost get caught by patrolling police cars.”

"Oh My God! Did you had sex in the car, Amy? Why did he not bring you to his apartment? You could end up in jail." I may have overreacted, but I care for her. I don't want her to get locked up because of a misdemeanor.

"Drop it, we didn't get caught, did we? It's my idea anyway," she says as if it's not a big deal.

I never had sex in the car. Maybe it's fun, but it's reckless.

"Now, missy, how's your weekend with Phoenix? Did he also fuck your brains out?" Now, it's her turn to ask me.

I don't want to tell her, but I know she won't shut up.

"Nothing interesting; first, we didn't have sex. Second, we're just friends, without benefits. And third, we just had lunch. That's it." I say, then walk inside the lecture hall.

"I can't believe he didn't fuck you. Now I might think he's gay." Her voice laced with disappointment.

I glare at Amy. "He is not gay. How he is a playboy if he is gay? He dated and had a girlfriend in college."

"Then why is he not making a move on you? He likes you, Sam. Don't tell me he just wants to display you like his China doll," Amy snorts that makes Maya laughs, probably because of the China doll.

I slump my back to the chair. "He doesn't date. He just bangs around. I'm a relationship type, so we don't match, okay?" I sigh, feeling my heart like shrinking.

"Did he even try touching you or kissing you?" Amy won't ever drop until she gets the answer she wants.

"No," I answer her flatly. "He is not interested in me. Satisfied?" I just want her to stop because the more we talk, the more she asks questions. That's the only way for her to shut up.

"Fine. I'll drop it." She gives me a sympathetic look.

"Good." I bite my lip to contain a smile. When I look at Maya, she's also smiling at me.

When the professor starts his lecture, my lids start to feel heavy. I even yawn. I didn't sleep well last night and just thought of the tantalizing gray eyes. I was even tempted to finger myself and think of him.

"Are you sure you did not sleep with him? You've never been sleepy in the class?" Maya whispers to my ear.

"No, I swear we didn't even kiss," I whisper back at her. I don't want Amy to hear us because she will ask me again and, this time, she won't stop.

My phone buzzes. I check it from inside my bag because the professor will kick me out of the class if he knows I am using my phone.

It's a message from Phoenix, and I can't help but smile.

PHOENIX: Hey, beautiful fake girlfriend, Princess

Samantha. What time your classes end?

SAM: Why, Almighty Phoenix?

PHOENIX: I miss my fake girlfriend.

I don't even notice I giggle until Amy elbows me.

"What?" I narrow my eyes.

"It's Phoenix, isn't it?"

I roll my eyes and don't answer. Then my phone buzzes again.

PHOENIX: Fine, don't reply. Bye.

I frown. I quickly get out of the lecture hall as soon as the professor says dismissed. Why am I so affected?

I grab my phone from the bag and dial his number. Phoenix doesn't pick up. Does he really just ignore me? I press my lips tight, berating myself to dial him again or not.

"Are you okay? You just ran out fast from the lecture hall," Amy asks.

I face her and give her a tight smile. "I'm fine. I'm just going to call Mom if she's not sleeping. I wanna spend time with her since I don't have work today," I lie because I can't tell her that Phoenix ignored my call.

"I got to go. Good luck on your shift, Maya. Take care," Amy says.

"You take care, girl," Maya says to Amy, then face me, "We're not done. You will tell me everything tomorrow."

We walk out of the campus to the parking lot, and I can't keep it inside me. I feel like I am going to explode. It hurts, and it's freaking me out.

"He ignored my call when I didn't reply to his message," I say in a low voice.

“He didn’t ignore you, Sam. Look who’s there?” she says, pointing to Phoenix with Garrett, leaning against Garrett’s car.

My mouth hangs open, and I think my heartbeat is drumming in my chest. Phoenix smiles at Garrett after shaking hands, then walk toward my direction, and he looks so sexy wearing a smirk on his face.

“Hello, girlfriend, I.” Pinch. “Miss.” Pinch. “You.”

“Ouch! Did you just pinch my face?” I scowl at him. I can’t just forget how he ignores my call.

“Do you want a kiss instead?”

I roll my eyes and narrow my eyes at him. “You’re unbelievable! You ignored my call, Phoenix!”

“You ignored my text.” He glares back.

“I was in the class when you were texting me.”

“I was with Garrett when you called me,” he retorts.

I blow a huge breath. “What are you doing here?”

“Can’t I see my girlfriend? I missed you.” He smiles, amused.

“Fake, fake girlfriend,” I correct.

“Fake or not still a girlfriend.”

“You still did not answer me.”

“I answered, princess. I said I miss you.”

“You said the reason why you’re here. You can go now. I’m going home.” I unlock my car.

“Whoa! And you will gonna leave me here?” Phoenix wears a devious smile.

“Yup because I’m going home. Now, please?” I move to open the door of my car.

“I didn’t bring my car, Samantha. I came here with Garrett. Give me your key, and I’ll drive.”

I refuse to give my keys when he offers his hand. “No way. I’ll drive home.”

“Stubborn little princess. Come on, Samantha, I’m hungry. Let me drive because I’m taking you for lunch. Is this how you treat your hot Tease boyfriend, princess? Who missed you like crazy?”

I groan, “Fake boyfriend. And you came here to have lunch with me?” I can’t believe actually he came to take me to lunch.

"No. I came here to annoy you," he says sarcastically, seemingly annoyed.

I glare then give him my keys.

He chuckles, "Now, I feel like you agreed with me because I will take you out to lunch."

I arch my eyebrows and prop my hands on my waist. "Really? I fed myself just right before I met you. Give me back my keys and go feed yourself!" I offer my hand for him to give me my keys back.

"Princess, get inside the car." He opens the passenger door.

I don't move a muscle. "Apologize to me, Phoenix that you didn't mean what you said." Then I cross my arms over my chest and wait.

He is grinning. "I'll apologize with a kiss."

"No way."

He chuckles, "No way now, Samantha. I'm sorry, I was just messing with you, okay? I came here to take you to lunch because I missed my princess." I break into a smile. Without saying a word, I get inside the car.

"My car isn't like yours, so, have mercy," I tell him in advance.

"Your car runs just well. When you have enough money, you can buy the car you want," he says calmly and starts driving—that's what I like about him—he doesn't judge. His flexibility is admirable.

"Where are you taking me to lunch?"

"To my home, princess. I just finished cooking when I came with Garrett. It will still be hot when we arrive there." He glances at me, and I almost grin because he's not just feeding my eyes, he's also going to feed my stomach.

"Really? Well, I might really think of moving into your house."

"I told you my door is always open for you. Come whenever you want." He smiles genuinely. God, how do I deserve a friend like him? He's not just handsome, kind, and generous, but he also understands my stubbornness.

"Why are you so nice to me, Phoenix?" I ask with a serious tone.

"And why not? Do you want me to treat you bad, instead?" he asks back.

"I don't know. That's why I'm asking you."

“You’re nice, beautiful, sexy, hot, annoying, stubborn, tease, funny, sassy, and you don’t bat your lashes on me. You’re natural. You make me smile, make me laugh, and you’re not bitchy. Do you want more? I can enumerate you for the whole day.”

My brain freezes, and I don’t know what to say.

“Speechless?” he asks, amused.

“Shut up!”

He laughs. “See, you make me laugh, and all you said was shut up.”

“You’re just making fun of me.” I tuck my hair behind my ear, suddenly feeling self-conscious. Does he really mean when he said I’m beautiful, sexy, and hot?

“Because you’re funny.” The sincerity in his voice does radiate warmth through my body.

He let me follow him to his kitchen when we arrive at his house.

“Can I help you?” I offer.

“No, princess. Just sit there in the dining, and be pretty. I already set up the table,” Phoenix simply says.

I walk to the dining table and sit where he set the table for two with flowers arranged at the center.

I can smell the lunch he prepared—a hint of olive oil, garlic, thymes, dills, and black pepper—it smells Greek.

Perfect! My stomach growls.

“See? I know you’re hungry.”

I chuckle because I can’t deny, and it’s loud that he even hears it.

He places the food on the table.

“I’m always hungry when I’m with you because I know you are going to feed me.”

He also chuckles, “You’re very confident that I’m not going to starve you to death, huh?”

“I know you won’t let me die. You’re going to miss me, and no one will make you laugh, and you can’t find someone like me to annoy.”

“You’re right, I won’t let you die. I feed you every day, then annoy you at the same time.” He sits, then starts serving me to my plate.

“I can’t finish all these, Phoenix,” I complain. “Do I look like an elephant to you?”

He put a huge amount of food on my plate that can feed one small family. He laughs. “Just eat what you can. I told you I can feed you every day. I don’t want to starve my princess.”

“You’re not starving me, but you’re turning me into an elephant.”

He looks at me, amused. “Yeah, a baby elephant.”

I wrinkle my nose. “You’re impossible!” I start digging, and my eyes grow big. “Wow!” I hmm, shove a forkful into my mouth again, chew, and swallow, I eat, again and again, then I notice him stops eating and just stares at me.

“What?” I glare, and he answers me with a chuckle and shakes of his head.

“You can actually cook, silly! Why didn’t you tell me you can cook like a chef?”

Phoenix just arches his brow, doesn’t say a word.

“It’s yummy. I will definitely marry you,” I say, then freeze. Did I actually say that out loud?

He bursts out laughing. “I told you I can cook. And really? You will marry me? Well, that’s actually easy proposing you than I thought. All I have to do is feed you with good food. Thank you, princess. I’ll take that as a compliment.” He continues eating.

“You’re welcome!” I almost empty my plate.

We both sit on the couch and watch a movie for a while. When the credits roll, he excuses himself.

I browse business magazine on his coffee table. I read the featured cover businessman Seb Hughes III who is the CEO of Hughes Industries. He’s still young, and yet he manages to raise the company’s profits at peak.

A few minutes later, Phoenix comes back and sits beside me.

“Princess, I have something for you. I hope you don’t mind.”

I look at him as he hands me the paper bag on his hand.

I crease my brows and take it from him. “What’s this?”

“You mentioned that your dad gave you a book every month. I went to the bookstore yesterday, then bought some books for you,” he explains shyly.

I peek and feel the grin spreads on my lips. My eyes widen to see what’s inside, then my emotions have turmoiled, and I burst into cry.

“Hey, why are you crying? I don’t know this makes you cry. I thought you’d like it.”

I launch into him, wrap my arms around his neck, and hug him as I cry again. I missed my dad, and Phoenix does like this means a lot to me more than anything. He reminds me of everything before Dad died.

I feel his hand rubbing my back—it feels good. Suddenly, I realize I can feel her strong arms wrap around me, his broad chest press against mine, and his face against my face until the heat of our bodies merging.

I pull myself away before I get used to it.

I sniff. “You don’t have to do this, you know, but thank you.” I sniff again and take the tissue he offers, then I blow my nose. “Sorry.”

He chuckles.

“Thank, God I came here with you, otherwise, I don’t have books right now.”

“Now I’m really convinced that you want me for food, rides, house, and books.”

I glare at him. “I know you’re bribing me. I’m paying it back to be your fake girlfriend, you hot tease.”

He laughs. He gave me five books—all of them are from the NYT bestsellers.

“Wow! You really pampered me. I can get used to this, you know.”

“Wait. What is this?” I look at the coupon on my hand.

“I thought you might want to buy something, so, that’s part of m gift.”

I hand it back to him, but he pushes my hand back. “That’s yours, princess. I thought you might wanna buy books or school supplies.”

I sigh and smile at him. “Thank you.” I giggle and hug all my books.

His eyes are glowing as he sees me hugging my books and giggling. “You’re really a nerd.”

“And you love me,” I say while putting back all my books inside the paper bag.

“You have no idea,” he murmurs.

“What?” I ask, maybe I don’t hear it right

“Nothing princess.”

I stare at him as he sinks himself on the couch. I place the paper bag on the coffee table and lie comfortably beside him and use his thigh as my pillow.

“Start another movie, Phoenix. Aren’t you going somewhere?” I look up to his face.

He looks down at me and shakes his head. “Nope, not going anywhere.” He then grabs the remote and plays another movie.

“You don’t mind me lying down here?” I ask, and I don’t want to impose. I can’t abuse his kindness because no matter how kind he is, I know he has his own limits.

“Make yourself comfortable.”

I focus on the screen, and he starts stroking his fingers through my hair, then massages my scalp.

God, it feels good.

I try hard to control my moan by biting my lip and press my thighs together. The sensation quickly spreads all over my body. My face feels hot. My heart starts beating fast, and my breath catches. I squeeze my eyes shut. God, I want to moan, and he’s really good at doing it. I wish he does it all over my skin, my body, everywhere. I even forget the movie we’re watching. Then a moan escapes my mouth. I freeze, then Phoenix stops. I look up to his face who is intensely looking down at me with eyelids heavy, and slightly parted lips.

I bite my lower lip as I feel my face heats with embarrassments.

I break my gaze from him then raise my head from his thigh. He cups my face before I can sit back to the couch. Before I can protest, his lips already press against mine. I gasp in surprise, momentarily forgetting all else. My heart raced inside my chest as I feel his wet, soft but firm lips. He kisses me.

He tentatively moves his lips over mine, teasing me, caressing softly my lips with his. My skin tingles, and I can feel the blood rushes through my veins, and it feels good. My heart seems to freeze, then harder again.

My lashes flutter closed, and I am already grabbing his shirt to kiss him back, and he sighs into our mouth.

Our kiss starts to be a frenzy—his wet tongue caresses my lower lip. I gladly open it for him, and he invades his tongue in my mouth.

I shiver with the sensations I’ve never felt before—it’s euphoric, disorienting.

Once our tongues met, I moan, and he moans back. I can taste him—he’s so addicting. Our kiss grows more intense.

I move my hands up to his neck up to his hair, grab handfuls, then I move and sit on his lap, and he moves his hands all the way down to my back down to my bottom.

As I press my body into him—down on him, and I can feel the bulge poking between my thighs—he's turned on as I am because I can feel my wetness.

His fingers lift up my shirt, and I don't care—I'm completely lost in his kiss, to our kisses, and to his touch.

Then my world stops—Phoenix breaks it when he stops.

Chapter 12

PHOENIX

I'm losing my control, not because of not getting laid, it's because of the woman beside me who's driving me crazy. When she cries over my gifts, it warms my heart.

It's been a long time since I spend gifts over a woman, but that woman betrayed me. Now, I want to pamper Samantha—she's worth every penny I spend for her. And I know those gifts remind her of her dad.

The moment she lies down beside me on the couch, I know the baby steps are long gone. When she moans, my traitor of a cock hardens like a rock. I know I have to kiss her one way or another because this beast inside is going to savage her anytime soon—my urge, my lust, and these feelings are overflowing in my body.

When our lips touch, I know she owns me—the feeling is overwhelming, fills with giddiness. Her taste and the softness of her lips are intoxicating. And I've never felt like this before with anyone, and it's freaking me out—in a good way.

I still want to kiss her—kiss her all day.

So, I break the kiss, lean my forehead to hers as we're both panting—her breath is warming my face. I love her smell, and I can nuzzle my nose on her all day.

I take a deep breath to calm my nerves, but my throbbing cock beneath her thighs doesn't help me so much as it's press under her sweet wetness.

"Princess, I know it's a rush, but I never regret kissing you. I love every second of it," I admit. No point of beating around the bush.

She opens her eyes and looks at me, and I know she's turned on as I am.

"Why did you kiss me?" she demands.

Fuck! She's angry. Didn't she enjoy it? But that kiss tells otherwise because she kissed me back, and it was as raw as mine, and I know she's as affected as me.

"Because I want to kiss you. You're a temptress, then you moaned, so I lost control. Are you mad at me right now?" My voice is laced with desperation.

“We shouldn’t kiss, and this won’t happen again, Phoenix. Friends don’t kiss the way we kissed.” She begins to stand up, but I grab her waist, causing her to slump down into my lap, causing my cock to press under her thighs.

“Oops! Sorry. That must be uncomfortable.” She bites her lower lip to hide her smile, then she smiles sheepishly.

“Yeah.” I shake my head, amused with her. “Having fun torturing my cock? You’ll beg for it later, Samantha. Oops!” I mimic her voice, causing her to narrow her eyes at me.

“Why would I beg?” she asks, still glaring at me.

“Because the moment you sat on him, he gave you permission to own him.” I can’t tell her what I really mean because she might run away from me, and I can’t let that happen.

She bursts into laughter.

Jesus! My cock jerks when her body shakes from laughing. Kill me now.

“I don’t wanna own him.” She grimaces.

“Then, own me instead.” I grin and cock my brow.

She looks me into my eyes and wants to say something, but she holds it back.

“What? You don’t want me either?”

“We’re friends, Phoenix. We don’t own each other. We don’t kiss, and we won’t kiss again.”

“You’re my fake girlfriend. The moment we kiss, you turned into my real girlfriend.”

She stares at me but doesn’t say a word as if she’s reading my mind. And whatever she’s about to say, I know I may not going to like it.

“Can we just forget what happened minutes ago,” she whispers.

“Can you? I don’t think I can, princess. Honestly, I don’t want to because you’ve been on my mind constantly since we met in the parking lot. Why not give us a chance? We can make it work. We both laugh at our own jokes, we enjoy each other's company, we ate together, we slept in the same bed together, we talked, we missed each other. I know you like the kiss, Samantha, why fight it? I know you like me too,” I sigh, feeling so desperate. And she’s unintentionally breaking my heart.

“You’re narcissistic. I didn’t tell you I missed you, and I didn’t tell you I like you either, silly. We may enjoy and laugh together but—” I press my finger on her lips to stop.

“Go out on a date with me, Samantha.” I pour my heart out to those words, and I hope she feels it.

Her eyes widen. Why does she seem so surprised?

“You don’t date. Don’t fool me, Phoenix,” she scowls at me. What the fuck?

“Who said I don’t date? How did I have a girlfriend if I don’t date?” I ask in disbelief.

“They said you don’t date and you’re a playboy.”

“Yeah, there’s no point in lying. After my break up, I never went on a date, never in a relationship again. But I want to date you properly. I want you to be my girlfriend, Samantha, and this time it’s real. Please, give us a chance?” I say desperately.

“Is this why you give me books? Bribing me to agree on dating you?”

I laugh my ass out loud, shaking my head. “Princess, you think so low of me. It hurts, you know. But I would never do that. It won’t be real if I have to bribe you to date me. I gave you those books because you love to read, and it reminds you of your dad,” I explain. “To go out on a date with you is worth more than all the books putting them all together into one library, and you, Samantha, to be my girlfriend is priceless.

“Fine. Whatever!” She rolls her eyes “Consider this our first date since we already kissed,” She giggles after that, and I can’t help but smile.

“Really? So we’re dating and you’re now my real girlfriend?” I ask, still can’t believe she agrees with me.

Her eyes widen. “Whoa! Hold your horses, cowboy! We’re just dating, and you’re not my boyfriend. Yet.” That makes me chuckle.

“That’s perfect. I’m glad you agreed. Thanks for giving us a chance.”

I kiss her lips, and she responses immediately. She cups the back of my head, so I can deepen the kiss. It turns intense that makes my body vibrates with lust and needs.

“I think we should stop now,” she says after she breaks the kiss.

We’re both panting.

I swallow hard and squeeze my eyes shut. “Yeah because you’re killing me here.” My voice becomes huskier.

She stands from my lap, this time I let her. I rub my face with my hands and release a deep breath.

“Stop saying like that. I need to go home anyway.” She checks her phone.

“I will send you just wait until I calm a bit.”

She looks at me with a query look. “Did you forget I have my car down? And you rode to school with Garrett.”

“And so? Can’t I send you? I’ll drive your car, then I’ll call a cab to get back home.”

She laughs. “I’ll be fine, Phoenix. I’ll let you know if I get home safe.”

I grab her hand. “Not so fast, always stubborn. It’s the right thing to do to send my date home, but I won’t insist. You might change your mind and text me that you don’t want to see me again.”

She smiles. “I would definitely do that.” She then moves her face closer to mine, then kisses my nose, and I think it’s sweet.

“Let me at least walk you to your car. Bring some food. I have plenty of leftovers. You can reheat it in the microwave for your dinner.”

She nods. “And that, I won’t resist.”

I walk her to her car after giving her the food I packed for her. “When you arrive home, call me, okay?” I cup her face, then kiss her lips again. Jesus, I don’t want her to go home just yet.

“Okay, bossy.” She enters her car, waves, then drives away.

I wave back, smiling like an idiot alone.

Before I can get back inside my house, I hear a familiar voice calling my name.

“What are you doing here, Gabrielle?” I ask sternly.

“That was quite a show back here. I don’t know you have bad tastes in women. What have you seen in her? She looks plain—”

I cut it off, “Don’t you dare say something like that to Samantha! I think you may be right that I had a bad taste in a woman six years ago. Now I don’t want a repeat because I apparently learned my lessons pretty hard. And she’s far from plain because she’s the most beautiful, genuine, and intelligent woman I’ve ever met.” I don’t know why I even bother talking to her because she doesn’t worth my time. Maybe because she just insulted Samantha, and I can’t let her say something like that when she’s nothing compared to my princess.

“Do you think she dates you because she likes you? She just wants your money.”

“Don’t you fucking call me Phoenix again, Gabrielle! You don’t have the fucking right to call me that name! What do you want from me? My money? Myself? I’m sorry to tell you, but the ship has sailed a long time ago. I don’t want anything from you anymore. You fucking cheated on me because you think I’m worthless! Now, get your ass out of my fucking property before I let the cops arrest you with trespassing!”

Her face flushes with anger. “You will take me back Phoe— Alex. Mark my word. I know better in bed. I know what you want. I know how to please you. And I will make sure to use every weakness I know for you to stay away from her!”

Did she just threaten me? My hands form into fists with anger, and I want to punch every surface I get in contact with, but Gabrielle doesn’t worth my pain.

“We’re done here, Gabrielle! Get the fuck out!”

She startles when I raise my voice. I’m so pissed at her, and if she’s a man, I already beat him to a pulp, but I don’t want to be like my father.

I watch her walk away from my driveway until I can’t see her shadow any more. I release a huge breath.

And I will make sure to use every weakness I know for you to stay away from her!

Fuck!

I sleep like a baby after talking to Samantha over the phone for almost an hour. I wake up when my alarm goes off. I check my phone to see for important calls or messages. A message from my brother catches my eyes.

“’Sup, Phoenix? What can I do for you this very fine morning?” There is a hint of a smile from his voice.

“Gabrielle threatened me in front of my house when she saw me kissing Samantha. She said she’ll make sure to use every weakness she knows to let Samantha stay away from me. Do you think she knows something?” I rub my eyes, get up, and sit on my bed.

“I don’t think she knows anything, Phoenix. Stop over-thinking it. She wants you back, and she’s just probably going to use your track record over women, but if Samantha knows about it, then it’s not a threat.”

I release a huge breath. “Samantha know about it. I hope I scared Gabrielle away, and won’t talk to me again. She even has the gut to take me back,” I chuckle, and at the same time grimace with the thought of taking her back. “What a heartless bitch?”

Hawk chuckles, “Because you’re loaded, and she hasn’t heard that you’re dating anyone. She’s way far too late to take you back, bro. How’s Samantha?”

My heart melts when Hawk asks about my girl because I know they will like her.

“She’s good, and she finally agrees to date me. Can’t you believe that she cried when I gave her books? Thanks for the idea, by the way. I think she likes those books you suggested. I might get her copy of some classics.”

“I told you she’d love them. Buy the classics I told you, and it’s better if you can find an early edition. She’ll love them, trust me. I would love to meet her, bro. Bring her for the Art Gallery Exhibit.”

“I almost forgot. Sure, if she’d like to come with me.”

“She would love that.”

“Thanks, Hawk!”

“You’re welcome, brother. Now, call her and ask her to come for the exhibit.”

I dial Samantha’s number after talking with Hawk.

“Hi, handsome! Good morning!”

My smile widens. Jesus, this woman is truly the death of me.

“Hello, beautiful! Good morning to my princess. Can I pick you up after your shift?” I say without beating around the bushes.

“How did you know my shift, Phoenix? Did you check my schedules?”

“Yes, Samantha. Did you forget I own the coffee shop?” I say sarcastically.

“Yeah, remind me of that and why I even agreed to date you, boss. Well, I can’t say no, can I?”

I chuckle. “You know me too well, beautiful. Second date?” I pause. “And please, don’t roll your eyes on me.”

She laughs. “I hate you right now.”

“Quite the opposite the last time I checked, Princess.”

“Fine. I’ll see you later.”

“Take care, beautiful.”

Chapter 13

PHOENIX

Six years ago…

We lost in the game. This is fucking exhausting! The more I did my best the more we lost by only two fucking points. I can't believe it! This is my last year and my last chance for NFL drafting.

Every muscle in my body aches and quivers with anger, disappointment, and exhaustion. My mind doesn't seem to work when all I feel is frustration and disappointment.

I take my quickest shower and bolt out of the locker room. I avoid my team because I know they're going to invite me to drink to oblivion since there's supposed to be a team party tonight if we won.

I need to go to my girlfriend Gabby's apartment, but she went to her family and wasn't able to watch our game.

I check my phone; Hawk did not call—he must have heard the news about our game. Since he moved to New York, I don't have my number one fan to watch my game anymore. I call Gabby; she's not picking up my call as well.

I get in my car and drive home instead. I think of going to Gabby in the morning because I don't think I have strength left in my body to deal with her. Sometimes, she's demanding and annoying.

I take a huge breath when I park my car in front of our home. My parents fight a lot lately, and I still don't know the reason. When I asked Hawk, he said doesn't know. Or he doesn't want me to know. My big brother always tells me to focus on my games and schools, and so I never pry. I unlock the front door then carry my bag inside. I can hear my parents yelling one another—this is not the best idea of coming home.

I should've gone with my teammates to get drunk than to hurt my parents' arguments.

I can still hear the muffled sound of their voices on my way upstairs—my parents must be fighting in the office.

I enter my room, play some music on my iPod, then plug the headset in my ear. I rest my head on the pillow then close my eyes.

I jolt up into a sitting position when someone grabs my foot. My headset falls off from my ears. I blink many times to see if I'm not dreaming. Mom is sitting on my bed. Her hair is worst than the bird's nest—it's like she's hit by a huge tornado. The pain in her blotchy eyes is so visible. Huge

bruises are over her left cheek; under her right eye, at the corner of her mouth. Her nose is busted, and a small cut on her lower lip that still bleeds. Mom is sobbing, sniffing, and hugging herself.

Jesus Christ! I can feel my skin gets stone cold. My heart sinks and my eyes water at her sight. I silently and painfully move slow closer to her and pull her into a hug.

"What happened, Mom?" I know I shouldn't have asked because it's crystal clear what happened, but maybe I am not thinking straight. "Did Dad do that to you?"

My heart bleeds in my chest. I've never seen my mother like this before—so broken, so hopeless, and so lost.

I want to ease those pain away, but I don't know how and where to start. Her bruises may heal, but the scars in her heart will stay forever.

She sobs more—her body shakes.

I rub her back, hoping I can make her calm. "It's okay mom. Everything will be fine." Everything is not going to be fine—I know it's complete bullshit.

She shakes her head. "Everything will not be okay, Phoenix. Our family is going to be broken."

She pulls herself, wipes her tears, and sniffs.

"Your dad was furious when I found out he was having an affair. I tried to confront him, but instead, he yelled at me, and he said he was already planning on divorcing me, Phoenix. He chooses her."

My blood boils—my anger is taking over me. It's even hard to breathe. I grit my teeth so hard as I try hard not to scream out my anger in front of my mother. My hands are already forming into fists as she continues to cry and tell me what happened.

"He's been cheating on me for almost two years. I didn't believe when people gossipped around until I saw him this morning with Suzanne Cox."

A sudden coldness hits my spine. My body freezes, eyes widen with utter shock. "W-wait? W-who? Suzanne Cox, who, Mom?"

She looks at me and stops crying. "Your dad's friend's wife, Phoenix."

What the fuck?

She looks down at her trembling hands as she shakes her head.

My veins pulse everywhere in my body. I get up from my bed and walk outside my room while Mom is yelling my name, but my senses were shut off. I stride down my father's office, pound on the door, and yell to open up for me.

The door swings open, revealing my furious bastard of a father. "Wh—"

Before he can finish his word, I punch him on his face as my anger take over.

My father falls to the floor. I get inside his office and bend down to grab his shirt with my left hand and punch him straight on his face. The crackling sound makes me flinch, but I punch him on the nose—another crack. He tries to push me, but I'm way stronger than him. With everyday exercise and training for playing football for more than three years, he doesn't have the strength to win over me.

He pushes my jaw away instead, but I punch him in his eyes.

All I can see is the blood running down from his broken nose into his mouth. But I am not nearly satisfied.

He covers his face with his hands, and Mom grabs me from behind.

That's not enough for what he did us. He betrays my mother, my family, and me—he's fucking my girlfriend's mother for two years while I'm fucking the daughter.

He says something that I can't comprehend.

"You cheated on my mom, motherfucker! You cheated on me, too, sonofabitch!" I yell. My chest is expanding so hard that I can't even catch my breath.

Mom's saying enough while my poor father is still lying on the floor, wiping his face with his bloody hands.

"Did you fucking know that I'm dating Gabrielle Cox? The daughter of your fucking slut, you, asshole! Fuck you!" My voice thunders in the entire room.

He tries to sit, but he fails, and I just watch him as he struggles.

"And you are going to fucking leaving us. And you've been planning for this, Henry? For how fucking long?" My eyes blur. My heart aches, only for my mother or for this family, but for myself. I'm going to lose my father.

I move closer to him again and grab his bloody shirt. My eyes protrude as I stare at him intensely.

"For how fucking long?" I hiss. My body is shaking.

"S-sshes shiitinonyu."

I pull him closer as we now face to face. “What did you say, motherfucker?”

Mom grabs my shoulders. “That’s enough, Phoenix! You’re going to kill your dad!”

My nose flares. “The fuck I care!”

“She.Is.Cheating.On.You,” Dad says it word for word, and it catches me off guard. My thought scatters. He is lying. There’s no way Gabby will do that to me. I give him one last punch and leave him.

I sprint to my room and grab my keys while mom is following me everywhere I go.

“Phoenix, where are you going? Don’t listen to your dad, honey. He’s just provoking you. Calm down, Phoenix, please?”

Only one way to find out.

She grabs my arm and wraps her arms around me. I have to stop when she sobs on my back.

“Let me go, Mom. I need some fresh air,” I say calmly. After a minute, she lets me go.

“Pack your things, Mom. I’ll call Hawk to come and get you. Stay with him in New York and leave this fucking hell hole!”

I reach Gabby’s apartment in no time. I burst into cry and lean my head against the steering wheel. I lost the game today. I’m going to lose my chance for the NFL. I am going to lose my family, and now my girlfriend.

I wipe my tears and take a deep breath. I open my car door when I pull myself back together.

When I get inside the elevator, I close my eyes and think straight. I have to tell her about my dad and her mom because she has the right to know.

I unlock her apartment door since I have a spare key. When I close the door behind me, I freeze in my place.

“Oh, god! Fuck me! Yeah! Oh. yeah! Wooo! Mark! Harder!”

The deep voice grunts, “Yeah! Baby! Yeah! Fuck!”

She moans, “Oh, god! Feels so good...”

Fuckers! My blood is pounding in my ears.

I stride myself to her bedroom, and I am surprised to see him riding her while clutching her hair from behind. None of them notice that they have already an audience. The sight makes my muscles

strain against my skin. She betrayed me. I grab his hair, pull him away from her, and let him stumble to the floor. My fist hits his face while Gabby, my girlfriend is yelling at me to stop.

Before he can regain his balance, I kick him on his abdomen, his chest, and his face. We almost have the same size, but I'm taller than him.

Gabby jumps into me, punches me, slaps me, and tries to strangle me from behind. When I grab her tiny arms, I pull myself away from her and push her to the floor in a thud.

"How long are cheating on me, Gabrielle? How fucking long?" I yell at her that makes her startle.

She tries to hide her naked body from me and her fuck buddy starts to move. I raise my foot to kick him, but he surrenders his hand and crawls to grab his clothes scattered on the floor, then bolts out of the room.

"Are you fucking deaf now, Gabrielle? Are you fucking mute now after what you just did right into my face? Did he fuck your brains out that you can't talk anymore?" My breathing catches, but I want to say more. My anger from my father hasn't dissipated, now here she is, fucking someone else behind my back.

She doesn't answer me and doesn't look sorry either, and that pissed me off even more.

"You will not talk to me. You will not call me. We're over! I don't wanna see you ever again! If I see you anywhere near me, I will fucking ruin you! Did you understand me?" I squeeze my eyes shut because I realize it hurts.

"Did you fucking understand me, Gabrielle?" My voice breaks in the end, and she nods. That hurts the most because it seems okay with her.

"Did you know that my dad is fucking your mother, Gabrielle?"

She nods again. Jesus Christ!

"And you didn't tell me? Since when?"

She shrugs.

"Un-fucking-believable! You, both bitches! Fuck both of you! You and your mother just ruin my family! Go to hell! You, your mother, and my fucking father!"

I bolt out of her room, out of her apartment. When I get inside, I stay for a while, letting everything sink in. I can't fucking believe Dad betrayed me and my fucking girlfriend has been cheating on me.

My world just turns into fucking hell for just one fucking day.

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I drive away without direction and nothing comes in my mind other than anger, hatred, resentment, and humiliation filling my chest.

I answer my phone when it rings.

“Phoenix, where are you? What’s going on, bro? Why mom is calling me to take her?” Hawk worried voice echoes in my ear.

“Our fucking father is cheating on Mom with my fucking girlfriend’s mother who is also cheating on me! I found her fucking with an asshole in her apartment. She fucking knew that her mom is fucking our father, but she didn’t say a thing!” I’m so angry that I want to fucking punch everyone I see.

“I’m coming to take you and Mom. You continue your college here, Phoenix. Go home and pack your things. I’ll see you tomorrow morning.” He sounds pissed, and who doesn’t when you respect your father so much only disappoints you in the end?

“How about my draft? I can’t just give it up. I can’t leave now, Hawk. Let me just find an apartment because this is my last chance. You know that.” My thought jumbled.

“Just take a moment to calm down, okay? We’ll talk about it when you’re in the right mind.”

“I don’t think I can. Gabrielle knew, but she kept it from me, instead, she fucked someone behind my back!” I break down and cry in my seat—I can’t take it anymore. “We lost the game today, Hawk, then I found out about Dad that he’s going to divorce Mom. He fucking hit Mom, and I lost my control and beat him until I fucking break every bone on his face. Then when I went to Gabby’s apartment, I found her sleeping with someone else. It fucking hurts, Hawk.” I throw my head back against the seat as I squeeze my eyes shut, pushing out the image of Gabby and that asshole fucking each other. “It hurts so fucking much. I think I’m going crazy, b-brother.”

My body shakes with anger, with lost, and with hurt, and it’s depressing that he’s not here. I can’t believe this is happening to me. The worst day of my fucking life.

I have to stop the car because I can’t drive anymore. I have no idea where I am. I get out of the car with my phone still in my ear and Hawk is trying to calm me down, but there’s nothing he can do because shits already happened.

“Phoenix, please, go home, brother. You’re not in the right mind to drive right now. We’ll talk about this tomorrow. Please, be with Mom. She also needs you.” He’s affected too—I can feel it in his voice.

I don't even notice I stop my car in the T- intersection. With shaky legs, I cross the road, still talking to Hawk over the phone. Until I notice a car is heading toward my direction. The driver has also a phone pressed to his ear, and he hasn't noticed me yet.

It happens so fast that I panic—the headlights are blinding my vision, and I raise my arm to protect my eyes.

My breathing holds, and my heartbeat thrusts through my ears as I freeze in my place. I close my eyes for the impact and think that I am going to die here tonight.

A deafening screech of tires against the pavement echoes. In a split second, a loud crash follows.

I jump with a strong impact, but I'm still standing in my place, unharmed. When I open my eyes, my phone simultaneously falls as I see the commotion starts to grow.

Everything happens so fast, and I am still in a shocking state to move.

Someone grabs my arm and helps me out of the road, then hands me back my phone. "Get out of here, son."

The car that supposed to hit me collides with the tree beside the road. I walk toward the accident, shivering.

My chest tightens to see the aftermath. The sirens echoes—someone must have called 911.

Quickly, I storm out of the accident site and drive away from there with my thought filled with self-loathing. I have to grip the steering wheel stronger to stop my hand from trembling as I recollect all my thoughts. It's my fault.

I stop at the park and sit on the bench, alone and shivering, wishing I can turn back the time and change what happened. I hug myself and cry until I can't anymore. What if he dies? What will happen to the family he left behind? Jesus Christ, what have I done?

Three Months Later…

"Alex, you have to follow up with physical therapy. I arranged an appointment for you with one of the best therapists. You will recover soon if you will follow my advice and your therapist," Dr. Chen is scribbling on the chart, but I don't have to see a fucking therapist. What future do I have? I lost my chance to follow my dream the moment I got a severe ACJ injury. They had to do surgery when the ligaments of my shoulder bones separated.

I've been here in the hospital for a week, and I think I deserve all of these after what I have done.

"You need to rest for at least two more weeks, Alex. And I wrote prescriptions for your painkillers."

I don't bother to respond.

"I'll take care of that, Dr. Chen. I make sure he will see a therapist. Thank you so much!" Hawk shakes the old doctor's hand.

When Dr. Chen is gone, Hawk sits beside me. "You'll be okay, bro. I promise you. You will enjoy New York and forget everything that happened back there. You will start a new life. A better life."

Hawk arranged a MedAir to take me when he found out I was injured during our final game.

"Ready to see the real New York?"

"Thank you for everything, brother."

"You're my brother, Phoenix, and I will do everything for you. You should know that.

Chapter 14

SAM

I've been checking the wall clock like every five minutes when I have only an hour left of my shift. I'm excited to see Phoenix. I won't deny that.

After I agree to date him and make out on his couch, I fell asleep last night smiling. I hope I made the right decision. I want this relationship to work out because we have strong chemistry that is hard to ignore.

"Stop glancing at the clock every minute. It won't magically turn into Phoenix's cock."

I roll my eyes even Amy can't see it.

"Seriously, Amy, stop talking like that when we are with customers."

She hugs me from behind. "You don't want me to talk about a cock or you don't want me to talk about Phoenix's cock?"

"Stop talking about that word. Period."

She squeezes me. "Finally, someone makes my best friend smile. I'm happy for you, Sam. At least setting you up is worth the effort."

I unwrap her arms around me and face her. I can see the smile on her face, and it's really not the always silly Amy.

"Thank you for the effort, Amy, but you will still pay for it. It's not funny, you know, and you still lied to me."

"Just thank her already, Sam, She deserves it. I've never seen you happy in like forever. He's coming isn't he?" Maya joins us in front of the counter.

"Our friend has the ego bigger than Jupiter. And let me tell you, she will thank me when she gets good orgasms, instead of screaming Phoenix's name, she will scream mine." Amy and Maya laugh together with a high five. Our customers' attention is now solely focusing on us.

Maybe I am red right now from embarrassment. I give a polite smile to the customers instead.

"So, where are you both going? Did you at least pack a pair of lingerie? You can't go with him like that." Amy gestures her finger to my body. "I think you can go to the locker room right now, take a shower, and change your sweaty underwear, dear." She wrinkles her nose as if disgusted. "No one will kiss a stinky pussy." Then drags me out of the counter and motions Maya to take charge.

"Where are you taking me, Amy? My shift isn't over. Let go of me." I wiggle my wrist to loosen, but she tightens her grip around my wrist until we reach the locker room.

"You're going to shower, silly. You won't gonna let him go down on you with a disgusting smell between your thighs." She grimaces.

"I'm not gonna go shower—"

She cuts me off and stands straight with her hands on her waist, shooting me a glare.

"You're going to, Sam if you don't want me to call him that you're sick and cancel your date," she warns me.

My eyes widen, alarmed. "You won't do that, Amy. And even if I will go and shower, I still don't have clothes to wear. My shift isn't over. Big D will fire me if—"

Amy pokes her finger to my chest. "Are you really stupid? Your boyfriend is the owner of this shop. If Big D values his job, he won't attempt to fire you. Remember what he did when you accidentally spilled coffee on Phoenix?"

My mind instantly goes back to that incident. I nodded.

"Now go take a shower before he arrives. I came here prepared because I know you have less dating experience, and even that stupid Tyler did not take you on a proper date."

"Jeez! Thanks, Amy." My cheeks burn because she's right.

"You're welcome."

"What do you mean by you came here prepared? And Phoenix is not my boyfriend." Yet.

She groans, "Here, wear them or you will be going out with him naked. Your choice."

I peek the content of the paper bag. "What's that?"

"What do you think?" She glances at the watch on her wrist "Fifteen minutes, he will be here."

I grab the bag and stomp my feet to the bathroom. I get inside and slam the door shut.

When I check what's in the bag, my smile widens. I pick up the towel with a new set of toiletries. I shower and use the cherry shower gel and the shampoo. I already shaved my legs at home and cleaned down there.

I wrap the towel around my wet body once I am done showering and walk outside.

"Oh, my God!" I pick up and inspect the underwear—the lacy red bra looks sexy and daring, and it pairs with the panties. I giggle alone. I should really thank Amy.

Amy bangs the door and says to open. Her eyes light up when she sniffs me. “I see, you used them.”

“I love them. I really should thank you. Please, let me pay for these.”

She rolls her eyes. “What friends are for, Sam? I’m glad you like them, and it’s a gift, silly. Now wear them, and I still have to do your hair and makeup.”

I remove the tag of the bra and the panties that will barely cover mine.

When I walk to the bathroom, Amy grabs my hand. “You’re not a virgin, are you?”

I look at her, puzzled.

“Then you can change in front of me, duh!” She rolls her eye. “I’m not gonna eye-rape you.”

“I’m not comfortable stripping with an audience.”

She huffs, “Are we gonna discuss it right now? Phoenix is probably on his way right now. Now wear them. Quickly.”

I look at her one last time. “Yes, ma’am.”

I wear underwear in front of her. She hands me the old rose-colored dress, and it looks pretty and expensive.

“Wow! I’m gonna give this back to you. I can’t take it.”

“You won’t. And it won’t fit on my chest.”

I chuckle. She’s really lucky with chest size.

“Let me pay, then.” I wear the dress run my palm to the dress that fit perfectly on me.

Amy turns to my back and zips it up. “Don’t pay, Sam. A gift is a gift for a reason. It’s really perfect for you.”

“Thank you so much, Amy.”

She hugs me quickly before I can even hug her back. “Thank me later by sharing every wild detail of how he goes down on you.”

I freeze in my place.

She barks out laughing. “Jeez. Just kidding, Sam. I may be a bitch to you sometimes, but it’s your privacy, and I know my limit when it comes to that. I maybe joke around with you, but I would never gonna force you into sharing your sex life.”

“Wow! What happened to the Amy I knew?”

She starts drying my hair, curling, and spraying it until she gets the look she likes. Next is applying little eye shadow, mascara, blush on my face, and lipstick on my lips.

She finishes it by with a sweeping blush on my face and smiles brightly.

I take it she's happy with the result.

"Look at yourself, missy. I hope this time you're going to get laid tonight."

"I was happy the old Amy was gone for a while, and now she's back," I chuckle and say thank you.

I face the mirror and surprise to see myself—a new me in front of the mirror looks radiant and glowing.

I can't help to not compliment myself. "Wow, I look—"

Amy answers, "Hot? Sexy? Yes. And you're welcome."

My phone rings and she hands it to me.

It's Phoenix. My pulse quickens. What if he changes his mind?

"Answer that. I'll take care of your things. Here are the shoes. Your mom gave it to me because I can't afford a new pair," she says, looking guilty.

"How did you know I'm going on a date with Phoenix, Amy?"

I groan when she bites her lip because I know she's hiding something from me.

She raises her hands for surrender. "I shouldn't tell you this because Phoenix asked me if what food you like, and he did mention that he wanted to take you somewhere special."

I blow a breath. "Fine. Sorry about that. Thank you."

"Can you answer that now?"

"Hey, princess! Ready?"

My eyes grow big. I ask him quickly, "Where are you?"

"Just park my car at the back of the shop,"

My heart flutters. I place my hand in my chest to calm. I am definitely going out on a date with him.

Amy chuckles and I narrow my eyes to her. She motions her hand to the door.

"Give me a minute, Phoenix."

"Take the time you need, princess. I'll be here waiting."

I wear my shoes and grab my purse that Amy prepared for me. I check myself once again in the mirror.

I start walking out of the coffee shop's back door. When I am about to pull the door open, someone pushes the door from outside.

"Phoenix!" My smile widens.

He looks surprised, and he smiles back at me. "You look stunning, princess."

"Not bad yourself, hot Tease." He's wearing a white shirt and dark pants. His dark hair is styled in a messy top.

"Ready, gorgeous?"

"Whenever you are."

We walk to his car. After unlocking his car, he takes my hand and ushers me to the passenger side.

When he releases my hand, he cups my face and presses his lips on me. "It's torture not to kiss you for hours, princess. I've been glancing at the clock every now and then because I'm so damn excited to see you tonight."

I was doing the same, Phoenix.

He looks at me in my eyes and kisses my lips. I can't help but clutch his white crisp shirt when he deepens the kiss. I even forget that we're still outside his car.

He instantly moans when I kiss him back.

"I wanna kiss you all night, but I can't do it right now. I have planned for us tonight. At least later, and that's a promise." He kisses me again, then winks. He let me get inside the car and rush toward the opposite side.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Excited much, Samantha? Don't you like surprises?"

I grin at him. "I love surprises, and who doesn't?"

"Then wait until we get there. How's work?"

"Good."

"That's it?"

“Yeah, that’s it.”

He laughs.

“What?”

“Did you miss me, princess?”

Oh, gosh! You have no idea

“No”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Samantha, are you gonna answer me with just one word all night?” He glances at me.

“Yeah”

“Fine.” He stops the car beside the road, unbuckles his seat belt.

“Why did you stop here?”

“Now you can talk?” He cups my head and crushes his lips on mine, and kisses me hard and wet with pure punishment. I place my hands on his chest and grab his shirt, and he sweeps his tongue on the seam of my lips. When I open my mouth, he pushes it inside me. I moan so loud, but I don’t care. I love how he kisses me with sweet tortures. He bites my lower lip a little stronger that might swell after our kiss.

“Yeah, I like one word from you, first my name. Second, your moan, and third, later when you scream.” He looks at my eyes and kisses me soundly on my lips.

I am panting, but I still want more of his kiss.

“Wanna say something?” he asks while securing his seat belt again.

I don’t answer. I can’t answer. My stupid brain freezes while my heart beats erratically.

He looks at me. “What?”

I answer him with a shake of my head and a smile.

Chapter 15 SAM

I let my eyes wander around when Phoenix ushers me outside the car. This place is an old books store which is renovated into a big and modern one. Many well-known authors used this venue for book signing events.

A woman around my age approaches us wearing a bright smile on her face. “Mr. Williams, Ms. Anderson, good evening! Please, follow me.”

I am surprised to hear my name, and I grin at her in return.

I feel Phoenix’s hand gripping my waist. “Let’s get inside, beautiful.”

“What are we doing here, Phoenix?” I whisper

“Thought you love surprises,” he responses with a smirk.

“Did you happen to buy this bookstore too?”

He chuckles as we both walk inside the store. I stop midway when I notice who’s talking to the woman who approached us outside the store. My hands fly to my mouth instantly.

“Omigod!” A squeak left my mouth, and I don’t even recognize my own voice.

They stop talking and all eyes are focusing on me now. I want to hide behind Phoenix as I interrupt them. I look at Phoenix and back at them with my wide eyes.

“Hi, Samantha! I heard that you’re my number one fan. I’m so pleased to meet you.” She offers her hand, and I shake her hand firmly, still speechless.

My fangirling shows off as I keep my gaze to her. “Omigod! You’re real! I thought I’m dreaming, but you’re real.”

She laughs softly. “I already signed the books your boyfriend bought for you, and I have also a surprise for you.” She grabs my hand, and I follow her to the table where she must be sitting during the book signing. How did I miss this event?

“This is my new book and will be published three months from now. This is my copy, but I want you to be the first one to have this.” She hands me the book that’s wrapped in a bright red wrapper.

I take it from her and my facial muscles will ache later because I’m still grinning like a stupid.

“I signed that for you too,” she adds.

I can't help but hug her. I want to jump for joy, and I can't believe that I was only reading her books months ago, and now she's offering me her copy of her own book. She laughs and hugs me back.

"Thank you so much. I can't believe that you're actually in front of me right now. This means a lot to me and thanks for giving me your copy. I promise I'll take care of this. Thank you so much!" I smile and giggle.

"Oh, dear! You have to thank your man over there as well." She points her finger to Phoenix who's grinning like a Cheshire cat. He winks when I meet her gaze. I grab the book firmly and hug it to my chest.

"I'll thank him later. Thank you so much!" I shake her hand once again. I can't contain my happiness, and this surprise Phoenix does is beyond my imagination.

Phoenix walks closer and shakes her hand after thanking her. I wave my hand to the staff and leave grinning.

I hug Phoenix and jump up and down as soon as we reach the car.

I kiss his lips soundly. "That's the best surprise I've ever had. I know saying thank you is not enough, but I don't know any other way to say that, Phoenix."

He kisses my lips. "You'll thank me later. I can't wait for that, princess." He winks. "I'm glad you like my surprise. I will do everything to make you smile like that. Are you ready to go?"

We stop in front of the huge three-story house with an iron-wrought gate.

"Where are we? Who's house this?" I ask while we walk toward the front of the house.

"This is my dad's. This is one of the properties he left for me," he explains as he unlocks the double-door and pushes it open.

"If this house is yours, then why did you buy a new house?" I ask out of curiosity.

"This is my first time to be here after six years. If it isn't because of you, I have no plan on coming back."

I hold his hand and squeeze it. "We don't have to come here, Phoenix. If this house reminds you of sad memories, we can go back now."

"I really want to take you here and let you know where I grew up. I called the restaurant to deliver our dinner here because this is a part of our date tonight."

I smile at him to assure him I'm okay with this. We climb all the way to the third floor. The house is well-maintained. He must be paying a caretaker because this looks spotless despite the old designs of the house.

"This is my room. Don't worry I never brought girls here. This is still a virgin if you won't consider me jerking off," he smirks.

My cheeks burn. I can't imagine Phoenix jerking off while looking at the Playboy magazine when he was younger.

A dark blue colored room with a football team poster on the wall. His queen-size bed is covered with dark blue sheets and duvet.

"Why not just sell this if you don't wanna stay here?"

"Mom won't let me. There were bad memories, but there were good ones as well. If Hawk and Mom will visit, they can stay here. I may hate my dad, but I don't hate this place. Not most part of this house filled bad memories."

We sit on his back door patio decorated with blue-green stripes daybed swing with a set of cushions, a rocking chair, a loveseat, globe string lights hanging from the ceiling, and a small wood patio table. But above all, the galvanized planters with blooming flowers catch my attention.

Phoenix chuckles, leaning against the French door.

"What?"

"I like that you appreciate those flowers. Mom used to plant those by herself when she was here." The sadness gleams in his eyes.

I move closer, wrap my arms around him, press my nose into his chest, and inhale his scent. "It's not too late, Phoenix. Your mom can still come and plant flowers like she used to do. You, hawk, and your mom can still replace those bad memories with new beautiful one once again."

I can feel his fingers raking my hair, and I love the feeling when he does it.

"I know, but mom is ready to come back. Our family was broken in this house. She was broken in this house, and me too, princess. But like you said, it's not too late. The reason why I brought you here is to show you who I was before I moved to New York. I used to love this place."

"Tell me."

"Our parents used to watch us from here while I, hawk, and my friends including Garrett played football in that back yard lawn." He points to the spacious lawn. Now, I can feel the sadness in his voice as he opens up about his childhood memories.

I wish I can erase the pain away, but I, myself missed my family too. When I was a kid, my parents used to bring me to the park and let me play with the kids there.

I still remember Mom made horrible sandwiches. I and dad wrinkled our noses because we couldn't eat how horrible the taste was. We had to drop by the nearest McDonald's to buy burgers and fries before going home from the park.

"What's the story behind that tree, Phoenix?" I point to the tree a few wards from the patio.

He smirks and wiggles his brows. "Are you sure you wanna know, princess?"

"What's with the smirks and wiggling?"

"I stole Hawk's magazine collections under his bed. I hid on that tree just to look at the magazines. We may be closer in age, but he was bigger and taller than me at that time."

"I don't wanna know about those magazines if he had to keep them under his bed, and you naughty boy had to steal from him just to see."

He laughs out loud. We both sit on the loveseat while he shared his life growing up.

I learned that he used to have a good family, friends, and got good grades in school despite being influenced by his brother and his brother's friends who pranked girls at school.

I really feel bad for him that his parents ended up divorced.

He stands up when he hears a knock on the door. He offers his hand and I grab it and stand up.

"Let's have dinner, beautiful." He ushers me to the enormous dining area.

One of the perks of owning a restaurant is just a call and everything is ready like what I'm seeing in front of me right now. The dining table is set for two persons with flowers arranged in the center, candles lit in the middle, red wine and glasses, and soft music played on the sound system.

"Wow! You really prepared for this date. Thank you again, Phoenix. You're really good at surprises!" I cup his face and kiss him quickly on his lips.

"I'm glad you like them." He also gives me a quick kiss.

He sits like a gentleman after helping me out to sit on my chair.

I can't help but smile.

"What?"

"Nothing"

"I can see that smile on your face, and it doesn't tell nothing, Samantha."

"Can't I just smile because I'm happy? That you chose me over those hundreds of women swooning over you? I'm just an ordinary girl, and yet here I am sitting next to you."

He moves his chair closer to me, it screeches against the floor. He grabs the back of my head, kisses me fiercely, shoves his tongue into my mouth, bites my lower lip that makes me whimper both in pain and pleasure. I squeeze my thighs together as the pressure gets intense.

“Never say you’re just an ordinary girl, Samantha. I would never be crazy over you like this if you’re just an ordinary girl. You’re a gorgeous woman that I’ve ever seen, and I’m the luckiest man that you chose me to date you.”

“Well, you kinda gave me no choice.” I raise my brows.

“And you regretted that, Samantha?” He creases his brows.

“Yeah,” I say quietly.

He slumps his back against the chair then presses his lips together into a thin line. His frown deepens as he stares blankly at the table while I’m biting my lip to hide my smile. He’s so affected of I sad.

He clears his throat this time, and I want to say I’m just messing up with him, but before I can say anything our gazes meet. My eyes widen because he’s now narrowing his eyes on me.

“Oops!” I grin sheepishly

“Funny, huh?” He stands up and drags my chair away from the table. I yelp in surprise. He slips his hand under my knees and his other hand on my back. He lifts me up and carries me bridal style.

Instinctively, I wrap my arms around his neck to avoid falling.

“Where are you taking me, Phoenix? We’re not done with our dinner!”

“I’ll let you pay for hurting my feelings, princess.” He strides out of the dining area and climbs all the way upstairs.

“Phoenix, put me down! I can walk, you know,” I protest.

“Samantha, you’ll fall if you won’t behave.”

“You won’t let me! Now put me down, please!”

“I’ll put you down when you’re in my bed.”

“I’m no—” He presses his mouth on mine to stop me from talking—this time he kisses me slowly, chastely, and loosen his lips on mine. I tighten my hold on his neck and press my body into him.

My body comes to life. I deepen my kiss that makes his moans. He nibbles my lower lip, persuading me to open my mouth—I do it, and he slips his tongue, invading me. A moan slips from my lips—I

can taste him—his taste is like a drug to me that is so addictive that I can't resist, and I'm so intoxicated.

I don't even realize we are already in his room until he lays me down to his bed. He stands up, places his hands on his waist, and shakes his head. He smiles, then grows into a big grin.

"What? Changing your mind already?" I ask with confidence.

"You still have a chance to change your mind because when I crawl down onto you, you're officially mine, and there is no taking it back."

Chapter 16

PHOENIX

I glance down at her as she bites her bottom lip. Her hair looks messy, yet she looks so stunning, especially now that she's turned on—her rosy cheeks make her looked more radiant—her blue eyes darken, and lids are heavy with desires.

"One last chance, beautiful." I'm afraid that she might change her mind.

When she sits up on my bed—it alarms me—instead, she unzips her dress and let the straps fall down so her arms slowly, revealing more of her delicious skin, leaving her lacy red bra that barely covered her luscious tits—the tits that gave me constant hard-on since that night at the parking lot.

"You're a tease, Samantha." My voice becomes huskier. My cock is already jerking in my pants since I carried her from our interrupted dinner.

"Am I now, Phoenix?" She laughs, eyes go hazy, then bites her lip again. She strips off her dress slowly and kicks off of the bed, leaving a pair of lacy red underwear and her high heels.

"God! Princess, you're so stunning." I crawl down to bed toward her without breaking eye contact. My pulse races as I get closer to her. My skin tingles and every muscle in my body tightens with anticipation of finally making her mine.

She welcomes me with open arms. My body fits perfectly above her, and my erection is pressing between her warm thighs.

I cup her face and look at her eyes for a few seconds, then I give her sweet kisses on her eyes, nose, cheeks, jaw, forehead, and her lips.

"Aren't you too overdressed?" She presses her lips on me.

"Do you prefer me naked?" She bites her lip and nods. A giddy smile spread across her face. How can I resist my princess?

I step out from the bed and strip my shirt off, pants, and boxers, just leaving me with what God gave me. Fully hard on.

Her eyes widen and her mouth forms into an O.

I chuckle. "Now, I'm naked as you wish, princess."

She swallows hard. "Wow!"

I remove her shoes and throw them behind my back.

She giggles as I kiss her toes, her legs, knees, and her thighs.

I crawl up until I'm face to face with her. "You're officially mine, Princess," I affirm.

"And are you officially mine too, Phoenix?"

"Since the moment we met that night." I press my lips into hers, and she cups the back of the head. I kiss her like my life depends on it. I nibble her lip, shoving my tongue into her mouth the moment she opens for me. She tastes so sweet, and I can't wait to taste every inch of her.

I unhook the clasp of her bra, throwing it to the floor. Jesus! I lick my lips as I get the first glimpse of her pale mounds. She lightly gasps as my thumb makes contact with her already pink hard nipple.

I capture her tit, suck it, and tug her nipple between my teeth while I knead her other tit with my free hand.

She pushes her back upward, grasps handfuls of my hair, and trembles as she moans my name. God, how I love my name rolls in her tongue when she's turned on. And she just tastes so sweet as I expected.

I run my tongue to the valley of her gorgeous breasts all the way down to her flat stomach.

She gasps when I slide my tongue down to her belly button. I slip my fingers on her lacy panties, slide down to her legs, and throw it behind my back.

"Phoenix, I want you now, please?" she murmurs.

"Patience, princess. We'll get there, I promise." I have so many things I wanted to do with her since I first saw her, and she doesn't have any idea how I try so hard not to take her right now.

"You're killing me here," she says in a breathless voice.

"You have no idea that I'm literally killing myself right now, princess, but it's worth a wait, trust me." I have to tell her how I anticipated this night. I kneel on the bed as I spread her thighs wider.

Her smell alone is driving me insane as I run my nose from her pubic bone to her now wet lips. She throws her head back, fists the duvet into her hands, and curls her toes. She's so damn responsive.

"You're soaking wet already, Samantha. And is it because of me?" I tease her a bit.

"Hmm," she says breathily.

I lick her wet folds, and she moans louder this time. I spread them and lick her clit all the way down to her pussy. She's sweeter, and I am already addicted to her taste.

"God, Phoenix!"

I Kiss her pussy just like the way I kiss her lips. She writhes, grabs my hair into fists, and pushes her pussy into my mouth.

I push my tongue into her tight entrance and fuck her with my tongue.

"Oh, God!" She arches her hips into my mouth uncontrollably and clenches my tongue with her pussy. She's shuddering and moaning until she lets go of her come, breathing heavily.

I step out of the bed.

"Phoenix, where are you going?" I can hear the worry in her voice.

"Grab some condoms, Samantha, because I'm far from done with you." I grin wickedly.

She's flushed from her recent orgasm, and she looks so gorgeous.

She sits on the bed and says quietly, "Let me return the favor, Phoenix."

I shake my head while tearing the foil pack with my teeth.

I climb over her after wrapping the condom into my so hard cock. "Now, I need to be inside you. You can return the favor later."

I position my cock against her entrance, then I kiss her lips so slow and sweet, and I'm sure she can taste herself in my mouth. Samantha rakes her fingers through my hair, kisses me back, and pushes her hips into me impatiently.

I break the kiss. "Eager, Samantha?"

She scowls at me.

"You know that I want this more than you do. Erase that scowl from your beautiful face. You teased me already." I peck her lips.

"Are we gonna talk about this right now?" she asks frustratingly.

I grin, "I just wanna let you know that the feeling is mutual, my girlfriend."

"When did I become your girlfriend?" she asks with a glint of wickedness in her eyes.

"The moment I crawled down to you." I kiss her hard and wet, shove my tongue into her mouth and push the tip of cock into her pussy. She gasps. She's so tight, squeezing me hard. She feels so fucking good.

She moans and paws her fingers on my scalp as I thrust all into her.

"You're so tight, Samantha. Are you?"

"No, Phoenix! Uh.., it's... it's been more than a year," she says between her moans.

God, I've never felt like this before. I want to feel more of her without the sheath in me—skin to skin. I press my forehead against hers, breathing deeply as a bolt of desire slams into my body.

"You feel so good, Samantha. So fucking good it makes my head spin." I push all the way into her and grind against her clit.

She writhes. "Oh God, Phoenix!"

"Yeah, princess. That's it," I murmur between kissing her.

I move my hips and thrust into her faster. I clench my jaw as I am near to full my pleasure. I can't just stop, but I'm building my release. I'm not yet ready to end this. I squeeze my eyes shut, grab her ass, and angle her up a little bit, and I thrust into her faster. She cries out while following my rhythm and meets her hips into mine.

I press my lips into her as I push into her harder and faster.

"Come for me, Samantha."

She wriggles her hips, trying to hit the source of her pleasure, then her head back to the pillow and rolls her eyes back.

I start to pant, beads of sweat forming on my forehead. Our body starts to slick. Her eyes roll back again, shuddering under me. I feel the heat of her release around my cock, and she's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. I kiss her panting mouth. One last thrust, I follow her over the edge, succumbing my own orgasm.

SAM

"I'm full. I don't think I still have a place for dessert, Phoenix," I complain while rubbing my tummy.

"Princess, our dinner won't be completed without dessert. How about we share, sounds good to you?" He sips his red wine, keeping his gaze on me.

"Okay, deal."

He stands and walks to the kitchen. I stand up from my chair and pull his shirt off of my head that I'm currently wearing.

He comes back with a plate of dessert, then lifts me up to let me sit on the table.

"I won't say no to this," I say pointing at the plate.

He kisses my lips tenderly and slowly. I grab a handful of his hair and kiss him back. He spreads my legs apart to let him settle between my thighs and gets closer to me. I wrap my legs around his gorgeous ass. Phoenix is half-naked and more delicious than the dessert he insisted.

"I won't say no to you either, gorgeous," he says between our kiss.

I chuckle and pull away, "I mean the dessert, Phoenix."

"I know, but what I mean is you. We'll burn calories now, then dessert later, what'd ya say?"

I don't give him answer by words, I grab his head and kiss him urgently. He kisses me back while unbuttoning his shirt on me. I unbutton his jeans quickly and push down with his boxers. He's already hard and just springs out freely.

He kisses and sucks my neck down to my collarbone, then he cups my breast and pinches my nipple. He sucks my other breast then bites my nipple that makes me moans so loud.

"I want you now, Samantha. Lie down," he says while wrapping him with a condom.

I do as he said. He reaches between my thighs and runs his finger on my now wet entrance.

"You're always ready for me, beautiful."

"I can't say no to you, Phoenix. What can I say? You're a hot tease."

He sinks into me, and we moan together. When he doesn't move, I look at him.

"Why did you stop?"

"You're so amazing and gorgeous, Samantha." He leans on me and kisses my lips. "You've no idea what do you do to me, have you? I don't think I can get enough of you. You're driving me insane."

"I don't think I can get enough of you too, Phoenix."

He starts to move slowly. I wrap my legs around his waist and push him closer to me, but it isn't enough—I want more of him. I bite my lip when he hits my spot.

I writhe beneath him.

He moves faster this time, and I follow his rhythm. He growls, and I grip his arms, chasing my own release.

"You feel so fucking amazing, Samantha," he grits.

I arch my head back on the flat surface of the table and squeeze my eyes shut.

"Don't close your eyes. Look at me, Princess. I wanna see you when you come," he growls between words.

"Oh, God!" I say between pants.

"Let go, princess." He is pounding into me, faster, harder. Table screeches. Thank, God he's unable to stop and he doesn't stop because I explode into the best orgasm of my life while screaming his name, shivering under him.

"So fucking beautiful!" One hard thrust, he follows me, calling out my name. He collapses on top of me, panting, and shuddering above me.

I run my fingers through his damp hair.

"I think I need a dessert now," I break the silence.

He lifts his head and plants his chin on my chest. "I told you we'll burn calories first," he says with a grin.

"Yeah, smartass."

He rests his head again on me. "Samantha, I want to visit a doctor for a check-up to make sure I'm clean. I don't want to use a condom every time we're together. Are you on a pill?"

I stop running my fingers through his hair.

"I'm on a pill already. I didn't stop even I don't have a sexual partner. I had checked up two weeks ago when Amy kept taunting me to get a lay. I'll show you the result."

"Don't bother, beautiful. I trust you. I don't have a partner since I moved here. That was almost four months ago. I'm always protected when I was in New York. I'll have me check up on Monday." His voice vibrates in my chest.

"I trust you too, Phoenix."

"I know princess, but I wanna make sure I'm clean. For your own good."

"Okay."

We eat our dessert after we clean up.

"Hawk invited us for an Art Gallery Exhibit next week." He pushes another forkful into my mouth.

"Where? New York?"

"Yup. I'll book us a flight."

"I didn't say yes, yet."

"I don't want you to say no either."

“I’m not sure. And I don’t have a dress for that kind of event, Phoenix.” I feel nervous all of a sudden. I don’t realize that I’m dating a businessman until tonight—A hot tease businessman.

“If you’re worried about the dress, don’t be, or are you just trying to decline Hawk’s invitation? Trust me you will like him.”

“I’ll give you the answer soon,” I sigh.

“What was that all about?”

I hug him and inhale his scent—I can still smell myself on him. “Just happy you’re with me.”

He kisses my head “Get used to it, Samantha, because I will be with you from now on.”

I look up at him. “Let’s have another round.”

He smirks. “I would definitely agree with that. Aren’t you sore, beautiful?”

When he lifts me up, I wrap my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist. He’s already hard, deliciously pressing against my core.

“Back to bed?”

He mumbles yes while we are lip lock. He kicks the door close, then places me down carefully in bed.

“I’m hungry again, princess,” he says and grins sheepishly

“Oh, no! Let me return the favor this time.”

He stands up defeated and groans.

“Complaining?” I ask while unbuttoning his jeans.

“Never.”

“Good. Now, watch me.”

Chapter 17

SAM

I kiss him one last time before I unlock the front door of my house.

“Why don’t you stay with me tonight, Samantha?” He doesn’t let go of me yet—he wraps his arms around my waist from behind, presses his body on me, and rubs his nose on my exposed neck.

“It’s Sunday, Phoenix. I have to spend time with Mom. It’s been so long since we have the same day off together,” I explain, and it’s already two in the morning.

He nods and lets go of his arms. I turn to face him, cup his face, and trace the bridge of his nose to the tip of it with my thumb—he looks so beautiful and teasingly hot.

“I’ll spend time with you, I promise. Just not today because I promised Mom that we are going to have some time together today.”

I can see the disappointment on his face, so I kiss his eyes, down to his nose, and press my lips to him. He kisses me back instantly, and I moan when he bites my lower lip.

“Fine, I let you go for now. I’ll pick you up on Monday after school,” he finally agrees, but there’s still a little disappointment in his voice.

“Sure, I’ll stay with you if you want.” I bite my lower lips, still puffing from his bite.

“Stop teasing me, Samantha if you don’t want me to take you here at your front door,” he groans and takes a huge breath.

“Good night, Phoenix!” I let go of his face.

“Night, Princess!”

He walks away to his car, and I wait until he’s gone.

I yelp in surprise after locking the door behind me.

“Mom!” I hold my hand to my chest. “Can’t you give me a little warning? You scare the hell out of me!” I tell her while my heart is still hammering in my chest.

She’s wrapping her arms around her robes.

“Who’s that, boy, Sam?” she asks but more like an interrogation, and she doesn’t look amused.

"Mom, can we talk about him tomorrow, please? It's two in the morning for questioning," I say and fake my yawn.

"Thought you're going to tell me if you're going out on a date," she says, sounding disappointed.

"Mom, I'm twenty-one, and we are both busy even to spend breakfast together. Our free time always didn't seem to match. Tomorrow is our day off, so you can ask me anything you wanna know." I start climbing upstairs because the longer I stay, the more questions she throws at me.

"I know, and I want you to know that I'm happy that you start dating again, as long as he isn't like Tyler."

I stop and turn to look down at Mom. I understand if she uses her motherly tone at me because she saw how devastated I was when I broke up with Tyler. I cried in her arms, on her lap when we were on the couch, and in her bed when I can't sleep, and I even lost a few pounds.

"Mom, I can assure you that he is far better than Tyler. You will meet him soon, and trust me, he is a good guy."

"Why don't you invite him to dinner? I wanna meet the man who makes my baby happy again."

I roll my eyes. "Fine, I'll tell him. Let me cook because I don't want to rush him to ER for food poisoning."

She laughs. "Fine. Good night, sweetie!"

I walk down to kiss her on her cheek. "Night, Mom. I love you."

After I tuck myself in bed, I can't help but giggle when I recall our moments in his bed. We can't just keep our hands off of each other. I feel sore after a few rounds. He was so caring and attentive—he made sure that he was not hurting me, and the sex was phenomenal.

"Samantha, missed me already? Am I coming back to pick you?" I can hear the excitement of his voice over the phone. I roll my eyes, but my lips are already formed into a wide grin.

"No, but mom is inviting you over to have dinner with us."

"Really? Your mom wanna meet me?" He sounds surprised.

"Yeah, she was actually awake when I got inside the house. Do you wanna come or not?"

"Of course, princess. I'll bring wine for us."

"Well, thanks! Mom will be glad to hear that." I giggle alone like a love-struck teenager.

"Are you sure I can't come with you now? I missed you already, Samantha." I hear him sigh.

“Phoenix, it’s almost three. What are we gonna do? I’m tired, and I need some sleep.” I bite my lip when I remember what we did on the dining table after we ate our dinner. We ended up eating ourselves instead. I feel my face flushed. My inner thighs clench, and I can still feel the soreness down there.

“What I’m gonna do to you, Samantha? Are you sore?” he asks. His voice gets deeper and huskier.

“I am, and I don’t wanna know what are you gonna do to me.” I shrug, but I’m actually excited to know.

“Are you sure you don’t wanna know, princess?” There is a tease in his voice.

I cut him off, “Phoenix, stop right there! You’re not coming, and I need to sleep. I’m still sore. Monday is Monday!”

“I’m already hard, Samantha. I need some help over here.” His voice is getting huskier, and he sounds like he’s gritting his teeth.

“And how can I help you? You’re not coming. That’s final!” I pretend I don’t know what he exactly means.

“Just continue talking to me, princess. You’re driving me crazy, and don’t ask me how can you help me.”

I laugh.

“Not funny!” he snaps.

“The hell not!”

“Princess, stop making fun of me. You will pay for this.” He’s also laughing.

God, he always finds his way to makes me smile.

Phoenix is just so amazing.

I can feel my body alive again, and my heart beats again.

“I’m not making fun of you, Phoenix, and I’m not gonna pay for your own mistakes.” I bite my lip to stop from laughing. Mom is going to knock on my door if she knows I’m still awake.

“It’s your mistake, princess because you call me.”

“I’m just inviting you for dinner. I should’ve just texted you. Remind me not to call you again.” I scowl.

"Whoa, princess! I'm glad you called, and don't get my idea wrong. I actually like talking to you than texting, Samantha."

"I thought you mean I shouldn't call."

He groans, "Princess, what I mean to say is, just listening to your voice is giving me a hard-on. You know that I'm crazy over you, Samantha. Everything about you is driving me insane. You're a walking aphrodisiac, but I am dating you just to be my sex partner. I like you so much, and you mean more than just my sex partner to me. You are everything to me."

I hold my breath. I blink rapidly. I can't still believe that he likes me and that I mean everything to him even though he told me many times already. I'm still in cloud nine. My brain is still foggy after spending with him.

"You mean so much to me too, Phoenix," I say slowly.

"I know, Samantha. I know."

"You're so cocky."

"And you love ruining our moments."

"Just your moment."

"God, tell me why I'm crazy over you?"

"Because I'm a super cool girlfriend?"

"No. You're an annoyingly fickle girlfriend!"

"And what are you?"

"I'm the most passionate, hot, captivating, and handsome boyfriend."

"Oh. My. God! You're full of hot air, Phoenix! I can't believe you're actually my boyfriend!" I tell him in an exaggerated way.

He laughs at me instead. "Tell me what do you like about me, princess?"

I freeze. I don't know how to answer him because I even love his cockiness, his annoyingness, and bossiness. He's so real, funny, considerate, and thoughtful. I love everything about him. I'm in love with him. My hand flies to my mouth at the thought of me falling for him. This is not possible! Too soon! But my heart tells me otherwise.

"Princess?"

I blink my eyes. "Phoenix.."

"Thought you sleep on me. You better take a rest now, Samantha. I'll call you as soon as I wake up, okay, beautiful?"

I swallow hard and clear my throat. "Yeah, sure."

"Night, beautiful girlfriend."

"Night, hot tease. Bye."

I close my eyes and take a huge breath.

I'm already in love with Phoenix before I even realize.

Phoenix sent me a message ten minutes ago that he's on his way. My bonding day with Mom turns into cleaning and grocery day. I feel exhausted after cooking for dinner.

They might not taste like a menu from the restaurant, but they aren't bad either.

I wear a light brown V cut mini dress and match it with a golden belt and golden sandals. I apply black eyeliner and gold eyeshadow, blush on, and red rose lipstick.

I wipe my sweating palm to my flat tummy to ease the little crease. I actually do that because I feel nervous to see Phoenix again, and I hope mom is going to like him.

I have to behave and keep my hands off of Phoenix when he arrives. After five minutes of staying calm, I sneak downstairs. Mom is still in her room. The doorbell rings the moment I step my foot on the floor. Good timing.

"Phoenix!" I squeal and throw myself into his arms.

He catches and wraps me into his arms with a chuckle.

Where is the I have to behave and keep my hands off of him goes?

"If you always welcome me like this, I make sure to come here every day, princess."

I break our warm embrace and look at him—he looks so captivating and handsome, wearing a huge grin on his face. I press my lips into his wide grin.

"You look gorgeous, Samantha," he murmurs while our lips still pressed together.

I hear a throat clearing from my back. I abruptly break my contact with Phoenix, feeling my cheeks burn.

"Aren't you supposed to invite our guest inside?" Mom says with an amusing tone.

I clear my throat. "Mom, meet Phoenix. Phoenix, this is my mom, Hannah."

Phoenix extends his hand for a handshake, and Mom instantly shakes it. “Pleasure to finally meet the woman whom Samantha got her beauty.”

I roll my eyes.

Mom giggles, “Aren’t you a charming, Phoenix. I like your name, very mystical.”

“Samantha didn’t say the same though.”

I roll my eyes again.

“Oh, honey. She likes something more from you other than your unique name.” Mom slaps his arm playfully.

My eyes widen, my lips part. I’m sure I’m terribly blushing right now.

“You’re actually right about that, Mrs. Anderson.” Phoenix winks at me with his playful smile.

“Oh, these are for you.” He offers the flowers and wine he promised to bring with him.

“You really shouldn’t have bothered, Phoenix, but thank you.”

“My pleasure, Mrs. Anderson.”

“Call me Hannah, sweetie.”

I chuckle, and Phoenix’s cheeks turn rosy when mom calls him sweetie.

“These are delicious, Hannah. And thank you for having me.” He smiles at Mom.

“I’m glad you like them, sweetie, but thank Sam for that. Breakfast is the only thing I can make edible,” Mom says honestly.

“I don’t know you can actually cook, Samantha?” Phoenix asks playfully.

“I can when glancing at the cookbook every five seconds.” I beam.

“Everyone can cook with a cookbook, but it doesn’t taste good no matter how they follow the instruction. You’re a natural. Trust me even without taking a look at it every five seconds.” He grips my knee under the table, and heat spreads through my body with his simple innocent touch. The muscles between my thighs clench in a delicious way.

I smile at him. “Why, thank you.”

“Um, Hannah, I would like to ask permission if I could take Samantha with me to New York this weekend,” Phoenix asks spontaneously.

“Oh, sweetie, you don’t have to ask me. And you know I would never say no,” she answers while stealing glances at me.

I hold my groan, but deep inside I feel relieved that she genuinely likes Phoenix. My heart slightly flutters at the thought of Mom approves Phoenix in dating me. I always want to date someone that my mother trusts him as well.

“She’s an adult, but I know Sam will come with you whether you ask me or not,” Mom adds. “And I appreciate you for asking for permission from me. Take care of my baby, Phoenix.”

“Always.”

“Aren’t you always planning on going to New York after you finish college, Sam? Now, you have the chance to see a glimpse of the big apple.”

I put my fork down. “Mom,” I say calmly, but I give her a seriously-look. She really has to share my plan with Phoenix. I feel embarrassed.

“Great. We’ll extend our stay, Samantha. I’ll tour you around,” Phoenix says, clasping his hands together.

“I’m undecided yet,” I reply wickedly.

“Trust me, sweetie. You will enjoy your weekend,” Mom says with a glint of mischief in her eyes.

“I promise you, Sam. You will,” He agrees and grins.

“Fine.”

“You can’t just wait until I give you an answer, can you?” I ask while I’m sitting on his lap and playing his hair.

“I’m impatient when it comes to you,” he answers. His lids are half-closed

“I doubt that. You have all the patience in the world.”

“Can I have a kiss now? Your mom is still in the kitchen,” he asks but more like a demand.

“Get a room!” Mom yells from the kitchen.

My cheeks burn. Phoenix bites his lip to stop from laughing.

“You’re eavesdropping, Mom!” I yell back.

“I didn’t, sweetie, but it’s hard to ignore when I can hear everything from here.” I can hear the joy in her voice, and I feel a sudden lightness in my chest.

“Whatever,” I sing.

“I’ll go up and change. I have a duty, and you two behave while I’m up.”

“Of course, Hannah,” Phoenix replies.

When I can hear any more of Mom’s footsteps, Phoenix crushes his lips on me, grips my waist, and pushes me closer to him. I grab his face and kiss him back, then break the kiss abruptly.

“Where is the ‘you two behave while I’m up?“

“Can’t feel me? And you’re my drug, Samantha. I’m addicted.”

I roll my eyes. “Very original!”

“Stubborn. Aren’t you wet?” he murmurs.

“Aren’t you a little impatient?”

“I’m losing it when I’m with you.”

“I want you, too, but let Mom go to work first, then we can have each other.”

“In my house?”

“I have class tomorrow.”

“Bring your things. Sleepover?”

I groan, “Phoenix!”

He looks at me directly in my eyes. “Then move in with me.”

“Isn’t it too soon?”

“I’ve been asking you since we’re not yet dating. I’m serious with that, Samantha.”

“We’ll see after New York. You might already feed up with me at that time.”

“I doubt it.”

“So optimistic.”

“Go, pack your things.”

“So bossy.”

“I’m horny.”

“So tactless.”

“You’re gorgeous.”

"So honest."

He laughs out loud. "Princess, you're infected with my cockiness."

"What can I say, you're infectious!"

"Pack up, love."

I freeze. My heart flutters, and this time I am sure that I'm so falling hard for him. He's just so amazing in every way.

"Okay," I murmur.

Mom is gone before I'm done the packing, then a knock on my door interrupts me.

"Phoenix, come in," I say without bother looking at the door.

"Ready, princess?" he asks after pushing the door open.

"Not until I have you first," I say, wrapping my arms around his neck.

"You already have me."

"Are you turning me down now?" I scowl.

He smirks, cups my rear with his big hands. I instantly wrap my legs around his waist and kiss him urgently. He lays me down in my tiny bed—the bed squeaks.

After stripping down my dress and my shoes, he looks at me—he doesn't blink.

"You look so stunning in that tiny dress, but you look ravishing naked," he says in a soft tone.

"And you're too overdressed."

He smirks and starts shrugging off his clothes.

I can see clearly the prominent of his bulge, and it quickens my heartbeat.

A fully naked and God-like looking Phoenix in front of me is drool-worthy, and it makes my body vibrate from the reactions he causes me.

I unclasp my bra, but he slaps my arm playfully.

"That's my job, Samantha. Your job is only to wear them."

I giggle while he unclasps my bra in a single click, then pushes my panties down.

"I wanted to eat you the moment you launched yourself on me at that door, but I badly need to be inside you right now, a sweet little tease." He doesn't waste a second—he knows I'm soaking wet.

He pushes inside me—all the way, and takes control, takes care of me in each delicious thrust he does.

I arch my hips to meet him. Phoenix picks up his speed and hits my exquisite spot, causing my head to spin. I whimper and shudder under him. I know I'm so close. Phoenix kisses me everywhere he could reach, making me fly higher and higher, and I know he catches if I let go.

"Come, Samantha," he growls as he continues to push harder and faster and rougher. And I love it every bit of it as I can feel every time he dives deeper and hard inside me.

"I'm...so...close." I bite my lip harder with a groan.

The bed squeaks, and he growls, "Come with me."

I meet his thrust.

He thrusts into me harder then so slow that touches me so deeply with its intensity that I feel everything—I feel how he's so deep, how perfect we are, and how I am so deeply in love with Phoenix.

I arch my head against my pillow, and I think I am transported to the realm of bliss, and Phoenix follows me there, quickening his thrust.

Suddenly, my bed wobbles and falls. Our gazes meet with wide eyes, but Phoenix has no plan to stop until I scream his name that my neighbors might hear me. At this moment, I don't care because I am still succumbing to the pleasure spinning through my body with endless bliss of climax. He comes with me. He shudders and collapses on top of me, panting, and sweating.

I giggle underneath him.

"We broke my bed, Phoenix."

Our gazes meet, and he grins, eyes lit with an inner glow of mischief. "Then you have the reason to move in with me."

"Sleepover."

Chapter 18

SAM

A smirk spreads across Phoenix's face when he notices me gawking at him. He's wearing a black tuxedo and looks yummy enough to be my dessert for tonight after the Art exhibit Fundraising event hosted by Hughes Industries.

"Wanna have quickie first before we go to the exhibit?" Phoenix asks, smirking, and I'm literally drooling over him.

"I spent half an hour just to like this," I say, motioning to my floor-length off-shoulder black dress. "I'm not gonna ruin just for a quickie, and we'll gonna be late anyway."

"You're right because quickie is not enough. I need to take my time making you feel good. Let's go because if we stay here longer, I might shred off that gown from you and press you against this wall." He presses his bulge against my rear, then kisses my exposed shoulder.

The venue of the event is not far from the King's hotel we checked in. Phoenix grips my hand when our driver opens the door for me. I take a huge breath before stepping my right foot outside the limousine. Phoenix immediately extends his hand like a fine gentleman, then kisses my forehead as soon as I am standing beside him.

"You'll be alright. I'll be with you all the time. Just let me know if you don't wanna stay longer. I'll find a way for us to escape. Let me tell you in advance that maybe my cousins are loaded, but they are great and slightly annoying people."

Cameras flash everywhere as soon as we step to the red-carpeted floor. I walk with all my effort to make sure I don't stumble in front of them. A smile spread across my face voluntarily when I see Phoenix smiling down at me.

I don't recognize anyone. I know most of them are businessmen because Phoenix briefed me during our flight, and he also told me that his cousin from his father's side was the one who hosted this exhibit for cancer patients' benefits. And we will be meeting his brother, Hawk here.

I stop walking when someone is marching toward us.

"Look who showed his ass up, if not the douche, himself." A smile curves on his lips. He looks older than Phoenix with brown hair, blue eyes, but with the same body built like him, then they immediately hug one another.

"And who's this unfortunate hot chick you brought here tonight, Phoenix?" he teases Phoenix with smirks on his face.

"Back off, Patrick. If you don't want Becca's knee on your balls. Meet my girlfriend, Samantha. Princess, meet my asshole cousin, Patrick."

I smile at him and extend my hand, but instead, he squeezes me into a hug that makes me whimper.

"Don't break her, twinzy!" Our hug is abrupt when a woman says in front of us.

"You must be the princess. I'm the gorgeous twin of this asswipe. Call me Trixie." Wow! She looks like Victoria's Secret model while I look like a wallflower in front of her.

"I'm Samantha, you can call me Sam. What do you mean by The Princess?" I raise my brows quizzically.

"Oh, I heard from Hawk that Phoenix will finally bring his princess. So, since you are with him tonight. It tells me only one thing that you are his princess," Trixie giggles.

My cheeks burn that everyone knows Phoenix will bring me as his date tonight. What if they are expecting someone who is gorgeous and rich like them? I am disappointing them.

I feel a hand gripping my waist.

"And what exactly did you hear from Hawk, Trix?" Phoenix asks who looks amused.

"That you finally met her." She grins at him.

I look up at Phoenix who's blushing and grinning back at her.

"And you waited that long, huh, whipped?" Patrick teases him.

I furrow my brows. "What are they saying, Phoenix? Did I miss something?"

"Don't mind them, Samantha. They're all nosy about my life."

"Let me tell you, Sam. When we were kids, Phoenix said that once he meets his—" Patrick is interrupted by a handsome man who hugs Phoenix from behind.

My eyes grow wide. His handsome face is like you only see in the movies—has dimples on both cheeks, disheveled curly brown hair with big honey-colored eyes. He's with a brunette around his age, and she looks beautiful with a green ankle-length gown.

After hugging Phoenix, my eyes widen when he faces me and with a dashing smile.

"Princess? Is that you? Jesus Christ! No wonder Phoenix forgot to ask your name that night at a parking lot. You're beautiful than I imagine." He hugs me tight, and I freeze on the spot.

“I’m the handsome brother of your boyfriend, and this is my wife Izzy.”

My eyes move to him, to Izzy and to Phoenix, but I am still tongue-tied to say a word. I never expect these people are so warm for me. What I was expecting was just his and hellos, then walk away, enjoy the party, and forget that I am with Phoenix. Phoenix smiles warmly that flutters my heart.

Izzy breaks me from zoning out with a hug. We kiss each others’ cheeks.

“Thank you for inviting me, Hawk. I’m really not used to attend an event like this, I can’t say no to your brother.” I smile shyly.

“Princess, you will attend more parties like this if you are dating my hideous of a brother because we are supporting King and Hughes charity events,” Hawks says, running his hand on his wife’s arm.

“Well, I never thought about this, and I think it’s already too late to back out.”

Phoenix groans and when I look up at him, he’s raising a brow at me.

“What do you mean by too late to back out?” he asks me, and everyone is listening and waiting for my answer.

“If I only knew that you’re this rich and I have to attend a various party, I might rethink of dating you,” I answer, then grin sheepishly at him. Everyone says oohs and ahhs.

“I will never force you to attend, princess, if this will give us trouble.” He leans down to kiss my cheek.

They whistle. Izzy clasps her hands together and smiles.

“It’s alright, Phoenix. Anyway, this doesn’t happen every day.” I wrap my arm around his waist to show him my full support.

I’ve been introduced around to the Williams, Hughes, and King family. They’re all kind, hospitable, and very down to earth people despite their status in society. I feel exhausted after dancing with Phoenix at the party after the exhibit. My feet give up, and the effect of the alcohol starts to kick in my system.

“Don’t sleep on me again, Samantha. You still have a promise for me after the party. Don’t think that I forget that,” he whispers to my ear that gives shiver down my spine.

“I can’t wait to arrive back to our room, Phoenix. My feet are killing me.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? We could have left sooner. Let me carry you.”

I stop him when he moves to carry me. “I was enjoying the party. You have great friends and families.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed, Princess. I was actually worried that you might be bored, and I was just waiting for your signal.”

“It doesn’t matter how boring the party was, as long as there are great people to entertain me.”

“We’ll still have lunch with Mom tomorrow. Hawk and Izzy will also be there.”

“Now, I feel nervous about meeting your mom.”

“Don’t be. She heard a lot about you already, and if she will make you uncomfortable just let me know, but I’m sure you will like my mom if you like Hawk.”

I let my body fall to bed dramatically and squeeze my eyes shut. I feel Phoenix slipping off my high heels, massages my foot.

I relax a bit. “God, Phoenix, you’re heaven sent!”

I bite lip to control my moan because it feels good.

“That good, huh?”

I hum to his question.

He does the same with my other foot, then moves his hands up to my legs, then to my thighs. The next thing I know, he is unzipping the back of my gown. I am only wearing a strapless black bra and a black thong underneath the gown he bought for me. He slips my gown off of my body. I don’t bother to look at him when hear him stripping his suits and the clinking of his belt.

I curl my toes when he starts kissing them. Then he moves to my legs, to the back of knees, and my thighs. He slips his fingers into my thong and pulls it down to my feet. The next thing that comes off is my bra.

Phoenix bites the cheek of my ass, making me whine and moan helplessly He then traces kisses on my back.

I can help to not moan louder when he sucks, bites, and licks each shoulder, then he flips me to face him, grabs my bra, and throws behind his shoulder.

Phoenix kisses my lips hungrily and slips his tongue into my mouth without mercy, and I grab his head and pull him into me as I suck his tongue causing him to moan. I wrap my legs around his waist and flip him over, and I instantly feel him hard poking between my thighs. I am already wet the moment he starts kissing my toes.

I break our kiss and position himself into my wet core. I push myself into him and sit while leaning my hands against his broad chest.

“Fuck! You look so hot on top of me,” he says with his raspy voice.

I can see the lust flooding in his eyes, and I’m sure he can also see the anticipation in my eyes.

He’s so deep in me, and I gasp as I can feel so stretch and full. I pull my hips back, then slam back into him again in a hard thrust. He groans and grips my ass stronger that will leave his fingerprint on my skin—the tingling pressure leaves me a beautiful agony.

“You’re so warm and tight. You feel so amazing, feel so good Samantha.” He cups my breasts and kneads them, pinching my nipples that send painful pleasures between my thighs. My muscles clench him as I ride him faster and harder.

“Oh! God, Phoenix,” I say breathlessly. “I’m gonna come.” I’m building my own release, and I never felt so good like this before. When I’m on top, but with him, it’s magical, and consuming that makes me dizzy with an amazing pleasure he gives me.

“Come around me, Samantha.” He meets my thrust, and our hips meet together. And I’m almost over the edge. I arch my head back, moans so loud, bites my lip, and rolls my eyes back.

My world splinters, vision blurs, muscles clench, and I can’t just control my body from shuddering when the pressure shatters in me.

Phoenix growls, “Come with me, Samantha.”

And that I scream his name and collapse on top of him.

He soon follows me and shudders under me—hot liquid spurts inside me, and can’t cease his body from shaking.

I keep on rubbing my sweaty palms on my skirt, and Phoenix chuckles beside me and thinks it’s funny.

“Not funny!” I glare at him.

“It is, princess. I told you to relax because Mom will like you.” He smiles at me that can make me wet, but at this moment, it has no effect on me.

I feel my loins are sweating with nervousness. This isn’t my first time meeting parents, in fact, I met Tyler’s parents before he cheated on me, but meeting Annabelle Williams scares me a lot that I can pee in my skirt.

My belly is twisting in knots. “What if she won’t? Are you going to break up with me?” I ask, and it makes him laugh out loud. I narrow my eyes and punch his arm.

"I'm driving, beautiful. I will never do that even Mom won't like you. You are stuck with me, and I will keep you and bring you everywhere I go, even to the moon."

I roll my eyes. "You're too confident about this, huh? Tell me about the princess thing, Phoenix?"

"You will never let this go, won't you, Samantha?"

"I'm just curious about why everyone knew about that, and yet you never mentioned it to me. You just call me princess out of the blue."

"When we were kids. Me, Hawk, the twin, and Seb were playing knights with our plastic swords. We tied Trixie to the tree like a hostage. Then who can save her will be her Prince and will get a reward, and who will lose will give his one-day money. I really wanted to win because Seb has bigger cash than all of us, but instead, I always ended up losing. They were stronger and faster than me. So, one day, I promised that when I meet the right girl for me, I will save her and call her princess." He grins at me.

My heartbeat thuds loudly in my chest.

I kiss his cheek. "And did you happened to save me from my asshole ex. Was that the reason you called me princess?"

"Have you not hear from Hawk, Samantha? That I even forgot to ask your name because I was busy gawking at you."

My mouth hangs open. He was also attracted to me that night. Did he also smile as he sleeps just like I did?

"Hmm. Why are you so silent, princess?"

I'm so falling for him hard. No, it's too late for that because I already fell so hard.

Chapter 19

PHOENIX

“Mom!” I stride all the way to the table where mom is sitting as soon as she comes to view.

She smiles and meets me halfway. “Phoenix! You are so rude by leaving your girlfriend alone just to give me a hug.” Then she walks toward Samantha who’s shyly sauntering to us.

Mom doesn’t need an introduction. She launches into Samantha and squeezes her into a hug. “Good to finally meet you, Samantha. I heard a lot about you already. Does my son treat you well? Or should I teach him some lessons because I can still spank his butt,” Mom jokes while Samantha hasn’t found a word to say, but I can see the amazement in her eyes.

She clears her throat, “Pleasure is mine, Mrs. Williams. Your son just treats me alright if I won’t count him being persistent and cocky. Otherwise, I can’t complain. Thanks for having me for your family lunch!”

“Now you can finally talk, Samantha? Thought you lost your voice,” I tease her.

“Leave Samantha alone, Phoenix. She’s mine at this time. You had enough of her last night,” Mom says.

A flush creeps across Samantha’s face.

“Mom is right, brother. You left us so early last night.” Hawk marches with Izzy to our table.

“She was drunk, and you have no idea what she’s capable of doing when she gets drunk,” I respond.

“Do tell me, Phoenix. What is she going to do if she gets drunk?” Hawk waggles his eyebrows.

I roll my eyes. “I’m not telling you, asswipe.”

“I called him hot tease when I was drunk,” Samantha says shyly.

“And was he, Sam?” my brother asks.

“Not much.” She looks at me while wrinkling her nose.

“Oh, dear,” Mom says, amused.

“Ouch, brother.” Hawk fakes his flinch.

“Tell me about your family, honey,” Mom asks her, and I forgot to tell them about Samantha’s father. The last thing I want is to make her feel uncomfortable.

“My mom works as a nurse, and my dad was working as a bank clerk at the local bank in town before he passed away,” she says casually.

“Sweetheart, I’m so sorry. I have no idea,” Mom apologizes and squeezes her hand.

“It’s okay, Mrs. Williams. That was six years ago. He died in a car accident. A witness said that his car hit a tree when he tried avoiding a man crossing the street,” Samantha replies.

My body turns into a stone-cold, and I think I gasp while my mind is completely blank. My heart stops beating, then pounds wildly in my chest. I even forget how to breathe while I am staring at her with wide eyes.

“Oh, dear. I’m sorry, Sam. You’re probably aware of what happened to their dad, aren’t you?” Mom says sympathetically.

“I’m sorry for your loss too, Mrs. Williams.” She squeezes mom’s hand back.

“I considered him dead the moment I left that place. We never talked again. We only reached out through our lawyers even until our divorce has been finalized,” Mom answers truthfully.

My heart breaks for Mom, but she seems happier than before.

“I was even surprised he did not remarry when all I heard was he has mistresses everywhere. Let’s not talk about those tragic memories, dear,” Mom finishes, and My girlfriend nods and smiles at Mom.

Hawk is stealing glances at me a few times, but I don’t mind him as I feel my throat is clogging with a shocking revelation of Samantha’s father’s tragic death.

I grab a glass of cold water with my sweaty hand and take a gulp. I blink and startle at the hand squeezing my thigh.

“You okay, Phoenix?” Samantha’s worried voice makes me swallow hard.

Nodding, I smile tightly. “Yeah, I’m okay.” My voice came out shaky and low.

“How did you two meet?” Izzy asks suddenly, breaking the tension inside me.

“I’ll tell you, honey,” Hawk cuts her off. “They met in a parking lot.”

“What?” Hawk asks when he sees me rolling my eyes.

“That’s right, we met in a parking lot, then after a few days I met him again only to find out he is the boss of my boss,” Samantha answers proudly.

“And you burned me with coffee.”

They gasp in unison.

“Oh, it wasn’t that hot!” Sam says amicably, gripping my arm.

“Maybe because I’m way too hotter than that coffee.”

They laugh in unison while Sam shakes to control herself from laughing loudly.

“Wait. You work with Phoenix?’ Izzy asks her.

“I waitress as a part-time in his coffee shop, but I don’t know he’s the new owner before I met him,” She explains, making Izzy giggles, and Mom’s smile is so delightful.

I can’t help but smile as I recall that incident.

“Oh, my God! That’s so romantic,” Izzy says with dreamy eyes while her husband is snorting.

“Come on, Hawk. That’s romantic than how we met.” She hits her husband’s arm playfully.

“Ours was way more romantic than them,” Hawk banters back.

Izzy rolls her eyes, “Where is the romantic there when you set everything up? It wasn’t real.”

“Don’t tell me you don’t like it, honey, because you wouldn’t be my wife if you didn’t fall for it.”

Our eyes are all focused on both of them.

“But that was cliché though.”

Samantha looks so amused at them bantering together.

She looks so gorgeous—her smile widens and eyes are twinkling.

My heart flutters the longer I stare at her. I know that now that I’m so badly falling hard for her.

“But you love me, Izzy.” Hawk pouted his lips.

“More than anything, my love.” Izzy pecks her husband’s lips.

Samantha giggles with Mom.

I groan causing Hawk to grin like an idiot.

“What, brother? Jealous much?”

“I’m not anymore, you, whipped!”

Suddenly, I feel something unsettled in the pit of my stomach. I excuse myself from them and kiss Samantha’s head.

I wash my face with cold water, then squeeze my eyes shut, and blow a huge breath. I startle when I see Hawk's image appears in the mirror. I don't know how he gets in here, but I know he wants to ask me something.

"What was that all about, brother?"

My brows furrow. "What are you talking about?"

"Do you think I did not notice your reaction?"

"And what was my reaction?"

"I've known you well if something is bothering you, brother. So, tell me now because you knew me that I'm not going to let it go." He crosses his arms over his chest, waiting for my answer.

"There is nothing to talk about, Hawk. Just drop it already, and you know me that I never kept secrets from you."

"I won't drop it when it concerns you, Phoenix. I'm affected as you are when there is something bothering in that brain of yours."

I take a huge breath and face him. "We will talk about it, but not here in this restroom and definitely not in front of them."

I give up because I know he won't stop, and I still have to tell him because it's been bothering me for a while now.

Hawk has been there for me since I can remember, and he is not just my brother, but he is also my best friend.

"You're lucky that she likes you a lot, Phoenix. Don't you ever hurt her because someone like Sam will only come to your life once, so take the opportunity to prove what you really feel inside." Hawk points to my chest.

"I know, Hawk, and you have no idea how much she means so much to me." He gives me a bear hug and pats my back. "Welcome to the club!"

I furrow my brows. "I'm not married yet, pussy-whipped!"

"I know, and that's our club!" he guffaws.

"What?"

He laughs again, and I can't help but join him.

"Welcome to the pussy-whipped club, asshole!"

I shake my head. “You’re insane!”

“You too, brother!”

“We better get out.”

“What took the both of you so long?” Izzy asks.

“Honey, Phoenix got constipation.”

I grimace and I’m about to say something when Mom interrupts.

“Hawk, don’t say inappropriate like that in the restaurant.”

“And why not? There isn’t a law against talking about constipation in the restaurant,” Hawk argues with a smile on his face.

We burst out laughing, even Mom can’t help it. Sam looks so amused at my brother—her mouth slightly open with a smile on her face, and wide eyes as she shakes her head repeatedly.

I really miss having fun like this with my family, and now we have a new family member. My heart just melts.

“Hawk, you know what I mean.”

“What do you exactly mean, Mom?” Hawk doesn’t just want to drop it.

“Just drop it, son. Sam, forgive my son for being so rude.”

Sam still smiling and looks at mom. “I think I should get used to it.”

I bite my lip because that’s the best thing I’ve ever heard.

Hawk whistles and touches his chest dramatically.

Mom smiles back at her while Izzy squeezes Samantha’s hand wearing a sweet smile on her face.

I can’t form a word. My brain is clouding with so much happiness.

“You love me already, Sam? I know it, sweetheart, and I love you too.” My brother stands up and gives her a quick hug.

“Mom, you can ride with us,” I suggest after Hawk volunteers to pay the bill.

“I have driver, Phoenix,” Mom replies.

“Since when?” I ask, furrowing my brows.

“You didn’t tell him yet?” Hawk interferes.

“Tell me what?” I look at them back and forth.

“She has a driver two months ago, brother.”

“And I don’t know anything about it? I can help the paycheck, mom since Hawk takes care much of everything.”

“Don’t bother, Phoenix.”

“And why not?”

“I’m not paying the driver. He’s Mike’s,” Mom replies.

“And who’s Mike? Why is he giving you a driver? Wait. Mike? Mike King?” Mom nods slowly, a tinge of pink creeps across her face.

“Yes, they’re dating for months,” Hawks answers.

“And you have no plan on telling me about it? Not even today?” I ask with a little annoyance.

“Honey, today is your day with Sam. I’m planning on telling you when I come to visit you,” Mom says softly.

“Then why aren’t you at the party last night?”

“I’m avoiding the media, and I don’t want you to find it out from them either. I’m sorry, Phoenix. I don’t want you to find out this way.”

I grab her hands. “Don’t apologize. Is he treating you well? Does Abby know about her dad dating you?” She smiles that I’ve never seen it for a long time. I don’t need an answer to that. Actions speak louder than words.

I’ve known Mike since we were kids, and the family got closer together since my cousin Seb married Abby, the heiress of King.

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“You have a beautiful family, Phoenix. I like your mom, Hawk, and Izzy. They are such great people.”

“How about me, princess. Do you like me too?” I ask her even though I know the answer. I still want to hear it from her.

She cups my face and kisses me as if her life depends on it. I grab her waist to press her against me while we kiss, and I am already hard for her.

“You’re my hot tease,” she says into our mouth.

Our kiss is interrupted when the elevator swings open.

“That was hot,” she whispers beside me.

“Never been kissed inside the elevator, princess?” I whisper back.

She shakes her head.

“Whatever you want to do in your life, just write them all down on your bucket list, and we will do them together.”

She looks at me instantly. “Really?”

“Yes.”

She cups my face and kisses me with a loud moan, then someone clears a throat in front of us. She mutters sorry, then bites her lower lip to hold her laughter.

I grip her waist to get closer to me, kiss the side of her head.

“What is your greatest fear, Phoenix?” she asks that freezes my brain.

I swallow hard before look at her in the eyes. “Losing you is my greatest fear, Samantha.”

“You will not gonna lose me, Get ready to be fed up because I’m planning on staying with you longer than you ever think,” she says with confidence.

I grab her waist, press her against the wall, and crush my lips on hers. She instantly kisses me back and grabs the back of my neck to deepen the kiss. She starts shrugging off my clothes while I’m busy kissing her like crazy and moaning into our mouth—the intensity of our kiss vibrates into my cock. She also strips off her clothes without my help.

We are both naked pressed against the wall, but it’s not enough for me. Our body heat turns into a wildfire.

I grab her ass and poise my cock in her warm and wet folds.

She wraps her legs around my waist instantly as I thrust deeply in her warm and tight pussy. I can’t avoid my limbs from shaking from the pressure building in my aching balls. I’m dizzy and drunk with pleasures at the same time as I pound into her.

“Oh, God!” She bites her lip, but her moan is already slipping from her mouth.

I capture her tit with my mouth and suck it, and she’s just so sweet. I lightly tug her nipple between my teeth, and she rewards me by arching her back and pushing her naked chest to give me more access.

I thrust into her stronger and harder than the wall shakes against us. She whimpers, and I'm enticed with her response.

The feelings are so intense and overwhelming, and it's getting stronger every time we are together like this.

I can't just get enough of her.

She feels like fucking heaven on earth.

"So fucking good, Samantha!" I suck her neck that might draw blood. She moans and whimpers brokenly as I continue nipping the sensitive skin of her neck while I thrust my greedy cock inside of her more.

I know she's closer to her orgasm, and I'm going to explode anytime sooner, but I put all my strength to prolong it because I always think of pleasure than mine.

I thrust into her wilder and may be rougher, but she's squeezing my cock in response that makes me losing my own goddamn mind.

I hardly care about the shaking wall against us. My senses narrow, and I'm wicked with delights.

My thoughts scatter. I can't hold any longer.

"Come with me, my love," I growl between panting.

She meets my thrust and grabs my hair to kiss me fiercely and fuck my mouth with her tongue.

So fucking hot! This side of Samantha is a fucking turn on.

One hard thrust and she shudders and screams my name into my mouth, and drapes her body on me.

We come together.

I press our body against the wall because I will probably collapse with her to the floor after our intense orgasms.

Chapter 20

PHOENIX

My mind goes back to the lunch I spent with my family. I can't help but think about how Samantha's dad died. What if? My stomach twists, and the longer I think about it, the more I feel I want to throw up.

"Penny for the thoughts?"

I look at her who's lying in my arms after our wall-banging. I break into a grin. "Just thinking about the wall that almost collapsed. It actually shook." She giggles. "And that's what you're thinking all this time?"

I push the thought back into my head. "What else would I thought about, princess?"

I really don't want to lie to her about what is bothering me because I hate being lied to, as well, but that night accident keeps flashing back to me. I still remember the face of that man when the EMT tried to take him out of the wrecked car.

"I don't wanna go back home yet, but I have classes and I have to attend them to graduate," she says while tracing her fingers on my chest.

"Have you decided yet?"

"About what?" She leans her elbows on the bed then looks at me.

"Princess, about moving in. You may have replaced your bed, but I still did not change my mind."

She pecks my lips then lies back on my shoulder. "We are still in New York, Phoenix."

"Just tell me already that you don't wanna move in with me, and it's too fast, or too early shit like that, princess."

She releases an exasperated sigh. "It's not like that, but—"

"But what?"

"Okay, fine. I think it's too early, and what if it doesn't work?"

"How will we know if we don't wanna try, Samantha? You gave us chance as friends, and we are still not killing each other, in fact, look at us, we are dating and starts our relationship, and so far, it's been great and one of the best things that ever happen in my life."

"I'll think about it."

"And you haven't thought about it? You're really planning on telling me no, aren't you?"

"Phoenix, what's in the after New York you don't get? You're so persistent and bossy. You always get what you want, don't you?" She sounds annoyed

"Fine, I'm sorry. But tell me honestly what's stopping you?"

"Can you just drop it!" She rolls her eyes. "A typical you."

"Tell me, Samantha."

"First, I think it's too early. We haven't been in a relationship for a month. Second, I have to tell Mom because I may be an adult, but I promised her that I will only move out if I get a job far from her, and that's after I graduate. Third, we are from two different worlds, you know what I mean? I work in your shop, so, technically you are still my boss."

"Then I will have to fire you if that what's stopping you from moving in with me," I say half-jokingly.

"You can't fire me because I don't wanna move in with you, Phoenix. That's unfair!" She glares at me.

"Who said I can't? You're fired!" I say and look at her intently.

Her eyes widen, and her mouth hangs open. I raise my brow to challenge her, but she sits straight on the bed and covers her chest with the sheet.

She clears her throat. "Okay. Then, I'm breaking up with you."

My heart literally stops beating. My jaw drops as I stare at her in disbelief.

She stands up from the bed, takes the sheet with her, and tucks it under her arms. When she starts opening the closet, it alarms me.

She's fucking serious!

She just broke up with me, and now, she's leaving. I don't have any idea that her job means so much to her. Or is it because of her mom?

"Princess, what are you doing?" I ask quickly. My stomach feels heavy, and my heart crushes and bleeds to the thought that she's leaving me that easy.

I stand up from the bed and head toward her. She stops and just looks at the opened closet. She doesn't say anything. I hug her from behind and press my nose against her neck. I inhale her sweet scent. She wraps her arms on my arms, running her palm over my skin.

"I shouldn't have said that. I Shouldn't—"

I hush her, "It's my fault, princess. Forgive me. I don't have any idea that your work there means so much to you. I should have thought about your mom before firing you. I just want you to be with me, all to myself. It's selfish I know, but you make me so incredibly happy. You give me everything I thought I never wanted. I-I—" I groan when my phone rings.

"Aren't you going to answer that?" she finally says, but I can still hear the hint of sadness in her voice, and it's because of my stubbornness and stupidity.

"I'm not gonna answer that, and I don't care whoever calls. I wanna apologize to you first."

She loosens my arms and turns to face me.

I can see clearly the sadness in her eyes, and it's killing me. I open my mouth to say something. It affects me so much that my brain stops processing, and my heart aches—that's how much she means to me.

"We'll talk later, Phoenix. Go take your phone and answer the call. It could be an emergency."

I shake my head stubbornly.

She rubs her hands on my arms, then cups my face and tiptoes to press her lips against mine. I instantly close my eyes and wrap my arms around her to pull her closer to me. I apologize and boost all my feelings into my kiss. I want to show her how sincerely sorry I am.

"I'm also sorry that I overreacted. Can I take it back?"

I lift her chin when she doesn't meet my gaze. "You should because I didn't agree to that, so that's invalid."

She scowls. Shit!

"You don't have to agree if I broke up with you if I say it, that means whether you like it or not, we still broke u! Why I even explaining this to you? Because I know you know it."

I smile. "Well for your information, Samantha Lorraine, ours is different. We both have to agree for break up, otherwise, it's not valid."

She narrows her eyes at me. "Phoenix, we are not married. We are not getting an annulment or divorce for both parties to agree, and I didn't sign a written paper on that."

"Then I guess we should sign, right?" I tease her.

"You're impossible!"

"Are we good?"

"Like you'll agree if we are not." She rolls her eyes.

She tries hard to hide her smile, but it finally breaks.

“Good! Because I’ll sue you if you won’t.”

She shakes her head and shuts the closet’s door close. “What did I get into?”

“I heard that.”

“I know. Now, go and check your phone, Phoenix. We need to pack up. We have a flight to catch in six hours.”

A loud bang on the door interrupts us causing us to exchange a look.

“I’ll get the door, wear something, Princess,” I tell her while I start wearing my boxers.

She picks up her clothes and walks to the bathroom. Knock continues with the voice of my brother this time. What he wants that he has to come all the way here?

“What took you so long to open the door? Why aren’t you answering your phone? You should throw it to the window, man, if there is no more use of it.” He glares at me.

“And what’s got your panties in a wad?” I open the door wider to let him get inside.

“Wear clothes. Where is Sam? We need to go to the hospital.”

I freeze midway from picking up my clothes scattered on the floor.

“What hospital?” I furrow my brows.

“Mom had chest pain. Mike brought her to the hospital. I’ll explain later.”

I squeeze my eyes shut and rub my face with hands.

“Is she okay?” My voice turns to whisper.

“Just get dress.”

We ride to the hospital in Hawk’s car with his wife. Samantha keeps saying she will be fine because she sees the worry on my face. I can’t even join them as they talk throughout the ride.

I love my mother so much, and I don’t want her to suffer that’s why we make sure she has everything she needs.

I slow my walk when I notice everyone is around. Samantha looks up at me and squeezes our intertwined hands. I swallow and nod at her.

“Thank, God, you’re here!” Abby marches toward us. She pecks Hawk and moves to Izzy and does the same.

“Phoenix, Anna will be fine.” She comes and pecks me then moves to Samantha. Sam grips my hand as her reassurance.

“Sam, good to see you again,” Abby says and kisses her.

We walk toward the crowd—the Williams, Hughes, and King are around. Hawk is first to ask, “How’s mom, Abby? And where is your dad?”

“We don’t have news yet. Dad is talking with the head of the cardiologist in the office right now. Anna is still under sedation,” Abby explains, and it terrifies me even more.

“What really happened to her?”

“Mike proposed to her, and she was overwhelmed. Her blood pressure shot up, then she had chest pain.”

“Didn’t she take her medicines on time?”

“The last appointment she had, her blood pressure was normal, and she told the doctor to hold it for sometimes,” Hawk explains.

“And she didn’t monitor it,” I deadpan. Samantha rubs my back.

I am restless while we are in the waiting area. I take a few deep breaths and rub my face, but it doesn’t help me a bit. I lean my elbows to my knees while I am scared shitless.

Is Mike really marrying Mom?

“Your mom will be okay, Phoenix?” I face my girlfriend who sits beside me.

“She should be.” I press my lips into hers.

Someone clears the throat. It was Hawk who went to check Mike. Now, they come back together.

“How’s Mom?” I stand up. Mike gives me a hug.

“Your mom will be okay. Ben said he’s going to revise her treatment. She was just overwhelmed.”

“Yeah, I heard that you proposed.”

He smiles and nods.

“Can I see her now?”

“Not until tomorrow. That’s what Ben advised, and we have to follow it. Your mom’s sedated anyway.”

“We’ll come back tomorrow.” Seb stands up and walks to his father-in-law.

“You two can go home, and the two of you.” Mike points to Seb and Abby and to the twin—my cousins; Patrick and Trixie.

“Can we at least take a glimpse at her?” Abby asks.

“Yeah, we can pass by her room,” Hawk answers.

“Let’s go.” Patrick stands up, and Trixie follows.

“How about the two of you?” Trixie asks, looking at me and Sam.

“We’ll see her later.”

The twin left with Seb and Abby after saying their goodbyes to us.

“We have a flight to catch up later, Hawk,” I inform.

“Phoenix, I can go back, and you should stay here and be with your mom,” Samantha suggests.

“No, Samantha,” I disagree. “I’m not letting you go back alone. I will come back as soon as I send you home safe.”

“Why do you have to go back sooner, Sam?” Mike asks.

“I have classes to attend. I really want to stay longer for Mrs.—I mean for Anna,” Sam explains, smiling tightly at us.

“Can’t you at least extend one day?” Izzy asks.

“Guys, Phoenix stays here with his mom. I wish I can stay longer, but I also have work.” She looks at me and grabs my hand.

“I’ll give a call to the captain to send you home, Sam,” Mike informs.

“Oh, No! Mr. King, please, don’t bother. We booked a flight.”

“Don’t discuss with me, young woman, and call me Mike. If you want Phoenix to sleep well tonight, then you have to let the jet send you home.”

Hawk chuckles, and I have to elbow him because Samantha is going to shield behind me from shyness.

She gives me a what-should-i-do look? I shrug because I want her to stay with me, or to send her myself.

“Thank you, Mike! You really don’t have to bother though,” Samantha says shyly.

“You’re welcome, princess.”

Her eyes almost pop out from each socket while Hawk chuckles with Mike.

“Let’s go and see your mom, boys,” Mike tells us “I’ll stay here for a while.”

“Let me send Samantha to the airport, and I’ll be back as soon as I can,” I announce.

“Take as much time as you want as long as you won’t let my captain wait for her that can delay the flight,” Mike says.

I rub the back of my neck, grinning while Samantha sinks in my arms.

“Go ahead and see your mom, Phoenix. I’m hoping to see you soon, Sam.” Izzy says sadly.

“We’ll come back very soon, Izzy. Or you can always visit us there. It’s only a two-hour flight,” Samantha squeezes Izzy’s hand.

“I’d definitely visit there, right, love?” Izzy looks at her husband to confirm.

He nods and smiles at Sam. “Of course.”

After taking a glimpse of Mom lying in her hospital bed, we leave with Mike’s driver who sends us back to the hotel.

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After we pack in silence, I place her travel bag beside the door.

She’s still busy tossing her toiletries to her handbag. I lean against the wall where I pressed her while we fled to seventh heaven.

“I really don’t want you to go, princess,” I tell her honestly, hoping she will change her mind.

She stops packing and saunters toward me. I can see that she’s also sad about going back by her herself. “You’re gonna be with me soon when your mom is released from the hospital, right?” she asks, cupping my face.

My heart sinks as I lean my forehead into hers. “Yes, but I want to send you there by myself.”

She kisses, and I release a sigh into our mouth. She deepens her kiss. I grab her waist and wraps my arms around her. I want to feel every inch of her. I don’t want this to end because in a few hours she is going to be hundreds of miles away from me. She slips her tongue in my mouth as soon as I open for her.

I moan, and my body vibrates with needs, desires, and even longing because I am definitely going to miss her every second of being far away from her.

My cock instantly hardens in my jeans and silently begging for her.

She bites my lower lip. God! This woman can kiss and makes me crazy. What am I gonna do without her by my side?

“I’ll be waiting for you, Phoenix, and be a good boy here, can you do that for me?” Samantha whispers breathlessly.

“I will always be a good boy for you, princess. I’m only a bad boy when you’re around.” I grin, but deep inside I am literally bleeding.

“Let’s go.”

I take a huge breath. “Let’s go.”

I send her to the private airport of King’s. I kiss her senseless, but it’s not enough, and I can’t just let her go until the captain himself asks me to let go of her.

I don’t leave until the jet soars up high enough that I can’t see it any longer. Feeling my energy has been out from me, I get inside the black sedan waiting.

“To the Hospital. Howard.”

I walk out of the car after thanking Howard. The hospital parking area is huge, and we parked far from the entrance as per hospital policies.

A familiar voice calls my name that stops me to halt.

Chapter 21

SAM

I call mom as soon as I land. Mike's jet is luxurious and I am pampered by the attendant even just for two hours. I sit on one of the adjustable spacious plush chairs.

The jet has cozy leather couches, and of course, a modern and spacious bathroom, and a lot bigger than the bathroom in my house. I wish I have more than two-hour flight because I'd love to avail of one of the cabins and the master suite.

As soon as I step down the jet's stairways, I feel empty. I missed Phoenix, but I have to let him stay with his mom. I don't want to be selfish to let him come with me when I know he needs to be there.

"Sam!" Mom yells my name, carrying a placard with my name written in a black marker.

I roll my eyes because I can't believe she does that.

"Hey, mom. You have time to do that." I kiss her cheek.

"Have a safe way home, Ms. Anderson," Phil says who helps me with my luggage to Mom's car compartment.

"Thank you, Phil! Have a safe flight back."

He nods with courtesy and to Mom, then walks back inside the airport.

"Wow! Who's that?" Mom looks at Phil.

"He works for Mike."

"And who's Mike, and where is Phoenix? Why he doesn't come back with you?" She asks again, searching for Phoenix.

"If you think I fought with Phoenix, don't go there. His mom is admitted to the hospital, and he has to stay there for a while with his brother, Hawk. And Mike is his mom's fiancé."

"Oh, sweetie. Is she okay?" She drives us out of the airport parking area.

"She's okay. She is sedated when we left the hospital." I feel sad for his mother, but the fact that Mike is a billionaire, I know she's in good hands.

"Did they treat you well, Sam?"

“Yes, mom. They’re really nice people despite that they come from the money, I feel like I’ve known him for a while already.”

“I can see that when you have to come back to her alone.” I feel the sarcasm in my Mom’s voice.

My brow furrows. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“They can tell you to stay there while their mom is still in the hospital, you know?”

I sigh. “Mom, I’m the one who forced Phoenix to stay there. We stay in the five-star hotel for free, and I came back with a private jet of Mike King.”

“Wait.” Her eyes widen in surprise. “Did you come here by a private jet? That’s the reason why your flight is late? I thought you’re delayed.” Mom’s voice raises a bit.

“Yes. So how can I complain? Hawk and his wife even asked me to extend my stay, but I have to work and I have to attend my class.”

“Wow! King? Sounds familiar,” she hmms.

“Heard of King Hotel chains. They have one actually here.”

“Oh, yeah. I remember he’s a widow, and his daughter married to the playboy Hughes.”

I roll my eyes. Mom loves gossips. She must have read those in the tabloid.

“He was a playboy. I met him and Abby, his wife. He’s Phoenix and Hawk cousin from his mother's side. His Mom is Williams.”

“And what Phoenix is doing here if he is from a rich family?”

“They have a home here in Ravenwood. He moved to New York when his parents divorced.”

My phone rings. It’s Phoenix. I can’t help but smile. God, I missed him already.

“Hey, just landed a few minutes ago. How’s your mom?”

He sighs, and I can’t help but close my eyes because I can imagine the sadness in his eyes. “She’s okay, but we can’t still talk to her until nine in the morning. Aren’t you going to ask how am I, princess?”

My smile spreads wider from my lips. “How’re ya doing, handsome?”

“Tell him I say hi,” Mom chuckles.

“Mom said Hi.”

"I heard that, beautiful. Tell her, I'll see her soon. I'll just make sure Mom is okay, then I'll be with you as soon as I can."

I bite my lower lip. "Can't wait to see you again, Phoenix."

I steal a glance at Mom, and she's smiling.

"Missed me that much, huh? What did you miss in me, Samantha? The wall-banging, or you, riding me?"

My cheeks burn, and the worse part is, Mom sees my reaction.

"I have to go, Phoenix. I'll call you as soon as we reach home."

"Why, princess? Am I on speaker?"

"No, but let's talk later, okay?"

He chuckles. "You're blushing, aren't you?"

"Yeah, kinda. Now, shut up!"

He barks to laughter.

God, I even missed his laugh. I can still feel the light sore as I press my thighs together. He's absolutely having fun to embarrass me beside my mom.

I can't help but think of what we did against the wall, and how I rode him in bed.

"Okay. I'll let you go for now. We have to continue this later. How about phone sex, sounds good to you?"

My eyes widen. "Phoenix, you're unbelievable!"

"It affects you, isn't it, princess?"

"Just stop it!" I grit my teeth in annoyance because he's right—it does affect me.

"Are you embarrass dirty talking with me while your mom is sitting next to you, Samantha?"

"Oh, thank God! Finally, you use your brain." I release an exasperated sigh.

He laughs again. "Okay, beautiful. Call you later."

Mom is still smiling after I hang up the call. "What?"

"What?" she asks me back innocently.

"Ugh! I know you heard it, mom. I'm sorry. Phoenix just likes to annoy me."

“Don’t apologize, sweetie. You’re an adult, and he’s your boyfriend. I’m just glad that both of you had fun in New York. I don’t need details because you both are adults. Just stay safe, and I don’t wanna be a young grandma.” Holy! I want to be an invisible right now because I can feel my ears are burning.

“Mom!”

“What? Don’t tell me you can keep your hands off of each other, and I doubt that you two haven’t had sex. And I didn’t buy that your bed was broken because you jump on it out of your excitement. Maybe you jumped, but you were not alone.” Mom smiles wickedly, and I want to escape from this situation at this instant.

“Oh, god! Kill me now! You are worse than Phoenix.”

“I can see that he’s serious with you, Sam. He’s a keeper. And I never saw you like this happy before and even while you were dating Tyler.”

“Thanks, I guess! That means a lot to me.” I squeeze her hand.

“You’re welcome, sweetie.”

I wear my apron lazily, suddenly feeling exhausted.

I didn’t catch a good sleep last night when Phoenix didn’t pick up my calls. I even left messages—he didn’t reply, but I saw them all seen.

I feel anxious—I can’t find a reason for him to ignore me. Is he mad at me? Why is he voiding me? Is his mom okay?

And we were okay during the call yesterday. So, what’s wrong?

I jump when someone wraps arms around me. I know it’s Amy because of her smell—a rose.

I turn to face her.

“What’s wrong? Who died?” Her brows furrow when she asks, holding my arms.

I shake head.

“Then, what’s wrong? Thought you had fun in New York with hot Phoenix.”

“Yeah, I had fun. His mom is admitted to the hospital, and he has to stay there for a while.”

Her eyes glint, then she nods slowly. “You missed his cock. You missed him inside you while he was saying “Oh, princess! Fuck! You feel so good! So fucking—” while she’s mimicking Phoenix voice, I cover her mouth instantly.

I let my eyes roam around the locker room to check if someone hears us. “Shut up, Amy! it’s not funny.”

She giggles and stops when she notices me not giggling with her, and I just looking down at my feet.

“Sam, seriously, what’s wrong?” She looks serious this time, and she scans my face.

I shrug because I don’t know if I am overthinking what’s going on, and it’s not even twenty-four hours for me to sulk, but it’s not a type of Phoenix not to keep his words—when he says he will call, he does it.

I tuck the strands of hair behind my ear. “We talked when Mom picked me up from the airport yesterday. He said he will call me back, but he didn’t. I sent him texts, he didn’t reply, but I saw them that he read them. Is he avoiding me?”

Her shoulders droop. “Just be patient okay? He will call you, and he must be stuck with his mother.”

“Thanks, Amy,” I say silently.

She smiles tightly. “Let’s get to work before Big D comes and starts preaching us.”

The whole shift helps me divert my attention away from Phoenix. Still no words from him—no missed calls, and neither a single text. Amy asks me to go home with her, but I refuse because I don’t think I am a help to her right now.

I go home and sleep, but I make sure that my phone is set in full volume on my nightstand. I send a text to Phoenix before I close my eyes.

Three days have passed, and I cried to sleep every night, and still no words from Phoenix—no calls, no return call, no text, no email, no chat, and no reply. I think he’s done with me.

And it proves me one thing though—he’s heartless like what they say—he’s a playboy, and doesn’t change.

He used me just like how he used every woman before me.

What does he want from an ordinary girl like me, anyway? He can have every beautiful woman in his bed, well-experienced, and rich just like him.

I’m such an idiot to believe that he actually cares. He probably tells the same—those sweet words, and probably spends gifts just like he did to me, to every woman he spends in bed with.

I may have to believe that I have a bad taste in men, and I never learn from it.

It’s just, I care for him so much it hurts, and now he’s done with me.

He can just tell me the truth if all he wants is sex, and not by letting me think that there's something more—more than just sex, he made me believe and trusted him, and the stupid me has fallen for his tricks.

"Still no words from him?" Maya asks and gives me a sympathetic looked.

She knows what happened, and I happened to zone out a lot in the class and at the shop.

I shake my head and look up to hold the tears that threaten to fall from my eyes.

"Garrett tried to contact him, but it went to his voicemail."

I shrug. "I guess I should move on and forget his existence. I should resign, and I don't wanna work in his coffee shop or anything has connections to his name"

Maya's eyes widen. "Girl, it's only less than a week. Don't rush to that decision, Sam. He'll come around."

"I care about him, and I'm such an idiot to even believe that we have connections. He just used me while he was here, and now he's back, he's probably with another woman." My tears finally fall from my eyes, and I wipe them away.

Maya hugs me and rubs my back. "This is our fault, Sam. I'm so sorry. I thought he liked you. The way he looked at you, it was so magical. I thought he changed because he never dated when he was in New York, then he dated you, so I thought he saw something in you."

"I'll be okay, Maya, and don't blame yourself. No one has to be blamed other than myself because I let myself believe that he cared for me." I say and try to make her laugh.

"He's just probably busy with his mother. Give him a benefit of the doubt. We'll see after a week," Maya says.

"But can't he at least leave me a single blank text to let me know that he's okay? Nowadays, people can't leave without their phones, social media, emails, and it's impossible he has not noticed my messages!" I shake my head, then I continue, "I'm done with him, Maya. If he really cares about me like how he always told me, then he should at least think that I have feelings, and he is hurting me."

I wash my face in the sink and check myself in the bathroom mirror.

"You can go ahead. I'll follow when I calm a bit." I face Maya.

When Maya leaves, I check my phone one last time. Nothing. I take a huge breath and walk out of the bathroom.

My brain can't absorb whatever the professor is talking in front of the room. My mind always goes back to how we spent time together. We had a great time—it was almost perfect. The sex was

amazing—phenomenal. What has gone wrong? I don't know, and I don't wanna think about it anymore. I'm done!

I almost bump into Tyler in the hallway.

He furrows his brows when he notices me.

I glare at him and walk away.

When he calls my name, I stop and face him. "What do you want, Tyler?"

He focuses his gaze into my eyes. "Are you okay, Sam?"

"Why do you care?" I snap

"I've never seen you like that in a long time, Sam. You may hate me, but I still care about you. We were friends once, and I know you more than you know." He's right, he knows me well because we were friends since high school before we started dating.

I feel bad for snapping at him because he seems sincere. "I'm fine."

"You're not, Sam. We can talk over a coffee, you know. But not at your boyfriend's coffee shop."

"No, thanks! He warned you to stay away from me. And why are you still talking to me right now?"

"Thought you two broke up," he says.

I glare at him. "What makes you think I broke up with him?"

"We'll talk about this over a coffee, Sam. Come on, for old time sake."

I look at him suspiciously, but he looks sincere. "Tell me why should I go with you?"

"Because you need someone like me who hates your ex."

"He isn't my ex. We never broke-up!" I hiss in anger.

"Then why he was with Gabbie Cox at the birthday party of Seb Hughes' daughter last night?"

Chapter 22

PHOENIX

Three days ago...

I growl in irritation when I hear her calling my name behind me.

How does she even know that I'm here in New York? I think I make it clear for her that I have nothing to do with her anymore, and she's never going to have me back.

I face her, clenching my jaw to avoid swearing at her where everyone around can hear it.

"Are you stalking me now, Gabrielle?"

Of course, she doesn't care how angry I am. She's a bitch for a reason—an insensitive and selfish bitch!

She cups my face and kisses my lips so loudly.

I cringe. I can taste the lipstick on my lips, but she doesn't taste like my princess. I grab her on her arms and push her away from me. I'm done being nice.

This woman won't just stop ruining my life—she's not satisfied once, she wants to ruin me again. I did everything for her—I was a loyal boyfriend, never cheated, but look at what she did to me, and now the evil spawn is back.

"What the fuck was that, Gabrielle? Are you insane? You can't just kiss me like that. I have a girlfriend and for fuck's sake, so stay the fuck away from me!" My anger creeps in my voice.

"Isn't Sandra back to her den? What are you afraid of? That she might leave you? I'm pretty sure it'll be sooner, Alex," she says unhurriedly, then pouts and crosses her arms over her chest.

"I have no time for your delusions, Gabrielle!" I grit my teeth and turn my face away from her, but she grabs my arm and digs her fingernails into my arm.

She's testing my temper, and I'm losing it.

"What the fuck do you want from me? Say it now because I will never give you another chance after tonight!" I pull my arm stronger, and it almost loses her balance, but I never feel sorry for that.

I narrow my eyes, but she just flips her hair over her shoulder and shows me her manicured fingers. Then takes strands of her hair and twists it as if she has all the time in the world.

"Remember I told you that I'm gonna have you back?" she asks, and I don't give her attention other than looking at her blankly

She continues, "I mean it, Alex. I have something to use against you.

Jesus, this woman is unbelievable! I was so naive and blind. How did I even fall for her and suffer for her cheating?

I try hard to look unaffected, but my pulse is already throbbing in my neck. My nose is flaring and I can feel my blood boiling in my veins. "And what is that, Gabrielle? Make sure it is good enough to give you a second of my time."

She walks towards me, but I take a few steps back.

"Don't you dare come close to me!" I beckon to warn her.

"You will take me back, whether you like it or not. And you will break up with her and forget about her for good—"

I cut her off. "Or what? You will shoot me in the head?" Squinting my eyes while pointing my finger to my head. "You'll spread our sex video all over the internet?"

"I don't have to do that to humiliate myself, Alex. I have better than that. And we don't have sex video in the first place. You should know me better before you threaten me that night," she says, lifting her chin up to intimidate me.

I can't help but think about what she has to blackmail me. I swallow the acid burning in my throat. "I don't have time to chit-chat with you. Time is up!" I clap my hands and walk away from her for good, but I can still hear the clacking of high heels echoing in the parking lot—Gabrielle is still following me.

"You will take me back, Alex!" she yells.

I wave my hand like I don't care, but her words affect me so much whether she has something to use against me or not—it pricks my skin and consumes my brain.

Hawk meets me halfway to Mom's room with his brows meet together.

I shove my hands in my jeans pocket because I still feel unease after I walk out from Gabrielle.

My curiosity is overriding my brain. What if she really has something to use against me? And what is it?

"Are you okay? You look like you can spit fire?" Hawk is looking at me studiously.

I sigh heavily before I answer, "I met Gabrielle in the parking lot. How does she know that I am here in New York and I am going to the hospital? It's not a coincidence," I tell him and I can clearly hear the weary in my voice.

"She can use her charmed to ask info about you, Phoenix. Don't worry if she will bother you again, let me handle it," Hawk answers dismissively, but I can see that somehow he is affected as I am.

"And how will you handle it? She's even going to blackmail me. She said she has something to use against me, Hawk," I swallow the thickness forming in my throat.

"And what is it? Did she tell you?" She was just bluffing, and stop overthinking about it," he scoffs.

"What if she really has?" I demand a response.

"Forget about it, brother." He waves his hand. "Let's see Mom again, then we can head home."

I nod and follow him at a slow pace.

"Are you still staying in the hotel?" he asks, side-glancing at me.

"Yeah. It's free, so why not take advantage of the King's hospitality," I chuckle.

"That's not what I mean, dumb!" he guffaws.

I look at him while he is watching Mom through the glass window of her room. Mom is still sleeping due to the effect of the sedative.

"What I mean is you being alone, pussy-whipped."

I know what he means, but I'm just trying to ignore his question because being away from Samantha is hard, and I feel empty.

My heart aches. I have to call her if I get back to the hotel. I missed her already. I wish I told her how I really feel for her, but I am just waiting for her to move in with me, then I tell her how much I care for her. And God, I'm so hard falling for her in just a short time.

"The coldest and the loneliest night I have to spend in the luxurious suite," I admit.

His face lights up but hasn't said a word.

"What?"

"Let's head home."

We go home in a separate car after talking to Mike for a few minutes. Howard sends me back to the hotel. I find out that he was Abby's driver before marrying Seb, then now he's driving mom.

Samantha arrives home safely. Thank, God! I know she's blushing too much sitting next to her mom when I mention how we spent our time in this very hotel room. Now, it feels empty and cold. I close my eyes after stripping my clothes off.

I open my eyes abruptly to the knock on my door. I rub my lazy eyes and move out of the bed. I drag my feet to the door without bother wearing anything but my boxers.

"Coming!" I yell. My voice is still groggy from sleepiness.

I open the door wider, and my eyes grow wide like the goddamn door.

I literally growl. "What the fuck?" My gravelly voice booms on the hotel floor.

"Good morning, handsome!" Gabrielle sings, grabbing my semi-erect cock, making me flinch.

She strides into my room without an invitation.

I grab her arm and grip it that can leave marks on her skin, but I don't fucking care.

"Get out of my hotel room before I call the security!" I warn her. I am sure my blotchy eyes are enough to scare her away. "Your choice!" I continue, clenching my jaw.

"You won't dare do that if I were you, Alex!" she yells back at me, tossing her clutch to the bed. She's annoyed at me.

I face her "Oh, I will do that, Gabrielle! If you still have a little respect for yourself, get the fuck out of my room, and out of my fucking life! I'm done with your pathetic bitchy attitude! I gave you enough of my time last night, and I've been very generous of that! Now, I won't give you my time again!" I yell back.

She's maybe a woman, but she's successful in getting on my nerves.

She places her hands on her hips and raises her perfect trimmed brows. "You will attend Seb's daughter's birthday party tomorrow. You will bring me as your date and introduce me to them as your new girlfriend," she orders me with all her confidence.

I laugh my ass loud until my tears are literally falling from my eyes.

She remains calm.

I wipe my tears away, lean against the closet, and cross my arms over my chest.

"You're delusional, Gabrielle! You're insane! A psycho! Do you take your meds regularly? Because I can tell you missed a few doses," I say snort and it's sarcastic enough for her to flinch.

"Do you think I'm joking?" She glares.

“Nope!” The p pops from my mouth. “You’re mentally ill! Now, get out because you will not get what you want, and you can’t manipulate and lie to me anymore like how you did to me before. I’ve learned enough from my mistakes when I was with you.”

“Do you think it was easy for me to lie to you? I love you, Alex! So much and it broke my heart when I found out that your dad was sleeping with my mom, and they were serious with each other.” Her voice shakes, but she’s a great manipulator.

“And we were not? That was why you cheated on me? For how fucking long? For the rest of our two-year relationship? Because our parents were fucking each other brains?” I shout. “Unbelievable!”

She slumps her ass down the bed and plays with her fingers. “It wasn’t like that, but I slept with him when I can’t bear the guilt anymore for keeping it from you,” she speaks quietly.

“But you carried the guilt pretty well when you cheated on me,” I mock her.

“I want to tell you pretty badly, but every time we spent time together, I forgot everything I wanted to say.”

I laugh louder. “Just shut the fuck up! Because it doesn’t change a thing. Why do you come now to explain when I’m not interested in you anymore? Why didn’t you even bother explaining to me when I was in the hospital alone?”

She stays quiet.

I continue, “Bearing the pain from my injury and from the pain of my broken heart from you, and from the pain of having a broken family because of your mother!”

She doesn’t say anything because she knows I am right.

“You didn’t come back that time because you were busy fucking that puck boy, and you thought I have no chance to be a superstar football player that you always wanted me to be, that you could make yourself proud, that you were dating a superstar, isn’t it what you always wanted? Is it, Gabrielle? What happened to your puck buddy?”

“Now you showed up your ass to take me back because I’m loaded, and you can use me again? Did your mother ask you to take me again as well? But it’s too late because I found the person that I want to spend my time, my fortune, and my life. She fixed my broken heart that I didn’t think it was capable of loving again. I love her, and I’m gonna marry her,” I say proudly.

Her eyes widen. She stands up instantly and narrows her eyes at me. “You will not marry her! And you cannot marry her! You will end up with her at this very moment, or I will be the one to end it myself!” she yells, and she’s so furious like she’s growing horns.

Her eyes glimmer viciously. She's really a witch!

"You can't control me! You don't own me! Now, get the fuck out! I'm telling you one last time before I will dial the security!" I point my fingers to the door.

"You can't marry her, Alex! She will hurt you, loathe you! Curse you and worse kill you like how you did to her dad!" Her voice cracks at the end and her anger is soaring up high.

I freeze in my place to her last words because I know I heard it right. My heart stops beating at the momentum. I feel the color drained from my face, and I can feel the blood rushes up my brain. I blink rapidly and swallow hard a knot of grief.

"Don't you even know?" Her voice calms down a bit, but I don't have energy left to answer her. "That you are the reason why her dad had an accident because you ran away from me after what you found out that night?" she asks, and I can barely comprehend.

I slump myself down to the floor and lean my elbows on my knees. I cup my head with my hands. The sense of my nerves unravel.

I shake my head continually because my life is doom. It's over.

"You will break up with her now while you can still bear it before she will find out and break your heart instead." She wins!

She's fucking affecting me.

So, it's true like I've thought a thousand times the moment I found out about her dad and when and how he died. I am right after putting it two and two together. I was right after all.

She will hate me for the rest of her life. She will think that I used her to get into forgiving me by sleeping with her. She will never forgive me. I lost Samantha. I lost my Princess. I will lose her forever.

"I don't believe you! And I don't fucking care! You are lying, Gabrielle! Get the fuck out!" I yell with all I can ever do.

"Why don't you ask Dad who gave you back your phone that fell down from your own hand?"

I look up at her. I can barely see her through my blurry eyes. "You, bitch, get the fuck out!" My voice cracks at the end.

"Party, Alex! Or I will tell her myself," she warns, grabs her bag, and leaves me without looking back.

I shake to cry on the floor. My heartbroken once again—it crashes in my chest. I will carry the guilt and brokenness for the rest of my life.

I'm losing her, I can feel my chance slips through my fingers.

She will hate me, and will never forgive me. I ruined her family. I killed her dad, and now it's payback.

God is punishing me, and it's worse than hell.

PART II - Chasing Princess

Chapter 23

SAM

Three months Post-Phoenix…

“Babe, text me before you go down the lobby, okay?” Tyler says.

Yes, you hear it right. After seeing that photo of Phoenix with Gabrielle all over the gossips sites and tabloids, I don’t need an explanation. It was cleared that he cheated on me.

Amy, Maya, and Garrett tried hard to explain that I should hear it from Phoenix, himself, but it was obvious that they were back together.

I was expecting to see him at Garrett and Maya’s wedding, but he didn’t show up—he just sent a gift for them. I changed my phone number and I quitted my job at the coffee shop the same day I found out his betrayal.

We didn’t talk at all or bothered to contact each other in any way possible. That was it, after our night together in the hotel that night, it ended there. I am brokenhearted again.

Tyler proved that he was better than before. My friends, of course, didn’t take it easy, especially Mom. I understood them though because it was Tyler we were talking about—the guy who cheated me.

The man that they liked for me, who they thought was best for me, broke my heart instead.

After a month of wooing me, I took Tyler back.

As I was planning, we moved to New York last month, and he was very supportive of my decisions.

Mom was furious when I told her—she didn’t like Tyler and the idea of moving with him in the same apartment as we were obviously living in together.

We got the same job in New York. He works as an assistant at Finance Department at Rexwell Financial Holdings, and I got a job at Rowen and Gilbert Publishing as a junior assistant editor.

“I’ll text you. And you’ve been reminding me since we woke up.” I kiss his lips one last time and open the car door.

He holds my arm to stop me, and I stop and look at him.

“I love you, Sam,” he tells me, and I can see the sincerity in his eyes.

I use my killer smile. “I love you too, Ty.”

He let go of my arm and smiles back at me.

I start turning on my desktop when one of my officemates peeks from my cubicle.

“Did you hear the news?” Sandy whispers at me, tucking her auburn hair behind her ear. Her brown eyes are slightly growing big.

I crease my forehead. “What news?”

This office is too small not to pick up gossips. Even just your hair tangled with the wind, they think you have a quickie in your car on your way to work.

“Someone wants to buy the share of Mr. Gilbert since his son is not interested in the publishing business. Mr. Gilbert will go back to London after a few months,” she answers.

I raise my brows. “Mr. Gilbert loves this publishing like how he loves his own son. He won’t sell his share. Then Rowen and what?”

“Your right, but that’s what I heard. Anyway, I don’t really care as long as they keep our job, right?” She looks worried though.

I nod and smile tightly at her.

She sits back to her cubicle. I start my work and push back the thought of who’s the new co-owner of this publishing.

The last job I had has a new owner, and this time again? I shake away that thought.

I can’t lose this job, I just started working here last month, and I don’t have enough savings. I spent most of my savings in our new apartment. My car still in the shop. I can’t let Tyler spend his money on me.

I brew coffee in the latest coffee machine in our cafeteria. I drum my fingers on the countertop while waiting for the coffee. Someone clear a throat at my back.

“Ben, want a cup of coffee?” I offer.

Ben is cute—has a face and has a body like a ramp model, six-foot and one-inch tall and who always wears a three-piece suit.

“Yup. Thanks!” He moves closer to me.

”We’re planning on going to the newly opened bar at downtown tonight, wanna join us? Bring someone with you,” he says.

I can't remember the last time I went to a bar. "Can I call for a rain check?"

"Sure. I'll send you the address if you ever plan on going."

I smile back, and something pops up in my mind. "Can I bring my boyfriend?"

His eyes grow wide, and his mouth formed an O shape. He comes even closer to me, then Ben whispers, "Is he hot?"

My brows furrow. "Are you? Omigod!" I cover my mouth instantly.

"Oh, yeah!" he admits and playfully slaps my arm.

I inspect him from head to toe. If Amy is only here right now, she might try making him straight again because he's definitely a big loss to every single woman out there.

I turn off my desktop after updating the social media account for our upcoming events.

I'm done sending e-mails to our two new possible authors who I suggested them to my boss after reading their manuscripts; one of them was a rom-com, and the other was an urban fantasy.

I enter the elevator five minutes after sending a text to Tyler.

My phone buzzes in my bag.

"Ty!" I answer lively.

"Babe, I'm sorry. I was trying to call you an hour ago, but I couldn't just leave my boss," he says, sounding still busy.

It's ten minutes after five.

"Okay. So, what's the problem, Ty?" I ask quickly.

"I can't pick you up now, babe. I'm really sorry. I have to go with him to meet a new client. He doesn't usually ask me to come with him—"

I cut him off. "Ty, it's okay. I'll take a cab." I tell him with sincerity.

"Babe, order some food because I don't think I can join you for dinner."

I couldn't complain about how he treated me these past few months when we got back together. He was always thoughtful, caring, and loving.

Our relationship was near perfect. We never fought. We had a little discussion on how he watched TV with high volume while I was reading a book, but that was it—we ended up apologizing to each other and had make-up sex.

"Don't worry about me. And oh, since it's Friday, my office mate invited me for a few drinks, and it's been ages since I went out to a bar. So, if you can join us after your meeting, that would be fun."

"Babe, I will let you know if we wrap up early, okay? Go ahead and have some fun. I'm really a terrible boyfriend that I didn't even take you to grab some drinks."

I laugh. "Ty, you are not a terrible boyfriend. You've been amazing these few months. We went to dinner, watched movies many times, and I think our way of spending together is way different than other couples, but I've no complaints." I feel guilty for him because he's been good to me. So good.

"I'll take you to a bar next time. I promise, Sam."

I roll my eyes and smile widely. "Silly, you don't have to do that."

"I want to drink and dance with you, babe. So, you better be ready for it."

The night I spent with Phoenix flashes back like a slap in my face.

I thought that night was amazing, and we were both turned on, but we managed to control our urges despite how hard it was.

I wanted to kiss him pretty badly that night. Just his smell was dizzying me.

"Babe, you still there?"

I blink. "Yeah! I'm, um. I'm here just I'm at the elevator, and maybe I have bad reception?" Thank God I'm alone.

"Got to go, babe. I'll let you know if I can join you, okay? Enjoy, babe, and I love you."

"I love you, Ty!" My face falls for lying to him.

***

I call Sandy to pick me up since she's only a few blocks away from my apartment building. She's happy to hear that I can join them.

"Wow! You look hot!" Sandy says when I open the door for her.

"And you look blazing hot!" I say back. She's wearing a red tiny dress. Her straight auburn hair is perfect just below her chin, but I'm so jealous of her bronze skin.

"Let's go before I take you against your wall." Her words make me freeze.

The last time I did was with him, and it ended there.

"You have a boyfriend, Sandy, and you like cock and not a pussy."

She laughs. “I never thought of you’re a bold type.”

“Then you don’t know me well, missy,” I respond.

“I guess you’re right because you were always so quiet in the office.”

“Because it’s an office, duh!”

We walk to the front of the Night Stalker Club. Ben knows a bartender who works here. We start to fill our line a few steps away from the two bouncers at the front door when my phone buzzes.

“It’s Ben,” I tell Sandy.

“Ben?”

“Girl, give your phone to the bouncer when you get to the club.” I can hear the music over the phone. He must be at the club already.

“We are already here in front.” The call is cut off.

“What did he say?” Sandy asks me.

“The call is cut off,” I answer. The line doesn’t move.

A few minutes later, a bouncer walks toward us.

“Miss, can I see your ID?” he asks politely.

“Okay.” I fish out my ID from my purse.

“Follow me, please,” he says, and I exchange a look with Sandy.

“Did Ben send you?” Sandy asks out of curiosity.

He nods.

We follow him to the front door of the Club, and we are instantly approached by the noise of the music, the smell of booze, and the lights of a typical nightclub.

I have to swallow hard the lump forming in my throat because I really miss his club. Ben is already sitting in front of the bar, talking to the bartender.

I pat his shoulder.

“Hey! You look hot!”

I roll my eyes, then he stands up and kisses my cheek and does the same to Sandy.

“Meet, Brad. Brad, this is my office mates Sam and Sandy.”

Brad is around my age with the same built as Ben, with short blonde hair and dark eyes—almost black. He's wearing a black shirt and jeans with a black apron tied around his waist.

He extends his hand. "Nice to meet both of you. And wow! Sam and Sandy with Ben and Brad," he says with a laugh. We laugh together.

"What can I offer you drinks, ladies?"

"Surprise us, Brad," Sandy answers as we sit in two empty stools next to Ben.

"You're dating him?" I face Ben.

He laughs, I mean belly laugh. "Silly, he's my brother."

My eyes grow even bigger. "Sorry. I thought you two are, you know."

"We don't have a resemblance. I'm older than him, and we didn't come from the same mother."

"Oh, your stepbrother."

He nods. "But we are closer than stepbrother, and he accepts me as I am."

I nod slowly.

Brad places down our drinks to the counter.

I sip. "It's good. I'm not good at drinks, but this is really good," I tell him honestly.

"That's my specialty. Thanks, Sam." Brad replies.

"I like mine too. Thanks!" Sandy says.

"You're welcome! For you, Sandy, it's called Devil's blood because of its color—deep red, vodka, dry vermouth, crush olives juice, and raspberry juice. And for Sam is Phoenix's Princess," Brad explains.

I almost spit out and drop my drink. I almost shiver as if I've seen a ghost.

"Wow! What's with Sam?" Sandy asks.

Brad gives me a confused look and asks me. "You okay, Sam?"

I blink and nod at him. "Yeah." My voice becomes raspy.

"That's a mix of vodka, dry vermouth, olives juice, lemon strip, and cherry."

I can't listen and comprehend what he's saying because I am sure I heard him right, but this is impossible, right? This is just a coincidence. This can't be his drink! There are so many bars in New York, and Phoenix isn't the only one in this City.

He can't be here to drink.

I clear my throat again. "I'll use the restroom."

Brad raises his hand. "I'll let you use one of the VIP restrooms. It's way cleaner than the common one."

He sends me in front of the restroom and tells me he will wait, but I tell him that I can find my way back.

I look at myself in the mirror. My heart beats faster and bleeds over and over again in my chest every time I hear his name. It only tells me one thing—I'm not over him.

I close my eyes and breathe deeply to calm my tense nerves.

The door lightly creaks open. My head turns abruptly to see who comes in, and my jaw drops the moment I see a familiar face in front of me.

"Samantha?"

Chapter 24

PHOENIX

After I don't know how fucking long…

Life is a fucking bitch! Why if you may ask because my life is a bitch. And I fucked up pretty bad, but I don't fucking care anymore. It doesn't make any sense, I know.

My brother, cousins, and friends loathed me. Mom ignored me. I was sure my Princess was cursing me to death. Who won't? When I left them without a single word. But none of them understood why because none of them had guessed what I did was worse than the loathing they felt for me. None of them had guessed how I desperately needed to see just a glimpse of Samantha. No one else had guessed how deep the cut in my heart compared to my previous broken heart.

But I did it for her own good before I could hurt her more, and I knew I would one day. I had no choice but to end what we'd just started before the cut would get too deep.

Lucky me, I had been practicing to be numb years ago, and I was back to the old me, and so far, I had been pretty successful doing that.

But this time, I fail miserably. The pain is getting worse every day.

I couldn't think.

I couldn't breathe.

I couldn't eat.

And I barely live.

I've been living in agony and misery for three months. Thank, God the witch, herself left me when she found out I left that place for good, and I broke up with Samantha.

That was her main goal to let me live in a miserable life and again, she won.

My businesses are still doing good profits though; unlike me. What I do good is breaking my own heart.

I never went back there again after the show I put at Lizzy's Birthday Party.

Mom never talked to me again after her release from the hospital. I did attend her wedding with Mike, but people treated me like I was invisible as if Phoenix didn't exist anymore. And I couldn't forget the look on their faces that day—as if I was having a disgusting disease.

Hawk and Izzy didn't say a single word after Mom's wedding, and now I'm living all by myself as a loner in my own apartment.

This time, I am the one avoiding them like plagues.

I work at my office in my apartment, and I barely go outside if not for some groceries or to get myself drunk.

I receive a group text from Paul, inviting us to his club, and I've been there more than I could count for these past months, in fact, the bartender, Brad knew my drinks, and he named it after me.

I dress in a blue button-down shirt and black pants. I can't remember the last time I have a haircut and shave my growing beard.

Why bother when my woman won't see me anymore?

I even have to adjust my belt around my pants. I look at myself in the mirror for the first time in like forever.

My gray eyes look deep and swimming with misery with dark circles around them.

I rub my growing patchy beard and comb my growing hair with my fingers—it touches the collar of the shirt I'm wearing.

If Princess is only here, she probably suggests that I need a haircut. I missed her so fucking much it hurts to even breathe.

You look like shit, Phoenix! I ready myself to hear more of it.

"Phoenix, good to see you again, man," Paul greets me lively. "No happy birthday for me?" He laughs and gives me a hug.

"Happy Birthday, Paul! I'm not used to hearing a word happy anymore, but happy birthday, anyway." My voice is a little bit strange to my own ears.

"Your brother is already there. Get inside to Seb's VIP Lounge already, man. I'll be there in a sec."

I rub the back of my neck with my sweaty palm. My nerve pricks me and my second thought of running away is tingling my skin, but I'm already here, and it's Paul's birthday after all.

If they won't like me here, then I will just leave. Easy peasy.

"Wow! Look who finally gets out from his lair?" Patrick says exaggeratedly, and as always, he is overreacting.

"Thought your dead, man. Good to finally see you suffer too much from stupidity, brokenhearted, and dumbass. You look like shit!" Patrick starts his speech and as I expected.

One. I counted mentally.

“Good to see your healthy ass, Patrick.” I hug him back.

Everyone is around, Trixie, and a man I think his name is Mason, Abby, Rebecca, Seb, Izzy, and of course, my brother.

But nobody stands up to greet me which I expected that as well. They just give me a disgusted glare.

I clear my throat. “Look, I came here for Paul. I know all of you hate me, and I can’t blame you all because I also hate myself.” I run my hands through my hair nervously.

“It was a jerk move, but I have to do that. And I have my reasons before I can hurt her even more,” I say while looking at everyone’s eyes. “Do you think it was easy for me? Look at me, do I look happy? Did I move on? I fucking love her.” I gesture at myself. My voice starts to shake and raise., And they haven’t said a word.

“Until now,” I add silently.

“Well, move on already because she moved on to her ex,” Abby snaps.

My mouth hangs open. My heart stops beating and I think I might also hold my breath. I blink incomprehensibly that I might hear it wrong, but I know I heard it right. My heart might be broken, but my hearing works well.

“What are you expecting? That she will wait for you after you dumped her without a word? Good for her, she looks happy though,” Seb snorts.

“Don’t you know she’s here in New York with her boyfriend? She works here in a publishing house,” Izzy is next to say.

I bite my trembling lip stronger that stings, and I can taste blood in my tongue.

“Cousin or not, but I hate you for breaking her heart! She’s a keeper, and I like her a lot. I hate to say it, but good for you, dear cousin. You deserve worse than that,” says Trixie while shooting me a glare.

“Are there anyone of you want to say something more?” I ask, looking at them one by one.

My stomach flips. My heart aches, but what I’ve done is done, and I can’t take it back. It fucking hurts though, that she moved on, and the worse part is, to her fucking ex, who hurt her more than once.

My brother stands up and marches toward me without expressions on his face. The next thing I know, a fist hit my nose. I saw stars. I never see that coming.

I land to the ground with a thud, and my hand flies to my nose in reflexive response. It hurts like a bitch, but it's worse a billion times after hearing that she moved on to that asshole.

Everyone yelps and gasps. They must have not thought that Hawk is going to punch me. He grabs my shirt with his left hand and hovers over me.

"That's for fucking hurting Sam!" My brother's hissing voice echoes in my ears. Another punch to my left eye. "That's for Mom who's worried as hell." Another punch to my jaw and my teeth stutter. "And that's for me! Your family and friends, who you didn't even bother telling us when something is bothering you. You, fucking asshole!" Another punch to my jaw.

I can feel his anger is taking over him, but I deserve worse than his punches—for hurting them and for hurting Samantha.

"That's enough!" Izzy yells at Hawk's back.

Hawk finally releases me or like throwing me back to the floor. He then stands up, placing his hands on his hips. He's breathing heavily, clenching his jaw, and his nose is flaring with rage.

"That's not enough, honey. I still want to punch him until he has his mind back!" he growls while looking at his wife. "He's insane and stupid! He has a family, friends around, and Mom is worried sick, but he didn't fucking care," he adds.

"He shut us all out of from his pathetic life. He was happy when we gave him a silent treatment. He is out of his fucking mind to think that we're not worried for him!" Hawk shouts, glaring down at me.

Everyone goes silent and no one interrupts Hawk.

I'm still on the floor, supporting my body with my elbows while wiping my bloody face with my free hand. It fucking hurts, but I have to bear this because this is what I choose.

Paul grabs my arms to help me stand up from the floor. My face hurts like hell, but it doesn't bother me at all. I wipe the blood oozing from my nose and from my split lip.

I grab the tissue Paul offers me and wipe the blood from my nose.

Rebecca helps me wipe my face as she grabs wet tissues from her purse. I sit beside Rebecca after cleaning my busted face.

Everyone gives me a disapproving glare.

"Should I go?" I say silently while pressing a tissue to my split lower lip.

My brother glares at me even more. I stand up, but someone grabs my arm—it's Patrick.

“Start talking.” My brother stern voice breaks the silence.

“Talk about what?” I ask innocently.

He groans and presses his lips into a thin line. Everyone shakes head and tsks at me.

“Why did you break up her?” Abby asks who is now my stepsister.

“It doesn’t matter anymore. She already moved on.”

Seb laughs, mocking me. “At least explain, and let us understand. You look like shit by the way.”

Two.

“He looks like Tom Hanks from Castaway.” Rebecca giggles beside me, and I shoot a glare at her.

“You look like shit, man. Don’t you own a razor at home?” Mason agrees.

Three.

“I’m waiting, Alexander Phoenix.” My brother angry voice makes me lift my head. He looks like he can swallow me whole.

“Do I have to tell here?” I ask silently.

Everyone says yes in unison.

“Yeah, we have the right to know, and just so you know, I asked someone to look after you. I was afraid that maybe you would commit suicide,” Abby says. “That’s how we were worried about you, asshole!” Her curse makes her husband groaned.

“Language Baby,” Seb tells his wife, and she just elbows him.

My lips quiver into a sad smile. Did she just say asshole?

“Gabrielle blackmailed me,” I start slowly.

They groan and curse.

“What did I tell you that I will handle it, brother?” My brother’s angry voice booms in the room.

“Can we at least talk this later. It’s Paul’s birthday for fuck’s sake!” I rant back, scowling at him.

Paul laughs at my back who’s sitting at the stool of the minibar. I mean, he laughs his ass out loud. “Did you really forget my birthday, Phoenix? Or you don’t even know the date today?”

I blink twice. I turn my head to him and shoot him a glare.

“It was my idea, brother dear. To let Paul send a group text that it’s his birthday today,” Abby snorts.

“So, you don’t have an excuse anymore. Now, continue,” Seb says, crossing his legs and who looks impatient in his seat.

“Why did you listen to that bitch?” Trixie asks.

I roll my eyes. “Can you all write your questions so that I can answer them one by one,” I say sarcastically.

“Are you trying to ignore us?” Patrick rants.

“It really doesn’t matter. It’s too late to take her back. She has Tyler in her life now.” My heart just crashes into pulp. Jesus, just mentioning Tyler’s name is like a knife twisting in my chest.

“Just explain, Phoenix. I want to know and not to help you take her back. it’s your problem, and I’m not gonna help you with winning her back. You hurt her, and now she’s happy, I’m not gonna let you barge into her life again,” My brother deadpans.

My mouth hangs open. I can’t believe Hawk hates me this much.

I swallow hard the bile that burns the track of my throat. “She blackmailed me, she will tell Pri—” I groan and squeeze my eyes shut. “—Samantha something if I will not break up with her and introduce Gabrielle as my girlfriend. She didn’t bother me again though after my break-up with Samantha. I thought her plan was really to take me back, but she might have figured out that I couldn’t stomach her face.”

Pairs of eyes are on me and none of them talk. So, I continue, “Six years ago.” I pause and take a huge breath.

I look at Hawk—his shoulders droop, and he slumps his body to the leather couch. He’s clenching his jaw and shakes his head constantly.

“I found out Gabrielle was cheating on me.” They curse again.

“I drove away from her apartment like a maniac, and I didn’t have an idea where I was when I stopped my car and walk away from it. I was talking with Hawk at that time over the phone. I didn’t realize I stopped my car at the T intersection and walked incautiously into the main road. I noticed a car rushing toward me—the driver was on his phone, too. I covered myself with my hand and prepared myself for the impact that didn’t reach me.” I stop.

My voice starts to tremble. I sniff and take a breath because this is the last part that gives me a nightmare. “That car was supposed to hit me, hit the tree instead. He was trying to avoid me, and he died because of me. My phone fell from my hand, but someone handed it back to me. The driver

died on his way to the hospital." I look at all of them. Nobody moves and nobody says a word, but somehow I get their sympathy.

"And that man was—" A tear finally falls from my eye.

"Was Samantha's dad."

They gasp.

"And the man that handed me back my phone was Gabrielle's dad. I remember his voice telling me to get away from there." I wipe a tear from my face.

"Gabrielle is going to tell Samantha if I will not break up with her. I know it was a jerk move, but I couldn't let her find out from Gabrielle or worse she would think that I used her to get into forgiving me. I couldn't let her fall for me when I was the reason her father died," I tell them with my broken voice. "It was better that way. At least I found out earlier than she's already moving in with me." I end it.

"What happened that night wasn't your fault alone, Phoenix. It was also his fault. He was talking over the phone while he was driving. You could have ended dead that night, and he would stay in jail for the rest of his life. It was his choice, he made that choice to save you over his life. You met Sam for a reason, maybe to explain, and let her understand what really happened that night. Maybe also to thank her, that he was the reason why you are still alive. She might hate you for sometimes, but she will forgive you when she realizes that her dad chose to save you instead," Hawk explains. "Her soulmate."

The word soulmate dooms me. I might breakdown if this conversation continues because I don't think Samantha is going to be mine again—that's what scares me, especially right now she's already with someone else.

"It's her dad's decisions, Phoenix. And she can't keep on blaming you. We can't return back the time, and all we have to do is face it and accept what has been done is done," he continues.

"You were in trouble that night. You had worse that could last a lifetime, Phoenix. You have to explain it to her."

I shake to cry while covering my face with my hands. I'm the worse person in the world. Every time I think of how I ignored her, it's killing me.

I feel a hand rubbing my back. I notice that I'm not crying alone—girls are crying too. I wipe my tears and look at them through my blurry sight. I can see the pain in their eyes, especially my brother.

"So, what's the plan?" Patrick asks when everyone seems to calm down a bit.

I shrug in my seat because I have nothing in mind other than the reality that I lose her for good.

"To chase his Princess," My brother answers.

Chapter 25

SAM

“A-Abby?” Stuttering, I swallow hard.

They are the last people I want to see right now. This can’t be a coincidence. Did they happen to own this nightclub too?

I’m such a stupid. Of course, they pretty own everything.

“Sam!” Her face lights up like a Christmas tree. She launches on me that makes me stumbles a few steps back and squeezes me so tight in a hug.

“I can’t believe you’re here! You’re really here, and I’m not dreaming, am I, Sam?” she continues mumbling I missed you, good to see you again blah blah blah. I’m so shocked to even say a word.

“God, you look gorgeous! Why won’t you come with me.” She grabs my hand, but I manage to pull it back.

“Um, I sorry Abby, but I can’t. I have friends waiting for me. They’re probably wondering what took me so long,” I reply and feel bad at the same time.

She’s really a good person, but I’m not yet ready to face his family. He and Abby are family now.

“It won’t take long. You can invite your friends to sit with us as—”

I cut her off. “Abby, maybe next time. I really should go. Thanks for inviting me though.” I squeeze her hand.

“Can I at least have your number?” she asks hesitantly.

I have no excuse not to give my number to her, then the door swings open that makes me gasp, and so as Abby’s husband, Seb.

“Sam?” He looks surprised and steps closer to pull me into a bear hug.

“Seb, good to see you here. Is this nightclub yours or Abby’s?” I ask absent-mindedly.

“It’s Paul,” he answers quickly. “Why won’t you join us, Sam. We missed you.” His smile doesn’t reach his eyes.

“Come on, just want you to meet some friends,” Abby insists, holding my hand tightly.

“Okay, but I’ll just say hi, then I can go back to my friends.”

Abby literally jumps when I agreed. I have no choice but to walk with them to the VIP Lounge. Seb opens the door, and I can hear everyone laughing. My stomach churns. I feel a shiver down my spine in a good way, and I know this feeling—so familiar.

I take a huge breath and step inside since Abby is already in, and Seb is holding the door for me.

Everyone stops, and I can hear my own heartbeat. I freeze in my place when all pairs of eyes are on me. My eyes scan every head involuntarily. Jesus, everyone is around.

I mean every freaking one of them! Even the last person I don't want to see is here. The person who made me hope for love, the very same person who left me with a broken heart, the very same person who still affects me when I hear his name, and the very same person I think of before I close my eyes to sleep.

His hair is longer than the last time I saw him almost four months ago. His facial hair is months old. He has fresh bruises all over his face with a bloody loose shirt. What happened to him? He also loses some weight.

I gasp when our gazes lock and it feels like I've been hypnotized. I can't take my eyes off of him—it's like I bare my soul to him, and I can see him at the same time. His eyes are wide as saucers, but something doesn't add up—the happy Phoenix I met almost five months ago is long gone—the Phoenix I see right now is in pain, lost, and broken. His eyes have lost their soul, and replaced with pure sadness and despair.

But I can still feel the very same effects he has on me, and it's even getting stronger this time. The pull we have that keeps us connected has never been cut off, and it's killing me not to run into him because no matter how I tried to keep my mind away from he's still here with me, a part of me, in my mind, and in my heart.

I know it's unfair for Tyler, but I've been trying so hard to forget Phoenix, but he won't just go, he is constantly in my brain and stuck in my heart. Maybe because we don't have closure? Or maybe I haven't moved on at all.

I haven't noticed him stands up from his seat when everyone yells my name with excitement. My heart flutters, and it aches at the same time, but my body reacts instantly with just our eye contact.

I shake my head repeatedly for protest.

He opens his mouth to say something—the pain in his eyes is more evident, and it's killing me. My heart says to come closer to him and ease his pain away, but my brain tells me the opposite.

He broke my heart. So, I take a few steps back and wipe the tears that unknowingly fell from my eyes.

I storm out from the lounge and run away even everyone is calling out my name, but I distinctly hear Phoenix because he's the one who calls me princess, and I hate that name. He made me feel special, treated me like a princess, but he also broke me into a million pieces.

My phone buzzes in my purse. I stop running when my lungs are burning, and I don't know where am I, but I know I'm outside the nightclub. I press the answer button blindly after picking up from my purse.

"Hello?" I answer with my trembling voice. I bite my lower lip to stop the trembling, but I am still catching my breath.

"Sam? Sweetheart, don't hang up on me, please?" It's Hawk. He sounds worried.

I sniff and hug myself as I feel like I am shivering. "What do you want?"

"Sweetheart, just hear me out, okay?"

I bite my trembling lip stronger, and I am torn between hanging up or listen to what he's about to say.

Maybe he has answers on why Phoenix left me—I want answers pretty bad on why he just left me all of a sudden without further explanations, and I want an answer until now.

Now, I'm more curious about his well-being. Is he sick? Dying? My tears won't stop, thinking of Phoenix is dying. It's killing me.

I shake to cry.

"Okay," I mumble with a sniff.

The line went off. I look at my phone screen, then I hear footsteps approaching. My heartbeat races. I yelp when I turn around to see Hawk is marching toward me.

I stride into him and meet him halfway, launching into his arms. I burst into cry out of anger, hurt, frustrations, and longing.

Hawk is rubbing my back and hugging me tight at the same time. "I'm sorry about everything, Sam. I know I'm not in a position to say this, but give him a chance to explain."

He drives us out to the nearest park. I inhale the fresh air that makes me calm a bit. The cool wind hugs my skin. I wrap my arms around me as we sit in one of the iron benches in the park.

"I waited for him for months. I want to know the reason why he left me just like that, without explanation. I don't know what had gone wrong? Everything was perfect when I went back home, then he was suddenly gone and took Gabrielle back." I wipe my tears with the palm of my hand.

“He has no choice. He may have made wrong decisions, but he did it what he thought it was best for both of you,” Hawk says, and I’m more confused than ever.

Narrowing my eyes on him, I ask, “What do you mean? Is Gabrielle carrying his baby? Is he dying? Tell me because I’m frustrated to know the truth, Hawk. Please?” I can barely see his face through my blurry eyes filled tears.

I shake to cry just thinking of Phoenix knocked up that bitch. He wraps his arms around me and rubs my back. His presence soothes me.

“I always hope he’ll come back to me even when I took Tyler back. Never a day passed by, I never thought of him coming back to me, and at least to explain or that he made a wrong choice. But that day never came, until I moved here,” I tell him in each sob.

“I know sweetheart, I know. He may have left you, but he never stops thinking of you. He never stops caring about you, Sam. Believe me,” he says while tucking his chin on top of my head.

“He doesn’t care about me, and he never thinks of me. He broke my heart, Hawk.” I break to cry even more. ”It doesn’t matter anymore. I don’t wanna hear, and I don’t wanna know what he is trying to tell me.” I pause. “It doesn’t take back the time we lost, and we were over. I’m with Tyler now, and he’s with Gabrielle.”

He breaks the hug and looks at me in my eyes. “Are you happy with him, Sam? With Tyler?”

I break the eye contact and sniff. “Yes, I’m happy with him.” Am I really happy?

“Do you feel the same when you are with him? Like how you felt when you were with my brother?” Hawks asks inquisitively, and I can still feel his gaze on me while waiting for my answer.

“What are you trying to point out, Hawk? Your brother broke me.”

“That doesn’t answer my question, Sam. Have you really moved on? Or is he just a rebound?”

My eyes narrow. “He’s not a rebound, and I love Tyler—”

He cuts me off. “But you love my brother more than him. More than anything—”

I cut him back. “I don’t love your bro—”

“Really? You don’t have to tell me or tell him, Sam, or tell anyone. You are still affected, and I saw that in your eyes and through your reactions the moment you saw him. Yes, you may love Tyler, but not as stronger than a best friend or maybe you care for him because you two share intimacy, but you are still in love with my brother. Whether you admit it to me or not, I know the answer.” His words make me swallow hard because I am afraid he’s right.

My body freezes. I can now fully understand why I'm still affected—that my feelings haven't ceased off each day even I'm already with Tyler, and it's even getting stronger now that I see Phoenix again.

I'm such an idiot to believe that I've moved on. I'm far from it. Now, I see him again, everything—from our memories to my feelings have awakened from their graves that I thought I buried them deep down before moving in here.

"It doesn't matter now. He still broke my heart. And what's the point in all of these?"

"Let him explain—"

"He didn't even try."

"He was too busy sulking, mourning, and killing himself. That's his first time coming out of his lair. If Abby didn't set this up, he wouldn't show up. He didn't even know the date today, Sam."

Jesus! My eyes widen in shock. "What do you mean?"

"Abby sent a group message to everyone that today is Paul's party, but his birthday is not until next month. Your officemate, Ben's stepbrother knows Abby. Abby has kinda hired a PI to search for you."

My eyes almost pop out from each socket. "What do you mean she hired someone to search for me?" My voice shrieks. I may have overreacted a bit, but my suspicions are right. This isn't a coincidence after all.

"She was worried about Phoenix. Abby is a little bit emotional, and she cares a lot about him. When Phoenix hasn't stepped out of his apartment after the wedding, she hired a PI."

I shake my head in disbelief. "So, Ben invited me because Abby asked him too? Oh, and what about that Martini?"

A smirk curves up from his lips.

I glare at him. "Was it also a setup?"

"No, sweetheart. Brad doesn't know anything, but Phoenix used to drink there every night, and then he eventually got tired, so he stopped. He made his own drinks and named it after you."

"It's not flattering! It's insulting!" I pout. My shoulder droop, feeling exhausted. "Is he sick?"

"Emotionally unstable, yeah, but he's not sick like sick."

I nod. Oh, thank God!

"He was also heartbroken."

My head snaps. “Did Gabrielle break up with him!?”

He groans and rolls his eyes. “No. They never even back together.”

I’m so confused.

But, thank God! I mentally hit my head.

“Then why—”

“Let him explain. Everything.”

“I can’t promise, but I’ll think about it.”

I get back to our apartment pretty late. I don’t bother checking my phone. After cleaning my face and changing to nighties, I crawl down beside Tyler who’s sleeping soundly in his side. I squeeze my eyes shut to shut off the face of Phoenix in my head.

Tyler’s hand sneaks in under the blanket and grabs my waist.

“Babe, what time is it?” he asks with a groggy voice.

“It’s three in the morning, Ty. Sorry, I wake you up.”

He opens his sleepy eyes and smiles at me—his eyes don’t give me shiver. Jesus! Why am I comparing it now?

His brows furrow. “Is everything okay, babe?”

I kiss his lips. “Yeah, everything is fine.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

I don’t answer, instead, I kiss him fiercely, hungrily, and wet. He moans and kisses me back instantly. I push down his boxers from his now hard part.

I pump it a few times with my hand, then he pulls my nighties up, and he knows I’m not wearing panties. He breaks the kiss and kisses my neck, sucking my earlobe, and I moan.

Tyler cups my breasts with his eager hands and presses himself on top of me. He sucks my breast and slips his free hand to my wet folds.

I arch my head back follow by my loud moan when he slips two fingers inside me.

“Oh, God!”

He pulls his fingers out and slides his hard cock inside me. “Oh, babe... you feel so good.” He freezes “Fuck! I’m sorry!”

I open my eyes and glare at him. “What the fuck?” I never swear on him, but I don’t know why he suddenly apologizes.

“Sorry, babe. I forgot the condom,” he answers as he pulls himself out. ”Wait a sec.”

My stomach churns. I reach out to our nightstand drawer and fish out a condom. I tear the foil pack with my teeth quickly.

He chuckles as I roll on him.

“Eager, huh?” he teases me.

I kiss him quickly to stop him from talking. Then he pushes all in at one time that makes me gasp at the sudden intrusion.

He pauses. “Did I hurt you, babe?”

I shake my head, instead, I demand. “Fuck me Tyler!”

He looks shocked at my bluntness, but he doesn’t say a word and just do what I asked.

He thrusts into me harder, and I arch my hips to meet his rough thrust. We move in rhythm. I grip his ass and ask for more. We are slick with our own sweat, and our body slaps together.

“Tyler, I’m coming!” I yell as my muscles quiver and body shudders for release. My pulse is racing as we rock each others’ world.

“Come now, babe,” he says hoarsely.

We both panting and ready for our release. My brain bewilders with my pending orgasm. I’m over the edge!

“Oh, God! Phoenix!” We both freeze, and just look at each other.

Chapter 26

SAM

Shock is an understatement of what had just happened minutes ago. I just shouted another name while we were on the verge of our orgasms. My face heats with an embarrassment. I feel so guilty, and I don't know what had gotten into me.

He pulled himself on top of me and went to the bathroom, and until now he doesn't come back. I sit up from our bed, tie my hair in a loose bun, and walk to our adjacent bathroom.

After taking a few huge breaths, my nerves are still all over my system.

"Ty?" I knock on the door.

I can't hear any movements from inside, neither a sound of water. The door swiftly opens, then our eyes meet—I can see the hint of pain in his eyes.

I swallow the lump blocking my throat. "Um, Ty. Let me explain." My words are almost inaudible.

I break my gaze when I can't take his gaze on me anymore—Tyler is scrutinizing me.

He doesn't say anything, he kisses my forehead instead, and that scares the hell out of me. He slips himself out of the bathroom and walks away from me without a single word.

My eyes start to wet, and I can't take the guilt anymore, so, I follow him and grab his arm.

"Babe, let's go back to sleep. We'll talk about this tomorrow when we are both calm," he says coolly, but I can feel the tension in his nerves, and the pain in his eyes is more visible this time.

"I'm so sorry, Ty. I don't know what comes into my mind why I suddenly blurted out his name—"

He cuts in. "Don't, Sam. Please, don't."

I shake to cry, and he pulls me into a hug in one swift move.

"I'm so sorry, Ty. I'm so sorry," I apologize, shaking my head against his chest, but I know I can't undo what happened, and I have to deal with my mistakes.

"It's okay, babe. It's okay. I know you don't mean it," he says while running his fingers through my hair.

After kissing the top of my head, he pulls himself and lifts my chin with his fingers to make me look at him. Tyler wipes my tears away and kisses me on my lips, and I kiss him back with all my

heart. I wrap my arms around his neck and press my body against him. He deepens the kiss, wetter, frenzied, and harder.

Slipping his tongue in my mouth, I moan and fist a handful of his hair and kiss him more wildly. When our tongue collides, he grabs my rear, and I can't help but wrap my legs around his waist. He is already hard, pressing against my bare and wet core.

I don't even realize he already carries me and lies me back to our bed. Without breaking our kiss, he pushes his fingers in my wet core, my hips arch to press against his moving fingers. I follow his moves, moving rhythmically.

He pulls out his fingers, and I open my eyes to look up at him, our eyes met and all I can see is the lust flooding in those blue orbs. His lips are swollen and red with our intense kiss.

"Do you want a condom?" I ask slowly.

He smiles with all his passions, love, and adoration on me. He moves away from my top for me, to grab a condom in our nightstand.

We haven't talked about having sex without using a condom, and I don't open the topic about it too.

He slips down his boxers and moves back on top of me, I slip the latex in one roll. The next thing I know, he is already inside me in one thrust. I bite my lower lip and close my eyes.

"Open your eyes, babe," he says softly.

I open my eyes and look at him. I run my fingers on his firm back. He moves faster while I'm meeting his thrust.

"I love you, Sam. So much it hurts," he whispers with his husky voice.

I kiss his lips and respond while our lips sealed together. "I love you too, Ty."

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"Babe, hurry up. We still have groceries to buy." I'm still in the middle of choosing between the two books on my hand. I can't decide which book to choose between romance or psycho-thriller.

"Ty, just give me five minutes. You can check something that might pique your interest. Try a mystery thriller, you know."

I know him well, he's not interested in fiction or any book at all unless it has something to do with his work. That's our one big difference.

"Babe, you know me that I don't read that crap."

My head snaps to face him, but I keep my words to myself because we haven't talked about what happened last night.

"I'm sorry," he mutters.

He slips his hands in his jean pockets and doesn't say a word again. I can see he's already losing his patience as he presses his lips into a thin line.

I grab the psycho-thriller book. "Got one, Ty!"

We drive to the grocery store and take one pushcart to the toiletries lane. He starts picking up the things we need because he knows what brand I used, so I don't have to tell him myself because he's very specific on that.

"Babe, do we need another box?" he asks while placing a large pack of my sanitary pad.

I grin at him and nod.

"What? Can't you even say yes?" He grins back, teasing me.

I cup his face when I notice no one is coming in our way and press my lips against him. I can feel him smiling, and then I suck his lower lip and bite it.

A clearing of a throat breaks us apart. I compose myself and murmur an apology.

"Sorry, my girlfriend is just so irresistible," Tyler says to that person at my back.

"I know, she is." I freeze at that voice.

My heart beats faster when I turn to face him.

"Hawk?" I say and it almost comes out as a whisper.

I feel the color drain from my face, and I'm so embarrassed. I don't know why, but it's like I am betraying his brother even though I am not.

I feel Tyler's hand gripping my waist.

"Do you know each other?" Tyler asks, raising his brow and presses himself on my side.

I swallow hard.

"Of course, I'm Hawk Williams, and you must be Tyler Payne." Hawk extends his hand.

I feel Tyler stiffens beside me. I elbow him because Hawk doesn't pull his hand back.

"Tyler, nice to meet you." He says after clearing his throat and finally shakes Hawk's hand.

"What are you doing here, Hawk? I can't see you doing groceries in a place like this."

This grocery store is big enough to a middle class like me, but this is not where usually the rich people used to come for a grocery unless he's following me.

"I actually follow you from the bookstore." Of course. "I'm sorry it may sound creepy, but can I talk to you for a second?" he asks, looking at me then to Tyler.

"You can tell her anything now in front of me because for sure I will eventually know what you two will talk about," Tyler answers, still gripping my waist unconsciously stronger that's hurting me already.

I look up at Tyler. "Ty, it's okay."

"It's not okay, Sam. His brother did already too much damage on you, and on us," he snaps.

My cheek burns with embarrassment, but I can't blame him though—he's right after all.

Hawk still patiently waiting for my answer.

"You can say it here, Hawk. He's right, and we don't keep secrets anyway."

His lips curve to smirk. "Good, then. Well, Mom invited you for lunch tomorrow. She tried calling your phone, but it said it was disconnected

My mouth gapes open.

He looks amused. "You can come with princess, Tyler," he adds.

My jaw drops, and my eyes might look twice bigger right now.

"Here is the address." He picks up a paper from his suit's pocket and hands it to me.

If Tyler doesn't grab it from him, I am just staring at it, still in shock.

"Tomorrow at one, princess, Tyler. See you both, and everyone's excited to see you. Good to finally meet you, man." That's it, then he walks away.

We haven't said a word after Hawk left. We loaded our groceries in the car in silence. I get in the passenger seat, and Tyler starts driving back to our apartment.

He parks the car and hops out, still zero words from him, but I can feel the tension in the air that is now suffocating me.

He picks out the bags of groceries, then he puts them down the floor. When I help him take some bags, that's the time he speaks.

"I can do it, babe. Can you go ahead and press the elevator?"

My stomach churns. I know he's hurting, and just to hear his voice is so upset, it hurts like hell. He has been nothing but nice to me, then suddenly Phoenix and Hawk come to the picture again when I am already peacefully living my life with Tyler.

I walk away and do as he asked. I jump when I hear a loud bang followed by the scattering of glasses on the floor. I brusquely turn around, Tyler is leaning his head against his car and shattered glasses on his feet.

I run to him and hug him from his back.

He's breathing heavily. "I'm fine, babe. I'm fine."

I can't pull myself away from him because I know why he's hurting. It's because of me.

I press myself tightly against him, my nose on his back, and inhale his scent—he smells good, a mix of his cologne and himself.

"Tyler, I'm so sorry. I don't mean this to happen. I swear I love you, and I'm trying to forget about him. I really do."

"I know, babe. I know."

I pull myself away and hold his arms to face me.

His eyes are so sad, pressing his lips together. His jaw still clenching and all his muscles are tense. He doesn't deserve any of this.

"Ty, we can go back if this is too much for you to be here. We can still work there and find a new apartment."

He shakes his head constantly. "No, babe. We are not going anywhere. We are not running away every time they show up. We should face this together. And I know how much you love your work here. You have to face this, Sam."

"Let's go up, and let me take care of your knuckles." I look down at his hands. His right knuckles are now bleeding and have a few cuts.

"It's okay, babe. Doesn't hurt that much."

"I don't want your hand gets infected, babe. I still need this," I tell him while caressing his split knuckles.

He chuckles. I look up at him who is now intently looking down at me.

I press my lips on him, running my thumbs on his smooth face. "I love you, Ty. Just remember that."

"I know, babe, and I love you more."

I fell to sleep instantly after our second round. I made up to him after upsetting him twice in less than twenty-four hours. He slept soundly, draping his arm on my naked chest.

His head is resting in the crook of my neck, his hair tickling my bare skin. I kiss his head and move his arm away slowly.

I walk to our kitchen after slipping on my nighties. I yawn, and it's still four in the morning, but I feel thirsty. I grab cold bottled water from the fridge and close it back.

After drinking almost half of the water, my mind goes back to the invitation of Hawk. Everyone is going to be there, it means he's going to be there too. My stomach churns. Tyler doesn't say if we attend or not.

I wake when the sunlight peeks from the slightly open curtain in our bedroom window. Squinting my eyes, I search for Tyler, but his space is already empty.

I check the alarm clock on the nightstand, and it shows ten minutes after ten in the morning. Did I sleep that long?

I stand up from bed, yawning, stretching my limbs. I feel a little bit sore from our two rounds last night.

A smile spreads from my lips before I call his name. "Ty?"

After tying my hair in a messy bun, I walk to our living room, but he's not there. He must go out for a jog which he usually did every weekend, but it's already ten.

I saunter toward our kitchen and stop to a halt when a folded paper is tuck by his keys that catches my eyes. Why didn't he take his keys with him?

My belly twists sickly. My heart stops beating, then pounds wildly in my chest.

Why do I feel something in that paper is going to hurt me? Whatever it is I know it's not good.

I walk closer to our kitchen island. My palm starts sweating. I take a breath and grab his keys with my right hand and the paper with my left.

I put the keys back and unfold the paper slowly.

Chapter 27

SAM

"Thanks, Howard!" I thank the driver Anna sent to pick me up. There's only one meaning to this—I can't turn down that invitation.

So, here I am wearing a blue dress with my black high heels to add four inches to my five foot four inches height, and I spent an hour just to fix my hair.

The Williams and King are all gigantic, and I look like a dwarf when I'm standing beside them.

I am still a little bit shaken after reading the letter Tyler left for me, and I read it a couple of times just make it sure I understand every word because I can't believe he just left like that without waking me up or talking to me about our problems.

He doesn't break up with me though—he's just giving me some space to figure out if I still have feelings for Phoenix, and if I'm really ready to start a relationship.

"Oh, darling, Samantha!"

I halt and back from my zoning out to Anna's voice who is marching toward my direction. A smile form on my lips.

She spreads her arms wider, and I walk to meet her halfway and hug her.

"It's been like forever since the last time I saw you," she says after our embraced.

"I miss you too, Anna," I reply shyly.

She looks so happy and even looks younger than the last time I saw her. She looks healthier and radiant. She has makeup on her face, but not too much. Her eyes glimmer and her blonde hair is tuck in a neat bun. She wears a beautiful light pink dress and a pair of beige pumps to match the outfit.

"Come on in, dear. Everyone is waiting for you." Anna wraps her arm around my shoulder as we walk inside the enormous King's mansion.

I stop and swallow hard. I don't know if I'm ready to face Phoenix again, or am I ever be ready facing him again?

My heart starts to flutter.

“He doesn’t know you’re coming. We didn’t mention it to him. He’s been here for two days after Abby literally dragged him to come,” Anna explains.

I nod, biting my lower lip.

“Sam!” I jolt when I hear someone screaming my name.

What’s with these people? Are they trying to kill me from a heart attack?

“Hello, Izzy.” I greet her with a smile.

She launches herself to me with a squeeze—not a hug, take note.

I whimper. They just laugh at me.

My body is going to be sore after this. The next is Hawk with a wide grin on his face, then Patrick, and of course, his twin Trixie, then Abby, and Seb who is carrying Lizzy.

“Hello, little angel.” I touch her little fingers. She bubbles, moving her free hand to grabs a handful of my hair.

“She likes you already, Sam,” Seb says after kissing my cheek.

My smile widens. “Really?” She looks so adorable—her look is a mix of her parents, and get their dimples too.

“That’s how she shows if she likes someone. Grabbing someone’s hair,” Abby answers.

My eyes roam at everyone, but he’s not around. He’s not here. My heart sinks. A knot forms in the pit of my stomach.

“He’s here, Sam,” Abby says. She must have seen the disappointment on my face. “At the greenhouse. He always went there when he woke up, only left that place when he went to sleep.”

“Welcome, Princess,” Mike says giving me hug. “Feel at home, and consider this your second home. You’re always welcome anytime,” Mike adds.

“Did you come alone, princess?” Hawk asks.

I look at him and nod. “Tyler left me.”

Then say yes in unison. I scowl at them. They stop abruptly and mutter an apology.

“Sorry, princess,” Hawk murmur.

“Are you, Hawk?” I ask, raising my brow at him.

He tries to hide his smile and doesn’t answer me.

“He left this morning without talking to me other than the letter he left. He took all his things.”

They say oh in unison. Again!

“But—” I stop and I can see the changes of reactions on their faces.

“We did not break up.”

They shrug as if disappointed. What’s with them?

“Let’s go, honey. let them catch up,” Mike announces, taking Anna’s hand.

“Darling, feel at home, and guys, don’t scare her away,” she says and gives everyone a warning glare.

Anna and Mike walk away from the living room.

“Sam, I’ll feed Lizzy. See you at lunch. It won’t take long. Babe, wanna come?” Abby says and faces her husband with a mischievous smile on her face.

Seb willingly takes her wife’s hand and walks away just like that, leaving me with the twin, Hawk, and Izzy.

***

We all sit on one bench a few meters away from the greenhouse that fits a two-story house. Its roof and wall are made of glass. I can see the plants, flowers blooming in different colors. It looks like a little paradise, but one thing that catches my attention is him.

Phoenix is sitting on a small bench in front of a flower bed that I can’t quite put my finger on what kind of flower is that. He’s wearing a white shirt and a pair of dark blue jeans. Only half of himself that I can see, but there’s a headphone plug on his ears.

“He’s been like that since he came here two days ago. He didn’t talk much, just ate whenever he needed it, then plugged the headset on his ears whether he was sleeping or not. When he woke up, he went there and stayed there until noon,” Izzy explains.

“What’s he listening to?” I ask with a low voice.

She shrugs. “No one knows.”

He’s not moving. He looks lost to whatever he’s listening to. He loses too much weight. Good thing he doesn’t look skinny because of the muscles stuck up in his body.

“What’s wrong with him? Is he always this weird?” I ask out of curiosity, but deep inside it’s killing me to know why he’s like this, pushing away the people who care a lot about him.

Whatever is going on with him is not doing any good for everyone and for him. He's so selfish to keep it for himself.

"He shut us off since you know. Since what happened between you two. He went out every night to get drunk for a month, then suddenly stopped, and locked himself in his apartment. We were worried hell that he might kill himself in the end," Trixie answers.

"That night at the club, that was the first time he showed up when Paul sent a group message to everyone. We never expected for him to come," Patrick says who sounds serious. He's always hilarious, but this time his face looks so worried.

"What is really happening to him? Why he suddenly stops talking to me? Stop talking to everyone, shutting everyone's out? I know, guys, you somehow have an idea. Why won't you guys tell me? Maybe I can help?" I stand up, prop my hands on my hips, and glare at them.

They look shocked at my outburst.

I swallow the lump blocking at my throat because I know I am one of the reasons and I can't just stand here and do nothing. As much as I am broken for what he did to me, I can't let him ruin himself for whatever the cause. I still care for him.

"You need to give him a chance to explain, Sam," Hawk finally talk.

I roll my eyes. "Seriously? Is it my fault when he's the one who dumped me and left me? Is it my fault that he's acting weird and shut everyone out of his life? Is it my fault that he ignored my calls, texts, and my voicemails? Did he even try talking to me? FYI, he didn't! He didn't leave me a single message! Nothing! Nada!" I yell at them out of my frustrations.

They all look down and don't say a word while I look up to hold the tears that threatening to fall.

"Seriously, guys. You invited me to let the guilt eat me alive, aren't you? You all invited me to slap it on my face! That Phoenix is acting like this because of me? Maybe or maybe not. He broke up with me because it's all my fault? For all I know, I'm also flabbergasted. I also wanna know what had gone wrong when I thought it was almost perfect," I say frustratingly.

"I know, Sam. I'm so sorry."

"No, you are not sorry, Hawk! Come on, tell me already! Slap it to my face. I've been dying here to figure out what's wrong." I wipe the tears with the back of my hand.

"Let me at least sleep quietly at night because these past three months I've been constantly thinking of what had gone wrong. I need peace of mind. I need closure. Please, Hawk?" I hold his hands and beg.

He looks directly into my eyes, and I grip his hand while kneeling in front of him.

He nods. “I’m not in a position to tell this, Sam.”

“Then who? If Phoenix is not willing, who then? Everyone has no plan telling me this shit. You said, he’s not sick, and Gabrielle and he broke up, but it seems that I am the cause of all of these, right?”

He takes a huge breath. “He blamed himself for what happened to your dad.”

My brows furrow for the confusion. What’s with Dad? My mouth gapes, and I want to say something, but I can’t form a word so I close it back. My brain freezes for a while and Hawk is intently looking at me.

“I think you two need alone to discuss this,” Izzy says.

She leaves after planting a kiss to her husband. The twins walk out too, and it’s just the two of us now. My stomach churns at the thought that I finally figure out all the reasons that I have been searching for these past months.

I move to sit back on the bench. “Why Dad is suddenly involved with this, Hawk?” I ask and focus myself at the greenhouse where Phoenix is currently sitting there quietly.

“Phoenix had something to do with why your dad got into an accident that night.”

I quickly place my hands to my mouth and snap my head on him. My eyes widen in surprise. My hands tremble. My tears fall like a stream. I shake my head continuously because I can’t believe it.

“Oh. My. God!” My body shakes and my voice cracks.

“He was the person that Dad avoided, wasn’t he? Was he, Hawk?” I stand up quickly and yell at him while pointing at the greenhouse. “It was Phoenix, right? Dad got an accident that night because of Phoenix!” I shout at him, but he keeps quiet.

“Answer me! Fucking answer me, Hawk! For fuck sake!” I never realize that my voice can be louder like this.

Then he nods slowly to confirm.

“Oh. My. God! My fucking God! Did he know all this time? Did he set all that up to let me fall for him because of his guilt?”

“No, Sam. He figured out during our lunch in New York. He left you because you might think that he was using you into forgiving him, and you would eventually find out because Gabrielle knew something, and she blackmailed Phoenix that if he wouldn’t break up with you, then she would tell you herself.”

That makes sense. I wipe my tears, sniff, and take a deep breath.

"Where is that bitch now? I swear I will slap her so hard until I break her hideous face!" I don't know why I say that, but I can't control my rage anymore. It feels like I am burning inside.

Hawk looks at me, shocked.

"He ended it up because he didn't want you to fall for him, Sam. He thought it was better that way."

"Huh, really?" I huff. "He thought it was better that way? Well, let me tell you, Hawk. It was too late for that because I was already freaking in love with him! But he broke me! He freaking broke me! I thought he was the one for me, and he ruined what we have in a freaking heartbeat because he thought it was better that way. He broke everything in me—my heart, my trust, and he ruined my life!"

I storm away from him without looking back even he's yelling my name.

"Sam!" I ignore him even if he's swearing at my back.

I run toward the door of the greenhouse, get inside, and stride my way to where Phoenix is sitting. Phoenix hastily stands up from his sitting position when he sees me striding toward him. He pulls off the headset from his ears.

He looks shocked—his eyes are wide with a hint of happiness as he finally meets my gaze. His mouth hangs open, and that gives me the chance to crash my lips on him. He gasps still shocks to respond to me.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I grab handfuls of his hair and press my chest on him, and my body instantly reacts and ignites into a billion bolt of electricity that radiates around us.

He wraps his arms around me and tightens them, he kisses me back hungrily, hurriedly with pure longing. Oh, God! I missed him so freaking much it hurts that I don't want to end this. It's been months, and it feels like a thousand years. I missed his taste, his smell, his touch, and everything about him is just my lifeline.

I never think that I miss him like this. I am fooling myself that I have moved on—I've been lying to myself all this time.

Nothing can ever compare the feelings I feel when I am with this man. I'm so madly in love with him. I feel alive again for the first time in months.

I feel his tongue in the seam of my lips, and I slip my tongue instead. God, he tastes so freaking good. He willingly submits it to me—he doesn't fight. He groans and moans while our mouth still moving in perfect sync. Our hearts unite together its beat.

I feel something warm flooding between my thighs, and this never happened when I was kissing Tyler. I shove that thought back and just kiss him one last time, then I pull myself away from him.

My palm stings when it strikes his face in a loud smack.

Chapter 28

PHOENIX

It's been two days since the last time I saw Samantha again. I saw the pain in her eyes when our eyes met, then she ran away before I could even take a closer look at her. She hated me—that confirmed my suspicion.

When Abby begged me to stay with Mom in the mansion, I had to agree. Mom was worried hell, and I was such a selfish ass. I even forgot that Mom was sick months ago, and I felt so ashamed of what I've done.

I missed Samantha so much, and I fucking want to see her again. She looks beautiful than ever and has lost some weight, but she still looks hot, and the only woman who can make my dying heart to beat again. Those tits that I adore so badly, and now I have no fucking chance to have those again. I am such a sick useless fuck. I chuckle bitterly.

I listen constantly to our recorded conversations, and thanks to my big brother who introduces this app to me. He called me that time that we had an urgent meeting, and I denied because I was drunk, barking like a rabid dog.

"Good morning, handsome! How did you know my schedule? I can't say no, can I?"

"'Evening, handsome! I'm still waiting for your call. Um, I missed you already. I wish I just stay there with you. Call me, okay? Bye, hot tease!"

"Phoenix? You're making me worried. Please, let me know if your mom is okay. I missed you."

"Hey, it's me again. Don't tell me you forgot your princess because I will put your dumbass on fire!"

"Seriously, Phoenix. What the hell is going on? You've been ignoring me. And I don't like it even a bit. You scare the hell out of me. Are you okay? Please, just send me at least a single text."

"Phoenix? It's been twenty-four hours, and I still haven't heard anything from you. Not even a single text. Fine, keep it that way. Anyway, I was thinking of moving in with you. I know it doesn't sound right telling you over the phone, but I made up my mind. Why not, right?"

"Alexander Phoenix Archibald Henry Williams! I hate you. I freaking hate you! I already told you that I'm moving in with you, but you're not happy to know it. I know you check my voicemails. And I take my words back, I'm not moving in with you. I changed my mind! You. Are. Not. Hot. Tease!"

“Are these things between us over? Are you breaking up with me? God,” she sighs. “I’m such an idiot! You.” She pauses, sniffs, and sighs again. “You lied to me that you.” She sniffs. “That you actually care for me.” She takes a deep breath, then sniffs. “I care a lot about you, and I thought there’s something real between us.” She sniffs again. “So, are we done? Great!” pause “Great. Have a great life ahead of you. Bye!”

“I can’t freaking believe you! You cheated on me! You are back together! Is that why aren't you answering my calls? You couldn’t reply to my messages because you took her back? I saw you on the internet with her. I thought she’s a bitch! I hate you.” She sobs, sniffs, then sobs again. “I hate you so so much. You lied to me. You could’ve just talked to me, you know. I will truly understand.” She sniffs, then sobs. “Well,” She hiccups. “I guess that’s all. Goodbye, Phoenix!”

I’ve been replaying her voice messages that I edited them in one file and transferred it in my music file. I did it to let the guilt eat me whole, and it’s fucking working, but her voice, either she’s angry or not it makes me calm and reminds me that I’m still alive.

I’ve been sitting in this greenhouse for hours for two days now. I love flowers, they remind me of her. I remember how she appreciated the flowers in that house where we made love over and over again.

Mom reminded me this morning about the family lunch It happens every Sunday, and this is my first time to attend since Mom married Mike. Abby is the best stepsister in the entire world. It’s like a dream come true to have a sister like her. She took care of Mom while I was sulking at my hell hole so-called apartment.

I replay her voice again, close my eyes, and think that she’s talking to me, instead of her worried voice, shouts, and cry. I’m about to replay when I hear the door slams, then follows by hurried footsteps—someone enters the greenhouse.

My eyes widen to see Samantha is rushing toward me. I think my heart just breaks out of my ribcage from beating so fast and wild that it’s out of my control. I hurriedly stand up and pull off the headset from my ears. My mouth literally drops that my eyes are not playing tricks with me. And if it’s a trick, I hope it’s not going to end.

Before I can call her name, she launches herself to me, her soft and luscious lips that I long to kiss crashes into mine.

Good lord in heaven, thank you so much for this wonderful day! I am not dreaming, am I? I am definitely not! Because I can feel in every damn cell in my body that she’s with me, and she’s kissing me. And everything ignites, electrifying all my senses. And I am alive.

She grabs my hair into fists, kissing me with pure hunger, fierceness, and longingness.

Jesus! I missed her so fucking much. Her body presses against mine, her smell, taste, and the warmth instantly makes my body burn into a wildfire.

I wrap my arms around her body, and she presses herself into me. I put all my frustrations, anger, loss, and longing into one kiss. Our lips move in sync. My tongue seeks entrance, instead, she shoves hers into my mouth.

I groan, and she tastes so fucking amazing, and I let her dominate my mouth. I can't help but moan so helplessly as she explores my mouth.

Before I can devour her more, she pulls away and the last thing I know, my cheek stings because my princess slaps me so hard that my face snaps to its side. I find hand touches my cheek that stings and feels hot.

The sweet Samantha I taste seconds ago is now glaring at me, pressing her swollen lips into a thin line. We are still both catching our breath, and I can still taste her in my tongue. I definitely kissed her a while ago because my heart is still racing in my chest.

"How. Could. You?" she asks with each poke of her finger against my chest.

Her face is red with anger. Her eyes are blotchy with a smudge of makeup all over her face. She shakes to cry, and I move closer to her, but she holds her hand up to stop me.

"Princess..." I can hear the pain in my voice, and I think I am going to break down in front of her because God knows how hard to see her crying, and I feel helpless.

"Don't you dare call me that name again, Phoenix! I hate that name! I hate you!" she yells.

I see my brother on the door, nodding before he leaves. So, she knows now. Everything.

I sigh exasperatingly. "I'm so sorry, Samantha, I... I-I don't—"

"Sorry for what, Phoenix? For freaking what?" Her tears are falling like a stream. It's killing me not to come to her, hug her, and tell her that everything is going to be okay because I know that everything is never going to be okay.

"For what happened to your father. That I am the reason—"

"The reason he was dead? Her voice is like lightning into my heart, and it's fucking excruciating. I deserve it.

"The... Yeah—" Before I can finish, she pushes me stronger so fast that makes me slump back down to the bench.

"You broke up with me because you think you killed my dad?" she asks, yelling at me. "You broke up with me because you thought you were using me in forgiving you!"

I nod.

“Were you planning on telling me that you were the reason Dad died that night, huh?” She breaks in the end.

I look down at my feet and cover my face with my hands as I lean my elbows on my knees.

“You broke our relationship! You broke my heart! You broke my trust! You broke me, you, asshole!” She yells at the top of her lungs.

I flinch. My body shakes, and I am also crying with her. Jesus, it fucking hurts. I don’t think it hurts this way, but I know she was hurt when she lost her dad, and for breaking her heart twice. I deserve all of these.

“I know, Samantha. I know.” My voice cracks.

“No! You don’t! You don’t know anything!” Jesus! kill me know. It’s killing me to see her like this, and I can’t even get close to her to even hold her hand.

“Samantha, I’m so so sorry. I should have told you when I found out—”

“But you didn’t, and you chose not to!” She’s still yelling. I can’t take this anymore—she is hurting because of me.

“I will not forgive you for this! For what you did to us! I hate you!” That’s it! That’s the end of my fucking terrible and pathetic life. She hates me and she won’t forgive me. Ever!

“And for the record. Dad will die anyway. He was talking to my mom that night because he had good news though that his insurance will cover the house and my college plan. Dad just came from an oncologist at the Cancer Center that night, and it was confirmed that he had stage four colon cancer. I will never blame you if you just told me about it. Dad won’t stay long anyway. Two months top, and that accident just made it quick and less painful compared to seeing him suffer every day. I’m not praying for that to happen, but he accepted his fate, that he’s dying soon anyway.”

I can’t hear this anymore. I shake my head and raise my hand for her to stop, but she keeps talking.

“You ended us, Phoenix. Dad.” She takes a breath. “Dad chose to save you… because you are meant to meet me one day. We will be meeting soon, and here we are.” She shrugs, then walks away.

“Samantha!” I shout but she is gone. And probably forever.

***

“So, Sam, who’s the work in Publishing?” Mike asks. I shove the forkful of the most delicious salmon, but it’s tasteless in my mouth. I chew it lazily just to stay on the table, and I get a chance to listen to her voice again.

“Oh, it’s good. It was intimidating at first considering it’s New York, but then I adjusted a little bit,” she answers with a bit of excitement in her tone because I know how much she loves books.

“You can work with me, Sam. Just say a word. No interview and I’ll offer you a good position,” Seb says.

I look at them through my peripheral visions without a word. My heart is still bleeding from my encounter with her earlier, and I don’t think it will stop so soon.

“No way. She will work with me.” Hawk cuts him off.

What’s with these people fighting to let her work with them. They don’t know anything about her. They don’t know what she likes.

I know she loves her work because she loves to read and loves books like her lifeline. I shake my head.

“No way. She will work in my department,” Patrick butts in.

I roll my eyes.

“Guys, she’s not going to work with any of you. Let her work where she is happy,” Mom cuts them off.

Thanks, Mom!

“Does she even want to work with any of you?” Abby asks.

Thanks, sis!

They slump their back to their chairs. I catch her mounts thank you to Abby. Then our gazes meet, but she breaks it shortly. She really hates me, no doubt. My stomach twists sickly.

“Are you happy there, Sam?” Izzy asks beside her.

“Yes, I made friends already, and I love my job. I got a good paycheck, so I’m not complaining,” she answers Izzy and smiles at her.

God, her smile—it always makes my heart flutter. That smile that I made her more than once, and now it’s the opposite—I make her angry and hate me.

“Good to know. Sorry, guys,” Trixie says, grinning.

“How about your boyfriend, sweetheart. Where does he work?” Hawk asks with a glint of mischief in his eyes.

I know my brother wants to get on my nerves and is testing my temper. I clench my jaw, and I can’t help but fidget in my seat. Sam smiles at him.

Fuck! She’s really happy with that asshole.

“He works at Rexwell.”

Seb groans because I know Rexwell well.

“Rexwell is a rival company of Hughes. Well, one of Hughes,” Mike answers.

“Well, you all own pretty everything,” she says in a soft voice with a sheepish grin.

She’s so fucking adorable.

“Not everything, princess,” Patrick responds. “There is always something that we can’t be bought with money,” he adds while side glancing at me.

What this asshole is up to this time?

Fuck you!

“You’re correct this time, twinzy!” Trixie announces happily and gives him a high-five. A smile spreads across Samantha’s lips.

“I know, ugly twin, right, Sam?”

I roll my eyes, still scowling.

So, this is what’s this lunch all about? Fucking Awkward!

“How about you, son? How’s business?” Mike asks, glancing at my direction.

I clear my throat. Everyone stops and focuses on me.

I furrow my brows and answer quickly. “Good.”

“That’s it?” Hawk asks.

“Yeah,” I reply. They all exchange look then stare at Samantha.

“Honey, we haven’t been heard anything about you for months, and we expect that you can tell us something,” Mom insists.

I look at her in her eyes, and she looks sad.

"Nothing really to tell Mom. Business is doing well," I tell her as my stomach churns.

"What were you doing lately, Alexander Phoenix? Besides sulking in your apartment," Mom asks again. This time she sounds annoyed.

Samantha is looking at me and patiently waiting for my answer. I swallow hard, and she doesn't break her gaze this time. I don't break it too. The tension suddenly thickens inside the dining room.

I want to see her looking at me. More of it. Her eyes are full of sadness, and I'm the one causing it.

"Nothing really. Just um, working, sleeping, eating, um—" Thinking about Samantha, crying over Samantha, thinking about how we fucked our brains out. I scratch my head and look down at my plate.

"What are you constantly listening to on your phone?" My brother grills me.

I quickly look at his side, and he's glaring at me.

"It's none of your fucking business!"

Everyone gasps.

I stand up quickly. The chair screeches, causing them to yelp. I am done. "This interrogation is over!" I throw the throw napkin to the table and walk away from the dining room.

Mom is still calling my name.

I storm to the stairs to the second floor all the way to my room and slam the door shut. Its impact echoes and rattles everywhere.

I sit on the bed while rubbing my face.

A soft knock on my door follows a seconds later

"Go away!" I yell. I know it was rude, but they made look me stupid in front of everyone, and in front of Samantha. They planned for this to humiliate me.

"Phoenix, it's me. Can I come in?" My head quickly turns to the door.

The door slowly opens, then Samantha is standing up there and shooting a glare at me.

"What you showed down there was rude, Phoenix." Great! It's still my fault. "They're all excited for you to join the lunch, but look what you've done?" She walks out and slams the door behind her.

Perfect!

Chapter 29

SAM

“Margaux, got the manuscripts ready, emails sent to the following writers, and pages online is updated. Anything else you want to add for today?” I inform her over the phone.

My boss is a forty-five-year-old divorcee with a son already a freshman in college. She’s an easy goer, never been a bitch to any of her co-workers that’s why I am so lucky to be a part of these amazing people, and I love my job so much.

“Enough for today, Sam. I’m on my way back with the boss from the meeting with the new co-owner of publishing, and his team is already waiting in the lobby. See you in five minutes,” she answers and sounds a little bit nervous and excited at the same time.

“Oh, I see. Can I do something?” So, it was true about the selling of Mr. Gilbert’s share.

“Thanks, Sam!”

I stand up from my chair to check for Sandy, and she’s busy talking with someone over the phone. She’s biting the tip of her pen and spinning herself in her chair.

So mature. She smiles, showing her deep cherry red lips.

I give her an I-wanna-talk-to-you-now looked, then she finally hangs up the phone and comes closer to my cubicle.

“What’s wrong, Sammy?” she asks with furrowed brows.

“What you said is true.”

“Which one?” she demands quickly.

“About the selling of half of the publishing,” I whisper.

She laughs, throwing her head back.

I grab her hand to let her behave, but instead, she shakes her head. “You are so not updated with the new gossips here, are you?”

I don’t react. She widens her eyes. “Wait, you haven’t heard the news? It was Monday, dear, Sammy.”

“Should I be worried?” I ask.

She shrugs. Before she can answer, I hear a commotion from the door. We both stop to check what's happening.

My jaw literally drops to the floor with a thud. My eyes almost pop out from my head.

"Oh, my God! They're so frigging hot!" Sandy giggles, gripping my hand and it's freaking strong that almost dislocates my bones.

And she's right! They're blazing hot!

They get everyone's attention in the office, and all stand and greet them hi and hello with handshakes and batting their lashes.

I feel my stomach twists and my heart aches with jealousy.

We are the only one who still in our place and doesn't approach them because I am still shocked and trying to process that I am not actually dreaming. I close my mouth, and I almost drool. I blink twice or maybe more.

They are all wearing a suit and tie that worth a year of my salary. They could be Armani and Tom Ford models.

Jesus, no wonder my officemates are about to jump into them and they all have a killer smile on their faces.

Sandy grips my hand stronger when they walk toward our direction. I barely hear our boss introduces them to my officemates.

"Hello, princess!" Hawk greets chirpily.

His smile even grows wider, showing off his dimples. He extends his hand for a handshake, and Sandy grabs it instead and introduces herself. I want to roll my eyes, but they are our visitors.

"Margaux, you are very lucky to have Sam here with you. She's a keeper," Hawk says.

"Yes, Mr. Williams, indeed she is." Margaux smiles and winks at me.

"Hi, Sam, good to see you again," Seb says with a smile and wink.

I can feel my face turns hot when everyone comes to join us.

"Princess, I'm happy to see again, too." Patrick shakes my hand stronger and chuckles, and I glare at him.

"Hi, Samantha," Phoenix says in a soft tone.

I can't almost hear his voice. He looks at me and smiles with sadness overflowing in his eyes. He's wearing a gray suit that fits perfectly for him with a white shirt and dark gray tie to match his outfit.

"Hi," I say back.

"Who bought half of the publishing?" I ask with a firm tone.

They knew that I didn't want to work for them, but I couldn't stop them from buying if this if it's in the market—that's how the business world works.

"Don't worry, it's not me. It's Seb, Abby is interested in owning half of this. She also loves books. Seb bought for her since he's still handling Abby's assets," he explains.

I nod and feel suddenly uncomfortable.

"Samantha, can we talk?" he asks.

I scowl at him. "What do you think we are doing?"

He gives me a tight smile. "I see, the princess I know is back."

I glare at him. "Don't you dare call me that again."

"Sorry," he grunts.

"What do you wanna talk to me. You can start talking before your time runs out."

"Samantha, I don't wanna talk to you here."

"Then we won't talk."

He sighs deeply as if he accepts his defeat. "I want you back."

I laugh my ass out loud that gets everyone's attention. I raise my hands up to apologize. They continue staring at us.

I give them a what-the-hell looked. I face him when everyone gets back to their own business. Seb, Hawk, and Patrick are busy with the boss for their tour in the whole office.

"Look, Phoenix." I take a deep breath. "There is no wanting me back." It honestly hurts to say that though, but I need to say it. "We are over almost four months ago. I gave our friendship a chance, our relationship a chance then you ruined it for your false assumptions. I'm not giving us another chance. I think I gave you enough chances already. I'm not blaming you for my dad's death. I forgave you for whatever mistakes you did for me, but taking you back is not happening. I've learned enough, and Tyler left me when I took him back, and I'm afraid you will do the same thing if I take you back, and you also cheated on me."

"Samantha, just let—"

I raise my hand to stop him. "I'm not gonna hear that, Phoenix. I gave you three months to come to me but you never did try. You hurt me the most. I trusted you, and I don't think I can ever trust you again."

He looks up the ceiling and releases a shaky breath. My heart is bleeding. I love him so much, but I should do this for my own good. I should think about myself this time. I need to let him go. I've had enough heartbroken that could last a lifetime.

"Samantha, can I, um, can I just give you something."

I laugh and shake my head. "You can't bribe me again, Phoenix. You can't just buy me something to get what you want from me. You did that before, so it's a no."

"That's not what I mean, I just want to—"

"No, Phoenix. I think we are done talking. I should go back to work."

I walk away from him even if I don't want to. I don't even wait for him to respond. My tears threaten to fall, but I take a deep breath to calm my emotions. My nerves are shaking, and I'm going to breakdown at any moment if I'll stay with him longer.

I bite my lower lip to stop from trembling. I can't see him so affected like that—that's my weakness. I could have agreed to take me back if I just followed what I feel for him. I can't even be a friend to him, that never going to happen—I will end up in his lap or worse in his bed.

"Princess, it's Abby." I look up at Seb who's leaning to my cubicle, offering his phone.

I take the phone from my hand. I clear my throat. "Hello?"

"Sam!" she squeals over the phone, and I can't help but roll my eyes.

"You are hurting my ear, mommy."

"I am your new boss of the boss," she says proudly.

"I heard that," I say slowly. "Should I resign?"

"Hell no! Don't you dare."

"The last boss didn't end so well. So, I'm just giving you heads up." I look up at Seb who's looking at me curiously, but there's a hint of a smile on his face.

"Sam, I didn't call you for that. I'm not your boss. I own half of it because I love books. I'm calling to invite you on Saturday. Don't worry it's a girls' day out. No guys this time."

I sigh. “I’ll call you if I can, okay?”

“No. You won’t say no to me, Sam! I won’t accept it.”

“Ugh! Are all of you don’t recognize a word no?”

She laughs. “We, King, Hughes, and Williams don’t accept no for an answer.”

I groan. “Your husband is waiting.”

“So, I’ll pick you up on Saturday. Be ready! Seb will babysit Lizzy.”

“Whatever! Like I can ever say no to you.”

“It didn’t go well, huh?” Seb asks.

“Your wife is so relentless,” I affirm.

“That’s not what I mean.”

“Oh, that.” I shake my head.

He nods. “Take your time, Sam. He won’t go anywhere soon.”

I shrug and I feel bad and empty, but it should be this way.

“Princess, we are leaving. We’re still seeing each other soon,” Hawk says with a sad tone.

I smile tightly and nod.

“Bye, Princess.” Patrick waves. I wave back, then they start walking away.

“You know them?” everyone asks in unison as soon as the guys close the door behind them.

I jolt up in my chair, holding my hand over my chest. “Are you all trying to kill me?” I ask to the five pairs of eyes looking down on me, including Sandy.

“Tell us, how did you meet those hot men in suit and tie.”

I roll my eyes to the brunette name Marie. “They’re taken, so go back to your work before the new co-owner fired us all,” I tell them flippantly.

They don’t move.

“I know the Playboy Seb Hughes is married, but how about the other three,” says the strawberry blonde with hazel eyes, I think her name is Chloe.

“Do tell us!” Ben pops his head from the crowded girls.

“As if you don’t know them already,” I answer him with a snort.

“Are you mad at me, princess?” de asks waggling his brows.

“I hate you!” I snap.

He laughs instead.

“We are waiting,” Sandy sings.

“Check them online to answer your questions,” I say and pretend to type on the keyboard, focusing my eyes on the screen.

“Such a sour puss!” Sandy exclaims and leaves.

Everyone moves away when they can’t get an answer they want except for Ben.

“What?” I snap.

“Phoenix’s Princess, huh?” he says with a grin then walks away.

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I groan after hanging up the phone call I received from the security of the apartment building. I head to the elevator after wearing a sweater and pajama bottoms, taking my keys with me.

I walk out of the elevator, then halt to stop to see Phoenix being grabbed by the security. He’s completely wasted, worse than I expected when the security called telling that there’s a man yelling and wanting to talk with me. His face is flushed, bloodshot eyes, his hair is messy, wearing the same suit, but without the tie.

“It’s okay. I know him,” I tell the security who’s his name is Jackson.

Phoenix almost stumbles down when Jackson releases him. I walk toward him before he falls.

“Are you sure, Ms. Anderson? I can call a cop,” he suggests with his weary voice.

“I’m fine. He’s a friend. He’s not used to drinking,” I lie.

“But—” Jackson is cut off when Phoenix growls.

“Fuck off!”

“Phoenix!” I snap and wrap his arm around my shoulder. I almost lose my balance when he leans on me. He may be lost some weight, but he’s pure muscles.

“Need help?” Jackson offers.

“Help me keeping the elevator open, please.”

Jackson walks past us and presses the elevator key as I guide Phoenix to walk with me. He smells of musk, cologne, and liquor that makes him smell very masculine. I can feel his warmth spreading on me as we are pressed together. His warm breathing tickles the exposed skin of my shoulder.

“Call me if you need anything, Ms. Anderson,” Jackson says.

“I said fuck off!” Phoenix responses.

I elbow him that makes him groan. “You are a drunkass, Phoenix!” I snap and glare up at him, but his eyes are half-closed.

“Why did you come here, Phoenix?”

“To see you, princess,” he answers with a slurred voice.

“I told you I don’t wanna see you!” I don’t know why I even bother going down to take him.

I can’t just let Jackson call the cop if Phoenix does trouble down the lobby. There is something inside me that tells me to do the right thing. The right thing? Seriously, Samantha? You just want to see him. I roll my eyes.

“You’re sassy,” he says with an amused tone.

“Just shut up!”

“Okay,” he says, pursing his lips close.

I guide him to lie down on my couch, remove his shoes, then his jacket. I stop when he’s looking at my face intently. He swallows hard. His pain bloodshot eyes are looking at me, but he hasn’t said a word.

“Go to sleep before I kick your ass out of my apartment!” I stand straight from my bending posture.

He curls himself in a fetal position, then closes his eyes. I walk away from him, then I stop when I hear him say good night, my love.

Did he mean it? Did he say it for me? Don’t they say that a drunk man’s words are a sober man’s thoughts?

I wipe my tears and crawl back to bed, tucking my blanket above my chin.

“Good night, Phoenix,” I say and close my eyes.

Chapter 30

PHOENIX

I was used to having a hangover for months since my disastrous relationship with Samantha, but I groan as I feel my stiff body for being curled up long. I sit up straight on the couch and begin rubbing the back of my aching neck.

I look around the small living room of her apartment, nothing to see other than the boring cream-colored wall, a flat tv screen, a set of couches, and a black glass coffee table.

The memories of last night are ambiguous to me, except that I remember pissing off the security guard, and how Samantha helped my drunkass up into her apartment.

She was still so magnificent even in her beige baggy sweater and baby blue pajama bottoms.

I wonder how it feels to touch underneath those baggy clothes she wears.

I missed those feelings.

I missed her skin against my hands, and I missed those lips I kissed days ago.

Jesus, I'm instantly a boner. It's been a while, buddy.

My head snaps to the door unlocked from the outside.

My eyes are instantly narrow.

Fuck! It's the asshole!

I stand up quickly and stride to him. He freezes the moment he sees me.

"What the fuck are you doing in my apartment, Williams?" Tyler yells, glaring at me.

I glare back. "And what the fuck are you doing here in my building, Payne in my ass?"

He's caught off guard.

He doesn't know that I already own this building. When I found out Samantha is renting here, I closed the deal just last week.

"What the fuck, Williams? You may own the building, but we are paying rent. Get out of my fucking apartment!" He looks pissed, but I am more than pissed at him.

"I will not get out. Samantha let me stay here last night. And you left her, now why are you coming back?" We are now facing each other.

He is breathing heavily.

My nose flares, and so as his. He clenches his jaw, and I do the same. He forms his fists into balls, and I am doing the same thing.

I may have lost some weight, but I went back to the gym last week and started kickboxing again. I am two inches taller than him and I'm pure muscles. I can knock him out in one punch, but I won't do that to piss Samantha even more.

I won't even punch back if he's going to punch me, just to get Samantha on my side—that's how much I want her back in my life.

How pathetic, Phoenix!

"I left her because I was giving her the space she needed. I am not like you, asshole! And I left a note, and you? What did you leave her? Nothing!" He growls. " Oh, yeah. You left her broken!"

I'm blink because the truth hurts, and he is right.

This asshole is right!

But I'm losing control. I want to punch him pretty badly. My knuckles are itching to punch something; to punch someone.

"We didn't break up, and she's still my girlfriend. And I am not breaking up with her anytime soon, buddy. It's your loss," he snorts.

I blink many times because he's getting on my nerves. I am trying hard to control the anger that is now quickly spreading in my veins, and he's testing me.

He doesn't see me when I am mad. I'm insane when I lose control.

"You left her, asshole, the moment you left her, it means you and her were over. I will take her back whether you like it or not. It's not that I need your permission, and she will be mine. Again," I say calmly with pride

Then he grabs my shirt! Fuck!

My hand instantaneously grips his throat and pushes him stronger to the wall that causes the wall to shake. I clench my jaw and my free hand is already formed into a fist.

I narrow my eyes at him without breaking eye contact. "Did you forget that I told you once to stay away from her if you still value your goddamn life?" I hiss, and my body shakes with anger. I can feel the rage is taking over me.

His face turns red at how strong I am gripping his throat, but he wants me to punch him because he doesn't let go of my shirt.

He struggles to loosen my grip using his hands and tries hard to kick me in my crotch, but he miserably fails. I just grip him and haven't punched him yet.

"Answer me! Fucking answer me!"

His eyes start to roll back—he's going to blackout. I raise my fist, then I hear a loud thud. We both look at each other in shock.

I release my hand from him quickly, and he almost falls. He's catching for air, wheezes, and coughs at the same time.

I rush to the where the sound comes from, squeeze the doorknob, and open the door widely only to see Samantha is lying on the floor beside her bed.

Tyler follows me. Samantha is struggling to stand up from the tangled blanket around her legs.

"Princess!" "Babe!" we squeal in unison.

We both look at each other, then back to Sam who now looks shocked and pissed to see both us in her bedroom door. I even forget my anger towards Tyler.

The woman on the floor looks sexier and hotter only on her baggy sweater from last night, but no more pajama bottoms.

Her messy bedhead gives her looks even better, and it will be perfect in my grip while I'm taking her from behind. Her face flushed maybe from embarrassment, and those luscious red lips that devoured me once are pressed into a thin line.

Good lord in heaven! Her bra free-gorgeous tits are begging for my attention as her nipples are poking through her thin sweater.

I can even see the white cotton panties peeking every time she tries to get free from the tangled blanket around her gorgeous legs that have been wrapped many times around my waist.

I'm so hard right now.

"Are both of you just gonna watch me while I am trying to free myself from this?" she yells, narrowing her eyes to both of us. She looks hot when she glares

Her hands are busy unwrapping her legs from her blanket. We both move toward her in one quick sprint to help her untangle herself from the blanket.

“What are those yelling that wakes me up?” she asks, placing her hands on her hips, still shooting us a glare.

We both don’t answer because I am busy gawking at her, and I want to punch Tyler in his eyes because he’s also eye-fucking her.

“Talk!” she yells.

I’m jarred from my dirty thoughts.

Jesus, this woman can yell. But she’s not that of a screamer in my bed. Yeah, she screamed my name many times, but not like this that irritates my eardrums.

I clear my throat. “Um, maybe you can wear something first,” I tell her and grin sheepishly.

Tyler looks at me or more like glaring at me. “Yeah, babe.”

I want to poke his eyes and punch his throat.

She scowls. “What’s wrong with what I am wearing?” she asks lifting the edge of her sweater that shows the complete view of her white cotton panties.

Tyler and I turn back quickly, not to see her more because I can feel my cock hardens and strains in my pants.

Samantha groans. “Both of you, get out of my room now! And wait in the living room,” she commands.

We both walk away towards her door like goddamn robots under the remote-controlled.

“Oh, and don’t kill each other, yet!” she adds.

***

They’ve been together in her room for ten fucking minutes long, and I can’t hear anything other than muffled sounds and murmurs. I wish I have a super hearing power at this moment to know what they’re talking about. What took them so long?

I’ve been pacing back in forth in her living room, then sit back to the couch, then back to pacing again.

I flinch many times at the thought of them—

Stop punishing yourself, Phoenix!

It’s all my fault.

I was an ass because I let her go for the thought that she would hate me. Now, I'm lucky she's giving me somehow a bit of her attention, and I'm very thankful for that.

What if they're getting back together? My blood boils! That is not going to happen.

She is mine!

I stride to her bedroom door and raise my hand to knock, but it hangs up in the air.

I release an exasperating sigh. This is killing me.

I press my ear against her thin wall.

"Are you gonna take him back, Sam?" Tyler asks.

I listen intently not even bother to breathe.

I wait and wait for her answer, but it never happens. I press my forehead against the wall, accepting my defeat. I close my eyes and take a deep breath. She doesn't like me anymore. This is the end. My end.

The door flies open. They both emerge from the door with creased brows

"Were you eavesdropping this whole time?" Sam asks who looks pissed.

I stand straight, shake my head innocently, and shrug.

"I have to go, babe. Call me if this asshole will do something that you won't like," Tyler says, kissing her on her forehead.

"Like what, Payne in my ass?" I growl.

"Phoenix!" Sam snaps.

"Bye, babe."

Samantha waves and smiles at him—that smile is supposed to be for me.

Tyler shoots me a glare before he closes the door behind him.

"Phoenix, you can leave now." Samantha takes my attention back.

My head snaps in her direction. "You gave him more than ten minutes and where is my turn?" I ask annoyingly.

"You don't have a turn, Phoenix. I gave him time because he is my boyfriend, and you are not," she says casually, then walks to her small kitchen.

I blink many times, ignoring the pain squeezing inside my chest.

I follow her. I won't give up. This is my chance.

"He left you already, Samantha."

She turns to face me.

"And you didn't?"

I wince. That caught me off guard.

I take a huge breath and turn my face away from her. I don't want her to see me in pain.

"Just give us another chance, Samantha," I say softly without looking at her.

"I can't because I still have a boyfriend, and I'm not gonna cheat on him," she replies firmly.

"You cheated on me already." I look at her this time and scowl at her.

"I cheated on you?" She exclaims and points her finger to my face.

"I freaking cheated on you? I just came back from New York, and I found out you have already Gabrielle in your arms!" she yells at me that makes me wince in pain—a kind of pain that can't be relieved by any analgesic. It fucking hurts.

"I didn't cheat on you, Samantha. You know the reasons why I did that."

"Yeah, I know," she simply says. "Can't you at least warn me or send me a notice?" Her sarcasm makes me flinch.

"I'm sorry—"

"It doesn't change a thing, Phoenix," she snaps. "We are not getting back together. So, forget it!" She makes her busy in the kitchen, opening the cupboards and takes a mug.

I wait patiently. One thing I learned from my miserable life since we parted months ago is to be patient.

She starts brewing coffee, then places a coffee mug on the kitchen counter. Yeah, a coffee mug.

One fucking coffee mug!

We are supposed to be doing these together, living together, and I am supposed to be making breakfast for her every morning.

Christ, it's killing me.

"I won't give up, you know. Not until you are mine again. Just remember that, princess."

She stops from whatever she's doing, but she doesn't face me.

“I let you slip once, and I’m not gonna let that happen again. I’ll make sure to do everything in my power to take you back, tit for tat.”

She doesn’t even fucking move, but I’m sure she is listening.

“You are born to be mine! One fucking mistake doesn’t mean it ruins us for good! And it doesn’t mean we are over because we are far from over, and I do believe in a second chance, Samantha. If you gave Tyler a second chance, don’t you think I deserve that too?” I sigh deeply.

I’m so desperate.

“We made to be together, and we will be together in the end. I will chase you to the end of this fucking earth.” I pause. “I will chase you, princess.”

I hope that’s enough for her to know that I’m so fucking serious, and I’m not giving up because she’s fucking ignoring me.

I walk away out of the kitchen, grab my coat from her couch, and leave without fucking saying goodbye because that’s not the end.

That’s only the beginning.

“I see, it didn’t go well as you’ve planned,” my brother says while blocking my punch with his arms.

“She’s so fucking stubborn!” I punch him with my left arm, and Hawk ducks.

“She’s not stubborn. She’s smart, dumbass.” He stands straight and lowering down his arms.

I wipe my sweaty forehead with my arms.

“She won’t make it easy for you, so be ready for the challenge, Phoenix,” he continues.

“I know, and I won’t give up until she’s mine again.”

“That’s my brother!” He announces proudly and smirks. “So, what’s your plan? Does she know, you own that apartment building?”

“Not that I know of, but her ex does,” I answer.

“You told me they didn’t break up.”

“I doubt that. Samantha just wanted to piss me off,” I retort.

“Whatever brother.” He laughs.

“I need your help,” I tell him.

“Anything. Just say it.”

“I need you to help me, and I’m running out of ideas.”

He laughs his ass out, and that makes me scowl.

“Ever heard of google? Book for dummies?” He smirks mischievously.

I roll my eyes. “I’m not gonna do what’s on the net, fucker. I am not like you. I’ve never been so helpless like this, and I never pursued any woman before,” I admit and start stripping off my gloves.

“There’s always a first time, brother. We’ve extended our family. I, Abby, and Izzy can help you with your problem.

While in the shower, I can’t help but think of how we enjoyed ourselves as I pressed against the wall. My nerves calm a bit just thinking that that asshole is not staying with her anymore. I couldn’t fucking think straight when I found out they live in one apartment together.

I shove the thought out of my head because I want to fucking kill him slowly till he begs for me to kill him quickly.

I’m turning myself into a ruthless and immoral person.

My phone suddenly rings that jars me out of my irrational thought.

“Abby?”

“Alexander Phoenix, I need you in my home, right now!” She sounds anxious and panicking.

“Calm down, Abby. What’s wrong?” I ask quickly.

“I said I need you, now!”

I blink. “Home? Where? What’s going on, Abbygail?”

“It’s Sam.”

“Fuck! I’m on my way.”

Chapter 31

SAM

I've been in the bathroom a few times, puking my guts out, but it still hurts. My back is dripping with sweat, and I want to puke more. It feels like there's a ball rolling in my stomach.

Thank God! Abby has a private doctor who takes care of me, and I don't have to rush to the hospital.

Even my mother is a nurse, I hate hospital and I never visited her in her work. Just for a dental checkup, something about it that scares the hell out of me.

I curl myself in the comfy king size bed of one of the guest rooms at King's mansion.

The doctor gave me something to relieve the cramps of my tummy, and I feel better for a while. He said it was not food poisoning—I might have eaten something that I am allergic to.

I know that I have allergies to mushrooms. There could be in the food we ate, but I didn't taste anything like it or maybe I was just too famished after hours of shopping with the girls.

"Abby, where is Samantha? Is she okay? What happened? You sounded so worried over the phone." It was the faint voice of Phoenix outside the door.

Crap! I'm gonna strangle Abby when I get my strength back. Does she really have to call Phoenix? I can't face him when I look like crap.

I just want this moment, I just want to curl into a ball.

"Um, she might have eaten something." I can hear the guilt in Abby's voice.

"What exactly happened, Abby?" Phoenix sounds stressed. "And why didn't you bring her to the hospital?" he demands annoyingly.

I want to roll my eyes, but I don't even have the strength to do that.

"She'd seen by our private doctor. She will be okay, and she's resting now." Phoenix groans. "Can I see her now?" He asks quickly, making my body tense.

Abby, please, say no.

He can't, and I can't let him see me like this—I am so weak.

"Don't you think she should rest first?" Abby response.

I release the breath that I've been unbeknownst holding too long.

"Abbygail Catherine, you shouldn't have called if you won't let me see her." My eyes widen.

Is he angry at Abby? There are seconds of silence. My heart is beating faster.

"Fine, but don't stress her out. She's still weak." When I hear Abby's defeated voice, I sink into the warm duvet.

"What did you exactly feed her, Abbygail?" He's not done.

I mentally groan. Can't he just stop interrogating her? It was not her fault.

"She is allergic to something," Abby answers.

He growls. "Did you let her eat mushrooms?" His angry voice roars from the outside.

"Phoenix, I swear I don't know. We are all famished, and I just asked the head chef to bring their specialty, then we ate—" There's a sadness in Abby's voice.

"Whatever!" he snaps. "I will let Seb spank your ass, Abbygail!"

I close my eyes shut when my stomach rolls again. Now, they are fighting because of me. Seconds later, the door flies open. I don't have to open my eyes to know who gets inside. I can feel the shiver down my spine, and his presence is overwhelming my senses—I feel alive, and my energy comes back as if I have never been puking my guts out.

The bed presses down when he sits at the edge. Now, I can smell him and feel his nearness, and his warmth alone ignites me like charging me.

He begins running his fingers through my hair. God! His touch makes me drowsy, and I want to sigh and just close my eyes, and his smell is intoxicating me. I can purr like a kitten because it feels so good. I missed this. I missed him.

He sighs in relief. "Samantha? Princess, are you awake?" His voice is almost a whisper, and I can hear the hesitation. He tucks the strand of hair behind my ear.

"Princess, say something if you're awake, please? I wanna hear your voice."

I wanna hear his voice too. I want him closer. I want to lie down in his arms and fall asleep. I want him to touch me that might relieve the pain I physically feel.

God, I want him inside me. Jesus, is this the effect of the drugs or the mushrooms?

"I'm okay, Phoenix," I mumble.

I wish he can hear my thoughts. Does being sick makes someone horny? Because I want him to do me so badly. I mentally hit my head.

“Do you need anything? A tea, something to drink, something to eat. Anything Princess, just say it, please?”

I bite my lip to avoid blurting out that I need him more than any food or medicine right now.

He’s the food and the medicine I want. He’s my lifeline and my life.

God, I love him.

“Princess, do you want to take a rest?”

I want to roll my eyes even my eyes are closed.

Ugh! Why men are so dumb?

“Yes,” I murmur.

“Okay. Feel better, okay? Call me if you need anything, I’ll be just right outside,” He tells me quietly, running his hands on my hair one last time, then stands up.

I squeeze my eyes shut and groan—a groan that no one can hear even my own ass. I open my eyes when I hear his footsteps—he’s walking toward the door.

“Phoenix!” I yell, applying pressure on my cramping abdomen with my hand.

He stops and snaps his head back at me. His eyes widen in surprise.

“I need you, please?” I plead silently.

He’s in front of me faster than lightning, and it’s comical. If I have only the strength, I might have been laughing my butt out. He kneels in front of me with his eyes full of worries.

“What do you need, princess?” he whispers, rubbing my exposed arm.

I close my eyes to feel his warm hand and for the sensation spreading in my entire body.

“Can you stay with me?” I ask while my eyes are still closed.

“Of course, I will stay with you. Wait, let me get a chair, okay?”

“No.”

He stiffens. “No?”

“Stay with me in bed.”

"Are you sure?"

I manage to nod with my eyes closed.

When he gets in the bed, he sits beside me, leaning his back against the headboard after throwing some pillows away.

I turn my body to face him and lift my gaze up at him, he is glancing down at me. Our eyes meet—he looks worried, his brows meet together. There's still a sadness in his eyes.

"Lie down beside me," I whisper without breaking eye contact.

Did I eat something to increase my libido? Why can't I control my desires? I should stop thinking right now.

Goodbye, self-control! I'm done controlling. I need him.

He gets inside the blanket silently—the same blanket I am using. He slips his arm under my neck, and I use it as my pillow, then he let his left arm draped around my waist, and our legs are tangled together.

I close my eyes to feel the warmth from his body and I'm drowning with my own desires. He feels good at my back. His breathing is tickling the back of my neck.

"Phoenix." I almost moan just being close with him like this. Enough of pushing him away, and I need him back.

"Princess?" he whispers, and it sounds so erotic that I have to bite my lip stronger because I almost lost in my thought.

"Your jeans are itching my legs," I murmur.

"Do you want me to remove my jeans?" he asks without moving.

I nod. "Your shirt too."

He mumbles okay.

A minute later, he slips back inside our blanket and hugs my back like how he did before.

Jesus, I'm dripping wet because he smells so good and he feels so good too.

The thin shirt and cotton shorts short Abby gave me feel like my second skin when he's pressing against me like this.

He kisses my exposed shoulder. "You feel better like this?" His voice turns deep and husky. Now, I can feel him poking my lower back.

I want to press myself against him so bad and dry hump with him, and I am sure he won't resist, but I'm too weak for that. Thank God my mind works well at this moment. What's wrong with me?

"I missed this, Samantha. I missed you so much. I missed you in my arms," he whispers in my ear, pressing his wet lips at the column of my neck. "Never a day passed by I never think of you. I can't see straight." He hugs me tight, inhaling my scent, then he releases a deep sigh.

I stay silent, press my lips together, and just enjoy this moment with him.

"Samantha, I wish this moment never ends. I want you like this with me. I want you back. I need you back in my life. You are the only person that keeps me sane," Phoenix says, kissing the back of my neck down to my shoulder.

Goosebumps spread in my entire body, and I want to turn my head and meet his lips.

"You took my heart with you. I barely live, I barely breathe. You took my life with you, and I want my life back, princess." He pauses and takes a deep breath. "You are my heart. You are my every breath and you are my life." He pauses again. "I love you, Samantha Lorraine. So fucking much, it hurts. I love you so much." His voice shakes in the end.

I gasp and I think my heart stop. My word suspends to hear him says those words that I've waited so long to hear it from him. I know it's true and I can feel it in bones.

Butterflies wildly scatter in my stomach and I want to scream and jump up and down in this bed.

I squeeze my eyes shut, and if this is a dream, good lord in heaven, I don't want to wake up. He presses me closer to him and sniffs. Is he crying?

"I love you, my love."

I close my eyes when he says it again—it's real, and I want to say it back so bad.

I wake up in the same position, but it feels cold and light. I sit up straight in my bed. I'm alone. Only a light coming from the lamp that illuminates in the room.

I remember Phoenix admitted his feelings, and it wasn't a dream, but now he's not here anymore. Did he regret it after that?

I frown, take the duvet, and cover myself.

The door swings open, and my head snaps to see Phoenix in the door with a tray on his hand.

A smile spreads across his beautiful face. Now, he's the Phoenix I met months ago.

"Hey, how's my princess?" he greets, kicks the door behind him, and walks closer to me.

I just stare at him and follow his move—I am still tongue-tied to talk.

He places the tray with a steaming bowl, water, fruits, and a cup of tea on the nightstand. He sits on the bed, facing me after kissing my forehead. We just stare at each other for a good whole minute.

"Abby and Seb went back to their home. Mom and Mike are already resting." He finally breaks the silence while taking the steaming bowl from the tray.

He looks at me when he has not heard me saying anything. Did he really mean what he said before we fell to sleep? I think I'm still dreaming, but my mind and my heart are celebrating with happiness.

"I think you should eat, princess. Your stomach had been empty for too long." He starts scooping the soup, and I'm speechless.

He put the bowl back to the tray and sigh heavily. "I know you are still mad me and I know I'm far from forgiven, but I won't force you into forgiving me. I am just relieved that I was able to tell you how I feel before we fell asleep. I hope you remember what I said last night, Samantha because I mean every word." He holds my hands. "Don't worry you will hear it every day for the rest of my life. I love you, princess." He squeezes them.

I can feel the huge grin spreads on my lips.

I take the soup and start digging it after a few blows because it's still frigging hot. When I look at him, his eyes grow big and his mouth hangs open.

"I'm hungry and my stomach keeps grumbling," I say in between blow, making him shake his head in disbelief.

"So, you can talk now, huh?" he teases and looks amused. "Seriously, how do you feel?"

"Not bad."

"Slow down, my love. It's hot." My spoon hangs in the air.

I'm still processing everything that happened in this short time, and I like every damn thing about it. And I like it every time he called me my love. I feel special.

I blink then continue eating.

My heart is fluttering. Tyler and I were over, but Phoenix doesn't have any idea, and I have no plan on telling him sooner. Let him chase me like what he said in my apartment.

***

"This house is so huge just for your mom and Mike," I say while sitting on the couch at the balcony.

The cold wind makes me shiver, but it's been a while since I am able to breathe freely like this.

"Abby grew up here. Mike has no plan to leave this place. This is the only memory of Abby's mom. Mom is okay to stay here since Abby treats her as her mother." He covers me with a blanket.

"Are you staying here for good?"

"Nope, Samantha. I have only one place I wanted to stay for the rest of my life," he answers calmly, pressing himself to warm me. He then kisses the top of my head. "I will wait till the day I die if I can have a place in you. There's nowhere else I wanted to be than to be with you. In your heart." He points his finger to my chest. "But I want you to make sure if you really want to be with Tyler. I will still wait for you though because I wanna make sure if you break up with him he doesn't get a chance to have you back because I will make sure that you will be mine forever. I made a mistake once, for letting you go, and if you'll give me a chance, I'll prove it to you that I also deserve a second chance."

"Like I have a choice," I snort.

He chuckles, "Will you come to my apartment tomorrow?"

I glare at him. "I'm not moving in with you, Phoenix!"

"I'm not asking, Samantha!" He glares back.

I can't help but smile. "Then why are you inviting me to your apartment? I'm not going to have sex with you anytime soon." That's actually a big fat lie.

"I'm not gonna have sex with you too, Samantha."

Ouch! I look down and hug myself. He laughs, his body shakes.

"Don't be disappointed, my love. Never a day passed by I didn't think of us making love together, in fact, I want to fuck you in this balcony hard and rough that you might be walking limp tomorrow." He grins.

Bastard!

"But I don't want you to cheat on him. I know the feeling of being cheated. When you're done with him, I am always here. Waiting." He lifts my chin, then kisses my nose.

I missed his smell, and I want to devour his mouth so badly.

Ugh! I'm not a saint!

Grabbing the back of his head, I crash my mouth into his and kiss him so hard and wet, and he moans immediately and kisses me back hard. He explores, tastes, bites, nibbles, and our tongues are

shoving and fighting while we are sucking, groaning, and panting like we are starving animals. We both pull back.

“I told you I don’t—”

I press my finger on his swollen and red lips.

“That you don’t want me to cheat on him? I’m not cheating on anyone. I’m just kissing the man I want to kiss pretty bad since the moment I laid my eyes on him in that parking lot.”

His jaw drops. I stand up grinning and walk away.

Chapter 32

PHOENIX

I'm grinning like an idiot even if she left me here astonished. I just confessed my feelings for her, and it took me all the encouragement in the world.

It's not that easy, especially for a guy who has an ego larger than the universe but for her; forget that fucking ego and it's time to man up!

It didn't bother me even if she didn't say it back—she doesn't have to because based on her reaction I know she cares me or at least she feels something for me somehow and that pays so much for my effort.

"What are you doing here, Phoenix?" I crawl down her bed after stripping off my clothes.

She's already curled up in bed with a blanket tucked up under her chin. She's still looked sick though, but she's not puking anymore. I want to strangle Abby for letting her eat that food with mushrooms, but I want to hug her and thank her at the same time.

If not because of that, I wasn't able to tell Samantha about my feelings, and she's not back here in my arms right now.

And Jesus, she kissed me.

"Sleeping beside you. What does it look like to you, Samantha?" I ask, slipping myself inside her blanket.

"I know, smart-ass, that's why I'm asking. There are twenty-three rooms in this house, and you have your own. Why not go back to your room and plug in your headset," she says, pulling her blanket away from me.

I tighten the grip. "Hush. Just sleep." I try covering myself, but she doesn't let go of the blanket

"Not until you are out." She faces me and glares.

"Are you kicking me out?"

"Yes, Einstein!"

I chuckle. "Not a chance, smurf!" She abruptly sits up straight on the bed

"Why smurf? Do I look blue to you?" She looks amused.

I'm still lying down and run my palm on her smooth expose leg.

“Just lie back down, my love. It’s almost morning. We are leaving early.”

She doesn’t move.

Samantha is back! Thank God because I missed her sassiness.

“I’m not coming to your apartment. What’s in there, anyway?” She tries to remove my hand on her leg.

I grab her hand and plant it on my lips, then kiss her knuckles one by one. I look up at her and give her a smile.

“Fine, I will move into your apartment building.”

She pulls her hand quickly then scowls.

“What? Am I not allowed to move in there too? FYI, Princess, trust me we will end up together in one roof, in one bed for the rest of our lives. So, I’m moving in there.” I tell her with confidence, then I smirk.

If she only knew.

“I hate you!” she exclaims and lies back beside me silently.

“I don’t believe you,” I whisper in her ear that makes her shiver. Wrapping my arm around her waist, I tangled my legs with hers. “Night, princess.” She takes my hand and kisses it.

She doesn’t have to say anything. That’s enough for me. For the first time in forever, I might sleep soundly tonight.

***

“I have laundry to wash, apartment to clean, and manuscripts to read. So, no!” she says while securing her seat belt in my passenger seat. We are still fighting about her coming to my apartment since we woke up this morning.

She even refused for me to send her back to her apartment, but Mom interrupted us and she had to agree with Mom because I knew she was ashamed to say no to my mother.

This time, I win.

“Fine. You are so stubborn now, Samantha. And just so you know, it won’t scare me away.” I pull out from the King’s mansion.

I feel desperate and disappointed. I sigh deeply in defeat.

“Good,” she replies.

“Is that it? You want me to chase you, beautiful?”

“I didn’t say that!” she snaps.

“Aren’t you and him getting back together, Samantha?”

She stiffens. Her face and her ears turn red. Is she embarrassed?

“It feels like I am cheating on you rather than I am cheating on Tyler. He is nothing but treated well since we were back together, then suddenly, you came along and everything turned upside down.”

My nose flares. I don’t know why I feel bad and guilty at the same time.

“Why did you take him back?” I ask grouchily.

“He proved himself, Phoenix!” she exclaims.

I sigh deeply. “But you still have feelings for me. Isn’t it unfair for him?”

She faces me, and I can’t help but glance at her. “I am trying hard to get rid of you, you, asshole! You broke my heart!” Samantha is shaking with anger. I can’t say another, I have to focus back on the road. It’s killing me. I thought when I confessed, everything between us was going to be okay, but it was wrong.

“Every day I prayed for you to show up at my door, at least explained to me why. I never stopped believing that you will come back to me before I took back Tyler, but that day never came.” She pauses. “I always thought of you every time I went to sleep and every time I woke up. You may be broke up with me, but there was still a piece of you that I couldn’t hate. Your heart, Phoenix.”

It’s fucking killing me.

She wipes her face. I grab her hand and squeeze it. I press it against my lips and kiss it. I wish I can turn back the time, but it’s impossible. Maybe this is just a test of how far I can go with our relationship.

“I’m so sorry, Samantha. Take me back, and let me prove it to you that I regret letting you go once, and I’m not letting you go again. I never stop thinking of you too, and I never stop loving you. Give me a chance, please?” I say it sincerely while looking at her.

“Where is the I will chase you to the end of this fucking earth?” she asks and bursts into a laugh.

I laugh with her too. Jesus, this woman is certainly the death of me. For the first time since I see her again, and I’m back to normal.

It feels so good to laugh with her again.

“Uh-huh! So, you want a chase, Princess?” I say, smirking.

“It would be fun, Phoenix!” she replies cheerfully.

“Fine! Let me chase you, but—”

She snaps her head to me.

“If... If I will catch you, I will never let you go, and this time, you will be mine. Mine. Forever.”

She enlarges her eyes as if with surprise, then grins at me.

We arrive back at her apartment.

The last time I am here when I was drunk, and I almost beat Tyler into pulp. Now it feels like normal, but I can’t help to feel jealous about what they shared together in this apartment.

“I can help you clean and wash your laundry, princess. Does your ex still have things in here?” I ask while wandering around her pad.

My apartment is almost three times bigger than this and almost as big as Seb’s penthouse.

“You can go home. I am sure you have works to do. Thanks for driving me back, though.” She carries a hamper bag full of dirty laundry.

“Why not just send that to the laundromat?” I ask, pointing to her dirty clothes.

“Why don’t you go home?” she banters back.

My lips curves to smile. “You’re having fun kicking me out?”

She chuckles, “Because you can’t get what I’m trying to tell you, Phoenix.”

“What are you trying to tell me, Samantha?”

She sighs, “I’m not comfortable with you here in this apartment until I clear everything of what I shared with Tyler.”

I take a deep breath.

She is doing it for my own good, and I am so stupid not to get it. I bite my lip then I nod.

“Stay in my apartment and let me handle this. I will ask somebody to clean your apartment.”

She looks surprised. “No! I will do it on my own. There’s nothing much here anyway.”

I groan in frustration. “My love, please, stay with me just for a day. I promise to keep my hands off of you. You will stay in another room. I work most of the time in my office anyway, and you will go to work too, so we don’t see much.”

She slumps herself down to her couch dramatically. “You won’t stop till I agree, will you?”

I grin, shaking my head.

“Let me take my things, but I’m not gonna have sex with you,” she says, biting her lip with her mischievous smile.

“Not yet, princess, but you can always change your mind!” I yell.

She laughs from her room.

Fuck yeah!

I take the duffel bag from her hand as soon as she emerges from her bedroom door.

“Let’s go. Anything else, princess?”

She shakes her head with a cunning smile on her face.

“Why do I feel like there’s something behind that smile, Samantha? Are you playing with me now?” I ask with furrowed brows.

She laughs her ass out loud and slaps my ass playfully.

“Kinky!”

She laughs again. “I am just teasing you, Phoenix.”

She’s so beautiful. Her eyes glimmer with happiness, and that’s my plan to see her smiling like this again every day.

“Whatever.”

***

After our tour in my apartment, I walk her to her room—the fourth room. I never let anyone use this room even I have guests. I don’t know why, but I felt to keep it that way or maybe I am just waiting for someone who is worthy to have this room. It is a little bit bigger than my master bedroom.

It has a small balcony that shows the perfect view of the city lights. Perfect for Samantha when she gets bored—I can imagine her sitting there and read a good book or sipping the finest wine.

“This is huge, Phoenix. Can’t I just have that room on the left?” She wanders around the room.

It has king size bed with walk-in closets with closet island, adjacent bathroom all in the same cream, and dark red color that match with the curtains that cover the wall to ceiling glasses windows. It has a set of couches and small coffee table closer to the door that leads to the balcony and she has not seen it yet.

"You can't complain, sweetheart. You are my guest, and it's rude to resist an offer." I say playfully.

She laughs. "As if you'll listen to me. You are just very kind and I bothered you too much already."

I take her hand to follow me and press the button on the remote on her nightstand. The curtains slide open. She gasps and covers her mouth with her free hand.

"I want you to have this room because I know you will love it. I want you to enjoy your stay as much as I want you to stay here for myself. I can see you sitting on that balcony with a book in your hand," I tell her and point at the door.

She releases my hand and opens the door. "Wow! Okay, I change my mind!" She shrieks with excitement.

My heart flutters. God! Woman, you're sure the death of me. I want to shout her name on that balcony to let the people know how much I love her. I know I am pussy-whipped! That's official.

I can have plaque and statue as number one pussy-whipped or have a wall of pussy-fame in this damn country, and I don't fucking care. I love her with all my fucking heart and my fucking senses.

"You are not listening!" She shakes me.

I blink. "What?"

She groans, "I said I should have brought my book. I bought a psychological thriller, and I wasn't able to start reading it."

I kiss the top of her head and hug her. "I love you so much, Samantha."

She looks up at me and smiles, then hugs me back.

"I will give you books," I say, breaking the hug.

"Nope. You don't have to buy for me."

I grin sheepishly, "Guilty. But I already bought them for you."

Her eyes grow big.

I kiss her forehead and I walk away. I carry her box of books that I placed in my office.

"What is that?" she asks when she notices me placing the box on the small coffee table.

"Books?" I answer.

She opens the box and stops. Her brows furrow, then she stands straight from her bending posture.

"Will you please explain why all these have my home mailing address?" she asks, pointing her finger to the box.

I shrug and feel I'm running out of words. How am I going to explain this to her? I wasn't thinking about it when I took the box from my office.

"Phoenix?" she asks in a low voice and swallows hard. "Did you send all these to my home?"

I nod slowly and bite my lip. I look down at the box and for the first time, I don't know what to say.

"But why?"

I clear my throat and take a deep breath. "I want you to know that I've never been gone that you're always in my heart no matter what happened between us. I sent a book every day to your home as a message that I have reasons, that I never hurt you intentionally, that I care about you, that I love you every day."

Her tears fall from her eyes, but she remains silent.

"The first book I sent I know it didn't reach you. I have a message written on it. After three days, it was returned to me. I didn't stop though, I'm still sending a book every day. The post office called me after a month and they all returned the books to me. Your mom sent them all back to the post office."

She shakes to cry. I get closer to hug her, and she hugs me back instantly.

"I was busy hating you when all you did is loving me. If I only know I—"

I hush her. "You don't have to say anything. It's all my fault, princess. It's all mine."

She picks up one book and opens it from the package. She flips open the paperback and begins reading.

Day 24

My princess,

You are always in my thought every day.

In my eyes.

In my ears.

In my nose.

In my heart.

In my skin.

And in my dreams.

Hot tease,

P

Chapter 33

SAM

I spent an hour soaking myself in the huge tab with vanilla strawberry bubble bath and a glass of red wine.

We had dinner after he's done the cooking. I was just sitting pretty while he was busy preparing our dinner.

We said our goodnight after finishing the movie we agreed to watch. I felt bad and empty when we separated our ways.

I am sleeping alone while he's just a few steps away, but he keeps to his words to keep his hands off me and the no sex we agreed.

I glance at myself in front of the mirror one last time. No matter how much I want to spend my day in his apartment, I have to work and bills to pay.

A knock at my door catches my attention.

"Phoenix?" I yell in front of the mirror.

I hear his vague voice, so I walk towards my bedroom all the way to the door.

I approach with a gorgeous smile on his face, and I can't help but gawk. He's freshly showered. His hair is still wet.

I can smell his aftershave and a hint of his cologne—the same cologne he used when we were still together.

"Can I come in?" he asks with a breakfast tray on his hand.

I can help but smile and feel blessed with the man in front of me. I open the door wider to let him enter.

"Good morning, too, Phoenix!"

He chuckles, gets inside, and walks towards the couch.

I follow him and notice he's only wearing a t-shirt and a pair of sweatpants. The ass that I adore is in full view when he bends to place the tray down.

I'm such a perv.

"Let's have breakfast, princess. I will send you to your work since you don't have your car here," he says after kissing me on my cheek.

I can't help but feel overwhelmed by the gestures he's doing.

The butterflies in my stomach scatter.

"Yesterday, you sent my dirty laundry to the laundromat. You cooked us dinner. Then, you already wake up early to make us breakfast. I think you've done too much already. I can hire a cab to go to work." I press the remote to open the curtain, then sit beside him on the couch.

"I am not complaining, and I'll be bored to death here at home. No arguments. I'll send you to work."

We start with our breakfast consists of blueberry pancakes, scrambled eggs, bacon, fresh fruits, and of course coffee.

"You always win," I complain.

He smiles and looks amused. "It's for your own good, my love."

My heart flutters every time he calls me my love.

Simple things he does have huge effects on me. I never say that three words back at him, but it's only at the tip of my tongue. I hope he knows that I love him larger than life.

I just want to process everything's happening between us first, and it happens so fast.

I just broke up with Tyler, and now I'm here with Phoenix though it's not official, it feels like we are already back together.

"Samantha."

I snap my head to him. "Yeah?"

"What's on your mind?"

I shake my head then sip my coffee. I grimace and put the steaming mug down. I hit his arm. "You pranked me!" I peek at the mug and fake my gag. "What's in there?"

He laughs his ass out loud, then gives me an innocent look. "That's a coffee, princess."

"No, it's not. It tastes like a poop of cow."

He barks out laughing. His laugh is contagious, and I can't help but join him.

"Did you happen to taste a poop of cow?" He grins.

Finally, Phoenix is back—the annoying and cocky Phoenix I knew months ago is back!

"No, ew! Why would I taste a poop in the first place?" I grimace.

"Stop talking about poop. We're in front of food, and where's your table manner?" His body shakes from laughing.

"And that mug you took is mine." He points at the mug I sipped from, then points at the mug with froth on top. "And that one is yours."

I smile because he remembers the coffee I ordered when we came here a few months ago.

"Sorry. But really, Phoenix. It tastes like poop," I say, biting my lip to stop from laughing.

It tastes bitter and tangy—a taste that won't leave in your mouth until you gargle with mouthwash.

"So, you won't kiss me if I drink this?" he asks with a mischievous smile.

I look at his lips that's still smirking. I roll my eyes. "Don't tease me early in the morning."

His smirk turns into a full grin.

"Evil!" I say and stand up, and he bursts into a laugh.

"Not yet!" He grabs my hand when I open the passenger door to get out of his car.

I stop and look at him. "Yeah?"

He grabs my head and presses his lips to mine, and I immediately kiss him back. His kiss is soft, slow, light, and chastely, then he breaks it and leans his forehead on me. He doesn't taste like his coffee—his taste is addictive, and I want to kiss him more.

"I love you, Samantha."

I kiss his lips softly. "I know. Will you come later to pick me up after work?"

He pecks my lips. "You don't have to ask because that's the plan. You should go before I'll change my mind and drives us back to our apartment." My brows furrow with the word our, I don't say anything.

"Okay, later?"

"Later, Princess."

He drives away in his dark blue Porsche after waving his hand. A hand pats my shoulder that makes me jump. My hand instantly places on my chest. I roll my eyes when I turn around to see Sandy with a smile and raised brows.

"Was that Mr. Williams?"

"I won't talk, so drop it."

She giggles even more like a teenager who just greeted by her crush. "So, you really knew them before their visits, don't you?" She bumps her arm on me.

I stop and hold her arm. "Don't gossip about my life around, Sandy. They're maybe rich and always in the news, but they have their private lives, and they are great people. They deserve privacy, and oh, if you love your job, just keep whatever you saw earlier to yourself."

She listens intently then widens her eyes. Her mouth gapes then jumps up and down.

I hold her arms to let her stop.

"I knew it! I knew it! That drinks that night at the Night Stalker Club! It was his drink because his name is Alexander Phoenix. That makes sense now." I glare at her. That's when she stops and pouts.

"What I told you earlier?" I ask.

She sighs, "You know, Sam. You're my close friend, and I never gossiped around about your life even they asked me questions about that visit. I still haven't answered them, and I have no plan on giving them what they want. So, you can trust me."

I nod then press the button of the elevator.

"So, you're dating him? What happened to that Tyler guy?"

I groan and suddenly remember Amy. It's been a week since the last time I talked to her. I usually call her and Maya during the weekend, but I missed it when I got sick.

"Fine. I'll drop it. Just so you know, I'm happy for you girl, and finally, I see the sparks in your eyes."

I stiffen. "What do you mean sparks, Sandy?"

"You may have laughed at jokes or smiled, but I could see the sadness in those blue eyes of yours. I was thinking about what happened to you because you have a boyfriend, but he didn't seem to make you happy. But I kept that thought to myself. I don't want to be nosy, you know. You may be my close friend, but it's not my business, and you will surely open up when you're ready." She gives me a genuine smile while rubbing my arms.

"It's a little bit complicated, Sandy, and I'm really not ready to share my love life or—"

She stops me. “You don’t have to. What is important is I can see that you are happy now.” She giggles again. “And Sam, I should meet your man, Alexander Phoenix Williams.”

I roll my eyes, and we both laugh then the elevator slides open.

Pairs of eyes are on us. I bite my lip to contain my laugh. Sandy elbows me who is now red beside me, and I give her a warning looked to stop.

I work silently when the telephone rings. “Sam Anderson speaking, how may I help you?”

“Ms. Anderson. I’m Janet from the reception, you have a delivery here. Can I send this up?”

I brow furrows. A delivery?

“What kind of delivery?”

“A bouquet of roses.”

My eyes grow big. Maybe from Phoenix.

My lips form into a grin. “Okay, send it up, thanks!”

“You’re welcome.”

My phone buzzes after I hang up the call from the reception.

It’s from Tyler. What does he want?

“Hey, Ty. How are you?”

He sighs deeply. “I went to our apartment yesterday, Sam, and you aren’t there. I asked the men who were fixing the apartment, and they didn’t tell me anything. They said they couldn’t tell me anything about their client. Why did you let them redecorate our apartment without asking me first?” he talks quickly and sounds annoyed.

Crap!

“I am sorry, Ty. I forgot to tell you about that—”

“I thought you don’t have money to spend. How did you afford to ask an interior design agency?”

My eyes almost pop out. Phoenix didn’t tell me anything.

God! I’m so stupid.

“Ty, it’s not me—”

“Then who? Did Phoenix kick you out from our apartment? We still have three months of paid rent.”

"No. Why would he even kick me out?"

"Oh, you don't know? He didn't tell you, did he?"

"Tell me what, Tyler?" My voice slightly raise.

I sink myself in my chair and cover the phone with my hand. The bouquet of red roses came. I smile at the man who delivers and sign the paper he showed me.

"He didn't tell you that he bought that apartment building?"

My mouth hangs open. My blood boils.

I take a deep breath to calm my anger. "Nope. He didn't mention. I will just pay you back, Tyler."

"No need, Sam. I'm not calling you to pay me back. Where are you staying for the meantime?" he asks.

I second thought of telling him. What would he think? That I moved on quickly?

"Phoenix offered me a place—"

"Of course, he did," he snaps.

"And what is your problem?" I snap back.

"Nothing, Sam. You know I still love you, and I don't want to see you getting hurt again. I am still here, your best friend, and if he will hurt you, you can always count on me."

"I know, Ty. Thanks for that."

"You're welcome."

"Call me whenever you need me, okay? Got to go, babe. Bye."

"Bye."

I dial Phoenix's number. He picks up almost immediately

"Princess." I can feel the excitement in his voice.

"Princess my ass," I hiss.

"When are you going to tell me that the apartment building where I am staying is already yours?"

He sighs, and I know he doesn't expect my question. "Is that a big deal, princess?"

I groan, "Of course, it is. Why didn't you tell me? Did you happen to kick Tyler out?"

"Did he tell you about the apartment?"

“I ask, and you will answer me, Phoenix!”

“Yes, ma’am,” he says slowly.

I bite my smile.

“I didn’t kick him or anything like that, princess. I told him when I slept that night on your couch that I bought that apartment after I found out you are staying there, and it was on the lease anyway. I got a good offer, so why not.

“What did you do to my apartment, Phoenix?”

He doesn’t answer right away, but he releases a deep breath.

“I asked a team from Seb’s who work to design and decorate for hotels, penthouses, offices, and apartments, something like that—”

I groan, “I don’t have money for that kind of crap.”

He just laughs at me.

“This is not funny!”

“My love, did I ask you to pay me? Or maybe you can pay me back with a kiss. I don’t accept cash anyway. I have plenty of them.”

I roll my eyes. “I. Am. Not. Sleeping. With. You!”

He laughs even more. “Not. Yet. But. Soon!” He mimics me.

“How soon?” I whisper with a seductive voice to tease him.

“How about later?” he whispers back.

“Not happening!”

“Fine, I can wait.”

“You should!”

“It’s worth it.”

“Is it?”

“Of course, princess,” he answers softly.

“Thanks for the flowers though,” I say grabbing the bouquet and smell at the delicate red petals

“Flowers?”

I roll my eyes. “Yes, Phoenix! The bouquet of roses you asked to deliver to me. It’s with me right now. Thanks! I love them.”

“Princess, I didn’t send you flowers. If I ever give you flowers, I will hand them for you personally, and I won’t give you red roses. I know what flowers you like, and certainly not red roses. Who the fuck sent you that fucking flowers?” He sounds pissed.

I almost drop my phone.

I swallow hard when I notice the card. I pick it up and open the message inside.

He is yours for now, but he will be mine later...

Xoxo

Phoenix curses, and I don’t even notice I am reading it out loud.

Chapter 34

PHOENIX

Jesus! Who the hell sent her those flowers with that kind of note? I wonder if it was Gabrielle because that couldn't be Tyler. I don't like that dude, but he will never hurt Samantha.

"I need help." My voice is still shaking. Whether it was a joke or not it still affected my nerves.

"Brother, don't tell me you and your princess is in trouble again," he answers chirpily. My brother knows that I and Samantha are having progress in our relationship.

"No, Hawk. We're good, but there's something bothers me." I breathe deeply. My stomach twists into a knot at the thought of scared Samantha.

"Someone sent flowers to Samantha in her office."

"Uh-huh! So, you're jealous. I get it, brother. You want me to beat that person's face," he mocks me.

I groan, "I wish that's the case because I can take care of it by myself. Can you be a little serious this time? I think Gabrielle found out that I and Samantha are back together. So, she sent her flowers with a message, and that scared the hell out of Samantha," I snap and tell him what is written on the card.

"Gabrielle can't scare her anymore. What else she can use to blackmail you, Phoenix? Don't mind her. She needs medical attention because she's mentally sick. If she is the one who sent her those flowers, what's her next plan? I will involve the cops the next time she will scare Sam again, and I will make sure to get a restraining order against her. We're in New York City, brother."

I close my eyes and think about Samantha. My shaking nerves calm a little bit.

"Okay, I may have overreacted." I rub my aching temples.

"It's alright to be worried, Phoenix. You just get her back. Not officially, but it's great progress. If it will get creepier, I would suggest that you should ask Seb for someone who can look after her."

Run my fingers through my hair and nod in agreement even though he can't see me "Okay. Thanks, Hawk."

"Just relax, okay."

Sighing, I lean my back on my chair. "Okay, bye." I put down the phone to my desk and rub my face.

I don't realize that I have so much paperwork undone until I lost track of time. I grab my phone and my keys on my desk and close my office door behind me, then I head down to the parking lot.

Once I am in my car, I dial her number from my GPS screen that's connected to my phone via Bluetooth. It will only take fifteen minutes to get into her office building.

"Phoenix," she answers right away. Her enthusiastic voice echoes in my car. I chuckle, "Princess, too excited to see me?" I missed her too, and I can't help but smirk.

"Annoying," she says, but I can hear her laugh.

"But you love it."

She must be rolling her gorgeous blue eyes right now. "Unfortunately."

"On my way, beautiful."

"Oh, now who is too excited?"

"Guilty, my love."

She laughs.

God, Samantha I've been hard since the moment I saw you again. I am just trying hard to control, and I am gonna lose it if you keep on teasing me.

"Waiting, hot tease."

I see her instantly waiting in the parking lot, leaning on a black sedan talking to a familiar face. I can't quite remember where I saw that woman before. I get out of the car and walk toward them.

I immediately cup her face and kiss the sweetest lips I've ever tasted. She gasps into my mouth and grabs my arms. I kiss her hungrily, but I break our kiss when someone coughs.

"Hello, Mr. Williams."

I smile and glance at her boss who's a few feet away from me.

"Nice to see you again, Margaux." I wave my hand and wrap my arm around Samantha's waist.

Samantha is already red as a tomato. She doesn't expect someone will see us showing PDA in front of her office building. Her officemate who looks familiar clears her throat and smiles sheepishly

"Oh, hi, I'm—"

"Alexander Phoenix. Yeah, I know who you are." She extends her hand.

I grip it for a handshake. "Good. I'm the boyfriend. She surely mentioned that to you."

Sam looks up at me with a surprised look on her face, and I wink at her.

“Sandy Millard, officemate/friend,” Sandy giggles.

“You look hot up-close,” she says while looking at Sam with wide eyes.

“See, my love.”

She just rolls her eyes.

“Come and join us for dinner, Sandy.”

There’s something in her that piques my interest, and suddenly, I want to know more about her.

“Not today. Next time maybe.” She waves her hand and winks at Samantha, and I can see the devilish smile on her face.

“Fine, on Sunday. No excuse, right, princess?” I look at Samantha who is trying to tell something to her friend.

“I knew it! I knew it!” Sandy squeals and jumps while shaking Sam’s arms.

I furrow my brows, and I laugh at Sandy’s reaction. What had just happened? “What is she talking about, Samantha?”

“Your drink at that nightclub,” Samantha answers with a timid smile as she wraps her arm around my waist.

“Oh, that.” I nod subtly. “How did you know about that? Did Abby set that up too?”

I should really have a serious one on one with my stepsister.

“Don’t know. Why don’t you ask Abby.”

“She’ll pay if she let you eat that mushrooms, too.”

Sam’s face lights up, covering her mouth, then squeaks. “Omigawd!”

“What mushrooms?” Sandy inquires.

“I have allergies,” Sam answers. Her friend’s eyes grow big when I see a glint in her eyes. She blinks when she notices me looking at her.

“Are you sure you don’t wanna come?”

“I have already planned with my boyfriend. Thanks though,” she says, but I know it was a lie. Then she smiles at us.

I can't help but think where I saw that woman. I swear she looks familiar to me, but I am sure I never sleep with her. She's not my type. but I met or saw her somewhere. I feel something odd every time our gaze met.

That's weird!

"Phoenix!" Samantha shouts. I slam the brake abruptly.

Fuck! I almost bump into another car. My heart palpitates. I grip the steering wheel stronger with my sweaty palms. I can feel my lungs expand laboriously which makes me difficult to breathe.

My head snaps at Samantha. Her face is pale and she's swallowing hard with a horrified look on her face.

"My love, are you okay?" I ask shakily.

She bobs her head, unable to speak.

"I-I am sorry. I was just thinking about the flowers, Samantha. I'm sorry." I tell her, blinking my eyes rapidly, then I focus back on the road.

"It's okay, Phoenix. I'm fine." She squeezes my arm with her cold sweaty palm.

"I don't want you to be just fine. I want you to be great."

"I'll be great as soon as you feed me." This time, she smiles.

"I will feed you whatever you want," I answer instantly.

"What are you gonna feed me, Phoenix?"

"Anything you want, my love, but definitely a mushrooms-free."

She laughs.

"I ordered for us already. I want to take you out for dinner, but not tonight. So, we will stay in our apartment and have dinner there."

She nods again.

"I know what's in that mind of yours, princess."

She snaps her head at me. "And what's in my mind?"

"The first time I mentioned our apartment, you stayed silent for seconds, now you didn't say anything and just nod at me. Just so you know, that's ours, and not mine alone."

She keeps silent.

As soon as I open our apartment door, she walks past me directly to the hallway that leads to her room without looking at me or saying anything. That bothers me. All I can do is sigh.

The food arrives twenty minutes later. I prepare the table for us and place a bottle of red wine. I take a glance once again.

Perfect!

Sprinting towards her bedroom door, I halt to stop when I hear her talking over the phone. She mentions Tyler's name, and it squeezes my heart.

Fuck!

Why is she still talking with him? We are not officially back together, but still, my heart congests painfully in my chest. She can't be mine alone for good. There's always something or someone dissuade against us. I walk away, feeling crushed.

I sit in front of our dinner, and still no signs of Samantha. I look at the table I prepared—the green salad seems to mock me. The broiled lobsters with wine, garlic, and lemon butter, and grilled asparagus will get cold if she will not show up sooner.

What are they talking about that takes too much of her time? I lean on the chair with clenched my jaw and squeeze my eyes shut.

A few minutes later, I hear footsteps—It's her, freshly showered, makeup-free face, and her hair is still wet. She's only wearing a very thin light pink spaghetti straps with cotton shorts short.

Fuck!

My cock stirs. She smiles at me then fades quickly, replaced with furrowed brows.

"Are you okay?" She asks while pulling the chair out to sit beside me.

Shit! I am such an ass. I didn't even help her to sit.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Why won't I be?" My answer sounds a little bit harsh.

She frowns.

Fuck! I'm gonna ruin this dinner. I better stop talking.

"What's going on, Phoenix?" She asks with inquisitive looks.

"Let's have dinner before the food gets cold, shall we?"

She looks at me for seconds, then nods. I can't even form a smile.

Jesus! She isn't yet my girlfriend, but I am jealous hell like an immature.

We start our dinner. I can feel her eyes on me, scrutinizing every move I make, but she doesn't say anything.

When she volunteers to clean, I can't argue anymore. I need to relax. I plant a kiss on her shoulder, then I leave her in the kitchen.

I stay in my office for an hour or maybe more. I send an email to Mason. I need to find out about that Sandy girl. Mason is working at a security agency that is co-owned by Lincoln White who is Seb's head security team. I check my wristwatch, it's almost eleven.

After an hour in my mini gym, My body is dripping with sweat, my breathing catches, and my tensed muscles relax a bit.

I frown suddenly. I am staying with Samantha in the same roof, but I don't treat her well. We supposed to go out on a proper date, have dinner in an expensive restaurant, and watch movies together, but here I am brooding and sulking, were in fact, she is just a few feet away from me.

What's wrong with me? This is what I want—to take her back, and now, she is giving me a chance to prove myself, but I am throwing all my chances instead. I will lose her forever if I will stay like this—a stupid.

I shower and change to a comfortable shirt and jeans. I need to man up or I will lose this chance forever. I don't even know what were they talking over the phone, but I overreacted and got jealous. I want to hit my head against the wall.

"Samantha?" I knock her bedroom door. I wait; no response.

Good for you, asshole! That's what you deserve, somewhere in my brain says.

I twist the doorknob and peeks my head inside. It's dark already, only the lamp that gives a golden color that illuminates the room. I close the door behind me.

Fuck! I'm such an idiot. She is curled up and sleeps soundly in her bed.

Serves me right indeed.

I crawl down on my bed after shrugging my clothes off, leaving just my boxers. I close my eyes, feeling defeated.

There's still a tomorrow, Phoenix.

I feel a movement in my bed that makes me stiffen when the smell reaches my nose. My heart flutters with happiness and excitement.

I bite my lip to hold my smile when she gets inside the blanket.

"What are you doing in my room, in my bed, and inside my blanket, Samantha?"

She doesn't answer. She snakes her hand on my bare stomach, making my muscles stiffen at her touch. She rests her head on the crook of my neck. Her warm breathing ignites my skin and awakens my attention-seeker cock. She then tangles her bare legs on mine.

God, it feels so good! Don't let this end, I'm begging you.

"You heard me talking with Tyler over the phone, didn't you?" she whispers.

Her smooth voice is like the sweetest melody in my room. Her warm breathing is like a soft touch on my shoulder.

I squeeze my eyes shut and nod.

"Are you jealous, Phoenix?"

I nod again.

"Do you know what we were talking about?"

I shake my head.

"Did you think that I take him back?"

I hold her hand and this time, I face her. My eyes meet hers. I look at her worried eyes for seconds. "It would kill me if you would choose to be with him, Samantha. I'm jealous as hell when I heard you talking to him. I can't tell you not to because I don't have the right to do that. You are still not my official girlfriend, but it hurts a lot." I swallow hard because it still hurts.

She smiles and presses her lips on me. "I am the one who called him, Phoenix. I told him that I will give him half of the rent we paid when I get my salary because he's still staying at his officemate's apartment. I want to help him, not to take him back."

"Okay." My reply comes out unsure.

"That's it? Just okay?" She raises her brow.

"What else do you want me to say?" I snap turning my back on her.

She sighs and proclaims, "I should go back to my room."

I stiffen.

"I think I am not welcome here," she adds.

I grab her arm and snap at her. "The hell you are."

“At least face me, you, arrogant prick!” she snaps back.

“You hurt my feelings, you insensitive smurf!”

She barks out laughing that causes the bed to shakes, and I laugh with her too. Jesus, Samantha! What have you done to me?

“Keeps calling me smurf, and I will paint your face blue.”

“Good luck with that because I still look hot in blue!”

“Back to your cockiness, I see!”

I turn to face her this time. “Stop talking and kiss me already, Samantha Lorraine.”

“Damn straight, Alexander Phoenix.”

She crashes her lips on me. Without hesitance, she shoves her tongue into my mouth, and I welcome her in—let her dominate me if I can kiss her and taste her like this. She owns me anyway—my body, my heart, my mind, and my soul. I am all hers. I moan when she sucks my tongue.

Good lord! This woman can kiss!

She breaks the kiss when we are both panting. She pecks my lips and smiles brightly which makes my world suspends. “I love you, Alexander Phoenix.”

Chapter 35

SAM

Phoenix's mouth hangs open as he stares at me for a good minute, then he finally blinks and laughs out loud. A whimper slips from my lips, and as fast as lightning, I am pressed underneath him, and he is grinning like an idiot.

"Shouldn't you at least say it back?" I raise a brow.

"Nah," that's all he says before he crashes his lips on mine and kisses me slow, sweet, and innocent. "Sorry, princess but I'm not having sex with you tonight."

I fake a pout. "Not even a dry humping?"

"Are you that desperate, my love?"

I nod, biting my lip, then we burst into a laugh while our body pressed together.

"I love you, Samantha. So fucking much!"

"Good, Phoenix," I reply.

He then kisses my forehead, my eyes, my nose, my cheeks, and my lips. "Never expect to be that easy to chase you, princess."

"Excuse me? I just said I love you, but it doesn't mean I take you back as my boyfriend. You still have to take me out to a dinner date, then I will decide if you pass my test or not." I roll my eyes.

"Seriously? That's childish, don't you think?" He moves away from me, then lies back flat beside me, placing his arms under his head.

I cover myself with his blanket and inhale his scent on it. "Night, boyfriend."

He laughs and hugs me back. "I knew it! You can't live without me."

"I want you naked now," I tell him, but more like a demand.

"Yes, your majesty." I feel him pulling his boxers and kick it down his feet. "Done."

"Now, strip me off."

"Of course, one of my expertise."

I'm stark naked in less than a minute. He rakes his gaze from head to toe of my naked body. His eyes glow with amazement.

"What are you waiting for?"

"Are you sure?"

"If I change my mind?"

"I hope you won't."

"Nah, I don't want to pleasure myself alone while you are here," I say biting my lip, then wink at him.

"Jesus!" Just like that, he devours me like a starved animal. I've never been so drained and limp until tonight. I can't even move. The only strength I have left is to breathe. After my uncountable orgasms. I closed my eyes.

"Night, my love," he says, still panting.

"Hmm." I don't even have strength left to say a word.

"I love you, Samantha."

Phoenix will be busy tonight due to some business meetings. My apartment won't be finished until the end of this week. I guess Phoenix spent too much money to meets his taste.

I can't complain though because he made his point last night that he will spend his weekdays in my apartment, and I will be at his apartment during the weekend.

"So, how was your night with your hot Alexander Phoenix?" Sandy gives a few glances at me then focuses back on the road.

We agree to have pizza in her apartment tonight and watch reruns of Arrow, She's into DC. Well, who can complain when Oliver Queen's abs showed on the TV screen. Maya loves this show too so, I'm kinda updated about it.

"What's with the full name? Can you call him Alex or Phoenix? Where is your boyfriend? Never heard about him lately? Are you and him still together?" I ask to avoid spilling to her about what happened last night in his bed, on the couch, in the kitchen, in his Jacuzzi, then back in his bed.

"We broke up. There are no sparks anymore. The problem is we have a lot in common," she answers but it seems that it doesn't even bother her.

"How's that a problem? I mean if you have a lot in common?" I am a little bit curious.

"Because it's boring," she snorts and that makes me laugh.

"Do you fight sometimes?" she asks me.

“Oh, we fight a lot,” I say proudly. “I mean not fight, like a big fight. We banter because he is annoying and loves to annoy me. He’s relentless, but he always accepts his mistakes. He’s bossy, but he’s also fair with me.”

“See, it’s exciting and mysterious if you have differences because you don’t know what comes next. The thrill is there, but if you both like the same thing, it’s boring. You eat the same pizza toppings, drink the same taste of coffee, read the same books, and the same positions during sex. No adventure and no experiments.” She shakes her heads.

I laugh at her reactions. “Kind of true.”

“You are a very lucky bitch!” She slaps her hand on my thigh.

I jerk in surprise. “What was that?”

She laughs at me. “He isn’t kinky, is he?” Sandy’swiggling her brows on me with a cunning smile on her face.

“What’s kinky?” I ask back rolling my eyes.

She barks out laughing. “So, he isn’t kinky if you don’t even know what does kinky means. I guess he has his own way in bed. Is he Christian Grey then?” Her smile widens even.

“He’s not kinky or whatever is that means, and he isn’t Christian Grey. He never tied me up or hang me, yet.” I scowl at her.

“Do you agree with threesomes?”

My jaw drops and my eyes widen with her bluntness. I swallow hard. I can’t imagine myself and Phoenix with another man or woman will be joining us.

I flinch at the thought. “Gross! No way. Not happening!”

She shakes with laughter. “You are a selfish bitch! But he has a horse size, isn’t he?”

“Oh, my God! You are worse than Amy! Can’t I just run away from people like you?” I tell her, blinking my eyes.

“Who’s Amy?”

“Oh, my best friend back in my home. She has a mouth like yours.” I reply while wrapping my arms over my chest.

She giggles. “But you love someone like us.”

I just roll my eyes and I can’t answer anymore.

We order pizza as soon as we arrive at her apartment. Her apartment is almost the same size as mine. Two bedrooms, a small living room, and a small kitchen. She's living alone now since her former roommate stayed with her boyfriend already.

Sandy doesn't want another roommate since she has no problem paying the rent. She said at least she has her privacy and she won't catch someone's shoving a tongue on someone's throat on the couch.

"Nothing much to see here, Sam. I turn that empty room into an office and a stock room," she says shyly.

"Phoenix asked someone to fix my apartment, so I'm staying with him for a while," I tell her, then take a seat on her couch.

"You are so lucky with him, Sam. Don't let him go again, and stay away from Tyler. I can see the way Phoenix looks at you. He loves you and cares for you. You can't find someone like him on this frigging earth."

I give her a genuine smile. I somehow told her what happened to me and Phoenix without the full details. She doesn't pry and just listens to me.

"You'll have someone who's kinky and has a horse size. Just have a little patience," I tell her as she carries our drinks and places them on a small round dining table.

"Huh! I've been waiting for him all my life. I doubt if he even exists," she snorts then sits across the table.

"I never even expected I will meet Phoenix that night, you know? But I feel something towards him the moment I hear his voice. I know it sounds cliché and it only exists in books, but I swear sometimes I do believe in the cliché-ness because that's how I felt for him that night." I laugh at what I've just said.

Sandy just looks at me with a smile on her face. "You love him so much, Sam. I swear if you will break his heart, I will break yours." Her face suddenly becomes serious, and it gives me shiver.

I feel the hair at the nape of my neck stands, and I wrap my arms around me. I jerk in my seat when the doorbell rings.

"That's the pizza!" she announces and stands up from her seat.

My heart thunders from my chest, and I'm still freezing in my seat when she comes back with two boxes of pizza on her hands. She takes her seat back then opens the boxes of pizza one by one.

"I always eat pizza from the box. Do you want a plate?" she asks.

I shake my head. “I also eat from the box.”

She picks a slice of pizza and I do the same.

“Wow! This is delicious. I can taste the oregano and the basil from the sauce. I never order from that pizza house,” I announce.

“Really? Then you almost missed half of your life,” Sandy chuckles. “That’s the nearest to our apartment.”

“Yeah, Tyler used to order, but not from that one near here.”

“I see, now you taste the real Italian pizza,” she says proudly. She has Italian ancestry. Her eyes and skin tell most of it.

“Yeah, the original taste. It’s really good.”

“So, where are your parents?” I take another bite then ask her.

She stops from chewing, then licks her lips.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Forget that I asked.”

“Nope, it’s okay. You shared your story, and I did most of the listening. I never meet my dad. My mom died from liver cirrhosis when I was in high school. Mom said it was a one-night stand with a drunk man, that’s how she got pregnant with me.” She seems not so much affected.

“But do you know him?” I ask cautiously.

“Yep, he’s dead,” she answers casually.

My mouth gapes for a few moments. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. Before my mom died. She left me money and a house. My dad was sending her money until she died, which two weeks before I turned eighteen. He was aware I existed, but Mom was so stubborn. She didn’t allow my dad to even take a glimpse of me,” she explains. “He has his own family at that time when they slept together. Mom was a singer who was just trying to start living her dreams, then she got knocked up by a drunk man.” She laughs at the end.

“Mom’s family is a close-knit, the typical Italian, you know. They hid her when her pregnancy was growing big. I was born in Italy, then Mom brought me back here when I was two. They met again when Mom was singing at the hotel lounge.”

I listen to her intently, and I even forget to blink. I put down the half-eaten slice of pizza when I realize that there is something more about the secret her mother was keeping until she died. Why is she telling me this?

"I don't want to do anything with them. My mother is dead and my dad is also dead. They have better lives, and I somehow survived without them." She shrugs.

I can't even form a word because I don't know what to say.

I grab a can of soda with my shaking hand. I tried to flip it open, but instead, the content bursts out to our faces which causes us both to squeal with surprise. We both stand up quickly. I look down at my now wet front dress. She does the same, then bursts out laughing.

She shakes her head and looks amused.

"I'm so sorry. I messed up your dress and our food," I say guiltily.

She's still laughing, and I can't help but join her. "It's okay silly. That soda is frozen, and I forgot to warn you. Let's get inside the bathroom so that you can change. I let you borrow my shirt and a pair of jeans. We're the same size."

I nod and follow her. "Thank you."

Her room is decorated with pastel red wallpaper. Her queen-size bed is situated in the middle covered with deep red color sheets. The closet and dresser are of the same red color as well. I guess red is her favorite color—that tells me why she always wears red lipstick and her handbag is also red sometimes.

I walk into her bathroom. The smell of vanilla and wildflowers wafting in the air.

"Here are the clothes, Sam." She knocks on the door then slips her hand at the ajar door with a red shirt and dark blue jeans.

"Thanks." I take them from her.

After cleaning the stained soda from my face and my arms. I strip my clothes off then wear the clothes she lends me. I comb my hair with my fingers then look at myself in the mirror one last time.

I get out of her bathroom after taking my dirty clothes with me. I scan her room, but Sandy is nowhere to find. She probably waiting for me in her living room to watch the show.

I walk towards her bedroom door when a photo framed hanging on the wall catches my eyes. I gasp, and my hand flies to my mouth.

Chapter 36

SAM

I'm still in shock with what I've found out. Sandy finally tells me everything, and I just listen closely to every word she says to me, but she makes me promise that I can't tell anyone. But I may have to tell someone about it because I'm not good at keeping secret especially when the people I care is involved.

"Your phone is ringing, Sam." Sandy's voice jarring me out of my thoughts. I dug my phone from my bag. Our supposed to be an Arrow marathon turns to be a telling of her life story. I look at her when I check out my phone screen. She nods.

"Handsome, miss me?" I answer.

"You have no idea, beautiful. My cock is in need of your attention. I missed you, princess." I can clearly hear the cheerfulness in his voice.

How will he react if I'll tell him the truth? God! It's hard to be in this position.

"Are you coming already?" I ask, biting my lip.

"On my way, beautiful, it's just three blocks away from your apartment, right?"

"Yeah, how's the meeting went?"

"So far, so good, my love. You will not ask me about business when we are together, right, princess?"

My lips curve to smile, and I find Sandy's eyes on me—she's also smiling.

I roll my eyes. "And why is that?" I know what he means but I want to tease him a little bit because I missed him too.

"I need your mouth somewhere else."

I feel my face crept with heat. I clear my throat. "Um, okay, whatever!"

He laughs. "Is your friend beside you? And you can't say what you wanted to say?"

"Yes, Phoenix, but that's not the case. The last time you said like that, I wasn't able to see you again not until after almost four months."

He sighs deeply, "Surely, Samantha. You love to ruin our moment."

I regret it when he sounds sad.

“Sorry about that. I’m just not ready for you to disappear again. I’ll never gonna be ready, Phoenix.”

“Princess, why are you talking about this now? And just so you know, I’m not leaving you again, and neither you are. I’m not gonna let you go. You’re stuck with me forever.”

I look at Sandy who is staring at me with furrowed brows. I shake my head at her.

“Are you on your way?”

“Come down, my love.”

“Okay, see you.”

I place my phone back in my bag and breathe deeply.

“Is everything okay?”

I smile at Sandy and nod. “I’ll go ahead. Thanks for everything.” I take my handy bag with me with a bag of my dirty clothes.

“Shut up and let me send you down.” She hooks her hand on my arm.

“Are you sure you wanna go down with me?”

“Of course, I’m used to see them you know.”

“Okay.”

We ride in the elevator with the song from the ’80s silently playing in the speaker. Sandy is humming, leaning her head on my shoulder.

“I’ll see tomorrow at the office then?” I tell her.

She lifts her head and looks at me. Her eyes glimmers. “Of course. And I had fun. Good luck with your kinky sex tonight.”

My mouth forms an O shape. “You are so unbelievable!”

We get out of the elevator only to find my handsome boyfriend leaning in his car. He stands straight when he notices us walking to his direction. He smirks.

God! There should be a law against smirking—it’s a danger to our ovaries. I swear my muscles between my thighs clenched.

“Princess,” he says, then cups my face with his huge hands and kisses me hurriedly, hungrily, and sloppy with a groan.

I can't help but grip his muscly arms. Sandy giggles at my back and that makes me pull away from Phoenix.

"We have an audience, silly." I slap his arms playfully.

He smirks, "So? Don't tell me she's innocent that we're corrupting her." He smiles at Sandy. "Hi Sandy, good to see you again. Saturday at lunch?"

My stomach churns suddenly, remembering what she just told me.

"Sure, I'll be there," Sandy agrees almost immediately.

"We're leaving. You better go up," Phoenix tells her.

She smiles at him and nods, then she comes closer to kiss my cheek and whispers, "Tomorrow, Sam. Night and Enjoy."

She giggles when she hears me groan.

"Night, Alexander Phoenix! Take care of my friend." Then she walks away waving her hand at.

"She' s something," Phoenix mumbles.

"Indeed, she is."

"I want to kiss you here, Phoenix," I tell him.

His brows furrow while securing his seat belt.

Before he can protest, I slip to his side and sit on his lap. Grabbing a handful of his hair, I press my lips on his, and he instantly responds to me. I press my chest on him when he wraps his arms around my waist. I moan when he slips his tongue into my mouth and I can feel his erection poking between my thighs.

I know I'm dripping wet, and we are both turned on, but I can't let him fuck me in this parking lot. I pull away when we are both catching our breath. I move back to my seat and buckle my seat belt silently.

"What was that for, my love?"

I smile at him and glance at his red lips. "That's on my bucket list," I tell him winking.

He smiles at me—the kind of smile that makes my heart flutters.

"I remember when I told you that." He runs his thumb on my lower lip. "Aren't you hungry, Princess?"

"Nope. Thank you for asking. Are you?"

He shakes his head. “Your apartment will be done on Friday.”

“You didn’t ask me what I like.”

“It’s a surprise, but if you don’t like it we can still redo it again.

“You’re silly. I will surely love it.”

“Hawk said hi to you. He misses you already.”

“I miss them too. So, on Saturday then?”

“Yup.”

“I can’t just get enough of you, Samantha,” he says while panting and still on my back.

I collapse underneath trying to catch my breath. He moves to lie down on his back and drag me from my waist to curl himself on my naked and sweaty body. He sweeps my messy hair away from my face, kissing the top of my head.

“You are beyond gorgeous even your hair is messy,” Phoenix says, pressing his nose on mine. His breathing is warming my face.

“And you look hot when you’re naked and slick with sweat.”

He smiles, kissing the tip of my nose. “I know why you like me because of my hotness.”

I roll my eyes. “I’m not that easy, you know. I’ve seen many hot guys, and I was asked for dates, but I turned them down.”

His smile fades and turns into a frown. “Oh, yeah?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me the names of those assholes,” he growls.

“And what are you gonna do with them once you know their names?” I challenge him, raising my brow.

“I’ll cut their dicks with their balls.”

“So, do you like dicks and balls?”

He looks more pissed at me. “Seriously, Samantha. You just ruin our awesome lovemaking just a minute ago.” He lies on his back with a scowl on his face.

“What are your problems, Phoenix? I love you, and I am here with you, in your bed naked. We just made love, and I love you with every air that I breathe.”

"Cliché," he mutters in his breath, then turns his back on me shaking.

I slap his arm, maybe a little bit stronger.

"Ouch! Woman. You're a sadist!"

I hug him from behind. "I love you, Phoenix. I mean it." I tell him with all my heart.

He turns his head to peck my lips. "I love more than you know."

We both stare at each other silently.

"I'm so lucky to be with you. I don't know how can I show you how much I love you, Phoenix, but I will do my best to let you feel it in each fucking way and in each fucking day."

His lips spread into a grin. "As much as I love to hear you swearing, you better don't say that word."

I kiss his shoulder one last time, inhaling his scent, then I close my eyes. "Sure." I'm gonna sleep in his arms again tonight.

"My love, don't you think it's too early to sleep."

I know he is teasing me, so I lie. "I'm sore."

"I'm that rough with you, huh? Why didn't you say so?" He takes my hand and kisses it

"You are not."

"Good. You can always say no if you don't like it, princess. I will never force you into doing something you don't like. All I wanted for you is to be content. And I will do everything just to make you happy and to see the smile on your face every day."

"Can't see you reading a Hallmark card, Phoenix."

He chuckles, "I mean it, Smurf!"

"I'm getting offended, Phoenix. You are calling me with so many names lately."

"Sorry, my love. Lizzy has collections of smurf stuff toys. Abby knows each name of them. One time, Lizzy cried so Abby panic why she suddenly cried. Lizzy was bubbling something like Sam, then I and Abby exchanged a look. I ran to Lizzy's room and grabbed what was near to me. I grabbed that Smurfette, that one with yellow hair then handed it to her. She stopped crying and kept saying Sam."

I laugh at what I just heard. "Really? Lizzy thinks I am smurf?"

He faces me this time. "It means she remembered you with blonde hair. No one at home has blonde hair like yours. Your hair is almost white. I love your hair by the way."

“Can I ask you something?” My heart beats faster, and I feel suddenly anxious.

“Sure. You don’t have to ask, just shoot.” He smiles that I know there’s something meaningful in it.

I just roll my eyes. “What if?”

His brows furrow, waiting for me to continue.

“What if you have a sibling?”

He looks more confused.

“What I mean, what if you have a sibling somewhere that you don’t know about? Like maybe your dad had someone impregnated?”

He looks at me in my eyes. “I always wanted to have a sister since I only have a brother. When Mom married Mike, it’s like a dream come true, and Abby is really a good and caring person. I don’t have a problem with that if the blood result shows we’re carrying the same DNA.”

“Okay”

He raises his brow. “That’s it? You are not my sister, are you? Because I’d rather die, and it’s gross to fuck my own sister!”

I groan.

“Oops! I don’t mean like that, my love. Forgive me.”

“I know, silly, and we are not related by blood. And it’s really gross.” I wrinkle my nose.

“So, why are you asking? Is Sandy girl good with you, princess?” He asks and searching for something in my face.

“Yes. She’s a good person, Phoenix. Don’t you like her?” I ask and watch out his reactions.

He shrugs. “I don’t know, but there is something off about her like she’s hiding something.”

My stomach churns. I want to say something, but I hold it. I can’t be the one to say it, and I promised it to Sandy. It’s not my position to tell it because if she keeps it a secret, then she must have a good reason other than she doesn’t want to cause trouble to Phoenix’s family.

“Give her a benefit of the doubt, Phoenix.”

“Who do you think sent those flowers to you, princess?”

I take a deep breath. “I forgot about it already. I was thinking maybe Gabrielle,” I answer truthfully because she’s the only one who doesn’t want me and Phoenix together.

“I doubt she will waste her time and money, Samantha.”

“And who else would do?”

He shrugs, squeezing his eyes shut.

“Do you have any other clingy ex?”

His head snaps at me. “I told you, Samantha. She was my last girlfriend, and I had sex, but none of them even came to see me again.”

I take a huge breath. “These conversation has to stop now. Nothing will do us any good. We better sleep.”

“I saw Sandy somewhere, but I can remember when and where. She looks familiar, but I am sure that I didn’t fuck her. So, erase that from your brain.” I chuckle. “I doubt she will sleep with you, Phoenix.”

“Do I not look hot to her.”

I wrinkle my nose. “Ew, that’s gross.”

“And why is that? She isn’t even my sister?”

I freeze. My breathing stops and I just stare at him. God, I am so terrible at keeping secrets.

“Samantha?”

I blink and swallow hard. “Y-yeah.”

“Who’s Sandy, Samantha?” he asks sternly.

“Sandra Millard,” I answer silently.

“Do you know anything about her?”

I shake my head. “My love, we don’t keep secrets with each other, do we?”

I nod. “Of course.”

“Is she the reason why you asked me if I ever have a sister somewhere?” He looks at me intently without blinking as if I might disappear in front of him. I swallow hard the lump in my throat, then I nod.

His jaw drops and sits silently on the bed. After a few seconds of silence, he nods slowly.

He turns his head to me. “How did you know?”

“From her. I’m sorry, Phoenix. I’m not supposed to tell you this because she lets me promise, but here I am. She doesn’t want to cause your family trouble. Her mom didn’t want your dad to know about Sandy, but they met once again.”

“Dad was sending them financial support,” he adds.

I nod.

“Her mom died when she was almost eighteen.”

I nod again. “How did you know about this?”

“Now, I remember. I found some documents and pictures at Dad’s office in our old house. Her pictures when she was still young. I want to tell Hawk and Mom, but I couldn’t just get the right timing until something happened between us.”

“What are you gonna do this time?”

He takes a deep breath, lies back down, and hugs me tighter. “I will spank her ass for not telling me because I know something is odd, but I don’t know why. Fuck! I have a sister. I and hawk have a sister.” He looks at me and smiles.

“Aren’t you mad?”

“No! But she doesn’t have any resemblance to Dad. Her nose maybe?”

“The shape of her brows and her lips, silly. I looked at her closely. She has a mix of you and Hawk.”

“Now, that’s creepy.” He laughs.

Chapter 37

PHOENIX

I wake up with the warm limbs draping over me. Samantha is still snoring in my arms. I slowly slip out my body from her warm cuddle. No matter how much I want to stay and cuddle her all day, I already have plans for today and for the whole weekend.

I'm secretly talking with Sandy for these last three days. I still didn't tell her that I knew she is my sister. Hawk will kick my ass to the other part of the continent if he will find out I'm hiding this kind of secret from him.

I start packing our clothes that's good for three days. I bought some clothes and swimsuits for Samantha and tanning or sunscreen lotions women these days are using. I drag our two travel bags to the front door.

I pick up my phone and scan Sandy's contact that I stole from Samantha's phone.

Phoenix: Get your ass ready. We'll be there in about an hour.

A few seconds later my phone buzzes signifying a message.

Sandy: Born ready.

Phoenix: I'll drag your ass if you will not come with us.

Sandy: I don't wanna be the third wheel, you know.

Phoenix: You won't. Everyone will be there. It's time for you to meet my family.

My stomach flips. I don't want her to be surprised and feel cheated by Samantha, but she has to know that she will meet everyone there.

Sandy: What do you mean?

Phoenix: What I mean is that you are not a third wheel. All my family will be there. Since Sam is your friend, I think you should meet the people who care for her.

I hope it sounds believable. She replies immediately.

Sandy: Whatever. I don't wanna be alone in my apartment while Sam is busy tanning her ass naked on the beach. Lol.

I chuckle. I like her already.

Phoenix: You'll tan your ass too, sweetheart.

Sandy: You'll tan your ass too, Alexander Phoenix.

My brows arch. What's with my name? My lips spread into a grin. I place my phone down the kitchen island where I ate Samantha until she writhed. Fuck! My cock is on full alert.

Bad cock!

I'm jarring from my thoughts when my woman wraps her arms around my waist, pressing her body on me. I can feel her nipples harden against her thin nighties, and I know for sure she's not wearing anything under. She presses her face against my back.

No matter how much I want to take her again here in this kitchen island, I have a better plan to take her somewhere.

"Morning," she says with her groggy voice. Her warm breath sends tingles straight to my cock.

"Good morning, my love! I didn't make breakfast for us, but we have to go somewhere today. So we might just buy coffee and donuts on our way." I face her. Her eyes are still half-closed.

She nods.

She's still beautiful even her hair is run by a tornado. Do I forget to mention that I love her hair?

"Where are we going?" She wraps her arms around me and inhales my naked chest. "You always smell so good, Phoenix."

"You smell good, too, beautiful. I want to take you here right now. Did you feel me? But we have a place to go, and you take too much time in the bathroom. So, wake your lazy ass already."

She chuckles, "Fine. Are we staying long?"

"I took care of that. Just wear something light and comfy." I kiss her forehead, then she sways her lazy ass with a smug in her face.

"Inviting but not here, beautiful. I have a better idea for that."

"Whatever!" she sings with laughs.

I stop in the coffee shops and order three coffee and a box of donuts for us. Sam doesn't have an idea that we're gonna pick up Sandy.

I get in the driver seat and give her the coffee she likes and a box of donuts.

"Why did you buy three coffee?" she asks after taking the box of donuts from my hand. I ignore her question, then my stomach grumbles when the smells of coffee and sugary donuts wafting inside the car.

She offers me a piece of donut wraps in a tissue paper.

"Thanks." I sip my coffee and take a huge bite of this sweet fluffy little thing. I almost moan, maybe with hunger.

"Where are we exactly going?" She is biting her donut, too with a coffee on her other hand, and a box of donuts on her lap.

I love watching her munching her food like she doesn't care even the world is watching her.

"We are going somewhere for the weekend." I'm done eating in just two bites. I dab the powdered sugar that fell on my lap.

"You have sugar here," she tells me, then wipes the side of my mouth with her thumb.

She's making my heart melts. I'm so contented with my life lately, and I can't ask for more. I have everything I need in my life—a woman that I love, money, businesses, a great family, friends, and a new-found sister.

I drive out from the coffee shop's parking lot all the way to Sandy's apartment building.

I notice a police car in front of the building. My stomach churns. I park immediately and get out of the car. Samantha follows, grabbing my hand.

"Phoenix, what's going on here? Why are we here in Sandy's apartment building?" I grab her hand as I sprint to get inside the building.

Once I get inside the lobby, I notice a police officer talking with Sandy who looks terrified. Her arms wrap around her body, and she's only wearing denim shorts and a white shirt. A few nosey heads lurking around.

I swallow hard. Sam grips my hands tightly.

"Sandy!" I walk faster toward her. She snaps her head to our direction. She runs toward me, leaving the police officer behind, then the next thing I know, she launches herself and wraps her arms around me. Sam lets go of my hand, and I hug Sandy back.

"What happened, Sandy? Can't you at least call me? Why is there a cop here?"

She pulls away from me to hug Sam. An officer of late twenties, medium-built wearing a blue uniform marches towards us.

“Sandra, I’m not done yet.” He stops in front of us while his eyes still on Sandy.

“What’s going on here officer?” I ask with a stern voice.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I can’t tell you any information unless you are related to the victim.” My jaw clenches.

Victim?

“You are gonna tell me or Sandy will do. Does she need to report it to the station or not? Because we have a place to go right now.” I cross my arms over my chest and look at the six-footer police officer.

“Alexander Phoenix, it’s okay. I shouldn’t have overreacted anyway. It was just a false alarm.”

My brows furrow. “What false alarm, Sandy?”

“She received a package placed on her front door with her name on it, and it contained a fake bomb,” the officer explains.

I breathe heavily while running my fingers through my hair.

“I opened the shoebox and there are a small digital clock and red, blue, and yellow wires attached to the clock and a rectangular shape written explosives on it. I threw it outside my door and I hid under my bed. I waited for a few minutes, but it didn’t explode. I dialed him to come to check,” She explains shyly.

I narrow my eyes on her. “Why didn’t you call a 911? Why him?”

She swallows hard. “We used to date,” she tells slowly.

I glare at the police officer and snort, “Used to date, huh?”Samantha elbows me.

“So, are we done, officer?” I ask the cop who looks confused.

“She doesn’t want to report and investigate it.” He shrugs “So, she is good to go,” he answers, still wearing a confused look on his face.

He faces Sandy. “If you will receive anything suspicious or even a text message, call me immediately, Sandra.”

Sandy nods.

“Thank you, officer,” Sam says to the police officer.

“It’s my job, ma’am.”

“Have a good day, sir, ma’am, Sandra.”

I nod. Sandy smiles and waves at him.

“Let’s go up and pack your things, Sandy.” I gesture at her.

She doesn’t move and just stares at me, making me groan.

“Let’s go up,” Sam tells her and wraps her arm around Sandy’s waist.

Abby will surely love her. Samantha already treats her like a sister. I can see the closeness between them.

I check the shoe box already placed on her coffee table. It looks like really a real bomb, only it didn’t explode. Who will do such things like this to scare the hell out of her?

“Sandy, did you receive anything odd before?” I walk to her bedroom door and knock. Sam opens the door for me while Sandy is holding her duffel bag in her hand.

I take it from her. “Give it to me. Pack all your things. You’ll leave this place for a while. I’ll ask someone to look after your apartment. Whoever sent this to you might hold a grudge against you.” I place my hands on my hips.

“I’m good, Alexander Phoenix. After this weekend, everything will be back to normal. I will just take the things that I’m gonna use for the weekend.”

I groan. “You’re stubborn. You will stay in my apartment for the weekdays because I am staying with princess in her apartment. Don’t argue with me.” She narrows her eyes at me and argues, “I can’t stay at your apartment, Alexander Phoenix. I will stay here this weekend.”

“You will stay in my apartment whether you like it or not, or do you want to stay at King’s mansion?” I ask. “You choose.”

Her mouth falls open, but still narrowing her eyes on me.

She is about to say something when we are interrupted by my phone.

I fish out from my jeans pocket. It’s Hawk.

Shit! We are late.

“Pack your things,” I command to Sandy.

She pouts, stomping her feet away to continue packing.

“Hawk?”

“Where are you? Are you coming or not? Where is Sam?”

I take a deep breath. “Somethings came up. Be there in less than an hour.”

“Is everything okay?” I can hear the worry in his voice.

“Yeah, everything is okay now. See you later, Hawk.”

Sam is already helping to pack her things in two traveling bags. Sandy is zipping the already full bag when I walk close to them.

“I’ll help you with that. Go and take anything you need,” I say, taking the bag from her.

“It’s all done. When can I come back here, Alex—”

“Alexander Phoenix,” I cut her off with a chuckle.

She stops and shoots me a glare.

I smile at her and point my thumb at the photo framed mounted at the wall. “Aren’t you going to take that with you?”

I smirk at her who looks shocked. Her face turns pale when she realizes her secret is already revealed. She swallows hard.

I bite my lip hard to hold my smile. She then walks past me and takes the photo framed with her.

“When did you get this?” I ask, taking it from her hand.

“After your dad died. His lawyer came to me and gave me a large brown envelope with a cheque, bundles of cash, and this picture.” She breathes deeply. “Look, I don’t want to give your family trouble, and I don’t mean for you to figure out. I’m happy with my life, and I’m happy to know that you have a good life, too. You can forget about this and pretend that I’m just Sam’s friend,” she says looking up at me with an apologetic look.

I can see the hint of pain in her eyes and the sincerity in there, too.

I smile at her. “Well, too late for that, Sandra Agnes Millard Williams.” I hug her tightly, running my hand on her chin-length brown hair.

“I always wanted a sister. When Mom married Abby’s dad, I somehow found a sister in Abby’s. Now, I have a real sister by blood, I am more than happy, and I want to be your brother, Sandra Agnes.”

We both pull away and Samantha clears her throat and grins sheepishly

“You! You told him, don’t you?” sandy growls, pointing her finger on Samantha who’s eyes grow bigger while shaking her head. She raises her hands up for surrender.

“Before you will spay me, Hawk is already calling Phoenix, so we have to hurry up,” Sam says smiling at Sandy.

“I’m hungry,” Sandy announces after I’m done placing her bags at my car’s compartment.

“There is a box of donuts in the car and your coffee, but might already cold,” Sam answers.

“Oh, thank God! I don’t care if it’s cold or hot,” Sandy says, rolling her eyes.

We arrive at the private airport in King’s. Everyone is already here. My brother is already glaring at me with his hands on his hips.

“What the hell, Phoenix? If you show up ten minutes later, brother or not we will leave you, and you’ll take a commercial flight.”

Their attention is now focused on my back. I know who they are looking at. My mom’s hand instantly on her mouth.

Shit! Did she know about her all this time and didn’t bother telling us? She stands up from her seat and walks toward us. I look back to find Sandy holding her purse tightly and looks terrified.

“Sandra?” Mom tells to confirm.

Sandy looks down her feet, then nods.

“Oh, my God!” Mom shrieks and launches to Sandy for a hug.

A smile forms on my lips. Samantha wraps her arm around my waist. I wrap my arm around her shoulder and kiss her the top of her head.

“Everyone, meet Sandra Williams, Henry’s daughter,” Mom says proudly while rubbing Sandy’s arm. Everyone’s mouth hangs open including Hawk.

“Guys, don’t be rude,” I tell them.

That’s the time everyone comes to Sandy to welcome her into the family.

Hawk is the last to walk and stops in front of Sandy, inspecting her from head to toe, tapping his chin.

“Hmm. You got my eyes, nose, and my chin.” His lips curve to smile then grin, “I want to punch Dad’s face if he’s still alive, and I want to spank Mom’s butt if she’s not with Mike right now.”

“Well, good to see you again, Albert Hawk,” Sandy says, offering her hand for a handshake.

I laugh my ass out loud. Hawk looks confused.

“Brother, dear, she calls me Alexander Phoenix. At least my name is decent than yours.” I’m still laughing when Hawk talks to her.

“Can’t you just call me Hawk, Sandra?”

Sandy shakes her head.

“What’s her full name, brother?”

I shake my head. “Not a chance brother. I’m not gonna tell you. Go, figure out yourself.”

Hawk squeezes her into a hug that makes her whimper.

I laugh at her when I see her eyes widen.

Chapter 38

UNKNOWN

Somewhere in the neighborhood...

I slumped myself down to the worn-out bed after kicking off my ten-dollar high heels. My eyes are focused on the white boring ceiling that is almost yellow, and the paint is cracked at every corner of my small bedroom. This place is too old and needs remodeling, but I can't even afford to do that.

I release a deep sigh, sniffing at the overused dress that I wore almost every day to the diner where I work for over a year now. I wince at the smell of grease, sweat, and a cheap perfume I bought last week after receiving my salary.

This isn't the life I want—I always dream so high when I was a kid. I dreamt owning sky-high buildings, fashion and cosmetics lines, and of course a yacht.

I love places like Greece, France, and the Caribbean—I've been to those places many times, and it all suddenly changed.

Patience is the key. I chuckle.

Everything is going according to plan. It won't take long, and I'll back to my life—a luxurious life with maids, with finest wines, fabulous spas, designer clothes and shoes, credit cards, and of course manicured fingers.

I raise my hand and glance at my callous hands and trimmed fingernails.

I cringe.

That bitch didn't deserve to be in that position!

My anger rises, and I can hear my blood pumping in my ears.

Gritting my teeth, I sit straight in my single size bed with a spring mattress that is poking my back every time I lie down.

I should be the one there, but she took everything that is supposed to be mine. I breathe heavily, stand up from my bed, and open the old wooden drawer in my nightstand.

It smells musty and old varnish.

I take the knife that I always placed it in the drawer. Well, I need to be always sharp in this kind of neighborhood.

Gripping it stronger with my right hand, I grab the not-so-fluffy pillow and stab the knife into it, and think that it was that bitch.

"You're a whore!" I continue stabbing and yelling at the top of my lungs

"Ugly bitch!" Stab. "You don't deserve everything you have!" I stab and rip it with one long slash.

I growl, and my anger is still soaring high.

Hatching.

Hatching.

I sneeze as the feathers fly all around my room.

My breathing catches.

My anger is still in my system. I walk out of my room and spot the single worn-out brown couch I have.

Slumping down into it, I cross my arms over my chest. My redo breasts pop out slightly at the open button of my dress.

I did this because of him, but he left me after finding out I am sleeping with his young right hand. I can't blame myself if he can't even pleasure me to succumb to my orgasms.

I was so angry at that time. I thought we're getting married, but I found out that he knew all this time that I've been sneaking out to let his man fuck my brain's out.

He dumped me without giving me anything—no money, no cheque, no car, no home, no jewelry, and no clothes, and I couldn't even take my shoe collections with me. Nothing! He knew that they were all from his money. Well, he was right.

But I was able to revenge what he did to me, and thank God he can't avenge back.

I laugh out loud at the thought of it.

"Sorry, dumbass! I'm a genius! You didn't see that coming, did you?" I yell and laugh my ass loud.

This is just the beginning. I found her—my new victim. Oh, no scratch that. Two new victims.

I stand up abruptly, swaying my hips, and think there's loud music playing and I'm at the nightclub. I dance, jumping up and down while closing my eyes.

Let's think I just had my dry martini. I stop abruptly.

"I need a drink for my soon victory. I just did a good job scaring the two bitches!" I lie down to my couch and roll in myself, laughing.

"Ouch! That hurts!" I groan, rubbing my ass after falling down from this stupid couch.

I fish out my phone from my dress pocket and dial his number.

"What do you want, old bitch?" I cringe after hearing the deep voice on the other line.

"I want a cheap wine," I tell him.

He laughs—a belly laugh.

Asshole!

"I can't just give you that for free. You know that, right, bitch?" he teases me.

"I know that, and I will pay you just like before." I grimace at the thought of how I'll pay for that.

"You better do it good than the last time. I won't give you until I'm satisfied. Do you have buyers? Got sets here."

I sigh. "I'll let you know, but I need a bottle."

"Sure, come over, and I need also a fuck. I miss your wrinkled pussy."

I roll my eyes. "But you enjoy being deep in me, old mutt!"

"Yeah, because it's pussy!"

"I'll be there tonight."

"Good! Oh, by the way, what do you need with that fake bomb?"

I groan, "Nothing!"

"It isn't nothing bitch. You don't do free fuck and free blowjob for nothing," he snorts.

Evil!

I breathe heavily.

You'll be dead soon, asshole! As soon as I get what I want, you'll be dead!

"I just want to scare someone," I say dryly.

"Uh, okay. You can just tell me and let me do that myself. I'm good at that, you know?"

The idea pops out into my mind. My lips spread into a grin—a devilish grin.

I'm such a dumb. Why have I not think of that before? He can scare them.

He's ugly with scars on his face, bulky, and tattooed. His long black hair reminds me of a machete movie. For a drug dealer, it fits him well.

"Sure, next time." I giggle silently.

"Good. See you later for a blowjob, and I'm gonna fuck you in the ass, bitch."

I almost choke when he grunts over the phone. My stomach twists sickly, and I have to swallow the bile rising in my throat.

"Bye," I say sourly.

And there is no one else left to blame than that bitch.

I wouldn't be here in this raunchy place if she did what I told her. She disobeyed me!

After what I did to her, this is how she pays me back.

My iPhone 7 rings again—the only thing that has worth left for me. I glance down at the buzzing phone on the top of my cracked coffee table.

Speaking of the bitch. I roll my tired eyes and compose myself. Clearing my throat, I answer and press the phone to my ear.

"What do you want, Gabrielle Nicolette?" I ask first before she can ask me. That's how I play my game.

"How dare you? I know you are the one who sent flowers to Sam! Now they're coming after me. They're watching every move I make. This is because of you!" she whines.

I can't help but wince and pull the phone away from my ear.

I press the hands-free button and place it back to the coffee table. Crossing my legs, I lean to the couch.

"Oh, sweetheart, I'm sorry to hear that. I wish I can help you during your difficult times," I chuckle.

"Stop! Stop being a sarcastic bitch! Tell me you were the one who did that." She sounds so upset or maybe she's crying because her voice cracked in the end.

"Sweetheart, what will you do if I'm the one responsible for that? Call the cops and let them drag me out of this rotten hole?" I ask, raising my brow.

"Stop doing all of these! Stop your revenge. It will just put your life in danger because I know you are selling drugs. If I will tell the cops about it, you will rot in jail."

My stomach flips. “You won’t dare do that, Gabrielle! If you will put me in jail, I will drag you with me. I still have people who are willing to help me to make your life miserable. Trust me, dear, you won’t dare cross someone like me.” My anger against this woman is getting unbearable. What is she thinking?

“Someone like you? You’re a loser! You are nothing but a pathetic homeless old bitch! Nobody cares about you. I hate you so much!” She’s yelling.

My face heats with anger. I know her damn well for twenty-five years of her life. She’s losing her mind when she’s angry and she’ll end up doing something that she might regret in the end.

“And what are you? You’re nothing but a desperate whore! I should’ve let you die that night instead. You, worthless piece of shit!” My heart beats wildly in my chest that makes me difficult to breathe.

Calm down. Breath. Don’t let her affect you.

“I did everything you asked me to. I ruined Phoenix’s life! I ruined my life! You asked me to cheat on him, I did it because you wanted their wealth! You thought Henry would just throw his money on you? You’re awfully wrong! Thank God, he dumped you! You manipulated twenty-five years of my life! You controlled me! Now, it has to stop! These have to end! I will tell the Williams of what you did to their family, to Henry, and to Phoenix!” She must be serious. I stand straight and cross my arms over my chest.

“Are you threatening me now, poor little rat?” My lips form into a bitchy smirk

“No. I’m warning you!” she answers quickly.

“You wouldn’t do that if I were you, Gabrielle!”

“Watch me, dear Suzanne!” The line cut off. She hangs up the phone.

She’ll see who dear Suzanne is.

I grab the phone while I’m still heavily breathing. My nose flares with anger. She’s turning her side against me for good.

Fine, let see who will remain standing.

“Oh! The cunt can’t wait to suck my awesome cock?”

I fake my gag.

An awful cock!

“I want you to do something for me,” I tell without hesitation. I need to teach her a lesson.

“What do you want me to do? You know I’m not doing that for free. What can you offer me this time, wrinkled whore?” he asks with a mockery in his tone.

Wait till I can get out of this hellhole, and you will see who is the whore!

“I want you to teach Gabrielle a lesson,” I simply say.

“Wait, that hot slut? How do you want me to teach her a lesson?”

Really, this asshole is getting on my nerves. He should be thankful I still need him.

“I don’t care! You’re a drug dealer. You must know something to shut her up,” I hiss at the infuriating sonofabitch.

“I see, and how will you pay me? I don’t want fuck this time, bitch!” He laughs.

“Rape her, beat her, make her your whore, leash her like a dog, or put her in a cage for all I care. But don’t kill her.” Yet. He laughs again.

Enjoy mocking me so much, huh?

“You must have hated her so much to let me do all that to your own daughter.”

I growl, “She is not my daughter! That bitch is my ex-husband’s daughter! Not mine!”

He laughs his ass out loud.

“I have already your payment. Consider this done.” The line cuts off.

Sweetie, sweetie Gabby…

Chapter 39

SAM

The two-story beach house owned by Abby is beautiful—it's a gift for her husband on her nineteenth birthday. I can't help but appreciated the magnificent view that catches my eyes. An azure blue sea in a seemingly calming current, and the sounds of the rippling of waves hitting the seashores. fluffy white clouds drifting up in the sky, the seagulls squabbling overhead. I can taste the salty smell of the breeze.

"This is the best part of the house," Abby says proudly while we girls are leaning against the concrete balustrades of the balcony.

We run over here as soon as Abby announces that she will show us the patio, leaving the guys behind us.

"Aside from our bedrooms, this is the best," Izzy agrees, giggling with Abby.

"You two stop with your innuendos. Sandy is single, and I need you two to arrange blind dates for her," I retort.

Sandy elbow me with a grunt.

"Oh, sister-in-law it's been taken care of. Thank me later, Sandy," Izzy answer, winking at her.

Abby barks out laughing that makes me confused.

"What did you two planned for her?" I ask. Sandy doesn't say a word and just look at the two them, just like I do.

"Our friends will be here. Maybe you've met them already, Sam, but you haven't been introduced. I can feel that you," Abby's finger points at Sandy, "And he will be your perfect match." Abby's smile widens. Her eyes glimmer.

"Why do I feel that I've been set up?" Sandy finally talks.

"You will like him, I promise," Izzy says. "Hawk will kill me if he finds out I and Abby planned this while we were on our way," She adds

"What did you and Abby are planning?" We all turn and face Phoenix as soon as we hear his voice. He's standing at the door with his hands in the pockets of his khaki shorts. He scans our faces when nobody answers him.

“Abby?” After looking at Abby, his gaze moves to Izzy. “Izzy?” He waits patiently, then cock his brows.

“Princess?”

I startle when I hear my name. “H-huh?”

“Why are you all silent? Like you’ve been caught in the act.”

I cough. “Phoenix, we, um, we are just planning for tonight. Um, maybe we could all have a bonfire then—” Crap! I’m a terrible liar.

“Yes, brother dear, Izzy and Abby planned that maybe we could spread blankets and sleepover at the seashore tonight, right, girls?” Sandy buts in. We nod like battery-operated toys and agree with her.

Phoenix is not look convinced at all.

“Really? Why do I feel like that these two had another planned for Sandy just like how they poisoned you with mushrooms.”

The two both gasp.

“No no no! It’s not like that. I mean it’s like that. No, I mean not. Um, not like the—Abby bubbles and stutters. Izzy covers her mouth before she can continue.

I stare at them placing my hands on my hips. With raised brows, I ask, “Is it true?”

Abby shakes her head while her mouth still covered with Izzy’s hand

“It’s not like that, Sam. I mean, um...” Izzy tries to explain, but she seems can’t just form a word.

Abby removes Izzy’s hand and takes a huge breath.

“Do tell, little sister.” Phoenix moves closer while focusing his eyes on Abby. He doesn’t look angry though, in fact, he looks amused at how they both panic and try to explain their plan.

“That was my idea, okay? Just to let Sam stay with us.”

“By poisoning her? How did you know she has allergies?” Phoenix raises his hand. “Don’t answer that, you hired one of White’s men to check on her, right?”

Abby nods and looks guilty.

“You will not do that again, Abby. She could get worse than just tummy upset. You could hurt someone. So, whatever you two are planning for Sandy, stop it now. She’s my sister.” Phoenix walks away, leaving us all stun.

“Phoenix!” I call him.

He stops and turns his head on me. “Yes, my love?”

I raise my brows, and he also raises his brows, then smiles at me before he walks away.

The two sighs deeply when Phoenix is gone.

“He’s not angry. You two guys can relax now,” I tell them.

“Are you sure?”

I nod.

“Thanks, by the way,” I tell them sincerely.

They exchange a look.

“For what?” Izzy asks.

“For that MO? Duh!”

“You’re thanking us?” Abby sounds surprised.

“Yeah. We won’t be back together if that didn’t happen. Maybe we will be but because I’m too stubborn I didn’t realize how much I missed him and how much I wanted him till that night.”

They hug each other, giggling.

“That’s why Phoenix is not angry with both of you. He’s just worried that it might make me sicker. And he figured out that you might have planned that all along.”

Sandy laughs beside me. ”Jeez, you two are dangerous liaisons.”

We laugh at her.

“How about this man you are setting me up with?” Sandy sounds interested.

“Now, maybe Phoenix and Hawk will lock you both in the closet,” I tell them.

“Come on, Sam. I also wanna know who’s that hot piece of—”

“Hot piece of what, Sandy?” Phoenix shows up again.

“Phoenix, it’s rude to eavesdrop,” I tell him, but he doesn’t seem to care and just walk right in front of me to my face and give me a loud peck on my lips. They all say eww in unison.

“Go find your husbands, and you Sandy, you will not gonna date one of my friends or cousins,” he announces.

"No? Why not? I don't think I need your permission, brother. I may be a year younger than you, but the last time I checked I'm an independent woman and I'm an adult," Sandy says with confidence.

Abby and Izzy wave their hands and walk away, winking at Sandy.

"Really?" Phoenix challenges.

"Really." Sandy answers.

"Okay then, but ready yourself to see broken faces of your dates."

Sandy's mouth hangs open, wearing a shocked look on her face.

"You can't do that, Phoenix, and you are scaring her away." I hold his hands. He snorts.

"Why are you doing this?" Sandy asks.

"You are my sister, haven't figure out yet?"

I hit his arm.

"You're being sarcastic, Alexander Phoenix!" Sandy scowls.

"Do you know who they're planning to set you up with?" he asks.

Sandy shakes her head.

"Paul Manwhore Hughes, Seb's cousin, the owner of the Night Stalker." Phoenix widens his eyes at her.

"It's not that I'm gonna marry him today. Jeez! Calm down, brother. I don't even know him, and I didn't say I like him or maybe he doesn't like me."

"Oh, he likes everyone has—" He stops.

"Has what? Have vaginas? Have holes? Brother, that's what men want, straight or not—"

I laugh at her bluntness. I suddenly remember her asking me about Phoenix's size.

"Your mouth, Sandra Agnes." Phoenix is caught off guard by her.

"You don't know me well, Alexander Phoenix. Ask your sexy piece of a girl here."

He groans, "I don't wanna know what you guys talked about. Just be careful. Thank God, Abby is already married before she becomes my sister. You, on the other hand, will not be out of my sight. If anyone will hurt you should have his death wish written down."

"What makes you think I go for a cock?"

I shake beside her.

Phoenix's face turns red. "Jesus, woman!"

"You prefer a dick, penis, junk—"

"Enough! Enough!" Phoenix raises his hand to surrender.

We burst laughing

"Found your match, Phoenix."

He narrows his eyes at me. "You will pay for that later," he whispers in my ear that makes me giggle.

"Ugh! You two need a break. Aren't you two running out of energy? That's why I don't wanna stay in your apartment, brother. I can't help but think what the two of you did in each corner of that apartment," she says, wrinkling her nose.

I and Phoenix laugh together. Phoenix arches back his head while holding his hand on his abdomen. The things we did in that apartment flashes back at me like in an old cinema.

"Ew, gross!" She laughs along with us.

"Let's go down. I'm hungry," Phoenix announces.

My stomach growls when I smell of grilled meat in the air.

"Make sure you are hungry with food, Alexander Phoenix," Sandy says, giggling.

"Isn't it awkward to talk about sex with your brother, Sandy?" I ask.

She just rolls her eyes. "Like I care"

Phoenix chuckles, "You are really something, Sandra Agnes."

"I love you too, brother dear. But..." We pause our steps in the middle of the stairs to face her.

"But if you will make her cry or hurt her again, either your my brother or not, I will use my Jiu-Jitsu between your legs," she says seriously, pointing her finger at Phoenix's crotch.

I laugh again and shake my head.

"Not happening intentionally, little sister. I'm gonna bring this woman to the altar with me."

I freeze, my eyes always pop out.

He kisses my slightly parted lips. We never talked about this, and he just drops it like a ticking time bomb

“Shock?” He smirks.

I close my mouth, swallowing the saliva that almost chokes me.

“Not really,” I answer silently.

Sandy claps her hand and dances down the stairs like a schoolgirl, leaving just the two of us.

“Why are you so surprise, Samantha? Are you still planning on looking for another man?”

The butterflies in my stomach turn into a dragon spitting fire. I hit his arm and walk away without saying anything.

“Samantha!” Phoenix calls me.

I raise my hand, showing my middle finger.

“Immature!” he yells.

I join the family on the huge lawn in front of the house. I can see the large indoor pool from the wall glasses windows. I sit silently in one of the empty chairs in front of the long table covered with a white cloth.

I can’t help but think about what Phoenix said earlier. Is he really marrying me? I love him so much, and if he will ask me to marry him I will definitely say yes. It doesn’t sound too soon, right?

“Do you like this place, darling?” Anna’s voice takes me back from Lala land.

“This place is marvelous, Anna. Thanks for having me here with your family.” I smile at her.

“Darling, we are family now. I just wanna say thank you for giving my son another chance, Sam.” She reaches out for my hand and squeezes it.

I squeeze her hand back. ”I love him so much not to give us another chance, Anna. I would be a fool and regret each day of my life if I didn’t do it.” Anna breaks her eye contact and looks up at someone behind me.

I feel a pair of hands on my shoulder. I know exactly whose hands are these without looking at my back—the sensation that gives me and the touch that makes me feel safe and loved. I take his hands planting kisses on them. I look up to see Phoenix smirking down at me. I know he heard what I said to his mother.

“I love you too, Samantha. Just so you know, I would regret every second of my life if I didn’t chase you, and I don’t think I would be back to normal without you in my life. I love you so much, and I will love you every fucking second of my fucking life.” He moves to my side and kneels beside me.

His eyes are dancing with so many emotions—love, amazement, happiness, contentment as he glances at me.

I feel my heart will combust in my chest each second. Is he going to propose now? Right here in front of his mother?

“I’m not gonna propose right now, Samantha. You can breathe now,” he chuckles.

I don’t realize I’m holding my breath until I finally release it. His mom giggles and I forget I’m talking to Anna.

“But I was serious with you earlier, Samantha. I mean it, and I wanna give you a proper proposal with a ring.” He smiles at me and kisses my knuckles

“Don’t you think it’s too soon?”

“Too soon my ass.”

“Son, your mouth.”

“Sorry, Mom. It’s not too soon, and we don’t have all the time in the world. We might have a heart attack or I might die tomorrow, and I wanna marry you. So why we have to wait for all this kind of shit if we will end up getting married.”

My jaw drops.

“Don’t you believe in marriage?” his mom asks.

My head snaps to look at her.

“Yes. I believe in marriage. Dad marries my mom after they graduate in college, then they had me after a year,” I answer chirpily.

“See, now what is your problem?” Phoenix asks and takes a seat between me in his mom.

“I don’t have a problem, Phoenix, and I didn’t say I’m not gonna marry you. I only asked that it’s maybe too soon. What if you’ll regret it?”

He laughs and so does his mom.

I scowl at him.

“I will only regret if I will not marry you.”

“If you say it like you are so serious.”

“Aren’t you?”

“Am I?

“Are you?”

“Seriously?”

“Yes?”

“Yes!”

“Guys!” Phoenix stands up quickly and claps his hand to get everyone’s attention. Their eyes are on us now even the guys that don’t look familiar to me. I guess they are their friends that Abby was telling while we were on the balcony.

I grab Phoenix’s shirt for him to sit down, but he holds my hand instead.

“Guys, thanks for coming here today! And we will celebrate my Birthday later.”

I freeze and I feel the color drained from my face. What? It’s his birthday today?

Oh, my God!

I look up at him who’s so happy and smiling at everyone. My eyes scan at everyone who is already standing and clapping their hands. What is going on? What did he say? What did I miss?

Phoenix grabs my hand to let me stand up. I stand up and look at him, but before I can ask him, he cups the back of my head then presses his lips against mine.

“Happy birthday,” I say slowly.

“We’re engaged!”

Chapter 40

PHOENIX

It's almost sunset—the colors of blue and violet scattering the sky with yellow-orange and red are covering the most of it.

Everyone gathers at the shore, sitting at the beach chairs to witness the sunset. The chopped woods are already piled for the bonfire later.

The smooth sand caresses my bare-foot in every step I make. The sound of waves rippling softly at the shores is so calm as I walk hand in hand with my fiancée, Samantha through the shoreline.

This is the best feeling in the world—at this moment all I can think is I am such a lucky man—being loved and in love with the same woman.

She is kicking the small waves every time they reach on our feet—it feels like a soft massage. I can't help but smile at how she laughs when the seawater hits me.

"Childish," I mutter, grinning.

She doesn't care. I can see how much she enjoys doing it, and I'm beyond happy watching her laughing freely because it just warms my heart.

"That's not funny, Samantha," I say, wiping my wet face with my shirt.

She looks down at my exposed abs and rolls her eyes when she notices me smirking at her.

"Eyes up here, woman."

"I'm just enjoying the view. You can join them if you don't wanna get wet," she tells me, pointing down at her wet feet with a wicked glint of in her eyes.

"I wanna get wet with you bn any means possible." She laughs and playfully hits my chest.

I catch her waist and grabs her to press against me. "Is this also in your bucket lists, beautiful?" I ask while she is busy tracing her fingers at the wet she made on my shirt.

"What? Kissing you at the beach on sunset?" Her eyes meet mine. She's so fucking beautiful as the rays glow on her. Her hair and skin look like a gold glittering under the sun.

"Yeah? I might add this to my list. Just like the proposal you did hours ago. I thought you want a proper proposal," she asks then bites her lower lip.

"I will propose properly if that worries you," I tell her because honestly, that was not my plan to propose her today, but I believe that was the right moment, and I never regret doing that.

"Phoenix, that was perfect for me, and I don't want you to propose again. That wouldn't be a surprise proposal. I love every second of it, and you did it in front of your mom and in front of the people you care about. I think that was the most romantic proposal I've ever seen."

I kiss her lips slowly and passionately. Our body molds perfectly together as our kisses ignite into a thousand lights. The sun goes down in the horizon while our kisses sync beautifully, coaxing, but it was cut off immediately by the applause at my back.

"I think we have audiences," I tell Samantha when we pull our lips away, but our foreheads are still pressed together.

"We always have," she chuckles. "I think we should go and join them." She grabs my hand and pulls me to follow her.

"Did I fulfill one of your lists?"

"Yes, and thanks, Phoenix!"

"Don't thank me, princess. We will do that together, and this time I will never be far away from you." I kiss her one more time.

"Enough of that already! You can continue that tonight, dear brother!"

I groan when I hear Sandy's voice. I intertwine my hand with Samantha's and walk to join them.

They already started the bonfire, and they encircle the fire they lit up. I and Samantha take the empty chair beside Sandy. I let Samantha sit on my lap and wrap my arms around her.

"So, how was the walk?" Sandy asks Samantha with a wide grin on her face.

Paul is sitting beside her, and I don't miss the way they talk together when he arrived with my friends. Sandy gets along with everyone immediately—she's friendly and funny just like how I first met her. Now I understand how she looked at me those days—she actually genuinely cares about me and Samantha.

"It was good," Sam simply answers.

"How about that kissed?" She teases her.

"As if you've never seen us kissing before silly," Sam replies.

I chuckle.

"Yeah, lover boy," Sandy snorts, glancing at me.

“Yeah, little sister. Keep your pretty ass new friend away from you if you don’t want to see him shoved against this sand.” I intend to let Paul hear it.

I don’t trust him even a bit considering his reputation over women. Seb, Paul, Patrick, and I knew we have our reputations. I was even surprised to find out Seb got married first who I thought has no plan even dating, but I have no doubt that he loves Abby with every breath he has. Patrick is also seriously dating Abby’s friend Rebecca.

Then me who is currently engaged to the most wonderful woman I’ve ever met. That leaves Paul who’s still single and still banging women around.

My teeth grit at the thought of him and my sister— I don’t wanna think about it.

“Thanks, Phoenix! I keep that in mind,” Paul retorts.

“Make sure of that if you’re not gonna let me hang you by your tiny junk,” I banter.

Sandy bursts out laughing that catches everyone’s attention even Paul is laughing with her too.

“That’s not funny, Sandy,” Paul guffaws beside her.

“How tiny, Paul?” she asks raising her fingers to show Paul how tiny it is.

Paul grabs her hand to put it down. Sandy almost gasps at his touch.

My brows furrow. Sam grips my thigh. I blink and look down at Sam who’s still staring at them, and I look back at them, but Sandy doesn’t say anything anymore.

What was that all about? That was weird.

Sandy decided to stay with Mom and I heard they have planned together. I’m so glad that they both get along and Mom was ecstatic that Sandy is staying with her for the meantime. The weekend with my family and friends was more than perfect than I ever expected.

Hawk and Izzy made their announcement that they are expecting a baby—I’m so happy for them, and I couldn’t help but feel jealous that they were expecting a baby. I glance at Sam who’s busy texting with Amy on her phone. Does she want a baby?

“Hot tease, Is everything okay?” she asks, placing her tiny hand on my lap.

I clear my throat. “Of course, why?”

“You’ve been silent since we drive back.”

I breathe deeply. “I guess I want another outing. It’s been a while since I had fun like that.”

“Me too, but I want to go home and see Mom. I wanna spend the Thanksgiving with her.”

“Can I come with you?”

“Don’t you wanna spend with your family?”

“Princess, you are also my family, and I spent twenty-six thanksgivings with them. If you don’t mind me tagging along.” I shrug.

I haven’t seen her mother since that dinner she invited me, and I’m sure she still hates me for hurting Samantha.

“Of course, I won’t mind, and I would be glad if you can come with me.”

“I will suggest to my brother to spend Thanksgiving in our home. If Mom agrees then you and Hannah can join us there. What do you say, Princess?” She nods and smiles at me. “I love that idea, Phoenix.”

“Great. Then we have a plan.”

I fish out the keys from my pocket and unlock her apartment. I open wide, then I gesture her to get inside. I pick up our two travel bags while she flicks the lights open.

Her jaw literally drops as she simultaneously covers her mouth. Her eyes wander around her new living room, starting from the new coat rack with a shoe organizer cabinet and a red leaf-shaped bowl on top where I drop her keys on it.

The old cream-colored wall is replaced with vanilla white. They did a great job with the wall-size Ivory white curtains, and the lights have been changed into dim. Two small and medium white Chinese lantern inspired chandeliers are hanging just above her new coffee table. Her old couches were replaced into a new set of maroon-colored leather with loveseat and an ottoman, and a square cream-colored carpet to complete the set.

Her boring tiled floor has turned into dark chestnut wood. Her TV set is still there, but it was placed down on the new black stand, and they added rectangular wall-mounted shelves just above it.

“What have you done in here, Phoenix?”

I chuckle because I can hear the amazement in her voice.

“So, I take it that you like your new apartment.”

She doesn’t answer, instead, she cups my face and kisses me loudly.

She walks towards her kitchen, and I know how they look like because I am the one who instructed them about design. Samantha doesn’t see her room yet. The empty room was now her office with bookshelves, and I can’t wait to fill it with books.

She's been saying oh, my god many times from the kitchen.

"As if you can cook, princess. What's the point of having the kitchen like that if you can't even boil water."

She walks in my direction and kisses me again. "Did you forget that I have an awesome chef of a fiancé? And I cooked us a dinner once," she says, biting her lip.

"Wanna see your room?"

"You mean our room?" she rephrases.

My heart swells, and I know she sees the swoon look on my face. "Really?"

"Don't you like a small apartment? You can go back to your apartment now." She gestures her hand to shoo me away.

"You're always having fun kicking me out, Samantha." I follow her to her room.

She yelps when I grab her waist and lift her up in the air.

"Put me down, Phoenix!" She wiggles to set free, but I throw her on my shoulder.

"Don't move or you will fall down and hit your ass on the floor."

"Put me down this moment, Phoenix!" She hits my back.

"Ouch! Woman, you're hurting my ears."

She wiggles, giggles in my shoulder then grabs my ass.

"You really love my ass, princess, don't you? You always stare, grabs, and grips, and I can't wait for you to kiss it."

She barks out into laughter. "Why would I kiss your ass?" She starts kneading it.

I throw her down on our new bed, and before she can move I'm already on top of her grabbing her hands and pinning them on top of her head.

"Tell me what you want, Princess." I look at her in her blue eyes, and she's still catching her breath.

"Maybe we can do something in this new bed?" She slowly says with a meaningful smile, still struggling to get free underneath my body pressed against her.

"Like how, Princess?" I ask innocently.

She rolls her eyes. "Maybe we can fuck."

I laugh aching my head back.

"What? Don't you want to fuck in here? I think you spent too much money on this apartment, and it's time to put all of these to good use."

I press my lips on her lips, and she tries to free her hands from my grip, but I tighten it even more.

"I want to touch you, Phoenix."

I shake my head and bite her chin slightly then suck it. I'm already hard, pressing between her thighs. I kiss her neck and suck it, and she arches her head back to give me more access, and she moans when I suck it again. She pushes her hips to press against my hard cock, that's the time I free my right hand while keeping her hands pinned above her head.

I run my free hand underneath the skirt to her already wet panties.

I groan when I touch her wet folds and look at her semi-closed eyes, and she's already biting her lip.

"Samantha, you're wet in just short foreplay," I groan.

I free her hands and warn her. "Don't dare move, Samantha."

"Okay, but where are you going?"

I stand up to unbutton my jeans. I stop and groan when the doorbell rings. I look at her, and she's looking up at me with furrowed brows.

"Are you expecting someone?"

She shakes her head.

"Stay here. I'll go check who the fuck is outside the door, and I'm gonna kick him soon."

"Maybe Tyler?"

My head snaps at her.

"Better not because I will punch him this time." My hard cock turns Jell-O.

"Phoenix, just go and see, and don't punch if it's Tyler."

I check at the peephole and the doorbell rings three times already. My blood boils when I see who's in there outside. I open the door wide.

"What the fuck are you doing in my fucking building, Gabrielle?" I growl as my anger rises.

She looks terrified and doesn't even look the same the last time I saw her. There's something wrong with her. The bitchy Gabrielle is quite the opposite of the woman in front of me right now.

"Go away, Gabrielle!" I bark, and she jumps.

My brows furrow.

She wraps her arms around her body without looking at me in the eyes.

“Are you deaf now? What happened to the bitch who blackmailed me months ago?”

She shakes her head. How the fuck did she got in here? Where’s the fucking security?

“C-can I come in?” she says slowly.

I laugh my ass out at her. “Not happening, sweetheart.”

Samantha gasps from my back. When I turned to see her, she looks like about to faint with her face as pale as if she’d seen a ghost.

“Princess, it’s not what you think.”

Sam walks slowly closer to me, grabbing the edge of my shirt.

“I’m not here to make trouble, Alex. I want to tell you something, you and Samantha.”

I snort, “Oh, now you know her name?”

She nods.

“Tell us now while you still have a chance,” I deadpan.

“Someone is planning to harm your life, Sam, and your sister.” She looks at my eyes this time. My skin turns cold clammy that she knows about my sister.

“What do you mean, Gabrielle?” I growl, grips her arms, and shakes her causing Samantha to yelp at my back.

She whimpers and cowers herself.

“Phoenix, get off. You’re hurting her!” Samantha grips my arms, and I literally drop Gabrielle down and she almost loses her balance.

“Talk, Gabrielle!” My fianceé’s stern voice catches Gabrielle’s attention. Gabrielle wipes her face and sniffs—something is not right.

“I know who sent you flowers and to his sister,” she starts talking slowly.

“Who?” We ask in unison.

“My mom.”

Chapter 41

SAM

My body is shaking with fury when I see Gabrielle in my apartment door. Those things she did to my relationship, to Phoenix, and to myself make me want to strike into her, grab her hair, and drag down to the lobby, then kick her to hell.

I don't know what stops me from doing things like that, perhaps I'm a better person than her? If this only happens before Phoenix is back into my life I already punch her face.

But she is not the bitchy Gabrielle—the insensitive, empathetic, and vicious woman. Right now, she cowers down while Phoenix is grabbing her and growling on her face.

"Let her talk, Phoenix," I say calmly to Phoenix while rubbing his back. He is losing his temper on her, but I can't blame him though because we both had suffered a lot in her hands.

"I'm done listening to her, Samantha. She almost ruined our relationship, and now that we are back together, she shows up again, and this time in our doorstep." He's breathing heavily, and I can feel him shaking with anger.

"I want to hear whatever she's going to tell us. I think that will clear the issue, and I want to figure out myself if what she's saying is true." I steal a few glances to Gabrielle who's wrapping her arms around her body—she looks terrified.

"I won't stay long. I just want to let you know something."

Phoenix snorts.

"Come in, Gabrielle. Are you sure you are not bringing explosives or a gun with you?" I ask cautiously.

She raises her arms. She has an only a small clutch bag, and I think even a small handgun won't fit into it.

Once we settled in on my new couch, Phoenix doesn't waste any moment.

"Why did you say your mother is involved in sending flowers to Samantha?" He doesn't look pleased with me on letting Gabrielle in, but he respects my decision. He's still glaring at her most of the time.

"First, talk from the very beginning, Gabrielle. I have all the time to hear them from you," I say with an unyielding tone.

"I found out Suzanne was sleeping with Henry two months before Phoenix found out that I was cheating on him. Mom let me do it because she wanted me to break up with Phoenix," she says with a low voice without looking at both of us. I think she feels guilty.

"Why did you listen to her?" I ask quickly.

"She abused me since I was still young—mentally, emotionally, and physically if she wouldn't be satisfied with what I did. I was so terrified to say no. Dad thought she was the best mother for me because she behaved like a perfect mother role when Dad was around. Dad saw some bruises on my skin when he asked. Suzanne answered it for me—that I fell or, got an accident at school P.E, something like that."

I hug myself, feeling goosebumps erupt all over my body.

"When I started high school, she controlled the food I ate, I couldn't drink sodas or eat candies or chocolate, sometimes I still sneaked out and bought and ate them at the store or in the coffee shop. She was toying with me—to dress like this, eat like that, wear like these, and even the guys I dated."

"What about me?"

My head snaps to Phoenix who's sitting at my right while Gabrielle is sitting on my left.

"She liked you because your family was rich and famous. She asked me to date you and broke up with my boyfriend in my freshman year. That was how I met you, but it wasn't like I played with you, Alex. I really loved you, for almost two years everything was real until my mom met your dad. She would blackmail me if I wouldn't break up with you. I was also brokenhearted when we broke up, I swear to God, I loved you."

"Dad left my mom when he found out mom was cheating on him. Dad helped me with that apartment and all my bills, but Mom wouldn't just let me go. She drugged me once and let some..."

Her tears fall like streams from her eyes. Her lips quiver, then she shakes to cry.

I freeze in my seat. Oh, my God!

"S-she. She let them rape me and took a video of me. T-that's when I was still with Alex. She said she was going to send it to Alex if I would not do what she wanted. That was why I slept with Mark, that day was the first day I slept with him, I swear. I lied to you that I was going to my parents because I knew if I didn't watch your game after that, you would come to my apartment."

"So, it was all set up, Gabrielle?" I ask.

She nods, sniffing. I take the tissue box on my right side and offer it to her. I don't know why I feel bad and just my brain told me to listen. My heart hurts. I don't know if she is just acting all of these to get our attention, but she looks so broken and lost.

“She still has a copy of that video, but now I lost everything, and I don’t care even if she will spread it all over the internet.” She sniffs again.

“She has lost everything. Henry found out that she was cheating on him. Now that she has nothing but a drug dealer who let her sell drugs, she still holding grudges against your mom, and Sandra.”

Phoenix stiffens at mentioning his sister.

I grab his hand on his lap, squeezing it. How can that evil of a woman know everything about Williams?

“How your mother found out about Sandy?” Phoenix growls.

“She knew since before, but Sandy didn’t want to do with your dad. So, she leaves her alone until she found out that Sam and Sandy are friends.”

“What she wants from me?” I ask annoyingly.

“You are the reason why Phoenix didn’t take me back, duh!”

I chuckle.

“Like I will take you back!” Phoenix snaps.

“I know!” She snaps back.

“How did you know she was the one who sent the fake bomb to Sandy’s apartment?”

“She asks me to befriend with Sandy. She knew Sandy is Williams and Henry left money for her.”

“So, it’s all about money, then?”

“Yes, Sherlock!”

“Stop being sarcastic, Gabrielle! You are in my building remember!” Phoenix warns her.

“Where is she now?”

“She left her old apartment since I succeed with the last assignment she gave me. I didn’t meet her last week when I refused to do what she asked me to.”

“Why are you telling us all these things, Gabrielle?” Phoenix asks and watches Gabrielle like a hawk.

“I want to do the right thing. I don’t know why I feel guilty these days that’s why I come here. I found out that she was not my birth mother.”

I gasp.

She snorts, “Yeah. Life is a bitch. After all those things I did, I found out she isn’t my real mother. No wonder she did what she did to me. My dad is an idiot too. He was afraid that I would hate him if I found out my mom was a drug addict,” She explains with all the pain in her voice.

“I’m so sorry, Gabrielle,” that’s all I can say because I am still too shocked to what I learned about her life.

Phoenix begins placing the pot with half full of water to the stove. He suggested to cook us a cheese Manicotti with fresh tomato sauce. I start chopping the red tomatoes into small pieces when I feel his gaze on me.

I stop and look at him. “What? Don’t you have other things to do?”

“Just sit, princess. I don’t wanna see you cutting your finger off because that’s not how to chop.”

I roll my eyes, placing down the knife on the chopping board with half chop tomato. “I did chop many times, and I haven’t cut my fingers even once. Show me then, and I want to learn.”

He guffaws, “We will be starved to death today if I will teach you now because I can see that cooking is not your cup of tea. You look good in the office and reading books and stuff like that.”

“You’re over-exaggerating it. I’m a quick learner, Phoenix. Don’t underestimate this beauty.” I gesture my hand under my chin.

He chuckles, shaking his head, “I am not, my love. We have the rest of our lives learning new things together, and I’d love to teach you how to chop, cook, bake, and everything you wanted to learn.” He moves closer, giving me a quick kiss on my lips.

After Gabrielle’s visit three days ago, our lives are back to normal. I heard Phoenix talking to Logan over the phone about watching over Gabrielle because being paranoid as Phoenix, he thought Gabrielle’s life was in danger.

“We didn’t talk about wedding plans, princess.”

I freeze in my seat. My heartbeat races a little bit.

I woke up lazily two days ago.

“Love, what time is it? Didn’t hear my alarm goes off,” I say in between yawn.

I stretch my limbs while his arm still draping on my waist. He doesn’t answer. I rub my still half-closed eyes with my fingers when I feel something heavy on my finger and it’s shining right into my eyes.

My half-closed eyes grow wider, and my mouth gapes open. I raise my hand to take a closer look at the engagement ring on my finger and laugh my ass out loud.

I feel him kissing my shoulder, and when I look at him over my shoulder, I see the most beautiful sunshine in the morning—he has the most beautiful smile on his face.

He hugs me tighter. "Samantha Lorraine Anderson, I've never been happier in my entire life until I met you almost five months ago. The moment I met the gaze of those beautiful blue eyes, I certainly knew that you were made for me—you are to love me, you are to fill the empty space in my heart, you are to grow old with me, and to be the mother of my children. I'm willing to take losses of our nonsense banters each day if we end up in our bed tangled together every night like this. As cliché-ness as it sounds, but I can't live without you."

I turn my body to face him and look at him straight into his eyes, and I know I look like an idiot because my facial muscles are aching for stretching so long. Well, it's good to start a day with a smile, right?

"Will you be my life partner, my wife? Will you marry me, princess?"

I sigh slowly like daydreaming, still wearing a grin on my face and batting my eyelashes at him.

"Yes! King of cockiness, I will marry you." I press my lips on him. "I love you so much. So so much, Phoenix. We are getting married or not I'm still willing to be with you for the rest of my life even we banter over nonsense."

"I love you too, so much larger than the universe. So fuckingly in love with you!"

"Samantha?"

I blink. "Yeah?" He is groaning, moving to the front of the stove, throwing the manicotti pasta to the boiling water. Then he announces, "I wanna get married sooner."

"How soon?"

"Very soon."

"Why very soon?"

"Why not?"

"Changing your mind?" he asks with furrowed his brows, staring at me intently.

He swallows hard with a hint of pain in his eyes.

I stand up from the stool, move closer to him, and close the gap between our bodies. I cup his face and kiss him with all my heart, then I move my lips slowly, enticingly and chastely until he kisses me back. Our kisses heated, turns hungrier, wilder and fiercer.

I'm already pressed against the countertop, and I can feel him hard, pressed against my lower abdomen. Phoenix cups my ass, and I wrap my legs around his waist instantly as he moves and places me on the top of our kitchen island.

Without breaking our kiss, I unbutton hurriedly his jeans while he's busy unbuttoning mine. In an instant, my shirt flies and also my bra, then his shirt follows.

"I want to eat you," he says with a guttural voice.

"What about the food?"

"How about it?"

"Look?" I point at the pot with the half of my bra is cook inside. His head snaps to the pot, looks at me instantly, then barks out laughing.

He throws his head back and slaps my thigh playfully. "You love to ruin our moment with your lame jokes."

I cup his face and kiss him again that's when I hear his phone rings and mine simultaneously.

We stop kissing and groan together.

"Fuck-blocker!" We mutter.

He moves away with a still full-mast erection, then pauses when he notices me ogling at him.

"Don't laugh!" he says, warning me.

I nod, biting my lower lip to stop from laughing.

"Stop it, Samantha, or you will not come later!"

"Self-service," I tease.

"Try."

"I will."

"You'll see," he sings, picking up his phone at the countertop.

"You should have a good reason ruining my almost intense orgasm in the kitchen," he says, placing his phone on his ear.

That must be Hawk because he won't just talk like that if it's Sandy or Anna.

"Fuck! Okay, okay, hold on. On it." He signals me to turn the TV on."

I immediately hop down from the island, pick up the remote, and press the power button on.

My hand immediately on my mouth, and I feel the remote slips and falls to the floor.

“Oh, my God!”

Chapter 42

PHOENIX

My heart is still pounding in my chest since I saw the News about an hour ago. I don't know why I feel guilty even if I'm not the one who hurt her—maybe because we had a history, and I loved her once somehow? Or perhaps I'm one of the reasons why that woman manipulated her into doing something horrible?

I feel Samantha gripping my hand tightly. She kept telling me that Gabrielle will be okay throughout the ride to the hospital.

I take a deep breath when we step inside the hospital lobby.

According to the News, Gabrielle was the one who called the 911 before the drug dealer killed Suzanne right in front of her own eyes. She must be so terrified and shocked, and she will never forget that extreme brutality of the murder of once she believed was her mother. I feel so bad for her, and I can see based on that News earlier that she was also beaten by those assholes.

"Phoenix, are you ready? That's her room."

I look down at Samantha and nod. She pushes the door open, and I see Gabrielle immediately lying in bed, wearing a hospital gown.

Her face is bruised, but still recognizable.

She bites her swelling lower lip when she notices us approaching. She gives us a tight smile. Samantha lets go of my hand as she walks toward Gabrielle's bed and gives Gabrielle a hug. Gabrielle wraps her arms around Samantha

"I'm so sorry, Gabrielle. I wish I didn't let you go home if they would come after you," I tell Gabrielle after kissing her on her forehead.

She rolls her eyes. Samantha is still sitting beside her on the bed after placing the bouquet of flowers we brought for her.

"Well, I don't know that that bitch is actually wanted me dead," she says, then slumps her back to the semi-elevated bed. She starts to cry—her tears just fall down her face even no matter how many times she wipes them.

"I ask someone to look after you, but you were too sneaky to get out of his sight," I say guiltily.

"It was all my fault that I believed in her again, and I thought she would really give me that video she had, but she finally admitted that she burned it already," she explains with regrets in her voice.

"Don't worry, no one will harm you now. She's dead now, and that drug dealer is locked up in jail, probably for the rest of his life," Samantha says while rubbing Gabrielle's arm.

Samantha has a good heart. After what Gabrielle did to us, she was even the first one to tell me that we should come to see Gabrielle. And now, it feels like nothing happened to us before, and she forgives her easily and never keeps grudges.

"Yeah, and I still have small luck because they let me join them in the kitchen with Suzanne, and that was the time I sneaked to grab a phone and placed it in the jacket I was wearing. I don't know that place though because they covered my face with a black cloth while I was in the vehicle."

I listen intently. She stops crying, but Samantha's hands are still on Gabrielle's hands, squeezing them.

"They killed her because of me. Their boss wanted to take me somewhere, but Suzanne was against that idea. They were supposed to kill me, but that boss killed her—" She blinks and takes a deep breath.

"You don't have to tell us, Gabby. I know it's hard for you, and you've just witnessed someone is brutally murdered," I tell her.

"Thanks for coming, though. I wasn't expecting both of you to be here, and you're the last people I expected to visit. My dad didn't even call me."

"Gabby, forget whatever happened in the past. You're forgiven," Samantha says, then Gabrielle suddenly launches herself to Samantha.

Sam laughs, surprised at what Gabrielle just did.

"Easy there, Gabrielle. You're still in the hospital bed," I remind her.

She pulls away, and she's already smiling—a genuine smile like how she smiled when we were still together.

"Am I forgiven too, Alex?"

I roll my eyes. "You can call me Phoenix now, Gabby."

"Thanks!" she says merrily. "I'm so sorry for what I did to the two of you—" Sam cut her off. "Oh, I understand. You were just manipulated and controlled by Suzanne. Forget about it, and I and Phoenix are getting married, and you're invited."

She launches herself again

“Yay!” Gabrielle says Chirpily. Her eyes twinkle with happiness.

“What’s the doctor said? When can you go home?”

“Tomorrow. I made a statement with the police officer, so I can go home immediately,” she announces with excitement.

“We’ll come here tomorrow to send you home,” I tell her.

She waves her hand. “You don’t have to do that, Phoenix.”

“We are coming, Gabby,” Samantha insists.

“Really? I don’t wanna bother to both of you, you know.”

“You’re not a bother,” My head snaps to the door just swings open. “Brother!”

“Hawk, hey.” I stand up and give Hawk a hug.

“Gabby, how are you feeling?” Hawk asks.

She smiles timidly. “Still alive, I guess.”

Hawk kisses her on the forehead. They knew each other since we started dating.

“You must be Isabelle?”

Izzy moves to her to gives her a hug. “Call me Izzy, Gabby, and I’m glad you’re okay. You’re a strong woman, remember that.”

Gabrielle nods at her. “Thanks, guys for coming.”

“I don’t think you’re still safe in your apartment, Gabby. I suggest you move away from there,” Hawk says with concern in his voice.

“Where will I go, Hawk?” she asks worriedly.

“There is still a vacancy in my building, down at Samantha’s floor.”

She shakes her head. “I don’t think I can afford there alone, Phoenix.”

“Let’s talk about the rent later when you’re already safe. We still need you alive,” I tell her.

She looks at Samantha.

“What?” Samantha asks.

“It’s okay with you?” Gabrielle asks with hesitation.

Sam laughs, rolling her eyes. “Of course, why not?”

“Okay, it settled then,” she announces lively.

“I think I should call the doctor to let you go home. You seem fine now,” Izzy says flippantly.

“Oh, you don’t know how hurt my face is. I might look like Lola right now,” Gabrielle says, pouting her swollen lips to demonstrate.

“Who’s Lola?” Hawk asks.

“Jeez, the sexy fish in the shark tale,” she says.

I chuckle, “Wow! and you still choose to be that sexy one.”

Samantha hits my arms playfully.

“Wow! I love it!” She takes Samantha’s hand to take a closer look at the engagement ring and kisses Samantha’s cheek. “I’m so happy for you, Sam, and I almost ruined you and Phoenix.” She starts to cry again then blinks to control her tears.

I give my brother a high five.

“What was that all about?” Sam looks at me.

I kiss the top of her head. “Nothing, princess.”

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Weeks later...

“My love, get your ass in here!” I yell at Samantha who’s still busy popping skittles in her mouth while my hands are full of grocery bags. She sprints ahead of me to open the main door of our family house.

“Sorry,” she mutters.

“Are you, princess?” I ask annoyingly.

“Why are you mad? You are the one who wanted to go grocery instead you could just write down and asked Gary to buy the groceries for us.” She throws me a glare.

I can’t say a thing because I know it’s all my fault, but I just wanted to take her to the grocery store with me.

We will be busy when everyone arrives since we moved here yesterday from her home, and tonight everyone will be here.

I already called the restaurant to deliver us dinner for my family and friends. Hannah, Sam's mom will be here as soon as her duty ends. I and Sam spent three days in her home, and she was busy during day time meeting with Amy and Maya while I was busy catching up with Garett and Danny.

Sam places the groceries silently into the cupboards and fridge. I watch every move she makes. After washing her hands, she walks away like she doesn't notice me at her back. I follow her to the patio where I showed her on our first date. She sits silently and looks at the wide lawn.

"Princess, you better hit me or slap me than you will keep silent like that," I say, taking a seat beside her.

"You annoy me."

"I know, and I'm sorry. You should always talk to me if you're mad at me, princess. It's not good for us if you'll stay silent all the time." I move closer to her to cup her face while looking at the brightest blue eyes I've ever seen.

I press my lips on hers and start kissing her soft lips, and she kisses me back, grabs my hair, and pulls me closer into her. I deepen the kiss by slipping my tongue in her mouth, and she tastes skittles and sweet just like her. She moves to sit in my lap, and I spread my legs wider to welcome her. My throbbing cock is already hard, straining in my jeans.

I moan when she bites my lower lip.

"You're a tease, Samantha," I say while she's busy biting my jaw. She moves to my neck, running her tongue from the base of my collar bone up to the crook of my neck, then she nibbles my ear lobe.

"God, woman! I need to be inside you now," I say, groaning as I slide my hand under her shirt to unclasp her bra. I move my hand to cup her two gorgeous tits, pinching the taut nipples between my fingers.

She hurriedly unbuttons the fly of my jeans, then slips her hand inside my boxers. My muscles tense at her touch, while her mouth still busy sucking my neck. She grabs my hard cock to free from my boxers and starts pumping it.

"Princess, stop. I'm gonna come," I protest, and she groans and doesn't want to listen.

I quickly run my hands to raise her skirt up while she's grinding on me.

"Fuck! You're not wearing panties?"

She shakes her head. I lift her to wrap her legs around my waist, and I can feel her wet folds against my throbbing cock.

“God!” I grunt when I’m all inside her, “Move Samantha.”

She does as I told her. I rest my back against the sofa to let her ride me

“My love! Fuck! Come for me, now!”

She rides me wildly without a sound, just arching her head back while biting her lip.

I cup her tits again and kneads them. They feel warm in my hands and slightly heavy. And she looks magnificent with her cheeks flushed and glassy eyes as she’s about to reach her orgasm.

“You should know how beautiful you are right now, my love,” I tell her, gripping her sweet ass to meet her thrusts.

She writhes. “God, Phoenix!”

She comes, and I come with her.

“My love, are you okay now?”

“Yeah,” she answers while her head still resting on my shoulder.

“I love you, Samantha.”

“I love you, Phoenix. Can you carry me up?”

I kiss her forehead, then I stand up, carrying her in my arms.

Hours passed, everyone arrives. From my family, Sam’s mom, and our friends.

Gabrielle is here too. Since that incident at the hospital, she became closer to us. Sam is very pleased with how Gabrielle shows her true nature. The woman that I once loved has good in her heart after all.

“So, Gabrielle, are you sure you don’t have ulterior motives with all of that you’re showing to us?” Hannah asks.

“Mom, we are in front of the dinner,” Samantha says.

“It’s okay, Sam. I know, Mrs. Anderson, I hurt Sam pretty badly, but I regretted it. I’m also thankful that she gave me a chance to be her friend, and I will never do anything again to ruin the trust that she started to give me. You have a wonderful daughter with a good heart, and I believe that Phoenix deserves someone like her.”

Everyone stops and listens to her.

“And Sam deserves someone like Phoenix. I know how much he loves Sam that even a blind person can see how much they mean to each other, and I will regret till the day I die if I continue

ruining their relationship. That's why I left Phoenix alone because I couldn't take the guilt every time I saw him. And I know that Phoenix will do something to take Sam back because that's where they belong together, in each others' arms."

Mike takes the glass of wine and clears his throat.

"Since Phoenix and Sam's family and friends are around at this wonderful evening, on behalf of my son, Phoenix, Hannah, I would like to ask your daughter, Samantha's hand in marriage to my son, Phoenix,"

Hannah's hand instantly covers her mouth and sniffs. A smile curves on my lips, but I can't say a word. I am overwhelmed. I can't believe that tonight will be one of the most memorable nights of my life.

"Mom," Sam whispers to Hannah.

"I always love Phoenix, and I can tell how they look at each other that night even they broke Sam's bed.

Everyone laughs except Sam who is blushing beside me.

"Of course, they have my blessings although they have it already since that night I met Phoenix for the first time."

I stand up and walk toward Hannah at the opposite side of the table.

"Thank you so much, Hannah." I kiss her cheek then hug her.

"Let's have a toast," Mike announces. "To Phoenix and Sam!"

Everyone raises their glasses. I look at Sam who is smiling and looking back at me.

I wink at her then sip my red wine.

She mouths I love you.

"I love you, my future wife, Samantha Williams."

Epilogue

PHOENIX

Six months later…

Do you know it's difficult to wake up someone who pretends to be asleep? And do you know when someone doesn't like doing has always found thousands of reasons to avoid it? Well, yeah because I've been there—waking up someone who pretended to sleep, and gave me thousands of reasons every day.

"Princess, I swear to God I will drag your sweet ass to the doctor if you won't get up and get dressed right now!" I shake her shoulder under the blanket, but she never budges.

She covers herself when I shout her name from our bedroom door. I'm already on my second cup of coffee, waiting for her to wake up until I decide to come to our bed and shake her.

Now, I can't wait anymore because I had to move our doctor's appointment three times just for this week.

"Go away, Phoenix! I need some sleep!" My wife slips her hand out of the blanket, gesturing to shoo me away.

"Samantha, that's not healthy for you and the baby if you just sleep all night and day. You have to wake up and eat at least." I sit on the bed beside her.

She removes the blanket and throws it down her feet, then sits up straight with her half-closed eyes and messy bedhead hair.

"Who said I'm pregnant?" she asks, glaring.

My eyes land to her naked chest. I ignore the dirty thoughts forming in my brain. I let her stop taking her pills after our wedding three months ago. She didn't argue with me, and I was so happy that we were on the same side.

I was thrilled when she told me she has missed her period four weeks ago and it'd been three weeks since I tried convincing her to visit an obstetrician that Abby recommended for us. But Samantha is Samantha Stubborn Williams, and she just bought a pregnancy home kit and checked it for herself.

"Then get dressed for us to figure it out," I suggest, taking her hand with me.

She pulls it back. "I'm not pregnant, Phoenix. That sticks lied, and I tried three times—"

I cut in. “And it gave the same positive results, right?”

“Yeah, but—”

“No, but, just get dressed, and we have an appointment in an hour.”

“I don’t have morning sickness. I’ve only missed my period, Phoenix.” She starts to lie back, so I grab her hand to stay still.

“It never happened before so, we’ll figure out that too, and not all pregnant women suffer from morning sickness.”

She glares at me again. “You don’t know that because you would never get pregnant, You have a penis.”

“Oh, I do know, my love. According to one of the books I read, 30% of pregnant women skipped from morning sickness. I think you are one of the 30% lucky women who have a good pregnancy.”

She looks surprised. “How did you know that?”

She asks and looks at me amazed. “Oh, princess, while you were busy reasoning out, I was busy reading books that Seb threw to me. He was done reading those anyway before Lizzy even born.”

“Really?” She smiles genuinely.

I kiss her lips. “Yeah, princess. Now, please, no more escaping an appointment. I was lucky the receptionist was very nice at me.”

She scowls. “Was she flirting with you?”

I can’t help but grin, then cup her beautiful face. “God, you’re sexy when you’re jealous.” I kiss her again.

“I’m not jealous!” she snaps.

“Don’t be angry, my love. It affects the baby’s health. You’ll be even sexier when your pregnancy grows.”

She snorts, “Who said a pregnant elephant is sexy?”

“Me?”

“Liar!”

“Elephant or not, you’re still sexy in my eyes.”

“You just want to poke me every night. That’s why you’re telling me that,”

“My love, I love poking you every night because I can’t get enough of you.”

Finally, we are only waiting for a pregnant woman to finish, then it’s our turn. Samantha laughed her ass out loud when she found out the receptionist was about her mother’s age.

“Let us start searching a name for our baby,” I suggest.

“It’s too early for that, don’t you think? We still don’t know if I am really pregnant, and I don’t wanna disappoint you.”

“You will not disappoint me. I will poke you every night to make babies till we can’t anymore move.”

She barks out laughing. Her eyes glimmer, and she’s so beautiful. I want to grab her to the janitor’s room of this hospital and take her there.

“Well, if a girl?”

“We will name her Mikayla, Ranyah, Layla, Payton, Ashley, Alessandra, Jasmine, Destiny, Faith, Kiara, Aubrey?”

“Are you sure they weren’t your fuck buddy?”

My eyes widen. “Why are you saying like that?”

She shrugs but doesn’t answer me.

“My love, I marry you because I love you so much, and you matter to me more than anything in this world and more than the air that I breathe. We’re gonna be parents, Samantha. I marry you because you are the only one that I chose to spend my life with, not the other woman that doesn’t even exist.” She smiles with a glint in her eyes, then she stands up.

“Evil!” I mutter under my breath.

“I hear that.”

“I know.”

“I love you too, Phoenix.”

“Good.”

“Mrs. Samantha Williams,” The receptionist that Samantha is jealous of calls us.

“That’s my wife!” I chirpily say, raising my hand.

“I want tiramisu!” My head snaps at her who’s eating sour candies in the passenger seat. She doesn’t even grimace and keeps popping candies in her mouth like it doesn’t taste sour.

My face contorts. “Are you sure you don’t eat too much of that already, my love?”

“Just shut up, and I want a tiramisu ice cream.”

“We’ll stop in the ice cream shop, don’t worry. Enough of that, princess.”

“Phoenix, we’re three eating of these candies, and it’s not even enough.”

“I know, but I don’t want you to have a tummy ache.”

“Ugh!” She rolls her eyes. “You worry too much.”

“Of course, I do. Now, I have the three of you to worry about.”

“That won’t be necessary.”

“The hell not.”

“Phoenix.”

“Samantha.”

“I thought of you as hot that night, Phoenix.”

“When was that?” I steal a glance at her while I focus my eyes back on the road.

My heart warms when she looks at me, and I can see the love in her eyes. I just love her so much that I never thought I’m capable of loving someone the way I love her.

“That night at the parking lot—the first time we met. I thought of you before going to sleep until I saw you again.”

We’ve been married for three months now, but she never told me about it.

“Really? Then why were you avoiding me?”

She laughs then looks outside the window.

“Princess, answer me,” I say while squeezing her left hand.

“Can’t I tease you a bit, Phoenix?”

I smirk. “Huh! So, you like me back then, huh?”

She rolls her eyes, then smiles. “That’s how I created my bucket list.”

“What? I thought you did it after our elevator kiss.”

She shakes her head. “Nope, that’s after our first met.”

"What's the number one on your list?"

"Like I will tell you." She laughs.

"Okay, number two."

"Nah!"

"Number three?"

"They're all done!"

"Okay, number five?"

"Why didn't you ask for number four?"

"Like hell you will tell," I say, pouting as I get out of the car. I walk to her side to help her get out.

"Teasing Phoenix," She says quietly.

"What?" I hold her hand that has her engagement ring and our wedding band and I plant a kiss on it.

"That's number four.

"Teasing Phoenix." I smile at her. "It's barely done. You can tease me more."

"If that's what you want."

I kiss her forehead. "Now, we must search for two names."

"I know, but we still have time."

"We'll do it after you're done poking me tonight."

I laugh. "Now you're not complaining."

"You know I never complain."

"Good."

"We need to tell everyone."

"Not now. I need you all to myself."

"The three of us, Phoenix!"

"Oh, sorry, little sour candies." I rub her still flat abdomen.

She barks out laughing. "Seriously? Little sour candies?"

“Isn’t it cute?”

“You’re terribly weird.”

“Yet, you love me.”

“More than words can say.”

“I love you too, Samantha, and my two sour candies.”

***

The End