

Marshall

A BAD BOY ROMANCE

KARA HART

MARSHALL: A BAD
BOY ROMANCE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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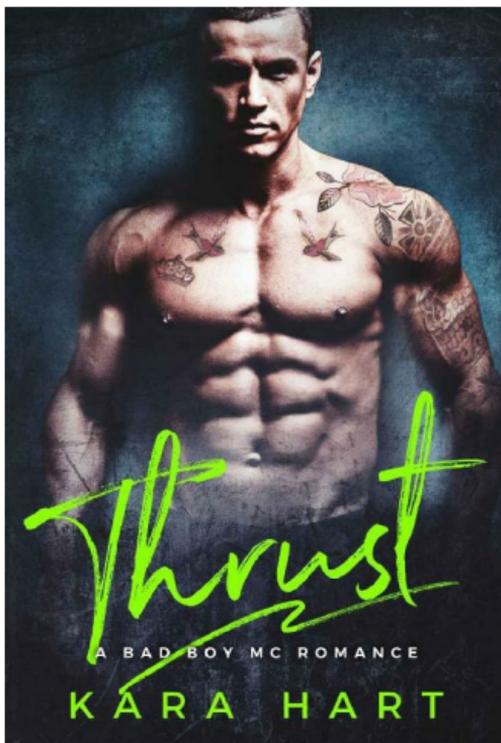


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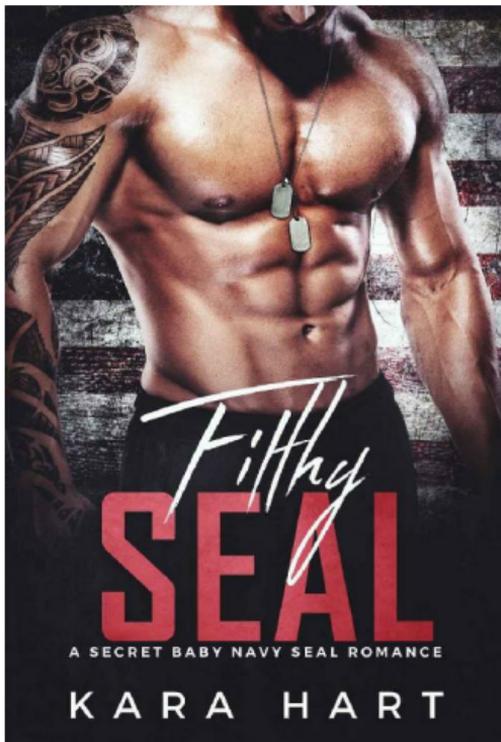
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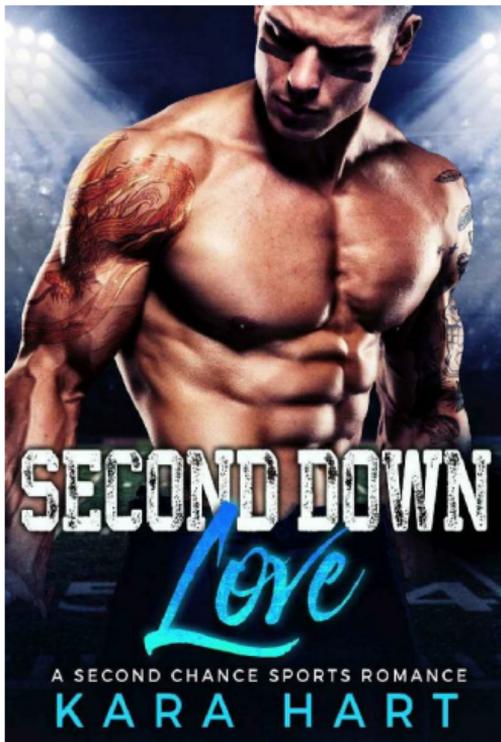
Come on, Kitten. Let's go for a ride.



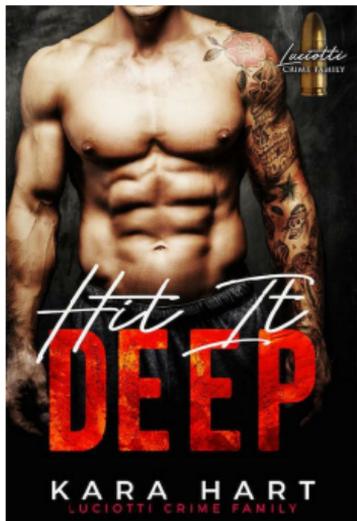
I'll stop when she begs



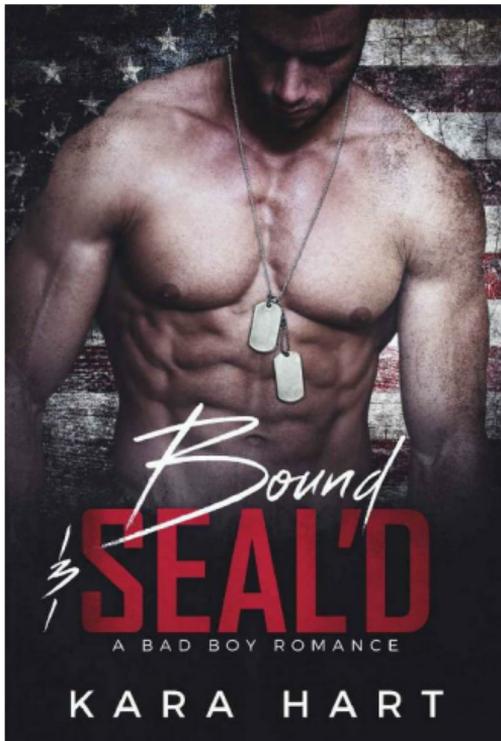
The hardest men take what they want



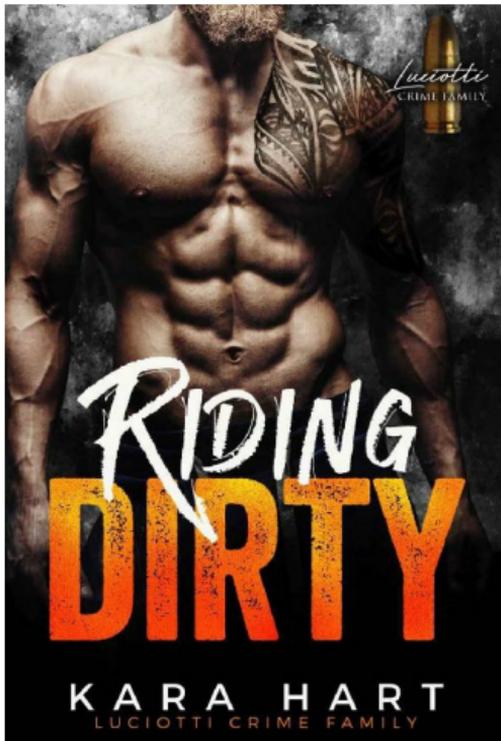
I play hard. On and off the field.



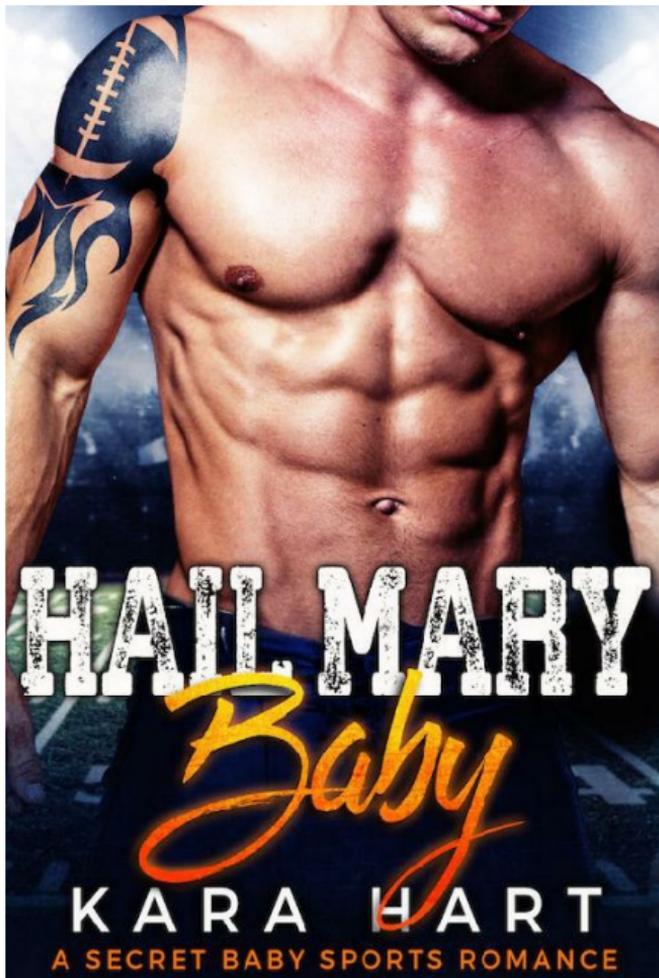
Lust is HARD. Love is DEEP.



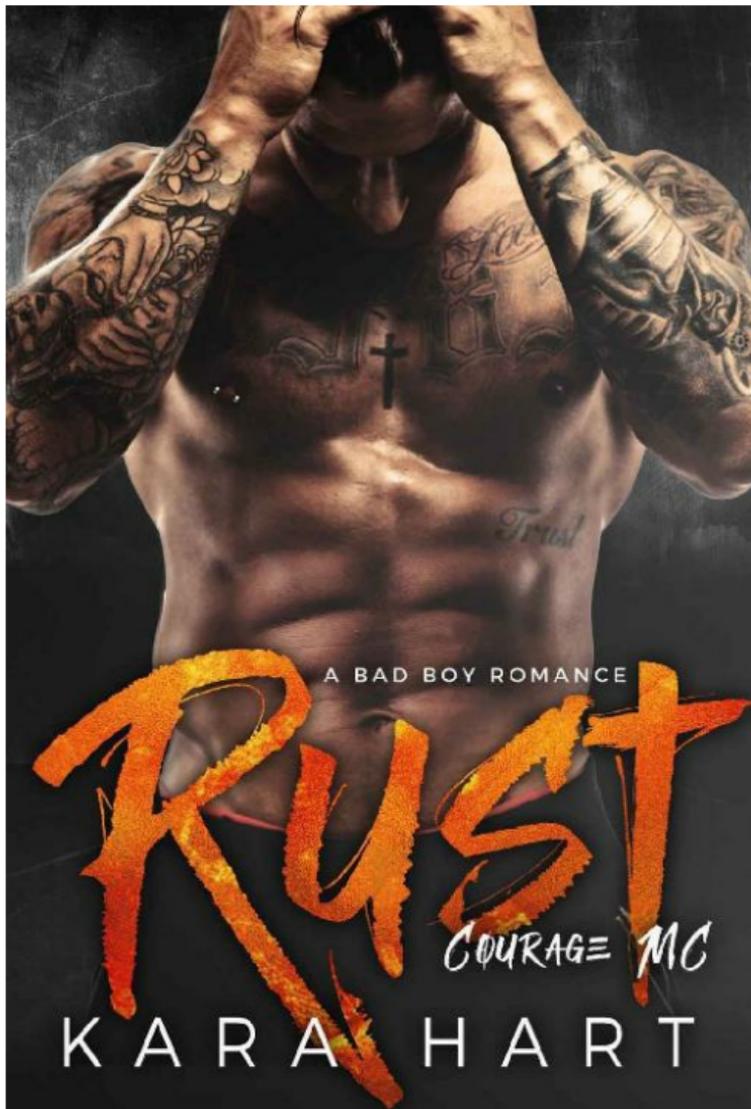
Ripped SEAL. Filthy mouth. Big... gun. What else does a woman need?



You want to play rough? Be careful what you wish for.



I made one big mistake that almost ruined my life -- I had the quarterback's baby.

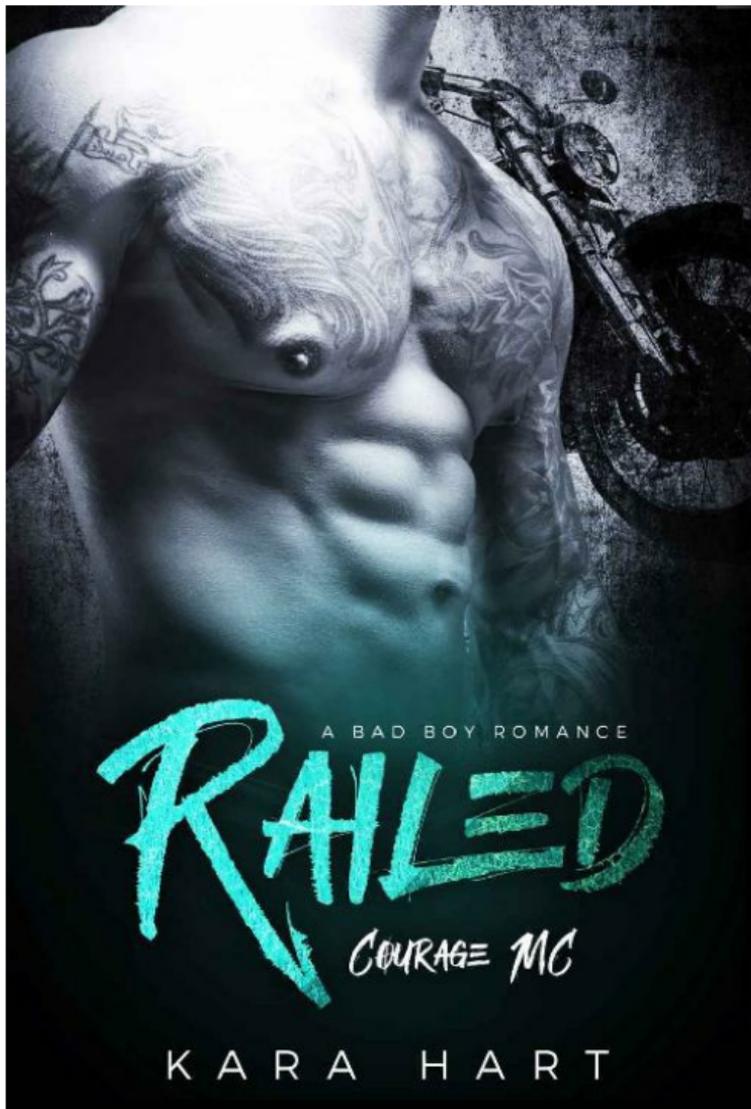


A BAD BOY ROMANCE

RUST

COURAGE MC

KARA HART

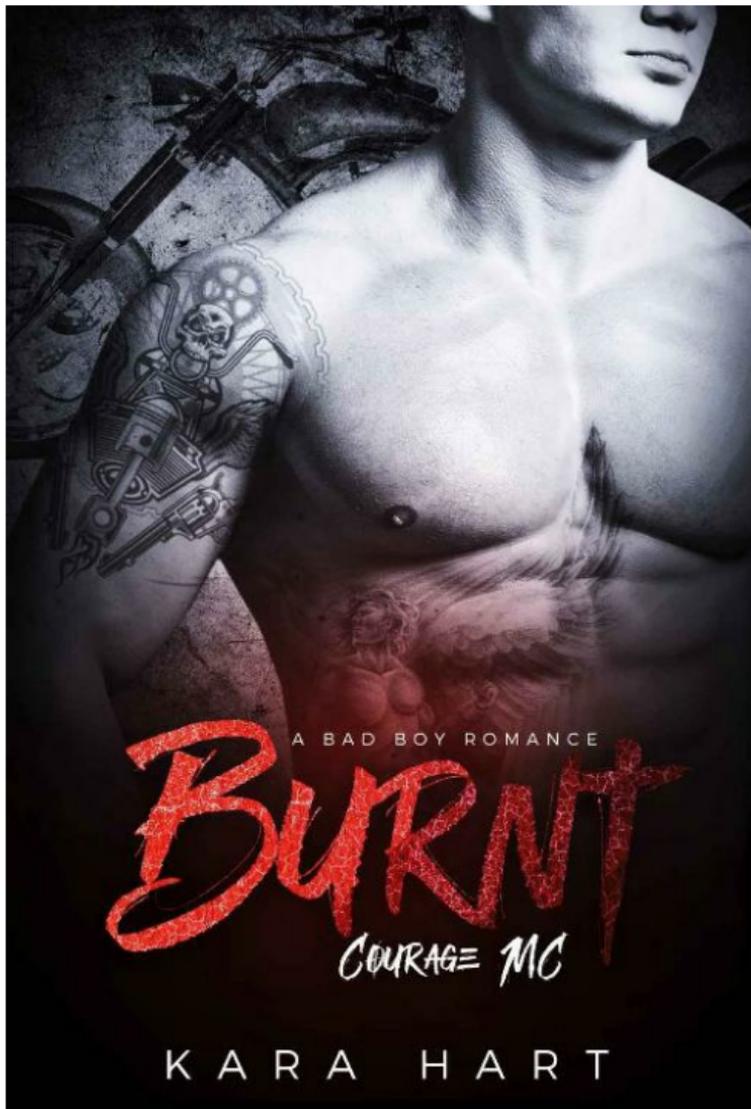


A BAD BOY ROMANCE

RAILED

COURAGE MC

K A R A H A R T



A BAD BOY ROMANCE

BURNT

COURAGE MC

K A R A H A R T

PROLOGUE: MARSHALL

“*M*arshall! Marshall!” The words sound like harsh bells ringing against my ears. “Wake up!” Then comes the banging against the doors, twisting of metal knobs.

“Shit,” I hiss, rolling over and pressing the pillow against my ear. “Come on. I’m sleepin’!” I say.

“Marshall, you better wake up, you bastard,” the guy says. It’s Adam, from back at the station. If he’s banging on the door this hard, God only knows

what's happened.

“Alright, alright!” I yell. “I’m getting up.”

I glance over at the left side of my bed and there's a body next to me. No, not like that. She's alive and she's, well, fine as hell. She's beautiful, young, and her ass practically shines against the moonlight coming through the windows. She rolls over too and moans and I have to ask myself, *Did I fuck her last night?*

Truth is things always get a little hazy in the evening for me. When you give me a bottle of liquor, or two, you never know what's going to happen. Hell, I've woken up in worse situations before. Much worse.

The banging just continues, which makes me want to bang my pistol against Adam's head when I open the door. “What the fuck do you think you're doing, Adam?” I ask him, squinting my eyes. I check my watch and... “It's four in the god damn morning! This better be good.”

“Sir, there’s been a robbery. At the bank, down south on Holton Street,” he says, out of breath. “I’ve been calling you for the past twenty minutes. We need you.”

“Like hell you need me,” I sigh, glancing over my shoulder to look at the girl in my bed.

“Come back to bed, sweetie,” she says, drunk.

“Not now, baby,” I say. When he looks at me as if I’m crazy, I just shrug and say, “Who knows.”

“You going to get some clothes on, or what?” he asks. That’s when I notice that he’s trying his hardest not to look down at my cock. I’ve never really had the same boundaries as other people, I guess. I don’t care for that sort of thing. If people are offended, they can move along. I’m a goddamn police officer, for Christ sakes. I’ve earned the right to roam around naked in my house.

Plus, the women love it.

“Yeah, yeah,” I laugh. “Try not to get too excited.”

I grab my favorite pair of jeans, my lone star belt buckle, and my boots and t-shirt. I put everything on as fast as I can and I take a deep breath. I'm drunk still, but I feel pretty good. At least, maybe I can figure out where these supposed bank robbers are going to next, 'cause they sure as hell aren't staying around town anytime soon.

"Out," I smack the girl in bed's ass. "Come on. Get." I hate to be rude, but there are more pressing matters that I need to attend to.

"You fucker," she says, shielding her big ol' breasts. I hate to see them go. I really do. It's just this damn job sometimes takes all my fucking time away from me. Frankly, it's not very fair.

"Sorry, honey. Time to go to work," I say.

"I'll sleep here." She forces a smile.

"No, you won't," I laugh. "You'll go home. Thank you very much." I give her a twenty, not for the sex, but for the gas home. She throws it on the floor and spits in my face.

Adam slaps the side of the door, laughing hysterically. “Whoa there!” he yells. “She got you good.”

She walks by him and spits on his face too. That makes the laughing stop. “Ignore it,” I warn him. “Happens too often.” I wipe the spit off my face and watch as her butt jiggles away into her car. She speeds out of there and I sigh loudly because I don’t remember being with her. It’s a shame, really.

“You ready?” Andy asks, shaking his head.

“Yeah, I’m ready,” I say. “Show me what’s going on.”

VIRGINIA

“*M*ove!” I hear Craig scream. “We have like ten fucking seconds.”

“Foul mouth,” I whisper, checking my watch. “And we have 30. Calm down and cut the chords, grab the cash, and detonate the C4.”

Men. They can't get anything done without help from a woman. That's just a fact. He cuts the lights and the whole bank goes dark. The sirens aren't too far away. When I glance over my shoulder, I

see the red and blue reflections, darting toward the glass. “They’re coming,” I say. “Hurry it up.”

“Almost got it,” Elroy says. “Almost...”

Craig and Elroy heave the money into the bag. After a few seconds, I hear the zipper move up. “Got it!” Craig yells. “Blast this place. Fuck the police.”

“Give ‘em what they give us every single day,” Elroy whispers, pleased with himself.

The front and back sides of the bank explode and we dart into the tunnel below. We’ve got this all planned out pretty damn well. We’ve been researching for a year now and it looks like we might make it out alive. Might.

Craig and Elroy, however, are in this for the wrong reasons. Social justice, power to the people... sure. I’m all for it. But for me, it’s all about the money. I want to dip out of this place, start a new life in Bangkok, or Tokyo, and never come back to the States again. It’s not that I’m even against the

place. I just have some bad history here. I'd rather not think about it ever again. I'd rather not think about *him* ever again.

“Move!” I scream, pushing past them. I grab two bags of cash and lurch toward the underground tunnel. “See you on the other side,” I whisper. We all split up. There're at least 12 different routes down here, and I doubt the cops have any idea where they lead to. It's good for us, down here. Bad for them.

Away from them, I run against the metal platform below me. I can finally have some peace of mind. If they get caught, they're out of their own cut of the money. They won't snitch. I know them too well. They have sealed lips.

I feel free, running like this, even with the sound of police boots echoing yards behind me. “Stop!” one of them screams. They aim their gun and sigh when they lose sight of me. I'm too fucking fast for them and much too smart. I hear one of the guys trip and fall against the metal platform and he screams a

curse word I can't quite make out. Part of me wants to slow down and tempt fate. The other part of me wants to get the hell out of here.

I get to the end of the line, where a large seal closes off the exit. I grab the metal twister near the ground and turn it as hard as I can, lefty-loosey, as they say in grade school. It unlatches. Loudly. But it doesn't matter. I keep the metal twister at my side and go through the exit, closing the thing behind me and locking it. I see the cops duck around the corner just as it slams shut for good.

I reach into the bag and heat up the metal with one of my torches. The whole thing is elaborately genius, I have to laugh out loud, though I hope it doesn't give me away as a woman. That's something I never want them knowing, despite how good it would feel to see the shock on their faces. There aren't too many women in this town who can rob a bank and I don't think with my history, it would be that hard to find me.

I heat up the metal until it's glowing. It's locked

shut and when one of the cops reaches out from the other side, I hear him scream in pain. “Too hot,” I whisper. “Dumbass.”

I grab my tools and my bag, and run the hell out of there. I climb the stairs up and peek my head out of the small manhole. There’s no one around. Not another human for a whole block. The government thought this street would be good for some construction and now they have to pay the price when they bail the city bank out of half a million dollars.

The construction guys leave this area every single night at around the same time. As for now, it’s only some drunk stragglers that are out. Derelicts, winos, homeless wanderers who don’t give a damn about me. As I move off the street, I duck into the forest by me, walking along the trees. Every time a car moves by me, I carefully put my back up against the bark and hold my breath. Nothing. No one knows a thing.

Cop cars zoom in the other direction, toward the

bank. I'm free. Fucking free.

MARSHALL

“*J*envy you,” he laughs, steering us toward the bank.

“Why the hell would you go and do a stupid thing like that?” I ask him, looking straight, toothpick in my mouth. I move it up and down with my lips and make sure my hat hovers in just the right way to make me feel confident I can solve this one. Truth is, I doubt I can. I’ll need them to be stupid. I’ll need them to make another move.

“You kidding me, sir?” he laughs again, awkwardly now. His breath is quick and irregular. He’s scared. I’m not sure if he’s frightened of me, or if he’s simply thinking the same thing I’m thinking. We can’t find them. We don’t have anything on them besides some names. Shit, I doubt we’ll even have CTV footage, knowing the lack of money this city is circulating these days.

“Not kidding,” I say. “Envy is a sin. You know that?”

“Well, then call me a sinner, sir,” he says. I hate how he’s sucking up to me right now. It’s pitiful. “Every time I come over there, and I know it’s not much, you’re always with some new girl. When I see you out at the bars, you’re with a new beautiful woman. I don’t know how you do it.”

I carefully side eye him and he nearly shits his pants. “Adam, are you calling me ugly or something?” I ask him. He chokes on his words. “Cause I know I’m nearing 40, but you don’t have the rank to start talkin’ shit to me, boy.”

“I—I—didn’t,” he stumbles and closes his eyes. “Watch the road, son,” I tell him. “Jesus.” Then I start laughing a little, letting him know it’s okay. “Ease up. You don’t have to be so high strung. It was a fucking joke.”

“Sorry, man,” he says, dropping the whole sir thing now. Thank the lord. “I just don’t think we have a case here.”

“Let’s see what comes up first. Cool?” I say, lifting my hat up for a second to wipe a bead of sweat from my forehead. “And, shit, man. Don’t envy me for fucking women. It’s weird.” He nods. I wish I could be like everyone else. Like Adam. Like the guys around me at the station, wifing up their high school sweethearts and feeling good about themselves. Having children. I’m not like them. The whole thing kind of makes me sick, to be honest.

When we pull into the bank, he stops the car, but keeps the lights on. “Thank God you came,” the owner runs out. “The bastards got in and took

practically everything.”

“Who the hell robs a bank at night?” I sigh, shaking my head. I hold my hand out and he instinctually takes it. “Warren. Warren Marshall. Friends call me Marshall.”

“Yeah, I know who you are,” he says, eyeing me like a whipped dog. “You do good work out here. I’m glad I got you working this thing.”

That line of his breaks my damn heart. Crushes it, really. “Seeing a small bank owner get robbed under his nose hurts my damn soul,” I say. “We’ll figure this out. Not sure what we have to go on though.” I have to be honest with the man. At least, I do a little.

“Figured,” he says. These things are taken care of at higher levels anyway. That’s not really the point, if you ask me. “Let me take you through.”

He walks me in and my jaw nearly comes unhinged. The whole front is blown to bits. The back too. “They demolished the whole place,” he

says. “I’m going to be dealing with this for months.”

I just nod and keep walking. “They left underneath. I didn’t know there were maintenance tunnels here. Why they would build them here is beyond me,” he says. Again, I just nod and keep my eyes open.

It takes me a few minutes to see it, but when I do, I know I’ve found something. A piece of cloth, near the gnarled-up vault. It looks like some of the burnt money scattered on the ground, only it’s got a slight pink hue to it. I grab it and put it in my pocket, making sure Adam doesn’t see shit. It’s not regular police work to do so, but it’s how I work. I don’t bring things into the station. I don’t play by the government’s rules and regulations.

I walk through the bank and see what I need to see. Adam just keeps sighing, whispering, “Shit,” and “Well, I’ll be.” Good police work, Adam. What a fine job you’re doing.

“Get forensics on this,” I say. “Any footage around

the next three streets would be great. Stoplights. Traffic cams. CTV?" I turn to the bank owner.

He shakes his head. "Nah. We can't afford any decent CTV. All we have are the back cameras, but that won't do any good," he says.

"Get that footage from him too," I say. "Maybe we'll find something. You never know."

I nod to myself. I need a fucking beer. I need a nice set of thighs wrapped around my face right about now. Fuck, I need a woman. Bad. It's too early to be policing. I just want to be continuing last night's fun.

We exit the bank and I get in the car. When we drive away, Adam's silent. "Turn on the radio or something," I motion. He does and while he does, I glance at the opening to my pocket. I caress the fabric until it slides out onto my fingers. Pink. Thin. Why the fuck would any bank heister be wearing pink? I stretch out, making sure Adam doesn't see anything he doesn't need to see.

Pantyhose. That's the only thing I can connect it to. Did the guys wear pantyhose around their faces? If so, why? It was nighttime. They were shielded. There weren't any customers. A woman? Did they have a woman with them? No fucking way. A woman couldn't plan a heist like this out. There's no way in hell I'm going to believe that.

Well, if they have a woman with them, it must be that she's taken under their will. That's the only thing I can come up with. Maybe I'm too tired. Maybe that's fucking stupid of me. Maybe I'm getting lazy. Older. Whatever the case, I need to find her. If she's being taken advantage of, I'll fix this. I'll come out as a hero to the city and to the citizens. Frankly, it's a win-win.

Good thing too. I never lose.

VIRGINIA

I never lose at pool. It's practically the one competitive game I'm good at. When I was a little girl, my dad used to take me to the dive bar across town, Six's, and I'd watch him drink and play pool all day. I was too young to know how fucked up it was. For me, I was just proud to be near my dad. I was happy then...

Now, I'm stuck on my own. No friends anymore. No nothing. I just have the money that I stole and

it's buried under a bush outside. I'm here because... well, I'm here really because I'm lonely. The idea was that it would be a good alibi. I'm not really sure how it's the best alibi anymore. I should be home. I should be asleep, dreaming of my escape out of this country.

I drink my Corona quickly and find myself ordering another one. The door nearly slams open and all of the bells attached to it jiggle violently. I'm shaky, probably too nervous. I need to relax. When I glance over, I see the guy. I know who he is. I've studied him. *Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.*

Warren Marshall. Jesus fucking Christ. I try not to cry, but I'm so freaked out. I hold my breath and count to ten. I fake a smile at the pool players, but it's obvious I'm not with them. I have no plan, no good alibi, and no great escape. I down the second beer in a second, and push toward the door, avoiding all eye contact.

“Shot of Whiskey,” I hear him say to the bartender. I feel it. I feel his head turn in my direction. *Don't*

do it. Don't say anything. Please. “Whoa there! Hold on a minute. Who are you and where are you going? You look suspicious,” he says.

I stop dead in my tracks. “Um, I—” I choke. I don’t know what to say. He’s caught me. I’m done for. I’m going to jail forever. All my plans down the drain. He smiles, looking like a wolf. He’s got perfect teeth, a perfect body, and a perfect face. He terrifies me.

“I’m kidding,” he laughs. “Didn’t mean to frighten ya. What’s your name? Why don’t you have a drink with me?”

Shit. I look toward the door, but he sees my hesitation, so I attempt to look calm. No dice. I am not calm. I am far from it. My heart is pounding. I swear, I’m starting to sweat. I’m losing fucking control in the worst way. I start to feel dizzy. I start to think about how things were three months ago, when the guys and me first hashed out this plan. It was so idyllic. It wasn’t too hot. Summer hadn’t quite hit yet. We had all these plans. There was

going to be so much money coming in that we could all buy a villa somewhere, on the cheap. All of our dreams could come true. I could own a coffee shop somewhere in the south of Italy, in Sicily. The old country. Things would be real. Finally.

“I really shouldn’t,” I say out of the side of my mouth. *God, why do I have to be so awkward all the time. I’m tough. Deep down, I’m really tough. Why can’t I ever let it show?* “I’ve had enough alcohol already...”

“What?” he laughs and claps his hands eagerly. “Too drunk? It’s early, darling.”

“Yeah, but...” Come on. I need an excuse. Anything. I just need to come up with something good. “Studying,” I blurt out. I don’t even say a real sentence, just studying. It’s pathetic and I hate myself for it.

He checks his watch and I suddenly notice how smooth his lips look, how perfectly tanned his skin

is. He's riding that perfect line of young enough to still be attractive and old enough to be a *man*. He's powerful. It all happens in a split second and then the allure wears off. Bad news. I'm always tempted by bad news. If someone told me to stare away from the sun, I'd stare straight at it until my eyes burned out.

"It's only 10:30. You're really going to leave this place at 10:30?" he asks. When I don't answer, he keeps going, pulling up two stools for both of us. "Come on. Sit down. This place gets *real* fun around 11."

"Okay," I mutter. I'm forced to oblige him. If I say no, I'm afraid he'll tail me. I hate cops more than I hate the real bad guys, killers and the like. They're practically the same thing to me. I still don't know if he's on to me or not. If he's not, then I can move on and feel a little better about my situation.

"What's your name? I think I've seen you around here before. You've lived here a while, haven't you?" he asks me, motioning for a drink at the bar

tender. “What’re you drinking?”

“Uh, yeah. A while now,” I lie. “I’ll take a—?” I glance over at his drink.

“Whiskey soda!” he yells at the bartender. He nods. “It’s a simple drink. I like it enough, I suppose. Anyway, I’ve been here all my damn life. Name’s Marshall.”

He puts out his hand, but when I go to shake it he takes my fingers in his hand and kisses the top of my knuckles. His cologne wafts into my nose slowly, but surely, and I can’t help but approve. It reminds me of my father’s and it brings back good memories for a second. Then I remember that he’s not akin to me. He’s nowhere near like me.

“Marshall. Nice to meet you. I’m Virginia Greene.” I say it to him in a nice, sweet voice. As long as I’ve got him here, I might as well play the character up a bit. If he thinks of me as nice, beautiful, and willing to please him, he’ll always think of me that way. That’s one advantage women

have over men.

“Virginia slim,” he jokes, wrapping his hand around my waist. I twitch a little and he lets it drop to my knee. I let it rest there, despite my major reluctance.

“Bad joke,” I tell him honestly.

“Yeah, I’m not too good at telling jokes,” he says, taking a sip. The way he looks at me is deep and thoughtful, and I soon start to realize that I have nothing to worry about. He has no idea that I’m a criminal. He can’t care to give that a second thought right now. Right now, all the thinking is going on in his cock.

Am I scared still? Yes. But my heart has slowed down to a normal rate and I’m not clammy anymore. Scared, but I can get out of this.

I drink from my glass faster than normal. All I can think about is getting back to my bed, back to the comfort of my shitty apartment. I’ve hated that place for so long, but now it seems like a godsend.

God, why did I have to change my life around for some extra cash? Freedom, I know. But the whole thing now seems unthinkable. If I could turn back time, I wouldn't go through with it. That much, I know.

He squeezes my leg and it snaps me out of my trance. Actually, he's looking more handsome. In this deck of cards, he's an enemy. But he doesn't know that. "You're funny," I laugh. "It wasn't *that* bad of a joke."

I don't know why I'm humoring him. It's the daredevil in me, always willing to ride the line. I could go back to his place right now. I could jump onto his lap. He could feel down my waist, around the curves that lead toward my ass, and even further toward the greatest treasure man has ever laid eyes on. I could unbuckle his belt and unzip his jeans. I could grab his thick cock. I know it's huge. And I could slowly push it inside me. I can feel it now.

I'm wet.

“Thank you, sweetie-pie,” he says, winking. The wink. It kills me. I need to calm down. My heart starts beating in a *very* different way. All of the blood has moved between my legs. I’m warm and he can sense it. Men like him can always sense it.

“You’re cute,” I say, laughing a little and scrunching up my nose. What the hell am I doing? I’m riding the line...

MARSHALL

“*I*’m cute?” I reply back. I can’t believe this woman is saying I’m cute. The things I could do to her. The things I *will* do to her. She has no idea. I’m not cute. I’m an animal and I’m going to ravage her.

“Little bit,” she smiles. God damn, her cute little nose. *She’s* the cute one. She’s fucking beautiful. Jaw-dropping, gorgeous. Perfect figure. An ass and a pair of tits that men would kill each other over.

She's talking to me. I found her first. I can't believe it.

"Damn, you're a whole lot of wonderful," I say, feeling the alcohol start to influence me. "I needed this."

"Needed what?" she smiles. Her teeth are white. Her eyes are hazel green. Her skin has a slight tan color to it. Perfect. She's perfect. I want to bend her over against the bar right now. I want to kick everyone out and have her do a little dance for me, while I sit in the back and stroke my...

"I needed to talk to someone beautiful," I say. "I had a hard night last night."

"Yeah?" she looks down at my belt and I feel my cock twitch a little. Gotta control myself. Can't get hard in front of a crowd. Everyone here knows who I am.

I see her glance at my holster and then at my badge, which is tucked inside of it. It shouldn't be hangin' out like that, but it is. Fuck it.

“You some kind of a sheriff?” she asks me.

“Somewhat,” I say. Ranks don’t matter. She doesn’t know the ins and outs of the business. Anyway, I’d rather not even talk about what I do for a living. That whole thing is boring. Unfortunately, women tend to focus on it. They love a man in uniform. They love the idea that there are some bad men out there and I can be the one to protect them.

“You lock up the bad guys?” she asks innocently. She makes a fake gun gesture with her hand and shoots at the air, making some noises.

I laugh when she laughs. I want her to keep having a good time. Being a cop is much more than that, though. It’s putting your life on the line. Any place you go, there can be trouble. Shit, there are probably a few people who want me dead in this bar here. I try not to let it get to me.

“Been a cop almost all my life. Even when I was a kid, I was already a cop. It’s in my blood, I guess,”

I tell her.

“Was your dad a cop or something?” she asks. She stirs her ice in her glass, letting me know that I need to buy her another drink. I glance at the bartender and point with my head, making a “two” sign with my hand. She continues, “Seems like a scary job to sign up for.”

I laugh again and glance down at her legs. She’s wearing a basic skirt, white, it’s a little short, but I want to see more. I have to see more. I place my hand on her thigh again and try to test fate. She doesn’t fret or say a word. She just lets me. She’s warmer the higher I go, but I stop at a normal respectable place. I don’t want to press too much, too fast.

“It’s a stupid job to sign up for. Most of us, believe it or not, aren’t the smartest people,” I smile. “But I was called to it. I, uh, grew up around some pretty bad people growing up. My pa used to beat up on my sister... Being a cop was a duty I felt I needed to do, despite my well-being.”

It's the truth. My parents were assholes. No. They were worse. They were low-life drug users who had a knack for knocking my older sister around. Then, they took to beating me, which wasn't really the whole problem. I could take a beating. I wanted to protect Sarah, but I couldn't. I wasn't strong enough. Helpless. That's the only word that sounds right.

"That's very noble," she says, nodding. I look solemn. I know it. I gotta snap out of it.

"Anyway, I'm getting all depressing now. Let's talk about something nice," I say.

"Like what?" she asks. She checks her watch. Have I blown it? Is she going to leave me here high and dry?

"Like that smile of yours," I say. She glances down bashfully. It's damn cute. "How can I get that smile to go out with me?"

She laughs a little and keeps on smiling. "I don't know. I..." she trails off, thinking a little. She's

seeing someone. I've seen this reaction before. "I sort of have a boyfriend," she says. Nailed it.

"Is your boyfriend as handsome and charming as me?" I ask her.

"Well, he's not a cop," she says. Ouch. "Just joking. He's kind of a deadbeat."

I don't care what he is. I want to feel what it's like when my lips crush against hers, dragging down her delicate skin, kissing her bellybutton, as she twitches ever-so-slightly, and I finally meet the center of all pleasure. I want to suck on each fold, massaging my tongue against her smoothly. I want to taste her and *enjoy* her. I want to devour her.

"Good," I say. "I'm not. Let me take you out. Steak dinner. It'll be expensive."

I never put this much effort into a woman. She should feel grateful. Hell, I do. I still can't believe I found a woman this beautiful in this kind of a shithole. "I might have to take you up on that offer," she says.

“How about we just skip the dinner and go back to your place?” I find myself saying, feeling pretty good about myself.

She just shakes her head and says, “Nice try,” and she begins to walk away. I call after her and she stops, grabbing in her purse. A real fucking tease, this woman. She smiles and pulls out a pen and a blank card. She writes down a phone number and kisses the front. Her lipstick leaves an impression and I nearly fall from the barstool. “Call me. Maybe I’ll answer. Maybe I won’t,” she says.

“Sure thing,” I say. I’m intrigued, to say the least. If I can solve this bank thing *and* bag a hot girl, I’ll have won the fucking lottery.

VIRGINIA

God, I want to vomit. What the fuck is wrong with me? Borderline personality? Maybe. I don't know anymore. You'd think I'd play it safe, but deep down I love to skirt the line.

“One week. That's all you'll have to wait. There's a boat with your name on it. Tell the ticket guy at the docks your name and he'll take you where you need to go,” Craig told me before the big heist. “We'll all meet up in Sicily. We'll have a big

fucking celebration. Pasta, fried squid, wine... it'll be perfect."

We're all good friends and now things feel so incredibly lonely without them. The only thing I have to do to pass the time is read the few books I've kept around my place. Other than that, it's stare at the wall. So I guess that's another reason why I talked to him. He really seems to have no idea who I am or what I really do for a living. I'm the girl he's after, in so many ways.

My phone rings the next day, but I don't answer it. I don't want to see Marshall. I don't need that kind of shit right now. It was stupid of me, anyways. No, instead, I head over to a small coffee shop down the block. It's a total dump, but they always have the TV on, there's never anyone there, and I figure I can get some news that way. I don't have a TV at my place, so it works out.

I open the door and Jin, the old Japanese owner, nods in my direction. I nod back and he smiles. My heart is beating quick again. I still haven't gotten

used to the thought that nobody knows what I did. Part of me is waiting for the day where everyone points in my direction, when I'll feel that heavy lump fall to the pit of my stomach.

No. I can't think that way.

“Just a drip coffee,” I tell him and I glance at the top right corner of the store. The TV is off. He's got the radio playing some old tunes instead. A fly buzzes by an open container of alcohol and he shoos it away.

He pours me a cup of coffee and asks, “How's it been, sweetheart?” Sweetheart. It's the type of compliment all men give to women in the area. For the most part it's cute and I accept it around these parts.

“Okay,” I take a sip of the coffee. “Anyway, I'm alive.”

“Yeah, that's something,” he nods. He doesn't take it any further.

“Think you can turn the TV on for me? Heard there was some commotion the other day,” I say. It’s a small town. He’ll know exactly what I’m talking about.

“The bank thing? They stole a hell of a lot of money,” he laughs and clicks the remote. “Good on them though. Those bankers have been stealing from us for decades. It’s about time someone gave them some payback.”

“I guess so,” I mutter, feeling sort of thrilled by the whole thing. I never really thought about the idea that other people might actually inadvertently be rooting for us, like we’ve done the town a favor or something. I expected pitchforks and mobs, and angry policemen. So far, we’ve gotten very little of any of that.

“It doesn’t worry you?” I ask him. “Seeing people steal like that? It kind of scares me.”

He shrugs. “Nothing really scares me these days. Nothing except myself,” he says.

Truth is, I really relate to that. Nothing scares me either, except my own guilt, and my history. The one thing I could relate to when talking to Marshall last night was when he mentioned his father beating up on his sister like that. My father also beat on us. The only difference was, my mother went right alongside with him. I don't know what kind of a relationship he has with his family now, if any, but I still see my parents around this city. I still have to be in the same proximity, knowing they got away with everything. I don't talk to them anymore, but every so often, our eyes meet.

The knowing hurts more than anything.

The TV volume blares and Jin struggles to hit the remote fast enough to turn it down. *"The police have offered very little information, but the investigation is going at full speed,"* a reporter says. They cut to a prior interview with Marshall's partner, a man named Adam. He says, "We will find these men and we will bring them to justice."

It's a standard answer, and one that has the desired

effect, I suppose. They will find these *men*, perhaps. But will they find the woman? I laugh slightly and Jin eyes me. “See, you think it’s a little funny too. Don’t you?”

“A little bit,” I admit.

“I doubt they’ll find them,” he says.

“I honestly have no clue,” I shrug. “Life goes on, I suppose.”

I think about Marshall and I feel sick to my stomach again. That guy is a bastard. No doubt about it. He’s a cop who fucks women, and probably doesn’t even think to call them back. And yet, I’m drawn to him like a fly to a spider’s web.

Before I get out of this city, I’m going to do everyone a favor. I’m going to respect Jin and everybody else’s wishes. I’m going to take Marshall down.

I am the spider. And he has no idea just how far he’s caught in my web.

MARSHALL

The bitch won't even answer her phone. All I get is the same "We're sorry. The caller you are trying to reach is not available," message. It's disheartening, to say the least. Here I am, working on the hardest case of my damn career. I thought she'd be there when I needed her. Well, shit, I thought wrong. I have to hand it to her. She led me on real well.

I have no real case to work on. That's the worst of

it. All I have are a few lousy descriptions of the three perpetrators. Let's see... they're about 5 foot 4 inches to 6 foot two inches. They were wearing masks. They carried bags. They were highly skilled. Possible sexual crimes on the side. The pantyhose still perplex me.

But now I have all the higher-ups on my ass, telling me I need to solve this thing in a week or else. Whatever that means. I've been with the department for over twenty years now. Would they really fire me that fast? I guess if they had orders to, they would.

It lights a fire under my ass, that's for sure. I want to solve this case more than anything. I want to take these assholes down. To me, it's just another chase and, boy, do I love a good chase. But this Virginia woman. She keeps popping into my mind. More so than the dumb fucking robbery.

I walk out of the department with Adam next to me, frowning. His bad attitude makes it that much harder to concentrate on our next move. We need to

find out where they'll hit next. Rest assured, they'll hit another bank. They always do.

“We got jack shit,” he sighs. “I swear, they're going to hang our asses when we show up empty handed.”

“Try and stay positive,” I tell him, knowing how impossible that is right now. He's younger than me, though. I need to lead by example. At least, I need to try to. “We'll figure it out. You got that map I asked you to make?”

“The one of all the banks within a 200-mile radius?” he asks. I nod. “Yeah, I got it. I've been studying it a lot, actually.”

“Good. We need to keep studying it. My guess is that they split up. Maybe they're waiting to meet up again. If they do, they're going to hit another bank. The ones without CTV cameras are first on our list,” I say. I stretch my back, feeling every muscle extend.

And then my phone rings. “One second,” I fumble

for my pocket.

“Warren Marshall,” I answer. I already know who it is. It’s Virginia. Only, this isn’t a good time. I have work to do.

“What’re you up to?” I hear her voice. That sweet, southern voice.

“Solving a case, honey,” I say, smooth. “And you?”

“Trying not to think about you,” she says. God, she’s killing me every single second. I glance at Adam who’s tapping his heel. Is he still envious of me, I wonder? “...and that steak dinner.”

“Of course you are. You going to take me up on that still?” I ask.

“Why not,” she says. “I mean, I don’t really have any plans.”

“Tonight then,” I say, feeling pretty damn confident of myself at this point. I smile big and think about all the positions I’m going to put her in tonight. I think of her smell, the way her smile angles ever-

so-slightly, and how her nose shrinks up when I make her laugh. I need her.

“Tonight. I’ll meet you at the bar again. 6:30,” she says.

“7,” I tell her.

“Sounds good.” She hangs up the phone and I’m left with Adam’s dumb, tapping heel.

“What?” I ask him. “What’re you staring at?”

“Another woman?” he smiles.

“No, a man,” I laugh. “What do you think?”

“I think I hate you,” he says.

“They all do, son,” I smile. “They all do.”

VIRGINIA

So I did it. I really did it. I made a date with the devil himself: Warren Marshall. The worst part about it is that I'm actually excited about it. It's not that *he* gets me going. I mean, don't get me wrong. He's hot. His body is practically perfect. It's clear that he works on himself, on the daily, in that natural kind of tough way. Still, it's more that I like the risk. I know that I'm about one second way from losing everything, and somehow that gets me going.

I take a deep breath and get ready. It's already six and I haven't even done my makeup. Marshall is cocky. He thinks he has me in the bag. But I'm going to make him work for it. I'm going to make him grovel for me, make him show me what he really thinks of me.

Outside, I walk toward the bar. I haven't ever owned a car and I doubt I ever will. Still, I look classy as ever. "He's going to die," I think to myself, with a smile. The black dress I have on was my mother's and though I despise that woman, she did have some taste every now and then. This is the one thing she gave me, before I severed all contact with her.

I'm not going to let those thoughts get me down tonight. No, tonight is all about making Marshall feel at home. I'm not going to fuck the guy or anything. That's a bit too much persuasion for my taste. What I'm going to do is lead him to the wrong place.

As I walk, I get a text. It's from an unknown

number, but I already know who it is. Craig and Elroy. They're breaking up the plan already. It figures they would do something stupid like that. Luckily, we all have new numbers, new burner phones. There's no way they're tracing the lines.

The text reads: "We're hitting another spot." I feel my stomach drop and I nearly turn back around.

"Are you fucking crazy?" I text back. Then another, "You can't just do that. It's not part of the plan. I won't go through with it."

"The people overseas want more of a cut. They know just how much we made out with," he says. I can't picture which one it is, but I can imagine both of their faces right now. No doubt they quickly met up afterward. I'm the only one with enough grace to follow through with everything correctly. It's fucking bullshit.

"Then we'll pay our fair share. We don't need to get greedy. I'm not going away. One was enough," I say.

“We’ll take your cut then,” he says. “They want 300. You willing to spend that much for a year somewhere overseas?”

“I’ll manage,” I say. “I’ll figure something out. I always do.” But I know what he’s saying. He’s saying we’re all fucked out of a shit ton of money. 300k? That’s ludicrous. But we don’t have any options.

“He’ll go to the authorities,” he says. “The feds. He’s one dial away, he claims. Do you really want to risk it?”

Fuck, fuck, fuck. I feel like slamming my head against the wall. No, I feel like giving up. The initial adrenaline makes me angry, but that quickly subsides. Now, I’m just sad and terrified. I don’t want to go to prison. I don’t want to sacrifice absolute freedom. The worst part is, now I really need Marshall. Now I need protection from the enemy himself.

“No,” I say, truthfully. “I just think this is *very*

sketchy. Like, it's too sketchy. We're fucked either way."

"What're you going to do over in Italy after one year? Get a job? Work at a bar?" he asks. "Seriously, what do you think you'll do?"

"I'll open up a business. I'll figure it out. Like I said," I tell him. "Look, just tell me the plan."

"We need to meet up," he says. "Virginia. I'm sorry."

"Fuck you," I type. "Don't call or text me on this phone. Seriously. It's not safe. If you need me, you know where I'm at."

"Cool," he says. "Ciao."

"Bastard," I mumble.

"Who's a bastard?" I hear that rough voice from in front of me. I jump back and make out a nice pair of cowboy boots. One is leaning against a large boulder. I look up and see Marshall. His back is against the sign of the bar.

“Nobody,” I say, shocked that I didn’t see him. I need to be more careful. He’s definitely the type of guy who pries for more information. “Just some crap I have to deal with.”

“Boyfriend?” he smiles and squints his eyes. “Don’t think I can’t tell. That was an intimate conversation.”

“You think you know everything. Don’t you?” I laugh. He’s wearing all denim, and yes, he’s looking extremely good tonight. He’s put together, much more put together than last night.

“I’m a cop. I’m supposed to know everything,” he says. He presses his boot heel against the rock, pushing himself up onto his feet. He’s wearing this ridiculous cowboy hat that somehow doesn’t repulse me. He takes it off and bows for me. “You look wonderful,” he tells me. He takes my hand and kisses it and I actually feel a rush run through my body.

I can't. I can't be into this. I'm a criminal. I can't

have feelings.

This is so wrong. “Thank you,” I smile. “You look handsome.”

“I know. I always do.” He smiles back. “Shall we?”

“Sure,” I say. “We skipping out on the drinks?”

“I thought we could drink some nicer cocktails at the Steakhouse, or get a bottle of red wine. Whatever you prefer,” he says. “After all, it *is* your night.”

I get into his car and he turns the key. He’s got an old Ford Mustang. Of course he does. Initially, when he smiles at me, there’s that feeling of helplessness a woman gets when in a man’s car for the first time. There’s something about the enclosed space, the lack of control. It rides the line of good and bad, and I wonder whether or not he’s a trustworthy man. To me, cops are the least trustworthy. They wear the badge, but that doesn’t mean they uphold justice. All that piece of metal

stands for is power.

“What’s wrong?” he asks. “I’m not going to bite. I swear.”

“No, it’s not that,” I tell him. “It’s just that I feel bad about something.”

“Yeah?” he drives and carefully watches the road. “What do you feel bad about?” Every so often, he glances over at my breasts. I know they look good in this dress. They’re practically spilling out. I feel self-conscious when he looks, but it’s not necessarily a bad type of self-conscious. It’s just a total awareness that this guy is bad and at any moment, he could put the cuffs on me, and send me away. To be honest, the thought sort of arouses me.

“I should let you know that I don’t have a boyfriend,” I say, feeling slightly ashamed, and a tad bit alarmed that I’m even admitting that to him right now.

“I thought as much,” he nods. “I mean, don’t get me wrong. You’re *hot*. Nah, you’re like an angel

trapped in this shithole desert abyss. But there's a fierce look in your eyes. If I didn't know any better, I'd say you might be out to get me."

I feel my heart speed up to an unimaginable degree. I try my hardest to control the red in my cheeks, but I know it's starting to show through my makeup. Why the fuck would I put myself in this position? Why couldn't I just take the next flight to Italy? Right. No passport. No ID. No nothing. That's why. Still, there were other options, right? Did I have to play with fate?

"I don't hurt people intentionally," I find myself saying. It's sort of robotic. I feel the click in my throat when I gulp down and he parks the car in the parking lot of the place. It looks nice. Fancy. He's trying to spend money on me. And I can sense that he wants me. But does he want to destroy me?

"I didn't think you did." He smiles and leans over. I smell his wonderful cologne. It's dark and rich, and sensual. I find myself closing my eyes when his fingers touch my chin lightly, beckoning me

forward. I obey his commands. I let him do what he wants. Then, his lips kiss my cheek. I know he can feel how warm I am, but he can't feel how wet I'm getting. This is bad. No, this is absolutely horrific.

He pulls back and smiles, breathing in heavy and slow, like he's taking all of me in. For a second, I wonder if he's hard right now and if he is, how hard? Is he thick? Is his shaft hot to the touch? *Fuck...*

"You're the kind of girl who kills silently. You don't play games. Not like these other women, anyway," he says. He unlocks the doors with one click of a button and I feel a huge weight lifted from my chest.

"I'm a nice girl," I lie. I want to be. I wish I could be a nice girl. I've always tried to be, but I just wasn't allowed the chance. My parents made sure I'd never be nice, or normal, or anything like the other girls. I'd always be a weed, growing out of the cracks of this scorched earth.

“But you’re right about something,” I continue, stepping out of the car. “I *don’t* play games.”

“Good girl,” he says.

We’re both outside, walking toward the entrance. I have no idea how this is going to end, but I’m actually quite proud of myself. I’ve played this one very nicely. There’s no way he has any idea, nor will he ever. There’s nothing that could go wrong now.

Yes, I have no idea how this will go. But I’ve got a million images in my mind. Like my body arching across his carpet, mouth wide open, as he pounds me ‘til I scream in absolute ecstasy.

MARSHALL

“*B*ring us another drink, darling. And make ‘em extra strong.” I smile at the waitress.

“Sure thing, Marshall,” she says, eyeing my beautiful lady, Virginia. She’s jealous, no doubt. But, that’s just life sometimes. You win some and you lose some. Right now, I’m fucking winning.

“So you said you grew up around here?” I ask her. She nods carefully. I take it we’ve had similar upbringings by the way she looks at me. There’s

sadness in her eyes. “Don’t worry. I won’t pry. Just wondering is all. Can’t trust a girl from outside of the city, right?”

“That’s what they say around here, anyway,” she smiles out of courtesy. This woman is hot and cold. It’s going to take a lot for me to get inside that dress tonight, but I’m going to try my damn hardest. I need it more than she knows.

The waitress comes back with two drinks and a large check. I slam down a couple hundred dollar bills and smile. “Keep the change,” I wink, trying to act nice, despite the fact that I don’t think she deserves any tip.

“But I think it’s sort of the opposite,” she says. “You can’t really trust anyone in this city.”

I laugh hard at that one. She’s right about that. “Well, I’m going to have to agree with you there.” I smack my knee. “I’ve met just about everyone in this town and they’re all hiding something. Question is, what’re you hiding?”

She smiles wide. “More than you know, Marshall.”

God damn, that turns me on. What is she hiding? All I can say is that whatever it is, I want to know. I’m guessing it’s in between those legs. Those sexy legs, the legs that should be wrapped around my face. The pleasure I could give to this woman... She has no fucking idea.

“We should get out of here. I’ll take you home,” I tell her. She nods and I feel the urge to grab the thick of her ass. Instead, I grab her hand and feel each ridge of her fingers against mine.

Outside, the hot wind wraps around our faces. I feel drunk, but I feel good and present. I want to take this woman to her house. I want to feel in between her legs. And I want her to invite me up. Anyway, that’s the way it’s playing out in my head. Who knows if it’ll work?

I pull her close to me when we get to the car. “You’re impatient,” she says, but she’s smiling.

“I know what I like,” I say. “I know what I want.”

“Oh yeah? You sure about that?” she asks, daring me to do something, to act.

We move close to one another as if we're pulled by the earth's gravitational force. Slow. Slower. Even slower. Our eyes close and then I feel it. Our lips crash together, heavy and deep. She falls back, ass against the door of the car. Some cowboy whistles at us and I have half a mind to pummel the bastard, but I can't even focus on that right now. I have this woman and she's giving into my every desire.

“Fuck,” she moans as I drag my lips to her neck. I kiss the curve down to her chest bone. I kiss along every ridge, stopping at the most tender spots. She tastes sweet, like sugar. This woman is dangerous. This woman is going to be my end. I know it. But I have to keep discovering her.

Our breaths are hushed and the world around us has turned into a dark haze. Her legs spread on their own. My knee rises up to her pussy. I can feel the warmth radiating from her. I reach down. I feel

the edges of that classy black dress. She's so fucking fine. I'm aching. She's moaning. We're both ripping at our clothes. Right when I touch the soft skin of her thigh, she pulls back and says, "I can't. Fuck. I can't."

She's panting for air and avoiding all eye contact with me now. "What? What's wrong?" I ask, but I know it's already too late. Something inside her has set her off. I'm not sure what it is, but this is a losing game. I'm a gentleman. I know when it's time to back off.

"I just can't, okay?" she sighs. "*Fuck.*" Her eyes have turned to fire.

"Okay, no problem." I lay my hands off her and back up. I unlock the car and watch as she walks hurriedly to the other side.

"Just drop me off at the corner of 31st and Garfield," she says, staring out the window. She's tense and sitting fully upright, as if she's ready to fucking strike. I don't know what happened. I don't

know what I've done to piss her off this much. None of it is making any sense to me.

"I can take you home. It's a hell of a lot safer that way," I tell her truthfully. 31st and Garfield is not the best area. It goes against my morals to drop a young, striking woman off by herself around that area.

She won't have it. "No. Not my house. Just do what I ask, okay?"

"Fine. Sure thing. Sorry, honey," I say, taking a deep breath.

My cock is still hard, pushing the top of my jeans up slightly. I adjust myself and turn the car on. I take off. As we drive, she rests her head against the window of the car. She stares out at the passing lights, idly. I have no idea what's on her mind. Normally, I wouldn't give a shit. Tonight's different. Tonight, I'm aching to know. I'm aching to make things right.

VIRGINIA

I run my hands through my hair. It feels abrasive, instead of silky, thin instead of its normal thickness. I look in the mirror and notice the dark rings under my eyes. “God, I’m disgusting. In every way,” I tell myself. This whole thing... it’s weighing on me bad. I hate knowing how this is all going to end. I loathe thinking about it, but I can’t stop myself. I’m panicking. I’m going to go to prison. I’m going to lose everything, including the chance to get away and live the life of my dreams.

How could this be? Why are Craig and Elroy fucking everything up? I should have never trusted two men to come up with a steady plan. Of course there would be some shakiness to all of it. All I can think is, “This is fucking bullshit.”

I almost fucked that man. I almost let him grapple with his innermost desires. Worst thing is, I think I actually wanted it. I think I wanted his hands to touch me, to grab me, to pull me in deeper. It's that look in his eyes that does me in. He looks at me like I'm a treasure, like I'm a cut above the rest. I've never really felt that before, but now I have the chance to pursue it in the most fucked up way ever.

I shouldn't do it. I mean, I couldn't even go through with it. How could I? But I deeply wanted to. God, I'm so fucked up. I'm not a girl that plays games? Fuck, I play the best games and it always starts with myself. My own battles... it's just not right. *I'm* not right.

Craig calls the new burner phone that I bought

earlier this morning. “What’s the word?” he asks me.

“Nothing,” I sigh. “What do you want? Do you have a plan?”

“We have something cooking up,” he says. He mumbles something to Elroy in the background and then says, “45 minutes outside of town. There’s a small local place. No CTV.”

“Security? Police?” I say, turning my head in paranoia to see if anybody could be listening or watching me. I’m in my house. I don’t know how it would be possible, but I don’t want to take *any* chances.

“Of course, some security. Nothing we can’t handle,” he says. “Police will get there fast, no doubt. We’ll have to get a vehicle.”

“Why can’t we go at night like last time?” I stupidly ask. Of course, we can’t. We have no materials left since the first hit.

“You know why we can’t. That took months of planning, months of buying the right stuff,” he says. “No. This time, we do it the old school way. In and out. 90 seconds or less. Hopefully less.”

“I don’t have a good feeling about this,” I say. “Not at all. It makes me sick to think about.”

“We’ll be fine,” he assures me in a calm voice. “You’ll do great. Just grab what you need to grab, while I do the yelling. In and out. Remember.”

“We need to meet,” I say. “At least, go over things better.”

“Sure thing,” he says. “Hey, listen. I saw you with that Marshall guy.”

When he says that, I take a seat, quickly. I don’t know how he’s going to react. He’s already expressed to Elroy in the past that he thinks I’m too wild, too crazy. What’s he going to think now?

“Yeah?” I try and keep cool. “Nothing to worry about.”

“Then what are you doing? Are you sabotaging us? There’s people I’ll let know. I’ll bring you down with us,” he says.

“Keep your enemies closer,” I say. “Anyway, it’s not like anything crazy has happened. He thinks I’m just another cute girl at the bar.”

He sighs loudly and talks to Elroy again. Finally, I hear the phone switch over. “Craig wants you done.” It’s Elroy’s voice.

“Yeah, well. What do you want?” I ask him. Elroy’s had a crush on me since, well, forever. But he’s not like Craig. He’s a standup guy. I just don’t like him in that way. Elroy will have my back on this. I know he will.

“I want you to come to your senses, girl,” he says. “This isn’t a game. It’s life or death.”

“I wouldn’t say it’s that extreme,” I argue.

“No? I think it’s worse. We could go away for a very long time, V,” he says. “You really want to get

out and see that the world's changed, that you could have had kids but missed the chance, and that you could have lived a real life if you just chilled out?"

"I didn't have a fucking choice, okay? He came at me at the bar," I tell him. "What was I going to do? Tell him to fuck off? I was scared. I was scared for my goddamn life."

"You should have kept your mouth shut and kept walking. He's just another horn dog who wants to fuck you. Big deal. There's no need to talk to the man," he says. "What did he want anyway?"

"Exactly what you just said. He wants me," I say, shielding my eyes. The whole thing is just so stupid. I can't believe I've gotten myself into this mess.

"Now he's going to do everything in his power to keep his eye on you. You really think he doesn't know you're involved in the hit? Really?" he presses me.

“Just let me deal with this. Your secret’s safe with me. You have nothing to worry about,” I plead. I place my head against the table. “Look, just leave me alone. And don’t call me on this number again. Goodbye.”

“V! Wait, I—” I hang up the phone.

Do I really like this... this... cop? No. I don’t *like* him. But now I’ve done myself in. I’ve given into the idea of the unthinkable and now I have to keep him close, especially after this next job. I need to make sure he has no idea what’s going to happen next. I think I’m about to make the worst mistake of my life.

MARSHALL

I've waited for her to call me for days.
Fucking days. I don't get this woman. First, she acts like she wants to straddle my cock, then she acts colder than cold toward me. What's her angle? Is she game or is she going to keep stringing me along? Better yet, what's she hiding in that brain of hers? Must be some kind of trauma. Maybe I want to back off.

Of course, just as I decide to, I feel my pocket

vibrate. “Sorry about the other night,” she says. “I overreacted.”

“It’s not a problem,” I type. “It’s your choice. If you don’t want to hang with me, you don’t have to.”

“No. I do,” she says. “I really do.”

“What about tomorrow night?” I ask her.

“Sounds good,” she says.

Sounds good? Great. I think I was wrong about this woman. She lives for the game. She lives to play tricks on guys like me.

“What’s wrong with you?” Adam says. We’re sitting at his house, whiskey bottle on the table, but we’re barely even drinking. I’ve tuned out again. I shouldn’t be focusing on what my cock wants. I should be in the game, trying to catch these bastards.

“Nothing,” I wipe a bead of sweat from my forehead. “I’m listening. Go on.”

“Look, I’ve found three possible sites that could point to where they’re going to hit next,” he says. “Here, here, and here.”

His fingers point at this last bank, one a little far away, but it’s a damn good guess. “It’s big enough. It would be hard to rob though. How much security do they got over there?”

“Not as much as you think,” he says. “Two. Sometimes three if they’ve hired on too many people for the year.”

“Hm,” I sigh. I can’t concentrate as much as I want to. My head isn’t in the game. I keep thinking of *her*. Her waist. Her ass. Those perfect, supple breasts. God dammit.

“I don’t know,” I tell him. “It seems too convenient.”

“I’ve got a hunch that these guys are about justice, or at least they think they are. Of course, in the grand scheme of things, they’re nothing but money stealing criminals,” he tells me, looking confident

with himself. “It’s a big bank. It’s not a conglomerate, so they could get away with it. They do a lot of shady loans over there. Very poor area. The people wouldn’t give a damn if it were hit. In fact, they’d probably celebrate it.”

“Just like they did over here,” I nod. “Sure. You’re probably right about that. But what about this one right here?” I move his finger over to the left, maybe twenty miles south.

“Too small,” he shakes his head. “I don’t know, Marshall. I just don’t see them hitting that one. It’d be easy, but there’s not a lot of money in it.”

“That’s exactly my point,” I say. “They already did their big hit and it made national news. They’re not that cocky. They can’t be.”

“Don’t underestimate the stupidity of a criminal,” he says.

“Don’t underestimate *the brains* of a criminal,” I correct him. After a few seconds of thinking this through, I tell him, “Fine. We’ll go your way on

this one. You deserve to call the shots every now and then. You're a big boy."

"Shut up, man," he folds up the map and takes a swig from the bottle. "I won't let you down, sir."

"I know you won't," I mutter. But deep down, I know they're going to get away with this one too. They almost always do, if they're smart enough. And these guys sure are smart enough. It takes three or four to really take a motherfucker down, and when it happens, I'm going to be the man who does it.

VIRGINIA

“*Y*ou still haven’t shown me your place,” he says, with a sly smile on his face. He calmly looks into my eyes as he takes another shot. I’m still sipping on my first, heart beating quick and irregular. My temperature has gone up and I know I’m glistening in the yellowish light of the bar.

“You don’t want to see it,” I tell him. “Trust me. It’s a shithole.” It’s not really a lie. It *is* pretty bad.

Clothes are strewn everywhere, I haven't vacuumed in months, and dust lines the tops of my cabinets. I thought I'd be out of the country in a few days. I didn't expect to be in this insane predicament. Still, even if my apartment was spotless, I wouldn't offer to show him. He's already gotten too close to me. He expects to get much closer.

He puts his hand on my kneecap and I nearly spill my drink from jumping. "You okay?" he asks me, slightly angry, I think.

"Yeah. Sorry I keep doing this. I'm just not used to —" He laughs, cutting my sentence short.

"Used to cops? I get it," he says, rolling his eyes.

"No," I laugh a little sarcastically. "I don't think you do."

"Sure I do, darling," he says, pointing at a bottle of something. The bartender knows exactly what he wants and he pours him another one. "Everybody hates the police nowadays. They think we're bad

men. It's a shame, really. I pride myself on being good. In multiple ways."

I get the idea. But he's downright annoying. He's got this heather-grey undershirt on that tucks in right at that V-formation that forms underneath his perfect abs. The shirt hugs tight against each and every curve of his muscles, and for a split second I wonder what it would be like to feel between those lines, to kiss each ripple of flesh.

I gulp my drink down and feel my thighs start to grow warm. I'm doomed, so doomed. "Well, that's great. You're the one good cop that's out there. A real small town hero, right?" It comes out bitchy and I know it, but I can't help it. I can't hear this guy brag about how righteous he is when he knows that deep down, we're all prone to being bad every now and then.

"Now you're getting rude," he says.

"Sorry. Again. But what makes you think you're such a great guy?" I ask him. His eyebrows arch

upward as if he's never pondered the question before in his life. "I mean, what gives you the right to take another man's freedom away from him?"

"You've been watching too much of the local news, haven't you?" he laughs. Then, he heaves a sigh and relaxes a bit. "But I get it. Don't you worry. I really understand. There's something to what you're saying. But it's like I told you a few days ago. I grew up watching really bad people get away with flexing their power. There were no checks and balances. Now, I've dedicated my life to stopping those people."

I nod, even though I'm sure he *doesn't* get what I'm saying. If he did, he wouldn't be pursuing this line. "Let's just hope you don't turn into one of those people, yourself. It's a real fine line."

This date is already off to a rough start. Why are we talking about this crap? Why do I always have to interject with my brazen opinion? Normally, it doesn't get me anywhere, and I'm sure it won't take me anywhere nice with Marshall. I want his

attention focused on *me*, not my criminality.

“Let’s talk about nicer things,” I let up with a smile.

“Better yet, let’s dance,” he says, twitching his brows up and down. He kicks the stool back and holds his hands out in front of him, bending slightly to the old country music. I turn to look at the empty dance floor and laugh.

“There’s nobody dancing, Marshall. It’s embarrassing,” I say.

“Aw, come on. Live a little. You’re always so damn tense,” he says, spinning me around. I awkwardly turn and waddle my feet.

“I can’t,” I tell him, feeling so embarrassed already. The old bartender starts clapping to the music and he hollers a “Yeah!” in my direction.

“You know you want to,” he hums. “Be my girl tonight.”

Be my girl. Be my baby. Be my woman. The

thought of that feels good. To be somebody's anything makes me smile, and I actually start laughing as he pulls me toward the dancefloor.

"There we go!" he says. Warmth floods my body like sunshine, like those good days I can remember, from back when I was a child. I step back and find a small groove, and I follow his lead.

"Dammit," I say. "I can't believe I'm dancing. I haven't danced in over a decade."

"You've got to be kidding," he says. "Well, now's your chance to be free again."

The thought is funny to me. That dancing with *him* could somehow be freeing in anyway is almost an oxymoron. He's my enemy. He's the man that wants to lock me up forever. Only, he has no idea. He's ignorant to the whole damn thing.

He pulls me close to him as the lights dim around us. Soon, others are dancing by us. The music has slowed down to something romantic, and slightly cheesy. I can feel his heart beating against mine,

the pounding of the rhythm of his body. The bass moves too, causing us to drift closer to each other. “You’re beautiful. You know that?” he whispers, lips against my cheek.

“You’re only saying that because you want something from me,” I say, honestly. My eyes soon close, though. My argument doesn’t matter much anymore. The truth is that we *all* want something from someone. We all want good things out of this life. I used to fault some people for this, but now it just seems like human nature. We’re all just searching for a little bit of the magic. Whatever of that is left, at least.

“Not true,” he lies. “I’m telling you because I want to. That’s the only thing I’m getting out of this. I know I’m not taking you home tonight, and that’s fine with me.”

My cheek falls to his shoulder. It’s strong and bold, and so is the arm that hugs around my back, the hand that is now running down my hair. It feels so good, and so pure. A bit of excitement runs through

my body and I smile again. I suddenly want to give him something real. I want him to have something special.

“Let’s go back to your place,” I say. “We’ll have some coffee and talk.”

“You sure about that?” He pulls me away slightly so I’m forced to look at him in the face. “We don’t have to.” He’s courteous, but of course deep down he’s thinking, “Please, lord. Let me bang the shit out of this woman.” I know, because it’s how all men think. At least he’s kind on the outside, although you almost have to worry more about guys like that.

“I want to, idiot.” I turn away from him and slide my hand down the front of his shirt. I feel his muscles finally and they’re impeccable. He’s built to last, that’s for sure. I let my fingers brush the top of his zipper, and I swear I can feel him grow a little for me. I walk toward the front door and he’s forced to follow me like a dog begging for food at the table.

Outside, I can hear the crunch beneath his soles. He's not wearing the cowboy boots anymore. Instead, he's got a pair of nice working man's boots, a little used from being on the job most likely. He's got his gun around his waist, which never scares a girl like me. Instead, I sort of like it. Maybe I'm not supposed to, but I grew up around men like that. I've never had a problem.



HIS HOUSE IS cold with A/C and oddly enough, it's much cleaner than I imagined. He turns around with a bag of coffee in his hand, smiling. "I got that coffee if you—" I stop him with a hurried kiss, and I pull back only to see his hungry-eyed expression.

Before I can even take another breath in, he quickly picks me up by my thighs, flipping me around until I feel myself fall against his kitchen counter. Everything is rushed and sloppy, in the best way possible. We've both been building this up for days, but tonight is the breaking point. We must

give into our lust and all the primal passions we have to offer.

He rips off both of our shirts as I fumble for his belt. I pull it off and throw it around his waist, making sure he moves even closer. I unzip his jeans and I can already feel how hard he is as my hands graze over him.

“Yes,” he moans, a simple gesture.

His right hand moves across my tits, and he feels me gently, becoming freer every second as a man. I let him have his way with me. His left hand moves firm around my thighs, slowly falling toward my core. I’m wet, so fucking wet, and the excitement is throughout my very being. He cups my pussy, spreading me apart. Two fingers push inside me and I unleash a high-pitched moan of desire. He feels so fucking good.

He falls to his knees and kisses the inside of my thighs. “Finally,” he says, as if he’s been starving for me. “Finally, I can have you.”

Marshall's tongue moves across my already wet lips with a confident assuredness I rarely ever get the chance to feel. His fingers arch up inside of me as if to say, "Come closer to me," but we're already as close as we can get. No, there's a different type of closeness we wish to get to, a level of feeling that's far too real. This man is much different than I am. We're practically on the other ends of life's spectrum. Yet, that's what makes this feel like it *needs* to happen. It's so wrong, of course life shoves us together.

He finally tastes me, kissing forward and licking in the opposite direction. He lets out a hungered groan. All his muscles flex for a second, tightening up. I wrap my legs around him and fall back against the cupboards above. "Fuck V," he moans, unknowing that that's the nickname my partners call me, how I'm known to all the bad seeds he so desperately wants to destroy.

When Marshall pushes over my clit, the feeling is unbearable. I grab the thick mass of his hair and pull, holding on and pressing him further. I push

and I push, and he devours me, moving him back down over my lips. For a second, he pulls back and smiles, and I'm left shocked. I laugh a little, surprised by his little show. I thought he would be different. I had an image in my head that he only gave a shit about himself.

I bring him up, holding his hair and he's still grinning wildly. We're both drunk as hell, eager to taste one another, and now I'm obsessed with the thought of doing the wrong thing. "Come here," I whisper. He comes forward and kisses me. I can taste myself now, mixed with his saliva and smooth tongue. His lips cup over mine, exaggerated and full. He grabs my ass and lifts me down, directing me toward his room.

Between the kissing and the touching, there's the soothing feeling of complete satisfaction. He bends me over on his bed, practically worshipping me. It's true: I love it. Who wouldn't? He runs his hand from my lips, up to where the curve of my ass extends.

He smacks my cheek and smooths out the skin, examining me. "More," I say. I'm not a prude. I love a good spanking. He smacks again and again. I turn my body and gently place my mouth around his cock. I push down deep and release, taking a huge air of breath. "More!" I say, a bit louder this time.

"You're one dirty girl," he says, eyes fixed on me. I smile, feeling good about myself. I love pleasing people more than I love getting pleased myself. Maybe that's my biggest fault.

I slide my tongue over his head, down to his shaft, feeling his hard cock against the sides of my cheeks. I can taste him. He's ready for me. I push away from him and fall against the bed, against my back. I spread my legs for him, slowly, but keep my hands against my pussy. He hovers over me and kisses my neck, and I remove each finger like a petal from a flower.

"Fuck me good," I whisper.

“By the time I’m done with you, you won’t be able to see straight,” he says. “I’m going to make you have the most mind shattering orgasm you’ve ever had.”

I feel him press against my lips. Using my hands, I guide him inside me. We both feel the intense pressure, driven by sensual desire. He pushes me apart, sliding deep inside, and we both quickly unlock a door of darkness & light, just where we’ve always dreamed of being. He pushes his forehead against mine and our lips meet once more. His tongue moves against mine and we both share the hot air within our lungs.

“Fuck me, baby,” I moan, allowing him to do whatever he pleases. “Give it to me.”

I open my eyes and he presses up against my legs. He lifts my thighs up in the air, controlling my every move. Desperate for more, he pins me with my limbs. He contorts my body, shoving my thighs against my tits. He holds me down and he fucks the life out of me.

“You like it rough?” he asks me, smiling. His eyes are dark and they hold old truths, buried for decades. He wants me more than I know, I realize. He wants to be within every crevice, examine every curve, and worship every mode of pleasure.

“Yes!” I scream.

The air outside has turned a few degrees cooler, but inside, the air is hot and filled with steam. He rolls me onto my side and holds me right where my thigh meets my ass. He grips me like he means it. He holds me like there's no tomorrow.

He groans and pulls his body back, thrusting himself inside of me. He reaches with his free hand and grabs my lower lips, where they curl around his cock. He presses them together and moves his hand up and down while he thrusts slow and deep.

“Jesus Christ,” I moan and close my eyes. He kisses my cheek and moves forward, closer now.

The pleasure is immense. While massaging my clit, he fucks powerfully. His shaft massages against my

g-spot and I know that I'm about to let myself go. I don't know what comes over me, but when I watch him, I imagine him naked. The only thing he's wearing is his gun holster. I look at him and reach up, feeling his abs pulse as he pushes forward.

"I'm going to come," I moan. "I'm going to—" But I can't make out the words. Everything starts to shake and it's almost like a bubble of electricity has burst inside of me. My whole body starts to quake. I fall on top of him, writhing against his body. He holds me still and whispers, "There we go, darling. There we go."

I can't stop. It comes in waves of shaking fits. Of course, this seems to get him going even more. He kisses my lips, hanging from my quivering mouth and whispers, "A beautiful angel... how did I get so damn lucky?"

I smile and I know he's about to shoot his load. I push myself on top of him and press my hands against his chest. "Stay there," I tell him. "Don't move." I begin moving my hips up and down. I

twist my ass and feel him go deep inside of me.

“Oh, fuuuuck,” he draws the words out, like everything is about to come crashing down. “Keep... going...” His head falls back and I feel him cum deep inside of me.

But I don't stop. He sighs because it feels too fucking good. He moans and shakes, twists and spasms. I'm too much of a woman for him and he knows it. Finally, I push my pussy down one more time and we kiss for at least a minute.

He takes multiple deep breaths when I climb off of him. “Who are you again?” he asks.

“I may play games,” I tell him, taking a swig of alcohol from the kitchen. “But I'm the best there is.”

MARSHALL

This is the worst thing that could happen to me. I meet the hottest woman on the planet and I'm knee deep in a huge case that seems like it may never end. Not to mention, I can't stop feeling so damn good around her. It's never been like that before for me. I've never really cared all that much. Still, part of me wonders if this can last forever. I'm bound to stop caring, right? But when she falls asleep next to me, I feel perfect, on top of the fucking world.

I wake up the next morning and roll over, expecting to feel her warm body next to mine. I take a deep breath in and smell her perfume. “You awake already?” I mumble, turning over.

She’s not there. She’s nowhere in fucking sight. “Shit,” I mumble. I check my phone. Nothing. No text. I climb out of bed, feeling my hangover creep up on me, and I look for a note. Of course, there’s none of that. That’s not how Virginia operates. If I’m being honest with myself, she’s selfish. End of fucking story. Hell, it’s not like I can really blame her. I can relate.

I stumble over to my coffee maker and pour a big serving into the top. I dump an unknown amount of water inside and press the button. “God,” I groan. “My fucking head.” I walk over to my massive bottle of ibuprofen and take about four. I can’t deal with the thought of going into work today, but we need to set up shop. In the next week, something big could happen and we need to be ready.

I hear Adam’s tires roll over the gravel outside, so

I peek my head out the window and flip him off. He does the same and smiles. I'm not smiling. "Cheeky bastard," I mumble. I walk outside, butt ass naked, like I always do. He shields his eyes, the pussy.

"God dammit! Put on some fucking clothes!" he yells.

"Go fuck yourself, Adam. I had a long night," I tell him.

"What else is new?" he asks, carefully walking toward the house. I grab a dirty pair of jeans, an old undershirt, and my boots. I put everything on and rub my eyes awake. "You okay?" he asks.

"I'm fine," I laugh. "Actually, I had the time of my life last night."

"I figured as much," he says. "That woman you've been seeing? You finally seal the deal?"

"I did more than seal the deal," I say, remembering her hands dragging across my body, remembering

how damn good she tasted.

“Well, I studied the bank’s layout last night, so when they hit it, you can thank me for knowing it front to back,” he says, sounding a little pretentious.

“Mhm,” I mumble. We walk to his car and he drives, blasting some terrible new country song.

“Turn it off,” I finally tell him. I only like that old stuff. The twang is what gets the heart moving. But it doesn’t matter. We’re already at the place.

“This is it,” he says, putting on his sunglasses. It’s a big bank, no doubt. We walk across the street, trying not to look too suspicious. Our car is unmarked and we’re not wearing any badges. That’s about as good as we can do around here. They’re bound to know exactly what we look like, so we take shelter in the bar across the street.

“What’re you having?” the waitress asks us, as if we’re some tourists she wants out as fast as she can.

“I’ll take a burger,” Adam says. “He’ll have the same.”

I nod and say, “And a whiskey coke, darling. If you please.”

Adam glances at me like I’m crazy to be drinking on the job, which annoys the hell out of me. “We’re going to be here for over 16 hours,” I say. “I really can’t have *one* drink?”

“Do whatever you want, officer,” he says.

I groan and keep my eyes steady on the bank. Of course, there’s nothing in sight. This whole town is fucking dead. In fact, it’s much emptier than I expected. It makes me start to think that maybe Adam has a real plan on this one. Maybe he’s going to put the case to rest.

“There’s no one in sight,” I say. “They’d have to be fools not to take advantage of this.”

Adam smiles big, like he’s won something. “See!” he nearly shouts. “I told you. Just wait. In the next

couple of days, you're going to have a couple thieves in your jail and we'll both get promoted."

The waitress brings Adam water, and sets the whiskey coke down on the table. "I can give a cheers to that," I say, smiling. I've been eyeing that promotion since forever. It would be nice to finally get recognized for all that I've done. Maybe they'll transfer me to a bigger city. I've always wanted to go down to Austin, or even Dallas.

In the back of my mind, however, is Virginia. I was trying not to call her or get her attention first. I figured, if she really wants to see me, she will. Though, after more than six hours pass, I grab my phone from my pocket and text her, feeling a little neglected.

"Round 2?" I type out. *Round 2?* Sounds like a fucking boxing fight. I delete it quickly. "How's your morning?" I type out. *Fuck.* That sounds too desperate. I never have this problem with anyone. Most people act like I'm the man in this town, but not her. She acts like I'm just like anybody else.

It's unreal how stupid a man can get when he comes in contact with one of the most gorgeous women he's ever seen. In fact, when I think about it some more, I have to tell myself to calm down. This is stressing me out a bit too much.

So, I keep it simple. I type, "Hey Gorgeous. How're you holding up?"

Adam sighs, glancing over at me. "What's your problem?" I ask him.

"Nothing. It's boring staking out. I thought it would be more action than this," he says.

"Welcome to being a police officer," I say.

I laugh a little and put my phone away. I glance in the binoculars, although the bank is close enough. Nothing. He's right, this is boring as hell. I wonder if we're getting anywhere at all with this. Part of me also wonders if I should just up and leave. I don't want to give the wrong impression. I love this state. I love the town I protect. And of course, I love the people, as wild as they can be. I'm just

like them. But, if I'm being honest with myself, it would be nice to get out of town for a while.

For a second there, I think about what it would be like. I don't know, ending up in South America, or somewhere in Thailand... maybe it would be nice to just disappear with some woman by my side. There wouldn't be any responsibilities. I wouldn't have to answer to nobody. I wouldn't have to do shit, except live a life. Hell, I could open a small business somewhere and make a fortune. 'Course, I'm only dreaming. This is the only life that's out there for me.

My phone vibrates and it shakes me out of my nice dream for a moment. I read the text message and it's short and to the point. "I'm doing well. Let's meet up tomorrow night. Your place again?"

Damn. This woman is already wanting more of this. Well, I'm going to have to give her what she wants.

"Tomorrow night it is," I type. I laugh a little out

loud. Shit, I'm excited. A man's allowed to be excited. Adam, however, isn't laughing. He's just shaking his damn head.

“Quit lookin’ at me,” I say.

“I envy you, you bastard,” he says.

VIRGINIA

“*V*i-” I hear my name being called. “Vi!”

A rock hits my window. I look down and it's the guys, Craig and Elroy. “Fucking idiots,” I hiss, jumping out of bed. Why are they here? Are they complete morons?

I run down and open the bottom gate, looking to the left and right. I make sure no one sees them, but you can never be too certain. I hurry them in, regardless, and lock the gate up. We walk upstairs

and I slam the door shut, locking that too.

“What the fucking fuck!” I half-scream at them.

“Are you insane?!”

Craig rolls his eyes. “We’re good. No one saw us. It’s still dark out,” he says.

“Barely,” I say. “Besides, that’s not the fucking point and you know it. We have to be extra careful now.”

“Why? Because you’re in bed with that cop?” Craig says, sitting down on my couch. For some reason, the sight of him doing that drives me crazy. I want him out and I want him to apologize now. Of course, he just smiles at me, looking all too smug.

“He’s our inside source,” I tell him. “I’ll find out some shit. You’ll see.”

“You better,” Elroy joins in, glancing at Craig. “I mean, the whole thing has been making us feel sick as hell. We don’t want to hit this bank if he’s going to be there waiting, guns ready.”

“He won’t,” I close my eyes and feel despair creep up into my body. How have I complicated things so much? I’ve let myself do the unthinkable. “I’m going to get him to tell me his plans. We’ll go from there.”

“We don’t have much time,” Craig reminds me. “So I thought we should go over this job. Most likely, we’re going to have to hit this one place regardless. If we have to switch it up last second, we’ll do it old school style. Fast.”

“Sounds good,” I nod.

My heart starts to race as he pulls out a blueprint. He points his fingers at each important spot, but it all moves in slow motion for me. I can’t think. I can barely even focus on my breathing. I just want out. That was the plan, to get the hell out of here. But here I am. Stuck. Nothing is ever as easy as it seems.

There’s always a catch and I’m stuck in the net.

“Got it,” I say, as he finishes up his speech. Elroy

glances at me with a worried look.

“You sure? You’re good, Vi?” Elroy asks. Vi... It just reminds me of Marshall, the man I shouldn’t ever have talked to.

“I’m sure,” I say. “In and out, fast. We’ll hit it and take the back routes. The car sounds good. I think we’ll be fine.”

But I have no idea if we’ll be fine or not. In fact, I’ve got a feeling we’ll all end up in Marshall’s control, and not in the way I had hoped.

We hug goodbye and Elroy whispers, “I hope you still have some fight in you. We’re doing this because bankers rob the world every single day. They deserve it.”

“Yeah,” I mutter. “I know.”

I don’t care about that anymore. I shut the door and fall face first on the couch. Justice, right? It would be one thing if we were giving the money back to the people. That, I might understand. But we’re not

doing anything like that. We're taking it for our own gain. Somehow, that seems a bit selfish. It seems like we're doing exactly what the banks do themselves. So, in turn, we've become the enemy we've always hated.

Great.



I SOMEHOW FELL asleep for hours, even though I had a full night of sleep. I'm not sure what's wrong with me. Probably stress. It's Marshall's call that wakes me up, actually. I answer, voice groggy and completely unsexy. "Marshall?" I say.

"Where you been?" he asks.

"What do you mean?" I ask. "What time is it?"

"It's close to nine. I've only been calling you for the past two hours," he says. He doesn't sound angry though, so that's good.

"Shit, I'm sorry," I sigh. "I got up earlier, but I

guess I ended up falling asleep. Give me 20 minutes and I'll meet you at your place.”

“Sounds nice. I wish I could sleep through the day,” he says. “20 minutes is fine. Take your time. I'll be here.”

“See you.” I hang up the phone and get ready quick.

I head out the front door, wearing some plain jeans and a t-shirt that cuts off around the stomach. I wanted to wear something a bit sexier, maybe classier, but I don't have the time. Hopefully this outfit can get something out of him still.

I take a cab to his house, and when I'm about to pay, he comes jogging outside, shirtless, with some money in his hand. “Here ya go,” he says to the driver.

“Marshall, you don't have to do that,” I weakly protest. Of course, he insists and I don't really put up that much of a fight.

“Come on in,” he says, kissing my cheek. “Shit,

I'm so excited. I've had the most boring two days of my life."

It's cute how excited he really is. I guess cops don't really have the most exciting jobs in the world and part of me is starting to realize that maybe I misunderstood him a little. Maybe, deep down at least, he's a really good guy. I mean, am I at all better than him? Probably not. I know Craig and Elroy aren't.

"Tell me about your boring day," I smile. "I want to hear all about it."

"Really?" he laughs.

"Really!" I say, stepping inside his house. "I'm sure it's more exciting than my last few days."

Inside his house, it's nicely put together, much nicer than my last visit. He's really put in some effort, all for me, and I'm just using him for his information. I feel like a total asshole. Well, it's not only about that for me. If he only wasn't a cop, I could bring him with me. We could leave this

stupid place together...

He sits down on his couch and smooths out a spot for me. "What do you do anyway?" he asks me. "You've got all this free time. You're lucky."

I look away for a brief moment and he catches me. I didn't even think about preparing myself for a question like this. Shit. "I, uh..." I stutter. "I kind of did some questionable work for a while." I look down, awkwardly. Sex work? Drugs? What kind of work am I even implying? It's a bad lie.

"What's that supposed to mean?" he eyes me, curiously.

"Advertisement," I laugh. A quick recovery. "It's the most evil profession a person can get into. You're wasting your time on the street criminals. You should be locking people like me up."

He cracks up and jumps up from the couch, over to the bar area. "You got me there for a second!" he says. "My heart was racing."

“That’s what I’m here for,” I say. *My* heart is racing. He points to the big selection of bottles. “Get me a vodka tonic?”

“Coming right up,” he says.

He pours the drinks and sits back down. “So you want to hear about my day?” he asks.

“I do.” I don’t even have to act interested. I *am* interested.

He leans back, looking pleased with himself. He puts his arm around me and pulls out his phone. He shows me a picture. It’s a picture of a bank, but not the bank we’re hitting. Already, I’m happy. “What is this? A bank? Did another one get robbed?” I ask him, playing dumb.

He laughs. “No, no. I wish another one would happen. I know it’s wrong, but we’re getting pretty stumped out there. I hate admitting that. But that’s how these things go.”

“So what’re you going to do? You’re staking this

place out or something?” I ask him. He’s already given me too much. If he’s staying in one area, we’re good. We’re golden.

“Yes, ma’am. Until they hit some place else. Then, I guess it’s back to the drawing board. These things usually happen in threes,” he says, eyeing me to see if I’m impressed by the big task he’s got. I’m assuming he thinks he’ll win this battle and draw me in further. He’s wrong though. Very wrong. Before he knows it, I’ll be gone. I’ll be on the coast of Europe, drinking a glass of red wine, happy as can be. I can’t wait.

“Well, you have to catch the guys,” I say.

He gives me a long, hard, and serious stare. “Who said they were guys?” he asks me. I start to freak out, but he bursts out laughing. “Just kidding. Of course they’re guys. And we’ll catch them. We always do.”

I laugh alongside with him, but things aren’t sitting right for me. At least he thinks there’s going to be

more jobs in the future. This is the only one though. None will come after. He'll be sitting, waiting and twirling his thumbs.

“Hey, want to do something fun?” he asks me.

“I love a little fun,” I smile, biting my lower lip.

“Well come on, then. I figure we could use some excitement,” he says, taking me by the hand. He pulls me into his garage and turns on the light. Inside is an old motorcycle. “Want to ride?”

My eyes light up. “Whoa, I haven't ridden one of these in years!” I exclaim. I haven't since I was a kid. It's kind of a coincidence, really. The other day I was thinking a motorcycle might make a perfect getaway vehicle.

“Hop on,” he says, getting on himself. He pushes the garage door open with a button. “And don't forget to hold on tight, honey.”

My hands grip tightly around his pecs, slowly moving downwards. I feel his tight abs and close

my eyes, pressing my face against his shoulder. Before I know it, we're flying out of the garage, going at least 80 on some neighborhood streets. He's speeding around some turns and definitely breaking the law, and he's scaring me to death.

But I like seeing him like this. He screams against the wind, something cheesy like "yee-haw," and I find myself doing it right after him, because in this moment we're nothing that we've built ourselves up to be. We're just living. We're free. In the end, this is what we should be, I think to myself. Again, I fall against his shoulder and feel the solid heartbeat of this man who could end my freedom any second. And even though this is the sad truth of things, I feel okay about it. Anyway, I'm not as hung up about it in the moment.

We turn off onto a dusty trail and it gets a little rough, so I'm forced to hold on tighter. "Almost there," he says. I can't stop fucking smiling. This is it. The highest I'll feel until I'm where I need to be. I know it. The trail starts to climb and we're face to face with a steep edge of a mountain. We keep

going until we turn around at the very top.

“Here, at last,” he smiles, a little out of breath. He turns the bike off and gets off.

“That drive was a little unexpected,” I laugh, fixing my hair.

He completely ignores me in the most charming way, that it almost makes me sick. “You’re so damn beautiful,” he says, reclaiming the air in his lungs. He looks confident, and a little bit somber, which hits me hard. Of course, I fall. I fall harder than he does. When he runs his hands above my ear and through my hair, I glance away for a second, only to feel my chest sink with emotions.

“You’re just saying that,” I tell him. I don’t know what else to say. It can’t be. *We* can’t be “a thing.” It’s just not in our cards.

“Only, I’m not. This is real. This isn’t a dream. You’re here in front of me and we can do anything our hearts desire,” he says, full of hope and wonder. It’s inspiring. It’s uplifting. It’s everything

every girl in the world dreams about. But what am I going to do about it?

“I wish that was true,” I say.

He gets down on his knees, covering himself in dirt. “What do you want me to do to get you to react like a human being?” he asks. If he wasn’t right in his assessment of me, I would be offended. “Just be here with me. For one night, at least.”

“Okay,” I say, tears filling my eyes. I hold them open so they don’t splash out onto my face. I don’t want him to know how pained I am. I don’t ever want him to know the decision I’m going to have to make. It’s not fair, but it *is* my fault. And sometimes you have to live with the choices you make.

“Tonight is our night,” I smile, feeling the tears disappear. I can smile again, even if it comes from a different place. Tonight, I’ll have to play the part. Tonight, we’ll be lovers as if this night were forever.

He kisses my jeans and I do him a favor and unbutton the top button. He looks at me, not smiling anymore, and unbuttons the rest of them with his teeth. I feel my lower body grow warm. All of the blood in my body floods downwards. "Yes," I moan. "Oh, God, yes."

I feel so... *invested* in this. All of my emotions are just there. Right now, I'm his, and it's not just some drunken hookup. He's not just some guy at the bar. I know it's so soon, but we have an unshakeable bond together, and I don't care how wrong that is or how short-lived it might be. This night will live on in my memories.

He pulls my jeans down as I throw my heels to the dirt. Soon enough, all my clothes are off and he leans me against a boulder. I feel the slight heat from the day still radiating from the rock as it pushes against my ass and back. I spread my legs aside as he slides his tongue against me. This time, he's not trying to please me. He's not "going with the motions." He's just enjoying me.

When I look down at him, it truly looks like he was born to do this. His tongue falls flat and wide and covers every single part of me. Every fold gets engulfed as he swipes up and down. Then, when I feel a slight tinge of electricity start to build inside of me, he goes further.

Not only does he fit three fingers firmly inside, pushing them in and out in the most sensual manner, he also begins sucking away. He sucks and pulls back like a suction cup. Every now and then, he lets go and looks up at me with those deep, masculine eyes, whispering, “This is what you want. Isn’t it? You want more of this, don’t you?”

There’s no question about it. I do. I just nod and let my head fall back. Up in the sky, the stars are shining bright. The air is much cooler up here, but my body is heating up by the second. All around us are the sounds of desert life, humming their song. And when he curls his fingers against that soft spot of mine, I howl like a fucking coyote.

“OHHHH!” I scream. “Yeeesssss!”

I convulse and he just picks up speed. My mind is racing and I'm dizzy with pleasure. He picks me up off that rock with all his strength and power, and sets me down onto his lap. His cock goes right inside of me.

He starts pounding me, back against the rock, as my body continues to spasm. I look at his eyes and he kisses me. "Keep looking at me," he whispers. "Just like that. Don't look away."

He grabs my face and I smile, so fucking turned on by him. He's revealing everything he likes. He's deep. He's nothing like I thought he was. "Oh, Marshall," I whisper back. "You fuck me so good."

He nearly dies. He lets out of a deep sound, almost like a lion roar, and holds me close to him. "Don't you dare let me go," I say. "Keep cumming for me, baby."

I can feel his cock expanding and contracting inside of me. Slowly, it inches its way back to its normal self. He presses his cheek against mine and

we're both gasping for air. At the bottom of the trail, we can hear hikers, which makes us both laugh.

“Fuck, you're hot,” I say. “Where'd you learn to fuck like that, Mister? Surely, not the Police Academy.”

We both grab our clothing quickly and get back on the bike. He's laughing and feeling good about himself. I'm doing exactly the same. “Hell no. Most of those guys are fools with women. I guess they don't get paid enough to care about eating pussy, right?” He laughs some more. “I just found a woman whose taste, looks, and wild personality I can't get out of my mind. It's bad, woman.”

I place my head against his shoulder again and close my eyes. God dammit. Why does the heart have to be so complicated? I guess other girls don't have this problem because they make normal choices, or maybe they just had some better chances in this life.

Either way, I can't reflect on it too much because I've already decided on something. Tonight, I'm going to spend the night.

MARSHALL

I'm used to the blurry alcoholic nights. The ones where you stumble and puke, and fuck and fight, until you find yourself laying down face first in a ditch. Yeah, I'm used to that kind of shit. I actually thought that kind of thing was fun for a while. That is, until I met my Virginia.

She's sweeter than sugar, softer than vanilla ice cream, and spicier than panaeng curry. Of course, I'm feeling pretty blessed right now. In fact, I

couldn't even get to sleep last night because I was too exhilarated from the night before. There's so much shit I want to do with this girl now. I have this weird feeling like I need to tell her all my wildest dreams. She makes me want to live. I ain't ever had that kind of a feeling before.

It's scary as hell, but sometimes you have to jump right now. If she ends up hurting me, so be it. Everything that happens in life, happens for a reason. There's nothing different about this.

When I wake up, I expect her to be gone. I expect that the warm body that I feel underneath my arms is nothing more than a pillow that she switched from under me. But I press my body forward and I feel her ass against my cock, and it's confirmed: she's still here. I kiss her back and smell her again, like a breath of fresh air.

"Mm, I could get used to this," I say. I kiss her cheek and crawl on top of her, opening my eyes. She presses her ass up against me some more.

“Then get used to it, big boy. Show me what you’ve got,” she says, sleepy, but clearly horny.

I push myself inside and immediately feel her warmth. I grab her tits and hold them firm in my hands. I push in and out, in and out, until finally, I cum.

“That was quick,” she laughs, jumping out of bed. I slap her ass before she can get away.

“I gotta go to work, dammit. Last day on the stakeout,” I tell her. I shouldn’t be telling her any of this shit. But she’s so far away from this case that I doubt it even matters. Though, if Adam knew I was telling any woman our information, he’d have me fired in an instant. The bastard. Of course he’d do me in.

I hear the sink running and finally she comes out. “That’s fine,” she says, smiling big. She pounces on me like a cat and kisses my lips, covering me in her hair. “I have to visit some friends, anyway.”

“Friends?” I ask her. “When are you going to invite

me out with them?”

“I don’t know if you’d get along,” she says, jumping back off and grabbing her clothes.

“Why, ‘cause I’m a cop?” I start to get a little annoyed and a little hurt.

“Exactly,” she laughs.

“What the hell is everyone’s problem with us?” I bark. “It’s like the world’s turned on all of us now. I don’t get it.”

“You ruin people’s fun.” She shrugs, cold as ice. “Not you. Calm down, Marshall. You’re different, of course. I’m just saying. If there’s something exciting happening in this country, there’s usually some police there bringing people down a notch.”

I groan, but don’t actually say anything. She’s probably right, anyway. When’s the last time I went to a party? She’s younger than me. She knows what it’s like. I’m so outside of the spectrum, it’s crazy. But why can’t people just wait to go to a good bar,

and relax?

“Last night was perfect,” she says, with honest eyes. She still looks stunning. “Let’s do it again soon. Please.”

“Just call me when you’re free,” I say. She kisses me again and then messes up my hair.

“Bye, Marshall.”

“Bye.” The door closes. “Baby...”



BACK IN ADAM’S CAR, back to this stakeout business, I feel my boredom start to kick in again. “You think this is it?” I ask him, eyeing him carefully. “Is this the big day?”

He smiles, looking cocky. He pulls off to the side and parks near the old bar we’ve been racking up a bill in. “This is our big day,” he says. “I can feel it.”

“Good,” I say. “It’s good to feel things every now and then.”

“You don’t think I’m right do you?” he asks. “You think I’m going to fuck this up. I may be newer than you, but I know a thing or two about criminals. I studied them in college.”

He makes me laugh. Every time he speaks, he reveals a whole new part of himself that I’ve never heard before. “College?” I look at him.

“Yes, sir. Four years at the University down here,” he says, proud of his achievements. I suppose he should be in a way. “Criminal Psychology. It was difficult, but I came out with a real understanding of the criminal mind.”

“Oh, come on, Adam. You came out with your head in your ass, from too much partying. Don’t try to talk to me about college. You don’t fully understand the criminal mind until you’ve *lived* with criminals. Not until you’ve been subject to their bullshit, day in and day out, do you

understand what kind of people they are,” I say. I motion for the lady to come over so we can order some steaks and a drink. “Besides, these are bank robbers. This ain’t some Silence of the Lambs type of shit.”

“How you doing, sweeties?” the waitress asks us.

Adam groans. I take the liberty to respond nicely. “Well, we’re doing pretty good over here, only my friend and I have a bet we’d like you to settle,” I say.

“A bet?” her eyebrows begin to rise. She’s intrigued. “What kind of a bet?”

“Well, my partner here said he thought you were around 40,” I begin to say. Adam looks mortified. I love playing games with him. He’s so sensitive. I continue, “But I was saying you must be only about 29. Which one us is right?”

“Oh you!” she slaps my arm with the menu and I laugh friendly with her. “I’m 57. You’re both wrong. You owe me a drink!”

“Ha!” I slap the table. “A drink it is, honey.”

“What’re you having?” she asks.

“Two steaks. Medium rare. Two beers. Uncooked please,” I wink.

“Coming right up,” she smiles.

“You always gotta drink, don’t you?” he shakes his head.

Just before I can shrug, my damn radio goes off and it’s not sounding good. “God damn!” one officer yells. “They got it guys, pursuit in process.”

I grab the radio and call in. “Don’t let them out of your sights, dammit!”

“Female in pursuit. I repeat, female in pursuit!” the radio beckons. A female? Well, I’ll be...

“Sorry honey, we gotta get out of here. Here’s some cash for you. Thank you, kindly,” I say, running out of the bar. I turn to Adam who looks completely shocked and say, “You owe me two

steaks and two beers, dumbass.”

VIRGINIA

“*P*ull over!” a rickety, old police car yells on the megaphone behind me. I’ve got this feeling of absolute uncertainty right now. I opted for the motorcycle. I found one that worked at the junk yard, one that could do the job and could be destroyed right after.

BUT NOW, I realize it’s only put a target on me, and

not my partners, who opted for a faster car. Figures. But there are some tight alleyways up ahead. I know them like the back of my hand. I just have to make it over there in time.

“No cops in sight,” Craig announced as we arrived on the scene. He didn’t think they’d respond as fast as they did. I kept screaming at him, “In and out, in and out!” But it didn’t matter. Things were going wrong. People weren’t getting down fast enough. The bank tellers weren’t playing by the rules. This usually doesn’t happen, but in Texas, you never know how people are going to react. There are a lot of heroes in this state.

“PULL OVER! You’re under arrest!” the car says again, completely robotic. It makes me hate the state more. But then I think of Marshall. Is he on his way to find me? What will he do if he sees my ass on this motorcycle? Will he know it’s me? Will he protect me? He sure as hell wouldn’t. It would break his damn heart.

SIRENS SOUND IN THE DISTANCE. I can hear them coming closer. I flip off the car behind me and rev my engine faster, nearly sliding my bike on the ground to make a 90 degree turn into that familiar alley way. I used to play in this alley and now I'm running from the cops in it. Up ahead, there's another set of alleys, and another after that. It's endless over here, and us poor people know it fucking well.

I MAKE a series of turns and finally, I stop. I get off the bike and head out on foot. I climb a fence and jump over, falling on the dirt. I pick myself back up and look around. I'm near my place now, but I can hear the helicopters coming. I reach my gate and slide the key in. I run up the long set of stairs, but I don't go inside. I look out from the bars of the balcony. The cops' lights are moving in the opposite direction now. They haven't got a clue.

I'm safe for now.

WHEN THE SIRENS finally shut off and the lights disappear, I slam my fist against the wall of my apartment and scream. "Fuck!" That's the closest I've ever been being locked up before. I mean, before this, I wasn't an angel. No "poor" kid is, they say, but that's only because you want certain things like food, or a nice blanket, or jacket to keep you warm when it turns winter. I mean, my parents probably could have afforded those things, but asking them meant screaming. It meant they wouldn't be allowed to buy their lottery ticket or third cigarette pack for the day.

I PACE around the room and I don't know what to do. Are the guys okay? I mean, are we going to get away with all of this? There's no way to get ahold of them now. I'll just have to play the waiting game. I don't even have a TV, so I turn on the radio

in my bedroom and listen.

“THERE MAY BE a possible suspect in police custody as we speak, Jen...” A news reporter says this one sentence and I immediately run to the bathroom to vomit. I deserve it, of course. We robbed a fucking bank. Two fucking banks! How did I not think this would happen?

PART of me thought it *would* happen, but the other half thought we could win this one. My only concern is with who they've taken in. If it's actually Craig or Elroy, I think the game is over. Shit, if it's Craig, I'll feel a little better. He's got a tight lid on his mouth. As for Elroy, well, I think he's got a good heart. He definitely likes me enough not to say my name, but he's also weak. It wouldn't be long before they convinced him he'd get a better deal if he got all of us in there with him.

FUCK.

I GLANCE AT MY PHONE. It's sitting next to my unloaded gun and bag of money. There was never any intention of using that gun. It's just for show. I couldn't stomach killing anyone, nor would I want to. I'm not that kind of bad.

THERE HASN'T BEEN any activity on my phone, which I guess could be considered good or bad. Stupid or not, I pick up the phone and dial Marshall's number, using my app that encrypts my number, as always. "Can't talk right now. Pretty fucking busy," he says, voice gruff and angered.

"SORRY. I just heard about the robbery. Did you get

the guys? I've been rooting for you," I say, trying to get some answers out of the guy.

"I TOLD YOU, I can't talk right now," he says.

"OH, I'm sor—" I start to apologize.

"SEE YOU," he says, hanging up the phone.

MY HEART IS FUCKING RACING, but most of all, I'm thrown into a deep despair. Everything is going to be ruined. My chances of getting out of here, my freedom, and I'll never be able to see Marshall again.

EVERYTHING IS DONE for and I'm a wreck.

MARSHALL

I was pretty mean to Vi on the phone just now, I guess. I'm going to have to make it up to her, but if she only knew the kind of shit we just went through, she'd surely understand.

The stakes were high, so I made Adam get in the passenger's seat. There was no way I was going to let him fuck anything else up. I knew they weren't going to hit that bank. It was too obvious of a pick. I knew exactly which way to head.

At first, we had an officer that was chasing a young female on a motorcycle, young, fairly fit, maybe 5' 6". I'm surprised by the news because women aren't usually the type of people who rob banks. No offense to women, of course. It just rarely happens. But I wasn't interested in grabbing her just yet. I figure, if we get the other guys, she'll come without putting up a fight.

So, we went after them. Only, we couldn't fucking find them. Turns out, the guy was too slow in getting into the escape vehicle. When he dropped some cash and went back to grab it, his friend left him. Now, we have our key.

“Fucking hell, boys! We did it! We've gotten one step closer to solving this thing!” I burst into the front room of the police station with a giant Champagne bottle in my hand. I open it and out comes giant spurts of wine. Everyone holds their glasses below it, hollering away.

“Yeah, well, if you didn't trust in me, this whole thing would have been solved today. I fucked it all

up,” Adam scowls.

“Nonsense,” I laugh. “It doesn’t matter. We got one. We’ll get them all soon enough. Remember what I said when this whole thing first went down?”

“Sure do, sir. It takes a couple to understand the pattern,” he says. I nod.

“It sounds better how you said it, but that’s exactly the point,” I smile. “They’re fucking done. And soon enough, that girl and the other guy will be thrown in jail for a long ass time.”

“Damn right.” Gary, a cop of 12 years nods his head in solid agreement.

“Now, let’s finish our drinks and interrogate the poor bastard. He seems a bit frightened,” I laugh loudly and chug my cup of champagne. When I’m finished with it, I sigh and throw it against the wall. It falls right in the trash.

“Game faces,” I say, walking toward the

interrogation room.

I knock on the door and open it. Adam and I walk in and sit down. “Elroy, how you doing?” Adam says, sounding very calm, like he’s going to be the one who helps him out on this.

“I need a lawyer,” he says.

“Well, I hear you, but there’s no lawyers around at this moment. It’s getting too late in the day and everyone has gone home,” he says. Tears stream down Elroy’s face. “But come tomorrow, we’ll get you that lawyer. Don’t you worry.”

“Alright,” he nods. “I understand.”

“Right now, we just need to ask you a few questions. It’s standard protocol, really. You don’t need to be worried, but mind your answers because they could be used in court,” he says.

The kid gulps down. “In court? Shouldn’t I—”

This is where I come in. I get out of my chair and place my foot on top, leaning forward. “Look, I

already know what you're going to ask because we hear it on a daily basis, kid. If you get a lawyer, all deals go out the window. That's just how it's gotta be. Right now is your chance," I tell him. "If you don't tell us some things fast, the years are going to start adding up for you."

The kid nods and closes his eyes for a few seconds, taking it all in. It's as if he's dizzy. I've heard that that happens sometimes. You immediately become confused and wonder, "how the hell did I get here? What did I do?" when you know deep in your heart exactly what you did.

"You made a conscious effort to rob two banks," I say. "You realize that?"

"I do," he says.

"You committed two *federal* crimes. That's as huge as you can go, big boy," I say, taking my foot off the table. I pace around the room until I'm behind him now. "Two. That's a prison sentence you can't undo. A jury is going to put you behind

bars for nearly your whole life. When you get out, you'll have nothing. No job. No wife. No kids. Hell, your parents won't even be alive. You'll be all alone. Then what? Did you even think about that?"

"I did not," he says, starting to shake. I hate doing this interrogation business. I hate making them feel like shit. I know how dismal it all feels. I know how it makes me feel at night. The guilt. The shame. But I know it needs to be done. There's the law and people need to follow it.

"Do you wish you could take it all back?" Adam asks, calm and gentle-like.

"Yes, sirs. I do. There's nothing I wish for more right now," he says, crying. He hangs his head and sobs as the tears start flowing.

"Shit, I just want to lock you up right now. I want you to pay for what you've done," I say, playing the bad cop part up pretty damn high.

Now is Adam's turn to soften the blow of all this. I

need him to offer the plea deal that'll get this guy's friends out of hiding. I already know it's going to work because of how he's reacting.

“Stop it, Marshall. Can't you see you're scaring the boy?” Adam asks, standing up and facing me, like he's angry with me. Elroy looks up and analyzes this odd exchange and his tears suddenly stop. Yes, there's someone to his defense.

“Well, he committed a federal crime, Adam. What do you want me to do? Let him go?” I ask him. It's almost as if Elroy is waiting for him to answer me “yes.” “You want me to just tell the boy that everything is alright now?”

“I want you to lighten up,” he says. “He's not a criminal. Any sane person can see that. He's a nice, young man. Hard working, probably. You can tell he just got mixed up into some shit. Hell, I did at his age too. I got into some real bad trouble. I just didn't get caught.”

I back off and put my hands up. “Fine. You handle

this shit. I can't do it," I say. I walk out of the room, allowing all of the tension to leave there with me.

The cops outside lightly clap and laugh a little when I'm outside of the room. They've been watching the little show on the monitors this whole time. I laugh with them and join them at the monitors, pouring myself another glass of that champagne.

"Watch as the guy folds all his cards. We've got this, boys," I whisper. "We've got this."

Adam sighs and sits back down. He throws a set of keys on the table so that Elroy can give his wrists some rest. "Here," he says. "You don't deserved to be all chained up, man. I'm sorry about him. He's a little bit of a loose cannon some times."

"A lot of cops are like that," he says.

Adam laughs and lights up a cigarette. He doesn't even smoke, but he's giving the kid the illusion that they're friends or something. "Want one?" he asks,

tossing the pack his way.

“Sure.” He lights up and leans back. After a few quick and shaky drags, he asks, “So am I done for? Am I going to go away for life?”

“You could,” Adam admits. “Or you can play ball. It’s really your choice. You kind of remind me of myself. I don’t want to see you go down the wrong path. You’ve got a lot to live for. There’s so much more to be done, isn’t there?”

“I’d like to do so much more,” he says.

“Like what? Tell me?” Adam asks.

“Like, go to Europe. Like meet someone beautiful. Start a family. I’d like to live my life. Right now that sounds pretty good,” he says. “The only reason I even helped them rob that stupid bank was because it was enough money to pay my debt and leave this country. I thought I had found a way out. Now, I’m fucked.”

“You ain’t fucked,” Adam says, hitting the ash onto

the table, like it's normal. "You have options. Take our deal."

"What's the deal?" he asks.

"I'll be right back," Adam smiles.

VIRGINIA

I wake up from a horrible nightmare. Nothing is right. Everything feels dreamlike in the worst way. It's like I'm floating in space, but there's no tether to keep me grounded. It's just endless floating, endless blackness. Endless death. I look for my space suit, but there's nothing on my body. That's when I realize that I can't breathe.

I wake up, choking on air. I grasp at my throat. "No!" I scream, sucking in air, but it feels like it's

not going in my body. Finally, I'm fully awake and I can breathe, although it's panicked. "Whoa, whoa!" a deep voice says. I turn and there's Marshall. "You okay?"

"What the fuck!" I scream. "Where am I? Am I at home?"

"You're at my place," he says, running his hands down my back to calm me down. He holds me close and I can feel his steady heartbeat. It *is* calming...

"How did I get here?" I ask, grasping at straws. I'm so fucking confused.

"You came over last night. You said you couldn't sleep. Don't you remember?" he asks, looking very concerned at me.

"Oh." I finally remember now. All of last night's memories trickle in. That's right. He called me after the interrogation process. I asked to come over so I could learn more, but I must have fallen asleep pretty damn fast.

“I remember,” I say, nodding. “Sorry, I just had a nightmare or something. Jesus.”

“What happened?” he asks me. “You feeling okay?”

“Yeah, it was just like... I couldn’t breathe. Not sure what that was about,” I say, closing my eyes again and falling back on the bed. It’s light outside. My guess is that we slept in a bit.

“Vi, I’m sorry. You need anything, a Xanax or something?” he smiles a little.

“You just carry Xanax with you?” I ask him.

“You never know when you might need one,” he shrugs.

“Bad cop. Bad,” I mumble.

“It’s harmless,” he says. “Here, I’ll just get you some water. Sound good?”

“Sounds great,” I say, pushing myself out of bed as well.

“I think we’re getting somewhere with this guy,” he says to me. He hands me a glass of ice-cold water and it feels good as it hits the back of my throat. Still, there’s no taste in my mouth. I feel so numb.

“What do you mean? You think you’re getting closer to getting the other two?” I ask.

“We gave him 48 hours to sign the deal. If he signs, he’ll get 5-10 years maximum,” he says, smiling.

“And if he doesn’t?” I ask, knowing that Elroy is weak. He’ll probably take the fucking deal. I need to come up with a better plan. I need to keep aware.

“Ha, if he doesn’t... well, he’ll be locked away for a long time. Nearly his whole damn life. They all took a hell of a lot of money,” he says. “It’s a federal crime. You don’t fuck with the government, especially not in the state of Texas.”

“He’ll take the deal,” I suddenly say.

“What makes you so sure?” he asks me, looking at

me carefully.

“Why wouldn’t he?” I ask him. “Wouldn’t you?”

“Depends on how much money I had,” he laughs. “If I had a rich family, I’d tell them to get me a good lawyer. I’m not a snitch. I couldn’t give a partner’s life up that easy.”

“Hm,” I shuffle and sit back down. “Well, it’s kind of exciting isn’t it?”

“It is,” he smiles again. “But it’s almost over.”

“What’ll happen to the rest of them?” I ask, feeling the pain in my stomach start to grow. I’m fucked. I’m done for. And after Marshall’s heart breaks into a million pieces, he’ll ask for the harshest sentence on me.

“No deal for them. We’ve asked them to come forward plenty of times on the news. They had their chance. They’ll go away until they’re old and wrinkly,” he says.

“Seems kind of... *harsh*,” I admit.

“The law is pretty harsh sometimes,” he agrees. “That’s why you don’t break it.”

He makes me sick. “Let me lose myself in you,” he says, not too long after, as he looks into my eyes. I blush, but I don’t feel that way about him right now. Every fucking time I look at him, I feel disgusted. I feel hopeless. How could I let him touch me now?

“I don’t feel that good,” I tell him. “I’m fine to stay, but I’m having some issues.”

“Period?” he asks, the dumbass.

“Yeah,” I frown. “Takes a lot out of me.”

“I don’t mind it,” he says, putting his hand on my leg. I close my eyes with annoyance.

“Well, I do.” I move his hand away. “Sorry, I’m just really not in the mood.”

“What the hell did I do?” he asks, pacing around the room, showing his true cop behavior. “Do I deserve this? All I’ve done is be nice to you.”

Yes, you do deserve this, asshole. You've ruined everything. All my plans are now *fucked* because of you. "That doesn't mean you get to do anything you want, you know," I say, standing up.

He groans loudly. "Cool," he says. "I see how it is. So you're just going to be in one your moods again. Fucking great."

"You know what? You're a real asshole sometimes, Marshall. I think I'm going to take off. For good," I say, feeling light headed. I need to be by myself. I need to get the fuck away from him for a while.

"Great! I hope you leave. I hope we never even speak again," he says.

"Okay then," I find myself reaching for his door handle. He walks after me and touches my arm. "Don't you touch me," I say, instinctually. "I need to leave. Now."

"Fine," he relaxes his hands. He wasn't going to hurt me. I know that. But I need to leave and he

needs to let me. “Sorry,” he says.

“Bye, Marshall,” I mutter, closing the door gently.
Now begins the road to the end of life as I know it.

MARSHALL

“*I*t’s the end of the world as we know it...”
The radio wakes me up, blaring in my ears. “What the fuck?” I mutter, hitting it three times, until it finally shuts off.

I slowly open my eyes and then every shitty fucking memory starts to flood back into my brain. All the things we said to each other last night. Vi... My Vi. Gone for good.

I know I fucked up, but I don’t understand why she

turns off all of the time. It's like one second she's into me, and the next, she hates my guts. I really don't get it. But still, I shouldn't have pressured her into anything. If she didn't want to be close to me, I should understand. Women generally have their reasons. I've lived long enough to know that.

Anyway, it's probably for the best. This whole week is going to be huge for the department and I'm going to need to keep my head straight. I can't keep letting women fuck with my thought process. I'll end up losing my job.

I glance over at the dresser in my closet. On the top is the woman's pantyhose from the first crime scene. We know now that there's a women involved and she's one of the bank robbers. Who knows, maybe she's the top girl in all of this. I laugh to myself as I walk up to the piece of fabric.

It would be funny, I start to think wildly, if the girl involved was Vi. Virginia, the bank robber. That would be good. I mean, she's tough enough. Still, I can't imagine her holding a pistol, while telling

everyone to get on the ground. I shake off the thought because it's too imaginary. The woman who did this is hiding away, no doubt.

She's not stupid. Hence, the reason why she split up from the men. She knew there was something weird going on between them. The one constant in all of this is the lack of loyalty. Well, that's how criminals tend to behave. It's a selfish sport, really. And when the going gets tough, we see friends selling each other out all of the time. It's pathetic.

I get to the station in a hurry. I want this plea deal done and signed. He's got 24 hours left on it, but I want him to know the consequences. This is a big fucking decision, alright.

“He's still mulling everything over,” Adam says, looking concerned. “He keeps saying he needs a lawyer. It never ends with this guy.”

“A lawyer? Is he completely ignorant? The man robbed two banks and got caught red handed, with the cash in his hands. There's no way a lawyer is

going to get him less time,” I tell him.

“He says his family’s got money. Says they have a family lawyer ready,” he tells me.

“Shit,” I sigh, eying the coffee in the corner of the room. I walk over and pour myself a cup and think for a second. I need to wake up before I make any decisions. “Well, does his story check out? Who’s his family?”

Adam frowns. “You know the Olington’s?” he asks me.

“The tire people? Olington *fucking* tires?” I nearly spit out my coffee.

“They do everything auto-related now,” Adam informs me.

“Yeah, big fucking deal. They’ve got a small franchise,” I say. “So what?”

“His direct family owns the company,” he says. “They’ve got a pretty damn good defense team over there.”

“And they’re used to handling cases like these?” I ask. “Give me a fucking break.”

He shrugs. “They’re used to the court circuit. They’ve got a lot of friends in this town. You know how far a couple of friends can get you in this city,” he says. “I wouldn’t shrug any of this off. It’s not sounding too good.”

“A bank robber!” I scream, slamming my coffee mug against the wall. It shatters and coffee splatters across the paint. Everyone is staring at me. “A fucking bank robber! This is ludicrous. This is...”

“Calm down, sir,” Adam says. Then, he lowers his voice and brings me over to the opposite corner of the room, waving at everyone to let everybody know that everything is okay. “Between you and me, the department is getting worried about you. They’re starting to say things.”

“What kind of things? I’ve been with this department before you even knew you wanted to be

a cop. How could they turn their backs on me?” I ask, with malice.

“I didn’t say I was saying anything,” he says. “I just wanted to let you know because I *am* on your side. I want you to handle this case, but you can’t be having anymore outbursts like that or people are going to say some shit.”

“Alright. Point taken,” I calm myself down. “What do you think we should do?”

“We keep pressuring him. We start to ask deeper questions,” he says.

“Alright. Well, I’m going in,” I tell him, walking ahead. I open the door and Adam follows me in, sighing loudly.

“Good morning, Elroy,” I say. “How’s our favorite guy at the station doing today?”

“I’m not talking to you.” He’s defiant already. I nearly turn red.

“I hear you, man. I heard you had a change of

heart,” I say. “But I need to ask you. Why?”

“Because I’m no fool. I know who I am. I know what I’m worth. And that’s the biggest weapon I have right now. Knowing that I can get out without ratting out my friends can at least help me sleep at night,” he says.

“That’s admirable. Real admirable,” I laugh. “It doesn’t change the fact that we have you on tape admitting guilt to a federal crime. You can’t escape that, brother. I’m sorry. You’re going to prison.”

“I’ll take my chances,” he says, crossing his arms.

He’s called our bluff, which is highly unusual. Usually, a criminal plays his role well. He knows he’s been caught and he takes the damn deal. But this guy has a small amount of power in this town, and in small towns, that means a lot. I need to start asking more poignant questions. I need to get the rest of the people involved. Once they’re all here, they’ll surely turn on each other.

“Where’s the girl?” I ask him, straight up with no

games attached. “Where is she?”

“Who said there was a girl? No girl can rob a bank, man,” he says.

“We chased down a female on a motorcycle,” Adam says. “We know that there’s one male and one female. Don’t bullshit us on that, Elroy.”

“Alright, there’s a woman. Fine. I won’t say anything about that, except for the fact that she’s smart. She’s already outsmarted all of you fools,” he says.

This hits me. I don’t know why, but it does. It means that she’s up to something big. I’m just not sure what that big thing is yet. “Outsmarted us? How?” I ask him.

“I ain’t saying shit, man,” he smiles.

“What the fuck are you saying, Elroy?” I ask again. “How is she outsmarting us? Where did she go? What is she up to?”

“*Fuck* you.” He spits with full force at my face.

Of course, I fucking lose it. I dive across the table, in an attempt to choke him out. Adam has to come in and defend me, while also defending that criminal. It's all fucking messy and at the end of it, the whole squadron rushes in to break up the fight.

The captain walks in, no sooner than two seconds after, and screams, "Marshall! You're off the case. Get the hell out of this interrogation room and collect your things."

"Sir, he attacked me," I say. "He spit directly at me. You saw him."

"Suspension. Three days. Get your things, Marshall. Did you fucking hear me?" he says, all in front of the criminal.

"Get your things, Marshall," Elroy laughs.

I make one last struggle to get the guy, but it's no use. They've got me held fucking down.

"Alright," I say. "Let me go. I'm getting my shit and going home."

The whole thing makes me sick.

MARSHALL

Ever since I met that woman, my life has gone to shit. It's like she's put a curse on me and is enjoying watching me fall. I'm hopeless, but this bottle of whiskey helps me deal with all of the bullshit that's been flung in my direction. Fuck it all, I keep thinking.

And then my phone rings. I glance down and I see her name. "Virginia." Vi. God dammit. I answer the phone and mutter, "What do you want?" I'm bitter.

I'm an asshole and the world should hate me. I'm going to make them hate me.

"I'm just calling to check in on you," she says. Her voice is soft and sweet. She sounds... *nice*.

"Why you doing that?" I ask. "I thought you hated me."

"Marshall, I don't hate you at all," she says. "I just needed some space the other day."

"Fine," I groan.

"Anyway, I heard on the radio the other day that you got suspended," she says. "What happened? Are you okay?"

"I don't know," I mumble. "I guess we don't have as much on the suspect as I thought."

"Uh, didn't you catch him in the act of fleeing? Isn't that enough?" she asks. I smile. My girl.

"You'd think," I laugh. "But turns out his family has some clout in this town. Wealthy. They most likely

donated to the mayor's campaign too. Anyway, he won't take the deal. He won't reveal anything about anyone. He's lawyering up."

"Do you need anything?" she asks.

Yeah. I need you. I need you to be here with me. I need to wrap my hands around that waist of yours and I need to kiss your sweet lips. I need to feel myself slip inside of you. I need to hear your heavy breathing as we move in oceanic rhythm. I need you now.

"Want to come over? I could use some company," I say.

"I'll be over in a half hour," she says. "Stay put."
My Vi.

She arrives at my doorstep in less than fifteen minutes and, boy, am I drunk. I open the door and she looks at me for a good 15 seconds before saying anything. Then, she bursts out laughing. "Are you joking, Marshall?"

“Does it look like I’m joking?” I ask her, smiling a little. “Come on in, darling.”

“Oh God, I could smell the whiskey from a mile away,” she says, walking inside. “Well, if you’re going to open your door this drunk, at least offer me a glass.”

“No glasses here. Only bottles,” I say. “Tonight, we drink as if our sorrows depend upon it.”

“But it’s just 4pm,” she smiles.

“It’ll be night soon enough, my dear.” I grab the bottle and hand it to her. We both mechanically make our way to the couch and I sprawl myself out. To my surprise and delight, she lays across my lap and wraps her arms around me.

“I’m sorry,” she says. “I know you’re going through a lot.”

“Eh, it’s fine,” I say. “I know I can be a little hard to handle sometimes. I’m kind of a prick.”

“You’re learning,” she laughs.

“The thing I don’t understand is what he said to me,” I tell her. “He told us the woman involved has already begun manipulating us. I just don’t get it.”

“He said that?” her eyes widen. “I wonder what he meant by that.”

“I can’t get it out of my damn head,” I say. “It’s driving me crazy.”

“Well, try and calm down. Here, let me help you,” she says. She runs her hands across my shoulders and squeezes gently. “You’re working too damn hard, Marshall. You need to take breaks every now and then.”

She’s right. I *am* working too hard. I always have overworked myself and now it’s starting to wear on me. This job is too much with too little pay. What’s going to happen if I take those bandits down anyway? Nothing. Nothing at all. Will I get a bonus? Fuck no. Maybe a promotion. *Maybe*. I’ve done better in my years and they barely gave me a thank you. No, in this business they give you a

standing ovation and a pat on the back. Then they tell you to get back out there and keep at it. It's all fine and dandy until you realize you're older with nothing to show for it.

I exhale all my problems and close my eyes. She runs her hands across my abs and I start to relax. Still, I can't get what's been bugging me out of my mind. I just can't wrap my head around things. "Who is this woman?" I ask her as if she has all the answers. Of course, she has no idea. She's more clueless on this thing than I am. "What is she up to?"

Her hands get tense. "I wish I could help you," she kisses my cheek and holds her lips there, breathing lightly. I feel my cock start to rise. I need her. Fuck, I need her.

"You can help me," I say.

"How?" she asks, even if she already knows the answer. "What can I do for you?"

"Help me open up," I say, opening my eyes again.

“I want to feel close to you again.”

She climbs over me slowly until her ass is directly over me. She’s wearing a short silky dress and the view I have is *perfect*. Suddenly, I forget all of my troubles. They all wash the hell away. “There’s my girl,” I kiss her thigh and run my hand up her dress.

She gives a hushed moan and bites her lip. She grabs my cock lightly and I feel her saliva fall across the tip. “Fuck,” I whisper. “I’ve missed your touch.”

“Yeah, baby? Did you miss this?” she asks, swirling her tongue around the base like it’s a lollipop.

“Yes, ma’am.” My eyes widen and my breath quickens. I kiss the curve of her thigh. I keep kissing until I can’t hold back any longer. When I feel her mouth open around my shaft, I suck on the edges of her lips. I lick up, meeting her clit, and I feel as she starts to let go.

“You’re all I need,” I whisper, pushing myself

deeper inside her. I feel the back of her throat grow wetter as she holds it open. “My dirty, filthy woman.”

“I like it when you call me that,” she whispers, pushing her body off of mine. She walks over to my wall and puts two hands firmly across the center. “Now, show this dirty girl how you fuck.”

I quickly take the rest of my clothing. It only takes one small movement on her part to be fully naked in front of me. She’s a goddess. Thick, beautiful, with enough curves to leave me satisfied. I reach out and grab a fistful of her ass. My cock won’t stop growing. She reaches behind her and takes it in her hand.

“My God,” she says, excited and surprised.

“Miss it?” I ask her.

“I dream about this dick, Marshall,” she says. She knows exactly what I want to hear.

She puts the tip against her lips. I wrap my leather

belt around her waist and close it in tight. I hold the end of the belt and push myself in deep. “Ohhhh shit,” she moans. Her cheek hits the wall and she gulps in a giant breath of satisfied air. I pull back on the belt and manage to push in deeper.

I feel the wall of her pussy close in around me. I’m soon enclosed by the purest feeling known to man. People go to war over this shit. People die over pussy like this. Somehow, I have her. Somehow, she’s mine. The craziest part about this is that I might not be able to let her go. I might need to make her mine forever.

I pull out and press my cheek against hers. I whisper, “Beg for it. Beg for this cock.”

“Please, Marshall,” she pleads. “Give me that cock. You know how much I need it.”

I keep a firm hold around the belt and tighten it further. “You’re not going anywhere until I cum. Got it?” She nods immediately. I slide myself back in and notice that she’s much wetter than before. In

fact, she's fucking dripping all over me. I reach down and move two wet fingers over her clit. I begin to pound her, holding on to the belt with my free hand.

“Yes!” she screams. “Harder!”

I love a girl who can take the heat. A man like me needs a wild woman and Virginia is *the* definition of wild. I keep holding on tight and, as I fuck her harder, I feel her push her ass back in time with each of my thrusts. I can barely hold back. She's going to make me fucking cum.

I immediately pull out and let go of the belt. “Get on the bed,” I say, motioning behind me.

She falls flat on her back. “Now, play with yourself,” I tell her, stroking my cock. “I want to watch you.”

I spit on her pussy and watch as she slides two fingers inside, spreading her lips apart. I'm obsessed with her body. I'm perverted to the core because of her, and I don't give a damn. I lust after

her, but more than that, I'm obsessed with her. She's all I can think about at the station. Even when I'm interrogating Elroy, I can't get my mind off her. I don't care if this all somehow ends in flames. I know that I needed to meet this woman because she's already changed who I am. Now, my life is profoundly different.

"I'm cumming," she whispers. "Marshall, fuck me. I'm cumming." She begins to shake. She looks at me right in the eyes and my heart breaks into a million fucking pieces. God damn, she's beautiful, more beautiful than I've ever noticed before. In this vulnerable state, I just want to give her everything, as odd as that sounds.

So I do. I give her all that I've got. I slide my body over hers and wrap my arms around her back. I kiss every curve on her collarbone and mount her like there's no tomorrow. I thrust forward and already feel myself letting go.

"I love you," I say. I don't plan to say it. It just comes out on its own. The way her skin is

glistening against the light of my bedroom, and the way her eyes widen with passion, it just confirms it for me. I might in fact love this woman and maybe it's time I admit it to myself. "Fuck."

I lose it. Everything starts to vibrate inside of me and suddenly, the pleasure intensifies. I can't get away from it. I start to cum and she pulls me in close. "I love you too, Marshall," she whispers. Everything starts to look so clear. And when we're both away from the orgasm, everything starts to make more sense.

Our lips crash together and we roll across the bed, laughing together. "What're we doing?" she asks.

"We're living," I say. "Finally, I'm living."

VIRGINIA

I can't believe myself. I said it. I said the three doomed words. *Ugh*. Then again, it's not *that* hard to believe I did another stupid thing, digging the knife in deeper. The question keeps lingering in the back of my mind: do I love him? I mean, really, do I?

I don't think I've ever been in love before. At least, not how it should be. The last time I said that was back in high school. I told my boyfriend that I

loved him, but really, I just wanted someone to be there for me. For once, I wanted someone to protect me.

He did protect me, actually. He was always there for me. But emotions always quickly reveal themselves and we drifted apart not too long after. Now, I'm an adult and you'd think that I would have learned from all my experiences. The thing they don't tell you about is that you're always learning, always trying to figure out how to make the right move.

Do you ever fuck up? Constantly. That's just life. But they don't tell you that when you're younger. They make it seem like you'll have figured *everything* out by the age of 30. I guess I still have some time to go on that front, right?

The truth is, I'm happy with Marshall. The harsh side of that is knowing it won't last. If he doesn't bring me down, I'll have to drift away, this time on a boat to the other side of the big blue sea. I'll take on a new name, learn a new language, start my own

business, and I'll never see him again.

I've thought it all out. When I'm in my 40's, I can write to him again. I can tell him who I really was and why I couldn't let him into my life. I wonder if he'd understand? Now that he's in love with me, would he stay by my side if he knew who I really was? What does it take for someone to truly understand something like this?

"Don't go into work today," I tell him. "Let's just have the day together. We can get breakfast and coffee. Oh! We could ride your motorcycle to a movie theater and see something. I haven't seen a movie in so long."

He smiles and runs his hands in my hair. He's got this look in his eyes, as if he's been doing drugs or something. "God, you're gorgeous," he says, with a sly smile. "Just so fucking beautiful."

"Come on, Marshall!" My heart is full. It feels good to be looked at like this. He actually likes me. He's not just using me for something. "Let's do

something, dammit!”

“Anything you want, babe,” he says. “I’m suspended, remember? Today’s my vacation from the department.”

“So you’re going to take me to a movie? And breakfast? We’re going to have a day together? A *real* day together?” I ask him, biting my lip with excitement. He grabs my waist and tickles me, and I scream loud, laughing. “Stop! Stop!” I yell, falling against him.

He stops and we’re both laughing. Soon, he’s holding me tight, like he never is going to let go. We both feel so free now that we’ve told each other how we feel. It’s like we’ve both had all this emotion pent up for decades and we’ve finally been allowed to let it all go.

“Yes,” he says. “Breakfast. Coffee. A movie. Anything. You name it, honestly. I just feel blessed I get to be next to you right now,” he says. “I’m really not worthy.”

“Trust me,” I say, glancing down at the mattress. “I’m the one who’s not worthy.”

I gulp down and he can see that I’m a little sad. He kisses the top of my head and breathes in. “Why do you keep saying stuff like that?” he finally asks. “You haven’t done anything to warrant that kind of outlook.”

“I don’t know,” I lie. “I guess I just feel that way sometimes, like I’m not good enough, you know?”

“I understand,” he says, but he really doesn’t. He has no idea. He’s made some pretty good choices, overall. All of my life choices have been utter shit.

“Shit, who am I kidding,” he chuckles. “I don’t understand at all. You’re the most beautiful, complex, and eye-opening human being I’ve ever met. Usually people as great as you get down a lot. It’s like part of being a genius I guess.”

“A genius?” I stare at him. A small smile is forcing its way across my face. Dammit, he’s making me feel good again, like he always does. “I think you

got the wrong girl, partner.”

“Nah, you’re a genius, alright. You can see them from a mile away,” he says. “I’m just lucky to be dumb enough to bump into you at a bar.”

“I think you’re a genius too,” I say. “How else are you so good at catching criminals?”

He starts laughing. I feel his fingers trail across my body until they stop, enclosing around mine. “I’m the equivalent of a fisherman. That’s all, really,” he says. “I wait. I throw some bait out in the water. And I hope to God that I get a nibble. Anyone could do it. You just have to be able to handle getting shot every now and then.”

“You’ve gotten shot?” I say with surprise.

“Ha, yeah. Nothing special,” he says, beginning to stand up. “Take a close look at my ass and my thigh.”

“Oh my God,” I can’t help but laugh. I look at his butt and there it is, a big old scar on his right

cheek. There's one a bit lower as well. "You got shot in the ass?!"

"An unlucky shot," he says.

"Or lucky. At least it wasn't in the gut," I say.

"Yeah, but then I'd have something to brag about at least," he winks. "Nah, I'm pretty lucky. You're right."

"Well, even if you're not Einstein, you're still my hero," I blush.

I quickly kiss his cheek and smile. I'm feeling so many things for this man that it's starting to scare me now. I just want to dive into it. For once, I don't want to have to think. So, for now, I won't allow myself to. I'll just go with it. And if it all explodes, taking me down, so be it. That's the life I've chosen.



"MAN, I loved it," he says, still eating from the

popcorn bag. “I just can’t believe that ending.”

“You were crying, Marshall. I saw it,” I laugh. “Don’t try to deny it.”

“I didn’t cry,” he blushes. “I got butter in my damn eye. I swear.”

“You cried! There were tears rolling down those cheeks,” I say. I have my arms around him as we walk. The smell of his cologne is so tantalizing. It smells like, well, love. Everything I imagined love to be, anyway. Movies, cologne, popcorn, the feeling of excitement that resonates from the pit of my stomach. It all feels so perfect right now. Like, maybe I wouldn’t have to go to Europe to start a new life. Maybe I could start a new life right here, with him.

There’s a sense of nostalgia attached to this. I haven’t been to the mall in forever, let alone seen a movie. I could never really afford it. However, when I was younger, it was like a ritual for my friends and I. I thought I’d never get to experience

things like this again. I always just figured that it was for one time in my life only. But that's what love does I guess. It brings you back to the basics, while opening you up to even newer memories. It's the best feeling I've ever felt, and that's what scares me the most.

"Alright, dammit. I cried!" he laughs. "I cried so damn hard."

"I knew it!" I scream with laughter. "I caught you."

He kisses me. "Why did Derrick have to leave Jessica!? It was so stupid and selfish," he says.

"But they fixed things," I giggle.

"Oh man, that hit hard. When he stood under her window for three days, soaking wet from the winter rain... *that* killed me, man," he says. "There's not a love more pure."

"You're such a softie," I say. I feel like a regular girl right now. I feel normal. All my life, I've stood on the outside. But right now, everything is perfect.

With Marshall, I'm on top of the world.

"I guess I am," he admits. But the truth always has a way of rearing its ugly head back in. "God, I don't want to have to go into the station tomorrow. The kid's not talking and the whole thing just makes me go crazy."

We get on the bike and he starts the engine. "Please don't bring that up, right now," I beg him. "It's just us tonight, remember?"

"Sorry," he says, but it's in this absent way that lets me know he's still thinking about it. Deep down, he's not a softie. He's a cop. He will always be a cop. What do cops do? They put their wives through hell because the job is their life.

We take off back to his house, but I'm already planning on going home. I can't take another night of suspense, or of feeling like he might suddenly come to the conclusion that I'm the girl he's looking for. It's just too much on my mind and body.

Oddly enough, when we get back and I tell him I have to go, he doesn't put up a fight. Instead, he just says, "Okay, darlin'," as if he already assumed I would leave in the first place. No, it's like he wants me gone. He wants to mull over this damn case so badly, that it actually makes me want to stay. No doubt, he's going to be scouring the internet for anything related to a woman bank robber in this county. I don't know how great his detective skills are, but if he throws the right bait, I'm fucked.

Tonight was the best night of my life. Sometimes, you just have to leave it at that and move on.

MARSHALL

“No celebrations, everyone,” I say, as I walk through the door. Still, my buddies at the station are all clapping. Odd, since they were the ones who were “worried about” me. I’ll keep in mind how fickle my relationships are down here. “I’m here to do my job. Adam, update me.”

“He’s not talking,” he says. “He says he wants to talk to you.”

“To me?” I laugh. “Why would he want to talk to

me. He spit in my face, remember?”

“Hell if I know,” he shakes his head. “But he wants to talk to you. His lawyer is here. He keeps advising him against it. Our first court hearing is tomorrow. We better act fast before he gets bail.”

“He won’t get bail. I’ll make sure of it,” I say. “Alright, I’m going to go talk to the kid. Wish me luck.”

“Don’t do anything stupid,” he says. I ignore him. This whole thing has been stupid.

I walk through the door and sit down, facing him. He smiles. “You wanted to talk to me?” I ask him.

“I figured you’d want to talk to *me*. You know, after everything went down the other day,” he says. His lawyer next to him is an unkempt man, but he’s well known around here as Lenny Krunnman. He’s a damn good lawyer.

“I have nothing to say. At this point, I’ve come to terms with the fact that I won’t be getting any more

answers out of you,” I admit. “So be it. That’s the way things gotta be sometimes.”

“And the girl involved? You don’t want to know anything about her?” he asks. His lawyer advises him against it, whispering in his ear, but he ignores him. I’m starting to feel like I might get something from him and that pleases me.

“I don’t care,” I lie. “Look, I told you. We’re going to prosecute and accept the judge’s decision.”

“I loved her, you know,” he ignores me. “That’s why I did this. I thought we’d run away together. To Europe. Thought we’d start a family. I guess that’s all finished now.”

“I guess so,” I say.

“That’s all you have to say? You know, she’s beautiful. She could blend in real well in this town. No one would suspect her,” he says.

I nod. “But you, they’d suspect,” I say. “You’re an obvious choice.”

“Hell yeah, I am. You look at me and you know what class they’ve put me in,” he says. “But you look at her, and you have no idea. She could have gone to fucking Harvard. That’s how captivating she is.”

His lawyer turns red and looks completely stressed out. “I would advise you to—”

“Shut up,” he says. “I’m saying something.”

“Go on,” I urge him. “You’re not saying much.”

“I’m saying more than you know,” he smiles. “If anyone will win this, it’ll be her. If she met you, you’d never know. She’d make sure of that. But Craig. You’ll have to search for Craig.”

It’s like he’s rung the fucking bell. “Craig?” I lean forward. “Who’s Craig? The other guy?”

“Craig Richardson. The motherfucker who left without me.” He just goes on and on, giving me a pile of gold. “He would have left her too, but she’s too smart. She took the third option, a safer route.”

“We’ll have to end this conversation now,” Lenny Krunnman says, completely outraged by his client.

I smile and give an arrogant wink, enough to piss off the guy. “Yes. I believe we do.”

I leave the room and everyone in the station is dumbstruck. I smile to myself and soon, I’m wondering where the damn champagne is. Still, there’s more to be done. We have to find the guy before any celebrating can happen.

I look at the team and throw my hands up in the air. “Well, get to work, guys. Let’s find him,” I tell them. They hurriedly get into their positions. Some leave the station to patrol and scour the streets, while others get on the computers and look through databases. Adam, however, is standing in front of me with his arms crossed, looking sour.

“You win again,” he says.

I shrug. “I’m just lucky. You know the guy who’s never played roulette before, but wins on his first try? That’s me,” I say.

“Whatever,” he huffs. “Look, man. We have to talk about what just happened in there.”

“What about it? Seems to me we just got ourselves a second suspect,” I laugh. We really won. Or, at least, we’re winning more than we were. This will be breaking news, once we find the guy. There shouldn’t be any doubts about that.

“Right. Well, he dropped a big bombshell in there, don’t you think?” he asks me. I’m not catching his drift.

“What about the girl?” he asks. “He said she’s smart. He said she would’ve outsmarted you right from the get go. What the hell does any of that mean?”

“Son, I’ve been asking myself the same fucking question for at least three days now. I don’t know,” I admit. “I wish I did.”

“That girl,” he says. “The one who was at your place on the night it happened...”

“What are you getting at?” I ask him. He’s crazy. Her? No fucking way.

“You don’t think she could have been involved in any way?” he asks. “I’m thinking we need to bring her in. Shit, we should bring in any woman you’ve been with in the past month or two.”

“You’re out of your damn mind,” I say. “The line would be out the door and around the block.”

“I’m not crazy,” he says. “I’m observant. Sometimes I’m wrong, I’ll admit. But this time, I feel pretty certain about it.”

“That’s what you said about the bank job,” I groan. “Look, man. Why don’t you stay in your area of expertise? Let’s find this guy and question him. Then, we’ll worry about which woman I’ve been with and when. Cool?”

“Whatever you say, boss,” is his passive response. He’s not happy, of course, but I’m not about to go and violate these women’s privacy. Plus, no one knows about my Vi. No one needs to. As far as I’m

concerned, she's not a suspect.

Virginia? A bank robber? Hell no. She's quickly becoming the love of my life. There's no way I'm going to let anyone ruin that. I'll die protecting her if I have to.

VIRGINIA

I wake up the next day to my radio, blaring by my bed. Normally, I hit the snooze button, but this time I'm forced to listen as I hear a female reporter say the words, "New suspect confirmed. Craig Richardson, a 27-year-old man from Texas, is now confirmed as the second of three bank robbers. Known for their cunning..."

I jump out of bed and turn the radio up. "Holy shit," I mumble. No. This can't be. It can't be true!

“Yesterday, Elroy Rodriguez dropped a bombshell on detectives at the local precinct. He has now been confirmed to have given the name to Officer Warren Marshall, known for his sharp interrogation skills and nearly perfect record,” the reporter says. “When questioned outside of the station, Marshall denied such statements, only saying, ‘I don’t know where you heard this rumor, but they are only rumors. Whatever has been said in that room is for our ears only right now. We are trying to build a case. It is currently in the public’s interest to stay out of it.’ You’ve heard it here first, only on 583 AM...”

I turn it off and stare blankly at my wall. Suddenly, it feels like my apartment is paper-thin. It feels like it’s closing in on me. I don’t know what to do. Do I flee to Europe on my own? Maybe I can find a cargo ship that I can sneak onto at night. But in Texas? In the middle of the fucking desert? No, that’s not going to happen.

I wrack my brain, trying to find out what the right move is. I have no answers. I only have questions.

What exactly did Elroy say? What do they know? The reporter received this information by a local officer, no doubt. That's how they find out about these things. They were tipped off.

I'm in shock. Total shock. I don't understand how or why Elroy betrayed us. My guess is that the situation is weighing on him. That, or he wants to be some sort of hero. He realized that he's caught. The media is going to vilify him for what he's done. Maybe this was his way of fixing his image.

Not too long after, I get a call on my new burner phone. The number isn't listed. After four rings, I answer it, completely terrified. I don't speak when I press the green button. I just listen.

"Hey, it's me," Craig's voice says into the receiver.

I exhale slowly. I feel so fucking dizzy and confused. I just want to be with Marshall. I want to be in his arms. I want to feel as good as I felt the other night. How did life get so out of hand?

“Hey,” I whisper. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” he sighs. “As okay as I can be. You heard the news, I’m guessing. Things are fucked right now. I don’t know what to do.”

That’s a first for Craig. Usually, he’s got all of the answers. He’s normally so confident in his abilities, but now he’s lost that edge to his voice. He sounds really scared.

“Yeah, I just heard on the radio. I can’t believe he did it,” I say, still in total disbelief. Maybe I’m dreaming. I can pinch myself and I’ll wake up. Of course, this is no dream. This is the harsh reality we chose. We fucked up.

“I can. I knew he’d do it. That’s why I am where I am right now. They can’t find me over here,” he says. “Anyway, it’s my fault. I freaked out during the last hit.”

“I know,” I say. “I saw you. You panicked. Everything was going so smoothly. Why’d you do it?”

“We were taking too long. I had to leave you guys. I *had* to. Ten more seconds yelling at the damn woman at the front and we’d have all been fucked,” he defends himself. “I thought I could create a diversion. I was wrong.”

“Bullshit,” I hiss. “You were always in this for the wrong reasons. You were being selfish and you know it. Admit it.”

“Selfish? You mean like you meeting with Marshall? What the fuck was that all about?” he asks. But he doesn’t let me answer. He just continues his long-winded rant. “Can you really blame me for leaving you two? I was freaked out, man. I thought you had set up a trap for us. Why else would you be talking with a cop?”

“I was getting answers for us, you idiot!” I scream, losing my cool. I can’t take this anymore. I can’t take being in a conspiracy with these guys. I just want to be alone. No, I want to be with Marshall. Fuck, I hate this so much. I’m blaming myself every second of every day. *I’m* the idiot.

“You were too busy sucking his dick,” he says with all the spite he has left.

“Fuck you,” I say. “You don’t know my motives. He was way off base. We were going to get away with it. They had no idea what our plan was and he was giving me all the information he could give. It was the perfect crime and you ruined it. Fuck, Elroy ruined it too. He didn’t have to talk. Marshall said the state had a shit case on him. That all just went out the fucking window.”

“We all ruined it,” he says, calming down. “We were all so naïve. Like little children. We shouldn’t have done this, but we were dreamers, right? We thought we could escape a rigged system. We thought we could make a better life, somewhere far away from this hellhole.”

“Yeah... well, now what do we do? Is there any way out of this? Let’s find a cargo boat on our own. We’ll hire a driver to the sea. It’s not that far to Louisiana. We can do it,” I say. I’m practically begging at this point. There are no more options,

other than to run out the clock and get caught. We're done for.

“My face is plastered on every single TV screen in America. The feds are after us now. There's no doubt about that. You know it's true too. Soon enough, they'll contact the department down here and take over the case. Your Marshall will have no idea what's going on anymore and you'll be in the dark,” he says. “And then, when you least suspect it, your image will be on that television screen. They'll bring you in for questioning and you'll be over and done with. We're in this together. We have been since day one.”

“Don't say that. Please don't say that,” I cry. I feel the tears falling down my face. They hit the carpet below me, making a dull tapping noise. My throat starts to close and I just break down. I weep.

Craig starts to cry too. He's never cried in front of me. He's too “manly” for that. But now I see that this has really affected him, maybe more than me. It all seems so hopeless now.

“I’m sorry,” he cries. “But you know it’s the fucking truth. We never stood a chance out there. They never gave us a fair shot, so we *had* to fight back. We *had* to!”

“Don’t give up now, Craig. You can’t give up now. Stay where you are. Stay in hiding. Get food and water when you have to, but stay in hiding, God dammit. I beg of you,” I say.

“There’s nothing else I can do,” he says, now calm. “My time is up.”

He hangs up the phone, but I’m screaming, “Craig! Craig, no! Please!”

There’s no response on the other line. He’s giving up. I feel broken. I’m shattered to pieces.

MARSHALL

*G*lance at the piece of fabric on my dresser. I can't get it out of my mind. Was that piece of pantyhose left there as a distraction for me? If it was, it's confusing, to say the least. If not, it's the smoking gun. It's my answer to finding this woman.

I pick it up and stretch the fabric out, looking at it in the light. It, of course, doesn't give me any concrete answers. It's just a piece of fucking fabric. Worst of all, I should have turned it in when

I found it. But I don't play by the rules. That's how I win. I work the cases in my own way. Up until now, I've never had any trouble doing so.

Now, I'm fucked because there's probably DNA evidence all over this small piece of pantyhose. It holds the key to the whole damn thing. I sigh and put it back down. All of this makes me exhausted. I even think back to what Adam said, even though it's bat-shit crazy.

All of those women I fooled around with... is one of them responsible for this? Shit, is Virginia responsible for this? What if she is and I've just been in the dark this whole time? It would break my fucking heart. I'd go completely insane. The only woman that I've ever bared my soul to is the woman I've been hunting down recently?

No fucking way. I can't believe it. I *won't* believe it. Yet, the fucking thought persists in my stupid head. Why? There's not a shred of evidence that she's involved. In this line of work, we *need* evidence. We need truth. This can't be true. I'll lay

down my badge before I believe it.

I hear a knock at my door, which is curious. No one comes over here, except for Adam. And I know he's back at home, thinking about the case. I open the door and I see Virginia, staring at me. She's holding flowers and a bottle of Singleton whiskey. "Happy birthday, officer," she says, smiling.

"Birthday?" I laugh, letting her inside. "It ain't my birthday, sweetheart."

She just shrugs and kisses me. "So what? I thought we could celebrate. You're about to finish this case," she says confidently. No, she couldn't be involved in this. She wouldn't be this chipper about things. "You're going to get promoted, right?"

"Shit," I sigh. "So you heard the news, I guess? That wasn't supposed to get out."

"What does it matter if it does?" she asks. "I never understood why cops get pissed when things like

that leak out. You got the guy. He's done for. Congratulations.”

“It pisses us off.” I open the whiskey and smell the flowers. “Because we haven't actually caught the fool yet. Now he knows we're onto him. It makes it that much harder to catch him.”

“You'll find him.” She ignores me. “There's no way he's hiding out forever. A guy gets hungry. He gets thirsty and wants a drink. He'll wander from his hole and someone will recognize him. And then you can get your promotion.”

“Well, you're probably right about the first thing. But there won't be any promotions for me. The department hasn't got shit for money. It'll be another 20 years until a guy like me is promoted,” I say. It's the cold, hard truth.

“Anyway,” I continue. “You came at the wrong time. The media is having a frenzy on this case right now, but they have no idea about the real story. The fucking FBI wants in the case now. They

claim we've done a poor job on it. Now, they're coming to investigate our claims. I'm fucked, Vi. I shouldn't have taken any of this on. I should've given all the responsibility to my partner."

She just hugs me, as pure as she is. "Everything will work out for you," she says. "Trust me like I trust you."

But I can't. I have no trust anymore. All of that has been stolen from me and it's no fault but my own. I've put myself in an awkward position by not reporting everything I know. Now, I'm pretty certain I'm going in the trash. I'll lose my job by the end of the year if the federal agents have anything to do about it.

"Okay," I say out of courtesy. "Sure. We can get through this."

She kisses my chest and rests her cheek against me. Suddenly, none of this matters, I'm transported into reality. Sometimes you forget what really matters in this life, and then it hits you right in the face.

This is one of those moments. I tend to have a lot of those lately.

“You know, I’m still thinking about that woman,” I admit. “Not like obsessively, so don’t worry. Adam’s just got me all freaked out.”

“How?” she says, absentmindedly.

“I don’t know,” I sigh. “He told me I should really look into all of the women I’ve been with in the past few months. Kind of takes the fun away from it all, you know? I mean, it’s a violation of their privacy. Not all of the encounters ended on good terms either.

I keep looking at her, wondering if it’s true. Is she the woman I’m looking for? I glance at my dresser and see the pantyhose just lying there. I look back at her legs. They’re covered by pantyhose tonight, but they’re a different type of pattern. *Stop it, Marshall. You’re going fucking crazy over this. She’s not the one.*

“That Adam guy doesn’t seem to lead you

anywhere productive,” she laughs.

“He’s got a good heart,” I say. “But you’re right. He doesn’t have an amazing track record. Not yet, anyway.”

Her hand falls on my chest and she kisses me, taking off my shirt. “You’ll find her,” she says. “You’re strong. You’re powerful. You have the world in your hands and you don’t even know it.”

She gets me fucking hard. So hard that I flip her over and bend her over on that couch. She screams with laughter that turns into a deep moaning. “Marshall,” she whispers. “You don’t seem so worried anymore.”

“I want to block it out with that ass of yours, baby,” I say, completely enthralled with her. If she *is* the one, I’ll have to throw the damn case out. I’ll have to...

I don’t finish the thought. Fuck even thinking about that stuff right now. It’s not worth my time. I unzip my jeans and my cock comes springing out on its

own. There's no time to take my clothes off. I simply push her little dress over her butt and pull her panties down, enough for me to slide myself in.

She's already moaning for me. When I reach my hand under her lips, I feel her wetness spread across my palm. "I'm going to fuck you *hard*," I tell her. I've got a powerful feeling in my chest and I need her to lift up my spirits.

I aim my cock at her and slide myself in between her warm lips. I'm enveloped by the best goddamn feeling in the world. And then there's a heavy knock on my door. "Nooooo," I groan. "Who the hell is that?"

"Don't stop," she moans, grabbing my thighs and pushing me forward. "Ignore it."

But I can't, despite how good she feels. I pull myself back and slick my hair back, putting my cock away. My balls are aching like heavy weights. "I swear to God, if it's Adam, I'm going to kill him. I'm straight up going to take my pistol

and shoot him.”

“Marshall...” she sighs. “Stop. It’s fine.”

“It ain’t fine. It’s bullshit,” I say, swinging open the door.

Standing in front of me is Adam, of course. Only, he’s surrounded by a bunch of suited-up motherfuckers, and they look like they mean trouble. “Warren Marshall, I presume,” one of them says to me.

I glance over at Virginia, who quickly sits up straight and adjusts her dress. “Who’s asking?” I question him.

“I’m sorry to disturb you sir,” he continues. “The name is Freddie Macker. FBI. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you.”

Pleasure? In what fucking way? So now I’ve got a clear understanding on this. The feds have finally decided to move in on our case. What else is new? I look over at Adam who just has a simpleton

buggy-eyed look. I want to sock him in the face. Dammit, why does he always piss me off? The bastard never puts up any sort of fight.

“Can’t say I’ve been waiting to meet you folks,” I admit “What do you want with me and my case?”

“The case has now been combined with ours. We’re looking for Craig Richardson as well. We have some a good tip that he could be involved in a murder that happened over six years ago,” he says. “I’m sorry we have to move in on you like this. I used to be a cop myself. I hate to put another officer in this type of position. Forgive me.”

“You’re forgiven,” I mutter. *Sellout cop bastard.* Now I want to sock him in the face too. In fact, just let me sock everyone in front of me right now. “Just give me a second and I’ll meet you at the station in fifteen. Cool?”

“Actually, sir. We’ve got firm rules on this sort of thing. You’ll have to come with us. Safety reasons, of course,” he says.

Dammit. Looks like I'm going to have blue balls all night. "Sure. Got it," I say. "Well at least give me five minutes to explain the situation to my girlfriend here."

"Girlfriend?" Adam blurts out. What an idiot.

"No need," she says, getting up. Her whole face is red with embarrassment. I feel fucking terrible.

"Vi, I—"

"You don't need to explain anything. I get it. Your job. It's important." She's feisty as hell right now. I don't blame her. "See you tomorrow, maybe. That is, unless you're too busy at the station. Bye."

She walks out, pushing past the FBI agents. Freddie lowers his sunglasses and smiles at me. "She's one hell of a catch," he says. Adam laughs too.

"Yeah," I scratch my head. "She's worth it, alright."

"Let's hope," Adam says. That's when I do it. I

sock him right in the face. Down he goes.

VIRGINIA

“*A* rgh!” I scream into my pillow. “Murder? Murder!” Huge gasping breaths go into my lungs and my body is shaking so badly that I think I might have a stroke. The FBI is involved in this. Craig was right. He knew all along. Now, things are going to get insane. Did he really murder someone? Why didn’t any of us know? I guess that was before we met him...

It takes over twelve hours before I hear anything

from anyone. The phone rings and it's an unidentified line. Craig. I answer. "What do you want?" I ask him. "I guess you didn't take your life, did you?"

"How'd you know it was me?" he asks.

"Are you really shocked?" I say, trying not to scream. "Who else calls me?"

"Your daddy, Marshall," he laughs.

"Go fuck yourself. I know where you're hiding. I'm about to head right over to the feds and tell them," I lie. "You deserve to get caught. You deserve the harshest sentence possible. You lied to us. You convinced us that life would be easier after this. You're just another con man."

"Back the fuck up," he says. "The feds? They're involved now? I knew it."

"Yeah, congratulations. You guessed right. I guess you knew because of the *murder* you committed six years ago, right?" I ask. "I guess you really had to

get out of the country. You had to convince a couple of innocent people like us that you wanted to help, that you were a justice warrior.”

“Who told you that? Marshall? Are you with them now?” he asks.

“Maybe I am. If so, you’re done for,” I say, out of breath and ready for a fight. “It’s all so clear now. You used both of us so you could find safe harbor elsewhere.”

“I guess you have me all found out,” he chuckles. “Frankly, I figured you would have figured it out a *long* time ago. I was kind of freaking out when you first talked to Marshall. I thought you pegged me right then and there. Turns out, you’re not as smart as I thought.”

“Spare the mad-genius speech.” I roll my eyes. “I know where you are.”

“Where am I?” he laughs. “You don’t know shit.”

“I’m not an idiot. Remember that time we got shit-

faced at your place? Remember?” I ask him.

“I remember falling asleep. That’s about it,” he says. “What does that have to do with anything.”

“You showed me that picture. You told me about the hole,” I say. “The ditch out by the swamps. I saw the small cabin you built. You promised to take me there, right before you tried to kiss me and I denied your ass.”

“Stop talking,” he says. “Don’t say anything more. They could be listening.”

“Yeah they could,” I laugh. “Where was it again? By which freeway? Near Louisiana, right?”

“Shut the hell up!” he screams. I’ve cut a nerve. Of course he went there. It’s just so obvious. Even if they haven’t found him yet, they will soon enough. It’s not hidden enough. Cars drive by there all the time and the locals over there know every nook and cranny.

“I’m going fucking crazy,” he says, after breathing

heavy. "I don't know what to do. But whatever it is, I know these are my last days being free."

"You'll get out eventually," I tell him. "You won't be in there for life."

"I killed someone, dammit. I killed him," he starts to break down again, just like yesterday.

"Who?" I ask him. "Tell me."

"I was young. Just really young and angry. I don't know why I did it. I was drunk," he says. "I was coming home from a party and so was this kid who had been talking to my girlfriend all night. I was wasted, Virginia. I wasn't in control. He looked at me and smiled when we stopped at the same light. I didn't smile back. I felt like he was taunting me."

"Was he?" I ask him.

"I don't know. All I know is that when he did it again, something went off in me. It was like a quick switch. Everything went hot black. I grabbed my pistol and pointed it at him. My window was

down. I could feel the cold breeze reaching in the car, begging me to do it. I pressed the trigger down. His face... I saw his face turn, like he was going to vomit. It was like he was looking at the devil himself," he says, crying. "You'd be surprised how easy it is to pull a trigger. I had shot a gun once and it seemed much harder. But that night, it was really easy. It went off and the gun fell on my lap, hot and smoking. I glanced up and he still had that same look on his face. Only this time, he was slumped over. I sped off and no one said anything about it to me. No one. Not until... *you.*"

A chill runs up my spine. For the first time, I feel really scared of the guy. I've never cared much for morality, but there's a huge line you can cross. Anyone can tell you there are circumstances that surround any situation. Craig, however, has something dark in him. It's a shade of dark I never want to cross.

"So you're going to talk?" he asks me. I choke. "I figured you would."

“I don’t know,” I admit. “I just don’t want to be involved in this. I want my time back, the time before I agreed to any of this.”

“I never meant to use you,” he says. “But I needed to escape this hellhole and you were my ticket out of here. Anyway, it’s almost over now. Soon, we’ll all have a little closure.”

He hangs up the phone before I can even respond. “Fuck!” I hiss, stomping my heel against the ground.

I have to turn him in. I’m not the same person I used to be. I can’t just sit by and let him leave the country. He could hurt others. He killed someone out of sheer anger. I’ve never met anybody who’s done anything like that before. Marshall, a cop, hasn’t even killed a man.

Today is a day of thought. When Marshall calls, I don’t answer. Everything is hanging on a thin line and I have no idea what they’re planning over there, or what the FBI knows. Everything I do or

say can be used in a court of law, right? The best bet for me right now is to watch my tongue and form a plan. I'm going to turn Craig in. After that, I might have to turn *myself* in.

VIRGINIA

I know exactly where Craig is. The one catch is that turning him in could implicate me. At this point, it's pretty clear that Craig is losing it. He's been holed away for too many days out there. Out in the swamps, there's nothing that you can do. You just have to wait.

That's why he built the damn place. He wanted somewhere safe. Now, after he told me all the details of the murder, it makes sense. He built it

after everything went down. He knew how fragile he was. He knew this case wouldn't just go away. They never do. No one like him gets away with murder. Eventually, it all catches up to you. So he built the cabin. He found a way to hide.

Only, he told the girl he was going to use. He got sloppy drunk and spilled it all to me. I'm the wrench in his plans and if I don't turn him in now, he's going after me. At least, that's how I'm feeling. Paranoid much? Probably. But I can't take any chances now.

I take out my laptop, sliding my black leather gloves on. The same gloves I used in our heists. They've been cleaned and carefully put into my bag. Now, I'm using them one last time.

I take out my laptop and glance at the blank screen. I begin typing: I never wanted to be typing these words. I never thought I'd be in this position, stuck in the middle of two crimes. The first crime was a bit foolish, I'll concede. We needed money and we studied hard. It wasn't the crime of the century, but

it was well thought-out. You see, I was leaving this place behind. We all were. We were going to Europe to disappear forever and start our new lives, separate from each other. Texas has represented a lot of things to a lot of people, but to us, it represented our hell. I won't apologize for the crime all three of us committed, but I will say this. We weren't trying to hurt anyone. You have to realize, our backs were against the wall. We had no choice, but to survive.

I'm the girl you've been looking for and I can tell you that Elroy and I had no idea Craig murdered someone. I spoke with him recently and he explained the whole thing. Now, I feel sick to my stomach. I can't think about anything else. He used us as a means to escape. But now that this is ending, I know I can't let him leave. I have to tell you where he is.

I want some semblance of normality in my life again. Falling in love with Marshall has given me something real to fall into. At first, I thought I could manage my emotions. I thought I'd keep him

close, while having fun too. It was dumb, I'll admit, but I thought I'd be in Europe by now, surrounded by Cliffside views.

I take a break from writing. Marshall. This is going to Marshall. The man who changed my life forever. My eyes start to water, but I hold back from crying. I miss him so much and it's only been a day. I grab my phone and look at his number. I text him, "I love you, my handsome man."

He texts me, "Missing you like crazy." And then, only seconds later, he says, "I've been thinking. After this whole thing is over and done with, let's do something special. Let's go to Mexico and get away. Let's get lost down there for a week. I want to get to know you better so bad, Vi. I'm sorry I've been so consumed with work. It's not fair to you and I'm working on a way of getting out."

Getting out? My heart sinks while reading. He's so good to me. He's done so much and worked so hard to make this work right and all I've done is lie to him. And now, he's talking about throwing

his career away, all so he can have more time with me, the liar.

My hands are shaking. I can barely breathe. I hold my phone and type the words: “All I want is you. I hope I’m good to you. Mexico sounds wonderful. I would love to explore the world with you.”

Huge dreams. I’m diving into the unrealistic, thinking about all we could do together. We could go to South America and hike the mountains of Peru. We could boat across Venice, while eating big globs of pasta. We could head to the streets of Bangkok and backpack across the lush terrain of Thailand. Then, we could take a road trip across America. I could see it all, while being with the one I love.

They’re just pipe dreams. It’s never going to happen like that. When he finds out who I really am, he’ll cuff me, throw me in my jail cell, and never talk to me again. I’ll have to become a different person in prison. I’ll have a new life, one defined by small quarters and bars that extend all

around. Small windows and decaying food. I'll lose all semblance of life, while Warren carries a broken heart throughout his career as a cop.

I set my phone back down and look at the laptop. There's more to be said, so I continue to write. "The directions will be listed below. You'll find him there. I'm sending you this, at the risk of losing everything. The truth is, I haven't spent the money yet. It was supposed to be for a home and a new job. But now, I'm thinking of giving it back. Funny, right? I know it doesn't make a difference, what I do now. I committed the crime. Your job is to seek justice. My job is to thwart justice. Who will win? My guess is that, in the end, no one will come out ahead. It'll just be the age-old cat and mouse chase. I have no doubts in my mind that you'll lock me up. But it won't change anything in the end. Anyway, I hope this helps your prior investigation on the murder. That's something I can't stand behind. Goodbye and good luck finding me."

I print it out and carefully grab the paper, holding it away from me. I don't want to get any of my hair

on it, any of my saliva, or anything. I quickly fold it and throw it in an envelope. I drive 40 miles out and drop it in a box, near a few shacks, in a poor neighborhood. There are no cameras around here, so I should be safe.

When I head home, I'm exhausted. Come tomorrow, Craig will be in their custody. As for me, I'll be holding my breath and hoping for better days.

MARSHALL

“Who is she, anyway?” Adam asks me, in a room full of FBI Agents. I glance at him with a hurried look of disgust and anger.

“Don’t question me about my business,” I tell him. “She’s a woman I’m saying. Let’s leave it at that.”

He has no business asking me who she is. Frankly, I’ve been nice to him up until a certain point. Him envying me and thinking I’m some sort of badass has now turned into him thinking I’m some sort of

hedonist. Maybe I used to be. Maybe I used to sleep around with any woman I saw as a catch. That was then. Now, I'm devoted to one woman and I'm not letting the department get involved in my love affairs.

"Come on, man. Just tell me about her," he says. I know where he's going with this.

"What is this new obsession with my love life?" I ask him. "It's getting weird."

The way he looks at me now is so different. It's like he's questioning my motives, every second of the day. It started at the first stake out. Once I proved he was wrong, he felt thwarted. Now, he's got it in his head that my girl is a bank robber. The whole thing sounds fucking ridiculous, even when I say it in my head.

"I just want to be closer with you, man. We're partners, after all," he says, in a friendly tone. Still, his eyes reveal everything. "I don't know. Maybe we can go on a double date sometime, or

something. I'm seeing someone too now, actually."

"Oh yeah?" I laugh because I know he's bullshitting me. He's spent his nights hunched over at his desk, researching the case. There hasn't been any time for him to find somebody. "Who is she?"

"Some girl I went to college with. I called her up the other day. I thought we could catch up and she ended up having dinner with me two nights ago," he says.

I'm staring directly in your eyes, man. How could you lie to me like that? Partners? Fuck that. We're so far removed from each other.

"That's sweet, but I don't really do the double dating thing. It gets... awkward." I chuckle and drink the bitter coffee. It's lukewarm at this point. The styrofoam cup in my hand feels out of place. I want to get the fuck out of this room. I've never liked working with the feds. No cop does. But Adam? Hell, he's loving every second of this. He feels like a fucking superstar.

Policing used to be an honorable profession. I suppose it still is in some places. Down here, in this county, it's nothing but an ego-game. It's just a department full of guys trying to climb their way to the top. Ever since the new team came in, it's been worse. It's like they'll do anything to get ahead. They'll even chat it up with the feds.

“Suit yourself,” he says, looking over at Freddie Macker, the fed who showed up at my door, violating my privacy. Freddie smiles. They're buddies, after all. Soon, they'll all go out for beers, like all men working for the government do after a long day. Adam will make the suggestion to look into my affairs. Adam, my partner. My *friend*.

I haven't been clean all of these years, but I sure as hell have done my job well. There's paperwork I've fucked up on, there's evidence I've withheld. Back when I first started, we were taught different procedures. We were told to go with our gut. Turns out, my gut was good. I put a lot of bad men behind bars. But how is that going to look to a federal agent, who's trying to take over this case?

They'll clean up shop. They'll try to get me on some bullshit, but we all know they'll just fire me. There won't be any going to any other departments. My career will be over. The life I've made will fall to pieces.

“What do we know about the guy?” I find myself asking. I might as well be proactive on this. “Craig Richardson. Where was he last seen?”

Freddie glances at the bulletin board posted in the office. It has all of Elroy and Craig's history up there, but it's not clear how they met or what woman is involved.

“After the murder, he went off the grid for a while. Word on the street is he took a number of odd jobs. He was a dishwasher for three months, before screaming at his manager and breaking a rack full of dishes. He worked on a farm out in Louisiana for a bit, but that didn't last too long. Someone told us he sold marijuana to some friends of his, but at this point, we can't confirm the validity of that,” he says. “All in all, we don't have much. The guy

doesn't use a smartphone or anything. He hasn't had internet for years, or even a registered place."

"Any bills? Anything we can trace to him?" I ask him. Adam won't keep his eyes off me. The jealousy is palpable.

"There's no paper trail. The man must've paid with cash," he says. "We've found a number of bills related to his mother, as she was the sole provider for the family. But even then, nothing points to him. We've sent our guys out to different properties and each time we've come back empty-handed."

"Fuck," I whisper. "A real mastermind, huh."

"Maybe," he nods. "He definitely thought this through. I think he knew we were going to hear his name sooner or later."

"Sir," a man walks through the door, holding an envelope in hand. He's looking at me. "This came in for you today. Just wanted to send it your way and make sure you got it."

“Who the hell would be sending you something at the station?” Adam asks.

“No idea, but we’ll find out soon,” I say, ripping open the envelope.

I start to read the words aloud: “I never wanted to be typing these words. I never thought I’d be in this position, stuck in the middle of two crimes...”

I look up at the guys in the room and it’s pretty fucking clear to everyone that I’m holding something big. Everyone is waiting for me to continue. This is good news, whatever is revealed. Only, Adam is looking at me in a different way, as if I’m the one behind this somehow. Still, I tune him out and read the letter.

“...anyway, I hope this helps your prior investigation on the murder...” I finish the letter and set it down, slumping back in my seat.

“Jesus Christ,” Freddie whispers.

I smile and nod. “Jesus Christ is right. We just

witnessed a miracle,” I say. “We got him, right?”

“Don’t be too sure. Could be a trap. Could be nothing,” Freddie says. “Either way, we have to send our men in *now*.”

“No,” I tell him. “This was our case from the get-go. It’s our boys in there or nothing.”

Freddie groans. “Are we really going to play this game?” he asks me.

I stand up and face him. “I’ve worked my whole life for these guys. Hell yeah, we’re going to play that game,” I say.

He sighs. “Fine. Your guys can go in. But it’s their lives that are on the line,” he says. “We’re going in behind you though. Our government orders it.”

“Deal.” I shake his hand. “Adam, you coming with me?”

“Yes, sir,” he says. I nod. “Gear up, boys! We’re about to have ourselves a little fun!”

LOUISIANA IS HOT, muggy, and full of dark mystery. It takes hours to get there, which means hours of silence with Adam. Finally, when we're close, he turns and asks me a revealing question.

“Who wrote that letter?” he asks.

“Excuse me?” I laugh at the absurdity of the question.

“I just mean, it's pretty good timing right?” he asks.

“What are you insinuating?” I ask him, turning grim. We turn off our lights when we get close and start driving a little slower. We park the car a block away and prepare to head out on foot.

“Nothing at all,” he says. “Forget I said anything.”

There are noises everywhere. Crickets, winged bugs, croaking gators... Louisiana always gave me the creeps, but it's these parts that especially freak me out. As we walk up to the sheltered cabin, I

hold my breath.

We get to the front door and move into position. I motion with my hands, keeping my pistol out. My heart is beating wildly. I motion. “1-2-3-” And we bust the door open, moving in.

We’ve got men with high-powered rifles, dressed in the nicest SWAT outfits our taxpayers can buy. “Craig Richardson!” I scream, holding my gun out. I look through the night vision goggles and see movement in one of the rooms. The door is open. “Down on the ground!” I scream.

He aims his pistol at me and I fire twice. One bullet clearly hits his abdomen, while the other hits his chest. He hits the ground fast and our men move in to arrest the bastard. It all happens so fast and I’m left, leaning against the wall, catching my breath. I’m dizzy with fear. I almost just lost my life. Worst of all, I almost lost the chance to have another day with Virginia.

“We need a medic,” I say.

“They’re on their way,” an officer says. I close my eyes and somehow, I know Adam is staring at me. I may have just killed our suspect and *that* doesn’t look too good.

VIRGINIA

I'm sitting at my favorite coffee shop, the one I went to the day after the crime. It's been a long time since I've let myself go out like this, but I need more information on what happened last night. The radio let me know that Craig was caught, but when I got here, all of the news networks were saying that he's dead.

"...shot down by Warren Marshall..." were the first words that I heard. It hit me like a ton of

bricks. I can't believe it. Craig is dead? Why? But I already know why. He was already on his last leg. No doubt, he came out firing.

Now, however, I'm learning that he's still alive. He's in critical condition. I call Marshall, but he doesn't answer. Instead, another guy does. "This is Adam, Marshall's partner. Who's calling?" he asks.

"I'm, uh, his girlfriend," I say. "Where's Marshall. Is he alright? I just the saw news."

"Oh, his girlfriend. We haven't met yet, though I'm curious. How can a woman fall for a guy like him?" he asks.

"Excuse me?" I blurt out. Already, it's obvious this guy is not someone I want to be talking to, but I keep myself on the line because I need Marshall. I need to know that he's okay.

"It's a joke. Er, sorry," he says. "He's pretty busy right now, but if you'd like to come in, you're more than welcome to."

“I’ll be there in less than an hour,” I find myself saying.

“Good, good. We’ll talk then. Thanks, uh...”

“It’s Virginia,” I say. “Goodbye.”

I hang up the phone and run out the door. I get to the station in fifteen minutes. I shouldn’t be anywhere near here, but there’s so much I need to find out. What happened in there? Is Craig really alive? I have to admit, I don’t want him to die. Even if he does hold the power to give me up, I don’t have it in me to wish someone to die.

At that station, all eyes are on me. It’s quiet in there, somber even. “Wait over here,” the FBI guy says to me. “Marshall’s busy right now, but he’ll be out soon enough.”

Another man, younger than everybody, walks over to me and sits down. “Virginia, right?” he smiles and extends his hand toward me. “Adam. I’m Marshall’s sidekick.”

“Sidekick?” I laugh. “Is that the official term?”

“It sounds better than saying partner,” he laughs a little with me. I nod and there’s a long silence where we both stare at the wall in front of us. “Pretty crazy stuff, right? Shootouts, bank robberies, and now the feds are involved. I sure didn’t expect any of this when I applied to work for the department.”

“Must be exciting.” I wonder if he’s on to me. After hearing what Marshall said about the exes, I think it’s safe to say he has a hunch. But how? Because of what Elroy said during his interrogation?

“It’s a little exciting. I’m not going to lie. But I’m praying that kid doesn’t die in there,” he says. “He did some pretty bad stuff, but no one deserves to die like that.”

“Yeah, but Marshall was just defending himself, right?” I ask, wondering what he’s getting at.

“Yeah, of course,” he smiles. “Even if he didn’t, I

think we all are prone to making mistakes in the heat of the moment. It can be pretty terrifying out there.”

I just nod and keep to myself. Whatever he wants can't benefit me. “Right before all of this, we got a mysterious letter from the woman who helped commit those robberies,” he finally says. Here it is...

“Yeah, I heard about that on the news,” I say.

“It's odd. Why would they write to Marshall? Why make it so personal?” he asks.

“I'm not a detective,” I say. “I really don't know. He *is* the leading guy on the case, right?”

“Yeah, I suppose that's why,” he says, stopping himself. Of course, he can't help but finish his thought. “Do you know anyone close to Marshall who might be involved in this? An ex-girlfriend or something?”

“Am I interrupting something?” The words come

from a familiar voice. It's that deep, gruff voice I've come to know and love.

"Marshall!" Adam jumps from his seat. "Your girlfriend came to see you."

"Keeping her company?" he asks him.

Adam awkwardly stuffs his hands in his pockets and says, "Just introducing myself. Wasn't I?" he looks at me.

"Something like that," I say. "Can you talk? Outside."

"I've got 30 minutes. Let's get some food," he smiles. I've missed that smile so fucking much.

Outside, we don't even talk. He simply wraps his arms around me and stares longingly into my eyes. "I dream about you every night," he says.

"I've missed your touch, Marshall. I've missed everything about you. When is this all going to end? I'm dreaming about Mexico," I say.

He glances back at the station. “Soon, hopefully,” he says. “Hey, can I talk to you about something?”

My heart jumps, but I nod. “Anything,” I say. Somehow, I feel ready. If he asks me about the robberies, I’m going to come clean. I can’t live with this weight anymore.

“I’m thinking about quitting the department,” he says. “Now, before you say anything, I want to tell you that I’ve been thinking long and hard about this. I don’t see a bright future if I stay here. There was a time when being a police officer meant things for me. Now, it doesn’t give me much joy. I hate saying that aloud, but I want to live a simpler life. I want more time with you, Vi. I hope I’m not rushing things here by saying any of this.”

“Marshall,” I try to find the words. “I was so mixed up before I found you. You’ve given me purpose, real purpose in this life. I love you so much. I don’t care what job you have. Just do what you love and I’ll be happy.”

Our lips meet and the weight of our passion knocks me against the station's walls. He brings me to the side and suddenly, my hands are under his shirt, feeling his strength. He grows hard against me and I have the biggest desire to fall to my knees right here, despite the fact that there are at least 20 cops inside.

"Not here," he says. "Tonight. I'll sneak away."

"Won't that Adam guy get mad? Aren't you supposed to be here all night?" I ask him, out of breath. My lips taste like him. Every time I breathe, I can smell him. He smells like confidence.

"Fuck him," he says. "He can stay and be their pawn. I'm done breaking my back for them."

"Okay, tonight then. But where?" I ask him.

"At the bar we met," he says. "They won't think to look for me there."

We kiss one last time. My body flutters with

excitement. I feel electrified. But behind all my excitement is the knowing that this may be it. Whether Craig lives or dies is beside the point. My conscience won't allow me to lie anymore. I have to tell him who I am. I have to let him know.

MARSHALL

*I*t's not hard to leave the place every now and then. It *is* hard to get Adam out of the way before I do it. Lucky for me, Freddie gives him the task of watching over Craig at the hospital, something that Adam is *not* happy about.

“Good luck,” I say to him as he leaves the station.

“Yeah, yeah,” he replies back. “Laugh it up.”

Surprisingly, he's been okay the rest of the day.

Maybe his talk with Vi set the record straight a little bit. Maybe now he knows we've got absolutely nothing to do with this thing. Either way, I don't dwell on it too much. I'm just excited to sneak out and see my girl.

When I get to the bar, I quickly change out of my old clothes and put on a nice suit. I don't normally dress this nice, but I figure it's a nice enough occasion. I see her walk in front of my car and I tap on the glass, smiling big. I jump out of the car, run, and pick her up into my arms.

"Marshall!" she squeals. "Put me down."

She laughs as I set her down. "God, I've had the worst day!" I exclaim. "Been looking forward to this for hours now."

"You look really good," she says, biting her lip. "Like, *really good*. I didn't know you wear suits."

"I'm feeling pretty good," I say. "Just knowing I'll be out of the department at the end of the year is like a huge weight off my shoulder, you know? I

just have to figure out what's next.”

“Whatever it is, I support you,” she says. It's the craziest thing. I somehow met the best woman in the world.

We both walk in the bar, our hands intertwined, and everyone inside is in good spirits. It's like our emotions have rubbed off on the world. I order two drinks for us at the bar, and try to find a table once they're poured. “I don't want to talk about all the crap we've been dealing with,” I finally tell her. “Tonight, I just want to be close to you.”

We sit down at a booth in the back and she sits *very* close to me. Her thigh comes across mine as she says, “Then be close to me.”

She slides up on my lap and very quickly I understand what she's getting at. She grinds her hips backward and my cock twitches until it's fully hard. I watch as she reaches back and pulls her panties halfway down her ass, with just enough space for me.

“You didn’t get to cum the other night,” she whispers. “You must be aching.”

“I’m fucking dying,” I say, heart pumping strong and steady. I cup my palm around her ass and feel her soft skin. I squeeze and have to catch my breath. She’s smoking hot and I want her more than anything at this moment. How could I have ever doubted her? She’s a fucking angel.

I slide my fingers in between her legs, under her ass, and feel her pussy. “I’m so wet,” she smiles. “Sorry about your suit.”

“Fuck my suit,” I say, unzipping my pants hurriedly. I carefully pull my cock out. We’re sheltered enough back here and everyone’s got their attention on the football game on the television anyway. Just for the record: I don’t give a fuck if anyone’s watching right now.

She leans forward and grabs my cock in her hand. She moves her wrist up and down, up and down, until she slides her pussy over it. “There we go,”

she moans.

“This is crazy,” I say, running my hand through her hair. I grab a fistful of it and start thrusting upward. The whole table starts to shake, but still, no one is looking our way.

“I want you so bad,” she says.

“My Virginia,” I whisper. “Vi...”

Thrusting, grasping, pumping, and searching for our lost selves, we find our completely unordinary lust. We tune out the bar. They're ordinary and boring to us. They sit and let their lives dole out on a daily basis, while love like ours is all around them.

I'm not a poetic man, but Virginia makes me want to write a thousand books on the word love. Her hands fall to my thighs and she turns her cheek to the left, enough for our lips to meet. This woman is like a wildfire, turning hot only for me. I love that about her. Deep down, she's a hesitant and methodical woman. Yet, with me, she's willing to

do anything.

“I would do anything for you,” I whisper.

It's true. I would do anything at this point just to have her forever. Her lips, her legs, her beautiful ass... these are the things I want to end up with. Money, a career, the stress coming from those around me are things I want to do away with. I want to be free, for once in my life. She's giving me that chance by opening up a door inside me I can't close now.

This is bad, an inner voice says to me. Only, I don't care how much this ruins me anymore. I'm not going to run away from this, from her.

“Anything?” she whispers.

I spin her around so that she's facing me. Her legs are straddled around my waist, in the darkened booth. The back of the bar is empty save for us, and a loud pinball machine. She keeps kissing me, over and over again. Lips are sucking, tongues are sliding, and our hands can't stop touching. Her

body is a fucking temple that I never get sick of exploring.

“Anything,” I say. “I promise.”

Her breathing is hushed, yet strained. As the sound rises, so does our body temperature. Our eyes open as the warmth inside us grows. “I think I’m going to cum,” she whispers.

“Cum for me, darling,” I whisper back.

Her cheek falls against my face, as she struggles to hold on. Her skin smells like sweet candy, roses, and something innocent that I can’t quite put my finger on. I take her all in, kissing her neck, and tasting her skin. I want to consume her. I want to dive into her and never come back. I want to fall into her endlessly.

“Please,” she whispers. “Don’t ever leave me. Don’t ever let me go.”

“I won’t, Virginia. I could never be without you,” I say.

My hand runs down her back, falling across the back of her ass. I hold her close to me, feeling the dull thud of her heart beating against her chest.

“I mean it,” she says. “Whatever happens. Whatever we find out about each other. We can’t let it ruin what we have now. This is much too important to me now.”

My heart swells. I couldn’t leave her if I tried. Her warmth envelops me. Her pussy closes in on my cock, as I pound it over and over. I crush my lips to hers and I’m free. I’m fucking free. “Nothing can ruin this,” I whisper. “Nothing.”

“I’m... cumming...” she says with an absent smile. “I love you, Warren Marshall.”

We both let the world around us fade away. Endless waves of pure feeling and emotion flow throughout our bodies, as we both let everything go. Our hands tear at our clothes and our lips slide across each cheek. Her nose. My God, her perfect nose. I kiss it. I kiss everything I can see.

Everything is so frantic, yet nothing is rushed.

When I open my eyes, she's staring at me. Her cheeks are rosy red and she's breathing heavy, smiling. Her eyes shine against the light, green as emeralds. "I'm sorry, Marshall," she whispers.

"Never be sorry," I said. "What could you possibly be sorry for?"

She kisses me one more time, lips forcefully glued to one another. A single tear falls from her eye and I'm stunned by her beauty. "I really fucked up," she whispers. "Fuck."

"Vi, what's going on?" I ask. She stays on my lap, as more tears start to fall down her face. Something doesn't feel right. Things are starting to feel very wrong. I don't want this to end. "Are you breaking up with me?" I ask.

"No," she admits.

"Then why does it feel like this is the end?" I ask her, grasping at straws. I'm trying to pick up the

pieces of something I'm unsure is broken.
Answers... I need answers.

“God, Marshall,” she says. “All I wanted was to be with you forever. What we have is so pure. It’s eternal.”

“Never let go of it,” I kiss her. “Please don’t.”

“I wanted to run away with you. I wanted to do so many things. But I can’t keep holding in this dark secret forever. You have to know who I really am,” she says. “If I keep you in the dark forever, I’ll hate myself.”

It’s at this point, I start to realize what she’s saying. This dark secret... I was wrong all along. Everything starts to slow down and I give a strangled, “No,” as the world around me morphs into something terrible and looming.

“I’m the one you’ve been looking for,” she says. “I was with Craig and Elroy.”

I feel sick. No, I feel angry. Sad. My brain ticks

through the number of horrible emotions a man can go through, and eventually I'm left feeling absolutely numb. "You? How could you?" I whisper, unable to even look at her.

"Please, Marshall. Look at me. Don't turn away from me now," she pleads. "Please!" her voice sounds sharp and distant. It's begging, like a hurt animal on the side of the road. Only, I'm the one who's been blindsided by this whole thing, not her. And right now, I'm left bleeding out on the guardrail. All eyes fall on me. At least, that's how it feels. Truth is, the world doesn't care. It keeps going on and on, while I fade away.

"You," I repeat, unable to form a coherent sentence. I look down at her legs. I imagine the pantyhose wrapped tightly against her skin. I can picture the indents from the pattern, how she ran in them, as she stole all that money. "Why'd you do this to me? You played me like a deck of cards."

"No, Marshall. I didn't know I'd fall in love with you," she says.

“Everything is a lie,” I say, feeling the anger rush in. It’s like the door that she opened for me has now closed forever. A solid chain wraps around the entrance and no key can unlock it now.

“It’s not a lie!” she screams. Now, I’m certain people are staring at us. Adam was right. I can’t believe he was fucking right. “What we have is real.”

“I can’t see you again. I have to take you in,” I say, though the thought of that disgusts me.

“Leave with me,” she says, as if this was her grand plan all along. “Leave the country with me. We can go anywhere. Nobody has to know. I can turn the money in. I can start over, with you. Together. Please, Marshall.”

“There’s not going to be any starting over. We were building something strong, but there was no concrete holding everything together. Now, it’s crumbling. My world is fucking crumbling down,” I say. “Don’t ever talk to me again. Don’t ever look

for me again. I want you out of this city in two days. I never want to hear your name again.”

“No!” she bawls. I wipe myself off, feeling tainted. The sex we just had went from hot to something I never want to think about again. To think, I was hoping to start a life with this woman. How could I be so blind? I leave the table and turn my head from her. All I can see is the exit as I walk forward. My vision is blurred with anger and despair.

“Goodbye, Vi,” I whisper to myself. “Goodbye, forever.”

VIRGINIA

I fucked up my only chance at forever. With two hands against his chest, I felt his heart pumping with the rhythm of my own. And then, with the sound of my voice, I let the beat crash into a violent crescendo. I watched as the city of our love burned away. I blew out the last candle and he drifted from me as fast as our eyes met on that first night.

I can't stop thinking about everything as I slowly

pack my things. *Leave this city...* I have two days to get out of here, but I have nowhere to go. I can't come up with those plans right now. Nothing really makes any sense. Why I told him, why I put myself in this situation... it's all beyond me.

I couldn't keep the lie at the center of our love. If I did, it tainted the whole thing. Honesty, truth, and being 100 percent real is what love is really about. So in that sense, I don't regret a thing. Anyway, I knew this was going to be our fate. I knew from the very start.

When something like this happens, you just wish you could go back in time. The whole time you're righting these wrongs, you see it with open and clear eyes. You keep asking yourself, "Why are you doing this?" But there is no response. You watch as you commit these wrongs, over and over again. The cycle of disappointment is never broken.

I guess this is just part of my story. Eternal unhappiness. The girl that loves to fuck it all up.

Look at where I am and look at where everyone else is who once surrounded me. Craig is dying. Elroy is rotting in jail. Warren Marshall's heart has been crushed to dust. But I'm left here, as I always am, a stone, waiting for the end to come.

I zip up my bags and sit in bed, crying to myself. The pain is never-ending. This time, I don't think I'm coming back from it. I picture myself as an old spinster, rotting away in an apartment somewhere. I deserve it, anyway.

I can't be with anyone else. I don't want to. All I want is Marshall. I want to fix things that cannot be fixed. We had such big plans. We were going to go to Mexico together. We were going to travel and discover ourselves. We were supposed to grow old together, dammit.

I guess I need to stop thinking about it. It only makes things worse. Only, I can't get the image of how this all started out of my head. Running from the bank, escaping, and ending up at that bar was like fate guiding us together. When I bumped into

him, I couldn't believe my eyes. The fear was so immense. And yet, something kept me there. Sure, I was scared, but I was also enamored almost immediately. His charisma and confidence was like nothing I had ever experienced before.

I knew I had to stay and talk with him. I couldn't say no and walk away because then I'd never know what could've been. Well, I know now. What could've been was everything. And I let it crash to pieces.

MARSHALL

*H*ave you ever felt your heart physically hurt inside your body? Before now, I had never felt that. Before Vi, things were always normal. It wasn't the most exciting life, but there wasn't any pain attached to it. I just did my job, went out with some women to pass the time, and went to sleep. That's how it was before her. I led a simple life.

Now, everything has fallen apart. Picture this: a grown man as sexy as me, laying on his bathroom

floor with a bottle of bourbon in hand. It ain't a pretty picture, right? That's what this woman has done to me. She makes my head spin, my stomach turn, and my eyes wince.

She knew what was going to happen. She did it anyway. Of course she did. Why wouldn't she? Here's a woman who's hell bent on playing games. From the very first night we met, she wanted to destroy everything that I had become. To her, I was just the enemy, waiting to bring her down. Yet, I had no fucking clue.

Vi. A bank robber. A criminal. It's unfathomable to me. This woman has put me in the worst position known to man.

Lying on my bathroom floor, I hear my phone vibrate. I glance at the screen, but I can't make out the name. I'm too fucking drunk and heartbroken for this shit. I answer it anyway, hearing Adam's stupid voice in the phone. I can't let him know about Virginia. He'd rub it in my face, gladly.

“Where are you, man?” he asks. “You were supposed to be here over an hour ago.”

“I’m piss drunk,” I say. “Leave me the hell alone.”

“You’re what?!” he screams. I can hear him scurrying out of the station. Outside, I can hear the cars whizz by. It’s about 9 AM and my head is throbbing. The thought of going out into the real world right now completely disturbs me. How could anyone do that at a time like this?

“Man, you have to be here. Craig just woke up from his coma. We’re hoping to get some information out of him later today,” he says.

“Fuck,” I groan. “The bastard woke up already? You’re not going to get any answers today. It’s too soon.” My words are slurred, but I’m capable of forming some coherent sentences at least.

“You *need* to be here. Freddie’s going to flip,” he says.

“Tell him I’ve got a fever. I’m puking my brains

out. Tell him anything. I don't give a damn. I can't drive a car, let alone walk into work like this," I tell him.

"Dammit, Marshall," he sighs. "I'm coming over. Don't do anything stupid."

"Like hell you are!" I scream, but he just hangs up the phone. "Bastard."

It feels like only seconds have passed when he knocks on my door. "Come in!" I yell, unable to pick myself off the ground.

I hear his footsteps in the hallway. I look up and see him standing over me. "You weren't lying," he laughs. "You're totally fucked up, aren't you?"

"Shut the fuck up, Adam," I say. "Don't be like that, right now. I'm hurting."

"Headache? You need some Advil?" he asks.

"It's my heart, dammit," I say. "She took my heart, squished it in her hands, threw it on the pavement, and stepped all over it. She broke it into a million

pieces. Now, I've got nothing to live for. Nothing.”

“Jesus, man,” he leans over and hands me a water bottle. “I've never seen you like this before. I thought women were a dime a dozen to you.”

“You envy me, right? You envy *this*?” I laugh with malice. “Women used to mean nothing to me. And then I met her. Virginia!”

I'm an embarrassing piece of shit. At least, that's how I feel. Melodramatic. A man isn't supposed to hurt like this. He's supposed to pick himself up, dust off his jeans, and get back into the ring. Instead, I'm laying on the floor, drunk as hell, and I'm on the verge of tears.

“What happened?” he asks me.

“Why'd you always blame her, man?” I skip over his question. “You always made her out to be a criminal.”

“I didn't,” he says. “Elroy said that the woman—”

“Fuck Elroy!” I yell, sitting up. The room starts to

spin, but I manage to stop it in my head. “We were partners. You’re supposed to stick by me, man. You can’t go around blaming people for shit they didn’t do.”

“I wasn’t blaming her. I was keeping the option open. This case is important to me,” he says. Anyway, he was right. He doesn’t know it, but he hit the nail right on the head.

“Well, you can fuck off with your assumptions,” I say. “Anyway, it doesn’t matter anymore. She’s gone. She left me for good.”

“I don’t understand. I thought you were in love,” he says. “I saw you two together yesterday. You looked happy enough.”

That was back when life was perfect. Funny how it wasn’t that long ago, but it feels like another life entirely. “Shit happened, okay? She’s gone. Let’s leave it at that,” I say. “And I’m not coming into work. Not today, anyway.”

“You don’t want to be the one to question Craig?”

he asks. “You sure? It wouldn’t bring you any joy?”

“I’m done caring about justice.” I smile. “You hear me? Done. I’ll be there tomorrow. Talk to Craig. I don’t give a flying fuck what happens.”

He gets up from kneeling next to me and shakes his head. “Get some rest, man. You’re losing it. I miss the old Marshall,” he says. I feel an angered sadness waiting to burst inside of me. He misses the old Marshall? Well, shit. I wish I’d never been born in the first place. Then, Virginia couldn’t have broken my heart.

“See you tomorrow,” I whisper. Tomorrow. Sure.

MARSHALL

The next day, I wake up feeling shittier than ever. I'm too sober to run away from the pain. Now, nothing matters to me. I'm as blank as a man can be. In some odd way, this gives me defiant strength. I walk into the station, ready to bring this case to rest.

"Bring me to Craig," I say. Adam glances up at me from his desk and smiles.

"You're finally ready?" he asks me. "You look a

hell of a lot better than yesterday.”

“I’m fine,” I say. “Just a bad day. You ever have one of those? Come on. You ready to get this over with?”

“I’ve been dying to,” he says, grabbing his keys. We storm out of the building so fast that even Freddie is bewildered.

“Freddie’s tried his tactics on him, but he’s not budging. The guy keeps claiming he can’t remember anything, like he’s got amnesia or something.”

“Bullshit,” I laugh. “He knows exactly where he is. The man doesn’t want to go to jail, but he’s going to end up there, regardless.”

“I figure you’re the one for the job, not Freddie. This is your area of expertise,” he says. “Let’s just hope he tells us who the third party is. That *woman*.”

Virginia. The woman who broke my soul. What am

I going to do with her and the knowledge she gave me? The hard pill to swallow isn't that she committed the crime. I can deal with that eventually. It just takes some time. No, the worst part is feeling how checked out I am. And it's all because of her. After this case, I'll surely quit the force. It's my time. The woman I loved duped me. You can't come back from something like that.

"Something tells me she's long gone," I say.

I think of her packing her things. I imagine her leaving town in a taxi. Maybe she'll take a boat overseas somewhere. Maybe she'll end up in Mexico by herself. Without me.

Fuck, we had so many plans. We were going to conquer the world. I really felt like we would. How can it all be over? The heavy blows come in waves of pain and misunderstanding. Confusion. It's part of the grieving process. Sometimes I find myself denying that it ever happened. Other times, it's just so fucking obvious. In the end, you don't know what to believe. You just know that it's not

how it was anymore.

We pull into the hospital, walk through those blue doors, and come across Craig Richardson's room. The doctor is standing in front of the door, blocking our access.

"Move aside, please," Adam says. "We have a court order."

"I won't let you terrorize this man during the healing process," the doctor says. "He deserves to get better."

"Look," I sigh. "I've had a really fucking hard couple of days. The least you can do is let us through."

"Frankly, I don't care about your last couple of days. I'm a doctor. I focus on health."

I let him have his say. Sure. When he's finished I say, "This man killed someone six years. He killed someone and then robbed two banks. He doesn't get time to fucking heal. People like him don't

deserve time,” I say, fed up with all the bullshit.

“Excuse me?” he asks, confused.

“Move aside or you’re under arrest,” I say. When he doesn’t move, I push him aside.

“Calm down, Marshall,” Adam whispers.

“I don’t give a damn anymore, Adam,” I tell him honestly. Then, I face Craig. Can you believe it? The bastard actually has a smile on his face. Even with the tubes coming out of his nose, he’s smiling. “Craig Richardson. I’ve been waiting weeks to talk to you.”

“Marshall,” he whispers, out of breath. “We finally meet.”

“It’s a real pleasure,” I say.

“I want to speak to you alone,” he says. “I won’t talk if this man stays in the room with us. I don’t trust him.”

“He’s under strict orders to stay,” I say. Though, I

wish he'd leave as well. "I'm sorry, but he's gotta stay."

"Then you get nothing from me," he says. "I'm very weak. I think I'll go to sleep for a while."

"It's fine," Adam sighs. "I'll wait outside. You got this?"

"Yeah," I groan. "I got this."

Adam exits the room and closes the door. "Make sure it's shut," Craig says. "We have some things to discuss, no doubt."

The door is definitely shut and I doubt Adam can hear anything. I can see him sitting against an opposite wall outside. I get right to the point with this guy.

"Virginia," I say.

He nods and smiles. "So, you already know?" he asks.

"Yeah," I sigh. "I know too much."

“You’re not going to turn her in, are you?” he asks with a concerned look on his face.

“Why do you want to protect her so badly?” I ask him. “Give me one good reason I shouldn’t turn her in right now?”

“Well, for one, you withheld the information for quite a long time,” he says. “How’s that going to look to the feds in there?”

“I just found out. I’m not withholding shit,” I say.

“Oh, so your partner knows? That’s good. I was under the impression he was being kept in the dark,” he smiles.

“What’s your fucking point?” I ask, getting irritated.

“The point is, we’re all capable of making mistakes. Even you. Mister police man. Mister *fucking* hero,” he says.

“I’ve never killed anyone. I’ve never robbed a bank,” I say. “I don’t take from people. I try and do

my best. That's the difference between me and you."

"And the difference between you and Virginia, I suppose?" he laughs, but it hurts him to strain his stomach.

"Me and Virginia are done," I say. "For good."

"Cute," he says. "Anyway, it's none of my business. I'm not out to turn her in. I know I'm going to prison for a very long time."

"Yeah," I mutter. "After this case, I'm done working for the force. You at least won on that front."

"Justice, right?" he laughs. "I don't really give a damn. It's all so inconsequential."

"What do you care about, Craig?" I ask.

"I cared about leaving this place. Now, I'm stuck here forever. Funny how that goes," he says.

"You'll admit to everything? The murder..."

everything?” I ask him.

“Why not? I have nothing to live for anymore. Might as well start living truthfully,” he says. When he can tell I’m not buying it, he adds, “Don’t worry. I’ll help your case, but I’m not doing it for you. I’m doing it for Virginia.”

“Vi?” I frown. “Why? You think she cares about you?”

“You’re wrong about her, Marshall. Deep down, she’s a really good woman who got conned into a false narrative,” he says.

“She used me,” I look away. “She used me to get information out of the case. I know she did, dammit.”

“You know, she kept your relationship somewhat of a secret to us,” he admits. “We had to pry it out of her. I don’t think you know her intentions as well as you think. Goodbye, Marshall.”

“See you in court,” I mutter, walking out the door.

When I turn to look at him one last time, he's got his eyes closed and he's breathing heavy.

"What happened in there?" Adam asks me right away.

"He's going to play ball in court, that's what happened," I say. "Can we go home now?"

"You did it? It was that easy?" he looks astonished.

"Yeah, well, I've stopped giving a fuck ever since... well, ever since Vi left me. I guess it's helped me in the long run." I give a short smile.

He nods and thinks to himself for a minute. "And the woman who helped them? Who was she?"

"You try asking him. They won't budge on that bit," he says. "My guess? She's far away from here now, sailing near the coast of Mexico."

I think about Virginia, all alone. She's probably on some boat somewhere, looking back at Texas. She's no doubt remembering what we had. I can't forget it either. She's starting a new life now. Only,

it's without me.

VIRGINIA

*J*hop in the cab and drive toward the docks. It's a couple of hours away. There's nothing left for me here. Now that Marshall has sworn me off, I don't know what to do. There's no forgiveness in this world that's large enough for me.

I always wanted a love like the one I had with Marshall. Sometimes that comes with unforeseen consequences. You can't give the other person the

full truth when you first meet them. That would be impossible. But I've learned now that if you swear off the truth for good, it'll come back to haunt you, one way or another.

"It's right over here," I say, pointing toward the docks. "Go slow and I'll find the boat."

"What in the world is a woman like you doing in the cargo docks?" The cabbie shakes his head in disbelief.

"I'm catching a ride out of here," I laugh, though it's completely true.

He laughs it off like it's a joke as well. No one takes a ride in a cargo boat. It's a long and dangerous journey, but it's really the only way out of here. My ride to Europe has been effectively compromised, as the money never got to our guy. I could try a bus to Mexico, but that means going through the border checkpoints. No, this is my best bet. A small space in a boat full of packages. Luckily, I've brought enough food and water to

survive a week down there.

I get out of the cab and hand him some money. “Thank you,” I say. “For everything.”

“It’s just a ride, lady,” he says, getting back in the car. Before he slams the door, he says, “Hey, uh. Be careful. Whatever you’re doing doesn’t seem so straight. I’m not going to butt in your business, but make sure this is what you really want to do. Good luck, miss.”

I watch as the taxi drives away. I’m alone. All alone. I don’t know how to feel anymore. Sometimes I think about the future and it seems so wide open. So many possibilities, you know? Other times, like now, it feels so small and empty.

I want Marshall. I want him so fucking bad.

Before the cab, I did something stupid. I had a brief moral dilemma. I may be leaving the country because I have to. I can’t go to prison for half my life. Still, I wanted to make things right again. That’s why I grabbed my money and threw it into a

big duffel bag. I made sure everything was clean. No fingerprints. No tracing the money to me. Anyway, it won't matter once I'm out of the country.

I took my chunk of the money and I marched it down to the police department. I have to say, seeing all those police cars made me nervous. Still, I look like a normal girl. A cop walked by me, tilted his hat and said, "Ma'am." I simply smiled and kept walking.

I left the bag in the front, right next to the door, note attached to the zipper. The note was short and to the point: "I regret taking this. Have it back. I don't want to carry this weight any longer." That was that. I walked away from the station and no one said a word to me.

Now, I'm on the docks and I have an hour to spare. I nestle my bag against a concrete pillar, near the water. I see a small vendor in the distance, where all the workers are eating their lunches. I walk up and the crowd starts whistling at me, but I ignore

it. I don't feel like my normal self anymore. If anything, I feel like a ghost.

"I'll take a Coke, please," I tell the vendor. He reaches in an ice cooler and pulls out a can of soda. I hand him two dollars and breathe a sigh of relief. I'm almost out of here. Just another hour of waiting and my boat will be here.

"Virginia?" I hear a voice call my name. I freeze, unable to bring myself to turn around. The voice is strangely familiar, yet distant from me. "It's you! I thought it was you."

I feel a hand fall against my shoulder and I shudder with fear. Who would know that I'm here? Nobody. Not even Marshall would know. I slowly turn around and see him. *Oh, God.* It's Adam, and he's got the cockiest smile plastered across his face. He knows he's hit the jackpot. He's won the game. Checkmate. It's over.

"Adam?" I ask because I have nothing else to say.

"What're you doing down here?" he asks me. "It's

so weird to be running into you here.”

My brain scrambles to make something up. Anything. I just need a good story. *Fuck!* “I’m, *uh*, visiting my dad down here. He works for the union here.”

“Works for the union, that’s great,” he says, still smiling. He knows he’s got me in a lie. I look past him to see if any other cops have followed. There’s a man on a bench, reading the newspaper. He glances up at me, smiles, and then looks back down at his paper. I can’t figure out who’s watching me, and who’s just an innocent bystander.

“Yeah, pretty great,” I bounce on the back of my heels, ready to run out of here if I have to. I’ll jump in the fucking water. I’ll swim away. I’ll... I’m so screwed.

“Hey, listen,” he continues, “I was wondering if you could help me with something.”

“Sure,” I say. “I could help tomorrow. What do you have in mind?” Just leave. Please, just leave,

Adam. Let me get on with my life. It's all I want. I'll never hurt anyone again. I'll never break another damn law. I won't even jaywalk.

“Well, I'd actually need your help now. That's the problem. I'm in a hurry,” he says. “Craig Richardson. You know him?”

“I heard about him on the news,” I lie. “Isn't he dying or something?”

“Actually, he woke up,” he smiles. “He's going to play ball with the authorities. We're pretty happy.”

“That's really great, Adam,” I say. “Tell Marshall I say congratulations.”

“Well, that's the thing. He's all broken up about what happened between you two,” he says. “But I know that you two were like two peas in a pod. You were both so cute together.”

“Yeah, well,” I sigh. “Things happen, you know?”

“Yeah, but before you catch that boat out of here, I thought you could head down to the station with me

and talk things over with him,” he says. My stomach completely drops. “You can grab your suitcase before we go. It’ll only be a couple of hours.”

“What?” I ask. “Adam... what’re you saying to me?”

“I’m just saying, before you leave on that cargo boat. You know, the one you paid \$500 for?” he waits for me to respond, but I’m choking on my air.

I stutter. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Adam. I—”

“Don’t play dumb with me.” He turns angry. “I know it was you. I know you kept Marshall close so you could try and get around the case, but I’m onto you. You just lost.”

“I didn’t do anything,” I say, looking behind me for an escape route. There’s no way out of this, however. I’m stuck.

“I know that Marshall knows too,” he goes on.

“You can’t fool me. You’re caught. Virginia Greene, you’re under arrest for the crime of—”

“No,” I whisper, feeling faint. “No! You can’t do this. I didn’t do anything.”

“...for the crimes of armed robbery and obstruction of justice...” His words fade like fog rolling into the day. I can’t pay attention to anything he’s saying. All I know is that I’m caught. This is my worst fear come true. He starts reading my rights, but it just feels like a death sentence to me.

“I can’t,” I whisper. “I can’t go to jail.”

He keeps talking and his words are muffled. I feel a surge of adrenaline coursing through my body and, finally, I allow myself to take a chance. I flee the scene.

That’s right. I run as fast as I fucking can. Turns out, I’m pretty fast. I climb up a shipping container and begin running across the line of them. He darts around the side, trying to cut me off. At the end of the line, I jump off, and continue running. I look

back and he's behind me, but he's got a good distance he needs to cover. What's best? No one else is following me. The guy came after me alone, breaking protocol, no doubt.

"Come on Vi," I whisper to myself. I turn a corner and see my suitcase. In front of me is the Cargo boat I needed to take, just pulling in. I won't be able to take it this time. Another time, maybe. As for now, I keep running. I turn right and run straight until I'm face to face with a busy road.

There's a cab parked on the side, so I jump in. "Take me out of here!" I scream.

"Where do you want to go?" he asks.

"Downtown! Oh, God. Just drive! Please," I beg.

Outside my window, I can see Adam running my way. He's got his gun in his hand and he's getting closer by the second.

"I can't go to Downtown right now. Too far. Sorry," he says.

“Then go anywhere!” I yell.

“You need to settle down, lady. I don’t take orders from customers. Get out of my cab,” he says.

“No, no, no.” I start to cry. “I’m sorry. Please. I need a ride out of here.”

It all happens in slow motion. Adam’s elbow comes crashing into the taxi’s window. Glass shoots out everywhere. His hand grabs my shirt and he pulls me toward the door. I try and kick at him, but it only buys me a few more seconds of freedom.

I feel those handcuffs wrap around my wrists and everything turns black. My whole world falls apart. “You’re under arrest,” Adam says.

MARSHALL

I'm spinning with confusion. I thought I could go on living without her and continuing my old life, but it's harder than I thought. I keep going back to the night I met that woman. That night changed my life forever. Despite her being a criminal and completely lying to me, I can't dispute the fact that she opened my eyes to a different life.

Before her, I was content, but I wasn't living my

life in the way that I truly wanted to. I was just floating by and waiting for the day I'd get my pension. Now, it's like I've let the sun in my life in a certain kind of way. Whatever happens in the next few days, I can hold my head up high because I'm not taking this shit any longer. When this case is over and done with, I'll be gone, travelling the world.

But I can't go by myself. I just can't.

When I get to the station the next day, I see a large duffle bag and a note near the door. Freddie walks up next to me and puts his hands on his hips. "What do you think it is?" he asks me.

I shrug. "I don't know, but there's a note." I read the note aloud and Freddie just laughs.

"Why on earth would you return the money? You're still guilty in a court of law," he says.

"Some people just can't live with the guilt," I say. "Too bad you can't turn back time."

I think of Virginia again. She could be anywhere by now. “Where’s Adam?” I ask one of the guys.

“He said he was going down by the docks. He thinks he found something with the case. Something big,” he says.

“And you didn’t think to call me? You know that’s against protocol, right?” I ask him, pissed. He just shrugs. “Dammit!”

I walk out the door and my heart is racing. I get into one of the patrol cars and take off, heading south. There are only a few ports out of here, but she’ll choose the closest one. Still, it’s far away, forcing me to keep my eyes open to every car going in the opposite direction.

I’m going about 110 in the left lane, and I’m not stopping. My foot is slammed against the pedal. It’s make or break time. Am I going to get her out of this mess? There’s no way I can do it without it getting messy. What do I do? Beg Adam? No. Of course not. I’m going to have to turn on my partner.

I'm going to have to come up with a plan.



I SLOWLY PULL up to the docks and get out, making sure I keep a low profile. After searching for 15 minutes, I come across Adam's car. It's parked and completely empty. I have some time, but probably not that much. My hope is that he didn't call for backup.

I keep walking, toward the workers at the docks. There's a small vendor selling some food and drinks. Nearby, I see her. And there's Adam, talking to her. She looks nervous. No, she looks worse than nervous. She looks hopeless and sad. A sense of guilt starts to creep in my body. My Virginia. The love of my life. Vi... How could I let her down like this?

Maybe it's for the best. Adam was onto her from the get go, it seems. Now, he's got her where he's always wanted her. He's won his little game. He'll get his promotion. I'll get fired, no doubt. There'll

be an investigation. I won't get charged. Cops don't get charged. We get torn apart by the media. The city will despise me. Hell, I probably deserve it.

I deserve it all for being so blind to everything. But I don't give a fuck anymore. I'm not here to play by the rules. I'm here to break them. I'm here to shake things up. I won't be a pawn in Adam's twisted game. I'm my own person, who happens to be in love with a known criminal. Fuck it. Sometimes that's just how life is.

She makes a run for it and a chase ensues. She's a damn good escape artist, but it's obvious where she's trying to go. Within minutes, she gets inside a cab. I'm hoping she doesn't take off. If she does, the whole squad will go after her and it won't be long before that driver stops for them.

I watch as Adam smashes the taxi window. He throws on the cuffs and pulls her out. "Hey," I mutter to myself. "Don't you dare fucking hurt her."

I'm getting close. My hand is on my weapon. This is not who I am. This is against everything the department stands for. But Adam is getting rough with her. He slams her down across the pavement and places his knee across her back. "Stand down!" I hear him yell. "Stop resisting!"

She's not resisting. She's fully compliant, except for the fact that she's writhing against his knee. It's a normal reaction.

I can't take this anymore. Sometimes cops don't deliver true justice. When that happens, someone needs to take a stand. My career over there is done. Even if it wasn't, I'm checked out. You want to know the honest truth? I want Virginia back. I want that feeling she gave me back. I want to feel the thrill of starting a new life with the woman I love. I love Vi. She's the only good thing left in my life.

"Adam! Stand down!" I scream, getting close to him. He turns his head and immediately points his gun at me.

“Stay back, Marshall!” he yells. “This isn’t about you. This is about Virginia Greene.”

“I’m not here to hurt you,” I say. “Just put the gun down. We’ll figure this out together. We’re partners, remember?”

“You knew all along, didn’t you?” he asks, hurt. “You hid this from me since day one. We were never partners. Admit it. You always thought I was stupid.”

“I didn’t know until a few days ago. That’s the God honest truth,” I admit. “Adam, put the gun down!”

Virginia is on the concrete, hands bound behind her back. She’s looking straight at me with those beautiful eyes. Only, they’re full of tears, hurt, and pain. I never want to see her like that. I want to protect her, always. I failed this time, but I won’t ever again.

“Marshall, just let me go,” she pleads. “It’s over. I can’t run forever.”

“Vi,” I say. “I love you. I’m sorry about everything. I don’t care about the past. I just want a future with you.”

“Stay the fuck back!” Adam screams, shaking with anger. “Warren Marshall, you’re under arrest.”

“Fuck off,” I spit. I start walking forward without any fear. “Face me like a man.”

“I’m warning you,” he says. “Stay back.”

“What?” I laugh. “You’re going to shoot a cop?”

The bang comes as a huge shock. At first, I stand there in disbelief. My ears are ringing and the smoke from the barrel is looming all around me. “No!” Virginia screams.

I fall to the ground and Adam drops his gun. What he doesn’t know is that I’m wearing a heavy-duty artillery vest, straight from the SWAT team’s supply room. Still, the bullet knocked the fucking wind out of me. I struggle not to move erratically and give myself away, taking small breaths in. I’m not going

to lie. It hurts like fucking hell and I'm pretty sure one of my ribs is cracked.

“Marshall.” Adam runs over to check my pulse. My hand is still fixed around my pistol. “You ain't dead, right? Come on, man. Hang in there.”

I don't say a word. He just keeps going on, trying to lay the blame on me. “You shouldn't have come at me,” he says. “I would have never pulled the trigger.”

Around us, a crowd has started to form. Quickly, Adam checks for my pulse. Now's my time to act. I throw up a leg and kick him in the jaw. I kick his gun away and hold my pistol, pointing it at his heart.

“I'm okay, Vi,” I say. “I'm getting you out of this mess.”

She's not saying a word and I don't have time to look her way.

“No fucking way,” Adam says. “No! This is my

case. You can't ruin this for me.”

“I need you to get on the ground. Put your hands behind your back,” I say. “If you don't, I'm going to lodge this bullet directly into your groin. Got it?”

He falls to the ground and puts his hands behind his back. I cuff him quickly and keep my gun at him. “Vi!” I yell. “Can you walk?”

She gets up and comes toward me. I uncuff her and hug her quickly. “There's no time,” she says. “I have to leave. I'm... I'm sorry for everything.”

“I'm coming with you,” I tell her. “I shouldn't have ever let you go.”

“Marshall, you can't. You have a life here,” she says. “I don't deserve you.”

Adam tries getting back up, but I kick him back down on the ground. He groans in pain. “Look, I broke too many rules. I'm done with policing. I want an out. I want to be with the woman I love.

“Do you love me still?” I ask her. “It was all real, right? The emotions? The things you said to me?”

“I’ve never fallen so deeply in love with anyone before,” she says. “I made so many terrible decisions. If you want to be with me, you have to know that life won’t be easy for us. We’ll have to get new identities. We won’t be normal. We’ll be outcasts forever.”

“I don’t give a fuck what we are. As long as I’m with you, my life is complete,” I say. “So give me your hand and let’s get the hell out of this place.”

She looks at me with a slight hesitance. Tears fall down her cheeks and she makes no attempt to brush them away. She grabs my hand and I pull her close to me. “My Virginia Slim,” I smile. Our lips crash together and all the goodness in the world floods into my heart. Her scent, her taste, and her touch all comes back with a familiarity.

I’ve missed this woman so fucking much. It doesn’t matter that we come from opposite sides of the

spectrum. We've found our middle ground. We've decided to live our lives dedicated to our love.

Our lips slide away from each other's and we open our eyes. In the distance, sirens can be heard. I look over at Adam, who's looking up at us, dumbfounded.

"Traitor," he says, shaking his head.

"I'd rather be a traitor than work with the likes of you," I say.

"There's no time for this. Let's go!" she yells, running toward the leaving cargo boat. It begins pulling away from the dock. There's no time to spare. This is it.

We both hop on at the last second and watch as we float away from the pier. Adam keeps his eyes fixed on me. I stare back at him, knowing this is going to be the big sensation on every news channel for the next year. The sirens are ringing out. Police cars are getting closer, but we're already far away.

I'm a wanted man now, but I have love. I have her.
Maybe this makes me crazy, but I've never wanted
anything more. Never.

VIRGINIA

“Are you crazy?” I ask him. I’m not smiling. I’m just completely confused at this point. “What are you doing trying to rescue me? I should be going to jail.”

He just laughs and kisses me, bringing me closer to him than ever before. “The only place you should be right now is in my arms,” he says.

“This is insane,” I say, falling to the floor. I lay down and stare up at the sky. “Oh, God. We’re

going to be on the run forever. You shouldn't have come with me.”

“I'm in this too now and I've never felt better,” he says. “I've been on the run my whole life, only I didn't know it before. Now, at least my life has some purpose. No more living under the confines of the department.”

I'm so confused, mad, and just about every emotion under the sun right now. Of course, I'm happy too. It's just that, it's not over yet. “They'll be coming after us soon,” I say.

“Sure they will. And guess what? We'll be in Mexico drinking margaritas at la playa,” he says, so sure of himself.

“No. No we won't. We'll be hiding out in some shack somewhere, until we can get further away from the border. There's not going to be any beaches, Marshall. It's going to be rough,” I say. He needs to know the stakes because right now, they're really high. I've been on the run for weeks

now. Things have only gotten crazier for me.

“Relax,” he laughs. “I get that. You forgot that rough is my middle name.”

He starts unbuttoning his shirt. It's a hot day out and the sun is shining directly on us. Nearby, we can hear a helicopter scour the water. “We should hide,” he says, pulling me in a random direction. We get to an open shipping container and sit inside it, carefully.

I'm sitting nearly on top of him, when he takes off his shirt. “Come here,” he says.

“Okay,” I whisper.

“Don't be scared. We're going to get away with this. Yeah, it's going to be hard, but good things come from hard work, right?” he asks. I nod carefully. “I don't give a damn what happens as long as I'm with you. I've gone crazy, sure. But it's how I feel. Truly.”

I rest my head against his chest. I've missed the

way my body feels when he holds me like this. I've missed the way he smells. I've even missed his stupid arrogance. And, *God*, that smile of his... he's so handsome it makes me sick.

We sit in silence as the helicopters fly over our boat. We hold our breaths and listen as it fans past us. We escaped it, but we'll have to leave this boat soon enough. "When we get there," he says, "just follow my lead. Last thing you want to do is get caught sneaking into Mexico."

I nod, but I'm not thinking about that right now. Right now, I'm only paying attention to his body. There's so much to worry about. Yet, it only excites me now. What the future holds is completely unknown to us, but that's just it! There's *us* again. There's *we*. We're together.

"I've missed this," I whisper.

He looks down at me and smiles. His eyes bear the understanding of the situation, but they betray themselves when he looks elsewhere. My face is

so close to his cock and he wants me to suck him dry. I want to please him again, to show him what he's going to get for the rest of his life.

“Baby,” he whispers. “My sweet darling, Vi.”

“I'm wet,” I reveal. “Touch me.”

He slides two fingers underneath the top of my jean shorts. He pushes them under until he feels me. My breath is sharp and quick when he touches me, while his is deep and long lasting. We have a hunger for each other, a thirst that cannot be quenched.

We both unbutton our clothes, until we're wrestling against each other. My hand is around his thick and *very* hard shaft, stroking him and ultimately, teasing myself. Our lips are crushing against one another's, opening just for the bit of tongue that begs to taste.

I immediately begin riding him. I don't want to waste any more time. I just want to feel him again. I press my pussy down and ride the hell out of him. In and out, he pumps short thrusts upward, as the

tingling starts to grow in my spine. I moan loudly, holding onto him tight. His muscles soon wrap around my body and I'm forced to give into him fully.

"I've missed hearing you moan." His hands fall to my waist. Gripping down around my skin, he holds on and pushes me up and down. I go with his rhythm, feeling the pleasure start to escape me. I look down at him and we kiss. His thrusting grows faster and faster, harder and deeper. He's not letting go. My nails claw down his back. I hold onto him and I feel myself dissipating.

Wave upon wave of pleasure shoots throughout my body. It starts with my legs, moving up through my spine. "Oh, Marshall!" I scream. "Fuck me!" He doesn't let up. He keeps pounding my sweet pussy, and I cum over and over again for him.

His balls draw up and he's left speechless. I feel him shoot his warm cum inside me. "Let's get married," he says, suddenly, with a look of strain in his face. He finishes cumming and kisses each

breast. He sucks on the ends of my nipples, cupping the bottom of my tits.

“I don’t have any ring to give you right now,” he says, out of breath. “But I’ll give you the world if you let me. Let’s get married. Tomorrow. We’ll find a priest. It doesn’t matter who does it as long as it’s done.”

“Marshall,” I laugh with excitement. “You don’t have to go on. Let’s do it. Let’s get married!”

“Could life get any better than this?” he throws his hands behind his head with air of relaxation.

“Probably.” I can’t help but laugh. “We’re stuck in a metal box, baby. These are situations people try and stay away from.”

“Well, they’re fools,” he says confidently. “Even in here, with you, I’m as free as I’ll ever be.”

It’s true. I should be more worried than I am, but I feel as if things will work out now. In the weirdest way, we got what we asked for. We’re almost

there. We're so close. I can feel it.

MARSHALL

Getting off the boat was the least of our worries. All we had to do was give some money to the guys at the docks. They weren't going to say a word. We walk into town with nothing but her suitcase and the clothes on my back. We find a cheap motel and we begin our life together. This is the kind of life I used to stand against. Now, it's my perfect reality.

There's just one small thing I want to do before we

find our stake over here.

“Priest,” I say to a man near a church, late at night.
“*El sacerdote?*”

The man smiles, understanding what I’m looking for. “*Si, sí!*” he exclaims. He brings us inside the small church and I give him some pesos for his help. The man shakes our hands and shows us where the priest sleeps inside the church.

We knock gently on the door. “Maybe we should come back in the morning,” she says. But I want to do this now. This is more important than anything else.

“And get caught by the *federales*? Hell no,” I say.
“This is our chance.”

“But we have nowhere to go,” she laughs, uncertain of the whole situation. “I know a few people. A couple of gringos that run a few farms down here. We’ll work for them and open our own thing. We’ll live well down here. I promise you. I’m going to be the best damn husband in the

world.”

I knock on the door again and a man finally opens it slowly, looking out of the crack of the door. “*El sacerdote?*” I ask him. “Priest?”

He nods. “Yes, I am a priest,” he says in slow English.

I laugh and hug Virginia. “Can you marry us?” I ask him. “*Por favor. Ceremonia de boda. Tú?*” My Spanish is shit and he knows it because he’s smiling.

“*Sí.* I can help you,” he says, glancing at the wallet in my hand. I give him a few bills and he nods, unlocking his door further. “*Un momento,*” he says. He turns around and grabs his priestly garb. I’m not a religious man myself, but it’s important to get the ceremony right. I want to remember this forever, even if it is under such extreme circumstances.

Back home, they’re searching for us. They know we’ve crossed the border, but chances are,

Virginia and I aren't on the government's top priority list. I can picture Freddie Miles asking to send a team over here. Millions of tax payers' dollars down the drain. They won't allow it. Not for some half-assed robbery, in which the money was returned. No way.

We follow the priest out to the center of the church. He lights the candles around the altar and says a prayer. I never imagined I would get married, but since I am, this is the setting I want to do it in. Virginia seems to be in the same boat as me.

"It's beautiful," she says. The silence in the church is as deafening as it is humbling.

"I love you so much," I whisper, my voice echoing throughout the long passageway.

The priest reads the ceremony by heart. His smile is big the whole time. "Because you come to me," he says. "Your love will flourish forever."

I do.

I do.

We kiss and it's as if all the candles in the room grow for the minute our lips meet. "You are married!" he exclaims. "Be free!"

I pick her up in my arms. She's got the same pair of jean shorts on as she did on the cargo boat. "Some wedding dress, huh?" she laughs.

"You don't need a wedding dress. You're beautiful in any outfit, darling," I say. "But once things settle down, we're going to have a huge ceremony. We'll invite all our new friends. Everyone that we meet in this country. It'll be incredible."

That night, we stay close to one another. We cuddle up in our small room. The bed is practically made of one wooden plank, with a hardened army-style mattress plopped on top. It's not comfy whatsoever, but we have each other. We laugh and turn on the television. We have no clue what's being said, but it feels strangely liberating being without a language.

As we fall asleep, I can't help but bask in the warmth of my happiness. "My wife," I smile and kiss the back of her head. She smells so damn good, even without showering for the past day and a half. She'll always be a breath of fresh air to me. "I can't believe it. I can't believe I'm here with you."

"Marshall?" she asks me, suddenly.

"Yes, baby?" I kiss her again.

"Let's have a baby," she says.

I don't even need time to react. "I was hoping you'd say that." I used to frown a lot. I used to get angry. Now, it's like a smile has been glued to my face forever. "A baby now?" one might ask me. I'd respond to them with, "What better time?"

We make love. Her legs intertwine with mine as we kiss. The flickering lights of this cheap motel keep bouncing on and off. The television is blaring. Outside, someone can be heard laughing and telling stories. There's life all around us.

Her sweet pussy lifts up in front of me, as she rests her arms and knees on the bed. “Take me,” she says.

I place my hands on the small of her back. I run my fingers down her spine. I’m forced to kiss every curve of her body before kissing those lips. I drop my body underneath her. My hands grope her huge tits. I suck on each nipple lightly and I come back down to her sweetness. She’s wet, of course, and I’m aching for her. My cock is practically bursting out of my boxers.

I lick her like it’s the first time. I *enjoy* her. She’s a taste of heaven, an angel fallen to this earth for me. The Morningstar of my dreams. We’ve had a hard time together, but that’s what makes us so fucking close. That’s what has kept us glued together. When I’m away from her, I dream of her body, her voice, and her mind.

My tongue slides across every crevice, slowing dipping into her hole. I suck her like a ripe fruit, making sure to savor every last drop. I worship her

pussy like it's God's gift to the abysmal world. I'm on my knees, praying it'll always be there for me, like this. She's open and waiting for me.

Her legs move apart more as my tongue and lips close around her clit. I'm sucking, sucking, sucking on her and she's getting closer to releasing for me. I can see her face in the motel mirror, staring at our reflection. Her cheeks have turned a rosy hue. Her back has arched considerably. Her knees are trembling from a sudden rising pressure.

I insert two fingers inside her and curl them against her spot. I groan loudly as my tongue starts sliding back and forth against her clit. I move faster. And faster. Faster than ever. She begins to moan with me. "Marshall!" she screams. She's about to cum. I keep my mouth on her, intent on giving her the best damn orgasm she's ever had. This is our wedding night. She deserves something special from me.

Finally, the front of her body falls against the hard bed. She starts shaking uncontrollably. Her face contorts with absolute pleasure. I insert a third

finger inside her and start moving quickly, mouth still fixated on her clit. When it's over, she's pulsating slowly. Her breathing has released and, like a fever, she's broke on through with a light sweat.

I waste no time when she says, "Give me a baby." There's nothing hotter to me now than keeping her by my side and giving her something so pure. I want to be the husband she dreamed about when she was a little girl. I want to be the father she and I never had. I want to protect them both, this being that I'm about to create.

I slide myself in slowly as she lay on her back, gazing wondrously into my eyes. She's perfect, like apple pie on a hot, summer day. I dig in, pounding her relentlessly. When she reaches down and starts rubbing my balls, I can't fucking contain myself. She smiles, knowing she's driving me crazy. She whispers, "Cum, baby."

Her smooth voice hits a spot inside my brain that lets out a beastly emotion. I moan loudly, looking

at every part of her body. My left hand cups around her tit, feeling the heavy, smooth skin. My right hand moves over her soft stomach. I feel her skin and soak up every bit of her.

I'm going to cum. I can't hold out any longer. I gaze into those hazel eyes and feel the pressure inside me burst. It starts between my legs, but moves up my spine. My mind opens up and I can see it all in front of me. The first night we met, the person I used to be, and everything else in between that led up to this moment. My cum comes bursting from me, shooting inside her like a loaded gun.

"Give it to me," she whispers as if there's even an option now.

I shudder lightly and kiss her stomach once more. I press my body down and kiss her sweet pussy. I rise back up and kiss her lips. Our tongues meet one more time before we're too tired to stay awake. I give her a taste of herself and she gives a last moan of pleasure.

“A baby,” I smile. “I can’t believe we’re going to have a baby.”

“*Marybell*,” she says.

“What?” I ask.

“Her name should be Marybell,” she says. She already knows it’s a girl and I trust that she’s right.

I wipe the sweat off my forehead and run my hands through her hair. “Marybell,” I smile. “That’s the prettiest name I’ve ever heard.”

“She’s going to be so loved,” she says.

I hold her close. Our naked bodies are warm amongst the cold walls of the motel. “She’s going to a fucking princess,” I laugh. “I’m going to give her everything in the world. I want to be the best daddy known to man.”

“You will be,” she says. “And I know everything will work out for us. We’re too damn smart for it not to.”

That's debatable on my end. But I let her have her say. Because right now, I'm on top of the fucking world.

Epilogue: Marshall

Years pass, but you always feel just about the same age. Sometimes, when you look back on things, they feel as if they just happened. Other times, it feels like a lifetime ago. I can't believe I was a cop. In Texas, no less. I still have all the admiration in the world for the force. But now, things are different for me. It's not like I followed any of their rules, anyway. I was bound to get out sooner or later.

Now, I'm the owner of my own produce company. We do business all the way into Arizona. I had to jump through a few hoops to get those jobs, but it can be done. Anything can be done with a little finesse and a little money. Luckily, we've managed to hit the gold mine out here, with a little help from our friends.

“Marybell, come on!” I yell. “I want to show you something.”

Today is Easter and it marks the 3rd year we’ve been a three-person family together. Like I said, I’m not a religious man, but I do think things hold a certain significance if you want them to. For us, this holiday is a good way of celebrating the birth of our family, for Marybell was born on April 2nd.

“Daddy!” She runs toward me. I pick her up in my arms and smile, even if she’s heavier than ever now. I’m just an old dad now, but I feel younger than ever. A kid can do that to you. “Look at that.” She points at a dried-up saguaro cactus on the side of the trail.

We’re always exploring the area together. Soon enough, we’ll be exploring the world, as a family. Once we get our passports approved, we’re taking a boat over to Europe. We’ve already saved enough money to do it.

“What is that?” I set her down near the cactus and

examine it. All the sharp pricks have fallen off and now it looks like a hollow shell.

“An elephant trunk,” she says, proudly identifying it in her own way.

“An elephant trunk!” I laugh. “Well, I’ll be.”

Slowly, Vi walks up and kneels down with us. “Where are the other elephants?” she asks Marybell.

“Well, they must be close by,” I say.

“They’re at home, silly!” Marybell says, touching a part of the yellowing cactus. The world is so strange out here and she loves exploring. Soon, however, we’re moving to the city. We found a private school there that’s hailed as one of the best in the country. Parent shit. PTA meetings. Homework. Truth is, I’m actually excited.

Virginia

It’s not the life a lot of people envision for themselves. We’ve had to jump through a million

hoops just to find normality. However, when I think back on my childhood, I would have killed to be in Marybell's shoes. Truthfully, she has it made compared to both of us.

Our life is dedicated to our love and she is the perfect gift out of the shit storm we ran from. But it's not like we have it perfect. We have the white-picket fence, the pool, the nicest house we could ask for, and a flourishing business, sure. But we're still on the fringe of everything.

So when the lights seem dim and the cold worry from the world seems to burst in our doors, we bask in our warmth and huddle together. We tell stories and try to give Marybell as much as we can. We go out to restaurants, we take plenty of beach vacations in the west, and we start to build memories together.

When Marybell finally goes to sleep, we invest in ourselves. I can't help but dive into the past, to think of all that we've escaped and done, all the wrongs I committed. My memory always drops

into the fateful night we bumped into each other at the bar back home. I was so scared. So nervous about what he'd do to me. I didn't know he'd become the center of my life. I didn't understand how deep this would all get.

We're getting older, but we grow closer every day. We build an empire with our love. We hold it down and cement it for future generations to wonder back on. This is the Marshall family, we say. Here's our story. Look at all we've accomplished.

"Remember the candles?" he asks me, before bed. We're close tonight, lost in the same dream together. His strong arms wrap around my cold body. He heats me up by sliding his hands over my ribs to my stomach.

"The candles?" I ask him.

"At our wedding," he says. He kisses my cheek. I feel his cock rising against my pussy as he says the words. Some things never change.

“How could I forget?” I smile. I reach around and feel his shaft grow in my palm.

“Let’s do it again,” he says. “Let’s replay it all over.”

“I wish,” I say. “It’s been so…”

“Crazy,” he finishes my sentence. “So fucking wonderful. So fucking crazy.”

“It’s only going to get crazier. Once Marybell is all grown up, she’s going to start teaching us,” I laugh.

“I think we should have another one,” he says. “Let’s just keep going with this. Why the hell not?”

His hand is around my ass now. His fingers are moving toward my lips. He spreads me open and I moan quietly. “Come on,” he says. “You want this dick?”

Pompous bastard. And yes, I want that fucking dick, dammit. Another kid? Oh jeeze. I hate to say it, but it does actually sound kind of perfect. Just... not yet.

“Give me a year, you horn dog,” I say.

“You don’t want this?” he holds his cock proudly. He looks better than ever. As my tits drop lower, his body gets more chiseled. And yet, he loves me more than he did back when we first met.

“Give me that thing,” I say. He keeps his fingers against my lips, spreading me open. When he enters me, my mouth drops and my toes curl.

We still got it, that’s for sure. And the world is at our fingertips. Sure, we’re fugitives. But that’s just one small piece of the story.

We’re the fucking Marshalls. Get used to it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kara Hart is a new author from the southwest. She's a full time student, writer, and mother of two loving dogs. She loves bad boys with a darker, sweeter side to them. She knows someday she'll get invited into the MC ... Someday...

I LOVE hearing from my fans! I do my best to respond to everyone, so please follow me on [Facebook](#).

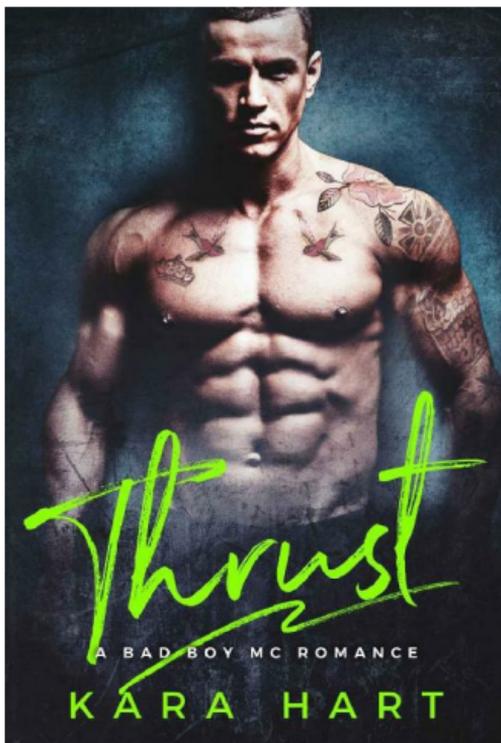
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authorkarahart

karahartauthor@gmail.com

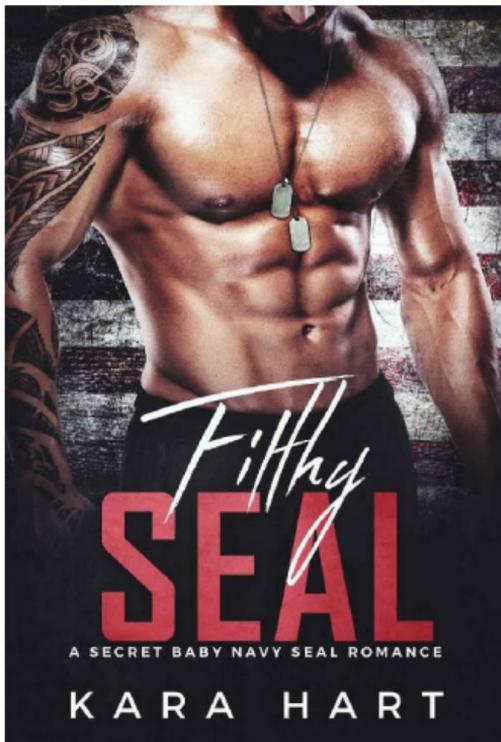
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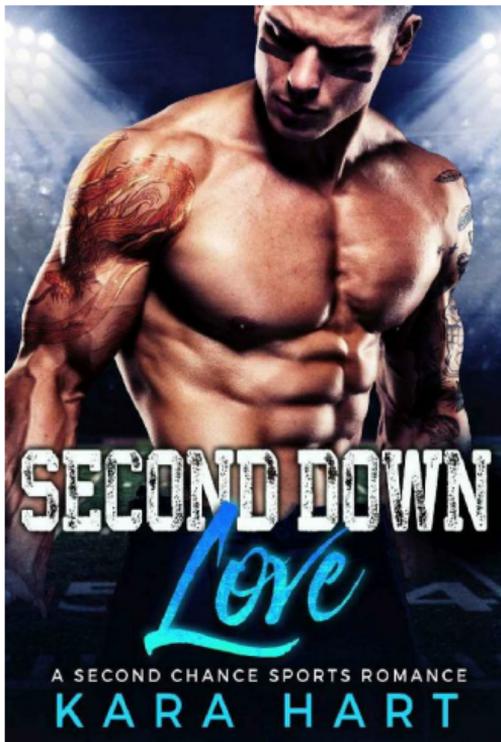
Come on, Kitten. Let's go for a ride.



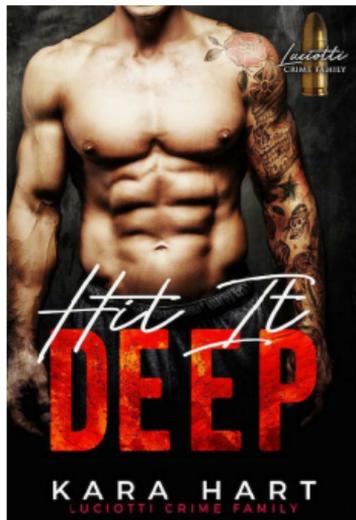
I'll stop when she begs



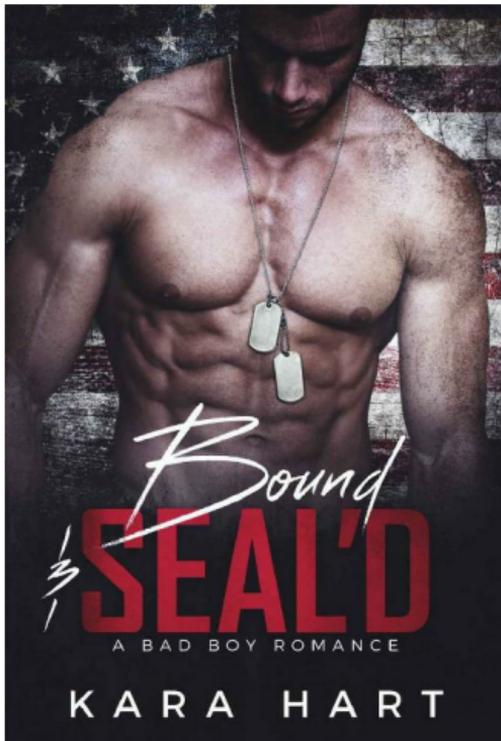
The hardest men take what they want



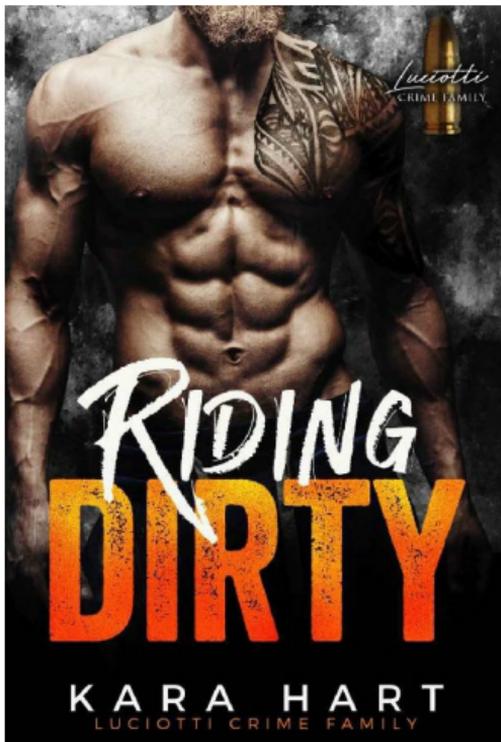
I play hard. On and off the field.



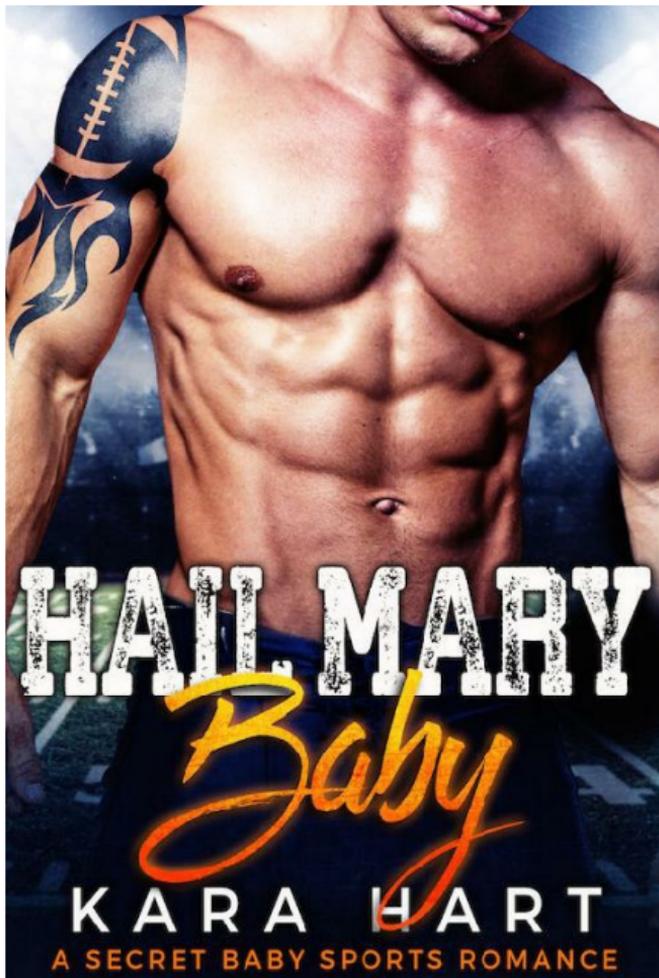
Lust is HARD. Love is DEEP.



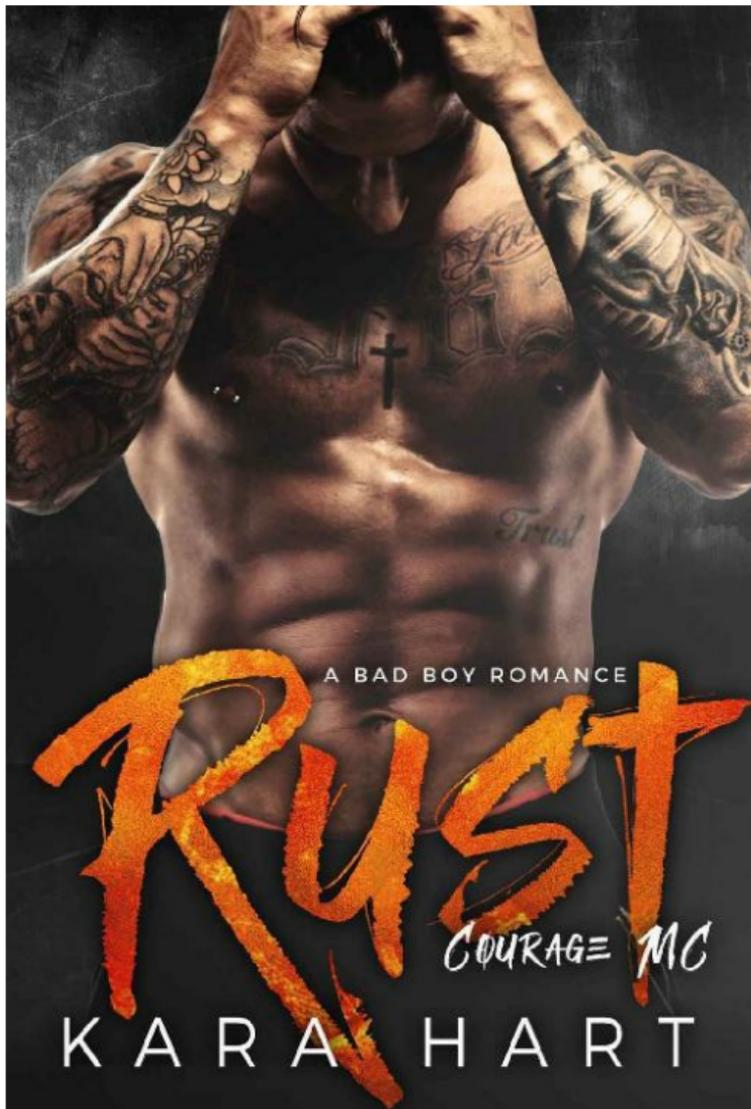
Ripped SEAL. Filthy mouth. Big... gun. What else does a woman need?



You want to play rough? Be careful what you wish for.



I made one big mistake that almost ruined my life -- I had the quarterback's baby.

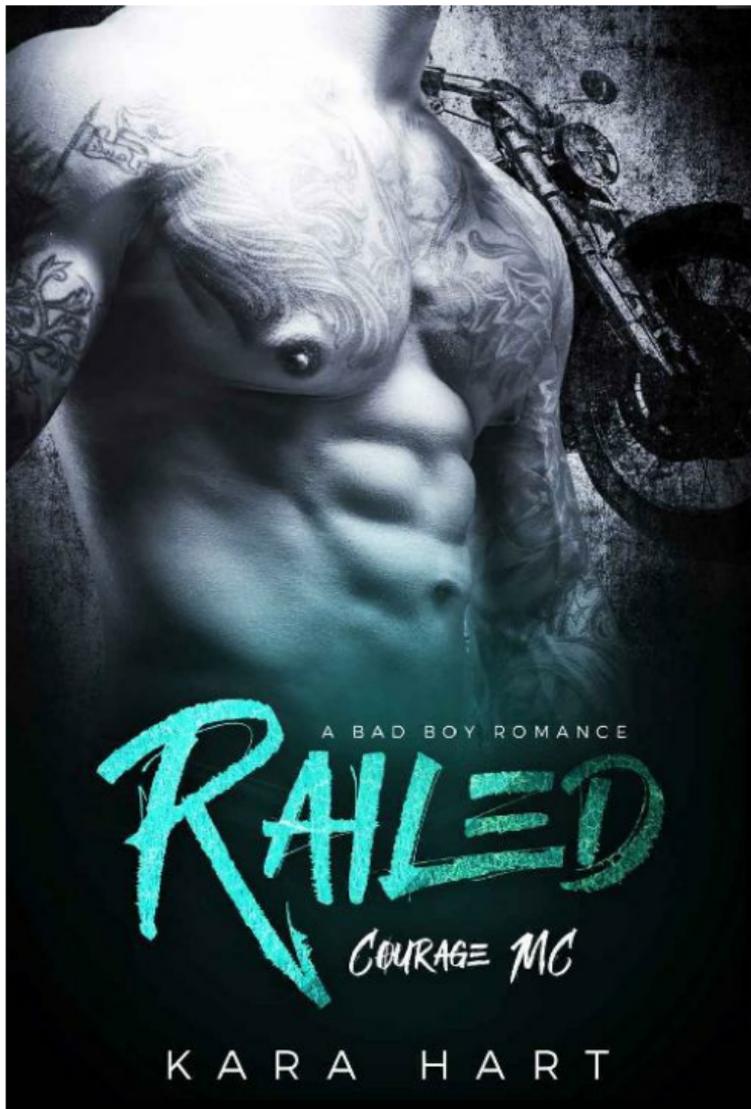


A BAD BOY ROMANCE

RUST

COURAGE MC

KARA HART

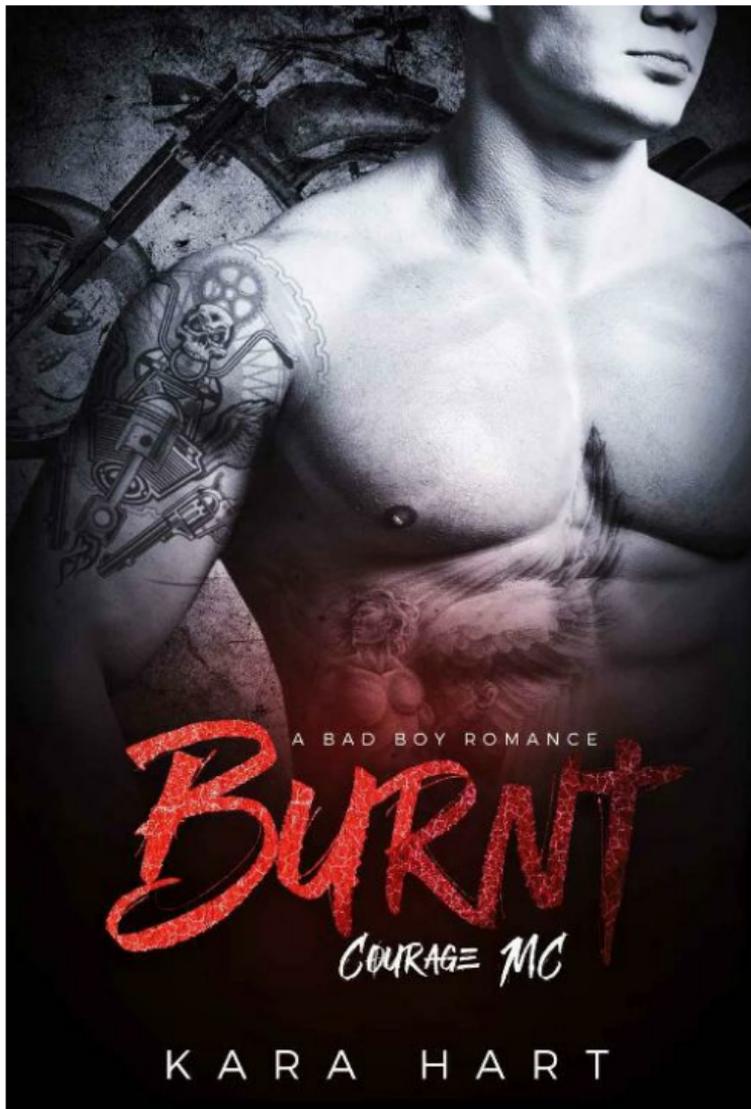


A BAD BOY ROMANCE

RAILED

COURAGE MC

K A R A H A R T



A BAD BOY ROMANCE

BURNIT

COURAGE MC

K A R A H A R T