



THE BOSS

Author of the #1 Bestseller BASTARD

J.L. PERRY

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Dedication

*This book is dedicated to Candy Ross . . .
Your support and friendship means everything to me.*

Hanna Scott . . .

she's been my obsession since I was seventeen.

She's the object of every dirty thought I've ever had.

I'm consumed.

I lust over her . . . albeit from afar.

She has no idea how I feel.

And my secret can never come out,

because there's one major hurdle standing in our way . . .

she's my best friend's little sister.

When she offers to stand in as my temporary secretary, I'm torn.

Will I be able to risk the temptation?

Or will I succumb and lose everything that I hold dear?

You always want what you
can't have . . .
it's human nature.



Chapter 1

The beginning of the end . . .

Harrison

The expensive black leather on my plush office chair creaks when I slump back into it. I pinch the bridge of my nose in frustration as my secretary hastily spins around and runs out of my office in tears.

“Fuck,” I mumble under my breath a few seconds later when I hear the door in the reception area slam shut. There goes secretary number four, or is it five? Michelle, my Human Resource Manager, is going to have my nuts for afternoon tea. Just the thought of it has my balls wanting to climb up inside of me and hide for their own safety.

Tilting my head back, I exhale an exasperated breath as my gaze moves to the ceiling. I start to count to one hundred in my head, because I know that’s roughly how long it’s going to take before she comes busting through the door.

“Eighty-seven . . . eighty-eight . . . eighty—.”

Wow. A new record.

“What the hell, Harrison,” Michelle screeches as she comes barreling into my office. As frustrated as I am right now, a smile tugs at my lips. I know her like the back of my hand.

We met in high school, when she started dating my best friend, Ethan. Ten years later they married, and she’s been a pain in my arse ever since. Don’t get me wrong, I love her like a sister, but she’s a ball-buster with a capital B. She keeps me, and her poor husband, on our toes. She’s also a constant reminder why I’m never getting married. Fuck that shit. I’m more than happy to keep playing the field. I don’t need no broad telling me what to do. I’m happy to date, but that’s as far as it goes. I think the longest relationship I’ve ever been in, lasted about a month tops. If I want to be henpecked, I’ll go to Ethan’s house.

In all honesty, I can’t blame my lack of wanting to commit on Michelle though, that ball lays firmly in my parent’s court. Their fucked-up relationship was enough to turn me off ever settling down. If that’s what being married is all about, then I don’t want any part of it.

I hold my hand up in the air, stopping her before she says another word. “Calm down, Shell,” I say as I place my hands on the desk and lean forward in my seat. She’s given me the same spiel three, or is it

four times, over the past two weeks. I really don't need to hear it again. I practically know it off by heart.

"Don't you tell me to calm down, mister!" Here we fucking go. I roll my eyes as I settle back into my chair. "You've had five secretaries run out of here in the past two weeks. May I add, in tears? Two weeks, Harrison."

"I have no tolerance for incompetence," I point out, folding my hands behind my head.

"Well, maybe if you stopped acting like a prick for five seconds and gave them a chance . . ."

Her comment gets on my nerves. "Listen," I say, bringing my body forward.

"No. You listen. I've worked my arse off trying to find you a perfect replacement. Every single one of them have come with impeccable references. They were all more than suitable for the job." She sighs before continuing. "The problem here is you, Harrison. Why can't you act like the guy I know and love when you're at work? This isn't the real you."

I'd ask her the same question, but she's a ball-buster even when she's not at work. The truth is, I wouldn't have her any other way. In her own twisted way, she's only doing it because she cares. I constantly need to remind myself of that. Underneath all that toughness, is a heart of gold, and she wouldn't hesitate to give you the shirt off her back. I trust her implicitly. She has my back, and only does what she thinks is best for me and my company. I can't fault *her*, or her multi-fucking-personalities, for that. She can be a raging bitch one minute and as sweet as pie the next.

"I didn't get where I am today by being a pussy," I state. This is a cut-throat industry. That's why I'm so successful. I know what I want, and I'm not afraid to go after it. I've worked my arse off to get where I am. I used my shitty childhood to inspire me to be somebody. To earn enough money to not have to worry where my next meal was coming from. One major lesson I learnt from my fucked-up circumstances as a kid is starvation is a really good motivator.

"Okay," she says, standing. When she straightens her shoulders, I know she's about to let me have it. "Maybe *you* should find your new replacement then, since my choices aren't up to your standards."

"Maybe I should."

"Fine," she snaps, placing her hands on her hips.

"Fine."

Turning on her heels, she storms out of my office. Exactly like the secretary I just lost. Unlike what's her name though, there's no tears with this one. Hell would freeze over the day I made her cry.

Exhaling a large breath, I run my fingers through my dark hair.

Ethan deserves a damn medal.

I honestly don't know how he does it. I asked him that exact question once, and his answer was simple—*love*. Fucking love. Is there such a thing? Lust maybe, but love? It's not something I've ever experienced.

Minutes later, Michelle comes storming back into my office, dumping a large pile of motherfucking folders on my desk. "Good luck," she says smugly, before turning to leave again. She pauses at the doorway, glancing at me over her shoulder. Her expression softens and a sweet smile graces her face before she speaks again. "By the way, there's a family dinner tonight at seven. Don't be late."

See, a perfect example of her multi-personality disorder right there.



“Knock, knock,” I call out as I push open the front screen door, entering Ethan and Michelle’s house.

“Harry,” I hear before I’m even through the doorway. She says it in a way that excites me, it’s one of those breathy kinda tones. Like the way I’d imagine her saying my name as I slid inside her. That sweet sound has all the blood in my body, rushing straight to my cock. I swear I could smell her before she even spoke. Plus, she’s the only person on this earth that gets away with calling me Harry.

I’m glued to the spot as my eyes drink her in. She looks even more beautiful than I remember. She’s tanned, she’s glowing . . . she’s fucking radiant. *Hanna*. Hanna Scott. The object of every dirty thought I’ve ever had. Christ. The things we’ve done together in my mind. Ethan would kill me if he knew what me and his little sister got up to in my head. He’d string me up by my nuts for sure. Unfortunately, for those reasons alone, my dirty thoughts of her, will only ever be that. Ethan worships the ground she walks on.

“God, it’s been months,” she says. “I’ve missed you.”

Three and a half months to be exact, but who’s counting?

“Shrimp,” I say as she leaps off the lounge, launching herself at me. It’s sinful how right she feels in my arms. Jesus, that smell. I inhale deeply as I tighten my embrace. It’s my addiction. It’s fruity and flowery, distinctively her.

“Did you just sniff me?” she asks.

“No.” I chuckle. I so just sniffed her. “What are you doing here? Why aren’t you at uni?”

Please don’t think of her tits. Christ, now I’m thinking of her perky tits, that are firmly pressed into my chest.

“I’m on a break. Classes don’t start back for another eight weeks.”

That news has me smiling. I shouldn’t like the thought of having her around for the next eight weeks, but I do. I hate to admit it, but I’ve missed her more than I should have. I was hoping once she moved away to start University, my secret obsession with her would diminish. If anything, it’s only gotten stronger. She’s under my damn skin and occupying way too much space in my brain. Well, the dirty thoughts part of my brain anyway.

“It’s good to see you,” I say, ruffling her hair.

“You too.”

I’ve never lusted over a woman like I do over her. Maybe that’s the problem. You always want what you can’t have. What I really need to do is fuck her and get her out of my system, but I already know that’s never going to happen.

Growing up, she was just like one of the boys to me. She’d hang with us sometimes. My other mates would never let their little sisters hang around, but Ethan was different. He adores her. I never minded her being with us. She’s smart, witty, unpretentious, and just fun to be around. She always dressed in sweats and loose T-shirts. Unlike other women, fashion never seemed to be high on her radar. Back then, I never even looked at her that way. But things changed for me around the age of seventeen. Boy, did they change.

I’ll never forget it. It was one of those lightbulb moments and it knocked me on my arse. Ethan and I were in his pool when she came out of the house wearing a tiny pink bikini. Her body was rocking. She had curves in all the right places. Her tits. *Fuck me, her tits.* I never knew she was packing those babies under all the loose clothing she wore. Thank Christ I was already in the water, because she gave me an

instant boner. Nobody had ever affected me so instantly before.

It was the first time I'd ever seen her for what she really was . . . a sexy as hell woman. She may've only been fifteen at the time, but she was all woman to me. A beautiful, every guy's kinda fantasy, woman.

From that moment on I was doomed.

Fucking doomed.



Chapter 2

*My every fantasy, and worst nightmare,
all rolled into one . . .*

Harrison

“Wanna beer?” Ethan asks as I settle back into the outdoor sofa by the barbeque.

“Yeah.” My eyes follow him as he opens the small bar fridge on the back patio, grabbing two bottles of beer. “Thanks,” I say when he passes me one.

I love coming here. Being with these guys has always felt like home to me. It’s by far my main motivator for staying away from Hanna. I’d never want to jeopardise my friendship with Ethan. I spent more time with his family growing up, than I did with my own. It was my happy place and far better than the nightmare of my reality.

Having an alcoholic father, who slaps your mother around for fun, meant my real home wasn’t a fun place to be. But instead of leaving him, my mother chooses to jump from one bed to the next. I don’t know if it’s to spite him, or whether it’s her way of finding the affection she doesn’t get from him. Either way, it’s messed up. It only makes my father drink more and escalates the violence. So, it’s a lose-lose situation for them both, for all of us. It’s a vicious cycle that only they can break, but I can’t see that happening . . . ever.

“So, how’s business going?” he asks as a smile plays on his lips. He knows damn well how it’s going. His wife works for me. Michelle would’ve already filled him in on the events of the day. She always does.

“Seriously man, you need to rein that woman in. She’s getting worse.”

He throws back his head and laughs. “Welcome to my world, sunshine . . . welcome to my world.”

I would be delusional if I thought I’d get sympathy from him. He likes it when Michelle’s giving me a hard time. *Cock*. It’s a welcome reprieve for him.

I wasn’t the one who put a ring on her damn finger, it’s an injustice that I have to be subjected to this bullshit. He signed on for it, I sure as hell didn’t.



“So how are the interviews going?” Michelle asks as I go to place a piece of meat into my mouth. My fork pauses mid-air when I hear Ethan snickering from opposite me. After kicking him under the table, I continue eating. It’s rude to talk with your mouth full, so that conveniently means I don’t have to answer her.

“Why are you interviewing?” Hanna asks.

I point to my mouth as I chew. I’m not getting into this now. I’ll end up with indigestion if I do.

“He’s looking for a new secretary, since he can’t seem to find one to suit.” Michelle’s eyes slightly narrow at me as she speaks. She’s on to me. She knows exactly what I’m doing. Nothing gets past her.

Hanna reaches out, running her fingers gently down the length of my arm. It sends shockwaves straight to my cock. How can a simple touch from her do that? It’s like electricity coursing through my veins and awakening every last nerve ending. I hate that she affects me like that. It’s unnerving. And why does she have to smile at me in that way when she does it? I’m a sucker for that smile.

“Oh, I’m happy to fill in until you find a replacement, Harry,” she says sweetly. The thought of having her so close has me inhaling a sharp breath, which causes the meat in my mouth to lodge in the back of my throat. Fuck. When I start to cough and bang on my chest, Hanna jumps up from her chair in a panic and begins tapping my back. I may be coughing up a lung, and possibly choking to death, but all I can think is, *hell fucking no, I can’t have her working for me.* “Oh my God, are you okay.”

I hold my hand up in the air when the meat finally slides down the back of my throat, alerting her that the crisis had been averted, and I’m okay. I was kinda hoping I’d pass out from the lack of oxygen so I wouldn’t have to deal with this shit right now.

“Yes, you’d be perfect,” Michelle squeals.

No, she won’t. It’ll be torture. I’ll never get any work done. I’ll be too busy lusting over my hot as hell secretary sitting on the other side of the wall.

“Hang on a minute,” Ethan chimes in, as his gaze moves to his wife. My best friend will save the day. “I’m not sure about this. You said the last five girls left in tears.”

“Yes, yes, they did,” I reply, a little too enthusiastically.

“I think we both know he’d never do that to your baby sister,” Michelle replies. She’s right, I don’t think I have it in me to make her cry, cry out my name in ecstasy as I send her over the edge, now that I could definitely do. “I can’t make any promises.” I’m grasping at straws here. I can already see Michelle’s mind ticking over. She’s gonna push for this.

Hanna is studying Business Management. She’d be more than capable of doing the job at hand, if anything she’s overqualified. Unlike Ethan and Hanna, I never attended University. My parents simply couldn’t afford it. My father worked, but he drank most of his money away. One of the positives I drew from my parent’s situation was not only street smarts, but a burning desire to be nothing like them.

When I was about ten, I started working; mowing lawns, washing cars, cleaning people’s windows and pools, whatever I could get my hands on. I even did the local paper route. What little free time I had, was spent at Ethan’s house. Neither Ethan, nor his mother, ever mentioned my situation at home, but they obviously knew it was pretty fucked up. Not only did Mrs Scott start having me over for dinner every night, she’d send an extra packed lunch to school with Ethan. Occasionally, she’d even give me clothes, using the excuse, “I bought these for Ethan, but they’re too big on him. It would be a shame to see them go to waste.” I wasn’t stupid, I knew exactly what she was doing. She’d bought them for me, but didn’t want

me to feel like a charity case. I may have been poor, but I still had pride. I'll always love her for that.

Except for the few necessities I needed, I saved every penny I earned. My mother didn't need money because all her best friends looked after her. By the time I was eighteen, I had enough saved to put a down-payment on a small unit, which I rented out to help pay off the mortgage. Within six months, I used the equity in that to buy another one. I had the property bug. It all seemed to grow from there. By the time I was twenty I made my first million and Williams Enterprises was born.

That's when I started acquiring prime parcels of land and selling them off at a huge profit to large corporations. Then I moved into building office blocks on the land. That brought in even more money. For a kid who did without so much growing up, I suddenly had the money to buy whatever I wanted. It was a nice feeling. If I never worked another day in my life, I'd never go hungry again. But I love what I do, so I'm not about to stop.

"Yes, you're right," Ethan says to his wife, with a nod of his head. Has he lost his damn mind? "He'll look after her. He always has."

Hello! Is anyone listening to me? This is a bad idea. A huge motherfucking catastrophe.



Chapter 3

I'm going straight to hell . . .

Harrison

Monday comes around way too fast. I always arrive at work early. I use this time to catch up on my emails and prepare for the week ahead. This morning my head hasn't been in the game. I'm on edge. I haven't done a damn thing, except pace back and forth.

I tried my best to stop this, but in the end, I was outvoted, three to one. Whose company is this anyway?

“Good morning, Mr Williams.”

Mr Williams? She's never called me that before. It's always been Harry or Giant. That's her comeback for me calling her Shrimp. She's four-foot-seven, so my six-foot-three frame, towers over hers.

Spinning around to face the door, I almost swallow my tongue when I see her. She's wearing a high-waisted tight fitting skirt that stops just above her knees. It hugs her body perfectly. I can see a hint of white lace protruding from underneath her white silk blouse. She looks like an angel. A sinfully, hot as hell angel. The thin red belt around her tiny waist matches her sexy red heels. She's sex on legs, a walking fucking wet dream.

I swear I'm holding my breath as my eyes drink her in. Her long blonde hair is pulled into a bun at the nape of her neck, and the red rimmed glasses she's wearing not only frame her beautiful blue eyes perfectly, they turn me the hell on. She has this naughty librarian thing going on and it instantly has my mind going into overdrive. I picture her releasing her long blonde locks from where they're being held captive, and imagine her shaking her head from side to side as her hair comes loose and cascades down her lean back. I shake my head and suppress a growl as I try to bring my mind out of the gutter and back into reality. What in the hell is wrong with me? Like always, she's playing the starring role in one of my many fantasies. This shit has to stop.

When my eyes finally meet hers, I find her smiling. Did she just witness me checking her out? Thank fuck she can't read minds. I'd be in deep shit if she could. Having her here is going to be harder than I thought.

Clearing my throat, I tug at the tie around my neck as I take a step closer. I'm suddenly feeling

claustrophobic. “You don’t need to call me, Mr Williams, Han.”

“What did your other Secretaries call you?”

“Mr Williams,” I chuckle.

She looks up at me from beneath her glasses and I’m pretty sure my heart just skipped a beat. I could drown in those damn eyes of hers. “Well, Mr Williams it is then.”

“I’d feel stupid hearing you call me that.”

“Only in the office,” she replies with a smile. “Outside of here, you’ll still be Giant, my brother’s pesky friend, or just plain old Harry.”

“Your brother’s pesky friend, hey?” I say, pulling her into a headlock.

“Yes,” she laughs.

“Take that back, Shrimp.”

“Okay. Only mildly pesky . . . and only on occasions.”

We’re both laughing when I release her. She’s like no other woman I know. Things are so easy around her, just like breathing.

“So now we’ve got that established, where do you want me to start?” I smile when she eagerly rubs her hands together. I like her enthusiasm.

“Come, your desk is out here.” The thought of moving her desk into my office, flashes through my mind. That would be asking for trouble; trouble I don’t need.

Placing my hand on the small of her back, I lead her out to reception. Once she’s seated, I get her to log onto the computer. “I have a conference this afternoon, I’m going to need you to make sure all the files are in order. I’ll also need you to print out copies of my presentation, for them to follow.”

“That sounds like something I could do.”

“Click on the Jensen merger file,” I say, leaning forward to point to it on the screen. I inhale a large breath when her fruity, yet flowery, smell invades my senses.

“Did you just sniff me?”

“What? No.” Standing to full height, I clear my throat. “Why would I sniff you?” I deadpan. *Jesus.* I’m starting to look like some kind of sniffing freak. In my defence, she shouldn’t smell so good. I need to get my shit together if I’m going to come out the other end of this unscathed.

“Okay. No need to get so defensive. I thought I heard you sniff.”

“Nope. No sniffing. I definitely didn’t sniff you.” I’m such a damn liar. *I so sniffed her.*

“Okay. You didn’t sniff me,” she says, shrugging her shoulders. “Relax. Geez. It’s no big deal.”

“I’ll email you a list of jobs that need doing this morning. After lunch, you’ll need to set up the boardroom for my presentation.”

With that, I turn and head back into my office. I need distance.

It’s safer.



It’s just after one when I stroll back into my office. I have a good twenty minutes before I need to

make my way to the conference room for my meeting. Hanna has been on the ball all morning and done everything I asked of her. I spent that time going over the pile of resumes on my desk. The quicker I find a replacement, the better off we'll all be. Although she's perfect for the job, and both efficient and diligent. I'm not going to mention how damn beautiful she looks sitting in my reception area. But I can't have her here.

I'm surprised when I don't find Hanna sitting back behind her desk when I enter. I left her in the boardroom when I headed out to lunch, but she was almost finished setting up.

My office door is open, so I just presume she's in there. Entering, my eyes scan the room, but I don't see her. When I hear, "Shit, shit, shit," coming from my private bathroom, I head in that direction.

I'm stopped in my tracks the moment I reach the doorway. There stands the object of my every fantasy, bending over the wash basin wearing only that sexy as fuck skirt, and a white lace bra. The sight has my cock jumping in my pants.

"Hanna," I say, but it comes out in a strangled groan.

"Shit." Spinning around, she faces me. Bad move. Now I have a full-frontal view and as much as I want to look away I can't. My eyes lock onto her tits, and don't move. Fuck me. I swear, if I could suffocate myself in her cleavage I'd die a happy man.

It's not until I hear her throat clear, that my eyes snap up to her face. Her amused smirk tells me she just witnessed me checking out her rack. I'd have to be blind not to. I'm teetering on the edge of hell here, and if she doesn't cover up soon I may commit the ultimate sin. I've already spent half the morning picturing her bent over my desk.

I'm surprised that she makes no effort to cover herself, but I on the other hand I stay strong. I will my eyes to remain focused on her face. I'm struggling and, as the seconds tick by, I'm losing all resolve.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

"I spilt coffee on my blouse. I'm trying to wash it out before the meeting starts, but it's not budging." Shoving my hands into the pockets of my pants, I avert my gaze to the ceiling. I can't trust my eyes not to betray me. "I can't go into the meeting wearing only this."

She's right, she can't. I honestly wouldn't mind, but I'd probably get violent if the others ogled her. Actually, I know I would. That's not going to help this deal go through.

Hanna is two years younger than me and Ethan. When we were in high school, I was the one who scared away the guys that were sniffing around. Anyone who showed the slightest bit of interest in her, was on my radar. Ethan thought I was doing it for him, you know, looking after his little sister and all that, but in reality, I was doing it for my own reasons. I didn't want anyone else to have her. I know that's wrong when I couldn't have her either, but I'm selfish like that. Since I don't have much, I'm protective over what's mine. Well, she's mine in my head, in reality she's not even close.

"Put this on," I say, removing my suit jacket. "I can't concentrate when you're dressed like that."

She laughs as she takes it from my hand. "It's just a bra. It's not like you haven't seen me in a bikini before." Oh, I've seen her in a bikini—that's what started this damn obsession.

"Just put it on," I snap.

"Wow. Easy there, tiger. I'm sure you've seen women more scantily dressed before. Actually, I know you have." My eyes snap to hers when she says that last part. Is it wishful thinking, or did she sound a

touch hurt, and possibly bitter, over her knowledge of my previous conquests? It's no secret I've been around, but I'm not a total manwhore. I will call the next day and I'm even capable of dating, just not long term. Without speaking, she does as she's told. "I can't wear this jacket to the meeting either."

My eyes travel down the length of her body. My jacket is sitting mid-thigh. She looks sexy wearing my clothes, even if she's practically drowning in it. But she's right, she can't wear that. *Think Williams, think.* Looking down at my watch, I see we have less than a quarter of an hour. There's no time to buy her a replacement, and I need her in there with me.

"I have an idea," I say as I spin around and head back into my office. Heading for the wooden panelling along the back wall, I push on the one that hides my small built-in robe. I always have spare shirts and suits here. There's been many a time I pulled an all-nighter. That's why I had a private bathroom installed, so I can shower. My leather couch came equipped with a pull-out sofa bed.

Removing one of the crisp white shirts from its hanger, I head back into the bathroom. "Put this on."

I turn my back, giving her time to get dressed. "I can't wear this," she whines a few minutes later. "I look ridiculous."

She's right, she does. Like the jacket, the shirt sits mid-thigh, and the sleeves are so long they cover her hands. "Come here," I command, and she closes the distance between us. I hold my breath so I'm not tempted to sniff her again. She's already caught me out twice.

I set about rolling the sleeves up until they sit just below her elbows. Her breathing becomes rapid and I try not to focus on the rise and fall of her chest. The close proximity of our bodies is too much. "Take your belt off and wrap it around your waist." When she does, I pull the shirt up and over the belt slightly to help bring up the length. "There," I say proudly.

"I still look ridiculous."

"No, you don't, you look hot." The words are out of my mouth before I even register what I've said.

I hear her gasp. "You think I look hot?" If she was wearing a paper bag, she'd look beautiful to me.

I can't even bring myself to look her in the eye. I'm such a coward. My gaze moves down to my watch instead. "Fuck, look at the time. We should get going."

Yep, I'm definitely going to hell.



Chapter 4

Falling over the edge . . .

Harrison

I've managed to hide this obsession I have with her for years. But in a matter of a few short days, I seem to be slipping. It was easy to lust for her from afar, but having her so close, and her intoxicating smell around me, was bringing me closer and closer to the edge.

I've caught her watching me over the past few days. There's something about the way she looks at me. I've never noticed it before; is she lusting over me too? Or is that just wishful thinking on my part?

Then there's the occasional touches. Like this morning. She brought a coffee into my office. It was just the way I like, or maybe it tasted great because she'd made it. After she handed it to me, she reached out and grabbed hold of my bicep. "You have great arms, Mr Williams," she said. I swear there was a twinkle in her eye as she spoke. What the fuck was that all about? *If she's trying to break me, it's working.*

I thought I'd hate hearing her call me by my last name, but it's growing on me fast. I'd like to hear her say it while she's under me. *Fuck me harder, Mr Williams.* That would be something.

I've been pouring over the resumes on my desk, but nobody catches my eye. Maybe subconsciously it's because nobody could replace Hanna. I want her here, but on the other hand I don't. It's just too risky. Ethan would kill me if I laid even a finger on his little sister. I don't want to do anything that will jeopardise our friendship. I'd be lost without it.

I reach for the receiver on my phone when it buzzes. "There's a Mr Jenkins, from The Jenkins Corporation, on the line," Hanna says. "He wants to reschedule his appointment next week."

"Fine, put him through. Can you bring in the diary?"

"Alex, how are you?" I say when I take the call. I look up and smile at Hanna as she enters my office. "Thank you," I mouth to her when she lays the diary down in front of me. Nodding, she grins as she runs her hand affectionately down my arm. It sends all the blood in my body rushing straight to my cock. Again, with the fucking touching. What is up with that?

"I'm not so good," he replies. I clear my throat and try to concentrate on the job at hand. His reply has me instantly on edge. He was supposed to be flying in from Queensland next week, to sign off on the

new office block I've just finished building for his company. Although my business is based in Sydney, I have my scouts looking for property all over the country. I'd be crazy to limit myself to just here. "I twisted my knee yesterday during a round of golf, and I've just gotten back from the doctors. Apparently, I've done some ligament damage which will require surgery."

"Christ. That's no good."

"It's certainly not what I need as we prepare to move the company to our new building. That's why I'm calling, I'm not going to be able to make it to Sydney next week." Fuck. I have all the papers ready to go. All I need is his damn signature. "My doc says I'll be out of action for a few weeks at least." I'm pulled from my thoughts momentarily as my eyes move to Hanna as she leaves the room. The intoxicating swing of her hips has me hypnotised. "Are you still there?"

"Yes. Sorry, I'm still here," I say. I see a smile play on Hanna's lips as she turns to close the door of my office as she leaves. Did she purposely put on that little show? I'm confused. Is she openly flirting with me now, or is it just my overactive imagination. Either way, it's messing with my damn head.



"Fuck," I mumble to myself as I place my suitcase in the trunk of my car. Is the universe fucking with me or what? I thought spending my days, from nine to five, with Hanna was bad enough, now we're jetting off to Queensland for the weekend so I can get this contract signed.

I don't even know why I invited her along. I made up some bullshit about needing her to assist me. It was a total lie. How hard is it to drive to your client's house and get him to sign a piece of paper? Actually, I don't even need to drive because Alex is sending a car to my hotel to pick me up. I guess I like torturing myself, because I didn't even hesitate in asking her, the words just fell out of my mouth. What's even worse, she said yes without even thinking about it. *Silly girl*. If she knew the kind of thoughts I have about her, she'd be running in the other direction.

I rest my head on the steering wheel when I pull into Ethan's driveway. Hanna is staying here with her brother because her parents are away on an eight-week tour of Europe. We're flying out at 10.45am. The flight will only take just over an hour, so we'll be there around lunch time. Alex has invited us over to his place for dinner tonight, so we can sign the contract while we're there.

I take a few deep breaths and try to calm the erratic beating of my heart before I exit the car. I'm not sure how Ethan is going to react to the news of his little sister coming away with me. Yes, it's work related, but he of all people knows my history with women. If he's not concerned about this weekend, then he should be.

"Hey," I say to him as I enter the house. He extends his arm from where he's sitting on the sofa, and I fist bump him before taking the seat beside him.

"So, what's the go with this weekend?"

I shrug, trying my best to act cool. "What do you mean? It's business."

"The way Hanna was carrying on when she got home from work last night, you'd think you two were going on a romantic getaway, or some shit. She spent the entire morning shopping with my wife, looking for new clothes to take away with her."

"That's crazy."

"It's not a romantic getaway, is it?" he asks. I bow my head when he looks at me sceptically.

“What? Fuck no.” Although it’s the truth, I still feel like I’m lying to my best friend? “Women just do shit like that . . . you know what they’re like. Any excuse to shop.”

“You’re right,” he chuckles. “Make sure you keep an eye on her while you’re in Queensland.”

“I will.”

“You’re not sharing a room, are you?”

“No. Definitely not.” That would be suicidal on my part. “I had Shrimp make all the arrangements.”

“Good, because even though I love you like a brother, it would pain me to have to kick your arse if you touched her.”

I exhale a large breath and pinch the bridge of my nose. “She’s safe with me.” Is she safe with me? How come I don’t even believe my own words?

I settle back into the sofa as an awkward silence falls over us. Maybe I’m just paranoid, but I get the feeling Ethan sees straight through my lies. It must be my guilty conscience, because I’m pretty sure he wouldn’t let this go any further if he doubted what I was saying.

A few minutes later the girls enter the room. I sit forward in my seat when Hanna comes into view. Fuck, I’m a goner. She looks breathtaking. Her long blonde locks are falling across her shoulders and down her back. She’s added some loose curls today, which I love. What I wouldn’t give to run my fingers through it. It’s something I’ve thought about doing for years. Without even touching it I know it’s soft. I can tell. There’s even a touch of makeup on her pretty face, which I’ve only ever seen her wear once, and that was at Ethan and Michelle’s wedding.

I’m grinning as my eyes roam down her body. She’s wearing an off the shoulder white top that accentuates her perfect rack, and there’s a sheer tan scarf hanging loosely around her neck. She’s paired it with dark, skin tight, denim jeans and long, brown knee-length boots.

She looks beautiful.

“My wife is talking to you, dickhead,” Ethan says, punching me in the arm.

Really? Because I didn’t hear a word. Peeling my eyes from Hanna, they move to Michelle. She has a smug look on her face, like she read every dirty thought my mind just had. *Fuck.*

“What?”

“I said, you two better get going if you don’t want to miss your flight.”

“Right,” I say, standing. “Are you ready?” I ask Hanna, as my gaze moves back to her.

“I’m ready,” she says with a sweet sigh. Why do I get the feeling there’s more to what she just said?

“Great.” I reach for the suitcase that’s sitting by her feet. Fuck me. What has she got in this? Bricks? We’re only going for a weekend. “Are your entire possessions in this bag?” I chuckle to myself as I head towards the door.

“A girl needs to be prepared,” is her only reply.

She definitely needs to be prepared around me. If I cave, she’s not gonna know what hit her. What am I talking about? I can’t even consider caving. I have way too much to lose if I do.

After placing her suitcase in the trunk, I walk around and open the passenger side door for her. “Thank you,” she whispers as she seats herself in my car. Since we’re flying home tomorrow, it was

pointless getting someone to drive us to the airport. I can just leave my car there.

Once seated behind the wheel, I wind my window down. Ethan and Michelle both approach. "Have a good time you two," she says with a smile that I swear says, *I know what you want to do to my sister-in-law*. Or then again, it may just be my paranoia or guilty conscience.

"Don't have too much of a good time," Ethan adds, punching me in the arm.

"That hurt, cock," I say, rubbing my bicep.

"Pussy," he chuckles.

I may love pussies, but I'm certainly not one.



Chapter 5

I can do this . . .

Harrison

Once we've landed and collected our bags, we head outside the airport to grab a cab to our hotel. It's a beautiful sunny day here in Queensland, and as much as I'm dreading this weekend, I'm honestly stoked to have her here with me.

Thankfully, I got through the plane ride unscathed, which is a positive start. Hanna spent her time flipping through a magazine she bought at the airport, and looking out the window. I, on the other hand, used the time to catch a bit of shuteye. I hardly slept last night, worrying about this damn trip. That, and the fact that I dreamt about her. When I woke this morning I was so hard my cock ached. Even a cold shower did nothing to relieve me. That's when I decided to do something I hadn't done since I was eighteen. I needed to get her out of my system if I was going to survive this weekend.

Turning the water on hot, I let the spray run over my body as I prepared myself for an unapologetic, no-holds-barred jerkoff in the shower. This was the first time we'd had a shower together in years. She frequently showered with me when my obsession with her first started, but I was just a horny teenager back then.

As the steam filled the room, I wrapped my hand tightly around my cock. Images of her perfect tits in that sexy white lace bra entered my mind as my eyes clenched shut. I imagined her unclasping her bra, freeing her breasts from their lacy prison. She smiled up at me seductively, as her hands slowly slid the straps down her arms. It was an exotic striptease at its finest. My heart started to beat rapidly as her pretty blue eyes fixated on me. I could seriously drown in her eyes. She sucked her bottom lip between her teeth as my grip on my cock tightened.

"Yes," I groaned as her hands moved up to cup her tits and she pinched her nipples between her forefinger and thumb.

"Harrison." I watched on as her back arched and her face tilted towards the ceiling. I almost lost my load when a perfect little 'O' formed on her luscious lips. My blood ran hot as I stroked my shaft up and down with a fiery passion, all the while imagining that I was now fucking her tits. I groaned when she pushed the soft flesh together with her hands, creating a perfect warm haven for my dick.

Moments later, her fingers slid in between us and down between her legs. "Oh God," she breathed as

she worked herself over. What gets me off, more than anything, is images of her coming undone. My body shuddered at the thought. My movements quicken as she moaned loudly, bringing herself closer to the edge. What I wouldn't give to find her masturbating in real life. Now that would be something. Just the thought of it sent tingles running down my spine.

"I'm coming, Harry," she whimpered, "I'm coming hard." I was right there with her. My fist was flying now and a wild, uninhibited groan ripped from deep in my throat as we came together.

Why do I get the feeling that the Hanna Scott in my imagination, would be even hotter in the flesh?

Adjusting my cock in my pants, I walk around the back of the cab, trying my best to push those images from this morning out of my mind. At the time, I had been foolish enough to think it would help rid her from my system, at least long enough to get through this weekend. Now I know better. It's gonna take more than a jerkoff in the shower to get her out from under my skin. *A hell of a lot more.*

My need to have her is consuming me. It's like there's a constant tug-of-war going on in my brain. It makes me wonder if my obsession with her runs deeper than I thought. Is it possible I have actual feelings for her? I doubt it. I just want what I can't have. That's all.

As soon as I get to the hotel, I'm gonna hide away in my room until it's time to go to Alex's house. *I'm safer there . . . she's safer.*



"What do you mean there's only one room?" I say, when the lady at the reception desk checks us in.

"I'm sorry, Mr Williams, but you only booked one room."

My gaze moves to Hanna who's standing beside me. "I thought I booked two," she says. I can hear from the tone of her voice she's upset by this. That's the last thing I want.

"It's okay, Han," I say, draping my arm over her shoulder. "We can just get an extra room."

"Ordinarily I'd say yes, but unfortunately there's a music festival on this weekend, so all the rooms are booked. To be honest, you'll be lucky to find a vacancy anywhere on the Gold Coast."

"Shit." I'm never gonna last the weekend if we're sharing a room. "We need separate rooms," I blurt out in a panic. When my gaze moves to Hanna I find her frowning. Is she hurt by my outburst?

"I'm sorry, Sir. That's not possible."

I sigh as I scrub my hand over my face. "Please tell me there's more than one bed?"

"It's a two-bedroom apartment, so yes, there's two beds . . . in separate rooms."

Okay. I can handle that . . . I think.

"Alright, I guess we don't have a choice." My eyes dart to Hanna again, and she bows her head. "If you have any last-minute cancellations, can you let us know?"

"Of course, Mr Williams. Your room number is 1608, it's on the sixteenth floor. I hope you both enjoy your stay."

"Thank you." I take the key from her, sliding it into the pocket of my jeans. "Coming, Shrimp?" Picking up both suitcases, I head towards the elevator.

I notice Hanna is awfully quiet on the ride up to our room. She's refusing to even look at me. "Are you okay?" I ask.

“Is the thought of sharing a room with me so repulsive?” she snaps.

Her comment surprises me. “What? No! Why would you say that?” Sharing a room with her is more like my every fantasy, but I can’t exactly tell her that. She shrugs her shoulders instead of replying. Taking a step forward, I place my finger under her chin, tilting her face up to meet mine. I’m surprised by the hurt I see in her eyes. “The thought of sharing a room with you is anything but repulsive, Han.”

“Then why did you ask her to let you know if there’s any cancellations?”

I sigh as my hand drops away from her chin. “Because I promised your brother I wouldn’t lay a hand on you.”

“What does Ethan have to do with this?”

“He’s my best friend, and he adores you. I’d never want to jeopardise that.”

“Do you want to touch me?” she asks as a smile plays on her lips. *Jesus Christ*. Taking a step backwards I pick up the suitcases. I’m pleading the Fifth Amendment here, there’s no way in hell I’m answering that.



After we place our stuff in our room, I decide it’s safer if I leave. I can’t stay cooped up in there with her . . . alone. I just can’t. “I’m gonna head out and get some lunch,” I say.

“Let me just freshen up and I’ll come with you.”

Fuck. I need distance, but on the other hand, I don’t have it in me to tell her she can’t come. At least we’ll be out in public, I suppose.

We walk the few blocks towards the main street in silence. Things feel awkward between us now. We’ve never been lost for words in the past. Her question is still swimming around in my mind. *Do you want to touch me?* If only she knew how much. I never answered her, and I have no intentions of doing so either. Some things are better left unsaid.

Once we’re seated in the restaurant, I pick up my menu, holding it up in front of my face. “Harry,” she says, “are you going to ignore me for the entire weekend?”

“Of course not,” I answer, looking over the top of my menu, “I’m just hungry.”

“Are you ever going to answer my question?”

“I think I just did.”

“Not that one.” She leans her body across the table before continuing. “The one I asked you in the elevator,” she whispers. “Do you want to touch me?”

“Christ.” I clear my throat. “Can we change the subject?”

“No. I want to know the answer.”

“Why?”

“Why? You’re a man and I’m a woman. And don’t tell me you bat for the other team, because I know you don’t.”

I chuckle as I place the menu down in front of me. “And how do you know that?”

“I’m not stupid, Harrison. You had a bit of a reputation as a ladies man growing up.” I’m surprised by how bitter she sounds when she says that, but she’s right. I did, and still do, have a reputation. What

can I say? I love women. I love everything about them—pleasing them, kissing them, fucking them, and more than anything, I love hearing them scream out my name when I bring them over the edge. I’m good at what I do. I once made a woman come with just my words alone.

“There’s no point in answering that, because nothing can ever come of it.”

“Because of Ethan?”

“Right,” I say, picking my menu back up. Hopefully she gets the message that this conversation is over.

“Ethan has no say in what I do.” I lift the menu up higher to cover my face. “Harrison,” she snaps, snatching it out of my hands.

I exhale a drawn-out breath. “I’m not answering that question, Hanna.”

“What if I said I wanted you to touch me?”

Her comment makes my cock instantly come to life. “You don’t play fair.”

“I want you to touch me. God, do I want you to touch me, Harry.” My dick’s growing harder with every word that falls out of her pretty mouth. “I’ve wanted you to touch me for so long.” She leans forward into my space, reaching for my hand. “I’ve even dreamt about you touching me.”

She drops my hand and sits back in her seat when the waitress comes to a stop beside us. I use this time to slide my hand under the table and adjust my cock in my pants. It’s so fucking hard it aches. Could this situation get any more fucked up?

“Are you ready to order?”

I nod my head because I’m not sure I could speak an audible word right now.

The only thing I do know is, *I can’t do this*. As much as I want to, I just can’t.



Chapter 6

I'm not giving up . . .

Hanna

"I laid it all on the line, Shell," I say as I wipe a stray tear from my eye. "I practically begged him to touch me, and he weirded out. He wouldn't even look at me as we ate, and afterwards he sent me back to the hotel while he went for a walk. I feel stupid. You must be seeing things that aren't there. He doesn't want me."

"Oh, he wants you alright. I've been friends with him forever. I know him better than he knows himself. I see the way he looks at you, Hanna. He's wanted you for years. I don't know why he's fighting this."

"Ethan," I say with a sigh. "He keeps bringing up Ethan."

"Leave Ethan to me. No one will look after his little sister better than Harrison would. You two are perfect for each other. I know it, you know it, and deep down Harrison and Ethan know it too."

"I shouldn't have agreed to come. Things are going to be awkward between us now."

"The weekend's not over yet. I bet he's staying away because he doesn't trust himself. You need to up your game."

"I'm not sure if I can. I don't think I can ever look him in the eye again."

"You can, and you will," she demands. As much as I love my sister-in-law, she is so bossy sometimes. "You're a Scott, and Scott's aren't quitters."

I pull my phone away from my ear and look at the time on the screen. Harrison has been gone for almost three hours. We're supposed to be getting picked up in about an hour for dinner. I should fake a headache so I don't have to go. Just the thought of being around him makes my humiliation intensify.

"I'm gonna go and jump in the shower. I'll call you later."

"Okay, Hon. You've got this in the bag. Just remember, men aren't as smart as us. Sometimes they need a push in the right direction."

My tears blend in with the warm water, as I hold my face under the spray. No matter what Michelle says, I'm not going to continue this ridiculous game. I've already embarrassed myself enough. Harrison

probably thinks I'm pathetic. I'm just going to pretend this whole mess never happened. Hopefully he can do the same.

By the time I turn off the water and reach for a towel, I've managed to pull myself together. I can guarantee I'm not the first person to throw themselves at his feet, and I probably won't be the last. I'm not sure if I've ever come across anyone who hasn't fallen victim to his rugged good looks and charismatic charm.

His thick, messy brown hair, his dreamy brown eyes, and the few days' growth of stubble on his perfectly handsome face. Sigh. What I wouldn't give to run my fingertips across it, or better still feel the bristles rubbing between my inner thighs. Just thinking about it is turning me on. He'd be an exceptional lover . . . that I am sure of.

Don't even get me started on that hard, sculptured physique of his. He's utter perfection. To top it all off, he's a seriously nice guy. One of the best I've ever known. I've been crushing on him for as long as I can remember. I always thought he never saw me as anything but his best friend's little sister. But working with him this week has given me a glimmer of hope. Maybe, just maybe, he sees me as more than that. Well, I thought that until lunch today. Boy, talk about a bubble burster.

"I'm such a loser," I mumble to myself as I bury my face in my hands. Everything in me wants to pack up my things and run. Run as far away from Harrison Williams as I can. How can I face him when he gets back?

I wrap the towel around my body as I run a brush through my wet hair. I look down at my phone. I have forty-five minutes to get ready. Plenty of time. I grab the hairdryer off the shelf and go about drying my hair.

Once that's done, I pick up my dirty clothes from the bathroom floor and head for the door. I gasp when I find Harrison standing on the other side. I wasn't even sure if he was back yet. His eyes briefly meet mine before they travel the length of my body. I'm still wrapped in a towel and nothing else.

Initially I feel mortified, but there's something about the way he's looking at me that sends tingles running down my spine. By the time his eyes meet mine again, I can clearly see the lust in them.

"Do you still want me to touch you?" he says in an almost whisper.

Excitement bubbles through me as his question sinks in. "Yes. God, yes."

I hold my breath as he takes a step towards me. I see his hands are slightly trembling as he raises his arm and tugs at the front of my towel. A primal growl bubbles from deep within his chest as he looks at me in my full naked glory.

My breath hitches as he slides his hands around my waist, drawing my body flush with his. "You're even more beautiful than I imagined," he murmurs as his face inches towards mine. By the time our lips connect I can already feel his erection growing in his pants. I want to touch him, taste him, and feel him buried deep inside me.

Our very first kiss is soft and sweet, and not what I expected from him; it makes my toes curl. His mouth fits perfectly with mine.

Sliding my hand between us, I go to stroke him through his jeans, but he captures my wrist before I get a chance to touch him.

"I want to touch you, Harry," I plead.

“No. This is about me touching you.” He takes a few steps forward, bringing me with him. He doesn’t stop until my back is pressed against the tiles on the wall. “Place your hands above your head,” he commands. I do exactly as he asks. “Don’t move them.”

I nod, because I’m incapable of speaking right now. I like this dominant side of him, it’s hot.

He runs the back of his hand gently down the side of my face, then my neck, before coming to a stop between my breasts. “Harrison,” I whimper.

“Do you know how long I’ve waited to do this?” he asks as his hooded chocolate eyes meet mine. I shake my head because I still can’t speak. “Years.”

That both surprises and pleases me. Michelle was right. I can’t tell you how happy that makes me. “Then touch me, Harrison. I’m all yours.”

He groans as his big strong hands palm my breasts. “So soft,” he whispers. “So perfect.” I moan when he pinches my nipple between his thumb and forefinger as his lips trail a path across my jaw and down my neck. I like the feel of his hands and lips on me. “Spread your legs.” Again, I do as he asks. My body trembles with anticipation as his fingertips brush down my abdomen and between my legs. “Jesus, you’re so wet.”

“Only for you,” I admit. Sure, I’ve been with other guys, but nobody has ever come close to making me feel what I do in this moment. I already feel like I’m on the edge.

Closing my eyes, I push my head into the wall as his fingers circle my clit. “Harrison,” I whimper.

“Open your eyes, beautiful. I want you to see who’s making you feel like this.”

“Oh God.” His fingers are magic.

I gravitate my hips towards his hand as he brings me closer to the edge. We both moan in unison as he slips a finger inside me.

“You’re so tight . . . so fucking perfect.” My breath hitches when he slides another finger inside me, as his thumb continues to circle my clit.

“Don’t stop,” I beg.

“Yes, that’s it. Fuck my fingers, sweetheart.” I don’t know what’s hotter. What he’s doing, or what he’s saying. His free hand moves up to palm one of my breasts again. When he pinches my nipple hard, it sends pleasure straight down to my core. “Come for me, Han.”

Those words send me crashing over the edge. His arm slides around my waist when my legs threaten to give way, but he doesn’t stop his assault until he’s drained every ounce of pleasure from me.

I immediately feel the loss when he withdraws his fingers. His eyes are locked with mine as he places them in his mouth. “Mmm. So sweet. Just like I imagined.” I can’t tell you how pleased I am to know he’s thought about me in that way.

“Make love to me,” I say, reaching for him. I need more. As amazing as that was, it wasn’t enough.

He sighs as he rests his forehead against mine. “I don’t make love Hanna, I fuck.”

“Well, fuck me then.”

“I can’t. Believe me I want to. I want you so bad I ache. But I’ve already crossed a line I promised I’d never cross. I only did this because I couldn’t deny you.”

“But you’re denying me now.”

He crashes his lips into mine, giving me a scorching hot kiss. He’s an exceptional kisser, just like I knew he would be. I’m not sure if he’s doing it to silence me, or if he’s had a sudden change of heart. I’m praying for the latter.

Just when I think he’s going to give me what I want, he abruptly pulls away. “I’m sorry, Han. I can’t.”



Chapter 7

I'm screwed . . . literally screwed . . .

Harrison

I'm trying not to make eye contact with her as we travel down in the elevator to the car waiting for us. My resolve is slipping with every passing second. I need her, I want her . . . I crave her. I'm even more consumed than I was before. Now that I've had a small taste, I want more. So much fucking more.

She's dressed to kill tonight, which does nothing for my resolve. She's wearing a simple black dress, and a pair of sexy black high heels, but she looks and smells good enough to eat.

After our little bathroom fiasco, she went into her room to get dressed, while I had a shower. And yes, I jacked off again. I didn't have a choice; my balls were the same fucking colour as her damn eyes . . . blue. This time I didn't need to make up shit in my head. I had a real life visual. I could still smell her on my fingers, and taste her in my mouth.

Sure, I feel guilty for breaking my promise to Ethan, but at the same time, I have no regrets. Those few short minutes I spent with her, will go down as one of the highlights of my life.

It forced me to realise that this thing I have for her is so much more than an obsession. My feelings for her run so much deeper than I ever anticipated. That scares the fuck out of me.

We find the car Alex sent waiting for us when we exit the hotel. I'd usually sit in the back, because that's the protocol. But not tonight. For my own safety, and hers, I need distance.

I'm grateful for the distraction when we finally arrive at Alex's place, although my peripheral vision can see her eyes are firmly locked on me. Alex and his wife, Alana, have seated us side by side at the dining table. She's so close. Way too fucking close. Her fruity yet flowery scent has all my senses running on high alert, and I can't concentrate. All I can think of is her. How her lips felt against mine. How her pussy felt wrapped around my fingers. And those damn noises she made when she came undone on my hand. I know we can't go any further than we have, but I was stupid to think that a simple taste would be enough. I want more, so much fucking more. My head and I are on the same page, but my heart and my cock are yet to get the memo.

"Would you mind if I used the bathroom?" Hanna asks as Alana places a glass of wine down in front of her.

“Of course not,” she replies. “Come, I’ll show you where it is.”

Rising from my seat, I pull Hanna’s chair out for her. Despite the fact that I’m avoiding her at all costs, I’m still a gentleman.

“Thank you,” she says in a breathy tone as her blue eyes meet mine. That’s just how she sounded back in the bathroom in the hotel. It’s like a sucker punch to my chest. *Please God, give me strength to get through tonight.*

“Your girlfriend is stunning,” Alex says when the girls leave the room.

I don’t bother correcting him because I actually like the thought of her being my girlfriend. How fucked up is that? “Thank you.”

A few minutes later I rise from my seat again when Hanna returns, pulling out her chair. My father may not have been a great influence on me, but I pride myself on being nothing like him. I respect women.

The moment I’m re-seated, Hanna reaches for my hand under the table placing something in my palm. Looking down, I have to suppress my groan when I see a tiny pair of black lace panties. When my eyes dart to hers, the smile she gives me makes my heart do a flip-flop. All I can think about is that she’s now panty-less under that sexy as fuck dress. My cock is so hard it’s straining painfully against my pants. *I’m a goner.*

If I’ve learnt anything today, it’s that Hanna Scott is a vixen and she *doesn’t* play fair.



After we eat and the contracts are signed, I make up the excuse that we have an early flight to catch. It’s a lie. Our flight isn’t until late tomorrow afternoon. It’s those damn panties of hers. They’ve been burning a hole in my pocket all evening. Thank Christ I dressed casually tonight in a pair of black trousers, an untucked grey button down shirt and a black blazer. The shirt was enough to hide my raging hard on. I swear my cock grew harder with every passing second, so much so I’m actually surprised that fucker hasn’t burst through the fabric. I’m obsessed, and I craved to be buried balls deep inside her.

I manage to tame the wild beast that’s raging inside me all the way home, but the second we step into the elevator, back at the hotel, I snap. I pin her back to the wall, raising both of her hands above her head. I can’t deny myself anymore. My need for her is too great. I’m not sure where tonight is going to lead, but one thing is for sure, Hanna Scott will be underneath me, and in my bed in a matter of minutes.

“Harrison,” she whimpers as my lips crash into hers. My kiss is unrelenting. It’s wild, raw, and full of need.

Sliding my hands under her dress, I cup her bare arse, lifting her off the ground. “Wrap your legs around me,” I command. Like the good girl she is, she does exactly what I ask. “I need you,” I groan into her mouth.

“I need you too, Harrison . . . *so much.*”

Removing her hands from the wall she threads her fingers in my hair, deepening the kiss. If there weren’t cameras in here, I swear I’d take her right now.

When the elevator arrives at our floor, I pull away from the wall, bringing her with me. My mouth never once leaves hers as I head towards our room. Fishing the key out of my pocket I enter our suite. I’m a desperate man. I ache for her.

Kicking the door closed with the heel of my foot, I turn and back her body against the wall. “I can’t

wait. I need to have you now. I'm gonna fuck you hard and fast, then I'm taking you to my bed so I can pleasure you all night long."

"God, yes," she moans.

Manoeuvring my hand between us, I slide my fingers through her slick, wet pussy. "Fuck," I say, pulling out of the kiss and resting my forehead against hers. "I don't have a condom." I purposely took the spare ones I carry out of my wallet before we left Sydney. I didn't want, or need, the temptation. Now I'm kicking myself.

"I'm on the pill," she pants.

"I've never gone bareback before, Han."

Raising her hands, she cups my face. "I trust you, Harry. Please . . ."

I can't deny her . . . who am I kidding, I can't deny myself. I've been dreaming about this moment since I was seventeen.

Without thinking, or giving myself time to over analyse this, I pull down my zip and free my rock-hard dick from my pants. My need is too great; I'll worry about the aftereffects tomorrow.

I stroke myself a few times as I rub it against her pussy. I can't believe this is actually happening. We both moan in unison as I push the crown of my cock inside her. She's so tight, so warm.

Drawing back slightly, I push all the way in. I still, giving her time to adjust. She's so small. Her pussy feels like a vice around my cock.

Jesus, she feels like heaven. In this moment, I know I'm ruined.

Fucking ruined.

"Fuck me, Harrison," she pleads.

Pulling back all the way to the tip, I slam into her with short hard strokes. I've been with lots of women over the years, but none of them have come close to making me feel the way she does. I'm actually overcome by the magnitude of emotions that are pulsing through me in this moment. I'm not going to last long; I'm already teetering on the edge. She feels too good.

Too fucking good!



Light is pouring into the room when I open my eyes. Hanna is still wrapped in my arms. Memories of last night bring an instant smile to my face. After taking her against the wall, I carried her to my room and took her every way imaginable, until the early hours of this morning. I made sure I became acquainted with every inch of her delectable body.

I know I'm going to have to face Ethan when I get home, but it's a small price to pay for what I got to experience last night. I thought I could fuck her out of my system, but now I know that's not possible. A lifetime of her will never be enough.

I tighten my hold because I'm not ready to let her go. I'm suddenly filled with the realisation that I don't think I'll ever be ready.

Lifting my head off the pillow, I inhale her scent as I place a kiss on the top of her head.

"Did you just sniff me?" she murmurs against my chest. I thought she was still sleeping.

“Never,” I chuckle.

Raising her head, her eyes meet mine. “You so sniffed me.”

I just laugh as I flip her over onto her back, settling between her legs. She’s right, I did, but I’ll never admit it. I’m hooked on her intoxicating smell. If she doesn’t want me to sniff her, she shouldn’t smell so damn good.

Sliding my hand behind her knee, I anchor her leg around my waist. “Good morning, beautiful,” I say as my lips trail a path down her neck.

“Morning,” she moans as I slide inside her little piece of heaven. I always thought sex was just that, a good time . . . a release. But last night she showed me that sex with someone you care about, is so much more.

Grabbing hold of her hands, I manoeuvre them above her head, lacing my fingers through hers. Our eyes are locked as I slowly rock into her. I told her last night I don’t make love, but I’m pretty sure in this moment that’s exactly what I’m doing. Things with her are so different.

“I don’t want my time with you to end, Hanna,” I say, and that’s the truth, I don’t.

“It doesn’t have to.”

“You and I both know Ethan’s not going to be happy about this.”

“Who I choose to be with is none of his business.” I sigh as I rest my forehead against hers. I want more, so much more. “I’m in love with you, Harrison Williams. I’ve been in love with you for as long as I can remember.”

Her confession knocks me on my arse, and I’m not ashamed to admit that her words bring a lump to my throat. *Nobody has ever told me they love me.* Nobody.

Placing my lips against hers, I kiss her like I’ve never kissed anyone before. If I was honest with myself, I’m pretty sure I’m in love with her too. I think I have been for years.

I know we have a fight on our hands when we get home, but she’s worth it. I don’t want to lose my friendship with Ethan, but I don’t want to lose her either.

If I’m certain of one thing; it’s that I want this . . . *I want her.*

She’s worth the fight and I’ll do whatever it takes to make her *mine.*



Chapter 8

Taking the coward's way out . . .

Harrison

Our flight home isn't much different to the one on the way here, yet it's completely different. If that even makes sense. This time Hanna sleeps the whole way. We're both exhausted because we chose to bonk each other's brains out instead of sleep. Mind you, we didn't get out of bed until around lunch time. We did pause long enough to order some breakfast via room service, and that's only because we needed the energy it would provide to sustain us. Then we were straight back into it. Unbeknownst to her, we played out almost every secret fantasy I've had since this obsession first started. I still have a few up my sleeves, but I'll get to them over the coming days.

I was sure my cock was close to falling off by the time we jumped into the shower, but he didn't disappoint and performed like a fucking champion as I took her one more time up against the tiles. Sure, I've had marathon sex sessions before, plenty, but never like this. She's so much more than I ever imagined she'd be. *So much more.*

I groan inwardly when I feel my cock jump in my pants. Just thinking about her is turning me on. "Down boy," I whisper as I adjust my crotch in my pants. Never in my life has a woman had this kind of effect on me. I guess this isn't just *anyone* though . . . this is Hanna Scott we're talking about here.

I smile to myself as I rest my head back onto the seat. I still can't believe it. I can't remember the last time I felt this happy. The smile quickly falls from my face when Ethan enters my mind. How am I going to break this to him? I know he's going to be pissed. Really pissed. *Fuck.* Talk about a bubble burster.

I exhale a drawn-out breath as my stomach churns. I'm torn. My brain is screaming, *what the hell were you thinking*, but my heart on the other hand, is close to bursting. I wouldn't give back a second of what we experienced together this weekend, even if it's going to ruin things with my best friend, *my bro*. Christ, I hope that's not the case. I'd hate to think of how my life would be without him in it.

My lips turn up at the corners as Hanna slides her arm around my waist and snuggles in closer to me. A contented sigh falls from her sweet lips when I lean down and place a soft kiss on her hair.

Settling down is something I didn't think I had in me, but one glorious weekend with her has me doubting that already. I want this with her, I mean really fucking want this. That thought doesn't even freak

me out, which is crazy. I feel my smile widen when I think about her confession. I can't believe she loves me.

How did I not see this?

Maybe because when she was around I was so busy trying to cover up my own feelings, I failed to notice she was doing the same.



"I had the best weekend," Hanna says when I exit the airport carpark and turn onto the street. "The best." She reaches over the centre console and places her hand on my upper thigh. I fucking love that she just did that.

"No regrets?" I ask.

"None whatsoever. I can't tell you how many times I've dreamt about being with you like this. You were everything I hoped you'd be, and so much more."

Her words have me smiling like a fool. Wrapping my hand around hers, I pull it up towards my face and plant a chaste kiss on her palm. "And you certainly surpassed every dirty thought I've ever had about you."

"You've had dirty thoughts about me?" she asks as her face lights up.

"Maybe one or two," I reply with a smirk. That's such a fucking lie . . . more like one or two million.

My head darts in her direction when we pull up to the traffic lights. She looks just as happy as I feel. "I like that you've thought that way about me," she confesses as a slight blush appears on her pretty face. She's always appeared so angelic to me, but after this weekend I know better. She's a damn vixen in the bedroom. Just the way I like my women.

We're quiet for the rest of the drive home. Her hand is still on my thigh, and mine is covering hers. I find myself driving slower than usual. I don't want my time with her to end. God knows what we'll have to contend with when we reach her place.

The closer we get, the more uneasy I become. When I turn into her street, my leg starts to bounce as I work myself into a frenzy.

"Are you okay, Harry?" she asks. "You look kinda petrified." I pull over to the kerb a few houses away from Ethan's. When I put the car in park, I let go of the wheel and scrub my hands over my face. "Harrison. What's wrong?" Shaking my head, I bury my face in my hands. "Harrison, please. You're freaking me out. This isn't the end of us, is it?"

I reach for her hand as I turn in my seat to face her. "Do you want it to be?"

"No. No, I don't." Her words come in a screech, and I can see the panic on her face.

"I don't want it to be either."

"Then what? What's going on?"

"I don't think I'm ready to tell your brother yet?"

"Don't worry about, Ethan," she says, bringing her hand up to cup my face.

"But I am, Han. He's like family to me, and I don't want to lose him over this."

"So, what are you trying to say? You're choosing him over me?"

“What? No!”

“Then what?”

“I’m just not ready to tell him yet. Can we keep this between us for a few more days?”

“I think you’re overreacting here. Ethan adores you. He’ll probably be shocked, but I think he’ll get over it.” I sigh as I look down at my lap. He’s going to be more than shocked. I know him well enough to know that. He’s always been protective over her. “Look at me?” she demands. “If that’s what you really want, then okay. I want to be with you, any way I can have you.”

Relief floods through me. I want to be with her so much. This weekend has given me so much more than I ever thought it would.

Reaching across the centre console, I pull her into my arms. “I don’t want to lose my friendship with Ethan, but I don’t want to lose you either.”

“I’m here for as long as you’ll have me,” she says, brushing her lips against mine.

I want to tell her that’s probably going to be forever, but I don’t.



Chapter 9

The art of deception lies in actions not words . . .

Harrison

I swallow nervously when Michelle enters my office, locking the door behind her. “So,” she says, stalking her way towards me. Quickly bowing my head, I get back to going over the figures in front of me, or pretending to. I’m worried if I look at her long enough she’ll see straight through me. “Ethan was concerned you didn’t come in yesterday afternoon when you dropped Hanna off.”

“I was tired,” I reply, without making eye contact with her.

“Really? Why? Did Hanna wear you out?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I say, when she comes to sit on the side of my desk.

“Come on, Harrison. Don’t play coy with me.”

“Don’t you have work to do?” I ask as my eyes quickly dart up to meet hers.

“You know Hanna and I are close, right. We tell each other everything.” Her words instantly have me on edge. I hope Hanna didn’t tell Michelle what happened between us. I specifically asked her not to when I dropped her off yesterday, and she promised me she wouldn’t.

“That’s nice,” is all I say, trying to act unaffected by her comment.

“She was so secretive when she got home. That instantly made me suspicious. That and the fact she was practically giddy.”

“That’s nice,” I repeat.

“Something happened, didn’t it? I’m not stupid.” I reach up and loosen my tie when she leans towards me. I suddenly feel like I’m choking under her watchful gaze. “Come on Harrison. We’re family, you can tell me.”

I’m not telling her jackshit. I trust her, but I don’t want her keeping a secret of this magnitude from her husband. This is huge and can only end badly for everyone involved. I clear my throat before I answer. I hate lying to the people I care about. Actually, I hate lying period. I may be a shrewd business man, but I’ve always prided myself on my honesty.

“There’s nothing to tell.”

I see her cross her arms over her chest out of the corner of my eye. “Huh,” she says, standing. “I don’t believe you. You can’t even look at me.”

“I’m trying to crunch these numbers and you’re distracting me. So, if you don’t mind . . .” I flick my hand towards the door.

“Fine,” she says, turning and leaving in a huff. The second she closes the door behind her, I lean back in my chair, scrubbing my hands over my face. Keeping this a secret isn’t going to be easy. Especially with super sleuth on the case.

A few minutes later the door to my office opens again. Initially I think it’s Michelle, coming back to interrogate me again. She’s as stubborn as all hell. I know her well; she won’t let this go so easy.

My grim expression is immediately replaced with a smile when I find my girl standing in the doorway. She looks as beautiful as ever. We texted each other all afternoon after I dropped her at home yesterday, and then she called me before she went to bed. Is it crazy that I missed not having her with me last night? Because I did. I lay awake for hours thinking about her.

“Good morning, Mr Williams.”

We agreed last night to keeping things professional at work. I’m already regretting that decision. I’m itching to pull her into my arms.

“Good morning, Miss Scott.”

“I brought you a coffee,” she says as she makes her way towards my desk. “I made it just the way you like.”

She’s wearing black rimmed glasses today. Christ, she looks sexy. And her hair is down, just the way I like it. I want to run my fingers through it.

She leans forward as she places the mug on my desk, giving me a glimpse of not only her spectacular cleavage, but the pink lace camisole underneath her pink satin blouse. My dick immediately comes to life.

I see a smile playing on her lips when I finally peel my eyes away from her chest. She’s a vixen, she’s doing this on purpose. There’s a hint of pink gloss on her luscious full lips, and I want to kiss her so bad right now. When our eyes finally meet, I can see she’s struggling too. The pull between us is strong, even I can see that.

Our eyes remain locked for the longest time until she finally stands to full height. “What do you need me to do today, boss?”

Take your clothes off and bend over my desk, is my first thought.

I clear my throat before I speak. “I’ll email you a list of what I need done in a few minutes.” What I really need is her to leave my office before I cave.

Not only is it unprofessional of me to carry on this affair at work, it’s dangerous with Michelle hovering around. I can’t risk her finding out. I’m not ready to go public with our relationship yet.

“Okay, you’re the boss.” To my relief, she turns and starts walking towards the door. I groan when my eyes fixate on that intoxicating little swing in her hips. She’s so damn sexy.

Glancing over her shoulder, she winks before closing the door behind her. I lean back into my chair, running my fingers through my hair. Fuck. This is going to be so much harder than I thought. Why does

everything sound so easy in theory?



I've managed to avoid Hanna for most of the day by locking myself away in my office. I even snuck out and grabbed something to eat while she was on her lunch break, so I wouldn't have to see her. It's killing me, but it's the only way.

Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I see it's just after four. The day is almost over. I'm proud of myself for making it this far. I've barely been able to concentrate all day.

The moment I place my phone down on my desk it dings, alerting me that I have a message. Picking it up, I see it's from Hanna.

Hanna: Can I see you tonight? I miss you.

I exhale a large breath. I want to see her, but how? I can't go to Ethan's, that's too risky.

Me: I miss you, too.

It's the truth, I do. Thoughts of her have been consuming me.

Hanna: Well, can I?

Me: I'll be working back tonight. I have to get these figures done.

Hanna: I can stay back and help you.

I chuckle to myself at her reply.

Me: If you do that, I'll never get any work done.

Hanna: What about when you're finished?

Me: I can't come to your place, it's too risky.

That's because I'm a fucking coward and don't want to confront her brother. We've been mates for most of my life. He'll see straight through me. I know it.

Hanna: I can come to yours . . .

Me: And what will you tell your brother? You know he's going to ask.

Hanna: That I'm going out with friends. I'm an adult, Harry. He has no say in what I do.

Fuck. I scrub my hand over my face. This is going to get messy, I know it.

Me: I don't want you lying to him, Hanna.

I wait for her reply, but it doesn't come. I hate that we're in this position.

A few minutes later my head snaps up when my office door opens. Of course, it's her. I don't want her to feel like I'm giving her the brush off, because I'm not. This is all my fault. I hate the fact that we're deceiving everyone; it doesn't sit well with me.

My eyes follow her every move. I have no idea what she's going to say or do. Closing the door, she manoeuvres her body in front of it. I hear the lock click as a smile spreads across her face. What's she up to?

Her gaze is firmly fixed on me as she saunters towards me. Instead of stopping in front of my desk, she makes her way around to my side. It has me swallowing hard. I'm not used to this, I'm usually the one in control. As much as it makes me feel uneasy, the anticipation of what she's about to do is also turning me the hell on.

It's not until she's standing beside me, that I notice the pencil in her hand. Christ, is she gonna stab me with it? Maybe I misinterpreted this whole situation.

"Oops," she says, purposely dropping the pencil under my desk. I chuckle as I roll my chair back,

bending to retrieve it. “Don’t.” She puts her hand on my chest, stopping me. “I’ll get it.”

The smile on her face grows as she gets down on her knees and crawls under my desk. That’s when I realise I haven’t misinterpreted her visit at all. Well, I fucking hope I haven’t.

I find it hard to comprehend that the woman of my dreams is on her knees under my desk. I’ve seriously hit the jackpot with this one. The mischief that dances in her eyes has my heart beating out of my chest.

Without speaking a word, her hand reaches for the buckle on my belt. Common sense tells me I should stop this before it goes any further, but fuck that. I’m not stopping shit. No fucking way. If she’s doing what I hope she’s about to do, I’ll be able to cross another one of my fantasies about her off my list.

I growl when she licks her lips and goes to work on the button and zip of my trousers—seriously, she’s too good to be true. “I’ve been thinking about doing this all day,” she says, freeing my cock from my pants. “All day . . .”

“Hanna,” I breathe as her face inches towards me. “I’ve been thinking about you all day, too.”

“You have a beautiful cock, Mr Williams.” Her eyes are fixated on my dick as she wraps her hand around its girth, stroking it. Jesus, if she keeps talking like that, this is going to be over before it’s even begun. I groan and thread my fingers into her hair as she swirls her tongue around the crown. “Mmm,” she moans as she takes me deep into her throat. It sends vibrations radiating down the length of my cock.

I’ve had plenty of blowjobs in my time, but fuck me . . . her mouth . . . it’s amazing. I don’t even want to think where she learnt to suck cock like this. Just the thought of it has my blood pressure rising. She’s far from the sweet and innocent girl I thought she was, but I’m not complaining. I love this side of her.

“Sweet Jesus,” I growl as she works me over with her mouth, tongue, and her hand. “I’m gonna blow.”

I try to pull her head back, but she doesn’t budge. My orgasm hits so hard and fast, I don’t even get a chance to protest. She doesn’t stop her assault until she’s milked every last drop from me.

Sliding my hands under her arms, I drag her up my body. As soon as her face is in reach, I crash my lips against hers. I’ve been dying to taste her all day. I said I wanted to keep things professional at work, but all bets are off now.

I need her.

I want her.

I crave her.



Chapter 10

I've fallen hard . . .

Harrison

Picking up the receiver on my desk, I dial one. “Can I see you in my office, Miss Scott?”

“I’ll be right in, Mr Williams,” she replies, almost breathlessly. She knows as well as I do what this is about. A few moments later she appears in the doorway. “You wanted to see me?” She’d better believe it. She’s all I damn well think about these days.

I crook my finger and motion her towards my desk. This has now turned into an everyday thing. It’s been ten days since we returned from Queensland, and I’m still yet to face Ethan. He’s been blowing up my phone multiple times a day. We’ve never gone this long without seeing each other. I fucking miss him, but I can’t bring myself to see him face to face. I’m worried that the guilt I’m feeling from sneaking around with his sister behind his back will be my undoing.

He knows me better than anyone, so he’ll notice. He’s even pulled me up a few times on the phone, saying I sound weird. The walls are closing in and it’s only a matter of time before they crush me and everything I hold dear.

I push those thoughts out of my mind. I have a more pressing matter to deal with at the moment. “Place your hands on the desk,” I command, rising from my chair and making my way around to her. She does exactly as I ask.

I hate that this is what’s become of us. Sneaking around like a pair of naughty teenagers. We’re adults for fuck’s sake. I’m falling deeper and deeper with every passing day. She deserves so much more than what I’m currently giving her, so much fucking more. I wish I could take her on dates and home with me in the evenings. I want her pretty face to be the last thing I see before I close my eyes at night and the first thing I see when I open them in the morning. I want to hold her hand when we walk down the street and show the world she’s mine. I want it all with her, which says so much.

I’ve never wanted any of that until now. She’s enriched me, and my life, in so many ways. I need to grow some damn balls and tell Ethan once and for all.

I come to a stop behind her, my chest lightly pressing against her back. I can feel her body trembling from the anticipation of what’s to come. The chemistry between us scorching. Like nothing I’ve ever known before. I love the effect I have on her.

I trail a path with my nose from her shoulder, up and along her neck, coming to a stop at the base of her hair line. Even now she's mine for keeps. I'm still addicted to her fruity yet flowery scent. I love it.

"You're sniffing me again," she whispers as she leans her head on my shoulder.

"Never," I chuckle. I'll never admit to that. I suck her earlobe into my mouth as my hands glide over her hips before snaking around her torso. "I can't wait to see what you're wearing under this sexy as fuck skirt today."

Every day she's worn different lingerie for me. I feel like a kid on Christmas morning each time I unwrap her. I don't think she has any idea, but she undoes me on so many levels. She's on my mind from the time I wake, until the time I go to sleep. Even then I dream about her. I'm consumed.

She lifts one of her hands off the desk, threading it into my hair. Turning her face sideways, her lips connect with mine. My cock is already rock hard and my need to be inside her little piece of heaven is overwhelming.

I savour the feeling of her lips against mine briefly, before pulling out of the kiss. I move my hands down her legs, sliding her skirt up until it sits around her waist. A primal growl erupts from deep inside my chest as I take a step back and drink her in. She's so beautiful. *So damn beautiful.*

My eyes travel up the length of her sexy lean legs. Today she's wearing black stockings that stop mid-thigh. There's a line of lace around the top that's connected to a black suspender belt. This woman blows my fucking mind. The tiny black satin panties she's wearing sit low on her hips. They're covered in small red hearts, and there's a tiny red bow that sits in the centre, just above the curve of her luscious arse cheeks. She's sex on legs. A walking fucking wet dream.

When my gaze moves further upwards, I find her watching me over her shoulder. There's a sweet smile on her face. "You like?" she asks.

"I fucking love," I reply, stepping forward. My lips crash into hers like a starved man, as my hand slides around her waist, slipping into the front of her panties. Christ, I love that she's already wet for me.

She moans into my mouth as my fingers circle her clit. The feelings I have for her are so strong they scare me. I don't want to lose her, but I'm scared once Ethan finds out that's exactly what's going to happen.

"Harrison," she whimpers, when I slide two fingers deep inside her. I'll never tire of hearing her say my name like that. I'll never tire of her, period.

"Come for me, beautiful," I whisper against her ear. I know it won't take long, she's powerless to my touch. "That's it, fuck my fingers, sweetheart." My cock is so hard; it strains painfully against my trousers.

Like I anticipated, I have her coming undone in a matter of minutes. When her body goes limp, and her legs threaten to give way from underneath her, I use my free hand to hold her upright.

As soon as she finds her feet again, I drop my hands and take a step backwards before falling to my knees. I nip at her exposed arse cheeks as I unclasp the suspender belt from her stockings. The moment I'm done, I don't waste any time as I slide her panties slowly down her legs. I'm already unzipping my pants and freeing my cock as I stand. I'm a desperate man. I need to be buried balls deep inside her.

Using my knee, I spread her legs as far as the panties around her ankles will allow. "Oh God," she moans as I glide my cock through her wetness. "I love the way you make my body feel, Harry." She's the only one I've ever gone bareback with, and the only one I ever want to do this with. It feels amazing . . .

she feels amazing.

My fingers dig into her hips as I slide the tip inside and pause. She already has me on the edge. We moan in unison when I push all the way in, filling her completely. Her pussy hugs my dick perfectly. It fits like a glove.

“Let me take you out to dinner after work, Han,” I whisper into her ear as I slowly pull back before burying myself inside her again. My time with her is so limited and I hate that. I need more, I’ll always need more where she’s concerned.



Chapter 11

Something's gotta give . . .

Harrison

I drape my arm around Hanna's shoulder, pulling her into my side. "Dinner was nice," she says, smiling up at me. "I wish we could do this more often."

So do I.

She slides her arm around my waist and rests her head on my chest as we stroll back to my car. I chose to take her to a restaurant about a twenty-minute drive from where we live. Purely because I'm a gutless prick and didn't want to run into anyone that may alert Ethan. Something's gotta give. I can't keep going on like this . . . *we can't keep going on like this*. The longer it takes for me to confess, the harder it seems to come clean.

Opening the passenger side door, I plant a soft kiss on Hanna's hair before she climbs inside. She's the only person I've ever been able to see myself having a future with, but we need to tell her family before I can even think of that. It's not like I can whisk her off in the middle of the night or day and marry her in secret, although the thought has crossed my mind. It's ludicrous. This whole situation is making me damn crazy.

"I'm not ready to go home yet," Hanna says, reaching across the centre console and placing her hand on my leg.

"Truthfully," I reply with a sigh as I glance over at her, "I'm not ready to give you back."

A sad smile tugs at her lips. "Is this the way it's going to be for us, Harry? Hiding away from everyone."

I exhale a large breath as my eyes move back to the road. I hate that this situation is upsetting her. I'm not fond of it either, but in my heart I know Ethan will come between us when he finds out. He's gonna blow a fucking gasket.

"Talk to me," she pleads, squeezing my leg. "Is it Ethan? Or is it that you're just not as into me, as I am to you? I'm a big girl, Harrison. If this is just a bit of fun for you, tell me. I don't want to get my hopes up."

I navigate the car to the side of the road, putting it into park. I don't want her to think she's just a good time for me. She's so much more than that. "Is that what you really think?" I ask, wrapping her hand in mine. I'm hurt she would even entertain the idea.

"When we're together everything seems so perfect. But the longer this goes on, the more sceptical I become. I really like you, Harry. I think you know that." Her gaze moves down to her lap before she continues. "But I hate hiding away from everyone. I hate deceiving my family. I hate that I only get to see you at work. I need more. I need you. All of you."

"Come here." I reach out and pull her into my arms when I see tears glistening her eyes. I feel like a bastard. This is all my fault. "I'm sorry I've put you in this position. I hate hiding away from everyone, too. Things are just so perfect the way they are now. We're perfect . . ." I let my words trail off. "Everything is going to change once this is out in the open, and that scares me. I don't want to lose you, Han."

Drawing back, she cups my face in her hands. "You'll never lose me. I'm in this for the long haul if you'll have me. Ethan will just have to accept this, whether he likes it or not. But I really think you're overreacting here. He adores you. Yes, he'll probably be shocked, but I honestly think he'll be okay."

"Really?" I wish I felt as confident as she did.

"Really."

"Do you wanna come back to my apartment for a while?"

"What about Ethan?"

"I'll talk to him tomorrow."

I may be putting it off again, but I mean it this time. *Tomorrow*, I'll tell him. But tonight, I just want to enjoy her. Who knows where we'll stand once the news is out.



Rolling over, I pull her soft body into mine. I wish I didn't have to let her go. My eyes drift to the clock on the bedside table, it's almost nine. "You probably should get going, it's getting late."

"I wish I didn't have to."

"Makes two of us," I say, as I rest my forehead against hers. "Tomorrow, once this is all out in the open, you can stay over whenever you like."

"I'd like that," she replies, brushing her lips against mine. "You may get sick of me, because I'm gonna be here an awful lot."

"Never," I chuckle. "I'm surprised Ethan hasn't been blowing up your phone, wondering where you are."

"I turned it off when we left the restaurant," she admits, with a small laugh. Although it was a wise move, it does nothing to ease that nagging guilt that has been swimming around in my gut for days.

I push that thought out of my head as I give her a scorching kiss. A little something to get me through until tomorrow. "Get dressed, and I'll drive you back to the office to collect your car."

"Do you mind if I have a quick shower. I'll probably get the third degree from my big brother when I get home, for not telling him I was going to be late," she rolls her eyes as she speaks, "so I don't want to be smelling like sex."

I chuckle as I place a soft kiss on her nose. “Probably a wise move.”

I watch as she climbs out of bed and gathers up her clothes before heading into my ensuite. Fuck, her arse is fine. As much as I’d like to join her, I need to get her home. Ethan will be worried, especially since she hasn’t told him where she is. Even though she’s a grown woman, he’s very over protective. He always has been.

My stomach churns as I roll onto my back and stare at the ceiling. I can only pray that my gut instincts are wrong, and Ethan isn’t going to take this as badly as I’m anticipating.

Once the shower is running, I climb out of bed and throw on a pair of sweats and a T-shirt. I resist the urge to join her. I can shower when I get back.

Grabbing my phone out of my suit jacket, I see it’s flat, so I head into the kitchen to put it on charge. Maybe Ethan has been trying to call me as well. That’s a blessing in disguise right there. I’ve been lying to him every time he’s called me over the past few weeks. Telling him I’m busy with work or some bullshit, and that’s why I haven’t been over. It’s the longest time I’ve ever gone without seeing him. Even though this is all my doing, I miss the boofhead.

After plugging in my phone, I grab a bottle of water out of the fridge. As I unscrew the lid and bring it to my mouth, there’s a knock on my door. “Harrison, it’s me Ethan. Are you in there?”

Fuck!

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” I mumble under my breath as I walk towards the door. Hanna is still in the shower so maybe I can get rid of him before she gets out. Who am I kidding, I don’t have a choice. I have to get rid of him. He can’t find out like this.

I swipe my keys off the hall table as I pass. I pause and take a deep breath before I open the door. “Hey,” I say, manoeuvring my body into the doorway, blocking him from entering.

“Why don’t you turn on your phone fucker? I’ve been trying to call you for the past few hours.”

“It went flat. I only just realised. It’s charging now.”

He exhales a large breath. He looks stressed. “Have you seen Hanna?” *Christ.*

I pause briefly before I answer. “Nope. Why?” I’m going straight to hell. I can’t believe I’m lying straight to his face. What can I say? *‘Yeah, she’s spent the last few hours in my bed and now she’s in the shower washing off the remnants of our sex romp?’* I don’t have a fucking death wish.

“She’s not home yet. I’m worried about her. She’s not answering her phone either.”

I swallow hard. Maybe I should just come right out and say it.

Nope, I’m a coward.

“Maybe she went out with her friends after work?”

“She usually calls if she’s going to be home late.”

“I’m sure she’s okay.” I place my hand on his shoulder. “Relax, she’s not a kid.”

“Will you help me look for her?”

“Sorry, I can’t. I was just on my way out.” I hold up the keys in my hand. “I’m sure she’ll be home soon.” I step forward as I speak, like I’m about to leave.

“Where are you going?” he asks as he looks me up and down.

“Just out.”

“You’re going out with no shoes on?”

Christ. I didn’t think this through properly. “My . . . ummm . . . joggers are in the car.”

His brow furrows as he gives me a sceptical look. “You’ve been acting weird lately. What the fuck’s going on? Are you really going out, or are you giving me the brush off?”

“No. Of course not. I’m just busy.” God, I hate this. “I’ve really got to go. Call me when she gets home, and let me know she’s safe. Okay?”

Just when I think I’m in the clear, I hear Hanna’s voice behind me. “Your shower’s huge.” *Fuck.* “You could fit like ten people in there.”

When Ethan’s eyes narrow and he pushes me aside, I know he’s heard her too. This is not how I wanted him to find out.

“What the fuck, Hanna?” he screams, when he enters my apartment.

I swing around just in time to see her face drop and turn a ghostly shade of white. “Ethan.”

He stands there unmoving for a few seconds before he spins around to face me. He doesn’t say a word, there’s no need. The murderous glare in his eyes says it all.

Fuck!



Chapter 12

Oh shit . . .

Hanna

The moment Ethan lunges towards Harrison, I drop the heels that I'm holding in my hand and reach for him. "You motherfucker," he seethes, grabbing him by the shirt and slamming his back into the wall. "I trusted you."

Poor Harrison just stands there. He doesn't even put up a fight. It's like he thinks he deserves whatever my brother is about to dish out. He doesn't. He's done nothing wrong. What Harry and I do in private is none of his business. He's not my father. My parent's love Harrison and I know they'd have no problem with us being together. Neither should Ethan.

"I'm sorry," Harrison says in a deflated tone. The devastation I see on his face breaks my heart. He's a good guy, he doesn't deserve this. I finally understand why he's been so hesitant to tell my brother about us. These two have been mates for as long as I can remember. They're like brothers their bond is so strong. I hope this doesn't ruin their friendship. That's the last thing I want to happen.

"Ethan," I scream, grabbing hold of his arms and trying my best to pry him off Harrison. It's no use. As angry as I am, he's too strong. "Let him go."

"Stay out of this, Hanna," he says, shoving me backwards. That's when everything turns to shit.

"Don't you shove her," Harrison sneers, pushing on his chest.

"No!" I scream, when Ethan raises a clenched fist, punching Harrison in the mouth. This time I jump on my brother's back. I refuse to stand by and let him do this.

"Leave him alone," I cry. My eyes briefly move to Harrison's, and the hurt I see reflected in them as he wipes the blood from his cut lip, brings tears to my eyes. I adore my brother, but in this moment, I don't like him. He's acting like a total douche bag.

Ethan sighs as he lets go of Harrison's shirt and takes a step backwards. "Get your things, Hanna, we're leaving." I can tell by the tone of his voice he's hurting too, but he had no right to come here and do what he did.

"Where do you get off telling me what to do?" I snap.

"I won't say it again. Get your shit, we're going."

I'm about to tell him where he can shove his demands, when Harrison cuts in. "Just go, Hanna." The pleading look on his face hurts, but not as much as his words. What's he trying to tell me? That we're over now? I'll bust his balls if he is. I thought I meant something to him. If he's going to throw what we have away, just because of my butthead brother, I'll be crushed.

"Can I have a moment alone with, Harrison?" I ask Ethan, narrowing my eyes as I speak. If he's ruined this for me, I'll never forgive him.

"I'll give you one minute." He gives me a look that says he means business. Who the fuck does he think he is? As he turns to leave, he points his finger in Harrison's direction. "Stay the fuck away from my sister, you hear me?" God, I could punch him right now for the way he's acting.

I wait until he's stepped out into the corridor before I approach Harrison. My watery eyes lock with his as I try and search for any sign that tells me we're okay. "I'm sorry he did this to you," I say, reaching up and running my thumb tenderly across his lip. I see tears rise to his eyes as his gaze moves to the floor. "Please, don't tell me this is the end of us." I slide my hands around his waist, resting my head on his chest. "I need you."

I'm relieved when he folds me in his arms. "I need you too, Han," he whispers, tightening his hold on me. "I need you so much."



"You had no fucking right," I seethe as my brother and I walk through the foyer of Harrison's apartment building. I'm so angry at him right now I could scream.

He abruptly stops walking and turns to face me. "Really? You're angry?"

"Yes, really," I say, pushing on his chest. "Who I choose to see is none of your business."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Like I said, none of your business." I can count on one hand how many times we've come to blows in our lifetime. I love that my brother cares, and that he's so protective, but this is where I draw the line. I'm not going to stand by and let him destroy what Harrison and I have.

"Answer me, Hanna," he screams.

"Go fuck yourself," I say, pushing him again. He's way too big and strong compared to me, so he doesn't even budge. But it still felt good doing it. "What I do, and who I do it with, is none of your damn business." Tears stream from my eyes as I turn and run out of the building and into the night. Never in my life have I spoken to my brother so harshly, but in all fairness, he's never stepped out of line like he did just now.

It's a good twenty-minute walk from Harrison's apartment to my brother's house, and it's late at night, but I don't care. There's no way I'm getting in the car with him right now. I'm so angry I'm shaking. It's going to kill my feet to walk all that way in heels, but I'm doing it. I'd rather kill my feet than him, because that's what I feel like doing right now.

After Harrison gave me a tender kiss goodbye, he said he'd call me later. God, I hope he does. I'm itching to call him myself. I need to know we're okay.

"Get in the car," Ethan says, pulling up beside me.

"Leave me alone."

"Hanna." I ignore him as I continue down the sidewalk. I can be stubborn when I want to be, and

there's no way I'm giving in. I start to walk faster, which is pointless. Ethan is in a car, so even if I ran he'll still be able to keep up with me. "Please."

"Suit yourself. I'm not getting in the car with you."

"I'll drive beside you the whole way if I have to."

I shrug, because in this moment I don't give a fuck.

Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I turn it on. My only thought right now is Harrison. I want to send him a message, apologising again. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't scared about what this is going to do to us. This is so much worse than I ever anticipated.

I'm startled when my phone rings. My pulse starts racing thinking it's him, but when I look down at the screen, I see it's only Michelle.

"Oh my God, Hanna. Where are you? Ethan is out looking for you now. I've been trying to frantically call you since he left, just in case you're with Harrison. I know you said nothing was going on . . ." Her voice trails off. I hate that I had to keep this from her, but like Harrison had said, it's not something that she should be hiding from her husband.

"He found me," I say, my voice cracking.

"At Harrison's?"

"Yes."

"Shit. How did he take it?"

"Not good. He punched Harrison in the mouth and told him to stay away from me."

"He what?" she screams. The loud noise has me pulling the phone away from my ear, but I can still hear her. People in China can probably hear her. "Where are you?"

"Walking along the main street with your dickhead husband driving beside me because I refuse to get in the car with him."

"Oh, Han."

"I hate him for what he's done, Shell," I cry.

"Sweetie . . . I'm walking to my car now. I'll come get you."

"Thank you." I'm so grateful to have her. At least she can see how perfect Harrison and I are for each other.

I wipe the tears from my eyes with the back of my hand once I've ended the call. I'd hate to be in my brother's shoes right now. Michelle is going to serve him his balls, and rightly so.

"Get in the car, Hanna," Ethan calls out from beside me again, so I flip him the bird and continue walking. Hell would have to freeze over before I got in that car.

Opening my messages again, I quickly type something to Harrison.

Me: I'm sorry. I hope this doesn't change things between us. I love you . . . it's crazy just how much. Please don't let this be the end of us. I need you. x

This is only the second time I've said it to him, but I do love him. *Boy, do I love him.* I hope he knows just how much. I'd hate for my relationship with my brother to be strained because of this, but I'm not going to let him stand in the way of my happiness. I've never been happier than I am when I'm with

Harrison. I've wanted him for so long. I never dreamed I'd actually get him. For years, I thought he didn't see me that way, but now I know differently. He may not be in love with me yet, but he feels something. That I am sure of. I don't need words. His touch . . . his kiss—it says so much. I also see it in his eyes when he looks at me. Nobody has ever looked at me the way he does. It makes my insides all mushy, and my heart feel so full.

Minutes pass before Michelle finally shows up. I stop walking when I see her do a U-turn before pulling up behind Ethan's car. There's still no reply from Harrison, which worries me.

She's out of the car in a flash and wrapping me in her arms. "It's okay, sweetie. Everything will be okay."

"What are you doing here?" Ethan says, coming to stand beside us.

"I'll deal with you in a minute," Michelle replies. The tone of her voice kinda makes me feel sorry for him. As much as I love his wife, she can be a ball-buster at times. We all joke about it behind her back. But he brought this on himself. The way he acted towards Harrison was way out of line.

Taking a step back, I wipe the tears from my face as my eyes quickly dart to Ethan. When he reaches out his hand and rubs my back, I flinch. The hurt and sorrow I see in his eyes tugs at my heart. He's always been such an amazing brother, but until he makes this right, if that's even possible, I can't forgive him.

"Do you think you'll be able to drive my car home, Han?" Michelle asks. "I'll travel with your brother." Her eyes narrow at him as she speaks.

"I'm right to drive," I say. I'm not sure if I am, but if it means not getting in the car with my brother, I'm gonna give it my best shot. Leaning forward, I kiss her cheek. "Thank you."



Chapter 13

The fallout . . .

Harrison

When I pull into the driveway, I rest my head on the steering wheel and sigh. I don't even know why I came here. *Yes, I do*—I had nowhere else to go. I've just lost the only real family I have. Sliding my hand into my pocket, I pull out my phone and open Hanna's message. A lump rises to my throat as I read it for the hundredth time. I can't bring myself to reply to her. As much as I hate to admit it, what just happened, *has* changed everything. It's easy for her to say she loves me now, but in the coming days or weeks I'm sure that will change. Ethan will make sure of it.

I can't even put into words how incredibly hurt I am by the way he acted towards me at my apartment, even though I deserved it. I actually deserved a lot more than what he dished out. I should've manned up weeks ago. Better still, I should've stayed the hell away from his little sister in the first place. I'm devastated that this is what it's come to. I don't want to lose her. Our last few weeks together have been some of the best of my life.

I toss my phone into the centre console before exiting the car. My eyes take in the yard as I walk down the path towards the front porch. This place was so beautiful when I purchased it. The gardens and lawns were all manicured and well cared for. I should've known they wouldn't look after it.

My stomach churns as I walk up the front stairs. Coming home shouldn't feel like this, but it always does. This place has never really been my home. Not really.

I knock on the door and wait for an answer. I have keys, but unlike Ethan's place, I don't feel comfortable just walking inside.

"Harrison," my mum says with surprise when she appears in the doorway. "I wasn't expecting a visit. I was getting ready to head out."

Of course, she was.

She was hardly ever home when I was a kid. I understood why she didn't want to be around my father, but I hated that she would just leave me on my own with him. When I was little I'd beg her to take me along, but she never did. It wasn't until I was older, and realised where she was actually going, that I understood why. My father was never physically violent with me, but he's a mean drunk and was known to be verbally abusive. I'm not ashamed to admit I was scared of him back then. I think any kid in my

situation would be. I'd usually lock myself in my room after my mother would leave, and avoid him at all costs. Thankfully, once Ethan came into my life his place became my safe haven.

"I just called over to see how you guys are doing," I say with a forced smile. I don't want her to see how much her lack of enthusiasm hurts me, but it does. It always has. Ethan's parents always made their children a priority. I'm not sure where I fit into my parents list of priorities, but I've never been at the top that's for sure.

I take in my mother's appearance, and as usual she's scantily dressed and overly made up. She's forty-seven and still dresses like she's in her twenties. I'm pretty sure there's more material in one of my work ties than there is in the skirt she's wearing. She always had a natural beauty, and doesn't need to dress so cheaply to get attention. She's the only person I know that goes to the grocery store dressed like she's on her way out for a night on the town; in way too tight dresses and sky high heels.

Is it wrong of me to have wished for a regular looking mum when I was kid? Because I did, I still do. Growing up, I absolutely loathed the attention her appearance would bring. Of course, she welcomed it, thrived on it even. The worst part for me though, were the rumours that circulated about her. We couldn't even walk down the street without people pointing at us, or snickering behind our backs. *'Oh, did you know she was seen out with one of the teachers from the school.'* Or, *'Oh, I heard she was sleeping with the postman now . . . that woman is shameful.'* There were so many taunts, and none of them pleasant. Even the kids at school gave me a hard time about it. It's not easy being the son of the town slut, or the town drunk for that matter. My parents are a joke. It was a constant battle to ignore them growing up. On occasions, I'd retaliate and get into fights, but mostly I tried to ignore it. I've never liked violence, since I lived and breathed it at home.

Funnily enough, despite what everyone said, I loved them; I still do. Don't ask me why, but I do.

"You're a good kid," my mum says, placing her shaky hand tenderly on the side of my face. My father has turned her into a nervous wreck over the years. I see her eyes move down to my cut lip, but she doesn't ask me what happened, or if I'm okay. She's had enough of her own shit to deal with, thanks to my father. It's probably no big deal to her. Call me over sensitive, but I'm pretty sure if it was my kid, I'd want to know.

Despite all her infidelities though, she does care about me in her own fucked up kind of way, I'm sure of that. My mum's just needy and craves affection, any way she can get it. She always has. Maybe that's why she is the way she is, she certainly doesn't get any of that from my father.

Moving to the side she looks down at her watch as she allows me to enter. I just got here and I already feel like she's pushing me out the door. Just once I'd like either of my parents to put me first. Is that too much to ask?

"Is dad home?"

"No," she replies, shaking her head at the same time. "He's probably at the pub, or passed out in the gutter somewhere." It's sad that she says it so casually and uncaring, but it's happened so many times it's no big deal anymore. I can't even count how many times he's been picked up by the police unconscious on the side of the road, or for drunk and disorderly behaviour. It's humiliating. The police won't even keep him in lockup anymore because they don't want to deal with his bullshit. It used to really upset me when I was a kid, but like my mother, I've become accustomed to it over time. When I was young I'd lie awake at night, consumed with worry. My father would be out drinking, my mum would be with God only knows who, and I was left to fend for myself. The thought of neither of them coming home would terrify me. In

hindsight, I probably would've been better off if they didn't.

"Why is the lawn so long?" I ask as I pass her. "What happened to the guy I hired to take care of it."

She rolls her eyes before answering. "We haven't seen him for almost a month. The noise from the edging woke your father from his afternoon nap last time he was here. After screaming profanities at him, he threw a full can of beer at his head, before chasing him down the street with the edger as he threatened to dismember him. The poor man never returned . . . I don't blame him. Your father can be so . . ." Her words drift off, but she doesn't need to finish that sentence, I know exactly what my father is like. I lived with him. I'm not sure how I would've turned out if it wasn't for the love and care I got from Ethan's family growing up.

I shake my head as I follow her towards the kitchen. There's never a dull moment in this house, that's for sure. I bought this place to try and give them a better life. Of course my father would have to make things hard, he always does. It's in a great neighbourhood and a far cry from the dump I grew up in.

My mother cried tears of joy the day I handed over the keys . . . my father just complained that it was too far away from a pub. Selfish prick. His addiction has always meant more to him than us.

We never had nice things when I was young because my father drank away most of the money he earned. So, I made sure their new house was fully furnished—everything was new. I wanted to give them something to be proud of. My mother does her best to keep the inside nice, but it angers me to see all the holes that have been punched in the walls as I walk down the hall. My father's lack of respect pisses me the hell off, but on the other hand, I'd rather him punch a wall than her.

"Sit," she says when I enter the kitchen. I can't help but notice that she looks down at her watch yet again as she goes about collecting the empty beer cans from the table, and throwing them in the trash can under the sink. My eyes follow her every move.

"I won't stay long. I know you have somewhere else to be." I try my best not to sound bitter.

"I can spare a few minutes to catch up with my son." Wow, a few minutes. I haven't seen her in weeks, and she can only spare me few minutes. It's a constant reminder of just how unimportant I am to my parents. It stings. I should be used to it by now, but I'm not. "How have you been?"

"I'm doing okay," I say with a shrug. I'm far from okay, but I'm not going to tell her that. We've never been close enough to discuss those kinds of things. I've always kept my feelings close to my chest. Even with Ethan. He knew my life was shitty, but had no idea to what extent. To be honest, once I saw how perfect his family was, I felt ashamed of mine.

I think he knew that too, because he never pried—never asked questions. In the beginning, yes, he'd ask things like, '*Where's your lunch?*' I'd just shrug it off by saying my mother had forgotten to go to the store, I'd left it at home, or that I wasn't hungry today. It was a lie. I was always hungry. That's when he'd start turning up to school with extra food. Even then he was discreet about it, but I'm not stupid. He'd say things like, '*My mum's packed too much food for me again. I swear she's trying to make me fat. Help a brother out and eat some of this for me.*' I'll always love him for that. He never made me feel like a charity case, he'd always turn it around and make me feel like I was doing him a favour. In my heart I knew better, but I never let on. He was just there for me . . . always. So, to say I'm completely devastated that I've lost him, would be an understatement.

I'm not sure how I'm going to cope without him in my life. When my business first started to take off, I offered him a partnership, but although he was proud of my achievements, he had his own aspirations.

He wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. Which is kind of ironic to me. I aspire to be nothing like my old man. I guess when you have a father like Ethan's though, someone to look up to, wanting to be like him is not unusual.

He does alright for himself, but he's certainly not rolling in money like I am. I've tried to give him things in the past, but he'd never take handouts, like I once did from him. I make up for it though, by paying Michelle a huge salary. In my opinion she earns every cent though, she's a fucking gem. Christ, I hope he doesn't make her quit her job. I'd be lost without her. This clusterfuck has the potential to create a huge domino effect in my life. Who knew falling in love with the wrong person could be this hard?

"I'd offer you something to drink," my mum says, pulling me from my inner turmoil, "but we don't have anything. Unless you're okay with tap water." The moment she bows her head, I know somethings wrong.

"What's going on mum?" I ask, concerned.

"Your father has lost his job . . . again."

"What?" I sit up straight in my seat. "When?"

"About two weeks ago."

"Jesus, mum. Why didn't you tell me?" I have all the rates and utility bills sent to me, so all they really need to do is buy food.

"It's not your problem, Harrison. You do enough for us already."

Standing, I reach into my pocket for my wallet. I pull out three one-hundred-dollar notes, and place them on the table. "That's all I have on me now, but I'll set up some regular payments tomorrow. I'll get it put into your bank so he can't piss it away."

"You don't have to do that," she says, tears glistening in her eyes.

"I want to."

She steps forward, wrapping her arms around me. "You're a good, son."

Leaning down, I place a soft kiss on her hair. "If you ever need anything, mum, call me. I mean it." I've tried so many times to help her over the years, to get her away from my toxic father, but to no avail. She's far from perfect, but God only knows why she continues to put up with his bullshit. She deserves better.



I pour some scotch into a glass, downing it in one gulp. I welcome the burn of the amber liquid as it runs down the back of my throat. I don't hesitate in pouring another. I'm not much of a drinker, usually only sharing the occasional beer with Ethan, but today calls for the hard stuff. I'm yearning to be numb. I don't want to think or feel, it hurts too much. If it wasn't for me going around to visit my parents, I'd never see them. They've never once made the effort to reach out to me, or see how I'm doing. Yet Ethan always has. I'm gonna miss that. I haven't just lost a friend today—Ethan's my family. The only real family I have.

After drinking my second scotch, I place the glass down. I rest my hands on the bar and exhale a large breath. I contemplate calling Ethan again. I've tried twice since I've been home, but he disconnected the call both times. I don't know what else I can do to smooth this out. In the almost twenty years of our friendship, we've never fought. *Never*. That's one of the reasons why this has hit me so hard.

My thoughts drift to Hanna. I miss her already. I'm craving her comfort, but I'm scared to reach out to

her. I've faced enough rejection in my life. I couldn't stand it if she rejected me as well.

I've always enjoyed going into the office, even more so the past few weeks . . . because of her. But tomorrow I'm dreading it. What if she doesn't show up? That's really going to fuck me over. I'm not banking on seeing Michelle anytime soon, either.

Picking up the empty glass, I raise it above my head, before instantly lowering it again. Throwing the glass against the wall isn't going to solve anything. It's not going to make this clusterfuck disappear, and it's certainly not going to make things right between me and Ethan. Or guarantee my future with Han. There's nothing I can do to undo this mess. Even walking away from Hanna won't help. I'm sure as hell not prepared to do that either. I can't . . . I'm in way too deep to even consider it.

Sliding my phone out of my pocket, I stare down at the screen. There's no missed calls or messages from her. That fills me with dread. The end for us is near, I can feel it.

I head towards my room to change. Maybe a good workout will help relieve some of the tension I'm feeling. It can't hurt. It's not like I've got anywhere else to go.

It's funny how one minute you can be on top of the world, surrounded by people who care—the ones that enrich your life and make it so much better—and in a blink of an eye it's all gone and you feel lower than you have in your entire life . . . *and so fucking alone.*



Chapter 14

Home is where the heart is . . .

Hanna

I knock on the front door, for what feels like the hundredth time. He's either not home, or he's ignoring me. *Please don't let it be the latter.* I've been blowing up his phone since I arrived here, but it keeps going straight to voicemail, which isn't a good sign. I don't know what to do. I have nowhere else to go.

Giving up, I slide down the wall, burying my face in my hands. This is so fucked up. Only a few short hours ago, I had everything I ever wanted. Now I have no idea where we stand. Not to mention my relationship with my brother is in tatters.

"Hanna." My head snaps up with I hear Harrison's voice. "What are you doing here?"

I sit there gobsmacked briefly. By the looks of him, I presume he's been at the gym. He's wearing a tight singlet, and a pair of workout shorts. He's all ripped, sweaty, and delicious. I shouldn't be staring, but I can't help myself. When he comes to a stop in front of me, he extends his hand, helping me to my feet. "Are you okay?"

"Of course I'm not okay," I say, burying my face into his chest.

Cupping my face in his big strong hands, he tilts my head back until my gaze is meeting his. "Don't cry," he says, wiping the stray tears from my cheeks with the pads of his thumbs. "Please. I can't bear it." The pleading tone of his voice tears at my heart, but it also tells me he still cares, which gives me hope.

Letting me go, he wraps me tightly in his arms. "Are we okay, Harry?" I whisper into his chest.

"I hope so."

When he finally lets me go, he takes a step back. That's when he notices my suitcase sitting by my feet. "Are you going somewhere?" I can tell by the shocked look on his face that he thinks I'm leaving.

"I couldn't stay at Ethan's. I'm so angry with him."

"So, you're not going back to uni?" There's hurt and confusion swimming in his beautiful brown eyes as they lock with mine.

"Not if you don't want me to. Classes don't start back for another six weeks." I see a small smile tug at his lips. Reaching up, I gently run my fingers over his cut lip. I hate that my brother hurt him. "Can I stay

here tonight?”

“You can stay as long as you like,” he says, pulling me back into his arms, practically crushing me, “as long as you like, Han.”

I can't tell you how happy his words make me. *Can I stay here with him forever?*

His fingers tenderly run a path down my arm, sending tingles coursing through my body. When he reaches my hand, he laces his fingers through mine, before bending to pick up the small suitcase by my feet. I only packed enough clothes for a few days. Ethan probably hasn't realised I've even left. He and Michelle were having a vicious argument when I snuck out. My car is still parked at Harrison's office, so I walked a few blocks before flagging a taxi. I had contemplated going to my parents' house. They're still overseas on their dream holiday, but I knew that would be the first place Ethan would look for me. Well either there or Harrison's. I can't see him turning up here again in a hurry. Well, he better not.

Once we're inside the apartment, he places my suitcase down. “Make yourself comfortable, I'm just gonna have a quick shower. I'm all sweaty from the gym.”

“I like you all sweaty,” I say, getting up on the tips of my toes and brushing my lips against his.

“I like you all sweaty, too,” he replies with a chuckle as he wraps his arm around my waist and pulls my body towards his. Although he never replied to my text, and is yet to tell me exactly how deep his feelings run for me, I swear I see love reflecting in his beautiful brown eyes as he gazes down at me.

When his lips meet mine, the kiss is soft and sweet. Not hungry and desperate like they usually are.

I moan into his mouth when I feel him growing hard against my stomach. Does this man have any idea how much he undoes me?

When our kiss finally ends, he rests his forehead against mine. “I don't think I'll ever get my fill of you, Miss Scott.” You have no idea how happy that makes me. I don't want to ever lose what we have.

I think we're going to be okay.



I pace the main room of Harrison's luxurious, penthouse apartment as I wait for him to get out of the shower. I can't seem to relax. The butterflies that have settled into the pit of my stomach are unnerving. In my heart, I know this isn't the end of our drama.

I'm startled when I hear the loud ringtone of his phone coming from the other side of the room. I walk over to the long wooden entry table by the door. My uneasiness intensifies when I see Michelle's number flashing on the screen. She must've finally noticed I'm missing.

Picking it up, I head towards Harrison's bedroom. I don't feel right answering it, but I'm curious to see what she wants. She's either checking up to see if I'm here, or worse, she's calling to say Ethan's on his way back over.

I'm momentarily stopped in my tracks when I enter his room. He's standing by the dresser with a towel slung low on his hips. The strong muscles in his back flex as he rifles through one of the drawers. He literally takes my breath away.

He stops what he's doing when he hears the phone ringing, swinging around to face me. “It's Michelle,” I say, holding it up in the air.

A grim look settles on his face as he walks towards me. I hate that. I wish everyone would just butt the hell out and leave us be. He forces out a smile as he takes it from my hand.

“Hey.” His eyes lock with mine briefly before he turns and makes his way back towards the dresser. “Yes, she’s here.” He pauses as he listens to whatever she’s saying. I wish the call was on speaker so I could hear the conversation as well. “Sure . . . okay . . .” I see his shoulders slump, and I know whatever she’s just said isn’t good news. “I kinda expected this would happen.” I stalk across the room and wrap my arms around his waist, resting my cheek on his back. I have no idea what she just told him, but I want him to know I’m here for him. “Alright.” He turns to face me again, and the sadness I saw in his eyes earlier is back. “I’ll talk to you tomorrow,” he says. “Oh, and Shell . . . I know it’s probably not going to make much difference, but can you tell Ethan I’m sorry for keeping this from him.”

When I rest my head against his chest he places a soft kiss on my head. I can feel his rapid heartbeat against my cheek. He has nothing to be sorry about. If anything, Ethan should be apologising to him. I tilt my head back and meet his gaze when he ends the call.

“Are you okay?” I ask, giving him a sympathetic look.

“She’s not coming into to work tomorrow. Ethan has forbidden her.” He exhales a large breath as he steps away from me. I stand there, rooted to the spot, as he turns and walks towards the bed. My heart hurts for him as I watch him sit down on the side of the mattress, burying his face in his hands. He’s hurting, and I can’t express how sad that makes me. Why is my brother doing this?

“Harrison.” I cross the room and take a seat beside him. “I’m sorry,” I say as I place my hand on his leg. I can’t help but feel responsible. “You know Michelle is her own person. She never lets anyone tell her what to do.”

He just shakes his head. “How can I make things right with Ethan?” When he turns his face to meet mine I can tell he’s on the verge of tears. The devastation I see tears me apart.

I rub his back with my hand as I rest my head against his arm. “Everything will work itself out, Harry.” I’m not sure if I’m trying to convince him or myself. I know my brother though, and I know how much he values Harrison’s friendship. I’ve never seen him this mad before, but I hope when he calms down he’ll see how ridiculous he’s being.

Well, I pray he does.



When I get out of the shower, I get dressed for work. I didn’t tell Harrison, but when we got home last night, Ethan forbid me from working with Harrison as well. But there’s no way I’m letting him stand in my way. That’s one of the reasons I packed up and fled. I didn’t fancy fighting with him this morning when I tried to leave the house.

Leaving my feet bare, I pad out into the kitchen. I can smell the delicious aroma from here, so I know Harry is cooking us breakfast. Just being here with him is showing me a side to him I never knew existed. As if he wasn’t already alluring enough.

Neither of us got much sleep last night. Numerous times during the night I woke to find Harrison lying on his back staring at the ceiling. And at 2am I found him missing from the bed completely. He was in the main room with his hands in his pockets staring out at the city skyline from the floor to ceiling windows. Even with his back to me I could tell he was troubled. It worried me. We spent the next few hours losing ourselves in each other, trying to forget the mess we were now facing. I hope what we have is strong enough to survive what’s to come.

“Morning,” I say, walking up behind him and wrapping my arms around his waist.

“Morning.” When I place a small kiss on his back, he turns in my arms. I hear him inhale when he buries his face in my hair. I’m not sure what his fascination is with that, but I don’t bother calling him out on it. He’ll just deny his was sniffing me, he always does. “Are you hungry?”

“Starved,” I answer as I raise my head and brush my lips against his.

He smiles in return but it doesn’t quite reach his eyes. I wish he’d open up and talk to me. He can play this down as much as he likes, but I can see he’s struggling.

“Sit. I hope you like Spanish omelettes.”

“I didn’t know you could cook?” I say, taking a seat at the breakfast bar.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me.” I bet there is. Although he was a constant in my life growing up, he was always very reserved and never talked about himself.

I watch as he grabs two plates and places them down in front of me. My eyes continue to follow him as he goes back to the stove to grab the frying pan off the hotplate. “It smells delicious,” I admit as he cuts it down the middle with the spatula, dividing the omelette between both our plates.

I don’t hesitate in picking up the fork. I hope it tastes as good as it looks. “Mmm,” I moan as I cut off a small piece and pop it in my mouth. My mum cooks a mean omelette, but this even rivals hers.

“You like?” he asks as he places a mug of coffee in front of me. I could get used to this. I’ve been fending for myself for the last three years at uni, so it’s nice to have someone wait on me.

“It’s delicious. Almost as delicious as you.”

He chuckles as he comes to sit beside me. “You’re cute,” he says, placing a kiss on the side of my head.

“Where did you learn to cook like this?”

He shrugs as his gaze moves down to his lap. “I didn’t really have a choice.”

I place my hand on his thigh, giving it a squeeze. I know he had a shitty childhood. I’m not entirely sure how bad it actually was, but there was a lot of rumours circling around town about his parents when we were growing up. It’s not something he’s ever talked about; not with me anyway. I remember stumbling across mum, dad, and Ethan talking in the kitchen once. My mum was crying. ‘*Poor Harrison,*’ I heard her say. ‘*We’ve got to do something to help him, he’s just a kid.*’

To this day, I have no idea what that was about, but soon after, my parents practically adopted him as part of our family. He was practically a permanent fixture in our home and came on all our family vacations. He spent more time at our place than he did at his own.

“You’re one of the good ones, Harrison Williams,” I say with conviction. Apart from his devilishly good looks, and a body made of pure sin, he has so many other redeeming qualities. Not only does he have a beautiful heart, he’s a doer . . . a fighter . . . and a survivor. I’m so proud of him and everything he’s accomplished despite the odds. I know my family is as well.

“I’m glad you’re here, Han.”

“There’s no other place I’d rather be.” And that’s the truth.



Chapter 15

Trying to mend the rift . . .

Harrison

I dial Ethan's number for the umpteenth time. Unfortunately, he's declined every single call. If only he'd hear me out. I know I have a bit of a reputation with women, but things are different with Hanna. She's changed me and everything I've ever believed. I could've sworn I wasn't the settling down type, but she makes me feel differently. Things I thought I was incapable of feeling. It's actually crazy just how much she's turned my life upside down. In a good way, of course. I *can* see a future with her, and believe it or not, I *want* this more than I've ever wanted anything before in my life.

Tossing my phone on the desk, I scrub my hands over my face. I'm not sure if I can mend the rift between us, but I'm gonna try my damned hardest. He's more than just my best friend, he's my brother. He's been a part of my life for as long as I can remember, and he's helped shape me into the man I am today. Without the love and guidance from Ethan and his family, lord knows where I would've ended up.

All I know is that I need him in my life, just as much as I need Hanna.

"Are you okay, Harry?" My head snaps up to find Hanna standing in the doorway of my office, watching me. I can see the worry etched on her beautiful face and I hate that.

"I'm fine," I lie. She has her own problems, she doesn't need to be burdened down with mine.

Pushing my chair back, I tap my leg and force out a smile. She's fast becoming the light in the darkness that's threatening to consume me. I'm not sure how I'd cope if I lost her too.

Closing the door, she saunters her way towards me. When she's within reaching distance, I pull her down onto my lap. A smile tugs at my lips when she wraps her arms around my waist, snuggling into me. I close my eyes and let her scent envelope me. She's my happy place. I need her more than she'll even know.

"Promise me you'll stay," I whisper into her hair, as I try to swallow the giant lump that has risen in the back of my throat. I know it's unfair of me to even ask her that, but she's all I have now.

Lifting her face off my chest, her pretty blue eyes meet mine. She just stares at me for the longest time as I await her answer. The longer it takes, the more anxious I become. I don't want to be alone. If I lose her too, I'll have nothing . . . no one.

I try to will the tears back, but it's no use. I'm powerless to stop them. I hate myself for showing her my weakness. *Men don't cry.* I learnt that when I was a kid. I was about four the first time I saw my father hit my mother. It was horrifying and I'm not ashamed to admit I cried. I was both shocked and scared. What kid wouldn't be? They'd always have vicious arguments, but this was the first time I'd ever witnessed the physical side.

It was also the first time my father laid his hand on me. He backhanded me so hard in the side of the head, it knocked me off my feet. I still remember his words like it was yesterday. "*If I ever see you cry like a girl again, I won't be held responsible for what I do.*" It was the one and only time he ever saw me shed a tear. If I ever felt the need to do it again, I'd always hide in the bottom of my wardrobe and shed silent tears, even if he wasn't home. I was just a kid. I didn't know any better.

"Oh, Harrison," she says as she wipes one of the stray tears that leaks from my eyes. I can't even remember the last time I got this emotional. Shame fills me as I go to turn my face away from her, but she grabs hold of my face and stops me. Leaning forward, she gently places her lips on mine. "I'm not going anywhere," she whispers against my mouth. Holding her tight, I deepen the kiss. I need this connection with her, more than she'll ever know.

I have a burning desire to tell her how much I love her, and how much she means to me, but I'm a coward. I've never said those words to anyone before.



Two days pass and there's still no breakthrough in our situation. Hanna's still staying with me, but for how long who knows. I'm still getting the silent treatment from her brother. All my attempts to contact him have been ignored. Yet, according to Hanna, he's busting his balls trying to contact her. It's only a matter of time before she caves, and that's what I'm afraid of. The last thing I want to do is come between her and her brother. But I'm also scared once they start communicating again, he'll convince her I'm not the right man for her.

Maybe I'm not, but fuck me, I want to be. My past might not be much to go on, but Hanna's different. She's the first person to ever make me feel like I can actually do this, or want to for that matter. I know I'm capable of loving her, because I already do. I'd never hurt her, well not intentionally, and I'll give her everything she's ever wanted if she'll let me, that I'm sure of.

I smile when she sneaks in a kiss before the doors of the elevator open. As hard as it can be, we act professionally in front of the rest of the office. Behind locked doors though, that's a whole other story. She makes me so happy, but I hate that our happiness is marred by the fallout with Ethan. Like me, she puts on a brave face, but I can tell she's struggling.

"I'm gonna go make us a coffee," Hanna says, when we exit the elevator.

Without looking, I can feel the eyes of the rest of my staff on us, so I just nod before turning towards my office.

"Good morning," I hear the moment I place my leather briefcase down on my desk.

"Shell," I say, spinning around. Relief flood through me when I see she's dressed in her usual office attire. "You're back."

I'm already crossing the room and pulling her into my arms before she has a chance to reply. I was positive I'd lost her. "Of course, I told you I would be." She wraps her arms around my waist. "You're not getting rid of me that easily."

“You know I’d never do that, I’d be lost without you.” My voice cracks slightly as I speak. I’m so happy to see her.

Drawing back, she places her hand on my cheek. “Give him time, he’s just upset and not thinking straight.”

I sigh at her words. He’s more than upset. “I never meant for this to happen . . .” I shake my head before I continue. “I hate that this is what’s become of us. I miss his friendship, but I’m not prepared to give Hanna up . . . I’m in love with her, Shell.”

Her face lights up at my admission. “I’ve know that for a while now . . . for a few years, actually. I’m so glad you two have finally gotten your shit together. I used to see the way you looked at her when you thought nobody else was watching, and her you. Nothing gets past me, Harrison Williams, you should know that by now.”

“Of course it doesn’t,” I chuckle. “You’re like a regular Sherlock Holmes and ball-buster all rolled into one.”

“I’m not a ball-buster,” she says, slapping my chest. When she stops laughing, she sighs. “Okay, maybe a little. But it’s for your own good.”

“I’ve been fighting this for so long,” I admit, shoving my hands into the pockets of my trousers. “I tried my best to stay away from her for Ethan’s sake. In the end, I just couldn’t do it anymore.”

“I think you’ve both been fighting the inevitable. Despite what Ethan says, you two are perfect for each other. Deep down he knows that too. He’s just hurt. He feels like you’ve betrayed him.”

“I know. He has every right to feel that way. That’s why it was so hard for me to tell him.” My gaze moves down to the floor. “How is he doing?”

“Truthfully, not good. He misses you, but he’ll never admit it.”

Makes two of us.



“I still can’t believe how well you can cook,” Hanna says, placing the plates in the dishwasher. “You’ve been holding out on me, Mr Williams.”

“There’s not much I’m not good at,” I reply with all seriousness, as I slide my arms around her waist and rub my semi-hard cock against her arse.

“Is that so,” she says with a laugh. “Tickets much.”

“I’m just being honest.”

She turns in my arms and brushes her lips against mine. “I’d agree with you, but I don’t want to give you a big head.”

“My head’s big enough already,” I say, pushing my hips forwards. “And I’m not talking about the one on my shoulders either.”

She throws back her head and laughs. It’s nice to see. Neither of us have been doing much of that the last few days. “You’ll get no complaints from me there.”

I place a soft kiss on her nose. “Have I told you how much I love having you here?” I’m not sure how I’m going to cope when she has to return to uni in a few weeks.

“Yes, this morning when you had me pinned against the wall in the shower,” she replies with a smile,

“but feel free to tell me again.”

“I love having you,” I whisper against her mouth. When I pull out of the kiss, I tuck a strand of her hair behind her ear. “Listen, I’ve got to go out for a little while. Do you want to come, or stay here?”

“Where?”

“I run a self-defence class one night a week.”

“You do?” she asks as her eyes widen.

“I do . . . at the community centre in town.”

“Wow. How did I not know this?”

“Like I said, there’s a lot you don’t know about me, Miss Scott.”

“You’re full of surprises.”

“You better believe it. And if you’re a good girl, you might even be full of me when we get home.”
When I grab hold of my junk, she playfully slaps my arm.

“You’re so full of yourself.”

“I believe it’s you who’ll be full of me.”

A smile erupts on her pretty face as she slides her arms around my neck. “I can’t wait to be full of you.”

God, I love this woman.



Chapter 16

*He's everything a girl could ever want -
and so much more . . .*

Hanna

I stare at him in awe on the drive back to his apartment. “What?” he asks, glancing at me from the driver’s seat.

“Nothing,” I say, smiling as I reach across the centre console and place my hand on his thigh. “I just think you’re pretty special.”

I see a boyish grin play on his lips as he brings my hand towards his face, placing a tender kiss on my palm. “I think you’re pretty special too, Miss Scott.”

“What made you start these classes?” I ask. He was amazing tonight. The women he teaches really respect him, and he’s so good with them. Their ages ranged from young teens to elderly women. He even made me join in on the class. He taught us a range of techniques on how to handle certain attacks. I’d like to continue going to his classes if he’ll allow me.

The smile drops away from his face as he shrugs his shoulders. “My dad . . .” he pauses briefly before he continues, “he’s been violent towards my mother for as long as I can remember.” The shame I hear in his voice, tears at my heart. “I’ve tried to help her over the years, but she won’t let me. I don’t know why she continues to stay, but she does.”

“Oh, Harry,” I say, squeezing his leg. I’ve heard the rumours about his father’s drinking and his mother’s philandering ways, but I had no idea about the violence.

“It is what it is,” he states, trying to play down the seriousness of his situation. “I started doing these classes about seven years ago, hoping she’d come. She never did.”

“That’s a shame,” I say, squeezing his leg. He’s right when he says there’s a lot I don’t know about him. But truth is, the more I get to know the real him, the more I love him.

“I look at it this way, if I can’t help her, I may be able to help someone else in her position.”

I force a smile because I have no words for what he’s just told me; nothing that could do justice to

this selfless act anyway.

Turning my face away, I gaze out the passenger side window. I can feel the tears stinging my eyes, and I don't want him to see them. He's a proud man and I know him well enough to know he wouldn't want my sympathy.

His admission tonight just makes everything he's accomplished in life so much more admirable. He's not only turned the shitty life he was dealt into something wonderful, he continues to give back by helping others. It's not something he's ever mentioned, but I've seen firsthand all the money he donates to charities while I've been working for him. He even sponsors a few of the local schools by supplying breakfast and lunches for the kids that don't get any from home.

We're silent for the rest of the drive home. My mind is swimming. I hate that he had to endure such a horrible childhood. It makes me feel guilty for having such a wonderful home life growing up, but I'm also grateful that my family was there for him when he obviously needed it.

When we step into the elevator of his apartment building, I wrap my arms around his waist and rest my face against his chest. My heart breaks for the little boy he once was, and I don't even want to let my mind think about everything he must've gone through as a child. I had a perfect upbringing and loving parents. I finally get why he was always with us and never with his own family. It also sheds some light on why Harrison was so reluctant to tell Ethan about us. I hate myself even more for coming between them now. Ethan is, or should I say was, his family.

"You're my hero, Harry," I whisper against his chest as tears silently leak from my eyes. He doesn't say anything, but when he tightens his hold on me I know he heard what I said.



Ethan's face lights up as soon as I enter the café. "Hanna," he says as he stands, wrapping me tightly in his arms. As much as I've missed him, and hate what's become of our once close relationship, I swore I wouldn't talk to him again until he apologised to Harrison for the way he acted. He's yet to do that, but I've decided to take the first step. Not for me, but for Harry. It's killing me to stand by and watch him hurting. I can't, in good conscience, do nothing. I need to make things right between these two again. Even more so now I've learned more about his family. He needs my brother in his life.

Every night this week I've woken up to find Harrison missing from the bed. And every time I've gone searching for him, I've found him staring out into the night through the windows in the main room. He puts on a brave face, but when he doesn't realise I'm watching him, I clearly see the turmoil he's bravely trying to hide. He's troubled by what's going on, and it's up to me to fix this. If my brother will listen to anyone, it's me. I'll do whatever it takes to mend the gap between my two favourite guys. Yes, Harrison has me, but it's evident I'm not enough. Surprisingly, I'm not even upset by that knowledge. I know how much Ethan means to him. These two have been inseparable since they were kids.

When Ethan releases me from his death grip, I take a seat at the table. The moment he's seated opposite me, he reaches for my hand. "I've missed you so much, Sis. Please come back home."

I take in his appearance. He looks sad, tired, and so lost. It's the exact same expression I see when I look at Harrison, and it breaks my heart. He's suffering as well, but he can easily fix this. He's the only one who can.

"I'm not coming home until you apologise to Harrison. You had no right to hit him, or demand he stay away from me."

He lets go of my hand and straightens in his seat. The frown that appears on his forehead tells me he's not happy with what I've just said. "I had no right?" he scoffs.

"Yes, you had no right. I'm a big girl. I can make my own decisions."

"He had no right to lay his double-crossing hands on you," he says through gritted teeth, banging his hand down on the table. He's seriously overreacting here, just like he did the other night.

"I wanted this just as much as he did," I reply in an angry whisper. I'm trying my best not to make a scene, but it's a little late for that. I can already see a few of the other diners watching us. "You have no right to try and come between us."

"I'm not going to stand by and watch him break your heart, Hanna. I know him well enough to know that he's incapable of a long-term commitment."

His words sting, but I'd be lying if I said that exact same thought hadn't crossed my mind. Harrison's had girlfriends in the past, but only ever for a few weeks' tops. I'd like to think that I'm different—that what we have is special, but only time will tell I suppose.

"He's your best friend. How can you just turn your back on him like this?"

"Was my best friend," he snaps. "That all changed the minute he crossed the line."

"What line? There is no line Ethan. You're acting like such a jerk. He's family . . . he's like your damn brother. You're just going to throw all that away over one small incident."

"There's nothing small about this," he says as his voice raises again, "it's fucking huge. And it can only end badly for everyone involved, especially you. He may have been like a brother to me once, but he's not blood. *You are*. He's told me himself he's not capable of having a long-term relationships. He's proved that many times over the years. He's never been with someone long-term. I know you better than anyone, Hanna. I know that one day you'd like to settle down and marry. Harrison isn't that man. So, if you know what's good for you, you'll end this now. I won't stand by and watch him break your heart."

"This isn't your decision to make." I can feel my own temper rising. "If I get hurt that's solely on me. It has nothing to do with you. You can't turn your back on him over this."

"I believe I've already done that."

"So, you're honestly saying his friendship means nothing to you? I call bullshit on that one."

He exhales a deflated breath as his gaze moves down to the table. "It means everything to me. Well, it did until he betrayed me. Before he put my sister's welfare on the line." The hurt he's feeling is just radiating off him. It's hard to watch, but he only has himself to blame.

"My welfare has nothing to do with this. When are you going to get it through your thick skull? I'm not a kid anymore."

"Your welfare has everything to do with this. Why can't you see that you're no different to the others? Once he's had his fill he'll move on to the next good time. It's what he does."

"It never seemed to bother you before."

"It didn't, but it does now because you're involved. You're my family. I'm just looking out for you."

"Harrison's family too," I snap. "We're his family, Ethan. Blood or not. We're all he has. You know as well as I do that his parents don't give a shit about him. He would stay at our house for days, sometimes weeks on end when we were kids. How many times did his parents contact him to see if he

was okay?”

“Not once,” he says, sighing.

“I’m in love with him, Ethan. I have been for as long as I can remember. He treats me well . . . really well. He makes me happy . . . happier than I’ve ever been. I know I make him happy too. Why can’t you accept this?” He doesn’t answer my question. These two had a friendship like no other, a bond I could’ve sworn was unbreakable. “What if you’re wrong? What if this isn’t a temporary thing?”

“I’m not wrong. I know him better than anyone.”

“You are wrong,” I whisper as tears rise to my eyes. I’m so frustrated with his arrogance right now. “Do you know where I went last night?”

“Where?”

“I went to self-defence classes with Harrison.”

“What self-defence classes?” I had a feeling he didn’t know about them. I think I’ve seen a side of Harrison in the past few days that he’s never let anyone see before. The fact that he’d share something like that with me means the world to me. “Is he taking self-defence classes to help protect himself from me? If he hurts you, he’s gonna fucking need them.” I could slap his smug face right now. How dare he make light of this situation.

“No, he’s the instructor. And I very much doubt he’s scared of you, Ethan. He didn’t fight back the other day when you hit him, because he unjustly thought he deserved it.”

“Instructor? Since when?” He almost looks hurt that he doesn’t know about this.

“Seven years. He’s been doing this for seven years.”

“Wow,” he says, shaking his head in disbelief. I probably shouldn’t even divulge this information to him, but I want to him see that, despite what he thinks, there’s parts of Harrison he doesn’t know.

“Do you know why he does it?” I don’t even give him a chance to answer. “To help women protect themselves. To try and save them from going through what his mother does.”

I see his shoulder’s slump as the realisation of what I just said sinks in. “I always suspected something was going on there. He’d always have bruises when he was a kid, but he’d never tell me how he got them. I’d ask, but he’d always change the subject or just flat out ignore me.”

My eyes widen at Ethan’s confession. “Really? Do you think his father was violent with him too?” That thought makes me sick to the stomach. I extend my hand across the table and place it on top of my brother’s. “Call him, Ethan. He’s miserable without you. Make this right.”

He sits back in his chair and crosses his arms. “Sorry, I can’t do that. Not as long as you’re a couple . . . or whatever the fuck you two are.” When he shakes his head, I want to punch him. He’s being totally unreasonable.

To say I’m taken aback by his comment is an understatement. “Well, I guess we have nothing else to say to each other. Have a nice life.” Picking up my bag from the seat beside me, I stand. Tears sting my eyes when I hear him desperately call out my name, but I ignore him as I rush towards the exit. Coming here was a mistake.



I take some time to pull myself together before I head back to work. I honestly thought I’d make some

headway just now. I've never seen this side of my brother before, and frankly I don't like it. I get that he's hurt, I do, but he's acting like a child. I'm an adult and so is Harrison. What we choose to do behind closed doors is none of his damn business.

Stowing my bag under my desk, I knock on the door to Harrison's office. "Come in."

I can't help but smile the moment I see his beautiful face. I'm not sure how I'm going to mend this rift between these two, but I'm not going to give up. I feel responsible for what's happened and I won't be able to rest easy until I've fixed this mess.

"How was lunch?" I just shrug my shoulders and I walk towards the desk. I'm not going to tell him what just happened, it will only hurt him further. "Hey, are you okay?" he asks when I get closer. When I don't answer him, he reaches for me and pulls me down onto his lap. "Hanna, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," I say, sliding my arms around his neck. "I just missed you."

He chuckles as his lips brush against mine. "You were only gone for an hour."

"I know," I say, snuggling into his chest. "I've been with you twenty-four-seven for the past few days. What can I say? . . . I've become rather attached to you, Mr Williams."

Lacing his fingers into my hair, he tilts my face back so our eyes meet. When a smile explodes onto his face, it literally takes my breath away.

As much as I want to put my conversation with Ethan out of my mind, I can't. His words swim around in my head as Harrison's lips connect with mine. *I need to make this right.*

When Harrison finally draws back, his eyes lock with mine. The look he gives me is so endearing and, if I'm not mistaken, it's full of love. It makes my pulse race. I could seriously get lost in his beautiful brown eyes. If my brother is right, my time with Harrison is almost up since we've been together for a few weeks now. In my heart, I don't want to believe that. It feels like it's just the beginning of us, not the end. Maybe Ethan's wrong—maybe what we share is different to all the others. A girl can only hope.

A smile tugs at his lips as he tenderly tucks a strand of hair behind my ear. "I've become pretty attached to you as well, Miss Scott." His words make my heart sing and break all at once.

As far as I can see, there's only one solution to mend this rift, and it's going to take every ounce of strength I have to pull this off.



Chapter 17

Well I didn't see that coming . . .

Harrison

The moment I've stripped her out of her clothes, I gently lay her down on the bed. She's become my addiction. Since she's been staying here we've been trying to keep our hands off each other at work, so I look forward to getting her home in the evenings so I can bury myself balls deep in her heaven. I'm consumed by thoughts of her all day.

Nobody has even come close to making me feel the sheer magnitude of emotions that course through me when I'm with her. I'm so completely in love with this woman it's overwhelming me. I need to tell her how I feel, but I'm scared. Scared she doesn't love me as much as she claims to. I've lost Ethan, which is something I never thought would happen. So, the fact that I could so easily lose her too, is forefront in my mind.

I drag her arms above her head as I settle over the top of her. She's been distant from me since she came back from lunch, and that worries me. I have no idea what's going through that pretty little head of hers. It makes all my insecurities come flooding to the surface. I hope she's not having second thoughts about us. I'm not sure how I'll cope if she is.

My eyes lock with hers as I lace our fingers together. We both moan in unison when I slide the tip of my cock inside her. Her eyes flutter shut and a beautiful smile spreads across her face the moment I slide all the way in. Her lips part and the sweetest sound I've ever heard falls from her lips when I draw back before pushing all the way back in.

"Hanna, look at me," I whisper, when she doesn't open her eyes. "Please."

I pause and wait for her to do what I've asked. When she finally does, I'm taken aback when I find tears brimming in her baby blues. Confusion sweeps through me, and it does nothing to ease my concern.

"What's wrong?" I ask. I'm trying hard not to let my panic show, but I'm pretty sure I fail. Stilling inside her, I wait for her response. It never comes. "Talk to me."

Instead, she unlaces her fingers from mine, bringing them up to cup my face. "Make love to me, Harrison," she pleads, pulling my lips down to meet hers. I sense there's something more to this, but whatever it is it can wait. If my girl wants me to make love to her, that's exactly what I'm going to do.

Maybe I'm reading too much into this. She's here with me in my bed—that's gotta mean something.

I push all my thoughts and worries from my mind, so I can give her my all. We've been together like this way too many times to count, but for some reason this time feels different. This is, without doubt, my favourite place to be. Everything is different with her—every touch, every stroke, and every kiss. She takes me to places I never thought possible.



While Hanna showers, I get a start on dinner. I was going to take her out tonight, but I'm selfish. I don't want to share her with anyone. Hiding away in our own little bubble, far detached from the rest of the world, is all I want.

After tossing the slices of cooked chicken into the pot of creamy sauce, I turn the stove down to let it simmer. I throw the pasta into the boiling water, and start setting the table. Most of my culinary skills are self-taught, but I also learned a lot from Mrs Scott growing up. Sometimes she'd let me help her in the kitchen when she cooked for the family. I always loved that one on one time with her. This may sound corny, but in my mind, I used to pretend that she was my mother and that her home was my own.

I grab the candle I used when we had a blackout a few months ago, from the cupboard under the sink, and place it in the centre of the table. I'm not the candlelit dinner kinda guy, but I will be for Hanna. I'll be anything she wants me to be, as long as she's happy. That is what's important to me . . . her happiness. Because fuck me if she doesn't make me feel the exact same way. Even with the clusterfuck I now find myself in with Ethan, I can still find contentment when I'm wrapped in her arms.

I should've bought some wine yesterday when I was at the store. I don't keep any here because I'm not a wine drinker, but I know Hanna loves it. I've witnessed her and Michelle polish off numerous bottles when we get together for family dinners. That thought gives me a pang in my heart. I used to love our regular family dinners. There'll be no more of them. As far as Ethan's concerned, I'm no longer part of his family.

Looking down at my watch, I contemplate whether I have time to duck out and grab a bottle of red. From memory, I know that's what she drinks. There's a liquor store just down the street. If I hurry, I can be back before she's even out of the shower.

I quickly stir the sauce, and turn the pasta down before I grab my keys and head for the door. If nothing else, the wine may relax her a little and help her sleep tonight.

Five minutes later I exit the elevator, with a bottle of Petit Verdot under my arm. I asked the sales assistant for a nice red to go with our creamy pasta dish, and that's what she suggested. I have no fucking clue about this shit. Give me a beer or scotch any day.

The uneasiness I was feeling earlier has vanished. Well, for the time being anyway. I made a conscious decision on my walk back to the apartment to put all that behind me and just enjoy the night with my girl. Life is way too short to worry about things you can't change. I've always been a firm believer in what's meant to be, will be. If Ethan and I are meant to work this out, then we will. It doesn't stop me from hoping that will be the case. I'm not letting go of Hanna, so it's going to make life difficult otherwise.

I'm smiling to myself as I unlock the front door, that smile immediately drops from my face when I notice Hanna's suitcase sitting by the door. *What the ever-loving-fuck?*

My eyes seek her out the moment I step into the apartment. I freeze when I find her sitting on the

lounge. I can see her red puffy eyes from here, so I know she's been crying.

"Hanna," I breathe out as I place my keys and the bottle of wine on the entry table. Dread fills me as I stalk towards her. She doesn't say a word as she rises from the sofa, but the expression on her face says so much. "What's going on?" Whatever it is, I know it's not good. My eyes search her face as I desperately try to find the answers she won't voice.

"Harrison," she whispers as her gaze moves to the floor. It's killing me to see her hurting like this.

Stepping forward I reach for her, but she immediately retreats a few steps backwards. My shoulders slump as I stand there watching her. My head is all over the place as I try and make sense of what's going on. When I left here a few minutes ago, everything was fine . . . we were fine. Well, I thought we were.

"Talk to me."

"I'm sorry, Harrison."

"Sorry? Sorry for what?" What the fuck does that even mean?

"I . . . I umm . . . I can't do this anymore."

"What? Do what?" The desperation in my voice is evident as I speak. Is she telling me we are over?

"This," she says as her hand gestures back and forth between us. My heart sinks. I can't believe she's saying this to me. I see a stray tear leak from her eye when her gaze finally meets mine again. "I thought this is what I wanted, but it's not."

"You're breaking up with me?"

"Yes." Her answer comes out in a strangled sob, but I just stand there in silence. I'm dumbfounded. I'm not sure what to do or say. A few seconds' pass, but it feels like an eternity passes before I can finally speak.

"But you said you loved me."

Her hand reaches out to grab hold of mine. "I do love you, Harrison, but not in the way I thought I did."

"What does that even mean?" I ask, confused. None of this is making sense.

She lets go of my hand as her gaze moves back down to the floor. "I thought I was in love with you . . . but I realise now it was more lust," she whispers. Her words are like a knife being plunged into my chest.

"Hanna," I plead.

"Goodbye, Harrison," is all she says as she walks around me, heading towards the door.

I want to reach for her and beg her not to do this, but for some reason I don't. I guess in my heart I was expecting this to happen. It was only a matter of time before she left.

Slowly turning, a crushing pain settles in my chest as I watch her pick up her suitcase.

Pausing briefly, she glances at me over her shoulder. "I'll never forget the time we spent together, Harry." With that, she continues towards the door before hastily opening it.

A lump rises to my throat as she walks out the door, and out of my life. "Please don't go," I whisper in a voice that's so soft it's barely audible, and I know she doesn't hear my plea.

Everything in me wants to run after her, to tell her I love her, and beg her not to leave me. I hate

myself for never telling her how I truly feel. I want her to know how much she means to me . . . how much she'll always mean to me, but I guess it's too late for that now. I'll only end up sounding pathetic and needy, even though that's exactly how I'm feeling. Her mind is made up, and I just need to accept that.

I clasp my head in my hands. I can't seem to wrap my head around anything she just said. It's come out of nowhere. Apart from the trouble with Ethan, things between us have been great. Have I been reading this all wrong? I was certain she was feeling everything I was. I would've put money on it. She told me she loved me for fuck's sake.

Yet, here I stand again, all alone. Only this time it's worse, much worse. This time I've not only lost my best friend, I've lost the love of my life, and everything I hold dear. I was right all along—*I am unlovable*.

Why is it so hard for people to love me?



Chapter 18

Trying to mend what's broken . . .

Michelle

I dig through my handbag looking for my phone. A smile forms on my face the moment I see Hanna's number on the screen. I'm so happy she finally got her man. She's been lusting over Harrison, for as long as I can remember. Despite the way my husband is carrying on, these two are perfect for each other. Once Ethan gets past the hurt, he'll see that too. Harrison's a good guy, and in my heart I know he'll look after her.

"Hey pretty girl," I say, when I answer. I love Hanna so much. She's like the little sister I always wanted. Growing up, I was an only child and that can get lonely. So, when I married the man of my dreams, I got an extra bonus—her.

"M . . . M . . . Michelle," she cries into the receiver, and my heart drops into the pit of my stomach. Ethan is supposed to be at the gym. God help him if he's lied and gone over to Harrison's apartment to cause more drama. I'll friggin' kill him if he has. I've warned him to stay the hell away from them.

Part of me understands why my husband is so upset. Not only does he feel betrayed by his best friend, because Harrison doesn't exactly have the best reputation when it comes to women, but Ethan's worried his little sister is going to get her heart broken. What he fails to realise is that things are different this time around. Harrison told me he was in love with her. Those are three words I never thought I'd hear coming from his mouth. I'd like to think I know Harrison just as well as I know my own husband, and his confession speaks volumes.

"Sweetie, what's wrong?"

"Is my brother home?" she sniffles.

"No, he's at the gym. Well, he's supposed to be. Why?"

"I'm parked outside. Can I come in?"

"Of course, this is your home, sweetie. You don't need to ask permission."

"I don't want to see, Ethan," she says. That statement makes me so sad. These two have always been close. I've always been so envious of their relationship, so it pains me to see them like this. Although

Ethan is the one who has caused this whole drama, he's really hurting from losing his little sister, as well as his best friend. He's always been so carefree and happy-go-lucky, but lately he's been a shell of his former self. It's hard to watch.

"He won't be home for at least another hour."

I'm walking towards the front door as I end the call. My heart is beating out of my chest. Something is wrong and I need to find out what.

The look on her face as she exits the car and walks towards me breaks my heart. Without saying a word she collapses into my arms and starts to sob. Like really sob. In the fifteen years I've known her, I've never seen her this upset. *Never*. Not even the night Ethan punched Harrison. Could I have gotten this all wrong? As much as I love Harrison, he'll be feeling my wrath if he's hurt her.

"What's going on?" I ask as I hold her tightly in my arms. I pray that my husband doesn't decide to come home early. He'll lose his shit if he sees her this upset.

She doesn't answer me for the longest time. She just cries . . . *and cries*. Seeing her this upset brings tears to my own eyes. My mind is swimming with so many different scenarios that my head hurts. Finally, she pulls herself together enough to speak.

"I . . . I . . . I broke up with Harrison."

Drawing back, I make eye contact with her. The complete devastation I see on her face tears me up inside. "You what?"

"I broke up with Harrison," she repeats, wiping her tear stained face with the back of her hand.

"Why would you do that?"

She shrugs her shoulders as her gaze moves down to the ground. "Things weren't working out." I don't believe that for a second. I work with them, and have seen the way they look at each other. Neither of them have ever looked so happy as they have since getting together. There has to be more to this.

"Bullshit, Hanna. What is really going on?"

When she covers her face with her hands and starts to sob again, I know I'm right. Draping my arm around her shoulder, I lead her inside. I intend to get to the bottom of this.



"Are you sure you're okay to drive all the way back to your apartment tonight?" I ask her. "I'd feel a lot better if you'd stay here for the night. You can get an early start in the morning."

"I can't stay here." When I see tears rise to her eyes again, I pull her into my arms. "I don't want to be here when Ethan gets home."

After everything she just told me, I can understand why she'd feel like that. My husband is not going to know what hit him when he gets home from the gym. This whole sordid mess falls squarely on his shoulders.

It wasn't easy, but after a lot of prodding I finally got the truth out of Hanna. I'm not stupid. I know she wouldn't walk away from Harrison without good reason. She's doing this to try and mend the rift between the boys, which is crazy. Harrison is the love of her life, so to throw that all away to give him back his best friend is not only ludicrous, but completely selfless. It just proves how much she loves him.

No matter how hard I tried, there was no changing her mind. She was adamant she was doing what

was best. I don't agree. I won't rest until I make this right. She belongs with Harrison and my husband needs to accept that.

"Call me as soon as you get there. Okay?"

"I will," she says, giving me a sad smile. It hurts me to see her so broken. I can only imagine how Harrison would be feeling right now. This would've rocked him to the core.

"I love you." I give her one last squeeze before she climbs into the car. "Everything will work out in the end."

I'll make damn well sure of it. I flat out refuse to let this be the end of them.

"I love you too, Shell," she replies in the saddest voice I've ever heard her use.

I'm still standing in the driveway minutes after she's driven away. My mind is in overdrive. After I rip my husband a new one, I need to go and see Harrison.

If Hanna won't fight for them, I'm gonna make damn sure Harrison will.



The second Ethan walks through the door I pounce. I've been taking it easy on him the past few days because I'm worried about him. He's so down. He's upset that Hanna isn't talking to him, and he misses Harrison. He'd never admit it, but he does. Those two have always been tight. They're more like brothers than best friends.

"Hey, babe," he says, when he casually strolls through the front door and finds me waiting for him.

I place my hands on my hips. "Don't you babe me."

"Fuck," he mumbles under his breath. He's knows my, *I'm not happy with you*, look well. And let me tell you, my bitch face is prominent right now. He sighs before continuing. "What have I done now?"

We hardly ever fight. Our relationship has always been rock solid, but I'm not one to bottle stuff up. If I'm upset, or I think he's done wrong, you can be sure as shit I'm gonna voice my opinion.

"What have you done?" I snap, placing my hands on his chest and pushing him. "You've ruined the best thing that has ever happened to your sister, that's what."

"Huh." I see a smug smile play on his lips and it only serves to anger me further. "I told you. I knew it wouldn't take him long."

"You're fucking shitting me, right? Harrison didn't end it, Hanna did."

"What? But she told me she was in love with him. Why would she . . ." His eyes widen at the same time his words drift off. "She ended it because of me?"

"Bingo!" He frowns when I poke him in the chest. "She sacrificed her relationship with him to try and salvage your friendship."

He raises his hand and runs it through his thick, sandy blond hair. I curse myself for being distracted by the muscles that flex in his strong arm when he does that. There's no time for ogling. I'm too angry with him to ogle. We have a more pressing situation to deal with—like how to rectify this travesty my husband created.



I pace back and forth in Harrison's office as I wait for him to arrive at work. He usually gets here before me, but I did arrive extra early this morning. I couldn't sleep last night and I wanted to talk with

him before the rest of the staff arrives. I tried calling him a billion times last night, but all I got was his voicemail. He never replied to any of my texts either. That's when I decided to go to his apartment. Ethan refused to come with me, because he's still being a stubborn arse. I knocked and pleaded for Harrison to open the door for over half an hour, until I finally got discouraged and headed back home.

The moment I walked through the front door I was ready to go another round with Ethan, but when I found him on the back patio with his face buried in his hands, I thought better of it. I know he's suffering, but his lack of desire to fix this pisses me off to no end. He won't find solace until he makes peace with his best friend, and his sister. They both mean way too much to him.

Nine fifteen rolls around and I'm almost beside myself with worry. Harrison has never missed a day's work. *Never*. I call his phone for the umpteenth time, but he still refuses to pick up. That's when I decide to call my husband.

This bullshit ends today.



Chapter 19

My heart has lost its rhythm . . .

Harrison

There's a knock on my front door, but I choose to ignore it and slump further back into the sofa. I have no desire to see or speak to anyone. I'm not sure what time it is, and frankly I'm not interested in knowing either. I've had no sleep, but the sunshine streaming through the windows tells me it's daytime. Not that I care. I should be at work, but for the first time in my life I don't give a flying fuck about that. Now that Hanna's gone my world seems to have lost its purpose.

Raising the glass of scotch off my leg, I bring it to my mouth and down the amber liquid in one gulp. I'm not sure how many of these I've had today, but in my opinion it's not enough. I can still feel. I need to be numb. You think I'd be used to rejection by now, but obviously I'm not. The worst part is, this one stings more than any of the others. More than my parents, and way more than Ethan's. She was the one. The only girl to ever make me believe a happily ever after was possible. Love made me delusional. That shit ain't even real. Well, not in my fucked-up world it ain't. Real life's a bitch, not a goddamn fairy-tale. The kicker, I gave up the best friend I've ever had for what? A fleeting good time and a shattered heart. Maybe Hanna was my karma for the string of broken hearts I've left behind.

The persisting knocking continues and I want to tell whoever it is to fuck off. But I know it will soon stop if I ignore it long enough. Just like it did last night when Michelle came over.

Leaning forward, I reach for the half empty bottle of booze on the coffee table. Nothing like a bit of hard liquor for breakfast. I guess I'm more like my father than I ever wanted to be. I wonder if he drinks to try and mask some kind of pain, or just because he loves the high. It's something I've never thought of until now.

I go to refill my glass, but pause mid-air when my front door flies open. "I knew you were here," Ethan snaps as his steely gaze meets mine. "Were you gonna just let me knock all fucking day?"

"What the fuck do you want?" I sneer as I go back to filling my glass. "Did you come back to finish the job?"

He throws his hands up in the air like he's surprised by my outburst, as he stalks towards me. "You don't have to act like a cock."

“Last time I checked, I wasn’t the one acting like a cock.”

“Fair call,” he replies, plonking himself down on the sofa beside me and snatching the bottle of scotch out of my hand.

“Give that back.”

“It’s 10am, dude.”

“Tell someone who cares,” I say, reaching for my twenty-five-year-old bottle of scotch.

He holds his arm in the air so the bottle’s out of my reach. *Prick*. I could wrestle him for it, but in all honesty, I can’t be bothered. The alcohol isn’t helping anyway. I doubt anything could help extinguish the pain I’m feeling. Well, Hanna could if she’d come back to me, but I already know that’s not gonna happen.

Slumping back into the sofa, I exhale a large breath as I run my fingers through my hair. “How did you get in here anyway?”

A smug smile tugs at his lips as he shakes the keys dangling from his finger. “You gave me the keys to your place remember?”

Fuck. That’s right, I did. I gave him the keys when I first moved in here so he could check on my place when I was out of town.

“Yeah, well that was when we were friends, which we no longer are, so you can give them back.”

“What the fuck, man?” His brow furrows like he’s hurt by what I just said. Is he for real?

“You punched me in the face and told me to stay the fuck away from your sister, remember?”

“Well, I was an idiot.”

“No shit.” I exhale a large breath as my eyes lock with my ex-best friend. “I fucking loved her . . . I still do,” I whisper. I feel like a fool. I was stupid enough to believe what we had was special. I should’ve known better. That shit doesn’t even exist.

“You love her?” he asks as his eyes slightly widen. He knows me well enough to know I wouldn’t say it if it wasn’t true.

“Yes,” I admit, shaking my head. They’re three words I never thought I’d ever say to him. Who am I kidding, they are words I never thought I’d say, period. Yet, here I sit, kicking myself and wishing the one person I’d said those words to were Hanna.

Why didn’t I tell her? Even though things didn’t end well for us, I think I’ll always regret not telling her how I felt.

Ethan is quiet for a brief time before turning his head to make eye contact with me. “If you love her, why the fuck did you let her go?”

“Because that’s what she wanted.” I hang my head as that heavy feeling in my chest returns. “She doesn’t feel the same way about me.”

“Bullshit,” he says.

I frown as my gaze moves back to him. What would he know? She told me exactly that. “Remind me again why you’re here?” Don’t get me wrong, I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t pleased to see him, but I just don’t understand why. I thought our friendship was over.

“Because . . .” he sighs before continuing, “I fucked up. I . . . umm, I was hurt and felt betrayed. You

were like my brother man.”

“I didn’t plan this, Ethan . . . it just happened. That’s why I didn’t tell you. I knew you wouldn’t be happy, but I was already in too deep to put a stop to it.”

“You can’t blame me for being concerned about my little sister’s welfare. It’s not like you have a good track record with women.”

“I know. But things with Hanna are just . . . different.” I don’t feel comfortable talking to him about his sister like this. He’s gonna think I’m a pussy for saying this, but it needs to be said. “She’s the one, man. She’s my . . . Michelle.”

I bow my head and wait for him to laugh, but he doesn’t. I turn my head, slightly returning my gaze to him. I’m surprised to see he’s not smiling, or looking at me like I’m some kind of freak. When he nods his head instead of replying, I know he gets me. He fell hard and fast when he met Michelle. For years I didn’t get it, but now I do. When that special someone comes along you just know. Hanna Scott knocked me on my arse, and now I’m not sure how I’m gonna get by without her. I need her in my life.

“Well, what are you going to do about it?” he asks matter-of-factly. “The Harrison Williams I know is no pussy. He knows what he wants and he goes out and gets it.”

He’s right, I do, but his statement confuses me. He was dead against this. Is he trying to tell me he’s okay with it now? Fat lot of good that’s gonna do me now. I want her more than I’ve wanted anything in my life, but the fact is, she doesn’t want me.

“I thought you hated the idea of us being together.”

He exhales a large breath before standing and walking towards my bar. I watch as he grabs a glass from the shelved cabinet on the wall before making his way back to the sofa. He picks up the bottle of scotch and pours himself a drink as I patiently await his reply. He takes a large gulp before finally speaking. “Now that I know how you feel about her . . .” His words drift off as his eyes lock with mine. “Honestly, I couldn’t ask for a better man for my sister. I know you’ll look after her, you always have.”

His answer not only surprises me, but makes me deliriously fucking happy. The downside—she doesn’t want me anymore. I’ve never felt rejection like this from a female before. It hurts, it fucking hurts bad. Maybe this is my karma for the string of hearts I’ve broken over the years.

“Thanks man,” I say. “That means a lot.”

“Good. Now we’ve got that settled, get up and go shower, because you look like shit.”

“Fuck you,” I chuckle.

“I’m serious man. Stop sitting around sulking like a fucking baby and go get her back.”

“I wish it was that easy.”

“It is,” he says, reaching for my arm and yanking it. “She’s just as miserable as you are.”

“She said that?” Hope surges in my gut.

“Well, not to me. She’s not talking to me. She won’t answer any of my calls or texts. But she has spoken to Michelle.”

I rub my hands nervously down the front of my pants. Everything in me wants to go after her. I’ve been kicking myself ever since I let her walk away without a fight. That’s not me. That’s not who I am. I’ve had to fight for everything in my life, and truth be told, I’ve never wanted anything as much as I want

Hanna. I can't believe I just let her go like that.

Placing my hands on the sofa, I push myself up to stand. I see a smile tug at Ethan's lips as my steely determination kicks in. I have nothing to lose and everything to gain by going to her. If she turns me away again, it can't damage my heart any further. It's already shattered.

Who am I kidding? This time I won't give up so easily. I'm lost without her.

I refuse to let this be the end of us.



Chapter 20

*If you love someone let them go,
and all that bullshit . . .*

Hanna

I'm struggling. A week has passed since I walked away from the only man I've ever truly loved . . . *from my heart*. I'm not gonna lie, there are times I've struggled just to breathe without him. It's crazy how hard and fast I fell. I guess when the right man comes along, your heart just knows. But I'm prepared to sacrifice everything we had to give him what he needs most . . . *My brother in his life*. That's what true love is, right? Sacrificing everything you want to make the other half of your soul happy?

Whoever made that damn rule sucks arse.

"Earth to Hanna," Brandon says, lightly nudging me with his elbow.

"I'm sorry," I reply with a sigh. "What were you saying?"

"Are you okay? You've been spacing out on me ever since I got here."

"I'm fine," I lie, forcing out a smile. Brandon and I have been friends ever since I started uni, but we're not close enough that I'd tell him what's really going on. He's only here tonight because we were paired up to do an assignment together before we broke up for the holidays. To be honest, it's the last thing I want to do right now, but I've sacrificed enough. I'm not going to give up my aspirations for a future in business management, since that's all I really have left to look forward to now. Even that dream seems to have lost its sparkle.

"If you say so." I can tell by the tone of his voice he doesn't believe me. "Listen," he says, closing the laptop that's perched on his lap. "Why don't we give this a miss for tonight, and go grab a bite to eat and a few drinks." He leans his body towards mine and nudges me with his shoulder. "You look like you could use some."

As appealing as that sounds, I'm not really up to going out. Since classes haven't started back up yet, I've been cooped up in this room all week. I'm so emotional right now, alcohol will only make me cry. I know it. I've done enough of that in the past few days to last me a lifetime. I can't even tell you how many boxes of tissues, or tubs of strawberry ice-cream, I've gone through since I returned home.

“Thanks, but not tonight.”

“Talk to me,” Brandon says as he places a finger under my chin to turn my face towards his. I can see the concern etched in his exquisite blue eyes. He really is handsome, but he doesn’t hold a candle to Harry. No one does. He’s every girl’s fantasy. Well, he’s definitely mine . . . he always has been. “I know somethings up. I’ve never seen you so down before. You’re always so . . . happy. It’s actually quite sickening how cheerful you usually are, even first thing in the morning.” A half-hearted smile tugs at my lips when he says that. I’m afraid that part of me will be lost forever now that Harrison is gone from my life. “So, this upside-down smile that you’ve been wearing since I arrived,” he says as he tenderly brushes the pad of his thumb across my lip, “concerns me.”

I shrug my shoulders as my gaze moves down to the floor. “I just have some stuff going on back home.”

“Anything I can help with?”

“No, but I appreciate your concern.”

I find it sweet of him to ask me that. He opens his mouth to speak, but pauses when we’re interrupted by a loud knock on the door. “Are you expecting someone?”

“No,” I reply as I stand. I’m curious to know who it is.

I nervously smooth my palms down the front of my denim skirt as I walk towards the door. My stomach churns and I can’t even tell you why. I guess in my heart I’m hoping to find Harrison standing on the other side of the door, but the logical side of me knows I won’t.

To my disappointment, he didn’t even put up a fight when I left. Yes, I could clearly see the hurt and confusion on his face, but the hopeless romantic inside me wished he would’ve got down on his knees and begged me not to go. I’m pretty sure I would’ve caved if he did. I was already hanging by a thread as it was. Lying to him and telling him I wasn’t in love with him anymore was the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life.

My hands are slightly trembling as I reach for the doorhandle. I can’t stop the gasp that falls from my mouth when I see who’s standing on the other side. I can’t believe he’s really here.

He looks tired and just as broken as I feel. “Hey,” he says as an unsure smile tugs at his lips. As confident as he seems, he’s always had that vulnerable side, it’s endearing.

“Harrison,” I whisper as hope surges in my heart. Did he come all this way for me?

“Can I come in?”

I’m just about to say *sure*, when I remember Brandon. If my past is anything to go by, he won’t be happy to know I have another guy in my apartment. He scared off the majority of my potential suitors when I was growing up. As much as it pissed me off, I used to pretend in my mind that he was doing it because he was jealous, not because my brother had asked him to.

Before I get a chance to reply he virtually pushes past me, entering my apartment. I should be annoyed by that, but I’m not. I’m just happy that he’s here. I love his dominant side, I always have.

The moment he spots Brandon sitting on my sofa, he freezes. His head snaps to the side and his steely glare meets mine. He doesn’t say a word, but his expression says everything. He probably thinks I’ve replaced him already. I’d never do that. I couldn’t. If I can’t have him, I don’t want anybody.

Brandon rises from the sofa, approaching us. “Brandon,” he says, extending his arm to Harrison. I’m

taken aback when Harrison shoves his hands in his pockets and looks him up and down with disdain.

“Brandon’s in my class,” I say, trying to quickly smooth over the situation before it escalates. “We’re doing an assignment together.”

Brandon swallows nervously as Harrison silently glares at him. “Yes . . . we, umm, are just doing an assignment together. That’s all.”

I almost want to laugh at Brandon’s obvious intimidation, but I feel bad for him. I know how Harrison can get. I also know he has every right to be anxious. One false move and God only knows where this will end up. When we were kids, Harrison was known for talking with his fists first. He wasn’t one to seek out trouble, quite the opposite, but if trouble found him he’d always take care of it.

“You can leave now pretty boy; study time is over.” Harrison’s gaze moves to me before he continues. “I need to talk to Hanna . . . in private.”

His eyes soften when he says the last part, but I’m still annoyed at him. Yes, I like his dominance, but in this moment he’s being rude.

Brandon doesn’t argue as he quickly turns to collect his things. I see a smile play on Harrison’s lips as my eyes narrow at him.

“I’ll see you out,” I inform Brandon, as I turn to follow him towards the door. I don’t miss the growl that falls from Harrison’s mouth when I say that.

“Who is that guy?” Brandon mumbles when we step out into the hall.

“My brother’s best friend.” He’s so much more than that . . . well, he was.

“Well, he’s a jerk.

“I’m sorry he was so rude to you. He isn’t always like that.” I feel the need to apologise for Harrison’s outburst.

“Is it safe to leave you alone with him?”

“Yes,” I chuckle. “His bark is worse than his bite.”

“Okay.”

When I walk back into my apartment and close the front door, I find Harrison still standing where I left him. I still have no idea why he’s here, but I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t glad he was. I’m almost giddy. It’s the happiest I’ve felt since I walked away from him. I’ve missed him like you wouldn’t believe. Just having him so close brings all my feelings back to the surface.

“Hey,” he says. The steely glare from moments ago, is now gone. It’s replaced with a boyish, unsure expression. I love that look so much. My heart melts a little more every time I see it. He’s always been so confident on the outside, almost to the point where you could say he’s cocky, but underneath all that is a lonely man just wanting to be loved and accepted. I hate myself for the way I’ve treated him, even though I did it for all the right reasons. He’s faced rejection his whole life, and it kills me to know I’ve done that to him as well.

“Hey.” We just stand there and stare at each other for the longest time. Neither of us knowing what to say.

Minutes pass before he takes a step closer to me.

“Why are you here, Harrison?”

“I needed to see you,” he answers without hesitation. “I . . . umm . . . wanted to ask you something?”

“What?”

“When you said you didn’t love me, did you mean it?” I bow my head, because I don’t know what to say. Of course, I love him. I love him more than I’ve ever loved anyone in my life, but admitting that to him isn’t going to help. It won’t mend his relationship with my brother. “Look at me, Han,” he pleads, placing his finger under my chin and raising my face to meet his.

Tears sting my eyes as he desperately searches my face for answers. “I . . .” I have so much to say, but the words won’t come.

“Please, Han. After everything we shared I think I deserve an answer. Things were going so well for us . . . weren’t they? Or was I reading it all wrong? You leaving seemed to come out of nowhere. I’m not imagining that, right? You told me you loved me. Nobody has ever said those words to me before.”

That statement just breaks my heart further and my resolve vanishes. I don’t want him to think I don’t, when I do.

“I do love you, Harry. When I said I didn’t, it was a lie.”

“Then what happened. Why did you leave?” He cups my face with his hand, and I involuntarily lean into it. A tear escapes when I clench my eyes shut, and he immediately wipes it away with the pad of his thumb. As innocent as his touch is, it awakens my whole body.

When I open my eyes and finally look at him, I can see tears glistening in his eyes as well. “I don’t want you to lose your friendship with Ethan over me.”

“I don’t want that either, but losing you hurt so much more. It almost broke me. I need you in my life . . . fuck, do I need you.” Without saying another word, he slides his free hand around my waist, pulling my body to his. “I need you,” he murmurs as his lips softly meet mine.

“Harrison,” I whisper against his mouth as I part my lips and deepen the kiss. I need him too. If this week has taught me anything, it’s that I’m miserable without him. Despite everything, leaving him was the biggest mistake of my life.

He slides his hands down to my arse, lifting me off the ground. “Wrap your legs around me, sweetheart,” he commands. I do exactly as he asks. “Which way is your bedroom?”

“At the end of the hall,” I say, without breaking this kiss.

He places me on the ground beside the bed, taking a step backwards. Without waiting to be asked, I reach for the hem of my top, pulling it over my head. “Hanna,” he breathes as his fingers lightly dance over the swell of my breasts, just above the white lace of my bra. It sends tingles coursing down my spine. “I never thought I’d get to touch you again.”

“I’ve missed your touch.” I’ve missed everything about him. My hands move to my waist as I undo the button and zip on my skirt, before pushing it down around my ankles.

“I’ve missed everything about you,” he admits. I smile at his words because that’s exactly what I just thought.

His eyes drink me in as he hastily goes about undoing the buttons on his shirt. I quickly remove my bra and drop it to the floor at the same time as his shirt. He’s now standing before me in just a pair of jeans I’m itching to touch him again. His body is so ripped, so perfect.

I reach for the waistband of his jeans, and make quick work of the button. I can already see his erection straining against the denim. “Who was that guy?” he asks as he slips out of his shoes.

“Just a guy from uni. I told you that.”

“Did he touch you? Has he ever touched you?”

“No.”

“You’re mine, Hanna. Nobody gets to touch what’s mine.”

“I’m yours. You’re the only person I want to touch me,” I say as I reach for his hand, placing it on my breast.

Without hesitation, he removes his jeans before lying me down on my bed and settling over the top of me. “I’m the only person allowed to touch you,” he repeats as his hand slips between my legs. “I own this pussy.”

“And I own this,” I say as I wrap my hand around his cock. “Nobody is allowed to touch what’s mine either.” A smile plays at his lips as his eyes lock with mine.

“You own every part of me, sweetheart. Even my heart.” My heart swells with love as he tenderly runs his hand down the side of my face. I wrap my legs around his waist as he slides the tip of his penis inside me. My eyes flutter closed as a whimper falls from my lips. “Open your eyes, Hanna. I want you to see who’s making you feel like this. Nobody can make you feel the way I do.”

“Nobody,” I repeat.

“I love you with all my heart, Hanna Scott,” he whispers as his lips connect with mine. His words make my heart sing. It’s the first time he’s said those words to me, and I can’t tell you how happy I am to hear them. He’s mine for keeps now. I refuse to give him up again. No matter what the future throws at us, we’ll tackle it together.

“I love you too, Harrison. I love you so much.”



Epilogue

All's well that ends well . . .

Harrison

I'm smiling as I step out of the elevator and head towards my office. *Life is good.* Hanna's enriched me in so many ways. She even moved in with me a few months ago after she graduated from uni. I can't tell you how happy that made me. We've been living in bliss ever since. I never knew just how much the love of a good woman could change you. She completes me.

We agreed that she should get her degree, even though she wouldn't need it working with me. But it was important to her, so that made it important to me. She was in her last year, so it made sense for her to see it through to the end. Like me, she's not a quitter.

Being away from her during that time wasn't easy though. If she couldn't come home on weekends, I'd travel to her. There were some days during the week I missed her so much, that I would commute the two-hour drive after work, and back again in the morning. It was worth it just to be able to sleep with her in my arms.

I'm smiling to myself as I open the door to what once was my reception area. I ended up knocking down the wall between reception and my office when Hanna came to work here full time. Her desk is now next to mine. Right where it should be. I no longer need a secretary now that I have her. We're partners now and share all the work load. You think being together twenty-four-seven would get old fast, but it doesn't. I want her by my side always.

"Hanna," I call out when I find the office empty.

"I'm in here," she replies.

The door to our private bathroom is open. I don't think anything of it as I waltz straight in. "Fuck," I say, when I see her sitting on the toilet with her pants around her ankles. We're extremely open and comfortable with each other, but this is where I draw the line. "I'm sorry." As I turn to leave, I catch the tears that are pooling in her eyes. I have no idea why she'd be crying; she was happy when I left.

That's when I notice the white stick in her hand. "What's that?" I ask.

"It's a pregnancy test . . . it's positive."

"Why? What do you mean—positive?"

“I’m pregnant, Harrison,” she says as she buries her face in her hands and starts to sob. As much as the news comes as a complete shock to me, my initial thought is to comfort her. I can’t stand to see her upset.

Quickly closing the distance between us, I pull her off the toilet, and into my arms. Sure, we’ve talked about having kids in the future, but way, way, way in the future. We’re not even married yet. Fuck me.

“Don’t cry,” I say, rubbing my hand down her back trying my best to console her, but it’s not working. “Please don’t cry.” Is it wrong that I inhale her addictive scent as I savour the feeling of having her in my arms? I can’t help it. I’m hooked on her smell.

“You’re sniffing me again.”

“Never,” I laugh as she draws back to look at me. It’s become a bit of a game between us now. She knows damn well I’m sniffing her, but I’m a stubborn man. I’ll never admit it. Never. Not even on my death bed. I’m taking that secret with me to the grave.

“You not angry with me?” she asks as her tear stained face meets mine.

“About the baby?”

“Yes,” she snuffles.

“No!” I answer truthfully. “It takes two to make a baby. I’m shocked maybe, but definitely not angry.” Once upon a time, those words would’ve freaked me the fuck out, but not now. This may not be planned, but I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t happy to know she has my baby growing inside her. I’m pretty certain I’ll even be joyous once the initial shock wears off. Being a father was never on my radar until she came into my life. Now, all my preconceived notions about marriage and families seem to be things of the past. I want it all with her. Every fucking bit of it.

“God, I love you,” she whispers as she buries her face in my chest. I’m not sure how her brother and father are going to take this news, but she loves me and that’s all that matters. We’ll sort the rest out when the time arises. We always do.

“I love you, too.”

“I thought you’d be angry.”

“With you? Never.” Her face breaks out into a beautiful smile as she gazes up at me. “You know how I said I had a lunch date?”

“Yes,” she replies as her facial expressions turn inquisitive. “You lied? You didn’t have a lunch date?”

“No, I didn’t lie. I’d never lie to you,” I chuckle. Well, maybe about the sniffing, but that’s where I draw the line. My mum continually lies to my father. I flat out refuse to do anything like that. “My lunch date was with your father and Ethan.”

“Really? You should’ve said something. I would’ve come with you.”

“Well, that’s the thing. I wanted to speak to them in private.”

“Why?” I smile when her brow furrows, she’s so adorable.

“Because,” I say, running the back of my hand tenderly down the side of her face. “I wanted to ask them for their permission to marry you.” We’ve only been a couple for just over a year now, but when you

know, you just know. She's part of me and I can't imagine my life without her in it.

"You did?" My smile grows when her eyes widen.

"Yes."

"What did they say?"

"They gave me their blessing."

Tears rise in her eyes as her pretty face lights up. "You know you didn't need to do that."

"I know, but I wanted to. After everything that happened in the beginning, I wanted to do things right this time." In my heart, I already knew they'd say yes, but I just wanted to be sure. Hanna's parents are thrilled that we're a couple, and Ethan has more than accepted it, he's embraced it. He can see that we're perfect for each other, and he knows that I'm in this for the long haul. Our friendship has gone back to the way it used to be, which I'm thankful for. "I even stopped by the jewellers on the way back to the office."

I chuckle when she gasps. "You did?"

"I was gonna wait and organise something special, but I guess now that I know I've knocked you up, in the bathroom with your panties around your ankles is as good a place as any."

I laugh when she lets go of me and slaps my chest. Quickly bending over, she shimmies her panties up her sexy as fuck legs. Once they're in place, she pulls down her skirt that's bunched around her hips. I kinda liked it better the way it was.

I couldn't love this woman any more if I tried. Technically she's not family yet, but she's home to me. I feel like I finally belong somewhere when I'm with her.

We stand there in silence for the longest time, with our eyes locked on each other. Although she's been crying, she looks happy. I'll never tire of the way she looks at me. I hope she knows just how happy she makes me.

Sliding my hand into my pocket, I fish out the ring. This isn't how I wanted this to happen, but in my heart I know it's the right time. At least she can never doubt that I'm marrying her just because of the baby. I'm marrying her because I love her, and nothing could make me happier than spending the rest of my life with her by my side.

Her mouth gapes open when I get down on one knee and place my hand on my heart. "Hanna Elizabeth Scott . . . I think I've been in love with you since the moment you walked out of your back door when you were fifteen, in that tiny pink bikini. After my eyes landed on your spectacular rack, I've been walking around with a permanent boner for you ever since."

"Oh my God, Harrison, stop it," she screeches as she playfully clips me in the side of the head.

"But it's all true, your tits are spectacular, babe," I add in all seriousness, because they are. If I ever suffocated in her cleavage, I know I'd die a happy man.

When her eyes narrow and she raises her hand in the air again, I laugh as I hold my arms up to shield my head from another attack.

This time when I speak, I make sure it's from the heart. "Sweetheart . . . I love you. I love everything about you, but most of all I love how you make me feel. You're it for me. I couldn't imagine my life without you in it. This may sound crazy, but you make me feel whole. It's something I never felt until you came into my life. I want to grow old with you and have a shitload of babies together." She growls at the

last part, but it's immediately followed by a smile. I reach for her, placing my lips on her stomach. I love that my baby is in there. "I've never really known the true meaning of family, but I want you to teach me. I want you and our kids to have everything I didn't." I see tears rise in her eyes when my voice cracks. "Will you show me . . . will you be my family, Han?"

"Oh, Harrison," she says as she throws herself into my arms. "Nothing would make me happier."

A Note from the Author

The Boss, started out as a short story I wrote for an anthology I was asked to contribute to, along with twenty other Authors. Ten thousand words was our limit. One hundred percent of the money raised went to a charity that trains companion pets for children with autism and veterans that suffer from PTSD. It was such a worthy cause so I jumped at the chance to participate. This was the first short story I'd ever written, but when I was done I felt like there was still so much of Harrison and Hanna's story to tell. My readers also wanted to know what happened when Harrison and Hanna returned from their weekend away in Queensland, and of course how Ethan reacted. Hence why I finished their story and produced this novella. Although it's very short compared to my other published books, I hope you enjoyed it nonetheless. It's a quick fun read.

About the Author

J. L. Perry is a mother, a wife, and she resides in Sydney, Australia. She has been writing for just over two years, and has nine published titles to her name. Her first five books were self-published, and in December 2015, she signed a five-book deal with publishing giant, Hachette. Her last three releases, *Bastard*, *Hooker* and *Jax*, skyrocketed to #1 on iBook's after release. *Bastard* has now been translated into two other languages, French and Hungarian. She's a romantic at heart and her love of reading, and happily ever after's, is what inspired her to start writing. J. L. loves to connect with her readers.

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Bastard

My name is Carter Reynolds. I was born a bastard and I'll die a bastard. I learnt it at a young age, and nothing and nobody can change that. I'm on a one-way path of destruction, and God help anyone who gets in my way. I hate my life. Actually, I hate pretty much everything.

That's until I meet the kid next door. Indi-freakin'-ana. My dislike for her is instant. From the moment I lay eyes on her, she ignites something within me. She makes me feel things I thought I was incapable of feeling. I don't like it, not one bit. When she looks at me with her big, beautiful, haunting green eyes, it's like she can see into the depths of my soul. It freaks me the hell out. She's like sunshine and rainbows in my world of gloom and doom. I hate sunshine and rainbows.

...

I'm Indiana Montgomery. My friends call me Indi. Despite losing my mum at the age of six, I have a wonderful life and great friends. My dad more than makes up for the fact that I only have one parent. I'm his little girl, the centre of his world. I adore him.

When Carter Reynolds moves in next door, my life takes a turn for the worse. He's gorgeous, sinfully hot, but that's where my compliments end. He seems hell-bent on making my life miserable. He acts tough, but when I look into his eyes I don't see it. I see hurt and pain. To me, he seems lost.

I should hate him for the way he treats me, but surprisingly I don't. If anything, I feel sorry for him. I want to help him find peace. Help him find the light that I know is buried somewhere within his darkness, but he won't have a bar of it.

He's warned me time and time again to stay away, but I can't. I'm drawn to him for some reason. He's always referring to himself as a bastard. That may be true, but to me, he's more like a beautifully, misunderstood bastard. Whether he likes it or not, I refuse to give up on him.

Jax

My name is Jaxson Albright. To my friends I'm known as Jax. I'm the disgraced son of well-known Politician, Malcom Albright. You could say I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I was supposed to follow in my father's footsteps and move into politics. My whole childhood was spent being groomed for this role, but that wasn't what I wanted. I had other plans.

To my family's disgust, I'm inked, I'm pierced and I own and run a tattoo parlour, in the hip suburb of Newtown. I fit in here. I can be the man I was destined to be, the man my family are ashamed of. The son they regret having.

I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for my saviour, Candice. My pink-haired angel. We grew up in the same circle, but like me, she's an outcast. She refused to conform to society's ways. She's the only one who stuck by me and not only encouraged, but supported my dream.

I love her. No, correction—I'm in love with her. I have been for as long as I can remember. She has no idea how I feel. It's a battle I struggle with daily. I've kept my secret all these years because I couldn't risk losing her. That's a chance I'm not prepared to take, because she's my best friend; my only real family.

I've spent the last few years moving from one hot chick to the next, trying to mask these feelings I have. But it doesn't help—I can't get her out of my head. She still owns my damn heart.

How do you get over the girl you know you can never have? And how do you live without the one person on this earth who is made for you?

She's my soulmate.

Hooker

Jade's young life was tough. After her mother died during childbirth and her father could no longer look after her, she was placed in foster care where she stayed for the next ten years. She grew up feeling unloved and unwanted as she was passed around from one screwed up home to the next.

Things began to look up for her when she was adopted by a wealthy socialite at the age of eleven. Sometimes though, things aren't always what they seem. Jade didn't know it at the time, but her new adoptive mother had big plans for her, and spent the next seven years grooming Jade for that role.

Jade learnt early in life that she couldn't rely on anyone but herself. Instead of letting her circumstances beat her, she took all the negatives she'd been dealt, and used them to her advantage. She grew up to be a strong, successful, determined and independent woman. She was a loner by choice.

The only thing lacking in her life was companionship and love. She'd never experienced it, so she didn't know what she was missing, until she had a one-night-stand with a handsome stranger. One night, that would change everything.

•••

Brock grew up privileged. He had everything going for him. Money, looks, charm, success and an endless array of beautiful women. He wasn't interested in commitment. To him women were easy. They practically threw themselves at his feet. All they wanted was to do something nobody had ever managed before. Snare the hot, rich bachelor.

Then he met Jade. She was like a breath of fresh air. A challenge. Nothing like the women he was used to. Their one night together ignited something within him. A burning desire to own her, possess her, but Jade had other plans. Nobody says no to Brock Weston, nobody.

He's left wondering about a woman he knows he can never have. But, when fate brings them together again, will he get what he wants? Will he be able to claim the unattainable? Or will her secrets crush him, and destroy any chance they have of being together?

New Releases Coming in 2017 . . .

Nineteen Letters

Nineteen. There is something about that number that not only brought us together, but bonded us forever. For a time though, it even tore us apart.

The 19th of January, 1996. I'll never forget it. It was the day we met. I was seven and she was six. It was the day she moved in next door, and the same day I developed my first crush on a girl.

Exactly nineteen years later, all my dreams came true when she became my wife. The love of my life—my soulmate. She was my everything. The reason I looked forward to waking up every morning.

Then tragedy struck. Nineteen days after our wedding day, she was in an accident that would change our lives forever. When she woke from her coma, she had no memory of me, of us, of the love we shared.

I was crushed. She was my air, and without her I couldn't breathe.

The sparkle that once glistened her eyes when she looked at me, was gone. To her, I was now a stranger. I'd not only lost my wife, I'd lost my best friend. I refused to let this tragedy be the end of us. That's when I started writing her letters. Stories of our life. Of when we met. About the happier times, and everything we had experienced together throughout our lives.

What we had was far too beautiful to be forgotten.

The Deal

My name is Alexander Gaffarelli. I was born into one of the most influential crime families in the country. With an infinite stream of money at my disposal, I have women falling at my feet. I don't do commitment, why would I?

That is until her.

One night of the hottest sex, and I'm hooked. When she walked out of my club without so much as a backward glance, it only made me crave her more. Now she consumes my every thought. Rest assured I will find her, and when I do, I'll make her mine.

...

My name is Chloe Carmichael. I was born into money. When my mum left and my dad turned to gambling, we lost it all. Now I work three jobs, just to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table. I don't have time for relationships, or even a life. When things finally hit rock bottom, dad promises me he'll clean up his act.

I thought he had.

Until I returned home from work to find him on his knees in the living room with a gun pointed at his head. The moment my gaze landed on the gorgeous man standing before him, my heart skipped a beat. It was him. After the one night we spent together, I haven't been able to get him out of my head.

As if things weren't bad enough, to my horror my father agreed to exchange me for his own life.

I was literally screwed, in more ways than one.

I'd been traded.

I was . . . the deal.

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