

*Decadent Publishing*

a.c.MASON

BOOK ONE:  
SOUL FOOD DINER

*Surrendering*  
TO THE RIGHT  
*Man*

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Surrendering to the Right Man  
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# *Surrendering to the Right Man*

*by a.c. Mason*

*Book One of the Soul Food Diner*

## ~DEDICATION~

*"Liza O'Connor, your support and encouragement has meant a great deal to me. Thank you."*

## Chapter One

“Indy.” Liam Boyd sprung from his pillow covered in sweat and opened his eyes. The raw note lingered in the stale air of his dorm room. The images of Indy lying on the pavement with blood pooling beneath her head did not fade. As he drew nearer, her scraped and battered body twitched. The rattle of her breathing echoed in his mind louder than the night of the accident.

“God.” He shoved the covers to the side. Nearly a year later and the event of last New Year’s Eve remained incomprehensibly vivid. A sense of helplessness plagued him. What happened to Indy the night of the accident? More importantly, why didn’t she want to talk about it? Maybe she blamed him for the accident. His actions toward her had been questionable.

10:21 a.m. The numbers glowed red from the clock radio, flooding the edge of his nightstand. He picked up the phone and speed dialed Indy. He needed to hear her voice.

“Hello...” Indy’s pitch was sultry.

“Are you all packed and ready to party?” Over the Christmas holidays, he would prove to her what she meant to him. He had nearly lost her last year. He wouldn’t risk time slipping away again.

“About that.” Static and movement rustled in his ear from her side.

Please, don’t let her have changed her mind. If she decided to join her parents in the Caribbean, it would put a serious monkey wrench in his plan.

“What about that?” He switched the phone to his other ear, bracing for the disappointment.

“I’ve got a favor to ask. I want you to hear me out before you say anything. Okay, Liam?”

This couldn’t be good; she used his name in that scolding voice, and she wasn’t one to lead into a request to soften the blow.

“I’m all ears,” he said.

“I trust you. It’s the only reason I’m asking you. But I don’t want you to say yes because you feel sorry for me. Promise?” Indy asked.

What the hell could she ask of him that would require this amount of prep? A kidney? Some bone marrow...

Swallowing the pit of pain in his throat, he let out a harsh exhale. “I promise.”

“I want you to deflower me.”

What the fuck had she said? He pulled the phone away from his ear, shook his head, then brought it back. An organ and some tissue were one thing, but she’d just crossed the line people didn’t even skirt around.

“If you think you could do that with me—have sex, that is. If you don’t...I’ll understand. It’s just ever since the accident with the scars on my body from what happened and the surgeries, I’m uncomfortable.”

This couldn’t be good. Indy was rambling, something she didn’t normally do.

“I trust you, Liam. You’re my best friend, so...I know it wouldn’t be an attraction thing, but if you’d consider my request, I’d be grateful. I don’t expect an answer right now. I’d prefer you thought about it and let me know when we see each other.” She took a deep breath.

A lump caught in his throat. He wasn’t sure he could speak. The corners of his eyes burned. Not once in the seventeen years he’d known her had she sounded vulnerable. Not a tear when her biological mother’s family called her callous, racial names. The accident had changed her. Still feisty, but with a new, exposed, tender side to her.

There went his entire seduction plan out the window. “I’ll think about it.” How could he show her that he loved her while charged with ridding her of her virginity? Huge sidestepping would be involved. If such a thing was even possible.

“You’re the best, best friend a girl could have, Liam. I could kiss you.”

Kissing would be involved. He’d prefer the reason be that she wanted to, because she felt something for him the way he did for her.

“What are best friends for?” An aching sensation riddled his chest. Somehow he’d gotten it in his head that they’d transition into a relationship after they’d

finished university. The accident was a wake-up call for him. Time wasn't unlimited.

"I've got to jet. My ride to the airport should be here in a few, and I'm not dressed yet." She exhaled. "I'll see you in Malibu, babes."

"Yeah. When you get in, I'll come over." Maybe not the best choice of words on his part given what she had just asked of him.

"Perfect. Have a safe flight."

Not even close to perfect. Seriously screwed up. "You, too," he said with a frown.

Indy hung up, and the line went dead.

\* \* \*

Indy sat in the back of a car headed for the airport. Her cell buzzed in her pocket. The name T. Boyd lit the call display. She flipped open the phone. Part of her couldn't wait to speak to Tim, and the other knew she shouldn't be feeling like that.

"Indy?" The deep tone of his voice shot straight to her clit.

Heat pulsed through her. "The one and only." The snow-covered landscape rolled by in flashes from the backseat window. "What's up, Tim?"

"I'm just wondering what time your flight gets in." Hunger laced the pitch of his voice.

There was a leading question.

Not soon enough. "I can't remember the exact time from the ticket. It's about four-thirty or so." How she missed him. Since she'd decided to execute her sexcapade with Liam, she'd pulled back from Tim, which didn't stop the frequent sex dreams of him nor the urge to call him.

"Great. Liam and I will wait for you. He lands at about four."

A car ride back to the coast with Liam and Tim wasn't her idea of pleasant. Liam wouldn't like finding out that Tim arranged to stay and pick her up after they spoke.

"It will look suspicious if you don't," Tim said.

Either way, Liam wouldn't be happy; hence, why she hadn't said no. "Okay." She'd deal with the testosterone, and Liam trying to outdo Tim.

“Are you all right?” Tim asked.

There was another one of his loaded questions. She covered her mouth so the others in the car didn’t overhear. Not that they cared. “I’m stressed about telling Liam what happened that night.” And the fact that she was only going to do so after she slept with him seemed even riskier. If she didn’t wait until after she slept with him to tell him, she’d never get him out of her system. Eight years of pining after someone was a long time. At least she’d have the memories of him being her first.

“Are you alone?” he asked.

Her nipples hardened. “No.” Tim provoked her body with such ease, which only left her more confused, since she had always been into Liam.

“Understood. My offer to tell him still stands. There is no point in him being pissed at us both when what happened is my fault.”

Tim was all the family Liam had left. After Liam let his father’s affair out of the bag, his mother vanished, and his father took up with his knocked-up secretary. Tim took over the responsibilities of the family residence. She couldn’t create a riff between them when she was to blame.

“You know that isn’t true. If I could put the blame on you, I would.” She meant it.

“Liar.” He huffed.

Her inner muscles tightened.

“We can grab a bite at The Diner on our way back to the coast,” Tim said.

The Diner was a little, out-of-the-way restaurant with Southern comfort food. Tim never minded stopping there after her rehabilitation sessions. At first, things between them had been awkward, but soon, she enjoyed his company. She hated hurting him. “Not tonight. Liam and I have plans. You know how he gets about you and me hanging out. I’m sorry.”

“Yes, of course. It’s just that you...” He trailed off. “Never mind. I shouldn’t have asked.”

Pain ached her heart. He’d been a solid friend throughout the ordeal. Whatever interest Tim had in her had been replaced by a nurturing friend. “You should come to the barbecue tomorrow at my place.”



“I look forward to it.”

The situation wouldn't be so damn complicated if it wasn't for Liam's sense of morality. “I'll see you when I get in.”

“We'll be waiting for you.”

“And, Tim, thank you.” She wouldn't have gotten through rehabilitation without his help. Unlike everyone else, he hadn't tried to talk her out of walking without a cane. The doctors, and even her parents, had been ready to throw in the towel.

“See you soon,” he said.

She pressed the end-call button and crossed her arms. Large snowflakes fell from the sky. This was probably the last snowfall she'd see for some time, and she wasn't sad about it. She was happy to be going home.

\* \* \*

Tim compulsively checked his text messages, hoping that Indy responded to his last note. Nothing. As he paced the floor, the knot in his stomach tightened. The airport schedule board on the wall indicated Liam's plane had landed a few moments earlier without delay.

Terminal seven buzzed with people awaiting their loved ones' arrival. The festive music and decorations added color to the sea of gray.

He hated his conflicting emotions. When Liam revealed he, too, had feelings for Indy, it felt like a knife to the heart. Especially after watching his brother push her away for years. Tim had assumed Liam wasn't into her. Last year when Liam stayed with his girlfriend Brenda's family rather than come home for Christmas, Tim and Indy had carried on the long-standing traditions. He and Indy had gone shopping and to the Christmas Eve barbeque at Indy's. They seemed to fit together. Their lives were closely interwoven. Even the mad dash to the extended family parties went off without a hitch. Tim wouldn't have denied being attracted to her before, but during their time together, he realized it was more. Much more. The only problem was Indy appeared to be interested in Liam. There had been chemistry between them. There still was.

As he endured months of watching her undergo rehabilitation because of his foolish action the night of the accident, his feelings for her only deepened. Her

strength and character left him breathless. Every moment with her held its own personal agony. Aside from the incident in the bathroom between them *that night*, he hadn't touched her. He couldn't.

Indy intended to tell Liam what caused her to flee on her motorcycle last New Year's Eve. Tim suspected she intended to sleep with Liam first, which worried him most of all. Not only because of his own selfish feelings, but he feared Liam's behavior towards her once she revealed their secret.

Every part of him wanted to stop her from making this mistake with Liam. How could he interfere when things ended as they had the night of the accident? Nothing he did would erase the consequences for Indy.

His cell vibrated. It was a text message from Indy. He clicked on it.

*Allow me to deal with Liam.*

## Chapter Two

Liam routed his way through Los Angeles International Airport sure of only one thing—he would be Indy’s first lover. Whether or not he could prove to her they belonged together was another matter. After they slept together, would she realize how much she loved him and always had? Doubtful.

Tim waved him over. As usual, his brother was in a suit, way overdressed for a simple trip to the airport. People always told Liam how much Tim and he resembled each other. He hated being compared to his perfect older brother. They had the same body type—six-foot-two, muscular, and broad—but similarities ended there. His eyes were green, and Tim’s were blue. Tim’s hair was dark brown, and Liam’s a few shades lighter. Liam tanned easily, whereas Tim burned easily. Did they even have the same father? Nothing would surprise him with their parents’ loose morals. It was the reason why Liam had high expectations of the woman he would settle down with. He wanted nothing to do with the high drama of his childhood nor questioning of paternity.

Tim leaned in, hugged Liam with one arm, catching him off guard. “Let’s go and get your bags.”

A sea of people greeting loved ones returning for the holidays surrounded them. Lately, Tim’s calm, serious mood had developed an undercurrent he couldn’t figure out. Everything in his life was changing in ways he wasn’t sure he liked.

“Thanks, but I have everything, bro.” He carted his carry-on behind.

“Great. We can wait here for Indy.” Tim glanced at the flight board next to rows of benches.

What had his brother just said? “I missed that.”

“Indy’s flight landed a few moments ago. I told her we’d wait. I hope that’s okay with you?” Tim asked.

Why hadn’t she made mention of her conversation with Tim when he’d spoken to her? “Sure. When were you talking to her?”

“While she was on her way to the airport.” Tim took a seat on the bench.

Liam pushed the pull-tab of his bag inside, sat, and turned to his brother. “You know how I feel about Indy?”

Tim met his stare and nodded.

“I need you to ease off. I appreciate everything you have done, like taking her to rehabilitation and visiting with her, but I’m uncomfortable with you hanging around her.” Anymore direct, and he would have told his brother not to speak to her.

“Whoa, bro. I’m concerned about her as a friend.” Tim placed his hand on his own knee. “She’s still struggling with a lot from the accident and under pressure from school and her parents. She is quite capable of deciding who she does and doesn’t want around.”

Friend? He couldn’t have his brother be pals with his Indy. “Of course, she is.” Indy hadn’t said anything to him about pressure or coping with stuff from the accident.

“Did you tell her how you feel?” Tim asked.

“No.” The plan had been to show her over the holidays. Now, another type of demonstration would take place. A much more physical set of activities was soon to get under way.

“Why not?” Tim cocked his head. “Have your feelings changed since what you told me after the accident at the hospital?”

Did he detect a note of relief at the possibility? “Not in the slightest.” Lately, Liam wished they had, though. She didn’t seem to want his support or affection. “I love her. It’s just that she has been very withdrawn since the accident.”

Liam didn’t get why she’d left his house that night. She hopped on her motorcycle with no helmet and raced down the street. He and Tim rushed after her, hollering her name. In horror, he watched her take the curve too sharp, and the bike careened out of control. Her leg was caught under the bike and dragged Indy like a ragdoll across the asphalt. By the time the bike jerked to a stop against the sidewalk, her mangled body lay motionless. Blood poured from the left side of her head. Her breathing was shallow with a rattle. Damn it, what had happened to her that night?

“Mom’s off somewhere with her new boy-toy. She gives her regards, but she won’t be around for Christmas.”

Did Tim change the topic to avoid having to answer questions about his sudden friendship with Indy? Not that the subject was one Liam wanted another go at. “And Dad and his cradlelegged wife Tiffy, Missy, or Miffy? How old is she again?” A large family too busy to notice rolled over his foot with the wheel of their cart. He gritted his teeth. People could be so self-involved.

“It’s Cindy, Liam, and she’s nineteen.”

“Only making her, what? Five years younger than me? Well, at least he’s consistent. I’ll give Dad that.” There was bit of sadistic pleasure in reminding himself how screwed up his family was and the type of life he wanted no part in.

“Cindy is Josie’s mom.” His tone was patronizing.

What kind of bimbo named a baby girl Josie? Wasn’t that a boy’s name? “Whatever. I don’t want to get into this. I ain’t calling that teenager “Mom.” They’ve only been together eleven months. It’s creepy. I mean, sure, biologically, we have the same father as Josie, but how are we going to relate to her?” His brother couldn’t help but try and play peacemaker.

Tim’s brow shot up. “Dad wants us to come by Christmas Day for dinner.”

Not high on his list of priorities. “I don’t know if I’ll go. I’ll see how charitable I’m feeling.” A man carted wrapped gifts with his luggage, and Liam disliked him on principle. He sighed, accepting his bitterness.

“Will you be around over the holidays?”

Liam wished Tim would give up trying to keep the family together. It wasn’t like they ever had one.

“No. I’ve got plans.” All right, Indy had plans, and he wasn’t stupid enough to pass them up. She’d never forget what he was about to share with her. If he played his cards right, he could sweep her into his arms for good.

\* \* \*

Tim rose as Indy emerged from the crowd of passengers. Beautiful in a crisp, fitted V-neck blouse and a tight, chocolate suede ankle-length skirt, she sashayed over in her high heels. How could he get through the next few days knowing what she would share with another man?

As she rushed toward Liam, a smile warmed her face. Tim exhaled and clenched his jaw.

"I've missed you, baby girl." Liam scooped her up into his arms, lifting her from the ground and squeezing tight.

Liam set her down. She turned toward Tim and wrapped her arms around him.

The warmth of her body stirred him. "How was the flight?" He leaned in, hands to his sides. If he held her, he didn't think he could let go.

"I slept right through." She averted his gaze.

When the agony of her leg was too much, and she couldn't sleep, she called him to distract herself. "The change in pressure didn't bother you?" That was what he represented to her, a distraction. Even so, he loved her.

She shook her head, but her eyes told him she lied. There was no talking about the accident in front of Liam, and he stepped right into it. Aside from him, no one else seemed to worry about her recovery. They were all too focused on the accident.

"I thought you said it barely hurt anymore." Liam piped in with a-butt-out-Tim.

"Exactly. Barely." As she shook her head, she darted her gaze to the ceiling and shrugged.

Barely his ass. Best if he changed the topic. "Do you have luggage to pick up?"

"No, I'm good." She towed a carry-on. If she was back for good, why didn't she have more stuff with her? Had she changed her mind about her plan to transfer to the University of California?

Tim walked toward the exit. "The vehicle is this way."

The sliding glass doors opened. He slid his shades on. Liam and Indy trailed behind.

"God, it's nice to be back in sunny California." The pitch of her voice warmed.

"Tell me about it. Ithaca, New York isn't much better than New Haven, Connecticut." Liam put his arm around her shoulder.

Tim held the parking garage door open. Why should Liam's touching her bother him? She wasn't his girlfriend. "I enjoyed the snow in Pittsburgh while at

med school.” Tim popped the trunk to his Porsche Cayenne and lifted her bag in. “The seasons came to life there.”

“I do enjoy the beginning of winter, but come January and February, I want summer back.” She parted her lips, and they turned upward.

When she smiled, the stars paled in comparison. She was beautiful. Long lashes framed her light brown eyes, a dramatic contrast.

“Sometimes not getting what you want makes you long for the times when you do.” Those words summed up his predicament. “If you never miss something or someone, how do you know how much it or they mean to you?” The problem was he could never have the woman he wanted as she loved another man. His brother.

“I had no idea you were such a philosopher, bro.” Liam tapped his shoulder.

Tim opened the front passenger door for Indy.

As she grinned, she climbed in. “I’d always thought you were a still-waters-run-deep kind of guy.” Her skirt slit ran up to the edge of her thigh-high, conjuring the silky feel of her skin to his face.

At least she thought he had depth. “Thanks.” If only his other qualities were what she looked for in a man. But he and Liam were at opposite ends of the spectrum. If what she was looking for in a partner was the type of man Liam was, he hadn’t a chance.

## Chapter Three

Liam opened his door, headed for the trunk, and pulled out his and Indy's suitcase. Tim helped Indy out of the passenger seat.

Liam would finally get this show on the road.

"Thanks for getting us home safe, Tim." Indy hugged his brother. "Don't forget the barbeque at my house tomorrow. Be there, or be square."

"Tim is square. Aren't you, bro?" Liam wedged between them and gestured her to turn around.

Tim waved and went inside.

Indy's heels sunk into the grass between his house and her parents' place.

"You're only encouraging him," Liam said.

"Don't be silly." She shook her head. "Tim's a friend." As she shimmied to her parents' porch next door, the curve of her bottom swayed. "So, have you thought about what I asked you?"

As if he could think of anything else after her proposition. "I have."

"Well, are you willing to be my first? Or not?" She bit her bottom lip.

"Yes." Hell, yes. Maybe her only lover if things went his way.

"Good." Glee beamed in her eyes. "Then we need to try as many things as we can manage."

"Pardon me?" What was this to her—some kind of sexcapade? "What are you talking about?"

She entered. The movement of her body had him hard. He followed her into the house and closed the door. A glimpse of the top of her thigh-highs showed between the slit of her skirt.

"Come on, you said yes not ten seconds ago. I have a list." She grinned.

"Ah." He took a breath. "A list, did you say?" This sounded less and less like him winning over the woman he loved, and more and more like an instructional arrangement. She'd tried to teach him how to dance in high school. Disastrous. Not how he was hoping this would go.



“Would you rather I ask someone else?” She set her keys down on the table in the foyer.

“Don’t threaten me.” Would she really just move on to the next man on her list? Maybe Indy asked someone before him, and—no way. She didn’t have enough guy friends for that. “I said I would.”

“Okay. It’s just that this is important. I want to be organized.” Indy’s round bottom displayed as she unhooked the strap of her shoes. Soon, he’d be buried in those generous curves. He shifted his erection towards the side of his boxers to hide the evidence.

She turned, and her eyes move down to his groin. “Liam, what are you thinking?”

Could he get any more obvious? “What do you think?”

“Sex. That’s the same look you had when we were lying in bed together, and your cock was poking into my leg.” She lifted upright and raised an eyebrow at him.

“Nice imagery.” Did she get off on tormenting him? Part of her had to.

She nodded. “I was unbelievably wet. As soon as you went into the shower, I got myself off.” She leaned into him and licked his bottom lip. The silky feel of her tongue ravaged him. She ventured her hand down to his cock. In an instant, her eyes burned with sultry amber heat. He grabbed her face with both hands and pulled her mouth to his. Lightly, he skimmed over her lips, soaking in the warmth. Then he pressed his mouth forcefully onto hers, driving his tongue in. She moaned. The sweet flavor of maraschino cherries coated his taste buds. She worked his zipper, and her hand slipped past the denim. silky digits wrapped around the shaft, sliding to the base.

“Indy.” He groaned. Oh, yeah.

She swirled her tongue around his.

A grunt escaped his throat. He’d wanted her for so long. It was hard to believe she was touching him.

She withdrew, breathless. “Yes, Liam?”

Was this just one more game to her? “Are you teasing me?”

“No, just sampling.” She glanced down, zipped up his pants, and met his gaze.

Liam licked his lips. "Grenadine?"

She flipped up her mouth to one side. "A Shirley Temple is a refreshing cocktail."

"Indeed." Those girly drinks she liked warmed him. Despite her blood alcohol level being within the limit the night of the accident, she hadn't touched a drink since.

"More importantly, we are on the same page about our arrangement." She tapped her chin with her index finger.

Would she enlighten him? "Page? What page, Indy?" He cocked a brow.

"You're as aroused about this as I am. I assume you jerked off in the shower this morning as usual before leaving."

Immediately after they'd hung up, he'd gotten off, but that wasn't the point. "Why are you talking like this?"

She slouched forward. "Am I wrong?"

"That isn't really the point." Liam shook his head. "Indy, how do you know that? About me jerking off."

"I'm a voyeur because of you. I thought you wanted me to watch. Why else would you have left your curtains open all these years? Like you haven't watched me from your bedroom window? Come on! Why do you think I left my drapes wide open, too, when I changed?" She placed a hand on her hip.

All those years, he'd hoped she'd wanted him to watch, but he never dared ask. Indy was a tease. He enjoyed that about her, since she'd kept his interest far longer than any other women had. "To torment me." Emotionally, Indy was shut down, and he didn't know why. He'd always been able to count on knowing where things stood between them.

"No." Heat blazed in her light brown eyes. "I wanted to look over and find you watching me, while I was touching myself."

This morning she sounded vulnerable. Somehow that part of her disappeared on the way there. "Indy, you've always been a flirt and gotten off on teasing me. This is different though. What's going on with you?"

"Am I being too blunt?" She moved back and sat on the tile staircase to the upstairs.

Liam ran his hand through his hair. "It is a little disconcerting. But what's with this idea your virginity is something to get rid of?"

"Look, I know about the bets in high school. The ones the guys made about who could get me into bed. Everyone called me a 'frigid cock-tease' behind my back. Yeah, I know it's redundant, because a cock-tease is someone who teases and doesn't put out. So 'frigid' is a moot point." She sighed. "I didn't want to be some guy's bragging right. So, I held off. I don't warm up to people like you do. I'm freaking twenty-three, Liam, and I'm still a virgin. I'm a sexy female. I don't want to look back on my first time and think I gave it to some bastard. I trust you, or I wouldn't have asked."

Liam sat next to her. "I know." Yet, her words hurt. Didn't women hold off so they could be with a man they loved? Somehow despite all her flirting and teasing, he'd gotten the impression she was holding off until the right man came along. "I don't want you to regret this and wished you'd waited for Mr. Right not Mr. Willing."

She laughed. "Of all people, Liam, I wouldn't expect that kind of puritanical crap to come from you. You're entire relationship history is a road map of Miss Convenient."

Ouch. She was right. Their relationship had always been above all of his bullshit, and this felt like a betrayal of how deeply he cared for her.

"I can be this holiday's Miss Convenient, and you don't even need to go through all the effort of charming my pants off. It's a win-win. I promise to be a good student."

The idea of molding her to what he liked in bed held more than a little appeal. Once women were with him, emotions always followed not far behind. Even if she didn't feel something for him now, after they shared such intimate acts, wouldn't that change?

"Was it a bad kiss?" She widened her eyes.

Great. He was causing her to doubt herself. "No, it was good."

"You have to be honest with me," she said. "If I suck, we can practice, and you can give me pointers."

“Pointers? Fuck, Indy, stop.” He placed his hand horizontally over the other vertically and signaled a time out. “You got the tip of my cock wet, all right?”

“Perfect. This should be pleasurable for the both of us, otherwise what’s in it for you?” She sat upright. “I don’t want you to be disappointed.”

Self-doubt peeked its head again. When had Miss Independent lost her sassiness? “Disappointed? Indy, you’re starting to worry me.”

“Don’t forget; it was me you complained to when a woman sucked in bed, and not in a good way.”

All the sex talk over the years had been his way of gauging her interest level in him and his unusual preferences. He hadn’t wanted to risk their friendship if she wasn’t interested. None of her behavior led him to believe she’d been curious about his sexual deviancy. Her reaction toward his sexual likes had left him wondering if she thought he was an abnormal freak.

“I’ve read up and watched instructional videos, but I have to put it into practice. I told you; I have a list.” She pointed to a bag and quirked her mouth to one side.

Images of her viewing porn and touching herself played in his mind. The topic needed to change, or he’d drag her to the bedroom.

The descriptions were getting to be a bit much for him. He cleared his throat. “When are your parents coming back?”

“You’re changing the topic.” She rolled her eyes. “They won’t be back until after Christmas, around Boxing Day, or shortly thereafter.”

“No, I’m trying to formulate a plan.” One less thing for him to worry about. Her father didn’t much like him.

“There’s nothing to plan. I’ve looked after everything,” she said.

Everything but her realizing he was the right man for her. “Your mom did a great job with the remodeling. It’s very sleek and modern with the white, black, and steel.”

She crossed her arms. “Is there a reason you keep changing the subject?”

“The sex talk is getting intense.” He tugged the neckline of his shirt.

“It’s supposed to.”

“All right. You’re the boss.” Wouldn’t hurt to have her once or twice somewhere else.

“Does that include getting you to take a ride on my bike?”

“No. I’d like to live to see my twenty-sixth birthday. I don’t know why your father got you that damn thing, since you landed yourself in the hospital and totaled the first one. You’re reckless.”

“Here we go with this reckless shit, again.” She dashed into the kitchen.

“Well, it’s true.” He followed and leaned on the counter of the island. “Isn’t it?”

“I’m not talking about this with you.” Indy picked up the menus to a few places from the middle drawer of the kitchen island. “Are you hungry?”

Famished for the sweet taste between her thighs. “Yeah, I’m hungry, but more for something else.” The curves of her body had him stiff again.

She smiled. “I’m with you.” Opening the door of the fridge, she showed him bare shelves by moving her hand up and down. “But after, when we are hungry, we won’t have anything to eat.”

“Good point. Looking after all our needs.” What a woman!

“You order, I’ll grab a shower, and we’ll meet up in my bed. Deal?”

Hell, yes. “Consider the food handled.”

A sense of satisfaction came over him.

She made her way to the stairwell and paused. “Liam, hurry. Patience isn’t one of my virtues.”

Nor his. Especially given how long he’d waited for tonight.

## Chapter Four

Tim stood at the sliding glass doors of his dining room. Adjacent was Indy's kitchen. She left Liam standing at the counter and went up the stairs. His brother picked up the phone and thumbed through a menu.

Her bedroom light illuminated the walkway between the two houses. His heart pounded harder and faster with each second that passed. Did he want to know if his suspicions were correct? Her silhouette broke the light shining on the pathway.

He glanced up and froze.

Could he handle seeing them together? Liam touching the woman he loved? His heart rate further sped, and heat burned his core. Fear. Jealousy. How could he feel as though he was losing her when he'd never had her? He knew Liam was the man she wanted. Not him. He turned his back to the window. As he remembered the feel of her, he grabbed a handful of his hair. Sensations Liam would now know, too. Tim paced toward the stairs, but stopped. He returned to the window. Indy removed her white blouse. A beige, lace bra contrasted her rum skin. She slipped the fabric down her arms. Cocoa buds peaked at the center of her lush breasts. Lust filled the shaft of his cock.

The still December night in the Malibu hills mocked him.

He averted his eyes. Damn it.

He dashed for the stairs, climbing them with fire in his steps, two at a time, and entered his bedroom above his dining room. Indy vanished behind the red shower curtain. He pressed his hand to the cool window. There was no knowledge from his life that could change her heart. She was slipping from his grasp.

\* \* \*

The hot, steamy shower did wonders for Indy. Her pesky tense muscles relaxed. She smiled at her reflection in her bathroom mirror. "Clever girl." Cold air hit her exposed skin, and the mist swirled. "Impatient, Liam?"

He leaned in the doorway. "Yes. I'm anxious." The lustful gleam in his gaze sent a shiver through her body. "I brought your suitcase up."

Indy smiled at him. "Thanks." Thoughtful and sweet, he was a nice man as long as she wasn't his girlfriend. For whatever reason, he exhibited more respect for women he had casual sex with than for those he dated.

His expression turned serious. "So, Indy, what's on this list of yours?"

Where to start? "Everything." She was an open, modern woman and educated about her sexuality. She was aware of the difference between a clitoral and a vaginal orgasm. Hopefully, she would soon know if vaginal orgasms were a male fabrication. She wanted to try it all. At least once, maybe twice, to make sure something wasn't her thing.

"Everything?" He shot his eyebrows up. "Do you have any rules? Things off-limits?"

What was on his mind? "Like?" Were there ways she had behaved that led him to think she had certain sexual hang-ups? Aside from the obvious that she was still a virgin.

"I don't know. That's why I'm asking." He crossed his arms and leaned on the door.

The two of them had spent enough time discussing sexual preferences, and these lessons should reap pleasure for them both. "Name something you're wondering about."

He exhaled a heavy breath. "Spanking?"

Indy laughed. "I've known you want to spank my booty, and I'm comfortable with it. What else?"

"Good." Warmth softened the corners of his eyes, while he quirked his lips to one side in a grin. "Me being dominant?"

"Yes." Indy was well aware of his dom tendencies; she suppressed a smile. "That would be a departure from our usual roles, wouldn't it?"

Liam nodded his head in agreement.

She couldn't wait for it. "I've had the pleasure of toying with you, and don't see why you can't reciprocate. I don't mind you being aggressive, rough, or even causing me some pain. Hell, I expect it. Just not the first time we have anal."

He'd been open about his attraction to strong women who wanted his dominance in the bedroom. When she pleased herself after the accident, it offset the physical torment of her injury. Her climax held at the blade's edge. An excruciating dance between pain and pleasure took place when she came. That was when all the things Liam confided in her seemed heavenly.

"Nice. Pardon the pun, but most women can be buggers regarding the matter." He cocked an eyebrow.

"I'm not knocking anything until I've tried it." She walked passed him into her room. Light streamed in between the curtains and soft music played in the background. "Seems you're ready." She went to her luggage, pulled out a fancy, pink plastic bag and dumped the contents out on the bed: condoms, two types of lube, motion lotions in orange and cherry, massage oil, a cock ring, pocket rocket, dildo, vibrator, cuffs, and three books.

Liam picked up a vibrator. "Double penetration?"

Heat burst inside her at the thought of Tim and Liam possessing her. "You mean, with you and the toy?"

"Yeah." He nodded.

As she suspected, Liam didn't enjoy sharing. "Once you've fucked both, yeah."

"Reasonable." He licked his lips. "Are you ready, Shorty?"

"Shorty?" Oh no, he didn't. She wouldn't let him suck her emotions into this. "A Malibu white boy like you, Liam, doesn't get to use that slang."

"White boy?" His shoulders depressed.

He'd heard her. "Just because you can dunk a basketball, play football, and listen to gangster rap, don't mean you're down. You're from Malibu, not Inglewood."

"If there was a possible world where I could use the term, you'd be my shorty."

As if. "Whatever. We grew up in Malibu, in big mansions. We ride around in cars our parents bought for us, and we ain't on scholarships."

"True dat. You're cute when you're mad. Are you ready to handle your business?" He smirked.



The reveal was now or never. “You’re the one who is going to need to handle me.” It was best to get this over with. She angled her injured hip away from him, pulled her towel loose, and let the terrycloth fall to the floor.

Liam stood motionless with his eyes narrowed.

Well, was he going to get on with it, or would she need to take the bull by the horns figuratively speaking? “Are you just going to stare?”

“Indy, you’re gorgeous.” He moved closer, reached for her face with his fingers and touched her lips. The smell of him lingered near. A hint of man: spice and smooth. He kissed her mouth and pulled away. He slid his hand over the marks on her flesh. “You’ve nothing to be embarrassed about. The scars add to your body’s charm.”

What else could he say about her disfigurement? She preferred not to think about it and covered his fingers, guided his touch to her breast, and kissed his mouth. Consumed by the heat of his flesh, she gasped.

He pushed his tongue in her mouth and twirled hers. The muscle in her leg trembled; she grabbed onto his arms for support. Pain pulsed through her. She didn’t want him to know how much agony she still lived with. To suppress the pain, she crushed her lips.

He pulled away. “The things I’m going to show you.” Once more, his mouth covered hers.

Using her lips, she forced his apart. She dug her teeth into his tender flesh.

“Shit. You bit me.” He pressed his finger to his mouth and checked for blood.

“Uh-huh. And?” She grinned. “Don’t make a fuss. I didn’t draw blood.”

“I see! So, that’s how you want things.” He made short work of removing his clothes. In seconds, he stood naked in front of her, his cock semi-erect.

Sizable. “Do you, now?” She’d see about that.

He lunged forward, clutched her wrists, and pulled her to him. “Yeah, I do.”

Please, God, let his words be true. “How’s that, huh?”

As he licked her neck then released one of her wrists, his silky tongue slid over her skin, sending moisture gushing between her legs. The heat of his mouth roared a fire inside. He took hold of her breast and squeezed.

She moaned.

He picked her up, carried her over to her bed, and laid her out. This was real. As he knelt on the edge, he grabbed her inner thighs and parted her legs.

“Mmm. Good eats.” With a flush covering his face, he lowered to her sex.

The thump of her heart pounded to her chest. Self-doubt gripped her. “You don’t have to.” The why hit her. Liam liked being dominant, and this act seemed so serving, submissive to her. Why would he want to pleasure her first? Wasn’t she to fulfill him?

He moistened his lips and lowered his head. “I want to taste you.” He parted her labia. His hot breath blew between her legs causing an internal tremble. The fact Liam wanted to give her this pleasure thrilled and scared her.

She relaxed. This was her long-standing fantasy, so she needed to enjoy the ride.

Jolted by the brush of his wet tongue sliding over her clit, she gasped. “Ah,” she cried out, grabbing the bedspread beneath her. Inside, satisfaction washed over her.

Liam was eating her pussy.

He peered up, met her gaze, and licked his lips. “Delicious.”

A rush of excitement flashed through her.

He descended, gliding over folds, sliding further down. The top of his head vanished farther. With his tongue, he parted her drenched, inner lips and pressed against her opening. She tightened her grip on the bedspread. Warm, gentle pressure from his tongue pushed down into her, his laps skimmed the edges of her entrance. He sailed up to her clit, drifting tenderly over, then back.

For far too long, she dreamed of sharing this with him, and now she was. Part of her had never believed their relationship would move to a physical level.

He ventured over her nub, back down, using his silky touch, and dipped into her wet sex.

She gasped as his fingers covered her clit, rubbing the tender flesh with deliberate strokes. The light caress forced her to thrust her hips out to find more. He brushed his satiny lips to her labia, while his brazen tongue forced into her. He was fucking her with his mouth.

She moaned desperately, rocking her famished pussy into his face.

As he licked back over her clit, delight moved through her. She held her grip, not wanting to miss a lick he offered her. He massaged the inner rim of her opening. She thrust her hips, pressing her sex against his caressing mouth.

He rubbed her nub faster, applying more pressure. As her body begged for more, her breathing quickened.

He groaned; his hot, heavy breath blew onto her throbbing labia. With his tongue, he flicked her clit, and his fingers circled her opening with slightly more force.

Warm waves crashed inside her. "Liam," escaped her trembling lips. She jerked with bliss. Thighs twitched, her ass clenched, and the quake of her inner muscles built on the frenzy he created. She panted.

As his mouth worked deeper into her, she groaned. "Fuck." She squeezed her legs together. "Please, Liam." Every part of her body tingled. She couldn't take any more stimulation, but he forged on. She quivered and shook with each pump from his mouth.

She directed his face away. "No more. I can't take it."

"So soon?" Liam lifted his face from between her leg and tenderly stroked her thigh.

Indy averted his gaze. There was an intense difference between her solitary orgasms and the one Liam built up for her.

## Chapter Five

Liam rested between her thighs. As the surface of her eyes glazed with bewilderment, she turned her face from him. Pink flushed her cheekbones.

The taste of her climax was fresh on his lips. "They weren't joking when they said the darker the berries, the sweeter the juice." Liam had been interested in non-white women before, but nothing ever came of the flirting. The pickings were slim where he came from.

"You can be such a freak." She rolled her eyes.

"I'll be whatever you need me to be if it means I get access to the sweet taste between those thighs again." Had he sounded needy? He kissed her forehead and rose. "Let me wash up, and I'll be right back." They had only just begun, and he struggled to keep his emotions in check.

"Wash up." She propped her elbows behind her. "Why?"

"I figured you'd prefer..." he trailed off. Never mind. Don't give her hang-ups that don't exist. Sex for women seemed complicated enough.

She shifted to her side and tapped the bed in front of her.

Liam crawled next to her facing toward her. "Are you sure about this?" Lightly, he caressed her red cheek with his fingertips. This act would bind them, wouldn't it? Women like her who waited, didn't have sex to get it over with, did they? Not that he could figure women out.

"About what?" She tilted her head.

What were they there to do? "Me being your first?"

"Technically, you already are." She tilted her head.

This was the oral sex was technically "still sex" deal.

"You're not changing your mind, are you?"

"Hell, no." That was literally the last thing he was doing. "I just don't want you to regret this later." It would crush him.

"How could I with a start like that? Are you hesitating on my behalf?"

“No.” Given how long he’d wanted her, he wasn’t sure round one would be his best performance.

“Then?”

He leaned in and kissed her mouth. The thought that she tasted herself on his lips was hot. He took a hold of her breast, and his thumb stroked her nipple. He used his body weight to force her onto her back and climbed between her legs.

She grabbed the bag and pulled out the condoms. One good thing about condoms was the added barrier helped to slow the buildup.

Removing the prophylactic from the packet, she held the rubber out. “May I? It’s good practice for me.”

Practice. Ouch. “Ehh, yeah.” Was this a practical arrangement for her?

She brought the condom to the head of his cock and rolled the latex down the shaft. Damn, her hand felt good. For a moment, the sight of her touching his cock was too much.

Eleven fifty-two on the alarm clock, which meant he would be making love to her into Christmas Eve. He smiled.

Indy lay beneath him, her legs spread open, and her wet sex glistened. Pressing his cock between her outer lips, he forced them wider apart. He rubbed the head over her clit. She wiggled beneath him, and her breasts bobbed.

Liam lowered his mouth over her nipple. He skimmed the bud, licking her button, and bit. She arched her back, shoving her nipple into his mouth. The head of his cock found the dip of her opening. She was so slick. He inched his cock into her, feeling the resistance of her body. He wanted in her, to be buried deep inside her. He resisted, not wanting to scare her off the first time. As their arrangement progressed, he could work her up to handle his dominance. The goal at this moment was to get her comfortable with him inside her.

“Liam, please, don’t treat me like some delicate flower you’re about to break.” She propped up on her elbow.

Wasn’t he about to take her innocence, deflower her literally? “I’m not.” Maybe he was a little, but for God’s sake, he loved her. He didn’t want her first time to be an unpleasant experience, with him seeing to his own needs while neglecting hers. Might there be a way for him to see to both their satisfaction? He pushed up

on his arms and stared at her. "Once I've worked my cock into you all the way, the muscles will have stretched, and then I could step it up."

"I appreciate that you are being careful with me." She leaned her lips to his ear. "Promise me once you've stretched me, you'll give it to me deep and hard."

At her words, he swallowed with difficulty. "You are sure it's how you want it?"

She nodded vigorously. "Yes."

"After, I don't want one complaint when you walk funny." He cocked his eyebrow.

She jerked her head from left to right repeatedly. "I won't."

"I promise to give it to you the way you want it—hard and deep." Liam rocked with quick motions to each side to loosen her inner walls. Pumping further into her and up, he worked his cock deep. He wanted her first time to be memorable. And if what she wanted was pleasure blurred between pain and bliss, he would do his best to deliver on her request.

"Ready?"

"Yes." She smiled up at him with those pretty, light brown eyes of hers fixed to his.

He took hold of her uninjured hip to keep her in place and rammed the length of him back deep inside her.

"Oh, God, Liam." She gasped. "That's what I'm talking about."

He withdrew and moved back in with matched strength. "You like that?" Was he old-fashioned in his thinking? Maybe he half-expected her to lay there, unsure of what she wanted or needed from him.

She rocked her hips meeting his thrust. "Hell, yes." She ground her pelvis into him, looking for more.

If she could handle it, who was he to deny her? He pumped into her harder. He should have expected her to challenge him, even in the bedroom. Damn, this woman made him crazy. He pushed into her.

"Rub your clit for me," he ordered with a groan, not sure how long he'd hold. She reached her fingers to her nub and obediently rubbed. "God, you're sexy." Inside, a burn built hotter. The tight fit of his cock in her pussy egged him on.

She arched against him with a moan.

He sped the rhythm of his thrust into her wet pussy.

“Harder.” She demanded.

Liam stopped with his body tucked to hers. His pants and her moans weaved in the air around him.

She continued to rock beneath him.

“Beg for it.” He knelt up, legs spread to angle to her opening, with the head of his cock still inside her.

“Please, Liam, I need you harder,” she pleaded hoarsely.

He pushed his length deep inside and drove up.

“I like that.” She moaned.

Slowly, he slid the shaft out, then rammed to her depth.

She played with her nipple, pinching and releasing, while he suckled the other.

“Damn, that’s hot.” He forced his cock in and up.

He grabbed her ass and pumped in and out of her. “That’s it.”

She played with her clit and brushed her nipples as he pushed in and out of her. He picked up his pace and the strength of his movement.

“I’m coming.” The rawness of her words drove him over the edge.

Frantically, he rocked deep. “Oh, Indy.” With his forehead to hers, he gasped. He held to her. He spilled his seed into the condom. As he slowed his motion, his cock jerked the last of his release. Never had he come so hard. He shuddered from the strength. He stroked the curls from her face and kissed her nose.

“Amazing.” The pure satisfaction of what they just shared filled him with hope. For those moments, she’d been completely his. He loved this woman. She quivered against his chest. He cupped her face softly with his palm.

## Chapter Six

Indy forced her gaze from his. The excruciating delight from his withdrawal brought a smile to her lips. What had she just done? The twitch in her leg nagged at her. She bit down on her lip to detract from her pain.

Liam got up, removed the condom, and tossed the rubber in the trash. “You were unbelievable.”

The man was her first. She smiled. Oh, God, he’d never accept what happened between her and Tim. Not that it mattered; she couldn’t change that night—the accident nor the incident. She’d always have the memory of him being her first. This was as good as it could ever get for her and Liam. Tim’s presence loomed over her. Facing the music would be tolerable because of what they just shared.

“Indy.” He pulled his boxers on.

She swallowed. “Sorry. What’s up?”

“Are you okay?” He wrinkled his brow between his eyes. “You seem distracted?”

She needed to keep it together a few more days until he’d fulfilled her wish list. “I’m better than okay.” Moving to the edge of the bed, she realized she spoke too soon. She got up. It was true what they said about being bow-legged after. She escaped, limping to the bathroom to clean up and assessed the damage.

From the towel rack, she took a face cloth, wet it, and wiped between her folds. Pink on the material was normal. She lathered the fabric with soap and cleaned the area, then patted dry. Everything was copacetic.

She opened the door.

Liam sat on the bed with his shoulders forward and his head down. Maybe he already regretted what they shared. The sheets and bedspread were changed. He got up with his boxers on, gathered her in his arms, and tilted her chin up. “Was I too rough? There was more blood than I expected.”

She could not allow him to feel guilty for doing what she asked him to. “No, just as rough as I asked you to be.”



“All right.” He nodded and kissed her forehead. “While you were in the bathroom, I put the blankets in the machine.”

The sweet little things he did made him lovable. If only he treated his girlfriends this way.

He slid a hand into hers and rested his forearm to her back, pulling her body to his. Rocking into her, he was hard again and shuffled to the beat. “You were amazing.”

That was the second time he’d used the word amazing. A rhythm and blues song hummed low in the background.

With his shimmering green eyes fixed to her, he moved in. Tingles moved through her body. He rushed her mouth. She parted her lips and accepted his tongue.

He groaned. “Are you hungry?”

The man was too charming for his own good. For her own good. She stepped away. “It’s too soon.”

“I know. I meant sustenance—food.”

“Nah. Are you spending the night?” She sat down slowly on the bed.

“Technically, it’s morning,” he said. “Merry Christmas Eve, Indy.”

Heat bolted from her toes to her head. Way too charming.

The man slept with women all the time. She shouldn’t read too much into this behavior. For all she knew, this was just how he rolled out his seduction.

“I ordered your favorite,” he said. “Indian food. Butter chicken—”

She needed to keep her head on right and not fall for his charismatic side.

“Thanks.” She removed her nightgown from her suitcase and covered up. “You’re so sweet to me.”

“You almost always get your way with me, don’t you?”

Why was that? The Madonna–whore complex. Up until now, she’d been the virgin, not the whore. Had he placed her on a pedestal? If that was the case, what had happened with Tim would knock his image of her, crashing it to the ground.

“I do.” All of that was about to go out the window. “You grab something to eat. I’m beat.”

“Are you sure? I could bring it up, and we could have a picnic on your bed.”  
Liam paused at the door.

“I’m sure.” What she needed was to shut down—sleep.

“All right.” He smiled, turned, and pulled the door closed. Finally, she would get the shut-eye she needed. She hadn’t slept more than a few hours in a week. Lately, she’d been unable to relax. Her mind ran through all the possible scenarios and extreme measures she was willing to take if this hadn’t gone smoothly, but it had. Now, that was all over. When the time came, she could face telling Liam the true, because of the bliss of tonight.

## Chapter Seven

Tim took a step back from his window. Images of the lovers still played his mind. Now Indy lay alone on her bed, thankfully. How he wished he could be the one next to her, comforting her. She gave her virginity to another man—his brother.

His erection pressed to his pants. Why wasn't he angry? He envisioned those moments in delight. The smile on her face as Liam touched her was brilliant. If only she wanted to find him at the top of the stairs the night of the accident.

But she didn't.

He took a seat at the edge of his bed, unbuttoned his pants, and peeled back the zipper. He pushed his boxers down, pulled his cock out, and closed his eyelids slowly. He let his mind wander to the incident last New Year's Eve. The night he had the privilege to taste and feel Indy.

He wrapped his fingers around his shaft, gliding his hand up and down.

Only the memory of what he and Indy had shared the night of the accident got him off these days. Remembering the taste and feel of her was the only bliss he could fathom.

Anticipation filled him as Indy had reached the top of the stairs and approached in the dark hall. She had stepped closer, the soft rub of her finger along the wall grew near. Excitement grew inside, waiting for her body to make contact. Heat rushed up his spine. She had touched his chest with her fingers, then her hand pressed into him, and lingered its way down to the waist of his slacks. With her fingers, she traced his erection. He had closed his eyelids and let the warmth of her stir his desire. A mere touch had him stiff with need. Reaching for her waist, he had pulled her in crudely, pressed her curves against him, and advanced his cheek to skim hers. No protest had come from her, only a soft exhale. As he had worked his lips softly along the skin of her face until he had reached her mouth, she had parted her lips. Any restraint he had had been lost, and he had explored her mouth with his tongue; the taste of her minty lips urged

him on. He had carried her into the bathroom, set her down against the counter, and locked the door.

She had moaned, then grabbed his shirt, pulling him into her, nails sliding down his chest, passed his abs. She had moved her hand along the length of his cock.

He had hiked up her skirt.

Again, his mouth had covered hers, kissing a trail down her neck, over her collarbone, and down between her breasts. Bending down on his knees, he had raised her left leg and placed her thighs on his shoulders. He had slipped his fingers beneath her thong, where he had found her slick folds. His cock had twitched with want.

She had grabbed his hair.

He had pushed aside the barrier, then had yanked her into him as his mouth tasted. Along her slick labia, he had buried his mouth. He had tongued the flavor of her. A raspy moan had escaped her throat. He had licked deep between her inner folds and moved back up to her clit.

She had gasped, spreading her legs farther apart, giving him further access.

He had groaned, lapping the juice of her from his lips. Pressing his fingers to her clit, he had forced his tongue to her wet opening.

With that memory, came his release.

“Indy,” he spoke in the quiet night. If only she wanted him. Her happiness was more important to him than how he felt. He couldn’t risk his actions costing her any more than they already had.

## Chapter Eight

Liam reentered the room with a bag of Swedish Berries he had brought back with him.

She slept peacefully.

He set her favorite candy on the nightstand and lifted the blanket. Light from the window shimmered off the scars on her legs and caught his attention. What happened to her on the night of the accident?

The events of that night were etched in his mind. He remembered when they'd reached the door, she'd laughed at one of his corny jokes. After a night of dancing with his hands all over her, all he could think of was getting in the shower and relieving himself to thoughts of her.

Tim had greeted them at the door. "Partying until the wee hours of the morning again, I see." With a smile, his gaze had lingered on Indy. Liam had wanted to say something to put his brother in his place for checking out his friend, but he knew better. The truth was it shouldn't bother him. He'd had a girlfriend, for God's sake. His brother's sudden focus on Indy over the holidays hadn't gone unnoticed and had rubbed him the wrong way. Or was it that Indy hadn't appeared to mind Tim's sudden interest in her? She had always teased, then gone cold, ignoring any poor man seeking her attention. That wasn't the case with Tim.

Indy had worn a long, suede, blue skirt and low-cut beige blouse; she didn't shy away.

"Happy New Year's, Tim." She had leaned in and kissed his cheek. "I can't believe you're home alone."

Had she been flirting with Tim?

"I don't mind being alone until Mrs. Right comes along." Tim had grinned.

She had shot up an eyebrow. "You're too young to think like that. Don't you ever let loose? What about Miss Right-Now or Miss Available?"

Liam had laughed. “Tim let loose? You’re kidding.” Had he really needed to be the one to point this out? Tim was a stick in the mud, she knew that. When Liam spilled the beans about his father’s affair, Tim had stepped into the role of man of the house. Then, when his mother met someone and had behaved irrationally, Tim took on the role of parent. “He’s more responsible than our parents. I think you had one too many Mojitos tonight.” Why the hell had he said that? Jealousy, of course, but he hadn’t had the right to take it out on Indy.

“One being the operative word, Liam.” Indy had glared at him, anger evident in her eyes. “Your brother is capital H-O-T hot, but he acts like he’s sixty or something. He needs someone to show him how to have fun and enjoy life.” She had met Tim’s eyes.

Had she been making an offer to Tim? And why that night? “Like who? You?”

“Doubtful. Tim’s probably into the repressed types.” Indy had huffed, her eyes narrowed in Liam’s direction. “Can’t say I’d mind trying, though.” She had slanted her lips to one side. It hadn’t gone unnoticed; her stare paused at Tim’s groin.

For the first time in Liam’s life, he had wanted to punch his brother. “Wouldn’t you need experience in that department to draw from?” His Indy, messing around with Saintly Tim, would kill him.

“What I lack in experience, I make up for in sheer inhibition.” She had smirked and cocked her head.

Knowing his brother, they’d soon marry, settle down, get a dog, and have one-point-five kids. “I have no doubt, then, that dead men would come back from the grave for a chance to have you loosen them up.”

“Aww, thanks.” She had tapped his shoulder and kissed his cheek.

Finally, he had said something right since they’d walked in. “Anytime, baby girl.” Flattery always worked better than insults. “You grab a bite to eat.” He had pointed at the fridge. “I’m going to grab a shower. Rendezvous in my room.” Liam had sent a warning glance at Tim.

What happen between Indy and his brother after he had left? What had caused her to run off on her motorcycle? Every time he asked her, she told him nothing.

Did it even matter now? Indy was there with him and would soon be his.

## Chapter Nine

Liam drifted in and out of a restless sleep, entranced by Indy's every movement next to him in her bed. Today, he needed to move things along and make her see they were meant for each other.

She stretched and rolled over.

"Good morning." Excitement from Indy choosing him to be her first sexual experience had him grinning from ear to ear.

"What's with the goofy look on your face?" She touched the tip of his nose with her index finger.

That wasn't the look he was going for. "'Goofy'?"

She nodded. "Yeah, an odd smile, but not a fully formed one."

"I don't know." He sat up and shrugged. "How are you feeling this morning?"

"About what?" She sat up.

Liam propped himself up against the headboard. "About last night. Are you sore?" He wanted to hear her complaints regarding the agony he caused her. The exquisite, delightful agony.

"The pain isn't as bad as I thought. Though..." Indy's face lost its expression.

Could she regret last night? It would kill him. "Go on?" Better he know sooner rather than later.

"Nah, you seem too eager to know." A smirk graced her lips.

This was a good sign; she was teasing him. "I won't underestimate your capacity for pain again. Expect me to bring it." He slid his hands beneath her bottom and squeezed hard.

"Ohhh, umm! Can we grab something to eat first? Or I won't survive round two." Indy sat up and shoved her hair in a ponytail, exposing her neck. "We could go to The Diner."

Sunlight beamed onto the bed, bathing her in its warmth.

"All right." Reluctant to go there was an extreme understatement, but Indy liked the place, and Tim didn't seem to take issue with taking her there. Liam

stood out like a sore thumb, which was the least of his problems. The experience was humbling since he was usually the only white male. Had Indy felt like that most of her life? She had been the only brown face until junior high at their ultra-exclusive private schools. What made him uneasy at The Diner were the murderous stares from the black men, because he was with her. Oh, and there was the blatant undressing of Indy, which pissed him off. The look which irked him most, though, was the one that read: “how dare a white man take a ‘sista,’ light skin or not.” That was how Indy had explained it to him.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

“‘Nothing,’ my ass. What’s that look on your face about?”

“I was just thinking,” he said.

“About...”

“How I don’t fit in there.” This wasn’t a late breaking news bulletin. “But I like bringing you there, because you enjoy it.”

She crossed her arms. “Don’t do me any favors. If you don’t want to go, we can head somewhere else. I can swing by some other time.”

If this was him seducing her, he was doing a poor job of it. The last thing he wanted was to suddenly not be willing to take her to one of her favorite food establishments. “No. I’m looking forward to having Bee’s fried chicken.” There was no denying the food was good, heart-attack-inducing good.

“Are you going to ride on my motorcycle with me to get there? Come on, Liam. It’s a thrill—second to only you—having that much power between my legs.” She smiled mischievously. “It’s a Ducati, baby.”

“Strangely enough and I know this will shock you, but I’m not looking for anything powerful between my legs. However, I can be talked into you riding me.” He stroked a few hairs from her face. “The way I see it, I should be the only one between yours.” Surprised by his possessive tone, he lowered his head. Ten forty-one glared at him from the clock on her nightstand.

“Not this again.” She hopped off her bed and bolted into the washroom.

Yeah, that again. He couldn’t help how he felt about her motorcycle. The damn thing nearly claimed her life. The night of her accident was etched in his mind.



He still had nightmares about her mangled, bleeding body on the road. Nor would he let an opportunity pass him by to tell her.

“I’m going to grab a shower.” She stopped in the doorframe. “Why don’t you call the gang and see if they want to come?” She closed the door.

Just what he needed, more stress to add to their outing to The Diner. Tim. Today wasn’t shaping out the way he had planned.

## Chapter Ten

Tim sat next to Greg. Liam was across from them, saving a spot for Indy—his Indy. Bing Crosby’s classic “White Christmas” song filled The Diner with a festive mood. Holly and mistletoe hung from reflective green and red garlands crisscrossing the ceiling.

Greg turned, peering over the edge of the seat of the booth. “The place is filled with sexy, single ladies.” This man gave Liam a run for his money when it came to womanizing. Greg and his older brother, Mike, grew up across from them. Tim and Mike were both in their thirties and went to med school.

“How did you come to the conclusion they were single?” Tim took the bait. Aside from the frequent checking outside the front panoramic window with the blinking Christmas lights, the three hadn’t said a word as they read the menu. He knew it off the top of his head. The only addition was a Christmas combination plate, which included cranberries and stuffing. The tension was tangible. Tim should have turned down the invitation, since Liam only asked him along to be polite. Yet, he wanted, even needed, to see Indy.

“It’s Christmas Eve, they’re hot, and they aren’t here with a man.” He leaned forward. “So, Liam, is it true? Are darker berries sweeter?”

Tim knew the answer. Now, Liam did, too. Did his brother actually want her, or was it when she’d finally lost interest, he couldn’t bear the thought of it? Granted, Tim was a bastard for even going there, but he couldn’t figure out his brother’s motives when it came to Indy.

Liam made eye contact with him, his expression blank. “Greg, you are a pig, and I have no idea what you are talking about.” Liam crossed his arms.

At least, he had the decency not to make this more difficult than it needed to be. Nor had he objectified Indy. Given Liam’s warning to stay clear of Indy at the airport, Tim wasn’t sure what to expect. One thing was for sure, he wouldn’t fade away unless Indy requested him to.

“You didn’t say no.” Greg pointed to Liam. “Which means what? Ding, ding, ding. That’s right, boys and girls. Dark berries are the sweetest and juiciest of them all.”

Outside, Indy pulled up on her blue bike, dismounted, tilted it on the stand, and pulled off her helmet. Her curls cascaded onto her shoulders. She wore a baby blue leather jacket. The fitted riding leather pants didn’t deter his interest. The doorbell chimed. Indy waved to the owner, Bee, behind the counter and strutted toward him.

As Tim stood, so did Liam. It wasn’t his place to do so in this situation. Over the months of her recovery, he got used to being with her.

Greg stood and gestured Tim to the counter stool. “She is going to cramp our picking-up prospects. No offense, Indy.”

“None taken, Greg.” She winked with a smile. “Tim, I’m glad you came.”

“I wouldn’t miss Bee’s peach cobbler or cornbread for all the gravy and turkey on the coast.” Nor the chance to be near Indy. Tim shuffled to the stool next to Greg.

She took a seat across from Liam. Tim and Greg sat at the counter.

“You just want an extra scoop of my homemade ice cream.” Bee tossed a dishtowel onto her shoulder and walked over to the couple. “What can I get you, hun?”

Silence.

“Are you ready to order, Indy?” Liam picked up his menu.

“You go first.” She gestured to Liam.

“I’ll have the number two. Can I switch out the mashed potatoes for a salad with ranch dressing and hold the beans?”

Tim shook his head. Why the hell had Liam agreed to go there when he clearly didn’t appreciate the food? Fried chicken with a salad didn’t cut it. Bee served some of the best soul food this side of Georgia.

“Sure thing, darling. And you, Miss Indiana?” Bee smiled.

Indy sighed and glanced over the selection.

Tim rotated his stool toward Liam and Indy. “She wants the peach cobbler, first, with two heaping scoops of your homemade ice cream, and a number six with an extra cornbread.”

If looks could kill, the current one in Liam’s eyes would have knocked him dead. Greg buried his face in his hands.

“What he said.” Indy nodded and pinched her bottom lip. “Thanks, Tim.”

It wasn’t rocket science to pay attention to a woman’s likes and dislikes. He and Indy were creatures of habit. She liked routine and tended to eat what she enjoyed over something new. Out of all the times they had been there, she’d only eaten something else once.

Devon walked in with a smile, followed by Malcolm. “Where you been at, Dr. Knock-You-Out? And where’s Miss Indiana-Tongue-Slinger at?”

Liam clenched his fist then lowered it to his lap. His brother was hot tempered over nothing.

Tim bumped knuckles with Devon, then Malcolm. Since the two were chewed out by Indy for making fun of her walk and were forced to apologize by her sassy tongue some months back, they had gained the two’s respect. Neither had been familiar with what an anesthesiologist was, Tim’s area of medicine. When he explained what he did, they gave him a nickname—Dr. Knock-You-Out. And Indy became Miss Indiana-Tongue-Slinger. Despite her numerous attempts at explaining Indy wasn’t a short form for a longer name. However, it seemed Malcolm and Devon would change their nicknames to fit in with the subject at hand.

“I’m over here.” Indy raised her hand and waved.

“What ya doing over there? If you don’t keep both eyes on Dr. Knocking-Dat-Boots, one of d’em college-educated sisters will make him her next baby’s daddy.” Devon put his hand on Tim’s shoulder.

Over the table, Indy covered Liam’s hand. “How do you know that isn’t what Tim wants?”

Was that what she feared? Given all the time she’d spent with him, he expected her to know him well enough to figure out the kind of man he was. He wouldn’t

walk away from the woman he loved, because the doctors didn't recommend she have children.

"You ain't told us who the new faces are. Do we gotta do our own introductions, Doc?" Malcolm brought his fist to his chest.

"Across from Indy is my brother, Liam, and next to me is Greg."

Bee came out from the kitchen with an overloaded tray. "Outta my way gangstars..."

Devon and Malcolm were Bee's nephews, and both hauled ass when she said. The two moved to the back of The Diner.

"Here you go, Doc," Dot, Bee's niece said with a smile. Her dimples appeared in her cheeks.

The young woman set his plate, then Greg's, down. She was attentive of him and sweet. Extra attentive.

Greg's eyes traveled over Dot's curvaceous body.

Tim tucked closer to Greg, not to be heard. "Don't even think about her if you're not serious. Malcolm's her older brother."

"Are you pulling my leg?" Greg asked.

Tim shook his head and peaked over at Indy. Her arms were crossed, and she stared out the window. Perhaps he should try one last time to talk her out of telling Liam, or at least letting him do it. The only thing which stopped him was that he'd given her his word. It wasn't like he'd had much choice. Last New Year's Day when she woke up in the hospital, she'd forced him to promise not to tell Liam why she'd fled to her motorcycle. In her condition, he hadn't been able to refuse her demand.

## Chapter Eleven

Indy couldn't eat another bite and pressed her back into the booth. No one spoke during the meal, and she wasn't sure why Tim and Greg sat at the counter. Bee's niece, Dot, hovering over Tim never went unnoticed. The girl wasn't his type. For one, she was too young for him. And second, her head was in the clouds. Tim deserved happiness, just with someone better suited to him.

Liam kept glancing over to see if Tim was looking at her. For whatever delusional reason, she hadn't expected the outing at The Diner to be uncomfortable. On her ride up into the mountains, she'd felt uneasy on her bike around some corners and next to a transport truck. She wasn't thrilled about going back down alone.

"Ride back with me, Liam?" she asked and crossed her fingers in the hope that he wouldn't give her his usual song and dance about the bike. "Please, for me? An early Christmas gift."

"On the death trap?" Liam stared at her. "We can put your bike in the trunk of my Jeep, but I'm not riding on that thing."

Every time he spoke of her motorcycle as a danger, he only pushed her away. She refused to let one reckless event scare her from doing something she loved. If the accident had been her riding a horse, everyone would be telling her to get back up again.

"Fine." She stood. "Greg, Tim, any takers for a ride back like none you've ever had?"

"I don't think so, Indy. You're a hottie, but after the accident, you looked totally messed up in the hospital." Greg swiveled the stool. "Good thing the plastic surgeons put you back together again."

"Thanks, Greg." She rolled her eyes.

"See, I'm not the only one." Liam got up.

“Whatever. Where are our bills, Bee?” Indy tapped her foot, not wanting to fight over her bike. The conversation could slide in a direction she wasn’t prepared to answer yet.

Bee smiled. “Doc settled all of you up.”

“Tim, you didn’t need to do that, but thanks.” Greg clamped a hand on Tim’s shoulder, rose, and walked to the door.

“How much do I owe you for me and Indy?” Liam pulled out his wallet.

This wasn’t a date. So why would Liam pay for her? Was he trying to make appoint to piss off Tim?

“It’s my treat.” Tim walked to the exit. “Please don’t make something out of nothing.”

“Fine.” Liam trailed behind his brother.

“I’ve never been on a motorcycle. If the offer is still open, I’d like to go with you.” Tim zipped up his leather jacket.

Liam clenched his jaw shut and climbed into the Jeep.

Soon enough, she’d tell Liam what happened last New Year’s Eve. She refused to completely ignore Tim to placate Liam’s insecurities. “Of course, it is.” She struggled with keeping away from Tim. Some time alone with him wouldn’t be a bad thing, without Liam watching their every action. It wasn’t like anything was going on between them. The man hadn’t touched her in that kinda way since the night of the accident. For all she knew, he wasn’t even interested. Why would he be? And even if he had been, her sleeping with his brother probably killed any possible future between them.

Liam peeled out of the parking lot in his Jeep, and Greg flipped them the bird. Lovely.

Indy handed Tim the other helmet. “Don’t put your feet here or here.” She pointed to the back by the wheel and the exhaust pipe. “Don’t lean into turns, or I won’t be able to pull back up. Relax, hold onto my waist, and let me take control.”

Tim brought his hands together in front of him and rubbed his palms. “Sounds fun.” He pulled the helmet over his head and slipped down the visor.

It might have been fun between them, but any hope of a “them” died when she slept with Liam. What kind of woman even contemplated such a thing? She didn’t want to be that person. That kinda girl.

Indy slid her leg over the seat, flipped up the stand, and turned the ignition. “Ready?”

As Tim wrapped his hands around her body, he tucked in close.

She shut her eyes and nearly moaned. Something was seriously wrong with her. How else could she enjoy him touching her? She pulled onto the road, and the back wheel kicked up dirt. The sun, wind, and beachside zoomed by. Clear blue sky, hills, and the ocean view stretched out in front of them. Not a car or person in sight. Tim’s arms holding her and the speed of his breathing, which was deep in and out, amplified. She tilted into the turn.

A sense of free falling accelerated her heart rate. Slamming into the pavement flashed in her mind. The weight of the motorcycle pinning her and dragging her shuttered through her mind.

She didn’t want to over-correct in fear of tipping the bike. She brought them back up right, slowed, and pulled over into the shoulder. Tremors moved through her body. She turned off the bike and kicked the stand down.

Tim removed his helmet and dismounted.

She shook all over. What a wacko Tim must think she was for freaking.

Tim stood in front of her with one leg on each side of the wheel of the motorcycle and lifted off her helmet. He set it down next to his on the ground.

“Indy.” With his hands, he angled her face up. “Indy, look at me.”

The intensity of his crystal blue eyes drew her gaze.

“Did the bottom layer of the ice cream melt into the peach cobbler crust?” he asked.

His words conjured the sensation of the peach, cream, brown sugar, and oats washing over her tongue.

“Yes. It did,” she said.

“Mine, too. I loaded my cornbread with a layer of butter which melted into it.” He smiled. “I’ll need to step up the workout to burn off Bee’s rich food.”



As if. The man was buff. She liked that he hadn't fussed about the order, changing things up for healthier alternatives. What was the point of going there to have salad?

"Are you okay?" Tim asked.

Her breathing had leveled. "I'm better."

"Uneasy about riding?"

"I don't want to be." She hated being afraid.

"Understandable. Given what happened, I'm not surprised. You might need to talk to someone about it."

"No way." It was enough to have her body being held together by pins. She wouldn't do the same to her mind. "No more doctors poking and prodding me, and definitely not messing about my head."

Tim backed away from her.

She grabbed his forearm and stopped his retreat. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that." What a jerk she could be. "I don't think of you like that."

"I get that it's been tough." He covered her hand with his.

Electric static sparked from his touch. She placed her other hand over his.

"Having you there helped. I don't feel I tell you enough how thankful I am to have had your support and help."

He pressed his lips to form a line, lowered his head, and his bangs slid over his brow.

She brushed back his hair with her other fingers. The warmth of him seeped into her. "I wish you'd stop blaming yourself."

"I wish the same of you." He stepped farther back.

Did he not want her to touch him this way? "Maybe we should both ease off on ourselves." She sat on the seat of the bike. "We better head back." Part of her wondered what would have happened between them if she hadn't done what she needed to do to get Liam out of her system.

Tim held out her helmet.

## Chapter Twelve

Indy laughed at the decor of the exterior of her home. Liam and his friends apparently wanted a Griswold Christmas. Flashing LED lights lit Santa and his reindeer, including Rudolph's red nose. From the roof, streams and streams of blue icicle decorations hung. On the lawn, air filled nine-foot-tall caricatures of Frosty the Snowman and the Grinch on each side of the walkway. If only Mum could see the place. It was worse than if Liberace had defecated the front of the house with his sense of style. The annual Christmas family barbeque wouldn't be the same with her parents vacationing in the Caribbean, but she insisted on holding the tradition.

She went around the back of her house, poolside by the fire pit, and sat at the patio table next to Lisa, who was tucked in a comforter. Greg, Mike, and Tim were in the heated saltwater pool. Lisa's boyfriend, James, was talking with Liam at the barbeque.

The typical, bleached blonde Malibu hottie moved in closer. "So, how was he?"

Lisa was the only one she'd let in on her plan to be seduced by Liam. "Not now," Indy whispered.

"That good, huh?" Lisa pushed her sunglasses into her hair.

Liam smiled at her as he manned the barbeque. One of only two men her father ever let touch his grill. Actually, Tim was the only guy her father liked. However, her father tolerated Liam, because he hadn't focused his player ways on her.

"See? He's got radar ears." Indy sunk back. After the ride she gave Tim, Liam was watching her like a hawk.

Since the night of her accident, Tim smiled at her in an awkward way when Liam watched them.

Lisa scooted closer. "You have to tell."

"I will." She fidgeted with the blanket in her lap. "Just not now." Tim didn't need to hear the details of what she and Liam had done.

“Bet you, he’s great in bed.” Lisa nodded with an “oh, yeah.”

Tim came out of the pool and grabbed the towel on the diving board. The towel around his shoulders gaped open, and water dripped off his sculpted body. “What are you two talking about? You appear up to something.”

Her clit throbbed. The man was a ten—his dark brown hair with calm, blue eyes, and a sweet smile. Without a doubt, she was attracted to him. He was fit, too, so what did anyone expect of her?

Liam’s smile faded as he watched from a distance.

“None of your business.” Lisa cocked an eyebrow.

“Don’t be mean.” She was determined to tolerate the sense of uneasiness. The alternative was to avoid Tim, and she didn’t want to.

“Can I talk to you alone?” Tim asked.

Lisa stared at her suspiciously.

If he had something to say, why didn’t he say it when he had her alone earlier? “Sure.”

Tim pulled out a shirt from his duffle bag next to them. As he covered his washboard abs with his T-shirt, Indy rose and followed him.

\* \* \*

Once inside, Tim closed the sliding glass doors behind them for privacy.

The tight rose dress hugged her curves. “You look beautiful.” Why hadn’t seeing her sexually with Liam ended his interest?

She gazed up at him. “Thanks.”

Tim stepped toward her, wanting to enjoy the agony she stirred in him with her mere presence. Since this afternoon when she’d taken him on her bike, he was caught up in how she made him feel. But given the state of things, he evidently didn’t have the same effect on her.

“How are you holding up?” Towel to his head, he drained the water from his hair.

“Better than I expected.” She tapped his forearm lightly. “The rain really seems to affect my hip, but otherwise, I haven’t taken a painkiller in a month. I’m lucky it doesn’t rain much here.”

The feel of her touch lingered. “I meant to ask if you worked everything out for schooling?” Over a year ago, Indy would have backed away, but she didn’t any more. The ill-ease between them was an improvement. As long as Liam wasn’t around, she appeared comfortable when with him. He needed her constant reassurance. Desperate to believe she didn’t blame him for what happened that night.

“Yep. I ship my most important belongings via the postal service. I start University of California Los Angeles campus in January.” She pinched her bottom lip with her index and thumb.

“Have you told your Dad or Liam yet?” He worried about how her father and Liam would take her decision when she told them. Aside from his selfish desire to have her closer, the only reason for her to come home was her own. She was miserable being away. “No.” She down cast her stare.

Neither of those two would make the talk easy on her. “If you want support, I’ll be there.”

“I know. Thanks, Tim, but I have to face Daddy myself.” And she wouldn’t back down just as she continued to push herself to walk without help from a cane. “As for Liam, I have to figure out when and how after we discuss other matters.”

A sliding noise from the patio door caught his attention, and he turned to find Liam.

“The food’s ready.” Liam gestured outside to the table where everyone was seated.

She walked to Liam.

“We’ll finish our talk later.” Tim winked at her.

If Tim didn’t leave, he’d only increase the tension between her and his brother. Tim didn’t want to cause another situation where she got hurt. He exited, leaving them.

## Chapter Thirteen

A tornado of anger swirled inside Liam. Didn't his brother get she was his? Why in hell would he wink at her in front of him? Maybe Tim was trying to provoke him. The problem was it didn't sound anything like his brother. If only he knew what the hell was going on.

"Tim still gives you that extra attention, huh?" His tone peaked with anger.

"Not exactly," she said. "We are friends."

"Friends?" He leveled his voice as he moved closer. "You and my brother? When did that happen?"

"I don't know." Indy shrugged.

What kind of answer was that? "Let me get this straight—you became buddies with someone you didn't like, and you don't know when that occurred?"

Indy moved around him to the doors. "I barely knew him other than what you'd told me, so I don't know why you think I didn't like him. I guess our friendship developed around the time of my accident."

He didn't get it. Why had she turned to Tim and not him after the accident? Did she blame him for what happened that night? Might she have run out, because of how Liam had acted toward her that night? Had she overheard him on the phone with his girlfriend? Was that why she couldn't speak to him about it? He knew he'd been a jerk. All night he'd been feeling her up on the dance floor. At the time, he had a woman.

Liam grabbed her shoulders. "You guess? Why is this the first I'm hearing of it?"

"It's not, Liam. When you stayed back to be with Brenda over Christmas last year, Tim and I hung out. After the accident, he drove me to rehabilitation. We got to know each other and realized how similar we are."

"Here, I thought you'd see through that as just a ploy to get into your pants." Saintly Tim was still a man.

“Liam, do you realize you’re making a big deal out me talking to your brother?”  
She stepped back. “I’m hungry. I hope you join us.”

Why didn’t it feel as though nothing was going on between the two of them?  
He wasn’t imagining the feeling inside that something wasn’t right.

## Chapter Fourteen

Liam grabbed plates and cups from the patio table. His brother was always the sweet, responsible, and helpful one. Tim picked a pile from the other side and headed inside Indy's house.

Liam followed, closing the glass door behind him. "Do you always have to outdo me in front of Indy?"

Tim laughed. "No. You made dinner. I'm trying to do my part. I don't get your hostility. What's your problem?"

"You and how you act around Indy." A tightening feeling pained Liam's chest. "All of your hanging out with her when I'm not around, driving her places, and lurking at her rehabilitation sessions. It's inappropriate." And let's not forget, Tim rode back with her when he damn well knew Liam didn't want her having a motorcycle.

"'Lurking'? Should I have left her to fend for herself? She was injured. Her parents couldn't always drive her. I figured you'd expect me to help out. Our families have known each other for seventeen years." Tim stared at him. "I get it. You feel bad, because you returned to school and didn't stick around to help her. Indy didn't expect you to. If anything, she would have been angry if you did."

His brother had no idea how aggravating it was to have him do the whole paternal thing on him. But he wasn't wrong. Liam would have stayed in a heartbeat. Why was he the last person she wanted help from? Jealousy raged through him at the thought of his brother comforting her after the accident. What was with all the secrecy that seemed to be going on between Indy and Tim?

Liam's stomach clenched. "You're not her type."

"Whoa. What is this about?" Tim lifted his hands in a placating manner. "First, I thought you were worried I'd put the moves on her, but now, I'm thinking you're worried she'll become interested in me. You have nothing to worry about."

Why? Had Tim made a move on Indy, and she shut him down? "What is that supposed to mean? Is there something you'd like to tell me?"

“Back off.” Tim stared out onto the patio with a haunting glimmer in his eyes.  
“See that?”

“What am I to see?” Liam crossed his arms.

“Come here and look at her.” Tim gestured for Liam to stand next to him.

Indy sat at the patio table, talking to Lisa.

Reluctantly, he approached. “What am I seeing?”

“Her left hand.” Tim pointed.

Better he find out where his brother was going with this. “What about it?”

“Be quiet and watch.” Tim huffed. “Watch. She’ll clench her hand.”

Just as he said, Indy’s hand closed to a fist. “Yeah. And what’s your point?”

“Look up at her eyes. Her lashes will flutter. See? You’d think she’s squinting, but she is in a tremendous amount of pain. She hasn’t told anyone how bad things were after the accident, and still are, for her physically. That’s why I’m helping, because Indy is too damn proud to tell you that every step she takes is agony. So rather than have her struggle to help clean up because of her stubborn sense of pride, I am.” Tim walked to the counter and started loading the dishwasher.

Liam moved away from the window. His brother cared about her, and she trusted him enough to confide in him. No, Tim couldn’t have her. He refused loose her. Not to his goddamn perfect brother. She asked him to be her first, not Tim.

\* \* \*

Indy fiddled with her curls. Liam turned away from the window. Great, what had Tim told him? She hated having to walk on eggshells around the two of them. It had been selfish of her when she had begged Tim not to tell anyone what caused her to run out of the house the night of the accident. But when she needed something to hold onto, something to believe in, she had hope that she would one day walk or run into Liam’s arms. If Liam knew the truth about what happened between Tim and her, that possibility wouldn’t have existed.

Lisa tapped on Indy’s hand. “Liam’s not here. I want all the juicy details.”

“It was good.” She rubbed her temple.



“‘Good’?” Lisa narrowed her eyes to half-moons. “Good? You’ve got to be joking. ‘Good’ is something you use to describe sex which wasn’t awful.”

“Everything I’d hope for and more.” No one had told her the rating scale. Besides, she didn’t have anyone to compare him to aside from Tim, which didn’t seem fair to do.

Lisa relaxed with a deep sigh. “Bet he was so tender with you.”

Indy smiled. “Something like that.” Obviously, her friend had a different opinion on sex from her own. Best to let Lisa imagine “good” in her own way. Some people would be horrified at her first time. It had been everything she’d hoped for.

“He wasn’t too bummed when you didn’t climax? Guys are touchy about that, even though it’s an irrational expectation the first time.” Lisa flipped her hair.

Indy grinned. Maybe she knew her body well enough to ask for what she wanted. Or maybe it was because she’d come to terms with her rough desires? One thing was for sure, though, being with Liam was a big part of why she climaxed. She’d never regret it. However, he might.

She cupped her hands around her mouth and angled toward Lisa. “I guess not, since I came twice.”

“Damn, you are lucky, girly.” Lisa giggled, bright-eyed.

“Yeah, I am.” The lack of attachment weighed on her. Shouldn’t she be madly in love or all worried? She had a year to consider her options and come to grips with the outcome of what she’d planned to share with Liam.

James walked toward them from the hot tub, waving at Lisa. “Babe, we have to go.”

“Yes, I know.” She waved back at him. “Wish me luck. I’m meeting his parents.” She stood up and gathered her things.

“Wow. It’s pretty serious, then?” Indy would probably never face the meeting-the-parents day. Once a man found out she couldn’t have kids, he wouldn’t stick around.

“Yeah.” Lisa nodded. “I think he’s the one.”

“Really? So soon?” How did she know? How did anyone? How would Indy know?

“Soon’?” Lisa’s eyes darted back to her. “It will be a year January third.”

Since her accident, she’d retreated from everyone, except for Tim. Only he truly knew what she was going through. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to sound like I question your judgment. I’m just realizing how much time has flown.”

“God. Don’t say that; you nearly died. I didn’t expect you to be worried about my personal life.” Lisa touched her forearm. “I wasn’t a great friend. I couldn’t bring myself to go to the hospital.”

“I didn’t want anyone to come.” Indy rose and hugged her. “You don’t need luck. You’re so lovable.”

The guys came over and said their good-byes. Liam went around front with them. Tim lingered at the back of the house with her to collect his belongings.

A spasm in her leg forced her to clench her teeth together. She hated not being able to stand on her own two feet. The pain she was in wasn’t about to force her to remain seated.

“Are you okay?” Tim’s eyes softened with concern.

“I still get the tremors, ghost sensations from muscles I no longer have.” To reconstruct her leg, the doctors had used muscles from donors. She felt sewn together by patchwork, like Frankenstein a quilt of mismatched pieces.

“You push yourself too hard, always have. I like that about you, but you need someone who’ll help you ease off.” He drew up behind her. “Put your weight on me.”

“Tim.”

“Do it,” he ordered.

As he gathered her up, the heat of his hard chest pressed to her back, and he lowered her into the lawn chair. “Bossy.”

“Only around you, Miss Independent.” The rise and fall of his chest accelerated. Calm, blue eyes warmed to flames.

Heat weaved a path in her insides turning her to mush.

“I’d better go.” He tossed his bag on his shoulder.

Pain burned her eyes. Being with Liam meant losing Tim, and she needed him. “You shouldn’t go just because the others have.”

Tim lifted her chin, forcing her gaze to his. “Yes, I should. Merry Christmas Eve, Indy, and I hope Santa gets you your heart’s desire.”

“You, too.” She nodded and grabbed his large, warm, kind hand. In April, his hands had stabilized her when she took her first steps since the accident.

“Unfortunately, mine is no longer available. Never really was for that matter.” He exhaled. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

She tightened her hold. “Tim, thank you for everything. I don’t know how I would have managed without your help and support.”

“It’s the least I could do, given—”

“Given what?” Liam asked, standing by the open gate to the backyard.

“What she went through. I hope you both have a wonderful evening.” Tim dashed passed his brother.

Fuck, that was close. Though nothing had happened between her and Tim, she felt guilty. She didn’t want to deceive Liam, but he wouldn’t understand the connection which came out of that night between them. How could he when she struggled to understand?

## Chapter Fifteen

Liam got the sense he'd missed something. Indy stared off in the distance with a well of tears in her eyes. What was she thinking? She clenched her fist and squinted her eyes. Tim's revelation worried him.

"Indy." Liam leaned his hands on the back of her seat.

"Yes?" She turned to him; her pretty, hazel eyes met his stare.

"It's only eight-thirty. Do you want to watch TV? *It's a Wonderful Life* is probably on. Or we could talk?" Since they'd gotten home, he and Indy had barely spoken.

"I was hoping we could pick up where we left off last night." She perked up.

Why the hell didn't she want to just chill? The most words she'd exchanged with him were in bed. Weren't women always complaining men never talked? If the woman was happy to push aside all the messy emotional stuff, why was he trying to stir them? Probably because she seemed to have no interest in him beyond sex.

"Okay." He picked her up into his arms.

Movement from Tim's bedroom window caught his attention. Hopefully, his brother figured out that something was going on between him and Indy and would squash any feelings he'd developed for her.

"Put me down." She glanced at him, and then over at the light from Tim's room.

Why the hell did she care if Tim saw them? "What?"

"Down. Now!" She raised her voice.

What had he done now? "All right." He set her down.

She stormed into the house and marched to the stairs.

Entering the house, he closed the patio door and made his way to her room. He was no closer to figuring out what was going on between them than before. The last thing he wanted was for sex to cost him his best friend.

Indy sat at the edge of the bed.

He stopped just past the doorway.

"I can't believe you." She vigorously moved her head from side to side. "Doing such a lame romantic gesture to make Tim jealous. I know you feel inferior to him, but that was mean."

Lame? Her words stung. Indy could gut him like a fish with mere words. And if his brother wasn't into her, why would he be jealous?

"That's not what happened. He was watching us. I didn't even know until after I picked you up." No one could live up to Tim, so he'd given up trying a long time ago. "Why would you bring up the fact that I feel second-rate to him?"

"Well, it's just that there is no reason for it." She hung her head. "Tim's got issues of his own."

Did he? This was news to him. "Like what?"

"Never mind." She plopped onto the bed.

"No, enlighten me. What problems does my perfect brother have? Other than being successful, respected, financially secure, and a saint for trying to raise his bitter, little, abandoned brother who wrecked the family by spilling the beans on Dad's affairs?" He huffed. "I've gotta stand here and listen to you tell me how bad Tim has it?"

"Enough."

"No, go on. Tell me."

"Why do you gotta be like this? He's your brother, and he loves you."

Liam walked over to the bed and sat next to her. Reaching for her cheek with his thumb, he trailed along the edge of her jaw line.

"I know he does." He kissed her nose. What he wanted was for her to love him. If sex would end this conversation, all the better. "What can I do you for tonight?"

"Well, I was hoping I could do for you."

This sounded promising. "Hmm, and what did you have in mind?"

"Sucking your cock." She tilted her head. "And then we could have anal. If that isn't too bad, we could try double penetration."

His dick responded with a twitch. This had to mean more to her than exploring her sexuality with someone safe. Didn't it?

"Do you mind standing for the blowjob?"

Would that put pressure on her hip? “No, but wouldn’t it be more comfortable on the bed?”

“Liam, I want to kneel. The idea really turns me on. If I’m uncomfortable, we can switch.” She sat up.

His head spun. One moment, this seemed to mean more to her, and the next, he was just the guy she’d picked to help her explore sex. Worst of all, he couldn’t bring himself to put a stop to this. The curtains remained open about a foot. It wouldn’t be such a bad thing if Tim got the hint.

Indy undressed. He pulled his shirt off and unbuttoned his pants.

“What are you doing?” She frowned.

Deep-sea diving, what did it look like he was doing? “Getting naked.”

She wagged her index finger at him. “No, please, I want you wearing your pants, so I can pull your cock out.”

Liam buttoned his pants and stood. He couldn’t think straight when she talked this way. Lord, help him!

\* \* \*

Indy wondered what Tim would do tonight. Would he spend Christmas Eve alone? Everything was even murkier now. Liam’s behavior toward her and Tim wouldn’t improve, especially once she told him what happened last New Year’s Eve. Sex with him changed how Liam treated her, and not for the better.

Reaching forward, she unzipped his pants and pushed his boxers down to his ankles. His hard cock pitched out horizontally. She wrapped her hand around the shaft and traced her lips with the head. Smooth and silky skin met with hers. She inhaled the musk of his arousal. How could she share such intimate acts with him and feel more disconnected from him than ever? She licked the head, the length of his shaft, and retracted her tongue. She tasted the saltiness of his skin. Opening her mouth to take him in, she met Liam’s eyes, glazed with a lustful hunger. Oh, how she wanted to pleasure him. She explored around the edges of the head. As her mouth passed back and forth over the satin flesh, she moaned. She needed to feel him slip in and out of her mouth. With her lips, she glided down his shaft until the tip of his penis met the back of her throat. For years, she longed to know Liam this way. Finally, she had him between her lips. She

skimmed her mouth over his cock. Then she licked from the base to tip, coating his dick in her saliva. Using the slickness, she jerk her hand from the base to the head and back again.

Liam groaned with a half-smile.

She pumped the lower half, sucked the head, and lifted her gaze to his.

As she worked him, the heat in Liam's stare encouraged her. Tenderly, he stroked her cheek with his hands. She withdrew her mouth from his cock. While her hand continued to slide over the shaft, his thighs trembled. He grunted harshly between heavy breaths.

"Would you be comfortable guiding my head and talking dirty to me?" she asked.

"Huh?" He panted.

"Will you guide my head and talk dirty to me?"

Both his eyebrows shot up. "Yeah."

Indy grinned. "Okay, start off slow, and if you feel me resisting, stop."

He nodded. "Will do."

Swirling her tongue around the head as his caressing touch move her down the shaft made her clit throb. He rested his hands in her hair. With his guidance, her mouth went to the base. She was amazed at how much of him she could take. She tasted the head.

"That's it, baby. Suck it."

She suckled on the tip; his hand nudged her mouth forward down the shaft. Salty fluid hit the back of her throat, making her moan. Heavy with need, her breasts swung, and her sex was wet with want for his mouth.

"Lick it." He led her to the crown.

Eagerly, she complied, working all the way around. She wanted him telling her how to please him.

"Suck it."

She moaned. He guided her mouth faster, moving her along with the command of his hands, back and forth.

He groaned. "That's it. Right...there. Damn...Indy."

The harshness in his tone sent a shiver through her. She wanted him to fuck her mouth and come. She met with his lustful stare as his hand steered her lips along the length a little faster each time. The tip dripped the salty taste of him, and all she could think of was how much she wanted to feel him release.

“Right...there.” He thrust in. “You like me fucking...your mouth, don’t you?”

She loved the raw pitch and dominance. The loss of his control and his desire for the relief she provided him egged her on. The feel of him passing between her lips was heaven.

“Your mouth feels so good.” He pumped into her more erratically, his hand touched her face gently, and he licked his lips.

“Indy.” Thrusting faster into her mouth, Liam groaned. “Mmm, gonna—”

Reveling in Liam’s plea for her, she sped the motion. Hot cum gushed on her tongue; his cock jerked and throbbed in her mouth. He held her head as he groaned with a hard, throaty grunt.

She swallowed. Subsequent pumps coated her mouth in his flavor. She twirled the head with her tongue and took in the last of him.

He withdrew, made his way over to the bed, and sat, catching his breath.

One more thing she could cross off her list.

What would Tim taste like? This wasn’t the time to be thinking about him.



## Chapter Sixteen

Liam stroked her face. “Pleased with yourself?”

Damn, she was sexy, smart, and independent. Everything he wanted in a woman. The kind of woman a man could settle down with. They’d need to manage a long-distance relationship awhile, until both of them finished their degrees.

“Only if you are.” Vulnerability held in her eyes, which caught him off guard.

What was going on with her? In all the years he’d known Indy, when had she ever wanted his praise? Yet, there she was asking for it. “Yes, very.”

She crawled to him. He touched her cheek and kissed her hot lips. The pleasure her mouth bestowed him flashed in his mind. Very talented, indeed.

“Liam.” She pulled back.

The flat tone of her voice caused his heart to beat irregularly. “Yes?”

“I really want you to fuck my ass.”

He grew stiff. A smile crept to his lips at her choice of words, but an odd jab stabbed him. Something about the way she acted felt off. Why was she in such a rush? He ran his hand in his hair slowly.

She narrowed her eyes. “What?”

“We can take our time. I’m back until after New Year. I assume you are, too.”

“Okay, and...” She reclined.

“And nothing. I’d just like to catch-up.”

“Oh.” With a sigh, she rose. “If it’s too soon after, I’ll let you recharge, while I finish other things.”

“Ouch. That’s pretty cold, even for you.” Something was up, and her reaction confirmed it.

“Don’t pull this warm-and-fuzzy crap on me. I’m not one of your cougar groupies.” She crossed her arms and paced.

Warm-and-fuzzy crap, was she for real? “Why are you on the attack?”

“I’m not. It’s just that I’m not able to do the friends-with-benefits thing. I’d like to keep my emotions in check. I don’t have a sexual Rolodex of the forgotten or the outgrown. I know you too well to be blindsided by your charm.”

“You think I’d run game on you?” That knife sunk directly into his heart. How could she think such a thing?

“Not intentionally, but I’m not willing to do this by ear. If you can’t respect that, let’s stop now.”

The truth in her eyes delivered on a silver platter. She could just walk away from what they were sharing. “Are you afraid of developing feelings for me?”

“Of course not. I like how I feel about you. You are a wonderful friend, but you’ve put the women you date through hell. And I’m not interested in more misery. Can you respect me enough to not attempt one more conquest?”

This was even worse than he’d thought. “All right, we do this your way. Sexual exchange, back to friendship after.” If he was smart, he’d pull out of this. He focused on her request. “What would be most comfortable?”

“What I’d like is for you to take me on all fours. I’ve read that the spooning position is the easiest for a newbie like me.”

A newbie, who’d read up like a pro, perhaps. Not that Liam would have bedded a virgin on purpose. No, thank you, ma’am. He preferred a woman with some experience and preferences. Indy somehow didn’t fit the profile. He had always been very open with her about what he was into sexually. He was willing to take her however she was offering herself. Her comfort in this case was paramount. He pushed further onto the bed and removed his pants from around his ankles.

“Liam, we can use a condom and Astroglide, or Astroglide and no condom, or Vaseline or baby oil and no condom. It’s up to you.” Indy pulled out a jar and bottle from the top drawer and placed them on the nightstand.

Indy just offered him sex without protection. Ehh, think! “Which is best for anal?” Yeah, he needed to use the other head. Of course, he wanted that, but he had none of the risks she did.

“Baby oil seems to be the preferred choice of ‘bumfuckers.’” She teased.

“You’re calling me a bumfucker?” He laughed. “Give me a chance to do it before the name calling starts.” Abrupt and tactless at times, but he still loved her. “What’s your preference?”

“From what I’ve read and personal experience using baby oil to finger myself anally, the issue is it’s unsafe.”

Impressive, she had fingered her ass. He’d never seen her do those things from his window view. A new hobby? True that baby oil broke down the condom which nullified the use. “I’ve tested clean since my last girlfriend and I broke it off on January first.”

“If I was worried about the risk you posed, I wouldn’t have sucked your cock without protection.”

“I’m good with baby oil and no condom.”

“Great.” Indy reached into the nightstand drawer and pulled out wet wipes. She put the oil in her hands and stroked his cock.

He lay back while her small hands rubbed down the shaft and up to the head. The gloriously silky feeling of her was heaven. The thought of what they were about to do caused delirium to set in. He closed his eyes to enjoy her masterful strokes.

“Lay on your side towards me.”

Pushy girl! But he followed the order.

She slipped in front of him, drizzled lotion on her fingers, and slid them between her butt cheeks. This woman.

She moaned. “Would you like to help get me all oiled up?”

“Mmm hmm, would I ever.” He held out his right hand, while she dripped oil on his digits. Once she stopped, he glided his fingers to her anus. He moved his index back and forth, applying pressure.

“Oh, Liam.” Her eyes smoldered. She cleaned her hand while he continued to explore. Reaching over to her goody bag, she pulled out the vibrator and held the phallic device like a trophy for him to see. Then she put the toy on the bed.

“You’re not too sore?”

“Definitely not.” She wiggled her bottom. “You ready?”

“Yeah.” He retracted his finger.

She handed him a wet wipe before turning away from him. She pressed her bottom against his erection. He leaned in and kissed between her shoulders, he tossed the wet wipe in the trash next to the bed.

“I’ll guide you in with my hand, okay?”

“Uh-huh.” Allowing his left hand to skim her skin from the arch of her back up her spine to her neck, he pushed her hair out of his way, then kissed her exposed curls at the nape.

She wrapped her hand around the base, causing his erection to grow harder.

“Can you move your body closer?”

He scooted in a little closer to her. She pressed the head against her sphincter and pushed her opening to his cock. Her anus widened to accommodate his entrance.

“Damn, Indy, you’re incredible.” He rubbed her back and kissed her shoulders.

She rocked into him. His fantasies were coming true. She felt so tight.

Managing to work the head in, she swayed back and forth into him.

“Should I?”

“No...please! Let me take more of you in, then you can fuck me.”

Her words made his cock jerk. She moaned. This was madness. She rocked her body a little harder into him each time. A deep, raspy gasp escaped her. He nibbled her neck. She arched her back. The motion forced his shaft deeper inside. Her breasts jiggled from the motion. The visual was exquisite, the feel was mind-blowing, and the sound brought him to the edge.

“You look so sexy.” He took hold of her breast and played with her bud.

She had him halfway in, and still her body didn’t seem adjusted to his size. She took his hand and guided him between her legs. The slippery wetness between her thighs he didn’t expect. He moved his hand farther, finding her folds even slicker, and rubbed the nub beneath his fingers.

It had been no lie when she told him how much this excited her. “Indy.”

“Please, don’t rub too much. I’m already close to coming,” she pleaded.

“Shhh, shh. It’s all right, baby.” He cradled her, wanting to comfort her.

“Slowly, start rocking in and out of me.” She released his cock.

Nearly completely in, he pushed and matched her motion. He clamped her hip as he pumped in and out.

“A little harder,” she requested.

Increasing his pace, he trembled.

“Deeper.”

He drove harder. As she cried out, he slowed.

“No.” She grabbed his hand. “More. Like that.”

He repeated, forcing deeper. As he thrust harder, she locked her fingers with his.

“Take the vibrator, Indy. Turn the thing on and work it inside your pussy. Can you do that for me?” He was so close to coming, he wasn’t sure how much longer he’d hold.

“Yes.” She nodded.

Everything blew his mind. Her cries killed him. How tight she felt, tormented him. Her lust for him, drove him. The demand in her voice pressed him on. A willingness from her to do as he ordered caused him to give her what she wanted.

The vibrator disappeared down between her legs, and slowly he felt the vibration as well.

“Liam.” She sounded hoarse. “Would you pull my hair?” She swallowed hard. “Spank me. I’ve been...a naughty girl.” She guided his hand, held to her raised butt cheek, and released.

“Indy?” Liam moved slower, preventing his climax.

“Please, Liam.”

He eased his arm from beneath her and grabbed a hand full of her hair from just above her neck. Pulling her face back, he stared into her hazel eyes. He tapped her ass with an open palm, using light force. Indy moaned. He smacked the cheek with greater intensity the second time. A light scream escaped her, followed by an approving smile. Indy made the situation impossible for him to have any restraint. He pumped into her, picking up the pace, and thrust deeper. The third spank was harder, causing her to gasp. The pink imprint of his hand on her bottom brought him back to the brink.

“Oh...naughty girl.” He retracted his hand back to come for his fourth spank of her booty. When he met her flesh, the sting of his hand burned his palm.

“Ah, more.” She moaned. “Harder.”

He thrust into her faster, while he yanked her hair.

“You want more, don’t you, naughty girl?”

“Yes, please.”

He paddled her rear, and his cock buried in her.

“Liam...umm...coming.”

She jerked against him. Why did she want him doing these things to her? He covered her mouth with his. With the muscles of her ass pulsing around his shaft, bliss flooded his entire body. He released inside her. As she quivered, she cried out. He gushed his seed into her ass. “Indy.” As he held her close, he nuzzled to her ear. “My sweet, sex goddess, that was insane.” Catching his breath, he kissed her cheek and withdrew. He lay back, completely drained.

“There’s nothing sweet about me.” Her tone was harsh.

Did he miss something?

She disappeared into the bathroom and closed the door.

The shower started, so he got up and knocked on the door. “Can I join you?”

“Not right now; use the hall bathroom.”

Why hadn’t she wanted him in there? Had he upset her? Did he hurt her? Should he push her?

“All right.”

\* \* \*

The pain was unbearable. She huddled in the fetal position at the bottom of the shower, glad Liam didn’t push about joining her. The ache of her hip made her ill. She asked him for the spanking, and at the time, the punishment felt exquisitely delicious, but now, she paid for it. She hoped the warm water would help, refusing to give in and take a pill for relief. Squeezing her eyes, forced the tears down her cheeks, and her jaw trembled. She held back from screaming out. Every part of her body was tense, and she feared losing control.

She concentrated on slow, deep breaths to let out the pain and regained her composure. Taking her time, she stood, and washed her hair.

A knock broke the silence.

“Yeah?” She shouted.

“Are you all right? You’ve been in there a while.” Liam sounded concerned.

“I’m fine.” As good as she could be, given she was screwing everything up so badly. “Just conditioning my hair.”

“All right.”

She washed her body and finished rinsing off.

When she exited the bathroom, Liam lay under the covers. The look on his face she couldn’t compare with any she’d ever seen. She moved over to the chair and slipped her nightgown over her head, using the motion as an excuse to turn, putting her back to his penetrating stare. “It’s still pretty early. Are you sure you want to go to bed?” On the nightstand was an unopened bag of Swedish Berries. She hadn’t brought it, so it had to have come from Liam. She couldn’t let him charm her when soon enough he’d hate her.

“I wasn’t planning on sleeping. I thought we’d talk.”

“Talk?” That was the last thing Indy wanted to do. She wanted to veg out and watch TV. She wasn’t immune to feelings of guilt. Those feelings crept in more and more. What was there to talk about? What if he questioned her about the night of the accident?

## Chapter Seventeen

What should Liam make of Indy's lack of communication, or the fact she seemed upset with him? He waited a few moments. She made no attempt at speaking.

"Don't act like you're off to the electric chair, Indy." He'd spent hours talking to this woman, debating her, and now, they seemed unable to have a conversation about anything but sex. Exactly the reason he always feared sleeping together would be a bad idea.

"I'm not. What do you want to talk about?" She avoided facing him. Why was she acting as though she was willing to indulge him in a few words?

"How's school?" Maybe he could ease her into things.

"I don't like talking about it." She massaged her forehead.

"Why? You've done amazing. You're one course shy of making up the semester you missed. You should be proud; I am." The woman went from being told she'd never walk unassisted to getting her academics in order in less than a year. What man wouldn't want her at his side? She wasn't a quitter.

She huffed. "If it makes you happy, school's peachy."

"You know that's not what I want. How's rehabilitation coming along? Your walk is back to what it was before—sexy."

"My walk might look fine, but my hip feels stiff and awkward." The attitude in her tone was evident in her sharp pronunciation of each word. "It has improved a lot, though." Now, the fake upbeat sound in her pitch came to the forefront.

Why didn't she want to discuss this stuff with him? He just didn't get it. The landmine seemed to include all topics.

"And is there pain? The scars are barely visible. But is there discomfort?" Running a hand through his hair slowly, he prepared for her response.

She glanced at him. "Tim told you, didn't he?" Her eyes were aimed angrily at him.



He propped up on his elbows. Why was she keeping things from him? What reason had she to treat him like this? When he busted up his knee and his football aspirations were dashed, Indy was the one who'd helped him pick himself up and pushed him to get his academics in order to get into Cornell's architectural program.

"He shouldn't have had to." Frustration laced the octave of his voice. "Why didn't you tell me you were hurting?"

"And what were you going to do for me? The muscles in my left leg and thigh were shredded. My hip fractured, and my pelvis has metal pins in it. Pain is part of the deal, and I'm coping with it. The only reason Tim knows is he was there when I was weaning myself off the painkillers. The pain causes me to have the shakes." She turned to him. "I know it's dumb, but my biological mother was an addict, and I don't want to end up dead like her, okay?" She crossed her arms. "I like how I felt on the drugs, the numb, dull feeling. I think of the oblivion, wish for the fog it created in my mind, and want it."

"Indy, we could have talked about it, figured out a better way." Liam reached for her hand.

She pulled away. "You think that's what I want from you? For you to be one more on the list of people telling me how to cope?"

"All right, I get it. You don't want my help." He had lost this discussion and should exit now.

"Good! We have cleared that up." With an exaggerated smile pasted to her lips, she glanced his way. "Do you want to go downstairs and watch a movie?"

"Sure." He had no other options available to him at this point. She was hostile, and it was best not to push.

He lay behind her on the sofa, and they watched *Scrooged*. As her body relaxed, he pulled her into him. Looking down to find her asleep, he played with her curls.

He pressed his lips to her temple. "I love you."

Now, he only had to tell her when she was awake. How? With her seeming so unreceptive other than during sex, and there, she wanted him aggressive towards her. He carried her up to bed.

## Chapter Eighteen

Tim buried his face deep in Indy's labia

"Indy?" His brother's voice came from the hall.

Her body became stiff, so he peeled his mouth from her pussy.

"Tim?" she asked, barely a whisper.

"Yes." Shocked that she seemed unsure, he removed his hands from her body.

"Oh, my God, I thought you were Liam." She gasped for air. "Lord."

Hearing her hyperventilating, Tim rose and backed away. "Shit-t-t. I thought you knew." He reached over and flicked on the light. "Indy, I'm so sorry."

She hid her face in her hands. "I can't believe this." She pushed her skirt back down and clutched her stomach. "I'm going to be sick."

Those words caused a sharp pain in his chest. This couldn't be happening. Was she repulsed?

Liam called out from a farther point. "Indy?"

Dashing for the door, she pulled the handle, fumbled her way to the stairs. For a moment, what had just happened made him unable to move.

Hearing her footsteps in the stairs worried him, and he ran after her. "Indy." As Tim sprinted behind her, he called to her. She darted out the front door.

"Indy." Liam's voice was stern.

Running to her bike, she jumped on and kicked up the stand. She started the engine and turned the accelerator, then sped off.

"Indy."

As she glanced back, the bike leaned too much to one side. Tim hustled after her as fast as his legs could carry him.

She slammed into the pavement, her bike dragging her along. The scraping of the metal on the pavement was the only sound in the still night air. The bike came to screeching halt against the sidewalk.

Liam cried out. "No." The raw pitch of his voice lingered in the air.

They ran, pounding their feet in the pavement until they reached her. “God.” Tim knelt down next to her battered body; blood poured from her head and pooled beneath her. As he started assessing the medical situation, he ordered Liam to call 911.

Tim opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling fan above his bed. The odd wobble in the rotation caught his attention. “Fuck.” He’d done that to her.

He sat up, and Indy’s bedroom window curtains were gaping open. The lovebirds were still sleeping. Maybe this was bad idea. Maybe she shouldn’t tell Liam.

## Chapter Nineteen

Indy gasped from the images of the events of the night of her accident. As always, her clit throbbed with want. The feel of Tim she wanted to forget and did her best never to think of it. Her body longed for Tim's lips and tongue. The heat in his hands as he'd touched her still tormented her.

Liam's arms were around her. Shit. Why couldn't the outcome be different for once? Because she couldn't rewrite the past. No amount of wishing could fix what happened that night. She hadn't wanted to have known the feel of Tim. From what she could tell, Tim was consumed with guilt from all angles. She didn't understand how she could barely remember the physical pain of the accident, but her body didn't want to forget Tim's ecstasy. How Tim's touch haunted her. Tears formed in her eyes. This wasn't the time to get emotional. She didn't want Liam comforting her after what she did. When her body longed for—Tim.

Things were only more of a mess now. Wanting to believe sleeping with Liam couldn't possibly change their friendship, she had hoped to erase someone else. Boy, did she ever get this one wrong. She was being unkind to Liam, because he cared. Great job!

Liam moved his hand toward her breast. One last time, and then she'd tell him. She was a selfish girl. As she closed her eyes, she imagined Tim.

\* \* \*

Liam was about to do something he had never done. He couldn't stop how he felt about Indy.

"Merry Christmas." He kissed her head.

"Merry Christmas."

"Hope you don't mind if I help myself to the best gift."

"What might that be?" She cocked an eyebrow.

"You." Liam slipped his hands under her satin, cream-colored nightgown.

As he moved his hands over her skin, she moaned. He pulled her nighty off. Her nipples were hard. He pinched them between his index finger and thumb.

Wanting to take his time and enjoy how great they seemed to connect in bed, he pressed his lips into her hip, and he kissed over her scars.

“Indy, you’re beautiful.” He caressed a trail up her hip to her ribcage.

She moaned. All he wanted was to adore her. Didn’t she feel that? He licked the underside of her breast, moving his tongue up to her nipple. He circled around her hard button, while his hand played with the other. Taking her into his mouth, he sucked.

He wanted to bring her pleasure. “You have no idea what you do to me.”

“Show me.”

He smiled. This was one of the reasons he enjoyed her—she never stopped challenging him.

She kissed him with hunger. Forcing him on the bed, she grabbed his boxers. He lifted up, so she could pull them off. She took a condom from the nightstand, removed the rubber from the packet, and rolled the latex down his shaft.

“I noticed the Swedish Berries.” Indy placed one leg on each side and straddled.

He sat up and started softly kissing her neck to her ear. “Are they still your favorite?” This was more than sex for him. He held her hips and kept her at bay, wanting more time to relish her body before he was inside her.

“A close second to a new salty treat.” She struggled against his hands. Just listening to her heavy breathing overpowered him.

She wrapped her hand around the length and moved forward. The smell of her arousal rose.

“You are cruel.” He shifted his angle away, released her hips, and continued kissing her neck. Feeling her adjust over him again, he touched her face with his palm and stared in her eyes. “You like the taste of my cum that much?”

“I do.” She rose up, then her tight opening moved down on his cock. She accepted all of him in her snug pussy. He kissed from her lips along her jawline, then cradled her back with his hand, and his other held her breast.

She slid up and down. Parted lips allowed for her deep moans. She took his cock into her with sharp motions. Deliberate about the speed, she moved on him, her juices dripping onto his balls.

He touched her chin, stroking the skin with his thumb, and brushed her cheek with the backside of his fingers. "Indy."

Covering his mouth with hers, she glided on him faster. "Yes, Liam." She moaned between kisses.

He wrapped his hand behind her neck as he pulled her mouth to his, wanting to feel her hot lips. Using his arm, he rushed her speed. Faster and deeper, he slipped her on him, wanting to hear her moan for him. The lust in her gaze drove him.

Indy's gasped turned to sharp grunts. He rocked his cock into her from beneath. A flush burned her cheeks to a shine. Wrapping his other arm around her back, he shifted his weight, forcing her onto the bed. He lifted up. He brushed her hair from her face.

"Indy." He thrust into her and pressed deep, then stopped.

She fixed her gaze to his. He slid back away and touched her mid-drift, tracing along her waist with his index finger, and pumped his weight into her.

"We've been playing around a long time." She slipped his fingers down to her clit. "I think the time for games is over." He stroked her swollen nub.

She let out a deep exhaled. He dipped in. With deliberate pumps, he drove into her, while his digits strummed her clit. Her pants became cries for relief with frantic breaths. The pulsating of her tender flesh beneath his touch made him mad with lust. He stimulated quicker, her body ceded to his command, and she shook beneath him.

"Oh, Liam." Every part of her quivered in his arms. "You make me come..."

He lowered, plunging deep into her. Framing her face with his hands, he stared into her eyes. The wave of his release gushed from his cock.

"I love you." He kissed her.

She dropped her mouth open and pushed him with her palms, forcing him back. She got out of the bed and ran into the bathroom.

"Shit." He got up, removed the condom, and tossed the rubber in the trash next to her nightstand. "Indy?" Locating his boxers, he put them on, then knocked on the bathroom door. "Open the door."

"No," she responded from the other side.

He turned the doorknob. "Come on." He didn't want to sound angry, because he was hurt.

"I'm going to pretend you never said that to me," she said with a strain in the pitch of her voice.

"I don't want you to do that. It's true, and I've felt this way for a while." He leaned on the door. Her silence was painful. "Indy?"

"Leave!"

How could she send him away for telling her his feelings? "Open the door. We need to talk."

"About?"

"The Theory of Relativity." He scratched his head. "Us."

"No, that's the thing. There isn't an 'us.'"

Could Indy not care about him beyond the friendship? And the sex was a means to an end? For years, everyone had believed and commented on how they thought she loved him. Had he let himself buy into what he wanted to be true? "If you mean that, you're going to have to come out here and tell me."

The door opened. She was wrapped in a towel. She limped over to the bed and took a seat, then crossed her arms.

He rested his back on the wall.

"I have something to tell you, and I don't want you interrupting me." She stroked her temple.

Please, God, don't let Tim have something to do with this. "All right."

"The night of the accident, it was dark when I got upstairs. I thought you pulled me into the bathroom and kissed me. I didn't know until I heard you call my name from the hall that it was Tim. That's why I ran out and took off on my bike."

His heart pounded in his chest. Anger burned his eyes. "My God." His Indy and Tim. "It all makes sense now." He slid down the wall to the floor. Tears welled in his eyes. The two people he loved the most had been hiding this from him for over a year. If she wanted him, then why not now? What changed?

"Explain?"

Indy's head lowered. "What part?"

“Tell me why you took off on your bike. Were you disgusted he touched you? When he kissed you, and you believed it was me, you enjoyed his touch. You wanted me to touch you that night. I don’t understand.”

“Shock, confusion, and fear. I didn’t know what I thought of him touching me. I just knew I expected it to be you. Yes, that night I wanted you.”

“Then why all this?”

“For so long, I loved you. I’d always thought one day you’d realize I was right for you, too. But with what happened, I drifted away from you, and so did my heart. I only realized after we slept together that I feel more than an attraction to Tim, too. I’m sorry.” Tears spilled onto her cheeks.

Had the spark between them been ignited the night of the accident, or as Tim cared for her? “I waited too long to tell you how I feel about you.”

“We were both kids.” She wiped her face. “The accident changed my life. I’ve spent the last year in fear you wouldn’t be able to accept what happened that night. I didn’t take the time to figure out what I wanted.”

He crawled over to her. One night sent his dreams spiraling out of control. He breathed in the sweet, coco-butter smell of her body. He lowered her onto his lap and skimmed her mouth with his lips.

“I need time, Liam.” She pulled back.

“Why didn’t you figure out how you felt before you fucked me?” Hurt seized his throat. He set her on the bed and grabbed his pants.

“I thought I did know.”

“What changed? Was my performance not up to par?” He tugged up his slacks.

Indy stood. “What?”

“You heard me.” How could he not question his abilities?

“Liam, this isn’t about the sex.”

“You made it about that when you slept with me and had already done only God knows what with Tim. Why have me taste what isn’t mine to have? Your innocence, Indy. Not some fuck buddy or booty call. Your fucking innocence.”

“Get out.” She gestured to the door.

Why was she angry with him? She’d just ripped his heart and soul to pieces.  
“No.”



"I don't want you here when you're like this." She ran out of the room. Her footsteps could be heard rushing down the stairs.

Liam grabbed his shirt, pulled the fabric over his head, and chased her. "Like what, Indy?" How was he the bad guy in all this? She and Tim hid the cause of her accident from him. He reached the foyer.

"Angry." She stood in her towel and opened the front door. "I want you to leave."

He slammed it shut. "No. I'm not done yet."

She reached for the handle. "Yes, you are. This discussion is over."

"I should have known you sucked cock too good for it to be the first time." He faced her.

She slapped him. He caught her wrist midair. Struggling to free herself from his grip, she backed away. "You were the first! Now, let me go and get out."

"I thought you liked these kinds of games. Who? Tell me. Who taught you how to play them? Tim?" All this time, Tim knew. And hadn't breathed a word to him. His own brother.

She raised her other hand to push him, but he grabbed that, too, and forced her onto the wall behind. Her towel loosened and pooled to the floor.

"Go to hell, Liam!" she yelled at him.

"Thanks to you, I'm already there." The woman he loved, cherished for years was into Saint Tim. He'd lost her before it even began.

"Let me go." Indy tried to wiggle her wrist free from his clutch.

"Not until I'm done with you." His affection wasn't good enough for her, but his body seemed to be.

"What do you want from me?" she asked.

"Well, the only thing you seem willing to offer me is your body." Liam leaned in for a kiss.

She turned from him. "Don't be like this."

"Shhh, shh, just close your eyes and pretend I'm Tim, since we feel so much alike." Why couldn't she tell the difference between them? He'd been touching her all night at the club.

Indy spat in his face. He released her and wiped the saliva on the sleeve of his shirt.

“You don’t get to speak to me like that.” She picked up her towel and covered up. “In all the years I’ve known you, not once have you let on about having feelings for me. I was clear when I asked you to sleep with me what the score was. For years, you strung me along, while you took your pleasure from every woman who wasn’t me.” She turned from him. “Now, get out.”

Liam grabbed her forearms. “I’m not done.”

“Yes, you are, and so am I.” She didn’t meet his gaze.

“What’s the problem, Indy?” Wasn’t this what she wanted from him? “Am I not taking my pleasure from you?”

Her hands traveled from her shoulders down, removing his touch from her skin. “I don’t want you touching me like this, with you hating me.”

Fuck. He let go of her and sat on the stairs to the left of her. “I seriously can’t believe you’d keep this from me. My own brother. I’ve made my views clear on that kind of trailer-park behavior.” Leaning back, he placed his elbows on the stair behind him. “I want to know what exactly happened sexually with Tim that night.” His tone held anger. He was unable to control the fury inside him.

She leaned her shoulder onto the wall. “We kissed, and he went down on me.”

“Did you come?” he asked.

“No.” She wrapped her arms around her torso and stroked her sides.

Both of them hid this from him. “What’s Tim’s excuse for all this?”

“Tim thought I made a pass at him in the kitchen.” She rubbed her eyes.

“So did I. That’s why when I got out of the shower, and you weren’t in my bed, I came looking for you. I would have flipped out if I’d found you two. Your flirting, teasing ways finally caught up to you, huh?” Shit. He was an ass for saying those words to her.

Indy pressed her back to the wall.

Liam rose from the stairs and stood in front of her. He softly touched her face with the back of his hand.

“A few moments ago, I made love to a woman for the first time. I confessed my feelings. Now, the sight of you disgusts me.”

Stepping back, he turned and left. Indy slid down the wall to the floor, huddled, and cried. He'd never forgive either of them for this.

## Chapter Twenty

Tim checked his BlackBerry. The last messaged was from Indy confirming Liam knew the truth. She hadn't responded to his inquiry as to how his brother reacted to the news. Perhaps this was because they were celebrating their love for each other. Liam might not have flown off the handle in the way he'd suspected. Everything was finally out in the open. It was time for him to accept there wasn't anything between Indy and him. She loved Liam.

Dad sat holding Josie. Cindy fussed about the kitchen, putting the final touches on Christmas dinner. He couldn't help but wish Indy was there with him.

"No word from Liam?" Dad asked.

Tim shook his head. Despite the man's faults, he did love him, Liam, and Josie. Part of Dad was grateful Liam hadn't kept his latest affair a secret. It wasn't a burden a parent should put on their child.

"Does he know you're paying his way?" Dad rocked Josie on his knee. With the recession, finances had gotten tight, and Dad was going to pull the plug on Liam's education.

Tim stepped up with the tuition and dorm funding. "No." His brother didn't know, and he wanted it to remain that way. "He has one semester to go. I don't want him to pull out over something so small." If Liam found out, he'd drop out to make a point. "Grandpa left us both sizable trust funds. He just won't have access to his until he is thirty." Out of spite, their Grandpa didn't leave a penny to their Dad. Liam and Grandpa were alike. "I'm not hurting financially over it, and I don't think there's a need for Liam to worry for nothing."

Dad nodded. "Now that Indy's moving back, are you going to finally make a move?"

Tim shook his head. "There is nothing between us."

"I'm your father and a man. No guy puts that much energy into a woman he isn't interested in." Dad smiled widely.

His father was partly right. "It's not that."

“Her age?”

“No.” Sure, he’d considered her age. Ten years was a large difference, but not a deciding factor for him.

“Unless, you had something to do with what happened?” Dad frowned.

The cat was out of the bag. “I didn’t mean for it to happen.” Tim exhaled a pent-up breath. For nearly a year, he’d held that in, with no one other than Indy he could talk to about it. Already he felt like she tried too hard to alleviate his guilt.

“Oh, God, Tim, you’ve had to live with this on your own.” Dad placed a hand on his lap. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“For Indy, to give her time. She needed to deal with what happened and the consequences.” He’d waited so that Indy could find a way to tell Liam.

“You do love her then?” Dad stared at him.

Tim wouldn’t lie, and nodded. “She loves Liam, always has.” It killed him to watch her with Liam. “He feels the same about her.”

“Hearts can change.” Dad stood, placed Josie in the rocking bassinet, turned, and put his hand on Tim shoulder.

In this case, he didn’t see how Indy or Liam’s feelings would change.

A knock came from the door. Cindy rushed to open the door and hugged Liam. His eyes were red and swollen. Tim hated knowing his rash decision the night of the accident caused so much pain to all those around him. Yet, he could not stop how he felt about Indy.

“You’re just in time for dinner. Graham will be happy his family is together.” Cindy closed the door behind him.

Liam crossed his arms. At any moment, he expected Liam to lunge at him. Nothing. Nor did his brother make eye contact with him. They all took their places. Dad carved the turkey. Mindless chit-chat didn’t alleviate the tension in the room.

## Chapter Twenty-One

Indy turned and shifted the key for the hundredth time. Even with the bright LED light overhead, she couldn't focus on the simple task. Pulling her fingers from the key, she dropped her little black purse and kicked the door.

"Crappy lock." She banged her fist into the hardwood and clenched her teeth in regret.

Liam loved her. How horrible was she to be sleeping with Liam when she couldn't get Tim out of her mind? How could she fix this? Mentally exhausted, she sat down on the porch's stone floor. Tears formed. Everything was much worse than ever. Knees to her chest, she held her burgundy, suede dress up underneath to cover her legs. Though the days were still warm, the temperature dropped in the evenings.

Tim jogged towards her. "What are you doing down there?" He held his hand out.

She reached up and took Tim's offered assistance. "Resting."

Once he pulled her to her feet, Tim let go, and turned his attention to the key.

She wiped her tears onto the back of her hand and leaned down to pick up her purse.

Tim opened the door, removed the key, and gestured for her to enter. "Here you go."

"Aren't you coming in?"

He stared at her.

Would he refuse her invitation? Maybe there was no going back to how things were. Had she also lost Tim as a friend because of her decision to sleep with Liam? Or did her spilling the beans seal the deal? She didn't know what to do anymore.

He nodded, entered, closed the door, and set the keys down on the small marble table to his left.

“Would you like something to drink?” She tossed her purse next to the key and turned on a colorful, Tiffany stained glass lamp. Soft orange and yellow reflected off the walls.

“A soda, thanks.”

Hell if she'd have pop. Something hard and mind-numbing was what she needed right now. She picked up the bottle of her father's favorite Hacienda del Cristero Blanco Tequila. She poured the liquid into Waterford crystal cognac glasses, cupped the drinks with her fingers, walked over to the sofa where Tim sat, and she held out his glass for him. As his hand touched hers, she glanced away, so he couldn't see his effect on her. She pretended to make sure the door was closed. She bit her lower lip as his fingers slid from hers, and he took hold of his soda.

“Fun with the extended family?” he asked sympathetically, patting the seat next to him.

“Let's just say they didn't help.” Scrunching up on the couch next to him, she rested against the back.

“Liam was troubled as well. Christmas dinner was very quiet. Though I'm shocked he hasn't tried to kill me.”

She lifted her glass to her lips and took a deep gulp, then choked. At this very moment, she wanted and needed Tim.

\* \* \*

Tim wanted her. Her puffy eyes pained his chest. Why couldn't he make all the suffering of that night melt away?

The smell of the sweet liquor in her glass wafted. “I hadn't been prepared for the can of worms I opened.”

“Ah, you mean by sleeping with Liam?” He forced his tone to remain even and not reflect the hurt in his voice. “Did he tell you how he feels about you?”

She whipped her gaze in his direction.

“I'd been blind to it, too.” His brother'd had a girlfriend. How was he to know Liam had feelings for Indy? “Maybe I didn't want to see. He told me when you were in surgery after the accident. He made me swear not to tell you. I tried to

clue you in.” Perhaps he’d done a poor job, because of his own emotions. His brother loved her, but so did he.

For a brief moment, her eyes widen, then cast downward reflectively. Silence followed. He took a sip of his soda and stared at the crystal she poured the refreshment in.

Awkward, he shifted. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and the soft glow of the beige lighting accented the warm rum color of her skin. She buried her face in her hands. Tim set down his glass and took Indy’s hand. The simple gesture was all the contact he ever allowed himself during her recovery. The surge from the warmth of her soft skin in his body brought him to a delicious hell. Closing his eyes, he savored her affect.

“How did he take it?” Tim met her honey gaze.

“Well, considering. He may have been in shock though.” Droplets ran down her face.

“I agree, given you’d slept with him before giving him the news.” If Liam laid a hand on her, the man would be dead to him. “I feared he’d flip.”

“It’s far worse. I told him after he told me how he felt about me.” She coiled her fingers around Tim’s, put down her glass, and pulled his arm against her heart, resting it on her chest.

Her beautiful eyes flashed up at him as she rested her chin on his shoulder. “You knew what I was planning, didn’t you?”

“Yes.” Unfortunately, the knowledge shredded his insides. He was powerless to stop her.

“No protest? No attempt to tell him?” Hurt laced her pitch, while her fingers tightened their grip on his.

“To what end?” He shifted to face her. “Send you running into his arms for pushing you, or tell him and have him reject you because of what happened between us? Or worse, I’d need to worry that you’d do something rash and hurt yourself.” Shaking his head, he reached, brushing a few fallen curls from her face. “I’ll never forgive myself for what my touching you that night cost.”

A swell of tears formed in her dazzling gaze. “It isn’t your fault.” She blinked, releasing the buildup.



“I should have made sure.” If he had, she wouldn’t have to live with the consequences for life. “You mean too much for me to behave selfishly.”

She nuzzled her face into his neck, further fueling his anguish. Her lips pressed to his ear. “I’m so sorry.”

The silkiness of her mouth made him groan. Embarrassed at his involuntary reaction, he shifted his body away from hers.

She relinquished his hand, curled her legs up to her chest, and buried her face against her knees. “I disgust you.”

“No. It’s just that when you touch me—” He placed his hand on hers. “I want more.”

“What are you saying?” She lifted her head.

“I haven’t stopped wanting you. I know I should, given what has happened. My heart and body won’t heed reason. Liam loves you, and you love him. Both of you will work this out. But I can’t stop how I feel when I’m with you.”

“When I told him about what happen between us, in that moment, I came to a realization.”

Where was she going with this? “And what would that be?”

“That all this time, I’ve been focusing on Liam’s sense of morality and not how I feel.” She rested her chin against her knee.

“And how do you feel?” A swirl of hope moved inside him, and he was a bastard for it. For wanting what wasn’t his to have.

“I thought my attraction to you was physical. It was natural, given my physical reaction to your touch. Then I was worried that my attachment to you was related to our shared guilt. Mine over Liam, and yours because of both feeling you’d crossed the line and the accident. But I think there is more than the physical chemistry I feel when I’m near you.”

Could she be saying there was more between them than his feelings for her? “Indy. Don’t say things to give me hope in an attempt to relieve me of my guilt.”

“When I was with Liam, I kept thinking about you. I missed you and how knowing your near makes me feel safe and yet strong.” She hid her face in her shoulder. “How horrible does that make me?”

Her words sunk in. “Half the world is longing for something different than what they have.” He pulled her to him, scared she’d vanish. “This doesn’t make you a bad person.”

Tears spilled from her eyes. “I want you, Tim, on your terms if you’ll have me. I hope you don’t hate me.” She wrapped her arms around his neck.

He held on and lifted her to his lap. Afraid he dreamt this, he squeezed her tight. “I could never hate you. I love you.” The woman had feelings for him, too. She wanted him.

“You love me...” She slid one leg to each side of him and looped her bare bronze skin around his waist.

The heat from her made him stiff. Need long unanswered dusted up a whirlwind inside his chest.

“Despite everything we’ve been through?” She rocked onto his crotch, against his length, and moaned.

“I’d have lived in hell if it was the only place I could be with you, because without you, heaven would have no meaning.” Was her goal to torment him or seek relief? “If you want me to touch you—” He placed his hand on her chin, then angled her gaze to his. “This time, I need you to ask me to.”

Her hot lips brushed his ear. “I want to feel your touch, love, and you, Tim.”

He moved his hand up her inner leg. “Is this what you want?” As he pressed her panties to her nub, the fabric grew wet. He groaned.

“Yes, and more.” She worked the latch of his belt and kissed his lips. “I want to know how perfect hell can be when I’m with you.”

The scent of her arousal filled the air. He slipped his tongue inside her mouth and tasted her deliciousness.

She pulled his cock from his boxers, wrapped her fingers around the shaft, and stroked.

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Indy couldn’t take the hunger in her body one moment longer. “I want you inside me.”

He pushed her panties aside, lifted her up over his cock, and lowered her opening. The width of him stretched her. He peeled down the thick straps of her

suede dress, exposed her mounds and pointed peaks. He twirled one, then the other, with his tongue, as he wedged her between the sofa and the coffee table.

His crystal blue eyes held hers. "God, I love you."

As he rammed deep into her, a growl escaped him, sending wildfire raging through her. She looped his shirt buttons.

"Will you come this way, or do you need clitoral stimulation?" He pressed his nose and forehead to hers.

Heat from his body warmed her. "I haven't without yet." She matched his motion.

He stroked her cheek, smiled, and withdrew. "On your knees, facing away from me."

The harsh edge to his gaze was something she'd only seen when she pushed herself too hard, and he nurtured her. She turned over on all fours.

He grabbed her hip, rammed his cock inside her, and scooped his forearm around her torso, squeezing her breast. He descended his other hand to her throbbing nub, then circled. The sharp quick movement of his length deep in her made her thighs quiver.

"Clamp your fingers together behind your head."

She complied.

He held her up as he pushed in and out of her and teased her clit. "You like that?"

"Yes." Did she ever.

He caressed her neck and cheek with his lips. "If I'm imagining this, let me be trapped in this dream until I die."

"This, me and you together right now, is very real." She spoke between thrusts. "Tim."

"Yes, baby?" He pumped faster.

Flesh smacked. Her body pulsed with the rise of her release.

She relaxed into his solid form. "I'm coming." Moisture flooded between her thighs.

"That's it. Let go." He wrapped both arms around her, slowing his motion. "You're so wet; I can feel your juices on my balls."

She matched his rhythm, riding the ripples of her climax. Her thighs felt numb.

“Do you like that?” Her inner muscles squeezed his cock.

“Do I ever.” His warmth met her flesh. He withdrew and jerked off his gleaming erection. Cum shot from the tip, and she moved in and tasted the fluid, then kissed his lips.

“Next time—”

He covered her mouth with his index finger and retracted. “I’ll make sure you suck me dry.”

“How did you know what I was going to say?”

“I get you, Indy. You like being submissive. I’ve never desired to dom, but with you, I become this way. You drive me to want your obedience.” He kissed her nose.

When had Tim figured out what she needed from him?

Tim lifted her to him by her shoulders. “Indy.” Gently, he pecked her forehead and fastened his pants with a smile. “I’m crazy in lust with you, too.”

She pulled up the straps of her dress and bit her bottom lip.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

Indy couldn't believe what she shared with Tim. Nearly a year of suppressing any and everything she felt toward him ended. She didn't know what to expect when he came out of the bathroom. Would he regret what they had done?

She rose from the sofa and paced.

Tim emerged, pulled her into his arms, and kissed her mouth. Parting her lips, she accepted his tongue and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"I want you again." He traced her mouth with his thumb, flames burned in his gaze.

With him, she was a goddess. "So soon?" She admired his ability to freely show her what she meant to him after everything they went through this past year. Tim's actions demonstrated, above all else, he wanted her to be happy.

"Yes, and again and again, until I can't move. Until all you can remember is the friction between us. Until we are both raw and exhausted."

Her insides pulsed at his words. She pressed onto her tip-toes and kissed him.

He lifted her arms onto the wall behind her with one hand. "Indy, I want you to be my missus."

Had he just said missus? There must have been something wrong with her hearing. He'd take her as his wife? He planted soft kisses along her jaw. Banging from the patio door startled her. Liam hit the glass again. Fuck. She hadn't meant for him to see her with Tim.

"Let me get it. If he's pissed, I don't want him taking it out on you." Tim strode over and opened the door for Liam.

"As soon as I turn my fucking back, I find you here." Liam aimed his index finger at his brother. "What was all that crap—you have nothing to worry about?"

"Liam, I didn't know you were into her that night. Given the questions I'd been asking about her over the holidays last year, I thought you got that I was."

Liam shoved Tim in the chest.

She couldn't handle them fighting. "Liam, please don't do this."

Tim remained unmoved. "I'm not going to fight or strike you. You're my brother." He raised his hands, palms facing Liam, and shrugged.

"No, you just banged the woman I love. That's an even lower blow, bro." Liam turned to her. "What? You had to fuck him, too?"

"Have some respect." Tim wedged between her and Liam.

"Are you going to stand here and lecture me about respect? She gave me her virginity. I guess you weren't good enough for that part of her, bro."

"It's sad that you put stock in such things. For someone who wants nothing to do with the way our parents behaved, you sure have your priorities messed up. Trust and honesty should be higher on your list."

"Trust and honesty?" He scoffed out a laugh. "That's rich coming from you, bro. The two of you have been lying to me for over a year."

"Indy was so terrified of how you'd react to what happened between her and I," Tim said. "That she nearly died not to have to face disappointing you."

"Is that what you think tore her up?" Liam brought his hands to his head. "Have you ever stopped to think that maybe what disgusted her was the fact that you touched her?"

"You carry so much anger inside you," Tim said. "You can't help, but poison everyone around you."

"Honestly, I wish you both the best." Liam stopped at the door. "Piece of advice though, bro, having you wasn't enough; she had to have me, too. So don't be surprised if you find out I'm not the only one banging your bitch."

"Fuck you, Liam." Indy lunged toward him.

Tim pulled her against his body.

"I guess you did that." He slammed the door.

"Are you okay?" Tim took her forearms into his hands.

Was Liam right? "I don't know." When she asked him to be her first, she had no inkling he had feelings for her. So how was she to know how things would turn out? "I didn't want to come between you two."

“You haven’t.” Tim tilted her face up. “Liam’s insecurities with me were there way before you. I’m safe to be angry with, because he knows I won’t abandon him.”

For that same reason, Liam hated Tim.

The muscles in her leg cramped, and she cried out.

Tim picked her up and cradled her to his chest. “You’ve been pushing yourself too much since you’ve been home. I don’t think having Liam spank you helped.”

What had he just said? “You know about that?” She hid her face in his chest.

“My window is across from yours, and the drapes weren’t closed.” He carried her upstairs to her room and set her down on the bed.

She patted next to her. Had he watched her with Liam?

“Do you want to talk about what happened the night of the accident?” He crawled on the bed, facing her. “I mean *really* talk about it.”

“I suppose we could if you want to.” Part of her struggled to understand how Tim could be so calm, but it was a strength she admired in him. “As long as you won’t throw it back in my face later. What’s on your mind?”

Moving in closer, he stared into her eyes. She rested her hands on his shoulders, tracing the lines of his muscles.

“I wouldn’t ask if I felt it would anger me.” He cupped her face and stroked her cheek with his thumb. “Were you flirting with me to make Liam jealous?”

Smiling at him, she shook her head. “I wish I was that cunning. I was really horny. I’ve always been attracted to you, and I’m a flirt. The combination, I think, caused me to seem blatant. Liam seemed to hint to the fact that you liked me, but I thought he was uncomfortable with me being close to you. He was always very possessive of us both.”

“Yeah, Liam and I are opposites in that area. Two very different extremes. He feels the need to control, where I don’t believe there ever is control. He’s very dom, and I am a sub. I think it’s partly why I felt such guilt after the accident, because it’s unlike me to make the first move.” Tim brushed her curls away from her cheek.

Tim was the type to take care of people. Even the medicine he practiced was related to the safety and comfort of the patient. “That explains why you went

down on me.” Indy laid back, pulling him against her chest. “You obviously have the hunger in you to want to conquer.”

“When I’m with you, I seek your surrender to the heat you create in me.” He rested his head between her breasts. “Is it my turn to make a move, then?”

“Yes.” She smiled.

The flat surface of his palm trailed between her legs to her panties. She pressed up, lifting her bottom. He rolled the fabric down.

He brushed her ear with his lips. “It’s time I finish something I started nearly a year ago.”

Slick heat collected between her inner folds. She rose.

“Take off your dress and spread your legs over the edge of the bed.” Tim lay propped up on his elbows, staring at her.

She unzipped the suede, fitted gown and peeled the material off.

“You’re beautiful.” With the tips of his fingers, he traced over her scars. He kissed her hip along the deep mark from her surgeries. The warmth of his caressing embrace moved through her. A soft moan escaped her lips.

As he lowered to the floor, he tugged her legs apart to the foot of the bed. He kneeled in front of her.

Sizzling heat met with her folds. He swirled her clit with his tongue. “Tim.” She slid her hands in his hair.

He suckled her labia. “You taste so good.”

“Do I?” She lowered her mouth to lick his lips. “A hint of me mixed with you.”

“I can think of no better combination.” Tim lifted her legs to his shoulders. Deliberate laps worked her pussy. He pushed his tongue to her opening, in and out. Up to her clit, then back down he licked.

At his mouth’s assault, her nub pulsed. “Tim.” She pressed her sex to his ravishing tongue.

He grazed the tender flesh with his teeth. She pushed his head deeper. He pumped into her opening. Liquid bliss rushed through her. She arched her back, thrusting her breasts. Every part of her body hummed with delight.

“Mmm.” Tim licked up the flood of juices between her folds. “Kiss me.” He guided her down the length of him and covered her lips with his slick ones.



She opened her mouth, accepting his tongue.

With sharp movements, he thrust his cock deep into her. Another wave burst inside her. The depth of his plunge impelled her with his need. "Oh, God, Tim." She wrapped her arms around his neck, holding on as he met the depth of her. Her inner thighs quivered, and the muscles of her canal squeezed his cock.

He angled her face to his and met her gaze. "Are you ready to suck me off?"

She nodded, as she felt the loss of him.

He guided her mouth to the head, her juices coated the surface. Cum shot out the tip of his cock, washing over her tongue. She swallowed. More of his seed followed. His taste filled her. Was this heaven? He blanketed her lips, and his tongue entered her mouth. No. This was.

"Merry Christmas, Tim." She guided her lips to his forehead and kissed.

"After a few more rounds, it will be." He picked her up and laid her out on the bed.

At his words, her clit throbbed.

"But first, you need some rest."

She laid her head against his chest and listened to his heartbeat. Part of her wondered if she'd imagined tonight. Her and Tim.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

Vibrating woke Tim from his sleep. Indy lay snuggled to him, naked. He hadn't imagined last night. The bright morning sun beamed on her warm, rum skin. The vibrating came from his pants.

He shifted. "I need to get that, as it will be the hospital."

Indy smiled and handed him his slacks.

"Dr. Boyd," he answered.

"Are you home?" Gwen, the hospital director's executive assistant, asked.

A call from her spelled a trip to the hospital. "Thereabouts."

"Have you been consuming alcohol or another substance that could impair your judgment?" she asked.

Indy was a potent addiction but not what Gwen was referring to. "I have not."

"Thank God. There has been a massive collision on the Pacific Highway. We need you to come in."

Those poor families. "I'm on my way." He pressed the end-call button.

Indy sat up next to him with a sheet covering her body. He needed to talk to her about it. Since the accident, she covered up more. She didn't go swimming, which she loved.

"Emergency?" She slipped out of bed.

"I'm afraid so." He pulled up his boxers, then pants.

"Can I come with you?" She got out of bed.

His gut reaction was no. She didn't do well in hospitals, but if they were going to be together, she wouldn't be able to avoid them, as they were a big part of his life.

"Hurry."

"The bike will be faster." She slipped on a shirt.

"Good thinking." He tugged his shirt down. "When we get there, I'll get one of the interns to set you up in my office." Given they were at it until two hours ago, she needed more rest if she was going to keep up with his need for her.

\* \* \*

Tim set down the flowers, reclined against the door of his office, and dialed Indy's house. He would tell her what he was planning to do, but he knew she'd try to talk him out of it. So he needed to set things into motion.

"Hello," her father answered.

"Hello, Mr. Kent. It's Tim Boyd calling. I wanted you to know Indy is safe and with me. When we get there, I would like to speak to you and your wife."

"Of course, Tim, and thank you for letting us know." The line went dead.

He picked up the roses, opened the door, and set down the items in his hands on his desk. The blinds were pulled closed. Without the florescent light on overhead, the room was oddly dim.

Indy turned over with a smile. "Tim?"

Mornings filled with her smile, saying his name, would be a perfect life for him. "I'm right here." He sat on the edge of the cot she lay in.

"For me?" She gazed at the flowers.

He pulled a rose from the arrangement, brushing the petals over her lips, nose, and forehead. "Indeed." He held it out for her.

"Thank you." She kissed his cheek and wrapped her arms around his chest. "How did the surgery go?"

He exhaled heavily. "She didn't pull through." His comfort came in knowing they didn't suffer in their final moments. He understood all too well the consequences of his actions the night of the accident. The pain Indy lived with. He also knew the pain kept her fighting to regain control of her body.

"I'm sorry." She squeezed him.

Her arms felt like heaven. "So am I." Too many hadn't pulled through today. A stillness lingered through the halls of the hospital. When her bike tipped over, he'd thought he'd lost her, and he'd caused her death. Perhaps she would never understand his reason for wanting their secret out in the open. He needed to set her free, to make sure their shared lie hadn't created a cage for him to keep her in. No matter if she wanted to or not, she might never feel able to leave the boundaries that could expose the truth. If once they were both free to fly away, and she stayed, he would know she was truly his.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

Indy held on to Tim. Part of her still questioned why he didn't even hesitate when she suggested they take the bike to the hospital. Not even for a moment with what happened on Christmas Eve. He believed in her more than she did in herself. In a few weeks, would he regret what they shared? The decisions he'd made?

Tim planted soft kisses on her forehead. "What's on your mind?"

The man read her moods. "Are you angry that Liam was my first?" She closed her eyes tight.

Tim forced her to face him. "I'm hoping to be your last."

She pulled the tie to his scrubs undone and stroked his shaft.

He lifted the covers. "I think it's against hospital policy to have a half-naked woman in my office." He rolled her panties down her thighs.

"I couldn't get comfortable with my pants on." She removed her shirt and parted her legs.

He climbed between her thighs and wrapped them around his waist. "But I don't remember any mention of a fully naked woman." He pecked her neck to her ear softly.

"You didn't answer my question." She tilted his head up forcing his gaze to hers.

"No, I'm not angry that Liam was your first. At the time, I felt hurt, but it wasn't about the sex. Only in the sense of sex being an extension of you expressing how you feel about someone. And I interpreted your decision as you sharing a deep connection with him. Now, I'm relieved."

"Relieved..." What did that mean?

"If you hadn't been with Liam, you never would have stopped wondering. No man can measure up to a fantasy of what could have been." He kissed her forehead. "I'm in awe of you."

Despite everything he knew of her? The mistakes she'd made along the way?  
Her fears?

"What you did took courage. Telling Liam the truth about the night of the accident and later how you feel about him and me was brave." He pressed his erection to her labia. "Telling me about how you'd thought of me when with my brother was gutsy."

"I was terrified you'd be disgusted by me." She pressed her face to the crook of his neck.

"Never." He slid his length inside her.

She rolled her hips, pumping up and down the length of him.

Tim dipped in and caressed her breast with his mouth. "You feel so good." Both of his hands on her ass cheeks, he thrust her down his cock. Harder, he pushed up inside her. The cot squeaked in tandem with the rhythm of their lovemaking.

"More, Tim." She met his intrusion with bucks of her hips, brushing her clit to his pelvis.

As he suckled her nipple, he penetrated her deeper. "Fuck, I'm close." He groaned, then nipped and nibbled her nipple.

Inner muscles tightened around his girth. "You make me come hard." Warmth erupted over her flesh. She bore down, filling her pussy with his cock. She kissed his lips, riding the wave up and down like a seesaw into ecstasy.

She cried out. "Tim!"

"I'm right here, baby." He stroked her back. "God, you're beautiful in the throes, and loud."

Every part of her buzzed with the delight of the pleasure they shared. "Did you?" Vaginal orgasms weren't male propaganda.

"No," he said. "I'm close though."

"What are you waiting for?"

"Well." He rolled her on top of him and circled her nipple with his finger. "Will you marry me?"

"What?" She pulled the sheet to cover her body and rose from the cot. This was the second time he asked. Last time, Liam had walked in on them.

He sat up. “You’re my Mrs. Right, Indy Kent. I know you aren’t fancy on churches and priests, nor legal contracts and judges, but I want to commit to you—to us. So what about a life-time engagement, and you moving in, us living together?”

A rush of joy spiked in her. Then reality hit. “Tim, there is something I need to tell you.” She pinched her bottom lip and sat next to him.

“You can tell me anything.” He locked his fingers with hers.

She searched for words that wouldn’t lash out in fear of losing what he felt for her. Tears trailed down her cheeks. If she had told him before, he would have further blame himself and taken on more responsibility and guilt for the accident.

“I don’t want you to settle for less than what you want in life, and if you commit to me, you’d have to forego a child of your own.” If he changed his mind about his request, she would manage, but she couldn’t keep this from him.

“I overheard the doctor at the hospital.” He wiped the tears from her cheeks. “Not all the details, but enough to understand a pregnancy could cost you the ability to walk.”

“And you still want to be with me?” Part of her wondered if Tim was a dream. Had she died last New Year’s Eve and created this elaborate fantasy?

“If the woman I love doesn’t want children, a life filled with her would still bring me joy. If you want children, there is no option I wouldn’t explore to give you what you want. Actually, there is one. I’m not prepared to carry them.” He kissed her nose. “I was kind of hoping to have you to myself a while before we think about having a child—children. In the meantime, you can finish school.”

If she didn’t know any better, she might believe Tim to be a figment of her imagination. “Yes. I want us to move in together.”

“Good. I’ve made arrangements to speak with your father when we get to your place.”

That wasn’t a good idea. “Daddy’s going to wonder why you’re not asking for my hand in marriage.”

“I know, and I’m prepared to explain myself to him. How he is partly to blame, because he raised an independent and stubborn woman that I’m madly in love

with. I'd be more than thrilled to marry her the day he, your mother, and I manage to change her mind about it, but until then, I refuse to be without you."

"At least you're going in prepared." As to whether her father would go for that explanation, would be another matter.

Tim nodded, tracing the outer edge of her mouth. "One more thing. I plan on telling your parents what happened the night of the accident."

Why would he do that? "No, please, don't. You have nothing to gain from doing this."

"I'm no man if I cannot own my actions that night."

Which meant they would know she also lied. "You don't know my father. This isn't going to go well."

"I know. Your father might never like me or forgive me, but he and I will know I value truth, even when it's painful."

From the expression on Tim's face, he'd made his decision. "There is no changing your mind, is there?"

"I respected your wishes for the past year. I need you to let me own what happened."

Why he wanted so badly for everyone to believe he was responsible, she'd never understand. She wasn't innocent in what happened. Both of them had behaved rashly, not considering the consequences.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

Indy held on to Tim's hand and opened the door to her parents' home. The smell of turkey and potatoes filled the air. The inside of the house was decorated, and the Christmas tree was over by the fireplace with blinking lights. For the first time in her life, this didn't feel like her home.

Tim let go of her hand and kissed her forehead. "Everything is going to be okay. I promise."

They both removed their shoes. Laughter carried from the kitchen.

Indy could barely move. She was afraid of what would happen. Tim guided her forward.

"Hon, bring the dips out." Mum carried out a platter with finger foods to the coffee table.

"What will be my reward if I do?" Her father stepped in the hall, stopped, set the row of dips down, and turned to her. "Indy Neela Kent, are you going to stand there, or give your father a hug?"

She wrapped her arms around her father and held on, trying not to cry.

"What's wrong?" Her father stared down at her.

"I believe I can explain," Tim said. Indy grabbed onto him.

"Sure." Her father gestured them to the formal living room.

Mum sat next to her father, and she and Tim sat across from them. Their expressions held concern.

"I'm to blame for Indy's accident. You entrusted her to my supervision, and I breeched that trust," Tim said.

Mum covered her father's hand, which clenched to a fist.

Indy turned to him. "How can you say that? We both know that isn't what happened. I propositioned you in the kitchen. You set down ibuprofen, asked for the keys to my bike, and when I handed them over to you, you headed for the stairs. I finished my slice of pizza, put my glass in the dishwasher." She should have suspected it was him when she touched him. He'd gone up just before her.



Liam had been in jeans and a T-shirt. Tim wore a dress shirt and slacks with a belt. The fabric beneath her fingers had been crisp. “At one point, my mind suspected it was you, but I pushed the thought aside. Then when Liam called to me, I panicked.”

“How can you say that? Don’t do this. Why are you trying to make what happened your fault? Just to alleviate my responsibility. If I believed you too impaired to drive, I shouldn’t have touched you.”

“But that’s the thing. I touched you first and went for—”

“I should have pulled away, but I didn’t, because I wanted you. That is why I shouldn’t have agreed to let you stay with us. ”

“That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard. Because you liked me, you should have avoided and rejected me?”

“Indy, I’m trying to do the right thing here. What do you want from me?”

“I want you to stop trying to make the accident your fault.” Indy turned to her father. “Daddy, I know you love me and only want the best for me, but I need to set a few things straight. It was unreasonable for you to ask Tim to keep an eye on me when I was freaking twenty-two. And I’ve transferred to UCLA. I know your dream was to go to Yale, but I hate it there. I won’t change my mind. Tim does have something to let you know about.”

He narrowed his gaze and cocked his head. She widened her eyes and sighed.

“I do.” Tim nodded. “I’ve asked Indy to move in with me.”

“I’ve accepted.” Indy took his hand into hers.

Her father scooted the edge of the sofa. “But—”

She shook her head. “No. I love him. Given what you just saw, you should rest assured he will do everything he can to make me happy.”

“Dinner is almost ready.” Mum got up. “Indy, can you help me in the kitchen?” She gestured for her to follow.

Despite her own hesitation, she knew her Mum would not ask her to leave the room if Tim wasn’t safe. Indy kissed Tim’s cheek and followed her mother.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

Tim closed and locked his bedroom door. He held Champagne and two flutes in his other hand. Light streamed in the dim space from the window and balcony. He turned on the lights.

“What did you and Daddy talk about when I went in the kitchen with Mum?” She sat at the end of his bed.

“He asked when we plan on getting married.” He turned toward her. Nervous.

From above, the beige light shone on her. “And what did you say?” Indy rolled her big hazel eyes and crushed her full lips together.

He went over to his dresser, removed the blue box. Inside was an emerald-cut, three-stone diamond, platinum engagement ring.

“As soon as you accept my open offer, but I wouldn’t pressure you and hoped he wouldn’t either.” He kneeled in front of her, set the bottle and glasses down next to him, and opened the blue case with a ribbon. “Indy Kent, I want to spend my life loving you. This ring is a symbol of my promise to honor and love you. It’s all I ask of you in return.”

“I know this ring.” She took the box. “When did you get this?”

“Does it matter?” He tucked in closer to her.

She nodded.

“The day I knew I loved you.” With his hand, he cupped her face and stroked along her jaw.

“What day was that?” She pressed into his caress.

Longer than he should admit to. “Last New Year’s Eve day.”

“This was the ring in the display case at Tiffany’s.” She did recall their stop at the store next to the jewelers on the way to pick Liam. “I said it was the kind of ring a man gave a woman when the only possible answer would be yes.”

“I told you, I didn’t expect you to say such a thing given your opinion of marriage.” While she’d run her errands, he’d purchased the ring.

"I remember. I shrugged and said even I'd wear that. It's not a regular skating rink; it's an Olympic-size hockey rink."

Hope flooded his chest. "Will you wear it?"

She laughed with nervous happiness. "Yes."

Tim removed the ring and slid the band down her finger. "A perfect fit."

"We most definitely are." Indy kissed his mouth.

He picked up the bottle, undid the foil, and popped the cork. Suds rushed over the side. He brought the flute to the neck, poured, handed her the glass, and filled his.

"A toast to—"

She held her glass up. "To pain, strength, love, and you and I forever."

He tapped his glass to hers, sipped back the liquid, and set the glass down.

She peeled the rim from her lips and cocked her head. "Is it my turn to make a move?"

As he nodded with a smile, he swallowed. Anticipation moved through him. She slipped onto his lap, filling him with hunger.

He covered her lips and suckled the taste of Champagne from her. She removed her shirt and bra. Taut peaks bobbed. He dipped his finger in the flute and coated her nipple. With his tongue, he flicked her button.

She pulled his shirt off. "Pants, too."

As instructed, he discarded his slacks with his boxers. The vixen licked her lips, eyes fixed to his erection.

"Are you going to suck me off?" he asked.

She nodded, lowering her head.

He cupped her face, angled it up. "On one condition."

"And what might that be?" She grinned.

He tucked her body to his, whispering to her ear. "That I can eat your pussy while you're giving me head."

"Will it always be like this?" She wrapped her arms around his chest. "The ache, the hunger, the need?"

“If we work at it.” He kissed along her neck as he slid her pants down her thighs and tossed them. The scars on her hip were shades lighter than her skin. Was what she told her father true?

He traced the lines. “Did you know it was me touching you that night?”

“I don’t know, Tim.” She ran her fingers through his hair. “When I think back, I don’t know how I didn’t. You smell, breathe, dress, and feel different. What if I was acting on what I couldn’t yet accept wanting? The accident is a fog in my mind, but your touch is as vivid as it feels in this moment.”

There might never be an answer; with all the trauma of that night, her mind would leave her the pieces that would help her cope. Even his recollection of the events would fade. Nor could he trust that he knew the true account of what happened. The mind was a strange thing.

“Don’t cover up one of the most beautiful parts of your body.” He skimmed his lips along the deep grooves in her hip from her surgeries, working his way to her inner thigh.

Using his fingers, he parted the labia and rubbed her clit. She rocked against his touch. A mass of curls cascaded around her face like a fountain onto her shoulders and back. The curves of her body were bathed in light. Soft gasps lingered.

He brought his fingers to his mouth. “Mmm.” He laid back. “One knee on each side of my face.”

Indy crawled forward in compliance. Her bronze folds on display with a pink core. He licked the slick taste of her. Back and forth, he lapped her nub. Her cold, wet lips made contact with his cock and descended. Bubbles tingled over his shaft.

“You’re just the right kind of dirty for me, Indy, sucking me with Champagne in your mouth.” He pressed his fingers to her opening.

As he twirled her clit, she whimpered, deepening her descent. She pumped her hand up and down his shaft in tandem with her lips. He pushed his tongue to the pink center, fucking her pussy. Her motion grew erratic, inner thighs quivering. A swell of juices coated her folds.

He lapped, relaxing into his release. “I love you.”

Cum gushed into her hot mouth. He grunted, licking his way to her rear opening. Her tongue suckled his offering from the head. He drove his fingers deep into her.

She sat up. "And I you."

He scooped her into his arms and rolled her beneath him. "My turn again?" With a smile, he dunked his fingers in the Champagne.

*THE END*

## ~ABOUT THE AUTHOR~

At the age of nine, a.c. Mason made up a zombie story at summer camp. It scared the other kids so much that the camp counselor called her parents asking them to ensure she never did such a dreadful thing again. From this, she learned the power of storytelling, and the seed of the author was planted.

Born from the union of her Scottish and Belgian mother and an African American and Cherokee father, her youth was filled with dichotomies and moving from place to place. She developed a curiosity to explore through writing the seedy side of our nature and desires. Add to that her fascination with theology, politics, history, horror, and erotica. And voila, her distinct voice surfaced; described as a unique mélange of complex characters, well-crafted suspense, and mesmerizing visceral erotica. Her stories are the place where darkness meets human desire and fairytales endings are not promised but earned.

She wrote on and off since her early teens as a hobby and for friends. She enjoys delving into the realms of the unknown and blurring the caution lines.

Mason is fluent in French and English. She's an avid traveler, including most of Canada, both of the United States seaboards, England and Europe. Her studies were in the computer field. She advocates the preservation of our natural and cultural riches for future generations.

Take a journey with her characters and come face to face with what lays beneath their illusions. Emerge...on the other side changed.

**Visit her online at: [www.acmason.com](http://www.acmason.com)**